The Fish Study Guide

The Fish by Marianne Moore

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Marianne Moore wrote "The Fish" in 1918 but it was published later in her first collection, *Poems,* in 1921. This collection was published, without her knowledge, in England by two of Moore's friends. An example of rhymed syllabic verse, "The Fish" highlights Moore's ability for precise visual description. Ironically, the poem is not about fish at all, but rather the relationship among a seaside cliff, sea life, and the sea itself. Sunlight acts upon the sea and its creatures, and the sea acts upon a cliff. Moore highlights the interdependence of these elements in the shape of the poem, which moves like a wave, surging towards a subject, then retreating from it. The narrator of the poem describes this interdependence in a hard, emotionally detached manner. Her images paradoxically suggest both fecundity and abundance and starkness and death. This dichotomy drives the poem, but Moore never resolves the paradox; rather, she suggests that it is a necessary part of the world. The processes of life and death are evident everywhere, and as much a part of the human as the natural landscape.

Moore was inspired by the natural world. She frequently wrote about animals, domestic and exotic, often preferring the non-human world over the human world. Moore was also interested in modern painting and studied color theory, which some critics mention as influencing "The Fish." Other possible influences were her brother Warner's passion for sailing and Moore's deep respect for him. When the poem was republished in her second collection, *Observations* (1924), Moore used six-line stanzas instead of five. However, it is the five-line version that has been widely anthologized and written about.

Author Biography

Known for her precise and measured observations of insects and animals, an often ironic tone, and idiosyncratic form, Marianne Craig Moore offered modern poetry a compelling alternative to T. S. Eliot's fragmented universe of archaic allusions, William Carlos Williams's speech-based poetics, and Wallace Stevens's flowery meditations on reality and the imagination. A naturalist as much as a poet, Moore wrote poetry with a painter's eye, packing an entire world of meaning into a single image. Her quirky rhyme schemes, odd stanzaic patterns, and use of unconventional syllabic patterns caused some critics to ask if she was even a poet. Moore often asked the same question.

Moore was born in 1887 in Kirkwood, Missouri, to John Milton Moore, a construction engineer, and Mary Warner. Her parents separated before she was born and Marianne never saw her father, who was institutionalized after a nervous breakdown. She grew up in the house of her maternal grandfather, John Riddle Warner, the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Kirkwood. After graduating in 1909 from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania with a degree in biology, Moore taught typing and bookkeeping while continuing her writing. The most influential person in Moore's life and on her writing was her mother, with whom she lived most of her life.

Though she began to publish poems in little magazines in 1915, Moore did not publish her first book until 1921 when her friends, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Robert McAlmon, published, without her knowledge, a collection titled simply *Poems* in London. This volume contains "The Fish," her most anthologized poem. Moore developed her reputation as a poet when she became editor of the influential literary journal the *Dial* in 1925. During her four-year tenure at the *Dial,* Moore published many of the twentieth-century's most well-known writers such as Paul Valery, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Ezra Pound, and Ortega y Gasset, and she corresponded extensively with many poets and writers.

Moore became somewhat of a celebrity in her old age. Photographs of her in a cape and tricorne hat often ran in newspapers and magazines, and she even made an appearance on *The Tonight Show* . A lifelong fan of baseball, she was invited to throw out the first ball of the season at Yankee Stadium in 1967. In 1969, Moore was named "Senior Citizen of the Year" by the New York Conference on Aging. That same year, she received an honorary degree from Harvard.

In addition to the poetry collections published during the 1920s, Moore published *What Are Years?* (1941); *Nevertheless* (1944); the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Collected Poems* (1951), which was also awarded the 1952 National Book Award and the Bollingen Prize in 1953; a collection of essays, *Predilections* (1955); and *Idiosyncrasy and Technique: Two Lectures* (1958).

Moore died February 5, 1972, in New York City. She was 84 years old.

Poem Text

wade
through black jade.
Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash-heaps;
opening and shutting itself like
an
injured fan.
The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the
sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating
the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff; whereupon the stars,
pink
rice-grains, ink-bespattered
jelly-fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.
All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of
accident
—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

Plot Summary

First Stanza

The first line of "The Fish" syntactically belongs to the title. In an almost filmic manner, the speaker focuses on fish "wading" through "black jade." These words are telling because they suggest a heaviness and a slowness to the fish's movement. Jade is opaque and is not naturally associated with water. The darkness of the water underlines the mysteriousness of the sea, the difficulty of knowing it. By calling the sand disturbed by the opening and closing of one of the mussels "ash heaps," Moore underscores not only the physical appearance of this action but also how the sea floor looks "disposable" to human eyes. By singling out one of the shells, noting how it is "adjusting" the environment around it, Moore suggests how the movement of the smallest thing can have an effect on the larger world.

Second Stanza

The second stanza picks up from the last line of the preceding stanza. By running her lines over, a technique known as enjambment, Moore foregrounds her own composing strategy, which highlights the interdependence of words and lines. Formally, then, the poem parallels its subject: the interdependence of the living and the dead, the individual thing and the context in which it exists. Her composing strategy, then, is also a composting strategy. She finishes the simile she began in the first stanza by likening the opening and closing of the mussel to an "injured fan." The sea now begins to resemble nothing so much as a hospital ward for sick sea life.

In this stanza, Moore focuses on the sea, pointing out the vulnerability of barnacles. By writing that they "cannot hide," Moore humanizes these underwater creatures. Barnacles are marine crustaceans that are free-swimming as larvae but permanently fixed (as to rocks, boat hulls, or whales) as adults. In this case, they "encrust" a wave, which is unusual because we don't think of things being able to affix themselves to water.

Third Stanza

The sunlight is refracted ("split like spun / glass") and acts as a searchlight beaming into the nooks and crannies of underwater life. As narrator, Moore acts as the person holding the flashlight helping readers *see* what they could not without her help. The "spotlight swiftness" of the sun suggests that it may be a cloudy day, as the sun comes out, then falls behind clouds.

Fourth Stanza

In this stanza, the water acts upon a cliff. Moore underscores the force and relentlessness of the sea's actions with the verb "drives" and the repetition of "iron." Iron is meant both figuratively and literally. Figuratively, it suggests the power of the waves; literally, it describes the iron deposits on the cliff from previous waves. The sea is no longer "black jade" but "turquoise" thanks to the sun's transformative action.

Fifth Stanza

The action of the waves wreaks havoc on the sea life on the cliff, as jellyfish, crab, and starfish "slide each on the other." Moore describes sea life here as land life□lilies, toadstools, grains, rice. Her precise descriptions of these animals highlight the sea's fecundity, reminding readers that all life came from the sea. The profusion of colors in this stanza marks it as the visual center of the poem. Also, it is interesting to note that, apart from the last stanza, this is the only stanza that does not run over to the next. After spending five stanzas describing the movement of the sea, Moore spends three commenting on that movement.

Sixth Stanza

The "abuse" comes from the waves' repeated striking of the cliff. However, the cliff is "defiant," meaning that it stands up in the face of such abuse. As she did with the sea, Moore personifies the cliff. By using the word "external," however, Moore implies that there is something internal that may not be known.

Seventh Stanza

By making the first syllable of "accident" the first line, Moore sticks with the syllabic pattern she has established for the poem. The break also underlines the idea of an accident (in which something is broken). The list of "the physical features of / ac-/ cident" are graphic. The violence of the marks also denotes human, as opposed to natural, action. Hatchet strokes, burns, and dynamite grooves all point to things done to the cliff by people who are never explicitly mentioned in the poem.

