

## Marianne Moore's "The Camperdown Elm" and The Revival of Brooklyn's Prospect Park

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### Abstract

*A little-known poem of Marianne Moore's entitled "The Camperdown Elm" has recently been the recipient of more attention among scholars. Published in 1967 when Moore was nearly eighty years old, the poem is credited with bringing financial assistance to an ailing ornamental tree in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. The tree's history, and the story behind Moore's poem, have been sketchy. This article resuscitates the history of the tree, some of the history of the park, and some of the history of the financially troubled era in which Moore's poem was written. The poem provides a strong paradigm for eco-activist poetics, and yet is also so particular to its time and place that it may be unique. Moore herself was asked for several encores to save other trees and parks in the New York City area, but this one poem remains her only eco-activist effort, but one that was successful in bringing together many different agencies, and which continues to inspire Brooklynites to work for the park's survival.<sup>2</sup>*

The Camperdown Elm (fig 1) is in Brooklyn's Prospect Park near the Boathouse. It is labeled and is surrounded by a protective fence to keep small children from climbing its weak branches. In the mid-1960s the tree was discovered in very bad condition and needed emergency surgery. According to the *Illustrated Guidebook*, "...the elm was saved largely by Marianne Moore (fig 2) ,

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the letters and other documents regarding Moore's personal correspondence and notes were found at the Rosenbach Museum Library and were discovered during research there in the summers of 2006-2009. Thanks to State University of New York at Delhi for a sabbatical and for College Foundation travel funds. Special thanks is due to Elizabeth E. Fuller, Rosenbach Librarian, for generous assistance. Special thanks is due to Charles Tarrants, Horticulture Professor at SUNY-Delhi for correspondence regarding the project, and especially for finding more information on A.G. Burgess through genealogical sites. Special thanks is due to Amy Peck, Prospect Parks Archivist, for permission to consult the Prospect Park Archives and to publish from its findings, and for a personal interview on February 10, 2010. I also had the chance to speak with Prospect Park landscape architect Christian Zimmerman, and to Anne Wong, head of Landscape Management at Prospect Park. These interviews took place on February 10, 2010. Finally, Hazard Adams of the University of Washington read and commented on an earlier version of this paper, as did Jessica Burstein, also of the University of Washington.

who wrote a poem in 1967 dubbing it 'our crowning curio' and asked that donations be made to save it instead of sending flowers to her funeral" (deMause 69).<sup>1</sup>

The poem, "The Camperdown Elm," first published in *The New Yorker* on September 23, 1967, begins with a stanza of 6 and a half lines that sketch the Hudson River school at the time of the Camperdown elm's planting in 1872:

I think, in connection with this weeping elm,  
Of 'Kindred Spirits' at the edge of a rockledge  
Overlooking a stream:  
Thanatopsis-invoking tree-loving Bryant  
Conversing with Thomas Cole  
In Asher Durand's painting of them  
Under the filigree of an elm overhead.

The Camperdown Elm is somewhat comical in aspect, short, and freakish.<sup>2</sup> It was donated to the park by A.G. Burgess, a florist from Brooklyn, who regularly donated trees to New York City parks, in 1872.<sup>3</sup> It is not beautiful, nor is it sublime. It fits into the picturesque. The picturesque is distinguished by "roughness and irregularity" (Uvedale Price summarized in Bedell 87). While Thomas Cole worked in the sublime category, producing immense vistas, Asher Durand worked in the beautiful. Neither one would have taken much notice of an odd non-native tree such as The Camperdown Elm. "For Durand's contemporaries," Bedell writes, "his were healing, soothing, therapeutic pictures" (91).

While Moore cites the Hudson River School's greatest painters as expert witnesses in support of her love of the Camperdown Elm, it is likely that they would not have concurred. There is nothing so odd as the Camperdown Elm in any of Durand's paintings. Louis Harmon Peet, in the book *Trees and Shrubs of Prospect Park*, first published in 1902, called the tree "exceedingly picturesque" (35). Durand preferred the commonplace natural elements of American forests. Cole, a native of Britain, had a more sublime sensibility. What would William Cullen Bryant have thought of Moore's poem? It is doubtful if Bryant would have endorsed this peculiar tree. It was Moore herself whose aesthetics tended towards the lopsided complexities of modernism (mixed, no doubt in this case, with the Victorian picturesque) who championed the elm.

