Catachrestic Divergence: in Marianne Moore's "The Monkey Puzzle"

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ABSTRACT

"The Monkey Puzzle" is one of the most interesting as well as intimidatingly complex poems of Marianne Moore. It envelops Moore's attitude as an objectivist poet moving towards the relationship between language and the world. The scarce critical attention it has received does not reflect the high status it should have in Moore's oeuvre. The present paper builds on the body of research that does exist, and from there moves on to a detailed analysis of the poem in an attempt to show how a catachrestic divergence from significatory processes is at work all throughout this poem. The reinterpretation of the poem through a focus on its catachrestic bounciness will not only shed light on some of its most complex imagery, but will also show how a philosophical filament runs through the whole poem and invites the readers to trespass the boundaries of the significatory walls drawn around our imagination.

Introduction

Bonnie Costello once commented that Moore's definition of wealth, "to relinquish what one would keep," is present in her own language in the form of a continual resistance to available forms.[1] Such a defiant attitude towards verbal productivity makes Moore's best poems often baffling for the readers. "The Monkey Puzzle" is one such work which has bewildered readers for years, with a number of metaphors in the poem such as "Gibraltar," "a glyptic work of jade," "lion's ferocious chrysanthemum head" and "Foo dog"[2] continuing to resist equivocal interpretation.

The collective body of critical essays on Moore's poetry includes few references to "The Monkey Puzzle." The allusions that can be found are often made amid discussions of the incongruency in Moore's poetics. In *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, one of the first of its kind, "The Monkey Puzzle" is mentioned only in two of the eighteen essays. In both cases, it is brought up to briefly exemplify the incongruity in her poetics and rhythmic patterns. In the critical collection *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, published years later, none of the essays discuss this poem. Even extensive critical interpretations as the those of Charles Molesworth, Harold Bloom, and Laurence Stapleton ignore this particular poem entirely. Nevertheless, "The Monkey Puzzle" is an outstanding poem in Moore's oeuvre which even expresses her poetic philosophy. Although a few of Moore's critics like Elizabeth Phillips have dedicated a few pages of their books to its discussion, the associations they establish between the unexplained incongruities in the poem's structure and its disjointed images are often within the framework of the poem's own claim to be a puzzle, or as Phillips calls it at the end of her essay, borrowing a line from Walt Whitman, "puzzle of puzzle of

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1   Bonnie Costello, "Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop: Friendship and Influence," *Twentieth Century Literature* 30, no. 2/3 (1984): 143.

2   Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 80.

puzzles."[3] Accordingly, the underlying logic of the poem is often not traced by critics to the point to resolving this poetic puzzle.

Melissa Monroe's stylistic reading of "The Monkey Puzzle" is an exception. Monroe points out that the logic of the poem is based on conceptual rather than verbal relations and succeeds in laying out its theme accordingly. In the discussion of Moore's stylistic choices, Monroe rightly discerns that the poet "assigns several names to a single referent" either to represent its different facets or to sketch out its world from different perspectives.[4] However, as she interprets this tendency as a linguistic inclination to participate in ordering and categorizing the world through a variety of labels, Monroe sees this as extravagant, "whimsical" and "exotic" or as an aesthetic subjective move away from reality towards the "odd" world of imagination.[5] Monroe also complains about the moments when Moore's "alternate linguistic labels" become "conflicting, misleading, or obscure."[6] In addition, she suggests no critical pattern for the relationship between the poem's two sections, and thus does not discuss a number of the central and most significant metaphors in the poem, including one that directly expresses the work's leitmotif: the Foo dog.

If the underlying logic in Moore's poetry is not deciphered, the putative incongruities and unresolved mysteries become problematic in critical interpretations. To list a few examples, Christopher J. Knight praises Moore's cataloguing style and her "nomen substantivum" (introducing things by giving them new names), but at the same time he labels this technique as "used to the point of mannerism."[7] In *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection* Pamela Hadas writes that although there is a "ring of truth" in Moore's poetry, "the tendency of Moore's verse to puzzle her readers despite her protestations of a 'burning desire to be explicit'" also comes to the fore.[8] Hadas views this tendency as "a form of negativeness that may not be intended."[9]

Although in most linguistically-inclined critical theories, Moore's excessive desire to seek pleasure in the proliferation of meaning by tossing names onto objects might be read as unexpectedly extravagant and misleadingly fanciful, it can in fact be supported by a theoretical framework which appreciates its defiant verbal playfulness. Moore's excessive tendency to hinder interpretation in her verse is, indeed, not only intentional but also represents a philosophical attitude which works exactly in the direction of, rather than against, her desire to be meticulously explicit. In this article, we want to draw attention to the leading philosophical motif that stands behind the unconventional associations in "The Monkey Puzzle" by pinning down the poem's theme in the light of Judith Butler's theory of "catachrestic divergence," thereby delineating how such a playful catachrestic attitude towards language can liberate the words from their significatory cells to serve

3   Elizabeth Phillips, *Marianne Moore* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1982), 165.

4   Melissa Monroe, "Comparison and Synthesis: Marianne Moore's Natural and Unnatural Taxonomies," in *The Text and Beyond; Essays in Literary Linguistics*, ed. Cynthia Goldin Bernstein (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 62–63.

