Introduction: The Achievement of Marianne Moore

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I.

Stories about "the first time I met Marianne Moore" are so numerous and so vivid, they seem to dominate the existing historical record of the poet's life, giving our collective memory of her the attitude of continuous surprise. She made a stunning first impression and, lucky for those of us who never met her, many of the people she startled could not resist the impulse to "write up" the experience. Something about it, apparently, suggested the appropriateness of making a formal record. A typical story of a momentous first meeting, and my personal favorite among the dozens that exist, is that of the literary historian and English professor William Wasserstrom, who met "Miss Moore" in 1958 over lunch at the Schrafft's on Forty-Second Street.

A few weeks before the meeting Moore's friend Hildegarde Watson mentioned to her that Wasserstrom, a friend of Watson's who lived near her in Syracuse, New York, wanted to meet with Moore in order to discuss her work as editor of The Dial. Moore immediately took the initiative. She contacted the professor from out-of-town and proposed that they make their meeting a luncheon. She set the time, she set the place, she even wondered what she could do to be certain that Wasserstrom would recognize her when he arrived (she planned to be there before him). Her solicitousness on this last count was possibly a bit ingenuous: by 1958 her tricorn hat and great cape were New York literary landmarks, recognizable even to professors from Syracuse. She may, however, have considered it presumptuous to so assume. Whatever her thinking, she was obviously committed, in making her arrangements, to leaving nothing to chance.
On the appointed day, she arrived first and continued her firm and gracious supervision of things. Having prepared the start of the meeting, she attended now at its beginning, to arranging its middle and end. She had no fascinated patience, as did the young T. S. Eliot, with watching “the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do.” She did not shirk, she boldly asked the pressing questions, such as whether or not the light lunches served at Schrafft’s would suffice. She hoped they would. Perhaps Mr. Wasserstrom would like to order a drink, she queried, and advised him not to let himself be influenced by her own commitment to avoiding such things. Not only would she ask the questions, she was willing to suggest proper answers. In his account Wasserstrom does not say whether he ordered more food or a drink; in the absence of information to the contrary, I like to assume that, being the perfect gentleman many English professors are when meeting writers they admire, he did not.

For all its gracious attentiveness, then, there is something gently manipulative about Moore’s manner. While she seems to be concerned to let Wasserstrom have his way, she is actually contriving to get her own. From the start her behavior suggests that she conceived of the luncheon meeting as something to be “managed.” And Wasserstrom himself, as the unpredictable stranger, the only potentially volatile element in the situation (Moore knew what to expect of Schrafft’s: “peace and comfort” and light lunches), is the focus of her attention, which is designed literally to disarm him. What he is armed with most threateningly seems to be a potential not to know what to do. Moore’s ministrations prevent her from having to witness any awkward uncertainties on his part. She manages for him those things she worries he might not be able to manage himself: would it be presumptuous of him, she might have wondered, to ask to visit Moore at her home? perhaps it would be better to ask her to meet him somewhere? or if it were the case that she did not go out, would the latter suggestion be the more presumptuous, indeed quite out of order? on the other hand, if she did venture out to meet him, dare he ask the famous poet how she might be recognized? and then in the midst of the meeting: how could he have his usual steak, rare, with mashed potatoes and gravy, when she had just ordered a spring salad? how could he order his Johnny Walker Red when she was sipping Tetley tea? She faces these crises for him. When at some point during the lunch she looked up and noticed that the drizzle outside had turned to a downpour, she thought at once of a possible anxiety it might cause him. He would, being the gentleman he was so far proving to be, naturally offer to walk her to the subway stop. She had noticed, however, when he entered the restaurant, that he was not equipped with the proper rain gear for such an enterprise. The prospect of an awkward walk with inadequate equipment did not appeal. So, before he could offer to escort her, before perhaps he thought of offering, before perhaps he even noticed the rain, she spoke to allay his supposed apprehensions. He “must not think to accompany her to a subway,” and that, we may imagine since Wasserstrom does not report protesting, was that. Early on in the meeting he recognized what was happening, and happily complied: “Miss Moore’s concern for my well-being included, as well, a determination to establish some unambiguous rules of procedure which would provide our meeting with a certain formal order.” That formality, so graciously contrived by the poet, distinguishes almost all accounts of “first meeting Miss Moore,” and their authors may have been inspired to make a formal record of the experience because it had already been given an artful shape and coherence. Moore provided them not only with their subject, but with structure and style as well.

The spectacle of Moore’s management, repeatedly enacted in accounts of first meetings, raises an obvious question worth a leisurely answer: why did she put herself to so much trouble? Obviously, as much for herself as for her guests. She wanted as little uncertainty in the meeting as possible; clearly she did not want to witness any uncertainties on the part of her Mr. Wasserstrom, whose possible uneasiness she seeks to quiet and whose potential to disrupt she seeks to dispel. It is hard, however, not to feel that she worries more than she needs to. Quite possibly, Mr. Wasserstrom is a socially mature adult who can take care of himself; and in any case, unpredictability and surprise are not necessarily dangers—or at least are not always as undesirable as Moore’s preventive measures assume. One could look forward to being surprised, even taken off-guard, by someone new. Of course, Moore is perfectly aware of what she is doing, recognizes her predilection for an order greater than experience usually affords, and acknowledges the responsibility she assumes when she plays the gentle bully to have her slightly unnatural way. If Mr. Wasserstrom’s account is typical in its last detail as it is in most of its others, Moore regularly insisted on picking up the tab, when there was one to be picked up, at her first meetings. It may have seemed to her only fair, the just price for having had her way. It may have served her as a means of thanking Mr. Wasserstrom for behaving well, a generous gesture born in part out of relief that—thank God—nothing untoward had happened, and in part out of guilt for never really, despite explicit signs to the contrary, having given Mr.
Wasserstrom a chance to have his way. Paying the bill was the clever final act of control that completed and atoned for all the others. Moore walked alone through the rain to her subway stop, triumphant but clear of conscience. Back at Schrafft’s, the ill-prepared Mr. Wasserstrom, if not well-fed, was at least no poorer and could go home to write with ease, and with our thanks, all about it.

Moore’s commitment to control, the consequence of her acute awareness of the potential in things for disorder, manifested itself in all her ordinary behaviors. Sometimes she managed things to stunning effects of order, as while lunching with Mr. Wasserstrom, or with Kathleen Raine, who remembers being served, when first meeting Moore, “superb duck sandwiches” fashioned by the poet herself and cut with jeweler’s precision out of stone ground wholemeal bread. Sometimes her efforts were less successful. Presented once with a photograph of herself, she quickly noticed her unruly hair. “I aspire to be neat, I try to do my hair with a lot of thought to avoid those explosive sunbursts, but when one hairpin goes in, another seems to come out.”

