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A Catholic New Woman Artist: A Contradiction in Terms? Sex, Music and Religion in George Moore's *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*

Throughout the Victorian era, the exploration of the motif of the woman artist provided writers with an important mechanism for challenging the received perceptions of gender roles, of the intellectual and creative potential of women, and of their position in modern society. The most significant examples of Victorian portrayals of women artists are those of writers—novelists and poets—who narrate the stories of their own lives as they acquire social and artistic confidence manifesting itself through the very act of writing. The eponymous heroines/narrators of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) can be seen as fictional alter egos of their authors, whose recognition as key literary figures of their day testified to the acceptance of the notion of a professional woman writer by Victorian public opinion. At the time, however, literature was different in that respect from other art forms: while music or painting were certainly seen as desirable accomplishments for upper- and middle-class Victorian women, they tended to be perceived as leisure activities rather than as potential pathways to social and economic independence. The talented painter Helen Graham in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and the much less gifted singer and actress Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) both only resort to trying to make a career out of their art in consequence of financial necessity, and view it as something to be given up as soon as a socially and financially acceptable alternative of a marriage presents itself. Victorian acceptance of the concept of a woman artist clearly had its limits.

This early- and mid-Victorian focus on writing as the one area of artistic activity suitable for women appears to have persisted into the late-Victorian period, even as the emergence of New Woman fiction opened up

the discussion of previously controversial topics, such as, in particular, the broad area of women's sexuality. Writing becomes the source of income, at least for a time, for strong women such as Diana Warwick in George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) and Herminia Barton in Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), while women trying to pursue careers in other forms of art tend to fail in their attempts to find independence: Kate Ede, in George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), may turn out to be a talented actress, but she also becomes, and dies, an alcoholic, while, in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Sue Bridehead's interest in the visual arts and music is an early manifestation of her desperate desire to escape the neurosis which increasingly takes control of, and ultimately destroys, her life. The radicalism of New Woman fiction did not, for most of the 1880s and 1890s, extend to the consideration of women's artistic potential and their powers of creativity.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that one of the first, and most powerful, analyses of the psychological as well as social situation of the woman artist in the late Victorian era came from the pen of a writer who had earned himself the reputation of an *enfant terrible* of late-Victorian letters, partly on account of his championing, in Britain, of the naturalist works of Émile Zola, and partly as the author of a range of highly controversial novels addressing, sometimes in quite explicit ways, some of the most taboo subjects ever touched upon in mainstream Victorian fiction. The above-mentioned George Moore (1852–1933)—a Catholic-born heir to a substantial landed estate in Co. Mayo; a modestly educated man who had spent much of his youth studying art in Paris in a vain attempt to emulate the achievements of his Impressionist friends, whose work he would subsequently popularize in Britain; an admirer of Wagner and a frequent visitor to the Bayreuth festival; a familiar if rather notorious figure on the literary and artistic scene of *fin-de-siècle* London; and a lifelong bachelor, whose numerous but sometimes half-hearted liaisons with society ladies may or may not have been an attempt to deal with his ambivalent feelings about his sexuality—was certainly well-placed to attempt to write a novel which explores the psychological, sexual, moral, and creative dilemmas of a woman artist who challenges the expectations of her society, her family, and her religion in an attempt to fulfil her dream of becoming an opera singer. Moore's early literary works had tackled the themes of the sexual mores of the London artistic scene (*A Modern Lover*, 1883) and marital infidelity (*A Mummer's Wife*, 1885), as well as adultery, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and female homosexuality among the Irish gentry (*A Drama in Muslin*, 1886), but his reputation as a controversialist as well as an insightful analyst of the female psyche was finally confirmed by *Esther Waters* (1894), a daring portrayal of a working-class woman who, as

a single mother, defiantly struggles to secure the best possible future for herself and her son. Moore's presentation of Esther's ability to successfully challenge the stereotype of a "fallen woman," which takes a radical step beyond Thomas Hardy's compassionate but ultimately still pessimistic portrayal, just a few years earlier, of the victimized protagonist in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), marks his readiness to challenge Victorian public opinion, with its received notions of morality and its vision of femininity—thus preparing the ground for his presentation of the eponymous heroine of his next novel, *Evelyn Innes* (1898).

