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# Escaping the Examined Life in George Moore's "Home Sickness"

Richard Rankin Russell

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- 1 George Moore's 1903 short story collection, *The Untilled Field*, was the first modern collection of Irish short fiction and, as Richard Allen Cave has noted, influenced Irish short story writers from James Joyce to Bernard MacLaverty to "move dexterously between inner and outer worlds of experience to define the fluctuating qualities of a particular consciousness or sensibility" ("Introduction" xxvi). Moore's collection features a long-misunderstood story entitled "Home Sickness," which revolves around the intricate psychological vacillations of James Bryden, as he returns to his native Ireland from his adopted New York City, only to become dissatisfied there and return again to the city. Moore not only brilliantly captures a perennial theme of Irish literature—immigration because of harsh economic and cultural conditions—but also holds Bryden up as the quintessential modern man, who is unconsciously uneasy with the prospect of living the contemplative life represented by a rural Ireland, a milieu which itself is criticized for its sometimes stultifying conditions and its circumscribed daily life. He thus chooses to return to New York's hustle and bustle in order to escape himself, although he is so unused to self-examination he tells himself he must re-emigrate because of the controlling village priest. Despite Moore's real criticism of the surveillance methods of the priest and the nosy townspeople, Bryden at least has a chance to live an examined life in Ireland. This potential for self-fulfillment in a bucolic Irish milieu has been misapprehended by critics of the story as thoughtful as Ben Forkner, who praises "Home Sickness" for "concentrat[ing] in Bryden's dilemma most of the themes of *The Untilled Field*: exile, barren land, religious domination and interference, and provincial boredom and despair" (29). Moore's own anti-clericalism has so colored our reading of the stories in *The Untilled Field* that the aim of this crucial story has been misread as an attack on the Catholic Church at least in part, while the thrust of the story lambasts the lack of self-awareness common to modern, urban man paradoxically conveyed through his highly interior prose style.

- 2 Through his subtly depicted study of James Bryden's mind, Moore richly implies his potential for self-awareness while also suggesting that Ireland and its literature could serve as sites where human consciousness might be protected from the pernicious influence of modernity, often city-centered, which he found increasingly distasteful in England and America. Moore's imagining of a realistic, communal Ireland as pictured in "Home Sickness" offers an intriguingly different one from the mythologized version even then being proffered by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Although Moore came from a Catholic landowning family in County Mayo and admittedly despised the peasantry of the area, especially on inheriting the estate of Moore Hall upon his father's death, he nevertheless rises above his anti-pastoral prejudice and adopts a qualified approval of rural life in "Home Sickness" as a site where the individual might attain real selfhood in the context of community. Never one to idealize the pastoral as a site of innocence, or abstract it as a monolithic entity, Moore refuses, however, to dismiss it in favor of an unabashed valorization of the city. Despite his fully realized depiction of Bryden's interior life in this story, Moore clearly shows how his central character resolutely refuses to engage in any serious self-exploration and thus settles for a sharply delimited self that itself is deadened and diminished by the frenetic pace of life in the Bowery area of New York City, to which he returns and lives out his days.
- 3 Moore's interest in fully depicting Bryden's consciousness in "Home Sickness" is intricately tied to his desire for a reinvigoration of Irish intellectual life over against what he came to see as the stagnant life of the mind he found in England. Properly understanding Moore's attitude toward Ireland at the time of writing *The Untilled Field* is crucial for interpreting the story, which despite its harsh, realistic portrayal of Ireland, suggests that it is a site in which cultural revival might take place. That revival, however, would have to start with a genuine reawakening of the self. Cave points out that Moore's autobiography *Hail and Farewell!* (published in three parts in 1911, 1912, and 1914) is "an account of how to cultivate a genuine renaissance in the self, which he sees as the only way a larger movement for social and aesthetic revolution will begin to be a possibility in the country" ("Introduction" xxi). Moore gradually realized that portraying fictional selves more deeply and thoughtfully than they had been in Irish literature might prove exemplary for his countrymen's personal renaissance. In his 1926 preface to *The Untilled Field*, using language still redolent with latent hope for a true Irish revival of the self, Moore recalls that he wrote the stories "in the hope of furnishing the young Irish of the future with models" (xxix).
- 4 Much criticism of Moore has been colored by *Hail and Farewell!*, in which he skewers the romanticism of the Irish Literary Revival, including his own attempts to revive the Irish language. But as Declan Kiberd has shown, Moore was fully invested in the movement at the time of writing *The Untilled Field*:

it would be wrong to assume that the corrosive tone of *Hail and Farewell!* had also characterized his relations with the Gaelic League and the Literary Theatre. The insolent satire which permeates that brilliant but willful book tells us a great deal about Moore's state of mind between 1910 and 1914, but reveals nothing of the passionate intensity with which he threw himself into the work of the Gaelic League in 1901 and 1902. Those who knew him well in his Dublin years—men like John Eglinton and George Russell—were in no doubt as to the depth of his commitment, which they found at times ridiculous, but which he himself learned to mock only when it abated. (26)

