Marianne Moore:
American Modernist read
from a French Feminist Perspective

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Paper submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of “Master in de Taal-
en Letterkunde: English” by:
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May 2014
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my promoter Prof. Dr. Marysa Demoor, who has given me the support and freedom to write this dissertation according to my personality. Even though she warned me for the high level of difficulty of my topic, her help and advice has sustained my determination to master this domain.

Secondly, I would also like to thank my mother, whom more than once bore the brunt of my frustration whenever my writing did not go according to plan. Without her patience and love this would have been a hopeless task. Similarly, I am indebted to Camille, my best friend and fellow student at the faculty, for the many stimulating conversations on literature and art in general.

Lastly, the main incentive to write this thesis has been the general sense (or rather lack) of justice and too often felt powerlessness whenever I heard another story on gender inequality. Abstract though it may sound, this thesis has been written with those women who still need a little ‘Moore’ at the back of my mind. They have subsequently given me the courage to keep on investigating patriarchal discourse and feminist theory, in order to hopefully turn literature into reality one day.
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1. Introduction

As a subversive modernist, a master of elliptical style, and a woman poet, Marianne Moore (1887-1972) created a poetics that is deeply rooted in the American and modernist tradition, yet which heavily questioned, disfigured and restored the principles on which that tradition is built. Her poetics attest to a quintessentially American practice in its insistence on the poet’s freedom and “instinct to amass and reiterate” any given subject without a diminishment of energy, as she herself described in an essay of hers to her fellow countrymen, “Henry James as a Characteristic American” (1934). Being American was for her, as it was for Henry James, “intrinsically and actively ample, … reaching westward, southward, anywhere, everywhere,” with a mind “incapable of the shut door in any direction” (Moore, cited by Schulman 2003, xxx). Consequently, her poetry is the product of her mind’s tendency to pivot from one vivid figure to another, while attentive to the subtle dialectic between freedom and repression (Schulman 2003; xxvi, xxx). Overall powerful, enigmatic, and often frankly ironic, Moore’s poetry succeeds in offering the reader the full scale of her observatory pallet. Her poems manipulate with absolute control and precision the vivid images that are born out of her observations, always undermining her readers’ expectations by the versatile representation of enigma, imbalance, and paradox. Though well aware of modernists’ pursuit to construct a universal consciousness and unity out of a “direct treatment of the ‘thing,’” (Pound), and the American tradition of unhindered, exhaustive observation, hers is an inclusive rather than a defensive or escapist poetics, embracing the fragmentation that so many modernist writers tried to control (Martin 1986; xiv, 62). By refusing the conventional forms of coherence, she created a proper American, modernist poetry in which she prefers presenting the reader the full scale of dualities and pluralities without necessarily resolving them.

Especially as a woman writer within a male modernist and a largely male American literary tradition, Moore must have felt alienated from the conventions of a traditional lyric poetry that was based upon an, if not overtly symbolic, at least specular aesthetic. For the specular implies that the lyrical I of the poem is in some unique and transcendent way reflected by the poem’s representation of that which is outside or other than the speaker (Heuving 25). An aesthetic that is clearly problematic for women writers given their own figuration as the ultimate other, the object (of beauty) described and addressed, but she herself never actively describing. Refusing to write from the position of the ‘second sex’, or even as ‘a sex which is not one’, Moore, like many other women writers, was fueled by the need to reinvent a poetic style, and to create herself a mode of being that would simultaneously “value
and cancel the self” (Diehl 45). Moore’s almost autistic exactitude and scientific accuracy, her idiosyncratic yet demotic diction, the obsessively restrictive metrical form, the use of lists and collages which disfigure rather than preserve speech, and the rhetorical self-effacement with instead the acquisition of the minute or grotesque as an emblem for the self, express, among other stylistic features, the need for a style that protects as it privileges the marginalized authorial self. As such, her poetics balance between proliferation and compression, freedom and repression, always aiming at but never fully attaining to “an unbearable accuracy” in the detailed depiction of her poetic mind’s dramatic struggle with the world, because “feeling at its deepest … tends to be inarticulate” (Moore, cited by Martin 1986, 64-5). This anxiety with resolution reveals, on the one hand, “a deeply Emersonian tendency” (Diehl 68), because she dares not to resolve her dynamic dichotomies into a conclusive composition, but rather wishes for her poetry to live on beyond the last line. On the other hand, Moore also bid for her own authorial control which could redefine the ontological status of the woman poet who feels marginalized from the authority that is exclusively reserved to male literary giants like Emerson.

However, as a feminist writer Moore has often been discarded or simply neglected because of the suppression of her sexuality, the ‘feminine experience’, and her refusal to make gender a central subject in her writing. Not uncoincidentally, the epigraph to Marianne Moore’s ‘Complete Poems’ (1967) famously reads ‘Omissions are not Accidents’. Interrogatory rather than feminist, her poetics try to eradicate, or at least subvert, hierarchy via its open-ended pluralism. Though many of her contemporary peers and critics could or would not understand and appreciate her self-deflating and even self-effacing style of “inflection disguised” (‘Those Various Scalpels’), Moore kept on reinventing “an aesthetics of renunciation, a series of punctuated deferrals, of endlessly proliferating figuration that replaces the otherwise apparently controlling authorial presence directing the poem” (Diehl 51). Critics took her strictly restricted metrical form and the apparent absence of sex anywhere in her poetry as the product of a prudish, chaste imagination, who created “a world in which feeling, affections, charity are so entirely divorced from sexuality and power, the bonds of the flesh” (Randall Jarell, cited by Heuving 18). Ezra Pound, who surprisingly lauded Moore’s poetry, remarked that her work was marred by her “spinsterly aversion” (Pound, cited by Heuving 18). But what these critics missed to see is that Moore simply refused to comply to a specular mode of writing based on hierarchy, a “heroics” which “confuses transcendence with domination”, or an aesthetic in which something is “great because something else is small” (‘When I Buy Pictures’). In her commitment to a non-
hierarchical form of meaning – which was expressed especially in the forms of her writing – she did not abhor gender issues on the whole, but simply rejected the idea that as a woman she was restricted to write about experiences that were intrinsically feminine or female in nature.

Though there are numerous feminist studies on Moore, each having respectively explored her either female, feminine or non-gendered poetics, none until now has analyzed her poetry from a purely French feminist, post-structuralist perspective. This is, at the least, remarkable, given French feminists’ particular concern with the factor of ‘difference’, and their focus on the man/woman dichotomy, which they try to unfold and ‘pluralize’ through a practice of symptomatic reading that analyzes the presence of ideology in literary texts. The linguistic sign becomes, as such, the arena itself for the gender struggle, and language with its culturally established meanings their key focus. In the same way, Moore has practiced “a reserve in her writing for the purpose of altering the very meanings she can make” (Heuving 19). French feminists have in fact theorized what Moore had been doing about half a century before; the subverting of the forms, structures and meanings as used by the existing representational powers. As a result, her meanings are rarely conclusive and her notoriously difficult poetry is best read as an inconclusive encounter with the predominant literary tradition and larger system of representation which modifies and disrupts these orders. Consequently, my framework will incorporate the theories of French feminism’s main representatives: Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) in “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975, 1976 English translation), Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) in This Sex Which is Not One (1977, 1985 English translation) and especially Julia Kristeva’s (b. 1941) Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art (1980). All provide important discussions of how “meanings” in literary texts are represented, constructed, and can be subverted. While their individual approach and focus differ, their theories add up to a conclusive, total analysis of Moore’s poetry.

Structurally, I will first provide a theoretical framework of French feminism, and especially that of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, according to which I will later analyze Moore’s poetry. Toril Moi’s extensive study Sexual-Textual Politics (1985) will serve as the main support in this endeavor. On the basis of this theoretical framework, I aim to analyze her poetry, which, due to space restrictions, I have limited to her earliest work. The difference between Moore’s earlier and later work is clearly visible in her relation to art, poetry and gender. Moore’s earlier poetry is far more vital than her later work because of her initial reaction against the existing specularity of language, her attempt at self-representation, and
creation of a non-gendered poetic by “reconceiving traditionally gendered poetic elements of beauty, voice, representativeness or universality” (Miller 93). As such, I will focus primarily on the experimental prelude from 1915 to 1918 and, secondly, also on the heyday of her poetic creativity during the years she edited *The Dial* (1920-1925). On the whole, I will argue from a French feminist perspective that Moore’s apparently humble, reserved, and sexless compositions succeed in subverting the conventional, patriarchal orders of language and its culturally dogmatized/engendered meanings.
2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will look into the theoretical depths and interdisciplinary ramifications of French, second-wave, “difference” feminism. Shortly introducing second-wave feminist thinking, I will quickly come to an overview of its key tenets. After which I will elaborate on the individual perspectives and personal insights held by its three main representatives – Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. As will become clear, though each is indispensable for a complete analysis of Moore’s poetry, the three French feminists are discussed in increasing order of importance.

2.1. Feminist Thinking

Since the late 1950’s and 60’s feminism came back onto the literary critical agenda after a moment of respite during the two world wars, and has since been called the second wave. The vast amount of feminist critical studies published ever since were set on exploring the nature and mechanism of male oppression, as well as the nature of female experience under these mechanisms, and, in critical terms, the challenge that can be created to male domination in areas like the arts by the construction of a ‘female’ canon (Sim and Van Loon 141). Central to these studies are the concepts of logocentrism; metaphysics; and patriarchy. The ‘logocentrism’ (logos in Greek has the sense of both “word” and “reason”) of metaphysics implies the “orientation of philosophy toward an order of meaning – thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word – conceived as existing in itself, as foundation” (Culler 92). Derrida argues that the standard conception of meaning in the West depends on an assumption of a “metaphysics of presence”, that is, the full meaning of a word is held to be “present” and transcendent to the speaker/writer (Sim and Van Loon 88). Throughout history, there has been a connection between patriarchy and the privileging of the rational, the abstract, or the intellectual (Culler 58). Patriarchy can thus be defined, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, as: 1. “the social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power”, or 2. “a society or institution organized according to the principles or practices of patriarchy”. Eventually, literature has become one of the prime sites of second wave feminist research. Diverse as it was in its aim and specific strategies to obtain equal rights, two main currents can nevertheless be distinguished: the Women’s Liberation Movement which dominated the Anglo-American scene, and the more theoretical French feminism which, especially from the 1980s onwards, came to focus on difference, instead of equality.
Second wave feminists’ critical agenda incorporates the discussion and rehabilitation of the significance of mostly forgotten or neglected women writers, focusing especially on the representation of women in art, as well as the woman writer’s gender and representation of gender issues in her literary production. However, for many women writers, such as Marianne Moore, who refused to make gender a central subject of their writing, such studies offer limited insight (Heuving 11). If according to the central principle of feminist criticism no account can ever be neutral (Moi xii), how then does a feminist critic analyze the apparently non-gendered, neuter poetry of Marianne Moore? As I will argue, French feminism provides the most adequate theoretical framework from which Moore’s non-gendered poetry can be read.

2.1.1. French Feminism
The student revolt of May 1968 in Paris has been iconic and revolutionary for more than only purely political matters. ‘Les événements’ enabled also the new French feminist groups to believe that change was at hand and that, at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, political activism thus seemed meaningful (Moi 95). Schooled as they are in Derridean deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, semiotics, and European philosophy (particularly Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger), French feminist critics have preferred to work on textual, linguistic, semiotic or psychoanalytic problems, or to produce texts which demarcate the genre boundaries between poetry and theory (Moi 97). In essence, French feminism can be characterized by three main points of interest. First, based on the concept of ‘difference’, it aims to deconstruct any form of binary opposition: mainly the man/woman dichotomy, but also all its culturally related meanings, such as reason/emotion, logic/chaos, etc.. Influenced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, French feminists take over the deconstructionist’s argument of how men throughout history have always been associated with logic, sense, and reason, whereas women stood for everything opposite. Not only did Derrida wish to break down these dogmatized hierarchies, but convinced as he was, he believed that the only way to completely discard these orders was via the complete “reversal” of hierarchy and “displacement” of the system (Culler 85-6).

Though, in the long run, the most useful thing that a training in French feminism can give, as Gayatri Spivak has described it, is “politicized and critical examples of symptomatic reading”, which not always follows the reversal-displacement technique of a purely deconstructive reading (Spivak, cited by Moi 139). Despite feminist criticism’s foothold in deconstruction, it is a method which turns out to be actually conflictual when used to expose the ruling discourse. Given that deconstruction is “self-confessedly parasitic” upon the
discourses it is out to subvert, and because it has shown that the female is produced exclusively in relation to the logic of the Same, all attempts to formulate a positive theory of femininity will turn out to be metaphysical, and will thus fall to the same temptation for the patriarchal logic of the Same (Moi 139). Or as Irigaray has warned, any definition of ‘woman’ will necessarily essentialize her. Thus, French feminists will have to subvert the ruling orders without creating a dominant discourse of their own through deconstructionism’s reversal. For if the aim were “simply to reverse the order of things, even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallocratism” (Irigaray 33). Instead, their aim is to break “phallocentrism, phallocratism,” loose from its moorings in order to return the masculine to its own language, “leaving open the possibility of a different language. Which means that the masculine would no longer be ‘everything’” (Irigaray 80). In short, through symptomatic reading that unveils the hidden ideologies in patriarchal discourse, French feminists do not simply aim for a change in the distributions of power, but for a reformation of the very power structure itself.

Second of all, French feminists, and especially Julia Kristeva, owe as much to post-structuralist semiotics which informed their way of investigating ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as subject positions within the structure of language. Language is what informs and creates reality – not the other way around – so any theory that sets out to reform our way of thinking and living has to start with analyzing the very words we use. Though not simply the words themselves, but in fact one needs to examine “the operation of the ‘grammar’ of each figure of discourse, its syntactic laws or requirements, its imaginary configurations, its metaphoric networks, and also, of course, what it does not articulate at the level of utterances: its silences” (Irigaray 75). In short, a structuralist poetics will “describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered” (Barthes, cited by Culler 32). Given that the very same structure can be uttered by both men and women, discourse analysts realized that sexism in language is not necessarily an inherent part of language, but rather an effect of the dominant power relationship between the sexes (Moi 158). Only when speaking do interlocutors add ideological meanings to the sign. As such, French feminists have discarded contemporary linguistics, which is limited to the analysis of a sentence at most. For Kristeva especially, linguistics is still “bathed in the aura of the systematic,” because it only concerns itself with discovering “the rules governing the coherence of our fundamental social code: language, either system of signs or strategy for the transformation of logical sequences” (Kristeva, cited by Moi 152). As there is no direct transition between the linguistic forms of the elements of an utterance and the forms of its whole, Kristeva undoes the old disciplinary barriers between
linguistics, rhetoric and poetics in order to construct a new field: semiotics or textual theory (Moi 155). Given that all meaning is contextual, for a text can have any number of contexts as Derrida pointed out – hence Kristeva’s term ‘intertextuality’ as I will elaborate on later – the study of context becomes vital.

A third focus is on how and with what consequences ‘woman’ and ‘the feminine’ are constructed as ‘otherness’, as non-Being, as something outside of and threatening to rationality. Especially Irigaray, but also Kristeva with her focus on marginality, have elaborated on woman as ‘this sex which is not one,’ a negativity residing within patriarchal society. Hence French feminists’ construction of an écriture feminine. For Cixous, écriture feminine constitutes a form of writing which enables women to represent themselves as they want, rather than as men want them to be, “woman must write woman. And man, man.” (Cixous 877). In her work, Cixous is trading on the term ‘undecidability’, a consequence of the deconstructionist criticism of logocentrism, and which offers a direct challenge to the assumptions of patriarchy: “It is impossible to define a feminine practice, …, for this practice can never be theorized” (Cixous 883). The very vagueness of the term is a reaction against the structured categorizations which patriarchal logos has always required. On the whole, it is these three main focuses – deconstruction and symptomatic reading of binary oppositions; language and discourse as the intertextual arena for gender struggle; and the marginalized ‘otherness’ of women – that constitute, to me, the triptych within French feminists’ criticism, though to which each practitioner has added her personal focus.

2.2. Hélène Cixous

Though Cixous’s main theories are not as significant for an analysis of Marianne Moore’s poetry, these have been so nevertheless for the later theories of Irigaray and Kristeva, which do provide more fruitful perspectives for my analysis. Following, I provide an overview of Cixous’s main theories as represented in her major work, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’.

2.2.1. Breaking the binary

True to Derrida’s principles, Cixous further explored the concept of binary oppositions, in which each opposition forms a hierarchy between a ‘masculine’ and a ‘feminine’ order, the latter always representing the negative, powerless instance (Moi 104). If woman represents the right half in the opposition activity/passivity, culture/nature, day/night; head/emotions, logos/pathos, has she then not always “functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man,” and is it not time, as Cixous argued, “to dislocate this ‘within,’ to explode it, turn it around, and seize it” (Cixous 887). Just like Derrida, Cixous’s theoretical project encompasses in one move the
effort to undo and even to reverse this logocentric binary thought: “to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women” (Moi 105). In other words, Cixous believes women should combine their efforts and, from one unified female front, each “must write herself” (Cixous 880). This *écriture feminine* – which “will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history” (Cixous 880), for it will inevitably bring down patriarchal domination – is nevertheless impossible to define, for this “practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist” (Cixous 883). This apparently exclusively female vagueness leaves Cixous vulnerable to the charge of biological essentialism. The trouble with essentialism being that it denies the possibility of meaningful change, for men and women are trapped by their respective biological make-up. As such, in trying to break the binary, Cixous becomes susceptible to constructing a binary theory herself, which divides men’s and women’s writing purely on the basis of gender.

### 2.2.2. Heterogeneous difference

Alternatively, against this binary scheming Cixous offers “a multiple, heterogeneous difference” (Moi 105), at least in women’s writing. It is a concept also based on the Derridean, and thus an anti-structuralist idea which implies that meaning is not produced in the static closure of the binary opposition. Many early structuralists held the believe that words are used according to strictly regulated laws and schemes within language, so that meaning is produced by hermetically enclosed binary oppositions. In contrast to this thesis, Derrida instead argues that meaning resides in the “free play of the signifier”, in the open-ended and never-ending play between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others (Moi 105-6). This fundamentally linguistic concern simultaneously implies a critique on the whole Western socio-philosophical tradition which foregrounds a metaphysics of presence that discerns meaning as fully present and identifiable in the word (Moi 106-7). Consequently, in subverting the comforting closure of the binary opposition, Derrida and his followers are throwing “the field of signification wide open,” annihilating “what Cixous perceives as the prison-house of patriarchal language” (Moi 107). According to her, women’s writing “un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield” (Cixous 882). Woman does not annul differences, but instead “stirs them up, pursues them, increases their numbers” (Cixous 884). This female heterogeneity is also the result of her being the “carrier of masculine investments,” for she is “the source; the locus for the other”, and thus at once a ‘she’ and a
‘he’ (Cixous 881, 888). Even more, “there’s no room for her if she’s not a he”, and if she is to be “a her-she, it’s in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (Cixous 888). In other words, according to Cixous, ‘woman’ encompasses both men and each and every woman, thus becoming the very personification of heterogeneous difference, both in her personality and in her writing.

