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Introducing Godzilla to Marianne Moore's Octopus of Ice at the Intersection of Global Warming, Environmental Philosophy, and Poetry

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INTRODUCING GODZILLA TO MARIANNE MOORE'S OCTOPUS OF ICE
AT THE INTERSECTION OF GLOBAL WARMING,
ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, AND POETRY

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Humanities

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ADVISOR'S PAGE

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisors and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Graduate Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the question: how can a poet write an ecologically aware poem about global warming? Global warming impacts everything on earth, most visibly the glaciers melting away before our eyes. Adopting Aldo Leopold's environmental philosophy of thinking like a mountain, the poet may describe the impact of global warming upon the mountain, glacier, flora and fauna, that form an interconnected web of life. A poem that thinks like a mountain already exists: Marianne Moore's "An Octopus" (published in 1924), which takes its title from the system of glaciers (or octopus of ice) on Mt. Rainier. For a contemporary poet to think like a mountain, he or she may explore the retreat of glaciers and disappearance of species attributable to global warming. But translating science into poetry may not convey the urgency of the situation. To make his or her poem truly impactful, the poet may employ a symbol of environmental apocalypse in existence since 1954: Godzilla. Introducing Godzilla to Marianne Moore's octopus of ice represents a sound theoretical approach for the contemporary poet to take in writing an impactful, ecologically aware, poem about global warming.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This paper develops an approach to writing an ecologically aware poem about global warming. At its core, the approach adopts Aldo Leopold's environmental philosophy of *thinking like a mountain*. Global warming, or the warmed atmosphere, and mountains, have at least one thing in common: both are immense. This is especially true for the largest of mountains including Mt. Rainier in the Pacific Northwest. Even the system of glaciers that tops Mt. Rainier is immense: it contains twenty five percent of the glacial mass of the continental United States. The glaciers intrigued Marianne Moore, who tackled the subject in a poem written between 1922 and 1924. She titled her poem "An Octopus" after the name *octopus of ice* given the system of glaciers by the National Park Service. In composing "An Octopus," by appropriating text from natural history guides and other knowledgeable sources, and by channeling the energy of species that call Mt. Rainier home, Moore thought like a mountain.

Moore's approach remains valid today, but in using this approach as a model the contemporary poet needs to acknowledge evidence that the octopus of ice is melting. Nearly a century has elapsed since Moore wrote "An Octopus." Using Mt. Rainier as the setting for an ecologically aware poem about global warming requires an understanding of current ecological conditions on the mountain. For this part of my analysis I relied on the work of naturalist Daniel Mathews, and scientists Kevin Ford and R. S. Beason. For basic scientific principles of global warming, in addition to my own background as an environmental engineer, I relied on the work of Joseph Romm. The sources I have chosen are accessible to a generally informed citizen who does not possess a scientific background.

In presenting the way in which Marianne Moore was equipped to describe the ecosystem of Mt. Rainier, I conclude that poetry and science are not mutually exclusive. Moore is quoted in

an interview with fellow poet Donald Hall as having adopted scientific methods in composing her poetry. Moore's approach in writing "An Octopus," in which she appropriated text from knowledgeable sources, produced not only in a snapshot in time of Mt. Rainier but also a virtual ecosystem on the page in which species are granted agency in harmony with people.

Appropriation of text is one of the approaches that connects Moore to the modernist movement in poetry. In delving into Moore's roots in the modernist movement, and into her points of divergence from the movement, I relied primarily upon the work of Taffy Martin; and Laurence Stapleton. To understand Moore's process in writing "An Octopus," I relied on the scholarship of Patricia Willis.

To apply the concept of *thinking like a mountain* in this analysis, it is necessary to delve into Aldo Leopold's essay of the same name. Moore and Leopold were contemporaries living in an era in which, in the case of poetry, strict formalism was being replaced by free verse, and in the case of environmental philosophy, assumptions about humankind's dominion over the natural world were being questioned. In his essay, Leopold challenges the human mind to realize the interconnectedness of all things making up earth's ecosystem; the human mind must expand its boundaries to solve the puzzle of how to think like a mountain. I present the perspectives of Timothy Clark and John Tallmadge in unravelling the riddle of how to apply thinking like mountain to the literary art of poetry.

The contemporary poet tackling the subject of global warming in the way Moore tackled the subject of Mt. Rainier quickly runs up against a complication: the warmed atmosphere that encircles the earth is unquestionably more immense than a mountain. I explore environmental philosopher Timothy Morton's use of the term "hyperobject" to describe global warming. Morton argues that hyperobjects are inherently difficult to describe. I provide the counterpoint

that the best way in which to describe global warming is through its effect on smaller objects, sentient and non-sentient, occupying an ecosystem. Specifically, if the contemporary poet succeeds in demonstrating changes attributable to global warming, the poet may succeed in thinking like a mountain in an era of global warming. To succeed at this task, the poet needs to develop a grasp of the concept of immensity. Here the work of philosopher Gaston Bachelard proves essential in interpreting how the human mind is capable of expanding boundaries through the realm of symbolism and metaphor.

And yet, the ecologically aware poem that results from applying Moore's technique, while conveying the immensity of global warming, may not be sufficient. Merely describing the changes to Mt. Rainier's ecosystem in a poem, specifically the retreat of glaciers and possible disappearance of species, doesn't convey the urgency of the situation. This is where the poet may take more risks than the scientist in conveying information. I argue that popular culture is the source of the solution to this communications dilemma. There is a figure of popular culture that has been in existence since 1954 which is also a symbol of environmental apocalypse: Godzilla. In presenting Godzilla's relationship to environmental apocalypse, I rely on the scholarship of William Tsutsui, David Kalat, and Susan Napier. I prove, using Morton's definition, that Godzilla may also be considered a hyperobject. What better symbol exists than Godzilla to pit against the hyperobject of global warming and what better place of convergence than Mt. Rainier? I conclude by presenting an argument that a combination of Moore's technique, supplemented by the admittedly activist act of introducing Godzilla to Marianne Moore's octopus of ice, is an appropriate approach to writing an impactful, ecologically aware, poem about global warming.

CHAPTER TWO: MT. RAINIER AND GLOBAL WARMING

In order to write a poem about global warming through the lens of Mt. Rainier, the poet needs to understand its ecology. The poet also needs to discuss changes to Mt. Rainier's ecosystem caused by global warming, specifically those that have transpired since Marianne Moore wrote her long poem "An Octopus." The most significant change to occur in the century that has passed is the reduction in mass of the octopus of ice, or system of glaciers; this development will be covered in detail below. Other changes that have occurred to Mt. Rainier's ecosystem will be addressed including shifts in habitat and dislocation of species. The resulting updated ecological setting for Mt. Rainier will form a sound basis for developing a scientifically accurate response to "An Octopus."

The most distinctive feature of Mt. Rainier is the system of glaciers that caps the peak. The summit is often veiled in clouds: tourists stand and wait for the mountain to "come out." When it does they are struck by a feeling of the sublime. With the brilliance of the glaciers caught in relief between purplish rock and the blue sky, such is the immensity of the mountain's prospect that it seems immune to human impact. Elsewhere on planet earth our human species has written the story of our existence into the land using a language of highways, railways, housing developments, open pit mines, reservoirs, etc. But seen from above, the etched lines of an industrial age only circumnavigate, and do not summit, Mt. Rainier. Seen from a place called Paradise within Mt. Rainier National Park, *seemingly* unedited by humankind, the mountain's system of glaciers, reaching down from the summit, assumes the form of an octopus.

Glaciers owe their existence to ice ages: periods of cooling of the earth's climate, during which ice sheets advance from polar regions. According to naturalist Daniel Mathews, the most recent of these episodes of glaciation occurred approximately 14,000 years ago (25). Glaciers

create the mountain landscape of the cirque, the tarn, and the horn, in the Pacific Northwest, features so large and distinctive that they challenge the work done by humankind's mighty bulldozer. And yet, while humankind hasn't directly attacked the octopus of ice with bulldozers, human-induced warming of the atmosphere does cause ice to melt. True to this basic relationship, as our climate warms, the octopus of ice retreats back up the slopes of Mt. Rainier much in the same manner that a real octopus would retreat from an obvious physical threat.

What is so special about Mt. Rainier, as a symbol for global warming, that we should give the octopus of ice our attention? According to scientist Scott R. Beason, Mt. Rainier's system of glaciers contains a quarter of the glacial mass of the continental United States ("Change in Glacial Extent" 3). Nevertheless, despite its immensity, the octopus of ice continues to lose mass, and appears to withdraw towards the summit. This retreat is not mere fiction: photographs taken over time provide the visual evidence. Scientific measurements confirm visual observations: the Department of Geology at Portland State University estimates that, between the years 1913 and 1994, Mt. Rainier's glaciers lost 25% of their volume. Beason estimates that the rate of loss further accelerated from 1994 to 2008, registering as much as 3% in a given year ("Landscape Response").

When Moore visited Mt. Rainier, she set foot on the octopus of ice. Moore and her brother joined a hiking party to the Paradise Ice Caves, accessible from Paradise Inn where Moore, her brother, and her mother lodged (Willis, *Marianne Moore* 38). Hiking parties were taught the proper way to rope together and were issued alpenstocks to help navigate the snowfields to the caves which, according to Donald Johnstone in his historical account of Mt. Rainier National Park, were located at the terminus of Paradise Glacier (59). Johnstone further reports that by 1992 Paradise Glacier had retreated to such an extent that the ice caves (which

Moore visited) no longer existed (60). The extinction of the Paradise Ice Caves demonstrates a reduction of the glacier's life force, the life force described so powerfully by Moore. The poem begins:

An Octopus

of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies 'in grandeur and mass'
beneath a sea of shifting snow-dunes;
dots of cyclamen-red and maroon on its clearly defined pseudopodia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice-fields from fifty to five hundred feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy. ("An Octopus" 441)

The phrase "in grandeur and mass" (note that Moore identifies appropriated text using single quotation marks) can be found in F. E. Matthes' description of the glaciers of Mt. Rainier c. 1916 (202). The phrase accurately captures the sublime aspect of the mountain. In fact, seen from Puget Sound, although 78 miles distant, Mt. Rainier appears to rise directly from the sound.

In present day, while still grand, the octopus has been reduced in mass by global warming. And so we see that Marianne Moore's octopus of ice is not immune to human impact, even though that impact may not be obvious to the casual tourist. But our warming atmosphere, absent another ice age, will continue to cause glaciers to recede and perhaps disappear entirely. Human influence on climate etches the story of humankind into the glacier in a way a bulldozer never could. As for those members of the human species who actually set foot on glaciers, the footprints they leave behind are erased by the changing seasons.

Although mountain climbers leave little trace, certainly no roadways, transmission lines, etc., nevertheless, these adventurers are part of the subtext of human presence written into the system of glaciers on Mt. Rainier. To access the mountain the climber generally needs to arrive by some combination of airplane, train, automobile, and/or bus. According to the National Park

Service, over the past 10 years an average of 615 thousand cars per year have entered Mt. Rainier National Park. (“Annual Visitation”). Most of these forms of transportation, powered by fossil fuel, release carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) to the atmosphere. As the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increases, so does the temperature. As the temperature increases, so does the melt-back of glaciers. What then, is the fate of Marianne Moore’s octopus of ice? Is it being loved to death? Beason suggests that the lower elevation glaciers making up the octopus of ice will certainly be impacted: given our warming climate, the octopus will soon lose one or more of its arms (“Change in Glacial Extent” viii).

