

Another Armored Animal:
Armoring and Protection
in the poetry of Marianne Moore

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12-8-06
Seminar in Lit

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*It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack of what is found there.*

--William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"

The poetry of Marianne Moore is filled with subversion and hidden meanings beneath the surface. Readers and critics alike have found it difficult to decipher her messages through her complex subjects and vocabulary full of paradox. Moore herself was a private person who liked to keep herself at an emotional distance, purposefully making meaning ambiguous, only adding to the difficulty of interpretation. Many may find it an arduous task to wade through the work of Marianne Moore. However, if one can break through the armor and get the news from her poems, as her friend and contemporary William Carlos Williams urged in his own poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," one will be rewarded with Moore's rich cannon of poetry full of carefully constructed messages.

One motif Moore consistently used in her work was the idea of armored animals and armor itself. Overall themes of protection, the internal world versus the external world, and armor are significant when analyzing both Moore's life and her poetry. To fully understand the significance of theme, it is necessary to first examine Moore's life, which was filled with restraint and the intention of being private. Illustrations of armor

in her poetry, notably in "The Pangolin," "The Paper Nautilus," and "Armor's Undermining Modesty," present images of protection. Through examination of her biography and these "armored" poems, it shows that Moore wrote about armor not only as a means of self-protection, but also as a way to go into the world. Too often by critics, Moore's concern with armored animals and armoring has been "taken to suggest something like hermeticism" (Molesworth 289). Literary critic Elisabeth M. Joyce characterized the reticence in Moore's life by stating that there was "sharp division between her private and public personae and in the paradoxical way that her poetry represents not how wanted herself to be perceived but the reclusive sphere of her life...her poetry was deeply invested in subversion, but in a subversion that Moore felt compelled to mask" (9). However, while it is agreed that Moore used subversion in her poetry, after examination it is clear that Moore did not see armor as a stern fortress that one could use to avoid the world, but rather as a means of protection that would allow people to go into it. And such is the paradox and significance to exploring armor in the work of Moore; it both allowed her to be subversive and keep emotional distance while ultimately allowing her to partake in humanity.

Marianne Moore's biography is not one of "unrequited love and haphazard adventures, but of self-motivation and restraint" (Martin 4). Her self-possessed life was a stark contrast from the more free-spirited twentieth-century contemporaries such as Williams Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. While they were openly conducting affairs and living more sexually free ways, Moore lived the life of a religious, devout Presbyterian. Her grandfather and her brother Warner were both clergyman, and Moore was even known to give her brother advice for possible sermon topics. Such religious

devotion and restraint caused her to be characterized by some critics as a kind of hermit, or an old-fashioned character from another era: "strict and chaste, Moore was not afflicted by the typical wanderlust or self-indulgence common among her fellow poets" (4). Another reason for this perception may have been that she lived in the same house as her mother, Mary Warner Moore, until her mother's death. They were extremely close, had pet names when writing letters (Moore was "rat" and Mrs. Moore "mouse"), and even were sometimes compared to sisters (Schulman 32).

Moore also seemed to defy the times as she spoke in formal sentences, wore capes and had an affinity for tri-corned hats. While Moore was respected as an artist during her lifetime, she was popular almost to the point of being a "national pet," a cult figure, a novelty. She was the "old lady in the tricorne hat" who threw the first pitch of the season at Yankee Stadium in 1968, ate dinner and wrote poetry with Cassius Clay, and was recruited to give a name to a new Ford car (though none of her many suggestions were used and "Edsel" was chosen for the new model) (Kermode). It was clear she was well liked, but she was different from her unguarded contemporaries and perceived as a kind of eccentric grandmother.

