Marianne Moore Among Her Contemporaries

Editorship in Her Poetry

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For Moore’s readers and her critics, the establishment of the text has long been a serious issue. We always want to complain, with John M. Slatin, one of her recent critics, that "Complete Poems does not provide a reliable basis for discussing the first two decades of Moore’s career" (viii). Especially for a student of early modern American poetry like Slatin, the radical editorship Moore exercised upon her early poetry is itself a matter of diverging critical consensus on her poetry. Since the so-called Complete Poems of 1967 (revised 1981), or the former Collected Poems of 1951, are largely dominated by the poems of her later years since 1935, the wealth of early modernism in Moore’s poetry cannot be fully witnessed by her present readers. For example, a progressively argued book of biographical study by Laurence Stapleton, relying on successive collections of her poetry, was still criticised by Slatin for its failure to account for the already revised status of each text. And more recent works on Moore seem continuing to depend on the poet’s authorized version of the texts, which inevitably sets a certain limitation to their arguments. One could only wish at this stage that someone with genuine textual scholarship and accessibility to the manuscript texts and
copyrights (Patricia C. Willis?) do the job of editing and publishing the variorum edition of Moore.

Though the polarizing phenomena in the critical evaluation of modernists, namely the division between their early stage of imagistic experiments and their later individual developments of longer poems, may vary from one poet to another, the more essential conflicts within each poet should remain the same. What Wallace Stevens speaks in his poem "Of Modern Poetry" may speak for the rest of his contemporaries best on this regard: "The poem of the mind in the act of finding/What will suffice. . . . It has to face the men of the time and to meet / The woman of the time. It has to think about war / And it has to find what will suffice. It has / To construct a new stage" (239-40). This is to mean, at least programmatically, that modern poetry has to account for the modern age since its theatre was changed to something else than the mere repetition of past souvenir. The aesthetic anxiety of influence by the romantic forebears on their modern inheriters may temporarily have been repressed or forgotten; many impending events of great historical power, like the World War or the sudden market crisis, should have affected the most sensitive species of the people in the way they could no longer entertain the same notion of the past as before. T. S. Eliot's celebrated 1919 statement on the historical sense in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is now proved to have been one of the most beguiling but successful remarks on the twentieth century sensibility of changing temporal order and its confused supplanting of the nineteenth century idea of progressionist historicism. Regardless of its orthodox canonization of European literary heritage, the remark itself and its exemplifying practice in The Waste Land attested to the more pragmatic side of its theory, i.e. juxtaposition and quotation in a stream of consciousness. Ezra Pound is, in this sense, the overtly ideological exemplar of this radical historical relativism. His "make it new" and other similar revolutionary remarks can then be taken as a Walter Benjamin-like cultural apology. Finally, his spiritual coeval Marianne Moore can now be supposed to take a similar role in the American poetic
scene of the twenties.

