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## Marianne Moore's "Granite and Steel": a Late Perspective on New York City

### 1. Introduction

"Granite and Steel" is one of the poems about New York that Moore wrote late in her poetic career. It was published in 1966 in *The New Yorker* and it focuses on the Brooklyn Bridge, one of the most famous and representative sites of the American metropolis.

Moore lived in New York for over 50 years, uninterruptedly, taking part in the city's intense social life, particularly since the '50s. She became a public figure of the city considered so representative as to be asked in 1968 to launch the baseball season, one of the most important events in New York, throwing out the first ball in Yankee Stadium. Some of the poet's most beautiful poems are located in New York, centered on some aspects or activities of the city's daily life or on the city itself as a specific kind of space different from other spaces such as the sea, the wilderness or Europe. All of this has contributed to Moore's association with the city of New York and to her reputation as a New York poet. In his biography on Moore, Charles Molesworth is so explicit on this point as to affirm that New York City "was to be both a locale and a state of mind for her" (134).

The goal of my essay is to show that "Granite and Steel" is the result of the poet's life-long relationship with New York and that it is one of the most powerful poems Moore has written about this city. Reminiscent in its structure and in its organizing principle of her early, and more fatuous, poems on the subject, "Granite and Steel" testifies also to the evolution of her perceptions in relation to this town. This poem is the poet's best example, among her later

works, of her response to the city, a response started during her college years and present in all her *oeuvre*, although to different degrees. Moore's late poems on New York are usually occasional poems, written on demand to celebrate one of its specific places. Although this composition is itself an occasional poem, it differs from the others thanks to the originality of its poetic construction and the richness and complexity of its implications. As a matter of fact, several critics consider "Granite and Steel" to be "[Moore's] last great and provocative poem" (Holley, *Voice and Value* 180).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Marianne Moore in New York

Moore's interest in the space of the city, and particularly in New York, dates back to 1909 when she visited Manhattan extensively for the first time as a guest of her Bryn Mawr classmate Hilda Sprague-Smith. She was so fascinated with this town that in two days she wrote five letters home, some of them even exceeding 40 pages", Moore gave every detail of her experiences and meetings and she described her stay as "*bewitched* with pleasure" (*SL* 55, italics in the original). Her first week-end in New York was full of events: she met several influential people of the political and cultural circles of the city, she attended plays and visited a few art galleries, she took part in meetings supporting women's suffrage so that at the end of her urban full immersion she wrote "In New York, I flourished like a bay tree. No extravagance of starch or chiffon was too much for me" (*SL* 57).

Moore went back to New York in December 1915 with family friends from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she was living at the time. This trip allowed her to explore the city on her own, following her tastes and inclinations, and to meet many writers and artists of the New York *avant-garde*. Away from home Moore, as always, wrote long and detailed letters to her family, reporting conversations and describing the literary and artistic *milieux* visited. This trip to New York was for Moore a turning point in her life, for it was thanks to this experience that Moore chose New York as her home-town, as she explicitly declared in an interview

with Donald Hall in November 1960: "It was the visit in 191[5]<sup>3</sup> that made me want to live there" (Moore, *Reader* 255).

It was only in December 1918 that Moore could satisfy her desire when she moved with her mother to 14 St. Luke's Place in New York City. Still sharing a house with her mother, Moore led a very different life compared to those of the other more emancipated and revolutionary artists of Greenwich Village, and she was conscious of this as she admitted in the interview with Hall "I was a little different from the others. [...] I might pass as a novelty, I guess" (Moore, *Reader* 258). However, Moore took part in the Bohemian atmosphere of this part of Manhattan in her own peculiar and personal way, attending some of the meetings and events organized, and socializing with writers and artists associated with the three most important little magazines in New York at that time: *Broom*, *The Dial*, *Others*.

1929 was a turning-point in Moore's experience of New York. In September she moved across the East River to Brooklyn, to a small apartment at 260 Cumberland Street, near Clinton Hill. The poor health of her mother and the urban revolution which transformed Manhattan, involving now also the once isolated and peaceful Greenwich Village, were two of the main reasons for Moore's change of address. In 1960, after almost 30 years of residence in Brooklyn, Moore published the essay "Brooklyn from Clinton Hill" which opens by evoking Moore's arrival in Cumberland Street in 1929:

Decorum marked life on Clinton Hill in the autumn of 1929 when my mother and I came to Brooklyn to live. An atmosphere of privacy, with a touch of diffidence prevailed, as when a neighbor in a furred jacket, veil, and gloves would emerge from a four-story house to shop at grocer's or meat-market. Anonymity, without social or professional duties after a life of pressure in New York, we found congenial (*Prose* 539-40).

