# The Poem, The Museum and Marianne Moore: A Creative Critical Thesis

and

# First, I turn off the light

(poetry collection)

Katherine Mack

100146275

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School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing

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**Author Name: Katherine Mack** **Year of Submission: 2021**

## Abstract

This critical and creative thesis takes as its starting point the relationship between the poem and the museum—looking at the museum as an actual and as an imaginary institution. If museums are thought to exist as buildings and as collections, then in the imaginative exploration undertaken in this thesis, the museum is also crystallized in moments when an artefact is displayed.

The creative portion of the thesis takes the form of a collection of poems. These poems consider a range of themes about the nature of the exhibited object and its relationship with human life. They examine how the stilled, muted object can be reanimated within the poem, and thereby given voice. I also reverse expectations and explore how human life can, in turn, be silenced, stilled and rendered object-like. Built into the collection is the idea of the poem itself as an exhibited object put on display.

My critical study focuses on the work of the American modernist poet Marianne Moore. It looks at her engagement with the changing museum displays at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, which Moore visited regularly throughout her writing career. I argue that Moore's interest in the AMNH was motivated by her passion for the natural sciences and, specifically, her lifelong interest in Darwinian evolution. Drawing on biographical and archival evidence, researched at The Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, the thesis offers close-readings of a selection of Moore's poems. The first chapter examines Moore's so-called 'animiles' poems of the 1930s, and the second chapter goes on to analyse her extensive revisions of her earlier work. Darwinian evolution is engaged with both as subject matter for Moore's work, and yet also, crucially, as a poetic principle running throughout. The ways in which the poem has been reinterpreted by Moore as an evolving object, absorbing Darwinian thinking on evolution into its form, will be a central concern.

Note: I have included an appendix at the back of this thesis with copies of the core poems discussed in the critical section. I have also used the Chicago referencing system for my citations in the critical section of this thesis.

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**Acknowledgements**

Many people have contributed to putting together this thesis and associated collection of poems, but my first and particular thanks are due to my two supervisors. Professor Jon Cook has supported me from my early studies as a Masters' student through to the completion of this PhD. His insights and rigour have been invaluable and have guided me through the process of shaping and refining my ideas. His kindness and patience are hugely appreciated. Professor Denise Riley has been encouraging at every stage of this process. Her insightful feedback on my poems has prompted me to develop my work at its own pace, and her generosity and support have been unwavering throughout. I am incredibly lucky to have had the privilege to work with both of my supervisors, and have no doubt that my work as a poet and a scholar has been transformed by their guidance and mentorship. I am sincerely grateful to them both.

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The staff at The Marianne Moore Collection at The Rosenbach Museum and Library have been very welcoming during my research trips to Philadelphia, and afforded me the opportunity of presenting my ideas to their knowledgeable visitors. In particular, Elizabeth Fuller and Alexander Ames have generously helped me to navigate the extraordinary resource that the archive represents to researchers.

Finally, my thanks are due to my family for their invaluable encouragement and support throughout, and, most especially to Lea, without whom this thesis would simply not have come to fruition. It is to her that this thesis is dedicated.

## Introduction

This critical and creative PhD thesis has developed out of a long-standing interest in the museum collection and the exhibited object. The museum has been a site of inspiration for my own poems for some time, and this thesis builds on some of the themes I encountered in the work I undertook as a master's student from 2015-2016. During this time, I developed a series of poems written in response to some of the artefacts housed in the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection Trust (SADACC) in Norwich. These poems took the form of a series of monologues written from the perspective of the artefact, seeking, in turn, to animate the exhibited objects in the collection—giving them voice. The end result was a multi-sensory exhibit, put together in collaboration with the head curator at SADACC, entitled 'A Cabinet of Curiosity'. The audience were able to observe the object as well as hear the poem on an audio device, imaginatively creating the experience of the object speaking directly to the viewer from the other side of the glass. Therefore, instead of visitors inspecting and discussing objects, the object spoke about what it was like to be looked at.

This work opened up an important question, both in terms of my work as a poet and as a critic: had other poets been inspired by museum displays? For many writers the gallery or museum and its collections have proved fertile ground for poetic exploration, John Keats' famous 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' or W. H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' being important examples. My own research into this field led me to the work of the American modernist poet Marianne Moore. Many modernist writers in Moore's milieu were regular visitors to the numerous museums of New York City (Moore's home for nearly sixty-five years). These institutions proved lively hubs for members of the artistic community, hosting many talks and lectures. Yet it was Moore's fascination with one museum in particular which initially drew my attention: the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). While the AMNH is rarely cited directly in Moore's poems, her enchantment with the museum, and the natural history specimens therein, reverberates throughout her work—especially her poems about animals. In Moore's poems, I found a dynamic and playful curiosity towards the exhibited object, an idiosyncratic sense of humour

and a 'gusto' (to use Moore's own description of what makes dynamic poetry).[1] This opened up my own perceptions of how I, too, might re-engage with the exhibited object in my own practice.

I endeavoured to undertake the task of writing the creative element of this thesis with Moore's principle of playful and spirited curiosity in mind. The collection of poems was written as an exercise of exploration, seeking to probe at the nature of the exhibited object and its relationship with human life. Building on my work undertaken as a master's student, the poems submitted as part of this thesis have broadened my previous definition of the artefact to incorporate many other forms of exhibited objects, including human beings. My imagination has been drawn to scenes where something or somebody is put on display, and this has led me to rethink the interplay between the exhibited object and the onlooker. Subsequently, the relationship between the inanimate object and animate life has also emerged as a particular area of interest, and I have been keen to explore the sinister possibilities of turning this relationship on its head. Many of the poems in the collection play with the notion of endowing the stilled, muted object with the potential for life, movement and voice, and, in turn, the poems also look at human life which is rendered inanimate, mute and object-like. I have found Moore's interest in observation—or *Observations,* to borrow the title of Moore's 1924 collection—an important influence. Moore's 1924 title implies that the practice of observation is multifaceted, bringing together two separate contexts: the scientific and the social. In Moore's work observation is an exploratory act, one which implies looking *before* considering any concrete interpretation of a subject, and I have found this to be a helpful guiding principle in many of my own poems. Moore's poems often absorb a variety of observational methods from a series of different perspectives; and I, too, have tried to immerse my own work in the act of looking and observing different objects from a range of different personas. The sensation of being observed is also a consideration which is taken up, conceiving the poem itself as a form of exhibit or display. In some of the later poems in this collection, I have increasingly found that the lyric first person voice is disturbed by becoming itself part of the exhibit. I have

[1] The term 'gusto' appears in: Marianne Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' *Sewanee Review* 52, no. 4 (1944): 4.

tried to tease out some of the wider issues and anxieties concerning this phenomenon.

The concerns which arose from writing the creative element of the thesis, have shaped and contributed to some of the issues that the critical prose takes up—albeit in a different register. My initial research into Moore's visits to the museum led me to discover a broad field of critical study concerned with Moore's interest in the AMNH. Catherine Paul provides one of the most extensive studies of this relationship, reading Moore's poems alongside the museum's introduction of the pioneering and immersive habitat dioramas into its exhibition halls.[2] Paul interprets Moore's animal poems of the 1930s and 40s as a series of 'poetic adaptations' written in direct response to these habitat groups.[3] This study sparked my own curiosity into the innovative display techniques employed by the diorama and how these were related to Moore's work. Yet despite the thorough nature of Paul's study, her reading of Moore's involvement with the museum neglected one important factor: Moore's passion for the natural sciences and, more specifically, evolutionary theory. This feature has become increasingly significant in my own research. Critics such as Robin Schulze, Natalia Cecire and Karin Roffman have all noted that Moore read widely on the topic of the natural sciences and record the particular influence of the ideas surrounding Darwinian evolution.[4] American natural history museums in the early to mid 20th century were also beginning to align themselves with a Darwinian conception of evolution. The introduction of the diorama, with its change of focus away from the universal taxonomic system to the localised habitat group, was a result of that shift. My reading of Moore's engagement with the museum is thus conceived through the frame of her interest in evolution, and the way in which Moore's poetics engage with this cultural and intellectual context has become an emerging concern.

Much of the critical debate surrounding Moore and her poems of the natural world seem to read the animal through the prism of moral emblem or allegory.

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[2] Catherine Paul, '"Discovery, Not Salvage": Marianne Moore's Curatorial Practices,' in *Poetry in the Museum of Modernism: Yeats, Pound, Moore, Stein* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).
[3] Ibid., 143.
[4] See: Robin Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text,' *Text* 11 (1998); Natalia Cecire, 'Marianne Moore's Precision,' *Arizona Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2011); Karin Roffman, 'Accidents Happen in Marianne Moore's Native Habitat,' in *From the Modernist Annex: American Women Writers in Museums and Libraries* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010).

Randall Jarrell interprets Moore's pangolin as a representation of the poet concealed and protected from an audience, while Ann Struthers reads the creature as a stand-in for the divine.[5] In each case, the animal is presented as having a specific kind of symbolic value. Critical interpretations which place Moore's work alongside her interest in the natural sciences, tend to take issue with those readings which posit Moore's animals as symbols. This vein of critical thinking, however, is inclined to lead many critics to position Moore in the role of the scrupulous scientific observer of natural phenomena. Bonnie Costello and Margaret Holley reframe Moore's technique of observation as a steadfast pursuit of, what Costello terms, 'literary accuracy'.[6] This persona, of Moore as the detached scientist, has also become enmeshed in the critical discussion surrounding her commitment to precision. It is part of a tendency, amongst some critics, to align this image of Moore with the notion of her as a 'fussy' poet, one whose accuracy is often represented as verging on the 'relentless'.[7] My own research into Moore's animal poems, or 'animiles' as Moore terms them, has questioned both the notion of Moore's animals as symbols and also as purely scientific specimens. Instead, the first chapter of my critical thesis uses the display techniques of the diorama as a means of exploring the ways in which Moore employs a different observational method in her work. Rather than reading the subject of Moore's poems of this period as if they are themselves inanimate scientific specimens, the chapter makes a case for reading Moore's subject matter as the result of dynamic evolution.

My discussion of the influence of Darwinian thinking on Moore's poetry also goes beyond her depiction of the animal kingdom in her poems. A preoccupation with evolution as an active principle in Moore's poetics has become central to my critical work. My research has looked into the ways in which evolutionary thinking has been absorbed into Moore's use of form, investigating how this thinking has impacted Moore's poetic process. This is most apparent in the discussion of Moore's career-long tendency towards extensive revisions to her work. Andrew Kappel has

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[5] Randall Jarrell, 'Her Shield,' in *No Other Book: Selected Essays,* ed. Brad Leithauser (New York: HarperCollins, 1999); Ann Struthers, 'Marianne Moore's use of Grace in "The Pangolin,"' in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1990).

[6] Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 66; Margaret Holley, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987).

[7] Critics such as Cecire have observed this tendency among some Moore scholars, as she notes in Cecire, 'Marianne Moore's Precision,' 84.

provided one of the first in-depth studies of Moore's revisions, construing these excisions as a process of whittling away in the service of revealing a final 'core' poem hidden beneath all the unwanted excess.[8] Revision is thus conceived by Kappel as part of Moore's commitment to precision, a process which pursues a final, precise and complete revised text.[9] Robin Schulze, however, has read Moore's revisions alongside her interest in Darwinian evolution, and encourages readers to interpret Moore's texts as 'evolving' entities.[10] Schulze makes a case for a new interpretative literature—one which reads Moore's revisions as mobile and dynamic responses to their changing contexts. She argues, 'Moore, I would argue, did not "perfect" her poems in a teleological quest for an abstract ideal. She adapted them in response to her changing social, cultural, and textual circumstances'.[11] My own work in my second chapter, therefore, closely engages with Schulze's conception of Moore's practice of revision, looking at the ways in which evolution can challenge the reader's conception of Moore's revised poems as authoritative, singular, finalised and complete entities.

The critical thesis is structured according to chronology. The first chapter focuses on Moore's 'animiles' poems of the 1930s, in her collection *The Pangolin and Other Animals.* The second chapter looks at Moore's revisions, which became a more frequent part of Moore's practice in the latter half of her career, in her two collections: *Collected Poems* of 1951 and *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* of 1967. The chronological structure of the thesis allows for a comparison between the middle and later periods of Moore's career; it attempts to show the reader how Moore's involvement with the museum and ideas of evolution was established, and then developed, between these two periods. The decision to dedicate the thesis to these two specific time periods has largely been dictated by my own archival research into Moore's interaction with the AMNH. I have undertaken two extended trips to The Marianne Moore Collection, housed at The Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, USA.[12] These visits to the archive have allowed me to scour

[8] Andrew J. Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions: The Text of Marianne Moore's Complete Poems,' in *Representing Modern Texts: Editing as Interpretation,* ed. George Bernstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
[9] Ibid.
[10] Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism'.
[11] Ibid., 299.
[12] A third trip to The Rosenbach Museum and Library had been planned in order to research some of the content of my second chapter. However, due to the lockdown and travel restrictions imposed in

Moore's correspondence, lecture notes and reading diaries for evidence of her trips to the AMNH, as well as enabling me to get a better sense of what enticed Moore to the museum. My findings indicated overwhelming biographical evidence that Moore's visits to the AMNH intensified in 1932, the period during which Moore wrote the poems in *The Pangolin and Other Animals*. It thus seemed pertinent to focus my first chapter on this period of Moore's career. I had initially envisaged that the thesis would consist of three chapters, rather than the current two, with a first chapter that looked closely at Moore's early career exploring the poems in her collection *Observations*. However, due to the constraints of space, such an investigation seemed beyond the scope of this thesis and much of that material has been distilled into the two core chapters where appropriate or remain to be developed in the future.

The poems I have, subsequently, selected as the main focus of each chapter are those where Moore's interest in Darwinian evolution is most clearly expressed. In the first chapter, I have focused on Moore's two poems 'Bird-Witted' and 'The Pangolin' both of which centre around living creatures which, in the case of 'The Pangolin', Moore researched on her trips to the AMNH. In the second chapter, I have chosen two poems, 'The Frigate Pelican' and 'Poetry', which are both known to have been heavily revised by Moore throughout her career. This gives the reader a vivid sense of the extensive and dramatic nature of Moore's revisions at this point in her writing life. In each chapter I have been careful to choose texts which are grounded in lively critical discourse, so that I may also better engage in the critical landscape surrounding each poem.

I have sought to provide a cultural, biographical and critical background to the works discussed in both chapters, thus framing my own critical readings of Moore's poems within their relevant contexts. Each chapter also provides a sample of Moore's work for which I have provided an in-depth interpretation. This method of close-reading has been deployed to acknowledge how deeply evolutionary perspectives have entered into the form of Moore's individual poems. This can be discerned through close attention to Moore's use of metaphor, analogy and shifts in perspective. I have also found that as I looked into the detail and verbal nuance of

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response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been unable to make this trip to the archive. The impact this has had on my research is also discussed in a footnote in my second chapter.

the poems, I was directed out towards the wider questions that Moore's work raises about art and nature, the mechanic and the organic, precision and feeling.

Inevitably, a thesis of this kind raises the question as to what influence my study of Moore may have had on my own work as a poet. Having spent the past four years reading Moore's poems closely, I have found much in Moore's work of profound significance, and her thoughts on poetic practice and composition have unquestionably impacted my own. Moore's formulation of the poem as a forum which encourages a particular kind of precise, close observation has been particularly influential. My poems have tried to explore the poetic potential of this act of observation, often envisaging the poem as a frame through which the object may be viewed with a steady and unwavering gaze. Moore's notion of precision has also been illuminating in this context. It has alerted me to the possibility that poetic precision resides in a dynamic tension: between the desire for accuracy when representing an object faithfully, and, crucially, the ability to harness the poem's potential to create the conditions for imaginative transformations—what Moore might call 'the lion's leap'.[13] As such, in my own work, I have been particularly alert to the poem's capacity to transform familiar objects into something unfamiliar and strange when they are placed under the scrutiny of the poem's observational lens. I have always tried to keep this tension between exactitude and the role of the imagination active in the process of writing my poems, and I have found this to be an enriching approach.

Moore's notions of the poem as an organic, morphing and evolving entity which requires time, a dedication to the continual process of trial and error, as well as a certain amount of fortitude and endurance on the part of the poet, has been a source of comfort during the inevitable moments of doubt and frustration which the process of writing a collection of poems can produce. Moore's configuring of the poetic process as a dynamic struggle between the two dual forces of instinctive 'feeling' and 'natural reticence' has also been illuminating for my own practice.[14] It has made me all the more acutely aware that the process of writing a poem is not an exercise in controlled stability. Rather, it is a process which must be open to incident and risk, a process which is continually balanced between the expansive possibilities

[13] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 499.
[14] Moore introduces these terms in: Marianne Moore, 'Feeling and Precision'. These terms are discussed at length in the second chapter of this thesis.

of the imagination—Moore's 'running panther of desire'[15]—and the forces which seek to solidify and contract these possibilities into precise language. As such, I have learnt to be mindful of the need to open up my own writing practice to these expansive spaces, to be more tolerant of their uncertain nature, and to be aware that the process is one which is always ongoing. My hope is that my attitude towards my work as a poet is all the more resilient for it.

[15] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 504.

# Critical Section

## Chapter One

### ‘Another armored animal’: The Natural History Diorama, Evolution and Poetic Form in Marianne Moore’s ‘Animiles’ Poems of the 1930s

In the summer of 1934 Marianne Moore wrote to T. S. Eliot as part of their continued correspondence in preparation for the publication of Moore’s *Selected Poems* by Faber and Faber in 1935. In this letter Moore responded to Eliot’s editorial suggestion to open the volume with Moore’s most recent poems—many of which, like the ‘The Frigate Pelican’ and ‘The Buffalo’, were concerned with animals. Moore welcomed the proposal saying, ‘[Y]our congregation of animiles at the front is wiley in the extreme’.[1] The term ‘wiley’ suggests a cunning proposal on Eliot’s part: the notion that to introduce Moore’s new volume with a ‘congregation’ of poems pertaining to animals, would inevitably capture the attention of more readers. This collective title ‘animiles’ could readily be applied to the majority of Moore’s poems written between 1932-1936. Most poems from this period portray a varied cast of creatures—from buffalos to pangolins, butterflies, and other creatures. Yet this term also wittily hints at another recurring preoccupation of Moore’s poems of this era: the nature of the representation of animals in art. It also introduces the idea that the animal in the poem becomes a poetic trope of a special kind: a trope which relies not merely on simile—although the term ‘animile’ plays on that association—nor metaphor, but rather something new.

A preoccupation with the natural world had been a long-standing feature of Moore’s work—her poems of the 1910s and 1920s included a number of dramatic monologues where the poet took on the persona of a rat in ‘Dock Rats’ or an elephant in ‘Black Earth’. She also wrote poems dedicated to various natural phenomena, such as the rose in ‘Roses Only’ or the chameleon in ‘You Are Like the Realistic Product of an Idealist Search for Gold at the End of the Rainbow’. However, Moore’s poems of the 1930s largely dispensed with the ode or dramatic monologue, as well as the wide assemblage of diverse voices in collections such as Moore’s 1924 collection *Observations*. Instead, the focal frame of the animiles poems is contracted, moving inward towards a pared down depiction of a central

[1] Marianne Moore to T. S. Eliot, July 2, 1934, V:17:25, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

relationship: between poet and subject matter, between man and beast, between art and nature. It is this relationship which the poems of Moore's 1936 collection *The Pangolin and Other Verse* published by The Brendin Publishing Co. in Britain are chiefly concerned with.[2]

Critics have been divided on the complex, and, at times, problematic, nature of these relationships. Jeredith Merrin and Andrew Kappel read Moore's representations of animals as symbolic, interpreting Moore's depiction of the natural world as evidence of her Presbyterianism and her subsequent tendency to read nature as part of divine purpose.[3] Others, such as Ann Struthers in her reading of 'The Pangolin', see the animal in Moore's work as emblematic of a lesson in morality waiting to be unearthed.[4] In a similar vein, some read Moore's collection of 'animiles' as extended representations of the poet herself: Victoria Bazin labels Moore's animal poems as 'self-portraits' and Randall Jarrell interprets Moore's pangolin as an elaborate—if repressed and concealed—depiction of the writer and her process.[5] In either case, the animal is perceived as being deployed by the poet as a means of conveying some deeper meaning.

Other critics, however, dispute the notion of Moore's animals as poetic symbols. These critics instead pick up on Moore's espousal of the role of objective observer in her work, linking this to Moore's career-long interest in natural history and the biological sciences. Bonnie Costello and Margaret Holley read Moore's technique of observation as a pursuit of facts and a commitment to what Costello terms 'literary accuracy'.[6] Holley takes this assertion a step further, relating Moore's

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[2] Many of the poems which first appeared in *The Pangolin and Other Verse* were later re-published in America by Macmillan in Moore's 1941 collection *What Are Years*.

[3] Jeredith Merrin, *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Uses of Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990); Andrew J. Kappel, 'Notes on the Presbyterian Poetry of Marianne Moore,' in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1990).

[4] Ann Struthers, 'Marianne Moore's use of Grace in "The Pangolin,"' in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1990).

[5] Victoria Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 154; Randall Jarrell, 'Her Shield,' in *No Other Book: Selected Essays,* ed. Brad Leithauser (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

[6] Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 66; Margaret Holley, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987). This pursuit of the factual bears a notable relation to the Objectivist movement. The poet Louis Zukofsky coined the term 'Objectivist' in the February 1931 edition of *Poetry,* for which he was a guest editor, the magazine also included his essay 'Sincerity and Objectification' which served as a kind of manifesto for the movement. The ethos of Objectivism was founded on two principles: the first was that of sincerity, whereby the poet might produce detailed unadorned writing which was true to 'things as they exist' and which was often delivered with an economy of style, as discussed in

technique of observation to her repudiation of the more personal usage of the lyric 'I' in her work.[7] This shift, Holley argues, is part of a wider trend in Moore's poems of this period—a 'push toward a radical objectivity', as she terms it [8]—and an invocation of an 'objective embodiment'.[9] Such an embodiment owes much to the observational practices of scientific methodology originating in 19th century positivist thought. This approach through the observation of natural phenomena was based on the premise that an ideal scientific observer was able to see phenomena lucidly and objectively from a detached perspective, without the prism of subjectivity corrupting their vision.[10] Critics who place Moore in the role of scientific observer read this as an attempt to get closer to a realistic representation of the animal as it is.

However, some of these critical interpretations, while reading Moore as an objective observer, also at times tend to cast the poet in the role of, what Dancy Mason terms, a 'scientific humanist'.[11] This implies a fastidious mind whose primary interest in the animal world is as a scientific specimen, available to further advance human knowledge. The implication is that Moore's commitment to scientific realism means that she is unable to see the animal as anything other than an object for study. Mason illustrates this point by quoting R.P. Blackmur's unflattering comparison of Moore's animiles with D.H. Lawrence's animal poems, stating that: '[I]n Lawrence you feel you have touched the plasm; in Miss Moore you feel you have escaped and come to the idea. The other life is there, but it is round the corner, not so much taken

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Louis Zukofsky, 'Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff,' *POETRY* 37*,* no. 5 (1931): 273. The second principle of Objectivism was described by Zukofsky as a 'rested totality', and this totality was based on: 'the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity – in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure'. Zukofsky, 'Sincerity and Objectification,' 274. In paying sincere attention to their subject matter, the poet is thus able to produce work which has the quality of an object-like structure in the mind of the reader. Moore had published the work of Objectivist poet William Carlos Williams in *The Dial* during her time as editor, and she also corresponded with Zukofsky. For an exploration of the relationship between the Objectivists and Moore's poetry see: Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 77-78, 80-81.

[7] Holley, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore,* x.

[8] Ibid., 83.

[9] Ibid., x.

[10] The positivists'—a term coined by August Comte in the 1820s—definition of observation had its roots in the work of Sir Francis Bacon and David Hume. There is also a link here, as discussed in n.6, between Moore and her response to Objectivism. For more on the role of the observer in positivist scientific study see: Alfred I. Tauber, 'From Descartes' Dream to Husserl's Nightmare,' in *The Elusive Synthesis: Aesthetics and Science* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997).

[11] Dancy Mason, '"Another armored animal": Modernist Prosthesis and Marianne Moore's Posthumanist Animiles,' *Feminist Modern Studies* 1, no. 3 (2018): 319.

for granted as...not allowed to transpire'.[12] The inference that the 'other life' is relegated 'round the corner', seems to place Moore again in the role of the cold and meticulous observer, peering at the specimen as if through the lens of a microscope. In so doing, Moore's animals, far from being organic and dynamic natural creatures, become bloodless objects: stilled, fixed and dead.

The issue with these multiple threads of critical debate is that they nearly all ultimately end up rendering Moore's animals as little more than symbolic representations, albeit with different incentives. Whether as literary symbols or as scientific specimens, Moore's creatures are presented in the critical literature as tokens, there to act either as a religious or moral allegory, as a symbol of the poet, or as a mechanism for the advancement of the poet's scientific understanding. In each case, it is the poet who is placed in a position of dominance. Yet to read Moore's depiction of animals in this vein seems to misinterpret the crucial role of the discipline of natural history—and the debates taking place within the discipline at the time—in Moore's interactions with natural phenomena. I do not mean to dispute Moore's adoption of the role of objective observer in her animiles poems of this period. Indeed, many of these poems begin with Moore in this very guise: looking on from a distance at animals in their natural habitats. Yet I believe Moore's engagement with natural phenomena is born out of a respect and curiosity with the evolved and evolving natural world, an approach which is mirrored in Moore's poems. Moore's intensified interest in the animal as a product of Darwinian evolution is echoed in her engagement with natural history exhibits at this time, in particular her interest in the diorama displays at American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). I intend to read Moore's representations of animals alongside the museum's own attempts at incorporating the animal as a specimen of Darwinian evolution into their display methodology. While the diorama still posits the specimen as an immobile entity, I intend to highlight the ways in which the diorama juxtaposes immobility with mobility, artifice with realism, along with the ways in which Moore replicates and plays with these contrasts in her own work. Ultimately, this chapter intends to illustrate an important strand in Moore's representations of the animal

[12] R. P. Blackmur, 'The Method of Marianne Moore,' in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 85, quoted in Mason, '"Another armored animal,"' 319.

world which has hitherto been overlooked by critics such as Blackmur: her refusal to allow her subject matter to be distilled into a symbol. In other words, the focus is on Moore's attentiveness to, what Andrew M. Lakritz terms, animals' 'irreducibility'.[13] Such attentiveness ultimately, I argue, means that—as Robin Schulze comments in her work on Moore's representations of animals—'somehow or other, Moore's animals remain animals'.[14]

## *'Man is by no means the master of anything': Marianne Moore and the American Museum of Natural History*

During the 1930s Moore's poetic output increased dramatically—she produced nineteen new pieces in the years between 1932 through to 1936—but this period had been preceded and was to be succeeded by two prolonged periods of dormancy. Moore's appointment to the role of editor-in-chief of *The Dial* from 1925-29, following the resignation of her friend Scofield Thayer who had decided to take a more secondary role on the magazine's board, had left her little extra time to spend on her poetry. This was part of a seven-year long hiatus during which Moore produced no new work. This prolonged period of silence was matched in 1936 for a further four years until Moore began preparation for the 1941 publication of her collection *What Are Years,* in which many of the poems from *The Pangolin and Other Verse* are reprinted. What, we might ask, brought on such a period of creativity during the years of 1932-1936?

One answer might lie in Moore's visits to the AMNH. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Moore's intensified return to her poetic endeavors coincided with the increasing frequency of her visits to the museum. Moore's family correspondence from this time is replete with numerous references to her multiple trips to the museum, in particular during the last six months of 1932 when Moore recounts her visits in her letters to her brother, Warner, on a monthly, and at times weekly, basis.[15] Ostensibly, Moore went to the museum in order to gather

[13] Andrew M. Lakritz, 'Marianne Moore's Animal Poems,' in *Modernism and the Other in Stevens, Frost, and Moore* (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1996), 128.
[14] Robin Schulze, 'Marianne Moore's "Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish" and the Poetry of the Natural World,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 44, no. 1 (1998): 5.
[15] See: Family Correspondence, June 1932: VI: 31: 26; July 1932: VI: 31: 29; December 1932: VI: 31: 34, Rosenbach.

information on the habits of the animal-life that made up the subject matter of her 'animiles' poems. In a letter dated July 19, 1932 to her brother, Moore recounts her visit to the museum library where she went to learn more about the jerboa, for her poem 'The Jerboa' published later that year.[16] Her journey to the library through the museum halls is, however, waylaid by the wildlife she finds therein, and these encounters are subsequently related in the majority of the correspondence. Moore writes at length about these wildlife displays, describing with particular detail a number of dioramas which were, at the time, housed in the Hall of Amphibians and Reptiles. The subjects of these dioramas include the basilisk— 'bright green with 8 bands on the tail and three plumes'—the Komodo dragon and a diorama featuring a cobra with a vigilant mongoose looking on.[17] What is clear from Moore's descriptions is that while the museum was utilised as a repository of information, it also represented more than this: it was a site of inspiration and Moore's letters are a testament to the manner in which its halls and displays provided a creative influence. This is particularly the case with the habitat dioramas, which are referenced at length in Moore's correspondence, and which were increasingly becoming a major part of the museum's displays during this period.

The 1920s and 1930s have been described as a golden age for American natural history museums. In the nation's largest cities, natural history museums had annually attracted about 10,000,000 visitors.[18] By the 1930s the museum had moved away from the outmoded style of taxonomic display cabinets towards the more spectacular and crowd-pleasing habitat dioramas. These dioramas became the jewel in the crown of the natural history museums' exhibition halls, drawing large audiences and generating much press coverage. The AMNH was at the forefront of these new exhibits, which became ever more a feature of the museum's display mode. The first examples of these dioramas originated in the habitat groups seen in the Chapman Hall of American Birds, created by the ornithologist and curator of mammals and birds Frank Chapman between 1898 and 1909.[19] This culminated

[16] Family Correspondence, VI: 31: 29, Rosenbach.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Karen A. Rader and Victoria E. M. Cain, 'From Natural History to Science: Display and the Transformation of American Museums of Science and Nature,' *Museum and Society* 6, no. 2 (2008): 154.
[19] Karen Wonders discusses the difference between the habitat group and the diorama noting that the habitat group is a life-size representation of the animal's habitat, whereas the diorama presents that habitat in miniature. One of the further key differences she highlights is also one of veracity: the habitat group is intended to as a true-to-life representation, whereas the diorama is imaginative. In

years later in the ambitious Akeley Hall of African Mammals in 1936. To this day, these displays remain one of the AMNH's most popular attractions.

The introduction of the new display technique of the diorama points to a wider shift in the intellectual climate surrounding natural history and the museum's espousal of the ideas of Darwinian evolution. At the turn of the century the AMNH's predominant display technique was that of the Linnaean taxonomic system for classification. Such displays were influenced by the neo-Lamarckist conception of evolution and tended to show the specimen as part of an ordered, unified and pre-designed scheme which adhered to the principle that nature was part of an essential order ranked according to God's plan. As Stephen Jay Gould—who himself worked at the AMNH—notes, the version of evolution displayed by the hierarchy of the taxonomic system is based on, what he calls, 'the cone of diversity' and as such is inconsistent with Darwin's principle of evolution.[20] The construction of this kind of taxonomic system seeks to rank creatures by their worth. This worth was determined, Gould notes, by 'assumed complexity, or relative nearness to humans', thus undermining Darwinian evolution for, as Gould goes on to say, '[I]n Darwin's world, all (as survivors in a tough game) have some claim to equal status'.[21] The dioramas of the 1920s and 1930s thus shifted away from taxonomic display, instead—in a striking resemblance to Moore's poems of this period—focusing the frame of observation inward onto the relationship of the singular specimen, or group of specimens, to its local immediate habitat. This shift encapsulates the Darwinian conception of adaptation as a defining feature in the livelihood of the individual—both man and animal alike—within its immediate environment. William Morton Wheeler, the curator of invertebrate zoology at the AMNH from 1903-1908, noted that 'an organism cannot be isolated, even conceptually, from the peculiar environment to which it has become adapted during eons of geologic time, without a serious misunderstanding of its true nature'.[22] For all that the diorama format portrayed a frozen scene, it nevertheless also portrayed dynamic, responsive evolution. As such, it focused on the isolated moment in which the individual

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Karen Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas: Illusions of Wilderness in Museums of Natural History* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1993), 15. This chapter will be chiefly concerned with the diorama.

[20] Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990), 38.

[21] Ibid., 42.

[22] William Morton Wheeler, 'Carl Akeley's Early Work and Environment,' *Natural History* 27, no. 2 (1927): 141.

organism attempts to survive within its local habitat, often depicting scenes of confrontation, such as an animal protecting its young from the threat of an intruder. Yet it also focused on another encounter: the encounter of man with the animal world on, ostensibly at least, the premise of equality. Gould discusses this change in his essay on the rise of the Victorian aquarium, where he observes that:

> We always draw such scenes in their "natural" orientation today: in the "eye-to-eye" or edge-on view, where a human observer sees marine life from within—that is, as if he were underwater with the creatures depicted, and therefore watching them at their own level.[23]

The same could be said of the diorama: that it transitions from the display cabinet where man can view all of life, looking on from a position of authority, to a more 'levelled' approach, where man and animal can exchange glances 'eye-to-eye'. That said, the perspective is not one where man is placed into a position of competition with the animal kingdom or, indeed, in a position where the animal kingdom competes with man.

The introduction of dioramas at the AMNH was the result of years of reform by the so-called 'museum men' who had urged natural history museums to rethink the way they engaged with their audiences.[24] These reformers believed that at the core of the museum's philosophy should be a drive towards educating the masses on the values of the natural world in a more accessible and playful manner. As Chapman observed, 'the aimless involuntary visitor pauses…His imagination is stirred, his interests aroused, and the way is open for him to receive the facts the exhibit is intended to convey'.[25] The tantalising visual effect of the diorama on the viewer's imagination was seen as the first stage towards the acquisition of knowledge. As such the diorama stood uninterrupted, didactic information such as

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[23] Stephen Jay Gould, 'Seeing Eye to Eye, Through A Glass Clearly,' in *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1998), 65.

[24] The term 'museum men' is used by Radar and Cain to describe the museum reformers of the late 1800s and early 1900s. These men included, amongst others, Frank Chapman of the AMNH. Radar and Cain discuss the nature of the work of these reformers and their impact on the changing ethos of the natural history museum. Karen A. Rader & Victoria E. M. Cain, *Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2014), 55.

