



Special Collections

Brian Moore

Biocritical Essay

by

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Brian Moore's fictional odyssey, which parallels to some degree his own experiences of living in various parts of the world as a self-exile, constitutes a rich and varied aesthetic accomplishment matched by relatively few contemporary writers of the three nations which have shaped him: North Ireland, Canada and the United States. That throughout his extended career he has reflected a far less visible profile than many of his colleagues in these countries can be attributed in part to his personal choice of living a private and somewhat secluded existence, and in part to the fact that in most of his novels to date, from *Judith Hearne* (1955) to *Black Robe* (1985), and with the exception of *The Revolution Script* (1971), he has tended to avoid the momentarily popular issues, or the social and political causes that have attracted many writers and readers in the post-war period.

Moore's artistry, however, has formally been recognized and rewarded on both sides of the Atlantic, in the shape of numerous literary awards and honours. In Canada he has won the Quebec Literary Prize and two Governor General's Awards; in the United States a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Institute of Arts and Letters Grant; and in Great Britain the W.H. Smith Literary Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Award, the Royal Society of Literature Award and the Scottish Arts Council International Fellowship Award. He has been Regents Professor at UCLA since 1974, has served as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto, a visiting Fellow at Stirling University in Scotland, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and is the subject of films and programs produced by both the BBC and the National Film Board of Canada.

A highly individualistic writer, Moore is never easy to categorize, least of all in national terms: though he has remained a Canadian citizen since 1953, he lives more or less permanently in the United States, and his fiction, with relatively few exceptions, has regularly reflected strong manifestations of his Irish background. Artistically, too, he has very much gone his own way, for though he does from time to time demonstrate an interest in fictional experimentation, he is not easy to link with any of the groups of writers who have

emerged since mid-century. In the fullest and the non-pejorative sense of the term, he is basically a realistic writer, whose integrity and solid craftsmanship have done much to redeem that approach, a writer who sees the novel both as a viable art form, and as a significant moral force that can help readers shape their vision and their responses to complex human dilemmas.

Moore's responses to the forces of family, church and state during the decades of his youth anticipated the independent way of life he was later to assume. The fourth of nine children (six girls, three boys) of James Bernard and Eileen (McFadden) Moore, he was born in Belfast on August 25, 1921, and received a standard Catholic education in that city's Newington Elementary School and Saint Malachy's College, though the family had been Protestant until his grandfather had converted to Roman Catholicism late in his life. His father, a successful surgeon, University examiner and head of a Catholic hospital, Moore remembers as a man who could not tolerate failure, and who believed strongly in the necessity of educating oneself for a traditional career. The division between father and son, a recurring note in Moore's fiction, had its genesis during Moore's teenage years, for by the end of the 1930s he had left Saint Malachy's without graduating, and had in effect renounced both Catholicism and Protestantism. He has always recognized, nevertheless, that his parents' faith very much shaped them into the strong people they were, a tribute he later was to formalize in such fictional characters as the O'Neills in *Judith Hearne*, Eileen Tierney in *An Answer from Limbo* and Mr. and Mrs. Fadden in *Fergus*.

It was in their respective attitudes towards the lingering Irish question and the ominously changing scene on the European continent that the two differed most radically. Moore's father continued to see Britain as the enemy, whereas Moore himself, like many young people of his day, saw the totalitarian forces in Europe as the real threat, particularly since they were undergoing at the moment a dramatic rehearsal in the Spanish Civil War. "I thought my father was wrong, very much as Gavin (in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*) thought his father was wrong", Moore recalled in an interview. "Not that I pretend to have had any foresight about Hitler, but I realized that Franco and Mussolini were not the great Christian gentlemen we were told they were".¹ His beliefs were buttressed by his readings of such poets as Auden, Spender and MacNiece, and he recalls that it was his introduction to the works of Yeats and Joyce that constituted the beginnings of his most important education. Through Joyce in particular he came to the realization that life in parochial Ireland was ultimately not bearable, and in a sense, therefore, he came intellectually to an acceptance of the permanent division between himself and the many forces that had been working to shape him.

