



BROWSE

OR



MENU

Modernism/modernity

Search Within Journal



Marianne Moore, Immigration, and Eugenics

David Kadlec
Modernism/modernity
Johns Hopkins University Press
Volume 1, Number 2, April 1994
pp. 21-49
10.1353/mod.1994.0031

ARTICLE
View Citation

Additional Information

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Marianne Moore, Immigration, and Eugenics

collapse

David Kadlec (bio)

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept

the screening procedures administered to the three to five thousand immigrants—mostly Italian, Russian, Slovak, and Polish—now landing daily at New York’s Ellis Island:

In the case of the large stations...it has been necessary to effect an organization by which the mentally sound immi-grants can be eliminated from the line.... On the average line...there are never less than two men on duty, and usually three or four.... If one of the medical examiners sees one of the stigmata of mental degeneracy, a certain mark is put in white or colored chalk on the immigrant’s clothing. Every other medical examiner noticing this as the immigrant comes down the line knows the meaning of it. The next medical examiner may discover some deformity, in which case another check mark is placed on the clothing of the immigrant. Finally the examiner detailed for the eyes may discover a...defect...in which case another mark is placed on the clothing of the immigrant, so that when he is pre-sented later in a private room for further examination, no less than three men are called upon to demonstrate the presence of the disease....¹

Examiners scanned aliens for defects of both body and mind, but screening practices were most keenly focused on [End Page 21] “the stigmata of mental degeneracy.” In private booths set off from the main lines at Ellis Island Station, intelligence tests involving flags, playing cards, and wooden puzzles awaited those who had been tagged for further scrutiny as mentally unfit.²

Asked once about her work’s layout and typography, Marianne Moore claimed never to have planned the odd shapes of her trademark syllabic stanzas: “Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure.”³ The genetic metaphor is certainly an important one for the kind of poetry Moore was writing during the first decades of the century; but her answer to Donald Hall was an artist’s evasion. Moore’s verse was crafted. By the early twenties the poet was known for her practice of sifting through various printed materials—natural histories, travel guides, Protestant divine tracts, magazine ads and feature articles—and singling out sentences and phrases, circling words that rhymed, and then connecting these with penciled lines. From splices in paraphrase and in quotation she sometimes then patterned out rhymed syllabic stanzas, and sometimes buried her rhymes in free verse. “When the poem reached a stage that pleased her, she turned to the typewriter, often making multiple carbons of a draft. Each carbon was an opportunity for revision, some bearing signs of six or seven reworkings with different colored inks and pencils. Colored pencils had another role: Moore often marked her ‘a,’ ‘b,’ and other rhymes with different colors to facilitate proper repetition of the pattern throughout a poem.”⁴ Even at its unruliest during the period just after the war, Moore’s verse was always carefully pieced together from a variety of sources.

...Principally throat, sophistication is as
it al-
ways has been—at the antipodes from the init-
ial great truths. “Part of it was crawling, part of it
was about to crawl, the rest
was torpid in its lair.” In the short legged, fit-
ful advance, the gurgling and all the minutiae—we have the
classic
multitude of feet.⁵

Moore’s democratic combining of all types of textual materials, both literary and popular, is a practice with intricate historical roots, particularly in view of the poet’s countervailing claim to “the eagle’s perch” of artistic selectiveness. But it was this mixture of the common with the highbrow that distinguished Moore among her modernist peers. Early detractors like the poet-critic Pearl Anderson, who branded Moore’s poems “hybrids of a flagrantly prose origin,” objected to the classical prose locutions that filled out her stanzas; but critics were equally disturbed by her quirky variety...

Additional Information

Print ISSN	1071-6068
Pages	pp. 21-49
Launched on MUSE	1994-04-01
Open Access	No

Project MUSE Mission

Project MUSE promotes the creation and dissemination of essential humanities and social science resources through collaboration with libraries, publishers, and scholars worldwide. Forged from a partnership between a university press and a library, Project MUSE is a trusted part of the academic and scholarly community it serves.



ABOUT

Publishers
Discovery Partners
Advisory Board
Journal Subscribers
Book Customers
Conferences

WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access
Journals
Books

RESOURCES

News & Announcements
Promotional Material
Get Alerts
Presentations

INFORMATION FOR

Publishers
Librarians
Individuals

CONTACT

Contact Us
Help



2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu

©2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility
Privacy Policy
Terms of Use

Now and always,
The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.



Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus