

## **Analysis and Interpretation of Marianne Moore's "Baseball and Writing"**

### **I.**

Moore wastes no time in spelling out for the reader exactly what this poem is about. The title says it all: "Baseball and Writing." From the get-go the reader knows the subject matter of the poem. This is a clever strategy by Moore to get the reader to be attentive in looking for these two title subjects as he or she reads the poem.

The poem has an epigraph which is an amusing note that the idea for the poem was suggested by post-game broadcasts. Moore, an avid Yankees fan, presumably listened to a baseball game on the radio and was inspired to write this poem afterward listening to the announcer recap the game.

This subheader feeds into the opening line of the poem in which Moore asks, "Fanaticism?" This question seems to be directed at some comment the radio broadcaster has just made. Moore continues saying "No. Writing is exciting..." This would lead the reader to believe that the term fanaticism was used on the broadcast in reference to writing. However, since the broadcast is about the baseball game, I believe fanaticism has been used by the commentator in reference to baseball and writing is simply a connection Moore chooses to make, saying that writing and baseball both inspire excitement, not to be confused with fanaticism. Moore continues drawing another parallel between the two saying one can never know "how it will go / or what you will do." This speaks to the unpredictability and open possibility which exists both in baseball and in writing.

Both generate excitement and an anticipation in "the victim." This word choice is interesting. What does Moore mean by victim? Following "victim" is a list of baseball

players: “pitcher, catcher, fielder, batter.” Victim when applied to these implies the ways they can be victim during a game. For example a pitcher could be a victim by having a homerun hit off him. Or a batter by being struck out, or struck by a pitch. Moore uses the term “victim,” which is at first unclear, but then ties it to baseball. After this however, it is almost as if she has realized that the reference could be applied to writing too, she asks “Victim in what category?” Category here, I think, means baseball or writing. But who is the victim in writing? Moore follows up asking “Owlman watching from the press box?” Could he be the victim? If owlman is in the press box, this seems to be a reference to writing, as he could be a sports writer for a newspaper or else he is a radio announcer, narrating the game to fans at home. In either case, he could be a victim if the game is very routine or boring, and thus he has little to write about or describe for the listeners.

Moore is very conscious of how tricky her use of the word “victim” is. Yet she gives no indication of how the reader should interpret it, asking only “To whom does it apply?” leaving it to the reader to resolve.

She ends the stanza by moving away from the complex idea of victim and back to the idea of excitement, asking “Who is excited? Might it be I?” Here Moore’s last question has a double meaning. Since baseball and writing both inspire excitement, she could mean that she is becoming excited because of the baseball game or because she is writing a poem. Again she leaves this up to the reader to discern.

In the second stanza Moore makes a move to discuss the baseball game more explicitly. She begins by saying “It’s a pitcher’s battle all the way,” meaning a battle between the pitcher and batter, since “pitcher’s” is singularly possessive and not collectively. Then she continues saying it is “a duel— / a catcher’s.” This comment takes

some dissecting to understand. Moore goes on to refer to Elston Howard coming to the plate, presumably to bat. Howard was a catcher for the New York Yankees in the 1960's. So the catcher's duel refers to Howard as the catcher up to bat, and the catcher from the opposing team who is receiving the pitches. In describing Howard, Moore uses (unsurprisingly) animal comparisons. Howard "lumbers lightly," to the plate "with cruel puma paw." (An interesting side note: Howard was one of Moore's favorite players of all time, and in fact she had a pet alligator named after him).

Howard's "spring / de-winged a bat swing." The spring is a term which connotes the springing of a puma on its prey, just as Howard here springs on a pitch and "de-wings" it. This is a very predatory image, and the conceit goes on in the next line where Moore writes, "They have that killer instinct." They, in this instance, refers to catchers. Moore goes on with the stanza:

yet Elston—whose catching  
arm has hurt them all with the bat—  
when questioned, says, unenviously,  
"I'm very satisfied. We won."  
Shorn of the batting crown, says, "We";  
robbed by a technicality.

