The News from Ireland Study Guide

The News from Ireland by William Trevor

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Contents

The News from Ireland Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

Summary....8

Analysis....13

Characters....14

Social Sensitivity....16

Techniques....18

Themes....20

Style....22

Historical Context....24

Critical Overview....27

Criticism....29

Critical Essay #1....30

Critical Essay #2....33

Critical Essay #3....36

Topics for Further Study....41

Compare and Contrast....42

What Do I Read Next?....43

Key Questions....44

Literary Precedents....45

Further Study....46

Related Titles....47

Bibliography.....48

Copyright Information.....49

Introduction

"The News from Ireland" hearkens back almost 150 years, to a cataclysmic event in Ireland's history: the Great Famine, which left over a million Irish dead from hunger and drove as many as two million to leave their country of birth. Many Irish peasants were dependent on the potato as their only source of food, and the blight that struck in the 1840s virtually wiped out the country's potato crop. Yet as the Irish author George Bernard Shaw pointed out in his play *Man and Superman,* the term "famine" was a misnomer: throughout the entire period, food products were being exported from Ireland instead of being made available to the starving population.

In "The News from Ireland," Trevor demonstrates the disparity between the starvation of the poor Irish and the comfort of Anglo-Irish who profit from their labor. He evokes the situation through the viewpoint of outsiders who feel no real effect of the famine. Hs characters are all Protestants, the majority from England. The Pulvertafts, who have inherited an English estate in Ireland, have over the years learned to accept the inequities inherent in Ireland and no longer feel uncomfortable about the position of privilege and ease that they occupy. Their new governess, however, has some difficulty acclimating to her new surrounding and accepting such "unintentional wickedness." The story chronicles her shift to complacency, and in so doing, it raises more universal themes: the greater issues of personal and social responsibility.

Author Biography

William Trevor Cox was born in 1928 in County Cork, Ireland, to Protestant parents. His family moved frequently, and Trevor spent his childhood in many different towns throughout the south of Ireland. Because he belonged to the minority religious group, Trevor says he developed early on a sense of being on the "outside looking in." Despite his "outsider" status, however, Trevor described himself as a young man who was "very, very nationalistic, intensely Irish."

Trevor attended Trinity College in Dublin, where he earned a bachelor's degree in history. After his graduation in 1950, Trevor spent the next several years teaching history and art in Northern Ireland and in England. He also spent several years working as a copywriter for a London advertising agency, a job he did not enjoy. Around this time, he began to pursue work as a sculptor; he had first become interested in this art as a teenager. Trevor became known for his church sculpting, and earned his living through his artwork.

Trevor had been writing short stories since his youth, and eventually he decided to write a novel; he later stated that his motivation was the need to earn money. The novel *A Standard of Behaviour,* published in 1958, was generally dismissed as imitative and pretentious. Despite these harsh reviews, in 1960 Trevor gave up sculpting and turned all of his artistic energy into writing. *The Old Boys,* published in 1964, won the Hawthornden Prize for literature. This prize marked the auspicious beginning of Trevor's career as a successful writer.

In 1967, Trevor published his first collection of short stories, *The Day We Got Drunk on Cake.* The title story of his next collection, 1972's *The Ballroom of Romance, and Other Stories,* established his reputation as a talented short-fiction writer. Critics drew comparisons between Trevor and other important contemporary British writers, such as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Muriel Spark. His short fiction has even been likened to James Joyce's *Dubliners.* "The News from Ireland" is the title story from a 1986 short-story collection. By the time of its publication, Trevor was generally considered a master of the genre.

Over the years, Trevor has won many prestigious awards, including the CBE (Commander to the Order of the British Empire) in recognition of his valuable services to literature. Universities in Ireland and England have awarded him honorary doctorates in literature. He is recognized as a contemporary short-story master, and he is particularly known for his portrayals of ordinary people.

Plot Summary

"The News from Ireland"opens with the reflections of Fogarty, a butler in the home of the Pulvertafts, an English family who came to Ireland to claim an estate left to Mr. Pulvertaft by an uncle. The Pulvertafts came to Ireland eight years ago, in 1839. Over the years, the Pulvertafts have cleared the overgrown estate grounds and, in general, learned "to live with things." Fogarty wishes they had left the estate unclaimed. Like Ireland's other "visitors," they have taken what is not theirs.

A new English governess has recently arrived at the Pulvertaft estate. Anna Maria Heddoe fascinates Fogarty because she is another visitor who does not truly belong in Ireland. His obsession leads him to read her diary and correspondence.

Anna Maria's diary records her homesickness and her confusion at the place in which she now resides. She understands that outside the walls of the estate, the poor Irish people, suffering the effects of the potato famine, die of hunger. Within the walls, however, the Pulvertafts seem unaware of this tragedy. Even the news that a child has been born with the marks of the stigmata on his hand and feet does not interest them. The Irish people consider the stigmata to be a sign from God in these difficult times, but the Pulvertafts remain engrossed in their own business: piano recitals, weddings, and the construction of a road that encircles the property. The road goes nowhere, but Mr. Pulvertaft supports its construction because it allows him to employ the Irish men who have no work.

The narration switches, exploring the family's and Fogarty's thoughts about Anna Maria. Mr. and Mrs. Pulvertaft think she is settling in, while the daughters, past the age of having governesses, are not concerned with her at all. George Arthur, the son, compares her to the last governess, and Fogarty thinks that she will make the Pulvertafts face the issue of the child with stigmata. Fogarty and his sister, the cook, discuss Anna Maria. Fogarty shares with her the Legend of the True Cross, which Anna Maria told him. The legend says that a seed fell into the mouth or ear of Adam, the first man. After he died, a tree grew from the seed. The tree was then used to make the cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pulvertaft and his estate manager, Erskine, oversee work on the road. Erskine had his military career cut short by the loss of an arm. He tells Mr. Pulvertaft that the men working on the road are dissatisfied and ungrateful. While speaking with his employer, Erskine thinks about Anna Maria and how he will propose marriage to her.

In the house, Mrs. Pulvertaft thinks about her plans for her children. Charlotte will marry Captain Coleborne, Adelaide will remain a spinster at home, Emily will travel to foreign countries, and George Arthur must be dissuaded from making a career in the military so he will stay at home and care for the estate. She briefly thinks about the plight of the Irish people, but knows that no one could be blamed for the failure of the potato crop.

The narration returns to Anna Maria's diary. She reports that Fogarty has told her that the child with stigmata has died and the people are anxious; they feel that Christ has been crucified again. Fogarty says that the Pulvertafts believe that the markings on the child were inflicted by the parents, as do Fogarty and his sister. Anna Maria wonders why the parents would do such a thing, and Fogarty says that hunger and death made them do so: they thought they would be saved if they were considered a holy family.

Life for the Pulvertaft family continues. The workers, attaching an omen to the death of the child, do not show up to build the road, but Mr. Pulvertaft knows they will come back—their hunger will require it. Emily goes on her trip, Charlotte accepts her beau's proposal, George Arthur begins to agree with his family about giving up a life in the military, and Fogarty believes that Anna Maria will leave the house.

Five months after her arrival, Anna Maria still thinks about the plight of the Irish people; they are starving, men haven't the strength to work on the road, and the babies die. The next month, however, her thoughts turn to different issues when she becomes aware of Erskine's interest in her. By the time the road is completed, they have become friends. The following year Charlotte's wedding is celebrated with champagne.

Come September, Anna Maria is still debating Erskine's proposal. At the beginning of November, however, Fogarty advises her not to marry Erskine. He confesses to reading her diary. Then he tells her that it would have been better if the Pulvertaft estate had been left untended to fall into a natural state of decline; it could have been returned back to the people from whom it was taken hundreds of years ago. Fogarty speaks of the "wickedness" that "is not intentional." He says that Anna Maria, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Pulvertaft and Emily, all sensed the wickedness of the dispossession of the Irish people but have come to ignore it. Anna Maria denies this and asks Fogarty to leave. Instead he tells her that the Pulvertaft line should end with George Arthur, and he speaks of a future "that's withering now." He tells her of a dream he had in which the Irish peasants attack the estate. They burn and destroy the buildings and shoot the son of George Arthur. The estate falls into disrepair.

Fogarty's conversation with Anna Maria is to no avail. She marries Erskine. Miss Fogarty speaks to her brother of her belief that Anna Maria will befriend them, but Fogarty says the Erskines will ally themselves with the Pulvertafts instead. Fogarty thinks of how he tried to warn Anna Maria from becoming like the Pulvertafts—accepting and ignorant of what goes on in their new home. He consid ers Anna Maria a stranger and visitor, but like the Pulvertafts, "she has learnt to live with things."

Summary

"The News from Ireland" is William Trevor's story about an English family, the Pulvertafts, who live on an Irish estate they have inherited. The story shows the disparity of the wealthy English and the poverty stricken Irish, which are starving in the midst of the Great Potato Famine.

As the story begins, the narrator relays the situation of Fogarty, the butler at the Pulvertaft estate, who serves along with his sister, Miss Fogarty, the household cook. Fogarty is thinking about the new governess, Anna Marie Heddoe, newly arrived from England. Fogarty's musings drift to thoughts of others who have also come here as strangers, namely the Celts, St. Patrick and the Vikings.

The current Pulvertaft family, themselves strangers to Ireland, arrived in 1839, eight years ago, when the last owner, Hugh Pulvertaft, died. The current Pulvertafts have assimilated into Irish life, but Fogarty wishes they had stayed in Ipswich and left the estate to fall to ruin, rather than be taken over by these English strangers.

Miss Heddoe fascinates Fogarty, as do all newcomers, and he takes the liberty of reading her diary and the letters she receives. Through this correspondence, Fogarty learns of Miss Heddoe's homesickness and incredulity at the Pulvertafts' indifference to the starving Irish people outside the stonewalls of the estate.

Miss Heddoe also writes in her diary of Fogarty's claim that a local child was born with the marks of the stigmata that the desperate people of Ireland believe to be a positive sign that God has not abandoned them.

Life in the Pulvertaft household continues as usual with the struggling piano recitals given by Adelaide Pulvertaft, an awkward, unattractive girl. Charlotte Pulvertaft, the oldest daughter, is caught up in a romance with a soldier, while Emily Pulvertaft, the most intelligent and artistic daughter, plans an upcoming trip to several countries as an extension of her education. George Arthur is the only son in the Pulvertaft household and is Miss Heddoe's charge.

Mrs. Pulvertaft is a round, stout woman, who remains wrapped up in her children's lives, not venturing past the stone wall of the estate other than to attend church. Mr. Pulvertaft considers himself the typical lord of the manor and provides employment for some of the local men through the construction of a road that circles his property.

Pulvertaft discusses the road every day with his estate manager, Mr. Erskine. There is much anticipation of the new road, although it does not lead to anything.

The Pulvertafts do not know of Miss Heddoe's dissatisfaction with her new position and think that the governess is settling in quite nicely. The Pulvertaft sisters take no notice of Miss Heddoe, as they have outgrown the need for a governess. However, George Arthur considers Miss Heddoe very serious and not nearly as pretty as his sisters.

Fogarty hopes that Miss Heddoe will serve as the voice of reason in the household, because she is in a more advantageous position to point out the futility of the new road and the significance of the child born with the stigmata. Fogarty does not mention this to his sister, who takes every little slight from Miss Heddoe as proof of the governess' wicked English ways.

One morning, Mr. Pulvertaft and Mr. Erskine pace back and forth across the front lawn in another discussion about the road. Mr. Pulvertaft is slightly afraid of Mr. Erskine, so he never lets his eyes meet those of the estate manager. Mr. Erskine takes a low opinion of Mr. Pulvertaft, because the new estate owner inherited the property with no effort on his own part and does not appreciate his good fortune.

Mr. Pulvertaft is doubly pleased with the road, because it not only provides local employment but also will be his generation's contribution to the estate. Mr. Erskine wearies of Mr. Pulvertaft's boasts and thinks about Miss Heddoe and whether she would entertain a marriage proposal. Being the wife of the estate manager is not as grand as the wife of the manor but is certainly a step up from being a governess.

Mrs. Pulvertaft retires to her room each afternoon with stomach pains that dissipate by evening, and she comes to expect the daily discomfort. Emily Pulvertaft often takes walks along the lake on the estate and thinks about the monks, who had lived there at one time. Emily's thoughts also wonder to her upcoming trip, where she will see the wonders of several European countries. As Emily walks, she can see the vast expanse of the dormant farmlands that mean nothing to her. She reminds a local woman at the gate that soup and bread are to be brought out again, tomorrow.

Miss Heddoe's diary contains an entry reporting on the death of the child born with the stigmata. This death is considered a negative omen to the local people, as significant as if Christ had been crucified again. Fogarty had told Miss Heddoe that he and his sister, and now the Pulvertafts, believe that the parents had inflicted the marks on the child with a hot coal. They may have done this, so that they might be considered a holy family, like the original one, and be saved from starvation.

Miss Heddoe writes in her diary that she is heartbroken for the dead child and the parents, who must be almost insane from grief and hunger. Miss Heddoe cannot justify the vibrant life in the Pulvertaft household with the dire situation occurring just outside the estate walls. Miss Heddoe cries herself to sleep to be in the employ of people, who show no sensitivity to the plight of the Irish people.

The workers consider the death of the child to be a bad sign and do not show up to work on the Pulvertaft road. Mr. Erskine assures Mr. Pulvertaft that the men will return in time, because they will soon need money for food.

Life in the Pulvertaft household continues as usual with Adelaide playing the piano and mooning over Charlotte's fiancy. Emily leaves on her European trip and visits Bath, Florence, Vienna and Paris.

Fogarty predicts that Miss Heddoe will leave because of the Pulvertaft family's insensitivity about the dead baby. The family does not realize that its refusal to acknowledge the horrible event could have repercussions, such as Mr. Erskine being attacked and possibly killed by the workers. If this should occur, the Pulvertafts would be forced to return to England, but they seem ignorant of any of these possibilities.

A few months pass, and Miss Heddoe continues to write in her diary about the women who come to the gate begging for food, and the men who want to work on the Pulvertaft road but are too weak from hunger to do so. Miss Heddoe cannot help but wonder what the Irish people have done to incur God's continuing wrath, but answers never come. All she can do is pray.

A few weeks later, Mr. Erskine approaches Miss Heddoe, as she walks the estate grounds and engages her in conversation about her adjustment to life in Ireland. He also provides some history of himself, including the loss of his left arm in the military. Mr. Erskine invites Miss Heddoe to stop at his home at any time. He then leaves her.

Not long after this, the Pulvertaft road is completed, and Mr. Pulvertaft receives a letter of thanks and commendation from the local Distress Board. Some of the men who had worked on the road, along with many others, are making their way to the harbor towns to board ships for America. Mr. Pulvertaft is grateful that they have a place to go. Later that summer, Charlotte is married in a champagne wedding ceremony at the Pulvertaft estate.

A year has passed since Miss Heddoe has arrived at the estate. She writes in her diary that Fogarty has encouraged her not to consider Mr. Erskine's marriage proposal. Miss Heddoe does not realize that anyone else is aware of the proposal and tells Fogarty to leave, but he persists. Fogarty had hoped that Miss Heddoe would leave earlier, when she became aware of the type of people the Pulvertafts are.

Fogarty tells Miss Heddoe that there is wickedness in the home. He says that the paltry spoons of soup, and a road that goes nowhere, are insults to the poor people. They need so much more. The horrific crime of starvation was able to occur through the gross neglect of the Pulvertafts, whose estate is filled with fruit trees, berry bushes, a fish-filled lake, and other wildlife.

Fogarty contends that it would have been better if the estate had been left to decay, instead of being taken up by this next generation of Pulvertafts. Fogarty says, "The past would have withered away, miss. Instead of which it is the future that's withering now."

Fogarty shares a dream he had in which George Albert's son is shot, ending the Pulvertaft lineage, and allowing the estate to return to decadent wildness. In the dream, the rioting local people burn the estate, and Fogarty is able to tell Miss Heddoe not to perpetuate the evil she has witnessed here.

Miss Heddoe ignores Fogarty's admonitions and marries Mr. Erskine. Miss Fogarty wonders if she and Fogarty will be invited to tea at the Erskine residence, but Fogarty reminds his sister that Mrs. Erskine has elevated her station and is not likely to entertain

servants. Miss Fogarty thinks Mrs. Erskine considers she and her brother to be friends. Fogarty does not answer and realizes that Mrs. Erskine has seen through the trick he had tried to get her to leave the estate, and that it is unlikely that he will be having tea at the Erskine house.

Analysis

The setting for the story is an estate in Ireland during the years 1847 and 1848. The country is in the midst of the Great Potato Famine that began in 1845 and ended in 1849. The dates are documented in Miss Heddoe's diary entries related to the famine that is plaguing the country at the time.

The author uses both the third person omniscient and the first person points of view. As the story begins, the narrative describes Fogarty's perceptions about his situation of being in service to the latest generation of the Pulvertaft family. An unnamed person, who surmises Fogarty's thoughts and relates them to the reader, tells the story. Fogarty does not reveal them to anyone through dialogue, but the author allows the reader to learn of Fogarty's thoughts through omniscience as background for the story.

The narrative frequently transitions from this point of view to that of the first person perspective. The characters engage in dialogue, which excludes the reader from any additional benefit of the character's thoughts and emotions. Miss Heddoe is granted the bulk of the first person point of view, which she relates through her letters and diary entries.

It is interesting to note that the Pulvertaft family had been living in Ireland six years before the famine started, yet have initiated no relationships with any of the local people and seem unfazed by the plague of starvation. Symbolically, the Pulvertaft road serves no purpose, just as the family itself has no reason for being here. The road leads to nowhere, circling round the estate, just as the Pulvertaft family keeps to itself behind the estate walls.

There is also symbolism in the child supposedly born with the stigmata, which are wounds like those received by Christ during His crucifixion. The local Catholic people desperately cling to the idea of a miracle in their midst, while the Pulvertafts rebuke the idea, symbolizing the English Protestant faction in the country.

Fogarty and his sister are Protestant Irish, and their alliance lies with Ireland first and their employers second. Fogarty's stance is that the Pulvertafts are strangers who do not belong to the estate or to Ireland. Fogarty prefers that they, Mr. Erskine and Miss Heddoe would all leave. Fogarty could then return to living on the estate as it had been under the last owner, and he would not have the nuisance of worrying about serving strangers in his country and in an estate he feels is part his.

The author uses the literary technique of foreshadowing by Fogarty's mention of all the strangers who have found their way to Ireland over the centuries. By the end of the story, Fogarty realizes that his attempts to scare Miss Heddoe by sharing his

perceptions of the wickedness of the Pulvertafts, and his premonitions of George Albert's death have backfired. He is resigned to his fate of living with yet one more set of strangers in Ireland.

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Characters

Erskine

Erskine, a former English soldier, is the Pulvertafts' estate manager. He is not happy with how life has turned out—ending up in a country that is not his own and having his military career destroyed by the loss of his left arm. He doesn't trust the Irish Catholics, although his job brings him into daily contact with them as he supervises their work on the road and collects their rents. Instead of lapsing into melancholy, however, he sets his sights on Anna Maria, who eventually accepts his proposal of marriage.

