

*This series is funded through the generosity
of the Attica Tradition Educational Foundation.*

MARIANNE MOORE AND THE PIPES OF PAN:

MT. RAINIER & MT. OLYMPUS



Moore's Poem, 'An Octopus'

© Copyright 2001 by Patricia C. Willis
© Copyright 2001 by The Attica Tradition Educational
Foundation
All rights reserved.

An Octopus

of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies "in grandeur and in mass"
beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes;
dots of cyclamen red and maroon on its clearly defined pseudopodia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice fields from fifty to five hundred feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy.

"Picking periwinkles from the cracks"
or killing prey with the concentric crushing rigor of the python,
it hovers forward "spider fashion
on its arms" misleadingly like lace;
its "ghostly pallor changing
to the green metallic tinge of an anemone starred pool."

The fir trees in "the magnitude of their root systems,"
rise aloof from these maneuvers "creepy to behold"—
austere specimens of our American royal families,
"each like the shadow of the one beside it.

The rock seems frail compared with their dark energy of life,"
the vermilion and onyx and manganese blue interior expensiveness
left at the mercy of the weather;

"stained transversely by iron where the water drips down,"
recognized by its plants and its animals.

Completing a circle,

you have been deceived into thinking that you have progressed,
under the polite needles of the larches

"hung to filter not to intercept the sunlight"—

met by tightly wattled spruce twigs

"conformed to an edge like clipped cypress

as if no branch could penetrate the cold beyond its company;"

and dumps of gold and silver ore enclosing The Goat's Mirror—
that lady-fingerlike depression in the shape of the left human foot,
which prejudices you in favor of itself
before you have had time to see the others;
its indigo, pea-green, blue-green, and turquoise,
from a hundred to two hundred feet deep,
“merging in irregular patches in the middle lake
where like gusts of a storm,
obliterating the shadows of the firtrees, the wind makes lanes of
ripples.”

What spot could have merits of equal importance
for bears, elk, deer, wolves, goats and ducks?
Preempted by their ancestors,
this is the property of the exacting porcupine,
and of the rat “slipping along to its burrow in the swamp
or pausing on high ground to smell the heather;”
of “thoughtful beavers
making drains which seem the work of careful men with shovels,”
and of the bears inspecting unexpectedly
ant hills and berry bushes.

Composed of calcium gems and alabaster pillars,
topaz, tourmaline crystals and amethyst quartz,
their den is somewhere else, concealed in the confusion
of “blue stone forests thrown together with marble and jasper and agate
as if whole quarries had been dynamited.”

And farther up in stag-at-bay position
as a scintillating fragment of these terrible stalagmites,
stands the goat,
its eye fixed on the waterfall which never seems to fall—
an endless skein swayed by the wind,
immune to the force of gravity in the perspective of the peaks.

A special antelope
acclimated to “grottoes from which issue penetrating draughts
which make you wonder why you came,”
it stands its ground
on cliffs the color of the clouds, of petrified white vapor—
black feet, eyes, nose, and horns engraved on dazzling icefields,
the ermine body on the crystal peak;
the sun kindling its shoulders to maximum heat like acetylene,
dyeing them white;
upon this antique pedestal—
“a mountain with those graceful lines which prove it a volcano,”
its top a complete cone like Fujiyama's
till an explosion blew it off.
Maintaining any minds, distinguished by a beauty
of which “the visitor dare never fully speak at home
for fear of being stoned as an imposter,”
Big Snow Mountain is the home of a diversity of creatures:
those who “have lived in hotels
but who now live in camps — who prefer to;”
the mountain guide evolving from the trapper,
“in two pairs of trousers, the outer one older,
wearing slowly away from the feet to the knees;”
“the nine-striped chipmunk
running with unmammal-like agility along a log;”
the water ouzel
with “its passion for rapids and high pressured falls,”
building under the arch of some tiny Niagara;
the white-tailed ptarmigan “in winter solid white,
feeding on heather bells and alpine buckwheat;”
and the eleven eagles of the west,
“fond of the spring fragrance and the winter colors.”

used to the unegotistic action of the glaciers
and "several hours of frost every midsummer night."
They make a nice appearance, don't they,
happy seeing nothing?
Perched on treacherous lava and pumice—
those unadjusted chimney-pots and cleavers
which stipulate "names and addresses of persons to notify
in case of disaster—"
they hear the roar of ice and supervise the water
winding slowly through the cliffs,
the road "climbing like the thread
which forms the groove around a snail-shell,
doubling back and forth until where snow begins it ends."
No "deliberate wide-eyed wistfulness" is here
among the boulders sunk in ripples and white water
where "when you hear the best wild music of the forest
it is sure to be a badger,
the victim on some slight observatory,
of "a struggle between curiosity and caution,"
inquiring what has scared it:
a stone from the moraine descending in leaps,
another badger, or the spotted ponies with "glass eyes,"
brought up on frosty grass and flowers
and rapid draughts of ice water.
Instructed none knows how, to climb the mountain,
by "business men who as totemic scenery of Canada,
require for recreation,
three hundred and sixty-five holidays in the year,"
these conspicuously spotted little horses are peculiar,
hard to discern among the birch trees, ferns, and lily pads,
avalanche lilies, Indian paintbrushes,

bear's ears and kittentails,
and miniature cavalcades of chlorophyllless fungi
magnified in profile on the mossbeds like moonstones in the water;
the cavalcade of calico competing
with the original American "menagerie of styles,"
among the white flowers of the rhododendron surmounting rigid leaves
upon which moisture works its alchemy,
transmuting verdure into onyx.
Larkspur, blue pincushions, blue peas, and lupin;
white flowers with white, and red with red;
the blue ones "growing close together
so that patches of them look like blue water in the distance;"
this arrangement of colors
as in Persian designs of hard stones with enamel,
forms a pleasing equation—
a diamond outside, and inside, a white dot;
on the outside a ruby; inside, a red dot;
black spots balanced with black
in the woodlands where fires have run over the ground—
separated by aspens, cats' paws, and woolly sunflowers,
fireweed, asters, and Goliath thistles
"flowering at all altitudes as multiplicitous as barley,"
like pink sapphires in the pavement of the glistening plateau.
Inimical to "bristling, puny, swearing men
equipped with saws and axes,"
this treacherous glass mountain
admires gentians, ladyslippers, harebells, mountain dryads,
and "Calypso, the goat flower—
that greenish orchid fond of snow"—
anomalously nourished upon shelving glacial ledges
where climbers have not gone or have gone timidly,

"the one resting his nerves while the other advanced,"
on this volcano, with the bluejay, her principal companion.
"Hopping stiffly on sharp feet" like miniature icehacks—
"secretive, with a look of wisdom and distinction, but a villain,
fond of human society or the crumbs that go with it,"
he knows no Greek, the pastime of Calypso and Ulysses—
"that pride producing language,"
in which "rashness is rendered innocuous, and error exposed
by the collision of knowledge with knowledge."
"Like happy souls in Hell,"
enjoying mental difficulties,
the golden grasshoppers of Greece
amused themselves with delicate behavior
because it was "so noble and so fair;"
not practiced in adapting their intelligence
to eagle traps and snowshoes,
to alpenstocks and other toys contrived by those
"alive to the advantage of invigorating pleasures."
Bows, arrows, oars, and paddles for which trees provide the wood,
in new countries are more eloquent than elsewhere—
augmenting evidence for the assertion
that essentially humane,
"the forest affords wood for dwellings and by its beauty stimulates
the moral vigor of its citizens."
The Greeks liked smoothness, distrusting what was back
of what could not be clearly seen
resolving with benevolent conclusiveness,
"complexities which will remain complexities
as long as the world lasts;"
ascribing what we clumsily call happiness,
to "an accident or a quality,

