

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

‘Impossible to do otherwise’: Social Injustice and Colonial Guilt in George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*

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Abstract: This paper examines concerns about the social injustice caused by colonialism as articulated in George Moore's 1886 novel *A Drama in Muslin*. In doing so it draws on recent analyses of the way in which guilt about colonial injustices can be found buried in literature and film produced under and 'after' colonialism. It also draws on Saunders' calls for more careful analysis of the 'spatial poetics' of literary texts, that is, the narrative devices authors use to tell stories about places in carefully crafted ways. Drawing on ideas from these fields, the paper examines how Moore's repeated juxtaposition of local poverty alongside colonial privilege, as seen from multiple perspectives in a range of social and geographical contexts, is a narrative device which serves to highlight the social injustice upon which the wealth and status of his class was predicated. However, also explored is a counter narrative that argues that while local instances of redress might be possible, at the broader national scale redress is neither possible nor desirable. As such Moore's novel works to acknowledge injustice but also frees his community and his readers from the responsibility of having to take action.

Keywords: colonial guilt; spatial poetics; nineteenth-century Ireland

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Introduction

Following Said's (1978) work on imaginative geographies as embedded in fiction as well as in other forms of writing, geographers have used literary sources to examine how selves and 'others'/our space and 'other' spaces are articulated in a range of colonial contexts (Godlewska and Smith 1994; Gregory 1995; Jarosz 1992; Ryan 1997; Schwartz and Ryan 2003; Sharp 2009). In doing so, the way colonised communities were depicted as inferior 'others' to the more advanced and civilised cultures of colonial classes has been identified. Also recognised are some of the more nuanced coloniser/colonised relationships and interactions that underpinned colonial activity (Guelke and Guelke 2004; Kearns 1997; Proudfoot and Roche 2005; Tyner 2005). Thus, while not denying the exploitative nature of colonialism, and the unequal power relations that have permeated and sustained it, colonies are now seen as highly diverse spaces where multiple kinds of engagement between colonial and non-colonial took place. In addition, it is now recognised that colonial communities were not a homogenous group of all-powerful, all-civilising or all-plundering agents, but that they came from different backgrounds, had diverse objectives, and varied outlooks (Blunt and Rose 1994; Sidaway 2017). This resonates with the research conducted by post-colonial geographers who have used diverse sources to study the lives and attitudes of those engaged in empire (Lambert and Lester 2006; Fitzpatrick 2019; Skinner and Lester 2012) which illustrates that many were ambivalent, conflicted and/or critical about its ideologies and practices, and some made attempts to dismantle it.

One aspect of this more nuanced approach is the consideration of issues of guilt as felt by members of colonial communities over the nature of their privilege, the exploitation of colonial subjects or the taking of indigenous lands. Using literature and/or film produced under colonialism (Weaver-Hightower 2011; 2018) or in its 'aftermath' (Celik 2010; Körber 2018; Marais 2019), scholars have begun to probe the existence of colonial guilt, attempts at acknowledging it, and in some instances at resolving it, as themes in the narratives produced by people who benefited from colonialism in a range of geographical contexts. Weaver-Hightower (2011, 2018) for example has explored colonial guilt as embedded in nineteenth-century novels produced by members of Australian, South African, and North America settler communities. In doing so, she reveals that while the dominant theme in such accounts tends to be that of the success and legitimacy of European settlement projects, guilt and anxiety about colonial activity can also be found therein. For her, however, while such anxieties are often voiced in settler texts, they are also often put to rest by their authors, who represent situations within which things could not be otherwise. Representations of landscape, she argues, provide opportunity for reflection and commentary on the processes of land acquisition, appropriation and transformation that underpin colonial projects, a point well established by geographers (Barnes and Duncan 1992; Cosgrove and Daniels 1989; Duncan and Ley 1993). However, as outlined by Weaver-Hightower, narrative devices such as the use of multiple characters enable authors to creatively project a variety of perspectives on relationships with colonised land and people, including those that relay conflicting and/or critical perspectives on colonial activity. In doing so, they can justify or defend the legitimacy

of colonial actions and/or accusations of wrong-doing that they feel might be directed towards them from wider communities, and counter or respond to such accusations by telling the story from their own side. This resonates with the work of literary geographers who have called for a consideration of how narrative devices are used to present stories about places in particular ways, and in doing so illustrate that spatial experience is more than just context (Brosseau 1995, 2020; Hones 2018; Saunders 2010).

