

The Textual Laboratories of Marianne Moore

by

Nikhil Tase

.

A thesis presented for the B. A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Winter 2018

For Tanuja

Acknowledgments

This thesis could not exist without the support of a large network of friends, family, and mentors who helped me through the writing process from the very beginning. I am especially grateful to my advisor, Professor Marjorie Levinson, who sparked my interest in poetry and encouraged me to work through challenging texts to find the strange and exciting ideas in them. I would also like to thank Professor John Whittier-Ferguson for his tireless enthusiasm and guidance and Professor Gillian White, who helped me become a more attentive writer and editor.

A huge thank you to my wonderful cohort for their advice and encouragement. Being able to work alongside you and see so many fascinating theses coming together has been an invaluable experience and a source of inspiration for my own writing. My family has also been kind and patient in listening to my ideas in their most vague and rambling forms.

This thesis also owes a great debt to the work of many scholars who have labored to illuminate aspects of Moore's complex textual history that have been hidden for decades. Robin G. Schulze, Linda Leavell, and Heather Cass White, among others, have all worked to make Moore's early poems, in all their complexity and brilliance, available to new generations of readers. And finally, I am deeply grateful to Elizabeth E. Fuller for helping me navigate the Rosenbach Museum and Library's Marianne Moore Collection. Seeing the depth and diversity of materials that shaped Moore's poetry has shown me how inadequate it is to append a single name to any text. I hope this thesis may, to the extent that it bears the marks of the many figures who have brought it into being, "acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it."

Abstract

Marianne Moore's poems express an interest both in modernist experimentation and in producing precise knowledge of the real world in all of its intricacy. These qualities cooperate to produce a poetics of "fertile procedure," in which simultaneous attention to the complexities of language and of material phenomena can allow poetry to demonstrate the intellectual rigor of science while maintaining its traditional epistemic orientation towards concrete particularity. This ambition has been largely obscured by a tradition of Moore scholarship that insists that the inescapably mediated character of writing destroys any claim to objectivity or truthfulness. But a closer inspection of the behaviors that Moore's poems demonstrate reveals a different account of form and reality.

Resisting the orthodoxies of "lyric reading," which frames poems as the self-reflexive meditations of an isolated persona, Moore explicitly and eagerly situates her creative identity within structures of publication and reception, using revision and signaled collaboration to present her poems as participants in a broader literary and social discourse. This attention to the movement of texts within and between diverse scenes of writing and reading situates Moore's writing within networks of textual and social material that transform the poem into a polyphonic meeting-ground, facilitating dialogue rather than soliloquy.

By formulating poetry in spatial terms—as "a place for the genuine"—and by casting that "place" as one in which formal manipulation can construct or enable reliable knowledge, Moore's poetry offers itself as an analogue to the laboratory. Drawing on Bruno Latour's argument that objectivity and artificiality are present in any laboratory, I propose that Moore's poems create spaces that do not attempt a naïve mimesis of incommensurately complex environments, but rather shape contained spaces of experimentation, deploying various methods of observation to understand material phenomena in their biological and physical, as well as their aesthetic and ethical dimensions.

Keywords: Textual scholarship, authorship, quotation, modernism, lyric theory, poetic voice, materiality, science studies, animal studies

CONTENTS

Short Titles.....	i
Figures.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapters	
1. Dismantling the Lyric.....	6
2. The Poem as Laboratory.....	50
Conclusion.....	88
Works Consulted.....	95

Short Titles

BMM: Moore, Marianne. *Becoming Marianne Moore*, edited by Robin G. Schulze. University of California Press, 2002.

NCP: Moore, Marianne. *New Collected Poems*, edited by Heather Cass White. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2017.

SP: Moore, Marianne. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1935.

Figures

Figure 1: First publication of “Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight” in *The Egoist*, 14

Figure 2: *Araucaria araucana*, the monkey puzzle tree, 72

Figure 3: *Basiliscus plumifrons*, the plumed basilisk, 77

Figure 4: The spire of Børsen, the Copenhagen stock exchange, 83

Figure 5: Monograph from *The Pangolin and Other Verse*, 93

Introduction

In a 1961 interview for *The Paris Review*, Donald Hall asked Marianne Moore about her tendency to compare poetry and science, noting that “most people would consider the comparison a paradox, and assume that the poet and the scientist are opposed” (*Reader* 273). Moore replied, “Do the poet and scientist not work analogously? Both are willing to waste effort. To be hard on himself is one of the main strengths of each. Each is attentive to clues, each must narrow the choice, must strive for precision. . . . The objective is fertile procedure. Is it not?” (274). Moore’s analogy recognizes both science and poetry as practices that can facilitate rigorous examination of their chosen subjects in order to produce precise knowledge. This struggle for relentless accuracy is one that can fuse a fascination with the strange and complex phenomena of the physical world with careful attention to the formal methodologies employed to maintain analytic discipline. Brought together, these qualities create a “fertile procedure,” through which formal restraint can support fruitful, ongoing inquiry.

Moore’s interest in applying the virtues of science to poetry is evident throughout her writing. Her poems abound with descriptions of unusual flora and fauna, including chameleons, elephants, jerboas, and monkey puzzle trees, as well as accounts of ecological and social forces interacting in environments ranging from a small New England town to Mount Rainier. Moore’s excitement about the rich intricacies of nature reflects a broader desire among modernist writers to create works that could reveal what Natalia Cecire calls “real knowledge, knowledge in a strong sense, of which scientific knowledge was, at the turn of the twentieth century, the gold standard” (Cecire 83). This project of infusing literature with a scientific ethos had a crucial linguistic dimension as well, demanding that authors discover new ways of organizing language to demonstrate the ingenuity and attentiveness of the skillfully devised experiment. These

qualities are also present in much of Moore's work. Moore stands out for her stylistic boldness just as much as for her naturalist bent. Her use of syllabic meter, quotations from a vast array of literary and nonliterary sources, and her unsettling slant rhymes, among other creative maneuvers, mark her as an eager participant in modernist innovation. William Carlos Williams insists on the value of developing new modes of writing in a 1925 article on Moore: "With Miss Moore a word is a word most when it is separated out by science, treated with acid to remove the smudges, washed, dried, and placed right side up on a clean surface. Now one may say that this is a word. Now it may be used, and how?" (Williams, quoted from *Critical Response* 72).

Williams's striking imagery emphasizes the tactility of words, the way that Moore isolates them from their "smudged" conventional contexts, where they are bundled together in commonplaces and platitudes, to apprehend them in their multifaceted complexity, potent tools that can be arranged into novel, generative structures. To see the physical world "right side up" requires that poets not only think about the external phenomena they examine, but about the alignment of the words themselves. Language provides the raw material of poetic inquiry—as Williams notes, "There is a 'special' place which poems, as all works of art, must occupy, but it is quite definitely the same as that where bricks or coloured threads are handled" (70). By viewing words as dynamic agents that can combine in surprising and fruitful ways, we recognize that linguistic experimentation is not a departure from the poem's focus on a central subject, but rather a necessary aspect of masterful construction of knowledge.

Moore's vision of formal complexity facilitating an encounter with the real has been largely obscured by a critical tradition that has tended to place stylistic intricacy in opposition to accurate observation of the phenomena of the physical world. In *The Degenerate Muse*, Robin G. Schulze argues that Moore advocated a poetics in which the poet forms a "pre-discursive, pre-

interpretive ‘genuine’ response to ‘raw’ material,” attempting to communicate their experience of the subject of the poem while minimizing the potential transformations or distortions that language could effect. David Anderson extends a similar line of thought to frame Moore’s syllabics as a sign of her desire to achieve an “organic unity,” inviting readers to move fluidly through the poem without the distraction of unusual formal patterns that could shift attention from the poem’s topic to its textual features. When critics do acknowledge Moore’s experimental techniques, they often in the same breath deny her claim to scientific knowledge. In “Presenting Miss Moore, Modernist,” for example, Andrew J. Kappel notes the stylistic density of Moore’s work, but insists that her jarring creative stratagems are an admission that the relationship between the language of a poem and its subject is “imposed and arbitrary,” so that internal formal consistency comes at the cost of precision in depicting the focal object of the poem.

Implicit in Schulze, Anderson, and Kappel’s accounts of Moore’s poetics is the assumption that language has little capacity to present accurately the events and objects of reality, and is even more unequal to the task as it becomes more formally ambitious. Although many critical narratives constructed around Moore recognize her passion for science and nature or her modernist experimental impetus, these tendencies are often presented as mutually exclusive. My thesis argues that understanding Moore’s creative project requires a synthesis of both aspects of her writing. Moore is not a compelling observer of nature because she suppresses the stylistic playfulness of poetry, but because she embraces it and harnesses it to develop methods of observation that yield a more comprehensive understanding of physical phenomena by placing them in sites of linguistic discourse. Through this lens, we can recover both the scientist and the poet at the heart of Moore’s artistic vision, inextricably bound agents working to construct useful knowledge.

The first chapter of my thesis will take up the problem of what Virginia Jackson calls “lyric reading,” a tradition of literary criticism that frames poetry as a hermetic medium that uses language as a self-referential tool to construct and reveal the internal experience of a fictive speaker. This mode of reading characterizes the poem as unable to represent anything except “the subject herself—suspended, lyrically, in time and place” (Jackson 90). I will discuss how Moore resists the norms of lyric reading by cultivating a poetics of materiality and embodiment, in which poems are not inert objects, but active agents, responding to the particular contingencies of their situations. Moore’s famously frequent and extensive revision of her work as well as her willingness to cede individual authority to collaborators (e.g. publishers, editors, and illustrators) suggest her interest in exploring poetry as a physical medium that participates in broader literary and nonliterary cultures. I will also explore Moore’s stylistic experiments in poetic voice and quotation as part of a larger poetic project: the construction of a new set of objects—dynamic artifacts that not only show but insist on the traffic between thought and things, private and public, poetry and the prose of life.

Moore’s formal experiments are not content to remain self-reflexive aesthetic exercises, their intricate patterns serving simply to display the creative virtuosity of either the poet-figure or of language itself in the abstract. Rather, Moore’s formal innovations are wielded as powerful instrumental for examining the world. Technical precision is always in aid of knowledge (a finer knowledge of the subject matter in play), knowing more, and knowing more finely. In my second chapter, I draw on the work of sociologist Bruno Latour to get at the role of formal ingenuity in the construction of scientific knowledge. Latour insists that rather than compromising science, writing is an integral element of the scientific process as a way to arrange and reconfigure information. This is most evident in his concept of the laboratory, which reveals cases of

“complete *artificiality* and complete *objectivity* moving in parallel” (Latour 90). I believe that the model of the laboratory offers a compelling analogical framework for Moore’s poems, which also function as artificial environments in which one can observe the behavior of a subject and recognize its being, not solely through the lens of human values and concerns, but also through careful observation of the ways it defines its own relationship to an environment or community. I will focus on several poems that discuss animals to consider the various methods (and methodologies) of observation that Moore employs to represent, contain, interrogate, or simply converse with her subjects, demonstrating the richness of experience outside of the human world.

Through my investigation of Moore’s poetics of knowledge, I hope to present a case for her value as an artist who not only saw the potential for poetry to create “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,” but also recognized that a toad is worth putting in a poem. Although her writing has often been characterized as icy, cerebral, or didactic, these accounts fail to recognize her explosive energy, her fervor for the strangeness of the physical world that manifests as careful observation of entities that may seem to lie outside of our human dramas. Instead of allowing the reader to retreat to a realm of affective musings, Moore’s poems turn us back to the complexities of life as it is lived, where we face the confusions and accidents that make up half the excitement of existence, and truly understand, as the speaker in “Poetry” insists, that “all these phenomena are important.”

Chapter I: Dismantling the Lyric

Visions, Revisions, and Editions

Marianne Moore's desire for poetry that could produce knowledge of the real met powerful resistance from the dominant critical methods of reading poetry that would persist through the twentieth century. In *Dickinson's Misery*, Virginia Jackson argues that practices of "lyric reading" created a model of the lyric poem as the private reflections of a complex speaker, free from the contingencies of a particular historical or social moment. This conception of lyric relies on the notion that the poem has integrity as a coherent record of the experiences of the fictive speaking persona, separate from the conditions of its composition and publication, so that even as "the mediating hands of the editors and reviewers who managed the print public sphere" gained influence since the early nineteenth century, lyric reading insists on "the idea of the lyric as ideally unmediated by those hands or those readers" (Jackson 7). The ahistorical tendencies of lyric reading threaten to obscure its own involvement in "lyricization," a process through which the multiplicity of generic practices has been reduced to a constraining model of the lyric. This dynamic is especially evident in the construction of Emily Dickinson as a lyric poet. Jackson notes that various critics have argued that Dickinson's poetry "is 'sceneless,' is 'a set of riddles' revolving around an 'omitted center, is a poetry of 'revoked . . . referentiality'" (3). These descriptions are predicated on a textual legacy shaped by the hands of many previous editors and critics who have worked to make Dickinson legible as a lyric poet, even when her manuscripts appear to resist lyricization. For example, in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson prints a poem taken from a letter Dickinson wrote to her brother. There are no line breaks in the letter, and Johnson admits that the divisions in his edition are arbitrary, highlighting his own involvement in making the text that critics would go on to use in their readings of her work. In

fact, its very existence as a poem is the subject of debate. The lines were “published as prose in 1894, 1924, and 1931—and were again published as a poem ‘in prose form’ in Johnson’s own edition of Dickinson’s letters in 1958” (4). A more recent edition edited by R. W. Franklin in 1998 places the poem in an appendix of prose writings that resemble verse, but the text remains lineated, creating a disjunction between its description as a prose artifact and its presentation in verse. Similar negotiations appear throughout the history of editing and criticism surrounding Dickinson. The body of texts produced by Dickinson, with their unlineated prose passages, cramped jottings on stray pieces of paper, and unusual stanzaic forms, has been shaped into a canon that observes the expected generic conventions of the lyric. But in the process of extracting lyric poems from their original textual worlds, the world that Dickinson herself inhabited is lost to us. We feel the absence of

the stationer that made the paper, of the manufacturer and printer and corporation that issued guarantees and advertisements and of the money that changed hands, of the butcher who wrapped the parcel, of the manuals and primers and copybooks that composed individual literacy, of the expanding postal service, of the modern railroad, of modern journalism, of the nineteenth-century taste for continental literary imports. All of these things are the sorts of things left out of a book . . . Once gathered as the previously ungathered, reclaimed as the abandoned, given the recognition they so long awaited, the poems in bound volumes appear both redeemed and revoked from their scenes or referents, from the history that the book, as book, omits. (3)

The expectations implicit in a collection of a poet’s work seem unable to accommodate the material realities of Dickinson’s texts. Framing these original documents as ephemeral or in need of ordering, editors remove her writings from the systems of nineteenth century literary culture in which they were embedded to structure them after the logic of the volume—the fantasy of a set of self-contained poems that can circulate in print, preserving the lyric voice that can express the thoughts and emotions of these poems in the absence of a concrete setting.

The problems surrounding Dickinson scholarship are symptomatic of the questions that many textual scholars have explored through the twentieth century. In *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, Jerome McGann notes the dominance of the Greg/Bowers approach, a tradition of editing that emphasizes final authorial intentions: the concept that a text with multiple extant versions can be edited to create a definitive presentation, representing the ultimate creative vision the author imagined for that work. McGann argues that this approach relies on the “concept of the autonomy of the creative artist”:

To be put in touch with these authors and their works, the historical method proposed not an elimination of the distance but a clearing of the view: take away the textual contaminants, remove the interfering scribal and typographical presence, and the autonomous original will appear before us. [. . .]
Having learned the lesson that authors who wish to make contact with an audience are fated, by laws of information theory, to have their messages more or less seriously garbled in the process, textual critics have proposed to place the reader in an unmediated contact with the author. This project is of course manifestly impossible, a Heisenbergian dilemma, since some form of mediation is always occurring, not least in the editions produced by critical editors of various persuasions. (*Critique* 41)

The intentionalist perspective asserts a division between private creation and public circulation, insisting that a manuscript of the text prior to its publication can represent a sort of Edenic state before it is subject to contaminating social pressures. In a formulation similar to the construction of the lyric speaker, editors using the Greg/Bowers method attempt to produce a reliable version of a text that reflects the final vision of “the author,” a static category that often seems to diverge from the multiplicity of ambitions an author may have expressed for that work through its various presentations. Instead of entering into the historical conditions that may account for the differences between versions, these editors reductively produce a version that aims to settle debates. But in doing so, they contribute to an estrangement between editorial and critical practices. By offering the “definitive” edition of a text, editors exempt critics from having to concern themselves with textual scholarship; the critic accepts the text as a stable foundation for

hermeneutic processes of close reading and linguistic analysis, closing off questions pertaining to the material shape and conditions of the text and to the contingencies of their own reception.

Both lyric reading and intentionalist editing posit a hermetic model of textuality. From this perspective, the text, once redeemed from the distortions of sociohistorical conditions, becomes a fully realized aesthetic object, its internal complexity partly a function of its clean distinctness from its original context. But the seeming tidiness of the text as an isolated artifact also circumscribes its ability to engage with the surrounding world or to claim for itself anything other than a marginal role within or for that world. After exploring some of the potential avenues of inquiry available in one of Dickinson's poems, Jackson laments the restraints that lyric reading places upon the critic's ability to tease out these associations:

While the problem of lyric reference might seem to have been what was at stake in the preceding pages, the overlapping or incongruous details, seasons, public and private histories, battles and pets, sex scandals and insect remnants, books, newspapers, and all sorts of familiar letters that surrounded the lines later published as a Dickinson lyric could not be said to be what the lines are 'about.' In fact, those contingencies may never have been the subject of the lines, but in any case they could only have formed part of what the lines *were* about; that is, the stories that could be unfolded from them may or may not have been relevant to the lines' potentially miscellaneous subjects (and objects) in the past. Once the lines were published and received as a lyric, those several and severally dated subjects and objects and their several stories faded from view, since the poem's referent would thereafter be understood as the subject herself—suspended, lyrically, in place and time. (Jackson 90)

The private reverie of the lyric creates a self-reflexive lens; anything that enters the poem forfeits its status as a distinct object or phenomenon and becomes an element in the speaker's internal drama of perception, reflection, and imagination. Lyricization also threatens a similar myopia within literary criticism: "The conceptual problem is that if the lyric is the creation of print and critical mediation, and if that creation then produces the very versions of interpretive mediation that in turn produce it, any attempt to trace the historical situation of the lyric will end in tautology" (8). Lyric becomes a self-perpetuating system, a historically constructed genre that

hides the traces of its own creation to claim universality and stifling other productive generic models that could be responsive to the contingencies at play in a text.

Moore seems to express a frustration similar to Jackson's in "Poetry," which begins with her famous complaint:

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
 Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in
 it after all, a place for the genuine.
 Hands that can grasp, eyes
 that can dilate, hair that can rise
 if it must, these things are important not because a

high sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
 useful. (*NCP* 27, ll. 1-8)

Lyric reading insists that the text is a static foundation for a cyclical hermeneutic process, poetic language instigating critical language which in turn generates more criticism that can be "placed upon" the foundation of its predecessors, as though writing were a skyscraper, each new level growing increasingly distant from the referents at its base. Moore offers an alternative to this isolated loftiness in the form of "usefulness." Although the term can seem mercenary or banal, demanding that poetry justify its existence in utilitarian terms, Moore suggests that to be useful is not to conform to a rigid standard of value, but to imagine the multiple ways that one can be of use to others, to engage with the material world and care about the ways that one's writing exists within and takes part in public life. Her ideal is not the inert and isolated aesthetic object, but the embodied text, with grasping hands that force a nearly tactile encounter with the reader.