Though Elston Howard has a "killer instinct" and his "catching arm / has hurt them all with the bat"—in other words, he is a good hitter, on top of being a good catcher, despite the fact that traditionally catchers make poor batters—simply says he is satisfied that "we" won. Moore implies that he would have said "I won" but that he was "shorn of the batting crown" by a "technicality." The "technicality," I initially thought, was Moore's sarcastic, humorous way of saying Howard got out. However upon further research, an essay by Cristanne Miller sheds light on this reference. This specific incident

regarding Howard being “shorn of the batting crown” actually occurred. .” This was an instance in which he “did not win the batting title one year because of what was widely believed to be a racist decision against him,” as Miller writes. Thus the technicality is the color of his skin. This passage in the poem illustrates Moore’s acute use of detail in her poetry because it is an explicit moment in history.

In the beginning of the third stanza Moore mentions “three players on a side play three positions.” These three, it would seem are the outfielders. Often the outfielders will adjust themselves on the field according to whether a particular hitter hits deep or shallow. When the outfielders “modify conditions,” or adapt to the circumstance, “the massive run need not be everything.” In other words, when the outfielders do their job, homeruns aren’t necessarily everything. This, it seems to me, is one place where Moore may be tying poetry to baseball. In poetry as in baseball, a deep hit or poem doesn’t necessarily mean it is the best, or a sure thing. Moore goes on to talk about the possibility of an outfielder catching a ball over the wall. She goes on to write “Going, going... Is it?” Going, going, gone is perhaps the most clichéd way for an announcer to talk about a homerun. So Moore begins that popular quip and then asks if it really is gone.

Roger Maris, who played for the Yankees during the 1960’s enters the poem here as Moore describes him running back and making a spectacular catch by reaching over the back wall. “You will never see a finer catch,” she writes and then immediately rethinks that statement saying “Well...” Now she brings in “Mickey” (Mantle) who is “leaping like the devil” to make a catch. The quotation marks around this phrase would imply that it is a verbatim quote from an announcer. This would make sense as Moore often borrowed quotations for her poems. Moore then provides her own thoughts on the

announcer saying “why / gild it, although deer sounds better.” Moore is ridiculing the announcer for his hyperbolic description, but then, ironically, she says in essence, but if you’re going to exaggerate a comparison to a deer sounds better; as usual Moore makes use of her animal motif.

Moore admired the competitiveness in Maris’ and Mantle’s battle to be the best fielder. In an interview with George Plimpton she mentions watching Maris and Mantle, “two such battling fielder,” who “have at no time been diminished by internecine jealousies” (687). This helps shed light on this bit of the third stanza.

These passages praise the two ball players for their physical ability as athletes, a quality Moore seems mirrored in the mental agility it takes to write good poetry. Making over-the-wall catches as these two great players do is a feat which requires great precision as well.

This little piece is just a sidetrack from Mantle’s catch where he “snares” the ball from where it was “speeding towards its treetop nest.” Again here we see the animal motif. The word “snares” is one we might commonly associate with hunting. The treetop nest draws obvious parallels between the ball and a bird. But Mantle grabs the near-home-run with one hand, thus making it a souvenir to be caught by “you or me,” she writes, referring to the reader as if s/he were present at the ball game. Moore here is playing with the audience, making them interchangeable with the audience of the baseball game.

In the fourth stanza Moore transitions to talk about another famous Yankee, Yogi Berra, who played catcher until 1965. She writes “Assign Yogi Berra to Cape Canaveral; / he could handle any missile.” By missile we can assume she is referring to pitches. This

helps to explain the Cape Canaveral reference. Cape Canaveral, Florida is the location of both the Kennedy Space Center and an Air Force base. Obviously these two organizations are used to handling missiles, so from there Moore draws the comparison of the catcher position. Berra is “no feather,” Moore adds, reassuring the reader of his sturdy catching ability. Moore next quotes the umpire as he calls strikes one and two. “Fouled back. A blur,” she writes. This line is in conjunction with strike two, describing just what kind of strike it was, as opposed to the next line in which “It’s gone.” In other words the third pitch is a homerun. Such a solid hit makes the audience “infer / that the bat had eyes” to be able to connect with a fast pitch. This line points to the precision needed to connect with a pitch in order to hit a homerun. “He”—the batter—“put the wood to that one,” she goes on.

