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Painting, Politics and Propaganda

Maebh O'Regan

In nineteenth-century Ireland one associates the profession of painter with the Protestant faith and the leisured class, and a glance at the list of the members of the Royal Hibernian Academy would appear to confirm this view.[1] Equally, one might assume that all Protestants supported British Rule in Ireland, and yet it is an established fact that many of the staunchest advocates of Home Rule, such as Charles Stuart Parnell, were members of the Church of Ireland. While a number of Irish nineteenth-century artists conform to this paradigm, a study of three painters who used their art to give visual expression to their disparate political convictions suggests a diversity of political beliefs that challenges the stereotype. The artists in question are Aloysius O'Kelly, Richard Moynan and John Lavery. All three were born in Ireland between 1853 and 1856. Crucially, all three completed their initial training with a sojourn in a well-known Parisian art establishment. And all three used their artistic skills to articulate their political beliefs.

The most senior member of the group is Aloysius O'Kelly.[2] He was born in Dublin in July 1853, the youngest of five children. His father ran a saddle-making business but his early death during the artist's childhood meant radical change for the O'Kelly family as his mother emigrated to London to be near her relatives. One of his cousins, the sculptor John Lawlor, was working on the Albert Memorial at that time. This connection with the visual arts helped determine career paths in the O'Kelly household as three of the five children became artists.

O'Kelly reached Paris the year of the First Impressionist Exhibition (1874) when he was twenty-one years old and began his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. His tutor, sculptor and painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, is now primarily celebrated for his Orientalist paintings rendered in meticulous detail.[3] O'Kelly's

[1] Ann M. Stewart, *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts: Index of Exhibitors 1826–1979* (3 vols, Dublin, 1985–87).

[2] Niamh O'Sullivan, *Aloysius O'Kelly: Re-orientations: Paintings, Politics and Popular Culture* (Dublin, 1999); Margarita Cappock, 'Aloysius O'Kelly and the Illustrated London News', *Irish Arts Review*, 12 (1996), 85.

[3] James Thomson, *The East Imagined, Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth-Century*

other teacher at the *Ecole* was the Spanish-trained artist Léon Bonnat whose outstanding talent as a figure painter led to his appointment as the director of the *Ecole* after the death of Paul Dubois.[4]

Like many other students in the *Ecole*, O'Kelly moved on to Brittany in 1876 to paint out of doors (known as working from the motif), where he made narrative paintings of peasant subject matter, depicting genre scenes demonstrating a knowledge of Dutch seventeenth-century masters. He also embarked on a series of observational images that documented the local landscape and peasant lifestyle. Many of the everyday activities of the peasants, their devotional rites and rituals, their occupations of fishing and farming, must have appeared familiar to O'Kelly as it echoed rural life in Ireland. The French subject matter must also have suggested the possibility of similar topics within an Irish context.

O'Kelly moved to the west of Ireland in 1881 in the prestigious role of an artist with *The Illustrated London News*. His mission was to document events during the Land War and, in this capacity, he made visual reports relating to the effects of English rule in Ireland. 'An Eviction in the West of Ireland', which appeared in *The Illustrated London News* on 19 March 1881, shows the forced removal of three generations of one family from a well-kept Irish cottage.[5] The family's possessions consisted of a bed-head, a milk churn, a table, chairs, buckets and bundles of clothes, all of which lie in disarray in the foreground. An elderly woman and a child bemoan their fate while other members of the group, including a mother carrying an infant, look towards the cottage door, where an elderly man is being escorted from the premises by a uniformed officer. The legal aspect of the eviction is emphasised by the landlord's agent, who is mounted on his horse facing into the scene. His position of visual dominance is reinforced by a row of constables flanking the building on the right hand side of the composition. This line of armed guards contrasts with a group of peasants positioned on the other side of the cabin. The locals look on in horror at the event, their body language suggesting anger and frustration.

O'Kelly's black and white illustration approaches the subject of eviction in a very different manner to Lady Elizabeth Butler's 1890 painting of the same subject. Butler's dramatic depiction of a post-eviction scene, entitled *Evicted*,

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Painting (Dublin, 1988).

[4] Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists, Delacroix to Matisse: European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London, 1984).

