

**REVIEW: MARÍA ELENA JAIME DE PABLOS AND
MARY PIERSE. EDS. 2014. *GEORGE MOORE AND
THE QUIRKS OF HUMAN NATURE. REIMAGINING
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George Moore invites comparison with the great masters of literature in their depiction of human nature, prone as he was to observe his contemporaries and to give a vivid portrayal of their defining oddities or, what this volume of essays terms the 'quirks' of human nature. Obviously, the editors have chosen to use the word in the widest sense with a view to opening further perspectives on Moore's 'snapshots of humanity in its numerous manifestations' (p.10). This provides an interesting mix of topics even though the interpretation of the word might seem to be stretched a little too far in some articles.

Published by Peter Lang in the series 'Reimagining Ireland', this collection contains fourteen essays grouped into four thematic sections. The papers were presented at the Fourth International George Moore Conference, held in Almeria in March 2010. Far from being straightjacketed into distinct sections that prohibit cross referencing, each contribution addresses its own particular field of study but also connects with the rest of the work, as is testified by the index; for example, the entry on 'women' refers to pages in various essays in the volume. The explicit aim of the collection, the editors explain in the introduction, is to establish overarching dialogues between essays: "There is perhaps more than binds their subject matter together than would separate them" (pp.9–10).

The first part of the book is entitled 'Hidden Links' and consists of five essays dealing with covert linkages between Moore and other authors or next of kin. Critics have generally highlighted Moore's complex relationship with Joyce and acknowledged the relevance of his works as a source of inspiration for Joyce. In the first essay entitled, 'Moore and Joyce : *Confessions of a Young Man* as an Influence on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', Adrian Frazier sets out to ascertain the putative influence of Moore's first autobiography on Joyce's *Bildungsroman*, uncovering extensive stylistic and thematic parallels between both works. Joyce may have been decisively inspired by Moore's rejuvenated form of the autobiographical genre when he revised his first version of *Stephen Hero*. For his part, Stoddard Martin, in 'Moore versus Wilde: The Vagaries of Spite', focuses his attention on the tumultuous relationship between the two compatriots, two strong personalities vying for literary success and public recognition. Drawing on the correspondence between George Moore and Frank Harris, Martin lays bare Moore's envious and spiteful feelings towards his fellow-writer. Moore was particularly resentful at seeing Wilde triumphant on the London stage. Robert Becker's essay, 'The Contrairian George Moore', identifies the author as a rebel with many a cause or, in a more jocular but thought-provoking way, as an 'Irish punk'.

Becker makes his point by providing an overview of Moore's artistic development and achievements, giving instances of his rebellious disposition at various stages of his creative career (the unconventionality of the essay goes as far as renaming 'Albert Nobbs' 'Alfred (sic) Nobbs' (p.47)). The last part of this stimulating essay concludes with a comparison between George Moore and Paul Simon, a pairing which might make sense for some of us only. In 'Moore and Fogazzaro, Body and Soul: Zeitgeist of the Fin de Siècle?', Mary Pierse sees all sorts of pertinent parallels – and disparities – in Moore's and Fogazzaro's respective novels: *Evelyn Innes*, *Sister Teresa* and *The Saint*. Both writers depict characters torn between a sense of spirituality, more often than not verging on mysticism, and the drives of the flesh. The pairing of Moore and Fogazzaro is particularly fruitful here. Beyond a most enlightening comparative analysis of the novels under study, the essay shows that the adopted critical stance introduces fresh ways of examining Moore's aforementioned novels. It has the merit of placing them against the religious and moral background of his time, and, thus, that of contextualising his exploration of human nature, notably through the portrayal of his heroines. The tempestuous relationship between George Moore and his brother Maurice is the focus of Conor Montague's essay, 'Philosophical Dialogue between the Brothers Moore (1903–1905): A Capacity for Misunderstanding'. Extensively drawing on their unpublished correspondence, Montague persuasively demonstrates that Moore exploited his theological dispute with his brother, and shows how their conflicting viewpoints reverberate through his fiction, notably in *The Lake* and *The Untilled Field*.

The second section, 'Terror and the Unconscious', offers three essays on George Moore's fascination for the darker recesses of the mind and shows that the author was familiar with the latest developments in psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Grubgeld's excellent chapter, 'George Moore's Autobiographies and the Vampiric Grasp of Home: To be Seduced, Transfixed, and Terrified', recalls that narrative memory is a characteristic trait of human nature and that it plays 'a crucial role in the formation of both personal and national identity' (p.91). In that respect, it ties in with the rhetoric and the imagery of the Anglo-Irish Gothic. The past is 'undead' and never loosens its vampiric grip on the present. However, for Moore, the past emerges as 'an object of aesthetic contemplation and imaginative reformulation' (p.98). In 'George Moore and the Unconscious in Evelyn and Sister Teresa: Shapes from an Underworld', Jayne Thomas claims that George Moore's novelistic treatment of the unconscious reflects nineteenth-century psychological theories. According to Thomas, Moore exploited the notion that the unconscious can cause psychic disruption but can also, alternatively, foster creativity. Unfortunately, the demonstration does not seem to get further ahead and peters out, for lack of proper textual support, into psychological considerations. Melanie Grundmann contributes a well-documented essay on the critical reception of George Moore's naturalistic novels in Victorian England. Focusing her attention on *A Mummer's Wife* and *Celibates*, Grundmann argues that Moore provocatively developed an imagery of physical and mental disease around his fictional characters so as to portray them as being victimized by moral conventions rather than as representing a threat to society.