Moore's inspiration for the creation of the character of Evelyn Innes came from a range of sources: the bohemian circles of the mid-1890s London in which he moved provided him with ample opportunities to meet and befriend a number of highly sophisticated women, some of them talented artists, who are likely to have contributed to the development of the portrayal of his new protagonist. One of them was a leading singer of the late Victorian London stage, the Australian soprano Dame Nellie Melba (1861–1931); another, Pearl Craigie (1867–1906), an American-born but England-based novelist publishing under the pen-name of John Oliver Hobbes, and a devout Catholic convert, with whom Moore collaborated in the writing of a play, and to whom he tried, unsuccessfully, to make advances; yet another, Maud Burke (later to be Lady Cunard, 1872–1948), an American-born society hostess with whom Moore would develop a long on-and-off friendship/relationship, and whose daughter Nancy he might have fathered. The relationship between Evelyn Innes and her musician father was likely to have been inspired by the memories of a concert of early Renaissance English music that Moore attended in January 1894, with Pearl Craigie, in the home of the French-born, London-based musician Arnold Dolmetsch (1858–1940), whose fifteen-year-old daughter Hélène (1878–1924) played the viola. Finally, the research that Moore undertook into the life of Victorian convents brought him into contact with Virginia Crawford (1862–1948), another Catholic convert and a future journalist, political activist, and supporter of the suffrage movement; the two were to become lifelong friends. While *Evelyn Innes* is not, essentially, a *roman à clef*, the combined characteristics of the women who inspired the character of its main protagonist add to the intensity of the portrayal of her moral, religious, and artistic dilemmas as she struggles to make choices between her dream to fulfil her vocation as an artist, her search for personal happiness, her love for and obligation to her father, and her complex, if uneasy, sense of duty to her Catholic faith (cf. Gray 187 and Frazier 248–50).

The story of the novel is simple enough. Born to a family of musicians, Evelyn Innes inherits her mother's operatic voice; however, after her mother's early death, her opportunities to develop her talent are restricted

by her father's limited means: he is a church organist and a private music tutor in the south London suburb of Dulwich. When Evelyn meets Sir Owen Asher—a rich society gentleman with a broad range of artistic interests and a seemingly limitless fortune—they develop a mutual attraction, which results in Owen's offer to fund her musical education in Paris, with a view to her becoming a professional opera singer, on the condition that she decides to join him there as his companion. This offer sets up the central dramatic conflict of the novel: Evelyn is passionate about music—particularly Wagner—and she is not entirely indifferent either to Owen's attentions or to the lifestyle he can give her, but her decision to live with him violates both the moral standards of late-Victorian respectability and, more importantly, the absolute and non-negotiable moral principles of her religion (the Innes family are devout Roman Catholics, and Evelyn's decision to live with Owen is obviously a blow to her father). Ultimately, her choice of music over the conventional understanding of moral duty acquires a near-religious dimension, with her expression of her individualistic belief in the duty she owes to herself paradoxically echoing the moral guidance arising from Matthew's Parable of the Talents:

> At that moment it seemed to her that she could renounce everything but love. Could she renounce her art? But her art was not a merely personal sacrifice. In the renunciation of her art she was denying a great gift that was given to her by Nature, that had come she knew not whence nor how, but clearly for exercise and for the admiration of the world. It therefore could not have been given to her to hide or to waste; she would be held responsible for it. Her voice was one of her responsibilities; not to cultivate her voice would be a sort of suicide. This seemed quite clear to her, and she reflected, and with some personal satisfaction, that she had incurred duties toward herself. Right and wrong, as Owen said, was a question of time and place. What was right here was wrong there, but oneself was the one certain thing, and to remain with her father meant the abandonment of herself. (91)

This combination of passionate individualism, whole-hearted commitment to her art, and a persistent sense of religious obligation characterizes Evelyn Innes throughout her life, and manifests itself in a variety of ways as her story unfolds. Thus, for example, early on in the novel, as Evelyn's central moral dilemma finds its way to her subconscious, it is articulated, in a dream, through two contrasting types of music representing the fundamental moral choice she has to make:

> When she fell asleep she dreamed of the stage when the world was won, and when it seemed she had only to stretch her hands to the sky to take the stars. But in the midst of her triumph she perceived that she could no longer sing the music the world required; a new music was drumming in her ears, drowning the old music, a music written in a melancholy mode, and played on invisible harps. (83)

