

***'An Artist of Much Merit':  
Clare Augustine Moore  
and Her Illuminated Manuscripts***

**Presentation to  
Anglo Irish Mercy Archives Conference  
2 July 2015**

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Part I: by Mary Kay Dobrovolny rsm

For the next hour, we are going to explore the life and art of Clare Augustine Moore – a contemporary of Catherine McAuley's who was an incredible artist and illuminator. The time will be divided into two parts – I will cover what we know about Clare Augustine's life and relationship with Catherine, and Danielle will explore Clare Augustine's art.

So, let's start with an introduction to Clare Augustine. Little is known about her life prior to her entrance into the Sisters of Mercy at age 29 (1837). She was born here in Dublin on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1808 to Protestant parents. She was the eldest child, being five and a half years older than her sister Georgiana who also entered the Sisters of Mercy. They had at least one brother whose date of birth is not known.

When Clare Augustine, then known by her birth name Mary Clare, was 9 and her sister Georgiana was 3, their father died (1817). Six years later (1823), their mother converted to Catholicism along with the children. September 1828, Georgiana (aged 14) became the governess for Catherine's 9 year old niece Catherine and 7 year old cousin Teresa Byrn. We know from early Mercy manuscripts that young Georgiana was proficient in reading both French and Latin when she became their governess. We do not know how either Mary Clare or Georgiana were educated, or how Mary Clare developed her talent for art.

In early 1829 Mary Clare met Catherine for the first time. Years later, Mary Clare provides a very detailed account of Catherine at the time of this meeting. For the interests of time, I'll only read the part about her eyes:

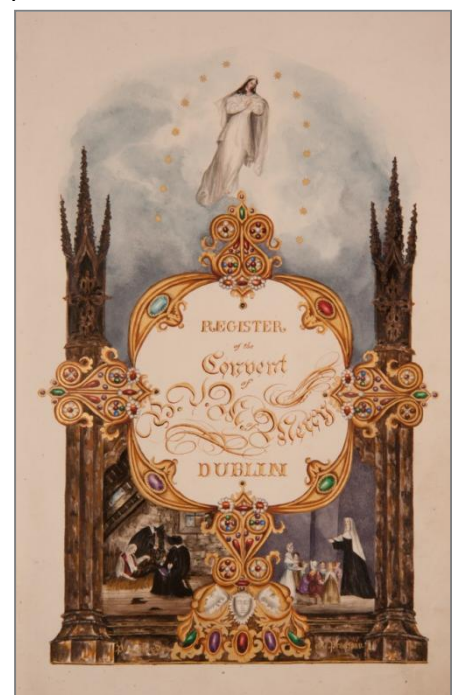
Her eyes were light blue and remarkably round with the brows and lashes colorless but they spoke. In repose they had a melancholy beseeching look; then it would light up expressive of really hearty fun, of if she disapproved of anything they could tell that too. Sometimes they had that strange expression of reading your thoughts, which made you feel that even your mind was in her power, and that you could not hide anything from her.

Within this account, Mary Clare also talks about Catherine's body frame, hair, hands, etc. with similar detail. With few artistic images of Catherine, this written description becomes invaluable.

There is again a gap in what we know of Mary Clare's life from this first meeting of Catherine in 1829 until her entrance into the Sisters of Mercy eight and a half years later on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1837. In the intervening years, her sister Georgiana remained at Baggot St while Catherine, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley were in the novitiate at George's Hill, and again her sister Georgiana along with six others were 'the first flock' received into the Sisters of Mercy on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1832. With Georgiana's entrance into the Sisters of Mercy, names get confusing as Georgiana takes her elder sister's name – Mary Clare Moore – to be her name in religion. Five years later as Mary Clare entered the Sisters of Mercy (August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1837), she took the name Clare Augustine Moore, but Catherine and her sister frequently called her Sr Mary Clare. Fortunately for our sakes, the two sisters' lives and interests were quite diverse, so it is generally easy to discern in the letters and early manuscripts when Sr Mary Clare is mentioned which sister is intended.

At the time that Mary Clare, now Clare Augustine, entered the Sisters of Mercy, her younger sister Clare had already gone to Cork as the first superior of this new foundation. For the vast majority of their lives, the two blood sisters lived and ministered in separate cities, with Clare ministering in Cork, Bermondsey and the Crimea while Clare Augustine remained almost exclusively in the Dublin area. The only time that the two blood sisters lived in the same city was the year of Catherine's death – 1841 – when for six months they both lived in Cork.