Fortunately for Moore, modernist literary culture provided a valuable testing ground for her poetics of engagement and embodiment. She began her career as a poet during a period of vibrant literary activity, publishing in major outlets for modernist poetry such as *The Egoist*, *Others*, and *The Dial*, and even serving as the editor of the last periodical for several years. Her

involvement in modernist literary journalism as well as in the production of her own collections afforded her many occasions for publication, and each new publication became an opportunity for modification. While Moore's habits of revision would become especially prominent later in her life, the tendency is present from the beginning of her career, with alterations ranging from minor tweaks to punctuation or diction to wholesale rewriting. Reading the revisions through the lens of final intentions, we might be tempted to simply accept the final published version of any given poem as the one most representative of Moore's plans for it, treating each iteration as a step towards this ideal. However, Robin G. Schulze proposes a different framework for making sense of Moore's shifting texts. In "Textual Darwinism," she coins the term "authorial selection," suggesting an affinity between Darwin's understanding of evolution and the way that texts can evolve over time:

While the word 'intention' seems to imply a singular, teleologically driven sense of authorial purpose, the phrase 'authorial selection,' like Darwin's concept of natural selection, implies that the author's goal in each new version of his or her text is, in fact, local fitness in relation to its social, cultural, or textual environment rather than some abstract ideal of perfection. The author may come up with any number of potential literary ideas that may or may not prove fruitful, but, in the act of putting pen to paper, the author inevitably selects the characteristics that best adapt the version of his or her text to its particular place and time, starting a chain of selection that continues for the life of the author. ("Textual Darwinism" 299)

Moore's revisions do not necessarily follow a set trajectory; each instance of publication creates a different space in which to situate the poem, suggesting changes that may be more appropriate to its new textual and social context. Schulze's model suggests that the text is not a stable entity in a fixed position, but a larger composite of choices made in response to varying circumstances, as though texts have a behavioral potential that cannot be realized in any individual presentation, just as a living organism has a variety of actions available based on its environment and physiology, only some of which are performed at a given moment.

A JELLY-FISH (1909)

Visible, invisible,
 A fluctuating charm,
 An amber-coloured amethyst
 Inhabits it; your arm
 Approaches, and
 It opens and
 It closes;
 You have meant to catch it,
 And it shrivels;
 You abandon
 Your intent—
 It opens, and it
 Closes and you
 Reach for it—
 The blue
 Surrounding it
 Grows cloudy, and
 It floats away
 From you.

(BMM 342)

A Jellyfish (1959)

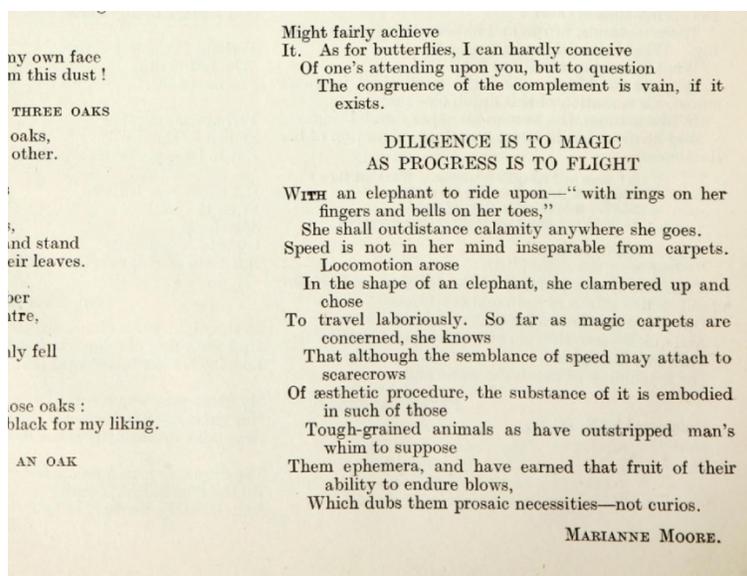
Visible, invisible,
 a fluctuating charm
 an amber-tintured amethyst
 inhabits it, your arm
 approaches and it opens
 and it closes; you had meant
 to catch it and it quivers;
 you abandon your intent.

(*O To Be a Dragon*, p. 12)

The enactment of revision as biological fluidity is particularly evident in “A Jelly-Fish,” a poem Moore originally published in a Bryn Mawr periodical for alumni in 1909 and returned to fifty years later in her collection *O To Be a Dragon* as “A Jellyfish” (see above). The first version uses irregular enjambment and capitalizes the first letters of each line to cut against the syntax, highlighting the moment-to-moment strangeness of the interaction instead of allowing the reader to move fluidly across the page. The later presentation, on the other hand, appears less jarring, ordering the lines into two quatrains that reveal the subtle rhymes in the first version. But the most significant change is the removal of the lines from the 1959 version. In the first, the “you” of the poem attempts to catch the jellyfish a second time, creating an odd cycle of desire and restraint that mimics the fluctuation of the jellyfish. This version locates agency in the

jellyfish as an object that commands the viewer's fascination, but remains elusive. The later version ends with the observer recognizing their own moral responsibility to the jellyfish—instead of “shriveling,” the jellyfish “quivers,” an ambiguous gesture that raises associations of eroticism as well as fear and vulnerability. Acknowledging the richness of the jellyfish's experience and their own inability to engage in reciprocal dialogue, the observer allows it independent subjecthood as a being that cannot be confined or fully understood. And just as the jellyfish, with its changing forms, maintains its integrity as a coherent entity, putting both versions of the poem together creates a dynamic of expansion and contraction—mirrored in their visual arrangement—where they do not compete for primacy, but rather reveal the multiple complementary states of the poem's existence.

The dynamism of Moore's poems does not reside solely in her own acts of revision or arise strictly from her own decisions; it also arises from Moore's sites of publication and from the materials that surround her poems in the various journals with which she developed crucial relationships. Perhaps the strangest occasion is her publication of “Poetry” in the July 1919 issue of *Others*. Schulze explains that the magazine faced significant financial troubles and was only able to publish intermittently, frustrating some of the people involved in producing it. William Carlos Williams, who served as one of the assistant editors, believed that the magazine had become staid and distant from the radical ideals of its origins. In July, he published the final monthly issue, including a rambling, vitriolic editorial in which he announced the end of *Others* (BMM 474-475). Although Moore was not aware of Williams's plans for the issue, “Poetry” turned out to be surprisingly resonant. In his editorial, Williams argues, “We older can compose, we seek the seclusion of a style, of a technique, we make replicas of the world we live in and we live in them and not in the world. And THAT is Others. The garbage proved we were alive once,



(*The Egoist*, Vol. 2, No. 10, p. 158)

it cannot prove us dead now. But THAT is Others now, that is its lie ("Gloria!" 3). Perhaps Williams felt a kindred spirit in "Poetry," with its suspicion of "high sounding interpretations" and its insistence on poets being "literalists of the imagination" who could fashion a poem into "a place for the genuine" rather than an escape from the conditions of the physical world. And the unsettling, self-accusatory opening—"I too, dislike it,"— could hardly be more appropriate to proclaim the death of a literary magazine. Whatever meanings Moore's poem might generate in a separate collection or anthology, its original site of publication allows new critical narratives to emerge even when the words remain unchanged.

The spatial arrangement of a journal (that is, layout, design, and the diverse practical constraints on those features) could also have a significant impact on the presentation and reception of a poem. The limited space available in periodicals often required the poems to adapt to situations that altered their formal qualities. This is particularly evident in "Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight." Cramming her poem into one of the double columns of *The Egoist*, Moore was forced to wrap her lines so that the poem's structure of ten lines in syllabic

meter, all ending with a persistent monorhyme, is hard to discern. Schulze argues that the compromise is a result of Moore's attempt to imagine the visual space of the poem in an unconventional form:

She was, it seems, thinking and writing in *landscape* mode rather than portrait mode—a habit that marked her work well into the 1930s and that had profound consequences, I now believe, on the development of her poetry, the reception of her verse, and the shape of her career. Landscape was distinctly NOT the visual orientation of early twentieth-century printing. Moore's poems, I now think, often struck readers as far more 'difficult' and 'strange', far less expressive of the common generic markers of 'poetry' (such as rhyme), because the shapes she created with her long lines and deep indents were simply not reproducible without the visual interference of heavy wrapping. ("What," 89)

The disjunction between the envisioned or ideal form of the poem and its material constraints effaces some of the properties Moore wanted it to express, but it also encourages us to consider the strange new ways that the poem functions when those properties become less clear—the poem seems more difficult, with bizarre enjambment and prosy cadences. That these effects are based on a misunderstanding of Moore's practice of wrapping lines is beside the point—the poem is not indifferent to its habitat, but adaptive, modifying its "behavior" to establish a different relationship with the reader from the one that the poem could facilitate in an unwrapped presentation.

While the challenges and distortions of entering the world of publishing may appear a high price to pay for engagement in literary culture, Moore found these negotiations compelling, acknowledging the excitement of shaping texts that circulate through a community of readers. In "Bowls," she meditates on the role of the writer as a figure in public life. Near the beginning of the poem, the speaker compares bowling to Chinese lacquer carving, an art characterized by "certainty of touch and unhurried incision" (*NCP* 60). Although the latter appears to have more aesthetic significance than a leisurely pastime, both practices can reveal a mastery that only comes through skill and attention to material form, whether in the shape of "lignum vitae balls"

or coats of lacquer meticulously carved so that “only so much color shall be revealed as is necessary to the picture.” Observing the capacity for complexity and aesthetic richness in seemingly trivial activity of bowling, Moore explains, “I learn that we are precisians— / not citizens of Pompeii arrested in action / as a cross section of one’s correspondence would seem to imply.” Although a sample of the correspondence from a given moment may appear chaotic, a disordered heap of chaff, recording the tedious goings-on of daily life, when taken as part of a dynamic system, they demonstrate a capacity to organize and enrich society. Just as the allure of bowling does not reside in the ball or in the arrangement of pins, but in the movement of physical bodies, no static cross-section can capture the multiplicity of correspondence—the relationship between writer and addressee, the routes along which the letters travel, or the position a single document occupies in a larger history of personal or professional exchanges. In contrast to the notion that time spent writing letters is a distraction from more fruitful or enduring artistic pursuits, the speaker expresses a different vision of participation in literary culture:

Renouncing a policy of boorish indifference
to everything that has been said since the days of Matilda,
I shall purchase an Etymological Dictionary of Modern English
that I may understand what is written and like the ant and the spider
returning from time to time to headquarters,
shall answer the question
as to “why I like winter better than I like summer”
and acknowledge that it does not make me sick
to look modern playwrights and poets and novelists straight in the face—
that I feel just the same;
and I shall write to the publisher of the magazine
which will “appear the first day of the month
and disappear before one has had the time to buy it
unless one takes proper precaution,”
and make an effort to please—
since he who gives quickly gives twice
in nothing so much as in a letter. (*NCP* 60)

The poem insists that to be an author requires a familiarity with the uses of language in its various states—not remaining doggedly antiquarian, but engaging with one’s contemporaries and tracing the developments of speech and writing in genres ranging from novels and plays to letters and magazine articles. To aspire to a state of preeminence through aloofness is nothing but boorishness; ephemeral as they may seem, correspondence and journalism are vital ways to stake a claim to public consequence. Quoting from a French advertisement, Moore argues that a magazine that can sell out rapidly achieves a different ideal of cultural value than the museum piece or leatherbound volume—marking an accomplishment of generosity, engaging not with a hypothetical viewer or reader a century later, but with the people who participate in contemporaneous literary culture, accepting the frantic marketplace as a space of meaningful production rather than a compromising necessity. The final two lines extend a Latin proverb—“he gives twice who gives quickly”—by recognizing the letter as an ideal vehicle of communication. Perhaps more than the contents within, the speed of a letter makes it a type of giving, expressing a desire to connect with the recipient that can surmount the barriers of distance. Texts are mobile bodies, which demonstrate their importance not only in their linguistic codes—the words themselves—but also in the conditions of their circulation, their paths of transit and the behaviors they can manifest along the way.

Moore’s account of a literary culture driven by involvement in the public sphere, requiring awareness of the economic and social institutions that shape a text, constructs a different model of authorship than that of the individual genius. Romantic ideals of artistic creation often emphasize the writer as an autonomous figure, using their creation as an expression of selfhood uninfluenced by the expectations of an audience or the circumstances of

production. McGann challenges these attitudes by noting that creating a text is an inherently social enterprise:

Were we dealing with psychological rather than social phenomena, we could properly say that the forms reflect authorial intentions. But a textual history is a psychic history only because it is first a social history. . . . The stories one may extract from a textual history are sometimes psychological stories, as we may particularly observe in the case of authorial manuscripts. But even there, especially in the fair copy manuscripts, the stories reflect social interactions and purposes, and as soon as we begin to study the proofs and the editions the psychological focus begins to recede into a subplot. We enter the world of textual versions where intentions are plainly shifting and changing under the pressure of various people and circumstances. (*Critique* 62)

The process of publication constructs, implicitly or explicitly, a reading public that can receive the text. Even in private acts of composition and revision, writers position themselves within a network of other mediators, including editors, illustrators, printers, advertisers, and distributors, among others. These dynamics are present in any act of writing, but are exemplified in Moore's interactions with literary culture. While the emphasis that lyric reading places on the poem as the result of an individual creative ethos effaces the roles of other participants besides the author, Moore is careful to acknowledge the role that these figures play in shaping her texts, often ceding personal authority in favor of collaboration. In so doing, she imagines the author not as a person, but as an event—a complex of the various conditions of production under which their works are shaped, as well the popular and scholarly reception surrounding them.

The role of literary institutions in shaping Moore's identity as an author is evident in the circumstances surrounding the publication of her first collection, *Observations*, in 1924. Three years earlier, Moore's friends H.D. and Bryher published a small volume called *Poems* without her consent, using Bryher's fortune to fund the book. Moore was taken aback by the surprise publication, and even more dismayed by the negative critical reaction. Over the following years, Moore received several offers to publish her works in a collection, but she was hesitant to expose

herself to the literary scene that derided her work in 1921. The inciting event that encouraged Moore to try publishing a book did not come from her own initiative so much as the economic need of *The Dial*, a literary magazine that had previously published her several of her poems and articles. Its publisher and editor, Scofield Thayer, offered to publish a volume of her poems through the Dial Press. Thayer planned to have the book published by the end of 1924, which would allow him to award Moore the Dial Award of \$2000, a prominent honor that would ultimately pay off through increased sales (*BMM* 29-38). While Moore was initially resistant to the idea of publishing again, she experienced a change of heart following a letter from Thayer in which he assured her that the Dial Press expected a financial gain from the book. Instead of considering the self-interest of *The Dial* as a compromising factor, Moore was encouraged by this commercial motivation. Unlike *Poems*, which was insulated from market forces by the wealth of her friends, *Observations* was a project of vital necessity, and one in which Thayer was confident, implying a greater potential to reach an audience. These considerations show that the publication of her first volume was not solely the result of private ambitions, but was rather a locus, or perhaps a nexus, of converging economic and literary interests from multiple parties. Understanding these influences grants us a robust vision of the position that a literary work can occupy in the public sphere; this richness and vitality more than compensates for the losses entailed by abandoning our commitment to the idea of the artist's total creative independence.

An even more direct example of Moore's authorship as a collaborative process appears in T. S. Eliot's editorial work for the 1935 *Selected Poems*. In his introduction to the *Selected*, Eliot explains his role in editing the volume:

The original suggestion was that I should make a selection from both previously published and more recent poems. But Miss Moore exercised her own rights of proscription first, so drastically, that I have been concerned to preserve rather than abate. I have therefore hardly done more than settle the order of the contents. (*SP* 12)

Moore's decision to exclude many poems previously published in *Observations* left Eliot with questions of ordering rather than selection, but he accomplished a great deal within the constraints of his limited role. In "Presenting Miss Moore, Modernist," Andrew J. Kappel argues that Eliot used his sensitivity to the formal concerns at play in her poems to create an arrangement that would determine the contours of succeeding Moore scholarship. Examining the differences in the sequences of *Observations* and the *Selected*, Kappel suggests that instead of simply placing the poems in chronological order, Eliot divided the poems into four general categories: the elaborate descriptive poems published from 1932-1934, her longer syllabic poems from earlier decades, her experiments in free verse from the twenties, and her shorter syllabic poems (Kappel 139-140). By placing her most recent work first, Eliot allows readers who are already familiar with Moore to encounter her latest poems, but he also emphasizes the stylistic qualities that come to the fore during the thirties. The first poem in the *Selected*, "The Steeple-Jack," has become one of the central works in Moore criticism, shaping our sense that the primary interest in her poetry is "the dynamic of observer and observed embodied in a descriptive poetic, with special attention to the Modernist problems of authority and epistemology included in that dynamic" (141). This influence has been compounded by the lasting significance of the *Selected* in subsequent volumes. Both Moore's *Collected Poems* and the subsequent *Complete Poems* begin by reprinting the *Selected*, keeping Eliot's arrangement mostly intact so that "The Steeple-Jack" and poems from the thirties come first in each book.

Eliot's decisions also reflect his interest in demonstrating Moore's affinity with modernist poetics. His introduction notes potential similarities between her descriptive style and the imagism of poets such as H.D. and Ezra Pound: "Miss Moore's poetry, or most of it, might be classified as 'descriptive' rather than 'lyrical' or 'dramatic.'"

Descriptive poetry is supposed to be dated to a period, and to be condemned thereby, but it is really one of the permanent modes of expression. In the eighteenth century . . . the scene described is a point of departure for meditations on one thing or another. . . . The aim of 'imagism,' so far as I understand it, or so far as it had any, was to induce a peculiar concentration upon something visual, and to set in motion an expanding succession of concentric feelings. (*SP* 8-9)

Instead of relinquishing Moore to the sensibilities of previous poetic eras, Eliot observes that Moore expresses a modernist fascination with the meticulous visual composition as a locus of intellectual and emotional associations, achieving resonance not because of its capaciousness, but rather its concentration on the evocative details of the focal object. The selection of the final poems in the *Selected* reflects Eliot's interest in Moore's imagistic qualities. Kappel notes that following a cluster of expansive poems in free verse, the volume presents a series of concise syllabic pieces and concludes with "Silence." This ordering creates the impression of a "gathering quiet that is restored and deepened" after the disturbance of the "loud, unruly note" of the free verse poems, so that "the silence that follows that beautifully placed last poem speaks feelingly" (Kappel 148-149). Kappel's symphonic analogy frames Eliot's editorial work as the result of awareness of the collection as a space where poems can respond to each other, generating harmony or tension through juxtaposition. In his introduction and arrangement of Moore's poems, Eliot turns the *Selected* into a poetic argument, which is to say that the contours of the book posit a vision of Moore based on Eliot's critical understanding of her personal interests as a writer as well as her importance within the context of twentieth-century poetry.