Eighth Stanza

This stanza is perhaps the most enigmatic in the entire poem. The "chasm side" of the cliff is "dead," suggesting that it might not contain sea life. However, it continues to live, evidence of its power to endure with little sustenance. The sea itself is that which "can not revive / its youth," and "the sea grows old" in the chasm. These last lines describe an interdependent relationship between the cliff and the sea, how they define and are defined by each other.

Themes

Nature

Moore's poem attests to the fact that although humanity may attempt to shape nature to fit its needs, it is ultimately a futile endeavor. Time itself effaces humanity's attempt to control nature. Moore threads images of the human world□culture□throughout the poem. In almost all cases they are negative images, suggesting the worst that human beings have to offer. In the opening stanza, she refers to the ocean's sand as "ash heaps," creating the sense, ironically, of a landscape decimated by fire. Later, she describes the sun as moving with "spotlight swiftness" as it slices through the water. By comparing the sun to a man-made object (that is, a spotlight), Moore highlights not only the human drive to "know" nature but the intrusive quality of that drive. More violent images of human presence occur in the seventh stanza, where Moore lists "marks of abuse" found on the seaside cliff. These marks include "dynamite grooves, burns, and / hatchet strokes." A human being, however, appears nowhere in the poem, testament to humanity's failure to change nature and to nature's capacity to endure long after human beings have gone.

Order versus Disorder

"The Fish" symbolically illustrates humanity's desire to impose order on experience and to make meaning out of a world in flux. The very opening of the poem attests to the elusiveness of meaning as the fish "wade / through black jade." Jade is a dark stone and, used here, underscores the absence of visibility in the sea. It is so difficult to see, in fact, that the fish can become lost, figuratively, and Moore focuses instead on the mussels. The shifting subject of the poem□from fish to mussel, to light, to cliff□underscores the axiom attributed to Heraclitus, that you can never step in the same river twice. Change is constant and everywhere, and Moore's description of sea creatures colliding into one another in the fifth stanza points to the impossibility of "fixing" the world in place or time. Instead of human-made order, the sea, and by extension all of nature, has its own order that, in Moore's poem, is ever changing and inscrutable to human beings, regardless of their desire to understand it.

Style

Syllabic Verse

"The Fish" is written in rhymed syllabic verse: organized in eight five-line stanzas, the poem is rhymed a-a-b-b-c. The syllabic pattern for each stanza is 1, 3, 9, 6, 8. In addition to end rhymes, Moore uses a variety of internal rhymes including slant rhyme, off rhyme, consonance, and alliteration. The sound of her poem mimics its subject matter. In the second through fourth stanzas, for example, the "s" sound dominates, echoing the ripple and splash of water itself. Her organization of the poem into syllabic units also provides the poem with its visual shape. Like the sea it describes, the poem ebbs and flows, the number of syllables expanding and contracting with each line.

Concrete Imagery

The poem looks like it does on the page because of its syllabic structure. However, the concrete visual imagery *in* the poem constructs another "look" in readers' imaginations. Images are concrete when they refer to one of the senses. Imagism was a movement popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. Imagists rejected sentimentalism and believed that poetry should create new rhythms, use precise, clear images, and address any subject the poet desired. Other imagists writing during Moore's time include Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Ezra Pound.

Historical Context

In his biography of Moore, Charles Molesworth speculates that "The Fish" was influenced by the poet's interest in color theory and in writing a poetry that was unsentimental and "critical," as opposed to flowery and expressive. Molesworth notes that, while studying at Bryn Mawr College, Moore would take out books on art and art theory and spend much of her time visiting galleries and discussing art and literature with her friends.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, when this poem was written, the world of art and literature was changing dramatically. Taking the lead from painters Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque experimented with increasingly more abstract compositions. Their cubist paintings broke down a subject, analyzed it, then reconstructed it in abstract form. Picasso's painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* considered by many to be the first Cubist painting, depicted five nude women in an angular and distorted way, destroying the continuity of the human body and creating an almost three dimensional effect. Cubism, and other art movements such as futurism, surrealism, and dadaism have since become part of the history of modernism itself, their emergence both effect and cause of how human beings perceived the world. The reconfiguration of space in the new art was part of the changing ideas of time and space in the early part of the century. In America, Daylight Savings Time, radio, shorter work weeks, and the explosion in the number of automobiles on the streets all helped to create the sense of a much smaller world, yet one that was moving faster. Albert Einstein provided the theoretical foundation for thinking about this new world when he published what became known as the theory of relativity in a series of papers in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. Einstein's theories dramatically altered ideas about time, space, and gravitation by challenging the Newtonian physics upon which so much science was built.

Poets responded to the changing world by rethinking what was possible in verse. In the second decade of the century, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot all published works that would launch their reputations as distinctly modern poets interested in exploring new forms and subject matter. Moore herself was part of the move away from emotionalism and convention in poetry and towards a more precise description of the physical world that was dense with images and borrowings from other texts. Though initially she had little success in publishing with established magazines, she was successful with smaller, newer journals such as *Poetry,* established in 1912; the *Egoist,* a magazine of imagist verse; and *Others* . Moore was influenced as much by her study of biology and histology in college as she was by other writers.

Joseph Parisi, writing in *Voices and Visions Viewer's Guide,* quotes Moore as saying this about the creative process: "Precision, economy of statement, logic employed to ends that are disinterested, drawing and identifying, liberate□at least have some bearing on□the imagination." Moore's success in the smaller journals and her correspondence with Eliot, Stevens, Williams, and Pound helped her to acquire the editorship of the *Dial,* a prestigious literary journal of the 1920s. Her four-year tenure

there solidified her reputation as someone with discriminating taste and critical acumen, a reputation that would only grow in the years to come.

Critical Overview

"The Fish" has been a popular poem ever since its publication. Biographer Charles Molesworth notes in his book *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life* that early responders to the poem such as Moore's good friend Winifred Ellerman (also known as Bryher) considered it an example of Moore's "otherworldliness." Molesworth writes,

Moore's poetry was increasingly to concern itself with . . . the struggles of perdurability. This subject is part of her interest in museums, in the forms of animal life, and in the intersections of nature and culture.

Critic Laurence Stapleton, writing in his book *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance,* makes a connection between the poem and Moore's interest in art. According to Stapleton, "The Fish" is notable "for intensity in the use of color." Stapleton, however, insists that it cannot be considered a "complex" poem. Bernard Engel locates the otherworldliness of the poem in the image of the cliff, which he claims represents "an ideal . . . the capacity of the courageous in spirit to triumph." George Nitchie finds the poem difficult, however, noting: "a rich and controlled confusion characterizes both the poem and the method." Writing in 1977, Pamela White Hadas remains fascinated by Moore's poem, calling it "immensely powerful and bitter." More recently, Cristanne Miller praises the poem for its formal qualities, its "ability to lace words appropriately within the severe limits of . . . a logically unpredictable form." Moore's poem appears in a number of anthologies on modern poetry, most notably *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,* signalling its continued popularity.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Semansky publishes widely in the field of twentieth century poetry and culture. In the following essay, he considers how Moore's poem is both a Romantic poem and a modern one.

Presented as a description of the sea's power and beauty, "The Fish" presents a Romantic subject in a modern way. Like so much Romantic poetry, it deifies nature; however, with its hard-edged imagery, its shifting subject, and its odd syllabic construction, it belongs to modernism. Occupying the middle ground between these two "isms," Moore's poem is a bridge of sorts between new and old ways of thinking about nature.

