

CONTROLLED ARRANGEMENTS, LIBERATED PERCEPTIONS:  
MARIANNE MOORE'S EARLY POETRY THROUGH THE LENS  
OF SHKLOVSKIAN RUSSIAN FORMALISM

BY

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Thomas and Amy Koval.

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I have had many great teachers and friends for the duration of my schooling. They have all been influential in my education, in many different ways, and I feel very fortunate to have been immersed in an environment with such interesting and wise people. These individuals know who they are, and they know that their friendship and guidance are appreciated deeply.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	vi
CHAPTERS	
-ONE: THE PHILOSOPHER POET.....	1
-TWO: A SEARCHING PERSEVERANCE.....	20
-THREE: IN-HABITING THE WORLD THROUGH ART.....	55
CONCLUSION.....	100
REFERENCE LIST.....	106
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	109

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Thesis under the direction of Mary Deshazer, Ph.D., Professor of English

This dissertation examines the early poetry of Marianne Moore through the critical lens of Russian Formalism according to Victor Shklovsky's 1917 essay "Art as Technique," which theorizes that art is a method of perception in which an individual assumes new, unfamiliar perspectives toward an object of perception in order to "make it new" and interesting. In practicing the technique of art, a perceiver combats habituation and familiarity that would otherwise rob him of conscious, attentive perception in life. Thus, art is a method by which to utilize the full potential of the human perceptive faculty. Moore expresses a theory much like Shklovsky's in her early poetry while stressing the importance of growth, development, and innovation in the human mind, as well as the material world. Her poetry discusses art and also exemplifies what art is, and does, by offering a mixture of specifically configured objects and general meditations upon those objects to fortify her notion of art, to reveal the supreme moral purpose in practicing art, and to provoke reader awareness and re-imagination of the various objects of perception in our material world.

## INTRODUCTION

Marianne Moore was distinguished among, and revered by, the Anglo-American modernist poets of the early twentieth century. Her poetic style is a sort of fascinating invention which resists any real categorization, though she is generally labeled as a modernist poet due to her formal experimentation, and due to the time and place she wrote – twentieth century America. Her poetry shines as a unique beacon of positive, playful, and supremely intelligent thought during a time when poetry tended to express alienation and despair over a warring world and a global industrial complex.

Moore's poetry has found great acknowledgment and respect internationally, and among popular culture; her work has been translated “into German, French, Spanish, and Italian [and published] not only in little magazines and literary quarterlies but in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Seventeen*, *Vogue*, *Life*, [...and even on] page one of the *New York Herald Tribune*” (Nitchie 1-2). Moore's dynamic appeal across cultures and social circles is compounded by her relevance to our current age – an age that, like any other, is defined largely by artistic innovation and new perspectives, for Moore's poetry deals in the philosophy of aesthetics. The aesthetic focus of her poetry has been discussed by a leading Moore scholar, Bonnie Costello:

In one way or another almost every Moore poem alludes to aesthetics. Contemporary critical theory is fond of finding self-reference in literature, but in Moore the argument can be made without special pleading. Many of her poems deal directly with the subject of art. And while a work of art can never directly trace its own activity, these poems confront in a general way the same problems they illustrate in the particular (Costello 17).

As Costello indicates, Moore's poetry intermingles generality and specificity and alternates between reflective thoughts and listed items. At the earliest point of her career, in fact, her poetry was based mostly on vague and repetitive thoughts, ruminations about art, sensation, and emotion; this stylistic practice would eventually expand to include an equal interest in particular objects and items that could exemplify her aesthetic sensibility. Consistently from the start of her career, however, Moore's poetry was concerned with reinforcing a theory of art and a way to experience the world. This theory of art emphasizes the importance of attentive consideration, yet whimsical and ever-changing perception. And according to Costello, "Each poem approves simplicity, humility, and naturalness in art, and deprecates ostentation, narcissism and contrivance" (Costello 17).

Moore's outlook on art – graced by her background in, and affinity for, science – aligns with the theoretical understanding of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian Formalist thinker Victor Shklovsky, whose foundational essay "Art as Technique" (1917) argues that art is a technique of perception by which we as individuals experience the world in a new, unfamiliar way; art is a process of continual innovation and discovery based on the reinterpretation of images. Moore's poetry eloquently expresses this same theory in different terms, albeit with some added considerations, and through the format of poetry instead of prose. Her work can therefore be greatly illuminated and better understood by an analysis through Shklovsky's formalist lens.

In considering the works of Moore through this lens, our fruits will be threefold: We will come to see why art – like science – is an unrelenting apprehension of the

unfamiliar; why our “inclinational” perceptions are genuine so long as they are freshly formed and unfamiliar; and how Moore's work functions doubly as both art and theory to occupy a liminal space, an unfamiliar literary territory, in which each poem is new, unique specimen to be studied for its formal arrangement and its aesthetic themes. In addition to these claims, we will also trace Moore's artistic development to gain insight into the formulation of her poetic and philosophical understandings during the early part of her career, which constitute a worldview of perpetual progress and development.

In our analysis we will distinguish two key phases of Moore's early career: the “introductory phase,” in which she is just beginning to have her work published and holds a concern for reconciling art with philosophy and science – a period lasting from about 1909 to 1913 with poems of minor publication; and the “pinnacle phase,” in which she produces some of her most characteristic, famous, and fully realized work, which expresses her brazen “solution” to previous concerns with, and incompatibilities between, art, philosophy, and science – a period culminating into her 1924 publication

*Observations.*

The introductory phase of Moore's career boasts very little critical research and analysis by other scholars, yet it will be pivotal to this paper's argument, so we will chart new territory in the realm of critical discourse on Moore's beginnings. As we do so, we will lend our attention to content and not form (though Moore would eventually come to say that “form is synonymous with content,” and it “must be”) since the content of these early poems requires strict analysis for our purposes. Once we examine the poems in Moore's pinnacle phase, we will devote increased attention to formal presentation, as by this time she had arrived at her signature sense of form and complexity in each poem.

Though Moore's early poetry constitutes the scope of this paper, we will occasionally contextualize it with lines of poetry from her later career which corroborate her enduring vision as a poet. We will also corroborate our analysis with interviews, prose writings, critical writings, and other published materials that serve to illuminate the essence of her poetic mission.

\* \* \*

This paper will strive particularly to make sense of Moore's development as a thinker in the early part of her poetic career – the most crucial era of her thought development on art. We will attempt to place Moore in a suitable philosophical context and trace the maturation of her ideas from their earliest state of uncertainty to their eventual state of clarity.

This will be a challenging task informed by a mixture of educated speculation, critical research, and theoretical recognition in the case of the Shklovsky comparison, for Moore was somewhat reticent about her poetic influence. Scholar Linda Leavell writes:

When Ezra Pound first wrote to Marianne Moore in December, 1918, he had likely read more than thirty of her poems, primarily in the *Egoist* and *Others*, over the past four years. He was writing to offer his services as an editor and promoter of her first books if she did not already have one – also to inquire who she was and what her influences had been. Guessing that her influences included the Greeks, the French symbolists, and himself, Pound became the first of many puzzled admirers to try to place Moore in a familiar context. She refused his offer regarding the book and politely corrected him: she had no Greek, had not heard of Ghil and Laforgue. As for himself: 'The resemblance of my progress to your beginnings is an accident so far as I can see' (Leavell 1).

Indeed, Moore's influence seems both extensive and difficult to place, yet despite her elusive response to Pound in 1918, she offers some limited clues in her correspondence the following year; in a letter to Pound, dated January 9, 1919, Moore describes herself, her background, and her poetic approach:

I am glad to give you personal data and hope that the bare facts that I have to offer, may not cause work that I may do from time to time, utterly to fail in interest. Even if they should, it is but fair that those who speak out, should not lie in ambush. I was born in 1887 and brought up in the home of my grandfather, a clergyman of the Presbyterian Church. I... was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1909...

Any verse that I have written, has been an arrangement of stanzas, each stanza being an exact duplicate of every other stanza. I have occasionally been at pains to make an arrangement of lines and rhymes that I liked, repeat itself, but the form of the original stanza of anything I have written has been a matter of expediency, hit upon as being approximately suitable to the subject... Gordon Craig, Henry James, Blake, the minor [biblical] prophets and Hardy, are so far as I know, the direct influences bearing on my work (*Selected Letters* 122-3).

Poet and professor Jean Garrigue also highlights the importance and influence of Moore's mother on Marianne's poetic output:

To her mother, Mary Warner Moore, [Marianne] paid significant tribute in a postscript to the *Selected Poems*: "In my immediate family there is one 'who thinks in a particular

way;' and I should like to add that where there is an effect of thought or pith in these pages, the thinking and often the actual phrases are hers" (Garrigue 5).

Since the above records of influence are as detailed as any that one might find, there is little concrete evidence of influence we can derive apart from her mention of "Gordon Craig, Henry James, Blake, the minor [biblical] prophets and Hardy." And though much of Moore's poetry contains rather detailed post-script notes about quotations and references she uses in writing, thereby indicating the minutiae of influence, such notes are non-existent for her earliest poetic outputs – the ones which most deeply reveal the formulation of artistic thought that would serve as a foundation for the remainder of her career. Given this limited discussion of her influence in published documents, we are left to fill the gaps of influence for ourselves as they are implied and evidenced in her poetic text itself. The link to Shklovsky is worth exploring, however, because it provides a solid theoretical inlet by which we can consistently access Moore's aesthetic ideas.

The layout of the thesis follows this model: Chapter One will introduce Moore as she is understood in modern critical discourse, address her unusual style of writing without traditional images, and contextualize her work next to Shklovsky's. Chapter Two will focus on the content of Moore's poetry during her pivotal introductory phase, treading rather deeply into philosophical territory as we examine her considerations of ideal art in a practical, scientific world. And finally, Chapter Three will explore some of Moore's poems from her pinnacle phase, incorporating an analysis of form and content in poetry that had become more complex to exemplify her ideas about subjectivity and art, her drive for personal growth and genuine truth, and her appreciation for science and objectivity.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PHILOSOPHER POET

In 1918, which seems to be a year that Moore garnered significant critical attention, T.S. Eliot lauded the modern American poet:

Miss Moore is utterly intellectual, but not abstract; the word never parts from the feeling; her ideas, imageless, remain quite personal... She has an admirable sense of form... [B]eing an American has perhaps aided her to avoid the diet of nineteenth-century English poetry (Eliot *Egoist* 69-70).

This remark, weighted by the ethos of a man who would soon write the modern poetic masterpiece *The Waste Land*, directs us to what would eventually distinguish Moore as a poet; that is, is a mixture of her clear and organized intellectuality, her precision with language and conveyance, her command of form. Eliot makes a point to note, however, that Moore's ideas are "imageless" – a trait which he famously despised in nineteenth-century English poetry. This matter of imagery is a significant one considering Moore's role as a poet amidst the modernist movement, a movement which centered so heavily upon the use of Eliot's so-called 'objective correlative,' a poetic device which functions by connecting a poetic idea or feeling to a concrete image, a precise visual representation. In his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920) Eliot claims, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," and "it is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* 40). As Eliot rightly notes, Moore's poems tend to be "imageless" and quite rich with personality. Her poems gravitate toward topics of philosophical whimsy

and/or curious descriptions and arrangements of people, animals, characters, objects, and ideas; the poems tend to be uplifting and playful, yet complex and dense. We cannot help but wonder what attracted Eliot to Moore given that her poetic style is so far removed from the modernists tenets to which Eliot, himself, adhered and championed, alongside the three original Imagists whose Imagist movement set the tone for modernism altogether – Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, and H.D.

The fundamental principles of that Imagist movement, and its axiomatic guidelines for ideal poetry writing, were as follows:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome (*Modernism: An Anthology* 374)

Moore's poetry does not consistently follow any of these Imagist rules, and instead favors a more instructive, philosophical approach in conveying its themes to readers. From the early part of her career onward, Moore's own voice resounds throughout her poems, and her poetic ideas are usually delivered through direct address to the reader. This distinguishing feature of her style, combined with another important feature which gained prominence throughout her career – the cataloging of particular items and objects – serves to create a unique poetry experience for readers, one that is far removed from that of reading other Anglo-American modernist poets.

Moore's work is strange because, as Eliot indicates, it does not deal in images – at

least not in a traditional way. Pound's short piece "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1912) explains the modernist definition of a poetic image:

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the new psychologists... It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art (*Modernism* 95).

Moore's poetry, frequently subject to the editorial suggestions of Pound himself, does not quite utilize images as they are defined here; her poetry does not present portraits that can be visualized "instantaneously." As scholar Elizabeth Phillips corroborates, "Moore correctly insisted that she was not one of the Imagists... She said simply, 'I like to describe things'" (Phillips 27).

In actuality, Moore's poems are dense, staggering in their rhythmic flow, heavy with abstract thought, and often taxing to comprehend and understand. In her poetry, she seeks to present us with an idea of aesthetics that does not correspond to a simple visual metaphor, but rather to a flow of data that is simultaneously concrete and abstract, understood not by the ocular eye, but by the mind's eye. Her typical theme is ultimately not a mere visual one, but a holistic philosophical one. Marie Borroff clarifies this:

Visual images of so high a degree of resolution, for all their authenticity, are far from realistic – they do not correspond to the selective and partially focused picture recorded

by the seeing eye... Moore's surreal word photographs bespeak an intellectual curiosity as readily satisfied by the printed page as by visible phenomena themselves. The minutiae of external appearance serve in the poems as data, pointing toward an apprehension of the object in terms of essential form or emblematic significance (Borroff 113).

For Moore, the physical world is absolutely saturated, and infinitely rich, with sights, scents, textures, sounds, and tastes that prove her overall point: Our aesthetic delight in the world relies not so much on the objects around us (which are plentiful), but on our own perceptual attitude and understanding. This is the essential bounty to be rewarded in exchange for the reader's apprehension; but that bounty, if we accept it, requires that we must enjoy the apprehension of Moore's poems, lest we miss her point. For the process is important, above all.

While Moore's poems are imageless in any given "instant," they are laden with the minutiae of *various* simple details, eclectic catalogs of concrete items, which are not necessarily evocative of any clear theme or 'thing' – much like a collage. Her pedantic passages serve to remind the reader that, while Moore addresses objective particulars with all the genuine enthusiasm and wonder of a true Romantic, her primary concern is the conclusion that can be drawn from her analysis of particulars. In this way, Moore remains faithful to her scientific background, and interest in biology, from her college years at Bryn Mawr. In fact, Moore's poetic style at the beginning of her career is far more characterized by general statements and philosophical ideas than it is by particulars. This style reflects a preoccupation with philosophy and science in her early years, which would eventually become a theory of artful living later on, when her cataloging of items would begin.

In any case, the objective elements of Moore's poetry are extremely important, but still secondary to the subjective elements. Her poetic ideas are therefore most often expressed indirectly – that is, they are not construed as images, but voiced as all-important insights, delivered abstractly. So it is essential for us to clarify that Moore's poetry *does* contain images – in fact, it in many instances contains almost overwhelming images, like a collage – but not ones of the sort that the Imagists endorsed. As scholar Linda Leavell gathers, Moore produces “what Kenner calls a 'rain of nouns' and Borroff rephrases as a 'hail' of nouns. Catalogs of nouns appear more and more often after the mid-teens” in her career (Leavell 92). The focal point of Moore's poems are the insights that she derives from these noun images, and not the images themselves. This may seem a subtle point, and literary critic Donald Hall helps us to understand:

[Moore's] poems are rooms of mirrors, faceted with imagery that blinds in its brilliance. They have an Arabian Nights opulence held tightly in a frame of technical control... Something peculiar happens intermittently in these poems. In the midst of comprehensibility, rational content suddenly disappears. All at once there is no paraphrasable meaning. Nothing makes sense. One realizes slowly that something else has taken over the poem. The images are no longer images of any *thing* but are, rather, images of feeling (Hall 13).

Hall's comment reinforces the notion that the images in Moore's poetry are unique. That they might be considered images of feeling is perhaps the highest compliment a critic could pay a poet. After all, if poetry, and all art, is not derived from feeling, and about feeling, then from what does it come and to what end does it reach? Moore's poetry takes

us straight to the artistic source, and it does so in a way that might seem entirely contrary to emotive extraction; it does so by virtue of its detail, precision, and reflection – traits all attributable to the underlying scientist within Moore. Just as Eliot and other modernist poets could utilize the poetic image to “approach the condition of science,” Moore could utilize her own style of philosophical whimsy and cataloging to *reveal* the condition of science. As Eliot claims, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things” (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* 43). Moore, however paradoxically, has a voice in her poetry that rings with personality and authoritative character, yet appeals to our emotions for that exact reason.

Hall traces Moore's youthful interests and the experiences leading to her involvement the arts, and ultimately to the scientific community of academia:

She took Latin in a Latin class of two and found it difficult. She took German and apparently found that difficult as well. It seems curious that a person so gifted with language should have found courses in languages hardest throughout her school years. Drawing and painting were easier. Later biology was easier... She elected courses in biology because her grade standing in English was not high enough to entitle her to choose electives in that subject until her junior or senior year. She spent hours in the biology laboratory. She found the courses exhilarating and, in fact, briefly considered studying medicine. The precision, the drawing and identifying, the economy of statement and logic used for disinterested ends appealed to her. She thinks now that these methods of scientific study had a bearing on liberating her imagination. Certainly

one can see evidence of this approach in her poetic style. Perhaps there really is, in applying the methods of scientific research to poetic construction, a liberating of the inner world of the imagination (Hall 18-9).

Hall consolidates precisely what it is that characterizes and distinguishes Moore's poetic-scientific mindset: Unlike a traditional scientist who analyzes the objective world and arrives at conclusions about it, Moore analyzes the objective world but arrives at conclusions about the *subjective* world. She invokes scientific concepts in her poetry as a way to discover the laws governing her own mind, and she finds that these governing laws are not constraining, but liberating.

The first part of Pound's definition of an image – “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex” – is, then, strangely applicable to Moore's poetic style, even if her images are not presented “in an instant of time” as Pound mandates. For Moore's images and ideas do, together, present a psychological sort of “complex” which aims to give “that sense of sudden liberation,” to liberate the mind “from time limits and space limits.” It is somewhat ironic that Moore's poetry fulfills the ultimate goal of Pound's “image,” albeit not in instant moments, but in lengthy poetic meditations. The fact that Moore refuses to deliver images in singular moments is important, as the artistic liberation which she strives to provide for herself and for readers is dependent on the consideration of each poem as a whole, complete with concrete images and abstract statements. We must be patient, and reflect. The strangeness of her form hints at this need for extended consideration.