Fogarty

Fogarty is the butler to the Pulvertafts. He is a poor Irish Protestant, but an educated man, and he occupies a middle ground between the starving Irish Catholic masses and the rich Anglo-Irish family he serves. In many ways, he is the link between the devastated world outside the estate walls and the idyllic world inside of them. For instance, Fogarty brings the family the news of the child with the marks of stigmata. Fogarty appears to be halfcrazed; his obsession with Anna Maria-indicated by his reading of her journals and letters as well as his over-zealous interest in her life—is just one manifestation of his unstable mental state. He also resents the Pulvertafts' takeover of the estate, for he believes it would have been better for the estate to return to nature, and then it could be of use to all the people.

Miss Fogarty

Miss Fogarty, Fogarty's sister, is the cook for the Pulvertaft family. She is a critical woman and she believes that her brother is too solicitous of Anna Maria. Although at first she appears to dislike Anna Maria, after the governess marries the estate manager, she hopes to develop a friendship with her.

Anna Maria Heddoe

Anna Maria Heddoe is the English governess who has newly arrived at the Pulvertaft estate. She is unhappy in her employment, both with the family and the servants and with being away from home. At first, she does not understand the Pulvertafts. For instance, she does not comprehend why they are they not interested in the child born with stigmata, or why they discount the markings. Her emotional discomfort with her surroundings is indicated explicitly through her journal entries as well as implicitly by her physical state, such as her inability to eat much of the food which is served to her. By the end of the story, however, she seems to adopt the Pulvertafts' disinterest. When she marries Erskine, she indicates her acceptance of the Pulvertafts and their isolation from the world around them—the world of the poor starving Irish.

Adelaide Pulvertaft

Adelaide is the plain daughter. She wears glasses, plays poorly at the piano, and seems fated to spend her life on the family estate as the spinster sister. Adelaide is secretly in love with her sister's beau.

Charlotte Pulvertaft

Charlotte is the petite and pretty daughter. She marries Captain Coleborne, although she does not love him. Instead, she is won over by his adoration of her.

Emily Pulvertaft

Emily is the beautiful daughter. Her aesthetic sensibility is more developed than that of others in her family. For instance, she imagines the estate when it was a monastery hundreds of years ago. She persuades her father to send her on a tour of the cities of Europe, where she can absorb their art and architecture. The following year she returns to Ireland, and it seems she will marry in the near future. According to Fogarty, Emily alone of her siblings once sensed the dispossession of Ireland.

George Arthur Pulvertaft

George Arthur is the only son of the Pulvertafts. He is drawn to the romance and intrigue offered by a career in the military, but he is persuaded to forsake his dreams in order to stay at home and learn how to manage the family estate.

Mr. Pulvertaft

Mr. Pulvertaft inherited the estate in Ireland from a distant relative. Although he had not wanted to move overseas, he felt it was his duty to accept the responsibility. Similarly, Mr. Pulvertaft feels he has a duty to employ as many of the Irish peasants as possible to work on estate improvements, and he even makes the road construction a more lengthy procedure than it need be.

Mrs. Pulvertaft

Mrs. Pulvertaft occasionally gets nostalgic for England, but after eight years in Ireland, she has become somewhat accustomed to it. Her discomfort, however, manifests itself through her abdominal pain, which she experiences every day. She has learned to live with the pain by ignoring it, as she has learned to live in Ireland by isolating herself and her family.

Social Sensitivity

Although William Trevor was born to Protestant parents in Ireland, the writer described himself as a young man who was "very, very nationalistic, intensely Irish." Beginning his writing career with the publication of his novel titled A Standard of Behaviour in 1958, Trevor eventually won the Hawthornden Prize for literature for The Old Boys, published in 1964. This prize marked the auspicious beginning of Trevor's career as a successful writer. "The News from Ireland" is the title story from a 1986 short-story collection, and by the time of its publication, Trevor was generally considered a master of the genre.

The story of "The News from Ireland" hearkens back almost 150 years, to a cataclysmic event in Ireland's history: the Great Famine, which left over a million Irish dead from hunger and drove as many as two million to leave their country of birth. Many Irish peasants were dependent on the potato as their only source of food, and the blight that struck in the 1840s virtually wiped out the country's potato crop. Yet as the Irish author George Bernard Shaw pointed out in his play Man and Superman, the term "famine" was a misnomer: throughout the entire period, food products were being exported from Ireland instead of being made available to the starving population.

The famine began in 1845, when a fungus struck Ireland's potato crop, the mainstay of Irish agriculture. Irish peasants subsisted on their small potato plots; many worked in return for a plot of land instead of money. At least two million people—one quarter of the total population—depended on the potato for survival. Afflicted plants wilted overnight and yielded potatoes that quickly rotted. By February 1846, only five months after the fungus first struck, the potato disease had struck every county in Ireland and three-quarters of the country's potato crop had been destroyed.

Irish peasants immediately suffered as a result of the destruction of the potato crop. Unable to work or pay their landlords, thousands of Irish families were evicted from their homes. Food prices rose dramatically, and riots to obtain food took place in several cities. A year after the blight was first discovered, the first deaths from starvation were reported. Soon, epidemics and dis eases took their hold on the starving human population.

As a partial response, the British Parliament repealed the Corn Laws, which limited the importation of cheap foreign grain, in 1846. While this helped the English population, it made little difference in Ireland, where people could hardly afford to buy bread at any price. In 1846, after another potato crop was destroyed by blight, the British government reinstated a public works program. Local landlords were required to pay for most of the work, but the government would advance them the necessary money as a loan. This program, however, was hard to organize. By December, 400,000 persons were thus employed, but there were still not nearly enough jobs for all the people who needed them.

While the British government continued to make other food items available to the Irish, the prime minister refused to lower the prices or to give food away, fearful that such

actions would ruin the United Kingdom's economy. Some private organizations did run charities to feed the starving, and Queen Victoria even donated money to this cause. Under public pressure, and after the deaths of thousands of people, the government decided to distribute free soup and other basic rations. By the middle of July, 1847, over three million Irish adults and children were receiving relief. This program, however, ceased in September of the same year. The British government made no more efforts to help the Irish people survive the famine. Throughout the famine years Irish farmers did produce foodstuffs, but these were for export or for those residents who could afford to buy them. Thus bacon, oats, flour, cattle, butter, eggs, and other such provisions left the country while the Irish poor starved to death.

More than two million Irish people emigrated between 1845 and 1855. Many left for the port cities of England, and those who could raise the money for passage sailed to the United States, where they faced great prejudice. The famine lasted until 1849.

All told, famine and disease killed over one million people.

In "The News from Ireland," Trevor demonstrates the disparity between the starvation of the poor Irish and the comfort of Anglo-Irish who profit from their labor. He evokes the situation through the viewpoint of outsiders who feel no real effect of the famine. His characters are all Protestants, the majority from England. The Pulvertafts, who have inherited an English estate in Ireland, have over the years learned to accept the inequities inherent in Ireland and no longer feel uncomfortable about the position of privilege and ease that they occupy. Their new governess, however, has some difficulty acclimating to her new surrounding and accepting such "unintentional wickedness." The story chronicles her shift to complacency, and in so doing, it raises more universal themes: the greater issues of personal and social responsibility.

Techniques

Although the setting of "The News from Ireland" is unidentified, the Pulvertaft estate is most likely in a county in southern Ireland, as indicated by the profusion of poor Irish Catholics in the community. At the time the story opens, Ireland has been in the throes of the Great Famine for about two years. Over a million Irish people leave their homes during this period, heading for harbor towns and, with hope, America.

They have little choice but to leave their homeland, for they have neither food for their families nor money to purchase food.

Trevor uses multiple points of view in "The News from Ireland," allowing the story to explore the innermost thoughts of his characters. The voices of Fogarty and Anna Maria, however, are given prominence throughout. Thematically, this makes sense, for the Pulvertafts have already come to accept their role as "strangers and visitors" to Ireland, but Anna Maria is still working through her feelings about the events in Ireland and the place of the English there. Fogarty is also deeply concerned with Irish history and the relationship between the Irish and the English. He focuses on Anna Maria because she is the newest arrival, thus a person he hopes to influence.

The story is told chronologically, beginning a few weeks after the arrival of Anna Maria and ending shortly after her marriage to Erskine, more than a year later.

Though this is a straightforward narrative style, the narration itself is varied, as indicated by the shifting points of view. The narrative itself also plays with various forms.

Some of it employs traditional storytelling technique, such as use of dialogue and description, but Anna Maria's point of view is solely expressed through her diary entries.

The most important symbol in the story is the child born with the marks of the stigmata. For the Irish peasants, this child symbolizes that God has not forgotten them; God has sent His message to them through the child. For the Protestants and the English, however, the child is seen as a symbol of both the desperation of the Irish people and their desecration of human life. Fogarty expresses the prevailing opinion that the family inflicted the marks on their infant in the hopes that being a "holy" family would save them in a time of famine. For the Protestants, the stigmata also serves as a symbol of the superstitious nature of the Catholic religion. Erskine vocalizes these thoughts when he talks about the fraud inherent in Catholic religious beliefs.

Other aspects of the story function symbolically. Details emphasize the Pulvertafts' self-imposed isolation from their community: the maids shuttering the windows, the wall that surrounds the property. The road also has a symbolic property, both one that is formally recognized in the text and one that is more subtle. Mr. Pulvertaft readily acknowledges that construction of the road is primarily undertaken to provide work for the Irish men in the community. However, the form of the road also has a symbolic content, for it merely encircles the property, essentially going nowhere. Thus the road further reinforces the

insular nature of the Pulvertaft family while demon strating the wasteful excess of the wealthy while others are starving.