2.2.3. Écriture feminine

Basically, what Cixous sees under feminine texts are texts that “work on the difference”, or at least strive in the direction of difference, which above all “struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasure of open-ended textuality” (Moi 108). Even though she herself cannot provide an exact definition, it is its very resilience to any sort of strict categorization and characterization which defines women’s writing. Also central within the feminine text is the privileging of the voice, or how “writing and voice… are woven together” (Moi 114). A vision of Cixous which has been much criticized given its essentialist fixation on the female body. She argues that the speaking woman is entirely her voice because “women must write through their bodies,” “women are body” (Cixous 886). As such, ‘woman’ is “wholly and physically present in her voice – and writing is no more than the extension of this self-identical prolongation of the speech act” (Moi 114). Essential within this concept of hers is the figure of the mother and the “all-powerful Good Mother” as the source of inspiration and the shielded space of security. Cixous’s mother figure is, in short, the omnipotent and generous dispenser of love, nourishment and plenitude who brings ‘woman’ to her heterogeneous difference, as explained before. She provides an ever-lasting “puissance feminine” to the woman writer, who, as a consequence, is immensely powerful (Moi 115). Also Cixous herself as a writer thus becomes powerful, and by incorporating difference, juxtapositions and even contradictions in her texts she works to undo the gaps and distinctions, though without ever aiming at resolution or closure.

2.3. Luce Irigaray

Irigaray’s theories provide a fundamentally interesting background from which Marianne Moore’s poetry can be read, certainly because she is less prone to biologism than Cixous, and more politically engaged with women as social individuals within real society. Irigaray’s initial focus on the demented person – whom just like women has been silenced and discarded – paved the way for her later feminist theory. Given that the demented are “spoken more than
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speaking, enunciated more than enunciating, … no longer an active subject of the enunciation” (Irigaray, cited by Moi 127), her theories on dementia seem to speak just as much for women’s situation throughout history.

2.3.1. The sex “which is not one” and its mimeticism

Intrinsically central in Irigaray’s theory is her argumentation on the philosophically dominant meta-discourse which situates women outside representation, because of patriarchy’s “hom(m)osexualité” – with the pun in French on homo (‘same’) and home (‘man’): the male “logic and desire of the same” (Moi 135). A project of reduction, which, in its greatest generality, stems from “its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a ‘masculine subject’” (Irigaray 74). Any (male) philosopher contemplates in fact nothing but himself, and his so-called reflection on the general condition of man are only disguises for his essentially narcissistic speculations (Moi 132). As a consequence, everything that lies outside of the proper and the (male) self is unthinkable and thus non-representable: the feminine is thus “always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex” (Irigaray 69). For, indeed, Irigaray rightly saw that when psychoanalysis took discourse as its object of investigation, the sexes became defined only as they are determined through language. Even more so, she argues that, as a result, there was in fact only sex,

“Psychoanalytic discourse on female sexuality is the discourse of truth. A discourse that tells the truth about the logic of truth: namely, that the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects. Which implies that there are not really two sexes, but one.” (‘This Sex Which Is Not One’, Irigaray 86)

Not anatomy, but discourse, language and its laws, which have all been prescribed by male subjects for centuries (Irigaray 87), is what classifies men as the sole sex to be represented via his desire for the same.

As man’s negative or mirror-image, in fact, as man’s Other, caught in the specular logic of patriarchy, woman has then only a limited set of options left. Either she is “to remain silent, to produc[e] incomprehensible babble (any utterance that falls outside the logic of the same will by definition be incomprehensible to the male master discourse)” (Moi 135), or alternatively she can enact, and thus mime, parody, paraphrase and quote male discourse and its specular representation of herself as a lesser male (Irigaray 76, Sielke 82). The latter option of mimicry is, to Irigaray, nothing more than a form of hysteria: “The hysterie mimes her own
sexuality in a masculine mode, since this is the only way in which she can rescue something of her own desire” (Moi 135). Significantly, the dramatization of the hysteric is then the result of her oppression, and not of her own sexual nature, as patriarchy likes women to believe. Above all, mimicry is not so much a (hysteric) option, for it has often been the permanent state allocated to all women under patriarchy (Moi 140). Though mimicry does not need to have this negative connotation with hysteria in all of its uses. At the same time, mimeticism and mimicry of the male discourse can be a deliberate choice, and become thus one of the most successful ways to disrupt patriarchal logic (Moi 139),

“To play with mimisis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. … but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful reception, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means ‘to unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere:…” (Irigaray 76).

Throughout her work, Irigaray focuses on the ‘elsewhere’ of women, by which she means that when one adopts a form of mimicry, any woman’s writing, even her own, will be inevitably marked by this. If woman wants to be understood, she must copy male discourse, for “she cannot pretend to be writing in some pure feminist realm outside patriarchy” (Moi 139-40). As such, Irigaray’s is a theatrical staging of the mime, as she raises this mimetic parasitism to the second power: “miming the miming imposed on woman, Irigaray’s subtle specular move (her mimicry mirrors that of all women) intends to undo the effects of phallocentric discourse simply by overdoing them” (Moi 140). In other words, she applies a fundamentally paradoxical strategy in looking for liberation via submission. Because, to her, “it is here, of course, that the hypothesis of a reversal – within the phallic order – is always possible” (Irigaray 77). Consequently, the very plurality, discontinuity, and unfixability of women’s mimicry evokes “heterogeneity”, which is Irigaray’s theoretical response to how “the male gaze” can be modified in another economy of understanding (Irigaray, cited by DuPlessis 1994, 81). Additionally, this heterogeneous mimicry also reminds of Irigaray’s theory on “The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids”, in which she criticizes the powerlessness of the “ruling symbolics” “to incorporate all the characteristics of nature” (‘Bowls’), especially those of fluids (Irigaray 106). On the whole, and compared to the other options of silence and incomprehensible babble, Irigaray’s and any woman’s theatrical (over)miming of patriarchal discourse might be woman’s only way out of the phallocentric straitjacket.
Though a final solving solution mimeticism will probably never be, given that the feminine is still discarded to the outer borders in all mimetic representations, to be read only “in the blank spaces left between the signs and lines of her own mimicry” (Moi 140). Therefore it is utterly important to identify the exact circumstances under which this strategy could actually work. In her doctoral thesis ‘Spéculum of the other woman’ (1974), Irigaray proposes one such a circumstance when she demonstrates the value of analogic or comparative arguments (Moi 140). Irigaray sees analogy, both in reading and writing, as an expression of the male desire for the same. Though it might seem paradoxical at first, Irigaray will mime this male desire through equivalence, parody, and homology, but “in order to undo its stabilizing, hierarchical effects” (Moi 141). In other words, woman’s use of this strategy always and implicitly results in the creation of a new, non-male context in which her writing circulates according to newly-set political effects. Thus, as Moi rightly pointed out, “the question of the political efficacy of female mimicry comes to hinge on the power of the new context provided by the woman’s miming” (Moi 141). If, however, one does not acquire this new context or the mimicry as such, its power is negated and the mimicry fails. Above all, Irigaray pointed out that “when these same movements aim simply for a change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself, then they are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order.” (Irigaray 81). In other words, mimicry is useless if it simply mimes without challenging the existing orders. Instead, mimicry should at the same time disrupt the very philosophical discourse, for it this is what sets forth the law for all others, “inasmuch as it constitutes the discourse on discourse.” (Irigaray 74). In the end, mimicry and mimeticism are still of major use and value to feminist practice, though they cannot be seen as the ultimate way out of patriarchal discourse.

2.3.2. Women’s speaking and womanspeak

Even without mimeticism – which as Irigaray indicated is actually an expression of the male desire for the same – any of woman’s efforts to give a worthwhile representation of her own sex will inevitably become enactments of this “hom(m)osexualité” (Moi 143). In this respect, Irigaray’s vision of femininity is almost the same as Cixous’s, for both assume an analogy between woman’s psychology and her anatomy. In such an essentialist vision, woman’s form is silenced by “patriarchal phallocentrism, which systematically denies woman access to her own pleasure: female jouissance cannot even be thought by specular logic” (Moi 143). However, as she argues in ‘This Sex Which Is Not One’, woman’s “sexual organ, which is not one organ, is counted as none” (Irigaray 26), even though her sexuality “goes even
further: it is plural,” she has “sex organs more or less everywhere” (Irigaray 28). Notice, again, Irigaray’s use of the term ‘everywhere’, which basically sums up her vision of women’s nature that is, as a result, indefinable: “she herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either” (Irigaray 31). Like Cixous, Irigaray also holds that woman is situated as man’s Other, outside all “property, production, order, form, unity, visibility … and erection” (Irigaray 86), for her economy is not specular in the sense that it does not work on an either/or model. Rather, her sexuality is inclusive. Her theory of ‘woman’ brought her to the concept of ‘le parler femme’, or ‘womanspeak’: a speech spoken by women which emerges spontaneously when women speak together, but disappears again as soon as men are present (Moi 145). Again, as is the case with Cixous’s écriture feminine, the first thing to be said about ‘womanspeak’ is that nothing can be said about it” (Moi 145). On the whole, whenever women are speaking in order to represent their own sex, or conversing among women via womanspeak, both are modes of conversation that are “inaudible for whoever listens [does so] with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand” (Irigaray 29). Consequently, her language cannot last in a specular discourse or patriarchal society, for it involves a different economy which upsets linearity, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, and “disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse” (Irigaray 30). Women’s speaking and womanspeak will thus either fail to be understood or become re-enactments of the male desire for the same.

2.3.3. Power

Even though her concept of mimicry and her belief in an essentialist womanspeak are both doomed to become similar enactments of the male desire for the Same, these do not yet completely bring down Irigaray’s feminist theory in practice. This, on the other hand, is brought forth by her refusal to consider power as anything but a male obsession (Moi 148). As previously indicated, Irigaray rightly believes that no feminist theory will ever reach a successful practice as long as power is seen as something women are against. Instead, feminism is, as she has indicated, not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures. For if one would leave the power structure itself intact, women would simply re-subject themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order (Irigaray 81). It is the very concept of power itself one has to tackle, in order to act out a successful mimicry and to talk comprehensively in womanspeak. Even though this womanspeak cannot be metasspoken, it paradoxically argues that it is a plural, heterogeneous, and fluid language; thus in incorporating this ‘elsewhere/everywhere,’ this ‘heterogeneity,’ and all the differences of
both ‘he’ and ‘she’ – for clearly, Irigaray was of all French feminist the one most concerned with the concept of difference – woman can come to speak with the power of men without having to comply to patriarchy’s power structures.

2.4. Julia Kristeva

Not so much a feminist as a semiotic psychoanalyst, Kristeva has mainly worked on discourse, language, psychoanalysis and semiotics in her theoretical treatises. Compared to Cixous and Irigaray she is the most atypical within French feminism, though probably the most effective in practice for she has abandoned the minefield of biologism on which Cixous and Irigaray often lost track. Like Irigaray, though, she started her academic career from a more general theoretical framework, approaching questions of oppression and emancipation, as “she subverts authority, the authority of monologic science” (Barthes, cited by Moi 150). Kristeva’s alien discourse “undermines our most cherished convictions precisely because it situates itself outside our space” (Moi 150). It is from this external, non-essentialist stranger’s position – hence, one of her main publications is called ‘L’étrangere’ – that Kristeva’s theories oversee the whole of patriarchal discourse and can, as such, serve to feminists’ ends and bring forth actual change to men’s ideological framework.

2.4.1. Language and linguistics

At the time, Kristeva was confronted with a linguistics that was still rigidly systematic, set out to discover “the rules governing the coherence of our fundamental social code: language, either system of signs or strategy for the transformation of logical sequences” (Kristeva, cited by Moi 152). Unsatisfied with language as “a system of signs” according to a strictly structural, Saussurian strategy, she argues instead for an interest in language as a heterogeneous process which re-establishes the speaking subject as “operating consciousness” (Kristeva 131). Language then, for her, is “a complex signifying process rather than a monolithic system” (Moi 152). Like Cixous and Irigaray, her work is clearly based on Derridean difference and similarly argues that “the binary model of difference as enclosed or captured between the two opposite poles of masculinity and femininity blinds us to that which escapes this rigid structuration” (Moi 154). However, unlike Cixous and Irigaray, her solution is more than just the theoretical proposition for a heterogeneous, plural, non-unified female discourse. According to her, linguists should study poetry and transcend the hitherto “sacrosanct sentence barrier”, for besides a merely linguistic causality, there also is, what she calls, “a heterogeneous destructive causality” (Kristeva, cited by Moi 153): “through the particularity of its signifying operations, [poetic language] is an unsettling process – when not
an outright destruction – of the identity of meaning and speaking subject” (Kristeva 125). Above all, she considered this speaking subject not as a solid entity with an ontological existence, to be equated with the inner being or truth of the speaker; but talked instead of the nontranscendental “subject” as a position in language: “the ego constitutes itself only through the operating of consciousness at the time of predication; the subject is merely the subject of predication, of judgement, of the sentence” (Kristeva, cited by Burke 135-6). As I will come to argue, the philosophical implications of her call for a critical theory that searches within writing “for the crisis or unsettling process of meaning and subject” were recognized by modernist writers like Moore, for whom the meanings of the “self” in relation to the “supposed person” were never unambiguous or univocal (Kristeva, cited by Burke 135-6).

On the whole, she is out “to undo – to deconstruct – the old disciplinary barriers between linguistics, rhetoric and poetics in order to construct a new kind of field: semiotics or textual theory” (Moi 155). Semiotics is, in contrast to linguistics, much more competent in analyzing discourse, for “‘there is no direct transition between the linguistic forms of the elements of an utterance and the forms of its whole, indeed, no connection at all! Only by making a jump from syntax can we arrive at problems of composition’” (Volosinov, cited by Moi 155). Clearly, one can see that context is of vital importance when it comes to semiotics. Once again based on Derrida’s work, Kristeva has coined the term ‘intertextuality’, for a text always has any number of contexts which are everything but unitary, closed-off phenomena (Moi 155). In order to provide decent analyses of a text and its discourse, a critic should take as the object of study the whole utterance, including its ideological, political, psychological and intertextual articulations. It is this which Kristeva has in mind when she advocates a semiotics that studies poetry rather than a linguistics of sentences.

If the basic premise implies that we all use the same language but have different “interests”, then the meaning of the sign is thrown open, which becomes ‘polysemic’ rather than ‘univocal’ (Moi 158). As such, in Kristeva’s semiotic textuality, the sign becomes an arena for the gender struggle. The differently oriented accents which intersect in every ideological sign are liable to the same power struggle which goes on between its speakers of different gender (and class and race, for that matter). Even more, the power struggle intersects in the sign. And though at any given time a particular power group will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this does not mean that its opposition has been silenced as a logical consequence (Moi 158). Based on the simple premise stated above, one can easily agree with the fact that, as a result, sexism is not inherently a part of the structure of language. It comes along as an effect of the dominant power relationship that goes on between genders.
Similarly, the activity of labeling and naming in terms of ‘isms’ – with ‘feminism’ and ‘sexism’ in particular – can be interpreted twofold once language is seen as intrinsically universal and apolitical, for the meaning of such labels will depend upon the particular context and speaker it is used by. On the one hand, many feminists have rejected labels because they see such labeling activity as “betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organize and rationalize our conceptual universe” (Moi 159). In their eyes, it is the ‘masculine’ that goes with reason, order and unity, which has silenced and excluded the chaotic, irrational, fragmented ‘feminine’. But, based on the premise, it is necessary and vital to deconstruct such binary opposition between culturally established ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ values and to dissect the political and ideological force that goes behind such categories (Moi 160). Thus the reason why labels like ‘feminine’ and ‘feminism’ are often discarded by many women is because a particular discourse linguistically and ideologically dominates the arena of the sign, which they have manipulated as such in order to assign a pejorative meaning to ‘feminism’. Consequently, if feminists wish to truly subvert authority and orders, following the linguistically imposed rules and dogmas prescribed by patriarchy will not avail, but rather by dissecting – and thus deconstructing – patriarchal ideology they could actually change the very linguistic structure itself.

2.4.2. The semiotic and the symbolic

As indicated, Kristeva succeeds in undermining the central structures of traditional linguistics simply by subverting and dissecting its own ideology: no inherent patriarchal essence is present in language, since the very same language shows itself equally applicable to the marginal, the heterogeneous and the feminist purpose. Though, one must keep in mind that, for Kristeva, language is still at once heterogeneous and structured. She perceives language as discourse uttered by a speaking subject in a particular (ideological) context, from which meaning can be derived via a signifying process that analyses the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic (Moi 161). The semiotic is inherent to the pre-Oedipal primary processes and pulsions which are simultaneously dichotomous and heterogeneous, or in Kristeva’s own terms: “a distinctiveness admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because if does not yet refer … or no longer refers … to a signified object for a thetic consciousness”1 (Kristeva 133). These semiotic pulsions are located in the chora –

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1 According to Kristeva, the predicative (syntactic) operation is thetic because it constitutes this consciousness, which simultaneously posits the signified Being (thus also the object of meaning and signification) and the operating consciousness itself (thus the ego) (Kristeva 129-30).
Greek word for enclosed space, womb – which, to Kristeva, is not so much a fixed position or a copied model but rather the “unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally connoted to such an extent that it merits ‘not even the rank of syllable’” (Kristeva 133). Clearly, one can see that *significance* then becomes a matter of positioning and movement to Kristeva. Via the splitting (*coupure*) of the semiotic chora the speaking subject can attribute difference and thus signification to the heterogeneity of the chora (Moi 161). Following Lacan’s theory on the mirror face, which both consider to be the first step away from the semiotic order towards the Oedipal phase, subjects then achieve the full separation from the chora and thus enter the symbolic order (Moi 161). Consequently, the chora will be repressed and remains only as “pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language” (Moi 161). The semiotic chora constitutes, in other words, “the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be caught up in closure of traditional linguistic theory” (Moi 161-2). In deconstructing the symbolic order, disrupting its homogeneous and ideological potential, one can find and strengthen the (un)consciously repressed semiotic order, which knows “no sexual difference, and will therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions” (Moi 165). Clearly, Kristeva notices that especially in poetic language, as for example the carnivalesque discourse and certain Dadaist and Surrealist experiments (Kristeva 133), but as I will argue also in Moore’s poetry, the “musical”, repetitive effects of “heterogeneity” destroy not only accepted beliefs and meanings, but even syntax itself.

But while post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis assume that only the separation of these pre-Oedipal connections, the “separation from a presumed state of nature … may constitute meaning” and voice, feminist theory has questioned this version of the Oedipal drama which assigns woman and the maternal a secondary role (Kristeva, cited by Sielke 89). More specifically, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory argues, on the basis of the repression of the maternal in the Oedipal drama, that the constitution of “the (male and female) subject is preceded by language, the symbolic order in which the name of the Father (*le nom du père*), his laws and his prohibitions (*le non du père*), and thereby all rules that structure human relations are always already inscribed” (Sielke 81). Language as symbolic function (that is, language as sign and syntax) constitutes itself at the cost of breaking with and repressing instinctual, semiotic drives and the continuous relation to the mother; whereas poetic language implies the reactivation of these repressed, instinctual maternal elements (Kristeva 136). As such, poetic language “*would be* for its questionable subject-in-process the
equivalent of incest” (Kristeva 136), whereas, according to Claude-Lévi Strauss the most basic social norms within the symbolic order are the incest taboo, “the supreme rule of the gift” which, “universal like language,” imposes the exchange of women, and the institutionalization of marriage” (Strauss, cited by Sielke 81). Marriage – also the topic and title of one of Moore’s most ferocious poems – thus functions as the communication device between two parties, in which women as objects of exchange is both sign and value; or in Jacques Lacan’s words: she is “excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words,” and thus posited as speaking subject in terms of lack absence, and silence (Sielke 89). Consequently, (French) feminists wondered how and from which position woman speaks, if she even speaks at all. As such, Kristeva shifts attention from woman’s reappropriation for power and power of voice toward a concern with the link of woman’s voice to what is prior to power structures and signification: namely, “the female body, the pre-Oedipal and the maternal as a realm of an ‘other’ economy of discourse, and voice” (Sielke 89).