Within this perspective, World War II and its immediate aftermath constituted the occasion for his literal break from these forces, and he received his baptism of fire in his service with the Belfast Air Raid Precautions Unit and the National Fire Service during the German blitzes that began in April of 1941. Later, as a port officer with the British Ministry of War Transport, he served in North Africa, Naples and Marseilles, and before war's end he saw the death camps at Auschwitz and the Russian armies occupying Poland. Immediately after the war he served with an UNRRA Economic Mission during the reconstruction of Warsaw, and then as a roving correspondent in Scandinavia before returning to England at the end of 1947. "I was terribly excited by the war", he recalled in an interview, "by the foreign countries I was in, by the disjointed, strange life I led just behind the front lines in a time when you felt you were living a part of history".²

While this dramatic transition from a static life in parochial Belfast to an active role with the events of history

was undoubtedly a liberating experience for Moore the youthful participant, his subsequent fiction reveals that for Moore the novelist the break gave rise to all kinds of moral ramifications that were not easy to resolve. Even the triumphant Gavin Burke of *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* finds his victory tempered by misgivings, while the older protagonists in *An Answer from Limbo* and *Fergus*, and in such short stories as "Grieve for the Dear Departed" and "Uncle T", feel even more intensely the human and moral consequences of what a severance from the homeland involves. Incidentally, it is only *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, of all his serious fiction, that specifically exploits actual events of this war time period, though Moore drew on his varied experiences of this decade for some of the pulp stories and novels he wrote at the outset of his career.

But it was his commitment to a permanent state of exile that was the most important consequence of this period of his life, for throughout his fiction its ramifications constitute a central aspect. His understanding of and sympathy for those individuals who have chosen exile are reflected in such diverse characters as James Madden in *Judith Hearne*, Ginger Coffey, Brendan Tierney in *An Answer from Limbo*, Fergus, Sheila Redden in *The Doctor's Wife* and Turlough Carnahan of "Uncle T", all of whom, much like Joyce's exile characters, are both winners and losers. The situations they find themselves in are characteristically more complex than what they initially had anticipated, and feelings of guilt contend with those of freedom to make their moral position somewhat equivocal. "No other postmark can compete in authority with the place of one's birth", observes the narrator of a Moore short story. "It is what we fled: it may, at any time, reach up to reclaim us".³ Such moral dilemmas, whether generated by family conflicts, religious doubts and controversies or the consequences of exile, constitute central issues in Moore's fiction, and one measure of his artistry is the way he has variously shaped novel after novel to render such situations powerful and credible.

Unlike that of his protagonists, Moore's own personal commitment to the New World has been consistent and generally satisfying. He emigrated to Canada in 1948, working first as a construction camp clerk at Thessalon, Ontario, and then as a proofreader and reporter for the *Montreal Gazette*, experiences he was successfully to exploit in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. He married his first wife, Jacqueline Sirois, in 1951, published his first short story and two pulp novels that same year, and took out his Canadian citizenship in 1953, which he holds to this day. He has continued to live the life of an exile, however, moving from Montreal to New York in 1959, to California in 1965, and spending portions of each year in Canada and various parts of Europe. But California, as it has for so many wanderers, has become a good place for Moore to live, and he has remained in Malibu since the middle 1960s with his second wife, Jean Denney of Kentville, Nova Scotia, whom he married in 1967.

The first story Moore published in 1951 - "Sassenach" in John Sutherland's *Northern Review* - marked the beginning of a writing career that has been quite exceptional, and details of which are recorded in his "Work and Publishing Diaries" in the *Brian Moore Collection* at the University of Calgary. Aside from his early pulp fiction (seven novels and some twenty short stories) he has published twenty novels, a documentary novel on the Quebec FLQ crisis (*The Revolution Script*, 1971), a book on Canada for the Time-Life Series (1963), a dozen or so quality short stories, stage and screen versions of some of his own novels, and film and television scripts for Hollywood, the American Home Box Office and French National Television. Though he has not consistently pursued the short story form, he has produced several of exceptional quality, like "Grieve for the Dear Departed" (1959), and "Uncle T" (1960), the latter of which, along with "Preliminary Pages for a Work of Revenge" (1961) was included in a privately printed limited edition of *Two Stories* (Santa Susana Press, 1978). As in his novels, the settings of his short stories range from Belfast and Dublin in the Old World to Montreal and New York in the New, and they deal with such familiar Moore characters and issues as losers,

grotesques, betrayals, failures, hate and pride within families and nations.

