

“IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO SEE SO MUCH CONFUSION”:
MARIANNE MOORE AND REVISION

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Marianne Moore's Complete Poems is not complete; it contains sixty-six poems, which is about one-third of her published work. What has not been omitted has, in most cases, been revised. Such acts of expurgation and modification have led some critics to argue that the older Moore revised the works of her younger self. Others view Moore's history of revision as a progression leading to succinct and compact poems. The fundamental claim of this study is that Marianne Moore's revisions are not the acts of an idiosyncratic poet but are manifestations of her aesthetic.

In her early poetry, Moore uses revision to "make it new." Revision allowed Moore to reinvigorate her poems after they had been published and interpreted. More importantly, in revising her poetry Moore kept her poetry genuine. "The genuine," for Moore, was that which was in a constant state of flux. Moore's revisions, then, achieve "the genuine." Moore's practice of extensive revision emphasizes the pursuit of latent meaning rather than the quick capture of patent understanding. The poems and their variants, then, serve as a "right good salvo of barks" so that Moore's reader must continue the chase, which she deems more meaningful than the arrival at understanding, and it also keeps the work genuine.

In Chapter One, I examine four of Moore's early verse essays that educate her reader as to her aesthetic. These poems emphasize Moore's aesthetic of pursuit and how her revisions defamiliarize the text so that the reader has to re-engage the poem and, likewise, his or her imagination. The focus of Chapter Two is "the genuine," which Moore defines in "In the Days of Prismatic Color" and in "Poetry." Her revisions of "Poetry" display "the genuine," and much

of the chapter is spent considering these revisions. Chapter Three discusses the shift that occurred in Moore's poetics between the 1936 The Pangolin and Other Verse and the 1941 What Are Years. Moore's revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity" demonstrate a change in audience and a change in Moore's aesthetic that leads to the simplification of what had been complex.

DEDICATION

“Dedications imply giving, and we do not care to make a gift of what is insufficient,” wrote Marianne Moore and then proceeded to dedicate her 1934 Selected Poems to her mother. It seems appropriate to follow in Moore’s footsteps and beg the insufficiency of this dedication to express my feelings of gratitude and utter love for my family, whose enthusiasm and sacrifice have allowed me to make this dedication to them.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CP</i>	<u>Complete Poems</u>
<i>CprMM</i>	<u>The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore</u> , ed. Patricia Willis (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986)
<i>ColP</i>	<u>Collected Poems</u>
<i>Crit</i>	<u>The Criterion</u>
<i>Critical</i>	<u>The Critical Response to Marianne Moore</u> ed. Elizabeth Gregory
<i>Di</i>	<u>Dial</u>
<i>Ego</i>	<u>The Egoist</u>
<i>Lan</i>	<u>The Lantern</u>
<i>OB</i>	<u>Observations</u>
<i>Oths</i>	<u>Others: A Magazine of New Verse</u>
<i>Oth16</i>	<u>Others: An Anthology of the New Verse</u> , ed. Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Knopf, 1916)
<i>Oth17</i>	<u>Others: An Anthology of the New Verse</u> (1917), ed. Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Knopf, 1917)
<i>Oth19</i>	<u>Others for 1919: An Anthology of the New Verse</u> , ed. Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1920)

POV The Pangolin and Other Verse

Po Poetry

SP Selected Poems

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. CHAPTER ONE	14
3. CHAPTER TWO	64
4. CHAPTER THREE	118
REFERENCES	164
APPENDIX	171

INTRODUCTION

In “The Steeple-Jack,” Marianne Moore describes a little “seaport town” in which there is much to see. The poem begins by showing how orderly this town is with its “eight stranded whales,” “water etched / with waves as formal as the scales of a fish,” “twenty-five- / pound lobster,” and “fishnets arranged.” The seemingly idyllic order is disrupted by a storm, which marches in:

. . . The
whirlwind fife-and-drum of the storm bends the salt
marsh grass, disturbs stars in the sky and the
star on the steeple; it is a privilege to see so
much confusion. Disguised by what
might seem austerity, the se-
side flowers and

trees are favoured by the fog so that you have
the tropics at first hand: (*SP* 1-2)

The storm obscures the scene, but in doing so presents “the tropics at first hand.” What has seemed to be a disturbance, results in a refined view of the town, for the storm reveals the unfamiliar and exotic. The poet is grateful: “it is a privilege to see so / much confusion.”

Observing this town after the storm is a bit like examining Moore’s revisions. What seems like confusion or idiosyncrasy reveals a conscientious poet who uses revision to express her aesthetic. Moore’s aesthetic, however, was not static. Before 1940, Moore’s revisions, I will argue, seek to defamiliarize her poems as they are reproduced so that the audience has to reconsider them. In other words, Moore used revision to “make it new,” in the modernist sense. At this time, her core audience consisted of poet-critics and other literati who read the Dial, The

Chimaera, Poetry, and Others. This audience was not bewildered by Moore's complexity; they understood the modernist theories behind it and were, therefore, willing to engage in the struggle the texts presented. Likewise, Moore understood the aesthetic of this audience and felt free to express her own. After the publication of Selected Poems, Moore's audience began to include those from outside these circles. As a result, her aesthetics shifted so as to communicate with an audience who was perhaps less willing to struggle with her complex descriptions and long syllabic poems. The poems composed for What Are Years illustrate this shift in her poetics. The revisions of her pre-1940 poems for What Are Years, Collected Poems, and Complete Poems demonstrate the simplification of her poetry for this new audience.

This study examines Moore's revisions as manifestations of her shifting aesthetic. For Moore, her aesthetic is an aesthetic of pursuit in that her revisions challenge her readers to re-visit her poems by changing them so that the reader must reconsider the poem and pursue its meaning. Her early poems are didactic in that they explain the benefits of such defamiliarization. Later in her career, Moore simplifies her poetry, but her aesthetic of pursuit continues. It has, however, changed due to her broader audience, which now includes both her established audience of poet-critics as well as members of the general public. In revisions of her 1930s poems for 1940s collections, Moore slows down the pursuit by simplifying her poems so that this broader audience can engage with her poetry. The first two chapters discuss Moore's early didactic poetry as it relates to her revisionary practices, and the final chapter examines her revisions of her 1936 "The Old Dominion" sequence for her 1941 publication What Are Years.

Moore, during her lifetime, resisted the permanency inherent in publishing. She was intensely involved in the publication of her work, excepting Poems, which was published by

H.D. and Bryher without her consent.¹ Moore made revisions with each publication; some are slight while others are substantial. “Poetry,” for example, has eleven distinct versions. Her Complete Poems even mocks the very idea of completeness through its cryptic epigraph, “Omissions are not accidents,” and its “Notes” section, which includes “Poetry” in its “longer version.” Thus, it has been difficult and almost impossible to define an authoritative text, much less an oeuvre of her work.

While the issue of an authoritative text has been discussed in Moore scholarship over the years, it has moved to the forefront since the 2003 publication of The Poems of Marianne Moore edited by Grace Schulman. Schulman’s edition publishes many out of print and previously unpublished poems and has been credited by the Washington Post as rescuing Moore’s poetry. From the standpoint of a textual critic, Schulman’s work has far from rescued Moore’s poetry. It has, in fact, further complicated what is already a difficult textual history.² The effects of Schulman’s work have yet to be determined, but the availability of this text has the potential to alter future critical studies of Moore’s poetry.

Schulman’s editorial choices are controversial because she does not select a clear editorial stance. Her approach is eclectic and is, therefore, problematic. She seems to choose, at whim, whether or not the original, final, or alternate version should be included in her edition. Furthermore, her manner of ordering the poems obscures the poems’ publication histories. Her

¹ Moore letter to T.S. Eliot, George Plank, and Bryher illustrate her concern with all the details of publication.

² Robin Schulze beautifully sums up the difficulties of Moore’s textual history in the introduction to Becoming Marianne Moore. The greatest difficulty springs from Moore’s Complete Poems. Originally published in 1967, Complete Poems contains sixty-six of Moore’s previously published poems, many of which are revised. These sixty-six poems represent one-third of Moore’s oeuvre. To further complicate matter, Margaret Holley and Clive Drive edited the 1981 edition of Complete Poems. As the editors proclaim, this new edition includes Moore’s revisions that she made between 1967 and her death. Since Moore continued to revise her poems up until her death, she seems to have had no intention of producing a stable, complete edition of her poetry.

“Table of Contents” attempts to organize Moore’s poems chronologically, grouping poems as follows:

Early Poems, 1907-1913
Little Magazines, 1915-1919
The Dial Years, 1920-1925
Lyrics and Sequences, 1926-1940
World War II and After, 1940-1956
The Magic Flute, 1956-1965
Late Poems, 1965-1972

Grouping the poems in this manner ignores, for the most part, the bibliographic codes of the poems.³ Scant references are made to the publications in which these poems appeared: “Little Magazines” and “The Dial Years.” When organizing Collected Poems and Complete Poems, Moore made some effort to acknowledge the bibliographic codes of her poems, grouping them according to the books in which they appeared.⁴ Even though she omitted references to Poems and Observations, Moore recognized the importance of this organizational strategy. Schulman’s grouping obfuscates all such references, and one must go to her “Editor’s Notes” to discover where and when the poems were collected and published.

Schulman describes her editorial method as “conscientious inconsistency” (xxvi). This admitted “inconsistency,” however, did have an underlying method. Schulman privileges Moore’s final intentions: “Whenever possible, and where versions did not vary excessively, I

³ Bibliographic code refers to features such as page layout, book design, ink and paper as well as publisher, price, and audience. Jerome McGann discusses the importance of the bibliographic in The Textual Condition. My discussion in chapter three considers the bibliographic codes of The Pangolin and Other Verse and What Are Years and the effects these codes had on the revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity.”

⁴ Collected Poems was published in 1951; a period of meager poetic output for Moore. This book is organized according to the books she published between 1935 and 1944 as well as some previously uncollected poems. Complete Poems is divided into two main sections with subdivisions: Collected Poems and “Later Poems.” The main section Collected Poems reproduces the table of contents of Collected Poems: Selected Poems (1335), What Are Years (1941), Nevertheless (1944), “Collected Later” (1951). The section entitled “Later Poems” is organized by the books published in 1956 and after: Like a Bulwark (1956), O To Be a Dragon (1959), Tell Me, Tell Me (1966), “Hitherto Uncollected,” and “Selections from The Tables of La Fontaine (1954). The 1981 edition of Complete Poems includes five poems printed after the 1967 edition which are included in “Hitherto Uncollected.”

used the Complete Poems (1967). These represent the author's wishes at the time . . ." (xxv).⁵ As I will discuss later in this introduction, a text that privileges final intentions assumes that personal and therefore authorial identity is stable over time. In spite of the problems that result from favoring final authorial intentions, if Schulman had consistently used Moore's final versions, it would make it easier to negotiate her text, but she does not. She admits, "In many cases, I used the version that I liked from earlier editions and/or literary journals, aware that her work changed continually. . . . In the end I chose what I loved best" (xxv-xxvi). This is illustrated in the version of "Poetry" she chose. In this instance she chose to ignore Moore's final intentions in so far as she selects the edition of "Poetry" that Moore includes in the notes of Complete Poems instead of Moore's final three line version. Schulman does, however, include other versions of "Poetry" in her editor's notes, but the postponement of these does not lend legitimacy to the poems and treats them as drafts. For Moore scholars, Schulman's edition is not ideal.

As George Bornstein suggests "[a]n ideal edition of Marianne Moore would need to include bibliographic as well as linguistic codes to reveal both the social embedding and the aesthetic variations of her works. . . . The texts that we would want and that she deserves should be inclusive rather than exclusive of the shifting and elusive perspectives of this extraordinary revisionary writer" (Material 117). The absence of such a text has stunted Moore scholarship. Critics without access or with limited access to Moore's work have been forced to base their studies on Complete Poems. According to Schulze, if Moore's contribution to modernism and her place in literary history is to be rightly acknowledged, critics should study Moore's revisions.

⁵ Schulman's choice of an authoritative text is problematic. Since she claims that attempts to use Moore's final wishes, the 1967 edition does not represent Moore's final wishes since she continued to revise some of these poems. However, Schulman may not consider the 1981 edition as having been approved by Moore and thus not representative of Moore's final intentions.

Because critics have been unable to examine Moore's dynamic process, her place in literary history and her contribution to modernism have been compromised. Recent publications by Robin G. Schulze and Heather Cass White present the ideal texts that Bornstein advocates.

Schulze's Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems 1907-1924 provides facsimiles of Moore's Observations as well as variant tables and first presentations of these poems as they appeared in various journals and magazines. White's "A-Quiver with Significance": Marianne Moore, 1932-1936 contains a facsimile reprint of The Pangolin and Other Verse and facsimiles of first presentations with variant tables. In addition to making available these important and hard to find texts, White's and Schulze's facsimile editions approximate the bibliographic codes of the original, and their introductions supply histories of the textual productions of these two significant collections. Schulze's and White's texts have allowed scholars to examine critically Moore's texts, showing the scholar that Moore's revisions are not hesitations and anxieties made manifest. This study is indebted to their work.

The average reader is usually unaware of textual emendations, variants, etc., but the reader of Marianne Moore's texts is confronted with the idea that her poems are changeable and changing since Moore herself refers to such textual issues in her notes, epigraphs, and even in her tables of contents. Given the aim of this project and Moore's revisionary practice, I call on textual theory to ground my argument. Specifically, I will employ the theories of Jerome McGann, George Bornstein, and Lawrence Rainey because they identify the significance and authority of multiple versions of a work.

In his A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism, McGann argues that "literary interpretation is grounded in the historical study of material texts." The bibliographic codes of the texts in which the versions appear are another important element in considering Moore's

revisions, and I rely on McGann theories, especially in Chapter Three. Bornstein, like McGann, places a similar value on bibliographic code. While Bornstein agrees that literary interpretation should consider the bibliographic code of the text, he argues that interpretation should examine all authorized versions. In Material Modernism, Bornstein writes, “If we ask, which is *the* poem, we can only answer with William Blake, ‘Less than all cannot satisfy the heart of man’” (Material 31). In the study and interpretation of Moore’s work, this means that all the versions of the poem should be considered. Rainey’s Institutions of Modernism examines how modernists used the newly created space for cultural production brought about by the Renaissance of Printing. Rainey suggests that these new spaces consisted of different audiences, which required authors to vary their approaches to these audiences: “Strategies of authorial construction changes as authors sought to address different publics, ranging from patron-salonniers to mass audiences, or from patron-investors, dealer, and speculators to a broader (if numerically restricted) corpus of critics and educated readers” (4). Rainey’s arguments have informed my reading of Moore’s revisions of “The Old Dominion” for What Are Years.

What Are Years marked a change in public and, likewise, a new strategy of authorial construction. Marianne Moore’s poetry has not received a significant amount of attention from textual critics, but this may be due to the unpopularity of the field.⁶ Many literary critics ignore revision entirely. They do so in part to avoid intentionalism, and yet in considering revisions one naturally confronts authorial intent on textual change. This must be so because revision, within

⁶ Textual theory and criticism is gaining in popularity, but it has yet to have a significant effect on Moore studies. W.W. Gregg and Fredson Bowers, in their “The Rationale of Copy-Text,” argue that editors are charged with determining and creating an edition that represents as closely as possible the author’s final intentions. Thus, when confronted with multiple versions of a text, the editor must choose from among the variants readings and assemble an “ideal text,” or the one the author would have wished to publish. The Gregg/Bowers editorial method was popular until the end of the 1970s. Jerome McGann’s Critique of Modern Textual Criticism (1983) began to question authorial intention by exploring the ways in which the author’s intention was “corrupted” or altered by the publication process. Such questioning of authorial intention has opened up the field of textual criticism by removing an editorial burden as well as the fear of intentional fallacy.

textual criticism and literary scholarship, refers to changes made to an already finished text by its author. Unlike editing, translation, and expurgation which can be performed by any number of people such as editors, friends, family, revision is the privilege of the author. Accordingly, an examination of an author's revisions is interested in recovering authorial meaning.⁷ The New Critics were not interested in textual change, and the Post Structuralists did not want to consider or even to recognize the author have dominated literary studies. Because these two literary schools who avoid the author and fear intentional fallacy have dominated English departments for the last fifty years, textual criticism has been given short thrift. This accounts, in part, for the dearth of textual criticism examining Moore's revisions.

Another obstacle to textual criticism was the idea that the goal of the textual critic was to determine final authorial intention. Thomas Tanselle's influential essay "The Editorial Problem of Authorial Final Intention" proposes that revisions made late in life "will almost surely constitute an effectively different work, since it is unlikely that the author will have the same conception of his work in mind as he had during the process of its original composition" (193). If one privileges final authorial intentions, Complete Poems represents Moore's final intentions and is, therefore, the authoritative text. Given Moore's propensity for expiation, Complete Poems does not benefit the study of her oeuvre. Additionally, such a view leads critics to see revisions as a progression towards perfection. The following comment made by Andrew Kappel illustrates this: "eventually the act of omission itself became expressive and toward the end, as we shall see, it became eloquent finally more eloquent than the finest phrase could be a moving last gesture of restraint testifying to her modernist loyalties" (128). Many Moore critics see her revisions as her

⁷ Michael Groden's "Contemporary Textual and Literary Theory" examines, briefly, the response by literary critics have had to textual criticism and theory. The bulk of his work considers and reconsiders some of the central issues in textual criticism and theory. Groden is attempting to bridge the gap between literary and textual criticism. In his study, Groden identifies "final authorial intentions" as the most contentious issue for Anglo-American textual critics in the past twenty-five years (264).

as acts of compression that illustrate the virtue of contractility. In part, this study aims to dispel such readings of Moore's revisions.

When one looks at modernism and revision, it is evident that Moore was not the only author or poet who was performing extensive revisions. Many modernists revised their texts. For example, Henry James's revised his prefaces, and Ezra Pound published "drafts" of his Cantos, assigning these provisional titles. The revisions of both James and Pound are perfect examples of how all genres practiced some form of revision. They did so, in part, because revision allowed them to achieve formal and aesthetic defamiliarization. What is odd about the modernists' propensity for revision is that their slogan was "make it new." So why were they expending so much energy and effort revising the past? Revision, which means "to look again," "to go see again," or "to revisit," is one way the modernists were able to "make it [their texts] new." Advances in technology made multiple revisions possible. It also made revision necessary as the authors had the opportunity to engage different public spheres, which often necessitated revision in order to appeal or communicate with a different audience.

For modernist poets, revision became easier not only because of new technology and sites for publication but also because verse libre, syllabics, and other new poetic forms. These forms were less rigid than a villanelle or a sonnet; this created the potential for revision. Moore took advantage of her form's flexibility. While most of her poetry is written in syllabics, she revised several syllabic poems into free verse. She also revised her syllabics, changing the syllabic count or disrupting it for effect. Revision and the modernist aesthetic were complementary, and in Moore's revisions we are presented with an excellent example of this compatibility.

I begin this study with Moore's early verse essay that shows the congruence between Moore's aesthetic and modernist theory. Chapter One examines, "Picking and Choosing,"

“When I Buy Pictures,” “To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity,” and “Critics and Connoisseurs.” Originally conceived between 1907– 1925, these early poems are representative of Moore’s verse essays in which she works out her aesthetic. As these poems illustrate, Moore employed language so that it was removed from the “laws of things.”⁸ In this way she could “make it new.” They, therefore, provide the groundwork for the claims that I will make about her revisions. The role of the audience is important in that Moore suggests that the reader should wish to pursue meaning and avoid a “familiarity” and “concord” with the work.

H.D., in an essay on Moore, compared Moore’s poetic assurance to that of a “perfect swordsman,” “perfect technician,” and “perfect artist” who seems to tease the reader, her “adversary,” whom she wishes were keener (20). H.D.’s apt comparison suggests that Moore did not wish to be perfectly understood but, instead, enjoyed and encouraged the reader’s pursuit of her meaning. These four poems illustrate the significance of pursuit. The idea of pursuit is reiterated in the revisions of some of these poems, especially in “When I Buy Pictures,” because Moore’s revisions do not clarify the poems. The revision, instead, makes evident her aesthetic of pursuit. Because the audience’s role is an important part of my argument, this chapter looks at her audience for these early poems. Since these poems were, for the most part, published in elite literary magazines, her audience consisted mainly of other poets, critics, and poet-critics. Thus, part of this chapter considers the role of the poet-critic in introducing Moore to the literary scene.

In Chapter Two I argue that Marianne Moore’s revisions are manifestations of her ideas about “the genuine.” In order to elucidate this argument, I will begin with discussion of Moore’s perceptions of truth and clarity as revealed in “In the Days of Prismatic Color.” Moore grapples with these ideas throughout her career, but “In the Days of Prismatic Color” and its revisions

⁸ Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era* explains that the modernists were preoccupied with the gap between language and object and language and experience.

offer the most complete discussion of these ideas. Truth and clarity, the poem explains, were lost when Paradise was lost, and complexity is the inevitable result of this loss. Through the poem's initial illocutionary sentence and its subsequent negations and modifications, Moore's method of describing what has been lost demonstrates the artistic potential of complexity. In confronting the absence of truth and the inevitability of complexity, Moore discovers "a place for the genuine" in poetry. "The genuine" is not defined by Moore because to define it would make it and its definition inauthentic. "Poetry" declares that there is in poetry "a place for the genuine" and proceeds to create such a place through a complex series of negations and modifications. "The genuine," "Poetry" suggests, is that which by eluding familiarity resists becoming hackneyed; therefore, that which is genuine remains in flux. Through a series of examples, negations, and modifications, "Poetry" illustrates how complexity can assist in providing the essential uncertainty so that poetry can find "a place for the genuine." George Bornstein discusses how the multiple versions of "Poetry" emphasize the mutability of poetry. He writes,

The poem does not merely present a series of propositions about poetry, nor does it even add to those an enactment of its own semantic principles, but through its successive embodiments it *re-enacts* important paradigms of poetic transmission, paradigms that remind us that poems exist in multiple, changing forms that constitute more an ongoing process than a final product. (36)

As Bornstein suggests, the value of the poetic transmission of "Poetry" is that it shows that poetry is a process and is not static. Since "Poetry" is a poem about "the genuine," and since "the genuine" is in a constant state of flux, Moore's eleven revisions emphasize her ideas about "the genuine." In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Moore's revisions, in general, are manifestations of "the genuine," for through omission and modification the poems remain in flux just as "the genuine" remains in flux so as to resist familiarity. In order to show how my

argument adds to the discussion of Moore's revisions, I provide a critical history of her revisions and situate my own within that history. Ultimately, "In the Days of Prismatic Color" and "Poetry" are complaints against the impossibility of pure art. Through these complaints, Moore offers a definition of art that celebrates complexity.

"Poetry," Moore's famous, begins with a complaint and ends with a cry for action that is ultimately as resounding as Modernism's "make it new." I will focus on Moore's revisions of this poem and suggest that due to the poem's initial success it received a greater amount of scrutiny from the poet in order to keep the work genuine. Bonnie Costello suggests that Moore's revisions are attempts to "wipe away the smudge of accumulated thought, and the poem must have the same effect on the reader; it must elude his settled understanding." For this project, "Poetry" serves as a transition between Moore's early and post-Dial works. I argue that the aesthetic she demands in the final line, "imaginary gardens with real toads," is exactly what she delivers in her 1930s poetry.

The third chapter examines Marianne Moore's revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity." In 1936, these two poems were published in The Pangolin and Other Verse as part of "The Old Dominion," a sequence of four poems. Five years later, Moore revised these poems and published them in What Are Years. During the five year interval between the publication of The Pangolin and What Are Years, Moore's poetics shifted. My argument is that the revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity" embody the shift that occurred in Moore's work after 1940. In examining the revisions, I will also illustrate the simplification of Moore's 1940s poetry as observed in her revisions of "Half Deity" and "Virginia Britannia."

Much of this chapter compares the bibliographic codes of The Pangolin and Other Verse and What Are Years. The Pangolin was a luxury limited edition published by Bryher, who was

Moore's patron and friend, and What Are Years was a trade edition published by Macmillan and intended for wide distribution. These publications had two different audiences. The Pangolin's audience consisted of Moore's peers, other poet-critics. What Are Years was marketed to those who were as yet unfamiliar with Moore's work but were aware of her status as a great American poet. I propose that the shift in Moore's poetry was provoked in large part because her audience changed. My argument does not neglect the effects of the Second World War on this shift. As the war began to build in Europe, Moore started reading the works of Reinhold Niebuhr. After reading his work and attending his lectures, Moore tried to strike a balance between the legitimate claims of a free self and the responsibility to her nation. For Moore, this newly assumed responsibility resulted in poetry that resisted its former complexity and relied on obvious and heavy-handed symbolism to communicate with its audience. Her new role as poet and wider audience effected her poetry. In this chapter I compare the revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity," to illustrate how these changes affected Moore's poetry.

Marianne Moore's revisions should no longer be seen as mere idiosyncrasies but as part of her aesthetic. As such, any examination of a poem should consider all of its versions. While this has been difficult in the past, recent publications are making it easier for critics to examine Moore's revisionary process. As George Nitchie writes, "Very possibly, as with the late egg, it may take all the king's horses and men to put Miss Moore together. But what a variorum edition it will be" (73).

CHAPTER ONE:
“SACROSANCT REMOTENESS”:
CRITICISM AND MOORE’S AESTHETIC⁹

This chapter will examine “Picking and Choosing,” “When I Buy Pictures,” “To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity,” and “Critics and Connoisseurs.” In these early poems, before her Dial editorship, Marianne Moore defines her aesthetic and, consequently, initiates her audience into that aesthetic. Steeped in traditional poetic forms and subject matter, most of Moore’s audience needed to be initiated because Moore’s poetry denies superficial treatment of material and breaks through preconceptions of poetic form. Readers and critics, therefore, often felt antagonized and bewildered by it. As a result, they ignored or questioned the poetic value of her work. These four poems represent Moore’s early verse-essays which educate her audience and critics as to her aesthetic. Moore was not alone in her efforts to explain the modernist aesthetic nor did she confine these efforts to poetry.¹⁰ As a poet-critic, Moore celebrated the achievements of her modernist peers, thereby, furthering the modernist aesthetic. Modernist

⁹ “Sacrosanct remoteness” comes from Moore’s “An Octopus.” The poem, on the whole, revels in the ability of the landscape to hide its treasures.

¹⁰ On December 16, 1915, Moore wrote to her brother, John Warner Moore, and expressed an interest in reviewing some books for The Philadelphia Ledger: “I could certainly extort the position” (qtd. in Goodridge 1). Since she wrote this letter in the same year that she published her first poems, we can surmise that Moore saw the benefits her criticism could produce for her poetry. It also shows that Moore realized that writing poetry and criticism were complementary. It is not my intention to delve into Moore’s critical reviews but to show how her poetry became an extension of her criticism. See Celeste Goodridge’s Hints and Disguises for an extensive study of Moore’s critical practices.

poet-critics, likewise, wrote reviews endorsing Moore's poetics as well as the poetics of modernism.¹¹

Most of these poet-critics recognized the difficulties inherent in shoring-up an audience for complex and demanding poetry, and they were, therefore, willing to campaign for the validity of modernist poetry, often assisting each other by writing reviews. For example, T.S. Eliot describes the obstacle Moore's poetry presents in his introduction to her Selected Poems:

The bewilderment consequent upon trying to follow so alert an eye, so quick a process of association, may produce the effect of some 'metaphysical' poetry. To the moderately intellectual the poems may appear to be intellectual exercises; only to those whose intellection moves more easily will they immediately appear to have emotional value. (x)

Eliot, as editor of Selected Poems, had a stake in the reception Moore received, and his rhetoric here throws down the gauntlet to Moore's detractors in that he threatens the intellectualism of those who find themselves exasperated by her poetry. Regardless of his motives, Eliot identifies the effects Moore's poetry frequently produced: bewilderment among the uninitiated and accusations of superficiality among the "moderately" initiated. For the initiated, however, Eliot claims that Moore's poetry possessed "emotional value," an element critics often felt her poems lacked. When one considers the negative critiques of Poems and Observations, Eliot's evaluation rings true. The negative criticism Moore received early on was symptomatic of the critics' poor of understanding of the modernist aesthetic or their resistance to such an aesthetic.

¹¹ Other studies of have been conducted as to the relationship Moore maintained with her contemporary poet-critics. Celeste Goodridge's Hints and Disguises reconstructs the dialogues Moore had with her peers and pays special attention to the criticism she wrote about and received from Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and T.S. Eliot. Elizabeth Gregory's The Critical Response to Marianne Moore, a collection of reviews, contains Gregory's essay "Flaring Moore, or the Revisionist Reviewed," which is a retrospective study of Moore's critical reception. Charles Tomlinson's introduction to Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays establishes the general characteristics of Moore criticism and very little interpretation. In fact, relatively little has been done to interpret how criticism affected Moore's poetry and, likewise, how her poetry affected criticism. It is my goal here to add another element to this discussion. Several of Moore's early poems criticize criticism and establish her aesthetic in two ways. First, the surfaces of these poems take on the subject of criticism and Moore's poetic. Second, their construction exhibits her aesthetics.

Through close readings and textual analysis of “Picking and Choosing,” “When I Buy Pictures,” “To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity,” and “Critics and Connoisseurs,” I will discuss Moore’s initiation of her audience, both general and critical, into her aesthetic of pursuit. Before defining this aesthetic and its relation to modernism, I will present some of the early criticism Moore received, both positive and negative, to underscore the necessity for such an initiation as well as how her contemporaries assisted in this process.

The negative criticism Moore received came from a variety of sources: editors, scholars, and poets. Most of these critics accuse Moore of writing a “clumsy prose” or using “tricks of printing” or “superficial unconventionality” to convince her reader of her poetry’s worth. In general, these critics clearly have an aesthetic sense that does not agree with that of the modernists. Frederick T. Dalton, deputy editor of The Times Literary Supplement, writes, “Miss Moore does not seem to have very much to say – certainly not much to say that is inspired by poetic emotion . . .” (*Critical* 32). Again and again, Moore’s poetry is accused of lacking emotion, which seems to be a particularly grave transgression in poetry written by a woman.¹² However, as Eliot argued, emotion exists if one allows the intellect or the imagination to pursue it, but it lies beneath the poem’s complex surface, which is what troubles Dalton. Editors of established journals were not alone in their negative assessments of Moore’s poetry. Poet, professor, and scholar Mark Van Doren praises Moore’s wit but regrets that her poetry lacks beauty and sense: “Her manners are those of the absurder coteries, her fastidiousness is that of the insufferable highbrows” (*Critical* 33). Van Doren’s review smacks of his distaste for the modernists in that he tries to minimize their influence by attacking them (“coteries” and “highbrows”). Van Doren’s response was perhaps not unexpected given his own poetic propensity; he wrote sonnets and some critics have compared his work to that of Dryden and

¹² See Eliot’s quotation on page one for a rebuttal to this accusation.

Wordsworth. Thus, he balked at what he deemed absurd form and manner. Harriet Monroe, unlike Van Doren and Dalton, was entrenched in the modernist aesthetic. Monroe founded Poetry: A Magazine of Verse and in doing so created an important venue for modernist poetry.¹³ She was, in fact, among the first to publish Moore's poetry, but Monroe and Moore did not share the same taste.¹⁴ In 1921, Monroe wrote "A Symposium on Marianne Moore" as a sort of review of Poems. She organized her article to include both positive and negative reactions, but her own review was particularly biting in its ambivalence. She writes that the title, Poems, offers a "challenge" and leads one to ask, "What is poetry?" (*Critical* 35). Oscillating between praise and indifference throughout the article, Monroe concludes that Moore is indeed a poet "though a poet too sternly controlled by a stiffly geometrical intellectuality" (*Critical* 38). She hypothesizes that this is the result of Moore's "terror of her Pegasus," the sentimental, which in turn "yields prose oftener than poetry" (*Critical* 38). Monroe's criticism, then, falls in line with Moore's other critics who accuse her of writing prose rather than poetry and of creating that which lacks emotion or sense. Given Monroe's influence, her critique is particularly damning; however, Monroe's words carried less weight than those of the prominent poet-critics.

T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H[ilda] D[olittle], Edith Sitwell, and William Carols Williams top the list of Moore's early supporters. Because they were poets and not only poets but modernist poets, they had a vested interest in the discussion and reception of their peers. Thus, their

¹³ George Bornstein's Material Modernism dedicates Chapter Five to a discussion of Moore's relationship to female publishers and editors. He devotes a portion of this chapter to the relationship between Monroe and Moore, suggesting that it was not the quantity of poetry published in the journal but the fact that she published there which influenced her career.

¹⁴ In May of 1915, "Pouters and Fantails" or "Tumblers, Pouters, and Fantails," a series of five poems appeared in Poetry. These were the only poems published in Poetry during Monroe's editorship; however, Monroe requested submissions from Moore. Monroe included several of Moore's later poems in various retrospective collections. In 1918, Moore wrote her bother that "Poetry's approach to art is different from my own" (Selected Letters 115). This letter precedes Monroe's review of Moore's Poems, so it appears that Moore's opinion of Monroe was not in reaction to Monroe's article.

criticism of Moore, more often than not, perpetuated their own theories of poetry, highlighting those aspects of her poetry which support a modernist aesthetic. In the first review of Moore's poetry, H.D. recognizes her role in bolstering her peer: "Miss Moore helps us. . . . We are all fighting the same battle. And we must strengthen each other in this one absolute bond – our devotion to the beautiful English language" (*Critical* 21). H.D.'s review admits to the baffling nature of Moore's poetry, but declares that they are "destined to endure . . ." (20). H.D.'s evaluation is crafted to persuade the reluctant reader to attempt Moore's work before it is widely acclaimed. Coming as it did from H.D., this comment possessed the potential to influence an unsympathetic audience to consider Moore's poetry as being among the best, which was H.D.'s goal and the goal of the other poet-critics. Williams too wrote of the necessity of poet-critics: "The established critic will not read. So it is that the present writers must turn interpreters of their own work" (*Critical* 67).¹⁵ The "distressing" nature of modernist poetry, according to Williams, makes the established critics avoid it: "These individuals who cannot bear the necessary appearance of disorder in all immediacy, could be led to appreciation through critical study" (*Critical* 67). Here, Williams identifies both the problem and solution to Moore's reception. The problem derives from the inherent complexity and disorder of modernist poetry as well as Moore's poetry. The solution resides in the modernist poet-critics' abilities to educate the established (non-modernist) critics' aesthetic sense, for these critics influenced the general reading public.

¹⁵ Williams's review of Marianne Moore is more modernist treatise than review, for he rarely speaks directly about her poetry. The article appeared in *The Dial* in May of 1925, the same year Moore won *The Dial* award. Williams, then, was "preaching to the choir," but he obviously still felt the necessity of such a battle and what better venue to garner supporters/defenders for Moore's work and the modernist aesthetic.

Early in Moore's career, the approval of these poets carved her niche in the literary world, for what they wrote of her created not only an audience but a sympathetic audience.¹⁶ Eliot's and Pound's reviews, because of their prominence, did a great deal to produce such an audience and to persuade established critics to re-think their opinions. In Eliot's reviews of Poems and Observations, he praises Moore's unusual rhythm and language and suggests that the only reason her work has been neglected, especially in England, is "that it is too good, 'in this age of hard striving,' to be appreciated anywhere" (*Critical* 46). Eliot's comment suggests that Moore's poetry lacks the artificiality characteristic of the age's poetry, which merely strives to immolate the old poetic principles. In saying that "it is too good . . . to be appreciated," Eliot presents a challenge to readers and critics. Pound offers a similar challenge but is far more brazen than Eliot:

The gentle reader accustomed only to glutinous imitations of Keats, diaphanous dilutions of Shelly, woolly Wordsworthian paraphrases, or swishful Swinburnianism will doubtless dart back appalled by Miss Moore's departures from custom; custom, that is, as the male or female devotee of Palgravian insularity understands that highly elastic term. The Palgravian will then with disappointment discover that his favorite and conventional whine is inapplicable. . . . [Moore's poetry] is very pleasing, or very displeasing, according to the taste of the reader; according to his freedom from, or his bondage to, custom. (25-26)¹⁷

Pound conjures up some of the Romantics so that he can show the shallowness of the "custom" to which some readers cling. He also refers to those who merely imitate the Romantics without

¹⁶ This chapter focuses on Moore's early poems (1915-1925); therefore, the critical examples discussed here, with the exception of F.R. Leavis's review of Selected Poems, will deal exclusively with this period. Also, after publishing Selected Poem and receiving The Dial award, Moore's reputation was established and the compulsion to defend her work lessened. Modernism, as a movement, too was beginning to unravel.

