

Emily Setina
English

'Mountains Being a Language with Me': Marianne Moore, Marsden Hartley, and Modernist Revision

In the late 1930s, the American painter and poet Marsden Hartley sent his poems and a request for advice to a writer he greatly admired, the poet Marianne Moore. Moore's suggestions for revision, inked on Hartley's carbon manuscripts, occasioned his pained responses in both poetry and paint. "Mountains Being a Language with Me: Marianne Moore, Marsden Hartley, and Modernist Revision" considers this overlooked exchange between two leading figures of American Modernism for the light it sheds on Moore's ideas of revision and practices of mentorship and for the context it suggests for a great puzzle of Hartley's career, his painting and repainting of Maine's Mount Katahdin in the years before his death in 1943. The question of how to interpret that series has continued to divide critics. Hartley's ongoing interest in modernist poetics, and in particular the poetics of revision that he was learning from Moore at the end of the 1930s, suggests a new context for the paintings, allowing us to view them, too, as revisions. Moore and Hartley's exchange—a kind of correspondence school in modernist poetics—stands to enhance our understanding of both figures' careers and of revision itself as an interdisciplinary practice and modernist principle.

I am applying for funding to complete research towards the project in Moore's archive at the Rosenbach Library and Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in the Hartley papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven, Connecticut. I would use additional time in Philadelphia to undertake essential research at the Rosenbach for the book manuscript based on my dissertation, "Modernism's Darkrooms." Moore's archive at the library—described by critic Bonnie Costello as "the single most complete record we have of any literary career"—includes material that I need to consult as I revise the book's third chapter, which describes Moore's biographical engagements with photography and her uses of photographs as sources for poems.