To live in Brooklyn was a choice for Moore; she did not regret the mundane and bustling life of the Village, since she was now looking for "decorum", "privacy" and "anonymity". Moore lived in Cumberland Street for about 37 years and her public figure was strongly associated with this part of the town, which she

affirmed had had a positive influence on her: "I like living here. Brooklyn has given me pleasure, has helped to educate me; has afforded me, in fact, the kind of tame excitement on which I thrive" (547).

The last of Moore's relocations inside New York City took place in 1965 when she was forced out of her neighborhood, dangerously deteriorated. Back to Greenwich Village, this time at 39 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Moore plunged again into the city's social life, linking her name more and more to a town she had never wished to leave and about which she wrote in 1952: "Even death in New York would seem to me preferable to 'exile'" (SL 497). Fate listened to her and she died in her sleep in 1972 in her Manhattan apartment without experiencing exile from New York City.

### 3. The poetry of New York

The chronology of Moore's poetic publications reveals a special distribution in her *oeuvre* of the poems dealing with New York City. Such poems are concentrated in two periods of her poetic activity which effectively mirror the two moments of greatest contact between Moore and the urban space considered. The first of these two moments covers the years between 1916 and 1922, which were the years of Moore's first extensive explorations of the city and of her decision to live there. In this period New York City represented the greatest novelty in Moore's life, both in relation to space and experience, and it is rather obvious that her attention focused on such a setting and its implications, writing at least four poems with New York City as the main subject.

"Is Your Town Nineveh?" is Moore's first poetic reaction to New York; it was published in 1916, when the poet did not live in the city yet, and had an acquaintance with it as a tourist, through her sporadic and often one-day trips.<sup>4</sup> This poem is rather interesting as it testifies how right from the beginning Moore saw this urban space as one of conflict, or, at least, of ambiguity. Rather than focusing on a direct description of the city and its space, as Cristanne Miller points out, the composition centers on a

suspended conflict between freedom and restraint (*Questions* 53-56). However, the references to two of its specific places, the Statue of Liberty and the aquarium clearly symbols of this abstract opposition, allow New York to play an important role in the composition, as it becomes a concrete representation of such a conflict. Being able to accommodate the two opposing elements inside its area, New York itself becomes an ambivalent space bound to generate conflict, signifying simultaneously one aspect and its opposite.

From 1919 to 1922 Moore published her three most important compositions on New York, "Dock Rats" (1919), "New York" (1921), "People's Surroundings" (1922). In "Dock Rats" she focuses her attention on a specific area of New York, its harbor, a closed space clearly set apart from the city but at the same time not sealed off, as its gates open and it can be crossed.<sup>5</sup> Moore again offers a picture of a double and ambivalent New York, metonymically through its harbor, this space being concretely surrounded by borders but theoretically open, a circumscribed area able to host the entire world. The ambiguity and variety of the harbor is not only to be found in the open/closed opposition, but also in other characteristics of the area. The harbor unifies the idea of home and shipping, and consequently of stasis and movement, visually objectified by boats, means of communication designed to sail around the world but which stand still. It is also the kingdom of "multiplicity", a word the poet herself uses to describe the variety of boats near the docks, and a meeting point where the water of the Atlantic ocean and the Hudson river meet, and where North and South, East and West are all present and symbolized by the goods carried by boats and the routes they have followed. In "Dock Rats" the multiplicity and contradictions of the harbor, and city, are not a source of worry and are, at least apparently, reconciled.

