"Men have power":
A Feminist Reclamation of Marianne Moore's "Marriage"

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received unacknowledged aid on this thesis.

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Dedications

To **Professor Wheeler**, for introducing me to modernist poetry, Marianne Moore, and "Marriage"; for countless hours of guidance and support for both life and this thesis; and for being an incredible professor, mentor, and not so scary deadline enforcer.

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An Introduction in Uncoupling "Marriage"

"It ought to be work to read something that it was work to write."

– Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore is an acquired taste, like coffee or oysters. Her poems are at first glance erudite, aloof, and seeming to lack any direction or emotion. While some of her poems can be read at face value, most beg deep dives to understand even the topic. I came to Marianne Moore thinking I understood poetry – how hard could it be? I could identify the difference between a Shakespearean and a Petrarchan sonnet and knew how to count meter and rhyme. But Miss Moore simply does not care. She takes the rule book and throws it out the window, subverting form, content, and even the poetic label itself. When I read Moore's poems in an upper-level Modern American Poetry class all I could muster by way of annotations on her 308-line poem "Marriage" was the measly one liner "unmarried on marriage." I didn't even include a question mark.

Come the end of the semester I still did not have a grasp on Moore. Her poem "Marriage" haunted me as she became this unobtainable woman whom all the other poets – Pound, Eliot, Williams – lauded yet we never hear of now. I wanted to know more about Moore. How is it that a Pulitzer Prize winning poet falls almost out of the canon, even amongst the literary elite? Why do we know so little about her biography? Why "Marriage"? What does it even mean; where does she fall on the institution – pro or con, or neither? With these questions in mind I scheduled an appointment over the summer at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia where all of Moore's letters, or those available to the public, are housed. After hours and days pouring over Moore's handwritten letters to family and friends, her poetry notebook containing drafts of "The Octopus" and "Marriage," often with lines from both poems interspersed and even written on top of one another, and first editions of "Marriage" I was even more lost than before. It seemed the guarded persona in her poems was not a persona – she herself was sheathed in armored words, cloaking herself in secrecy even to her most intimate

relations. While Mary Moore's, her mother, letters illuminated more about the poet's feelings than her own, Moore still remained an enigma to me as I could only understand her through the lens of others.

When school began again, I checked out every book in the Washington and Lee Library on Marianne Moore, trying to understand her, her oeuvre, and her poem "Marriage." I read her preeminent biographers and began to paint a picture of her life, her upbringing, and the world she lived in while writing "Marriage." I began to interpret her poem differently with each subsequent fact about her life: her being raised by a single mother who encouraged her to pursue higher education, participating in the early suffragette movement, relying on her older brother Warner to be the male head of household and breadwinner, living with her mother for her entire life, writing in the Greenwich Village avant-garde modernist circles. Yet pieces still did not fit perfectly. "Why marriage?" still stuck in my brain – why write on a relationship you have no personal experience with? Scholars like Linda Leavall point to her editor at the literary magazine *The Dial* proposing to Moore while still being married to someone else as the catalyst for "Marriage," although the evidence is circumstantial. Charles Molesworth suggests it stems out of a visit to her brother Warner and his wife, Constance, that inspired "The Octopus," a similarly long poem written around the same time. Other Moore scholars still posit it may be due to marital and extramarital relations in her modernist literary circle. Despite all these facts, nothing seemed like it covered the scope of the poem, nor answered my question of Moore's opinion in general.

When biographical criticism did not answer my research questions, and seemed to elude textual evidence, I turned to Moore scholarship, much of which came before Leavall had full access to the Moore estate for the first and only time. Here I began to interrogate the poems'

form and content. Through a close reading of the 1923 *Manikin* edition of "Marriage" combined with the Notes later added by Moore in the *Observations* collection, Moore's use of collage began to shine through. She reclaimed male words and texts, cutting and pasting them into her own narrative. She co-opted the traditional, ancient form marriage poem, an epithalamium, and epically mocked the canonical verse form through an ironic evocation of Adam and Eve and her biting tone. I began to read the formal choices Moore made as subversive, as uniquely feminine in voice and form, as having a conversation with all the males around her. Her timid whisper that I read a year before began to grow into a yelp and then a shout at the top of her lungs.