Through the editorial job of *The Dial* from 1925 to 1929, which included also the writing of reviews, essays, short comments, and briefer notes, Moore must certainly have exercised some power to accommodate or acclimatize the works of her contemporaries. If this were an overstat-
ing judgement, it would still mean for Moore some internal necessity to accommodate others' works. For instance, the review of Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920) in *The Dial*, 70 (Mar., 1921) necessarily focuses on Eliot's notion of "the perfect critic" and also on his sense of literary heritage in the essays on Swinburne, Ben Jonson, Blake and Dante. And the pervasive tone of her review is that of a reticent sympathy. Likewise, the reviews of her other contemporaries (Williams, Stevens, e. e. cummings, H. D. and others) are all her testimonies to accommodate their literary powers into her own in a less extravagant and more reticent way than those by Pound or Eliot. Perhaps more revealing ways of her accommodation can be seen in those "comments" and "briefer mentions" where Moore's tart, penetrating, and well-balanced rhetoric finds its way into almost any target of her interest. Willis suggests in her introduction to *The Complete Prose* that "the 'comment' pieces are, in their way, its substitute" (vi) for her poetry which were absent from those years. Slatin goes further to suggest that what Moore calls in "The Labors of Hercules" (1921) "the principle of accommodation" replaces her initial poetics of resistance or isolated originality, and then becomes the dominant mode of her poetic activity in the twenties (7-10, 122-55). My argument here is that Moore's "accommodating" method is as essential to her poetics in the twenties as the editorship of revision is essential to her whole writing career. In fact, her initial composing way by quotation is hardly discernible from her later practice of editing and revising the original text both of her own and of others.
"The Labors of Hercules" is our first instance to show how the author's later revision changed not only the poem's grammar but also its meanings. The title can mean at least a suggestion, or a certain propaganda for America to become more "civilized" (remember Pound's denunciation of America as "a half savage country" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly") both in a broadly cultural ("polite") and a narrowly artistic ("sophisticated") way. "To popularize the mule" is the first of such agendas, whose appositive variations, not their condensed theme, are apparently impressive. Here in the text from Observations (1924) we see the deleted lines from The Complete Poems (1967). As Bonnie Costello notes in her analysis of the poem's grammar, those deleted lines mean not just clarifications but also complications, that some paratactic units dominate over others. Costello observes: "While the infinitive units continue to divide the poem into short segments, the punctuation after 'curious' [in the middle] suggests that the second half of the poem is one long discussion on 'creative power.' Subtly inverting main and subordinate clauses, Moore has displaced 'the labors of Hercules' with 'creative power' as a controlling phrase. Thus the main sentence 'it takes the labors of Hercules to persuade X that Y' contains one long subordinate clause, which gathers a momentum of its own: 'one detects creative power by its capacity to prove to X that Y' " (172).

This purely rhetorical reading of the poem can have a strong potential to deconstruct also a strong ideology of the poem. The concealed theme of liberal progressivism or feminist liberationism can easily be at issue. However, one may well approach this aspect of Moore's poetry more cautiously by exploring not just into such an overtly feminist poem like "Marriage" (for which Sandra M. Gilbert argued a case of female impersonation in her recent "Marianne Moore as Female Female Impersonator") but also into a less seemingly ideological
poem like "England" or "A Grave." "Engrand" is necessarily a prelude to "The Labors of Hercules," since her judgement on the certain American traits can be reflected in the following antitheses:

... and America where there
is the little old ramshackle victoria in the south,
where cigars are smoked on the street in the north;
where there are no proof readers, no silkworms, no digressions;

the wild man's land; grass-less, links-less, language-less country in which
letters are written
not in Spanish, not in Greek, not in Latin, not in shorthand,
but in plain American which cats and dogs can read! (O 57/ CP 46)

The concluding judgement that there should be "the flower and fruit of all that noted superiority" (O 58/CP 47) in America is not voiced so strongly but in a definitive tone; hence comes the steady tone of "The Labors Hercules" which proliferates the idea of America as a land of equal opportunity. As Elizabeth Phillips explains the basic idea of the poem by referring to the political scene behind it, "the disintegration of Woodrow Wilson's presidency, the 'return to normacy', and the disillusionment with the vision of 'a world safe for democracy' after the 'war against the Huns' fed the distrust of the alien and foreign. 'Pure' America was in danger of becoming as hybrid as the mule, so Congress, in 1921, adopted policies of rigid restriction on immigration. Hatred of nonconformism and liberalism took new and ominous forms, including the sinister revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Blacks, Jews, Chinese, Catholics, and recent immigrants were alike victims of the Klan as its membership spread throughout the country. Marianne Moore's was one unaccommodating protest against a resurgence of native knownothingism" (160-61). Also the accusation is directed against those "high priests of caste" who seem to believe in the hierarchal order but do not seem to know that "snobbishness is a stupidity,... kissing the feet of the man
above, /kicking the face of the man below," or against "the patron-saints-to-atheists," namely, benefactors who may sit as rather sentimental audience to see a play named "Meet Me Alone by Moonlight" in the Coliseum and fuss about small things like catstrings (O 63-64). In any case, we finally hear a strong resolution that "we are sick of the earth, / sick of the pig-stye, wild geese and wild men" (O 64/ CP 53).

