

Thirst and Patience · Marianne Boruch

HER THIRST, PERHAPS, began in childhood, and patience too, passionate as seed. After all, getting there was an equal gift, crossing to the island—Monhegan Island, Maine—those summers which slowly turned as the last century geared down and disappeared into this one, and the island, ten miles off shore, kept its own beauty lightly, sleepily. The idea came from her mother—Mary Warner Moore—for whatever reason: to get her children, Warner and Marianne, out of the heat of Carlisle, Pennsylvania; to witness herself—landlocked, Missouri bred, her husband lost, institutionalized—what was coolly, lushly visible. Here was the island's sweating, raw board ice house, and the pond beside it, cut and harvested every winter since 1874, going nearly lagoon in summer, languid, dizzy with birds. Here was Lobster Cove, desolate, wet and dangerous ("No one has ever been saved who fell overboard or from rocks here," the village pamphlets warn), and the thick high woods beyond, solemn with pine. Enough for children, certainly. Enough finally to make Mary Warner Moore come whisper close to building a house here, settling permanently. Later, in 1933, it was Marianne Moore herself who would recall those days when she and her mother reached the island by a sail boat called *The Effort*, arriving at low tide, which is to say, midnight, hobbling "over stones. . . by lantern-light" to the "gabled attic room in a fisherman's cottage."¹ Now crossing eighty, ninety years beyond those summers, it is enough to put such reverie against the chill sea air. And there, eider ducks in stiff flying formation skimming the waves, and seals on sudden outcroppings of rock, stilled by sun. Our boat takes its long hour to get there, progressing, as Marianne Moore wrote of such boats, "white and rigid as if in / a grove,"² to this island where imagination became a place for her to loot and redream, most urgently to see.

Impossible, finally, to judge the weight of such memory, this island of folktale austerity and strangeness, but we have some evidence. There it is, Moore admitted in "The Steeple-Jack," the piece which opens her *Complete Poems* with a firm clear color ("a sea the purple of the peacock's neck"), a careful wonder that recognizes waves "as formal as the scales / on a fish," or the ornate "sugar bowl shaped summer house" liked because the source of such elegance "is not bravado." Like Ambrose, the student she

invents for the poem, we see through her the town Dürer would have embraced, grateful for such fine complexity: “eight stranded whales to look at,” or aloft, the gulls who sail around the lighthouse, or town clock, “without moving their wings.” These scenes offer themselves in painterly ways. One sees to believe, close up and far away; the details of nature and village veer picturesque and articulate. “‘Seeing and saying; — language,’” she wrote later, quoting Howard Nemerov, makes “‘visible not only the visible world, but through it the invisible world of relations and affinities. . . .’ The world of the soul?” she herself suddenly asks, “. . . creativeness is perhaps as near a definition as we can get” (*Prose*, 590). But its beauty is surprisingly barbed. Or so her poem proves, narrowing down to an ominous heart. “Danger,” the sign in red and white declares at the church whose spire the steeple jack climbs, danger against even this depth of peace, against the spire’s “Solid- / pointed star, which . . . / stands for hope.” As in good painting, in good poems one might wait forever for the final click. *Danger*. The thing unnerves. Its tension, its ticking, is mystery.

It was John Ruskin who turned this instinct into iron, handing down with deliberate passion his three laws for drawing—unity, individuality, mystery—the latter affirming that “nothing is ever seen perfectly, but only by fragments,” a thought that slips quickly, lyrically, into more personal matters. “How little,” he adds, “we may hope to discern clearly, to judge justly, the rents and veins of the human heart.”³ Nature was lesson, moral lesson. To see was to think, to discover, to weigh, but for Ruskin, and probably for Moore who read and valued him, referring to him many times in years of essays, awe remained at the center of such clarity. In everything shone this hard unknowable thing, this mystery, this danger, before which humility was the only sensible option. It is not accident that “The Steeple-Jack” moves with such visual intelligence. Painting and drawing, these were habit for most of Moore’s life, an obsession beyond the commonplace books and daybooks—scrapbooks of comment, clippings, quick sketches—fashionable among educated women at the turn of the century. Her need to witness physically was settled early; her ambition throughout high school, and much of college, was, in fact, to become a painter. By the 1920s, she was writing with verve and moral intensity about art as well as literature, reviewing exhibitions of Soviet art, discussing Dürer, Chagall, and others for *The Dial*, and beyond.

