Introduction

*Flaring Moore, or The Revisionist Reviewed*

Elizabeth Gregory

“We prove, we do not explain our birth.”

Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore’s poetic career crossed seven decades, beginning with her first publication in 1907 and extending until her death in 1972, her last poetic publication having appeared in 1970. Over those many years and since, critical attitudes toward Moore have fluctuated—in response both to changes in Moore’s work and to changes in the concerns of the critics. In its early days, Moore’s renown was limited to the small group of readers of the innovative little magazines of the teens and twenties for whom her modernist complexities were exciting. Critical response was thoughtful and largely and quite influentially enthusiastic. As the decades passed, Moore’s work became more accessible and her audience expanded. In 1951 her *Collected Poems* won four major national awards. Moore became a poetic celebrity, a role she participated in building. Actively choosing to make her work available to the wider readership of the front page of the *New York Herald Tribune* and of the *New Yorker*, Moore made popular culture her material and became a figure of whom the culture at large could be fond. Informed criticism gave way to a species of eulogistic cheerleading that often repeated received opinions about her work’s importance overall without affording new work the respect of a careful consideration on its own merits. There were exceptions, but much of the critical response of this period is most interesting for its engagement with and rendering of Moore’s public persona. Sustained, in-depth analysis of Moore’s work did not resurface until after her death. Since then it has grown steadily, as critics identify new dynamics in Moore’s work and add to our understanding of its dialogue with the world in which it was written and that in which it continues to be read. Looking back over the history of Moore’s critical reception will assist us in giving her her due as one of the
great modernist—something that has long been denied her—as well as allowing appreciation of the important contributions of her later work. And the dynamics of the relation between Moore's poetics and her public persona also offer a rich field for study.

Critical response to Moore's work began in August 1916 with an essay by the poet H. D. in the Egoist. Moore's poems, which began appearing publicly in 1907 in a Bryn Mawr college journal, had first been published outside her college magazines in 1915. Ten had appeared in six separate issues of the Egoist by August 1916, so H. D.'s readers knew whereof she spoke. But the poems were in an unfamiliar mode. H. D.'s reiterated question "Does it mean something?" serves as surrogate for her readers' bafflement at the same time that it inaugurates the long-term critical project of examining what indeed it might mean.

The essay identifies several key concerns for Moore criticism. H. D. characterizes Moore's work as at once "quaint" and "ironic," pointing to a radical tension that would remain in force across Moore's career. As she is writing from England in the middle of World War I, it is not surprising that H. D. employs a martial frame, seeing Moore's pursuit of beauty as furthing the work of "strengthening" Englishmen and Americans, both of whom need support in this time of "turmoil and distress." But her reading of Moore's technical skill in terms of perfect swordsmanship moves beyond the martial circumstance to recognize a basic dynamic of Moore's work and to forecast the absorption with self-defense that develops in later poems. H. D.'s conclusion that Moore's swordplay supports her devotion to "the beautiful English language" opened the way to a series of more well-known critical dicta on Moore's work, including Ezra Pound's coinage "logopoeia" (in Pound's translation, "poetry that is akin to nothing but language" [March 1918]). William Carlos Williams's remark that "Miss Moore gets great pleasure from wiping soiled words or cutting them clean out" followed in this same line of thought (1925).

H. D.'s insight was again reiterated by T. S. Eliot in his 1935 Introduction to Moore's Selected Poems, where he affirmed that Moore was "engaged in maintaining the life of the English language." H. D. thus began the process of decoding the puzzle that Moore poses for her readers—no mere word-puzzle but a puzzle nonetheless, the puzzling over which, H. D. understood, would yield a prize of "rich and strange" meaning to the stalwart.

On her first visit to New York City in 1915, Moore made the acquaintance of poet and avant-garde publisher Alfred Kreymborg, editor of the journal Others. Others was among the first extra-collegiate magazines (along with the Egoist and Poetry) to publish Moore, and Kreymborg wrote admiringly of Moore in his 1925 memoir, Troubadour (his description of their trip to a baseball game is particularly

times Moore radically altered her work, transforming syllabic poems into free verse, cutting or adding back large sections, or even omitting whole poems from her canon. The effect overall was to keep any one version from taking precedence and to forestall complacency on the part of the reader. Moore’s willingness, even exuberance, to revise already published work in new collections is maddening to those who seek stable texts, as well as to those who prefer the earlier versions. But revision played an integral role in Moore’s poetics throughout her career, and to ignore it is to miss much.

