

Lecture 17 Marianne Moore

As for "A Grave," it has a significance apart from the literal origin, which was a man who placed himself between my mother and me, and the surf we were watching from the middle ledge of rocks on Monhegan Island [in Maine] after the storm. ("Don't be annoyed," my mother said. "It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing.")
--Marianne Moore commenting on her poem, "A Grave"

Thank God, I think you can be trusted not to pour out a flood (in the manner of dear Amy [Lowell] and [Edgar Lee] Masters).
--Pound commenting on "A Grave" in a letter to Moore (December 16, 1918)

I am glad to give you personal data and hope that the bare facts that I have to offer, may not cause work that I may do from time to time, utterly to fail in interest. . . . I was born in 1887 and brought up in the home of my grandfather, a clergyman of the Presbyterian church. I am Irish by descent, possibly Scotch also, but purely Celtic, was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1909 and taught shorthand, typewriting and commercial law at the government Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, from 1911 to 1915. In 1916, my mother [Mary Warner Moore] and I left our home in Carlisle to be with my brother [John Warner Moore]---also a clergyman---in Chatham, New Jersey---but since the war, Chaplain of the battleship Rhode Island and by reason of my brother's entering the navy, my mother and I are living at present in New York, in a small apartment. . . . contrary to your impression, I am altogether blond and have red hair [Pound had asked, in response to reading Moore's poem "Black Earth," if she was "Ethiopian"].

. . . Any verse that I have written, has been an arrangement of stanzas, each stanza being an exact duplicate of every other stanza. I have occasionally been at pains to make an arrangement of lines and rhymes that I liked repeat itself, but the form of the original stanza of anything I have written has been a matter of expediency, hit upon as being approximately suitable to the subject matter. The resemblance of my progress to your beginnings is an accident so far as I can see [Pound had supposed that his early experiments in writing syllabic poems had influenced Moore].

. . . I do not appear [that is, appear in literary periodicals]. . . . I grow less and less desirous of being published, produce less and have a strong feeling for letting alone what little I do produce. My work jerks and rears and I cannot get up enthusiasm for embalming what I myself, accept conditionally.

. . . To capitalize the first word of every line is rather slavish and I have substituted small letters for capitals in the enclosed versions of the two poems you have.

. . . In "A Graveyard," [the change] I have made is to end the line as you suggest and for the sake of symmetry, have altered the arrangement of lines in the preceding stanzas. I realize that by writing consciousness and volition [the order of the words Pound

preferred], emphasis is obtained which is sacrificed by retaining the order which I have, and I am willing to make the change, though I prefer the original order [which she ultimately kept].

---Moore to Pound, January 9, 1919