

## The Fourth Master: Reading Brian Moore Reading James Joyce

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In the opening chapter of James Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses* (1922), Stephen Dedalus speaks with Haines, that "ponderous Saxon," who is an ethnologist of the Irish language studying at Oxford (4). While standing atop Martello Tower, Dedalus muses, more to himself than to Haines, that he is the servant of three masters: the imperial British state, the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church, and colonial Ireland (17). For Dedalus, these three masters stifle his creativity and frustrate his understanding of what it means to be a writer. In a similar manner, Brian Moore deeply admired James Joyce but, like other writers of his generation who were grappling with Joyce's ghost, he also needed to escape from the long shadow of this powerful 'fourth master'. Much of Irish fiction in the latter twentieth-century echoes with Joyce, and this is particularly true of the early novels that Brian Moore wrote in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Moore, who grew up in Northern Ireland, wrote twenty novels before his sudden death in 1999, and he is best known for such work as *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965), *Catholics* (1972), *Cold Heaven* (1983), *Black Robe* (1985), and his final novel, *The Magician's Wife* (1997). An uncommonly prodigious writer, Moore also wrote a number of short stories, a brief documentary on Canada, and several screenplays, most notably *Torn Curtain* for Alfred Hitchcock. As a young man Moore served in the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) in Belfast during the Blitz and then he joined the British Ministry of War Transport. After VE Day he served in Poland with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association until, in 1947, he was made redundant and moved to Canada. From the beginning of his career, Moore viewed Joyce as a hero not only for his literary genius but also for his ability to reinvent himself through peripatetic

exile. It is, of course, perilous to state that one author categorically influenced another author because to do so is to ignore the miasma of experience that swirls around any writer's life. During the early years of World War II, for example, while Moore was still living in Belfast, he was reading Yeats, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dostoevsky, and a number of socialist broadsheets. While these influences are significant and should not be discounted, it was nevertheless Joyce who dominated Moore's imagination and influenced his early fiction in ways that other writers did not.

In a letter to his brother dated 18 September 1906, Joyce declared that, "I am not a literary Jesus Christ" (Ellmann 231). Indeed, yet on some level he does seem to have 'saved' Brian Moore from, as Moore saw it, the bigotry and hopelessness of the North. In fact, what Moore learned about the Joycean motif of exile and internationalism enabled him to undermine the expectations placed on him as a writer. It is even possible that Moore's passion for internationalism and the varied identities that are associated with a rootless writer may have been promoted by his early admiration for Joyce.

Admittedly, Moore's teenage interest in *Ulysses* was fueled by the salacious reputation of the text as well as his father's intractable opinion that "James Joyce is a sewer" (Carlson 112). In spite of these aesthetic pronouncements—or perhaps because of them—Moore was fascinated with *Ulysses* and it is worth quoting at length his first experience with the text because it illuminates his feelings at the time. In an article that Moore wrote entitled "Old Father, Old Artificer" he remembers his introduction to *Ulysses*:

In 1939 when I was eighteen years old I was invited to spend the weekend at the house of parents of a boy I had known in school. Browsing through the bookshelves, I discovered, hidden behind some innocent titles, the two-volume Odyssey Press edition of *Ulysses*, published in Hamburg, Paris, Bologna, and bearing the warning: *Not To Be Introduced Into the British Empire Or the U.S.A.* My friend told me it was a dirty book which his older brother had brought back from Paris earlier that year. As my friend's parents were not present that weekend

I settled in to read it openly in search of the ‘hot bits.’ It was, of course, a dirty book, more explicit about sexual matters than any other I had read until then. But it was, for me, stimulating in an altogether different way. On Sunday night, when it was time to leave, I hid both volumes in my suitcase. It was the first and only time that I have committed theft and today, forty years later, I still have both volumes, much worn, carefully preserved, the only books I have carried with me throughout my life. (13)

Patricia Craig, who has recently published the authorized biography of Moore’s life, notes that he gave several versions of his first encounter with *Ulysses*, but that the above version seems to be the most authentic except that, instead of visiting a friend, Moore was visiting his cousin Tom Graham (76–77). Although these biographical details are somewhat mercurial, what remains less ambiguous is the effect that Joyce had upon Moore, as he further notes in “Old Father, Old Artificer”:

From those first readings, *Ulysses* changed, if not my life, then my ideas about becoming a writer. It both inspired and intimidated me . . . For in my twenties, before I began to write myself, Joyce was already, for me, the exemplar of what a writer should be: an exile, a rebel, a man willing to endure poverty, discouragement, the hardships of illness, and the misunderstandings of critics, a man who would sacrifice his life to the practice of writing. (14)

Moore would later assume many of these qualities in his own career. He would also make the ironic discovery that one of his relatives appears in *Ulysses*. Coming as Moore did from the Catholic elite in Northern Ireland (his father was the first Catholic surgeon at the Mater Infirmorum Hospital), Moore’s uncle was Eoin MacNeill, the same man who countermanded the Easter 1916 Rising. MacNeill’s brother, Hugh, was the prototype for Professor McHugh in *Ulysses*. Moore, however, did not realize his own biographical closeness to the text until much later in his life when Joyce’s biographer, Richard Ellmann, told him (Hicks 318)<sup>1</sup>.

Moore clearly viewed Joyce as, if not a hero, certainly as a role model for how writers were supposed to act and by emulating this man who placed Dublin so firmly upon the literary map Moore was given credit for doing the same to Belfast. The influence of Joyce on Moore's early career is certainly strong, and Moore found his voice by subverting several Joycean motifs that are found in both *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* and *Ulysses*. We can even argue that Moore found his voice by rebelling against the fourth master. This is most evident in his first three novels: *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Feast of Lupercal* (1958), and *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960).

For his first serious novel, Brian Moore made a conscious decision to create a protagonist that was antithetical to Stephen Dedalus in nearly every respect. Judith Hearne is an aging devout Catholic who yearns for acceptance, which is in direct contrast to Stephen's youthful iconoclastic individualism; moreover, since its publication in 1955, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* has been hailed as a modern masterpiece in part because it is a radical departure from the traditional concerns of a male Irish writer. This novel, which was written in the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains, not only exposes Moore's resentment of Catholicism, but it also subverts several Joycean leitmotifs. As Moore notes,

I wanted to write about my own loss of faith, but did not want to risk adverse comparisons with [Joyce] by describing the loss of faith in a young Irishman. And so, I thought of Bloom rather than Stephen and attempted a characterisation which could in no way be described as autobiographical. I decided not to write about an intellectual's loss of faith but of the loss of faith in someone devout, the sort of woman my mother would have known, a 'sodality lady.' ("Old Father" 15)

According to this particular quote, when Moore first conceived the idea about writing about his own loss of faith, the prototype was initially Stephen but he forced himself to think instead of Bloom. Thus, in a paradoxical manner Stephen is the center of gravity for the character that would eventually become Judith Hearne because Moore forced himself

to consider a character that was *unlike* Stephen, and more like Bloom. Comparing Judith Hearne to Leopold Bloom is useful, but her characterization was chiefly generated by a reaction against all that Stephen represents. Rather than focus on the loss of faith for a young intellectual Irishman, Moore concentrated instead on a middle-aged Irishwoman and, in turning away from the literary expectations placed on Moore for this particular subject matter, he crafted a novel that was, at least at the time of its publication, unique to Northern Ireland. Although *Judith Hearne* is not autobiographical in the strict sense of that word, the story is loosely drawn from Moore's childhood memories of a middle-aged woman who visited his home. Moore states that Mary Judith Keogh was

. . . a lady with very genteel pretensions. We used to have her up for Sunday afternoon tea and sometimes we'd give her a glass of sherry. She had once been engaged to be married. She thought he had money and he thought she had, but neither of them had so the whole thing was sort of broken off. (qtd. in Lennon 21)

Even though Moore wrote a number of successful pot-boilers in the early 1950s, this becomes the plot of his first serious novel: like Miss Keogh, Judith's spinsterhood and social awkwardness jeopardizes her financial security. That she turns to God for comfort and is rejected merely frustrates her already unstable mental condition. Her subsequent collapse of faith is compounded by the harsh socio-economic bigotry of Belfast. Moore makes a specific point to show that Belfast is even more unforgiving than Joyce's Dublin, which at least has a "certain robust charm, a feeling of camaraderie, which is conspicuously absent in Moore's Belfast" (Sullivan 19). Just as Joyce had great affection for Dublin, Moore is hostile to Belfast and this polarizing emotion necessarily shapes the tone of the novel.

