

Brian Moore (1921–1999) was born into a large, devoutly Catholic family in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His father was a surgeon and lecturer, and his mother had been a nurse. Moore left Ireland during World War II and in 1948 moved to Canada, where he worked for the *Montreal Gazette*, married his first wife, and began to write potboilers under various pen names, as he would continue to do throughout the 1950s. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955, now available as an NYRB Classic), was said to have been rejected by a dozen publishers and was the first book Moore published under his own name. It was followed by nineteen subsequent novels, three of which were short-listed for the Booker Prize. *The Great Victorian Collection* won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. After adapting *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* for film in 1964, Moore moved to California to work on the script for Alfred Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*. He remained in Malibu for the rest of his life, remarrying there and teaching at UCLA for some fifteen years.

Christopher Ricks teaches at Boston University and is a former president of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers. From 2004 to 2009 he was Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford. His most recent book is *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht, and Robert Lowell Under the Sign of Eliot and Pound*.

THE MANGAN INHERITANCE

By **Brian Moore**
Introduction by Christopher Ricks

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“*The Mangan Inheritance* is both scary and erotic, a primitive and visceral tour de force about the imperfections of blood and birthright.” —John Gregory Dunne

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Jamie Mangan is a man in limbo: abandoned just before Christmas by his wife, Beatrice Abbot, an actress of some repute, he spends his New Year's Eve reflecting on how his sole identity for years has been as her husband. Without that, Jamie isn't sure who he is—which is why it comes as such a pleasant surprise to find a century-old photograph in his father's house that happens to look just like him.

When shocking news comes just after the New Year and Jamie finds himself with a large inheritance, he decides to put the money to use. He embarks on a journey to Ireland discover the truth about the photograph: whether it shows, as he suspects, the poet James Clarence Mangan, and whether James Clarence might be a long-lost ancestor.

Upon his arrival in Drishane, however, Jamie finds more—much more—than he could possibly have imagined. As the heady cocktail of curiosity, lust, and dread he experiences in Ireland grows stronger with each passing day, Jamie begins to feel he's being watched—but who, or what, could be out to get him, and what might it have to do with his birthright? In *The Mangan Inheritance*, Brian Moore crafts a twisting, eerie psychodramatic mystery with a thrilling, altogether unexpected conclusion.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *The Mangan Inheritance* begins on New Year's Eve. Why does Moore choose to take up Jamie's story on this day? What role does timing play in the novel? When Jamie returns to America at the end of the novel, do you have a sense of how much time has passed?
2. Beatrice could be called a successful actress—she's received good notices, a supporting-actress Oscar nomination, and enough pay for herself and Jamie to live comfortably—but she's not an A-list movie star. Why do you think Moore chooses to portray her this way? How might Jamie's story be different if Beatrice had been a household name?
3. Jamie remembers a moment midway through his marriage in which he said to Beatrice, “I'm your husband. That's it, isn't it? That's what I am. That's exactly what I am. In fact, it's all I am” [p. 37]. Do you think Jamie feels this identity crisis especially keenly because of his gender? Is there a masculine element to the quest he undertakes to uncover his heritage?
4. What did you make of Jamie's extended imagination of Beatrice, starting on page 151, after he has met Conor, Kathleen, and Dinny? Why, in his imagination, does she speak only in lines of verse? Does this acting-out of his unresolved feelings towards Beatrice result in closure for Jamie?

OTHER NYRB CLASSICS OF INTEREST

The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne, Brian Moore (Afterword by Mary Gordon)

The Fountain Overflows, Rebecca West (Introduction by Andrea Barrett)

My Father and Myself, J.R. Ackerley (Introduction by W.H. Auden)

The Pumpkin Eater, Penelope Mortimer (Introduction by Daphne Merkin)

The True Deceiver, Tove Jansson (Introduction by Ali Smith)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Martin McDonagh, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays*

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

W.B. Yeats, *The Tower*

Mary Gordon, *Final Payments*

5. “Beatrice never needed me. This girl needs me,” Jamie thinks with reference to Kathleen [p. 242]. Is that true? Why does Jamie seem to be so comfortable with the fact that Kathleen is unapologetically using him for his money? Does he really love her, or is a different feeling at play?
6. There are many points in the novel at which Jamie feels like he's being watched, he even suspects the house at Gorteen is observing him. Is this just paranoia on Jamie's part, or are his fears warranted?
7. Reread James Clarence Mangan's poem “My Dark Rosaleen” [p. 57]. We are exposed to lots of perspectives, positive and negative, on the poète maudit's work: Jamie calls this poem “corny but powerful,” while Kathleen doesn't seem to care much for the poetry, at least in Jamie's recitation; Michael basically worships his forebear. Do you think it is a good poem? Is James Clarence Mangan a good poet? Does it matter?
8. Were you surprised by Michael's revelations near the end of the novel? He tells Jamie that he, Jamie, his uncle Dan, and James Clarence are all fated to “lives filled with troubles and injustice and neglect” [p. 306]. Do you think this is true for Jamie? What is your impression of Michael? Is he fundamentally different from Jamie?
9. Did the information Michael gives Jamie about what he did to Kathleen change your opinion of Kathleen? In what way? Why do you think Kathleen entered into a sexual relationship with Jamie, given her past experience with his “double?”
10. At the beginning of the novel, Jamie feels Beatrice's success has subsumed his own. “It's as if there's nobody there any more,” he explains to his father [p. 43]. “Sometimes I feel as if I'm going mad. Except that there's no me to go mad.” By the end of the novel, has this problem been resolved? Has Jamie discovered who he is—in an existential sense as well as a genealogical one?
11. Most of the novel is spent chronicling one mission of Jamie's—to track down the history of his doppelganger and discover once and for all whether he's related to the poet James Clarence Mangan—a type of “inheritance.” And, of course, the book's title also refers to his literal inheritance from Beatrice. The end of *The Mangan Inheritance* brings another inheritance, though, and another mission: to honor the promise he's made to his father about Margrethe and her baby. Do you think Jamie is equipped to fulfill this duty? Can he escape the curse?

NYRB Classics is an innovative list of outstanding books from many eras and all around the world. It includes both acknowledged masterpieces and hidden gems of literature with introductions by distinguished contemporary authors. NYRB Classics offers a wide-ranging and endlessly surprising selection of books including novels, short fiction, mystery, suspense, history, autobiography and memoir, and poetry. Visit www.nyrb.com to learn more about NYRB Classics and to discover, or rediscover, a host of wonderful books.