5   Monroe, "Comparison and Synthesis," 64; 70.

6   Monroe, "Comparison and Synthesis," 63.

7   Christopher J. Knight, *The Patient Particulars: American Modernism and the Technique of Originality* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 199.

8   Pamela White Hadas, *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 73.

9   Hadas, *Marianne Moore,* 73

Moore's objectivist style. Consequentially, uncovering the logic of the associations Moore establishes in "The Monkey Puzzle" will help us decode some of the its most mystic associations and images.

According to Judith Butler, the proliferation of the excessive is usually prohibited in all significations for which a sense of stability is routinely sought. Yet, a constant concentration on the excluded excesses of signification proliferates the signs to a point that the signifying processes that have structured them lose their sense. One way to invite such excesses to signification, which Butler refers to as "catachresis," is to concentrate on unusual and improper puns. Butler asserts that a catachrestic "use of a proper name to describe that which does not properly belong to it" will "return to haunt and co-opt the very language" from which this otherness is excluded and will thus cause the linguistic domain to shift its conceptual boundaries.[10] As it will be explicated in this article, in "The Monkey Puzzle" Moore is attentive to the exclusions of linguistic signs not to bewilder her readers but to help them discern what their habitual linguistic tendencies might have deprived them of perceiving.

In the first section, we will take a closer look at the potentialities of the word "catachresis" and the Butlerian definition of it. The second section illuminates the associative logic that propels "The Monkey Puzzle" forward towards what Butler has named a "catachrestic divergence." and finally the third and the final section offers conclusions. We hope that the illumination of this underlying philosophical attitude toward language in Moore's "The Monkey Puzzle" will elucidate readings of this work as well as her other poems.

Catachresis: The Trope of the Unknown

Catachresis is a trope with a history of varied, and at times contradictory, definitions, some of which have been elaborated upon by Roman rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian. In his *Institutio Oratorio*, Quintilian distinguishes between metaphor, (transfer) and catachresis (misuse), defining the latter as "the practice of adapting *the nearest available term* to describe something for which no actual term exists."[11] The rhetorician maintains that catachresis "is employed where there is no proper term available," while metaphor is employed "when there is another term available."[12] Shifting forward in history, one can see that the 2012 revised edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* still foregrounds the same "semantic lack" in the definition of catachresis that distinguishes it from metaphor.[13] Nevertheless, many critics have attempted to demonstrate that the distinction between the two is not so straightforward.

To mention a few such complications, Northrop Frye defines catachresis as "the unexpected or violent metaphor," found more frequently in "lyric poetry where the associative process is strongest."[14] Richard A. Lanham describes it as "an extravagant, unexpected, farfetched metaphor" or even an "implied metaphor" and, finally, J. A. Cuddon claims that it is "the misapplication of

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10 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Roudedge, 1993), 37, 213.

11 Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *The Institutio Oratoria Vol. III.*, trans. H. E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1943), 321 (emphasis added).

12 Quintilianus, *The Institutio Oratoria Vol. III.*, 321.

13 Roland Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 210.

14 Northrop Fry, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 281.

a word, especially in a mixed metaphor." [15,16] Indeed, even Quintilian's ancient definition of the term and the more recent explanation offered in *The Princeton Encyclopedia* complicate the term even further, as they make extraordinary moves to demarcate it. Near the end of his definition of catachresis or abuse as the naming of the unnamed, Quintilian mentions that poets "indulge" in abusing words and employing catachresis "even in cases where proper terms do exist."[17] By offering this exception, Quintilian deprives catachresis or abuse of its main distinctive quality from metaphor: i.e., applicability in the lack of a proper term. *The Princeton Encyclopedia* also complicates the term when it draws on Barthes's explanation of it, and in so doing nullifies all other attempts the Encyclopedia makes to clearly distinguish catachresis from metaphor. Quoting Barthes, the Encyclopedia highlights that while "there is no other possible word to denote the 'wings' of a house, or the 'arms' of a chair," "'wings' and 'arms' are *instantly, already* metaphorical."[18] This citation of Barthes thus further blurs the boundaries between the two terms.

Every time that an attempt is made to fix this term in a clear-cut category distinct from metaphor, there is a failure of discourse in the very examples provided, and this fluidity gives catachresis an uncanny quality. Patricia Parker best discusses this uncanniness of catachresis in her article "Metaphor and Catachresis" featured in a book duly titled *The Ends of Rhetoric.* Parker follows the historical definition of catachresis and metaphor along two main axes. The first approach is a "progress narrative" which defines catachresis as a precursor of metaphor whose application is necessitated to compensate for the semantic poverty of primitive languages.[19] This semantic poverty impels the users of language to transfer terms from another linguistic domain to the domain of their discussion. Such catachrestic expression turns into a common expression as the language progresses. Metaphor, on the other hand, is defined within this framework as an ornamental trope made possible in a pool of linguistic affluence. The progress of languages is thus seen as a move away from catachresis and towards metaphor.

Parker's second approach is not so much focused on a historical hierarchy as on social and cultural distinctions. Within this "similarity" approach, metaphor is defined based on a recognized correspondence between two existing terms and the verbal transfer of a term from one domain to another, while catachresis is demarcated as a unique similarity in that it draws an analogy between an existing term and one that is non-existent.[20] This second axis can also be seen in the definition of catachresis offered by George Puttenham, who following Quintilianus calls it "the figure of abuse." Puttenham defines catachresis as a figure of speech which occurs when "for lack of natural and proper term or word we take another, neither natural nor proper, and do untruly apply it to the thing which we would seem to express and without any just convenience."[21]

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15 Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 31.