Two years later "New York" offers a new picture of the town, a more placid and meditated observation based not on first impressions but on a three-year experience of Greenwich Village.<sup>6</sup> In her attempt to define what New York is, Moore abandons the element of water, so central in "Dock Rats", and she relates the

city to its Indian past and to another kind of space, the wilderness. In the poem Moore refers to a variety of spaces. First of all there is a closed urban space in opposition to the wilderness which extends outside its borders. Moreover, the urban space described is not homogeneous but it is made of two superimposed spaces of equal extension, one describing the New York contemporary to the poet and the other the same area when inhabited by the native Americans. The analysis of the spatial elements shows a paradoxical and contradictory description of the urban and Indian spaces, a means adopted by Moore to refuse both an idyllic vision of the Indian past, which tends to idealize and romanticize the "savage" as noble, and a superficial condemnation of the modern world, which sees every aspect of contemporary life as ruled by commerce. She does not even propose the wilderness as a totally positive space in opposition to urban materialism and she does not invite the reader to abandon the city in order to plunge into a better wild world. Moore suggests a physical separation ("one must stand outside") and a detached attitude ("laugh") towards the wilderness to avoid its dangers ("since to go in is to be lost").<sup>7</sup> Such a many-sided and complicated vision is even reinforced by the ambiguity of the scene, due mainly to the co-existence and interweaving of several perspectives which make it difficult to connect all the details listed and to define univocally the object of the representation.<sup>8</sup> After characterizing New York city in relation to its Indian past and to the wilderness which surrounds it, in the final section of the poem Moore tries to define directly the features of the city. Through a series of negations which identify some elements of the urban space but not its essence, she arrives at the conclusion that New York is primarily "accessibility to experience",<sup>9</sup> an expression that proposes again a vision of the city as a place that can accommodate everything, even the negative, an element which separates the New York of this poem from that of "Dock Rats".

In "People's Surroundings" for the first time Moore enters New York's closed spaces, as it starts with a catalogue of possible interiors one can come across in such a city.<sup>10</sup> In this poem the

multiplicity and diversity of the urban space is represented by the heterogeneous furniture of its buildings and also by the variety of places listed at the end of the composition, each inhabited by a particular kind of person. The people listed in the final section of the poem refer both to a synchronical and a diachronical ambivalence of New York. Such an urban space can accommodate not only "cooks", "carpenters" and "surgeons", but also "queens", "emperors" and "dukes", people with different jobs belonging to the present time and people reminiscent of a medieval society. Referring to this poem John Slatin writes: "People's Surroundings, represents, it seems to me, a kind of low water-front in the history of Moore's response to New York" ("Town's Assertiveness" 68). In her depiction of the town as a "vast indestructible necropolis" she seems to propose a vision of the urban space as one of death and sterility, sharing a perspective common to other modernist authors, such as T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* or William Carlos Williams in *Paterson*. However, the comparison between the city and a tropical imaginary landscape shows how the city can after all be a safer place than an apparently idyllic setting that turns out to be a "dungeon with odd notions of hospitality".

The second moment in Moore's poetic career that shows a concentration of poems on New York starts at the end of the '50s and lasts till her death. Moore focused her attention back on New York after almost 40 years from the publication of the compositions written after her first experience of the city. Her popularity and the new public role acquired deeply influenced her ways of dealing with such a theme. In general, these poems are occasional poems written to meet someone's request and to celebrate some particular places of New York. The confidential and familiar tone reveals a long acquaintance with the town and a deep relationship between Moore and her environment. It is also interesting to note that almost all the poems she wrote at the end of her career were published in *The New Yorker*, a popular and widely-read magazine that right from the title explicitly relates itself to New York. The close link between the poet and the

American metropolis is already visible in Moore's decision to publish her works in a magazine with strong local connections, even if read all over the country.

In tune with a general decay in Moore's later work,<sup>11</sup> the poems on the city written in this period lack the richness, originality and variety of connotations of the poems previously described. In 1960 Moore published "Glory" — included in *Complete Poems* with the title of "Carnegie Hall: Rescued" — a poem that celebrates the success of the campaign against the demolition of the famous and historical New York concert hall.<sup>12</sup> The exaltation of victory turns into melancholy for a lost past in "Old Amusement Park" of 1964, in which Moore recollects that the area which is now the site of La Guardia Airport was once an amusement park. Moore describes the familiar and relaxed atmosphere that characterized this place and that is now completely unknown to the contemporary "hurry; worry; unwary / visitor" (*CP* 210) of the airport. "The Camperdown Elm" is what Molesworth defines as "a perfect 'occasional' poem" (*Literary Life* 427). It appeared in 1967 and she wrote it to support the committee for the restoration of Brooklyn's Prospect Park and its old elm. Moore exalts the historical relevance of the park, focusing on a specific tree that becomes a symbol of the American cultural past and an example of a tradition in evolution but which must also be preserved.