Her idea that the world is a continuous succession of situations requiring management, though it makes something of an amusing eccentric of her, gives to her poetry, where it is also an underlying given, impressive tension and power. In Glenway Wescott’s excellent formulation, her poetry presents us with a continuous “object lesson in the exploitation of an environment by a mind.” The characteristic action of a Moore poem is an act of management. “Exploitation” is a precise term here, because Moore’s attitude is self-assertive and manipulative, as the luncheon with Mr. Wasserstrom demonstrates. Her poems recognize and often demonstrate with extraordinary vividness the enormity and complexity of the project of wrestling from the world a satisfying and coherent experience but, it is also important to recognize, the poetic consciousness committed in her poems to the challenging project of managing the world is always equal to the task.

In order to emphasize the importance to her poetry of the struggle between the mind that desires order and the world that resists it, Moore placed her poem “The Steeple-Jack” conspicuously out of chronological order in the opening position in all collections of her work from Selected Poems (1935) on. The poem is a description of a seaside town which assumes as the description proceeds the status of a mobile kaleidoscopic reality that some of whose inhabitants as well as the describing poet would like to bring to rest in set patterns. The town features “eight stranded whales” in its harbor, “fish nets arranged to dry,” and off-shore “water etched/ with waves” images that capture a fluid reality coming into settled order. The seagulls that “keep/ flying back and forth over the town clock,/ or sailing around the lighthouse” or “rising steadily with a slight quiver of the body—or flock mewing near the sea, always move “one by one in two’s and three’s.” “Dürer would have,” as Moore asserts, “seen a reason for living/ in a town like this” because it provides a reality chaotic enough to give him something to order into his art but not so devoid of pattern as to make him, in despair, unable to begin. “It is a privilege,” Moore writes, “to see so/ much confusion.” The privilege is the seeing, the beholding from a distance at which patterns are discernible. Moore’s perspective on her town is panoramic; she does not participate in its confused action but hovers above, though not so far above that all movement is resolved into stasis: the water is in waves but the waves are moving. Her admired “college student/ named Ambrose” enjoys a similar, slightly removed and elevated perspective; he “sits on the hillside” and “sees boats/ at sea progress white and rigid as if in a groove,” another image of mobile reality coming into order.

“The Steeple-Jack” is a central poetic statement properly placed at the beginning of collections of Moore’s work not only because it announces so explicitly her persistent concern with the struggle between the mind that desires order and the world that resists, but also because it establishes at the outset what may be called her “hillside perspective,” the position she likes to occupy in the struggle. Such shrewd positioning permits her to demonstrate the unwieldiness of reality as she is ordering it. “The Steeple-Jack” enacts an “exploitation of an environment by a mind” that recognizes the chaotic volatility of the environment but also asserts, lightly yet resolutely, the ordering powers of the mind. As the case of Mr. Wasserstrom, the nervous professor, whiskey drinker and rain-soaked cavalier of Moore’s fantasy, showed, she has a vivid sense of the world’s volatile energy as well as a firm but gentle hand to control it.

II.

Glenway Wescott’s critical formulation provides terms that enable us to locate Moore’s place among other modern American poets. Much of the best modern poetry is animated, sometimes with harrowing explicitness, by an interest in the interaction between the individual human consciousness and the threatening world of apparent chaos in which it must exist. We may see the work of each modern poet as demonstrating a particular form of that vexed relationship. The poetic
consciousness of Moore's poems is characteristically a match for the world it confronts, and so her poetry constitutes a triumphant demonstration of repeated mastery. Among her contemporaries, T. S. Eliot stands out as the case most sharply in contrast to Moore's own. Of course, he shares with Moore her acute sense of surrounding chaos and her desire for control. His promotion and use of the famous "mythical method," for instance, succinctly demonstrates this; "it is simply a way," he wrote, "of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." But unlike Moore, Eliot has no triumphs to report. In his poetry there are only failures and retreats.

J. Alfred Prufrock, for instance, does make his "visit," though reluctantly, and the world that he encounters, with its peaches and pillows, so overwhelms him that he withdraws in cringing defeat. At the end of his "love song" his imagination transforms the real women who threaten him—as they intrigue him—with their downy arms and talk of Michelangelo, into mermaids, with whom he feels more comfortable because they are not real and therefore cannot be visited. Just to be doubly safe, he also concludes that, in any case, these imaginary creatures will not sing to him. The gentleman who prefers his females in the form of mermaids naturally prefers his mermaids silent and aloof. Prufrock's retreat from life is complete and perversely self-satisfying.

The Waste Land is Prufrock's belittlement and withdrawal writ large. In the fuller poem the world is the same teeming mass of depravities, usually human and erotic, and consciousness is the same fragile Prufrockian sensibility, outmatched and weakening in its effort to wrestle from the sordidness some sense of coherence and value. If its defeat seems somehow less complete in the longer poem, that is only because it manages there to lodge its complaint against the world more forcefully and to articulate its futile hopes more vividly. In this latter regard, the poem concludes with what may be seen as a three-part Hindu program for achieving a satisfactory relationship with the world. The program isolates, as does Eliot's poem as a whole, the human element, Sartre's "les autres," as the foremost unmanageable. "Control" is the third, culminating directive of the thunder, and Eliot glosses it to mean erotic control of another person: "your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited, beating obedient/ To controlling hands." Here he is imaginatively replaying, with a different, successful conclusion, the catastrophic hyacinth-girl episode at the beginning of the poem. The third thunderclap, which completes the Hindu program for successful management of the world, leads only, and inauspiciously, to compensatory imaginative action. He does not transform the vibrant hyacinth-girl, so near at hand when she appears earlier in the poem, into a haughty mermaid "riding seaward" away from the forsaken poet; she is at the end still close enough to be touched. Consequently, the retreatism seems less pronounced, and is certainly less self-pitying, than in "Prufrock" but the imaginative play with the desirable figure nevertheless takes the self-involved, stagnant form of wish-fulfillment. The thunderous call-to-action fades ominously and almost immediately into the silence beyond the poem's last line.

