

The Collected Short Stories of George Moore: Gender and Genre

In Single Strictness (1922)

Edited by
Mark Llewellyn





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The Collected Short Stories of George Moore:
Gender and Genre

Volume 5

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General Editors: Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn
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INTRODUCTION

[Moore] is ... ruthless in his estimation of his own achievements. He is never satisfied. He is for ever issuing new and revised editions.¹

I do not deal in adventures but in soul cries[.]²

In the pages of *The Londoner* on 14 January 1922, the column 'From the Library Chair' noted that 'Mr. George Moore is continuing the re-writing of his earlier books, having just finished "Celibates"'.³ At a time when Moore was conscientiously and deliberately setting about the revision of almost all his works in order to publish final, definitive texts in line with his desire to perfect his style and secure his place in the literary canon of the period, it is not surprising that he would return to his earliest short-story collection in order to find the materials and inspiration for what would be his last.⁴ This is especially fitting given that the central narrative of that first collection, *Celibates* (1895), 'John Norton', was itself the result of a rewriting of Moore's novel *A Mere Accident* (1887). The urge to return to narratives, to find the perfect means of telling the tale was therefore nothing new in Moore's work, as has been demonstrated in the previous four volumes of this edition. What is interesting, however, is that the rewriting of *Celibates* into *In Single Strictness* (1922) lasted only five years before it was itself redesigned into *Celibate Lives* (1927). If we take into account the fact that the ending of one of the stories in *In Single Strictness*, 'Hugh Monfert', was changed within a matter of weeks of its first publication⁵ we can see how determined Moore was to make the text succeed on the level both of subject matter and style. This introduction seeks to unravel some of the complexities of Moore's narratives and examine more closely than has been done before the fundamental urgency Moore felt about getting these key texts of celibacy and singularity right.

Moore began rewriting his 1895 collection *Celibates* in the late 1910s, but the final revised text seems to have come together only in 1922, the year of its publication. Thus, while Moore was writing to his publisher T. Werner Laurie in September 1917⁶ and making reference to having begun the work, even in 1921 his descriptions of the collection do not match the published product: to Werner Laurie in March 1921 he wrote that the collection would 'consist of four stories' (it actually contains five),⁷ and in 1922 there was still comment in various periodicals about

the debate Moore was conducting with himself over whether the title should be *In Single Strictness* or *In Strict Singleness*, a matter of seemingly slight importance but a symbolic one for a perfectionist like Moore. The reason Moore decided not to maintain the title *Celibates*, according to his fictional dialogue with Robert Louis Stevenson which prefaces *Celibate Lives* in 1927, is because the title had already been taken by 'Balzac, dear master'.⁸ Although *Celibates* had indeed been used by Balzac as a title this took place before Moore published the 1895 text. The explanation might therefore lie in Moore's comments elsewhere that either *In Strict Singleness* or *In Single Strictness*⁹ would be a more 'English name',¹⁰ and perhaps also in the idea that Moore was trying to place himself at the centre of the English literary tradition rather than claim kin, as he had done in youth, with French influences of the 1880s and 1890s. The fluctuations in the number of stories the text would include, changes to the parts of *Celibates* carried over to the new volume, and even question marks over what the collection would be called, highlight the pains to which Moore was determined to go in order to ensure that the replacement volume for *Celibates* met his requirements. For that earlier volume had been a failure in his eyes, a view shared by many of its reviewers.¹¹

Moore's continued desire to write on celibacy as a theme even in the 1920s might therefore be seen to develop from a conviction that he had not got the tales right in his first attempt, that the subject matter, the true essence of the narratives, had somehow escaped him. But the need to publish *In Single Strictness* also came from Moore's own recognition that celibacy, the lonely life, and the singularity of those individuals who spend their existence not only without or apart from sexuality and sexual desire, but also disdaining close companionship with their fellow men and women, was his theme *ne plus ultra*. Moore did comment in his letters that the new volume would 'not be so important' as the recently published *Héloïse and Abélard*,¹² and regretfully some studies of his work have taken him at his word, with the narratives in *In Single Strictness* having received relatively little critical comment.¹³ Yet the collection deals in many respects with the central issue in the majority of Moore's short stories: specifically celibacy, but more generally the torments, difficulties and place of the solitary lives led by those who cannot, for various reasons, form emotional or physical attachments.

Moore believed, as he told the columnist of 'The Library Chair', that 'celibacy is an essential part of life, and ... a great many things are to be said of a life of celibacy'.¹⁴ By celibacy, Moore did not mean only those who adopted a life apart from sexuality, nor did he interpret it as simply those who did not marry. Although Moore pointed out to Julia Frankau in relation to the story 'Mildred Lawson' in *Celibates* that he used a definition of celibacy derived from the Latin 'coelebs' meaning 'single life, unmarried state',¹⁵ that was in 1895, and by the 1920s Moore's definition of celibacy is not merely related to the sexual impulse or to religious observance. His stories do contain characters, in this volume and elsewhere, for whom celibacy might be interpreted as primarily a religious matter and as a result it is informed by the acceptance of a particular element of Christian teaching (one thinks particularly of the priestly

stories in *The Untilled Field*),¹⁶ but Moore's understanding of celibacy reaches far wider. In the term 'celibate' Moore encompasses not only those who abstain from sexuality through vows, but also those who are unable to contemplate sexual contact or even close emotional correspondence with other individuals. Not wholly misanthropic in nature, several of Moore's celibates are nevertheless unable, for a diverse range of social, familial, emotional, psychological, economic, physical and spiritual reasons, to communicate with others at a level beyond the purely superficial. Celibacy in these terms is about the ultimate form of otherness or difference which the individual consciousness feels about itself when it encounters the world around it, and this means that celibacy as a state of mind extends beyond the sexual drive. It is noticeable, for example, that Moore's definition of celibacy throughout his writings, but especially perhaps in *In Single Strictness* and *Celibate Lives*, includes those who feel a most profound alienation from the culture that surrounds them even to the point of finding themselves unable to engage with their closest relations. The distance between parents and children, and the gap between siblings, is a fertile territory for Moore's imagination in these tales. In some ways it might be seen as ironic that Moore places celibacy in the domestic context so that, to take the example of one of the stories in this volume, 'Priscilla and Emily Lofft', sisters who are practically identical, live together, read the same books and sleep in the same room for many years, are revealed not truly to know one another. Celibacy is therefore about a kind of distance in proximity; it is that inner state of mind and body, rather than a total abstention or removal from the sphere of home, work and life, which instead represents a setting apart of aspects of one's identity, even, to use Moore's phrase, one's 'soul'.

While these themes are also present in *Celibates* and the roots of many of Moore's later ideas can be found in that volume, in *In Single Strictness* he found a means to express a wider portrait of the celibate life than his three narratives of 1895 had allowed. On the differences between the two texts, Moore himself noted in 1922 of *In Single Strictness*: 'I have done it more carefully, and have constructed it better. It is not one story but five, all threaded on the same theme and each dependent on the others. I decided that in this way, by exhibiting bachelorhood and spinsterhood in different lives, could I best express the different shades of singleness.'¹⁷ The more novelistic approach, with each example of a celibate being partly dependent on the examples around it, and the conveying of a broader palette of characteristics, means that *In Single Strictness* makes for a far more coherent read than *Celibates* while at the same time covering a greater range of (in)experience. In the earlier volume, although there was a diversity to be found in the individual narratives of Mildred Lawson, John Norton and Agnes Lahens, the discordant nature of Moore's pathological analyses, especially in the 'John Norton' story, prevented the overall picture of the varied nature of the celibate life coming across to the reader: one might even argue that the extreme nature of Lawson, Norton and Lahens, the very excessive differences on display for the reader rendered them too abnormal to be understood, too psychologically flawed to be sympathetic. In *In Single Strictness*, Moore's portrayal

of a wider range of celibates and most importantly a spectrum of reasons for celibacy stimulates the correct mix of consideration and understanding for the individual's predicament that the 1895 text did not. In the later volume, each reader can recognize something in the solitary experiences presented to them, be it as the relative of a Wilfrid Holmes or the employer of a Sarah Gwynn; the individual's uniqueness is maintained while somehow allowing for the acknowledgment or perception of them as an everyday type.

This serves to make Moore's portraits less examples of difference as case studies in the ordinary nature of the extraordinary life. The accessibility of Moore's portraits is the reason why the reviewer Alec Waugh should be seen as mistaken in writing in *John O'London's Weekly* that the stories

are studies in frustration, in unfulfilment, of men and women too weak or too diffident to snare enchantment. To George Moore celibacy would seem a sign of weakness ... His characters are one and all ineffectual. Nowhere is there the strong celibate, the man whose energies are focused on to one issue and whose undivided force achieves triumph.¹⁸

It would be wrong to think that Moore viewed celibacy *per se* as 'a sign of weakness'; indeed, if we take 'celibacy' at one of its literal meanings of 'unmarried' then Moore was himself living, as he always had done, a celibate life. However, when celibacy was the result of unthinking subservience to a religious ideal then Moore did criticize it because it led to the destruction of the individual's core and the need to escape from such constraints then became paramount (see, for example, his 1905 novel *The Lake*); but the inability to forge relationships with other people is not of itself a weakness. Society's incapability of finding a place for such individuals, or lack of seriousness in the attempt to understand them, on the other hand, is the focus of Moore's account.

This does not mean that Moore's characters are to be excused their own moral and emotional failings. But some of the stories do require us to forgo some of our prejudices about certain character types we might associate with the single life, and begin to enquire a little more closely and sympathetically into why such lives might be lived. The players in *In Single Strictness*, wrote the reviewer for the *Sunday Times*, represented a 'bankruptcy in moral energy'.¹⁹ But the outrage some of the collection's first readers felt towards Moore's protagonists, while interesting in the context of the period, should not deflect our attention away from the fact that Moore rarely places a moral to his tales. Like sketches of a moment rather than minute accounts of a life, Moore's narratives are not really about condemnation or criticism of the individual under the reader's eye; rather, they are about understanding and interpretation. Moore is the teller of the tale but not to the extent that he prescribes our reading of it.

