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Paralysis and Exile in George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*

by ALEXANDER G. GONZALEZ

OVER the years much has been written about James Joyce's use of paralysis as a major symbol for spiritual inertia and about his use of exile as the means for Stephen Dedalus to deal with Ireland's inhibiting atmosphere in general. Naturally, Joyce wrote about the class he knew best—Ireland's emerging middle class in the early twentieth century. George Moore was interested in these same themes, especially as he saw them reflected in his own class, Ireland's dying, anachronistic ascendancy in the early 1880's—the upper class of a society still essentially feudal in nature. In *A Drama in Muslin*¹ Moore shows us paralysis in Ireland roughly twenty years before Joyce was to do so, and in Alice Barton, the novel's heroine, gives us a worthy predecessor for Joyce's Dedalus. The primary purpose of this essay, however, is not to compare Moore's work to Joyce's; rather, it is to affirm the worth and intensity of what may actually be Moore's best novel, and certainly a novel whose value goes generally unrecognized. William F. Blissett² has noted Moore's use of paralysis in *The Untilled Field* (1903), short stories that in essence form a rural version of *Dubliners* and that Joyce almost certainly drew some inspiration from; however, nothing has been written about Moore's earlier and arguably more powerful use of this major motif in telling the tale of his ailing society.

In fact, in many ways Moore was an augur when he began to predict the demise of the ascendancy. The terms used by critics and historians to document its demise all carry suggestions of the paralysis Moore so well recognized and depicted in *A Drama in Muslin*. The doomed upper class is "dispirited" and "indifferent,"³ and Moore has succeeded in portraying "the decay of a civilization no longer vital enough to sustain itself."⁴ The threat that the ascendancy might have to emigrate, as thousands of their tenants had done, "paralyzes" them,⁵ until eventually

1. Between 1886 and 1889 Moore published three novels through which he attempted to expose the spiritual vacuity he saw in modern man: *A Drama in Muslin* (London: Walter Scott, 1886), *Spring Days* (1888), and *Mike Fletcher* (1889). *A Drama in Muslin*, the first and by far the strongest of these novels, is the only one set in Ireland instead of England. I will quote from this first edition.

2. William F. Blissett, "George Moore and Literary Wagnerism," in *The Man of Wax*, ed. Douglas Hughes (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), p. 202.

3. Sean O'Faolain, *The Irish* (Old Greenwich, Conn.: Devin-Adair, 1949), p. 167.

4. Anthony Farrow, *George Moore* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), p. 53.

5. Richard Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore* (Gerrard's Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 58.

they simply take "solid money in exchange for [their] privileges and [go] away quietly."⁶ The last reference is to the Wyndham Land Act (1903), which allowed landlords to sell out their lands and privileges under the most favorable terms they could possibly expect.

As his title suggests, Moore's focus is on the women of the ascendancy, although the image of physical lethargy is also prominent in his depiction of male characters, for *A Drama in Muslin* deals with the spiritual vapidness and the boredom of a whole society—in effect, an Irish version of Eliot's *Prufrock*. Published seven years before Gissing's *The Odd Women*, Moore's novel is mainly about the many and various odd women in Ireland's landed class and about the proliferation of odd women that resulted largely from the gains made by the tenant class: there are constantly fewer and fewer landed, titled, and financially solvent eligible bachelors to be found for them. One critic has called attention to the worth of this unreasonably neglected novel as "a piece of highly significant social history,"⁷ while another has justly claimed that the "psychology of his characters had been partially determined by the external forces of environment."⁸ The most important characters are developed both as individuals and as representatives of their own class.