Moore's preference for oddity drew her to the bizarre and unlikely. She writes of monkey-puzzle trees and jerboas, plummet basilisks, giraffes, swans, pangolins and elephants, never the more commonplace creatures of the American landscape such as the maple or the moose. Moore manifested this preference for decades, and it forms quite the contrast with a nativist's taste such as Asher Durand's.

"The Camperdown Elm" is an occasional poem written in response to a Brooklyn committee that, according to Moore's biographer, had "asked Moore to help them in their efforts" (Molesworth 427). Among that committee for whom Moore wrote, was parks activist M.M.

Graff. Graff, who preferred the first name "Dickie," was a prominent horticultural writer whose articles had appeared in the *New York Times*, *Popular Gardening*, and *Flower and Garden* (Graff 231). After the tree was discovered to be in ill health, Graff sent a post card in late spring 1967 to the members of Friends of Prospect Park, outlining the "grave danger" that the tree was in. Moore received the call to action. On August 5, 1967, an article by Marianne Moore appeared in *The New York Times* entitled "Topics: Crossing Brooklyn Bridge at Twilight," which advertised the history of the tree, the need for money to save it, and gave the address of Mrs. Graff as "Camperdown fund/ 171 Congress Street/ Brooklyn/ Mrs. Graff." After the *Times* article, the poem appeared the following month in *The New Yorker*. A lively correspondence between Moore and Dickie Graff ensued (these letters are in the Collection of Mrs. M.M. Graff, Prospect Park Archives). The letters are not dated, but one to Mrs. Graff reads, "How delighted I am that the salvage of the great Elm is assured, and of the hornbeam ... life is worth living when people have hearts! ... P.S. *The New Yorker* has accepted several lines of verse by me about the Elm – for use perhaps soon: The Camperdown Elm it is called" (undated letter by Marianne Moore).

Much of the description of the tree's injuries in Moore's poem are drawn directly from the initial postcard by Dickie Graff. Grateful for her help, Graff continued to keep Moore updated on the tree campaign. The parks lacked money for day-to-day upkeep, much less money for the kind of intensive care that the Camperdown elm required. Historian of New York City Eric Homberger provides an overview of the financial problems that beset New York City at the time:

The fiscal crisis of New York City in the 1970s left a disastrous legacy of neglect to the park system. In the 1960s the New York economy had ceased to grow, but the city's budget rose by over eight percent a year. It was a period of great social tension (the war in Vietnam, violent crime, the growing drugs crisis, and aggravated racial tension) when politicians tried to address the needs of the community and the demands of powerful constituencies within the city's unionized workforce by one temporary expedient after another... The budget for parks was slashed.... The city looked shabby and threatening. New York's total revenues in 1975 brought in \$10.9 billion. Expenditures amounted to \$12.8 billion. The annual operating deficit was just under \$2 billion. ....New Yorkers moved out of the city in increasing numbers. Factories fled to Sunbelt states. The tax base was weakened, and the city debt sharply increased. (Homberger 156-157)

Biographer Charles Molesworth cites the general downturn in Brooklyn's safety, as the well-heeled were abandoning the city. Molesworth writes that Moore herself was affected:

...in Brooklyn ... things had taken a negative turn in Moore's neighborhood. As early as March, 1960, there was a mugging in the subway near Moore's apartment that troubled her friends... In March, 1962, Moore wrote to [Elizabeth] Bishop that break-ins were becoming rather frequent in the neighborhood... In a later interview it was mentioned that sometimes people were sleeping on the stoop of her apartment building. By the winter of 1965, she admitted to Bishop that she had grown scared in the neighborhood. (426-427)

Thus, Moore's poem and the appeal in *The New York Times*, provided financial aid to the tree at a time when New York City and Brooklyn were caving in financially and it might be argued that preservation of an odd tree should have been among the least of her concerns. With money in the Camperdown Elm Fund ("never more than a few thousand dollars" according to Park Director Tupper Thomas), work began. On July 2, 1970, Graff wrote to Moore:

I've been all week in Prospect Park with the Bartlett men, watching them as they prune, feed, fill, and cable some of the park's magnificent trees. Yesterday we gave the Camperdown elm a slight grooming, taking off one broken branch, doing a little bark work, giving it a hundred pounds of fertilizer – but mostly, and this is happy news, cutting off some of the vigorous group of suckers that obscure the lines of the trunk. I did most of this, as the tree is low enough to permit reaching the branches without a ladder. I left all the beautiful trailing ones, some of which must be a yard or two long, and all those that help to mask wounds and fillings. It is proof of the worth of our efforts to save the tree that it is now growing almost too exuberantly! (Rosenbach Museum Library V:22:41, 2 July 1970)