Ultimately, Moore's stories are about revealing the humanity behind every story; as Elizabeth Grubgeld phrases it, 'Moore's portraits of human beings confused and driven by sexual impulse and economic pressures register not only his amusement,

but a sense of admiration and sympathy for the multifarious forms human behaviour may take.²⁰ It is this 'sympathy' which Moore requires us to extend to the characters whose lives he explores. Naturally, Moore being Moore, there are moments in which we are inevitably encouraged to see the humorous futility of some characters' foibles, but we are also meant to recognize that on the flip side of comedy is tragedy. It is these twin elements, coupled with the need to see or have revealed that the individual predicament is meant to be approached with a curiosity that is not prurient and compassion which does not transform into condemnation, that were lacking in *Celibates* but are present in almost all the stories in *In Single Strictness*. One needs only contrast the difference in the reviewers' reactions to 'John Norton' from *Celibates* and 'Hugh Monfert' in *In Single Strictness* to see Moore's success in changing the pitch of his portraits. *The Critic's* reviewer in 1895 commented:

In these three stories, Mr. Moore deals with the marriage question, or, rather, with that of celibacy. They are supposed to deal with three states of mind that render matrimony an impossibility, but the author draws no conclusions and has no theories: he merely chronicles what are the results, probably, of personal observation. Two of these celibates are women, the third is a man – or, to be more correct, a being in trousers.²¹

Conversely, on 'Hugh Monfert', *The Times* reviewer of 1922 could suggest that this story 'which ... Moore had so beautifully written' and which is the 'longest and also the most interesting'²² reveals Monfert 'not as a social pariah whose mind is twisted by physical influences, but as a man spiritually exiled from his age'.²³ Admittedly, one must consider that there were almost thirty years between each of Moore's versions of the tale, and the rewriting between 1895 and 1922 (and 1923) was far more dramatic and far reaching than had occurred between 1887 and 1895; and one must also bear in mind the social changes that had taken place during the same period. Yet homosexuality was still a crime and the Wilde trials were still within living memory. Moore's style was much better but the subject matter was also much more explicit. It appears that it was this very explicitness, coupled with Moore's more developed style, which made the tale better (in a qualitative and moral sense) for the reviewer. Writing of the earlier version in *Celibates*, the *Sunday Times* reviewer commented: 'The horror and violence of the double event which freed the indifferent lover were so excessive that they blinded our attention to what was the object of the whole story, John Norton's own lack of moral equilibrium.'²⁴ Drawing a further conclusion from this, the same reviewer, Moore's friend Edmund Gosse, noted that Moore's purpose was to convey the 'necessity of preserving moral equilibrium unless life is to be an absurdity'.²⁵ The 'moral equilibrium' might equally be seen in Moore's own response to the characters about which he writes: his pictures are balanced and, while they illustrate the extremes of human behaviour, they do so not to sensationalize but to comprehend.

The collection was also a matter of stylistics for Moore. As he wrote in the 'Advertisement' to *Celibate Lives*, 'The nearest equivalent to music in literature is

the story',²⁶ an idea he claims to have inherited from Robert Louis Stevenson. In the same text, he identifies what he terms 'the melodic line';²⁷ the aim of his writing was to achieve this harmonious combination between the story-telling and the subject, a naturalness in style that would make prose akin to music. This was something which contemporary reviewers of *In Single Strictness* appreciated, with Llewellyn Jones noting that Moore's was 'a style that is music'.²⁸ Moore was also clearly successful in his claim that the collection should be read as a series of narratives linked by a common thread, almost episodes in the same tale rather than separate elements in a more haphazard gathering of material. Reviewers positively advocated that the book be read 'not as a collection of stories on a theme, but as one story, illustrating, in five chapters, the adventuring of the celibate thru life'.²⁹

In Single Strictness, overall, was well received and was even listed in Edward J. O'Brien's book *The Best Short Stories of 1922*,³⁰ but the story which was its longest and which in many ways represented the core of Moore's desire to write the volume in the first place, was not, in his eyes, a success. Only a matter of weeks after the English version was published, Moore, the eternal editor and reviser, was circulating the new ending to the 'Hugh Monfert' story in which the protagonist not only acknowledges his sexuality but aims to embrace it in a future life away from the destructive influence of his mother. Far more radical than 'John Norton' had ever been, Moore's alternative ending was used for the publication of the American edition of *In Single Strictness* in 1923.

But Moore remained unhappy with the narrative at the collection's heart and in 1927 he republished *In Single Strictness* as *Celibate Lives*. The only major change to the text, and the only reason for the new edition, is the excision of the 'Hugh Monfert' story and the insertion of its replacement, the tale of 'Albert Nobbs', first published in *A Story-Teller's Holiday* in 1918. *Celibate Lives* was received with similar praise to that which had greeted *In Single Strictness*. Moore was seen as 'a delicious stylist'³¹ who wove tales of 'exquisite simplicity'.³² Interestingly, in spite of Moore's replacement of 'Hugh Monfert' with 'Albert Nobbs', the reviewer for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, among others, declared that the 'unity of the book as a whole is remarkable',³³ which, given Moore changed remarkably little of the Nobbs text before its inclusion in the volume, perhaps only highlights the consistency of the celibacy theme in Moore's wider work and the assured way in which he was able to deal with it on its own terms. Focused, succinct, penetrating and yet also musical, Moore's volume had, it appeared, finally achieved his aim of a melodic line and a satisfyingly revealing portrait of the diversity of the celibate life.

In the new 'Advertisement' published as a preface to *Celibate Lives*, which features a fictionalized conversation between Moore and Robert Louis Stevenson, Moore declared that 'I do not deal in adventures but in soul cries'.³⁴ Moore's characters in these stories are ordinary and extraordinary at one and the same moment. They are average individuals: generally, they are not more or less human, or moral, or beautiful, or ugly than anyone else. One could consider them extreme but only in the sense that all extremes have their polar opposites. What Moore was seeking to

reveal, and does successfully bring into his portraits, is that these individuals might be encountered by any of his readers at any place on any day; that these are people trying as best as they can to go about their daily lives in the world. What makes them singular is the choice they have made, or had imposed upon them, or cannot escape from, to live a life outside of what society deems 'normal'. The fact that the reasons for this difference are so varied and that the spectrum of experience and naivety Moore covers is so diverse serves only to make the humanity of the majority of his characters clearer.

Reviewers of *Celibate Lives* even picked up on Moore's musical analogy in creating their own metaphors for the text's theme. R. L. Duffus, for example, stated that Moore's collection demonstrated that a 'life in which sex is denied, or suppressed or underdeveloped is like a palette with two or three tones, a musical instrument with two or three notes'.³⁵ These were, said another reviewer, intense psychological tales about the inescapable 'influence of [the] sex impulse, gratified or resisted'.³⁶ As an Irish commentator suggested, the celibate life Moore is dealing with is not that imposed by religion or external forces, but is rather 'a natural state of mind' for these individuals.³⁷ Most importantly, bearing in mind the outraged voices which had greeted Moore's first foray into the issue of celibacy thirty-two years before, the *Boston Evening Transcript* noted that 'nobody can feel shocked' by the subject matter 'when the treatment is so cleanly rendered as in these tales'.³⁸

Not every reviewer, however, was happy with the claims of Moore's new book. In the *New York Evening Post* a debate began on whether the book was 'new' at all, an accusation prompted by a misguided review by Conrad Aiken in which he claimed that the text was nothing more than a rehashing of Moore's earlier works. Aiken declared: 'Will Mr. Moore never tire of serving up to us his earlier works in a slightly disguised and altered form',³⁹ and asserted that *In Single Strictness* was the same as *Celibates* 'with a few changes and substitutions'.⁴⁰ Implying that Moore was practically delusional, and certainly suffering from egocentrism as a result of his 'mania for revision',⁴¹ Aiken also criticized the substance of the tales: 'in all of them one feels a certain thinness – a thinness which one is apt to think is characteristic'⁴² but which was not, according to Aiken, present in the earlier versions found in *Celibates*. Aiken's criticisms are misplaced and plain wrong: there is far more that is new in *In Single Strictness* and *Celibate Lives* than old, and the changes Moore made to material he did carry over from *Celibates* through to *Celibate Lives* were far more radical than this review would suggest. Indeed, although they deal with similar themes to 'Mildred Lawson' and 'John Norton' it cannot seriously be doubted that 'Henrietta Marr' and 'Hugh Monfert' are different enough to constitute new stories; the differences are even greater when one considers that Aiken's review was in response to *Celibate Lives*, which omits the Monfert/Norton narrative altogether. Aiken's objection, it seems far more likely, related to the reuse of subject matter, a kind of aesthetic distaste that Moore could keep returning to the issue of celibacy and claim to be saying something new; thus Moore's 'hypertrophy of manner'⁴³ and other criticisms

of his developed style might be seen as a cover criticism for Moore's long established interest in the more unusual modes of living.

And it was the unusual aspects of outwardly normal lives which always drew Moore's attention, no matter what the critics said. As the title character of 'Hugh Monfert' states: 'We bring our characters into the world, and it would seem that character is Fate; yet our lives depend upon circumstances; from the moment we come into the world we are being moulded, and the more we think about it the less we understand' (p. 91). It was in an attempt to portray the consequences of that enforced moulding that Moore wrote the tales which follow.