Moore's form is guided not so much by musical phrasing (as the third tenet of Imagism demands), but by a syllable count akin to the sequence of an irregularly stressed

metronome. W.H. Auden writes of Moore's formal style:

[Unlike an accentual meter,] a syllabic verse, like Miss Moore's, in which accents and feet are ignored and only the number of syllables count, is very difficult for an English ear to grasp... A typical poem by Miss Moore... is written in stanzas, containing anything from one up to twenty syllables, not infrequently a word is split up with one or more of its syllables at the end of a line and the rest of them at the beginning of the next, caesuras fall where they may and, as a rule, some of the lines rhyme and some are unrhymed. This, for a long time, I found very difficult. Then, I found her process of thinking very hard to follow (Auden 297).

As Auden implies in his testimony, Moore's poetry is 'hard to follow' and there is a strangeness to the verse. It is nontraditional and it is not conducive to quick interpretation or 'instantaneous' image-formation in the minds of readers. Indeed, Moore seeks to set our minds in motion, to incite new perspectives and challenge preconceived understandings.

Moore's situation among other modernist poets, who generally subscribed to the notion that poetry should be cinematic and unemotionally wrought (hence Eliot's comparison to science), readily exposes the uniqueness of her own poetic conceptions. While it is generally agreed upon, and evident in the conventions of not only modern poetry but also cinema, that you *do not tell* readers/viewers what to think, but instead *show them* and let them think for themselves, Moore rejects this premise. She directs our thought with her own asserted aesthetic axioms, and the described items in her poems become subject to our testing of those axioms. In doing this, she aims to liberate our

perceptions in the controlled environment of each poem.

Moore's poetry eventually comes to invite us to interpret not necessarily as “cold” analytical scholars, but as thinking, opining individuals given to emotional, fleeting judgment and interpretation. She assures us that our reactions to poetry, and all art, can be nothing but accurate and genuine, so long as they draw from an honest and ready personal assessment. Furthermore, she uses her poems in a way that might be characterized as thoughtful, pensive, and uplifting. Her tone is playful and positive, even when poetic content may seem dense and heavy. Moore's relaxed, humanistic outlook on art, and her markedly positive attitude in writing, serves to distinguish her as a modern poet with a very interesting, original vision; by 1921, Eliot – the proponent of poetic difficulty and “cold,” stoic expression – even amplified his earlier praise of Moore to directly express a growing appreciation for her ingenuity: "How much I admire your verse. It interests me, I think, more than that of anyone now writing in America" (Eliot Letter 442). Even Auden, who was originally skeptical of and puzzled by Moore's poetry, eventually came to admit, “Uncomprehending as I [originally] was, I felt attracted by the tone of voice, so I persevered and I am very thankful that I did, for today there are very few poets who give me more pleasure to read” (Auden 298).

Hall qualifies the wonder expressed by Auden and Eliot, and many other modernists, toward Moore's incredible poetic ability and originality. Noting her self-guided efforts and her unique style, existing largely of her own volition and outside of the literary 'movement' around her, he writes,

The awe in which Marianne Moore was held by her contemporaries is explainable in part, I think, by the fact that she was already writing poetry that was highly original. Her

poems had broken with tradition. They were examples of the sort of new poetry her contemporaries had envisioned, for although there was agreement among poets about what innovations were required to revitalize American poetry, writing the new thing was something else... [Moore's poetry] was a poetry without 'poetic' diction, shorn of cliches, with a thoughtful disregard for the usual requirements of rhyme and meter. Here was something new, a genuinely new thing. And it was coming from a reticent small woman who simply wrote as she liked (Hall 30-1).

And so Moore was revered by her peers and held “respect, friendship, affection from a circle wide and various enough to include T.S. Eliot and James T. Farrell, Allen Ginsberg and W.H. Auden, Robert Frost and Ezra Pound, John Hersey and Robert Lowell, Amiya Chakravarty and M.M. Tambimuttu” (Nitchie 1-2).

Not only was Moore extremely well-respected and well-liked by her modernist peers, but she had a valuable presence among the modernists, for she exercised a distinct voice and a unique outlook on art and poetry. In fact, her poetic style and her overarching poetic display/argument during the early years of her career (1909 – 1924) aligned not so much with her contemporaries in the Anglo-American modernist movement, but rather coincidentally with the Russian Formalist movement – particularly as it was expressed by Victor Shklovsky.

Dull understanding is what art should combat, according to Shklovsky in his famous essay “Art as Technique” (1917). He argues that “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” (*Russian* 12). Hence, perception is the key component in evaluating aesthetics. Since we perceive everyday things in an efficient, simple, linguistically economical way, and since that

perception then becomes habitual and automatic, art must re-present those everyday things to us in unfamiliar, and often more complicated terms in order to draw our focus and attention to what they describe and how they describe it. As Shklovsky explains further,

The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important (Russian 4).*

In other words, we can derive more meaning and “artfulness” from our own perceptual inclinations and creativity than we can from the object which inspires them.

These perceptual inclinations are guided by an understanding through images. Shklovsky even notes, “[T]he definition ‘Art is thinking in images,’ which means... that art is the making of symbols, has survived the downfall of the theory [and Symbolist movement] which supported it.” He elaborates, “[Artists] are much more concerned with arranging images than with creating them” (and “arranging images” translates to “cataloging nouns,” in Moore’s case) (*Russian 7*). As a consequence of Shklovsky’s realizations, it seems we are all potentially artists by virtue of the ability to engage art. And as such, we do not re-create the world we perceive; rather, we rearrange our mental schemas to shed a new, unique perspective on it.

Of course, not everyone is compelled to be artful in his or her experience. Many people are subject to habituation and automatization. Perceptions that are automatic pass by a perceiver unnoticed. What is perceived is not processed and likely forgotten

altogether. In our automatic perceptions, “We see [an] object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette.” And so the experience eludes us, and “life is reckoned as nothing. Automatization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.” It is as if our automatic moments, after the fact, “had never been” (*Russian* 11, 12).

Since “the over-automatization of an object... permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort,” however, we often submit to what is habitual (*Russian* 12). True art challenges this habituation of perception by presenting us with something unfamiliar and “interesting” – something that we do not automatically process, but rather something we are forced to perceive and absorb, something about which to ponder. It makes us pause to appreciate that which would otherwise elicit a systematized reaction.

This philosophy of art shared by Shklovsky and Moore has historical roots that trace back to William Blake. In order to gain a greater understanding of the former figures, we must take some time here to examine Blake, a revolutionary figure whom Moore mentions and praises in her early work on numerous occasions, in poems such as “He Did Mend It. His Body Filled a Substantial Interstice” and “Blake.”

In “There is No Natural Religion” (1788) Blake constructs an argument to validate the infinite capacity of the human mind. He says, “Man’s desires are limited by his perceptions,” however his “perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. he perceives more than sense... can discover” (Blake aV, bI). Here Blake indicates that the conscious human mind, as a whole, is capable of perceiving in a way that the senses are not. If the five senses are organic receptors of sensory data from our environment, then the brain is what assembles and interprets that data. While still admittedly organic, each human brain has unique interpretive properties which allow for an artistic, poetic view of

reality. In a sense, each individual is sovereign in the formulation of his or her own thoughts and perceptions.

Blake goes on to say, “The bounded is loathed by its possessor,” and “[L]ess than All cannot satisfy man,” finally reasoning, “The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite” (Blake bIV – bVII). That is, the endless capacity for human desire – that which gives rise to “the Poetic or Prophetic character” in man – escapes the realm of the finite, ignores the abstractions and generalizations of objectivist thinking, and dodges what Blake refers to as “the ratio of all things.” This ratio is better understood as the empirical matrix of scientific quantification that attempts to encode our world in numbers and subdivide time and space into measurable fragments of a presumably finite whole. Such a ratio threatens to limit the boundless desires of man and bring forth despair. According to Blake, “If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character [,] The Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” (Blake Conclusion). A product of his own “Poetic character,” Blake in his poems and paintings attempts to present the world we all know in unfamiliar, mythologized terms so we can re-experience what otherwise belongs to our ratio of dull understanding.

This necessity for perceptive innovation may be a bit perplexing. Why should innovation and development be absolutely essential? Can life not continue, even if we are victims to “the same dull round” of events and ideas? Blake’s response to this would be subtle, but potent: If the human life is a quest for meaning, for evidence of personal or collective progress, then life is really a quest for what we call “God.” According to Blake, “He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God” (Blake Application).

Moore knew Blake's work well, as her writing and poetry about him indicates, and

he probably served as Moore's introduction to a new aesthetic thinking during her younger years. Furthermore, Blake set a precedent for the investigation of perceptual understanding and implication long before Russian Formalism existed, and long before virtually any explicit discussion of perception in art altogether. Honoring his role as *the* original innovator on the subject, Blake has been tied to Russian formalism in scholar Nicholas Warner's essay "The Eye Altering Alters All': Blake and Esthetic Perception." Warner says,

In the current climate of critical diversity and methodological experimentation, it is natural to speculate on the value of various critical theories in approaching the notoriously recalcitrant work of William Blake... Blake repeatedly seems to call for a critical approach geared to creative perception and response: "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees"; "The Sun's Light when he unfolds it / Depends on the Organ that beholds it"; "the Eye altering alters all." Again and again Blake insists that what our eyes behold is partly the product, as well as the object, of our own perception (Warner 18-9).

Warner sees Blake's "revision and redefinition" of traditional outlooks on perception as "an attempt to revise and redefine our entire cultural perspective" and "the whole way we look at our own traditions and, finally, at ourselves. Warner also posits a link between Blake and Russian Formalism: "This concern with teaching us to see afresh links Blake... with the early twentieth-century practitioners of Russian Formalism," especially "the famous Formalist theoretician Victor Shklovsky," who, "[r]ailing against the perceptual complacency of his society," claims that

We have lost our awareness of the world; we are like a violinist who has ceased to feel the bow and the strings, we have ceased to be artists in everyday life, we do not love our houses and clothes, and easily part from a life of which we are not aware. Only the creation of new forms of art can restore to man sensation of the world, can resurrect things and kill pessimism (Shklovsky 46, Warner 27-8).

Shklovsky does not talk of “fools” or “wise men” as Blake does, but the concern with revitalizing a culture dulled by habituation and stale perception is similar. Both figures urge us to expand our minds, consider new perspectives, wander into unknown realms of thought – if for no other reason, than to imperialize the unknown and gain mental territory; to fully enjoy our conscious, aware lives as if we recognize that consciousness is a supreme gift and should not be put to waste.

Moore agrees with T.S. Eliot's claim that “[Blake] approached everything with a mind unclouded by current opinions,” and adds that Blake had a “humanly personal approach to any subject that he treated” (*Complete Prose* 54-5). Since Blake's work introduces “only what can be presented and need not be explained,” he exemplifies traits of openness, honesty, and as Moore says, “truth,” but he fails to provide a crucial, accessible, traditionally elaborated account of his artistic outlook. For this reason, we will turn to a comparable and fully fleshed-out critical perspective – Russian Formalism – in order to provide a suitable lens through which to analyze Moore's work. We will use Shklovsky – “probably the most important of the Formalist critics” – to provide the proper account of Russian Formalist thought for our purposes, and in particular we will use his famous essay “Art as Technique” (*Russian Formalist Criticism* 3).

Russian formalism expert Victor Erlich refers to “Art as Technique” as Shklovsky's “improvised theory of art,” as an “unequivocal esthetic commitment – more pronounced in Shklovsky than in other Formalist spokesmen – which accounts for the tenor of the spirited essay: the rather unexpected preoccupation with the uses of poetry and the therapeutic value of creative deformation.” The essay, Erlich says, “had a considerable influence on subsequent Formalist theorizing” (Erlich 180).

As the translators Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis state in their introduction to “Art as Technique” (1917), “The essay is the most important statement made of early Formalist method, partly because it announces a break with the only other 'aesthetic' approach available at that time and in that place” (*Russian Formalist Criticism* 3).

Shklovsky was the first thinker to provide a convincing answer to the problem of imagery in literature; “Art as Technique” was “a spirited attack on the imagery doctrine,” and the foundational work for all subsequent Russian Formalist thought (Erlich 175). Erlich offers a clarifying outlook on a famous Shklovskian passage:

'The poet,' wrote Shklovsky, 'does not create images; he finds them [in ordinary language – V.E.] or recollects them.' Consequently, it is not in the mere presence of imagery, but in the use to which it is being put that one should seek the differentia of poetry... This was the crucial and most valuable phase of the Formalist argument... Shklovsky argued persuasively against the rationalistic notion of the poetic image as an explanatory device, a mental shortcut. 'The theory', he wrote, 'that the 'image' is always simpler than the notion for which it is substituted is totally erroneous.' ...If in informative 'prose', a metaphor aims to bring the subject closer to the audience or drive a point home, in 'poetry' it serves as a means of intensifying the intended esthetic effect. Rather than

translating the unfamiliar into the terms of the familiar, the poetic image 'makes strange' the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by placing it in an unexpected context... Shklovsky's theory of 'making strange' the object depicted switched the emphasis from the poetic use of the image to the function of poetic art (Erich 176).

According to Erlich, even “[b]ack in 1955 Russian Formalism was virtually unknown in the West,” and it is safe to say that Moore's outlook on art aligns with Shklovsky's theory not due to direct influence, but due to coincidence (Erich 11). Perception-focused views of art and reality had been “in the air” during the first half of the twentieth century, so while the coincidence between Moore and Shklovsky is particularly notable, others were creeping forth with similar ideas in decades after. But Moore's idea of art as a mode of defamiliarization dates back as early as 1909 in the poem “Qui S'Accuse, S'Accuse” ; and by this token, Moore predates Shklovsky by many years. Erlich writes, “[I]t may be noted, without detracting from the validity of Shklovsky's formulations, that his notion of art as a rediscovery of the world had more in common with traditional or popular views than the Formalist critic would have cared to admit,” citing comparable writings by T.S. Eliot and Max Eastman in 1933 and 1935, respectively (Erich 179).

Furthermore, the psychologist/philosopher John Dewey, of whom Moore was a self-proclaimed reader and admirer since her early years, had been traveling and researching in Russia during 1928, only to publish his work “Art as Experience” (1934) six years after his visit. This work would seem to have been influenced by his exposure to the Russian Formalist school that flourished in the early part of the century, and its title is uncannily similar to Shklovsky's “Art as Technique.” Dewey writes,

The individual who has an enlarged and quickened experience is one who should make for himself his own appraisal... The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive (Dewey 325).

Scholarly literature connecting Dewey to Russian Formalism is scarce, and Dewey does not mention Russian Formalism, or Shklovsky, in his own writings, so one can only speculate over the influence of these elements on Dewey's work, but the link here is extremely strong. Molesworth discusses Dewey's "Art as Experience" as being a significant influence on Moore's aesthetic during the rise of her career:

I would suggest one of the best glosses on Moore's poetry is the third chapter in Dewey's *Art As Experience*, called "Having an Experience." For Dewey experience did not mean something crudely empirical, or, even less, something subject only to positivistic science. Moreover, aesthetic experience was a consummator stage in our common, symbolically mediated, and environmentally integrated awareness as human beings. Moore read Dewey, especially in the 1920's (Molesworth xx).

While Molesworth offers the suggestion of referring to Dewey as a gloss on Moore's poetry, we will utilize Shklovsky as our lens instead, since "Art as Technique" is more foundational, it is more succinct and focused, and in particular, it arose in history as a revolutionary theoretical doctrine with critical, new ideas prior to the rise of other published doctrines that we might compare to it. Even Moore's early poetry is too cryptic

and unspecific to be recognized as established theoretical doctrine.

Thus, Shklovsky's theory will serve as our lens in this paper through which to analyze Moore's poetry – as he states his theory of art with the most clarity, originality, and utility for our purposes. The translation of “Art as Technique” that we will use in this dissertation “was approved by Victor Shklovsky, who perhaps more than anyone else deserves to be called the founder of Russian Formalism,” according to the translators, Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (*Russian Formalist Criticism* xvi). The fact that Moore's stance on art might align with Shklovsky's is a testament to the validity of defamiliarization – that is, the renewal of perception – as an important and resounding literary concept.

It should also be noted here that the following chapters will begin with an analysis of Moore's *very* early poetry and gradually build toward a more complex analysis of later poems; this progression of analysis will serve to mirror the development of Moore's poetry from its basic early years to its complex later years. It will also be necessary in Chapter Two to overview the work of French philosopher René Descartes, whose philosophical musings are absolutely foundational in any modern consideration of sensation, perception, and the nature of reality. Finally, while retaining Shklovsky as the key lens of analysis for Moore's poetry, I will occasionally deviate back to Blake for his pre-eminence on the matter of perception in art.

## CHAPTER TWO: A SEARCHING PERSEVERANCE

“Of [Moore's early poetry] one might say: [it is] first and last a voice. The voice of sparkling talk and sometimes very lofty talk, glittering with authority. It has dismissed poetic diction, indeed is rigorous in its exclusion of the traditional or the romantic sensuous word, phrase, and implication. It works in a new area of language and meanings because it has new insight to bring to subjects not before then quite approximated by poetry. It is experimental and/or revolutionary because it is excluding the magical, the lyrical, the incantatory... Bringing a new diction to another kind of 'subject matter,' it employed the cadences of prose in a rhythm based on speech. But whose speech? [...]it is essentially her uniquely mother-English own, running with a rapid, finely nerved energy. Held tautly to the line articulation, when so finely intermeshed, is meant, like a dance, to last just so long and not a second longer” (Garrigue 8).

\* \* \*

It is worth noting, as we begin our poetic analysis, that Moore is generally understood to be the speaker in her poetry, unless instances in a specific poem give reason to assume otherwise. And even in her presentation of numerous and varied objects, topics, and concepts – most of which contain quoted elements and references to other speakers – Moore remains *the* speaker for us as readers. She is consistently the arbiter or intermediary of thoughts and ideas. Elizabeth Phillips writes of Moore's poetic voice and artistic outlook:

Although Moore has been associated with objectivist poetry because of her respect for things in their own right, she is also a subjective, an introspective, and a personal poet. She rarely apologized for her predilections, which reveal the woman who made the poems (Phillips 70).

Like her artistic and philosophical arguments, Moore's poetic voice would remain virtually unchanged, and hold unfaltering integrity, throughout her entire career. Quoting from a passage from the poem "In the Public Garden" (1958) – "...Art, admired in general, / is always actually personal" – Phillips writes,

We assume she is speaking in her own voice because... the word 'personal' sums up the point of view, and because Moore habitually, if not consistently, used that point of view in her verse. My guess is that when she began to write she was naive in regard to questions that critics debate as they try to distinguish between a fictive voice in the first person and the autobiographical 'I' (Phillips 71).