Everything, in fact, conspires against Judith because she is poor, unmarried, and she has been raised in a society that has practiced a conservative form of Roman Catholicism. All of these factors curtail any chance Judith may have of personal growth and she is forced into passivity and, by extension, a type of suffering. Her social downfall is coupled with a spiritual crisis that allows the passion of the title to be read in

three distinct ways: passion for alcohol, passion for love, and the passion of Christ's suffering. Through it all she grows ever more isolated.

This runs in direct contrast to the world surrounding Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist* because in spite of his determination to become his own individual he still has friends and family that he can fall back upon for support. Judith Hearne does not have these social luxuries and she spirals into overwhelming loneliness. While both characters ultimately lose their faith, the authorial attitude towards this loss remains markedly different. In *Portrait*, Stephen listens to Father Arnall's blistering sermon on hell but ultimately rejects such visions after seeing the Bird-Girl on the beach; the tone in the rest of Joyce's narrative remains heroic and Stephen's famous stance of *non-serviam* strikes us as an energized and beneficial rebellion against Catholicism.

Judith Hearne, on the other hand, listens to a thunderous sermon about hell from Father Quigley and silently begs for absolution when she hears the line, "if you don't have time for God, *God will have no time for you*" (73). Unlike Stephen who willingly turns away from the Church, Hearne wants to embrace Catholicism but when she tries to get inside the tabernacle to feel the existence of God she is ordered to leave the Church (241). Both of these characters experience a terrifying sermon on hell but Stephen rebels against Catholicism and is saved from Irish society, while Hearne tries to embrace Catholicism and is damned by Irish society. Stephen Dedalus flees Catholic Ireland and shucks off his religion, but Judith Hearne is literally imprisoned by Catholic Ireland when she is taken to Earncliffe Home, which is a mental institution managed by a group of nuns. Shortly before they affix a portrait of the Sacred Heart above her bed, Judith Hearne realizes that her loss of faith is related to a loss of country:

If you do not believe, you are alone. But I was of Ireland, among my people, a member of my faith. Now I have no—and if no faith, then no people. No, no, I have not given up. I cannot. For if I give up this, then I must give up the rest. (252)

Dedalus does not want to be a Catholic but he may still believe in God while Hearne, on the other hand, wants to be a Catholic but she

no longer believes in God.<sup>2</sup> One character gains freedom as a result of doubt, and the other is imprisoned in a mental ward. Although the plot of *Judith Hearne* was initially inspired by a family story, Moore has written a masterful narrative about losing faith, and he achieves this in large measure by reacting against the long shadow of James Joyce.

Moore's second novel, *The Feast of Lupercal*, is about the Irish educational system. The narrative perspective, however, is not from a young pupil but from a disaffected and sexually prudish teacher. If *Portrait* is about the development of Stephen's moral consciousness, *Lupercal* is about the stagnation of moral courage. This particular novel represents what could have happened to Stephen Dedalus if he had stayed in Ireland and never found the defiance, as he says with such charming hubris in *Portrait of the Artist*, "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (218). Unlike Joyce's novel, *Lupercal* is not just about religious control over young men because Moore's text is also about how Catholic education at the time frustrated male adulthood, both intellectually and sexually.

From the outset, Diarmuid Devine—who goes by the nickname "Dev" which in the 1950s would recall the name of Ireland's famous *Taoiseach*, Eamon de Valera—contemplates why he finds it awkward to talk with women. After he assigns pieces of *Macbeth* to his class he considers that, "it was the education in Ireland, dammit, he had said it many a time. He had been a boarder at this very school, shut off from girls until he was almost a grown man" (12). Devine lives alone, his parents are both dead, and this isolation strengthens his ties to the college of Ardath where he teaches. A substitution has taken place in that the school is Dev's parent and provider. His entire life has taken place in an enclosed system, and even though he is thirty-seven years old he remains naively boyish in his understanding of the world.