Among these late poems, however, "Granite and Steel" stands out not as a simple occasional composition but as a poem capable of conveying the poetic strength characteristic of Moore's early poetry and of showing that the poet has still something to say about New York, even at the age of 80.<sup>13</sup> Looking at the dates of publication, about forty years separate "Granite and Steel" from Moore's early poems on New York. However, a sequential reading of the compositions with this urban setting reveals links between the first works and that of 1966, to be found mainly in the resumption and the new elaboration of some elements of the previous poems, such as the sea, the relation to Europe, the problem of materialism and the vertical/horizontal opposition.



## 4. "Caged Circe of steel and stone"

## GRANITE AND STEEL

Enfranchising cable, silvered by the sea,  
 of woven wire, grayed by the mist,  
 and Liberty dominate the Bay —  
 her feet as one on shattered chains,  
 once whole links wrought by Tyranny.

Caged Circe of steel and stone,  
 her parent German ingenuity.  
 "O catenary curve" from tower to pier,  
 implacable enemy of the mind's deformity,  
 of man's uncompunctious greed  
 his crass love of crass priority  
     just recently  
 obstructing acquiescent feet  
 about to step ashore when darkness fell  
     without a cause,  
 as if probity had not joined our cities  
     in the sea.

"O path amid the stars  
 crossed by the seagull's wing!"  
 "O radiance that doth inherit me!"  
 — affirming inter-acting harmony!

Untried expedient, untried: then tried;  
 way out; way in; romantic passageway  
 first seen by the eye of the mind,  
 then by the eye. O steel! O stone!  
 Climatic ornament, a double rainbow,  
 As if inverted by French perspicacity,  
     John Roebling's monument,  
     German tenacity's also;  
     composite span — an actuality. (CP 205)

The visual impact of a composition on a white page has always been of great importance to Moore. Although she denies conducting experiments with form and drawing lines before writing them, in her interview with Donald Hall the poet claims that a wrong spatial arrangement is inevitably mirrored on the phonic level and causes a lack of sound harmonies: "if the phrases recur into incoherent an architecture — as print — I notice that the words as a tune do not sound right" (Moore, *Reader* 263). This special attention to visual patterns results in Moore's conceiving of a new form, "the syllabic stanza", characterized by the repetition of stanzas made of verses with exactly the same number of syllables. According to some critics, such an innovation leads Moore to transform poetry from a genre traditionally based on sounds to one where the visual element plays the principal role.<sup>14</sup>

Keeping in mind Moore's devotion to the textual arrangement of a poem, the fact that there is a certain correspondence between the form of the bridge and the form of the composition on the page cannot go unnoticed. Looking at the construction from Brooklyn towards Manhattan south-westwards, which is also the perspective adopted in the poem — being the one that allows the reader to have the Statue of Liberty in the background "dominate the bay" — one sees a tower of the bridge first, which rests on the bank just at the end of the mainland, a span on the river that reaches the other tower, whose foundations are in the water below, and then another span which gets lost among the buildings of Manhattan. In "Granite and Steel" the first and third stanzas are short and compact and remind the reader of the towers of the bridge, while the second and the fourth are longer and visually extend across the page like the steel spans across the river. Moreover, the content strengthens what the form represents. In the first and third stanzas the focus is on the bridge as a construction and an object, and the tower is effectively the solid, static, mighty part of the bridge. In the second and fourth stanzas, instead, the bridge is put in a historical, symbolic and conceptual perspective. Besides several references to the link with Europe, such a perspective shows the crossing function of the bridge and its most abstract traits, mirroring the spans in their joining ability and in their ethereal essence as compared to the towers.

Taking into consideration that the spatial organization of the poem on the page recalls the form of the Brooklyn Bridge, Moore is explicit in relation to the object depicted. However, at the same time she is also implicit about it, since the bridge itself is never mentioned. The way she presents urban space in "Granite and Steel" is similar to the one used in "Dock Rats". In each of the two poems the poet is not interested in the city in general but in one of its specific sites, respectively the harbor and the bridge, which are pictured and alluded to but never directly mentioned. The Brooklyn Bridge is the only possible object of discussion in "Granite and Steel" and the author wants the reader to be sure about this and lists details that undermine whatever ambiguity exists: technical features, construction materials, position, name of the builder. However, in spite of all the clarifications and the certitude about the center of interest of the poem, such a focal point is absent from the composition, and the words "bridge" and "Brooklyn" never appear in it. It is as if the poet refuses to be final on the poem; she gives readers all the elements but she wants them to draw conclusions by themselves.