In the "introductory phase" of Moore's early career, then, her writing places her as the speaker, presenting us with insights and descriptions that illuminate her own perceptions of the world, and of art and philosophy in general. But these writings do not quite bear the supreme conviction that would develop in years to come. In fact, a defining trait of Moore's early poetry is its equivocation, revealing the tension of thought in a young woman who had only recently graduated from Bryn Mawr college with a degree in biology and histology – the study of the microscopic anatomy of cells and living tissues in plants and animals. She was still in the midst of her formative years, expressing a

distinct and enduring interest in human perception and its aesthetic dimension, yet torn between the distinction of 'personal' and 'impersonal' in art.

As we will see, Moore shares Shklovsky's basic understanding of art – that art is a technique of innovative perception – and she indicates this in poems that were published several years before Shklovsky's "Art as Technique." But as a fresh college graduate with an official background in science, Moore's early poetry expresses art as "something impersonally pursued, yet at the same time it is the fullest expression of one's personality," and as Molesworth elaborates,

The real tension between these two models was not something Moore could resolve easily. Behind this formulation of the tension is heard an analog of the Romantic paradox stated by Coleridge when he defined art as rooted in 'the desire for spontaneity and the need for order.' Moore became a post-Romantic poet in her acceptance of the value of impersonality, but she was far from being an unexpressive poet (Molesworth 74).

In poems like "My Senses Do Not Deceive Me," "Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse," "Things Are What They Seem," "To You – of the World, Not in the World;," and "Emeralds," Moore develops relatively terse expressions of the aesthetic philosophy that would serve as a basis for the more complex poems of her later years. Each of the aforementioned poems is little known and understated, if acknowledged at all, in literary criticism focusing on Moore's work. This is perhaps not only because the poems represent a young and uncertain Moore, but because each has been subject to extremely limited publication, if not left unpublished altogether until recent years.

Specifically, "My Senses Do Not Deceive Me" and "Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse"

were published together in the literary magazine *The Lantern* in the Spring of 1910, and “Things Are What They Seem” was published later in the Spring 1913 edition of *The Lantern* (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 346, 351). However, “To You – of the World, Not in the World:” and “Emeralds” seem to have been unpublished until the 2003 release of *The Poems of Marianne Moore*. Records of exactly when they were written are scarce, but authorship must have been between 1907 and 1913, probably among the latter years of that time frame. In addition, these poems contain no accessible “notes” or formal commentary by Moore.

While critics have tended to leave these earlier poems unaddressed, they are perfect for our purposes – for they reveal Moore's undeniable interest in, and outlook on, art and sensation. They readily demonstrate the more pedantic, yet still mysterious, aspect of Moore's poetic style without the complex conviction and detail of her later work. These poems have fairly basic formal structure, and little focus on arrays of objects – both poetic traits which would grow and mature in years to come. By addressing the general topics of art and sensation, these poems are more plainly philosophical in nature than most of Moore's other work – even than other poems of her early career. It is conceivable that the poet felt too self-conscious, equivocating, or too “exposed” to include these poems in her first major publication, *Observations* (1924), yet here we will engage them for exactly those reasons.

“My Senses Do Not Deceive Me” (1909) is a poem that Moore may have neglected to publish more widely due to its terse immersion in philosophy. In discussing this poem, we will have to take a brief detour from our Shklovskian lens of analysis as we set a proper foundation for Moore's thinking and argumentation about sensation. Once this foundation is set, we will return to Shklovsky. “My Senses Do Not Deceive Me,” in

its entirety, reads:

Like the light of a candle

Blown suddenly out,

I witness illusion,

And subsequent doubt.

Like a drop in the bucket

And liquid as flame,

Is the proof of enjoyment

Compared with the name (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 19).

While the structure of this poem is fairly regular, with one stanza containing an ABCB-DEFE rhyme scheme, the poem's content is unusual and cryptic; but *sense* can be made of it – and that pun is intentional, for we must imagine the sensations, and dissect the voice, of the poem to place ourselves in a context which will allow for understanding.

The first four lines of the poem present a speaker who witnesses “illusion and subsequent doubt” deemed comparable to “the light of a candle” being “blown suddenly out.” With the poem's title in mind, it seems that we have a speaker who momentarily doubts his or her senses, a speaker whose belief in the senses is suddenly extinguished but will be reignited with the realization that “my senses do not deceive me.” The imagery of a candle being “blown suddenly out” gives rise to a visual of fire and light, followed by smoke and potentially darkness. Therefore, the speaker's doubt of genuine “sensation” hinges upon impermanence, upon the ever-present possibility of an instantaneous change of conditions, marking what seems to be an instability and

deceptiveness in the realm of sensory data.

Given Moore's interest in philosophy and aesthetics, her familiarity with the French language and culture, and her status as a college-educated woman of the early twentieth century, it is not only appropriate, but irresistible, to figure French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), the recognized “father of modern philosophy,” into the basic context of this poem. Descartes earns his prestigious title for his groundbreaking work, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), in which famously doubts his senses and admits that he needs to “make a serious and unimpeded effort to destroy generally all [his] former opinions” in order to build a new foundation for genuine philosophical understanding (Descartes 17). He figures that if he assumes nothing to be true but infallible rationality, thereby dismissing all sense-related, empirical gatherings, he can build pure rational thoughts upon each other and triumphantly discredit his original doubts.

Empirical rejection is the first step of Descartes's task. In doubting the information he receives through his senses, claiming that “these senses sometimes mislead,” Descartes describes his sensory perceptions of a “bit of wax which has just been taken from the hive” before he proceeds to apply a flame to it (Descartes 18, 29). Once the wax is heated, Descartes notes:

What remains of the taste evaporates; the odor vanishes; its color changes; its shape is lost; its size increases; it becomes liquid; it grows hot; one can hardly touch it; and although it is knocked upon, it will give out no sound. Does the same wax remain after this change? We must admit that it does; no one denies it, no one judges otherwise. What is it then in this bit of wax that we recognize with so much distinctness? Certainly it

cannot be anything that I observed by means of the senses, since everything in the field of taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing are changed, and since the same wax nevertheless remains... Now I am truly astonished when I consider how weak my mind is and how apt I am to fall into error (Descartes 29, 31).

And with that, Descartes justifies that the mind is prone to erroneous judgment based on perceptions of the “physical” world. This leads Descartes to deny corporeal truth.

Considering Moore's words in the context of Descartes's meditation, it seems likely that her poem is actually an intended reply to Descartes's musings. For while Descartes applies a flame to wax and witnesses changes that alter his perception of the wax to inspire empirical rejection, the speaker of Moore's poem extinguishes the flame of a presumably waxen candle and experiences “subsequent doubt” much like Descartes. In both cases, the presence of physical materials seems constant but perceptions of those materials, of their sensory effect, are quickly altered. It is granted, on a very basic level, that Descartes's era did not boast the same knowledge of chemistry as did Moore's, and this helps explain Descartes's confusion and doubt of sensation based on what would later be recognized as a simple chemical reaction. But in “My Senses Do Not Deceive Me,” Moore's argument and reply to Descartes is not at all based on innovations in science and scientific understanding, though it does have its foundation in empiricism, like science.

The second half of Moore's poem can be paraphrased, “The proof of sensual enjoyment – the perceived experience itself – is deemed inconsequential compared to the rational labeling of an event or thing.” Rational thought substitutes categorizations, names, and labels of “true” or “false,” “logical” or “illogical” to any given experience, but such rational thought overlooks and undermines the experience itself, that which

cannot be replaced by rational understanding. The common phrase “a drop in the bucket” refers to a very small proportion of a whole – that is, a negligible amount of something – and the phrase “liquid as flame,” is intended to be understood in the manner of a simile, “as liquid as flame.” Both phrases compare expressions of insignificance and intangibility (as a flame's flicker evokes) to Descartes's valuation of his sensations. Moore is indicating in her poem that Descartes's paranoia of deception frames his meditation into a rational, empirically ignorant search for holistic truth that might somehow exist independent of sensation. And so if we consider the poem's title once again, it becomes clear that her reply to Descartes is not corroborative, but disagreeing, for Moore would argue, “My senses do *not* deceive me.” The poem nearly assumes the voice and thought patterns of Descartes in all areas except the title. As Moore lightly mocks the privileging of rationalism in Descartes's thought, she cleverly endorses the embrace, not the doubting, of sensation and experience – that is, of empirical thought. This stance is entirely consistent with Moore's background in the biological sciences, for science is based on empirical gatherings.

But Moore can identify with Descartes a great deal, too, for she understands the trouble in reconciling a world of personal perception with a world of independent, objective existence. Perhaps she is not as sure about her empirical stance as she lets on in “My Senses Do Not Deceive Me,” and perhaps the contrariness between the poem's title and content indicate not so much a doubting of Descartes as Moore's own identification with Descartes's quandary. She hints at this when she announces her definition and understanding of art poetically in “Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse” (1909), which translates from French to the expression “He Who Excuses Himself, Accuses Himself”:

Art is exact perception;  
If the outcome is deception  
Then I think the fault must lie  
Partly with the critic's eye,  
And no man who's done his part  
Need apologize for art (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 20).

Based on the content of the poem, and its French title, we are tempted once again to think of Descartes, whom we might see as the “critic” of the world whose perceived “deception” reflects a “fault” in his own outlook. We are also driven to consider the similarity of art conceptions between Moore and Shklovsky, for both thinkers view the perceiving mind – the “eye” – as primary in the creation of art. That is, both thinkers bear the same essential philosophy: art is a precise and active manner of perceiving material objects.

If we recall, Shklovsky's “Art as Technique” says:

The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important* (*Russian* 4).

So for Moore and Shklovsky, art is the *process* of perception – and not just any type of perception, but active, attentive, intentional perception which Moore opts to call simply “exact perception.” “Exact perception” is admittedly, however, a loaded term. We might

consider what Molesworth says of Moore:

For her poetry, the interaction between the realms of nature and culture serves as the great dramatic subject. This interaction is the ground for the crucially human experience of making choices... To be human was, for Moore, to be involved in a world of choice. Making choices, however, was stringently circumscribed by natural instincts or overly complicated by cultural considerations (Molesworth xvi).

Given these insights, which correctly emphasize Moore's concern with intention in human thought being situated within the natural order of the world, we are prompted to think of 'exact perception' as perception that is at once intentional and instinctive, cultural and natural, a product of choice yet a product of intuition. Moore implicitly recognizes that our perceptions of the world, as well as her own, will change and develop with the practice of exact perception, yet exact perception is that which exactly portrays the nature of reality at a given moment – and this reality is an amalgam of changing subjective truth and enduring objective truth, the perceiving mind and the objects outside of it. Frankly, Moore has a difficult time reconciling a changing world of perception with the idea of an ordered material world, and this is the major confounding element of her overall philosophy in the beginning of her career. For someone who had recently graduated from college and the biological studies of living cells and microscopic structures that compose the organic world, Moore's predicament is entirely understandable, and a difficult matter to reconcile with art as perception. This may be why Moore's poem clearly asserts the modifier “exact” in defining art as “exact perception.”

Though Moore and Shklovsky have the same general definition for art, they differ

in the severity of their adherence to the implications of that definition. Shklovsky can be viewed as a purist toward the art he defines, and he does not hold any concern for discussions of objectivity. That is not to say he rejects the material world, but only that his theory is limited to a total focus on subjective perception. He plainly says, “The object is not important.” For him, art is pure perception, and its neglect will render us as creatures of “mere recognition”, re-cognizing the same world which has been cognized before. Erlich summarizes Shklovsky's outlook, which is a literal demonstration of 'mind over matter':

'People living at the seashore,' wrote Shklovsky, 'grow so accustomed to the murmur of the waves that they never hear it. By the same token, we scarcely ever hear the words which we utter... We look at each other, but we do not see each other anymore. Our perception of the world has withered away, what has remained is mere recognition.' ...It is this inexorable pull of routine, of habit, that the artist is called upon to counteract. By tearing the object out of its habitual context, by bringing together disparate notions, the poet gives a *coup de grâce* to the verbal cliché and to the stock responses attendant upon it and forces us into heightened awareness of things and their sensory texture. The act of creative deformation restores sharpness to our perception, giving 'density' to the world around us. [According to Shklovsky], 'Density is the principal characteristic of this peculiar world of deliberately constructed objects, the totality of which we call art' (Erlich 177).

Shklovsky's notion of “density” in the “peculiar world of deliberately constructed objects” is one Moore would absolutely agree with, and it reveals that Shklovsky acknowledges the constructed world's independence, but chooses not to address it. He

merely notes it as being “peculiar.” His purpose in theorizing is to describe the technique of art and its capacity to revitalize. He does not seek “ultimate truth,” and he does not intend to analyze the nature of objective, absolute reality in his work. Erlich notes that the Russian Formalists, in general,

...were not primarily concerned with the essence or purpose of art. Avowed champions of 'neo-positivism', they sought to steer clear of 'philosophical pre- conceptions' as to the nature of artistic creation [and its objective sources]; they had little use for speculations about Beauty and the Absolute. Formalist esthetics was descriptive rather than metaphysical (Erlich 171).

While “the object is not important” for Shklovsky, it certainly holds importance for Moore, who is throughout her career increasingly concerned with “truth” and “the genuine.” In this sense, Moore seeks in her poetry answers that will supply not only emotional knowledge to the individual, but intellectual knowledge about the nature of the world. This is why critics like Molesworth, and Wallace Stevens, claim to see in Moore the mind of an underlying Romantic (Costello 134). Moore's concern for the absolute is not mentioned explicitly at this point in her work, but it is obviated by the philosophical nature of her poetic exercise. After all, to question the senses and talk of art as “exact perception” is to express an interest in that which is genuine and real, not just in the mind, but in the world.

In the phrasing of “Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse,” we witness Moore actually equating art with this search for general truth that exists objectively and universally. This is evidenced when she says, “If the outcome is deception” – “outcome” being a convenient

word to describe the result of perception – and if it proves to be other than artful and genuine, then “the fault must lie *partly* with the critic's eye.” Yet Moore has already revealed that “the senses do not deceive,” so how could perceptions be deceptive? The answer is that perceptions occur amidst the mind's coherence of sensory data, and are therefore ultimately created in the “mind's eye,” not directly via the senses (as Blake notes). For if our perceptions were a direct feed from sensation, if they were not processed by the mind, there would be no such thing as a technique to practice art – that is, willful techniques, and active intentions, would not exist in the first place.

Thus, our processing, perceiving minds must err in order for the “outcome” to be “deception.” But how does an individual err in the perception of his own reality? Moore imagines that perception and “genuine” reality are distinct, and that they must converge in art, in an “exact perception.” Yet because she does not yet understand how to commingle both partitions of her distinction – perception and reality – into a whole, she merely focuses, in 1909, on the subjective component in her definition of art – the mind that perceives.

Though Moore believes art to require a certain technique of perception, it might seem a stretch to suggest that her proposed “exact perception” requires defamiliarization as Shklovsky's theory of art demands. But Moore surely understands art to be a creative, innovative process, and thus one that marks the creation of new perspectives, and continual progress; this belief is reinforced by her succinct poem entitled “Progress,” published in the June 1909 issue of Bryn Mawr's literary magazine *Tipyn O'Bob*. In the poem, we see that Moore relates the concept of progress to confidence in the face of doubt and adversity. And we witness her own desire to overcome any odds that stand in her way (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 343) :

If you will tell me why the fen  
Appears impassable, I then  
Will tell you why I think that I  
Can get across it, if I try (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 15).

This poem illustrates Moore's determination to progress beyond not just "the fen," but any given obstacle. She is committed to the idea of development. The poem at one point also bore the title "I May, I Might, I Must," which only furthers the point.

Given this outlook, let us return to "Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse" and re-examine a bit, for it is implicit that Moore's dedication to progress in life reflects a dedication to progress in art. Thus, perception must be "deceptive" only when it reveals a subjective reality that has been experienced in the past – one that has been habituated and familiarized – and one without progress. Art has everything to do with the untainted presence, "unclouded judgment," and attentiveness of the perceiver. This is exactly what Shklovsky states; art must "defamiliarize" so we can see the world anew, and when we conform to habituated perceptions it is because we are stagnant, inattentive, and inactive. But according to Moore, we are not entirely at "fault" when our perceptions result in such "deception" – only "partly."

The other part of the fault could lie with the objects perceived by the critic. Yet there is no fault to be found in objects of the material world, for there is no real blame to place; to accuse an object for hindering art would be tantamount to accusing oneself of failing to practice art; it would be to accuse oneself of "excusing" oneself from active and innovative perception. Thus the translated title "He Who Excuses Himself, Accuses

Himself.” What, then, are we left to make of the lingering “fault”? Moore is unwilling to designate it, for perhaps she does not know. But the fact remains that the content of the poem distinctly leaves that partial fault unaccounted for, indicating what can only be taken as her hesitation to fully accept the subjective world as the only important one in art. As a scientist, Moore is covertly clinging to her scientific training and appreciation of objectivity, as if the material world has a “part” to play in our subjective experience of it. The other “part,” the part that we play as perceivers, however, claims Moore's primary and explicit interest as a poet, “and no man who's done his part need apologize for art.”

This tension between Moore as a poet and Moore as a scientist lives on in her 1913 poem “Things Are What They Seem.” In this poem, which is even more brief than those we have discussed already, Moore tersely illustrates the philosophy expressed by the title – an extension of the Shklovskian notion of art. For if “things are what they seem,” then perception is not only the key to art, but the key to reality. And in this poem, as Molesworth offers, she “tries to accept the 'given' world as the only one.” The poem's “brevity conceals what may well have been a genuine struggle in Moore's thought at this time” (Molesworth 93):

The clouds between  
Perforce must mean  
Dissension.

The broken crock's  
Condition mocks  
Prevention (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 25).

These two short stanzas bear analogous shape, syllable counts, syllable stresses, and rhyme schemes, revealing an increasingly creative drive in Moore to command her form. The stanzas each describe a very specific perspective on a given situation, and the tone of each perspective is a negative one, somewhat despairing. This is why Molesworth speculates that the poem reflects “a genuine struggle” in Moore's thought at the time. And if “things are what they seem” to her, it appears that Moore's practice of poetry/art is not revitalizing her life with much pleasure.

“Things” seem to illustrate an instance of fracture and separation in each scenario presented in the poem. In the first stanza, a division line of clouds indicates what the poet feels must “perforce” – that is, by force of circumstance (interestingly from the Old French “par force” or “by circumstance”) – indicate “dissension,” argument, or disagreement. Moore writes that the clouds between “must mean,” using the unnecessary word “must” to indicate the speaker's supposedly self-assured stance which ironically requires qualification. The second stanza of the poem presents perhaps a frank bit of self-deprecating humor with “a broken crock” seeming to “mock prevention,” indicating some satire when the state of a broken cooking pot inspires a mockery of damage prevention – for this realization is a reactive formulation to a situation requiring pro-activity, and the realization of this perspective is already after the fact of the “broken crock's condition.”