Within Catherine's life, Clare Augustine fully participated in the ministerial endeavours of the Mercy community – ministering to the sick poor in Dublin or teaching in a school in Cork. In hours of recreation and during lectures, Clare Augustine worked on the First Register of the Baggot St community, and a few other artistic projects. After Catherine's death, Clare Augustine

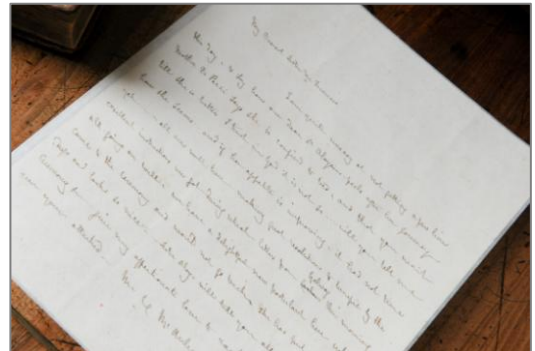


was given more time and material resources to engage in art, while she continued to be involved in additional ministries, such as teaching women completing prison sentences how to paint on china that could be sold for an income.

By 1854, Clare Augustine had acquired some public notoriety as an artist. In that year, the Bishops of Ireland asked her to illuminate an address to Pope Pius IX, congratulating him on the decree of the Immaculate Conception. Subsequent to her death in 1880, Mercy historians recognize that Clare Augustine was unparalleled in her talent for art. Art talent notwithstanding, Clare Augustine is more frequently mentioned by historians for her un-illuminated biography of Catherine than for her art. This 'Memoir of the Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland', or 'Dublin Manuscript' as it is more commonly known, was the first biography begun on Catherine, and was written over a twenty year period from 1844 until 1864 or later. It uses as its sources reminiscences and letters which Clare Augustine solicited from Catherine's friends, relatives, and fellow sisters.

Shifting now away from a more general biography of Clare Augustine to the specific topic of her relationship to Catherine McAuley –

Clare Augustine's relationship with Catherine is an interesting one, because the two women present it so differently in their own respective writing. Most of what we have of Catherine's writing about Clare Augustine Moore comes from Catherine's letters to her friend and confidant Frances Warde, who at the time of the letter writing was the superior of the Mercy house in Carlow. In these letters over a two year period, we find that Catherine is frustrated by the slow progression of Clare Augustine's artistic work; Catherine experiences Clare Augustine to be strong willed and one who does not easily bend to the wishes and desires of others; and Catherine is only moderately patient with Clare Augustine's tendency to expound on points of artistic style. Some examples of these sentiments:



- During Clare Augustine's novitiate period prior to profession of vows, Clare Augustine was asked to do some work on the Carlow Register. In late February to March of 1838, Catherine writes to Frances, somewhat apologetic that this task has remained undone, saying:

'The Register ordered by Revd Mr Maher has been here two months, waiting for Sister Moore who prints beautifully in every type to write the title page. She has been constantly employed, and now Bazaar work engages all their

time. I constantly spoke of your book – for a long time, indeed, a cut finger prevented her.’

In this first example, Catherine recognizes Clare Augustine’s talent, and she acknowledges that the artistic endeavour is not Clare Augustine’s sole pursuit. But we can begin to hear impatience – ‘I constantly spoke of your book’ – she was clearly keeping this work on Clare Augustine’s radar. There may also be a bit of sarcasm as Catherine mentions Clare Augustine’s cut finger. For those of us who have examined the intricate detail of Clare Augustine’s work, we can appreciate how a cut finger would hinder the quality of art Clare Augustine could do and how she might be reluctant to do lesser quality work on the Carlow Register. If this was Catherine’s only comment on Clare Augustine’s slowness, then we could conclude that Catherine was legitimately providing an excuse for the inattention Carlow’s register has received. But it was not her only comment...

- Within the same month in another letter to Frances, Catherine says:

‘[Cecilia Marmion] would have printed your Register long since – but knowing there was one could do it more fancifully, she was quite anxious to get it done so. *That one* [Clare Augustine] has more of her own ways yet than of ours – and it is not very easy to fix her to a point. She finds the duties sufficient to fill up her time, and as her constitution is strong, she is much employed in out door work. Sister Cecilia will bring our Register and print for you Friday, Saturday & Sunday’ (March 13, 1838).