a spiritual substance or the soul itself,
an act or a disposition or a habit
or a habit infused to which the soul has been persuaded,
or something distinct from a habit, a power—"
such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of.
"Emotionally sensitive, their hearts were hard;"
their wisdom was remote
from that of these odd oracles of cool official sarcasm,
upon this game preserve
where "guns, nets, seines, traps, and explosives,
hired vehicles, gambling, and intoxicants are prohibited,
disobedient persons being summarily removed
and not allowed to return without permission in writing."
It is self-evident
that it is frightful to have everything afraid of one;
that one must do as one is told
and eat "rice, prunes, dates, raisins, hardtack, and tomatoes"
if one would "conquer the main peak" of Mount Takoma—
this fossil flower concise without a shiver,
intact when it is cut,
damned for its sacrosanct remoteness—
like Henry James "damned by the public for decorum;"
not decorum, but restraint;
it was the love of doing hard things
that rebuffed and wore them out — a public out of sympathy with neatness.
Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish!
Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact.
"Creeping slowly as with meditated stealth,
its arms seeming to approach from all directions,"
it receives one under winds that "tear the snow to bits

and hurl it like a sandblast,
shearing off twigs and loose bark from the trees."
Is tree the word for these strange things
"flat on the ground like vines?"
some "bent in a half circle with branches on one side
suggesting dustbrushes, not trees;
some finding strength in union, forming little stunted groves,
their flattened mats of branches shrunk in trying to escape"
from the hard mountain "planed by ice and polished by the wind"—
the white volcano with no weather side;
the lightning flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak—
the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed,
its claw cut by the avalanche
"with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
in a curtain of powdered now launched like a waterfall."

The Dial 77 (November, 1924), 478-481.

MARIANNE MOORE AND THE PIPES OF

MT. RAINIER & MT. OLYMPUS

**Marianne Moore and the Pipes of Pan:
Mt. Rainier & Mt. Olympus**

by Patricia C. Willis

I. First Encounters

"Frances and Norvelle are determined I see Greece if I never see another thing in my life," Marianne Moore wrote from Athens to her brother in 1962. The Brown sisters, Bryn Mawr College schoolmates, took her to Athens, Marathon, and the Greek islands. Reporting on the trip later, she distilled her experiences:

What has made most impression on me in recent years was going to . . . Greece Everything I had read in books came to life. Have you been to Greece, seen the olive trees and the goats, and the magpies flitting and hopping? And going to battlefields in Greece I even visited the olive tree under which Plato sat, a high excitement. I wish I could go again, to see the real and tangible Discobolos, . . . the Calf-bearer, The Gladiator, Laocoön. And then the Acropolis!¹

This summary (more from her study of books than from real life) touches on flora, fauna, history, philosophy, art and religion—six subjects which had preoccupied her throughout her career as a poet. That there is a correlation between her life-time of poetry and her fascination with ancient Greek culture should be no surprise, given the time and place of her upbringing and education, the roots of all her adult interests.

What will emerge from an examination of Moore's Greek subjects, philosophy, art, and history, anchored for her by Demetrius, Longinus, and Xenophon, and flora, fauna, and religion, anchored by Pan and Mt. Olympus, is that in developing her own matter of poetry, she drew upon these inspirations in order to transform them. She used the poet's power to transform her subjects just as the tellers of Greek myths transformed a woman into a nightingale or a man into a flower. Her transformations serve what I would call the secular Christian goals of her work: acceptance of moral responsibility and contemplation of the sublime.

There are three chronological layers to be seen in Moore's Greek substrata. Her literary childhood, her education at Bryn Mawr, and her friendship with Hilda Doolittle and Bryher all constitute significant parts of her appreciation of things Greek. Not surprisingly, all the parts were in place by about 1921, the year of her first book and the solidification of her career as a poet at age thirty-four.

Mary Warner Moore, Marianne's mother, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, was educated at the Mary Institute, a St. Louis private girls' school, where she took the superior class, the equivalent of some years of college. She became a teacher of English at the Metzger Institute, a Presbyterian school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she raised her children, Marianne and John Warner. This bookish woman was known to read to the children from the likes of Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*; she found them suitable bedtime stories for very young Christians. There is evidence that she also read from Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*.²

Kingsley's version of "The Story of Perseus" sets the scene as if the topography were a local one, leaving telltale traces on his

compilation that would appear in Moore's work later. He refers to the "fens" through which Perseus will pass on his way to slaying the Gorgon Medusa, a sixty-page revel in which are omitted only the various ravishings and other behaviors thought unfit for children to hear.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* also graced the nursery.³ His reading of the Baucis and Philemon story as "The Miraculous Pitcher" would find echoes in a poem in 1923. His device includes a storyteller, Cousin Eustace, who appeared at the Tanglewood family retreat on vacation from Williams College. It was Eustace's theory of the plasticity of Greek myths that would engage Moore when she was a college student some years later.

There may have been other means by which the young Moores learned the Greek myths. Kingsley, writing in 1856, considers the English literary landscape of his day, a landscape likely delayed in its replication in America by some years but surely to be found by the time of Marianne's childhood:

Some of you have already heard of the old Greeks; and all of you, as you grow up, will hear more and more of them. Those of you who are boys will, perhaps, spend a great deal of time reading Greek books; and the girls, though they may not learn Greek, will be sure to come across a great many stories taken from Greek history and to see, I may say every day, things which we should not have had if it had not been for those old Greeks. You can hardly find a well-written book which has not in it Greek names, and words, and proverbs; you cannot walk through a great town without seeing Greek buildings; you cannot go into a well-furnished room without seeing Greek statues and ornaments, even Greek patterns of furniture and paper.⁴

He goes on to point out the Greek foundation of science and philosophy and the beauty of the language which "became the common language of educated people all over the old world And therefore it was that the New Testament was written in Greek, that it might be read and understood by all the nations of the Roman Empire, so that, next to the Jews and the bible which the Jews handed down to us, we owe more to these old Greeks than to any people on earth." Kingsley concludes in a spirit proper for a minister of the gospel that the message of Greek myth is "Do right, and God will help you." His sentiment was a pervasive one in Europe and America through the end of the nineteenth century. Thus is myth for little ones made all of a piece with Christian scripture and tradition: the Gorgon and Bunion's Apollyon, Pandora and Eve, Pan and St. Hubert.

When Moore entered college at Bryn Mawr in 1905, she literally entered through the Owl Gate at the corner where the town meets the campus. Imagine a vaulted archway, its ribbing completely covered with owls—owls reading, singing, writing, playing tennis—collegian owls. Designed in the Oxbridge style favored by American colleges, Bryn Mawr's architecture flowed from a dedication to more than mere playfulness. The college was a woman's school, dedicated to Pallas Athena⁵ and to providing girls with the same education their brothers were receiving at Yale or Harvard. It can be supposed that the college contained the routine elements of Greek heritage that Kingsley described and that the art studios and classroom walls were rich in busts and prints of Greek subjects.

It is difficult to reconstruct the course syllabi of a century ago, but we know that Moore had passed an entrance examination in ancient history, that she took twelve semester credits in Latin

(Livy, Horace, Cicero), and that she majored in history, politics, and economics. But perhaps more to the point are the incidents reported in letters home that reflect extra-curricular activities and deep interests.

Moore told Ezra Pound, "I have no Greek, unless the love for it may be taken as a knowledge of it" when she first wrote to him in 1920.⁶ But this modesty belies an effort begun in her last year in college. Dr. Theodore de Laguna taught philosophy and took time with his students. Moore asked him to name a beginner's Greek book that she could purchase in Philadelphia. He obliged with advice: "It's much easier than German, and *much* easier than Latin, but you must regard every sentence as spoken, even if you don't read it aloud."⁷ He concluded: "I'm glad you want to learn Greek. . . . Come to me if you want help and I'll be glad to give it to you." Moore had just passed her German oral exam and perhaps felt that she had time to embark on self-taught Greek. Surely her intentions were good; her low marks were endangering her degree but she nonetheless thought she had a chance to learn a new language.