The three essays in the third part of the book, under the tripartite heading, 'Paradox, Parody and Linguistic Significance', form a somewhat less homogeneous group than the first and the second part. Fabienne Gaspari's 'George Moore's Sense of Paradox in *A Mere*

Accident: 'In Large and Serpentine Curves' provides a compelling reading of Moore's 1887 novel. It is probably one of the most insightful essays in the collection, for it adroitly balances close reading of the text with illuminating insights into *fin de siècle* aesthetic tenets. Taking up the Moorian trope of the conflict between flesh and spirit, Gaspari ably demonstrates that the author's deep-seated sense of paradox underpins his digressive, image-making mode of writing, which, in its turn, brings to evidence the self-reflexive dimension of Moore's experimental novel. Identifying, in *Esther Waters*, aesthetic and stylistic characteristics and traits, seemingly at odds with naturalistic principles as expounded by Zola, Kathy R. Griffin sets out to revisit Moore's novel and to read it as a parody, in an essay entitled, 'Esther Waters as Parody: Naturalism, Victorian Morality, and the 'Bulges' of Human Nature'. This reading holds some truth and Griffin has a point. It is all the more plausible as George Moore had distanced himself from Zola by the time he published *Esther Waters*. However, while the essay is supported by a body of authoritative theoretical writings, the demonstration is impaired, to some degree, by an inadequate use of such words as 'imitation', 'parody' and 'satire'. In his essay, 'Early Feminist or Mainstream Writer? A Linguistic Analysis of George Moore's Portrayal of Women in Three Novels', José Antonio Hoyas Solís proposes an interesting linguistic approach to three naturalistic novels by George Moore with a view to assessing the author's degree of commitment to the feminist cause. Hoyas Solís shows himself to be cautious, recognizing that there might be inherent semantic fuzziness in the processing of the entered criteria. The verdict is that, while Moore was aware of women's issues, he was not a committed feminist.

The final section centres upon the representation of women in some of George Moore's works. Comprised of three chapters, it tackles a variety of texts produced at various stages of Moore's career and presents a number of interesting issues about the status of women within the social context of the late nineteenth century. In 'Nora Glynn in *The Lake*: 'A Natural Woman'', María Elena Jaime de Pablos engages with the representation of woman in George Moore's revised version of *The Lake* (1921). Informed by an ecofeminist framework, combining environmental and feminist theories, this innovative essay presents Nora Glynn not only as a socially emancipated woman, subverting the traditional gender stereotypes and eschewing essentialist notions of femininity, such as were developed by Rousseau, but also as a goddess-like figure closely associated with nature. Empowered with healing energy, Jaime de Pablos concludes, Nora plays a determining part in Father Oliver Gogarty's process of self-discovery and concomitant awakening to the reality of human nature. In her essay, "'On Women, on Art, on Life': George Moore (1852-1933) and Hannah Lynch (1859-1904)", Kathryn Laing seeks to establish parallels between the fiction of George Moore and that of the lesser known Irish author Hannah Lynch. Through their respective works, both novelists came to address the Woman question but, also, to celebrate the emergence of the New Woman in the late nineteenth-century. Laing's essay is concerned with identifying common ground between both authors, exploring their social interest in women's issues, not the least being the predicament of Irish daughters falling prey to their domineering, "monstrous mothers" (p.229). Laing speaks high of Hannah Lynch. My sole reservation about her documented essay is that its sociological turn precludes any really appreciative literary insight and comparatively tends somewhat to belittle Moore's acknowledged artistry. Catherine Smith's contribution and the final essay in the

last section, 'Listening to Héloïse and Abélard : 'A Barbarian and a Great Sorceress'', examines a much-neglected novel illustrative of George Moore's later period. The lack of critical interest in this work can probably, and partly, be ascribed to its convoluted style and narrating mode, spawning digressive tales, imitating medieval courtly love narratives but also disclosing Moore's fascination with story-telling and "romantic mythologizing" (p.245). Interestingly, Smyth argues that Moore intended to establish significant linkage between twelfth-century France and the Celtic Twilight besides foregrounding Héloïse as the primary narrator of his self-reflexive exploration of the past.

Overall, with all its strengths and minor failings, *George Moore and the Quirks of Human Nature* makes a highly valuable contribution to Moorian studies and adds to the already impressive body of critical writings published over the last years. It is a commendable collection of enlightening essays, adopting a wide variety of critical approaches. It will be rewarding reading for those who are interested in Irish Studies and, more generally, in the representations of human nature in the late-Victorian era and the early twentieth-century.