The long poem of the North American highway system, authored by members of humankind who drive automobiles (myself included) extends a line to Paradise, the outpost within Mt. Rainier National Park where Paradise Inn is located, and where Marianne Moore and her family lodged. While roadways represent one of the more visible signs of change imposed by human invention of the automobile, the link between the automobile and the shrinking of the octopus occurs between the lines. While the impact of a single mountain climber may be small, the impact of human commercial/industrial society, as a whole, is large. How large? The only thing that could cause the octopus to grow again would be a protracted period of cooling; yet Mathews concludes that human-induced warming of the earth’s atmosphere has interrupted the earth’s cycle of glaciation and has postponed the next ice age (27).

The retreat of the system of glaciers on Mt. Rainier is the most visible indication of climate change on the mountain’s ecosystem. Other changes, such as the outward migration or local extinction of species, are not immediately apprehensible. It generally takes wildlife surveys conducted over a period of time to prove this order of change. Such is the nature of extinction that one decade a species is seen; the next decade it is not seen, and only then do scientists start

to ask why. In this context, how does climate change impact today's reading of Marianne Moore's poem about Mt. Rainier? Marianne Moore populates "An Octopus" with animals that called Mt. Rainier home in 1922, including those in the following passage:

 this is the property of the exacting porcupine,
 and of the rat 'slipping along to its burrow in the swamp
 or pausing on high ground to smell the heather';
 of 'thoughtful beavers
 making drains which seem the work of careful men with shovels' ("An Octopus" 442)

Moore introduces human presence on the mountain (we're part of the ecosystem too) by comparing men to beavers. She also does not forget the mountain climber:

 the one resting his nerves while the other advanced,
 on this volcano with the blue jay, her principal companion ("An Octopus" 444)

Many of Rainer's inhabitants referred to by Moore still exist today, but global warming has reduced the habitat of, and threatened the health of, the most fragile species.

Relevant to this discussion, in 2012 Dr. Kevin Ford produced, for interpretive guides at Mt. Rainier National Park, a synopsis of predicted impacts of climate change. Ford identified the following habitats or species as particularly vulnerable: subalpine meadows; whitebark pine; and North American pika (4). In the case of subalpine meadows, warming temperatures cause tree populations to move to higher elevations thereby replacing meadows; meadows in turn colonize higher elevations, their populations constrained by the remaining space up the mountainside. In the case of whitebark pine, heat stress exacerbates the impact of "white pine blister rust," a disease that ultimately kills this species of tree; further, a warming climate may lead the destructive mountain pine beetle to advance into territory previously considered too cold. In the case of the pika, a small rabbit-like mammal, this species is said to possess a low heat tolerance; if it cannot cope by adapting to increased heat stress, then its range may shrink or the pika may become locally extinct.

Are the challenged species identified by Ford found in Moore's poem? We do find distributed throughout the poem the following wildflowers: periwinkles; heather-bells; alpine buckwheat; avalanche lily; paintbrush; larkspur; lupine; fireweed; asters; Calypso orchid; harebell; and gentian. Most of the above can be classified as alpine/subalpine species native to the Pacific Northwest. Two species listed by Moore are not specifically alpine/subalpine. The first is fireweed which, according to Mathews, is common at all elevations in the Pacific Northwest (261). The second is Calypso orchid, which Mathews indicates is present mainly in lowlands (182). With respect to trees, Moore does not include the whitebark pine, but does refer to: fir; larch; birch; and aspen. With respect to mammals, Moore does not include the pika, but she does reference numerous other species, a few of which are represented in the lines excerpted above.

In this chapter the ecosystem on Mt. Rainier and the major changes being caused by global warming have been described. To summarize, the melting of the system of glaciers on Mt. Rainier is the most visible impact of global warming, starkly represented by the retreating octopus of ice. However, more subtle changes are taking place that are not apparent to the naked eye, especially over the short time span during which a tourist may gaze up at Mt. Rainier. These changes, which include reduction in habitat and potential local extinction of vulnerable species, need to be taken into account by the contemporary poet writing about global warming. But first we need to better understand the literary movements to which Moore belonged and their role in influencing her composition of "An Octopus."

CHAPTER THREE: MARIANNE MOORE'S POETRY AND THE LITERARY MOVEMENTS TO WHICH IT BELONGS

In order to better understand how Marianne Moore came to write “An Octopus,” and why the poem takes the form it does, in this chapter we will consider Moore’s development within the modernist literary tradition as supplemented by her postmodernist leanings. I will explore Moore’s use of scientific methods in keeping with modernism’s celebration of science, and will make a strong case that Moore was especially well-suited to thinking like a mountain. Specifically, I will evaluate her use of collage, in which she incorporates text from various knowledgeable sources, including scientific ones. In the case of “An Octopus,” Moore’s skill in describing Mt. Rainier from various points of view, while channeling the spirit and mythology of the mountain, results in the poem becoming its own unique ecosystem on the page.

A long free verse poem of originally 230 lines, Marianne Moore’s “An Octopus” was first published in the literary magazine *Dial* in 1924. The text to which I refer in this analysis is the version presented in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. One key feature of this version is that footnotes accompany the poem to identify the sources of text appropriated by Moore. This version comprises 227 lines due to minor edits made by Moore between the years 1924 and 1935. Before delving into specifics about “An Octopus,” however, it will be helpful to learn a little more about Marianne Moore’s development as a poet.

Moore was born in 1887 in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. She began honing her craft as a poet during her college years. She attended Bryn Mawr, a women’s college with Quaker origins located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and graduated in 1909 with a B.A. degree. Moore earned her first publication credits when she placed two poems in the February 1907 issue of the Bryn Mawr literary journal *Tipyn o’Bob*. According to Marianne Moore biographer Linda

Leavell, while Moore's work was well-received by fellow students, one of her English professors, Miss Fullerton, found Moore's work "incoherent" (76). The two poems published in *Tipyn o'Bob*, bearing the titles "Under a Patched Sail," and "To Come after a Sonnet," can be found in the collection assembled by Robin Schulze entitled *Becoming Marianne Moore* (331). The two poems exhibit a level of abstraction: they require the reader to make a "leap" in interpreting the relationship between the title and the text. Otherwise, they are short, end-rhymed, and relatively direct in their subject matter about fleeting youth and friendship.

One aspect that I would like to explore in some detail is how science, including the curriculum at Bryn Mawr, influenced Moore's poetry. During the years Moore was enrolled at Bryn Mawr, the curriculum was diverse and students did not major in one subject area. While English literature featured heavily in Moore's chosen curriculum, in addition, she studied Latin and Biology (Leavell 67). In an interview conducted by poet Donald Hall, Moore cites her interest in science as providing a method through which to approach poetry:

Did laboratory studies affect my poetry? I am sure they did. I found the biology courses—minor, major, and histology—exhilarating. I thought, in fact, of studying medicine. Precision, economy of statement, logic employed to ends that are disinterested, drawing and identifying, liberate—at least have some bearing on—the imagination, it seems to me. (23)

The methods, especially precision, are demonstrated in by Moore. In "An Octopus," she appropriates phrases from natural history texts and National Park Service pamphlets, and thus, undertakes to represent the ecosystem of Mt. Rainier with precision. Of Moore's adoption of the sciences, biology is of particular interest: she employed animals frequently in her work and became known, in the words of literary critic Helen Vendler, as "a writer of texts to go beside a *National Geographic* photograph of an ostrich or a pangolin" (70).

As well as the life of the mind, direct physical experience was important to Moore. According to Leavell, although Moore weighed a mere 98 pounds she was fearless: Moore's favorite exercise at the gymnasium was called *ring high*, in which she "sprang from a diving-board-like plank, grabbed two rings, and swung over a suspended bamboo pole" (68). Moore's athleticism also comes into play in her process of writing "An Octopus." While Moore derives portions of her poem from various source materials, she also shapes the poem based on personal experience derived from her visit to Mt. Rainer in 1922. In the following example, Moore enriches the description of Goat Lake, beginning by calling the lake a mirror:

...The Goat's Mirror—
that lady-fingerlike depression in the shape of the left human foot,
which prejudices you in favour of itself
before you have had time to see the others;
its indigo, pea-green, blue-green, and turquoise,
from a hundred to two hundred feet deep,
'merging in irregular patches in the middle lake
where, like gusts of a storm
obliterating the shadows of the fir-trees, the wind makes lanes of ripples'.
What other spot could have merits of equal importance
for bears, elk, deer, wolves, goats, and ducks? ("An Octopus" 442)

The enrichment added by Moore is that of an observer so struck by the scene that she is prejudiced (a clearly human trait) in favor of Goat Lake. The lake becomes not merely a lake but a mirror into which the goat may implacably gaze. The speaker of the poem also channels the spirit of bear, elk, etc., in marking (much like a wild animal) this important habitat.

Marianne Moore was a contemporary of fellow poets T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Hilda Doolittle (known as H.D.), and is generally considered to belong to literary movement known as modernism. However, I will also show that formal aspects of Moore's work reflect the postmodern techniques of a subsequent generation of poets. Modernism as a period lasted from approximately 1890 until the start of World War II,

and as a movement is marked by such characteristics as: “overthrowing the rhyme and traditional forms and moving towards fragmentation, juxtaposition of images from widely scattered times and cultures, complex intertextual allusion and patterning, and personal discourse”

(“Modernism”). We find in the above passage from Moore several of these characteristics including: absence of direct rhyme; interspersed fragments of appropriated text; complex patterning (and even breaking of narrative, a postmodernist trait); and the personal discourse of one prejudiced toward Goat Lake. Note, however, that Moore’s use of personal discourse is indirect: she doesn’t use the personal pronoun “I” a single time in the poem.

Literary critic Taffy Martin differentiates Moore from other poets of her era by terming her a “subversive modernist,” specifically:

Moore emerges as a poet who responded to the twentieth century with humorous irony and aggressive optimism. Her blend of ideas was unique in its time, she was both at the center of twentieth-century modernism and at its outer limits. (x)

Martin argues that Moore pushed the boundaries of modernism to such a degree that her poetry manifests elements of postmodernism. Martin in part applies the metaphor of musical composition to explain Moore’s position in time:

Rather than the pioneering but still recognizably musical compositions of Aaron Copeland, Moore’s quotation-littered poems make one think of John Cage’s music, in which artificial time constraints and found sounds replace traditional phrasing. Moore’s attention to curious objects, her refusal to set most poems into a recognizable narrative, and her nearly too startling metaphors become not precious mannerisms but postmodern credentials when they appear in Frank O’Hara’s poems. (xxi)

As a point of reference, John Cage was born 25 years after Moore, and Frank O’Hara 39 years after Moore. This would suggest Moore was a visionary. Cage is famous for his composition entitled “4’33” in which the orchestra sits on stage, silent, for a period of 4 minutes and 33 seconds. O’Hara as a poet was known for his collaborations with painters Jackson Pollock and

Jasper Johns, both abstract expressionists active in the art world around the time Cage wrote his famous composition.