"New York" (O 65/ CP 54) is a sort of companion piece which shows also how the poem's "principle of accommodation" can be an analogy to the poet's editorial technique. Since Moore had moved from Catham in New Jersey to Greenwich Village in 1918, New York became really her "accessible" literary scene where she could make various "observations." One of them was surely a stroll around the commercial and shopping district. From the Fifth Avenue to the World Trade Center "the centre of the wholesale fur trade" indeed "starred with tepees of ermine and peopled with foxes," which signals the triumph of civilization over a savage wilderness ("Niagara Falls, the calico horses and the war canoe"). However, the apparent supremacy of culture over nature here may be immediately overturned when the description of such "a far cry from the 'queen full of jewells'/and the beau with the muff" or "the gilt coach shaped like a perfume" can have an easy overtone of plundering savagery. Even the concluding assertion that "it is not the plunder, / it is the 'accessibility to experience' " may lose its critical edge by the quotation mark (the phrase is from Henry James, according to the notes), which encapsulates the whole argument. And a confessional aside in the line which was later deleted: "one must stand outside and laugh / since to go in is to be lost" may tell more of Moore's fear or contempt for "experience." In other words, "the savage's romance" is necessarily a fiction for the poet to appropriate her "savage" wish to penetrate to the accessible experience. Like the actual New York, the poet is seeking a melting-pot of poetic commerce.

Though what kind of poetic "commerce" or negotiation Moore tried to achieve in this poem may not be immediately known, a sense of primitive wish to strip all the traps of civilization can be felt. For
instance, one assertion that "if the fur is not finer than such as one sees / others wear, / one would rather be without it——" may still concern shopping or fashion (as suggested by the source of quotation), its inherent primitivism ("that estimated in raw meat and berries") can also be about more basic human needs in a civilized society. Also savage reality in "Black Earth" (O 45-47) or "In the Days of Prismatic Colour" (O 49-50/CP 41-42) should testify to this aspect of Moore's poetry. "In the Days of Prismatic Color" has a beautiful passage as follows:

... sophistication is as it al-

ways has been — at the antipodes from the init-

ial great truths... Truth is no Apollo

Belvedere, no formal thing. The wave may go over it if it likes.

Know that it will be there when it says:

"I shall be there when the wave has gone by."

(O 49-50/CP 41-42)

The last line in quotation (the source is not noted) now forms part of the myth about "truth," whose naked, primal light in the pre-Edenic world, contrasted with the sophisticated complexity of darkness in a fallen society, may be attainable only through experiencing the withdrawal of the tidal wave of consciousness (or the mediacy of language). It should be noted, however, that the primacy of such a vision here resides again in the quotation mark which characterizes crucial moments of Moore's poetry in a qualified, proleptic manner. Getting back to "New York," the "accessibility to experience" is such a quoted mediacy. Once as we survey the later editorial deletion drastically made as in "Poetry," we begin to suspect the technique of editorial revision as her chief method of formulating the poetry in a sophisticated textual maneuvering.
Here before tackling her grand masterpiece "An Octopus," we must deal with another shorter poem to enlarge our notion of Moore's editorship in her poetry. Our third instance is a celebrated one called "Poetry." Its original version first appeared in Others (Summer 1919), which was reprinted in Poems (1921) and also collected in Selected Poems (1935) [later reprinted in Collected Poems (1953) and in the notes of Complete Poems (1967) as the "longer version" (CP 266-67)]. Then appeared a different revised version in the second edition of Observations (1925); finally appeared a drastically excised version of the original poem in Complete Poems (CP 36). Especially from the conflicts in writing two versions of the original longer 1919 poem and the revised 1925 poem, we may decode her technique of editorship in her early poetry. Slatin's characterization of the prosodic method of her initial stage, during the period from 1915 to 1920 as "the poetics of resistance" may appeal to our consideration of "Poetry" itself, since its first sentence begins, in all of its versions, quite sonorously resistant as follows:

I, too, dislike it...

(P 22/ 0 31/ CP 36)

The resistance to definition, to any defining act of producing an always already cultural and historical misrepresentation of the author's hidden undefinable desires and intents, has been one of the main agendas in the modernist aesthetics. Pound's "A Few Don'ts" (4) with his other changing manifestoes on Imagism is one. Eliot's highly paradoxical pronouncements on the "impersonality" of the poem (13-22) is another. Still another is evasively negative expressions like Stevens' "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (10), or Williams' "No that is not it/ nothing that I have done/ nothing / I have done / is made up

(336)
of nothing" (191).