16 J. A. Cuddon*, Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 114.

17 Quintilianus, *The Institutio Oratoria Vol. III.*, 321.

18 Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia*, 210.

19 Patricia Parker, "Metaphor and Catachresis," in *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. John B. Bender and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 66–69.

20 Parker, "Metaphor and Catachresis," 70–74.

21 *George Puttenham, The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition.* ed. Frank Whigham and A. Rebhorn Wayne (United States: Cornell University Press, 2008.), 284. In Puttenham's original text, it is "without any just inconvenience," but

Despite their different attitude towards how catachresis may be distinguished from metaphor, what both approaches echo is that catachresis is both *a necessity* in communication as well as an unnatural and uncanny application of language since in its presence the language meets matter. Such proximity between unnamed matter and language, or the meeting between what falls within the realm of language and what lies beyond its significatory processes, is what has drawn poststructuralists' attention to the concept of catachresis. *The Princeton Encyclopedia* mentions how catachresis becomes the epitome of "the originary gap at the heart of all systems of meaning" for certain poststructuralist and postmodern theories.[22]

Unlike many other commentators, Butler does not define catachresis as necessarily the naming of what does not have a proper name, but rather as the "usurpation of the proper for fully improper purposes."[23] Butler neither makes catachresis distinct from metaphor nor places catachresis as a subcategory to metaphor. She does not even attempt to define catachresis as simply the original function of all languages that signals the rhetorical nature of symbolic systems. On the contrary, catachresis in Butlerian philosophy becomes equal to the activation of a performative potential for creating new names through the usurpation and resignification of available, proper, linguistic signs.[24] This is the main distinction of Butler's definition of catachresis from other available ones. According to her theory, if this catachrestic possibility of diverging from the arbitrary meanings of the signs becomes a strategy to proliferate meaning, this will threaten the stability of signification, which is dependent on the closure of proliferation to control the meaning of its signs. Nonetheless, the same performative potential of the catachresis which shakes the boundaries of normative signification enables us to perceive some aspects of the referents that the normative signification had left undiscerned.

To map the philosophical origin of this claim for the readers, we need to delve a bit deeper into Butlerian philosophy. In her *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* Butler maintains that the relationship between the sign and the referent, or the matter to which the sign refers, is very slippery because while the sign can never fully contain the presumed materiality of its referent, the sign must fully claim its referent in order to represent it in language. She calls the unnamed materiality of the referent which lies outside the boundaries of our normative signification its "excess," or "remainder," the possible return of which threatens the effectivity of the sign.[25] "This radical difference between the referent and the signified," she claims, "is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated."[26] This site of negotiation between the named and the unnamed is exactly where Butler places her definition of catachresis. Catachresis is, thus, a "permanent risk" for the process of signification because it "unfixes the referent" from the demarcating lexical cell which the sign has arbitrarily assigned to it.[27]

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the editors of the edition consulted here have asserted that the double negative is a textual error and have corrected the phrase the way it appears in our article.

22 Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia*, 210.

23 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 37.

24 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 217–218.

25 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 138.

26 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 69.

27 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 213.

Within this theoretical framework, it also becomes obvious that although catachresis is a trope that can be intentionally appropriated to attend to the unknown facets of the referent, intentionality is not a necessity. The reason for is that the closure of the sign is never fully obtained within any process of signification and yet the sign depends upon its reiterability by linguistic subjects for its survival. Thus, any failure in the meticulous reiteration of the sign may result in an improper use of the sign which may open a new, but unintended, possibility for that sign within, while at the same time moving beyond, the significatory domain of the discourse.[28] However, when intentionality is at work, Butlerian catachresis becomes an umbrella term for a philosophical attitude toward any attempt for the resignification of the sign and the inclusion of the excluded, an attitude which can even contain metaphor as one of its manifestations. "Catachrestic divergence" can, thus, be understood as any intentional attempt to focus on the excess remainder of signification to name what the sign excludes.

Although the criteria of necessity and semantic lack for the definition of catachresis are absent in Butlerian theory, her overall philosophical definition does not rule out the principles of similarity and proximity mentioned above in other definitions of the term. Indeed, Butler generally argues that all the users of language are always already caught up in the signifying chains that the discourse provides, therefore any form of resistance is possible only within the limits of discourse, where we must rely only on what the language includes in order to name what it excludes. Moreover, her theory implies that the "catachrestic wanderings" which the reappropriation of a term brings about can be reestablished to new significatory associations when the users of the catachresis divergence intentionally position themselves as the ones who can now control the liberated potentialities of the unfixed signs.[29] However, as we are confined within signification and there is no such access to a prediscursive matter, "the only way to convey that materiality is precisely through catachresis."[30]

Having set this general philosophical framework, we can now move on to see how a catachrestic divergence is employed in Marianne Moore's "The Monkey Puzzle."

