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“No Country for Old Men”? The Question of George Moore’s Place in the Early Twentieth-Century Literature of Ireland

ABSTRACT

The paper scrutinizes the literary output of George Moore with reference to the expectations of the new generation of Irish writers emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although George Moore is considered to belong to the Anglo-Irish ascendancy writers, he began his writing career from dissociating himself from the literary achievements of his own social class. His infatuation with the ideals of the Gaelic League not only brought him back to Dublin, but also encouraged him to write short stories analogous to famous Ivan Turgenev’s *The Sportsman’s Sketches*. The idea of using a Russian writer as a role model went along with the Gaelic League advocating the reading of non-English European literature in search for inspiration. However the poet’s involvement in the public cause did not last long. His critical view on Ireland together with his uncompromising approach towards literature resulted in a final disillusionment with the movement. The paper focuses on this particular period of Moore’s life in order to show how this seemingly unfruitful cooperation became essential for the development of Irish literature in the twentieth century. *The Untilled Field*, though not translated into Irish, still marks the beginning of a new genre into Irish literature—a short story. More importantly, the collection served as a source of inspiration for Joyce’s *Dubliners*. These and other aspects of Moore’s literary life are supposed to draw attention to the complexity of the writer’s literary output and his underplayed role in the construction of the literary Irish identity.

Keywords: Gaelic Revival, George Moore, Ivan Turgenev, *The Untilled Field*.

In his latest publication, *Vivid Faces. The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923*, Roy Foster discusses the emergence of the generation which led the Easter Rising. The 1916 generation, as Foster calls it, construct their identity, first and foremost, in opposition to Parnell's generation, whose failure in the negotiations with the British parliament for Home Rule in 1914 marks the symbolic end to the role of the landed gentry and the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in Irish politics and cultural life. The topos of a compromise is replaced by a call for military action so that the world once again would hear about Ireland's struggle for independence. However, as Foster rightly points out, the 1916 generation were not as homogenic in their views as it is usually portrayed. Especially in its early stage, it comprised divergent approaches towards the future of the country from the social, political, and most importantly, from the literary point of view. At the turn of centuries, two main paths of development of Irish literature might be observed. They are represented by two distinct organizations—the Irish Literary Theatre, and the Gaelic League—and two literary persona—William Butler Yeats and Douglas Hyde, respectively. At first glance, it seems natural for George Augustus Moore as the son of the famous George Henry Moore—an MP in Parnell's government, and an Irish nationalist—to join Lady Augusta Gregory since he shares with her an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy background. However, in his early career, George Moore rebels against his father's heritage and leaves Moore Hall for Paris, preferring art to politics. So how does the Anglo-Irish writer find his way to the Irish Literary Theatre and the Gaelic League, an organization whose actions predate the political rebellion? This paper aims to answer this particular question, as well as other inquiries concerning Moore's cooperation with William Butler Yeats, his fascination with the Irish language, together with his short literary liaison with Douglas Hyde. The analysis of these aspects ought to disclose the writer's literary path of development, as well as his changing expectations towards literature concomitant with his place in the Irish literature of the time. In what follows, the discussion will dislodge Moore's continuous urge for experimentation with form and the aestheticization of Irish literature, which, on the one hand, forces the writer to become an inner emigré of the Irish literary scene, but on the other, allows him to pave the way for Irish modernism. The analysis of Moore's literary output predominantly focuses on the collection of short stories *The Untilled Field*, which serves as an example of the writer's futile attempt at reviving Irish language and literature according to his vision of how modern literature should be composed. Despite its initial failure, the collection served as a source of inspiration for the young James Joyce to write his *Dubliners*. Therefore, the discussion on Moore's text also includes its modernistic potential.

George Moore's stay in Dublin and his Irish fervour marks the third turning point in his literary career, preceded by the French and English periods.¹ The success of his Independent Theatre Society attracts W.B. Yeats's attention. This results in Yeats's and Edward Martyn's (Moore's old friend and an Irish "neighbour"²) visit at Moore's flat in London. They ask Moore to participate in the founding of a Literary Theatre in Dublin. Moore's first reaction is rather negative, as he does not think much of the Irish capital: "to give a Literary Theatre to Dublin seemed to me like giving a mule a holiday," is the writer's immediate reply (*Hail and Farewell* 77). However, "the thought of an Irish Literary Theatre, and [his] own participation in the Celtic Renaissance" (78) is so pleasing an offer that Moore decides to ignore the call of reason, even whilst saying that "it never does an Irishman any good to return to Ireland" (77). Moore does not participate in the famous summer party at Tillyra Castle, and then Coole Park, when the idea for the Celtic Literary Theatre is brought about. However, another name considered for the organization is the Irish Independent Theatre Society (Frazier 264–65), which clearly testifies to Moore's indirect influence on the concept, with his London theatre project laying the foundation for the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin.