The next term, while taking "Imitative Writing," a course dedicated to seventeenth-century prose stylists, Moore apparently came across Longinus's *On the Sublime*. It is easy to imagine the following passage from that work as key to the writing class:

To return from my digression. Although Plato thus flows on with noiseless stream, he is none the less elevated. You know this because you have read the Republic and are familiar with his manner. . . . This writer shows us, if only we were willing to pay him heed, that another way (beyond anything we have mentioned) leads to the sublime. And what, and what manner of way, may that be? It is the imitation and

emulation of previous great poets and writers. And let this, my dear friend, be an aim to which we steadfastly apply ourselves.⁸

No doubt this was the directive that prompted a poem published in the Bryn Mawr literary magazine, *Tipyn o'Bob*, that spring:

O Longinus,
Blot your name
From every page
We sigh and look and try
To intersperse
With our own thoughts,
A page, a book
But you laugh grim
In silent metre
(*Banish him—*)⁹

The poem suggests Moore's difficulty with imitation of the masters; it reveals that she knew Longinus when she was beginning to write. His work would continue to inspire and challenge her in later years.

A second incident with a professor also marked the young poet. Moore had enjoyed the Ben Greet Players' performance of *The Tempest* given at college. She wrote home that she loved the scene in which Trinculo discovers an inglorious, hidden Caliban and screams "What have we here? a man or a fish? . . . Legged like a man! and his fins like arms!" (Act II, Scene ii)¹⁰ In March, she turned the event into a poem in *Tipyn o'Bob*.¹¹

Ennui
He often expressed
A curious wish,
To be interchangeably

Man and fish;
To nibble the bait
Off the hook,
Said he,
And then slip away
Like a ghost
In the sea.

Dr. Charles Sanders, a professor of classics and a translator of Xenophon, lectured on the poem to his class (unknown to Moore) and said that the meter of its lines "interchangeably / Man and fish? was 'dithyramb glyconic'."¹² Later, he rewrote the poem to his satisfaction, revising the last three lines. He retitled the poem "Alkaios to Sappho" perhaps as a comment on the banishment of the two poets—although Moore does not comment on the title. She did say that the changes "of course were in the spirit of Plato and Homer—(Plato): 'He adjusted his wreath and walked off smiling to the sacrifice'."¹³ Sanders had queried the meaning and Moore said (in the same letter to her mother) that she had replied "I really put no hard and fast idea, that I excused myself for writing things that *had* no idea, by making use of the privilege of youth for if I waited till my thoughts no longer were inconsequent, I would not have incentive to write. . . . I felt like a mouse on a very high chair, nevertheless pleased." Moore kept Dr. Sanders' version of her poem in her copy of Shelley's *Poetical Works*, which she had with her at college. With or without Greek, to have been considered virtually a Greek poet by a classics professor must have left a deep impression on the young writer.

A third Bryn Mawr incident concerns a four-line poem published in *Tipyn o'Bob* as "Progress."¹⁴

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.

A substitute title, "Perseus to Polydectes," used when she submitted the poem to Bryn Mawr's alumnae magazine, ties the poem to Charles Kingsley's version of "The Story of Perseus." The evil Polydectes hopes to send Perseus to his death by ordering him to kill the Gorgon Medusa; the poem summarizes Perseus's reply. The telltale "fen" from Kingsley reveals the connection; it is not part of Moore's vocabulary, as she confirms years later when, introducing the poem, she remarked on its archaic quality.

This example of obscurantism—detaching the content of a poem from its context—stands for thousands of similar examples in Moore's poems. Moore added endnotes to her 1924 *Observations* in an attempt to refute the charge of obscurity but any reader lulled into thinking that the notes solved all the puzzles was mistaken. One wonders how many other veiled references to Greek myths may lie buried in the poems.

If the years at Bryn Mawr brought Moore in touch with her desire to learn Greek and introduced her to Longinus, the next decade provided literary friendships which drew her further along the same path. Hilda Doolittle, later famous as the poet H. D., belonged to Moore's class of 1909 although she left during her second year. The two women renewed their acquaintance in 1915 when Hilda saw a poem of Moore's in *The Egoist*.

H. D. early staked out Greek literature as her poetic inspiration, relying heavily on her reading of Euripides, Pausanias, and the Greek Anthology. Her companion, Annie Winifred Ellerman, a wealthy Englishwoman known as Bryher, shared that interest

and supported it by taking H. D. to Greece early in 1920. By that time, Bryher knew and admired Moore's work and she began to take up a friendship in correspondence with her.

Bryher and H. D. traveled to New York that fall where Moore welcomed them, helping to arrange places for them to stay in California during the winter. Upon meeting Moore, Bryher began to coax her to come to Greece, even offering to pay the fare, but Moore steadfastly refused: "I hope I am on the way to Greece though by the long way round If I seem to take your efforts too coolly, do not be deceived; your interest has helped me and in having been the occasion of your illusory sketch of a Pertains-flower-strewn Greece, I find rich satisfaction. (Letters, 137-38) Moore had a job at the New York Public Library and she could ill afford to risk losing it for a trip. Bryher kept up her promotion of what she thought best for Moore—even causing the publication of her first book, virtually secretly, in July 1921. When Bryher and H. D. returned to Greece in 1922, they bombarded her with prints and photographs: views of temples of Dionysus and Zeus, images of Amazons and Pan. Moore wrote to say she felt "transported" to Greece by their gifts of purse, scarf, and postcards.¹⁵ Her thanks were expressed by her research into guidebooks to Turkey which she thought the travelers might enjoy.

When Bryher published her own book of poems¹⁶ in the summer of 1922, Moore sent a letter of detailed appreciation and copied out, as those she relished most, the lines

It is the visible world that has shattered me,
Zeus, Zeus, with your lightning,
Grant me freedom from earth.¹⁷

The allusion to Zeus and Mt. Olympus complements Moore's photographs sent to H. D. with her next letter. She had taken

snapshots of Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies and Mt. Rainier in Washington State on a trip that summer. The references to both Mt. Olympus and Mt. Rainier would meet the next year when Moore began work on "An Octopus," a poem in which her experience of the American mountain and her longing for the fabled Greek one called forth one of her finest works.

II. Mentors

Q. What influence have the Greek . . . classics had upon your creative and/or critical work?

A. A strengthening effect—becoming wider and more unmistakable.

Q. Would you advise a young writer or critic to get himself a classical education?

A. By all means; ignorance of originals is suicide.¹⁸

Moore affirmed the importance to her of classical texts in this 1964 interview in *Arion*. In response to a question as to how the classics can survive without tainted classicists, she replied, "We have the Loeb Library," and to a question as to whether the classics have been imitated to death, she said "Originals are never 'used up'." These comments come from the end of her career—her last poem appeared a few years later—but their roots go back to her youth.

While she discovered Longinus in college and experienced there a moment's fame as a young "Greek poet," Moore claimed that she intended to become a painter. She professed to dash off her college poems without much care. But as soon as she had a job, teaching commercial subjects at the Carlisle Indian School

near her home, she began to write in earnest. In 1914 she left teaching to concentrate on poetry; her first professional publications emerged in 1915 in the little magazines, such as *Poetry*, *The Egoist*, and *Others*.

The poems of the early years, 1915 to about 1919, treat of matters of literary technique. Some of them state their subjects openly: "To William Butler Yeats on Tagore," "To the Peacock of France" (Molière). Others refer to writers unnamed but writers nonetheless whose work comes under her fire. Beginning about 1919, questions of technique and qualities of writing are subsumed by questions of behavior. In both cases, there are classical texts at the heart of the work.

What has been said [about word order, implausibility, clarity, rhythm] pertains to technique (*teknikos* from the Greek, akin to *tekto*: to produce or bring forth—as art, especially the useful arts). And indeed if technique is of no interest to a writer, I doubt the writer is an artist.¹⁹

Moore's modesty prevented her from considering herself an artist but her passionate interest in the *how* of poetry manifests itself in her 1957 lecture, "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," given at the University of California. Technique had been the subject of her research about writing poetry from as early as 1913 when she spotted a review of *The Greek Anthology* in the *London Spectator*. The reviewer commented:

Then again, the translator must struggle with difficulties arising from the fact that the Greeks regarded condensation in speech as a fine art. Demetrius, or whoever was the author of *De Elocutione*, said: "The first grace of style is that which results from compression."²⁰

Moore's resulting poem praised compression:

To a Snail

If "compression is the first grace of style,"

You have it. Contractility is a virtue
as modesty is a virtue.