[25] Frank Chapman, *Autobiography of a Bird-Lover* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1933), 166.

charts, maps and diagrams were restricted in size and placed unobtrusively beside the diorama, so as to preserve its visual impact.

The taxidermic specimen would take centre stage in the diorama surrounded by local flora and fauna made from artificial materials such as wax or fabric and set against an elaborate backdrop painted, often by landscape artists, directly on to the curved so-called 'dead wall' behind. Stage lighting techniques were also used to give an added sense of realism. The diorama unashamedly blended the disciplines of science and art, nature and artifice, employing these artistic methods in order to narrate a scene akin to something one might more readily find on a theatrical stage set. The premise of the diorama's dramatic effect on audiences was dependent upon its ability to convey the realism of the scene depicted. The diorama artist's intention was to imitate the natural world so exactly that the viewer would be unaware of the artist's hand—encouraged into ignoring the fact that the scene was, in reality, artificial. James Perry Wilson, one of the most highly respected diorama painters of the time, described his work's purpose with the Latin motto *ars celare artem,* 'art to conceal art'.[26] Karen Wonders in her extensive exploration of the diorama places its display methods in the context of the pre-modernist pictorial premise of representation in art—that the image would transport the viewer, without question, to the time and place it represented.[27] She writes that diorama was intended to 'make an invisible transition between an objective sculptural and architectural space and the subjective two-dimensional space of the pictorial surface, thereby recreating for the spectator the spatial sensation of a distant panoramic landscape'.[28] The effectiveness of the diorama thus depended upon the audience's interaction with these three-dimensional constructions as windows into the natural world. Carl Akeley, a pioneer of the diorama during this time, called his display cases 'a peep-hole into the jungle', and as such the expectation was that city-dwelling audiences could be transported to a wilderness of evolutionary struggle.[29]

Yet for all of the diorama's attempts at displaying the drama and realism of the wild, there is still a plain difference between the diorama and the 'real' scene it

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[26] Quoted in Stephen C. Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), 12.
[27] Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*.
[28] Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas,* 226.
[29] Akeley to Osborn, 29 March 1911, quoted in Donna Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,' *Social Text,* no. 2 (1984-1985): 24.

depicts: animals in their natural contexts, of course, move—and therefore it is difficult to see them in detail; in the diorama, however, they are stilled, frozen in time, and therefore more easily observed. In fact, movement in the diorama is inverted from its natural context: rather than the animal observed, it is the *observer* who moves freely around the museum hall. Gregg Mitman has explored the growing importance of the film camera as a tool of observation amongst natural history researchers at the time.[30] He describes the camera as an instrument which facilitated so-called 'mechanical objectivity', and is subsequently linked with the diorama.[31] As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison argue, the machine offered the scientific observer a 'pure' image that was 'uncontaminated by interpretation' and thus 'free from the inner temptation to theorize, anthropomorphize, beautify, or interpret nature. What the human observer could achieve only by iron self-discipline, the machine effortlessly accomplished.'[32] Mitman notes that the diorama and the camera attempted to achieve the same goal of objective 'mechanical' observation.[33] In the case of the diorama, this is achieved by the inert nature of the specimen alongside the detachment of the viewer, looking at the static scene through a pane of glass.[34]

At the time of Moore's visits to the AMNH there was a growing concern that the diorama, with all its attempts at realism, was not sufficiently able to capture the essential elements of the creature in its natural habitat. The Hall of Amphibians and Reptiles, which Moore describes visiting in some depth in her correspondences of

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[30] Gregg Mitman 'Cinematic Nature: Hollywood Technology, Popular Culture, and the American Museum of Natural History,' *Isis* 84, no. 4 (1993).
[31] Mitman 'Cinematic Nature,' 640.
[32] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 139.
[33] Mitman 'Cinematic Nature,' 640.
[34] However, the static nature of the specimen has also been problematised in the diorama. Writing about the Akeley Hall of African Mammals in the AMNH, the social critic Donna Haraway states that in the hall the animals: 'have transcended mortal life, and hold their pose forever, with muscles tensed, noses aquiver, veins in the face and delicate ankles and folds in the supple skin all prominent'. Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy,' 25. Each stationary composition is, as Haraway states, a window onto 'knowledge', but the real question the diorama poses is: whose knowledge? Haraway, 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy,' 21. In response, Haraway offers the answer that the display method of the dioramas, despite its attempt to encompass Darwinian evolution, ultimately ends up retreating to the taxonomic concept of nature as hierarchy. Haraway interprets this hierarchy as one of race and gender, as well as the implied supreme progress of humanity placing nature at the bottom of the scale. Haraway illuminates the complexity of the diorama's objective to replicate 'mechanical objectivity' in the form of a static exhibit, and the risk that such a display runs of ultimately reproducing the very hierarchical structures of taxonomic display the diorama was created to disrupt. While Haraway's discussion provides a compelling critique of the highly problematic nature of the representational methods of the habitat diorama, for the purposes of this argument my main focus centres around the diorama as an innovative museological display method and Moore's interaction with the museum technique at this time.

1932, was at the centre of this debate and was one of the most playful and innovative diorama halls of its time .[35] Gladwyn Kingsley Noble, director of experimental biology at the AMNH, had become increasingly aware of the need to make the dioramas more engaging and dynamic to visitors. He, alongside his trustee William Douglas Burden, started to introduce film into the halls with the view to, as he put it, make it 'possible to reproduce with startling realism the most beautiful scenes in nature'.[36] Existing displays such as the Komodo dragon diorama thus incorporated pieces of film shot during a 1926 expedition to Indonesia.[37] These films were generally projected onto a wall flanking the diorama. The projections showed the animals in action in their natural habitat, and Moore references these films in her correspondence.[38] In showing the animal in movement, the idea of the footage was to add another layer of visual information to the experience by juxtaposing the still specimen with its 'real', active state. This display technique—in some senses a forerunner of the art installation—introduced into museum halls the notion that there can be a variety of different ways of representing the specimen within the same space. The specimen can be presented as both static and mobile, it can be apprehended within an artificial landscape and the 'real' natural world.

The linkage between the diorama and the film camera during this time has been made by many scholars.[39] While most might readily associate the motion picture with Hollywood entertainment, the first motion pictures were, in fact, developed as scientific tools for the analysis and observation of animals in the wild.[40] Critics such as Scott MacDonald have subsequently interpreted the diorama as a forerunner of television, reading the scene of the diorama as if it were a freeze-frame of a movie scene.[41] The juxtaposition, therefore, of the immobile specimen in

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[35] See: Family Correspondence, VI: 31: 29, Rosenbach.
[36] Gladwyn Kingsley Noble, 'Reptiles and Amphibians,' *American Museum of Natural History: Annual Report of the President* 59 (1927): 60-61.
[37] For more information on the installation of this film see: Mitman 'Cinematic Nature,' 642.
[38] Family Correspondence, VI: 31: 29, Rosenbach.
[39] For more information on this relationship see: Mitman 'Cinematic Nature'; and Scott MacDonald, *The Sublimity of Document: Cinema as Diorama* (Oxford: OUP, 2019).
[40] Mitman discusses the work of French physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey who invented the chronophotographic gun in 1882 in order to study birds in flight. In America during this period, Eadweard Muybridge also produced a photographic sequence of horses in motion by using multiple cameras with electronic shutters. In addition, the advent of the 16mm film, along with ever more lightweight equipment, also meant that the use of film in field trips was increasingly being used as a research tool for the scientific community during this period. The AMNH's Carl Akeley often used film during research trips and even created his own camera—the Akeley camera in the 1930s. As discussed in: Mitman, 'Cinematic Nature,' 639.
[41] MacDonald, *The Sublimity of Document,* 8.

the Hall of Amphibians and Reptiles alongside footage of the mobile animal in its natural habitat adds further emphasis to this linkage. The diorama, although an essentially static composition, nonetheless incorporates a sense of organic movement, a movement which has been in some way suspended. Thus, specimens are presented as poised as if on the verge of movement. The installation of film footage, by providing a point of contrast, enhances this sense of suspended movement in the diorama, inviting an imaginative leap between the two modes of representation. What is important, therefore, is the relationship between these different modes.

These new presentational styles absorb Moore when she encounters the dioramas on her visits to the Hall of Amphibians and Reptiles. What is perhaps most striking about her retelling of these visits is the dynamism of the language in which the animals displayed are described. Far from static specimens in a museum case, these animals are endowed with a quality of activity. Moore writes, for example, of the basilisk diorama and how the creatures are caught in mid-movement:

> they plane down through the air, lighting on orchards or spotted leaves, and are exhibited at the museum on a nut-meg tree – one in air, suspended by a wire, and two on the orchid blossoms with the wings folded in a little, like a half closed umbrella.[42]

The verbs Moore selects in speaking of these animals celebrate them as if they are living, breathing entities: they 'plane down through the air' as if caught mid-flight and are 'lighting' on orchards. The use of the present tense further creates the vivid sense of immediacy, as if Moore were watching these lizards leaping forth in real time. Yet for all of the realism with which these creatures are endowed, Moore is still aware of these scenes as artificial compositions. In her discussion of the Komodo dragon diorama, a group of Komodo lizards are displayed 'with painted backgrounds and various logs and grasses to complete the picture'.[43] The basilisk, too, is 'exhibited at the museum on a nut-meg tree' and 'suspended by a wire'; and there is a noticeable alertness to movement 'suspended' in the retelling of the scene.

[42] Family Correspondence, VI: 31: 29, Rosenbach.
[43] Ibid.

For Moore, an awareness of the diorama's performative and artificial nature by no means impairs her enchantment with the scene's realism or dynamism—on the contrary, it seems to enrich it.

In the world of the diorama, then, opposing forces sit side-by-side: the diorama purports to represent reality and yet it does so through artifice. The specimen is lifeless and static, and yet it is also endowed with the potential for movement. While it is evident that Moore's interactions with the animal exhibits at the museum were partly motivated by an intellectual curiosity, it is also clear from her accounts that she was entranced and delighted by what she saw. Her descriptions of the exhibits at the museum depict the animals therein not merely as scientific specimens, but also as organic creatures. Moore's longstanding interest in Darwinian evolution attests to the fact that she saw the place of animal life in the natural world as being alongside that of the human. As she wrote in a letter of 1932 to the American philosopher Professor Irwin Edman in response to an article in *FORUM*, where he states that man is the master of all things, 'science informs us, man is by no means the master of anything'.[44] This scientific principle, which reads animal and mankind as equals, is apparent in Moore's work of this period. How then did the diorama, with its multiple modes of representation, influence Moore's representation of animals in her work? What effect, if any, did Moore's engagement with the AMNH at this time have on Moore's attentiveness to the animal's 'irreducibility'[45] in her 'animiles' poems?

## *'Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure'*: *The Role of the 'Mechanic' and the 'Organic' in Moore's Use of Syllabics*

After experimenting with the free-verse form in longer poems such as 'An Octopus' and 'Marriage'—both of which appeared in *Observations* in 1924—Moore returned to the syllabic stanza in her poems of *The Pangolin and Other Verse*. This syllabic form was previously deployed in poems such as 'Critics and Connoisseurs' (1916) and others of the 1910s. Rather than using a regular metric structure, based on a system of stresses, Moore's poems of the 1930s are largely made up of stanzas

[44] Family Correspondence, December 1932, VI: 31: 34, Rosenbach.
[45] Lakritz, 'Marianne Moore's Animal Poems,' 128.

arranged according to a pattern of syllabics. This syllabically measured stanza is replicated throughout the course of the poem, often with an unaccented rhyme scheme also threaded in and duplicated throughout. The question as to why Moore chose to revive the syllabic stanzaic structure as part of her animiles series, thus moving away from both the traditional metric pattern and the more experimental use of free verse, has been central to interpretations of Moore's work of this period.

In Moore's reading diaries of the 1930s there is a recurrent interest in the work of the 19th century American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly his writings about nature and poetic principles.[46] Moore quoted extensively from the 1926 article 'Emerson's Organic Principle in Art' by the American critic Norman Foester.[47] In this essay, Foester discusses Emerson's assertion that the objects of the natural world are symbols of thought suffused with divine power; he remarks, 'the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind.'[48] Foester develops Emerson's so-called 'organic principle' of artistic form, setting it against its opposite, the 'mechanic' form, associated with the work of Edgar Allen Poe.[49] In illustrating the tension between the two terms, he quotes the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who also espoused the idea of the 'organic principle' in art. In a quote Moore copied into her reading notebook, he suggested:

> The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material – as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form.[50]

The 'organic' principle Emerson and Coleridge put forward invokes a more mobile process than that of the 'mechanic' form, whereby the work of art grows and

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[46] Emerson is mentioned extensively in Moore's two reading notebooks from this period: Reading Notebook 1250/18 1938-1942, VI: 02: 03, Rosenbach; Reading Notebook 1914-1932, VII: 03: 07, Rosenbach.
[47] Moore quotes Foester in Reading Notebook, VI: 02: 03, Rosenbach.
[48] Norman Foester, *American Criticism: A Study of Literary Theory from Poe to the Present* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1928), 61.
[49] Foester, *American Criticism,* 64.
[50] Reading Notebook, VI: 02: 03, Rosenbach.

develops tree-like from the inner, innate properties of the material of which the work of art is made; here the exterior appearance and the organic material work in harmony to create a 'perfect' form. The 'mechanic', on the other hand, imposes a more static preordained form, moulding the matter of the work of art to fit its overarching rules of design and pattern.

The difference between these two terms also extends to the authority of the writer over their material. As Moore writes in her reading diary, Emerson describes this difference in his *Journals* as 'the difference between the carpenter who makes a box, and the mother who bears a child. The box was all in the carpenter; but the child was not all in the parents.'[51] In the 'mechanic' conception the writer is placed in a clear position of authorial control over their work. Their work bears their mark as a made object, and thus the work of art and the artist are intimately connected. The 'organic' principle, however, implies the importance of other factors which play a role in the creation of the work of art, dictating the shape and nature of the finished product. For Emerson, as for Coleridge, this factor was the presence of the divine for which the writer was a conduit, and the resulting work of art is thus endowed with wonder.[52]

It would be tempting to read Moore's use of syllabics as a solely artificial construct; indeed, any reader who has taken up the arduous task of methodically counting each syllable per line throughout Moore's poems might readily attest to the mechanical nature of the endeavour. Some critics have gone even further and read Moore's deployment of syllabics as an act verging on the fussy or even the obsessional—further evidence of the poet's unwavering dedication to precision in her work.[53] Yet Moore's use of syllabics is more complex; in an interview with Donald Hall for *The Paris Review* in 1961, Moore was asked whether or not she ever planned her stanzas. Her response is revealing:

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[51] Reading Notebook, VI: 02: 03, Rosenbach. A similar distinction was also developed by R. G. Collingwood in his 1938 work *The Principles of Art*, in this work, however, the distinction is developed into a contrast between art and craft. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938).

[52] This idea is also taken up by M. H. Abrams. Abrams reads literature before the Romantics as a 'mirror' reflecting the real world. For the Romantics, however, literature was a 'lamp' with the light of the writer's soul illuminating the world. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: OUP, 1953).

[53] Natalia Cecire makes this point in her study Moore's use of precision. Natalia Cecire, 'Marianne Moore's Precision,' *Arizona Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2011): 103.

> Never. I never "plan" a stanza. Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure. I may influence an arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first. Spontaneous initial originality – say, impetus – seems difficult to re-produce consciously later. As Stravinsky said about pitch, "If I transpose it for some reason, I am in danger of losing the freshness of the first contact and will have difficulty in recapturing its attractiveness."[54]

Far from a mechanical act of projecting a predefined structural pattern onto the verse then, Moore instead attributes the initial rendering of the syllabic form to a spontaneous moment of inspiration. Crucially, this inspiration arises from the material itself as if by chance. This process engages with the notion of the organic, yet it does so in a very different way to that of Emerson's notion of divine presence. Here, Moore speaks of her creative process in terms of the chromosomal and the cellular—we are told that words cluster together 'like chromosomes', as Moore puts it using the language of science. The poet's task, therefore, is to identify and select a pattern amongst the varied so-called 'chromosomes', and the poet is careful to remove her own assertive hand from this process—noting instead that she may only 'influence' the initial arrangement of words. The difficulty this practice encounters comes with the reproduction of the initial organic verse throughout the course of the poem, a process which is in danger of losing both its initial 'impetus' and its 'originality'—or as Moore puts it in quoting Stravinsky, 'the freshness of the first contact'—as it is mechanically duplicated throughout the poem.

What is evident from Moore's comments is that she envisages the syllabic stanza as having elements of both 'organic' and 'mechanic' principles. The organic is expressed in the fresh vitality of the poet's 'first contact' with the varied patterns amongst the chromosomes; the mechanical procedure is the poet's selection and duplication of those patterns which determine the poem's structure. What is clear is that this dual relationship between the organic and the mechanic, as well as the poet's compositional practice of identifying variation and selecting from it, is of keen interest to Moore at this time. In Moore's lecture notebook of 1931-1933, these

[54] Marianne Moore, interviewed by Donald Hall, 'Marianne Moore,' in *Poets at Work: The Paris Review Interviews,* ed. George Plimpton (New York: Penguin, 1989), 89.

two conflicting terms of 'mechanic' and 'organic' reappear.[55] Moore mentions her attendance at a series of lectures given by the philosopher E.G. Spaulding of Princeton University on the different ways of conceptualising the universe, both scientifically and philosophically. In one of the lectures entitled 'The Universe as a Scheme of Development', the universe's development over time is discussed in relation to the Aristotelian view of a universe which develops continuously according to the laws of order which govern its pattern of development.[56] Spaulding, in contrast, advocates a modern perspective on the universe associated with the Darwinian model of evolution, where development is conceived as a discontinuous process with various interruptions, linked here with the organic.[57] In another lecture entitled 'The Universe as a Machine', Spaulding revisits this conception but this time from the angle of the mechanic. In this interpretation evolution is depicted as a continuous process whereby everything is determined in a mode which allows for no 'freedom', much like Aristotle's conception.[58] Spaulding thus articulates the conflict between the 'mechanic' and the 'organic' as one between the preordained and the constantly, randomly, evolving. Ultimately, Spaulding comments that the relationship between the 'mechanic' and the 'organic' models of development are a preoccupation of contemporary thought, and he urges a new way of looking at these two conflicting notions, what he terms a 'dualism' whereby the two contradictory ideologies can exist in the same space and be mutually informative.[59]

While the terms 'mechanic' and 'organic' have different connotations in the evolutionary context to the literary, they provide a useful framework through which to read Moore's use of syllabic form. Darwinian evolution adds a new perspective to the concept of the organic: it introduces the idea that the way in which form emerges and evolves organically is dependent both on chance and on that form's ability to successfully adapt to its environment. The development of this idea will be taken up in my readings of the poems, as will the question, which Spaulding introduces, as to how the two terms 'mechanic' and 'organic' coexist in Moore's work. I suggest that one way of approaching this question is through the display techniques used in the diorama.

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[55] Marianne Moore Lecture Notebook 1931-1960, VII: 05: 09, Rosenbach.
[56] Lecture Notebook, VII: 05: 09, Rosenbach.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

While the diorama is a mechanical reconstruction of an organic interaction of the animal with its environment, it is also a hybrid form. This is evident from its composition which reconstructs reality using both artificial and organic components. Yet the relationship between the real and the artificial, the organic and the mechanic, is also complex in the diorama: in order to maintain the mechanical objectivity otherwise associated with the camera lens, the composition is static and the viewer is detached. This must be the case, for if the diorama is to fulfil its purpose of allowing the viewer to observe the specimen in detail then the stillness of the scene is—of course—a prerequisite. Yet this also, inescapably, highlights the artificiality of the experience. So, the diorama is not merely a mechanical form, for, while it is frozen in space and time, it also implies a previously active subject which retains a vicarious sense of the potential to once again become active, despite the interventions of the taxidermist. Moore's own interaction with the diorama attests to the fact that for any viewer peeking through the 'window' into the wild, the immobile is playfully transformed into movement, the inert into vitality. Furthermore, the intimate connection between artifice and reality, the mechanic and the organic, adds to the diorama's drama.

Catherine Paul provides one of the most extensive explorations into Moore's use of the diorama display aesthetic in her work, looking at the ways in which certain poems can be directly linked with some of the dioramas at the museum.[60] I argue, however, that the diorama's aesthetic seeps into many more of Moore's 'animiles' poems of this period than Paul attributes. The diorama's espousal of the mechanic and the organic also provides an important framework through which an understanding of Moore's use of syllabics can be deepened.

## *'The/intellectual, cautious-/l y  c r e e p i n g  c a t': Curiosity and Caution in the Observational Modes of 'Bird-Witted'*

'Bird-Witted' was first published in *The New Republic* in January 1936, before subsequently appearing in *The Pangolin and Other Verse* in the same year, later being reprinted in *What Are Years* in 1941. This poem is the second, after 'Virginia

[60] Catherine Paul, '"Discovery, Not Salvage": Marianne Moore's Curatorial Practices,' in *Poetry in the Museum of Modernism: Yeats, Pound, Moore, Stein* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

Britannica', in a series entitled 'The Old Dominion'. This group of poems are all concerned with the themes of innocence and childhood, experience and adulthood, and feature a recurring troupe of animals—most notably the mockingbird, which makes numerous appearances in most of the poems of this series.

The poem's title plays on the idea of being 'bird-brained', bringing to mind the character of the scatter-brained idiot. Yet this is also a term which (although not referred to in the 'notes' section of the collection) is taken from the work of the late-16th/early-17th century philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, whom Moore admired and wrote of extensively in her prose and reading diaries. The title refers to Bacon's comment over his fear of what misadventure might befall a boy if he be 'bird-witted'. In response Bacon points out the more positive uses of, what he terms, 'pedantical knowledge' for the young, a knowledge based on the sharpening of attention and focus as opposed to a more bird-like tendency towards digression.[61] Moore's poem, however, provides a comic twist on this assertion—the poem's focus is instead directed at three fledgling birds, rather than the boy who is the object of Bacon's concern. We are left to deduce that for Moore being 'bird-witted' is in fact a more desirable trait than an allusion to Bacon, or the popular colloquialism, might initially imply. In foregrounding Bacon's work, Moore also introduces one of the poem's main themes: the nature of observation.

The poem unfolds as a kind of humorous anecdote, beginning conversationally as if mid-sentence: '[W]ith innocent wide penguin eyes, three/grown fledgling mocking-birds'.[62] The poet gives the first five lines of the poem over to setting the scene in which the reader is presented with a seemingly static composition of three fledgling birds placed in their immediate context: 'below/the pussy-willow tree' as they stand 'in a row,/wings touching, feebly solemn'. The introduction of these creatures seems to hark back to the introduction of the mockingbird in 'Virginia Britannia', the first poem of 'The Old Dominion' series, where the reader is instructed to 'Observe the terse Virginian': the mockingbird—'the terse Virginian'—is also rendered as stilled at the point at which the reader is instructed to observe it. Here, too, it is as if the poet is encouraging us to join her as she observes the brood.

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[61] Stephen Gaukroger, 'The Nature of Bacon's Project,' in *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 25.

[62] Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017). All quotations are taken from this edition. Copies of the core poems used in this discussion are supplied in an 'Appendix' at the end of this thesis.

Yet, noticeably, Moore's observational tactic differs from that of the empirical observer inferred in the poem's title, for Moore exercises her subjective judgement from the outset, calling the birds 'innocent' and 'feebly solemn'. What is clear is that Moore's practice of observation is being presented as different to that implied in the poem's reference to Bacon.

The seemingly inanimate composition of the fledglings positioned beneath the pussy-willow changes, in one of the poem's first major shifts, as their mother enters the frame of the scene 'bringing/something which will partially/feed one of them'. This suggestion of action enlivens the fledglings from their state of inertia, and it becomes clear that the mockingbirds presented in this poem will be different to the stilled and lifeless bird in 'Virginia Britannia' with its 'meditative eye as dead/as sculptured marble/eye'. These young birds are very much alive—as if reanimated for the purpose. The fledglings, we are told, have the child-like quality of innocence with 'wide penguin eyes'. Yet they are not children: they are 'grown' and on the brink of adulthood. As such, as Moore wittily reminds us, their mother—who is, in their eyes, 'no longer larger'—must still look after them and feed them. The 'innocence' of which Moore speaks, therefore, seems here to refer to the fact that the fledglings' view of the world around them is by no means worldly or calculating, and thus when they look at their mother they simply see a food source. Unlike their mother, however, they are not yet able to imitate the voices of others for their own protection, a failing which leaves them vulnerable to predators. It becomes evident that it is the mother who has the sole task of protecting them. She must feed her chicks even though she can no longer find food enough to feed all of her grown fledglings in one sitting and so can only 'partially/feed one of them'.

Moore describes this process with a fastidious accuracy, which arises—we assume—from having watched these birds in the wild:

> Towards the high-keyed intermittent squeak
> of broken carriage-springs, made by
> the three similar, meek-
> coated bird's-eye
> freckled forms she comes; and when
> from the beak
> of one, the still living

beetle has dropped
out, she picks it up and puts
it in again.

In the moments depicted in these lines the system of feeding the young birds seems to have comically broken down. The scene brings to life the awkwardness and contingency of the struggle for survival in the natural world, as the mother tries, and fails, to feed her fledglings—as the live beetle drops from the beak of the fledgling, only for her to pick it up again. Part of the comedy of this section of the poem pivots on the reader's expectations: there is an assumption of how the well-trodden trope of the relationship between a mother and child might play out. Moore, however, rather than choosing to present the young birds as vulnerable chicks—as we might expect—instead depicts them at the awkward stage of adolescence. There is a kind of humorous and endearing clumsiness implied in the process by which these large fledglings are fed, alongside the fact that the demand to be nourished—which is, of course, key to the birds' survival—is a struggle which evidently goes on longer than one might expect into the birds' adult lives. There is a clear attentiveness in this section of the poem to the different forms of instinctive animal behaviours. We see this in the fledglings' need for food, in the maternal instinct of the mother-bird for the chicks and also in the insistent manner in which she feeds her fledglings. This process is like watching a machine at work, so that when the food falls, it is swiftly picked up. We are reminded that this machine-like ritual works instinctively too. Instinct is part of survival. In a Darwinian sense it is there to ensure that the species reproduces, yet to be adept at survival is not quite what we might initially imagine it to be. Moore shows us a process which, rather than being smooth and ordered, is often awkward and clumsy. Nature is not being presented here as harmoniously proportioned; this is not a representation of the natural world as part of a divine order where every living thing is engaged in a structured complementary relationship with one another. Far from it—what is being emphasised in these lines is a natural world which lacks continuity, and yet is also perpetually evolving and changing. It is a world that is excessive rather than economical. These excesses creep into the exaggerated adjectives used to describe the fledglings as wearing 'thickly filamented, pale/pussy-willow-surfaced/coats'. It is also a world which, rather than being tidy and neat, is in fact comically imperfect.

The rickety, imperfect quality of the natural world is absorbed into the form of the poem itself. The choppy unexpected line breaks imitate the lively and mobile—if disjointed—movements of these 'bird-witted' creatures. Far from concurring with Bacon's critique of the overactive nature of the young mind, Moore is instead celebrating the birds' repetitive persistence, as the verse itself shifts and digresses—moving, hot-footed, from one perspective to another. The line also keeps time with the action so that as the beetle drops from the beak of one of the hungry fledglings there is accordingly a line break, as if the words have dropped, unwittingly, down the page. Hugh Kenner points out the pleasing sonic quality this section of the poem offers, noting the use of onomatopoeia in the repeated *ee* vowel sounds of the words 'squeak', 'meek' and 'beak' which impersonates the discordant noise of the young birds chirping in their nest.[63] The music of these young fledglings is not reminiscent of the sort of music one might expect from the traditional birdsong of Romantic poetry, such as the nightingale's song which inspired John Keats's ode.[64] The music of these creatures is instead jerky and uneasy. Moore likens the song of the birds to the archaic mechanical image of 'broken carriage-springs', and thus the repetitive noise of the carriage wheel squeaking as it rotates is brought to mind. The stanza, therefore, holds both the organically disjointed chirping of the fledglings and the mechanical repetition of the squeaking carriage spring within its music.

At this point, however, the poem introduces another major shift. Rather than keeping pace with the action as it unfolds, the poem instead moves into a mode of lyric exclamation:

is closed again. What delightful note
    with rapid unexpected flute-
sounds leaping from the throat
  of the astute
grown bird comes back to one from
the remote

[63] Hugh Kenner, 'Meditation and Enactment,' in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), 162.
[64] See: John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale,' in *John Keats: The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard (London: Folio Society, 2001), 355-357.

unenergetic sun-
lit air before
the brood was here? Why has the
bird's voice become
harsh? A piebald cat observing them,

Moving from the frame of close observation, the speaker thus adopts another—seemingly more self-reflective—filter. Moore, for the first time in the poem thus far, references herself through the lyric exclamation—'[W]hat delightful note…comes back to *one…'* (my italics). This section also has a nostalgic quality—elevating the speaker from the direct action of the poem to a position where she looks back. As she does so she laments the loss of the 'remote' memory of a moment in the 'unenergetic-sun-/lit air before/the brood was here', where the mother-bird was able to sing in a way she cannot now that she has her brood.

This section of the poem thus adopts a different way of seeing to that used to observe the creatures in the previous stanzas. This form of human seeing is distinct from that of the animals because it is endowed with a kind of sentiment and memory. The poet J. H. Prynne has explored the effect and function of this kind of exclamation and apostrophe in Romantic poetry and elsewhere.[65] Prynne reads the lyric exclamation as a moment of interjection in the lyric discourse where the natural world is seen through the internal world of the self.[66] In a direct quote from William Hazlitt, he makes the point that while this form of representation may not exercise poetic language's mimetic representational capacity, it is no less true to nature because it conveys the 'impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind'.[67] However, to the contemporary ear the apostrophe strikes a different note. It is often received with scepticism, a 'rhetorical contrivance' as Prynne notes, employed with the parodic intention of mimicking a romantic sensibility, which places too much emphasis on the singular response of the speaker.[68] While Moore does not use the formal device of the apostrophe's '*O'* in this stanza, her interjection into the unfolding action seems to supply something of

[65] J. H. Prynne, 'English Poetry and Emphatical Language,' (Warton Lecture on English Poetry, British Academy, London, 10th November, 1988)
[66] Ibid., 137.
[67] As quoted in J. H. Prynne, 'English Poetry and Emphatical Language,' 137.
[68] J. H. Prynne, 'English Poetry and Emphatical Language,' 169.

its tone. Starting, as it does, with a question—'[W]hat delightful note…before the brood was here?'—this question lacks a specified recipient and thus seems closer to an internal musing. The exclamation, with its echo of romantic poetic diction, seems to be poised between parody and strong feeling.

John Slatin, in his reading of this section, states that the 'note' of the poem at this point refers to the note which sounds in the mind: it is a recollection of a moment of 'apparently innocent ecstasy now past'.[69] Yet this stanza is not as 'innocent' as it might at first appear. It is worth noting that Moore introduces this section after the fledglings stop their discordant noise and snap their wings shut like 'an accordion', literally closing themselves off from the observer, camouflaging themselves so as to take on the 'pale/pussy-willowed-surfaced' of their surroundings, thus causing the poet to change tack. This—as we realise later on—is an act of self-protection on the part of the birds, foreshadowing the threatening arrival of a predator, the 'piebald cat'. However, Moore misses the predator's entrance, instead lamenting the loss of a 'remote' and 'unenergetic' time when the sound of the birdsong had the (strikingly Keatsian) quality of the 'flute-/sounds' of the mother-bird. These 'flute-sounds', we are reminded, emanate from the 'astute' mother-bird who imitates the call of others in order to protect her brood. Moore, it seems, misrepresents the sound of the bird, remembering only its lilting musicality. The harshness of the bird's call is, however, audibly present throughout the stanza from the outset; it is there in the transition to a harder assonance in the insistent rhyme of 'note', 'throat' and 'remote'. It is also mirrored in the loosening of the unaccented rhyme scheme, where the rhyme between the fifth and tenth line is weakened to the more awkward half-rhyme of 'from' and 'become'. The 'harsh' sound of the mother-bird's call is thus two-fold: it acts both to respond to the threat of danger, and also to resist Moore's attempt at using it as an occasion for lyric effusion. This sets up a moment of Darwinian contrast: between the mother-bird who is evolved to react instinctively to the presence of threat, and the poet who is instead lost in thought and momentarily separated from the action unfolding around her.

The poet is brought back to the action abruptly with the arrival of a new 'observer' in the scene—the cat, that 'uneasy/new problem'. We are aware that cats,

[69] John Slatin, *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1986), 232.

by nature, rarely merely observe with disinterest. The presence of the cat introduces a new kind of observation, opening up a comparison with the other forms we have previously encountered. Unlike the poet's peaceful mode of observation which cherishes the object it views, for the cat the subject of observation quickly becomes prey. His methods are predatory and threaten to enact a literal quashing of the 'innocent' voices of the poem's subject. This form of observation implies a more menacing mode which is narrow, structured and claw-sharp, depicted through the cat's act of singling out its prey and preparing itself to pounce. This considered, cautious manner of proceeding seems the very opposite of the lively attitude of the ever curious 'bird-witted' fledglings. It provides a clear distinction between the poem's two differing principles of caution and curiosity.

The entrance of the cat, strikingly, brings violence into the seemingly tranquil scene. As the scene becomes ever more threatening, the pace quickens, and the movement of the cat becomes absorbed into the lines of the verse:

> A dangling foot that missed
> its grasp, is raised
> and finds the twig on which it
> planned to perch. The

The cat, in another methodical act, places his 'dangling foot' on the twig he had 'planned' to perch on, presumably in order to test its weight. As he misses his holding, the line tumbles into the next, until he finds an appropriate branch on which to place himself. This form, where the line mimics the action of the poem, mirrors a similar scene at the beginning of the poem when the fledglings drop their food. However, the cat's act in this section is very different to that of the mother-bird earlier in the poem. The mother-bird acts in direct response to its environment—when something is dropped she instinctively picks it up. The cat, however, tests out his environment *before* he acts—he places his paw on the twig in order to discover whether or not it will allow him to perch there. There is a comedy to this section, particularly in the focused detail of the cat's 'foot' abstracted from the rest of its body. Much like the feeding of the fledglings, this scene seems to run cartoon-like from image to image in real-time, providing a sequence of stilled moments which leave the reader to connect the dots between each image, in a striking resemblance to

the diorama. In both these moments, the cat and the birds are engaged in the struggle to survive: the birds react to the events unfolding around them, while the cat tries to take control of that environment. The poem's form seems to assimilate the cat's violence, as readily as it does the instinctive acts of the other creatures. Again, we see the way in which the form of the poem emerges organically from its material, reveling in its deviations, its twists and turns, as it moves towards its conclusion.