At the time of Moore's writing “Things Are What They Seem,” Molesworth speculates that she may have been enduring a religious confusion, and I would add to this that the confusion stems from a trouble with reconciling the world as it “seems” with the world as it can seem if subjectively manipulated. Again, this interpretation designates in Moore a concern with absolute truth versus a concern with perspectival truth.

Molesworth writes that

in November [of 1912], [Marianne's brother] Warner tells his mother that he is planning a sermon about the proof of divinity from the Bible; she responds by quoting Dr. Norcross, whose last sermon contained the statement that 'the strongest proof there is of God, is man's consciousness of him.' This Emersonian notion would appeal to Mrs. Moore and to Warner, ...[but] Marianne, it should be said, never ostensibly entered these discussions, and she seems to have been less overtly devout in her attitudes (Molesworth 93).

Moore had recently graduated from college at this point and was once again living with her family, and given the above anecdote from late 1912, it is likely that the rather negative tone in "Things Are What They Seem," uncharacteristic of Moore's work, indicates a crisis of understanding art and perception in the context of the "given" material world. The Emersonian notion of the conscious, subjective world determining the "truth" of reality is obviously related to Shklovsky's views, and it marks a view of art and life that Moore does not fully accept.

If "Things Are What They Seem" reveals Moore's mood at the time of writing, her art at this moment is failing to increase her general pleasure and emotional enthusiasm by way of aesthetics. Since the art of "perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged," there is an implicit value judgment on art in Shklovsky's theory, even if his theory is meant to be merely "descriptive" of how art functions, and nothing more (*Russian* 4). The value judgment relates that art is desirable and good, and that if humans could choose a permanent mode of consciousness for an ideal lifetime, art should be it; for the exercising of art can be, and "should" be, subject to permanence. All else,

including everything at the core of each sequential experience, and everything at the core of all gained knowledge, must embody change due to the very fact that art functions in order to persist in change and the accumulation of knowledge, and to prevent a habituated, lifeless worldview. As Lemon and Reis write of Shklovsky,

Although Shklovsky did not [pursue the following] line [of thought], it does widen the range of his theory without inconsistency[:] He prefers to argue... that perception is an end in itself, that the good life is the life of a man fully aware of the world. Art, ...to summarize Shklovsky, is the record of and the occasion for that awareness (*Russian 5*).

While “the good life” holds a great deal of philosophical and ethical obligation, Moore's “less overtly devout” attitude toward the sovereignty of perception leads her to question whether an ideal life can be one that refuses to acknowledge personal desires and emotions. Throughout her career she sees emotions not as an impediment to “the good life,” but as a part of human reality. Therefore, when art fails to revitalize perceptive pleasure, why should art be practiced? Let us explore this question a bit more.

Shklovsky's theory is explicitly and implicitly unconcerned with human emotions, yet entirely concerned with art's “aesthetic end” which is somehow granted to be pleasurable and desirable. It assumes each of us will seek the aesthetic end of art to satisfy the obligations of “the good life,” and thereby assumes we will follow its moral imperative. And in this assumption, Shklovsky overlooks the attitude and desires of any given perceiver, for why would someone habituated to a pleasurable perspective in life intentionally, and for the sake of an art practice that might decrease pleasure, switch perspectives? Emotions guide all that we do as humans, and our desires hold primacy in

every conscious mental action.

Although we must remember, as Blake notes, “Man's desires are limited by his perceptions,” and we cannot desire what we do not know to exist. Therein lies the lure for, and repulsion from, practicing art: if we choose to practice, we momentarily sacrifice what may have been a perfectly pleasurable perspective from habit, but we also stand to gain greater insight into the realm of conscious life; if we choose to not practice art, and instead rely on habit, we retain what may already be a perfectly pleasurable perspective, but at the expense and sacrifice of new knowledge. In this way, habituation may be a hindrance to new knowledge, but it is also a recognized zone of comfort, shelter, and familiarity, in accord with the emotional desires/needs of an individual.

Much later in her career, Moore would address this matter. In the essay “Feeling and Precision” (1944) which appears in Moore's prose compilation *Predilections*, she writes that “art is but an expression of our needs; is feeling, modified by the writer's moral and technical insights” (*Predilections* 11). Based upon Moore's quotation here, Nitchie offers that while we may practice the “exact perception” of art, “it is not for us to understand art,' since whatever it is that makes us respond to such [emotional, moral, and technical] tensions is a matter not of understanding but precisely of response, something probably organic in nature rather than rational – a 'beautiful element of unreason” (Nitchie 26).

Though Moore's 1944 essay might seem to bear little resemblance to her 1913 poetry, there is a perhaps a greater connection that one might think; Moore was actually savvy to the dominant role of emotion in determining perception as far back as 1909. In “A Red Flower,” published in the May 1909 issue of *Tipyn O'Bob*, Moore explicitly discusses emotion as the necessary driving force of art (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 341).

The poem reads:

Emotion,  
Cast upon the pot,  
Will make it  
Overflow, or not,  
According  
As you can refrain  
From fingering  
The leaves again (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 25).

From the first line, this curious poem establishes emotion as its primary concern. The title indicates that “the pot” bears a “red flower” which may or may not “overflow” – or figuratively bloom in our minds – depending on the emotion we “cast” upon the pot and its contents. Since this poem was written at a time very close to “My Senses Do Not Deceive Me” and “Qui S'Excuse, S'Accuse,” it is safe to say that the blooming “overflow” to which Moore refers is one of artistic capacity. That is, if Moore sees art as “exact perception” of the sensory world, then here she notes part of that exactitude to be rooted in emotions that will lead to “overflow” and the blossoming of our perceptive appreciation for the flower.

Moore also writes that emotion will only make the pot and its contents overflow, or not, “According / As you can refrain / From fingering / The leaves again.” These lines of the poem's second half indicate a focus on the leaves of the red flower. The lines present attachment as a hindrance to the overflow permitted by emotion and the exact

perception of art. Indeed Moore is suggesting that while emotion and perception are the keys to the enriching “overflow” permitted by artistic technique, the sensual attachment and the compulsion to “finger the leaves” are a hindrance to such enrichment. Moore is having to choose between a reality of perceptual/emotional verity and one of sensual/tactile verity, and she once again chooses the former. But as we have seen from her other poems of this period, she is not fully satisfied with, or certain of, this focus on the perceptual over the sensual. Her poetry, while ostensibly favoring emotion and perception as the truths to be found in art and life, cannot hide the fact that she remains uncertain of how to include the physical, material world into her overall conception.

Her consideration of emotions leads her toward an answer, though, for she is certain of the role emotion plays in art. And if we consider “Progress” alongside “A Red Flower,” then it seems Moore is committed to the positive emotions of determination, hope, and courage, and she is committed to the idea of growth – as would be symbolized by the “overflow” of “a red flower.” Whether or not Moore is fully aware of the implications of her ruminations on emotion and art between 1909 and 1913, her basic recognition of them foreshadows what would later become an explicit insistence that art should be inspired by our courage for inward growth. This claim is corroborated by nearly all of her poetry during the pinnacle phase of her early career.

Though Moore has a concern for objectivity and emotion in art, her theory of art remains generally the same as Shklovsky's – art is a consciously creative outgrowth of perception which revitalizes our world; Moore develops this idea of art further, however, expanding on issues that Shklovsky leaves untouched. With regard to emotions, she realizes that we, as her audience, may need motivation and encouragement to practice art – we need a reason beyond mere aesthetic pleasure and innovation, as we may often get

greater pleasure from our attachments. Furthermore, Moore does not seek to appeal only to theory-interested intellectuals. She is searching for an appeal to the common reader, as well. How can she appeal to our emotions?

“To You – of the World, Not in the World:” reveals an early attempt of Moore's to convince readers that art is worthwhile, and it appeals to us by hypothetically placing us as the targets of an expressed sympathy, whether or not we actually take ourselves to be “of the world – not in the world,” or servile to the world but not self-imposed in it, like the subject – a butler. The poem reads:

Butler! I regret that life should have  
    Been so bitter to you  
    Whose perceptions were so acute:  
Damning your eyesight you saw much, and  
    in your own lackluster intensive  
    Fashion you were resolute (*The Poems of Marianne Moore* 25).

This is a poem of mourning for a figure who could have been artful, but was not. The butler is presented as a figure worthy of sympathy, perhaps a servant not entirely by choice or intention, but a butler nonetheless. From the poem's beginning, we wonder why life has been “bitter” to the butler, “whose perceptions were so acute.” We are then told that he “saw much,” but was “resolute” in “damning” his eyesight in his own “lackluster intensive fashion.” The word “damning” indicates Moore's feeling that those who do not utilize those senses and faculties granted to them display a wasteful irreverence and, literally, a short-sightedness in living. The butler had the potential to artfully perceive his

environment, but damned that potential and succumbed to the lackluster, the habitual. We are not told why he did this, but it is presumably for a reason linked to emotions of diffidence and/or fear – owing to an “intensive” and “resolute” attachment to the “fashion” of the familiar, and a lack of courage in perceptual expansion and exploration. These emotions would warrant our sympathy for the butler, a victim of his own consuming cowardice.

Moore has chosen to focus on eyesight/visuals as the particular mode of perception in this poem, but sight is only one of many ways to perceive. In her poems, however, Moore most commonly uses the motif of sight and the ocular since it is conducive in poetry to clear communication of ideas and reader understanding.

Shklovsky reinforces this point:

Poetic imagery is a means of creating the strongest possible impression... [It] is but one of the devices of poetic language [, others including comparison, repetition, hyperbole, etc.], [...but] poetic imagery [alone] externally resembles either the stock imagery of fables and ballads or thinking in images (*Russian* 8-9).

Shklovsky continues, “The works of poets are classified or grouped according to the new techniques that poets discover and share, and according to their arrangement and development of the resources of language... Images are given to poets” (*Russian* 7).

Moore often uses her “hail of nouns” in later poetry to provoke new thinking with complexly arranged images – each image being attached to the noun that defines it. In the course of the above poem, however, the only “stock” image we visualize is that of a butler – a servant, attendant to things other than himself, valued as a resource for the will

of others. Given the stock image, a butler is not a positive association for one to imagine being. This simple figure is used here by Moore to inspire repulsion toward the idea of servitude. The remainder of her poem amplifies our understanding of the image by explaining the 'wastefulness' of a "lackluster" condition in life. She uses the butler as an analogy for any person enslaved by his or her own stubborn "resolution" to perceive the world in a lackluster fashion. To be free, we must practice artful perception, the opposite of the lackluster.

Thus, Moore has established the butler as a character exemplifying the "lackluster," automatized lifestyle of actual readers whom she appeals to in her poetry. The hyphen and colon in the poem's title, "To You – of the World, Not in the World:," indicate this direct address to the reader. Lackluster individuals are *real* people in the world as opposed to mere fictional characters. Carl Jung notes the phenomenon of automatization in his psychological writings:

I had always been... surprised to find many intelligent and wide-awake people who lived (as far as one could make out) as if they had never learned to use their sense organs. They did not see the things before their eyes, hear the words sounding in their ears, notice the things they touched or tasted, and lived without being aware of their own bodies. There were others who seemed to live in a most curious condition of consciousness, as if the state they had arrived at today were final, with no change in sight, or as if the world and the psyche were static and would remain so for ever. They seemed devoid of all imagination, and entirely and exclusively dependent on sense perception. Chances and possibilities did not exist in their world, and in their 'today' there was no real 'tomorrow.' The future was just the repetition of the past (Jung 98-9).

Here, Jung is describing a realm of people who are unimpressed by their worlds – people who have become habituated to their daily encounters and therefore cease to exhibit any imagination or artful pleasure. This is exactly what Shklovsky and Moore describe as being a threat to the human experience of art and life; it is an all-too-real scenario in which humans fail to engage with the world around them, for such an interface becomes stale when structured upon habit.

In her poem “Emeralds,” Moore tries to convince us of art's importance in life so that we might follow her lead in practicing it. She writes of emeralds,

It arouses my indignation that they should be so rare,  
Yet I think I should be as willing to wear green  
Sapphires as I should be willing to wear  
Emeralds, the point of the thing's being, not to make people stare  
But to have to wear, what keeps life from becoming a parcel of  
uniformities –

*(The Poems of Marianne Moore 25).*

The fact that Moore's “indignation” is aroused tells us that the rarity of emeralds is something she regrets; they seem to be something to which she is rather attached. But she says that she “should be as willing to wear green / Sapphires” since “the point of the thing's being” – that is, the purpose and utility of it – is for her “not to make people stare,” but “to have to wear” as it “keeps life from becoming a parcel of / uniformities.”

The green sapphire would therefore serve as a variant on the emerald, break the popular habit of wearing emeralds, and achieve an even greater purpose than the emerald. It would be something new, something less familiar. With these lines, Moore lets go of her attachment to the emerald; for her primary value is expressed to be not the emerald itself, but any “thing” that keeps life fresh.

“To You of the World” and “Emeralds” both represent Moore's attempts to appeal to readers with her theory of art and life; that is, given her tone as writer and speaker, we are not merely urged to acknowledge the legitimacy of her theory, but to assume it as a doctrine worthy of practice. Yet the poems struggle to find solid ground in persuading us. Moore tells of this struggle in the essay “Feeling and Precision” (1944):

By feeling, I mean emotion; and feeling at its deepest – as we all have reason to know – tends to be inarticulate. If it does manage to be articulate it is likely to seem over-condensed, so that the author is resisted as being enigmatic or cryptic or disobliging or arrogant (*Predilections* 10).

This quotation expresses Moore's frustration in finding a way to articulate her emotional landscape in poetry. In “To You of the World” and “Emeralds,” she can only express sympathy, or present her own value-laden outlook in a way that seems “sensible” and obvious to her, yet may not be so obvious to readers. During this introductory phase of her career, she is coming to realize that she cannot impose emotional values solely by way of intellectual argument. Her mostly abstract style of writing cannot command readers' feelings and entice our conviction without specific examples to support and exemplify the triumph of the artistic life she preaches. This realization is perhaps

propelled by Moore's acceptance of a further difficulty in her mission – how might she appeal to our emotions and persuade us to be artistic if she admits that artistic thought is difficult? For she acknowledges on numerous occasions that progress is no relaxed aspiration; it is not rooted in the eases of habit and familiarity. We must work toward progress, mentally and physically, and we must exert effort to achieve advancement. Grace Schulman writes,

In Marianne Moore's poems... [d]ignity and freedom are attained through hardship, and wisdom results from the struggle of consciousness. In letters to E. McKnight Kauffer, an artist with whom [she associated], she wrote of her belief, despite affliction and suffering, in 'anastasis – the going forward' (Shulman 79).

Moore's very long poem from *Observations* (1924), “An Octopus,” demonstrates this in one of its passages, which straightforwardly offers praise to “the [Ancient] Greeks” for their progressive, challenge-welcoming morale in living – like that of an octopus. They embraced the power of their emotions and nurtured a “love of doing hard things”:

“Emotionally sensitive, their hearts were hard” ;

[...]

it was the love of doing hard things

that rebuffed and wore them out – (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 130-1).

Moore's applauds the Greeks because they were “[l]ike happy souls in Hell,” suffering

both mental and physical difficulties, yet engaging them enthusiastically (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 130). Their bravery and courage are something to be admired, and their progress should inspire ours. Though they were “emotionally sensitive,” “their hearts were hard” and “it was the love of doing hard things” that both excited them and exhausted them, that “rebuffed and wore them out.” Moore seeks to instill this morale and courage into readers of her poetry, and *Observations* bears many such poems with this intent.

Schulman reinforces this focus on struggle and overcoming adversity in Moore's work: “For Marianne Moore, the mind was a place of continuous struggle, and a center for 'the love of doing hard things.'” Schulman emphasizes the mind as the place of toil particularly evident in Moore's work, saying, “The theme of struggle is found throughout her writing, and appears in 'Radical' (1919), a remarkable poem that should not have been abandoned after its publication in *Observations*” (Schulman 77). “Radical” certainly does center upon the theme of struggle, but also builds toward the themes of triumph, determination, and self-fulfillment. In its entirety, it reads:

Tapering

to a point, conserving everything,

this carrot is predestined to be thick.

The world is

but a circumstance, a mis-

erable corn patch for its feet. With ambition, im-

agination, outgrowth,

nutriment,  
with everything crammed belligerent-  
ly inside itself, its fibres breed mon-  
opoly –  
a tail-like, wedge-shaped engine with the  
secret of expansion, fused with intensive heat to  
the color of the set-  
  
ting sun and  
stiff. For the man in the straw hat, stand-  
ing still and turning to look back at it  
as much as  
to say, my happiest moment has  
been funereal in comparison with this, the condi-  
tions of life pre-  
  
determined  
slavery to be easy, inclined  
away from progress, and freedom, hard. For  
it? Dismiss  
agrarian lore; it tells him this:  
that which it is impossible to force, it is impossible  
to hinder.

Like “An Octopus,” “Radical” takes readers forward in time from Moore's introductory

phase to her pinnacle phase as a poet. In this poem, we see once again see Moore's newly established style of focusing on an object – a vegetable, in this case – to exemplify human traits. It is her clever solution in finding a way to appeal to our emotions and our intellects, for the understanding and encouragement to be artful and strive toward progress – a progress that is solely physical for the plant, yet both physical and, more importantly for us, mental, too. This poem is where she begins to develop what Schulman calls “the poet's meditative practice of taking hold of the object as the first step in illuminating a human concept” (Schulman 79).

Moore says of the carrot, “With ambition, im- / agnation, outgrowth, / nutriment, / with everything crammed belligerent- / ly inside itself, its fibres breed mon- / opoly – / a tail-like, wedge-shaped engine with the / secret of expansion.” She emphasizes how it does all of this with but “a mis- / arable corn patch for its feet.” And so the carrot is personified and presented as a vegetable with heroic, undying traits, “predestined to be thick” and overcome all odds. The “man in the straw hat” looks upon the carrot's engine for growth as if to reflect, “[M]y happiest moment has / been funereal in comparison with this.” We are meant to identify with this man, to be inspired by the growth property that exists in the natural world so that we may replicate it in ourselves. Our physical bodies are subject to “outgrowth” given proper “nutriment,” and we have far more than “a miserable corn patch” to sustain that nutriment, but our subjective minds are not necessarily driven by this property of growth. With free will comes the choice to stagnate or grow, to seek the comforts of habit or to seek the unknown through art, and Moore hopes that we will take a hint from nature – that growth of the mind is just as important as growth of the body.

