

BOOK REVIEW

Una Hunt, *Sources and Style in Moore's Irish Melodies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017). xvi + 190 pp. £115 hardback; c. £40 e-book

Una Hunt's 2017 monograph complements a recent concentration of literary, editorial, and cultural scholarship on the Irish polymath Thomas Moore (1779–1852).¹ In writing about Moore's *Irish Melodies*—a 10-volume song series initially published in Dublin and London between 1808 and 1834 by fraternal publishers William and James Power²—she is considering one of Moore's more iconic works.³ Surprisingly, given the international prominence of Moore during the nineteenth century, the volume under review offers the first truly in-depth appreciation of his musical skills; Moore's gift in adapting instrumental tunes from the Irish traditional music repertory into beguiling songs for the amateur musician has never before received such close scrutiny. The 'sources' of the title refers to earlier exemplars of the tunes adapted by Moore; these are listed in the appendix (pp. 140–77). While the author aims to 'provide a truer picture of [Moore's] assuredness and skill as a song-writer by examining every aspect of the discipline' (p. 10), the reader should note Hunt is approaching the neglected, musical side of 'the discipline' rather than assessing Moore's skills as a poet. As a concert-pianist and musicologist, Hunt is ideally situated to establish Moore's credentials as a song-writer, for she has recorded (as producer and also as chief piano accompanist) a complete set of his 124 *Irish Melodies*—typically in settings involving two singers and a piano.⁴ Hunt's sensitive and intelligent coverage of factors unique or particular to this series is a notable strength.

¹ Recent work exclusively on Moore includes Francesca Benatti, Sean Ryder and Justin Tonra, eds, *Thomas Moore: Texts Contexts Hypertext* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012); Ronan Kelly, *Bard of Erin: The Life of Thomas Moore* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2008); Sarah McCleave and Brian Caraher, eds, *Thomas Moore and Romantic Inspiration: Poetry, Music, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Jane Moore, *The Satires of Thomas Moore*, as volume 5 of *British Satire, 1785–1840* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003); Jeffery Vail, *The Unpublished Letters of Thomas Moore*, 2 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013); and Jeffery Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

² Thomas Moore and John Stevenson, *A Selection of Irish Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments*, numbers 1–7 (London and Dublin: James Power and William Power, 1808–1818); Thomas Moore and John Stevenson, *A Selection of Irish Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments*, number 8 (Dublin: William Power, 1821); Thomas Moore and Henry Bishop, *A Selection of Irish Melodies with Symphonies and Accompaniments*, numbers 8–10 (London: James Power, 1821–1834).

³ The other, of course, is his 'oriental romance' *Lalla Rookh* (London: Longmans, 1817).

⁴ Una Hunt, *My Gentle Harp: Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies the Complete Collection* (Dublin: Claddagh Records, 2008), available at: <https://unahunt.com/merch/moores-irish-melodies-my-gentle-harp-the-complete-archive-6xcds>. In this, Hunt records Henry Bishop's original settings of numbers 8, 9 and 10; she also records John Stevenson's original setting of number 8 (number 8 was produced with two distinct artistic collaborations due to the unravelling relationship of fraternal publishers William and James Power). Yet for

Above all Hunt is committed to conveying the centrality of the music itself to the compositional process of the *Irish Melodies*. Two practical factors determined her approach to analysing the material: (1) the selection of the music by Moore from various printed and manuscript sources preceded the writing of the poetry and (2) the source tunes were originally conceived for instrumental rendition, and often required adjustment by the poet himself in order to suit their new purpose as song tunes. Regarding this first consideration, Hunt observes: 'As Moore's lyrical writing was designed to dovetail with a pre-existing melody, there is no reason to discuss it in terms of poetical analysis' (p. 41). Instead, she concentrates on issues such as word painting, the use of elision as a declamatory device, and a mirroring of musical repetition with verbal repetition. Phrases that look awkward in print – 'No, not more welcome' – make sense when we appreciate the way in which the important word, 'welcome' is thus set up to fall on a strong beat of the musical metre (p. 45). A detailed evaluation of 'Silent, oh Moyle!' highlights Moore's inspired 'integration of sonic, poetic and musical expression' (p. 49) by considering the placement of words within the musical metre, the selection of individual words to match rhythms in the melody, and the judicious placement of open vowels and onomatopoeic consonants. Hunt demonstrates her claim that 'the text fits the air like a glove, as if both elements were actually conceived and executed together' (p. 46).