It is not the acquisition of any one thing
that is able to adorn,

or the incidental quality that occurs
as a concomitant of something well said,

that we value in style,

but the principle that is hid;

in the absence of feet, "a method of conclusions";

"a knowledge of principle"

in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.²¹

It is likely that Moore had in hand the W. Rhys Roberts translation of Demetrius's *On Style* when she worked on this poem because she seems aware of the example of grace in Xenophon given there: "This man has really no part or lot in Greece, for he has (as I have myself seen) both ears pierced like a Lydian"; and so it was." Demetrius goes on to say: "The clinching stroke 'and so it was' has all the charm of brevity." (137)

Moore follows her plea for brevity with one for clarity: adornment and additions of the well said have little value. "I have a mania for straight writing," she wrote,²² echoing Demetrius's call for clarity when he addresses the plain style:

In the case of the plain style, we can no doubt point to subject-matter which is homely and appropriate to the style itself. . . . The diction throughout should be current and familiar. An expression is homelier the more familiar it is, while the unusual and metaphorical is elevated. (190)

Diction "current and familiar" would have set off bells for a poet who had learned her craft during the Edwardian and Georgian eras when florid diction still haunted poetry. Even Pound, the master modernist, was in 1912 still caught up by his Provençal enthusiasms and could write

Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw
there, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff a
portent . . .

Given the ways, the breath of the fields is thine there,
open lies the land, yet the steely going
darkly hast though dared the dreaded aether
parted before thee.²³

Pound uses archaic words to cast his medieval spell. Further, he reverses word order, a practice Moore allows without condoning it: "although one may reverse the order of words for emphasis, it should not be to rescue a rhyme."²⁴ To be fair, Pound is not rescuing a rhyme here, but "the steely going / darkly hast thou dared" seems more contrived than mere emphasis requires. In writing "To a Snail," Moore dismisses adornment, arguing for "something well said" in itself, all without a single reversal of word order.

"To a Snail" also opens a window on poetic meter when it praises the snail for its "absence of feet." In Moore's typical fashion, her allusion is somewhat cryptic. In her essay "Feeling and Precision," Moore looks to Longinus's *On the Sublime* to support her opinion about meter when she condemns "'weak rhythm' of the kind that 'enables the audience to foresee the ending and keep time with their feet,' disapproved by Longinus."²⁵ She is referring to this passage in Longinus:

There is nothing in the sphere of the sublime, that is so lowering as broken and agitated movement of language, such

as is characteristic of pyrrhics and trochees and dichorees, which fall altogether to the level of dance-music. For all over-rhythmical writing is at once felt to be affected and finical and wholly lacking in passion owing to the monotony of its superficial polish. And the worst of it all is that, just as petty lays draw their hearer away from the point and compel his attention to themselves, so also over-rhythmical style does not communicate the feeling of the words but simply the feeling of the rhythm.

Sometimes, indeed, the listeners knowing beforehand the due terminations stamp their feet in time with the speaker, and as in a dance give the right step in anticipation.²⁶

"Absence of feet" and no "weak rhythm," in fact no metrical feet at all characterize Moore's rhythm. Her modernist colleagues, during their apprentice years, talked of free verse, speech rhythms, and learned to eschew both rhyme and conventional meter. Moore struck out on a new path, one likely influenced by her appreciation for Demetrius and Longinus who addressed style and tone of writing rather than the mechanics of sound. Later called syllabic meter, Moore's rhythms owed their origins to prose, natural word order, and organization by logical grammar with rhymes, in her early work, as visual, not metrical, punctuation.

Demetrius also insists on the use of natural word order as a caution against ambiguity:

In general, the natural order of words should be followed. . . No doubt the order might be reversed. . . . We do not absolutely approve the one order nor condemn the other, when simply setting forth the natural method of arranging words. (199-200)

His goal is to avoid obscurity. Moore fought against obscurity throughout her career, but, as "To a Snail" suggests, she rarely succeeded. She wrote that "we must be as clear as our natural reticence allows us to be."²⁷ Other poems confirm her struggle. From "An Ardent Platonist," 1918:

. . . to be philosophical is to be no longer mysterious; one is under no obligation then, to say what one thinks in order to be understood.²⁸

And in her famous "Poetry," 1919, when the elements of poetry

. . . 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.²⁹

When we look back at "To a Snail," we find anything but transparency. But the point is that Moore strove for clarity, waging war against elliptical expression, missing referents, and recondite descriptions. Even if she did not always—or even often—achieve great clarity, the fact that she found clarity problematic points to her reverence for the precepts of her Greek style consultants.

Another precept that Moore took to heart stems from Demetrius's notion of propriety. Demetrius addresses the use of the four styles: grand, elegant, plain and forceful. He writes that:

There are, however, people who hold that we ought to use grand language of little things. They regard this as a proof of surpassing power. . . . But fitness must be observed, whatever the subject; and in other words the style must be appropriate,—subdued for humble topics, lofty for high themes. (120)

Moore's preoccupation with this kind of propriety in a poem called "Propriety" comes to light only when understood with Demetrius's definition in mind. While part of the poem discusses propriety in musical composition, much of it concerns writing:

Propriety

is some such word
as the chord
Brahms had heard
from a bird,

sung down near the root of the throat;

.....

The fish spine
on firs, on
somber trees
by the sea's

walls of wave-worn rock have it; . . .

.....

It's an owl-and-a-pussy-

both content
agreement.

Come, come. It's
mixed with wits;
it's not a graceful sadness.³⁰

The first three images—birdsong, trees, and Lear's "The Owl and the Pussy Cat" (the agreement is to use the Piggy's nose ring for their nuptials) range from the cheerful and somber aspects of nature to playful fantasy. In the same way that the birdsong suits Brahms's melody, so, too, the fish-shaped image suits the trees by the rough ocean. The Lear poem has the right proportion of subject and style, an amusing tale told with wit, all with propriety.

"Propriety" from the 1950s summarizes a practice learned from Demetrius. "To a Steam Roller" from 1915 criticizes a writer for lack of propriety:

The illustration

is nothing to you without the application.

You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.

Sparkling chips of rock

are crushed down to the level of the parent block.³¹

While the writer addressed is not named, a poet like Vachel Lindsay comes to mind. A favorite of Harriet Monroe at *Poetry*, where Moore felt less and less at home during the decade between 1910–1920, Lindsay remained pre-modernist. His "General William Booth Enters into Heaven" has the rhythm of a march played by a brass band:

Booth led boldly with his big brass drum.

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

The saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Walking lepers following rank on rank,

Lurching bravos from the ditches dank

Drabs the alleyways and drug fiends pale--

Minds still passion ridden, soul flowers frail:

Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath,

Unwashed legions with the ways of Death—³²

One can interpret the relentless rhythm—march or hymn—as the "chips crushed down to the level of the parent block." The use of hymn rhythm to satirize the founder of the Salvation Army may in itself lack propriety, as may such word-choice as "vermin-eaten saints." Moore, liberal yet respectful concerning matters of reli-

gion, would certainly have found the poem's premise and its use of ugliness to describe Booth's sincere followers entirely improper. Whether or not her steam roller refers to Lindsay, Moore demonstrates her lack of sympathy for a writer who flattens what should stand out and writes without attention to propriety of style.

For another example of propriety, Moore turns to Xenophon. We have followed her college experience with Bryn Mawr's classics professor over her poem about Perseus. At the end of the same school year, Moore sent her mother a list of possible graduation presents including Henry T. Wharton's edition of Sappho and Xenophon's treatise *On Hunting (Cynegeticus)*.³³ She received the Xenophon in the Dakyns translation.³⁴ A decade later, Moore attended her tenth college reunion, re-encountered Dr. Sanders, and said she would be pleased to receive a copy of his dissertation on Xenophon's essay on hunting.³⁵ By September, she finished "Picking and Choosing," a poem about literary matters and Xenophon which appeared in *The Dial* in April 1920.