The theatre as a bridge of communication between Yeats and Moore results in a short but rather intense collaboration on the production of new plays. The most controversial seems to be the case of Edward Martyn's play *The Tale of a Town*, which, dismissed by Moore, becomes one of the victims of the writer's constant revisions with the accompaniment of Yeats. They change it into a completely new text, and thus they have to provide it with a new title—*The Bending of the Bough*³—since Martyn

¹ The reasons for his sudden decision to return to Ireland predominantly stemmed from his disenchantment with the Victorian prudery in English society, which prevented English literature from following the French path of development. Tired of his fruitless efforts to introduce naturalism into English prose and of his losing battle with the circulating libraries' censorship (*A Mummer's Wife*, *Esther Waters*, and *Evelyn Innes* caused a moral scandal in London), Moore turned to drama. His idea of reviving the English theatrical scene led to the creation of the Independent Theatre Society, which analogously to *Théâtre Libre*, would go on to promote unconventional, original and literary plays (Frazier 218).

² George Moore and Edward Martyn were cousins who knew each other from childhood, still living in family houses in Ireland. They both shared their Anglo-Irish Catholic descent together with their interest in literature, and later they also both became Irish landlords of Moore Hall and Tillyra Castle, respectively (Frazier 99).

³ The most controversial change Moore introduces into the play is his satirical comment on Dublin society, as each character resembles someone from

does not accept the new content. This situation already discloses Moore's lack of desire to collaborate, preferring to play the dominant role in the theatre rather than taking a back seat with Yeats capturing all attention.⁴ Critics chase after the best expression to convey Moore's approach towards the Irish Literary Revival by calling him "a disappointed John the Baptist" (Kenner 8) or a reversed version of St Patrick (Foster, *Telling Tales* 19); nonetheless, the need to prevail over the movement discloses no intention to monopolize it, but rather to manifest his personal vision. Nonetheless, other members of the movement frown upon Moore's overwhelming decisiveness. Lady Gregory comes to the conclusion that Moore is "resolving himself into a syndicate for [the] rewriting [of] the plays" (353), by this token, enforcing his vision of a politically involved theatre upon other playwrights, especially Yeats. She would rather the Irish poet remained a folklore gatherer, a mystic and a propagator of cultural revival, whereas Moore intends Yeats to resemble his own idea of a writer: a politically engaged and progressively satirical critic of the contemporary Dublin literary scene. Furthermore, Lady Gregory begins to fear that Moore is too controversial a figure for the Irish audience with his socio-political involvement and fame as a scandalist, which consequently may threaten the reputation of the new theatre. Yeats, at the beginning, recognizes the need for a public controversy over the theatre, and therefore he uses Moore to write a preface to the edition of Martyn's plays *Meave* and *The Heather Field*, which are to be staged at the opening of the theatre. However, Moore's open letters to Queen Victoria, in which he criticizes her for the Boer War, add to the growing dissatisfaction of Lady Gregory with Moore's negative influence on Yeats's talent (Frazier 278–88).

Moore's Anglo-Irish background together with his anticlericalism are other threads which keep Yeats interested in the Irish landlord. Moore's speech during the famous dinner at the Shelbourne Hotel⁵ clearly dislodges

the public life of the capital (Frazier 280). Such socially involved and critical plays are what Moore understands as belonging to Independent Theatre. Edward Martyn and Augusta Gregory are far from this opinion.

⁴ Other plays meet the same fate of rewriting: Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*, *Shadowy Waters*, *Diarmuid and Grania*, Martyn's *The Heather Field*, Hyde's *Casadh an tSúgáin*. Moore even attempts to have his say in Alice Milligan's *The Last Feast of the Fianna* (Frazier 282).

⁵ The dinner was organized by T. P. Gill on 11 May 1899, the editor of the *Daily Express*, to celebrate the success of the first season of the Irish Literary Theatre. Among the invited guests are Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, W. B. Yeats, Douglas Hyde, George Moore, John O'Leary, T. W. Rolleston, J. F. Taylor, John Eglinton, William P. O'Brien, Max Beerbohm, and many others (Dunleavy and Dunleavy 216).