For the most part, these landlords and their families live a sequestered life, protected by police day and night. "We haven't seen a soul for the last month," complains one young beauty who is feeling the effects of Ireland's land war. Phrases like "hours limped slowly away" (143) help set the paralytic mood. Thus the women sit each day "helplessly wailing by their firesides" (95) as the Land League makes its gains, simply declaring once the evening has dragged on, "Gracious me! there's another evening wasted" (83). The unselfconscious lightness with which such remarks are made points to the utter obliviousness of these women that countless peasants suffer so that they may go idle. In fact the only difference between families seems to be whether they live in "comfortable idleness" (74) or "luxurious idleness" (127). Much of their time is spent dreaming about the Dublin social scene, but once they reach Dublin their morbid ennui continues. For example, in the ladies' drawing room at the Shelbourne Hotel the women "yawned over circulating novels" while waiting for a man—any man—to enter the room, for "they were accustomed to think of all time as wasted that was not spent in talking to a man" (189). Moore goes to great lengths in showing that there is "no active force in their lives," nothing to fill "the void of [their] objectless days" (101). Using the image of a helpless bird, an animal he will use again in *The Lake* to help symbolize paralysis, Moore argues through his narrator that "An entire race, a whole caste, saw themselves

6. Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1972), p. 300.

7. A. Norman Jeffares, *George Moore* (London: Longmans, Green, 1965), p. 21.

8. Susan Dick, ed. *Confessions of a Young Man by George Moore* (London: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1972), p. 12.

driven out of their soft, warm couches of idleness, and forced into the struggle for life. The prospect appalled them; birds with shorn wings could not gaze more helplessly on the high trees where they had built, as they thought, their nests out of the reach of evil winds. What could they do with their empty brains? What could they do with their feeble hands?" (95). The novel provides an answer to such questions in the character of the protagonist, Alice Barton; the remainder of the novel depicts the ascendancy in its flaccid efforts to comprehend the quickly moving social changes.

II

ALTHOUGH the paralysis of the male ascendancy is treated as a secondary theme, that treatment is not cursory. Rather, we are given a broad cross-section of landlords who, titled or untitled, can be likable or odious, cultured or unrefined, progressive or conservative, strong or cowardly. The most paralyzed of all, however, is Arthur Barton, a landlord with strong escapist tendencies. Mr. Barton's refuge from the distasteful realities of having two unmarried daughters, an overbearing wife, and various problems with his tenants is to retire into his world of painting and of dreams. In fact, he is often referred to as "a dreamer," for it is in this world alone that he is active, preferring that outlet to having to act constructively in his present problematic situation. As he says: "I cannot argue with those fellows about their rents. I think the Government ought to let us fight it out. I should be very glad to take the command of a flying column of landlords, and make a dash into Connamara. I have always thought my military genius more allied to that of Napoleon than to that of Wellington" (123).

At one point Mr. Barton receives a threatening letter from his tenants, "and, in consequence, [has] for a week past been unable to tune his guitar" (133). Thus the reality of the landlord is indirectly brought into comparison with that of the tenant: one is uncomfortable because he can no longer shut himself away in his puerile world of art, the other because he is hungry. Mr. Barton's own daughter, who loves him very much, can only recoil from "the languid nonsense he spoke of his genius" (52). The most telling passage comes when the plainer of his two daughters, Alice, announces that she intends to marry a common doctor. Mr. Barton's dominant wife immediately threatens that she herself will not attend and secures Barton's non-attendance by threatening "that if he attempted any interference, his supply of paints, brushes, canvases, and guitar-strings would be cut off" (315). He is the most castrated of all the males we see in the novel.

III

As HAS been mentioned, his daughter is the novel's central character; probably the best way to begin a study of Alice Barton is to examine the various other women of the ascendancy more closely, because each in her own way acts as a foil to set off Alice's strengths and fears. Violet Scully, for example, punctures several of the myths propagated by the ascendancy. Born to a family barely removed from shopkeeping, Violet brings with her no dowry of any substance and certainly no great social position, yet this restless and essentially frivolous girl manages to do what none other in the novel does: she marries the most eligible bachelor, Lord Kilcarney, thwarting most notably Mrs. Barton, who had been expecting to marry off her dazzling daughter, Olive, to the little Marquis. Thus Violet is, in a way, a source of hope for the plain Alice, who fears spinsterhood. Moreover, Alice sees that a woman like Violet, who is delicately built, even frail, can find a husband. However, unlike Violet, Alice has the independence of spirit to wait for the man she truly loves—not just to acquiesce in a marriage arranged by her mother to a man who brings with him only his coveted title and paralytic spirit.