Ruskin's fervor quite arguably affected her writing about art, but in her own painting she only half-listened. In watercolor, she kept coming back, as in "The Steeple-Jack," to exactly what Ruskin had warned against elsewhere, to those outdoor scenes traditionally, inescapably "picturesque," to water, to trees and hills, country houses. "There is a great danger," he continued in his primer for artists, in "trying to make your drawings pretty. . . . Choose rough, worn and clumsy looking things as much as possible . . . Do not draw things you love" (Ruskin, 110–111). Moore disagreed, moving forward anyway with the fine indifference only love can generate. "Where there is personal liking we go /," she begins in her poem, "The Hero," "where the ground is sour, where there are / weeds of beanstalk height / snakes' hypodermic teeth . . . and so / on—love won't grow." She kept her bias for form and color clear, without apology. Haunted, for instance, by her mother's garden in Carlisle—row after row of yellow, only yellow, flowers—she acknowledged such beauty with cranky independence: "If yellow betokens infidelity, / I am an infidel. / I could not bear a yellow rose ill will / because books said that yellow boded ill / white promised well" (*Poems*, 81). One imagines her search for subjects, directed not by a sense of duty, but by curiosity, by friendship, by a simple affection for the process itself. Early on, she dropped her own professional ambitions in painting. Still—or perhaps because of this—her seriousness only deepened; there were hundreds of drawings ahead of her, and thousands of hours, over many years. "You must add yourself to what you see, and infuse the object with the passionate essence of your own thought," her good friend, sculptor Malvina Hoffman wrote, ". . . the result will be the merging of matter and spirit." ⁴

This idea was not Ruskin's, but Rodin's. Hoffman came under his influence early, at twenty-five, leaving New York for Paris with the feverish resolve of studying with the master. At seventy, deluged with admirers, awards and commissions, finally certain of his reputation, Rodin was a difficult man to meet. She came armed with photographs of two heads she had sculpted; her father's, pianist Richard Hoffman, and that of the young violinist Samuel Grimson, whom she would marry fourteen years later, in 1924. This was the story Moore herself loved to tell: how her friend, after five attempts, was finally admitted to the Rue d'Université studio; how going off to lunch, Rodin had locked her in so she could study his work in solitude; how on his return, the fire out in the large damp room, he had

wrapped his cloak around her, lecturing her furiously about health (*Prose*, 605). Hoffman stayed on for months. She held her experience there above any in her life. At a time when many artists were rethinking the whole business of form, pressed by the excitement of impressionism, cubism, and other abstractions, it was Rodin who kept high his old passion. "Do not be afraid of realism," she quoted him as saying, "to understand nature is a lifelong study." Marianne Moore, only two years younger than Hoffman, had just been graduated from Bryn Mawr, and was enrolled in Carlisle Commercial College to study a whole set of equally realistic, if unnatural, things—typing, shorthand, bookkeeping—subjects she would teach beginning in the fall of 1911 at the U.S. Industrial Indian School in Carlisle. That summer, though, she and her mother froze everything, and went to Europe, to England, then on to Paris, Moore keeping scrupulous visual accounts of what she saw, beginning what would be a lifetime of sketchbooks. These early collections held a rich summary: window seats, men in hats, gothic doorways, cathedrals, garden walks, fishes, ships, faces, ducks and frogs with little balloons rising out of their mouths filled with nonsense—both wit and rigorous reproduction in a lively mix.⁵ "Art is contemplation,"⁶ Rodin has said. Which is to say, it is heightened observation, paying attention; it is time.