Although Moore's *Selected Poems* make the influence of editorial work particularly clear, Eliot's bold arrangement is far from an unusual case. In fact, Schulze argues that editing is by its very nature

a deeply interpretive act. Good editing demands that each and every editorial decision a scholar makes in regard to an author and his or her texts reflects the scholar's interpretation of that author and his or her texts and the scholar's interpretation of

textuality generally. The ways in which texts are edited inevitably determine the ways in which they are read and the meanings that either do or do not emerge. No editorial decision is insignificant. All good editing is a form of argumentation. All good editors explain their editorial choices in relation to the arguments they wish to make. All good editors understand that their editions constitute only one of many arguments that might be made about an author and his or her texts. (“How” 120)

While the interpretive nature of editing is not readily visible in many texts, the complexities of Moore’s textual history have made it nearly impossible to ignore the mediation of editors in any presentation of her poetry. She often took advantage of opportunities to tinker with her poems throughout her life, but her practices of revision become especially prominent in the 1967 *Complete Poems*. Despite the title, many of Moore’s early poems are absent, while others are drastically altered from previous versions—changes include severe truncation, breaking syllabic stanzas into free verse, and in a few cases, wholesale reinvention. Baffled critics and readers get little help—only the enigmatic epigraph, “Omissions are not accidents.” This volume, with minor corrections and additions in 1981, was most easily accessible collection of Moore’s poems for several decades—despite the notable absences, no other book made a similar attempt to present a comprehensive account of her body of work until the publication of Grace Schulman’s *The Poems of Marianne Moore* in 2003. Although the principle of final intentions would lead us to accept the *Complete Poems* as “the set of poems, the stable monument complete with omissions, by which Moore wished to be remembered,” (*BMM* 3) Schulze explains that using the volume as the primary point of contact with Moore’s work has limited the ability of scholars to engage with the social and historical spaces in which she wrote her poems:

As one might expect, limited access to Moore’s variant texts has made the chronological, historically grounded study of her career particularly difficult. Scholarly approaches to her poetry have been marked by a series of uncomfortable compromises made in the face of Moore’s circumscribed textual condition. Throughout the literature on Moore’s verse, critics often pause to acknowledge that her poems occur in multiple versions. Frequently, however, they back away from discussing the variant texts for the simple, and, it seems to

me, sensible reason that their readers do not have access to a full range of Moore's poems. (9-10)

While the instabilities or ambiguities of a text are often treated as a secondary concern for editors and textual scholars, Moore's frequent and extensive revisions demand acknowledgment as a critical problem. These questions cannot be relegated to a brief "Note on the Text"—instead, they become a site of vigorous debate. These challenges have become especially prominent in several recent volumes that provide alternatives to the *Complete*. Instead of relying on the notion of a set of "best practices" for editorial work, the editors of these collections present arguments based on their attentive reading of Moore's work and their understanding of her as a poet and a person. In *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, Grace Schulman offers a far more comprehensive array of poems than the *Complete*. Although she expresses hesitance to publish a book that challenges Moore's final editorial decisions, she justifies her choice by appealing to her friendship with Moore. At one point, she recalls taking a drive with Moore and seeing a man burning a painting in a trash can:

'Don't burn your work,' she commanded. Her voice was plangent. The man looked at her, bewildered. 'No, don't ever burn your work,' she called out again, as though talking as well to me, and herself. After a pause, she asked the driver to move on. Remembering that ride, I realize now that we never found out just why he was burning the canvas, just as I've never known the actual reasons for her omissions. Still, at the very least, the memory is a sign. (Schulman xxiii)

Rather than grounding her decisions in questions of textual scholarship, Schulman recognizes her editorial work as a way of honoring her friend, revealing that Moore had an interest in the preservation of creative works, a dimension that the *Complete* fails to make clear through its exacting selection.

In the *New Collected Poems*, published as recently as June 2017, Heather Cass White also emphasizes her sense of fashioning a different version of Moore by publishing earlier

versions of heavily revised poems and including ones that Moore chose to leave out. In her introduction, White argues that “there are at least two major Moores: pre- and post- war. Where Moore sought to bring the former into line with the latter, however, I have worked to keep them distinct” (*NCP* xxvi). To this end, she positions her editorial work in direct opposition to Moore’s selection in the *Complete*:

In its broadest terms this edition argues that although Moore’s omissions were not accidents, they were nevertheless mistakes. I think that Moore, in the later decades of her life, did her readers a lasting, and compounding, disservice by altering and suppressing the writing she published as a younger poet. As the first generations of Moore readers have disappeared, so has the Moore they collectively sustained in memory. This edition exists in the service of the Moore her peers witnessed, and as a counter-testimony to the Moore she herself invented to take her place. (343-344)

White’s stance is argumentative, and perhaps even combative, as she insists on the urgency of restoring a version of Moore that has been unavailable to readers for decades. But instead of simply creating the illusion of an unambiguous reversal of the older Moore’s decisions, White acknowledges her own role in mediating the texts, pointing out that “‘selected’ is the only adjective that accurately describes any book of Moore’s work thus far produced, or any that can be produced” (xv). Each new arrangement of Moore’s poetry is an occasion of reinvention, forcing the editor to grapple with the instabilities built into her textual legacy and come up with a solution based on their own critical and affective readings of the poems. We receive Moore not as a static, autonomous artist, but as the locus of many mediating activities—it is impossible for us to ignore the collusion of editors in constructing her as a literary phenomenon.

The dispersal of Moore’s individual authority across a network of both knowing and unwitting collaborators may seem to compromise her accomplishment or prestige as an original author, realizing a unique creative vision. This concern is particularly evident in Jayne E. Marek’s “The Ironic ‘Editorial We.’” Pushing back against claims that Moore had little influence

on the journalistic procedures of the periodical *The Dial* during her tenure as editor, Marek insists that this perceived insignificance is an illusion perpetuated by Moore herself in order to sustain the appearance of a harmonious editorial team that was unified in its interests and priorities. Marek maintains that Moore's skilful management of her relations with the founders, Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, as well as with crucial contributors such as Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein; her frequent requests that authors revise their submissions; and her inclusion of her own anonymous reviews, which allowed her to express opinions without accusations of favoritism, demonstrate that Moore was able to use the journal as an outlet to champion her own vision for modernist literature without calling attention to her own power. Despite the democratic model that appeared to organize *The Dial*, "her ironic fiction of collaboration has acted as a foil to disguise her decisionmaking, as if it were subservient to men's interests, when in effect she was promoting critical literary thought at the *Dial* almost singlehandedly" (Marek 145).

While Marek offers compelling evidence of Moore's strategic control of many aspects of *The Dial*, it is important to note Moore's comfort with appearing part of a collaborative effort rather than asserting personal significance. Her sense of her value as an editor did not rely solely on those accomplishments that could be isolated as her unique contributions. To insist on individual literary success while effacing the useful roles of other participants would be uncharitable. Her poems also challenge the image of the isolated author as the figurehead of *auctoritas*. In "He Wrote the History Book," Moore mocks the notion of the writer as an elevated figure, having sole proprietorship of his writing:

There! You shed a ray
of whimsicality on a mask of profundity so
terrific, that I have been dumbfounded by
it oftener than I care to say.
The book? Titles are chaff.

Authentically

brief and full of energy, you contribute to your father's
legibility and are sufficiently
synthetic. Thank you for showing me
your father's autograph. (*NCP* 31)

Moore's note: At the age of five or six, John Andrews, son of Dr. C. M. Andrews, replied when asked his name: 'My name is John Andrews. My father wrote the history book.'
(*NCP* 298)

By designating his father's book as *the* history book, the interlocutor unwittingly casts the monumental figure of his father in a comical light, highlighting the childish myopia that allows one to imagine that having written a book gives one a claim to universal recognition, rendering a distinguishing title unnecessary—the same sort of unqualified ownership that the John Andrews asserts over his father, believing that his own identity gains consequence because of the achievements of his parents. But the poem sees the potential to redeem the history book from its aura of self-importance through the mediation of others. By introducing the book to the speaker, Andrews performs an act of synthesis, recognizing the work of his father, his own relationship to the work by extension, and attempting to communicate its importance to the speaker in the absence of his father. The child claims the book as his inheritance, destabilizing the straightforward relationship between it and the autograph within. This complication serves to make the text legible as an object that is not entirely subsumed by a name—breaking through the “mask of profundity,” the speaker can engage with the book as a document to be read and understood.

The version of “When I Buy Pictures” published in *Poems* also complicates the motif of the autograph. Using the title as an opening, the poem goes on to qualify: “or what is closer to the truth, when I look at/ that of which I may regard myself as the / imaginary possessor” (*BMM* 257). The poem suggests the possibility of possession on terms other than economic ones, as though the act of aesthetic appreciation constructs a provisional experience of ownership. Instead

of remaining under the confines of private ownership, the work of art can circulate through a community of “imaginary possessors” so that it does not remain on an unapproachable pedestal, but rather becomes a familiar object that viewers can evaluate according to their unique sensibilities. At the end of the poem, the speaker concludes:

It comes to this: of whatever sort it is, it
 must make known the fact that it has been displayed
 to acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it;
 and it must admit that it is the work of X, if X produced it; of Y, if made
 by Y. It must be a voluntary gift with the name written on it. (*BMM* 257)

While these lines insist on the value of revealing the identity of the artist behind the aesthetic object, they do not present the artist as an isolated creator, but rather as a complex of “spiritual forces” that come together to produce an artwork. Instead of restricting the circulation of a text, inscribing the name preserves an awareness of the material and social conditions of its creation. Authorship becomes a form of gift giving, creating an object that can both acknowledge its origins and respond to the contingencies of various situations of imaginary possession. In another version of the poem published in *The Dial*, the final lines state, “it must be ‘lit with piercing glances into the life of things;’ / then I ‘take it in hand as a savage would take a looking-glass’” (255). Just as a mirror can reveal different shades and textures from different positions, the work of art interferes with our self-image—we find ourselves “more truly and more strange” through the encounter, not the stable, static, or secure individuals we might imagine ourselves. Each collaborator who has participated in constructing Moore’s textual history has added their name to the spiritual forces behind her legacy, and in the process, allowed her to take on a multiplicity of existences prohibited by the limited romantic understanding of the autonomous author. By revealing the network of mediators behind the text, Moore shows how writing is physically and

socially bound, and in the process, takes on forms more exciting than anything the isolated writer could devise.

“The Outward and Every-day World”

In addition to undermining the ahistorical model of textuality that lyric reading proposes by demonstrating how her poems adapt to their ever-changing situations as material objects produced and transformed through the collaborative systems of literary culture, Moore challenges the fantasy of the decontextualized aesthetic object at the heart of lyric reading through her experimentation with poetic voice. Her approach stands in particular opposition to the foundational conception of the speaking figure in poetry offered by John Stuart Mill in “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,” an essay that has shaped our understanding of the lyric as a record of solitary contemplation. Unlike “eloquence,” which addresses listeners directly in order to appeal to their sympathies or move them to action,

poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet’s mind. (Mill 95)

The lyric poem exists in the private sphere, allowing reflection without the confounding influences of performance to an audience. Even acknowledging that many poets write with the clear intention of publication, Mill argues that the poem must maintain the illusion of isolated expression of emotions, just as in a soliloquy, “no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself. The actor knows that there is an audience present; but if he act as though he knew it, he acts ill” (95). This framing of poetry suggests that the work must remain free of public considerations, hiding every trace of “lookings-forth into the outward and every-day world” in order to support the fiction of the soliloquy. As it circulates through a body

of readers, it retains the sense of private emotional contemplation that allows it to become both anonymous and universal—unmoored from the specificities of a distinct social or historical situation, the poem allows each reader to appropriate the lyric “I” as an enactment of personal feelings. This perspective creates a form of engagement outside of the conventions of narrative, with its focus on events, but in the process, it limits its interest “only to those to whom it recalls what they have felt, or whose imagination it stirs up to conceive what they could feel, or what they might have been able to feel, had their outward circumstances been different” (94). Without the sensuous experiences or practical concerns that can create a spectacle for an audience, lyric performance can only find appeal with those who can see their own affective or intellectual experiences represented by the speaker.

What would the staging implicit in Mill’s description of a poem look like? Perhaps the action of the play subsides or freezes, the lights go dim except for a bright pool upstage center, into which the actor steps and pours forth their unrestrained sentiments, imagining themselves alone despite the watchful audience. In an actual theatrical production, this would be one among many potential stagings considered by a production team, but for Mill, the techniques of lighting, blocking, and other elements of stagecraft construct a moment of privacy where the speaker is separate from a broader social scene of action or community of witnesses are effaced. The speaking figure is not simply a participant in a drama, but the sole presence, and their impulse towards isolated soliloquy is taken for granted as the occasion for an act of unmediated speech. The theater in his analogy is not a vision of bodies on a stage, but of the incorporeal voice as a conduit of language that displaces the physical world with internal thoughts and emotions.

Moore proposes an alternative formulation of voice in her essay “The Accented Syllable,” in which she examines various passages from articles and books, arguing that they offer aesthetic pleasure through a tone of voice separable from direct meaning:

By the tone of voice I mean that intonation in which the accents which are responsible for it are so unequivocal as to persist, no matter under what circumstances the syllables are read or by whom they are read. . . . If an author’s written tone of voice is distinctive, a reader’s speaking tone of voice will not obliterate it. (*Prose* 32)

Moore recognizes that the publication and distribution of texts will create any number of reading situations, each with its unique contingencies, but insists that the poem still retains a cohesive identity. Where Mill suggests that distributing a poem among a public audience can allow the voice of the reader to appropriate and inhabit the lyric “I,” Moore insists that the formal properties of a text construct a voice that remains distinct from that of the reader, so that each instance of performance is not a displacement, but a reification of the textual voice through the reader’s enactment. The speaker in Moore’s framework is not an anonymous cipher, but a sensibility that is “so unequivocal as to persist” as an embodied figure, in much the same way that a character in a play does not disappear into the personality of an actor. And by emphasizing the rhythm that shapes the textures and intonations of language, Moore reveals the sensuous qualities of the voice as a physical process, bound to a particular temporal and material context. Through her framing of the voice as something that can be heard, she reveals the various scenes of action in which language is deployed—it is not confined to moments of silent reflection, but can also facilitate dialogue with others—it can explain, examine, question, argue, and engage with a community of listeners and readers. Moore’s poems do not treat the speaker as a vessel from which language pours forth as affective experience, but rather as a compositional element within a physically and temporally realized dramatic situation. The poem becomes a site of rhetorical and social negotiations that can interest readers by presenting a distinct spectacle that

cannot be assimilated into their personal affective experiences. The action of the poem retains its material and social concerns instead of dissolving into the emotions of the speaker.

Moore's resistance to the lyric assumption of the "I" itself as the central topic of a poem is particularly overt in "Poetry," which employs several pronouns to strategic effect. It begins, "I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle. / Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in / it after all, a place for the genuine" (*NCP* 27). The showy introduction of the speaker might initially suggest that the poem is guided by the thoughts of a dominating personality. The opening suggests that the speaker is responding to an interlocutor or larger group that dislikes poetry, but the piece only begins when the speaker voices their own opinion as an authoritative judgment—in effect, appropriating the idea of another figure and implying that it gains legitimacy as the occasion for a poem only when taken up by an individual speaker. But the second and third lines, with their tortuous syntax, enact a small drama in which the speaker begrudgingly suspends their individual preference in order to consider the merits of poetry for a hypothetical reader, and in doing so, exiles the "I" from the rest of the poem. The self-important figure of the opening is exposed as an ironic rhetorical gesture to be promptly discarded in favor of the impersonal "one." The poem advances its argument in the manner of a lecture, alternating between the impersonal—"One must make a distinction"—and the first-person plural—"the same thing may be said for all of us, that we / do not admire what / we cannot understand"—to consider both collective values and the obligations of specific individuals with regards to poetry. At the very end, the poem makes a direct appeal to the reader:

If you demand on one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

Instead of the myopic community of the beginning, into which the first-person speaker enters by aligning with their dislike of poetry, these final lines enlist the reader into a different model, based on shared interest, not in a specific poem or poet, but in poetry as a genre that has the potential to create a place for the genuine. Throughout these maneuvers, which explore the ways that poetry can appeal to aesthetic and ethical values of the individual and the group, the poem displays an animating voice, but not that of a human interiority. To the extent that the speaker remains a consistent figure, it is in the form of a sensibility, a driving spirit of argument that, by enacting a shift from contempt to interest, demonstrates its own capacity to escape the limitations of the lyric model of the speaker, in which the first-person subject and their attitudes are the fundamental subject matter of the poem.

By moving out of the cloistered chamber of the self-reflexive speaker, Moore can stage interactions that show the power of language to act as a tool of concealment rather than self-disclosure. Lyric reading assumes that the public reception of the poem exposes the private sentiments of the speaker, but Moore argues that poetry can be a site of self-presentation in which figures make deliberate choices about their social behaviors and what aspects of their personalities are available to others. In “To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity,” the speaker organizes language to shape a protective shell that defends her from an aggressive proposition from a male interlocutor:

“Attack is more piquant than concord,” but when
 You tell me frankly that you would like to feel
 My flesh beneath your feet,
 I’m all abroad; I can but put my weapon up, and
 Bow you out.
 Gesticulation—it is half the language.
 Let unsheathed gesticulation be the steel
 Your courtesy must meet,
 Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my senses
 Are a shout. (*NCP* 33)

Near the beginning of the poem, the speaker senses the inefficacy of verbal communication to smooth over the breach of courtesy created through the interlocutor's impertinent overtures. Although the physical associations of "flesh" and "feet" infuse his address with the threat of violence, he fails to acknowledge his trespass—the tone the speaker perceives in his reported dialogue conveys a tactile experience of aggression and she is unable to express her revulsion through a reciprocal act of speech because words are "mute" to him, rendering him unable to understand the urgency of her distress. Even the quote in the first line, which offers a general principle that could make sense of his boldness, collapses under the weight of his corporeal desire, leaving the speaker "abroad." But even as the semantic functions of communication break down, the speaker realizes that she has recourse to "gesticulation," developing a more robust conception of language, one that can accommodate not just layers of denotative meaning, but also choreography, mobilizing words to create formal patterns. Using the stylistic qualities of syntax and sound, the speaker can position objects and people in carefully organized relationships even in the absence of mutual understanding. The speaker transposes the unsettling dialogue to the field of battle, imposing the formality of a duel on the interaction and stripping away the ambiguities and misunderstandings of conversation to leave a core of deadly intent. The two halves of the poem create a dynamic of attack and riposte, supported by the rhyme scheme in which "steel" parries "feel"; "meet" rebuffs "feet." This structure rejects the strange mixture of violence and eroticism suggested by the aggressor, insisting on a relationship predicated on difference—not a fluid and generative Blakean dialectic between opposing forces, but a clear and irreconcilable division between two combatants. This separation is encapsulated in the rhythm of the final two lines, which split into two segments of iambic tetrameter, one describing the opponent, the other, the speaker—the rhythm gives equal weight to both figures,

but counterbalances them to emphasize the tension between their incompatible experiences of language. While lyric reading celebrates language as a medium through which one can reveal hidden sentiments, “To Be Liked by You” suggests that this valorization of unqualified openness can be troubling when applied to social exchanges with others. In his commitment to emotional “frankness,” the interlocutor is inattentive to the details of the scene of dialogue, ignoring the sensibilities of the speaker and the social obligations of conduct present in a verbal interaction. The formal mechanisms of poetry offer a way to place limits on speech, subjecting it to procedures of visual, aural, and structural organization that can neutralize or contain distasteful expression.

