

MODERN and CONTEMPORARY POETRY and POETICS

TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY
MARIANNE MOORE

Essays from a
Critical Renaissance

*Edited by Elizabeth Gregory
and Stacy Carson Hubbard*



Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics

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Editors

Twenty-First Century Marianne Moore

Essays from a Critical Renaissance

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We want to thank the underwriters of the Twenty-First Century Moore Conference, without whom the initial exchanges that led to this book would not have occurred: the Houston Endowment in the University of Houston Department of English, the Center for Public History Lecture Series Endowment at UH, the UH College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Dean's Office, Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, and the UH Friends of Women's Studies. Thanks also to the University of Houston's Small Grants Program.

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Three *Illustrations to Milton's "Paradise Lost,"* 1808, by William Blake (English, 1757–1827) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: *The Expulsion from Eden*, 50 x 38.7 cm (19 11/16 x 15 1/4 in.). *Adam and Eve Sleeping*, 49.2 x 38.7 cm (19 3/8 x 15 1/4 in.). *The Temptation and Fall of Eve*, 49.7 x 38.7 cm (19 9/16 x 15 1/4 in.). All three are pen and watercolor on paper, and museum purchases with funds donated by contribution. Photographs © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A photograph of E. H. Kellogg is reprinted courtesy of the Presbyterian Historical Society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Adversity* *Adversity and Grace: Marianne Moore, 1936–1941*. Edited by Heather Cass White. Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2012.
- A-Quiver* *A-Quiver with Significance: Marianne Moore 1932–1936*. Edited by Heather Cass White. Victoria, BC: ELS, 2008.
- Becoming* *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924*. Edited by Robin G. Schulze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- CP* *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*. Revised Edition. New York: Macmillan/Viking, 1981.
- CPr* *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. Edited by Patricia C. Willis. New York: Viking, 1986.
- CRMM* *The Critical Response to Marianne Moore*. Edited by Elizabeth Gregory. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
- Obs* *Observations*, by Marianne Moore [1924]. Edited by Linda Leavell. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- Poems* *The Poems of Marianne Moore*. Edited by Grace Schulman. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- RML* Marianne Moore Collection, Rosenbach Museum and Library, of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Selected* *Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*. Edited by Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

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Introduction

Elizabeth Gregory and Stacy Carson Hubbard

Openly, yes
with the naturalness
 of the hippopotamus or the alligator
 when it climbs out on the bank to experience the

sun, I do these
things which I do, which please
 no one but myself. Now I breathe and now I am sub-
 merged; the blemishes stand up and shout when the object

in view was a
renaissance; shall I say
 the contrary?
(—from “Black Earth,” *Observations* 43)¹

Both poetically and personally avant-garde in her own day, Marianne Moore (1887–1972), who plotted her life and career against the grain of

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received ideas, “pleas[ing] / no one but [her]self,” has become newly au courant for twenty-first-century readers. One hundred and thirty years after her birth, we’re in the midst of a Moore renaissance as increasing numbers recognize the work as “no [merely] formal thing” (though form plays a vital part) but a set of deeply acculturated texts that still speak exuberantly and thoughtfully about what matters, including the politics and practices of valuation, race, gender, class, democracy, passion, species, authority, spirit, knowledge, performance, ecology, and more. With the recent publication of Linda Leavell’s field-redefining biography (2013), six new editions of Moore’s work out since 2000, expanded ancillary materials, and a new online archive of her notebooks underway, readers of Moore are clearing space on their bookshelves and clearing away preconceptions to make way for fresh encounters with this dazzling individual and her still challenging, still deeply engaging work.

The recent proliferation of her work follows many years of relative obscurity for Moore. Though always included in catalogs of important modernists, her work has been little taught or collected, compared with that of her peers Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens, H.D., and Stein. Moore’s complicated publication history played a significant role in limiting her renown. Practicing what Robin Schulze calls a “poetics of radical instability” (1996, 120), Moore often drastically revised her poems from one publication to another, to an extent much greater than other revision-prone poets. This practice, along with her habit of deleting poems—many of them brilliant—from her canon over time, meant that new readers were denied a sense of how her work had evolved, and how it looked to its original audiences. Her famously incomplete *Complete Poems* omits nearly half the poems she published before 1951, among them the wonderful “Black Earth,” “Dock Rats,” “Half Deity,” “Pigeons,” “Roses Only,” and “Radical,” and includes many in versions quite unlike those in which they initially appeared.