Themes

Poverty and Wealth

The differences between poverty and wealth figure strongly in "The News from Ireland." The difficult life of the poor Irish—though they are not seen—is sharply contrasted with the ease of the Pulvertafts' life. The Pulvertafts are a wealthy English family. They enjoy the means to maintain a large estate with several servants. They have the money to provide food for the poor, donations to beggars, and even to employ a number of men to build a road that will encircle their property. The road is essentially an act of charity: it goes nowhere and is unnecessary, but it gives some of the local men a way to earn money. Mr. Pulvertaft acknowledges this truth with his orders to Erskine: "We must continue to occupy these men." Despite a superficial understanding of the plight of their lessfortunate neighbors, the Pulvertafts continue to live in luxury, and their point of view influences their perceptions. For instance, they see the road as an act of benevolence for the community because it provides work; they never understand that for their impoverished community it may symbolize excess and waste.

In contrast, the majority of the Irish Catholics in the community have not even enough money to buy food to stave off starvation. With the failure of the potato crop, they have lost their primary food source. There is little work or food to be had, and people are dying in seemingly countless numbers. Parents feed their babies grass and roots in a futile attempt to provide nourishment. Their monetary poverty also leads to emotional and spiritual poverty, as indicated by their perception of the stigmata child. The Great Famine has made the Irish peasants feel as if they have been forsaken by God; thus they see the child as a sign that God has at last recognized them. If the child's parents actually inflicted the marks on him, however, such an action would also indicate a moral poverty. The sum of the poor Irish experience in the story is one of physical and spiritual emptiness.

God and Religion

By the time the story opens, the Great Famine has been devastating Ireland for about two years; all the Irish peasants have left is their Roman Catholic faith. The child with the marks of stigmata is considered by the people as a "miracle, a sign from God in these distressful times." For a time, this event transforms the community: the priests give sermons about it, the bishop pays a visit to see the child, a letter is sent to Rome. The Irish people in the community believe in the validity of the stigmata, but the child dies. Subsequently the Irish grow discontent, attaching "some omen to this death."

In contrast to the faithful Irish, the protagonists of the story, all of whom are Protestant, do not believe that the child was born with stigmata. Fogarty and his sister believe that the parents did it themselves, as a means of saving their lives by becoming a "holy family." The Pulvertafts also come to that same conclusion. Anna Maria is astonished

when Fogarty tells her this. "I could not believe what he was telling me," she writes in her diary, "that all these people had independently dismissed, so calmly and so finally, what the people who were closer to the event took to be a miracle." But Anna Maria comes to accept this explanation for the marks on the child, thus indicating her alliance with the other Protestants, all of whom negate the Irish Catholic experience. As Erskine says, the Irish do not think the stigmata child is a fraud "any more than they believe that the worship of the Virgin Mary is a fraud perpetrated by the priests. Or that the Body and the Blood is. Fraud is grist to their mill." Such a statement not only degrades the Catholic religion, but also demonstrates the lack of understanding the plight of the poor Irish people. In trying times, people often rely on their faith to sustain them, but the Protestants in the story would take even that away from the Irish Catholics.

Change and Transformation

The themes of change and transformation are crucial to the story. Fogarty opens the story by presenting the idea of the transformation of Ireland itself. He "thinks of other visitors there have been: the Celts whose ramshackle gypsy empire expired in this same landscape, St. Patrick with his holy shamrock, the outrageous Vikings preceding the wily Normans, the adventurers of the Virgin Queen." All of these people came to Ireland over the centuries and changed it: The Celts dominated the region for over a thousand years. St. Patrick, a Romano- British missionary, brought Christianity to the pagan region. The Viking conquerors attacked in the 700s and 800s but eventually assimilated with the Irish people. The Normans invaded Ireland in 1170 and soon gained great wealth and land, and Queen Elizabeth I sent soldiers to Ireland, which effectively brought Ireland under English control. Fogarty's list indicates that the nature of Ireland has changed over the centuries as "strangers and visitors" have come to dominate the region.

On a more personal level, Anna Maria's transformation into an Anglo-Irish person is demonstrated in the story. When she first arrives, she keenly feels the inequity of the situation. Even five months after her arrival in Ireland, she is still "thinking of the starvation, of the faces of the silent women when they come to the gate-lodge for food." By the end of the story, however, her marriage to Erskine allies her with the other, more callous Protestants. She has come to accept the imbalance that is Ireland.

Style

Setting

The setting of "The News from Ireland" is an unidentified location in Ireland, but the Pulvertaft estate is most likely in a county in southern Ireland, as indicated by the profusion of poor Irish Catholics in the community. At the time the story opens, Ireland has been in the throes of the Great Famine for around two years. Over a million Irish people leave their homes during this period, heading for harbor towns and, with hope, America. They have little choice but to leave their homeland, for they have neither food for their families nor money to purchase food.

The Pulvertafts are English and have been settled on their estate for eight years. Despite this length of time, they do not actively engage with their community, except by giving away food and hiring men to build their road. Instead, they maintain their isolation behind the walls of their estate, demonstrating that they are not really of their community, but rather, exist apart from it. What goes on outside of their walls does not strongly affect them or their actions and decisions.

Point of View and Narration

Trevor uses multiple points of view in "The News from Ireland," allowing the story to explore the innermost thoughts of his characters. The voices of Fogarty and Anna Maria, however, are given prominence throughout. Thematically, this makes sense, for the Pulvertafts have already come to accept their role as "strangers and visitors" to Ireland, but Anna Maria is still working through her feelings about the events in Ireland and the place of the English there. Fogarty is also deeply concerned with Irish history and the relationship between the Irish and the English. He focuses on Anna Maria because she is the newest arrival, thus a person he hopes to influence.

The story is told chronologically, beginning a few weeks after the arrival of Anna Maria and ending shortly after her marriage to Erskine, more than a year later. Though this is a straightforward narrative style, the narration itself is varied, as indicated by the shifting points of view. The narrative itself also plays with various forms. Some of it employs traditional storytelling technique, such as use of dialogue and description, but Anna Maria's point of view is solely expressed through her diary entries.

Symbols and Symbolism

The most important symbol in the story is the child born with the marks of the stigmata. For the Irish peasants, this child symbolizes that God has not forgotten them; God has sent His message to them through the child. For the Protestants and the English, however, the child is seen as a symbol of both the desperation of the Irish people and their desecration of human life. Fogarty expresses the prevailing opinion that the family

inflicted the marks on their infant in the hopes that being a "holy" family would save them in a time of famine. For the Protestants, the stigmata also serves as a symbol of the superstitious nature of the Catholic religion. Erskine vocalizes these thoughts when he talks about the fraud inherent in Catholic religious beliefs.

Other aspects of the story function symbolically. Details emphasize the Pulvertafts self-imposed isolation from their community: the maids shuttering the windows, the wall that surrounds the property. The road also has a symbolic property, both one that is formally recognized in the text and one that is more subtle. Mr. Pulvertaft readily acknowledges that construction of the road is primarily undertaken to provide work for the Irish men in the community. However, the form of the road also has a symbolic content, for it merely encircles the property, essentially going nowhere. Thus the road further reinforces the insular nature of the Pulvertaft family while demonstrating the wasteful excess of the wealthy while others are starving.

Historical Context

The English in Ireland

England first gained control of Ireland in the late 1100s. The English conquerors initiated a program of seizing land belonging to Irish owners and giving it to English settlers, most of whom were Anglican. These landowning Anglo-Irish became the upper class and controlled most of the countries wealth. Over time, much of the land came under the control of these absentee landlords. The majority of native Irish were Roman Catholics and worked as laborers and as tenant farmers on the English estates. They formed the lowest social and economic class. The English brutally repressed the Irish, and at times over the centuries, the Irish rebelled.

In 1801, the Act of Union joined Ireland and Great Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This act disbanded Ireland's Parliament, but the Irish had little representation in Britain's Parliament. The Irish resented their lack of representation, as well as the use of their tax dollars to support the Anglican Church.

During the 1800s, the British government struggled with Irish nationalists over the issue of home rule for Ireland. In 1916, Irish nationalists revolted in the Easter Rising. The British suppressed the rebellion and executed its leaders. Two years later, fighting broke out between the Irish Republican Army and British troops. Finally, in 1922, a treaty divided Ireland, with the 26 counties of Catholic southern Ireland becoming the Irish Free State. It was a self-governing dominion with ties to Britain. The remaining six northern counties, which were mainly Protestant, remained part of the United Kingdom. Many Irish nationalists refused to accept the arrangement, and civil war again broke out. In 1949, the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, became completely independent.

Protestants in Northern Ireland came to dominate the government and economy. In the late 1960s, Catholics in Northern Ireland began to demonstrate for an end to discrimination. These demonstrations soon turned violent, and the British government sent in troops. The Irish Republican Army wanted to drive the British out of the north and unite all of Ireland. In the ensuing decades, Northern Ireland was fraught with violence.

Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s

By the mid-1980s, the British government was trying to end the violence in Northern Ireland through political means. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 gave the Republic of Ireland a voice in the affairs of Northern Ireland, but in time, both Catholics and Protestants denounced the agreement.

In 1993, the British and Irish prime ministers pledged their commitment to the principle of selfdetermination in Northern Ireland. The IRA declared a cease-fire the following

year. The British, however, demanded that the IRA disarm before talks began. The IRA refused and in 1996 renewed its fighting. Peace talks resumed the following year, and the Good Friday peace accords were signed in 1998.

The Irish Potato Famine

In 1845, a fungus struck Ireland's potato crop, the mainstay of Irish agriculture. Irish peasants subsisted on their small potato plots; many worked in return for a plot of land instead of money. At least two million people—one quarter of the total population—depended on the potato for survival. Afflicted plants wilted overnight and yielded potatoes that quickly rotted. By February 1846, only five months after the fungus first struck, the potato disease had struck every county in Ireland and three-quarters of the country's potato crop had been destroyed.