Critics have argued recently with increased consensus and vigor that in his later poetry Eliot abandons altogether the advice of the thunder and stages a full-scale retreat from the scene of struggle. The famous "break" in his career after The Waste Land marks a shift from a struggle's tormented poetry of failures and retreats to a pacifist's poetry of non-involvement. His Anglicanism justified the change. From the late Twenties onward, his poetry presents the human desire to achieve a state of happiness by mastering its experience not only as futile but as sinful as well. To indulge such a desire was to commit the sin of intellectual pride. The vision of the Order of Things is God's alone; the individual soul must learn to be content in its wretchedness, in its tendency to desire what it cannot have, a condition from which there is no escape except through death. Eliot's commitment to struggle was always uncongenial; the poet of Ash-Wednesday is happy no longer to have to "strive to strive" and wants to learn "to sit still," a posture which comes naturally to him. The movement within "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land from the torments of futile struggle to an exhausted retreat from the struggle is enacted, then, within Eliot's career as a whole. The poetry after The Waste Land is an effort to find "the peace that passeth understanding" which is evoked as a formal ending to his last poem of struggle. There it constitutes little more than a state of exhaustion after defeat but by the time of the Four Quartets it is refined into a passionate waiting. What the poetic consciousness had once struggled to achieve becomes transformed into an object of contemplation which is beyond any feeble human efforts of attainment. All the poet can do is wait and hope to wait patiently. Eliot's poetry is an alarmingly single-minded effort of refinement. The poet begins with embarrassing efforts to converse with the pillowed ladies of drawing rooms. He advances from there to the more intense humiliation of tongue-tied impotency before the hyacinth girl, but finds some perverse satisfaction in the silent dismissal by the haughty mermaids. He conventionalizes his perversities by learning to
say prayers to the Blessed Virgin, and finally achieves contentment when able to sit perfectly still and contemplate the ideal form of the multifoliate rose, which is all he really wanted to do in the first place. The real becomes the abstract and the struggle that disappoints becomes the contemplation that fulfills.

While Eliot's poetry, then, enacts a series of early skirmishes with the world all of which end in failure and lead collectively to a long process of withdrawal, Moore's poetry enacts an impressive succession of victories and an unflagging commitment to struggle. The difference between these two Protestant poets may be seen as the difference between a cultivated Anglican and a rugged Presbyterian. Reference to orthodox Christian religions will not help us to see how the poetry of Moore's other great contemporaries—Stevens, Pound and Williams—may be related to her own, but that realization itself embodies a critical insight. In their poetry, Stevens, Pound and Williams do not conceive of the interaction between the individual human consciousness and the world in any conventional Christian terms.

Stevens would have readily admitted that in his poetry, so persistently concerned with the interaction of mind and world, he was engaged in what might properly be called a religious enterprise, but he would have insisted that it was a pagan one. His poetry presents the religions of the world to us as a series of sustained acts of collective imagination which, in very different ways that can be evaluated one against the other, seek to make a good deal more of the world than what merely meets the eye. The poet with his blue guitar is engaged in the same enterprise: “things as they are/ Are changed upon the blue guitar.” The poet's job, indeed his irresistible impulse, is to extend empirical reality to an imagined fullness beyond itself. Stevens praises Moore for doing just this in her poem “He 'Diggesth Harde Yron,'” which he discusses at length in his essay “About One of Marianne Moore's Poems.” According to Stevens, Moore presents the ostrich that is the subject of her descriptive poem not in the empirical terms of the Encyclopedia Britannica, as readers of some of her other poems, which Stevens does not praise, might well have assumed. In “He 'Diggesth Hard Yron” Moore is concerned, Stevens argues, not with what the ostrich is but with what it signifies because, as she has herself written, in that poem, “the power of the visible/ is the invisible” (CP, p. 100). Approving of her imaginative transformation of the ostrich, Stevens concludes that “to confront fact in its total bleakness is for any poet a completely baffling experience... The aim of our lives should be to draw ourselves away as much as possible from the unsubstantial, fluctuating facts of the world about us and establish some communion with the objects which are apprehended by thought and not sense.”

Stevens' self-amused neo-platonism here, which speaks with gentle perversity of thoughts as “objects” and of the facts of the world as “unsubstantial,” might also have amused Moore but she would not have given it her approval. Stevens' praise of her poem, for which she would have been grateful, also implied, as she would have recognized, a criticism of her tendency elsewhere in her work to try “to confront fact in its total bleakness.” She regularly availed herself of the use of encyclopedias and other scientific reference tools. She was not, as a good Presbyterian, willing to play quite so fast and loose as he was with the things of this world, which she believed to be carefully contrived by God to serve his purposes. A pagan has a very different use for the world than does the conventional Christian, as Stevens makes clear in his playful reprimand to “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman.” That formidable lady would “take the moral law and make a nave of it/ And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,/ The conscience is converted into palms.” She extrapolates from the world an imagined order beyond what meets the eye. Consequently, Stevens the poet points out, “We agree in principle. That's clear.” But whereas the good Christian woman imaginatively orders the things of this world accordingly to the moral categories of good and bad, the pagan poet, on the other hand, would “Take the opposing law... our bawdiness,” or what we usually call the “pleasure principle,” and project from it a transcendent hierarchical order which would be “palm for palm” the equal of the Christian heaven. Stevens seeks to blur the distinction between moralist and aesthete; the former pleases herself when she does what she thinks is good and pains herself when she does what she considers bad, whereas the latter commends himself when he does what pleases him and chastises himself when he gives himself pain. Moore would have recognized this as the dangerously disarming sophistry of the devil.

The good Christian poet never forgets that the chaos of the world is a continuous test in which we must demonstrate our commitment to right over wrong; for the pagan poet the world is an opportunity for us to indulge our capacity for pleasure (he may do good but only to please himself). For both pagan and Christian there are the possibilities of success or failure; for both it is a matter of what can be made of things. To the extent that Moore makes of her ostrich something more than a large, awkward bird, Stevens admires her poem. He does not in his commentary ever applaud what she makes of it. (She makes of it, he
notes, "a symbol of justice," recognizably the sort of thing a high-toned Christian might make of it.) "Considering the great purposes that poetry must serve," Stevens explains, "the interest of the poem is not in its meaning but in this, that it illustrates the achieving of an individual reality," by which he means in this essay any comprehension of a worldly thing beyond its empirical dimensions. In a gentle reprimand of Moore's Christian moral sententiousness, Stevens points out that the transcendent "reality so imposed" on a thing of this world "need not be a great reality." If it gives pleasure, that is enough. He would not have been nearly as critical as Moore is in her poem of the uses the pagan Romans found for the ostrich: their "ostrich-plume-tipped" tents, "jewel-gorgeous ugly ostrich" egg-shell goblets, and "six hundred ostrich-brains served at one banquet." The Roman extravagance might even have appealed to him. He does not have a Christian's respect for the things of this world, which the Christian believes have been made as they are so as to function properly as parts of God's test for us. To tamper with them is to tamper with His plan. If all that matters is the satisfaction of our bawdiness, then we may, indeed we must since pleasure is the pagan's moral principle, do whatever, and exactly whatever, we want with our ostriches.

The greater representationalism of Moore's poetry, then, in comparison with Stevens' unbridled fancifulness, is a consequence of her Presbyterianism, which unlike Eliot's Anglicanism does not seek to escape from the tormenting chaos of the world but accepts it as a good which must be preserved if we are to fight against it the good fight God planned for our edification. Moore's Presbyterianism inspires and justifies her "exploitation of an environment by a mind" but also sets the guidelines of the exploitation. The point is not to escape from the world, as Eliot would; not to enjoy it, as Stevens would; but to survive it, and furthermore, to survive it on its own terms.