Though we still have no full variorum edition of Moore’s work, we do now have several scholarly editions that make early versions of the poems available, as well as a new reader’s edition (*New Collected Poems*), which provides broad access to poems too long out of print and to comparative versions of some poems. These volumes make clear that a single Moore poem often has multiple texts and that this multiplicity fruitfully informs analysis of Moore’s oeuvre. While many critics prefer specific versions of the poems, Moore’s view of her work as endlessly open to ongoing revision is itself worthy of critical and readerly attention. It challenges the idea of the poem as stable artifact and of the poet as static subject.

Though, unlike the early publications, Moore's later work was never out of print, it has also begun to be read in new ways recently. When the elder Moore became a celebrity in the 1950s after winning the triple crown of poetry prizes (the Bollingen, the Pulitzer, and the National Book award), she altered her style and material to speak to her widened audience. The shift toward popular material and easier access created the impression for some readers that the later work was entirely distinct from the earlier, more difficult (but equally playful and democratic) poems. After Moore's death, critics overwhelmingly agreed that the later work was also less interesting, and it has received almost no critical notice until recently. But that is changing fast.

Greater cultural understanding of gender variation has also set the scene for less clamped-down readings of Moore's sexual status and of her writing about the body. These have combined with Leavell's work to convey an expanded sense of Moore as an individual whose unusual personal choices and various styles in different contexts call for more nuanced consideration than has been the case. All of these factors together are fueling the current "Marianne Moore revival" (Raphel 2016).

As our epigraph documents, Moore had a distinctive voice from her earliest forays into poetry. As a woman aiming to establish her own authority, she openly broke with tradition concerning who could speak and about what, flaunting her difference through her unique syllabic meter, disjunctive line breaks, and visually challenging stanza forms as well as through her challenging materials. Rather than espousing any one line of thought, she presented herself as an interlocutor, engaging in dialogue with the world around her, sometimes critically, sometimes appreciatively, often both, through inclusion of quotations from all sorts of sources that converse within the poems and their notes, and sometimes through direct address—from the early poems that apostrophize admired figures (Bernard Shaw in "To a Prize Bird," Disraeli in "To a Strategist") or admonish anonymous others ("To a Steam Roller," "Those Various Scalpels") to later poems that reassess American history ("Virginia Britannia"), engage political urgencies ("In Distrust of Merits"), or call for communal action ("The Camperdown Elm").

The speaker of Moore's poems is, early to late, a curious investigator of the world—social and natural, aesthetic and ethical—who presents herself as an arbiter. She assesses the world around her afresh, asking *what do I like? what is of value? what is worth doing?* Her poetic self is expressed in her evaluative choices. In this sense, Moore was always both a "critic" and a "connoisseur," whose outward-directed interest in

objects, people, plants and animals was both discriminating and impassioned. One might say that the title of Moore's first authorized book, *Observations*, aptly names all of her poems, which simultaneously offer commentary and teach us to see anew.

Moore's poetry also requires work of her readers. Her agile vocabulary and her disdain for connectives demand acute readerly attention in order to track (and to co-invent) the poems' unfolding logic. Her poems shadow the twists and turns of a highly informed mind in motion—touching on the huge spectrum of material that all minds encounter as they hop from stimulus to stimulus in our endlessly distracting world: ranging from war, to fashion, to animal behavior, to religion, to food, to the details of plant life—and drawing on the sources she meets in daily life, as diverse as the *Illustrated London News*, sermons, conversations overheard, folk songs, Greek philosophers, letters from friends, advertisements, and, later, TV performances of circuses and operas. Moore's associative methods are entirely familiar to all Internet users.

Understanding of Moore's work has been greatly assisted by the arrival of Leavell's biography, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*, the first written with full access to the Moore family papers. Happily for posterity, the family members documented themselves prolifically. Their many letters, along with Moore's 120+ notebooks and extensive correspondence with friends far and wide, convey with great depth the complexity of their family dynamics and demonstrate that Moore's skills at innovation in the poetic realm extended also to her self-fashioning. After an unusual childhood in a tightly knit, idiosyncratic, highly educated and religious family, Moore (along with her mother) moved to Greenwich Village in 1918. There she immediately joined the Modernist literary revolution, first as a poet and then in the late 1920s as editor of the influential *Dial* magazine. She lived at the core of the New York cultural scene as it evolved over the next six decades.