I suspect the modernist’s pervasive tone of resistant impulse toward the direct definition of poetry should come not only from his or her difficulty of defining the poetic self in the modern world but also from a necessary defence against the nineteenth-century romanticists’ entangled commitments into the domain of humanist, if not humanitarian, values and ideologies. Wordsworthian revelations of poetic truth are often accompanied by his humanist sentiments on the revolutionary politics (The Prelude II 210-18, III 716-65). Coleridge’s theorizations on his "supernatural" imagination tend to transcend the ordinary domain of human perceptions but has no real difference from the latter but in degree of its operation (Biographia Literaria X III). Keatsian poetics of intangible sensuality derives mainly from the conflicts and sufferings of the human plights ("The Fall of Hyperion" 154-215). Shelly’s "epipsychic" imagination masks his radical humanist stance ("Epipsychidon"). These High Romantic poets in the nineteenth century have largely extended this humanist argument of redemptive imagination. Though some modernist poets may seem merely to endorse this "natural supernaturalist" position of the humanist aesthetic (Abrams 65-70), most of them, facing the crumbling of the faith in such a humanist aesthetic, have instead started their poetry in the experience of nihilism (see Miller).

In Moore’s case, some of these generalizations take a form of resistant accommodation: "Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in / it after all, a place for the genuine" (P 22; CP36 / 266). Poetic genius survives any contemptuous disregard in Moore. Further she says, "When they [poetic materials] became so derivative as to become unintelligible, / the same thing may be said for all of us, that we / do not admire what / we cannot understand" (P 22; CP 267), or, in another version, "when they have fashioned / into that which is unknowable, / we are not entertained/ / It may be said all of us / that we do not admire what we cannot understand" (O 31). This states the general meaning of "accommodation" or appropriation. And the conclud-
ing remarks that "if you demand on the one hand, in defiance of their opinion—/ the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness and / that which is on the other hand / genuine, you are interested in poetry" (P 22) or, in a shorter one, that "enigmas are not poetry" (0 31). all testify to the poet’s demystifying act of resistant accommodation.

Though a "resistant accommodation" may indeed be an oxymoronic coinage, it will suggest to the poet that the initial swerve away from the poetic ancestors should be both resistant and accommodating. Again John Slatin’s observations about "the profound sense of isolation at the core of her sense of self" and her need of "reconciling her interest in radically innovative young writers like Ezra Pound and the other Imagists, with the gentility which was and remained a fundamental aspect of her sensibility" (4) seem appropriate but insufficient. Moore went deeper into the domain of poetic battles than Slatin may have surmised. Several Imagistic instances in "Poetry" show more of this entanglement than a characteristic constraint within the poet’s biographical gentility. The first of these: "Hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise / if it must, these things are important not because all high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are / useful" may reveal how much Moore has been under the influences of the nineteenth-century romantics and its aesthetic consequences. One key figure to Moore, as she once admitted to Ezra Pound (Tomlinson 17), is William Blake, whose prophetic clarity is an exemplifying influence on her. In a poem entitled "Blake" published in Others (December 1915), there appear two lines which constitute the poem: "I wonder if you feel as you look at us, / As if you were seeing yourself in a mirror at the end / Of a long corridor — waving frail-ly" and "I am sure that we feel as we look at you, / As if we were ambiguous and all but improbable / Reflections of the sun — shining pale-ly" (Quoted in Slatin 54). These sentences describe what Moore takes to be the reflected influence of Blake in the contemporary poetry, which also takes a form of "reflections" of Blake’s "sun." Moreover, besides the above quoted lines of "Poetry" which remind one of Blake’s "The Tyger"
("What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?")
what Moore quotes from the Yeats' phrase on Blake of "literalists of imagination" in the longer "Poetry" indeed suggests her idea of poetry. While Moore’s use of prosaic language can be argued as her main problem of definition in her poetry, in conjunction with her prosodic experimention with the "syllabic" and "free" verse, the poet tries to achieve a more clarified expression in "Poetry" through its revisions. Blakean norm of clarified expression, as she notes on Yeats' words that Blake "hated for every grace of style that might obscure their [poetic figures'] lineaments" (CP 268), drives Moore to the unrelenting editorship; "The opaque allusion, the simulated flight upward, / accomplishes nothing" (CP 45) as she said elsewhere. Hence other Imagistic illustrations in the first longer version ("the bat / holding on upside down or in quest of something to // eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under / a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flies, the base- / ball fan, the statistician,-") more crucially, "business documents and // school-books," are at first indicted as "what / we cannot understand" (CP 267); then in the second version are all condemned as "pleasing" phenomena or "unknowable" enigmas (O 31); and finally deleted (CP 36). One another regrettable deletion in the later editions may be a celebrated phrase in the original longer version: "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" (CP 267), which is presented "for inspection" (P 267) but may be unknowable of its own source except in Milton's Pradice Lost where Satan "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of Eve" (IV, 800) 

