

THE MOOREAN OCULUS: OBSERVATIONS OF THE UNCONVENTIONAL IN THE LATE  
WORKS OF MARIANNE MOORE

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A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of English

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

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By

Abigale L. Ramos

May, 2019

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## ABSTRACT:

Marianne Moore, modernist poet, left behind drafts of poetry within her various numbers of notebooks which are preserved in the Marianne Moore Digital Archive. Incorporating these early drafts of her work allows for a more complete picture on the background thought and inspiration behind the poems themselves. Her mental state and drive for writing the poetry is also able to be presented within the analysis itself. Within "An Expedient," Moore's depression can be noted through certain articulations of emotion surrounding the drafts of the poetry. Analyzing the figures of Saint Jerome, who translated the bible into Latin from the Greek, and in analyzing the figure of Leonardo Da Vinci, one can see Moore's interest in ascetic manners of living which are manifested in her own choice to be a celibate woman. The figures and analysis of these figures also allow for the contribution of a queer archive, where the numerous manifestations of human sexuality exist. As Moore pushed the boundaries of what a poem could be, she also pushed for greater understanding of little written-of figures, at least within a poetic context, to foster advancement for herself and for poetry as it continued to evolve and continues to evolve into the 21st century.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION
- 5. THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE AND TRANSCRIPTION PROJECT
- 18. BACKGROUND ON MOORE PRE-1951
- 24. POST 1951: AN AGING CELEBRITY
- 26. CELIBACY, “QUEERNESS”, AND THE “QUEER ARCHIVE”
- 29. EKPHRASIS - A HISTORY AND PRESENCE WITHIN MOORE’S WORK
- 31. ON THE POEMS
- 49. CONCLUSION
- 51. BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Introduction

Marianne Moore, modernist poet (1887-1972), was a woman who continually challenged social convention through her poetry and through her presence as a literary celebrity. Throughout her life she wrote notes for and drafts of her poems in a series of notebooks, which are currently being archived and transcribed into the Marianne Moore Digital Archive based in the University of Buffalo. This thesis combines analysis of two poems with analysis of the poet's methods of drafting poetry, which is aided by the transcription of the notebooks. For such a famous poet, one who received multitudes of awards and whose celebrity was so pronounced, there is a relatively small amount of critical analysis of her later works of poetry. After Moore's death, her later works were not well received by critics, some of whom denounced them as inferior to her earlier works because of their new appeal to popular culture. Moore's later work post-1951 can be described as "mixed brow"--a combination of the "high brow" modernist poetic technique she employs throughout her poetry (laser-precise diction, collage technique, and her unusual use of animal subjects and allusions)--with subjects which were considered "low brow," i.e. baseball, an Elm tree in Prospect Park, and Santa Claus ("Combat Cultural"). In 1986, critic John Slatin wrote that Moore's work post 1940 was not of the same caliber as her earlier works, finding that it "lacks interest entirely" due to its "radically simplified style" ("Stamps," 124-125). Another critic explains why he views her later work as lackluster and lesser than her earlier works, going so far as to say "She didn't develop the way most poets of her caliber do, in the direction of candor, towards a heightening, by simplification, of effect. The late poems are an example of genius in soft-focus" (Chiasson). But increasingly, critics are now coming to question this view, finding interest in not only the unconventional nature of the subjects Moore was exploring, but also in how they connected to her personally in a semi-autobiographical sense, and how they were received by the general public of their day.

Moore's early poetry, which captured the essence of Modernist rejection of tradition, pushed forward a different style of poetry from that expected from women in her time, and was a testament to her own personal habits of collecting information and curating it, though not overtly autobiographical or

confessional in style (that came into prominence in the 1950s through writers such as Sylvia Plath). Not only did “Moore's movement into the popular arena [represent] a complex handling of her paradoxical position as a poet who both aspired to authoritative status and questioned the hierarchical terms on which such authority circulated” (“Stamps”), her work also contains subject matter she was undoubtedly drawn to analyze and process through its relation to her own personal life.

It turns out that there are a lot of unresolved questions about not just Moore's work but Moore herself. Where for a long time it was ignored, her sexuality is now actively debated by critics. This thesis aims to support the assertion that Moore's personal sexuality is her own and, while she was announced as publicly celibate, I argue that she chose to be herself without the limitation of labels. The purpose of my thematic analysis of her poetry is not to pin down or typify Moore as obviously or overtly gay, but rather, that Moore was a nonconformist and feminist who chose not to define herself through the use of labels nor limit herself through lifestyle expectations placed upon women in her time period, especially within a society in which many women were not considered equal to men. Though she was not an overt gay activist, she was still friends with many gay literary figures and individuals in a pre-stonewall society in which it was considered unlawful and even dangerous to be gay or be associated with the gay community.

My thematic analysis of Moore's poetry will discuss the celibate subjects within the poems through Moore's own perspective and in relation to her life and the time period in which she wrote them. Moore was controversial to some during her time, and she was at one point referred to as a “hysterical virgin” by poet Hart Crane (Kahan 509). But she clearly embraced the controversy. In her later years, coinciding with her rise as a literary celebrity, appearing on the Tonight Show and throwing out the first pitch at a Yankees game, she chose to explore unconventional themes within her poems, as Elizabeth Gregory argues, in order to appeal to a wider audience, while also exploring subjects and themes which pertained to her own interests and were connected to her own personal life.

In her final two decades she often chose to dress as George Washington in tricorn hat and black cape, a very specific type of performance which was meant to inquire into the minds of the American

audience she wrote poetry for. The cape and tricorne hat is a distinctly masculine form of dress which, according to Gregory, was intended to challenge the norms regarding men and women's attire, fashion and social roles, by "...raising questions about her and her audience's "identities"—as Americans, as gendered and racialized people, as spenders of dollars, as people of a particular age..." ("Marianne Moore's 'Blue Bug'"). Moore, through the challenging of social convention and gender roles, is able to assert her position as a feminist who, through her poetic and public performance, sought to change the way women as well as women poets were viewed in a society in which gender roles and manners of dress were adhered to for the sake of being socially accepted.

Within her poetry, she does not necessarily draw conclusions, nor does she seek to pinpoint a centralized idea, instead she engages in internal dialogue with the books she was reading and produces her own perspective along with many others, unlimited and unhindered by the practice of labeling or typifying the contents of the poem. She does not intend to draw a conclusion, end with some moral claim or divulge her own personal emotions in an explicit manner, but rather, she collects information and displays it in a poetic performance, as we will see with her poem "An Expedient- Leonardo da Vinci's- and a Query," and she often uses ekphrastic description of an image (as, for example, in the unfinished painting of Saint Jerome described in "Leonardo da Vinci's" or the photo of polo ponies from *Sports Illustrated* portrayed in "Blue Bug"). Moore can be looked at as "queer" poet in the sense that, just like her poetry, she refused to be labeled or placed within a box--she chose to write whatever suited her best, regardless of the people who criticized her later in her life for succumbing to "celebrity" or "selling out." Moore's collage method combines older and contemporary sources to create her poetry. What is chief to note among the poems analyzed is that although there is no overt confession, obvious articulation or manifestation of emotion, the presence of deep feeling is present within Moore's technique and collage. The pieces Moore places together were carefully chosen to create a personal artistic expression- the choice of quotes in "An Expedient" were chosen from sources with personal relevance to her life, though the relevance to her life need not indicate directly autobiographical content.



Figure 1: Marianne and her mother, Mary Warner Moore.

### **The Digital Archive and Transcription Project**

The Marianne Moore Digital Archive was created to begin to provide public access to Marianne Moore's personal notebooks (which are housed in the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, and hard to see), while also providing contextual information regarding her poetic process and procedures. The collection of notebooks at the Rosenbach totals 122 and they vary in size and length; so far two are now available online through the digital archive, where they are scanned, transcribed and annotated by researchers, so that they can be legible to non-scholarly readers as well as scholars. The notebook which will be discussed in this thesis is from the years 1961-1970, ending about one year before Moore died in February 1972, and includes drafts of thirteen published poems. In this section I will



discuss Moore's composition process, and I will offer a reading of the poem discussed here as finally published in another section further along in the thesis.

The transcription process begins with adherence to the transcription rules and regulations as set by the Marianne Moore Digital Archive. The first page of the transcript provides a general overview of the contents of the notebook and its physical qualities, such as the dimensions, any embellishments or defining characteristics, the years it was in use, and whether there are lines or page numbers present. In this case, it is a fully lined, paginated school notebook entitled "Study Assignments." The pages are divided into five sections--the first four sections being seven lines each, the fifth just six lines.

Throughout the notebook Moore writes in both pencil and in ink, often writing across the lines and in the margins. Each page of the notebook is transcribed using a premade template; it documents the number of the scanned page (corresponding to an image number), and each line of transcribed text is numbered on the left side of the page. The contents of the page is summarized to help categorize the large amount of information within the notebooks and what is present on each page. For example, if a page contains primarily the rough draft of a poem, the poem's name serves as the title of the page. If the transcribed page primarily contains notes which Moore wrote down or contain drafts of unknown poems because they were not fully developed or were never published, the title of the transcription page will indicate that what is present on the page are notes and it will not contain the title of a poem. In total, the transcription amounts to 134 pages. Of those pages, my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Gregory, had already transcribed the first 63 and I went on to transcribe the next 71.