2.4.3. Femininity: marginal, central, or indeterminate?

Even though, women cannot be, according to Kristeva, for she only exists negatively and marginally – “I therefore understand by ‘woman’ that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies” – she nonetheless sees this relation as entirely strategic (Kristeva, cited by Moi 163). Kristeva’s refusal to define ‘woman’ is an attempt to locate the feminine negativity and marginality, in order to undermine the phallocentric order that defines woman as marginal in the first place (Moi 163). She sees through this patriarchal attempt, which succeeds – via the strict positioning of all women as necessarily feminine and all men as exclusively masculine – to define not femininity, but all women as marginal to the symbolic order (Moi 166). Kristeva’s emphasis on marginality allows the repression of the maternal and the feminine to become a positionality rather than an essence (Moi 166). Above all, not unsurprisingly, her refusal for any definition is rooted in her deep suspicion of identity, which similarly led her to reject any idea of an écriture feminine or a parler femme that would be inherently feminine or female (Moi 163). Unlike Cixous and Irigaray, she does not believe there are particularly recurrent stylistics typical of women’s writing, because such stylistics could just as well be the outcome of a more general, socio-cultural marginality (Moi 164). At most, ‘femininity’ can be seen in Kristevan terms as “that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order” (Kristeva, cited by Moi 166). However, in the same way women are central to the process of production, precisely because the ruling order cannot maintain the status quo
without the oppression of this group (Moi 171). Thus at the same time, women are essentially marginal and central to patriarchy which, in order to locate themselves centrally, masks women’s central role as marginal. Concluding, to speak ‘as a woman’ is rendered meaningless. Instead, Kristeva proposes the analysis of the many discourses – including sexuality and gender, among others – which together could construct the individual: “‘It is there, in the analysis of her difficult relation to her mother and to her own difference from everybody else, men and women, that a woman encounters the enigma of the ‘feminine’” (Kristeva, cited by Moi 169). In other words, hers is a focus on the specific discourse of a particular individual, marginal in the case of a woman, and not a general feminist theory.

Though she advocates a study which focuses on marginality and on discourse, she is nonetheless as much interested in the feminist cause as Cixous and Irigaray. For instance, Kristeva’s distinction between the semiotic and symbolic raises the question as to how the subject, whom is always already inserted in the symbolic, can break up this phallocentric structure (Moi 170)? For indeed, there is no other space or reality from which feminists and woman can speak. According to Kristeva, the only way to disrupt this symbolic order is by releasing some of the semiotic pulsions through the activity of expulsion or rejection (Moi 170). In practice, this is perceptible in a negativity informed by the death-drive and which results in ruptures, absences and breaks in the symbolic order and thematic preoccupations, which, to Kristeva, is the most fundamental of semiotic pulsions (Moi 170). Clearly, Kristeva prefers to focus on negativity, disruption and fragmentation rather than on unity, organization and conformity. Though Kristeva argues that the disruption of the subject will inevitably and logically result in the revolutionary disruption of society, Moi rightly questions whether a literary, deconstructionist practice of a language will in fact break up anything else: “Nowhere are we given a specific analysis of the actual social or political structures that would produce such a homologues relationship between the subjective and the social” (Moi 171). In the end, Kristeva’s vision is not exclusively feminist, but her theory on language and her undermining of phallocentric and patriarchal discourse has opened up the free play of the signifier, which subsequently has allowed an anti-essentialist perspective to both women’s and men’s writing (Moi 172). As such, Kristeva tries to provide a realistic answer to a question Derrida once put: “What if we were to approach … the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating?” (Derrida, cited by Moi 173). For him as for her, the relationship would go beyond the binary gender difference, with instead a world in which there is a “multiplicity of sexually marked voices” (Derrida, cited by Moi 173), where gender no longer determines the individual and his/her position to power, and where,
therefore, the very concept of power would be transformed. Femininity (and masculinity for that matter) would then be neither central nor marginal or negative, but simply without determinable connotation because it no longer matters in the process of meaning making.
3. Moore’s Poetics: “Less is More, Moore is Less”

“Creative secrets, are they secrets? Impassioned interest in life, that burns its bridges behind it and will not contemplate defeat, is one, I would say.”

-- Marianne Moore, ‘Idiosyncrasy and Technique’ (1959)

(cited by Schulman 2003, xxx)

In this chapter I will elaborate on Moore’s poetics, and especially her non-gendered poetics. Her poems manipulate with absolute control and scientific precision the vivid images that are born out of her observations and experiences, always undermining her readers’ expectations by successively representing enigma, imbalance, and incongruity (Martin 1986, 92-3). Hers is an inclusive rather than a defensive or escapist poetics, which embraces the fragmentation that so many modernist writers tried to control (Martin 1986; xiv, 62). Though refusing the conventional forms of coherence, she instead prefers presenting the reader the full scale of dualities and often mutually exclusive pluralities without resolving them. These aspects of scientific accuracy, unresolved ambiguities, and unity in diversity mainly constitute Moore’s overall poetics.

Concerning her non-gendered poetics, I will briefly elaborate on Moore’s use of mimicry, and on the notion that aesthetic distance is a version of gender resistance, both in the sense of Moore’s authorial self-effacement, and in her anti-aesthetic treatment of traditionally perceived ‘feminine’ topics. In offering a resistance to the complacencies of thought and language, Moore continuously readjusts the line, pushes against the limits of language (Costello 1980, 224). As such, Moore’s non-gendered poetics is mainly present in her poetic form, for, indeed, “one might say that Moore devises a way to make gender a part of the structure rather than of the content of her poems” (Miller 94). On the whole, Moore’s greatest, most effective power lies in the surgical manipulation of language to reverse its ordinary meanings and significations, which, as I will demonstrate, operates according to, what Burke termed, a “less is more, Moore is less”-principle (Burke 135, 143), both in her general and non-gendered poetics.

3.1. Scientific accuracy

When reading a poem by Moore, one is bound to be startled by the scientific accuracy and almost autistic exactitude with which she records the sensuous details and her idiosyncratic interpretations of American modernist society. At the time, the precision of art was a welcome, though temporary, respite from the unpredictability and instability of human actions
and the increasingly fast developing modern society (Martin 1984, 205). Moore, as she matured artistically, even went beyond the imagists, taking the notion of exactness literally, “in the biologist’s sense of getting the facts straight” (Costello 1981, 66). Despite her affinity for facts, these are seldom those of conventional politics, love or economics, but rather minor facts, whose meanings are artificially, not naturally, attached to them (Costello 1981, 67). As I will argue, the quotations and facts inserted by Moore are seldom those of high literature or great authority, and, even if, it is always with the intention of emasculating, instead of accumulating, authority. Nevertheless, her facts and ambition to write “with maximum impact,” imply that “the writer seems under compulsion to set down an unbearable accuracy” (Moore, cited by Martin 1986, 64-5). Hers is emphatically an art of exact perception, and describing herself as an “observer”, rather than a poet, Moore’s intention to feel deeply is to see clearly, to peer beyond the surface, and to explore immanent, universal truths (Schulman 2003, xxiv). Passionate observation equates observant precision, even though Moore realizes that art cannot triumph over the chaos of the modern world, which leads her to accept human limitation (Martin 1986, 205-6), even to face adversity.

3.2. Ambiguities and Incongruities
For “feeling at its deepest … tends to be inarticulate” (Moore, cited by Martin 1986, 64-5), contradiction and adversity – despite the scientific accuracy – thus reign supreme in Moore’s poetry. Moore delights in introducing tensions and then emphasizing the impossibility of their resolution. She leads her readers to expect traditional images, solutions, and verbal structures; but she gives them “images that dissolve, epigrammatic endings that solve nothing, and quotations that disfigure rather than preserve speech” (Martin 1986, xiv). In short, Moore loves confusion. One such a major, frequently reoccurring duality is that of the subtle dialectic between freedom and repression. For instance, the reader learns from the salamander in ‘His Shield’ that freedom is “the power of relinquishing / what one would keep” (ll. 25-6). Equally, Moore’s poetic freedom and creativity is built on the very limitations (modern) life imposes (Schulman 2003, xxx). Additionally, contradictions are not only found on a thematic level, but also in Moore’s stance regarding the desirability of either a natural or a personal voice. On the one hand, for Moore, as Hugh Kenner states in A Homemade World, “the poem is a system, not an utterance, though one can trace an utterance through it. A thing made, then, not a thing said” (Kenner, cited by Miller 63). On the other hand, the sound (and thus the semiotically disruptive rhythms) of the verse eventually became more important to her than its visual patterns, “it ought to be continuous,” and wanted it to sound “unstrained and natural, as
though I were talking to you” (Moore, cited by Schulman 2003, xxvii). Thus, at the very height of the modernist concern with fragmentation, Moore introduces an opposite stance and subverts even the possibility of its synthesis (Martin 1986, xiii). On the whole, Moore portrays irresolvable multiplicity and pluralities by refusing to accept transcendent coherence where none can be found, and also, as I will indicate, by inserting fragmentary quotations and notes, and even by questioning the stability of the medium itself, language.

3.3. Unity in Diversity
Though Moore’s aesthetic of collision abounds in dualities and multiplicity, there is one binary which she was highly prone to dislike: the gender polarity; and therefore hoped to avoid such fixed binaries in the first place. In her letters, reviews for The Dial, and poetry, stereotypes of masculine and feminine were coming under her increasing scrutiny as she was trying to “build gender-blurring bridges between the polarities of masculine and feminine” (DuPlesis 1994, 85). Her admiration for the erasure of gender binaries enabled her to create a poetry which, in Irigaray’s terms, expressed a fluidity and ‘heterogeneity’. In order to represent dualities and ‘heterogeneity’ accurately and coherently, observation becomes thus “de facto a mode of being that balances the effacement tactics of the male-identified poetic tradition” (Diehl 45), as, for Moore, “seeing an object meant speaking of its various aspects on many levels of discourse” (Schulman 2003, xxvi). Moore shares with Emerson the belief that perception is the ideal process of attaining knowledge. “This insight,” writes Emerson in ‘The Poet,’ “which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees…” (Emerson, cited by Schulman 1990, 35). Although, Moore will never assume that (her) art – “with its high tolerance for paradox and contrariety, its resolution of time and timelessness, [its] idealized reconciliations of difference” (Costello 1981, 109) – should capture the transcendent reflection of the external reality. Nor does her art offer advice, escape from life, or any reassurance. Her poems incorporate conflict in order to attempt a resolve, yet always fully aware of the impossibility of this endeavor. In the end, the great value of Moore’s poetry is indeed to be found in the depiction of a dramatic struggle between the poet’s mind and the world (Schulman 2003, xxix), often inexpressible for “feeling at its deepest … tends to be inarticulate”, yet, as always the case “when writing with maximum impact, the writer seems under compulsion to set down an unbearable accuracy” (Moore, cited by Martin 1986, 64-5).
3.4. Moore’s (non-)gendered poetics
Moore’s apparently feminine, female, masculine, universal, or sexless voice has been much debated by feminist critics, and depends on the adopted perspective. Some, like Diehl, see Moore’s movement toward gender neutrality as allied with “the universalized authority of the masculine poetic tradition” (Diehl 82). Whereas others, like Erickson, from a more essentialized perspective, argue that Moore writes deliberately in a woman’s voice to express a woman’s perspective, which is consequently more “real” in its invocation of the “source of human creativity” than patriarchal or “men’s” methods (Erickson, cited by Miller 103). Then again, Heuving stresses Moore’s double attempt at the paradoxically double representation of both a ‘universal’ perspective and her own woman’s view (Heuving 11). Whereas Bonnie Costello’s “The ‘Feminine’ Language of Marianne Moore” denies any feminist intent on Moore’s part while arguing that Moore “purposely assumes the traditional ‘household’ virtues and attributes in order to redefine them in the action of her poems” (Costello 1980, 223). Cristianne Miller detaches Moore’s poems – which she believes to be engendered in their representation of aesthetic and ethical dilemmas as conjoined with pragmatic engendered relations and constructions of power – from the poetic speaker, whom she sees as non-gendered (Miller 120). What all these different, at times contradictory, interpretations agree upon, nonetheless, is the complexity inherent to the ‘self’ and ‘self-representation’ in Moore’s poetry (Burke 142-3). However, for Moore, the gendered world of writing – which has always been associated with activity and thus the masculine – as the generative, ordering process, has never born an exclusive or intrinsic gender mark (Pondrom 386-7). She wishes for a reinterpretation of the relationship of the woman writer to this inaccurately gendered world of writing, as she believes that people write with their heads and hands, and not with their genitalia or genders. Even though Moore is obviously a woman and rooted in a patriarchal society from which she cannot be separated, her poetry is an ambitious attempt to “change our mortal psycho-structure,” while retaining a recognizable cultural basis by which such change is made meaningful” (Moore, cited by Heuving 13). Thus, Moore’s non-gendered poems only came about as it summed up, refracted and transposed culturally biased concepts, and stripped off or at least subverted its gendered notions.
3.4.1. Mimicry

In a first instance, questions of (gendered) voice and power automatically revolve around Irigaray’s concept of mimicry. In order to represent herself, or to create a poetry that “is I”, but therefore not necessarily female, feminine or male, Moore’s speech at times resembles an almost parodic version of social discourse; in which “the artificiality ... is the point”, as Robert Pinsky has noted in “Marianne Moore: Idiom and Idiosyncrasy” (Pinsky, cited by Miller 65). Though Moore’s poetry is anything but a staged theatricality or parody, she does indeed play with “the mimesis of [especially] prosodic traditions” (DuPlessis 1988, 8-9), and her foremost strategy is the artful assemblage of quotations, statements, and notes in, what Barthes has called, “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes, cited by Keller 221). Moore’s lifelong habit of collecting, recording, and indexing quotations resulted into a poetry of subtly imitative form, in which Moore deliberately blurred the chronology and sometimes even identity of those quotations in order to enact rather than shy away from the complexity of her subject (Martin 1986, xiv). The use of quotations also exemplifies Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, which is imperative to her poetry of lists and collage during her poetic heydays (1920-1925). Her quotations, mainly from insignificant and even anti-poetic sources, are above all often disfigured and almost never presented in their original version, which enables Moore to tackle the stability of both spoken and written word. In short, the disfigured quotations allow her to mimics, hail, or criticize the established orders, then construct her own critical impasse, and finally show how to dismantle it (Martin 1986, xv). As such, she grants herself an authoritative voice which operates according to her own standards. Above all, as I shall indicate later, notes also de-romanticize, ‘de-lyrize’, or de-poeticize a poem, by retracting the reader from the imaginative into the real and pragmatic (DuPlessis 1988, 16). Thus, Moore can recover a voice without being reduced to it; can invent a tradition which she alone controls.

3.4.2. “Aesthetic distance is a version of gender resistance” (DuPlessis 1994, 87)

(i) The Poet’s self-effacement

Moore’s most famous virtues – humility, restraint, and modesty – have been so often misjudged and misinterpreted, that her actual intent to create a poetry of objectivity and minimalism, at least concerning authority, gender and her self-representation, has just as often

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2 On February 28, 1908, Moore wrote in a letter to her family: “I read my story yesterday in proof – I like it fine – It’s slight as an ice-coated twig but ‘it is I’.” (Moore, cited by Heuving 17).
been completely overlooked. Stating the self was and has never been a straightforward undertaking for women writers. Moore tried to avoid this issue by reflecting not on the personal, but upon the philosophical implications of language’s inherently figurative qualities instead. Therefore, some critics like Burke have concluded that there is little to say, at least in an obvious way, about the ‘female’ content of her writing for she adopted, what Burke called, a ‘less is more, and Moore is less’-aesthetic in regard to the personal as a source of her poetry (Burke 135, 143). For instance, Moore succeeds more than once in deliberately not given the poetic speaker any gender marking in order to transcend the inevitable hierarchies and thus breaking out of the terms of gender. Neither does Moore offer her opinion on any matter in her poems, which are rather “imaginative acts, efforts to reconstruct the world in language, and thus in relation to the self, to render the world harmless, and to give the self objectivity” (Costello 1981, 65). Moore recognized that the meanings of the ‘self’ in relation to ‘the supposed person’ was always complex, and thus, once more, practiced what Kristeva would later call “the crisis or unsettling process of meaning and subject” in writing (Kristeva, cited by Burke 135-6). She called her work “compositions,” explicitly distinguishing them from poetry, and, about her best know poem ‘Poetry’ also stated that “I [Moore] see no reason for calling my work poetry”, thus limiting not only her own poetry, but disrupting genre assumptions in general (DuPlessis 1988, 7-8). As DuPlessis indicated, this distortion of hers has implications on two levels: on the one hand, she insists on objectivity and covertly defies authoritarian literary traditions, and, on the other hand, she calls into question typically feminine concepts like beauty and passivity. Thus, in creating a textual strategy that is, at once, non-masculine in being non-authoritarian and non-feminine in challenging typically feminine virtues, Moore hopes to create a minimalist, genderless poetry, through which she and her poetic speakers can obfuscate.

(ii) Anti-beauty aesthetic
Distance and resistance can also be found on a more thematic level, where Moore opposes to romantic lyric and its strategies which beautify, objectify, and silence women. As a member of the New Woman group, a position that stressed individualism and originated out of an opposition to this romantic lyric, she thus desires not for beauty but for diagnosis – a diagnosis of poetry’s own gender assumptions (DuPlessis 1994, 77). The central ethics of her style, and chief source of her poetic vitality, is a resistance to the complacencies of thought and language, to “a tendency to accept given forms as descriptive of the world as it is” (Costello 1980, 224). Thematically, Moore’s gaze – quite unlike ‘the male gaze’ – thus comes
to tackle such topics as the mystery of modern love (‘Marriage’), the proliferation of sights, sounds, and senses (‘Those Various Scapels’), the unity that each person strives for in a life that urges disruption, and, beyond that, ventures to apprehend permanent truths that are seen only by the eye of the mind (Schulman 2003, xxvi). In essence, and especially in her early poetry, she attempts to create a non-gendered poetic by reinterpreting traditionally biased and gendered poetic elements of beauty, voice, and representativeness or universality (Miller 93). Though she wishes to subvert any meaning based on hierarchical dualities, the ultimate binary Moore wishes to subvert is the distinction between stereotypically and/or exclusively feminine or masculine types and behaviors, which has been covered in a great many of her poems from 1916 and 1917 (Miller 105). In particular, she divorced associations of weaponry, ambition, and chivalry from domination and masculinity and, of beauty from merely visual attributes and femininity (Miller 105). On the whole, she intends to break and remix some of the most pertinent conventions around Woman and the feminine – both as objects of her thematic and the subjects of writing – with conventions stereotypically linked to the masculine, in order to create a synthetic, non-gendered, androgynous world which combines the best from both.