In the next line we find out that the “he” who hit the homer and gets the praise afterward is Bill Skowran who played for the Chicago White Sox in the 1960’s. Again Moore here uses a quotation, this time by Skowran after the game: “Thanks, Mel. / I think I helped a *little* bit.” One possibility is that the quote refers to Mel Stottlemyre, a pitcher for the Yankees in the mid-1960s. Skowran is poking fun at Mel saying he (Skowran) helped a little bit but that Mel gave him an easy pitch to knock out of the park. The other possible interpretation of this passage is proposed in an anonymous online criticism in which the author opines that “Mel” is probably Mel Allen, a baseball radio announcer of the day. If this is the case, the unquoted line “you would infer / that the bat had eyes” is probably Allen’s announcing and Skowran’s response is to that comment. This quote by Skowran is also a great example of restraint, a quality Moore admires

greatly in writing and in people. Skowran does not boast or brag of his homerun but simply claims to have “helped it a little.”

The following line reads, “All business, each, and modesty,” following naturally from Skowran’s modest comment after hitting a homerun. He certainly is an example of being “all business” and at the same time modest.

Moore proceeds to name four more Yankees from the 1960’s teams; “(Johnny) Blanchard, (Bobby) Richardson, (Tony) Kubek, (Clete) Boyer.” “In that galaxy of nine, say which / won the pennant? *Each*. It was he,” she writes, finishing out the stanza. The metaphor of the baseball field as a galaxy all its own is one which recurs again at the end of the poem. It creates an image of baseball as an entire galaxy all its own, apart from the rest of the world. Which of the nine won the pennant? she asks. Each of the nine players won the pennant. What does Moore mean by this? Each of the players contributes to the win of the whole team, just as each star contributes to make up a galaxy. And of course, Moore’s use of “star” here is a pun on calling celebrities stars.

Stanza four starts by focusing on the plays of two players who contributed to the team’s winning. Boyer, an infielder, made two “saves” or presumably outs, from his knees. Moore describes his throws with the word “finesse.” This, along with the following passage about pitcher Whitey Ford’s skill, exemplify yet again Moore’s love of the lightning reflexes it takes to be a good baseball player.

Moore segues to talk about pitcher Whitey Ford by saying that Boyer’s finesse is like that of Whitey’s “three kinds of pitch and pre- / diagnosis / with pick-off psychosis.” Prediagnosis in actuality, is not a real word, but Moore’s meaning is understandable. Prediagnosis seems to mean Whitey’s ability to diagnose how the batter will react before

even throwing the pitch. He also has the ability to pick off runners who take too large a lead from the base. But Moore uses the word “psychosis” to describe this ability which again is her humor coming out because psychosis denotes a mental illness.

Her mention of Whitey Ford opens up to her the whole subject of pitching which is a “large subject” she says. From an account by her friend Alfred Kreyborg and letters exchanged with her brother Warner, we know that Moore had actually read an instructive guide to pitching written by Christy Mathewson, a Yankees pitcher from the 1930s (Molesworth, 164). It is evident that Moore having read up on the subject would comprehend just how large a subject pitching is. She imparts a little knowledge of pitching to the reader here saying that with enough practice one “can learn to / catch the corners—even trouble / Mickey Mantle.” Moore’s word choice in saying that at first “your arm” is “too true” speaks, I think, to poetry and baseball. One has to train his or her ability to really be able to aim just across the outer edges. This may be a subtle stab by Moore at the traditionalists of poetry whose aim, like novice pitchers, is too good and needs to be worn in to be on the fringe of what is acceptable, just as pitcher is most successful for being able to pitch to the limits of the strike zone with precision. But despite that possibility, this line undoubtedly points to Moore’s belief in practice as a necessary element for success both in baseball and in writing.