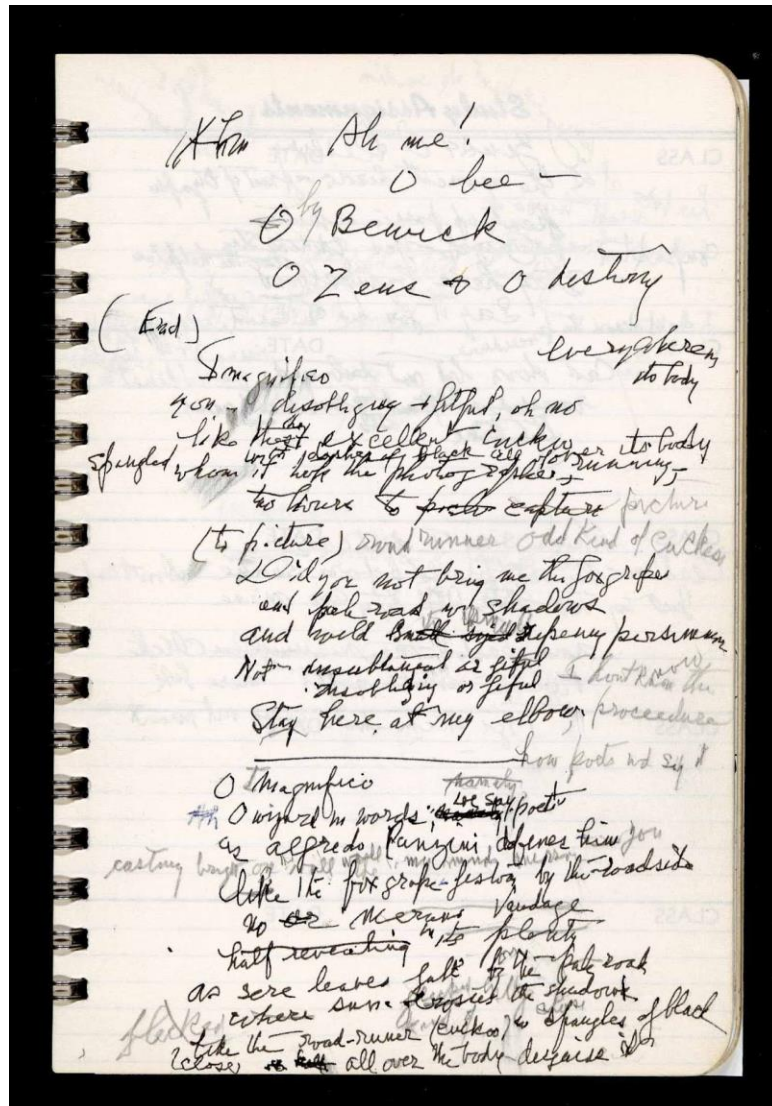


Figure 2: "Image 0065," of the transcribed text.

[IMAGENUMBER=0065—recto] [59]  
[poem][notes for The Mind, Intractable Thing][poem]

- [1] [Ahm?] Ah me!  
[2] O bee-  
[3] O by Bewick  
[4] O Zeus [&] O destiny  
[5] (End)  
[6] everywhere  
[7] [?] magnifico nobody  
[8] you- [?????] gang faithful oh no  
[9] they  
[10] like that excellent cuckoo  
[11] with dashes of black all over its body

[12] spangled whom it were the photo of dashes running,  
 [13] two brown to pitch captain pitcher  
 [14] (to picture) road runner odd kind of cuckoo  
 [15] Did you not bring me the foxgrape  
 [16] and pack mad w shadows  
 [17] the [unclear] small [/unclear]  
 [18] and would small-eyed- [??????] persimmon  
 [19] not unexplained as fitful I don't know know the  
 [20] [unobliging?] or fitful  
 [21] Stay here at my elbow procedure  
 [22] how poets wd say it  
 [23] O I magnifico namely  
 [24] O winged m words; [??] spy poetic  
 [25] as Alfredo Panizini defines him you  
 [26] [casting?] brought on the wall wall my [mind?] [??????]  
 [27] like the box grape festival by the roadside  
 [28] no or [??????] [bandage? ]  
 [29] half reverberating its [plenty?]  
 [30] as sure leaves fall to the pale road  
 [31] flecked where sun crosses the shadow  
 [32] take the road-runner (cuckoo) spangles of black  
 [33] close all over the body disguise it  
 [34]  
 [ver.35][desc]span \_\_\_\_, along left side[/desc]

The Digital Archive aims to create an accurate archival collection of Moore's notebooks and to allow for a thorough study and evaluation of her drafting process. Moore used a variety of notebooks to record her thoughts and took extensive notes on what she was reading. Among the notebook's first indicators of her propensity for collecting information is a small clipping of Leonardo Da Vinci which has been pasted on the inside front flap, taken from an article about the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, where Moore resided from 1918 to 1972.

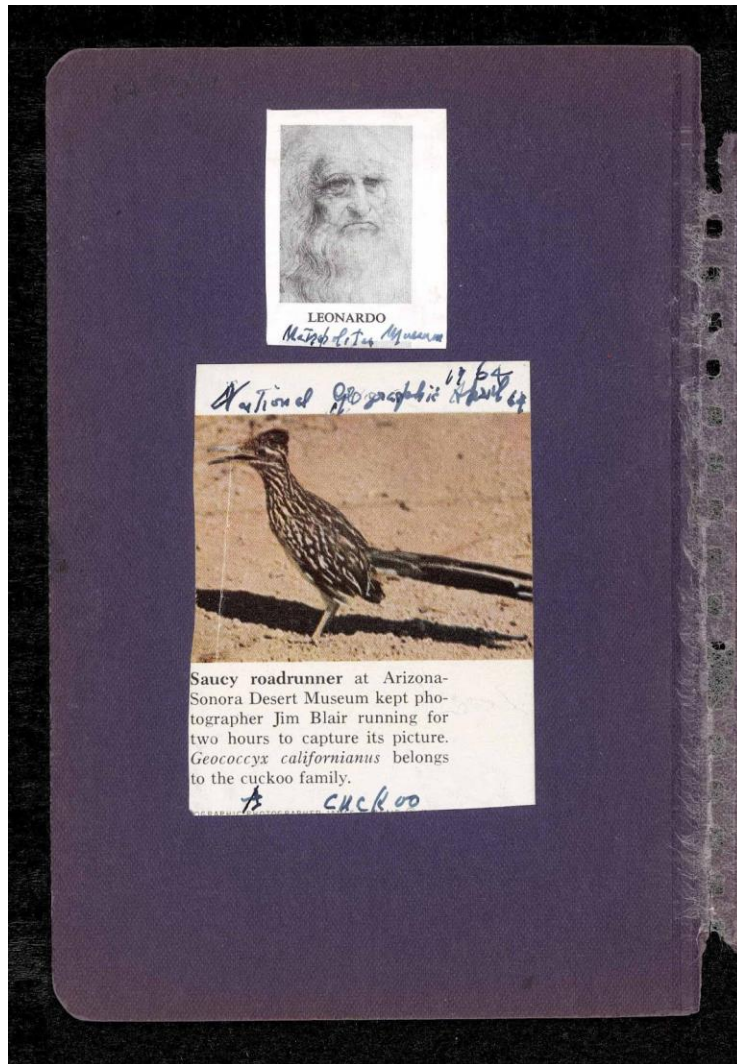


Figure 3: “Image 0002,” the inside flap of the notebook.

Underneath the image of Leonardo da Vinci, is the printed caption “LEONARDO,” and below the printed word are the words “Metropolitan Museum” handwritten by Moore in blue ink. The picture of the roadrunner underneath the photograph of Leonardo da Vinci contains a typed caption underneath, which says, “Saucy roadrunner at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum kept photographer Jim Blair running for two hours to capture its picture. *Geococcyx californianus* belongs to the cuckoo family,” and below the caption is Moore’s writing in blue ink which reads “A cuckoo” (Image 0002). These images are noteworthy because Leonardo da Vinci appears in the poem “An Expedient--Leonardo da Vinci’s--And a Query” (1964), which was drafted in this notebook. The roadrunner, or, “A cuckoo” as Moore calls it,

appears in the poem “The Mind, Intractable Thing” [1965], which is also composed in this notebook. The attention to detail in Moore’s collecting process carries over into her poetic process, and leads back to her mother’s urging her to pay close attention to exactly what she wanted to say, and provide detail and precision to her words (*Holding On*).

The poems drafted within the notebook are “Rescue with Yul Brynner,” “To Victor Hugo of My Crow Pluto,” “To a Giraffe,” “Baseball & Writing,” “Blue Bug,” “Arthur Mitchell,” “Charity Overcoming Envy,” “Avec Ardeur,” “An Expedient-- Leonardo da Vinci’s-- And a Query,” “Old Amusement Park,” “The Mind, Intractable Thing,” “The Camperdown Elm,” “Mercifully,” “Then the Ermine,” and it also includes notes for her study of Italian, likely because she was preparing for a trip to Italy. Certain pages contain drafts of multiple poems, though the majority include mostly a working through of one poem at a time. They are in chronological order of composition, and reflect when they were eventually published, with the earliest published poem written first, the next published poem drafted next, etc. Over the period in which this notebook was utilized by Moore, she suffered several strokes, which, in turn, made writing more difficult, especially after 1969.