Through its way of representing space, the continuous hiding and at the same time revealing of the bridge, "Granite and Steel" becomes an extreme example of the dialectic between the visible and the invisible that permeates Moore's entire *oeuvre*. This theme becomes explicit in "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron'", a poem published in 1941, where Moore unifies the two concepts and defines their connection in this way: "the power of the visible is the invisible" (CP 100). Throughout her work Moore shows that these two worlds don't always simply oppose each other and that their relations can be of various kinds, even becoming complementary in certain circumstances.

In the composition of 1966, Moore denies the bridge its most explicit aspect, the totality that dominates the city. The bridge as a whole, in its most extreme visibility becomes invisible. As a matter of fact, the poet focuses her attention on details or elements in the background, unnoticed either because they are too little and invisible from a distant view, or because they are abstract and ideal

traits, which are themselves an integral part of the bridge even though they are linked to a knowledge which a pure contemplation of the bridge does not reveal. In relation to the issue of the visible and the invisible, Margaret Holley affirms that "her choice to render the "granite and steel" monument as nearly transparent makes that title ironic, insofar as it points toward the material rather than the significant, the invisible dimensions of the subject" ("Artist as Anthologist" 148). According to the critic Moore uses this strategy because she is not really interested in the bridge itself, which is for her just a means to approach an idea.

This late poem witnesses also a return to the composing principles of Moore's best poems, particularly her capacity to present her object of interest from simultaneous points of view. This multiplicity of vision is to be found first of all in the poem's syntactical structure, composed of appositions, invocations and nominal phrases and just one finite sentence governed by the verb "dominate"<sup>15</sup>. The bridge is depicted through single elements put in sequence without any connection, each of them like a slogan proposing its own perspective on the bridge. The result is a dishomogeneous whole, however, with a single focal point, where various, even opposite, aspects are bound to coexist, such as a synchronic and a diachronic dimension, the infinitely small and the infinitely big, the concrete and the abstract.

In "Granite and Steel" Moore composes a cubist picture of the bridge traveling backwards along the path run by John Roebling, the builder of the bridge.<sup>16</sup> In fact Roebling had first imagined the bridge with his mind and then had carried out his project ("romantic passageway / first seen by the eyes of the mind, / then by the eye"). The poet starts from the information her eyes give her and then she stands in front of the construction with the eyes of the mind, capable of transforming the visible into invisible and vice versa and of observing an object simultaneously from several points of view. To "the eye of the mind" the bridge as a whole in the way perceived by the gaze does not exist, and the absence in the poem of the word bridge is simply a direct consequence of the perspective adopted by the poet — of her will not to portray the bridge photographically.

The space represented in "Granite and Steel" is a single space that coincides with the area of the bridge. However, in its description Moore refers to four other specific spaces — the sky, the sea, Europe and the American continent — each of them characterizing the construction in its own way. Consequently, the spatial element is present on two levels in the composition: it is the theme of the poem, the subject being New York, symbolized by that bridge, but it is also one of the structuring principles around which the poem is organized. As a matter of fact, in this poem space interprets space and the poet uses spaces different from that of the bridge to describe the specific place towards which she directs her attention. The references to the sky, the sea, Europe and America are extremely revealing as they express the bridge's *raison d'être*, which lies in its linking capacity. Concretely located between earth and sky and ideally between Europe and the new world, the Brooklyn Bridge is a structure connecting several aspects, whose form perfectly matches its essence.

This is exactly the concept expressed also by the last word of Moore's poem, "actuality", if read in the Hegelian sense, a reading not out of place but even inferred by the extra-textual references given by the author herself. In her notes Moore cites three times Trachtenberg's book *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol*, recognized as one of the sources of inspiration of the poem. Margaret Holley reads "Granite and Steel" exclusively in relation to this text and she underlines the borrowings from Trachtenberg present in the poem. The critic affirms that the composition is exemplary of Moore's practices of quotation and paraphrasing and that the discovery of this extra-poetic source "adds historical and philosophical dimensions to the poem that are only partially available to the reader who has not studied Trachtenberg's text, and preferably the one particular copy of it that Moore herself covered with clues by annotating it" ("Artist as Anthologist" 141).