This paper draws on these ideas to explore the issue of guilt in the writing of one representative of the colonial class in Ireland, George Moore (1852-1930). Moore has been selected here because of his scathing critique of the system of which he was a part. This critique is particularly evident in his 1886 novel *A Drama in Muslin*.¹

The analysis explores how Moore's text works to acknowledge colonial injustice by highlighting material inequalities in a variety of spatial contexts, examined here as scenes. In doing so, the reading shows that Moore does call into question the exploitative nature of colonialism in Ireland. However, also evident in Moore is a geography of guilt. For much of the novel the reader is presented with scenes in which social injustice is stark and colonial culpability unambiguous. In these scenes those with privilege observe the poor at a distance – from their carriage, through darkened windows, or from their part of the church. However, at the end of the novel, in a scene where characters attempt to intervene in an injustice and to take action, Moore puts forward the idea that such attempts are futile and that redress itself is impossible. As such, the geography of his text, and more particularly 'the spatial sequence of events,' drawing on Brosseau (2020), allows him to lay bare the injustices brought about by colonialism, but also to highlight what he saw/wanted to see as the impossible position of his class when it came to bringing about change.

The first part of the paper explores existing work on colonial guilt, focussing on literary and film studies. This is followed by a discussion on research by literary geographers on the need for a consideration of how narrative devices function to tell stories about people and places in particular ways, to project some truths more strongly than others. The paper then examines the context in which Moore was writing, followed by an examination of colonial guilt and culpability as relayed through his 1886 novel. The final part highlights this paper's contribution to knowledge and points to avenues for further research.

Colonial guilt

As outlined above, while geographers now take a more nuanced approach to colonial contexts which recognises how those involved in empire were often ambivalent, conflicted and/or critical about its impacts (Fitzpatrick 2019; Lambert and Lester 2006; Skinner and Lester 2012), the issue of colonial guilt about the exploitation of other people and their lands has received less attention. By contrast scholars working in literary and film studies have identified guilt as an issue which is articulated within texts (literary and visual) produced during or after colonialism. As outlined above, Weaver-Hightower (2011, 2018) has explored colonial guilt as embedded in nineteenth-century narratives produced by members of Australian, South

African, Canadian and US settler communities. In doing so, she explores how representations of landscape as well as encounters with colonial others enable settlers to comment on the impacts of colonial activity. These types of representation either emphasise positive or inevitable aspects of settler activity. In doing so writers justify their presence and activities in/on 'other's' lands. However, beneath these stories lie some contradictory perspectives, some of which raise concerns about the legitimacy of colonial settlement. Weaver-Hightower sees critical perspectives as evidence of guilt or of an awareness of potential accusations of wrong-doing. However, she also notes the tendency for settler narratives to address criticisms by highlighting that injustice is not their fault, that they are themselves victims of settlement schemes, or that indigenous subjugation is necessary for progress. As such blame for the exploitation of 'others' is deflected from the settler community. This serves to ease settler anxieties about their conscious or unconscious culpability in the exploitation of colonised communities. In a similar vein, Dynarowicz (2007) has examined the narrative devices used by J.M. Coetzee in the novel *In the Heart of the Country* as an articulation of colonial anxiety in the South African context. Set in the early twentieth century and written as a series of diary entries, the main protagonist, Magda, narrates her experiences as a white woman living on a farm in rural South Africa during apartheid. Magda's use of pronouns we/them or our/their highlights the sharp social and spatial divisions between the two communities, divisions which are reinforced by descriptions of the materially different conditions under which white settlers and black servants live. However, Magda's use of the passive tense, Dynarowicz argues, points to her lack of agency and to a certain extent to her non-complicity in the exploitative situation in which she is located. Magda writes that she has 'been used, used as a tool, to bring the house to order, to regiment the servants' (quoted in Dynarowicz 2007: 61). As such responsibility is located not with herself but with the wider context of colonial norms within which she is a prisoner. Also presented in the novel are Magda's attempts to break down the we/they divisions that regulate social relations by asking her servants to call her by her name rather than by her title. However, these attempts are unsuccessful due to the servants' unwillingness to comply. As such, Magda is presented as one who desires change, but who does not have the power to bring it about.

An attempt to transgress the boundaries established under colonialism is similarly explored in Wang's analysis of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (Wang 2009). Set in Zimbabwe in the 1940s, the novel explores the physical boundaries between settler and servant communities. These are examined at a number of spatial scales which include the settler farmyard, the home, the bedroom and the body of the white farmer's wife Mary. The novel explores the violence that is used to maintain these boundaries and punish transgressions. The story follows the relationship between Mary and their black farmhand Moses, with whom she becomes increasingly obsessed. This results in his gradual move from labourer out on the farm to domestic worker in the house, at her behest, and to eventual carer (and possibly lover) of his increasingly unstable employer. This leads to Mary's ostracisation from the wider community, who shun her for her actions. Further mental deterioration ensues, and Mary is eventually killed by Moses who hangs for his crime. As such the novel points to a desire to transgress established boundaries, a desire which apparently could only

come from a woman suffering from mental breakdown. Also presented are the implications of such transgressions. As a result, Wang reads Lessing's work as a comment on the violence and exploitation of the situation in which the story is set, and on the potential dangers of settler attempts to defy existing social conventions.