Writing some two hundred years ago, Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth represented humanity's response to the grandeur of nature as one of awe and terror. This feeling is called the sublime. In 1757, Edmund Burke drew a distinction between the sublime and the beautiful in his treatise *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* . Burke argues that the sublime is one of the most powerful human emotions and links it to ideas of infinity; beauty, he argues, belongs to the temporal, finite world. For Wordsworth and other Romantics, experiences of the sublime come out of immersing oneself in the processes of nature, melding with the object beheld. This is different than simply observing nature's beauty. In the former experience, one participates in nature; in the latter, one is merely a tourist, marveling at the sites.

In her poem, Moore simultaneously underscores humanity's distance from the natural world and its participation in it. Like the adjustment one of the mussel shells makes in the first two stanzas, Moore's narrator adjusts her own gaze throughout the poem, as her "eye" shifts from sea to land to sea again. This searching but thwarted desire to know the sea highlights both humanity's drive to be lord of creation and nature's essentially mysterious and transcendent quality, its "unwillingness" to be dominated. The split between nature and humanity is evident in the poem's metaphors, which underline the incapacity of words to adequately name the natural world. Moore's speaker cannot describe the sea without comparing it to human-made things. Comparing natural processes or actions of the sea to "ash heaps," "injured fans," and "spotlights" demonstrates that the narrator is locked within the human world of perception, though she tries to break free from it and be a part of nature's processes.

The speaker's attempts to break free of the human world can be seen in the sympathetic description of the sea and, later, the seaside cliff. Moore presents both as objects that have been acted upon by malicious human forces. The seaside cliff, appearing in the last three stanzas, shows "marks of abuse," though those marks are also described as "ac-/ cident[s]." Moore doesn't attempt to reconcile this apparent contradiction; rather, she focuses on the cliff's ability to withstand any and all assaults, to persevere *even in death* . Moore personifies the cliff by calling it "defiant," and she also martyrs it, giving the cliff a kind of supernatural identity, a common poetic gesture in

Romantic poetry. The cliff endures beyond all earthly limits. After writing that the "chasm side is / dead," the speaker states, "Repeated / evidence has proved that it can live / on what can not revive / its youth. The sea grows old in it." Critics grapple with the meaning of these last lines, some calling them incomprehensible. How should readers understand the youth of the chasm side? And to what does "what" refer? These vague references and obscure descriptions only highlight the natural world's inscrutability. There is a moral in Moore's poem, but what is it? Moore scholar Taffy Martin asks:

Why does the sea, clearly the most active and powerful force in this scene, grow old within this teeming shelter? Moore not only does not answer these questions, she does not even admit that she has asked them. The poem pretends that it works visually, whereas it should warn readers that images in poems are not always what they seem to be.

Obscurity itself became a hallmark of modern poetry. Poets such as Wallace Stevens and T. S. Eliot, though widely celebrated in literary circles, were often considered elitist, their work dense with allusions and full of poetic techniques that were beyond the ken of the average reader, if there ever were such a creature. Moore certainly became a part of this tradition, though her work was never seen as elusive as that of either Stevens or Eliot. Indeed, she is considered to be one of the more accessible of America's modern poets. But by writing a poetry that, in many cases, didn't even look like poetry, and by constructing poems whose subject was the form of the poem itself, Moore helped to change the way people read poetry and thought about their surroundings.

Just as the sublime became a staple of Romantic verse, changes in human perception became a staple of modern poetry. Moore contributed to that in her acute observations of the natural world and her visual display of poems. "The Fish," for example, a rhymed syllabic poem, uses a rigidly fixed form to describe organic natural processes. However, connections can be made between the two. For example, from the first to the second stanza, Moore runs over the words "an / injured fan." Visually, this looks like the very thing she describes. Similarly, the dominance of particular sounds helps to draw attention to her subject. The "k" sounds throughout the seventh stanza, for instance, give the poem a choppy and rough sound as well as look. This is appropriate for describing an edifice that has literally been attacked and scarred by the violent sea that surrounds it. Ultimately, the artificiality of the form for its subject asks readers to more carefully consider *how* the poem says what it does. This technique helps focus readers' attention on the relationship between sea and cliff, rather than on any one thing. By doing so, readers see the interrelationships of all things and processes in the natural world: animals (for example, the sea creatures); sea, sun, gravity, etc. By concentrating so much on how the poem means, rather than what it means, Moore participates in the twentieth century's obsession with epistemology, which asks the question: "How do we know what we know?"

Critic Pamela White Hadas sees in "The Fish" an allegory of sorts, a myth that Moore wrote to understand her own life's story. Hadas writes, "This strange poem is the work of a thirty-year-old woman whose rather unnervingly cool sympathies lie with a battered and violated nature. It is a poem about injury of wholeness, resentful but resigned

deprivation." Ironically, Moore sees herself in this violated nature. Her attempt to understand it is also an attempt to understand herself and her relationship to the natural world. That her attempt results in both insight *and* confusion attests to its success. In the end readers understand that it is not a question of whether or not human beings are part of or separate from nature, but rather to what extent are we part of and separate from it? By focusing on the process of knowing as well as its product, Moore creates a distinctly modern poem from a conventionally Romantic subject.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "The Fish," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Ranta examines Moore's "The Fish" and her other "sea" poems, emphasizing the role of the wave and rhythm in her poetic expression.

Marianne Moore's poetic depiction of the sea offers special challenges to her readers. For one, there is a disparity between the largeness of the subject "the sea" and the specificity of Moore's formal methodology in treating it; the connection between the two is subtle and generally difficult to apprehend. We see this when we realize that, despite the attention given to her poems of the sea, we are left with an interesting, unanswered question: What is Moore's sea as sea and as poetic construction? For a second, no single verbal formulation seems satisfactory for the many features of the sea that Moore treats when she writes about it. Her focus is constantly shifting and the reader is hard pressed to keep up with her. In "The Fish," for instance, she successively glimpses so many things□the fish, water like black jade, an injured mussel, barnacles, a wave, the sunlight, a cliff, etc.□that she hardly seems to be writing about the sea itself. Indeed, of this poem Bonnie Costello says, "We are not interested in the sea as such." (As we shall see below, however, this is not the case.) Finally, the challenge derives in part from Moore's method, which is sufficiently subtle and mystifying that she is sometimes able to represent the sea formally even if she is not saying anything directly about it in the content of the poem. This is the case in "Sojourn in the Whale," which□as far as I can tell□has not hitherto been recognized as being significantly about the sea, among other things. No doubt related to the difficulties of reading Moore's poems in general, such things almost convince one that her sea is inaccessible.

Faced with such difficulties, it has proven expedient for Moore's critics to generalize her sea and, all too often, to settle for assigning abstract and/or symbolic meanings and values to it. Bernard Engle, for example, says that "in 'The Fish' the sea [is] a challenge and threat, a symbol of forces to be resisted with bravery and independence. The ever-present perils of existence are the subject of her poem on the sea, significantly entitled 'A Grave.' In it the sea is beautiful, tempting, and challenging. But it concedes nothing; it is totally inhuman; and, more than impersonal, it is malign." And George Nitchie says that "the sea in 'A Grave,' 'Novices,' or 'The Fish' . . . exempli[fies] the essential non-humanness of the nonhuman." Finally, without trying to assimilate all of the tags put on Moore's sea in the various discussions of this or that poem, we can note that Pamela White Hadas has reached the furthest in trying to grasp Moore's writing about the sea as a subject possessing larger meanings and values. For Hadas, Moore's sea is many things□"an image of language," an analog of "all that has been written before one," an example of freedom gained by surrendering, an analog for "unconscious force," an analog for poetry itself, and even an analog for Moore's conversational style.