A parenthetical expression follows to close the stanza.

(“Grazed a Yankee!  
My baby pitcher, Montejo!”  
With some pedagogy,  
you’ll be tough, premature prodigy.)

It is unclear from whom the quote comes, but in all likelihood it is one of Manny Montejo's coaches. Montejo played for the Detroit Tigers in 1961. His career lasted only that one year, twelve games in total. Moore's comment then is that with some teaching Montejo, the "you," will toughen up. She leaves the passage ambiguous in terms of what she means in saying Montejo will toughen up. The "premature prodigy" line undoubtedly refers retrospectively to his very brief pro baseball career.

As seems to be Moore's trend in this poem, the new stanza begins a new train of thought, though still loosely connected to the preceding stanza. Here she continues to talk about pitching but focuses on the attempts of the pitchers to strike out the batter. "Trying / indeed!" she writes, as if it were the voice of the batter scoffing at the pitcher's efforts to secure the strike out. The anonymous author of the online criticism believes this voice to be that of Mickey Mantle at the plate. However, Mickey was hit with a pitch by Montejo the stanza prior and hence is no longer at the plate. I think the author makes a jump in logic here. Moore is instead speaking from the general perspective of any batter.

"The secret implying: / 'I can stand here, bat held steady,'" she continues. The batter's secret, I think, is that the pressure is on the pitcher to make good pitches, which implies that the batter does not have to swing but instead can simply stand at the plate as long as the pitcher does poorly. This passage points to the restraint baseball players must exhibit to keep from swinging at bad pitches. It also implies the acute attention to detail required to discern the good pitches from the bad.

The next three lines are short and go together. They say that one pitch "may suit him," he has been hit by no pitches yet, and that "imponderables," or pitches he cannot decide on, "smite him."

Moore subsequently fires off a specific list of wounds ball players suffer and how to heal them: “Muscle kinks, infections, spike wounds / require food, rest, respite from ruffians. (Drat it! / Celebrity costs privacy!)” “Respite from ruffians” means that one must get away from the fans in order to recover but the bit in parenthesis informs the reader that being a celebrity, such as a baseball star or poet perhaps, means it is hard to get privacy.

Moore seems to follow this with a list of more cures for ailments or injuries, all beverages: “Cow’s milk, “tiger’s milk,” soy milk, carrot juice, / brewer’s yeast (high potency).” These “concentrates presage victory / (*stanza break*) sped by Luis Arroyo, Hector Lopez— / deadly in a pinch.” Both the aforementioned players were Yankees in the early 1960s. Both men were also apparently, deadly in a pinch, presumably as pinch hitters, at least according to Moore.

Again Moore quotes some outside source as she writes: ““Yes, / it’s work; I want you to bear down, / but enjoy it / while you’re doing it.”” Given the quotation, the most logical assumption would be that it is a coach or manager talking to his team. The anonymous critic believes that these lines are directed at the aforementioned pinch hitter and speak to pinch hitting as “hard work.” I disagree, in favor of the belief that these lines are directed at the team as a whole. Since the title of the poem is “Baseball and Writing” it would benefit Moore little to use this line to refer specifically to pinch hitting to the exclusion of the remaining elements of baseball and consequently by metaphor, writing. It seems that Moore intends for the reader to create a connection of this quotation not only with baseball but also of the process of either reading or writing poetry.

Now Moore turns and addresses “Mr. Houk and Mr. Sain.” Ralph Houk was Yankees manager from ’61-63 and again from ’66-71, and Johnny Sain played for the Yankees in the 1950s. “If you have a rummage sale, / don’t sell Roland Sheldon or Tom Tresh,” she pleads with them. Moore’s word choice here draws to mind the idea of baseball players as property of the team, to be sold or traded as the managers would.