Postmodernism, the movement with which Cage and O'Hara are associated, is considered a reaction to modernism. Some of the characteristics of postmodern literature as follows: "tendencies to parody, pastiche, skepticism, irony, fatalism, the mixing of 'high' and 'low' cultural allusions, and an indifference to the redemptive mission of Art as conceived by the Modernist pioneers" ("Postmodernism"). We see a number of these characteristics in the following passage from "An Octopus:"

Distinguished by a beauty
of which 'the visitor dare never fully speak at home
for fear of being stoned as an imposter',
Big Snow Mountain is the home of a diversity of creatures:
those who 'have lived in hotels
but who now live in camps—who prefer to' ("An Octopus" 443)

The humor in the above passage is certainly dark or fatalistic, as it refers to the tourist being stoned to death, somewhat ironically, for deigning to share his or her experience of the sublime with family and friends. The allusions in this passage are also "low" (reflected in the preference of the human "creatures" to live in tents instead of hotels) in comparison to the more idealized, nearly mythical, treatment by Moore of Goat Lake presented earlier.

It may be useful to keep in mind at this point in our analysis that terms such as modernism and postmodernism are relative. Patricia Willis places the "isms" in context:

Modernism in poetry has come to mean the work of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Hilda Doolittle, William Carlos Williams, and their contemporaries. Although it subsumes the cross-currents of the named "isms" of the period – imagism, futurism, cubism, vorticism, dadaism, precisionism, and synchronism among them – modernism is not a term which those writers applied to their own work. The poets we think of as a group did not consider themselves a school nor did they write according to a single aesthetic formula. (*Marianne Moore 2*)

In other words, Moore did not deliberately follow a pattern called modernism but rather she and her generation of poets sought to disrupt pattern and convention. One of the techniques that Moore employed, that of collage, works against convention by appropriating text from other writers. Collage is also popular in today's ecopoetic movement. Ecopoetics seeks to place humankind in proper relation to other species, showing the human species as interconnected with, rather in dominion over, other species. This relationship makes "An Octopus" an interesting model to follow in composing a contemporary eco-poem about global warming.

At this point, informed by the background of Marianne Moore's development as a poet within the principally modernist tradition, we are ready to move on to a more detailed discussion of the writing of "An Octopus." The most complete source of information regarding how the poem took shape appears in the scholarship of Patricia Willis, who served as curator of Moore's personal papers at the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia. Willis relies upon Moore's notes to reconstruct the poet's approach in crafting the poem. First, however, we must address the title. As shown below, the title runs into the first line of the poem's text, and reveals Moore is not speaking of a conventional octopus but an octopus *of ice*:

An Octopus

of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies 'in grandeur and mass'
beneath a sea of shifting snow-dunes;
dots of cyclamen-red and maroon on its clearly defined pseudopodia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice-fields from fifty to five hundred feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy. ("An Octopus" 441)

Note the mention of twenty-eight ice-fields in the above excerpt. Willis reveals that the poem in its overall structure faithfully, and with scientific accuracy, represents the octopus of ice:

...the poem grew into twenty-eight sentences, a number not to be taken lightly since Moore well knew from her reading that Mt. Rainier is formed by twenty-eight glaciers.

Like the mountain itself, this poem is not truly symmetrical but marked by what might be called various elevations. (“The Road to Paradise” 249)

So we see that not only did Moore seek to inhabit her poem “An Octopus” with the proper number of glaciers, she also sought to represent the asymmetry of the mountain. Another more personal example of Moore’s pursuit of scientific accuracy is as follows. As Moore drafted “An Octopus,” she placed herself, her brother, and her mother, in the poem as animals. Moore’s choice for her brother was initially “badger” after the character in *The Wind in the Willows* until, prompted by a desire for accuracy, she changed “badger” to “marmot,” the actual small mammal found on Mt. Rainier (Willis “The Road to Paradise” 244).

Moore, like other poets and artists before her, had to choose whether to take a representational or expressionist approach. A representational approach would mean one faithful to the facts of the setting, an approach typical in narrative poetry. An expressionist response would focus to a greater extent on the emotions stirred up in the poet by nature, an approach typical in lyric poetry. A representational approach, though aiming for scientific accuracy, has its limitations; a mere catalogue of species and biological processes may make a fine biology textbook but not a fine ecological poem. On the other hand, a fully expressionist response to the subject centered on the author’s singular perspective may seem intrusive, especially if the pronoun “I” dominates the poem. Moore balances her response to nature by using a combination of representational and expressionist approaches. The representational approach is achieved through Moore’s incorporation of text from various sources. This technique is used to excellent effect in the following passage, in which Moore links the heat of the sun (which is represented as having the intensity of an acetylene torch used in welding metal) to the latent heat of the dormant volcano that is Mt. Rainier:

A special antelope...
the sun kindling its shoulders to maximum heat like acetylene, dyeing them white—
upon this antique pedestal,
'a mountain with those graceful lines which prove it a volcano' ("An Octopus" 443)

The appropriated text, identified by single quotation marks, grounds the passage with the fact that Mt. Rainier is a (dormant) volcano, thus providing a base from which Moore can use poetic craft to provide the reader with the unusual merging of sun and volcano, antelope and acetylene torch.

Recall that Taffy Martin compared Moore's technique of collage to that of a musical composer. Literary critic Laurence Stapleton links Moore to the modernist movement in painting. Stapleton offers the opinion that, as utilized in Moore's poetry, collage has the effect of dissolving "any sequence of idea or events" (33). If a representational approach shows the relation of one idea to another by juxtaposing the two, then the representational approach of Marianne Moore's poem "An Octopus" multiplies this effect by juxtaposing multiple ideas to each other and dissolving the sequence into a composite view of the ecosystem of Mt. Rainier, complete with mountain climbers who prefer tents to hotels. In the case of the antelope (above), we see the following juxtaposition: not only is the heat of a volcano associated with the heat of an acetylene torch, the mountain also serves as a pedestal for the antelope, referencing the human cultural practice of elevating, or even objectifying, wild animals as symbols.

"An Octopus" is broken into two stanzas: the stanza break occurs after line 160. The first stanza proceeds with exhaustive description of the flora and fauna of Mt. Rainier, then mentions Calypso (the goddess who kept Odysseus enchanted for a period during his journey home from the Trojan War) and a blue jay who "knows no Greek" ("An Octopus" 444). Calypso and the blue jay, in making their appearance before the stanza break, foreshadow a turn in the second stanza, away from Mt. Rainier into the realm of Greek philosophy. At this point in the poem,

Moore criticizes the Greeks for being too much inside their own heads and for preferring the idea of nature to actual nature. This detour lasts from lines 161 through 207 of the poem, at which point the focus shifts back to the octopus of ice with the line: “Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus” (“An Octopus” 445). From this point the poem builds momentum on the mountainside, ending with its focus on “the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed / its claw cut by the avalanche” (“An Octopus” 446).

As an aesthetic choice, what is the potential of collage in writing a poem that, with relentless accuracy, presents a mountain? As described by Stapleton:

“An Octopus” dispenses with narrative and dialogue. This documentary in verse proceeds by intent descriptive passages that build from romantic or humorous phrases of travel books and matter-of-fact details given in government pamphlets on the national parks. Some of the most pronounced effects are again achieved by combining phrases from other writers in totally new and unexpected context. (42)

Facts, when readily available, mitigate purely “romantic or humorous phrases,” by adding science to the equation, resulting in a more accurate ecological poem. Does that mean a poet needs to be a scientist to write a good ecological poem? Not necessarily. But a commitment to research or scholarship helps. As we have seen in several of the above excerpts from “An Octopus,” reliance on, and appropriation of, “outside” texts helps to inform the ecology of the poem to excellent effect. In considering the representational / expressionist balance of the poem, the direct quotations favor the representational.

What adds dimension to the poem, even in the absence of the pronoun “I”, are the ways in which Moore provides commentary. Taking the following passage:

The fir-trees, in ‘the magnitude of their root systems’,
rise aloof from these manoeuvres ‘creepy to behold’,
austere specimens of our American royal families,
‘each like the shadow of the one beside it.
The rock seems frail compared with their dark energy of life’,
its vermilion and onyx and manganese-blue interior expensiveness

left at the mercy of the weather;
'stained transversely by iron where the water drips down',
recognized by its plants and its animals.
Completing a circle,
you have been deceived into thinking that you have progressed. ("An Octopus" 441)

The reference to "American royal families," given that the United States of America was never a monarchy, assigns regal status to the firs, an expressionist act on the part of the poet. A deeper stamp of authorial intent (subtle rather than intrusive) appears in the observation that things have a tendency to come full circle and that we as readers and members of society may be deceived that we have progressed.

How do we avoid being deceived? By being pragmatic, as Rachel Buxton makes evident in the following:

Moore, like [Wallace] Stevens, believes that the imagination can accomplish nothing without a commitment to the contingencies of the 'physical world'; equally, though, she recognizes that any useful encounter with and account of that world demands shape and form, demands an imaginative overlay like those 'backgammon-board wedges' she sees on the moth's wing. (532)

One of the advantages of art over pure biological inventory is that it helps place nature in perspective by engaging the subject, in this case Mt. Rainier, in conversation. To accomplish this the poet must translate the mountain by thinking like a mountain. On its simplest level, thinking like a mountain can mean choosing whether to depict a badger or marmot: if the marmot is present on the mountain, and the badger is absent, then the mountain must insist that the poet refer to the marmot. At its most complex, the practice of thinking like a mountain results in a poem, like "An Octopus," that while set in a specific ecological place, creates a new ecosystem through the poet's expressionist touch. In other words, the poem does not simply provide the human perspective of an inventory of species, but also interprets the spirit and mythology of those species through metaphor. Every poem written about Mr. Rainier will be slightly different.

The poem as a work of art is essentially free to set its own rules of interrelationship. The trick is to achieve, as does Marianne Moore, both scientific accuracy (thinking) and emotional response (feeling).

We have seen the extent to which Marianne Moore's poem "An Octopus" uses collage or an accumulation of source material in combination with artistic rendering to create a detailed portrait of Mt. Rainier. The poem is "about" a mountain and also many other things including the capacity for human thought and endurance. We will next describe in more detail how Moore "thinks like a mountain" and, in some ways, "feels like a mountain," thus fulfilling the objective of providing an example of an ecologically aware poem.

CHAPTER FOUR: ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY CONTEMPORARY TO MARIANNE MOORE: THINKING LIKE A MOUNTAIN

In the previous chapter we explored Marianne Moore's compositional methods. In this chapter we will explore how Moore's method results in a poem, specifically "An Octopus," that thinks (even feels) like a mountain. To do so, we need to understand what environmental philosopher Aldo Leopold meant by the phrase "thinking like a mountain." This analysis will show that both Leopold and Moore sought to challenge the human mind to adopt new perspectives and that, in fact, "An Octopus" does think like a mountain.

Forester, conservationist, and environmental philosopher, Aldo Leopold was born in 1887 in Burlington, Iowa. Interestingly, Marianne Moore was born in the same year 200 miles away. Although there is no indication they ever met, Moore and Leopold belonged to a generation that rebelled against structure. Poets including Moore were breaking away from constrictive structures of meter and rhyme; and scientists including Leopold were beginning to think of the forest as an interconnected system of species rather than a stand of trees. Because Moore and Leopold were of the same era, it isn't surprising that Moore, in writing "An Octopus," thought like a mountain.