The exuberant May Gould represents another direction not taken by Alice. Intelligent and artistically inclined, May appears to have the potential to transcend her paralytic environment, but that potential is held in check by several of her negative aspects. First of all she is a "fat" woman (48), one whose self-confidence suffers for her corpulence; compounding the insecurity is her flighty mind, which is easily influenced by others. Thus, attracted by Fred Scully's affected, shabby, "genteel" demeanor picked up during his recent stay in London, May becomes sexually involved with the dissolute and self-seeking young landlord. We soon see that May is a woman "ruled by her appetites" and it is essentially in this lack of restraint, this willingness to indulge her promiscuous impulses, that she differs most from Alice. The result for May is that she becomes pregnant and is cast off by Fred—instead of having become his wife as she once naively expected. In a characteristically generous act, Alice arranges for May to have the baby secretly in a convent and supplies May with the money to endure and ultimately to survive quite well her ordeal—money not easily obtained, for Alice has to work very hard to earn it by writing stories and articles for the London press. In spite of her seeming vitality, May suffers from the same basic lethargy that characterizes her class—as, for example, when she is described as being one who "yawned in a way that betokened the nervous lassitude she was suffering from" (224). At the end of the novel she is unchanged, the latest of her lovers being merely an old man for whom she feels no love. Thus May serves to underscore Alice's strength of will and spiritual integrity; however, she also forces Alice to do some

serious thinking about another of her related fears: a life of celibacy. If May is willing to indulge her sexual appetite as a means of perhaps procuring a husband, then the highly principled Alice is not. But, on the other hand, Alice's much-desired lovers then can exist only in her dreams.

To a high degree, Alice is made to feel as inferior as she does because she lives with the reigning local beauty—her sister, Olive, who is also the belle of the Castle Season. Alice's insecurities are constantly reinforced by her family, by whom she is more or less ignored—especially by her mother, whose only concern is that Olive find a “match” in Dublin. For example, Alice is often forced to play the piano while everyone present focuses his attention on Olive's physical charms. Like her independent-minded sister, Olive too has a streak of independence, but she almost always willingly subordinates it to her mother's promises of future success, as when she gives up her lover, Captain Hibbert, because she is repeatedly told that a better match can be found, that Hibbert brings with him only enough money for them to live comfortably—not luxuriously. Not only is Olive weak-willed relative to her sister, but she is also flighty, one whose “light mind could support no idea for any length of time” (247). Amid the chaos of tenant unrest, Olive can merely hope that the state of the country will not upset the Castle Season, a frivolous and selfish consideration that glaringly contrasts with Alice's concern for peasant suffering. However, it is significant that Olive remains unmarried despite the large dowry—twenty thousand pounds—that Mrs. Barton scrapes together for her. There are simply not enough “eligible” bachelors in the ascendancy to make Olive even hopeful. Therefore, in Olive Alice sees her own spinsterhood looming larger than ever.

Finally, among the younger women in the novel, Lady Cecilia Cullen must be considered, since her life-denying traits act as the most prominent foil to Alice. As has been hinted, if Alice finds the life of a sexual libertine like May Gould to be repugnant, then she fears equally the lonely world of celibacy; Cecilia represents that world in the extreme. Sometime in her life she has suffered some form of paralysis, for she is constantly referred to as “the little cripple,” and her outer deformity is certainly intended to act as a measure of her inner perversity. Cecilia is intelligent, perceptive, and sensitive, but she is so conscious of her deformity that she has become bitter and resentful of the world around her. She does, however, have a strong affection for Alice, whom she sees as being in a position similar to her own, that is, without any physical attractiveness. To a degree, Cecilia does find an ally in Alice, who feels at times as lonely and left out of things. But, as the narrator reveals, “the ascetic vision of life remorselessly insisted on by the cripple jarred Alice” (97). Cecilia has not only an ascetic vision, but, like Rhoda Nunn's in Gissing's *The Odd Women* before her first encounter with a man changes her mind, a vision that holds an intense loathing of

all things male, a position Alice's life-embracing soul cannot endure.