In his book Trachtenberg provides interesting details of the biography of John Roebling, details that connect "Granite and Steel" with Hegel. One learns, for example, that Roebling attended Hegel's popular lectures at the University of Berlin and that he wrote in his diary about his desire that the bridge should possess

the Hegelian traits of *Wirklichkeit*. Trachtenberg explains the Hegelian concept of *Wirklichkeit* in this way: "[It] is the unity of essence and existence, of the inner world of life and the outer world of appearance" (quoted in Holley, "Artist as Anthologist" 140). Such a concept perfectly fits the poem, as it presents now in philosophical terms one of the central themes of "Granite and Steel", namely the relation between the visible and the invisible. "Actuality" reveals Roebing's inspiring principle and in her poem Moore proposes her vision of the union between essence and existence, between what can be perceived of the bridge and its interior life, in conclusion between the visible and the invisible.

As for the organization of space the area of the bridge, the concrete place on which the poem focuses, is characterized by the presence of two axes, one vertical and one horizontal, both of which connect two spaces, the first being earth and sky, and the second Europe and America. This double orientation is already present in the title: "granite" and "steel" are namely the two materials of which towers and spans are respectively made of, the first a symbol of its verticality and the second of its horizontal dimension. Verticality is made explicit placing the bridge between earth and sky: "silvered by the sea" the bridge comes out of the sea but is also a "path amid the stars". Moreover, the adjective "climatic" as well as the parallelism with the Statue of Liberty underline the upward movement of this construction. The horizontal extension is instead alluded to through the continuous characterization of the bridge as transit and route ("path", "way out; way in", "passageway") and by the references to its European and American components that make it a virtual connection between the two continents, being positioned on American soil but a product of "German ingenuity". The final definition of the bridge as a "composite span" might refer right to its ability to join different nations. In her interpretation Cristanne Miller underlines this aspect of the poem (*Questions* 161) and Margaret Holley links it to the speech delivered by Reverend Storrs at the Opening Ceremony of the Bridge in 1883, during which he affirmed that the construction "represents that fellowship of the Nations which is more and more

prominently a fact of our time" ("Artist as Anthologist" 140).

On a symbolic level, the space pictured in the poem is a space of freedom. The word "enfranchising" opens the composition and right from the beginning the bridge is linked to the Statue of Liberty, with which it dominates New York Bay. The connection between statue and bridge does not only originate from a local proximity, the sharing of the same space, but also from having a common constructing element, the chains, transformed from a symbol of imprisonment into one of freedom. Chains are no longer used to tie but lie at the feet of the statue of the French sculptor, Bartholdi, and they become the essential components of a structure, the bridge, that facilitates the circulation and movement of people. Moore plays on the oxymoron "Liberty dominate" and paradoxically transforms the bridge into a symbol of freedom, despite referring to it with terms that evoke imprisonment: "cable", "wire", "caged", "catenary". The American dream, America as a place of beaten tyranny and endless possibilities, permeates the entire composition and takes shape in the opportunity given to a simple German immigrant to erect such an important structure, which has become one of the symbols of the new continent.

However, "Granite and Steel" is not an idyllic look from the bridge and the reference to "man's uncompunctious greed / his crass love for crass priority" introduces the theme of materialism, already connected by Moore to urban space, particularly in the early poem "New York". It is worth noting that in the collection *Tell Me, Tell Me: Granite, Steel and Other Topics*, published in 1966, the theme of materialism is not only present in "Granite and Steel" but also in the essay "Profit Is a Dead Weight". Laurence Stapleton remembers that a first version of the poem also included the following lines, which were later eliminated: "Let me say with the poor / 'O my Lord ... / if it endanger my soul/take it from me". With some changes these lines are instead preserved in the essay and, according to the critic, such a common element between the two texts confirms the interpretation of the poem according to which greed is an evil that bisects the whole of humanity, regardless of race or historical period (*Poet's Advance* 209). In the composition the bridge becomes an "implacable enemy" of human

greed, defined as "mind's deformity", that shows in the attempt to stop people from moving, from "step[ping] ashore". This construction, in its essence a place of transit, must oppose this human behavior, as a lack of movement would question the existence of the bridge itself.