In both *Portrait* and *Lupercal*, women offer an escape (or at least an alternative) to the restrictive Catholic system that surrounds the two main characters. In *Portrait*, Dedalus is not only influenced by Eileen Vance, a Protestant, but he also feels courtly love for Emma Clery, a spiritual attachment to a quasi-mystical Bird-Girl who wades on a beach, and he lusts after a Dublin prostitute while at Belvedere. This hodgepodge of

feminine identity tugs him towards a sense of individualism and freedom. Pointedly, these archetypal images of virgins and whores enable him famously to turn his back on his community, his religion, and his family.

Diarmuid Devine, on the other hand, is only interested in one woman and it appears that, subconsciously or not, Moore has fused the Joycean models of femininity (virgin, whore, temptress) into the character of Una Clarke, who is up from Dublin after having an affair with a married man. Like Eileen Vance, Una is a Protestant and, like Emma Clery and the Bird-Girl, she offers a sense of salvation but she is tainted and sexually dangerous. In spite of the racy gossip that surrounds her, Una is in fact a virgin. She wants to sleep with Dev but he turns away, terrified, thus exposing how emotionally crippled his education at Ardath has left him. He is not necessarily afraid of the social repercussions of sleeping with Una, but he lacks the character to embrace a healthy sense of masculinity that runs counter to that which he has learned at Ardath. Rumors about their affair nevertheless spread around campus and Dev is punished for his perceived sins. Stripped of dignity, he is allowed to keep his job but decides not to follow Una to London.

Stephen Dedalus, of course, rises above the institution of his boyhood education and leaves Ireland. Conversely, at the end of *Lupercal*, Dev does not rise above the institution that shaped him because he chooses to keep his job at Ardath. In a clever zeugmatic metaphor his manhood is likened to that of a horse that is “harnessed” and “dumb” (219). Commenting on the close of this novel Moore once stated,

I thought that [Devine’s] fate was, finally, his own fault. It was partly the system—the system of education which produced a man, a schoolmaster, who was once like those boys he is caning and who is repeating it all over again. When he made his rebellion it was too late and they—authority—they walked over him, just as he would have walked over a boy who rebelled in class. But he had a choice—he could have gone away with that girl. He had a choice. (Sale 74)



Although Devine's individualism has not had the chance to develop like Dedalus's he could have, if he had the strength, escaped. *Lupercal* is therefore certainly a story of Moore's own draconian educational experiences at Saint Malachy's College in Belfast, but beyond that he inverts several elements of *Portrait of the Artist*. Namely, Moore's narrative is told from the perspective of a teacher, not a student; secondly, women strengthen Dedalus in *Portrait* but this theme is subverted in *Lupercal*; and, lastly, escape and moral conviction exist in Joyce while the reverse is the ending of Moore's novel. In other words, Devine is what Dedalus might have become had he not rebelled and fled Ireland.

Moore's third novel is also the last narrative in his oeuvre where Joyce's influence can be detected running throughout the entirety of the text. *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* is not only Moore's first novel to be set outside of Ireland, but it may also be the first Irish critique of North American society, as Moore once cautiously intimated during an interview, "I think I am the first Irish-born Irish writer who came to America and has made the transition to writing about American people" (Graham 73). Even though Ginger is abrasive and foolish, he is still better off than Judith Hearne and Diarmuid Devine because he is married and he is a father. As Ginger drifts from bar to bar, job to job, he encounters the life and pulse of Montreal, which was Moore's adopted home from 1948 until late 1958. Ginger's voyage around Montreal is uncannily Bloomian and this similarity between Moore's protagonist and one of the greatest characters in literature is not accidental, as Moore suggests when he noted that, "if you wanted [Coffey's] literary genesis, it's in Joyce's father" (Fulford 17). Of course, according to Richard Ellmann, John Stanislaus Joyce was the template for several of Joyce's primary characters, including Simon Dedalus and Leopold Bloom (Ellmann 22). Moore, I believe, was thinking specifically of John Joyce and Leopold Bloom when he wrote *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. Many critics, in fact, have likened Ginger Coffey to Leopold Bloom. It has even been humorously suggested by one critic that 2 January 1956 be known as "Coffeyday" in Montreal (Frayne 222).