In the poem's closing section, the mother—in an attempt to protect her young—is forced to swoop down on the cat, half-killing it. We are told that she reacts quickly to the perceived threat:

planned to perch. The
parent darting down, nerved by what chills
the blood, and by hope rewarded —
of toil—since nothing fills
squeaking unfed
mouths, wages deadly combat,

This section of the poem has notably complex syntax. The introduction of the notion of the 'toil' of the mother-bird refers to everything the parent has done in order to feed and protect her chicks, the 'reward' for this effort is the survival of her offspring. The line 'of toil' which comes before 'since nothing fills/squeaking unfed/mouths', might just as readily be supplied with a set of brackets as if to say: 'nothing fills squeaking unfed mouth (except toil)'. This section seems to imply an irony, that the mother who 'wages deadly combat' does so in order that she can continue with the toil of feeding her chicks. The 'toil' which the poet refers to thus seems to be perpetual, the implication being that it will continue well beyond the closure of the poem.

In the poem's striking last section, where the violence of the mother-bird comes into play, time and action are decelerated. The poem's final line enacts this slowing of pace—finishing on the figure of the cat: 'the/intellectual, cautious-/l y c r e e p i n g c a t'. Moore, again, freezes the final frame of the poem, locking the cat and the mockingbird at the point of combat. This act of protection on the part of the poet seems to mimic that of the mother-bird defending her chicks and has the effect of returning the bird to its statue-like position in 'Virginia Britannia'. The static

quality of the final stanza replicates that of the poem's opening. Throughout 'Bird-Witted' the poem's pace accelerates and decelerates at key moments. Initially, we see the fledglings in a static composition, as discussed. This display is very different to the previous incarnation of the mockingbird in 'Virginia Britannica' who initially appears on the scene in a blur of motion, so much so that the poet barely registers the bird. In an attempt to see the animal clearly, therefore, Moore must instruct herself and the reader to 'observe' it; yet this instruction also renders the bird immobile and statue-like. Much like the diorama, then, the animal in 'Virginia Britannica' is stilled so that the poet and the reader can observe it in detail. This is duplicated at the beginning of 'Bird-Witted', where the poet and the reader are encouraged to observe from a position of detachment; it is from this vantage point that the creatures are enlivened within the poem. Thus, the aesthetic of the diorama is here replicated in order to establish a distance between writer and subject matter, between viewer and animal, detaching the two from one another as if through the glass of the display case.

This distancing technique also extends to the syllabic pattern of the opening stanza, which is then repeated throughout the poem. The poem is divided into six stanzas of ten lines. However, because Moore chooses not to have stanza breaks, these verses seemingly run on continuously. Within each stanza the syllabic pattern roughly follows a pattern of 9, 8, 6, 4, 8, 3, 6, 4, 7, 4, syllables per line consecutively per stanza, and there is also a complex unaccented rhyme scheme which follows the rough pattern of ABABCADEFC, although there are occasional deviations throughout. The overarching syllabic pattern, therefore, is introduced from the outset and acts as a kind of box-like device working throughout the poem like a frame containing the line. In a sense, what happens in 'Bird-Witted' is an experiment in how to reanimate the mockingbird within the enclosed 'window' of the poem. As we have seen, the poem contains the mobile and evolving elements of the organic within the overarching mechanic syllabic pattern, yet how are these two forces presented as the poem draws to a close?

Holley, in her study of Moore's use of the syllabic pattern, discusses the use of what she terms Moore's 'model stanza'.[70] The 'model stanza' is the name Holley

[70] Margaret Holley, 'The Model Stanza: The Organic Origin of Moore's Syllabic Verse,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 30*,* no. 2/3 (1984).

attributes to Moore's organically conceived 'unplanned' first stanza. In this stanza the syllabic pattern—which is then replicated throughout—works in harmony with syntax and grammar, so that the poetic line makes grammatical sense as a unit. However, in order to sustain the syllabic pattern as it is replicated, line breaks appear mid-sentence or, indeed, mid-word. Often in Moore's poems of the 1930s, as Holley notes, Moore tended to place her 'model stanza' at the end of the poem.[71] Holley writes:

> The syntax (dynamic in its continual unfolding) and the syllabic design (static in its self-repetition) proceed through the poem in tension with one another, until, as in a musical piece, the variations end, the tension is resolved, and the poem closes on another model stanza. In this closure, syntax and syllabic schema are harmoniously united in a stanzaic whole.[72]

We may just as readily read this tension between syntax and syllabic design as the tension between organic and mechanic principles. Yet the end of 'Bird-Witted', far from providing a resolution between these two tensions which have been present throughout the poem, seems instead to seek to preserve them.

Indeed, as Holley remarks, the final lines do seemingly uphold the principles of harmony between syntax and syllabic schema. Yet to read the final stanza as a harmonious unification would be to ignore the charged violence of the scene and the strangeness of the poem's final line. This final line appears, in one sense, to be an intervention on the part of the poet—a literal slowing down of the poem's pace. By drawing attention to the poem's typography, the poet also hints at the poem's mechanical artifice. This staggered typography also becomes a tool of emphasis, as if Moore had used an exclamation mark. Yet, at the same time, the line itself also intriguingly embodies the cat's organic elongated and slinky physicality—as if it were literally stalking across the page, looming large over the poem's final line. This extension of the length of the last line also pushes against the mechanic syllabic pattern. While the line logically adheres to the mathematical rules of the syllabic pattern, it also acts to disrupt it from within by literally forcing the line to be visually

[71] Ibid., 183.
[72] Ibid., 182.

and audibly drawn out. The final line of the poem thus holds within it the tensions of the mechanic and the organic which have been in conflict throughout the poem, distilling them into a final moment. In this moment the poet plays with our expectations: appearing at once to pounce, cat-like, on a single conclusive scene where the poem will inevitably end. However, the poet also delays this moment of closure by refusing to let the poem land, instead gesturing, playfully, outward and onward. Kenner states that, '[T]he poem is a system not an utterance, though one can trace an utterance through it'.[73] Yet it seems that in 'Bird-Witted' it would be more accurate to say that while the poem is a system, organic utterance mischievously pushes up *against* that system from within.

Throughout the poem, Moore has provided the reader with a number of different forms of observation. The poem has moved among the perspectives of the fledglings, the mother-bird, the poet and the cat. In this closing tableau we are left with the confrontation of two named observers: the mother-bird and the cat. The mother-bird is, as we have discussed, a protective force. Her method of observation is a form of vigilance—she must be alert to predators in order to protect her brood. It is also linked to the fledglings' instinctive method of observation, one motivated by lively curiosity. It is significant that this curiosity is connected to the poem's excess of adjectives and observational details. For Moore, these excesses and elaborations aid observational precision rather than hinder it. The cat, on the other hand, has a different method of observation. Moore labels the cat an 'intellectual', and the intellect she describes here is a reference to the cat's caution. Unlike the instinctive action of the birds, the cat is a predator with a plan—he checks his next move before it is performed. Here observation tips into watchfulness. This watchfulness is a variant of the same kind of vigilance performed by the mother-bird, only the cat's vigilance is directed towards pursuing prey rather than protecting it. Thus, within the notion of observation the poem presents there is also a series of variations: observation can become a form of watchfulness, which is a variant of vigilance in the pursuit of prey; and this is distinct from the same vigilance which is used in the protection of that prey.

[73] Hugh Kenner, 'Disliking It,' in *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), 102.

The poet's own method of observation is also distinct from that of the animals in the poem. For the poet observes other animals in the act of observing. In so doing, Moore is able to make these distinctions between the various forms of observation from a position of detachment. The poet, we are reminded, is as a member of the human species able to observe from a position of relative security in the animal struggle to survive. Only humans, therefore, can observe from the perspective of a subjective onlooker. Only humans can write poems about observation. What is important about these variations in forms of observation is that the poem has the capacity to hold all of them. Moore does not make a judgement about which method is preferable. Rather, in the natural world the poem depicts all methods are equally geared towards each animal's survival, even if the method by which each animal survives is different. Observation for Moore is thus redefined: it is not a single act of attention; rather it is a practice which embraces multiple perspectives, and which undergoes a series of variations throughout the course of the poem.

The poem thereby absorbs these various modes and variations of observation within its form. The enjambment of each line moves organically, as if reacting instinctively to the actions of its material—and it is as if the poet, too, is motivated by the same curiosity that we see in the young fledglings. However, the poem is also a highly structured composition. The mechanical, repeated deployment of the syllabics mirrors the cat, edging ever forwards towards its conclusion. Thus, the resounding note of this final static scene seems again to replicate the diorama's drama, both in terms of the striking subject matter—a frozen scene of potential confrontation between two animals engaged in the battle to survive, yet also in terms of the charged nature of the stilled moment, left perpetually on the verge of action.

All acts of observation—organic and mechanic—are given the space to coexist, but, crucially, they coexist in tension rather than reconciliation. This is a tension which, formally, allows the mechanical syllabic structure of the poem to keep the restless organic mobility of the line in check. The poem enacts the instinctive, curious vitality of the fledglings' movement, whilst it also frames, orders and structures the representation of its many subjects. This act of mechanical framing and structuring also risks fixing—or quashing, in a cat-like act—that liveliness of its subject matter within a rigid structure. In the end, the poem does not allow one force to win out. Rather it leaves the reader with a visual enactment of the

forces of attack and defense which have been at play throughout. This is a tension which is true to the natural world which Moore represents, one where the mockingbird must be continually prepared to act to protect her young, and the cat must be cautiously alert to his prey, in both cases in order to survive.

### *'Mullions branching out across/the perpendiculars?': Divergence, Contingency, Variation and Equilibrium within Moore's Syllabic Verse in 'The Pangolin'*

In Moore's title poem to her 1936 collection *The Pangolin and Other Verse* the poet takes as her inspiration the ant-eating manis, a creature which Moore researched in detail in her many trips to the AMNH.[74] Again, the relationship between writer and subject, observer and object is a central concern in 'The Pangolin'. The poem begins with the image of the pangolin: '[A]nother armored animal'. This animal we are led to believe is by no means unique; the poem's first word '[A]nother' implies that it is simply one of many 'armored' animals one might readily come across in this collection of 'animiles' poems. The aesthetic of the diorama is introduced from the outset, as if the poet—like the reader—were walking through an exhibit passing a glance at yet another animal behind glass in the display case. As in 'Bird-Witted', the poet and the thing described are initially placed at a distance from one another, with the observer looking on at the seemingly static image. Accordingly, the poet deploys the same close observational technique of the kind we have witnessed in 'Bird-Witted', paying scrupulous attention to the minutia of each detail—we are told, for example, of the pangolin's 'uninterrupted central/tail-row', the 'head and legs and grit equipped giz-/zard' and its body of 'scale/lapping scale'. The pangolin, we are informed, is an '[I]m-/pressive animal/and toiler, of whom we seldom hear'. As such, the creature is no longer presented as merely yet 'another' animal—it now takes on a distinctiveness which has been largely, and we infer unfairly, overlooked. The poem thus becomes an exercise in attempting to give this remarkable creature its just deserts, to save it from the realms of neglect through the act of description.

[74] Family Correspondence, VI: 31: 29, Rosenbach. Linda Leavell, in her biography of Moore, also notes that an article in *The Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* and a small bronze pangolin at the Museum of Modern Art inspired the poem. Linda Leavell, *Holding on Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 290.

Again, as in ‘Bird-Witted’, Moore playfully uses a multitude of descriptive details and analogies as a means of getting closer to an accurate description of the pangolin. The poet is immersed in the complex design of the creature and likens it to a number of inanimate objects—its scales with ‘spruce-cone regu-/larity’, the animal is a ‘near artichoke’. The sheer number of analogous images are offered in the spirit of tribute. Such an exquisitely detailed object must, Moore deduces, have been designed with a certain purpose; she muses: ‘the night miniature artist-/engineer is Leonardo’s/indubitable son?’ This question, which plays on the idea of Leonardo as an artist and engineer, describes the animal in relation to the human, as being an ‘artist-/engineer’ and therefore both the creator and the product of that creator simultaneously. We infer that only a human maker and engineer as talented as Da Vinci himself could have created such a creature. This simultaneity between the animal and the human extends to the creature’s qualities as both a machine and an object of art, and Moore is careful not to prioritise one quality over the other. Indeed, there is a sense that the pangolin’s delicate beauty and artistry can also be attributed to its usefulness as a mechanical object. Hereafter the pangolin is described in a chain of allusions which take on both the qualities of the mechanical and the artistic—he is likened to a ‘wrought-iron vine’ and is compact like ‘Gargallo’s hollow iron head of a/matador’; yet his tail is also a ‘graceful tool’ and as a species pangolins are collectively defined as having a ‘machine-/like form’. There is also, however, a tentative tone in Moore’s depiction of the pangolin as an ‘artist-/engineer’. By leaving a telling gap—this gap reappears throughout the poem—between Da Vinci and the sentence which went before, Moore pauses with a momentary sense of hesitancy. Even the question mark at the end of the sentence opens up a query as to whether or not the creature is an artist-engineer, it is a question which Moore comes back to repeatedly.

Moore alludes to the animal’s protective outer skin or ‘armor’ throughout. We are told in the opening passages of the pangolin’s ‘contracting nose and eye apertures/impenetrably closable’ and his ‘closing ear-/ridge’. Moore asserts that while ‘[A]rmor seems extra’ for the pangolin, this is not, in fact, so, for he has evolved to be able to protect himself against predators. Yet the pangolin is not a violent creature by nature. He ‘draws away from danger unpugnaciously’, and his hiss is ‘harmless’. His defense, then, is an act of withdrawal, and he does this by defiantly turning in on himself:

rolls himself into a ball that has
power to defy all effort
to unroll it; – strongly intailed, neat
head for core, on neck not breaking off,
with curled-in feet. Nevertheless
he has sting-proof scales; and nest

What, or who, the pangolin draws away from is not made explicit. It seems, instead, that the poet's mode of observation has reached a dead end; the creature rolls himself into a ball—thus taking on the qualities of the static objects he has hitherto been likened to—and he becomes 'impenetrable' beneath his armour-skin. This is further evident in Moore's word-play where the poet in an attempt to discover what the creature entails instead is met with the pangolin literally '*in*tailed' (my italics). Faced with this comically absurd change in circumstance, Moore is seemingly momentarily left at a loss. Again, the poet inserts a suggestive gap between 'feet' and '[N]evertheless'; and there is a sense of comic timing here as if the poet pauses to gather herself for a beat before considering how best to continue. Costello, in her extensive discussion of the poem, reads this pivotal section as 'an analogy for the very breakdown of analogy'.[75] If we look back at the closing scenes of 'Bird-Witted', Moore's strategy for protecting her subject matter from exterior threatening forces was to still the frame of the poem at the point of confrontation. Here, however, she employs a somewhat different approach by examining what happens after the scene of confrontation. The poet must find a new way of continuing her mode of observation, even when the subject matter makes observation difficult. Yet there is also a humour and a lightness of tone in this section which Costello overlooks. The poem takes pleasure in the challenges it faces in order to describe this wonderfully tricky and evasive animal. The poem poses the question: how might it continue without the presence of its subject matter? If the poet cannot speak of the animal rolled up in a tight ball, how can she continue to speak at all?

In response Moore switches her method and interjects herself into the scene with another lyric exclamation of the sort we have previously seen in 'Bird-Witted':

[75] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 124.

Sun and moon & day and night & man and beast
each with a splen-
dor which man
in all his vileness cannot
set aside; each with excellence!

The emotive tone of this section is heightened by the use of the exclamation mark, with the sense of the poet calling out to an unknown subject. This interjection, again much like in 'Bird-Witted', opens up another frame through which we can view the pangolin. Moore encourages us to view the creature from a broader perspective, seemingly removed from the main action of the poem, instead musing on the creature in the context of the unfolding discussion surrounding the relationship of man and beast. Moore appears to admire the 'splen-/dor' and 'excellence' of both man and animal; and yet she laments that man, in his 'vileness', is unable to discount or 'set aside' that 'excellence'. The association of man with the revealing light of 'sun' and 'day'—and, conversely, the animal with the dark mysteries of 'moon' and 'night'—implies that in spite of himself man is compelled to discover the hidden ambiguities the pangolin conceals. Such curiosity for the unknown is in man's very nature.

The poem follows the line of curiosity with the interjection of another voice in the form of a quotation, '"[F]earful yet to be feared"', taken from—as Moore's notes suggest—Robert T. Hatt's article on pangolins written for the AMNH. The interjection of this new voice allows the poem to open out into another discussion, this time on the ways in which the pangolin—now envisaged in motion again—is also a creature capable of violence, and he is presented in conflict with the 'driver/ant'.

What follows is a series of associations presented in a revolving sequence which keep switching the focal frame between dual comparisons of man and beast, machine and artefact, writer and subject, observer and thing observed; these transitions continue throughout the rest of the poem. The architecture of the poem is a precise mathematical feat with its structure of sixteen-line stanzas and its rigid use of syllabics which largely keeps to the initial pattern of the first stanza of 9, 8, 6, 9, 7, 9, 8, 8, 7, 5, 9, 8, 4, 3, 7, 9 syllables consecutively throughout. Moore playfully

alerts the reader to the hidden principles of the syllabic framework by the, at times, abrupt and seemingly arbitrary introduction of line breaks—often in the middle of words—in order to keep to the rules of the syllabic pattern. We see this throughout with 'regu-/larity', '[I]m-/pressive' and even 'con//versities' which is stretched over two stanzas.

Many critics have commented on Moore's use of armour and combat in her poems of this period; in particular, Moore's implementation of the syllabic form has been likened to the pangolin's protective skin. Linda Leavell reads Moore's syllabic verse as a protective shell, repeatedly interpreting Moore's images and syntax as 'hard', part of what Leavell terms Moore's 'clinical detachment'.[76] Yet this raises the question: what or whom, exactly, is this protective armour-surface aiming to protect? Jarrell provides one of the most extensive discussions of the recurring motif of armour in Moore's work, interpreting the motif as Moore's personal 'delicately chased, live-seeming scale armour'.[77] This armour is intended, Jarrell argues, to protect the poet's internal life from that of prying external forces and judgements, reading the pangolin as a reflection of the poet shielding herself from others.[78] However, Jarrell overlooks Moore's insistence that the reader not fall into the trap of viewing the pangolin as a symbol of the poet: the poem states that it is the work of mere 'simpletons' to deem the pangolin a 'living fable'. Armour in this poem, I argue, is instead an evolved form intended as a means of protection, not for the poet, but rather for the animal which is the focal point of the beginning of the poem—it is a means of allowing the pangolin to maintain its own autonomy. From this distanced vantage point, the poet may observe and celebrate the variety of images the pangolin resembles, and we are reminded that the pangolin's armour is both a condition and a result of its evolution. Rather than reading the imposition of this highly contrived syllabic surface as mere armour, it is also useful to read it alongside the diorama. As in 'Bird-Witted' the syllabic structure is imposed in order to provide an ordered frame or enclosure through which the subject can be viewed. The effect of this structure operates much like the diorama's structure, for it allows the subject to be fixed and stilled within the regularity of the stanza so that Moore and we, as readers,

[76] Linda Leavell, 'Surfaces and Spatial Form,' in *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995), 94.
[77] Jarrell, 'Her Shield,' 134-135.
[78] Ibid., 134-135.

may observe the animal in detail and from a distance. This distance sidesteps the traditions of metric verse—Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' being one famous example amongst many others—where the poet transforms creatures of nature into objects of art. Instead, syllabic verse (with its inaudible patterns which, unlike metric verse, has the effect of reading like natural speech) ensures that the poet can make comparisons between herself and the pangolin without transmuting the pangolin into a symbol of art or artist. Jarrell—in my view, mistakenly—implies this when he reads the pangolin as a symbol of the poet. However, while this 'hard' structure may appear to immobilise the subject, as Leavell states, we are also aware that while the diorama presents a seemingly static mechanical composition it is also imbued with potentiality, suggestively implying organic movement. So, too, does Moore's formal syllabic composition hint at another series of dynamic structural forms which work beneath the poem's static exterior surface, presenting the reader with a new set of perspectives through which the pangolin can be conceived.

If, at this point in the poem, one takes a broader view of the course of the rest of the stanzas, there are certain points throughout where it seems that pressure is applied to the overarching syllabic structure. One striking example is Moore's use of the caesura; we have cited examples of these gaps and interruptions earlier in this discussion, yet they are a feature which we find regularly repeated throughout. These openings always occur on the eighth line of each stanza and always after the first four syllables of each word in the line. We see this in lines such as 'between the thus ingenious roof-' and 'sense of humour  then, which saves a'. It is tempting to question the purpose behind the placing of these caesuras in a poem already peppered with examples of similar structural oddities. Yet this is not the question Moore wishes us to ask; rather, the reader is being guided towards another set of playful frameworks which are built into the poem so as to run counter to the overarching framework. Moore uses these gaps to disrupt the syllabic form from within; for we are aware that while the eighth line of each stanza conforms to the principles of the syllabic count, the caesura also implies a moment of pause or hesitation, thus elongating the time it takes for the reader to finish reading the line. Much like the final line of 'Bird-Witted', then, this moment—replicated throughout—still conforms to the rigid rules of syllabics while also visually pushing at the boundaries of the syllabic stanzaic form, suggesting the flexibility of the poem's armour.

Alongside the use of caesura there are a number of other sets of patterns working internally beneath the poem's surface. One immediately striking feature of 'The Pangolin' is the sheer number of repetitions scattered throughout, this includes words such as 'armor', 'machine' and 'grace', but also extends to images and word sequences—we are told of 'a monk and monk and monk' on the abbey seats, and the 'and new and new and new' of the poem's closing lines. This use of repetition is deployed in a different manner to its earlier configuration, as seen in the use of the ampersand in '[S]un and moon & day and night & man and beast,' a device here used to show comparison whilst keeping these opposing images separated. However, at this point repetition appears to be used as a means of re-approaching, rather than upholding, some of the poem's recurring distinctions, such as those between the pangolin and man. If we take, by way of example, a sentence towards the beginning of the poem where Moore associates the shape of the pangolin with a wrought iron vine, 'keep-/ing the fragile grace of the Thomas-/of-Leighton-Buzzard Westminster/Abbey wrought-iron vine', we are presented with a series of different images which are picked up at various points throughout. The image of the sinuous wrought iron vine relates to an earlier description of the pangolin '[S]erpentined about/the tree'. This quality reappears throughout in the imagery of the pangolin rolling into a ball, and then again in the compactness of the alliterated 'furled fringed frill/on the hat-brim/of Gargallo's hollow iron head', before it finally peters out towards the middle of the poem. We can also see a similar arrangement emerging conceptually from the mention of 'Westminster/Abbey' which is echoed later in the poem in the discussion of the abbey built by man, and, further, in the protracted discussion of the nature of grace—references which encompass both the physical grace of the abbey and the pangolin's graceful quality. What these repetitions create is a chain-like sequence of various strands of words, images and concepts which snake throughout, much like the wrought iron vine itself. Crucially, these strands work inside the mechanical structure of the poem and are subsequently able to cross over the various comparative divisions and analogies Moore puts in place between pangolin and man, author and subject matter, natural creature and object of art. Thus, as we see, Moore creates a tracery around the figure of the pangolin from the poem's outset. By referencing Leonardo and Gargallo in the opening stanzas when describing the pangolin, the creature becomes associated with human invention and

art. This sets up the transition the poem makes mid-way through when it moves its focus away from the pangolin and onto man.

As the strands of repetition gain momentum across the poem, they also significantly begin to branch outward. An example is the concept of 'grace', one of the main themes of the poem. It becomes clear that as the notion of grace is repeated its definition expands and varies. The argument surrounding grace comes to a crescendo towards the middle of the poem, in a discussion which transitions from the pangolin to the architecture of the man-made abbey. This is the second instance in the poem where the poet poses her observations, in this case her observations about the nature of theological grace, in the form of a question:

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 monk and 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? A sailboat

Here the poet appears to be explaining a confusion on the part of those who 'graced the spires' of Westminster Abbey, adorning them with animals. If grace were an eternal gift from God, a divine benefaction, which man possesses by definition, it cannot therefore be earnt through human acts ('if that which/is at all were not

for/ever'). So why, Moore asks, would the 'those' of the poem have worked (or 'slaved') to earn grace by ornamenting the spires? In so doing, those who 'graced the spires' have confused the concept of grace by elaborating on its theological sense, eliding it with a number of different notions—a 'kindly/manner', 'time in which to pay a debt' and 'the cure for sins'. The implication is that these concepts could also exist independently from the belief that everything is eternal. Moore proposes no answer to this question. Rather, she presents the reader with a conundrum.

We have, however, also encountered the notion of grace before this passage in different contexts; at first in the 'fragile grace' of the beauty of the wrought-iron vine, and then in relation to the pangolin's tail as a useful and 'graceful tool'. Thus, the unfolding concept of grace takes on the artistry and fragility of the art object and also, in a perhaps more unexpected context, the composed and exacting grace of the pangolin's tail as a 'tool'. In addition to the association of grace with a religious and theological context, picked up in the passage concerning Westminster Abbey, the definition of grace is further multiplied. Each time the word 'grace' reappears in the poem, therefore, it carries the multiple meanings accrued from its previous contexts, as well as having its meaning shift slightly. Thus, when we re-encounter the word in the key section which describes the pangolin as being 'made graceful by adversities, con-/versities', the meaning of grace in this new context is multifaceted. The context in which we approach this term is broadened, and consequently the term used to describe the pangolin as 'graceful' here draws in its previous associations: gracefulness thus carries with it the sense of the elegance, fragility and skill of the man-made wrought iron vine, as well as the mechanical precision of the pangolin's tail. It is at once a quality of the organic natural world and of the man-made world, whilst also having a spiritual dimension of divine grace. The word itself becomes indicative of a kind of playfulness, carrying forward accumulated meanings into each new context in which it appears.

These moments of repetition are erratic, punctuated instances which create a space within the poem where the recurring concept or image can be opened up. Such punctuations are contingent on what has gone before, and they, in turn, lead on to what follows. In the case of the concept of grace, as we have seen, it is used to describe the abbey. This builds on the previous meaning of grace as a construct of the natural and the man-made, as well as of the artistic and the mechanical. The image of the abbey thereby comes to encompass a number of qualities: it is a man-

made construct and an object of art, it has both a physical grace and a symbolic religious grace, it is both a thing of beauty and a useful construct, all met under the 'ingenious roof-/supports' of the abbey's architecture. The grace of the abbey is also broadened so that it comes to signify the grace of the poem itself. Its structures and expansions are replicated in the stone mullions 'branching out across the perpendiculars'.

Moore does something similar when she is describing the shape of the pangolin. From the poem's beginning we are supplied with a close observation of the creature's scales. They are first described as having a 'spruce-cone regu-/larity'. The description then moves on from the image of the spruce-cone to the 'near artichoke'. What is interesting about these images is that while the shape of the spruce-cone and the artichoke are similar, we are not being encouraged to think of them as simply identical. In fact, within the space of a few lines we have rapidly moved from the implications of one image to another divergent description. This happens throughout the rest of the poem as the images and metaphors used to describe the pangolin shift slightly as the poem continues. We have also seen this process at work before in 'Bird-Witted'. The process of variation can be seen at work as Moore creates a rapidly shifting series of comparisons and metaphors around the central image of the pangolin.

Costello reads these punctuations and moments as 'overlaps' which attempt to unite the two sides of Moore's analogies.[79] I argue, however, that Moore merely *gestures* towards these associative links, thus engendering an environment for the reader which is highly suggestive of certain shared similarities between man and pangolin, between organic and mechanic, rather than imposing a definitive likeness onto them. Moore is making her reader alert to the fact that in addition to these suggestive associations, the two sides of the analogy are still distinct from each other, and she is careful to uphold the subtle variations and differences between the two. The poem's ability to suggest these associations while still maintaining such distinctions is an important feature of Moore's poem and of the 'animiles' poems of this period. By this means, Moore resists turning the animal into a trope or symbol.

[79] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 126-127. Critics such as Rachel Trousdale in her discussion of the role of humour in the poem also talks of these punctuated moments, or 'frames' to use her term, as moments which seek to: 'unite disparate objects within a single frame of reference'. Rachel Trousdale, '"Humor Saves Steps": Laughter and Humanity in Marianne Moore,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 3 (2012): 130.

These moments occur fleetingly in the poem, with Moore purposefully setting them in a mobile discursive context. Her technique is to draw the reader towards a succession of images—none of which simply capture the animal or turn it into a symbol or allegory—multiplying references before any can take precedence over those that have gone before. All are potentially in play at any one moment.

This process of punctuation, divergence, contingency and variation bears a marked relation to Moore's notes on Spaulding's reconfiguration of the organic in Darwinian terms as a discontinuous and constantly evolving entity. Expanding on the discussion of Darwinian evolution as a process of perpetual divergence, Gould introduces the principle of what he terms 'punctuated equilibrium'.[80] This principle is offered as an alternative to the traditional iconography of evolution as a 'cone of diversity', as Gould describes it.[81] The conventional reading of evolution sees human life as restricted and minimal at the beginning and becoming ever more complex over time. However, according to Gould, this interpretation is no longer applicable, and instead he advocates that the pattern of evolution mimics that of a 'copiously branching bush', or in other words a non-linear pattern of divergence which is 'trimmed' by the onset of extinction.[82] Within Gould's notion of 'punctuated equilibrium', therefore, is an abandonment of the long-held misconception of evolutionary change as a structured force moving ever upward in an orderly fashion. Instead, Gould urges us to rethink the course of evolution as operating in a set of rare and temporary punctuations sitting amongst long periods of stasis.[83] In 'The Pangolin' Moore employs an alternative form to that of her use of syllabics, one more akin to Gould's formulation. Here the poem—rather than producing a linear ladder of progress, leading towards a final conclusion—is, in fact, a growing and diverging organic mass of ideas and images which are occasionally punctuated by transitory moments where equilibrium can occur.

It is also significant that in this middle section of the poem the overarching focal frame shifts from the pangolin to man. This transition spins on the axis of the discussion surrounding grace, moving from the pangolin's grace to that of the man-made spires of the abbey. Here the spires are adorned with animals, a switch from

[80] This term appears in many of Gould's works, including *Wonderful Life; Ever Since Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1991); *The Richness of Life* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2006).
[81] Gould, *Wonderful Life,* 38.
[82] Ibid., 35.
[83] Gould, *Wonderful Life; Ever Since Darwin*; *The Richness of Life*.

the previous stanzas where the pangolin has been given human qualities. It is as if the poet is prompted into this transition by the subjects the poem itself throws up. The digression into the nature of grace in the line 'to explain grace requires a curious hand' happens upon the human 'hand' as if by accident. This subsequently leads the poet into a discussion of the human. The repeated traces of the human seen previously in the poem are now coming to the fore and find their way into a more prominent role in the poem's composition. These moments of erratic punctuated repetition, therefore, also act to open the poem up to the possibility of chance. This shift from the pangolin to the human, rather than appearing to have been preordained by the poet, instead seems to have been prompted by the digressions of the poem itself.

In the closing section of the poem Moore explores the suggestive comparison of the human with the animal in more depth. While the pangolin has been previously described in human terms—we are told his 'hands may bear the weight' and he stands 'plantigrade,/with certain postures of a/man'—this is the first time in the poem where man is explicitly seen through the prism of the animal:

disheartenment. Bedizened or stark,
naked, man, the self, the being
so-called human, writing-
master to this world, griffons a dark
"Like does not like like that is
obnoxious"; and writes errror with four
r's. Among animals, one has a
sense of humor then, which saves a
few steps, which saves years – unig-
norant, modest and
unemotional, and all emo-
tion; one with everlasting vig-
or, power to grow
though there are
few of him – who can make one
breathe faster, and make one erecter.

Man, the 'so-called human', has now become the main subject of observation. The connection Moore makes between animal and human life is not a symbolic one. Just as she resists a description of the pangolin that renders it a symbol of the human, here the connection made between the human and the animal is one of science. Man is read as a phenomenon of natural history and located against the backdrop of 'his/own habitat'. Man is a member of a species which, we are told, is a maker of many things, a 'paper maker/like the wasp' or a 'tractor of food-stuffs,/like the ant'. The human and the animal worlds are presented in parallel. Man, too, is a fearful creature, just as the pangolin is '[F]earful yet to be feared'—man who is '[N]ot afraid of anything' amusingly goes 'cowering forth'. He is also described as 'mechanicked/like the pangolin'. Thus, pangolin and man are presented as evolved machines. They are both admired as 'toilers'.

Toil, much as in 'Bird-Witted', is an important principle in this poem. It is first introduced in the discussion of the pangolin as an '[I]m-/pressive animal/and toiler' for whom toil is linked to endurance and survival; thus, the pangolin must suffer 'exhausting solitary/trips through unfamiliar ground at night'. Similarly, man must go 'cowering forth, tread paced/to meet an obstacle/at every step'. He too must toil against adversity edging, tentatively, into the unknown. Man, like the pangolin, must test out his environment in order to forge new pathways and progressions, and this action is met with both success and failure. This principle of trial and error as an aid to creativity is also central to Darwin's theory of evolution.[84] Moore references trial and error in her lecture notes on Spaulding's discussion. Moore notes Spaulding's citation of E. G. Conklin's seminal work *Heredity and Environment in the Development of Men* which offers an example of a new evolutionary point of view.[85] In his work Conklin, a leading biologist and cytologist of his day, discusses evolution in terms of development. Crucial to this idea of development is the concept of trial and error. In his discussion of insects, most notably Paramecium, Conklin deduces that 'the insect continually tries its environment, and backs away from irritating substances or conditions, until it makes a new modified path'.[86] Trial and

[84] Trial and error as a principle of Darwinian evolution is discussed at length in Gould, *Ever Since Darwin,* 12.
[85] VII: 05: 09, Rosenbach.
[86] E. G. Conklin, *Heredity and Environment in the Development of Men* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1929), 47.

error, therefore, is the means by which animals and humans learn to adapt to their specific environments. The animal and human kingdoms are being presented in this section of the poem as equal in their struggle for survival. As both creatures must adapt in order to endure, neither creature exists for the other's satisfaction or delight, and Moore encourages the reader to view the human and the animal as being a part of the same evolutionary system. This is not presented by Moore as a wholly negative assertion, however. There is some comfort to be gathered from the knowledge that there is '*one* with everlasting vig-/or, power to grow...who can make *one*/ breath faster, and make *one* erecter' (my italics). In a striking display of Darwinian rhetoric, Moore declares that all it takes is 'one' attempt or adaptation to be successful from the multitude of possibilities in order to progress, and what is important is 'vig-/or'—the continued effort to keep trying in spite of adversities.