But it is as a novelist that Moore demands to be examined, for it is in this capacity that he has established his reputation among contemporary writers. Up to a point, the settings, characters and issues of his novels reflect his own stages of exile and experiences, but the only consistent thing about Moore's fictional pattern is the regularity with which he defies our expectations of what he will write next. Manifestations of his Irish background keep recurring in his fiction, and it is in only four of his more experimental or metaphysically disturbing North American novels - *I Am Mary Dunne*, *The Great Victorian Collection*, *Cold Heaven* and *Black Robe* - that this element is missing. But in all of his fiction his protagonists, whether Irish or North American, men or women, secular or religious, are essentially isolated and sometimes quite desperate individuals attempting to resolve dilemmas that in many cases derive from weaknesses within themselves, but that almost always are also connected to pressures exerted by family, by religion or by the demands of society at large.

Only in his first two novels, *Judith Hearne* (1955) and *The Feast of Lupercal* (1957) and in his fifth one, *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965), does his native Belfast and its people constitute the total subject matter, though both *The Doctor's Wife* (1976) and *The Temptation of Eileen Hughes* (1981) exploit that city as background to their events in France and London respectively. Those first two novels, Moore's most realistic and despairing works, on one level constitute a confirmation of his decision to go into exile, for some two decades later he recalled that the start of his writing career brought back "my bitterness against the Catholic Church, my bitterness against the bigotry in Northern Ireland, my feelings about the narrowness of life there"⁴ - surely the central impressions that emanate from those two books. Judith Hearne and Diarmuid Devine are unquestionably the victims of the determinism that informs Belfast, but they are not without guilt themselves: in their narrow and uncharitable attitudes and in their fearful and neurotic habits, they are convincing representatives of the collectivity that makes Belfast such a destructive city. Moore is never to come so close again to an expression of a deterministic interpretation of experience, though Judith and Devine are far more than objectively observed organisms in an indifferent world. Both are sympathetically created characters who grow out of Moore's understanding of, and compassion for, life's losers, and though readers undoubtedly become impatient with these characters from time to time, they are never able to deny them or feel comfortably superior to them.

Moore's view of Belfast, both as a literal place and as a fictional setting, has never really changed over the years, for this city is potentially as destructive a place in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* and *The Doctor's Wife* as it was in those first two novels. But his characters change, as do their responses to a world that can dictate either failure or success, a reflection of Moore's modified vision that in large part derived from the positive effects of his happy life in North America. In *Judith Hearne* he had dramatized the aftermath of failure, and in *Lupercal* the moment that failure became inevitable and irrevocable, and in both cases the protagonists took refuge in the past, in illusion and hope, rather than in the reality of the moment. In the later Belfast novels he creates individuals for whom failure in the sense that Judith and Devine experienced it ceases to exist: Gavin Burke's and Sheila Redden's impulses about themselves are transformed by external forces into experiential realizations about their own worth and about how they must proceed to live. In *Emperor* the city is being destroyed by an outside enemy, and in the later novel by secular and spiritual strife within, so in both cases history comes to the aid of the protagonists, as indeed it did for Moore himself. Belfast clearly continues to remain as a powerful residual element in Moore's fiction, but as a literal place with its seemingly permanent religious and political strife, its violent bigotry and hatreds, it is simply not a city that he is eager

to live in again.

It was over a decade after his emigration to Canada that Moore felt free enough of his Belfast legacies to turn fictionally to the New World, and in the next twenty or so years, he produced some half dozen novels that reflect his changing visions and concerns. Beginning with *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960), Moore establishes a number of new directions in his fiction: he creates characters who are caught between North American and Irish values; he explores the dilemma of the exile figure; and he makes some significant modifications to his predominant realistic techniques. In most of these novels, the emphasis shifts from the social or institutional orientations of his early Belfast novels to concerns with individual identity and self-realization, in which respects Moore's exiled Irish protagonists, unlike his indigenous North American ones, have a particularly difficult residual legacy to resolve. Thus Ginger Coffey, Brendan Tierney and Fergus Fadden, as opposed to such figures as Mary Dunne, Anthony Maloney and Marie Davenport, fight strenuously against the moral conditioning that their Irish backgrounds have imposed upon them, and although all three win victories of sorts, they are left with feelings of guilt, and a lingering uncertainty about the course of life they have embarked upon.