Throughout her career Moore returned again and again when giving expression to this conviction, to the image of the sea cresting against a chasm wall. It appears in the early poem "The Fish" where she celebrates "this/ defiant edifice" distinguished by "all external marks of abuse"; it does not retreat from the encounter but faces experience and survives: "Repeated/ evidence has proved that it can live/ on what can not revive its youth" (CP, pp. 32–33). She reverses the terms of her analogy when she uses the image several decades later in "What Are Years?" "He . . . who/ accedes to mortality . . . in his imprisonment rises/ upon himself as the sea in a chasm, struggling to be free and unable to be." In his "surrendering" to the predicament, he finds his "continuing" (CP, p. 95). The pagan Stevens would have accused Moore here of imposing an arbitrary Christian significance on the phenomenon of water cresting in a chasm. He might suggest that it could be seen as an image of delight, thereby demonstrating a commitment to his bawdy pagan bias as strong as Moore's to her Christian one. More certainly, he would have suggested not one interpretation but rather thirteen ways of looking at the phenomenon. He would make the world serve his purposes at all times, with special attention to his pleasurable purposes (ideally all purposes might be such). The commitment to enjoying himself leads directly to the multiplicity of imaginative uses of reality. The world is only his occasion. He would enjoy it whenever he could, and in every case would insist at least on having things on his own terms, thereby adding, Moore would point out, to his own moral injury an insult to God.

In her reviews of his work Moore confirms Stevens' understanding of their differences. She admired the gusto with which he struggled to comprehend the world in other than secular terms but she felt obliged to point out the dangerous excesses of his efforts. As "America's chief conjurer" he was eminently capable with his imaginative magic of transforming the world into anything it had to be in order to answer our desires. It was a deliberate effort to confuse the world with heaven, and would render pointless the Christian God and his plan. Moore was committed to recognizing those features of the world that persuaded us to think of it as less than heavenly, and to believing that the way to heaven was through this vale of tears. Stevens' poetic ambition to find a way of seeing the world as heaven was a damning enterprise that precluded salvation in the very act of seeking it. In a sentence deliberately parodic of the metaphorical excesses to which Stevens' unrestrained poetic project of transforming anything into anything else sometimes led him, Moore warns us that "upon the general marine volume of statement" in his poetry, he sets the fanciful "parachute-spinnaker" of verbiage which looms out like half a cantaloupe and gives the body of the theme the air of a fabled argosy advancing. It will take us, no doubt, to faraway heathen lands beyond the sobering influence of the gospel. The "introspective voyager" seeks a fresh land stripped of the imaginative associations of the past that would have us see it as a vale of tears. His vehicle is powered by the faith, that once seen as its naked self, the world will look like heaven. The old world appears unpleasant to us only because high-toned old Christian women and others have dressed it in a guise designed to mortify the bawdiness of all who behold it.
Moore is reluctant to fault Stevens for his profound attack on Christianity, for she recognizes as he does that they “agree in principle.” Both are committed to a full-faced encounter with the world; she may hope that Stevens might in time come to see the Christian description of things as accurate but will not preach to him. She recognizes that he shares with his high-toned old Christian woman a desire to see the world in other than secular terms. Stevens insists on a direct confrontation between human consciousness and the world but he errs when he imagines that the proper relationship between them is fulfillment and not struggle. Consequently, in her reviews of his work Moore isolates for her full approval those places where he admits to the condition of struggle, where he emphasizes that the imagination struggles with the world when trying to envision it in terms that afford human consciousness of it the feeling of fulfillment. She quotes him with special approval when he gives the struggling imagination a moral status by equating it with nobility: “in The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words . . . he says that . . . ‘nobility is a force . . . a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.’” Stevens’ pagan poet, Moore asserts, in an allusion to the codex to Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction, is a “soldier” fighting alongside if not within the Christian ranks, the “war that never ends” between the empirical world and the mind of man.12

If Stevens and Eliot stand to one side of Moore as poets whose work, though for nearly opposite reasons, do not give to the world the sort of attention she feels it is due; Pound and Williams stand on the other side, oppositely errant in their excessive worldliness. Williams, whose secularism is more thoroughly unredeemed than Pound’s, is the greater offender in this direction. Moore was able to admire his attentiveness to the world but wished that he were as concerned to order his materials as he was eager to present them accurately, bit by uneven bit. His representationalism’s devotion to prickly reality led to his abhorrence in poetry of “sleek and natty” beautifications of the real. “This,” wrote Moore when reviewing his Collected Poems, 1921–1931, “is a good sign if not always a good thing.”13 To the Christian the world is not of value in and of itself; what matters is what we make of it; as far as Moore was concerned, the confirmed atheist Williams did not try to make enough of it. To his unbiased eye, anything qualified as poetic material; indeed, he demonstrated throughout his career a preference for the apparently random and unassimilable, for the odd red wheelbarrow of reality, which unlike Stevens “jar in Tennessee” did not take “dominion” over its surroundings but instead gave to the backyard where it happened to be, and where some white chickens pecked about as the mood to peck struck them, the fickle air of chance. Moore, on the other hand preferred to the unnumbered, erratically peripatetic chickens, stranded whales in groups of eight. She included in her poems only those things that could serve as indications, however incomplete (or even preferably incomplete), of emergent order. In the terms of their famous debate, Williams accused Moore of cultivating lilies in a hot-house imagination; she chastised him for wallowing in the mud without the least effort to reach solid ground.

But to the extent that Williams’ desire to present the world accurately and comprehensively made “struggle . . . a main force”14 in his work, the Presbyterian in Moore admired him. He neglects, however, the second stage of his obligation to the world—and that is to press his struggle to the achievement of some imaginative vision of things that triumphs over their disorder. He underestimates the power and value of the mind; his dictum “no ideas but in things” too often deteriorates into “no ideas at all.” Moore cannot accept his poetic demonstration of the mind’s subservience to the world. His poems, she complains, are “often about nothing that we wish to give our attention to,” are even “at times almost insultingly specific.”15 When she writes in “The Steeple-Jack” that “it is a privilege to see so/ much confusion,” she is acknowledging the chaotic nature of the world, but at the same time, is implying a relationship between the world and the mind which “privileges” the mind; it is greater than the world’s confusion, which it “sees” or comprehends within its desired larger vision of the Order of Things. The Christian mind “sees” the world’s confusion as in the process of achieving the order of its creator: the off-shore waters may be in constant motion but they are moving in the “etched” form of waves.