the writer's aristocratic approach towards the Celtic Renaissance. For him, the Irish Revival is possible thanks to the finished Land War between tenants and their landlords. While the peasants have won their rights, the aristocracy has won the opportunity for a further development of the country, with Home Rule being one of its consequences (Moore, *Hail and Farewell* 137–38). Moore's approach goes in accordance with the unionist line of Augusta Gregory and Yeats's views on the Irish class system, which the poet clearly delineates in an article "The Academic Class and the Agrarian Revolution" (qtd. in Frazier 537).⁶ It is Moore's genuine belief in the redemptive role of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in the Irish revival which brings Coole Park and Moore Hall together. Moore in his early life serves the function of an absentee landlord; whereas, when back in Ireland he tries to turn his Moore Hall into a cultural centre, analogously to Lady Gregory's Coole Park and Edward Martyn's Tillyra Castle. In 1902 he decides to organize a Gaelic lawn party with the staging of a play *An Tincéar agus an tSídheog* (*The Tinker and the Fairy*): "I want to have a Gaelic speaking audience. I think this would be a very good thing, and I think it would annoy Dublin society very much, which will add considerably to my pleasure" are the words Moore writes to his brother when he is planning the party (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 21). To a certain extent, Moore begins to associate himself with the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, despite the fact that he has never followed the views of his father. This is visible in Moore's urge to write about his own social class, which springs from the assumption he shares with Balzac that: "the history of a nation as often lies hidden in social wrongs and domestic griefs as in the story of revolution, and if it be for the historian to narrate one, it is for the novelist to dissect and explain the other" (qtd. in Genet 120). To him, as to other Anglo-Irish writers, the history of their class is part and parcel of the Irish cultural heritage, which many decades after Ireland gains its independence is challenged by such critics as Seamus Deane.⁷

⁶ Yeats also expresses his approval for the involvement of the Ascendancy in the shaping of Irish culture in *The Countess Cathleen*, where he underlines the bond between the landlord and the tenants in the form of a female martyrdom, in this way opposing the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie in Ireland (Smith 32). Yeats, despite his partial middle-class origin, aspires to be treated as a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy by participating in the cultivation of its intellectual freedom. Thus, his approach towards the Easter Rising is at least ambivalent: "At the moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics" are the words, which best illustrate his fear of the possible aftermath of the rising (qtd. in Longley 22).

⁷ Deane notoriously accuses Yeats of misjudging the role of the Protestant Ascendancy by associating it with "the spiritual aristocracy of the Catholic and

What is important to note is the fact that Moore's collaboration with Yeats in the Irish Literary Theatre is partially triggered by his wish to create an Irish speaking theatre. His new vocation of the Irish language revivalist leads Moore to a short infatuation with the Gaelic League. Moore's growing involvement in the revival of *Gaeilge*, although appreciated by Lady Gregory and Yeats, brings second thoughts due to the political underpinning of the Gaelic League. Lady Gregory manages to discourage Yeats from participating in yet another idea of Moore's, this time of going on a lecture tour in the USA "as Gaelic League missionaries and anti-war protesters" (Frazer 291). With time, Moore's engagement in the language campaign results in him acting too unpredictably. Contrary to his anticlericalism, Moore starts cooperating with the clergy, first, in the case of the theatre, then, in the production of short stories. Thus, Yeats states in the pages of the *United Irishman* in 1901 that "the revolutionary initiates bent on overthrowing a decadent modern civilization" are allegedly working upon the Church's errand (qtd. in Foster, *Vivid Faces* 4). A similar remark concerning his lack of acceptance for the production of plays under the censorship of priests published in *Freeman's Journal* several days later may be read as the last warning for Moore (Frazier 306). Such declarations serve as an example of the literary society becoming divided between the followers of the national and the cosmopolitan visions of art, with the Gaelic League being more and more often accused of "boyscoutish propaganda" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 157). Still it is the argument about the rights to the idea for a new play *Where There is Nothing* that is read as the end of the friendship between the two writers and as the main source of later accusations and snipes.⁸

While still participating in the Irish Literary Theatre, George Moore becomes engrossed in the Irish language campaign organized by the Gaelic League. He treats seriously the words of Douglas Hyde from the article "On the Necessity of De-anglicising Ireland," welcoming all those who want to teach the native language, write new literature in Irish or translate the already existing one into the mother tongue. His first idea concerns the

Celtic peasantry—defining aristocracy in each case as a mark of Irishness and Irishness as a mark of anti-modernism—that he distorted history in the service of myth" (*Celtic Revivals* 32). A similar comment may be found in the critic's other monograph *Strange Country* (163). This stems from Seamus Deane's republican views and his postcolonial stance on the issue of the Anglo-Irish (protestant) aristocracy as the descendants of the colonizer.

⁸ According to Cantwell, the layout for the play, which Yeats later claims to be his, has been constructed by Moore. For the justification of Moore's line of argument, the critic provides the reprint of Moore's letter to Yeats, in which the plot is clearly sketched (103–04).

participation in the creative process of other activists, among them Thomas Ua Concheanainn, whom Moore intends to lend a hand to in writing an autobiography (Frazier 284). As even Hyde finds Moore's enthusiasm problematic, the Gaelic League prefers to direct the Irish landlord's energy into other actions, for example, putting a play on in Irish, giving prizes to his tenants for speaking Irish or writing a composition in the native tongue, organizing for Hyde a publication of his poems, or having his nephews be taught Irish (Frazier 292). However, it is the public campaign against professor John Pentland Mahaffy—a great opponent of the Irish language entering schools (Pierse 88)—that shows the power of the Irish landlord's public image. Moore's ironic article "Plain Words to Party Men" published in *Bat* in 1901 by such people as George Russell is read as a sign of "a new Voltaire" arriving in Dublin, whereas Hyde is rather shocked how easily the reputation of a well-established public persona may be destroyed at the Gaelic League's command (Frazier 302). Since Maurice Moore is sent to fight in the Boer War, his brother—George—turns against all the manifestations of the British establishment, the Trinity professor being one of them. Therefore, it seems difficult to decipher whether Moore is led by his missionary vision of Gaelic Ireland or private grudge against his family's forced involvement in a war.