Through these taxtual struggles to acquire clearer or more succinct expressions we have finally got some sense of Moore's idea of poetry: its "raw," "genuine," "initial great truths" (CP 41). In fact, these qualities are often revealed rather in those poems of animals or natural objects (like "The Plumet Basilisk," "The Frigate Pelican," "The Buffalo," "The Fish," "The Monkeys," or "Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain," "Those Various Scapels," "Bowls," "An Octopus" in Selected Poems of 1935) than the ones with more abstract or sophisticated titles ("In This
Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance Is Good And," "Pedantic Literalist," "Critics and Connoisseurs," "Marriage," "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns," or "Silence," to name several titles from the same volume), especially during the first half of Moore's poetic career. We will now examine how such "great truths" can be revealed in a poem from the former category, that grand masterpiece on the Mount Raignier, which is also a hidden companion piece to her another great poem "Marriage."

4

Like any great poem, "An Octopus" (1924) has a unique position both towards the poet's other works and those of her contemporaries and her predecessors. It points toward one of Moore's poetic achievements, especially of her pre-Dial years, and also stands as a summary poem of modernist poetry. This judgement is hardly surprising when we think of such other modernist masterpieces during this period as Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920), Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C" (1923), and Williams' "Spring and All" (1923). We can even surmise some preceding model poems such as Dante's Divine Comedy ("Purgatory" X X V III 136-141 and "Inferno" I 118-120), Milton's Paradise Lost (IV 138-268 449-69, IX 781-81, XII 641-44) and Paradise Regained (IV 313-330), Wordsworth's, The Prelude (VI 624-26, 638-40), Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (20-29, 69-75), all of which contain either prototype visions of "the Garden of Eden" or some sublime mountain visions. Here we do not aspire to suggest every possible source of the poem's imagery or discuss its intended meanings full but limit our discussion to the question of the poet's editorship and especially to the process of creating the poetic meaning through quoting and revising both the poetic canons and non-canonical texts in the way most subtle but scandalous among her contemporary modernists.

In the essay of laborious textual documentation and criticism entitled "The Road to Paradise: First Notes on Marianne Moore's 'An
Octopas," Patricia C. Willis draws some biographical circumstances and gives some important observations on the textual revisions. Willis' documentation of the poem's background circumstances, especially in the article's first portion entitled "Ascent to Paradise," comprises the information about how Moore's family (Mrs. Moore, Marianne, and her brother Warner) gathered together on two occasions (Summer 1922 & 1923) and climbed Mt. Rainier and its "Paradise Park" areas. This kind of biographical information would be a necessary, if inessential, one as with the poet's other "notes"; in Moore's case her radical editorship is a matter of such diverging critical issues that each quotation (mainly from Rules and Regulations: Mt. Rainier National Park, 1922) can become suspect of its pragmatic value as a source of poetic materials except in conjunction with the extrinsic experience in the poet's biography. One such suspicion arises when Willis describes how the poet's initial notes on her two Northwest trips have become separated ultimately into two poems: "Marriage" and "An Octopus" (Willis 247). This, I suspect, shows also how "An Octopus" as a poem has suffered, rather than gained, from the ideological contamination by some ideas in "Marriage," as well as the textual frauds in its theme and imagery.

Now to elaborate on this intertextual problem between "Marriage" and "An Octopus," for it gives us a good occasion to open our general discussion of "An Octopus," we begin by observing the opening "remarkable conjunction of lines" (Willis 247) in the original notebook:

An octopus of ice
so cool in this the age of violence
so static & so enterprising
heightening the mystery of the medium
the haunt of many-tailfeathers
these rustics calling each other by their first names
a simplification which complicates
one says I want to be alone
the other also I would like to be alone.