¹⁷ Francis Turner Palgrave (1824-1897) was a critic, poet, and editor. His major contribution was The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics (1861), which he edited. This publication dictated the poetic tastes of at least two generations. In May of 1918, Pound wrote a notice in Exiles a new edition of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, lamenting the tastes and customs that had prevented this publication: "Despite the War, despite the paper shortage, and despite those old-established publishers whose god is their belly and whose godfather is the late F.T. Palgrave, there is a new edition of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (qtd in Read 133). Pound associates Palgrave with the stagnant tastes of the reading public, but he rights faults the publishers who perpetuated those tastes.

success, suggesting that “custom” is indeed elastic. Pound, like Eliot, dares the reader to expand his or her definition of poetry to include work that defies custom and is perplexing. In so doing, Pound attacks the main criticism of Moore’s poetry. While Moore’s break with custom provoked much negative criticism, the sheer difficulty of her work created an obstacle for the general reader. Novelist Glenway Wescott aptly sums up this difficulty writing, “these poems cannot be taken possession of in a subway. . . . It is necessary to accustom one’s self not only to an unfamiliar manner of syntax and punctuation but to a set of perceptions which in most persons is rarely awakened” (*Critical* 42). Here, Wescott taunts those who delight in immediate gratification, suggesting that this standard of poetic appreciation is silly. Moore’s poetry demands one’s attention in order to reap its rewards, and Wescott’s review alerts readers to the reward their patience will reap. By challenging critics’ and readers’ preconceived notions and customs, these poet-critics helped create an audience who was aware of Moore’s aesthetics and, consequently, the aesthetics of modernism. The necessity of such bolstering derives from the difficulty modernism presented to an audience who was weary of new forms and who clung to their preconceptions of the poetic.

Modernism encouraged both poet and audience to embrace the chaos of poetry and to acknowledge the absence of absolutes. One of the key factors of modernism that concerns this work and especially the revisions of Marianne Moore springs from Pound’s famous declaration “Make it new.” In an attempt to avoid what the modernists saw as a formless mass culture, they affirmed styles and forms that had been deemed “other” or were ostracized by popular culture, making them new. This explains Moore’s use of syllabics that were certainly not a popular poetic form. In a broader sense, it also reveals how Moore’s collages of traditional subject matter and “business documents and school books” are in keeping with Pound’s declaration.

Modernism, while not purely reactionary, rejected the certainty of Romanticism and embraced the chaos and complexity of the modern world. This led the poet to consider the benefits of complexity and how it leads to heightened mental states. Thus, poets were intent on leading their audiences to a rarified mental state. For Moore, her style, subject matter, and, most significantly, her revisions make complacency nearly impossible and force her reader to pursue meaning. Her revisions, in fact, literally make what has been published new.¹⁸

Wallace Stevens's "Of Modern Poetry," famously asserts that "the poem of the mind" is in the "act of finding / What will suffice" (1442). Stevens refers to the poet's process of pairing down. For Moore, the "act of finding / what will suffice" suggests the reader's engagement with the text or, rather, the pursuit of understanding. In "Picking and Choosing," Moore's employs images of the hunt as a metaphor for her aesthetic; she declares that "only the most rudimentary sort of behavior is necessary / to put us on the scent." The hunter does not need to see his prey; the scent is enough to provoke the pursuit. Moore's metaphor of the hunt implies that the reader does not require the flourishes of poetic form to engage with the text. Since Moore's poems attempt to incite the audience's imaginations, ambiguities (the scent) not the concrete (the presence of the prey) help produce the desired response. Again, in "Picking and Choosing" Moore describes the response she hopes to evoke from her audience: "a few 'strong wrinkles' puckering the / skin between the ears, are all we ask." Her image of the wrinkled skin between the ears recalls both the wrinkled brow and brain, indicating deep thought. As the negative criticism of her work indicates, she was successful in producing this response; however, those critics were merely puzzled and failed to pursue meaning that did not yield easily. Thus, poems like "Picking and Choosing," performed a similar function to that of the criticism of Moore's

¹⁸ Michael Bell's The Context of English Literature 1900-1930 and Michael Levenson's A Genealogy of Modernism have informed my understanding of modernism.

contemporary poet-critics; the poems advocated the principles of her aesthetic of pursuit and belittled those who were unwilling to acknowledge the merits of the curious and the difficult. In order to initiate and provoke her readers, Moore's poems act as well-armored prey. Essentially, the poems attract and fascinate the reader without revealing enough to be captured, leaving the reader to continue the pursuit.

In a review of Moore's work for The Egoist, H.D. comments on the poet's playful relationship, writing that Moore's work is filled with her "curiously wrought patterns, these quaint turns of thought and concealed half-playful ironies" (19). H.D.'s description of Moore's work quickly turns from descriptions of Moore's playful games to something a bit more dangerous: swordsmanship. H.D. suggests that if Moore is playing with or laughing at her reader, "it is a laughter, that holds, fascinates and half-paralyzes us, as light flashed from a very fine steel blade, wielded playfully, ironically, with all the fine shades of thrust and counter-thrust, with absolute surety and with absolute disdain." The disdain, according to H.D., derives from Moore's understanding of herself as the perfect artist. H.D. imagines Moore mocking her readers, "'see, you cannot know what I mean – exactly what I mean,' she seems to say, half pitying that the adversary is so dull – that we are so dull – 'and I do not intend that you shall know – my sword is very much keener than your sword, my hand surer than your hand – but you shall not know that I know that you are beaten'" (20). H.D.'s apt analogy suggests that Moore did not wish to be perfectly understood but, instead, enjoyed and encouraged the reader's pursuit of her meaning. Alicia Ostricker also notes Moore's persistent "adversarial inclinations." Ostricker remarks that this stance is somewhat at odds with Moore's poetic critiques that are predominantly personal and private rather than political, social, and historical and have, therefore, been labeled as benign. Ostricker writes, "Everyone is fond of the Marianne Moore

who is a sort of household pet that it seems somehow criminal to point out that she bites. One worries that her admirers will stop liking her then. Yet bite she does” (55). Donald Hall also characterizes Moore as a sort of wild animal who carefully constructs her own cage of self-protection (14). Hall, Ostricker, H.D., and others have observed the sharp tip of Moore’s poetry and have recognized that it is often aimed at the reader. While some critics identify this sharpness as part of Moore’s famous armor, Moore’s sharpness is also indicative of aesthetic and serves as a lesson, of sorts, for her reader in that the reader must recognize the poet’s ability to “bite.” This potential should be understood by the reader because if the reader felt that the poet was too gentle, then the poem would be less worthy of pursuit. While Moore’s work displays her ability to wield her sword, as H.D. suggests, her skill also invites the reader’s curiosity.

Moore invites the reader’s curiosity through her poetic ambiguity. Grace Schulman recognizes Moore’s aesthetic as being an “aesthetic of inquiry.” Schulman argues that this aesthetic is part of Moore’s process, writing that Moore’s early poems are primarily concerned with the “process of attaining knowledge by perception”; perception that is beyond the ordinary knowledge attained through the eyes. She sought an ultimately unattainable spiritual perception through “x-raylike inquisitive intensity.”¹⁹ Moore’s “aesthetic of inquiry,” as Schulman perceives it, refers to the poet’s process of inquiry not to the perception of the audience. However, the “aesthetic of inquiry” also applies to Moore’s poems since the poems themselves invite the inquisitive reader. The poems’ ambiguities encourage the reader to pursue questions that emerge. To do so, the reader must overcome a sense of befuddlement and willingly engage

¹⁹ In “People’s Surroundings” (*The Dial* 1922), Moore displays her acervate style in describing a room only to assert that “[i]n these noncommittal, personal-impersonal expressions of appearance / the eye knows what to skip.” She then writes that “with x-raylike inquisitive intensity upon it, the surfaces go back . . . we see the exterior and the fundamental structure - .” Schulman references this poem in order to illustrate the unattainable perception Moore sought and how instead of abandoning the spiritual perception she sought, she began to see it as an “heroic struggle” (36).

in that pursuit. It is Moore's ability to engage the reader in this pursuit that Wallace Stevens praises. He writes that the "potency" of her work stems from its factual appearance, which is really no more than an abstraction, and can, therefore, achieve what is to Stevens the ultimate endeavor of poetry: "communication with the objects which are apprehended by thought and not sense" (95). Consequently, if the reader or critic approaches such a work with the senses and not with the mind, he will be disappointed and even frustrated. Thus, in some of her early work, Moore plays the role of the pedagogue who through example, praise, and even swordplay teaches her readers and critics to relinquish their rigidity and fastidious attitudes in order to delight in the idiosyncratic.

"Picking and Choosing," "When I Buy Pictures," "To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity," and "Critics and Connoisseurs" illustrate the value of pursuit as well as the risk of the rigid, codified behaviors so often demonstrated by both critics and readers. In the discussion of these poems, I will establish Moore's modernist aesthetic as it relates thematically to pursuit and, likewise, to the engagement of both audience and critic. While not the focus of this chapter, revisions will be discussed as they relate to Moore's aesthetic of pursuit. With the exception of "When I Buy Pictures," the poems discussed here are fairly stable so that her revisions are less significant in the discussion of her poetics.

For my purposes, "Picking and Choosing" is the ideal introduction to Moore's "verse essays" because its focus is literature and thus serves as the foundation of this chapter. In her examination of "picking and choosing literature," Moore provides insight into her aesthetic and instructs her readers. "Picking and Choosing" is Moore's criticism of criticism. It is a poem in which she examines how one approaches a work and what one expects to receive from the

experience. Ultimately, this reveals Moore's inclination to provide her readers, critics too, with what will "suffice" and put them "on the scent."

Oscillating between extreme approaches to literature, Moore suggests that the reader should neither fear literature nor attempt to control it, by forcing a work to conform to preconceived ideas or standards. To Moore, familiarity breeds biased response that will ultimately overlook some aspect, negative or positive, of the text. The poem begins "if / one is afraid of it, the situation is irremediable; if / one approaches it familiarly, / what one says of it is worthless."²⁰ These approaches are, to her, useless because "[w]ords are constructive / when they are true." Perhaps it is a bit of a cliché, but Moore is interested in "constructive criticism" because it is generative. She is suggesting the generative power inherent in the quest for truth. Much of Moore's work, in fact, addresses the ideal of truth, but here she does not dwell on truth or attempt to define it. Instead, she concentrates on that which is not true and, therefore, does not contribute to criticism. She condemns "opaque allusions" as well as "simulated" critiques for their emptiness. Because they depend on the familiarity of the reader, allusions are "worthless."²¹ Likewise, a "simulated flight" is, in a way, a mockery of the truth and is, therefore, equally "worthless." While Moore addresses both the general reader and the critic, she focuses on the critic because the critic's response influences the reader's response.

According to Moore, if one is to offer true criticism, the criticism should not negate some aspect of the work or yield to some established idea or ideal. It should also embrace the complexity of the work. Thus, Moore questions critics' search for absolutes: "Why cloud the

²⁰ For my close reading of "Picking and Choosing," I have used the Poems text as it has the correct stanza breaks. Since the poem is fairly stable, this choice does not affect my reading. I will discuss the slight revision later in the chapter but here my purpose is to establish the general poem as it relates to Moore's aesthetic.

²¹ Moore's poetry employs allusions, but they are not "opaque allusions," in general. More often than not, Moore uses quotation marks, notes, and plain invocations. Thus, she provides just enough information to leave a trail for the serious reader to pursue.

fact / that Shaw is self-conscious in the field of sentiment but is otherwise re- / warding?"

While she questions the necessity of absolutes, she applauds George Bernard Shaw for his ability to maintain his voice and vision in spite of criticism. Her praise is that he is "re- / warding."

Because she splits the word, she complements two aspects of Shaw's work.²² First, his work is "rewarding" in spite of its sentimentality. Second, "warding" can refer to Shaw's talent for "warding" off negative criticism. In "To a Prize Bird," which was written for Shaw, Moore pays homage to this aspect of Shaw's ability to shrug-off that which would hinder his work: "Nor are you blinded by the chaff / that every wind sends spinning from the rick." Moore's praise of Shaw's idiosyncrasy reveals a biting critique of criticism in that she reduces criticism to blinding chaff. Moore continues to question the contribution of criticism, examining past criticisms of the works of Henry James and Thomas Hardy: "that James is all that has been / said of him but is not profound? / It is not Hardy / the distinguished novelist and Hardy the poet, but one man / 'interpreting life through the medium of the / emotions.'" These are not comprehensive statements; they are queries, which effectively open rather than close a discussion of James and Hardy. Thus, the lines serve as models of criticism. What has been puzzling about these lines is that Moore seems to pass judgment on writers whom she admires. In fact, in a letter to Ezra Pound, Moore affirms their direct influence on her writing. Her letter was written as response to Pound, who wrote to Moore guessing that European writers and his own work influenced her syllabics and her work in general. In her reply, Moore rejects his idea that her syllabics were somehow inspired by his early work and offers the following explanation:

I have no Greek, unless a love for it may be taken as a knowledge of it and I have not read very voraciously in French; I do not know Ghil and La Forgue [sic] and know of no tangible French influence on my work. Gordon Craig, Henry James, Blake, Hardy and the minor prophets are so far as I know, the direct influences bearing on my work. (Letters to Ezra Pound 1907-1941)

²² Moore often divided words to maintain her syllabics, but in this case it changes or, rather, expands meaning.

Given the acknowledgement in this letter, John Slatin proposes that in “Picking and Choosing” Moore “obscures [their influence] in an attempt to retain control rather than let the poem be swayed by the active influence of the writers she has named” (126).²³ Slatin concludes that “Picking and Choosing” reveals Moore’s effort to distance herself from T.S. Eliot with a “wall of names” that excludes his (127). This may be so in her letter to Pound in so far as Moore excludes Pound’s name from her list of influences. Slatin’s argument, however, does not hold true for Moore’s references to Shaw, Hardy, and James in “Picking and Choosing.” In the poem, Moore’s criticism denies absolutes and invites investigation by asking questions rather than making statements. In other words, this “wall of names” offers Moore the opportunity to discuss the nature of constructive criticism. Also, in selecting writers of various genres and whose pre-eminence is well established, Moore provides herself the opportunity to illustrate the absurdity of strict definitions of literary works and artist. Including Eliot would have been off-putting to biased critics, thereby lessening the effect of Moore’s critical examples.

As a critic, Moore grasped the potential of criticism. In “Idiosyncrasy and Technique,” for example, Moore “sanctions” criticism that is “prompted by affection” citing the sheer entertainment value of “fraternal accolade in reverse” (*CprMM* 514). She distinguishes the unique criticism poet-critics provide, for poet-critics when reviewing the works of others reveal something about their own work. Moore writes, “it is often a curiosity of literature how often what one says of another seems descriptive of one’s self.” If this is true, then Moore’s criticism of James in “Picking and Choosing” requires some attention since it reveals Moore’s opinion of James, whom she openly admired. Her criticism of James also demonstrates her frustration with critics and the general reading public who seemed to demand traditional and superficial work.

²³ While I disagree with Slatin on this particular point, his work connecting “Picking and Choosing” to Moore’s “English Literature since 1914” is persuasive.

Additionally, the line's three revisions demonstrate how Moore exhibits her aesthetic of pursuit in her revisions.

Even though the poem is relatively stable, this particular passage on James is the site of three significant revisions. In the first presentation in the April 1920 issue of The Dial, on which the Poems version is based, the line on James reads, "that James is all that has been / said of him but is not profound." If "words are constructive when they are true," Moore's criticism of James is constructive. She is the good critic who acknowledges the criticism that has been leveled against him and discovers that he "is not profound." Coming from Moore, this was indeed a heavy criticism since she admires profundity: depth, sincerity, and perception. This line, however, could be taken as tongue-in-cheek, for how can James be "all that has been / said of him" without being profound. Moore's criticism of James exemplifies the sort of sweeping generalizations she loathed. In later lines of "Picking and Choosing," Moore mocks critics who ignore the text in order to push their agendas and end up spewing nonsensical generalizations instead. Since the criticism of James is a generalization, it serves as an example of the ridiculous in criticism. Besides, Moore appreciated the tension and complexity of James's work, which seethed beneath the sheen of the Belle Epoch. Add to this Moore's comments on James in "An Octopus," and it is probable that this line should be taken as a criticism on criticism, not as a negative criticism on James. In "An Octopus," Moore compares Mount Tacoma's complexity to that of James's works:

[Mount Tacoma] damned for its sacrosanct remoteness –
like Henry James "damned by the public for decorum";
not decorum, but restraint;
it was the love of doing hard things
that rebuffed and wore them out – a public out of sympathy
with neatness.
Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish! (*Obs* 204-209).

Here, Moore refers to the modesty and restraint James employed and sees these as elements of his work. She recognizes James's genius as his restraint and identifies the public's frustration with this restraint. James's restraint and profundity, or lack thereof, are not unrelated. Because of James's reliance on decorum some found his work to be superficial. Like Mount Tacoma, James has depth and profundity if one searches for it, but this search requires "doing a hard thing." According to Hugh Kenner, James's prose fiction is an "enigma" since in his Prefaces and Notebooks, James "hugs secrets, talking round that overwhelming question, what the story may be *for*" and that as "he ponders his theme or works out his tale we detect him flushed with orgies of reticence . . ." (23). Kenner's description of James's reticence is in keeping with not only Moore's admiration of James but also the public's frustration. James's critics as well as the general public, according to "An Octopus," dislike his decorum or what she terms "restraint" and were unwilling to engage the text. If profundity must openly display meaning without being thwarted by decorum, then James is not profound nor does Moore value this type of profundity. Moore, however, admired James.²⁴

Her revision of this line for Observations qualifies her previous statement with "*feeling*." The revised line reads, "that James is all that has been / said of him, if *feeling* is profound?" In the previous presentation, Moore declared that James, in spite of all the praise and censure his work received, was "not profound." Now she claims that he is profound "if" one considers "feeling" a characteristic of profundity. The revision, then, alters the original criticism of James, but the revised line is less absolute, less rigid in its proclamation. Thus, Moore provides space for the audience to consider whether or not feeling is profound or merely sentimental. Moore guides the audience with her note on "*feeling*" that somewhat elucidates her revision:

²⁴ As mentioned, Moore alludes to James in several of her poems and she wrote "A Characteristic American" in honor of his work.

feeling: T.S. Eliot; In Memory; The Little Review; August 1918. “James’s critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas; a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it. . . In England ideas run wild and pasture on the emotions; instead of thinking with our feelings (a very different thing) we corrupt our feelings with ideas; we produce the political, the emotional idea, evading sensation and thought.” (OB 97)

What Eliot admires is James’s ability to withstand the corrupting ideas of the establishment, leaving his feelings an inviolate source for creation. Moore’s argument in “Picking and Choosing” is essentially the same in that through her criticisms of James and the others, she is demanding that criticism be liberated from inflexible ideas. Her inclusion and revision of this line, then, serves a double purpose. First, the line itself resists an absolute with its subordinate and qualifying “if.” Second, her reference to Eliot’s words enables her to reiterate a quality that she admires both in a critic and an author. The line is the same in Complete Poems (1967), but “feeling” is not italicized, despite the fact that she preserved italics for “*Summa diligentia*” and “*diligence*.” The plain-text “feeling” diminishes the potency of the word itself as well as Moore’s reference to Eliot. The note remains, but since the word is no longer emphasized, Eliot’s comment loses its influence. Moore revised the line again for Complete Poems: “that / James is all that has been said of him.” Moore removes the qualifier and in doing so loses, I think, some of the power of the Observations (1924 and 1925) version. However, the line remains an inclusive criticism that does not negate any aspect of James and his work. The line suggests that in spite of Moore’s clear admiration of James’s work, her struggle to present the truth necessitates her inclusion of the negative as well as the positive. The omitted qualifier also removes her bias from the statement. While biased criticism is worthless because the critic’s bias obstructs pursuit, Moore recognized the generative potential of opinion. According to Moore, however, “If he must give an opinion, it is permissible / that the / critic should know

what he likes.” In other words, a critic should refrain from expressing opinions, but if he or she is compelled to do so, the opinion should be based upon likes rather than dislikes. Moore puts forward Edward Gordon Craig as the ideal critic.²⁵ Craig, however, was not a literary critic and was not shy in expressing his distaste rather than admiration.

Although he was not a literary critic, Craig edited The Mask, a journal dedicated to innovations in the theatre. He also provided his design, illustration, and advertising expertise to several periodicals including The Dial (Taxidou 7). Moore mentions Craig’s assistance in “The Dial: A Retrospect”: “Decorum, generosity, and genially decorative improvement to the proof sheets were matched in Gordon Craig by an unsubservience justifying the surname ‘crag’ as synonym from Craig” (Predilections 112). Apparently, Moore did not admire Craig’s lack of congeniality. She identified the fact that Craig’s surliness produced work that contained no trace of it. What she appreciated was his willingness to express his opinion in spite of opposition. Moore praises Craig’s overbearing nature in one of her early poems “To a Man Working His Way Through a Crowd” (1915). In it she compares Craig’s speech to that of Ezekiel’s, The Old Testament prophet: “Your speech is like Ezekiel’s; / You make one feel that wrath unspells / Some mysteries – some cabals of the vision.” In The Old Testament, Ezekiel’s vivid prophecies foretold, among other events, the destruction of Judea and Jerusalem. His prophecies explained that this destruction was punishment for the abominations practiced by the people of Israel. As foretold by Ezekiel, God’s wrath will result in the rise of a new Israel with a second David and a new division of the twelve tribes. Like Ezekiel’s prophecies, Craig’s harsh opinions force the old cabal to see anew without the residue of custom impairing their vision. Craig’s unabashed

²⁵ Craig was the spiritual leader of the “New Stagecraft” that departed from realistic stage scenery. He called for the elimination of trivial details and believed that there had to be a sense of mystery about the theater, “a sense of imaginative illusion, a something that will put one’s mind in the way of understanding” (qtd. in Myers 80). Not unlike Moore, Craig sought to create what Yeats has called a “never-never land of opulent imagination” (qtd. in Myers 82).

opinions make him, in Moore's opinion, a good critic because he knows what he likes in spite of what tradition or fashion dictates: "Undoubtedly you overbear, / but one must do that to come where / There is a space, a fit gynnasium [sic.] for action." In "Picking and Choosing," Moore declares that "Gordon Craig, so / inclinational and unashamed – has carried / the precept of being a good critic to the last extreme." When Moore first invokes Craig's name as the ideal critic, she focuses on a critic's ability to know what he likes. However, in speaking of Craig she seems less concerned with what the critic likes and more concerned with the critic's ability to express his opinions, no matter how daring because "words are constructive / when they are true"; Craig's "unsubservience," especially to custom makes him a good critic.

It was not Craig's bold opinions alone that garnered him Moore's respect. She also admired his theories of "New Stagecraft" because they largely coincide with her aesthetic. Craig's new stage design called for paired down sets that would engage the imaginations of the theatre audience. He rejected realistic stage design because the audience was not encouraged to project their imaginations onto the stage or to the drama that was unfolding. Like the Modernists, Craig sought to provoke the audience's imaginations by offering stage design that was complex in its sparseness (Eynat-Confino ix). He also resisted the serotypes of stage design. Because of his avant-garde design, Craig received a fair amount of negative criticism. In 1913, Edward Hale reviewed Craig's Towards a New Theatre for The Dial. Hale's review is a reaction to some of the negative criticism that Craig had received from American critics who could not accept Craig's innovations. Here, Hale argues that Craig's ability to resist characterization in favor of artistic expression is his contribution to theater:

Get a mind like Mr. Craig's full of fine idea, and that is something worth having. Do not fancy that his work for the stage is connected with this kind of scenery or that, with this kind of costume or dancing or some other. He will use any of such things or all of them, whatever be the right things, for the carrying out of whatever idea he may have in mind for artistic expression. (523)

Like Craig, Moore wanted her artistic productions to affect the audience's imaginations. Thus, she too included untraditional material to achieve this goal.²⁶ The invocation of Craig in "Picking and Choosing" adds to Moore's criteria for a good critic, but it also alludes to Craig's theories that she admired. Craig's opinions and his theories reinforce Moore's attitude that absolutes have no place in literature and that the critics who seek these absolutes participate in a "simulated flight."²⁷

Moore also invokes Burke to clarify her point: "And Burke is a / psychologist – of acute, raccoon- / like curiosity." But to which Burke is she referring: Edmund or Kenneth? Moore was an admirer of both. In fact, she quoted both Edmund and Kenneth in an interview with Donald Hall, which shows her familiarity with and admiration of these two critics. Also, both fit the description set forth in the line, so perhaps Moore is enjoying the ambiguity, which is part of the aesthetic she is touting in "Picking and Choosing."

If Moore is referring to Edmund Burke, then she is praising his essays on taste and the sublime, which coincide with Moore's censure of strict definitions. On the sublime, Edmund Burke's writings discuss its vastness and potential to evoke a psychological response in the

²⁶ Moore speaks to her inclusion of untraditional material in "Poetry" where she proclaims that one should not discriminate against "business documents and school-books" as far as poetic material is concerned.

²⁷ In her article "When Marianne Moore Buys Pictures," Linda Leavell makes a compelling argument that past critics of Moore have tried to make her into a relativist when she is, as Leavell suggests, a pluralist: "Rather than lamenting the loss of traditional values in an increasingly diverse world, Moore witnesses truth in diversity itself" (252). Leavell equates Moore's artistic values with those of the visual artists in that she, like the visual artists she knew, had an "appreciation for art from diverse cultural origins . . ." (252). More important than this appreciation was the conviction Moore shared with these artists that standards, conventional and hierarchical, would "obstruct one's ability to see the 'spiritual forces' in art and elsewhere" (252). While Leavell is addressing issues surrounding Moore criticism, her argument is equally compelling when one considers what Moore herself is saying about critics.

reader. Ultimately, Edmund Burke thought a work should make the reader investigate the work and its subject, setting “the reader himself in the track of invention . . .” (540). “Invention” refers to the act of the imagination in making discoveries similar to those that the author made in creating the work. Vastness like ambiguity is a perquisite for such an invention in both the poet and the reader. Critics, who were, according to Edmund Burke, arbiters of “taste,” hinder a reader’s investigation by imposing strict definitions on art; therefore, the potential invention is curtailed. In his A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, Edmund Burke suggests that when we attempt to define “we seem in danger of circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions, which we often take up by hazard, or embrace on trust, or form out of a limited and partial consideration of the object before us, instead of extending our ideas to take in all that nature comprehends, according to her manner of combining” (540). Here, Edmund Burke discusses the debilitating effect of definitions. He argues that by submitting to a definition we limit our inquiry. Moore was a fan of Edmund Burke’s theories and in “Picking and Choosing” and elsewhere she too ridicules strict definitions of art imposed on poets and readers by the arbiters of taste, critics. Clearly, Moore admired Edmund Burke’s “philosophy of enquiry.” In fact, In “Picking and Choosing,” Moore refers to Edmund Burke’s “acute, raccoon – / like curiosity.” This implies that Moore refers to Edmund Burke because he possessed and valued acute curiosity. However, she could also be referring to the Kenneth Burke who was her contemporary and who wrote on the limitations of criticism.

Kenneth Burke is the other Burke in question. Hall, in fact, assumes that Moore’s reference is to Kenneth, not Edmund, writing, “Miss Moore cites as good critics Gordon Craig and Kenneth Burke, men whose predilections enrich their precision of expression” (35). In her interview with Hall, Moore also quotes Kenneth from his Counter-Statement: “Great artists feel

as opportunity what others feel as a menace. This ability does not, I believe, derive from exceptional strength; it probably arises purely from professional interest the artist may take in his difficulties” (268). Moore uses this quotation in a response to a question about how she has handled criticism of her work, and it speaks to the value Moore places on grappling with a text, be it literary or critical. Kenneth, who wrote for The Dial, was a proponent of the criticism of criticism, which he considered the ultimate form of criticism. Although Kenneth did not publish his first work of literary criticism, Counter-Statement, until 1931, his presence in Greenwich Village and at The Dial indicates that Moore was likely to have come in contact with him and his theories, making him a possible candidate for her Burke reference in “Picking and Choosing.” What is certain is that Kenneth and Moore understood that criticism could not and should not attempt to pin down a poem or make it conform to a single theory. In his “Kinds of Criticism” published in 1946, Kenneth explains the inability of the critic to reach a complete understanding of a poem:

The relation between poetry and criticism is here somewhat analogous to the relation between “revelation” and “reason” in theology. The poem, as the given, is something extra, something by nature beyond the reach of a purely critical rationale; hence, in the intuiting of it, there is always something which the critical treatment cannot equal (just as there is, in a physical object, something which a poem about it could not equal). The poem, as the object of the critic’s intuition, thus forever sets an obligation, that can never be wholly met, to bring the facts of the poem wholly within the orbit of the critic’s terms. (1277)

If this is so, then criticism that pushes for or implies complete understanding is no more than an “opaque allusion” or a “simulated flight.” It becomes the steam roller that forces its object into compliance; “[b]ut will [it] comply?”²⁸ According to both Burkes and Moore, a poem cannot comply because it is too vast and unwieldy for a critic who insists on “penning” it down. So, is it

²⁸ In a Paris Review interview with Hall, Moore quotes Edmund Burke: “You can shear a wolf. But will he comply” (260). Moore uses this quotation as an example of prose she admires, but it certainly fits with her attitude towards criticism in that a critic may attempt to make something conform, but it does not have to obey.

Kenneth or Edmund? Here too, we are unable to pin Moore down, but both Burkes suit Moore's purposes. The ambiguity of her reference further illustrates of her point as to the complex density of poetic language.

Through her invocation of these novelists, poets, theorists, and critics, Moore provides her audience with examples of criticism that attempts to encapsulate a career in a sentence and with examples of good critics who exhibit the requisite curiosity and idiosyncrasies that will produce constructive criticism. While the general reader continues to be educated by Moore's examples, a shift occurs after the discussion of James and the other authors. Moore begins to address the critic, specifically, because she recognizes the influence criticism has on the public's perception of poetry.

Ever the pedagogue, Moore does not rely on examples because the bias and familiarity of her audience could negate the pedagogical value of such examples. Moore, therefore, employs her sharp wit to disarm those critics who insist upon absolutes: "Summa diligentia; / to the humbug, whose name is so amusing – very young and ve- / ry rushed, Caesar crossed the Alps on the 'top of a / diligence.'" Great diligence or persistence by a humbug or sham artist only leads to a mistranslation or misinterpretation; Moore dubs the critic a humbug. Because Moore calls attention to the "amusing" name, we should consider that the word humbug means nonsense, which is all the humbug is able to offer. Given the context, Moore implies that the critic who pushes a text to an absolute contributes nothing but utter nonsense because the plurality of poetry keeps meaning from achieving a fixed form. Also, Moore is belittling the critic's disinclination to do his due diligence. After all, the humbug belittles Caesar by having the Roman Emperor cross the Alps on the "top of a diligence," a common or ordinary stagecoach for public transportation. She also reduces the humbug's interpretation to a common school-boy

joke. Her note on this line indicates that it was taken from an article about E.H. Kellogg. Her note reads, “‘top of a *diligence*’: Preparatory school boy translating Caesar; recollected by Mr. E. H. Kellogg” (Observations 97). Moore was rather fond of this story and used it again to illustrate a similar point in “Humility, Concentration, and Gusto” (1948). In this essay Moore discusses the importance of humility in persuasion and recalls the “Hill School Boy”: “Our lack of humility, together with anxiety, has perhaps stood in the way of initial liking for Caesar’s Commentaries, which now seem to me masterpieces. I was originally like the Hill School Boy to whom I referred in one of my pieces of verse, who translated *summa diligentia* (with all speed): Caesar crossed the Alps on top of a diligence” (Predilections 12). A willingness to be wrong, then, becomes a virtue in a critic. Critics who puzzled over Moore’s poems and other modernist poetry were in some ways humiliated by the uncertainty these poems present. Driven and blinded by ambition, these critics often railed against modernist poetry.

“Familiarity,” as Moore uses the term in “Picking and Choosing,” refers to biased knowledge. To Moore, familiarity on the part of the critic or the audience results in a failure to open the text, making it difficult to consider a text’s possible contradictions and tensions. Moore reproaches the critic’s familiarity through her mention of the Latin school-boy joke. She continues to berate the critic in the lines that follow the joke. As in the first stanza, Moore is concerned with “familiarity” on the part of the critic: “We are not daft about the meaning but this familiarity / with wrong meanings puzzles one.” Making this quest for meaning absurd, Moore provides two examples: “Humming- / bug, the candles are not wired for electricity. / Small dog, going over the lawn, nipping the linen saying, / that you have a badger - . . .”²⁹ Both examples illustrate how critics may wrongly impose meanings on a text. After all, a candle is not

²⁹ “Badger” was also the family nickname for Moore’s brother, Warner. All the family members had nicknames inspired by Kenneth Grahame’s The Wind in the Willows. Mrs. Moore’s took the nickname of “Mole,” and Marianne was most often referred to as “Rat.”

electrified, and the “small dog,” which is by nature incapable of seeing high enough to determine what is being carried, makes an assumption. Moore does not reveal whether or not the dog’s assumption is correct, but the very idea of a diminutive dog “saying / that you have a badger” is ridiculous enough and perhaps puts the overly familiar critic in his or her place.

Since a critic cannot, according to Moore, hope to bridge the gap between “revelation” and “reason,” what is the purpose of criticism? (Kenneth Burke 1277) The final lines of “Picking and Choosing” ask the critic to “remember Xenophon,” the ancient military authority who wrote a pedagogical text on hunting. Moore puts the critic in the position of the hunter and admonishes the critic: “only the most rudimentary sort of behavior is necessary / to put us on the scent.” Accordingly, the critic should abandon “opaque allusions” and “simulated flights” in favor of fundamental treatment of the work. Since criticism cannot encompass the poem, its aim should be the provocation of the reader with “a right good / salvo of barks” to indicate the direction of the pursuit. What she is suggesting is that critics change course and recognize that their aim is similar to that of the poet: to engage the reader. In a review of Paul Rosenfeld’s work, Moore writes, “Flamboyant generalities are the refuge of the lazy.”³⁰ Moore certainly felt this way about critical prose, but her poems also resist generalities and discourage idle reading. “Picking and Choosing” communicates the importance of active pursuit. Like the criticism Moore received from her peers, “Picking and Choosing” debunks custom in its form and in its message. In so doing, the poem encourages pursuit in spite of the unfamiliar terrain. “When I Buy Pictures” defines the fertile terrain for the pursuit, providing another lesson for the uninitiated reader.

While “When I Buy Pictures” is in some way a poem that presents criteria for poetry, it is also a pedagogical text instructing the reader in the proper consumption of art. Moore, the

³⁰ Marianne Moore, “Paul Rosenfeld” rev., A Marianne Moore Reader (New York: Viking, 1961) 209.

pedagogue, employs a conversational tone to impart her message.³¹ Although her tone is casual, what she articulates in her tutorial is too precise and calculated for the reader to discard. Part of her lesson concerns the infinite possibility of language as separate from object. On this subject, Hugh Kenner connects Pound and Eliot to Mallarme and his use of language, writing that they “felt words as part of that echoing intricacy, Language, which permeates our minds and obeys not the law of things but its own laws, which has an organism’s power to mutate and adapt and survive, and exacts obligation from us because no heritage is more precious. The things against which its words brush are virtually extraneous to its integrity” (Pound 123). Kenner explains the modernists’ departure from their predecessors who thought that words merely denote things and that a “language is simply an assortment of words, and a set of rules denoting them.” Modernists were preoccupied by the gap between language and object and language and experience. One way in which modernist poets dealt with this gap was to “pile up” images so that, as Hulme proclaims, “it will arrest the mind all the time with a picture” (50). In the visual arts, collage was the method artists used to “pile up” images and to explode visual boundaries, denying the frame its traditional function as boundary between the artwork and the real world.³² Moore, who was certainly influenced by her contemporaries in both the visual and literary arts, used collage to demonstrate language’s ability to mutate, and her collages emphasize incongruities between

³¹ See “Morals, Manners, and ‘Marriage’: Marianne Moore’s Art of Conversation,” for Heather Cass White’s persuasive reading of “When I Buy Pictures” and Moore’s “casual tone” and how it differs from Eliot’s women “talking of Michelangelo.”

³² As critics have long acknowledged, Moore was undoubtedly influenced by visual artists and by collage in particular. Bonnie Costello provides comprehensive evidence of this through her research into the books Moore read as well as the galleries and museums Moore visited. In her Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions, Costello dedicates a chapter, “Moore and the Visual Arts,” to this connection. Linda Leavell’s Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color more closely examines the effect of the visual arts on Moore’s poetry in that Leavell probes the poet’s “unique response to a turbulent aesthetic climate” as well as the development of the poet’s modernism as it relates to the visual arts (1). Elizabeth W. Joyce’s “The Collage of ‘Marriage’: Marianne Moore’s Formal Cultural Critique” suggests that the poet’s use of collage is political because it violates conventional rules and “registers its critique of the status quo at the level of the technique itself” (103). Although Joyce’s focus is “Marriage,” her argument has broader implications.

objects and language. “In collage verse,” explains critic Andrew M. Clearfield, “the interior space of the poem is broken – flattened or ruptured – to display parts for view, like an animal laid out for dissection” (61). Clearfield’s explanation and analogy are apropos of Moore’s poetry because she too focuses on the parts, the disparate words, rather than the whole. In “When I Buy Pictures,” for example, Moore amasses a collection of seemingly unrelated nouns. As a result, the collected nouns lose some of their connections to the objects they signify. Through her collage of nouns in “When I Buy Pictures,” Moore demonstrates the intricacy of language, and she revels in the diversity of the pictures she creates with it.³³ The mutable nature of language as opposed to the rigidity of objects becomes the focus of “When I Buy Pictures,” for Moore’s interest lies in what will permeate the imaginations of her audience, and as Kenner explains, language possesses infinite possibility to provoke the imagination because its power exists outside the exacting “laws of things” (Pound 123).