[5] 'An Eviction in the West of Ireland', *The Illustrated London News*, 19 March 1881.

shows a handsome peasant woman wearing a red skirt standing defiantly in front of her ruined home. The picture is set on a cloud-swept mountainside and the gables of the demolished cottage echo the contours of the landscape. In the distance, one can see the retreating eviction party moving towards another homestead with a smoking chimney.

In 1889 Harry Jones Thaddeus' *Eviction Scene* addressed the subject from the obverse perspective.[6] The action takes place in the cabin interior as the painter focuses on a group of men who have barricaded themselves into the building that is currently under siege. The artist focuses primarily on the actions of the defenders who are dashing around inside the cottage with ladders and buckets of water, ready to quench the thatched roof that has been set alight by the constabulary. The cramped, crowded, smoke-filled interior is shown in semi-darkness. The fact that the daylight is spilling into the cabin above the head of a baton-wielding British officer generates a feeling of action and menace.

Not all of O'Kelly's drawings for *The Illustrated London News* are confrontational in nature. In 'Posting the Government Proclamation', which appeared on 19 November 1881, the artist depicted a party of government officials pasting a proclamation to the side of a rock in a mountainous landscape. The narrative hinges on a couple passing by with a horse and cart who inquire about the document's contents. The cart is full of carefully-stacked turf and suggests good husbandry; but the fact that the Irish have to make inquiries of the British official implies that the notification is in English and that peasants are at a disadvantage from both a linguistic and a literacy viewpoint. The proclamation in question outlawed the Land League and the subtext of the image suggests that the role of the ordinary Irishman was to accept the rule of law posted by a foreign authority.

Yet not all the images show the Irish from a reactionary viewpoint. 'The State of Ireland, Stopping the Hunt', published in *The Illustrated London News* on 24 December 1881, illustrated the pro-active approach being taken by ordinary people to prevent the gentry from engaging in hunting, one of the landed classes favoured winter pastimes. The artist contrasts the beautifully-attired, mounted gentry with the poorly-dressed peasants, but, while the Irish may be at a disadvantage from a sartorial view point, they stand together valiantly in a tightly-formed group and state their case articulately.

The legacy of O'Kelly's educational experience at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, coupled with his experience of painting from the motif in Brittany, led him to

[6] Brendan Rooney, *The Life and Work of Harry Jones Thaddeus, 1859–1929* (Dublin, 2003).

explore the devotional side of Irish life in *A Station Mass in a Connemara Cabin*, a large format oil painting exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1884. The subject – a group of peasants attending Mass in the cramped setting of an Irish cottage – may have been prompted by Gérôme's Orientalist work, *Prayer on the Rooftops of Cairo* (1865). Both paintings show peasants at prayer. Gérôme's work is set on a Cairo rooftop rather than in the more conventional Mosque, while O'Kelly takes the unlikely domestic interior and turns it into a place of official worship – legitimised by the presence of the priest. The hand movements of the celebrant as he blesses the congregation echo the gestural aspect of the silhouetted worshiper on the Cairo roof, while the prostrating poses of a Muslim situated towards the back of the Orientalist scene is reproduced in the grovelling actions of an elderly woman who is positioned near the dresser in O'Kelly's Irish painting.

The practice of conducting services at unorthodox venues such as domestic dwellings and Mass rocks reflects an earlier tradition stemming from a period in Irish history prior to Catholic Emancipation when, under a penal code, Roman Catholics were placed under severe restrictions in relation to their religion. Furthermore, the scale of this work demonstrates the artist's elevation of subject matter, putting it on a par with historical and mythological themes as it departs from the tradition of small genre pieces. In this regard, O'Kelly was following in the footsteps of Alphonse Legros and Leon L'Hermitte whose large-scale images of rustic devotions were exhibited in the Paris Salons of the 1860s.