Hunt's balanced consideration of their compositional skills leaves the impression that overall Moore's two composer collaborators have been under-valued. Their principal challenge was this: they had to adapt modal and monophonic tunes originally conceived for fiddle, pipe or harp to a tonal and harmonized setting suitable for an amateur music market of singers and pianists. Some of the tunes unhelpfully changed metre, while others spanned a range impossible for a single singer to accommodate. The politics of Irish 'traditional' music – where a particular version of a tune may be hallowed as 'authentic' – is a notable factor in its reception history that has not entirely disappeared. At the time, Moore and his initial collaborator Sir John Stevenson (1761–1833) were openly criticized by the veteran Irish tune arranger Edward Bunting (1773–1843), who clearly felt sidelined by the *Irish Melodies* project.⁵ Stevenson, although evidently a shabby proof reader who imposed an overly ornate and apparently foreign style onto the accompaniments, deserves credit for his effective part writing, particularly in the harmonized songs; his 'vital' tenor parts with their 'wide ranging movement and variety of texture' may well have been inspired by a colleague, the vicar choral Dr John Spray of Dublin's Christ Church and St Patrick cathedrals (p. 67). Hunt's comparisons of the parallel settings by Stevenson and Henry Bishop (1786–1855) of the eighth volume in the *Irish Melodies* series are particularly fruitful, for this enables her to demonstrate how Bishop was more adept at integrating the material of the song tunes into his instrumental introductions, while the inherent discipline behind Stevenson's old-fashioned classical style lent a tasteful restraint and

numbers 1 through 7, she prefers the later arrangements of Moore's lyrics (published by J.A. Novello of London in 1859) by Michael William Balfe to those by Stevenson.

⁵ Edward Bunting's published collections include *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (Dublin and London: William Power and James Power, 1796); *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* (London: Clementi & Co., for the Editor, 1809); and *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1840). Bunting's manuscript collection of Irish tunes and lyrics in Irish or English (often collected separately) is available through Special Collections and Archives, Queen's University Belfast.

simplicity to some of his more effective accompaniments. Bishop also receives recognition for providing a greater sense of drama in his accompaniments' textures, and for his experimentation with through-composed accompaniments that reflected Moore's lyrics more closely than the strophic accompaniments of his predecessor.

Hunt does not frame her study of the *Irish Melodies* within a particular theory. Her monograph resembles the better music history studies of the past 50 years or so in offering a well-documented narrative that blends factual narrative and critical perspective, where an accumulation of selected detail is marshalled under a succession of section headings, and then followed by a summative conclusion at the end of each chapter. Her observations are underpinned by a wide reading of relevant sources, dating from Moore's time through to our own. Hunt's particular interest in 'performative analysis' is timely, and also particularly apt, given Moore's own acclaim as an endearing performer of these songs. The wealth of detailed information and observation supplied does make demands of the reader; the further removed one is from this material, the more challenging it would be to absorb it.

Hunt's appetite for historical detail positions her to undertake a thorough investigation into the possible source for each of Moore's tunes. Moore sometimes identified his source, but more often not; the challenge for the modern researcher is to discern which of any competing sources might be the 'actual' one. Hunt, working on the general principle that Moore's source must be the exemplar that offers the closest match in terms of any and all details, suggests – despite a waywardness in his correspondence – that the precise spelling of a title in an exemplar can establish a connection with Moore. His occasional echoes of lyrics from older sources can also suggest the origin of a tune. Of course, the structural, melodic and rhythmic details of the tunes themselves are central to source identification. In many cases, Hunt revises the conclusions reached by previous researchers Veronica Ní Cinnéide and Aloys Fleischmann,⁶ with the net result that she is able to reveal that it was not Edward Bunting – transcriber of the famous 1792 Harpers' Festival in Belfast – who was Moore's most frequent source, but rather the Dublin-based music publisher Smollett Holden. She observes that certain collections were favoured for each of the numbers, and that manuscript sources played a larger role from number 3, with a noted increase 'in the later volumes of the *Irish Melodies*, by which time Moore considered the published collections largely exhausted' (p. 99). The small minority of *Melodies* for which a source has not been traced may well have been annotated from memory. Moore preferred modern sources, with his earliest known printed source being Joseph Cooper Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* of 1786. He sometimes drew on theatrical sources – notably the works of Irish playwright John O'Keeffe (1747–1833) – for tunes. The 'comments' field in Hunt's 'Table of Sources' notes important distinctions between exemplars of a tune, as well as offering a general comment on the closeness (or not) of sources already named by Ní Cinnéide and Fleischmann. While the reader may wish to see all these tunes laid out to appreciate these distinctions, this feature would not be practical within the volume under review.

⁶ Veronica Ní Cinnéide, 'The Sources of Moore's *Melodies*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquities of Ireland*, 89/2 (1959): 109–34; Aloys Fleischmann, ed., *Sources of Irish Traditional Music c.1600–1855*, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1998). For a table comparing Hunt's findings with those of Ní Cinnéide and Fleischmann, see pp. 140–77.

In any case, Fleischmann provides transcriptions of the relevant tunes within his wider study of the repertory.