Relatedly, Moore also challenged common views on the value of establishing “official” poetic texts through publication. Though she sent poems off to journals and worked to get them placed, she also wrote to Pound in 1919 that “I grow less and less desirous of being published” and referred to publication as “embalming.” This reticence may seem to contradict the flamboyant unusualness of her work, but it may also be understood to participate in the overall critique of the literary superstructure that her work effects. When Moore was urged to publish a collection, she refused, holding that the body of work was not strong enough, though she earlier had made moves toward a book. In 1921, H. D. and her companion Bryher, good friends to Moore by now, felt that she was not the best judge in this case and arranged the publication in England of Moore’s first volume, Poems. Moore’s response combined anger (“... if you knew how much more than stubborn I am, you would blame yourself more than you do, on having put a thing through, over my head!”) with gratitude (“As for Hilda’s part in gathering the poems, I am too much in awe to be articulate; I cannot grasp the benevolence and the compassing of the whole enterprise”). Though Moore also took steps to encourage publication of her work, her qualms (more than mere modesty) seem consistent with her revisionary practice in their questioning of the privileged and inviolable status of established texts, though they were certainly not the only operative sentiment. In the event, no matter how mixed her feelings, the career was launched.

The launch was not without its difficulties, however. The anonymous reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement (then Deputy Editor Frederick T. Dalton) found her work intelligent but uninspired, and was particularly displeased with her “eccentricities of spacing” and other prosodic innovations, which he considered “superfluous unconventionalities” employed in an “attempt to attract attention.” Mark Van Doren in The Nation compared Moore negatively to Edna St. Vincent Millay and Anna Wickham, blaming her for having “wedded wit, but after divorces from beauty and sense,” and for being one of the “insufferable highbrows.” Wickham and Millay, on the other hand, got points for being passionate and apparently for writing in manners Van Doren found suitable to the category he judged under in this review, that of Woman. Edith Sitwell, in The Sackbut, called Moore “one of the most interesting American poets of the day,” for reasons very similar to those for which Van Doren took her to task. Sitwell judged Moore’s work possessed of “a curious, hidden beauty,” but Sitwell too found Moore’s prosody irritating.

Poetry editor Harriet Monroe, who had been among the first to publish Moore in 1915, but from whom Moore felt distanced by 1919, convened a “symposium” on Moore’s work in the January 1922 issue. Quoting letters from a number of critics, Monroe began with praise but ended with censure, offering her own judgment that Moore’s “ironic mind harnesses down [her Pegasus’s] wings and her iron hand holds a stiff rein.” But the fact of the symposium and its serious consideration of Moore’s work granted the work significance nonetheless. This significance was celebrated in a later review by Glenway Wescott, who made claims for Moore’s poems as examples of aristocratic art. He distinguished this from proletarian art by its requirement that readers spend time deciphering it. (Later Clement Greenberg offered this same criterion for distinguishing high art from kitsch.) Eliot’s December 1923 Dial review of both Marriage and Poems seconded Wescott’s sense of Moore’s difficulty and importance, while taking issue with his distinction: “fine art is the refinement, not the antithesis, of popular art.” Eliot praises Moore’s combination of American jargon with her own inimitable “magnificence of phrase” and draws attention to her invention of a “quite new rhythm,” which brings everything together in an uncommon way. In drawing to his close, he finds her the heir of many traditions, “too good ... to be appreciated anywhere.” The final paragraph, taking a tack quite different from Van Doren’s, compliments Moore for writing poetry in which her femininity is apparent but in which “one never thinks of this particularity as anything but a positive virtue.”

Parallel to the world of reviews, the world of anthologies likewise indicates poetic status and influences what the general public reads. In 1922 the second edition of Louis Untermeyer’s Modern American Poetry: A Critical Anthology omitted both Moore and Williams, setting off controversy in poetic circles. Untermeyer clarified his view in a review of Poems in the Freeman, which he included, in an expanded version, in the 1923 edition of his American Poetry Since 1900. Moore was a good writer, in his judgment, but not of poetry—her true medium was prose! This view, however influential its advocate, did not win the day.

Though Poems was not widely reviewed, the reviews it did get marked Moore as a serious poet. In 1923 director Lincoln MacVeagh, at the urging of Scofield Thayer, offered to have the Dial Press print an American edition of Poems. After some convincing, Moore went to work choosing her texts, a privilege she had not earlier been afforded. The American version quickly expanded into a much larger collection, entitled Observations, published in 1924. This book included fifty-three poems, where Poems had twenty-four. The expansion included new poems as well as several earlier ones that had not been selected for the first volume. Moore also chose to omit three poems that H. D. and Bryher had collected.

The new book received a much wider range of notices than its predecessor, again with varying views. The enlarged attention was due in some important part to
Moore's winning of the 1924 Dial award, announced in the January 1925 issue of the magazine. The award, begun in 1921, had previously gone to Eliot, Sherwood Anderson, and Van Wyck Brooks. The endorsement of the Dial, arguably the most influential literary magazine of its day, meant Moore could not be ignored. And Scofield Thayer, co-publisher of the Dial along with James Sibley Watson, also took the role of Moore's direct advocate to readers, penning three ebullient "Comments" on her work in addition to the initial announcement of the award, in which he spoke of her as "one whose already published work will so beyond mortal hap single her out through generations, one who seems to us so incomparably, since the death of Emily Dickinson, America's most distinguished poetess." His purpose was to "light our beacon, and—for a worth-while moment—flame a name worth flaring." Thayer's pieces, along with an essay by Wescott on Moore in the January issue and another by Williams in the May issue, constituted an extended paean to Moore, a rather extraordinary recommendation for a poet whose work until that point, Thayer acknowledged, had been "so meagerly relished and so signaly unacclaimed" by the American public. In effecting this laudatory "flame," Thayer extended the work of the prize, to "fulfil in an especial degree our functions of criticism and of propaganda, those twin functions wherefore we exist."