Ginger seems less troubled by these moral concerns than either Brendan or Fergus, perhaps because on the whole, in that first North American novel Moore does not explore the background Irish issues as profoundly as he does in *Limbo* or *Fergus*. He seems more concerned in *Ginger Coffey* with the immediate plight of the Irish exile: how to sustain a family in a new land, with the added problem, in Ginger's case, of how to do so without diminishing the exalted opinion he has of himself. To render these processes credible, and to show Ginger coming to an important realization about his true self, Moore frequently exploits the comic elements of fiction, and tries to get behind the reality of Ginger's situation. His wish to move beyond realism was inevitable, given the kind of objective perfection he had achieved in his first two novels; Montreal constituted a more complex setting for him than did Belfast, since it was a city he did not know as well, and therefore he attempted a more impressionistic style which went beyond the literal and the logical. This approach produced mixed results, and it is significant that Moore has never really persisted with the comic mode: only in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* did he again exploit this approach, and there the escapades of the youthful Gavin seem particularly suited to it. Still, *Ginger Coffey* does illustrate successfully many of the standard requirements of the comic mode: the instinct for self-preservation, the restoration of the hero, the defeat of the impostor figure, including Ginger himself, and the completion of the mythic cycle that was implied by the beginning. The novel anticipates Moore's other North American novels in its stylistic experimentation, but neither Moore nor the critics have been entirely satisfied with it. "I tried to mix three styles in this novel", Moore confessed, "realistic style, comedy, and tragedy, and to do something that actually could happen realistically in certain scenes in the book in a farcical way. To lift it out of flat realism".⁵

Moore's two other novels of exile, set respectively in New York and Malibu, reflect his own peregrinations, depicting the dilemma that an artist in exile can never really resolve the legacies that he carries with him from place to place. Both Brendan and Fergus are writers, who have much more to resolve than Ginger did: the demands of editors, publishers and film producers, whose every suggestion they see as artistic interference; their recurring fears that they might in fact not be talented writers; and the accusations of family and friends back home that they are merely selfish deniers of their proper heritage.

An Answer from Limbo (1962) is one of Moore's most ambitious and disturbing works, one in which, as he explained in an interview, he wanted to juxtapose Irish Catholicism and the North American wasteland

situation, to depict the inevitability of self-destructive ambition, and to examine the dichotomy in a writer between his human side and his compulsion to be a cold and objective observer.⁶ His use of three members of a family who in various ways represent manifestations of these concerns gives his novel a workable structural framework and provides a humanization of what otherwise might remain intellectual abstractions. Brendan appropriately is given the central emphasis, but his first-person sections are modified by the third-person sections of his wife, the rootless North American in this paradigm, and his mother, the Irish Catholic he brought over from Belfast to look after his children. As a result, we are always aware of the morally precarious situations that Brendan finds himself in, for his own rationalizations undergo a kind of constant judgement by what in fact is happening to the other people in his life. In his manipulations of these dramatized perspectives, Moore introduces the kind of stylistic experimentation that he is to take quite a bit further in *Mary Dunne* and *Fergus*, but on the whole he has not surpassed the effect he achieved in *Limbo*. The novel in many respects is a frightening one in that it threatens the foundations of our accustomed morality, much as Sheila Redden's actions do in *The Doctor's Wife*, and though it does not reflect the metaphysical uncertainties of *Catholics*, *The Great Victorian Collection* or *Cold Heaven*, it raises more questions about the day-to-day kinds of human morality than those novels do.

