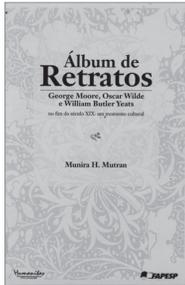


Álbum de Retratos

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Munira H. Mutran. *Álbum de Retratos. George Moore, Oscar Wilde e William Butler Yeats no fim do século XIX: um momento cultural.* São Paulo (Brazil): Humanitas / FAPESP, 2002.

Dr. Mutran, the author of this book written in Portuguese and published in Brazil, is recognized as an authoritative Irish Studies Scholar. Both her doctoral and post-doctoral studies have dealt with Irish Literature and Culture. Besides publishing intensively in this area, she has, for many years, presided over the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies and, at the University of São Paulo, has taught courses and supervised many of Master's theses and Doctor's dissertations in this field. As expected, this book, a result of her post-doctoral activities, has made an outstanding contribution to Irish Studies, especially for Brazilians and other Portuguese language readers.

Album of Portraits, which deals with a cultural moment at the end of the nineteenth century, consists of an Introduction, a very informative chapter devoted to the study of those literary genres identified as "Literature of the Self", three central chapters dedicated to the three authors, namely, "The Portrait of the Artist in Paris" (Moore), "The Portrait of the Artist in London" (Wilde) and "The Portrait of the Artist in Dublin" (Yeats), and a concluding chapter entitled "The Picture of a Cultural Moment: 1880-1900," contextualizing and interrelating the three authors and their works. After a judiciously selected bibliography, useful for the beginner as well as for the experienced scholar, an appendix closes the book with a series of portraits, pictures, and paintings, which illustrate the "spirit" of the period under study. Its principal thread is Decadence, Symbolism, Realism and Naturalism as seen by Moore, Wilde and Yeats. As the author puts it at the very end of the "Introduction", "in the course of this book, I wanted to enhance the autobiographical genre as the mirror of a cultural moment and show how Moore, Yeats, and Wilde's autobiographical texts present great documentary and, above all, literary value. The threads which strongly connect them to the plot of that moment define them as heralds of modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century." (p. 33) The author also justifies her approach stating that it is in syntony with new historicism, which is concerned with the small things that make up the backdrop to great historical events.

Dr. Mutran considers the dissemination of Moore's ideas regarding nineteenth-century Literature as important for her purposes, since this period is characterized by great richness and complexity. Besides, Moore was lucky enough to meet and know some of the most significant authors of the period: Mallarmé, Zola, the Goncourts, Huysmans, and Victor Hugo. In Paris, he witnessed the struggle between the aesthetic forces of the Romantics, Symbolists and Realists, having sided with the latter.

After contrasting Wilde's emphasis on imagination with Moore's realism, Wilde's view of life, nature and art, and of the critic as an artist, are also discussed. According to the author, "The Decay of Lying" could be considered as a dialogue between Moore and Wilde about the relationship between life and art, a topic both were interested in. Wilde also observed a battle similar to that Moore had seen, but sided with those "who preached the veil instead of the mirror" (p. 164) and favored the symbol within an aestheticist and decadent attitude, one of modernity's features. It is also known that Wilde's poetry, fiction and some of his plays have a close relationship with music and painting.

The chapter on Yeats shows both his course from painting to literature and the formative role of his four-year London sojourn. The importance of his talks with Wilde is also emphasized. The poet's preference for symbol and symbolism, also inspired in Blake, is explained by his hatred of science, rejection of realism as an imitation of life, and his interest in that which lies beyond reality. His interest in magic and occultism has to do mainly with the context of the end of the nineteenth century, the eve of a new century marked by the idea of an apocalypse, which, to some extent, may explain the link between poetry and belief.

As the author shows, the keywords for "the literature of the self" of the period under consideration are: portrait or mirror, young, artist, copy or imitation, imagination and symbol. This would suffice to give an idea of the complexity of this kind of literature. But the book is aimed at "the process of social and cultural transformations and their relationship with the creative activity when considering the autobiographical texts written by each one, what they thought of each other and of their times, the understanding of the tableau comes mainly from the differences and recurrences." (p. 221)

As a rich and useful source, this book will be of great help to all those interested not only in Irish Literature, but also in autobiography and other genres concerned with the literature of the self, as well as in literary criticism and comparative literature.