- 5 Although Moore felt he was too old to learn the Irish language, he made great efforts to have the stories of *The Untilled Field* translated into Gaelic, even having the book published first in Irish under the title of *An tUr-Ghort* in 1902 (20). Even though his later disappointment with the Gaelic League and with Ireland is significant, Moore continued to see the English language "as the language of business, journalism and commerce with the outside world, Irish as the idiom of culture, education and the domestic life" (27). Robert Welch concurs with Kiberd's assessment of Moore's antipathy toward English, noting that for Moore, "English itself seemed to be a language slackened by abstraction and commerce, whereas Irish was vivid, fresh, untainted by the exhaustion of modernity" ("Preface" 7).
- 6 John Wilson Foster suggests that Moore's conversion to the values of the Irish Literary Revival stemmed from his anti-British stand during the Boer War, which enabled him to conceive of himself as an Irishman concerned with abstract values linked to rural culture such as spirituality:
- He suddenly thought of himself as an Irishman rather than an Englishman, and found himself railing against English materialism and cosmopolitanism, coarse next to Ireland's spirituality and nationality. In "Literature and the Irish Language," he retracted the hymn to England that closes *A Drama in Muslin* and attacked "the universal suburb" which England was trying to make of the world. (127)
- 7 Thus, even though Bryden in "Home Sickness" does not speak Irish and despite the story's having been translated into the English language, Moore suggests that his rural, squalid Irish village functions as a latent site of cultural and personal renewal; Bryden's re-emigration to America relegates him to a milieu characterized by commerce and trade and a lack of self-reflection. Welch argues that by the time Moore returned to Ireland from London in 1901 he was convinced of the value of contemplative reflection in the individuation process: "he placed great value on the individual gaining, through experience and self-scrutiny, some insight into and acceptance of his own nature" ("Moore's Way Back: *The Untilled Field* and *The Lake*" 29). This self-scrutiny could work best, Moore felt, in the largely non-material milieu of rural Ireland, although he deplored its poverty and what he saw as its close-mindedness.
- 8 Understanding Bryden's interior life, much of which occurs below the surface of the story, requires an unusual degree of attentiveness from the reader. Moore placed a special burden on the reader to enter his characters' minds, which was influenced by his reading of the Russian writer Turgenev, whose *A Sportsman's Sketches* provided the model for *The Untilled Field*. Adrian Frazier points out that in Moore's 1888 essay on Turgenev, he turns away from the realism of Zola which he had valorized in his early fiction, relegating Zola and popular writer Rider Haggard to the "fact school" and elevating Turgenev as the great master of the "thought school" (162). In his fiction of the early twentieth century, Moore was inspired specifically by Turgenev's depiction of impressionistic mental states. In his perceptive article on Moore's indebtedness to Turgenev, Cave points out that Moore's penchant for letting phrases and details accrete into an aggregate impression of mental attitudes rather than explicitly detailing particular states of mind is directly borrowed from Turgenev, who trusted the reader enough to make the nuanced interpretations necessary for apprehending the contextual point being made: "It is because his mastery of his material is so exact that he can 'lead the reader at will'; he does not need to describe feelings or analyse mental attitudes because that mastery is so thorough that he has an absolute confidence in the reader's ability to make scrupulous

inferences" ("Turgenev and Moore: A Sportsman's Sketches and *The Untilled Field*" 46). Cave sees this narrative technique adopted by Moore in the stories of *The Untilled Field* as the source of his statement to a friend about the "dryness" of the volume that suggests readers must become aware of its complexities by repeated readings of it (45). Only by becoming more familiar with these stories, which have acquired a sort of mythic status in Irish literary history that often impedes their accurate interpretation, can we truly realize Moore's depth of psychological insight into his remarkable characters that he desperately wished their real-life counterparts might also acquire as part of a growing self-awakening in Ireland.