Moore concludes the poem by reverting to her metaphor of outer space. “Studded with stars in belt and crown, / the Stadium is an adastrum,” she writes. The players are the stars forming Orion’s belt. This idea of three stars in the famous constellation’s belt connects to Moore’s reference in the third stanza to “three players” playing their positions. The crown she mentions here implies, perhaps the idea of victory. Cleverly, she creates a word again from the Latin phrase “ad astra”—to the stars. So the stadium becomes a transport to the stars essentially. “Ad astra per aspera” is a fairly common Latin motto translating: to the stars through difficulties. This further iterates Moore’s motif of writing and baseball being difficult, though enjoyable, as the ending point is the stars.

A final note on this segment of the poem: I think it is possible Moore wrote these “ad astra” lines with a Protestant Christian connotation to the idea of vocation. That is, Moore might have had in mind the theological notion of vocation or calling in mind when she wrote this conclusion. She may have seen both poets and baseball players as fulfilling God’s call in their life through their respective career paths.

“O, flashing Orion, / your stars are muscled like the lion,” she concludes, addressing the constellation of Orion. The players, as stars, are the muscled elements.

Also, Moore uses a comparison dealing with animals again in referring to the lion for a strength comparison.

The mechanical components contribute to the content in supporting Moore's initial assertion: "...baseball is like writing. / You can never tell how it will go / or what you will do." Just as Moore did not know when she started writing the poem how it would end up, what metaphors she would use or whom she would quote, her structure too seems to be unique.

"Baseball and Writing" consists of seven stanzas, each one containing twelve lines, minus the fourth, which contains thirteen lines. It is unexpected that the middle stanza has a different number of lines, but it adds to her original assertion by being unexpected. That the first two lines of each stanza rhyme and the last two rhyme is also seemingly random, but how could Moore have been expected to know how the poem would turn out until she actually wrote it? In addition to rhyme scheme and lines, each stanza has the same line set-up, having certain lines in each stanza be shorter, other longer and indented the same. While the poem is seemingly random in terms of having landed upon twelve lines a stanza, to rhyme certain lines, and how the stanzas should appear on the page, there is yet a distinct organization and order to them. So Moore is not advocating the complete randomness of poetry, but making the point that what comes out when one writes is always unknown until it is written.

## II.

Now having waded through the intricacies of this later and complex poem by Marianne Moore, the question could and should be asked: so what? Just what importance does this single, rather obscure poem hold in the larger pool of the collected Moore poems?

Since “Baseball and Writing” does not appear until Moore’s volume *Tell Me, Tell Me*, published in 1966, the poem must have been written in the early 1960’s. This is toward the end of Moore’s life and career as a writer. By this point, Moore had been writing poetry for thirty-five years at the very least. All this to say that by the time Moore sat down to write “Baseball and Writing” her attitudes and beliefs about the writing process and what makes for good poetry are well developed and cemented.

“Baseball and Writing” is of incredible significance to the overall work of Marianne Moore because she uses her love of baseball to write a poem which is simultaneously a cumulative credo of all Moore’s centrally held beliefs about the art of writing poetry. This poem clearly spells out or at very least implies Moore’s main tenets of writing. I have made efforts to point these out through the course of my explication de texte; however, I will list these central ideas for clarity sake. Moore was committed to the view that writing was hard work simultaneously enjoyable. She also believed that writing also involved practice and yet consisted largely in spontaneity as well. Finally, Moore held agility (both mental and physical), precision, restraint and attention to detail as essential components of effective poetry.

While these characteristics may be evident in the poem, there is significant evidence for each of these points from Moore's other writings, interviews and other authors writing on Moore.

First, Moore was a firm believer in the writing process and baseball as a struggle, but a rewarding one at that. In her essay "Subject, Predicate, Object" Moore writes: "Poetry is the Mogul's dream: to be intensively toiling at what is pleasure" (*Complete Prose*, 506).