(341)
Why not be alone together
I have read you over all this while in silence
silence?
I have seen nothing in you
I have simply seen you when you were so handsome you gave me a
start

Editing the notebook manuscript into the form of two published poems
requires Moore more than the usual editorial task of clarification by
excision; here at least lies the genuine difficulty of incorporating the
quotations without losing their original sense and naturalness. Here
also exists an interesting textual / intertextual problem which may
have changed not only the specific interpretations of the opening lines
of "An Octopus" but also the whole design of the poem as well. The
notebook manuscript for "Marriage" had once the following later reject-
ed lines, which read: "Adam / I have seen him when he was so handsome
that he gave me a start . . . // this division into masculine and feminine
compartments of achievement will not do . . . one feels oneself to be an
integer / but one is not one is a particle / in an existence to which Adam
and Eve / are incidental to the plot" (Stapleton 39, my emphasis).
These rejected lines, in Stapleton's words which Diehl approvingly
quotes, will surely have "suggest[ed] a different direction for the poem"
(Diehl 175) from the one appeared in the published "Marriage":

Eve: beautiful woman—
I have seen her
when she was so handsome
she gave me a start . . .

"I should like to be alone";
to which the visitor replies,
"I should like to be alone;
why not be alone together?"
The original Adamic temptation for Moore, as depicted in the above exchange, may underscore "a first fall and no *felix culpa*" (Diehl 63) but the myth of origin can easily be overturned or elided in the cultural institution of "marriage." This is not merely because "Eve" was formerly "Adam" in its textual prehistory and hence almost interchangeable in its role but because the narrating speaker has taken a rather detached stance towards the two protagonists. The poet's insistence that "Adam and Eve are incidental to the plot" in the manuscript may express such alienation or "impersonation," as Gilbert likes to call. Hence "this revisionary scene of masculine seduction," as Diel puts, "is interrupted by a descriptive passage that evokes the pathos of the isolated male imagination" (63). Dieh's further interpretation, especially on "the central flaw" (CP 63) of Eve and after, gives us once more an occasion to observe Moore's typical textual fraud or unexplained presence of the quoted materials. As the poet herself admitted once that "Marriage" is a poem of "statements that took [her] fancy which [she] tried to arrange plausibly" (CP 271), the poem becomes more and more disjunctive as it progresses. From the vantage point of entangled but enriched interpretative paradigms of "Marriage," we can probe deeper into some of the textual problems of "An Octopus," centering on the inevitable thematic considerations on Moore's idea of "paradise," which has a genuine uniqueness in contrast to the other male modernists' poetry.

First we should remind ourselves of how the opening of the published version differs from the original notebook version. As the imagistic shift form those symbolically evocative phrases of "so cool in this age of violence / so static & so enterprising / heightening the mystery of the medium the haunt of many-tailfeathers..." (Willis 247) in the notebook version to the more determinedly articulated ones like "Deceptively reserved and flat, / it lies 'in grandeur and in mass' / beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes; / dots of cyclamen red maroon on its clearly defined pseudopodia..." (CP 71) in the published one seems
indeed magnificent, the basic principle of editorship in the poem becomes more problematic. According to Willis, Moore first chose during her research for the poem "a popular text by the explorer-adventurer Walter Dwight Wilcox, The Rockies of Canada" and did "copying out quotations and page numbers; and filling nine pages of the stenographer's pad," circling phrases for future use: 'roar of ice,' 'goats looking-glass,' 'curtain of snow'" (Willis 248). Next, she turned to other notebooks to find quotations from other sources ("glass that will bend," and so forth), then to the main source: Rules and Regulations, drawing a line across the page with the word "END" probably signifying a discovery of a closure to the poem:

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avalanche
with the crack of a rifle
a curtain of powdered snow
loosed like a waterfall. (Willis 249)
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The above phrases in the manuscript have their source in Rules and Regulations, as is made clear from the final published version: "'with a sound like the crack of a rifle, / in a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall'" (CP 76). And these closing lines are established before she has completed most of the other parts of the poem; moreover, Moore had yet to turn to another source-book, Clifton Johnson's What to See in America (1919) before coming to an abrupt stop in her working notes (Willis 249).