- 9 An intense scrutiny of James Bryden enables us to begin building an impression of the conflict operating in "Home Sickness" between the attraction of rural Ireland and the lure of urban America. Moore's precisely controlled diction and carefully deployed sentence structure even in the opening passage reflect Bryden's state of mind and its vacillations from moment to moment in subtle and suggestive ways that anticipate Moore's praise in *Avowals* (1904) of the similar way in which Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* "relate[s] the states of consciousness through which Marius passed" (Orel 168). For example, the degree to which Bryden has become depersonalized by living in New York City is reflected in the opening paragraphs of the story, in which the narrator only refers to him as "He." The opening sentence subtly conveys the tedium of his life: "He told the doctor he was due in the barroom at eight o'clock in the morning; the barroom was in a slum in the Bowery; and he had only been able to keep himself in health by getting up at five o'clock and going for long walks in the Central Park" (21). The skillful use of semicolons only creates brief pauses, suggesting the degree to which Bryden has been caught up in the frenetic pace of New York. While he argues that his exercise before work keeps him healthy, he merely has compounded the hectic pace of his day and worn himself out further. He also is likely substituting the anonymity of Central Park for the intimacy of his native village. The reason for his trip to Ireland is to improve his health, which has been sacrificed to his career. While he soon finds he longs for Ireland, one connotation of the story's title, the title also suggests that the frenzied pace of his adopted home has literally made him sick.
- 10 It is significant that Bryden is only named when he arrives at the train station, five miles from his village of Duncannon, Ireland: "A car was waiting at the station, and the boy, discerning from his accent and his dress that Bryden had come from America, plied him with questions, which Bryden answered rapidly, for he wanted to hear who were still living in the village, and if there was a house in which he could get clean lodging" (21). Part of his warm greeting arises from the villagers' fascination with a relative stranger from America and part of it stems from the possibility that he will spend money recklessly, but more important, his attachment to a landscape and a web of communal memory here confirms him as an individual most himself in the context of community.
- 11 One of Charles Taylor's arguments about the formation of the self seems particularly apposite regarding Bryden's homecoming. As Taylor points out, "One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it" (35). Taylor is at some pains to make this point, since, as he notes, "not only the philosophico-scientific tradition but also a powerful modern aspiration to freedom and individuality have conspired to produce an identity which seems to be a negation of this [point]" (35). Moore's description of Bryden's village accords with the long-standing Irish worldview of self-in-community that has been occluded and even denied by the modern

world. Bryden's new self develops through his interaction with the villagers, who function as the "webs of interlocution" that Taylor holds are the constitutive matrix for identity formation (36). Bryden's interlocutors give him the necessary feedback that helps effect the rise of his latent self, one that is prone to contemplation and self-renewal.

- 12 After reacquainting himself with some of the villagers on his first night back, Bryden retires to his bed. The passage that follows demonstrates his terror of being left alone. Through sentences that convey a rapid succession of individual sonic images, the narrator shows us Bryden's realization of the desolation of the village and he lies awake, frightened, undoubtedly missing the impersonal hum of the city:

The cackling of some geese in the street kept him awake, and he seemed to realize suddenly how lonely the country was, and he foresaw mile after mile of scanty fields stretching all round the lake with one little town in the far corner. A dog howled in the distance, and the fields and the brens between him and the dog appeared as in a crystal. He could hear Michael breathing by his wife's side in the kitchen, and he could barely resist the impulse to run out of the house, and he might have yielded to it, but he wasn't sure that he mightn't awaken Mike as he came down the ladder. His terror increased, and he drew the blanket over his head.  
(24)

- 13 Since he cannot see, he projects an image of what he knows is likely there and frightens himself at the sparseness of the landscape. Most terrifying of all is Michael's breathing, not only for its delicate evocation of humanity, but also because of his lying in such close proximity to his wife. Bryden, afraid of relationships generally, is particularly shocked and horrified by this quotidian example of married life, and he longs to escape.
- 14 Moreover, being within Michael's house itself, placed as it is in a natural, detached setting with all the intimacy that setting bespeaks, heightens the terror of the city-dwelling Bryden. He has undoubtedly been living in a tenement in New York and that urban dwelling has helped dehumanize him. Gaston Bachelard has pointed out the mechanical properties of urban architecture in articulating his theory of topoanalysis: he argues that houses set "in a big city lack cosmicity. For here, where houses are no longer set in natural surroundings, the relationship between house and space becomes an artificial one. Everything about it is mechanical and, on every side, intimate living flees" (27). Michael's natural intimacy with his wife, made more personal by his house's isolated setting, frightens Bryden, who has felt less exposed in the city because of its architectural impersonality and cloistered blocks of buildings. As Bachelard further holds, in a statement pertinent to Bryden's state of mind here, "In our houses set close one up against the other, we are less afraid" (27). The isolation of the house in this passage thus leads Bryden into a state of mind that nearly disables him mentally. Forced back upon himself and made to contemplate himself more closely than he has done in some time leads him into an awareness of his intense loneliness, a loneliness that has been masked by the impersonality and pace of city life.
- 15 The next morning, however, he has recovered enough to eat a hearty breakfast and stroll outside. Forbidden by Mike from helping with the mowing, he lounges by the lakeside and dreams the day away, lulled into an imaginative reverie by the combined sounds of the breeze, the reeds, ducks, and by the lapping of the water at the shorelines, along with the interplay of sun and cloud on the water. His reverie puts him into a much better mood, and when he sees the local villagers, he chats idly with them, while still feeling himself superior to them: "whenever a *peasant* driving a cart or an ass or an old woman with a bundle of sticks on her back went by, Bryden kept them in chat, and he soon knew the

village by heart" (my emphasis; 25). After meeting and reacquainting himself with the local landlord one day, he procures a boat from him and rows around the lake every morning.