It is not that Engle, Nitchie, Hadas, and others who have taken this approach are wrong in their choice of labels. Rather, it is that they do not show us exactly what it is that Moore treats when she writes of the sea□what her sea is as sea□nor how she constructs it. There is need for further analysis and elucidation in this connection. In particular, it is important to note that, whether Moore writes about the sea at length or

alludes to it in passing, the central thing she keeps returning to is the wave□water rising or surging. Sometimes the wave breaks, "turn[s] and twist[s]", and there is even the "drama of water against rocks," but her recurring point of focus is the wave. Moreover, her wave is generally built up by an accumulation of small, measured, formal units. Geometric patterns are at the heart of the representation of water in motion in all four of her extended sea-poems, although they are more pronounced□and apparently more crucial to her sense of how to represent a wave□in "Sojourn in the Whale," "The Fish," and "A Grave," than in "Novices." They are also evident in the poems where she treats the sea less lengthily. Finally, these patterns are generally consistent with Moore's notion of prosody. "Prosody," she says, "is a tool; poetry is 'a maze, a trap, a web'□Professor Richards' epitome." Of importance here are the metaphors of maze, trap, and web, for Moore's prosody is often complicated by the extension of syntactical structures into geometric patterns.

More often than not, Moore's geometric waves are couched in syntactical constructions□particularly, the sentence□and in manipulations of a sequence of sentences, rather than in line and stanza arrangements. In keeping with her own sense of her work, the shape and rhythm of her waves is "governed by the pull of the sentence"; the rhythm is "built in" the sentence. As the analyses below will show, we begin to understand her work with water in the sea-poems better, and to understand the poems themselves better, when we examine their sentences. Then we discover that her sentences□what she does in them individually and with them collectively □are not only syntactic but prosodic undertakings.

They are more or less loosely measured units whose lengths and masses and movements she manipulates□often syllabically□for the purpose of creating and shaping space, motion, rhythm, and design. Relevant here is W. S. Merwin's observation that, "in a world of technique," which is at least a partially accurate description of Moore's world in the sea-poems, " *motions* tend to become methods" (his italics). This handling of the sentence (or any syntactical unit) as a syllabic *unit of motion* would seem to constitute a new□a modern□variation of syllabic metrics.

Then, too, particularly among the four sea-poems, Moore's waves are more often than not prosodically or formally implied rather than directly described or stated; the action□the rhythm□is deemed sufficient in itself without the reiterated statement of wave as subject. The statement might treat something else□the fate of Ireland, the repetitive movements of an injured mussel, the grave-like nature of the sea, the failings of certain "good and alive young men." Nevertheless, the formal implication of wave brings meaning into the poem. This is deliberate, according to principle: "With regard to form," Moore wrote in 1934, "I value an effect of naturalness and feel that the motion of the composition should reinforce the meaning and make it cumulatively impressive." "An effect of naturalness" and "the motion of the composition": in large part, this is what her wave-making is about; hers is something of a craftish wave, an aesthetic wave.

This quality notwithstanding, in "The Fish" and "A Grave" there is a definite attempt to give the movement and rhythm of the poem over as much as possible to the naturalistic action of the sea. The same holds true for "Sojourn in the Whale" and "Novices."

Indeed, one could argue that the attempt to do this increasingly dominates the four poems as a sequence—a sequence that runs from "Sojourn in the Whale" (1917) to "The Fish" (1918) to "A Grave" (1921) to "Novices" (1923). What is being pursued in this sequence is the effect of contact with, or a verbal embodiment of, water-in-motion, the wave. Moreover, since Moore's chief means of achieving this effect is by formal implication as opposed to descriptive statement, we could say that her formal means—her syntax and prosody—perform a naturalistic function in these poems. With them, she makes her waves. As she said in "Things Others Never Notice" regarding one of William Carlos Williams' water passages: "With the bee's sense of polarity he searches for a flower, and that flower is representation. Likenesses here are not reminders of the object, they are it." That her main primary work with this particular naturalistic representation engaged Moore throughout four poems and over a period of some half dozen years is evidence of both the inexhaustible variety inherent in it and of the strength of her attraction to it.

The importance of the effect of contact with physical reality—and the representation thereof—cannot be over-emphasized. Insofar as the waves in the sea-poems are concerned, this is the central, recurring "truth" among all of the others; without it, perhaps the others would not be possible; certainly, they would be presented very differently from how they are. Rhythm is at the heart of this effect, the rhythm of water in motion. However, this is never the burden of the statements in the poems but the means, the vehicle, for conveying them. Again, Moore's waves are structural-metaphoric waves that speak of other things—the fate of Ireland, the rule of age-old accident over natural phenomena, the limits of "volition" and "consciousness," a language that can stand on equal terms with the potentially overwhelming forces of the physical world. Perhaps this use of metaphor is something of what Robert Duncan had in mind when he said in "Ideas of the Meaning of Form" that Moore's "metaphor is never a device but a meaningful disclosure."

In section three of "Novices," Moore comes closest to *saying* directly what she herself is doing in and with her verse about the sea, but then, that poem is not about her own work with representation but about the failings of the "good and alive young men." Nevertheless, it is the case that she succeeds where they fail. Here, too, she seems to suggest that expressing themselves well of the sea, whether as fact or as metaphor, is a test of the powers of language and art. That she kept coming back to this test, handling it differently—yet similarly—each time, suggests its importance to her. Indeed, writing of T. S. Eliot's poems, Moore says that "correspondences of allusion provide an unmistakable logic of preference," an idea that applies directly to her work with the sea, where a "logic of preference" for the geometric-syntactic-rhythmic representation of waves is displayed.

Indeed, the range of writing in which she cultivated this "preference" is larger than the poems. In her unpublished notebooks and in her criticism, Moore frequently refers to the sea and to writing about it. Of the former, Bonnie Costello says that Moore's "notebooks are filled not only with long, detailed presentations of 'facts' but with quotations about the need for the factual in art" and that the "notebooks [are] full of passages about the sea." As for her criticism, in her reviews Moore's discussion of her contemporaries'

writing frequently includes illustrative quotations from their work that pertain to the sea, or to water in other bodies and forms, and these are often associated with the notion of the value of faithful, effective representation of physical reality. The comment cited above regarding one of Williams' water passages is an excellent example of this kind of thing. Such observations are critical-theoretical echoes of what she herself is engaged with in the sea-poems. They constitute another form as well as further instances of the "correspondences of allusion [that] provide an unmistakable logic of preference"□a "logic of preference" for a certain event in the experience of natural phenomena, for a certain rhythm and subject matter in writing, for a certain kind and quality of representation, for a certain moment in the act of writing, for a certain moment in the act of reading.