All of the subversion and hidden meanings in her poetry only contributed to the portrait. Ezra Pound was redefining imagism and free verse and William Carlos Williams was openly writing about sex and desire, while Marianne Moore preferred to stay private and guarded. She "made the artistic choice to work some distance from emotion, sensuality, depravity, and despair; at a time when most of her colleagues were making far difference choices" (Erickson 143). Moore's deliberate ambiguity and desire to be private has often been interpreted as a type of armor Moore put up against the

world. Perhaps she kept a distance to protect herself; perhaps she did it to protect her art. No matter what significance the armor has, it is clear through her deeply private life that Moore valued that which is internal over that which is external. Themes of armor, protection, and the internal versus external all appear frequently in her poetry. Though it is often argued that the frequency of these themes illustrates the protection Moore chose to utilize in her own life to hide herself away, through an examination of her poems it appears that Moore actually employs armor as a type of protection one can use to go into the world, though a scary world it might be. Though there are many mentions of these themes in Moore's poetry, "The Pangolin," "The Paper Nautilus" and "Armor's Undermining Modesty" can be examined further to provide complex explorations of armored animals and armor.

"The Pangolin" was written in 1936 and while one of Moore's most well known works, it has also been characterized by some critics as one of the most important poems of the 20th century. Marianne Moore first heard about pangolins in 1927, when she wrote to her brother Warner who was then on tour with the navy: "I want you to tell me if you see a pangolin. It looks like an artichoke, has a tail about a foot long and lives on ants" (Erickson 157). Nine years later, in 1936, she wrote the poem.

A pangolin itself is an armored animal with large, hardened, plate-like scales that generally lives in Africa or Asia. It is a "nocturnal, isolated animal, stealthy and seldom seen;" its general virtue is in its patience and "wise use of strength" (Molesworth 289).

Moore begins the poem with a physical description of this exotic animal:

*Another armored animal—scale
lapping scale with spruce-cone regularity until they
form the uninterrupted central
tail-row! This near artichoke with head and legs and
grit-equipped gizzard,*

*the night miniature artist engineer is,
yes, Leonardo da Vinci's replica...*

Moore choice to use a pangolin as the subject is a bold one; it is an animal unfamiliar to most of her readers, and it is not likely that a reader would have a reference point for it. However, Moore often chooses exotic animals, from the jerboa to the basilisk to the mongoose, on purpose for then her reader will have no preconceived notion of its disposition or attributes. She can use the unfamiliarity to her advantage to make any leap of comparison between objects. In the case of "The Pangolin," Moore will begin by comparing the title subject to Leonardo da Vinci.

With its mention of Leonardo did Vinci as an "artist-engineer," it seems this poem can be interpreted to be about the practical protection artists need in general. In *Illusion is More Precise than Precision* Darlene Williams Erickson argues that Moore does not write about pangolins because she herself feels safest when she places herself behind armor in a "self-effacing and self-protective way," but rather Moore compares herself to a pangolin "not as an emotionally armored woman, but as an artist" (165). This is true in life, as all artists need some sort of armor or the critics will rip them apart. Artists are in a vulnerable position as they show their art; they bare their souls only to be criticized or misinterpreted. Moore is arguing that as an artist it is necessary to keep an emotional distance from one's work in order to protect oneself.

Moore also views armor as beautiful in and of itself, as a form of art. She takes the time to discuss the appearance of the armor in some detail, as on its body each scale overlaps each scale with "spruce-cone regularity;" this overlapping effect causes Moore to refer to a pangolin as a "near artichoke with head and legs;" the flattened scales called "sword-edged leafpoints," and though protected, he moves with a "fragile grace." With

all of this detail, it seems that while Moore was discussing that protection that artists need, she also considered the armor itself a form of art. Museums around the world house suits of armor and coats of arms, some of which Moore saw herself in Oxford, England in 1911. An exploration of a coat of arms is taken more fully in her 1950 poem “Armor’s Undermining Modesty,” but most likely that visit would have influenced her slant on armor in this poem as well.

