Multiplying Access: the Marianne Moore Digital Archive's Tools and Methods for Collaboration

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Introduction

The Marianne Moore Digital Archive (MMDA) has begun to publish digital editions of the 122 manuscript notebooks of Modernist poet Marianne Moore. The notebooks contain a plethora of materials, include reading notes, recorded conversations Moore participated in or overheard, drafts of poems, travel descriptions, financial records, notes on concerts, lectures, classes, and sermons Moore attended, and other miscellanea documenting an active and increasingly prominent life as part of New York's literary and cultural scene from the 1910s to the 1960s. These unique resources pose significant resistance to accessing the trove of literary and cultural data they contain: they have never been published in any form, can be visited by appointment at a library in Philadelphia for only limited hours during the week, most of the notebooks are written in a cramped, uneven hand with frequent abbreviation and shorthand, Moore repurposed calendars and other cheap or free items that include preprinted material interspersed with her writing, many notebooks are now too fragile for normal handling, and previous attempts at conservation have led to the disordering of many pages. The unfamiliar and sometimes obscure historical and cultural references that are needed to trace the broad scope of Moore's readings and activities present an additional layer of difficulty for most of the potential audience that could take advantage of the notebooks for literary, historical, or cultural research. In response to these challenges, the MMDA has created a team of Moore scholars and scholarly digital editors at three universities and partnered with the Center for Unified Biometrics and Sensors (CUBS), an automated handwriting recognition and machine learning lab at the University at Buffalo.

This paper reflects on our efforts to increase access with respect to the notebooks in several senses: design choices with respect to the digital editorial apparatus needed to make the notebooks usable to non-specialists; the implementation of a HubZero 2.0 collaborative hub platform, designed for use in the sciences and engineering, for a humanities project; and the development of a customized, integrated editor/viewer based on existing digital manuscript editing tools that can enable non-technical editors to participate more directly in the digital workflow. The hub platform and workflow solution are primarily designed to support the specific research needs of the MMDA and its users, however the project code and our methodologies can be readily applied to other digital editing projects and digital humanities collaborations.

Abstract

Marianne Moore (1887-1972) was among the foremost modernist poets of the early twentieth- century. Her work contributed to the revolution in poetic form and conceptions of poetry occurring during the 1910s and 1920s and she remained a poet of profound reflection and innovative design throughout her lifetime. In particular, Moore was among the first to conceive the poem as constructed through both language and visual design on the page and she was the first Anglo-American poet to divorce the poetic line from syntax. While her peers such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and H.D. often excoriated each others' work, all were profound admirers of Moore's thought and poetry (see, for example, Leavell 2014, and Miller, 1995 and 2005). Moore was also significant to modernism in her decades-long reviewing of work by her contemporaries, her publication of essays on aesthetic and cultural topics, and in her editing of one of the premier periodicals of modernist literature and art, *The Dial*, from 1925-1929. Moore received the Pulitzer Prize, the Bollingen Prize, the National Book Award, and the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters—among other awards. Additionally, she was made Chevalier de l'ordre des Lettres in France and received a Gold Medal Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Society. Her notebooks constitute a unique and extraordinary resource for understanding the composition, experience, and intellectual alertness of a brilliant thinker and poet to a very broad range of popular, mundane, intellectual, artistic, and historically significant events of her time.

The MMDA is making digital reproductions and transcriptions of Moore's notebooks readily accessible

to scholarly, classroom, and non-academic readers for the first time. The transcriptions are supported by annotations contextualizing Moore's writing and life, including citations to the original source texts she invokes, and an image-text linking feature that makes it easy to move back and forth between the facsimile and the transcription. The digital editions of the notebooks are supported by a growing collection of related materials, such as indexes, a glossary, an interactive timeline of Moore's life and publications, searchable reproductions of the now hard-to-find Marianne Moore Newsletter, and faceted text and image search tools currently under development. This site will, we hope, revolutionize criticism on this significant poet; contribute to popular understanding of the modernist period's history and culture; and develop new tools for the digital editing and publication of handwritten materials.

Moore's notebooks offer extraordinary challenges for editors and digital designers because they include multiple genres, images (Moore frequently sketched objects that interested her), genetic layers of text (evidence of Moore's later editing of and additions to earlier notes, sometimes with different writing implements), and references to decades' worth of popular and academic source materials. Fully edited and annotated, Moore's notebooks suggest the deep cultural genesis of her poems: Moore's notebooks constitute not nearly finished drafts of poems and essays (that is, pre-publication texts) but, instead, a rich and varied collection of notes and compilations from which Moore drew the materials that went into her drafts and published work. Part commonplace book, part scrapbook, part sketchbook, part diary, each of Moore's notebooks offers an extraordinary window into the eclectic print and visual culture of the twentieth century and the ways in which one of America's most innovative poets responded to her world.

The MMDA addresses the special challenges and opportunities presented by these documents through a customized version of the Edition Visualization Technology (EVT), an open-source software project directed by Roberto Rosselli Del Turco (Del Turco et al, 2014-15). We have extended the tool significantly to allow for the transcription and facsimile coordinates to be edited directly in the browser, then saved automatically to underlying TEI XML files according to our project's customized TEI schema (Our viewer/editor tool was developed on the basis of the EVT version 1.0, which utilizes XSLT, CSS, and Javascript to generate its viewer. The EVT version 2 recently released utilizes a different method that removes the need for XSLT and relies on converting the TEI XML documents into JSON, which we are considering as an alternative for future development. See the EVT blog for more information about the proposed changes for version 2). This has significantly extended the utility of the EVT, and we will continue to add more advanced editing features for modern manuscript collections. This combination of editing and publishing capacity makes the editing of these manuscripts accessible to any of our registered team members directly in the browser, allowing us to address the needs of the site's editorial team and its users through the development of an integrated web platform, which we are continuing to develop along with manuscript editing tools being developed at the University at Buffalo in collaboration with the Computer Science and Engineering and the Center for Unified Biometrics and Sensors (CUBS) at the University at Buffalo. Our partners in CUBS are also developing automated handwriting recognition software that we are integrating into our platform. We aim to create a complete editorial workflow solution for transcription and annotation of manuscript collections. This is possible through the use of the HubZero 2.0 platform, based on Joomla, which to our knowledge has not previously been used for a digital humanities project.

The *MMDA* is making a vast quantity of unpublished writing by a major American poet and cultural figure freely available and easily accessible for the first time. Such access will have extraordinary impact. It is already transforming Moore studies and, as the number of publications on the site increases, it will contribute significantly to historical, cultural, and literary studies of modernism and of twentieth-century women's lives. The specialized tools and platforms for collaboration on digital manuscript editions we are developing will, we hope, serve as useful models for making manuscript collections more accessible to scholars and editors in collaboration.

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