If we recall, Shklovsky says in “Art as Technique,” “The technique of art is to

make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception” (*Russian* 4). But according to both Shklovsky and Moore, it is not at all unfortunate that the mind does not expand automatically or easily; the fact that we control our minds and direct a will is the most incredible and special element of our humanity. Schulman says of Moore, “The endeavor to achieve awareness is fundamental to her work [and in considering art, Moore once described] ‘The mind – and the drama of consciousness’ [as] ‘that generalized awareness which includes, comprehends all we know’”(Schulman 77). Thus, the difficulties of choice are what make us human. We have a choice in the subjective realm to be idle or be artful, and if we learn anything from the natural world around us, it is that the trope of progress is sovereign. Successful business enterprises in human society are also founded on this principle of progress and expansion, and Moore uses the language of economics in this poem to suggest as much. Practically speaking, stagnation is a waste of the resource of time; and in Shklovskian terms, stagnation is a waste of the resource of consciousness.

Moore says that the carrot’s “fibres breed mon- / opoly,” and are “an engine with the / secret of expansion.” There is a sense that the carrot’s destiny “to be thick” – with a history of growth and expansion – is inexplicable, but inborn and unstoppable; its progress cannot be hindered, for “that which it is impossible to force, it is impossible / to hinder.” And we must make no mistake: the carrot is not driven by outside forces, but inborn ones. Its “fibres,” its material essence, holds the key to its growth. Any human enterprise, rooted in personal desires, is no different. According to Winthrop Sergeant, Moore

bears no ill will toward the world of business, finance, and technological progress[; she

even] regards it as an interesting and worth-while world, and gladly concedes that some of its activities are quite possibly even more interesting and worth while than the writing of verse” (Sergeant 72).

“Radical” supports this claim with its praise for the “engine” of “expansion” in the “fibres” of the natural world, analogous to the engine of expansion that is human history; and we will see further justification of Sergeant's quotation when we discuss the poem “Poetry” in Chapter Three.

It is relevant that Moore tells us, “[t]he condi- / tions of life pre- / determined / slavery to be easy... and freedom, hard.” She admits to us that the freedom of art and innovation is difficult. But she then surprises us with a claim that supports Sergeant's aforementioned quotation, and marks Moore as a *new*, different sort of Romantic; she indicates that “agrarian lore” – that is, lore preaching the moral superiority of a life based on farming as opposed to industrial enterprise – should be “dismissed.” For our hardship of freedom through art, she recognizes that the main truth of agrarian lore is based on what the style of living reveals about nature: “That which it is impossible to force, it is impossible / to hinder.” Thus, the industrial, capitalistic society of the modern world is for Moore the outgrowth of freedom and innovation in art; it reveals human progress. Unlike Eliot and many other modernist poets, Moore views the modern world primarily as one of beauty through re-invention and through emotional courage.

Given all of the above, the following line of reasoning can be traced through Moore's work: Emotion manifests thought, and thought motivates action. Thought can take the form of any of the infinite perspectives allowed by art; therefore, action should reflect those artistic perspectives. The construction of modern society is thus a cumulative

embodiment of human art, and as society develops further, it will be because of art. This is a good thing, and indeed a natural thing – something which was not forced, and cannot be hindered; it is a willful evolution and a process of self-realization. As Moore conveys this point through her poetry, she makes no effort to hide her moral conviction, which is not one of traditional religion (though she does often reference Christianity), but of artistic philosophy; her conviction is moral, and even 'religious,' to the extent that it praises the use of perceptive faculties that have been afforded to humanity by the circumstances of our creation as a species. To not utilize the gift would be a sacrilege. And to convince readers of her 'religion,' to convince us to have faith in growth and artistic renewal, Moore allows her authoritative voice – justified by interpretations of examples in nature – to infuse inspiration into us.

When Moore's personality is exposed in her poetry, we experience the very definition of encouragement. Her emotional enthusiasm and her “salvo of barks” in favor of artistic progress inspire our empathy, and we are cheered on toward a common understanding, an identification. She rouses our imaginations to new understandings of the emotion with which we empathize – the feeling of being in a position where we cannot be forced to grow and expand, but cannot be hindered either. In this personalized appeal, Moore disproves Eliot's claim that: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* 43). Moore does not want to escape from her emotions in poetry; she seeks to celebrate them with us. And her emotions often center upon an enthusiasm and excitement to be human, along with a moral compulsion to practice art and discover the truth of our world – a truth which establishes itself at the intersection of subjective and objective vistas, where the mind plays upon the

possibilities for growth and artistically expanded experience in material realm.

And so in an organized material world, art allows us to re-organize and reinvent ourselves, our surroundings, and our possibilities for human experience; art is a liberation from pre-established conditions. In the years following her introductory phase of philosophizing, Moore progresses beyond philosophical appeal and, by pointing to the natural world in which we co-exist, moves toward an appeal to our emotions of camaraderie, bravery, courage, discovery, aesthetic delight, amusement, and moral purpose. Her writing becomes more cheerful, playful, and whimsical with these objects of interest (such as the carrot) while maintaining a tone of undeniable authority. As Leavell notes, Moore's "use of the generic present tense" and her "technical idiom" comes from [the influence of] journalistic and scientific prose," and "the authority of science in modern society is so great that it demands neither solemnity nor reverence" (Leavell 93-4). Simply put, we cannot argue with Moore's assertions, for they are objectively and syntactically sound, and they command our respect. Indeed, she is using the force of her authority, as well as her genuine charm and a contagious infatuation with a world that she makes seem endlessly rich and ripe for exploration, to encourage us to practice art. She is holding our collective hand and giving us a tour of artful wonder, and then revealing to us that actually we are the ones who have wandered in wonder on our own, merely by considering the concepts to which she has directed our attention. Our growth through art, our mental expansion, has occurred during the course of reading about the carrot's inborn "engine with the / secret of expansion." This penetration to our emotions, driven by a simple yet innovative and revelatory analogy, is Moore's unique tactic as a modern poet, and is perhaps the reason why Donald Hall says that

[s]omething peculiar happens intermittently in these poems. In the midst of comprehensibility, rational content suddenly disappears. All at once there is no paraphrasable meaning. Nothing makes sense. One realizes slowly that something else has taken over the poem. The images are no longer images of any *thing* but are, rather, images of feeling (Hall 13).

The imagery and communication of so much at once “blinds in its brilliance” and drives toward our emotions without ever soliciting us for our permission. Moore penetrates to the core of our respect and carries us through an experience of feeling that marks the practice of art on our own behalf.

And so in her development and understanding of art, Moore comes to be concerned not only with the Shklovskian theory's basics, but also with reconciling subjectivity with objectivity, and reconciling the artistic enterprise with human emotion. She learns to not only tell us about art and persuade us of its moral importance, but also to show us how art is done – to impress us with her own art so it will become nearly irresistible for us to not emulate the “technique” in the future. This combination of *show* and *tell* marks the pivot point from her introductory phase to her pinnacle phase as a poet.

### CHAPTER THREE: IN-HABITING THE WORLD THROUGH ART

“[Moore] promote[s] active thought within revitalizing images [and she] will allow us to deal no more complacently with ourselves than we do with nature. [Her poetry] indulges freely... in the play of association and the pull between eye and mind, word and thing, fiction and fact, human meaning and nature's indifference. But in the process of casting out and reeling in associations, she catches glimpses of the self at the poem's surface, consoling her when objects swim away from the lure of meaning... I see her original and revealing images as central to her genius. Image clusters usually suggest to Moore wider areas of fascination. 'It is human nature to stand in a middle of a thing' [from a lyric in Moore's *Complete Poems*], to assign meanings to all the qualities and configurations we see around us” (Costello 8).

\* \* \*

We have purposefully delayed a discussion of poetic form until now for want of Moore's arguably more interesting and complex poetry. Many of her earlier works that we saw in Chapter Two are fairly simple in their general regularity of meter and style. However, by the time she writes “Radical,” her poetic form has become more distinctive and brazen. She has begun to make her poems longer, more tapered – often in a downward direction and to the right, and overall more complex. Furthermore, she pays strict attention to syllabification in each line of each poem, often developing unique syllabic sequences in every mirroring stanza. In a 1960 interview with Donald Hall, Moore reveals the method of structural thinking that entices her for virtually her entire

career:

Hall:

What is the rationale behind syllabic verse? How does it differ from free verse in which the line length is controlled visually but not arithmetically?

Moore:

It never occurred to me that what I wrote was something to define. I am governed by the pull of the sentence as the pull of a fabric is governed by gravity...

Hall:

How do you plan the shape of your stanzas? I am thinking of the poems, usually syllabic, which employ a repeated stanza form. Do you ever experiment with shapes before you write, by drawing lines on a page?

Moore:

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 reproduce consciously later... No, I never “draw lines” ...However, if the phrases recur in too incoherent an architecture – as print – I notice that the words as a tune do not sound right... (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 33-4).

And so we see that Moore's view on poetic form is rather commonsensical to her, and it is guided not by Poetic Form as a concept in academia, but instead by the self-guided

arranging of what “sounds right,” and what spontaneously occurs as “words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure.” In any case, Moore's form does indeed become noticeably more complex after the introductory phase of her career. We have seen this complexity in “Radical,” and will certainly, and in a heightened way, see this play through to her other pinnacle phase poems of this chapter.

Shklovsky has excellent insight to offer with regard to the complex, strangely formed, free verse structure in Moore's poems. In “Art as Technique,” he expands upon his premise of anti-habitation in art, saying that the “impeded” rhythms of poetry are conducive to attentive consideration and artful thinking:

The language of poetry is... a difficult, roughened, impeded language. In a few special instances the language of poetry approximates the language of prose, but this does not violate the principle of “roughened” form... In light of [this] we can define poetry as *attenuated, tortuous* speech. Poetic speech is *formed speech* [whereas p]rose is ordinary speech – economical, easy, proper... (*Russian* 22-3).

So poetry is distinguished from prose by its “roughened” and tortuous – that is, full of twists and turns – format of speech. Poetry impedes our ability to rush in comprehension, and it is attenuated to the degree that we do not feel any sudden impact of understanding upon reading it; we must search for an understanding since the speech is presented in unfamiliar, strange terms. This required searching ensures that we lend attentive consideration to the poetry we read, as it demands our active, exacting perception.

Rhythm may have two functions. The rhythm of prose, or of a work song like

'Dubinushka,' permits the members of the work crew to do their necessary 'groaning together' and also eases the work by making it automatic. And, in fact, it is easier to march with music than without it, and to march during an animated conversation is even easier, for the walking is done unconsciously. Thus the rhythm of prose is an important automatizing element [and a predictable one]; the rhythm of poetry is not... Attempts to systematize the irregularities [of poetic rhythm] have been made, and such attempts are part of the current problem in the theory of rhythm. It is obvious that the systematization will not work, for in reality the problem is not one of complicating the rhythm but of disordering the rhythm – a disordering which cannot be predicted (*Russian Formalist Criticism* 24).

As Shklovsky indicates, poetry's rhythm need not be 'complicated,' but only unpredictable, for the two are not necessarily synonymous. This unpredictability is what serves to separate poetry from prose, prose being a type of language borne of norms and cultural regimentation. When a conversation takes place, or when a work song plays, we have expectations as to how each will 'play out.' There are rhythms that we expect, and ones which will carry us along a trail of familiarity. In this way, prose and its rhythm is automatizing as it caters to our unconscious habits and expectations. While many popular and folk song lyrics may seem like poetry to a layperson – by mere virtue of rhyme and/or foot-tapping rhythms – Shklovsky rightfully distinguishes poetry as that which offers unfamiliar and unpredictable rhythms. Poetry must be something new and unfamiliar; it must make us appreciate in a new way – in a way which cannot be anticipated, but can only be experienced. Moore's poetry, with its irregular patterns, unique syllabification, and its tortuous speech, tends to be exactly what Shklovsky has in

mind.

That is, by the pinnacle phase of her career, Moore had figured a way to make the rhythm of her poetry unpredictable, thereby solving the “problem” of disordering rhythm that Shklovsky describes. “Radical” has already made this apparent to us with its numerous words carrying over from one line to the next, breaking the flow of our reading and setting askew the rhythms we expect: “mis-erable,” “im-agination,” “mon-opoly,” “set-ting,” “stand-ing,” “condit-ions,” “pre-determined.” These broken words break our natural rhythms of reading and/or comprehension. Moore even carries some of these word breaks over from one stanza to the next, thereby distorting the intuitive and traditional compartmentalization of words and ideas in each stanza. Thus, Moore's poetic method is a triumph over habituation, not only in its content, but in the arrangement of that content on the page. The tapered design of each stanza greatly influences the movement of our eyes across the page, and the specifically set number of syllables in each stanza line impresses upon us a rhythm that we have likely never seen in a poem before, and will probably never see again.

In speaking of form, and in preparing for the main content of this chapter, let us consider what Elizabeth Phillips writes of Moore's career-long development of form and content:

The integrations of form and content in Moore's poems are noticeably various. Even after one has learned to expect characteristic imagery and mannerisms... the poems can be almost bewilderingly innovative. The inevitable variations of the minute particulars that she apprehends mean changes of structure, surrender to different influences, and a reconstitution of them in individual modes. She hardly ever repeats herself in the design

of the poems (Phillips 25).

So we might view each of Moore's poems as a unique creature – a unique “cluster” of “chromosomes” ; and considering her tendency to revise and republish her previous poems, it would even be more accurate to say each is like an evolving organism, with a history of development. Just as the carrot in “Radical” tapers “to a point, conserving everything,” so does the poem's structure seem to do so. Each stanza tapers from the left margin toward the right, mimicking the vegetable's growth and progress. The words of each line of each stanza “cluster like chromosomes,” like the genetic information that predetermines the carrot to be “thick.” In this way, the poem is like an organism, an analogue of its corresponding object in the organic world.

Moore calls every one of these growing, changing poems a “singular form,” with reference to the words of contemporary Canadian poet and editor Louis Dudek. Phillips adds insight, saying, “Moore based her eclecticism on a principle that she applied to the art of any period or school: 'Form is synonymous with content – must be’” (Phillips 25). Just as form is synonymous with content in poetry, so does structure determine function in chemistry and biology – giving rise to richness and unique population in the subjective realm of thought, and the objective realm of elements and organisms.

As we have mentioned, Moore's pinnacle phase poetry displays a great interest in this objective realm and the materials, people, plants, animals, and objects that populate it. *Observations* (1924) boasts numerous poems bearing titles to reveal this: “To a Chameleon,” “A Talisman,” “To a Prize Bird,” “To a Strategist,” “To a Steam Roller,” “To a Snail,” “To the Peacock of France,” “Critics and Connoisseurs,” “Dock Rats,” “A Grave,” “People's Surroundings,” “Snakes, Mongooses, Snake-Charmers, and the Like,”

“Bowls,” “An Octopus.” These poems represent only a fraction of the topical matter with which Moore would deal throughout her career, but they also mark the pivotal period during which Moore would come to harness her poetic ability to a fuller extent. The fact that she begins to look for such specific objects – items, animals, people – is a completion of her earlier intent to reconcile her inner poet with her inner scientist/objectivist. This is especially true in regard to her animal poems.

Her poem “To a Chameleon” was originally titled “You Are Like the Realistic Product of an Idealistic Search for Gold at the Foot of the Rainbow,” indicating once more Moore's concern for reconciling the realistic and the idealistic. Here the chameleon, a creature that is objectively and endlessly mutable in its own coloration and camouflage (spanning the spectrum of the rainbow), is used to represent a confounding and amazing instance of the perceivable world being intermingled and blurred with the objective world. “Hid by the august foliage and fruit of the grape vine” is the “anatomy” of the “Chameleon” “round the pruned and polished stem.” The “pruned and polished stem” of the grape vine is indicative that the chameleon's anatomy is not concealed by any mass of the stem. Instead, the chameleon manages to “snap up the spectrum for food,” that is, to assume any configuration of appearance permitted by the color spectrum of the natural world (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 53)

The chameleon is a creature, and an object of perception, that rearranges its own composition to re-present itself to those who perceive. It is an object of perception that need not necessarily be revitalized by art, but one that can revitalize itself for us – and this explains Moore's fascination with it. It is an ever-mutable object that responds to human perception with reconfiguration. The chameleon's implications about the relation of the subjective to the objective are profound. Schulman offers insight which guides us

toward a discussion of science as it relates to perception.

Central to her poetry of the mind's inward growth is her use of metamorphic imagery that accentuates the tendency of consciousness to pivot continuously from one vivid figure to another. Her vision of a shifting reality is a further indication of her sense of the age, whose leading philosophers have questioned the accuracy of unchanging reality. 'What is more precise than precision? Illusion,' exclaims the speaker of 'Armor's Undermining Modesty' (1950), in what could be a maxim for the twentieth-century view that what we perceive to be real is not actual, and that optical illusion is the rule, rather than the exception (Schulman 79).

Science has classically been understood as a system of thought that uncovers 'truth' existing apart from individual emotion and perception. That is to say, for most of scientific history, science sought to be free of bias and to be pure in its objectivity. But in the twentieth century, this idea of total objectivity was exposed as an impossibility. The mind that perceives holds a very real connection with the object of perception. Numerous scientists of great renown acknowledge this fact, and they acknowledge the creative, innovative, artful thinking that contributes to great science. Scientist, historian, and author Sir William Dampier writes:

Einstein pointed out that neither space nor time are absolute quantities, but are always relative to some one who measures them. [...] Even if we take empirical observations as the sole basis of physical knowledge, we thereby select subjectively the kind of knowledge to be admitted as physical; the Universe so discovered cannot be wholly objective. Relativity theory says we observe "relations", and these must be relations

between physical concepts, which are subjective (Dampier xx, 544).

So inductive procedures – those procedures in which we observe several specific examples of an event and then draw general conclusions from those specifics – are the foundation for the scientific method, yet they are not entirely objective as they propose to be; this is because the humans who conduct experiments are perceivers with expectations, biases, and subjective minds. Subjectivity is a part of science, and science is therefore necessarily linked to art. When Moore develops her trademark of writing object/animal-based poems at the “pinnacle phase” of her career, it is because she has found a way to mix her art philosophy with illustrations of determination and progress in the objective world, and this way she calls attention to “relations between physical concepts, which are subjective.”

Growth, change, and advancement of knowledge are perhaps the greatest themes of our world, and science propagates them for humans – mentally, by way of human understanding; and physically, by way of technology. Not long before his death in 1996, famed scientist and writer Carl Sagan frankly admitted:

Science is far from a perfect instrument of knowledge. It's just the best we have... The scientific way of thinking is at once imaginative and disciplined... [it] invites us to us to let the facts in, even when they don't conform to our preconceptions... It urges on us a delicate balance between no-holds-barred openness to new ideas, however, heretical, and the most rigorous skeptical scrutiny. [...But i]f you're only skeptical, then no new ideas make it through to you. You never learn anything... [and] you're going to miss (or resent) the transforming discoveries in science... [Y]ou will be obstructing understanding and

progress (Sagan 27, 304-5).