'Wilfrid Holmes'

Wilfrid is the youngest child of the Holmes family and the story begins with a deliberate distancing of him from his siblings. He is physically out of place when compared to his brothers:

The Holmes were tall men with long faces and small eyes. Wilfrid, the last, was larger-framed, more heavily built than his brothers; his long, oval face was fuller, and in him the family eyes were not less intelligent than his brothers' eyes, but weaker, announcing and indolence of mind and body so inveterate that he had just grown up in it without a struggle, passing from boyhood into manhood clinging to the widow's skirts. (p. 5)

Wilfrid's father, like that of so many of Moore's male protagonists, is dead and his parental role is taken up by Wilfrid's eldest brother, Hector, who displays a mixture of contempt and weariness in his dealings with this younger brother.

Hector is, though, in many ways the most astute member of the Holmes family when it comes to Wilfrid. Debating his brother's general lack of impetus and desire to achieve or settle to anything, Hector and his mother appear at cross-purposes when she thinks that Hector's fears surround the possibility that Wilfrid might lead a dissolute life with members of the opposite sex. Rather than reassuring Hector, his mother's comment that Wilfrid is not interested in women almost causes him to speak his true feelings: 'It was on Hector's lips to say that a man who is indifferent to women is indifferent to all things' (p. 6). Like Moore's brother Julian, on whom the character is based,⁴⁴ Wilfrid flits mentally from one profession to another, never able to settle down either in terms of a job or in relation to his family. Julian had posed a long-term problem for Moore, and his letters to friends and family members illustrate part of the motivation behind his writing of the character of Wilfrid Holmes. Writing to Maurice Moore in 1888, for example, Moore told him that he heard 'but little' from his mother and younger brother because:

they live at Moore Hall in their mysterious way. Julian is very good in that respect but it would me [*sic*; be] more satisfactory if he were to try to do something for himself; still we must be grateful [*sic*] that he is not a blackguard loafing around bar rooms in London. Occasionally he sends me stories to read, they generally contain an idea,

which I could make use of, but he does not seem to have any power whatever of execution.⁴⁵

It is a touch ironic that Moore would later use this brother, who could not 'execute' his own stories, as the basis for one of his own, but the brotherly concern which Moore gives Hector – whose name inevitably evokes the term 'hectoring' – towards Wilfrid reveals something of his own ambivalent affection for Julian.

Wilfrid finally, and rather irrationally, decides that he will take up the flute (another cross-reference to Julian Moore's musical aspirations),⁴⁶ but refuses to be taught more than the very basic elements of musical composition by a friend of his mother. Trying to play and subsequently compose alone and untaught, Wilfrid's music, like his social skills, lack all 'harmony' (p. 7). While the investment of energy in his pursuit might be deemed admirable, the failure to either heed the advice of his mother or to recognize that his skill level remains static rather than progressing to a higher stage demonstrates Wilfrid's wilful infantilism. He does not mature but rather stays set in the path and mental understanding of a young child. Following his mother's death, and rather than become independent, Wilfrid remains attached to the mother figure, now transformed from the real, live mother to the terms of her will, and her request that her sister will send Wilfrid a cheque every six months.

While Wilfrid is eager to appear as an adult and make visible his ability to perform daily functions such as cooking for himself, when others, like his London landlady, offer to do things for him, and thus fill the place of the absent parent, he always accepts. Trying to live the life of a composer in spite of his feeble grasp of the finer elements of composition and modern musical practice – he is composing an opera entitled 'The Mulberry Tree' which, if the bars presented on the final page of the story are anything to go by, matches his childish nature in their similarity to the nursery rhyme 'Here we go round the Mulberry bush' – Wilfrid's excitement at discovering an obscure musical score in a rag-and-bone shop leads him to play it rather loudly very late at night. Almost thrown out of the lodging house because he has kept the landlady and other residents awake, when Wilfrid apologizes to the female lodger on the floor below him, he discovers she is able to play the piano. The two begin a short-lived musical partnership, which has at least the potential to develop into something close to human companionship. But Wilfrid's cold and single bed proves his undoing for, while on a mission to locate an extra blanket in the spare room one night, he inadvertently stumbles upon the landlady comforting her daughter, who has returned home unexpected and pregnant. The landlady thinks that the nightgowned Wilfrid is the culprit and evicts him from his room.

Not long after Wilfrid's move to less suitable lodgings which, although they are nearer to the British Museum where he now pursues a flickering interest in elements of the myth of Tristan and Isolde, Wilfrid's aunt's cheque fails to come on the appropriate day, and he is reluctantly forced to write to his brother for five pounds to see him through his expenses. Wilfrid's fears that the failure of his aunt's payment means the end of his steady income lead him into thoughts of how he could possibly earn a

living by himself. Remembering a time when he once wrote some articles for a provincial newspaper, he toys with the idea of journalism and, by chance, comes across a correspondence concerning birdsong in the letters pages of a newspaper. Wilfrid decides to reply to the letters in order to set in motion a chain of events which he believes could lead to his appointment to the musical editor's position on the paper. His letter is published, and he contemplates a mild form of blackmail on the editor in return for a post on the staff. A journalist, whom we might read as a coded representative of Moore himself, is sent by the editor to see Wilfrid. During the course of their conversation, Wilfrid breaks down and tells the journalist everything. The journalist recognizes Wilfrid's type and thinks of how 'the family [is] the worst enemy of the individual' (p. 18). The real pity of the story is that at that moment a delayed and much larger than usual cheque arrives from Wilfrid's aunt. The £200 bonus he receives turns Wilfrid back into the childlike, simple and dependent figure that the narrative thread has led us to believe must be thrown aside if he is to survive. As he leaves, the journalist ponders on Wilfrid's character and summarizes that he is 'one of those weak, timid, harmless souls, come out of the mould that Nature reserves for some great purpose known only to herself, mayhap the preservation of pity and compassion in the world' (p. 19).

Moore's tale demonstrates an insightful penetration into the position of the lonely last sibling, and a sympathetic dealing with the feelings his own brother must have coped with in relation to him, the constant recipient of requests for handouts. As Moore puts it: 'Whosoever cannot get his living dreads his relations, dreads their eyes and words' (p. 8), and there may even have been something of the younger Moore, struggling to make his own living as an artist, in elements of Wilfrid's story. While the story reflects upon a simple, naive individual in his struggle to exist socially in the world, Moore nevertheless imbues Wilfrid with a sense of cunning and a survival instinct. When he writes to the editor of the journal with the intention of being made its music critic, although he cannot follow through his plan and breaks down in front of the assistant the editor sends on his behalf, it is nevertheless possible to see a basic ability to survive if need be. This is again suppressed when the aunt's cheque arrives, a moment which returns Wilfrid to – a gladly accepted – dependency. Although the portrayal of the protagonist's failure to achieve anything with his life reflects badly on his own inner character, Moore's study nevertheless spreads the causes of this listlessness among the Holmes family and even society as a whole. The irony the journalist points to at the end of the tale, that the world and humanity need individuals like Wilfrid because our response to them reinforces or identifies our own moral compass and values, perhaps identifies the central position the idea of the celibate held in Moore's own world view.

'Priscilla and Emily Lofft' and 'Emma Bovary' (1902)

Moore's second narrative is a seriously reworked version of his story 'Emma Bovary', first published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in May 1902.⁴⁷ The title of its earlier incarnation reveals its subject matter rather more clearly than the second, namely the fears over the corrupting influence of (French/European) literature on female English sensibilities.⁴⁸ Moore had written to Clement King Shorter in 1892 with the outline of the tale; it would concern

an elderly spinster who has led a most strict and virtuous life and whose whole knowledge of life is derived from French novels – she has read everything – Then a certain moment (the story) comes in her life and she wonders she remembers all the women she has read about and their wilful lives afford a strange contrast with her own ... You see the idea, this is a woman we have all known and I think I could write the story well but I do not know if one can describe in the News an elderly and virtuous spinster who reads Flaubert and Maupassant.⁴⁹

The story changed by the time Moore came to publish it into something more precisely concerned with what happens when an individual, in this case a woman, is exposed to passion and sexuality after a life spent removed from such thoughts and emotions. The story is an awakening yet also a silencing and a loss; it is, as one reviewer termed it, about 'the diversion rather than the absence of the sexual impulse'⁵⁰ and it is all the more poignant for the simple reason that the awakening of that natural impulse comes far too late and with deadly consequences.

The story begins with the return of one sister from the other's grave, marking out the territory of loss and isolation. The Lofft sisters, Priscilla and Emily, are not identical twins but they appeared to be, 'so like were they to the other' (p. 21); the name 'Lofft' with its double 'f' might be seen as a signifier for 's' making them literally the 'lost' sisters. Taken to live with an aunt when they were 'two little children of ten' (p. 22) because their father had died, the girls begin to construct a unified identity through creating a shared environment in the garden grounds of their aunt's home. This space, open to all the residents of Smith's Buildings, has become 'taboo because everybody living in the five houses could go into it' (p. 22). Their aunt buys 'exclusive possession of the garden' (p. 22) for Priscilla and Emily and it becomes their domain, replicating the sense of security and shared comfort they had previously enjoyed when united in their mother's womb, a connection which Emily makes explicit: 'and her thoughts dropped back into consideration of her love for her sister; an almost mystical attachment it had often seemed to her, going back to the time when they had lain in the womb together. Priscilla had never seemed another being to her, but her second self, her shadow, her ghost, each akin to the other as the sound and its echo' (p. 23).