I have arranged to conclude this brief discussion of Moore’s poetic contemporaries with a consideration of Pound because he is the one with whom she has the greatest affinities. To her mind, his work embodied all the strengths of her other contemporaries but none of their weaknesses. He shared with Williams, despite all their famous arguing, a commitment admired by Moore to seek persistent close encounter with the world. Pound gains her further approval, however, because while Williams refuses to order his materials, he doggedly pursues the order of his. Like Eliot, Pound documents in his poetry the unmanageableness of reality but he departs from his friend and earns Moore’s deeper respect by refusing to respond to the repeated failure to establish order by withdrawing from the struggle to do so.
although he shares with Stevens a commitment to the mind’s necessary exploitation of the world, he does not lose sight of the world’s recalcitrance, and therefore unlike Stevens, always presents the project of exploitation as a struggle. Stevens, Williams and Eliot in different ways slipped out of a difficult situation, but Pound and Moore always insisted that life was a continuous struggle of consciousness to make something of the world. Anything else seemed to them like a denial of the very terms and feel of existence.

Furthermore, Pound matched Moore in the persistence of his commitment to struggle. Even at the broken end of his career, when he acknowledged in disheartenment that he had failed to “make it cohere,” he never denied the value of the effort. Throughout his career he proceeded with an unshakeable faith—and it was a faith as threatened by the world as anyone’s faith ever was—that there was an order to things which the mind was properly committed to comprehending. But his faith, unlike Moore’s, was not based on an orthodox belief in a godhead. Rather, it was built upon the extraordinarily simple assumption that the world was of a piece; his was an organist’s faith that the world was a whole which constituted a unity of its parts. “It coheres all right,” he wrote at the very end of The Cantos, “even if my notes do not cohere.” His secularism sustained him as magnificently as Moore’s Presbyterianism sustained her.

Despite their close affinities as strugglers, however, they left very different records of struggle. While Moore’s poetry demonstrates an almost perfect succession of triumphs, usually of comprehension over confusion but at the very least of hope over despair, Pound’s poetry contains many fewer isolated triumphs and many more explicit defeats. Here again, as elsewhere, Moore’s Presbyterianism explains her difference from her contemporary. Pound included defeats in his record because he believed that it was his artistic duty to bear accurate witness to life as he lived it. To suppress them would amount to an act of dishonesty and deceit. Moore excludes her defeats from her poetic record—and it would be foolish to assume she never had any—because she is committed not to bearing true witness but to giving inspiring example. She considered it her Christian duty to “show,” as W. H. Auden put it, “an affirming flame.”

In her reviews of The Cantos Moore applauded the “certitude” of the poetic sensibility she found there, and admired such assurance of manner all the more for the defeat and despair it also acknowledged, and acknowledged with increasing frequency as the poem proceeded. She appreciated Pound’s willingness to wait, his refusal to press any advantage he achieved over facts into some premature vision of unity. He could wait until he had amassed his famous “phalanx of particulars” before launching his attack on truth. His patience revealed an enviable strength of mind and an admirable self-confidence. In comparison, Moore had an anxious managerial way with things, even with something as apparently harmless as a luncheon; she was overeager to feel the assuring presence of an invisible order, and would sometimes artificially establish it herself.

Again, her religious belief explains her behavior. She keeps her defeats and her despair private because, while such occurrences were for Pound only the unavoidable failures suffered by a man engaged in an impossible enterprise, for her they were sins. It was more than a matter of setting bad example. Pound might lose his self-respect were he to weaken and fail; for Moore her very soul was at stake. He could afford the luxury of his human weaknesses; she could not. If she struck the rough rock of reality more forcefully and more often than she should have in hopes that signs of another order of things would reveal its presence, we can forgive her impatience. It may well be that her poetry hides more defeats than Pound’s reveals. He, of course, was explicitly committed to preserving with accuracy the record of a consciousness free from the pressures Moore felt, an agnostic consciousness, free as well of the prejudices of an atheist like Williams who would have expected nothing of the rock but asymmetrical solidity. Pound was willing to expect anything and would have accepted nothing. For Moore, Pound’s work embodied an awe-inspiring hopefulness, especially at the end, for as she wrote, hope is not hope “until all ground for hope has vanished” (CP, p. 9). She could only aspire to Pound’s equanimity, which probably seemed to her slightly inhuman.

III.

Criticism of a writer’s work often devolves into personal admiration of the writer. This is particularly true of the existing criticism of Moore’s poetry; many of her critics discuss her poems as demonstrations of their author’s personal virtues. Perhaps because even our most mature impulses to admire are often based on a nostalgia for the hero-worship of childhood, we frequently create oversimplified heroes who permit us the regressive pleasures of immature idolatry. Marianne Moore, unfortunately, has sometimes been made to serve us in this way. Her more rigorous critics, such as Charles Tomlinson, have protested strongly against such usage, which does injustice to Moore by
reducing her to a kind of "national pet."20 Our domesticating admiration of Moore, although unfortunate, is nevertheless of some critical interest. The most "sickly sweet" responses to her verse are only the extremest form of the pervasive tendency of her readers to move away from the poems to a personal admiration of the poet. That is to say, something about Moore's poetry has induced even rigorous criticism of it to take the form of admiration of the poet herself. She seems to meet us halfway in our desire for heroes to worship; her poetry provokes that desire by seeming to offer satisfaction of it, by deliberately presenting the poet herself to us as someone we may admire.

What her critics have admired most about her is her strength, which permits her, as her poems demonstrate again and again, to triumph over experience by mastering it. In treating her as a "national pet" we are treating her, perhaps not altogether consciously, as one of those admirable animals which she herself depicts in her poems as exemplars of behavior; her jerboa, pangolin, frigate pelican, ostrich, among many others, are near-marvelous creatures who manage against considerable odds to achieve a proper relationship with their threatening environments, manage to make a home for themselves of the wild world. There is the frigate pelican whose wondrous "wings uniting light in strength" allow the bird to fly wherever and however it must; the fish that moves slow and "close to the waves" to fish, but "oftener appears to prefer" the greater challenge of taking on the wing "from industrious crude-winged species." She is strong, and is seldom successless... no matter how fast his victim may fly or how often may/turn" (CP, p. 25). Even fruits and vegetables may serve to inspire us with their successful, persistent efforts to survive in a world that challenges them: "you've seen a strawberry/that's had a struggle," missapen but nevertheless thriving against the climatic and agronomical odds; there is the invigorating example of another small red fruit: "What is there/like fortitude! What sap/ went through that little thread/to make the cherry red?" (CP, p. 126).

In "The Pangolin," a major poem on this theme, Moore claims, in ambiguous lines which may refer to her pangolin or to man, that "there are few creatures who can make one breathe faster and make one erecter." "Not afraid of anything is he./and then goes cowering forth,/tread paced to meet an obstacle/at every step" (CP, pp. 119-120). Such creatures inspire her and she in turn inspires us. Theodore Weiss, in the only poem of the many addressed to Moore that can rival Elizabeth Bishop's famous "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore," makes the same claim for Moore that she makes for her pangolin-man.