Bernard F. Engel also notes the obvious comparison Moore makes in "Baseball and Writing" in the passage "Yes, / it's work; I want you to bear down, / but enjoy it / while you're doing it." He writes "...one—whether baseball player or, we deduce, writer—should 'bear down' at his work but 'Enjoy it'" (156). Engel, in his brief analysis of the poem goes on to mention Moore's use of humor throughout, citing the line "Pitching is a large subject" as an example. Engel also points out Moore's careful craftsmanship in use of "rhymes, abrupt shifts in rhythm, and citation of living people..." (155-156). Thus Moore, in her own poem exemplifies both the joy in writing by use of humor but also the work which goes into it through her intentionality.

Andrew J. Kappel acknowledges Moore's emphasis on struggle in her poetry, crediting her Presbyterian faith as the source of it. For Moore, Kappel points out, "struggle, the condition of the world, becomes a positive good, the means of salvation" (*Marianne Moore: Poet and Writer*, 45). Clearly, the theme of hard work and the inextricable joy that accompanies it is one of importance which presents itself in "Baseball and Writing."

Another important duality for Moore's in regards to writing and baseball is that of practice and spontaneity. In a 1965 interview with Howard Nemerov, Moore expresses her meticulous nature in writing poetry saying: "Uniform line-length seemed to me essential as accrediting the satisfactory model stanza." In order to reach such precise results is no doubt the work of much practice. In that same interview, only a short while later she also emphasizes the need for possibility and creativity in writing saying "Conscious writing can be the death of poetry" (CP 588-589)<sup>1</sup>.

In an interview with George Plimpton, he asks Moore what aspects of baseball make it so appealing to her. The first line of her response is: "Dexterity—with a logic of memory that makes strategy possible" (686). This helps to emphasize the point that Moore appreciates both the spontaneous nature of baseball as well as the practice that goes into it. Just as with writing, practice accounts for improvement but there is a great deal that is also unpredictable about it as well.

Another example of Moore's appreciation of the idea of practice comes from her own life when in 1967 she was asked to throw the opening pitch of the Yankees 1968 season. She excitedly agreed, and then "showed up in midseason of 1967 to practice" her pitch for the opener.

On the other hand, in a 1968 article for *The New York Times* in support of the St. Louis Cardinals as World Series potentials, Moore quotes Orland Cepeda, a Cardinals first baseman:

"One of the things that makes baseball so fascinating to me is the number of non-standard plays—plays you're seeing for the first time—that occur in baseball. Stan Musial said

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<sup>1</sup> CP denotes *Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*.

that even after twenty years in the game you constantly keep seeing things you have never seen before, which makes baseball a lot different than so many other sports” (CP 622).

But for Moore, this original spirit of baseball is one of the things which makes it so akin to writing. Charles Molesworth sums up Moore’s view of both baseball and writing succinctly as “a utopian medley of gestures that are both practiced and spontaneous” (393).

Another crucial similarity Moore sees between baseball and writing is her admiration for agility and ability or both a mental and a physical caliber. The physical ability required of baseball players mirrors for Moore mirrors the quick mental abilities it takes to be a poet.

Moore, on more than one occasion spoke of her admiration for what she dubbed “miracles of dexterity.” In an article in *Harper’s* George Plimpton writes of Moore: “She loved athletes; she did not know how to account for people who could be indifferent to miracles of dexterity.” Later on in this same article, Plimpton arranges for Moore to meet Muhammad Ali and the two of them write a poem “together” (though Ali does most of the work because Moore seems to take too long for him), and Plimpton writes that Moore “nodded in delight” upon reading the final version of the poem. She subsequently asks Ali to show her the “Ali Shuffle” which he did to Moore’s delight.

Moore once said of her poetry that “rhythm was my prime objective. If I succeeded in embodying a rhythm that preoccupied me, I was satisfied” (CP 587). The rhythm of poetry mirrors the rhythm of baseball players in a game and both require an agility of sorts in order for success. Engel points out that Moore ends the poem aptly with

the image of Orion: “the symbol of strength and skill which create the beauty Miss Moore finds in expert performance whether in the arena or on the page” (156).