Finally, the place represented in the poem is also an enchanted space, a space of dreams far away from the concrete and factual dimension of the bridge. The construction is for example defined as a "Caged Circe of steel and stone", referring to the uncontrollable impulse that pushed a reporter one night to climb up to the top of one of its two towers, as if the bridge were a sorceress that held him in her power.<sup>17</sup> In the poem there are two dimensions co-existing: one is real and is founded on a direct knowledge of the bridge, expressed through references to some of its concrete elements, such as its constructing principle, materials, geographical location, builder; the other is abstract and is responsible for the definition of the bridge as: "[a] path amid the stars", "[a] romantic passageway", "a double rainbow". Trachtenberg argues that in his great poem *The Bridge* Hart Crane transforms this construction into a symbol, refusing its social reality, "its concrete relations to its culture" (quoted in Stapleton, *Poet's Advance* 207). In her interpretation of the bridge Moore does not completely share Hart Crane's perspective. She does not forget the social implications of the bridge, while underlining its ability to turn itself into an ideal, universal passageway, a passageway unanimously recognized as able to overcome its local specificity as a simple link between two New York districts.

Far from being a simple occasional composition, in its celebration of the bridge "Granite and Steel" proposes once again the multiplicity of vision that has characterized all of the other poems that focus on New York City. The bridge and its urban setting are an idealized space but also a space corrupted by human materialism, deeply American but born from foreign minds, concrete but with a symbolic meaning. After 50 years of familiarity with New York, Moore seems to have come to terms with its ambiguity and variety. The definition of the bridge as a "composite



span" in the last line of the poem reveals not simply a neutral acceptance of this feature of the city but even a positive judgement of it, the bridge being an exemplification of something made up of different parts or materials that work as a whole in unison, Moore herself grants the construction with a sense of harmony when she writes that the bridge is an affirmation of "interacting harmony!". On the one hand, harmony reminds the reader of the "multiplicity" of the boats in the harbor described in "Dock Rats". On the other, it is also a step forward, as multiplicity focuses on the variety of aspects and not on their inter-relation, while harmony implies that these aspects relate to each other and do so in a positive manner.

Being not just a description but a celebration of the Brooklyn Bridge, the tone of triumph that permeates "Granite and Steel", and that distinguishes it from the previous works with an urban setting, is also present in the idea of the bridge as a borderline and connection. In her works on New York, Moore has explicitly presented it as a border city, either focusing on an exemplary liminal area, such as the harbor in "Dock Rats", or relating it to different spaces, such as the wilderness in "New York" or a tropical landscape in "People's Surroundings". In "Granite and Steel" New York is always a border city, being between America and Europe, land and ocean, sky and earth. However, focusing on the Brooklyn Bridge implies that the border is affirmed just to be crossed and that the essence of the city is not its liminality but its capacity to bring together. If multiplicity is transformed into harmony, the border becomes a "romantic passageway" in "Granite and Steel", underlining New York's potentiality for communication, union, contact.

The presence of a work like "Granite and Steel" at the end of Moore's poetic career is rather telling because it testifies to her life-long relation with New York and her increasing enthusiasm for the town. Such an enthusiasm is witnessed not only in her poetry but also by Moore's increasing involvement in the social life of the city and finally clearly stated in 1967, one year after the publication of "Granite and Steel", in the concluding lines of her essay "Crossing Brooklyn Bridge at Twilight": "I Like Santa Barbara, Vancouver, British Columbia; I have an incurable fondness for London. But of any cities I have seen, I like New York best" (Moore, *Prose* 612).

<sup>1</sup> For a positive evaluation of the poem see: Guillory pp. 83-91, Leavell pp. 192-3; Stapleton pp. 206-210.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of these letters see: Costello, Goodridge, Miller eds., *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, pp. 54-55, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SL*.

<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, in her interview Moore talks about 1916 and not 1915, probably due to the difficulty of the old poet to remember exactly an event which took place more than 50 years before. However, all her letters referring to this trip to New York are dated December 1915.

<sup>4</sup> This poem was published for the first time in *The Lantern* in the Spring of 1916. It has been included in *Observations* and *Selected Poems*, to be afterwards abandoned.