Like a bit of purest honey
you bring all the bees
and the shaggy world itself,
a big fat baggy bear,
lapping after, to attention.21

She embodies in the poetic consciousness of her poems an inspiring example of continuous, repeatedly successful effort to master the difficult materials of existence. We breathe faster trying to follow her example and stand erecter, brought to a proud vigilant attention over things, where we might otherwise be, as her pangolin sometimes is, "capsizing in disheartenment" (CP, p. 119). She considered it her Christian duty to try, by setting good example, to prevent us from giving in to our natural weakness. Like her frigate pelican "in the majestic display of his art," she seeks in her "to foil the tired/moment of danger that lays on heart and lungs/weight of the python that crushes to powder" (CP, p. 26). We are meant to be inspired by the spectacle of her vigor.

To speak, as I do in the title of this introduction, of Moore's "achievement" is to use that commonplace critical term with a special accuracy. Criticism of her work is more than usually justified to speak, as it characteristically has, of her "achievement"; she would have approved of such a critical conception of her work—as a sustained act of achievement, of successful effort. The concept, which properly animates most Moore criticism, also explains why there is so little of it. When I began work two years ago on this collection of new essays on Moore, I set out to read, or reread, what had already been written. Compared with the vast and sophisticated scholarly and critical literature devoted to her great contemporaries, work on Moore seems almost negligible—very small in volume and largely preliminary in nature. There are only about a half-dozen full-length studies, several of which present themselves very tentatively as descriptive introductions to Moore's work with only modest critical ambitions; there are another half-dozen general studies of modern literature or poetry which include a chapter on Moore; and to complete the secondary literature there are a dozen or so isolated essays and of course the many reviews, greater in number than the essays but naturally much less substantial critically.22 There is almost as much work on Amy Lowell, or on T. S. Eliot's plays. Many of the things we like to know about our poets, we simply do not know about Moore. For instance, we know very little about her place in the traditions of American and British literature; we have only the crudest sense of the shape of her career; we do not have
a tradition of competing interpretations of her poems, nor any well-developed sense of which poems are greatest, which lesser. This situation of relative neglect, which the present volume naturally hopes to begin to remedy, is due in part to the triumphant strength of Moore’s poetic consciousness.

During the Sixties and Seventies, when the vast bulk of scholarly and critical literature on modern poetry amassed itself, our aesthetic preferences in literature ran to the open, the secular and the dark; we preferred artistic visions that emphasized the “total bleakness,” as Stevens called it, of the chaotic particulars of reality and the consequently desperate condition of the hopelessly beleaguered self. Moore’s poetry obviously answered to quite different aesthetic interests, interests in the neatly finished, the spiritual, and the enlightened. Her poetry had very little in common with the confessionalists’ poetry of psychic distress, or with the programmatic secularism, even banality, of the Beats. Eliot, Pound and Williams presented much more congenial figures than the fastidious Miss Moore. In his memoir of Moore, “Omissions Are Not Accidents,” included in this collection, the poet Arthur Gregor stresses Moore’s aesthetic differences during her later years with many younger American poets. Bonnie Costello, in an essay entitled “Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop: Friendship and Influence,” points out that even between Moore and Bishop, a younger poet aesthetically much closer to Moore than most others, there is still the essential difference between the lost secular consciousness and the believer who has found her way. Our fascination with the romance of failure caused us to overlook Moore’s poetry of triumph. With the artificial stimulus of the centenary of her birth approaching, if not because our tastes are changing, interest in Moore seems likely to increase. The present collection of essays may be taken as a sign of that growing interest; I hope of course that it will stimulate further study.

Throughout I have kept the existing work on Moore continuously in mind as a foundation upon which to build. That critical work is remarkably mild mannered and non-argumentative, almost to a fault. It does not, for example, recognize that much of it is involved in an on-going dispute. This unacknowledged debate has to do with the two related matters I have already discussed at some length: Moore’s attitude toward the world and her place among her contemporaries. Her best recent critic, Bonnie Costello, in her book Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions (1981), consolidates an opinion of earlier commentators such as Denis Donoghue and Donald Hall, that Moore’s poetry is more deeply committed to allowing the objects of its attention their own clattering individualities than to transforming their disparateness into a unified poetic vision. Critics on this side of the unacknowledged debate consider Moore an adherent of Williams’ dictum “no ideas but in things” but as I have suggested there are important distinctions to be made between the aesthetics of these two poets. Those distinctions are fully elaborated for the first time by Celeste Goodridge in her essay in this collection entitled “Public Reviews and Private Exchanges: Marianne Moore’s Criticism of William Carlos Williams.” Goodridge demonstrates how Moore resisted Williams’ efforts to enlist her to his secular cause; although publically she praised his work, privately she expressed deep reservations. Significantly, as Goodridge points out, when Moore reviewed Williams’ Collected Poems, 1921–1931, she used Stevens’ “Preface” to that volume, an introduction which was not always approving of its subject, to frame her own carefully measured comments.

On the other side of the unacknowledged debate, where Moore’s kinship with Stevens’ and his enterprise of imaginative redemption of reality is emphasized, there is the work of Kenneth Burke, probably Moore’s finest critic. He knew her and her work with a special intimacy and so his opinion deserves particular attention. His comments frequently emphasize her acute susceptibility to experience. He has described how she was, while visiting a museum, once overcome with sensations provoked by the holdings she encountered, and literally fled the building on the run. Her poetry, however, he hastens to point out, was not a subservient act of homage to the power of things over us but in fact just the opposite, an assertion of her own force of consciousness against them, what Stevens called “a violence from within that protects us from a violence without.” Her poetic “observations,” as she called her poems, are not, according to Burke, presentations of phenomena but remarks about phenomena; the emphasis is on the observer not the observed. Her poems, he concludes, are “subjective lyrics” and “her metonymy is really disguised metaphor.” The poet Louis Zukofsky, in excluding Moore from his Objectivist school of poetry, argued the same point. The facts of Moore’s poems, he asserted, are not of interest primarily in themselves but as occasions for the poetic self to act. “The work of Marianne Moore is largely a portrait of the author’s character intent upon the presentation which is sincerity, rather than the revealed rest of objectification.” In the present collection Ralph Rees’ essay, “The Reality of Imagination in the Poetry of Marianne Moore,”
emphasizes her persistent validation of her own imaginative life. As Stevens explained, she made of her ostrich a personal imaginative reality.