At a time when Mass was celebrated in Latin by a priest with his back to the congregation, O'Kelly chose to depict the ritual occurring in a domestic rather than a ecclesiastical setting. Moreover, the painting shows a young handsome priest, suggesting vibrant continuation of the faith, depicted during one of the rare moments in the ceremony when the celebrant actually faces the people. This potent image was exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1884, and again in London at the Irish Exhibition at Olympia in 1888 and in the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin in 1889. The work had a further life in terms of illustration; a detailed preparatory sketch was shown in Henry Blackburn's *Academy Notes* for 1883 and it was viewed as far afield as America where it was reproduced in *The Gael* in 1895.[7]

Another large-scale genre painting, *Military Manouvres*, was exhibited in the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1891. This work focused on an equally important

[7] Niamh O'Sullivan, 'Imaging the Land War', *Éire-Ireland*, 39 (2004), 59–80.

aspect of everyday life in Ireland, the presence of the British military. Both the scale of the work and the peasant subject matter owe a debt to O'Kelly and to other French-trained artists such as Harry Jones Thaddeus. Indeed, its creator, Richard Moynan, also received his artistic education in Europe, studying initially in Antwerp and later at the Académie Julian in Paris. Moynan's original career choice was the medical profession, but he abandoned his studies in the Royal College of Surgeons in order to become an artist. He differed from many of his Continentally-trained colleagues in that he returned to Dublin after four years of post-graduate study in order to set up a painting practice in his native city. Hailing from the professional classes, Moynan was very conscious that a buoyant art world depended on a stable political establishment. He viewed the burgeoning threat of Home Rule and the possible severing of ties with England as a potential social and economic disaster.[8]

The artist celebrated his return to Dublin with a narrative studio piece entitled *We Hope We Don't Intrude* (1887). The painting shows a group of well-dressed ladies paying a casual visit to the artist's studio-gallery in Harold's Cross. This work is a masterpiece of self-promotion as it immediately advertises the elegance of the studio with its excellent lighting, warm caste-iron stove and fashionable oriental and modern furnishings. The walls are adorned with academic studies clearly signalling the artist's Continental training in Antwerp and Paris, while the framed painting on the easel shows a flower girl, a popular subject in 1880s Dublin. One is immediately struck by the clarity of the composition as two of the visitors are engaged in conversation while a third lady appears to be totally entranced by the exhibits. A particularly elegant young woman addresses the artist who is depicted with his back to the viewer. His body language suggests total approval of the visit as he respectfully welcomes the visitors.

Moynan's personal acquaintances would immediately have recognised the fact that the women are in fact his wife and sisters – a factor designed to underscore his ability as a portrait painter. Certain elements combine to give the work a Continental feel: the ladies' clothes are French, the lightness of the palette has an Impressionist touch, and the composition echoes Fredrick Bazille's *The Artist's Studio* (1870) which was painted some seventeen years earlier.

The artist's return to Dublin in December 1886 coincided with a number of events that emphasised the shifting sands of Irish politics. William Ewart Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill had been narrowly defeated in May of the

[8] *The Union*, 29 January 1887.

same year, leading to a split in Liberal ranks and to the party's defeat in the subsequent election. Parnell was still actively agitating for Home Rule and had commenced his Plan of Campaign, which demanded that landlords recognise the hardships brought about by bad weather and falling prices and reduce their tenants' rents accordingly. Furthermore, the Irish leader's honour seemed to be in question following the publication of a series of letters in *The Times* under the title 'Parnellism and Crime', which linked Parnell's name with a raft of illegal activities including his alleged approval of the Phoenix Park murders of two British civil servants – an act that he had publicly condemned. This resulted in an investigation of Parnell and his colleagues at a tribunal known as The Special Commission.[9]

These events preoccupied the Unionist community in Dublin to the point that they decided to establish a newspaper, *The Union*, to broadcast their political beliefs.[10] Moynan soon became their chief illustrator, providing weekly images in large format that expressed their political beliefs with wit and skill. The artist supplied over 120 cartoons, and each drawing was accompanied by an explanation in the body of the newspaper. The resulting collection closely reflected the situation as viewed by The Special Commission, providing a blow by blow account of events leading up to the eventual unmasking of the letters as forgeries produced by anti-Parnellite journalist Richard Piggott.

Under the pseudonym Lex, Moynan nailed his political colours to the mast taking every opportunity to support Ireland's ties with Britain. His large black and white illustrations drew on a variety of sources, ranging from nursery rhymes to literary texts, to underscore his message. He lampooned Gladstone as the British mouthpiece of the Irish Home Rule party depicting him as everything from an inanimate object, as in 'The Grand Old Battering Ram', to a pot mender unable to mend the Home Rule pot. Some cartoons relied heavily on literary allusion. 'Gladstone's Ghost', for example, takes its inspiration from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene IV. The editor of *The Union* made the following comment concerning it: 'Mr Gladstone is depicted by our artist as a political Hamlet nerving himself to follow the dead ghost of Anarchy, whose mysterious will has magnetized him into action.'[11] Gladstone is shown, sword in hand, lunging blindly into the dark.