On first reading, the statement that "correspondences of allusion provide an unmistakable logic of preference" might seem flat and mechanical. Reflecting on it, however, we realize that "correspondences" are not identical but diverse and that a "logic of preference" that would either satisfy or describe Marianne Moore would not be rigid and closed but variable and open. Reconsidering, then, that Moore presented the combination of the principle of representation and water-in-motion in various ways in her writing over the years, we begin to notice a quality of this writing in general that is important to her work with waves in the sea-poems. This is its projective transformational quality □the fact that over a period of several years it variously depicts and embodies and represents something (water-in-motion, in general, and waves, in particular) that, in itself, constantly changes as it exists in time and space, and in our experience of it. Now and then, this quality is expressed directly in the poems. In the words of "A Grave," "the ocean . . . / advances as usual." And in the closing lines of "Novices," there is an image of a seemingly perpetually moving ocean eternally "crashing itself out in one long hiss of spray." Or, or borrow some lines from Wallace Stevens's poem, "That Which Cannot Be Fixed," which Moore cites in the review "A Bold Virtuoso", and which work very well to describe her own sea: "there is / A beating and a beating in the centre of / The sea, a strength that tumbles everywhere." These are all images of something that, the longer it stays the same, the more it changes: the inexhaustible variety of forms in flux that waves, or the sea in motion, take. And for Moore, the proper rendering of this matter seems to have required a new and slightly different reenactment of its wave-ness, along with others of its recurrent actions, each time she came to it. Hence, the projective-transformational quality of the sea-poems□the sense that they constitute a sequence of representations of waves projected through four transformations. This quality is visible in the poems at least partly in the different prosodic-syntactic ways in which they embody waves, in their different geometrical features, and perhaps even in their different tones and points of view and subjects and larger meanings. Moreover, it allows us to recognize that in each of the poems a wave is "held up for us to see," that in each of them the sea "advances as usual," and that in each of them there is abundant evidence in both form and content of that "strength that tumbles everywhere." In short, it allows us to see in these poems a great deal of the uniformity in variety, and variety in uniformity, that is a fact of the sea. But, as an illustration of these ideas, let me make a few observations about three of the sea-poems□"Sojourn in the Whale," "The Fish," and "A Grave."

Initially, Moore pinpoints her interest regarding the sea and water in "Sojourn in the Whale" (1917) as "water in motion." But while the statement of subject is general, the prosodic and formal construction that embodies the activity of "water in motion" is specific and detailed; in particular, the last few lines of the poem are made to do what they say. The effect is as if obstructed water suddenly rose "automatically." A major source of this effect, a pivot or reversal mechanism is built around the penultimate sentence of the poem: "Water in motion is far / from level." Structure and rhythm and meaning pivot geometrically around this sentence.

Visually and prosodically, the effect of the last stanza is like that of a wave or a swell, first building and spreading, then overflowing at the end. This effect is paralleled in the pattern achieved with the lengths of the six sentences in the poem. There is a fairly regular reduction of the number of syllables per sentence□from sentence to sentence□through the pivotal fifth sentence. Then, in the last sentence□in accord with the idea of obstructed water suddenly rising "automatically" and surprisingly, the syllable count per sentence suddenly increases, approximately to what it was in the fourth sentence. At the same time, this effect is further particularized by variations in the syllable-counts (the lengths) of□and by the pauses among□the phrases and clauses of the last three sentences. Altogether, these things take us past the pivot so that we experience the lift as Moore's "water in motion" "rise[s] automatically." The implication is that the rising of the water, and the formal building capable of reenacting it, continues after the ending of the poem. This work in and with the six sentences makes the effect of the poem, and illustrates something of what Moore meant when she remarked to Donald Hall that she was "governed by the pull of the sentence." To repeat, this is a key notion with respect to all of the sea-poems. What Moore did in "Sojourn in the Whale" was to reenact the movement of a trough followed by a mounting swell or wave. This is to say that she gave the rhythm of the poem over to the embodiment of that action. Similarly, her concern in "The Fish" (1918) was to reenact the action of a wave as it builds, crashes into a cliff, then recedes. Again, too, the mechanisms that give the poem over to the activity of the sea are caught up in the syllabics, the syntax, and a geometrical formal design. We sight the line of the wave, so to speak, if we notice the relative syllabic lengths of the seven sentences in the poem. There are 6, 28, 57, 49, 54, 20, and 6 syllables per sentence. The design embodied here becomes more obvious if the sentences are typed out at full length across an extra-wide page; then they make a visual pattern that looks like this:

Sentence 1: □□□.

2: □□□□□□□□□□□□.

3: □□□□□□□□□□□.

4: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

5: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

6: □□□□□□□.

7: □□□.

Syllabically, or visually, this is a palindromic pattern in that, like a palindrome (*e.g.,* deified), it starts at a certain point (sentence 1), progresses through a series of steps (sentences 2 and 3) to a middle point (sentence 4), then reverses itself and progresses backwards through the aforementioned series of steps (sentences 5 and 6) to its beginning point (sentence 7). In both form and content, sentences one through three incorporate the approaching-building of the wave. The fourth or middle sentence□slightly shorter than the ones on either side of it□likewise incorporates the impact of the wave on the cliff and the subsequent backwash. And sentences five through seven, whose content is not directly about the wave, formally present the receding-diminishment of the wave. Like a similar pattern in her poem "To a Chameleon," this wave is illustrative of Moore's self-proclaimed liking of symmetry.

Like the pattern among the sentences of "Sojourn in the Whale," this wave is not an incidental feature of the poem but the very essence of its heard, formal design□the primary shape of the sound and rhythm that address the ear. Moore's remark that she was "governed by the pull of the sentence" is especially relevant here. The individual and cumulative "pull" of the seven sentences of the poem is this wave; to read the poem properly is□among other things□a matter of recognizing and accounting for the sentences as wave. In that sense, the whole poem is a process of wave-building, wave-impacting, and wave-diminishing, which should not be ignored. Nor should it matter that only two of the seven sentences (three and four) directly refer to and enact the wave in their content inasmuch as each of the seven sentences formally holds its own unique place in the poem; once the wave's shape and path are perceived, we see that its activity can be and is formally implied as well as directly stated. Indeed, Moore's formally implying this activity becomes another means by which she can and does allow meaning to enter the poem. We can□and apparently should□read the poem which such formally induced meaning in mind.

To do so is to recognize that□in addition to everything else they say and do□the seven sentences bespeak moments in time and locations in space germane to the approaching-building, impacting-backwashing, receding-diminishing of the wave. The changes in the lengths and masses of the sentences parallel changes in the size of the wave. Contrary to Bonnie Costello's notion that "we are not interested in the sea as such" in this poem, the poem is the story of a wave. Thus, the first sentence □ *"The Fish* / wade / through black jade"□bespeaks that moment when the wave, still small, begins to take shape and that location, at some distance from the shore, where it begins to form. This sentence's elliptical, compressed quality is perhaps intended as metaphor for the power that generates the wave. In sentence two, closer to the shore and increasing in size, the wave in passing imparts motion to an injured mussel in a heap of mussels; moved by successive waves, the mussel keeps "opening and shutting itself like / an / injured fan." Still closer to the shore□and still greater in body, the wave is directly mentioned in sentence three. Now, it is perceived as carrying barnacles, and its mass and motion refract and give motion to the sunlight in the water. At the beginning of sentence four (the middle sentence), the wave is again mentioned directly□as it impacts on the cliff: "The water drives a wedge / of iron through the iron edge / of the cliff." The

rest of this sentence appropriately treats the immediate backwash effect. The wave has begun to recede and diminish, and in their progressively shorter lengths and lighter masses, the remaining three sentences provide formal metaphors for the measured termination of this action. The separation between the content and the formal "pull" in these three sentences is interesting; perhaps it is intended as metaphor for the diminishing power of the wave. The poem does not resolve the observations and apparent paradoxes of the last three sentences but recedes out of them with the wave. The last sentence suggests a lifted gaze and a look at the broad expanse of the sea□at a distance in space from the shore□and, unlike the highly compressed first sentence, it makes a general statement about the sea as a whole: "The sea grows old in it." Appropriately, this expansive but weary-sounding statement parallels the disappearance of the wave.