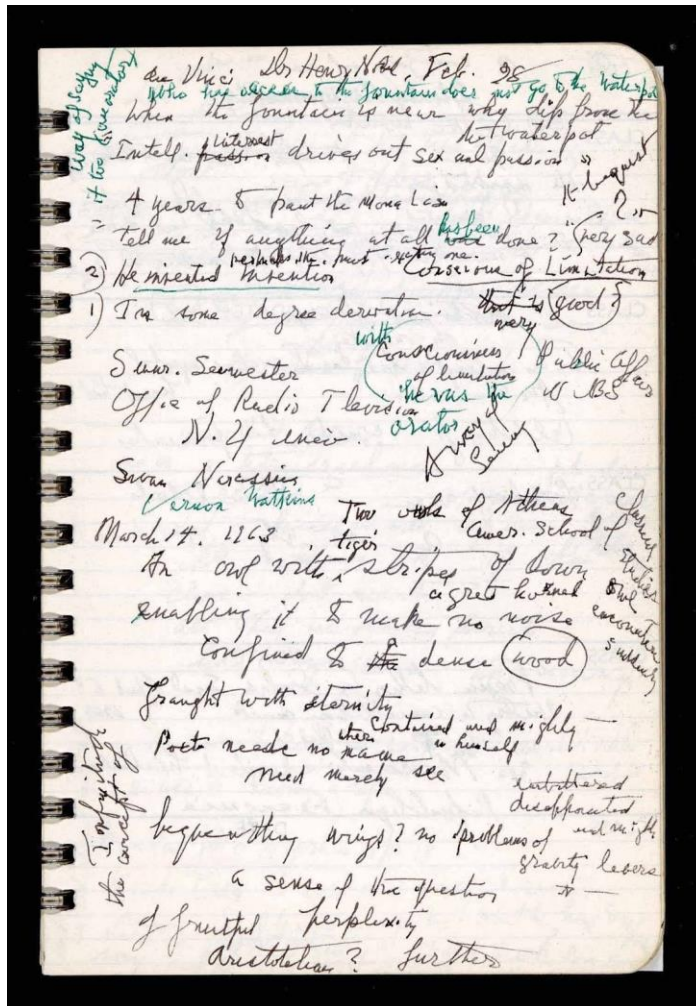


Figure 4: "Image 0045," a page in which  
 "An Expedient-- Leonardo Da Vinci's-- And A Query"  
 was being drafted.

The poem "An Expedient-- Leonardo da Vinci's-- And a Query" was published in *The New Yorker* magazine on April 18th, 1964, one of Moore's later poems which have been relatively undiscussed in terms of academic poetic analysis. "An Expedient" is drafted within Moore's notebook on five separate pages, whose corresponding transcribed documents are derived from Images 0045, 0046, 0049, 0051, 0052. Figure 3 is an example of one of these. The difficulty in deciphering Moore's intricate cursive was an obstacle in transcribing the material, as well as her tendency to write upwards and downwards across the page, as well as in the margins close to the spiral spine of the notebook. Moore also



sometimes wrote using more than one writing utensil, as in Image 0045 in which she used green ink, black ink, and pencil, and scattered the words across the page, making it difficult to make sure which ideas were connected, whether the changes in utensil were meant to indicate corrections, or to mean that they were simply written at a different time.

[IMAGENUMBER=0045—recto]

[39]

[poem][notes for An Expedient—Leo da V's--& a Query][poem]

[1] da Vinci Dr. Henry Noss Feb. 28  
[2] Who has access to the fountain does not go to the waterpot  
[3] when the fountain is near why dip from the  
[4] the waterpot  
[5] Intell.~~passion~~ interest drives out sexual passion  
[6]  
[7] 4 years to paint the Mona Lisa A bequest  
[8] "tell me if anything at all ~~was~~ has been done?" (very sad)  
[9] perhaps others must excite one.  
[10] 2) He invented invention Conscious of Limitation  
[11] 1) In some degree derivation ~~that is~~ good?  
[12] very  
[13] with  
[14] (consciousness)  
[15] Sunr. Semester (of limitations) Public Affairs  
[16] Office of Radio Television he was the NBS [?] [it was on NBC]  
[17] N.Y Univ orator  
[18]  
[19] Swan Narcissus  
[20] Vernon Watkins Two owls of Athens  
[21] March 14, 1963 Amer. School of Classical Studies  
[22] An owl with tiger stripes of down  
[23] a great horned owl / encounter / suddenly  
[24] enabling it to make no noise  
[25] Confined to ~~the~~ a dense wood  
[26] fraught with eternity  
[27] contained and mighty  
[28] there in himself  
[29] Poet needs no name  
[30] need merely see embittered  
[31] disappointed  
[32] bequeathing wings? No problems of and [unclear]mighty[/unclear]  
[33] gravity [unclear]levers[/unclear]  
[34] a sense of the question  
[35] of fruitful perplexity  
[36] Aristotelian? further  
[ver.37][desc]span 17-15, midpage[/desc] A way of [unclear]Seeing[/unclear]  
[ver.38][desc]span 34-29, in left margin[/desc]Infinitude / the concept of

[ver.39][desc]span 7-1, in top left margin[/desc]Way of saying / it too (an orator)

As the transcript above indicates, Moore's early drafts of "An Expedient" begin with writing "Who has access to the fountain does not go to the waterpot / when the fountain is near why dip from the waterpot / the waterpot" (Image 0045), all of which are derived from a line by Leonardo da Vinci that reads in full "He who has access to the fountain does not go to the waterpot," and refers to Leonardo's "...general antipathy to the common humanistic assumption that book learning could explain the secrets of nature..." (Bondanella et al., 313). He preferred direct analysis of the world. Characteristic of her drafting process, Moore plays around with the words in the phrase and rewrites the quote to say "when the fountain is near why dip from the / the waterpot."

Da Vinci was interesting to Moore for many reasons, including, the poem suggests, for their shared status as celibates. Celibacy is hinted at in the notebook when she writes that "Intell. ~~passion~~ interest drives out sexual passion." In the next line, Moore reflects that it took Da Vinci "4 years to paint the Mona Lisa"; she then describes this his most famous artistic achievement as "A bequest," or legacy. The next line introduces what is arguably the most important thematic element of both the drafted work and the published poem (discussed in depth below)--the tonal shift from explanation of Da Vinci's achievement and notoriety to the, as Moore puts it, "(very sad)," request from Da Vinci's last days: "tell me if anything at all ~~was~~ has been done?", a blunt expression of emotion which suggests that the tone of the poem is intended to be one that does not end on a positive note, but suggests a certain air of doubt on Da Vinci's part in regards to his own achievements, which while noteworthy and important, were not enough to their creator. Moore goes on to write "2) He invented invention / Conscious of Limitation / 1) In some degree derivation," only to detract from the sense of achievement with "...~~that is~~ good?". The line "tell me if anything at all has been done?" does make its way into the final line of the published poem. The quote reads in Da Vinci's native Italian as "Di mi se mai fu fatta alcuna cosa," or, in English, "Tell me if anything was ever finished" (Douglas). The note evolves to include the line in the published poem which reads "'Sad'... could not Leonardo / have said..." (CP 212). The phrase suggests Da Vinci's own



personal thoughts and feelings, which were written down towards the end of his life, in which he was reflecting on the art he created, the innovative and groundbreaking ideas he explored, the self-awareness of the lasting impact of his own accomplishments and his own status as a celebrity on his society at large. Moore was conducting this same self-evaluation of her own career as a celebrity and poet, therefore the two are undoubtedly related, and “An Expedient,” while certainly contributing to an archival collection of information that presents a collage of information on Da Vinci’s life, is also a collage of Moore’s own life, and Moore’s own deep feelings regarding death, mortality, and the concept of lifetime achievement and success as defined and measured by one’s own sense of self and self worth.

Regarding Moore’s drafting process, she begins here by writing down a main idea and then branching out to explore the nuances of the poem. In the transcribed document 0045 she writes “da Vinci Dr. Henry Noss Feb. 28” which was a documentation of one source of inspiration for the poem. Moore often wrote footnotes for her poems in order to correctly identify the source material, and as indicated within drafted page 0045, the lines are derived from a lecture on Da Vinci that Moore attended by Dr. Henry Noss on February 28th. The footnote reads: “Lines 31-36: *“Sad” . . . “Tell me if anything at all has been done?”* Dr. Henry W. Noss, Associate Professor of History, New York, University, quoting Leonardo da Vinci in a lecture.” (CP 295). Moore’s use of footnotes indicates the significance of the modern source material (the lecture by an academic), its connection with the ancient source material (the quote by Da Vinci), and its importance in the drafting process as inspiration. The “high brow” academic commentary and analysis provides cultural context, and gives further proof that her poetry is the result of information collage and synthesis.

On the latter half of transcribed page 0045, after the note on “Swan Narcissus,” published in The New Yorker magazine on March 2nd, 1963 (Watkins), Moore either seems to begin a new poem or to expand on the draft of “An Expedient” in a direction that she later abandoned. She writes “two owls of Athens,” referring to the owls of Athena, who is commonly seen as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Whether or not this was an expansion of “intell. ~~passion~~ interest drives out sexual passion,” is unclear,

however it would be consistent with Moore's penchant for incorporating animals into her poems as well as creating a space for mythological allusion to be integrated.

On the following page Moore experiments with titles, "title a category of one" (Image 0046). She expands on the point that Da Vinci had a "consciousness of limitation," as a further discussion about the limits of his (or any) mind, the limits of his own achievements, of his lifespan, etc. Moore then writes a personal note regarding her mental state, an expression which questions her own sanity and her own sense of self, "Am I a lunatic" and, though written unclearly, the words "head / lost" (Image 0046). Moore, though mostly reticent to openly discuss her own emotional state both in her writing and poetry, does so here in the midst of the drafts for "An Expedient." On page 0051 the discussion of both her and Da Vinci's own emotional state continues as she works through the draft. She writes "I / Must life not count for something? / Nothing at all has been done? / Alas / Everything attempted so far has been / crass? / So it seemed to him." And so, it could possibly be said, it seemed to Moore, who at the end of her life was contemplating her own achievements and success (0051). The intermingling of her own thoughts in these early drafts with what Da Vinci was possibly feeling during the later years of his life is important and should inform analysis of the published work as a whole. When taking both the published work and the transcribed drafts into account for the analysis, a fuller picture can be constructed and deeper understanding can be reached regarding trains of thought and left out details which might have revealed the obvious when it comes to the thematic nature of the poem. Often, what surrounds the draft and what might seem irrelevant to the poem is crucial when it comes to articulating deeper emotion and feeling. It is on page 0052 that the draft comes closer to the published form, without the overt expressions of emotion as in the earlier drafts, though clearly not devoid of emotion.