3.4.3. Gender in structure
In a review for The Dial in December 1926, Moore claimed that: “In making works of art, the only legitimate warfare is the inevitable warfare between imagination and medium” (Moore 1987, 177). And indeed, whereas her commitment to non-hierarchical and –biased forms of meaning is sometimes expressed in the thematics and content of her writing, it is carried out most heavily in the very structure, forms, and “medium” of her writing (Miller 94, Heuving 12). Moore’s early use of “syllabic verse” – which means that each stanza has exactly as many syllables in the poem (Leavell 1995, 68) – may well be an effort to give each word, even each syllable, significance apart from the larger structures which unify them (Heuving 12). Her unique creation of a complex syllabic structure instead of the traditionally English rhythmic line divisions can be best described as “conscientious inconsistency” (‘The Mind is an Enchanting Thing’) (Schulman 2003, xxvi), for she presents us completely irregular poetic lines which, in the total scope of the stanza and the overall poem, nevertheless follow a strictly measured pattern. In Moore’s poetics, the poetic unity is the stanza and, not, as is usually more common in modernist poetry, the line or the phrasal unit (Holley, cited by Leavell 1995, 68). At the same time, she takes away what you are used to in poetry (i.e. meter, regular rhyme, regular line lengths, conventional quatrain stanzas), but, instead of
modernist free verse, she gives back syllable count, slang or irregularly recurring rhyme, unique but exact stanza shapes based on syllable count, and intricately irregular lines (DuPlessis 1988, 8-9). In the end, her poetry incorporates the accentual of conventional poetry, but unlike the conventional, in hers accent and meter are independent of each other (Leavell 1995, 77). Similarly, she adopts the irregular cadence of free verse, but unlike free verse, her stanzas consistently have at least two end-rhymed lines, but because her unstressed rhymes so often “occur at spatial rather than accentual intervals,” they also provide “a virtually inaudible form without interrupting the cadence” (Leavell 1955, 77). Moreover, line breaks and typography – unlike in free verse – define the rhythm and the spatial pattern of the poem, writing as such a literary response to cubism with the invention of “a stanza that splits and then realigns the poem’s ‘architecture’ and its ‘tune’” (Leavell 1955; 58, 77).

Above all, she wished for a non-artificial poetry, which “ought to be continuous,” and wanted her verse to sound “unstrained and natural, as though I were talking to you” (Moore, cited by Schulman 2003, xxvii). The very artful elegance of her syllabic system forms a “disruptive excess” which, as Irigaray posits, could be the final answer to theories of female incapacity and lack (DuPlessis 1988, 9). Thus, in obfuscating her poetic self, its speakers and perspectives, in obliterating gendered notions and binary hierarchies, in offering instead a synthetic poetry which refuses climactic resolution, Moore’s “less is Moore”-poetics allows for a poet as well as a poetry of difference; in which Moore, as a marked maker, is more, and she gives read in this manner, “no Moore of the same” (DuPlesis 1988, 9).

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3 In describing her composition process, Moore stressed the importance of the sound of the verse, more than its visual pattern: “If the phrases recur in too incoherent an architecture – as print – I notice that the words as a tune do not sound right” (Moore, cited by Leavell 1995, 58).
4. Poetic Analysis

In my discussion of Moore I focus primarily on the relation of Moore’s gender to her non-gendered, and though there is no period of concentrated focus on gender in her poetry, mainly her early work until 1935 – and especially from 1915 to 1925 – are concerned in one way or the other with gender issues. Moore’s earlier poetry is far more vital than her later work not only because it offers a reaction against the existing specularity of language, but also because it is a profound attempt at self-representation (Heuving 15). Above all, in her early poetry, Moore aims to create a non-gendered poetic by “reconceiving traditionally gendered poetic elements of beauty, voice, and representativeness or universality” (Miller 93). Furthermore, in her early poems there is “an aesthetic of inquiry, and the vision of a reality more coherent than ordinary perception” (Schulman 1990, 35). She dives into the depths of her subjects, like a universal but female citizen of the modern world, analyzing with scrutiny conventions which have become, but perhaps are anything but, (engendered) normalities. Whereas, in her later work, Moore no longer attempts the “paradoxical quest of writing as a woman and as a universal representative of her culture, as an implied ‘I’, but rather assumes the position of a generalized and far more conventional ‘we’” (Heuving 14). Even if she speaks from the plural in her earlier poems, it is, like Costello and Burke have argued, an “impersonal, evasive ‘we’ rather than the royal ‘we’ of others’ usage” (Burke 142). On the whole, in her later work, the issue of gender and her overall difference from dominant forms of meaning and representation become much less prominent and more conventional in both style and thematic, though there are some exceptions. As indicated in the introduction, I will analyze two periods: her experimental pre-1918 prelude and, the heyday of her poetic creativity during The Dial years (1920-1925).

4.1. Pre-1918 Prelude

One of Moore’s first outbursts of creative energy is the poem ‘Dear St. Nicklus’ from December 25, 1895 when she was eight years old. Despite the accompanying visual art, it does not qualify for my analysis of her earliest work. In fact, though she started writing professionally as soon as 1907 (when she was still at Bryn Mawr College), the poetry which I will focus on here has all been written between 1915 and 1918, when she started publishing in major literary magazines as the *Egoist*, *Others*, and *Poetry* (Heuving 49).

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4 This juvenile poem goes as follows: “This Christmas morn / You do adorn / Bring Warner a horn / And me a doll / That is all” (*The Poems of Marianne Moore*, ed. Grace Schulman 2003, 3).
4.1.1. Early Poetics
Moore’s early poetry has been characterized as a “poetry of understatement”, in which she says more than she can express, through combative voices and fantastical diction, in response to “adverse ideas” via a “poetry of address” (Heuving 13, 49, 83). Also Stapleton and Holley noted this peculiarity of address in Moore’s earliest works: they are all titled ‘To someone or something’ – ‘To a Steam Roller,’ ‘To Statecraft Embalmed,’ ‘To Military Progress,’ etc. (DuPlessis 1988, 12). Above all, these are vocative works of direct address – with address and invocation as closely allied with issues of gender and speech, though, here not in the traditionally engendered sense of the lyric mode of ‘apostrophe’ – in which the explicitly present ‘you’ is challenged (DePlessis 1988, 12). Others focused on how she tries to achieve an integration of image and idea in her earlier work, “draw[ing] us into its un[ities and out of] its diversity with an elasticity that seems never to let the surface break” (Costello 1981, 70). Whereas even others saw in it an “aesthetic of inquiry” which tried to deconstruct traditionally gendered concepts (Schulman 1990, 35). Despite critics’ different views of Moore’s intentions and voices, they do agree that Moore, in her early poetry, applied singular speakers to address frequently oppositional stances, ideas, and languages in an aesthetic that is always anti-symbolic and anti-specular. Consequently, through these early poems, “Moore defines her aesthetic as something complicated, weapon-like without dominating, preeminently active, and intelligent” (Miller 119), for she refuses an aesthetic in which something is “great because something else is small” (‘When I Buy Pictures’). Indeed, despite her humility and understatement, there is nevertheless a rich thematic and verbal complexity to be found as a result of her questioning and breaking the conventional, traditional values, which corresponds in its practice to French feminist theory. In the following subchapters, I will look at her ‘otherness’ as a woman author who (un)consciously posits herself ‘elsewhere’ (Irigaray), but also at the ‘otherness’ of her speakers via (dis)embodiment (Cixous), or because of their marginality (Kristeva). Further, I also focus on her use and misuse of language, which result in a disruption of the symbolic structure (Kristeva), and on the presence of certain power structures which inspire and prohibit her expression and self-representation on a thematic level (Irigaray and Kristeva). Though, first, I start by appointing some of the main binaries which Moore intended to subvert (Cixous), in order to insert ‘difference’ and an ambiguous, plural multivalence instead.

4.1.2. Deconstruct the binary in the name of difference and multivalence (Cixous)
Strikingly, almost every poem Moore wrote between 1915 and 1919 is based on a distinction between types of behavior and/or states that might be stereotyped as typically feminine or
masculine. These poems, however, seem not intent on confirming or identifying with one of the stances or on establishing a gendered hierarchy of values, but rather aim to overturn these common associations (Miller 105). Although Moore valorizes qualities that are stereotypically and exclusively identified with the feminine, she does not create a hierarchy – as Derrida would have wished – which raises those features above qualities that are inherently identified with the masculine. I agree with Miller, who demonstrated that, instead, “Moore combines qualities from both categories to create a fluid, composite, hence to her mind gender-neutral ideal” (Miller 127). Besides the breaking of binary gender hierarchies, Moore’s greatest originality can be found in her “breaking out of the terms of gender,” especially in such poems about a mental division in which aspects of the self are deliberately not gender-marked in order to transcend “the inevitable hierarchies that result from such loaded identifications” (Burke 134, emphasis mine). As the following examples will demonstrate, Moore practices Cixous’s later theory.

(i) Writing, communication, and functions of poetic voice

A first and major binary of interest entails the different modes and effectiveness of communication and voice. This interest of hers fits perfectly within the modernist concern for communication, which was “typically conceived as a matter of voice rather than of audience or systems of communication” (Miller 61). She even makes the various functions of poetic voice and the effectiveness of different modes of communication a theme in her early poetry. For instance, in ‘In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance Is Good, And’ (1916), she distinguishes between fiction “of what could never have been actual” (l.14), and transparent non-fiction, which can be recognized by “the haggish, uncompanionable drawl / of certitude;” (ll.15-6). In this poem, the gift of speech is given by the gods to men – or rather “conferred on some poor fool” as a “privilege” (l.10) – yet, speech is fiction rather than transparent metaphysical talk. When the speaker implies that the fool’s “by- / play was more terrible in its effectiveness / than the fiercest frontal attack” (ll.16-8), Moore implies once more what the speaker previously literally said: that storytelling and fictional tales are “better” (l.15) than non-fiction, a domain which Miller associated with the “dogmatic insistence of language characterizing religion and war – both spheres historically dominated by men or exclusively male” (Miller 109). Moreover, though the “poor fool” is a male speaker, his speech is effective because it is a “weapon” (l.20) of “humility” (l.7), “feigned inconsequence / of manner,” and of “self-protectiveness” (ll19-20), in short, qualities typically associated with the feminine and with Moore herself. In this poem, Moore breaks down the gender categories.
suggesting they are useless, for what does it matter if a male speaker has a feminine speech as long as it is more effective than the traditionally masculine weapons? Moore suggests and disrupts the links between stereotyped gender categories and the functions of poetic voice, even though the speaker and his voice are clearly gender marked.

Similarly, in ‘To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity’ (1916), though this time through non-gendered speakers, speech is represented as a defense strategy against a threat of violence, “I can but put my weapon up, and / Bow you out” (ll.4-5). Even though the context implies an almost military combat of survival, the speaker nonetheless prefers to confront the attack with “unsheathed gesticulation” (l.7) rather than with unsheathing one’s sword. Moore’s notebooks reveal that the inspiration for this poem come from a gendered conflict in a scene in Thomas Hardy’s A Pair of Blue Eyes, “in which a young woman responds to a male critic’s hostile review of her romance: masculine attack seems to be met by feminine expressive silence” (Miller 108). Moore’s poem, however, focuses on a nongendered ‘you’ and ‘me’, suggesting that gendered labels do not matter, for there are different ways of winning, regardless of gender. In the end, as the speaker realizes that “since in your hearing words are mute, which to my sense / Are a shout.” (ll.9-10), the speaker chooses not to engage in a duel – “the field of masculine honor par excellence – but instead to redefine the mode of combat, and thus demonstrates her or his superior effectiveness and strength” (Miller 108). Likewise, in ‘Feed Me Also River God’ (1916), Moore is again concerned with the power and effectiveness of speech, for she asks the gods to ratify her prayers as well, even though “I am not like / them, indefatigable, but if you are a god, you will / not discriminate against me.” (ll.11-3). However, if the gods – or simply those with power – will not act appropriately, the “privilege” will “fall” as in ‘In These Days’ on marginal figures, those without traditional power, or on “some poor fool” (Miller 109). In the end, Moore’s craft shows that storytellers may be more effective and powerful than either warriors and gods (Miller 109), even though they speak humbly of fiction and prayer. On the whole, in these three poems, Moore presents two modes of communication through mini-parables of combat and weaponry, which disrupt and redefine the gendered categories, suggesting a poetic position that is idiosyncratic and fluid rather than marked by fixed gender boundaries.

(ii) Beauty and weaponry
Another culturally implied binary which Moore wishes to disrupt in order to create a more fluid perception, is that of beauty and weapons. Especially in ‘Roses Only’ (1917) and ‘Those Various Scalpels’ (1917), one notices the links between Moore’s deconstruction of
traditionally exclusive gender categories and her simultaneous construction of a new aesthetic for the lyric poem (Miller 113). A rose, the most archetypal symbol of beauty, the feminine, love, and carpe diem injunctions, is here deliberately regarded for its intelligence, ignoring the traditional rose’s pristine aura of beauty beyond understanding (Heuving 78; DuPlessis 1994, 85). Given that “You do not seem to realize that beauty is a liability rather than / an asset” (ll.1-2), while intelligence is permanent and, even more so, part of the rose’s make-up, “we are justified in supposing / that you must have brains” (ll.2-3). What is affirmed about the rose are her thorns, “You would look, minus / thorns – like a what-is-this, a mere // peculiarity.” (ll.9-11). For indeed, “What is brilliance without / coordination?” (ll.12-3), implying that the prickliness of the rose brings it into contact with the world, coordinates it, even if only through its sharpness (Keller and Miller 114). Her beauty would wither if she did not have her thorns – thus her intellect, assertion, and self-protection – for, either “the predatory hand” (l.12) would grasp her freely, or “infinitesimal pieces of your mind” (l.13) would be left unguarded. As such, the poem is a deliberate attack on carpe diem motifs (DuPlessis 1994, 85). However, by titling the poem ‘Roses Only,’ Moore suggests that her poem is not for those cynics who would attempt to undo the sweetness and beauty of the rose, but rather for those who would find the rose sweeter only because of her “co-ordination” (l.12), for she is beauty and thorniness (Heuving 79). The rose thus possesses the ideal “grasp of opposites” (‘Marriage’) within a single form, as “a symbol of the unit” (l.3), making it possible for contradictions to coexist (Keller and Miller 114).

In ‘Those Various Scalpels’ weaponry is also linked to the feminine, as Moore describes a woman transformed into an arsenal via “inflection disguised” (l.4). Moore uses the traditional form of the love catalogue, or blazon, but instead of presenting the woman as with golden hair, cheeks colored by Shakespearean, damasked roses, and emerald eyes, this woman has hair like “the tails of two / fighting-cocks head to head in stone – / like sculptured scimitars” (ll.4-6); eyes like “flowers of ice and snow // sown by tearing winds on the cordage of disabled ships” (ll.7-8); cheeks like “those rosettes / of blood on the stone floors of French châteaux” (ll.9-10); etcetera. Having disrupted the form, Moore then asks what the purpose is of so many sharp edges: “Are they weapons or scalpels?” (l.23) (Miller 111). For, if weapons/scalpels are not open but “superior to opportunity” (l.25) – because of her “sophistication” which “by [its] hard majesty” has “whetted [her] to brilliance” (ll.24-5) – she possesses nothing but the brilliance, thus her assertion and self-protection. Moore’s last question, “But why dissect destiny with instruments / more highly specialized than the tissues of destiny itself?” (ll.27-8), nevertheless shows that defense, however necessary, can be
overdone as well (Miller 111). In contrast to ‘Roses Only’, where the thorns were openly and almost aggressively applied to protect the female self, Moore here indicates that such “rich instruments” can also exceed their aim, and instead of protecting like “a magnificent square / cathedral tower of uniform” (ll.19-20), can become nothing more than a shell of “diverse appearance” (l.21).

Similarly, ‘Sojourn in the Whale’ (1917) addresses, like ‘Roses Only’, not a masculine ‘you’, but a feminine one, in a voice more simple and intimate, and less fantastical (Heuving 78). In this poem, Ireland and the Irish seem to represent women, who, “have been compelled” for centuries “by hags to spin / gold thread from straw” (ll.6-7), and having not just survived, but abundantly “lived and lived on every kind of shortage,” (l.5) she has found in this her own endurance and strength (Miller 112). While Britain, thus men, have complained,

“There is a feminine temperament in direct contrast to ours,

which makes her do these things. Circumscribed by a
heritage of blindness and native
incompetence, she will become wise and will be forced to give in.
Compelled by experience, she will turn back;

Water seeks its own level’;
and you have smiled. ‘Water in motion is far
from level.’ You have seen it, when obstacles happened to bar
the path, rise automatically” (ll.8-16).

Clearly, the woman’s smile implies that she knows more than the men who criticize her (Miller 112). Women, like water, are not stopped by obstacles, but rise above their downtrodden stance, rise above themselves. Not insignificant here, is Moore’s application of water imagery and fluids in relation to feminine flexibility and her “automatic” heterogeneity, which link up to Irigaray’s ‘mechanic’ of fluids. Nonetheless, this intrinsic relation between women and nature, which has some biological essentialism to it, is problematical, especially in contrast to Moore’s other poems. According to ‘Roses Only,’ women have the “coordination” of both brilliance and thorns, (thus intellect); according to ‘Those Various Scalpels,’ women are capable of aggression and even self-destruction if she (over)uses her own “thorns” – thus “are they weapons or scalpels?” she doubtfully wonders; and, more generally, according to Moore’s philosophy, “one is limited in one’s effectiveness and success
by one’s determination and wit – not by ‘nature’” (Miller 113). Thus, if women’s defense rises along with the water level, thus because of nature, a possible interpretation is arguably that woman will respond to resistance with whatever “weapons or scalpels” at hand; “her nature, as it were, may appear the same but has changed in its determination to respond” (Miller 113). Consequently, the “rise” in this poem predicts, unlike most of Moore’s other poems, revolution, for Moore undoubtedly must have been inspired by the resurgence of Irish rebellion against British colonialism in 1916 (Miller 113).

A last significant example of Moore conjoining physical beauty with spiritual strength is ‘Melanchton’ (1917), published in the same year as the three others, and the first poem of her several, quintessential animal portraits. Noticeably, it is written in the first person and begins revealingly, “Openly, yes, / …/ I do these / things which I do, which please / no one but myself” (ll.1, 5-7). The speaker apparently could not care less about what others think of her behavior, which somehow resembles Moore’s own conduct towards the male literary tradition and criticism, if she wishes not to write a pre-chewed but unchallenging copy of male writing. For, indeed, “the blemishes stand up and shout when the object / in view is a / renaissance;” (ll.8-10), and thus nothing more than a male literature repeated and re-enacted. The elephant speaker of this poem, on the other hand, who spoke at first with utter self-worth and pride, now doubts whether it really “shall say / [] the contrary?” (ll.10-11), and thus create an independent writing that is its own. Circumstance and “unpreventable experience” (l.23) which have made it wise, have in fact become an intrinsic part of its personality, “The sediment of the river which / encrusts my joints makes me very gray, but I am used / to it, it may / remain there; do away / with it and I am myself done away with,” (ll.11-5). As such, it can become a symbol, a role model, “a manual for the peanut-tongued and the /hairy-toed” (ll.24-5), thus for other elephants like her. This elephant, like Moore’s rose, combines elements that are unfeminine in conventional stereotype with qualities that are quite conventionally so (Miller 116), just like she combines the physical with the spiritual. For though it is said to be “Black / but beautiful, my back / is full of the history of power” (ll.25-7), the speaker immediately counters this all too common upsurge of pride, by denouncing this “external poise, it / has its center / well nurtured – we know / where – in pride” (ll.36-9). Instead, she asserts that true strength can be find in the much more difficult to locate inner determination, “spiritual poise, it has its center where?” (l.39). Above all, and as suggested above, this poem can arguably be read as a self-portrait of Moore,

“I see
and I hear, unlike
the wandlike body of which one hears so much, which was made
to see and not to see; to hear and not to hear;

That tree-trunk without
roots, accustomed to shout
its own thoughts to itself like a shell, maintained intact
by who knows what strange pressure of the atmosphere; …” (ll.41-8).