<sup>5</sup> Of this composition Donald Hall affirms: "Among the poems left out of later collections, "Dock Rats" is, perhaps, the only questionable omission. It has life and charm and flavor and [...] it seems salvageable for the felicities in contains" (Hall, *Cage*- 54). As a matter of fact, Moore definitely, and questionably, abandons this composition after its publication in *Others for 1919* in 1920 and its inclusion in *Observations*, her first collection of poems. Quotations from this poem are taken from the version published in *Observations* (53-54).

<sup>6</sup> This poem appears for the first time in *The Dial* in December 1921. Moore includes this poem in *Observations* and in the later cumulative collections *Selected Poems*, *Collected Poems* and *Complete Poems*. Quotations from this poem are taken from the version published in *Observations* (65).

<sup>7</sup> In the version published in *Complete Poems* (54) Moore omits the two lines that most directly reveal a controversial attitude towards the wilderness: "To combat which one must stand outside and laugh / since to go in is to be lost". Moore's notebooks reveal that those two lines are a transformation of a sentence by Duns Scotus to be found in his *Medieval Mind* (vol,II: 516) and that the poet copied in her notebook about in 1920 ("New York". *Marianne Moore Newsletter*, IV.1 (1980): 12). For interpretations of this omission see: Joyce pp. 121-2, Nitchie pp.101-2, Steinman pp. 321-34.

<sup>8</sup> For Leavell "New York" is exemplary of Moore's use of assemblage techniques that she had seen at work attending New York artistic circles. Particularly, the critic draws a parallel between Moore's poem and an embroidered tapestry by Marguerite Zorach entitled *The City of New York* that the poet had seen at an exhibition: "By taking advantage of assemblage's ability to present multiple perspectives, both Moore and Zorach undermine the nineteenth century assumption that one can see an entire landscape from a single, dominant perspective" (*Visual Arts* 123).

<sup>9</sup> In the notes to her poem Moore acknowledges Henry James as the source of her sentence without specifying the exact references of her borrowing. For possible explanations of the origins of this phrase see Willis, "New York: 'Accessibility to Experience'", pp.13-14. This sentence has also been considered of great importance by many critics who have often built around it their

interpretations of the poem. Among the most interesting interpretations see: Gregory p.169, Joyce p. 121, Merrin pp.191-206, Miller *Women Modernizing* pp. 339-362; Slatin p.119, Steinman pp. 321-334.

<sup>10</sup> This poem appears for the first time in *The Dial* in June 1922. Moore includes this poem in *Observations* and in the later cumulative collections *Selected Poems*, *Collected Poems* and *Complete Poems*. Quotations from this poem are taken from the version published in *Complete Poems* (55-7).

<sup>11</sup> Generally, critics see a decline in Moore's poetry after the 30s. For contrasting views see Holley *Voice and Value*, Miller *Questions of Authority*, Stapleton.

<sup>12</sup> Citations from these late poems are all taken from the versions published in *Complete Poems*, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CP*.

<sup>13</sup> After the publication in *The New Yorker*, the poem is included in the collection *Tell Me, Tell Me: Granite, Steel and Other Topics*, which appeared in November 1966 and contains not only poems but also four pieces of prose, and in *Complete Poems* published in 1967.

<sup>14</sup> For insightful analyses of Moore's stanzaic patterns see: Graham pp. 33-50, Holley "The Model Stanza" pp. 181-191, Leavell pp. 56-95. For a different interpretation that underlines an aural rather than a visual organization of Moore's method of composition see Schulman.

<sup>15</sup> Even if "Granite and Steel" is never cited in her work, I think that in this composition it is possible to find all Moore's stylistic features that Borroff underlines in her *Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore*.

<sup>16</sup> For parallels between Moore and Cubism see: Miller *Questions of Authority* p. 47; Erickson pp. 46-51 and the two entire volumes respectively by Joyce and Leavell.

<sup>17</sup> In his book Trachtenberg describes this incident and he affirms to have read about it in Meyer Berger's *Modernized Brooklyn Bridge*. Trachtenberg himself uses the image of Circe referring to the fascination the reporter felt for the bridge: "To him she was always a Circe made of steel and stone" (qtd. in Holley, "Artist as Anthologist" 138).

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