Even more importantly, the development of Evelyn's personal progress, as a woman as well as an artist, is marked by her changing perception of, and attitude towards, the parts she sings. In the early stages of her career, her repertoire includes parts associated with the traditions of Italian *bel canto*, and of early- and mid-nineteenth-century lyric opera, such as the eponymous heroine of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* (1831) and Marguerite in Charles Gounod's *Faust* (1859), but as her career progresses, she identifies more and more clearly with the dramatic roles in the operas of Richard Wagner—at first, with the pure and loving Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* (1845), and subsequently with his increasingly complex and passionate characters, such as Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), Brünnhilde in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1876), and—at least up to a point—Kundry in *Parsifal* (1882):

> As she lay between sleeping and waking, she strove to grasp the haunting, fugitive idea, but shadows of sleep fell, and in her dream there appeared two Tristans, a fair and a dark. When the shadows were lifted and she thought with an awakening brain, she smiled at the absurdity, and, striving to get close to her idea, to grip it about its very loins, she asked herself how much of her own life she could express in the part, for she always acted one side of her character. Her pious girlhood found expression in the Elizabeth, and what she termed the other side of her character she was going to put on the stage in the character Isolde. (149)

Evelyn's operatic career does not, of course, develop exclusively as a function of her growth as an artist: her progress as a singer is also a reflection of the development of her relationships with the three men in her life: her father, Owen, and a young and idealistic Irish composer Ulick Dean, with whom she engages in a passionate liaison. For Owen, Evelyn's growth as an artist is a project he wants to plan and control: in taking on the responsibility for the funding of her professional training while at the same time making her his mistress, he literally takes ownership of her career to the extent of making her a tool for the development of his own ambitions as a Wagner aficionado:

> And what an interest it would be to watch the development of that voice, surely the most beautiful soprano he had ever heard! She might begin with Margaret and Norma, if she liked, for in singing these popular operas she would acquire the whole of her voice, and also the great reputation which should precede and herald the final stage of her career. Isolde, Brunnhilde, Kundry, Wagner's finest works, had remained unsung—they had been merely howled. Evelyn should be the first to sing them. His eyes glowed with subdued passion as he thought of an afternoon, some three years hence, in the great theatre planned by the master himself, when he should see her rush in as the Witch Kundry. (68–69)

The nature of Evelyn's relationship with Ulick is more complex—it is far more spontaneous, and it has none of the transactional quality that

characterizes her arrangement with Owen; in addition to the evident sexual chemistry between them (she is clearly an Isolde to his Tristan), Ulick is himself a musician, and a friend of Evelyn's father, which makes him, at least initially, a much more likely candidate for her affections. Nonetheless, it is the differences in their approach to music that signal the incompatibility of their characters: thus, when he writes a newspaper article about her, he chooses to concentrate on her performance as Marguerite, a part which she has now outgrown as an artist ("with Margaret she was back in the schoolroom" [161]). Even more importantly, Ulick's vision of the world turns increasingly alien to Evelyn: his initial enthusiasm for Wagner wanes as his reflections on art become embroiled in a rather vague combination of Celticism and post-Christian spirituality,[1] which gradually becomes meaningless to Evelyn's less esoteric mind, firmly grounded in the palpable emotional intensity of both Wagner's music and her Catholic faith:

> Her thoughts paused a moment, and then she remembered something he had said. It had struck her at the time, but it appeared to her more than ever interesting. Catholicism, he had said, had not fallen from him—he had merely learnt that it was only part of the truth; he had gone further, he had raised himself to a higher spirituality. It was not that he wanted less, but more than Catholicism could give him. In religion, as in art, there were higher and lower states. We began by admiring *Faust*, and went on to Wagner, hence to Beethoven and Palestrina. Catholicism was the spiritual fare of the multitude; there was a closer communion with the divine essence. She had forgotten what came next . . . (299)

Paradoxically, the one man in Evelyn's life whom she can fully trust, and with whom she shares her understanding of music, is her father: while she knows that, as a committed Catholic, he cannot approve of the moral decisions she has taken, he does not reject her when she returns to London, and he recognizes and acknowledges her artistic achievements. Their connection, as father and daughter and as fellow artists, is, again, represented through their increasingly convergent tastes in music: while Mr Innes's main focus, as a musician, is the rediscovery of mediaeval and Renaissance church music, he has clear views on modern composers: he intensely dislikes "the jovialities of Rossini, whose *Stabat Mater*, he said, still desecrated Good Friday, and . . . the erotics of M. Gounod and his suite" (4), and he thinks that "the Margaret of Gounod and his librettist is not a real person, but a sort of keepsake beauty who sings keepsake music" (216), while at the same time he shares his daughter's main operatic fascination: "I hope you've not forgotten my teaching; as I've always said, music ended with Beethoven and began again with Wagner" (217). It is,