Cecilia, more so than the others, has sequestered herself, in her room for the most part, and it is this bitter world that Alice visits when she is disappointed or depressed—in moments of weakness, which Cecilia seems to pounce upon as opportunities to vent her increasingly venomous attacks on men. And even as Cecilia's attacks increase in severity, real overtures of love begin to accompany them, but they are rejected by Alice, a woman with strong maternal and moral instincts. When Cecilia finally gives up all hope of a lesbian relationship with Alice, it is only to embrace fully the life of celibacy, which she has thus far been leading involuntarily, by going to live in a convent. Such a complete rejection of marriage, either as lesbian lover or as celibate, is another option that Alice cannot allow herself to take—indeed, one that is totally anathema to her.

Throughout the novel we come to see various "older" spinsters—women in their thirties who have irrevocably succumbed to the spiritual malaise afflicting their class. Foremost are the Brennan sisters, who by degrees have cut themselves off from a world that has been less than kind to them. At first they no longer choose to go riding; then driving seems unsatisfactory. Finally, they more or less entomb themselves, allowing their uneventful lives to "dribble away in maiden idleness" (58).

Alice is chilled when the idea finally crystallizes for her that these women are representatives of what she will become if she allows her will to be lulled by a dying way of life, a tradition that has become spiritually pernicious. She also comes to realize that the changes between maiden and spinster are slow but relentless, and hence are even more to be feared:

And to think that only a few years are required to degrade a girl full of sweetness and promise . . . by what delicate degrees is the soul befouled in this drama of muslin, and how little is there left for any use of life when, after torture and disgrace, the soul, that was once so young, appears on the stage for the fourth act. Examine the meagre minds of the Ladies Cullen and the Honourable Miss Gores, listen to their narrow bigotries, and think that once these poor old things were fresh, hopeful, full of aspiration. Now if they could rise for a moment out of their living death it would be like the skeleton in Goya's picture, to lift the tomb and write on the headstone: "Nada." (193-94)

The primary force keeping Alice on track for such a fate is her mother. As we have seen, her father plays no significant role in family life, and Mrs. Barton is by temperament quick to assume the position more or less abdicated by her husband. Mr. Barton is a man whose marriage to a beautiful woman was once perceived as a "good match," but which has since become, obviously, an empty and sterile arrangement. While Mr. Barton is off amid his dreams and paintings, Mrs. Barton effectively runs the household. Conservative in the extreme, she seems to live only for seeing her beautiful daughter, Olive, situated in a "good match," as she once was herself. There is no doubt that she is vicarious-

ly reliving her own youth through the life of her younger daughter, over which she has almost complete control. However, it is ironic that she lavishes all her attention on Olive, who has her face and figure but lacks her tenacity and intelligence; these latter positive qualities instead typify Alice, but Mrs. Barton feels only burdened or even perhaps threatened by her plain but extremely perceptive daughter. In fact, Mrs. Barton's harsh treatment—even ridicule—of Alice only prepares and toughens her for making her eventual choice to leave Ireland. These qualities that mother and daughter share “are good . . . in themselves but in [Mrs. Barton] misplaced in being directed to such worthless ends”;⁹ Moore implies that in leaving Ireland Alice will be able to put these same qualities actively to work without fear of becoming stifled or paralyzed by the society that has proven itself inimical to her happiness, even to her spiritual survival. The role played by Mrs. Barton cannot be underestimated—she is a dominant force throughout the novel, and one from whose influence Alice must tear herself if she is to have any chance at all of fulfilling her human potential. This strained relationship between mother and daughter is thus very similar to that between Ernest Pontifex and his mother in Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), but Alice's struggle is the more difficult because she is a woman.

