

The Hidden Meanings of Marianne Moore

Of the two poets that we studied intently throughout our class, the work of Marianne Moore spoke to me the most. I could relate to many of her works, especially dealing with animals, athletes, religion, and the imagination. I hold these things to be important to myself as well. Moore not only writes about the quality and beauty of these concepts, but she puts her own voice into her work as well, telling us why these concepts are important to her. We also are provided with brief glimpses into her life and the kind of woman she was. These things are what made Moore into the great poet she is revered for today and why her work touched so many. She was able to do this by writing about various concepts that we can all relate to in our own lives and her work knows no sense of time. It is just as applicable now as it was during her time. The focus of this paper is about Moore's hidden meanings and themes in her some of her works, namely her works pertaining to animals, and how she reveals to the reader what qualities she holds dear to herself. I will refer mostly to two of Moore's poems that are centered around animals, but one of her poems pertaining to Ireland is worth being talked about and deciphered as well. Moore does not usually make her meanings blatant in her poetry; one needs to dig underneath and study each line of the poem to find the truth of what she is getting at and I found this to be one of the most enjoyable things to do in reading her poetry. It is very satisfying to figure out what a piece of literature is saying to you after you have analyzed it and studied it for a period of time. Even after doing this, it still may not be 100% clear, but you do become closer to the poet and knowing about the poet's life is also very essential when trying to derive meaning from his or her work work.

Moore was born in Kirkwood, Missouri in 1887 and lived with her grandfather after her father was institutionalized due to a mental breakdown. Moore attended college in 1905 and taught at the Carlisle Indian Industrial Institute until 1915 when she began publishing her works (Marianne Moore, 1). Moore maintained a very close relationship with her mother and brother throughout her career. Her mother was deeply religious, being a Presbyterian, and she was a profound influence for Moore throughout her life. Her mother influenced her not only in maintaining a conservative and religious lifestyle, but she also pushed Moore a little too much at times, forcing Moore to make her own path and diverge from her mother's old fashioned ways. Much of Moore's work revolves around these relationships with her brother, mother, and grandfather, indicating to the reader how important the roles of these people played in her life, whether positively or negatively. Again, Moore does not make it very clear that a certain poem may be about one of her family members, such as her mother for instance, because Moore uses other things such as animals to help describe to the reader what she deems important to her. This mysteriousness about Moore is what I found fascinating and also a challenge when reading and focusing on some of her poetry relating to her family members and the qualities that she thinks are important to herself and to humankind.

I chose to study and analyze the poem "The Fish" extensively because I wanted to choose a poem that had to do with animals or nature because I am an avid animal lover myself and I find nature very comforting and beautiful. Moore wrote this poem in 1918 and it was published in England in her first collection, *Poems*, in 1921. Incidentally, the poem was published without her knowledge by two of her friends, Hilda Doolittle and Robert McAlmon ("The Fish: Introduction", 1). Critics have often debated that Moore's influence for writing this poem came from Moore's interest in modern painting and her study of color theory. Others have said that

Moore's brother, Warner, and his love for sailing and being in the Navy were the reason that this poem was written. As I will explain later there are various critics who looked at this poem differently, but I came to the conclusion that Moore found a kind of lesson to be learned from the beauty of a scene such as waves crashing against a cliff.

What struck me first and foremost about this poem was its tone. I had first expected it to be uplifting and positive because I assumed it was a poem about fish swimming in the sea, but I soon found that this was not so. It actually appeared somewhat violent and somber and really had nothing to do with fish at all. The poem actually focused on the waves, the sun, and the cliff. The form of this poem was a very important aspect of it and a few critics studied the form that she used extensively. The poem forms a wavelike pattern with the first two lines of each stanza beginning at the same place, the next two lines have a space, and the last line of each stanza is even further away from the beginning lines of the stanza. The poem contains eight stanzas in all following a syllabic line of: 1, 3, 9, 6, 8 and a rhyme scheme of *a a b b c*. What is interesting to note is that Moore made three major revisions to this poem and its original form was quite a bit different than the form we are provided with now. The earlier form had eight stanzas as well, but followed a syllabic line of: 1, 3, 8, 1, 6, 8 and a rhyme scheme of: *a a b c c d*. I found Moore's latest form to follow more of a wavelike pattern and was more aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Darlene Williams Erickson talks about how the poem moves in an "ethereal, surrealistic kind of slow motion" (Willis and Nelson, 3). I found that there was a close connection with the way this poem was written on the page and what it had to reveal in its contents and I found this to be a very interesting aspect of the poem that I had not really come across much in reading poetry.