"A Grave" (1921), the next extended sea-poem Moore composed, has no tightly constructed syllabic stanzas like the two preceding poems but is all of a piece in free verse, and while it too possesses geometrical qualities of design, it lacks the neat, symmetrical kind of form of "The Fish." Perhaps Moore was interested in giving a poem over still further to the naturalistic action of water in motion, and sought a different way to do this in the syntactic manipulations, the free verse, and the less rigid structuring of "A Grave." Be that as it may, the poem conveys a greater sense of the threatening, unpredictable, indifferent nature of the sea in relation to human life than does "The Fish." Subtle though they are, the geometrical formal features of "A Grave" are crucial to the poem, and have to do with the way in which Moore creates and utilizes space in it. For instance, the poem is divided into two large halves of eleven lines each by lines one and twelve, which are syllabically the same (7 syllables) and are the two shortest lines in the poem. These halves are used differently, the first dominated by stasis and the second by action, motion. Among the ideas of the poem, the stasis of the first half, which is characterized by the standing, looking, and wearing of a look of the man who has taken the view from others, is synonymous with the "volition" and "consciousness" mentioned in the last line, while the action or motion of the second half, which is characterized by the activities of the fishermen, the wrinkles, the birds, the tortoise shell, and the ocean itself, is synonymous with the "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" mentioned in that line. Altogether, Moore transforms the space in stasis of the first half of the poem into the space in motion of the second half, simultaneously giving the movement and rhythm of the poem over to the inhuman action of the sea.

An important element of this undertaking is a building-pattern that goes from less to more in the measures of the poem. With line lengths varying between 7 and 24 syllables in the poem, there is no clear dividing point between long and short lines. Rather, counting syllables per line, we notice that the first half is dominated by shorter lines and the second half by longer lines, with a syllable difference between the two halves of 168 syllables (first half) and 197 syllables (second half). An important part of this building, the last eight lines are some of the longest in the poem, both sonically and syllabically. The building is also reflected in the lengths of the four sentences of the poem, which contain 68, 67, 92, and 138 syllables, respectively □another instance of Moore's working with "the pull of the sentence." Necessarily, the effect of the shorter lines of the first half of the poem, together with the first two shorter sentences, is synonymous with

the stasis and the "volition" and "consciousness" of that half, while the effect of the longer lines of the second half, together with the last two longer sentences, is synonymous with the action or motion—essentially, the "turn[ing] and twist[ing]"—of that half. This is to say that a characteristic effect of the whole poem is generated at its very beginning by the transition from the first line (a shorter line) to the second line (a longer line). You can hear the stasis of the first line give way to the "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" of the second line: "Man looking into the sea / taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to it yourself." Significantly, the second half of the poem begins with two pairs of lines which repeat this pattern and effect twice—in itself a building or increase.

In general, if the purpose of the building in the poem is to increase the space in the lines and sentences toward the end of the poem, then the use of this space is to increase both the allusions to the sea's dangerous nature *and* the reenactment of its inhuman activity. We see Moore creating and using space in this way, when we look at what she does inside her sentences. This is still another aspect of her work with "the pull of the sentence" in this poem. In several respects, the key point of her sentences—at least the first three of them—is their middles, and what she does there.

In the first one, the line, "it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing," is both the middle line and the middle clause of the sentence. It is also syllabically at the middle of the sentence, with 27 syllables before it and 26 after it. Not only is it a line whose content emphasizes standing in the middle of things, but it stands in the middle of things itself. Moreover, near or at its middle—and therefore at the middle of the sentence—is the infinitive "to stand," which is the syllable and word middle not only of the line but of the whole, centered and balanced sentence. Then, immediately after this centering of things—and the effect of stasis that comes with it, we have the exception which undercuts it (my emphasis): " *but* you cannot stand in the middle of this; / the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave." At this point, with this first reference to the inhuman nature of the sea, the poem suddenly opens up—expands—to include the terrible consequences of someone's tumbling into that "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" grave. Or, to put it differently, the shift from less to more space, from stasis to motion, from "volition" and "consciousness" to the mindless "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" of the sea, begins here.

A similar thing happens in sentence two, where the tonally heightened exception, "repression, however," marks the line and word and syllable middles of the sentence, and initiates the expansion of the sentence and a repetition of the aforementioned shift.

Things change subtly in sentence three, which is—suddenly—a longer, more spacious sentence. While a colon marks the line middle of this sentence, dividing it into two three-line units, there is no stated exception that generates space here, and the word and syllable middles, which come in the line after the colon, do not seem to matter very much tonally or quantitatively. However, with the abrupt quality of extension signaled by the colon, there is a sense that additional space is simply taken, assumed—as if the sea-grave suddenly opened up beneath one. Moreover, allusions to the threatening, grave-like sea, and (implicitly) embodiment of the sea's action into the rhythm of the

poem, are not reserved for the second half of the sentence but pervade the whole thing. In both content and syntax, the poem's embodiment of the nature and action of the sea increases.

The increase continues in sentence four, which abruptly assumes still more space to itself. With no particular tonal or quantitative or descriptive emphasis placed on its middle□certainly no strong emphasis as in sentences one and two□ *all* of its seven lines treat the "beautiful" but dangerous world of the sea. The birds and the tortoise shell replace the man and the fishermen of the preceding sentences, as possible representatives of some degree of "volition" and "consciousness," but even they are subject to the power of the sea. Altogether, sentence by sentence, any human attempt "to stand in the middle" of things□whether the poem or the sea□is rendered increasingly impossible as, sentence by sentence, the "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" action of the sea is increasingly embodied in the poem.

The form this embodiment takes is that of an incoming wave. As Moore says in sentence four, "the ocean . . . / advances as usual." Also, as in "The Fish," the construction of the wave occurs syntactically and is formally implied rather than directly stated; it is embodied in those lines and clauses that make direct reference to the sea. The prototype of the building-mechanisms in the poem, the wave starts out small in sentence one, with one line: "the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave." This increases to two lines in sentence two: "repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea; / the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look". In sentence three, which is less amenable to counting in this way, the cumulative reference to the sea's nature or action is something like three to four lines. And in sentence four, if we choose to omit the lines about the birds and the tortoise shell, at least five of the seven lines embody the wave. Altogether throughout the poem, there is increasing direct reference to the sea's nature or action, and increasing formal representation of the approaching-building action of a single wave. Subtler than "The Fish" in its representation of water in motion, "A Grave" reaches further with its ability to touch the heart of the reader with the inhuman "turn[ing] and twist[ing]" of that motion or action.

Apart from the general ideas summed up earlier, the chief revelation of these analyses is the extent of Moore's work with the sentence, and with a larger, sentence-based, geometrical form, in the sea-poems. As it has been described here, this work involves at least three kinds of manipulations of the sentence: one having to do with content and/or form, including rhythm, *inside* a sentence; one having to do with the *length* of a sentence; and one having to do with the *placement* of a sentence in a geometrical sequence of sentences. These manipulations describe or apply to all of the sentences in the three poems, although some of the sentences are more striking in certain respects than others. Whatever might have been the case in the writing, all three manipulations register simultaneously in reading. It is when we examine the poems that we discern the manipulations. To mention some of the more striking sentences: in the diminishing-then-building sentence pattern of "Sojourn in the Whale," there is the pivotal fifth sentence with its important pronouncement about "water in motion." In "The Fish," there are the first and the last sentences, with their identical lengths, their contrasting

contents and rhythms, and their associations with the beginning and the ending of the wave. Also in this poem, there is the brilliant middle sentence, which is slightly shorter than the sentences before and after it (a consequence of the impact), and in which the wave crashes into the cliff in the first half of the sentence, and the consequent backwash is registered in the second half of the sentence. And in "A Grave," there is the subtly centered and balanced first sentence with its attention to the middle of things□and its sudden "twist and turn," or expansion, via exception. Perhaps it is significant that these sentences all mark turning points and boundary lines (beginnings and endings). In sum: with these manipulations, Moore implicitly and explicitly states and / or reenacts sea-water-in-motion □chiefly, waves□in the form and content of the three study poems. Among other things, this work is ample testimony to her admission that she was "governed by the pull of the sentence." At the same time, this work is an excellent illustration of Ron Silliman's observation in "The New Sentence" that

it is at the level of the sentence that the use value and the exchange value of any statement unfold into view. As such, the sentence is the hinge unit of any literary product.

