

**Mutilated Verse and Afghan Wounds:
How Entrenchment and Joint Construal Explain the Reception Histories of
Marianne Moore and Arthur Conan Doyle**

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Joint attention—the ability to share attention to some object with another person and mutually recognize that the attention is shared—is a fundamental aspect of social cognition. As such, it is a fertile site for literary creativity, experimentation, and anxiety.

This paper examines how texts themselves serve as objects of joint attention and joint construal within reading communities. Specifically, I discuss the intersection of joint attention and entrenchment: the process by which ideas or behaviors become routine, automatic, relatively opaque to self-reflection, and difficult to eradicate. Entrenchment arises from the intersection of distributed cognitive processes (propagation and reinforcement of a behavior) and individual ones (habituation and routinization).

Two distinctive twentieth-century reception histories demonstrate what happens when complex joint construals become highly entrenched in a reading community. The first case study considers the critical response to Marianne Moore's many revisions of her "Poetry". The second takes up the game-playing "Sherlockian" readers of Arthur Conan Doyle, who write mock-scholarly articles under the conceit that Holmes was a living historical figure, and Watson his real biographer.

Critical responses to "Poetry" often treat its history of revisions as a sequence of losses, although the original printings of previous versions still exist, and the collection that presents the traumatizing three-line revision includes a complete instantiation of the "scarred" (Kenner 1967) five-stanza version in every copy. Meanwhile, the parodic style of the original Sherlockian essays fades over generations of performance. It is replaced by increasingly earnest iterations of the form, invoking historically ironic frames that have been bleached of much of their ironic meaning.

In both cases, the reception history reflects processes of entrenchment in the larger discourse community. I survey linguistic evidence of these larger trends and, finally, point to ways that the critical texts use these entrenched linguistic forms rhetorically to influence conceptualization.