"Thinking like a Mountain" begins with a wolf's howl bouncing off rock formations of the desert southwest: Leopold explains that the sound means different things to the hunted, the hunter, and the mountain. He contrasts the hope of the hunter with the fear of the hunted but ascribes a deeper sensibility to the mountain: "Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf" (129). Proceeding to confess that he hunted wolves in his youth, Leopold describes the sense of regret he felt while looking into the eyes of a dying wolf:

I realized then, and I have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then, and full of

trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. (130)

To be clear, Leopold's youthful conclusion was that killing wolves was a good thing; it meant more deer to hunt. The error in this way of thinking is as follows: throwing off the balance of predator (wolf) and prey (deer) negatively impacts the ecological balance of the entire mountain, resulting in slopes denuded of vegetation, erosion, and reduction of the mountain's life force.

Although Leopold's "Thinking like a Mountain" is a brief essay of four pages, its influence on ecological thought runs to great length. Ever since its publication, the phrase "thinking like a mountain" has been employed by ecologists to argue for a holistic view of nature that recognizes the interconnectedness of things, such as the natural balance between the wolf as predator and the deer as prey. This philosophical position regarding ecological interconnectedness is also found in the environmental philosophy of John Muir, who in 1916 published his text *My First Summer in the Sierra*, in which he states: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (129). Muir, along with Leopold and Moore, drew inspiration from the mountains. Muir's work is punctuated with detailed descriptions of fauna and flora identified by their scientific names. Leopold was aware of, even influenced by, Muir's work.

Like any resonant, timely, idea cast into a receptive world, "thinking like a mountain" has taken on a life of its own. In the words of Timothy Clark: "This striking phrase has since become a biocentric motto, representing at once much that is problematic and yet most exciting" (77). Clark finds the phrase paradoxical because the lifespan of a human being and his or her way of thinking "would seem miniscule to a mountain" (78). The skeptic may say, mountains don't "think" in the same way humans do: mountains have no brain or central nervous system. But if

we consider human thought the process of synapses firing, the metaphorical equivalent in nature would include the passage of energy across the mountain, for example, in the form of predators (wolves) chasing prey (deer).

Harold Fromm, perhaps pointing out the obvious, contextualizes the anthropocentric nature of the phrase “thinking like a mountain” as follows:

When John Muir talks about "thinking like a glacier," or when Leopold talks about "thinking like a mountain," they are engaging in quintessentially anthropocentric appropriations of reality, for to think like glaciers or mountains is already to have nothing to do with those things and everything to do with people. (“Aldo Leopold”)

But “thinking like a mountain” need not be limited to placement of the human mind in the same geographic position as the mountain, Mt. Rainier for example. The phrase may also be treated as a riddle. This is the angle explored by John Tallmadge, who compares the phrase “thinking like a mountain” to a Zen koan:

The title, at first glance, appears cryptic and paradoxical, much like a Zen koan: how could a huge, inanimate object "think"? The answer does not emerge till the end, and, like the solution to a koan, it requires a fundamental change in the reader's world view. (124)

The conversion Tallmadge speaks of is that of Leopold from forester to conservationist when he realized the mountain preferred the wolf and deer in ecological balance.

What would enable a poet to take a Zen-like approach in giving voice to the mountain? Wakefulness would be a good first step. As would feeling gravity and what it means to be connected to the earth. As would surviving on the thin air of altitude. This state of wakefulness would ideally lead to awareness toward species inhabiting an ecosystem, for example: a marmot (rather than a misplaced badger) on the slopes of Mt. Rainier. As a poet, if I want to think like a specific mountain, as opposed to a generic mountain or mountain as symbol, and if I want to know the difference between a badger and a marmot, ideally, I will set foot on that actual mountain. This is perhaps where the need for scientific method comes more clearly into focus.

It's all fine and good to speak in riddles, but mountains are made up of rock, and soil, and plants, and animals. To truly understand a mountain requires some form of data, whether qualitative or quantitative. By setting foot on the mountain in question, one may collect one's own data, as did Muir in making his sketches and notes identifying plant species encountered. But Muir's practice also relied on information collected by other naturalists including those who first named the plants. In that sense, Muir supplemented his personal experience with knowledge that went beyond what one person could experience. Marianne Moore, whose approach, as a poet, is somewhat different from Muir's, nevertheless shows similarities with Muir's technique. She, too, set foot on the mountain and made her own observations. She, too, consulted other sources of data on the mountain in the form of natural history guides and National Park Service brochures.

Thinking like a mountain, then, is both about specificity and direct experience. Literary critic Charles Tomlinson describes why Marianne Moore was perhaps better equipped than her fellow contemporaries to this task:

In an age when such major poets as Eliot and Yeats have treated nature with an imperiousness that, at times, recalls their symbolist forebears, Miss Moore is ready to accord to objects and to animals a life of their own. (1)

Taking this into consideration, we can then modify the above statement to say: thinking like a mountain is about specificity and direct experience of not only the poet/mountaineer but also of the species that call Mt. Rainier home. In other words, identifying the marmot as merely being present in the landscape as a cardboard cutout lacks dimension; the poet must channel the marmot's life force (or direct experience) to make the poem itself come alive. Another way of saying this is that the poet must subjugate to the greatest extent possible his or her anthropomorphic voice to let the voice of the mountain come through. Channeling the life force of the marmot still must begin with a precise description of the mountain's ecology incorporated

from knowledgeable sources. Moore addresses the need for scientific precision in the interview with Donald Hall:

Do the poet and scientist not work analogously? They are willing to waste effort. To be hard on himself is one of the greatest strengths of each. Each is attentive to clues, each must narrow the choice, must strive for precision. (44)

These difficulties appear to have been surmounted by Moore, as we have shown in examples of her text where she successfully populates the mountain with actual species. She then adds her impressionistic touch to animate the same inhabitants on the page.

I have already offered the opinion that Moore's work creates a new ecosystem on the page. This is in agreement with Stapleton, who writes: "'An Octopus' is a poem about a particular place, opening vistas of time into other spaces, a poem about the findings that can occur there, as unpredictable life, seeking its own unity" (45). Moore's poem takes the reader on an ecological tour of the mountainside replete with the particulars to which Stapleton alludes. How extensive is the tour? In the first portion of the poem, through line 160, Moore specifically catalogues the following living inhabitants in order of their appearance in the poem: periwinkle; fir trees; larches; bears; elk; deer; wolves; goats; ducks; porcupine; rat; heather; beaver; ant hills; berry bushes; goat; mountain guide evolved from trapper; water ouzel; ptarmigan; heather bells and alpine buckwheat; eleven eagles of the west; marmot; spotted ponies; frosty grass and flowers; birch-trees; ferns; lily-pads, avalanche lilies; Indian paint-brushes; bear's ears; kittentails; fungi; rhododendron; Larkspur; blue pincushions; blue peas; lupine; aspens; cat's paws; woolly sunflowers; fireweed; asters; Goliath thistles; gentians; lady-slippers; harebells; mountain dryads; Calypso (the goat flower); mountain climbers; and the blue jay.

But in Moore's work what happens after line 160 is especially unpredictable. Moore shifts to personal discourse as her vision shifts away from the mountain and into the human mind:

‘Like happy souls in Hell,’ enjoying mental difficulties,
the grasshoppers of Greece
amused themselves with delicate behavior
because it was ‘so noble and so fair’;
not practiced in adapting their intelligence
to eagle traps and snowshoes (“An Octopus” 444)

These lines reveal Moore’s argument for direct experience of nature; there is no doubt in my mind that eagle traps and snowshoes are among the gear used by Moore to hike to Paradise Glacier and enter the ice caves. Perhaps more significantly, Moore’s argument seems to take up the modernist banner of the redemptive capability of art; in fact, her argument in this part of “An Octopus” takes on a distinctly activist tone. Moore appears to be saying that those who merely operate in a world of theory, or of mental difficulty, are less qualified to speak about nature than the mountain climber. This departure by Moore from cataloguing flora and fauna to criticizing the Greeks is unexpected to say the least, as Willis agrees: “This startling development has the effect of making the reader question what has gone before” (“The Road to Paradise” 251). This is exactly the point: questioning what has gone before is part of the process of scientific analysis.

The above passage in Moore is key to understanding how she thought like a mountain; as her work proves, this mental process requires creative energy beyond the mere cataloguing of the mountain’s attributes in cardboard cutout fashion. Moore succeeds in building the ecosystem of “An Octopus,” and therefore in thinking like a mountain, by having set foot on the mountain and enabling herself to channel the energy of the mountain and its inhabitants. Moore’s poem successfully meets the challenge of truly presenting a mountain by building a biological inventory of life on Mt. Rainier derived from various sources. She then necessarily modifies that inventory or catalogue by introducing the concept of human thought, specifically arguing for direct experience of nature. To think like a mountain means to seek balanced relationships; given

the human species is part of the mountain's ecosystem, Moore successfully incorporated human perspective into "An Octopus" side-by-side with other species.

Next it will be necessary to determine what adjustments the contemporary poet may need to make to adapt Moore's technique to the challenge of composing an ecologically aware poem about global warming in our present age of denial. Specifically, we must ask the question: is it possible for the contemporary poet to think like a mountain in a way that conveys the energy or spirit essence of global warming? The following chapter will address this question.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATING THE CONTEMPORARY / COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM OF GLOBAL WARMING

The contemporary poet taking on the subject of global warming must consider two major complications. The first is denial on the part of a potential reader that global warming is real and human-induced. The second is that global warming is an immense subject (the warmed atmosphere completely encircles the earth). I explore the first of these complications only briefly, as there are only so many strategies to employ against denial. In focusing on the second complication I rely on the scholarship of environmental philosopher Timothy Morton who uses the term “hyperobject” to describe global warming. While Morton successfully argues that hyperobjects, due to their size and complexity, are inherently difficult to describe, I explore as counterpoint whether global warming may be best described through its effect on smaller objects, both sentient and non-sentient, occupying an ecosystem. Recall that the approach taken by Marianne Moore involves the relentless application of small details. Yet the poet operates in the realm of imagination as well as fact. Therefore, I also rely on the scholarship of Gaston Bachelard in interpreting how the human mind may deal with immensity by expanding beyond scientific data or details into the realm of imagination through the vehicles of symbolism and metaphor within the poetic art.

First I will address the challenge posed by denial that global warming is real and is human-induced. This challenge is explored in detail by climate change communications expert George Marshall in his book *Don't Even Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. Marshall explores the gap between individuals who believe that global warming is real and attributed to human activity and those who do not hold this belief. In his text, Marshall uses the term climate change instead of global warming. The terms are often used

interchangeably but I prefer the term global warming, believing it more accurately describes the ecological condition being described. With respect to denial, Marshall offers: “This response to climate change is all too similar to that other great taboo, death, and I suggest that they may have far more in common than we want to admit” (2). Marshall goes on to explore what amounts to a code of silence, both in conservative communities in Texas and in liberal communities in New Jersey, in which survivors of climate disasters failed to acknowledge global warming as a causal factor. In comparing reactions to wildfires in Bastrop, Texas, to reactions to Hurricane Sandy on the Jersey Shore, Marshall reports that neither community blamed climate change as the cause of severe weather events. In the words of Marshall: “As in Bastrop, Texas, the dominant narrative all along the Jersey Shore was one of community cohesion and resilience” (7). Marshall also found that, once skies cleared and communities rebuilt, people impacted were unlikely to change their underlying beliefs. From Marshall:

Because weather events can never be ascribed with certainty to climate change, we are therefore prone to interpret them in light of our prior assumptions and prejudices. If we regard climate change as a myth, we regard variable and extreme weather as proof that weather can be naturally variable and extreme. If we are disposed to accept that climate change is a real and growing threat, we are liable to regard extreme weather as evidence of a growing destabilization. (14)

Marshall terms this human psychological mechanism *confirmation bias*, in which a person tends to fit information into his or her existing, already formed, belief system.