A similar blend of vocational and private reasoning is observable in George Moore's disappointment with what is happening to English culture. When in Ireland, he starts criticizing the English language:

From universal use and journalism, the English language in fifty years will be as corrupt as the Latin of the eighth century, as unfit for literary usage, and will become, in my opinion a sort of volapuk, strictly limited to commercial letters and journalism. (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 17)

Moore's negative comments on literature in English partially stem from his harboured resentment against the poor reception of his novels by the English literary scene. Since his mission to introduce naturalism into English literature failed, Moore tries to find his place in Irish literature. "I came to give Ireland back her language" (qtd. in Kiberd, "George Moore's Gaelic Lawn Party" 14), claims Moore once he arrives in Dublin, and the fact that he does not speak a word of Irish himself does not cause any dissonance to him. The Irish landlord looks at the two nations through the prism of their language, the English embodying the sterile imperialism of England, its abstraction and commerce, and the Irish expressing the spontaneity, vividness and freshness of Ireland, untouched by modernity (Welch, Preface 7). Therefore, his aim is to "make Ireland a bilingual

country—to use English as a universal tongue, and to save our own as a medium for some future literature” (qtd. in Kiberd, “George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 18). To sound authentic Moore has to make himself bilingual first. However, his enthusiasm for learning Irish wanes fast, as he realizes it would take him ten years to master it to the extent necessary for being able to write literature. He believes he is too old to learn it.⁹

Moore’s inability to speak Irish does not discourage him from popularizing the language. His cousin, Edward Martyn, is the one who encourages Moore to get involved in the production of plays in Irish. However, the growing tension between him and the rest of the Irish Literary Theatre pushes Moore to the idea proposed by William Kirkpatrick Magee (known under the pen-name—John Ellington) for the Irish landlord to become Dublin’s Turgenev (Frazier 306). By this time, Moore, already disillusioned with French naturalism, has turned to the Russian writer for inspiration.¹⁰ The idea of writing stories about Irish life appears in Moore’s mind long before the momentous conversation with Ellington; however, it is the comparison with Turgenev which encourages Moore to collaborate with Father Tom Finlay on the creation of a text-book for learning Irish in primary schools based on Moore’s short stories. The first three stories are successfully translated into Irish by Tadhg O’Donoghue and Pádraig Ó Súilleabhain and published in the *New Ireland Review*: the Irish version of “The Wedding Gown” (“An Gúna Phósta”), “Almsgiving” (“An Déirc”), and “The Clerk’s Quest” (“Tóir Mhic Uí Dhíomasuigh”) (Welch, *Changing States* 41). However, another two of Moore’s stories—“Home Sickness” and “Exile”—are already too anticlerical for the clergy to be published in the Jesuit magazine. Still, this does not diminish the writer’s enthusiasm. The first version of *The Untilled Field* is published by the Gaelic League in 1902 under the title *An-tÚr-Ghort* and includes altogether six stories in Irish. At the time of the publication, Moore’s involvement in the Irish language cause is considerable enough to claim that after the translation of the “The Wedding Gown” from Irish back into English, the sentences are

⁹ Since Moore is unable to learn Irish himself, he decides to provide Irish education for his nephews, as suggested by Douglas Hyde. He intends to hire a nurse from the Arran Islands to teach the children the native tongue. He even threatens his sister-in-law that he will disinherit the boys if they do not learn the language. His zealotry shakes Hyde, who claims that there are good teachers nearby, so there is no need to bring a woman from the other end of the country.

¹⁰ Ivan Turgenev becomes an important source of inspiration for Moore already in the 1880s, with the greatest manifestation of it being the article “Turgeneff” for *The Fortnightly Review* in 1888. Richard Cave enumerates the Russian writer as one of the two long-lasting literary influences of Moore apparent already in *Drama in Muslin* (18–19).

“much improved after their bath in Irish” (Kiberd, “George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 21). The booklet, first and foremost, includes the two stories dismissed by Father Finlay: “Home Sickness” as “Galar Dúithche,” “The Exile” as “An Deóraidhe.” Apart from them, the publication comprises the reprint of “The Wedding Gown,” but also three new stories: “A Playhouse in the Waste” as “San n-Diothramh Dubh,” and two stories, which do not appear later in the English version. “Ír-ghrádh” disappears from *The Untilled Field*, whereas the last Irish story later becomes part of “Some Parishioners” (Cronin 115).