Armoring in this poem is ultimately significant for Moore because she considers this armor, this beautiful visual shield, a carefully constructed fortress to protect the life underneath. She admires the pangolin for its grace, a trait she feels humans should strive to attain. The word “grace” itself is used seven times in the poem, which is a clear indication that this is something to be noticed. Her intent is to peel away the “layers of armor covering the word ‘grace,’ to show the reader the beauties of it, just as she had shown the reader the beauties of the animal” (Struthers 133). A rumination on the word “grace” appears in the middle of the poem:

*...Pangolins are not aggressive animals; between
dusk and day they have the not unchain-like machine-like
form and frictionless creep of a thing
made graceful by adversities, con-
versities. To explain grace requires
a curious hand. If that which is at all were not forever,
why could those who graced the spires
with animals and gathered there to rest, on a cold luxurious
low stone seats—a monk and monk and monk—between the
thus
ingenious roof-supports, have slaved to confuse
grace with a kindly manner, time in which to pay a
debt,
the cure for sins, a graceful use
of what are yet
approved stone mullions...*

In the word “grace” Moore means both the condition of being free of sin, and also the infinite love and mercy God bestows upon humankind. Her Presbyterian affinities come through in this poem as she exemplifies the pangolin as a creature that embodies this decent, Christ-like behavior. She is encouraging her reader to be full of grace in the same way, to embody a Christ-filled hopefulness that “steadies my soul.” This helps one to live a good Christian life, something Moore strove for in her own day-to-day living. The final lines of the poem continue to portray the pangolin a creature filled with grace, for:

*...he, always
curtailed, extinguished, thwarted by the dusk, work
partly done,
says to the alternating blaze,
“Again the sun!
anew each day; and new and new and new;
that comes into and steadies my soul.”*

The pangolin, always working hard, calls to the sun to come again and bring a new day. For with the sun, a symbol of God with its power and also a symbol of hope that equates to the promise of life, will bring in a new day in which the pangolin can embody grace of Christ.

All in all, while armor is the pangolin’s protection, since the armor "seems extra," it shows the peacefulness and lack of abrasiveness to the armor. The armor allows the pangolin to go on its way; the pangolin is "unpugnacious" and does not want to harm other animals. These are certainly not fighting words. It retreats with a “harmless hiss” and conducts its movements in a “fragile grace.” In the tenth stanza it is even explicitly said that “Pangolins are not aggressive animals.” All this talk of external armor and yet it seems that perhaps Moore admires the pangolin’s internal, moral character the most; he

is an “impressive animal,” a “toiler,” and one “who endures.” He takes “exhausting solitary trips through unfamiliar ground,” showing that he gets his strength from inside himself. Thus, as the pangolin is non-aggressive and admired by Moore for his inner personality, it is clear that the armor is truly only “extra.” Ultimately the armor does not allow for the pangolin to pick fights, but rather to live its life more freely. The illustration of armor can be applied to Moore’s attitude of protection in her own life; she used armor not simply as something to keep herself hidden away, but rather as a safe means to allow her to enter the real world and partake in humanity

Another significant Moore poem featuring an armored animal is “The Paper Nautilus,” written in 1941 for the *What Are Years* collection. This poem uses a paper nautilus, a sea mollusk, to show another kind of armoring, the protection of the family unit. This poem was written as a gift for Elizabeth Bishop in return for her gift of an actual nautilus shell. Moore was the senior poet and may have had mentoring inclination toward the younger poet, Bishop, and thus the mothering relationship explicated in the poem may have been reminiscent of Moore’s own feelings toward Bishop (Heuving 161). As always, however, Moore puts up a kind of armor in her poem which prevents one clear interpretation, and such is the case in “The Paper Nautilus.” As the mother nautilus constructs her shell to protect her nautilus babies, themes of maternal protection and watchfulness seem to be dominant in the poem, though a specific inspiration or allusion from Moore’s own life is never revealed.

The poem begins in stark contrast to the overall theme of feminine protection and maternal power. Instead, Moore chooses to locate her poem in a masculine-gendered world—one of “mercenaries” and “authority:”

*For authorities who hopes
Are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
Teatime fame and by
Commuters' comforts? Not for these
The paper nautilus
Constructs her thin glass shell.*

This is a deliberate choice on the part of Moore; she sets up a contrast between this world of power and authority and the world of the paper nautilus, a gentle female world of creation (Leavell 315).