Larger literary products, such as poems, are like completed machines. Any individual sentence might be a piston. It will not get you down the road by itself, but you cannot move the automobile without it.

My sense is that Moore's phrase "the pull of the sentence" refers to the same subtle complex of language and literary phenomena as Silliman's phrase "the use value and the exchange value of any statement."

Although a more thorough examination of these phenomena lies outside the scope of this essay, a crucial question that must be asked□an ideal one□is: How do the main elements of Moore's sentence in the sea-poems participate in the determination of the poems' "use value" and "exchange value"? In a highly relevant passage that focuses directly on the function of sentence elements in modern poetry, Roland Barthes characterizes modern poetry in "Is There Any Poetic Writing?" as "an explosion of words" and says that it

destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an inflexion which lasts only to present the Word.

While this might be true for some modern poems, we are on more solid ground with the sea-poems if we take them not as "explosion[s] of words" (a questionable metaphor) but as reenactments of water activity, and if we make their sentences the focus of our reading. Taking this approach, we see that Moore does not destroy "the spontaneously functional nature of language," but that she calculatedly heightens it, or gives it more to do, by making it state and/or reenact the activity of water-in-motion. As we have seen, the syntax carries the burden of this reenactment in the content, the length, the location,

the form, and the function of the sentence, individually and as a unit in a larger, geometrical form. At the same time, her "lexical basis" is given over to making images and abstract statements□and even rhythmic constructions □that complement, extend, and deepen the effect of the reenactment. So, while it is true that "grammar . . . becomes prosody" in the sea-poems, this is not done at the expense of its function but as a more complete utilization of it, and rather than reducing grammar to "an [empty] inflexion which lasts only to present the Word," it gives grammar the much more lively and demanding task of appropriately carrying rhythm and image and abstract statement. Rhythm here, we should note, is a two-sided thing, including the rhythm of wave and the rhythm of a natural speaking voice, both of which Moore achieves in the sea-poems.

We see the central role of rhythm in this context still more clearly, when we note that□at the level of the sentence as well as at the level of the poem's overall form□it is *the* basis of correspondence in the "correspondences of allusion [to the sea, which] provide [the] unmistakable logic of [Moore's] preference" for wave. (Similarly, in her criticism rhythm is the basis of her interest in many of her citations of her contemporaries' writing about the sea, or water in other bodies or forms, which I have commented on above.) As we have seen, when it comes to waves and what is done with them in the sentences and the overall forms of the sea-poems, the "allusions" might appear at times in the content, or in the form, or in both, making for some variety of "correspondences." And underlying all of them is the one thing: rhythm. Although much of the "logic of preference" has vanished with Moore because she never explained it, the one thing she did say something about is rhythm. For instance, her self-announced "passion for rhythm" is well-known, as is her statement that she preferred to think of her poems as "experiments in rhythm." These emphases take on new meaning here. Similarly, she says in "Poetry and Criticism," "Rhythm was my prime objective. If I succeeded in embodying a rhythm that preoccupied me, I was satisfied." Obviously, the wave was such a rhythm. Then, there is also her notion of a *personal* relation to rhythm: "You don't devise a rhythm," she says in "Feeling and Precision," "the rhythm is the person, and the sentence but a radiograph of personality." Finally, going a step further with respect to the possibility of a special connection between the person and the rhythm of the sea, there is her observation that, "The many water metaphors in the work of Wallace Stevens are striking evidence . . . of his affinity□say, synonymity□with rhythm." Here she quotes the lines cited earlier from Stevens' "That Which Cannot Be Fixed"□with their unique image of wave-action: "there is / A beating and a beating in the centre of / The sea, a strength that tumbles everywhere." The evidence suggests that Moore herself possessed a similar "affinity□say, synonymity□with rhythm," one associated with the sea generally, and with waves specificially. And so, the sentences in the sea-poems are "radiograph[s] of [her] personality," and in them we find "a strength that tumbles everywhere," a strength that is hers, as well as the sea's.

Source: Jerrald Ranta, "Marianne Moore's Sea and the Sentence," in *Essays in Literature,* Vol. 15, No. 2, Fall 1988, pp. 245-57.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Martin comments on contradiction and false images in "The Fish."

In "The Fish," for instance, Moore employs a typically intricate stanzaic pattern along with evocative, sensual language to create a scene as unfathomable as it initially seems specific. The first three sentences are clear enough. The fish "wade through [the] black jade" of a sea where "submerged shafts of the / sun . . . move themselves with spotlight swiftness." Nevertheless, even within those sentences, Moore has hinted at the broken vision to follow. She describes the movement of one of the "crow-blue mussel-shells" with curious indirection. The movement of the sand helps a viewer to infer rather than to observe directly the broken movement of the shells. We know only that "one keeps / adjusting the ash heaps, / opening and shutting itself like / an / injured fan." The rest of the poem develops this hint of submerged movement and emphasizes its potential for violence: "The water drives a wedge / of iron through the iron edge / of the cliff" and the cliff itself shows "external / marks of abuse," both natural and deliberately inflicted. Having developed the apparent specificity of the poem to this point, Moore dissolves the scene in a flood of ambiguity. One side of the cliff provides a sheltered pool for sea life. In describing it, Moore begins a new stanza with a new sentence, a technique which, in her poems, often foretells dissolution.

All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of
accident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what it can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

Contradiction dominates these images. "Lack of cornice," if it means a natural curve to the edge of the cliff, is certainly a physical feature of accident; but "dynamite grooves, burns, and / hatchet strokes" are just as surely not accidental. They are human interventions that "stand out" on the cliff. Thus, it should not be surprising that "the chasm side is dead." That announcement, however, makes the next two sentences entirely incomprehensible. If the chasm side is dead, ravaged as it clearly has been by the force of the water it contains, how does it *live* on the barnacles that adhere to its surface, on the shifting mussel shells that may or may not contain live mussels, and on the rest of the sliding mass of sea life that it shelters? Finally, why does the sea, clearly

the most active and powerful force in this scene, grow old within this teeming shelter? Moore not only does not answer these questions, she does not even admit that she has asked them. The poem pretends that it works visually, whereas it should warn readers that images in poems are not always what they seem to be.

Source: Taffy Martin, "Craftsmanship Disfigured and Restored," in *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist,* University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 92-112.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay excerpt, Phillips analyzes "The Fish," calling it "both imagist and extra-imagist."

"The Fish" (1918) are among the poems responsible for association of Moore's verse with the seminal movement of the Imagists in the pre-World War I period. She said simply, "I like to describe things."

Moore correctly insisted that she was not one of the Imagists. They, of course, had no monopoly on a tenet essential to their poetry: language "should endeavor to arrest you, and to make you see a physical thing, and prevent your gliding through an abstract process." On that basis alone, however, they could claim Moore's work. She said simply, "I like to describe things."

She was a fine descriptive poet whose keen sense of the visual and shifting images is perfected in "The Fish." The initial perspective is that of an observer looking down into the sea as she stands on the coast. The words of the title, "The Fish," run over to the opening lines:

wade
through black jade.