By comparing the Irish with the English version of the stories, one may easily observe that already in the early stage of the composition Moore is driven by the urge to rewrite the already existing stories. According to Cronin’s meticulous comparative scrutiny, “A Playhouse in the Waste” departs from its Irish original, with the ending being changed—the plans of the priest are fulfilled: the playhouse is built, but it falls into ruins, for which the girl and the death of her illegitimate child are held responsible (115). Still, the 1903 version of the story, with a friendship between a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister, stands out from the rather satirical view of the clergy presented in the rest of the collection. Most interesting seems to be the case of the Irish story “Ír-ghrádh,” which focuses on “a heroic figure who undergoes a mystical experience on a mountainside, feels called upon to join the Boers in their fight against British imperialism and emigrates to South Africa to join in the battle there” (Cronin 115). The story, from which Moore later resigns, clearly embodies the current frustration of the writer that most probably later, when the war finishes and Maurice returns back home, stops playing such an importance in Moore’s life. This serves as yet another example of Moore acting upon emotions. According to Cronin, the romantic nationalism expressed in the story is too idealistic for the collection, especially in its English version (116). Yet there might be a third reason for the writer’s change of mind. The grudge against the British for the Boer War is quickly replaced by the disappointment with the state of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The years of absence result in Moore gullibly believing that “Archbishops are educated men,” thus the intellectual collaboration analogous to his father’s with the clergy of his time is still possible (qtd. in Yeats 446).

The embitterment felt for Father Finlay drives Moore back to his anticlerical views and to his involvement with a new idea concerning Dublin’s “Parisification” as an act of rebellion against the growing Irish Catholic bourgeoisie (Frazier 319). Although Moore at this point could once again be accompanied by Yeats, who shares the dislike for the Catholic middle class, Moore still feels embittered about Yeats stealing, allegedly, his idea for the play. His loss of enthusiasm for the Celtic Revival goes

in accordance with his disillusionment with Irish society, which is clearly disclosed in a letter to Dujardin: "I have absolutely renounced all my Celtic hopes. Of the race there is now nothing but an end left over, a tattered rag, with plenty of fleas in it, I mean priests" (qtd. in Frazier 328). The greatest manifestation of his dissociation from the Catholic Church is his official conversion to Protestantism in 1903. He explains his decision to the public in a letter published in *The Irish Times*, in which he underlines his lack of acceptance of the clergy being politically involved in the affairs of Ireland. Similar to the public protest against the visit of Queen Victoria, this time Moore expresses his criticism for the Irish Catholic Archbishop's warm welcome of King Edward VII.

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At the beginning of the twentieth century Moore already rightly foresees the increase in influence of the Catholic Church on the final shape of Irish literature. He may not have managed to become a saviour of Irish literature, but undoubtedly he might be treated as a prophet of the gradual increase in nationalistic moods visible on the Irish literary scene with his cosmopolitan vision of Irish literature turning into a lost battle. Therefore, with time he realizes that Ireland is no country for his generation of Anglo-Irish writers who dream of revolutionizing the literary scene in a cosmopolitan sense. His disappointment is shared years later by Yeats and well resonates in the words: "This is no country for old men" from "Sailing to Byzantium." However, what Moore does not manage to predict is the fact that his experimental collection of short stories, treated as an apparent failure in the revival of Irish language and literature, still have a considerable function to fulfil in the history of that literature. The critical image of the countryside created by Moore is inventive enough for Joyce to think of his own collection of short stories. There is no denying that Moore's collection is a source of inspiration for Joyce's *Dubliners* (Brown xiv). Very tellingly, Joyce also plans a sequel to *Dubliners*, to be titled *Provincials* (Norris 48). This is not the first time Joyce is inspired by Moore's work. The Irish modernist sees the first staging of *The Bending of the Bough*, which makes him impressed enough to write his own play, *A Brilliant Career*, with a similar municipal theme (Frazier 288). Moore's novel *The Lake*, which at first is supposed to be a short story added to *The Untilled Field*, marks another of the writer's experiments, this time with interior monologue, the method borrowed from *Les Lauriers Sont Coupés* written by his friend Dujardin. Interestingly, Joyce, at this time being in Paris, comes across Dujardin's novel and discovers the new type of narration, which Moore already incorporates into his new novel in 1905 (Frazier 323). Yet what attracts Joyce's attention in terms of *The Untilled Field* is, first and foremost, Moore's critical view on the current state of Ireland.