Wallace Stevens, in his 1935 review of Moore's *Selected Poems*, also admires the poem's wavelike motion. He found it interesting how Moore incorporated rather destructive

language like “external/ marks of abuse”, “dynamite grooves, burns, and/ hatchet strokes” and also incorporated things that were unlike the sea such as “defiant edifice” (Moore, 32-3).

Stevens felt that this was a risk to use language such as this in describing the sea, but I felt that this use of language was necessary to describe to the reader how the sea looks and sounds (Erickson, 83). Other critics have described this poem as “beautiful”; they have described the poem’s unity as coming from a “central consciousness that identifies itself with the movement of the sea”, how it contains “some of the loveliest images in all poetry” and how it is “like a mosaic which had no point of beginning” (Erickson, 84). It was obvious to me that many critics found this poem to be one of Moore’s greater works and they revered her greatly for her use of imagery and form in this particular poem and I agreed very much so that this poem was a very beautiful, yet destructive piece of work containing a message that needed to be heard.

A common theme that I came across in analyzing this poem was a struggle between endurance and destruction in terms of the cliff and the sea in a constant struggle with one another. In the beginning stanza, the line starts with “The Fish/ wade/ through black jade” (Moore, 32). The words “black” and “jade” do not usually describe the waters of the sea, it is usually described as being very fluid and blue. Jade in its noun form is made up of either of two minerals called nephrite or jadeite. Jade in its verb form means to wear out by overuse or overindulgence. It means to become weary or spiritless. This image of jade as either minerals or a rock or to become weary both seem very contradictory of what a sea should look like and I thought this line described a struggle for the fish because they do not swim freely through the water, they struggle through it and they are tired from it. The 3rd line of the stanza describes the mussels in the water:

Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash-heaps;

opening and shutting itself like
an injured fan.

Again there is an image depicted here of a struggle for the animal life beneath the water. The mussel's shell is described as moving like an injured fan. This suggests that the animal needs to maintain endurance to survive in this environment, just as the fish that wade through the water instead of swimming freely. Sue Renick also agreed with my interpretation that there is a common theme depicting destruction and endurance throughout the poem. She mentions how the sea has the power to destroy small fish and even the cliff, as I will talk about further, but yet the fish need the sea to survive (Erickson, 85). It's interesting how Moore creates this paradox that forms the heart of this poem, but this paradox makes sense throughout the poem.

Images that are more forceful and violent begin to emerge in the 4th stanza when Moore describes how, "The water drives a wedge/ of iron through the iron edge/ of the cliff". The water is shown as deteriorating the side of this cliff with its sheer force. The stanza continues:

...whereupon the stars,
pink
rice-grains, ink-
bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.

The forceful movement of the waves is shown here that moves these sea creatures about in chaos and dishevelment. However, despite this madness of the sea animals moving about, some still remain stationary such as the "pink rice-grains" which could depict sea anemones and the toadstools. These animals show their endurance and strength despite the force of the waves moving everything else about in a mess.

In the 6th stanza, the ferocity of the waves is more evident judging by the description of the cliff face:

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.