While scholars disagree on the poem's ending stance on the institution of marriage, I began to see the female voice screaming through everywhere, refusing to be silenced when she is half the couple. I could not ignore her version of Genesis containing a "LISTEN TO ME I HAVE SO MUCH TO SAY AND WILL MANSPLAIN IT ALL TO YOU" Adam, while poor Eve just asked to be left alone. Eve becomes the first female poet of sorts, the literary mother through whom all female writers gained their knowledge. Moore takes Eve's question from Milton's *Paradise Lost,* "For inferior who is free?", and begins to reimagine a marriage in which female inferiority is not essential. Moore asks, can we find equality in marriage, in "Marriage," for "men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it"?

Moore's postlapsarian marriage ideal in "Marriage" screams feminism yet she has been denied the title for decades. In the 1960's a new kind of female voice began to appear that would sideline Moore and her earlier work. Between 1963 and 1966, Sylvia Plath's collection of poems *Ariel*, Betty Freidan's feminist treatise *The Feminine Mystique,* Adrienne Rich's third book *Snapshots of a Daughter in Law*, and Anne Sexton's poems about her uterus all captured the American literary imagination (Leavall 372). Moore's refusal to claim her most feminist works

such as “Marriage,” as her own thoughts, rather than “statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly,” began to alienate her. The confessional form and sexualized, overtly feminine topics of Second Wave feminist poets ostracized Marianne “no poet has been so chaste” Moore. Her subversive modernist form and subtle male critique was not enough for the women fighting the patriarchy for more than voting rights. When Moore died in 1972, “white, middle-class feminists had come to regard the Plath/Sexton/Rich paradigm as a nearly universal female experience: an imaginative girl who idolizes her father tricked into marriage, motherhood, and powerlessness by a patriarchal society. To deny the resulting anger was both cowardly and dishonest” (Leavall 372-373). Poets like Moore who did not outwardly embrace their anger nor sexuality were seen as, according to Leavall, “the wrong kind of woman with whom to identify” (373). Moore fell out favor, and feminism.

Yet, poems like “Marriage” give us the chance to revisit Moore with a new post-third-wave feminist lens. While Moore is lacking intersectionality and appears to adhere strictly to heterosexual and heteronormative ideas of marriage and sex, we must read her within her historical and social context; and within that context Moore is radical. Despite her white cis-feminism, Moore is still relevant today as she not only wrote, according to poet Maureen McLane, “the best poem on marriage since, perhaps, *Paradise Lost,*” but also managed to interrogate women’s places in the world and the canon simultaneously. In addition, we can read the poem as feminist today because it is not just personal. Moore’s play on temporal and spatial movement throughout “Marriage” demonstrates the ubiquity of misogyny and patriarchy, especially in terms of male and female romantic, sexual, and martial relations. Her comments apply equally to the years 1521, 1921, and 2021. For while at first Moore's biography seems separate, it is paradoxically understanding Moore's milieu, family, and experiences that opens up

the feminist reading of the text itself. In 1923, Moore needed feminism as a woman and as a writer and as a female writer, although she may have not claimed the term herself.

I began and ended my research with "Marriage" itself in the same way that this thesis begins and ends with the poem itself. From here I naturally moved to understand Marianne Moore, hoping that through knowing Moore's background I would be able to elucidate the poetic and personal context in which she wrote. Through Charles Molesworth's biography *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life* and Linda Leavall's 2014 seminal work *Holding On, Upside Down*, supplemented by my archival research at the Rosenbach Museum, Moore's life began to unfold. My first chapter, "Moore's Many Marriages," examines the biographical details of Moore's life leading up to and during her writing of "Marriage." The understanding of the relationships in her life – in particular her mother, brother, and editor – help guide my close reading of the poem. Chapter Two, "Serpentine Answers to Flawed Questions," then unfolds in two sections that reflect my research methodology. The first is an interrogation of the macro aspects of the poem as well as the scholarship surrounding the poem. After first walking through the concepts of collage, the epithalamium form, and the overarching themes in the first section, the second section turns to a close reading of "Marriage" supplemented by Moore's notes from *Observations* and scholars' interpretations of the poem. Finally, in my coda, "The Female Poet, Feminism, and Moore," I conclude that Moore's poem ends on a feminist note and I reclaim her as a feminist poet using first, second, and third-wave definitions of feminism, arguing that Marianne Moore should be re-added to the annals of American poetry in her rightful position among not only the first ranks of female poets but, in poet John Ashbery's words, "our greatest modern poet" (Leavall 380).