“When I Buy Pictures” begins as a commentary on the process of selecting art. Moore’s standard for selection is that which will “give pleasure” in “average moments.” Only when one is the “imaginary possessor” can these pictures be accessed during “average moments” because one does not need the physical picture to enjoy its pleasures. That this possession occurs in the imagination also implies that the pictures are not concrete and are, therefore, changeable, giving the imagination infinite possibilities for pleasure in its “average moments.” This is somewhat reminiscent of William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” because Wordsworth, like Moore, illustrates the power of “that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude” in the

³³ Victoria Bazin takes notice of Moore’s use of language in “When I Buy Pictures” aptly noting that the “critical discourse of restraint, frigidity and modesty seems entirely inappropriate when considering Moore’s linguistic immoderation” (229). I, too, am intrigued by Moore’s language in this poem, which on the surface or, at least in its tone, seems impromptu and even cool. Bazin’s article, “Marianne Moore and the Arcadian Pleasures of Shopping,” does not dwell on this idea but focuses on consumer culture as it relates to modernism and gender. “When I Buy Pictures” provides the site for her argument, which is insightful in its explanation of how “When I Buy Pictures” alerts the reader to the connection between mass culture and modernism.

recollection of images. The difference, which is significant, is that Wordsworth's poet is "gay" in the "jocund" company of "golden daffodils" and the "green bay." Moore, on the other hand, finds "pleasure" in a "mediaeval decorated / hat-box" and a "literary biography." In other words, her imagination is, for the most part, stimulated by items that have been produced or somehow cultivated by humans as in the "artichoke in six varieties of blue" and not by a romantic vision of nature. The line also expresses a quintessentially modernist belief in language's ability to transform the mundane object by focusing on the word rather than thing it represents. Even when handling a traditional subject, Moore "make[s] it new" by shifting her focus. For example, her invocation of Adam is an invocation of something that has been produced: "the silver fence protecting Adam's grave." It is the fence and not the first man that she fixes upon, but when she does turn her attention to Adam, it is to the story of Adam's expulsion: "Michael taking / Adam by the wrist." The story too has been produced in that it has been replicated in the various versions of the Bible as well as through visual and literary depictions.

The collection of "parquetry," "letters" of a "literal biography," "artichoke," and "hieroglyphic" becomes unified through language because they are grouped together in order to create a single image that gives "pleasure" in "average moments." Alone, these objects that the nouns signify would not be categorized as "fine art" because they are common goods, but in this poem they have been elevated. Even Adam, a popular subject of fine art, is just another item on the list. What is more, as Heuving observes, we are not presented the Adam associated with the originality of "In the Days of Prismatic Color" because Moore focuses instead on his grave and on Michael, the angel who led Adam and Eve out of Paradise (102).³⁴ Not only is Adam dead and buried, he is removed from Paradise. Adam's inclusion in the list, therefore, suggests a mix

³⁴ "In the Days of Prismatic Color" begins by defining a time when truth was "plain to see and account for." This time was before the Fall and, thus, before Eve.

of “high” and “low” subject matter in that Adam, traditional subject matter, appears along side non-traditional subject matter: a hat-box, a square of parquetry, and an artichoke. Moore’s mix of the traditional and non-traditional challenges the audience’s prejudices. Together, Adam and the other objects create a collage that satisfies the criteria for imaginary possession. Once the criteria for possession are established, Moore examines the role of the possessor.

After Moore completes her list of well-wrought examples, she suggests that “[t]oo stern an intellectual emphasis upon this quality or that, / detracts from one’s enjoyment.” As in “Picking and Choosing,” Moore advises her readers and critics to avoid applying their biases to the text. Here, her reason is not because this emphasis is worthless. Instead, she suggests that it hinders the pleasure one can have through his or her imagination. Moore also alludes to picking apart a work, “this quality or that,” which is ironic considering that “When I Buy Pictures” is partially a list of fragments of which she has fixed upon some detail instead of the whole. Thus, she has chosen to emphasize one quality over other qualities, making her guilty of her own admonition. Moore also suggests that “it must not wish to disarm anything; nor may the approved / triumph easily be honored.” The indefinite “it” refers either to commentary or criticism because Moore shifts her focus from the pictures she will buy to the method of examination. In fact, her examples demonstrate how to look and how to respond to a work. What Moore warns against is criticism that seeks to “disarm” a work or “triumph” over its object. Criticism should not seek to defuse a work of its natural defenses and thereby sanitize it by forcing it into conformity through some “intellectual emphasis.” Also, the critic should not approach a work in order to defeat it, and if the critic flaunts such a “triumph,” it is dishonorable. She continues to remind the critic not to belittle the object of his or her criticism: “that which is great because something else is small.” In other words, the critic’s attempt to gain authority

through criticism that minimizes or disparages cheapens both the critic and the criticism. Moore rejects this type of high-handed criticism because in it the critic in a sense usurps the work.

Of Moore's collage, Leavell asserts that it is tyrannical and imperialistic to collect objects and force them onto a canvas to serve the artist's purpose, and she suggests that it is this tyranny to which Moore objects in "When I Buy Pictures." Is Leavell implying that artists impinge on the sovereignty of, say, apples and oranges in still-lives? While Moore may not have been quite this sensitive to objects, it appears that Moore struggled with the appropriation of objects in art, for she revised the ending three times. In the first presentation for The Dial's July 1921 issue, the closing lines read, "it comes to this: of whatever sort it is, / it must acknowledge the forces which have made it: / it must be 'lit with piercing glances into the life of things.' / then I 'take it in hand as a savage would take a looking- / glass.'"³⁵ Heuving suggests that Moore's wish to see herself is "narcissistic gratification," which "breaks with the middling and anti-specular consciousness of her poem."³⁶ However, Moore can hardly be considered "narcissistic" when she has come to realize that imaginary possession is self-reflexive, tyrannical, and "savage." After all, narcissism implies that one sees one's self in positive terms, self-love. Furthermore, the savage is given or finds the looking glass, which implies that the speaker sees her reflection in the work. Moore's line also implies that the savage, who has no prior knowledge of a looking glass or of his or her own appearance, can see without the interference of authorities or experts who define and pass judgment, thus, limiting the ability to see either the looking glass or the reflection it holds. Heuving's argument puts forward that "When I Buy Pictures" has an "anti-specular

³⁵ Dial issue and general appearance information give Schulman credit.

³⁶ Jeanne Heuving, Omissions are not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1002) 103.

consciousness,” but how can this be when it is essentially a poem about how to be an active spectator through imaginary possession.

The second presentation appeared roughly two weeks after the first in Poems. It consists of twenty-five lines laid out in five regular syllabic stanzas of five lines each. The Dial version consists of a single stanza of eighteen lines and is written in free verse. At first glance, it appears that Moore changed the original free verse poem into syllabics. However, the Poems version is based on an early version of the poem that Moore sent in a letter to H.D., so H.D. had no knowledge of the free verse version.³⁷ Understanding the order of composition shows that Moore changed her syllabic verse to free not vice versa. This is significant because the change from syllabics to free verse suggests the poet’s attempts to avoid the artifice of complicated syllabics. This seems in keeping with the poem’s collage of “high” and “low” objects as well as “average moments” because free verse is more accessible to a larger reading public than Moore’s syllabics, which can seem a bit daunting on the page. While the free verse version is less intimidating in its appearance, it still challenges its audience and encourages pursuit. Aside from the syllabics, the final stanza of the Poems’ version presents a daunting equation. The final stanza of this version also differs in that the indefinite “it” seems to refer to the work and not to the criticism:

³⁷ In The Savage’s Romance, John Slatin maintains that Moore was most comfortable in syllabics and used them to draft poems that she later published in free verse. Schulman’s notes on “When I Buy Pictures” also suggest that the Poems version is based on a draft that Moore sent to Thayer. Slatin’s argument is that Moore shifted to free verse in order to pay homage to The Dial and her peers. See “Chapter 3: Getting Closer to the Truth: Free Verse and the Acknowledgement of Debt” for an in-depth analysis of Moore’s use of free verse and how it relates to “When I Buy Pictures.” Moore’s shift to free verse, which lasted for approximately three years, is significant, but this shift is not my focus here. Since Moore only approved the publication of the free verse version and continued to revise the endings until her Complete Poems, I will contend with her revisions of the final lines.

It comes to this: of whatever sort it is, it
must make known the fact that it has been
displayed
to acknowledge the spiritual forces which
have made it;
and it must admit that it is the work of X, if X
produced it; of Y, if made
by Y. It must be a voluntary gift with the
name written on it.

Here, the objects possessed must maintain their inherent natures so that when they are incorporated into something other than their original form, they acknowledge their removal and the “spiritual forces” that made them. By “spiritual force,” Moore is referring to God or a craftsman, but she is not judging the “sort” of object because “high” or “low” the “force” that made it is worthy of recognition. Moore’s use of quotations follows this thought in that quotation marks acknowledge that the source and that the quotation is being “displayed” or used in a new manner.³⁸ Although Moore dropped most of this final stanza from subsequent publications, her particularity and precision evident in this ending are in keeping with her characteristic precision. Perhaps the most common adjective used to describe her is “precise,” and her syllabics only emphasize her precision, which seeks to eliminate the superfluous and aids her in rendering “what will suffice” to engage the imaginations of her audience.

The Observations and Complete Poems versions closely resemble the first presentation, but the savage and the looking glass are removed. The poem ends, “it must be ‘lit with piercing glances into the life of things;’ / it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it.” This is a rather abrupt conclusion to the list when compared to the earlier presentations because here the poem becomes demanding with the repetition of “it must.” Not only does she cut the closing lines, but Moore also removes some of the poem’s notes in Complete Poems. In her

³⁸ Heuving wrongly asserts that this is not a “Moore conclusion” because it seems “too particular, not fluid or middling enough” (103).

notes for “When I Buy Pictures,” Moore does credit her sources, but interestingly her notes in Complete Poems do not recognize all of the sources that she acknowledges in Observations even though the poems are about the same.³⁹ In Complete Poems she gives credit to the Literary Digest for her appropriation of “silver fence” from a descriptive paragraph with a photograph: “A silver fence was erected by Constantine to enclose the grave of Adam” (268). However, she does not attribute “Michael taking Adam by the wrist” to a wash drawing by William Blake as she does in Observations (140). In both Complete Poems and Observations, Moore recognizes her source for “Lit by piercing glances . . .,” giving credit to A.R. Gordon’s The Poets of the Old Testament. Only in Observations does she mention that “snipe legged hieroglyphic” was in some way inspired by an Egyptian low relief in the Metropolitan Museum, but she does not clarify her exact source. The omissions are striking because they ignore artist/poet Blake and the Metropolitan Museum. In omitting these sources from her notes, Moore removes references to artistic authorities and traditions since both Blake and The Metropolitan are recognizable sources for inspiration and, likewise, for imaginary possession. Her notes are merely “piercing glances” into the forces that have created the text.

Overall, Moore recognizes that art ought to accomplish two ends. First, it must contain an element of truth. Second, because she recognizes the impossibility of looking directly at truth, she states that art must “be lit with piercing glances into the life of things.” Real or imaginary possession becomes tricky for Moore because she discovers the impossibility of a possession in which the possessed maintains authority over itself. She declares, Art “of whatever sort it is,” must acknowledge its origins, “the spiritual forces which [have] made it” – its basis in

³⁹ Substantively these two presentations are virtually the same. Variants include some change in hyphenations i.e. “hourglass” in Observations is “hour-glass” in Complete Poems. Visually the poems are different in that the long lines that must move to the next line are aligned to the right margin in Complete Poems and in Observations they are flush to the left margin.

reality. As Leavell writes of the final image in “Poetry,” “Preserving the reality of the toad is then for Moore not merely an aesthetic challenge but a moral imperative” (119). For Moore, there is an exception to this “moral imperative.”

Shortly after “When I Buy Pictures” was published in Observations, Moore wrote to Bryer: “I think in a work of art, one must get at the individuality of a thing one is describing literally. [. . .] I do not mean of course, that things cannot be distorted for the sake of art for they can so long as you don’t do violence to the essence of thing.” The artist’s purpose and problem, then, is to respect reality and truth while respecting art. Certainly this describes Moore’s own conflict, for she does distort objects again and again for the sake of her art, but she does so in an attempt to define the “essence” or the fundamental nature of the object being observed. Therefore, her appropriation and collage of the objects in “When I Buy Pictures” serves her purpose of discovering the “essence” of art. Ironically, this definition is qualified by its very method of assemblage, which is perhaps the reason she had difficulty with the concluding lines; Moore was acutely aware that her representation of an object distorted it in the process. Her goal seems to rest in the line that “of whatever sort it is, / it must be ‘lit with piercing glances into the life of things.’” Moore is speaking as much to the critic as to the artist since “sort” could easily refer to criticism. For Moore, because both the critic and the poet can only hope to touch upon the truth, they must do so with an intensity and eloquence that “must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it” with “piercing glances.” Moore speaks to this in her acceptance speech for the The National Book Award for Poetry in 1952:

In poetry, metaphor substitutes compactness for confusion and says the fish moves “on winglike foot.” It also says – and for “it” I had better say Confucius – “If there be a knife of resentment in the heart, the mind will not attain precision.” That is to say, poetry watches life with affection. In poetry the light touch is the strong touch.

This rather enigmatic speech, like Moore's poetry, is revealing in spite of itself. Metaphors, according to Moore, invite confusion, which is something that she does not resist and even seems to enjoy. Her quotation from Confucius is about honesty from both the poet and the critic and is reminiscent of her requirement, "it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it." The poet must be honest in the representation of objects in that he or she should keep in mind the origins of the objects and do so with "affection." Likewise, the critic should avoid bias and realize that the work is a human creation. For these reasons, Moore proposes that poetry requires a "light touch" or "piercing glances" that will maintain "affection" for works and artists without destroying them. Therefore, the final lesson of "When I Buy Pictures" is that the acknowledgement of "spiritual forces" is an acknowledgment of the aesthetics that propelled the work. Understanding this will enable the critic to examine the work with "piercing glances." For the critic this necessitates a denial of absolutes, of pushing the text into conformity with some predetermined agenda. As both critic and poet, Moore was keenly aware of the power of criticism. It is likely that her firsthand experience with the criticism of her poetry that led to her frustration with critics.

In the Marianne Moore Issue of The Quarterly Review of Literature, William Carlos Williams's article praises "the magic name, Marianne Moore" and her talent, but in doing so offers a curious honor to the poet he holds "dearest to [his] heart": "How so slight a woman can so roar, like a secret Niagara, and with so gracious an inference, is one with all mysteries where strength masquerading as weakness – a woman, a frail woman – bewilders us" (125).⁴⁰

Williams's misogynistic comment is indeed bewildering, but Moore's poetic prowess is not. Williams views Moore's femininity and strength as somehow at odds, and yet he recognizes the potency of her imagination as compared to her contemporaries. Williams, in fact, ridicules Eliot

⁴⁰ The Quarterly Review of Literature. Vol IV, Number 2 (1948) Editors T. Weiss and Renee Weiss 121-223

in praising Moore's talent: "It is a talent which diminishes the tom-toming on the hollow men of a wasteland to an irrelevant pitter-patter" (125). The references to Eliot's poetry are difficult to ignore since Williams includes two of Eliot's popular titles "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men." Unlike Moore's "roar" and "gracious inference," this attack on Eliot is not masked by decorum. In spite of Williams's patronizing tone, he is right in that Moore possesses the ability to attack elegantly. Several of her early poems illustrate her tactfulness, including "To a Steam Roller" and "The Past is Present," but I would like to focus on "To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity" because while it is an attack, the poem justifies both the attack and the method of attack employed. This poem also illustrates how Moore initiates her readers, especially her critics, into her aesthetic of pursuit.

"To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity," was composed after Moore had received several rejection notices from literary magazines. In a March 27, 1914 letter to her brother, Warner, Moore alludes to the poem: "I am writing a poem as an indirect choke pear for all my detractors and sluggard critics – drat them. It is on a couple of fighters."⁴¹ This "indirect choke pear" of a poem was intended to silence critics whom Moore viewed as being lazy. Once again, Moore does not respect readers who are unwilling to accept the challenge of her poetry. While she intends for the poem to be an indirect attack on her lazy detractors, she reveals that the poem is "*on* a couple of fighters" (itl. mine), indicating that she had particular "fighters" in mind. Since the first line, "Attack is more piquant than concord," is taken from Thomas Hardy's A

⁴¹ "To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity" has received some critical attention, and the general consensus is that it, like "To a Steam Roller," attacks some artistic establishment, literary or otherwise, that uses force or power to belittle. Robert Pinsky suggests that the poem is an elaborate way of saying that "I am not speaking to you." "Marianne Moore: Idiom and Idiosyncrasy," in Parisi, The Art of a Modernist. The quotation is from RML VI 20:04

Pair of Blue Eyes.⁴² The “fighters” are Elfride Swancourt and Henry Knight, characters from Hardy’s novel. In the story, Elfride writes The Court of Kellyon Castle, a medieval romance, which Knight reviews. Knight writes that he was provoked by the book’s extreme “badness,” and in the review he suggests that the author refrain from writing romances and concentrate, instead, on domestic material. While this review is negative and insulting, Elfride is ultimately more stimulated by it than she is by a letter from her beloved: “Attack is more piquant than concord.”⁴³ In the poem, however, Moore turns away from this idea because she recognizes that her critic is not merely engaged in a challenging attack. Her critic, the addressee of the poem, wishes to control the poem and the poet through his or her criticism. “Picking and Choosing” and “When I Buy Pictures” examines the futility of this type of criticism. Here, Moore grapples with the critic instead of engaging in banter from afar.

Moore’s original title “To the Stand Patter” speaks to this idea more directly because a “stand patter” not only is unyielding but is also domineering, like a “steam roller.”⁴⁴ Perhaps Moore revised the title because of its directness, or perhaps “To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity” is in keeping with her goal of providing an “indirect choke pear” in that the title has the benefit of a back-handed sting; it requires thought in order to understand the insult. Even so, the poet’s apprehension originates in the critic’s need to dominate the poet: “but when / You tell

⁴² Heuving discusses, at length, the significance of Hardy’s line to the poem, but she suggests that Moore’s reference to Elfride and A Pair of Blue Eyes illustrates Moore’s anxiety of authorship. Heuving argues that Moore saw herself in Elfride because, like Elfride, Moore had written fiction set in a medieval time and was as a child called “Marianna of the Moated Grange” by her classmates (76). For an in-depth examination of this connection see Marianne Moore Newsletter Vol.2.2 Fall 1978 7-10.

⁴³ Moore wrote a poem based on A Pair of Blue Eyes when she was in college. It was published in The Lantern and is entitled “Elfride, Making Epigrams.” A facsimile copy appears in The Marianne Moore Newsletter 2.2 (Fall 1978). Moore ridicules Henry Knight writing, “Men with torrents of toads from lips of lead / And then grind up her bones to make their bread” (9) Her preoccupation with the unsavory manner in which critics make “their bread” is evident in this early poem, which is precursor to “To Be Liked By You Would be a Calamity.”

⁴⁴ As I understand it, a “stand patter” is one who is unwilling to change his or her opinion in the face of new information.

me frankly that you would like to feel / My flesh beneath your feet.”⁴⁵ While these lines can be and have been interpreted as having a sexual undertone with their “feet” and “flesh” and even missionary position, “beneath,” they also demonstrate the poet’s frustration with the critic’s blunt attempt to reduce and control the poet. Moore’s reaction is “I’m all abroad” (4). By “abroad” Moore implies that her defense is to refuse to stand still and allow the “stand patter” to crush her. Furthermore, “abroad” literally means to move out of doors; in other words, she is refusing, in a sense, to be domesticated. This reading of “abroad” is especially attractive considering Moore’s reference to Elfride and Henry since Henry suggested that Elfride write about the domestic material with which, as a woman, she was most familiar. Here, Moore escapes the trap of female domesticity.

Moore’s best defense against such tyranny, however, is her chivalric refusal to do battle with an unworthy foe: “I can but put my weapon up, and / bow you out.” Like Othello’s composed remark to Barbantio and Roderigo, “Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust / them,” Moore’s words have the same cool effect (1.2.58-59). For Othello and Moore recognize the inferiority of their opponents and that such a duel is beneath their superior skills. Interestingly, Moore does not bow out but instead bows her adversary out. She does so because her adversary unknowingly bowed out upon making the frank request. The opponent’s lack of linguistic finesse forfeits his or her right to duel Moore. Still, the refusal to do battle itself is a weapon as Moore suggests in her “Comment:” “[The Dial] agrees with the editor of Copleston’s warning to reviewers that ‘the unbearable repartee’ is silence. . .”⁴⁶ This chivalric gesture, then,

⁴⁵ I am using the Observations version at this point in my discussion because there are only slight changes between this presentation and The Chimera and Others: An Anthology of New Verse presentations. The greatest revision occurred in the final two lines, and this revision consists of a spacing issue.

⁴⁶ “Comment” The Dial, 83 (November 1927), 449-50 from The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore Ed. Patricia Willis (192-93).

is powerful for several reasons. First, it belittles the attacker by implying, through silence, that the attacker is not up to the battle that it has chosen to begin. Secondly, the chivalric silence also implies that the attacker is ill-mannered, so this too is belittling. Lastly, Moore enters and finds success in the male sphere of swordplay and chivalry.

While Moore's response to attack is cool, she is not implying that negative criticism is unwarranted. As editor of The Dial, Moore suggested that "[a] business-like rancor may exist in the heart of one who has learned from Erasmus 'the smoothest form for each suggestion of politeness,' but ill nature on the part of those who have not learned politeness from Erasmus results usually in a collapse of unequestrianism." In this instance, Moore does not argue that all criticism should be positive; instead, she suggests that criticism can be negative when it has the edge of politeness. Perhaps "politic" is the appropriate term for the approach Moore commends. What is certain is that she disproves of those who ridicule without considering a more tactful alternative. This passage from The Dial is particularly interesting because her final comment is, in effect, a double negative in that the result of the impolitic criticism results in a "collapse of the unequestrian." What appears to be a positive statement is, upon consideration, negative in that the ill-natured loses hope of obtaining human form and must be content with a horse-like state. As in the title, "To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity," this is another of Moore's stinging, back-handed compliments. Moore is clearly capable of attack, but her attacks are elegant. In fact, part of Moore's interest in decorum stems from her concern for protecting and recognizing art's "spiritual forces." To approach art disparagingly is, therefore, to damage not only the art work and the artist but also the critic. According to Moore, "If criticism is 'the effect of the subjection of the product of one mind to the processes of another,' is not the reviewer's own mind disparaged by him in resorting to an inconsequent and disrespectful *ruade*?" "Ruade" is an

interesting choice of words because it is a French word for “kick” and is, in general, an equestrian term, which relates to her comment, “a collapse of unequestrianism.” In this case, the “ruade” is that the critic is pursuing the poet in order to dominate and is, therefore, too inconsequential to engage in an elegant repartee.

Since we have a poem as a response to Moore’s “detractors and sluggard critics,” we have to assume that silence is not a “choke pear.” It is the gesture of the poem that becomes the “choke pear,” and the gestures within the poem serve to silence her critics as well as to educate them. For example, by bowing out of the duel, Moore recognizes the boldness of this gesture writing, “Gesticulation – it is half the language.” In R.P. Blackmur’s Language as Gesture, he emphasizes the significance of gesture in poetry: “It is that play of meaningfulness among words which cannot be defined in their use together; gesture is that meaningful which is moving, in every sense of that word; what moves the words and what moves us.”⁴⁷ Thus, the gesture of the bow, the honorable bow, is in this case perhaps more potent than silence. Moore, in fact, refers to this gesticulation as “unsheathed” and that it is the “steel” the critic’s courtesy “must meet.” Here, she clearly draws the parallel between her gesture and the sword, the usual instrument of a duel. The reference to her gesture as being “unsheathed” illustrates that she recognizes that the action of this poem is in some way like brandishing a sword. H.D.’s analogy seems particularly pointed here, especially since H.D. understood that Moore’s keen politeness would leave her adversary unaware of his defeat. Even when seeming to compliment, she grazes her opponent, but the opponent must be alert to grasp the insult. When, for example, Moore writes that this gesture will meet her critic’s “courtesy,” she is, once again, politely mocking her attacker. After all, the attacker is not courteous in expressing a desire to trample on the poet.

⁴⁷ Given Moore’s knowledge of R.P. Blackmur’s criticism, it is likely that she was familiar with his Language as Gesture. Moore’s own criticism often refers to Blackmur. See Complete Prose.

Some critics have rightly noted that the gesture of bowing out is in some way Moore's method of moving away from the masculine duel to a level playing field, so to speak.⁴⁸ While this interpretation is compelling, it minimizes her gesture in that it implies that she cannot participate in a duel on the same level as her critics. Her stance in this poem, however, is one of superiority. It is not a superiority of brawn, but a superiority of understanding that is demonstrated. The final lines illustrate Moore's recognition of her antagonist's complacent arrogance that is incapable of understanding subtly: "Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my / senses/ Are a shout." The critic, therefore, does not possess the ability to recognize Moore's elegant attack much less the fineness of her poetry because the critic does not hear the gestures within the words. If this is so, "To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity" may do little in the way of educating her critics. However, the poem, from the title to the final line, shouts. Even though the words may be "mute" in the ears of her critics, the shout and gesture of the poem are not.

"To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity" had several revisions, but for the most part these are minor. Its first presentation was in The Chimaera (July 1916). Its final presentation was in Observations (1924). In all three of its presentations, it is an eleven line poem. One significant alteration of a line break and few changes in punctuation make up the variants. For example, a hyphen follows "I'm all abroad," and in the final presentation, these words are followed by a semi-colon. Moore had removed hyphens because she felt that they distracted her readers. Visually, these presentations are different; The Chimaera presentation is a single block

⁴⁸ Cristanne Miller suggests that the "masculine attack seems to be met with feminine expressive silence" (108) and that the poem is "more broadly representative of Moore's stance as a woman toward an attractive but potentially condemnatory masculine world" (348). See Miller's Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority for her analysis. I admire, especially, Robert Pinsky's analysis in "Idiom and Idiosyncrasy" from his The Art of a Modernist. He discusses how Moore uses language as a social weapon and proposes that Moore creates this artificial dialogue "to dramatize and protect her inward poise" (14).

stanza with an indentation of the final two lines. Whereas both the Observations and Others: An Anthology of New Verse (1917) presentations consist of one stanza in stepped indentation, the Others version is eight lines, combining the final lines into a single line: “to my senses are a shout.” This diminishes the gesture of the shout, which is a possible reason for Moore’s restoration of the line break in Observations. While these revisions are not particularly telling, her omission of the poem from her later collections is perplexing. It is one of her poems that directly represents her strength, yet she chooses to cut it from Selected Poems, Collected Poems, and Complete Poems. David Bromwich writes that its omission cannot be her poor estimation of it because “among her poems of blame and praise, it has less distinction perhaps that ‘To a Steam Roller,’ but it is plainly more memorable than some others which she did choose to reprint” (“That Weapon” 69). Perhaps Moore cut it because it is memorable. Or, perhaps she chose to omit it because she wrote it prior to experiencing the life of a critic. It was not until after Moore had some experience as a critic that she removed the poem from her published collections. The poem, after all, takes critics to task. In Moore’s early career, this was necessary, but after Moore was established and “liked,” Moore may have felt the poem unnecessary. The poem’s omission is a loss because its wit so wonderfully expresses Moore’s aesthetic, which values engagement not domination. “To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity” illustrates Moore’s need to escape those who would like to pin her poems down. And when faced with such a reader or critic, she is “all abroad.”

“Critics and Connoisseurs” was published in the same month and year as “To Be Liked by You Would be a Calamity,” July 1916.⁴⁹ William Carlos Williams had requested a poem

⁴⁹ For the most part, criticism of “Critics and Connoisseurs,” while sparse, centers on a debate of the virtues and vices of conscious verses unconscious fastidiousness. Heuving’s Omissions are not Accidents offers an interesting discussion of “fastidiousness.” She concludes that “Critics and Connoisseurs” is essentially a “critical sympathetic and ultimately comic portrayal of both its swan and ant, showing them as stalemated in their respective behaviors”

from Moore for his issue of Others, which Kreymborg asked him to edit. Perhaps the poem struck Williams' fancy because of its newness. "Critics and Connoisseurs" is a line of demarcation of sorts in that it is the first Moore stanza. Leavell astutely recognizes this change noting that "here she not only has a typographical and syllabic pattern consisting of rhymed and unrhymed lines but, most significantly, a syntax liberated from stanzaic form, which allows her to write longer poems and to write more straightforward, naturally fluid prose sentences" (72). Moore's newly liberated stanzas and syntax inform the content of the poem in which the speaker admires the freewheeling nature of childish attempts.

Addressed to both critics and connoisseurs, Moore represents both types with animals, a technique for which she is famous. Before she describes the habits of these creatures, she introduces her subject matter in the first stanza with a conversational, casual tone. She begins with a straightforward statement, "There is a great amount of poetry in unconscious / fastidiousness."⁵⁰ Moore suggests that conscious disdainfulness and haughtiness do not produce poetry, but this poem addresses readers not poets. Given her title, it is fairly safe to assume that Moore recognizes critics' and connoisseurs' proclivity for displaying disgust without provocation. Again, Moore claims negative criticism, when warranted, can produce great works, but, likewise, she understands that the practice of ridicule seeks to bolster the critic not the work. As Leavell suggests, "if one assumes that Moore fits the cliché that poets hate and distrust critics, she will miss the point . . ." (165). What seems to frustrate Moore is a critic's attempt to make a work conform to his or her ideas of worth. To illustrate this point, Moore honors "Certain Ming

(59). Most critics identify this poem as a turning point in Moore's work, and some like Donald Hall proclaim its brilliance: "One has the impression of words having been selected and placed by tweezers in their context" because "the words used defy substitution" (39).

⁵⁰ In the three presentations of "Critics and Connoisseurs," the only variant in these lines occurs in Others (July 1916) because the magazine retained its house style, so capital letters are used at the beginning of each new line.

/ products, imperial floor coverings of coach / wheel yellow.” Her mention of the decorative art rather than traditional art is somewhat pointed in that she chooses not the famous porcelain but “floor coverings” and then compares them to the wheel of a common coach. Moore writes that these things “are well enough in their way.” The understatement here negates her praise, which is further minimized by what she readily praises: childish attempts and determination. She writes that she prefers a “[m]ere childish attempt to make an imperfectly / ballasted animal stand up, / similar determination to make a pup / eat his meat on the plate.” The attempt performed with resolve suits her more than “imperial floor coverings.” It is not, however, the “mere” attempt or even determination that she admires since. In her example, the attempt is made to balance something that is naturally unbalanced, and the determination to feed a pup meat is likely unnecessary. This is, in fact, part of Moore’s aesthetic, for it praises attempting the difficult. In Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority, Crisianne Miller observes that Moore’s comments about art and her unconventional form “reflect her preference for a ‘beauty’ that is wild, prickly, and ethical rather than iconic, aesthetic, and elite . . .” (115). Certainly Moore’s preference of the “childish attempt” illustrates Miller’s perspective. However, Moore’s rejection of imperialistic art, “certain Ming products,” provides insight into to a dilemma Moore would battle throughout her career: authority. As a poet, a critic, an American, and a woman, Moore struggled with the desire for and disdain of authority. For example, in these four poems, Moore dictates her aesthetic. At the same time, she mocks those critics who attempt to reign over a poem and poet. In “Critics and Connoisseurs” we glimpse this struggle, which will become pronounced in Moore’s poems of the 1940s. Unable to resolve the issue in “Critics and Connoisseurs,” Moore focuses not on authority but on rigidity, as illustrated in the behaviors of the ant and the swan.

Moore recalls a swan from her visit to Oxford that displayed “conscious fastidiousness.”⁵¹ The location of this swan seems particularly significant since Oxford is the elite and ancient place of learning, a place where “conscious fastidiousness” would perhaps be easily observed. In fact, I am reminded of A Room of One’s Own in which Virginia Woolf is prevented from entering the library at “Oxbridge,” by a deprecating old gentleman who with wings “like a guardian angel . . . of black gown instead of white . . .” bars her access to the treasures since she is a woman and must be accompanied or have a letter of introduction. Moore’s swan displays the same rigidity and looks at her as battleship would consider its enemy even though she is offering him food. It is interesting that Moore uses navel terminology in the first half of the poem: “ballasted,” “battleship,” and “reconnoiter.” Perhaps she is suggesting that the attitude of the military promotes this “conscious fastidiousness.” This is likely considering her “To Military Progress,” also titled “To the Soul of ‘Progress’.” This poem is about the awfulness of the First World War, and in it she faults the “mind” that “like a millstone” grinds all to “Chaff” in the name of military progress.⁵² What is particularly interesting and also relates to “Critics and Connoisseurs” is that in “To Military Progress” she scolds the addressee for disembodiment in which, as Heuving observes, “the ‘Soul’ is all mind” (69). Furthermore, the separation is consciously performed and enjoyed, “you polish it / And with your warped wit / Laugh / At your torso.” Because the “soul” is detached, the actions performed, according to Moore, lack good, proper, or ethical motivation and is frozen just as the swan has a “disinclination to move” due to its “conscious fastidiousness.” It seems that Moore recognized the futility of this stance in the swan and in the military. Perhaps then it was not an accident that

⁵¹ In “Idiom and Idiosyncrasy,” Robert Pinsky delivers a thoughtful account of “Critics and Connoisseurs,” especially the section on the swan. His focus is one Moore’s construction of polysyllabic sentences that are comically and artfully contrasted to the monosyllabic, “Have seen this swan and I have seen you.”

⁵² It is important to note that Moore’s beloved brother, John Warner Moore, was in the Navy.

in Observations the swan had “flamingo colored, maple- / leaflike *fleet*” instead of “feet.”

Nevertheless, the swan’s attitude and Moore’s language are indicative of a military performance, but the swan is a swan and not a soldier under someone’s command. Moore demonstrates the potential for change through the swan’s instinctual acceptance of food:

Finally its hardihood
was not proof against its
proclivity to more fully appraise such bits
of food as the stream
bore counter to it; it made away with what I gave it
to eat.

When offered food, the swan’s natural inclination to inspect, at least, the food that moved in its direction prevail over its initial “hardihood” and distrust. It does not, however, move. Rather, it maintains its regal post and deigns to eat the offered food. Moore then compares the swan to the critic and connoisseur: “I have seen this swan and / I have seen you.” Like the swan the self-imposed, rigid postures of the critic and connoisseur hinder their appreciation of the works, “food,” offered them. This comparison is perhaps too simplistic, but it seems that Moore is suggesting that the critic and connoisseur are not hopeless cases if they will dismiss their deliberate disdain that is, in general, futile because it is “ambition without / understanding.” The swan represents conscious fastidiousness that can be countered with an appeal to instinct.

Moore praises unconscious fastidious and faults conscious fastidiousness, but she also views fastidiousness as altogether ridiculous, for it presents another case of “ambition without / understanding.” Once again, Moore reproaches the ambitious in favor of the humble actions of a child. In “Humility, Concentration, and Gusto,” Moore writes that “humility is an indispensable ally, enabling concentration to heighten gusto” (*CprMM* 426). The observed ant demonstrates the preposterous actions of those who instead of making “childish” attempts make attempts prompted by ambition rather than gusto:

I have
seen a fastidious ant carrying a stick, north,
south, east, west, till it turned on
itself, struck out from the flower bed in the
lawn,
and returned to the point
from which it had started. Then abandoning the stick as
useless and overtaxing its
jaws with a particle of whitewash pill-like but
heavy, it again went through the same course of pro-
cedure.

Moore, the observer, looms superiorly over the ant in his futile exercises that seem, in some way, like an odd military drill, accomplishing nothing. This ant, in its fastidiousness, makes poor choices in what it undertakes: carrying a stick and a pill-like particle. The stick, too large for the ant's jaws, functions only as means for the ant to prove that it can indeed carry a stick. It serves, then, in feeding the ant's ambition only. Likewise, the critic or connoisseur who tackles a work and picks it apart does so only to feed the ego, for the action is not constructive and is no more than a "simulated flight upward." Thus, a stick, potential building material, is only strutted about by a haughty ant. However, the ant does put down the stick, recognizing that it is "useless." What is troubling about the ant's actions is that once the ant abandons the stick, it picks up the heavy particle of "whitewash pill-like." The potential for danger is present now as the ant now performs a feat of strength. This potential is represented by the whitewashed particle. Moore would use "whitewash" again in 1932 in "The Steeple Jack." In this later poem, "white-wash" is used to disguise the danger present in the church whose columns, "each a single piece of stone" have been made "modester by white-wash." The weight, mass, and solemn nature of the stone is masked so that it is now a "fit haven for / waifs, children, animals, prisoners, / and presidents who have repaid / sin-driven / senators by not thinking about them." In the final stanza, Moore writes that "It could not be dangerous to be living / in a town like this." The implication is that it

is indeed dangerous because of the disguise. Thus, the ant's particle indicates the allure of something that has been made "modester" as well as the danger in accepting that pill.

Furthermore, the ant does not change its "procedure" and again accomplishes nothing in part because of its attitude, the material, and its codified behavior. Moore's criticism of the critic and connoisseur, then, is that fastidiousness often leads to "pseudo-profound" criticism.⁵³

The anecdotes of the ant and swan illustrate Moore's attitude towards those critics and connoisseurs whose approach and response to art is informed by fastidiousness. To Moore this stance is unproductive and is no more than a "simulated flight upward." Donald Hall astutely recognizes that in "Critics and Connoisseurs" Moore "asks the purpose of such rigidity" and identifies this rigidity as a "hampering attitude for a critic . . . and by extension, one might conclude, an almost fatal altitude for a poet" (39). Hall argues that ultimately Moore criticizes fastidiousness as an "artificial pose" that deadens "intellection and sophistication" (39).