These studies highlight that colonial guilt or an awareness of injustice or wrong-doing is embedded in literature produced under and after colonialism in a range of historical and geographical contexts. Also evident is a willingness or desire on the part of some settlers to redress the social and spatial inequities created by colonialism. However, while characters in the examples discussed above represent attempts at making things otherwise, their creators place responsibility for the situation elsewhere – in the past, in the landscape or in the norms of the society. As such these writers present their protagonists as being incapable of bringing about change. Also concerned with the representation of injustice, although through the medium of cinema, Cain (2004) has examined the exaggerated juxtapositions and over-sentimentalised perspectives put forward in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). 'The film's dramatisation of a true story about an attempted forced adoption of three girls of mixed heritage in 1930s Australia, Cain argues, attempts to shed light on the brutality of an historical colonial policy. Its overemphasis on colonial white/black, European/Aboriginal, civilised/savage, settled/feral motifs reflect settler anxieties about such colonial distinctions, but places them in the past. At the same time its exaggeration of the distance travelled by the girls in their attempt to escape, and its happy ending render it somewhat fairytale-like, thereby undermining and/or silencing the real and enduring impacts of such policies. Also concerned with attempts to absolve colonial guilt is Körber's (2018) examination of the Danish film *Gold Coast* (2015). The protagonist, from whose perspective the story is told, is a Danish botanist-agriculturalist who has been sent to Ghana to establish a coffee plantation in the 1830s. While there is brutality and exploitation around him, he is depicted as an 'innocent accomplice of the colonial system' (27) which he eventually comes to reject and resist. Telling the story from the perspective of a morally just protagonist, Körber argues, suggests that not all Danes were complicit in colonial brutality. Like *Rabbit Proof Fence* it uses historical facts to add authenticity to the story. However, in *Gold Coast* the brutality is imagined by the protagonist who suffers from mental breakdown and delirium. As such the extent to which brutality is real or not is left ambiguous. In both examples, despite their differing historical and geographical contexts, film directors use narrative devices and styles of representation to present historical colonial exploitation and potential guilt about it in a particular way. As argued by Körber, they allow colonial guilt to be 'acknowledged' but also 'denied', 'diverted', and 'managed' in the aftermath of colonialism (27).

Spatial poetics/narrative spatialities

The examination of narrative devices outlined above, while not explicitly concerned with depictions of space as such, resonates with ongoing work by literary geographers on what has been called 'spatial poetics' (Saunders 2010: 446) or 'narrative spatialities' (Hones 2011: 686). This involves the examination of the ways in which spatial perspective and experience are

crafted structurally and stylistically within a text and the part this plays in the storytelling. These include the structuring them/us impulses identified by Said (1978) which distance some communities, places, territories from 'others' spatially, morally and ideologically as imaginative constructs. However, they also include other kinds of narrative devices. Brosseau for example calls for a consideration of spatial form and in particular of 'the spatial sequence of events' and what this adds to the story in terms of relaying how different characters experience spaces or events in different ways at different times (Brosseau 2020: 83). Moreover, the use of multiple perspectives enables authors to show reality from different vantage points, some of which may be omniscient and perhaps more authoritative, while others are localised and more particular or subjective (Hones 2011; Kearns 2005), a device identified by Weaver-Hightower (2018) discussed above. The interplay between varied spatial scales in a story can point to proximities and relationships between places, agents and events or highlight the impacts of events or decisions made in one place on people and places elsewhere (Hones 2010, 2018; Noxolo and Preziuso 2013; Sharp 2000). Levels of agency (or lack thereof) of particular characters or communities can be presented by focusing on their ability to be in control of their own geographies or those of others (Hamlin 2016, Kearns 2005). Juxtapositions can highlight differences and inequalities (Brosseau 2020; Noxolo and Preziuso 2013) while metaphors can suggest association and possible similarities (Barnett 1996; Bradshaw and Brown 2018). As such geographers pay attention not just to descriptions of place as background detail, but to the ways in which space, place and geographical experience are crafted into the storytelling process.

This paper brings the work on colonial guilt in literature and film outlined above, and the work in literary geography which explores how geographical experience, perspectives and sensibilities are narrated and function as part of the story, to a reading of Moore's text. In doing so it examines how issues of colonial injustice and the possibilities for redress are presented as a spatial story and how that works to release settlers from feelings of guilt. This demonstrates not only that the issues explored in the range of colonial contexts discussed above can also be found in this particular colonial context, but more importantly that spatial readings of settler narratives which deal with exploitation can help us to understand the processes through which guilt and questions of responsibility can be resolved in a broad range of contexts.

