

Brian Moore (1921–1999) was born in Belfast. He emigrated first to Canada and later to California. He is also the author of *Black Robe*, *Catholics*, and *The Statement*, among other books. He was short-listed for the Booker Prize three times, and five of his novels have been made into films, including the BAFTA award-winning *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, starring Maggie Smith and Bob Hoskins.

Mary Gordon is the author of the novels *Spending*, *The Company of Women*, *Final Payments*, *The Other Side*, and *Pearl*; the collections *Temporary Shelter*, *The Stories of Mary Gordon*, and *The Rest of Life*; and the memoir *The Shadow Man*. She has received a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the 1997 O. Henry Award for best story. She teaches at Barnard College and lives in New York City.

THE LONELY PASSION OF JUDITH HEARNE

by Brian Moore

Afterword by Mary Gordon

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“Brian Moore was a wonderful writer, one of the few genuine masters of the contemporary novel.” —Thomas Flanagan

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Judith Hearne—frugal, unmarried, middle-aged—has just made a fresh start: she's moved into a new boarding house in Belfast. Though she quickly finds she doesn't think much of her new housemates, there is one exception: her nosy landlady's brother, a Mr. James Patrick Madden. Mr. Madden has recently returned from America, where he was in the hotel business—a perfectly respectable career, Judith decides—and unlike most of the men who have come into and gone out of her life, he seems to care for her.

Judith and Mr. Madden go to Mass together, then to the movies, and even to the Plaza for dinner; and for the first time, Judith allows herself to imagine a different kind of life than the spinsterhood to which she had been resigned. Marrying Mr. Madden could bring the kind of security and happiness Judith has never experienced—she spent her youth nursing a cruel, sick aunt and has barely made ends meet since her aunt died. To be Mrs. Madden would change everything.

But Mr. Madden has his own ideas about his relationship with Judith, and they don't match her romantic fantasies. What begins as a simple misunderstanding between two well-intentioned people is soon complicated by the secrets and self-delusions harbored by each. The result is a deeply human portrait of imagination gone awry and life gone astray; Brian Moore's clear-eyed sympathy for his character places her among the most unlikely, unforgettable heroines in modern literature.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. After Judith's first conversation with Mrs. Henry Rice and Bernard, what is your impression of her? What does it say about Judith that she decides, after hearing Bernard's story about Father Quigley, to eliminate Bernard's punch line [p. 18]?
2. Discuss the role of fantasy in the story. Why, when Judith imagines being married to Mr. Madden, does she imagine him as both caring and physically abusive [p. 29]? What about Mr. Madden—what do his sexual fantasies tell the reader about his character? Is Judith emotionally repressed? Why or why not?
3. Were you surprised to learn John Patrick Madden's real backstory [p. 42]? Did you believe, as Judith did, that he had been a success in America? Do you think he had the accident with the city bus on purpose?
4. When Mr. Madden first asks Judith to the movies, he does it awkwardly; and Judith thinks to herself that his manner of action is similar to her own: “It was, she realised, the way she herself left others, after a successful theft of their time, after a promise, so terribly wanted, a promise that she could come again” [p. 69]. Is this wishful thinking on Judith's part? In what ways are she and Mr. Madden alike?

OTHER NYRB CLASSICS OF INTEREST

Wish Her Safe at Home

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The Slaves of Solitude

Patrick Hamilton (Introduction by David Lodge)

The Mountain Lion

Jean Stafford (Afterword by Kathryn Davis)

School for Love

Olivia Manning (Introduction by Jane Smiley)

Corrigan

Caroline Blackwood (Afterword by Andrew Solomon)

Summer Will Show

Sylvia Townsend Warner (Introduction by Claire Harman)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Brian Moore, *Black Robe*

Patricia Highsmith, *Edith's Diary*

Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Mary Gordon, *Final Payments*

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*

Lorrie Moore, *Self-Help*

5. How do the O'Neills feel about Miss Hearne? Do you think Judith has a sense for their feelings towards her, or does she truly believe that she is like a member of their family? Why does she continue to visit the O'Neills, if she thinks Moira is a "common" woman who "tricked and guiled and provoked him [her husband] into marriage" [p. 75]? Why do the O'Neills continue to take her in as a visitor each week?
6. Why do you think Moore chose to write Chapter VI in the voices of the other residents of the house? Why do they all disapprove of Judith's relationship with Mr. Madden? What effect does Moore's use of narrative voice have on the novel generally—for example, shifting rapidly between first and third person or between reality and fantasy?
7. Why does Mr. Madden rape Mary [p. 104]? Do you think he realizes the consequences this act will eventually have for the both of them? Why does Mrs. Henry Rice send Mary away when she finds out what has happened?
8. How and why does Judith's relationship with religion change throughout the story? When she begins to doubt God, she stages a mental debate between the influences of God and of nature on human life [p. 125]. Which side does the novel itself take? Does *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* present piety as a comfort or an impediment?
9. What did you make of the scene in which Judith and Mr. Madden finally confront one another about their misunderstanding [pp. 135–138]? Did it happen as you expected it would? Who, in your opinion, is the injured party—that is, who led whom on?
10. Why does Judith lie to the O'Neills, telling them that Mr. Madden proposed to her and also that he owned his own hotel in America [pp. 144–5]? Do the O'Neills believe her?
11. What is Bernard's reason for interfering with Judith and Mr. Madden's relationship? Why does he tell Judith, "You and I are going to hook him, if you do what I tell you" [p. 158]? Is cruelty his sole motivation, or does he really want to help Judith? What role does Bernard's atheism play in the construction of his character?
12. Why is Judith so judgmental of others? Did your sympathy for her grow or diminish as the novel went on? Is *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* a novel about a descent into madness, or is it about a basically sane person who makes some mistakes? Is Judith an addict?
13. After she is kicked out of Mrs. Henry Rice's boarding house, Judith goes on a journey with several destinations: the Plaza; Earnscliffe Home to visit her friend Edie; the O'Neills' house; the church. What does each of these stops signify? What do you think about where Judith ends up? Will she ever move again?

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