[1] Those dimensions of Ulick's character are clearly based on the mysticism of W. B. Yeats, whom Moore first met in 1894, around the time he was beginning to plan *Evelyn Innes*.

therefore, hardly surprising that one of the climactic scenes of the novel, in which Evelyn asks her father for forgiveness, is presented in direct parallel to the scene from the final act of *Die Walküre* in which Brünnhilde, one of Evelyn's favorite characters, asks her father Wotan's forgiveness for disobeying his orders:

> She knelt at her father's or at Wotan's feet—she could not distinguish; all limitations had been razed. She was *the* daughter at *the* father's feet. She knelt like the Magdalen. The position had always been natural to her, and habit had made it inveterate; there she bemoaned the difficulties of life, the passion which had cast her down and which seemed to forbid her an ideal. She caught her father's hand and pressed it against her cheek. She knew she was doing these things, yet she could not do otherwise; tears fell upon his hand, and the grief she expressed was so intense that she could not restrain her tears. But if she raised her face and saw his tears, his position as a stern father was compromised! She could only think of her own grief; the grief and regret of many years absorbed her; she was so lost in it that she expected him to answer her in Wotan's own music; she even smiled in her grief at her expectation, and continued the music of her intercession. (210–11)

Thus, it might appear that half-way through the novel, Evelyn Innes has reached a moment of personal, artistic, and indeed social equilibrium: as a successful singer, she seems to have found fulfilment as an artist, and she enjoys a financial status and a level of respectability and social acceptance that reduce the impact of the irregularity of her personal situation. In this way, she appears to have become, effectively, a New Woman, economically independent, sexually liberated, and free to pursue her personal ambitions and desires—and yet she finds herself increasingly disturbed and frustrated by the fact that, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, she remains a sinner. Owen's attempts to persuade her to ignore her religious impulses prove only partly successful: both during her Continental travels and back home in England, she finds herself drawn to various manifestations of Catholicism: she visits churches and experiences moments of remorse even if on the surface she adopts Owen's agnosticism. And it is again the influence of music that brings Evelyn to a decisive point in her life: on a visit to her father's church of St Joseph's to hear Palestrina's *Missa Brevis*, she meets Monsignor Mostyn, an influential prelate from Rome, who becomes a crucial presence in her life as she moves towards the decision not only to seek reconciliation with the Church, but also to leave the stage. The Monsignor may be fully appreciative of Evelyn's musical achievements—despite knowing about her past, he asks her to organize and sing at a charity concert in support of a Passionist convent at Wimbledon, where Evelyn had, coincidentally, gone on a retreat in the past—but he refuses to hear her sing at the opera because he has reservations about the moral implications of theater: in his opinion, "as at present constituted,

the stage is a dangerous influence" (330). This view chimes in with Evelyn's own thoughts as she reflects on her memories of the convent:

> Thinking of the poor sisters who lived in prayer and poverty on the edge of the common, she remembered that her life was given up to the portrayal of sensual emotion on the stage—an egotism which pursued her into every corner of her life. Compared with the lives of the poor sisters who had renounced all that was base in them, her life was very base indeed. In her stage life she was an agent of the sensual passion, not only with her voice, but with her arms, her neck and hair, and every expression of her face, and it was the craving of the music that had thrown her into Ulick's arms. If it had subjugated her, how much more would it subjugate and hold within its sensual persuasion the ignorant listener—the listener who would perceive in the music nothing but its sensuality. Why had the Church not placed stage life under the ban of mortal sin? (328–29)

There are multiple ironies around Evelyn's situation here. On the one hand, the potential culmination of her career as a Wagnerian dramatic soprano would be singing, in *Parsifal*, the part of Kundry—a sensuous sorceress and temptress, who is a personification of the very kind of emotion Evelyn finds increasingly objectionable. On the other hand, her vague and ambiguous personal arrangement with Owen, involving, when she leaves the stage, the possibility of a marriage—which would consolidate her social position as well as help her escape from her complex relationship with Ulick—becomes dependent on her playing the role ("when you have sung Kundry, we can be married" [286]). Ultimately, Evelyn faces an impossible choice between the demands of her faith, those of her passionate nature, and those of her art:

> She could never do all her religion asked. Her whole life would have to come to pieces; nothing of it would remain, and she entirely lost heart when she considered in detail the sacrifices she would have to make. She saw herself at Dulwich with her father, giving singing lessons, attending the services, and living about St Joseph's. She saw herself singing operas in every capital, and always a new lover at her heels. Both lives were equally impossible to her. (333–34)

The dilemma Evelyn experiences is a natural consequence of the moral absolutism characteristic of the Ultramontane spirit dominant in English Catholicism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (cf. Norman 244–86), and represented in the novel by the Monsignor ("He was all-powerful in Rome. He spent his winters and springs in Rome, and no one thought of going to Rome without calling on him. It was through him that the Pope kept in touch with the English Catholics" [224]). For Evelyn, brought up in the faith and unable to leave her Catholic guilt behind, the Monsignor—described ironically by Ulick as "no more than an Oxford don with a taste for dogma and for a cardinal's hat" (235)—becomes

a personification of the moral certainty she seeks, but, interestingly, not a figure of authority: her social and economic independence means that she is free to talk to him as an equal, to engage him in moral and theological debate, and eventually to adopt him as her spiritual mentor and confessor, which she actively chooses to do precisely because he never wavers in upholding the rigorous Catholic values which she may have, for a long time, chosen to ignore, but which she has never been prepared to reject. Paradoxically, then, the Monsignor assumes, in Evelyn's life, a role that is analogous to Owen's—they may represent two fundamentally different moral principles between which she needs to make a life-defining choice, but their relationships with her are ultimately determined by the way they engage with the two most essential dimensions of her identity—as an artist and as a woman:

> Evelyn sat watching him, fascinated by the clear, peremptory, ecclesiastical dignity which he represented. If he had a singing voice, she said to herself, it would be a tenor. He had allowed the conversation to wander from the convent to the concert; and they were soon talking of their musical preferences. There was an impersonal tenderness, a spiritual solicitude in his voice which enchained her; no single idea held her, but wave after wave of sensation passed, transforming and dissolving, changeable as a cloud. (323)

The resolution to Evelyn's dilemma comes as a consequence of her return visit to the Wimbledon convent following the charity concert: the invitation she receives to join the nuns for another retreat intensifies her internal struggle. In a climactic scene, on a sleepless night she reaches the point of contemplating suicide, but the accidental discovery of her old broken scapular, which she interprets as a sign from the Virgin Mary, becomes for her a moment of psychological and emotional breakthrough. In due course, she reforms her life: she makes her confession and takes communion, she breaks off with both Owen and Ulick, and she decides to return to the convent to try to find some form of composure and reflect on her future. While there, she comes to what is, for her, perhaps the most difficult discovery: when asked to sing at a Benediction service, she realizes that her voice still resonates with the sensuous tones of her passionate past, and will therefore never again achieve the virginal purity of the voices of the nuns:

> She had never known how much of her life of passion and desire had entered into her voice, and she was shocked at its impurity. Her singing sounded like silken raiment among sackcloth, and she lowered her voice, feeling it to be indecorous and out of place in the antique hymn. Her voice, she felt, must have revealed her past life to the nuns, her voice must have shocked them a little; her voice must have brought the world before them too vividly. For all her life was in her voice, she would never be

> able to sing this hymn with the sexless grace as they did. Her voice would be always Evelyn Innes—Owen Asher's mistress. (451)

While the ending of the novel is disappointingly inconclusive—Evelyn leaves the convent after her retreat, though the reading of St Teresa of Ávila's *The Way of Perfection* has by then opened her mind to the possibility of becoming a nun herself—the reasons for this lack of proper closure have less to do with Moore's overall design of his story than with the pragmatics of the publication of the novel: as he explains in the Preface to *Sister Teresa* (1901)—technically a sequel to, but practically the second volume of, *Evelyn Innes*—the original novel was growing beyond the length deemed suitable for publication in one-volume format, which led the author and the publisher to decide to break the story and continue it in another volume, under a new title. In this context, it is clear why *Sister Teresa* does not really develop as an independent story, with its own narrative trajectory: rather, it is an extended account of the process of Evelyn's gradual transformation into her new self as a nun. Following her final rejection of both Owen and Ulick, as well as the emigration to Rome and the eventual death of her father, Evelyn confirms her decision to take her vows and spend the rest of her life in the Wimbledon Passionist convent.