Willis's further documentation on the "additional notes: a palimpsest" (249-57) contains one central reference to the following series of "Greek" passages, which combine varying sources from Rules and Regulations, Richard Baxter's The Saints' Everlasting Rest (1909), and John Henry Newman's Historical Sketches (particularly the passages on "The Site of a University," namely about Athens, the original grove of "Aca-

(344)
"Like happy souls in Hell," enjoying mental difficulties, the Greeks amused themselves with delicate behavior because it was "so noble and so fair."

The Greeks liked smoothness, distrusting what was back of what could not be clearly seen, resolving with benevolent conclusiveness. . . . (CP 74-75)

Preceding the above quotations, there was in a late manuscript version a reference to "'Calypso, the goat flower — that greenish orchid fond of snow' — —" and "the blue jay, her principal companion" which is described as "'secretive, with a look of wisdom and distinction, but a villain, / fond of human society or the crumbs that go with it,' / he knows no Greek, the pastime of Calypso and Ulysses — / 'that pride producing language' " (270). Calypso is the name for an orchid and a goddess from the Odyssey, or "Calypso a nothern orchid named for / the goddess who fell in love w[ith] Ulysses" (Willis 253) as the poet says, drawing from Wilcox's The Rockies of Canada.

Now in the quoted passages lies one of the most revealing textual configurations in "An Octopus." A mere glimpse of Moore's efforts to integrate several references from the source books will reveal how deft and uncanny her textual manipulation is. First there was a primary source, Newman's Historical Sketches, which she was reading on her second Northwest trip in 1924. As Willis explains, Moore "took Newman's view of the Greeks — philosophers who chose to deify the beautiful, observing propriety as their code of conduct 'because it was so noble and fair' — — and used it as an overlay to notes already made from Richard Baxter's The Saints' Everlasting Rest" (252). The quotation from the latter appears quite mechanically in the poem as a definition of happiness as "'an accident or a quality, / a spiritual substance or the soul itself, / an act or disposition, or a habit / or a habit infused to which the soul has been persuaded, / or something distinct from a habit, a power' — — / such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of " (CP 345)
but its textual prehistory has more to reveal its entangled meanings and now lost possible interpretations. Moore's first notebook manuscript on Baxter contains several amendments as follows:

*the Greeks speculating whether it be an accident or a quality, a spiritual substance — the soul itself... such a power as Adam lost they had & we are still devoid of.* (Willis 252; my italics)

Moore's alterations and additions, noted above in italics, suggest her intention to connect a seventeenth-century nonconformist Christian divine's meditation with the Greeks' relentless love of eternal beauties in Newman's persuasion. Her further notebook manuscript confirms this conjunction:

the Greeks liked smoothness
telling us of those
upon whose lifelessness
[the] piercing melting word becomes
a pearl on lepers hands
since some of them
weary of a hard heart, some of a proud,
some of a passionate & some, of all
these & much more. (Willis 252-53)

The interjections like "Like happy souls in Hell" or "The Greeks liked smoothness" (CP 74, 75) onto the quotation from Baxter clearly show Moore's editorship. The troubling aspect of this editorship, however, is that it sometimes suppresses a potential paradox inherent in each quotations. Willis points this out by saying that "the phrase ['enjoying mental difficulties' CP 74] is a paradox that the poet associated with the Greeks and the nonbelievers whom Baxter described as 'richly famished' " (253). The essential incongruity between the pagan Greeks and the Calvinist (though mildly Catholic) Baxter seems to have been
suppressed in Moore as to produce a textual conjunction of lines such as the quotations above. Or else we can reinterpret this as the poet trying to resolve the paradox by finding out a common feature; the words from her letter to her brother on Newman’s book that "Newman visualizes the material beauties of the Greeks previous to an exposing of spiritual defects" (Letter to Warner, April 21, 1924: Willis 251) might explain a possible equation with Baxter’s meditative "spiritual" phrases, especially in its "meditative" or healing significances.