Catachrestic Divergences in "The Monkey Puzzle"

In "The Monkey Puzzle,"[31] catachrestic wanderings emerge from the very beginning of the poem. As many critics have noticed, the title itself is a teasing equivoque. On the one hand, it refers to the Chilean pine whose curious shape is behind its name – monkey puzzle or monkey puzzler – and on the other, Moore usurps this taxonomic term in a pun created within the complex conundrum her puzzle-like poem. The poem consists of two stanzas, the first replete with images of animals along with scattered references to natural and artificial objects. Nonetheless, neither the mysterious

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28 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 90–110. An example for such an unintended catachresis is the word "Covfefe," a misspelling in one of the tweets of the U.S. President Donald Trump which quickly went viral and has been since used by different groups both on social media and in the news to denote various suppositions.

29 Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 83.

30 Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 34.

31 All the quotations to "The Monkey Puzzle" in this article are based on *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*, unless mentioned otherwise.

proper name in the title nor the curious succession of other names in the opening stanza provides the reader with any clue to decipher that the poem is in fact about a kind of a pine tree. These enigmatic references create a cluster of similes and metaphors in the opening lines which, coupled with a scarcity of verbal and syntactical clues clarifying their relations, tantalizes readers and makes it difficult for them to rely on the signs for meaning-making.

In fact, the verbal relations between the poem's dissociated linguistic signs consciously create confusion. Elizabeth Phillips carefully traces these relations and concluded that they are not intended to reach at a complete picture. Nevertheless, Phillips' reading can help to clarify the poem's intentional obscurity. The first four lines of the poem as one long sentence depicts the object through two successive sets of disjointed phrases. The first defines the still unknown object of the poem as "a kind of monkey or pine lemur / not of interest to the monkey / in a kind of Flaubert's Carthage." The second, however, introduces "this 'Paduan cat with lizard,' this 'tiger in bamboo thicket.'" The scarcity of syntactical clues in the first succession creates ambiguity about the relations among its elements. In the second, the quotation marks and the proximal deictic adjective "this" evoke the probability of describing external objects, but the poem gives no internal verbal clue to clarify their relation. Phillips finally arrives at the conclusion that Moore's intention was creation rather than to resolve mysteries in this poem, and "[n]o wonder Marianne Moore said she wrote poetry to please herself. Readers would have appreciated a note about the tabby material."[32]

Monroe's article on "The Monkey Puzzle," too, is directed at the above-mentioned syntactical complexities. She notices that the pine tree, the answer to the riddle, is surrounded by confusing verbal clues. As mentioned above, in the first eight lines we are confronted with a long list of animals: "lemur," "cat," and "lizard" are mentioned once, "monkey" twice, and "dog" and "tiger" three times; "pine," however, is brought up only in three combinations, accompanying the word "tree" just once. In the first combination "pine lemur" the syntactical pattern makes possible the interpretation of "pine" as a habitat, though an unusual one, for lemurs. In the third, however, the nonsensical combination "pine tiger" derides such an interpretation. Meanwhile, all these eccentric verbal relations distract readers from the en passant reference to the "pine tree" in the second combination.[33] In fact, in the presence of "pine tiger" and "pine lemur," the word pine is problematized to an extent that the combination "pine tree" cannot create the *proper* definitive denotation it must. Therefore, the intentionality behind the complexity of the poem's linguistic plays is already established by both Phillips and Monroe.

However, following these signs with the intention of arriving at a decoded meaning built up through ordinary significatory processes leads us to only more complications, and we will get lost in the significatory maze of Moore's poetic puzzle. Moore has already warned her readers in "Pedantic Literalist" that meditations with a "perfunctory heart" will only present more obstructions.[34] Let us first begin with collectively offering and unifying the interpretations that are scattered in the previous critical readings of the poem in the next two paragraphs, then move on from there to the points that remain a mystery in their seemingly "morose" verbal combinations. [35]

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32   Phillips, *Marianne Moore*, 163.

33   See Monroe, "Comparison and Synthesis," 77–79.

34   Moore, *Complete Poems*, 37.

35   Moore, *Complete Poems, 80.*

The relations between these successions of names and images are directed at those parts or characteristics of the pine tree which are not invoked in its proper name, i.e., the Monkey Puzzle. At first, there exists a partial adherence to the central sign, as the very first line defines the central object as "a kind of monkey." However, not only is this adherence directed precisely at a part of the taxonomic term which has nothing to do with the Chilean pine in real life, but also it is soon displaced with the first catachrestic naming of the tree as "a pine lemur," seemingly because the branches of the tree visually resemble the tail of a lemur. Many critics have noticed that Moore is "an expert in the visual field."[36] However, we believe the play of the associations in "The Monkey Puzzle" goes even one step further than simply establishing visual similarities; it destabilizes the verbal ones by constantly including descriptions and associations that the verbal signs have excluded.