Positive notices in the New York Times Book Review and The Nation (wherein Wescott's view of Moore's as "aristocratic" work was echoed approvingly), countered a negative in the New York Herald Tribune (where Wilbert Snow found the poems and modernist poetry in general "satiarily aloof and snobbish"). Gorham Munson in the Little Review offered a qualified endorsement, ranking Moore "an amazing minor poet." But Yvor Winters in his review in Poetry and Richard Aldington's in the Criterion were exuberant in their praise, declaring Moore a "genius" and "the best poet now living in America."

Given the overall positive cast of her reviews and especially the enthusiasm of Thayer's "Comments," it ensued neatly that the June issue of the Dial concluded with the announcement that Moore had been selected as acting editor upon Thayer's departure. She began in July, and it became a permanent position in 1926. The new role made Moore even more well known among the literati, affording her both wide influence and some blame—a risk run by all decision makers. Though the magazine was widely admired, some felt that it lost its cutting edge toward the end of the twenties. As editor, Moore herself was deeply absorbed in the life of the Dial and published no poetry during her tenure. Only after Sibley Watson, living then in Rochester, closed the Dial down with the July 1929 issue did Moore return to her poetry.

That return was marked by a return to syllables and a change in poetic manner and focus—longer poems with a more consistently natural-historical concern. Friends again urged Moore to publish, and Eliot took the lead this time. In 1935 Macmillan and Faber and Faber issued Moore's Selected Poems, edited by Eliot, though Eliot noted in his introduction that Moore did most of the selecting, and his work consisted mainly in ordering the poems. Eliot's Introduction flared Selected Poems as Thayer's "Comments" had done for Observations, but more directly.

Operating as a preemptive review, which all other reviewers would read along with the poems, Eliot's piece soon became dogma. His words echoed through reviews of Moore's work for decades. When reviewers did not understand what Moore was doing, they cited Eliot, saying that her poems "form part of the small body of durable poetry written in our time" and left it at that. In 1964 a writer in the Festschrift in honor of Moore's seventy-seventh birthday could confidently say that "Almost all that can be said of Miss Moore's poetry was said thirty years ago by Mr. Eliot, in his Introduction to the Selected Poems." This kind of view gives small honor, since one sign of poetic accomplishment, as Eliot's Introduction points out, is the ability to inspire new and compelling readings across generations. Fortunately, Moore criticism has moved on in the years since.

What Eliot said was itself quite compelling, and full of resonant phrases of the sort welcomed by book jacket blurb writers. The essay evokes issues raised by Eliot in earlier essays on poetry, as well as in his two earlier essays on Moore. And building on Wescott, Eliot argues that what may seem to some readers of Moore's work to be a frigid, unemotional manner is instead the effect of those readers' inability to recognize unfamiliar emotion. This argument intersects interestingly with his complex discussion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" of emotion's role in the creation of effectively impersonal poetry (impersonality being of course a valued quality in Eliot's poetic system). Praising her highly detailed powers of observation and accelerated associative technique, her innovative rhymes, and her precise diction, Eliot comes little short of crowning Moore. He affirms the "genuineness" of her work, a term he extrapolates from Moore's poem "Poetry," and insists on her specialness: she is "one of those few who have done the language some service in my lifetime" and she is understandable only by the more than "moderately intellectual." In fact, the bafflement of the many by her work is an indicator of her superiority. And while Eliot begins by holding that we cannot determine which of our contemporaries are great—greatness here being defined as what will stand the test of time—he concludes that "Miss Moore's poems form part of the small body of durable poetry written in our time"—apparently contradicting his initial premise.

Drawing on his own authority, which he affirms in claiming that only a necessarily small number can recognize genuine poetry, Eliot works then to extend some of that authority to Moore.

Though many of Moore's reviewers adopted Eliot's judgments absolutely, F. R. Leavis took issue. Indeed, in light of the subsequent submissiveness of critics to Eliot's dicta, Leavis's refusal to go along seems refreshing, though we may strongly disagree with his views on Moore's work. In fact, Leavis reviewed Eliot's Introduction rather than Moore's writing, taking direct issue with his authority claims, quoting the Introduction extensively, and leaving consideration of the poetry to its readers. Like Leavis, Basil de Selincourt, reviewing the book anonymously for
the Times Literary Supplement, also disputed Eliot's judgments on several points. Most emphatically, he disagrees with the claim that Moore's work is "for the life of our language." Rather, he judges that "its cultivated refusals and subtle detachment are poison to us." While acknowledging Moore's skills and the interest of her innovations, the TLS comes out on the side of "the crooners, the slang-singers, the lumber-jacks"—the common speakers—and against those, like Moore, Eliot, and Pound, who share "a similar aesthetic and intellectual revision from common life and common standards."