- 16 Although the passage following this one in which Bryden is portrayed as day-dreaming sounds escapist, his entry into this mindset is actually a crucial step toward acquiring a contemplative approach to life:

Bryden rowed about the islands every morning; and resting upon his oars looked at the old castles, remembering the prehistoric raiders that the landlord had told him about. He came across the stones to which the lake dwellers had tied their boats, and these signs of ancient Ireland were pleasing to Bryden in his present mood. (25)

- 17 Gazing into the distance, into immensity, enables Bryden to be transported in his mind to an imagined, but no less real reality than that which surrounds him. Bachelard argues that daydreaming arrives "in the space of *elsewhere*" and suggests that "When this elsewhere is in natural surroundings [. . .] it is immense. And one might say that daydream is *original contemplation*" (Bachelard's emphases 184). The sheer immensity of Bryden's vision is achieved by his condition of being motionless, which state, Bachelard claims, facilitates the movement into contemplation: "As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming" (184). Motionless in his boat, Bryden escapes the hectic movement of the city, which militates against contemplation, and acquires through his stillness the dynamism of immensity as described by Bachelard.

- 18 His expanded mental capacity now makes him receptive to other options than those normally presented to him in his formerly circumscribed urban world. Thus, despite his aversion to emotional relationships, when Margaret Dirken appears one evening to him as he fishes a smaller lake near the village bog, she is a welcome respite from his solitude. He has noticed her before at local dances, but had never spoken to her. Now, however, "he was glad to speak to someone, for the evening was lonely, and they stood talking together" (26). As he looks at her, he admires her beauty but then is quickly disturbed:

Her cheeks were bright and her teeth small, white, and beautifully even; and a woman's soul looked at Bryden out of her soft Irish eyes. He was troubled and turned aside, and catching sight of a frog looking at him out of a tuft of grass, he said: "I have been looking for a frog to put upon my pike line." (26)

- 19 Although James F. Carens argues that this passage suggests that "Margaret [. . .] has an Irish charm that Bryden cannot dismiss" (54), Bryden's attitude toward her here is much more complex than Carens implies. Why, within two sentences, is Margaret transformed from an idealized beauty into a troubling image? The answer lies within Bryden's perverse psychology. At first, he manages to attend to her specific beauty *and* abstract her enough to incorporate her into his idealized landscape of ancient Ireland that he fantasizes about every morning as he rows a borrowed boat on the bigger lake. But then reality intrudes in the form of individuality. Margaret's soul peers at him, puncturing his conflated image of woman and myth—she may temporarily function as a Mother Ireland figure in this sense—and resists his abstraction of her.

- 20 There is not even any real evidence that he cares for her; in fact, he has pursued her out of a perverse desire, it seems, to reincorporate her into his fusion of woman and landscape and make her over into the abstraction to which he first was attracted. This desire is compounded by his evident wish to conform to the social conventions of the

village, which Margaret apparently brings up in an effort to force his hand on the issue. Despite his disdain for the "peasants" around him, Bryden succumbs to this village woman's pressure and societal custom and becomes engaged.