Time. "Slowness makes it large," Moore wrote years later in one of her sketchbooks, "& swiftness weak." On the opposite page, dated Nov. 6, 1943, she had carefully placed a large red leaf over the drawings of that leaf, deeply veined, with its shades pointed out in patches of colored pencil. There, the thing itself, and below it what the mind makes of it, what muscle and time make. One might revolve a long time before this mystery: the actual leaf, brittle now, wholly shell, wholly *past*; the drawing still in the alert ready passage that we call present. The leaf then pressed squarely into this dream of itself, no longer real at all, but perfect sad disguise. Is it possible to imagine such moments? Moore secreting the leaf from whatever garden, bedding it here, amazed no doubt at its solidity, its intricacy, so amazed she wished to follow it physically, know it through eye and hand, and in doing so, perhaps forget—what? News of war, the neighborhood of trees going empty into winter, whatever human daily tedium fills the brain to numbness? Contemplation, or as Malvina Hoffman put it, this "merging of matter and spirit" lies solidly within generosity and risk—and care. In Moore's definition of freedom (from her poem "In

the Public Garden”), it comes down to such simple work, freedom itself being the “‘freedom to toil’ / with a feel for the tool.” (*Poems*, 191) Moore admired Hoffman’s “passion for fundamentals,” in her sculpture, of course, but more affectionately, perhaps, for her genius at living: the way she would rigorously clean her easel, or in her wish that Paris laundresses quit ironing the old Convent embroidery, “demanding it be drip dry” (*Prose*, 578).

The two women, however, did not meet until 1949, although Moore knew of Hoffman’s work, and even wrote of it with a back-handed praise in her retrospective piece on the dancer Anna Pavlova done for *The Nation* in 1945. (“It would seem that Pavlova was obligated to overcome her roles, and for the most part her costumes . . . though one must make an exception: the Gavotte, as portrayed in Malvina Hoffman’s wax statuette”) (*Prose*, 391). They finally spoke when both became members of the Academy of Arts and Letters, meeting often for supper in the artist’s Manhattan studio. “After an evening of talk,” Hoffman wrote, “I would put her in a cab to return her to her Brooklyn home, arguing with the cabdriver, who would usually protest against going to that far-away place.” Hoffman claimed to understand few of Moore’s poems. “She didn’t mind my saying what I did,” the artist wrote, “she liked the truth, a mending kind of adhesive. . . .” Hoffman was more useful to Moore when the poet began her translations of La Fontaine’s *Fables*—a little more useful, anyway. “She would call me up on the phone late at night and ask me to do an unrehearsed, direct translation for her . . . then she would read me (hers) . . . I would say ‘Is that the same fable?’ for her translation would be full of adjuncts and additions and curious new angles and light. But without replying to me, she would ring off and go back to work.”⁷

What Hoffman could do—and did—was guide and encourage Moore’s drawing and painting. For several summers, they spent weeks at a time in various spots on the Maine coast, from Kittery to Ellsworth, busy, as Hoffman put it, with “our usual undramatic tasks”: painting, taking drives, reading, writing. In 1955, they spent a few weeks in Louis Hyde’s summer place in Kittery, an old sea captain’s house, formerly owned by F. O. Matthiessen, his library still there, delightfully intact. Their daily outings were simple: a couple of afternoon hours at the dock, or in the woods, doing watercolors. “We would go, for example, to a granite quarry . . . to me, a very exciting place . . . —all pinks and grays,”

Hoffman wrote. "I'd be trying to get all of it at once, as usual, the three floors of ladders going down to the water below, the derricks, the men working. But Marianne would select just one thing, a piece of chain on a pulley, and paint that." Her work, Hoffman admitted, was "perfectly evocative and imaginative," a comment hard to interpret (*Yesterday*, 355). Moore's own version of her efforts was typically modest. ". . . I could not get the chimney realistic. Miss Hoffman corrected my angles, and after supper demonstrated for me the axiomatically interacting principles of perspective" (*Prose*, 575). The paintings she speaks of—a watercolor of Matthiessen's house itself—is one of Moore's most detailed, elegant pieces, and the only painting of her own she allowed to be matted and framed, and hung in her living room.