Wallace Stevens, on the other hand, firmly approved of Selected Poems. Wielding his poetic weight much more languidly than Eliot, he calls it "the veritable thing" and praises Moore's combination of fastidiousness with invigoration (a description not inappropriate to his own work). He spends much of the essay asserting that Moore is a Romantic, defining that term so that it becomes a synonym for Moore's concept of the Genuine: essentially something that is newly observed, not a repetition of a received idea. Perhaps surprising to those familiar with the image of Moore as independent spinster is Stevens's characterization of her as "not a writer [but] a woman who has profound needs." In the next sentence, he clarifies that all poets are "men and women first, not writers," but there is a noteworthy continuity here with Eliot's pointedly exceptional view of Moore as a poet of strong, if unfamiliar, emotion.

Morton Zabel, alone among reviewers, discussed the development of subject matter and technique exemplified in the new pieces included in Selected Poems. He celebrated her new poems' advancing complexity (which mirrors that of modern experience and renovates readers' attention), and their "passionate acceptance" of "the physical reality of the creature" so that "all the banalities of allegory can be discarded." Zabel's thoughtful and extensive consideration of Moore's work (he even reviewed the book twice) was part of the beginning of the process of in-depth consideration of Moore's poetry—moving beyond the introductory descriptions of the early pieces and the concise analyses generally admissible in the review format. R. P. Blackmur's essay in his book The Double Agent also gave Moore extended consideration, drawing back to look at her methods and offering close readings of several poems. Though he is quite enthusiastic through most of the essay, he closes with a kind of implicit censure—naming Moore's method "the perfection of standing aside." This judgment grows out of his critique of "Marriage" for its lack of mention of "sex or lust," the absence of which, Blackmur finds, makes the poem "less complete" than it could be, idiosyncratic and necessarily therefore not major poetry. The logic at work here combines aspects of prior negative reviews (frigidity, distance) with a generally positive presentation. And it leads the way to a kind of marginalizing praise that was to become more prominent in the years that followed. Moore is, as Eliot predicted, marked down here for not displaying the common emotions.

In 1936 Moore published in England a short collection of new work called The Pangolin. This limited printing received almost no notice, but the poems have been held by later writers to be among Moore's strongest. In 1941 What Are Years included all five of the poems of The Pangolin, as well as ten others. This volume was received favorably, with Randall Jarrell's review "The Humble Animal" giving her the strongest reading of the set—not only in his declaration that her poems "seem already immortal" and that she must surely be "the greatest living woman poet," but also in its serious engagement with her work. In dialogue with negative or marginalizing reviewers, Jarrell offers: "Miss Moore has limitations—her work is one long triumph of them—but I am sick of seeing them insisted on, and Miss Moore deprecated ad majorem gloriæ of poets who ought not to be allowed to throw elegies into her grave." This view stands in contrast to the cast of his subsequent review of Moore's 1944 collection, Nevertheless, which takes her to task for exactly the sort of limitations Jarrell disparaged other critics for stressing in the earlier review. Here he first reproves Moore for "seen[ing] postcards to only the nicer animals." He saves his greatest censure for the poem "In Distrust of Merits," which Jarrell finds naively sentimental. "In Distrust of Merits" was unusual for Moore, as Jarrell notes, in its outright appeal to sentiment, but while it lost her credit among some, it gained her many new fans. Among them was W. H. Auden, whose review of Nevertheless takes her seriously in a way new to her poet-critics: he admits to having been influenced by her and to having stolen already a great deal from her store of prosodic inventiveness (the syllable method in particular, as Roy Fuller points out later).

Having won the Shelley Prize in 1940 and the Harriet Monroe Poetry Prize for Nevertheless, Moore's reputation continued to expand throughout the 1940s. In 1948 the Quarterly Review of Literature published a special issue on her work—the first such concerted attention she had received. (The Moore issue has recently been reissued in QRL's Retrospective Special Issue series, vol. 19.) These essays followed in the path of Kenneth Burke's fine 1942 essay, both in situating Moore's work in relation to her poetic context (predecessors and peers) and in giving extended consideration to the operations of her poetry. Where Burke explored the ramifications of a linked set of ideas and images in poems from across Moore's career, the writers in this collection considered such material as Moore's debts to Imagism (John Crowe Ransom, building on Burke), her use of animal imagery (Vivienne Koch), her ties to a Puritan heritage (Louise Bogan), and her links to Poe (Elizabeth Bishop). There remained far to go in the development of Moore studies, but given this beginning, Ransom could predict that Moore would soon be the subject of extensive academic scrutiny.