The focus of the novel is, in fact, on Alice gradually coming to an awareness of her own capabilities and of the impossibility of her realizing them in Ireland. At the beginning of the novel she exhibits paralytic traits markedly like her father's: she sits away “in her room reading . . . she never stirs out of it.” Reading Scott's novels and Romantic poetry, Alice loses herself in her world of art. But also like her father she begins to dream and daydream more often, and, “having the divine power to create, and to live an interior life, she often forgot the reality of existence” (102). Even when she does meet a man who interests her, she only “half-curiously, half-admiringly lapse[s] into dreams of him” (146)—a common enough reaction for a naive young woman perhaps, but particularly strong in Alice, who, too steeped in literature read in seclusion, cannot at first see him realistically. And little wonder: since leaving school she has “experienced little but a sense of retreating within herself, to escape . . . a broken world [that] seemed to slide and reel beneath her feet” (140). Alice is painfully aware that she is different from all the women she knows: “Why was she not like the others?—why could she not think as they did? her soul cried out in its anguish; and for the pain it caused her, she almost hated the invincible goodness of her nature” (140). While she strives to find answers to these questions—ones that she must necessarily confront—her suffering worsens until she feels “despair at her own helplessness . . . with a feeling of lethargy so strong that it seemed like physical sickness” (141). Alice actually feels

9. Cave, p. 55.

herself becoming paralyzed, and with so many aging spinsters in the county acting as reminders of what is in all probability her own future, it is no wonder that, like them, she unintentionally encourages her own paralysis by shutting herself away. The process is thus self-stoking—and seemingly inescapable.

However, something does happen to change the vicious pattern: in Dublin she meets an English writer, John Harding,¹⁰ and immediately she feels a fresh and vital movement of her spirit, a stirring of life: "His fearless speech was what the sea-wind and the blue and white aspects of a distant mountain range are to the convict. Her life seemed suddenly to have grown larger, clearer; she felt as if the breathing of the dawn were on her face" (151). Harding is different from the other men she has known before. In a conversation at the Shelbourne they amicably discuss literature at length, but that discussion afterward holds special meaning for Alice: she has finally met someone who has listened to and shown interest in her *ideas*, and that someone is not only a man, but a person who cares about vital things and who is as impatient with time-killing small talk as she is.

After successive meetings with Harding she begins to be impressed by how busy he is—writing, constantly writing. But that she might do the same, or at least try to, never occurs to her until Harding suggests it. From this point on he becomes an even greater source of encouragement for her. When she expresses doubts about her abilities, he convinces her she is quite capable of writing fiction and enjoins her to send him some of her work so that he can appraise it or perhaps even get it published. In making this offer, Harding reveals to Alice an avenue of escape she had not seen before; he is thus the catalyst that brings about Alice's transformation from passivity to activity, but the change comes slowly, and only later is Alice able to take full advantage of what he offers.

Before leaving for London, Harding predicts Alice's eventual exile, for what he sees at this late point in the novel is something that has been slowly building from the start: Alice's only hope of spiritual survival is to escape Ireland's paralytic atmosphere. In this she is obviously a predecessor of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, with whom she has much in common.

Each must escape the political turmoil that is so often the cause of Ireland's paralysis. Curiously, each novel features an extended dinner scene, during which volatile political discussion fills the air. If for Stephen the discussion he witnesses deals with Ireland's paralyzed politics after Parnell, then for Alice it centers upon various possible solutions to the land issue, none of which are at all feasible. Another basic similarity between the novels is that each character's siblings and friends seem to fit in quite comfortably with the *status quo*; that is, the

10. An author of sketches remarkably like Moore's in *Parnell and His Island*, John Harding appears in several of Moore's pieces of fiction and usually represents Moore's own opinions.

protagonist in each novel is the only major character "stricken" with the awareness necessary to motivate exile. Each rejects conventional "security," preferring instead to take the risk necessary to gain personal and artistic freedom—for each is indeed artistically inclined, but in different ways. If Stephen's revolt is primarily against the philistinism he sees in his class, then Alice is morally opposed to the ascendancy's attempts to perpetuate Ireland's feudalism, which, of course, only allows for artistic dabbling, like her father's, and which leaves little room for genuine creative feeling born out of unrest or dissatisfaction. Each must grow into a sense of disgust, of repulsion, at a culture, after having made concerted efforts to become assimilated into that culture. Stephen's flirtation with the priesthood is thus roughly analogous to Alice's lonely hours spent dreaming about men, for each of these alternatives is self-effacing, comfortable, and socially acceptable.