The human reaction to climate change is further complicated by social relations with other human beings, most significantly within peer groups. Marshall states that there are “real and serious risks involved with holding views that are out of step with your social group and your brain is wired to give them greater weight than other risks, even those that directly threaten you” (27). Marshall goes on to detail strategies of policy makers seeking to encourage people to reduce carbon consumption, and therefore reduce production of the greenhouse gas carbon

dioxide. According to Marshall, communication experts operating in the policy venue seek to “harness the power of social norms,” or to, in effect, use peer pressure (29). Later we will explore whether the poet, in seeking to counter denial or confirmation bias, may employ a strategy of employing cultural icons (sea monsters, for example) as “messengers” acceptable to a broad range of peer groups.

The second challenge I have raised related to communicating the nature of global warming—that of an inability to understand—is embodied by the sheer scale, or immensity, of global warming. Environmental philosopher Timothy Morton, in his text “Sublime Objects,” refers to global warming as a *hyperobject*. Morton defines hyperobjects as follows:

These are objects that are massively distributed in time and space.... They’re nonlocal. They’re foreshortened in time. They’re viscous—they have the strange quality of sticking to you the more you try to shake them off. The more you know about them, the more you figure out how enmeshed you are in them. The more you know about them, the stranger and even more terrifying they become. They occupy a high dimensional phase space so it’s only possible for humans to see pieces or aspects of them at any one time. (“Sublime Objects” 207)

We immediately see that several aspects of this definition apply to global warming: the warmed atmosphere that surrounds the earth is certainly *massively distributed*; the human species is *enmeshed* in global warming because we have no choice but to come into contact with the warmed atmosphere (we must breathe the atmosphere to survive); the hurricanes and wildfires we experience make global warming seem ever more *terrifying*; and because global warming involves the entirety of earth’s atmosphere, we can only see *pieces* of it at any one time.

Recall that Marshall equates the taboo of discussing climate change with the taboo of discussing death. In each case, the taboo enters the realm of the unknowable and the scary: the realm of the sublime. Morton also introduces the sublime in the context of global warming, arguing that to communicate the meaning of such a hyperobject we must return to the rhetorical

method of Ancient Greek philosopher Dionysius Longinus. Morton argues that the dominant philosophies of the sublime under which Western culture has operated, specifically the philosophies of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, are insufficient. From Morton:

I'm going to argue for a speculative sublime, an object-oriented sublime to be more precise. There is a model for just such a sublime on the market—the oldest extant text on the sublime, *Peri Hypsous* by Longinus. The Longinian sublime is about the physical intrusion of an alien presence. (“Sublime Objects” 207)

By the “physical intrusion of an alien presence,” Morton is clearly referring to global warming.

In order to better understand what Morton has in mind in referring to Longinus, it is helpful to consult the work of literary critic Philip Shaw on the subject, as presented in his text *The Sublime*. According to Shaw, Longinus believed “the discourse of the sublime, whether in political oratory or in epic verse, works to overcome the rational powers of its audience, persuading them of the efficacy of an idea by means of sheer rhetorical force” (4). The concept of rhetorical force, or strong delivery (the term Morton uses), seems to mesh with Morton’s idea that global warming must be treated as an alien presence.

Morton recommends the poet take what he calls an object-oriented approach as embodied in the work of John Keats. Keats, born in 1795, belongs to the English romantic tradition in poetry. The following is Morton’s description of what he admires in Keats’ approach:

The inventor of the object-oriented approach was John Keats, who exemplifies a minor tradition within modernity, a tradition that has flirted with objects and is thus vilified as naïve, kitsch, or commodity-fetishist.... Keats had discovered a totally new move within modern consumerist possibility space.... he went straight to the object, trying not to upgrade the reader’s mind but to melt it. (*Hyperobjects* 181)

Morton identifies Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as an exemplary example of the object-oriented approach. Here are the opening lines of the poem:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme (475)

It's worth explaining here that Keats embraces a scene from antiquity frozen in time by the artist who created the urn. Although the events depicted took place in the past Keats addresses the scene in the present tense.

But given global warming is a contemporary issue, does Morton offer an example of a contemporary poet who uses the object-oriented approach? Morton provides just such an example in Brenda Hillman's "Styrofoam Cup" which reads:

STYROFOAM CUP

thou still unravished thou

thou, thou bride

thou unstill,

thou unravished unbride

unthou unbride (21)

It's interesting to note that Hillman's poem makes intertextual reference to Keats' poem by appropriating the words "thou," "unravished," and "bride." By using the term "still unravished," Hillman adds a third dimension of time (the present day) to Keats' poem, which already represented two dimensions in time (Keats viewing in his present day a scene depicting Ancient time). What we can gather from Morton's choices in Keats and Hillman is that he appreciates an object-oriented approach that is multi-dimensional; and although his text is somewhat enigmatic, he appears to conclude that global warming must be described through such an approach.

Hillman refers to the Styrofoam cup's inertness, or longevity: it remains unravished. It will remain unravished, even once deposited in a landfill. Using Morton's definition, the Styrofoam cup itself may be considered a hyperobject. Specifically, because of its widespread use in the fast food industry, the Styrofoam cup is *massively distributed in time and space*. But Hillman also expands upon the object itself by linking the Styrofoam cup to the Grecian urn through intertextual allusion to Keats; this form of expansiveness may certainly be used to describe a hyperobject. However, Hillman's approach relies in part on a well-read reader conversant of Keats' work. I prefer Moore's approach of collage in describing the hyperobject of Mt. Rainier. As we have discussed, it is in part by amassing detail on the page that "An Octopus" thinks like mountain. And yet "An Octopus" also feels like a mountain, because it is more than a list poem of scientific data: it comes to life in the imagination and forms its own ecosystem on the page.

At this point in our analysis it becomes necessary to consider the way in which the poet shapes experience to translate nature into art. In doing so we return to Shaw's interpretation of Longinus:

Feelings, in other words, may arise in nature, but art is required to give them shape and coherence. The author [Longinus] goes on to describe a number of devices that may be employed to sublime effect, a list that includes hyperbole, periphrasis (circumambulatory or round-about speaking), comparisons, similes, and metaphor. (14)

It is fair to say that Marianne Moore used most of these literary devices in conveying the sense of the sublime, most notably that of periphrasis. "An Octopus" is a 227 line circumambulatory ramble on Mt. Rainier. But to understand the relationship between the poet's internal space and nature's external space, I turn here to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, in which he examines spaces of human occupation and the manner in which they shape human perception and memory.

In Bachelard's text, the poetic image features heavily. We see parallels to Morton's argument for *object-oriented ontology* when Bachelard states: "Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*" (2). In other words, the poetic image works not through a process of explication or definition: the mind interprets the image through its database of experiences, objects encountered, and spaces occupied. Bachelard further describes this concept: "The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me. The communicability of an unusual image is a fact of great ontological significance" (2).

Taking the example of "An Octopus," the selection and ordering of images is critical to Moore's objective of conferring meaning upon the reader. Here we enter into the realm of the imagination. Bachelard is more expansive than Morton in this respect:

If we could analyze impressions and images of immensity, of what immensity contributes to an image, we should soon enter into a region of the purest sort of phenomenology—a phenomenology without phenomena; or, stated less paradoxically, one that, in order to know the productive flow of images, need not wait for the phenomena of the imagination to take form and become stabilized in complete images. In other words, since immense is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. (202)

Bachelard's thought bears repeating: immense is not an object. We generally resort to describing immensity in relation to objects that are not immense. But if global warming is a hyperobject, or an object too large to describe using a method of accumulation of objects, then the poet must appeal directly to the reader's imagination in moving beyond the barriers of understanding.

To a large extent this analysis has relied upon demonstrating how Marianne Moore's poem "An Octopus" thinks like a mountain through an accumulation of detail. If this strategy were sufficient, then we may simply describe global warming in relation to the objects associated with global warming, for example automobiles and coal fired power plants, both of which release

carbon dioxide which causes global warming. Alternatively, in the case of the ecosystem of Mt. Rainier the contemporary poet may “update” Marianne Moore’s “An Octopus” by depicting changes caused by global warming that have transpired on Mt. Rainer since 1922. The most visible change is the retreating octopus of ice. More subtle changes include the retreat of subalpine wildflowers up the mountain along with the octopus of ice, and the threatened existence of the species whitebark pine and pika. The contemporary poet may respond to “An Octopus” by placing these imperiled species into his or her poem of response, thereby updating Moore’s presented ecosystem of 1922.

But an accumulation of detail or scientific data may, in itself, fail to convey the sense of the sublime that seems to be a requirement to stir the emotions of the reader. This where the poet’s imagination may help guide the poet’s hand in employing the tool of language. This is where Bachelard’s philosophy is key. The space of imagination Bachelard occupies in conveying a sense of immensity to the reader is that of the forest. If there’s a relation between the fear of being lost in the forest and the fear of global warming perhaps it is this: a feeling of powerlessness. As Bachelard describes such an experience: “We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of ‘going deeper and deeper’ into a limitless world” (203). To understand the immensity of the forest, however, is not a simple act to Bachelard:

But who knows the temporal dimensions of the forest? History is not enough. We should have to know how the forest experiences its great age; why, in the reign of the imagination, there are no young forests. (206)

In Bachelard’s seeking to understand “how the forest experiences its great age,” I hear echoes of Leopold’s assertion that: “Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf” (Leopold 129). Bachelard and Leopold seem to agree that nature’s hyperobjects

hold a different perspective from humankind. And so we return to the problem of how to translate the forest, the mountain, the warmed atmosphere, within the constraints of human language.

Both Bachelard and Leopold operate in the world of imagination in trying to understand the forest and the mountain, respectively. One might say, as did Tallmadge with respect to Leopold that the two philosophers are operating within the realm of the Zen koan or puzzle. To the extent that global warming is a puzzle to be solved, the poet could hardly do better than to think like a forest, a mountain, or a glacier, in writing a poem that responds to the ecological condition of global warming. One way in which to think like a natural feature is to present the wealth of data the natural feature encounters, in the example of the mountain: fire, snow, creatures traversing and nesting in its terrain, the mountain climber, etc. Marianne Moore attempts to unravel the riddle of the octopus of ice, and its meaning, by assembling data from various sources much like a scientist.

And yet, in a world of denial, perhaps an agglomeration of detail still isn't enough in writing a contemporary, impactful, poem about global warming. The poet may detail changes to the landscape wrought by a warmed atmosphere, including: retreating glaciers, the local extinction of species, etc. But to bridge the peer groups who hold differing opinions, pro and con, on global warming, perhaps a symbol of popular culture accepted by both peer groups is needed. Or better than a symbol, a gender-neutral spokesperson rooted in popular culture may shake up our common understanding of global warming: a charismatic spokesperson capable of reaching a larger audience than the less thrilling scientist quietly processing climate data. It's a tall order to ask of any public figure or poem. We will explore in the following chapter whether Godzilla may be just big enough to succeed at the task.