What he has to say about "He 'Digesteth Hard Yron'" might also be said of many of Moore's poems that are often considered to be demonstrations of her interest in presenting the "total bleakness" of objects. Frequently, her poems about "things" are not focused squarely on a "thing" itself but on representations of the thing; that is to say, her poems are often not about a thing but about what has been made of a thing. She presents representations. So, for instance, her poem "Nine Nectarines" is not about pieces of fruit but about a plate upon which a picture of the fruit has been drawn. While in "He 'Digesteth Hard Yron'" she condemns the use Romans made of ostriches, in "Nine Nectarines" she praises the Chinese artist's use of the nectarines, concluding with an emphasis Stevens would most certainly have approved: "It was a Chinese/who imagined this masterpiece" (CP, p. 30). "An Octopus," Moore's poem about a mountain and its glacier, is composed almost exclusively of quotations of others' descriptions of the phenomena. In particular, she presents a guidebook's verbal representations of the mountain scene. Indeed, the act of quotation itself, a hallmark of her poetry, is a demonstration of her interest in what we have made of things, rather than in the things themselves. Even when she does describe a thing directly, in her own words, and in a way that suggests a concern with the nature of the thing itself, she regularly evokes a representation of the thing in the very act of ostensibly merely presenting it: her jerboa holds itself erect "on a three-cornered smooth-working Chippendale claw" (CP, p. 15). The desert rat's tail is presented in terms of a representation that nicely expresses something essential about the thing itself. As Stevens said, to confront things in their total bleakness is for the poet an entirely baffling, if not impossible, experience. Furthermore, to invoke even the quintessentially unimaginative encyclopedia description or scientific observation of a thing is to emphasize observer over observed. To give the capacity of the red wheelbarrow or to note the pecking order of the white chickens is to deflect attention away from the things themselves to a consideration of what we have made of them.

Moore's qualified approval of Stevens, about which I have already spoken, is presented with her customary graciousness in her review of Harmonium, entitled "Well Moused, Lion" and reprinted in this collection. She acknowledges the dominance of the imagination in Stevens' poetry, where its presence "precludes the banality" of mere things and allows an "order to prevail" over them. But often he provides too much of a good thing: "The riot of gorgeousness in which Mr. Stevens' imagination takes refuge, recalls Balzac's reputed attitude to money, to which he was indifferent unless he could have it 'in heaps or by the ton.'" Her cryptic title, glossed obscurely at the end of the review, is something of a gentle chastisement. The apostrophe to the lion in A Midsummer Night's Dream represents for Moore an ideally mannered use of language, a "nutritious permutation," not the sort of self-amused, gratuitous phrase-making in which Stevens sometimes, she feels, indulges. But moreover, the apostrophe, alluding to the need in Shakespeare's play for a gentle lion whose roaring would not frighten the imaginatively susceptible audience, suggests that a poet properly softens the roar of his own fancies so as not to scare other people out of this world, which is after all where they are and where they belong. Moore recognizes with awe the ferocity of the imagination, particularly Stevens', but she believes that it should not stalk the world in a posture of intimidation. Rather, the imagination should quietly musk around the planet, gently stirring things up.

The unacknowledged debate among Moore's critics over her status as either, in Randall Jarrell's phrase, our "foremost poet of the particular" or, in Roy Harvey Pearce's, a poet who celebrates "the tragic sufficiency of the self," will continue unresolved until her critics address themselves fully to each other's commentary, at which point it should become clear that she strives to be both types of poet simultaneously, not out of a sense of compromise but out of her conviction that any other stance would be false. There is the world, there is our consciousness, and human existence is exactly and nothing but the experience of the well-matched encounter between them. To put it in the terms of "The Steepke-Jack," human existence is the experience of being halfway up the side of the hill. The world is below, God is above, and we are stuck where we are in the middle. Our life is the walking of a borderline from which we cannot diverge. Furthermore, in deliberately fusing the two conceptions of the poet's role Moore is seeking to confuse the distinction between world and mind, and insist upon their seamlessness. The mouse of the imagination is an elusive creature that cannot be caught and separated from its haunts. When she is not trying to correct an excessively fanciful poet's overemphasis on the imagination, she usually allows herself to present it in less humble terms, though always ones which emphasize its inextricable relationship with
the world. Her greatest image for the imagination, featured on the cover of this collection of essays, is the Nisqually Glacier atop Mt. Rainier.

In her poem "An Octopus" she celebrates the glacier for its relationship with its mountain; it exhibits the suppleness of an octopus in accommodating itself to every crevice and nook of the complex mountain surface and yet retains the glass-like hardness and evenness of its own character. It achieves a "neatness of finish" without relinquishing its "relentless accuracy" and "capacity for fact" (CP, p. 76). It bears impeccable witness to the environment in which it exists but also adds a lumenescent dimension to that environment. It is affected and it affects. Such reciprocity is definitive: in the first line of her poem "The Mind Is An Enchanting Thing" Moore qualifies and completes the title and definition, adding immediately, "is an enchanted thing" (CP, p. 134). The mind does not cover over the world with an opaque fabric of its own making but like the glacier on the mountain or the "dove neck's iridescence" (CP, p. 135) casts a transparent sheen through which all things are more brightly seen. And the world is better for it. The glacier's sensitivity to the mountain is not servility but homage. It honors the mountain by assuming its shape, the way Moore's desert rat, admirably attuned to its environment, "honors the sand by assuming its color" (CP, p. 14). The "untouched: sand-brown jumping rat—free-born" may affect the sand's color but not its passivity. It is in the world but not of it. Moore could never accept Williams' subservience to the world nor Stevens' disregard of it. She insists on the relationship between the mind and its environment as an intimate and inextricable bond, any deviation from which was not only falsification of the nature of human existence but also deviation from an ideal. The Nisqually Glacier on Mt. Rainier is an image of our condition and an inspiring example.

"An Octopus," Moore's poem about the glacier, has been neglected by her critics, largely because of its complex allusiveness, and I have arranged for special attention to be paid to it in this collection, in order to establish it not only as a poem central to Moore's work but also as probably her most ambitious and possibly her greatest poem. An early manuscript version of the poem, much longer than the published version, is printed here for the first time. Patricia C. Willis' essay "The Road to Paradise: First Notes on Marianne Moore's 'An Octopus'" discusses this early draft in detail, identifying many of the heretofore unexplained allusions of the poem. (It demonstrates, like its subject, a "relentless accuracy" and "capacity for facts" in its own careful atten-

tiveness to multiple sources, and weaves them together with an admirable "neatness of finish" into the rhetorical evenness of the poetic text.) Willis' essay also emphasizes the significance of Moore's inclusion in the poem of a criticism of Greek culture. The Greeks are subjected to the same criticism the poet leveled, though more gently, against the pagan Stevens. They are faulted for averting their attention from the world, for not being "practiced in adapting their intelligence to eagle traps and snowshoes" and for being "happy" just "enjoying mental difficulties" (CP, p. 74) for their own sake. The good Presbyterian struggled with the uneven surface of the world. "An Octopus" is Moore's fullest statement of her greatest theme—the relationship between the imagination and morality.