Like "An Expedient--Leonardo da Vinci's--And A Query," her earlier poem "Leonardo Da Vinci's" (1959) also includes representations and explorations of ascetic living and hermeticism, explored via the lens of her own life in which she renounced the traditionally expected role of marriage, family, and child rearing among women, and instead chose, in a revolutionary manner, to live as a celibate

woman, asserting her role as a feminist poet, subverting societal norms and tradition in regards to the lifestyle expected of women and what was perceived as valid sexuality. The core of the poem is steeped in emotion and contemplation, on one's life and one's choices to renounce sensual pleasures for the companionship of knowledge, as Moore writes "genius like a dear friend in his company / intimate w the stranger within" (Image 0051). Celibacy could fall underneath the umbrella term of "queerness" as defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Arckens). Though it is defined as abstaining from sexual activity, that in itself can also be regarded as a form of sexuality (Kahan). Moore has been regarded as a "queer" poet by a number of scholars, including Kahan, and queerness does not necessarily need to be limited to the discussion of sexuality. "Queer," when used to discuss Moore and her poetry, can describe her decision to subvert societal norms through writing about subjects which were not necessarily expected of women, choosing not to marry, being publicly celibate, and even dressing in what is traditionally considered a masculine silhouette--i.e., suit tops and a cape paired with a tricorn hat, which reflected her desire to challenge social structure and previously established gender norms ("Still Leafing"). At Bryn Mawr college, she was regarded by a classmate as "the convent type," but Moore disagreed--she preferred the more masculine term "Byronesque" (*Holding On*, 75). The discussion of celibacy and the later years of Moore will continue in the poetic analysis later on in this essay.

### **Background on Moore Pre-1951**

Marianne Craig Moore, modernist poet and 20th century literary celebrity, grew up in an unusual household, including her single mother, her older brother, and for about six years, her mother's gay partner. In the midst of first wave feminism, Moore was exposed to the changes occurring within her society both directly through her personal life and the people she knew and came to know, and indirectly through wider cultural changes. Born in the city of Kirkwood, Missouri, Moore was devoted to her

family, maintaining throughout her life an unusually close relationship with both her mother Mary Warner Moore and her brother, John Warner Moore. At a very early age, the siblings developed a game in which they referred to one another other using animal names, some of them derived from the children's story *The Wind in the Willows*, a story of friendship (Mole for Mary, Badger for Warner, and Rat for Marianne). They wrote with playful British accents, for example using "vey" for the word "very," or "kam" for the word "calm." The peculiarity of their personal and private language continued into Warner's name "Uncle Biter," Marianne's name "Uncle Fangs," with their mother referred to as an orphan Fawn that they both adopted. They continued this sort of wordplay with nicknames and private language into their old age (*Holding On*).

Moore's very Christian mother, Mary Warner Moore (daughter of a minister), left Moore's bible-obsessed father when Moore was in the womb after he went mad (he lived most of his life thereafter in an asylum and Moore never met him). Letters reveal that Mary fell in love with a woman named Mary Jackson Norcross, daughter of their family pastor, and the two lived together and raised Marianne and her brother, Warner, until the children left for college – Warner to Yale and then Marianne to Bryn Mawr in 1905. Mary Warner and Mary Norcross separated when Mary Norcross fell in love with another woman in 1911, two years after Marianne had graduated, but Norcross continued to correspond with Marianne (*Holding On*, 45,107). To the outside world and general public, Mary Warner Moore and Mary Norcross would have been considered to have been in what was called a "Boston Marriage," a term used to describe two single women who resided with one another and shared their lives (Rothblum). In that time, the outward assumption would have been that the relationship was not sexual in nature. Leavell writes of Mary Warner Moore and Mary Jackson Norcross's relationship in her biography of Marianne Moore in *Holding On Upside Down*:

Although sexual acts between members of the same sex had been acknowledged for centuries, few people in central Pennsylvania would have heard of homosexuality, much less of lesbianism, as psychological proclivities. The terms would not come into common

usage until the 1920s. Because the Victorian era assumed that only men felt sexual desire, women often held hands, kissed, and slept together. When Mary was visiting relatives in Chambersburg, Norcross did omit the usual *darlings* and *sweethearts* from her letters, but this is their only indication of their hiding anything except their most intimate relations from family and friends.

Although none of Mary's letters to Mary Norcross survive and Mary later destroyed most of those she received from Norcross, those that do survive leave little doubt about the physical nature of their relationship. The earliest one is a note Norcross wrote in March 1901. It laments their just missing each other one Sunday afternoon and says that Norcross cannot leave the house for a week while her cousin is visiting. 'I fear I shall devour you on Sunday to repay me for my long long wait,' the letter concluded. When the next weekend did arrive, the two women took a spontaneous trip to Atlantic City, leaving Marianne and Warner behind (*Holding On*, 46).

Moore began writing poetry seriously at Bryn Mawr college, where she wrote for the student literary magazine, *Tipyn O' Bob*, in her sophomore year, with her short story titled "Yorrocks" for which she received praise from upperclassmen. Moore was able to publish her work even though her piece was considered "'incoherent'" by her teacher, Miss Fullerton (*Holding On*, 76). Moore was severely homesick during her time at Bryn Mawr, and her first published short stories written for the *Tipyn O' Bob* explored themes of loneliness and homesickness among her protagonists, which directly related to her feelings regarding her time spent away from home attending college. Her characters experienced solitude as she did to a certain extent because of her physical distance from the people she was closest to, i.e. her family. Though the stories she wrote were not strictly autobiographical, they still were undoubtedly influenced by Moore's own intense personal feelings which preoccupied her mind, and she used her writings to express them to an audience. Over time, the protagonists of her short stories developed to be more autonomous and independent, which, likely, also reflected her coming into her own and

experiencing feelings of renewed independence during her time at Bryn Mawr and as she grew and matured into young adulthood (*Holding On*).

Moore's crush on Peggy James, daughter of philosopher William James and niece of novelist Henry James, was described avidly to her mother during her years at Bryn Mawr college and has been written about by Moore's biographer, Linda Leavell. Though Moore expresses her intense infatuation with Peggy in her letters home, James seemed less interested and there was no evidence of any romance after that particular instance within Moore's life. Elien Arckens writes that Moore adopted Henry James, a known celibate, as "her own model of identity" and a source of unequivocal admiration and affinity for Moore herself. Marianne Moore's future identification as a celibate woman could have been defined through her interest in Henry James, and her attraction for Peggy was most likely associated with her passion for writing and Peggy's familial relationship with the James family (*Holding On*, 80).

Though we may find it surprising today, at the turn of the twentieth century at colleges like Bryn Mawr "girl crushes" were common; upperclassmen would often choose an underclass girl (nicknamed "birds") to "crush" on ( *Holding On*, 79). As she approached her junior year of college and became an editor for the *Tipyn O' Bob*, Moore chose Peggy, a freshman at the time, as her "bird." So common were the presence of "girl crushes" and "birds" that the girls at Bryn Mawr organized and reported them in their "Bird News," a report which "deals with all college crushes and comes out daily on the bulletin board" (*Holding On*, 79), as Moore reported to her mother in a letter. Bryn Mawr President M. Carey Thomas also challenged traditional roles of women in society, both by getting a PhD herself (she had to go to Europe to do so, as no US school would admit her) and through her own personal relationships with women: she shared her campus home with two successive "intimate friends" (*Holding On*, 57).

After Moore graduated from college, she began to show interest in avant-garde artwork. That, compounded with her interest in collecting information through extensive reading and study, propelled her poetry into collage technique, and helped to form her distinctive literary style which continued to evolve throughout her career, even through her later poetry. In 1915, she began to publish in the avant-

garde literary magazines based in London, Chicago and New York (*Holding On*). Her interest in avant-garde visual art can be traced to her visit to Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery in New York in 1915, where she also met other members of the avant-garde scene. Through creating poetic collage, Moore is able not only to articulate her interest in an avant-garde style of expression, but also to explore the relationship between her poetry and visual art, which can also be expressed as an "assemblage" (*Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts*). Her interest in avant-garde visual art translated into innovative methods for poetry writing, demonstrated by her "assemblage" method of collaging quotations from diverse texts, her extensive use of ekphrasis, and in her unusual poetic subject matter, such as Pangolins or *Sports Illustrated* photographs. Her penchant for unconventional subjects sometimes confused her readers, but they also invited readers to pay close attention to figure out what was going on. Her subsequent move to Greenwich Village in New York City in 1918 placed her in a position to directly connect with other prominent poets of the time, including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, all of whom became Moore's good friends and collaborators over the ensuing decades.

Moore began publishing her poetry in 1915, after she stopped teaching at the Carlisle Indian School (located in her hometown, this was her second job out of college). Her 1915 poem "Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel" demonstrates an early use of one of her many poetic innovations, syllabic meter--since then imitated by many, Moore's was "the first serious use of it in English" (*Holding On*, 130). Three of her early poems were published in the April and May 1915 editions of the literary magazine *The Egoist*. Immediately, Moore's former classmate and fellow poet Hilda Doolittle, known professionally by her initials H.D., wrote to Moore to sing the poems' praises. Moore was soon recognized as a leading Modernist. She began to further develop her own poetic voice which, as Leavell puts it, demonstrates, "a 'passion for the particular.' Never does she long for a lover's embrace or for oneness with nature [as was the common mode of her day]. She comes to distrust unifying metaphor as much as she does romantic love, preferring instead observation, differentiation and the precise diction of science" (*Holding On*, 165). She began to fine-tune her use of line breaks and produce structured,

geometrical stanzas that joined with her use of syllabic verse to create her own free verse technique (*Holding On*, 193).