Moore’s careful management of the poetic voice as a rhetorical device rather than a psychologically-driven consciousness takes on an even more subversive edge in “Silence”:

My father used to say,
 “Superior people never make long visits,
 have to be shown Longfellow’s grave
 nor the glass flowers at Harvard.
 Self reliant like the cat—
 that takes its prey to privacy,
 the mouse’s limp tail hanging like a shoelace from its mouth—
 they sometimes enjoy solitude,
 and can be robbed of speech
 by speech which has delighted them.
 The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence;
 not in silence, but restraint.”
 Nor was he insincere in saying, ““Make my house your inn.””
 Inns are not residences. (*NCP* 71)

Of the fourteen lines in the poem, eleven are entirely taken up by the father. While he seems to think of himself as a dispenser of Johnsonian wisdom who can explain the paradoxical virtue of silence as a form of sincere expression, he fails to observe his own principles, displacing the speaker from the space of the poem and robbing her of speech. But this imposed silence turns out to be a potent weapon as the speaker allows her father to proceed unhindered to the point where

his own claims become unsupportable. He fumbles in his attempt to establish a general dictum, awkwardly revising “silence” to “restraint.” The speaker has learned her lesson all too well—in observing the reticence expected of her, she allows her father’s voice to expose his impropriety in refusing to be a gracious host and his pomposity in taking on the role of the authoritative patriarch, a position that becomes increasingly comical as his hypocritical failure to show self-restraint culminates in a vague, unconvincing aphorism. Even when the speaker reemerges in the last two lines, she does not offer a direct response to his ideas, instead recalling his use of a second-hand joke. But these lines also turn the tables, subjecting him to his own standards of behavior. The final line clarifies the unwelcoming logical extension of his remark and simultaneously extends the logic of his inhospitality, realizing that the father has made an excessive claim to the space of the poem and promptly banishing the encroaching figure by bringing the piece to a close.

Quotation and Associative Networks

The formal stratagems in “Silence” are incisive tools, but they only become clear when we understand poetic language as an embodied experience, not a free-floating bundle of inner thoughts and feelings that, transcending the barriers of time and space, can invite any reader to assume the lyric “I,” but a specific instance of speech. As an aural and visual artifact, a poem makes the sensuous aspects of speech, a physiological process unfolding over a length of time, available to the reader as a distinct tone of voice. “Silence” places the father before us as a dramatic figure—condemned not only for the cruelty of his opinions, but also for his interminable drone and the way he leaves the speaker “robbed of speech / by speech,” within the finite space available on the page. Moore’s manipulations of the voice do not allow Mill’s fiction of a lyric speaker who can escape from the “outward and every-day world.” Speech and silence

must play out not in the vacuum of interiority, but in social scenes where the speaker uses language to navigate structures of power, establish relationships with other figures, and define their own role within a community. While lyric reading sees the voice as the animating spirit of the poem, recording the motions of the speaker's mind, Moore recognizes that the voice is an instrument to be deployed—or withheld—in negotiations with the surrounding world. A poem is not made of fluid, unmediated speech, but rather presents a space where various configurations of speech can emerge. This understanding allows her to devise a radical act of speaking that Mill's theory of poetry cannot account for: to stand on the stage, make one's presence known, and remain silent.

Although "Silence" may appear to present a self-contained dramatic moment, its pointed social implications become clearer when we consider the two sources Moore discusses in her notes on the poem:

My father used to say: a remark in conversation; Miss A. M. Homans, Professor Emeritus of Hygiene, Wellesley College. "My father used to say, 'superior people never make long visits, then people are not so glad when you've gone.' When I am visiting, I like to go about by myself. I never had to be shown Longfellow's grave nor the glass flowers at Harvard."

"Make my house your inn": Edmund Burke to a stranger with whom he had fallen into conversation in a bookshop. *Life of Burke*: James Prior; "Throw yourself into a coach," said he. "Come down and make my house your inn."

The first note may tempt us to see the poem as a straightforward portrait of Miss Homans's father, but the second raises associations with a broader tradition of patriarchal attitudes. By deliberately quoting Burke, the father models himself after an image of the formidable male intellectual, but his self-fashioning turns out to be superficial. While Burke's quip seems to be a clever invitation to a new acquaintance, the substitution of an inn for a residence feels less appropriate when applied to the relationship between a father and a daughter. The remark reveals

his unwillingness to maintain any form of dialogue that could unsettle his unchallenged superiority, even at the cost of loosening familial ties. The quote that the father appropriates to bolster his authority turns against him to expose the cruelty behind his demands of silence and restraint, which implicitly demote close friends and family to passing acquaintances. The resistance the quote provides to the father's argument depends on its ability to retain a trace of its external origins. The enclosing double quotes introduce it to the space of the poem while marking it as a foreign presence that cannot be entirely assimilated into the dominant voice. The two sources in "Silence" enter into dialogue without losing their integrity as distinct fragments that can behave in ways that can undermine or complicate any attempt to make a straightforward argument.

The unstable role that the two anecdotes play in "Silence" is characteristic of Moore's practices of quotation that appear throughout her poetry. Just as the father can function both as a coherent dramatic figure and a composite of multiple texts, each with its own perspective on the responsibilities of the host and ideals of masculine behavior, Moore's quotation poems bring together a wide variety of sources into a bounded space where they can converse while also recognizing their separate social and historical contexts. Moore discusses this double function in "A Note on the Notes," a brief comment that prefaces the notes in her collections, beginning with

What Are Years:

A willingness to satisfy contradictory objections to one's manner of writing might turn one's work into the donkey that finally found itself being carried by its masters, since some readers suggest that quotation-marks are disruptive of pleasant progress; others, that notes to what should be complete are a pedantry or evidence of an insufficiently realized task. But since in anything I have written, there have been lines in which the chief interest is borrowed, and I have not yet been able to outgrow this hybrid method of composition, acknowledgements seem only honest. Perhaps those who are annoyed by provisos, detainments, and postscripts could be persuaded to take probity on faith and disregard the notes. (*Adversity* 60)

Moore recognizes that the inclusion of notes may appear to compromise the integrity of the poem by pointing outwards towards something absent in the work, and permits her readers to accept the poems “in and of themselves,” without the need to extend the reading process beyond the lines on the page. But she also insinuates that this approach fails to appreciate the “chief interest” driving some of the most compelling moments in her writing and displays a perverse desire to force the poems into shapes that limit their usefulness, like the donkey who became a burdensome beast instead of a beast of burden—or, to invoke another fable, the reader who dismisses “provisos, detainments, and postscripts” only apprehends part of the textual elephant, and in doing so, labors under self-imposed blindness. In addition to studying the quotes through their interactions with the other elements within the poems, a thorough account of Moore’s poetry must trace the complex intertextual networks that lie behind even the briefest phrases, exploring the historical and social concerns at play in their original contexts. Moore provides one example of her “hybrid method” in her introduction to *A Marianne Moore Reader* while explaining the inspiration behind the title of an unpublished essay, “Tedium and Integrity”:

As antonym, integrity was suggested to me by a blossoming plum branch—a drawing by Hsieh Ho—reproduced above a *New York Times Book Review* notice of *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* formulated about 500 A.D.— translated and edited by Miss Mai-mai Sze, published by the Bollingen Foundation in 1956 and as a Modern Library paperback in 1959. The plum branch seed led me to *The Tao of Painting*, of which ‘The Mustard Seed Garden’ is a part, the (not *a*) Tao being a way of life, a ‘oneness’ that is tireless; whereas egotism, synonymous with ignorance in Buddhist thinking, is tedious. And the Tao led me to the dragon in the classification of primary symbols, ‘symbol of the power of heaven’—changing at will to the size of a silkworm; or swelling to the totality of heaven and earth; at will invisible, made personal by a friend at a party—an authority on gems, finance, painting and music—who, exclaimed obligingly, as I concluded a digression on cranes, peaches, bats, and butterflies as symbols of long life and happiness, ‘O, to be a dragon!’ (The exclamation, lost sight of for a time, was appropriated as a title later.) (*Reader* xiv-xv)

Moore’s winding narrative of imaginative connections offers an abundance of details—dates, names, conversations—that capture a person eager to incorporate the rich minutiae of life into

her writing. The curiosity driving her explorations does not limit itself to a specific question or aim—even after explaining the reasoning behind her choice of “tedium” and “integrity” as antithetical traits, she proceeds to describe the way that her interest in Tao continues to inform other aspects of her art. The fact that her friend is “an authority on gems, finance, painting, and music” seems as potentially fruitful as the main through line of Taoist thought. While the passage only identifies two direct products of her research—the titles of the essay “Tedium and Integrity” and the poem “O to Be a Dragon”—the paths of inquiry she illustrates demonstrate the wealth of knowledge available to the reader who is willing to understand her borrowings as elements within a dense network of allusions and associations.

Moore’s practices of quotation indicate a fascination with the value of a wide range of texts beyond conventional understandings of “literary” writing, ranging from newspaper articles and advertisements to travel brochures and casual comments that struck her fancy. Even when she draws on more canonical works such as *The Compleat Angler* or a novel by Thomas Hardy, she often lights upon the casual phrase rather than the iconic line. Her magpie-fashion gathering of quotes reminds us of the materiality of texts, the processes of collation and the mosaic-like arrangement of fragments necessary to produce her poems. This gesture towards the physical dynamics of organizing disparate, markedly commonplace objects into a work of art finds a parallel in her habit of scrapbooking. In “Scrapping Modernism,” Bartholomew Brinkman explains that while the scrapbook had been a significant aspect of the cultural landscape from the nineteenth century, the increasing abundance of printed materials in the early twentieth century allowed it to become “an important vehicle for negotiating modern mass print culture through scrap juxtapositions and assemblages that resemble artistic collage” (Brinkman 46). Moore was an enthusiastic participant in the medium, clipping articles, poems, reviews, and political cartoons,

among other ephemera and developing intricate compositions through careful placement. Through this process, clippings would become part of a new context within Moore's scrapbook while still "exhibiting markers of date, place, and name of publication (which Moore meticulously recorded) in an effort to maintain some connection to the previous contexts from which they were taken" (53). By identifying similar strategies of "incorporation, juxtaposition, and assemblage" at work in how Moore borrows from other texts in her poems, Brinkman suggests that we can understand her quotations "as not only linguistic negotiations of identity, voice and context, but also as material manipulations, where diacritical marks impose real bibliographic barriers that may or may not be transgressed" (57). The scrapbook makes visible the tensions of unity and separate identity at work in the poems, presenting an arrangement of different clippings as an aesthetic object without masking the distinct origins of each element.

Although Brinkman offers a compelling and useful exploration of the analogous qualities of Moore's scrapbooks and poems, it is also important to consider the unique ways that quotation in poetry differs from visual collages and assemblages. Her use of notes encourages the reader to trace the textual networks that branch out from her quotes, but the poem does not function simply as a collection, catalog, or menagerie that attempts to curate objects without altering their fundamental behaviors or states of being. As she transposes her quotes from their sources to the space of the poem, Moore subjects them to the generic expectations of poetry and highlights new dimensions that were less available to the reader in the original context. Here again, the function of voice plays a central role. In "The Accented Syllable," Moore begins not by discussing poetry, as the use of "accent" might suggest, but by offering a selection of prose passages that she finds impressive for their tone of voice, drawing from novels—"Tom when very young, had presented Sophia with a little bird which he had taken from the nest, had nursed up and taught to sing.

(*Tom Jones*)”—reviews—“Androcles is probably Mr. Shaw himself and right glad we are to see him. (*English Review*, October, 1913)”—and even a footnote to a play—“Three chops well peppered” (*Prose* 32). Although the reader would likely not have paid much attention to the aural dimensions of these quotes in their original sources, Moore’s presentation asks us to attend to these aspects in a way that counters our tendency to read prose as information, with any aesthetic virtue grounded on lucidity of thought or elegance of syntax rather than mellifluousness. While “The Accented Syllable” has to directly insist on the richness of sound present in these quotes, Moore’s poems make a similar argument implicitly, relying on the questions of performance and voicing central to discussions of the medium. Prose is often received on the terms of what McGann calls a “transmissional model,” able to circulate as intellectual content unmediated by the senses (*The Textual Condition* 11), but Moore’s poetry shatters the façade, not by imposing a voice, but rather by drawing out those attributes of language that have always been present in the prose texts she quotes.

Moore’s emphasis on prose as source of rich sonic experience is particularly clear in the ending of “Novices.” The poem satirizes writers who “anatomize their work” in an attempt to “present themselves as a contrast to sea-serpented regions ‘unlit by the half lights of more conscious art’” (*NCP* 61). Novices insist on disarticulating their creations, trying to establish arbitrary boundaries between their exemplary craftsmanship and the less deliberate methods used by artists who lack the self-awareness of the modern person. These writers are “averse from the antique,” denying that they owe any debt to the artists of the past, instead placing authority in their claims of preeminence over others: “Yes, ‘the authors are wonderful people, particularly those that write the most,’ / the masters of all languages, the supertadpoles of expression.” While they believe that they demonstrate superiority of expression, these novices sustain their illusion

of mastery only by remaining tadpoles, not yet mature writers who can navigate the complex terrain of literary history to find a place within it, but simply content to seem important within their small ponds. But their complacency soon meets a power incommensurate with their capacity for disdain:

Accustomed to the recurring phosphorescence of antiquity,
 the “much noble vagueness and indefinite jargon” of Plato,
 the lucid movements of the royal yacht upon the learned scenery of Egypt—
 king, steward, and harper seated amidships while the jade and the rock crystal course
 about in solution,
 their suavity surmounts the surf—
 the willowy wit, the transparent equation of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.
 Bored by “the detailless perspective of the sea,” reiterative and naive,
 and its chaos of rocks—the stuffy remarks of the Hebrews—
 the good and alive young men demonstrate the assertion
 that it is not necessary to be associated with that which has bored one;
 they have never made a statement which they found so easy to prove—
 “split like a glass against a wall”
 in this “precipitate of dazzling impressions,
 the spontaneous unforced passion of the Hebrew language—
 an abyss of verbs full of reverberations and tempestuous energy,”
 in which action perpetuates action and angle is at variance with angle
 till submerged by the general action;
 obscured by “fathomless suggestions of color,”
 by incessantly panting lines of green, white with concussion,
 in this drama of water against rocks—this “ocean of hurrying consonants,”
 with its “great livid stains like long slabs of green marble,”
 its “flashing lances of perpendicular lightning” and “molten fires swallowed up,”
 “with foam on its barriers,”
 “crashing itself out in one long hiss of spray.”

The sudden, dramatic transition at the end may seem baffling at first glance, but becomes clearer when we trace a dialogue implicit in the sources from which Moore is drawing. The “fathomless suggestions of color” that she creates out of the chaos of words and water in these lines stands in stark contrast to the Greek ideals of beauty that P. T. Forsyth identifies in *Christ on Parnassus*:

It is clear that an Art proceeding from the spiritual condition of the Greeks must be an Art of form, not of colour. It was mind and its laws that the Greek infused into the material world, not heart and love. Its ideal was Plato’s philosophic Republic, not Dante’s heavenly rose. . . . Measurement, his philosophers told him, was the principle of all

things; therefore his aim was the perfection of form and balance of mass and line. It was not the melting and **fathomless suggestions of colour**. (Forsyth 20-21, my emphasis)

Forsyth argues that instead of embracing an aesthetics that revels in color, with its boundless fine distinctions of shade and hue, the Greeks imagined beauty as the result of exact and undeviating faithfulness to principles of shape and proportion. Of course, such mastery of form can rarely occupy a stable and enduring position in the physical world, a situation the Greeks could resolve only by appealing to the concept of a supreme realm of which experience offers only diluted glimpses. This tradition, exemplified in Plato's theory of perfect forms, is responsible for the "much noble vagueness" that Moore, borrowing from James Harvey Robinson, recognizes in novices. Robinson explains,

Plato made terms with the welter of things, but sought relief in the conception of supernal models, eternal in the heavens, after which all things were imperfectly fashioned. He confessed that he could not bear to accept a world which was like a leaky pot or a man running at the nose. In short, he ascribed the highest form of existence to ideas and abstractions. . . . It invited lesser minds than his to indulge in all sorts of **noble vagueness and impertinent jargon** which continue to curse our popular discussions of human affairs. (Robinson 132, my emphasis)

By placing artistic and moral perfection on a level other than the material one, Plato paved the way for the subjects of Moore's condemnation, who can dismiss the fascination of the ocean by calling it "reiterative and naive," and further marred by its "chaos of rocks." In their appeal to a higher dimension, novices are unable to register and reflect the richness of color and feeling that the sea reveals. But Moore use of "great livid stains," taken from Flaubert's correspondence regarding a trip to Greece, points towards a different model of aesthetic value. Flaubert writes,

The road from Megara to Corinth is incomparable: the path, cut out of the mountain, hardly broad enough for your horse to stand, and sheer above the sea, curves, ascends, descends, climbs and squirms against the flank of the pine-covered hill. From below, the scent of the sea reaches your nostrils; it is right below you, rocking its sea-weeds and gently murmuring; here and there, on the surface, **great livid stains like long slabs of green marble**, and, behind the bay, stretching out into space, the carved outline of lazy-

looking oblong mountains. Passing by Scirronian rocks, the hold of Scirron, a brigand whom Theseus killed, I recalled gentle Racine's line—

Reste impur des brigands don't j'ai purgé la terre.¹

How fat was all those good people's classic antiquity! And yet we have only to see at the Parthenon the remains of what is called typical beauty. I'll be hanged if there ever was in the world anything more vigorous, more natural. (Flaubert, quoted from Faguet 51-52, my emphasis)

From the tortuous path that, nearly animate, "squirms" around the hill to the ocean with its patchwork textures of seaweeds and regions of color, the reigning ideal of Flaubert's Greece is not beauty, but the sublime. Even the Parthenon, monument to artifice, epitome of proportion, has, in becoming a ruin, relinquished its stateliness to a more vital, holistic expression of grandeur that reflects the ways that natural forces have shaped it. And this alternative aesthetic vision brings with it a new dispensation for human life, one that Moore associates with Hebrew scripture. She takes the phrase "precipitate of dazzling impressions" from *The Poets of the Old Testament*, by Alexander R. Gordon:

Man is far the greatest work of God. In the cosmologies of Genesis he is created last of all things. God's tenderest care is centred on him. The breath of God is breathed into his nostrils, and he becomes a living person after the image of God Himself, and capable of enjoying a life of intimate friendship with the Divine. The eighth Psalm is the poetical counterpart of these cosmologies. . . . The author builds up no systematic conception of human nature. His thought of man's exalted dignity is **the precipitate of a dazzling impression** of God's glory in nature. (Gordon 153, my emphasis)

Gordon offers a different account of the human body than that of Forsyth's Greeks. Instead of locating aesthetic greatness in constraint and limitation, asserting control over one's material being to achieve perfection, the author of the eighth Psalm suggests that humans reveal some part of God's inconceivable glory, that breath itself is a manifestation of divine creation. Carefully pruned beauty is insufficient to celebrate the God of the Old Testament—the impulse must be towards expression rather than order, not to assert the importance of the self over the surrounding world, but to demonstrate the multiplicity of being. The power of the unmanageable sublime in

¹ Foul relic of brigands of whom I cleared the earth. (Faguet 51)

Hebrew scripture is even more evident in *The Expositor's Bible* by George Adam Smith, from which Moore draws several phrases describing Isaiah 17.12-13. Smith explains the rich arrangement of sound in the original Hebrew text:

Here three or four lines of marvellous sound repeat the effect of the rage of the restless world as it rises, storms and breaks upon the steadfast will of God. The phonetics of the passage are wonderful. The general impression is that of a stormy ocean booming in to the shore and then **crashing itself out into one long hiss of spray and foam upon its barriers**. The details are noteworthy. In ver. 12 we have thirteen heavy M-sounds, besides two heavy B's, to five N's, five H's, and four sibilants. But in ver. 13 the sibilants predominate; and before the sharp rebuke of the Lord the great, booming sound of ver. 12 scatters out into a long *yish-shā 'oon*. The occasional use of a prolonged vowel amid so many **hurrying consonants** produces exactly the effect now of the lift of a storm swell out at sea and now of the pause of a great wave before it crashes on the shore. "*Ah, the booming of the peoples, the multitudes, like the booming of the seas they boom; and the rushing of the nations, like the rushing of the mighty waters they rush: nations, like the rushing of many waters they rush. But He checketh it—a short, sharp word with a choke and a snort in it—and it fleeth far away, and is chased like chaff on mountains before wind, and like swirling dust before a whirlwind.*"

So did the rage of the world sound to Isaiah as it crashed to pieces upon the steadfast providence of God. (Smith 282, my emphasis)

The passage attempts to express through description the effect of hearing the verses in Hebrew, but Smith also offers his own translation in an attempt to illustrate the impressions of the lines, creating a divide between expository prose and the musical qualities of poetry. But instead of drawing on the translation for her "Novices," Moore identifies the intensity of imagery in Smith's prose, recognizing the "tone of voice" that he displays in his passion to explain the brilliance of Hebrew verse.