A question posed by Brendan that is central to the dilemma of the exile-artist figure - "will I be able to revenge myself on the past by transforming it into a world of words?" - takes on something of a surrealistic testing in *Fergus* (1970), for here the protagonist is compelled to ask this question not only to himself, but to a procession of ghosts from his past. This novel illustrates the fact that Moore's exiles in North America have moved from a manageable and realistic world to increasingly unmanageable ones, for the Malibu-Los Angeles setting of *Fergus* is the most unreal of all, a world where make-believe, imitation and gesture take over from substance. The hallucinatory approach that Moore adopts is therefore appropriate, for the reader, like Fergus himself, is hard pressed at times to determine who is more realistic, the visiting ghosts from his Belfast life, or the relatively few living characters from his contemporary world whom he meets during his twenty-four hour ordeal. "Everything here", Fergus observes about California, "is designed to deny one's existence", and within this perspective, he in a sense conjures up his family and past acquaintances to provide himself with a verification that he does exist.

Though Fergus is able to dismiss his ghosts as a new day dawns, he is still saddled with the plights of his present life - the demands of Hollywood producers, of his ex-wife and of his present mistress - and the novel does not suggest that he can resolve these dilemmas. In this light, *Fergus* is a more pessimistic work than Moore's other exile novels, and it anticipates the metaphysical dilemmas of two or three of his later books. It is not totally successful, and Moore was aware of the aesthetic risks he was taking in departing so far from his customary realism, yet he remains satisfied with both his concept and execution of the novel, even though readers at large have found it one of his least successful ones. What is certain is that *Fergus* pushed him well beyond what he had already accomplished successfully many times before, and in addition, on a personal level, it suggests that Moore the exile, just as Fergus the exile, had not at that time exorcised all the ghosts from his past.

The experimentation and concern with some of the less realistic aspects of the world that characterized *Mary Dunne* and *Fergus* continued to be of interest to Moore in his next two novels, *Catholics* (1972) and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975), the latter of which he had already embarked upon as *Fergus* was being published. But these two works depart from his earlier novels in a significant respect: their protagonists are denied the opportunity to elect their course of action within the framework of choice and free will, a situation

which did not apply even to such trapped characters as Judith and Devine. Tomas O'Malley and Anthony Maloney are in a sense accidental creators of their worlds, but become permanent victims of it, for what they brought about in isolation and sustained for a while through belief, they are ultimately unable to control as the world at large assumes direction over their creation. Their only choice at the end, imposed upon them by forces other than themselves, is literal or spiritual suicide: to enter a "null", in O'Malley's words, from which they "would never come back".

But Moore does not entirely depart from the empirical world in these two novels, once he establishes the initial situations - O'Malley's isolated Muck Abbey at the end of the twentieth century, and Maloney's collection of Victoriana he dreamed into existence one ordinary night in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Indeed, everything that is taking place as the two novels open reflects an ordinary and verifiable universe, and what seems to be coming is yet another manifestation of Moore's scrupulous realism. In both works, the transition from the real world to the one removed from our present reality is achieved through Moore's careful verisimilitude, though *The Great Victorian Collection* is more fantastic or unreal than *Catholics*, reflecting the different purposes Moore had in mind in these novels. *Catholics* exploits the recurring concerns that he had always had over the question of faith, whereas the later novel deals with ideas, such as the relationship between the artist and his work, or the meaning of artistic creation, concerns that allowed him to depart from some of the formal requirements of his other works.

Catholics grew both out of the historical ecumenical developments within the Roman Catholic Church and out of Moore's personal concerns about how the Church had changed since his own youth, even though he had long since given up his own institutionalized faith. It is Moore's slightest novel (published originally as a sixty-page novella in the *New American Review*), but only in size: its dramatic tension is one of his most powerful, centred in the confrontation between Father O'Malley and Kinsella, the American "organization man" sent by the Vatican to bring Muck Abbey in line with the Church's ecumenical stance. That O'Malley himself is not a believer adds an ironic meaning to this confrontation, but there is a further irony in the fact that the practices which Rome wants him to stop - conducting the Mass in Latin, hearing private confessions, and so on - are the very things that the Church had used to sustain people like Judith Hearne. Kinsella's Rome-supported official belief in the literal emptiness of the tabernacle joins here with O'Malley's experiential realization of the same point to offer a belated proof to Judith's fears: the tabernacle in Father Quigley's church *was* empty. O'Malley is compelled to surrender to official Rome, but as a last act of pretense he also surrenders to his monks, and leads them in the prayer *they* believe in, though he knows he is entering "null". It is a measure of Moore's artistry here that he can take a traditional, spiritual route to salvation like prayer, and transform it convincingly into a route to metaphysical despair.