For years, critics worked under the biased misimpression that Moore essentially had no personal story because she was not romantically involved; this fed the view of her career as a regrettable decline into sentimentality and idiosyncrasy from an early Modernist height. However, as biographical material has become more available and critics have expanded their openness to alternative life narratives, new lines of insight into the relations between the life and the poems have emerged. Within her family, Moore was called by male pronouns and nicknames, and she often dressed in masculine styles. This makes new sense to contemporary

readers more familiar with alternative genderings. Though readers of Moore's family letters have long known that Mary Warner Moore had a love relationship with Mary Norcross, their pastor's daughter, Leavell's biography has clarified the dimensions of their nine-year partnership. Images of Moore (or her mother) as naïve or strait-laced moralists come undone when we learn that she grew up in a matter-of-fact Christian lesbian household.

Our sense of Moore sharpens further in light of Leavell's claim that her mother's frugality and controlling ways effectively aided her poetry by pushing her to develop an alternative realm of complexity and freedom into which her mother could not follow. That complexity included the fact that Moore's relationships with her mother and brother were also close and sustaining. They offered companionship and a strong sense of family identity, and that too is reflected in the work, as are Moore's many strong friendships, with Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Crane, Hildegard and Sibley Watson, Monroe Wheeler, Bryher and H.D., Joseph Cornell, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden, among many others. Coming to understand these relationships of mutual influence as they evolved over years and their significance for twentieth and twenty-first-century American culture will be the fertile focus of decades of critical work to come. Moore studies have steadily expanded to include readings that explore her environmental, political, gendered, religious, artistic, and cultural investments, based in a combination of reference to historical and biographical materials and engaged close readings of the poems. All of these lines of inquiry bear fruit in this volume.

Changes in the landscape of Moore scholarship have been building gradually for decades. Accompanying and feeding this growth have been several conferences devoted to Moore's work. The present volume developed out of a 2015 conference at the University of Houston—the fourth conference devoted to Moore over roughly thirty years (following two in 1987, her centennial, at Orono and Chicago, and a third at Penn State in 2003). Where the Chicago celebration (sponsored by *Poetry*) brought together established poet/critics, the Orono, Penn State, and Houston conferences included emerging Moore scholars, many of whom have gone on to make significant contributions to the field, along with established scholars. The first three conferences led to exciting volumes that moved Moore studies forward and continue to serve as resources.² We hope this collection will do the same.

Drawing on new approaches and on Moore's archive, the essays in this volume are part of a new wave of culturally situated and contextually rich readings of Moore's poems. Many of these chapters explore Moore's sometimes surprising relationships to a wide network of artists and thinkers, including Lola Ridge, the Rev. E.H. Kellogg, Beatrix Potter, Omar Khayyam and Edward Fitzgerald, William Blake, Klaus Mann, Anna Pavlova, Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery, and Andy Warhol. This collection breaks ground in looking at all stages of Moore's career, from her early days in Carlisle where as a young suffragist she developed her innovative voice and reached out confidently to the burgeoning international community of politically and aesthetically astute modernists, through her arrival and aesthetic prominence in NYC in the late teens and twenties, her *Dial* editorship, her deeply political and historical poetry of the 1930s, her committed war poetry of the 1940s, and her populist, celebrity phase in the 1950s and 1960s in which she took on a whole new range of causes and aesthetic experiments.

This volume is organized in five sections—the first dealing with trans-temporal dynamics in Moore's work, the three that follow anchored in specific periods, and the fifth offering commentaries by major Moore scholars and editors on the evolution and future of Moore studies. The essays in all these sections deal with the many interactive dialogues through which Moore engaged the wider world.

The first section, "Moore's Methods," explores new approaches to thinking about Moore's vocabulary, rhetoric, metrics, structure, and style. In the opening essay, "Marianne Moore's Gustatory Imagination," Robin Schulze takes Linda Leavell's biographical account of Moore's troubled relation to food as a springboard for examining her frequent use of appetite-related terms such as "gusto," "fastidiousness," "disgust" and "taste" in her poetry. She argues that Moore's taste for such language encodes her investment in the importance of absorbing new ideas and avoiding narrow judgments, balancing appetite with self-control and scarcity. Tracking these images across the first few decades of Moore's career, Schulze offers a fresh perspective on some of Moore's best-known poems.

Roger Gilbert's essay, "'These Things': Moore's Habits of Adduction," continues the exploration of Moore's processes of selection, analyzing her use of the phrase "these things" to conjoin disparate particulars while simultaneously giving them categorical status. Through incisive analysis of rhetoric, organization, and punctuation, Gilbert illuminates the ways that Moore's poetic assemblages invite us to puzzle out

the hidden principles that bind them together, opening connections to modernist collage and disjunctive poetics. Approaching Moore's accumulations from a mathematical angle, Fiona Green's essay on "Moore's Numbers" analyzes Moore's lifelong fascination with counting and numbering. Again using Leavell's biography as prompt, Green notes that Moore suffered from "dyscalculia," a difficulty with mathematical thinking, to which doubling down on counting is often a response. Green argues that "dyscalculia" can at once elucidate Moore's syllabics, her focus on enumeration, and her poetry's foregrounding of numbers that refuse to meld into the background of meaning or into naturalizing rhythms.