In 1921 Bryher and HD published a book of Moore's poems titled *Poems*. Three years later, she published *Observations* in 1924, which also contained altered and rewritten versions of her first published poems. From 1925-1929 she edited *The Dial* magazine. In 1935 she published *Selected Poems* with T.S. Eliot writing the introduction. Eliot writes of her work:

My conviction, for what it is worth, has remained unchanged for the last fourteen years: that Miss Moore's poems form part of the small body of durable poetry written in our time; of that small body of writings, among what passes for poetry, in which an original sensibility and alert intelligence and deep feeling have been engaged in maintaining the life of the English language (*Selected Poems*).

During WWII, Moore's content began to change and began to reflect on the war (Leavell 302). In this period, Moore's poems "What are Years?" "Four Quartz Crystal Clocks," and "Rigorists" were all rejected by *The New Yorker*, and her response was that apparently "'Technical virtuosity is not the essential nourishment we need at this time'" (Leavell 301). As Leavell describes, the years which would follow would introduce "...more accessible, more personal, and more political poets..." (Leavell 301), and Moore's poetry also changed. Moore's mother's health began to decline and she died on July 9th, 1947. Her mother's death had a profound impact on Moore's mental and physical health, she began to feel more and more lonely, and she saw little of her brother due to strained relations with her sister-in-law, Constance (*Holding On*, 334-335).

### **Moore Post 1951: An Aging Celebrity**

Things changed however in December 1951, when Moore published her *Collected Poems*, which went on in 1952 to receive the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize and the Bollingen Prize, and she began to attain nationwide fame. Her social environment began to change and she was seen mingling with



celebrities of high status, “including the mayor of New York, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Muhammad Ali” (“Still Leafing”). Her poetry--which had been distinctive for its collage-like style and its apparent impersonality, which was antithetical to the style of many of the other poets of the 1950s who preferred to express themselves via highly personal “confessions”--became more accessible. Moore began to draw her material from the realm of the people or the popular, and while that made her work popular with general readers, it became therefore less interesting to some more elitist poets and critics.

Her later poems keep the same characteristics of analysis and collection of information in the form of a poem, rather than offering a personal, autobiographical expression of personal feeling and experience--from the ekphrastic poem based around the avant-garde painting “The Magician’s Retreat” by René Magritte, to the discussion of Leonardo da Vinci in her poem “An Expedient- Leonardo da Vinci’s- And a Query.” However, rather than characterize her poetry as unemotional, unfeeling or not autobiographical in any sense of the word, it can be said that Moore’s later poetry though focused on unconventional subjects more clearly hints at her personal feelings, though not necessarily as overtly as in the confessional style.

The subject of Moore’s age is also a significant factor when it comes to analyzing her later poetry. Contemporary American society is concerned with maintaining a young and youthful state of appearance and mindset, but Moore’s presence as an older, celebrity woman poet shifted the perception of both women and especially older women, and suggested that writing poetry using both unconventional, little-used methods (such as her collage method and odd subject matter), could be successful in subverting society’s expectations of what was expected from women poets of her time (“Still Leafing”). Her poem “The Camperdown Elm” (1967), drafted in the same notebook as “An Expedient-- Leonardo Da Vinci’s-- And a Query,” has been described as a discussion of mortality which involves internally processing the concept of imminent death in a later stage of life. Scholar Elizabeth Gregory discusses the thematic scope of “The Camperdown Elm,” as follows, and this theme of mortality also resonates in “An Expedient”:

In our paradoxical world, both the admission to mortality and its apparent opposite, the unwillingness to accept mortality quietly, are equally scandalous. The elderly Moore survives as a vital poet and as a person by performing both her mortal frailty and her resistance to it for a wide audience of kindred (and equally mortal) spirits, drawn to her by the shared scandal of our impending death.... The poem reminds us we are all defined and sustained through the wider set of relationships—with people (living, dead and yet to come), with art, and with nature—that make our world. Not only must we save it, but only we can save it, together. (“Still Leafing,” 71).

Moore lived alone when “An Expedient” was published. She was growing older and though she was becoming more visible as a celebrity in her society, she was not immune to thoughts of her own impending death. Her own meditations on mortality after a lifetime of cultural achievement are explored in “An Expedient” chiefly through Leonardo da Vinci’s point of view. The poem explores her own personal experience of depression in her later years of life.

### **Celibacy, “Queerness” and the “Queer Archive”**

Because she never married or was known to be involved in any relationship, with a man or a woman, the question of Moore’s sexuality was long avoided by scholars, but it has lately begun to be discussed by some who do not seek to define or place a precise pinpoint on her sexual identity. For some, Moore’s status as “spinster” has suggested that she was a. gay and b. repressing her homosexual feelings. While either or both of these may have been true, it is impossible to know. Moore was publicly celibate, and in her time, premarital sex was still considered taboo not only for men but especially for women (though many modernists ignored those rules, Moore was a dedicated churchgoer and seems to have embraced them). Moore viewed chastity as proffering its own strength and as feminist in its own right. The woman’s choice to exercise chastity and to not adhere to the societal expectation to marry and procreate is her right, and Moore was simply exercising that right, even though the social sphere around her viewed her choice as odd or outdated. Moore’s choice to be publicly celibate was revolutionary--rejecting her contemporary society's expectation of coupling and marrying and having children. Benjamin

Kahan suggests that we may view celibacy as a form of sexuality in itself, and another form of queerness, since choosing not to engage in sexual activity seems unusual in the twentieth century context.

The decriminalization of homosexual contact only began in the year 1962 in the state of Illinois-- before that, being LGBTQ was still very much considered a crime (US-LGBT). However, this did not stop people from exercising their right to be themselves, including many of Moore's friends and colleagues (NYXT). Moore associated with other prominent literary figures of the time who were out gay people, including H.D., Bryher, novelist Glenway Wescott and his partner (and MOMA curator) Monroe Wheeler, heiress Louise Crane and her partner Victoria Kent, poet W.H. Auden, and American Ballet theater producer Lincoln Kirstein, to name only a few. This community of friends,, risky in and of itself, significantly reveals Moore's acceptance of the LGBTQ community during a time when association put one in harm's way.

Moore's poetry is and has been described as collage style work, similar to an assemblage of items (*Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts*) and as an archive of information or word exhibit, for both its references and for its value as a work of art in itself (Arckens). Critic Charles Tomlinson describes Marianne Moore's poetry as built through "collage," which is displayed both in her notetaking and in the synthesis of ideas and quotations from other texts in her published work (Tomlinson, 198-199). Her later works also demonstrate a characteristic which is "a form of collecting" (Berry). Catherine Paul writes that "Moore believes that animals, texts, and objects should be put to some kind of active use, 'digested' by the viewer or reader, rather than merely preserved" (Berry, 20). This claim is supported by evidence from the notebooks she kept across her lifetime. In Moore's acceptance speech for her award of the National Medal for Literature in 1968, she emphasized that "My writing is the result of books I have read and of persons I have known" (*Holding On* 381). What Elien Arckens calls Moore's "queer archive" is an archive personal to the poet, and "[c]onsequently... becomes an autobiographical memoir" (Arckens 112). Though Arckens argues that the archive present in Moore's poetry is impersonal and not autobiographical, I maintain that Moore's poetry does contain elements of intimate feeling which can be

seen within “An Expedient.” These archives are “queer” in a sense that they are not limited by tradition (as Moore’s modernist qualities also suggest); instead their “queerness” is enhanced by their unusual subject matter and by the ingenuity with which the syntax and poetics are engineered, through unique use of multiple perspectives and collective, collage-like style. The creation of the queer archive and the presence of queer format within Moore’s poetry could reflect her rejection of aspects of the aesthetic tradition (through her Modernism) but also her rejection of both hetero- and homo-normative aspects of sexuality. Leavell claims that “Moore resisted not just heterosexuality but the homo-/heterosexual binary itself,” through her own status as a publicly celibate woman (“Celibacy”). In our contemporary society we find that celibacy is almost unheard of as a way of life, or, if a person is celibate, that it must be either involuntary or there must be something wrong with their personality or psyche in some way. However, Moore saw her celibacy as the complete and total opposite; as she put it in a 1958 essay: "What of chastity? It confers a particular strength" (*Complete Prose*, 503). Scholar Benjamin Kahan also contends that celibacy is not to be frowned upon as abnormal, and is actually a completely valid type of sexuality. Kahan adds to the dialogue thus: “Moore reanimates ... Progressive Era celibacy as a political identity in the 1950s and 1960s, when it no longer seems viable, in order to rejuvenate socially, sexually, and temporally abject spinsters” (Kahan 514).