CHAPTER SIX: GODZILLA AS HYPEROBJECT

Merely describing the changes to Mt. Rainier's ecosystem in a poem, specifically the retreat of glaciers and possible disappearance of species, doesn't convey the urgency of the situation. This where the poet may take more risks than the scientist in conveying information. I argue that popular culture is the source of the solution to this communications dilemma. There is a symbol of popular culture that has been in existence since 1954, who is also a symbol of environmental apocalypse: Godzilla. In presenting Godzilla's relationship to environmental apocalypse, I rely on the scholarship of William Tsutsui, David Kalat, and Susan Napier. Godzilla, using Morton's definition, may also be considered a hyperobject. What better symbol exists than Godzilla to pit against the hyperobject of global warming and what better place of convergence than Mt. Rainier?

In choosing a symbol of popular culture applicable to the environmental threat of global warming, it's hard to imagine a better choice than Godzilla. Godzilla was born in 1954 in Japan as Gojira. Godzilla is the Americanized name of the monster, or shall we call him or her a movie star, cultural icon—or even—hyperobject? I say “him or her” because the gender of Godzilla is unclear. As explained by William Tsutsui, author of *Godzilla on My Mind*: “Over the years, much debate has swirled around the issue of Godzilla's sex. Whether Godzilla is male or female is by no means apparent.... the Godzilla films provide little in the way of physical evidence” (11). Although the gender of Godzilla may not seem important, I believe treating Godzilla as gender neutral offers more possibilities as a contemporary symbol for our contemporary world.

Briefly, for the reader uninitiated into the worldwide cult of Godzilla, here is a description of his or her background. Godzilla falls into the category of sea monsters which are common to the mythology of seafaring nations such as Japan. Most mythological creatures are

ancient, but Godzilla was born in the atomic age. At least that's when Godzilla surfaces in Japan, roughly a decade after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during an era when the United States continued to detonate nuclear weapons in the Pacific Ocean. Godzilla is best described as a giant lizard awakened by radiation who comes ashore to wreak havoc on the structures of society. Godzilla's intentions are interpreted in different ways by characters in the movie and by film critics. Complicating matters, Godzilla's role seems to shift through the years from foe of the human race to friend: the monster at times attacks, and at other times defends, Japan (from other monsters such as the giant moth named Mothra).

Measured on a human scale, Godzilla is massive: towering over office buildings like a strange, ambulatory construction (or deconstruction) crane; crushing commuter trains as if they were plastic toys; and emitting radioactive breath that sets objects on fire. But is this enough to call Godzilla a hyperobject? Recall that Morton's definition of hyperobjects includes that they have "the strange quality of sticking to you the more you try to shake them off" ("Sublime Objects" 207). In this respect, as an object of popular culture, Godzilla sticks to us all. Beyond his or her physical scale, Godzilla has grown beyond proportion, from humble beginnings as film star, into a cultural icon known to billions of members of the human race. According to Tsutsui:

Godzilla movies have been screened in every corner of the world, dubbed, subtitled, and edited for audiences from Warsaw to Macao, Karachi to Monterey. Godzilla merchandise—little vinyl Mothras, colorful posters, T-shirts adorned with flashing teeth, glowing dorsal fins, and massive saurian feet—have found their way into the hands of fans and children on every continent. (128)

Therefore, not only does Godzilla live on in the imagination of those of us who have seen the original film or one of its many sequels, Godzilla also occupies, as a scale model, places of honor upon our desks and refrigerators.

We recall that Morton drew an association between hyperobjects and the sublime. It's simple to argue that Godzilla's appearance in films is associated with the sublime, which is the realm of the unknowable and scary. The definition of the sublime also includes the sense that it is "crushing or engulfing, as something we cannot resist" ("Sublime"). The latter certainly conforms to the plot of most Godzilla films in which the monster does just that, crush or engulf objects and persons. According to Tsutsui, "The original *Gojira* was a sincere horror film, intended to frighten rather than amuse, which engaged honestly—indeed, even grimly—with contemporary Japanese unease over a mounting nuclear menace, untrammelled environmental degradation, and the long shadows of World War II" (14). That said, Godzilla has since become, in more than forty separate films, more a figure of entertainment than metaphor for environmental apocalypse. Peter H. Brothers writes of this development:

Sadly, the film's desperately serious message was disavowed by critics both in Japan and America, largely because they considered Godzilla as a monster movie not worthy of serious consideration, whereas many able to see below the surface discovered the film's moral. Strangely, the fact that *Godzilla* was a great commercial success may have worked against it, spawning as it has over two dozen sequels of inferior quality that have tended to cheapen the original film's intent by simply attempting to cash in on a major merchandising enterprise. (39)

Is it possibly time for Godzilla to reclaim his or her original position in the creative arts as a harbinger of environmental doom, and to choose Mt. Rainier as his or her place of reappearance?

In creating Godzilla, Toho Studios in Japan wanted to replicate the success of the movie *King Kong* from 1933. Tsutsui relates that film producer Tomoyuki Tanaka, on an airplane ride from Indonesia to Japan, while staring out at the surface of the sea, began to envision sea monsters. He then decided his next movie would feature a sea monster, but not just any sea monster. During initial collaboration between Tanaka and science fiction author Shigeru Kayama on the script of the movie that was to become Godzilla, the monster initially took the form of an

octopus (15). And so we see Godzilla and the octopus of ice share common roots in the human imagination. How did Gojira receive his or her name, and how was Gojira translated into the English equivalent of Godzilla? According to Kalat:

...the name was a fusion of the English word 'gorilla' with the Japanese word *kujira*, for whale. The name is comprised of three Japanese characters, which when transliterated into English letters by today's standards would produce *go-ji-ra*. Pronouncing that word in English, though, is a whole different problem from writing it—and since the 'ji' syllable would actually sound like 'dzi,' and Japanese makes no differentiation between 'l' and 'r' sounds, the word written as *gojira* would end up sounding like go-dzi-la. (15)

Thus, not just octopi, but also gorillas (suggestive of King Kong) and whales figure in the narrative of Godzilla's—or Gojira's—birth.

Radiation, in addition to the monster's sheer size, contributed to feelings of terror Godzilla projected on Japanese audiences. Radioactivity features in the opening scenes of *Gojira* (references to *Gojira* in this paper mean the original, Japanese version of, the film). Early in the film, occupants of a fishing trawler experience a blinding flash (resembling a flash of nuclear detonation). Peter H. Brothers relates how this scene echoes real life:

In 1954, while barely recovering from a devastating defeat in the Second World War and a humiliating seven-year-long American occupation, the Japanese were once again reminded of their unwilling participation in the Atomic age... In March of that year a Japanese tuna trawler named The Lucky Dragon No. 5 returned to port after finding itself covered in radioactive ash following the detonation of the first underwater nuclear explosion from the American "Operation Crossroads" atomic-bomb tests. (36)

While Brothers relates that film director Ishiro Honda avoided direct reference to the real-life Lucky Dragon incident in *Gojira*, to the informed viewer the parallels are clear.

Aside from Godzilla as a symbol of the bomb, Tsutsui points out that he or she fits into the broader tradition of sea monsters in mythology, including in Japanese culture, where such monsters often take on a majestic and benevolent side and only turn violent when provoked. In *Gojira*, the first time the monster comes ashore, he or she remains unseen: only the massive

footprints left on the beach the next day betray Godzilla's presence. Godzilla's nocturnal, unseen, landfall is accompanied by typhoon-like winds, heavy rain, and thunderous sounds. Such conditions, as depicted in the film, associate Godzilla with environmental unrest. As Tsutsui points out:

The figure of Godzilla played on other long-standing Japanese fears, and particularly on a deeply rooted vulnerability to the awesome and erratic forces of nature. Japan, as geologists, geographers, and meteorologists will attest, lies directly in the crosshairs of almost every destructive power Mother Nature can command. (16)

Among the destructive powers mentioned by Tsutsui, earthquakes and tidal waves come to mind, as well as destructive weather events. Climate scientists believe there is a linkage between global warming and severe weather events such as typhoons like the one that struck Odo Island in *Gojira*: all the more reason to appropriate Godzilla as a symbol of global warming, a human-induced environmental phenomenon.

Is Godzilla up to the task of serving as a symbol of global warming? Or is Godzilla too familiar, too "cuddly"? Scholar Susan J. Napier refers to the Godzilla series of movies as belonging to the category of "secure horror," in which "the collectivity is threatened, but only from the outside, and is ultimately reestablished, usually through the combined efforts of scientists and the government" (332). In this respect Godzilla seems, if not a hopeful symbol, a secure symbol who does not provoke the reaction of simply throwing one's arms in the air and giving up. Should we give up? Is it too late to combat global warming? Morton seems to suggest as much in concluding:

The end of the world has already occurred. We can be uncannily precise about the date on which the world ended.... April 1784, when James Watt presented the steam engine an act that commenced the depositing of carbon in Earth's crust—namely, the inception of humanity as a geophysical force on a planetary scale. (*Hyperobjects* 7)

To be clear, Morton traces the destruction of the world as we know it from the inception of the steam engine, which ushered in the industrial era, which in turn set humanity on the path to the consumption of ever greater quantities of fossil fuel.

However, if we choose optimism over pessimism as an operating principle in writing a poem that introduces Godzilla to Marianne Moore's octopus of ice, we may rely on Napier's principle of secure horror. But we still must ask the question: has Godzilla become too secure to be taken seriously as a harbinger of environmental apocalypse? Napier discusses the complexity of Godzilla's relationship to humankind:

...it is interesting to note that the Japanese have to some extent held a love-hate attitude toward monsters in the postwar period starting with Godzilla himself [or herself]. Godzilla began as the ultimate alien who, as the series continued, became a friend to Japan, an insider, "one of us." (349)

Based on Godzilla's history in the world of film, is the poet forced to choose whether to treat Godzilla as either friend or foe? Or may Godzilla instead serve as a neutral messenger: a symbol of nature's imbalance caused by humankind? The complexity of Godzilla would seem to argue for just such a nuanced interpretation. Using the example of the mountain lion, the lion may attack a human being to defend its territory but generally does not consider the human prey. Then Godzilla may be neither friend nor foe, but just an unusual species sensitive to radiation and a warming ocean disrupted in the act of trying to go about his or her day.

The poet may use metaphor to interpret a threat that is difficult to see. When faced with the retreat of the system of glaciers on Mt. Rainier, rather than blame ourselves as a contributing factor as members of the human species, we feel less guilt-ridden if we can blame something else: why not say God, or Godzilla? In the case of Godzilla, the poet may use Godzilla's destructive breath as a metaphor for the warm, carbon-dioxide laden, air of the earth's atmosphere. This gives us a potential film title (or the title of a poem): *Godzilla versus an*

Octopus of Ice. At this point in the development of the metaphor the poet may take into account that Godzilla was born (in the human mind) of the environmental threat posed by continued nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific Ocean. In this sense, Godzilla may be reborn out of the global environmental crisis of global warming which, in terms of its potential to devastate life as we know it, parallels the global threat of nuclear armament.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This critical analysis demonstrates a methodology for composing an ecologically aware poem about global warming. Specifically, this method involves thinking, and feeling, like a mountain consistent with the philosophy of Aldo Leopold. Marianne Moore's poem "An Octopus" may be relied upon as a baseline example of how to think, and feel, like a mountain. Marianne Moore did not write "An Octopus" as an ecological poem. And yet, despite the fact that in 1924, when "An Octopus" was published, global warming had not yet emerged as a scientific concept, the poem is not a nature poem in the romantic tradition. It does not seek to objectify a glacier without showing humankind's presence. What has changed since 1924 is that humankind's presence now includes the byproduct of our existence: a warmed atmosphere that causes Marianne Moore's octopus of ice to retreat back up the slopes of Mt. Rainier. Moore's technique proved honest with respect to the state of human knowledge at the time, but human knowledge today suggests it's time to update "An Octopus."

