

*In The Name of God*



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**Department of English Language and Literature**

**M.A. Thesis**

**A Study of Baudrillard's Ideas in Brian Moore's Fiction**

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*To my family*

## **Abstract**

The rise of the second phase of capitalism after World War II has been contemporaneous with the increase in information production and the ubiquity of mass media. The incessant play of signs and images in the groundless 'cyberspace' fuels the erosion of referentiality and 'reality' in our media-governed era. The consequent absence of 'reality,' as Baudrillard (1929-2007) argues, is masked through the simulation of reality and generation of cultural 'hyperreality'. The present researcher would survey the applicability of Baudrillard's ideas regarding the contemporary 'semiurgic' era in Brian Moore's (1921-1999) fiction.

This study aims at examining the ultra-modernist society of Brian Moore's three novels: *Fergus* (1970), *Catholics* (1972) and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975), in the light of Jean Baudrillard's theories. In Moore's selected works, a consumerist society is delineated in which the infinitely reproduced objects and commodities threaten the subjectivity and identity of modern man. Besides, the 'auratic' value of art, history, human relations and religion, in such a universe, is replaced by their 'hyperreal' counterparts.

**Keywords:** Jean Baudrillard, Brian Moore, *The Great Victorian Collection*, *Fergus*, *Catholics*, Hyperreality, Simulacra, Consumerism, Mass Media, Art, History.

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## **Chapter One**

### **“Brian Moore: a postmodern realist writer”**

#### **Introduction**

##### **1.1. Introduction:**

Brian Moore (1921-1999) is a prolific Irish novelist whose brilliant works made Graham Greene (1904-1991) nominate him as his “favorite living writer” (qtd. in Pell, 15). What distinguishes him as a notable author is his capacity in creating innovative plots and unique characters. Although the themes of his works are repeatedly pivoting around loneliness, “fragility of identity” and religious crisis in the rootless modern world, the plots by which he reflects those themes are widely different from each other (Sullivan, 239).

Moore’s early novels, set in his native city of Belfast, are reflective of his aversion to the traditional atmosphere of the country he had left for Canada. The exile he imposes on himself is indicative of the influence of James Joyce (1882-1941) who had fixed himself as the “role model” of Moore since his childhood

(Hicks, 104). Similar to Joyce, he criticizes the bigotry of the superficially religious Irish families and its impact on the formation of the character of their children. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), the first novel which brought him literary acclaim, can be categorized under his Belfast works. The heroine of the novel is an isolated spinster whose commitment to Catholicism has deprived her of the basic needs of a young girl. Moore in *The Feast of Lupercal* (1957) and *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965) utilizes some biographical elements to critique the strict, repressive religion of his sectarian country as responsible for various pressures which his characters tolerate (Pell, 15).

*The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960) represents Moore's new perspective which is the result of his growing familiarity with American culture. The protagonist of the novel is an Irish émigré who apparently has taken the essential steps to achieve the freedom denied the likes of Judith Hearne. Casting off Catholicism and other Irish values, Coffey pursues his secular ambitions in the supposedly liberal city of Montreal. The utopia he had delineated in his mind of life in Canada, however, turns out to be a disgusting dystopia in which he cannot even find an appropriate job to satisfy the basic needs of his family. Towards the end of the novel, the penitent protagonist begins pondering upon the rich tradition he had left behind in favor of a depthless culture which deprives him of both his family and his social position. A similar theme can be traced in *An Answer from Limbo* (1962) and *Fergus* (1970) whose characters are Irish writers who have won their fame in Montreal and Los Angeles respectively. Both of

them miserably attempt at taking their minds off their original background and adapting themselves to their new context; none of them, however, succeeds, since they are regularly reminded of the Irish values, the former through his traditional mother's frequent pieces of advice and the latter through the ghosts from his Irish past that have haunted his house.