What fascinated Moore in Xenophon's essay, to judge by the portions she copied into her notebook of quotations useful for poems, was the proper hound needed for hunting. She transcribed the first part of pages 83 and 85:

In the first place, this true type of hound should be of large build; and in the next place, furnished with a light small head, broad and flat in the snout, well knit and sinewy, the looser part of the forehead puckered into strong wrinkles . . . while even and again they give a right good salvo of barks.

She takes care to choose the expression about the kind of barking from an alternate reading given in a footnote, far more colorful than the main text's "while even and again they give tongue and yet again till the very welkin rings."

The hound Moore fashions from these quotations appears in her 1920 poem as a kind of antidote to bad writing:

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. Words are constructive
when they are true; the opaque allusion—the simulated flight
upward—accomplishes nothing.

Small dog, going over the lawn, nipping the linen and saying
that you have a badger—remember Xenophon;
only the most 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, are all we ask.³⁶]

The small dog here behaves like a writer guilty of "the simulated flight upward," claiming the impossible, the scent of a badger. He makes a fuss over nothing while Xenophon's hounds show propriety in the right amount of barking to alert the hunter to the nearness of the prey. Further, the small dog acts like a writer guilty of unconstructive, useless words while Xenophon writes in words appropriate to his subject—true words. For Xenophon, "literature is a phase of life." His admirable propriety, in line with Demetrius's sense of style, stands revealed even in brief excerpts, even in translation.

Moore also copied excerpts from the translator's introduction to *On Hunting*:

The idiosyncrasy of Xenophon [means] that he was emphatically pious, that he had a naturally or Socratically-induced propensity to educate others, and that he possessed

... the shrewdness and practical wit of his fellow-countrymen, along with a sense of beauty ... part and parcel of his Attic inheritance.³⁷

By "idiosyncrasy" Dakyns means "personal equation"; when Moore uses idiosyncrasy, she refers to "personality"—much the same thing, pre- and post-Freud. With her Ewing Lecture for the University of California in 1957, Moore capped her long history of learning from Xenophon and Demetrius by entitling her talk "Idiosyncrasy and Technique." In that lecture, she acknowledges that "there is no substitute for individuality—that which is peculiar to the person (the Greek *idoma*)" and that everything she says about technique is derived from the Greek "to produce or bring forth—as art, especially the useful arts."³⁸ With "useful" she also echoes Xenophon's conclusion to *On Hunting* where the writer reproaches the Sophists for their lack of wholesome sentiments by which the young might be trained:

It may well be that I fail to express myself in subtle language, nor do I pretend to aim at subtlety; what I do aim at is to express rightly-conceived thoughts such as may serve the needs of those who have been nobly disciplined in virtue; . . . For I would wish my writing not to seem but rather to be useful. I would have them stand the test of time in their blamelessness.³⁹

"Useful" leads to the statement of writing as a moral act; Moore contends: "The most important influence on my writing technically has been ethical."⁴⁰ The links between idiosyncrasy and technique and between them both and ethics and morality capture exactly what Moore set out to do in her poetry: to make a useful art in the service of right living. "Poetry, I, too, dislike it," she said; what I write is not poetry but verse, she often asserted. Verse—the useful art. Ethics—the life that art engenders.

Moore learned well the lessons of her Greek mentors. By 1924, when her modernist period reached its full flowering, she would apply them to her longest, and arguably most important poem, "An Octopus." There she found other Greeks—historical and mythological—on the peaks of an American mountain, the realm of the sublime and of Olympian transformations.

III. Mountain Peaks

[When Nature] appointed us men to be no base nor ignoble animals; but when she ushers us into life and into the vast universe as into some great assembly, to be as it were spectators of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirants for honor, forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we. . . . This is why, by a sort of natural impulse, we admire not the small streams, useful and pellucid though they be, but the Nile, the Danube or the Rhine, and still more the Ocean. Nor do we view the tiny flame of our own kindling. . . . nor do we deem it a greater marvel than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw up stones from its depths and great masses of rock, and at times pour forth rivers of that pure and unmixed subterranean fire.⁴¹

In this way Longinus makes his case for man's longing for the sublime. In general, the journey into the sublime takes two paths—the one through majesty and physical greatness, the other through high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth. Longinus expresses the first; Moore, in "An Octopus," addresses both. Here she portrays the majesty of America's ghostly peak, Mt. Rainier (local residents are heard to inquire if the mountain is "out" today) and she examines the morality of its inhabitants and its visitors.

Moore selects transformation as a tool to sketch her mountain, as the first four words of her poem suggest: "An octopus of ice." She takes mountain scenery, anticipated by all to be sublimely beautiful, and transforms it by permitting its invisible characteristics to show forth; the magnificent mountain in the distance belies the unsettling and "creepy" behavior of an octopus. "The power of the visible / is the invisible," she wrote.⁴² The power of Mt. Rainier is the volcano at its heart.

"An Octopus" began for Moore on a trip to Mt. Rainier, Washington, in the summer of 1922. Still longing to travel to Greece with Bryher and H.D., Moore accompanied her mother across the country for a reunion with her brother, John Warner Moore, a naval chaplain whose ship would spend the summer in drydock across Puget Sound from the mountain. The highlight of their stay was a motor trip to Paradise Park, about 5,000 feet up the peak, near the timberline. They spent the night at Paradise Inn and hiked the paths to the dramatic Nisqually Glacier. Marianne and Warner rented stout boots and climbed, roped together with other adventurers, to the ice caves—in the poem, "grottoes from which issue penetrating drafts / which make you wonder why you came." They encountered—as it is impossible not to—the marmot, the badger-like "Victim of a 'struggle between curiosity and caution' / inquiring what has scared it." They admired the water ouzel, "with its passion for rapids and high-pressured falls," and the rat, "slipping along to its burrow in the swamp." Badger, ouzel, and rat stand for the Moore's nicknames in use at the time—regular minor transformations in which they always indulged—chosen in the poem to represent the presence of the family's experience on Mt. Rainier.⁴³

In writing a poem, Moore never satisfied herself with her

direct experience of an event or a place but rather sought verbal and pictorial matter to assist her composition. At Mt. Rainier, she acquired the official park handbook, a score of postcards; back at home, she added a work on the Canadian Rockies through which her train had passed, a host of articles found at the New York Library branch where she worked, and books by such naturalists as John Muir and John Burroughs—an arsenal of material. She copied out passages in one notebook and filled another with her own reworkings of quotations, making a poem out of the pieces. In these early drafts, one finds a kind of Mt. Rainier meets Mt. Olympus, the American West and Attic Greece. It appears that after sketching a poem focused on Mt. Rainier, she discovered the Greek component that interested her—largely from John Henry Newman's *Historical Sketches*—and repeatedly added "the Greeks" to her notes on Rainier. No other intermediary drafts of the poem survive. She sent the fully realized poem to *The Dial* in late summer 1924.

"An Octopus" appeared in November.⁴⁴ Moore's longest poem, it runs to 231 lines. It imagines Mt. Rainier as an octopus and as a volcano. Seen from above, or as mapped, the mountain appears to have eight white glaciers stretching down its sides. Moore takes up this image, turning the glaciers into tentacles or arms of a creature deep in a "sea of shifting snow dunes." The octopus "hovers forward" "on its arms" and kills its "prey with the concentric crushing rigor of the python."

Above the sea rises the forest, the fir trees "specimens of our American royal families." The trees part to reveal a lake of "indigo, pea-green, blue-green and turquoise"—"The Goat's Mirror," their reflections lost when "the wind makes lanes of ripples." Fauna populate this realm, including "elk, deer, wolves, goats,

and ducks." Bears live in dens "concealed in the confusion / of 'blue stone forests thrown together with marble and jasper and agate / as if whole quarries had been dynamited."