Sagan raises the issue that science is a path to knowledge. It is a systematic mode of progress, and of physical and mental revolution. But science walks that fine line between “openness to new ideas” and skepticism. Sagan says, “Some may consider this an overbroad characterization, but to me every time we exercise self-criticism, every time we test our ideas against the outside world, we are doing science” (Sagan 27). Moore's interest in art and perpetual growth are the result of her seeing them in the physical world around her; she indicates this by describing these themes as they apply to the objects and animals around us, and striving to convince us of their legitimacy as a sign of moral purpose.

Thus, Moore's poems retain a strong emphasis on her “call to arms” for progress and human innovation. The animals presented almost always align analogically with the human condition of struggle in art. Pearce says, “At her best [Moore] is the poet of the local, controlled analogy. It is her superb sense of locality and her remarkable control which let her keep the analogy firmly in hand” (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 151). In accord with Pearce's claim, many of Moore's animal poems superbly demonstrate the connection between the struggle of animals and the struggle of humans toward progress. We both press forward to represent not only an evolutionary “survival of the fittest,” but a progress of self-identification and self-realization.

There is also the strong sense in Moore's animal poems that the creatures being described do not only exemplify the struggle of progress and development, but they endure it with an intentional, searching perseverance that serves as a model for humans. This would imply that non-human animals have a culture much like humans do, one

geared toward problem-solving and the progress that comes with survival; and not just an evolutionary survival of the fittest, but individually willful acts and innovative procedures of survival and expansion. Many people today seem to regard animals as creatures of pure reflex and instinct, without the sophistication of full awareness and intention. Moore's descriptions of these animals would argue otherwise, especially as they are contextualized with the concept of art and difficult progress. In this way, Moore reconciles the natural world with the subjective one – she grants 'wild' animals a brand of agency that places them parallel to humans. In doing this, she illustrates our relationship with art to be identical with other animal organisms.

For example, in “Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight,” Moore says, “With an elephant to ride upon.../ she shall outdistance calamity anywhere she goes. / Speed is not in her mind inseparable from carpets. Locomo- / tion arose / in the shape of an elephant; she clambered up and chose / to travel laboriously. So far as magic carpets are concerned, / she knows / that although the semblance of speed may attach to scare- / crows / of aesthetic procedure, the substance of it is embodied in / such of those / tough-grained animals as have outstripped man's whim / to suppose / them ephemera, and have earned that fruit of their ability / to endure blows” (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 64).

In this poem, a certain “she” - perhaps Moore speaking of herself in the third person – is a traveler with a choice of transportation: a “magic carpet” with the benefit of “speed,” or “an elephant” which entails traveling “laboriously.” “She” chooses to “clamber up” the elephant because she knows that “the semblance of speed may attach to scare- / crows / of aesthetic procedure” – that is, speed may seem inherent in art, but in fact is not. In actuality the true “substance” of speed “is embodied in / such of those / tough-grained animals as have outstripped man's whim / to suppose / them ephemera.” In

other words, those “tough-grained” animals like the elephant, which man may have at one point been assumed incompetent, ephemeral, and outmoded by its slowness and relative calmness, have “outstripped” such assumptions. It seems these creatures are more than 'mindless' organisms of fleeting and insignificant existence; they are our inexhaustible and ever-willful instructors of art and progress. Their persistence, perseverance, and resilience to the challenge of their nature have “endured that fruit of their ability to endure blows.” Moore encourages us to be “tough-grained” like the elephant in our lives and in art – to be a species that progresses and perseveres by virtue of hard work and the ability to endure blows. For without the struggle, there is no worthwhile goal we can reach. We must overcome ourselves and challenge ourselves; if we can do this with “diligence,” the result will not be mere “progress,” which might be achieved by speed, but instead will be “magic,” a result specific to diligence and mindful toil. In many ways, this poem is a reiteration of the fable of “The Tortoise and the Hare.”

In recounting Moore's own preface to the *Marianne Moore Reader*, Molesworth writes: “Turning to questions of subject matter, she asks rhetorically why she is interested in animals and athletes [and types of people and objects]. She says they are subjects but also exemplars of art, and praises their self-possession; but then she adds the qualification, 'Perhaps I really don't know.' She quotes Charles Ives: 'The fabric of existence weaves itself whole.' Moore was to remain committed to the principle of art as based on organic unity, one of the many legacies of romanticism that found its way into her modern approach” (Molesworth 408). I suspect that Moore views 'wild' animals to be more analogous to people, and to identify more in their life condition with humans, than most people would ever care to admit. In fact, animals, athletes, and any of these

“exemplars of art” are part of the whole “fabric of existence” Moore describes. That which we perceive is, to her and Shklovsky, a part of us – and in this way our subjective worlds meet with the objective world. As Dampier has told us, “Relativity theory says we observe “relations”, and these must be relations between physical concepts, which are subjective.” By this token, the struggle of animals is the struggle of humanity.

So for animal and human alike, Moore believes that hard work and struggle comes with the territory of art. And for humans, art is exuded by the natural world so as to instruct us of our own destiny for progress and struggle. In a 1936 essay, Moore writes, “One who attains equilibrium in spite of opposition to himself from within, is stronger than if there had been no opposition to overcome; and in art, freedom evolving from a liberated constraint is more significant than if it had not by nature been cramped” (*Predilections* 50). Here, Moore tells us that a person who challenges his preconceptions and struggles to reinvent himself – that is, a person who is open to change and progression – will be “stronger,” will have more integrity and self-definition, than he would otherwise have. Art is at its best, its most profound, and its most exciting when struggles are won and adversity is overcome.

And so with conviction for the philosophical and moral correctness of growth, and the sanctity of artistic thought, Moore gains confidence and advances her poetic method during the “pinnacle phase” of her career. She writes in her 1921 poem “The Labors of Hercules” that “one detects creative power by its capacity to conquer one's / detachment” (*Selected Poems* 53). That is, we measure our aptitude for art by our ability to grow beyond our habits and attachments; but we do not forget our roots, we merely grow past them. This poem, which Phillips calls a “criticism of stereotypes in thinking,” is one in which “Moore had written: 'It is one thing to change one's mind, / another to eradicate it –

, ' which she deleted from the final version." Phillips continues,

Becoming more tempered and skilled in verse forms as well as more certain of her own acts of mind, the poet who renounced the lust for stress was followed by one who stopped hitting readers over the head. If her verse does not usually soar or sing, it has that sense of sleight-of-hand synonymous with a freedom resulting from the discipline she imposed on herself to become a 'modern' poet (Phillips 68).

Moore hoped that readers of her poetry would discard 'stress' and painful, overwrought thought procedures, but she also made a concerted effort to restrain her own iterations of thought that threatened to limit the perceptions of her readers; no stress was intended for the reader, and no mind control was imposed either. Art is difficult because an individual mind searches for innovative perspectives, not because the object perceived is inherently "difficult." Moore sought to craft a poetry defined by openness, freedom, and whimsy, so as to heighten the possibility of liberated thinking in the minds of her readers. This marked a clear attempt by Moore to let her poetry gain our favor and agreement solely by the authority of its construction and statements. She began to make poems that carried in them assemblages of objects for us to analyze as an exhibit, and interspersed throughout these poems are general thoughts to guide our understanding. But gone is the stress on "difficulty" and toil in art and life. As a basic matter of salesmanship, Moore realized that she cannot "beat us over the head" with moral appeal, but rather she must give us a window to art so that we can realize the inherent "goodness" that exists in it for ourselves. She must *show* us, not tell us.

This new style of poetry would reflect, in its very composition and content,

Moore's integration of artistic and scientific thought. What had originally been a conflicted stance on art and science was now reconciled, opening her to an acceptance of the infinite mind, which is spurred by a fascination with a controlled material world that humans can endlessly manipulate and perceive, back and forth. The objects we perceive play upon us just as we play upon them. Our physical re-arrangement of the material world, then, is quite important to the practice of art – for it increases the exposure to new objective configurations, thereby increasing the opportunity for artful perception. Moore's concern with objectivity makes her theory of art, and her poems themselves, more practical and applicable to us, as we live in a world which is now dominated by, and driven toward incredible progress through, scientific thought.

“Picking and Choosing” and “Poetry” reflect Moore's fully developed poetic style at the pinnacle of her career. They move beyond the realm of single animals and objects to discuss the overarching concept of art, as Moore did in some of her earliest poems. By this time, however, Moore had a new method to present these familiar themes, a more complex yet simultaneously more relaxed one that exemplified its overall artistic tenet rather than simply stating it. These poems fortified her status as a poet who had reconciled the arts and sciences, and overcome the ensnaring nets of modern philosophy, to arrive at a unique style of poetry characterized by her own authoritative voice and her own Shklovskian idea of art strewn across multitudes of objects, animals, and people that comprise the material world. From these poems, scholar Roy Harvey Pearce notes the presentation of “two views of the world” – one “as a series of assemblages of not ideas but things in themselves” and the other “as the scene, and the occasion too, for a series of meditations” (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 151-2).

The poem "Picking and Choosing" was originally presented in Moore's minor

1921 publication entitled *Poems*, and reappeared with curiously nuanced revisions in *Observations* (1924) as well as several other poetry collections during later years. In what is perhaps the poem's most widely recognized version, published in Moore's 1935 collection *Selected Poems*, "Picking and Choosing" reads:

Literature is a phase of life. If one is afraid of it,  
the situation is irremediable; if one approaches it familiarly,  
what one says of it is worthless.

The opaque allusion, the simulated flight upward,  
accomplishes nothing. Why cloud the fact  
that Shaw is self-conscious in the field of sentiment  
but is otherwise rewarding; that James  
is all that has been said of him. It is not Hardy the novelist  
and Hardy the poet, but one man interpreting life as emotion.

The critic should know what he likes:  
Gordon Craig with his "this is I" and "this is mine,"  
with his three wise men, his "sad French greens," and his  
"Chinese cherry"

Gordon Craig so inclinational and unashamed – a critic.  
And Burke is a psychologist, of acute raccoon-like curiosity.  
*Summa diligentia*; to the humbug whose name is so amusing –  
very young and very rushed, Caesar crossed the Alps  
on the top of a "*diligence*"!

We are not daft about the meaning,  
but this familiarity with wrong meanings puzzles one.

Humming-bug, the candles are not wired for electricity.

Small dog, going over the lawn nipping the linen and saying

that you have a badger – remember Xenophon;

only rudimentary behavior is necessary to put us on the scent.

“A right good salvo of barks,” a few strong wrinkles puckering

the skin between the ears, is all we ask.

*(Complete Poems 45).*

Relating to Shklovsky's discussion of rhythm, Jane Dowson writes that this poem “sets up and distorts rhythmic norms. Marianne Moore avoided rhyme because it impeded a 'naturalistic' voice and she preferred the scope of free verse for varying intonation” (Dowson 149). Dowson qualifies Moore's poetry as being exactly what Shklovsky defines poetry to be – “a difficult, roughened, *impeded* language” – yet also one with a 'naturalistic' qualities. This so-called naturalistic quality is what scholar Henry Gifford calls a “conversational” style:

It has often been remarked that Marianne Moore's style develops out of highly civilised prose. Her sentences are beautifully articulated, more condensed than prose normally is, and with an odd sidelong movement that in prose would probably disconcert; but no one could mistake the element from which they have arisen. Their affinities are with conversation – [Her poetry] calls for the hearer to participate [in] a discovery [by way of] conversation (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 172-3).

Gifford even adds of Moore by this point in her career, “Marianne Moore inhabits her

poetry as a watchful commentator... The actual incidence of the first person is not to the point. What reveals her throughout is a consistent tone" (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 176). Indeed, Gifford's claim is generally correct for, as we will see in analyzing this poem's content, her pinnacle phase poetry is mysteriously interactive.

"Picking and Choosing" begins by offering an authoritative, instructive assertion to its readers: "Literature is a phase of life. If one is afraid of it, / the situation is irremediable; if one approaches it familiarly, / what one says of it is worthless." This quick assertion elicits immediate puzzlement. If literature is "a phase of life," then we cannot maintain it. It must be used and disposed of, parted with, which means that it is more of a process than an enduring, graspable thing. Based on its content, and its position as the opening line of the poem, the declaration "Literature is a phase of life" is meant to shock the reader a bit – not enough to incite a defensive or repulsed reaction, but enough to intrigue us with a demand for explanation. Fortunately, the following lines of the poem do elaborate: "If one is afraid of it, / the situation is irremediable. If one approaches it familiarly, / what one says of it is worthless." It seems that fear precludes the experience of literature's phase, and familiarity indicates a circumvention of literature as an old, stale, departed-from phase – a phase not worthy of reconsideration. In both cases, there is a certain unknowing that muddles clarity or ready experience of literature. And so we begin to understand that literature, as a form of art, is temporally bound in a strange way. That is, the experience of reading, assimilating, and understanding a piece of literature is a phase of learning, a phase of influence. The fearful cannot know literature, for they cannot embrace it and accept its ideas; this "situation is irremediable" – it has no remedy or cure – since the subject is mentally opposed to/blocked from any type of interface with the art. And the familiar cannot know the art because they are unable to re-experience it

for the first time, to manifest and reproduce the configuration of their thoughts upon initial assimilation.

For once the mental phase of an artwork has been experienced, "[t]he opaque allusion, the simulated flight upward, / accomplishes nothing." To think or speak of that which is a bygone is quite unlike re-inhabiting that era of learning and discovery. Any "allusions" will be "opaque" by virtue of their oversimplification into a fleeting word on the page, or from the mouth. Moore's choice to use the word "allusion" here seems indicative of an intentional pun with the word "illusion," which would mark a person who finds in his or her thoughts the ghost of an old experience. Any findings will necessarily be an illusion, a transparent hallucination, for the reminiscer; and when an "opaque allusion" is made from a transparency, the product is shoddy and fraudulent. Any "flight upward" in the mind is merely "simulated," and it "accomplishes nothing." Familiarity with an artwork permits only a dull understanding.

Dull understanding is exactly what art should combat, according to Shklovsky. And we know that Moore feels the same way; Costello reminds us, "Combat is intrinsic to the structure of Moore's poetry. An orthodox orientation of the mind to the world risks blindness and boredom" (Costello 135). Art is the key to perceptual delight; it is the road to new knowledge, an apprehension of the unknown. We are all potentially artists by virtue of our ability to interface with the sensate world. And as artists, we do not re-create the world we perceive; rather, we re-arrange our mental schemas to shed a new, unique perspective on it.

Moore's poetry provides an interesting twist to, and revision of, this idea. Rather than demand that readers re-arrange their mental schemas "from scratch" to re-perceive the text in an artful way, Moore provides us with poems that are each, themselves, a

peculiar arrangement of items, people, ideas, etc. Her poems present bits of information that need no rearrangement – and require no “increase” in “the difficulty and length of perception” – upon first reading, for the very construction and contents of the poems already constitute an arrangement with which the reader will be unfamiliar. The minutiae of Moore's arrangements serve as the configured “images” for readers to perceptually engage and ponder, and her instructional, commentator-esque assertions serve to prove generally the same point as Shklovsky: That art is a process of anti-habituation, but with the caveat that those who perceive need not gruel over their task. “The making of symbols” is something that should come naturally and reflexively with all the purity of an emotional impulse, and Moore wants us, specifically, *not* to over-analyze.

To convey this in “Picking and Choosing,” Moore demonstrates for us her idea of art. She offers a series of simple evaluations regarding literary figures and what their work reveals about them as individuals. The “symbols” that Moore has formed in her mind to represent Shaw, James, and Hardy are not difficult or complex, but are graced with a taste- and mood-influenced simplicity:

Why cloud the fact  
that Shaw is self-conscious in the field of sentiment  
but is otherwise rewarding; that James  
is all that has been said of him. It is not Hardy the novelist  
and Hardy the poet, but one man interpreting life as emotion.

The thinkers Moore references are presumably Bernard Shaw, Henry James, and Thomas Hardy – all well-recognized literary figures writing at the start of the twentieth century. In

this passage, the rhetorical nature of the question being asked is reinforced by a period at the end of the thought (rather than a question mark), which detracts from the impact of the inquiry. Moore is not attempting to incite a debate or provoke any disagreements; in fact, she is only humbly offering her thoughts on the literary figures and their work while tacitly recognizing that she has already seemingly invalidated her commentary with the earlier line, "[I]f one approaches [literature] familiarly, / what one says of it is worthless." That is, her insightful statements are surpassed after they are stated – after the poetic exercise is completed. What is recorded in the poem becomes almost instantly old and familiar to the poet, and therefore of little artistic value – indeed “worthless.” Nitchie rightly says of this phenomenon, “Miss Moore's best work, perhaps like all best work, embodies a kind of dialectical tension between theoretically incompatible modes of knowledge and ideas of value” (Nitchie 81). Given the fleeting value of any recognized or stated knowledge, we can see why Moore's poetry undergoes such frequent revision during the course of her career; she is searching to “make it new” and create new value for herself, and for past readers.

Of course, Moore does not actually create poetic value for readers – at least not directly – and that is part of the point. As Shklovsky states clearly, and as Moore urges us to recognize here, *we* are the artists interpreting the textual object. “Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” What Moore provides us with is only an impetus for the experience of art. The arrangements and ideas she offers are not indefinitely going to be art to *us*; they are, in fact, art to her at the time of their writing. They are a recording of her own artistic creations and formulations at this point in her “phase” of literature, her own inventive and shifting perspectives, declarations of genuine and personalized artistic truths – even if they are only temporary

and fleeting. These momentary truths are aesthetic ones, tinged by individual perception and mood, as when Moore says of aesthetic philosopher Kenneth Burke (who was an admitted influence on Moore's thought), "Burke is a psychologist, of acute raccoon-like curiosity" ; she invites us to experience art through the same whimsical fancies as she does, as her poem is a demonstration of her own process, her own technique. In this way, Moore's instructional and minutiae-scattered lines of poetry *tell* us how to do art, and at the same time *show* us how it is done.

So literary familiarity has an inverse relationship with literary worth, but literature – and any specific text or object of perception – need not remain familiar when we consider the qualifying line of Moore's statement: *If one approaches it familiarly*. One need not ever approach literature, or any object, familiarly – even if one has been exposed to it or studied it before. "Approach" might, in fact, be recognized as a tactical word here, and indeed a person who is familiar with a work of literature may choose among infinite perspectives from which to approach the work, always inherently reserving the option to assume an unfamiliar angle. The possibilities of this aesthetic outlook are infinite in literature, so long as a subject is not "afraid of it" - that is, afraid to approach the object as new and perpetually different with each visitation. Fear and habituation are the enemy, and the whimsies of chance, intuition, and creativity are to be embraced in each encounter. We must remain perplexed by, and considerate of, the objects in our world if we are to reap their simple purpose: to induce creative thought.