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[9] W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland VI: Ireland Under the Union II, 1870–1921* (Oxford, 1996).

[10] Supplement to *The Union*, 28 February 1887.

[11] *The Union*, 13 August 1887, 5.

Parnell also featured in many of the cartoons, although Moynan generally treated him with more respect than Gladstone. In *'I Do Not Recollect'*, the artist depicts the Home Rule leader in a pensive mood struggling to answer the tribunal's question.[12] Here, in the time-honoured fashion, the politician has taken refuge in a faulty memory. Philip H. Bangel, editor of *The Union*, explained the presence of the rodents in the background:

> In this piece, Parnell, like many other politicians, takes refuge in a most evasive alibi. A report from the Parnell Commission, which appeared the previous week, reflects the fact that the trial was going badly for Parnell, Biggar and his colleagues, as Parnell admitted to 'miss-leading the House of Commons' and not being able to locate account books dealing with the enormous sum of £100,000.[13]

As the Special Commission progressed, the Home Rule Party increasingly appeared to be losing momentum. Moynan took every opportunity – no matter how slight – to vilify the movement. The inspiration for the drawing 'In Full Retreat' was a speech made by Parnell when he was elected a Burgher of the city of Edinburgh in July 1889. During the course of his oration, Parnell referred to himself as a coward in a positive sense because he was applauded for the sentiment. Lex, predictably, took the matter out of context and seized this opportunity to poke fun at the entire Home Rule entourage. The caption of the work suggests that a good motto for the Parnellite party would be: 'He who fights and runs away/may live to fight another day'.[14] Parnell is shown leading the charge away from a personification of the British justice system in the form of a noble knight. The armour-clad Irish cohort includes such luminaries in the Home Rule party as Michael Davitt, John Dillon and Tim Harrington. To the rear of the group is the much-hated William O'Brien who refused to wear prison clothes during periods of detention; Lex shows him waving his famous breeches at the British knight.

The tide turned in favour of the Home Rule party when Richard Piggott took the stand. Anomalies in spelling in the various letters he wrote were cited and he broke down under interrogation and admitted to forgery. This effectively brought an end to The Special Commission and the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party took recourse in the law and began a libel action

[12] *The Union*, 28 May 1888, 5.
[13] *The Union*, 11 May 1889, 5.
[14] *The Union*, 27 July 1889, 1.

against *The Times* newspaper. The newspaper settled out of court, paying Parnell a hefty £5,000. *The Union* newspaper may also have had concerns about being sued as it ceased production early in October 1889, bringing Moynan's career as a political cartoonist to an end.

The final artist of the group, John Lavery, worked primarily in oils. He was celebrated throughout Britain as a portrait and a subject painter. Born in Belfast on 20 March 1856, Lavery was orphaned by the age of three. He was brought up in the households of various relatives in Ireland and eventually settled in Glasgow where he served a three-year apprenticeship as 'a miniature painter over photographs on ivory', a process that required certain drawing skills.[15] His opportunity to fund a professional art education arose in 1881 when he received £300 compensation when a fire had destroyed his Glasgow studio. In November of the same year he travelled to Paris to study at the Académie Julian. During the following three years, he spent the winters studying in the studio and the summers painting out of doors in Brittany.

Indeed, it was this painting from the motif that first brought Lavery to prominence in the Parisian art world: 'One Sunday I went to Noget-sur-Marne and started a little canvas, which found a place on the line at the Salon next to *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* by Manet. Mine was called *Les Deux Pêcheurs* and was purchased by Saint-Marceaux, the sculptor, for three hundred francs.'[16]

On returning to Glasgow Lavery became a core member of a group of young, vibrant painters known as the Glasgow Boys. His importance within this group became evident when he was chosen to paint *The State Visit of Queen Victoria* during the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1888. This detailed painting documented the 253 people present during the twenty-minute ceremony when Queen Victoria was presented with an Address from the people of Glasgow. Lavery successfully managed to recreate the event over the following two years as he assiduously painted preliminary oil studies of those involved. Recent research by Brian McQuade suggests that Lavery used a series of thirty-seven photographic plates, now held by the Glasgow Photographic Club, to help him complete this enormous canvas. McQuade attributes the presence of the photographic plates in the Glasgow Photographic Club to James Craig Annan who was one of the official photographers to record the state visit.[17]

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[15] John Lavery, *The Life of a Painter* (London, 1940), 41.