The incredible strength and destruction that the sea is capable of is very evident here in this passage. The sea has managed not only to inflict smaller “marks of abuse” such as the hatchet strokes and dynamite grooves upon this “edifice” or great structure, but it has managed to eat away a chasm into the side of the cliff. A chasm is described as a deep opening or fissure in the earth or rock brought about by a disruption. What the sea is ultimately capable of achieving because of its strength and natural tendency to destroy is made very clear. Some of the uses of language here appear contradictory with the physical appearances of abuse being described as dynamite grooves and hatchet strokes because these suggest man-made marks of abuse, not wave-made marks. Perhaps Moore is talking about man-made marks of abuse here as well as wave-like marks of abuse to show how strong the cliff is despite these two forces working against it.

In the last stanza, Moore provides a kind of twist and resolve to the end of this fairly destructive and disruptive poem: “Repeated/ evidence has proved that it can live/ on what can not revive/ its youth. The sea grows old in it”. Moore is showing us that there is a compromise between the concepts of endurance and destruction. Erickson describes this relationship

perfectly: “The cliff has seen and has weathered great adversity, all the external ‘marks of abuse’ that humans and nature can provide. Yet the great rock persists; it lives in the sea, that which ‘cannot revive its youth’. The sea can slowly provide destruction, erosion, but it cannot reverse the process and make the cliff young and unmarked....The two are locked in a mutually nurturing and mutually destructive embrace” (Willis and Nelson, 6).

By the end of this poem it becomes clear what Moore is trying to convey to the reader. She is showing us an ongoing struggle between endurance and the fight to keep going and the forces of destruction that can break us and other things down. This idea doesn’t just need to apply to nature, Moore just chose to write about this from the perspective of the sea, the life within it, and the cliff. This idea can also apply to the reader’s life and the struggle to deal with the ups and downs of life; one cannot exist without the other. We as people “grow old in it”, the “it” being the struggles of life and the need to endure it all just as the sea life and the cliff endure their struggle against the destructive force of the waves.

There are two other perspectives to the poem provided by Grace Shulman and Jon Slatin that are very interesting in providing a different way of interpreting either parts of the poem or the poem as a whole. Shulman sees the sea, sun, and the rock all in opposition to one another. She sees these elements as being acted upon and acting upon one another at the same time. In the 2nd and 3rd stanzas, the rays of the sun are struggling to penetrate through the water. The rays are “split like spun/ glass”; in other words they are being refracted or bent by the water (Erickson, 86). As I mentioned previously, the fish are fighting the power of the waves in the beginning of the poem; they are described as wading and not being able to swim freely. In the 5th stanza, the other creatures of the sea also seem to be fighting against the waves or perhaps succumbing to its power. The waves are also in obvious opposition to the cliff as well, as they

are driving a “wedge/ of iron through the iron edge/ of the cliff”. Reverting back to Shulman’s idea about the sun’s rays trying to penetrate through the waves, Erickson takes this idea further. She gives an interpretation of the light as being a beautiful and comforting force beneath a sea of darkness and fright. Erickson points out how many people may be afraid of what the ocean contains within it because we do not know about all of the life that swims and lies beneath the surface. But the 3rd stanza provides some hope in describing how the light moves “with spotlight swiftness” and how it is always around. The light of the sun illuminates the darkness and creates a beautiful and safe scene of seemingly harmless mussel shells, jellyfish, barnacles, and crabs (Willis and Nelson, 5-6).

Slatin looks at this poem from a very different, yet interesting perspective. Slatin noticed that this poem was beside another of Moore’s poems called “Reinforcements” in her publication of *Observations* and felt that “The Fish” was a poem about war just as “Reinforcements” was a poem about war as well. Moore’s brother, as I mentioned earlier, joined in the Navy and served as one of its chaplains in the North Atlantic in 1917 and Slatin felt that this was the reason to write about this poem from the perspective of war. He viewed the poem as being filled with horror and sees the landscape as “strange and filled with ruins” (Willis and Nelson, 4). Slatin does not give more reasoning as to why he thinks this, but I believe he is making a connection between the unfamiliarity of the ocean and the unfamiliarity of foreign lands to a soldier during war. During Moore’s time and even today, the ocean is still viewed as a mysterious and intriguing place and I thought that Slatin was trying to connect the feelings of mystery, intrigue, and fear that a soldier may experience during a time of war. The “ruins” that Slatin describes may pertain to the mussels that open and shut “like/ an/ injured fan” and the barnacles that are encrusted on the side of the cliff. In the 2nd and 3rd lines of the 4th stanza, Moore describes the