Hoffman's description of Moore's habit—zeroing in on one element of a scene and painting *that*: working into depth out of a single focus—is characteristic of her approach to poems as well. It's true that she is careful in "The Steeple Jack" to give us first a wide angled feel for place, but the eye is drawn firmly into the real heat of the poem, its trigger: the danger sign against the calculated calm of the church. One suspects it is this moment, this image in its matter-of-fact perversity that initially caught the poet and induced her onward, and into, later, the more narrative necessities that gradually stage the imaginative event, lulling us there in the first place by the blue and white precision of gulls and waves and summerhouses. In "A Grave," a more urgently philosophical poem, the play of concrete elements takes us breathlessly, seamlessly really, into more abstract reverie quite from the beginning. About the sea, "it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing, / but you cannot stand in the middle of this; / the sea has nothing to give but a well-excavated grave . . ." (*Poems*, 49). Whatever the wide lucid outcome of Moore's contemplation here (and her redefinition of the sea is just that—unsentimental and iridescent, irresistible and terrifying at once), the poem's "literal origin," as Moore wrote of it herself, was, again, a single focus: Monhegan Island once more, when "a man . . . placed himself between my mother and me, and surf we were watching from a 'middle' ledge of rocks. . . . 'Don't be annoyed,'" Moore remembers her mother remarking, "'It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing'" (*Prose*, 643). In the middle of anything, one suspects,—futility and danger, beauty and thoughtlessness.

Moore's stance throughout many of her poems, her fascination, if not

reverence, for things both man made and natural, does not have the immediate physical freshness of say, William Carlos Williams, who, in his observant "Spring and All" offers the roadside world quickly, with colloquial flash and offhand grace, (" . . . the reddish, / purplish, forked, up-standing, twiggy / stuff of bushes and small trees.")⁸ Moore, instead, looks at things with the savor of someone who has come, like the painter on a quest, to do just that—look at things—and little else. "The fish / wade / through black jade. / Of the crow-blue mussel shells, one keeps / adjusting the ash-heaps; / opening and shutting like / an / injured fan" (*Poems*, 32). There is a slow lush gravity in such description that makes clear why Louise Bogan would complain to her friend, critic Morton Zabel, that though she, Bogan, wanted to write about "things naturally elegant, like pineapples and shells and feathers," she could not. "M. Moore," she went on, "has rather a lien on objects characterized by natural elegance, hasn't she? I'd have to be very lyrical about them, in order to get them out of her class; the class that presents and imaginatively constructs and describes. . . ."⁹

That class, I suppose, could be rightly called "imagist," those drawn to Pound's idea of image as presenting "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," but Moore refused such a title, claiming she simply liked to describe things. The emphasis was active, not passive, squarely on process. Several times in her essays she remarks that our chance of happiness is greater if we want to do something rather than have something. Given this, however, one might wonder why the poet herself seemed intent on keeping everything, a zealous pack rat filling up notebook after notebook with clippings, postcards, photographs, letters, even her books serving her to the end as file cabinets, some volumes swollen from the burden to three times their size. Now, lovingly reassembled at Philadelphia's Rosenbach Museum, one finds her famous living room, a place, no, a world, nearly overcome in mementoes—animal knick-knacks, toys, paintings, baseballs—so much lovely, stately and whimsical clutter, the bulk of which, it seems fair to add, was given to her over years by friends. "No ideas but in things" might seem a fit, if predictable, caption, but not things particularly beautiful as in exhibits, for their own rigor, but exactly because they are shot through, to quote Moore quoting Nemerov again, with conscious "affinities and relations" Her things *refer*—the blue ceramic camel given to her by E. E. Cummings, or the Ojibway quill box

with a dollar bill and a note from her brother inside, or even the baseball signed by Mickey Mantle and Joe Dimaggio—; her things narrow and activate the luminous power of a life lived. “My idea of research,” she told Grace Schulman in one of her last interviews, “(is to) look at a thing from all sides.”¹⁰ A looking, no doubt, that she lived through, and sometimes with, over years of days, until—as painter or poet—she could exact, as she said of other people’s art, “the spiritual forces which have made it,” this thing inside “lit with piercing glances into the life of things” (*Poems*, 48).