[16] Ibid., 50–1.

[17] Alan Taylor, 'Revealed: The Secret of the Glasgow Boy, The Royal Painting and Some', *Sunday Herald*, 5 March 2006.

Queen Victoria was reluctant to give Lavery a sitting and it was only through the intercession of Prince Henry of Battenberg that she eventually posed for the painter. The extensive research and studies necessitated by this large canvas honed the artist's skill in portraiture. The fact that the queen was the central figure in the narrative also helped Lavery's commercial profile. It certainly facilitated his one-man show, which was held in London the following year, and the artist soon moved to the English capital where he established a fashionable portrait practice.

In 1913, Lavery was commissioned to paint *The King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales and Princess Mary*, enhancing his status further. This painting was a resounding success to the point that when the royal family viewed the work in the artist's studio in Cromwell Place the king requested a paintbrush and colour so that he could put his mark on the canvas and thus claim association with the creation of the piece. During the war years Lavery worked as an official war artist – underscoring his allegiance to king and country. Indeed, his close connection to the royal family, and the British aristocracy in general, makes his associations with the establishment of the Irish state appear somewhat incongruous.

Kenneth McConkey suggests a number of reasons for Lavery's growing interest in his Irish identity.[18] These include his association with Hugh Lane and his support for the proposed establishment of a municipal gallery for Dublin. Lavery took part in the Guild Hall Exhibition in 1904 under an Irish banner much to the consternation of the art critic from *The Times*. The artist also donated two important paintings to the Hugh Lane collection and his commission to record the trial of Roger Casement seems to have sparked some nationalist interest.

Yet the catalyst for Lavery's involvement with the signatories of the Irish Treaty was his wife, Hazel, who had ancestors in Galway. Lavery commented: 'She had much Irish blood, but she was primarily American'.[19] Yet, the couple extended the hospitality of their London home to the delegates of the Irish Treaty and Lavery painted portraits of Eamon de Valera, Robert Barton, Gavin Duffy, Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins. The family had a particularly close relationship with Collins, and Lavery painted him in death, lying in state with the Irish flag draped over his torso, as well as recording his state funeral in *Requiem Mass for Michael Collins* (1922).

Lavery's endorsement of the new Irish state was signalled by the donation of over thirty paintings to the National Gallery of Ireland. This generosity

[18] Kenneth McConkey, *Sir John Lavery* (Edinburgh, 1993).

[19] Lavery, *The Life of a Painter*, 195.

proved to be reciprocated as the committee established to organise the new Irish currency asked Lavery to make a painting of his wife in the guise of Kathleen Ni Houlihan, a personification of mother Ireland. Lavery complied with this request and Hazel's portrait adorned Irish paper money from 1928 until 1970.

The three Irish artists O'Kelly, Moynan and Lavery, demonstrate three disparate reactions to the Irish political scene. Aloysius O'Kelly's influence in heightening awareness of the plight of the Irish peasant in the 1880s was extremely important. At a time when the simianisation of the indigenous Irish was rife, O'Kelly portrayed the plight of the Irish and their struggle against the injustices of British rule with sympathy and dignity.[20] Images such as *A Station Mass in a Connemara Cabin* modified the scale and subject matter of Irish genre painting and contributed towards the process of forging a national Irish identity.

Richard Moynan came from the professional classes, a group that regarded their political and economic future as being synonymous with the aspirations of the British Empire. He clearly considered himself as an Irishman loyal to queen and country. Moynan's belief in the Irish art establishment is demonstrated by the fact that, unlike many of his fellow painters, he pursued a career as a professional artist in Ireland at a time when English or Continental markets were more lucrative. He cogently articulated the turbulent political climate through his illustrations, while paintings such as *Death of the Queen* (1902) reflect his continuing loyalty to the state.