Emily's reflections on her relationship with Priscilla always dwell on their similarity, the fact that they are united in an inexplicable way; she thinks that their 'likeness was not a mere chance; it penetrated from the surface into the heart and

brain' (p. 23) and even that 'they had grown up to look upon themselves not as two but as one' (p. 23). Yet within this Emily's thoughts also let slip that there was a tension in the relationship partly based on mutual need and partly on Priscilla's desire for independence. Only, according to the narrative, at two moments in their lives do the sisters emotionally move apart. The first occasion had been when they were debutantes and a man, James Mease, 'had made [Emily] think she was willing to leave Priscilla to go to live with him; Priscilla was willing that it should be so' (p. 24). In order to meet Mease's parents' demands over Emily's dowry, Priscilla is prepared to give up her half of their shared inheritance. In many ways a sacrificial offering of part of her own identity, this can be read either as a move on Priscilla's side to free her sister and herself from their symbiotic state or as an attempt to buy herself into their future home, for, with no money or income, her ability to survive alone must be questioned. The match, because Mease will not accept the presence of his prospective sister-in-law in a marital home, breaks down.

Emily nevertheless blames Mease for her sister's decline, 'for he was the cause of Priscilla's death' (p. 24). The reason Emily at first holds Mease to account for Priscilla's demise is that the sisters had left Dublin because of the cancelled engagement, to go to 'their own lodge in the glen under Croagh Patrick' (p. 24). It was there that Priscilla caught a cold and a cough, which her sister views as the ultimate reason for her death. As Emily ponders the single and lonely life which lies ahead of her, it is not the absence of someone to love her that she mourns but the lack of someone she might love:

she bethought herself of the life that awaited her without Priscilla, alone in the world, without parents or relations ... nobody whom she could love. Lonely evenings, she said, the words provoked by the sight of the books in the bookcase, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Henry Wood, and Charlotte Yonge. All these she and Priscilla had read together on either side of the fireplace. (p. 25)

The fact that books dominate the room, that the sisters have had a shared life filtered through words on a page rather than actions or experiences lived, is telling. While the image of the two sisters reading together is companionable, it is the ability and, on Priscilla's side, the desire to read alone, to have a solitary pleasure away from the rather smothering presence of her sister's need to have someone 'she could love', which proves fundamental. Emily's domination of Priscilla's identity and her resistance to them developing as individual and separate selves is clear.

While Emily thinks of the sister from whom she is now permanently divided, her thoughts turn back to the second time when they were apart. This occurred when they were forced to have separate bedrooms, against their usual sleeping habits, at a hotel in Aix-les-Bains where they went to aid Priscilla's recovery. Although this arrangement was not what the sisters originally planned, even after a double room became free they remained separate because the thought of sharing 'didn't seem to please Priscilla ... [Emily] fancied that Priscilla had come to like a room to herself' (p.

27). Fearing for her sister's safety in a room on her own, Emily insisted that she keep her door locked at all times. Once, however, Priscilla did leave the door unlocked and when Emily entered her chastizing impulse towards her sibling was 'stayed by the sight of Priscilla's embarrassment at the sudden intrusion. It had seemed to her that something was thrust under the pillow' (p. 27). The idea that there might be a secret between the sisters confuses and upsets Emily, but she remembers that moment again when she thinks of how, as she lay dying, Priscilla had 'written on a piece of paper: In the garden' (p. 27), a mysterious message which Emily does not understand. The idea of something 'In the garden' haunts Emily along with visions of her dead sister until one day while she is outside it rains and she runs for shelter to the potting shed. There she discovers behind a loose panel 'something that looked like a book ... a French book and a dictionary' (p. 28). Emily reads, occasionally dropping the book to her knees in shock, and revealing her own prudishness and middle-class respectability in the process: 'It seemed to her hard to believe that a woman had ever lived in Ireland so licentious as the woman in the book, even during the Protestant ascendancy' (p. 29). Emily's perturbation while looking at the novel does not prevent her from desiring to read on, particularly given that

the book was written in a style that beguiled the reader, one which she could appreciate. She would have liked to read on for the sake of the style, but Priscilla had never read for style. She was not interested in literature for its own sake, and the questions that Priscilla had put to her about married life ... left no doubt in her mind that Priscilla was altogether ignorant of the relations between men and women. (pp. 29–30)

The fact that Priscilla had asked her sister questions 'about married life' while reading the book not only reveals the dead sister's ignorance before she began her furtive study of the novel, but also the manner in which Emily is seen as the arbiter of knowledge. The fact that a distinction is drawn in Emily's thoughts between her sister's ignorance and her own understanding suggests quite pertinently that sexuality is the taboo between them, the very fundamental element in their relationship which makes them different (Emily knows, Priscilla does not) even before the mysterious 'French novel' appeared.

The book, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and its sensual descriptions of passionate adultery and female sexual desire are perceived to have infected Priscilla with the desire to read on out of an innocent need to gain some experience of the world. The means by which Priscilla dies – 'a bad sore throat' as the doctor puts it (p. 26) – is not a poetic justice on Moore's part, but rather a reflection on the fact that the story of Emma Bovary has become Priscilla's life and her death; it is, in fact, the most intense moment of being she will ever enjoy. Separate from her sister, Priscilla has lived passionately, albeit only through the world of books as opposed to in 'real' life. Emily wonders if her sister

availed herself of the chance that had put this book into her hands to learn before she died something of the world she was about to leave? A morbid desire, no doubt, hardly legitimate, but comprehensible. She might have felt, Emily continued, that she had never looked on the true face of life, but on a mask, and that of the true face she could only catch a glimpse in a book. (p. 30)

Recognizing that 'Priscilla had died struggling for speech ... had died with something on her mind' (p. 26), Emily desperately searches for reasons as to how Priscilla came by a copy and then why she might have kept it hidden. She concludes that her sister would have wanted the book burned, but there had not been any fires lit, so Emily stays up during the night, tearing 'paper from the book and watching the text disappear into black ashes' (p. 31). But this takes time and so she has to keep it under her pillow, dreading her own death throughout the night in case the book should be discovered with her corpse, and she finishes burning it the following night. Emily feels a liberation by the burning of the book because it is the only sole possession her sister ever really had. In burning it, Emily is able to be free of guilt over her sister's death, but the liberation is not all it appears to be for, as Emily recognizes, her life will remain lonely, single and unfulfilled:

she was free to leave this dusty old house and the dusty conventions in which half her life had been spent. She was free to return to Aix and to live like other English spinsters on a small income, travelling whither she listed, from one boarding-house to another, seeking – Does anybody do more than to seek and to find, mayhap, something? Does any woman find even the shadow of her dream at thirty-five? (p. 31)

Perhaps most telling of all in this tale is Moore's statement that 'in grief, as in all human things, there is a grain of insincerity ... In the midst of our deepest emotions we are acting a comedy with ourselves; within us one self is always mocking another self' (p. 27). It suggests that for all their similarity, for all their shared experience and apparent unity of self-understanding, the two sisters were halves of the same identity only inasmuch as they were the corrective element to one another's inner desires and needs.

In Moore's first version of the tale, 'Emma Bovary', the relationship between Ismena and Letitia is less subtly woven than that in *In Single Strictness* and there are also more seeming inconsistencies in the narrative. Ismena, for example, the Emily-equivalent, ponders solitariness in an almost wishful way – 'Ismena wondered what it would be like to awaken in the middle of the night and to feel herself alone' (p. 183) – and at one moment both sisters are 'on the point of being married' when 'Ismena went to study art in Julien's and Letitia was left alone in their lodge in the west' (p. 184). The fact that the sisters are seemingly whole when together but less individually is reflected in the reference made to their one-time fiancés' reactions on seeing them together; at that moment, 'neither loved his betrothed as much as he had done before' (p. 184). When middle aged the sisters inherit a house but find it necessary to go to France for Letitia's health. The reading and the living of life through literature remains a consistent theme, and the sisters find that 'they missed

their reading a little, but about a week after their arrival they discovered there was an English library in the town' (p. 184).

Unlike 'Priscilla and Emily Lofft' we are given far more of an insight into Letitia's (Priscilla's) consciousness. When she says it is 'hardly worth while changing' (p. 184) into a double room when one becomes available in the hotel, in this story we know that it is because she has discovered a book while moving the chest of drawers in her room. We also know that she is worried before they leave for England because she cannot finish the book but neither can she leave it behind for fear of what the owner or a future occupant of the room might think. Worse still, Letitia realizes that speaking to Ismena is out of the question: 'One can discuss Scott or Dickens or Thackeray, but one cannot discuss emotions that one ought never to have felt with one's sister' (p. 185). Importantly, the sisters had

always read the same authors, for if they read different authors they would have nothing to talk about ... It was Ismena who decided which author they should read; her mind was more methodical ... and she believed that to derive any considerable benefit from an author he should be read from the earliest to the latest works. Her preference for authors of historical tendencies enabled her to overrule Letitia's taste for modern sentimentalities, and she was now forcing a thorough reading of the Waverley novels upon her sister. (pp. 185–6)

It is clear that reading is a substitute for living for both sisters, but the divergence between them lies in what kind of lives they would like to gain a greater understanding about through literature. For Ismena, reading means studying, it is in many ways a chore, albeit an occasionally pleasurable one; the 'considerable benefit' to be 'derived' from reading is one based on identifying a development in the writing style, in ways of writing rather than the subjects one writes about. There is a quasi-morality, even a religious impetus about her desire to read in that literary texts have, for her, a particular 'benefit'. Letitia, on the other hand, is interested to read about people, events – lives that she can never and will never know; as she thinks of *Madame Bovary*, 'this book was life or very nearly' (p. 188) and it is certainly the nearest that she will come to the physical, passionate and emotional side of existence.