“turquoise sea/ of bodies”. Slatin views these two lines as representing the actual dead bodies of soldiers. Furthermore Slatin views the cliff as a metaphor for “the iron hull of a ship which looms clifflike above the surface” (Willis and Nelson, 4). The 5th stanza describes the chaos of the sea creatures moving about and I thought about Slatin’s perspective and took this scene to possibly represent a torpedo being shot underwater which flings the sea creatures about and also destroys them with its terrible force. The image of the “ink-/ bespattered jelly-fish” could represent squid or octopi being hit and ripped apart by the torpedo, sending bits of it and its ink into the water and onto other animals. Perhaps the terror of the commotion by the torpedo could be scaring the octopi so that they produce ink to swim away and hide. Although Slatin’s idea may be taking this poem a little far, I felt that he built up a strong enough case that deserves some consideration.

Whatever interpretation a reader wants to make and stick with when reading this poem, I believe that at the heart of this work Moore is trying to convey a strong message to the reader. She uses the great imagery and form of “The Fish” to invite the reader to take it a step further and try to figure out what she is trying to say and what concepts or ideas she thinks are important in this poem.

Another animal poem that we studied at length in class and that I analyzed myself was “The Pangolin”. This poem was published in 1941 along with her other works that made up *What Are Years*. The poem is centered around the strange, yet interesting creature called a pangolin. It is a type of anteater that is surrounded by armor to protect itself against predators. Moore exemplifies this armor that the pangolin possesses and she describes the creature wonderfully. The 1st stanza begins:

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...

Right away Moore makes mention of the animal's superb armor and I think that this is the central theme of what Moore is getting at. It was known that Moore lived a very conservative and religious lifestyle and that she tended to hide her feelings and emotions away. I think Moore did this not only because of the way she was raised, but she used this protective, emotional armor to go out into the world. Moore mentions some religious implications towards the end of this poem that could also tie into this idea of armor and the need to protect oneself. I found it interesting here as well how Moore uses the metaphor of a pinecone from a tree to describe the scales over-lapping one another on the pangolin's body. I thought it was clever of her to use two living, but distinctly different things as a comparison; a tree and an animal. Right away Moore makes it clear that she is celebrating this animal's beauty, ingenuity, and ability to protect itself with such intricate and heavy armor. In lines 6-8 Moore again makes the use of comparing two unlike things: "...the night miniature artist engineer is,/ yes, Leonardo da Vinci's replica--/ impressive animal and toiler of whom we seldom hear". Moore ingeniously compares these two things; a living animal and the brilliant artist /inventor (among other things) Leonardo da Vinci, to show the reader how beautiful and intelligent this creature is just as da Vinci's mind and work were as well. Moore continues on with a very detailed description of the pangolin's body and in the 2nd stanza, the reader starts to get a sense of what the pangolin's life is like in lines 4-8:

...exhausting solitary trips through unfamiliar ground at night,
returning before sunrise; stepping in the moonlight,
on the moonlight peculiarly, that the outside
edges of his hands may bear the weight and save the
claws.

This animal leads a life of solitude and hunts at night by itself. It also travels in an environment that is unfamiliar to it when it needs to be able to find food, exhausting itself in the process.

When Moore describes how the pangolin is stepping “on the moonlight peculiarly” she means that the pangolin has to walk on the outside of its paws to save its claws from being worn down as they are used for digging. It appears that this animal does not live an easy life and that it must endure a few hardships to remain alive. Moore is again celebrating this animal by showing how it endures and moves on despite difficulties such as hunting by itself at night in unfamiliar territory and having to walk on the edges of its feet constantly. Moore is showing the reader how important it is to maintain one’s armor and to protect oneself in order to move on through life’s difficulties.

