CHAPTER FOUR

Beyond Zoos: Marianne Moore and Albrecht Dürer

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Marianne Moore's poetry stands as a striking example of art that teaches a great deal about animals without necessitating their constraint, and without involving (even figuratively) people's spectatorial presence, as all zoos and most zoo stories do. A stay-at-home type who never ventured to exotic foreign habitats (she infrequently even left Brooklyn, making friends from Manhattan cross the river to see her), Moore read about animals and looked at pictures of them. She nurtured her imagination—and, in turn, her audience's—creating poetry about animals without recourse to animal captivity. Others who write about animals may share Moore's attitude, determining to integrate animals into art from a distance and without disturbing their natural existence, but Moore is remarkable for the extent and determination with which this ethos explicitly informs her poesis. With one exception, her animal poems do not derive from or relate firsthand encounters with animals, but rather, they come from a bestiary of her mind.

Moore's poetic bestiary is the best-known component of her oeuvre. Animals are "Moore's most frequent concrete subject," writes Margaret Holley. "She wrote approximately forty poems featuring animal subjects from 'A Jelly-Fish' in 1909 to 'Tippoo's Tiger' in 1967."[1] Animals featured in these poems include the buffalo, pigeon, arctic ox, ostrich, snail, elephant, rat, horse, lizards, porcupine, ibis, goose, vulture, and loon. In a letter to T. S. Eliot, Moore referred to some of her poems as "animiles"; Holley writes that

negative energy surrounding zoo animals; zoo stories tend to be sad stories. Moore's and Dürer's animals combat this negativity with an imaginative panache that offers an exemplary ideal for cultural interaction with animals. Moore specifically admires Dürer's *Rhinoceros* in her essay on him, noting "that in the best pictures he has obtained his sense of fact second hand, filtered through prior representations, a tendency of course akin to her own drawing of the particular from books, pictures, films. She writes of Dürer that 'liking is increased perhaps when the concept is primarily an imagined one—in the instance of the rhinoceros, based apparently on a traveler's sketch or description.'"[23]

Dürer never saw a live rhinoceros (as Moore presumably never saw a live plumet basilisk or arctic ox). His source was another picture and a description, by the Moravian printer Valentine Ferdinand, whose text Dürer reproduces on his woodcut:

> They call it a rhinoceros. It is represented here in its complete form. It has the color of a speckled turtle. And in size it is like the elephant but lower on its legs, and almost invulnerable. It has a sharp strong horn on its nose, which it starts to sharpen whenever it is near stones. The stupid animal is the mortal enemy of the elephant. . . . Because that animal is so well armed, the elephant cannot do anything to it. They also say that the rhinoceros is fast, lively and clever. The animal is called "Rhinocero" in Greek and Latin. In India it is called "Ganda."[24]

In some ways, Ferdinand contextualizes this rhinoceros unfortunately—calling it "stupid" (although he contradicts himself subsequently) is an irrelevant exertion of human presumptions to superiority. Ferdinand experienced the animal under conditions of imperialist domination and captivity, "in Lisbon when the great beast was shipped there in May 1515, sent from the farthest reaches among Portuguese Maritime conquests, Cambay in northwest India."[25] Dürer is implicated to a degree in this context—at a remove, so less damningly, but nevertheless Ferdinand's experience affects Dürer's cultural interaction with the animal.

But I think the cultural outcome finally invokes praise, rather than condemnation, of Dürer's ethics of representation. I acknowledge that this ethical stance may have been unconscious or unintended: drawing animals from life was not considered a necessary technique in the aesthetic of this period, so Dürer was not necessarily rejecting the ethos of the immediate captive animal subject; but nevertheless, especially in the legacy of Dürer's representation, we can (as Moore did) acclaim his art as an important ethical statement for *our own* time if it was not as clearly so for his own. The

rhinoceros had already been caught, and Dürer's disseminated image allowed people to experience a rhinoceros without any others having to be caught, imprisoned, and exhibited. Dürer himself (who often travelled under difficult conditions to get to something he wanted to draw) *could have* done what Ferdinand did—witnessing and recording as a spectator the display of a captive animal as imperial booty—but chose not to. Dürer's audience, the vast majority of which had never seen a rhinoceros, was "shown" one by the artist, who similarly had never seen one. An important transmission, a recycling, of culture has thus taken place, concerning animals, without the direct implication in the dynamics of captivity by either producer or consumer. If Ferdinand was implicated at second-hand because he went to see the animal an imperialist had captured, then Dürer is implicated at third-hand, and his viewers at fourth-hand: this complicity is not negligible, but at least it lessens at each remove. Dürer's picture and text do not in any way apologize for this remove from nature, or attempt to atone for it or conceal it. On the contrary, the work proudly proclaims its distance from the original subject—proudly, because the artist is all the more talented for having produced this representation out of his own mind, without direct experience.