Let us see how the proximity and similarity principles work in this poem. *Lemur catta*, the most commonly known lemur, is an animal nearly the size of a cat whose widely varied diet contains, for example, pine pollen and lizards. Unlike monkeys, the lemur does sometimes live in pine forests. Therefore, to Moore the pine lemur seems to be a better name than the monkey puzzle for the tree. In an earlier publication of the poem, "Monkey Puzzler," we read that it was "not of interest to the monkey / but to the animal higher up which resembles it." This second line was later omitted. As Moore writes in the epigraph to her *Complete Poems* "omissions are not accidents": the omitted line gave a clear verbal clue which, if it had been maintained could spoil the riddle-like quality of these catachrestic wanderings. Nonetheless, the relations between pine and lemur in this new name is not merely directed at their proximity in a shared inhabitance. As biologists have placed lemurs and monkeys as well as cats and tigers within the same order because of their similar characteristics, Moore, a former student of biology, brings lemurs and lizards to the description of the monkey puzzle tree for almost the same reason: similarity. This similarity is the first visual relation in the poem, which most of the critical readings of the poem have noticed. *Lemur catta* has a long black and white ringed tail, like the zebra-tailed lizards of Mexico, and there exists a visual similarity between a lemur's long ringed tail and the Chilean pine branches, whose leaves are attached to them in spirals. This is a sketch of what can be found in the scattered critical commentary on this poem. However, in the rest of the poem the associations become too complex to be pinned down, and critics have often fallen short of an explanation beyond this description.

The next displacement is the "Paduan cat with lizard." Phillips examines this image, but fails to notice that all the clusters of imagery in the opening lines are catachrestic definitions of the tree itself. For instance, she notes that the tiger is brought in because it resembles the lemur, but this observation misses the fact that both resemble the tree in the first place. She also traces the etymology of the word "Paduan" and states its possible relation with the word "silk," but she does not explain what a word that denotes "silk" has to do here. She finally complains that Moore should have provided footnotes for her metaphors.[37]

Our main argument here is that the logic in these lines remains dependent on the same catachrestic wanderings Moore had used in the first line. In fact, the combination "Paduan cat with lizard" is another name the poet has given to the pine tree and also to the cat-sized lemur catta

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36 R. P. Blackmur, "The Method of Marianne Moore," in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New Jercy: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), 79.

37 Phillips, *Marianne Moore*, 162–64.

who eats lizards, a linkage also made with the name that follows: "this 'tiger in a bamboo thicket." Tiger brings in many connections based on both similarity and proximity to the words preceding it. A look at pictures of the Monkey Puzzle tree reveals that the patterns on a tiger's skin do not only resemble the pattern of stripes on a lemur's tail, but its skin patterns also resemble the shape of the branches on a young monkey puzzle tree. With its brown trunk covered with fur-like green offshoots on its lower parts and branches near its crown which dangle loosely in different directions, the tree itself resembles a seated tiger-cat with a lizard's tail, head, and legs hanging from the sides of its mouth. And Paduan? Apart from referring to Padua in Italy, Paduan refers to a kind of old bronze coin. Well, what could possibly represent the fire-resistant grayish-brown trunk of this pine tree whose natural inhabitant lives near volcanoes better than old bronze coins which often develop a powdery patina coating? Therefore, another unseen aspect of the referent, the Monkey Puzzle tree, is offered in this catachrestic naming of the tree as the "Paduan cat with lizard."

It is worth mentioning that in "Flaubert's Carthage," the fictional setting of Gustave Flaubert's historical novel Salammbo, often criticized for blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, a hallucinatory "tiger-cat" is spotted by the characters behind the trees and the bushes. However, what Moore intends to help us discern does not seem to be facts about "Flaubert's Carthage," the logic of which is still that of appointing similarities and proximities by observing the objects themselves. Both displacement and condensation are at work in the catachrestic divergences, as each name that displaces the previous one contains several minute relations with the ones preceding or following it, while all of them can be traced back to the image of the tree simultaneously, making a condensation of connections between names.[38] The catachrestic divergences in the poem take us into a hallucinatory realm outside the symbolic realm of signification, an effect that might be said to make it similar to Flaubert's Carthage. In this dream-like realm, the connections between the names are not linear as are the arbitrary connections between a signifier and its signified. They work rather, to use a Deleuzian term, as a rhizome, attaching their semantic hooks to various points both internal and external to the poem. The rhizomatic nature of these interconnections which keeps accumulating data through the invocation of seemingly unrelated new names is what is often left out of the critical readings of the poem.

Moreover, anyone familiar with Moore's poetry, knows that her style of bringing frequent quotations in her poetry, a style she herself calls a "hybrid method of composition,"[39] is not meant to send the readers to find and check out those sources. She usurps quotations catachrestically to suit her own purposes. If one follows those quoted lines, they will find out that "the tiger in a bamboo thicket" refers to a painting by Sessoon to which there is a reference in *The International Studio*, a magazine that Moore read, and "Paduan cat with lizard" was a bronze statue Moore had seen in *The International Studio* in 1923. Nevertheless, searching for and locating this kind of information will put one in the category of "the pedantic literalists" Moore advises us not to be. That is why, though they appear in quotation marks, no reference is provided for these two quotations in

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38 Condensation and displacement are the two characteristics of dreams in Freudian psychology which are called metaphor and metonymy by Lacan. Judith Butler who often draws on psychoanalytic terms in her theories, defines the realm of the excess remainders excluded from significations as the realm of desire and dream. The philosophical underpinnings of the connections between these terms falls outside the scope of this short article.