Although Moore criticizes religion as an element of passivity and "stasis" in his own homeland, lack of it, he believes, has brought into existence a frail and rootless culture in Canada and the United States whose people suffer from an "uncertain identity" (Sullivan, 241). The crisis of identity in Moore's characters culminates in the heroines of *I Am Mary Dunne* (1968) and *The Doctor's Wife* (1976). Whereas the protagonist of the latter, Sheila Radden, has lost her own identity in being called the doctor's wife and attempts at reestablishing her character as a woman by faithlessness (Dahlie, 9), the narrator of the former tries to reach self-recognition through the memories of her past years. Her retrospection, nonetheless, leads her to more uncertainty and insecurity, since she gradually understands that she had never had a stable character in her past life; she conjures up various names and identities which not only undermine her present name as Mary Dunne, but also serve to prove the impossibility of finding a coherent self (Sullivan, 239).

Moore's critique of the penetration of media images and commercial valuation in the western culture takes an elaborate form in *Catholics* (1972) and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975). *Catholics*, set in future, illustrates how

mediated culture shatters the traditional rituals of Christianity such as communal worship and private confessions in an Irish monastery which still celebrates the Catholic liturgy according to older rites. The submission of the Abbot of monastery to the demythologizing act of the Pope intimates the fact that even religion is negotiable (Sampson, 50).

The existential void in which Maloney, the protagonist of *The Great Victorian Collection* lives, epitomizes allegorically, the contemporary 'hyperreal' world; the novel portrays the way various orders of simulacra sap the original 'aura' of the unique Victorian collection artifacts and reduce them to seemingly fake imitations. The position of the artist as an alienated victim whose personal life is the target of television cameras can also be traced in Moore's popular work.

Moore's most recent works reflect a commitment to investigating the relationship between individual moral choices and their political and religious contexts (Gallagher, 181). *Black Robe* (1985), *The Color of Blood* (1987) and *Lies of Silence* (1990) can generally be classified under this theme. By adopting the new "genre of thriller," thus, Moore fixes his name as a writer who would never repeat the patterns and plots of his previous novels (Ibid).

Brian Moore's manner of narration is not definitely modernist or postmodernist, since he rarely uses the experimental techniques of which modern and postmodern avant-garde writers used to take advantage; O' Donoghue attributes Moore's "lack of concentration on aesthetic approaches" to his belief in

“novel-writing as a kind of art that conceals its art” (xiv). Accordingly, the transparency and smoothness in his novels without structural deformation, technical experimentation or figurative language are due to the fact that he is a “quintessential realist whose occasional forays into fancy or parable” cannot put under question his realism (Ibid). Although in *Fergus, Catholic* and *The Great Victorian Collection* there is a transition from the real world to the one removed from the conventional reality, this passage is achieved through his “verisimilitude” (Dahlie, 7). Therefore, the fantastic and parable-like plots of these novels take place in an everyday situation. Moreover, the ‘hyperreal’ nature of the modern world which is the target of Moore’s critique conceals the unreality and supernaturalism of events and gives them a real and natural sense. To put it differently, what makes Moore a postmodern writer is not the unique technique of narration but his “novelty of vision” in inventing incredible plots whose roots can be found in the contemporary, shallow and mediated culture (Gallagher, 180).

## **1.2. Thesis Statement:**

The highly volatile culture of post-World War II era urged many critics to examine its instability and depthlessness. One of these critics is Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), the French sociologist and cultural theorist, whose ideas regarding the reigning culture of the late stage of capitalism have been immensely influential. In his account, the substitution of the logic of consumerism for that of



productionism has paved the way for the predominance of signs. The consumers consume not only the objects that have lost their earlier functionality and been reduced to signs of prestige and comfort, but also the ubiquitous televised images. The consumption of images by the masses leads, subsequently, to the exchange of the real with its sign (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 33-34). A recently occurred event, for instance, would be abstracted from its concrete context and its actuality would be converted into media simulacra. The same destiny is anticipated for other real values such as art, history, religion and direct human communication. In other words, the contemporary universe is choked up with an endless “stream of images, brands, slogans, signs, graphics and labels” whose differential relation with each other creates meaning, hence the impossibility of finding an ultimate truth (Toffoletti, 24).

