

UNA HUNT, *SOURCES AND STYLE IN MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES* (London: Routledge, 2017). ISBN 978-1-409-40561-0 (hbk), xvi, 190 pp., £120; ISBN 978-0-367-23145-3 (pbk), £36.99; ISBN 978-1-315-44300-3 (ebk), from £21.

Thomas Moore's ten collections of *Irish Melodies*, compiled between 1808 and 1834, are at once the kind of compilations that everyone feels they must surely know, but (today, at least) are barely known at all in any meaningful sense by the vast majority of people. The first seven sets were set to music by Sir John Stevenson, and the remainder by the prolific, and perhaps better-known, Henry Rowley Bishop, after the split between Moore's publishers, brothers James and William Power. Throughout the Victorian era the songs were widely known and performed, not only in Ireland but also abroad. If in their heyday the coded political metaphors of the *Melodies*—the harp as a representation of Ireland and its culture, the proud Irish soldier-boy, or a decayed Irish stately home, embodied respectively in the likes of 'The harp that once through Tara's halls', 'The minstrel boy' and 'Rich and rare were the gems she wore'—were at first highly contentious in some circles, these undertones have subsequently been quietly overlooked by most listeners, who have preferred instead to delight in Moore's adept combination of words and traditional tunes to create his unique blend of nostalgic Irish song.

Una Hunt, with a background combining both research into and performance of these songs, is ideally placed to author this monograph. Indeed, her 2008 CD boxed set recording of the songs makes a useful companion to the present book.¹ While the monograph is amply illustrated with musical examples, the reader would be well advised to read it with copies of Moore's *Melodies* to hand, in order to place poetry and music in their fullest context, be that in tracing historical and political allusions in the song texts or in comparing Stevenson's and Bishop's approaches to accompaniment, melodic introductions and link passages.

As is clear from the book title, Hunt's focus is on sources and style, but there is also much on the significance and context of these songs. Her work builds upon scholarship by a number of writers, and draws most specifically upon the substantial work by Aloys Fleischmann in his two-volume *Sources of Irish Traditional Music c1600-*

¹ *My Gentle Harp: Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies, the Complete Collection*, TMF 2008 101–106.

1855 and Veronica Ní Chinnéide's article, 'The Sources of Moore's Melodies', as well as the work of Harry White, who provides a foreword to the volume.²

The seven chapters begin capably and engagingly by considering political reference and literary influence on Moore, with Hunt referencing Mary Helen Thuente's comparatively recent monograph, *The Harp Re-Strung*, as well as earlier scholarship.³ This is followed by a discussion of Moore and music, chapters dealing with Stevenson's and Bishop's respective contributions to the *Melodies*, a re-evaluation of sources for the *Melodies*, alterations to the airs and, finally, new perspectives on sources and style. A weighty appendix lists some eighty printed and manuscript sources and forms the basis of a song-by-song table, in which Hunt compares Ní Chinnéide's and Fleischmann's earlier work and adds her own insights. The book is very generously provided with footnotes and there is also an extensive bibliography.

To the historian of national song-collecting and collections, there are certain key questions about any compilation: where is the repertoire gathered from; what was the motivation for the collection; how was it presented for the contemporary performer; and what does this tell us about the intended audience? Moore, as a poet, was obviously responsible for the lyrics and his interaction with the contemporary political climate is a matter of critical importance, but Hunt demonstrates that he also selected tune versions and modified instrumental tunes to suit the range of the voice. Indeed, she suggests that one can posit the range of his own singing voice on the basis of the songs' registers and the alterations to wide-ranging instrumental melodies. Moore appears to have been closely involved in choosing a particular version of a tune, even down to the smallest detail of rhythm to suit the words he was setting, and he took enormous care with word-painting, achieving a high degree of synchronicity between words and music. Hunt avers that his sources were generally contemporary printed ones, although he also drew upon manuscript versions. Furthermore, while it has always been known that Bunting's harp publications were an important source of

² Aloys Fleischmann (ed.), *Sources of Irish Traditional Music c1600–1855*, 2 vols, (New York and London: Garland Press, 1998); Veronica Ní Chinnéide, 'The Sources of Moore's Melodies', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 89/2 (1959), 109–34; Harry White, 'The Sovereign Ghosts of Thomas Moore' in *Print Culture and Intellectual Life in Ireland, 1660–1941*, Martin Fanning and Raymond Gillespie (eds) (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2006), 164–85; Harry White, *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998).

³ Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

melodies,⁴ Hunt finds that Smollet Holden's self-published *A Collection of Old Established Irish Slow and Quick Tunes* (2 vols, Dublin: 1804–6) and *Holden's Collection of the most Esteem'd Old Irish Melodies* (2 vols, Dublin: 1806–12) were drawn upon more than has hitherto been appreciated. With so many sources, it is impossible to mention them all here, but there were some unexpected surprises among them: the much earlier London publication, Daniel Wright's *Aria di Camera* (London, 1727), which itself drew material from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales; S. A. Thompson and P. Thompson's *Hibernian Muse* (London, 1790); the work of the Oxford drawing master and tune-collector, John Baptist Malchair; and William Crotch's *Specimens of Various Styles of Music*, vol. 1 (London, 1807).

As was often the case, Moore and his publishers became embroiled in allegations of copyright infringement or inaccurate quotation in both directions. Bunting not only alleged that Moore had made improper use of his harp tunes, but also claimed ownership of versions that Hunt does not believe were his. Conversely, Moore and James Power claimed that the Scottish Robert Archibald Smith's *Irish Minstrel* had plagiarised the *Irish Melodies* and insisted that Smith's collection be suppressed. While these narratives are already known, Hunt gives us another interesting detail that highlights the complexity of the whole issue: despite Moore's animosity towards Smith for his alleged plagiarism, credit is actually *given* to Smith for a melody that Moore used, for his song, 'Sing, Sweet Harp', in volume 10 of the latter's *Irish Melodies* (103, 107).

Hunt looks in detail at the treatment of the melodies, first by Stevenson and later by Bishop, considering also their instrumental introductions, treatment of modality and alterations to tunes. Stevenson was notoriously disorganised and tardy, and Hunt alludes to errors creeping in on account of this. Hunt also notes that both composers sometimes made alterations to airs determined by Moore and that there is evidence that Moore objected to some of these details in correspondence with his publisher. Of course, at two centuries' distance, there will inevitably be some instances where we cannot now determine which elements of a melody were determined (or changed) by Moore or by his music arrangers. In terms of the melodies themselves, it could be suggested that one cannot always tell precisely where Moore's input ends and that of

⁴ *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (Dublin: Power, 1796 and London: Preston, 1796).

his arrangers begins. However, this observation is not in any way intended to detract from Hunt's detailed detective work and careful analysis.

The title of the book might lead an interested reader to imagine that it has a fairly narrow, specialist focus. However, they should not be deterred by this, for it is in fact a very readable, interesting and wide-ranging exposition and will prove informative to any student or scholar of historical Irish song.

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