However, the critic's fastidious stance is more than "artificial" if the critic is incapable of understanding the artificiality of fastidiousness or, for that matter, fastidiousness itself. The poet-critics were engaged in a battle against deeply rooted customs not an "artificial pose."

Moore's verse essays attempt to enlighten her readers and critics, showing them the error of their ways. More often than not, she relies on her sharp wit to make her audience question their customs. Her pointed, final question certainly exemplifies this method:

⁵³ In Marianne Moore, Bernard F. Engel writes that "Miss Moore, an impressionist in her own criticism, is again arguing for the spontaneous rather than the codified and pseudo-profound that she apparently believes typical of the 'immovable' critic of 'Poetry and the 'consciously fastidious' interpreter of 'Critics and Connoisseurs' (63 Engel's insight illustrates Moore's criticism of the critics whose approach and attitude hinders understanding as well as highlights Moore's own attitude as a critic.

What is
there in being able
to say that one has dominated the stream in an
attitude of self defense,
in proving that one has had the experience
of carrying a stick?

Unless it is unconscious, fastidiousness seems incapable of rendering anything useful or genuine. Likewise, the fastidious critic or connoisseur is made ridiculous through a defiant, domineering, and blindly ambitious pose. In her own criticism, it has been noted that Moore's tendency was to review books of which she approved. This inclination is marked by the commentaries she chose to reprint in Predilections; she chose only her positive reviews. Joseph Parisi questions the accuracy of this, noting Moore's desire to choose, when she could, those pieces that she was in sympathy with, but as the editor of The Dial "she could not restrict her choices only to what she personally liked; and as a critic, before and during The Dial years, she did not send postcards (to paraphrase Jarrell) only to the nicer authors" (128). Parisi goes on to remark that Moore's tastes were indeed "catholic," but her selections were strict and guided by her basic criteria concerning precision and truth as well as imagination and individuality (129). In fact, "Critics and Connoisseurs," admonishes the inability of the swan and ant to recognize the importance of these criteria. For Moore, a connoisseur is "one who knows and delights in knowing" (*CprMM* 13). This definition illustrates the attitude a connoisseur should possess and is at odds with fastidiousness. Likewise, Moore identifies the critic's job as a fundamentally positive one. In her comment in The Dial (June 1928), Moore writes that when in search of "pure art" readers feel "betrayed when experts tell us merely where it is not" (*CprMM* 201). Moore does not, however, dislike critics or connoisseurs. On the contrary, she acknowledges that there is potential in "a kind of destruction which is not destruction" (201). It is the condescending attitude and overall rigidity that her poetry and prose criticizes. In the interview

“Poetry and Criticism” conducted by Howard Nemerov, Moore identifies the function of criticism as twofold. First, “criticism should stimulate an improved understanding of the subject discussed – ‘with a truce to politeness,’ as Montaigne says; unmannered and ‘without the pestilent filth of ambition’” (593). Thus, the anecdotes of the swan and the ant illustrate the absence of the desire to improve understanding and the presence of ambition. Secondly, Moore writes that “criticism should animate the imagination, afford comparisons one had not thought of, should be affirmative with unequivocal gusto . . .” (593). Again, the fastidiousness of both the ant and the swan show the futility of their positions as well as the fact that their attitudes do not animate anything except the imagination of Moore.

Early in Marianne Moore’s career, her poetry was “damned for its sacrosanct remoteness” (“An Octopus”). Critics damned her work because it frustrated them. Her syllabics, obscure quotations, notes, untraditional subject matter, and sheer complexity left readers feeling disoriented. Of course, this is exactly what she wanted. Once the preconceptions of the poetic are removed, the reader is at liberty to engage with the text and to pursue the revised text’s meaning. This sounds easy enough, but readers and critics alike were entrenched in custom and were unwilling to pursue something that was difficult. As Williams wrote, “Modernism is distressing to many who would at least tolerate it if they knew how. These individuals who cannot bear the necessary appearance of disorder in all immediacy, could be led to appreciation through critical study” (*Critical* 67). Poet-critics, including Williams, reviewed Moore’s poems in order to lead such individuals to an appreciation of what they originally found distressing. While such reviews helped to establish Moore’s work and her aesthetic, Moore also educated her readers through her poetry. In “Picking and Choosing,” “When I Buy Pictures,” “To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity,” and “Critics and Connoisseurs,” Moore instructs

her reader on the merits of the aesthetics of modernism and her own aesthetic of pursuit. The poems themselves establish the virtue of the unfamiliar, and they mock the reader who is unwilling to relinquish his or her bias and acknowledge the virtue of grappling with a text. Moore's aesthetic of pursuit encourages the struggle because the struggle prompts the reader to see anew.

CHAPTER TWO
“THE POWER OF THE VISIBLE / IS IN THE INVISIBLE”:
MOORE’S REVISIONS AND THE CLARITY OF COMPLEXITY

Marianne Moore scholarship has recently begun to examine the implications of Moore’s revisions. Before the publications of Robin G. Schulze’s Becoming Marianne Moore (2002) and Heather Cass White’s A-Quiver With Significance (2008), such an examination was difficult at best because of the limited availability of Moore’s poetry. Observations (1924 and 1925), Selected Poems (1935), The Pangolin and Other Verse (1936), and What Are Years (1941) are out of print. The Pangolin was a limited edition of 120 copies and is, therefore, difficult to find. The limited availability of these texts would not be an impediment to Moore scholarship if not for Moore’s drastic revisions and omissions of her work appearing in Complete Poems. Even though Moore revised her poems throughout her career, her final series of revisions as well as omissions have hindered Moore scholarship. Complete Poems, which is incomplete, has been the standard text of Moore’s poetry since its publication in 1967. The recent publication of Grace Schulman’s The Poems of Marianne Moore (2003) has further complicated matters. While Schulman restores some poems and prints some previously uncollected poems, her editorial choices do not consider Moore’s revisionary practices. Because Schulman’s collection is published and marketed by Viking, it is widely available and inexpensive.⁵⁴ Schulman’s

⁵⁴ On Amazon.com you can purchase a paperback edition of Schulman’s The Poems of Marianne Moore for \$16.50. Complete Poems is still available and costs \$10.88. The scholarly facsimile editions are more expensive but available nonetheless. A hardcover edition of Schulze’s Becoming Marianne Moore is \$60.00, and White’s paperback A-Quiver with Significance is \$22.00.

editorial choices create an incomplete picture of Moore's oeuvre and, therefore, give those who are new to Moore's work a false sense of her poetics.

The argument of this chapter is that Marianne Moore's revisions are manifestations of her ideas about "the genuine." In order to elucidate this argument, I will begin with discussion of Moore's perceptions of truth and clarity as revealed in "In the Days of Prismatic Color." Truth and clarity, the poem explains, were lost when Paradise was lost, and complexity is the inevitable result of this loss. Through the poem's initial illocutionary sentence and its subsequent negations and modifications, Moore's method of describing what has been lost demonstrates the artistic potential of complexity.⁵⁵ In confronting the absence of truth and the inevitability of complexity, Moore discovers "a place for the genuine" in poetry. "The genuine" is not defined by Moore because to define it would make it and its definition inauthentic. "Poetry" declares that there is in poetry "a place for the genuine" and proceeds to create such a place through a complex series of negations and modifications. "The genuine," "Poetry" suggests, is that which resists becoming hackneyed by eluding familiarity; therefore, that which is genuine remains in flux. Through a series of examples, negations, and modifications, "Poetry" illustrates how complexity can assist in providing the essential uncertainty so that poetry can find "a place for the genuine." In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Moore's revisions, in general, are manifestations of Moore's ideas about "the genuine," for through omission and modification the poems remain in flux just as "the genuine" remains in flux so as to resist familiarly.

⁵⁵ Cristanne Miller's insightful discussion of "In the Days of Prismatic Color" examines the illocutionary features of the poem. Miller's argument is that, as a poem about style, "In the Days of Prismatic Color" illustrates "the tension between spoken or directly engaging and constructed or distracting tones and structures in her verse, or her repeated use of illocutionary or spoken structures within a poetic form and dominant diction that contradict any impression of idiomatically ordinary or immediate presence" (65). Miller's argument is helpful because she focuses on how Moore's language resists the familiar and my argument is that her revisions resist the familiar and therefore offer "a place the genuine."

Before discussing “In the Days of Prismatic Color” and “Poetry,” it is necessary to provide a critical history of Moore’s revisions so as to show how my arguments contribute to this ongoing discussion in Moore scholarship. Moore’s comments about her revisions have influenced some of her early critics, who were only vaguely aware of the pervasiveness of her revisions. Moore often commented that her revisions were an attempt to reproduce spoken language. Several critics took Moore at her word. In 1956 Moore delivered a lecture, “Idiosyncrasy and Technique,” in which she presents an anecdote about George Bernard Shaw and revision. The story is something to the effect that because Shaw did not regard the texts of his play as sacrosanct he did not mind when an actor misquoted a passage and once said that he liked what the actor said better than what he had written. Shaw then encouraged the actor to keep misquoting him so long as the actor misquoted so well. After concluding this anecdote, Moore comments,

Writing was resilience. Resilience was an adventure. Is it part of the adventure to revise what one wrote? Professor Ewing has suggested that something be said about this. My own revisions are usually the result of impatience with unkempt diction and lapses in logic; together with an awareness that for most defects, to delete is the instantaneous cure. (Reader 170)

Her initial comments about writing being resilient and an adventure seem to me truer statements about her revisions. Characteristically, however, Moore leaves this thought unanswered, which leads me to believe that it was “closer to the truth.” Moore abandons this train of thought and presents what is essentially a “canned” answer. Several critics have latched onto to this response and others like it. Grace Schulman, for example, writes that Moore’s revisions, beginning with those for Observations, are Moore’s attempts to create poetry that sounded natural (“Engagement” 22-25). Schulman bases much of her argument on Pound’s influence during Moore’s early poetic output. In Moore’s correspondence with Pound, he commends the use of

native language and the precise word.⁵⁶ Schulman also points to Moore's 1960 interview with Hall. In that interview, Moore insists that her first concern was for a natural, spoken pattern in her poetry (99). Moore said that after hearing herself read her own work in the 1930s, she realized that "the spoken line is different from the one on the page sometimes" ("Conversation" 162). Moore goes on to say, ". . . I tried to read out loud what I'd written, and then I saw I would have to alter a good deal. Some of the lines wouldn't read, and I revised a number of things. I found that in reading a thing aloud you have to change the wording." While Moore says that she had to alter "a good deal" to improve the natural rhythm of her poems, this does not explain her significant changes to the content of the poems. For example, her revisions of the final stanza of "When I Buy Pictures" concern content not diction. Thus, Schulman's argument does not fully account for many of Moore's early revisions. Schulman, however, is not alone in her assessment of Moore's revisions. Donald Hall laments the loss of some of the poems omitted from Complete Poems but concludes that Moore's extensive revisions "demonstrate clearly Miss Moore's tendency to greater and greater concision," and they contribute to "more graceful expression" (54-55). Laurence Stapleton is a bit more ambivalent in his assessment of Moore's revisions. His ambivalence is due in part to his greater understanding of the pervasiveness Moore's revisions. Thus, he says that the subject of Moore's revisions cannot be studied until all of "her writing can be brought into one framework" (78). However, he does claim that most of the major changes of the pieces in Complete Poems were likely made for the sake of compression (78).

Other critics interpret Moore's revisions as being subversive. Elizabeth Gregory's Quotation and Modern American Poetry focuses on Moore's quotations, but she suggests that Moore's revisions, like her quotations, bring authority into question by refusing to provide a

⁵⁶ See Pound's Letter to Moore dated 16 December 1918 (*Critical* 26-29).

stable, “authoritative” text (157). In A Homemade World, Hugh Kenner writes that Moore’s revisions “ignore” poetry’s rituals thereby creating Moore’s own authority. Of the critics who read Moore’s revisions as subversive acts, Rachel Blau DuPlessis presents the most compelling argument. It is compelling because in it she addresses issues of textual authority as well as gender:

The apocopation of [“Poetry”] and other poems, the omission not accidents both deny the authority of any one text – undercutting the “definitive” – and evade the author’s consumption by and containment in any selection of her work. Her practice is an outrage upon a fundamental textual institution: “copy text” with its iconization of the authorized version of any given work of art, or of the one editorially judged or editorially arranged as the final intention of the author. . . . Like a number of women writers, Moore plays, in her creation of textual plasticity, with the ethical and aesthetic question – how can a woman be an author, and maintain some authority without being authoritative, or even authoritarian. (10)

Through her multiple revisions, Moore denies the authority of a “textual institution,” and she exercises authority while remaining enigmatic (the notes, the revisions themselves, and the epigraph) so as not to be authoritarian. Because authority is definitive and because “the genuine” rejects that which is definitive, DuPlessis’s argument can be extended to a discussion of Moore’s revisions as they relate to her concept of “the genuine” in that “the genuine” is transient because it resists familiarity. Familiarity, according to Moore, often leads to an authoritarian stance. “Picking and Choosing,” “To a Steam Roller,” “To Be Liked by You Would be a Calamity,” among other poems, denounce familiarity for this very reason. Bonnie Costello maintains that Moore’s revisions are an attempt to prevent the reader from becoming familiar with her poetry. Once a reader is familiar with a poem, his or her imagination is no longer engaged. She suggests that Moore’s revisions are “motivated by an essential ambivalence about poetry’s capacity to assert and form an elusive, multifaceted world” (26). She goes on to say “The imagination must continually catch itself in its complacencies and wipe away the smudge of accumulated thought.

And the poem must have the same effect on the reader; it must elude his settled understanding” (26). For the most part, I agree with Costello’s assessment. For Moore, the value of “the genuine” is its ability to engage and to provoke the reader’s imagination. Thus, Moore’s revisions do prevent the reader from becoming complacent; however, I will argue that her motivation for and method of resisting familiarity stem from her ideas about “the genuine.” In order to be genuine, poetry must be fluid, and Moore’s revisions and complex combinations of negations and modifications provide a necessary unsettledness to her poems. Moore’s revisions also illustrate that Moore, ever-mindful of her audience, sought a complexity that would not sink to the level of an enigma but would, instead, provide the audience with the “rudimentary behavior” that is “necessary to put [it] on the scent” and create “a few strong wrinkles between the ears.”

From T.S. Eliot to F.R. Leavis, Marianne Moore’s critics agree that her poetry is complex. In his “Introduction” to Moore’s Selected Poems, Eliot acknowledges a sense of “bewilderment” after reading her poems. Of the same volume, Leavis writes, “Miss Moore’s verse leaves me defeated and exasperated. . . . [t]here is not one poem of which I can confidently say I see the point . . . what I see looks to me decidedly ponderous” (*Critical* 110). Both Leavis and Eliot recognize the complexity of Moore’s poetry. Their evaluations of that complexity are decidedly different, but they identify it as a characteristic of her poetry. Moore herself claims that “complexity is not a crime.” Given such reviews and declarations, it may come as a shock that Moore consistently valued clarity above all else in her poetry. In a 1919 letter to Ezra Pound, she writes, “Anything that is a stumbling block to my reader, is a matter of regret to me . . .” (*SL* 123). In her 1956 address “Idiosyncrasy and Technique,” Moore declares that “one should be as clear as one’s natural reticence allows.” Moore goes on to say that “one must have

clarity, and clarity depends on precision; not that intentional ambiguity cannot be art” (Reader 171). The complexity of Moore’s statements concerning clarity may seem ironic, but they illustrate how she defines clarity. According to Moore, clarity and complexity are not mutually exclusive. In defining clarity and its relation to complexity, I must explain how clarity is, for Moore, inextricably bound to her understanding of truth.

Marianne Moore was a devout Presbyterian, and her Presbyterian beliefs informed her poetry, especially her perception of truth.⁵⁷ As a Presbyterian, Moore recognized the limitations of humanity’s ability to fully conceive of God’s truth. In his study of Moore’s Presbyterianism, Andrew Kappel writes, “She does not pretend to understand everything – that would be to commit the sin of intellectual pride, to confuse human intelligence with divine intelligence” (49). Thus, Moore believes in an abiding truth, but recognizes and accepts the limitations of a human’s ability to fully understand that truth. Consequently, she prizes the intellect because, according to her Presbyterian faith, it is a manifestation of God’s grace and because it “affords whatever awareness is humanly possible of God’s will and truth” (Kappel 48). In embracing the capacity of human intellect, Moore also embraces struggle as a condition of a complex world. Since belief alone does not provide an understanding of truth, belief becomes a struggle, but a struggle that has meaning.⁵⁸ In Moore’s poetry this struggle is manifested in her poetic process.

⁵⁷ Andrew J. Kappel discusses the connection between Moore’s religious faith and her poetry in his “Notes on the Presbyterian Poetry of Marianne Moore.” Kappel notes that Moore, unlike Eliot, Pound, or Yeats, “did nothing to bring her faith to the world’s attention. . . there was only quiet devotion” (39). To expose her faith through the medium of poetry, Kappel argues, would have been too self-expressive and ambitious, which she would deem sinful. Kappel opens up the discussion of Moore’s Presbyterianism, but there is potential here for greater research into the implications of her faith.

⁵⁸ Kappel suggests that struggle is the central theme in Moore’s poetry and points out that this theme is most often noted by critics wishing to emphasize Moore’s place in modernism because struggle is one of the most recognizably modern themes. As a Presbyterian and a Christian, Moore’s struggle was different: “The believer embraces struggle – does not, as the unbeliever might imagine, flee from it; belief does not alleviate struggle, it gives meaning to it, and that meaning does not make the struggle less, but rather may well serve to intensify it; hope can be as frightening as hopelessness – may easily be more frightening” (45). Although Kappel indulges in a bit of

Cristanne Miller discusses Moore's process as it relates to truth and suggests that Moore "identifies truth with a process of negation, contradiction, and modification" (82). Thus, in order to arrive at that which "is closer to the truth," Moore's poetry engages in a negotiation with the inherent complexities of its subject matter. What Miller identifies as Moore's definition of truth is in fact Moore's struggle for clarity. However, Moore recognizes the impossibility of achieving clarity, yet it remains her ideal. Clarity becomes Moore's technique because the process of achieving clarity is a struggle that ultimately celebrates the human intellect. This struggle for clarity also privileges God's truth, which has been unknowable and indefinable since the loss of "the days of prismatic color."

"In the Days of Prismatic Color" describes the clarity that is lost in the loss of Eden and the complexity that is the inevitable result of that loss:

In the Days of Prismatic Color
Not in the days of Adam and Eve but when Adam
was alone; when there was no smoke and color was
fine, not with the fineness of
early civilization art but by virtue
of its originality; with nothing to modify it but the

mist that went up, obliqueness was a varia-
tion of the perpendicular, plain to see an
to account for: it is no
longer than; nor did the blue red yellow band
of incandescence that was color keep its stripe: it also is one of

those things into which much that is peculiar can be
read; complexity is not a crime but carry
it to the point of murki-
ness and nothing is plain. Complexity
moreover, that has been committed to darkness, instead of
granting it-

preaching here, his essential argument about Moore's understanding of struggle in Christian terms illustrates how Moore differs from her peers and how her Christianity informed her poetics.

self to be the pestilence that it is, moves all a-
bout as if to bewilder us with the dismal
fallacy that insistence
is the measure of achievement and that all
truth must be dark. 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. To what purpose! Truth is no Apollo
Belvedere, no formal thing. The wave may go over it
if it likes.

Know that it will be there when it says:

“I shall be there when the wave has gone by. (*BMM* 50)⁵⁹

Moore’s acquaintance with artists Marguerite and William Zorach inspired “In the Days of Prismatic Color.” The Zorachs, who had been influenced by Fauvism and Primitivism, produced brightly colored paintings and hooked rugs as well as sculptures that drew on African and ancient artwork.⁶⁰ Their colors and forms celebrated a diversity of influence rather than traditional Western conventions. In their work, as well as in the works of other Primitivists and Fauvists, Moore found art that was aesthetically pleasing as well as morally compelling. She shared their appreciation of art work with diverse cultural origins. Primitivism is the practice by Western artists of borrowing themes and forms from non-Western art. These artists were drawn to non-Western art because they believed that nonindustrialized, non-Western indigenous

⁵⁹ In order to facilitate this discussion, I have included the poem. This is the Observations 1924 version., which was its fourth presentation. I chose to reference this version for my general discussion of the poem because it is the most stable.

⁶⁰ During the last half of the Nineteenth-Century and the first half of the Twentieth-Century, the term “Primitivism” was applied to Western art that was influenced by non-Western or ancient cultures. With the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism in 1978, art historians recognized the West’s condescending attitude evident the term “Primitivism” and in Western artists’ appropriation of non-Western themes and forms.

peoples were less civilized and, therefore, more “natural,” which made them free to express their emotions and religious beliefs more directly (Davies et al. 951). Like the Primitivists, Moore also maintained “a moral resistance not only to conventions in art but to conventional, hierarchical standards of any kind” believing that these conventions obstructed truth (Leavell 137). In a spring 1919 notebook entry, Moore wrote down some of her observations of the Zorachs and their works:

The Zorachs. Their fineness of early civilization art I have never seen such primeval color. It is a color of the sort that existed when Adam was there alone and there was no smoke when there was nothing to modify it but mist that went up. May there be a veil before our eyes that we not see but which would harrow up our soul and may that veil be love not insensibility. (qtd. in Leavell 148)⁶¹

“In the Days of Prismatic Color” was obviously inspired by her contact with the Zorachs and their works. In her observation, we see her appreciation for early civilization art, and we detect, to a certain extent, her longing or nostalgia for a pre-industrial era. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of her thoughts is her wish to see with the soul instead of the eyes. This is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson’s “Before I got my eye put out” in which she celebrates the loss of her sensual eyes: “So safer – guess – with just my soul / Upon the Window pane – Where other Creatures put their eyes – Incautious – of the Sun –.” Moore, too, seems to reject the capacity of her sensual eyes, requesting a veil to obscure her vision so that she must employ the finer vision of her soul, which possesses a greater capacity to see. The speaker of Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” makes a similar request. To the piper beneath the blooming tree, the speaker invites the piper to “play on; / Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared, / Pipe to the spirit deities of no tone” (168). Thus, the speaker listens to “songs for ever new.” Hearing or seeing with the soul or spirit, then, encourages diverse responses that deny the concrete and, consequently, the

⁶¹ See Linda Leavell’s *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts* for a thorough discussion of Moore’s connection to the Zorachs as well as her involvement and interest in the New York art scene.

limitations of reality. In her observation of the Zorachs, Moore asserts that the veil should stem from “love not insensibility.” Thus, what obstructs should liberate in that the veil should become a means of recovering the ability to see the new in the familiar by forcing a new perspective through obstruction.⁶² Moore’s compositions are propelled by modification and negation that are intended to hinder and unsettle the reader so as to engage the reader’s imagination.

In this same note in the Zorachs’ work, Moore comments on a difference in color as it existed when Adam was alone and as it is now, praising the fineness and originality of it. Her inclusion of Adam in her comment is prompted by two facts. One, the Adam and Eve were favorite subjects of the Zorachs. Two, as Fauves, the Zorachs used bright, undiluted colors. The Fauves use of bright color was not a purely aesthetic choice. It was an exercise in design and a release of color from a naturalistic or documentary function: color with nothing to modify it. Henri Matisse, who led the Fauves, explains their approach: “What characterized fauvism was that we rejected imitative colors, and that with pure colors we obtained stronger reactions – more striking simultaneous reactions, and there was also the luminosity of our colors” (qtd. in Gardener 1006). Matisse also said that God did not give artists color to imitate nature; instead, he argued that it was given so that painters could represent or express their emotions. Cezanne, too, argued that since paint could not reproduce light, painters should seek to represent light with color. Their respect for original truth and their recognition of the futility of reproducing or defining that truth would have been particularly appealing to Moore. Overall, the Fauve movement was driven by the desire to liberate color from its mere descriptive mode and use it to be both expressive and structural (Gardener 1005). “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” which was

⁶² Walker Percy’s “The Loss of the Creature” examines how man’s ability to be the “sovereign knower” has been obstructed by the “symbolic complex” making it difficult, if not impossible, to have a genuine or authentic experience. According to Percy, in order to recover the experience of the “sovereign knower,” one must recognize the loss and attempt to see from a perspective that has not been assigned a symbolic value. Moore’s veil is one such method of recovering sovereignty.

undoubtedly influenced by the Zorachs in particular and the Fauves in general, considers the origins of light and the artist's inability to achieve pristine color. Moore begins the poem by defining pure color or original color as existing in Eden when Adam was alone. This original color is then lost not with the fall of man but with the creation of Eve, for she introduces otherness and complexity and, therefore, dilutes original color.

The first lines of "In the Days of Prismatic Color," "Not in the days of Adam and Eve but when Adam / was alone" immediately set the criteria for "prismatic color." Eve's absence indicates that these are the very first days, the original days in which color was fine "by virtue / of its originality; with nothing to modify it but the / mist that went up;" accordingly, originality is the standard of fineness. Much has been made of Moore's explicit removal of Eve from Eden. Moore is, after all, a woman, and she, in effect, snubs the original woman by suggesting that her presence ended prismatic color, clarity, and truth. But, is Moore's insistence on Eve's absence an antifeminist jab? No. Eve represents otherness and complexity that obscures Adam's view. The gender of the first person has little to do with Moore's point. It is the solitude of the first person, be it man or woman that makes original color possible. Pamela White Hadas offers a smart interpretation of these lines. She writes, "The entrance of Eve is not an explicit event in this poem, but we are made to know that when Adam's solitude was lost, so was his uncomplicated vision, admit the presence of an 'other,' explain or try to explain yourself and exactly how you see things, and all becomes complex, obscure" (47). Eve's presence complicated Eden in that she becomes the first audience with whom Adam must struggle to communicate.

In qualifying the particular moment of original, prismatic color, Moore draws attention to the moment when such color is no longer possible: the creation of Eve. However, the

complexity Eve engenders is not wholly negative. While Eve, according to Genesis, is responsible for the fall of man, she is also responsible for art.⁶³ In Genesis, Adam's reveries are concluded when Eve appears. Without Eve, Adam's language is a system used to name not to explain. Explanations are necessitated by complexity, and Eve represents complexity, but as Moore writes, "complexity is not a crime." Complexity is, in fact, Moore's strategy for defining truth in "In the Days of Prismatic Color." From the first line on, Moore like Emily Dickinson, tells all the truth, but she tells it slant since "the truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind –." In order to convey the blinding truth, Moore circuitously arrives at a definition. As Cristanne Miller writes, "Moore's truth lies in a world of complexity rather than of name giving" (82). Thus, Adam's language is mere "fiddle" and even quaint since it lacks complexity. Adam, like the poet and artist, needs to embrace complexity in order to effectively communicate with his audience, Eve. In "Half-Deity," Moore concludes with one her most perplexing lines, "his talk was as strange as my grandmother's muff." Like the decorative fur muff that kept hands warm but immobile, the original language of Adam is no longer constructive because it no longer conveys the complexity inherent in the modern world. Moore not only recognizes but employs complexity, the language of Eve. Thus, Eve's presence provides the possibility for art.

Moore further defines the "days of prismatic color" as the days "when there was no smoke and color was / fine, not with the fineness of early civilization art but because / of its originality . . ." "Originality" used close on the heels of the allusion to the story of Adam and Eve requires, I think, some attention since it evokes not only the origins of humanity but also the story of original sin. The original sin was Eve's broken trust with god and her desire for wisdom. Eve's consumption of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge brings forth complexity in

⁶³ In "Marriage," Moore does not blame Eve for the fall; instead, she finds fault in both Eve and Adam for their politeness. Eve takes what is offered her by the serpent. Likewise, Adam takes what Eve offers. In this way, Moore equalizes their contributions to the loss of Eden.

that the knowledge is of both good and evil. Thus, the original sin in bringing forth the knowledge of good *and* evil affords the necessary complexity for communication.

Moore, in fact, utilizes the art of complexity in her descriptions in “In the Days of Prismatic Color.” For example, she relies on “negative” qualifiers. Eve, early civilization art, smoke, and obliqueness, the negative qualifiers, are not present in Paradise, but Moore inserts them to get her “closer to the truth” as she clarifies what has been lost through their negation. These negative qualifiers become the focus or “prism” through which she clarifies her definition.

As Moore characterizes prismatic color, she supplies additional specifics through negation: “when there was no smoke and color was / fine, not with the fineness of early civilization art.” Here, the negations suggest that this is indeed a time before the Fall since smoke did not exist until fallen humanity had to burn wood, plants, and animals in order to feed and shelter themselves. Moore continues to qualify color as she compares it to early civilization art. Color in paintings is created with pigments that change the color of the light they reflect. Early civilization art work was created using naturally occurring pigments such as ochres and iron oxides. Even though these pigments were natural, the fact that they reflect not produce light makes them derivative and, therefore, un-original. Furthermore, “prismatic color” is not the result of effort or thought on the part of an artist; it is pure, effortless color.

In Selected Poems (1935), Moore revises “fineness” to “refinement.” The subtle change from “fineness” to “refinement” is significant, especially considering how these words relate to early civilization art. Art that is purely aesthetic and not intended for a specific use or function is categorized as fine art because of its “fineness,” which means that it is superior. The word “fine” also implies that what is fine is free of impurities. Thus, Moore’s use of the term “fineness” praised early civilization art for its pure aesthetics that were untainted by outside influences. Her

revision, however, censures early civilization art for its “refinement.” “Refinement” refers to that which has been extracted or cultivated so as to create something new and improved. While the end product is improved, it is not original. Even though Moore’s point that early civilization art is unoriginal remains unchanged, the revision criticizes primitive art by referring to it as refined. Moore’s criticism was provoked by a change in her perception of early or primitive art. When Moore arrived in New York, Primitivism was popular, especially among the modernists, because it was a break from a strictly European tradition. Contemporary to Moore’s revision, the appropriation of so-called primitive art by Western artists had begun to receive widespread condemnation because of an imperialistic attitude associated with those who collected or imitated “primitive” art. Moore too became increasingly sensitive to the romanticizing of primitive art and the “savages” who produced it.⁶⁴ It is likely, given Moore’s connection to the New York art scene, that she would have recognized this practice as something that had become “so derivative as to become unintelligible.” The revision, while minor, demonstrates that Moore often revised her poems so that they reflected her evolving politics.

After establishing the historical moment of “prismatic color,” Moore continues to qualify both the time and the color itself, writing that it existed “with nothing to modify it but the / mist that went up.” Again, she seeks the purest time: before the first rain, which also precedes the creation of Adam. The first instance of rain is described in Genesis 2:5-6: “For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there* was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.” The mist and the rain

⁶⁴ Linda Leavell comments on Moore’s connection with primitivism and notes how she initially embraced it. Leavell also remarks that Moore became increasingly sensitive to the imperialistic attitude connected to primitivism. In fact, Leavell suggests that because of her sensitivity to this issue Moore used Adam instead of a “savage” in “In the Days of Prismatic Color”: In her poem lamenting the obfuscating effects of civilization, Moore avoids a noble savage stereotype by choosing Adam as her hypothetical primitive. Increasingly in the twenties and afterward, Moore avoids the ethnocentrism endemic to much modernist literature by extolling animal virtues instead of human ones” (154). I find Leavell’s final comment particularly compelling, but I disagree with her suggestion that Moore chose Adam instead of a savage because Adam and the Zorachs’ Adam and Eve inspired the poem.

refract the light and, likewise, color but in so doing alter the original color: however, this alteration modifies instead of obscuring. In fact, “Obliqueness” in Paradise is like the mist because it was “a variation of the perpendicular, plain to see and to account for.” Nothing in Moore’s paradise of color obstructs or taints the color; it is only a modification or a variation. “Obliqueness” in Paradise, then, is not possible since it is only a “variation of the perpendicular.” Kristin Hotelling Zona writes that Moore’s use of “obliqueness” was inspired by a passage from Baudelaire’s “Any Where Out of the World.” From Baudelaire’s work, Moore copied the following passage in her reading diary: “Let us set our camp at the Pole! There the sun strikes the earth obliquely and the slow alteration of light and night suppresses variety and increases monotony – that better half of nothing.”⁶⁵ In Baudelaire’s poem, the speaker is provoked by his lethargic soul to “flee to those countries that resemble Death” (96). Ultimately, the soul detests a world of complexity and begs to flee anywhere “so long as it is out of this world!” (97). Zona writes, “Given the reference to antipodes in the penultimate stanza of ‘In the Days of Prismatic Color’ and obliqueness in the second, the connection between Moore’s poem and this passage is likely” (27). Moore, however, must modify Baudelaire’s poem because in it the speaker and his soul are sick of the complexities of this world, seeing life as a hospital of diseased souls. Thus, in Baudelaire’s poem obliqueness and complexity are detrimental to the soul. Because the speaker and his soul are grounded in a world of complexity, they seek refuge “out of this world.” “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” on the other hand, emerges from a land of clarity and discovers the possibilities of complexity (Zona 27).

If “In the Days of Prismatic Color” is a poem about poetry or, more specifically, the language of poetry, then the absence of “obliqueness” in Adam’s paradise of clarity is significant. “Oblique” is a grammatical term used to denote any grammatical case other than the

⁶⁵ See Zona “Marianne Moore’s Strategic Selfhood” pg. 27

vocative and the nominative cases. Thus, the potential of the oblique case is much greater than either the nominative or the vocative cases. In “In the Days of Prismatic Color” the oblique case is particularly significant in its relationship to the story of Adam and Eve and to the development of language. When Adam was alone, he “called every living creature, that was the name there of. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast in the field” (Gen. 2:19-20). Without the oblique, Adam can only name and call; therefore, conversation is impossible. While alone, Adam had solitude, clarity, and certitude, but obliqueness and complexity, as Moore writes, are “better than the haggish, uncompanionable drawl / of certitude.”⁶⁶ The necessity of companionship brought about variation: Eve. In Paradise Lost, Milton emphasizes Adam’s desire to converse. Adam tells God that it is only through “conversation” with his like that he will find solace and “collateral love” (Book VII 426). Thus, the creation of Eve constructs the oblique or other, which ultimately makes art possible. Clarity does not produce art or even “the genuine” because to Moore “the genuine” is produced by instability and uncertainty. In the first stanza and a half of “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” Moore attempts to define a paradise of clarity, but her very definition with its six qualifiers illustrates not only the impossibility of clarity but also the artistic potential of complexity. Ironically, the acceptance of complexity is expressed in the only straightforward statement in the poem: “It is no / longer that.”

“It is no / longer that” is effectively the Volta of “In the Days of Prismatic Color.” Given the first stanza’s references to Eve, smoke, early civilization art, and obliqueness, this declaration seems a bit redundant in that the definition of the days of prismatic color has already reminded the reader of how these days were lost. Ironically, then, these lines, perhaps the most

⁶⁶ “In this Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance is Good and”

uncomplicated of the poem, signal a loss as well as a gain. If “it is not longer that,” then we should be thrust into a fallen, dark world; instead, Moore provides a rainbow:

nor did the blue red yellow band
of incandescence that was color, keep its stripe; it is also one of
those things into which much that is peculiar can be
read; complexity is not a crime, but carry
it to the point of murki-
ness and nothing is plain. (*SP* 46).⁶⁷

While Moore may regret the blending of the colors, the rainbow, a proverbial symbol of hope, illustrates the beauty of complexity in that the blurred lines reveal new colors: orange, green, indigo, and violet. The rainbow also provides an object of conjecture and, likewise, food for the imagination. Complexity, here, leads to beauty and is, therefore, a hopeful symbol for the artist who recognizes that pure color is unattainable. In this way, “complexity is not a crime.” However, this line is modified by the following: “carry / it to the point of murki- /ness and nothing is plain.” In her descriptions of Paradise, Moore relied on negation. Once the inevitability of complexity is established, Moore shifts from negation to illocutionary statements. Since negation relies on duality, as in Adam not Eve, it is a fairly simplistic method of description. Illocution, on the other hand, relies on the reader’s understanding of word’s various and complex denotations and connotations. Her shift from negation to the more complex illocution, emphasizes the presence of complexity. This shift also illustrates how complexity can bewilder and pester. Moore, in fact, insists that one must recognize that complexity is a “pestilence.” Complexity or art that “has been committed to darkness, instead of, ”

⁶⁷ See Cristanne Miller’s *Questions of Authority* for an interesting analysis of the rainbow. Her basic argument is that the rainbow introduces “a note of irony” since the reader knows of other things with varying and peculiar interpretations, most notably Moore’s poetry (81). She also argues that the claim “complexity is not a crime” is defensive because it implies that someone, Adam perhaps, has proposed that it is indeed a crime. Since Moore employs the art of complexity from the first line of “In the Days of Prismatic Color” to the last, I am less inclined to see this as tactical maneuver on Moore’s part. Furthermore, part of her argument is that only complexity is possible after the Fall, so there is no need to defend what is fact.