As Letitia ponders how the book might end she gets a throat sickness and dies shortly after writing a note which reads: '*There is a brown-paper parcel in the summer-house*' (p. 188). This is not to prevent the book falling into the wrong hands, or for fear it might be found after her death, but rather she 'thought that if she got better, she could read the book in bed; if she got worse, she would ask the nurse to burn it' (p. 188). The self-pleasuring impulse and the desire to relocate reading from the seats opposite one another by the fire to the privacy of the sick bed, reveal that reading becomes a pseudo-sexual act for Letitia but, as in every aspect of her life thus far, the climactic moment is to be withheld. As in 'Priscilla and Emily Lofft' the surviving sister discovers the book but, rather than being shocked by its contents, Ismena reveals that she 'had read it in France long ago; she remembered who had given her the book, and wondering what had become of him she stood for a long time watch-

ing the trees waving in the garden' (p. 188). Moore's earlier version thus ends with a more human moment, perhaps: rather than end with the living sister destroy the work that has consumed her sibling, Moore allows a greater insight into the surprisingly single life that the sisters have lived together.

One might also detect in Moore's story a meta-narrative and autobiographical strand. It was Moore, after all, who took on the circulating libraries in the 1880s with his polemic pamphlet *Literature at Nurse; or Circulating Morals* in which, following a dispute with Mudie's over a scene of nudity in one of his texts, he rebutted the right of 'two ladies in the country'⁵¹ to determine the nature of literary morality. Moore's tale is therefore a cautionary one: it does not argue for respect towards such ladies' morality but rather to an awakening of the possibilities of life. The sadness of the tale is not to be found in the fact of the sister finding the book and, metaphorically, reading herself to death; it is in the pity that must be felt that the only passion she ever felt and the closest she ever came to such emotional intensity was through words rather than actions.

'Hugh Monfert'⁵²

The central and longest narrative of *In Single Strictness*, 'Hugh Monfert' is the story Moore forever struggled to write. Unable to produce a clear and frank portrayal of the repressed homosexuality which lies at the heart of the narratives *A Mere Accident* and 'John Norton', Moore continued to be haunted by the kernel of the tale. As Adrian Frazier points out, even in the 1920s Moore felt 'it was crucial that he should finally get the ... story right ... This time around Moore had decided to take the leap and simply make the hero come to consciousness of his love of men.'⁵³ Making that 'leap' remained difficult, and the 'Hugh Monfert' story has two drastically different endings, published only a matter of weeks apart.

'Hugh Monfert' is a radical rewriting of the original John Norton texts which maintains enough reference points to the earlier versions to make it possible to view them all as part of the same narrative; as with the character of Norton, Moore based Monfert on his one-time collaborator Edward Martyn.⁵⁴ Moore's revisions can be divided into those on a basic level (such as the renaming of Thornby Place to Wotton Hall), and other more drastic changes not only to the plot but also to the narrative's aesthetic framework. Moore moves the division between Monfert and his mother away from the Catholicism at the centre of the Norton texts and firmly into a debate about his failure to produce an heir. Religious conflict does not really arise as an issue in the story and its position as a signifier of Catholic celibacy and non-reproductive sexuality is displaced onto Monfert's obsession with a high-Victorian medieval idealism: the Latin authors which littered the text of 'John Norton' are replaced with Arthurian romance and the tales of knights and chaste courtships to be found in Provençal texts of the fourteenth century, a change signified also in the more Norman 'Monfert' surname.⁵⁵ This is more important than mere stylistics. Where the original formulation of the Norton text figured Catholicism-as-celibacy

and failed to translate this into an escape from desire and an effectual substitute for emotional/sexual satisfaction, Monfert's medievalism by its very idealistic nature offers an arousal of his attraction to the appropriately named Percy Knight. The son of Monfert's confessor, Dr Richard Knight, Percy becomes Monfert's companionate ideal.

As the story begins, Monfert has returned to his mother from college and is residing at his ancestral home, Wotton Hall. From the outset, he is described in no less flattering terms than John Norton as we look in upon a 'white-washed, cell-like room, [and] a young man of two-and-twenty, tall, thick-set, round-headed, and short-necked, whose curved nose hung flag-like over a long, loose mouth' (p. 33). Realizing that he is unable to change Mrs Monfert's determination to see him married and thus interfere with his chosen lifestyle – 'We cannot go on wrangling for ever about an heir'; 'I must be allowed to live my own life as it pleases me' (p. 40) – Monfert has called upon the assistance of Dr Knight, ironically to prevent him from becoming a religious servant: 'Dr Knight will save me from Minor Orders' (p. 33). The immediate disclosure of Monfert's reluctance to enter the church, except as a final resort to escape from his mother, places him in marked contrast to Norton, who eagerly surrounded himself with the protection of a religious institution. The reason for Monfert's antagonistic relationship with Catholicism is revealed in his fetishistic memories of his former teacher, located around the fact that, in the harsh world of Stanislaus College, Knight was the only figure who took the time to understand him. When Knight arrives, he brings his son, Percy, 'a youth of seventeen or eighteen, hollow-chested and pale, with large, eloquent eyes' (p. 38). The problem of how to escape from Mrs Monfert's plans to pair off her son is solved by Percy who, following Monfert's confession that he 'feels a restlessness I can't overcome', suggests that 'the best thing we can do is to go away' (p. 48). The young men engage in a pseudo-elopement, leaving in search of their ideal destination. Hugh has his heart set on Wales, 'for Wales was a country with a language, a history, and a literature' (p. 48). This search for a *separate* language, history and literature is, of course, of ultimate importance because Monfert is a character as yet unable to express himself, his true self, so separate from others, to anybody. Monfert's is a desire as yet without a voice and language of his own.

The subsequent section of the narrative is taken up in great detail concerning the two men's travels (pp. 50–83), which had involved Moore in relatively extensive research.⁵⁶ There are several minor incidents in these sections, but the text focuses largely upon Monfert's growing attraction to Percy's idealistic and sensual personality, a stark contrast to his own superficiality. Following a brawl between Percy and some local gamekeepers at a country inn, Hugh's passion for his 'knight' takes a manifest shape as he kneels in prayer beside the unconscious Percy's bed:

I pray thee, O my God, to spare his life, for I need him and cannot live without him. I am lonely in my life, as thou knowest well. O God, be merciful, be merciful this once to me. I have asked nothing of thee ever before, only that I might love and obey thy will ... for I am weak, as thou knowest, and if all things be taken from me, I may have

no strength to live, no strength to love thee as I would love thee, no strength to obey thee, but shall be a thing worthless in this world ... Let him live, let him live, let him live, and all my life shall be devoted to thee and in thanksgiving shall be spent, I swear it ... If he were to die to-night and I watching! I might be driven to – but the suicide dies in mortal sin and hell is punishment. But in a moment of madness ... and again he fell on his knees ... I cannot live without him ... (pp. 55–6)

Monfert's desperate and passionate need for Percy is self-evident. Monfert's ability to attach himself and his affections onto even the briefest period of human contact reveals the intensely frustrated nature of his emotional life up to this moment. The next morning he tells the local doctor that he has seen Percy coughing up blood during their long walks over recent days, and the sexual root of his desire becomes plain when he fantasizes that Percy will need a blood transfusion: 'he would have liked to give his blood to Percy ... He knew that the doctor had not asked for a transfusion of blood, but he liked to think he had, and he walked to and fro under the limes possessed by all the exaltations of sacrifice' (p. 60). Eventually, they reach their journey's end at St David's where, in between sketching and arguing about the relative values of certain architectural styles over others, they find a shared enthusiasm for Arthurian myth and legends of the Grail. For Percy such stories act as simultaneous representations of the vulgar realism and pure idealism of heterosexual love, but for Monfert such narratives are a means to outline an alternative version of what his life could have been: 'he knew that was why he had become so intensely conscious of the life he had always believed to be his own, a life that accident had estranged him from, casting him into one in which he would never be happy, for it was not himself ... I never can altogether surrender the belief that I am but the shadow of a knight who lived eight hundred years ago' (pp. 66–7). This wistful longing for a time which is not his own is repeated by Monfert at several points in the narrative. Indeed, he confesses to Percy that he is a man out of time with his world:

The mediaeval world, Hugh replied, is nearer to me; it is my present, the Greek world is my past; in the world around me I am an exile ... I sometimes think the world has had its way with me, come between me and my real self, a self that nobody will ever know, not even you, Percy, who are so sensitive and sympathetic. (p. 68)

The connection between Monfert's worlds – the 'real' present, as opposed to the medieval vision that he cannot escape from and the past he cannot ever truly flee to – lies in celibacy as a state of the highest attainment; the ability to survive emotionally and intellectually as 'a self that nobody will ever know'. As Monfert tells Percy, his view of the past is coloured by his present (sexual) condition: 'Chastity has always been the centre of my thoughts; sometimes among the stress of modern things the idea seems to fade a little, but it brightens again, and I feel that if I were to lose it, by some mischance, I should not be able to bear with my life' (p. 68).

While Percy is able to perceive the contradiction inherent in Monfert's 'admiration ... for two things so opposite' (p. 67), the difference between these two

versions of Monfert's 'otherness', his sense of belonging to either the Greek or medieval worlds, but never the present one, is of fundamental importance because it is the key to understanding Monfert's subsequent relationship with Percy's sister, Beatrice. Moore sublimates Monfert's unacceptable attraction towards Percy – which, given its homoerotic overtones and despite what Monfert may himself believe, is firmly Hellenistic (see the description of Percy as 'some early Italian sculpture imbued with the Greek spirit', p. 76) – into an idealistic, medieval, chivalric and chaste attraction towards Beatrice. That he should be able to transfer his attention from Percy to his sister is not that surprising or far-fetched. Monfert is, after all, already locked in a celibate but intensely emotional relationship with his mother: 'Loneliness perhaps tells the story of my life better than any other word, how it passes from day to day, two human beings, my mother and I, divided as no two are' (p. 68).