Jeanne Heuving argues in *Omissions are not Accidents* that throughout the “The Paper Nautilus” it moves from images of externality to internality. After beginning with a series of external enclosures, such as “teatime fame” and “commuters’ comforts,” Moore turns her attention to internal enclosures, namely love and family, symbolized by the nautilus shell (162). She spends a bit of time describing this tender enclosure, using soft language such as “dull-white” and “smooth-edged” to depict the shell of the nautilus. Paper nautilus’ themselves are a type of sea mollusk,

“Internality is proposed by the poem,” and while it is a highly intimate picture it is not stifling, for the mother does not crush eggs (163). Moore describes the mother nautilus as burying her babies “eight-fold in her eight arms,” layer after layer of protection for her offspring. As stated in the opening stanza, the nautilus creates a “thin glass shell” as armor for her offspring. However, in this poem the armor is not physically thick or especially fierce as in the plated armor of “The Pangolin.” The power behind the nautilus’ thin glass shell is the love for the babies that will continue to protect them, as illustrated by the eight tentacles embracing its cargo.

The poem continues with a description of the mother- baby relationship and hints as to Moore's feelings about this fragile armor:

*...her glass ram' shorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed;
as Hercules, bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,--...*

It is significant that the eggs are "hid but not crushed;" this is a warning that too much armor becomes crushing. It can be stifling and prohibit growth because one is too cut off from the world. The phrase "hindered to succeed" is a similar sentiment, for too much maternal protection can hold children back. The eggs that Moore refers to are on one level the nautilus babies, but she may be hinting at her own relationship with her mother. Moore and her mother lived in the same house until her mother's death, and Mrs. Moore exerted a kind of protection over Marianne her whole life, giving her frequent advice and editing Marianne's poetry. Though in her notes Marianne Moore never cites quotations from her mother, in the Postscript to her *Selected Poems* she writes, "In my immediate family, there is one 'who thinks in a particular way;' and I should like to add that where there is an effect of thought or pith in these pages, the thinking and often the actual phrases are hers" (Holly 141). In this she is giving credit to her mother for much of her work. It is clear that Mrs. Moore was a huge asset to Marianne and Mrs. Moore's voice was an influence in her poetry, but it can be speculated that perhaps at a certain level this over involvement hindered Marianne to succeed. Though Moore never explicitly criticized her mother or openly expressed this sentiment in her letters, it can be surmised that on some level, Mrs. Moore's intense watchfulness must have had this effect.

In this section of the poem Moore is also arguing that the nautilus is a creator—explicitly a hero, like Hercules. She creates love (internal, personal, intimate), which stands in contrast to narcissism of “commuter’s comforts” and the financial and military implications of “mercenaries.” She creates something that lives protected inside of the armor (Ostriker 57).

In Bonnie Costello’s criticism she writes that Moore directly associates these issues of protection and struggle with problems of language and interpretation. Costello says Moore’s ideal language is a “shell in which our impression of the world can take shape without calcifying,” or a type of non-permanent armor (119). Language can never purely embody either the writer’s feelings toward her object nor can it embody the object itself, for language it is a “perishable souvenir of hope” a “thin glass shell.” This poem describes the creative process as “a highly precarious restraint of energy;” it both depends upon maximum power and maximum restraint to ensure the health of the eggs. The idea that language is its own armor is more explicitly explored in her poem “Armor’s Undermining Modesty.” The similar theme that language can never fully capture what it is one is trying to say it again restated in this later poem.