At the time of writing the stories, Moore becomes increasingly disillusioned with the social situation in Ireland, finding the Catholic Church to be responsible for it. It is not without reason that the process of rewriting and adding new stories into *The Untilled Field* is accompanied by a changing amount of anticlerical remarks. The first edition, as well as the following three ones, start with the two stories which were previously dismissed by Father Finlay. While in "The Exile" Moore ponders the question of false or forced vocation, in "Home Sickness" the writer already places clear blame on the local priest for the protagonist's disenchantment with Ireland. The title of "The Exile" might be treated literally, as James's journey to America, but it also connotes a metaphorical exile from one's desires and love into celibacy, which happens both in the case of Peter and Catherine. For a long time Peter does not know what he wants to do in his life; he therefore chooses priesthood to meet the expectations of his father, because "there has always been a priest in the family"¹¹ (Moore, *UF* 7). Catherine's case is clearer: "she didn't go to the convent because she had a calling, but because she was crossed in love" (Moore, *UF* 12). In the first story the opposition between desire and religion, though not directly implied, emerges as a leitmotif for the whole collection. An analogous mixture of motifs of exile and forced submissiveness are prevalent in Joyce's *Dubliners*. "Eveline" begins with the desire of the protagonist to leave Ireland and finishes with a resigned acceptance of her Irish fate. The idea of a paralysis, which Joyce introduces into his collection, elaborates on this seemingly paradoxical coexistence of a longing for change accompanied by a reluctance to act which is already noticeable in Moore's stories.

In "Home Sickness" the Irish landlord also plays with the double meaning of the title. At first glance, it seems to express the longing for Ireland that leads the ill James Bryden back to Duncannon. Although the surnames differ, the repeated name of James provides a link between the first story and the second. In the former, the reader sees him leave for America; in the latter, he is back in Ireland after thirteen years of absence. James's reaction to what he experiences during his return might be compared to the author's own bemusement at his arrival in Dublin. Duncannon does not resemble the place James remembers from his youth: "the country did not seem to be as much lived as it used to be" (*UF* 25). It turns out that many young people have left the village. However, it is "the obedience of these people [who stayed] to their priest . . . their submission of a primitive people clinging to religious authority" (*UF* 30) that most strikes the protagonist. Moore reacts analogously, though for some time he still believes that Ireland may "awake at last out of the great sleep of Catholicism" (qtd. in Kiberd,

¹¹ All quotations from *The Untilled Field* are marked with the acronym *UF*.

“George Moore’s Gaelic Lawn Party” 13). As the story of “Home Sickness” develops, it transpires that Moore’s fear that the clergy might take the place occupied by the landlords comes true. The local landlord, to James’s surprise, no longer plays the central role in the community as he used to do. Now it is the priest who governs the place. Thus, the letter from an American friend evokes a true feeling of home-sickness: “When the tall skyscraper stuck up beyond the harbour he felt the thrill of home that he had not found in his native village” (*UF* 34). Moore may share a similar feeling once he leaves Dublin in 1910 and goes back to London and then to his beloved Paris. The motif of leaving Ireland reappears in “The Wedding Feast,” “Julia Cahill’s Curse,” “The Wild Goose” and “Fugitives,” by this token becoming one of the key associations that Moore ascribes to the state of Ireland at the beginning of the new millennium. Similarly, in Joyce’s short stories some characters are determined enough to emigrate. The tone of Moore’s “Home Sickness” prevails in Joyce’s well-known “The Dead” with Gabriel’s negative approach towards his own country. Nonetheless, Joyce’s collection includes another story “A Little Cloud,” which corresponds well with Moore’s “Home Sickness.” Two friends—Chandler and Gallaher—embody two possibilities that Joyce sees for young Irish people: stay and live in a paralysis or leave to meet your expectations. The story, presented from the perspective of a frustrated good-for-nothing poet, Chandler, who blames his wife and child for his artistic inertia, embellishes the success Gallaher achieves in London Press. Those who manage to leave, like Gallaher, visit Dublin occasionally and have a good time there because they have a home elsewhere.

Other anti-Catholic overtones concern the critical portrayal of the clergy. Apart from the famous Father Flynn in “The Sisters,” Joyce devotes a lot of attention to the clergy in the story “Grace.” Mr Kernan’s conversation with his friends abounds in ironic comments on the Irish priesthood. In particular, the words “‘I haven’t such a bad opinion of the Jesuits,’ he said, intervening at length. ‘They’re an educated order. I believe they mean well too’” (Joyce 127) uttered by Mr Kernan—a Protestant with anticlerical views, who marries a Catholic, therefore officially having to convert to Catholicism—echo Yeats’s critical remark on Moore’s gullible belief that the Irish Jesuits with whom he collaborated to publish the stories are educated enough to appreciate his literary talent.