- 21 After the parish priest bans Bryden's parties in which excessive drinking and a great deal of dancing occurs, he is angered. Bryden has also gotten engaged to Margaret to avoid being censored by the priest, thus unconsciously succumbing to the village conventions he has sought to distance himself from, but since he has no real self-awareness, he still separates himself from the villagers, and is shocked by their obedience to the priest. In thinking about their passiveness, he explicitly contrasts their rural Catholic existence with the urban, secular, restless life he has temporarily left behind in New York: "And their pathetic submission was the submission of a primitive people clinging to religious authority, and Bryden contrasted the weakness and incompetence of the people about him with the modern restlessness and cold energy of the people he left behind him" (27). Already, though he too has submitted to the priest's authority by getting engaged to Margaret, Bryden feels the allure of the city drawing him back, though that place seems to render its inhabitants without agency.
- 22 Bryden is anxious to be married, but cannot obtain his money from America for several more months. In the meantime, a letter arrives from America from a fellow employee in the bar. Although it is a mere inquiry into whether he is returning from someone who is not close to him, it spurs a renewed longing to return to the Bowery:
- He tried to forget the letter, and he looked at the worn fields, divided by walls of loose stones, and a great longing came upon him. The smell of the Bowery slum had come across the Atlantic, and had found him out in his western headland; and one night he awoke from a dream in which he was hurling some drunken customer through the open doors into the darkness. He had seen his friend in the white duck jacket throwing drink from glass into glass amid the din of voices and strange accents; he had heard the clang of money as it was swept into the till, and his sense sickened for the barroom. (29)
- 23 Those loose stone walls surrounding the village remind him of the city walls and pavement of the Bowery. Suddenly he misses not just their uniformity, in contrast to the jumbled stone walls of the village, but also the hubbub of that other life. That world of action and busyness lures him away from the loneliness of the village and the effort he will undoubtedly have to make to start examining and knowing himself if he stays. Although Cave intriguingly argues that Bryden's vision of the "worn fields divided by walls of loose stones" implies that "the quality of his perception intimates his own slow breaking down to the pattern of spiritual greyness common to the villagers if he should stay" ("Turgenev and Moore: *A Sportsman's Sketches* and *The Untilled Field*" 60), the juxtaposition of the staid rural landscape and frenetic Bowery cityscape in this passage suggest instead his longing for the non-reflective world of the city, although he cannot even reflect enough to admit this fully to himself. Margaret's clinginess frightens him and, still lured by his image of the Bowery as a site of activity and impersonal relations, he searches desperately for reasons to leave her.
- 24 "Hunted" alternately by the smell of the barroom and by Margaret's quest for marriage, he rapidly examines and rejects reasons for going back to America, finally seizing on the priest as a symbol of the harsh repressiveness of the village and convincing himself he misses the excitement of politics:
- The smell of the barroom hunted him down. Was it for the sake of the money that he might make there that he wished to go back? No, it was not the money. What



then? His eyes fell on the bleak country, on the little fields divided by bleak walls; he remembered the pathetic ignorance of the people, and it was these things that he could not endure. *It was the priest who came to forbid the dancing. Yes, it was the priest.* As he stood looking at the line of the hills the barroom seemed by him. He heard the politicians, and the excitement of politics was in his blood again. He must go away from this place—he must get back to the barroom. (my emphasis; 29)

- 25 Bryden's loathing for his parish in this passage seems more constructed than real as he seems to struggle valiantly to come up with reasons to leave for the Bowery, repetitively trying to convince himself that the priest is at fault and even feigning an interest in politics as a reason to return.
- 26 Criticism of the story, however, has overwhelmingly seen this passage and the one cited earlier in which Bryden, shocked by the townspeople's submission to the priest, contrasts "the weakness and incompetence of the people about him with the modern restlessness and cold energy of the people he left behind him," as evidence of Moore's anti-clericalism and read that attitude onto Bryden. Proof of Moore's anti-clericalism in general abounds, as his most recent and best biographer, Adrian Frazier, notes. Frazier points out that Moore's objection was not to Catholicism *per se*, especially not in its long-standing folk practices such as local pilgrimages and worship in cottages instead of churches, but to the modernization of the Church under Cardinal Cullen's "devotional revolution," in which a whole series of devotions used to promote a newer, more rigid dogma were introduced (309). Moore became so dissatisfied with the Church's drift toward modernism that, Frazier argues, "In *The Untilled Field*, the tales about artists in Ireland or exiles returned are always tales of dissatisfaction, tales of Ireland as a prison run by jailers who are priests" (309-10).
- 27 And yet "Home Sickness" stands out from the volume's other stories about exiles in its focus on the incorporation of an innovative interior narrative technique to depict its protagonist's state of mind, a strategy that suggests Moore saw strong possibilities for self-renewal in Ireland. Elizabeth Grubgeld has argued that Moore's fiction written after 1900 increasingly is concerned with developing a narrative style that modeled a growing trajectory toward self-consciousness on the part of his characters: "After the turn of the century, Moore's fiction steadily advances toward a depiction of the process by which we progress from intuition to consciousness" (204). She realizes the stylistic significance of "Home Sickness" for his subsequent fiction, noting that "In this story, which of all those in *The Untilled Field* most prefigures the achievements of *The Lake* and *The Brook Kerith*, Moore [. . .] establishes a technique integral to his sense of how a life finds meaning through the recollective process of narration" (218). And yet Grubgeld wrongly suggests that Bryden finds meaning in his life "through the recollective process of narration"; rather, when he finally experiences a moment of contemplation at the end of his life, he chastises himself for not having had the courage to live an examined life in Ireland. Bryden's problem is not so much with the Church's oppressiveness but with not examining himself.
- 28 Frazier's casting of the stories of *The Untilled Field* as a monolithic example of Moore's hatred of the modern Church is hardly new. Almost every critic writing on the volume reads Moore's dissatisfaction with the Church onto his characters including Bryden himself. For example, in what is still considered a landmark essay on *The Untilled Field*, John Cronin, discussing Bryden's reason for leaving the village for the second time, states that, "his sturdy independence will not brook the priestly control of his lovemaking and his future marriage to Margaret Dirken" (123). In an earlier article, Brendan Kennelly