### **Ekphrasis - A History and Presence within Moore’s Work**

Moore’s use of ekphrasis as a literary device is another unusual aspect of her work. Ekphrasis presents a distinct and personal impression of a work of art or visual piece by the writer of the ekphrasis (Zeitlen) and has had extensive and pervasive use across literary history: for instance, it was famously used by Homer in *The Iliad* in his description of the shield of Achilles, and by Keats in his “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” It is known for “...involving aesthetic considerations, theories of vision, modes of viewing, mental impressions, and the complex relationships between word and image,” and can be described as its own genre (Zeitlen). Its origins lie in ancient Greece and Rome, in which it was used as a technical term

...mainly for the training of orators and epideictic speech ... Whether defined as a rhetorical exercise, a literary genre (or mode), a narrative digression, a species of description, or a poetic (even metapoetic or meta-representational) technique, the properties associated with ancient ekphrasis ... are the qualities of *enargeia* (vividness), *sapheneia* (clarity), and *phantasia* (mental image), which, taken together, aim to turn listeners (or readers) into viewers and to evoke an emotional response through an appeal to the immediacy of an imagined presence. (Zeitlen)

Moore's use of ekphrasis is pervasive throughout her works, and in terms of the transcribed notebook for this project, ekphrasis was used as a literary device in "The Camperdown Elm"--in reference to Asher Brown Durand's painting "Kindred Spirits" ("Still Leafing"); "Old Amusement Park" with reference to a postcard photo; in "The Magician's Retreat" through description of Rene Magritte's painting "Empire of Light," and in "Rescue with Yul Brynner" through allusion to a photograph in which actor Yul Brynner is greeting children as the Appointed Special Consultant to the United States High Commissioner for Refugees, from 1959-1960 (NCP 243). Moore's 1959 poem "Leonardo da Vinci's," though not drafted within this notebook, is an ekphrasis of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "Saint Jerome in the Wilderness" and will be explored here because of its direct connection and relevance to "An Expedient."

The concept of ekphrasis, for Moore, does not have to be limited to works of art, but can also be extended to other media, such as the photo in *Sports Illustrated* magazine cited in the poem "Blue Bug." "The scope for ekphrastic focus is vast: shields, urns, cups, statues, frescoes, tapestries, cartoons, paintings, photographs, movies, bits of buildings, whole buildings, ruins of buildings" (Cunningham), and the scope only widens in Moore's poems. Moore's choice to use popular photographs as subjects extended the definition of the ekphrastic and gave it a contemporary relevance that was not previously explored in poetry before. Not only does the ekphrastic description of the *Sports Illustrated* page extend the relevance of the use of popular photographs as viable sources of ekphrastic content, but it also captures the essence of observing that particular photograph, through Moore's own particular perspective,

at that particular moment in time. Moore extends her analysis and observation to multiple perspectives within the realm of the poem, so that the mention of the *Sports Illustrated* photograph in the epigraph “marks our access to this pony as at several removes: Readers (us) / Moore (poet) / Moore (reader of SI) / McAvoy (photographer) / Williams (owner, who is pictured in *Sports Illustrated* looking at the ponies) / and then Blue Bug,” (“Blue Bug”). The use of ekphrasis in Moore’s poetry adds multifaceted dimensions to the narrative element of each poem via the numerous perspectives which are provided. There is a similarity to the construction of the poem “Blue Bug” within “An Expedient,” which is the presence of a number of perspectives that can be named within the realm of the poem--that of the narrator, of Da Vinci, and of a combined perspective which the poem employs via the combination of paraphrased words and direct quotes taken from Da Vinci’s own sourced notebooks.

### **On the Poems**

Two poems--“An Expedient-- Leonardo da Vinci’s-- And A Query,” and “Leonardo da Vinci’s” (an ekphrasis da Vinci’s unfinished painting “Saint Jerome in the Wilderness”) contribute to Moore’s queer archive and seek to re-typify their genre and exhibit a queer history through their seldom explored literary subject matter. The subjects of these poems--Da Vinci and Saint Jerome (347-420 AD)--both renounced physical sexuality in favor of an ascetic style of living to further their own cultural advancements, leaving a lasting impact on human history. Moore chose them as the subjects of these poems to reflect on her own choice to remain celibate and in so doing she contributes to a dialogue over little-discussed ways of living, within a poetic context. Leonardo da Vinci made great contributions to the history of arts and sciences through his artwork, including drawings and studies of the human body, while Saint Jerome made a major contribution to the religious lives of many through his Vulgate, a translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. Moore’s tendency to meticulously archive and collect information for presentation within her poems can be clearly seen within both poems.

Two other poems written earlier on in Moore’s writing career, “The Pangolin” (1936) and “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” (1924) also feature Leonardo da Vinci and Saint Jerome and can be

connected to Moore's later work. Saint Jerome appears in "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns," published in her first book of poetry *Observations*. Of lions she writes, "A puzzle to the hunters is this haughtiest of beasts, / to be distinguished from those born without a horn, / in use like Saint Jerome's tame lion, as domestics" (*Observations*, 93). Moore's early reference to Saint Jerome indicates that her reflection on him spanned many years, while also reflecting her early interest in ekphrastic description. Her interest in the relationship between humans and animals is also evident, and is also indicative of Moore's frequent use of animal allusions within her works, be they fictional like the unicorn or very real as the lion is. Moore's early interest in Da Vinci is also noted in her early allusions to him in the poem "The Pangolin." The 1936 poem is an extensive examination and articulation of the armored animal the pangolin, which earlier in the poem is described as

This near artichoke  
with head and legs and grit-equipped giz-  
zard, the night miniature artist-  
engineer, is        Leonardo's  
indubitable son?        (*New Collected Poems*, 141)

The animal described as Leonardo's progeny is an odd connection and is even more difficult to decipher through Moore's presentation of the idea in the form of a question, almost as if she thinks it odd or questionable, rather than indubitable. However, the connection she makes in her thought process is clear in the poem when she begins with calling the pangolin a "...night miniature artist-engineer," and she makes the leap to Da Vinci, an artist-engineer. The leap is manifested through the use of the large space between the words "is" and "Leonardo's," and though the connection is a leap, it still lands, and the poem begins to describe not only the animal, but the shared characteristics between the animal and Da Vinci, described as "solitary," "non aggressive," and "a monk."

At the time of "An Expedient"'s composition, Moore had already published her own translation into English of *The Fables of La Fontaine*, originally written by the French poet Jean de la Fontaine. Her own translations of these animal fables were met with mixed reaction: they were described as "very bad,"

by critic Arthur Mizener (*CRMM*, 186), but as full of “normal excellence” by Hugh Kenner (*CRMM*, 191). Though they were best sellers in their day, they are out of print today. However, the existence of Moore’s translation of *The Fables* remains important, due to the presence of naturalistic content in the stories--W. H. Auden recommended that Moore undertake the work due to her love of animal stories. The stories themselves connect to her early childhood nicknames “Rat” and “Willow,” which, along with her affinity for the children’s tale *The Wind in the Willows*, can be connected to the presence of a paraphrased fable about the willow tree by da Vinci within “An Expedient.” The connection between her translation of *The Fables of La Fontaine*, her own personal nickname “Willow” and the presence of the willow fable suggests both that in writing this poem Moore was collecting and collaging information, and that she could also have been thinking about her own past in the form of her childhood stories and family use of nicknames and her own reality at the time, combined with her own thoughts and interests in Leonardo da Vinci and reflection on his life. Her musings over the past and present in the drafts of the poem within her notebook would then become “An Expedient,” which becomes its own story as well as a collection of ideas which related to her own personal life.

At first glance, “An Expedient” seems disjointed, proffering an apparently haphazard insertion of quotes that can be perceived as aimless or confusing to the reader unfamiliar with Moore’s use of intertextual references and subtexts. Historically, Moore’s poems have been difficult in this regard--she creates a labyrinth of wordplay and lyricism which may be off-putting to some readers but also demands to be scrutinized and examined, a reflection of her approach to the world around her. Her penchant for detail and dedication to analysis, examination and collection is evident in both her writing method and her approach, which has the same effect on the reader when it comes to deriving not just meaning but context within the poem. The seemingly disjointed quotes create a distinct word mosaic emblematic of Moore’s poetic commentary on culturally and historically relevant materials. “An Expedient” explores not only Da Vinci as a subject, but also writings from his personal notebooks, an important source for his ideas and life, and it explores themes of the depression that he experienced later on in his life.



## **An Expedient-- Leonardo Da Vinci's-- And a Query**

It was patience

protecting the soul as clothing the body  
from cold, so that "great wrongs  
were powerless to vex"--  
and problems that seemed to perplex  
him bore fruit, memory  
making past present--  
like "the grasp of the gourd,  
sure and firm."

"None too dull to  
be able to do one thing well. Unworthy  
of praise, an orator  
who knows only one word,  
lacking variety." Height deterred  
from his verdure, any  
polecat or snake that  
might have burdened his vine:  
it kept them away.

With a passion,  
he drew flowers, acorns, rocks--intensively,  
like Giotto, made Nature  
the test, imitation--  
Rome's taint-- did not taint what he'd done.  
He saw as treachery  
the all-in-one-mold.  
Peerless, venerated  
by all, he succumbed

to dejection. Could not

the Leda with face matchless minutely--  
have lightened the blow?  
“Sad”... Could not Leonardo  
have said, “I agree; proof refutes me.  
If all is mobility,  
mathematics won’t do”:  
instead of, “Tell me if anything  
at all has been done?”

(CP212)

Towards the end of his life, Da Vinci suffered illness and depression, and his feelings are manifested through the slightly paraphrased quote in the final lines of “An Expedient,” “Tell me if anything / at all has been done?” Moore’s citation of this particular quote suggests her own questions regarding her lifetime of achievement--apparently she wondered if anything she accomplished was what she meant to have accomplished, if what she has amounted to is enough, and if it is “finished” or complete through her own definition of success. Moore has Da Vinci as a point of reference for her own emotions while at the same time suggesting similarities between their shared depression and reflection over their own lives, and lifestyles as ascetics and celibates to the audience’s attention.