Historical and historiographical context

While there is much debate on the nature and duration of Ireland's status as a colony, in general, the colonial class that is the focus of this paper originated from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conquests when English soldiers and adventurers were rewarded for their services with land confiscated from Irish territorial elites. This resulted in the settlement of people from Britain to varying degrees in Ireland (Smyth 2006). In some areas, particularly in the south where settlement was more fragmented, newly established landowners let properties to newcomers from England but also retained existing populations as their tenants. Some of the existing tenants were Gaelic, but many were Anglo-Norman families who had

settled in Ireland as part of earlier (twelfth-century) conquests. Lands not confiscated (largely in the west) remained in Irish hands as before. The more recent wave of settlers (called the New English to distinguish them from those of Anglo-Norman descent) had, however, the privilege of extensive land titles (and consequently rents). Moreover, penal legislation restricted Catholics from owning or inheriting land, having access to capital, or holding positions of power, thus enabling these new settlers to dominate the economic and political landscape (Connolly 1992; McGrath 1996). The situation in the north of the country was somewhat different. This later settlement involved the plantation of larger numbers of occupiers. This included people of English Protestant and Scottish Presbyterian background. As a result, the settler population in the northern counties were in the majority and identities here were more clearly demarcated along sectarian lines.

What complicates the Irish story, therefore, is the uneven nature of this colonial project, which was in places fragmented and piecemeal but in other places more extensive and complete. It also involved a range of ethnic groups which included New English (mostly Protestant post sixteenth-century settlers), Old English (or Anglo-Norman families) some of whom had converted to Protestantism and were loyal to the English Crown but some of whom were not, Scots Presbyterians predominately in the northern part of the island, and the Irish (or Gaelic) communities who were predominantly Catholic and constituted the majority population in the south, but were outnumbered in the north. A key distinction between the colonisation of Ireland in comparison to the other contexts discussed above, is that the Irish were white, European and Christian and thus their 'otherness' from the settlers was more subtle than in North America, Africa or Australia (Connolly 2016). Overtime marriage further complicated the relationships between native and newcomer groups, although Penal legislation restricted intermarriage between Catholic and Anglican denominations. In what would become the republic of Ireland, as in the United States, the descendants of those who had acquired land from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conquests, and had been in Ireland for over a century, began to feel Irish and to demand parliamentary independence from London (Claydon and McBride 1998; James 1987). This was however, conceived as a Protestant parliament and as such was elitist and sectarian, excluding the wider population who were largely seen as inferior 'others' (Foster 1988). This, coupled with a populist rebellion in 1798, led the London administration, fearing the loss of another colony, to transfer the Irish administration to London (Keogh and Whelan 2001).

As a result, some of the landed class left the country to take up their administrative positions across the channel but retained their lands in Ireland. Others stayed but travelled back and forth to fulfil their roles. By the nineteenth century, therefore, the settler community in the southern part of the country had what has been regarded as a 'schizoid identification' feeling part Irish and part English (Foster 1988: 178). Their ethnic difference from the majority population, along with a socio-economic status predicated on an ability to exploit the land and labour of the wider population, their occupation of positions of power which included all political, legislative and judicial offices, their membership of the colonial church and their enjoyment of the social benefits that were attached to being the crown's representatives in Ireland, meant that they functioned as a colonial class. Their maintenance

of strong social and familial connections with England, where many had been educated, and in whose administration, military and empire many served, furthered their 'otherness' from the majority population. As a result, they and their country estates were seen as symbols of colonial power in Ireland throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Dooley 2001; Dooley and Ridgeway 2011). They came to be known as the Anglo-Irish, a term which is now widely used, to highlight their hyphenated ethnicity, bearing in mind that the nature of this hyphenation is varied and contested (Moynahan 1994).

The treatment of the Anglo-Irish in Irish historical scholarship and in popular imaginations has varied over time. Nineteenth-century nationalists treated them as exploitative alien 'others'. Anglo-Irish commentators, however, made a key distinction between good landlords and bad landlords, the former being those who lived in Ireland and managed their estates and their tenantry in efficient, productive and paternalist ways. This group were contrasted against non-resident or absentee landlords who lived in England and were far removed from their Irish estates, which were managed in a careless and unproductive way. Such distinctions between the good and the bad can be read as an attempt by some to distance themselves from those they saw as exploitative and alien 'others', and to align their interests with their new country, an issue identified as a feature in the writings examined by Weaver-Hightower discussed above. It is well recognised that, like the settlers discussed above, segments of the landed classes in Ireland sought to justify their position in Ireland through their writing, which includes a significant body of fiction as well as autobiography, memoir and social and political commentary (Leersen 1996; McCormack 1985; Rauchbauer 1992). However, while many sought to highlight their Irishness, or their contribution to Irish society, culture or causes, Moore, particularly in his novel *A Drama in Muslin*, has been recognised for the more caustic light he sheds on his own class (Grubgeld 1994; 2004). It is for this reason that this text has been selected for analysis here, although a similar treatment of many others would no doubt be insightful.