Irish peasants immediately suffered as a result of the destruction of the potato crop. Unable to work or pay their landlords, thousands of Irish families were evicted from their homes. Food prices rose dramatically, and riots to obtain food took place in several cities. A year after the blight was first discovered, the first deaths from starvation were reported. Soon, epidemics and diseases took their hold on the starving human population.

As a partial response, the British Parliament repealed the Corn Laws, which limited the importation of cheap foreign grain, in 1846. While this helped the English population, it made little difference in Ireland, where people could hardly afford to buy bread at any price. In 1846, after another potato crop was destroyed by blight, the British government reinstated a public works program. Local landlords were required to pay for most of the work, but the government would advance them the necessary money as a loan. This program, however, was hard to organize. By December, 400,000 persons were thus employed, but there were still not nearly enough jobs for all the people who needed them.

While the British government continued to make other food items available to the Irish, the prime minister refused to lower the prices or to give food away, fearful that such actions would ruin the United Kingdom's economy. Some private organizations did run charities to feed the starving, and Queen Victoria even donated money to this cause. Under public pressure, and after the deaths of thousands of people, the government decided to distribute free soup and other basic rations. By the middle of July 1847 over three million Irish adults and children were receiving relief. This program, however, ceased in September of the same year. The British government made no more efforts to help the Irish people survive the famine. Throughout the famine years Irish farmers did produce foodstuffs, but these were for import or for those residents who could afford to buy them. Thus bacon, oats, flour, cattle, butter, eggs, and other such provisions were exported from the country while the Irish poor starved to death.

More than two million Irish people left the country between 1845 and 1855. Many left for the port cities of England, and those who could raise the money for passage emigrated

to the United States, where they faced great prejudice. The famine lasted until 1849. All told, famine and disease killed over one million people.

Critical Overview

By the time "The News from Ireland" was published in 1986, as part of a collection of short stories, William Trevor was already a highly renowned writer of fiction. As they had done in the past, reviewers acclaimed Trevor's clear style, subject matter, and character evocation. While Trevor continued his trend of exploring the lives of ordinary people, he also expanded his scope to focus on the historical and political turmoil that Ireland has suffered over the centuries.

Reviewers almost unanimously admired the collection. Overwhelmingly, reviewers preferred the stories set in Ireland to those set in England or Italy, where Trevor has also lived. Elizabeth Spencer, writing for the *New York Times Book Review,* believed that his English stories were "strangely 'produced,' planned instead of crying to be written." But she continued, "It is the news from Ireland that, wander where he will, [Trevor] is always returning to give voice to—and these are the stories with flow and power." T. Patrick Hill also lauded the authenticity of Trevor's Irish stories in a review for *America*: "This book serves as a strong reminder of how authoritatively [Trevor] can hold up a mirror of fiction to reveal a real face of Ireland that many of us . . . cannot fail to appreciate."

John Dunne was one of the few exceptions to the laudatory reviewers. He wrote in *Books Ireland,* "generally [Trevor's] work ambles along in a pleasant nondescript manner which, for me at any rate, seldom elicits any emotional response at all." Dunne, however, acknowledged the subjectivity of the genre of book reviewing and did not fault Trevor stylistically.

Surprisingly, other criticism stemmed from Trevor's already proven artistry. Geoff Dyer wrote in the *New Statesman,* "Of Trevor's skill, his understanding of human foibles and weakness—of his stature as a writer, in other words—there is no question. Each of these stories is extremely impressive in its own right; taken as a whole though one wonders what this collection *adds* to his reputation." John Fowles, on the other hand, took exception to those who faulted Trevor for his past achievements: "Everyone conceded that he is a very accomplished writer and then argues that such accomplishment is not enough." Fowles opened his *Atlantic* review stating that "William Trevor is one of the finest writers in English today and that his new collection of short stories equals the best of his past ones," and he closed his review by adding, "I pray my American readers will join the circle round [Trevor's] sad and fastidious but ever seductive Irish voice."

Most reviewers particularly enjoyed the title story. Wrote Spencer, "For its grasp of a historical moment, penetration of character and dramatic force, [the title story,] less than 40 pages long, comes close to creating the resonant effect of a full novel." A few reviewers, however, saw the story's length and wide-ranging content as a drawback. Fowles believed that Trevor was guilty of "trying to smuggle the would-be short novel into the short story." However, he concludes his discussion of the story with this positive declaration: "It is a story that needs to be read more than once to be fully savored."

Veronica Geng, writing for the *New Republic*, called "The News from Ireland" Trevor's "primal story." She explained, "From it has flowed all his earlier fiction—five volumes of stories, twice as many novels—and he's needed 20 years to be able to write it." Overall, many reviewers shared Geng's opinion that Trevor's "are still the best stories around."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she explores the process by which the privileged characters in "The News from Ireland" learn to shirk responsibility for the devastation of the Great Famine.

The prolific writer William Trevor is one of the modern masters of the short story. He turned to writing after he had already developed a successful career as a sculptor, and his talent for the written word quickly propelled him to fame. Despite his long-term residence in England and other locations in Europe, Trevor considers himself to be a wholly Irish author. As scholar Kristin Morrison points out, "Just as Trevor wrote about England from the vantage point of an outsider [in his earliest works], so later he began to write more and more about Ireland only after the years spent in England, Switzerland, and Italy had provided necessary distance, allowing him [in his words] 'to look back from someplace else.'" Indeed, it was several decades into his career before Trevor's fascination with Irish history began to manifest itself, starting with two novels from the 1980s: *Fools of Fortune and The Silence in the Garden.* Those novels are now considered masterpieces of Irish fiction, as is Trevor's short story "The News from Ireland."

"The News from Ireland" immediately distinguishes itself in its length; some of the story's first reviewers dubbed it a would-be novel. However, the length of the story mirrors its breadth of scope. In this story, Trevor hauntingly evokes the Ireland of the 1840s, when the nation was caught in the midst of the Great Famine that led to the deaths of as many as 1.5 million Irish, or almost 18 percent of the estimated population of 8.5 million. However, Trevor also raises issues that extend beyond the tragedy of the famine, particularly ideas of personal and social culpability. Though the characters in "The News from Ireland" attempt to escape responsibility, Trevor shows that all people have a moral obligation— a human responsibility.

"The News from Ireland" uses one Anglo- Irish family and their household to draw these universal themes from the famine experience in Ireland. The wealthy and Protestant Pulvertafts arrived in Ireland in 1839, only eight years before the story begins, to claim the estate left to them by a distant relative. Although they aid the Irish peasants with food, monetary donations, and even work projects, they evidence little true understanding of the plight of the people who live outside their walls; thus they belong to the private and protected world. Fogarty, their half-mad butler, who is also Protestant, recognizes them as foreigners who "belong here now," yet he actively resents their ignorant intrusion. "The wickedness here is not intentional," he says of the Pulvertafts, yet it is wickedness nonetheless. At the same time, however, he recognizes that he "belonged neither outside the estate gates with the people who had starved nor with a family as renowned as the Pulvertafts"—neither in the private world of privilege nor in the public world of poverty. Another member of the household who has no clearly defined place is the English governess, Anna Maria Heddoe, who has recently arrived in Ireland. Her fresh perception is a focal point of the story: as a newcomer, Anna Maria—

a "young woman of principle and sensibility" but more importantly, a "stranger and visitor"—still has the ability to see the inequities in Ireland.

Fogarty accuses the Pulvertafts of "perpetrat[ing] theft without being thieves." By this he means that the Pulvertafts have, by virtue of an inheritance handed down among English families since the days of Queen Elizabeth, assumed that their estate is actually *theirs.* Their acts of charity are based on a sense of feeling that they *should* do so, not that they must. Through his litany of those other "visitors" who have overrun Ireland-Celts, Vikings, Normans—Fogarty demonstrates the Pulvertafts' lack of true claim to the land. He would prefer the estate to have gone unclaimed and revert back to its natural overgrown state. The Irish peasants would have eaten the wild fruit that grew there, fished in the lake, and trapped rabbits as game. Fogarty's dream shows his belief that the land should not be usurped and transformed by the conquerors but should belong to those people who would use it most equitably. This vision contrasts strongly with the Pulvertafts' plans, which include improving the land. "Much undergrowth has yet to be cleared and burned," Mr. Pulvertaft says; the natural order of the land must be demolished in order to make the estate habitable for the newcomers.

When Anna Maria arrives on the estate, she instantly senses the disparity between the public and private spheres, the domains of those who have long been in Ireland and those who are newly arrived. Although only in Ireland for a few weeks, she sincerely prays for the Irish peasants, asking for God's mercy. Mrs. Pulvertaft, in contrast, although repeating the reverend's prayer each Sunday "that God's love should extend to the hungry at this time," believes the Irish only deserve as much charity and prayers as she sees fit to disperse. She agrees with the "[J]ust and sensible laws [that] prevent the wholesale distribution of corn," subscribing to the English propaganda that providing food to the starving would destroy the British economy. Thus she shows her agreement with the British government's policy of essentially doing nothing to ease the hunger in Ireland.

Among the actions the British government did take on briefly were work programs to employ the unemployed, and Mr. Pulvertaft hires as many of the local Irish peasants as possible to construct a road that encircles the estate. The Pulvertafts feel they are doing a great service in hiring the Irish men, and Mr. Pulvertaft even creates more work in order to employ more men for a longer period of time. Pulvertaft, however, fails to recognize the injustice of spending so much money to build a road that essentially goes nowhere, while people do not even have the means to feed themselves and their families. That the road only traverses the Pulvertaft property also serves to enforce the private, privileged aspect of the estate; along with the wall, it acts as another barrier to protect the family from the outside world of death and devastation.