As the title "Picking and Choosing" suggests, in crafting this very poem Moore is "picking and choosing" among the entirety of her knowledge to select the minutiae and general statements that will comprise her poetic arrangement. The title is Moore's self-commentary on the active, discovering function she serves in the poem, so the poem's

specific arrangement and manner of presentation is a new artistic vista for not only the readers, but also for Moore herself. Her catalog of items – mostly literary figures, in the case of this poem – seems composed of incidentals; it is as if the items have been drawn by chance, or by fleeting intuition, from the canon of literary and cultural knowledge in her own poem-crafting mind.

Noting Moore's curatorial interests and involvement with museums, scholar Catherine Paul has linked Moore's poetic strategy to museum exhibits: “By including so many [literary and cultural references] in her poems, followed by [an extensive index of] 'Notes' that explain or identify them, Moore makes her poems into assemblages of found material.” Moore is *arranging* her words and itemized visuals in interesting, new ways. She is picking and choosing her setup, for her own innovation and for our artistic consideration. And much like a museum tour guide, Moore accompanies us through her poems with that lyrical, instructive voice which serves to comment upon the exhibits, yet not spoil their “message.” She wants to intervene only enough to pique our interest as readers, yet she leaves to us the task of interpreting an exhibition's personalized significance. For as Paul notes, “[B]oth the exhibitor's processes of selection and display and the visitor's interpretive ability shape that big picture” (Paul 146, 149). In this way, any “phase” of literature is somewhat collaborative, yet simultaneously fruitful on a purely individual level. One person's work of art is another person's gateway to the practice and technique of art – through which the old can be made new.

In presenting poems of arranged items and lyrical commentary, Moore shows us how the defined boundaries of a poem/exhibit/text allow for liberated perceptions. After all, she has 'picked and chosen' from her own familiar, pre-existing bits of knowledge to assemble an entirely new knowledge – a poem – defined not by the sum of its individual

parts but through the context created by, and the relationship between, those parts – now pieced together in an unfamiliar and thought-provoking configuration. Her work is highly calculated and arranged, with minute details and nuances such as fine punctuation, ordering of objects, and general claims revealing the utmost degree of intent and choice, thereby validating the artistic thought behind her textual representation.

Of course, Moore's knowledge and personality are unique, as are each of ours, so the opportunity to discover something unfamiliar, or to reap a particular realization that stands independent of any planned intention on the poet's behalf, is absolutely limitless. Whether we want to learn who Burke is, why he is curious like a raccoon, or what his relation to Hardy is, we impose our own perceptions and imagination upon the exhibit we are given. We formulate connections, and we focus our attention based on personal interest or attraction – curiosity, even. And our mindsets will change with mood, age, taste, etc. Thus, the freedom and willpower associated with picking and choosing give a sense of limitless possibility, an expanded perception of reality, which Moore is asking us to inherit and exercise; her plea is reinforced by her own demonstration of this principle, lending a certain purity to her assertions.

She is fearless, bold, and progressive, and she asks us to be the same in our interpretations: “[O]nly rudimentary behavior is necessary to put us on the scent. / 'A right good salvo of barks,' a few strong wrinkles puckering / the skin between the ears is all we ask.” The “we” that Moore speaks of here includes herself as well as her fellow poets and presenters of artwork – that is, anyone who not only practices art, but sets the tangible product of his or her art on display to provoke art in others. Thus, Moore speaks for her peer group in requesting readers' consideration of literature – not necessarily a deep study or a tenuous obsession, but only an exposure that will permit the solicitation

of text to elicit an emotional reaction. This reaction is even “rudimentary,” not at all complex or unattainable. It should be basic, and rooted in primal emotions and senses which any curious animal might display, be it a investigative and pursuant canine unleashing a “salvo of barks,” or a curious raccoon, like the one Moore compares to Burke. As readers, our reaction to the text should be accompanied by a “puckering” of “the skin between the ears” to ensure our emotional and responsive engagement of the text. Costello aptly states of Moore's work here, “Each poem approves simplicity, humility, and naturalness in art, and deprecates ostentation, narcissism and contrivance” (Costello 17).

To reinforce the attention that Moore places on the look of an engaged reader's face – representing an apprehension of the unfamiliar and interesting – let us consider a clarifying quotation from a poem much later in her career called “A Face” (1951): “[S]tudying and studying its expression, / exasperated desperation / though at no real impasse, / would gladly break the mirror; when love of order, ardor, uncluttered simplicity / with an expression of inquiry, are all one needs to be!” (*Complete Poems* 141). The face that looks into the mirror here, signifying a self-study that compares to the self-searching required by exact perception in art, is a frustrated one marked by “exasperated desperation,” even though the person behind the face is “at no real impasse.” Moore playfully remarks that we need not despair over art, but only embrace it and accept it with a “love of order and ardor,” and “an expression of inquiry” – all traits of a person who realizes that our ordered world conveniently presents infinite interpretive possibilities for our aesthetic pleasure. “Uncluttered simplicity” describes the ideal practice of art, for it progresses past cluttered habits and gains knowledge with “naturalness” and minimal difficulty. If we are truly committed to art, it will not be

“difficult” to practice – in the sense of a “grinding” tedium – but rather will be necessary in the sense that it is instrumental to a fulfilling life.

With regard to the formal structure of “Picking and Choosing,” Nitchie traces an elaborate line of development over repeated revisions, re-printings, and re-publications:

If literature is 'a phase of life,' and if that means 'interpreting life as emotion,' for which 'a right good salvo of barks,' a few strong wrinkles puckering the skin between the ears, is all we ask,' then... one may argue that a certain decorum has been observed in the poem's reshaping... [T]he changes have been gradual, progressive, rather than all at once.

'Re-/warding,' for example, lasted through three reprintings, in *Observations, Selected Poems*, and *Collected Poems*; 've-/ry,' on the other hand, became 'very' in *Collected Poems* (Nitchie 48-9).

Nitchie notes, too, that the poem “has changed in ways other than its form.” For example:

*Poems* sees it as fact

that James is all that has been  
said of him but is not profound;

*Observations*,

that James is all that been  
said of him if *feeling* is profound.

*Selected Poems* abandons italics, but *Complete Poems* abandons qualification:

James

is all that has been said of him (Nitchie 49-50).

Nitchie concludes from his close analysis of these revisions, “Such inconsistencies make it almost impossible to generalize meaningfully about Miss Moore's revisions... Some need no defense, others admit of no explanation except the impulse to tinker” (Nitchie 51). Indeed Moore's “impulse to tinker” is exactly the reason and the explanation for her revisions; her poems are mutating and evolving over time, in slight and major ways – some poems more than others, some poems not at all. Some mutations are random, only for the sake of change over time, and others are quite deliberate and change meaning to achieve greater precision or altered purpose; in this way Moore's poems are as organic and mutable as life in the natural world, and as fickle as the whimsies of artful perception. If we are told that literature should not be approached familiarly, lest our perception of it become “worthless,” then Moore cannot be accused of hypocrisy. With her revisions, she signals to readers that even the smallest punctuations, layouts, phrases, clauses, or changes can draw our attention to new aspects of a poem that we may have never considered before. While hasty and impatient readers of habit will fail to notice this subtle point, those who thoughtfully analyze will come to see the endless details of a perceptual object which can perpetually guide new, creative thinking.

While “Picking and Choosing” demonstrates, and compels us to experience, literature as an endlessly mutable “phase of life,” Moore's poem entitled “Poetry” attempts to convince us of the truth and value in poetry, and by extension, the truth and

value in any form of art. "Poetry" has been published in two key versions, one of which is quite short, as a single poetic statement, and the other of which is extended and detailed. The longer version was the original, published in *Observations*, and we will analyze it first.

The longer version of "Poetry" published in 1924's *Observations* begins,

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all

this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one

discovers 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

(*Becoming Marianne Moore* 72).

Perhaps the most immediate thing readers recognize here is the strange visual layout of Moore's free verse. The line divisions and spacings seem largely arbitrary, and it seems as if she is teasing us with a design that has no explanation other than her own whimsical impetus to craft freely. After all, the visual presentation of any poem has an influence on

how we read it – with pauses or without, smoothly or with struggle, in condensed blocks or scattered bits. In a poem entitled “Poetry” Moore is drawing our attention to the formal element which distinguishes poetry from prose, if for no other reason, than to emphasize the “fiddle” she playfully describes in the poem's second line. We are enticed, either begrudgingly or happily, to play along.

Presumably regarding the title, and topic, of “Poetry,” Moore immediately reveals, “I, too, dislike it.” This is certainly an unexpected revelation from a poet; and it is an implied accusation on readers, as the word “too” suggests that Moore relates to *our* pre-established dislike of poetry. As we read on, she qualifies her statement that “Reading it... with a perfect contempt for it, one / discovers in / it after all, a place for the genuine.” This hints to us that the emotional response of contempt, alone, is genuine, and poetry is capable of influencing its expression and affectation. Any emotional response at all is indicative of an undeniable momentary truth; for that which “moves” us, so to speak, elicits a change – a development – that is undeniable.

In fact, poetry is a window to not only such emotional change, but physiological change, as well. We read on, “Hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise if it must,” and with that we expand the terms of “the genuine” to include the tactile, the visual, the nervous system response – Moore is describing anything in the realm of experience, anything we can think or feel in living. These experiences “are important not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because / they are useful.” Useful, here, is taken to mean “educational” or “expanding,” or “giving way to art.” When we have new experiences, we progress in our understanding of what it is to be alive, conscious, and perceiving.

Moore continues, “When [experiences] 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.” And what we cannot understand would include that which we have not interfaced with directly; to truly understand, one must experience first-hand, not through the text of poetry, but through the medium of the mind *and* the body. Paradoxically, however, reading poetry *is* a physical and mental exercise requiring “hands [that] grasp, eyes [that] can dilate, and in moments of intense emotional transference, “hair that can rise if it must.” In this way, poetry-reading is its own experience, and is a direct interface with the sensational world. Yet it cannot allow us access to the experiences of

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 –

*(Becoming Marianne Moore 72).*

Though a bat questing, elephants pushing, and a wild horse rolling may not be directly accessible to readers through poetry, and therefore cannot be truly understood, Moore says that “all these phenomena are important.” Even if “we / do not admire what / we

cannot understand,” poetry rouses the imagination to bring us *closer* to our own understandings or perspectives of the world. To emphasize this exact point, Moore includes in her catalog of animals/persons “the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that / feels a flea.” This is an obvious and clear reference to the readers of poetry, the critics. Moore has specifically crafted a simile comparing our reading exercise – initially understood to be centered upon “dislike,” and therefore a bother – to a horse's annoyance at a flea. Just as we have perhaps begun to doubt the use of poetry, we are given this simple link between how we feel and how a horse might feel. This provokes a new thought conception, and invites a new way of considering one's experience. Thus, what began as an irksome task of reading poetry now segues into an epiphany, or a playful relationship between our “twitching skin” and a horse's. As with the end of “Picking and Choosing,” we have this image of *skin* arise in direct relation to the reader – calling our attention to the sensational impact of innovative perception, a new outlook, a new mental experience joined by real sensory reaction.

Yet it is understood still that we cannot, through poetry, fully inhabit any of the cataloged scenarios Moore gives us in this poem. “[N]or 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,’” will we ever be able to do so (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 72-3). Though the experience of a poem's subject matter may be far removed from the actual reader's experience, Moore is offering us 'food for thought' as to how we might consider poetry or any text. Acknowledging William Blake to be *the* “literalist of the imagination” to which Moore refers – “the phrase is made from one in W.B. Yeats's essay, 'William Blake and the Imagination.’” – Blackmur says,

...Miss Moore's object is to exalt the imagination at the expense of its conventional appearances. Her gardens are imaginary, which makes possible the reality of her toads.” Hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, and hair that can rise – all “props and crises of poetastry” – are “commonly given in unusable, abstract form, mere derivative gestures we can no longer feel; as indeed their experience may also be. They remain, however, exemplars of the raw material of poetry. If you take them literally and make them genuine in the garden of imagination, then, as the poem says, 'you are interested in poetry.' You have seen them in ecstasy, which is only to say beside themselves, torn from their demeaning context; and if you are able to given them a new form... then you will have accomplished a poem (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 71-2).

To “accomplish a poem” is to think and feel *something* unfamiliar, even if that something does not precisely emulate what the language truly signifies. And the unfamiliar response, mental and/or physical, is genuine in and of itself, even if the source of its incitement is an imitation of sorts, an intermediary between “the horse that feels a flea” and “the immovable critic twitching his skin.”

So while poetry is not perfect, and cannot replace the scenarios it describes, it allows us to create our own truths and understandings through art. What is genuine to us is a reflection of what we have conceived, based upon what we have perceived and how we have consciously and impulsively manipulated those perceptions to reach a new conception. As Moore leads us to realize, poetry attempts to teach us that nothing is hiding in the realm of ideas and perception, that we have only to recognize connections and relationships between seemingly isolated entities – and the connections are infinite. Forming them endlessly is the purpose of art. In practicing art, we wander along the path

of truth, not necessarily an objective and universal truth, but a personal – and therefore intimate and genuine – truth. According to Moore, poetry is an object for artful engagement, and is perhaps the best way to engage the truth until “poets among us can be 'literalists of the imagination.’” Moore ends the poem “Poetry” with an authoritative claim:

In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, you are interested in poetry

*(Becoming Marianne Moore 73).*

The interest is what is genuine, and the poetry instigates the interest. The poetry gives us the experiential truth of reading and becoming curious, frustrated, separated from the “real.” But ironically, in experiencing these emotions, we are in touch with the real. “With a perfect contempt” for poetry during reading, we discover “a place for the genuine” in our very attitude and reaction. Our understandings and “inclinational” evaluations are as true as any experience can be.

For Moore, art is truth and innovation. In “Poetry” she justifies the former aspect, and in “Picking and Choosing” she emphasizes the latter – that we must perpetually seek to understand and experience our world in a new way. Moore provides us with work that encourages a new perspective, that sparks an emotional response of either pleasure and

interest, or dislike and disinterest. In either case, the poetry teaches us something about ourselves, it connects us to a particular emotion or group of emotions. It is the object of our approval or disapproval. It encourages us to think and reconsider, to explore, to experience the flux of possible mental and physical states in the realm of experience. But as we have already noted, Moore wants any exploration of truth and innovation to be intuitive, “rudimentary,” and not overwrought. As her poems suggest, the perceptual world does not hide its fruits, so we need not become paranoid or overzealous in analyzing the texts around us. We need only discover – that is dis-cover – the infinite layers of reality that await our consideration.

Moore's shorter version of “Poetry,” the version which she endorsed for final publication, exemplifies her favor for simplicity. Perhaps thinking the longer version to require too much thought and questioning on the reader's behalf, she limited her poem to this:

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

*(Complete Poems 36).*

This version is very much like the introductory section of the longer version of “Poetry,” but it has a particular formal difference. The third line is indented to the far right, displaying the phrase “covers in,” which is actually a continuation of the fuller phrase

“dis-covers in” which carries over after a hyphen from the previous line. The isolation of this phrase “covers in” has a curious connection with the idea that “the perceptual world does not hide its fruits,” as discussed above. In using poetry as a springboard for artful perception, we dis-cover what is “covered in” by the poetry, itself. Nothing is hiding from us, but we must peel back the layers that block the genuine experience of the new. We must cast off the shell of the familiar, and investigate novel perspectives.

This brings us back to Moore's recurring theme of “skins,” a term which brings to mind the concepts of layers, dimensionality, and depth. Taken as figurative language, the word “skin” can refer to any sort of covering, anything that conceals with one layer or multiple layers. Philosopher Mark C. Taylor, in his book *Hiding* (1997), offers a philosophy that centers upon the idea of “skin” :

In the end, it all comes down to a question of skin. And bones. The question of skin and bones is the question of hiding and seeking. And the question of hiding and seeking is the question of detection. Is detection any longer possible? Who is the detective? What is detected? Is there anything left to hide? Is there any longer a place to hide? ...Does skin hide anything or is everything nothing but skin? “Skin rubbing at skin, skin, skin, skin, skin... (Taylor 11).

Taylor's question is quite postmodern, and yet Moore addresses the same question in her “modern” poetry. As Taylor's quotation asserts, “It all comes down to a question of skin.” The 'it' to which this claim refers is the general, all-encompassing 'it' which includes everything in life. 'It' includes perception and reality, as we are bound to them in interpreting any text. Of course, truth and “answers” are what Taylor seeks as a

philosopher. “Does skin hide anything or is everything nothing but skin?” Moore answers this question, as a poet and philosopher ahead of her time, to show us that, in fact, nothing is hiding. Texts do not seek to deceive us, nor do they have anything to hide or the agency with which to intentionally conceal. They wait only to be uncovered and discovered by an artist with liberated perceptions. Skin may be a hide, but it does not hide; it only offers endless layers for us to consider. In a text, there is nothing but skin – organized layers that go as deep as we are willing to pry.

In Moore's 1918 poem “Black Earth,” published in *Observations*, she writes, “Will / depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who can see no / beautiful element of unreason under it?” (*Becoming Marianne Moore* 237). Skin is a sign of life, and sensation comes through feeling, awareness through tactile understanding. Penetrating from one layer of skin to the next in this multidimensional world of texts is pointless unless we can see the “beautiful element of unreason” underlying it. No amount of reductivism or probing analysis will lead to a “core,” for the core is the intangible recognition that nothing is hiding from us in the first place. The skins, themselves, are the truth of art, which has no end or answer – only action and progress. Moore's multiple revisions of the poem “Poetry” illustrate this point well, as Nitchie notes:

“Poetry” [moves] in its successive versions between rigorously symmetrical artifact and quintessential statement, between prose that looks like verse and verse that looks like prose. But in “Poetry” the answer is both exceptional and excessive: one must eliminate elaborate nonsense in order to get to the heart of the matter, but one must save the nonsense one has eliminated in order to provide credentials for what remains” (Nitchie 47-8).

For Moore, elaborations of skin and depth are merely circumstantial to the artistic truth that each specific layer contributes toward; and yet, as Nitchie correctly notices, one must rely on the elaborations to verify the artistic truth. The details and layers of a text are evidence of the text's holistic statement. To better know the text, we must always be interpreting its infinite layers. Taylor concludes his philosophical inquiry with a recognition much like Moore's: "To err amidst shifty interfaces that know no end is to live an irreducible enigma: nothing is hiding" (Taylor 336-7).