This sentiment is a stimulus for the poem as a whole. Moore explicitly aligns this concept of trial and error with the writing process—we are told man is a 'writing-/master to this world, griffons a dark/"Like does not like like that is/obnoxious"'. Furthermore, man goes on to write 'errror with four/r's'. Thus, intimately bound up with Moore's conception of the writing process is the idea that error is inevitable. This is a principle which is absorbed into the internal structure of the poem, which itself has been opened up as a testing ground for ideas and concepts. We see this in the constantly morphing, diverging and developing ideas, concepts and repetitions which appear throughout. In this spirit of experimentation, Moore picks up an idea which is either developed into an important thread which might run through the rest of the stanzas, or else an idea is dispensed with if it is no longer found to be of use. What is promoted in the creative endeavour is the importance of *process,* and process is constant effort, one which does not aim for any specific conclusion or destination. Thus, as Moore reflects in the closing lines of the poem, a poet's work is only ever 'partly done'. It is a task of admirable courage that both mankind and poet continue in spite of the constant threat of failure, or, as Moore puts it, the fear of 'capsizing into disheartenment'; and it is this resistance to the imposing disheartenment where 'naked' man and animal—connected in their struggle against adversity—are at their most commendable.

Yet there is one thing, Moore tells us, which sets mankind apart from the animal kingdom: '[A]mong animals, one has a/sense of humor then, which saves a/few steps, which saves years'. Moore adds emphasis to humour's capacity to

‘save’ mankind by repeating the word twice. She plays on her own mischievous sense of humour throughout the poem, using it as a means of going against the grain of expectation: initially the reader is introduced to the pangolin through a series of unexpected and absurd comparisons between the creature and a number of seemingly bizarre objects. Man, in turn, is also puckishly likened to the animal world, for we too share the pangolin’s propensity for failure, his fallibility. Humour, therefore, provides a series of lenses through which we are encouraged to look in new and surprising ways at the things we may otherwise take for granted. At the beginning of the poem this playfulness implements a necessary distance between man and the object of the joke, in this case the pangolin: we are able to laugh at this creature because we recognise that it is different to us. Yet the use of humour in the poem ultimately reaches across this distance by teasingly implying comical similarities. Thus, the pangolin, far from being presented as the butt of the joke, is instead endeared to the reader precisely because of his likeness to us as much as the obvious differences. Humour, then, is a further observational mechanism by which the poet can gently make suggestive associations, whilst both maintaining the creature’s autonomy and probing at the inherent connections between animal and human life. Furthermore, by turning the jest on its head and looking at the human with the lens hitherto applied to the pangolin, Moore emphasises the quality she most admires in man: that we have—if we choose to use it—the capacity to laugh at ourselves. Those who are willing to step outside themselves and observe themselves from a distance are the ‘unig-/norant, modest and/unemotional, and all emo-/tion’. Significantly, this self-effacing ‘modesty’ is seemingly unemotional, yet also presented as having the capacity for ‘all emo-/tion’. Humour is thus one of the poem’s most significant techniques. It is a uniquely human phenomenon.

The poem draws to a close with a final exclamation in the form of a quotation:

> The prey of fear; he, always
> curtailed, extinguished,
> thwarted by the dusk, work partly done,
> says to the alternating blaze,
> “Again the sun!
> anew each

day; and new and new and new,
that comes into and steadies my soul."

This closing image of the poem centres around the sun, a seemingly stable image to steady the dynamic flow of the poem towards a single conclusive moment. However, the fact that Moore closes with a quotation is significant, for it interjects into the unfolding discussion, as if the poem itself were to continue once the quotation had finished. The speaker who interrupts is unidentified—Moore does not include a reference in her notes—and thus seems to represent a generalised human speaker, apparently observing the sun. Yet despite the sun's stabilising effect on the speaker's 'soul', Moore has undercut this steadying quality in the lines preceding the quotation by calling the blaze of the sun 'alternating' and by eclipsing the quotation with the imagery of the onset of dusk, when the sun's light is extinguished before re-emerging with a new dawn. The end of the poem is charged with a sense of movement and progression beyond its final lines. While the poem stages its closing moment as one of unification between humankind and animal-kind around the single image of the sun, it also destabilises the permanence of that image, for the sun's blaze alternates and it will just as surely give way to night.

The final stanza of 'The Pangolin', like that of 'Bird-Witted', appears to fit with Holley's notion of Moore's 'model stanza'. In this stanza, unlike the other eight stanzas of the poem, syntax and syllabics seem to work together in relative harmony. There are no instances of words spliced mid-sentence, and the syntax, largely, seems to follow in tandem with the line breaks. If, as Holley suggests, we are to read this stanza as the template from which the rest of the syllabic structure is then reproduced[87]—'progressing backwards' as Moore puts it[88]—then indeed the stanza encapsulates many of the formal syllabic elements which run throughout the rest of the poem. Yet what Holley neglects in her discussion is that this replication is also true of the organic form which, unlike the syllabic pattern, evolves as it is repeated.

We have already discussed the recurring use of the caesura and the divergent, varying and contingent repetitions used throughout the poem and running counter to

[87] Holley, 'The Model Stanza,' 186.
[88] Marianne Moore, 'Some Answers to Questions Posed by Howard Nemerov,' *Poets on Poetry*, ed. Howard Nemerov (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1966), 10, quoted in Holley, 'The Model Stanza': 186.

the mechanical syllabic construct of the verse, but there is also another thread which makes up an important part of Moore's organic counter-pattern. There is a continual chain of expansion and contraction that repeats across the poem. We see it in the shape of, what Holley terms, the final 'model stanza'.[89] In the poem's final stanza the first two lines are longer, then become indented and narrow down towards the middle of the stanza, before opening up again with a longer line which slowly contracts as the stanza draws to an end. This scheme is also largely replicated in the previous stanzas. This curious stanza shape is also mirrored in the content of the poem; the stanza often starts by introducing an opening statement within its first few lines, as is the case in the final 'model stanza' with the statement: '[N]ot afraid of anything is he'. Or in the previous stanzas with the introduction of a new image: 'the giant-pangolin/tail'. This insertion of a new statement or image is then either clarified or described in more depth. In the case of the 'model stanza' Moore embarks on a description of the various features of the species of mankind, or, in the case of the pangolin's tail, she elaborates on the initial image, which is, she says, 'tipped like/the elephant's trunk with special skin,/is not lost on this ant and/stone swallowing artichoke'. Yet this apparent whittling down of one thought often sparks other associations and images in the poet's mind. The poem, thereby, opens up into another series of thoughts or digressions roughly mid-way through the stanza. We see this in the case of the 'model stanza', with the assertion of man as 'serge clad, strong shod', which causes the poet to exclaim man is '[T]he prey of fear'. This then leads into the final quotation. In the case of the earlier example, Moore, following her discussion of the pangolin's tail, writes: '[P]angolins are/not aggressive animals; between/dusk and day'. This clear visual pattern of expansion and contraction moves throughout the poem as a whole, often bleeding between stanza breaks. This also seems to mimic the pangolin's movements as described throughout the poem, as if the creature were courageously rearing up on his hind legs and then fearfully closing in on himself. The form is in a state of continual renewal. Moore hints at this pattern in her final image of the sun 'anew each/day; and new and new and new', alerting the reader to the poem's capacity for regeneration.

[89] Holley, 'The Model Stanza,' 186.

Duplication, Holley states, is an act of artifice, as she goes on to illustrate in Moore's use of syllabic structure.[90] However, rather than reading these organic repetitions as duplications, I suggest that we read them in terms of Darwin's concept of variation and a key aspect of Moore's evolving organic form. As the poem repeats an image or metaphor, it subtly changes, as if the act of repetition itself causes the thing repeated to shift. The same is true of Darwinian evolution, for evolution could not be set into action without variation.[91] What is particularly striking about 'The Pangolin' is the sheer number of variations, and the subsequent rapidity with which one image subtly shifts and changes. There is a sense that this process could continue on and on. The overarching organic structure we are left with is thus a set of evolving enlaced and interconnected structures which are woven together, much like the pangolin's armour, the wrought-iron vine and the mullions which branch out across the perpendiculars.

Evolutionary life gives rise to a variety of creatures each specially adapted to their environments; Moore is keen, I argue, for her readers to share in her delight in the fact of evolutionary variation. Yet variation is also a principle which we see at work in her poetic practice. Taking joy in variety is a feature of Moore's enquiring mind; it is part of her willingness to explore a subject from a multitude of different, changing perspectives. No one perception is valued above another; rather the poem is propelled by its capacity to transition, expanding from one perspective to another. This propensity is intimately connected to the value Moore attaches to endurance and toil in the writing process. There is a strong sense that survival implies a willingness to embrace the possibilities of variety and change.

In terms of the argument developed here, what is significant about 'The Pangolin' is its promotion of the same overlapping perspectives foregrounded in the diorama. To sum up, the syllabic verse provides a frame through which the reader may encounter the stilled creature; yet at the time Moore was visiting the dioramas at AMNH, frozen action was supplemented by moving images. Moore too presents a series of 'alternating', to use the closing phrase of the final stanza, and varied ways of looking. The syllabic form fixes the creature, enabling the reader to observe it

[90] Holley, 'The Model Stanza,' 186.
[91] For information on Darwinism and the concept of variation, see: Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1984).

closely. The organic form, working beneath and within the syllabic structure, instead conceives of the pangolin through a tracery of playfully mobile, altering analogies and perspectives. What is of interest to Moore is the relationship and tension between these two modes of presentation. Far, then, from reconciling, to use Holley's phrase, the utterance and the syllabic, the natural and the artificial, the organic and the mechanic within the 'model stanza', Moore instead holds these tensions in place throughout the poem. This characteristic form is one of the ways she keeps the 'freshness of first contact'[92]—to use the phrase she borrowed from Stravinsky in her 1961 interview—alive throughout the poem.

*Conclusion: 'Summer in December' and the Grace of Poised Equilibrium*

In the 'Comment' section of *The Dial* of 1926, Moore anticipates the dualism she discusses in terms of the mechanic and the organic. Yet, this time, the principle of duality is taken up in the context of the creative process and the role of the artist. When discussing the writing process, she notes:

> The unquiet nature of the artist is proverbial, genius being in some sense always in revolt. But…the aesthetic malcontent is out of court, for wherever there is art there is equilibrium…It is determination with resistance, not determination with resentment, which results in poise…the artist is in a state of profound activity, emerging from darkness into light like the grain which he eats, unable to often recognize in himself that "summer in December" of which enduring art consists. The ruffled genius might in his acuteness realize that sometimes he fights with that which he is agreeing, and is like the hour, marked by a shadow which seeming to cut the sun, defines it.[93]

In this complex passage, Moore praises the harmonious character of art for the artist whose natural disposition is 'unquiet'. The artist must develop organically (not seasonally) as grain grows from the ground towards the sun. Characteristically for Moore, the creative process is a constant struggle which requires tenacity and

[92] Moore, 'Marianne Moore,' 89.
[93] Marianne Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore,* ed. Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber, 1987), 177.

'determination', and, as such, the artist is in a constant state of 'ruffled' revolt. This struggle is celebrated by Moore: it is a struggle of 'resistance'—a resistance which, notably, does not slip into 'resentment'—and it results in 'poise'. To describe 'poise', Moore uses a series of dualities which are counterbalanced against each other: the division of light from dark, the sense of 'summer in December'. The conflicting nature of the images are offered up as examples of good art, art which, poised between two states, achieves 'equilibrium'.

Both of the poems discussed in this chapter are composed around a series of counterbalances. Counterbalance, in the case of 'The Pangolin', is implicit in the double meaning of the word-play surrounding 'scales' as representing both the scale-like pattern of the pangolin—as well as the poem itself—and also the poem's ability to hold two conflicting images in equilibrium at any one time. We also see this counterbalance in the closing image of 'Bird-Witted'. Costello reads Moore's poems of this period as having a high 'tolerance' for 'contrariety'; yet this is only tolerated as a means of offering, as Costello puts it, 'idealized reconciliations of difference'.[94] However, unlike Costello, I read Moore's poetic practice, far from being 'tolerant' of these counterbalances and contrariety, as a celebration of the tension upon which they originate. 'Poise', as Moore suggests, implies a fine balance between two conflicting forces. It carries the temporal implication of something *about* to happen, being always on the cusp of movement, about to tip into one of two opposed states. So too are Moore's poems constructed around this principle of poise. This is evident in the complex balance forged between the organic and syllabic structures of Moore's poems of this period: one formal element pushes against the other, thereby keeping the two 'poised' in lively tension with each other. Moore does not intend to reconcile these two differing states, as Costello suggests, precisely because the poem is built out of this relationship. The resulting equilibrium is, crucially, not a permanent state, for it is always in the process of being reconfigured. This, Moore suggests, is how art 'endures'.

The prioritising of poise within the poem bears an important relation to Moore's notion of 'grace' in 'The Pangolin' which culminates in the key lines: 'made graceful by adversities, con-/versities. To explain grace requires/a curious hand'. To return again to the concept of grace, in 'The Pangolin' grace requires

[94] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 109.

poise, a poise which arises from the opposing notions of 'adversities, con-/versities'. Gracefulness is a term which encompasses multiple and various meanings throughout the poem and, crucially, to explain grace requires a 'curious hand'. Curiosity in this context is a multifaced entity too, for it holds both the notion of the strange—something which sits outside of the 'ordinary' occurrences of everyday living—as well as inferring the impulse towards the inquisitive. The suggestion is that anyone seeking to unravel the mysteries of grace must have an inquisitorial lightness of touch, as well as a curious nature. Curiosity is an organically-driven process: it is a slippery state, always residing in the present, never tipping into the realms of the definite or the complete. It is exemplified in Moore's own observational methods throughout her poems, and indeed in the continual chains of digression and association that are driven by curiosity. Yet such a way of seeing can only arise in someone who is themselves 'curious', and able to observe from a position of difference and detachment. Ultimately, however, grace is not something which can be explained simply. 'The Pangolin' never attempts to do so. Instead, it provides readers with a series of 'graceful' images, leaving them to make connections as they will. The grace which the poem celebrates, therefore, is not so much a concept to be unraveled as it is a state of being. To have gracefulness is to embody the balance between the poem's multiple conflicting forces, to keep them continually in play. It is this embodiment which the poet admires.

Grace, however, also speaks to something of the wider shared experience of humankind. If we return to the closing passage of the pangolin, Moore seems to say that man who is faced with the experience of the 'alternating' blaze may try to steady and soothe his soul against the notion of unity and permeance encapsulated in the image of the sun. This is understandable, for men, too, are creatures who need armour to protect themselves; they, like the pangolin, are 'the prey of fear' being 'serge-clad' and 'strong shod', protected against threat. Yet the experience of being human is more than this. Alongside this very human need for stability, is also an awareness that stability is only ever transitory. To be human, in Moore's estimation, is to be aware of the challenges and struggles of the task, the pitfalls by which man is always in danger of being 'curtailed', 'extinguished' and 'thwarted by the dusk'. To have grace, therefore, is to have a knowing acceptance of the lot of man. It is not the job of art to reconcile these factors. Rather art embodies and opens itself up to the curious complexities and conflicts within which we exist. To be human, to use

Moore's phrase, is to go 'cowering forth' despite the continued threat of failure, but with humility, humour and curiosity. To embody all these things is to embody grace.

## Chapter Two

### ‘A hybrid method of composition’: Moore’s Incomplete Revisions in *Collected Poems* and *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*

Over the decades, Moore’s readers have wrung their hands at her lifelong desire to continue revising her published work to the point, some have argued, of something akin to vandalism.[1] For the most part, these revisions have taken the form of deletion rather than addition. This self-editing became ever more a feature of Moore’s process in her later life, as she set to work reviewing her earlier poems with an increasing vigour. In Moore’s two later volumes, her *Collected Poems* of 1951 and her *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (*Complete Poems*) of 1967, the poet made deep and widespread cuts to many of her best-known works, notably to ‘The Steeple-Jack’, ‘The Frigate Pelican’, and, perhaps most famously, ‘Poetry’, which she revised over four times throughout her career. Moore’s justification for the escalation in the process of excision was a terse remark made to her editor Arthur Gregor: ‘omissions are not accidents’.[2] The phrase sits as an epigraph to her *Complete Poems,* seeming to prepare the reader for the obliterations that will ensue.

The approach of revision and omission was not reserved for Moore’s poems alone: it also extended to the presentation of the chronology of her canon. The ordering of Moore’s texts in the table of contents in her later collected works—seemingly arranged according to publication date—is deceptive, providing only a partial picture of her publishing history. In *Collected Poems,* for example, Moore removed her first published volume, *Observations,* from the contents list altogether, thus implying that the 1935 *Selected Poems* was her first published work, a preference which reappeared in *Complete Poems* some sixteen years later. Cuts also

[1] Moore’s numerous and often drastic revisions to her literary canon have been widely criticised among admirers and scholars alike. ‘Notorious’ is how Jerome McGann put it in his 1983 discussion of Moore’s work. Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 86. After the publication of Moore’s 1967 volume *Complete Poems* the reviewer Anthony Hecht bemoaned, ‘more often than not she has cut and trimmed in radical and merciless ways’. Anthony Hecht, ‘Writer’s Rights and Reader’s Rights,’ in *Hudson Review* 21 (1968): 208.

[2] Andrew Kappel in his chapter on Moore’s revisions gives an in-depth discussion of the conversation with Gregor and the editorial decision to have the phrase as an epigraph to *Complete Poems.* Andrew J. Kappel, ‘Complete with Omissions: The Text of Marianne Moore’s Complete Poems,’ in *Representing Modern Texts: Editing as Interpretation,* ed. George Bernstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 126.

extended to the listed poems attributed to these sub-volumes. For instance, under the title of 'Selected Poems' in the table of contents for *Collected Poems,* forty-five poems are listed rather than the original's forty-nine. This practice is made all the more puzzling as it reappears in Moore's *Complete Poems* under the volume's self-professed title as the 'definitive edition' of Moore's work.[3] Yet, in fact, the volume contains less than half of Moore's oeuvre.

The lack of a reliable, comprehensive or complete volume of Moore's work, much less any single 'definitive' version of many of her poems, has proved problematic for scholars. With multiple, often conflicting, versions of any one text, the decision as to which version of which poem, and from which specific collection, to work with becomes a challenge. Until recently the standard text for Moore scholars had been her 1967 *Complete Poems*, republished in 1981. However, Heather Cass White's recent 2017 volume of Moore's *New Collected Poems* seeks to take Moore's editorial processes into account. Cass White encourages a reading of Moore's work which calls into question the definitiveness and 'completeness' of any single version of her poems.[4] This is achieved by adding Moore's numerous revised versions of her poems into the editor's notes.

This chapter moves on from Moore's 'animiles' poems of the thirties, this time looking at the later part of Moore's career with a particular focus on Moore's final collections, *Collected Poems* and *Complete Poems.* This chapter will focus on Moore's role as a reviser of her earlier poems, asking why Moore chose to go back and make such extensive excisions to her early work at this later point in her career. I will keep to the spirit of Cass White's multilayered approach, of interpreting Moore's poems through the prism of their multiple revisions and omissions, in order to provide close readings of the allegedly 'definitive' final versions of Moore's poems in a dual perspective, placed alongside their earlier incarnations. The main reason for this is that in order to appreciate the extent of Moore's omissions, and to gain an insight into the ways in which the later poems differed from their earlier forms, it is necessary to first understand what exactly was omitted and, subsequently, how this changes the reader's interpretations of these poems. This chapter will also engage with the scholarly debate surrounding Moore's editorial interventions. It will

[3] Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).
[4] For more on the process of editing Moore's poems see: Heather Cass White, 'Editing the Poems,' in Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems,* ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 343-355.

focus on two schools of thought: the first that of Andrew Kappel, who reads Moore's revisions as a marked improvement on her earlier poems; and the second that of Robin Schulze, who argues that Moore's revisions are the very opposite, urging a new interpretative literature which, rather than reading Moore's revised work as the final rung on a ladder of progression, instead reads these revisions as responding to their changing contexts.[5] My argument sides with the latter, yet I intend to offer my own interpretation which, by interrogating the intention behind Moore's revisionary process, proposes a new lens through which we might read the relationship between Moore's 'final' revised poems and their previous versions.

My approach to Moore's revisions will develop some of the issues discussed in my earlier chapter, in particular the interplay between the mechanic and the organic will be explored further. This chapter will build on that discussion, offering a series of related terms against which to read Moore's practice of self-editing: feeling and precision, reality and the sphere of the imaginative, the intellectual and the instinctive, the actual and the virtual. All these dual terms will play an important role in the unfolding argument. Finally, this chapter will continue to examine Moore's lifelong interest in Darwinian theories of evolution. Whilst I argue that the conventional theories of evolution play a crucial role in Moore's process of revision, I will also build on this interpretation by setting it alongside the work of Henri Bergson and his observations of the impact of evolution on human psychology. The American Museum of Natural History, which has been a dominant concern thus far, is less a feature. While the museum was still an important source of inspiration for Moore's work in the latter part of her career, there is notably less archival material concerning Moore's interactions with the museum during this period. However, the preoccupations which derive from Moore's numerous visits to the museum, and her inspiration in the diorama's display technique in her poems, still resonate in her work of this period and inform this chapter.

## *'A plain Presbyterian effect': The Nature of the Sparse, the Emotive and the Precise in 'Feeling and Precision'*

[5] Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions'; Robin Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text,' *Text* 11 (1998).

With such a complex and perplexing history to Moore's editorial choices, the question as to why she chose in later life to go back to the early versions of her poems and radically remove so much, is central. Critics have largely read this action as something resembling the subtractive practice of a sculptor, whittling away at the text as if to reveal the 'core' of the poem lurking beneath, awaiting discovery. Kappel, in one of the first and most comprehensive studies of Moore's revisions, reads Moore's excisions as part of her growing interest in later life in creating, what he terms, a 'plain Presbyterian effect'.[6] This is largely attributed to the devastating death of Moore's mother in 1947, and Kappel reads Moore's *Collected Poems* as a tribute to her mother's dislike of what she believed to be Moore's tendency towards 'excess' in her work.[7] Kappel notes that the majority of the excisions Moore chose to make at this time were 'the detailed presentation of particularities'.[8] This has led to a plainer, pared-down aesthetic which Kappel and many other critics have read as an affirmation of Moore's adherence to the modernist principle of precision, and specifically the work of the Imagist movement.[9] The Imagists' demand for economical verse was in part a stance against sentimentality; through an aesthetic of sparseness, focused upon the thing itself, the poet might create a more charged essence from which 'concentric feelings'[10], as T. S. Eliot put it, could subsequently be evoked. Hannah Sullivan, in her work on revisions, argues that modernist authors saw the process of editing as an integral part of the modernist practice.[11] This is clearly visible in the editorial methods of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, for whom, as Sullivan writes, '[R]ather than being simply a mild improvement, the revised text is accordingly represented as *deeper* and more fundamental than the original version'.[12] The revisionary practice of the modernist writer tinkering away at the text becomes a process of excavation, an act of chipping at the surface of the original—or 'mining'

[6] Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions,' 154.
[7] Ibid., 138-140.
[8] Ibid., 143.
[9] Ibid.; Bonnie Honigsblum also provides a lengthy discussion on this linkage in Bonnie Honigsblum, 'Marianne Moore's Revisions of "Poetry,"' in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1990).
[10] Eliot discusses these 'concentric feelings' in his introduction to Moore's *Selected Poems* in Marianne Moore, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1935).
[11] Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2013), 34.
[12] Ibid.

as Pound has it[13]—in search of some hidden jewel glinting within, resonating with a depth of meaning. This act was often, but not always, a process of subtraction rather than addition.

However, as I will argue, there are problems with this assumption. As far back in Moore's career as 1916, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), a leading Imagist poet, explored Moore's poems and their complex ability to weave 'curiously wrought patterns, quaint turns of thought and concealed, half-playful ironies'.[14] Far from plain, then, Moore's poems use of these 'concealed' patterns, turns and ironies—what Kappel might term 'excesses'—create what H.D. reads as a game of bafflement with her reader. Plainness, therefore, is not a quality critics have always attributed to Moore's poems, as will become apparent, nor is it supplied as the reason for valuing them, as H.D. attests.

Moore's positioning as a poet of precision is well-established and has been the discussion of much critical analysis.[15] Moore's essay 'Feeling and Precision', first published in *The Sewanee Review* in 1944, had initially been written as a paper for the Entretiens de Pontigny, a conference of 1943 which took place, for the second year, in exile in New England. The conference, as John Peale Bishop discusses in his introduction to the review, was intended to provide a space in which ideas could be exchanged, both in relation to the ongoing war and to what Bishop terms 'those permanent concerns of men'.[16] Moore spoke alongside three other American poets, one of whom was Moore's contemporary, Wallace Stevens.[17] These poets had been set a challenge: 'develop their own thought…hear their conclusions disputed and their dearest convictions put to doubt.'[18] In her paper, Moore engages with a number of arguments concerning the nature of modern poetry, notably citing Wallace Stevens and his discussion of the imagination as a response to adversities in his essay, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words'.[19]

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[13] As Pound notes: 'If a man owned mines in South Africa he would know that his labourers dug up a good deal of mud and an occasional jewel, looking like the mud around it'. Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965* (London: Faber, 1973), quoted in Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision,* 34.
[14] H.D., 'Marianne Moore,' *Egoist* 3, no. 8 (1916): 118.
[15] For an in-depth reading of Moore's use of precision see: Natalia Cecire, 'Marianne Moore's Precision,' *Arizona Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2011).
[16] John Peale Bishop, 'Introduction,' *The Sewanee Review* 52, no. 4 (1944): 493.
[17] Stevens' contribution to the conference was his paper, 'The Figure of the Youth as a Virile Poet'. Wallace Stevens, 'The Figure of the Youth as a Virile Poet,' *The Sewanee Review* 52, no. 4 (1944).
[18] Bishop, 'Introduction,' 494.
[19] Marianne Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' *The Sewanee Review* 52, no. 4 (1944).

In her contribution, Moore explores the linkage between her understanding of the concept of 'precision' and what she describes as 'feeling' from the perspective of the writer. Feeling—notably different to the notion of sentimentality rejected by the Imagists—is introduced as emotional intensity, and at its very deepest, Moore notes, 'it tends to be inarticulate'.[20] The rest of the essay is, in part, an attempt to establish how this intensity can be articulated effectively in language, and Moore gives much of the initial discussion over to establishing the nature of this so-called 'feeling' and its resulting relationship with 'precision'. The emotive force of feeling tends to charge language with a release of kinetic energy. This is represented by what Moore terms the 'running panther of desire' which she discusses in relation to the work of the British poet Henry Treece.[21] Feeling originates from instinct—a term called upon by Moore five times across her essay—and is envisaged as a state which, far from being preconceived by any designs of the poet, develops organically. This instinctive drive creates verse which allows for, what Moore terms, the 'natural' (a term which she later expands to 'natural reticence'), and she confides that her own 'fondness for the unaccented rhyme derives, I think, from an instinctive effort to ensure naturalness'.[22] Art endowed with the spirit of such feeling is secured in contrast to the kind of art which is merely technical and thus risks becoming inauthentic and artificial. As Moore states, 'when we think we don't like art it is because it is artificial art', and she goes on to quote Plato describing mere technical display as 'a beastly noise'.[23]

However, while Moore explores the effect of art as an expression of instinctive emotive intensity, true artistry lies in the way in which that intensity is mediated. Feeling, when unimpeded, is described as highly problematic; it runs the risk of becoming, as Moore puts it, 'over-condensed'[24]—we might here recall the Imagists' preference for the sparse—so much so that the author 'is resisted as being enigmatic or cryptic or disobliging or arrogant'.[25] Such writing also has the tendency to run away with itself, falling into an excessive overflow of language, which tends to rush towards premature conclusion. Art therefore lies neither in compressed overly

[20] Ibid., 499.
[21] Ibid., 504.
[22] Ibid., 502.
[23] Ibid., 501-502
[24] Ibid., 499.
[25] Ibid., 499.

ambiguous verse, nor in the unchecked outpouring of feeling. Precision is offered up as the means by which such feeling might be harnessed evocatively in language, and Moore reads precision of language as having a propensity for both 'impact and exactitude'.[26]

As the essay unfolds Moore provides a set of exemplifications of what she envisages precision to be. She calls on numerous examples including metaphor, sustained climax and antithesis, all of which, with differing effect, are intended to assist with the rendering of precision. Significantly, Moore does not seek to explicitly define what she means by precision, nor does she provide us with a set of hard and fast rules which might help the writer to obtain it; instead, she offers a series of guidelines, and we are told that we can but 'try' to follow them.[27] Precision is thus understood to be a rhetorical effect. The result is an impressionistic series of disparate examples and quotations which draw on the work of other writers and which act only as a general illustration of what Moore might mean—or, just as readily, *not* mean—by this term.

Early on in the essay Moore calls upon three specific principles which are described as 'aids to composition'.[28] These principles have one feature in common: they are all associated with restraining speech which Moore determines to be in some way excessive. In the first instance, Moore describes what the writer might do when a 'long sentence with dependant clauses seems obscure'.[29] Here the excess of the long sentence is segmented into conversational idioms which act to better engage, rather than alienate, readers. Moore, secondly, refers to 'expanded explanation' which can become awkward.[30] This speech has the capacity to impair 'the lion's leap'[31], a term Moore returns to later on in her essay. She seems to be inferring that the writer must avoid the kind of long-winded speech that tends to explain everything away, leaving no room for the reader to make imaginative associations. In the final example, Moore provides us with an internalised impulse on the writer's part, a 'natural reticence' which, it would seem, wills the writer to speak economically rather than excessively.[32] Thus, in all three examples Moore

[26] Ibid., 499.
[27] Ibid., 499.
[28] Ibid., 499.
[29] Ibid., 499.
[30] Ibid., 499.
[31] Ibid., 499.
[32] Ibid., 499.

furnishes the reader with a series of aids to excision which have the effect of restraining speech which might be deemed excessive. It is through these acts and impulses that Moore positions her unfolding notion of precision.

The principle of 'natural reticence' reappears throughout the essay and is a central part of Moore's discussion. One might readily imagine such reticence as a form of propriety on the part of the poet. However, throughout 'Feeling and Precision' 'natural reticence' is instead described as a force of intervention and disruption. Significantly, its link to the 'natural' domain builds on Moore's previous categorising of the natural as a state of instinctive feeling. Reticence is translated into a series of technical devices which act to pull language back from the edge of overpowering intensity and overly simplistic resolution. It interrupts and modifies expressive speech with hesitations, silences, line breaks, and unusual syntax.

Moore's discussion of climax is a compelling example of her admiration of the usage of reticence in the work of others; she esteems Robert Henryson's 'gusto of invention, with climax proceeding out of climax, which is the mark of feeling'.[33] Moore's own use of climax, deployed by the poet in many of her poems (as will be explored later in this discussion), embodies the energetic swell of intense feeling, prolonging it throughout the poem as it follows a pattern of rising and falling and rising again, yet never reaching any form of comfortable closure. The subsequent effect is much like a wave gathering pace, perpetually quivering at the point at which it might crash onto the shoreline without doing so. This allows for a sustained tension without dissolving into any finite solution. The poem is thus set into continual and beguiling motion where the reader's anticipation is kept alive and any sense of singular didactic explanation is denied. Emotion, therefore, is all the more impactful when it is implied rather than directly identified in language. 'Feeling' in poetry must always be imbued with a sense of the incomplete. Such a principle is mirrored throughout 'Feeling and Precision', where Moore chooses to furnish her argument with indirect examples throughout, never quite allowing the unfolding discussion to fall out as explanation. Precision is thus located in tension: the tension

[33] Ibid., 503. It is also worth noting that in Moore's unfolding discourse surrounding climax there is an echo of the work of Kenneth Burke, in particular his discussion of crescendo and climatic moments in 'The Poetic Process'. Crescendo, according to Burke, had a highly emotive effect which is particularly favourably to the human mind. The human mind, Burke notes, tends to 'think' in terms of crescendo because it parallels certain psychic and physical processes which are at the root of our experience. Kenneth Burke, 'The Poetic Process,' in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 174.

between, on one hand, the instinctive driving force of the poet's creative vision and, on the other, the need for exactitude which tempers that vision by breaking the continuity of emotive language. The result is all the more exhilarating as it promotes a charged form of diction which is, in Moore's words, 'virile', and thus 'galvanized against inertia'.[34]

In this characterisation, the poet is compelled to work amidst friction. As Moore states, '[I]n any writing of maximum force, the writer seems under a compulsion to set down an unbearable accuracy suffering from a kind of overwhelmed receptivity.'[35] Accuracy, for Moore, can never be finalised; it is always in the process of becoming ever more accurate and, as such, 'unbearable'. In turn, Moore's 'overwhelmed receptivity' seems to provide an endless stimulus to this pursuit of accuracy. The poet is in a state of continual alertness to the new and changing information around her. The act of writing, therefore, is presented as a form of heroic self-preservation, a means of mediating the intense force which impels the writer to set down their experience in language; yet it also requires the result to have an exactitude which makes the poet's work accessible to readers. For Moore, writers deal in lively experimentation. Rather than adhering to a set of rules, writing is above all an ongoing process of trial and error. This sentiment is also mimicked in the style of the essay itself, where on occasion the poet, urged to speak, struggles to find the right words to express her intended sentiment. It is as if the act of writing 'Feeling and Precision' becomes an illustration of language's (and the poet's) propensity towards failure. Language, Moore reminds us, is by its nature slippery and inclined towards inexactitude. The poet, much like the heroic figure, is thus constantly battling with disappointment: on one hand instinctively impelled towards the creative act, yet also aware that the poet/hero is always prone to make mistakes, to render their inclination towards expression inaccurately.