5 This phrase was reemployed in Jarrell's later essay on Moore, "Her Shield" (see bibliography).
6 See Susan Schweik's essay on Jarrell's response to "In Distrust of Merits" and the complex genderings that both poets employ in their treatments of war.
That outcome was delayed by several decades, however, perhaps most of all by the transformation of Moore's public persona that came with the publication of her *Collected Poems* (1951), and its receipt of the Pulitzer, the National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize, and the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Letters. The wide recognition that came with this abundance of awards dovetailed with the increasing accessibility of her new work and with her emerging public image as a dawningly charming spinster poet. Declared the "best living poet" by *Newsweek* in 1951, Moore was soon featured in *Life* magazine on a zoo tour. Subsequent appearances included the Johnny Carson show and the cover of *Esquire* magazine (as an "Unknockable," someone nobody doesn't like). In 1968 she threw out the first ball on opening day at Yankee stadium. The daffy element Moore's public persona reaffirmed the popular view of high culture as out of touch. At the same time that her apparent kinliness quieted persistent anxieties about high culture's elitism. Her status as poet celebrity intersected with the change in her poetic focus: new poems now included more popular material, were much easier to follow, and employed many more familiar attitudes than had been the case earlier. This newly accessible poetry suggested reassuringly that the divisions between high- and low- or middle-brow culture were perhaps not so deep as feared. The new material soon found publication in such popular venues as the front page of the *New York Herald Tribune*. In 1957 Moore was the subject of a *New Yorker* profile that celebrated her connection to the Dial (the literary sophistication of which the *New Yorker* now emulated) and played, as did all of her popular representations, upon the amusement factor created when the three categories "elergency," "female," and "modernist"—all variously threatening—were unexpectedly combined and presented in a pointedly unthreatening fashion. (The need for the reassurance involved in this dynamic suggests the wider cultural anxiety that intellectual and older women did provoke.)

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9 In the *New Yorker*, Moore worked as a kind of advertisement for the magazine's claims to high-brow status, but in a manner suited to the *New Yorker*'s rather compromised position. Her high-brow role was paradoxical, with her collision, and so was suited to the magazine's familiar humor mode (Moore became a kind of living cartoon: elderly woman at racetrack in tricorn). In the profile, her poetry is barely mentioned, and when it is mentioned, we are reassured that she doesn't really take it seriously (a view that Moore did much to promote) and that we shouldn't either. The effect is one of strong ambivalence toward both high and low culture. In addition, Moore, who refused standard domestic arrangements, was adopted as part of an ongoing battle of the sexes fought steadily across the magazine's pages throughout the fifties. Standard domesticity, as Mary Corey has outlined, was represented quite negatively in the *New Yorker* of the '50s, through cartoons and short stories that depicted nagging suburban wives and their harried husbands who were forced into a life of conformity at work in order to support their wives' unending demands for new and better goods (Corey, *The World through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999], 157 ff.).

Moore's apparently asexual femininity (unthreatening and bordering on the masculine) is employed as the exception that proves the rule of feminine threat.

10 "There is no doubt that in the later work the cozy element in the poet, the element acceptable to the *New Yorker*, is in greater evidence," wrote Roy B. Fuller, reviewing Moore's *Complete Poems* in 1968 [essay in this volume].
In 1955 Moore, who had been an active writer of essays and reviews since the start of her publishing career, issued her first collection of prose works: *Predilections*. As with the *Fables, Predilections*’ failure to fit genre expectations disconcerted some reviewers. Many noted that Moore’s reviews tended not to analyze the work under consideration, but instead to quote from it extensively and to focus on virtues rather than faults. Kingsley Amis, taking a distinctly un-Moorish tack, found the book full of “tortured shrewdness” and “lacking in any sense of relevance or direction.” But others praised the work’s unusual sensibility and pointed approvingly to its commonalities with Moore’s poetry.

This was also the year in which Ford Motors invited Moore to submit names for a new car. They eventually chose Edsel, after Henry Ford’s son, and the car was famously unsuccessful. Perhaps one of Moore’s suggestions—like Mongoose Civic or Utopian Turtletop—would have done better. The correspondence was later published in the *New Yorker*. The unexpected combination of commercial and poetic concerns in the collaboration—Moore’s suggestions demonstrate and play ironically upon an awareness of the animal names often given to cars—furthers Moore’s growing reputation as a charming eccentric.