This attentiveness to the prosody of prose allows Moore to devise a strategy of quotation that creates a distinctly poetic ethos. While the half-submerged dialogue of Hebrew and Greek aesthetics may seem a strange tangent from the satire of self-important writers earlier in the poem, Moore's networks of reference create a textual sublime, a complex of ideas and sensibilities that capsize the novice's "royal yacht" on which they glide smoothly, confident in

their ignorance on the grounds that “it is not necessary to be associated with that which has bored one.” Moore turns the phrase back on these self-proclaimed experts by recognizing their insignificance to her meditation on writing. Discarding the tedious figures, she orchestrates a scene that proves the value of the ancient texts the novices reject, not by quoting them directly, but through the invocation of a critical discourse on aesthetics and the value of Greek and Hebrew art. These quotes, which may seem dry and academic in their original contexts, become “voiced” and mobilized in the poem, and, instead of simply rehearsing the arguments of their sources, become an “abyss of verbs,” an “ocean of hurrying consonants” in which the variety of opinions and attitudes in the borrowings becomes “submerged by the general action,” just as the distinct voices in a crowd, without unifying into a chant or refrain, can rise to a clamor. The internal variance of the quotes, with their unique perspectives on writing and art, does not compromise the poem, but rather allows a richness of texture and feeling, sweeping up fragments of critical and epistolary prose and transforming them into the stuff of poetry, capable not just of thought, but of action and motion in a sublime, symphonic drama of language.

While “Novices” manages to mobilize its quotations as part of the “general action” of the poem, other works like “Marriage” are more ambivalent, unable to resolve conflicting perspectives into a decisive conclusion. Instead of presenting a straightforward argument, the sources in “Marriage” argue with each other, functioning as what Elizabeth Gregory calls “enablers and ironizers” (*Quotation* 179), allowing moral inquiry into the complexities of marriage without the need to form an individual opinion. The speaker’s reticence is evident from the beginning:

This institution,
perhaps one should say enterprise
out of respect for which
one says one need not change one’s mind

about a thing one has believed in,
 requiring public promises
 of one's intention
 to fulfill a private obligation. (*NCP* 63)

The immediate qualification, the evasive, tentative “one,” and the balancing of public and private suggest a speaker who is hesitant to make clear assertions on a subject with which they have relatively little intimate knowledge. The poem quickly settles on viewing marriage through the lens of the semi-allegorical figures of Adam and Eve, who function both as biblical figures and ordinary people, with the speaker serving as an external observer, using quotation to weigh the various merits and dangers of married life. The uncertainty of the tradition is apparent in passages such as the description of Hymen, a personification of marriage:

He tells us
 that “for love
 that will gaze an eagle blind,
 that is like a Hercules
 climbing the trees
 in the garden of the Hesperides,
 from forty-five to seventy
 is the best age,”
 commending it
 as a fine art, as an experiment,
 a duty or as merely recreation.
 One must not call him ruffian
 nor friction a calamity—
 the fight to be affectionate:
 “no truth can be fully known
 until it has been tried
 by the tooth of dispensation.”

The first quote comes from a scene in Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, describing an experience of love at first sight felt by the middle-aged Mr. Thorne. The narrator of the novel claims that the most powerful affections are only in effect beginning at forty-five. Moore heightens the humorous tone of the quote by emphasizing the rhymes, casting the figure of Hymen in a comical light, offering facetious advice without recognizing the irony and unable to

articulate any of the potential virtues of marriage, instead framing it as though it were a pastime or project rather than a serious commitment. But the speaker is also careful not to condemn Hymen outright, recalling a quote from Robert of Sorbonne, a French theologian and educator, which advocates suspending judgment where direct experience is lacking in favor of rigorous debate. The conflict of voices denies the comfort of detached satire, insisting on sincere engagement with the thorny questions surrounding marriage. The final lines seem to reinforce the ambivalence of the poem by quoting part of the inscription on a statue of Daniel Webster in Central Park: "Liberty and union / now and forever." Moore takes the phrase, originally part of a speech Webster delivered in the Senate, arguing that America had an identity as a nation that superseded the sovereignty of individual states. The speech dates back to 1830, part of the tense political climate in the decades leading up to the Civil War. While Webster proclaims that liberty and union are both essential to nationhood at a time when the two seem increasingly incompatible with each passing year, and Moore recognizes that the paradoxical demands of individual desire and collective responsibilities exist not only in questions of government and political philosophy, but also in interpersonal relationships such as marriage. Like the quotes, which circle around the topic without finding a stable position to assume, marriage itself can never settle into a fixed state, so that any vision of the ideal marriage remains an "amalgamation which can never be more / than an interesting impossibility." "Marriage" does not offer answers or solutions to the ethical problems the custom raises, but its ambivalence allows it to construct something more productive than a set of absolute claims. The poem stages a symposium, inviting the quotes to engage in debate, a process that does not attempt to assimilate them into a single tone of voice, but acknowledges the importance of "disputation." The poem is not the lyric expression of a single speaker's understanding of marriage, but a space where a multitude of personalities can

assemble to examine pressing questions that matter not only within the work, but also for a larger community of readers.

Moore's desire to escape the constraints of a limited model of poetry based on lyric reading and the notion of the isolated aesthetic object is evident both in her textual history and her formal maneuvers within the poems. Instead of claiming supremacy as a writer, independent from the influences and distortions of social forces, Moore recognizes her poems as material objects that gain vitality through their engagement with the circumstances of their production and reception, adapting to their different contexts through revision and rearrangement. Her emphasis on the contingencies that shape a text allow her to imagine an ethos of collaboration in which writing is not the work of a single artist, but of multiple figures, from publishers to editors, who take part in constructing the phenomenon of authorship. This awareness of writing and language participating in negotiations and exchanges with the surrounding world is also at play in her formal strategies of voicing and quotation, which dismantle the concept of the isolated lyric speaker in favor of dramatic situations that can facilitate interplay between multiple agents or perspectives from different texts, turning the poem into a space of discourse and dialogue rather than cloistered meditation.

Chapter II: The Poem as Laboratory

A Critical Problem

Moore's stylistic innovations and enthusiastic participation in literary culture reveal her interest in viewing texts as objects with corporeal heft and social consequence, embodied through the physical page and circulated through a reading public. The emphasis on the social dynamics that appears in her poetry's textual history and formal maneuvers risks being encapsulated in a narrow concept of "intertextuality," one that acknowledges the ways that writing responds to sociohistorical contingencies and forms associations with other texts while still inscribing a barrier between the sphere of literary activity and linguistic experimentation on the one hand, and the world of physical entities that remains "outside" of poetry on the other. But this notion of intertextuality cannot explain some of the most daring aspects of Moore's poetic enterprise. Her departure from the expected conventions of lyric reading is not simply an attempt to develop a new aesthetic idiom. Rather than framing her bold formal stratagems as self-reflexive textual and linguistic exercises, Moore suggests that the technical dimensions of poetry can be mobilized to examine the phenomena of the material world and produce useful knowledge about them. In "Poetry," she insists that poets should strive to construct "imaginary gardens with real toads in them," using their craftsmanship to turn the poem into an environment that can accommodate external phenomena without compromising their claim to realness.

The spatial analogy that the image of the garden evokes is reinforced in the index to *Observations*. Instead of providing a traditional index consisting solely of titles and first lines, the volume presents a strange catalog of the objects and entities that populate the poems. For example, the entries under "C" include

coach, gilt, 65; wheel yellow, 35
cockatrices, 71, 10

cockroaches, 57
 coffin, 79, 104
 Coliseum, 63
 collision, of knowledge, 88, 107; of orchids, 67
 colubrine, 74, 102
 Compleat Angler, I envy nobody, 58, 98; French greens, 55, 97
 (*BMM* 154)

The categorical diversity of the elements (e.g. animals, texts, concepts) that make up the index is a testament to the wide-ranging interests that Moore demonstrates in her writing. A conventional index to a poetry collection acts as a technology for navigating the corpus, allowing the reader quickly to find and isolate a poem while filtering out the surrounding works. While titles also appear in the index of *Observations*, this piece of textual apparatus primarily refers not to the volume itself, but to the abundance of material that has been introduced into the space of the text. These artifacts do not conform to ready-made categories of knowledge, but rather expose the archival work at the heart of Moore's compositional process. As Srikanth Reddy explains in "Marianne Moore's Interdisciplinary Digressions," Moore immersed herself in a culture of "library reform marked by the introduction of reference service, the promotion of 'recreational reading' and 'self-culture' programs, and the introduction of free evening lectures on a variety of subjects in American libraries" (Reddy 456). Drawing on sources such as "The Pratt Free Library, the American Museum of Natural History, the *New York Times*, and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences," Moore develops her poems not only in the private study, but through her traversal of "the 'democratic archives' of early-twentieth-century American culture" (453). The index celebrates Moore's excursions into various fertile fields of knowledge and experience, recording the fruits of the harvest.

It is also important to consider the index as an opportunity afforded by the publication of Moore's first book (excluding the 1921 *Poems*, published without her permission). Although

Moore's poems had previously appeared in many periodicals, *Observations* allowed Moore to consider her pieces in relation to each other and work out questions of arrangement and organization. The index serves to assert the cohesion of the volume, removing the "denizens" of the poems and placing them in an arbitrary alphabetical order where exciting juxtapositions emerge. The poems appear not as walled-off gardens, but as communicating chambers through which one can travel. *Observations* recognizes the analogous qualities of a physical environment and the space of a volume. Both can house the material entities that make up the world and can facilitate an encounter between an observer² and a "real toad."

Moore's poetic vision of a union between textual craftsmanship and external phenomena has been difficult to apprehend, largely because of anxieties about the function of language as a corrupting or controlling force that were present both in the early twentieth-century society in which she wrote and in contemporary critical discourse. These anxieties are particularly evident in the ways that Moore scholars such as Schulze, Kappel, and David Anderson describe the relationship that Moore constructs between her poetry and nature. While the three critics provide differing perspectives, they all structure their readings of Moore around the assumption that language becomes more distant from nature as it becomes more stylized or complex.

A suspicion of language and writing as experiences that alienate people from nature was also a prominent trend in the scientific and sociological discourse of the twentieth century. In *The Degenerate Muse*, Schulze explains that the American middle-class became increasingly concerned with the threat of "degeneracy" around the turn of the century. "Degenerationists," thinkers who advocated a pseudoscientific paranoia of cultural and biological regression, feared that without subjecting themselves to the competitive drives of nature at play in

² I use the term "observer" instead of "speaker" for most of the following readings of Moore's poems, allowing me to preserve the dynamics of perception and examination that the poems construct while centering the action of the poem on the behavior of the focal subject rather than the observing persona.

agrarian communities, white middle and upper-class Americans could grow complacent and atrophy, losing touch with the world of facts and giving in to decadent impulses (*Degenerate* 15). The burgeoning educational discipline of Nature Study, which encouraged young students to step out of the classroom and make contact with the material world, became a particularly contentious site of debate about the role of the environment in counteracting over-sophistication. Degenerationists such as the ichthyologist David Starr Jordan argued that at school, the child “is brought into a medley of words without ideas . . . He learns things easily by rote, so his teachers fill him with rote-learning. Hence grammar and language have become stereotyped as education without a thought as to whether undigested words may become intellectual poison” (Jordan, quoted from *Degenerate*, 43). Jordan was concerned with the capacity of language to leave words unmoored from their referents, creating “a medley of words” with the semblance of internal consistency as a system of knowledge without actual substance. Perhaps no medium better represented the threat of language to degenerationists than poetry, which can seem to generate language through inner experiences and sensations and through mechanical devices such as rhyme and meter that confound clear perception of the real. The disjunction between the scientific endeavor to understand the material facts of nature and the Romantic tradition of using nature to cultivate sympathies and enrich feelings placed demands on children that seemed incompatible. Schulze discusses an anecdote from Clifton F. Hodge’s “Foundations of Nature Study” in which he describes a Nature Study class that required students to write poetry:

“There is a sugar-coated pill method [of Nature Study] by which the attempt is made to stuff in a modicum of “scientific” information under the cover of what some may be inclined to call “poetry,”” he explained. ‘Collections are made which must contain a “poem” about every flower or animal, or other phenomenon of nature, even though, as a friend once remarked to me, they have to saw it out with a bucksaw.’ Not only were these ‘poems’ unscientific, they were also terrible verse. ‘It is little wonder,’ he concluded, ‘I hear children in school exclaim “I hate poetry.”’ (54)

The children regard the demand to write poetry as an artificial imposition on their initial sensuous experience with the phenomenon, requiring such unnatural corruptions of their perceptions to meet the rules of verse that the process of writing feels stilted and laborious. The attempt to reconcile scientific observation with the conventions of poetry fails to produce either knowledge or beauty. The complaint of the students, “I hate poetry,” is reminiscent of the frustration expressed by the speaker in Moore’s “Poetry,” who initially sets the desire for the “genuine” at odds with poetry, insisting, “There are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.”

Moore may have been considering the questions the degenerationists raised about the tension between poetry and engagement with nature when she wrote these opening lines. Schulze explains that throughout her life, Moore immersed herself in the study of animals and plants, reading the works of scientists and conservationists such as John J. Audobon and John Muir, collecting clippings from magazines including *Nature Magazine* and the *Illustrated London News*, and availing herself of opportunities to visit exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History or view nature documentaries (170). Her passion for the natural world also manifests in her writing. Unlike many of the degenerationists, who saw poetry as incompatible with their desire for rigorous observation and scientific precision, Moore believed that poetry could play a vital role in cultivating clearer knowledge of natural phenomena. In her reading of “Poetry,” Schulze suggests that Moore prioritizes the notion of unaffected, spontaneous creation as the source of poetry that can be more than “fiddle.” Noting the instinctual physiological nature of phenomena such as “Hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise / if it must,” Schulze claims that Moore imagines that the “genuine” emerges in a poem when the poet does not “rummage the cupboards for derivative ‘poetic’ phrases, but rather reacts from the core

of his or her unique organic being” (172). Instead of deviating from the first impulses that they experience in response to an external stimulus, poets can maintain contact with nature by capturing their “pre-discursive, pre-interpretive ‘genuine’ response to ‘raw’ material” (176). Moore’s emphasis on instinctual responses that precede conscious thought allows her to frame poetry as “a mode of evolutionary self-protection—a deeply necessary act that was the farthest thing from ‘fiddle’” (176).

Although I agree that Moore saw her writing as a way to establish contact with nature, I am skeptical of Schulze’s characterization of Moore’s desire for “organic” expression unmediated by more deliberate cognitive processes. Any act of writing necessarily involves layers of mediation, a dynamic that is never more present than in formal, stanzaic poetry, which requires meticulous craftsmanship that can transform and distort the immediate experience of an encounter with an external entity. Nevertheless, this implicit barrier between the human, linguistic, and cognitive on the one hand and the natural, material, and instinctual on the other has remained present in many accounts of Moore’s exploration of the “genuine.”

In “Marianne Moore’s ‘Fertile Procedure,’” Anderson places a similar emphasis to Schulze’s on the “organic” dimensions of poetry that can only develop when more intricate or unsettling formal patterns are effaced. Her frequent use of syllabics throughout her career indicates her interest in “organic unity—that is, she wanted to sustain readers’ attention throughout the entire poem rather than divert readers’ attention onto the form of the text” (Anderson 87). Anderson posits that without the regular rhythmic effect of accentual-syllabic verse, syllabic poems remove the aural structures that typically draw the attention of the reader. Instead, syllabic meter functions as a compositional technique, a tool to concentrate the focus of the poet during the process of writing without becoming a distraction for the reader. Because the

subtle form of the poem has the potential to go unnoticed by many readers, a different organizational structure governs the reading experience: “since the principle is hidden, the reader faces a task analogous to that of the author—to give moral shape to the poem, and ultimately to the world at large” (105). Anderson’s concept of “moral shape” relies on a division between style and content, imagining that the reader can produce a thematic structure for the poem based on its semantics, while the poetic effects of rhyme and meter recede into the background, having performed their function as ways to aid the poet through their experience of composition.

While it is true that syllabic meter lacks the more recognizable rhythmic effects of more traditional patterns such as iambic pentameter, Anderson fails to take into account the visual dimensions involved in Moore’s stanzas, making available the form that is difficult for the ear alone to perceive. This aspect of the syllabic poem is particularly evident in the version of “The Fish” published in *Observations*. At one point, the piece describes a “cliff, whereupon the stars,

pink
 rice grains, ink
 bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like
 green
 lilies and submarine
 toadstools, slide each on the other. (*NCP* 39)

Far from maintaining an “organic unity” that allows the poem to express its ideas without formal interference, “The Fish” reveals an intricate visual and sonic design. The indentation links together rhyming lines to highlight aural resonances between words and complicate the syntactical impetus of the stanza. This visual resistance to the syntax is intensified by the jarring enjambments that place unexpected weight on words like “pink” and “green” by giving them separate lines. Although the sentence offers a small catalog of creatures bound together by the same sliding action, the formal layout of the poem denies straightforward movement across the page, encouraging us to pause and consider the entities in the list as beings with distinct traits.

By refusing to allow individual lines to become fully subordinate to the meaning of the sentence, the stanza enacts the motion of the organisms in the scene, which shift around each other without settling into a clear spatial hierarchy. When considered not as a purely aural experience, but as an organizing force that can mobilize visual, sonic, and semantic structures, Moore's syllabic meter reveals a different conception of the poem as an "organic" object. The poem as organism need not be reduced to stylistic homogeneity or confined to homeostasis where form acts as a transparent medium through which to access the content of the work. Instead, the poem becomes a hyper-formal creature in motion, recognizing the artful construction of systems that can work in tandem or resist each other while playing out in a bounded space, a complex site of interaction where words, like organisms in an ecosystem that retain their own behavioral imperatives, "slide each on the other."