The characteristics of precision and restraint, both crucial to writing and baseball according to Moore, are all closely related. In Moore’s other baseball poem “Hometown Piece for Messrs. Alton and Reese” Moore writes: “The modest star, / irked by one misplay, is no hero by a hair” (183). In other words, by the slimmest error, “a hair,” a baseball player can throw the whole game. She clearly in that line emphasizes precision and the restraint necessary to act at the exact right moment.

Another source I found which also helps support precision and restraint as essential characteristics for both writers and baseball players is a sort of interview by letter in the appendix of *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. George Plimpton, a brief baseball player and friend of Moore’s, wrote her ten questions, most pertaining to sports in some way or another. Moore’s replies reveal much about her views of sports.

Moore writes the following on athletes: “A sense of ability and prime strength safeguarded by caution—with a recollection of success—Goliath-like brashness tamed by near-misses—should, I feel, conduce to form. Not knowing how to hold back by perhaps a second seems to account for many a failure” (CP, 683). Clearly, this passage Moore wrote illustrates not only her admiration of restraint and precision in athletes, but also how incredibly crucial she believed them to be in baseball, and similarly in writing.

Lastly, Moore believes attention to detail to be imperative in both writing and baseball. A humorous example from Plimpton’s outing with Moore to a Yankees game, as he recorded in *Harper’s*, exemplified Moore’s close attention to detail. The two were seated in skybox and Moore noticed that the pitcher had according to Plimpton “...a most

disturbing habit” of adjusting himself at the end of his delivery on every pitch. She pointed it out to those sitting around them, much to their shock. Obviously none of them had noticed this small gesture before. Plimpton adds that Moore seemed to take little interest in the statistics or score of the baseball game but that instead “she was interested in the way pigeons dropped down out of the rafters, how a player wore his socks.”

In writing as in baseball, Moore placed importance on the details and made them her focus. In the foreword to *A Marianne Moore Reader* she writes ““Why the many quotation marks?” I am asked. When a thing has been said so well that it could not be said better, why paraphrase it?” Clearly she kept a close eye out for quotable material for her poetry. Moore also writes that “Always, in whatever I wrote—prose or verse—I have had a burning desire to be explicit” (CP, 606). Clearly this knack for detail is both crucial in her writing as well as in the game of baseball.

The only criticism of “Baseball and Writing” I was able to find was online, posted by an anonymous author. The author argues that “Baseball and Writing” is a masterful use of dialogue by Moore to communicate the similarities of baseball and writing. Moore’s use of quoted dialogue, both fictional and real, as well as “dialogue without quotation marks” enhance the “imagery and realism of the poem.” I am willing to admit that the dialogue Moore uses in the poem contribute to its meaning. For example, the author writes that “Moore uses the dialogue of announcer Mel Allen to compare the excitement of a baseball game to the excitement of writing,” as in describing Mickey Mantle’s catch. I agree here with the author. Moore’s use of dialogue (be it fictional or

real) adds to the urgency and immediacy of the poem, intensifying the “excitement” of both her writing and of the game she is describing.

However, the author of this essay takes some broad assumptions about the speaker in certain cases which I think are somewhat unfounded. In the course of my own explication de texte I have tried to point out these minor differences.

While ultimately this piece of criticism does contain some valuable insights about the poem’s use of dialogue, if indeed the author wanted to examine Moore’s use of dialogue, there are many other poems he or she could consult in conjunction with this one in order to give a fuller picture of that theme. The principal flaw of this criticism is that it misses the larger significance of the poem in terms of Moore’s ideas about writing. While dialogue and quotations are abundant in this and other Moore poems, they fall under the umbrella of Moore’s desire to be precise and thus fit into the larger framework of her poetry. The author misses Moore’s credo on writing contained in the poem.

“Baseball and Writing” serves as an ingenious and subtle way for Moore to display all her thoughts on the writing process and standards of evaluating poetry. While at first glance, the only similarity she seems to be drawing between baseball and writing is that both are exciting. Upon further examination, we discover that Moore has crafted a poem that encompasses all her major opinions about writing, cleverly disguised in her passion for baseball.

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