Mrs. Pulvertaft, like Anna Maria, gives voice to the supposed reason for the famine: God's wrath. Erskine best expresses the Protestant view of the Catholic religion: "Fraud is grist to their mill." Thus, when the village reports a Catholic child born with the marks of stigmata, the Protestants—the Pulvertafts and the Fogartys-believe the parents to have inflicted the injury in order to be considered a "holy" family and be saved from starvation. Anna Maria listens, "astonished," as Fogarty tells her this." I could not

believe. . . ," she thinks, "that all these people had independently dismissed, so calmly and so finally, what the people who were closer to the event took to be a miracle." That night she cries before going to sleep, "hating more than ever the place I am in, where people are driven back to savagery." With these words, Anna Maria shows her acceptance of the idea that the Irish parents did mutilate their own child, although it goes against her first instincts. Like the other Protestants, she is "learn[ing] to live with things" as they are in Ireland.

Although Anna Maria continues to despair of the plight of the starving Irish and of the "infant tortured with Our Saviour's wounds," she is slowly becoming incorporated into the landscape: the world of the Pulvertafts, not the world of the Irish. Yet the transition is slow. Her discomfort with her surroundings and the situation of Ireland is evidenced by her inability to eat the food served by the Irish Catholic cook. Soon, however, she will more closely resemble Mrs. Pulvertaft, who also manifests physically her discomfort in Ireland. Just as Mrs. Pulvertaft "has become used to [the discomfort], arriving as it does every day in the afternoon and then going away," Anna Maria comes to accept that Fogarty will dispose of her meals—in a sense, making the problems go away. Interestingly, Anna Maria, so cognizant of the starvation of the Irish, never faults her own wasteful habit.

Anna Maria draws closer to the Pulvertafts when she and Erskine, the estate manager, spark up a courtship. The two speak of the Pulvertaft son, who has been persuaded by his family to forsake a career in the military in order to learn to care for the estate. "He is reconciled now," Anna Maria says of George Arthur, but in reality, she is also speaking of herself. When Erskine proposes to her, she ends in accepting his offer and, as Fogarty points out, "pulling herself up by marrying him." At last, she has found a place for herself, and indeed, the marriage seems more out of desire for position than for love. When she first arrived at the estate, she recognized that she belonged with neither the Pulvertafts nor with the servant Fogartys, but once she is Erskine's wife she will sit in church with him "in the pew behind the Pulvertafts, not at the side of the Fogartys." In allying with Erskine, Anna Maria ultimately rejects the public world of the Irish. She no longer is concerned with the difficulties that lie in the country, for after a year residing with the Pulvertafts, her world has already shrunk to the goings-on inside of the estate walls.

Still, Fogarty tries to prevent her alignment with Erskine, and hence the Pulvertafts. He tells her that it would be better if the Pulvertaft line should expire with George Arthur. When Anna Maria exclaims that is a wicked thing to say, Fogarty admits that "It is wicked, miss, but not untrue. It is wicked because it comes from wickedness, you know that. Your sharp eye has needled all that out." "I do not know these things," Anna Maria protests, thus negating her former interest in understanding the situation in Ireland and everyone's place in it—both English and Irish. As the story sums up, "Stranger and visitor, she has learnt to live with things."

Source: Rena Korb, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses themes of invasion and homesickness in Trevor's story.

The characters in William Trevor's story "The News from Ireland" are preoccupied with their place in the world. As the story presents the perspective of several different characters, themes of history, nostalgia, and foreignness emerge as dominant in the thoughts of these characters.

History is a central theme of this story. Particularly, Irish national history. The story, first published in the 1980s, is set in the 1840s, during the potato famine in Ireland. The author thus demonstrates an interest in history through setting his story in the context of a historically real era in Irish history which took place some one-hundred-andforty years earlier. Several characters in the story are equally preoccupied with the history of Ireland. Fogarty, the butler at the home of the Pulvertafts, is keenly aware of Ireland's long history of being invaded by foreign forces. Fogarty resents the presence of the "Pulvertafts of Ipswich," an English family, on the Irish estate of their deceased ancestors. In Fogarty's thoughts about the Pulvertafts, as well as about their newly arrived English governess, Anna Maria Heddoe, he ironically refers to them as "visitors," quickly making the connection of their presence in Ireland to previous "visitors," who were in fact series of "invaders" in the history of Ireland : "Fogarty is an educated man, and thinks of other visitors there have been: the Celts, whose ramshackle gypsy empire expired in this same landscape, St Patrick with his holy shamrock, the outrageous Vikings preceding the wily Normans, the adventurers of the Virgin Queen." For Fogarty, the series of foreign invasions which characterize Irish history are as much a factor in his perspective as if they had occurred in his own life time. Fogarty adds the Pulvertafts to his litany of invaders, following mention of the Normans: "His present employers arrived here also, eight years ago, in 1839." Fogarty even marks the exact year of their arrival, in a similar fashion as one would note the date of an important historical event. Even the fact the Fogarty still thinks of the family in residence as the Pulvertafts "of Ipswich" expresses his opinion of them as a people who come from, and rightly belong, elsewhere than in Ireland. Fogarty is particularly preoccupied with the latest "visitor" to the estate, Miss Heddoe, the governess, whom he views as "another of the strangers" who have accompanied the Pulvertafts, as "such visitors, in the present and in the past, obsess the butler." Miss Heddoe con- firms this preoccupation with history, as she writes in her diary that, "I was not here long before I observed that families and events are often seen historically in Ireland—more so, for some reason, than in England."

Fogarty's preoccupation with Irish history includes a strong sense of resentment toward all "visitors," past and present. In addition to his preoccupation with Ireland's history of invasions, Fogarty has a strong sense of *nostalgia* for the past. In fact, this nostalgia is warped and distorted to the point that he hopes for the decline and decay of the Pulvertaft's estate, by means of returning to its natural, prehistoric, primitive state,

returning "back into the clay it came from." In other words, Fogarty's nostalgia for a past free of invaders goes all the way back to the beginning of time. When in possession of old Hugh Pulvertaft, "House and estate fell away under the old man, and in Fogarty's opinion it is a pity the process didn't continue until everything was driven back into the clay it came from."

The new family of Pulvertafts—new to Fogarty, although they have occupied the estate for eight years at the opening of the story—are also interested in the history of their inherited land. Fogarty muses that they have done much to the grounds, "in their endeavor to make the place what it had been in the past, long before the old man's time." The Pulvertafts, however, view the history of their estate as a legitimization of their rightful ownership; as Mr. Pulvertaft remarks, "'There have been Pulvertafts here, you know, since Queen Elizabeth first granted them the land.'"

But, clearly, for Fogarty, the desire to return the estate to its past state goes infinitely further back in history than what the Pulvertaft's have in mind. Again, from Fogarty's perspective, the Pulvertafts are simply one of many invaders, whose offense against his person, and against Ireland, lies in the fact that they "did not stay where they were."

He wishes to speak the truth as it appears to him: that their fresh, decent blood is the blood of the invader though they are not themselves invaders, that they perpetuate theft without being thieves. He does not dislike the Pulvertafts of Ipswich, he had nothing against them beyond the fact that they did not stay where they were. He and his sister might alone have attended the mouldering of the place, urging it back to the clay.

Fogarty's desire for the departure of these English "invaders" is so extreme that he even delights in the fantasy that Miss Heddoe will leave in dismay, that Erskine, the English grounds keeper, will be killed in anger by the Irishmen Mr. Pulvertaft has employed to build the estate road, and that the Pulvertafts will "return to their native land." Fogarty hopes that "the governess might leave," and that: "Erskine might be knocked from his horse by the men in a fit of anger. . . . Erskine might lie dead himself on the day of the governess' departure, and the two events, combining, would cause these Pulvertafts of Ipswich to see the error of their ways and return to their native land."

The perspective of the English characters in this story, the Pulvertaft family, the grounds keeper Erskine, and the governess, Miss Heddoe, is contrasted with that of Fogarty. While from Fogarty's perspective, these English "visitors" are in fact "invaders," from the perspective of the English characters, their experience on the Pulvertaft estate is that of foreigners in a foreign land. The English are similarly concerned with history and nostalgia, but of a very different nature from that of the Irish Fogarty. As foreigners in Ireland, these characters struggle to find a secure sense of place in their new environs.

Miss Heddoe states in her diary at one point that she is "homesick" for England: "I am homesick, I make no bones about it. I cannot help dwelling on all that I have left behind, on familiar sounds and places. First thing when I awake I still imagine I am in England: reality comes most harshly then." In addition to her sense of being misplaced nationally, Miss Heddoe does not have a stable sense of place in terms of her socioeconomic

status within the Pulvertaft household. As she writes in her diary, "I had not thought a governess' position was difficult in a household, but somehow I am finding it so. I belong neither with the family nor the servants." Miss Heddoe's distress over her sense of displacement worsens over time. As the famine worsens, and Miss Heddoe learns that the child supposedly born with a stigmata has probably been intentionally marked by its own parents, she comes to despise "the place I am in": "I wept before I went to bed. I wept again when I lay there, hating more than ever the place I am in, where people are driven back to savagery."

Erskine, the English grounds keeper who eventually proposes marriage to Miss Heddoe, is also aware of his status as a foreigner in Ireland: "He has ended up in a country that is not his own, employing men whose speech he at first found difficult to understand, collecting rents from tenants he does not trust, as he feels he might trust the people of Worcestershire or Durham."