Kappel also recognizes the complex formal mechanisms that drive Moore's syllabic experiments, but his account differs from mine in its positioning of form in relation to the object or event described in the poem. He argues that Moore

was alert very early on to the truth that the human mind cannot produce randomness, nor even replicate reality without affecting it. She did not want to give the impression that she thought that it could. The violent clash in her later syllabics between material and form vividly demonstrates two aspects of her Modernist rage for order that make it an unusually intelligent and circumspect version of that obsession. First, it stresses the fact that the obsession is inevitable: one has no choice but to rage for order; everything that comes before the mind is subject to its ordering processes, which are vividly replicated by those syllabic stanzas. The mind never sleeps. . . . Second, the clash in her poems between material and form insists that the order after which the mind rages is to a considerable extent imposed and arbitrary, not discovered and organic. (144)

Kappel suggests that Moore's style deliberately exposes the fault lines in the poem, the points where its fiction of describing a "real toad" breaks down and we recognize the ways that the human rage for order fails to apprehend the surrounding environment in its chaotic totality. To create a work of art that preserves internal order and coherence, the poet must sacrifice fidelity to

the object they attempt to depict. While Kappel's characterization of Moore as a formalist who wished to make form evident to the reader appears to be the antithesis of the accounts provided by Schulze and Anderson, who both argue that Moore valued the "organic," "instinctual," and "unaffected" as aesthetic virtues, all three critics base their interpretation on the fundamental assumption that when language is at its most explicitly formal, it is least capable of observing a physical entity or phenomenon and producing knowledge about it.

Elizabeth Gregory offers the most direct explanation of the assumptions about the nature of language that structure the arguments of Schulze, Anderson, and Kappel. In *Quotation and Modern American Poetry*, she suggests that Moore was aware that "the very act of describing wildness tames it to the writer's terms, and 'otherness' is subverted when translated into the language of the observer" (*Quotation* 143). Moore is unable to transform a physical entity into a poetic subject without "objectifying it, locking it into the system of her terms and silencing it in order that she may speak of it" (145). Gregory portrays language as a colonizing force, one that prioritizes the interests and concerns of the writer rather than allowing the described subject to express its own self-image. Describing the other carries a threat of linguistic violence, establishing an unequal power dynamic where the poet can observe an external object without the need to recognize its own ethical and emotional experiences as distinct, unassimilable traits. However, Gregory notes that Moore partially mitigates the inevitably objectifying effects of her poetry. Describing her focus on animals such as pangolins, Gregory suggests:

Her choice of unfamiliar subject matter is one way of resisting implicit co-optation, for it makes it difficult for both herself and her readers to ignore the extent to which that material does not fit into the network of the known, and it impedes the general tendency to assume that once a thing has been described it is known. Her strange animals mean to estrange us, to resist our knowing: a pangolin on a page fairly shouts at Westerners that we don't know it. (144)

By discussing animals that are unfamiliar to the typical western reader, Moore highlights the disjunction between processes of description and the complexity of the subject matter, which refuses to yield to the patterns of observation and analysis developed within the poem. Although this approach may allow Moore to portray an animal without subjugating it to her own perceptions, this framework also abandons the pretense of producing useful knowledge about it. Reality becomes an epistemological no man's land, eluding the linguistic systems we craft to examine it. Writers grasp at the "real toad," only to see it crumple to paper in their hands.

The suspicion of language as a way to capture and contact reality that emerges both in the rhetoric of "degenerationist" thinkers and in more recent criticism is not necessarily an attitude shared by Moore herself. The final lines of "Poetry" insist that the reader who is "interested in poetry" must demand both "the raw material of poetry in all its rawness" and that which is "genuine" (*NCP* 27). While the genuine may appear to be an abstract ethical value, I argue that the genuine refers to the physical world itself. By claiming in the opening lines that poetry has "a place for the genuine," Moore recognizes that a poem can function as a space where the entities that populate real environments can reside. But the "genuine" is placed alongside the "raw material of poetry." Although many critics including Schulze argue that "raw material" refers to the physical phenomena that a poem attempts to describe—"hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise / if it must"—the materiality of a poem also resides in the substance that constitutes it—syllables, words, lines, and stanzas. Although Schulze and Anderson suggest that the genuine is distorted through the manipulation of language into overt stylistic patterns, Moore recognizes that form is as intrinsic to a poem as the matter that creates and supports a building, and to ignore or efface the raw material of poetry would eliminate the foundation of the work, the musculature that guides it through its intellectual motions. The challenge is to embrace

language with all of its confusions and complexities and grapple with it to develop poetic structures that can facilitate an encounter with the genuine.

“A Fit Gymnasium for Action”

Moore’s formulation of a poetics that combines formal intricacy with a commitment to understanding the real world may seem empty or idealist theorization, but the sociologist Bruno Latour offers a framework for the production of knowledge that can ground her values in praxis. He notes that when the idea that scientific information is “constructed” became popularized by the growing field of science studies, many people received the claim as an argument that science was “false.” The implicit dichotomy was that “*either* something was real and not constructed, *or* it was constructed and artificial, contrived and invented, made up and false” (Latour 90). Similar to critics who valorize spontaneous writing unmediated by the complexities of form as the basis of “genuine” poetry, scientific realists assume that scientific knowledge is extant information that simply needs to be discovered and gathered rather than something that only comes into being through the processes of scientific investigation. This attitude towards constructivism fails to realize the virtues that a “construct” can demonstrate. Latour suggests that the word “construct” invites associations with “robustness, quality, style, durability, worth, etc. So much so that no one would bother to say that a skyscraper, a nuclear plant, a sculpture, or an automobile is ‘constructed’” (89). These qualities of “constructed” objects are equally present in scientific facts:

Science offered the most extreme cases of complete *artificiality* and complete *objectivity* moving in parallel. There could be no question that laboratories, particle accelerators, telescopes, national statistics, satellite arrays, giant computers, and specimen collections were artificial places the history of which could be documented in the same way as for buildings, computer chips, and locomotives. And yet there was not the slightest doubt that the products of those artificial and costly sites were the most ascertained, objective, and certified results ever obtained by collective human ingenuity. This is why it was with

great enthusiasm that we began using the expression ‘construction of facts’ to describe the striking phenomenon of artificiality and reality marching in step. (90)

The decidedly artificial procedures that govern sites of knowledge production are not “unnatural” deviations from the desire for objective inquiry, but rather the manipulations necessary to understand the material world and its phenomena.

The constructivist dynamics of knowledge are not limited to spaces traditionally considered “scientific.” Latour suggests that the laboratory is not the fixed conventional image of a designated room or building with technical equipment and personnel, but rather any space where information can be compiled and arranged into various useful configurations. The scientific ethos of the laboratory extends beyond what we normally consider “experiments”—observing the behavior of live animals, developing new chemical compounds, tracking the movements of planetary bodies—to include the process of writing, the attempt to organize information and present an accurate account of a phenomenon. Instead of treating a written text as a transparent window pane, simply communicating the facts after they have been discovered through previous scientific activity, anyone who wishes to construct knowledge of reality must acknowledge the complexities of language that influence the creation and reception of information. He explains that although some sociologists attempt to claim the intellectual weight of “hard” scientists by dismissing the problems of writing in favor of trying to establish “direct contact with the thing at hand via the transparent medium of a clear and unambiguous technical idiom,” other sociologists better versed in science studies

don’t need to ignore the thickness of any given text, its pitfalls, its dangers, its awful way to make you say things you don’t want to say, its opacity, its resistance, its mutability, its tropism. We know too well that, even in ‘hard’ sciences, authors clumsily try to write texts about difficult matters of concern. There is no plausible reason why our texts would be more transparent and unmediated than the reports coming out of their laboratories. Since we are all aware that fabrication and artificiality are not the opposite of truth and objectivity, we have no hesitation in highlighting the text itself as a mediator. (124)

The distortions and dislocations of language and writing cannot be dismissed or minimized in favor of a fantasy of unmediated contact with the subject of a scientific or sociological account. Instead, we must recognize the “thickness” of texts as necessary, and possibly even useful, aspects of shaping facts. If the conventional research facility relies on microscopes, computers, and other specialized equipment, all of which frame and structure the data we receive, the properties of writing, with all of their “mutability” and “resistance,” can be powerful tools with which to arrange and present networks of information. Latour even offers a system that could function as a potential textual laboratory for sociological investigations. He proposes a series of four notebooks, tracking the research process and the data that emerges through it. The first notebook functions as a “*log* of the enquiry itself,” recording “appointments, reactions to the study by others, surprises to the strangeness of the field,” and other circumstances of the project in order to understand how the enterprise itself transforms over time. A second notebook gathers information into sets of data that can “be kept at once unspoiled while still being reshuffled in as many arrangements as possible,” allowing the researchers to experiment with different configurations and orderings of information. The third notebook “should always be at hand for *ad libitum* writing trials,” providing a space where the writers can collect the “ideas, paragraphs, metaphors, and tropes” that occur to them through the course of study. And a final notebook, formed after the completion of the initial study, registers how the subjects of the investigation react to and are affected by the written account that describes them. This step acknowledges that “the study might be finished, but the experiment goes on: the new account adds its performative action to all the others, and that too produces data” (133-135).

Latour’s sequence of notebooks positions writing as a site of knowledge production that is both systematic and responsive to the accidents and surprises involved in any ambitious

investigation. Instead of positing a “divide between enquiring and reporting” that separates field work from the creation of a textual account, he understands that the ingenuity of artifice must be present both in devising experiments in the field and in constructing intelligible facts through language. Although Schulze and Anderson suggest that writing is at its most “organic” when it effaces form in favor of unmediated spontaneity, Latour argues that the immediate impulses of the writer manifest as “generalities, clichés, transportable definitions, substitutable accounts, ideal-types, powerful explanations, abstractions; in brief, the stuff out of which more social genres write themselves effortlessly” (134). In other words, our “instincts” often lead us to fall back on preexisting social narratives and structures of knowledge—novel ideas demand the labor of developing novel modes of expression.

Latour’s understanding of the text as a space that can harness the formal qualities of language in order to develop more accurate and objective reports of the physical world has significant implications for the role of poetry as a medium that can produce knowledge of reality. Instead of dismissing the complexities of formal patterns like rhyme, meter, and lineation as affectations or self-reflexive structures, we can recognize their potential as tools to organize and present information in ways that can construct precise accounts of external phenomena. The question is not whether art can engage with the real, but rather what kinds of relationships can emerge between “imaginary gardens” and “real toads”—how can the various methodologies of observation and analysis that Moore employs in her writing contribute to her project of constructing the genuine?

One of the crucial functions that art can perform for Moore is to provide a self-contained space that can accommodate consequential activity. In “To a Man Working His Way Through the Crowd,” one of the two poems that Moore published in her first appearance in a major

periodical, she celebrates the achievements of Gordon Craig, a modernist director and scenic designer. Craig pioneered innovative theatrical techniques that emphasized using unusual lighting, backdrops filled with abstract patterns, and stylized performances to turn the play into a Symbolist composition rather than an attempt to perfectly replicate the incidents of ordinary life. His passion for the artifice of the stage shows up in his critical writing as well, where he argues for a radical reinvention of theatrical conventions. In “The Actor and the Über-Marionette,” he claims that the traditional approach to acting that attempts to channel human emotion to govern the expression, motion, and speech of the performer ends up allowing the personality of the actor to subsume the work of art. Craig offers a different ideal of performance in the form of puppetry, a discipline based on technical mastery and careful management of movement. Where the human body is subject to the vicissitudes of affective experience, the marionette retains a constant stateliness:

Modern puppets are extraordinary things. The applause may thunder or dribble, their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused; and though drenched in a torrent of bouquets and love, the face of the leading lady remains as solemn, as beautiful and as remote as ever. There is something more than a flash of genius in the marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. (Craig 82)

Craig’s replacement of the traditional actor with the über-marionette may invite associations of stiltedness or affectation, but Moore’s poem offers a different perspective. The final stanza states, “Undoubtedly you overbear, / But one must do that to come where / There is a space, a fit gymnasium for action” (*BMM* 352). Despite the jarring formal maneuvers that characterize Craig’s artistic vision, Moore dismisses the distinction between the artificial action on the stage and the more “natural” action that takes place in a gymnasium. Both the theatre and the gymnasium create spaces where the actor or athlete can demonstrate their vitality. And both locations act as open clearings, areas set aside for structured physical performance that reveals

the expressive potential of the body. The poem itself performs similar work for Moore as a crucial event in her career: her arrival on the modernist literary scene, extending her audience beyond the readers of the Bryn Mawr affiliated journals in which all of her previous works were published. Although her creative voice could be unsettling—many of her early critics would go on to accuse her of being cerebral, pedantic, and unnecessarily complex—the poem suggests that like Gordon Craig, Moore is willing to work her way through the crowd of popular opinion to find a niche that can support her strange experiments.

The notion of the poem as a space that can facilitate the intellectual activity of observation and investigation without attempting to replicate the environment of the poetic subject is even more central in “To a Snail”:

If “compression is the first grace of style,”
 you have it. Contractility is a virtue
 as modesty is a virtue.
 It is not the acquisition of any one thing
 that is able to adorn,
 or the incidental quality that occurs
 as a concomitant of something well said,
 that we value in style,
 but the principle that is hid:
 in the absence of feet, “a method of conclusions”;
 “a knowledge of principles,”
 in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn. (*NCP* 19)

The poem suggests that aesthetic virtues can inhere in the physical properties of the snail, recognizing that its ability to contract and its “modesty” both demonstrate “compression” and noting the way that its “absence of feet” implies a hidden “method of conclusions,” a principle of organization that achieves grace and beauty. But this mode of analysis also relies on a “principle that is hid”: the laboratory of the poem creates an effect of “placelessness,” removing the snail from any familiar environment in order to situate it within the habitat of the text itself. Instead of considering the snail’s physiology in terms of the necessities of survival, Moore is able to place

it within a discourse on aesthetics, where seemingly abstract terms such as “grace,” “style,” and “virtue” gain currency as ways to understand the material body. Just as the snail’s shell allows it to withdraw into a self-contained area, the poem’s retreat from the surrounding world with which the snail would normally interact creates a provisional boundary that allows the observer to meditate on its formal qualities without tying them to a reductive teleology.

Although this dislocation from the physical environment may seem to preclude any ambitions of understanding the snail as a biological phenomenon, Latour’s model of the laboratory suggests that the text can become an alternative site of examination where the observer can trace connections or identify details that are less visible in a more “natural” context. The final line emphasizes the crucial link between formal analysis and the emergence of scientific language. As Natalia Cecire notes in “Marianne Moore’s Precision,” the occipital horn refers to the back of the skull, a feature that snails lack. The snail’s shell comes closer to resembling a “horn,” but renders “occipital” void. The term, which initially appears stable and resistant to the ambiguities of ordinary language, becomes a point where “concretion and abstraction meet in vertiginous confusion” (Cecire 87-88). Scientific terminology relies on specificity as a way to manage the proliferation of meaning that writing usually facilitates—by developing a technical lexicon filled with words that have precise referents, scientists attempt to fashion texts that can straightforwardly communicate information. But Moore recognizes that scientific language is constructed out of the phenomenological process of observation, considering the formal qualities of an entity or event through sensory experience and aesthetic examination. The inscrutability of “occipital horn” in the context of the poem asks us to consider the way that any scientific term is coined and mobilized to gain currency in professional discourse. The phrase relies on the imaginative work the poem first performs in describing the

grace the snail demonstrates as a reflection of its physical being. By apprehending the snail in all its formal elegance, the observer can create a term that captures a strange facet of the organism in two words. “To a Snail” enacts an instance of scientific language coming into being—like the snail shell spiraling towards its apex, the poem moves towards the “occipital horn”—not departing from the more abstract “grace” or “virtue” of the opening lines, but rather compressing the network of aesthetic and textual connections into a pithy expression. Even though the exact semantic import of “occipital horn” is inaccessible to us, we become aware of “a knowledge of principles,” a methodological integrity behind the phrase that allows the poem to claim intellectual soundness as it follows its oblique path.

While Moore’s snail readily yields to the scrutiny of the observer, “Peter,” a poem about a cat owned by two of Moore’s acquaintances, recognizes the challenges of creating a space for observation when confronted with a less cooperative poetic subject. In the beginning of the poem, the observer watches Peter taking a nap, describing features including his “detached first claw on his foreleg,” his “katydid legs above each eye,” and “the shadbones regularly set about his mouth” (*NCP* 45-46). The poem notes that this opportunity to examine him is a tenuous situation:

He lets himself be flat-
tened out by gravity, as it were a piece of seaweed tamed and weakened by
exposure to the sun; compelled when extended, to lie
stationary. Sleep is the result of his delusion that one must do as
well as one can for oneself; sleep—epitome of what is to

him as to the average person, the end of life. Demonstrate on him how
the lady caught the dangerous southern snake, placing a forked stick on either
side of its innocuous neck; one need not try to stir
him up; his prune shaped head and alligator eyes are not a party to the
joke. Lifted and handled, he may be dangled like an eel or set

up on the forearm like a mouse; his eyes bisected by pupils of a pin’s
width, are flickeringly exhibited, then covered up. May be? I should say,

might have been; when he has been got the better of in a dream—as in a fight with nature or with cats—we all know it. Profound sleep is not with him, a fixed illusion.

In his stationary state, Peter becomes pliable, surrendering to the pressure of gravity and appearing nearly lifeless, a figure that the observer can manipulate without resistance. The passage frames him as a suspended spectacle who can be “lifted and handled,” taking whatever shape is forced upon him—as a piece of seaweed, snake, alligator, eel, mouse, or any other potential analogue the observer can devise. In his repose, he remains a comic figure of bizarre proportions, the subject of a joke, but not a party to it. However, the poem reminds us that Peter is not a stable object, but an animate being that, like the “dangerous southern snake” precariously suspended by forked sticks, cannot be entirely contained within the framework of the observer’s perceptions. We see that, despite his apparent calm, Peter’s rest masks an intensely active dream in which he has fought with nature or other cats and been defeated. Far from mimicking “the end of life” as the observer initially assumes by imposing human commonplaces about sleep on Peter, his nap simply transposes his energetic impulses to the space of the dream, where they are inaccessible to us until his sudden waking. The “may be” that the observer proposes of handling Peter as a passive object of inspection becomes a “might have been” as Peter escapes his dream and springs to life, prioritizing his own behavioral imperatives over the figurative language the observer constructs around him, so that, “springing about with froglike ac- // curacy, emitting jerky cries when taken in the hand, he is himself / again.” These lines suggest that Peter’s ontological state is not bound to a single moment, but rather emerges through expressive action—his being is defined through continuous acts of self-definition rather than ossifying into an object to be “taken in the hand.” The poem goes on to note,

He can
talk, but insolently says nothing. What of it? When one is frank, one’s very

presence is a compliment. It is clear that he can see
 the virtue of naturalness, that he is one of those who do not regard
 the published fact as a surrender. As for the disposition

invariably to affront, an animal with claws wants to have to use
 them; that eel-like extension of trunk into tail is not an accident. To
 leap, to lengthen out, divide the air—to purloin, to pursue,
 to tell the hen: fly over the fence, go in the wrong way—in your perturba-
 tion—this is life; to do less would be nothing but dishonesty.

In the final stanzas, the narration shifts from the perspective of an external observer to free indirect style, ventriloquizing Peter's un-"humanlike" attitudes towards individual freedoms and responsibilities. Unabashedly pursuing his immediate impulses, Peter replaces verbal communication with the reality of his presence, using his body as the medium to express his unconstrained will. What would appear as impropriety for humans becomes the sign of "frankness" for Peter, giving free reign to the physiological arrangement that directs and enables his explosive energy. It is not the "published fact," the static narrative that claims knowledge of "cat-ness" that governs his conduct, but rather the physical features—his aggressive claws, or the "eel-like extension of trunk into tail"—that illustrate the possibilities contained within his anatomy. The final sentence, with its paratactic catalog of behaviors suggests that instead of remaining committed to a fundamental purpose, Peter's vitality depends on his willingness to change, to drop any course of action in favor of the present inclination. The apparent chaos of his motions "is not an accident," but the result of his multiplicity, the complex organization of his body that allows him to zigzag between moments without sacrificing the honesty of "naturalness."

