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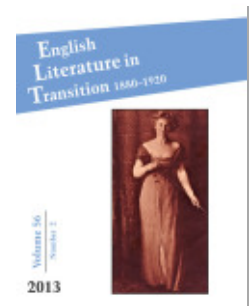
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Michele McCall

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# Honor Woulfe and George Moore: “Not a Woman that a Man Forgets”

MICHELE MCCALL  
Austin, Texas

WHEN I FIRST VISITED my husband’s family home in 1983 I was surprised to see an enormous life-size portrait of a woman leaning against a wall in their living room. Like everyone else who sees the painting for the first time, I said “Who is that?” My then future husband, Joe McCall, told me it was his Great-Aunt Honor. He had heard that she was an interesting and unconventional woman but he did not know many details about her life. The oil painting is six and one-half feet tall and three feet wide and it shows a woman in a long gown that is falling slightly off her shoulders. The most unusual feature is that she is holding a large peacock feather diagonally across her body (Fig. 1). When I first saw the painting it was so dark and dirty that the artist’s signature was not visible, and no one in the family knew who the artist was. The canvas was hanging loosely in a plain black wooden frame and it was torn in one spot. Still, there was something about the expression in her eyes and the luminosity of her skin that made me feel it was special.

When my husband inherited the painting earlier this year we took it to be restored, a process we were told would take several months. Meanwhile, I decided to write a short biography about Honor to keep with the portrait so that future generations of our family would know who she was. The information I discovered has gradually brought Honor to life.

Lois McCall, my husband’s ninety-year-old aunt by marriage, is the last living member of our family to have known Honor. Lois has a remarkable memory and was happy to share her genealogy records and old family photographs. It was she who told me that Honor had been friends with the Irish novelist George Moore and that he had written a story about her called “Euphorion in Texas.” After reading the story I found a 1992 article in *ELT* called “On His Honor: George Moore and Some Women” by Adrian Frazier.<sup>1</sup> The article explored the relation-

ships Moore had with several women, but especially his relationship with my husband's great-aunt, Honor Woulfe. I was thrilled to read the part about Honor and Moore discussing their portraits because the portrait she described was clearly the same one my husband had inherited. She also mentioned that the artist was Charles Courtney Curran (1861–1942), a noted American impressionist painter. His works are displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among others.<sup>2</sup>

The same issue of *ELT* also included a never-before-published essay called "George Moore and the Amenities" that Honor wrote several years after his death.<sup>3</sup> No one in the family knew about the essay and we enjoyed getting to hear Honor's "voice" as she spoke fondly about her friend.

In March 2012 I sent an email to Professor Frazier because I thought news of Honor's portrait might be of interest to him. Over the next several months I sent him copies of the family photographs I found and kept him updated on my search for details about Honor's life. The information I have about Moore and his work comes from Professor Frazier and the following is a result of our combined research.

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When George Moore's "Euphorion in Texas" was first published in 1914 it was greeted with skepticism by literary critics. In the story a young woman from Texas travels to Ireland to ask an author she admires to be the father of her child so that she can "bring literature to Texas." It seemed to be autobiographical and was included in later versions of *Memoirs of My Dead Life*, but many people found the premise hard to believe. Critics debated whether or not the character



Fig. 1 Portrait of Honor Woulfe  
McCall Family Private Collection 1912

of Honor was a real person and the story was generally considered to be another one of Moore's sexual fantasies. This article should put those doubts to rest.

In Waco, Texas, the publication of "Euphorion in Texas" caused quite a scandal. It was a conservative community and the home of Baylor University, a Baptist university that is one of the oldest in the state. Like the Honor in the story, Honor Woulfe and her two sisters owned a bookstore. They didn't live in the city of Austin, but their store was located on Austin Street. All three sisters were strong, independent, unmarried women who frequently traveled to Europe. Honor was also known to be a friend of Moore, so the similarities to the story were impossible to ignore.

Once you know more about Honor Woulfe it's easy to see why she inspired George Moore to create the character of Honor in "Euphorion in Texas." Honora Euphrasia Woulfe was born on 3 April 1871 in Streator, Illinois, although she lied about her age for most of her life, claiming to have been born in 1876. She was the third of eight children born to Richard Downey Woulfe and Margaret Shine Lyons, who were both born in Ireland. Honor's father bred French Norman horses, as his father before him had done in Ireland. He died when Honor was fourteen, after a stallion kicked him in the head.