On April 2, 1969, Graff pressed Moore to collaborate again in an effort to save another tree. This one was a great magnolia located in Bedford-Stuyvesant on Lafayette St.:

...the magnolia is a focus of community pride. Mr. Cooperstock believes that if there is enough public demand, the brownstone which shelters the magnolia may not be torn down. He begs me to ask you to write three lines in praise and concern for the tree, something that he can quote and circulate in newspapers and political circles. He knows, as I do, how your intercession helped stir interest and active participation in saving the Camperdown elm, and he hopes that you will spare a moment to put in a magic word for the magnolia... All of us who love the Camperdown elm are in debt to you. Perhaps you can do as much for the people in Bedford-Stuyvesant who hope to save their treasured magnolia. (RML V:22:41 2 April 1969)

Two years after "The Camperdown Elm" poem was published, Moore was also asked to write a poem about the police stable that was to be built in Central Park. There is no record of her having written anything against the police stable (or about the magnolia that she is asked to praise), but one sentence in *The New Yorker* was apparently enough to galvanize public interest against the stables. The article begins, "When we heard that Marianne Moore was joining a battle against the city administration's plan to take over seven and a half acres of Central Park ... we decided to find out what the fight was all about" ("Preserving the Greensward," 28-29).

On March 8, 1969, in a meeting that is described in *The New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town Section," Marianne Moore and various members of the Save Central Park Committee spoke out against the police stable. One member of the committee identified the stable as having, "...apparently originated ten years ago with Robert Moses ... Miss Moore then rose and delivered one sentence, in which she referred to Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the designers of Central Park: 'Mr. Olmsted was a genius in art, and he wanted the people of the city to get the benefit of nature – a sense of enlarged freedom in limited space' ("Preserving the Greensward," 29). The police stable was never built.

The New York City parks are fragile creations, as are many of their exotic trees and plants. Prospect Park has many imported trees, picturesque bridges, and buildings. To be kept up, it has often been argued, such parks need to be seen as works of art, something Frederic Olmsted himself referred to in the 1873 *Annual Report of Central Park* when he wrote "...If a park, as a whole, is to be considered a work of art, it is in this direction, then, that it most needs to be carefully protected; for the demands of special art of which it is an example must always have the first claim to consideration" (Reed and Olmsted, cited in Reed 113). Moore uses this same

idea, as she praises the Camperdown elm as worthy of 19<sup>th</sup> century artists Cole, Bryant and Durand (as well as from the point of view of a contemporary arborist):

No doubt they had seen other trees—lindens,  
Maples and sycamores, oaks and the Paris  
Street-tree, the horse-chestnut; but imagine  
their rapture, had they come on the Camperdown elm's  
massiveness and 'the intricate pattern of its branches,'  
arching high, curving low, in its mist of fine twigs.  
The Bartlett tree-cavity specialist saw it  
And thrust his arm the whole length of the hollowness  
Of its torso and there were six small cavities also.

Moore's poem finishes with a short stanza:

Props are needed and tree-food. It is still leafing;  
Still there. *Mortal* though. We must save it. It is  
Our crowning curio. (*Complete Poems* 242)

Poets in New York City have long argued for parks. It was William Cullen Bryant who lobbied for Central Park long before the committee to found a park had chosen Olmsted to design it (Reed 3-4). Walt Whitman had been behind Fort Greene Park which was "the first successful public park in Brooklyn" (Simpson 36). "Begun in 1848, the park was largely the product of *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* editor Walt Whitman, who for two years tenaciously kept the issue before the minds of the people of the city" (Simpson 36). However, these aspects of the poets' lives and works are mostly forgotten, and this aspect of Moore's life and work is also little known or appreciated.

Olmsted's parks are traditionally seen as a repository where picturesque art meets natural beauty. Olmsted himself once stated rhetorically, "The question remains whether the contemplation of beauty in natural scenery is practically of much value ... I will but add that the problem of a park ... is mainly the reconciliation of adequate beauty of nature in scenery with adequate means in artificial constructions for protecting the conditions of such beauty" (532). Prospect Park and its trees can be viewed as occupying a strange middle-ground between art and nature. The parks are not wilderness. Prospect Park administrator (until 2010) Tupper Thomas said in an interview that without maintenance of any kind, everything within the park would be dead "within five years." The boundary of the park constitutes a frame, but the trees and flowers inside the frame grow and die. The park is artificial, and yet natural, maintained by arborists and naturalists and volunteers. A painting can last a hundred years without constant

attention. What about a park that includes hundreds of acres? If we put a frame around a 526-acre park such as Prospect, how do we determine which element is worth keeping? Do we have to worry about every bug, every blade of grass? "As much as one may want to resist rankings, they are necessary for determining how to proceed with conservation priorities," environmental aesthetic philosopher Emily Brady writes (215).