39 Moore, *Complete Poems*, 262.

Moore's notes to the poems. As Knight notices, "Moore's poetry most fabulously illustrates [. . .] Stanley Cavell's claim that '[t]here is a locale in which quotation becomes more original than its original.'"[40] In order to understand the catachrestic metaphors in the poem, it would be enough to mentally visualize a real tiger in a real bamboo thicket and a real cat with a real lizard hanging from its mouth. The garden of the metaphors is imaginary, like Flaubert's imaginary setting, but the natural objects in it are real, too real and alive for the language to pin them down in one fixed sign. One must truly be "the literalist / of the imagination" to be able to apprehend Moore's "imaginary gardens with real toads in them."[41]

The most interesting part of the poem, however, is the second section of its first stanza which invokes the image of the Foo dog. Both Phillips and Monroe connect this section to the preceding reference to Flaubert's Carthage and interpret the underlying logic of this section as representing a tension between nature and art. We maintain, however, that it is the catachrestic logic of proximity and similarity that continues to propel this section. It is here that Moore offers her poetic philosophy. In fact, the speaker of "The Monkey Puzzle" gives us the clearest guidance on how to apprehend the eccentric relations between all other catachrestic images in the poem: "Ignore the Foo dog and it is forthwith more than a dog, / its tail superimposed upon itself in a complacent half spiral." Foo dog, or the dog of fo, means the dog of Buddha, but the name is a western invention for the sculptured scorpion-tailed lions often placed at the entrance of Chinese buildings and temples. By momentarily ignoring the sign, the foo dog, and inviting us to look at its referent, the poem enables us to see what is excluded from the signifier – the lion with its spiral tail!

Being "nomad[s]" and not endemic to China, lions in the Chinese culture do not enjoy the prestigious position of tigers as kings of the wild world, therefore the proximity of "lion," "dog," and "tiger" are not accidental. There is yet another visual relation between the Foo dog and the Rock of "Gibraltar" which comes in nearby lines. The stone statues of Foo dogs with their bulky bodies, almost always seated in a sejant position, resemble the slanted promontory of Gibraltar, believed to be one of the mythical Pillars of Hercules. Foo dogs often appear in pairs and wearing an "unhappy" perfunctory smile on their countenance; the pillar, however, is called "lonely" in the poem because the location of the other pillar is unclear. Foo dogs have dignity because of their paired architectural position at the seat of entrance pillars as the guardians of castles and big houses, but Gibraltar, though lonely, has more dignity in Moore's eyes because, in legends, it is known to be positioned as a pillar on the entrance to the world of unknown. And it is exactly such a threshold to the world of the unknown that the poem is inviting us to trespass by momentarily ignoring the sign and revisiting the referent.

Therefore, once the proper name, the dog of Buddha, is replaced with other names, other facets of the referent are revived: its similarity with a lion and a scorpion rather than a dog, its existence as paired stone sculptures, its sejant pose, its unhappy smile, and its similarity with the Rock of Gibraltar both because of its shape and its place on the threshold as guardian. "Ignore the foo dog" can, therefore, be interpreted as an invitation to leave the structured and familiar world of the language behind, a Ulysses' voyage past the Pillars of Hercules, and surf to the unknown

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40   Knight, *The Patient Particulars*, 200.

41   Moore, *Complete Poems*, 267.

world of catachrestic wanderings. Nevertheless, although this section stands out and envelops the theme of the poem, it still maintains its minor rhizomatic connections with the rest of the poem through similarity and proximity: the superimposed tail of the Foo dogs links it, through the logic of similarity, to the long and twisted tail of the lemur and, by association, to the spiral twigs of the tree; and if Chile is crowded with monkey-puzzle trees, Gibraltar is the house to real monkeys, the only wild monkey population on the European continent.

It is in between these images that the speaker once more invites us to see that "this pine tree– this pine tiger, is a tiger, not a dog." This is the second and the third time that the word "tiger" is mentioned, but the first and the only one that mentions "pine tree." In fact, now, the speaker is reminding us that we have to ignore the signifier, the Monkey Puzzle or the pine tree, to see that just as the foo dog is not a dog but a lion, a young monkey puzzle tree, covered with twisted branches and twigs on a large portion of its trunk which gives it a pyramid shape, is not a monkey but a tiger in sejant whose bent black stripes are superimposed on themselves, a tiger that "will not come out."

When we move to the next set of images in the second stanza, the tree begins to grow and it calls for still new catachrestic names which are so varied and far-fetched that made us not only take a look at as many pictures of the tree as we could, but also to consult sources on ancient trees and the lives of beasts to learn more about them.[42] It must be mentioned that as the monkey puzzle tree matures, it loses its lower branches develop in a long trunk with a large green bark crown on its head. Thus we are confronted with the name "glyptic work of jade" in the poem. The mature tree also resembles a chrysanthemum on its long stalk or even the mane of a lion, hence "the lion's ferocious chrysanthemum head." Furthermore, as the Monkey Puzzle tree matures, the curve of its branches decreases and they develop a "porcupine-quilled complicated starkness." It might be worth mentioning that in *The Book of Beasts*, a source we know Moore consulted, we read about lions' litters: "The short ones with curly manes are peaceful. The tall ones with plain hair are fierce,"[43] and though Moore, too, might have read this but the modifier "ferocious" makes its way to the tree's catachrestic description because of the change of the shape of the branches in a mature tree from curved twigs to stiff branches.