Granting it-

self to be the pestilence that it is, moves all about as if to bewilder us with the dismal fallacy that insistence is the measure of achievement and that all truth must be dark (*SP* 46)

Like the fastidious ant in “Critics and Connoisseurs,” insistence alone does not lead to truth: “What is / there . . . / in proving that one has had the experience / of carrying a stick?” (*CP* 44). Similarly, supposing that truth is the unknown or “dark,” is also a fallacy that is typically associated with a sophisticated and, likewise, narrow-minded point of view. It is this “throat, sophistication” that is at the “antipodes from the initial great truths.” “Throat sophistication” embraces complexity for its own sake. It is this sophistication that produces darkness and the “classic / multitude of feet” (*CP* 49). Complexity, then, becomes a crime when it is exclusive, bewildering, and grandiose (*Zona* 26). Therefore, the idea of complexity itself is intricate and challenging. *Zona*, in fact, considers this to be Moore’s challenge or burden “to be confronted and perhaps even cured” (26). While Moore’s poetic progression from The Pangolin and Other Verse to What Are Years seems to substantiate *Zona*’s claim, complexity was not Moore’s burden. Moore’s revisions, notes, and “hybrid method of composition” denote a poet who celebrates complexity while comprehending its pitfalls. “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” in fact, develops into a sort of cautionary tale against both an idealized truth and a sophisticated posture. The “poster-child” of complexity “gone bad” is the seemingly fearful dragon whose multitude of feet hinders rather than helps him advance.

Images of light and dark prevail in the first half of the poem, but once darkness falls in Paradise and “prismatic color” is unattainable, we witness a new creation that is at the

“antipodes” from the original creation of Adam. The second prevailing image in the poem is the primeval creature beginning to crawl:

‘Part of it was crawling, part of it
was about to crawl, the rest
was torpid in its lair.’ In short legged, fit-
ful advance, the gurgling and all the minutiae – we have
the classic
multitude of feet. To what purpose! (*SP* 49)

In her notes, Moore cites a fragment from Nestor of Laranda in the Loeb Library translation of the Greek Anthology.⁶⁸ The quotation is taken from the epigram describing the dragon who consumes the river Cephissus, leaving the nymphs in despair. In Quotation and Modern American Poetry, Elizabeth Gregory relates the lament of the nymphs to Moore’s own lament of the loss of Eden and its clarity. What the nymphs lament is Cephissus. Cephissus is the name of both the river and the river god. It is unclear whether the nymphs suffered due to the loss of the river or of the river god.

Cephissus, the river god, was the father of Narcissus. Given the emphasis on truth in “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” any allusion to Narcissus, however slight, is worth considering since Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection believing what was only an image to be real and corporeal. Misplaced adoration is also addressed in presence of the Apollo Belvedere sculpture at the end of the poem. Perhaps the dragon’s consumption of the river Cephissus removes the opportunity to fall in love with insubstantial reflections. At any rate, Moore’s citation in her notes invites this reading because it reveals its possibility and like the proverbial crumb leads the reader down the path.⁶⁹ Perhaps the ambiguity of the mythological reference serves another purpose. Mythology, like the rainbow, “is also one of / those things into which

⁶⁸ John Hollander notes that Moore’s citation is incorrect. The reference is not on page 129 of volume 3 but from epigram 129 of Book 9, page 67 of the third volume (90).

⁶⁹ See pages 172-75.

much that is peculiar can / read.” Thus the notation points to the complexity of the dragon so that the dragon is symbolic of complexity.

Although a symbol of complexity, the dragon seems more like a lethargic centipede than an intimidating mythological dragon. Holley and Heuving identify the dragon as a representation of “principally throat, sophistication.” Holley recognizes that the dragon is “‘pestilence’ of sophisticated complexity” and points out that Moore focuses on “the layout and habitual gestures of the beast rather than Nestor’s dramatic narrative of how Cephisus kills himself by running into [the beast’s] jaws” (88). Given the “habitual gestures” of the dragon, the dragon is no great threat. Heuving also notes that the dragon’s propensity for consumption makes it an ideal representation of sophistication because “Principally throat, sophistication” “consumes rather than replenishes” (90). Slatin, however, argues that the dragon is “excessive complexity . . . so huge and so unwieldy that it can move only in segments” (95). The dragon’s ineffectual “multitude of feet” represents complexity for the sake of complexity. At the same time, the dragon’s actions represent sophistication because the dragon, after consuming the river, does nothing more than produce a gurgling noise. Ultimately, Moore is presenting the evolution of poetry with the image of classical verse and its “multitude of feet.” The derogatory description of the “short legged, fit- /ful advance” and “the gurgling and all the minutiae” is the advance of poetry and of civilization away from “the init- /ial great truths” and towards narrow and pointless sophistication. Moreover, the advance is not one of great strides; instead, it is part crawling and “fitful.” This parody of evolution stands in stark contrast to the original creation, and suggests that truth cannot emerge from this “lair.” However, in view of the negations and modification of “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” the poem, like the dragon, has made a “fitful advance.” And

yet, the poem's form has not abided by the standards of the "classical multitude of feet" of which she half asks and half declares, "To what purpose!"

The original 1919 poem, which was printed in Bryn Mawr's Lantern, does not question the viability or objective of classical verse. Instead, it focuses on its similarity to truth. Here, the classic / multitude of feet" is like complexity when it has "been committed to darkness":

- formidable only in the
dark. Truth, many legged and formidable also,
is stationary by choice.
The wave may go over it if it likes; know
that it will be there when it says: I shall be there when the wave has gone by.

Truth, here, is like classic verse; it is "many legged and formidable." While "the classic multitude of feet" insists on adherence to a specific meter and rhyme, it is only complex when it is "committed to darkness instead of granting its- / self to be the pestilence that it is." Analogous to complexity, classical verse can become a "pestilence" when "committed to darkness."

However, like the dragon, once it is recognized for what it is, it is no longer "formidable." In this final stanza, Moore compares truth to the "gurgling" creature that is classical verse.

However, she makes several distinctions between verse and truth. Unlike poetry, truth "is stationary by choice." The fifth stanza presents an unflattering evolution of poetry, so the implication here is that truth does not evolve because it does not need to evolve. Miller recognizes that the final stanza suggests that "'Truth' is different from both the lost clarity of Eden and the sophisticated simplicity of canonical, iconic form" (81). Clarity can be lost, as in the loss of Eden, and poetic form can change. Truth, on the other hand, cannot be lost or altered. The poem, which cannot reproduce Truth and is not static, does change through a series of omissions and alterations of form.

In 1921, Moore published a much revised “In the Days of Prismatic Color” in William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon’s Contact (Schulze 243). In this presentation, Moore breaks the formal pattern of the poem and offers a four line final stanza, breaking her strict syllabics, thereby illustrating her criticism of sophisticated or forced form. Slatin suggests that “to sustain the pattern in the face of the claim just advanced about the nature of ‘Truth’ would be to sacrifice Truth to form – to countenance, not an inevitable complexity, but the lie of willful symmetry” (95). Even though Moore’s syllabics are far from simplistic, breaking the pattern is like the introduction of Eve; it introduces yet another layer of complexity through disruption. Thus, the form of the poem gives way to complexity.

The content of the revised stanza reveals further complexity, for Truth is no longer “many legged and formidable” as the dragon of classical verse:

To what purpose! Truth is no
Apollo
Belvidere [sic], no formal thing. The wave may
go over it if it likes.
Know that it will be there when it says:
“I shall be there when the wave has gone by.” (*BMM* 243)

In the revised poem, the explanatory statement, “Truth, many legged and formidable also,” is omitted. Laurence Stapleton suggests that the revision “shows a master’s hand” because the complexity is not murky but illuminating (19). Instead of explaining, the revised lines offer a challenge to “the multitude of feet”: “To what purpose!” In the next phrase Truth is contrasted: “Truth is no Apollo Belvedere, no formal thing.” The allusion to this famous statue is significant. The Apollo Belvedere is a Roman marble copy, probably of a Greek original of the late fourth century B.C.; therefore, it is not an original sculpture (Jansen and Jansen 157). During the Greek Revival it was presented as the exemplar of an aesthetic ideal of Classical beauty. Plaster casts or reproductions of it were considered indispensable for all museums, art

academies, and colleges. It was, in fact, considered to embody the essence of the Greek spirit although it is no more than a mechanical Roman copy of no great distinction (664). Therefore, the negative comparison of Truth and the Apollo Belvedere borrows the very quality of what is rejected (Stapleton 19). Truth is not a copy, and it is not something formal or even sophisticated. The comparison goes even deeper because neoclassical sculptures were overwhelmed by the authority accorded Apollo Belvedere and other ancient statues (Jansen and Jansen 664). Bernini modeled the Apollo of his sculpture, Apollo and Daphne, on the Apollo Belvedere and Sir Joshua Reynolds so admired Apollo's pose that he used it in his painting of Commodore Keppel. Interestingly, Reynolds, in "A Discourse, Delivered at the Opening of the Royal Academy, January 2, 1769," praises the works of antiquity and argues that students ought to consider these a "perfect and infallible Guides: as subjects for their imitation, not their criticism" (qtd in Jansen 774). Ironically, the Apollo Belvedere proved to be a copy and since artists, such as Reynolds, were, in effect, burdened by what seemed to be true, they produced works that did little more than imitate ancient statues and even copies of ancient statues. Likewise, the "classic / multitude of feet" and "all the minutiae," elements of exalted verse, posed problems for poets who felt they could not deny the authority accorded to classical verse. The Apollo Belvedere and classical verse rely on form not Truth. Form, for Moore, becomes a pestilence when it is contrived and ostentatious, which is the case in classical verse and the Apollo Belvedere. As far as Moore's method for defining Truth is concerned, her revision and the inclusion of the Apollo Belvedere illustrate, yet again, her manner of getting closer to the truth through negation. Although Moore cannot accurately define Truth, she can clarify it through negation. In these lines, we discover that Truth is neither a contrived imitation, which has been accorded underserved authority, nor a "formal thing." "formal" is a pun on poetic form, which cannot encapsulate Truth. The revision

also reveals how her revisions usually ask her readers to be attentive and diligent. The first presentation of “In the Days of Prismatic Color,” for example, defined Truth with direct statements of what it is instead of what it is not. Contrasting Truth to the Apollo Belvedere encourages the reader to discover why “Truth is no Apollo Belvedere.”

The final lines of “In the Days of Prismatic Color” show the constant wave that washes over Truth, and Truth’s retort, “I shall be there when the wave has gone by.” In the first presentation, quotation marks do not appear, but in all subsequent presentations, Moore choose to set it off the line with quotation marks, which lets Truth have the last word.⁷⁰ Like Keats’s Urn, Truth’s words resonate, but unlike Keats’s Urn it is Truth not Art speaking. After all, “In the Days of Prismatic Color” illustrates the fleeting nature of Art with its reference to the Apollo Belvedere, which, although revered, was a copy. Unlike the Apollo Belvedere and the Urn, Truth will not be affected by the ravishing wave.

Significantly, for Moore, the wave or the sea is associated with a place of burial. In “A Grave,” Moore writes that the sea is a “collector” and that fishermen who lower their nets into the sea do so “unconscious of the fact that they are / desecrating a grave” (CP 49). The ocean in “A Grave” persists in spite of fish, fishermen, lighthouses and “the noise of / bell-buoys”; it “advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which / dropped things are bound to sink.” The waves then are unaware of the drama occurring, yet the poet looks at the ocean and sees a grave. Walt Whitman’s “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” contains a similar reference to the sea. In the poem, the speaker observes corpses washed on the beach and calls to the sea, “Ebb, ocean of life (the flow will return,) / Cease not your moaning you fierce old mother.” Instead of seeing death as Whitman did, Moore finds Truth revealed as the ocean ebbs.

⁷⁰ In *The Savage’s Romance*, John Slatin observes that Moore’s break in form is like the breaking of a wave upon the hard solid foundation of truth: “The wave of form breaks now, not merely for the poet to gesture toward Truth, but to make Truth *visible* by the only means available to the poem – by letting it speak” (96).

Whitman's poem was, in fact, the source of Moore's title. She borrowed it from the following lines: "(See, from my dead lips the ooze exuding at last, / See, the prismatic colors glistening and rolling,)." Whitman's prismatic colors are revealed through death instead of a return to Eden. Gregory acknowledges the allusion or quotation from Whitman as Moore's method of commenting on her predecessors, since origins and originality are concerns of the poem. She writes, "The borrowing invokes, through allusion, the original world lost – the paradise of Whitmanic or Miltonic speech . . . , represented here as free from the need to acknowledge the world's complexity" (174).⁷¹ The abiding nature of Truth is emphasized in the concluding stanza because in it Truth, unfaltering, remains in spite of the obscuring waves of complexity.⁷²

The revisions of the final stanza illustrate Moore's effort to arrive at some definition of Truth that acknowledges its elusiveness. The break with the original formal pattern of strict syllabics has resonance in the final stanza given that in the previous stanza formality and sophistication are ridiculed. In addition to the disruption of the formal pattern, Moore's other revisions do not clarify but rather invite curiosity. Certainly her allusion to Apollo Belvedere is not "plain to see and / to account for" and, thus, relies on the audience to pursue the oblique reference. In "In the Days of Prismatic Color," Moore's attempt to define the era of pristine art becomes an argument for her aesthetic, which embraces the complexity that is inherent and necessary in her modern, fallen world. An element of her aesthetic that is revealed, in part, through her revisions is the responsibility the audience has to pursue meaning. The revisions

⁷¹ Gregory also asserts that the fact that Moore does not acknowledge her source shows the world's complexity and her own originality. The poem is framed by allusions to Whitman's poem since it begins with "prismatic color" and concludes with the ebb and flow of the ocean of life.

⁷² On the concluding lines, Heuving writes that "sophistication is the wave that passes over 'truth,' leaving it brightly intact" (90). Moore's insistence that Truth is "no formal thing" supports Heuving's reading in that Truth, unlike the Apollo Belvedere, is not subject to the eroding effects of nature as well as predilection. Slatin, too, argues that "In the Days of Prismatic Color" reveals Moore's nostalgia for the truth and clarity: "Thus Truth has the last word" (96).

prevent familiarity and, thereby, provide a “place for the genuine.” “The genuine,” not defined, is explained in “Poetry” and demonstrated in the revisions of “Poetry.”

Robin Schulze calls “Poetry” Moore’s “famous complaint against her own medium” (206). The complaint, which begins “Poetry, I too dislike it,” is famous not only because it rails against the art form it employs, demanding a new criteria for poetry, but also because of the poem’s complex textual history, which is almost playfully complicated. Between 1919 and 1981, “Poetry” made eleven distinct appearances and was printed twenty-seven times.⁷³ Of the eleven versions, the 1951 version found in Complete Poems is the most radical and dramatic in that Moore reduced what had originally been a thirty-line poem of five stanzas to a single stanza of three lines. Although Moore slashed the original, she included the 1951 version, which is twenty-nine lines in five stanzas, in her Notes. “Omissions are not accidents,” riddles Moore in her epigraph of Complete Poems. Moore’s radical reduction and riddle has puzzled readers and has garnered “Poetry” much critical attention, but long before Moore reduced “Poetry,” it had been one of Moore’s most popular poems. Bonnie Honigsblum’s research reveals that “Poetry” was published seventy-nine times between 1919 and 1982. Its popularity stems from Moore’s attempt to define an art-form for which she confesses contempt and dislike, but this popularity may have led Moore to use her keen revisionary tactics to keep “Poetry” genuine, which has made the poem more than popular; it is, in fact, infamous.

An analysis of the eleven presentations of “Poetry” demonstrate Moore’s desire to keep the poem genuine by keeping her readers searching for understanding rather than becoming too familiar. Thus Moore, like Eliot’s Prufrock, seems to fear being reduced to tea-time

⁷³ Bonnie Honigsblum’s “Marianne Moore’s Revisions of ‘Poetry’” and Jeffery D. Peterson’s “Notes on the Poem(s) ‘Poetry’: The Ingenuity of Moore’s Poetic ‘Place’” are both excellent sources offering both textual history and critical insight into “Poetry” and its many revisions. Honigsblum’s article is particularly helpful due to her inclusion of a variorum edition of “Poetry.”

conversation. In many of her poems, Moore criticizes familiarity and encourages the rewards of the pursuit, but her very method of writing discourages familiarity in that through her negations and complex constructions the reader is forced “to pant” in pursuit of understanding. To be liked and understood are not the goals of her poems, and one method to keep liking and understanding at bay is to be agile so that the reader will, like Psyche in “Half Deity,” continue to be curious.

“Poetry” does not present a concrete definition of poetry. Its revisions more than the poem speak to the nature of poetry; in fact, George Bornstein argues that “through its successive embodiments it re-enacts important paradigms of poetic transmission, paradigms that remind us that poems exist in multiple, changing forms that constitute more an ongoing process than a final product” (Material 36). The importance of flux is displayed not only in the revisions but also within the poem.

The first presentation of “Poetry” in Others commenced its interesting and complex publication history. However, the peculiarity of this presentation stems not from the poem but from the publication. Others magazine was teetering on the edge of existence, and Alfred Kreymborg, the editor, enlisted William Carols Williams to edit the July issue perhaps to rekindle interest in the faltering magazine. Williams, however, saw an opportunity to bury Others rather than to revitalize it. His “Gloria” led the final installment of Others in July of 1919 and called for the end of the magazine that had, in his opinion, “grown inevitably to be a lie, like everything else that has been the truth at one time” (*Oth19* 3). Knowing that the magazine’s future was uncertain, Williams planned for the issue to be dedicated to the burial of Others and included poems and prose that spoke to the death of what had once provided a shelter for poets but now isolated them from the actual world. He included, for example, Wallace Stevens’s “Earthy Anecdote” in which the firecat, representing order that had once been wild, herds the

“clattering” bucks. Eventually, the firecat “closed his bright eyes / And slept” (3). The death of the firecat like the death of Others, is a loss of order, but its loss brings with it a sense of calm. Williams also includes Lola Ridge’s “Easter Dawn” that speaks to the isolation that Others represented for Williams: “Shall I too press – how much of my essence? - / in a cube of space” (15). Williams’s plan for the issue was an independent decision and remained unknown to most of the poets whose poems were included in this issue, including Marianne Moore.

Williams chose Moore’s “Poetry” because, according to him, it seemed “peculiarly fitted” to the message he planned for Others’s final issue (qtd. in Schulze 475). Placed amid Williams’s choices for the edition, especially his “Gloria!” editorial, “Poetry” appeared to attack the very aspects Others Williams sought to denounce. For Williams, Others had become a shelter from the gritty modern world. Thus, when Moore, in “Poetry” calls for “the raw material of poetry / in all its rawness,” she seems to agree with Williams’s complaints.

“Poetry”’s opening lines address an audience who is fed up with the “fiddle” of poetry:

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all
this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it after all, a place for the genuine. (*SP* 36)

“Poetry” does criticize ostentatious forms and contrived poetry for its inability to produce the genuine. It, therefore, perfectly suited Williams’s purposes for his “burial” of Others. Moore, was, however, unaware of Williams’s intent. Williams’s placement of “Poetry” after his own “Gloria!” gave the appearance that Moore was fully aware of Williams’s intentions. This would have been particularly distressing to Moore because Others had supported her work early on. Moore, who had been rejected by other American journals, was greatly appreciative of Kreyborg’s enthusiasm for her work and would have been loathe to criticize Kreyborg’s

magazine. Aside from The Egoist, which was London-based, Others had been the most receptive to Moore's poetry, publishing thirteen of her poems between 1915 and 1919.⁷⁴ Kreymborg was also responsible for Moore's introduction to the New York art scene during her pilgrimage to New York City in December 1915. Moore maintained her relationship with Kreymborg after Others official closed, following him to his next venture, Broom. It is certain that Moore did not appreciate Williams's tactics, which she is certain to have seen as vulgar and overly emotional. Thus begins the sensational textual history of "Poetry."

The two constants in the eleven versions of "Poetry" are its title and its opening lines. What constitutes "the genuine" is extensively revised, which underscores the fluidity of "the genuine." In confronting "Poetry" and its convoluted textual history, I have chosen to begin with a discussion of the five stanza versions. There are several major variants, which I will discuss as I move through a close reading of the poem. The free verse, three stanza, and three line versions will be addressed later in the chapter. I begin with the five stanza versions in part because this is how Moore began and, in a sense, ended her revisions of "Poetry."

The title, "Poetry, which doubles as the first word of the poem, obviates the traditional title that serves as a summary of the poem's themes (Miller 58). This is not uncommon in Moore's works. This practice points to how Moore approaches her audience. A traditional title, which often provides insight into the poem itself, usually facilitates understanding by offering a starting point for the audience. Even traditional titles that indicate form, such as "Sonnet" and "Canto," serve as prologue. Such titles create an expectation of form and content; therefore, these titles can also impede meaning because they narrow the focus instead of enlarging it. As a

⁷⁴ See Robin Schulze's Becoming Marianne Moore for a full account of Moore's relationship with Others and with Kreymborg as well as for a description of Williams's editorship of the final issue (466-78).

title, "Poetry" suggests that what follows, although its form looks odd on the page, will provide a definition for the genre it employs:

Poetry

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important
beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in
it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, there things are important not because a
high sounding interpretation can be put upon them
but because they are
useful; when they become so derivative as to
become unintelligible, the
same thing may be said for all of us – that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand. The bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll,
a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a
horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician – case after case
could be cited did
one wish it; nor is it valid
to discriminate against "business documents and
school-books"; all these phenomena are important.
One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets,
the result is not poetry,
nor till the autocrats among us can be
"literalists of
the imagination" – above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads
in them, shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,
in defiance of their opinion –
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine then you are interested in poetry.⁷⁵

Of the five stanza versions, critics, among them Engel and Juhasz, have remarked on the brilliant rhetoric of the poem. “As a piece of rhetoric,” writes Juhasz, “the poem is also perfect, in its precision of vocabulary and placement . . . revealing argument and counterargument, process and conclusion, with economy that is both dazzling and impenetrable” (50). Engel suggests that Moore’s “artfully casual beginning” draws the audience into “a climax of feeling in the next-to-last stanza” and then “ends almost off-handedly with a final, fairly direct comment upon what has been presented” (42). Engel goes on to propose that “as a work of art, it is its own exemplification” (42). This is remarkable since the poem suggests that there are some things “that are important / beyond all this fiddle.” If by “fiddle” Moore is suggesting that form and even rhetoric are “fiddle,” she perpetuates that for which she has a “perfect contempt.” Her revision addresses this issue through a deviation from the syllabics. This is not unlike her problem in the concluding stanza of “In the Days of Prismatic Color” in which she was forced to break her syllabic pattern in order to deny the obligation of form and to embrace the truth of complexity.

Poetry can be “fiddle,” or it can be “genuine.” Like the dragon’s “multitude of feet,” “Fiddle” refers to ineffectual poetic form. Although she refers to it as “fiddle,” Moore does not dismiss form outright. Instead, she suggests that form is not the most important aspect of poetry, but one that, nonetheless, should confront form in order to discover “a place for the genuine.” It

⁷⁵ This is the first presentation of “Poetry.” It appeared in *Others* in July of 1919. It chose this version as a reference to my discussion of the poem because it is the only five stanza version that does not disrupt the syllabic pattern.

is Moore's explanation of "the genuine" that becomes the focus. Because "the genuine," according to Moore, is discovered through complexity, Moore describes genuine responses through a series of negations and modifications:

Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a

high sounding interpretation can be put upon them
but because they are
useful; when they become so derivative as to
become unintelligible, the
same thing may be said for all of us – that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand.

The problem of defining poetry has become the problem of defining "the genuine," and here Moore seems to suggest that what is genuine must also be useful. The list she constructs is a list of responses. Heuving argues, "It is difficult to determine how they could be useful in any common sense of the word," and "these reactions are particularly prone to disingenuousness" (93). However, grasping hands are indeed useful, and dilating eyes are not "disingenuous." The grasping hands, dilating eyes and rising hair are all physical reflexes; furthermore, they are defense mechanisms. Hands grasp to keep the body from falling. Eyes dilate to control light, and an animals' hair rises to add ferocity in the face of an adversary. These reflexes are "useful" in that they protect or warn, and they are by nature "genuine." They are, as Costello writes, "physical manifestations of internal responses" that are also analogous of the imagination and its response to stimuli (Possessions 20). These things are also instinctual, unconscious reactions – the opposite of fastidiousness. Hadas notes that "hands that grasp" and "eyes that dilate" find their source, and likewise poetry's source, in "childhood's ready equipment, spontaneous needs and fears, like and dislikes, not in adult inhibition . . ." (205). Hadas's observation of the

childlike spontaneity suggested by these lines is interesting in that Moore has illustrated her admiration of this quality in other poems. The best example is found in “Critics and Connoisseurs” in which she writes that “there is a great amount of poetry in unconscious / fastidiousness” citing her appreciation of a “mere childish attempt.” These things do not need “high sounding interpretation[s]” to make them valuable, nor do they need to become “so derivative as to become un - /intelligible.” However, some questions persist. Is Moore arguing that the responses are genuine? Or, are these the appropriate responses to “the genuine”? Costello observes that Moore never answers these questions, which she believes any defense of poetry, even a definition, ought to answer the questions it poses. Instead, Moore, according to Costello, offers a mere tautology. If one reduces Moore’s argument it runs: “these things are useful because they are important; these things are important because they are useful” (Possessions 21). Although this appears to do little to advance the defense or definition, something is achieved in the attempt to get at the question. After all, it is the struggle not definitive understanding that is the point. Costello astutely reasons that in the first two-thirds of the poem there is no attempt to answer questions or to resolve a duality (Possessions 21). What the audience is given are “spiritual glances” that display the everyday or commonplace from new and changing perspectives.

Before moving forward, Moore’s application of the word “useful” requires some attention since here it assumes the same meaning as “genuine.” Those things that are “useful” are, at least, important elements of the “genuine.” Moore’s connection of “genuine” and “useful” raises the question: must objects that are genuine also be useful? For a poet or an artist this is an interesting question. In order for art to be “genuine” and above “fiddle,” must it also be “useful”? If so, how does an artist define “useful”? Jean Garrigue writes that Moore ridicules

the traditional aesthetics of the word, “useful,” the connotation of which is “hateful” and “factual” as well as the “epitome of understatement – as if to say the sky is *useful*, or rain, the sun, or for that matter poetry” (27). It is also a word commonly utilized in advertisements, which lends it a rather un-poetic tone.⁷⁶ Slatin, too, comments on “useful” and its usefulness in “Poetry.” He remarks that it is placed “with a ‘feigned inconsequence of manner’ at the beginning of a line” and is, therefore, given a certain amount of “shock value” aiming a “blow at the genteel school of thought which exposes poetry to Hueffer’s charge of superfluity” (43). Hueffer’s, Ford Maddox Ford, essay “Impressionism” offered his own complaint against poetry, especially the works of Browning, Tennyson, Pope, and Swinburne. He said that as a youth he had developed an aversion to poetry that never left him. He felt that poets seemed compelled to use affected language and that this was the essential failing of poetry and the source of his contempt for it. Moore and Hueffer are on the same page, so to speak, in that both attribute the failings of poetry to the hackneyed, overwrought, and superfluous language so often employed by poets.

Moore’s argument in “Poetry” is that language is not useful and not genuine when it is “so derivative as to become / unintelligible.” Poetry should be intelligible because “we / do not admire what / we cannot understand.” Derivative means that it has removed itself from the original and is a mere imitation of the original. If poetry is derivative, an imitation, it based on previous poetry and is, therefore, mired in the past and unchanging. “The genuine,” for Moore, is always in flux. Poetry should remain in flux so that it cannot become too familiar because to become too familiar is to make not only what one says worthless, but the work, likewise, loses its

⁷⁶ Moore’s clippings show that she was interested in the language of advertising.

luster, thereby losing its usefulness as far as poetry is concerned.⁷⁷ Her slight revision of the punctuation following “understand” seems to bear out this idea.

In its initial presentation for Others, “understand” was followed by a period. The finality of the period indicates that what precedes it is a complete idea so that what follows is not directly related to those things that are “useful:”

the
same thing may be said for all of us – that we
so not admire what
we cannot understand. The bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to [eat] (*BM* 205)

In Observations (1924), Moore exchanged the period for a colon making what follows into an illustration of those things that “we / do not admire” because they are not useful. Aside from Moore’s free verse version in the second edition of Observations and the much reduced version of Complete Poems, Moore maintained this revision in subsequent presentations including the “longer version” she includes in her notes for Complete Poems. The revision creates ambiguity in that it rejects the finality of the absolute statement. Costello astutely observes that the “colon suspends our expectation, suggesting that the example could illustrate the antecedent negative or the following positive observation” (Imaginary 20). Thus, her revision speaks to the subject matter of the poem since it encourages the genuine quality of uncertainty. It also undermines what had seemed to be a fairly straightforward statement since what precedes and follows it consists of things that elicit admiration and, moreover, curiosity.

⁷⁷ In “Stamps, Money, Pop Culture, and Marianne Moore,” Elizabeth Gregory discusses how the hackneyed image, in Moore’s terms, “is no longer eligible for poetry” (239). Gregory arrives at this conclusion after searching for what Moore means by the “genuine,” but discovers that Moore never explicitly defines the term. As is common in Moore’s poetry, she gets “closer to the truth” through negation rather than through explicit statements.

The list of actions performed by a bat, an elephant, a wild horse, a wolf, a critic, and a baseball fan are beyond our understanding because their actions derive from an impulse that the observer is incapable of fully grasping:

. . . The bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll,
a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a
horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician . . . (*Oths* 5)

Like the grasping hands and dilating eyes, these things are important because they are “useful.” These examples also illustrate the importance of curiosity. Instinctual or learned, curiosity compels the bat, elephant, horse, wolf, critic, baseball, and the statistician. Moreover, they are all engaged in acts of pursuit that hinge upon their curiosity, which in turn engages the reader’s curiosity. Both Costello and Joyce recognize how the reader’s curiosity mimics the subjects’ curiosity. Joyce writes that despite our, the readers’, “lack of comprehension of ‘phenomena,’ we must confront them repeatedly, following that human instinct to investigate and describe” (Cultural 23). Likewise, Costello recognizes that what is interesting about these phenomena is that “they reflect our own acts of investigation – our curiosity depends on theirs” (Imaginary 21). The point of Moore’s catalog of images is not to define the genuine or useful but to force the reader to engage in a genuine act: discovery. Altieri comments on the heap of images and suggests that these images fail because they distance the reader from “the genuine.”⁷⁸ However,

⁷⁸ In Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry, Charles Altieri offers a reading of the negations that are prevalent in Moore’s work. On “Poetry” and its final presentation, Altieri suggests that the 1935 version found in the notes of Complete Poems does not alleviate the questions presented in the short version. Instead, he argues that “once we feel the pressure of all these images that rush in to provide names for poetry, but actually displace it, we begin to understand that those indefinite pronouns [“it”] both reflect highly intelligent choices and orient us toward the kind of negotiations necessary if poetry is to provide alternatives to those images” (266). He then argues that if one needs the assistance of images or metaphors then “one is condemned to the distance of attempting to explain the genuine” (266). This may indeed be true of Moore’s final presentation of “Poetry,” especially the play between the

Moore's attempt here is to define through example, making these images glimpses into the genuine, which does not in turn distance the reader from the genuine. After all, according to Moore's "When I Buy Pictures," "piercing glances into the life of things," are all that are necessary and possible in poetry. Altieri also suggests that in recognizing the failure of images to explain "the genuine," "we also get a glimpse of the deepest efforts of poetry – the quest to find, within the transient, a sense of the genuine that is abstract enough to allow for a range of contents, and fluid enough to merge into a state of grace achieved by individual poems" (266). Altieri goes on to say that if one made a generalization about the poem, it would be that the poem shows us "that we must conceive of the genuine in poetry in terms of forces, rather than of things or images" (266). Thus, it is the abstraction and ambiguity that ultimately draw the reader into the poem allowing the reader to focus on the process of discovery. This process or act on the part of the reader would be diminished if not subsumed if such images became too "derivative."

In the initial publication, Moore followed these images with a line that the subsequent lines, which carries a hint of the rhetoric that many critics have recognized in this poem: "case after case / could be cited did / one wish it" (*Oths* 5). The suggestion is that Moore has been building an argument supporting the criteria of "the genuine," which is the quality that can redeem poetry from "contempt" and "dislike." Moore removed this line from subsequent presentations that otherwise are chiefly the same. The line had given "Poetry" a defensive tone, which Moore may have wished to eliminate. Be that as it may, her removal of this line disturbs the strict syllabics of the poem. This change suggests that Moore once again recognized the problem inherent in her formal style. Her strict syllabics could, after all, be considered "fiddle." Again, Moore's revision supports her definition of poetry since it denies strict form. In "In the

two versions, but the images themselves support her definition of the genuine since they speak to act of investigation, which Moore connects to the discovery of the genuine.

Days of Prismatic Color,” Moore disrupts her formal syllabics in order to criticize sophisticated, forced, or hackneyed form. What she omits in “In the Days of Prismatic” is an explanatory statement: “Truth, many legged and formidable also.” In “Poetry” the omitted lines were less significant so that little in the way of meaning is altered; however, the disruption of the syllabics in this stanza carries a similar import. The third stanza’s focus is on presenting a list of non-traditional poetic subject matter. Thus, her syllabic break intrudes upon the formal pattern emphasizing her critique of “this fiddle” or the contrived form that can hinder the genuine in poetry.

Moore’s poetics, as defined in “Poetry,” depend upon the ability of the poet to present a genuine reality. Producing such a work necessitates that the poet accept non-traditional phenomena and material that are “important beyond this fiddle”:

nor it is valid
to discriminate against ‘business documents and
school-books’; all these phenomena are important.

Moore is quoting from Tolstoy’s diary in which he theorized that “poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books.”⁷⁹ Tolstoy’s definition expands the definition of poetry, yet Moore takes exception with his theory in two ways. Firstly, she is challenging the validity of such discrimination. Secondly, she declares that business documents and school-books are “phenomena.” Moore is well known for her use of extracts from newspapers, advertisements, and other equally non-traditional sources, so it is striking that she quotes Tolstoy, a literary icon, in order to refute his definition of poetry. It is also notable that

⁷⁹ In her notes, Moore cites Tolstoy’s diary and includes the following passage from Tolstoy: “Where the boundary between prose and poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. The question is raised in manuals of style, yet the answer to it lies beyond me. Poetry is verse: prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books” (qtd. in *OB* 96).

her only other cited reference in “Poetry” is to William Butler Yeats’s comment on Blake, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In both cases, Moore uses the quotations in order to contest their original contexts. More importantly, on some level she rejects the authority accorded to her predecessors, Tolstoy and Yeats. Generally, Moore’s sources gain import from the phrasing not from who said or wrote them. However, Moore’s refutation of Tolstoy’s and Yeats’s opinions of poetry and poets lends weight to Moore’s definition since through their negation she becomes the authority.⁸⁰ Again, Moore demonstrates her mastery of rhetoric in that she uses the words of the “authorities” in order to gain authority.⁸¹

It is important to note that Moore did not always cite her sources so the fact that she decides to include Yeats and Tolstoy in her notes is significant. Without the citations, she would be unable to have “the last word,” so to speak. According to Elizabeth Gregory there are 278 citations of phrases in Complete Poems, only thirty-four of these refer to literary works (novels, poems, and plays). Another seven reference prominent essayists, and two cite private papers of the literati (Quotation 156).

Beyond the connection to Tolstoy, the line conveys Moore’s criticism of narrow-minded rejection. Earlier in “Poetry” Moore suggests that one should avoid categorizing because it inhibits the imagination by creating limits. She also writes that one should not disregard non-traditional sources: “nor is it valid / to discriminate against ‘business documents and / school books.’” On the one hand, Moore disapproves of things that are unintelligible, but she concedes,

⁸⁰ I say her sources are “irrelevant” because she wants them to be so. In her “Notes” for Complete Poems, she writes that “acknowledgements seem only honest,” making her “Notes” necessary, but she suggests that “those who are annoyed by provisos, detrainments, and postscripts could be persuaded to take probity on faith and disregard the notes” (262). This certainly deflates the importance of the quotations, but she also justifies their use and is playing with tradition by including “Notes” on mostly non-traditional sources.

⁸¹ See Elizabeth Gregory’s Quotation and Modern American Poetry for an in-depth study of quotation in the works of Eliot, Pound, and Moore. Her introduction also offers an insightful overview of the practice as well as an historical context.

“all these phenomena are important,” including that which does not appear to be poetry, “business documents / school books.” Nevertheless, “One / must make a distinction,” according to Moore, because in the hands of “half-poets, / the result is not poetry.” In other words, all poets are not equipped to handle the ordinary, useful, or curious. Moore’s revisions of this line provide some insight.