This, perhaps, is one definition of patience, reliable as lunch, this part of Moore that Bogan called the “moralist (though a gentle one) . . . a stern—though flexible—technician,” able to rein in and aim for reason and outcome. But most astonishing about Moore’s work, both poems and drawings, is its immense quirkiness *anyway*, an exuberance, half-sprung, this other side of her that Bogan has called “high Roccoco.”¹¹ Intention is prized, but that done, the dream sets in with lovely strange digressions, pure spirit keeping the whole creature high and light. “There is something attractive about a mind that moves in a / straight line—” Moore writes in rich amusement—

the municipal bat-roost of mosquito warfare;
the American string quartet;
these are questions more than answers,

and Bluebeard’s Tower above the coral-reefs,
the magic mouse-trap closing on all points of the compass,
capping like petrified surf the furious azure of the bay,
where there is no dust, and life is like a lemon-leaf,
a green piece of tough translucent parchment,
where the crimson, the copper, and Chinese vermilion of
the poincianas
set fire to the masonry and turquoise blues refute the clock . . .

and the acacia-like lady shivering at the touch of a hand,
lost in a small collision of the orchids . . . (*Poems*, 56)

As tough and detailed as this writing is, its movement and color is a drug. We forget everything, almost, in its intricate incantation.

Moore's drawings—some—radiate an equal light. Once inside the Rosenbach Museum where the poet left everything behind—her papers, her furniture, her portable trapeze where she chinned herself daily—one participates in ritual. Visitors strip down to pencil and notebook. One sits at the high thick monastery table and pulls from the storage box a pale serge sketchbook. There, page 1, placed in the spine are two small airy feathers—*feathers*, bluish, gray—and the date, in pencil: June 1916. Then—see this—a single claw foot, expertly drawn, raised as if in horror or flight, mid-page, alone (RM, Box 3, Folder 3). In 1916, Moore was twenty-nine. Her first poems had appeared in the *Egoist*, *Poetry* and *Others*. She and her mother, “two chameleons,” she said, had just moved to Chatham, New Jersey, to keep house in her brother's parsonage. These are facts. But this—these feathers, this page out of a young woman's notebook—is intense imagination: an enormous solitude and drama, a hint of whimsy. Not the public solitude of her watercolors where one feels hours spent gazing down a dark-leafed road in woods, or past a high black house with its red chimney and rich blue trees, or near the lobster pilings where the blue film of water can be seen, and sensed, through the windows of the sagging fishing shack (RM, Box 1, Folders 16, 18, 19). This solitude is not so picturesque. It is not disguised or laywayed by beauty, but intrigued by it, then seized. In the process of composition, of drawing itself, something has happened, some interior resistance is not defeated, but defined.

Curiosity defined. Some might say eccentricity defined. “I like county fairs,” she wrote in 1951 at 64, “roller coasters . . . dog shows, experiments in timing like our ex-Museum of Science and Invention's two roller-bearings in a gravity chute. I . . . take an inordinate interest in mon-gooses, squirrels, crows, elephants” (*Prose*, 648). What, in fact, pleased her about her friends might have been a similar quirk of mind. In her piece on Malvina Hoffman, she praises the artist's tool case, which included a “Javanese dagger ending in a bird—its strong angled claws grasping a snake—the bird's circular white eyes staring down on the upturned circular white eyes of the snake. . . .” The snake and the bird, this moment of resolution and terror frozen, and thus propelling the blade: the *idea* of knife in its grand cruel purpose, startlingly visible. “A very emotional object,” she adds, stepping back, still touched by its mystery (*Prose*, 578). Yet the same woman could spend what must have been a good long time

drawing a live tarantula in 1932. It fills the whole page of a blue serge notebook with poisonous immediacy, suddenly undercut by its no-nonsense caption. "The common name of this large spider is properly accented on the second syllable—tarantula. Putting the accent on the third syllable is not correct" (RM, Box 3, Folder 7).