It is difficult to decipher whether Moore bears in mind this past incident while writing the stories, since in his collection several types of priests are depicted, not all of them negatively. Particularly interesting is the contrast between Father Maguire and Father Mac’Turnan, who reappear in more than one story. As the author explains in the preface to the collection: “the somewhat harsh rule of Father Maguire set me thinking of a gentler type of a priest, and the pathetic figure of Father Mac’Turnan tempted me”

(*UF* xx). Indeed, the image of Father Maguire, who forces Kate into an unwanted marriage (“The Wedding Feast”), who refuses to marry Ned and Mary for less than five pounds (“Patchwork”), and who intends to denounce a girl from the altar for delivering a child out of wedlock (“Some Parishioners”) stands in stark contrast to Father Mac’Lurnan’s progressive approach. His controversial collaboration with a Protestant minister to provide his parishioners with some entertainment (“A Play-house in the Waste”) or his proposition for the clergy to get married and have children as a solution to the problem of Ireland’s depopulation (“Letter to Rome”) make him not so much “pathetic,” as Moore claims, but rather too irrational or revolutionary for traditional Ireland. Interestingly, the reasoning behind Father Mac’Lurnan’s abolition of celibacy resides in the fact that: “the priests live in the best houses, eat the best food, wear the best clothes; they are indeed the flower of the nation and would produce magnificent sons and daughters” (*UF* 92). This openly ironic remark by Moore on the great discrepancy between the poor parishioners and the wealthy clergy points to another of the writer’s accusations “that the Church had enriched itself at the expense of the people, and that Ireland would never thrive under its oppression” (Frazier 309). By this token, Moore places blame on the institution rather than on individual priests for all the wrongs done to Irish society. If the clergy takes the place of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, as Moore claims, it is still the semblance of the feudal system that is partially to blame. This Moore does not see, since, as an Irish landlord living from the work of his tenants, he perceives the landlord-tenant relationship idealistically as a partnership.

As long as Moore remains conservative in his assessment of the positive role of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy in Irish society, his anticlericalism is not the only reason why he is still treated as a controversial figure in Dublin. His attitude towards sexuality, shaped during his stay in Paris, results in his progressive approach towards the role of women in society. However, here the writer is not the exception to the rule, since such views are shared by many people, especially those belonging to the 1916 generation. To follow Foster’s argumentation, women who take part in the republican movement first and foremost fight for their emancipation. Many of them are daughters of well-established politicians, ambassadors, or Anglo-Irish Ascendancy landlords (*Vivid Faces* 20). Joining the cause has its private dimension, as they rebel against the roles imposed on them by social norms. The problems they aim to solve concern birth control, the traditional treatment of motherhood, and sexuality, strongly believing that “sex feelings are to be expressed as freely as any other kind and more harm is done in the world by repression of them than almost anything else” (qtd. in Foster, *Vivid Faces* 131).

The progressive approach towards female sexuality proposed by the 1916 generation is in accordance with Moore's viewpoint on the subject. His novel *Drama in Muslin* portrays Alice's rebellion against her parents' wish to find her a husband appropriate for a girl of an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy background. In *Esther Waters* the writer focuses on the problems of a working-class woman who has to raise an illegitimate child on her own. *Esther Waters* presents one of the rare examples of a novel of the time, where the hardship of a woman's life, together with a detailed description of a case of child labour, is presented so naturalistically. The problem of female sexuality reappears in *The Untilled Field*, where women do not want to sacrifice their lives for the sake of marriage contracts. In contrast to the male characters, who obey the rules imposed on them by the Catholic Church, Moore's female protagonists manifest their independence in many different ways. One example is Kate from "Some Parishioners" and "The Wedding Feast," who is courageous enough to speak her mind directly to Father Maguire, disagreeing with the priest's statement that "those who wish to make safe, reliable marriages consult their parents and they consult their priest" (UF 45). "I think a girl should make her own marriage" is what Kate replies. When the marriage is enforced on her by her parents, she leaves Ireland for America just after the ceremony, by this token, choosing the "unpredictability of her own nature, her own odd, aloof freedom" (Welch, *Changing States* 43).

Neither the Irish Literary Theatre, nor the new generation of 1916, embrace Moore's literary manifestations of female sexuality. Once again the presentation of the issue finds an associate in the young James Joyce. Joyce shares with Moore the aesthetic perception of the human body evoked by a fascination with classical art. Both also clearly delineate in their literary works that a Catholic notion of the female body's sinfulness stands in opposition to the aesthetic perception of female beauty. This incongruity, famously grasped by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, may be found earlier in Moore's short story "Fugitives." The first English edition of *The Untilled Field* from 1903 seems most straightforward in the depiction of Moore's opinion of the Catholic Church, sexuality and art, since the tale of the sculptor Rodney is presented in two stories: "In the Clay" and "The Way Back." In both examples Moore clearly condemns Irish philistinism, partially resulting from the repressive actions that the Catholic clergy exerted on Irish society (Cronin 117). Therefore, the two stories provide a tentative conclusion that Moore must have reached in 1903 that "Catholicism and nationhood are incompatible" (Frazier 310). The two stories are missing from the second 1914 edition, and then in the last edition from 1931 "Fugitives" is introduced, in which the two original stories are merged. Still the clear division of the story into two parts indicates the original partition.