In Others (1919), Moore calls for “the autocrats among us” to become “literalists of the imagination.” In subsequent presentations, including Observations (1924) and Collected Poems (1951), Moore calls on the “poets among us.” Moore’s revisions often create ambiguity rather than clarify it, and this is one such instance. In the first presentation, “autocrats” seems to refer to those poets who are willing to think and write independently of the established class of poets. Williams would have relished this thought too since he felt that many poets published in Others had grown apathetic or had been anesthetized to their bleak surroundings. The revised “poets,” however, is perhaps a more biting criticism in that it suggests that not all “among us” are poets. True poets, according to Moore, must become “literalists of / imagination.” To be a “literalist of the imagination” implies that the poet avoids exaggeration or metaphor and presents a true account of the imagination. Heuving suggests that Moore’s proclamation stems from a desire to bring reality into poetry without using “egotistical sublime or specular poetry” (94). Heuving’s use of the word “specular” suggests that Moore strives to produce poetry that does not reflect herself. While Moore struggled with the poet’s role, her overriding concern for sincerity means that her poetry is to some degree “specular.” Moore, in a review of A Portrait of George Moore, she writes, “[a]s Mr. Moore himself says, ‘the impersonality of the artist is the vainest of delusions’ and in this portrait it would seem that George Moore the man of letters and George Moore the man, are identical” (*ComPr* 77). Similarly, in a review of Williams’s Collected Poems, Moore

comments, “One asks a great deal of an author . . . that he should not induce you to be interested in what is restrictedly private but that there should be the self-portrait; that he should pierce you to the marrow without revolting you” (*ComPr* 328). Thus, Moore did not avoid a specular quality in her poetry; she embraced it. The balancing act of self and reality is what is implied in becoming “literalists of the / imagination.” “Poetry” teeters on the sword tip of the decadent and the barbarous in that Moore’s strict syllabics are almost decadent and her subject matter is almost barbarous. Her source, Yeats, reinforces this idea, but she again heightens Yeats’s intended meaning through negation.

In her notes for “literalist of the imagination,” Moore cites Yeats’s Ideas of Good and Evil and his comment on William Blake: “The limitation of his view was from the very intensity of his vision; he was a too literal realist of imagination, as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind’s eye, when exalted by inspiration, were ‘eternal existences.’ Symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments” (*CP* 268). Yeats’s criticism of Blake is that he neglected style in order to fully render the vision of his imagination. Her quotation negates Yeats’s criticism in that she takes what Yeats determines as a negative and turns it into a positive. However, she does not totally dispel Yeats’s sentiment since she chose to include the context of his comment in her notes. As mentioned earlier, her citation of Yeats is atypical, and the length of the citation is also unusual. Reading the citation softens the statement in “Poetry” by offering a different context or a point of contention. Jean Garrigue suggests that “by portmanteau effect she rendered a daring new meaning. Like many of her finest phrases it combines opposites as compactly as possible” (28). Part of this effect is due to Moore’s inclusion of Yeats’s comment in her notes. On the one hand, she negates his statement and seems to suggest that becoming a “literalist of the / imagination” is

the greatest achievement for a poet. After reading the citation, however, it seems that perhaps “grace of style” might still be important. Since Moore constructed stylistically sophisticated syllabics, it seems that she does not totally disagree with Yeats. The line is also qualified: “above / insolence and triviality.” Moore’s qualifier speaks to Yeats’s criticism of Blake in that it too suggests that one should avoid “insolence and triviality” even when “exalted by inspiration.” At the same time, Moore is able to maintain the force of the negation of Yeats’s criticism because of the emphasis she places on becoming a “literalist of the imagination.”

Ultimately, Moore urges poets to present “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.”⁸² Thus, she mediates Blake’s and Yeats’s methods, for to “present / for inspection, ‘imaginary gardens with real toads in them’” is to offer the abstraction provided by the imagination combined with the genuine “toads,” which she has argued cannot be ignored and are, furthermore, a legitimate source of poetic inspiration. “Imaginary gardens” are “fiddle” without the “genuine” and “useful” “real toads.” “In the Days of Prismatic Color” displays Moore’s attempt to connect these two seemingly incongruous elements, for she presents the pristine qualities of Paradise by offering the complexities that are inherent in the fallen or modern world.⁸³ Joyce writes that “the toads are the result of the artist’s attempt to render the abstract into the concrete, Moore’s own poetic goal that also allows her to draw directly into her poems the subversion that the abstraction serves to shield” (Cultural 24). Moore, however, acknowledges that this goal may be unattainable:

⁸² “Imaginary gardens with real toads” is perhaps one of the most discussed lines in “Poetry” in part because the line originally appeared without quotation marks, but in Collected Poems Moore placed the line in quotation marks. No one has yet to discover the source for the line in spite of Bonnie Costello’s challenge to do so.

⁸³ Williams probably enjoyed this line in particular because his major criticism of Others was that it denied the grit of the modern world and here Moore seems to suggest that the recognition of the unseemly is necessary if poetry can indeed provide “a place for the genuine.”

omitted “in defiance of their opinion” because in the context of Williams’s edition it connotes a level of disgust with the magazine that had been perhaps her greatest supporter to date. “Poetry” was reprinted by Kreymborg for his Others for 1919: An Anthology of the New Verse with only two changes in punctuation and two typos, but one assumes that Kreymborg simply adopted the first presentation for his anthology. The omission in later presentations does, however, illustrate Moore’s awareness of her audience as well as her reluctance to maintain a strict poetic form.

Moore also refers to the “raw material of poetry” and declares that one should “demand” it. For both poet and audience this is significant. While Moore does not cite her source for this line, Patricia Willis discovered a likely source in Moore’s clippings at the Rosenbach Museum. The clipping is of a review of Ancient Gems in Modern Settings by G.B. Grundy. In it the reviewer wonders why “The Greek Anthology” in spite of its artificial and common matter manages to charm a variety of readers. He provides his own answer:

The reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, no productions of the Greek genius conform more wholly to the Aristotelian canon that poetry should be an imitation of the universal. Few of the poems in the Anthology depict any ephemeral phase or fashion of opinion, like Euphuism of the sixteenth century. All appeal to emotions which endure for all time, and which it has been aptly said, are the true raw material of poetry. (Newsletter 11)

The reviewer goes on to imagine that upon reading “The Anthology” each reader whether patriot, moralist, or man of the world will be stirred according to his demeanor. The moralist will consider human vanity, the patriot will feel passion in his blood, and the man of the world will celebrate the acute power of observation. The “raw material of poetry” is that which captures the interest of the audience through its “appeal to emotions which endure for all time.” From the first line of “Poetry” to the last, Moore engages the audience as well as focuses on the audience’s role in establishing a definition of poetry. Consider her first line: “I, too, dislike it.” Aside from gaining the confidence of the audience, this illustrates her acute understanding of the audience’s

role in poetry and the need to consider the audience. The final lines emphasize this role through the repetition of “you.” Only in the final stanza does Moore employ the second person pronoun; the other stanzas use the first person and third person pronouns, both singular and plural. The effect of this is that the first four stanzas suggest a struggle of “us” against “them” while the final stanza suggests that the fate of poetry is in the hands of the audience.

Moore’s revision of “Poetry” between the two editions of Observations erases some of the urgency established in the first presentations. This revision is the first of two radical revisions of “Poetry,” and it is a bit of an oddity since the context, the second edition of Observations, was not a significant change in venue. Therefore, it does not seem to warrant a drastic revision. The revision is radical in what Moore omits and what she alters. Instead of thirty or twenty-nine lines in five stanzas written in syllabics (with a few exceptions), Moore condenses “Poetry” into one stanza of thirteen lines:

I too, dislike it:
there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
The bat, upside down; the elephant pushing,
a tireless wolf under a tree,
the base-ball fan, the statistician –
“business documents and schoolbooks” –
these phenomena are pleasing,
but when they have been fashioned
into what is unknowable,
we are not entertained.
It may be said of all of us
that we do not admire what we cannot understand;
enigmas are not poetry. (qtd. in Schulze 207)

Here, the opening lines do not dwell on the negative aspects of poetry. Rather, they seem more conversational and matter-of-fact. “A place for the genuine” is not considered, and “hands that can grasp,” “eyes that can dilate,” and “hair that can rise” are neither mentioned nor deemed “important” because they are “useful.” The bat, elephant, wolf, baseball fan, and statistician and

even “business document and school books” are present, but the critic is absent.⁸⁶ The actions of these entities are condensed, and they are categorized as “phenomena” that are “pleasing” rather than “important.” Any discussion of “poets among us,” “half poets,” or “autocrats” is absent. Instead, Moore considers the effect of fashioning these “phenomena” into something “which is unknowable” and discovers that the effect does not entertain. The “imaginary gardens with real toads” is conspicuous in its absence, and we are left not searching for the “raw material of poetry in / all its rawness” but with a direct statement: “enigmas are not poetry.” Indeed, this version of “Poetry” does not contain the “enigmas” of the earlier presentations.

Schulze refers to this revision as “one of the most striking” of Moore’s literary career, which is remarkable statement when one considers the revisions and omissions that Moore executed over the course of her career (207). What is “striking” is that unlike the final, three-line “Poetry” in Complete Poems, this presentation only slightly resembles the earlier five-stanza presentations. What is more, the second edition of Observations was published a mere three months after the first, and the first edition had garnered Moore a good bit of publicity. She received The Dial Award, which in turn brought her public exposure through the mixed reviews published in New York Herald Tribune Books, The Nation, and The New York Times Book Review. Also, Thayer and Watson, editors of the Dial, worked diligently to support Moore using the Dial “Comments” to promote her work.⁸⁷ Given the attention Observations received it is indeed “striking” that Moore would chose to revise “Poetry,” but the book’s association with the Dial may have provoked this revision.

⁸⁶ Slatin astutely observes that Moore must remove the “immovable critic” because that critic’s role “has been played with such vigor by the poet herself that the critic can no longer find anything to ‘dislike’” (57).

⁸⁷ Robin G. Schulze “Moore’s Early Volumes” in her Becoming Marianne Moore discusses the influence Thayer and Watson had on Moore’s career as well as their motivation for granting her the Dial Award, which they may have done as much for financial gain as for sheer patronage.

Her radical revisions begin with the poem's form. Since its initial publication, "Poetry" had maintained its original five stanzas written in syllabics, with a few deviations. This version, however, totally deviates from the five stanza versions as well as from syllabics; it is written in free verse. In and of itself, this is not unusual since Moore had dabbled in free verse and even seemed to prefer free verse for some of her poems.⁸⁸ "When I Buy Pictures" and "A Graveyard," both published in the Dial in July 1921, were the first of her free verse poems, and "The Monkey-Puzzler," published in the January 1925 Dial, was her last. Slatin suggests that these poems as well as her re-casting in free verse of "England" and "Picking and Choosing" pay homage to the Dial as well as reveal "Moore's effort to open up her work, both to her readers and to those manifestations of 'creative power' that were appearing all around her, and to which her association with the Dial in particular demanded that she paid heed" (102). Slatin's argument is compelling and can also be applied to Moore's re-casting of "Poetry" in the second edition of Observations (1925). After receiving the Dial Award, which included both free publicity and two-thousand dollars, Moore may have felt obligated to reconcile her poems to the tastes of the Dial audience. Her formal syllabics are not exactly accessible to the broader audience of the Dial, so free verse allowed her to reach this audience. If appealing to the Dial audience was not the impetus for this change, the change to free verse may have been motivated by Moore's desire to cut out "fiddle." In fact, through the omission of details and the pattern, this presentation of "Poetry" in a sense lives up to the definition the five stanza versions describe. But, to what end? The effect of "Poetry" is not as strong in this version. As Nitchie comments, it seems to be more notes towards a poem than an actual poem (37). What Moore excises from "Poetry" is greater

⁸⁸ "Picking and Choosing" is good example of this. Initially, it was written in syllabics, but in its final presentation in Complete Poems, Moore re-wrote it in free verse. In "Getting a Closer to the Truth: Free Verse and the Acknowledgement of Debt" in his The Savage's Romance, Slatin argues that Moore abandoned syllabics in favor of free verse in order to pay "a debt of gratitude; it marks the limits of a period of central importance in Moore's career, a period of significant experimentation; and it demonstrates the particular form of that experiment" (99).

than the mere “fiddle” of her syllabics, for she introduces abstractions like “unknowable” and “enigmas” that maintain only a slight connection to the more concrete images of the bat, wolf, etc. On the whole, it lacks the development that the five stanza versions possess. This is perhaps why it received little praise, and why Moore abandoned this version altogether.⁸⁹

In 1932 Moore revised “Poetry” for The New Poetry, edited by Harriet Monroe. The date and the editor are significant in that Monroe’s editorship may have prompted Moore’s revisions.⁹⁰ Monroe as well as Louis Zukofsky, who would publish this version of “Poetry” in his A Test of Poetry in 1948, brought out the Objectivist issue of Poetry magazine in 1931.⁹¹ It seems that this issue struck Moore and gave her some hope for the magazine and poetry in general. Having been asked to submit a poem for The New Poetry and later for A Test of Poetry, Moore seems to have been affected by the Objectivist issue of Poetry as evinced in her revision of “Poetry.” This version, which was reprinted five times, displays a new direction for the poem:

Poetry
I too, dislike it; there are things
that are important beyond all this fiddle. Reading it,
however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in it, after all, a place for the genuine:
hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that
can rise if it must.

⁸⁹ It is important to note that this is the last syllabic poem Moore would re-write in free verse. Several critics argue that after serving as editor of the Dial, Moore decided to stay true to her convictions, which meant that she would continue to write her poem in syllabics.

⁹⁰ As the long time editor of Poetry, Harriet Monroe had published a few of Moore’s early poems, but she had proved to be a difficult critic and editor. One significant occurrence in Monroe’s relationship with Moore was Monroe “A Marianne Moore Symposium.” This was Monroe’s review of Observations, and in it she questions whether or not Moore is writing poetry and takes up a great deal of space with negative reviews of Moore’s work.

⁹¹ In “Brooklyn from Clinton Hill,” Moore exhibits her admiration for Zukofsky’s book: “Louis Zukofsky’s anthology, A Test for Poetry, exhilarated me when it came out. . . . Mr. Zukofsky expertly presents poetry, composition, and American literature” (Reader 185).

the bat holding on upside down,
 an elephant pushing, a tireless wolf under a tree,
 the immovable critic twitching his skin
 like a horse that feels a fly, the base-ball fan, the statistician – nor is it
 valid to discriminate against business documents,
 school-books,

 trade reports – these phenomena
 are important; but dragged into conscious oddity by
 half poets, the result is not poetry,
 This we know. In a liking for the raw material in all its rawness,
 and for that which is genuine, there is liking for poetry.⁹²

Moore returns to her syllabics, but she now uses three stanzas instead of five. The first stanza reverts to the original presentation with one exception; Moore excludes the provision: “these things are important not because a / high sounding interpretation can be put upon them / but because they are useful.” Usefulness as a criteria is absent from this version even though she maintains the examples that originally illustrated useful behavior as well as useful material for poetry. She also omits most of the second stanza, which discusses the negative effect of those things that “become so derivative as to / become unintelligible.” She does, however, admonish those who would “discriminate against business documents, / school books, / trade reports” (qtd. in Honigsblum 209).⁹³ In fact, she expands her earlier list of suitable sources to include “trade reports” in which she had found valuable material. This addition also places a certain distance from her source: Tolstoy. As in earlier versions, she suggests that “these phenomena are important,” and she acknowledges that there are some exceptions: “but when dragged into conscious oddity by / half poets, the result is not poetry, This we know” (209). This line is only slightly altered from the five stanza versions, but this alterations speak to Moore’s awareness of

⁹² Bonnie Honigsblum presents a varioum edition of “Poetry” as an appendix to her article “Marianne Moore’s Revisions of ‘Poetry.’”

⁹³ Honigsblum’s essay “Marianne Moore’s Revisions of ‘Poetry’” provides the hard-to-come-by version found in The New Poetry and A Test of Poetry. Thus, all my references to this version are based on Honigsblum’s work.

Monroe's and Zukofsky's Objectivist agendas. The emphasis she places on the possibility of taking what is "important" and, moreover, what is "genuine" or sincere and dragging it into "conscious oddity" illustrates her familiarity and admiration of the Objectivists, for in Poetry Zukofsky proclaimed the need for sincerity. Furthermore, considering the fact that Moore revised "Poetry" for Monroe and Zukofsky and later reverted to earlier versions, her line "This we know" becomes significant in that it seems to speak to a likeminded, Objectivist audience. The revision of the final lines performs a similar function: "In a liking for the raw material in all / its rawness, / and for that which is genuine, there is liking for poetry." Instead of demanding "the raw material of poetry / in all its rawness and / that which is on the other hand / genuine," the predilection for this type of poetry is emphasized. It is assumed that the audience is "interested" in poetry, so the problem or the need for the definition in this presentation is less important. The focus then becomes one of illustrating the necessity of enjoying the object of the poem. Once again, Moore's revisions display her keen awareness of her audience. Of the presentations of "Poetry," all of them, perhaps with the exception of the Observations 1925 version, would have suited Monroe and Zukofsky as well as their audiences, but the alterations and omissions to "Poetry" recast what had become familiar and place it in the light of the Objectivist audience. Moore's awareness of her audience in her revision is significant even though here she seems intent on appealing to them rather than befuddling them.

While both the 1925 Observations version and the 1932 version omit much of earlier and popular five stanza versions, their omissions only hint at Moore's final revision of "Poetry" for Complete Poems in 1967, which would reduce the poem to a single stanza of three lines:

Poetry

I, too, dislike it.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.

This final revision or, rather, reduction did not follow on the heels of the radical revisions of 1925 and 1932. In fact, only three years after the publication of the three stanza version, Moore chose to send Eliot the Observations 1924 version for Selected Poems. Evidence suggests that Moore did not give Eliot the option of choosing from among the versions. Eliot's Selected Poems would engender a larger and more diverse audience, so perhaps Moore's selection was conscious of this broader audience. This argument is strengthened when one considers that Moore allowed the three stanza version to be published in Zukofsky's A Test of Poetry in 1948 and again in 1952. This becomes especially interesting considering that Moore had revised the five stanza version yet again for her Collected Poems (1951). The variants when compared to Observations (1924) or Others are fairly minor. Most of the variants are line breaks or slight changes in punctuation. Of these, the most significant is Moore's return of the quotation marks to her famous "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." In the final 1967 Complete Poems version, she eliminates the gardens and toads, real and imaginary, as well as the other "important" "phenomena."

It is the final three-line revision of "Poetry" that has received the greatest amount of critical attention. In spite of the quantity of criticism, most critics concur in their negative views of the revision. Some regard it as a fragment or even a sort of modernist parlor trick, especially in light of the cryptic epigraph, "Omissions are not accidents."⁹⁴ Indeed, Moore's final revision was no accident nor was it something that Moore did without consideration. In an interview with Grace Schulman, Moore says that she felt that all but the three lines she retained felt like "padding" (160). Even though she thought that the rest of the poem was unnecessary, she agreed

⁹⁴ After Moore delivered her manuscript to Penguin, the editor was shocked to discover the reduced "Poetry." Moore responded, "Omissions are not accidents," and the editor decided to use it as an epigraph for the collection.

to put a longer version in her “Notes.”⁹⁵ Of this compromise with her editor, Moore said that the inclusion would save “the serious reader from looking up these things as they were” (161). The serious reader now has the opportunity to read another version of “Poetry,” but the 1967 edition of Complete Poems does not give the reader any indication of the other versions. After all, “Poetry” was published some twenty-seven times, and she offers only one of the eleven versions to the “serious reader.” In 1981, however, Penguin gave the “serious reader” an indication that other versions existed by including the phrase “longer version” just above the 1951 Collected Poems version. Both the revision and its note illustrate, yet again, how Moore piques her audience’s curiosity through her revisions, which are like the “right good salvo of barks” she requests in “Picking and Choosing.” Another interpretation of Moore’s comment to Schulman is that she is in some way hiding the previous versions from even the most “serious reader.” But, how can this be when one considers that she did include this “longer version”? In her notes, this version stands along side sources and subverted as a note becomes less poem and more reference. Honigsblum writes that by “giving the note an archival function, she allowed it to become a cue to her readers, telling them how to react to her latest venture into unconventionality” (201). Honigsblum does not explain what reaction the audience should have, but the relegation of the longer version to the notes may force the audience to question the authority and stability of “Poetry” and poetry. Gregory suggests that the subverted longer version serves as “guarantor, with an authority based on priority” lending credibility to the newer, shorter “Poetry”; however, the “exiled poem” also “creates a sense of alienation for the reader,” which in turn lends a sense of unfamiliarity that “allows for (though it does not ensure) the prerequisite genuineness” (158). Thus, Moore’s revisions are her attempts to preserve the

⁹⁵ The “longer version” Moore chose to include in her notes the 1951 Collected Poems version. She also includes all the notes that accompanied the Observations (1924) version so that they became notes on a note.

genuineness of the poem because to Moore for something to be genuine it must remain in flux. If the poem, through its revisions, can make itself unfamiliar to its audience, then it can be genuine or, at least, there is “a place for the genuine” in poetry.

This final version of “Poetry” does not “present / for inspection, ‘imaginary gardens with real toads in them.’” However, prior to 1967 and this final revision of “Poetry,” this was the goal of her poetry. In fact, after serving as editor for the Dial, Moore’s poetry no longer discusses her aesthetics in verse-essays but attempts instead to convey her now formed aesthetic. Part of this aesthetic includes her desire to avoid absolutes and to unsettle the understanding of her audience. For this project, “Poetry” serves as a transition between Moore’s early and post-Dial works.

CHAPTER THREE: MOORE'S "UNEASY NEW PROBLEM"

During the five year interval between the publication of The Pangolin and What Are Years, Moore's poetics shifted. My argument is that the revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity" embody the shift that occurred in Moore's work after 1940. In examining the revisions, I will also illustrate the simplification of "The Old Dominion" as Moore revised it for What Are Years. This chapter examines Marianne Moore's revisions of "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity." In 1936, these two poems were published in The Pangolin and Other Verse as part of "The Old Dominion," a sequence of four poems.⁹⁶

After a hiatus of seven years, from 1925 to 1932, Marianne Moore composed what is considered to be her best work.⁹⁷ With the publication of "Part of A Novel, Part of A Poem, Part of A Play" in 1932, Moore began publishing longer, more elaborated syllabic verse similar to the verse that characterized her poetry in the 1910s.⁹⁸ This new body of work, unlike her longer

⁹⁶ From this point forward, I will refer to The Pangolin and Other Verse as simply The Pangolin.

⁹⁷ Charles Molesworth declares that The Pangolin and Other Verse, in which the "Old Dominion" appears, is Moore's "masterpiece" (95). He makes this claim in light of the poems' originality as well as their "complex and engaged dialogue with a cultural and historical past" (96). According to Molesworth, these qualities earn the poems the "modernist pedigree" that makes them equivalent to "The Waste Land" and "The Cantos." John Slatin concurs: "my own conviction is that Moore's work begins to decline in 1940 The decline is evident in the radically simplified style of poems like "Rigorists" and "What Are Years" and "Light is Speech" (all 1940 or 1941) . . ." (13). Heather C. White proposes that the uniqueness and brilliance of Moore's work of the 1930s, especially the new poems of The Pangolin and Other Verse, is due in large part to Moore's artistic confidence and her poetic freedom ("Preface" xii). Laurence Stapleton remarks that Moore's new poems of Selected Poems confer "a new life on the poet's own power" and are her best. Such statements usually hinge on a common point; the 1930s poems come from a poet who is self-assured and are, therefore, less constrained than Moore's early poems.

⁹⁸ In the 1910s, Moore wrote longish poems with complex syllabics. "Black Earth," "Roses Only," and "Peter" exemplify this era in Moore's work. Linda Leavell suggests that in "Critics and Connoisseurs" (1916) we have the first Moore stanza: "a typographical and syllabic pattern consisting of rhymed and unrhymed lines . . . a syntax

poems composed in the 1910s, demonstrates the hand of an established and self-assured poet. Of Moore's 1930s poetry, Donald Hall writes that "[w]hat we have, finally, is imagination itself, not talk about the imagination" (92). Instead of verse-essays that discuss qualities of the imagination, the 1930s poems show Moore turning inward and using her imagination as the medium for her poetry. The greatness of these poems would have gone unnoticed by the general public if not for the 1935 publication of Selected Poems, which secured Moore's reputation.⁹⁹

The majority of Selected Poems, edited by T.S. Eliot, consisted of previously published work. In fact, of the forty-nine poems "selected," only nine or eighteen percent, represent previously uncollected work. The others had been collected in Poems (1921) or Observations (1924) or both. Observations, Moore's second collection, essentially reprinted Poems with some additions and alterations. Composed between 1932 and 1934, the nine new poems of Selected Poems reveal a confident poet, which was evident to the critics who reviewed this work. Morton Zabel, for example, comments on Moore's advance in his review of Selected Poems. He writes,

[In Selected Poems] her special world reappears; but it is now far more extensive. This comes not merely by selecting from nature of a more formidable character – formidable in their complexity . . . All this suggests a greater complexity of attention of form which marks the one notable advance made by Selected Poems over Miss Moore's previous books. Her idea of the stanza was already

liberated from stanzaic form, which allows her to write longer poems and to write more straightforward naturally fluid prose" (72). Moore briefly turned to free verse and in the 1920s, Moore composed longer free verse poems, "Marriage" and "An Octopus," for example. I should note that Moore said that she composed her free verse poems in syllabics before converting them to free verse; it was her natural method of composition. The 1930s poems show that Moore had figured out how to sustain complex syllabics and write longer poems.

⁹⁹ Selected Poems affected Moore's reputation as far as the general public is concerned, but by 1932 Moore's reputation among critics and editors was such that she was encouraged to publish, and they published what she gave them. However, Eliot's offer to assist Moore in getting a new book together was not her sole option at the time. Robert Frost, among others, had made similar proposals. Thus, Moore's stint as editor of The Dial earned her the respect of her peers, but Selected Poems decidedly determined her place among them. Heather Cass White cites the significance of this fact: "the struggles of her years of isolation and rejection during the teens, and reputation – building in the twenties, had receded and left her poised to demonstrate her claim to consideration as one of her day's significant and original artists" (A-Quiver xv). This critical success allowed Moore a degree of poetic freedom that would lead to the achievements of her 1930s poems.

established there, but it had not reached such massive effects of verbal interplay and structure as in seven of the new poems. Along with this there has developed a greater luxuriance of detail, austere annotation having given way to a freer imaginative fascination. (127)¹⁰⁰

Zabel's enthusiastic praise celebrates Moore's advances in and employment of complexity, detail, verbal interplay, and form. All of the qualities denote the superiority of Moore's 1930s poetry. Zabel's recognition of Moore's "freer imaginative fascination" is perhaps the most significant attribute of the 1930s poems, making its loss in the 1940s more pronounced.

During and after the publication of Selected Poems, Moore continued to compose long, complex syllabics, publishing four new poems in 1935.¹⁰¹ Among these were three poems, "Virginia Britannia," "Bird Witted," and "Half Deity," that would make up three-quarters of the sequence "The Old Dominion."¹⁰² "The Old Dominion" poems appeared only once as a sequence in The Pangolin and Other Verse (1936). In all subsequent publications, Moore rearranges the sequence by removing its title and changing the original order. With the publication of What Are Years in 1941, Moore not only alters the order of the sequence but also significantly revises two of the poems: "Virginia Britannia" and "Half Deity."

¹⁰⁰ Zabel does not list the seven new poems that he is particularly impressed by. He does, however, compliment four of them: "The Frigate Pelican," "The Plumet Basilisk," "The Jerboa," and "The Buffalo."

¹⁰¹ Technically, "Old Tiger" was the first new poem Moore published after her seven years silence, but this poem was originally written and sent to Ezra Pound in 1918. Thus, I am not counting it as a "new" poem. "Part of A Novel, Part of A Poem, Part of A Play" consisting of three poems, "The Steeple-Jack," "The Student," and "The Hero" was published in Poetry in 1932. "No Swan So Fine" was published Poetry's October issue of the same year; "The Jerboa" was also published in the October-December issue of Hound & Horn. In the following year Moore published "Camellia Sabina" in Pound's Active Anthology and "The Plumet Basilisk" in Hound & Horn. In 1933, "The Frigate Pelican" appeared in Criterion, and "The Buffalo" and "Nine Nectarines" were published in Poetry under the collective title, "Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish." "Half Deity," "Smooth Gnarled Crepe Myrtle!," and "Virginia Britannia," all of which would be included in "The Old Dominion," were published in 1935; they appeared in three different journals, Direction, New English Weekly, and Life and Letters Today, respectively. "Pigeons" was also published in 1935 in Poetry's November issue. 1936 saw the publication of four new poems: "Bird-Witted," "Walking-Sticks and Paperweights and Watermarks," "See in the Midst of Fair Leaves," and "The Pangolin."

¹⁰² The title of "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" was originally "Smooth Gnarled Crepe Myrtle!". George Plank, the illustrator of The Pangolin and Other Verse, politely notified Moore that when he was in the Natural History Museum he "discovered that it is CRAPE myrtle, not crepe. . ." and apologized for "giving these shocks. . ." (qtd. in A-Quiver xxvi).

The revisions of these poems illustrate the shift that occurred in Moore's poetry after the 1936 publication of The Pangolin. The five poems of The Pangolin demonstrate a poetic confidence and depth that would not return to Moore's poetry.¹⁰³ Such a shift is evident in the simplified style and moralizing tenor of Moore's poems composed in 1940 and after. The complexities that characterize Moore's work up until 1940 and that reached an artistic zenith in 1936 are no longer evident in poems such as "What Are Years?," "Rigorists," and "Light Is Speech," all of which appeared in What Are Years. Compression is another characteristic of the 1940s poems, which again marks an abrupt shift. As Margaret Holley notes, none of the 1940s poems run over eighty lines and average thirty-eight lines; whereas, the 1930's poems' average length is seventy-six lines, twice that of the 1940s poems (113). Critics account for these changes by pointing to the declining health of Moore's mother and the building tensions that would eventually lead to the Second World War. While these dramatic events certainly affected Moore's poetry, something else had changed between 1936 and 1941: Moore's audience.

Selected Poems's famous editor and its critical acclaim placed Moore in the position of demanding a broader audience of non-poet critics.¹⁰⁴ This new audience may not have read Selected Poems; in fact, it is likely that they did not. When What Are Years was published in 1941, Macmillan had remaindered the unsold copies of Selected Poems for thirty cents a piece.¹⁰⁵ In spite of weak sales, the publicity Selected Poems received broadened Moore's audience. Because of Eliot's involvement and his well-constructed "Introduction," Selected

¹⁰³ Both Molesworth and White praise these aspects of The Pangolin's poems and identify the marked difference of Moore's 1940s poems.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Kappel's "Presenting Miss Moore, Modernist" studies the lasting effects of Eliot's editorial decisions and introduction on Moore's reputation and all subsequent Moore criticism.

¹⁰⁵ Thirty cents in 1940 is about four and half dollars in today's currency. Moore's Selected Poems was remaindered for about sixteen percent of its cover price of two dollars. Stapleton recounts Moore's discovery of Macmillan's decision. See Chapter Five of The Poet's Advance.

Poems was reviewed by numerous newspapers and journals, increasing the general public's awareness of Moore and her poetry.¹⁰⁶ Even though Macmillan remaindered Selected Poems, they recognized Moore's preeminence and in 1940 arranged to publish What Are Years and Nevertheless although both were shorter than the collections they usually published.¹⁰⁷ Harold Latham of Macmillan agreed to the contract because, as he wrote, "It promises to be a smaller book than we usually do, but it will certainly be a distinguished addition – no matter what the size – to our list (qtd. in Stapleton 112). Clearly, Moore could now command the attention of publishers, and when Macmillan offered to publish What Are Years, she took the opportunity to engage a broader audience. In doing so, Moore considered her role as a poet in the climate of war.

By early 1941, America was on the verge of declaring war. Germany had invaded Paris and had begun its London air raids. Moore, having read the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, felt a responsibility to construct works that offer a "meaningful interpretation of individual and human history while acknowledging the limitations of all human metanarratives" (Leader 317).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ By 1970, Moore achieved legendary status. Ford Motor Company asked Moore to suggest name for their new model. The New Yorker even published the correspondence between Moore and Ford. In 1968 she opened the baseball season at Yankee Stadium, and in 1969, Harvard awarded her an honorary degree. She was an easily recognizable figure in her black tricorn hat and black cape. I mention these instances of Moore's fame to highlight the profound change that occurred in her career, which began with the recognition she received after the publication of Selected Poems.

¹⁰⁷ Selected Poems had been published by Macmillan in the U.S. and by Faber and Faber in the U.K. While in 1940 Macmillan could agree to publish these short books, Faber and Faber could not publish such small books due to wartime controls. Again, this shows how even the production of What Are Years was affected by the war. Macmillan may have agreed to publish these books after having turned down her novel, The Way We Live Now, in 1940. What Are Years had only fifteen poems; nine of these were written since The Pangolin. Nevertheless contained only six poems all of which were written after the publication of What Are Years. While neither of these books is as brief as The Pangolin, The Pangolin was a lavish limited edition.

¹⁰⁸ Jennifer Leader's 2005 study of Moore's connection to Niebuhr examines several poems from What Are Years, including "What Are Years?", "Rigorists," and "Light is Speech." Her thesis is compelling: "[t]he questions [Moore] was tackling aesthetically during a poetic career that spanned two world wars were also being tackled by Niebuhr in terms of philosophy, pragmatic politics and national justice movements; namely, how to strike a balance between the legitimate claims of a free self and the responsibility to the community or nation at large; how to assert a just and loving truth while at the same time avoiding extremes of determinism, totalitarianism, repression, and fanaticism . . ." (317).

Striking this balance became, for Moore, a struggle that is evident both in the poems she composed during this period and in some of the poems she revised or omitted. Prior to her study of Niebuhr, which either coincided with or was a result of the Second World War, Moore had achieved poetic freedom; her poems in The Pangolin attest to this freedom, for they were composed by a confident, uninhibited poet writing for her peers, other poet critics, who were a sympathetic and encouraging audience.¹⁰⁹ What Are Years, however, offered Moore a larger audience, and Moore was now writing for an audience who may not be willing to put in the necessary effort her poems require.¹¹⁰ She also felt responsible for producing poems that spoke to the concerns of that time, namely the Second World War.

As early as 1935, Moore felt compelled to speak out. This compulsion is exemplified in a June 22, 1935 letter to William Carlos Williams. The letter responds to recent news and to Williams's poem "Item": "Every time I see a newspaper that mentions Hitler or Abyssinia I wonder why I do not walk up and down the street like a sandwich-man wearing as broadside your "Item," for good through certain other things are this says it all" (*Letters* 345).¹¹¹ What Are Years became, in a sense, Moore's sandwich-board for her audience even though the poems in What Are Years are less explicit than Williams's "Item." I am not suggesting that in 1941 Moore felt a sudden compulsion to write about social issues because that is simply not the case. In her long poems composed between 1932 and 1936, we see Moore addressing issues such as history

¹⁰⁹ The Pangolin was a limited edition, and I will discuss this in some detail later in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ The new poems of What Are Years support this theory. In them, Moore begins to engage in an overt moralizing, abandoning the complexities which has defined her poetry.

¹¹¹ "Item" was published in Williams's An Early Martyr in 1935. The poem is most certainly a war poem that examines how the common person, in this case a woman, is shoved by men with guns, who represent authority, and is left "sprawling – / a note / at the foot of the page" (Collected 379). Williams, like Moore, was attempting to reconcile the political demands of the 1930s with the descriptive poetry that he was accustomed to writing. Moore's comment to Williams indicates that she felt his "Item" was explicit in comment on the sorrows of war. However, Moore was not anti-war. She recognized that military action was required in order to stop the Nazis' atrocities and to secure democracy.

and social justice from a poet's perspective; however, these poems are not overt in their treatment of these issues. They depend upon Moore's characteristic complexity and her audience's willingness to confront that complexity. In "What Are Years?," published in the Kenyon Review in 1940, we see that Moore continues her preoccupation with the same themes, but with a changed style. Her "rigorous complexity," as Slatin dubbed it, is removed in favor of a heavy-handed treatment of these themes (254). Some years later, in "Humility, Concentration, and Gusto," Moore writes, "In times like these we are tempted to disregard anything that has not a direct bearing on freedom; or should I say, an obvious bearing, for what is more persuasive than poetry . . . it works obliquely and delicately" (Predilections 12). On the one hand, she wanted her poems to deal directly with the issues of war. On the other hand, she still wanted to compose poems that worked "obliquely" so as to persuade the audience. Striking this balance was made all the more difficult because of Moore's perception of her audience and of her role as a poet had changed. These changes and Moore's struggle to cope with them account for the transformation that occurs in Moore's poetry between The Pangolin in 1936 and What Are Years in 1941. John Slatin rightly proposes that Moore's poems change because her audience changes:

For she is no longer writing for an audience of poets and critics, of people like Eliot and Williams and Pound and Stevens, who can be counted on to work at grasping what she is doing; she is addressing herself to a much larger public composed – as the fate of Selected Poems attests – of readers whom she cannot trust to understand her, readers on whom she cannot count at all unless what she writes has an "obvious bearing" on the matter at hand. (256)¹¹²

¹¹² In the "Afterward" of The Savage's Romance, John Slatin touches on the ways in which Moore's poetry changed after The Pangolin and Other Verse. This particular passage states succinctly the two impetuses for this change: the war and her audience. Slatin's "Afterward" opens the door for investigation into the poems of What Are Years. Again, the "Old Dominion" poems that are revised and rearranged in What Are Years offer insight into this change, which is what I am studying here.

The “obvious bearing” Slatin refers to is the war. The new poems presented in What Are Years attest to Slatin’s assertion, but the revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity” serve as better examples of Moore’s attempt to address a new audience. Because these poems were composed in the 1930s and revised in the 1940s, they illustrate the simplification of Moore’s verse as well as her need to observe the moral issues the war had brought to her attention.

Before attending to the revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity,” I need to establish the far-reaching effects of Selected Poems, especially Eliot’s “Introduction,” had on Moore’s poetic production in the 1930s and 1940s.