Monfert's desire towards Beatrice is largely not of a sexual nature, nor is it predicated on any marked resemblance between Beatrice and her brother, except in Monfert's mind. On first encountering Beatrice upon returning to Wotton Hall, after having left Percy with his father at the college, Monfert instantly identifies the differences between the siblings. Beatrice is all too able to see that Monfert's attitude towards her would be patently different, if, as she tells him, 'you hadn't known Percy first, or if you had not found a great deal of Percy in me' (p. 91). The attraction Monfert feels is based upon the fact that Percy told him he would like his sister, which in Monfert's mind has acted as a type of permission to merge Percy and Beatrice in his unconscious sexual fantasies while keeping his waking thoughts of them separate:

there were moments when he thought he would like to kiss her ... and all evening he took pleasure in the mien and motion of her body under her dress. He was caught at dawn in dreams, and all next day he sought to keep forbidden thoughts from his mind, thoughts of Beatrice and Percy – very often he could not tell of which he was thinking, and in his dreams they were often by him, singly and together. (p. 95)

Monfert's feelings towards Beatrice turn to the sexual only when his mind merges her with Percy. It is his chivalric attitude to her, prompted by his mother's exploitation of her son's Arthurian ideals, that leads to his proposal of marriage (p. 96); what Mrs Monfert terms the pushing 'over the brink' (p. 95). However, Monfert's fearfully anticipatory visions of the marriage night reveal that all Mrs Monfert's fears that he might turn out to be a dissolute figure like his father, sleeping with 'common women' (p. 43), prove false. Monfert's horror of the honeymoon where he will be 'finding her in bed' (p. 98) show him to be a man with no previous sexual experience, no doubt having been terrified by his mother's constant supply of stories about the state of the damned in Hell (pp. 44–5). The couple leave for their honeymoon after the ceremony, which, interestingly and perhaps tellingly, Moore deals with in the same way as the assault on Kitty in *Celibates*, by leaving an hiatus in the text, but shortly afterwards Mrs Monfert receives a telegram summoning her to their hotel in Calais. The

message arrives as Mrs Monfert is reflecting on Hugh's 'aversion' to women and Beatrice's remark that he kissed her as he would kiss his mother, which leads Mrs Monfert to state 'we both suspect him' (p. 101). The 'suspicion' is grounded in the mother's knowledge that her son's shrinking from physical intimacy is based on his sexuality and that women have never been, nor can ever be, the objects of his desire. Mrs Monfert had already suspected this for some time, having almost told Dr Knight earlier in the story that she 'would sooner Hugh sinned and repented than that he should remain a chaste man' (p. 45). As Beatrice tells her mother-in-law when she arrives at the hotel and it is clear that the marriage is not and cannot be consummated, 'it isn't a thing of the body, it's a thing of the mind' (p. 104).

Monfert himself subsequently denies in vehement terms that he is impotent to his father-in-law (p. 107); it is simply that his intense desire for one of Knight's children finds its heart in Percy, not Beatrice. Confessing his homosexuality to Knight and the fact that 'Percy knows nothing of my love' (p. 107), Monfert is taken aback by the prelate's stern advice to return to his wife. This Monfert cannot do and instead, while the priest leaves for France to explain to his daughter and Monfert's mother the steps that will have to be taken to resolve the situation, Hugh goes to stay at a small inn, lost in contemplation of the impending nullification of his marriage, and then returns to his mother at Wotton Hall. Ultimately, the story ends as unsatisfactorily as Moore's earlier attempts in *A Mere Accident* and *Celibates*. Although Moore does not transpose John Norton's statement that he will be an 'onlooker' (Volume 1, p. 127) into the thoughts of Hugh Monfert, the ending remains remarkably similar. Monfert remains alone, keeping his mother company and watching the world but not participating in it, noting the marriage of Beatrice and the death of Percy.

Immediately following the publication of *In Single Strictness* in 1922, Moore expressed disappointment that the denouement to 'Hugh Monfert' was still not able to satisfactorily bring to a close his need to tell the tale. In essence, it remained uncomfortably close to the conclusions of the earlier versions, with a protagonist who has fundamentally failed and resigned himself to a pessimistic withdrawal from active participation in the world around him. Dissatisfied, Moore had an alternative ending printed privately for his friends, and this was subsequently adopted as the ending when *In Single Strictness* was published in a second American edition the following year. The 1923 'Hugh Monfert' text is identical to that of the previous year's edition until the moment at which Monfert and Dr Knight part company.⁵⁷ At this point, Monfert again goes to the inn but this time dreams of the journey he had wanted to take at the very start of the story. Imagining himself accompanying Knight on the trip to Dover, Monfert becomes mesmerized by the names he can discern on 'a suitcase plastered with labels', names of far-off places like 'Tunis, Tangiers, Morocco, towns well known to him by name' (p. 258). Among the stickers Monfert partially discerns the name 'Laghouat' and has a vision which merges the events he foresees taking place between Knight, Beatrice and his mother, the three of them plotting his demise into the married state

(p. 259), with an exotic and erotic epiphany focused upon a young Arab boy who clasps 'Hugh's hand, saying: Amnez moi à Paris, je serai votre domestique et je vous aimerai bien' (p. 258).⁵⁸ This picture of the young Arab's offer of love is blurred in the final paragraph of the story, in which Monfert defiantly refuses to remain in subservience to his mother 'as an animal is to a trainer' (p. 259), and vows to travel to Italy, to Greece and to find that Arabic voice of friendship and the sexual liberation it represents. The fact that this remarkable departure from the ending of the previous version of 'Hugh Monfert' appeared in print only a few months after the first's publication signals just how unhappy Moore remained with his increasing number of failed attempts to write the Norton/Monfert story.

When *In Single Strictness* was reissued as *Celibate Lives* in 1927, the Monfert story was replaced with 'Albert Nobbs', the tale of a female cross-dresser. The reason Moore removed 'Hugh Monfert' from the book, according to the 'Advertisement' to the 1927 text, was that it did not have 'the melodic line';⁵⁹ it was, like Wilfrid Holmes's music, unharmonious because the subject matter and the writing style failed to be sufficiently in tune with one another to create the sense of completeness Moore needed to find in his later work. In this act of removal, therefore, Moore offered his final comment on the story that had occupied him for over forty years.

'Henrietta Marr'

If 'Hugh Monfert' is a story about the struggle within a man whose spiritual ideals are of an historical time older than that in which he lives, 'Henrietta Marr', who noticeably shares her initials with Monfert, is the corresponding narrative that deals with a character whose materialism rather than religiosity lies at the root of her celibate state. A rewriting of 'Mildred Lawson', like 'John Norton' a *Celibates* text, 'Henrietta Marr' is more visceral than its earlier incarnation,⁶⁰ and seeks more than the original text to alienate the reader from the protagonist. Moore does this from the outset in that the text plunges immediately into a scene of homecoming with the arrival of Henrietta from Paris, to be greeted by her brother Harold. The distance between the siblings, a recurrent theme throughout *In Single Strictness*, is pointed and lies partly in Henrietta's behaviour and partly in Harold's innate distrust of his sister's ability to make the right choice in life. One of the earliest and more telling insights we receive into Harold's mindset is the statement that: 'He was always a little nervous as to the class of man Fate would give him for a brother-in-law' (p. 118). Feeling that Henrietta's friends are always 'very middle-class' (p. 118) and recognizing that her relationships with men will be her downfall, Harold is nevertheless of the same ilk as his sister. Neither is seen to be able to commit to another individual, emotionally or psychologically.

The shared celibacy of siblings was something which Moore explored elsewhere in his work: one thinks, for instance, of the male protagonist of *The Lake* and his sisters, both of whom are in holy orders while he is a priest.⁶¹ But in Moore's Irish

stories the idea of an inherited or familial celibacy, while novel, is at least explicable in the context of the geographical location and social/religious factors. In neither 'Mildred Lawson' nor 'Henrietta Marr' is the shared sense of singularity between the siblings explained. It suggests something congenital, a genealogical antipathy to close human contact or a predestined celibate life; possibly a shared trauma at the parents' early deaths. Yet Moore is also always at pains to point out the visible *differences* between the generations in his description of individual character. Thus Harold is seen as close to the Marr family in terms of having a character which is very much inherited: 'Harold's density, or rather his lack of humour, his slow, methodical mind, had always been an amusement to his mother and sister, who looked upon him as a very pure Marr in mind and in body' (p. 119). Henrietta, on the other hand, is very much identified with her maternal heritage, so that she, unlike her brother, might be said to be a very *poor* Marr:

Etta threw back to her mother in many little ways, for a true Marr would not have picked up acquaintances in the National Gallery – an Orme (Mrs. Marr was an Orme) might ... Harold would, of course, ask to see her drawings, and the thought of showing drawings to Harold, who was a real Marr, more Marr than ever, more like himself, awoke the spirit of comedy in Etta ... (p. 120)

It is tempting to overanalyse such passages and see them as indications that Moore was uncomfortable with the idea of inherited characteristics, traits or even physical similarities between the generations, and to read them possibly autobiographically. But the point Moore is making here, it appears, is a far wider one. Just as in 'Wilfrid Holmes' reference was made to the way in which siblings viewed as failures or as out of place in the family community come to 'dread' their relations, so Moore is again enforcing the point that the family unit is the sphere in which the individual can be suffocated, repressed and defeated for life. The inability to move into one's own space, to assert that singularity and uniqueness as a being, means that one's energies are instead directed into futile pastimes or unproductive concerns that ultimately hamper any chance of success. While Henrietta can laugh at the 'Marr' in Harold, in such comedy there is also a tragedy because in rejecting one element of her shared inheritance with Harold she rejects a part of the whole; as Moore put it in 'Priscilla and Emily Lofft': 'we are acting a comedy with ourselves; within us one self is always mocking another self' (p. 248). The story of Henrietta Marr is one of self-mockery made all the more painful by the fact that the protagonist is utterly unaware of her own divided psyche.