attributes Bryden's decision to go back to America to the priest's repressive control of the villagers: "Because of this claustrophobic world with the priest at its centre, Bryden leaves Ireland and Margaret Dirken behind him, deliberately choosing the noisy bar-room in the Bowery slum to the intolerable repression of the Irish village" (154). Seamus Deane concurs, arguing that "although he wants to marry a local girl, Margaret Dirken, and settle down in the beautiful landscape of his youth, the authoritarian interference of the local priest so discourages him that he finally returns to New York and abandons all he loves" (170).

- 29 Besides being colored by Moore's personal disdain for the Church's trajectory toward modernization, this misinterpretation of Bryden's motives for his decision is undoubtedly influenced by Moore's depictions elsewhere in the volume of other controlling priests, such as Father Maguire, who figures in the linked stories "Some Parishioners," "Patchwork," "The Wedding Feast," and "The Window," and attempts to arrange marriages in the parish in order to revive it. But Maguire's harsh domination of parish life is explicitly contrasted by the gentle character of Father MacTurnan in the stories "A Letter to Rome" and "A Play-House in the Waste." This character attempts to help his parishioners and, according to James F. Carens, represents "sure evidence that the artist in George Moore could not remain for long a prisoner of his anticlericalism" (57). Clearly, Moore's priests in *The Untilled Field* have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Although the priest in "Home Sickness" is authoritarian, his presence does not really explain Bryden's decision to re-emigrate; rather, he seems to be an excuse hastily seized upon by Bryden as a rationale for departure.
- 30 Richard Allen Cave's more thoughtful argument about Bryden's decision to leave suggests that although the priest's dominance in the village bothers him, he actually leaves because of his realization of the stultifying quality of life lived by the peasants:
- Though a parish priest vigorously condemns the drinking and dancing that Bryden's money can buy for the villagers to celebrate his courting of Margaret Dirkin, more than that shapes his decision to go back to the Bowery: it is the joyless drudgery of the peasant farmers working their smallholdings for a pittance; the hard, unyielding landscape; and the meanspiritedness and self-pity these seem together to induce in the villagers that afflict him. He pities them but comes to dread sharing their condition. ("Turgenev and Moore: A Sportsman's Sketches and *The Untilled Field*" 60)
- 31 Cave's reading gets significantly closer to the complex reasons for Bryden's re-emigration than do those of Cronin, Kennelly, Deane, and Frazier, which represent the main line of criticism on this aspect of the story. But even Cave's response neglects the main reason for Bryden's departure—his unconscious desire to escape back into an urban environment where he only has to react to those around him and never reflect deeply and develop an emotional and intellectual life. Moore felt strongly at this time that rural Ireland, despite its poverty and the increasing authoritarianism of the Church, could provide the contemplative milieu in which deep personal and societal change might flourish.
- 32 Bryden's disgust with the priest stems from his recognition that the life lived by the priest and the local community is antithetical to his detachment from others, which is enabled by a urban milieu; correspondingly, the prose in this passage suggests that he is searching for reasons to return to America and the busy, impersonal life of the Bowery. When he recalls the priest's interference, he does so in a repetitive phrase that suggests he is trying to convince himself: "It was the priest who came to forbid the dancing. Yes, it was the priest" (29). Carens briefly acknowledges the possibility of this reading when he

notes that, "'Home Sickness' thus seems to be touched by Moore's anticlericalism, unless we conclude that Bryden blames the priest for his departure as a rationalization of his longing for the urban scape of the Bowery" (55). Bryden does not so much hate or fear the priest but fears instead becoming part of a personal community in contrast to the impersonal world of the Bowery he has come to know and love. The priest represents the fear of the intrusion of personal relationships into his emotionless life. After all, he sought Margaret's hand in marriage partly to escape the priest's wrath. That the priest stopped the dancing Bryden so enjoys adds to his fear of the personal, for although dancing seems personal, it actually is a way for him to have impersonal relations. We should remember that although he "had found himself opposite to her in the reels" (26), he had barely spoken to Margaret before that first evening when he met her by the lake. That impersonal letter from his co-worker in America that seems so intimate to the villagers who see him read it brings all that bright and busy world back to him, alluring him with its hectic pace. His cycle of illusion/disillusionment has begun again and now he convinces himself that he hates the village and its peaceful life. That life is characterized by interpersonal relationships and is symbolized by his forthcoming marriage to Margaret and his pastureland that the landlord has so generously given them.