A key aspect of Evelyn's rejection of her previous worldly life is, of course, her decision to subject her artistic ambitions and tastes to the requirements and expectations of her new life. The radical nature of her choice in that respect goes beyond mere loyalty to the church: independent-minded as ever, she rejects Monsignor Mostyn's suggestion that she could still sing Handel and Bach: "Well, Monsignor, perhaps you won't understand me at all, and will think me very wilful; but if I am not to sing the music I made a success in, I don't want to sing at all. I can't do things by halves" (14–15). Initially, her enthusiasm for her new vocation allows her to identify with the religious music she sings regardless of her own tastes: her interpretation of Schubert's "Ave Maria" brings out in her voice the spiritual purity which she feared she had lost:

> Evelyn's voice filled with the beauty of the melody, and she sang the phrase which closes the stanza, a phrase which dances like a puff of wind in an evening bough, so tenderly, so lovingly, that acute tears trembled under the eyelids. And all her soul was in her voice when she sang the phrase of passionate faith which the lonely, disheartened woman sings, looking up from the desert rock. Then her voice sank into the calm beauty of the Ave Maria, now given with confidence of the Virgin's intercession, and the broken chords passed down the keyboard, uniting with the last notes of the solemn octaves, which had sounded through the song like bells heard across an evening landscape. (91–92)

This sense of inner peace, however, does not last: obliged to perform, in order to please the other nuns as well as the convent's patrons, music which

both her father and herself always considered aesthetically mediocre ("she was so weary of singing Gounod's 'Ave Maria' that she had intentionally accentuated the vulgarity of the melody, and wondered if the caricature had been noticed" [188]), she finds herself increasingly frustrated by the discipline of the convent and increasingly unwilling to obey its rules, which she manifests by playing, to her sister nuns, dramatic tunes from her favorite Wagner operas :

> The prelude to "Tristan" and the "Forest Murmurs," and the Rhine journey could not but trouble the quiet souls of Sister Elizabeth and Sister Veronica, and Evelyn knew that in playing this music to them she was doing a wicked thing. But a strange will had taken possession of her and she had to obey it. (194)

As her psychological crisis deepens, Evelyn—now Sister Teresa—begins to suffer from hallucinations in which she sees a variety of scenes and hears music from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*; at a moment of increasing anxiety and confusion she eventually decides to leave the convent, but as she is about to do so, she falls seriously ill, and in her delirium continues to sing fragments from *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde*. However, such subconscious attempts to return to her earlier life of passion and creative expression mark the end of Evelyn Innes the singer. When she eventually recovers from her illness, during which she came close to death, made her final confession, and received communion, she discovers that she has lost her voice, which dramatically restricts her chances of making a living as a concert singer. As a result, she ultimately decides to remain a nun, her artistic ambitions reduced to offering basic music teaching to pupils in the school now run by her convent.

Ultimately, then, Moore's vision of the woman artist in *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* proves to be much less radical than the opening sections of the original novel suggest that it might become: despite achieving undoubted artistic success, securing a stable financial and social position, and rebuilding her relationship with her father, Evelyn is unable, in the long term, to resist the feelings of remorse resulting from her traditional Catholic upbringing, and ultimately chooses to reject her personal and artistic ambitions in order to conform to the norms of her religion. However, the story does not see Evelyn either as a Christian heroine or as a victim of the Church: the narrative, in its focus on the diversity of factors affecting the development of her personality and the multiplicity of motivations influencing the decisions she makes in her life, offers no easy judgements that would make it possible to see the novel either as a moralistic story of a Victorian fallen woman repenting for her sins and rebuilding her life, or as a critique of the psychological pressure exerted on a talented young woman

by the power of the patriarchal structures of her society and her religion. The paradox of *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* lies in the fact that the heroine remains, throughout the two novels, her own woman, ready to take ownership of her decisions and to accept the consequences of her choices; she may end up sacrificing her independence in social and economic terms, but she does not do so because she has been defeated. On the contrary, her laughter as she repeatedly calls herself, in a conversation with her friend Louise Heilbron in the last chapter of *Sister Teresa*, "a broken spirit" (235, 236)—a claim which her interlocutor is entirely right not to take at face value—demonstrates that she maintains her sense of individuality by distancing herself, as best she can, from the circumstances of the situation in which she finds herself in the convent, and by negotiating the parameters within which she will be operating, and which she eventually comes to accept. As a result, while the message that the story of Evelyn Innes conveys may be ambivalent, the reader nonetheless retains both respect and sympathy for her throughout, even if the decisions she takes may sometimes be very difficult to understand and accept, particularly for the modern reader.