Upon receiving her copy of Selected Poems, Marianne Moore wrote to thank T.S. Eliot for his generous introduction to her poems, which he edited and published:

What could you think I am, if I were to appropriate easily the comments you are granting my book? I want to, badly enough. One could scarcely be human and not wish your “Introduction” might have the effect of a tidal wave, on the public, that it has had on me. The energy of thought that you bring to bear in behalf of this venture is the kind one summons in a case of fire or flood, and is a generosity the most self-ministering could not hope to pray for. And you do it with such sobriety and fine dignity. (*Letters* 529)¹¹³

Moore, who had not published a book since Observations in 1924 and who had not published a poem between 1925 and 1932, felt that Eliot’s “Introduction” had restored her and hoped that it would have the same effect on the public.¹¹⁴ She indulges in a bit of hyperbole, writing that the introduction’s fervor is analogous to that which is used in emergencies such as fires and floods. Moore’s characterization of her dire situation is hardly accurate. After all, Moore had been editor of the influential Dial magazine for four years, and after seven years of not publishing any

¹¹³ The letter is dated 23 October 1934.

¹¹⁴ Between 1925 and 1932, Moore did not publish any of her poems in spite of invitations from Hound & Horn and Poetry. This seven year period of poetic silence is due in large part to Moore’s duties as editor of The Dial. She began her editorship in 1926 and ended it when The Dial ceased in 1932.

new poetry, Moore published five new poems in 1932. Of these, “Part of A Poem, Part of A Play, and Part of A Novel” won her Poetry’s Helen Haire Levinson Prize as well as general acclaim. However, Moore clearly recognized the potential effects of Eliot’s endorsement. Of these potential effects, the most significant is Eliot’s ability to persuade the public as to the value of Moore’s poetry.

Moore compliments Eliot on his ability to combat negative criticism before such criticism can be given: “I cannot speak fitly – in fact at all – of the coolness with which you spike the guns of the critic before he attacks” (Letters 330). Eliot’s preemptive review did indeed disarm the critics. In determining whether or not Moore’s poetry possess greatness, Eliot suggests a test: “One of the tests – though it be a negative test – of anything really new and genuine, seems to be its capacity for exciting aversion among ‘lovers of poetry’” (“Introduction” viii). Eliot, thereby, compliments Moore’s poetry, which had received bad reviews for both Poems and Observations. At the same time, he belittles the “lovers of poetry” who prefer “stale goods in new packages” by cheapening and undermining any negative reviews they may offer Selected Poems. Eliot’s barbed comments certainly helped Moore’s case with the public because his endorsement garnered attention from critics, which contributed to an increased awareness of her work.

Given Eliot’s pre-eminence as both a poet and a critic, his assessments of Moore’s work could not be ignored. Eliot’s “Introduction,” for example, triggered a review from the famous critic F. R. Leavis. Leavis was not unfamiliar with Moore’s poetry; he tried Moore’s Observations a decade earlier and had not cut half the pages before quitting it. Eliot’s “Introduction” seems to have provoked Leavis to now read and comment on Moore’s work. Given the provocation for his review, it is perhaps no surprise that Leavis’s review of Selected

Poems does not so much review Moore's poetry as it reviews Eliot's assessment of Moore's poetry. Leavis confesses as much in his conclusion:

I ought, perhaps, in differing with so distinguished a critic, to have examined passages of Miss Moore's verse in detail. But such an examination would have taken more room than can be spared, and those readers most likely to have commented on this deficiency will, for the most part, in any case insist on reading so authoritatively sponsored a book for themselves. I hope to be assured and convinced that I have been obtuse. (*Criticism* 112)

Exasperated, Leavis perceives that his review lacks the persuasive powers of Eliot's "Introduction" and that Eliot's sponsorship is enough to induce most readers to try Moore's work for themselves. Leavis's review appeared in his Scrutiny in June of 1935. Scrutiny's audience consisted of academics who were short on time but wanted to keep abreast of the latest literature, and it proved to be one of the most influential journals of its time (Townsend 400). However influential the journal or Leavis was, Eliot's "Introduction," which was calculated to ensure that the public consider or reconsider the value of Moore's work, proved to have more influence on Moore's reputation. In fact, Leavis' calculation or, rather, miscalculation of Moore's work became an embarrassment to Leavis and to Scrutiny. Hugh Kenner, in his article "The Making of the Modernist Canon," writes that Leavis failed to recognize that language need not be vested in measure when it is brought into a poem. As an example of Leavis's failure, Kenner points to Leavis' review of Selected Poems: "Of [Moore], despite T.S. Eliot's firm endorsement, Leavis could make nothing: a defeat of a great critic [Leavis] so humiliating it has vanished from the Index to the reprinted Scrutiny" (52). Was this omission an accident? Considering the authority accorded to Eliot's "Introduction," one understands Leavis's desire to hide his review.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ I have been unable to discover any other information about this omission, but it is a striking omission when one considers Leavis's relationship with Eliot and is, perhaps, worth consideration in a future study.

F.R. Leavis's attempt to dissuade readers failed in part because Eliot's comments were compelling in the extreme. They contained resonate phrases that summarized both the greatness and newness of Moore's poetry. Some critics have suggested that Eliot's "Introduction" was so compelling and authoritative that it hampered Moore scholarship. Elizabeth Gregory writes that Eliot's "Introduction" became "dogma" and was Eliot's "dicta" to subsequent critics. Indeed, there is much evidence to support Gregory's forceful comments, for much of Moore criticism relies on Eliot's "Introduction." Moore, herself, commented on this effect writing, ". . . I am profoundly grateful for – the armor afforded me by your introduction to my book. Reviewers bow to the defense . . . the writers whose opinion one truly values seem minded to conform and say 'this is what he says'" (Letters 347).¹¹⁶ Eliot's "Introduction" was so effective that the dust jacket for What Are Years uses a quotation from it to endorse Moore's new work.¹¹⁷

Throughout his "Introduction," Eliot assesses Moore's poetry, making proclamations of her greatness. The most resonate of these is Eliot's final "conviction": "Miss Moore's poems form part of the small body of durable poetry written in our time; of that small body of writings, among what passes for poetry, in which an original sensibility and alert intelligence and deep feeling have been engaged in maintaining the life of English language" (xiv). Eliot's declaration did have "the effect of a tidal wave" on the public, for Selected Letters cemented Moore's preeminence in American poetry.¹¹⁸ His "Introduction" certainly affected the reception of

¹¹⁶ This excerpt from Moore's post script in a letter to T.S. Eliot dated June 27, 1935.

¹¹⁷ I will discuss the details of What Are Years's physical appearance as it relates to the marketing of this book later in the chapter. However, in order to illustrate the effects of Eliot's words, it is important to see who Macmillan used Eliot's comments for a dust jacket blurb: "As T.S. Eliot said of her previous book, some of the poems 'have a very wide spread of association. . . Many . . . are in exact and sometimes complicated formal patterns, and move with the elegance of a minuet. . . . Of the light rhyme Miss Moore is the greatest living master.'"

¹¹⁸ With the publication of Selected Poems, Moore received numerous awards honoring her preeminence. More importantly, Eliot's "Introduction" caused the book to be reviewed in major mainstream magazines and newspapers thus increasing the public's awareness of Moore.

Selected Poems, but his arrangement of the poems also affected the way in which her oeuvre was perceived in 1935 and is still perceived. As Andrew Kappel has argued, Eliot's ordering of the poems presents Moore to her readers as writer of "longish, predominately descriptive poems in elaborate and strictly controlled syllabic stanzas" in that the book opens with Moore's post-Dial "animiles" and concludes with her shorter syllabic verse (140).¹¹⁹ Eliot's ordering appealed to Moore's modernist peers, the core audience of Selected Poems. Moore saw the brilliance of Eliot's arrangement, writing to him, "Your congregation of animiles at the front is wiley in the extreme" (qtd. in Kappel 141). Moore was keenly aware of Eliot's strategy and the effect it would have on her audience and was clearly pleased with the table of contents.¹²⁰ In fact, Moore would consult Eliot again as to the arrangement of The Pangolin and would adopt his methods in constructing What Are Years. While Moore had a history of seeking Eliot's advice, in this case, she recognized how in settling the order of the contents Eliot had marketed her poems.

When Moore began working on The Pangolin for Brendin publishing Company, Bryher's publishing house, she sought Eliot's advice as to the order.¹²¹ Eliot agreed to help, but he merely confirmed Moore's order: "The Pangolin," "Bird-Witted," "Pigeons," and "Half Deity." He did suggest that Moore use The Pangolin as the book's title (A-Quiver xviii).¹²² However, The Pangolin developed into something more than a collection of animiles like those in Selected

¹¹⁹ "Animiles" is Moore's term for her longer poems composed in the 1930s.

¹²⁰ The tables of content of both Collected Poems and Complete Poems adopt Eliot's order for Selected Poems. In fact both of these collections are organized around Moore's books and simply reproduce the order of those books. Poems and Observations, however, are subverted, and Selected Poems is listed as Moore's earliest collection.

¹²¹ Bryher is the pen name of Winifred Ellerman who was the only child and heir of a shipping magnet considered to be the wealthiest man in England. Bryher was the famous patron and lover of H.D.

¹²² White's "Introduction" to A – Quiver with Significance relates much of the correspondence between Moore and Eliot as to The Pangolin's table of contents. Also, White discusses the influence that Pound had on "The Old Dominion." Apparently in the course of their correspondence, Pound had suggested the Moore had a duty to bring along the younger generation of poets. Thus, her focus on American history speaks to Pound's influence. Charles Molesworth's "Moore's Masterpiece: The Pangolin's Alternating Blaze" also discusses Eliot's influence as well as Stein's.

Poems, for as Moore began work on “Jamestown,” which eventually came to be called “Virginia Britannia,” the tenor of the book changed; it became more ambitious. With the creation of “Jamestown,” Moore now envisioned a sequence of three poems: “Jamestown” followed by “Bird-Witted” and “Half Deity.” “Pigeons” and “The Pangolin” were still included but were separate from “The Old Dominion.” Moore’s conception of the book had changed from a collection of “animiles” to a statement about America’s history and the poet’s role in that history. Given this conceptual shift, it is not surprising that Moore decided to omit “Pigeons” and add “Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle” to “The Old Dominion.” The final order, then, is as follows:

The Old Dominion
Virginia Britannia
Bird-Witted
Half Deity
Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle
The Pangolin

Moore’s deft construction of The Pangolin creates a mature collection of what is arguably her most significant work. However, The Pangolin, being a limited edition, was not intended for a broad audience, so Moore had the luxury of producing a book for her peers, and the fine construction of the book, especially as compared to What Are Years emphasizes the freedom Moore felt in publishing these poems for an audience who understood that “complexity is not a crime.”

Heather Cass White’s recent work A-Quiver with Significance provides not only a facsimile edition of The Pangolin and Other Verse but also an account of the production and decoration of this unique and important book. Such an account has made it possible to compare Moore’s choices in the production of The Pangolin to her choices for What Are Years, providing insight into the sea-change that occurred in her poetry between these two books. The Pangolin, the production of which Bryher left up to Moore, was a luxurious book. From the illustrations

by George Plank to the choice of materials, the book displayed the significance of the poetry it contained. The cost of the book, fifteen dollars, was prohibitive to the general public, but the book was not intended for general consumption.¹²³ Only 120 copies were printed by the famous Curwen Press, which had printed limited editions of T.S. Eliot's Journey of the Magi (1927) and D.H. Lawrence's Love Among the Haystacks and Other Pieces (1930).¹²⁴ and as George Bornstein writes that with The Pangolin's "elaborate geometric cover design, fine printing, wide margins, and generous use of white space, the entire volume gestured toward an alternate economic order to the one that had led to the Depression itself" (113). While Moore enjoyed the beauty of the book, she does seem a bit embarrassed by the expense of it. Moore absolves herself of any sense of guilt by accepting The Pangolin as Bryher's "gift" to her.¹²⁵ In Moore's estimation, the book was "too valuable to sell, or keep from sale" (qtd in A-Quiver xxiii). In spite of any seeming reluctance on Moore's part, her correspondence with Bryher clearly shows the delight she took in constructing such a fine edition: "Your presentment of The Pangolin and [H.D.'s] The Hedgehog make me feel as if I were watching a couple of humming-birds, I am so

¹²³ In today's currency \$15 dollars equals about \$200. Since The Pangolin was published in the midst of The Great Depression, it was hardly destined to become a best-seller nor was it intended to be one. Moore, in fact, was shocked by the price, writing to Bryher, "Fifteen dollars appalls [sic.] me . . ." (Letters 351). Also, as a limited edition it is a collector's book.

¹²⁴ See Curwen: Art and Print by Alan Powers for a history of the Curwen Press, which was hugely influential in terms of book design. While the Curwen Press was prestigious, it was not originally considered for the publication of The Pangolin. Darantiere Press in Dijon, France was to print the book. Darantiere printed the first edition of Joyce's Ulysses in 1922. Due to its connection with Ulysses, which had many obstacles in its printing, Darantiere became a sort of rogue printer. Rainey argues that its press became a way to avoid the public sphere altogether (154). H.D.'s The Usual Star, Nights, and Kora and Ka were all printed by Darantiere, so Bryher's and Brendin's relationship with Darantiere made it the likely press for The Pangolin. George Plank's involvement, as the illustrator, made Curwen Press the better choice for The Pangolin.

¹²⁵ See Moore's letter to Bryher dated August 27, 1934 in Selected Letters (328). This letter is Moore's first allusion to the book, but it also alludes to the other "gifts" Bryher gave to Moore. Specifically, Bryher gave Moore a sum of money that was thinly disguised as an inheritance from Perdita Schaffner's elderly relative that could only be claimed by a permanent residence of the United States. Moore's response to this gift displays her deep-felt gratitude for Bryher's assistance in what were financially difficult times for Moore and her mother.

unable to connect myself with it” (Letters 392).¹²⁶ After having little influence as to the construction of Observations and Selected Poems, Moore was overwhelmed by the quality of The Pangolin and rightly so.

Poems, Moore’s first book, was published by Bryher and H.D. without her direct knowledge. After receiving her copy of Poems, Moore wrote to Bryher that she felt like a Darwinian “pigeon born naked without any down whatever” (Letters 164). Both Pound and Eliot had offered Moore their assistance in bringing out her first book, and if she had allowed them to do so, she would have been better protected from her critics, a fact that Moore’s comment to Bryher substantiates. “Naked” as she was, Moore was indeed exposed to the negative criticism she feared. At this time, Moore had decided that she had yet to write anything “substantial,” so Moore’s reluctance to publish in 1921 was due to her conviction “that to publish now would not be to [her] literary advantage” (Letters 164). She compliments the book on its correctness, paper, type, title-label and the fact that it was, to her, “remarkably innocuous” but seems otherwise unimpressed and comments on the fact that she had already revised some of the poems. Three years later after pressure from a variety of people, Moore finally acquiesced to Scofield Thayer’s entreaties.¹²⁷ This time she was protected, in a sense, by the Dial Award, which she received on November 13, 1924 just before the December release of Observations.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ This letter to Bryher is dated June 10, 1938.

¹²⁷ Moore had been courted by McAlmon and his Contact Publishing Company for access to all of her poems to date so that Contact might publish them. Moore kindly refused the offer citing her satisfaction in publishing individual poems rather than a book. McAlmon enlisted Williams to help him in her quest to publish another book of Moore’s verse, but Moore refused all such entreaties. The reason for her refusal is debatable, and it seems that Moore had multiple reasons. Among them was her unwillingness to publish with Contact, for she did not trust McAlmon’s editorial decisions and did not care to be associated with the expatriate press. See Robin Schulze’s “Introduction” to Becoming Marianne Moore and Laurence Stapleton’s The Poet’s Advance for accounts of Moore’s dealings with both McAlmon and Thayer, especially Thayer’s marketing of Observations through the Dial Award.

¹²⁸ Moore received news of the Dial’s intent to honor her with the award in November, which prompted her to sign the contract for Observations. However, the public announcement was not made until January of 1925.

In an effort to market the book, both Thayer and Glenway Scott set about writing announcements/reviews of Moore's new book. In order to market Observations effectively, it had to be produced between September and December, which stressed Moore. Because it was hastily produced, the first edition of Observations contained numerous mistakes. In a letter to George Plank, Moore writes that the first edition was "disappointing in text and format" (Letters 216). Moore was determined to correct these defects in its second edition, but it seems that it was still not to her liking. To Monroe Wheeler, Moore commented that the second edition was "not properly reprinted perhaps but improved. I could not have Garamond type, or a different page size or an omitting of certain poems . . ." (Letters 218). Although Moore had not been totally satisfied with Poems or either edition of Observations, she left the details of Selected Poems to Eliot's expertise. She was, however, concerned when Eliot sent her a Faber and Faber proof of Pound's work, but Eliot reassured her that this was Faber's proof and did not represent the finished product. Ultimately, Moore liked "the choice of type *very* much" (Letters 330). Given her past experience, it is not surprising that Moore enjoyed having free reign over the production details of The Pangolin.

Aside from the luxuriousness of the physical text, The Pangolin, being a limited edition, marked an important milestone in Moore's career. In his Institutions of Modernism, Laurence Rainey discusses the role of the fine, limited edition book as the second step in the "tripartite publishing program" adopted by modernists (101).¹²⁹ This step was preceded by publication in a

¹²⁹ Institutions of Modernism addresses the role of publishing in modernism. In it Rainey argues that "modernism marks neither a straightforward resistance nor an outright capitulation to commodification but a momentary equivocation that incorporates elements both in a brief, necessarily unstable synthesis That equivocation, in turn, demands new strategies of authorial self-construction that can accommodate a rapidly changing configuration of cultural institutions" (3-4). Moore's Pangolin and What Are Years illustrates her ability to accommodate the two cultural institutions that these books represent: the elite and the public. Jerome McGann's Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism also discusses the production of modernists' texts. Focusing on the 1910s and 1920s and the Renaissance of Printing, McGann notes how this renaissance encouraged writers "to explore the expressive possibilities of language's necessary material conditions" (20). McGann's argument differs from Rainey's in that

literary journal and followed with a public or commercial edition. According to Rainey, the limited edition “established a kind of special productive insulated space from the harsh exigencies of the larger marketplace. It bypassed a broad public receptive to standardized products . . . and suspicious of novelty, and instead addressed a prosperous minority with a luxury good that emphasized innovation and was produced in small quantities” (101). Coming as it did during the Great Depression, The Pangolin was produced after the popularity of such limited editions had waned, removing the necessity or pressure to produce a limited edition. Such a lavish edition produced in the midst of the Depression may not have, at the time, been an investment piece for collector as was often the case with earlier limited editions. However, the prohibitive cost of The Pangolin certainly removed any need to placate the public’s taste, which gave Moore the freedom to compose the poems of The Pangolin.

The expense of a limited edition usually meant that a patron was involved in its production, and The Pangolin was indeed sponsored by Bryher whose generosity had also produced Poems. Patrons, through their subsidies and endowments, provided writers with a space that was “immune to the pressures of a market economy, partially removed from the constraints of an expansive and expanding mass culture” (Rainey 40). Thus, through the generosity of their patrons, authors gained the freedom to compose according to their own aesthetics and not the market’s. For Moore, Bryher’s patronage gave her the ease and freedom necessary for the composition of The Pangolin. Patronage, however, could also isolate the author from the public. Rainey writes of the risks that attended the modernist creation of limited editions. He suggests that the exclusion of the public could lead to a withdrawal from “genuine

McGann’s argument is based on the modernists’ desire for craft as opposed to mass production: “These presses [Cuala Press and Kelmscott], it is important to remember, were specifically founded as part of an effort to return to an earlier, craft-based method of book production – an effort to step aside from the processes and products of the age of mechanical reproduction” (5).

social exchange, a retreat into the complacency of the coterie and solipsistic reverie” (170). To support his claim, Rainey points to H.D. who, like Moore, enjoyed the patronage of Bryher but to a greater extent. As H.D.’s lover and patron, Bryher provided not only a medium for H.D.’s poetry but also an audience for her poetry, making H.D. a “coterie poet” whose poetry circulated among a “cénacle of friends and hangers-on in wealthy bohemia” (Rainey 148).¹³⁰ Rainey suggests that H.D.’s poetry was not so much the victim of social prejudice but of the isolating effects of patronage, which perhaps explains why her poetry was neglected until the 1980s. Most modernists did not enjoy such extreme patronage, but they did have to balance the benefits afforded by a patron with the need to connect with the general public. On this subject, Rainey writes,

Patronage could nurture literary modernism only to the threshold of its confrontation with a wider public; beyond that point, it would require critical approbation and some measure of commercial viability to ratify its status as a significant idiom. The modernists understood that. They were shrewd in turning the early mass media to account, adept at melding together workable niches into a sustainable submarket, skillful in shaping an institutional structure that, though extraordinarily fragile, enabled them to pursue their aims. (170)

Modernists may have used larger publishing venues to create a market outside of the elite readers who purchased limited editions, but as Rainey touches on here, this required the author to consider strategies of authorial construction so that he or she could address diverse and fragmented audiences. Unfortunately, in creating a book for the trade, Moore altered drastically her poetic style and voice to appeal to a new audience. When compared to The Pangolin, What Are Years illustrates Moore’s failure to maintain the same complexity and freedom her poems of The Pangolin possess. Before discussing her dismantling of “The Old Dominion” and her revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity,” I want to demonstrate the shift by an

¹³⁰ In addition to paying for the publication of H.D.’s work, Bryher also provided to her a lavish lifestyle. H.D. was able to travel Europe and even received therapy from Sigmund Freud.

examination of the material construction of What Are Years as compared to The Pangolin in order to emphasize how all aspects of What Are Years were constructed to appeal to a broader audience unfamiliar with Moore's poetry and, consequently, their complexities.

The most immediately obvious differences between The Pangolin and What Are Years are found in their physical presentations. What Are Years is not constructed of fine paper nor does it contain colored lithographs created by a famous illustrator. Its cover is not a splendid William Morris-like design of peacock-neck blues and blacks.¹³¹ There is in fact no color; the cover is black with large white lettering announcing the author and title.¹³² At the bottom of the cover, there is a two-inch boarder of white with the publisher's name, The Macmillan Company, printed in black. The boldness of What Are Years's cover stands in stark contrast to the understated elegance of The Pangolin's. However, the books were marketing two different audiences. The arts and crafts design of The Pangolin's cover appealed to the collectors who could afford to purchase it. The title and Moore's name do not overpower the cover, so clearly Plank wanted to emphasize the design. The cover of What Are Years, on the other hand, needed to emphasize both the title and author because it had to capture the consumer's, not the collector's or investor's, attention. The dust jacket's inside flap for What Are Years also markets the book and proves that the general public was, as yet, still unfamiliar with Moore's work. The publishers carefully constructed the dust jacket's blurb to introduce her work to a new, wider audience. The inside flap has the heading "What Are Years / by Marianne Moore / Author of 'Selected Poems,' etc." The blurb reads,

Some of the most individual poetry of recent years has come from the pen

¹³¹ I have not located any direct references to the cover design. In a letter to George Plank, Moore does suggest that he use a "blue-green of the peacock's neck" and a "brown-gray-black," which was called "penciled Hamburg" (qtd in A-Quiver xxv).

¹³² The font size for the title and author are equal so that neither dominates.

Marianne Moore, and this in spite of her reluctance to have any but the smallest portion of her work published. She has won the praise of the most exacting critics and has caught the attention of all who are concerned with what may have lasting weight, what of our present efforts will influence the poetry of years to come.

Relish, minutely perceived detail, and the precise word, seem able here to convey emotion that is, at times, not the less surprising for having been stirred by an apparently trivial theme.

Miss Moore's new poems are further evidence of her skill in the identifying of form with mood. As T.S. Eliot said of her previous book, some of the poems "have a very wide spread of association. . . . Many . . . are in exact and sometimes complicated formal patterns, and move with the elegance of a minuet. . . . Of the *light* rhyme Miss Moore is the greatest living master."

Following the publication of "Observations" in 1924 – her first book to appear in America – she received the Dial Award, and also the Helen Haire Levinson Prize for 1933 and Shelly Memorial Award in 1940.

This blurb emphasizes three points. First, the critical acclaim Moore has received: "She has won the praise of the most exacting critics and has caught the attention of all who are concerned with what may have lasting weight, what of our present effort will influence the poetry of years to come." They also quote Eliot's "Introduction" as an endorsement. What they chose to quote demonstrates their need to explain and praise Moore's complex formal patterns. As a further endorsement, they cite the various awards Moore received. Second, recognizing that by 1941 Moore's books were out of print, publishers explained this fact assigning "Moore's reluctance to have but the smallest portion of her work published" as the cause. Third, the readers are asked to "relish" the details and precision of the poetry because they "convey emotion" in spite of their "apparently trivial theme."¹³³ Moore's early critics complained that Moore's work lacked feeling and emotion. Eliot claimed that emotional value of her work would appear "only to those whose intellection moves more easily" than those who are bewildered by minutiae and "so quick a process of association" (x). Eliot's comment was true of Moore's poetry in Selected Poems and certainly of those poems in The Pangolin, but in What Are Years the publisher's words ring

¹³³ Essentially, the publishers continue to quote Eliot.

true. In fact, they have hit upon the deficit of Moore's work after 1936; these poems are not critical or complex. Moore has simplified form and theme in favor of obvious symbolism and heavy-handedness in order to convey emotion and appeal to her new audience.

Another significant difference between these two books is the manner in which Moore chose to present her notes. Since the publication of Observations, Moore included "Notes" after Thayer's request for sources (Stapleton 37). Since "a Sears Roebuck catalogue-page effect would not do" for The Pangolin, Moore almost excluded the "Notes" (qtd. in A-Quiver xxvi). After George Plank reassured her of the appropriateness of the "Notes," they were included. As in the past collections, these notes were simply placed unceremoniously at the end of the book. In What Are Years, however, Moore was compelled to present "A Note on the Notes –":

A willingness to satisfy contradictory objections to one's manner of writing, might turn one's work into the donkey that finally found itself being carried by its masters, since some readers suggest that quotation-marks are disruptive of pleasant progress; others, that notes to what should be complete are a pedantry or evidence of an insufficiently realized task. But since in Observations, and in anything I have written, there have been lines in which the chief interest is borrowed, and I have not yet been able to outgrow this hybrid method of composition, acknowledgements seem only honest. Perhaps those who are annoyed by provisos, detainments, and postscripts, could be persuaded to take probity on faith, the will for the deed, the poem as a self-sufficiency, and disregard the notes. (46)¹³⁴

The opening remark is telling since it acknowledges an audience who will not only object to the notes but whose objections will also be inconsistent. While recognizing the potential objections, Moore comprehends the impossibility of pleasing such an audience and, therefore, explains that

¹³⁴ Moore would continue to use "A Note on the Notes" in subsequent collections. Of course, she made revisions most notably the omission of "the will for the deed, the poem as a self-sufficiency" from the final sentence so that it reads as follows: "Perhaps those who are annoyed by provisos, detainments, and postscripts, could be persuaded to take probity on faith and disregard the notes" (*ColP* 152). Moore, herself, does not seem to take the "will for the deed" or to consider the "poem a self-sufficiency" since in the "Table of Contents" of What Are Years, she includes the page number for the poems and the corresponding page number for the poems' notes. Instead of persuading a reader to disregard the notes, this invites and directs the reader to the notes by giving the note equal standing with the poem.

the inclusion of notes is not attempt to do so. Her notes, instead, are simply an honest acknowledgement of borrowed material, or so she claims. Her final plea is to those who dislike notes; Moore asks them to simply disregard the notes. The implication of the final line of “A Note on the Notes” strikes me as a criticism of those who are unwilling to put in the extra effort or who accept “the will for the deed.” In fact, Moore has made it virtually impossible for the reader to ignore the notes in What Are Years since in the “Table of Contents,” the page number for each poem is followed by the corresponding page number for the poem’s note.¹³⁵ Thus, the prominence of the notes makes them difficult to “disregard.” Moore’s “Notes,” according to “The Table of Contents,” is another place in which the reader can find the poem. Thus, Moore blurs the traditional lines of the poem and its notes. The poem, therefore, cannot be taken as “a self-sufficiency,” as she suggests to those who dislike such detainments. Overall, Moore’s qualification of her notes, “A Note on the Notes,” once again indicates a general shift in Moore’s conception of her audience and her role as poet to this new audience. Another indicator of this is in the general appearance of the poems on the page. To this new audience, Moore feels the need to explain her predilections.

Moore’s stanza patterns when printed on the page look like traditionally formed, indented stanzas. In its first two presentations, “Half Deity” does not contain spaces between its syllabic stanzas. In What Are Years, Moore adds a space between the eleven, seven-line syllabic stanzas. This revision could indicate Moore’s attempt to appease an audience who may not have recognized a poem without clearly defined stanzas.¹³⁶ “Virginia Britannia,” on the other hand, had twelve defined seventeen-line stanzas in its first two presentations, which Moore maintained

¹³⁵ Similarly in the indexes of both Observations and Selected Poems, Moore lists each poem followed by its page number and the page number of its note. Jeffery Peterson’s “Notes on the Poem(s) ‘Poetry’” writes that Moore “poeticizes the book’s index” (225).

¹³⁶ The space between stanzas could also be McMillan’s house style. At this point, I have been unable to discover what their house style required in 1941.

in What Are Years. However, for Collected Poems and Complete Poems, Moore revised the stanza so that “Virginia Britannia” had twelve stanzas of twelve-lines each. Interestingly, Moore changed passages of “Virginia Britannia” while maintaining her syllabics; however, when she altered the stanza length for Collected Poems she retained wording of the What Are Years version. The resulting version would appear in both Collected Poems and Complete Poems. While alterations of stanza lengths are significant, such revisions do not reveal the extent to which Moore shifted her poetics.

The dismantling of “The Old Dominion” poems and their redistribution in What Are Years altered the poems’ meanings. “The Old Dominion” describes the landscape of colonial Virginia. Through this description, the sequence reconstructs America’s history and in so doing addresses issues of America’s colonization that have persisted, such as imitation and tyranny. As the lead poem in the sequence, “Virginia Britannia” describes the landscape of “The Old Dominion” and the history of its people. In it Moore stresses the repetition of colonizing and colonization in America’s history. The sequence title, “The Old Dominion,” encouraged such a reading. More importantly, the combination of the sequence’s title and the placement of “Virginia Britannia” as the lead poem determined that the other poems in the sequence were in some way connected to the ideas initiated in “Virginia Britannia” and held together by “The Old Dominion.” The final thought of “Virginia Britannia” concerns innocence and experience or, rather the difference between adult knowledge and childlike innocence: “childish sages.” “Half Deity,” the third poem in “The Old Dominion,” addresses this difference. Since “Half Deity” is a poem about innocent observation that turns into conscious pursuit, its role in “The Old Dominion” is to illustrate how observation naturally becomes pursuit unless the observer can content himself or herself with intellectual rather than physical possession. Observation, in other

words, is a learned behavior. As a part of the “Old Dominion,” “Half Deity” and its lesson about observation take on a decidedly political tone. The poem is not only about resisting pursuit but also about the consequences of that pursuit: capture and tyranny. Observation, on the other hand, resists tyranny allowing the observed its freedom. Pursuit that results in capture is tyrannical. In “Virginia Britannia” we are presented with incidents from America’s history that have more often than not involved tyranny: colonization and slavery. Since “Half Deity” follows not only “Virginia Britannia” but also “Bird-Witted,” it hard to mistake Psyche’s role as potential-tyrant in “Half Deity” as well as how this tyranny has affected the landscape of America’s history and will continue to affect it. Once these poems are excised from “The Old Dominion” and rearranged in What Are Years, their meanings are altered.

Like Moore’s other sequences, “The Old Dominion” was dismantled. In fact, the four poems making up the sequence appeared only once under the collective title, “The Old Dominion,” which was published in The Pangolin. Several factors may have contributed to Moore’s suppression of not only this sequence but all of her sequences: “Part of Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play” and “Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish.”¹³⁷ These types of sequences were common among the modernists because they allowed them to mediate between their desires to create the long poem while maintaining the concision they sought. Pound’s Cantos and Eliot’s The Waste Land are prime examples. The modernists extolled the virtues of concise images but

¹³⁷ “Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play” appeared in Poetry in June of 1932 and again in 1935 with the publication of Selected Poems. “The Steeple-Jack,” “The Student,” and “The Hero” comprised the first presentation of the sequence, but “The Student” was omitted from the sequence as it appeared in Selected Poems. Since the sequence title implies three parts, “The Student” was conspicuous in its absence. It was, however, published again in 1941 in What Are Years without “The Steeple-Jack” and “The Hero.” In Moore’s Collected Poems and Complete Poems, which organize poems according to the books in which they were published, Moore dismantles the sequence by removing the title while maintaining the poems presences in Selected Poems and What Are Years. “Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish” is comprised of two poems: “The Buffalo” and “Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain.” The sequence was published in Poetry (November 1934). The sequence title was subverted in Selected Poems, but the poems are presented together and in the same order. Moore maintained this order in Complete Poems, but shortened the title “Nine Nectarine and Other Porcelain” to “Nine Nectarines.”

sought the glory of the traditional long poem. The long poem, however, presented them with a dilemma because it represents tradition and authority, which they attempted to resist or redefine. The titles of Moore's sequences seem to bear out her anxiety over the matter of asserting even titular authority. Both "Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play" and "Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish" suggest a hesitation to specify that which will follow. As discussed in Chapter Two, Moore often chose to use the first lines of her poems as their titles because she did not want to reveal too much about the poem or to influence her audience's reactions. A title, by definition, implies ownership and authority; consequently, "The Old Dominion," as a title, does so especially since it directly refers to an established authority.

Moore's 1930s poems, especially those in "The Old Dominion," demonstrate that Moore was capable of negotiating complex poetic terrain. Slatin argues that, as a sequence, "The Old Dominion" is "designed to reveal, the extent to which both the peculiar historical shape of America and the anguished compromised civility of Moore's poetry are produced by 'the rapture of observation' and the 'instinct to amass and reiterate'" (209). Only with the freedom Moore possessed in The Pangolin could she mediate these opposing actions. Complexity for the audience of The Pangolin was not only accepted but valued, and complexity of thought and form were required to write "The Old Dominion." In Moore's acceptance of her public role as a poet, she ceased to be daring and, therefore, did not attempt to write about complex issues using complex forms. The poems Moore composes in the 1940s and after are observations that fail to explore the ironies and tensions inherent in the things they observed. Thus, her dissolution of "The Old Dominion" illustrates her abandonment of the complex issue it addressed. Furthermore, "The Old Dominion" was in many ways a political poem, about America's history of tyranny, "the instinct to amass and reiterate." Moore's concept of the poet's role in America

changed in the late 1930s. Consequently, she was less willing to express overtly political sentiments that were in any way anti-American. Also, the fact that the Second World War was raging and that Hitler was marching through Europe made the “instinct to amass” sinister. Moore’s suppression of “The Old Dominion” and her revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity” are the result of Moore’s new audience. She was no longer comfortable with the political matter of “The Old Dominion” and removed politics from the four poems by dismantling the sequence.

Moore does not abandon the poems of “The Old Dominion” in What Are Years. Instead, she dissolves them into the context of What Are Years. The “Contents” of What Are Years illustrates Moore’s integration of the sequence into her new work:¹³⁸

What Are Years	1
Rigorists	2, 47
Light is Speech	4, 47
He “Digesteth Harde Yron”	6, 48
Walking-Sticks and Paper-Weights and Water Marks	10, 49
The Student	15, 50
<i>Half Deity</i>	17, 50
<i>Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle</i>	20, 51
<i>Bird-Witted</i>	22, 51
<i>Virginia Britannia</i>	25, 51
See in the Midst of Fair Leaves	33, 52
Spenser’s Ireland	34, 52
Four Quartz Crystal Clocks	37, 53
The Pangolin	39, 54
The Paper Nautilus	44
Notes	47

Catherine Paul suggests that in removing the sequence’s title and integrating the four poems into What Are Years, Moore “truly changes both [the poems’] bibliographic codes and their relationship to the poems around them.” It is reasonable to believe that such an outcome was intentional. After observing Eliot’s tactful ordering of Selected Poems, Moore fully

¹³⁸ The italics are mine. I included the page number to show how Moore made her notes part of her poems by listing implying that you can locate the poem in two different places.

comprehended the effects that it had on the audience's perceptions of her poems. Moore places the poems of "The Old Dominion" in the middle of What Are Years. Her strategy was similar to that of Eliot's in his placement of her free verse poems. In Selected Poems, Eliot grouped Moore's free verse poems from the 1920s in the middle of the collection, between Moore's longer syllabics from the late 1910s and her shorter syllabics also from the 1910s. According to Kappel, Eliot strategically placed the free verse poems in the middle because they were anomalies (142). Kappel suggests that Eliot had an additional motive in placing the free verse poems in the middle of Selected Poems:

[Eliot's] arrangement obscures the fact, unfortunately, that these were the last poems that Moore wrote before "The Steeple Jack," "The Hero," and the other post-Dial syllabics. As a result, the sharpness of Moore's shift in these poems back to syllabics is obscured, as are the other critical insights stemming from an awareness of the special relationship between these groups of poems . . ." (142)

In What Are Years, Moore adopts Eliot's strategy and obscures the chronology of "The Old Dominion" poems by placing them in the midst of her newer poems. The effect of her ordering may be damaging to the critical study of her poetry because these poems appeared only once as a sequence that was not widely available. Thus, many critics have been unable to track the shift that occurred in her 1940s poems. Moore further obscures the poems by rearranging the order of "The Old Dominion." She thereby alters how the poems relate. White observes that "'Virginia Britannia,' placed last in that block, no longer serves as a touchstone for the other poems, 'returning them to the status of unconnected animiles' (A-Quiver xxi). As "unconnected animiles," the poems no longer have a political bite. In addition to Moore's depoliticization of the poems, Moore simplifies their descriptions to appeal to a general audience.