Unlike the first part of the poem, in which lack of syntactical clues and the succession of catachrestic divergences become quite complicated, the rest of the second stanza contains no catachrestic complication. Once the reader figures out to lose trust in the verbal clues of the language and to allow the images to lead the meaning through the catachrestic revival of new names in this "bypath of curio-collecting," like the forest in her "Apparition of Splendor" which under the touch of a fairy "lets the primed quill fall,"[44] the second part moves swiftly by ordinary syntactic and verbal relations.

As in the taxonomic term, the use of "monkey" as a modifier for a poetic puzzle is curious, since there were no monkeys in the pine forests of Chile. This has led the critics to ponder upon

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42 Edward Parker and Anna Lewington, "Monkey Puzzle: Tree of Fire and Ice," in *Ancient Trees: Trees That Live for a Thousand Years*. (London: Batsford, 2012).

43 Terence Hanbury White, *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*. (Madison: Parallel Press, 1954), 7.

44 Moore, *Complete Poems*, 158–159.

the meaning of the monkey in the title. Melissa Monroe, implicitly linking the poem with the legal debates of the 1920s over the public teaching of the theories that recognized man's descent from monkeys, comments that the reader is "'the monkey' who must try to solve the linguistic puzzle."[45] Richard Howard's reading of Moore's poetry, however, implies that the title refers to a stylistic feature of the modernist poetry which he calls "the monkey business of Modernism," a concept characterized by dissociated and fragmented imagery with "abrupt juxtapositions, and entangling oppositions."[46] The reason behind the naming of the tree is illuminating here: it was named Monkey Puzzle because the first European observers thought that monkeys could not climb such trees, but there were no monkeys living there. However, the use of the monkey modifying the poetic puzzle has still remained a mystery, as does the appearance of the monkey in the taxonomic term. Only a reader who has not grasped the theme of the poem will remain occupied with the taxonomic term the poem has usurped to name its own puzzle. As the Lion-scorpion statues called foo dogs have nothing to do with dogs and the monkey puzzle tree has nothing to do with monkeys, the use of the monkey in the poetic puzzle has nothing to do with the poem: Ignore the monkey and indulge in the pleasure of renaming the referent in the crossword puzzle, but as Moore mentions "no one takes it from these woods" because "society's not knowing is colossal."

The names of both foo dogs and the monkey puzzle were western inventions, and their deconstruction shows that their very first use itself was a catachrestic event. As Taffy Martin puts it, Moore's message in this poem is both "severe" and "clear," as the curio in the poem, whether we interpret it as the tree or the poem itself, "gains power from knowing that it need not explain itself."[47] It can simply *be* in the reverberation of being incarnated time and again through new names. Catachrestic divergences, according to Butler, represent the primary pleasure principle that makes us feel alive by giving us the opportunity to name the world anew, with Moore once having commented that when a poet seeks his own pleasure, he will give his readers pleasure.

Catachrestic divergence in Moore's oeuvre is not limited to "The Monkey Puzzle." It is, in fact, typical of Moore's "curio-collecting" style and might have roots in her interest in Asian art[48]: the chimeras on Persian carpets or the mixed creatures on Chinese porcelains. In "Nine Nectarines," for instance, all the animals and colours that go into the making of the mythical chimerical creature the Kylin are abruptly and successively mentioned either as nouns or as modifiers. Moore frequently problematizes our reliance on significatory processes of language by not clearly spelling out the analogies out or by mentioning the main linguistic sign en passant, as she does in "The Monkey Puzzle." In "An Octopus," too, the name of the mountain described as the central sign, is mentioned in such an elusive way in the middle of this long poem that it can easily be missed.

Unless we grasp their catachrestic relations, such clusters of disjointed verbal signs often hinder interpretation. This is likely why Taffy Martin, briefly mentioning "The Monkey Puzzle" as an example, opines that "Occasionally Moore seems to revel in dislike and misunderstanding."[49] Still,

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45 Monroe, "Comparison and Synthesis," 78.

46 Richard Howard, "Marianne Moore and the Monkey Business of Modernism," in *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, ed. Joseph Parisi (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1990), 12.

47 Taffy Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist* (Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2012), 115.

48 Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne*, 80.

49 Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist,* 115

like many other critics who have seen a great degree of subjective associations in the dissociated images of "The Monkey Puzzle" and have often relating this to Moore's intentional obscurity, Martin confesses that despite not grasping the full picture, "we cannot not like what intrigues us so much."[50] Indeed, as Stanley Lourdeaux has mentioned, the dissociated image is "a hallmark of modernist poetry" and the modernist poetry relies on the reader's intuitive and psychological "perception of similarity-in-difference" to appreciate the poem.[51] But can objectivist poetry, with all its claims of objective presentation of a central subject, also rely on the intuitive and psychological motives that *subjectively* link the dissociated images of the poem?