Stacy Carson Hubbard's essay, "Yellow Roses and Bulbuls: Marianne Moore's Persian Effects," furthers the discussion of taste and appetite in examining the allusions to Persian decorative objects, paintings, poetry, and gardens that abound in Moore's poems from the mid-teens through the 1960s, where they signify beauty and extravagance, and work to displace the primacy of European culture. Hubbard argues that such Persian cultural influences helped Moore to develop a modernist aesthetics of the "arabesque" that embodied her contradictory attractions to elaboration and reduction, passion and restraint, and suggested ways of valuing pleasure and passion unavailable within Judeo-Christian traditions. This essay is in dialogue with several others in the volume around Moore's views of pleasure, restraint, and censorship.

From the wide views of the opening chapters, we move in the second section to explore two early and profound influences on Moore's poetics. Patricia C. Willis, the scholar with the deepest knowledge of Moore's archive, demonstrates in "'Contrarities Equally True': Marianne Moore and William Blake" the enthralling effect that Blake had on Moore. Willis reveals that together Blake's poems and images shaped Moore's early work at a genetic level—affirming the essential nature of paradox and the power of the invisible within the visible, and initiating the ekphrastic practice that animated much of her work thereafter. Willis deftly traces the evolution of some of Moore's basic principles and most affective images.

In "'The Teacher Was Speaking of Unrhymed Verse': Marianne Moore, E.H. Kellogg, and the Poetry of Modernist Hermeneutics," Jennifer L. Leader further unwinds the religious thread, exploring the difficulty Moore's readers have sometimes felt in attempting to reconcile her anti-authoritarian free thought with her lifelong Presbyterian

piety. Remarkably, Leader makes the dynamics of cutting-edge, early twentieth-century biblical criticism entirely comprehensible, tracking the impact on Moore's work of her Carlisle pastor, "believing critic" Edwin H. Kellogg—a figure who was, like Blake and Moore, at home with paradox.

In 1925, just months after she won the Dial Award for poetry, Moore took over as editor of *The Dial* magazine, and stopped writing poems for the five years she worked there. When she returned to verse in the 1930s, her methods had evolved, responding to the Depression and to her changing sense of the poet's role in a democratic society. As World War II approached, she became even more actively engaged with exploring the terms through which liberty is defined and can prevail.

The third section focuses on Moore's editorial and creative work between the 1920s and the 1940s. In "Editing Modernism: Marianne Moore at *The Dial* Magazine," Victoria Bazin reconsiders Moore's editorial work as an extension of her poetic practice, involving juxtaposition, montage, and a principle of "contractility" that is distinctly modernist as well as distinctively Moore's. Her analysis rethinks the "cut" in order to revise dominant narratives of modernist periodical culture that have underestimated Moore's editorial influence or characterized it as destructive. In her essay, "Marianne Moore and Labor," Linda A. Kinnahan also reveals connections in what formerly have seemed like discrete sectors of Moore's work. Kinnahan enriches our sense of Moore's relations with her contemporaries and her political engagements across her poems of the teens, 1920s, and 1930s, by exploring the evolution of her concerns with labor and social justice, including her connections to activist poet Lola Ridge and labor theorist Thorstein Veblen.

Emily Setina's essay, "Marianne Moore's 'Light Is Speech,' *Decision Magazine*, and the Wartime Work of Intellectual Exchange," furthers our sense of Moore as a political poet by discussing her little-treated poem about the Nazi occupation of France in its original publication context in the March, 1941, issue of *Decision* magazine. Analyzing the poem's allusions, puns, and intertextuality, Setina illuminates the vision of intellectual exchange as political action and artistic acts as resistance that Moore shared with the editors of the magazine. This section's final essay, Karin Roffman's "'Mysteries Expound Mysteries': Marianne Moore's Influence on John Ashbery," tracks the dynamics of intergenerational literary dialogue, looking at the impact of Moore's poetry on the younger poet. Documenting Ashbery's multiple discoveries and

rediscoveries of Moore's work from the forties forward, Roffman argues that Moore's methods of indirection profoundly shaped Ashbery's expressions of powerful feeling in ways hitherto unrecognized, offering us yet another way of thinking about Moore's passion and restraint.