Possibly, Moore, unlike the feminine persona that could be imposed on her by patriarchy ("the wandlike body of which one hears so much"), makes no distinction between what she hears or sees and prefers not to hear or see. She, as a woman writer, is "without roots" for she has no literary tradition to build on, and thus "shout[s]" "to itself like a shell", given that there is no public. Nevertheless, as in ‘Sojourn in the Whale,’ she has endured hard experience and still “maintained intact” throughout. Moore is thus satisfied with herself as the result of her own “rut / upon rut of unpreventable experience” (ll.22-3). Even more, only through fully “inhabit[ing]” one’s own increasingly thick and wrinkled skin one can accumulate power and attain the easy openness with which she speaks here (Miller 117), even though the pertinent question remains: “Will / depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who can see no / beautiful element of unreason under it?” (ll.66-8). Moore can assert her own power in and through speech, but if the literary and critical scene will not accept and appreciate this power, it might be nullified.

(iii) Art: magnificence and dimness; complexity and purity of form
A last dichotomy of Moore of interest in my discussion is the one concerning art, more specifically the duality between its magnificence and dimness, as well as its complexity and purity of form. The poem that deals most clearly with the topic of art is ‘Poetry’, which begins with her best known (adverse) line, “I, too, dislike it,” (l.1), and attempts but eventually fails to provide a solid definition of poetry. The terms and comparisons Moore uses to define poetry proliferate in its relation to supplementarity rather than unity, as can be seen in the displacement of “genuine” from primary term at the beginning to one of two terms (along with “raw material”) at the conclusion (Heuving 90-1). She tries to break down the conventional definitions of what poetry ought to be, in order to create a more fluid aesthetics which eventually only distinguishes between “half poets” (l.19) who are no “‘literalists of the imagination’” (l.21-2) versus a “genuine” (l.3) poetry which represents “‘imaginary gardens with real toads in them’” (l.24). Notably, Moore does not attempt to define poetry from her
position as a maker, but as audience – a position that enables her to posit herself ‘elsewhere’ (Heuving 91). If poetry can be defined at all, to Moore, the genuine is an inexpressible quality – “a magnetism, an ardor, a refusal to be false” (Costello 1981, 2). Yet, Moore cannot achieve the “genuine”, for she remains outside the center of masculinist ‘universal’ poetics which could allow her to mediate the “real” (Heuving 92), thus making it very hard for the reader to distinguish what exactly she intended with this poem.

Another significant poem is ‘Blake’, in which Moore pivots between the contradictory perspectives of Blake looking at “us” and of “us” looking at Blake, via the mediation of an “I”. In a first instance, Moore represents the “us” as more “ambiguous” and “improbable” than the powerful presence of the sun-like Blake, “I am sure that we feel as we look at you, / As if we were ambiguous and all but improbable / Reflections of the sun” (ll.4-6). Yet, the poem is built on tentative tenuousness – “I wonder if,” “As if you were seeing,” – even when the “I” is “sure”, it is only of something which she cannot know with certainty, “I am sure that we feel as we look at you, / As if we were…” (ll.1-2). As such, she detaches the literary giant from the glory of his past, as he sees himself “walking frail-ly”, “as if … in a mirror at the end / Of a long corridor” (ll.2-3). He appears like a shadow, a ghost disappearing though not completely. Thus, in the end, “frail-ly” and “pale-ly” divert the discussion into a world where some presences crudely outshine others – “a shadow world where the concept of ‘contraries’ may be insufficient to demark the complex reality of the ‘contrarities’ of a female poet” (Heuving 62-3). For authors are not intrinsically sublime or “shining palely”, but find themselves on a scale of many gradations, whose position in the shadow depends above all on the period, intensity and perspective of the “reflections of the sun”, thus the literary (male) elite.

Similarly, in “The Monkeys”, Moore investigates the contradiction between a magnificence that is remembered dimly and a dimness that is magnificent. She does so via a standoff between the speech of a connoisseur-type figure or artist and a critic or critical public (Heuving 61). In a first instance, the speaker asserts how “I recall their magnificence, now not more magnificent / than it is dim. It is difficult to recall the ornament, / speech, and precise manner of what one might / call the minor acquaintances twenty / years back;” (ll.7-11). Despite the faded glory, the speaker does remember one particular figure, Gilgamesh, and his “astringent[] remark[s]” (l.14). Gilgamesh, as an artist, critiques that the presumably critical “they” have said that “it is not for us to understand art; finding it / all so difficult, examining the thing / as if it were inconceivable arcane” (ll.17-9), while he himself uses in his protest the most arcane, defamiliar, and artistic of terms. As such, he conflates a dimness that is
magnificent and a magnificence that is dim (Heuving 61). Because, on the one hand, he wishes to dismantle the critical vocabulary and its magnificent dimness – their “pale / half-fledged protestation,” and “inarticulate frenzy” (ll.14-6) – which critics apply in order to create a distance between a work of art and a perceiver of art. On the other hand, he wishes to enlist this artful diction in his own speech to maintain art’s powerful effect of defamiliarization – to maintain indeed its dim magnificence (Heuving 61-2). For though his protest begins with a reaction against the representation of art as “inconceivably arcanic”, he himself uses an arcane language to create an image of art that is both “deeper / than the sea” (ll.22-3) while “it” (art) is also not much more than mere “flattery” (l.23). At the end, art constitutes both magnificence and dimness.

A dilemma also stated in her later poem ‘Picking and Choosing’. Here, the speaker begins with proclaiming that “Literature is a phase of life. If / one is afraid of it, the situation is irremedial; if / one approaches it familiarly / what one says of it is worthless.” (ll.1-4). The speaker distinguishes and contradicts two modes often perceived in artistic and/or literary circles: either one is arrested by its potential sublimity and does not venture to indulge in it, or one attempts to approach it “familiarly”, in an “opaque allusion – the simulated flight / upward” which “accomplishes nothing” (ll.5-6), because it is dim. These possible contradictions are presented in the two poems as simultaneously, often even intrinsically intertwined, for the boundary between potential sublimity and vacuity, between dim magnificence and magnificent dimness, is small. Though, as long as one creates and “you demand” “the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness and / that which is on the other hand / genuine,” (‘Poetry,’ ll.25-9), then a genuine, “right good,” and “strong” response can be expected – for “Words are constructive / when they are true;” (‘Picking and Choosing,’ ll.4-5, emphasis mine), certainly given that “‘a right good / salvo of barks,’ a few ‘strong wrinkles’ puckering the / skin between the ears, are all we ask” (‘Picking and Choosing,’ ll.28-30).

Finally, Moore’s concern with art also deals with the duality between a complexity and a purity of form, as her poem ‘In the Days of Prismatic Color’ shows most clearly. The days of prismatic, thus original, color were when “Adam / was alone” (ll.1-2), and when “color was / fine, not with the refinement / of early civilization art, but because / of its originality;” (ll.2-5). According to the speaker, Eve, and thus all women, have brought “the refinement of early civilization art” into the “plain to see and / to account for” world of Adam’s, thus male, authenticity, which “it is no longer” (ll.7-9). Moore clearly prefers an art that speaks of “complexity” that “is not a crime” (l.12), even though it “has been committed to darkness, instead of / granting itself to be the pestilence that it is, moves all a- / bout as if to
bewilder us . . .” (ll.15-7). She prefers complexity, not because its “sophistication is as it al-/ways has been – at the antipodes from the init-/ial great truths” (ll.20-2), but because truth in itself is “no” transcendental, or “formal thing” (l.27). The world of Adam alone might have been more plain, and in which “obliqueness was a variation / of the perpendicular” (l.6-7) – which is much the same as no obliqueness at all – it was also a world of illusion, for the truth there present and cherished could be obliterated, for “The wave may go over it if it likes” (l.27). The wave here probably representing the cleansing, all-encompassing wave of complex, dark “sophistication”, of which the speaker assures that Adam ought to “Know that it will be there when it says, / ‘I shall be there when the wave goes by.’” (ll.28-9). Thus, sophistication, complexity, obliqueness of form is preferred above the simplicity, and stoic rigidity of an apparent purity of form possible only in a world housing “Adam … alone”. In the end, Moore’s own poetry also features this darkness and all-encompassing, fluid waves / wavelike fluidity that comes when Eve, and thus women, enter the (artistic) scene.

4.1.3. Female ‘otherness’ via (dis)embodiment (Cixous), or because of the marginal ‘elsewhere’ position (Irigaray, Kristeva)

In her early poetry, Moore establishes, on the one hand, a (dis)embodied poetry from a position ‘elsewhere,’ while also a poetry that speaks of embodiment, continuity and unity (Heuving 52). On the whole, her poetry, and hence any use of ‘voice’ is an extension of the physical body which functions in tension with the poetic creation and lineation, more than it aligns with a possible harmony (Miller 74). The poems in which she breaks down binaries and dichotomies allow her to express the censored or repressed state women experience in the dominantly masculine (literary) field. Essentially, woman needs to look at a man in the knowledge of the disconnection that he and his language mean for her (Heuving 65), and, subsequently, needs not to overpower that disconnection, as Heuving further implied, but rather subvert the metaphysical, patriarchal structure which creates this disconnection in the first place. In line with Irigaray’s concept of mimicry and woman’s positioning ‘elsewhere’, Moore, who often felt herself to be a pariah, created in defense a host of masculine pariahs, whom mimic under the authority of Moore – while she remains ‘elsewhere’– the speech of (male) others in strange accumulations of (deformed) quotations.

A first poem which stresses Moore’s distinct positioning as female writer is the already mentioned ‘Feed Me, Also, River God’ (1916). The speaker of this poem literally asks the “River God” not to “discriminate against” one who, unlike “the Israelites”, is “not ambitious to dress stones, to / renew forts, nor to match / my value in action,” (ll.8-10). Read autobiographically, this poem suggests that after multiple rejections from literary magazines,
Moore sees herself as “despised, outcast, a minority – like the Jews” (Miller 107). Yet, she is not like “them”, she is not the chosen of any god, nor “indefatigable” (l.12), hence implying that the “Israelites” of literature may be those (predominantly male) poets who already dominate her region of the literary world. More than them, for they are at least successful in their chosen field, she occupies a total outsider position and cries for help. Though not pathetically or full of self-pity, because the tone of the poem is proud and her call for help is not without conditions: “if you may fulfill / none but prayers dressed / as gifts, in return for your own gifts – disregard this request” (ll.13-5). More generally, the poem also deals with marginality, in which the non-gendered speaker comes to accuse its god of discrimination (Miller 107). What started off in despair ends in self-sufficiency, for the speaker is not only “not like / them” but neither wishes to be so, if this entails falsification on her or his part. The speaker would much rather “become food for crocodiles” (l.2), if her own nurturance should come at the price of “prayers dressed / as gifts” (ll.14-5) (Miller 108).

Another poem which deals with the speaker’s, and possibly also Moore’s, position ‘elsewhere’ is ‘To be Liked By You Would Be a Calamity’. Even though “attack is more piquant than concord” (l.1), the speaker’s response to the opponent’s provoking humiliation is much more than an attack: “but when / You tell me frankly that you would like to feel / My flesh beneath your feet / I’m all abroad;” (ll.1-4, emphasis mine). Clearly, in the face of humiliation and violence, it is as if the speaker turns the other check, and shows her broad tolerance and multivalence, for she posits herself above (abroad of?) such demeaning behavior. Above all, her defense is one of bodily “gesticulation” (l.6), which the speaker here establishes as the last line of defense, increased by the “circulation” of her being “all abroad” (Heuving 74). The speaker is not to be pinpointed neither to one position, let alone under the “feet” of the provoker, but rather remains ‘elsewhere’, thus ‘everywhere’ at once. Moore herself reaches this bodily position ‘elsewhere’ via her use of both concrete and abstract phrasing, idiosyncratic and demotic language – for instance, the vague “Attack is more piquant than concord” is countered by the physical and very concrete “My flesh beneath your feet”. Both the speaker’s and Moore’s “circulation” are increased via their choice and use of language, which, as the extension of their physical body, enables them to stay everywhere and anywhere except for under the (male) opponent’s feet.

Two last examples which clearly address and cleverly manage the problem of women’s representation as other are ‘Roses Only’ and ‘Sojourn in the Whale’. In the first, Moore creates an ‘elsewhere’ position by stressing the traditionally ignored characteristics of intelligence, assertiveness, and individuality in a rose, the most conventional of female
symbols. In the latter, she goes a step further and addresses “every kind of shortage” (l.5) women have come to endure, as both the result and preservation of men’s dogmatized belief that “‘There is a feminine temperament in direct contrast to ours, / which makes her do these things’” (ll.8-9). In both poems, women are not pinpointed to one fixed and restricted space, certainly not under the oppressor’s “feet”, nor do they like “water seek[] [their] own level” (l.13), for women know that “Water in motion is far / from level” (ll.14-5). Similar to ‘Feed Me, Also, River God’, it is a poem that starts, here, with complaining despair though ends in self-sufficiency and victory. For though she is “compelled by hags” (l.6) to perform almost magical impossibilities – “Trying to open locked doors with a sword, threading / the points of needles, planting shade trees / upside down;” (ll.1-3) – the physical properties and unusual use of these impossibilities, nevertheless, simultaneously enhance as well as obstruct the motive that they serve (Heuving 80). In other words, as soon as the speaker pronounces her frustrations, she immediately rationalizes and recognizes the futility and (magical) improbability of her assigned place and duty, thus positioning herself above and ‘elsewhere’ from the oppressor. As such, Moore’s, and for that matter also Ireland’s, ‘art’ implies the diligently carrying through of impossible feats – “attending to without falsely resolving the contradictions that structure her literary endeavors, and her existence” (Heuving 81). The contradictions of the impossible feats, in this poem, can thus be read as either being assigned to them – as they “have been compelled by hags” – or as inherently pertaining to their (female) experience, art, and existence ‘elsewhere’ – given that they, like water, “rise automatically”, regardless of “obstacles” (ll.15-6). Though, apart from the question whether women’s multitude and position ‘elsewhere/everywhere’ can be assigned to her nature; Moore still succeeds in cleverly skirting the male belief in an inherently female “temperament” that stands “in direct contrast to ours [men’s]”, by positioning her female speakers and symbols as more than just ‘Man’s other’. For indeed, smilingly and knowingly she is able to “rise automatically” because she contains both beauty and thorns, a ‘she’ and a ‘he’, or in Cixous’s terms, “there’s no room for her if she’s not a he”, and if she is to be “a her-she, it’s in order to smash everything, …, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (Cixous 888), or at least with a smile.

4.1.4. Symbolic uses and semiotic misuses of language in structure (Kristeva)
It is in her early work that Moore’s own thorns stand out most cleverly and prick most sharply (Keller and Miller 99). Because, not only does Moore break binaries long before deconstructionism and French feminist theory, and does she posit ‘woman’ and her symbols
in positions ‘everywhere’ before Irigaray created her position ‘elsewhere’, she also emphasized what linguistic pragmatics would later claim as “the discursive implication of all language use” (Miller 67). In French feminist theory, especially Kristeva stressed that all language inevitably occurs as discourse within a multitude of contexts, and similarly Moore creates structures of “conscientious inconsistency” which have interactive implications and presuppositions in the whole spectrum of her verse and beyond. Above all, and especially in her poems of address, her structures depend for their meaning not on truth-value or the poet’s authority, but instead on interaction with an audience, for she boldly addresses and jabs at anyone that might threaten her own rose-like “self-dependen[cy]” (‘Roses Only’ l.5) (Keller and Miller 99). The strategies applied in her poems of address to create this illocutionary effect are mostly directives, exclaimations, and rhetorical questions as well as questions which imply a dialogue (Miller 67). Although Moore most often provides the answer herself – creating as such monologues rather than dialogues (Keller and Miller 99) – she nonetheless establishes, by implementing this open procedure in the first place, an open and inclusive rather than a closed or iconic frame (Miller 68). Not surprisingly then, Moore’s most radical experiments, especially with the stanza and her syllabic structure, occur from 1917 to 1919 (Leavell 1995, 74). Consequently, the previously mentioned combination of arcane and demotic diction; vague and abstract phrasing; her experimental syllabic structure; often odd enjambments; and the atypical choice of quotations used in her poetry, which I will explore more deeply later, all contribute to a disruption of the conventional, thus symbolic language.

In her poem ‘Critics and Connoisseurs’, Moore even makes this distinction literal via a personification of the ‘conscious’ symbolic, through the figure of the critic swan, and the ‘unconscious’ semiotic, through the figure of a connoisseur ant. However, Moore does not concentrate on the simple distinction between unconsciousness versus unconsciousness, but has created the more complex phenomena of “conscious fastidiousness” and “unconscious fastidiousness” (ll.1-2, 12), which complicates the term for “fastidiousness” itself denotes a certain kind of reasonable and unreasonable behavior (Heuving 59). Many readings have already addressed the question of which behavior arguably wins in the end, which is no unambiguous interpretation for both are represented as stalemated in their respective positions (Heuving 59). Typically Moore, it is a paradox already asserted at the very beginning by letting her speaker claim that, “There is a great amount of poetry in unconscious / fastidiousness” (ll.1-2), thus clearly advocating the disruptive of a defamiliarizing poetry. Whereas the swan, “with flamingo-colored, maple- / leaflike feet” (l.10-1), is characterized by its “disinclination to move” (l.14) because of its “disbelief and conscious fastidiousness”
(l.12) and “ambition without / understanding” (l.20-1); the ant, on the other hand, is seen “carrying a stick north, south, / east, west, till it turned on / itself, … / and returned to the point / from which it had started” (ll.23-7). This description of the ant reminds a lot of Moore’s other description of Henry James as the ideal American, who is “intrinsically and actively ample, … reaching westward, southward, anywhere, everywhere”; just as much as it reminds of Cixous’s “circulation” of women’s positioning ‘elsewhere’; and of Ireland’s, and thus women’s, being “all abroad” in ‘To Be Liked By You Would Be A Calamity’. Though one would think that, certainly as a woman, Moore would prefer the ant in the end, she in fact remains undecided, for both are accused of ineptitude: the swan dominates the stream, but only “in an attitude / of self- defense” (ll.33-4), whereas the ant can only be judged on its endless attempts, its “experience / of carrying a stick?” (ll.34-5), and not on any final achievement.