"Peter" offers a vision of the poetic subject not as the helpless victim of linguistic dissection, but rather the incommensurately complex phenomenon that the poem attempts to follow. Moore does not insist on presenting the definitive account of what a cat can be or do, but

rather traces the paths along which Peter travels, adapting to his unpredictable behavior instead of racing ahead of him to determine the route he will take *a priori*. This approach reflects Latour's dictum to "follow the actors themselves." Actors—entities that demonstrate agency, including organisms, household objects, corporations, and nations—often develop patterns that confound any attempt to define them, so that rather than taking a prescriptive role, the researcher or scientist must "try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish" (Latour 12). Latour suggests that actors are constantly positing and reinventing identities for themselves, both as individuals and as members of a larger community. The emergent interactions of these various actors form complex relationships that cannot be explained in advance, but rather observed as they unfold without the expectation of finding a single immutable frame of reference that can contain the entirety of an actor's existence. The interest of any account describing a phenomenon lies in its capacity to respond to serendipitous occasions.

"Literalists of the Imagination"

The unmanageable complexity that emerges through allowing the self-defining behavior of an actor to take precedence over a predetermined explanation of their identity allows for a form of "objectivity" that differs from the conventional understanding of the word. Latour insists that

there are texts that pretend to be objective because they claim to imitate what they believe to be the secret of the natural sciences; and there are those that try to be objective because they track objects which are given a chance to *object* to what is said about them. . . . Objectivity can thus be obtained either by an objectivist style—even though no object is there to be seen—or by the presence of many *objectors*—even though there is no pretence for parodying the objectivist genre. (124-125).

Sociologists often assume that the authority of the natural sciences rests on a sense of absolute mastery or certainty regarding the subject of study. But this approach turns out to be a false pretense—the objectivity of the “object” renders the topic of the investigation inert, creating a master narrative that celebrates the analytic prowess of the observer while obscuring the recalcitrant properties of the observed entity that could lead to a more compelling, but less authoritative account. In contrast to this method, Latour proposes an objectivity of “objection,” which asserts intellectual rigor through an attentiveness to the strange contingencies of any phenomenon, allowing the account to register these complications and acknowledge the slippages between the focal subject and the text that describes it.

Latour’s definition of “objectivity” provides a useful framework to make sense of some of the most unsettling linguistic experiments in Moore’s poetry. Far from displacing the topic of the poem or trapping it within the perceptions of an observing figure, language becomes the medium through which an entity can express its objections to any predetermined role or identity imposed upon it. This dynamic is especially clear in “The Monkey Puzzler,” a poem about the monkey puzzle tree from Chile and southwest Argentina, distinguished by its angular branches and sharp, scale-like leaves. The poem begins,

A kind of monkey or pine-lemur
not of interest to the monkey,
but to the animal higher up which resembles it,
in a kind of Flaubert’s Carthage, it defies one—
this “Paduan cat with lizard,” this “tiger in a bamboo thicket.” (NCP 26)

The disjunction between the monkey puzzle tree and the terms the poem uses to describe—primates, a besieged city (depicted in Flaubert’s *Salammbô*), cats, and tigers—may appear to indicate a shift from the precise anatomical insights of “To a Snail” and “Peter” to a more subjective mode of observation, centered around the imagination or metaphorical wit of the



(*Araucaria araucana*, the monkey puzzle tree)

observer rather than the properties of the tree itself. The perceptions of the observer seem to deform the tree into bizarre and unexpected shapes, transferring the agency of the poem from the action of a self-defining entity to the metaphysical associations that language can construct. But in “Deformance and Interpretation,” Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann argue that alteration and deformation can be useful techniques to understand dimensions of a focal object that may not be immediately evident. The article argues that literary criticism often reckons with the semantic instability of texts while assuming that their qualities as physical artifacts are “preinterpretive and precritical” (Samuels & McGann 35). Samuels and McGann challenge this belief in the integrity of the physical text by demonstrating various methods of “deformance,” in which criticism does not treat the text as a stable foundation for hermeneutic inquiry, but rather manipulates a text in order to explore its latent behavioral possibilities (for example, reading Wallace Stevens’s “The Snow Man” as an unlineated sentence or removing all the words except

the nouns). Although these deformed versions may seem to reject critical examination because of their suspect position as warped or illegitimate artifacts, Samuels and McGann suggest that “deformance does not banish interpretation. The reversed text is still subject to, still giving of, interpretive readings. Deformance *does* want to show that *the poem’s intelligibility is not a function of the interpretation, but rather that all interpretation is a function of the poem’s systemic intelligibility*” (40). Instead of prioritizing criticism as a way to render the text meaningful or coherent, this passage locates agency in the text itself, claiming that acts of interpretation are responses to the systemic construction of the text, and that even those readings that appear to distort or deform the text are simply revealing its range of possible behaviors.

The concept of deformance offers a suggestive lens through which to interrogate the maneuvers of the observer in “The Monkey Puzzler.” Just as Samuels and McGann deform the poems they present in their article to reveal their “systemic intelligibility,” the observer in Moore’s poem transforms the body of the tree into various shapes that reflect facets of its complex physical form and the forms of agency it expresses in acting upon the perceptions of others. The rich linguistic discourse generated by the monkey puzzle tree precedes the creation of the poem. The name “monkey puzzle” comes from a remark made by British barrister Charles Austin when he encountered a specimen that had been transplanted to a garden in Cornwall. Noting its sharp leaves and strange geometrical arrangement of branches, he speculated that the tree “would be a puzzle for a monkey” (Wilson). Austin’s quip is an act of imaginative ecological distortion—there are no nonhuman primate populations in the monkey puzzle’s original habitat in southwest South America or in its new environment in Britain (Napier 378-379). The figure of the monkey attempts to make the alien tree intelligible by framing it as an object to be climbed, encompassed within the framework of a familiar usage. But the conceit

also reveals its own instability by admitting the “puzzlement” the tree would inspire in a monkey, bringing it to a point where its instinctual or intuitive faculties would prove inadequate and it would be forced to navigate the structure of the tree through a series of strategic negotiations rather than by following ingrained principles for climbing. Similarly, Austin’s use of figurative language does not demonstrate the triumph of his imagination over the monkey puzzle, but rather his discomfort with the tree, which he displaces into the fictive encounter between the monkey and the tree. The opening lines of “The Monkey Puzzler” recognize that the tree does not puzzle an actual monkey, but rather “the animal higher up which resembles it,” the human who deploys the figure of the monkey to express his own reaction. But instead of dismissing the monkey as an insubstantial or misdirecting fabrication, the poem suggests that the monkey can become a productive conceit, one that can become part of a network of associative maneuvers in a larger experiment to understand the tree. Describing the human as “the animal higher up” invokes the image of a taxonomical tree, in which the monkey is not a figure for human confusion, but rather a careful shift to a related organism that could more effectively enact the puzzlement that humans experience. The further inclusion of organisms such as the “pine-lemur,” “Paduan cat,” and “tiger in a bamboo thicket” extends the series of imaginative connections that the monkey puzzle initiates. By expanding the identity of the monkey puzzle beyond its status as a tree to include these other figures created through the action of the poem, Moore rejects the distinction between linguistic constructs and the material organism at the heart of the work. The tree is marked not only by what it makes available to the observer, but also by its potential to generate other ontological states hidden in the bizarre structures of its branches.

While the imaginative transformations the observer performs are powerful techniques for understanding surprising dimensions of the tree, Moore suggests that these insights must be

incorporated into a set of shifting frames of reference rather than established as stable frameworks to contain the focal subject. The poem continues,

Ignore the Foo dog and it is forthwith more than a dog,
its tail superimposed upon itself in a complacent half spiral,
incidentally so witty;
But this pine-tree—this pine-tiger, is a tiger, not a dog.

These lines argue that by releasing an entity from the preconceptions attached to its name, its formal properties can create new resonances and associations beyond the spaces of discourse in which the entity is conventionally located. “Foo Dog” is a western name for the Chinese guardian lion, frequently depicted in Buddhist art. But to ignore its status as a “dog” allows it to become “forthwith more than a dog.” Rather than accepting the common name, which tames the guardian lion by placing it within a familiar category for westerners, the poem encourages the viewer to use formal observation to produce the descriptive language surrounding the figure. Rather than becoming an imposition on the unique historical and behavioral imperatives of a given entity, language can respond to these contingencies. The language of the observer does not have to silence the observed figure—instead, it emerges from the agency the figure demonstrates through the impressions it leaves on the viewer. As the observer shifts from describing the monkey puzzle as a “pine-tree” to apprehending it as a “pine-tiger,” the tree casts off its associations of immobility or inertness to become animal, animate.

The shifting figurative stratagems of the poem reveal the phenomenological process to be not simply the assimilation of an external object into the paradigms of the observer, but rather the record of the images and sensory experiences an object imparts on the observer. The poem concludes by noting that the tree offers a strange beauty, but that

One is at a loss, however, to know why it should be here,
in this morose part of the earth—
to account for its origin at all;
but we prove, we do not explain our birth.

Noting the inability of the observer to find a secure frame of reference that can make the monkey puzzle legible, these lines argue that knowledge is not a question of explanation, of finding some point of origin that can neutralize the tree's performance as an object that can transform over time and place it in a static moment of examination. Instead, knowledge emerges as the tree proves itself against the various metaphorical structures the poem builds around it, demonstrating both their local accuracy and general inadequacy. The complexity of the tree forces the observer to remain mobile, creating provisional metaphors or analogies that can be cast away to accommodate new associations, forming a language of observation that combines description with unfolding dialectic, experimenting with the systems it attempts to understand rather than positing absolute principles.

Moore's most ambitious fusion of linguistic experimentation with keen insight into her chosen topic appears in "The Plumet Basilisk," which mixes natural science with cultural and mythological traditions to illustrate the vitality of the reptiles it presents. The poem, to an even greater extent than "The Monkey Puzzler," is keenly aware of its status as a hybrid document, constructed not through Moore's direct interactions with reptile specimens, but rather through the textual work of what Reddy describes as "a poetics of curiosity, research, and exploration not of the uncharted globe but the archives of published knowledge" (Reddy 453). While "To a Snail" and "Peter" may seem to stage scenes in which the observer persona is in the immediate presence of the focal animal, the creatures that populate "The Plumet Basilisk," including frilled lizards, tuataras, and flying dragons, are markedly alien, unavailable to Moore except through books, articles, or documentaries. But the poem argues that knowledge of a phenomenon is not confined to the direct encounter, but rather can become richer as information circulates through audiences, in the form of professional communities or the general public, and enters negotiations



(*Basiliscus plumifrons*, the plumed basilisk, taken by Joe MacDonald)

with other bodies of knowledge. This interdisciplinary venturousness is clear from the first section of the poem, “In Costa Rica,” in which the observer claims that “In Costa Rica the true Chinese lizard face / is found” in the form of the plumed basilisk:

He leaps and meets his
 likeness in the stream and, king with king,
 helped by his three-part plume along the back, runs on two legs,
 tail dragging; faints upon the air; then with a spring
 dives to the stream-bed, hiding as the chieftain with gold body hid in

Guatavita Lake.

He runs, he flies, he swims, to get to
 his basilica—“the ruler of Rivers, Lakes, and Seas,
 invisible or visible,” with clouds to do
 as bid—and can be “long or short, and also coarse or fine at pleasure.” With a

modest quiver, he
 ascends the bank on clinging tree-frog
 hands and waits; the water draining, forms a lizard there, from
 skin now looking a little newer than the log
 it rested on & the thick mass of verdure all about.

This passage relies on precise details of the basilisk’s behavior, but invests them with imaginative resonances. The plumed basilisk is both capable of running across water on its hind legs and of diving into water to avoid danger. With its fluid movements, at ease on land and

water, the basilisk demonstrates an ability to generate other versions of itself, from its reflected “likeness in the stream” or the “clinging tree-frog” to the vision of the Chinese dragon in the second stanza, a being characterized by its shape-shifting powers and command of water. The multiplicity of its being is compounded by the etymological history that surrounds it. Its genus name, *Basiliscus*, comes from “basileús,” the Ancient Greek word for “king,” from which “basilica” is also derived. While the connection to royalty may appear to imply the rigidity of stately ritual, the poem’s reference to “the chieftain with gold body hid in // Guatavita Lake” offers a different account of kingship. One of Moore’s notes on the poem elaborates on the allusion:

Guatavita Lake. Associated with the legend of El Dorado, the Gilded One. The king, painted with gums and powdered with gold-dust as symbolic of the sun, the supreme deity, was each year escorted by his nobles on a raft, to the center of the lake, in a ceremonial of tribute to the goddess of the lake. Here he washed off his golden coat by plunging into the water while those on the raft and on the shores chanted and threw offerings into the waters—emeralds or objects of gold, silver, or platinum. (NCP 311)

This reference suggests that the majesty of the king of El Dorado, like the majesty of the ever-changing dragon, resides not in a fixed position of power or wealth, but rather in the ability to remake oneself in new forms. As the king enters the lake, he performs a symbolic sacrifice of his elevated, godlike status, but emerges again ready to take up his role as a leader among his people. The basilisk reveals a similar majesty in humility, suspending the miracle of his flight across the water to emerge on the bank of the stream to “form a lizard there.” Returning to its seemingly mundane repose on land, it still appears “a little newer than the log / it rested on,” having shown its ability to traverse physical and textual spaces and create itself anew in each moment of its passage through its environment.

The poem’s interest in travel between realms of knowledge is also evident in the way it weaves together two articles in *The Illustrated London News*, one of which focuses on natural

science while the other discusses art and mythology. In “The World of Science: The Frilled Lizard,” W. P. Pycraft takes up a number of lizards with notable anatomical features that set them apart from many other lizard species. He explains that while many closely related species may appear nearly identical “save for differences of coloration, size, or differences in proportion,” “in practically every group you will find at least one (there may be a dozen) which have, so to speak, ‘run amok’ by developing some structural peculiarity which sets it apart from all its tribe” (Pycraft). The strangeness and diversity of lizard life establishes an ongoing problem and source of fascination throughout the article. After describing the expandable frill of the frilled lizard, Pycraft identifies some possible precursors, but is careful to remind us “that what applies to one animal does not by any means apply to its near relations. No two living bodies are ever quite alike, or make precisely the same responses to the same stimuli. We can never say of A and B that, given the same stimuli, and of the same intensity, both will respond in the same way.” And after noting the ability of both frilled lizards and basilisks to sprint on two legs, he admits,

These two cases are more than ‘curious.’ They are, indeed, extremely puzzling, for it seems impossible to conceive of the steps by which so remarkable a mode of locomotion can have been brought about. . . . Doubtless, if the habits of these lizards and of their near relations could be intensively studied on the spot, a clue to the mystery would be found.

Evolutionary history can offer tentative accounts of how biological attributes develop, but the vast differences between species, or even between specimens within the same species, often leaves these explanations seeming inadequate or incomplete, unable to manage the proliferation of life as lineages “run amok” and develop structures or behaviors that confound attempts at straightforward taxonomy. Bizarre creatures like basilisks and frilled lizards appear adjacent to their fellow lizards, but the connective tissue remains difficult to trace.

The second article, “A Page for Collectors: The Chinese Dragon” by Frank Davis, also presents a diverse body of material and proposes frameworks that can organize these distinct objects. Davis explains that the article was inspired by “the appearance of a new blue-and-white Staffordshire pottery milk-jug upon the breakfast-table,” on which, “amid thoroughly European swags of flowers, appears upon a white ground a quite authentic dragon in the best tradition of the Sons of Han” (Davis). The milk-jug leads Davis to meditate on the dragon as a central motif in Chinese art and mythology, relating legends of its transformative powers, auspicious symbolic import, and ability to control rain. Like the reptiles Pycraft examines, the Chinese dragon presents an epistemological challenge as an uncontainable being, one that pervades all aspects of Chinese art, appearing “on silks, porcelain, pottery, sculpture; on furniture, on dresses.” And its heredity also creates challenges for the scholar:

There are various theories to account for the peculiarly Chinese conception of this strange creature. Some say they first obtained it from the remains of a prehistoric saurian; others from one of the many foreign serpent myths that reached them from the West; yet others bleakly assert that the kindly and auspicious dragon is no other than the alligator of the Yangtze River.

But where Pycraft recognizes that science has yet to reach a satisfactory answer for the uncertain histories of lizard traits, Davis suggests that attempting to find the origins of the Chinese dragon is beside the point: “We can afford to put no faith in theories, but rather to admire the extraordinary imaginative power of a people that could not only evolve so fantastic a legendary creature, but utilise it for so many centuries as one of the most notable decorative symbols of their many-sided art.” Like the monkey puzzle tree, which proves its birth through a demonstration of its ongoing vitality in the absence of an explanation of its past, the Chinese dragon can be accepted for its aesthetic potential as a being constructed and recreated through centuries of imaginative work. Davis enacts his perspective through the conceit of treating

depictions of dragons as living entities, able to respond to their changing environments. Describing the dragon on the milk-jug, he notes, “he has no wings, he breathes no fire, but he sprawls amiably yet proudly on nothingness, a little surprised, maybe, at his surroundings, but none the less a kindly, even cheerful, exile, willing, I would wager, to perform the functions allotted to him by the Supreme Ruler of Heaven for the benefit of foreign devils.” The dragon experiences not only transformations of physical proportions—being able to change size, become visible or invisible, and even assume the form of a human—but also shifts in its habitat as it travels from China to the western world. Davis deploys the dragon as a figure of mobility, traveling across national boundaries, equally at ease in earlier works of Chinese art and its new position as a cultural import. While the vast quantity of works that present dragons might not fall into neat categories, the dragon itself, containing multitudes, can accommodate this sprawl of cultural and narrative material, becoming richer with each new iteration.

Moore also recognizes the potential of the dragon to move between physical spaces in ways that can expand her investigation of reptile life beyond the limits of a local scene. While “The Plumet Basilisk” begins and ends by observing the eponymous lizard, its two middle sections create a lengthy digression as Moore explores “dragon-ness” in other manifestations around the globe. For example, the second section, “The Malay Dragon,” begins by noting, “We have ours; and they / have theirs,” comparing “our” plumed basilisk to the Malay dragon (more commonly recognized as *Draco volans*, the flying dragon), a lizard with elongated ribs that can expand to support winglike flaps of skin, used to glide down from heights (Pycraft). The observer states, “This is the serpent-dove peculiar / to the East; that lives as the butterfly or bat / can, in a brood, conferring wings on what it grasps, as the air-plant does.” Like the basilisk, the flying dragon follows paths of travel that cannot be accounted for by typical understandings of

lizards, forcing the viewer to strain for terms such as “serpent-dove” to account for its strange mixture of lizard traits with birdlike behavior. Even more unsettling is its ability to extend its agency by “conferring wings” on the objects it carries with it so that inert matter becomes charged with the mobility of its possessor. Like the shapeshifting Chinese dragon, *Draco volans* contains the ever-present potential to expand beyond itself, transforming the landscape by passing through it.