The typography is not mimetic, as it was for "Chameleon"; spacing, on first glance, is more jagged and seems to contradict the expectations of the movement of fish. The space between the lines, between the verb "wade" and the phrase "through black jade" (preceded by the use of the title as the subject of the poem's first verb), prevents one from darting through inattentively. The almost startling image depicts the slow motion of the fish and the stillness of the water, its resistance, color, sheen, and polish. Both literal and figurative, the image is not only powerful in itself, but prepares the reader for the poem's final subject□the "defiant edifice." The eyes move down to see crow-blue mussel shells: "one keeps / adjusting the ash-heaps; / opening and shutting itself like / an / injured fan." Again, the singular images are visually interesting and anticipate the conclusion□the seascape is both beautiful and treacherous.

The scene quickens. There is a succession of changing actions:

The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the
sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
into the crevices□

The barnacles play tricks on the eyes. The sense of the water's stillness has been dissipated. Nothing is inert; the poet's eyes, the water, the light□all are fluid. The color changes; there is a "turquoise sea / of bodies." The coast is rocky.

The water drives a wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff; whereupon the stars,
pink
rice-grains, ink-
bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.

The effect is kaleidoscopic, but the precision of the images gives one the experience of standing alongside the sentient poet. Then the action of the eyes is arrested by the wrecked ship:

All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice□
all the physical features of
ac-
cident□lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

The ocean, the source of life, is also a place of conflict, danger, and destruction. The sense of dying life within the sea garden hovers over the poem in much the same way that a theme hovers over a Picasso painting without being articulated. The poem's final statement, "The sea grows old in it [the damaged and deteriorating vessel]," is similar to the "barnacles which encrust the side / of the wave" in reversing the usual habit of "saying and thinking," but different in the fact that the old sea is no illusion. The complexity of the statement stimulates a meditation on time and change in "the world's body" that the dissolving images clearly define.

The typography delineates the music of the poem. On a minor scale, the hard rhymes are dominant: "wade . . . jade," "keeps . . . heaps," "side . . . hide," "pink . . . ink-," "ac-. . . lack"; but the sibilants in "keeps" and "heaps" introduce the words that also mimic the sound of the sea: "swiftness" and "crevices," "the" and "sea," "this" and "edifice." The old-fashioned word "edifice" attracts attention to itself and contrasts with

"spotlight swiftness" at the same time that the language echoes the slapping and shishing of the waves. Alternations in stress patterns of syllables for pairs of rhyming words, "an" and "fan," "green" and "submarine," "all" and "external" or "dead" and "repeated" lighten the music; and the unrhymed last line of each stanza points up the subtle discordant tones. The final eye rhyme is a musical pun: "it can live / on what cannot revive . . ." The form is synonymous with the content.

The modulations of sound and images, the expressive use of space in the line and stanzaic arrangements□all work together in the contemplation of a scene to which the fish alert the observer. In the poem, Moore's vision is both imagistic and extra-imagist. By describing movement in space she was able to escape the Imagists' tendency toward stasis; this tendency was frustrating, for example, to Williams because it limited the choice and development of subjects. The major reason she was not a "pure" Imagist, however, is apparent in the "vivid exposition consonant with the best use of metaphor," as Moore said of Eliot's verse. Fascinated as she was with the visual object and the phenomenal world, she always respected the natural shapes, colors, textures, and autonomous physical values of what she saw. In this she was like the modern painters she admired, was aligned with Williams, and was not a visionary or mystic; but her penchant for exposition was strong and seldom denied in the poems, as the commentary beginning with "All" in "The Fish" indicates.

Source: Elizabeth Phillips, "The Art of Singular Forms," in *Marianne Moore,* Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1982, pp. 21-68.

Adaptations

Moore reads her poems on *Caedmon Treasury of Modern Poets Reading Their Own Poetry,* released by Caedmon/HarperAudio in 1980.

Caedmon/HarperAudio also carries *Marianne Moore Reading Her Poems & Fables from La Fontaine* in 1984 *.*

In 1987, The Annenberg/CPB Project produced *Voices and Visions,* a series of documentaries on modern American poetry that appeared on Public Television. A segment is devoted to Moore titled *Marianne Moore: In Her Own Image*. Many libraries and video stores carry this series.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of the world's oceans, paying particular attention to how long certain species of fish have existed. Then pick one species and describe how it has adapted to its changing environment. What effects can be attributed to human beings (overfishing or pollution) and to natural changes (climate or non-human predators)? Report your findings to your class.

Write a descriptive poem on some natural phenomenon other than the sea. Concentrate on describing parts of this phenomenon that echo or parallel the processes of human life. Do you find any similarities between your poem and Moore's? What are they?

Research a local topic in which human beings are attempting to control or alter nature in some way and describe what is at stake and for whom. Possible topics might include development, pollution, and species preservation.

Compare the first version of "The Fish" from *Poems,* which has six-line stanzas, with the later version, which has five-line stanzas. What is gained and lost in the changes? Which format do you prefer and why? Can you think of other formats that may have suited the poem better?

Compare and Contrast

1920: Grand Canyon National Park is dedicated.

1980: Environmental and conservationist groups find that, over the last 200 years, the lower 48 states have lost an estimated 53 percent of their original wetlands.

Today: Before leaving office, President Clinton signs a parks bill designed to protect lands in forty-one states, including the Presidio in San Francisco, the country's oldest continuously operated military post.

1921: U.S. President Harding issues an executive order transferring management of the Navy's emergency oil field deposits at Teapot Dome to the Department of the Interior. The deal is thought to be a win-win situation, allowing developers to profit from the oil while setting aside part of it in reserve for naval emergencies.

1980: The price of crude oil peaks at thirty-six dollars per barrel as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries exercises its power to control oil production.

Today: President Bush pushes to open Alaska's pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling.

1920: The Nineteenth Amendment gives American women the right to vote.

1984: Congress passes the Women's Economic Equity Act in 1984, which ends pension discrimination against women, provides job options for displaced homemakers, and enables homemakers to open Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs).

Today: The Supreme Court rules that college athletics programs must actively involve roughly equal numbers of men and women to qualify for federal support.

What Do I Read Next?

Moore's collection of essays *Predilections,* published in 1955, contains essays on major poets such as Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, as well as Moore's own idiosyncratic views on poetry and nature.

Mark Kurlansky's 1998 book, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World,* tells the story of the cod, a fish that contributed to the economic development of New England and contributed words such as "codpiece" to the English language. Kurlansky also includes a dozen recipes for cod dishes.

Lyla Foggia's 1995 study, *Reel Women: The World of Women Who Fish,* explores the history of women who love to fish. Foggia's book is also an excellent resource guide listing organizations, clubs, and businesses for and about women who fish.

Craig Lesley's novel *The Sky Fisherman* (1995), tells the story of a rugged small town Oregon family and their trials and tribulations in a sometimes harsh, sometimes beautiful landscape. The novel includes lyrical insights into the joys of flyfishing.

Further Study

Allen, Frederick Lewis, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's,* HarperPerennial Library, 2000.

Originally published in 1931, *Only Yesterday* traces the rise of post-World War I prosperity up to the Wall Street crash of 1929 and against the backdrop of flappers, Prohibition, and the rise of the women's suffrage movement.

Molesworth, Charles, *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life,* Atheneum, 1990.

Molesworth's biography is the best so far on Moore's life. Using Moore's correspondence and diaries, he deftly makes connections between the poet's work and her life.

Stapleton, Laurence, *Marianne Moore: The Poet's Advance,* Princeton University Press, 1978.

Stapleton's critical study of Moore's poetry contains a good deal of biographical information, and makes connections between her work and other poets and poetry. This is a very accessible study.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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