As has been made clear from the description of Moore’s editorship in "An Octopus," "quotations" are made very tactfully through many layers of original sources and the poet’s interpretations. Even the poem itself knows its authorial will-to-power and indicts its fundamental impossibility of such a project:

it is the love of doing hard things
that rebuffed and wore them out — a public out of sympathy with
neatness.
Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish!
Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact. (CP 76)

Moore’s idea of "paradise" at the top of Mt. Raignier, both in physical and metaphysical sense, has finally become bankrupt; its Greek perfectionality is indicted here in repeated "neatness of finish!" As Stapleton pointed out (MNL 16), this accusation is immediately directed at a passage near the end of Williams’ Kora in Hell (1920), where Williams mocks the notion that "a work of art" can be neatly "wrapped":

Neatness and finish; the dust out of every corner! You swish from room to room and find all perfect. The house may now be carefully wrapped in brown paper and sent to a publisher. It is a work of art. You look rather askance at me. Do not believe I cannot guess your mind, yet I have my studies. You see, when the wheel’s just at the up turn it glimpses horizon,
zenith, all in a burst, the pull of the earth shaken off, a scatter of fragments, significance in a burst of water striking up from the base of a fountain. Then at the sickening turn toward death the pieces are joined into a pretty thing, a bouquet frozen in an ice-cake. This is art, mon cher, a thing to carry up with you on the next turn... (Imaginations 71)

Slatin quotes the same passage as well and has a nice comment: "'An Octopus / of ice,' Moore's poem begins; again, it is only at the very end of the poem, when it has taken what Williams calls here 'the sickening turn toward death' and we have begun to Fall, that 'the pieces are joined into a pretty thing' which reveals that we have been in Paradise" (162). To this comment, we can also add that Williams' colloquial description of the precise nature of fragile art as "a bouquet frozen in an ice-cake" may best apply to the artificial world of icy paradise in Moore. And if we compare the above paradisal vision in Moore's "An Octopus" with that of the other modernist poets — one may think of Pound's hallucinatory vision in Pisa ("Le Paradis n'est pas artificial" Cantos LXXVII: 468), Stevens's agnostic questionings in his meditation ("Is there no change of death in paradise?" CP 69), or even Eliot's purgatorial vision in "Ash Wendsday," we may be made aware of her strict textual codification and editorialization of that vision, and hence recognize its subtle mechanism which is quite a unique device of her own.

Notes
1. In the Complete Poems (CP 53), the following lines were deleted from the text of "The Labors of Hercules" in Observations (O 63-64): "till the sky is the limit" (63/9), that excessive conduct (63/10) [between "in value" (7) and "augurs" (7)]; the Coliseum (63/24), meet-me-alone-by-moonlight maudlin troubadour (63/25), that kickups for catstrings are not life (63/26), nor yet appropriate to death — (64/1) [between "atheists" (20) and "that" (21)]; that it is one thing to change one's (64/4), another to eradicte it — (64/5) [between "controversialists" (23) and "that" (24)].
2. This deleted line in *Complete Poems* appears between "the wilderness" (14) and "It is not" (15) in the page 65 of *Observations*.

3. Slatin tries to resolve this issue by observing Moore's notes (*Tolstoy's Diary*), T. S. Eliot's "The Boderline of Prose" (1917), and another Moore's poem ("Why that Question?", an unfinished poem, 1917), as a separate discussion from his consideration of her "syllabic poetry" and her experimentation with the "free verse." Slatin, 47-49, 86-93, 99-119, passim.

4. More about this source, see Holley, 207.

5. The poem was first published in *The Dial*, 77 (December 1924), 475-81, which is reprinted in *CP*, 71-46. Its late manuscript version was published in *Twentieth Century Literature (Marianne Moore Issue)*, 30, 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1984), 267-72.

6. Quoted in Willis, 247 (The Notebook manuscript: Rosenbach 1251/17). Also see Diehl's discussion (72, 177-78).

7. Later in the poem it is proclaimed: "Everything to do with love is mystery" (*CP* 69), which may suggest "a gesture of interpretative relinquishment" (Diehl 67), and the poetic argument is finally deconstructed in the closing image of Daniel Webster with his pose: "the Book on the writing-table; / the hand in the breast-pocket" (*CP* 70). For a more complete interpretation of the poem, see Diehl (61-70), Bloom (49), Hadas (Bloom 25-41), among others.

**Works Cited**


London: Faber, 1932.