This reading of precision sits uncomfortably with Kappel's argument. In the first instance, precision throughout Moore's early to mid-career has been aided by and *through* the use of observational details from numerous sources, as well as the accumulation of those details. These observed details, quotations and snippets of information—the 'detailed presentation of particularities' Kappel discusses[36]—

[34] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 500.
[35] Ibid., 500.
[36] Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions,' 143.

mediate the excessive overflow of intensity the poet wishes to keep in check. As such, they provide an important part of the principle of 'natural reticence', which Moore puts forward as integral to precision in her essay. One result of this principle of 'natural reticence' is that precision in Moore's poems often tends to produce more extensive and dense poetry rather than smaller, slighter poems. As Bonnie Costello has noted, 'the peculiar result of such "precision", peculiar since it is presented as restraint in process, is not fewer words but more.'[37]

Thus, in choosing to remove the bulk of her observational details of the particular in her revisions, as Kappel rightly foregrounds, Moore seems to go against the grain of a well-established writerly practice. This does not mean that Moore's revisionary practice does not entail the removal of observational detail from her earlier work and that the result of these cuts is not a plain effect. On the contrary, I agree with Kappel that the bulk of the cuts made are indeed concerned with detail and the subsequent effect is a much sparser form of verse. However, it is Moore's intentions that this chapter seeks to interrogate. It does not follow that Moore made these excisions in the misguided service of the sort of precision that critics such as Kappel and Honigsblum discuss, for both critics ultimately read Moore's process of revision and concision as working towards what Honigsblum calls, quoting David Daiches, a 'principle of unity'.[38] I take issue with this statement on two counts: firstly, because the resounding effect of Moore's revisions seems, far from presenting a concise coherent unity, to produce instead a sense of uncertainty, confusion and, in many places, a confounding simplicity which in actuality encourages more questions than firm answers.[39] Secondly, Moore's conception of precision as mobile natural speech mediated by discontinuous constraint seems to differ significantly from what Kappel and Honigsblum describe. For Moore, as has been discussed, precision is the result of a finely orchestrated tension between two opposing forces; it is an ongoing process of disruption in contrast to Kappel's and Honigsblum's notion of precision as a means of uncovering a single unified pre-existing, and finalised, whole.

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[37] Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 218.
[38] Honigsblum, 'Marianne Moore's Revisions of "Poetry,"' 185.
[39] Many critics have, as a result, bemoaned the strange ambiguities of Moore's revised verse, lamenting that Moore did her readers a great injury by altering her early writing so drastically. Cass White has explained, 'although Moore's omissions were not accidents, they were nevertheless mistakes'. Cass White, 'Editing the Poems,' 343.

Rather, therefore, than reading Moore's later work as an unfortunate and ill-advised transition from her earlier literary aesthetic, I intend instead to read her revisions as part of her commitment to the aesthetic of the discontinuous and the incomplete, interpreting Moore's revisions as an extension of her career-long interest in Darwinian evolution. This aesthetic seems clear in Moore's revisions from the outset. The playful disordering of chronology in *Collected Poems* and *Complete Poems* testifies to Moore's wish to dispense with any sense of there being one single authoritative text by which to interpret her work. Even Moore's declaration of a 'complete' and 'definitive' work seems consciously self-mocking, for the description is disproved once the reader discovers the absences and the *in*completeness at the heart of her so-called *Complete Poems.* Rather than interpreting Moore's revised poems as the end result of a process of compression, or whittling away, I instead read Moore's revised poems as another step along a writerly process of experimentation, a trial-and-error practice which Moore had adhered to throughout her career. It therefore becomes pertinent to ask: why did Moore choose to revise her poems in this manner? What end were these excisions intended to serve? How do these revisions translate into the tension of 'impact and exactitude' in Moore's detailed description of precision?[40]

## *Adaptation as Grace: The Sphere of the Imaginative and the 'Pressure' of Reality in the 1934 Version of 'The Frigate Pelican'*

In 1951 Moore returned to the text of 'The Frigate Pelican' for her forthcoming *Collected Poems.* The poem had previously been published first in Eliot's *The Criterion* in 1934, and then again, a year later in Moore's collection of *Selected Poems,* before Moore chose to revisit it in 1951. The cuts she made at this point in her career were extensive and deep. Rather than the exact filing down of excessive details to a smooth cohesive whole, the poem in its final form appears to have been hacked back, crudely and erratically. The twelve-stanza poem of the 1934 original was cut to a mere five and a half stanzas, omitting crucial aspects of the poem's opening and middle stanzas as well as its ending, thus dramatically changing the poem's overall effect. Far from reading the resulting poem as a complete entity,

[40] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 499.

streamlined and authoritative—a stand in for 'what really mattered, privileged for its meaningfulness and positioned centrally in a place of authority', as Kappel has it[41]—the revised poem seems instead a mere fractured outline of the multilayered, nuanced poem of previous years. The 1951 poem is widely treated by scholars as the definitive version, reappearing some years later in this form in Moore's *Complete Poems*. Given the extent and seeming brutality of Moore's cuts, the question arises as to why Moore chose such a radical act at this point in her career. How is the meaning of 'The Frigate Pelican' changed and to what end? In order to fully appreciate the nature of the changes Moore made, it is necessary to read the revised version against the poem's original state as it was printed in *The Criterion* of 1934. What follows focuses first on this version and then on its later form.

The opening of the early version of 'The Frigate Pelican' hones its observational lens in on the initial prospect of a pelican voyaging through the sky. This creature is discussed through a mass of varied details and associations:

Rapidly cruising or lying on the air there is a bird
  that realizes Rasselas's friend's project
  of wings uniting levity with strength. This
    hell-diver, frigate-bird, hurricane-
bird; unless swift is the proper word
    for him, the storm omen when
  he flies close to the waves, should be seen
      fishing, although oftener
      he appears to prefer

to take, on the wing, from industrious cruder-winged species
   the fish they have caught and is seldom successless.
   A marvel of grace, no matter how fast his
    victim may fly or how often may
turn, the dishonest pelican's ease
    in pursuit, bears him away

[41] Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions,' 143.

with the fish that the badgered bird drops.[42]

This bird, we are told, is a fast-paced 'hell-diver', a 'hurricane-bird' and a 'storm omen'—a dangerous, disruptive force. This 'dishonest' pelican is also a trickster and a thief: he steals the prey of others, chasing his 'victims' who carry their own fish. He is not to be trusted. Yet the speaker's opinion of this tempestuous creature is more complex than we might at first imagine. This bird is also described with admiration: he is a 'marvel of grace' and his 'ease of pursuit' is rendered as a cunning form of elegance. From the outset, Moore revels in the intricacies of this creature's unique flight, a flight which is deemed superior to that of the other so-called 'cruder-winged species'. Moore thus presents this exceptionally well-adapted animal as having an evolutionary advantage over other lesser species, and a focal point of Moore's admiration seems to centre around the evolution of the creature's wings which, we are told, are capable of 'uniting levity with strength'. This sentence is a direct quote from Samuel Johnson's apologue *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759) and references the unsuccessful imagined wings whereby the engineer, the friend of whom Moore speaks, might enable Rasselas to swim through the air, as a fish swims through water, thus abetting his escape from the valley in which he is trapped.[43] Such an imagined fantasy once conjured in fiction, Moore seems to say, is here made manifest in a living creature with an aptitude for flying between air and sea. Much as in Moore's 1936 poem 'The Pangolin', the quality Moore admires in this animal is its 'grace', and grace is located, as in 'The Pangolin', in the ability to embody and unite dual characteristics. In this case, the frigate pelican's grace lies in its unification of 'levity and strength', and, in so doing, the animal can make the imagined actual.

Such a sly being is this bird that the speaker grapples to find an appropriate name with which to define him:

> A kind of superlative
> swallow, that likes to live

[42] Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017). All quotations are from this edition. Copies of the core poems used in this discussion are supplied in an 'Appendix' at the end of this thesis.
[43] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (Cleveland: The Floating Press, 2017).

on food caught while flying, he is not a pelican. The toe
    with slight web, air-boned body, and very long wings
    with the spread of a swan's – duplicating a
        bow-string as he floats overhead – feel
the changing V-shaped scissor swallow-
        tail direct the rigid keel.
  And steering beak to wayward always,
          the fleetest foremost fairy
          among birds, outflies the

aeroplane which cannot flap its wings nor alter any quill-
    tip. For him, the feeling in a hand, in fins, is
    in his unbent downbent crafty oar. With him

Even when the poet manages to finally settle on a description for this shape-shifting animal, she is tentative, second guessing the validity of her own words: 'unless swift is the proper word/for him', and the bird is merely 'a *kind* of superlative/swallow' (my italics). The resounding character trait of this creature seems to be his suggestive capacity to adopt these multiple forms at once; he is described as a natural being of many guises, a 'superlative/swallow' with 'very long wings/with the spread of a swan's'. Not merely a pelican, then, he is also partly swan and partly swallow. Yet this pelican doesn't quite sit within the category of the purely natural either, for he is also endowed with technical imagery: described as a 'bow' capable of 'duplicating a bow-string as he floats overhead', and then as a boat with his 'rigid keel', his 'steering beak', and a 'crafty oar'. This floating animal-cum-boat tacks between the descriptions of the natural and the man-made with the same 'ease' he reserves for pursuing his prey. Yet he also seems to belong to neither grouping, being seemingly too rigid, too boat-like to quite be a part of the natural world, and too swift and crafty to be a man-made object. As such this particularly well-evolved creature, 'the fleetest foremost fairy/among birds', can even outfly the airplane which, we are told in a humorous turn, 'cannot flap/its wings nor alter any quill/tip'. This image, which echoes the poem's previous reference to Rasselas's flying machine, comically plays with the assumed superiority of the airplane. Conversely,

the human invention is described as clumsy and less technologically advanced when compared to Moore's bird. This creature seems to defy any form of easy categorisation the poet may seek to place on him as he masterfully hovers between the dual positions of natural creature and evolved machine. He is at once playful and yet robust.

Throughout the poem Moore employs the use of an unaccented rhyming scheme. Here she follows the pattern of ababcc dispersed throughout each stanza. In 'Feeling and Precision' Moore associates her use of the unaccented rhyme with her commitment to 'an instinctive effort to ensure naturalness' and as a means of avoiding a self-consciously 'poetic' tone.[44] Indeed, in 'The Frigate Pelican' this overarching scheme takes on an organic quality which seems, in turn, to replicate the 'swift' pelican's movement, propelling the reader forward and thus simulating the bird's speed. The pace is further emphasised in the use of hyphens and internal rhymes deployed throughout the opening stanzas of the poem. In this, the poem attempts to keep time with the pelican and his playful transformation from one state to another; this is also reflected in the stanza's use of detailed descriptions which seem to tumble from one line to the next. This overflowing quality is part of the poet's project to imagine the bird precisely. This project has the effect of producing multiple descriptions, some of which are successful and some of which fall short. Successful descriptions tend to be taken up by the speaker and discussed, whereas those deemed less successful are cut short, often by a contrary statement such as, 'unless swift is the proper word for him'. This echoes Moore's espousal of trial and error in the service of exactitude in 'Feeling and Precision', and, much as in Moore's essay, the poet's perceived failure to describe the bird accurately is presented as being as important as her more successful attempts. This adds to the subject of the poem, which comes to include the difficulties of the act of description. She understands that knowing what the bird isn't takes the poet, and the reader, closer to envisaging what the bird *is*; and the result of this advancement towards precision leads inevitably to an expanding series of descriptions. Thus Moore identifies the frigate pelican's ever-changing movements as part of her own instinctive commitment to the quality of 'naturalness', as she puts it, and the bird's ascendance also comes to inhabit the poet's imaginative flight. Yet alongside unaccented rhyme

[44] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 502.

Moore also employs a carefully constructed syllabic pattern which works away largely undetected by the reader, as if beneath the kinetic sonic structures of the poem's surface. As the first chapter has discussed, it is typical of Moore's work of this period that the meticulous use of syllabics is executed throughout. This poem is no exception, following as it does a very strict premeditated pattern of 15, 12, 11, 9, 9, 7, 9, 7, 6 syllables per line consecutively. It is in this balance between the unaccented rhyme and the syllabic structure that we see Moore's use of precision at its most adept, for, at each point that the instinctive quickfire speed of excessive description seems in danger of running away with itself, the premeditated syllabic structure acts as a constraint, pulling the poem back into focus, and acting as part of the 'reticence' Moore links to exactitude.

In the opening stanzas of this poem, therefore, there is a finely tuned tension between the natural and mobile language used to speak of the frigate pelican, and the exactitude and accuracy with which the formal structure of the poem intervenes in order to keep that language in check. While this tension is maintained throughout, there is one point where the balance seems to break down. We are told that the frigate pelican is 'the fleetest foremost fairy/among birds'; he even 'outflies the/aeroplane'. Yet while the reader has come to expect an end rhyme between the last words of the closing two lines of the stanza, as is the case throughout most of the poem, in this instance there is just a ghost of a rhyme between the word 'fairy' and the word 'the'. The unaccented rhyme here appears to have been pushed to its limit, to the extent that it is on the verge of becoming non-rhyme. The enjambment of the poem is thus momentarily disturbed as is the natural momentum of the detailed language. The tightly wrought balance between the 'impact and exactitude' of precision thereby falls apart. It is as if the free spirit of the frigate pelican has managed to outwit the poet, and thus this 'fleetest foremost fairy/among birds' seems not just to outfly the airplane, but also the poem itself. The unaccented rhyme scheme which beforehand managed to keep time with this creature, mimicking the charged pulse of the pelican's flight, falls out of step, and in its wake the poem momentarily loses its capacity to contain its subject matter. The reader's attention, however fleetingly, is drawn to the hitherto undetected unaccented rhyme by the poet's weakening of its construction, and in a single moment the poem pulls back the curtain to reveal its inner mechanics. While this is a minor moment in the grand technical scheme of the poem's structure, it is nevertheless significant, for it

indicates how exacting the counterbalance of precision really is: if the poet tips the scales too far in one direction, then the whole equilibrium is upset. We are thus reminded of the poet's depiction of the writer's struggle throughout 'Feeling and Precision', and it seems that at this revealing point in the poem Moore displays the tendency of language to fail in its inability to capture this slippery ever-adapting creature within the body of the poem. From this point the pelican is suddenly detached from the speaker, locating the poet, and the poem, on ground level below while the pelican soars overhead in the sky above. This is a division which reverberates throughout the stanzas that follow, and it is a division which is subsequently put into question.

The stanzas that follow develop the allusions Moore set forth in her opening reference to Rasselas, again emphasising that the frigate pelican cannot be elucidated by the means of fictions or narratives:

> This is not the stalwart swan that can ferry the
> woodcutter's two children home; no. Make hay; keep
> the shop; I have one sheep; were a less
> limber animal's mottoes. This one
> finds sticks for the swan's-down dress
> of his child to rest upon and would
> not know Gretel from Hänsel.
> As impassioned Handel –
>
> meant for a lawyer and a masculine German domestic
> career – clandestinely studied the harpsichord
> and never was known to have fallen in love,
> the unconfiding frigate-bird hides
> in the height and in the majestic
> display of his art. He glides
> a hundred feet or quivers about
> as charred paper behaves – full
> of feints; and an eagle
>
> of vigilance, earns the term aquiline; keeping at a height

so great the feathers look black and the beak does not
show. It is not retreat but exclusion from
which he looks down and observes what went
secretly, as it thought, out of sight
among dense jungle plants. Sent

The emphasis in this section of the poem shifts from a concern not merely with fictions but, rather with fictions that seem dated and outmoded, using the 'stalwart swan' and Hänsel and Gretel as an example of this. The anxiety surrounding these kinds of fictions bears an important comparison to Moore's contemporary Wallace Stevens' essay 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' (1942) and its introduction of the terms 'antiquated and rustic.'[45] Stevens begins his essay with the allegorical figure, taken from Plato, of the charioteer of the gods driving two winged horses, one noble and one ignoble, an image intended to represent the soul.[46] Stevens, however, argues that in such an image the notion of a soul is an outmoded concept which no longer rings true to the ear of modern audiences.[47] Thus, the imaginative enjoyment any reader might have derived from such a depiction is diminished by what Stevens terms 'the pressure of reality'.[48] The imagination, as Stevens conceives it, 'loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to that which is real' and, subsequently, becomes implausible.[49] The vitality of the imagination for Stevens thus depends upon its connection with the reality of things as they are. This formulation has an important association with Moore's own account of precision in 'Feeling and Precision' as being located in another point of contact: between charged and 'virile' emotion and a natural reticence concerned with preserving accuracy. The danger for the poet resides in the loss of that tension or point of contact, if it is lost, the object described risks becoming antiquated and accuracy is lessened.

In this section of the poem, with its notable shift in tone, the poet introduces imagined creatures recognised from fiction as an example of the danger of these outmoded forms of image. Drawing in this instance on an allusion to the popular

[45] Wallace Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,' in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber, 1960), 4.
[46] Ibid., 3.
[47] Ibid., 3.
[48] Ibid., 13.
[49] Ibid., 7.

German fairy tale of *Hänsel and Gretel* written by the Brothers Grimm in 1812, Moore focuses in on the swan who, in some versions of the fairy tale, ferries Hänsel and Gretel away from danger and has typically been read as a symbol of freedom.[50] However, in a conversational tone, Moore emphatically asserts that the frigate pelican 'is not the stalwart swan that can ferry the/woodcutter's two children home; no.' The presentation of these images, Moore seems to suggest, has lost touch with the reality that she is seeking to comprehend. Again, much like her assertions of the frigate pelican as the realisation of Rasselas's friend's project, Moore is again keen to emphasise the fact that this bird is, by contrast, a living creature. This 'limber' pelican thus rejects any association with a constricted imagination which adheres to a literary tradition where animals take on the subservient role of helper. Moore refuses to allow her rendering of the bird to be so easily assimilated into an antique trope or symbol, implicitly questioning the morals that might be derived from these kinds of images. Yet again, the bird defies any attempt to be fixed to an iconic function. Rather than being presented as an antiquated symbol of freedom, the pelican instead embodies that spirited freedom. He *is* 'aquiline', an 'eagle//of vigilance', as Moore has it.

Subsequently, the poem jumps from this depiction of Hänsel and Gretel to that of the 'impassioned' composer Handel. To assist this leap Moore employs an end rhyme, comical in its clumsiness, where 'Hänsel' seems to suggest another 'German' figure, 'Handel'. This self-consciously awkward deployment of rhyme has the effect of directing the reader towards the poem's shift in gear and adds to the poem's expanding wayward shape. The shift is further accentuated by Moore's unusual use of syntax where Handel appears to be offered up by way of another comparison in the sentence, 'As impassioned Handel'. Here, Moore wryly introduces an epic simile whereby Handel is likened to 'the unconfiding frigate-bird'. An elaborate comparison is thus being made over a number of lines which draws together Hänsel, Handel and the frigate pelican. Yet what is interesting within this comparison is that Handel—and by extension the frigate pelican—is presented in opposition to Hänsel

[50] This fairy tale tells the story of two siblings, Hänsel and Gretel, who when in the forest fall prey to an evil witch, who lives in a house made from gingerbread. The witch plans to fatten the children up so that she might eat them, however Gretel outsmarts the witch and kills her. The children run away, and, in some versions of the story, they are helped across the river to their home, and to safety, by a swan (in other versions of the fairy tale the children are helped by duck rather than a swan). Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Hänsel and Gretel* (London: Franklin Watts, 1981).

and the homiletic safety that he represents. Handel, we are told, was 'meant for a lawyer and a masculine German domestic/career' and he was 'never was known to have fallen in love'. In refusing to follow the ordinary patterns of domestic life he must study the harpsichord 'clandestinely'. So too, the frigate pelican rejects the trappings of the domestic, refusing to 'Make hay; keep/the shop'. As such, he also is removed from that society, for he 'hides/in the height and in the majestic/display of his art.' By creating a direct comparison between Handel and the frigate pelican with Hänsel and Gretel, Moore also makes a comparison between an imagination which risks becoming outmoded and domesticated and one which does not. We might remember that Hänsel and Gretel is a story of children who, after leaving home, are finally restored to the safety of the domestic space. Moore is, therefore, keen to distinguish the composer and the pelican from such fictional representations.

Such a digression—from Hänsel to Handel and then to the pelican—is one of many deviations throughout the poem and illustrates Moore's concept of 'the lion's leap'. In this instance, Moore seems to swerve away from an unfolding critique of the emblems which play a part in literary traditions like that of the fairy tale, yet before such discussion runs the risk of falling into expanded didactic explanation—of the sort Moore criticises—the poem veers off in a different direction. This action has the effect of opening the poem up to an engagement with the reader's own imaginative associations which, in turn, prompts the reader to indirectly align Handel with the frigate pelican. Crucially, the effect is to avoid a forced comparison which might render the pelican as a symbol of the artist or artistic process. Moore celebrates the poem's twists and turns which share in the frigate pelican's restless energy as he continually transmutes himself, behaving, we are told, as 'charred paper'. For Moore, artistry, it would seem, lies in a disposition towards perpetual energetic motion and transformation, something of the 'virile' spirited quality she heralds in precise and emotive verse.

Critics have suggested that Moore's pelican is intended, in part, to be symbolic of the figure of the poet.[51] Schulze interprets the bird as being representative of Wallace Stevens, maintaining that Moore's portrayal of the pelican is an implied

[51] John Slatin reads the bird as the poet, or 'hero' as he puts it. John Slatin, *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1986), 203.

critique of Stevens and his difficult relationship with the public domain.[52] Such readings, however, rely on the long-standing literary traditions which Moore seeks to evade. These traditions encompass not just fairy tales but also, and perhaps most notably, the well-worn romantic trope of the bird and bird song as a universal symbol of poetic voice. This is a recurrent feature of Romantic poetry ranging from Shelley's 'To a Skylark' to Keats's famous 'Ode to a Nightingale'.[53] While Moore is aware of such traditions, I argue that ultimately her pelican defies association with such staid symbolism. Moore's pelican maintains his own identity, his shape-shifting energy defies any efforts on the reader's part to fix him to any narrative which might render him symbolic.

At this point, the poem introduces yet another switch in perspective as the speaker seems to momentarily rise up above the humdrum surface of the terrestrial, joining the pelican in his flight and looking down on the world the speaker has left behind, as if through his eyes:

ahead of the rest, there goes the true
knight in his jointed coat that
covers all but his bat

ears; a-trot, with stiff pig gait – our tame armadillo, loosed by
his master and as pleased as a dog. Beside the
spattered blood – that orchid which the native fears –
the fer-de-lance lies sleeping; centaur-
like, this harmful couple's amity
is apropos. A jaguar
and crocodile are fighting. Sharp-shinned
hawks and peacock-freckled small
cats, like the literal

merry-go-round, come wandering within the circular view

[52] Robin Schulze, '"The Frigate Pelican"'s Progress: Marianne Moore's Multiple Versions and Modernist Practice,' in *Gendered Modernism: American Women Poets and their Readers,* ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996).
[53] For more on the role of bird song as a trope in Romantic poetry see: Frank Doggett, 'Romanticism's Singing Bird,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 14, no. 4 (1974).

of the high bird for whom from the air they are ants
keeping house all their lives in the cracks of a
crag with no view from the top. And here,
unlikely animals learning to
dance, crouch on two steeds that rear
behind a leopard with a frantic
face, tamed by an Artemis
who wears a dress like his,

and hampering haymaker's hat. *Festina lente.* Be gay

It is from this expansive position that the poet can observe the world below, as if with a renewed clarity, seeing 'what went/secretly, as it thought, out of sight/among dense jungle plants'. What the speaker views from the pelican's vantage point seems at first to depict a version of 'reality' of the kind Stevens reads as putting 'pressure' upon the imagination. In Stevens's essay the reader is presented with a world which, he writes, is in the midst of a new era of reality, one where people appear to move as if 'in the intervals of a storm'.[54] Stevens is in part referring to the effects of World War II on society, but he is also describing a more generalised perception of a world which is in flux, continually changing and moving with no sense of permanence or order. Moore shares in Stevens's perception of modern society, presenting the reader with a world below which seems to be in the throes of a kind of Darwinian game. It is a place where animals are pitted against one another: 'A jaguar/and crocodile are fighting', we are told, and the 'tame armadillo' and the 'fer-de-lance' are here depicted as a 'harmful couple' whose 'amity/is apropos'. In this particular version of society, the life of the world below is one of constant strife. The inhabitants are deficient in the frigate pelican's impressive ease of adapting to his particular environment, and thus they labour in the perpetual state of a struggle for survival. However, this world is not depicted in a somber light. Rather the surreal rendering of images, moving from the knight with 'bat//ears' trotting with 'stiff pig gait', to the 'peacock-freckled small/cat' provides a comedic overtone, rich with imaginative zeal. Yet as the section continues this zeal takes on a

[54] Stevens, 'Nobel Rider,' 20.

frantic quality; the sheer excess of images of 'unlikely animals learning to/dance', coupled with allusions to the circus and its 'literal/merry-go-round', all add to a sense of vaudevillian theatrics. Yet again, Moore is preoccupied with the way in which the imagination risks running away with itself within the sphere of the poem. As this series of animals become more and more stylistically overstated, so too the reader is drawn further away from an understanding of these animals as they really are. Instead, the reader is presented with masked images, such as the 'leopard with a frantic/face, tamed by an Artemis' who herself 'wears a dress like his'. Thus, as Moore partakes in the frigate pelican's freedom swooping overhead in the domain of the imaginative, that flight is also tempered by the concern that in order for the imagination to remain dynamic it must sustain its contact with the reality of the world beneath. Again, Moore gestures towards language's problematic tendency to overstatement, providing an obstacle which must be overcome if imagination and reality are to be connected.

Just at the point where the reader might readily assume the poet may fly away with the majestic pelican to pastures new, the poem suddenly brings itself back down to earth with a bump, and Moore employs her characteristic use of 'natural reticence':

and hampering haymaker's hat. *Festina lente.* Be gay
civilly. How so? "If I do well I am blessed
whether any bless me or not, and if I do
ill I am cursed." We watch the moon rise
on the Susquehanna. In his way

Changing perspective again, the poet interrupts her imaginative voyage with the injunction: '*Festina lente.* Be gay/civilly. How so?' This interjection acts as a reminder to the poet to ground the joyous abandon of the imaginative flight in, what Moore terms, 'civility'. The unity of civility and the 'gay' provides an important challenge for the writer: to act both with the imaginative liberty and abandon needed for the task and yet to still adhere to the codes and requirements of a civil society. The poet must embody the dynamism of the imaginative realm, yet she must also produce work which is relevant, which does not risk slipping into the antiquated and rustic. She must write for, and within, the community of which she is a part. In

response Moore turns to a Hindu saying linked to Gandhi, stating: 'If I do well I am blessed/whether any bless me or not, and if I do/ill I am cursed.' It thus seems that Moore is forced to choose one state—the sky or the ground—and that it is not possible for the poet to embody both. Moore chooses to remain in the world beneath, and yet this choice is a somber one for both the poet and the pelican, as she concludes:

ill I am cursed." We watch the moon rise
on the Susquehanna. In this way
this most romantic bird, flies
to a more mundane place, the mangrove
swamp, to sleep. He wastes the moon.
But he, and others, soon

rise from the bough, and though flying are able to foil the tired
moment of danger, that lays on heart and lungs the
weight of the python that crushes to powder.
The tune's illiterate footsteps fail;
the steam hacks are not to be admired.

By remaining bound to the reality of society at ground-level, Moore places herself within a community, the 'we' who watch the moon rising. Here Moore references the Susquehanna of Pennsylvania, the state where she spent her youth, and from this position of domestic familiarity the poet is left to observe the moon. Yet this community appears far from ideal. Moore, without the bird's aerial perspective, is left looking at the moon—perhaps the most antiquated romantic trope of all—and attempting, but failing, to speak of it without falling into the kinds of worn symbols that she has previously dismissed. She returns to the image of the vaudevillian circus by referencing the 'the steam hacks', another term for a calliope or steam organ which plays mechanical music and was generally found at the circus. Yet this kind of music is not the kind Moore wishes to emulate. As she states, 'The tune's illiterate footsteps fail'. This admission reads as a direct aside from poet to reader, 'tune' here refers to the poem itself, and the poet seems again to acknowledge the poem's tendency towards failure, as its 'illiterate footsteps fail'.

The pelican, on the other hand, ‘wastes the moon’, choosing instead to sleep in the more ‘mundane’ mangrove swamp. Sleep for the pelican, however, does not signal closure. Instead, it is but a momentary state, and within the following lines the pelican is seen to ‘rise from the bough’, restored to continual activity as the poem continues into the next stanza.

As at the beginning of the poem, the speaker gives the closing stanzas over to the intricacies of the frigate pelican’s flight. Yet this time the bird, as he rises up and leaves the page, is joined by ‘others’ who belong to a community we are not a part of. What separates these other-worldly beings from us is their ability to move in an ‘unturbulent’ fashion, as Moore puts it. It is through this perpetual motion, from place to place and category to category, that these creatures foil the danger of the ‘python that crushes to powder’ all that stands in its way, leaving only decay and dust behind:

These, unturbulent, avail
themselves of turbulence to fly – pleased
with the faint wind’s varyings,
on which to spread fixed wings.

The reticent lugubrious ragged immense minuet
descending to leeward, ascending to windward
again without flapping, in what seems to be
a way of resting, are now nearer,
but as seemingly bodiless yet
as they were. Theirs are somber
quills for so wide and lightboned a bird
as the frigate pelican
of the Caribbean.

Thus, the poem concludes with a return to the earlier image of the frigate pelican’s wings. However, this time the pelican in flight is fashioned differently. In the opening stanzas the lone pelican’s unique agility resided in his quick ‘ease of pursuit’ as well as his devious shape-shifting nature. Yet here he is now represented as a member of a species and is joined by a group of equally adept followers. What

is heralded in the closing description of their flight is these creatures' ability to fly in a manner which avails them of all turbulence. As such, they are 'pleased/with the faint wind's varyings/on which to spread fixed wings'. Unlike the frigate pelican of the opening stanzas, who 'outflies the/aeroplane which cannot flap its wings nor alter any quill-/tip', these creatures are able to glide without the action of flapping their wings at all. What Moore seems to admire about the pelican at the end of the poem is that he can make an art of travelling in accordance with the 'faint winds varyings', and yet is still able to embody a 'fixed' position. He neither cuts through the breeze, nor is he buffeted by the currents of the wind, instead managing to maintain his own autonomy. This smoothness of flight requires a coalescence between the internal momentum that propels the animal forward and the external pressure of the wind that keeps the animal aloft. These birds soar to and fro between the two seemingly opposite positions of 'leeward' and 'windward' with such composure that they appear to be 'resting', when they are in fact in motion.

The final resounding note of the poem is, in part, a celebration of the pelicans' extraordinary abilities and adaptabilities. The principle by which this community of pelicans are able to stay in the air is based upon poise. Poise, as discussed in the first chapter, is a temporary state which exists by virtue of the finely tuned tension between two opposing forces. Moore highlights this by focusing on the pelican's aerodynamics enabled by the bird's physical structure: the bird can only stay afloat in the air because of the relationship between the force of the creature's forward momentum and the variants of the wind that carries it. By noting the 'fixed' nature of the pelicans' wings in the poem's closing stanzas, Moore returns the reader to the opening image of the lone pelican's set of wings with its ability to unite 'levity with strength'. Strength thus bears a relationship with the still fixity of the pelicans' wings in the closing stanzas, as does levity in Moore's description of the variations of the wind beneath. The pelicans' distinctive ability thus lies in the evolution of their wings, for it is their wings which have the power to 'unite' the push and pull of these two opposing forces. Unity here signals the bringing together of different and varying forces, and the pelicans revel in the dynamic tension within these changing and shifting dualities. Moore's rendering of the pelican as a product of Darwinian evolution in this poem is therefore not a dystopian warning of nature's tooth-in-claw struggle for survival; rather, the poet is enchanted by the evolutionary processes by

which the creature is adapted to transform the 'faint wind's varyings' into glorious flight.

This poised position of the group of pelicans has ramifications for the poet. There are many playfully suggestive overlaps throughout the poem between Moore's description of the pelican and that of the numerous birds fashioned in the poems of her Romantic predecessors. The poet is aware of the contrast readers might make between the frigate pelican and Keats's nightingale. Ultimately, however, Moore's pelican is a wholly different creature. In Keats's poem, the nightingale's song ushers in a trance-like state of poetic creativity, as well as exploring the moment when that state fades.[55] The bird thus becomes a symbol of the pure creative imagination detached from the 'real' world from which the poet must escape.[56] Moore's Darwinian creature, however, refuses to become a symbol of transcendence in this way, belonging instead to the world of the living rather than that of a dream. By locating the pelican firmly in the realm of the actual, the creature is no longer represented as a symbol of the imaginative creative act. Far from having a symbolic resonance, Moore instead rejoices in the bird's movements and fluctuations as something she might learn from. Unlike the Romantic poets, Moore sees the creative act as something anchored in reality. Just as the once imagined bird from Johnson's Rasselas is manifested in the poem, so too must the figments of imagination have an active relationship with the real world if they are to remain dynamic and relevant. Creativity, thus, lies in the continually shifting relationship between the real and the imaginative. The group of pelicans in the closing stanza become '[T]he reticent lugubrious ragged immense minuet'. (This is an intentionally verbose line with a series of, in places, contradictory terms which include references to Handel's 'minuet' and even the notion of reticence Moore introduces in 'Feeling and Precision'.) As they are able to embody multiple positions and characteristics at once, so too can the poet enjoy the expansive perspective of the imaginative and yet be grounded in the real world beneath, poised between the two.

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[55] For an in-depth discussion of bird song in Keats's poem, see: Doggett, 'Romanticism's Singing Bird'.

[56] Schulze's discusses the 'out-in-out' shape of Moore's poem likening it to M. H. Abrams definition of the poems of, what he terms, the 'greater Romantic lyric'. Schulze reads 'The Frigate Pelican' as a variant of this lyric device by which the poem moves from description-vision-evaluation. Schulze, 'The Frigate Pelican's Progress,' 129-130. However, I argue that rather than mimicking this Romantic device Moore is instead doing something of a very different kind. This chapter argues that rather than espousing the methods and concerns of Romantic poetry, Moore is instead a naturalist and as such her work is concerned with understanding the bird in its reality and not as a vessel for her imagination.