Henrietta's contradictory nature is expressed in her attitude to what should be the vocation in which she seeks her fulfilment. The following illustration of Henrietta's thoughts on art and why she paints not only sum up her character, but reveal Moore's acute understanding of the fickle nature of those who not only cannot give themselves entirely to one subject or purpose, but who also do not live in any deep sense of the term but rather survive on the surface of things:

When I am in Paris I think of nothing but painting, for painting is being done all around me. But if I had a house in Berkeley Square I should think of other things besides painting. One likes to know and to be known, and if one has not a title one has to do something, to write a book or paint a picture. But what I don't understand are people with titles bothering themselves about books or pictures. Why aren't they satisfied with their titles? (p. 124)

For Henrietta, social status can replace all her attempts at an aesthetic lifestyle because the two positions are mutually exclusive in her world view; another similarity, though on contrary terms, between her character and Monfert's.

In thinking about her own life and relationships, Henrietta ponders the fate of one of the men with whom she had a flirtation before and during her time in Paris. Ralph Hoskin, another artist, had met her at the National Gallery and had helped to instruct her in painting. Attracted to Henrietta, he was not able to win her because of her eternal desire to be worshipped as an unrequiting lover, a *femme fatale*: 'It seemed unkind of her to leave Ralph, but if she wasn't going to marry him it would be better for her to go away for a time, for in no other way could she free herself from him' (p. 127). It was because of Hoskin that she went to Paris, although he followed her there and, while Henrietta 'had never known a man who did not respond if she held up her little finger' (pp. 128–9), he soon realized that there was little chance of her ever returning his love. Since that separation in Paris the two had not met, but now, having returned to England, Henrietta decides to go to the National Gallery, where she hears that Ralph is seriously ill.

When she visits his home Ralph is asleep and so she leaves a message with the woman attending on him, thinking to herself that 'the woman was, or had been, his mistress' (p. 129). Hoskin writes to Henrietta and they arrange for her to visit him again the following day. Her desire to see her former (prospective) lover, however, results not from a concern for his health but rather a need to confirm that his sickness is a result of longing for her, that the man will literally die for unreciprocated passion. Henrietta recognizes that such 'base thoughts and calculations' are not what others would feel, yet she claims not to be able to control them or care much anyway: 'I do not call them, nor do their promptings affect me' (p. 130). Hoskin almost goes so far as to confirm Henrietta's belief that she has exerted such a powerful influence over him that he is dying for her when he says, referring ostensibly to his work but also to his relationship with her, that 'disappointment, I think, is as often the cause of a man's death as anything else' (p. 132). The frigidity of Henrietta's emotional state is revealed in her response to this confession: 'Etta longed for tears, but her eyes remained dry' (p. 132). Even the longing for tears here is to be questioned, for it is suggestive more of the recognition that tears are what others would expect in these circumstances, or that they should be a part of the performance of grief at parting, rather than any intense feeling on her side.

When Ralph dies Henrietta's 'desire to see her dead lover was an instinct' (p. 134), suggesting a kind of conqueror's need to view the field of battle. On returning to the house, however, she is confronted by Ellen Gibbs, whose scathing comments

in response to Henrietta's remarks about the relationship she had with Hoskins are a direct attack on the pretence of Henrietta's morality. As Gibbs admits being Hoskins's mistress she also attacks Henrietta's virtue:

I was his mistress? Well, so I was. It appears that you were not. But I should like to know which of us two is the most virtuous, which has done the least harm. I made him happy; you killed him ... I dare say you were virtuous, more or less, as far as your own body is concerned. (p. 134)

After this confrontation, Henrietta returns to France with a friend where she engages in a flirtation with the owner of the art studio in which she studies, Davau, who eventually dismisses her from his class because of her frigid and yet undeniably public attempt to exhibit him as another man in her thrall. Following her dismissal, Henrietta moves from 'boarding-house to boarding-house' (p. 138) until she is invited to Barbizon by her friend Elsie. On arrival she is told that 'There's a fellow here who might interest you; his painting would, even if he failed to respond to the gentle platonism of your flirtations' (p. 139). Seeing this as something of a challenge, Henrietta sets about flirting with the man, Morton Mitchell. They exchange sniping witticisms about the role of sex and gender in art, with Henrietta declaring that 'In the studio a woman puts off her sex. There's no sex in art', to which Mitchell responds 'There's no sex in art, and a woman would be very foolish to let anything stand between her and her art' (p. 141). The dialogue, which bristles with sexual tension on Morton's side, hides a more serious element, namely Henrietta's ability to reconstruct to her own ends visions of her past which do not reflect anything of the truth but rather her desire to act the part of victim. Even when seemingly at her most self-reflective, Henrietta is revealed to be all shallowness and insincerity: 'I wonder if I am selfish, Etta continued reflectively. Sometimes I think I am, sometimes I think I am not. I've suffered so much; my life has been all suffering. There's no heart left in me for anything. I wonder what shall become of me. I often think I shall commit suicide. Or I might go into a convent' (p. 144). She even lies to Morton about the final encounter she had with Ellen Gibbs, commenting 'She said very little. She was very nice to me. She could see that I was a good woman' (p. 149), even while she accuses the woman who cared for the man she spurned of poisoning Hoskin in a far-fetched plot including secret societies and assassins.

But, while Henrietta is prepared to use her ability to tell fabricated versions of her own life, and this is the closest she ever comes to true artistry, she is not so willing to be used by others when the material gains she seeks are unlikely to be achieved. She refuses to become Morton's mistress, for example, but she does offer to become his wife, almost pleading that 'I will not do what you ask me. But I'll marry you?' (p. 150). On the lookout for financial and social security, Henrietta seeks to find a man who can offer her both in return for as little commitment or emotional investment on her part as possible. She appears to have found her ideal match in the Comte de Malmédy, a rising figure in politics with influence, money and – conveniently allowing Henrietta not to become too attached too soon for her purposes – a wife.

After a ball in which it becomes clear that Henrietta is if not already the Comte's mistress then apparently close to being so, Morton Mitchell reflects on her as she leaves the party with her prospective lover:

as Etta went upstairs, three or four steps in front of the Comte, Morton saw her so clearly that the thought struck him that he had never seen her before. She appeared in that instant as a toy, a trivial toy made of coloured glass, and he wondered why he had been attracted by this bit of coloured glass. (p. 155)

For Morton, Henrietta has become a material object, a trinket, both physically fragile and emotional incredibly hard because lacking in feeling and compassion. Mitchell is tormented by his thoughts of Henrietta, though not to the extent that Hoskin once was, and as he discusses her frequently with her friends they offer him an insight into the coldness and frigid nature of her character, with one telling him directly that 'She can't hate, Morton, for she can't love' (p. 157).

When the Comte is appointed to be Governor of Algeria, Henrietta goes with him and his wife. On her return to France, she goes to visit Morton, who has spent most of the time she has been away pining for her to come back. In Morton's studio he pressures her into answering whether the Comte was or is her lover: 'No, he was not my lover in the sense that you mean, and I don't think I could give myself to a man with any conviction unless I was going to have a child by him' (p. 160). Henrietta reveals that the Comtesse has had a child by another man but, as Morton knows, she is now ill, perhaps mortally, and Henrietta expresses a vague acknowledgment that perhaps if his wife dies the Comte will marry her.

Several weeks later, while Morton and Henrietta's friends Cissy and Elsie are dining at the hotel in which she is lodging, they see Henrietta receive a letter which, from her expression, they guess contains 'evil news' (p. 162). The following day, Henrietta is found dead in her bedroom, 'probably from heart failure' (p. 163), but with the more likely possibility of suicide hanging over the death. As the three friends go through Henrietta's belongings they piece together from the letter they had seen her reading the previous night what had happened. She had written in condolence to the Comte at his wife's death, a letter 'full of pathetic sentiments about his dead wife, ending up by reminding him he had promised her that if ever he was free he would marry her' (p. 164). Unsurprisingly, the Comte had cast her off and this action presumably made her realize the futility of her life. Deliberately leaving such evidence on display, as one of her former friends rightly concludes, 'she lived in vanity, and she died in it' (p. 164).

The celibacy of Moore's story is really concerned with frigidity. In this respect it is quite distinct from the earlier 'Mildred Lawson' because in that text the protagonist had far more of a social background to her actions. Where 'Mildred Lawson' begins with the young woman in feverish sleep because of the ideas and thoughts stimulated by Mrs Fergus, the Oxford educated exemplar of the 'New Woman', 'Henrietta Marr' is devoid of a chronological substance: there is no explanation for her behaviour, there is no awakening to the fact that women can use their position

to gain advantage. There is also no psychological depth to the character: while Mildred might be seen as a casualty of the period, the hysterical degenerate, Henrietta is far more the victim of her own lack of self-awareness, inwardness and morality. Noticeably, Henrietta is aware of sexuality and the power her own sensual nature gives her over members of the opposite sex in a way which is quite alien to the other individuals in Moore's collection. Yet the knowledge of what sexuality means, the way in which Henrietta is able to and deliberately does play with the emotions of men like Hoskin and Mitchell is, as Ellen Gibbs pointed out, more immoral than it would be if she was giving her body to them. The fact that she knows what she does and is aware that she cannot ever really commit herself to another – very early in the story she lends a dress to her friend Elsie with the words, 'promise not to return it to me. I cannot abide anybody's sweat but my own' (p. 121), underlining her inability to feel another's physicality – does not make her any more knowledgeable about herself. Her death therefore results not from inner despair about what she is but rather from the shock that she is no longer what the Comte wants; the trinket is no longer of value, and the valueless is dead.

'Sarah Gwynn'

The final story of *In Single Strictness*, considered by one critic to be 'the best story in the collection, and the only entirely new one',⁶² 'Sarah Gwynn' provides a stark contrast to the moral absence found in 'Henrietta Marr'. It is the narrative of a woman compelled by a sense of duty and morality to forever forgo her own happiness in order to atone for the sins of another.