Moore's interest in "things" has often been understood, by those critics who see her as a poet of particulars, as a sign of her Americanism. Her conscientious awareness of "others" in the broadest sense was a demonstration of the definitive national characteristic of openness. Grace Schulman points out in her essay in this collection, "Marianne Moore and E. McKnight Kauffer: Two Characteristic Americans," how Moore shares with the commercial artist McKnight Kauffer, and with the proto-typical American Henry James, an "accessibility to experience." They shared an interest in things not usually considered proper materials for artistic treatment. Furthermore, as Lisa Steinman argues in an essay entitled "Modern America, Modernism, and Marianne Moore," this characteristic that made her recognizably American also made her modern. Steinman argues that modern poetry's interest in conventionally unpoetic materials and in a scientifically "chilled" presentation of these unemotive materials were seen as tendencies fostered by and associated with the larger technological bias of twentieth-century American culture. Margaret Holley, in her essay "The Model Stanza: The Organic Origin of Moore's Syllabic Verse," also places Moore's work in the context of modernism by exploring her exploitation of poetic form. Earlier critics frequently recognized that Moore's use of emphatically prose-like rhythms in her verse was appropriate to her new secular material and its scientific presentation. Holley argues further that Moore's infamously awkward wrenching of prose sentences into the strict mechanics of her syllabic stanzas was her contribution to the effort of modern poetry to redefine the relationship between form and content. Content clashes with form as Moore's prose sentences dismember themselves into the peculiar shapes of her vividly artificial stanzas. The clash is an image of the struggle between shaping mind and resistant matter. Because each
emphatically artificial stanzaic form is unique to its poem, it represents only an isolated victory of mind over matter and therefore does not obscure the important fact that the struggle is a "war that never ends."

John Slatin's essay "Advancing Backward in a Circle: Marianne Moore as (Natural) Historian" places Moore's work in two other important contexts. Slatin shows how such poems as "Virginia Britannia" and "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" reveal her interest in the traditional American theme of innocence. According to Slatin, Moore's interest in America is an interest in the possibility of seeing the world afresh, of confronting the world in its "total bleakness," in particular without shaping it according to preconceived European notions about it. Slatin also places Moore's work in the context of British Romanticism and is thereby able to refine our understanding of her attitude toward the imagination. He discusses in particular how Moore shares with Wordsworth a concern with the connection between a child's loss of innocence and the diminishment of imaginative power.

The collection also includes two essays on Moore's translation of the fables of La Fontaine, a part of her work few critics have looked upon favorably or with care. Bruce Ross's essay, "Fables of the Golden Age: The Poetry of Marianne Moore," places all of Moore's poetry, not merely her translations of La Fontaine, in the fable tradition. Ross reveals the ways in which many of her poems, especially those about animals, employ the strategies, embody the values, and achieve the goals of traditional fables. The fable tradition supported Moore in her enterprise of giving a moral order to experience; she added to the tradition a closer feel for the experience to be ordered: she ascribes moral significance to her animals but treats them as animals, not as mere symbols. Rosalie Sprout, in her essay "After The Fables: The Translator as Poet," demonstrates how Moore's work on the translation of La Fontaine had an effect on the poetry she wrote subsequently; it fostered among other things the intense interest in music that pervades Moore's late poems.

Finally, I had hoped to include in the collection an essay by Stanley Lourdeaux which presented a psychoanalytic reading of Moore's early unpublished poetry, a large body of unknown and extraordinary work. Acquaintance with these early poems shows that Moore was not always the strong poet of mastery and triumph who emerged so fully assured in her first published poetry. Taffy Martin's essay in this collection, "Beyond the Myth of Marianne Moore: Portrait of a Writing Master," which quotes from letters Moore wrote to her family during her apprentice years, reveals the mixture of determination and anxiousness with which she undertook her poetic vocation. The early unpublished poems are another moving and invaluable record of her struggle to achieve the psychological poise and intellectual generosity of her public poetic persona. Although it was not possible to include in the collection Lourdeaux's psychoanalytic reading of these poems, a section of his essay, entitled "Marianne Moore and a Psychoanalytic Paradigm for the Dissociated Image," which offers a reading of the early published poem "Peter" with reference to an unpublished version called "A Tiger," is printed here.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the contributors to the collection for their admirable flexibility, hard work and patience. Patricia C. Willis, Curator of the Moore Collection at the Rosenbach Museum and Library, supported this project from the beginning and generously assisted throughout in making available many of the materials of the Moore archive. For permission to quote from Moore's unpublished writings, I would like to thank Clive E. Driver, Literary Executor of the Estate of Marianne C. Moore. And for their personal encouragement and expert professional assistance I am most grateful to Helen Bajan and William McBrien.

2 William Wasserstrom, "Marianne Moore's Dial," Festschrift for Marianne Moore's Seventy-Seventh Birthday, ed. Tambimuttu (Tambimuttu and Mass, 1964), p. 34. This festschrift will be referred to throughout as Tambimuttu.
5 Quoted in Tambimuttu, p. 35.
6 Marianne Moore, The Complete Poems (New York: Macmillan/Viking, 1981), p. 5. All subsequent quotations from Moore's poetry are from this edition, which will be referred to as CP and cited parenthetically in the text.
12 Marianne Moore, "There is a War That Never Ends" (review of Part of a
Well Moused, Lion

MARIANNE MOORE

It is not too much to say that some writers are entirely without imagination—without that associative kind of imagination certainly, of which the final tests are said to be simplicity, harmony, and truth. In Mr. Stevens’s work, however, imagination precludes banality and order prevails. In his book, he calls imagination “the will of things,” “the magnificent cause of being,” and demonstrates how imagination may evade “the world without imagination”; effecting an escape which, in certain manifestations of bravura, is uneasy rather than bold. One feels, however, an achieved remoteness as in Tu Muh’s lyric criticism: “Powerful is the painting . . . and high is it hung on the spotless wall in the lofty hall of your mansion.”1 There is the love of magnificence and the effect of it in these sharp, solemn, rhapsodic elegant pieces of eloquence; one assonts to the view taken by the author, of Crispin whose . . . mind was free
And more than free, elate, intent, profound.

The riot of gorgeousness in which Mr. Stevens’s imagination takes refuge, recalls Balzac’s reputed attitude to money, to which he was indifferent unless he could have it “in heaps or by the ton.” It is “a flourishing tropic he requires”; so wakeful is he in his appetite for color and in perceiving what is needed to meet the requirements of a new tone key, that Oscar Wilde, Frank Alvh Parson, Tappé, and John Murray Anderson seem children asleep in comparision with him.2 One is met in these poems by some such clash of pigment as where in a showman’s display of orchids or gladiolas, one receives the effect of

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