“The Paper Nautilus” concludes with an external image of the nautilus and its own freed eggs, and arms wound around the Parthenon horse of Ancient Greece:

...and close

*laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.*

Critic Linda Leavell writes that the word “fortress” at the end of the poem recalls images of masculine strength. A fortress is a kind of protection, a military armor. However, the fortress in this line is of love, not aggression. Rather the word “fortress” in this instance refers to the personal power of maternal and artistic devotion (316). Like the internal world of the mother paper nautilus and the external world of authority, war is too a paradox; the internality of armor contrasts the externality of war. Some critics even see all of her armored poems to be pacifist reactions to war. Moore scholar Bonnie Costello writes that “gradually armor came to be one of the most dominant metaphors in her work, at times challenging a political ethos that viewed material possession, mechanization, and martial conquest as ultimate goals” (110).

In the spring of 1967 Marianne Moore revealed her anti-war leanings as she expressed her view on the Vietnam War: “I try to comfort myself with the thought that they are learning better why they are fighting. But when they say, ‘This may go on till summer,’ we are doomed, I feel” (Schulman 40). Moore then went on to quote the last stanza of “The Paper Nautilus” to describe her opinions on the war: “..round which the arms/ had wound themselves as if they knew love/ is the only fortress/ strong enough to trust to.” She then said, “Now that is as specific as I can put it. If you felt that way about any people, you couldn’t fight them. You couldn’t want to kill anyone” (41).

However, while it is clear that Moore had pacifist leanings, to limit her view of armor as only this would be far too limiting. In “The Paper Nautilus” overall this shield is not meant to protect from war, but rather allow this maternal and artistic devotion to flourish. Though the poem ends with an external image of a fortress, it says that love, an

internal image, is that which is strong enough to trust too. On the whole it is clear that “The Paper Nautilus” values that which is internal over the external.

Moore is introducing in this poem a different kind of armor than that of the Pangolin, who has stiff body armor with sword-edged leaf-points, etc. The armor of “The Paper Nautilus” in contrast is literally paper-thin. It is constructed by the mother out of an act of love and its mark is only temporary. Moore is also arguing that with this delicacy, however, comes kind of strength. This paper-thin shield of love is in fact a “fortress” and the only thing in life that would be “strong enough to trust to.” So ultimately there is a paradox in the armor: it is to be both delicate, like a wasp’s nest, and strong, like Ionic columns and the force of the Parthenon sculpture.

In Marianne Moore’s later poem “Armor’s Undermining Modesty,” she tackles armor from a more mature perspective; she was sixty-two when this poem was published in *Nation* in the year 1950. It can be argued that Moore’s poetry became less complex as she grew older, but “Armor’s Undermining Modesty” is hardly a light read (Erickson 137). Though complex, in this late poem it still seems that Moore is giving the reader the most open description of armor yet. She casts aside the need for a dominant animal motif and instead examines “our mis-set alphabet” or the armor words can provide as well as the undermining modesty one can learn from an actual coat of arms used by knights.

*...Once, self-determination
made an ax of a stone
and hacked things out with hairy paws. The consequence—
our mis-set
alphabet.*

*Arise, for it is day.
Even gifted scholars lose their way
Through faulty etymology.*

No wonder we hate poetry...

In this passage Moore is describing the creation of language, how it was a thing that was hacked out with “hairy paws,” and how it ultimately is limiting. Words fall short and fail to effectively communicate the message. They form a kind of armor between what is on the page and the meaning that is trying to be conveyed. Because of this “faulty etymology” Moore says it is “no wonder we hate poetry.” If it is difficult for even “gifted scholars” to get the news from poems, what hope is for the reader?

The middle of the poem demands the questions, “What is more precise than precision? Illusion.” Illusion, like armor, has the ability to deceive based on appearances. This also illustrates a modernist view—what we often perceive to be real is just an illusion; it is not actually real (Schulman 79).

Then Moore shifts to a discussion of literal armor, coats of arms worn by knights. In 1911 she visited Oxford, England with her mother and it seems the classic armor she saw there was an impressionable memory. In a letter dated July 1911 she wrote to her brother, John Warner Moore, “Oxford for fat rich olfactory impressions. I have never seen such a place...And the portraits and statuary and the collection of arms in the house are very fine. I shan’t be satisfied now till we have an armoury... the Roman swords were the only ones Ive (sic) seen and the chain mail was particularly fine” (Erickson 178).