The pangolin’s nature is brought out by Moore in the 3rd and 5th stanza from lines 2-4 in the 3rd stanza and lines 1-3 in the 5th stanza:

...he draws
away from danger unpugnaciously,
with no sound but a harmless hiss...
rolls himself into a ball that has
power to defy all effort to unroll it; strongly intailed, neat
head for core, on neck not breaking off, with curled-in feet.

The power and strength of the armor of this creature is incredible, yet its nature is not to attack.

The pangolin appears to live life by its own accord and whatever troubles come its way it meets with a heavy line of defense including the power to roll itself, including the feet, into a tight ball that cannot be unwound, yet it is not so strong as to break its neck.

In the 6th stanza Moore depicts the pangolin struggling to eat driver ants despite their stings and bites. “The armored/ ant-eater met by the driver-ant does not turn back, but/ engulfs what he can” (l. 1-3). Where other animals may fail and become engulfed by the driver ants, the

pangolin faces them fearlessly and is the one engulfing them. However the pangolin does not go into this frenzy of ants without being retaliated upon. Moore describes in lines 3-7:

...the flattened sword-
edged leafpoints on the tail and artichoke set ; legs-and
body-plates
quivering violently when it retaliates
and swarms on him.

Even though the driver ant's fury can be somewhat painful for the pangolin, he is rewarded for his hard work in facing these enemies by obtaining a satisfying meal. Moore continues on in the poem describing how people used to believe from fables that the pangolin swallowed and was nourished by stones, when it was really the ants they were eating. She talks about how the pangolin should not be viewed as an aggressive animal, but should really be viewed as a graceful animal that is made "graceful by adversities" in line 10 of the 8th stanza. Moore even begins to compare the pangolin to man in the 12th stanza in lines 1-6:

Pangolins, made
for moving quietly also, are models of exactness,
on four legs; on hind feet plantigrade,
with certain postures of a man. Beneath sun and moon,
man slaving
to make his life more sweet...

When Moore mentions the word "plantigrade" here, she means that the pangolin is sitting upright on its hind legs, like that of a man. She also compares man's hardships and "slaving" to that of the pangolin and its hardships at acquiring food and living.

The end of this poem is a kind of lasting tribute to this solitary animal and how it is fearless, enduring, powerful, and hopeful for a new day. The last 3 lines of the last stanza create an emerging image of hope and renewal: "Again the sun!/ anew each day; and new and new and new,/ that comes into and steadies my soul". It is possible here that Moore is not only referring to the physical sun, but to Jesus the Son of God as well. Moore's religious beliefs seem to be

coming to the surface here and I found it interesting that she decided to tie this in with the armored endurance of the pangolin. I think Moore is showing the reader that it is not only ok, but important to put on protective armor, in this case perhaps armor in the form of religion and hope, to face the world and turn the other cheek to attacks. Individuals may feel that they are alone in this religious endeavor to live a good and moral life, perhaps Moore felt this way as well during her time. The pangolin travels alone, in lands that it is unused to. It faces the relentless attacks of driver ants and perhaps other animals that wish to harm it. Yet at the end of a long and hard night of hunting and roaming, it rests with the hopefulness and assurance of a new day. This ability to face obstacles, to keep moving on, and to trust in the hope and wonder of a new day is the lesson that Moore wants the reader to experience and something that she strove to practice as well.