An even more powerful spiritual struggle informs *Black Robe* (1985), a novel far removed in time and place from *Catholics*. Here, in 17th-century Canada, the conflict is not between opposing factions of one church concerned with rituals rather than with beliefs, but rather between what Moore sees as opposing superstitions, whose proponents are prepared to kill and die rather than surrender. The Jesuits' belief in a paradise after death for the converted stands in opposition to the Savages' beliefs in dreams and darkness, a drama played out during a grim voyage from Quebec to the mission of Ihonatiria near Georgian Bay. Father Paul Laforgue's doubts begin almost as soon as the journey begins, doubts intensified by the physical hardships he endures, by the Savages' filth and scatological language, by his vicarious participation in a sexual act between his companion Daniel and Annuka, daughter of the Savage leader Chomina. Before he reaches Ihonatiria, he undergoes a literal descent into various forms of darkness: he gets lost in the forest, he is cast off by the

Algonkins, he is captured and unspeakably tortured by the Iroquois, he witnesses cold blooded killings and cannibalism, and is spared only because the Savages, in their superstitions, fail to understand his. At Ithonatiria, he surrenders his long held dream of martyrdom, for he now knows he will survive for a while in the midst of continuing danger, and as he begins the ritual of baptism, he realize that it is his love for the Savages, as much as it is his belief in the power of baptism, that will sustain him.

Just as Moore had turned to Vatican II for some background material for *Catholics*, he came to *Black Robe* through another historical document, *The Jesuit Relations*, which he approached through Graham Greene and Francis Parkman. But in both cases he transforms a document into art, into an examination of one of his abiding themes, and an analysis of characters who find themselves caught between instilled or inherited belief and the powers emanating from various forces of darkness, light or superstition. What Father Laforgue was attempting to do may have lost much of its pragmatic application in today's world, but the psychological dilemmas engendered by his journey, by his quest and by his struggles have lost none of their relevancy.

The hallucinatory kind of reality that Moore exploited in *Fergus* receives an extended and far more complex treatment in *The Great Victorian Collection*, for here the dream creation becomes a permanent element in Maloney's life, rather than constituting occasional intrusions, as was the case for Fergus. In a literal sense, this is one of the least autobiographical of Moore's novels, but in using the dream as a metaphor for artistic creation, he is clearly writing about himself as an artist. "In a way", he said shortly after the novel was published, "I have my own 'Collection' to escape from: if I had not changed and written these new novels I would be very much like [Maloney]..., caught, trapped, forced to dream the same dream,...to write those Belfast novels over and over again".⁷ This novel therefore represented an important step for Moore, but as with *Fergus*, his own deep satisfaction with it has not on the whole been matched by that of the reading public, undoubtedly because it *was* something new that did not fulfill the expectations of what he would write next.

Once the premise is accepted of Maloney's dream coming true, everything in the novel unfolds within the strict conventions of realism, from Maloney's rational recounting of his dream to his examination and cataloguing of the Collection, from his involvement with Mary Ann McKelvey and Vatterman to his eventual obsession to escape everything connected with the Collection, and to his inevitable suicide. The realization of one's dream is undoubtedly one of the more extravagant acts of creation, one that can be shaped without any regard for the rules governing a rational world, though, as Maloney realizes, it immediately produces its own inviolable rules. In any act of artistic creation, there always arises a conflict between the work as the artist produced it, and the interpretations of it offered by the world at large. The artist cannot change what he has created, for any such attempt will debase it, as Maloney quickly discovers, nor can he proclaim what the world should do with it. Within this perspective, the novel can be read as an allegory about the mutual disintegration of the artist and his art, not in the world at large necessarily, but certainly in the kind of Disneyland California where this experience unfolds, for here it is the manipulators, the organization men and the media people who exploit and subvert the meaning of this creation.