Midway through the poem Moore begins to discuss these coats of arms, most likely influenced by and similar to the ones she would have seen in Oxford:

Knights we’ve known,

*like those familiar
now unfamiliar knights who sought the Grail, were
ducs in old Roman fashion*

*without addition
of wreaths and silver rods, and armor gilded
or inlaid.*

It is interesting that Moore references the Holy Grail, for it is the ultimate romance. The mythological question is not reality; it is an illusion, an example of something that is “more precise than precision.” In stating that they were “without addition of wreaths and silver rods,” Moore is stating that they were not so laden with armor and decoration that it got in the way of the job they were meant to do (Erickson 182). Perhaps this could be compared to early language. While it was being hacked out with “hairy paws” it was pure, and language was defined by its usefulness in communication. However, as time went on we acquired our “mis-set” alphabet that soon paved the way for “faulty etymology.” Just as armor can be overburdened with too much decoration, or too much “guild,” so too can language, and this can ultimately bar its purpose.

Moore then continues to warn against too much excess in armor, in the most open explanation of how she feels about armor yet:

*...Though Mars is excessive
in being preventive,
heroes need not write an ordinal of attributes to enumerate
what they hate.*

*I should, I confess,
Like to have a talk with one of them about excess,
And armor's undermining modesty
Instead of innocent depravity.*

In criticizing Mars the Roman god of war for being excessive in using too much armor, Moore is clearly taking a stand on personal protection. She understands that armor is necessary, but excessive armor only limits one's interaction with humanity. One needs to have some self-protection, but too much has an adverse effect. This sentiment is also reminiscent of the phrase “hindered to succeed” in “The Paper Nautilus, which perhaps

was influenced by her life-long relationship with her mother. Their extremely close relationship could be seen as excessive in being preventive, and in these lines Moore is clearly showing the reader that too much protection only holds a person back.

Moore view that armor need be modest recalls the spiritual armor described by St. Paul in the book of Romans, Chapter 13, Verse 12. This is a Bible verse Moore would have been familiar with, for she was a devout Christian: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12). St. Paul is calling for people to cast away evil and wear the grace of God as their protection (Stapleton 152). The appeal for the goodness of god to shine through is similar to, and no doubt also influenced the message Moore expressed in the “The Pangolin.” The most important thing armor can provide a person is a shield between oneself and any evils of the outside world. If one wears an armor of grace, they will avoid sin and reflect the beauty of God. Thus at end of “Armor’s Undermining Modesty,” Moore is arguing that armor must not be too ostentatious. We need modesty in armor in order to allow the grace of good, the goodness of the person underneath the armor to prevail over outer appearances.

Laurence Stapleton also argues that the final line of the poem also evokes St. Paul’s verse. Moore concludes with: “There is the tarnish; and there, the imperishable wish.” Stapleton states the tarnish on the armor is “man’s imperfection; the perishable wish, his resolve” (152). The message in this line is that our armor’s undermining modesty should be our humility. No one is without sin, and no one can ever purely embody the grace of God, for we are only human. Thus the significance is that in

wearing our armor we must be humble, and wear our imperfections externally as tarnish on our armor.

There are many other poems of Marianne Moore that feature armor or armored animals. “To a Snail” exemplifies many of the same themes as her other armor poems. In this particular poem Moore is glorifying a snail, another armored animal, as a creature who knows “compression is the first grace of style.” Like the pangolin, Moore too considers the snail an animal that illustrates grace. She continues by stating “Contractility is a virtue/ as modesty is a virtue,” similar to the argument of armor as modesty in “Armor’s Undermining Modesty.” Like the modest armor of light we are to adorn if we want to honor God, the snail understands that “it is not the acquisition of any one thing/ that is able to adorn... that we value in style, but the principle that is hid.”