Although Moore frequently used animals in her poetry to convey her hidden meanings and themes, a poem I studied entitled “Spenser’s Ireland”, I felt needed to be talked about in this paper. The poem has nothing to do with animals at all, but it is about a place, specifically Ireland. This poem was filled with colorful and wonderful stories and imagery that depicted the importance of imagination to Moore and how it should always remain within a person and culture. Straying away a bit from the use of animals in Moore’s poetry should not take away from the value of what she is trying to say in “Spenser’s Ireland”. The poem itself was published in 1941 with her collection entitled *What Are Years*. Looking at the form briefly, each stanza of the poem is 11 lines long following a syllabic pattern of: 4, 8, 8, 6, 9, 7, 11, 4, 5, 5, 12. As with “The Fish”, form is very important to Moore and she must have taken a great amount of time in ordering her poems this way. Maurice J. O’Sullivan points out that the 12th syllable in each line echoes the Spenserian alexandrine. An alexandrine is a line of poetic meter that has 12 syllables.

It was popular in both English and French poetry and was used as far back as the 12th and 13th centuries. The English poet, Edmund Spenser, wrote works such as the “Fairie Queene” which followed this alexandrine form, hence the title and beginning of the poem being called “Spenser’s Ireland” (Willis and Nelson, 1). Moore also incorporates the title into the first line, which she does frequently. It helps to create unity and follows a continuous thought process.

On the surface, this poem appears to depict many of the old myths, rituals, and artifacts of Ireland and it helped to create a scene of Ireland that was both mysterious and seemingly untouched by the industrialized way of life such as we live here in the US. But at the heart of this poem, Moore is trying to reach out to the reader and exclaim how important it is to hang on to one’s imagination and to use it to appreciate the beauty and wonder of life.

In line 4 of the 1st stanza there is a reference to the Irish town names and how “every name is tune”. Donn Byrne wrote an article entitled “Ireland: The Rock Whence I Was Hewn” and in it, he mentions how Ireland’s town names are alive in both speech and meaning and that their names are like a bar of music. An example would be the town name Aderg, which means “the Red Ford” or the town name Killabrick the Wood of the Badger (Willis and Nelson, 4).

Right away the reader is drawn into a world very possibly unlike their own that is filled with colorful and ingenious names of these Irish towns. In lines 5-7 Moore makes a reference to the Irish servants who are considered pathetically loyal to their masters: “Denunciations do not affect/ the culprit; nor blows, but it/ is torture to him to not be spoken to”. As it is described here, no tongue-lashing or harsh speech can affect these servants. The only way to punish them is to refrain from speaking to them, which is like “torture”. Lines 8-11 lead us into the story of Maria Edgeworth’s *Stories of Ireland: Castle Rackrent and The Absentee* where there is a description of one of the characters named Thady Quirk. The description from the story is as

follows: “for I wear a long great coat winter and summer, which is very handy, as I never put my armes in the sleeves; they are as good as new, though come Holantide next I’ve had it these seven years; it hold on by a single button round my neck, cloak fashion” (Willis and Nelson, 5-6). Looking at the passage from Moore’s poem and comparing these two scenes makes the imagery of what Moore is trying to convey easier to understand. The lines from the poem are as follows: “They’re natural,--/ the coat, like Venus’/ mantle lined with stars,/ buttoned close at the neck,--the sleeves new from disuse”. It’s also interesting to note here that sometimes Irish rebels would hide weapons in the big sleeves of their coats so this could perhaps be one reason as to why Thady doesn’t use the sleeves of his coat.

The 2nd stanza entertains the reader with interesting customs such as playing the harp backward and eating fern seed. In lines 1-5 of this stanza we get a glimpse into these strange customs:

If in Ireland
they play the harp backward at need,
and gather at midday the seed
of the fern, eluding
their “giants all covered with iron...”

The Irish custom of playing the harp backwards was said to scare away evil spirits. The gathering of fern seed on Midsummer’s Eve and then eating it was thought to give its possessor invisibility, therefore being able to hide from giants. Padraic Colum, in his work the *Wizard Earl*, explains this notion of eating fern seeds and Moore refers to another of his stories later on in the poem which I will talk about later. The “giants all covered with iron” could stand as a symbol for industry and the machines of industry that the Irish people want to hide from because they don’t want to lose the rich imagination and history of their seemingly primitive culture.