Louise Bogan might have sensed the "stern, flexible technician" in such a remark, and certainly a great deal of Moore's drawing has deliberate, reasoned intention. She was fond, she said, of museums, and notebook after notebook delivers this affection. One sees her rigid before the long glass cases, at work in one of her favorite places, New York's Natural History Museum, rendering silk moths, or a portable brass dial and compass. One imagines her drawing quickly, deftly, a Manchurian pheasant at the Armory's Poultry Show in the late 1930s, or copying intricate tile designs at the Iranian Institute (RM, Box 3, Folders 7, 8). But this too is curiosity defined, a conscious hospitality toward the daily treasure that bombards us. Or perhaps will has little to do with it. "People ask me," Moore said in 1967 (though she might well have been asked about her drawing), "How do you think of things to write about? I don't. *They* think of *me*. They become irresistible" (*Prose*, 663).

This might be a puzzling kind of ambition that waits for things to declare themselves, but desire is often alerted by patience. And thirst—much of its power must be surprise. In answer, this drawing is wonderfully revealing: a young woman caught up not in herself, but in her work, poised over it, her back to us, her concentration a visible creature (RM, Box 1, Folder 31). Part of that patience, too, might have made Moore relaxed enough for whimsy—drawings of frogs, of course, speaking their nonsense, or later, red plums in cool gallop across the double page (RM, Box 3, Folder 7), or a poem warning of a different sort of ambition, that "fastidious ant carrying a stick north, south / east, west, till it turned on / itself" (*Poems*, 30). Dead serious, Moore holds up an "Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish," and says with absolute clarity:

Here we have thirst
and patience; from the first,
and art, as in a wave held up for us to see
in its essential perpendicularity:

not brittle, but
intense—the spectrum, that
spectacular and nimble animal the fish,
whose scales turn aside the sun's sword by their polish.
(*Poems*, 83)

How something comes into being is a miracle of the first order. We call it coherence, or more glibly, form. I don't imagine Moore ever got over the gift of its presence, or thought for a moment it was easy, this "violence within," as she said, quoting Wallace Stevens, "that protects us from a violence without" (*Prose*, 649).

Of course in her humility she refused to call her poems *poems*, but instead "exercises in composition," herself an "interested hack, rather than an author" (*Prose*, 640). Inarguable crimes for her were snobbery, murkiness, intolerance. "Blessed the geniuses who know/that egomania is not a duty," she wrote (*Poems*, 173). Her own drawings and poems she called her "kitchenware," scorning the piety with which so many artists and writers talk about their work.¹² She spoke little of hers, preferring, in interviews and essays, to address the world: baseball, Indian sign language, the history and aesthetics of knives, the work of her contemporaries. Her friend, Elizabeth Bishop, called her, without hyperbole, "The World's Greatest Living Observer" (*Quarterly*, 129), and praised her eye. "I don't know how without seeing Key West you managed to do it, but what you said about its being a 'kind of ten commandments of vegetable dye printing' is the best description yet."¹³ Such skill, though, should not be too surprising for a poet whose lifelong apprenticeship lay with line and color, pencil and brush. So she astounds us, as William Carlos Williams wrote, by setting us to look "at some apparently small object," and in that feel "the swirl of great events" (*Quarterly*, 126). Humility might not absolutely evoke brilliance in poetry or in anything else, but it does provide perspective, that crucial ability to forget, momentarily anyway, one's true place as center of the universe, and so usher in, *see*, perhaps even transfer into art, the world's real wealth.

Thus, one imagines, Moore's stubborn choice of Brooklyn over Manhattan, this place, wrote Marguerite Young about an afternoon visit with the poet "so generally depicted as the arid jumping off place," or at best a strange "mixture of the archaic and the modern" (*Festschrift*, 63), the latter

description not altogether unsuitable for Moore herself. Her street—Cumberland—was Whitman's too, however briefly, in 1852. It is, of course, still there; her lovely old apartment house too whose three stone lions gaze about the entry way in a kind of blank rapture. Here Moore lived for 36 years, watching a scarlet tanager take root in a nearby white magnolia, walking to the zoo and the Botanic Gardens, taking in so many lectures at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, that she was "pitied at home for not being able to sleep in the building" (*Prose*, 543). Down the block, her corner grocery continues, and Fort Greene Park still waits at the street's other end where the old revolutionary fort stood.