There are certainly a number of compelling parallels between Coffey and Bloom. Both of them are outsiders in that one is Jewish in Irish

society, and the other is Irish in Canadian society; one sails around Dublin, the other, Montreal; Bloom is a canvasser of newspaper advertisements and Coffey is a proofreader at the *Montreal Gazette*. Aside from these surface congruencies, both of the characters are in danger of losing their wives—Blazes Boylan threatens to cuckold Molly from Bloom, Gerry Grosvenor threatens to steal Veronica from Coffey. Both men illustrate the masculinity of their rivals from similar perspectives. In *Ulysses*, Bloom describes Blazes as the “conquering hero” in part because the masculinity that he displays in the Ormond Hotel is confident and virile (217). Grosvenor, a cartoonist, is equally masculine and when Ginger sees him eating lunch at the Pavilion with his own wife he runs away feeling like a “boy escaping a pair of bullies” (88). Both Bloom and Coffey have teenage daughters they do not understand and both men have unintentionally adopted a son in either Stephen Dedalus or Michel Beaulieu. Notably this little boy in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* is the only character that says “I love you” to Ginger (99) and, in response, Coffey gives Michel certain trappings of his identity such as two Alpine buttons and a brush dingus that he wears on his hat (103). Just as Bloom has feelings for Dedalus, Coffey has similar feelings for a boy who is not biologically his own.

Lastly, both men undergo a trial for their perceived sins and they both experience a form of personal resurrection and familial rejuvenation. Bloom transforms in “Circe” when he encounters Bella Cohen, Zoe, Grandfather Virag, and several others who make him male, female, sometimes messianic, but in the end a new Bloom appears as the “finished example of the new womanly man” (403). Ginger Coffey likewise undergoes a trial, albeit one that is not rooted in the fantastic or hallucinogenic, when he is arrested for urinating on the Royal Family Hotel (217–18). After spending a drunken night in jail, Ginger stands before Judge Amédée Monceau who listens to testimony brought against him by the Montreal police. In the process, Ginger’s Irishness becomes an object of ridicule, which reduces the courtroom to bursts of laughter. Throughout the trial Monceau asks Coffey if he thinks it is “common practice to relieve oneself in office doorways? Are you asking me to believe the Irish are uncivilized?” (229). In spite of Coffey’s outsider status

as an Irishman, Monceau allows him to return to Canadian society instead of sending him to prison for seven years. With clemency granted, Coffey's anagnorisis is complete when he "no longer felt any interest in Ginger Coffey. He felt like someone else" (234). As a result of these two epiphanic trials, the two Penelopes—Molly and Veronica—have their wayward husbands returned as transformed men, and both women accept them back.

Although these congruencies are intriguing, there are significant differences that suggest Moore reacted against Joyce in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. Ginger's crisis, for example, is far more immediate than Bloom's because Molly never genuinely considers leaving him, but Veronica seriously considers leaving Coffey. Likewise, Bloom is a pacifist in relationship to Blazes, but when Coffey finds out about Grosvenor he attacks him (93). Bloom is financially secure while Coffey is struggling to make ends meet and, lastly, Bloom is at least tenuously a part of his home-country, but Coffey has abandoned his. On this final point, there is significant difference between the two characters because Coffey's nationality and background are called into question in ways that Bloom's never are. The Citizen may question Bloom's nationality in "Cyclops" but never to such an extent that Bloom feels entirely alienated. As James Fairhall notes in his seminal critique of Joyce, Bloom "represents the Other, to the Citizen and his cronies, not just because he is Jewish but because he strikes them as unmanly and even feminine" (118). This implies a problem that others have with Bloom's nationality and manhood but, significantly, Bloom himself is relatively comfortable with his identity. This is not the case for Coffey, who often finds his nationality ridiculed, his role as husband and father undermined, and this distresses him throughout the novel.