In 1956 *Like a Bulwark* appeared to reviews that consistently remarked upon Moore’s developing public persona. Kenneth Koch, though a fan of Moore’s earlier work, felt that the new poems pointed their morals too didactically and sounded too much like “Marianne Moore” the character rather than the poet. The *TLS* found some fault with the poetry of *Like a Bulwark* (specifically a tendency to lack connection between the sections of poems), but was overall quite enthusiastic: “Miss Moore’s work is the embodiment of wit, of style, of the fantastic and erudite imaginative flight, but there is something earthy, something Emily Dickinson-like about the epigrams [quotations, perhaps, but chosen with what skill] which are placed like cloves of garlic in the exquisite meat of her poems.” The reviewer notes both that Moore has all along felt equal interest in popular and elite texts (“the sporting page of the *New York Times*, ‘Plastic Sponge Implants in Surgery,’ and *Sidney’s Arcadia*”) and that she now seems to be making an effort at popularity for herself (“going out towards the world at the same time as the world is coming towards her”). This movement is read here positively, as “evidence of a liveliness and freshness of mind scarcely paralleled in a poet of her years.”

The British version of the volume included an additional poem—“Hometown Piece for Messrs. Alston and Reese,” a baseball poem set to the tune of “Hush Little Baby,” which had appeared on page one of the *New York Herald Tribune* soon after the publication of the U.S. edition. This poem built upon Moore’s long-standing interest in baseball (represented in Kreyborg’s 1925 memoir), and now introduced to the wider public this “new” aspect of the Moore persona. As baseball lover she allied herself to the font of American national sentiment. With a doggerel air and big stretches to rhyme and to include the names of team members, the poem was immediately accessible to all readers and required none of the effort to make sense of that her earlier poetry had. Instead, the poem played its own game—of poetic parody. The parody being quite cheerful, fans and players loved the poem. With this new broad acceptance, Moore had moved into the realm of kitsch, at the opposite cultural pole from her avant-garde start. The move was not without its own ironic self-consciousness, as the *TLS* review noted. The question for current critics lies, I suggest, in exploring the ways in which Moore employed the critical and reflective elements of her kitsch position. But among reviewers at the time, few went so far as the *TLS* in recognizing the possibility that Moore exerted some canny control of her “going out towards the world.” Most either accepted the work without analysis while celebrating Moore’s character, or condemned the work for cuteness and triviality. Thus the books of the next ten years—*O to Be a Dragon* (1959), *Arctic Ox* (1964), and *Tell Me, Tell Me* (1966)—received in fairly equal shares friendly but often unsustaining reviews, and critical expressions of high-brow dismay at the growing flavor of kitsch in the work of this honored modernist. As a result the later Moore had two reputations at once, divided between high- and middle-brow audiences.

When George Plimpton took Moore to a Yankees game in 1963 (for an article published in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1964), he was pointedly engaging the persona for purposes of public merriment. The essay mixes admiration with polite condescension in a manner representative of much of Moore’s press in the 1960s. Though respectful, Plimpton has doubts about Moore’s ability to understand what’s going on at the ballgame. To his credit he acknowledges that she may be finding things interesting apart from what he expects her to, but an element of superiority plays in. The apposition of Plimpton’s article with Kreyborg’s piece of nearly forty years earlier, however, suggests that Moore led the scene more than Plimpton knew. She pointedly plays to Plimpton’s assumptions about her baseball innocence by claiming to have first become interested in the game in 1949. But Kreyborg tells of taking Moore to a baseball game in the early ‘20s in order to hear “her stumped about something.” He chooses the game because it will be “an experience completely strange to her,” because it is “low-brow.” Moore surprises him by turning out to recognize the pitcher by his pitch, having read his book on the art. This episode presents neatly a dynamic that would be repeated many times over Moore’s career, one in which Moore’s status as high-brow poet is complicated by her wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, which extends to popular culture, to the amusement of those who observe. While Kreyborg is disappointed in his attempt to stump Moore, he is also pleased with her ability to sustain the image of infallibility. What threat such feminine erudition might be felt to represent is dealt with through recategorizing Moore as amusing.

But Kreyborg could not have been entirely surprised by Moore’s skills in multiple realms, since Moore herself established the dynamic of high/low blur early on in her poetry, through quotations from low- and middle-brow texts that create a challenge to the distinctions behind the assignment of brow status. This challenge

fits well with the challenges to hierarchy enacted in the work of many of Moore's fellow moderns. But Moore took the challenge further than most, being willing to carry it into the sphere of personal life. The public persona of the '50s and '60s had roots in much earlier phases of Moore's career. The two baseball stories together suggest the extent to which she was in wry command of the persona she presented to the world.

In the same year that Plimpton's article appeared, Moore was lauded in a festchrift, edited by M. J. Tambrutti. Forty-six of her friends and admirers wrote tributes, varying in length from a few lines to a few pages. While the festchrift was essentially celebratory, 1964 also saw the publication of the first book-length scholarly study on her work, by Bernard Engle. Engle provided a thoughtful and respectful analysis of each stage of Moore's career, emphasizing the interaction between her work and that of her modernist peers. Several more studies soon followed Engle's, finally getting under way the long-delayed and still gradual process of affording Moore her critical due.