Just as "Virginia Britannia" set the foundation for "The Old Dominion," "What are Years?," as both the title and opening poem, creates the tenor of the poems it precedes. After

examining What Are Years, Paul suggests that “the other poems collected therein [act] like supporting details” of “What are Years?” in that “What Are Years?” establishes several issues that pertain to the poems in the collection including, courage, morality, and innocence (166). The opening lines of “What Are Years?” introduce a sense of loss and the resulting insecurity:

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt, –

The democratization of vulnerability does not lead to security but to resignation. The poem ultimately advocates resolve in spite of doubt, mortality, and imprisonment:

. . . He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment, rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be
in its surrendering
finds its continuing. (*Years* 1)

The poem’s dominant image is that of a caged bird: “The very bird, / grown taller as he sings, steals his form straight up. Though he is captive” (*Years* 1). The captive bird is resigned and “his mighty singing / says, satisfaction is a lowly / thing, how pure a thing is joy” (*Years* 1). In relation to “What Are Years?”, the meaning of “Half Deity” is altered in that pursuit and capture have far more sinister repercussions than they did in “The Old Dominion.”¹³⁹ In this context, “Half Deity,” while it remains a poem about the loss of innocence, the loss is not one of American innocence. Instead, it suggests that the artist can lose his or her innocence when the pursuit of an object transforms into the desire to capture that object. Moore has struggled with

¹³⁹ The revisions of “Virginia Britannia,” especially those made to the final stanza, so alter the poem that “What Are Years?” has little effect on its meaning. They are made so similar after Moore revised “Virginia Britannia.”

the position of the artist and the authority of the poet.¹⁴⁰ The revisions of “Half Deity” that occurred between its presentation in The Pangolin and What Are Years suggest that Moore continued to grapple with the authority of the poet. Ultimately, Moore omits the poem from her oeuvre because it was indeed “too explicitly self-revealing and too deeply disturbing,” but it was so not only due to her newly created public image but also due to her personal struggle with authority, which in the 1940s became more significant to Moore as both an artist and as an American (Slatin 237).

Having established some of the issues that prompted a shift in Moore’s poetics and after illustrating some of the physical differences between the constructions of The Pangolin and What Are Years, I will turn my attention to the revisions of “Virginia Britannia” and “Half Deity.” Following Moore’s organizational principles for “The Old Dominion,” I begin with “Virginia Britannia.”

“Virginia Britannia” begins with a description of Virginia’s present landscape, but this description and the landscape itself are grounded in Virginia’s colonial past: “Pale sand edges England’s old / dominion.” The descriptions and the poem were inspired by a trip Moore and her mother made to Virginia in 1934 (Stapleton 100). The landscape and the people impressed Moore’s sensibilities. She recorded her observations of Jamestown, the 1617 church, and the facsimile of Captain John Smith’s coat of arms (101). These notations and keen observations gave way to “Virginia Britannia.” After receiving a copy of the poem, George Plank, illustrator of The Pangolin and Other Verse, wrote, “Your poem makes me a bit drunk. I think the government ought to subsidize you to go to all sorts of exciting places where you could use that

¹⁴⁰ Her revisions of “When I Buy Pictures” also illustrate this struggle, especially the revisions of the final stanza and the change from syllabics to free verse. See Chapter Two for a full discussion of these revisions.

eye of yours for your delight and ours” (qtd. in Stapleton 100). While Moore’s descriptions of Virginia delight, they also instruct.

“Virginia Britannia” has been a popular subject of critical study. Most agree that it is essentially a poem about the importance of civic virtue that must guard against imperial arrogance (Molesworth 107). In order to convey this message, “Virginia Britannia” describes the landscape of colonial Virginia. The resulting image is something of a fallen paradise. Charles Molesworth comments on the representation of nature in “Virginia Britannia.” He suggests that in the poem Moore illustrates that “the despair of history is offset by the glory of nature, but nature’s glory is conditioned by history’s lack of ‘intellect and delicacy’” (113). Slatin also observes how the natural world highlights the unnatural colonization: “The landscape of Colonial Virginia is not a natural one: it is a human artifact, a carefully constructed, reconstructed, preserved historical record” (211). Cristanne Miller recognizes the tension within “Virginia Britannia.”: “Moore . . . successfully contrasts the extraordinary beauty of the landscape with the ugly history of colonization” (151). Thus, most critics recognize how “Virginia Britannia” uses the landscape of colonial Virginia to bring forth the unnatural results of colonization. Most also recognize that Moore, through this poem, wanted to show the cyclical pattern of colonization in America’s history. In historicizing the negative effects of colonization, Moore educated her audience.

Due to lack of availability of the various versions of “Virginia Britannia,” there has been little in the way of criticism that examines these versions. Slatin has examined the revisions of “Virginia Britannia,” but his discussion focuses on the poem’s final stanza. While he recognizes the simplification of the What Are Years version, he does not recognize it as Moore’s method of communicating with a new audience who may be unwilling to confront complexity and irony in

the way that the poet-critics did. In Material Modernism, by contrast, George Bornstein discusses the variants of “Virginia Britannia.” Bornstein notices that the revisions evident in What Are Years are stripped of their political edge. He argues that the first two versions of “Virginia Britannia” are harsh in the political criticism because these two versions appeared in publications that were managed by the network of “pressing women,” H.D. and Bryher. Thus, Moore felt protected and, therefore, freer to express herself. I agree that The Pangolin offered Moore a secure venue and that, as a result, she felt empowered. What Are Years, which was published by Macmillan, may not have provided Moore with a sense of security, but it did enable her to reach a broader audience. It was the change in audience that caused Moore’s revisions of “Virginia Britannia.” Thus, the following will consider the revisions of “Virginia Britannia” that were made for its appearance in What Are Years and will argue that Moore made these revisions in order to appeal to audience of this commercial production as opposed to the elite audience of The Pangolin.

“Virginia Britannia” was initially published in Life and Letters Today in December of 1935. Life and Letters was published through Bryher’s Brendin Publishing Company. Wallace Stevens’s “A Poet That Matters,” a review of Selected Poems, preceded “Virginia Britannia” in Life and Letters. This detail illustrates Moore popularity among her peers who were, at this time, her core audience. In preparing “Virginia Britannia” for The Pangolin, Moore made only a few alterations; there are only nineteen variants between the two versions. When one considers that “Virginia Britannia” is a long poem, over two hundred lines long, this is a small number. Most of the changes are minor having to with punctuation or spelling, arbor/arbours and splendor/splendour. Moore, however, heavily revised some of the poem’s passages for its

presentation in What Are Years. I have chosen two passages to examine that exemplify the importance of these revisions.

In the first passage, Moore creates an analogy between the treatment of Native Americans and African-Americans, as both groups are “colonized.” In the context of the poem, we realize that to be “colonized” is to be exploited. There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that the land is taken from the Native Americans so that it can be worked by the slaves. In both versions, this is made plain, but Moore emphasizes the irony through her characteristic use of an illocutionary phrase. The following is from “Virginia Britannia” as it appeared in The Pangolin:

from taking The Potomac
cowbirdlike; and on
The Chickahominy
establishing the Negro, opportunely brought, to strength-
en protest against
tyranny. Rare unscent-
ed, provident-
ly hot, too sweet, inconsistent flowerbed!
Old Dominion

Here is the same passage revised for What Are Years:

From taking the Potomac
cowbirdlike, and on
the Chickahominy
establishing the Negro,
inadvertent ally and
best enemy of
tyranny. Rare unscent-
ed, provident-
ly hot, too sweet, inconsistent flowerbed!
Old Dominion

The irony of “opportunely brought” is utterly lost in the revised “inadvertent ally” because the first reminds us that slaves were brought and used opportunistically to fill America’s coffers so that America could stand up to tyranny. The revision focuses on the slave’s role as an “inadvertent ally” and not on American guilt. The revision, therefore, depoliticizes “Virginia

Britannia.” In addition to the presence of irony and tension, The Pangolin version contains a significant break in the syllabic pattern. Moore often broke with her pattern for emphasis. She does so here in the line, “establishing the Negro, opportunely brought, to strength-.” The revised lines maintain the syllabic pattern because to break the pattern would introduce complexity. The same may be said of Moore’s use of irony in The Pangolin as opposed to her inclusion of it in What Are Years. The most significant revision is the depoliticization of slavery. Moore’s new vision of the poet’s role in American history forced her to reconsider such political statements and more often than not she removed or altered these statements. The final stanza of “Virginia Britannia” is another such instance of Moore’s unwillingness to be overtly political.

This is the most famous stanza of “Virginia Britannia.”¹⁴¹ In it Moore makes a direct allusion to William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” She said that she tried to avoid the allusion but found that she had to “overcome her reluctance to be unoriginal.”¹⁴² Bornstein suggests that the allusion to Wordsworth’s romanticism marries a sense of the romantic to the political (112). The allusion alone does not accomplish this blending of the romantic and the political. Throughout the poem, Moore uses descriptions of the natural landscape to comment on colonization. While the final line clearly alludes to Wordsworth’s ode, “cloud,” “child” and “glory” are also allusions. In The Pangolin version the splendid natural scene filled with various specimens of trees blend together as the “sunset flames” create a new unity, a new beauty. As the poem’s description moves to a description of the town, we find that the glory of nature has no effect on a town that is “bothered with wages” and full of “childish

¹⁴¹ Most critics when writing about “Virginia Britannia” focus on this stanza. They do so impart because of Moore’s obvious allusion to Wordsworth.

¹⁴² Here is the quotation in full: “I did not care to use the word ‘intimation’ because it suggested to me Wordsworth’s Ode, Intimations of Immortality, and one naturally respects first rights, but after rejecting it a number of times, I still came back to it and felt I must, so I finally kept it . . . one must overcome a reluctance to be unoriginal and not be worried about possible comparisons and coincidences” (qtd in Slatin 211). Slatin spends some time untangling the remark and its relation to “Virginia Britannia.”

sages.” Such natural glory is lost on them but are an “intimation of what glory is” for the child. George Plank’s illustration highlights the sense of hopefulness. The simple illustration shows a child holding a glowing orb containing a single star. It is the perfect image not only of a hope that has been attained but also of the power of observation. The following is the stanza in its entirety:

they say. The live oak’s rounded
mass of undulating boughs, the white
 pine, the aged hackberry – handsomest vis-
itor of all – the
 cedar’s etched solidity,
 the cypress, lose identity
and are one tree, as
 sunset flames increasingly
 against their leaf-chis-
elled blackening ridge of green;
and the redundantly wind-
widened clouds expanding above the
 town’s bothered with wages
 childish sages,
are to the child an intimation of
 what glory is.

Since “Virginia Britannia” was published during the Great Depression, the idea of a town “bothered by wages” and “childish sages” clearly refers to the economic crises. Moreover, it criticizes the “childish sages” who created the economic disaster. These lines are altered in What Are Years:

The live oak’s darkening fila-
gree of undulating boughs, the etched
 solidity of a cypress indiv-
ible from the now
 aged English hackberry,
 become with lost identity,
part of the ground, as
 sunset flames increasingly
 against the leaf-chis-
elled blackening ridge of green;
while clouds, expanding above

the town's assertiveness, dwarf
it, dwarf arrogance
 that can misunderstand
 importance; and
are to the child an intimation of
 what glory is.

Moore has removed the political criticism from the closing lines of this version. Her changes to the final stanza are more pervasive. In these lines we do not see the glorious natural display. The trees are already dark and the sunset does little to add life to them. The trees lose their identity, but it is not by blending with each other or with the sky. Instead, they become part of the ground. In fact, the trees and the sunset are overshadowed by the "town's assertiveness." Slatin observes that Moore had increasingly come to identify the city as the agent of moral decay (215). Thus, the town dwarfs the natural scene so that the "child" must seek out glory instead of being presented it in the natural world, which is a nearly hopeless mission. It is hopeless because the child is dominated by the town and to seek out such glory would require great effort on the child's part.

The suppression of The Pangolin version has led some critics to false evaluations. For example, in Costello's Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possession, Costello's interpretation is based on the Collected Poems version, which has a different stanza length but the same wording as the What Are Years version. This led to the following evaluation of "Virginia Britannia": "Moore's 'imaginary possession' of this Jamestown setting has less of the humility and restraint, less of the open subjectivity, and less of the moral complexity of her earlier work"(104). Of the final stanza, Costello writes, "here Moore asserts a superiority of words over their subject by offering us a moral as consolation. In Observations and Selected Poems Moore would never have used allusion in this way or allowed herself such unqualified 'poetic' solutions as the Wordsworth borrowing provides" (105). The allusion to Wordsworth loses its value in the final

version of “Virginia Britannia” because Moore simplifies the poem as a whole. Because Moore did not limit her revisions to “Virginia Britannia,” we are presented with example of further simplification in her revisions of “Half Deity.”

Moore may have simplified “Half Deity” when she revised it for What Are Years, but when she chose to omit it from subsequent collections, she complicated the poem’s textual history. “Omissions are not accidents.” or so proclaims the epigraph of Complete Poems, which are not complete. “Half Deity” is less conspicuous in its absence than other omitted poems because Moore cut “Half Deity” after its 1941 publication in What Are Years.¹⁴³ After What Are Years, Moore continued to publish the other poems of “The Old Dominion”: “Virginia Britannia,” “Bird Witted,” “Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle.” All three were published in Collected Poems and Complete Poems. Until the publication of Grace Schulman’s The Poems of Marianne Moore in 2003, “Half Deity” was relatively obscure. Schulman chose the What are Years version for her main text although she places “Half Deity” in the order Moore chose for The Pangolin and Other Verse. The Pangolin version is included in Schulman’s edition, but it has been relegated to the “Editor’s Notes.” Schulman mentions the original Direction I version in her notes, but does not discuss the variants. While Schulman has resurrected “Half Deity,” her editorial choices are poor. Why, for example, does Schulman restore “The Old Dominion” order and not The Pangolin version of “Half Deity”? Her presentation of “Half Deity” confuses what is already a complex textual history.

Given the difficulty of finding a version, much less versions, of “Half Deity,” it has received little critical attention. Slatin offers the most extensive examination of “Half Deity” in the context of “The Old Dominion” sequence. His project focuses on how “The Old Dominion”

¹⁴³ Heather Cass White’s A-Quiver with Significance published in 2008 reproduces a facsimile of “Half Deity” in the context of The Pangolin as well as a facsimile of its first presentation in Direction I version. Textual variants are also provided in this edition.

and, likewise, “Half Deity” contribute to Moore’s understanding of America and her own patriotism. In his discussion of the poem, he suggests that “Half Deity” was ultimately omitted from Moore’s Collected Poems and Complete Poems because it is “too explicitly self-revealing and too deeply disturbing, to suit the public image she had come by the to project successfully” (237). To some degree this is true, but perhaps it is not “self-revealing” in the way that Slatin perceives it.

Slatin asserts that “Half Deity,” like the other poems in “The Old Dominion,” examines the relationship between childhood innocence and adult knowledge, especially as it relates to American history (236). As a sequence, he suggests that “The Old Dominion” illustrates how Americans have “tamed” the landscape. Slatin goes on to discuss how Moore identifies the mimetic actions of the colonized people, who attempt to imitate European or, more specifically, English people. In imitating the English, Americans have perpetuated their own colonization, which has, according to Slatin, only led to “a long series of repeated Falls” (12).¹⁴⁴ Slatin proposes that while these poems address America’s history, they also reveal Moore’s history because in writing the sequence Moore participates in the same imitation and parody that has marked America’s history. In “Half Deity,” according to Slatin, the speaker, Moore, attempts “to capture the memory of [her] former innocence” and discovers that her innocence is a memory and is, therefore, “lost in fact,” so she ultimately discovers the “full burden of [her] guilt” (237). Slatin suggests that Moore felt guilty because she recognized that parody and imitation, while the American way, is a “circular process of loss, a search for redemption which ends, inevitably, in

¹⁴⁴ Unlike “Virginia Britannia,” “Half Deity” does not reconstruct a specific American landscape, but it does construct an Eden filled with an American butterfly and a figure from Greek mythology. Thus, “Half Deity” shows another Fall as Psyche transforms from curious observer to predator and as the butterfly transforms from prey into a “fiery tiger-horse.”

yet another recapitulation of the Fall and this implicates the American self in the irrecoverable lapse from innocence into experience and guilt and complexity (209).

Slatin interprets Moore's removal of "Half Deity" from Collected Poems and Complete Poems as "too explicitly self-revealing" because he suspects that by the 1940s Moore had established a public image as a sort of modern-historical American figure and that "Half Deity" undermines her public image. In his "Introduction" to The Savage's Romance, Slatin discusses Moore's self-created public character and points to a photograph of an elderly Moore in a long, black opera cape and black tricorne hat standing in front of the Brooklyn Bridge.¹⁴⁵ Slatin writes that she looks like a "female George Washington who has crossed the Delaware to find herself in an urban setting" and that the impression of the photograph is "that we are looking at a figure out of America's legendary past, a living relic" (16). This photograph and Moore's public persona seem to suggest that America's present cannot deny and should embrace America's past. According to Slatin, if this was the image Moore was attempting to perpetuate, then the rather bleak conclusion of "Half Deity" would have made Moore question what is lost in pursuing the past, especially its revolutionary past that was often evoked by her tricorne hat.¹⁴⁶ In "The Old Dominion" sequence, "Half Deity" does suggest that the American instinct to "amass" results in

¹⁴⁵ The photograph was taken by Esther Bublely and is reproduced in Marianne Moore Newsletter 3 (Fall 1979):20. In the article that appears with this photograph, Willis discusses how Moore collaborated with photographers. She compares Moore's control of her image to the control of her poetry: "As thoughtful in her appearance as in her craft, she created a unique visual persona, itself part of a long poetic tradition. . . .[s]he controlled to an unusual degree the final record of her visual shape and form. When she sat for her portrait, she composed a persona which became an equivalent of her poetry, as different from her informal everyday appearance as her poetry was from her conversation" (22).

¹⁴⁶ Moore's image is inextricably tied to the tricorne hat, which she wore to all sorts of public events including baseball games. The tricorne hat is synonymous with both American and French revolutionaries. While it had a practical use, a sort of gutter system to keep rain off soldiers, they were also fashionable.

a loss of innocence and in unrequited pursuit of that innocence.¹⁴⁷ “Half Deity,” however, was published only once in the “Old Dominion” sequence having been first published alone in Direction I (1935). Its connection to “The Old Dominion” poems is broken unless the reader was familiar with The Pangolin, which was unlikely given that it was an expensive limited edition. Since Moore not only removed the context of American history but also heavily revised “Half Deity,” Moore removed any sense of guilt associated with her role as both an American and a poet. Moore’s omission of “Half Deity” seems to have been motivated by her feelings about authority and tyranny. Such feelings were exacerbated by the Second World War, but Moore had grappled with the issues associated with authority since the 1910s.

The mother bird in “Bird Witted,” the second poem in “The Old Dominion,” must protect her “three grown fledgling mocking-birds” from the “intellectual, catious- / l y c r e e p i n g cat,” who is “observing” the “trim trio.” Unaware of danger, the young birds make room for the “piebald cat,” causing an “uneasy new problem.” The problem stems from the cat’s observation that is more akin to stalking than to observing. While the birds do not recognize the inherent danger in the proximity of the cat, the “parent bird” instinctively comprehends the cat’s intent and “wages deadly combat, / and half kills” the cat. Moore, here, identifies how observation soon transforms into pursuit. In her early career, Moore recognized the potential problem of observation. In “When I Buy Pictures” the speaker avoids physical possession of a “picture.” Instead, the speaker becomes the “imaginary possessor.” This “imaginary possession,” however,” still implies authority over the “picture,” a fact that the speaker fully recognizes: “When I Buy Pictures / Or what is closer to the truth, / when I look at that which I may regard myself as the / imaginary possessor (*OB* 59). Looking or observing seems to lead unavoidably to

¹⁴⁷ In “Henry James as a Characteristic American,” Moore writes that James was a characteristic American in spite of living abroad because “he possessed the instinct to amass and reiterate,” which she believes are part of the American psyche that time abroad cannot destroy (Predilections 21).

acquisition, and, on some level, the speaker sees imaginary possession as a transaction that gives transfers authority to the “imaginary possessor.” At the end of “When I Buy Pictures,” Moore addresses the problem of this assumed authority and suggests that in order to assuage the guilt of usurpation, one must “acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it” (*OB* 59). Moore’s verse essays dealing with the art of criticism exhibit her uneasiness with critics who assert authority over the work being criticized. “Half Deity” describes how observation becomes pursuit. This pursuit is ultimately motivated by a desire to possess and control. Given Moore’s increasing concern with the negative effects of authority it is likely that she removed “Half Deity” for this reason. However, the poem is complex and contains one of the most enigmatic lines in all of Moore’s poetry, so Moore may have concluded that it was too complex, even after her revisions, for her audience of non-poet critics.

Because of the dearth of scholarship about “Half Deity,” it is necessary to provide a general reading of the poem as I discuss the revisions that Moore made to it for What Are Years. I will focus on three significant moments in the poem and how Moore’s revisions simplify the language to appeal to the audience of What Are Years.¹⁴⁸ The greatest alteration was that of context since “Half Deity” was placed third in the four poems that made up “The Old Dominion.” Aside from the change of context, most of the revisions consist of changes in punctuation, mainly the addition or removal of dashes. Therefore, this examination will not consider the revisions Moore made of the initial version.¹⁴⁹

“Half Deity” begins, “Half Deity / half worm. We all infant and adult, have / stopped to watch the butterfly.” The opening introduces three figures into the poem: the speaker/poet, the

¹⁴⁸ The working title of “Half Deity” was “For Several Reasons” (*A-Quiver* xvii). I’m not sure why this was the working title unless Moore changed the first line from “for several reasons” to “Half Deity.”

¹⁴⁹ Please see the Appendix for a table of variants of the three presentation of “Half Deity.”

child, and the butterfly. It also introduces the tension of the poem: observation. Kenneth Burke called “Half Deity” a “poem of jeopardy” as well as “a poem of coquetry” (“Motives” 98). Since it is a poem about pursuit, Burke’s comments point to the problems inherent in pursuit. While dangerous for all involved, “we all” young and old have “stopped to watch.” Thus, none are immune from the jeopardy of observation.

Duality is also introduced in this first line. We have a butterfly, who transforms from caterpillar to butterfly just as the child transforms into an adult. “Half Deity / half worm,” however, does not only refer to these transforms. “Half worm” also alludes to the worms that are the inheritors of mortal flesh. The artist and poet too contain these halves because they possess the ability to create as a god does, yet they do not possess the ability to create something original. They must feed off the world around them. The butterfly that is being observed by “infant and adult” also fits into this idea of two selves because the speaker draws attention to the butterfly’s metamorphosis from the earth bound worm to the heaven bound butterfly. The “wingless worm” is spared human curiosity: We all, infant and adult, have / stopped to watch the butterfly – last of the / elves – and learned to spare the wingless worm/ that hopefully ascends the tree.” The butterfly is observed:

This more
peninsula-tailed one with a black
pitchfork-scallop edge on sunburnt zebra-skin,
tired by the trip it made
with drover-like tenacity, has been
sleeping upright on the elm. Its yellowness,
that of the autumn popular-leaf, by day
has been observed. Disguised in butterfly-
bush Wedgewood-blue, Psyche follows it

This detailed description suggests that the poet has pinned down the butterfly, for only through extended examination can she describe the minute details of the butterfly. Moore was inspired to

write this poem after she went to the Museum of Natural History, where she had in fact had the time and opportunity to observe what had been pinned down after being observed.¹⁵⁰ After the details of the butterfly's appearance are given, Moore turns our attention to Psyche, who like the poet has been observing the butterfly and is now following it. It is significant that Psyche is "disguised" in the butterfly-bush because if the observation was innocent such camouflage would not be necessary.¹⁵¹ Psyche's presence is also significant when one considers that Psyche's curiosity was her downfall in the myth, Cupid and Psyche. Thus, Psyche's presence emphasizes the danger of curiosity and observation. Moore's revision of these lines removes Psyche and replaces her with an unnamed nymph:

The north's
yellower swallow-tail with a pitch-
fork-scalloped edge, has tails blunter at the tip.
Flying with droverlike
tenacity and weary from its trip,
one has lighted on the elm, Its yellowness

that almost counterfeits a leaf's, has just
now been observed. A nymph approaches, dressed
in Wedgwood blue, tries to touch it and
must follow to micromalus, the midget

The removal of Psyche from the poem removes the allusion to the myth of Cupid of Psyche, which thereby lessens the danger of the nymph's observation. The revised lines also illustrate how Moore's revisions lack descriptive force. Here, the butterfly is simply "yellow." Also, the

¹⁵⁰ In a letter to her brother, Moore wrote, "it also came to me after my journey to the museum that I should write something on the tiger swallow-tail, the tiger salamander, and the tiger horse, and I said so to Mouse [her mother], and she said, 'Don't be bizarre.' Now I hate that, for it is more serious than leverets for me. I wish you would speak to Mouse about damping me" (qtd in Stapleton 246)

¹⁵¹ A butterfly-bush was given this name because it attracts butterflies.

nymph's intent is overt; she "tries to touch it." The effect of this revision is that it removes the tension.

Moore's revisions simplify both the allusions and descriptions that were so rich in The Pangolin version. Another example of this occurs when Psyche and the butterfly look at each other and "all's a-quiver with significance." In The Pangolin version, Moore compares the scene to Goya's painting: "enact the scene of cat's eyes on the magpie's / eyes by Goya." It is an allusion to a painting by Goya, and in her "Notes," Moore reveals the source of the allusion: "Goya. The portrait of Don Manuel Osorio De Zuniga in which he stands to the left of three cats, holding in his hands a thread attached to the leg of a magpie." Moore does not mention that Don Manuel is a child, but she reveals the tension of the scene. All of the subjects in the painting are in a moment of acute observation that could at any moment turn into destruction. Don Manuel controls the situation. He can either force the magpie to stay and perhaps die if the three cats attack, or he can release the string, allowing the bird to escape. Don Manuel and the poet are in the same position. As the poet, Moore controls the fate of the scene she is "observing." In What Are Years, Moore removes much of this tension by explaining too much instead of letting the reader consider the complexities of the allusion. The revised lines read, "It is Goya's scene of the tame magpie faced / by crouching cats." Moore gives the reader information, but what she provides leaves out Don Manuel, which diminishes his and the poet's role in this scene.

After the butterfly is aware of the threat he flees, but is ultimately attracted by Zephyr, who offers his outspread hand. The butterfly does immediately go to Zephyr but listens with "strict ears" when the

West Wind speaks. It was he, with mirror eyes
of strong anxiety, who had no net
or flowering shrewd-scented tropical
device, or lignum vitae perch in half-shut

hand; for ours is not a
canelly land; nor was it Oberon, but
this quiet young man with piano replies,
named Zephyr, whose hand spread out was enough
to tempt the fiery tiger-horse to stand,
eyes staring skyward and chest arching
bravely out – historic metamorphoser
and saintly animal
in India, in Egypt, anywhere.
His talk was as strange as my grandmother’s muff.

Zephyr poses no threat to the butterfly. He has no net. He has no bait. And, he is not Oberon.¹⁵²
Thus the butterfly is encouraged to land in his hand. Because Zephyr does not capture the butterfly, he receives the gift of viewing the “fiery tiger-horse” the “historic metamorphoser.” Jean Garrigue comments on Zephyr’s presence and suggest that he acts as the “dues ex machine to allow the butterfly’s, full achievement of his transfiguration” (44). The final enigmatic line shatters Psyche’s, the poet’s, and the reader’s appreciation of the scene. The butterfly’s talk is inaccessible to all but Zephyr who has “learned to spare the wingless worm.” The comparison to “my grandmother’s muff” can be read in several ways. A “muff” is an old-fashioned garment used by women to warm their hands. In this way, their strange talk was comforting and warm. A “muff,” unlike gloves, prevents the hands from being useful. So perhaps his talk cannot be useful to those who have not learned how to observe without the intent to capture. A “muff” could also be a baseball reference since a ballplayer makes a “muff” when he fails to catch a ball; it is a mistake.¹⁵³ Although “muff” and its relationship to his talk is ambiguous, “muff” has something to do with hands. Zephyr offered his hand and did not pursue the butterfly, so

¹⁵² As king of the fairies, Oberon would pose a threat to the butterfly because he may seek dominion over the butterfly. Also in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Oberon plays tricks and is vindictive. As such, he would pose a threat.

¹⁵³ Moore was an avid baseball fan.

perhaps the strangeness of the “muff” refers to the poet’s inability to simply observe without capturing.

The final line in What Are Years is altered as is much of what precedes it:

west wind spoke; for pleased by the butterfly’s
inconsequential ease, he held no net,
did not regard the butterfly-bush
as a trap, his no decoy in half-shut
palm since his is not a
covetous hand. It was not Oberon, but
this quietest wind with piano replies,

the zephyr, whose detachment was enough
to tempt the fiery tiger-horse to stand,
eyes staring skyward and chest arching
bravely out – historic metamorphoser
and saintly animal
in India, in Egypt, anywhere.
Their talk was as strange as my grandmother’s muff.

Almost all of the ambiguity and complexity is removed. We are told in rather plain language that “zephyr,” who is now the wind and not “the quiet young man,” did not have a lure the butterfly with a decoy. Also, zephyr is described as being “detached.” If he is “detached” and uninterested the butterfly’s glorious display is not as rewarding. Like the revised closing line of “Virginia Britannia” Moore removes the “glory” from Zephyr and our observation of this scene. The final line is the same except that Zephyr and the butterfly are engaged in a conversation, which further isolates Psyche, the poet, and the reader.

Moore’s revision of “Half Deity” is unfortunate because she simplifies what were complex and vivid allusions and descriptions. “Virginia Britannia” also suffered from her revisions. Both of these poems were initially produced for elite literary magazines and the limited edition, The Pangolin and Other Verse. The audiences for these publications were made up of poet critics and those who were familiar with the complexities of Moore’s poetry. Her

complexity, for them, was not a liability but a virtue. With the publication of Selected Poems and the attention it received, Moore's audience changed. As her audience changed, Moore altered her poetry to appeal to this audience. As her audience changed and the Second World War raged, Moore reconsidered her role as a poet. She saw that she had a responsibility as an artist to present the human condition while showing the limitations of humanity's ability to produce such a narrative.¹⁵⁴ All of these changes resulted in a simplification of her verse. In What Are Years we see the results of these changes, which are manifested in her revisions of "Half Deity" and "Virginia Britannia."

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¹⁵⁴ See footnote 13.

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APPENDIX

Presentations of "Half Deity"

Direction (Peoria, Ill.) 1 (January-March 1935): 74-75.

The Pangolin and Other Verse. London: The Brendlin Publishing Co., 1936: 12-14.

What Are Years. New York: The MacMillian Co., 1941: 17-19.

Textual Variants of “Half Deity”

In The Pangolin and Other Verse, “Half Deity” appeared third in the sequence “The Old Dominion.” The other poems of this sequence are “Virginia Britannia,” “Bird Witted,” and “Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle.”

2. *Dir*, *POV* butterfly – last | *Years* butterfly, last
3. *Dir*, *POV* elves – and | *Years* elves, and
4. *Dir* The fine-tailed | *POV* The well-known | *Years* What zebra
5. *Dir* best tiger-butterfly | *POV* silk tiger swallowtail | *Years* could surpass the zebra
- 6-7. *Dir* of South America, with body veiled / in silk was that, bearing pigments which engrave | *POV* of South America, with body light- / ly furred was bearing pigments which engrave | *Years* striped swallow-tail of South America / on whose half-transparent wings, crescents engrave

8-14. *Dir*, *POV*
the lower wings with dragon’s blood, weightless.
They that have wings must not have weights. This more
peninsula-tailed one with a black
pitchfork-scallop edge on sunburnt zebra-skin,
tired by the trip it made
with drover-like tenacity, has been
sleeping upright on the elm. Its yellowness,

Years
the silken edge with dragon’s blood, weightless?
They that have wings must not have weights. The north’s

yellower swallow-tail with a pitch-
 fork-scalloped edge, has tails blunter at the tip.
 Flying with droverlike
 tenacity and weary from its trip,
 one has lighted on the elm. Its yellowness

- 15-6. *Dir, POV* that of autumn polar-leaf, by day / has [. . .] Disguised in butterfly- | *Years* almost counterfeits a leaf's, has just / now [. . .] A nymph approaches, dressed
17. *Dir* bush Wedgewood-blue, Psyche follows it | *POV* [. . .] Wedgwood-blue, Psyche follows it | *Years* in Wedgwood blue, tries to touch it and
18. *Dir, POV* to that small tree, *Mircomalus*, | *Years* must follow to *micromalus*,
19. *Dir* crab, to the mimosa | *POV* crab; to the mimosa | *Years* crab-tree, to a pear-tree,
21. *Dir, POV* Baffled not by the quick-clouding serene gray | *Years* Defeated but encouraged by each new gust
22. *Dir* moon, but forced by the hot *POV* moon . . . | *Years* of wind, forced by the summer
23. *Dir, POV* "it is not | *Years* some are not
25. *Dir* majesty, in such a manner as might | *POV* majesty . . . | *Years* majesty [. . .] as she
26. *Dir, POV* well happen here." | *Years* is gazing here.
27. *Dir, POV* fearing the slight | *Years* afraid of the
28. *Dir* finger, wanders – as though it were ignorant – | *POV* wanders, [. . .] ignorant, | *Years* slight finger, floats [. . .] ignorant,
29. *Dir* a step further and lights on Zephyr's | *POV* across the path . . . | *Years* across the path, and choosing a flower's
30. *Dir, POV* planting forefeet soberly; | *Years* of air and stamens, settles;
31. *Dir* around – apostrophe - | *POV, Years* round – apostrophe –
34. *Dir, POV* Vexed because | *Years* Aware that
36. *Dir* Small unglazed china eyes of butterflies - | *POV* The butterfly's round unglazed china eyes, | *Years* The butterfly's tobacco-brown unglazed

37. *Dir* pale tobacco brown – with large eyes of | *POV* . . . brown, . . . | *Years* china eyes and furry countenance confront
38. *Dir* Nymph on them; | *POV* . . . them – | *Years* Nymph’s large eyes –
39. *Dir* she, | *POV*, *Years* she
40. *Dir* observes the insect’s face, | *POV* . . . face | *Years* explores [. . .] face
41. *Dir* significance | *POV* significance – | *Years* significance.
- 42-3. *Dir* as in the scene with cats’ eyes on magpie’s eyes / by Goya. The butterfly does | *POV* enact the scene of cats’ eyes on magpie’s / eyes by Goya. Butterflies do | *Years* It is Goya’s scene of the tame magpie faced / by crouching cats. Butterflies do
44. *Dir*, *POV* Zephyr and Psyche | *Years* the admiring nymph
45. *Dir* patent leather | *POV*, *Years* patent-leather
- 46-8. *Dir* loud and [. . .] garden-toad side by side, / it springs away, bewitched / and dangerous, zebra half-deified, | *POV* loud, [. . .] garden-toad, the swallow- / tail bewitched and danger- / ous, springs away, zebra half-deified, | *Years* loud or [. . .] garden-toad, the swallow- / tail bewitched and haughty, / springs away; flies where she cannot follow,
49. *Dir* air; [. . .] tramples | *POV* air . . . | *Years* air [. . .] trampled
50. *Dir* Twig-veined, irascible | *POV* Twig-veined irascible | *Years* Equine irascible
51. *Dir* fastidious, stubborn undisciplined | *POV* fastidious . . . | *Years* unwormlike unteachable butterfly-
53. *Dir*, *POV* nice. But free | *Years* nice; to the
54. *Dir* to leave the breeze’s hand | *POV* . . . outspread . . . | *Years* friendly outspread hand. But
56. *Dir* away till | *POV*, *Years* off until,
58. *Dir* easily; mounting | *POV*, *Years* easily, it mounts
- 61-2. *Dir* us it’s gone [. . .] my / voice, or magnet-nice? [. . .] flutters | *POV* is [. . .] ap- / proval – magnet-nice, . . . | *Years* her, is [. . .] ap- / proval, magnet-nice [. . .] fluttered
63. *Dir*, *POV* fresh. It has | *Years* fresh, it had

64-5. *Dir, POV* West Wind speaks. It was he, with mirror eyes / of strong anxiety, who had no net | *Years* west wind spoke; for please by the butterfly's / inconsequential ease, he held no net,

66. *Dir* or flowering, shrewd-scented tropical | *POV* . . . flowering . . . | *Years* did not regard the butterfly-bush

67-71. *Dir, POV*

device, or *lignum vitae* perch in half-shut
hand; for ours is not a
canely land; nor was it Oberon, but
this quiet young man with piano replies,
named Zephyr, whose hand spread out was enough

Years

as a trap, hid no decoy in half-shut
palm since his is not a
covetous hand. It was not Oberon, but
this quietest wind with piano replies,
the zephyr, whose detachment was enough