In this letter, Catherine’s frustration with Clare Augustine is much more evident: ‘*That one* has more of her own ways yet than of ours – and it is not very easy to fix her to a point.’ Ouch! Admittedly, the twenty-nine year old Clare Augustine has only been in the community for seven months and she hasn’t professed vows – so she is in a period of life where she is actively trying to learn the ways of vowed religious life. Yet I hope my community leader never had cause to say that of me when I was in the novitiate! If I’m honest, likely she did, so here too we can ‘forgive’ Catherine of her impatience and frustration with the learning curve for a new member. On the positive side, Catherine recognizes that Clare Augustine is contributing to other work. The ‘outdoor work’ mentioned is likely the visitation of the sick poor – a worthy endeavour for a Sister of Mercy. Still, Catherine’s frustration and impatience are palpable. Catherine has given up waiting for Clare Augustine, and has handed the project onto Cecilia Marmion whom she trusts will complete the work in a timely fashion.

- A year later, while Clare Augustine is 30 and continues her novitiate, Catherine says in another letter to Frances:

‘The invitation is very nicely done. I think the printing remarkably good. The *Judge* thinks the etching would be exceedingly good if not so heavy, which she says gives it the appearance of a print – but I do not mind half what she says on these scientific points, which she delights in unfolding to the fools that will hearken to her. She will do anything in the Register you wish, but what is mentioned. She calls three weeks work – and she could not give that time until the bazaar is over. She is very slow.’ (25-27 January 1839)

According to Catherine, Clare Augustine delights in ‘unfolding to the fools who will hearken to her’ scientific points of art; and she is shown to protect her time, saying a project will take three weeks work and it is not possible to work simultaneously on these various projects that demand her intense focus. These characteristics are a classic five on the Enneagram. Catherine seems quite impatient with this personality type.

- Probably the most telling example of Catherine’s impatience with Clare Augustine comes in Catherine’s letter again to Frances dated March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1841. By now, Clare Augustine has professed vows a year prior, continues to live in Dublin but is preparing to go to Cork, and continues to work on the First Register for the Dublin community. Catherine says,

‘Sr Mary Clare Moore is a character – not suited to my taste or my ability to govern – though possessing many very estimable points. She teased and perplexed me so much about the difficulty of copying the two pages, that I was really obliged to give up – unwilling to command lest it should produce disedifying consequences. She said it would take the entire Lent – indeed you can have no idea how little she does in a week – as to a day’s work, it is laughable to look at it. She will shew me 3 leaves, saying, I finished these today – 3 rose or lily leaves.’



Strong words – ‘a character not suited to my taste or ability to govern....’

Likely there was one instance when Catherine’s impatience was expressed directly to Clare Augustine, and in the presence of others. Clare Augustine’s sister Clare

describes an incident with a sister who likely was her own blood sister Clare Augustine:

[Catherine] had spoken, as she thought, rather sharply to [a sister], and a few hours after she went to the Sister and asked her did she remember who had been present at the time.... they were summoned, and when all assembled our dear Reverend Mother humbly knelt down, and begged her forgiveness for the manner in which she had spoken to her that morning' (Bermondsey Manuscript, *Tradition of Mercy*, edited by Mary C Sullivan rsm, p. 119).

Those of us who have been privy to Catherine's inner thoughts and feelings expressed to her good friend and confidant Frances Warde know that Catherine struggled to be patient and tolerant of Clare Augustine, but Catherine carefully guarded these attitudes and sought to treat Clare Augustine with upmost respect and regard. The one time when her frustration got the better of her and she publicly showed her exasperation, Catherine was quick to rectify the situation and publicly showed her regret and sought forgiveness. In this way, Catherine embodies the words she wrote to Elizabeth Moore reflecting on the founding of the Sisters of Mercy, 'One thing is remarkable, that no breach of Charity ever occurred amongst us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger' (January 13, 1839).

On the surface, it appears that Catherine was successful in hiding her impatience and frustration from Clare Augustine and others. In Clare Augustine's biography of Catherine, we get a feel for Clare Augustine's admiration of this woman she calls 'the Foundress'. In addition, we get a window into Clare Augustine's perception of her own relationship with Catherine. Clare Augustine occasionally portrays herself as a confidant to Catherine and generally gives the impression that she is someone with whom Catherine genuinely enjoyed spending time. Clare Augustine never once reveals any tension in their relationship.