The enduring popularity of Dürer's *Rhinoceros* further testifies to the power of an aesthetic representation derived wholly from the artist's mind. The rhinoceros as Dürer depicts it has striking idiosyncrasies: "the complicated cut of the fierce beast's covering recalls those of courtly armor," writes Eisler. "The animal has a strangely 'dressed' look, like some revolting pet lovingly clad by a proud owner." But "this personal quality is one of the many reasons why Dürer's print remained the definitive image of a rhinoceros centuries after its many inaccuracies and strange little additions—such as the spiral dorsal horn above the shoulders. . .—had been noted."[26] A contemporary of Dürer's, Hans Burgkmair, also made a rhinoceros print the same year, but without the extra horn and stylized armor: "Burgkmair's more accurate rhino never caught on. People wanted to believe in the rhinoceros just as Dürer first showed it. If nature was demonstrably different, he was right and reality was wrong."[27] Joan Barclay Lloyd confirms that "Dürer's beautiful, but largely imaginary, figure . . . became the standard picture in Europe of a rhinoceros for nearly two hundred years."[28] The cause of art triumphs in Dürer's work, and most importantly (as Moore and her cat would appreciate), without cost to nature. *Rhinoceros* had eight printings; by the seventeenth century, when the woodblock was showing signs of decay, two Dutch printers restored the image by preparing "an additional woodcut, inked in grey to be printed over the first one to create a chiaroscuro effect, lengthening the old block's life and enhancing the image's rich graphic quality to suit the new Baroque style."[29]

Dürer's work thus shows one of the consummate indications of enduring art, the modification by artists of subsequent eras who combine both the original and more contemporary attributes. Other subsequent representations of a rhinoceros indebted to Dürer's—situating viewers at a fifth-hand remove from the original animal imprisoned by Portuguese imperialists—include appearances in Maximilian's *Hours* and the triumphal arch on his coat of arms, as a statue in Paris celebrating the ascension of King Henri II (1547), in sculptured reliefs in Schönborn castle, in white china for the Porcelain Palace in Dresden (1731), in Jan Joesten's 1660 book *Curious Descriptions of the Nature of Four-Footed Animals, Fish and Bloodless Water Animals, Birds, Crocodiles, Snakes, and Dragons*, and in a silk painting based on Joesten's drawing (thus, at sixth-hand remove from the original), by the Japanese artist Tani Buncho in 1790.[30] Dürer's image demonstrated an energy of recirculation and proliferation, exhibiting a vitality generally absent from the cultural representation of zoo animals (as Moore's predominantly dim recollection in "The Monkeys" typifies). When a zoo animal dies, it is dispatched to the prosector or the glue factory and another is acquired to replace it, whereas Moore's and Dürer's animals have an enduring power and worth that testify to the strength of animals' cultural potency in a context free from captivity.

I like Costello's characterization of both Moore and Dürer as "realist[s] of the imagination and not of nature."[31] I do not mean to argue that an animal of the imagination is inherently better than a natural animal. Rather, an animal of the imagination is a more fitting thing to expect from artists, from people and for people, as a representation of nature, than an imperial appropriation of the thing itself. Moore and Dürer recognize the vast potential and also the limits of human perception, cognition, and appreciation. They give their audience as much as they can in the realm of the imagination, forgoing as irrelevant and inappropriate any attempt to "capture" the natural. Moore herself provides a fitting terminus to the centuries of recycling Dürer's animal representation (and the dual aesthetic and environmental connotations of "recycling" are appropriate—both are ways to conserve our planet's resources). Her "Apparition of Splendor," about the attributes of the plain old porcupine, begins by recalling Dürer's fabulous creature:

> Partaking of the miraculous
> since never known literally,
> Dürer's rhinoceros
> might have startled us equally
> if black-and-white spined elaborately. (158)

Moore does not mean to deny the imaginative sense of rhinocerosness Dürer achieved when she suggests it could have been just as amazing if it

were a porcupine. Rather, she implies that any animal transformed through art into the realm of vivid aesthetic consciousness has an equally fabulous potential.

Moore's poetry pays homage to the "miraculous" power of animals in purely imaginative art, a miracle in which she invites like-minded readers to partake.

Notes

1. Margaret Holley, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 128.
2. Holley, 79.
3. Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), 193. All references to Moore's poetry, given parenthetically in the text, are from this edition.
4. Marianne Moore, *A Marianne Moore Reader* (New York: Viking, 1961), 260.
5. Pamela White Hadas, *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 103.
6. Bernard F. Engel, *Marianne Moore* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 9.
7. The poem's original title was "My Apish Cousins." Engel suggests that the title change offered a neater and more subtle irony. The new title explicitly informs that an animal is conveying the message; "the poem's original title . . . made somewhat more obvious the ironic comparison of human and animal" (43).
8. Bob Mullan and Garry Marvin, *Zoo Culture* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987), 133.
9. Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 31.
10. Hadas, 122.
11. Engel, 45.
12. Costello, 30.
13. Engel, 43.
14. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
15. "The Arctic Ox (Or Goat)" expresses Moore's feelings about fur: "To wear the arctic fox / you have to kill it. Wear / *qiviut*—the underwool of the arctic ox - / pulled off it like a sweater; / your coat is warm; your conscience better" (193).
16. John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York, Pantheon, 1980), 14.
17. Marian Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 5.
18. Darlene Williams Erickson, *Illusion is More Precise Than Precision* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 74.
19. Costello, 194.

20. Colin Eisler, *Dürer's Animals* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 9.
21. Eisler, 26.
22. Eisler, 27.
23. Costello, 194.
24. Eisler, 269.
25. Eisler, 269.
26. Eisler, 270.
27. Eisler, 271.
28. Joan Barclay Lloyd, *African Animals in Renaissance Literature and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 91.
29. Eisler, 271.
30. Eisler, 271–274.
31. Costello, 194.