In a special issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* on Environmental Aesthetics, Stanley Godovitch writes, "Just as there are rotten violinists, so there must be pathetic creeks; just as there is pulp fiction, so there must be junk species; just as there are forgettable meals, so there must be inconsequential forests" (121). Godovitch asks us to think of nature alongside art, which means that any tree depends on interpreters to make its beauty appreciated by others.

Park arborists also have to negotiate between competing factions to determine what is worth saving. Prospect Park Director of Landscape Management Ed Toth published a paper in 1991 entitled *An Ecosystem Approach to Woodland Management: The Case of Prospect Park*,

Obviously, the modern science of ecology was not available to Olmsted and Vaux in 1866. Most of their attention to Prospect Park's woodlands centered on presenting a heightened sense of nature to park users. To this end they built waterfalls, steepened slopes, created fast moving streams, and laid out vistas for picturesque effects. As such, all of Prospect Park, including its wooded areas, is a highly designed space. Some aspects of Olmsted and Vaux's design have not withstood the passage of time. Specifically, many of the park's slopes are so artificially steep that they are constantly eroding. ... Short of altering the original design, cloaking the slopes in thick understory vegetation offers the best solution for holding them in place. (11)

Toth concludes, "There is nothing about ecological restoration that precludes respecting an historic design, now or in the future" (11).

August Heckscher was Parks Commissioner for New York City under John Lindsay from 1967 to 1973. Heckscher took issue with the single-work of art theory that strict preservationists such as Olmsted maintained. Heckscher writes, "This would have the result of stopping all change within these two parks" (270). Heckscher argued that Olmsted parks had already been changed by the introduction of automobiles, by the high-rise buildings around them, and even in Olmsted's time and under Olmsted's supervision, roads were widened or narrowed, and arenas for athletics put in or changed. Heckscher concedes, "The danger, as we meet the small and the large challenges of park guardianship and innovation, is that we shall be enticed into forsaking the first grand conception. More insidiously, the danger is that, without being aware of it, future commissioners will eat away bit by bit at the park's design, until the thing they should be preserving has lost its recognizable identity" (272).

Poetry may legislate, and Moore's poem drew public attention to the Camperdown Elm. But Heckscher needed to argue further, "If we are going to preserve these two unique parks for the next hundred years, if we are going to tend them with the care they merit, it will be not only because we have entertained good resolves, but also instituted administrative machinery to make the goal attainable" (276).

The City of New York Department of Parks and Recreation is today aided by the Prospect Park Alliance. The Alliance is a group of private citizens who solicit grants and gifts and pay the salaries of landscape architects, while the City provides money for maintenance and operations. The Alliance was preceded in the 1970s, however, by a group called Friends of Prospect Park. This was a volunteer organization that cleaned the park, and often repaired trees at a time when the area was very dangerous and infested with muggers. Bill Novak, now 73, worked with Dickie Graff in the early 1970s, and recalled that the group used to recite Moore's poem as they worked in the park. At one time the group had almost 700 members, and, according to Novack, it was Moore's poem that convinced many of them of the beauty of the park and of its aesthetic significance.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after Heckscher's term in office as Parks Commissioner ended, and shortly after Marianne Moore's death, the entirety of Prospect Park was designated in 1975 as a Landmark (*New York City Landmarks Preservations Commission* 261). The *Prospect Park Designation Report* appeared on November 25, 1975, and concluded under the heading "The Design of the Park and Its Notable Features," with a direct reference to "The park's most famous tree, commemorated in a poem by Marianne Moore, ... the Camperdown Elm" (7).