The first quotation within the published poem is the phrase “great wrongs were powerless to vex-  
-.” The quotations and cross references are noticeable throughout the poem and create a multi-dimensional perspective which has also been seen in prior Moore poems. In this poem, the perspective can be marked as that of a narrator, of the willow in Da Vinci’s fable, and of Da Vinci through multiple parts of his life, as manifested through the varying quotations presented. Moore chooses not to insert direct quotations of Da Vinci’s musings (in translation), but rather to paraphrase them. The paraphrasing creates a new perspective, a dual, shared perspective by the narrator and Da Vinci himself, perhaps indicating a shared feeling, shared mindset or shared thinking in terms of what is being reflected on within the poem. The subject matter being explored within the poem is contemplation of one’s life and

achievements through the self-awareness that one's life is nearing the end--a sentiment Moore and Da Vinci both experienced.

The first four lines of "An Expedient" tell us that "It was patience/ protecting the soul as clothing the body/ from cold, so that 'great wrongs were powerless to vex' --." The paraphrasing in the first four lines is taken from Da Vinci's own personal writings in one of his many notebooks. The full quote is, "Patience serves as a protection against wrongs as clothes do against cold. For if you put on more clothes as the cold increases, it will have no power to hurt you. So in like manner you must grow in patience when you meet with great wrongs, and they will then be powerless to vex your mind" (Hall). While it is evident that the entirety of Da Vinci's quote is paraphrased within the poem, only part of the phrase is placed within quotation marks. Even though the source is from a distant past, the narrator taking over his words suggests a certain identification with Da Vinci's feelings. The melding of words produces a shared feeling and shared idea in which Moore's mind was preoccupied regarding her own life and Da Vinci's life. Because celibacy does not indicate the absence of sexuality, Moore could be indicating that the "patience" she is discussing is that which helps her to not give into temptation- i.e. sexual temptations.

However, though the patience exercised could refer to sexual temptations, it could refer to a variety of problems. The poem moves on to say that "...problems that seemed to perplex/ him bore fruit, memory/ making past present-- like 'the grasp of the gourd,/ sure and firm." The reference to the gourd refers to Da Vinci's own fable about a willow tree (harking back to Moore's affection for *The Wind in the Willows*) (NCP 247). "Problems that seemed to perplex," could refer to a variety of issues not just referring to other people-- maybe to the self, or to a larger intellectual concern. The patience which is practiced can be with others, but also to the self, referring to solving a larger intellectual problem or concern that may seem daunting. However, though they "perplex", they also "bear fruit," the fruits of intellectual labor, and likewise they create "memory / making past present," referring to using prior knowledge to advance knowledge into the future. Both Da Vinci and Moore were creatives, though their

disciplines were wildly different, shared a “passion” for their creations, with Da Vinci drawing “flowers, acorns, rocks-- intensively / like Giotto,” (NCP 247).

Regarding the reference to Da Vinci’s fable, the willow asks a magpie to plant gourd seeds next to her because she thinks they will be less likely to interfere with her growth than other plants. When the seeds begin to sprout, she is proved wrong, because the gourd plants also overtake her and cause the willow to be ripped out from the earth by the wind after it has already been weakened. Eventually, the willow is overtaken by the seeds that were present within the gourd (“1279”). Presenting the fable in this context adds to the connections that can be made between Da Vinci and Moore, while also going back in time to both when the fable was written and back to Moore’s childhood. The actual context of the fable, a willow, which could be represented by Moore, being overtaken by other plants could symbolize the overtaking of ideas on the self, or thinking too much. Overthinking to the point where the fruits of your labor consume you and destroy you is what seems to be hinted at with the fable incorporation.

Though throughout his life Da Vinci studied the human form, constructing detailed images and diagrams to help further the study of human anatomy and reproductive cycle, there has been discussion among scholars suggesting that Leonardo (like Moore) rejected physical sexuality in all forms, be it homosexual or heterosexual. In one inscription on an anatomical plate, Leonardo writes

The sexual act and the members employed therein are so repulsive, that if it were not for the beauty of the faces and the adornments of the actors and the pent-up impulse, nature would lose the human species (Gilman).

Though Da Vinci’s own personal sexual preference was never documented, he rejected all forms of physical sexuality and never married nor had any children. Moore here explores another historical subject who seems to have felt the same way as she did about physical expressions of sexuality. Through reference to his “patience,” Moore seems to emphasize that Da Vinci’s choice to curb his sexual desires in favor of his own personal intellectual pursuits resulted in the creation of innovative machines and great

artwork, like the “Mona Lisa,” “The Last Supper,” and the unfinished work “Saint Jerome in the Wilderness” that Moore discusses in another poem of this period. Da Vinci's choice to remain celibate and its discussion within “An Expedient,” along with the discussion of his own cultural achievements, contributes to Moore’s “queer archive.” At the time of “An Expedient” (1964) Moore was 77 and lived alone, after living with her mother up until her death in 1947. By this time, Moore had suffered several strokes and was far from being in good health. But nonetheless, she was still publishing poems in *The New Yorker* magazine and was still recognized as a celebrity among her literary peers and the general public (*Holding On*). Another parallel can be made through the lives of Da Vinci and of Moore, since both seemed to wrestle with a depression which began its onset later on in their life, though Moore seems to give in to hers less than did Da Vinci. In the final lines of the poem Moore’s use of Da Vinci as a subject extends her thoughts and places them in context with the past. Though she does not indicate an autobiographical lean within the poem itself, it is in the creation of the intertextual dialogue that we can gain insight into what Moore’s mind was occupied with. The reference to the willow represents her early childhood fascination with *The Wind in the Willows*, while at the same time referencing her translations of *The Fables of La Fontaine*, and directly connecting with Da Vinci’s own interest in fables. Moore’s own name for herself, Willow, could indicate that within the realm of the poem she is observing herself in the third person.

The words “polecat” and “snake” both appear in da Vinci’s fable -- the Willow promises the Magpie not to let these predators into the tree near his nest. Both terms may refer to both animals and unsavory people, within the context of the poem. In the poem the quote suggests the theme of solitude, of the willow wanting to keep away other animals, “...height deterred from his verdure, any / polecat or snake that / might have burdened his vine: / it kept them away.” She writes in the drafted material “For him genius like a dear friend in his company / spreading ever wider” (Notebook, Image 0052), a line eventually omitted from the published poem. The “self as one’s own best partner” is a difficult concept to ponder, and for some, to accept as the truth as Moore did. Our contemporary society is flooded with

conceptions of idealized love-- in television, in music, in romance novels and in film. Very rarely is solitude or even celibacy discussed, if at all, in the realm of literature or mass media. Moore does not yearn or long for the embrace of a man in this poem, not in any of her poems for that matter-- instead, she writes of a different kind of love, though not overtly. Her love of knowledge, of genius, of solitary living as a means to intellectual advancement is expressed instead. She chooses Leonardo as a figure of her ideal mode of living, and explores this through the use of the quotations, through the use of her own paraphrasing and of her own narration within the poem, "With a passion, / he drew flowers, acorns, rocks-- intensively, / like Giotto..." (NCP 247), though he was "peerless," he was "venerated by all," but still, he "succumbed to dejection," and the dejection is what Moore does not choose to wallow in. Though it is something she was still preoccupied with, and it can be seen in the poetry drafts that her thoughts were dealing with difficult emotions reminiscent of a depression, she does not choose to dwell on it and does not fully live in the thoughts which drag her into despair (NCP 247).

Moore describes the life of the willow, and how its "Height deterred/ from his verdure, / any polecat or snake," personifying the tree and describing its relationship with the outside world. The theme of deterring outside forces as harmful or a nuisance is evident through the double meanings of animals with people. The choice to be celibate rather than pursue a marriage or a family in exchange for study and immersion in knowledge is articulated through these connections. It can be ascertained that the interweaving of information mimics the weaving and connections being made within the poem concerning Moore's intellectual interests, her past, and her sentiments. The cross references to her own third person name "Willow" and the reference to the main character of the willow in the fable could indicate that Moore sees herself as the willow who fends off people with insidious intentions ("1279"). Within the fable, the willow, dissatisfied by the rate and height by which her branches were growing towards the sky, composed herself and chose to spend her time and efforts solely on her imagination and creativity, as Moore did when she chose to devote herself to her literary life, her editing position at *The Dial* magazine, and furthering her own personal knowledge through first attending college as so few

women did during her time, and then extending that to a lifelong effort of constantly learning, absorbing new information, creating new poems and spending months rewriting them, taking notes and collecting the information within her notebooks, and in the 1960s, watching the educational TV show “The Sunrise Semester,” as noted in the draft of Image 0045 above. Though she had many friends and was writing poetry until strokes incapacitated her in 1970, up to that point she lived alone after her mother’s death (with daily visits with her housekeeper Gladys Berry and when needed from nurses), and she certainly thought and reflected on solitude and the end of her life. However, these reflections did not end on a sorrowful note, but rather, quite the opposite, as the poem affirms.

Moore inserts a bit of imaginary dialogue at the end: “Could not Leonardo / have said, ‘I agree; proof refutes me. / If all is mobility, / mathematics won’t do.’” This is explained in the note as drawing on an explanation by Sir Kenneth Clark in *Leonardo da Vinci: An Account of His Development as an Artist* that tells us that the cause of Leonardo’s depression lay in his discovery of “Continuous energy. If everything was continuous in movement it could not be controlled by mathematics in which Leonardo had placed his faith.” It could be said that Moore is questioning why Da Vinci would choose to become dejected in the fact that his faith in mathematics was put to the test. She wonders if he could instead have thought that moving on from his feelings of dejection were possible, rather than dwelling on them and continuing to allow them to control his mental state.