These lines introduce the image of Mt. Rainier as a volcano, the results of eruption visible in the fallen rock above the timberline. Near the peak, the mountain goat "stands its ground

upon this antique pedestal —

"a mountain with those graceful lines which prove it a volcano,"

its top a complete cone like Fujiyama's
till an explosion blew it off.

Having shown us the peak, Moore steps back to review this Big Snow Mountain "distinguished by a beauty / of which 'the visitor dare never fully speak at home / for fear of being stoned as an imposter. . . .'" This mountain reveals the roosts and nests of eagles, ptarmigan, and water ouzels. It welcomes mountain goats and campers who have filed "names and addresses of persons to notify / in case of disaster." It harbors a dazzling array of wild flowers: cat's paws, larkspur, blue pincushions, avalanche lilies; it "admires gentians, lady-slippers, harebells, mountain dryads / and Calypso, the goat flower" "on this volcano with the bluejay, her principal companion." The bluejay

knows no Greek, the pastime of Calypso and Ulysses —

"that pride producing language,"

in which "rashness is rendered innocuous, and error exposed by the collision of knowledge with knowledge."

There follows a long description of Greek behavior, intelligence, interests, and ideas, all "remote" from "this game preserve" where climbers must do as they are told if they hope to "conquer the main peak."

The marine images recur as Moore begins her conclusion:

Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact.

"Creeping slowly as with meditated stealth,
its arms seeming to approach from all directions,"
it receives one under winds that "tear the snow to bits
and hurl it like a sandblast,
shearing off twigs and loose bark from the trees."
Finally, this "hard mountain" is a
white volcano with no weather side;
the lightning flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak —
the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed,
its claw cut by the avalanche
"with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
in a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall."

This prosaic summary cannot do justice to the eloquence of Moore's poetry; it is meant only as a guide to an extremely intricate work, full of quoted passages, seeming non-sequiturs, catalogs of flora and fauna—and Greeks.

Moore's elaborate tapestry has a message—or several messages, concerning right living in her introduction of two Greek elements. Her first, the practice of behavior "so noble and so fair" derives from John Henry Newman's "The Idea of a University," his lectures urging the formation of what is now University College, Dublin, the first Catholic university in the British Isles. Her second, the Calypso "goat-flower," Ulysses and the mountain goat, Pan, flow from her immersion in Greek myth. These two aspects of Moore's Greeks will center this discussion of the poem and lead to an interpretation of its messages.

Leaving aside for the moment the introduction of Calypso,

Ulysses and the language of Greece, I want to focus on the Greeks Moore brings as visitors to Mt. Rainier:

"Like happy souls in Hell,"
enjoying mental difficulties,
the golden grasshoppers of Greece
amused themselves with delicate behavior
because it was "so noble and so fair"

This passage begins with a reference to Dante's *Inferno*⁴⁵: "And then you will see those who are happy in hell, for they hope to come, whenever the time shall be, among the blessed. (I, 118-120) Virgil explains the course of their travels to Dante and these lines describe their ascent of Mt. Purgatory. Right off, Moore uses a transformation to create her uniquely styled Greeks. While Dante places Homer and his cohort of heathens in the first circle of hell where the unbaptized suffer the pain of desiring to see God without hope of doing so, Moore moves them to purgatory from which they will one day achieve heaven.

These are the Greeks who, according to Newman, chose propriety as their principle of conduct

as became so exquisite a people, and preferred to practice virtue on no inferior consideration, but simply because it was so praiseworthy, so noble and so fair. Not that they discarded law . . . but they boasted that "grasshoppers" like them, old of race and pure of blood, could be influenced in their conduct by nothing short of a fine and delicate taste, a sense of honor, and an elevated, aspiring spirit.⁴⁶

Propriety, here, reflects the propriety prescribed by Demetrius—in his case the suitability of style to theme, in Newman's the matching of exquisite people and praiseworthy behavior. If there is logic in these two aspects of Athenian life, it emerges as a

life of propriety yielding salvation, a transformation to Christian redemption from pagan status. Moore's Greeks do not fall from nobility in the way of Newman's who deified the beautiful and so fell into dissolution; Moore's maintain their dignity.

The Greeks in the poem also ascribe

what we clumsily call happiness,
to "an accident or a quality,
a spiritual substance or the soul itself,
an act or a disposition or a habit
or a habit infused to which the soul has been persuaded,
or something distinct from a habit, a power--"
such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of.

This passage comes from a treatise on heaven by a seventeenth-century English non-conformist preacher, Richard Baxter.⁴⁷ The most Catholic of Puritans, Baxter preached to Cromwell and Charles II alike, a feat suggestive of the mind-bending arguments for which he distilled his theology. Here he addresses the question: is there an internal spiritual life in persons? His answer, this list of perhaps this, perhaps that, culminates in a guess at a prelapsarian inner life that still eludes us.

I think Moore's interpolation of these philosophical-sounding lines into her listing of the Greeks' activities functions to suggest that the Athenians loved philosophy and argument. Newman, in proposing his idea of a university, offers a passage from which Moore quotes when she addresses Greek as a "pride-producing language":

[The University] is the place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. (16)

That is not to suggest that Moore confused Christian theological speculation with Greek philosophy—she was keenly aware of the difference. But as she adjusted the positions of the ancient poets in Dante, she here juxtaposes Greeks and a Christian disquisition on heaven. This edging toward Christianity in the poem will continue.

The Greeks liked smoothness, distrusting what was back
of what could not be clearly seen
resolving with benevolent conclusiveness,
“complexities which will remain complexities
as long as the world lasts”

Another piece from the same page of Baxter, reworded, has the Greeks resolving unending complexities, an inherent contradiction. It follows two lines which, we know from her working notes, commanded her attention for weeks while she developed the poem. In the notebook⁴⁶ she repeatedly associates smoothness and distrusting the unseen with “the Goat’s Mirror,” the beautiful lake at the beginning of the poem, whose reflective surface is disturbed by the wind. She makes notes to the effect that if offered a goat’s mirror as a gift, no Greek would want it, no Greek would value looking at the mottled surface which renders the “two hundred feet deep” lake opaque. Why the distrust, the fear?

We begin to see idealism and realism clash on Mt. Rainier, to see the visible and the invisible at odds. Moore seems to say that the Hellenes, so aptly suited by their lives of propriety, their reverence for beauty, their genius for undertaking responsibility for the core of Western civilization, cannot cope with the unnerving landscape of a vast North American wilderness. While through their culture, they may look deeply into the human heart,

they do not pursue the power behind it, the power of the invisible that informs the visible.

Not at home in the forest, the Greeks were

not practiced in adapting their intelligence
to eagle traps and snowshoes,
to alpenstocks and other toys contrived by those
“alive to the advantage of invigorating pleasures.”

Nor did they understand that in “new countries,” “the forest affords wood for dwellings / and by its beauty stimulates / the moral vigor of its citizens.” And finally, the Stoics among them, “emotionally sensitive” but hard of heart, would not unbend to the rough magic of the wilderness:

their wisdom was remote
from that of these odd oracles of cool official sarcasm,
upon this game preserve
where “guns, nets, seines, traps, and explosives,
hired vehicles, gambling, and intoxicants are prohibited,
disobedient persons being summarily removed
and not allowed to return without permission in writing.”

The Greeks found themselves in alien territory, a game preserve whose “oracles” offer rules and demand discipline.

We have to conclude either that the proper Greeks, so prominent in the poem, would have been forced out of Mt. Rainier National Park or that Moore never intended them to arrive at all. Moore’s discussion of them creates a foil to her exposition of the pleasures ready for the outdoorsman and the discipline needed by the climber who would ascend to the peak. By virtue of their virtual presence, they escape expulsion from this postlapsarian Garden of Eden and they escape the destruction by avalanche that ends the poem.