Moreover, Moore demonstrates these and other literal renditions of the conscious and unconscious via a corresponding (un)conscious diction. For instance, to depict the swan’s deliberate thinking and “hardihood”, and the ant’s spontaneous judgment of the connoisseur, Moore respectively applies conscious and unconscious uses of language. The swan’s stiffness and stubbornness, which manifest itself in its critical reluctance to ingest that which he does not know, is also visible to the reader on the level of speech, for his behavior is described in equally formal language, “It reconnoitered like a battle- / ship. Disbelief and conscious fastidiousness were / ingredients in its / disinclination to move” (ll.11-4). Similarly, the spontaneous, unpretentious ant is described in more simple, straight-forward, and unconscious related phrasings, “Happening to stand / by an ant-hill, I have / seen a fastidious and carrying a stick north, south / east, west, till it turned on / itself,” (ll.21-5). Nevertheless – for Moore would not be Moore if the descriptions would be thus straightforward – the speaker comes to criticize, and almost mock, both behaviours via a language opposite to their initial behaviours (Heuving 60). Whereas the swan reservedly refuses to eat that which he does not know, finally its hunger got the upper hand and as simple as the speaker states it, “it made away with what I gave it / to eat” (ll.18-9). In a similar but reversed way, the ant is first described doing the most simplest of actions in equally straight-forward language, but the useless repetition of its manoeuvres are later mocked, “Then abandoning the stick as / useless and overtaxing its / jaws with a particle of whitewash – pull-like but / heavy – it again went through the same course of procedure” (ll.27-30). Thus, this transformation with the accompanying change in diction provide a marked contrast between both behaviours and representatives, which in the end demonstrate the necessity and desirability of an unreasoned,
spontaneous “coming to know” – which is the root meaning of the word “connoisseur” – in the “conscious fastidiousness” of the critical, stiff swan, and vice versa (Heuving 60). Though, the speaker, and possibly Moore, remain deliberately vague about which attitude they prefer, it is especially both the ant’s and the swan’s determination, their “fastidiousness”, which Moore values and wishes to represent as a universal, cohesive attitude, rather than being “consciously”/ “unconsciously,” symbolically/ semiotically, and/or, thus, gender marked.

Another significant poem which deals, though in a distinctly different manner, with this conscious versus unconscious duality and with disruption in representation, language and structure is “Injudicious Gardening”. In this poem, Moore’s double perspective leads, as one expects of her by now, to a far more duplicitous and complicated verbal action (Heuving 63). Quite essential for a correct understanding of the poem, is to know that the inspiration for this poem, as Moore’s notes reveal, was the possible betrayal of Elizabeth Browning by Robert Browning, and the latter’s subsequent effort to remove this reproach of the infidel yellow rose by planting white ones (Heuving 63). However, Moore focuses on more than just the betrayal by Robert Browning – or even more generally of all women by men – and equally addresses the adverse idea of the betrayal of the literal yellow rose by its derogatory symbolic association with infidelity (Heuving 63). In the speaker’s claim that “Because books said that yellow boded ill” (l.4), “books” can be read quite liberal, and be associated with the dominant, phallocentric, male ideology which has dominated the political and literary scene for centuries with their symbolic, logocentric “books”. Whereas, in the first stanza, Browning is criticized for his succumbing to traditional symbolism, the second part of the poem turns to praise him for his “sense of privacy” (l.7) (Heuving 63). Though, in praising his “sense of privacy”, she exposes him, thus countering her initial intent. At the same time, she praises and disregards privacy, which shows the need and desire to cross these boundaries. From yet another perspective, privacy in this poem can be seen as the hidden, private sphere of the unconscious, for betrayal and “effrontery” have been committed, which thus disrupted the normal and the symbolic state of orders. Moore, in both praising the revelation of this private unconscious, which breaks open the conscious sphere dominated by “books”, and in disavowing and “not tolerat[ing] / Effrontery” (ll.9-10), she once more refuses to prefer one stance against another, but leaves open the created ambiguity.
4.1.5. Power structures which inspire and prohibit her self-expression and representation (Irigaray and Kristeva)

For Moore to identify with the otherness and marginalization of the feminine writer, nonetheless, entails the potential risk of depriving herself of the source of power, illusionary as this might be (Diehl 48). To break free of the confines of an engendered poetics – in which women as outsiders are automatically identified with passivity, whereas male authors use economic and governmental structures to reify their active power – she needs to sacrifice ascriptive clarity, which she does by obscuring both the speaker’s attitude toward the words on the page and also the source of those words itself (Diehl 48). Similarly, other critics like Burke agree with Costello, who is very clear about these complexities of the ‘self’ and ‘self-representation’ in Moore’s poetry; an ambiguity of reference which at times even extends to the speakers as well (Burke 142). Consequently, in avoiding the first-person singular as a position in the sentence, the communication pattern applied in her poems is one of (apparent) dialogue and response, as demonstrated before. In such dialogues, even the speakers themselves can already be used as sources of power. Especially since Moore often addresses powerful masculine figures, whom thus allow her to confront her own desires and fears for power (Heuving 65). She is not afraid of the power structure as structure, but instead distinguishes between good power and bad power – power as ‘gusto’ and power as force – which enables her to accept the kind of power she believes is necessary and desirable to establish her own authority (Heuving 65). Like many woman writers, Moore plays, in her creation of textual plasticity and fluidity, with the ethical question: “how can a woman be an author, and maintain some authority without being authoritative, or even authoritarian?” (DuPlessis 1988, 10). Because, one cannot forget that, certainly in part, Moore is defending herself against the masculine powers of a larger literary establishment, which is more or less the same as the masculine bias of any larger representational order (Heuving 69). Consequently, especially in her poems of address, Moore’s use and manipulation of her speakers, their attitude to the words and the source of these words all bring forth a personal authority based on power as ‘gusto’.

A first poem of interest is the previously mentioned ‘To Be Liked By You Would Be a Calamity’, in which the speaker chooses not to engage in a duel – “the field of masculine honor par excellence” – but instead to redefine the mode of combat itself (Miller 108). The speaker does not distance him/herself from power, but rather prefers to change the codes that might lead to power. If the speaker would fight according to the opponent’s (male) conditions nothing would be proved, “Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my senses / Are a
shout.” (ll.9-10). Above all, Moore’s use of a ‘you’ of direct address whom is not the reader perhaps resembles the romantic apostrophe, but this only formally for hers does not include any distance of exaltation or sublimity, but instead adopts a mundane and even ironic perspective (Miller 68-9). Unlike previous poems of blame, such as ‘To a Steam Roller’, this poem creates its defense primarily through its speaker’s powerful self-assertion, rather than through the portrait of an entirely despicable you (Heuving 75). Some critics, like Miller, proclaim that the speaker, in redefining the combat, thus demonstrates her or his superior effectiveness and strength. Whereas I argue that Moore’s intent was not to posit one opponent above the other, even though it is generally acknowledged that those who refuse to enter/accept a duel (and instead prefer to “Let unsheathed gesticulation be the steel / Your courtesy must meet,” (ll.7-8)) are thought to be morally superior. One can read superior moral strength in such behavior, though, with Moore’s poetics and ethics in mind, she was probably out to change the existent hierarchy and accompanying rules of combat, without necessarily establishing a new hierarchy. Additionally, the first sentence of this poem, which authoritatively contains a quote of which the source is unknown, nonetheless proclaims a philosophy that is at odds with the rest of the poem; “‘Attack is more piquant than concord,’ but when” (l.1). Above all, by positioning “but when” in that same line, the citation is even already countered at the very start within its own line. As I will demonstrate more accurately in the following chapter, the use of quotations and notes from prominent sources and famous authors usually adds to the prominence and fame of the one citing. Thus, when Moore decides to insert quotes from totally unknown or anonymous authors or from anti-poetic sources, her aim must have been to somehow subvert the prevailing authority and power inherent to quotations. Not only through inserting this anonymous source, but also by countering it immediately, Moore succeeds in creating an alternative position of power for both her speaker and herself.

Another poem which clearly deals with the concept of power is ‘He Wrote the History Book’. Moore again starts off with a quote, though, here, it is in the title itself. The allusions to masculine authority – for a “He” is the writer of this apparently known book called “the History Book” – somehow lend a rigid, forced stiffness to the statement. The subsequent “There!” (l.2), as if the speaker points at something fascinating and odd, together with the ironic, questioning tone of the whole poem, nonetheless, changes this fact into a misplaced circus attraction, rather than a serious statement. Especially the last sentence, “Thank you for showing me / your father’s autograph” (ll.9-10), with its clear reference to male authority and literary tradition, is pure sarcasm. Even though the father is silent in the poem, he is legible,
and, via the metaphor of inscription, has engraved his autograph twice: on the book and on the boy (DuPlessis 1988, 14). Playing with inscription, the definite article ‘the’ and the definiteness of the boy’s tone, Moore comes to question authority. The speaker obviously criticizes and mocks this writer’s good reputation, for it is in fact nothing more than a “synthetic” (l.9) repetition of what has been done by its “father[s]”; “Authentically / brief and full of energy, you contribute to your father’s / legibility and are sufficiently / synthetic” (ll.6-9). Although Moore is not critical of the whole male literary tradition, because once it was “authentically / brief and full of energy”, she especially blames the copycats who “shed” nothing more than “ray[s] / of whimsicality on a mask of profundity” (ll.1-2), and who claim that they have written the book. Thus the speaker rightly notes, “The book? Titles are chaff.” (l.5). Similarly, throughout her oeuvre, one might say that Moore never cherished an impassioned interest in dominance (DuPlessis 1988, 15), which, unlike power, is concerned only with possession and the proprietary rights over books, boys, as well as women. Unlike ‘To Be Liked By You’, Moore here asserts her own power, assertiveness and self-expression via the deliberate ridiculing of a despicable “you”. In fact, the poem is a critical analysis of the pretensions and comic conceit of patriarchal authorship (DuPlessis 1988, 15). Once more, through the insertion, but especially the manipulation and ridiculing, of a citation, and the speaker’s dubious attitude to what is said – the last sentence clearly carrying a hidden meaning – Moore subverts the structure of power, creating a domain in which she herself can only occupy an alternative stance.

4.2. Poetic Heyday: 1920-1925
In this second subdivision of Moore’s poetic analysis, I will look at Moore’s most creative and productive period, during the years she edited The Dial (1920-1925).

4.2.1. Subversive Poetics
The years before she came to be the chief editor at The Dial, her aesthetics began to change from one of “adverse ideas” to one of “agreeing difference” as Jeanne Heuving noticed (Heuving 83). More specifically, this entails that around 1917-1918 her poetry of address gave way to a poetry of description, while the combative voices and truculent diction of earlier work was replaced by a seemingly more agreeable manner and more commonplace language (Heuving 83). Though indeed the more agreeable manner was only so seemingly, for it is during this period that she wrote her most ferocious, quick-witted, and subversive poetry, certainly concerning issues of gender and self-representation. The titles of her poems are no longer the odd, poetical, mysterious ones of before, but rather deceptively short (e.g.
“England,” “Silence,” “Novices,” “Marriage”), descriptive (e.g. “When I Buy Pictures,” “An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish”), or frankly ironic (e.g. “‘Nothing Will Cure the Sick Lion but to Eat an Ape’”). The poems themselves also employ rather ordinary, intelligible language, though the content these express is – even more so – quite enigmatic and inconclusive, even on the verge of unintelligibility. More than ever, Moore wishes to express all angles and perspective and, refuses to limit herself or her speakers to a single voice. Consequently, though she wishes for some unit – or, at least, for a unifying inconclusiveness – the poetry of this period is simultaneously highly multivalent and unifying, even “agreeing”, in its attempt to create this fluid aesthetics of Cixous’s ‘heterogeneity’.

A clear and successful attempt at trying to express that multitude of voices and perspectives can be found in her poems based on the format of the list, which she started composing in 1920-22 (Heuving 100). The list form enables her to reintroduce ambiguity and multivalency, as well as it enables her to maintain an openness, for it establishes its authority in part through the nominal coherence provided by its “direct treatment of the ‘thing’” (Heuving 100). The list – as in the poems ‘England,’ ‘When I Buy Pictures,’ ‘New York,’ ‘The Labors of Hercules,’ and ‘People’s Surroundings’ – approaches the fluid writing of Cixous’s and Irigaray’s respective “écriture feminine” and womanspeak, as the names, objects, and subjects enlisted often reach ‘elsewhere/everywhere,’ and thus tries to include all registers and standards in one great waterfall of expression. As such, her list poems train her reader’s consciousness away from the reifications and over-determinations of existing thought, affirming “the palpability of phenomena” (Heuving 100). Her focus ranges from the usual to the unusual, and not solely on that which is powerful, hence choosing “those objects and qualities which are relatively free from over-determined and reified valuations that overwhelm more fluid realities and possibilities” (Heuving 100). Via the use of lists, Moore presents a multitude of perspectives, which disrupt the symbolic as well as effectuate self-representation in which she gains back her own voice and authority through this personally created poetic mode. Though the list also enables her to break free of the binary and its culturally established values and over-determined and reified meanings. In short, her poems express and include a fluid aesthetic. Unfortunately, due to space restrictions, I will not be able to look into these poems, even though – according to my opinion – especially the lesser know list poem ‘England’, her pre-collage poem ‘Novices’, and the collage poem ‘Silence’ most subtly and craftily represent Moore’s difficulty with gender and (self-)representation.
A second mode which enabled Moore to express this fluid aesthetic is via the format of arguably either the collage (according to Heuving) or the mosaic (according to Keller), to which she turned after ‘People’s Surroundings,’ her last poem in the form of the list (Heuving 111, Keller 220). Collage, a technique which applied materials like newspaper, cigarette paper wrappers, and bottle labels onto the canvass, was brought into the visual arts in 1912 by cubist artists like Picasso and Braque (Leavell 1995, 62). Moore thus did not invent this particular technique, but applied it innovatively to her literature via the practice of, especially, quoting and footnoting. I argue in favor of both collage and mosaic, because, like collage, Moore’s poems suggest the pasting together of fragments from different sources in a paratactic relation; while, like the mosaic, she still aims for a unity of “conscientious inconsistency” in her wide-ranging diversity. Moore extends the omniscience and ‘elsewhere/everywhere’ position of her list poems to range over items which relate to one another in even more diverse ways, thus creating an even more far-ranging and shifting poetry (Heuving 111). Given that her fluid écriture, or what she called her “hybrid method of composition” (Moore, cited by Stapleton 49), juxtaposes phrases that have been “said in the very best way” (Moore, cited by Hall 30), she can thus destabilize and relativize the meanings of these phrases. She plays fragments not only against each other, but even against themselves, allowing herself a good amount of poetic freedom as she changes the meaning and words of the statements cited. ‘Bowls,’ ‘Silence,’ ‘Marriage,’ ‘An Octopus,’ ‘Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns,’ and ‘No Swan So Fine,’ all indicate Moore’s more direct struggle with language, meaning, gender, and representation which determine her existence as a woman and as a poet (Heuving 112). Though I agree with Heuving, who claims that any unity in Moore’s poetry will not be the result of a “singular perspective imposing order on a multiplicity”, I do not think that unity in Moore’s poetry is just a mere “illusion” (Heuving 114). Both the form of the list and, later the collage and the mosaic allowed Moore to represent and voice as many perspectives possible. Despite the inconclusiveness of many of her subjects and stances, she always aimed at “agreeable difference” in solutions, which like “marriage is our attempt to solve a problem and I can’t think of anything better” (Moore 1997, 177).

4.2.2. ‘Marriage’ (1923)

Moore’s most criticized and misread poem is ‘Marriage’. A masterpiece, nonetheless, in which “we see both her art and her mind at their most radical, unwilling to budge from their refusing” (Bergman 254). As an exquisite example of tessellated collage, ‘Marriage’ contains, like no other poem in Moore’s oeuvre, “such frequent and radical shifts in perspective
reflecting such powerful ambivalence about its subject” (Keller and Miller 114). For indeed, even though Moore saw marriage as nothing more than “the indestructible limestone keep of domesticity”, in which “the home is a prison, and wives are somnambulists who magically keep the household going without ever waking into mortality or error” (Bergman 242), she also believed that marriage was “our attempt to solve a problem and I can’t think of anything better” (Moore 1997, 177). Yet, given that Moore never married, or courted a man for any considerable amount of time, apparently never fell in love, nor ever lived with a two-parent family, readers and critics long puzzled over the inspiration for ‘Marriage’. As Leavell wonders, “Why would the least autobiographical member of her famously impersonal generation devote her longest poem to such a subject?” (Leavell 2007, 65). Regardless of its inspiration, Marriage is especially interesting for Moore’s artful creation of a ‘heterogeneity’ in its conduct of a multifaceted examination of “the dynamics of influence and intertextuality as they affect the woman poet” (Keller 219). As such, in breaking binaries – especially between Eve and Adam, which I deliberately appoint in that order, and a more general ‘She’ and ‘He’ – she creates a fluid, heterogeneous poem, which via the use of collage, bears that multitude of perspectives in an, as I will point out, alternatively empowering and intertextual discourse.

(i) Deconstruct the binary in the name of difference and multivalence (Cixous)
The speaker is alert to inconsistencies and ironies – such as the imbalance between Eve and Adam, the confusion of public and private, the difference between egotistical fights and the “fight to be affectionate” (l.158) – and as a kind of “‘criminal’ marriage evader” he/she is keenly aware of the many ways in which marriage is woven into the social fabric (Keller 227). Even though Moore’s criticism might be ferocious, it is not brutally harsh or condemning, rather “the poem’s criticism of marriage employs comic tones that bespeak sympathetic understanding of human limitations more than condemnation” (Keller and Miller 106). Even more so, conflict is not to be understood as negative at all, given that Moore’s

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5 On August 31, 1921, she wrote in a letter to her friend Bryher that, “I [Moore] don’t like divorce and marriage is difficult but marriage is our attempt to solve a problem and I can’t think of anything better” (Moore 1997, 177).

6 Moore grew up in an intimate and atypical household, which consisted of her mother, Mary Warner Moore, her brother, (John) Warner, and her mother’s intimate friend, Mary Norcross. Moore’s family never really had a male father figure around, for the father was separated from the family because of a nervous collapse before Marianne’s birth (Miller 94).

7 The instigating incident for the poem is generally apprehended to be Moore’s friend Bryher’s hasty, seemingly loveless, marriage to Robert McAlmon in February 1921 (Bergman 248).
dramatization in ‘Marriage’ of several kinds of conflict – or “disputation” as she likes to call it – allows her to enact her fundamental belief that “no truth can be fully known / until it has been tried / by the tooth of disputation” (ll.159-61). Thus, as Keller and Miller rightly noted, “disputation” is not evidence of ambivalence or vacillation; it is the model she propose for the exploration of any truth (Keller and Miller 101), and this via a fluid and heterogeneous poetics.

To flesh out this inner conflict, Moore starts off with a portrait of Adam and Eve in which she evokes prelapsarian possibilities as well as anticipates their fall: “This institution / perhaps one should say enterprise” (ll.1-2), “I wonder what Adam and Eve / think of it by this time” (ll.9-10). Though ‘Marriage’ reflects more intensely on the woman than the man, certainly given that Moore is ready to admit woman’s human failings, even to acknowledge that certain defects may be characteristically female, but, unlike Eliot, she avoids degrading stereotypes and is determined to counter the imbalances of her culture’s prejudices (Keller 239). Thus the speaker begins by depicting Eve in the first person,

“Eve: beautiful woman –
I have seen her
when she was so handsome
she gave me a start,” (ll.21-4)

Similarly, her beauty is later once more described as “the strange experience of beauty; / its existence is too much; / it tears one to pieces” (ll.37-9). Twice, Eve is portrayed as an utterly compelling creature, a real person to whom Moore’s speaker responds with passion and even physical reaction (“she gave me a start,” “it tears one to pieces”). Despite the speaker’s appreciation of female beauty, Moore’s poem deemphasizes sexuality in order to claim for women more intellectual and rhetorical powers, as I will demonstrate in the next paragraph. Whereas Adam “has beauty also”, Moore nonetheless depicts him with less positive, more measured and from a greater distance. Some of his attributes are even Satanic,

“And he has beauty also;
it’s distressing – the O thou
to whom from whom,
without whom nothing – Adam;
‘something feline,
something colubrine’ – how true!
a crouching mythological monster” (ll.61-7)
Surprisingly, it is man, not woman, who is “‘something feline, something colubrine’”, and thus cat- and snake-like. The particular phrase is taken from a contemporary review of George Santayana’s *Poems*, and whether Moore knew Santayana to be homosexual is not known, but the fact nevertheless adds to the irony (Bergman 249). Nevertheless, ad corresponding to the patriarchal story of the Fall, Eve remains “the central flaw” (l.43), which is presented ironically as “that invaluable accident / exonerating Adam” (ll.59-60). Though, Moore eventually criticizes both for their narcissistic self-love to which they have succumbed; for Adam “‘experiences a solemn joy / in perceiving that he has become an idol’” (ll.101-2), and “loves himself so much, / he can permit himself / no rival in that love” (ll.233-5); whereas Eve “loves herself so much, / she cannot see herself enough” (ll.236-7). In the end, Moore thus condemns both for the failure of and their bitter disillusionment with marriage; “What can one do for them -- / these savages / condemned to disaffect / all those who are not visionaries / alert to undertake the silly task / of making people noble?” (ll.244-9).