- 33 Thus, even though he will not admit to Margaret or himself that he is not coming back, he leaves. She knows he is leaving, and asks him to tell her outright, but he does not, rushing away instead and rejecting her offer to come with him:

He hurried away, hoping he would come back. He tried to think that he liked the country he was leaving, that it would be better to have a farmhouse and live there with Margaret Dirken than to serve drinks behind a counter in the Bowery. He did not think he was telling a lie when he said he was coming back. (58)

- 34 He vacillates as he runs toward the train station, but luckily meets a car and its motion sufficiently enables him to feel he has left the village and the personal relations it represents behind: "Once he was on the car he felt himself safe—the country was already behind him. The train and the boat at Cork were mere formulae; he was already in America" (58-9). Conveyed by a succession of vehicles, Bryden is quickly led back into the life of the city and its dehumanizing qualities—speed, anonymity, atomic individuality—even before he reaches it. Raymond Williams has argued that the qualities of the modern car—privacy, enclosure, and individuality—recall the earlier descriptions of "crowded metropolitan streets—the people as isolated atoms, flowing this way and that; a common stream of separated identities and directions [. . .]" (296). Bryden's embrace of these locomotive devices linked to an urban milieu suggests his comfort with particularized negative qualities of life in the city, despite his need for contemplation, a state of mind able to be attained in the city, but only through much more effort than he is willing or able to give.

- 35 Upon his return, Bryden is relieved to be back in the Bowery and feels "the thrill of home that he had not felt in his village" (30), but he nonetheless has managed to delude himself yet again. America must surely have been a dream to him before he emigrated the first time; its shabbiness and disorder, however, literally made him sick and long for home so he left. Now, after returning the second time, he does not pause to reflect how the milieu of his native village might have satisfied the embryonic life of the mind that had begun to emerge, however fleetingly, during his time there and simply proceeds based on his moods. He merely briefly wonders, "how it was that the smell of the bar seemed more natural than the smell of fields, and the roar of crowds more welcome than the silence of

the lake's edge" (30). He will not answer these questions because he is no longer capable of doing so: the city's impersonal and artificial qualities have successfully blotted out his sensitivity toward the land and his partially regained disposition toward contemplation.

36 The disingenuous phrase, "thrill of home," that the narrator uses to describe Bryden's return to the Bowery suggests just how fully he is deceiving himself that he is truly home. Despite his poor Irish, Moore would have known that, as Fintan O'Toole has pointed out, the phrases *sa mbaile* and *sa bhaile*, the equivalents of the English phrase "at home," "are never used in the narrow sense of home as a dwelling. They imply, instead, that wider sense of a place in the world, a feeling of belonging that is buried deep within the word's meaning" (167). Bryden has already acknowledged this deeper sense of home early in "Home Sickness" when he is described in New York as beginning "to wonder how the people *at home* were getting on" (my emphasis; 21). Despite having experienced back in Duncannon just the sort of "feeling of belonging" that O'Toole argues characterizes the connotations of "at home" for Irish emigrants, Bryden denies that community and settles for a pale simulacrum of one that is largely devoid of feeling.

37 Having escaped one terrible marriage, he enters another one, and lives out the rest of his life. The flatness and limpidity of the sentences in this concluding section suggest just how repetitive and empty his life in New York has become and significantly, he does not even attempt to call the Bowery "home" now:

He entered into negotiations for purchase of the barroom. He took a wife, she bore him sons and daughters, the barroom prospered, property came and went; he grew old, his wife died, he retired from business, and reached the age when a man begins to feel there are not many years in front of him, and that all he has had to do in life has been done. (30-1)

38 Bryden has succeeded in his career, but he has failed miserably at any self-examination. Just as he was unnamed at the beginning of the story, implying the dehumanizing effect of the city upon him, he has become reduced by the end of the story to a pronoun again. Always superficial, his inner life has receded even more from him.

39 The last sentences, in which a vision of Margaret floats before his eyes, seem ambiguous upon a cursory reading. Is Bryden merely fantasizing about the life he could have had with Margaret, as many commentators have suggested, and continuing in his cycle of illusion and disillusionment, or is he experiencing something else? I suggest that Margaret's image is not significant in and of itself, but important for what it represents: the world of personal relations and the contemplative life he might have had if he had remained in the village, broken the engagement off, and began to reflect on his selfhood. For this vision passes quickly and smacks of romanticism:

Margaret's soft eyes and name vivified the dusk. His wife and children passed out of mind, and it seemed to him that a memory was the only real thing he possessed, and the desire to see Margaret again grew intense. But she was an old woman, she had married, maybe she was dead. Well, he would like to be buried in the village where he was born. (31)

Despite its vividness, Bryden rejects this image, realizing the fruitlessness of trying to pursue Margaret yet again.