Calypso, however, remains.

this treacherous glass mountain
admires gentians, lady-slippers, harebells, mountain dryads,
and "Calypso, the goat flower—
that greenish orchid fond of snow"—
anomalously nourished upon shelving glacial ledges
where climbers have not gone or have gone timidly,
"the one resting his nerves while the other advanced,"
on this volcano, with the bluejay, her principal companion.
"Hopping stiffly on sharp feet" like miniature icehacks—
"secretive, with a look of wisdom and distinction, but a villain,
fond of human society or the crumbs that go with it,"
he knows no Greek, the pastime of Calypso and Ulysses[.]

Calypso bulbosa, a tiny lady-slipper, grows right at the timberline on Mt. Rainier, often poking up through the snow to bloom in earliest summer. Calypso the sea nymph detained Odysseus on Ogygia for seven years. "Calypso" means hidden or "hider"; as snow hides the flower, so the nymph hid Odysseus. Moore affects a transformation here, flower into nymph, mountain dweller into sea goddess. Calypso behaves like a mountain flower; it grows on "glacial ledges" and survives snow. Calypso also acts like the Homeric nymph; she speaks Greek with Odysseus, passing the time pursuing knowledge.

Moore sets Calypso higher up the mountain than the ordinary range of vegetation where it is "anomalously nourished." The "glassy" mountain admires it, and "glassy" reflects the mountain as octopus, the sea creature, and calypso as sea nymph. But with her sleight of hand, Moore makes Calypso a mountain nymph, the "goat flower." In a poem webbed with quotations, "goat flower" is pure poetic invention. Calypso conceals yet another relationship, one to the mountain goat and, in fact, to Pan.

"Greece with its goat and its gourds, / the nest of modified illusion," Moore wrote in a poem in 1920. Note that "goat" is singular. Where in Greece is there but one goat except in Arcadia. Is this too far a reach? Moore's working notebook for "An Octopus" shows that the poet tried repeatedly to work Pan's name into her poem but in the end, she preferred to conceal him in the figure of the mountain goat.

Just as Calypso inhabits the uppermost range of mountain flora, so, too, the goat commands the highest range of fauna.

And farther up in stag-at-bay position
as a scintillating fragment of these terrible stalagmites,
stands the goat,

.....

A special antelope

.....

it stands its ground
on cliffs the color of the clouds, of petrified white vapor—
black feet, eyes, nose, and horns engraved on dazzling
icefields,
the ermine body on the crystal peak;
the sun kindling its shoulders to maximum heat like
acetylene,
dyeing them white;

In mountaineering practice of old, a goat in "stag-at-bay" position, higher up the mountain than a hunter, would be spared; when Mt. Rainier became a national park, the Park Service banned all hunting:

"guns, nets, seines, traps, and explosives,
hired vehicles, gambling, and intoxicants are prohibited,
disobedient persons being summarily removed
and not allowed to return without permission in writing."

Like Calypso, the goat keeps himself elusive, nearly invisible, white against "cliffs the color of the clouds."

Moore's notes of the goat's appearance take an unusual turn when she describes its whiteness. The sun kindles the goat's shoulders "to maximum heat," an image of burning that foreshadows the image of the mountain as volcano:

"a mountain with those graceful lines which prove it a volcano,"
its top a complete cone like Fujiyama's
till an explosion blew it off.

This mountain goat with its flowers and its mirror unbeloved of Moore's Newman-derived intellectual Athenians, stands for Pan.

Models for Pan in poetry abound and Moore must have known many of them. Pound had published "Pan is Dead" in the *Smart Set* in 1912:

"Pan is dead. Great Pan is dead.
Ah! Bow your heads, ye maidens all,
And weave ye him a coronal."

"There is no summer in the leaves
And withered are the sedges;
How shall we weave a coronal,
Or gather floral pledges?"

"That I may not say, Ladies.
Death was ever a churl.
That I may not say, Ladies.
How should he show a reason,
That he has taken our Lord away
Upon such hollow season?"¹⁴⁹

For the purposes of the poem, Pound accepted the Plutarchian version of Pan's demise, "Great Pan is dead" sung out over the seas. Pound's speaker and the maidens curiously refer to Pan as "our Lord" in whose absence nature withers. One wonders whether he were mindful of the Christian reference.

Oscar Wilde, whose work Moore met at Bryn Mawr, has a different view in his "Pan: Double Villanelle":

O goat-foot God of Arcady!
This modern world is grey and old,
And what remains to us of thee?

.....
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady,
Thy satyrs and their wanton play,
This modern world hath need of thee.

This is the land where liberty
Lit grave-browed Milton on his way,
This modern world hath need of thee!

A land of ancient chivalry
Where gentle Sidney saw the day,
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady!

Then blow some trumpet loud and free,
And give thine oaten pipe away,
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady!
This modern world hath need of thee!¹⁵⁰

For Wilde, Pan still inhabits Arcadia, the utopian pastoral landscape which Pan ruled. Wilde invokes Sidney's *Arcadia*, the pastoral romance that acknowledges Pan's importance; he refers to *Paradise Lost* where Satan views the Garden of Eden where

[M]urmuring waters fall
 Down the slope hills, dispersed, or in a Lake,
 That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crowned,
 The Birds their quire apply; airs, vernal airs,
 Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
 The trembling leaves, while Universal Pan
 Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance
 Led on the Eternal Spring ⁵¹ (IV, 260-268)

Milton's "Eternal Spring" contains the twin notions of expulsion from Eden and the certainty of death for mankind. But from Wilde's point of view in late Victorian England, Milton's freedom and Sidney's chivalry have both waned; he cries out for Pan's naturalness and high spirits,

Death haunts Pan's legend. The year before she read Pound's poem "Pan is Dead," Moore must have seen the great canvas at the Louvre by Nicolas Poussin, "*Et in Arcadia Ego*," the title usually rendered "death, even in Arcadia." In the painting, shepherds trace out those words in the partially visible carving on a tomb. The melancholy shepherds mourn the passing of Pan: even in Arcadia, death prevails.

Death ultimately prevails on Mt. Rainier. As the poem builds to its conclusion, references to the "glassy octopus" and the "white volcano" mount. Although possibly distracted by images of the mountain's gorgeous flora and diverting fauna, we are aware that the poet prepares us for danger. Moore labels the mountain with telltale words: misleading, cold, explosive, treacherous, inimical. "Creeping slowly as with meditative stealth, / its arms seeming to approach from all directions," lightning, rain, and snow pummel it until "its claw cut by the avalanche / 'with a sound like the crack of a rifle, / in a curtain of powdered snow

launched like a waterfall.' " The avalanche, the disaster against which climbers filed names of next of kin, ends the poem.

An avalanche affects people, not goats, lakes, or flowers, all naturally protected from snow. In the poem, it cuts off the observer from the mountain. It acts "like a waterfall," a phrase that harkens back to the mountain goat,

its eye fixed on the waterfall which never seems to fall—
 an endless skein swayed by the wind,
 immune to the force of gravity in the perspective of the peaks.

That waterfall seems not to move, not to follow gravity; it appears a steady thing like the focus of the goat's eye. The avalanche-waterfall pours down with such power that it cuts one of the mountain's claws, one of the glaciers. The mountain, "this fossil flower concise without a shiver / intact when it is cut," changes but it does not die. It remains, however, subject to two dangers, one natural, one man-made.

Mt. Rainier, a volcano that last erupted in 1870, lies dormant but not extinct. We know from the experience of Mt. St. Helen's eruption in the 1980s, with its killing lava flows and pervasive ash, the effects of such an event—it devastates any living thing in its path. Mt. Rainier could erupt again, and if it does, the long cycle of recovery will begin again. The mountain's ability to erupt is part of its majesty, its beautiful exterior powered by the force of its burning interior, and its sublimity.

As a national park, Mt. Rainier enjoys protected status; forest rangers maintain the beauty of its environment. When Moore visited the park in 1922, guns, explosives and the like had been banned, their bearers expelled. But man's folly is the enemy of the mountain and its inhabitants. Its survival demands the

cooperation of a highly moral citizenry, its government, and its laws. Were the current protective laws to change, were logging and building allowed in the park, devastation of the environment would follow, leaving its recovery to later generations.