The third stanza introduces the reader to some of the more “old fashioned” or “outdated” ways of looking at social practices such as marriage. Lines 1-3 and 5-8 describe this:

It was Irish;
a match not a marriage was made
when my great great grandmother'd said...
“Although your suitor be
perfection, one objection
is enough; he is not
Irish”.

The grandmother in this stanza is unhappy with this suitor simply because he is not Irish, although he is perfect in every other way. This idea seems to bring us back to more medieval times, and even today in some cultures, when a person's match was made for them. Perhaps here Moore is trying to show the reader that old traditions die hard in this country and that these people are very stubborn in their ways and views. Towards the end of this stanza Moore talks about “outwitting the fairies” and “befriending the furies” which alludes to another Irish custom of dressing young boys up in red skirts. This was done mainly along the coast of Connemara and it was thought that if the boys were dressed in these red skirts, that they would be mistaken for young girls. The fairies would usually try to steal away the young boys, but they would not touch the young girls (Willis and Nelson, 5).

The fourth stanza provides us yet again with another interesting story from Edgeworth's “*Stories of Ireland...*” In this scene there are two British officers that are collected by the houseguests of Lady Dashfort where they impose upon Count O'Halloran to request permission to fish on his grounds. The officers make fools of themselves trying to make a fly tie in front of the Count who is an expert at this. He shows them how to tie a feather and then divide the wings. Moore describes this story in her own words in lines 4-9:

When large dainty
fingers tremblingly divide the wings

of the fly for mid-July
with a needle and wrap it with peacock-tail,
or tie wool and
buzzard's wing..."

When I first read this passage in the poem it did not make any sense at all, but once I researched the story by Edgeworth, everything fell into place. This is what I found particularly interesting about this poem. Moore took so many stories and references from other sources that the reader could not simply read the poem itself and completely understand what she was trying to say. In looking up and reading about these stories and references, the whole poem began to be more comprehensible and the reader begins to understand what Moore is trying to tell us about this land with such a great history and how we need to be appreciative of this imaginative world.

The fifth stanza refers to some of the customary linen and ornaments of Ireland. Byrne talks about how some of the Irish linen is so fine that it resembles silvered chamois leather and holds water well as Moore explains in the 3rd and 4th lines. The torcs and lunulae that are described in this stanza as well are used as neck rings or necklaces. The lunulae appear to be pieces of jewelry in the shape of a half moon. The "purple-coral fuchsia-tree" that Moore writes in the 7th line of this stanza refers to a photograph that Byrne possessed that was of a grandmother who was knitting in front of a fuchsia tree and whose flowers were described as "purple coral" (Willis and Nelson, 5).

The final stanza illustrates for us the last of these great Irish stories. As I mentioned earlier, it is thought that if one gathers fern seed on Midsummer's Eve and then eats it, that person has the ability to become invisible. In *The Wizard of Earl* by Colum, the main character, Earl Gerald, attempts to gain this power of invisibility by eating the fern seeds, but it does not work and he is seen in one of his wizard shapes. His wife begs him to show her his various wizard shapes and he turns into a stag, then a cat of the mountains, and then himself in a dwarf

form. The Earl was then picked up by a monkey in his dwarf-like state and he disappears forever. Moore illustrates this story in her 6th stanza in lines 1-7:

they are to me
like enchanted Earl Gerald who
changed himself into a stag, to
a great green-eyed cat of
the mountain. Discommodity makes
them invisible; they've dis-
appeared.

I think that Moore refers to this story, particularly the last three lines of this passage, specifically to shed light on what she believes to be important to this story and that is imagination. Both Moore and William Carlos Williams wanted people to look around them and to notice the beauty that is in everything. Moore wanted people to use their imaginations in order to really live. All of the stories, rituals, customs, and beliefs that are held within this poem reflect a people that have not lost their imagination. The Irish people want to keep their stories, myths, and traditions alive, no matter how silly they may seem, and they do so by remaining stubborn in their beliefs, just as the grandmother was in the 3rd stanza. Perhaps the loss of imagination is what Moore eluded to when she talked about the “iron giants” of industry and how “discommodity makes them invisible; they’ve disappeared”. If one does not use their imagination, it will disappear and nations such as ours that are obsessed with money, power, and technology may have come to this sad conclusion.