Though he shares the kind of metaphysical despair that disturbs O'Malley, Maloney is quite unlike all of Moore's earlier protagonists, mainly because he does not at the outset have any crisis, obsession, or dilemma or resolve, whether of his identity, his past, his psychological or his sexual deficiencies. He is simply an ordinary person who becomes an accidental victim of an unpredictable event, and his affinity in this respect is therefore with the more recent Moore protagonists, like Sheila Redden, Jamie Mangan and Eileen Hughes,

who also get caught up in sudden, unforeseen situations. But these later novels also reflect a strong relationship with *I Am Mary Dunne* (1968), for all of them are very much concerned with the question of self and identity, a theme that has long interested Moore. *Mary Dunne's* working title, "A Woman of No Identity", could with very little change be applied to Sheila Redden, whose identity is always proclaimed as the doctor's wife, or to Jamie Mangan, who even after the accidental death of his actress wife, was still addressed occasionally as Mr. Abbot. In these novels, the search for identity constitutes the central rather than a peripheral concern, for everything that Mary, Sheila and Jamie do is deliberately undertaken in order to discover, enhance or transform who they really are.

Of this group of novels, it is only in *Mary Dunne* that Moore departs significantly from his realistic stance; because of the nature of Mary's introspection, and because Moore wanted to write this book from a woman's first-person viewpoint, the modified stream-of-consciousness that he employed, with its allowing of frequent flashbacks and overlappings, constituted an effective approach. It is not that Mary's world is an unreal one, in the sense that elements of Fergus's and Maloney's worlds were unreal, for everything that she recalls from the past seventeen years, and the events that take place during that one day that constitutes the time span of the novel, belong to a recognizable world. Moore's break from realism here is stylistic rather than in subject matter: it is her recollections of the events of her life, and not the events themselves, that create their significance for Mary. Because the emphasis in the novel is on the way Mary sees her dilemmas rather than on her as a complete character, we are able to measure how well Moore succeeded in this somewhat risky stance that he assumed here. "I have taken my years of wandering from country to country", he explained just after the book was published, "my changes of nationality, my forgettings, rememberings, my feelings of being lost and a stranger and have, I hope, made them hers".⁸

By the end of her long and confusing day, Mary has come to terms with the sexual and, in part at least, with the social determinants of her psychological dilemma, and she emerges with a complexity that on the whole is missing in Sheila Redden, Jamie Mangan and Eileen Hughes. It is true that Sheila and Eileen, like Mary, have to fight against an order imposed upon them by a male oriented world, but their response is more direct and impulsive, for neither one is obsessed with the self-introspection and intellectualization of this situation that characterize Mary. Sheila remains as Mrs. Redden - that is, as the doctor's wife - throughout her affair with Tom, and even after her desertion of her family to start a new life in London, for what disturbed her in retrospect was not a wasted identity, but a wasted life. And though Belfast and its rigid male dominated society was in part responsible for that, the true cause lay within herself, and her ultimate dismissal, therefore, of the three men who tried to control her - her husband, her brother and her lover - represents an essential step in her search for a life where she alone would be responsible for her actions.

Quite unlike Mary and Sheila in terms of experience, Eileen Hughes is the most ingenuous of Moore's female protagonists, recalling in some respects Una Clarke of *The Feast of Lupercal*, whose innocence and forthrightness also saved her from what could have been a destructive relationship. Seemingly detached from the feminist and political issues that in part moved Mary and Sheila to their actions, Eileen simply takes the world for what it offers, with a combination of astonishment and puzzled concern: her own freely accepted sexual surrender has no more effect upon her than her gradual learning about the erotic and spiritual compulsions that shape the lives of Mona and Bernard McAuley. In terms of the novel's title, she is both the temptation and the tempted: though McAuley's suicide cannot directly be blamed on her, she does, in her casual uninvolvedness with the world, pose something of an irresolvable threat to individuals who are characterized by sophistication and deviousness.

The question of marital and sexual infidelity has occupied Moore in most of his fiction since *Ginger Coffey*, though it is only in *Fergus* where the husband leaves the wife. In *The Mangan Inheritance* (1979), Moore shifts his emphasis from the person who does the walking out to the one who is left behind, though throughout his fiction, as reflected in such characters as Devine, Ginger and Ernest Truelove, he has always manifested a strong compassion over such situations. James Mangan's discovery that he is related to the Irish *poète maudit* of the same name is perhaps no more consoling for him than to be regarded as an appendage to his successful actress wife; for him, this process of self-discovery becomes a nightmarish experience, where he encounters greed, drunkenness, violence and incest - a world, to which he, alarmingly, finds himself attracted through the sluttish sexuality of Kathleen Mangan. That he is saved from this world by his father's stroke in Montreal constitutes something of a *deus ex machina* solution, but in terms of the recurring father-son relationships throughout Moore's fiction, as well as of many of his protagonists' compulsions to exorcise their Irish ghosts, it is a fitting one. Formally, however, this very brief concluding section of the novel, where Jamie sits beside his dying father, might have worked better had it resolved or echoed more credibly the issues raised in the long gothic section of the novel set in Ireland.