Da Vinci’s unfinished oil painting titled “St. Jerome in the Wilderness” was painted in 1482. Saint Jerome (347 - 420 AD) would have been considered an ancient figure even in Da Vinci’s day. Though the painting itself is unfinished, the outline of Saint Jerome, his lion and the construction of the wilderness background are visible, and they are on display in the Vatican Museum in Rome. Though “Leonardo Da Vinci’s” was published in 1959 and the drafts are not present within the notebook as transcribed for this project, the later poem clearly builds on this precursor and is essential in discussing Moore’s exploration of celibate figures in her work.



Figure 5: “Saint Jerome in the Wilderness”, by Leonardo Da Vinci, c. 1482.

Tempera and oil on walnut panel.

In his own search for repentance and peace, Saint Jerome made the choice to travel to the Syrian desert for four years in order to purify “...his soul through physical suffering” (“Saint Jerome in the Wilderness” [Getty Museum]). The draft of “Expedient” contains a line that might describe him, as “Confined to a dense wood/ fraught with eternity / contained and mighty” (Image 0045), alluding to both the artistic depiction of him within the woods or wilderness, and the title of Da Vinci’s work. Jerome’s hermetic and ascetic style of living is also attributed to the description of the purification of his soul through personal sacrifice manifested as physical suffering, along with the physical expression of agony in his face within the painting. The painting itself, a mix of neutrals and browns, has the visible picture of the Saint and just the outline of the roaring lion in the bottom right corner, with a significant portion of



the background filled in. In his prostrated stance, and in the emptiness of its manifestation, the hollowness of the potential beauty of the work which is now centuries old, evokes a dejected, deeply melancholic mood and an unusual choice to write an ekphrasis of, especially considering that many of Da Vinci's finished works are considered masterpieces of fine art, and also contain religious themes, which Moore could have chosen to write about based on her her own religious devotion-- The Last Supper, and The Virgin and Child with St. Anne, to name only a few. Herself a devout Presbyterian, Moore held that "...it was not possible to live without religious faith" (Letter to Miss Gray, November 5, 1935). She describes the unfinished work of the painting as a story to be told, the verse structured like a narrative, similar to the narrative structure used within *The Fables of La Fontaine*.

### **Leonardo Da Vinci's**

Saint Jerome and his lion  
in that hermitage  
of walls half gone,  
share sanctuary for a sage--  
joint-frame for impassioned ingenious  
Jerome versed in language--  
and for a lion like on on the skin of which  
Hercules's club made no impression.

The beast, received as a guest,  
although some monks fled--  
with its paw dressed  
that a desert thorn had made red--  
stayed as guard of the monastery ass...  
which vanished, having fed  
its guard, Jerome assumed. The guest then, like an ass,  
was made to carry wood and did not resist,  
but before long, recognized

the ass and consigned  
 its terrorized  
 thieves' whole camel-train to chagrined  
 Saint Jerome. The vindicated beast and  
 saint somehow became twinned;  
 and now, since they behaved and also looked alike;  
 their lionship seems officialized.

Pacific yet passionate--  
 for if not both, how  
 could he be great?  
 Jerome-- reduced by what he'd been through--  
 with tapering waist no matter what he ate,  
 left us the Vulgate. That in *Leo*,  
 the Nile's rise grew food checking famine,  
 made lion's-mouth fountains appropriate,  
 if not universally,  
 at least not obscure.  
 And here, though hardly a summary, astronomy,  
 or pale paint makes the golden pair  
 in Leonardo da Vinci's sketch seem  
 sun-dyed. Blaze on, picture,  
 saint, beast; and Lion Haile Selassie, with household  
 lions as symbol of sovereignty.

(CP 201-202)

Both poems reflect on monasticism, asceticism and hermetic lifestyles from the perspective of  
 revered historical figures. Both Da Vinci and Saint Jerome renounced sensual pleasures to focus on  
 scholarly pursuits, both of which contributed significantly to the advancement of human knowledge and  
 understanding of both the physical and nonphysical. The two also fit within the realm of queerness in  
 terms of Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition, and allow for the realm of "queerness" to be expanded to

include those who renounce physical sexuality, namely, those who choose to live a celibate life. Moore purposefully explores these subjects in order to offer multiple perspectives about those who choose celibacy, and presents these subjects to the reader for further analysis and for understanding the lives of celibate individuals. Both poems also portray ascetic living as a life that is difficult, at times filled by suffering and despair, and a connection can be made between the unfinished painting and Leonardo Da Vinci's own quote which is paraphrased at the end of "An Expedient-" "Tell me if anything was ever finished."

"Leonardo Da Vinci's" begins with the presentation of a "hermitage" as the poem's thematic focal point. The poem can be read as its own narrative, as well as an exploration of the incomplete and unfinished painting, when Moore says "walls half gone." However, though the painting is unfinished, the space is still regarded as "sanctuary for a sage," a shelter for the "impassioned ingenious / Jerome." "Impassioned" and "ingenious" are terms that can be used to describe the renowned poet Moore, who also subscribed to a hermit-like lifestyle, the same kind of passionate genius that is explored here in "Leonardo Da Vinci's." Moore presents an ascetic mode of living as one of hardship and suffering, since Jerome is portrayed as "--reduced by what he'd been through-- / with tapering waist no matter what he ate," articulating the sense of sacrifice which comes with creating such monumental advances and contributions to society. Moore herself sacrificed much in order to attain the achievements she did--she lived in solitude and dedicated her life to her poetry and to her craft, to reading extensively about her subjects and documenting details meticulously in her notebooks. Her own "impassioned ingenious" is manifested through her extensive body of work which propelled her into celebrity, and led her to become a renowned cultural figure, so famous that stamps were made of her portrait ("Stamps, Money, Pop Culture and Marianne Moore").

This poem like so many Moore poems incorporates animals, including both the lion and an ass. As in a fable, this lion (described with reference to the mythical Nemean lion killed by Hercules in the first of his twelve labors decreed by King Eurystheus) behaves like a human. When Jerome helps the lion

by pulling out a thorn, it then helps Jerome out by restraining its animal appetites. Saint Jerome and the Lion foster a friendship within the context of the poem, “The vindicated beast and / Saint somehow became twinned.” Their friendship merges them to make the two one and the same- “and now, since they behaved and also looked alike; / their lionship seems officialized,” asserting a sense of duality between both the human and animal. Saint Jerome and his lion are both symbols of strength and solidarity in the face of adversity. Though Jerome was “reduced by what he’d been through,” he still triumphed and “Left us the Vulgate,” a marked achievement for Christianity. In writing of Saint Jerome Moore both rejects and accepts the traditional--she doesn’t write of love and marriage but explores an alternative set of story lines, strength in the face of adversity, the relationship between humanity and their companion animals, and the relationship between humanity and religious devotion.

The role of the lion in the story of Saint Jerome ends with the re-presentation of the lion in the present (of the poem) as also a figure of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (who was perceived as a god by the Rastafari movement which emerged in Jamaica in the 1930’s), which takes the lion of Judah as its “symbol of sovereignty.” (Moore examines not only Saint Jerome and the Lion, but the relationship between lions and the geography of the area throughout history, making references to the “Nile’s rise,” and exploring how the symbol of the lion has also been explored throughout a variety of cultural contexts.) The end of the poem marks a call to action for both the figure of the lion, Saint Jerome, and the painting itself. The narrator urges “Blaze on,” as though she were telling them to live on, to thrive, to be remembered, etc.

## **Conclusion**

In analyzing the poem “An Expedient” in conjunction with its early draft, valuable insight and perspective can be obtained regarding the crucial emotional themes written within its published form. While only one poem which was within the drafted notebook which was transcribed is present in the analysis of this thesis (“An Expedient”), important connections can be made in terms of Moore’s own personal interest in Da Vinci as a subject across multiple facets and dimensions--as a celibate and

renowned historical figure. Her interest in Da Vinci was not restricted to just “An Expedient,” he was present in other poems as well: in the form of exploring another celibate figure who contributed one of the most vital translated documents ever written, the Vulgate; in the form of ekphrastic expression as is seen within “Leonardo Da Vinci’s”; and in his comparison to a pangolin in her early poem “The Pangolin.” The exploration of the two celibate figures who endured suffering directly relates to her own personal life as a celibate woman, who while she also endured personal troubles, contributed much to the history of modernist poetry and did not let this suffering consume her. Moore’s references to celibate subjects in her work reflect her own status as a celibate woman and are indicative of her personal thoughts and feelings regarding her status later on in her career. The discussion of celibate figures within her poetry contributes to a discussion of queer subjects within poetry, as defined by the limitless possibilities that one’s own personal sexuality can manifest, which, in Moore’s case, was in her celibacy.

Reading Moore’s drafts allows for a more complete picture on the background thought and inspiration behind the poems themselves. In obtaining valuable commentary and notes from the poetry drafts, a more thorough understanding and more accurate interpretation can be made regarding the meaning of the poem and the background and mental state of the poet. Within “An Expedient,” Moore’s depression can be noted through certain articulations of emotion surrounding the drafts of the poetry. The figure of Saint Jerome as a suffering celibate figure who provided the Vulgate to humanity is in direct relation to Moore’s own interests in celibacy, in religious figures as a Presbyterian, and also in understanding the feelings which come with a solitary, ascetic manner of living, and having solitude foster mental growth and intellectual advancement. Moore’s own dedication to fostering her own intellectual growth in her solitary lifestyle is evident in these poems, and is evident in her many notebooks. As Moore pushed the boundaries of what a poem could be, she also pushed for greater understanding of little written-of figures, at least within a poetic context, to foster advancement for herself and for poetry as it continued to evolve and continues to evolve into the 21st century.

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