The story begins with Dr O'Reardon at home in Ely Place, Dublin, as a visitor calls. Sarah Gwynn has come to see if O'Reardon has a vacancy for a domestic servant. He knows from a female friend the young woman's story: 'You were in a convent for nearly ten years, and because you answered the Sub-Prioress, or maybe the Prioress herself, sharply, they bundled you out' (p. 168). O'Reardon expects the woman to feel anger at her treatment by the nuns, but instead, characteristically, Gwynn takes the responsibility upon herself, declaring 'all the blame is with me' (p. 168). Offering her employment, the doctor forgets her by the following day, only taking notice when he sees a new figure in his household: 'On looking under the white cap he recognised the anxious face of the vagrant nun whom he had seen overnight, asking himself again what animal she resembled, if it was the white and red that had put a weasel into his head. But a weasel is white underneath and red above. Or was it her gait? She seemed to run forward and to stop suddenly, just like a weasel' (p. 170). In spite of his less than charitable assessment of Gwynn's animalistic, even rodent-like appearance, O'Reardon acknowledges that she turns out to be an excellent servant and he can only admire the improvement in his contentment with things as time passes: 'every month he discovered new qualities ... he noticed improvements everywhere' (p. 171). These displays of conscientiousness, ability and hard work, however, conflict with 'other reports' which reach him from 'friends [who] had seen Sarah late

at night in Sackville Street and Grafton Street and round Trinity College ... loitering, peering into the faces of the passers-by like one in search of somebody' (p. 171). Leaping to a conclusion which perhaps reflects on how the 'weasel' image he first saw in Sarah has stayed with him, O'Reardon thinks that her experience at the 'convent had driven her to lead a double life – his parlourmaid during the day, a whore on her evenings out' (p. 172). O'Reardon's stark formulation of Sarah Gwynn's employment options reflects an awareness of the position of women from a particular background at the time, but also betrays the doctor's assumptions (and those of his class more generally) about the traditional spheres of female activity: Gwynn is not married, so wife and mother are out of the question, and having tried factory work and the religious life, the only possibilities for her are domestic service or prostitution.

As O'Reardon writes a letter to the friend who told him of Sarah to enquire about these apparent contradictions in her character, she comes into the room and states that she will be leaving at the end of the month unless he will allow her to go sooner. Sarah then pours forth her story to him as if he is a kind of secular confessor, able perhaps to offer her the forgiveness and absolution she cannot ask from the church itself. Sarah was born Catholic in Protestant County Down, and was persecuted because of it. She left her home for Belfast then headed to Dublin. There she met a girl named Phyllis, who took her in and got her a job at the biscuit factory where she worked. Phyllis, to make ends meet, like many other girls, spent her nights on the streets as a prostitute, but Sarah decided to take in sewing rather than work in this way, and as she carried out her evening work she began to watch from the window a convent's garden. During a subsequent strike, Sarah spent time in the convent at Mass and was encouraged by a priest to enter orders. She was persuaded to go to a convent in Wales, but she had no money with which to make the journey. One of Phyllis's male friends offered to pay for Sarah to go to a convent if she would pray for him and his sins. Thus Sarah's service was bought like a commodity and she was forced to sell her soul in the same way (and to the same man) as Phyllis had exchanged her body.

Not long after reaching the Welsh convent, Sarah's guilt overwhelmed her and she confessed the details of the transaction to the Mother Prioress, who in turn told Sarah that prayer was the best course available. While Sarah was able to endure her fate, the arrival of a new prioress, following the death of the one who had advised Sarah, changed the nature of the convent community. The younger sisters were made to look after the sick older ones, the convent numbers dwindled and no novices arrived: each new burden of work that Sarah had to undertake gave her less time for prayer and this weighed heavily on her mind. Finally, after an incident in which she was chastized by the Mother Prioress for accidentally dropping something, Sarah snapped and complained to her superior that 'the nunnery was no house of prayer but just a sweaters' den' (p. 179). This is why Sarah returned to Dublin and is why she spends her free hours roaming the lower districts of the city searching for Phyllis. Doctor O'Reardon suggests that she has no reason to leave him, particularly given the fact that the gardener has become close to her and clearly wishes to offer her mar-

riage. It is precisely because of the temptation of a happy future that Sarah wishes to leave, which, reluctantly, O'Reardon allows. In so doing he recognizes that Sarah has become as much a servant of celibacy as she ever was to him or to the Welsh convent; as one reviewer put it, for Sarah Gwynn 'celibacy had become a condition of duty'.⁶³ Celibacy has become her overarching mode of living to the point where any prospect of happiness with another human being or opportunity for emotional fulfilment is a threat rather than a liberation.

As one critic has noted, the story's 'sympathy for the fate of women – who could choose no course of life other than that of domestic, sweatshop worker, prostitute, nun, or wife',⁶⁴ marks out 'Sarah Gwynn' as an important text of the period and of Moore's *oeuvre*. Like the novel *Esther Waters* (1894), this story displays Moore's ability to explore the realities of life for women who were oppressed by a society that made choices for them over which they had very little control. In this case, the religious dogma of Sarah Gwynn's youth, which led to her childhood persecution and her need to escape the confines of her home town for the city, is revealed to maintain its hold on her destiny even after she has seemingly fled its grasp. The story is a gentle tale of regret and lost opportunities, interesting as much for its sympathetically drawn incidental details as for the plot itself. Thus we might see O'Reardon as a briefly glimpsed celibate himself when, dreaming of his own desire to be an artist when he was younger, he ruefully thinks early on in the story: 'A might-have-been lives on in the heart, almost a reproach, and the memories of the art that he abandoned and that could never now be his, put the ex-nun out of the doctor's mind' (p. 170). Such a self-reflective moment does not, however, negate the fact that in the celibate economy of the text, O'Reardon's voice takes precedence over that of the woman whose tales he hears and which Moore relates. O'Reardon is therefore as much a passive observer of the world around him as Sarah Gwynn: his encounter with her takes place within the domestic safety of his own home, she is subservient to him and the *frisson* of sexual curiosity aroused in the tales of her night walks into disreputable areas of the city, known even to those of the respectable standing of O'Reardon, might be seen to reflect on how he, too, leads an uncommitted life as 'other' to the norms of heterosexuality and marriage.

'Albert Nobbs'

The final story in this volume is 'Albert Nobbs', the replacement text for 'Hugh Monfert' when the collection *In Single Strictness* was republished as *Celibate Lives*. It has been rightly claimed as 'a little-known masterpiece of the short story'.⁶⁵

The story inherits its framework from *A Story-Teller's Holiday* (1918), hence the opening section of the text and the never explained references to the narrator's interlocutor 'Alec'. In several ways the story is out of place in *Celibate Lives* because it feels far more like one of Moore's autobiographical sketches than it does a story in the same framework as 'Wilfrid Holmes' or 'Sarah Gwynn'. The narrator's presence as a character in the text and the commentary on the telling and value of the story at

beginning and end problematize the nature of the narrative in ways not encountered in the rest of the collection. Having said that, it does share the same central theme of celibacy as the other stories in the volume and, perhaps uniquely in terms of Moore's stories on this subject, the celibate state of the protagonist is partly accidental and partly economic, rather than deriving entirely from a psychological or moral reason. Yet the narrative itself is deeply psychological in its analysis of Albert Nobbs's life and in the way in which it gives readers an insight into the peculiarities of the character's thinking and motivation. While Moore declares to Alec early on, as he elaborates on his childhood memories of Moore Hall and Morrison's Hotel, that 'I am telling you these things for the pleasure of looking back and nothing else' (p. 189), the story of 'Albert Nobbs' is conjured up almost from a sense of childhood unease at the 'odd' or 'peculiar' nature of the grown-up world. As Moore puts it, Albert Nobbs 'was the ugliest thing I'd seen out of a fairy-book' (p. 190). This is fitting because the core of Nobbs's story is firmly rooted in childhood trauma and it is the early and ultimate rejection of Nobbs while still very young which determines so many of the character's responses to adult events.

The narrative proper begins when Albert is asked by the proprietor of Morrison's to share his bed with a painter, Hubert Page, who frequently stays at the hotel but for whom there is not currently a room available. After firing off a series of excuses as to why he would prefer not to share his bed, including the fact that 'as I've never slept with anybody in my life, it may be that I shall be tossing about all night, keeping you awake' (p. 191), his manageress insists the two men must be companions for the night. After they retire and fall asleep, Albert is awoken in the middle of the night by the bites of a flea brought into the bed by Hubert. As Albert is about to kill the flea, Hubert wakes up and declares: 'Lord amassy! what is the meaning of this? Why, you're a woman!' (p. 192). Hubert persuades Albert to tell the story of how she came to adopt a man's guise. Albert says that 'the story seems to me to be without a beginning' (p. 193), but gradually reveals the reasons for her transvestism.⁶⁶ While she does not know who her parents were she was brought up by a nurse who 'hinted more than once that my people were grand folk' (p. 193). The nurse was paid 'a big allowance ... a hundred a year' (p. 193) to cover Albert's education and living expenses, but 'when they died the allowance was no longer paid' (p. 193). This resulted in Albert's withdrawal from her convent school and the need for her and her nurse to undertake work as domestics. In the Temple, Albert was maid to a Mr Congreve who was friendly to the young girl and lent Albert books. But one day Albert discovered a letter to Congreve from a woman in Nice. The woman arrived and began, in Albert's eyes, to disrupt the domestic routine between herself and Congreve: 'all my anger went out against the woman, and not against Mr. Congreve; in my eyes he seemed to be nothing more than a victim of a designing woman' (p. 195). Following the death of Albert's nurse, she began to contemplate killing herself, so weary had she become of the sadness and loneliness of her life. It was at this point that a female friend suggested that Albert dress as a man in order to earn extra money as a waiter.