40 The image that replaces it in the concluding paragraph in the story – a vision of the village – lingers, however, suggesting the life that was available to him there without her that even now is receding from him:

There is an unchanging, silent life within every man that none knows but himself, and his unchanging silent life was his memory of Margaret Dirken. The barroom

was forgotten and all that concerned it, and the things he saw most clearly were the green hillside, and the bog lake and the rushes about it, and the greater lake in the distance, and behind it the blue line of wandering hills. (31)

- 41 It is easy to conflate this vision of the village with those earlier visions Bryden has of the village shortly before his arrival and during his reveries by the lake in which he naively idealizes the landscape. But Moore makes clear that this vision of his "unchanging, silent life," is associated with "his memory of Margaret Dirken." I use "associated" here because the memory of her is not the important vision—it is merely a psychological entry into the landscape of the village and what that terrain potentially represents—self-awareness. Seamus Deane thus misapprehends the significance of this concluding passage by arguing that its "tender note of regret" stems from his memory lingering "on Ireland and Margaret" (171, 170).
- 42 Although Bryden is stereotypically conflating Margaret and the landscape into a unified figure again, what seems important here and what was lacking in this conflation earlier in the story was his failure to recognize that he needed a contemplative life even as he momentarily had his best chance at it. Earlier, his romantic daydreams about the Irish landscape had been interrupted by Margaret, who temporarily embodied them, and whom he perversely sought. Now, he has entered into a reverie about Margaret, whose image leads him back to those hills and lakes again. This chiasmic pattern suggests not a mirroring of his earlier thinking, but a significant change. He now realizes that that milieu, as materially poor as it was, could have provided him a life with real meaning, a life with deep, lasting human relationships, but that he had impulsively gotten engaged to her in order to escape that very life even as he needed it most. Instead of seeking a woman who might have fulfilled him and aided in his process of self-discovery, he sought one he abstracted and idealized so that he might escape having to know himself and another human being—a double burden. The grinding poverty, the priest, and the peasants of his native village were all abominable to him, not so much for their repressive and repressed qualities, but for their personal qualities. Even as he grasps the significance of that landscape for his life, for what might have been, it recedes from him and he realizes he has never known himself nor never now will.
- 43 While it has been rightly noted that in the stories of *The Untilled Field* Moore is deploring the romanticized pastoral Ireland of the nationalists, he nonetheless was attempting to posit rural Ireland, despite some of its repressive qualities, as a site rife with potential for rich cultural and personal renewal. What has passed largely unremarked and unrealized about "Home Sickness," the most important and lasting story in the volume, is Moore's stylistically innovative depiction of Bryden as a symbol of modern man, caught up in and depersonalized by the allure of the negative elements of urban modernity, such as atomic individualism and frenzied activity, which preclude any sort of meaningful, contemplative life. Bryden is thus a forerunner of T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, who also is paralyzed by uncertainty. Just as Prufrock suffers an emotional and intellectual death by drowning in the babble of urban voices around him at the end of that poem, so does Bryden, in the pool of chaos and dehumanization that awaits him on his return to the city.

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## ABSTRACTS

La nouvelle de George Moore, "Home Sickness" (Le mal du pays), publiée dans le recueil *The Untilled Field* (Le champ en friche, 1903), a été souvent perçue – à tort – comme une œuvre anti-catholique, puisque y est dépeinte au vitriol la figure d'un prêtre réactionnaire. S'il est évident que Moore, lui-même catholique au demeurant, a marqué son œuvre d'un trait profondément anticlérical, la nouvelle "Home Sickness" est plutôt une critique originale de la modernité urbaine. Moore considère le rythme et le matérialisme de cette modernité comme un facteur de dégradation des conditions vitales à un esprit contemplatif.

Bien que Moore et le protagoniste de l'histoire, James Bryden, soient tous deux révoltés par certains aspects de la vie rurale, une opportunité s'offre tout de même à ce dernier, celle de mener sur sa vie une réflexion : cependant, celle-ci n'est possible que dans la mesure où Bryden doit quitter New York et retourner définitivement dans son village natal, en Irlande. Il reste que Bryden voit dans l'ingérence du prêtre la raison de son départ vers la ville. A cela, le narrateur ajoute une vérité qu'il assène au lecteur : la ville a mentalement appauvri Bryden...

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