Another Moore poem, “His Shield,” is about a hedgehog. This poem argues as well for modesty in appearances and armor. The title subject is glorified for “his shield was his humility.” The poem concludes with the same advice about living a humble life: “Become dinosaur-/ skulled, quilled or salamander-wooled, more ironshod/ and javelin-dressed than a hedgehog battalion of steel, but be/ dull. Don’t be envied or/ armed with a measuring rod.”

In a 1951 radio broadcast Marianne Moore said this on art and the creation of her poetry: “For instance you see a suit of armor. The moveability suggests a wearer—there is a life under the mechanism; you are reminded of an armadillo, say, or a crayfish, and recall the beauty of the ancient testudo... presently you see a live iguana and are startled by the paradox of its docility in connection with its horrific aspect. The idea of beauty

outweighs the thought of a painful self-protectiveness, and you have a developing theme” (Erickson 177).

Thus for Moore herself there was beauty underneath it all. Even though readers have sometimes had trouble “getting the news” from the poetry of Marianne Moore because of her subversion, or have had trouble understanding the workings of her stringent life, for Moore there was a kind of beauty that lay beneath. Though she knew she was self-protected, the thought of beauty, the thought of living a life of grace, was more important than staying hidden. Like a paper nautilus whose eggs were “hid but not crushed,” Moore lived in a balance of protecting herself while not holding back too much.

There is a deeper surface to Moore than the reserved picture that tends to be portrayed; “Lover of order and Durer-like precision, she often appears docile or retiring. But beneath and because of that demeanor lies deepest feeling and unshakable determination” (Martin 4). In her life Moore was ambitious and focused on writing good poetry. Her professors at Bryn Mawr thwarted her writing career early on by remarking that her prose was “obscure” and often failed to expression her ideas or points. She instead then majored in Economics and History (Schulman 32). Though some readers, even readers of her later poetry, may have also gotten the impression that her poetry was “obscure” or inaccessible, it was never Moore’s intention to be anything but straightforward. She once wrote that she had a “burning desire to be explicit” (Willis 25). Friends of Moore have said that her poetry is written in the same way she spoke in life—in formal phrases and with a complex vocabulary. So though to some it may have seemed too incomprehensible, to Moore her poetry was in fact a natural way of

expression. This message becomes explicitly clear in her poem published in 1935,

Poetry:

*I, too, dislike it.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one dis-
covers in
it, after all, a place for the genuine.*

Moore's poetry, though reserved, is such a genuine place. The "genuine" in her poetry is the way she includes and describes her struggle for self-expression. She does not want to be "excessive in being preventive," as the Roman god Mars is accused of in "Armor's Undermining Modesty" and make the mistake of keeping too much inside. However, she also argues that "unobtrusiveness is dazzling" in "Voracities and Verities Sometimes are Interacting," and Moore also sees a merit in presenting her messages in a subtle way.

While contemporaries such as William Carlos Williams were writing in a much more frank, unguarded style of poetry at the same time, there is something to be said for Moore's elegant restraint. She produced a much smaller cannon of more terse poems, while Williams left a huge, sprawling body of work. With that smaller cannon, however, Moore has avoided some criticism that Williams has since received, stating that he should have better edited some of his work. Moore does not let her true feelings pour over the surface, but it is undeniable that her carefully constructed messages still delight and challenge the reader to dig deeper.

Through examination of Moore's life and poetry it is clear that for Moore the idea of beauty did outweigh the thought of painful self-protectiveness. Three of her major poems on armoring, "The Pangolin," "The Paper Nautilus," and "Armor's Undermining Modesty," illustrate Moore's idea that armor itself should be nothing more than a beautiful, though modest shield, to protect the life (a life full of grace) underneath. It is

clear that Moore did not see armor as a stern fortress that one could use to avoid the world, but rather as a means of protection that would allow people to go into it. And such is the paradox and significance to exploring armor in the work of Moore; it both allowed her to be subversive and keep emotional distance while ultimately allowing her to partake in humanity.

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