Kenneth Burke gives us the answer: No. Comparing the dominant poetic styles of the late 19th and early 20th century, Symbolism, Imagism and Objectivism, Burke has asserted that while the three contain overlapping features since they were "recipes all having the same ingredients,"[52] their dissimilarities lie in the different proportions of these ingredients:

> In symbolism, the subject is much stronger than the object as an organizing motive, that is it is *what the images are symbolic of* that shapes their treatments. In Imagism, there would ideally be an equality of the two motives, the subjective and objective. But in objectivism, though an object may be chosen for treatment because of its symbolic or subjective reference, once it has been chosen it is to be studied in its own right.[53]

In a pioneering piece of writing on objectivist style, Louis Zukofsky mentions two important criteria that can clarify Burke's formula of "*studying an object in its own right*": sincerity and objectification. By sincerity Zukofsky means that "shapes suggest themselves" in word combinations, but he believes that this is not enough since "presented with sincerity, the mind tends to supply" and does not attain "the rested totality" which he calls "objectification"[54]. Zukofsky believes that the dissociated image, even if it offers a sincere representation of a facet of an object, will not give birth to the kind of the poem which following his article was later labeled objective poetry. The reason is that dissociated images that do not reach a totality give the reader the freedom to multiply the line of subjective associations started by the poet and do not create the required objectification that is the peculiarity of this style of poetry.

As shown in this article, the images in "The Monkey Puzzle" are not disjointed metaphors which merely adhere to the sincerity of individual images which, as many critics have suggested, are connected to one another subjectively based on Moore's personal and intentionally unrevealed preferences. Rather, these catachrestic visual depictions do reach a totality, finally making a full image of the tree in all its different facets as it grows, and thus they cause the poem to reach the desired rest of objectification Zukofsky mentions. Indeed, in the same article Zukofsky refers to Moore's poetry, although he sees that rested totality only in her "An Octopus" and "Like a Bulrush,"

50   Martin, *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist*, 115

51   Stanley Lourdeaux,,"Marianne Moore and a Psychoanalytic Paradigm for the Dissociated Image," *Twentieth Century Literature* 30, no. 2/3 (1984): 366.

52   Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 486.

53   Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 486.

54   Louis Zukofsky, "Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff," *Poetry* 37, no. 5 (1931): 273.

and he claims that her other poems only attain sincerity and not objectification.[55] Here we are not attemptng to simply add "The Monkey Puzzle" to Zukofsky's list by showing that a full image is attained in it, but rather we are claiming that Moore reaches this totality of combining smaller units of sincerity in a peculiar way: through catachresis which rhizomatically connects all those disjointed images to the same object, creating one clustered unit by referring to the central image, time and again, through a successive arrangement of catachrestic names. And we believe that the same framework might be applied to readings of Moore's other poems. For instance, "the tailless / small cinnamon-brown, common / camel-haired unicorn" who has "antelope feet" in "Nine Nectarines," or the swan with its "flamingo-colored, maple-leaflike feet" in "Critics and Connoisseurs" depict such moments when Moore's style indulges in the uncanny pleasure of catachrestic wanderings that rise and swell like waves of unruly visual depictions, but do reach the shore at last.

Towards a Conclusion

Moore's catachrestic style in "The Monkey Puzzle" contains elements of most of the definitions of catachresis mentioned in the first section of the present article. The rhetorical function it enacts often draws on the nearest available terms to what is being described and the relations between its verbal elements follow an associative logic based on visual similarity and actual proximity rather than the logic of syntactical and semantic associations in *proper* significatory processes. The metaphorical images offered are, at times, improper and unnatural, creating inconvenience for the reader and at other times are uncanny and seem overly fanciful. Nevertheless, the main axis of all the definitions of catachresis presented here is the lack of a proper name, a vacancy that creates a necessity. One exception is Butler's definition of catachresis as a philosophical attitude rather than a verbal necessity, an attitude that views all proper names as improper, as violently exclusive, and calls for an equally violent catachresis divergence from the arbitrary limitations that the linguistic signs impose on our imaginative capacity to see the world afresh.

Although such catachrestic wanderings in "The Monkey Puzzle" reach an unprecedented sincerity by a crowded cluster of seemingly dissociated images, all these uncanny images finally add up in order to depict the pine tree full-face, young and mature. We have shown in this article that despite the fact that its supreme sincerity might confuse the readers to the point of missing the rested totality that it offers, Moore's "The Monkey Puzzle" provides us with a full picture spread over two stanzas, and the work deserves to be placed side by side with her "An Octopus" for its subtlety, sincerity and rested totality, a totality is also mirrored in the smooth ending she gives to her poem. Although "the society not knowing is colossal,"[56] once the final image is apprehended we may see that she has reached the objectification Zukofsky describes "as the arrangement into one apprehended unit of minor units of sincerity"[57] and as Moore has said "this is beauty, a certain proportion in the skeleton which gives the best results"[58].

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55 Zukofsky, "Sincerity and Objectification," 276–277.

56 Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne*, 80.

57 Zukofsky, "Sincerity and Objectification," 274.

58 Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne*, 80.

Moore's "The Monkey Puzzle" teaches the reader to ignore the taxonomic name in order to see in its own right this "pine tiger" which grows for a hundred years to become the "lion's ferocious chrysanthemum head" green gem it is, a tree that "is worth its weight in gold." The poem, "with a certain proportion in the skeleton" teaches us a lot about the tree through its catachrestic invocation of a succession of new names that try to sincerely depict the tree. The work proves, but does not explain, the birth of each of these catachrestic signs by making us discover the link between the referent and the succession of catachrestic names it receives to see the totality of the tree. Moore invites us to set our minds and the Chilean pine tree free from the discursive and significatory cells, which are the readers' own monkey puzzles.

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