Such was the context in which Moore's Complete Poems appeared in 1967. Though it might have seemed the occasion to reflect upon Moore's importance to twentieth-century poetic history, critics focused instead on the contemporary persona and on the inaccuracy of the title, which was the most remarked upon feature of the volume. Moore's epigraph "Omissions are not accidents" made it clear that exclusion of such poems as "Roses Only," "Black Earth," "Is Your Town Nineveh," and others was intentional (in fact, only 125 of her 192 published poems were included). And it was noted that the omissions occurred within poems as well, so that whole stanzas could disappear without notice, and carefully constructed prosodic structure could melt away—part of Moore's movement toward wider accessibility. The cutting of the poem "Poetry" from its twenty-nine-line length in Observations and the Selected and Collected Poems to a mere three lines in the Complete Poems (though with one of the longer versions appended in the notes) was the most flagrant, and a much-discussed, change. This latest example of Moore's revisionism was itself a factor in blocking the view of the full trajectory of her career.

13 Hugh Kenner was one of those who noted that Moore's poetry was getting little real attention: "Of late] Miss Moore is rather a collector's item (for the New Yorker and George Plimpton) than reading matter," he noted. "That doesn't change her work. It 'will be there when the wave has gone by'" (National Review 19 [December 26, 1967]: 1433).

14 This is not the first revision this poem underwent: While several small changes characterized its move from the thirty-line versions in Others (1919) and in Poems (1921) through its twenty-nine-line versions in Observations (1924), Selected Poems (1935), and Collected Poems (1954), it was radically altered in the second edition of Observations (1925), where it had only thirteen lines, five of them new additions. This truncated version has been erroneously cited as the first version several times.

Introduction

The fact that the poems had been changed and the canon cut made it difficult for readers to see how the work had evolved. Instead, the entire volume represents a late redaction of Moore's aesthetic.

The solution to the difficulty of teaching Moore's full career posed by The Complete Poems will be not to throw out that volume entirely but to make the earlier texts available as well, or to move on to a variorum edition, which, by including all Moore's versions of all her poems, would provide readers with a real sense of her poetic history. When omitted poems and all versions of revised poems are admitted, her canon balloons and complicates. Inclusion of the omitted poems and versions reveals Moore to have been an assiduous and quite ambitious poet, whose methods of revision challenge our understanding of what constitutes any poem's "true" text.

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Moore was at work on (minor) emendations to The Complete Poems when she died in 1972. By the time the second edition appeared in 1981, the landscape of Moore criticism had changed. The absence of the media persona made the poems more approachable on their own merits, and the new availability of Moore's papers and effects at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia gave scholars a wealth of contextualizing material to draw upon. Rosenbach curator Patricia Willis began publishing the Marianne Moore Newsletter (1977–83)—a fine series that included articles on the holdings of the collection, brief analyses of Moore's work based on those holdings, and questions that invited reader input, opening up the work of discovery to a burgeoning set of Moore scholars. The first step toward establishing the array of reference texts necessary to careful scholarship had already come with Charles Tomlinson's collection of critical essays (1969). The field was further enhanced by the work of feminist critics, who expanded understanding of the operation of poetry by women within the larger cultural frame. A body of serious, in-depth examinations of Moore's work soon emerged.

As with any such body of critical texts, no single reading tells the whole story. Instead, the atmosphere of vigorous debate admits a range of readings, sometimes contradictory, that together contribute to a wider understanding of the poetry and lead the way to further insight. Because space is limited, for this volume I include only a few selections from the posthumous response to Moore's work. Among these are pieces by a few of the most influential critical works of the '70s and '80s. The collection is rounded out by two pieces from the '90s—a 1994 essay of mine on Moore's later work and persona, and excerpts from a 1999 article by Catherine Paul on the role of museum-theory in the shaping of What Are Years. Two essays written for this volume, by Anne Raine (on Moore's mediated relation to nature via natural history exhibits) and Meg Scherker (on the role of emotion in Moore's work and critical response to it), bring this collection up to the present day. Readers, of course, are encouraged to refer to the bibliography to more fully explore the range of recent response to Moore's work.
Kenner’s chapter on Moore in *A Homemade World* (1975) influentially continued the process of contemporary exploration of Moore’s role among the modernists. Suzanne Juhasz, in her *Naked and Fiery Forms* (1976), offered a provocative analysis of the role of gender in shaping Moore’s poetry. Laurence Stapleton’s *The Poet's Advance* (1978) was the first critical book to draw on Moore’s papers for an understanding of the poetry. Stapleton argued for regarding the changes in Moore’s style across her career as an unswerving series of literary advances, without missteps—a defense that could and would be taken issue with, but that played an important part in the growth of Moore criticism.