Several years after her father's death her mother moved the family to Texas and they eventually settled in Waco, which is about 100 miles north of Austin, the hometown of the Honor in "Euphorion in Texas." At the time Waco was a large, prosperous city whose economy was primarily based on cattle, cotton, and wool. With three railroad lines going through the city it was also a major transportation hub. Honor's brother Daniel owned a bookstore and gift shop in downtown Waco called Woulfe & Co. and his three sisters, Honor, Marie and Aileen, worked there with him from time to time. At some point Daniel quit the business and the Woulfe sisters ran it together. One picture postcard I found shows the lower level of the store with a line of Victrolas for sale in addition to books, and another postcard shows the Glad Tea Room on the second floor.

My husband and I do live in Austin so Professor Frazier directed us to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, which maintains a collection of Moore's books and papers that had proven helpful to his research. Among other things, the collection contains some letters Moore wrote to Honor, as well as the original copy of the essay she wrote about him after his death. According to "George Moore and the

Amenities,” Honor first met Moore in 1907. She doesn’t mention their ages, but he would have been fifty-five in 1907 and her true age would have been thirty-six. Although she may have lied to him about her age, she still doesn’t fit the profile of the shy but determined young woman in “Euphorion in Texas.”

In a letter to Honor dated 21 October 1914, Moore says: “I am sending you *The (English) Review*—the number contains a story by me: *Euphorion in Texas*, which *cannot* fail to interest you. Several letters came from Texas asking for more precise information regarding Euphorion.”<sup>4</sup> His letter to her dated 6 August 1915 shows that the story became a running joke between them. It says in part:

I often think of you and the baby, who I suppose is now growing up into a fine boy. But will he become a cow puncher or will he found a literature in Texas remains to be seen. I would prefer him to write music. Do write and tell me if he shows any aptitude. If he stands up at the piano and composes.

In “George Moore and the Amenities” Honor wrote:

A friend who had previously read *Euphorion* came into my shop to see me and laughingly asked me where my son was hidden away. I answered in the same banter, “Oh he is up on a ladder somewhere seeking out a first edition of his *Papa’s Confessions*—you see he is only two days old and cannot yet reach the high shelves.”<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the character in “Euphorion,” Honor never had children. She seems to have had several lovers, but she never married. Only one of her siblings had children who lived to adulthood: Aileen Woulfe McCall, my husband’s grandmother.

It seems very likely from reading Moore’s letters to Honor and the essay she wrote about him that they once had a love affair and that over the years their relationship developed into a warm, lasting friendship. The earliest letter the library has in its collection was written in 1908 and the last in 1932, a year before his death. One of the most romantic of the existing letters he wrote to her is dated 2 June 1917. It was apparently written in reply to one she had written to him and it says in part: “The letter before me is the letter of a woman to a man whom she knows to be a man, and this letter is the letter of a man to a woman whom he knew to be a woman. A sexual memory is a wonderful memory, it transcends all other memories, and I am sorry for those who have not tasted the poetry of sex....”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, none of the letters Honor wrote to Moore are known to have survived.

Honor first demonstrated her flair for the dramatic as an elocutionist and when she was younger she often gave public performances.

A newspaper notice published in 1897 announcing one of her dramatic readings described her as an “elocutionist of merit and a woman of very attractive personality.”<sup>7</sup> She had an abiding interest in art, literature and the theatre. According to her essay about Moore, he strongly encouraged her to write the story of “Euphorion in Texas” from the woman’s point of view, but she declined and he eventually gave the job to James Whitall. Although he collaborated extensively with Whitall, Moore was not happy with the manuscript and *How Literature Came to Texas* was never published.

Honor was not a woman of great wealth or beauty (Figs. 2 and 3), but she had an eclectic assortment of interesting friends, some of them quite famous. In her essay about Moore, Honor said that she loved to travel as much as he hated it and very casually mentioned that on one of her trips to London she had come directly from Mexico, where she was received at the Castle Chapultepec by “Diaz.” We don’t know how she managed the introduction but Castle Chapultepec is the name of the opulent presidential palace in Mexico City and “Diaz” was Porfirio Diaz, the dictator who ruled Mexico for approximately thirty-five years. In a letter Honor received in 1943 from the Irish poet Padraic Colum he recalled the time when his friend the Irish nationalist Tom Kettle introduced him to her.<sup>8</sup> She was also a good friend of May French Sheldon, the woman who mounted a solo expedition into the East African jungle in 1891 and wrote a book about her experiences.<sup>9</sup> And of course



Fig. 2 Honor Woulfe

McCall Family Private Collection

Date Unknown



Fig. 3 Honor Woulfe

McCall Family Private Collection

Date Unknown

there was Moore, who was Honor's friend for more than twenty-five years.