Hunt's sixth chapter, which considers the 'Alterations to the airs', is an important and original contribution. In it, she quantifies the concept of 'alteration' according to the following categories: musical form, manner or tempo, key, melodic range, melody and ornamentation, modal alterations, pauses, breathing points, and rhythm. She is determined to measure whether Bunting's accusation that 'the tune was too often adapted to the words' was just (p. 108). Moore would transpose the key down to suit his own vocal range; he might alter the ornamentation for practical performance reasons or tweak the rhythm to better reflect 'the contours of the text' (p. 131). Hunt defends Moore's occasional alteration of the character and tempos of the airs as part of a change in function from dance music to sung music. She observes that 'some harpers' airs required radical revision' as they could to span a range too wide for a vocal setting (p. 131). A summative and particular consideration of these alterations – illustrated by 26 music examples – sees Hunt conclude that Moore was generally 'true' to most of his source material. Any impression that he frequently took liberties was based on the misdiagnosis of the actual source for certain tunes: Bunting, for example, sometimes thought a tune originated with him where Hunt has identified a closer exemplar. Notably, the motivation behind Hunt's musical commentary and source-based investigations is to address an accusation arising from the cultural politics of some 200 years ago. And while the aesthetics of authenticity, and also that of 'ancient versus modern' are wider conceptual issues that would seem to invite expansion within the current study, Hunt confines herself to noting that 'authenticity was not uppermost in Moore's mind for, indeed, he was no antiquarian' (p. 109).

And yet, Hunt's historicist sensibilities position her to reveal the considerable extent to which Moore drew on or alluded to the traditional political imagery of the United Irishmen in his lyrics. Moore's *Irish Melodies* have associations with a widespread contemporary interest in Celticism as well as The Society of United Irishmen's use of music to propagate political ideals. In her first chapter, 'Political reference and literary influence' Hunt's study of Irish sources – such as Walker's *Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786), Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), and the United Irishmen's *Paddy's Resource, being a select collection of original and modern patriotic songs, toasts and sentiments* (1795) – alert her to certain 'trigger words' (liberty, freedom, slavery), potent symbols (wearing of the green, the Irish harp), and likely allegorical applications. We are told, for example, that there are 21 examples of the 'metaphorical' use of the colour green within the *Irish Melodies* (p. 19). Hunt supports her claim that Moore would highlight a lyric's historical allusion in order to 'remove contemporary references' (p. 16) with a case study: 'When he who adores thee' was accompanied by a note claiming 'a story in an old Irish manuscript' as its inspiration, but a reading of this as alluding to the martyred Irish nationalist Robert Emmet (1778–1803) was popular at the time, as now. Modern writers on Ireland's cultural politics such as Georges-Denis Zimmerman, Helen Thuente and Harry White inform Hunt's understanding of the distinction between powerful, nationalist bards and the less potent minstrels.⁷ In promoting the figure of a 'crownless queen' Erin as the personification of Ireland (p. 22),

⁷ Georges-Denis Zimmermann, *Songs of Irish Rebellion, Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs 1780–1900* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967); Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (New York: Syracuse University

Moore not only drew on the *Aisling* tradition of the allegorical dream poem,⁸ but refined the United Irishmen's presentation of this figure as 'sleeping' by depicting an emotive observer who weeps (p. 23). While the lyrics relating to 'Story songs and legends' (pp. 27–30) are likely contexts for celebrating Irish battles or paying tribute to Irish historical figures, a less obvious context is Moore's numerous references to flowers, which Hunt argues at times 'can be read as allusions to fallen heroes' (p. 25) – including the sleeping lily offered 'liberty' by spring in 'Erin, oh Erin'. Floral references had a strong parallel in English popular song, and so Moore likely cultivated this ambiguity when he wrote a 'Last rose of summer'. Hunt notes that the image of the rose as a dark-haired girl who symbolized Ireland had a place in Irish patriotic literature; this particular flower was also a Catholic Marian symbol of martyrdom. Hunt further argues for viewing Moore's numerous drinking songs, with their allusions to lost youth, as offering a 'political declaration or a moral dimension' in keeping with the political toasts of the United Irishmen (p. 26). By engaging with the lyrics in detail, and by remaining alert to the plausible use of veiled references, she counters the calculations of earlier writers such as Joep Leerssen or Thérèse Tessier that relatively few of the *Irish Melodies* invite patriotic or nationalist readings.⁹

This carefully researched monograph evaluates and contextualizes a popular and influential song series of some 200 years ago. And while Hunt at times comes across as a champion of Moore – rather than as a clinically detached observer – this championship is supported by a deep and informed engagement. Her book does demonstrate its summative claim that Moore achieved an 'alliance between words and music added to the successful translation from one performance mode to another', and that these qualities 'mark him out as a songwriter of note' (p. 139).

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Press, 1994); Harry White, *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770–1970* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998).

⁸ The *aisling* is a type of Irish poem that recounts a particular kind of vision. As Maria Tymoczko explains, 'the poet has a vision or dream of a beautiful woman who comes to appeal or lament to him. The woman in the *aisling* represents Ireland, and her misery is associated with Ireland's political bondage; she is often portrayed as languishing for her rightful spouse – associated at this period with the exiled Stuart line.' See Maria Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 101.

⁹ Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996); Thérèse Tessier, *The Bard of Erin: A Study of Moore's Irish Melodies* (Salzburg: Institute für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981).