An interesting if artistically less satisfactory coda to the story of Evelyn Innes is added in the second edition of *Sister Teresa* (1909)—rewritten to the extent that, in comparison to the original 1901 text, it essentially constitutes a different novel. The focus of the first part of this version of the story moves away from Evelyn's experience of convent life—a significant part of the narrative shifts its attention to Owen, his travels in the Mediterranean and in the Sahara, and his eventual return to England, where he subsequently attempts to re-establish a form of platonic friendship with Evelyn. When the narrative eventually returns to Evelyn, it loses much of the precision and intensity of its discussion of her emotional and spiritual struggles, concentrating instead on the internal mechanisms of convent life and on Evelyn's increasing inability to conform to the requirements that the rules of her order impose on her everyday life: ultimately, at the end of the novel Evelyn decides to leave the convent and open an orphanage for disabled children. This change in the development and the resolution of the plot is no doubt a reflection of the author's increasingly skeptical view of Catholicism[2] (a long-lapsed Catholic, Moore converted to Anglicanism in 1903)—but it does not seem to be convincingly justified either by the narrative logic of the story or in terms of the consistency of its overall tone,

[2] Cf. Cave: "For Evelyn to have left the convent would have amounted to a rejection of the Roman Catholic position. To accept the conscience as the gauge of one's responsibility and the visible world as exemplary of God's beneficence and not as a vanity to be spurned in preference for eternal treasures hereafter is to challenge the power of the confessional to act as mediator between God and man" (160).

as it marks a clear departure from the complex and nuanced analysis of Evelyn's religious experience and motivation which was attempted both in *Evelyn Innes* and in the 1901 version of *Sister Teresa*.

The discussion of the impact of Evelyn's artistic inspiration on her response to convent life is also significantly reduced in the rewritten text. While the 1909 text retains the scenes in which she sacrifices her artistic principles by singing the popular music by Schubert and Gounod in order to maximize the convent's income, the analysis of the impact of Wagner is dramatically reduced: the sequence of events, towards the end of the 1901 version of the novel, describing Evelyn's illness, her hallucinations, and the eventual loss of her voice is deleted, and the only trace of her old fascination with Wagner is that she teaches her bullfinches to sing some of the key motifs from *Der Ring*. This change might appear justified in the context of a reading that suggests that the main focus of the novel's discussion of art is the difference between aestheticism and utilitarianism[3]—the 1909 ending emphasizes Evelyn's ultimate defeat as an artist more directly than the more nuanced conclusion of the 1901 version—but it is inconsistent with the intensity of the presentation of Evelyn's character in *Evelyn Innes*, as well as with the bibliographical and critical status of the 1909 revision as a whole: Moore himself abandoned the 1909 text when authorizing a collected American edition of his work a decade later, and subsequent reprints of the novels have tended to choose the 1901 text as well (cf. Frazier 416).

Although *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* have not generated as much critical debate as some of Moore's other novels—possibly because of his own dissatisfaction with them in later years—some of the recent criticism has seen them as important contributions to *fin-de-siècle* British fiction; they have been described, for example, as novels of faith and doubt, as Wagnerian *Künstlerromane*, and as Freudian narratives (cf. Heilmann and Llewellyn). At the same time, it seems that the consistency and intensity of their focus on the central protagonist, who is prepared to struggle, against the odds and against external pressures, to try to reconcile her essentially irreconcilable ambitions, obligations, and beliefs, make her story an important contribution to late Victorian New Woman fiction. At the peak of her operatic career, Evelyn is not only a woman artist, but also a defiant New Woman—an independent, liberated professional—and although her subsequent choices may not always be ones that she might be expected

[3] Cf. Huguet: "In the text's compelling exploration of proselytism, the dilemma which the prima donna fails to recognize is not between selfish sensualism and unworldly abnegation, but between essential aestheticism and motivated art, spelt out by Moore as art for religion's sake" (19).

to make given her background and circumstances, they are nonetheless hers, and hers alone. Ultimately, it is the personal autonomy that Evelyn Innes always maintains—as a woman, an artist, a Catholic, and even as a nun—that makes her the most unlikely of late Victorian literary characters: a convincing Catholic New Woman artist.

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