Poise in this poem is an active position: it implies both motion and fixity. To be poised is to be on the cusp of movement, to be neither still nor mobile, and yet also to be, perversely, both. Such poise is absorbed into the structure of Moore's poem, working throughout. This is a sentiment which appears time and again throughout 'The Frigate Pelican'. It appears in the poem's tension between the unaccented rhyme scheme and the use of syllabics, as well as in the recurring switches of perspective moving between earth and sky, and back again. By making these switches the poem can never reach a climactic peak or resolution. In this way, the poem takes on the experimental and spirited quality of the pelican's flight, and this quality has the sense of continual renewal, denying the poem any form of simplistic conclusion. In Keats's ode the coda fades out, bringing the poem full circle and restoring the poet to the scene as he is revived from his trance-like state. In Moore's poem the concluding image is that of the group of pelicans 'resting' in the air. This state—which also has connotations of Keats's closing line 'Do I wake or sleep?'[57]—is a temporary one; to be in a state of rest is a condition charged with the potential to be awakened at any moment. The birds, we are told, fly away to pastures new; and the poem's final lines—'as the frigate pelican/of the Caribbean'—seems on one hand to enact the stillness and fixity we might expect from a conclusion, and yet on the other it gestures forwards and upwards, suggestively drawing the reader's focus back to the bird's flight. In this sense, as the poem draws to a close it is endowed with the same transient 'resting' quality attributed to the pelicans; it stages a sense of closure and fixity seemingly rounding the poem off, and yet it doesn't provide any conclusive statement. Thus, as the poem seemingly concludes, the pelicans carry on in continual motion, imaginatively taking the reader with them. Crucially, the poet too appears to be in flight with the birds by the poem's end, as if she too has absorbed their sense of flux and motion.

Thus, poet and poem, like the birds themselves, manage to 'foil' the 'tired/moment of danger' that arises in the images of destruction at the poem's closure. The poem, by foregrounding lively and continual motion, displays the qualities Moore so admires in the group of pelicans. This capacity for restless and perpetual experimentation is something which Moore uses throughout as an aid to

[57] John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale,' in *John Keats: The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard (London: Folio Society, 2001), 357.

precision. Moore employs the multiplication of utterances as a means of attempting to get closer to an accurate depiction of the reality of the bird, and the intended effect is, far from a sign of the absence of precision, the very means by which precision is pursued. With each successive instigation and utterance, the poet edges closer to a precise representation of the pelican. Even utterances that do not quite capture the pelican are useful as they guide the poet ever closer to descriptions which are more successful in an accurate understanding of what the pelican precisely *is*. This method of trying again and failing again is also, significantly, a means by which the reader is drawn in, paying closer attention to the bird and what the bird might be. This task, however, is one without end, and, as the poem appears to conclude, the reader is left with the sense that the process of trying and failing might go on forever. For Moore, then, precision is an infinite task and, by its very nature, is always incomplete.

## *'A work is never complete': Excision and Ellipsis in Moore's 1951 Revisions of 'The Frigate Pelican'*

The revised poem of 1951 that appears in Moore's *Collected Poems,* published by Macmillan, provides the reader with a very different text to that of its predecessor. Perhaps the most notable difference between the two poems is the difference in length, the later poem being considerably shorter than the twelve stanza earlier version; there are a number of omissions scattered throughout. In the first of these, Moore cuts out the critical section in which the bird's shape-shifting capacity to straddle the organic natural world and the man-made machine world of bow and boat is foregrounded in the first version. Moore here removes the latter half of the second stanza, the whole of the third and the beginning of the fourth stanza of the original. The image of the pelican thus loses its complexity: the detailed execution of its 'dishonesty', as well as his cunning mastery, are entirely absent, and there is none of the same rigorous interrogation of the bird's character. Instead, we are presented with a more straightforward creature whom we are intended to admire from the outset.

The next revision, however, is by far the most extensive, with the bulk of the seventh stanza, and all of the eighth and ninth cut away. What Moore chooses to leave out here is the entirety of the section in which she joins the pelican in flight looking down on the excessive, comedic and game-like world below. In deleting this

segment, the poet loses the vantage point of detached clarity which affords one of the major transitions on which the poem turns. Without this, neither the pelican nor the poet come into contact and thereby no longer temper one another, their two spheres remaining completely separate across the course of the poem. Thus, the dynamic multiple perspectives of the 1934 version, where the observational lens dips from sky to ground and back to the sky again, is erased, and what we are left with instead is a stark division between sky and ground, bird and poet, expansive imaginative vision and the world beneath it. The reader and the speaker are grounded and are thus both entrenched in their own perspective, peering up at the bird above them.

It seems this version of the poem is intent on depicting what the artistic process might look like if the poet had never come into contact with the pelican at all. By eroding the dynamic tension between the imaginative realm and that of the 'reality' from which the previous version of the poem was composed, the later incarnation of the poem relinquishes the restless energetic quality of its predecessor in which the description of the pelican twists and turns. No longer does the poem keep its wayward, ever-expanding shape, nor are the multiple utterances through which the poet attempts to describe the pelican precisely retained. The reader is thereby kept at a distance from the pelican, no longer drawn into Moore's myriad attempts to capture its true nature. By denying this contact between pelican and reader, pelican and poet, the capacity to mediate the tension between her imaginings of the creature and the creature as he truly is is forfeited. The bird, in turn, ceases to embody the lively and 'limber' vitality through which he was represented in the 1934 poem, and comes dangerously close to being imagined as an antiquated symbol of imaginative freedom, the very kind of romantic trope Moore had previously resisted so persistently. Even in the section in which Moore introduces Hänsel and Gretel's swan, the tone is notably less emphatic; the poet merely states that the pelican is '[U]nlike the more stalwart swan that can ferry the/woodcutter's two children home'. Moore goes even further by removing the final section of the original poem altogether, choosing to omit the scene where reader and poet seemingly join the pelican and his companions as they fly away. Instead, the writer is left to a bleaker end, suffering the deadening consequences of the 'moment of danger' as the poem draws to an abrupt close with the menacing image of the crushing python poised for action. Thus, where the earlier version of the poem had left the reader with the sense that the poet might continue on with the infinite task of describing this ever-changing

creature, the poem instead gives in to a sense of closure and finality. Quite to the contrary of Costello's comment that the poem is only 'slightly revised',[58] this version of 'The Frigate Pelican' is a mere husk of its former incarnation.

These excisions also translate to the poem's physical appearance, as the lines and the formal structure of the poem start to break down. As critics have argued, what is most striking about Moore's omission at this point in her career is her decision to indicate them with an ellipsis.[59] She does this in the second omission of 'The Frigate Pelican':

> display of his art. He glides
> a hundred feet or quivers about
> as charred paper behaves — full
> of feints; and an eagle
>
> of vigilance. . . . *Festina lente*. Be gay
> civilly? How so? 'If I do well I am blessed

Kappel reads this ellipsis as Moore's failed attempt at smoothing over deleted material.[60] However, my reading is more aligned with Schulze's interpretation, that rather than papering over the cracks in her work, Moore is, crucially, attempting to highlight them.[61] This intention is further exposed in Moore's disruption of her syllabic structure and unaccented rhyming scheme. In the places where cuts have been rendered, Moore makes no attempt to reinstate the syllabic structures of the opening stanza. Similarly, the unaccented rhyme is fractured in stanza two and non-existent in the shortened final stanza. Consequently, the poem moves along awkwardly, losing its finely honed tension between the forward momentum of unaccented rhyme and the subtle restraint of the syllabic structure, both of which are designed to hold each line in place, poised like a taut cord. It is as if this act of omission literally enacts the two punctuated moments in the poem's original version, where the unaccented rhyme momentarily breaks down as the pelican eludes the

[58] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 97.
[59] Both Kappel and Schulze discuss Moore's use of ellipsis at length. In: Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions,' 144-146; Schulze, 'The Frigate Pelican's Progress,' 136-137.
[60] Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions,' 144.
[61] Schulze, 'The Frigate Pelican's Progress,' 136.

poet. Both of these moments hint at the disjointed nature of the poem to come. It seems highly unlikely that a poet renowned for her scrupulous attention to detail and use of syllabic structure would simply abandon these techniques altogether without making some attempt at redressing the deficit. On the contrary, Moore used this technique in other revised poems of this era including 'The Buffalo' and 'Nine Nectarines'. It seems more probable that Moore is consciously goading her reader towards the realisation that something crucial is missing.

In a parallel discussion centring around modernist writers and their process of revision, Sullivan discusses Ernest Hemingway's revisions to his novels describing the thought processes that lay behind his excisions. She states that it is part of Hemingway's method to ensure that the reader is aware of the work's incomplete nature, and thus the revised novel, like a work of art, still resonates with the outlines and shapes of what has gone before.[62] I argue that Moore does exactly this. By intentionally producing a watered-down version of the poem's original—a version so full of disruptions, fissures and incompleteness—it seems that the poet, far from hiding her omissions, is guiding the reader back to seek out the 'original' version of work that has been so clumsily cut away. The authority of this so-called 'final' version of the poem is thus diminished, and the poem, in turn, impels the reader to reinterpret this version of the poem in relation to that which went before it.

Yet while I agree with Schulze's reading of this version of Moore's poem as a text which carries within it gaping omissions, I believe this act of revision is much more radical than Schulze's reading allows. Moore's revisions in the later version of the poem should be read as another step in her continual process of lively experimentation and trial and error, one which, much like the pelican itself, is constantly adapting and changing in order to survive. Moore presents the reader with a poem which is seemingly complete and final, and yet by literally cutting into the poem and highlighting its apparent absences we are instead presented with a deeply fractured and destabilized text, one which seems to announce its own incompleteness. Finality and completion are thus a kind of performance in this version of 'The Frigate Pelican'; a performance which is staged only to be undercut. Kappel's reading of Moore's work as a step on a journey towards the precise rendering of the text as a synthesised and economical entity does, I believe, neglect

[62] Sullivan terms this technique the 'iceberg principle'. Sullivan, *The Work of Revision,* 118-119.

Moore's application of a form of precision which is more complex and nuanced than this. As we have seen in 'Feeling and Precision', precision is only obtained as part of a process of continual experimentation. This is a method by which the poet instigates an utterance for it to be tested out in the text with varying success and failure. This is a method which Moore utilises throughout the 1934 version of the 'The Frigate Pelican'. Yet I believe this method also applies to Moore's editing process, and as such this inevitably leads to multiple changing versions of the edited texts, rather than one crystalline 'final' version. While this version of the text may fail to capture the vitality of the pelican in the 1934 poem, seemingly falling short of its previous state, it is still significant, for even these unsuccessful efforts at description draw the poet closer to precision. The quest for precision is endless, and the revised text provides but one moment in a string of moments. No rendering in the poem's ongoing history is intended to be read as final or complete. I believe this conception of revision is much closer to that which French poet Paul Valéry discusses, reading the process of revision as one of an 'assumed infinity'.[63] He states:

> a work is never completed except by some accident such as weariness, satisfaction, the need to deliver, or death: for in relation to who or what is making it, it can only be one stage in a series of inner transformations. How often one would like to start on something one has just regarded as finished.[64]

In this sense the text behaves much like the frigate pelican of the first version of the poem. By the time the poem seems to have come to an end, to be complete, the poet—like the pelican who flies beyond the page before the poem has finished—has already moved beyond the poem's current state, restlessly looking forward to the poem's next incarnation.

## *'Hands that can grasp': Bergson's Intellect and Instinct, the Actual and the Virtual in Moore's 1924 Revisions of 'Poetry'*

[63] Paul Valéry, 'Recollection,' in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 1: Poems*, trans. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1971), xvi.
[64] Valéry, 'Recollection,' xvi-xvii.

Arguably, the most infamous example of Moore's later revisions is the chequered history of her well-known poem, 'Poetry'. With six major revisions across Moore's career, the poem, an *ars poetica* in which Moore reasons out her 'dislike' of poetry, has changed its form multiple times. First published in the July 1919 issue of *Others* magazine, 'Poetry' was originally written in syllabics . However, when Moore returned to the poem for *Observations* some five years later, she disrupted both the poem's syllabic form and the structure of its stanzas. Moore then revisited it a year later for the 1925 edition of *Observations* and transformed the verse into thirteen lines of free verse, with a very different ending. The poem underwent further changes in 1932 for the anthology *The New Poetry,* in which it again appeared in syllabic format. Next came further revisions for Moore's *Selected Poems* of 1935, in which Moore restored her older twenty-nine-line version but with a number of changes. This version of 'Poetry' was maintained until 1967 when, at the age of eighty, Moore made her most extreme and widely criticized cuts of all, chopping the poem back to a mere four lines. For present purposes I will analyse Moore's last radical published revisions against the much earlier, and frequently referenced, 1924 version of the poem in Moore's collection *Observations.* This version is also used as the copy text in Cass White's edition of *New Collected Poems*. These two versions offer the starkest examples of the depth of Moore's excisions to her own work. I will also briefly reference Moore's 1932 version of 'Poetry' by way of comparison, asking why she adopted this editorial practice and what it achieved.

The 'Poetry' of 1924 proceeds in a conversational manner:

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.

The speaker's confession, 'I too, dislike it', assumes a community of poetical sceptics in which the reader and the speaker are joined in their mutual aversion to the art form. It is not lost on the reader that this opinion is made sharper by the knowledge that the harshest critic of poetry also happens to be the poet herself, and that she chooses this apparently 'contemptible' medium as the vehicle with which to

criticise it. The implication is that, much like the poet who joins the bird in flight in the middle section of 'The Frigate Pelican', in order to see a thing clearly one must step outside of it, and Moore's 'perfect contempt' for poetry affords her the distance with which to analyse her subject.

We are next told that there are 'important' matters which reside in a realm 'beyond' this poem. Despite the obvious flaws of 'all this fiddle'—a conversational phrase here applied dismissively towards the poetic work itself—Moore states that, nonetheless, she is still able to find within the poem a 'place for the genuine'. This puzzling statement seems to locate 'the genuine' in the poem offering a 'place' for it. Yet it is not made clear what the nature of this place is: whether it is a clearing made within the poem where the genuine might reside (presumably therefore labelling that which sits outside of this 'place' as disingenuous), or whether poetry might be remodeled by Moore as a forum for the genuine. The next questions the reader might fitfully ask are what the nature of this 'place' within the poetic is; what, exactly, is the 'genuine'?

Rather than address these questions directly, the speaker instead provides a list of seemingly 'important' things:

> 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; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
> the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
> do not admire what
> we cannot understand: the bat,

Moore here proposes a measure of value, a value located in physiology; what makes these things 'important', she seems to say, is not that an exterior 'high sounding interpretation' might be projected onto them, rather that they are deemed to be 'useful'. Initially, the only readily discernible traits this catalogue of 'useful' images seems to offer is that it references bodily features, 'hands', 'eyes' and 'hair'. It is

also striking that their utility seems to reside in their ability to respond to a surrounding environment: they are able to grasp, dilate, rise. They seem to invite a Darwinian interpretation. In Darwinian terms, use-value is attached to a creature's adaptive ability which ensures its survival as a species; the hand would surely have no use at all if it could not grasp. In this list of equally 'useful' physiological responses, Moore moves with slight modulation from the manual responses of 'hands that can grasp', to the visual 'eyes/that can dilate', and on to the emotive 'hair that can rise/if it must'. By listing these otherwise separate responses together, Moore accords equivalence to emotive expression alongside aptitudes which have an evident practical value. We have seen a similar argument mirrored in 'Feeling and Precision', and Moore is again keen to emphasise that emotional expression need not lack precision. It has, after all, a place in poetry. This is a concern which runs throughout 'Poetry'. Moore stresses that poetic language which includes the emotive need neither be saturated with sentimentality nor become the inflated 'high sounding interpretation' she criticises. Emotive expression has the propensity to be at once useful and genuine.

In her lengthy discussion of the poem in relation to Darwinian theory, Schulze also reads these three images as being indicative of the 'genuine' and therefore linked to what the reader might assume makes for 'good' poetry.[65] She notes that these features are all so-called 'primal' images, as discussed in Darwin's 1872 study *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* a book which Moore noted in her reading diaries as early as 1910.[66] In this study Darwin focuses on the instinctive responses of animals and humans to a variety of stimuli, arguing that human emotion is as much a product of instinctual organic processes as any other physiological response, and thus part of the evolutionary drive to 'fitness'.[67] The work of the physician Sir Charles Bell greatly influenced Darwin's understanding of the role of expression and instinct among animals. Bell claimed that smiles, frowns and other forms of human expression produced a 'natural language' by which humans

[65] Robin Schulze, 'Marianne Moore, Degeneration, and Domestication,' in *The Degenerate Muse: American Nature, Modernist Poetry, and the Problem of Cultural Hygiene* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 171.
[66] Schulze discusses these features at length in relation to Darwin. Robin Schulze, 'Marianne Moore, Degeneration, and Domestication,' 172-173. Darwin is referenced in Reading Notebook, 1907-1915, VII:01:01, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
[67] Charles Darwin, *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), 12.

communicated with one another.[68] In this conception, the instinct always comes first followed by reason which, according to Darwin, subsequently grew out of instinct while acting to modify it.[69] Thus Schulze argues that, by including both emotive and non-emotive responses in her list, Moore is prioritising the primal role of the instinctive in her work, a role that is in line with Darwin's theory which cites the emotive as, in Schulze's words, 'not good or evil, ugly or beautiful but simply "useful"'.[70] Moore thus argues that the emotive need not be a contrived device within the poem. She creates poems which avoid hackneyed sentiment because they originate from, what Schulze terms, 'organic points of genesis' reflecting the writer's experience.[71] Schulze goes on to herald this instinctive drive as part of Moore's ideal for poetry; the natural language she aspires to allows the true poet to speak from 'the core of his or her unique animal being', originating in nature itself.[72]

Moore read widely on the topic of human and animal instinct from as early as the years of the first version of 'Poetry' in 1919.[73] One of the leading European thinkers to assimilate Darwin's claims on the role of intelligence and intuition in evolution was the French philosopher and experimental psychologist Henri Bergson, in his seminal book of 1907, *Creative Evolution*.[74] While I agree with Schulze that Darwin's notion of evolution and the role of instinct are an important influence on Moore's work, Bergson's findings on this topic provide an illuminating and productive line of inquiry.[75] Bergson's thinking on evolution has influenced the

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[68] Although Darwin agreed which much of Bell's research, he ultimately disagreed with the theological argument that underpinned Bell's analysis, in preference of his own notions of natural selection as the driving force behind evolution. This is discussed in more depth in Michael J. S. Hodge and Gregory Radick, *The Cambridge Companion to Darwinism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 110.
[69] Hodge and Radick, *The Cambridge Companion to Darwinism*, 95.
[70] Schulze, 'Marianne Moore, Degeneration, and Domestication,' 173.
[71] Ibid.,173.
[72] Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 283.
[73] Schulze makes this point in a footnote citing N. C. MacNamara's book *Instinct and Intelligence* as having an important influence on Moore. Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 282 n. 19. MacNarama's work is an educational aid which makes a case for the importance of an individual's instinctive behavioural qualities, claiming that these qualities have been overlooked in education in favour of training an individual's intellect. N. C. MacNamara, *Instinct and Intellect* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915).
[74] While Bergson was one of the leading European thinkers to take up Darwin's work on evolution he was not the first, thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche also assimilated Darwin's thinking into his own work.
[75] Some critics have noted the connection between Moore's thinking and that of Bergson, namely Robin Schulze, Rachel Trousdale and Darlene Williams Erickson in Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 282 n.19. Rachel Trousdale, '"Humor Saves Steps": Laughter and Humanity in Marianne Moore,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 3 (2012): 124-126; and Darlene Williams Erickson, *Illusion is More Precise than Precision: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama

work of many modernist poets—notably, amongst American poets, T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens; and Bergson was also an important influence on T.E. Hulme.[76] One of the leading theorists of Imagism, Hulme was a reader, translator and follower of Bergson throughout his life. Moore was certainly aware of Hulme's work and he is referenced in a number of Moore's essays and reviews across her career.[77] It is very improbable that she would not have been aware of Bergson's engagement with the idea of evolution. *Creative Evolution* was available in English translation by 1911, and Bergson achieved international acclaim in Europe and America. He visited New York as early as 1913, when he lectured at Columbia University and was the subject of an enthusiastic full-page article in *The New York Times*.[78]

While Bergson was one of the main philosophers to absorb the concepts of Darwinism, Bergson's own interpretation of evolution diverges from Darwin in important ways: while Bergson concurred with the paradigm of life as a story of evolution, he also read evolution in terms of what he phrased 'pure mobility'[79], a continual state of motion, variation, and change. A chief concern was with the ways in which human life experiences sit with this perpetually mobile state of evolution and how it is comprehended. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson reads this navigation through two dual concepts, those of the instinct and the intellect. Reading these two terms in relation to one another, he notes that 'there is no intelligence in which some traces of instinct are not to be discovered, more especially no instinct that is not surrounded with a fringe of intelligence.'[80] While these two intermingled states share certain tendencies and qualities, they also diverge into different kinds of 'knowledge'. Bergson differentiates between the two thus: 'Intelligence, in so far as it is innate, is the knowledge of a form; instinct implies the knowledge of a matter'.[81]

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Press, 1992). I am, however, yet to find an in-depth study of the relationship between Moore and Bergson. I had intended to visit the Marianne Moore archive at the Rosenbach Museum and Library to research this relationship, however the travel restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have meant that I have been unable to make the trip to Philadelphia. I do, however, intend to continue this research in the future.

[76] The influence of Bergson on modernist writers is discussed at length in Paul Ardoin, S. E. Gontarski and Laci Mattison, ed., *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[77] See: Marianne Moore, 'The Cantos,' in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore,* ed. Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber, 1987) 270; and Marianne Moore, 'Reticent Candor,' in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore,* ed. Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber, 1987), 457.

[78] Louis Levine, 'The Philosophy of Henri Bergson and Syndicalism,' *The New York Times*, January 26th, 1913.

[79] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan, 1911), 171.

[80] Ibid., 143.

[81] Ibid., 157.

The function of the drive of intellectual knowledge is towards placing an object within a comparative frame. This results, Bergson adds, in 'unification, that the common object of all its operations is to introduce a certain unity into the diversity of phenomena and so forth.'[82] In order to establish relations between objects, such intellectual acts require that the object be inert and discontinuous, the continuous nature of mobility and fluidity escape it and as such the intellect cannot experience—or 'think' as Bergson terms it—evolution.[83] Bergson expands this observation to incorporate our understanding of different notions of time, time as periodicity and time as duration. Using the metaphor of the beats of a drum, he writes that such beats 'stand out against the continuity of a background on which they are designed…they are the beats of the drum which break forth here and there in the symphony.'[84] Intellectual knowledge performs a similar act in apprehending the continuous symphony of time, to continue Bergson's metaphor, into a sequence of discontinuous beats so that we, as humans, are not overwhelmed by it. In contrast, instinctive knowledge is chiefly a knowledge of matter; it acts organically, and largely unconsciously, carrying out the procedures by which matter perpetually mutates.[85] Bergson also speaks of intuition, which he sees as the self-conscious, intellectual construct of instinct, and thus a significant unifying perspective.[86]

I agree with Schulze that the primary role of instinctive poetic expression is something which Moore prioritises above a uniquely intellectual approach to poetry. I also argue that in Moore's work there is an important mediation between the two states of instinct and intellect, which has not previously been discussed. As we have seen in Moore's representation of the frigate pelican, the poet, on the one hand, fixes the pelican in comparative descriptions between the man-made and the natural, of the sort associated with Bergson's concept of the intellect. Yet, on the other hand, the bird is presented as having an instinctive mobility, echoed in the use of continually shifting perspectives and descriptions, all of which resist any interpretation of the creature which might render it an inert object. The interplay between intellect and instinct is clearly at work in Moore's poetics.

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[82] Ibid., 160.
[83] Ibid., 171.
[84] Ibid., 3.
[85] Ibid., 157.
[86] Ibid., 186-192.

I also believe that the properties of the instinctive, its active and mobile nature as Bergson has it, is more complex than Schulze acknowledges in her reading of Moore's work. While Moore may conceive of an instinctively motivated approach to expression as part of the aesthetic with which 'Poetry' is concerned, it does not follow, as Schulze implies, that this quality is expressed as a smooth and uncomplicated transition. Nor, indeed, does the transition subsequently produce images or language which have the capacity to represent the genuine. Schulze describes Moore's list of animal features as physiological reactions which are 'the instinctive products of terror or amazement. Such bodily reflexes require no conscious thought'.[87] I argue what is most striking about these images is that they represent a moment *before* any instinctive action has taken place: we are presented with '[H]ands that *can* grasp, eyes/that *can* dilate, hair that *can* rise' (my italics). Moore chooses to present the reader with a series of images which are all motionless—we are not, for example, presented with a grasping hand—and yet while these images may be apparently immobile, they are charged with the *potential* for motion. Moore thus offers features which are less the expressive products of instinct, as Schulze has it, and rather the objects through which an instinctive adaptive response may present itself. The question surely follows as to why Moore might choose to highlight this.

To answer this question, I return to Bergson. In a discussion of Bergson's conception of the visual, the philosopher Howard Caygill introduces Bergson's notion of hyperaesthesia and its relation to the image. In particular, Caygill explores Bergson's thinking about the role of human consciousness; Bergson's conception of consciousness radically turns Cartesian thinking on its head, for rather than reading consciousness as augmentative, Bergson, crucially, interprets it as restrictive.[88] Bergson writes:

> . . . we perceive virtually many more things than we perceive actually, and that here again the role of our body is to separate from consciousness all of that which

[87] Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 282.
[88] Howard Caygill, 'Hyperaesthesia and the Virtual,' in *Bergson and the Art of Immanence: Painting, Photography and Film,* ed. John Mullarkey and Charlotte De Mille (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), 247.

> we sense to be of no practical interest, all that which does not lend itself to our action.[89]

What Bergson argues, therefore, is that we perceive far more than we are conscious of. In Bergson's formulation human perception is made up in the relationship between what he terms the 'virtual' and the 'actual'. Virtual human perception is boundless and thus a part of evolution's continual 'pure mobility'. Humans, Bergson argues, always already perceive everything and this perception is, significantly, intuitive, for the instinct is where 'consciousness slumbers'.[90] In human consciousness evolution has, however, conspired to diminish and restrict our instinctive perception.[91] This is a useful adaptation which enables humans to function and act in the world without being overwhelmed. In this sense, consciousness is perceived by Bergson as having an important editorial function, removing what is of no practical use to us from the otherwise continual flow of perception. 'Actual' (as opposed to 'virtual') perception is therefore part of our intellectual knowledge which acts to interrupt the constantly mobile state of evolution so that humans can go about their lives. From this position Bergson introduces his notion of hyperaesthesia as a state of extreme perception.[92] Here, the human subject is capable of accessing the limitless virtual perceptions our consciousness has otherwise edited out. Hyperaesthesia, however, can only be attained when 'actual' human consciousness is suspended in some way.[93] Bergson uses hypnotism in his experiments as a means of exploring this hypothesis.[94] This formulation is extended to the image. The image, which in Bergson's formulation is matter, is part of a continuously mobile totality of matter propagating throughout the universe. Certain kinds of images can be the bearer of hyperaesthesia, inviting a form of intuitive attention which our consciousness or intellect has otherwise kept at bay.[95]

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[89] Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres,* trans. Howard Caygill (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France*,* 1959), 873, quoted in Caygill 'Hyperaesthesia and the Virtual,' 247.
[90] Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 174.
[91] Caygill 'Hyperaesthesia and the Virtual,' 248.
[92] Ibid., 248.
[93] Ibid., 255.
[94] Ibid., 249-252.
[95] Ibid., 255.

Bergson's thinking can be seen to have a significant impact on the unfolding discussion of Moore's poetics. Returning to 'Feeling and Precision', Moore seems to have Bergson in mind when she comments, '[I]n any writing of maximum force, the writer seems under compulsion to set down an unbearable accuracy suffering from a kind of overwhelmed receptivity.'[96] Such extreme receptivity implies a consciousness which is editing things out and yet has been somehow 'overwhelmed'. Moore is arguing that, while in everyday circumstances consciousness is selective, poetry has the potential to expand consciousness into the realm of the virtual. Poetry is thus created out of a condition that has distinctive parallels with Bergson's analysis of 'hyperaesthesia'.

Returning to Moore's image of the 'hand that *can* grasp…if it must' (my italics), it seems that by renegotiating, as it were, the transition from intuitive perception to the conscious act of, for example, grasping, Moore is foregrounding the process by which the 'actual' consciousness edits 'virtual' perception 'if it must', so that we can perform actions. By presenting us with the bodily image *before* consciousness has acted upon it, the image is accorded the potential for intuitive perception, and the poem becomes a forum charged with the possibility of unlocking an experience of the virtual. The balance between intellect and intuition is tilted in favour of the latter. Poetry is envisaged as a sphere of extraordinary opportunity (where 'receptivity' is no longer 'overwhelmed'). Yet we are reminded that it must also conduct itself within the realm of the consciousness. Moore's notion of poetry as an art form is located at the interface between these two forms of virtual and actual perception, endowing it with the potential to continually test out this boundary. The issue becomes one of expression and interpretation, for poetry's problematic tendency towards rhetorical exaggeration or 'high-sounding interpretation' obstructs its potential to embrace virtual, boundless perception. The question then becomes not so much what this 'genuine' instinctive state of virtual perception is, but rather how can the poet, and the reader, begin to access it?

The poem goes on to present the reader with another list. Moore links this list to what has gone before by introducing the idea of these assorted images as being in some way 'derivative' and therefore 'unintelligible'. The 'they' of the sentence 'when they become so derivative as to become/unintelligible' seems to refer to the

[96] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 500.

‘important’ things of the previous sentence, and the reader is left to ponder why it is that these features are ‘derivative’ in such a way as to render them beyond our understanding. The list which follows is thus set up to be a further series of challenging examples of what we might in some way find incomprehensible:

we cannot understand: the bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf
under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels
a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician –
nor is it valid
to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make

As we see, this sequence moves the reader on from the human passive fragments of potential action to a roster of active creatures, first animal and then back to the human. Initially, the examples enumerated are offered up as examples of things we cannot understand, which are then reinstated as ‘important’ phenomena. The list provides a register of images of animals and humans going about their daily business: the horse rolling, the critic twitching, the baseball fan watching, and the statistician collecting data. These phenomena seem to the reader largely commonplace and therefore a strange choice of material for special emphasis. Having stressed the ‘derivative’ quality of these images, Moore seems to locate their derivativeness in their commonplace nature, implying that because we take these familiar images for granted, we are in danger of not deeming them worthy of the application of further thought, thus finding them ‘unintelligible’. Yet by both using the list to redirect our attention to these humans and animals and by stating that ‘all these phenomena are important’, the poet seems to urge the reader to reconsider. By moving from one instance of life to another, Moore seeks to establish these

overlooked properties and images as being worthy of our attention and admiration. She encourages us to resist the tendency of the consciousness to filter them out.

While this sequence is a continuation of the 'important' images of the previous list, it also goes further, showing us what might happen when the writer chooses to animate the subject matter she has previously presented as mere potential. The series of creatures are split into two sub-lists, which are broken typographically on the page by the word 'under'. In the first half of the list, we are given a sequence of animals seemingly in instinctive movement: the bat in search of food, the wild horse rolling. Moore seems to be expanding her definition of what constitutes an 'important' and 'useful' image to encompass more exempla. Much as in her celebration of the frigate pelican's qualities, Moore takes pleasure in the sheer variation of such a collection of evolved creatures. These images are all straightforward representations with little descriptive embellishment; however, this changes with the transitional figure of the 'tireless wolf/under/a tree'. Emphasising the wolf's 'tireless' activity draws attention to a quality which, it transpires, does not translate to the human figures in the following list, in particular the 'immovable critic' who sits 'twitching his skin like a horse/that feels a flea'. These two images seem to playfully mirror each other; in the first list the 'tireless' animals are crucially positioned 'under' the tree, a word of some importance in this context as it is given its own line, and yet in the second list the 'immovable' critic (we note here Moore's wordplay on the term 'immobile') feels an itch underneath his skin. Rather than roll to ease his plight, as the horse might in the first series of images, the critic must comically and unsatisfactorily 'twitch'. Moore provides us again with a meeting point between instinctive knowledge and intellectual knowledge, between raw animal instinct and the application of restrictive human consciousness. Instinctive knowledge is here associated with the animal kingdom, where impulse is translated unproblematically into immediate actions. Human individuals, however, act with consciousness and they are thus—in a return to the hands, eyes and hair of the poem's previous lines—charged with the potential for instinctive mobility, yet remain still. Moore thus presents the reader with a series of characters who are all motionless observers on the verge of movement: the critic, the baseball fan, and the statistician. Significantly, each evaluates the world around them translating what they see into language, numbers, or observing (in the case of the baseball fan).

Moore goes on to quote from the *Diary of Tolstoy* where, as we are informed in the notes, Tolstoy stated when asked '[W]here the boundary between poetry and prose lies', that 'poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books'. However, Moore goes further than Tolstoy, using his words to argue that 'all these phenomena are important', implying that there are no limits to what might constitute material for the poet.

Moving the discussion onwards, Moore changes course. Returning to the idea of the poem as a source of vexation and dislike, she continues:

school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must make
a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result
is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
"literalists of
the imagination" – above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall
we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,

Again, Moore refers back to the 'high-sounding interpretation' to which she is so adverse. The implication is that the work of the half-poet to (poorly and aggressively) drag phenomena into prominence subjects it to the kind of hyperbolic language of which Moore is so contemptuous: this does not make for 'good' poetry. There is here a developing distinction between the notion of importance and that of prominence. To return to Moore's observations about the value of her list of overlooked, 'derivative' and commonplace things, she seems here to imply that poetry's tendency to exaggeration makes it difficult to create the conditions for the kind of acknowledgement such images warrant. The half-poet might attempt to create such a condition by selecting these phenomena for special attention, thereby granting them prominence; yet this act also risks falsifying their importance. The

challenge for the poet, therefore, is to write poetry in which such phenomena can be registered as having value without that value being over-inflated.

It is worth noting that one way in which Moore responds to her own challenge is in her fondness for lists. Throughout 'Poetry', lists are used as a mechanism through which she is able both to highlight the significance of phenomena, inferring that each item on the list must be paid equal attention, whilst also inferring that no such list is exhaustive. On one hand, the reader assumes that the material has been brought to their attention because of its collective unique importance; and yet, on the other, we are also aware that any sequence can always be continually added to, for lists also imply multiplicity. The poet thus frames these items as important and worthy of attention, yet, by implying that there are many other items with a similar importance, denies the risk of over-amplifying such acknowledgement. This device also provides a way in which Moore can expose the boundary between virtual perception and actual perception, to echo Bergson. Moore provokes in her reader a dual perspective: providing an edited list of discontinuous items assembled in one place, whilst, in the manner of a more expansive form of virtual perception, implying the countless other items which do not appear in the list provided.