Mrs. Pulvertaft is also "homesick" for England, haunted by dreams which express her feelings of foreignness and displacement in Ireland. In contemplating the possible dangers of her daughter Emily's plans to travel throughout Europe, Mrs. Pulvertaft thinks nostalgically of England as the only "safe" place in the world: "Only England is not like that: dear, safe, uncomplicated England, thinks Mrs. Pulvertaft, and for a moment is nostalgic." Dozing in her room one afternoon, Mrs. Pulvertaft drifts into a dream which expresses her anxiety over occupying an "unfamiliar landscape," and the disjunction between her sense of vulnerability (in the dream she is "naked"), as a foreigner, and the feelings of comfort and familiarity she experiences inside her home with her family: "She dreams that she runs through unfamiliar landscape, although she has not run anywhere for many years. There are sand dunes and a flat expanse which is empty, except for tiny white shells crackling beneath her feet. She seems to be naked, which is alarming, and worries her in her dream. Then everything changes and she is in the drawing-room, listening to Adelaide playing her pieces. Tea is brought in, and there is ordinary conversation."

By the end of the story, these foreigners in Ireland, these "visitors," "strangers," accept their uncomfortable status on the Pulvertaft estate, just as Fogarty has no choice but to accept the perpetual presence of "invaders" to his country. In the final lines of the story, Fogarty, probably based on his clandestine reading of her diary, reflects that, although Miss Heddoe is "sick at heart," and "has wept on her pillow," she will remain, and, although she "has learnt to live with things," she will always be a "stranger and visitor" in Ireland.

Source: Liz Brent, for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In this essay, Bonaccorso illustrates how Trevor employs his characters to evoke the author's view of historical truth.

What is history? Is it a kind of truth that transcends our individual lives, and, essentially, our understanding? Or is it our creation, an external manifestation of our lives together, of relationships that begin at the level of intimacy? Here, at this base point, we often find the wisdom of fiction.

A prevalent device for the revelation of truth in William Trevor's fiction is his characters' evasion or subversion of it. When these characters are seen in their social contexts, it is historical truth that often emerges like an uninvited guest, insinuating itself into collective experience and individual lives. Amorphous and mainly perceptible in shapes of family, class, and culture, history is ultimately revealed as a moral force adhering to the inheritances and destinies of Trevor's people.

In the story form Trevor does not so much write historical fiction as fictional portraiture in the context of history. And yet in Trevor's hands such group and individual portraiture is an interpretation of history. He envisions Irish history along the lines of Stephen Dedalus' definition, of a "nightmare" from which few awake. Certainly, in Trevor's stories, the recognition of history as nightmare precedes any possible wakefulness. And yet to be sure, there is pain in such an enlightenment.

"Beyond the Pale" and "The News from Ireland," two title stories of the collections published in 1981 and 1986, evidence Trevor's development of historical context as a short story device. In both stories that context moves into the reader's focus from the outer edges of the narrative, paralleling Trevor's vision of the infiltrating effects of history into people's lives. The suggestion is that it moves so subtly that many fail to comprehend it, or, because it seems so sinister in its pervasiveness, willfully avoid contemplating it.

In "Beyond the Pale" the historical element is at first contained almost entirely in one person's (Cynthia's) mind, and, after she receives an external shock, she becomes the medium through which it essentially explodes upon the other characters. Yet Trevor ironically mutes and distances that explosion by writing the story in the first person from the perspective of the emotionally smug and intellectually indifferent Milly. Furthermore, as in the Cassandra myth, Milly and the other characters react to the oddities of Cynthia's behavior rather than to the verities of her message.

"Beyond the Pale" is one of Trevor's many tourist stories. Four middle-aged people from Sussex arrive on their fourteenth annual trip to Glencorn Lodge in County Antrim. The bridge-playing foursome includes Cynthia's husband, Strafe, his old bachelor schoolmate Dekko, and the widowed narrator Milly, with whom Strafe is having an affair. "To Milly," as Ted Solotaroff states, "this is but another aspect of their longstanding comfortable arrangements." Indeed, all four are aware of the relationship, but tactfully

wrap it into their complacent cocoon. We begin to sense the story's historical linkage when we notice that this group also insulates its sensibilities from the political violence taking place in Northern Ireland. "We'd come to adore Co. Antrim, its glens and coastline," remarks Milly:

Since first we got to know it, in 1965, we'd all four fallen hopelessly in love with every variation of this remarkable landscape. People in England thought us mad of course: they see so much of the troubles on television that it's naturally difficult for them to realize that most places are just as they've always been. Yet coming as we did, taking the road along the coast, dawdling through Ballygally, it was impossible to believe that somewhere else the unpleasantness was going on.

As Gregory Schirmer comments, Milly's euphemistic tone "both perfectly characterizes and ironically undermines" her as one whose "willed innocence . . . rules out any understanding of the world beyond that of the self." But indeed, Trevor also shows that her failure to seek external understanding corrupts her self-awareness.

The small, bookish Cynthia stands in relative isolation within the group, however, and on this occasion suffers a shock of recognition about Ireland and about herself that all but consumes her and causes her to violate the group's placid code. An uncouth young Irishman, "not at all the kind of person one usually sees at Glencorn Lodge," appears as a one-night guest. He is in a distracted state, and finding Cynthia alone, singles her out to have her hear his tragic story. As a youth he had lived in the area near Glencorn Lodge. A young woman he had loved became an I.R.A. bomber in England. In utter despair over her crimes and shattered personality, he has sought her out and killed her. He makes a clumsy attempt to physically touch Cynthia, then goes down to the sea and, with her as an only witness, drowns himself.

When the others return to the lodge they find Cynthia teetering between hysteria and collapse. Their initial sympathy for her is tempered by her insistent protestations over what has happened and its meaning. Wishing to shunt off this new "unpleasantness," they prefer to think that the drowning was an accident and that the man's having touched Cynthia has set her mind astray. "All's well that's over," states Dekko, speaking for the three of them. But Cynthia does not acquiesce as she usually does to their refusal to listen to her, and she slips into a state that seems on one hand deranged and on the other clairvoyant, emerging as one of those manic menaces, those unwelcome truth-tellers that populate Trevor's works: "Can you imagine," she embarrassingly asked, "our very favorite places bitter with disaffection, with plotting and revenge? Can you imagine the treacherous murder of Shane O'Neill the Proud?"

She has been a reader of Irish history, and she mixes old events with present ills. Of course the others cannot and will not imagine such things. But we do, and we begin to sense a link between hysteria and history. Sibylline, she makes a wild but telling connection between the sexual guilt of her companions, their indifference to the day's tragedy, and a history of English colonial abuses in Ireland. Never before has she conceived a unity between these levels of selfish indifference, "the active principle," observes Ted Solotaroff, of their "privileged life." Up to this moment, her reading

knowledge of Ireland has served to spice the tourist curiosities of the others. Now and in this form it becomes threatening, and her husband angrily proclaims it "rubbish."

The fear that she inspires in the others convinces us that Cynthia is at least partially right. Her associates certainly generate an atmosphere of hypocrisy that squares with her sense of historical wrongdoing. Though they do not exactly perpetrate imperialism, they perpetuate its spirit by clutching their well-wrought complacency. Whether they are historically guilty by association is another matter. One may wish to apply Kristin Morrison's general point when she argues that ". . .in Trevor's world, the immoral behavior of individuals necessarily wounds the whole social fabric." It seems, however, that Trevor is content in "Beyond the Pale" to show a correspondence rather than a causality. He comes closer to causality in "The News from Ireland."

Although this story, set in mid nineteenthcentury Ireland, brings historical event to the doorstep in the form of the Great Famine, history enters tangentially as it does in "Beyond the Pale." The famine's horrible realities are spoken of (and indeed, mythologized) rather than shown, and only gradually do they dominate the feeling of the story. There is an oracular voice to match that of Cynthia in "Beyond the Pale" (that of the butler Fogarty), but in this work even the less emphatic characters seem to express history's manifestations. Active or passive, conscious or unaware, the characters in this story all move within a symbolically-defined historical context. There is no single dramatic crisis as in "Beyond the Pale," but this story more ably bears its historical weight.

The Pulvertafts of Ipswich have come to restore and live in their inherited Big House on an estate ceded to their ancestors during the Elizabethan plantation. It is 1847, and while starvation ravages the native population, the Pulvertafts carry on their renewal of grounds and house within their estate walls and plan an uncomplicated future for their children.

This family inhabits a complacent position similar to that of Milly, Strafe, and Dekko in "Beyond the Pale." Yet its intentions seem benign. Mr. Pulvertaft performs as master steward of his family's traditional succession. In this vein he considers his generation's "contribution to the estate" to be embodied in the construction of a road that is to encircle it. He is quite unaware, however, of how ironically the road symbolizes the Pulvertaft relationship to Ireland. It is a meaningless project, a circle that goes nowhere. It does not connect the estate with the outer world, but rather reenforces and actually extends the old barrier walls that it runs around. It is thought to be constructed as "an act of charity," employing destitute men for miles around, but as such it shows how the Pulvertaft position continues to be empowered by the people's disadvantage. Furthermore, and in spite of his apparent good will, Mr. Pulvertaft has hired a harsh and unscrupulous manager named Erskine to oversee the labor, who will send the men off one by one as gradual starvation makes them too weak to work. For the peasants the road involves heavy, bouldermoving effort; for Mr. Pulvertaft, it represents an aesthetic proposition: "Now, what could be nicer," he resumed, "than a picnic of lunch by the lake, then a drive through the silver birches, another pause by the abbey, continuing by the river for a while, and home by Bright Purple Hill?" Robert Rhodes calls attention to the

story's drawing-room symbolism of "the Irish maids fastening the shutters and drawing the blinds, further isolating and insulating the family." The road becomes another curtain drawn between the powerful and the helpless.