Death and recovery, in terms of nature, lead to sin and redemption, in terms of Christianity. Another poet links redemption and Pan. Ben Jonson, in a masque of 1620,⁵² writes:

Pan is our all, by him we breathe, we live,
We move, we are; 'tis he our lambs doth rear,
Our flocks doth bless, and from the store doth give
The warm and finer fleeces that we wear.
He keeps away all heats and colds,
Drives all diseases from our folds,
Makes everywhere the spring to dwell.
The ewes to feed, their udders swell;
But if he frown, the sheep (alas),
The shepherds wither, and the grass.
Strive, strive to please him then by still increasing thus
The rites are due to him, who doth all right for us.

The poet takes his inspiration from the New Testament where Luke describes St. Paul preaching in Athens:

Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of

your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man. In him we live and move and have our being.⁵³

For Jonson, no distance separates Paul-Athens-the Christian God-Pan. Pan, he says, must be appeased; if we fail to honor him, we wither.

Moore never forged so tight a relationship between Pan and Christianity as Jonson did. She hesitated, always, to quote from religious sources. Instead, she kept her expression at one remove, maintaining ostensible secularity. But it is hard to ignore what she does with her mountain goat, a creature of yellowish, ragged fleece which she transforms: "the ermine body on the crystal peak; / the sun kindling its shoulders to maximum heat like acetylene, / dyeing them white." It stands "on cliffs the color of the clouds, of petrified white vapor," ermine on crystal. The blinding whiteness meeting the power of the sun near the top of the mountain surely echoes a famous scriptural passage:

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them.⁵⁴

The point here is the transforming power, the whitening, the effect on mountain goat-Pan that Moore applies on Mt. Rainier and that the images are consistent in place, color and importance with their scriptural antecedent.

With that in mind, we may argue that Pan, the mountain goat, rules the Arcadia that is Mt. Rainier National Park. He represents not only the transformation of the native goat but also the power of nature to survive even the force of a volcano. When he is absent, whether metaphorically as in Pound's "Pan is dead" or naturally, if the victim of human folly, nature withers.

Mt. Olympus did not welcome Pan any more than did Moore's severe, intellectual and Apollonian Greeks, preferring sublimity of style but not that of the wilderness. Pan's sublimity for Moore flows from his steadfast presence in his natural milieu, her Arcadia, an environment that, given man's propensities, could wither. Obliging, Pan represents redemption through right-living, his own, as a proper mountain goat, and mankind's, through the standards the caretakers of Mt. Rainier must observe to insure its survival.

Moore's mountain has an additional transformative property derived from its function as poetry. "An Octopus" resists analysis like the modernist poem that it is. But by the beauty of its images, the juxtaposition of its ideas, and the majesty of its topic, it effects change in the reader. One enters its non-rational world and comes out changed. Although unexpressed by Moore, that effect is clearly one she sought. The highly ethical act of writing a poem about an endangered American arcadia resulted in an ethical experience for her readers. She chose Pan, not Apollo, to represent that kingdom of life and freedom, proprieties and demands, all in the service of stewardship of nature.

Pausanias is said to have reported after Pan's death had been declared that shrines to Pan all over Greece drew worshippers. Perhaps there is still one active shrine in North America.

Notes

1. From *When I Was Sixteen*, ed. Mary Brannum. New York, 1967. In *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (New York: Viking, 1986), 665.
2. Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes, or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*. (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1856).
3. *A Wonder-book, Tanglewood Tales, and Grandfather's Chair* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1883).
4. Kingsley, 10.
5. Today a statue of Pallas Athena stands in a college hall and underclasswomen who violate school traditions must sacrifice something to the goddess of wisdom. The statue is also supposed to bring luck and at finals time, the area surrounding it holds many offerings from hopeful students.
6. Marianne Moore, *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Christanne Miller (New York: Knopf, 1997) 123.
7. *Selected Letters*, 53.
8. *Longinus on the Sublime*, ed. and trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge: University Press, 1899) 13.
9. *Selected Letters*, 123.
10. Unpublished letter to Mary Warner Moore, May 26, 1907. Rosenbach Museum & Library.
11. *Tipyn o' Bob* 6 (Spring 1907), 7.
12. Glyconic denotes a Greek and Roman meter that consists of a spondee, a choriamb, and an iamb /' /' ~ ~' / ~' /.
13. *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 5 (Spring 1981), 23-24.
14. 8 (June 1909), 10.

15. Unpublished letter, April 14, 1922. Rosenbach Museum & Library.
16. Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), *Arrow Music* (London: J. E. Bumpus, 1922).
17. Unpublished letter, August 21, 1922. Rosenbach Museum & Library.
18. An *Arion* Questionnaire: The Classics and the Man of Letters (1964), *Prose* 690.
19. "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," 1957, *Prose* 510.
20. Pasted in to Moore's scrapbook from 1910-1913 and noted as dated May 10, 1913. The identity of the author of *On Style* remains in doubt but Demetrius is the name given him. Moore, like the reviewer, had access to *Demetrius on Style* with introduction, translation, facsimiles, etc., by W. Rhys Roberts, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1902. Rhys translates the beginning of paragraph 137 as "The very first grace of style is that which results from compression, when a thought which would have been spoiled by dwelling on it is made graceful by a light and rapid touch."
21. *Observations* (New York: The Dial Press, 1924), 23. When first written, about 1915, this poem conformed to Moore's syllabic meter with two rhymed stanzas, but it was not published until 1924 when it had undergone considerable revision. The original version is in the Rosenbach Museum & Library.
22. "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," *Prose* 509.
23. "Apparuit," in *Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Michael John King (New York: New Directions, 1976), 182. Originally published in *The English Review*, 1912.
24. "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," *Prose* 509.
25. *Sewanee Review*, 1944. *Prose* 410.
26. *Longinus*, 41.
27. "Feeling and Precision," *Prose* 396.

28. *Bryn Mawr Lantern* (1918), 22.
29. As published in Marianne Moore, *Poems* (London: Egoist Press, 1921) 22.
30. Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems* (New York: Viking, 1967), 174.
31. *Complete Poems*, 84.
32. *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry*, ed. Oscar Williams (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 155.
33. *Letters*, 71.
34. *The Works of Xenophon, Vol. III, Part II. Three Essays: On the Duties of a Cavalry General, On Horsemanship, On Hunting*, trans. H. G. Dakyns (London: Macmillan, 1897).
35. Unpublished letter to John Warner Moore, June 8, 1919. Rosenbach Museum & Library.
36. *The Dial* 68 (April 1920), 420-421.
37. *Xenophon*, xxv.
38. "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," *Prose* 509.
39. *Xenophon*, 124.
40. "The Education of a Poet," 1963. *Prose* 572.
41. *Longinus*, 35.
42. "He Digesteth Hard Yron," *Complete Poems*, 100.
43. Badger and Rat (Warner and Marianne) from *Wind in the Willows* were life-long nicknames; Ouzel was adopted for Mrs. Moore on the trip.
44. *The Dial* 77 (November 1924), 475-481. This is the version used in this study. Moore revised the poem with some frequency thereafter, omitting about 25 lines and altering others.
45. *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Israel Gollancz (London: J. M. Dent, 1906).

46. *Historical Sketches* (London: B. M. Pickering, 1872), 80.
47. Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, ed. William Young (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1909), 18-19.
48. Notebook 1250/17, Rosenbach Museum & Library, 77ff.
49. Erra Poud, *Personae*, ed. Lee Bachelder and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990) 67-68.
50. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121-122.
51. *The Portable Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush (New York: Penguin, 1977) 318-319.
52. "Hymn 2" in *Pan's Anniversary* in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) 313.
53. *Acts of the Apostles*, 17: 18-24, 28.
54. *Mark* 8:39-9:28.

One thousand copies printed in November 2001

in connection with the Eighth Annual

Kimon Friar Lecture in

Neo-Hellenic Arts

& Letters.

Typography and Design

by Matthew Jennett.

Twenty-four

Greek-lettered, large-paper copies

have been sewn into wrappers

and signed by

the author

here.