Moore goes on in the next lines to deepen our understanding of what she might start to define as 'good' poetry. She looks forward to an idealised point in the future, intimating the state a poet might achieve in order to overcome their contempt for poetry. The poem lands upon what seems to be its closest definition of what a genuine poetics might entail: 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'. By setting the two terms 'imaginary' and 'real' into close proximity within the structure of the sentence, Moore invites the reader to identify a relationship of some sort between these two adjectives. Whether the relationship between the imaginary and the real is complementary or conflicting, is purposefully left unanswered. The poet thus makes room within the poem for the reader's own imaginative responses to this question. There is also a resonance here with Stevens's formulation of the relationship between the 'pressure of reality' and the imagination in his essay 'Noble Rider and the Sound of Words'.[97] One answer to the enigma lies in the poet's ability to become, what Moore terms, '"literalists of/the imagination"' working 'above/ insolence and triviality'. It is these 'literalist' poets, we are told, who have the ability

[97] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,' 13.

to present ‘imaginary gardens with real toads in them’. The notes indicate that the quotation ‘“literalists of/the imagination”’ recalls W.B. Yeats in his discussion of the work of William Blake. Yeats criticises Blake:

> …he was a too literal realist of the imagination, as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind’s eye, when exalted by inspiration were ‘eternal existences,’ symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments.[98]

Yeats’s disagreement with Blake is founded on Blake’s belief that his imaginative visions were realities. He thus reads Blake’s work as refuting any ‘grace of style’ which might obstruct or ‘obscure’ the essential nature of what he wished to represent. For Blake, who famously critiqued his contemporary Wordsworth’s use of ‘natural objects’ as a means of obliterating the imagination, the reality, actual or potential, of the imaginative image was all; they thus come before any flair of style which might make art more palatable or readily enjoyable.[99] Yet again, however, Moore uses Yeats’s words against him, changing the quotation from the singular ‘literal realist’ to the plural ‘literalists’, implying an established community amongst poets of whom ‘the poets among us’ might seek to be included. So, she thereby presents Blake’s artistry as something to be admired rather than rebuked. Blake’s ability to take the literal subject matter of his imagination and transpose it into the material of the text or artwork is something to be celebrated. This principle might be identified in the frigate pelican’s ability to present his ‘majesty of display’ so seamlessly. In similar language this creature is praised by the poet for his own ‘grace’. Contrary to Yeats’s assertion, Moore believes that the ‘“literalists of the imagination”’ have the most exacting ‘grace of style’. There is also an important comparison to be made between Moore’s resistance to rendering the pelican as a symbol of something else in ‘The Frigate Pelican’ and her continued discussion of the propensity of poetic language’s hyperbolic representation of ‘important’ phenomena in ‘Poetry’. Here she makes a comparison between an imagination which

[98] This quote from Yeats is transcribed and discussed at length in Schulze, ‘Textual Darwinism,’ 286.
[99] For more on Blake’s critique of Wordsworth, see: James R. Bennet, ‘The Comparative Criticism of Blake and Wordsworth: A Bibliography,’ *The Wordsworth Circle* 14, no. 2 (1983).

distorts reality in being prone to falsifying overstatement, and one that acknowledges reality, enabling the reader to register it in such a way as to avoid inaccuracy.

This vision of Blake's artistry, therefore, opens the poem back up to the metaphor of 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'. Yet what are 'imaginary gardens'? These 'gardens' with their prelapsarian connotations seem to represent a balance between matter and form, the real and the imaginative. They are intended to signify the poem, or poems. An imaginary garden, like a poem, is a cultivated setting; we are not being presented with an imaginary wilderness. This idealised garden/poem is, therefore, an imagined construction. It is a composed setting which, like the garden, grows and expands. The way in which the poem might achieve this is connected to Moore's own deployment of form, as we have seen in her use of syllabics and unaccented rhyme throughout her work. Yet what is significant about the constructed, imagined space of the poem/garden is that it is able to create the imaginary conditions in which something real—the 'real toads'—might appear. This metaphor of the poem, or poems, as 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' conjures the image of the diorama, as discussed in chapter one, as a designed environment which contains within it the real specimen.

These 'real toads'—the addition of the word 'real' being significant in this context—come to represent the raw subject matter of the imagination made literal in the poem. For toads, as Costello points out, are highly symbolic creatures that carry with them the allusion to fairy tales: the toad that turned into a prince.[100] However, the insertion of the term 'real' emphasises Moore's reluctance to allow this creature to be transmuted into an antiquated symbol of the sort she opposes in 'The Frigate Pelican'. Once again, the poet picks up on these recurring concerns and the poem's 'real toads', just like Moore's pelican, refuse to be a vessel for the poet's imaginative projection; they are instead evolved and evolving, living, breathing creatures. The importance of the point of contact between things as they are and an imagination made virile by its relationship with those things is again stressed. In this idealised imaginary garden, the poet's anxiety that expression might slip towards rhetorical exaggeration and inaccurate speech is thus also suspended.

The previous chapter discussed Moore's celebration of poised equilibrium as a highly poetic notion. This concept recurs in the closing passage of 'The Frigate

[100] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 23-24.

Pelican', in the pelicans' flight, and we see it again encapsulated in the image of the 'imaginary gardens'. We are reminded that the poised quality which enables the frigate pelican's flight in the closing scenes of the 1934 poem is born out of a tension between two opposing forces. This tension enables the bird to appear to be 'resting' while seemingly still in motion. In this poem, too, Moore's idealised conception of equilibrium is present. What is significant about the relationship between the gardens and the toads that reside within is that the two depend upon each other in order to thrive: the toads add to the ecosystems of the gardens and the gardens provide the toads with their natural habitat. Thus, the toads actively inhabit and interact with the gardens rather than merely creating a place for themselves within it. So, too, the genuine inhabits this idealised version of poetry, rather than clearing a space for itself within 'all this fiddle'. With this image we are presented with a conception of poetry where reality is an integral part of the imaginary, and vice versa; where feeling and precision, intuition and intelligence sit side-by-side.

The imaginary poem/garden is a dynamic space which expands and grows. Yet, much like the 'resting' pelican in the closing stanza of 'The Frigate Pelican', the reader is presented with an image which is at once both static and mobile. Moore offers the reader this image as if she were exhibiting an object to 'present/for inspection', implying that in order for us to observe these gardens closely they must be stilled in some way. Again, Moore returns the reader to the image of the 'hands that can grasp' by presenting a seemingly motionless object which is also charged with the potential for mobility. It is significant, therefore, that the poet chooses to depict these 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' as plural rather than as singular. This has the effect of inferring multiplicity: countless gardens and countless toads. The poet's presentation of these gardens thus sits at the boundary between actual and virtual perception, as the reader is at once given a static image for inspection which, we are told, also depicts an ever-evolving and ever-changing space, part of the 'pure mobility' which Bergson links to the reality of evolution.

However, as the poem seems to draw to a conclusion, there is yet another shift in tone, and another definition of what it might mean to be interested in poetry. The poem has offered us an image of what might constitute a poetry of the 'genuine' and the reader is left to ponder: if all we have is a 'place' for the genuine in poetry that is more readily accessible to us, what exactly does this place consist of? Moore continues:

it. In the meantime, 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.

Significantly, Moore locates the 'place' for poetry as being again situated between two apparently opposing demands: that of the 'raw material of poetry', and that which is 'genuine'. Costello has noted that this demand seems contradictory, reading language as the material of poetry and the genuine as the rawness of that material; to make a distinction between the two seems inconsistent with Moore's argument.[101] The phrase 'raw material' has, as John Slatin notes, been taken from a review of a book by G. B. Grundy, named *Ancient Gems in Modern Settings,* published in *The Spectator* of May 1913.[102] This review discusses the continued relevance of *The Greek Anthology* for modern readers, arguing that, '[A]ll appeal to emotions which endure for all time, and which, it has been aptly stated, are the true raw materials of poetry'.[103] Thus the 'raw material' of poetry is aligned with enduring emotions, or the 'real toad' in Moore's idealised imaginary garden. However 'genuine' this raw emotive material might seem, it is not, as Costello suggests, articulated smoothly and unproblematically in language, for language is not a raw material. Rather it can only ever act to imitate raw experience, compromising the rawness of that material by ordering it into form and utterance. In a similar sense, this 'raw material' recalls Bergson in his discussion of the raw and mobile nature of evolution, this quality is then lost and rendered immobile when represented in the conscious realm of expression. Thus, the two concepts become separated. The final note of 'Poetry' therefore dwells on the form's difficult relationship with expression. Poetry risks giving itself over to the kind of inflated sentiment or affectation that is not a true representation of the raw emotive experience. It must therefore rely on the relationship between the instinctive drive to express 'raw material' and the

[101] Costello, *Marianne Moore,* 23-24.
[102] As Slatin notes, the reviewer's name is not given in full and is simply signed 'C'. Slatin, *The Savage's Romance,* 49.
[103] Quoted in Slatin, *The Savage's Romance,* 49-50.

'genuine'. Notably, the genuine in this context is linked to Moore's notion of 'natural reticence' in 'Feeling and Precision', acting to resist the tendency of emotive material to overwhelm the lines of a poem. Such a concern is a long-standing preoccupation of Moore's, and the poem repeatedly returns to this assertion. The challenge for the reader—and the poet—becomes how to sustain the 'genuine' on the one hand and the 'raw material' of poetry on the other. The location of the poetry of the genuine, its 'place', lies, then, in the tension between these two dual concepts; and yet it must remain unarticulated, for attempting to express this 'genuine' quality is to risk jeopardising its authenticity. The poem thus closes with a return to the poised equilibrium we have previously seen in 'The Frigate Pelican'.

Throughout 'Poetry', Moore teases the reader, playing with our expectations of what a poem ought to be as well as speaking of poetry indirectly through other voices or comparisons, without ever defining it directly. Much as in 'The Frigate Pelican', Moore uses successive description through negation as an aid to precision: we are made aware of what poetry is not, of what poetry *could* be, but never of what actually poetry *is*. In the poem's closing lines, however, while we may not 'have' the poetry of the genuine, it is—much like the group of birds at the end of 'The Frigate Pelican'—nonetheless closer.

*Conclusion: Absences and Co-presents in the 1967 Revision of 'Poetry'*

The final form on which the poem settles, after many years of revisions of which probe at the notion of what this 'genuine' poetics might be, seems to leave little material with which the imagination might conjure:

> I, too, dislike it.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one dis-
> covers in
> it, after all, a place for the genuine.[104]

[104] Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Macmillan, 1967). All quotations are taken from this edition.

The poem, having been dramatically pared back to just four lines long, is a sparse version of its previous intricacy. Critics have read such an apparently ruthless editorial process as being motivated by the desire to get back to the 'the spirit or the core of the poem', as Honigsblum puts it.[105] It seems more likely, however, that rather than viewing revision as a means of getting rid of material which has become in some way redundant or unwanted, Moore is instead intentionally playing with our expectations. Her revisions, I argue, are an extension of the playful sword-game of bafflement, as H.D. termed it some 51 years earlier, in which Moore's poetry has been engaged over the years.[106]

Bafflement is certainly one of the overriding sentiments one feels on comparing this later version of 'Poetry' with its earlier states. The poem consists of an amalgamation of the opening lines of the 1924 version. These lines have been restructured and the first sentence in the later version is a good deal shorter than its predecessor, with only five syllables left from the 1924 version's seventeen. While Moore has kept the first line of the 1924 version of the poem, she removes the sentence 'there are things that are important beyond all this/fiddle'; the elimination of this line upgrades the notion of poetry from the dismissive mere 'fiddle' to a more self-assured medium. Even the shorter, sharper opening sentence capped with a full stop adds an air of authority to the poem's assertive tone. Gone entirely from this version is any sense of a tentative search for a definition of poetry. After many revised statements regarding the definition of poetry, the speaker seems to say, the truth is much simpler than had been previously thought, and there is, after all, a poetics which seamlessly encompasses 'raw material' and the 'genuine'. This more optimistic assertion is hinted at in Moore's 1932 version of 'Poetry', published in the edited anthology *The New Poetry.* Here Moore begins to reconfigure her previous 1924 distinction of 'raw material' on the one hand and the 'genuine' on the other:

> This we know. In a liking for the raw material in all
> its rawness,
> and for that which is genuine, there is a liking for

[105] Honigsblum, 'Marianne Moore's Revisions of "Poetry,"' 195.
[106] H.D. 'Marianne Moore,' 118.

poetry.[107]

The implication is that there is no longer such a division to be made between the 'raw material' of poetry and the 'genuine', that in fact the two are interconnected in a seemingly fluid and uncomplicated manner. If the 1932 version of 'Poetry' deviates from Moore's declaration about the nature of poetics in 1924, then this later 1967 version seems to solidify Moore's thinking. Yet why the speaker of the 1967 version has had this change of heart, and what has led to this realisation, is left unanswered. In this version of the poem, lively interrogation is apparently replaced by clarity, curiosity by discovery, and a conversational tone by singular didactic statement. As such, the reader might be forgiven for interpreting this version as the culmination of Moore's argument regarding poetics, as many critics have.[108] I believe, however, that it is precisely the poem's unquestioning self-assurance that alerts the reader to the fact that this poem is not to be taken at face value. The poem's bewildering simplicity, alongside the lack of evidence offered in explanation of this sudden shift in argument, purposefully leaves readers perplexed. They are prompted to make sense of this sudden change in perspective, and this, in turn, leads them to the endnotes Moore includes.

Few critics have discussed the importance of the notes section at the back of *Complete Poems,* despite Moore drawing our attention to it from the outset.[109] In her 'A Note on Notes' Moore apologises that 'notes to what should be complete are a pedantry or evidence of an insufficiently realized task', and that she has regretfully 'not yet been able to outgrow this hybrid method of composition'. This short, gently self-effacing paragraph is in many ways a standard approach by which writers have traditionally justified their use of a notes section, seemingly apologising for the fact that the poem cannot achieve all it should in its own right. Yet within this statement Moore makes two admissions: firstly, that the slight and seemingly complete poem in the main body of the text is only made complete with the addition of the notes, suggesting that some supplementary commentary might be necessary; and, secondly,

[107] Marianne Moore, 'Poetry,' in *New Collected Poems,* ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 364.
[108] See: Kappel, 'Complete with Omissions', and Honigsblum, 'Marianne Moore's Revisions of "Poetry"'.
[109] With the exception of Aurore Clavier's discussion of Moore's revisions in Aurore Clavier, '"~~Radical~~": Marianne Moore and the Revision of Modernism,' *Transatlantica* 1 (2016).

that the notes are intended to be read, not merely alongside the text, but in combination with the text in a new compositional manner, a 'hybrid method of composition'. Even the now-infamous 'Author's Note' that introduces the edition—'[O]missions are not accidents'—teasingly directs the reader to what is absent. Indeed, the poem reverberates with the absence of its redacted material. Given the poem's colourful history of multiple omissions, it seems unlikely that Moore would not have known the consequences that drastically cutting back such a well-recognised work might have on any reader with a knowledge of her oeuvre. This matter is made all the more apparent by Moore's decision in this version of 'Poetry', unlike all of its predecessors, to include the full 1951 version of 'Poetry' in the notes section. Significantly, this 1951 version of 'Poetry', taken from *Collected Poems*, is drawn from an earlier incarnation of the poem in Moore's 1935 *Selected Poems,* which is itself a slightly modified version of the 1924 form of 'Poetry' as it appeared in *Observations*. The choice to place the whole of the 1951 poem in an appendix is a radical departure from the modernist practice of providing additional notes to poems—the most famous example being Eliot's *The Waste Land*—and while Moore's notes have always erred towards the playful rather than the strictly informative, this is the first example of the poet placing the entirety of an earlier version of the poem in a notes section.

The endnotes are thus being deployed by Moore as a creative device by which the poet undermines the authority of the later version of 'Poetry', offering up a counter statement. This, in turn, renders the 1967 poem's slight tone and simplistic declarations closer to a form of self-parody. It is as if Moore is offering the reader an example of a seemingly 'complete' poem on the one hand, and cunningly destabilising this notion on the other. In so doing, Moore playfully undercuts a long-standing literary tradition which asserts that the poet in old age would establish a final version of the poem and that this version has a lasting authority which displaces any predecessor. By dispelling this idea, Moore goes against a critical assumption of a singular definitive version of the text. Yet the question remains: if Moore is rejecting a reading of her oeuvre that locates authority in her 'final' work and is also eliminating any notion of a single 'complete', conclusive text—what sort of reading of the poem is she guiding her reader towards instead? The next question the reader might ask is: why has Moore chosen this puzzling and mystifying approach in her revisions?

In an interview with Grace Schulman in 1967, just before the publication of *Complete Poems,* Moore recounts her decision to transplant the 1951 poem into the notes section in full. As justification, she states: 'it saves the serious reader from looking up these things as they were'.[110] This statement implies that Moore has a 'serious reader' in mind, one who, when engaging with her work, is both alert to Moore's oeuvre and therefore to the changes she has made to it over the course of her career. This admission also implies a particular aesthetic, one which refers back to the 'hybrid method of composition', where the poem must be read in combination with its predecessor. But what Moore means by introducing this hybrid method is a matter of some contention. Schulze reads this hybrid aesthetic as evidence that Moore wished to disrupt a critical reading of her poetic opus that might frame her work in terms of progression.[111] By reading Moore's revisions alongside her interest in Darwinism, Schulze urges readers to interpret Moore's revised texts as responses to their different contexts—'each version an adaptation suited to its particular time and place', she writes.[112] While I agree with Schulze that Moore's revisions can indeed be convincingly read in terms of Darwinian adaptation, whereby the poem adapts to the particular environment in which it was written in order to survive, I also argue that Moore's intentions in her signalling of a 'hybrid' poetics is more radical than Schulze indicates. The problem with Schulze's reading is that it risks tethering our interpretation of Moore's poems to a particular time-frame and context, one that over the course of time might risk fixing her work in the eyes of future readers into what Linda Leavell (quoting Marie Boroff) has said of Moore's poems: that they are not so much 'events but exhibitions'.[113] Schulze echoes this sentiment when she writes: 'To be a textual Darwinist is to be interested not merely in any one static version of a text, but in the entire fossil record of a text's various versions'.[114]

At first glance the 1967 version of 'Poetry' and its 1951 predecessor may both appear to have the static exhibit-like quality Leavell and Schulze describe. However, it also seems that this quality is part of a more elaborate staging on the part of the poet, whereby the poem is presented as seemingly static only so that it may

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[110] Marianne Moore, interviewed by Grace Schulman, 'A Conversation with Marianne Moore as Recorded by Grace Schulman,' *Quarterly Review of Literature* 16 (1969): 160-61.
[111] Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 277.
[112] Ibid., 280.
[113] Linda Leavell, 'Surfaces and Spatial Form,' in *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995), 91.
[114] Schulze, 'Textual Darwinism,' 302.

subsequently be reanimated. The reader and critic, like Schulze's textual Darwinist with trowel and brush in hand, may initially be led to believe that they have come across two specimens from separate decades, each providing a different argument about the nature of poetry. They may consequently expect to make a judgement as to which of these two arguments is the more valid. Yet I believe Moore guides the reader towards an altogether different response. While Schulze reads the inclusion of the 1951 version of 'Poetry' in the endnotes as a prompt for the reader to read these two texts 'side-by-side',[115] it seems that Moore means to go further: that the two texts are intended to be read together, and what is important to the poet is the dynamic relationship between them. This relationship bears a striking resemblance to the first chapter's discussion of the 'alternating' display technique used in the dioramas of the 1930s and espoused by Moore in her use of syllabic and organic form in her 'animiles' poems. Here, far from providing the reader with two specimens, Moore is instead presenting two seemingly discontinuous arguments about poetry, both of which are made incomplete by the existence of the other, but which are framed as having some kind of continuous relationship. By placing these two incomplete texts together, Moore creates the conditions for the reader to make what the poet termed in 'Feeling and Precision' 'the lion's leap'. This time, however, the leap is made not within the context of one poem, but rather between two ostensibly different versions of the same poem.

Far from being invited to make a judgement about which commentary on poetry the poet intends as her lasting authoritative statement, then, the reader is instead encouraged to make associations between the two texts, the apparently old and new version of the text, and to find connections and continuations between the seemingly different and discontinuous. Such associations are, crucially, imaginative ones. For the lion's leap, we remember, is an act of instinct, to use Bergson's terminology, a jumping forth into the unknown. In this sense, it seems that there is a particular foregrounding of, and engagement with, the reader in Moore's revisions which Schulze does not take into account. Furthermore, this engagement is, I believe, an extension of Moore's interest in the work of Bergson. By creating the conditions for 'the lion's leap', Moore stimulates in her reader the potential for an active and instinct-led form of interaction. Such an interaction is itself a continuation

[115] Ibid., 280.

of Moore's testing and probing at the boundary between actual and virtual perception. The reader is thus motivated to experience these two poems in the sphere of the imaginative, and within this sphere the conscious and intellectual is restrained, releasing the potential of virtual perception. Activating the reader in this manner has ramifications for the way in which the texts themselves are mobilised. Moore thereby dispels the forces that might render her work as the 'fossils' or 'exhibits' Schulze and Leavell describe.

Moore's poems consistently display a keen awareness of the tendency of all literature to lose its connection to the ever-changing, ever-evolving circumstances in which it is read. This concern is voiced in 'The Frigate Pelican' by the speaker's wariness that the poem might risk reducing the free-spirited bird to a mythological stereotype; and in 'Poetry' the issue arises again in the fear that the poem has a tendency towards inaccuracy, potentially tipping it into rhetorical exaggeration and hackneyed sentiment. Yet this anxiety is not exclusive to Moore's subject matter alone; it extends to the poet's own unease that her oeuvre might be rendered twee over the course of time. In the first version of 'The Frigate Pelican' Moore mediates these concerns by using a continually shifting perspective, where one perception is swiftly followed by another. By the end of the poem, Moore presents us with two states: the expansive and restless state of continually altering perceptions which seem to carry on endlessly as the birds, and the poet, take flight; and second, the literal state in which the poem draws to a close, or, in Bergson's terms, the state of the virtual and the state of the actual. In this way, we are made aware that the act of closure, of literally stilling the poem, is an act of an evolved consciousness, but at the same time that there is something active which continues beyond it. To mythologise a work of literature, Moore seems to suggest, is in a sense to imply an editing form of consciousness rendering the active subject motionless, discontinuous and, in due course, antiquated. This concern is also true of Moore's own oeuvre: if her poems have ceased to test the boundary of this active intersection between virtual and actual perception then they too risk fossilising. Thus, by reading Moore's 'hybrid method of composition' as a means of sustaining poetry as a challenging artform which tests this boundary, it becomes clear that Moore is attempting to avert interpretations which might render her work as the antiquated fossils of a bygone era, to use Schulze's analogy. To approach these two poems from the perspective of the archaeologist unearthing symbolic relics of different times and contexts is,

arguably, to miss the point. Rather, Moore is conducting a kind of experiment whereby the reader, discovering the two texts together at a point in the future, is encouraged to interact with the texts, stimulating imaginative and intuitive response. This has the effect of animating the poems at the point at which the reader makes contact with them. By endowing the reader with this kind of agency, the poems are enlivened by and within the reader's imagination and are pulled away from their different contexts and time frames.

This cleaving of text from the context in which it was conceived, opens the poem up to the possibility of perpetual mobility, or the 'pure mobility' which Bergson has in mind when he discusses evolution. To accept that the text is itself a continually mutating and incomplete entity which is, in a sense, brought to life at the point at which the reader makes a connection with it, means that we can no longer read Moore's revisions against a backdrop of chronology. When Moore labels her revised text 'final', 'definitive' and 'complete', she is merely mischievously staging the process by which an editing consciousness freeze-frames that text. For every singular and 'final' version of the revised text, there are multiple other versions coexisting within the frame of the same publication. The very fact that when Moore references the 1951 version of 'Poetry' she is also pointing backwards to the 1935 version, which itself is a modified version of the 1924 version, attests to exactly this. The reader is thus encouraged not to read the revised poem as one iteration in a string of adaptations, but rather, as one version within a continuum of multiple versions, all of which coexist in the same space and time-frame. To use Bergson's terminology, Moore is presenting us with an edited poem which is merely a beat in an otherwise endless ongoing symphony of alternating possible versions and adaptations. The totality encompasses all previous forms—it is inclusive, not exclusive. All are co-present in the latest version, that version being made coherent by the presence of earlier forms. The model here, then, is musicality, not archaeology.

If we view Moore's final revisions of 'Poetry' as a kind of experiment, then what is this experiment in aid of? Throughout this chapter we have explored Moore's deployment of the device of trial and error. The concept appears in 'Feeling and Precision' as a technique fundamental to the pursuit of precision. It is part of the successive descriptions in the early version of 'The Frigate Pelican', where the poet continually introduces digressions and swerves of perspective throughout; and it is

evident again in the numerous lists in the 1924 version of 'Poetry'. By extending this trial-and-error approach from the individual poems onto the broader perspective of Moore's revisions as a whole, then, it becomes clear that each revised text acts like the utterance or instigation, a hypothesis the writer is trying out in order to get closer to a precise, complete and final version of the poem. In this sense, Moore's act of directly placing two texts together is in a sense an experiment in completeness—it is a last attempt at testing whether a complete text can be made under these new 'hybrid' conditions which Moore creates; both between the different versions of the two texts and their relationship with the reader. However, this is a process which is destined to fail. If we view the process of revision as a process in pursuit of precision, as Moore does, then we are reminded that precision always tends to produce more rather than fewer utterances. It is also a process which is continuous and therefore always incomplete. So, in staging this experiment Moore is also aware that it will always produce more hypotheses, more utterances. What is important for Moore is not necessarily achieving the precise, but rather the process by which the poet attempts and fails to achieve it, and it is this process, rather than its end result, which is for Moore the essence of the artform of poetry.

This chapter has worked through a series of conceptual dualities: feeling and precision, imagination and reality, instinct and intellect, virtual and actual perception, all of which as we have discussed are interlinked. Feeling, imagination, instinct and virtual perception all have a boundless quality; they are all important states of vitality—Moore uses the example of the dynamic and mobile 'running panther of desire' when she discusses feeling in poetry.[116] Yet each of these states also needs to be tempered by their dual opposite—precision, reality, intelligence and actual perception—in order to prevent them from becoming overwhelming; feeling must be moderated by precision so as not to isolate the reader. As has been described, for Moore, poetry and the poetic exist in the tension created between these dual concepts. Poetry is alive in a mediation between virile, emotive imagination and the 'natural reticence' that grounds that 'feeling' in the real. It also exists in the poised equilibrium between the expansive domain of mobile, continuous, instinctive and virtual perception, and the static and discontinuous realm of the intellect and the actual. The poet is not encouraging the reader to abandon one state in favour of the

[116] Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' 504.

other, but rather to open up to a new mode of interpretation, and it is within this spirit that 'the lion's leap' may be enacted—a leap, we are reminded, made from one state *towards* another. These concepts can never be synthesised within the poem, precisely because they are the very matter of poetry itself. This is why Moore's hybrid 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' is relegated to the realm of an idealised Eden in 'Poetry'. Poetry is a process of experimentation. It is a dynamic and shifting entity, continually changing and mutating. It can never be finalised because it exists in a tension which refuses to be resolved or made complete. In this sense the poem is incomplete, it is endless. Just as the task of constantly renewing itself through revision in the pursuit of precision is infinite. Thus, Moore's legacy, in so far as such a term is appropriate, is, indeed, to undercut any subsequent critical readings of her body of work which might risk its becoming canonised. Yet it is also to provide us with a series of poems which refuses to end, which playfully continue to evolve.

# Conclusion

It seems perhaps ironic to end this thesis with a chapter entitled 'Conclusion'. After all, its subject was famously averse to concluding her own work. Both the central chapters of the thesis have ended by noting a recurring preoccupation of Marianne Moore's poems, their resistance to the notions of finality and completion. This conclusion, then, is less a sense of closure than a 'to be continued'. It seems fitting, however, to return and reflect on the observations which have emerged from the poems discussed in this thesis, and which span different decades and different elements of Moore's career.

One of the concepts both chapters propose as a means of thinking through this reticence to declare any version of a poem finalised, is that of poised equilibrium. This may seem to be a familiar idea when it comes to thinking about what a poem is. The Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge had this notion in mind when he wrote about the poetic imagination; Coleridge notes that imaginative activity is manifested in the poem as 'the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities'.[1] In a similar vein, the twentieth century literary critic William Empson wrote that the chief point of the poem is: 'to contrast and reconcile conscious and unconscious states, intuitive and intellectual modes of apprehension'.[2] The argument of this thesis, however, is that Moore's engagement with evolutionary thinking changes the way in which we conceive of this idea of the poem as a poised equilibrium.

Both chapters work through a series of paired concepts from which Moore's poems are composed: the mechanic and organic, precision and feeling, reality and imagination, intelligence and instinct, actual and virtual perception. Significantly, the finely tuned counterbalance between the pairings that these chapters discuss is different to the synthesis Coleridge and Empson have in mind in their conception of poised equilibrium. For Moore, poised equilibrium is created out of the lively resistance of two opposing qualities, rather than their reconciliation. While these chapters examine the tensions between these dual concepts, they ultimately argue

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Chapter XIV,' *Biographia Literaria* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), 279.
[2] William Empson, 'Marvell's Garden,' *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 119.

that, for Moore, the poem is not a vessel which merely *contains* these pairings. Rather it is created *out of* these conflicting dualities. The poem is thereby redefined as a dynamic arena, a charged entity never quite settling into a state of completion or finality. Both chapters have noted the tendency of Moore's poems to stage their endings, appearing to conclude while at the same time anticipating a continuation beyond their final lines.

This thesis has made a case for the crucial importance that Darwinian evolution has on Moore's thinking around the question of what makes a poem. Evolution is interpreted as dynamic and responsive. It is a process which itself resists completion, always being in a state of activity as species constantly adapt to their environments. The first chapter of the thesis explores the ways in which Darwinian thinking is absorbed into the poem's structure, how the overarching mechanic syllabic verse is set in tension with the organic counter-structure evolving beneath. The second chapter broadens its observational frame to look at the poem as an object which itself evolves and adapts over time. Moore's practice of revision is read as a form of resistance against the expectation that the revised text is definitive, final and complete. In Moore's revisions, the poem comes alive as the site of contact between multiple versions of the past and present text, and also, crucially, between the text and the reader who is able to make imaginative associations—what Moore terms 'the lion's leap'.[3] Revision is thus another means by which the poem is rendered restless, a living, adapting and evolving entity.

This preoccupation with the possibility of the complete poem was also a concern shared by other modernist poets in Moore's milieu. Moore's editor and lifelong correspondent, the modernist poet T. S. Eliot, articulated his own reflections on whether or not the notion of a complete poem was possible in his seminal essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. In this essay, Eliot notes: '[N]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to dead poets and artists'.[4] Modern poets cannot, in Eliot's view, have 'complete meaning' unless they are placed alongside, and in dialogue with, those 'monuments' of the tradition which precede them.[5] For Eliot,

[3] Marianne Moore, 'Feeling and Precision,' *The Sewanee Review* 52, no.4 (1944): 499.
[4] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 99.
[5] Ibid.

what applied to the poet also applied to the poem. In his account of the relationship between new work and the tradition, he goes on to argue: '[T]he existing order is complete before the new work arrives, for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered'.[6] Here, Eliot articulates a paradox at the heart of his conception of tradition: that it is complete and yet also endlessly altering.

There is a striking difference between Eliot's conception of the poem in its relationship with the past, and Moore's: while Eliot conceives of the poem in terms of tradition, Moore considers it in terms of evolution. It is instructive that in Moore's use of other writers throughout 'Feeling and Precision' the word tradition is never mentioned. There is also a marked contrast to the way in which Moore and Eliot incorporate the works of tradition into their texts. Eliot termed his calling upon the other voices of the past in 'The Waste Land' as 'fragments'. He wrote: '[T]hese fragments I have shored against my ruins'.[7] Here, quotation is invoked in the poem as a defensive act, a means of shoring up against ruination. Tradition, for Eliot, is thus haunted by the threat of its ruin, while simultaneously holding the promise that there is an aesthetic tradition which might be able to survive the destruction of history. For Moore, however, the act of quotation does not carry the same sense of melancholy. Quoted material is not invoked as a means of showing tradition at work within the poem, as it is for Eliot. Rather, it is deployed as part of an experimental curiosity on Moore's part, where she tests out what might happen to the unfolding and evolving text if another voice is brought in. In so doing, the poem is reinvigorated by the addition of another voice, and, at the same time, the quoted voice is reanimated by its positioning within the new context of the poem.

Quotation, therefore, is another example of Moore's commitment to evolution as an active principle working across Moore's poems and poetic practice. Evolution, for Moore, enables creativity precisely because it produces such originality. We see this form of evolution at work in the repeated but varying description of the bird's wings in 'The Frigate Pelican', where Moore celebrates this uniquely adapted animal which has survived by evolving in a particular manner which, Moore implies, no other species has. Thus, as poems embody this evolving

[6] Ibid.
[7] T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land,' *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 67.

state, so too are the conditions created whereby the poem might produce that which is new and original. Evolution may be seen by Moore as a process of violent competition for resources, but it is also celebrated as a joyful and highly creative process.

The critical understanding of the impact evolutionary thinking has had on Moore's poems extends well beyond the arguments put forward in this thesis. There are a number of questions that my own research has produced which I haven't been able to include in the critical arguments of this work.[8] My hope is that this research could lead to a new understanding of the relationship of Moore's poems to evolutionary time and the work of the image.

[8] I am aware that while the focus has been on Moore's mid to late career, as well as a close reading of a number of core poems from this time, evolution has been a lifelong interest. In my future research I would particularly like to focus on Moore's earlier work, looking at her first 1924 collection *Observations* against the backdrop of her early interest in the American Museum of Natural History. I am also eager to develop my findings on the influence of the work of Henri Bergson. Continuing the research started at The Marianne Moore Collection at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, unavoidably interrupted by the pandemic, promises further insight into Moore's engagement with Bergson and his revision of Darwinian ideas.

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# Creative Section

The poems that follow build on a number of the central themes and concerns identified in the critical thesis. As has been argued, the museum was influential for Marianne Moore both as an informative resource and as a starting point which inspired her abiding interest in evolutionary thinking. In the creative part of this PhD I, too, interact with the museum-as-site, as a springboard to other ways of imaginative thinking.