In 1981 Bonnie Costello’s *Imaginary Possessions* set a new and very high standard for Moore scholarship, combining penetrating interpretation with rich archival work. Costello, focusing on Moore’s early work, explores the ways that the structures of that poetry inform its oscillating messages. She reads the principles of Moore’s vision—sincerity and gusto—as both moral and aesthetic. Moore’s project, in Costello’s view, celebrates the elusiveness of the world—of objects, of ideas, and of others. In place of a concise, physical or linguistic, Moore seeks and commends the pleasures of “imaginary possession.” In addition, in the piece excerpted here, Costello analyzes the dialogue of Moore’s poetry with contemporary work in the visual arts. With its strong combination of textual and contextual attentions, Costello’s book has framed the discussion of Moore’s work ever since.

In his 1986 volume, *The Savage’s Romance*, John Slatin, like Costello, takes issue with the view of Moore’s career as continuous advance. He makes a pointed case instead for a sharp decline in the value of the work after the ’30s (a scholarly version of the argument made by Moore’s dismayed high-brow reviewers of the ’50s and ’60s), while offering very strong readings of the early poetry and a thoughtful analysis of Moore’s changing attitudes toward and interactions with her community of fellow poets. Margaret Holley’s 1987 survey of the development of Moore’s poetry, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value*, offers detailed analyses of eight stages of Moore’s poetic career. Holley makes the opposite case to Slatin’s, arguing for an understanding of the later work as a natural and worthy development out of the earlier stages. In addition Holley appends a valuable “Chronology of Moore’s Published Poems,” which provides details on the first appearance of each one. Slatin and Holley both expanded critics’ awareness of the importance of looking at original or contemporary versions of the poems for analysis of each period of Moore’s work. In their differences in approaching and judging Moore’s poetry and career, these and other keen scholars suggest the depth and complexity of Moore’s oeuvre.

In the late 1980s, the volume of work on Moore increased. A 1987 centenary conference at the National Poetry Foundation in Orono, Maine, brought together many Moore scholars, and a collection issued from that gathering in 1990 (ed. Willis). Four other collections were published between 1984 and 1990: three featured new work (ed. Andrew Kappel, Theodora Rapp Graham, and Joseph Parisi) and one collected some of the criticism of the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s (ed. Harold Bloom). Along with these came a plethora of new books and book chapters on Moore. Several of these explore, among other subjects, Moore’s special position as a woman among the largely male crowd of modernist poets. Her rather unusual gender presentation played an important part both in her acceptance in that group and in the way she constructed her poems. Gender’s pivotal role in Moore’s work is examined in books by Alice Ostricker, Joanne Feit Diehl, Betsy Erkkila, Jeanne Heuving, Cynthia Hogue, Cristanne Miller, Elizabeth Gregory, Sabine Sielke, and others; essays by Sandra Gilbert and Rachel Blau DuPlessis in the Parisi and Graham collections are also central in this discussion. As the critical focus has widened to include the interactions between poetry and its cultural milieu, important work has been emerging steadily on an expanding set of issues—among them, Moore’s dialogues with her poetic contemporaries (Celeste Goodridge and Robin Schulze); the role of science and technology in Moore’s work (Lisa Steinman); Moore’s interaction with visual culture (Elizabeth Joyce and Linda Leavell); her uses of quotation (Gregory and Miller); the role of religion in the poetry (Kappel and Jeredith Merrin); the effect of museum studies on her work (Catherine Paul and Anne Raine); her response to Chinese culture (Cynthia Stany); and more.

This critical expansion depended upon an analogous expansion of source materials. While the trajectory of Moore’s career has been obscured by the lack of availability of much of her early work, the historical apparatus necessary for contextualizing her work has also been lacking until recently. Gradually the gaps are being filled. The year 1986 saw the publication of Moore’s *Complete Prose* (ed. Willis), which made a huge body of material readily available for the first time and greatly expanded the basis for understanding Moore’s role as critic and active participant in the literary discussions of many decades. The appearance in 1990 of the first full biography, by Charles Molesworth, made a crucial opening for scholarship. The long-awaited issuance of Moore’s *Selected Letters* in 1997 (eds. Costello, Miller, and Goodridge) further expanded the field. The year 2002 brought the publication of Schulze’s *Becoming Marianne Moore*, which, among other things, reproduces Moore’s 1924 volume *Observations* and so makes widely available for the first time in decades many of the poems Moore chose to omit in later collections, as well as importantly different early versions of many poems. And a second biography is under way. As yet, the variorn is not on the horizon, but we can hope. The present volume offers readers what I believe is a representative selection of the important critical response to Moore’s work across the six decades of her poetic career, with a small sampling of the posthumous response as well. No single text is offered as “correct” in its viewpoint—instead I mean to emphasize the variation in response and invite readers to analyze that variation for themselves. In providing a sense of the milieu in which this marvelous poet wrote and lived, this collection will, I hope, give students of Moore a firmer basis for situating her work within the history of twentieth-century poetry.
The Critical Response to Marianne Moore

Edited by Elizabeth Gregory