Further instances of dragon behavior are acknowledged the next section, “The Tuatera,” [sic] another reptile that refuses easy classification. Moore’s notes quote a passage from *Animals of New Zealand*, which describes the tuatara as “in appearance a lizard—with characteristics of the tortoise; on the ribs, uncinat processes like a bird’s; and crocodilian features—it is the only living representative of the order Rhynchocephalia” (NCP 311). The tuatara’s anatomical hybridity is reflected in its practice of sharing burrows with seabirds. The observer explains, “Bird-reptile social life is pleasing. The tuatera

will tolerate a
petrel in its den, and lays ten eggs
or nine—the number laid by dragons since “a true dragon
has nine sons.” The frilled lizard, the kind with no legs,
and the three-horned chameleon, are non-serious ones that take to flight

if you do not. In
Copenhagen the principal door
of the bourse is roofed by two pairs of dragons standing on
their heads—twirled by the architect—so that the four
green tails conspiring upright, symbolize four-fold security.

The description of the tuatara quickly spirals into a broader meditation on the habitats that reptiles can occupy, inviting a comparison with the bourse, or stock exchange, in Copenhagen, which displays a sculpture of four dragons with tails intertwined to form the spire of the building. While the bourse may seem a departure from the real animals described previously, the



(The spire of Børsen, the former site of the Copenhagen Stock Exchange)

poem recognizes that the sculpture, like Davis's dragon on a milk-jug, reveals the animal-like agencies that artificial objects can assert. Rather than seeming a linear, unified projection, the bourse spire reveals the physical pressures that counterbalance each other in the form of the dragon tails, which "conspire upright" to actively maintain structural security. Unlike "non-serious" reptiles, which flee from encounters with the alien, both tuataras and the dragon sculptures demonstrate an ability to occupy strange communal situations—the former willing to share its home with birds, while the later beings hold an odd position as living stonework, "twirled by the architect" to expose the spiraling trajectories that underlie the upward thrust of the spire. Throughout all of these accounts of dragon-like behavior, both in animals and art, Moore identifies a common thread of formal strangeness, binding her subjects not through clear

biological traits, but rather shared ability to resist conventional notions of reptile appearance and activity to achieve a more fluid, provisional identity, constructed through continual negotiations with their environments. The poem itself, with its digressive structure, enacts this dynamic of slantwise travel, using language as a conduit that can support a connection between “natural” and “artificial,” collapsing the distinction between the plumed basilisk and the Chinese dragon or the tuatara and the bourse spire to reveal all of these actors as discursively constructed entities.

By highlighting the self-determining behavior of its subjects, the conceit of the dragon that undergirds “The Plumet Basilisk” opens a space where accounts of animal physiology and behavior can be observed on terms other than those of biological necessity. While the natural sciences recognize how organic life has diversified and formed new patterns to facilitate survival and reproduction, a passage from the final section of the poem suggests that the complexity of an organism can also allow for expressive activity. Returning to the basilisk, the Moore describes it swimming as night descends and the inhabitants of the jungle become available to the observer only as detached sounds: “Upon spider-hands, with

wide water-bug strokes,
in jerks which express
a regal and excellent awkwardness,

the plumet portrays
mythology’s wish
to be interchangeably man and fish—

traveling rapidly upward, as
spider-clawed fingers can twang the
bass strings of the harp, and with steps
as articulate, make their way
back to retirement on strings that
vibrate till the claws are spread flat.

Among tightened wires,
minute noises swell
and change as in the woods’ acoustic shell

they will, with trees as
 avenues of steel
 to veil invisibleness ears must feel—

black opal emerald opal
 emerald—the prompt-delayed loud-
 low chromatic listened-for down-
 scale which Swinburne called in prose, the
 noiseless music that hangs about
 the serpent when it stirs or springs.

Instead of emphasizing the basilisk's swimming as a way to hide from predators, Moore liberates from teleology the creature's capacity to dive underwater, instead investing it with an aesthetic agency rarely afforded to nonhuman animals. Instead of locating the beauty of the passage in the imagination of the observer, the poem positions the basilisk as an artist-figure, able to traverse water with a gracefulness that resembles the mastery of the harpist—not just efficient or pragmatic, but “regal” and “articulate.” The passage also marks a significant departure from the stanzaic pattern used throughout the rest of the poem, creating a sort of “shell” in which the formal properties of the basilisk's “noiseless music” can play out, complemented by the couplets in the three-line stanzas and the conspicuous enjambments of the longer stanzas, creating a mixture of poised rhyme and rapid shifts resembling movement along a musical scale.

Although this section may seem to abandon the scientific ethos that dominates so much of Moore's writing, creating a fantastic scene that appeals to hermetic aestheticism rather than precise knowledge, it may represent her most radical deployment of the laboratory as a poetic practice. Like the textual laboratory that Latour proposes, these stanzas create an artificial space, visually, aurally, and thematically distinct from the rest of the poem. The passage does not attempt to reproduce the basilisk or its relationships to the environment in their entirety, instead recognizing those aspects of its behavior that are most salient to its proposed experiment: making tactile through poetic language the aesthetic experience that even the musical Swinburne only

approaches in prose. In this analytical fantasia, the woods themselves can become the materials of imaginative manipulation, an “acoustic shell” where the trees become “avenues of steel,” the stage for a scene in which the observer, caught in darkness, receives the nocturnal activity of the jungle as a sonic drama. Under these conditions, which filter out details of the environment to focus on the impressions the basilisk’s movement, the experiment culminates in a moment of splendor seemingly unrelated to the passage as the poem states, “black opal emerald opal / emerald.” The surprising reverie transforms, almost alchemically, the sensuous forces of music into visual opalescence, an experience that emerges out of the aesthetic laboratory Moore carefully constructs, marking the success of the enterprise through the creation of unique knowledge.

This passage allows us to know the plumed basilisk more fully and in ways that demolish the distinction between the artificial creations of humans and the modes of expression demonstrated by other animals, which we traditionally accept as pre-discursive and “natural,” confined to the lens of physiology and ecology used by the natural sciences. It is true that the basilisk’s bipedalism, agile frame, and remarkable crests are products of millennia of evolutionary influences, but so are human hands. While the human body is shaped by biological determinants, these forces do not deny us modes of creative or intellectual expression, nor do they do so for other organisms. Placing the basilisk within the realm of art and beauty does not displace it from its “natural” state as a brute animal, but rather allows it a space where it can make visible those aspects of aesthetic activity that it observes for and to itself, always-already the discursive being at the intersection between biology and legend, where it can express “mythology’s wish / to be interchangeably man and fish.”

“The Plumed Basilisk” constructs a poetics of knowledge that transforms our understanding not only of the role poetry can play as an epistemological process, but also of the parameters of useful knowledge. Mixing biological information with imaginative sallies into myth and art, Moore recognizes that her creatures she describes are not passive objects open to the scrutiny of an active observer, but rather subjects fully invested with subjecthood, defining their own existences through expressive action. The laboratory of the poem is able to construct the “real toad” through its attention to both the externalities of ecology and anatomy and the linguistic and aesthetic dimensions that develop as these physical elements are mobilized, allowing surprising and complex formal relationships—between an entity and its environment, its depictions in various textual accounts, or even between the various aspects of its physiology—to emerge. Poetry, far from being the “fiddle” that the speaker in “Poetry” initially suspects it to be, is an essential site for constructing the “genuine” because it allows a creature to reveal its ability to participate not only in physical environments, but also in textual spaces, performing aspects of its identity through its movement across the page, generating associations and resonances that are neither wholly its own nor the impositions of an observer, but rather the traces of a collaboration between the described phenomenon and the imaginative impulses of the writer. The creatures Moore portrays seem truthful because of their rapid fluctuations, their ability to swerve away from any containing narrative the observer attempts to construct in order to follow new paths of self-defining behavior. They appear to us as strange entities hidden in thickets of figurative language and scientific fact—unstable, artificial, and entirely real.

Conclusion

Moore's experiments, in publication and revision, in voice and quotation, and in tracing the surprising paths of the phenomena she observes, develop a poetics of contact with the real, illuminating the explosive possibilities that dwell in complexities of material bodies and their negotiations with each other and the texts that describe them. Far from accepting the role of poetry as a hermetic, self-reflexive medium advanced by traditions of lyric reading, Moore offers intimations of a world in which poetry takes a vital position as an active agent in society, constructing knowledge not just as a series of indifferent facts, but as dynamic process of information put into motion to find functions and uses in ordinary life. The social promise Moore identifies in writing and poetry comes clearly into focus in a passage from "The Pangolin" in which the observer notes,

Pangolins are not
not aggressive animals; between
dusk and day, they have the not un-
chainlike, machine-
like form and
frictionless creep of a thing
made graceful by adversities, con-
versities. To explain grace requires
a curious hand. If that which
is at all were not for
ever, why would those who graced the spires
with animals and gathered
there to rest, on cold luxurious
low stone seats—a monk and a monk and a monk—
between the thus ingenious roof-
supports, have slaved to confuse
grace with a kindly
manner, time in which to pay a debt,
the cure for sins, a graceful use
of what are yet
approved stone
mullions branching out across
the perpendiculars? (*NCP* 142-143)

Although Moore's use of "confuse" may seem to condemn the efforts of the monks as vague or inadequate to dealing with the vastness of grace, I follow Reddy's suggestion that the poem "employs *confuse* in a more neutral and literal Latinate sense of fusing together," (Reddy 467). Through this lens, the scene is not one of isolated linguistic self-indulgence, but rather a site of essential productive activity. The monastery itself, far from being a cloistered, hermetic space, is exposed as the result of skilful labor, accommodating the work of the monks with "low stone seats," "ingenious roof- / supports," and the community of animal sculptures that grace the edifice. Within this constructed framework, visually complemented by the carefully chiseled stanzas, the monks find a clearing in which to experiment with grace, not receiving it through a set definition, but rather acknowledging its potential manifestations in the world, taking on interpersonal, economic, theological, and even architectural implications through various applications. The work of the monks does not imagine grace as an abstraction that "droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath," but rather as a pragmatic virtue effected in social scenes through the ingenuity of its earthly practitioners. This lived experience of grace emerges out of the textual investigation that the monks perform in tracing the received histories of "grace" as a term circulating through spaces of discourse, simultaneously recognizing the word as a meeting point that can fuse together diverse social activities and as an infinitely complicated, infinitely diffuse concept, taking on new forms in response to the transformations of historical contingencies. The poem participates in and extends the enterprise of the monks by revealing grace in the unlikely guise of the pangolin, an animal initially described by the observer as a "near artichoke." The apparent comicality of this initial impression gives way to admiration of its anatomy as "machine-like," organized to allow the pangolin to gracefully navigate adversities and conversities. The poem combines textual play with the serious task of

constructing grace, revitalizing the word as the domain not just of humans, but a larger community of entities that demonstrate the virtue in the ways they grace the world with their unique modes of being.

Moore's poetry recognizes the production of knowledge as an ethical project, the result of recognizing an unfamiliar or alien phenomenon as worthy of examination as a physical and moral agent. Poetry becomes essential to this process as a space where every word becomes active, responsive to its surroundings, weighted with potential associations and implications. Refusing to take proposed ideas as settled conclusions, the poem demands the ingenuity to take up the experience of observation as a dynamic encounter where the subject can offer an account of its own values and concerns, not untouched its histories as the focus of literary or scientific narratives, but rather incorporating these traditions into its acts of redefinition, working with the materials of language to create a new version of its identity by which we can know it. Moore's response to a 1934 questionnaire offers a telling glimpse into her poetic ethos. Asked "As a poet what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?" Moore responds, "Nothing; unless it is an exaggerated tendency to visualize; and on encountering manifestations of life—insects, lower animals, or human beings—to wonder if they are happy, and what will become of them" (*Prose* 674). Poetry, for Moore, becomes an experiment in attention, to wonder about the lives of beings commonly forgotten or taken for granted and reconstruct the complexity of their situations through the formal maneuvers of writing. This approach reveals the deep undercurrent of care and consideration that drives the most rigorous scientific inquiry. Science strives for objectivity not because it is indifferent to the phenomena it explores, but because it is committed to understanding something beyond the subjective preconceptions of the scientist, to revealing

what these subjects, followed instead of guided, can make of themselves, and what they make themselves into.

Moore's poems argue that an ethos of scientific attention and interest can yield an experience beyond the realm of familiar human life: the sense of having known something other than oneself, of having beheld something exciting and fascinating and altogether wonderful. Poetry can construct opens realms of imaginative and intellectual discovery, a process that resists the urge to bind information into settled categories, instead adhering to a "fertile procedure," a slow unfolding of knowledge through active arrangement and rearrangement of ideas. Perhaps this dynamic is clearest in the relationship between a fragment from "The Plumet Basilisk"—"the plumet portrays / mythology's wish / to be interchangeably man and fish"—and "Ennui," a poem Moore published twenty-four years earlier in 1909:

He often expressed
 a curious wish,
 To be interchangeably
 Man and fish;
 To nibble the bait
 Off the hook,
 Said he,
 And then slip away
 Like a ghost in the sea. (*BMM* 339)

In its earlier usage, the vision of a fusion between "man and fish" reflects the desire of a vague figure to achieve some state that seems fundamentally impossible, marking the fault lines between the limitations of physical existence and a yearning for some mode of existence that can realize the contradictory impulses of the inner self. But in "The Plumet Basilisk," Moore relocates the focus of the lines from the confined psychological strife of a human figure to the external form of the plumed basilisk. With its hybrid behaviors, the lizard can express the double state of "man and fish" as a spectacle that can be observed and integrated into the visual

imagination of the viewer. The poem allows it to function neither as the plaything of the fabulist nor as a curio for the natural historian, but as an incommensurately complex creature that can transmute the paralyzing, self-effacing ennui of an unattainable wish into a lived performance. The vitality of the basilisk as a locus of physical and mythological material allows it an ethical significance that is hidden in the self-reflexive drama of the figure in “Ennui,” a distinction made clear in the endings of the two poems. The subject of the earlier poem imagines dissolving into the vast sea, casting away the burden of the self. The plumed basilisk also exits the space of the poem by diving into water, but the scene of departure is framed in different terms:

he is alive there
 in his basilisk cocoon beneath
 the one of living green; his quicksilver ferocity
 quenched in the rustle of his fall into the sheath
 which is the shattering sudden splash that marks his temporary loss.

The ending of “The Plumed Basilisk” apprehends the lizard not as a unified being, but a composite of fluid layers—the “living green” of the shifting impressions it imparts on observers, the anatomical frame that governs its modes of behavior and interaction with its environment, and, at the heart of it all, the elusive self that is “alive there” within its physical “cocoon.” The dynamism of the basilisk’s “quicksilver ferocity,” likened to the energy of a “living firework” at the beginning of the poem, suddenly disappears beyond our reach as it dives into the “sheath” of water, leaving us bereft of the presence that has graced the poem. It is a testament to the power of Moore’s observational ingenuity that the basilisk is rendered not as the incorporeal fancy of the poet, vanishing unnoticed as a ghost, but as a vibrant moral and biological agent whose absence carries the weight of a loss.



(Monogram from *The Pangolin and Other Verse*,
illustrated by George Plank and reproduced in *A-Quiver with Significance*)

Works Consulted

- Anderson, David. "Marianne Moore's 'Fertile Procedure': Fusing Scientific Method and Organic Form Through Syllabic Technique." *Paideuma*, Vol. 33, No. 2 & 3, Fall & Winter 2004, pp. 83-108.
- Brinkman, Bartholomew. "Scrapping Modernism: Marianne Moore and the Making of the Modern Collage Poem." *Modernism/modernism*, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 43-66.
- Cecire, Natalia. "Marianne Moore's Precision." *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Winter 2011.
- Craig, Edward Gordon. *On the Art of the Theatre*. London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1957.
- Davis, Frank. "A Page for Collectors: The Chinese Dragon." *Illustrated London News*, August 23, 1930, p. 346.
- Faguet, Emile. *Flaubert*. London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1918.
- Forsyth, P.T. *Christ on Parnassus: Lectures on Art, Ethic, and Theology*. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911.
- Gordon, Alexander R. *The Poets of the Old Testament*. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919.
- Gregory, Elizabeth. *Quotation and Modern American Poetry*. Houston: Rice University Press, 1996.
- Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Kappel, Andrew J. "Presenting Miss Moore, Modernist: T S. Eliot's Edition of Marianne Moore's *Selected Poems*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, pp. 129-150.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: University of Oxford Press, 2005.

- Marek, Jayne E. "The Ironic 'Editorial We': Marianne Moore at the *Dial*." *Women Editing Modernism: "Little Magazines & Literary History*." Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995.
- MacDonald, Joe. "Green Basilisk Lizard." *Marianne Moore: Poetry*, Patricia C. Willis, March 21, 2011, <https://moore123.com/2011/03/21/the-plumet-basilisk-and-other-lizards/>.
- McGann, Jerome. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." *The Crayon*, Vol. 7, No. 4, April 1860, pp. 93-97.
- Moore, Marianne. *Adversity and Grace*, edited by Heather Cass White. Victoria: ELS Editions, 2012.
- Moore, Marianne. *A-Quiver with Significance*, edited by Heather Cass White. Victoria: ELS Editions, 2008.
- Moore, Marianne. *A Marianne Moore Reader*. New York: Viking Press, 1961.
- Moore, Marianne. *Becoming Marianne Moore*, edited by Robin G. Schulze. University of California Press, 2002.
- Moore, Marianne. "Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight." *The Egoist*, Vol. 2, No. 10, p. 158.
- Moore, Marianne. *New Collected Poems*, edited by Heather Cass White. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2017.
- Moore, Marianne. *O To Be a Dragon*. New York: Viking Press, 1959.

- Moore, Marianne. *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, edited by Patricia C. Willis. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1986.
- Moore, Marianne. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1935.
- Napier, J. R. & Napier, P. H. *A Handbook of Living Primates*. New York: Academic Press, 1967.
- Pycraft, W. P. "The World of Science: The Frilled Lizard." *Illustrated London News*, February 6, 1932, p. 210.
- Reddy, Srikanth. "'To Explain Grace Requires a Curious Hand': Marianne Moore's Interdisciplinary Digressions." *American Literature*, Vol. 77, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 451-481.
- Robinson, James Harvey. *The Mind in the Making*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1923.
- Samuels, Lisa & McGann, Jerome. "Deformance and Interpretation." *New Literary History*, Vol. 30, Winter 1999, pp. 25-56.
- Schulman, Grace. Introduction. *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, by Marianne Moore. New York: Viking Penguin, 2003.
- Schulze, Robin G. *The Degenerate Muse: American Nature, Modernist Poetry, and the Problem of Cultural Hygiene*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Schulze, Robin G. "How Not to Edit: The Case of Marianne Moore." *Textual Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 119-135.
- Schulze, Robin G. "Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text." *Text*, Vol. 11, 1998, pp. 270-305.
- Schulze, Robin G. "What a Facsimile Edition Can and Cannot Do: Marianne Moore's *Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight*." *Textual Cultures*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn 2011, pp. 84-91.

Smith, George Adam. *The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Isaiah*, edited by W. Robertson Nicholl. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son.

Williams, William Carlos. "Gloria!" *Others*, Vol. 5, No. 6, July 1919, pp. 3-4.

Williams, William Carlos. "Marianne Moore." *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*, edited by Elizabeth Gregory. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Wilson, Matthew. "Riddle of how the monkey puzzle tree came to be a UK favourite." *Financial Times*, July 5, 2013.