George Moore

Born in 1852, Moore was the son of a west of Ireland landlord who had acquired land during the Elizabethan conquest. While originally Protestant, the family converted to Catholicism in the eighteenth century when George's great grandfather married into a Spanish merchant family and, seeking to improve his capacity for trade with his wife's country, changed his religion. Subsequent Moores were people of note. George's great-grandfather fought against the Crown in the 1798 rebellion, while his father was MP for Mayo at Westminster and leader of the first Irish Home Rule Party (Hone 1936; Pierce 2015). As such the Moores, despite their colonial origins, had nationalist leanings. Moreover, as Catholics, they worshipped in the same church as their tenants.

At the age of six, George, like many of his class, was sent to school in England. In 1861 when his father was elected MP the family left the west of Ireland to take up residence in London. In 1870 George Moore senior died and young George, now eighteen, inherited the Irish estate, which stretched into three counties. However, with the exception of a period in

which he lived in Dublin from 1901-1911, George spent his life as a permanent absentee (Frazier 2000). Despite this, Moore was deeply aware that his leisured life abroad was the direct result of the labour of his Mayo tenants. This became particularly evident when their refusal to pay their rents in 1870 forced him to return to Ireland. However, while frustration over his dependence on them and his recognition of their ability to curtail his leisure led him to refer to them in 1886 as ‘infernal’ and ‘wretched creatures’ (Moore 1917: 73), in his 1916 autobiography he spoke of the ‘dread’ and ‘shame’ he felt at meeting them, so conscious was he of the injustice that they ‘be left to the labours of the field’ while he had ‘gone forth to enjoy the world’ (Moore 1919: 338 and 342).

Moore’s guilt about the social injustice that underpinned his position of privilege works its way into his fiction, particularly so in his 1886 novel *A Drama in Muslin*. The story revolves around the experiences of two young ladies who have recently returned from England where they were educated. Due to financial pressures, and in particular the indebted nature of the family estate, their parents are anxious to see their daughters married into wealthy families. As such it provides perspective on the lives of the landed gentry in Ireland, and on their relationship with the wider population upon whose labour their income depended. Moreover, the novel’s setting during the Irish land war (1879-82), a period when rural communities agitated against the landed class through non-payments of rent as well as direct attacks on landlords and their property, including house burning and cattle maiming, provides opportunity for commentary on colonialism and anti-colonial resistance, and, as argued by Maurer (2012), property rights.

The ‘big house’ novel, of which Moore’s *A Drama* is one, is a genre of Anglo-Irish writing produced in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century well recognised as a form of social commentary (Cahalan 1988). Moore himself believed that it was the responsibility of the novelist to record the events of one’s time. *A Drama* is subtitled ‘a realistic novel’ and speaking of it in 1885 he argued that it represented with photographic realism ‘the true condition of Ireland as it is now’ (quoted in Mullen 2013: 164).

However, as outlined above, big house novels are also seen as a medium through which the landed gentry, in the knowledge of their perception as outsiders, sought to legitimate their place in Ireland. Some, for example, used their writing to accentuate their community’s Irishness or their commitment to Ireland and Irish issues. Others used it to voice criticism of those absentees who neglected their estates or of the English government’s mismanagement of Irish affairs. These were narrative strategies employed to write oneself and one’s family into Ireland. Moore’s novel is by contrast is a scathing critique of landlordism as an overall system and its focus on the shortcomings of a Catholic landed family disrupts the sectarian binaries of good Catholic and bad Protestant landowners that permeated imaginations at that time (Hand 2014). Moreover, its classification as ‘land war fiction’, much of which was propagandist in its attempt to highlight the plight of the landed owners at the hands of an unruly and violent peasantry, also runs against the grain, in that it presents neither landlord nor tenant in a positive light (Murphy and Hansson 2014). In doing so, and in failing to present an ending in which issues were resolved, the novel has been seen to fly in the face of novelistic conventions of the time. As argued by Hand (2014: 49) it is ‘a sophisticated and multilayered

critique' of the situation in Ireland in the 1880s as well as of what was considered appropriate content for a novel. This paper draws on these insights but also explores the spaces in which social injustice is presented by Moore to illustrate how concerns for the colonised 'other' are articulated and acknowledged but also how these concerns are resolved. As such this reading of Moore's scenes of injustice adds to the current work on Moore and on Anglo-Irish literary justifications discussed above, while also adding to the literature on the processes through which settler guilt is managed.