It was New Year's day when I made my pilgrimage. The exterior door was broken but still wrought iron, still banked by a stone cornucopia of fruits and vegetables on either side: apples and squash and grapes, over ripened, splitting open to seed. I began, as Moore might have, to draw, though unlike her, I wanted everything in my sketchbook—the lions, of course, but even the sticker plastered on the inner marble wainscoting with its Cheshire cat gleaming above the day-glo letters: *I luv your smile*, even the bright message, *I was hear*, spray painted on the outer wall. Two doors down, the little Mount Carmel Church of God In Christ, Inc. was silent; no one, in fact, was on the street. My mother-in-law waited, reading in the car, until I climbed back in, and we started for Manhattan, over Brooklyn Bridge which Moore loved as much as any poet has, and into the Village. It was there I noticed that my favorite gray beret had vanished. We stopped the car, and searched. Nothing. "Maybe it fell out when you got out in Brooklyn," my mother-in-law said. Then, weakly: "Do you want to go back?" "It probably won't be there," I said, "this is New York." But we did drive back, the traffic thickened now, and winter's afternoon light graying, almost silver.

She parked at the corner, and took up her book again. I ran down Cumberland Street, breathless, past two young cops chatting, twirling their nightsticks. Half a block away, an old man pulled his good wicker green shopping cart, the kind my grandmother believed in too. I stopped suddenly right there, thinking: this is the place she chose, this is the place she knew by heart. Now the building—five stories high with its somber lions—was startlingly hers. I could see its elegance up ahead, inscrutable in that broken street, and solid. "I tend to like a poem," the poet wrote, "which instead of culminating in a crescendo, merely comes to a close"

(*Prose*, 644). And an essay too, I imagine. So for you, Miss Moore, thank you. My hat was still there.

Notes

1. *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. by Patricia Willis (New York: Viking, 1986) pp. 643–44. Subsequent material will be cited parenthetically as *Prose*.
2. *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Viking, 1967) p. 6. Subsequent poems will be cited parenthetically as *Poems*.
3. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (New York: Wiley, 1876) pp. 123–24. All subsequent sections will be cited parenthetically as *Ruskin*.
4. Malvina Hoffman, *Sculpture Inside and Out* (New York: Norton, 1939) p. 83.
5. Artwork, XIII, Box 3, Folder 1, in the Marianne Moore Collection of the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, PA. My thanks to the Rosenbach Museum and Library for allowing me to examine material in this collection, hereafter cited parenthetically as RM. Previously unpublished comment from the sketchbooks of Marianne Moore is quoted here by permission of Clive E. Driver, Literary Executor of the Estate of Marianne C. Moore. My thanks to Mr. Driver as well.
6. Auguste Rodin, *On Art and Artists* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957) p. 29.
7. Malvina Hoffman, *Yesterday is Tomorrow* (New York: Crown, 1965) p. 321. Further sections will be cited parenthetically as *Yesterday*.
8. William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1985) p. 39.
9. Elizabeth Frank, *Louise Bogan* (New York: Knopf, 1985) p. 306.
10. Grace Schulman, "Conversation with Marianne Moore," *Quarterly Review of Literature*, XIX, p. 155.
11. *Quarterly Review of Literature*, IX, 2, p. 150. Subsequent material from this issue will be cited parenthetically as *Quarterly*.
12. *Festschrift for Marianne Moore's Seventy-Seventh Birthday*, ed. by Tam-bimuttu (New York: Tambimuttu and Mass, 1964) p. 129. Subsequent material will be cited parenthetically as *Festschrift*.
13. Lynn Keller, "Words Worth a Thousand Postcards: The Bishop/Moore Correspondence," *American Literature*, 55, 3, October 1983, p. 44.