In a similar departure and ironic subversion of popular stereotypes, Moore stresses Eve’s as well as Adam’s facility with language, although their modes of verbal control differ. Eve is portrayed as a clever, talented woman, gifted with language and independent in asserting her own desires (Keller and Miller 104); “able to write simultaneously / in three languages -- / English, German, and French -- / and talk in the meantime;” (ll.25-8). Yet despite her multi-lingual fluency, she is “constrained in speaking of the serpent” (l.56). Eventually, it is Adam, more than Eve, whose vitality depends on language, and who uses it to maintain power; “alive with words,” he “has prophesied correctly -- / the industrious waterfall, / ‘the speedy stream / which violently bears all before it,’” (ll.74-80). That is, through self-fulfilling prophecy, he enforces his own power to direct civilization and destroy what stands in his way (Keller 228). Pompously “he goes on speaking / in a formal customary strain, / of ‘past states, the present state / seals, promises, / the evil one suffered, / the good one enjoys, / hell, heaven,’” (ll.89-95), and while invoking conventional dichotomous categories of Western culture, he is doing nothing less than claiming how we are to perceive the world (Keller 228, Keller and Miller 104-5). Moore highlights the pomposity of Adam’s pronouncements on the foundations of history in the summarizing phrases – “‘everything convenient / to promote one’s joy’” (ll.96-7). Moore’s irony suggest that the “one” Adam is looking for is probably himself. Above all, his binary categories justify the arrangements that make it possible for him to eventually “experience[e] a solemn joy” in becoming “an idol” (Keller and Miller 105). Nevertheless, in doing so, he “forget[s] that there is in woman / a quality of mind / which as an instinctive manifestation / is unsafe” (ll.85-8). Even more, in
being “plagued by the nightingale / in the new leaves, / with its silence -- / not its silence but its silences,” (ll.103-6) – with woman here suddenly taking on the form of Philomela, who had to become a nightingale in order to obtain what Eliot calls “inviolable voice” (Keller 239) – Adam remains tormented by women’s presence and speech, even when silenced. Her speech, multiple in its “silences”, and Moore’s deemphasized female sexuality not only claims for women more intellectual power, but thus also places female sexual abuse (like that of Philomela), and the sexual possession of marriage (as “the indestructible limestone keep of domesticity”) within a larger, both biblical and cultural, context of female oppression. Eve may be “constrained in speaking”, she has not one silence, but a multitude of silences which enable her to keep on “plague[ing]” Adam.

Furthermore, Adam and Eve also have different paradises in mind when they think of marriage. When Eve expresses that “‘I should like to be alone’;” Adam replies “‘I should like to be alone; / why not be alone together?’” (ll.31-4), thus clearly not respecting each other’s wishes. Above all, for Adam, his ideal vision of marriage is “a fire -- / ‘as high as deep / as bright as broad / as long as life itself’” (ll.120-3), “compared with which / the earth is but deformity” (ll.118-9). In elemental opposition to Adam’s fire stands Eve’s water images; “the heart rising / in its estate of peace / as a boat rises / with the rising of the water” (ll.52-5) (Keller and Miller 105). Where Eve is looking for the peace and quiet in a marriage, Adam wishes for all-consuming passion and “‘the illusion of a fire / effectual to extinguish fire,’” (ll.116-7). Similarly, rather than enjoying the tranquility of a possible Edenic union, as Eve does, Adam is “plagued” and “unnerved by the nightingale”, which possibly stands for both the woman and his own sexuality (Keller and Miller 105). Adam, in seeking this “fire / effectual to extinguish fire”, he wishes for a passion that might satisfy his sexual desire, but it is nothing more than “an illusion”, and thus Adam “stumbles over marriage” (l.124). Even Eve, whose vision of the first marriage in Eden was initially far more romantic, “that crystal-fine experiment” (l.44), she later comes to recognize it as “this amalgamation which can never be more / than an interesting impossibility” (ll.45-6). Though not only Eve and Adam, but also ‘She’ and ‘He’ later mistreat each other and corrupt the originally Edenic state of marriage. As such, Moore extends her earlier mockery of the patriarchal myth of paradise and comes to represent marriage in a context of mutual disagreement.

These initial differences between Eve’s and Adam’s orientation prepare for the later vicious dialogue between ‘She’ and ‘He’ – as completely post-lapsarian versions of the married couple – and as Keller and Miller demonstrated, their conflict represents Moore’s two major forms of disputation: “one, the purely antagonistic, egotistical fight, such as that
dramatized by He and She; the other, a battle waged as much with oneself as with another, dubbed by Moore ‘the fight to be affectionate’ (l.158)” (Keller and Miller 106). While the antagonistic fight involves simple opposition to the other, the fight to be affectionate – which, as stated above, Moore values highly, proclaiming: “no truth can be fully known / until it has been tried / by the tooth of disputation” – is dynamically more complex and may characterize a struggle both between partners and within the individual (Keller and Miller 106-7). Similar to Moore’s presentation of Eve and Adam’s beauty and language, here again with ‘She’ and ‘He’ we encounter the idea of expanding “discursive boundaries” within which Moore entertains widely divergent views of marriage, thus enabling herself to abandon the desire for a single unqualified stance (de Lauretis, cited by Keller and Miller 101). More specifically, the section dominated by an internal dispute as part of the “fight to be affectionate” starts from “Unhelpful Hymen!” (l.130) – which ironically announces the wedded couple for it itself is but “a kind of overgrown cupid / reduced to insignificance” (ll.131-2) – and ends with the ill boding statement: “in which experience attests / that men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it” (ll.190-3).

The “fight to be affectionate” as such turns into crude, antagonistic bickering in the following section, which presents all the impediments to union posed by the nature of men and women (Keller and Miller 110), and which ends with the decisive male pronouncement that, “I [‘He’] am yours to command” (l.254). This vicious battle between the sexes allows Moore to express her dismay at the childish, egotistical behavior of men and women in many marriages. ‘He’ starts off particularly crude by offending her, “‘What monarch would not blush / to have a wife / with hair like a shaving brush?’” (ll.193-5). In what follows, he associates “the fact of woman” (l.196) not with “the sound of the flute / but very poison” (ll.197-8), thus with death, and later calls them “these mummies” (l.204), and “‘a wife is a coffin’” (l.210). Though, ‘She’ is no less bitter in her accusations towards men, labeling them in terms of social power: “‘Men are monopolists / of ‘stars, garters, baubles’ -- / unfit to be the guardians / of another person’s happiness.’” (ll.199-203). Above all, as with Adam and Eve, both love themselves too much to permit a “rival in that love” (l.235). At this point in the poem, all possible glimpses of an Edenic garden and love relationship have been completely shattered. Both sections, the first with its fight to be affectionate and the second with the crude bickering, illustrate what Moore evidently sees as the primary obstacle to ideal marriage:

“on the one hand, the danger of domination, a possible threat to both parties but one more frequently suffered by women because of the support men receive from
patriarchy; on the other hand, the tendency toward overweening self-love in both women and men which blocks the possibility of all but hostile communication” (Keller and Miller 110-1).

As such, Moore cannot but conclude that marriage has turned into,

“This model of petrine fidelity
who ‘leaves her peaceful husband
only because she has seen enough of him’ --
that orator reminding you,
‘I am yours to command.’” (ll.250-4)

Clearly, (male) domination, (female) indifference, and insurmountable self-love on both sides might allow for a marriage of “fidelity”, but it certainly also is a marriage without true, genuine, honest feeling.

Subsequently, a last dichotomy represented through ‘She’ and ‘He’ is the meaning of marriage in terms of passion or as “institution” (l.1). As Stapleton points out, the poem begins in what is for Moore a rare grammatical inversion, as if from the outset of the poem and by starting from the end she were turning the subject on its head (Stapleton, cited by Bergman 248). But then again, ‘Marriage’ is not a poem about morality, or about whether marriage is ethically good or bad, instead Moore’s question is concerned with the psychological drive toward marriage – for why would a woman like Bryher, who knew the liabilities of marriage and was financially independent, willingly enter into matrimony (Bergman 250)? It is a question that inevitably revolves around the opposition between private and public, for if marriage has turned into an “institution”, it means a private matter has turned into social, public property, thus escaping critical scrutiny. Institutions become “articles of social faith” (Bergman 251); they are things “one has believed in” (l.5) and “out of respect for which” (l.3) one continues to believe in. When marriage is destructive, it takes pride in its heroic sacrifice; it survives because people are unwilling to contemplate doing without it (Bergman 251). As such, with the irony of those iconic first lines “this institution / perhaps one should say enterprise” (ll.1-2), Moore denounces this very “thing” because it “requir[es] public promises” for a “private obligation”. In fact, a “thing” so self-evident – because it has been reinforced by centuries “‘of circular traditions and impostures, / committing many spoils’” (ll.14-5 )– that one needs “one’s criminal ingenuity / to avoid!” (ll.16-7). Thus, what Moore denounces is not so much marriage itself, but the fact that matrimony became in many cases (like Bryher’s) nothing more than a public contract, even an economic necessity and exclusive
social norm, which hardly left any other alternative to women’s lives (Sielke 84). Indeed, this kind of marriage as an institution means to Moore “shared loneliness, pure convention or pompous ritual” (Sielke 84), but I do not agree with Sielke that it is simply “an illusion” to Moore. For despite her criticism, in the final section, Moore again shifts to her earlier expressions of an ideal marriage. Yet her belief, irrational in view of what ‘She’ and ‘He’ just demonstrated, depends on the very recognition that her subject cannot be contained within the bounds of logical knowledge: “Everything to do with love is mystery; / it is more than a day’s work / to investigate this science” (ll.255-8) (Keller and Miller 111). Thus marriage, in the end, remains a “mystery” – as she initially argued that “Psychology which explains everything / explains nothing” (ll.18-9) – and can be best defined in terms of ongoing oppositions – “that striking grasp of opposites / opposed each to the other” (ll.259-60), which is disputation at its best.

Instead of letting Hymen end her poem with its traditional marriage song, as in conventional epithalamia, it is portrayed as a ridiculous “‘kind of overgrown cupid’ / reduced to insignificance”, because of the commercial fanfare of modern day weddings he now has to herald (Leavell 2007, 75). Instead, the poem ends with a tempestuous but honest Euroclydon “of frightened disinterestedness” (l.266). Unlike the Greeks in ‘An Octopus’ who distrust what cannot be clearly seen, this Euroclydon looks past the superficial emotions and easy assumptions and has encountered “the essence of the matter” (l.284) “among those unpretentious / protégés of wisdom” (ll.177-8) (Leavell 2007, 75). So, in her conclusion, Moore once more presents apparently incompatible dichotomies: she paradoxically compares political/public and personal “triumph[s] of simplicity” (l.264), while arguing in favor of paradox and passion, at the same time that she scorns all but the rarest of marriages (Leavell 2007, 75). She even embeds this dubiousness in her structure, for she praises simplicity in one of the longest and most complex sentences of the poem:

“the number of parallel phrases serving as subjects in dependent clauses and the number of embedded modifying clauses, combined with the extension of the sentence over thirty-one lines, make the relations of its parts at times nearly incomprehensible” (Keller and Miller 112).

Though, as one would come to expect by now, Moore’s preference for simplicity and clarity is not to be found in one exclusive perspective or belief, but rather, as she indicated midway the poem, in “the ritual[s] of marriage, / augmenting all its lavishness; / its fiddlehead ferns, / lotus flowers, opuntias, white dromedaries, / its hippopotamus -- / … / its snake and the potent
apple” (ll.137-44). Similar to this confusion, Moore once more repeats at the end of the poem in her quintessentially complex style that simplicity and purity of feeling can be found only in “lavishness”, contradictions, and apparent paradoxes brought together: “Liberty and union / now and forever”, (ll.285-6). Or, as Keller and Miller see it: “this final grammatical unit serves as a tour de force in which Moore syntactically makes opposites one, marshalling a syntactic union where she has not found a logical one” (Keller and Miller 112). However, Moore would not be Moore if her poem would end in a climactic solution – even if it is a heterogeneous, contradictory one. The reader should note that the final words, “‘Liberty and union / now and forever’”, are uttered by Daniel Webster, the prototype of masculine oratory and political power. As such, one can only conclude that Moore, even to the very end of this anomalous poem, still hedges and thus remains loyal to her belief that only the truth tested by disputation can be fluidly multiple.

(ii) Female ‘otherness’ via (dis)embodiment (Cixous), or because of the marginal ‘elsewhere’ position (Irigary, Kristeva)

Moore’s question concerning the psychological drive toward marriage not only reveals that men and women still willingly enter into marriage because of their human susceptibility to the allure of standardized “institutions”, but perhaps even more important, because of their narcissism (Bergman 252-3). Likewise, Bonnie Costello has demonstrated that “the narcissist and sophisticates in the art world are the constant butt of Moore’s satire, though they are ‘deaf to satire’” (Costello 1980, 202). Moore saw that those entering marriage believed that they could avoid the fate no one else avoids; a narcissism that always again results in disillusion and embittered disappointment. Instead of talking sense into such people – as she tried with Bryher and McAlmon – she satirically mocks both female narcissism, which lures women into a relationship that will ultimately destroy their freedom and individuality, and male narcissism which eventually makes him “perceive what [he] was not / intended that he should; / ‘he experiences a solemn joy / in seeing that he has become an idol.’” (ll.189-92). In this sense, men and women’s self-love and love for the same self links up to Irigaray’s notion of “hom(m)osexualité”. Though Moore, in this poem, applies this intrinsically patriarchal principle of love and desire for the same to both sexes; for “He loves himself so much, / he can permit himself / no rival in that love”, but she as well “loves herself so much, / she cannot see herself enough” (ll.233-7). Narcissism here befalls both ‘She’ and ‘He’ – contrary to Irigaray’s argument that woman cannot be intrinsically narcissistic – and, as such, Moore makes both sexes responsible for marriage’s reduction to “‘a very trivial object indeed’” (ll.125).
In order to express this narcissism, ‘Marriage’ foregrounds the couple’s voice as a primary textual concern. The poem challenges the privileged position of voice by effecting a division and multiplication of it, as well as by mockingly delivering a critique on poetic authority and marriage (Sielke 86, 82). The absence of communication and dialogue with instead the insertion of various quotes that highlight the speakers’ verbal fluency and multiple voices – or “not its silence but its silences” (l.106) in women’s case – also reminds of Irigaray’s notion of mimicry, and women’s (lack of) voice. In fact, mimicry and the multiplication of voice go hand in hand in Moore’s poem, which then again reminds of Irigaray’s parler femme. According to Irigaray’s paradoxical theory, women’s language cannot be metaspooken because they remain ‘elsewhere’, while her voice is, nonetheless, both limited and multiple. Moore’s ‘Marriage’ enacts not only this impossibility of conjugal union and unified voice within the (female) speaker(s) (Sielke 80-1), but also the absence of uniformity in the sexes’ respectively different expression of their narcissism – even though both have succumbed to the same self-love. Whereas man, “the orator” “alive with words” (l. 253, 74), possesses multiple voices in order to assert his power and authority in as many ways possible; the female voice is split and divided in its utterances because of her mimicry. Despite the fact that she is “able to write simultaneously / in three languages” (ll.25-6), she is either “constrained in speaking” (l.56) because of her multiple “silences”, or can only copy and mimic statements exclaimed already by others, as she cites – with some poetic license – Carey Thomas’s rhetoric: “‘Men are monopolists / of ‘stars, garters, buttons / and other shining baubles’ -- ’” (ll.199-201), well aware that Adam is also the monopolist of oration and debate (Sielke 86). Unlike men, her mimicry in citing does not grant her power but, only further diminishes her voice. Thus, in ironically mimicking women’s silence – for the speaker quotes “See her, see her in this common world’” (l.42), and not “Hear her, hear her”, implying as such that woman is to be observed as an object of beauty that cannot speak – the speaker thus allows men to speak for them. He is deaf to the meaning of her words and erases all her attempts at self-expression, convinced as he is that “‘if he does nothing, it [the nightingale] will sleep; / if he cries out, it will not understand’” (ll.112-3). His use of ‘it’ instead of ‘her’ is significant, for it shows what he thinks of women: not a fulfilled, complete person, but rather “‘a wife is a coffin,’ / that severe object” (ll.210-1, emphasis mine). In the end, any attempt at dialogue fails because of their narcissism which enhanced their oppositional voices/silences and rhetorical strategies.
(iii) Power structures which inspire and prohibit her self-expression and representation (Irigaray and Kristeva)

Given that Eve, ‘She’, and, to a certain extent, Moore herself are deprived of their voices, and in their parler femme reduced to the miming of words already spoken by others (possibly men’s), these women have to look ‘elsewhere’ for the power structures that might inspire expression and self-representation. Unlike earlier poems in which Moore establishes her difference, hence her own personal expression, through singular speakers presenting their perspectives en masse, she establishes her difference, her ‘elsewhere’ in ‘Marriage’, “by playing language against language more variously – utilizing a range of voices and intensities” (Heuving 84). In her 1963 interview with Donald Hall, she justified her abundant use of quotations by implying that she did so in order “to be honorable and not to steal things. I’ve always felt that if a thing has been said in the very best way, how can you say it better” (Hall 30). Thus, Moore can simultaneously affirm phrases which have been “said in the very best way” and subvert them through ironic juxtaposition, deliberate omissions, and expedient distortions in multiple speakers and perspectives. Or, as Heuving sees it, “Moore can attain the very expansiveness and agreeableness of one situated within a ‘universal’ poetics while investigating and expressing her own alienation from its centrist vision” (Heuving 84). In order to bear on her experiences and expressions from ‘elsewhere’, Moore uses quotations of lesser value and authority, and avoids to cite – or at least correctly copy – statements from culturally central figures. Indeed, Moore’s juxtapositions and playful modifications of statements produce not only, as Heuving mentioned, radical ironies which seriously undermine the very possibility of solid meaning (Heuving 113), but also create a personally crafted, alternative position from which she, as her own authority, can express her poetic powers and utter her ‘elsewhere’ poetry.