In terms of Clare Augustine's admiration of Catherine,

- she portrays Catherine as 'who was always inclined to look at the sunny side of things and shew it to others' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 201);
- she indicates Catherine treated all in the community as valued decision-makers, saying: 'the business of the convent was talked of as freely as if it were a Chapter of Discreets. She was with us precisely as my own mother was with her family, or rather we used less ceremony than was used at home' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 206).
- She highlights Catherine's love of her sisters, saying: 'I believe the greatest trial of all to her were the frequent deaths of the Sisters.... she never saw the approach of a

Sister's death or spoke of one who had died without great emotion. She had a really tender affection for us' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 209); and

- she indicates that Catherine was patient and indulgent of trials and the wrong-doing of others, saying: 'She endured ingratitude and even insolence so sweetly that those who behaved ill towards her never felt they were doing wrong' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 211).

In examining Clare Augustine's portrayal of her relationship with Catherine, it appears that Clare Augustine was not aware of Catherine's impatience with her. Clare Augustine remarks that Catherine 'moved about the room' during recreation but that she herself 'had a trick for keeping her.' She says, '[Catherine] liked to look at me drawing or working and I always contrived an empty chair I could reach without standing up and by drawing it to her I have often got her to sit half an hour at the end of the table' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 206).

Clare Augustine presents herself as Catherine's occasional confidant. For example, when Catherine is portrayed as struggling with the wayward activity of her nephews, Clare Augustine says, 'how much she grieved for their errors few knew so well as I' (*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 211). Catherine sought Clare Augustine's advice including once when a sister in the community became melancholy. Catherine not only asked Clare Augustine what ails this sister, but also followed her advice.

Clare Augustine's portrayal of her relationship with Catherine seems incongruous with Catherine's own private confiding in her friend Frances. On the obvious level, Clare Augustine genuinely seems oblivious with Catherine's impatience with her temperament. But at the same time, there is one story that makes me suspicious that Clare Augustine would choose to edit her account of Catherine in such a way that she herself is in Catherine's favour – with this one story there is evidence that Clare Augustine has an inclination to present herself in 'good light'. In the second to last paragraph of her biography, Clare Augustine portrays herself as being virtuous and unwilling to 'approve of a breach of trust under any circumstance' but all the while she tells the full details of a story that is indeed that breach of trust. Here's the story:

Revd. Mother then called [Teresa Carton] back to her bedside and shewing her a packet she had wrapped in the brown paper and tied up most curiously told her she was to go to the kitchen, stir up the fire, and when it blazed strong to put the parcel in it and turning her back to it remain till it was quite consumed, "but", she continued, "I forbid you under obedience to attempt to open this parcel or look at it while it is burning." The Sister did not stir. The idea of standing in the kitchen where the cockroaches would be crawling about her was not a pleasant one, but the prohibition under obedience made the matter worse. Revd. Mother then said,

“Would you be afraid, dear?” “Oh, Revd. Mother, I would be afraid I might look.”  
“Well, call Sister M. Vincent.” Sr M. Vincent [Whitty] was awakened, came down and received the same injunction and solemn prohibition, with the further direction that when she put the parcel in the fire she was to draw red coals over it. She burned the parcel but disobeyed that prohibition. She hinted to me of a haircloth, but as I could not approve of a breach of trust under any circumstance, asked her no questions. She told Fr. Vincent, the Passionist, she saw a discipline. However that be, she returned to the infirmary, was asked if she had done as she was required, answered in the affirmative, and received the thanks of her dying Superior.’  
(*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 216)

Clare Augustine’s choice to include this story with more detail than other accounts of Catherine’s final day is curious to me – one who could not ask any questions as she could not approve of a breach of trust under any circumstance, chose to publish the full detail of the breach of trust and the offending person’s lie about it to their beloved dying foundress. Clare Augustine is intentional to portray herself as being rather virtuous when the inclusion of the detail of the story is not quite so virtuous. This makes me suspicious that even if Clare Augustine perceived she was not the one with whom Catherine most wanted to spend time at recreation, then she likely would not reveal it – it was too important to portray herself in ‘good light’ in relationship with her beloved foundress.

Returning again to Clare Augustine’s earlier description of Catherine’s eyes which ‘if she disproved of anything they could tell that too’, likely Clare Augustine was aware of times when her beloved foundress looked upon her with disproving eyes. And yet, Clare Augustine’s bond of love, affection and admiration of Catherine seems genuine and strong. ‘One thing is remarkable, that no breach of Charity ever occurred amongst us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger’. May we all be able to say the same, even when tested with personalities not suited to our tastes!

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