Colonial guilt and culpability in Moore's *A Drama*

Scene I: The Landscape

The novel opens at a convent school in England, where a group of Irish girls have reached the end of term and their parents have arrived to take them back to Ireland. However, excitement about the girls' return to their native country is undermined by parental fears of the 'trials that await' their daughters (6) given the 'present agrarian agitation' (7). The year is 1881 and the agitation being referred to is the Irish Land War, a period of conflict between landowners and tenants, which as outlined above often involved violence. As the group travel back to county Galway, characters observe the 'disturbed state of the country' from the windows of their carriage and reflect on the London administration's failure to protect landowners, on the economic difficulties that result from the tenants' withholding of rent and on the likely disruption to normal social life that they can expect. As such the novel provides perspective on the colonial relationships within the Irish countryside and between Ireland and Britain. Moreover, while the focus is largely on one family (The Bartons), it revolves around a collection of families, who form part of or are connected with the land-owning elite, and, like the settler narratives discussed above, serve to provide a range of perspectives on the social and political context in which the novel is set. As argued by Grubgeld (2020: 102), Moore intentionally sought to 'integrate a multiplicity of Irish voices' into his work and in doing so sought to capture multiple truths.

Key topics discussed at dinner table conversations include the colonial origins of landowners (and as such on the manner through which land was acquired), on the current status of landowners as either being resident or non-resident in Ireland, and on landlord behaviours towards their tenants. As such the dinner table provides characters with opportunities to discuss the concerns of the day. At one such event, hosted by Lord Dungory, a Mr Ryan, who 'farmed large tracts' with his cousin Mr Lynch, distinguishes between those who are resident in country and contribute to local life and those who are not, arguing that he 'wouldn't moind the lague [the Land League] being hard on them who lives out of the counthry, spendin' their cash on liquor and theatres in London, but what can they have agin us who stops at home, mindin' our properties and riding our harses?' (43).

Mr Lynch proceeds to consider the legitimacy of other categories of landowner. There are 'many in the country' he argues 'who don't deserve much consideration. I am alluding to those who acquired their property in the land courts, and the Cromwellians, and the – I mean

the rack-renters' (44). References to 'the Cromwellians' here points to those who acquired their lands as a result of seventeenth-century conquests and were often looked upon negatively. References to the Land Courts points to those who acquired land through the more recent purchase of estates that have become indebted and who are often seen as land grabbers. While Moore uses this diverse array of characters to highlight something of the complexity of ownership patterns, and of the varied perspectives on landlord tenant relations, it is the character of Alice, the eldest Barton daughter, and one who Moore tells his reader, 'held opinions' contrary to everyone else, who comments most critically on issues of social injustice.

On their way to church amid a throng of country people heading in the same direction, Alice refuses to agree with her mother on their 'sour and wicked' appearance, even though it is known that they are holding an anti-landlord agitation meeting after mass. Alice's sympathy stems from her understanding of the people's plight. She had, as Moore recounts it, 'already begun to see something wrong in each big house being surrounded by a hundred small ones, all working to keep it in sloth and luxury' (68).

Here, and throughout, Moore uses the novel's sensible and compassionate heroine to project a discerning perspective on the exploitative nature of landlord tenant relationships. Indeed, the parasitic nature of landlordism in Ireland is a feature of his broader writing. In his non-fiction account of the period *Parnell and his Island* written two years later than *A Drama*, he reported that in Ireland 'every chicken eaten, every glass of champagne drunk, every silk dress trailed in the street, every rose worn at a ball, comes straight out of the peasant's cabin' (1887: 8).

As such, Moore uses Alice to project his own views on the reality of class relations in Ireland.

Scene II: The Church

Social differences between the two communities are further explored through observations made within the confines of the local church. As outlined above, unlike the majority of his class, Moore was a Catholic and therefore attended the same place of worship as his tenants. This provided him with the opportunity to observe and reflect on them in a context not normally within the purview of Anglo-Irish commentators. In this scene, the gentry, Moore writes, prayed 'elegantly' and with 'refinement' on an elevation close to the altar whilst:

The peasantry filled the body of the church. They prayed coarsely, ignorantly, with the same brutality as they lived ... Further away a circle of dried and yellowing faces bespoke of centuries of damp cabins, brutalising toil, [and] occasional starvation (70-71).

Here Moore speaks as the omniscient narrator presenting what he depicts as reality. His references to the 'the centuries of damp' and 'brutalising toil' and 'occasional starvation' can

be seen as a comment on the history of material poverty in Ireland. Social difference is relayed through the impacts of their arrival on the genteel ladies:

The peasants came ... [into the church] ... coughing and grunting with monotonous, animal-like voices; and the sour odour of cabin-smoked frieze arose ... and whiffs of unclean leather, mingled with a smell of a sick child ... Olive and May, exchanging looks of disgust, drew forth cambric pocket handkerchiefs, and in unison the perfumes of white rose and eau d'opoponax evaporated softly (70).