While the tree has symbolic significance, it is also living. According to the *Complete Illustrated Guide to Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens* the tree has "been a favorite curiosity since the park's opening" (deMause 68). "The tree, it turned out, was a mutation that lacked the gene for negative geotropism – quite literally, it didn't know which way was up, and so it crawled along the ground instead of soaring into the sky" (69). In Summer 1995, an issue of *Tree Topics*, a newsletter published by The Bartlett Tree Company, carried the article "The Camperdown Elm." The article says:

This special tree was a Bartlett patient for many years... Several Bartlett arborists, dendricians and technicians have lovingly worked on this tree over the years.... The Bartlett crew was horrified at what they found during their first inspection in 1967. The largest cavity was exactly as Miss Moore described it, and worse. She hadn't realized that, in addition to what she could see, carpenter ants had nested inside ... Deadwood was removed and a program of corrective pruning begun. A drain tube was installed to treat the slime flux problem. Wire mesh was placed over holes at the base of the tree caused by rats. A system of cables was begun, to support the weakest, longest and most heavily laden limbs and steel reinforcing rods helped strengthen the weakest crotches. The tree was fertilized using Bartlett Green Tree food. (*Tree Topics* 13-14)

The tree is perhaps the park's most "famous," and Marianne Moore's poem was rhetorically effective (it did its job), nevertheless, the critical history of the poem has tended to suggest that the poem itself is very slight and of little importance.

In 1969, George Nitchie wrote, "Some of Miss Moore's feeblest work is in these late volumes, work about which there is simply nothing to be said except that she wrote it and has found it worthy of being preserved, which may, of course, be all that needs saying" (150). Breaking the later work into "private games... private passions... and private causes" (150), Nitchie goes on to pitch "The Camperdown Elm" into the final category. He closes his discussion of the poem by saying that "the dippy schoolmistress may be the only one who can save the tree" (169). Jon Slatin is as dismissive, arguing that all of the work after 1942 shows a steady decline: "To the

extent that there is a debate about Marianne Moore, the issue is whether she did her best work in the 1930s or the 1940s; there is no question at all about the work of the 1950s and 1960s, whose slightness is conceded universally" (13). Slatin doesn't even discuss "The Camperdown Elm." Most of the earlier books on Moore's work barely mention the poem, and none indicate the poem's centrality. The omnibus volume of criticism collected by Pat Willis in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, has no single mention of it. But the "universality" (Slatin 13) of the poem's dismissal is no longer quite so universal.

Charles Molesworth's biography of Moore is the first to open up the richness of the poem by placing it in the context of a last dramatic involvement in her late 70s. Molesworth appreciates the clever use of rhymes, her botanical insight, and the "parallels and antitheses" (428), which, he says, "shows that her poetic abilities were undimmed by age" (428).

More recently, David Gilcrest's article on "The Camperdown Elm" appeared in the ecocritical flagship ISLE in 2001. Gilcrest treats the poem as a successful example of "some of the central ambitions (and dilemmas) of environmental poetry" (169), but he also marshals strong arguments against Moore's rationale for saving the tree. "Moore abandons any attempt to preserve the ontological autonomy of the Camperdown Elm" (178), he writes, and he accuses Moore of having venal designs when she wrote the poem: "Moore's rhetorical strategies, and especially the appeals to cultural values associated with the American veneration of nature, were carefully designed to separate sympathetic Brooklynites from their cash" (178). Although Gilcrest does argue for the inarguable "preservationist utility" (178) of the poem, he again forwards his prosecutorial stance to ask in his final sentences, "Must we sin to save the world? In the dappled green shadows, will we be forgiven?" (179).

Gilcrest was apparently unaware that the Camperdown elm was an artificial tree planted in an artificial park, and that it never had "ontological autonomy." Does this mean that it is not worth saving? Is anything to do with money always already corrupt? Brooklyn is a highly built environment, and the cost of the park in which the tree resides is enormous. To argue for the preservation of the park, or any given tree or plant within it, is inevitably to visit the topic from the financial angle.

The poem "The Camperdown Elm," is inextricable from the aesthetic, economic, and activist history of the Camperdown elm. While the notion of a poem's autonomy is central to the modernists, after World War II Moore's work began to be more engaged in various kinds of activism. This meant that she wanted the work to be accessible to ordinary readers and to move them to open their pocketbooks. The attitude of detachment that she had held before the war was now changed toward writing a poetry that could make a difference. The poem brought attention to the neglected tree and beyond it to the importance of preserving the beautiful parks of New York City. This last chapter in her long life forms a parenthesis that brings her back to the Hudson School painters, with the eco-activism of poets Whitman and William Cullen Bryant, and is almost certainly the most successful of her poems in terms of what it accomplished in the real world.