John Lavery was one of the few successful Irish artists whose international lifestyle transcended the fragmentation of the political scene. While O'Kelly moved permanently to America sometime in the 1890s, and Moynan's struggle with tuberculosis led to his early death in 1906, Lavery managed to maintain his relationship with his English patrons while at the same time experiencing an increasing association with the emerging Irish state during the post-war period.

The link between religion and political orientation is harder to establish. O'Kelly was Catholic by birth, but his brother James – with whom O'Kelly had a particularly close relationship – was an outspoken atheist. Moynan's membership of the Church of Ireland was central to his sense of identity, yet he assiduously avoided any religious subject matter. Lavery's approach to religion was extremely ambiguous. His memoir clearly records his departure from the Catholic faith during his time at the Académie Julian:

[20] Simianisation refers to the depiction of the Irish peasants as monkeys

> Up to that time I had been what is called a good Catholic, and an Irish one from Belfast to boot. I must say I was shocked [by some of the behaviour of his fellow students] and gladly joined my friend Alexander Roche, who attended the student's mass up high in one of the towers of St Sulpice. But the ridicule had entered my soul, and it was not many months before I began to find the padre of St Sulpice tedious and his sermons dull. By the following winter, I had forgotten about him and had almost become an optimistic agnostic.[21]

Yet with Lavery things are never that simple. He clearly retained certain relations with the Catholic faith as he documented his daughter Eileen's *First Holy Communion* (1902) in paint.[22] The artist's early experience of being Catholic by birth yet attending a Protestant school may have trained him well in the art of diplomacy. Therefore, it is not surprising that later in life he carefully balanced donations to both Catholic and Protestant institutions. This complex situation underscores the fact that the concept of stereotypes within the artistic canon is not always reliable.

O'Kelly's education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts undoubtedly influenced his selection as special artist with *The Illustrated London News*. His interpretation of rural Ireland owed much to the French practice of depicting peasant life, and the public dissemination of his illustrations led the way for a number of Irish artists to seek training in France and to emulate his work both in terms of painting from the motif and forging an interest in the every day life of the Irish peasant. Although Moynan favoured a different political orientation to O'Kelly, his close observation of the latter's work affected his illustration style, his increasing interest in painting out of doors, and the prospect of portraying peasant subject matter.

O'Kelly's role as an illustrator had international consequences as well. Niamh O'Sullivan observes that the Dutch artist Van Gogh was an avid collector of O'Kelly's prints. Van Gogh was fascinated by O'Kelly's serialization of the story of the Irish land wars and his apparent admiration for the Irishman was such that in his correspondence with his brother Theo Van Gogh he expressed the wish to become an illustrator himself. Van Gogh's artistic subject matter was also influenced by O'Kelly. In a letter to Theo he compares his first painting of a cottage in Drenthe with its Irish counterpart.[23]

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[21] Lavery, *The Life of a Painter*, 50.

[22] McConkey, *Sir John Lavery*, 77.

[23] O'Sullivan, *Aloysius O'Kelly*, 35.

Moynan's education in Antwerp provided him with excellent drawing and etching skills that facilitated his role as chief illustrator for *The Union* newspaper. His training at the Académie Julian and his exposure to the Impressionist aesthetic led to sophisticated portraits framed in unusual narrative, such as *We Hope We Don't Intrude*, painted on his return from France in 1887. Moynan's initial educational experience was studio-based and this gave him the confidence to paint the human figure in a rather large scale – an approach that became a key element of his annual exhibition pieces. As his practice developed, he increasingly painted out of doors, demonstrating a lighter palette and celebrating such things as children enjoying a rural life style.

John Lavery's initial art education was rather scrappy and therefore his sojourn at the Académie Julian was of enormous benefit – especially as the rapid execution of subject matter advocated in the art-school helped him develop a fluid handling of paint. Working out of doors, a methodology that was popular at the Académie Julian, was to become the corner stone of his art-practice. A bright palette and a sense of immediacy forged from painting from the motif are the two defining characteristic of John Lavery's artistic success, both of which reflect a clear legacy of his Continental education.

O'Kelly, Moynan and Lavery's sojourns at Continental art schools had far reaching effects on Irish artistic and political developments. By their example, the painters in question helped develop the approach to subject matter and studio practice of future generations of Irish artists. The fact that all three artists gave visual expression to the emerging political situation provides the contemporary viewer with three contrasting visual records of Anglo Irish relations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

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