One of the many mysteries about Honor's life is the question of how she came to own an enormous Chinese screen which was commissioned for the Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago in 1893. The screen is nine feet wide, seven feet tall and weighs 1,500 pounds. It has a massive, intricately carved black teak base with vertical supports on each end that are attached to a framed, embroidered Chinese silk tapestry. Honor loaned the screen to the Texas Memorial Museum at the University of Texas in 1940 and in the description she provided to the museum she said it had originally been purchased for the exposition by a group of Chinese businessmen for \$10,000.

Piecing together the records of her life, it becomes clear that Honor had a wide variety of interests. Records of numerous transatlantic voyages and correspondence addressed to her at elegant hotels in New York, Dublin and London were interspersed between the following events:

In 1913 Honor copyrighted a one-act play called "What is Love?"<sup>10</sup>

In 1915 she was the president of the Waco Business Woman's League and at a celebration commemorating the completion of a natural gas system she gave a speech titled "The Users of Natural Gas."<sup>11</sup>

In the mid 1920s she owned and operated the Main Hotel in Corsicana, Texas, during an oil boom. Corsicana is about fifty-five miles northeast of Waco. Lois McCall says that Honor and her sisters often cooked meals for the guests themselves.<sup>12</sup> Honor may have also invested in the oil business, as one newspaper article said that she was departing for Mexia, Texas where she had "promising oil interests."<sup>13</sup>

In the 1930s she worked for a time in Hollywood, presumably as a writer. In a letter dated 21 January 1932, Moore wrote: "My dear Honor—dear Film Maker! I received a letter from you in August in which you tell me that you are on the films and have succeeded in obtaining the recognition which you craved for so long, and which eluded you."

In the 1940s, when she was past 70, she worked as a research assistant to a university professor who was writing a book about the sculptress Elisabeth Ney and her husband, Edmund Montgomery.<sup>14</sup>

In the latter part of her life Honor had persistent health and financial problems and she did not travel much. She lived in Chicago with her sister Marie in a three-story brownstone where the two elderly women were frequent hosts to family and friends who visited the city. One cousin wrote a letter in 1972 recalling her memories of visiting their home as a young girl. She particularly remembered the inter-

esting furnishings, including the portrait, the screen and Marie's antique golden harp, and said their home "seemed like something out of a novel."<sup>15</sup>

Honor died in 1951 at the age of eighty with many memories of the fascinating life she had lived to the fullest. As George Moore said in a letter he wrote to her in 1932, "I never forget, Honor: you are not a woman that a man forgets."<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

1. Adrian Frazier, "On His Honor: George Moore and Some Women," *ELT*, 35.4 (1992), 423–45.
2. The restoration uncovered the artist's signature and date: "Charles C. Curran 1912."
3. Honor E. Woulfe, "George Moore and the Amenities," *ELT*, 35.4 (1992), 447–61.
4. George Moore to Honor Woulfe, 21 October 1914, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRHRC), University of Texas, Austin. The word in parentheses is difficult to read in the original handwritten letter, but the story was first published in *The English Review* in July of 1914.
5. Woulfe, "George Moore and the Amenities," 452.
6. George Moore to Honor Woulfe, 2 June 1917; *Ibid.*, 439.
7. *Houston Daily Post*, 7 February 1897.
8. Letter from Padraic Colum to Honor Woulfe, 12 September 1943 (HRHRC).
9. Letters from May French Sheldon to Honor Woulfe written between 1921–1934, owned by Lois McCall. May French Sheldon, *Sultan to Sultan: Adventures of a Woman Among the Masai and Other Tribes of East Africa* (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1892). Lois McCall owns a signed first edition copy that belonged to Honor.
10. United States Copyright, "What is Love?"—a one act play in two scenes, by H. E. Woulfe / 12 p. fol. Typewritten 9286, 1 c. April 24, 1913; D. 33044; Honor E. Woulfe, Waco, Texas.
11. "Completion of Gas System Celebrated," *Dallas Morning News*, 1 April 1915.
12. The 1924 and 1926 Corsicana City Directories list Honor as the proprietor of the Main Hotel at 124 W. 6th Avenue. The 1924 directory says "Woulfe, Honor. prop. Main Hotel, rms. same."
13. "Texans in New York," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 30 October 1921.
14. Vernon Loggins, *Two Romantics and Their Ideal Life* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1946). Honor's name is mentioned in the acknowledgements. Lois McCall owns a first edition copy that belonged to Honor.
15. Letter from Doris Craigmile to Lois McCall dated December 9, 1972.
16. Letter from George Moore to Honor Woulfe, 21 January 1932, HRHRC.