Here social distinctions are heard, smelt as well as seen. Moreover, these distinctions are rendered more poignant by Moore's presentation of the two communities both worshipping a universal god.

In this lonely Irish chapel, was the Creator of the twenty millions of suns in the Milky Way ... [both gentry and peasantry had] ... come to be in the Absolute presence of God – the Distributor of Eternal rewards and punishments (70-71).

Moore's references to rewards and punishments might be seen as a commentary on the morality of landlord tenant relationships as they existed at this time in Ireland, and on the failure of the landed classes to concern themselves with the social injustices from which they benefitted.

Scene III: The Spinsters' Ball

The third scene in which Moore juxtaposes the position of the two communities is one which takes place at a ball which has been organised for the unmarried ladies of the neighbourhood. A key theme in the novel is the need for Anglo-Irish families to have their daughters married into wealthy families. Given the economic challenges faced by many Irish landowning families, it was preferable that these wealthy families be English. The relative poverty of the west of Ireland gentry on which the novel is centred is suggested by the fact that to save money, the supper being provided at the ball has been prepared by two of the local landed families themselves. However, Moore highlights that poverty is relative:

Day after day rich smells of roast-beef and the salt vapours of boiling hams trained along the passages ... Fifty chickens had been killed; presents of woodcock and snipe were received from all sides; salmon had arrived from Galway; cases of Champagne from Dublin (84).

This contrasts sharply with the peasant poverty discussed above. The reader is told that the ball is being held in a school which was 'built by an enterprising landlord for an inappreciative population that had declined to support it' (84) who continue to feature as a threatening menace. As the ladies travel to the venue 'vague forms' are seen

‘scrambling’ along the roadside hedges (86). To placate the fears of the young ladies, one character explains that as ‘no very unpopular landlord was going to be present’ (86) it was unlikely that there would be an attack. In this way Moore reminds the reader that some landlords were more popular than others and that some had attempted albeit unsuccessfully to contribute to the community. At the ball itself the peasants can be seen peering in through the windows at the elites inside. Alice observes them sympathetically and somewhat guiltily:

‘But look!’ said Alice, ‘look at all those poor people staring in at the window. Isn’t it dreadful, that they, in the dark and cold, should be watching us dancing in our beautiful dresses, and in our warm bright room’ (87).

As such Moore again juxtaposes the two communities. The wealthy are warm inside the school constructed by the colonial class for the local peasantry but now being used as a social space for the intermarriage of landed families. The poor remain on the outside looking in.

Scene IV: Dublin City

These stark contrasts between the gentry and the wider population, evident in scenes set in the rural west of Ireland, are later extended to the capital. The girls travel to Dublin to attend the social events of the season, again in the hope that they may find partners from within their own class. Moore notes the ‘squalor multiform and terrible’ that could be clearly seen as the girls make their way to a society ball:

In the broad glare of the carriage lights the shape of every feature, even the colour of the eyes, every glance, 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 cold’. (171)

‘Never’ writes Moore ‘were wealth and poverty brought together in plainer proximity’. However, while those on the outside and those on the inside could peer at their opposites ‘in like manner’ suggests the ability of both parties to consciously recognise social inequality, it is only Alice who connects the poverty she sees here with what she had seen previously in Galway.

Scene V: The departure

The final scene in the text where Moore again comments on social relations is one where Alice, now married to a local doctor and disillusioned with Ireland, departs with her husband for a new life in England. As they peer out on the landscape, which is again viewed from the

window of the passing carriage, Moore outlines how ‘half fondly, half regretfully, and wholly pitifully’ they look on ‘all the familiar signs and the wild landmarks, which during so many years had grown into and become part of the texture of their habitual thought’ (322). In this ‘deliquefying country’ they observe:

Through the streaming glass ... the inevitable strip of bog ... And further on there are low lying swampy fields, and between them and the roadside a few miserable poplars with cabins sunk below the dung heaps, ... and then, as these are passed, there are green enclosures full of fattening kine, and here and there a dismantled cottage, one wall still black with the chimney’s smoke, uttering to those who know the country a tale of eviction and the consequent horrors. (322)

Above these ‘sweeping along the crests of the hills’ stand ‘the White Martello-like houses of the landlords’ encircled with ‘long lines of beautiful plantation ... great gateways ... and outlying fir-woods and masses of beech’ (322). The ‘green enclosures full of fattening kine’ here refers to the expansion of grazing, a process which led to the displacement of local populations.

