



Pierse, Mary (ed.), *George Moore: Artistic Visions and Literary Worlds*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006, xvii + 246 pp.

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In her essay, 'His Father's Son: the Political Inheritance', Mary Pierse, the editor of this volume, argues for a continuing political commitment in George Moore's work. It may not always be as overt and polemical, she maintains, as it is in *Parnell and His Island*, the book in which he came closest to the political attitudes of his nationalist MP father, but it is implicit through Moore's fiction of the 1890s including his best-known novel *Esther Waters*. Those politically challenging attitudes, together with his preoccupation with language, Pierse concludes, make it valid to class his work as 'minor literature' according to the definition of Deleuze and Guattari, literature written against the grain. This book as a whole, however, raises the problem of why Moore should continue to be treated as a 'minor writer' in the more conventional sense of the term, so little read and so little studied in the academy.

Adrian Frazier, in the volume's opening essay, '“I No Longer Underrate Him”: the Question of Moore's Value', attributes much of the blame to Yeats, whose cannily negative portrait of Moore in *Dramatis Personae* 'has caused more damage to Moore's reputation than any other of the multitudinous disparagements of this often-disparaged master of the modern novel'. Frazier's essay itself is suggestive of the frustration he has come to feel at the lack of appreciation of Moore, the subject of his superb biography published in 2000. That book was very widely and positively reviewed, but often by reviewers who continued to belittle Moore's work: Denis Donoghue is cited as a notable example. As a result, the present essay is written in a spirit of partisan apologetics, just the spirit Frazier avoided in the biography, which in its sympathetic reading of Moore's work never tried to make a case against his detractors. Why is Moore not taken seriously as the major writer that Frazier and the other scholars represented in this volume clearly take him to be?

On the face of it, there is a great deal to be said for Moore. There is his international cosmopolitanism as a writer who first established himself in Paris as companion and associate of Manet and Zola, took a major role in the Irish Literary Revival, and ended his life in London celebrated as the great master of English prose. The range of scholars represented in this volume, based on an international conference held in Cork in 2004, reflect his interest for different literary and linguistic traditions. So Siofra Pierse compares Moore with Voltaire as 'briseurs de fers', liberatory breakers of shackles, while Munira Mutran in her essay on *Confessions of a Young Man* analyses the exemplary value of its form as autobiography from within a Brazilian context. Konstantin Doulamis examines what was involved in Moore's 'translation' – he knew

no Greek and was working from a French version – of *Daphnis and Chloe*, the third century romance by Longus. We are shown in a number of essays the continuing relevance of some of Moore's less well-known later works, such as *The Brook Kerith*, which Peter Christiansen relates to the traditions of the search for the historical Jesus. Many of the contributors, however, concentrate on the central period of his more realistic fiction from *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) through to *The Lake* (1905). Ann Heilman looks at various pathologies of the artist manqué in *Vain Fortune* (1891-5), Fabienne Gaspari at portraits of the artists and the exhibition of women's bodies in *A Mummer's Wife* (1885) and *Evelyn Innes* (1898). The significance of the collection of short stories, *The Untilled Field* (1903) is examined from very different points of view by Fabienne Garcier as a pivotal work in the history of the Irish short story and, in its first translated Irish form as *An t-Úr-Ghort*, by Pádraigín Riggs. The issues of Moore's politics is brought into focus not only in Mary Pierse's own essay but in the contributions of Elena Jaime de Pablos who makes a strong case for Moore as a committed feminist, and Catherine Smith who sees Moore's feminism in *A Drama in Muslin* in a more qualified light. The intersections between politics and aesthetics are highlighted in two essays, by Michael O'Sullivan and Mark Llewellyn, on Moore's treatment of the theme of celibacy.

The volume thus gives us a renewed sense of the sheer range and volume of Moore's work, its political engagement, its contemporary relevance and its characteristic thematic preoccupations. Yet the evidence of Alberto Lazaro's essay, fascinatingly revealing as it is about the practices of censorship in Franco's Spain, brings home how little known until very recently Moore has remained to Spanish readers, while it does not appear from Munira Mutran's contribution that Moore is much more widely read in Latin America, for all the words of praise for *Hail and Farewell* she quotes from Borges. Only indifferently honoured in his own country, long unfashionable in Britain, not much translated even in countries where his work might seem of relevance, why does Moore remain in the marginal status of minor writer for all his accomplishments?

One partial answer might be derived from two of the essays in this book that analyse Moore's incurable tendency to re-write. Brendan Fleming comments on an early forgotten serial version of the story 'Mildred Lawson' from 1888, and how it differs from the revised novella that appeared in *Celibates* (1895). He shows the stylistic significance of the first text as an early marker of Moore's desire to break away from Zola's realism and his immediate reaction to the device of the interior monologue pioneered by Edouard Dujardin in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* published just the year before in 1887. But what he does not bring out is how many of the changes to the 1895 version must have been animated by Moore's vituperative revenge on Pearl Craigie, in the wake of an ignominiously ended love-affair, a biographical source revealed in detail in Frazier's biography. Moore constantly revised previous work in the grip of the strong feelings of the moment, often unbalancing the writing as a result. He was equally prone to indulge whatever was the latest in his stylistic passions. Moore notoriously swung from decadence in the manner of Huysmans, through earnest Zolaesque naturalism to

muted impressionism, and on finally to the fully-blown rhythmic aestheticism of his late style. Christine Huguet in her essay 'Charting an Aesthetic Journey: the Case of *Esther Waters*' shows the remarkable instability of Moore's narrative style in the novel from its first manuscript drafts to the last revision of 1920. One is bound to feel, irritably, that Moore was unable to leave well alone. What is more, though one may agree with Frazier that 'Moore committed himself heart-and-soul to being a great author and to bringing the dignity of art ... to the production of English prose fiction', virtually every one of his books is flawed by his uncertain touch and his personal volatility.

Frazier places Moore with a small group of the most important modernist writers of his time – James, Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf – but points to his uniqueness among them in that 'he never forsook his sense of personal absurdity and self-doubt'. That is absolutely right, and may hold a clue to his continuing (relative) obscurity. Moore's greatest work is *Hail and Farewell*, the book in which he most tellingly and effectively exploits just that sense of personal absurdity in the achievement of his autobiographical memoir. Lucy McDiarmid's brilliant essay 'Face to Face, One on One: George Moore in the Contact Zone' shows the subtlety of the way Moore constantly adjusts the focus in his evocation of his encounters with peasant figures in *Hail and Farewell*, encounters that expose his own gauche uneasiness, as in the hilarious episode where he leaves behind his underwear in a cottage in payment for a bowl of milk. *Hail and Farewell* is a splendidly mocking evocation of the enterprise of the Literary Revival, but nothing is better achieved in it than the mocking self-portrait of the author. The trouble is that it runs to three volumes, and a great chunk of it is devoted to what now feels like an impossibly dated cult of Wagnerism. So it remains, and probably will remain, one of the great unread Irish books, not even making it into Declan Kiberd's *Irish Classics*. *George Moore: Artistic Visions and Literary Voices* is a valuable addition to the still fairly small shelf of Moore scholarship, but it may not be enough to win him the larger readership that the essayists obviously feel he deserves.