A reversal of scholarly opinion has been slow in coming, and is certainly still far from univocal. The poem, as Gilcrest writes, represents some of the "central ... dilemmas" of eco-poetry. The tree is not sublime but picturesque, the poem is not accorded canonical status within Moore's work, and yet Moore herself is increasingly considered canonical. Does this make all of her work



canonical? Does it make everything she wrote about worthy of preservation? The Camperdown elm is not a native species, and yet is one of the few elms to be impervious to Dutch elm disease, so it is an increasingly popular ornamental. The tree is New York City's most famous, and yet exists in an area that is not among its most visited. The tree and the poem Moore wrote about it contributed to landmark legislation, and yet much about the tree remains a mystery. What was the significance of the tree to A.G. Burgess? Why was the tree planted where it is? Why did Moore write about this tree and not others that were requested that she save? What exactly in her rhetorical strategy worked so well? Could such a strategy be used again by other poets, or must each poet discover their own eco-activist rhetoric, as each unique item or area requires a unique vision?



**Figure 1. The Camperdown Elm, Prospect Park, Brooklyn. Photo: Kirby Olson**



Figure 2: Marianne Moore, 1967 publication party for the Prospect Park Handbook. Credit: The Prospect Park Archives.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Moore's poem "The Camperdown Elm," has a curious reception within literary criticism. This reception is discussed (in some detail) in the final pages of this article. Today, both Moore's poem and Olmsted's parks are accorded considerably more artistic value than they were in the late 1960s when the poem was first published. Part of this has been the turn to an ecological consciousness that is now thought of as a crucial aspect of 1960s culture. In her book *Central Park, An American Masterpiece*, Sara Cedar Miller writes, "In the late 1960s environmental artists, who shaped the land into massive compositions, recognized the groundbreaking status of Central Park as a new art form – America's first earthwork. Robert Smithson, a spokesman for the movement and creator of its most

iconic piece, *Spiral Jetty*, identified one of the Park's codesigners, Frederick Law Olmsted, as 'America's first 'earthwork artist,' and viewed the magnitude of his creation as a work that 'throws a whole new light on the nature of American art'" (7-8). This upsurge of appreciation has been helped along by the advent of ecocriticism. It is within this movement that Moore's later poem "The Camperdown Elm," has been revisited in David Gilchrest's seminal article in ISLE. Yet this renewed discussion of the poem, and the park to which it points, is far from monolithic. As a result of this discussion, the poem may come to be considered one of Moore's most important. The logic on which the reevaluation rests has to do not only with Moore's rising stature as a poet, nor with the rise of western ecological conscience, but also with the rise of the Olmsted legacy.

<sup>2</sup> The Camperdown Elm was not part of Olmsted's original vision for Prospect Park, and was donated by A.G. Burgess, a local florist. But since that time, and since the success of the tree in drawing visitors, Camperdown elms have become quite common within Olmsted's legacy, and are now featured in many of his parks. There are many Camperdowns, for instance, on the grounds of Montreal's Mount Royal Park. At the University of Idaho grounds (designed by Olmsted's son) they form the chief attraction. What Olmsted himself thought of this strange tree is not recorded, and yet many see the tree as a substantial part of Olmsted's legacy. As we look at the tree, the poem, and the many controversies within ecocriticism, much remains to be thought and said: the tree and the poem about it and the many controversies around the park are difficult to extricate from one another. Moore's ability to create a poem in her late 70s that has this ability to pull together the spirit of her time could make us ask what else in her later poems, often thought to be among her "feeblest," (Nitchie 150) may also be neglected simply because they fell afoul of older reigning critical commonplaces at the time of their first publication.

<sup>3</sup> A.G. Burgess, who donated the tree to Brooklyn's Prospect Park, is not well-known, but traces of his life can be found in horticultural journals of the period and in the annual reports of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners and in Census Statistics. In the "Eleventh Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners of January 1871" extensive reports and minutiae of the building of Prospect Park have been preserved. In an appendix, it states that a donation consisting of "one fine specimen golden arbor vitae, and several evergreen and perennial plants" were gifted to the park by "Mr. A.G. Burgess of East New York" (69). In the "13<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Brooklyn Parks Commissioners of January 1873," along with elms, maples, lindens, larch, and birches donated by various people, and which were "moved by truck into favorable locations on the park during the spring of 1872," there is also this specific notation of the Camperdown Elm. "Mr. A.G. Burgess, of East New York, contributed a singularly curious weeping elm, which has been planted near the Cleft-Ridge Arch" (558).

<sup>4</sup> Novak, Bill. Personal interview. 21 February, 2010.

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