Immediately after World War II, Moore struggled with caring for her mother and with her own health issues. After Mary Warner Moore's death in 1947, Moore immersed herself in translations of La Fontaine's fables (published in 1954), and in organizing her *Collected Poems*. When that book won the three major poetry prizes in 1952, Moore became a celebrity, famous with Americans of all brow levels for being famous. Moore reframed her persona and her poetry to engage her expanded audience, with poems about sports and popular culture. Her turn toward the popular won her many fans in her day—her poems appeared on the front page of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and in magazines such as *Vogue* and *The New Yorker* aimed at middlebrow audiences with aspirations to elite knowledge. But in the decades after her death her work of this period was little appreciated, or even discussed, by critics. With time, however, as celebrity culture has come to be more thoughtfully analyzed, Moore's canny negotiation of the multiple audiences for her poetry, her performance of her insistently democratic George-Washington-in-drag persona, and the links of that negotiation to prior evolutions in her poetics, is increasingly being recognized and valued.

The fourth section collects three essays on aspects of Moore's late phase. As a performer herself, the always-stylish Moore drew on and expanded her longstanding love of dance in several late works. Aurore Clavier's lively essay, "'The First Grace of Style': Marianne Moore and the Writing of Dancing," explores Moore's twinned uses of dance: her miming of dance's fleeting nature in poems such as "Arthur Mitchell" (1962) to trope the transitory, ungraspable qualities of a given moment or person, balanced with her love of the arresting quality of artfully stylized fixed poses that seem to stop time, as expressed in her 1944 essay on Anna Pavlova and her 1956 poem "Style."

Focusing on Moore's final volume, *Tell Me, Tell Me* (1966), and particularly its title poem, Zachary Finch emphasizes the personal element in Moore's work, frequently overlooked but often underlying. Finch's careful close reading of this poem makes the case that Moore is telling the story of her own aesthetic and social development through analogies with those of Henry James and Beatrix Potter. He demonstrates that she calls on her readers, through the title's injunction, to actively engage in the

process of meaning-making with her—like the mice who assist the tailor in Potter’s *The Tailor of Gloucester*. Elizabeth Gregory’s “Is Andy Warhol Marianne Moore?” closes out the essay sections with a reading of Moore’s poem “Rosemary,” which appeared in *Vogue*’s 1954 Christmas issue, a few pages away from Andy Warhol’s first *Vogue* ad. Noting the strong parallels between the lives of the two Pennsylvania-raised celebrities, Gregory explores their shared investment in the liberating possibilities of artistic and personal self-fashioning and their shared critiques of high/low hierarchies, and reads their work and careers as both actively subversive of received ideas—about gender, value, and what constitutes art.

The volume closes with a collection of brief memoirs by six leading Moore scholars who have been active in opening up Moore studies to new audiences: Patricia Willis, Bonnie Costello, Cristanne Miller, Robin Schulze, Linda Leavell, and Heather Cass White. While Moore studies have been too-long limited by a lack of textual resources, they have always been rich in the energies and insights of engaged scholars who have worked individually and collectively to increase access to the full range of Moore’s work. These accounts provide a quick retrospective of the trajectory of Moore studies over the past 40 years that has brought us to the current renaissance and they foresee new avenues of future endeavor, both editorial and critical, that will put ever-expanding audiences in conversation with Moore’s democratic genius. She will be here when the next critical waves have gone by.

NOTES

1. This poem was first published in *The Egoist* (April 1918) as “Melancthon,” republished in *Poems, Observations and Selected Poems* as “Black Earth,” then retitled “Melancthon” for the *Collected*, and omitted from the *Complete*.
2. Willis 1990; Parisi 1990; Leavell, et al. 2005.

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PART I

Moore's Methods

Marianne Moore's Gustatory Imagination

Robin G. Schulze

I have to admit that, while I love Linda's Leavell's 2013 biography of Marianne Moore, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*, I also find it disturbing. While I knew that Moore had made certain sacrifices in order to pursue her life as a poet in the company of her mother, Mary, I don't think any of us imagined the extent of the deprivations involved. Mary held the money. Every penny that Moore made, whether from salary, poetry, or prizes, went to savings that Mary never touched. The basement apartment that the two women shared after they moved to Greenwich Village was tiny and afforded Moore neither mental nor physical privacy. Mary supervised Moore's bedtimes, personal hygiene, and meals, which consisted of meager fare prepared on a hot plate that Moore ate sitting on the edge of the bathtub. Thanksgiving dinner one year, Leavell writes, consisted of leftover sardines. Moore internalized her frustration and anxiety by not eating. Leavell charts the frightening fluctuations in Moore's weight.

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