Yeats's continuing influence on Moore is reflected in the title and metaphysical implications of *Cold Heaven* (1983), which also carries many echoes of his earlier novels, in its settings of Nice, New York and Carmel, and in its exploitation of such recurring concerns as marital infidelity, guilt and the day-to-day conflicts between faith and disbelief, between free will and various forms of determinism. Marie Davenport is not overtly as courageous or as impulsive as either Mary Dunne or Sheila Redden, though she shares those women's guilt over her decision to leave her husband; unlike them, too, she does not easily replace a lost spiritual faith with a secular state of grace deriving from a fulfilling sexuality. Her metaphysical fear is akin to that of Tomas O'Malley or Anthony Maloney, and as with Fergus Fadden, her uncertainty about the consequences of what on one level is a purely selfish act is given a bizarre dramatization through a series of events that in the strictest sense defy or expand our notions of reality. Yet the events of the novel, from the opening motorboat accident to Alex in Nice (based on a similar accident to Moore in the *Laurentians* in 1954) through his "deaths" and "resurrections" to Marie's final resolution, are given a precise authority and inevitability through Moore's ability to exploit the possibilities of traditional realism. Our capitulation at the outset to the basic elements of the "thriller" story (an interesting note in the novel is Moore's naming one of the doctors Bernard Mara, a pseudonym he himself used when writing three of his early pulp "thrillers") is soon reinforced by our involvement with Marie's metaphysical and spiritual dilemmas, and we are not entirely certain whether she is free at the end, or whether she is still to be, as Yeats states in his poem of the same title, "stricken by the injustice of the skies for punishment".

Artistically, with his occasional forays into the comic mode, his experimentations with fantasy and the gothic, but particularly with his recurring exploitations of realism, Moore has amply demonstrated why he is not only Graham Greene's "favourite living novelist", but one who enjoys a high reputation throughout the literary world. Early in his career he said that "a good writer must feel sympathetic with even the least of his characters, and it is only the second-rate writer who will make out of his flat characters mere caricatures",⁹ and this compassionate stance has continued to shape his vision and to underscore his reputation as a humane and moral novelist. He has on occasion voiced his concern that writers sometimes lose contact with the world of ordinary people, "that real world in which our parents and relatives still live", and that he is "anxious to preserve those strong links with the real world".¹⁰ As we have seen, that "real world" in Moore can take many shapes and be disturbed by many forces, but what remains consistent in him are the substance and

credibility of his characters, and his own sympathetic dramatizations of the ways these characters attempt to resolve their dilemmas.

NOTES

1. Hallvard Dahlie, "Brian Moore: An Interview", *Tamarack Review* 46 (Winter 1986), pp. 9-10.
2. Brian Moore, "The Expatriate Writer", *Antigonish Review* 17 (Spring 1974), p. 30.
3. Brian Moore, "Preliminary Pages for a Work of Revenge", *Midstream* (Winter 1961), p. 58.
4. Robert Sullivan, "Brian Moore: A Clinging Climate", *London Magazine* 16:5 (December 1976/January 1977), pp. 65-66.
5. "Robert Fulford Interviews Brian Moore", *Tamarack Review* 23 (Spring 1962), p. 14.
6. "David Watmough Interviews Brian Moore", CBC Radio, June 1, 1963.
7. Robert Sullivan, p. 69.
8. "Brian Moore Tells About *I Am Mary Dunne*", *Literary Guild Magazine*, July 1968, p. 5.
9. Brian Moore, Speech at Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver, B.C., November 26, 1962.
10. Donald Cameron, "Brian Moore", *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, 2 (Toronto, 1973), p. 75.

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