As the environment in which Moore’s novels are set has a direct influence on the characters’ identity and individuality, he depicts realistically the postmodern society and its consumerist culture. In doing so, Moore gives a concrete image of the hypercapitalist era whose features Baudrillard has enumerated in his works. The present study aims at examining the applicability of Baudrillard’s theories to Moore’s three outstanding novels that artistically delineate the mirage towards which modern man is moving. The novels are: *Fergus* (1970), *Catholics* (1972) and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975).

The subject under study is probing the current commercial mode which has supplanted the ambivalent logic of the pre-capitalist epoch as reflected in Brian

Moore's fiction. The idea that modern man is surrounded by machine-made commodities whose identity with their models has undermined the 'auratic' value is surveyed in this writer's fiction. Moreover, this study tries to shed light on the modality of Moore's take on how the 'hyperreality' of television and 'virtuality' of computer have pulverized modern man's identity in the labyrinthine maze of reproductions. Overall, the main concern of the present thesis is answering the following questions:

1. How Brian Moore's fiction reflects Baudrillard's most fundamental tenet, that is, the annihilation of reality by 'hyperreality'?
2. To what extent mass media has succeeded in destroying Moore's characters' privacy and individuality?
3. How the rise of consumerism and the culture of reproducibility have led to the marketing of art, which is clearly seen in Moore's *The Great Victorian Collection*?
4. What role do the technical communicative devices play in alienation of human relations as reflected in Moore's *Fergus*?
5. And why has capitalism determined to efface the traces of traditional Catholicism whose ceremonies are rooted in sacrificial symbolic exchange as mostly reflected in Moore's *Catholics*?

### **1.3. Methodology:**

The objective of the present research is to examine the reflection of the shift from modern capitalism to postmodern hypercapitalism in Brian Moore's fiction. Jean Baudrillard is the theorist who centrally figures in this study, since he is a critic who primarily introduced himself through his Marxist works in which he criticized the reified market relations of industrial era. However, influenced by the rapid technological progresses, Baudrillard has oriented his thought towards cultural studies and examined the current "state of extermination" which is marked by "the ecstasy of the real: the hyperreal. More real than the real" (Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, 46). Therefore, this thesis examines Brian Moore as a modern novelist whose works have internalized the excessive 'hyperreality' to which Baudrillard refers. The consumer society, Moore suggests, has obliterated the tradition which had united people into a community to be replaced by "pervasive and fast changing life-styles which reflect a consensus of media images and commercial pressures" (Sampson, 50).

This study consists of six chapters: the first one provides the reader with an introduction in which a brief outline of the following chapters is given. As the theoretical framework of the thesis, the second chapter briefly surveys Jean Baudrillard's ideas concerning the dominant cultural atmosphere from the pre-industrial to the post-industrial era. Consumerism, art commodification and superseding of originality and referentiality by ubiquitous images generated by

various types of mass media are among the issues which would be explored in this chapter.

The analysis of Brian Moore's major novel, *The Great Victorian Collection*, is the focus of the third chapter. Taking into account Baudrillard's comments, the chapter foregrounds the materialist society of the novel which converts a genuine Victorian collection to a series of artificial reproductions. It is also shown how Anthony Maloney, the creator of the miraculous set of artifacts, loses his agency, privacy and above all identity as a history professor and becomes the subject of frequent television and newspaper interviews.

The fourth chapter will probe the applicability of Baudrillard's beliefs to Moore's less famous novel, *Fergus*. Having experienced living both in Ireland as a traditional country and Los Angeles as a modern city, Fergus compares in his mind the differences of the two cultures: the naturalness and simplicity of his past life against the artificiality and complications of his present one.

Decline of religion in the west at the turn of the century is the controversial theme of Moore's *Catholics* which would be discussed in the fifth chapter. In line with Baudrillard's view that the symbolic rituals of primitive societies have been shattered by the logic of equivalence in the economic system of capitalism, the chapter would focus on the state's attempt at demolishing the mythological traditions of old Catholicism. Finally, the last chapter will sum up the discussions in the previous chapters.