Departing this landscape Alice and Edward become ‘unwilling witnesses’ to a scene ‘for which Ireland is infamously famous,’ that of an eviction. On this occasion however, the characters attempt to intervene in the situation by paying the rents of the family being ejected. On doing so, the local land agent ridicules their generosity arguing that ‘there are plenty more of them over the hill on whom he [Alice’s husband] can exorcise his charity if he should feel so disposed!’ (323). With that half a dozen excited peasants eagerly offer to show them to the next house from which a family is to be evicted. ‘This way [they say] not a couple of hundred yards from here, close to the public [house], where we may have a [drink], if your honour feels so inclined’ (324).

Clearly here again Moore points out the social inequalities and injustices that stem from landlord practices, which include clearing tenants from land, evicting people in the process. However, here we see that the agency of the novel’s heroine is undermined by the scale of the problem, evictions are widespread, and by the interminable nature of the problem, ‘land-hunger’ Moore writes was now ‘as keen as ever’ (322). Moreover, the presentation of a wretched peasantry ‘so ready to betray’ their neighbours and ‘so and eager to lick the hand that smites them’ (244) renders them undeserving of Alice’s attempts to take action on their behalf. As such Alice and the reader leave Ireland with the sense that any attempt to redress the social injustice starkly portrayed throughout the novel is futile.

Conclusion

As outlined in this analysis of Moore’s *A Drama in Muslin*, colonial guilt or the awareness of social injustice created by colonialism was a feature of this author’s writing on Ireland. Moreover, while he expressed it more explicitly than other Anglo-Irish writers, he resolved it

in ways that resonate with the settler writers discussed above, even though he was writing from a different colonial context.

Moore's reflections on the stark differences between communities highlight his consciousness of the social inequalities that exist in Ireland and his repeated exploration of these inequalities in a number of social and spatial contexts puts forward the idea that this inequality was ubiquitous. Moreover, the representation of the wealth of one group as resulting directly from the toil of the other enables Moore to highlight the exploitation that underpinned class relations at this time in Ireland. Reflections on landscape provided opportunities for discussion on the varied waves of colonial settlement, and on the politics and ethics of landownership and of land management practices. His critical reflections on the distant government and the negligence of absentee landlords cast a negative light on colonial activity in Ireland. Moreover, while Moore presents a range of perspectives on the issues that affect the local area, the most convincing perspectives are provided by Moore himself, by way of his status as omniscient narrator, and by the text's compassionate heroine. She sees it as Moore does and, as a result, she corroborates his perspective.

Also, evident here is a geography of injustice. In most contexts, social injustice is stark and colonial culpability unambiguous. In these instances, the issue is observed from a distance, often through the windows of the passing carriage, or from the confines of their own spaces. In the church, here a shared but segregated space, poverty is brought into closer proximity, where it is seen, heard and smelt. However, at the end of the novel, when characters attempt to intervene in an actual injustice, their ability to effect change is called into question by the widespread and interminable extent of the poverty as presented by Moore. This, coupled with the depiction of a wretched peasantry who show no sympathy for their neighbours but seem to willingly accept the injustices brought upon them, calls the logic of the intervention into question. Thus, while Alice reflects on the horror 'that human creatures should endure such misery' the context, as presented here, does not lend itself for her or husband to do anything. This resonates with Moore's own experience as a landlord. In the year following the publication of *A Drama* he reflected on the need for Irish property owners to extract income from an impoverished peasantry, stating that it was as 'impossible' for him as it was for the rest of his class 'to do otherwise' (1887: 7).

As such Moore's novel acknowledges colonial guilt, interrogates it in a range of social contexts and spatial scales, presents an attempt to redress it, but ultimately illustrates the powerless position which he saw as the predicament of the colonial class in Ireland. By projecting a landscape in which action or intervention was futile and change impossible Moore, it could be argued, frees himself (and his readers) from the responsibility of action. To establish whether this was Moore's intention or if this was how his readers read it, is beyond the boundaries of this paper. In light of the work on colonial guilt outlined above, and of the work of literary geographers who examine the ways in which the geographies of a text work to present stories in particular ways, this reading demonstrates how Moore's *A Drama* functioned to acknowledge exploitation but negates responsibility for action.

Given the range of colonial contexts, each with its own range of injustices and modes of justification, there is much work to be done on the ways in which responsibility for social

and spatial injustice are potentially, as argued by Körber (2018: 27) ‘acknowledged, denied, diverted, managed—or perpetuated.’ To do so may enable us to better understand firstly, how concerns for the exploitation of ‘others’ are articulated, and secondly, how the need to take responsibility or to take action is articulated spatially and, lastly, how the possibilities for redress are negated through geographical representation.

Notes

- ¹ In this sense Moore differs from many of his contemporaries who often wrote stories in which they highlighted their community’s contributions to Irish society, their support of Irish issues and their Irish senses of identity (Grubgeld 2004) or masked their anxieties in gothic tropes (see Eatough 2012 on Bowen, Fernández 2020 on Le Fanu and Ingelbien 2003 on Stoker).

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