As Mary Deshazer appropriately notes of Moore, "The power of the visible, she believed, was invisible; and 'art,' she wrote in "Why I Buy Pictures," must 'acknowledge the spiritual forces that made it'" (*Longman Anthology* 990). Not only is nothing hiding for Moore in our world of texts, but art is made possible by forces that have no tangible or evident nature beyond our own recognition of their presence in perception. In this way, the technique of art makes itself evident to us; this is the opposite of hiding. The very faculty we use to even consider what might or might not be hiding is, itself, a revelation. We can endlessly perpetuate the degree of this revelation by experiencing art through the skins that present themselves. Blackmur offers one final illumination on Moore's behalf:

[Literature, and by extension, all art] is a method not a formula; it can be emulated not imitated; for it is the consequence of a radical leaning, or more than a leaning, an essential trope of the mind: the forward stress to proceed, at any point, to proceed from one thing to another, crossing all gaps regardless, but keeping them all in mind  
(*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 82-3).

Blackmur is right in saying that art is “a method,” and that “it is the consequence of... an essential trope of the mind: the forward stress to proceed.” This is a key realization that can be drawn from Moore's poetry, and each of her successive poems that demonstrates this argument is a unique iteration of the same “trope of the mind.” Art and progress, innovation and discovery – all words for the same trope – are the genuine truths of life which “acknowledge spiritual forces” through their practice.

And so the self-guided experience of art – the active role of perceiving texts in life – embodies all the truth and ingenuousness that is to be had in life. Our experiences are simple and valuable, and of core importance to our very being. While we live in a world of mathematical division and complex arrangements (mimicked by Moore's carefully crafted and arranged poetry, as we have seen) the task of perceiving should be enjoyable and fruitful in a basic way. Since nothing is hiding from us, our fancies of interpretation should reflect whatever immediate inclinations the mind has to offer – lest the task of perception become a deficiency rather than a gift. Of course we must not become so relaxed in our experiences that we slump into automatic perceptions, in which Shklovsky says “we see [an] object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette.” For when this occurs, the experience eludes us altogether, and “life is reckoned as nothing. Automatization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war.” It is as if our automatic moments, after the fact, “had never been” (*Russian* 11, 12).

\* \* \*

Throughout this dissertation, our exploration of Moore's work has made reference

to science in rather general terms. Considering her academic involvement with biology and histology, however, and considering the themes of progress and the search for truth in Moore's poems and Shklovsky's theory, I would like to explore the domain of science in greater detail here – for it solidifies much of what has been said thus far, and provides a new perspective by which to appreciate the theory of art put forth by Moore and Shklovsky (and, after all, new perspectives is what art is all about).

By the time of *Observations*, a poetry collection titled with a definitive empirical word, Moore had embraced simple empiricism and whimsical, emotional thought as a means to achieve art. Whatever we feel or perceive in the world, whatever is inducted, becomes the raw material of art, in all its “genuine” “rawness.” For each of us, Moore indicates, the world is the stage of our own life experiment. Furthermore, the experiment is personal to the extent that we experience our own specific emotions, but communal and societal to the extent that we use our emotions to guide artful thinking and create the artwork that represents our innovations. Moore's poetic understanding at this point in her career becomes undeniably akin to a scientific understanding.

As established academics and scientists, Martin Goldstein and Inge F. Goldstein define science in their book *How We Know: An Exploration of the Scientific Process* as “an activity characterized by three features”:

1. It is a search for understanding, for a sense of having found a satisfying explanation of some aspect of reality.
2. The understanding is achieved by means of statements of general laws or principles – laws applicable to the widest possible variety of phenomena.
3. The laws or principals can be tested experimentally (Goldstein 6).

The specific objects and items of each poem are used by Moore to illuminate truths much more expansive than the individual properties of objects themselves; and this is how Moore's technique is a scientific one, one of induction: she gathers objective particulars from which to extrapolate, and after briefly meditating on them, she exposes a theory of art and living which holds ground from one poem to the next. It is as if each poem she writes is a new experiment with different particular objects but the same conclusion, and this is the mark of a good theory – maintained integrity after repeated attempts tempting the falsification of the theory. Indeed the theory of art held by Shklovsky and Moore is a solid one, yet one that boasts evidence of truth only in individual, subjective minds.

Since the truth in any art practice (as opposed to a crafted result of the art process, the artwork) is inherently evasive to anyone not directly involved in it, there is a trouble in communicating to others exactly what one feels in art. The experiment is so personal that the artwork can only approach the art which inspired it, which is why Moore claims that until we can be “literalists of the imagination,” poetry will fall short of its ideal realization. During her lifetime, Moore often referred to her writings as “verse,” and not poetry, admitting, “[W]hat I write... could only be called poetry because there is no other category in which to put it” (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 27). Indeed, the “problem” with written poetry, and most artwork, is that it fails to adequately communicate the imagination which made it. Moore once found in the margins of an old, graded school essay she had written at Bryn Mawr, “I presume you had an idea if one could find out what it is” (“A Burning” 12).

Even in an individual's practice of scientific thought, induction is conducted in a

mind that thinks in terms of the familiar and defined. The standard of language, and its stagnant definitions, guides every thought process. Philosophy professor Jerold Abrams notes,

Projecting inductions is just one of our common habits, like saying, "Hello." We can make inductions without any problems; but we should not pretend that they are logically sound. We should not pretend that they are so logically defensible, or that science is so pure. We speak from context which is laden with linguistic habits, and inductions are one of them" (Abrams 545).

This argument involving linguistic confusion hinges upon the same anathema in Moore and Shklovsky's theory: habit. So the problem of language, one of the most notorious "problems" in modern philosophy and literature, is made to apply to science as well.

Scientist and writer Edward O. Wilson adds,

The canonical definition of objective scientific knowledge... is not a philosophical problem nor can it be attained... by logical and semantic analysis. It is an empirical question that can be answered only by a continuing probe of the physical basis of the thought process itself... If the exact biological processes of concept formation can be defined, we might devise superior methods of inquiry into both the brain and the connectedness between the brain and the world outside it. As a consequence we could expect to tighten the connectedness between the events and laws of nature and the physical basis of human thought processes. Might it be possible then to take the final step and devise an unassailable definition of objective truth? Perhaps not. The very idea is risky. It smells of absolutism, the dangerous Medusa of science and the humanities alike

(Wilson 70).

Wilson concedes that the subjective world and the objective world blur together, and at their nexus lies perhaps a better understanding through further empirical investigation – but such an investigation promises to carry on infinitely, constantly refining itself to avoid the seductive lure of absolutism. It is quite fortuitous that Wilson describes “absolutism” as “the dangerous Medusa of science and the humanities alike.” Since the Medusa was a mythical creature that turned men into stone who were seduced to look at her, Wilson is indicating that absolutism – the claim of a definite truth beyond any possibility of falsity – threatens the idea of progress through new thinking, specifying, or dissecting. Absolutism in any field of knowledge threatens a standstill, a stagnation, in further development; it stands in opposition to the very idea of art, for art is the promise of continual development and innovation in knowledge.

Professor Jill Bolte Taylor, a neuroanatomist who suffered a massive stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain and spent about eight years recovering her full mental abilities, is an individual with particularly valuable insight into the mind, its evaluative capacities, and its perceptions. Having expertise on matters of the brain before her stroke, she retained an incredible understanding of her situation from years of objective study, but now – more importantly – she *occupied* a mind suffering from partial collapse. This interesting situation allowed her to survey her emotions, understandings, and capabilities with a detailed understanding of the neurocircuitry that permitted each mental operation during the reconstruction of her brain. Here is a key reflection she offered after her journey, which supports the idea that habit and automatization is anathema to a conscious, artful life:

I define responsibility (response-ability) as the ability to choose how we respond to stimulation coming in through our sensory systems at any moment in time... What most of us don't realize is that we are unconsciously making choices about how we respond [to our environments] all the time. It is so easy to get caught up in the wiring of our pre-programmed reactivity (limbic system) that we live our lives cruising along on automatic pilot. I have learned that the more attention my higher cortical cells pay to what's going on inside my limbic system, the more say I have about what I am thinking and feeling” (Taylor 146-7).

Thinking and feeling are what comprise any artful experience, and when automatic reactions are derived from any object of perception, our brains retrace old circuits rather than create new ones. This process marks a stagnation in the mental world – a standstill. Exercising conscious choice, awareness, and the technique of art is the key to overcome it.

So even to scientists, art is a means by which to live and grow and think. Wilson recognizes,

Scientific research is an art form in this sense: It does not matter how you make a discovery, only that your claim is true and convincingly validated. The ideal scientist thinks like a poet and works like a bookkeeper... The scientist's style of investigation is the product of the discipline he chooses, further narrowed by aptitude and taste. If a naturalist at heart, he saunters at random, sometimes through real woods thick with trees, or, more commonly nowadays, cells thick with molecules” (Wilson 62-3).

Whether owing to her scientific background in biology and histology or not, Moore knows as a poet what Wilson says as a scientist: Progress through innovation and creative thinking is the greatest truth we may have as human beings – and even this is not a “truth,” *per se*, but a technique to approach truth. Art is a method to gain knowledge and perspective, and science is an empirically specified form of art to study the configurations of the world we perceive and find patterns among it. Perhaps the symmetrical patterns and syllable counts of Moore's poetry are meant to indicate a recognition that the structure and arrangement of the physical world can be effectively mirrored in poetry, as if a controlled presentation allows for great leaps of the mind toward innovation and liberation.

Let us isolate an important point here: art and science do something extremely significant besides inspire feeling and awareness in a perceiver; they drive us to action, to physically manipulate the objects and elements of our world to construct works for others to experience and utilize. In a world characterized chiefly by “density,” as Shklovsky says, art and science lead us to reconfigure that density, to propose ideas and facilitate experiences through a poem, a painting, a song... a sport, a technology, a drug... a ritual, an ideology, a fashionable style of dress or behavior... All of these “configurations” are the product of human art, and they evidence the fact that humans are alive, conscious, focused, and actively uncovering – or creating – truths in the world. Moore's poetry illustrates this point by showing us how “picking and choosing” among that which we know, re-framing our perspectives, and reconfiguring our world, gives rise to new connections and understandings.

From the introductory phase to the pinnacle phase of her career, Moore's confrontation of that enigmatic interface where art takes place – between the perceiver

and the object – becomes fully realized in the form of yet another enigmatic interface, where emotion meets artistic thought. There is an advancement of understanding by this change of perspective, a progress toward greater knowledge, which exemplifies the point of Shklovsky and Moore's argument; for art's true power cannot be stated, but must be felt, practiced, and experienced. As Dr. Jill Taylor tells us, “[T]he focused human mind is the most powerful instrument in the universe,” and this is because the focused human mind embodies the creative force of art (Taylor 157). This is a claim implicit in the works of Moore and Shklovsky.

We might situate Moore and Shklovsky alongside another figure of great influence on modern thought, one whose scientific background endorses the same conclusion we have encountered heretofore through poetry, literary theory, and philosophy. For it was none other than Albert Einstein who said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed” (Einstein 219). Moore's poetry urges us to keep our eyes open, and our minds aware, with wonder. Her poetry engages us both as a text for artful interpretation, and as a clear communication of vocalized theory. Moore encourages, and offers us hope, that our perspectives will change, develop, shift focus, clash, combine and reconcile, simplify, complicate, and remain elusive and mysterious for the entire span during which “literature is a phase of life.”

## CONCLUSION

It seems most appropriate to conclude this dissertation with an explanation of Moore's significance to modernist poetry. To begin this discussion, let us revisit the words of Donald Hall:

The awe in which Marianne Moore was held by her contemporaries is explainable in part, I think, by the fact that she was already writing poetry that was highly original. Her poems had broken with tradition. They were examples of the sort of new poetry her contemporaries had envisioned, for although there was agreement among poets about what innovations were required to revitalize American poetry, writing the new thing was something else... [Her poetry] was a poetry without 'poetic' diction, shorn of clichés, with a thoughtful disregard for the usual requirements of rhyme and meter. Here was something new, a genuinely new thing. And it was coming from a reticent small woman who simply wrote as she liked (Hall 30-1).

Moore was a self-realized woman, writing self-realized poetry, and urging her readers to seek out self-realization, as well. She lived the process of art that she preached, and is one “whose art was all in the doing, not in the thing done” (Nitchie 116).

As her poetry reveals, Moore was interested in nearly everything. She found people, sports, societal practices and organizations, animals, plants, crafted items, and any tangible objects or intangible ideas to hold interest, to be worthy of consideration and appreciation – and this open-mindedness arose precisely because she was artful in living. Moore held a *special* interest in plants, animals, and athletes because they are “exemplars of art,” and thus their art is “all in the doing, not in the thing done,” as Nitchie claims of

Moore herself. These animate organisms all strive forward, in action and progress, to develop and grow not only in a 'survival of the fittest' manner of evolution, but in a self-guided process of self-realization. The inanimate objects of Moore's poems, however, cannot grow and develop as do living things. These objects are, according to our senses, fixed. But according to our perceptions, they need not remain fixed. This is where the technique of art comes into play – it allows us to re-arrange our perceptions and see these objects of the world in a new light. Art thereby allows us to re-imagine the material world and thus places on humans the liberating task of animating the inanimate (the inanimate including that which is figuratively idle, that which is familiar and stagnant and habituated in our perceptions). Art is mentally and sensationally exciting.

Shklovsky presses the same point as Moore regarding art and life: “If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.’ And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (*Russian* 12). Shklovsky's solid theorizing and determined outlook on art is not only consistent with and applicable to Moore's work, but grandly illuminating and clarifying as a lens for it. “Art as Technique” remains, today, a key document in describing exactly how art functions, and in implying the importance of art's practice in human society.

In his academically renowned book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, internationally recognized geographer Yi-Fu Tuan provides a more recent historical elaboration on the importance of art and awareness in fully realizing the complexity of our lives and our world:

If we examine certain visionary plans, study certain social surveys, and eavesdrop on the

small talk that is the common fare of life, we are likely to discover that whereas the world is enormously complex, human beings and their experiences are simple. The scientist postulates the simple human being for the limited purpose of analyzing a specific set of relationships, and this procedure is entirely valid. Danger occurs when the scientist then naively tries to impose his findings on the real world, for he may forget that the simplicity of human beings is an assumption, not a discovery or a necessary conclusion of research. The simple being, a convenient postulate of science and a deliberate paper figure of propaganda, is only too easy for the man in the street – that is, most of us – to accept. We are in the habit of denying or forgetting the real nature of our experiences in favor of the clichés of public speech. And here is the ultimate ambition of this essay, in common with the thrust of humanistic enterprise: to increase the burden of awareness (Tuan 203).

Moore and Shklovsky urge us to recognize, as Tuan does, that “the thrust of humanistic enterprise,” the awareness that comes with artistic experience, is not something to be read about or learned; it is to be personally practiced, first and foremost. Oscar Wilde famously wrote: “Education is an admirable thing but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing worth knowing can be taught.” That is, facts and information are admirable and should be conveyed to students – and we are all students – but “nothing worth knowing can be taught” in the manner of feeding from one mind to another. Conveyed knowledge excludes the revelation of actual experience and “exact perception,” and renders a student with only the husk of true insight. That which is worth knowing must arrive from inside the mind itself, based on an epiphany of new perspective, a new way of looking at some element of the world. In this modern age, we are detectives, artists, and indeed scientists.

Late in her career, during an interview with Donald Hall, Moore suggested the analogous relationship between the artist and the scientist:

Hall:

[I]n your criticism you make frequent analogies between the poet and the scientist. Do you think this analogy is helpful to the modern poet? Most people would consider the comparison a paradox, and assume that the poet and the scientist are opposed.

Moore:

Do the poet and the scientist not work analogously? They are willing to waste effort. To be hard on himself is one of the greatest strengths of each. Each is attentive to clues, each must narrow the choice, must strive for precision. As George Grosz says, "In art there is no place for gossip and but a small place for the satirists." The objective is substance. Is it not? Bronowski says in the new *Post* that science is not a mere collection of discoveries, but that science is the process of discovering. In any case it's not a thing established once and for all, it's evolving (*Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* 44).

As Moore says in her later poem "The Student" (1941), "It may be that we / have not knowledge, just opinions, that we / are undergraduates, not students; we know we have been told with smiles, by expatriates / of whom we had asked 'When will / your experiment be finished?' 'Science / is never finished' (*Selected Poems* 101). And, more generally, the art of conscious, aware life is never over.

The feeling that Moore and Shklovsky seek to impress upon readers is one of infinite possibility, richness of the perceptive faculty, and the endless domain of artistic thought. They seek to excite us and make us feel valuable by virtue of our basic

existence, by virtue of our awareness of, and interaction with, an outside world.

Thus, Moore is distinguished among the modern poets of her era by her chipper attitude and her celebration of modern life. Unlike many of her peers, she does not dwell on the problems of the industrialized world; she does not aspire to communicate sadness, and she does not seek to inspire commiseration between herself and her readership.

Garrigue verifies this: “Based in the decade of *The Waste Land* she partakes of no cynical or despairing view. From the first her highly defined world seems based on a clear-cut recognition of ethical values she considers still extant” (Garrigue 11). In a letter to her artist friend Yvor Winters, dated December 20, 1922, Moore wrote, “*The Waste Land* is, I feel, macabre; it suggests that imagination has been compressed whereas experience should be precipitate” (Selected Letters 191). “Precipitate,” a rather scientific word, refers to a solid state of matter that forms out of, and separates from, a liquid solution. Moore is saying that experience, itself, is the joy of life and imagination; experience is art because it liberates from the mix of “compressed” habit and routine a solidified extract of visible, real, tangible truth – a genuine, conscious, “exact” perception of living.

Moore's early poetry between 1909 and 1924 spans two phases which delineate her own evolution as a philosopher and artist. The poetry offers, as its crowning achievement, a style of presentation that explains itself to us, and exemplifies what it discusses. Each poem is a microcosm, an organism, an entire world which holds the evidence of, and the explanation for, the entity itself. And when these poetic entities are combined and viewed in their entirety, they comprise a whole that is consistent with its pieces; this reflexive structuring is called 'synecdoche,' and as Moore says, “The fabric of existence weaves itself whole.” In this way, elephants, bats, horses, chameleons, athletes, critics, poets are all part of the entire fabric of art; they are all exemplars and examples of

the concept of art.

Moore was full of joy, and full of hope that we might come to see the richness and possibility in the world as she did, and more importantly that we might come to truly feel each experience. While Shklovsky described this possibility with his theory of art in 1917, Moore described *and* demonstrated it throughout her career, generally focusing more on the demonstrative aspect of each poem as years passed. And how exactly do we understand a poem that demonstrates the poet's art? We dissect it and analyze it to gain insight, like scientists do to the natural world. In other words, we practice art upon it. And in practicing art, perceiving art, and comprehending art, conscious life becomes, indeed, a total representation of art – a “process of discovering.”

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