In the collection of poems, the museum is envisaged not simply as 'a place', but as a venue where an object is put on display. These poems explore what happens when an object is singled out, animated and given voice. Yet they also explore an imagined scenario where the relationship between object and onlooker is overturned and then reversed: where it is the human that is observed, rendered lifeless, and object-like. In so doing, the poems reflect on Moore's adoption of a practice of close observation before any interpretation is proposed.

The poems also observe people and things from different perspectives and personas, and they do so inspired by Moore's technique of lively multifaceted close-looking. In these ways the poems represent a creative engagement with the ideas, methods and practices discussed in the critical part of this thesis.

# First, I turn off the light

**Katy Mack**

Emily, in many things: a sequence

## Emily, in many things

It is said she is on the other side
of the door to the sealed room.
You can hear her in the creak
of the china-stacked dresser,
the scrape of the chair's leg
along the flagstones.

She's in the shift
of the bone-dry sticks
in the swept hearth,
the subdued tick
deep in the tall clock's
hollow chest.

She's in the resistance
of the iron-forged bolt,
and the click
of the door's brass latch
as it lifts
and lifts, once again.

## What was she?

‘She wore a leg of mutton sleeve
and petticoats without a curve or wave’
‘She rarely crossed the threshold–’
‘Her tendency to seclusion’
‘Solitude-loving raven’
‘One who is your other self’
‘Making haste to leave us’
‘Long strides over rough earth’
‘Her lips compressed into stone’.

*Note: Beyond her poems and the drafts of her novel, very little archival material remains of Emily Brontë’s writing or correspondence with others. This poem uses extracts of phrases and observations taken from those around Emily. They include: a description of Emily’s dress taken from her fellow students in Brussels, where she studied for nine months in 1842; a series of conversational phrases taken from Charlotte Brontë’s memories of her sister; W. S. Williams’s recollections of Emily which he recounted in a letter to Charlotte after Emily’s death; and Mrs Gaskell’s retelling of a scene where Emily beats her disobedient dog, Keeper, after he was found sleeping on a forbidden bed in the Parsonage, Emily’s home throughout her life.*

## Emily, in the parlour

Upright on the ladder-backed chair,
surrounded by primroses in lines on papered walls,
her needle unpicking
the silhouette of her name on silk:
*E – M – I – L – Y*
A streak of light in the polished brass,
coals disturbed in the grate.
There it is, again,
that low, flickering sensation–
someone, or something,
is watching.

## Emily's wafers

*U no secrets I*

*(Bear) it in mind*

*UR all price*

*Faithful + firm*

*Always at home*

*I can't get out*

*Note: These phrases are taken from a white packet of 'Clarke's Enigmatic Puzzle Wafers' found in Emily's desk and paint box. Such wafers were used to seal correspondences and were intended, in part, to ensure that the contents of the envelop were not tampered with. They also became another method of correspondence between the sender and the recipient of the letter, in some cases a form of private joke or dialogue between the two. The wafers often had cryptic, ambiguous or flirtatious messages, as well as playful images or letters in the place of words, an equivalent of the modern-day text message. There is much evidence to suggest that Charlotte used such wafers regularly in correspondence with her friend, Ellen Nussey. However, despite owning many packets of such seals, there is no evidence that Emily ever used these wafers on any of her correspondences.*

## Emily’s writing table

Her gown of crimson in its chair, poised
over the ghost of a fern,
its small skeleton laid out on the page.
A mahogany box with its lid flung open–
a leather-bound notebook inside,
and shadows from the door’s threshold
lengthening across the floorboards,
like gloved fingers.

## Charlotte's alterations (i)

THOU *for* thou

wanderer *for* Wanderer

weep *for* yearn

mother *for* Mother

sinless *for* love

house *for* House

safe *for* _____

*Note: In the autumn of 1845 Charlotte famously lighted upon Emily's poems 'accidentally' while searching through her sister's belongings—this invasion of privacy was infuriating to Emily. In the years following Emily's death, Charlotte went back through Emily's poems and made a series of editorial alterations. In some cases, these edits were small modifications to words and syntax, in others Charlotte rewrote whole stanzas. These changes appear in poems such as 'The Night-Wind', 'The First Blue-Stocking' and 'No Coward Soul is Mine'. The words and phrases found in these poems are taken from the alterations made by Charlotte in some of Emily's poems. The column on the left-hand side are Charlotte's alterations and Emily's original words are on the right.*

## Emily, of the moor

Moving through thick clouds of pollen
her pockets filled
with foxgloves and the fronds of bracken,
her hair framed with yellow gorse-flowers,
up to her waist in thicket
her head tilted to meet the sky,
while beneath
the quiet peat does its work.

## Charlotte's alterations (ii)

thou *becomes thou*

laid at rest *becomes* resting

winter *becomes* frozen

alone— *becomes* alone.

*Note: In this poem, the column on the left-hand side denotes the words and punctuation as they appear in Emily's original poems. The right-hand column is made up of Charlotte's later alterations.*

## Emily, of the night

They say she's still out there
a figure composed of mist,
disassembled and reassembled
as the birds' murmuration,
twinned moons for eyes,
hair as startling
as the gorse-thorn.
Some wait by the window
to catch a glimpse–
others see nothing
but the outline of a face in the glass,
both their own
and yet someone else's entirely.

## Charlotte's alterations (iii)

moon *is* man

flickering *is* alien

another sky? *is* _____

_____ *is* never dies

invading *is* merging

*Note: In this poem, the column on the left-hand side denotes the words and punctuation as they appear in Emily's original poems. The right-hand column is made up of Charlotte's later alterations.*

## Emily, through the window

Winter. The wind from the moor
is rolling down off the hill,
the dew has hardened to crystals,
the heather bells lock-jawed
in the snapping cold.
Everything here carries an inward frost
even the yew tree in the churchyard
won't bend to the breeze,
its roots rising up
out of the turned earth
like fists clenched
so tightly
they can't be prized open.

## Inventory of the contents of Emily's pocket

An apple core  a bone-handled comb
with five teeth missing  a candle stub
a dandelion's head  half-blown out.

An envelope, sealed, with nothing inside.

Dried fish scales sewn onto satin
in the shape of forget-me-nots.

A neatly clipped blade of grass  a sprig of heather.
The hook-and-eye fastener of a Sunday dress.

Black ink  jet  keys  a quarter yard of lace.

A looking glass with no glass.

A Venetian mask  Keeper's brown leather muzzle
nibs  a bottle of opium
to bring back *wildering* thoughts.

A pocket watch stopped at 2 o'clock, exactly.
Pressed flowers. A goose-quill. Toadstone. Ripped parchment.

Sewing box with the words  *here I am*  etched inside.
Thread  thimbles  torn-up fabric.

The trapped vapour of solid things
such as whin  yellow gorse  peat.

A small ring set with a zircon stone–

the mineral commonly mistaken for diamonds
owing to its flitting, hidden light.

*Note: Some of these images are taken from objects the Brontës were said to have had in their possession, as well as items found at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth. Included among these images is, notably, the bone-handled comb Emily used on the morning of her death, when, weakened by illness, she attempted to brush her hair only to drop the comb into the fire. Her servant, Martha Brown, entered the room and pulled the comb out however five of its teeth had already been singed in the flames. There is also mention of the sewing-box of painted wood which held clothing fasteners, ribbons and fragments of broken jewellery. Found inside the box was a pair of linked jet ovals with Charlotte and Emily's names scratched inside. The writer Deborah Lutz reads this as a statement of identity on the part of the sisters—as if to say, 'here I am'. The box is said to have been purchased for the sum of five pounds in a junk shop close to Haworth by the novelist Stella Gibbons. Historians have found it impossible to prove the source of the scratched names.*

## Emily is unwell

Illness hangs over this house
like a heavy, scheming cloud.
They've stoked each fire,
added layer upon layer of winter furs,
yet still Emily's lips are turning purple–
her skin, once as translucent
as tracing paper, now ivory to the touch.
The physician bleeds her,
but her rigid veins won't open up.
Instead she lies there,
quiet as a bone-handled knife.
*She is lost to us,* he says,
closing his pocket book –
little does he know,
it is we who are lost.

**********

## From the house of artefacts

O how I worship you, Collector.
Your passion for order.
Those bony, precise fingers.
How they rest on your desk
like a set of skeleton keys.

What was I before you?
My life just an empty box, shabby,
I sat in dark corners,
a thing of no significance.
Was that what first attracted you?

You place me on the velvet bed so exactly,
with such meticulous care.
I am held tight in those eyes
they are unflinchingly tender.
Do I feel any regret, Collector?

Only in the dead of night
when there is a locked-up
jangling chaos in my throat.
I will beg your forgiveness,
come morning.

## The butcher

He arranges the meat in a plastic box:
lamb's liver, intestine, a whole pig's heart.
A raw assemblage of off-cuts,

close-packed and cleaned with salt and brine.
Loaded into the back of the truck.
The spill of blood deadened with ice.

It's 5 a.m., and the city has frosted over;
he can see it laid out neatly in front of him.
There's something pleasing about the frost,

he thinks, something uncomplicated,
how every frozen thing clings to itself.
His mind jolts as he gathers speed,

getting closer to the off-loading bay.
There he'll park up
as a man in a white apron unloads the boot,

laying its contents out
on a cold steel slab,
while another picks out the best meat

and tosses the rest in a pile, to be minced.
Through the gap in the car window
the disembodied panic of a siren.

The city is thawing:
each cold crisp note rises
then fractures and dissipates to nothing.

## George Eliot collects seaweed

When words escaped her
Mary Ann went to the shore, to collect seaweed.
She found it pleasing to watch the crimson algae
swirling in rock pools, their crushed-velvet skirts billowing
like waltzers in a Russian ballroom
so she netted a sample to examine.

Back at her lodgings jars crammed the shelves,
*Gatty's Book of British Sea-Weeds* open on her desk.
She placed the specimens with all the others,
printing the common names onto parchment:
*Fan Weed, Oyster Thief, Devil's Tongue.*

The cottage shutters began to rattle in their frames–
salt-air was whipping along the flats,
agitating the twist of candlelight.
She must work quickly before dark.
On the shelf the algae swayed in its pickling fluid,
hanging loose-limbed like unmanned puppets,
their heads slumped forward.

## Through the telescope

I am coaxed into looking
in straight lines, up close,
at things beyond my reach.
Out there in the exacting
darkness I tune in to the
solitude of a single star,
its quiet evolution measured
to the nearest decimal.
Or focus on a crystal
of light, slow-bending
each quicksilver ray
into coherence.
What can I know
of the glass-blown dust
of scattered nebulas,
or the sudden blaze
of a supernova,
the small catastrophe
of its brilliance, caught
only in the blink
of an eye.

## The red shoes

Poised, like two pointed tongues
making ready for song,

your shoes, with their accent of vaudeville-rouge,
fashioned to articulate the grand arc

of your instep. Their dark leather soles hidden
beneath satin. Your shoes, as showy

as two Venetian masks, with kinked beaks,
arched brows, holes

where the eyes should be. Your shoes,
the ones you couldn't let go of, are sitting in the hallway.

I want to wear your shoes out.
To show them off, take them out dancing

in the places you danced,
to glide with your ease

through blank-faced crowds.
To plié and twirl, tirelessly, like a revolving

marionette in a Salzburg theatre.
Even as the same song rotates and

the red-sashed sky grows heavy, limp,
your shoes won't rest.

Even as the waiters uncloak
the splintered dining tables,

the starched white tablecloths
stained burgundy-red.

## Death’s-Head Hawk-Moth

You’ve tried to kill me.
Pinning me up by my thorax.
Unravelling the mystery
of my wingspan.

Mapping the skull
across my forehead.
The flutter of my breath
stopped up

sealed behind buffed glass.

## Clothes Moth

I've been in the rooms
you've slept in, digested the
half-spun fabric of your sleeping

thought, worked each strand
to a silver dust – a smear left
across the palm of a hand.

## Curious Jeanette

What, do you imagine, is wrong with Jeanette?
Her hair is so implausibly long,
those too-sharp fingernails.
Some say she smells of starch
and empty rooms,
others, that she has the scent of rose petals –
it's impossibly cloying
if you get too close.
How she stands there at the roundabout,
so frustratingly straight,
traffic happening around her,
her gaze always off to one side.

Sometimes we make a detour,
just to look,
or else, bring her gifts
to grab her attention–
lilies or sharpened stones.
She doesn't even flinch.
Instead she stands
with her arms held open
like an invitation
or a warning.

## The umbrella with a parrot's head

You imagine you can comprehend what dark contraptions
I shield in the wings of my hooped skirt?
Think that when the sun shines you can call me 'bird'
and have me sashay along the promenade?
Show off the coiffure of my fine plumage?
My empress headdress glinting,
my proud beak protruding.

Think me mere material, big boy?
You forget, in your flights of fancy
I am neither thing nor beast –
acting shady is my very nature.
When the pitter-patter starts
how you try to ring my pluck.
How you ruffle my feathers
with your hand up my bird-spine.
Think you can turn me topsy-turvy and inside out?
My gown unprized to form a canopy.
My throat in your palm.

## Autumnal

Tonight you're dressed as a skeleton,
wearing your bones on the outside,
each curved rib a filament,
fluorescent against the dark.

Leaves are turning
crisp and red like small fires,
making ready to peel away
from their branches.
Soon the trees will be exposed–
a series of raw barbed limbs, extending.

When the conversation is over
we'll lie in bed, naked,
an arm's span opening between us;
your clothes stripped off onto the floor,
a shriveled heap.

## Twins

They were majestic
placed on the pewter dish to ripen,
the neat folds of the linen tablecloth,
a pair of steel knives laid out.
All of that week we had been waiting
my sister and I for the right moment
when the bitterness would give way,
and they would be soft, ready.
A quiet inner chemistry was at work,
we were told, a prickling at first
like a pot of milk heating on the stove,
the lid starting to rattle.
The plums rested on the table,
each one beginning to turn.
We children were impatient
in the kitchen's sour heat–
one cheek flushed in a small hand,
ears ringing.

Screen saver

Face down onto the kitchen tiles
I pick it up turn it over not realising
the damage until the backlight reveals
a cracked rectangle of sun over
a new image: the park only not the park
I remember – here the lamp posts jut
at impossible angles like fractured bones
parents are queuing in crooked lines
for the ice-cream van – their kids
hanging in the playground lopsided
on the monkey bars and you sitting
on the bench with your smile split
in two waiting for our daughter who is
midway down the helter-skelter
her small laugh caught in that metal tunnel
at the point before she might hurtle out
headfirst into a puddle of murky water
though when I look again
it's not really a puddle
not really water
but splintered glass
resting on the palm of my hand.

## The women who left their bodies

i

A patient once described the sensation as a kind of slippage–
a part of her leaving, like milk escaping from a glass.
What if, however, we imagine drawing the spoiled liquid back
into its container holding it there so it cannot find its way out, again?
Even water can be made dense with salt; it simply requires patience
and a vigorous hand.

ii

Another patient described a part of her being dispersed into the wind,
the rest left behind like the head of a dandelion, blown-out.
We placed her in an airtight room to monitor the disturbance
through a Perspex screen. When she spoke, it was only in billowing roars–
the sound battering the concrete, it took time for the noise to subside
to a whimper, then finally die out. Now, one would hardly know
there had been any upset, save a cluster of bruises
blossoming deep beneath the porcelain skin like yellow poppies.
It's how we know there is a storm on its way.

## Self-portrait

I am given the exercise
of observing myself in the mirror.
For this I wear a heavy dress of velvet
which, I am told, shows off my curves
perfectly. I must grow accustomed
to the unseen ribbons at my back,
cinching my waist ever inwards
as if two large hands
were pressing there,
or the way my breasts are perched
above the boning in stiff peaks
like whipped egg whites,
or my neck thick and pulsating
as if a fist were at work there, wanting out.
I look at the woman locked
in the gold-gilded frame
before me, and ask her–
    *Am I this?*
through the darkness.
    *Am I this?*
she repeats back to me.

*Window I*

I tell him that I live high up
on the fourth floor of a block of flats.
*So far off the ground*?
he asks, pointing down to the tiled floor
*No*, I say, *just four floors up*
pointing out to the air
in between.
*I like it that way.*

*Window II*

The window takes up most of the bedroom wall;
there are no blinds, I tell him,
so at night the sky is exposed:
stars loosened and travelling,
the thin breeze passing through
with a beckoning quality.
*You always leave the window open?*
he asks
*Yes,* I say, *I do.*

*Window III*

I watch the flies in his office
move back and forth
as he stirs his coffee –
fingers gripping
the silver teaspoon,
exerting a careful force.
Something in me
starts to swirl, then spiral,
a pressure building at my temples.
I feel his eyes
on my skin, but his glasses
catch the strip-lights
in such a way
that I can't pinpoint
where they settle.

*Window IV*

*My advice,*
he says*, is to keep your*
*window locked*
*at all times*.

*Window V*

At night
my body
is sage green glass,
a bottle
with its cork eased open
on the pillow.
Sometimes,
I wake myself up
from the feeling
of something
exiting,
like the body is
fighting back
to keep me
stopped up
inside.

*Window VI*

Through the window
the trees are not right;
their backs are snapped and
their chests forced open,
what was inside is emptied
away like an egg sucked clean
from its shell. The whole street
is strewn with branches
and broken glass – even the shadows
are split in two on the pavement:
one side rigid the other
leaning out
into the wind.

## When it came

We thought it would announce itself
with a knock on the front door
at an unfamiliar hour.
Or else rush in on a sudden gust
forcing the crack in our bedroom window,
the curtains blown apart.
In fact, there was no signal.
No splintered glass on the carpet,
no telephone receiver, dangling.
We hardly even noticed
the sun's pulse had quickened
against the kitchen floorboards,
that faint smell of must in the basin,
and the taste of rain
at the backs of our throats,
lodged there like a wishbone.

## I’m always on the brink

scouring the glazed horizon for something I can lay claim to;
in the rubbish tip a seagull with blood on its beak
taps at a bottle of London Pride as if summoning a genie.

This city is a jar with all the air sucked out.
I’m wasting my best years like this: chipping at the breaking point
of insight. The inroads I try to make keeping my head at the traffic lights
waiting for signals; the air turns giddy with amber.
I don’t know if I’m coming or going. You leave me
a note on the back of a lottery ticket saying you can’t live this way
but it’s not representative.

The shopping mall rings of its vacancy
I can’t get close without breaking up.
The last voices are draining from the streets.
In the TV shop window faces talk to me;
you can see their breaths on the flat screen.

## In the play I saw about a door-to-door hoover salesman

Perhaps it was because his teeth were too straight,
or the way his glasses changed from dark to transparent
depending on the slant of the spotlight,
or that, at certain angles, you could see the faint ‘O’
of a nipple through his short-sleeved shirt–
but somehow, we knew this was not a man to be trusted.
He had a secret alright, unsightly, like a ferret up a trouser leg.
It didn’t matter about his stable home life,
his wife, three plump children at the flat above the arcade.
Secrets like that were dirty then,
sticky, push them right to the back of the sofa,
but still there’s a black ridge left beneath a fingernail.
His secret was no different, only
it happened to be my secret too.
When the big reveal came they hauled it out of him
kicking and screaming – *slap!* – onto the stage,
the auditorium fell silent;
my secret turned and scurried back
into my open mouth
burrowing itself into my chest,
pressed against the inner membrane.
Nothing would prize it out,
not a lullaby or a scrap of raw meat.
Once I thought of feeding the entire arm of a hoover
down there like a bad party trick:
each coil snaking down my windpipe,
my lungs vibrating like a tin can.
Even now, after I’ve told you all of this,
I’m still here dragging the nozzle
over the white living room carpet,
on my hands, on my knees.

## When the scarecrows come, you must not question why

Instead, let them in like an old friend
allow them to hang their ragamuffin coats
and sit at your table on the steadiest chairs.
Let them eat the decent bread
and drink the cider you'd been saving.
They may talk amongst themselves in the low hum
of telegraph wires on a hot summer's day,
they may swoop their pumpkin heads,
or unfasten their patchwork smiles,
but you mustn't read too much into it.
Affect an air of absolute self-assurance:
wear a casual blazer, unscrew the jar of pickled onions
like someone who owns many jars of pickled onions.
If one of them looks at you directly, look back
but not too intently; it has been said
that to stare into the eyes of a scarecrow
is like peering down the shafts of great wells –
some have been known to slip.
Of course, not everyone knows the way of scarecrows;
some can hear the click of the garden gate
free from the feeling that something inside
is unlatching. Imagine being such a person as this–
arranging tumblers along a kitchen shelf,
taking the small, clean weight of a whole glass in your hand,
turning it against the light and simply thinking
*yes, this glass is empty, and yes, this one, empty also,*
like someone who really believes it.

## Hard thoughts

I am learning to think of my heart
as a pocket watch
all those tiny components
ticking neatly inside my chest,
which I have also come to regard
as a bureau of polished oak
drawers filled with air
inside the body,
which I am learning to think of
as a grand house
closed up for the winter–
a fireplace relieved of its kindling,
a long table set for dinner
with porcelain and rows of chairs
draped in white linen.
I have come to regard
the difficult thoughts as intruders–
they have been placed outside
rifling, fox-like, through the rubbish
for scraps.
I must learn to ignore their crunching
up and down the gravel path,
their multiple mouths
gapping through the windows,
while somewhere
a doorbell rings
and it rings
and it rings.

## Upstairs

His pointed feet walk the tightrope of the brick wall
behind me as I head back from the corner shop.
He holds plastic tulips in one hand,
a Costcutter bag swinging from the other.
If I were to turn around, suddenly,
I'd half-expect to catch his painted grin
peeking out from behind a tree – *here I am!*

When I'm chopping onions
in the kitchen, I hear him clinking bottles upstairs
and fancy that he's hosting a party–
other clowns arriving (some happy, some sad),
all of them squeezing into his one bedroom flat,
dogs in velvet ruffs whining from the windows,
the sound of tiny accordions ringing in my ears.
Sometimes he leaves gifts on my doormat:
sugared cigarettes, and a small red fish
which rocks from side to side in my palm,
indicating that I, too, am out of kilter.

But the clown upstairs is always in good spirits,
his laugh enters my bedroom,
bouncing off the four walls
like a face in a hall of mirrors.
Other nights, he is so quiet I begin to think
he has gone away entirely,
until the morning
when the soured lemonade of his breath
crouches in the corridor.

## Heron

Sometimes the tv becomes mute,
or a curtain parts to reveal a streetlamp
and everything in the room is exposed.
The coat on its hook, plumper, somehow,
than it was before–
or the neck of the umbrella, protruding.
No one knows why there are scissors everywhere,
on the mantelpiece or beneath the sofa,
their slender mouths open.

Other times it's nothing like that:
instead you'll be taking a shower
or boiling the kettle
and it will dawn on you
prickling up the length of your body
until nothing flinches,
the way the lake doesn't flinch
and gradually turns solid,
a recognition, perhaps,
that something is
always, possibly,
about to happen.

## What the water does

It starts as a noise
from the bathroom – *drip, drip, drip,*
but when I check
the room is dry as a bone.
The next night it happens again,
and then every night thereafter,
each time I expect to catch
the bath's full belly, quivering
in the dark. I lie very still
unable to shake the thought of water,
contorting itself through the pipes
underneath the floorboards–
a boa constrictor
edging its way into my room,
taking the shape of everything it touches.
I seal all the cracks in the house
with wire-wool and cloth
and, for a while, the dripping subsides,
until it starts to seep into other things:
I'm on my way to work or in a coffee shop
and the noise will start again,
only louder, more insistent–
a dark ring forming
at the bottom of my jeans.
Soon, water creeps up
through the concrete,
puddles swell into streams.
It isn't long before the whole road
is writhing
as birds glide its surface.
It slides under front doors,
through letter boxes
until I feel it enter,
making its way into
the pit of my stomach,
as it starts to expand there.

# Appendix

Marianne Moore Core Poems

## Chapter One

Bird-Witted

With innocent wide penguin eyes, three
  grown fledgling mocking-birds below
the pussy-willow tree,
  stand in a row,
wings touching, feebly solemn,
  till they see
        their no longer larger
        mother bringing
something which will partially
feed one of them.
  Towards the high-keyed intermittent squeak
    of broken carriage-springs, made by
   the three similar, meek-
    coated bird's-eye
freckled forms she comes; and when
    from the beak
        of one, the still living
        beetle has dropped
out, she picks it up and puts
it in again.
    Standing in the shade till they have dressed
      their thickly-filamented, pale
    pussy-willow-surfaced
      coats, they spread tail
and wings, showing one by one,
    the modest

white stripe lengthwise on the
tail and crosswise
on the under wing, and the
accordion
is closed again. What delightful note
with rapid unexpected flute-
sounds leaping from the throat
of the astute
grown bird comes back to one from
the remote
unenergetic sun-
lit air before
the brood was here? Why has the
bird's voice become
harsh? A piebald cat observing them,
is slowly creeping toward the trim
trio on the tree-stem.
Unused to him
the three make room – uneasy
new problem.
A dangling foot that missed
its grasp, is raised
and finds the twig on which it
planned to perch. The
parent darting down, nerved by what chills
the blood, and by hope rewarded –
of toil – since nothing fills
squeaking unfed
mouths, wages deadly combat,
and half kills
with bayonet beak and
cruel wings, the
intellectual, cautious-
l y c r e e p i n g c a t.

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 136-137.

The Pangolin

Another armored animal – scale
lapping scale with spruce-cone regu-
larity until they
form the uninterrupted central
tail-row. This near artichoke
with head and legs and grit-equipped giz-
zard, the night miniature artist-
engineer, is Leonardo's
indubitable son? Im-
pressive animal
and toiler, of whom we seldom hear.
Armor seems extra. But for him,
the closing ear-
ridge – or bare
ear, lacking even this small
eminence – and similarly safe

contracting nose and eye apertures
impenetrably closable,
are not; – a true ant-eat-
er, not cockroach-eater, who endures
exhausting solitary
trips through unfamiliar ground at night,
returning before sunrise; stepping
in the moonlight, on the moonlight
peculiarly, that the out-
side edges of his

hands may bear the weight and save the claws
for digging. Serpentined about
the tree, he draws
away from
danger unpugnaciously,
with no sound but a harmless hiss; keep-

ing the fragile grace of the Thomas-
of-Leighton-Buzzard Westminster
Abbey wrought-iron vine, or
rolls himself into a ball that has
power to defy all effort
to unroll it; – strongly intailed, neat
head for core, on neck not breaking off,
with curled-in feet. Nevertheless
he has sting-proof scales; and nest
of rocks closed with earth
from inside, which he can thus darken.
Sun and moon & day and night & man and beast
each with a splen-
dor which man
in all his vileness cannot
set aside; each with an excellence!

“Fearful yet to be feared,” the armored
ant-eater met by the driver
ant does not turn back, but
engulfs what he can, the flattened sword-
edged leafpoints on the tail and
artichoke-set leg and body plates
quivering violently when it
retaliates and swarms on him.
Compact like the furled fringed frill
on the hat-brim of

Gargallo's hollow iron head of a
matador, he will drop and will
then walk away
unhurt, al-
though if unintruded on
he will come slowly down the tree, helped

by his tail. The giant-pangolin
tail, graceful tool, as prop or hand
or broom or axe, tipped like
the elephant's trunk with special skin,
is not lost on this ant and
stone swallowing uninjurable
artichoke, which simpletons thought a
living fable whom the stones had
nourished whereas ants had done
so. Pangolins are
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 monk and 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? A sailboat

was the first machine. The manis, made
for moving quietly also,
is neither a prisoner
nor a god; on hind feet plantigrade,
with certain postures of a
man. Beneath sun and moon, man slaving
to make his life more sweet, leaves half the
flowers worth having, needing to choose
wisely how to use the strength; –
a paper-maker
like the wasp; a tractor of food-stuffs,
like the ant; spidering a length
of web from bluffs
above a
stream; in fighting, mechanicked
like the pangolin; capsizing in

disheartenment. Bedizened or stark
naked, man, the self, the being
so-called human, writing-
master to this world, griffons a dark
"Like does not like like that is
obnoxious"; and writes errror with four
r's. Among animals, one has a
sense of humor then, which saves a
few steps, which saves years – unig-
norant, modest and

unemotional, and all emo-
tion; one with everlasting vig-
or, power to grow
though there are
few of him – who can make one
breathe faster, and make one erecter.

Not afraid of anything is he
and then goes cowering forth, tread paced
to meet an obstacle
at every step. Consistent with the
formula – warm blood, no gills,
two pairs of hands and a few hairs – that
is a mammal; there he sits in his
own habitat, serge-clad, strong-shod.
The prey of fear; he, always
curtailed, extinguished,
thwarted by the dusk, work partly done,
says to the alternating blaze,
"Again the sun!
anew each
day; and new and new and new,
that comes into and steadies my soul."

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 141-144.

## Chapter Two

The Frigate Pelican [1934]

Rapidly cruising or lying on the air there is a bird
  that realizes Rasselas's friend's project
  of wings uniting levity with strength. This
    hell-diver, frigate-bird, hurricane-
bird; unless swift is the proper word
      for him, the storm omen when
   he flies close to the waves, should be seen
        fishing, although oftener
        he appears to prefer

to take, on the wing, from industrious crude-winged species
  the fish they have caught, and is seldom successless.
  A marvel of grace, no matter how fast his
    victim may fly or how often may
turn, the dishonest pelican's ease
      in pursuit, bears him away
   with the fish that the badgered bird drops.
         A kind of superlative
         swallow, that likes to live

on food caught while flying, he is not a pelican. The toe
  with slight web, air-boned body, and very long wings
  with the spread of a swan's – duplicating a
    bow-string as he floats overhead – feel
the changing V-shaped scissor swallow-
      tail direct the rigid keel.
  And steering beak to windward always,
        the fleetest foremost fairy
        among birds, outflies the

aeroplane which cannot flap its wing nor alter any quill-
tip. For him, the feeling in a hand, in fins, is
in his unbent downbent crafty oar. With him
other pelicans aimlessly soar
as he does; separating, until
not flapping they rise once more,
closing in without looking and move
outward again to the top
of the circle and stop

and blow back, allowing the wind to reverse their direction.
This is not the stalwart swan that can ferry the
woodcutter's two children home; no. Make hay; keep
the shop; I have one sheep; were a less
limber animal's mottoes. This one
finds sticks for the swan's-down-dress
of his child to rest upon and would
not know Gretel from Hänsel.
As impassioned Handel –

meant for a lawyer and a masculine German domestic
career – clandestinely studied the harpsichord
and never was known to have fallen in love,
the unconfiding frigate-bird hides
in the height and in the majestic
display of his art. He glides
a hundred feet or quivers about
as charred paper behaves — full
of feints; and an eagle

of vigilance, earns the term aquiline; keeping at a height
so great the feathers look black and the beak does not

show. It is not retreat but exclusion from
which he looks down and observes what went
secretly, as it thought, out of sight
among dense jungle plants. Sent
ahead of the rest, there goes the true
knight in his jointed coat that
covers all but his bat

ears; a-trot, with stiff pig gait — our tame armadillo, loosed by
his master and as pleased as a dog. Beside the
spattered blood — that orchid which the native fears —
the fer-de-lance lies sleeping; centaur-
like, this harmful couple's amity
is apropos. A jaguar
and crocodile are fighting. Sharp-shinned
hawks and peacock-freckled small
cats, like the literal

merry-go-round, come wandering within the circular view
of the high bird for whom from the air they are ants
keeping house all their lives in the crack of a
crag with no view from the top. And here,
unlikely animals learning to
dance, crouch on two steeds that rear
behind a leopard with a frantic
face, tamed by an Artemis
who wears a dress like his,

and hampering haymaker's hat. *Festina lente*. Be gay
civilly. How so? "If I do well I am blessed
whether any bless me or not, and if I do
ill I am cursed." We watch the moon rise
on the Susquehanna. In his way
this most romantic bird, flies

to a more mundane place, the mangrove
swamp, to sleep. He wastes the moon.
But he, and others, soon

rise from the bough, and though flying are able to foil the tired
moment of danger, that lays on heart and lungs the
weight of the python that crushes to powder.
The tune's illiterate footsteps fail;
the steam hacks are not to be admired.
These, unturbulent, avail
themselves of turbulence to fly – pleased
with the faint wind's varyings,
on which to spread fixed wings.

The reticent lugubrious ragged immense minuet
descending to leeward, ascending to windward
again without flapping, in what seems to be
a way of resting, are now nearer,
but as seemingly bodiless yet
as they were. Theirs are somber
quills for so wide and lightboned a bird
as the frigate pelican
of the Caribbean.

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 112-114.

<u>The Frigate Pelican [1951]</u>

Rapidly cruising or lying on the air there is a bird
that realizes Rasselas's friend's project
of wings uniting levity with strength. This
hell-diver, frigate-bird, hurricane-
bird; unless swift is the proper word

for him, the storm omen when
he flies close to the waves, should be seen
fishing, although oftener
he appears to prefer

to take, on the wing, from industrious crude-winged species,
the fish they have caught, and is seldom successless.
A marvel of grace, no matter how fast his
victim may fly or how often may
turn. The others with similar ease,
slowly rising once more,
move out to the top
of the circle and stop

and blow back, allowing the wind to reverse their direction –
Unlike the more stalwart swan that can ferry the
woodcutter’s two children home. Make hay; keep
the shop; I have one sheep; were a less
limber animal’s mottoes. This one
finds sticks for the swan's-down-dress
of his child to rest upon and would
not know Gretel from Hänsel.
As impassioned Handel –

meant for a lawyer and a masculine German domestic
career – clandestinely studied the harpsichord
and never was known to have fallen in love,
the unconfiding frigate-bird hides
in the height and in the majestic
display of his art. He glides
a hundred feet or quivers about
as charred paper behaves – full
of feints; and an eagle

of vigilance. . . . *Festina lente.* Be gay
civilly? How so? ‘If I do well I am blessed
whether any bless me or not, and if I do
ill I am cursed.’ We watch the moon rise
on the Susquehanna. In his way,
this most romantic bird flies
to a more mundane place, the mangrove
swamp to sleep. He wastes the moon.
But he and others, soon

rise from the bough and though flying, are able to foil
the tired
moment of danger that lays on heart and lungs the
weight of the python that crushes to powder.

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 381-382.

Poetry [1924]

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; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what

we cannot understand: the bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf
under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels
a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician –
nor is it valid
to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make
a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result
is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination” – above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall
we have
it. In the meantime, 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.

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *New Collected Poems Marianne Moore*, ed. Heather Cass White (London: Faber, 2017), 27-28.

Poetry [1967]

I, too, dislike it.
    Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one dis-
                                                covers in
    it, after all, a place for the genuine

*Taken from* Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 36.