Moore, in her poem "Poetry," takes the position that poetry should not "discriminate against business documents and school-books" ("Poetry" 438). In making this statement, Moore counters the position of Leo Tolstoy, who mused in his diary that poetry "is everything with the exception of business documents and school books" (94). Why is this distinction important, and why should one support Moore's position? The answer is, for poetry to be relevant in contemporary society, it must reflect to some extent the culture that helped to form the poem. By incorporating text from the equivalent of school-books, i.e. natural history publications, and by incorporating text from perhaps not business documents but National Park Service brochures, Moore made the poem current to her time. To write a poem about Mt. Rainier today, following Moore's technique, the contemporary poet could not help but stumble across, and incorporate,

evidence found in current school books, nature guides, and government publications, that Moore's octopus of ice is being forced into retreat by global warming.

Recall that Morton terms global warming a hyperobject and expresses concern about the difficulties in describing such an object. Mt. Rainier's system of glaciers has been shown to contain approximately twenty-five percent of the total glacial mass of the continental United States. As such, I find Mt. Rainier's symbolism impossible to ignore, having personally encountered feelings of the sublime while standing in Paradise gazing up at the brilliance and seeming purity of the glaciers caught in relief between the dark, purplish, jagged exposed rock and the ice-blue sky. As I have argued, hyperobjects may be best described by describing the smaller objects tethered to them. In the case of global warming, this means describing global warming by detailing its effect on other objects such as glaciers.

This idea of describing an object such as Mt. Rainier through an accumulation of the objects, sentient and non-sentient, found there, comes very close to thinking like a mountain. As we recall from Leopold "Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf" (129). If a mountain may think, or feel, it is through the transmission of life forces across its own being, from the dying wolf to the retreating glacier. Marianne Moore wrote a poem that thinks like the mountain within the bounds of Leopold's definition. Moore also made the poem feel like a mountain by channeling the life forces found there and animating what would otherwise would have been a cardboard cutout assemblage of species. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but Moore's "An Octopus," clocking in at 227 lines, 28 sentences, and over a thousand words, provides an in-depth portrait of Mt. Rainier that a camera will never be able to capture.

And yet while Moore's "An Octopus" seeks to present an objective portrait of Mt. Rainier, the poem is not absent Moore's opinion or voice. The second part of the poem takes a strong position that nature must be experienced firsthand not only in the mind. This is where Moore's poem leans toward the activist's perspective. Contemporary ecological poets, or ecopoets, ask whether the activist poem represents a valid response on the part of the artist to conditions such as global warming. Brenda Hillman, whose poem "Styrofoam Cup" is admired by Morton, sees a role for such poetry. When interviewed on her activist perspective, Hillman presented an argument that that ecological problems such as disappearing species (an end result of global warming) must be presented in "a nondidactic and imaginative way," which calls for "an intense, unpredictable poetry" (Hume 759).

And so, when it comes to the intense and the unpredictable, if the poet should not discriminate against business documents and school-books, then, the poet arguably should not discriminate against comic books and movie icons—elements of popular culture. It is a dramatic, and activist, step to appropriate Godzilla to address environmental threat in a poem. It is risky to introduce Godzilla to Marianne Moore's octopus of ice in attempting to respond to the poem so delicately crafted by Moore. Can poetry match the scale and significance of the problem of global warming? Can poetry serve as a force of change in the course of environmental destruction? Maybe not, but to not be in conversation with the world around it the poem takes the risk of irrelevance. In a time of crisis irrelevance is something we may not be able to afford.

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APPENDIX

This appendix consists of this brief introduction, my poem “Godzilla Versus an Octopus of Ice,” and end notes to accompany the poem. This appendix is intended to supplement the preceding critical text on the subject of how to write an impactful, ecologically aware, poem about global warming. The octopus of ice in the title “Godzilla Versus an Octopus of Ice” refers to Marianne Moore’s poem “An Octopus,” which in turn takes its title from the name “octopus of ice” given by the National Park Service to the system of glaciers atop Mt. Rainier. My poem represents one example of how to employ the strategies described in my critical text, specifically the employment of Marianne Moore’s technique of collage, and the incorporation of a symbol of popular culture (namely, Godzilla). The end notes cite the sources of appropriated text that appear in “Godzilla Versus an Octopus of Ice.”

GODZILLA VERSUS AN OCTOPUS OF ICEⁱ

by Dave Seter

1 Fukushima Bay, Japan—a nuclear power plant fails—
2 an amniotic sac of radioactive water disperses into Pacific currents.
3 Three years later cesium-134 reaches Tacoma, U.S.A.—
4 invisible—except to scientists—to krill—to the Pacific bluefin tuna.
5 Known to the bones of the long-lived sea turtle, what else hides in the sea?
6 Seen from Tacoma, Mt. Rainier rises in the east and seems to surface
7 directly from Puget Sound to a height of fourteen thousand
8 four hundred and eleven feet—on top, Marianne Moore’s octopus of ice.
9 The mountain won’t come out
10 every day—tourists can’t believe their eyes—
11 they arrive at Sea-Tac International Airport codependent
12 on Camry, Civic, Corolla, Accord, Altima, Sentra, Fusion, Elantra, Malibu, Cruze—
13 all common to North America—the Ford Pinto long since extinct.
14 If from a distance you see Rainier and things seem permanent,
15 you may have been deceived because: *black bears may be brown, tan, or blonde;*
16 *Paradise Inn is only open in summer;* and
17 *Mt. Rainier has the potential to erupt again.*
18
19 Sea-Tac to Mt. Rainier—on the drive—615 thousand cars per year will lose sight
20 of the mountain and may rely on the storytelling device
21 of National Park Service brochures to keep the mountain present—
22 so did the poet Marianne Moore—who adopted the octopus of ice in 1922.
23 Arms of glaciers dangle down the mountain’s talus slopes—alive themselves—
24 in fact, you might hear *a ventriloquistic nasal eeeeenk*—
25 then see a pika appear, thick-set, 5-6 inches, no tail, ears round. You might
26 think you see a rodent, but the posture is rabbit-like.
27 *Only the mountain*
28 *has lived long enough to listen objectivelyⁱⁱ to the call of the rabbit-like pika.*
29 The octopus—with its *pinkness in late-lying snowfields of living algae*—is also alive,
30 but it has lost twenty-five percent of its *grandeur and mass*
31 since Marianne Moore slept here, at the foot of the mountain, in Paradise.
32
33 Paradise Inn, Mt. Rainier National Park—*A visitor to Paradise in 1920 would be stunned*
34 *to see the number of cars in the parking lot today.*
35 Today, you may arrive at a paradox—snow falling in June,
36 you may think global warming an urban myth—you may think—
37 where are the wildflowers? Marianne Moore slept here
38 then set foot on the mountain—in 1922 open ground marked the trailhead
39 to the ice caves. Now
40 the snow comes down—children

41 make snowmen in the parking lot—the tourist can't find his or her way—
 42 everyone is driven inside where timbers support each other
 43 over a forest of people—headroom for elephants and other non-sequiturs.
 44 In the lobby, a storyteller beginsⁱⁱⁱ
 45 while glasses clink and climbers sigh, among so many ghosts in the room,
 46 among so many beliefs, in science or not, in God or not. *In a way,*
 47 *the very beams of Paradise Inn tell the story of another time: after many winters of*
 48 *drifting snow, the Inn began to slowly slide downhill, it's massive cedar beams initially fit*
 49 *together without nails. The octopus is alive—and the inn is alive—both in motion,*
 50 *and still, despite the falling snow the octopus shrinks, as if in retreat.*
 51 The ice caves Marianne Moore visited melted away, years ago,
 52 into the Nisqually River, into Puget Sound.
 53 Next year or the next—*snowpack (declining), date of snow meltout (earlier),*
 54 *severe frost events (fewer) and summer drought (increasing)—these changes will affect*
 55 *the flowering of subalpine wildflower species. Don't be surprised*
 56 *like the pollinating insects that rely on them*
 57 to find Avalanche lily blooming in July instead of August.
 58 Make snowmen while you can. Windows are closing. To chase the color purple,
 59 you will need to climb higher to find: *Aster, Alpine; Aster, Cascade;*
 60 *Broadleaf Lupine; Dwarf Lupine;*
 61 *Harebell, Common; Jeffrey's Shooting Star; Low Jacob's Ladder;*
 62 *Mountain Bog Gentian;*
 63 *Penstemon, Cascade; Penstemon, Menzie's;*
 64 *Speedwell, Alpine; Speedwell, Cusick's;*
 65 *Tall Bluebells; Thistle, Edible.*
 66 *A late snow, even for here^{iv}, says the desk clerk. We need*
 67 *some of that good old-fashioned global warming—the television personality*
 68 *disrupts the narrative—but*
 69 *there's no television at the inn and there is no reception.*
 70
 71 Mt. Rainier—a Native American tribe wants Rainier's name not changed,
 72 *but its real name restored. An old man retorts:*
 73 *But it's Rainier Beer. It's on our license plates.*
 74 *The old man and Godzilla, both relics from days past.^v*
 75 If the mountain tried to name itself—
 76 *obstacles of intricate geology and difficult terrain necessitate great oversimplification,*
 77 *but let's say for argument's sake pyroxene, andesite, lava, subordinate mudflows, and*
 78 *thin pyroclastic deposits; say tuff-breccia, volcanic sandstone, sill rock,*
 79 *gabbro, diorite, recent pumice and ash.^{vi}*
 80 Some climb up to meet the octopus. Marianne Moore
 81 climbed as far as the ice caves in 1922, roped to her party, carrying a staff.
 82 Nearly ½ million people have tried to climb Mt. Rainier from all over the planet.
 83 Those who made the first successful ascent asked: *pouring down from the mountain*

84 *by immense weight and force what other peak can offer to scientific examination*
 85 *glaciers of such magnitude?*^{vii}
 86 Their Native American guide advised them: *Don't go!*
 87 *Don't go! A mighty chief dwells upon the summit in a lake of fire. If you should escape*
 88 *and reach the great snowy dome, a furious tempest will sweep you off into space like a*
 89 *withered leaf.*^{viii} This was an act of translation.
 90 Only fifty percent succeed. Even they must procure *Recommended Climbing Equipment*
 91 *(equipment is useless if you do not know how to use it!)*
 92 including: *Map & Compass; Ski goggles (dark lenses); Sunscreen and Lip Balm;*
 93 *Food (extra for emergencies); Headlamp and extra batteries;*
 94 *Signaling Device (whistle and/or mirror); Wool or Synthetic Clothing, layered;*
 95 *Sleeping Bag - comfortable to 10F; Ice Axe; Carabiners (minimum 4);*
 96 *Prussik Slings (3) or Ascenders; Helmet; Boots and Gaiters; Crampons;*
 97 *Picket (1) or other appropriate protection device.*
 98
 99 Mt. Rainier—in the clouds—What does the mountain think of all this? *How could*
 100 *a huge, inanimate object think? Like the solution to a Zen koan*
 101 *it requires a fundamental change in the reader's world view.*^{ix}
 102 The mountain speaks through: *trail conditions can change; look for elk*
 103 *on the park's east side in September; an average of 680 inches of snow;*
 104 *hazards include unpredictable mudflows; do not run downstream; ask*
 105 *about programs in summer; keep wildlife wild; the fresh smells of living trees and soil.*
 106 Beneath the falling snow try to find the *island habitat in the sky* of the cascade red fox—
 107 originally from the Midwest (like other erratics)—
 108 *when the Wisconsin ice sheets receded,*
 109 *the foxes migrated into the mountains.* The mountain measures time
 110 beyond our comprehension. But if flesh is weak,
 111 then the endangered disappear—though we may search
 112 for their tracks—remember *all areas of the park are closed to the use of elk bugles,*
 113 *varmint calls, audio attractants, or other artificial or natural means*
 114 *of attracting or disturbing wildlife.*
 115 You have been warned.
 116 Though you may see it as a rabbit, the rodent-like pika, its own *alarm call*
 117 *used for large predators but not for weasels and martens,* must harvest
 118 its bushels of hay for winter quickly. And the whitebark pine,
 119 silent except when the wind plays through:
 120 *needles in bundles of five; bark thin, scaly, superficially whitish or grayish;*
 121 *pollen cones carmine red; they're especially easy to identify when dead,*
 122 *in subalpine ghost forest.*
 123 Implicated in the whitebark pine's death the pine bark beetle:
 124 *small black to pale brown or red; tiny, elbowed, club-tipped antennae;*
 125 *warm summers enable them to produce two generations; rarely seen except for*
 126 *their excavation patterns.*