The Pulvertafts hide themselves as a way of coming to terms with the unruly, unencouraging reality of Ireland. Perhaps they also intuit the injustice of their powerful position and the moral compromise that inheres to their acceptance of it. Kristin Morrison comments succinctly: "The lie that they live is quite simply their assumption that the estate is theirs, that they can live safely within its walls, that their obligations outside are a matter of charity and not justice." Theirs is a "polite" self-deception, and their avoidance of truth approaches an art form. But the main characters in this moral drama are not the Pulvertafts. Rather they are two household retainers to whom the truth matters greatly: Fogarty, the poor Irish Protestant butler whose residence in the house precedes that of the Pulvertafts, and Anna Maria Heddoe, a principled young Englishwoman who is the newly-arrived governess. Through these two characterizations Trevor respectively separates the visionary and humanistic qualities that were embodied in Cynthia in "Beyond the Pale." This is an effective piece of strategy, for Trevor here wishes to challenge a purely humanistic version of truth.

The unpleasantly insinuating but accurate Fogarty considers the Pulvertafts unwitting meddlers in a world that is not rightfully theirs, "not themselves invaders" but perpetuators of a "theft without being thieves." Indeed, although Fogarty is himself devious and ungenerous, he alerts Heddoe to the grand irony of this well-fed family living easily in the midst of famine, assuming ownership while failing to acknowledge responsibility (for indeed, the Great Famine is partially a product of the colonial system that also produced the Big House).

The humanitarian Heddoe, on the other hand, is deeply troubled by the people's suffering and by the Pulvertafts' moral evasions. The story (much of it told through excerpts from her diary) mainly concerns the process of her Irish initiation. Fogarty hopes that she will become rebellious and throw outrage at the Pulvertafts. Ultimately, however, she is more repelled than moved by Fogarty's words and by the horrors beyond the estate walls. Robert Rhodes observes that this "desensitization process" leads to her acceptance of the marriage proposal of Erskine, in effect moving her "closer to the company of the Pulvertafts." Her goodness is compromised in turn, even as that of the Pulvertafts was by their inherited situation.

If such an inertia can overcome Anna Maria Heddoe, one wonders if all is not preordained by past events. What then is this powerful thing we call history? On the one hand it seems a manifestation of startling correspondences—such as a report of a peasant child born with the stigmata. On the other hand, history seems entirely inscrutable ("We live with His mistakes," says Fogarty.) Fogarty loves history's revelations. Heddoe is horrified by them. The Pulvertafts avoid them. Erskine manipulates them. Divine or hellish, the force of history seems a monolithic emanation from the beyond. Nevertheless, history is by definition human. In both stories, forces beyond the characters enter into their makeup and destiny, yet most of them fail to notice or willfully dismiss that connection. And yet Trevor shows us that their

complacency or moral evasion is part of history itself, that they unknowingly perpetuate the forces they fail to recognize, or perpetrate their evil effects without taking responsibility for doing so. In the later "The News from Ireland," the apparent conversion of the most morally responsible character into the perpetrators' camp lends a more sinister aspect to Trevor's tragic view of history itself.

Source: Richard Bonaccorso, "Not Noticing History: Two Tales by William Trevor" in *Connecticut Review,* Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 21-27.

Topics for Further Study

Find out more about the role of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland during the famine years. Do you think the Pulvertafts reflect a typical Anglo-Irish family? Why or why not?

Read "The News from Ireland" as if it were your introduction to the cataclysmic famine that devastated the Irish population in the 1840s, then compare it to a history of that time. How does the story portray the famine? Do you think it is an accurate portrayal?

Imagine that a portion of the story is told through another character's diary entries. Who would you choose to best convey the story, and why?

Find out what caused the devastation of the Ireland's potato crop in the 1840s, and how scientists managed to prevent such devastation from occurring again.

Conduct research to find examples of Irish literature written during the famine years. How do these portrayals differ from or resemble Trevor's?

Find out more about the efforts taken by the British government to improve the situation of the Irish during the famine. Do you think the government took enough action? What solutions might you propose to alleviate the starvation?

Do you think the multiple points of view and narrative styles render "The News from Ireland" a more effective story? Explain your answer, using specific examples from the text.

Compare and Contrast

1840s: In 1847, one quarter of a million Irish people leave their country. About 75 percent of these immigrants go to the United States.

1990s: Between 1985 and 1995, more than 150,000 Irish citizens leave their country. The majority of these immigrants go to the United Kingdom. The United States is the next most popular destination; between 1991 and 1994, 47,800 arrive in the United States.

1840s: During the Great Famine, as many as 1.5 million Irish people die as a result of starvation and disease. From 1845 to 1851, the population drops from 8.5 million to 6.6 million, or 23 percent.

1990s: The population of Ireland by 1999 is around 3.6 million. The death rate is 9 per 1,000 people, and the natural increase of population is .50 percent. The population of Ireland, on the decline since the 1840s, did not begin to rise again until the 1970s.

1840s: Half the Irish population learn the Irish language before they learn English. In 1841, 4 million, or about half the population, spoke Irish, but within ten years only 25 percent of the population could speak Irish.

1990s: Today, the Irish language is spoken by a distinct minority. Schools teach Irish, but classes are conducted in English.

1840s: It takes at least twelve hours to get from London, England, to Dublin, Ireland, via boat and railway.

1990s: Plane travel between London and Dublin takes under an hour and a half.

1840s: In 1841, 7 percent of land holdings are over 30 acres, while 45 percent of holdings are under five acres. Over two-thirds of the Irish people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Despite the Great Famine, by 1850, the area of cultivation has increased by over a million acres.

1990s: In the 1990s, 12 percent of the Irish workforce is employed in agriculture, which makes up 90 percent of the gross national product. The service industries dominate the Irish economy, and 40 percent of Irish industry is foreign owned.

1840s: In 1841, Daniel O'Connell launches a political movement to repeal the union of Ireland and Britain. Of the 100 Irish representatives in the British Parliament, 39 support this measure.

1990s: Most Irish citizens (in Southern and Northern Ireland) have come to accept the division. In 1998, an overwhelming majority of voters—94 percent in Southern Ireland and 71 percent in Northern Ireland—voted in support of the Good Friday peace accords, which ceased hostilities between the two factions.

What Do I Read Next?

Trevor's fiction has been compared to that of the Irish writer James Joyce. Joyce's short story collection *The Dubliners* (1914) explores facets of life in Ireland from the viewpoints of children and adults, and raises political, artistic, and religious concerns. The final story of the work, "The Dead," is considered a masterpiece of fiction worldwide.

Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* (1938) explores sin and redemption through evocation of a British teenage gang leader and his young wife. Both are Roman Catholics, and their religious background plays a major role in their thoughts if not their actions.

British writer Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The House in Paris* (1935) reveals the inner workings of an upper middle-class family through the narration of two children. Against the backdrop of a house in Paris, the family's infidelities and tragedies are revealed.

Trevor's short story "Beyond the Pale" (1981) explores the political turmoil in contemporary Ireland through the plot device of English tourists exposed to terrorist violence in Northern Ireland. The vacationers are forced to confront their own roles in the Anglo-Irish conflict.

Seamus Deane's novel *Reading in the Dark* (1996) chronicles an Irish Catholic family in the 1950s and 1960s, relating how the family tragedies hearken decades back and have their roots in the Anglo-Irish conflict.

Irish writer Sean O'Faolain, known for his carefully crafted, lyrical short stories, presents historical views of the Irish people in 1940s *An Irish Journey* and 1949's *The Irish, A Character Study.* His short stories have also been collected in *The Collected Short Stories of Sean O'Faolain I* (1980), many of which examine the decline of the Irish nationalist struggle and the oppressive provincialism of Irish Roman Catholicism.

Irish writer Liam O'Flaherty recreates the effects of the Great Famine on the individuals of a small Irish community in his 1937 novel *Famine.*

Frank O'Connor's stories have been collected in 1981's *Collected Stories.* These stories use mundane incidents to illuminate Irish life.

Key Questions

Trevor is known for his skill in describing the lives of unhappy, unloved, selfdelusional characters, and evoking sympathy and humor rather than pity or ridicule for his misfits.

1. Find out more about the role of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland during the famine years. Do you think the Pulvertafts reflect a typical Anglo-Irish family? Why or why not?

2. Read "The News from Ireland" as if it were your introduction to the cataclysmic famine that devastated the Irish population in the 1840s, then compare it to a history of that time. How does the story portray the famine? Do you think it is an accurate portrayal?

3. Imagine that a portion of the story is told through another character's diary entries. Whom would you choose to best convey the story, and why?

4. Find out what caused the devastation of Ireland's potato crop in the 1840s, and how scientists managed to prevent such devastation from occurring again.

5. Conduct research to find examples of Irish literature written during the famine years. How do these portrayals differ from or resemble Trevor's?

6. Find out more about the efforts taken by the British government to improve the situation of the Irish during the famine. Do you think the government took enough action? What solutions might you propose to alleviate the starvation?

Literary Precedents

Trevor's fiction has been compared to that of the Irish writer James Joyce. Joyce's short story collection The Dubliners (1914) explores facets of life in Ireland from the viewpoints of children and adults, and raises political, artistic, and religious concerns.

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Further Study

Course of Irish History, ed., F.X. Martin and T.W. Moody, Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994.

A collection of essays by renowned scholars sketching out the history of Ireland.

Foster. R. F., *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972,* New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

This historical work focuses on Ireland in the past four centuries.

Schirmer, Gregory A., *William Trevor: Study of His Fiction,* London: Routledge, 1990.

An examination of Trevor's fiction in terms of its fictional technique and moral vision.

Related Titles

In 1967, Trevor published his first collection of short stories, The Day We Got Drunk on Cake. However, it was his next collection, 1972's The Ballroom of Romance, and Other Stones, that established his reputation as a talented short-fiction writer. Critics drew comparisons between Trevor and other important contemporary British writers, such as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Muriel Spark. Most of Trevor's short fiction explores life in Ireland. For example, a short story titled "Beyond the Pale" (1981) explores the political turmoil in contemporary Ireland through the plot device of English tourists exposed to terrorist violence in Northern Ireland. The vacationers are forced to confront their own roles in the AngloIrish conflict.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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