Throughout this class I have personally become very close to Marianne Moore, her work, and what she stood for. She was daring enough to write poetry that was outside of the norm at this point in history. Not only as a person was she daring enough to do this, but as a woman in a time where women were not nearly as accepted or respected as they are today. Moore’s work really forced me to look outside of myself and to analyze the kinds of concepts she was trying to

get across to her readers. As I said from the beginning of my paper, Moore does not make the true meanings and themes behind her work blatant and obvious. She kept these things somewhat private and I felt that I was let into this secret world of Marianne Moore every time I discovered something new from the text or whenever we would talk about it at length in class. The fact that Moore could hide these things in various poems such as animals and places as I have discussed in this paper, was very clever of Moore. She mastered the art of comparing and intertwining two unlike and even contradictory things. “The Fish” was centered around the idea of two contradictory ideas: endurance and destruction, but Moore made it work in the poem. Not only did she pay close attention to the content of her work, she also put a lot of time and effort into how the poem would look on the page, just as she did with her wavelike, syllabic verse of “The Fish”.

Moore showed us her theme of endurance continually throughout this poem by showing us the struggling fish, the creatures within the waves that were struggling against its force, the sun struggling to peak through the water, and the cliff standing like a “defiant edifice” against the destructive power of the waves. She also provided us with some hope with the introduction of the sun’s rays lighting up the unknown world of the sea with its seemingly harmless creatures such as mussels, jellyfish, barnacles, toadstools, and crabs. She showed us her need to maintain her protective armor against the harsh realities and attacks of the world. Moore introduced us to the interesting world of a strange animal called the pangolin. We were shown the solitary and physically trying life of this animal that had to work and fight so hard to get its meal. She celebrated this graceful and powerful animal with the ingenious ability to protect itself by rolling into an impenetrable ball. We were also provided with the message of hope and renewal at the end of this poem and how these ideas were central to her beliefs and life. Moore showed us her

passion for the imagination in “Spenser’s Ireland”. Again she paid close attention and put a lot of work into having the poem follow a certain, alexandrine form just as Edmund Spenser used to practice. She provided us with many hints at wonderful tales of giants, fairies, the power of invisibility, and so on. She introduced us to the various traditions and practices of Ireland that its people want to maintain and never change. She celebrated this wonderful world of imagination and stressed the importance of using the imagination or having it be lost for good.

These worlds that I was introduced to in these three poems and the world of Marianne Moore have made a great impact on me and have taught me to hold these concepts close to my heart as well. Moore’s use of hidden themes and meanings in her poetry, specifically through the use of animals, was very trying at times to try to pick out and comprehend. However the rewards and lessons I was provided with more than made up for it and I can now speak from the experience of reading about and studying Marianne Moore that she truly was one of the greatest poets of her and our time.

Works Cited

Erickson, Darlene Williams. Illusion Is More Precise Than Precision: The Poetry of Marianne Moore. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1992.

“Marianne Moore.” Wikipedia. 2006. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 4 Dec. 2006.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marianne_Moore>.

Moore, Marianne. Marianne Moore: Complete Poems. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.

“The Fish: Introduction”. eNotes.com. 2006. eNotes.com. 20 Oct. 2006.
<<http://www.enotes.com/fish>>.

Willis, Patricia C., and Nelson, Cary. “Modern American Poetry: On ‘Spenser’s Ireland’”. Modern American Poetry. 14 Nov. 2006.
<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/moore/ireland.htm>.

Willis, Patricia C., and Nelson, Cary. “Modern American Poetry: On ‘The Fish’”. Modern American Poetry. 20 Oct. 2006.
<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/moore/moore.htm>.