The real yearning Stephen and Alice each feel for the opposite sex reveals their intense sexual-sensual natures. Their highly romantic fantasies and their curiosities show some ignorance of the world, not unusual in a *bildungsroman*, but their feelings are different from those of their society in general in that they have no practical goals—security, materialism, social position—in mind beforehand. This sensuality of nature, sensitivity to the world around them, reveals also their highly artistic temperaments, though these traits are more pronounced in Stephen because of Joyce's more personal technique.¹¹ If Alice has "the divine power to create, and to live an interior life," then it is hardly surprising that, again like Stephen, she at first turns inward from what she sees as an unpleasant world, one in which her sister attracts all the attention and she none, and prefers instead to reside in a world of her own creation. In fact, Alice's room serves as a symbol not only of her own isolation but of the paralysis that affects the entire ascendancy. The main difference between Alice and the rest of her society is that Alice becomes aware of the source of her suffering—Ireland—while the rest can only endure their paralysis without hope of escape. Like Stephen's, Alice's progression to awareness is wave-like, with some successes and some setbacks, but as forward-moving overall as the incoming tide.

That turning inward must perforce lead Stephen and Alice—for both are Catholics—to turn to the Church for meaning and direction in a confusing world. But Alice is as fiercely an independent thinker as Stephen, and she by degrees comes to reject Catholic doctrine in favor of a humanistic agnosticism that better fills her need for a larger sense of

11. By making these somewhat broader comparisons I do not mean to imply that the novels are completely on an equal footing, for they differ considerably once we go beyond the level of theme. The focus of Moore's novel is much more diffuse, since *A Drama in Muslin* is at least as much about the decline of a social class as it is about the success of its heroine. Moore's tone is also more varied, ranging from comedic to plaintive to angry. And perhaps most importantly, his style is obviously more conventional than Joyce's; we can, therefore, never really come to know Alice the way we know Stephen. Still, that Joyce received some inspiration from Moore is at the least highly probable.

community with life: "That frail, fluttering thing was once a bud; it lived the summer life of a leaf: now it will decay through the winter, and perhaps the next, until it finally becomes part of the earth. Everything in nature I see pursuing the same course; why should I imagine myself an exception to the general rule?" (61). Harding believes as she does, so when she meets him he becomes a source of support for her in this spiritual respect also.

She feels a similar frustration about another aspect of her society, one in which "men have bought women, kept women as a sort of common property." Thus she comes to rebel "against social, as she had long done against religious laws" (101). Since her mother represents the most conservative elements of the ascendancy's way of life, her rebellion against society must needs be also against her family, and in this she is also, obviously, like Stephen. When she does finally meet her match in Dr. Reed and agrees to marry him, Mrs. Barton tries to interfere and, as we have seen, refuses to attend the ceremony, at the same time effectively forbidding her ineffectual husband's presence.

But Alice, whose sense of purpose is by now firmly fixed, is undaunted, assuring Reed that "her feelings toward him would remain uninfluenced by anything that anyone might say" (312). After having helped May through her pregnancy by writing to earn the money, Alice has continued to write and has been slowly shedding her paralysis until these assertions of her newly discovered independence actually produce in her for the first time the opposite effect of paralysis, a thrill that is "almost a physical pleasure" (315). Now all that remains is for her to tear herself away from her country, something still difficult for her, as even to the last moment she expects to see her family come rushing out to wish her luck and to tell her goodbye. If her ambitions are not as lofty as Stephen's, then neither is she as arrogant as he. Her good sense warns her "against the usefulness of offering any too violent opposition to the opinions of the world" (315-16), so her final act of rebellion is not as dramatic as Stephen's, for Alice shows a greater maturity than he in making her departure as amicable as possible.

She does not want to forge in the smithy of her soul the uncreated conscience of her race; however, she shares with Stephen a tremendous and vital love of life. Where he declares "Welcome, O Life!", she, from the depths of the paralysis she seeks to escape, once cried out, "'Oh, give me life, give me love!' and her anguish was like the wail of the frozen bird, that wailed its thin life away in the silent light of the stars" (100). Alice actively loves life and has a firm "belief in this world, and faith in its ultimate perfectability" (253).