Nonetheless, this rather abstract creation of a separate sphere for Moore’s poetic power might be more hopeful than actually possible, because “mimicry, woman’s interim strategy and preliminary speaking position may at best be a subversive force, but ultimately fails to construct a ‘different’ voice and to ‘make connections’” (Sielke 89). Eve and ‘She’ remain “constrained in speaking” even though they have a thorough command over a multitude of languages, and dialogue remains an illusion as long as it is “Daniel Webster”, the prototype of masculine (oratory) power, who pompously and authoritatively declares, “‘with the Book on the writing-table; / the hand in the breast-pocket’ (ll.287-8), that marriage means “‘Liberty and union / now and forever’” (ll.285-6). Consequently, can ‘Marriage’ be read as a cry for freedom? Could it be read perhaps even as an escape from Moore’s mother’s
oppressive love (as most of Moore’s friends did), or rather as a celebration of the ‘rare,’ ‘disinterested,’ liberating love between a mother and daughter (Leavell 2007, 74)? Moore was known for her opposition to any situation or “institution” that, in its desire for possession, might limit woman’s freedom or individuality. “Love is the thing more written about than anything else,” Marianne wrote in 1934, “and in the mistaken sense of greed” (Moore 1987, 321). If a woman did not marry and lived with her mother until the age of 60 (and this only because the mother had died), it is logical for the outer world to perceive this particular daughter-mother relationship as pathological, stifling, and, indeed, greedy. Though, Moore herself, as later work like ‘The Paper Nautilus’ and ‘The Hero’ (1939) attest, saw maternal love as anything but greedy, but rather as the symbol of disinterested, altruistic heroism. These explore how, respectively, a mother and her “intensively / watched eggs” (ll.24-5) ultimately free one another, given that “love / is the only fortress / strong enough to trust to” (ll.33-5); and how the maternal hero can look “upon a fellow creature’s error with the / feelings of a mother – a / woman or a cat” (ll.33-5). Thus, even though it is true, as Bertram Hartman wrote in a letter to Moore after reading ‘Marriage,’ that she never herself “experienced the institution, the enterprise in quite the public promise intimate manner” as others did; it is not so hard to image that the intimate life she shared with her mother could also provide both the greedy and the liberating aspects of love (Leavell 2007, 74). Be it a man or one’s own mother, any influential, greedy and powerful person or “institution” can – depending on the perspective – shatter or enhance the mimicry a woman created in order to express her (poetic) powers ‘elsewhere’.

Likewise, not only Moore, but also Eve and ‘She’ are confronted by power structures which either prohibit or allow for their self-expression. As indicated before, Adam, far more than Eve, uses language to maintain power. As such, what resources do women have against such male (verbal) power? Moore suggests a possible way out through re-associating the female with an intrinsic, fanciful “instinct”, as she claims that “there is in woman / a quality of mind / which is an instinctive manifestation / is unsafe” (ll.85-8). Indeed, it is this very fanciful unreliability, woman’s unpredictable multiplicity which allows both Moore and her female poetic creations to occupy not just one position, but multiple positions, or even ‘non-positions’ from which they are empowered to speak (Sielke 85). Other possible solutions suggested by the poem are, as Keller indicates, women’s attempt to fight back on men’s terms by repaying insult with insult: “She says, ‘This butterfly, / this waterfly, this nomad / …’” (ll.219-20) etc. (Keller 230). But, as indicated previously, by simply being a copycat of men’s demeaning behavior, ‘She’ is no more admirable than ‘He’ and all the more entrapped in self-
love (Keller 230). An alternative strategy then suggests the resort to “imperious humility,” using the (feigned) appearance of deference, compliance, and modesty to usurp male control; but, like Carey Thomas, Moore dislikes such thoughtless disavowal of one’s ethics, because “secrecy and guile are the only refuge of a down-trodden sex’ (Moore 1987, 417). Will women then only be prohibited a decent self-expression?

A third, more promising, strategy is enacted by the speaker, and more particularly in his/her first description of Eve: her ability to “write simultaneously / in three languages -- / English, German, and French -- / and talk in the meantime” reaches beyond “the monolithic force of phallic power and of its linear transmission” via her influence to a multiplicity associated in the poem, as it is in French feminist theory, with the feminine (Keller 230). Additionally, Moore’s notes in her poetry workbook further ground this assumption, as she states of Eve that she,

“takes advantage of her abilities in everyday life, writing her letters simultaneously with both hands; namely, the first, third, and fifth words with her left and the second, fourth, and sixth with her right hand. While generally writing outward, she is able as well to write inward with both hands ‘Multiple Consciousness or Reflex Action of Unaccustomed Range,’ Scientific American, January 1922.”’ (Moore, cited by Keller 230).

Noticeably, this passage emphasizes especially Eve’s written, rather than spoken, qualities – suggesting, as does Cixous, that in speech woman is limited for she speaks with and through her (objectified) body, whereas the written form is far more objective. Consequently, like men, women are equally well suited to authorship, though, unlike men, she can write both inward and outward with both hands simultaneously. Above all, this multiple consciousness of women is also laid out in Moore’s handling of water imagery, which reminds of Irigaray’s notion of women’s language as one dominated by the ‘mechanics’ of fluids. Moore associates Adam with unidirectional, resolute aquatic motion, in which the end justifies the means – “the industrious waterfall”, “the speedy stream / which violently bears all before it. …” (ll.78-80) – whereas Eve prefers gentler, more curious and widespread waters. Nonetheless, as indicated before, despite Eve’s fluency in writing, she remains “constrained in speaking” and silenced by men’s deformation of her into a nightingale, whose voice is “not the sound of the flute / but very poison”. Her notes, as do the final section of the poem, equally emphasize the difficulties of women in verbal and marital dialogue, for she repeats about eight times that “men have power and sometimes one is made to feel it” (Moore, cited by Keller and Miller
109). She posits this observation immediately before the conflict between ‘She’ and ‘He’ (in which, ‘He’ claims both the first and the last word), as if she wants to indicate that any female effort to change the status quo is pointless. Moore nonetheless tries very hard to keep voices and perspectives multiple, in order to empower the flexibly inclusive (female) mind, even though it is painfully misunderstood or unheard by men.

(iv) Symbolic use and semiotic misuse of language in structure (Kristeva)
In presenting these multiple voices, dictions, and perspectives through a variety of other texts from which her speakers quote, the poem becomes a verbal patchwork which replaces “intersubjectivity with intertextuality and thus claim[s] – or disclaim[s] – voice through literary reference, quotation, and allusion” (Sielke 80-1). Indeed, ‘Marriage’ is, as Bonnie Costello remarked, “made up almost entirely of quotations” (Costello 184), and critics are increasingly interested in investigating Moore’s use of quotations. For instance, a critic like Sielke highlights the “ambivalence of the female talent vis-à-vis tradition” resulting from this use, as it challenges tradition and canonicity some time before literary criticism did (Sielke 89). Others, like Keller, demonstrate how Moore purposefully muddies the waters of attribution in denying any single direction of literary transmission, invoking instead “an intertextual ocean of signifiers on which authors sail, selecting for display or use now one piece of verbal flotsam, now another” (Keller 231). Whereas Margaret Holley emphasizes how the quotes both highlight intertextuality and mark the poet’s “dependence on the discourse and textual possibilities of the larger cultural milieu” (Holley, cited by Keller 240). I agree with Keller and Holley on the account of intertextuality, which – in accordance with Kristeva’s theory – weaves together both highly literar y and anonymous or anti-poetic sources, that only receive value as they are appropriated in Moore’s poetry into a dialogue. However, unlike Holley, I do not see a dependency on the larger, male literary discourse in Moore’s quotation-littered poetry. Rather, through her many ironic inconsistencies and deliberate modifications of citation, Moore indeed playfully parodies the “textual apparatus of poetic authority”, while, as demonstrated previously, exploits it as the ultimate speaking position for her own alternative poetry (Sielke 85). Moore, at once, both passively establishes her familiarity with the recognized tradition and actively analyses and subverts how issues of gender relations have affected these literary traditions and conventions (Keller 221, 224). She acknowledges the impact of literary masters’ words upon her own, but unlike someone as Eliot, she does not wish to bath in that same authorial, patriarchal tradition. It is a rhetorical strategy which, as shown, allows her to simultaneously express her criticism of the
“institution” (and the male poetic discourse), as well as her admiration for the originally private, passionate “fight to be affectionate” which marriage once was. As Keller and Miller similarly point out, Moore reveals the divisions within her own opinion by creating an extremely disjunctive structure in which contradictory perspectives and multiple voices rapidly shift (Keller and Miller 103).

More specifically, in ‘Marriage’, this implies that Moore’s “fancy” led her to once-popular novels like Christie Johnstone, poems by amateurs such as her friend Mary Frances Nearing or Hagop Boghossian, advertisements, book reviews, and magazines such as the French Feminina and the popular English Review as well as the Scientific American; and works of ‘high culture’ like The Tempest, or ‘Ecclesiasticus’, and most importantly Milton’s Paradise Lost (Keller 232). Another remarkable statement is by the outspoken feminist and president of Bryn Mawr College when Moore was a student there, Carey Thomas who, as Moore’s notes indicate, had a considerable impact on her thinking. Though, in her poem, Moore only cites part of Thomas’s original statement about men being “monopolists”, in which Thomas scornfully dismisses their quest for badges of glory and conquest, “stars, garters, buttons / and other shining baubles,” whereas Moore’s notes include the full quotation in which,

“... the derogatory ‘baubles’ receives diminished emphasis, while men’s desire for recognition and the difficulty of their labors gain considerable sympathy” (Keller 226).

Clearly, in her approach, Moore is highly “democratizing” for she treats all her sources equally in her typically practical, ‘fanciful’, and thus gender conscious manner (Kenner, cited by Sielke 89). Another significant quotation is the one taken from Daniel Webster’s statue in Central Park, in which Moore connects the historical figure of Webster with his rhetorical figures, and thus gives ‘body’ to rhetoric and its postures (Sielke 89). Webster’s original quotation, “Liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable,” is stripped from its third phrase in Moore’s poem, thus deliberately distorting its meaning and making “Liberty and union” instead the great paradox of marriage as well as of democracy (Leavell 2007, 73). Eventually, these quotations are not simply “a little anthology of statements that took my fancy,” as Moore later described, but rather an instance of “by-play” which is “more terrible in its effectiveness than the fiercest frontal attack” (‘In This Age of Hard Trying’ ll.16-8) (Leavell 2007, 64).

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Strikingly, and contrary to all expectations, Moore takes no particular care to be accurate about her sources: she misspells Christie Johnstone as Johnston; she mistakes the date and title of many sources; and she provides no information about where in the cited author’s oeuvre we might find the quoted phrases (Keller 233). She, in fact, leaves many of her borrowed statements unacknowledged. Just as unashamedly she changes the meaning of words, an exquisite example being Baxter’s original lines “as high as deep / as bright as broad / as long as life itself”, that are ultimately transformed by Moore to, “as high, as deep, as broad, as long as Love itself” (Keller 233). This overall indolence is surprising for a writer who is renowned for her “relentless accuracy” and precision of feeling. Above all, this almost plagiarizing inaccuracy contradicts her later statement in the Donald Hall interview; in which she claimed that she cited in order “to be honorable and not to steal things”. Consequently, a possible explanation for this indolence may indeed be, as Keller demonstrated, that it is a manifestation of her belief that preexisting phrases are simply raw materials, ready to be modified and recycled (Keller 233). Though, with the previous (sub)chapters in mind, it seems more probable that Moore desired precision and accuracy except for one domain: patriarchy’s literary tradition. Thus if she had the opportunity to completely debauch, subvert, and distort her literary fathers’ sayings, she would make the most of that opportunity.

One such a literary father significantly absent from Moore’s notes is John Milton. Obviously, Milton’s depiction of paradise and the fall in *Paradise Lost* – a work Moore had known since childhood when her mother read it aloud to her and her brother – stands behind much of ‘Marriage’ as a powerful precedent Moore critiques and revises. (Holley, cited by Keller 234). Especially Milton’s self-conceit and narcissism – as he boasted of his own superior inspiration in pursuing “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme” – is what Moore deflates in her allusion to *The Syrian Christ*, which helps her to place Milton, as biblical interpreter, within an elaborate intertextual network (Keller 234). More specifically, in citing sections from the book ‘Sisters of Mary and Martha’ – in which Saint Paul says in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, “Let your women keep silence in the Churches: for its not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience” – Moore suggests through this essentially intertextual approach to the Bible that Milton, like Saint Paul before him, is merely the voice of his misogynist, woman-silencing culture (Keller 234). Clearly, in not mentioning his name she wishes to erase his authorship, while her poem is also in dialogue with his as she revises his representation of the fall by placing far greater responsibility on Adam (Keller 235). However, Moore’s quarrel is less with Milton, than with the cultural intertext which created *Paradise Lost* through him, and therefore she avoids
letting her poem to be simply a revision of his epic (Keller 236). Instead, in Moore’s version of the fall, Adam as both the satanic seducer – “something feline, / something colubrine” (ll.65-6) – and the helpless victim of passion – mockingly underscored by Moore’s use of passive verbs: “unnerved by the nightingale / and dazzled by the apple, / impelled by ‘the illusion of a fire / effectual to extinguish fire,’ / … he stumbles over marriage” (ll.114-24, emphasis mine) – must certainly share responsibility with Eve for the fall (Keller 236). On the whole, Moore pursues a double endeavor: on the one hand, she tries to free herself from his authority in order to create her own authorship, yet, she cannot entirely escape such notions without re-instigating herself an authoritative authority.
5. Not Quite a Conclusion

“I find it impossible to draw a conclusion or even to summarize. When I try to, I become foolishly bemused: I have a sort of subliminal glimpse of the capital letter M multiplying. I am turning the pages of an illuminated manuscript and seeing that initial letter again and again: Marianne’s monogram; mother; manners; morals; and I catch myself murmuring, ‘Manners and morals; manners as morals? Or morals as manners?’”

– Elizabeth Bishop, ‘Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore’
(cited by Sielke 95)

Like Bishop, who was a close friend, disciple, and critic of Moore’s art, I feel the same agitation when trying to conclude this versatile figure and her multifaceted, often inconclusively paradoxical poetry of “conscientious inconsistency”. Her humility – more often taken for prudence and chaste disinterestedness in the female experience/sex – is nonetheless Moore’s very strength and defense, “His shield / was his humility” (‘His Shield’, ll.20-1). It is this very alternative aesthetics of “modesty, gusto, and humor” (Diehl 51), which created a will to power, expressed in a language that deflects attention from the self toward the field of the object world, “a world where creatures excel and plants can be heroes,” through a style “that theatricalizes itself in the name of self-effacement” (Diehl 53). “Omissions are not accidents”, and thus Moore’s refusal to make gender a central subject of her writing does not mean that gender issues are accidentally absent from her work. On the surface, Moore creates a non-gendered art, as she does not wish to conform to the gendered world of patriarchal writing (in which something is “great because something else is small”), nor to report exclusively standardized female experiences. Yet, after a thorough reading of her poetry, one perceives that gender in fact is present in her writing, though not in the conventionally engendered way. More specifically, it can be read in her subversive attitude towards stereotypically engendered hierarchical meanings; in her anti-specular poetics that “reconceiv[es] traditionally gendered poetic elements of beauty, voice, representativeness or universality” (Miller 93); in the very structure and form of her work; and in her ambitious attempt to “change our mortal psycho-structure” (Moore, cited by Heuving 13). Even a topic like marriage – which would equally well fit into Bishop’s capital M-list – that is traditionally the topic of “silly novels by lady novelist” (George Eliot), is stripped of its idealistic symbolism and edenic mystique by Moore. She succeeds to change our perspective – or, at least, to show us “angle [] at variance with angle” (‘Novices,’ l.40) – and to create a male femaleness and a female maleness, which takes the best form both sides and are both
responsible for “the fall”. Eventually, via a controlled manipulation of language and syntax, a heterogeneity of form and style, and the use of a recurring though always pluralistic vocabulary and subject choice, Moore has set out for a (non-)gendered poetics in which women and the feminine are neither repressed or lauded, but simply part of her greater attempt to break open the ideological conventions of the prevailing patriarchal discourse and its meanings.

She, like the ostracized, marginalized Jews, writes with “the spontaneous passion of the Hebrew language -- / an abyss of verbs full of reverberations and tempestuous energy” (‘Novices,’ ll.38-9). Or, in French feminist terms, Moore is multiple as “there’s no room for her if she’s not a he” (Cixous 888). Moore’s desire to disempower the (literary) tradition sustained by generations of egotistically individual (male) talents and the patriarchal perspective their texts have imposed (Keller 239), led her to cultivate a mode of textual construction reflecting this multiplicity, ‘heterogeneity,’ and intertextuality which challenged inherited structures of power and authority. It enabled her to demonstrate how patriarchy evaded literature and its cultural meanings, revealing them to be fragments of preexistent texts, sign systems, and culturally engendered codes. More constructively, this focus “enabled her to discern ways women writers might capitalize on its nonhierarchical character to gain greater freedom from the controlling fathers whose works, when seen in an intertextual context, comprise only a portion of the ambient texts” (Keller 239). The overall effect of this ‘heterogeneity’ and intertextuality was that it implemented her own work within a wider extraliterary context; as well as liberated Eve and any other ‘She’; helped her to create an impersonal, minimalist art in which she herself was not the authorial/authoritative center; and – most importantly – abandoned the desire for single, unqualified stances. As seen, beauty alone, “conscious/unconscious fastidiousness” alone, the “crystal-fine experiment” alone, and in fact any single perspective, argument, or engendered vision is incomplete. Arguing that, “The I of each is to / the I of each / a kind of fretful speech / which sets a limit on itself;” (‘Melanchthon,’ ll.52-5), Moore thus teaches the reader that “complexity is not a crime” (‘In the Days of Prismatic Color’, l.12.), because “‘no truth can be fully known / until it has been tried / by the tooth of disputation’” (‘Marriage,’ ll.159-61).

Even though Moore does not aim for a change in the distribution of power, but the very structure of power, one, however, can still wonder whether her mimicry and intertextuality is eventually successful and effectual. Because, as Moi rightly pointed out in Irigaray’s theory, “the question of the political efficacy of female mimicry comes to hinge on the power of the new context provided by the woman’s miming” (Moi 141). In other words, if
one does not acquire this new context or women’s mimicry as such, its power is negated and the mimicry fails. Given that Moore was more misread than rightly understood and appreciated in her time, this is a significant side-note that possibly counters Moore’s attempt to “change our mortal psycho-structure”. Nevertheless, Moore was not naïve and herself very much aware of this possible risk, as she pointed out in ‘Melanchthon’, “Will / depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who can see no / beautiful element of unreason under it?” (l.66-8). In fact, it is a question that holds true to all great, “beautiful” literature “of unreason,” which sets out to change the ruling orders of reason, power, and authority.

Ultimately, Moore’s art and my analysis do not provide quite a conclusion. First, because, as indicated, her multivalent poetics and avoidance of any climactic or singular solution imply that no truth or stance can ever be fixed, for it needs to be “tried by the tooth of disputation” over and over again. Furthermore, given that she subverted binaries, enacted a personal mimicry, and created intertextual works of art quite some time before literary criticism, somehow turns her into a French feminist avant la lettre. Hence, further feminist studies regarding Moore’s later work, might provide new, perhaps even challenging, insights to the theory here presented. Lastly, her embracing of fragmentation, the disbelief in the singular stance, her insertion of tessellated collage, and the overall subversion of gender identities, all foretell postmodern literary trademarks. As such, comparative studies not only of Moore and her female contemporary writers – for instance, Elizabeth Bishop – but perhaps even more so of Moore and, for instance, Hart Crane or John Ashbury could yield interesting interpretations. As such, and with her inconclusive and ironic poetry in mind, it seems justified to end with the following statement, written by Moore in a letter to Marcect Haldeman on February 11, 1908: “I really don’t know myself – but shall with the help of Heaven be getting on with myself famously in a short time” (Moore 1997, 38).
Works Cited