127 Life for us, for the cascade red fox, for the pika, for the whitebark pine,
 128 for the mountain, is unpredictable. Like St. Helens to the south—
 129 dormant not dead—triggered, Rainier could erupt and send a tongue of fire
 130 licking its way down the glacier,
 131 consuming some and letting the rest slobber; a torrent
 132 of water and rock descending. The snow continues
 133 to fall; humans continue to fall from grace; in the end,
 134 will we claim this was Paradise?
 135
 136 Above Paradise—the octopus of ice—
 137 loses grandeur and mass—clouds hide the force it takes to melt tons of ice.
 138 The mountain won't come out every day
 139 to tell its story, so when asked what causes the octopus to retreat,
 140 will we say: carbon dioxide;
 141 the human race in its *dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl in the air,*
 142 *over the cattle, and over all this earth, and over every creeping thing*
 143 *that creepeth upon the earth?*^x
 144 Or will we say God?
 145 Or will we say Godzilla because we need a placeholder—to take the blame—
 146 or because we're unsure of the plot—where and when the disasters
 147 of -zilla proportions will arrive?
 148 What of the people—scientists—who believed in things that couldn't be seen—
 149 or who saw things differently? Like Galileo, imprisoned because
 150 he proved the earth isn't the center of the Universe.
 151 Science deniers—flat earthers—rapture celebrants—say global warming isn't real.
 152 Just when you think you're free of the old ways of The Father. *Don't it always*
 153 *seem to go*^{xi} playing on the car stereo,
 154 the octopus in view from the parking lot, the car waiting for ignition:
 155 *about 5,700 years ago, the smoldering fires inside Mount Rainier erupted and the*
 156 *mountainside collapsed...the 16,000 foot summit...was gone...*
 157
 158 Odo Island, Japan—Godzilla remains unseen for the first twenty-one minutes
 159 of the original film. Warned
 160 by a sage—or simply an old man—
 161 that sea monsters will come back to haunt the village if villagers ignore the past,
 162 the uninitiated scoff but—
 163 overnight typhoon and thunder turn into morning after
 164 reptilian footprints—giant—found on the beach among debris.
 165 *How can we explain the presence of such a creature during the present day?*^{xii}
 166 In March 1954, near Bikini Atoll—Castle Bravo—a 15-megaton hydrogen bomb,
 167 detonated. Fair warning? There wasn't any.
 168 They say a fishing boat too near became enmeshed in a flash
 169 of radiation, the fishermen blinded and sickened.

170 Bikini Atoll—not a reality television show but a coral reef—
 171 is connected to Tacoma, U.S.A.—
 172 by a ring of fire—volcanoes and radioactive fallout.
 173 Offshore Tacoma in Puget Sound you can stand in shallow water
 174 where currents from Japan meet waters of the Nisqually River
 175 fed by the octopus’ meltwater. Godzilla, it is said, was awakened in the sea
 176 by radiation. Godzilla, it is said, is attracted to light—
 177 and the octopus of ice is lit by alpenglow.
 178 You have been warned.
 179 Look out the car window and see our common history where
 180 Godzilla started as an octopus, too, then mutated, named for the conjunction
 181 of gorilla + whale. Godzilla—treated as a force to be fought—with weapons of science—
 182 *with a purposeful grimace and a terrible sound*
 183 *he pulls the spitting high-tension wires down*
 184 *oh no, they say he’s got to go.*^{xiii} But in every sequel to date Godzilla has been
 185 repelled. This *secure form of horror*^{xiv}
 186 leads us to believe we succeed in pushing aside—harbinger—sentinel—
 187 sea monsters like Godzilla and the legendary kraken (an octopus too).
 188 Once upon a time there were kraken—
 189 then there were no kraken swimming in the sea.
 190 And there was God—
 191 then there was no God
 192 in the *schoolbooks and business documents.*^{xv}
 193 Fukushima was an accident of melting fuel rods.
 194 Lucky Dragon Five was an accident of fishing near Bikini Atoll.
 195 Godzilla was an accident of birth who wouldn’t exist except for nuclear weapons testing.
 196 *The circle is closed, and the net is being hauled in.*^{xvi}
 197 *Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.*
 198 Jack said global warming’s a hoax. Jane said climate-zilla.
 199 *The most extraordinary story of the century.*
 200 *There’s no time to take cover.*^{xvii}
 201 The octopus will lose an arm, and it will come tumbling down.
 202
 203 Paradise—in middle time^{xviii}--another Godzilla might appear^{xix}
 204 And melt this, this octopus of ice, with superheated breath—
 205 gathered from warming oceans—from Earth’s warming surface.
 206 There’s no rest for Godzilla—first radiation—then smog—now a warming planet—
 207 why would Godzilla fight an octopus of ice?
 208 Maybe because in *Godzilla Raids Again*, in 1955,
 209 Japanese fighter pilots thought they had dropped enough bombs to bury Godzilla
 210 beneath a Hokkaido glacier—but they were deceived.
 211 Sixty years later Godzilla still exists! *The truth is the truth!*
 212 *That’s what makes it such a delicate matter!*^{xx}

213 Marianne Moore slept here and translated the mountain for the absent reader.
 214 She's still here—sister of the cascade red fox—chased by extinction, her species
 215 of poet a seer. Like John Muir, Moore saw the water ouzel
 216 differently—with its *passion for rapids and high-pressured falls, building under the arch*
 217 *of some tiny Niagara*^{xxi} and its skill in *flitting from rock to rock—*
 218 *diving for breakfast in icy pools, merrily singing as if*
 219 *the avalanche-swept gorge was the most delightful of mountain homes.*^{xxii}
 220 Fourteen thousand four hundred and eleven feet high in the year 2018, Mt. Rainer
 221 could erupt and shed the octopus. *At least the end would be quick,*^{xxiii} the waitress says.
 222 Or the octopus may gently melt away, loved, loved
 223 to death while the internal combustion engine's pistons fire. There was fire
 224 before we arrived—will be fire after we're gone—call it God's or Godzilla's will—
 225 insurance policies don't cover the contingency.
 226 Are you like Godzilla, are you,
 227 like Godzilla, attracted to light—Rainier struck by alpenglow? Is this a trick
 228 of light or manifestation
 229 of the sublime—the sun having set into the sound but still broadcasting onto the peak
 230 the color gold—lavender—peach—can you name it
 231 before it changes, shifts, before it all comes to an end,
 232 pleasure so ripe it runs sweetly down the chin?
 233 This has been an act of translation.

ⁱ The National Park Service in the past has used the phrase “octopus of ice” to describe the system of glaciers on Mt. Rainier. Marianne Moore adopted the phrase in writing her poem “An Octopus,” which was first published in 1924. Italicized text has been appropriated from various sources. Text relating to Mt. Rainier National Park, its rules and its ecology, has been appropriated mainly from National Park Service brochures and online content, with additional key phrasing about threatened species adapted from Daniel Mathews’ *Natural History of the Pacific Northwest*. Line numbers in the left margin are deliberate and are intended to be suggestive of the scientific process of counting (radiation, species, etc.).

ⁱⁱ Aldo Leopold, in his essay “Thinking Like a Mountain,” writes: “only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of the wolf”.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Park Service: “The Story of Paradise Inn.” Following in Moore’s footsteps, I stayed at Paradise Inn in June 2016, where I heard author Terry Tempest Williams give a reading in the lobby, from her book *The Hour of Land: A Personal Topography of America’s National Parks*.

^{iv} Actual words of the desk clerk at Paradise Inn, June 2016.

^v Dialogue from the movie *Gojira*. Early in the movie, after several ships catch fire followed by a decline in the fisherman’s catch, fishermen’s wives make fun of the sage, or old man, who says Godzilla (a monster from a forgotten era) is responsible for the tragedies occurring.

^{vi} United States Geological Survey: *Geology of Mount Rainier National Park* (Publication 444) (1963).

^{vii} From General Stevens’ account of the first successful ascent of Mt. Rainier in 1870.

^{viii} Text attributed to a Native American guide named Sluiskin, as translated by General Stevens.

^{ix} John Tallmadge discusses the Zen koan in relation to the phrase “thinking like a mountain.” A Zen koan is essentially a form of riddle, but a riddle with no exact solution. The intent of master testing pupil with such a riddle is to encourage the pupil to come up with his or her own unique solution.

^x Genesis 1: 26.

^{xi} Mitchell, Joni. “Big Yellow Taxi.”

^{xii} Dialogue from the movie *Gojira*.

^{xiii} Blue Oyster Cult. “Godzilla.”

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- ^{xiv} Secure horror films like *Gojira* tend to portray an optimistic point-of-view that the object of horror may be overcome by human society.
- ^{xv} Leo Tolstoy, in his diary, offers the opinion that poetry includes everything but schoolbooks and business documents. Moore turns this concept on its head in her poem "Poetry," by asking: why shouldn't poetry include the very things that Tolstoy says should be excluded?
- ^{xvi} Jeffers, Robinson. "The Purse Seine." (1937).
- ^{xvii} Dialogue from the movie *Gojira*. The dialogue takes place as reporters are broadcasting from a tower, watching Godzilla's rampage through Tokyo: ultimately Godzilla knocks over the tower and the reporters fall to their deaths.
- ^{xviii} The phrase "middle time" is used to describe present ecological conditions on earth: a time between the prior age of innocence (Eden) and the coming age of environmental apocalypse.
- ^{xix} Dialogue from *Gojira*. At the end of the movie, Dr. Yamane reflects, after a scientific invention called the oxygen destroyer has killed Godzilla, that the deceased monster may not be the only member of its species, therefore the threat posed to humankind by Godzilla may recur.
- ^{xx} Dialogue from *Gojira*. Exchange between a reporter wanting to publish news of the existence of Godzilla and a government official who wants to suppress the news.
- ^{xxi} Moore, Marianne. "An Octopus." Lines 84-85.
- ^{xxii} Muir, John. *My First Summer in the Sierra*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916: 223.
- ^{xxiii} Conversation with a waitress in the dining room at National Park Inn, Mt. Rainier National Park, June 2016.