Thus, we see her always striving to nurture, to improve, to aid life in any way she can; we have already seen how Alice works tirelessly, writing the many stories and articles whose income goes directly to support the pregnant May Gould. Alice cannot know at the time that these

efforts on someone else's behalf are helping bring about the freedom she seeks by making her an active artist, one who is now able to earn an income by putting her talents to work and publishing her efforts in London. The implication here, of course, is that through goodness of spirit Alice has brought her good fortune upon herself. Similarly, Dr. Reed can find success and security only in England: his book has been published there and he has bought a modest practice—all through his own hard work and strong self-confidence. Thus their exile is necessary for the success of their careers as well as for their spiritual well-being; Moore implies that the two are interrelated and inseparable.

At the same time, Alice and her husband are the only ones in the novel who truly feel for the starving peasants that surround the Big Houses. Their wholeness of spirit is attributable to a vision of life that is not solely based in the self, and that takes into consideration the condition of others. As we have seen, only through Alice can the "tender human sympathy that was one of Moore's pronounced traits"¹² find expression. Though lurking in the background through most of the novel, the peasants and the poor do receive consideration; a strong example of Alice's concern comes when she notices that the peasants are locked out in the rain and cold, while the landlords dance in warm rooms at the grotesque ball held for local spinsters.

When the scene shifts to Dublin in the second book of the novel, the contrast between the two classes is described in more extended and gruesome detail. In one well-wrought scene, set on a cold night replete with torrents of rain and loud cracks of thunder, the Bartons are in their carriage and approaching Dublin Castle when gradually the traffic in the dark streets slows to an unexpected standstill. The scene then quickly becomes gothic in its eeriness, the outer world transformed into something sinister and alien as the fearful occupants peer through the carriage's "breath-misted windows" at the sombre shapes that move around close by. Heightening the effect is an occasional shaft of lightning, which suddenly illuminates that world of poverty they know so little about. Sometimes the flimsy carriage stands "no more than a foot . . . from the crowd on the pavement's edge":

Never were poverty and wealth brought into closer proximity. In the broad glare of the carriage lights the shape of every feature, . . . every detail of dress, every stain of misery were revealed to the silken exquisites who, a little frightened, strove to hide themselves within the scented shadows of their broughams: and in like manner, the bloom on every aristocratic cheek, the glitter of every diamond, the richness of every plume were visible to the avid eyes of those who stood without in the wet and the cold. . . . "How wicked those men in the big hats look," said Olive, "I'm sure they would rob us if they only dared."

Alice thought of the Galway ball, with the terrible faces looking in at the window. (171)

As before, only Alice seems to be sensitive to the gross disparity between classes. Although one critic has claimed that "beneath the aesthetic

12. Joseph Hone, *The Life of George Moore* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 206.

foolery there is anger about Ireland and the poor,"¹³ an evaluation closer to the truth is Jeffares', which acknowledges Moore's suppressed emotions in service of his art: *A Drama in Muslin* "contained the humanitarianism he so strongly denounced and the love of Ireland he loathed."¹⁴ This assertion is borne out most effectively in the final scene before the couple emigrates. As Dr. Reed and Alice are traveling along a lonely country road on their way out of Ireland, the well-matched couple comes upon an eviction in progress, a scene so appalling that they feel compelled to offer assistance despite the fact that they are themselves on precarious financial footing. When the father of the destitute family, "a picture of speechless despair" (323), sees his rent paid for him, he and his kin fall on their knees to thank their benefactors. However, the agents with the eviction papers can only laugh scornfully, asking the Reeds whether they have enough money to give relief to the hundreds more on their schedule. Significantly, this is the final experience the Reeds suffer in Ireland.

In offering exile as the only option open to those who are creative and enterprising, Moore has condemned his country for its paralysis. The last few pages are devoted to showing the Reeds two years later flourishing in dignity and harmony. Living off the products of their own labor, they soon raise a family—something Alice's strong maternal instincts have always demanded—and become settled and fulfilled in a way that would have been impossible in Ireland. Moore will return again and again to this same theme in his later Irish fiction.

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13. Peter Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," in *The Man of Wax*, ed. Douglas Hughes, p. 89.

14. A. Norman Jeffares, "*A Drama in Muslin*," in *George Moore's Mind and Art*, ed. Graham Owens (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), p. 20.