The story is the last in the collection, and thus it may be treated as a conclusion of the whole book. The plot focuses on John Rodney, an artist who tries to make a living from art in Dublin. Already famous for his talent, which was shaped during his stay in Italy, one of Rodney's patrons is Father McCabe, who seems to be deeply fascinated with art, since he eagerly discusses "the Irish Romanesque, the Celtic Renaissance . . . [or] the possibility of returning to the origins of art" (*UF* 202). The priest sees in Rodney an Italian artist: "he has often told me that I am more Italian than Irish, that he had seen my narrow eyes in an Italian bust, and that if I had lived three hundred years ago I should have been one of Cellini's apprentices" (*UF* 197). Father McCabe's perseverance in obtaining funds to reconstruct a Medieval Abbey and to enrich it with the finest pieces of art is supposed to prove his understanding of art in general. However, when Rodney has to create a statue of the Virgin Mary with a child, it appears that Father McCabe's artistic sensitivity prohibits a nude model from being used. This point of disagreement indicates a real discrepancy between the priest's and the artist's perceptions of art and their understanding of the role of the human body within it. Rodney is well aware of the fact that the magnificent statues one may find in the churches of Rome are based on real female bodies. Therefore, he is happy when he manages to find a model in prudish Dublin. Lucy, the embodiment of innocence, agrees to pose naked because she wants to help her cousin, Father McCabe. Once Father McCabe learns the truth, he prevents Lucy from posing, treating it as an act of sin, while the destruction of Rodney's studio together with the statue of the Virgin Mary by Lucy's brothers further testifies to Irish society's philistinism. The second part of the story clearly illustrates two crucial conclusions Moore seems to have reached. The first concerns the lack of freedom of expression in Dublin. Thus, Rodney leaves his country and goes to London, where he meets two other Irish artists who are already in exile. The second refers to the role of the artist, who should follow the rule of beauty and nature. Rodney, as an artist, perceives Lucy's physical beauty exclusively in aesthetic terms. However, Father McCabe, after the affair with Lucy, comes to the conclusion that: "bad statues were more likely to excite devotional feelings than good ones, bad statues being further removed from perilous nature" (*UF* 214). Father McCabe bears much resemblance to Father Moloney, whom George Moore had occasion to meet during a Gaelic festival in Galway. As Yeats relates, Father Moloney presented himself as a specialist on Greek art and tried to converse with Moore, known as an art critic at that time. When Father Moloney states: "I have always considered it a proof of Greek purity that though they left the male form uncovered, they invariably draped the female," Moore has one possible reply for him: "Do you consider Father Maloney that the

female form is inherently more indecent than the male?” (Yeats 404). This exchange of remarks clearly summarizes the idea behind “Fugitives”: that of the Catholic Church misunderstanding the aesthetic concept of art and, consequently, restricting freedom of artistic expression.

Thus, the idea of writing *The Untilled Field* also ought to be read in terms of Moore’s search for an appropriate form of artistic expression. This is a challenge for Moore, who so far has mainly novels to his account. The short story form is new to Irish literature, with Moore being one of the first Irish writers to produce a collection of short stories. Nevertheless, Moore’s constant experimentation with the form is not solely limited to the genre but also covers the aspect of the language used, which brings Moore close to modernism. Everything Moore does is governed by the idea that “through dialect one escapes from abstract words, back to the sensation inspired directly by the thing itself” (*Hail and Farewell* 246). What further triggers the constant development of Moore’s writing is the change in the writer’s understanding of nature’s role in the creative process. It is no longer naturalism which governs the representation in *The Untilled Field*, but the idea borrowed from Turgenev: “obey Nature’s laws, be simple and obey” (qtd. in Cave 52), which rather echoes Pope’s understanding of Nature inherited from Aristotle. A narrative governs the story, not descriptions. Real life situations, analogous to Turgenev, are the source of inspiration for Moore.¹² Consequently, with *The Untilled Field* Moore manages to present a panorama of Irish society, with a special focus on the countryside.

Looking at George Moore’s Dublin period, one may come to the conclusion that the ten years he spent in the Irish capital mark one of the many stages in the writer’s self-development as an artist. As Gerber rightly points out:

Moore may have regarded his invasion of Ireland as a missionary opportunity. He may have begun by having some Messianic notions of himself, but he ended by being an artist first and foremost. . . . In the *Field*, like his sculptor Rodney, George Moore discovered that the model is not his vocation, art is. (279)

The time Moore chooses to spend in Ireland is special, as the first decade of the twentieth century abounds in sea changes in the social, political and literary life of Dublin. Moore’s views on literature clearly express a need for a constant experimentation with form together with freedom of expression

¹² Moore takes the idea for a plot for the majority of his stories from tales he hears from other people, among them Edward Martyn and George Russell (Frazier 308).

as prerequisites for the emergence of a new Irish literature. Paradoxically, once this process begins it turns out that there is no place in the new literary scene for George Moore, since Ireland goes in the very opposite direction to that which the writer expects from his country. To him, and similarly to Yeats and Joyce, Ireland loses its intellectual, denominational and literary freedom once it gains a political one.

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