Although *Ginger Coffey* is the last novel that Moore wrote that contains resemblances to Joyce throughout the entire text, the fourth master nevertheless continued to influence fragments of Moore's subsequent work. In *An Answer from Limbo* (1962), Brendan Tierney adopts the artistic credo of Dedalus but he does so in New York and at the expense of his family. The gritty determination that Tierney embodies in this *Künstlerroman* appears noble at first, but it ultimately ruins his family

and casts doubt upon the virtues of turning away from his Irish roots. Similarly, the eponymous character of *I am Mary Dunne* (1968) parallels the “Penelope” chapter of *Ulysses* in that both narratives are in first person, and both Molly Bloom and Mary Dunne recall their love affairs while simultaneously asking questions about the state of their current marriages. On a lesser note, the fantastic images and trial that appear in Joyce’s “Circe” are recreated in Moore’s brilliant but often overlooked novel, *Fergus* (1970).<sup>3</sup>

Although Moore had great respect for Joyce, he was not impressed with *Finnegans Wake* (1939). In spite of this attitude though, elements of the *Wake* exist in Moore’s ninth novel, *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975). Moore never hid his criticism of Joyce’s final novel, and he went so far as to call it “an unreadable curiosity, a naked emperor” (“Old Father” 15). In an interview, he further stated that, “although, I am among Joyce’s greatest admirers, I think *Finnegans Wake* is a great mistake. No one reads *Finnegans Wake* for pleasure, nor have they ever” (Meyer 175). Echoes of the *Wake* nevertheless dominate *The Great Victorian Collection* along with elements of magic realism and Moore’s growing interest in one of Joyce’s heirs, Jorge Luis Borges. In this, one of Moore’s most surrealistic novels, Anthony Maloney is a history professor at McGill University. He awakens one morning in California to discover that he has created a perfect collection of genuine Victorian artifacts in the parking lot of a motel. These objects have appeared *ex nihilo* and we are confronted with a world where reality is grounded in a waking dream.

On a final note, Joyce and Moore were both intrigued by Ireland’s premier *poète maudit*, James Clarence Mangan. While Joyce often “exaggerated the extent to which Mangan had been ignored by his countrymen after his death” (Deane 32), Moore used this quasi-nationalist poet to interrogate quaint stereotypes of Irish peasantry in his eleventh novel, *The Mangan Heritage* (1979). The main character, Jamie Mangan, visits Ireland in search of his roots but discovers instead a dysfunctional and psychologically disturbed family.

Brian Moore lived most of his life in North America and came to understand self-imposed exile intimately and because of this he was

skeptical of Joyce's myth of expatriation. As Moore correctly notes in his article, "The Writer as Exile," it could be argued that "Joyce chose exile because he ran away from Ireland with a woman he was not married to, and fell into the habit of expatriate life because he managed to earn a small living abroad as a teacher of English language classes" (6). Although critical of Joyce in his later life, Moore retained great affection and respect for the man that so influenced his early career as a novelist. Shortly before Moore died in January 1999, an interviewer asked him if he thought that the Great Irish Novel had been written yet. Moore thought for a moment and replied, "In a way, *Ulysses* is the great Irish novel, except that it's not a novel, which I think is very nice" (Fay 17).

The old father, the old artificer, influenced Moore profoundly as a young man and it was not until the middle of his career that Moore was able to liberate himself from serving the great master of twentieth-century literature. Put another way, without Joyce—and Moore's reaction against some of his motifs and tropes—Moore's early work as we know it would not exist with the same power and beauty that it does.

### Notes

- 1 Of further interest, Constantine Curran also names Hugh MacNeill as the prototype of Professor McHugh in his memoir, *James Joyce Remembered* (61).
- 2 Why else, in *Portrait*, would Dedalus muse about not being afraid to make a "mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too" (213)?
- 3 The eponymous character of *Fergus* also intones the word "Thalassa" at the opening of the story much like Buck Mulligan does at the beginning of *Ulysses*.

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