Chapter 1:
Moore's Many Marriages

"The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence; not in silence, but restraint."

- Marianne Moore

Much like her difficult poetry, Marianne Moore remains an elusive character today due to her estate's protective nature, even long after her death. Although Moore was an active and acclaimed poet for 63 years, little was known about her private affairs during her lifetime, even as she became a public, one could say celebrity, figure. Posthumously, her letters and library were bequeathed, at her request, to the Rosenbach Museum and Library, but "she revealed her deepest feelings to no one… although she left to posterity an archive that chronicles virtually every week of her life, the archive reveals little about her private thoughts, emotions, fears, and aspirations" (Leavall xi). Due to this, and the fact that much of the Moore family's most personal correspondence was kept amongst the family members, there are great disparities in the biographical, and thus, in parts, literary, understanding of Moore's life. While people have searched for Marianne in her poetry, "Moore's poems are famously unforthcoming, you can study them for years and derive little sense of her family, friendships, jobs, and littler sense still of the nature of any balked hopes and private losses" (Leavall xiii).

Two people have had access to Moore's full correspondence: Charles Molesworth and Linda Leavall. Their biographies of Marianne and interpretations of her poems vary drastically, however. Molesworth was forced to focus, in *Marianne Moore: The Literary Life,* on "the external facts of Moore's life. In part this is because [he] was not allowed to quote from the unpublished correspondence of Moore and her immediate family" (xxii). In rescinding their offer to publish previously unseen information, the estate censored Molesworth. On the other hand, Leavall's *Holding On Upside Down*, published decades later, extensively relies on this material to create a fuller backstory and explanation of the eccentricities of the Moore family: "The Moores made it clear that they wanted me to have the freedom to tell my story as I pleased… I was shown documents that no one outside the family had seen. These documents, especially a

large cache of letters about Moore's father, filled a major gap in her history" (xvii). Both scholars relied heavily on the Rosenbach Museum and Library's Moore archive, publically available in 1972, but Leavall was able to focus on the interiority of Moore– which often comes through in her poems – in ways that no one had been able to previously due to the help of the estate. Despite this, Leavall still claimed to "come to know Mary [Moore's mother] and Warner [Moore's older brother] rather well" but "still knew little about Marianne" (xvii).

Marianne Moore's life was marked by "the absent father, the lesbian mother, the feminist upbringing, and the fierce opposition to most heterosexual unions" (Leavall xvi). Marianne was born to Mary and John Milton Moore in St. Louis, Missouri in 1887. Moore's parents separated before her birth, but never divorced. She never met her father, as he spent most of her childhood in an insane asylum, and did not see a picture of him until adulthood (Leavall 19). Meanwhile, Mary Moore left St. Louis and raised Marianne and her older brother Warner as a single, working mother in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The daughter of a Presbyterian pastor and an English teacher at Metzger Institute, she raised her children on books and the Bible: "Her vision of the family was both ethnic… and religious. 'Don't forget that we three people are a 'peculiar people,' that is according to the Scriptures, a people *set apart*. We have a mission to the world; as the old prophets used to call their message, '*a burden.*'" But while they may have had a "burden" to bear, Mary ensured that "sea trips and books were necessities to the Moores, no luxuries" (Leavall 38). The maternal upbringing, in Moore's words, "hand reared" Marianne, who claimed to get "almost too much individual attention" (44). But despite their lower income level due to Mary as the sole breadwinner and parent, Mrs. Moore never doubted that both of her children would attend college.

Warner Moore, thus, was the main male influence in Marianne's life, something that had an outsized influence on her poetry and "Marriage." While there was no doubt that Marianne would attend college, it was also expected that traditional gender roles would be maintained. Warner was expected to attend better schools and pursue a more prestigious career. Mary expected Warner to be able to provide for his mother and sister long into his life, thus "nothing posed a greater threat to the sanctity of the family than the girls Warner courted" (Leavall 53). However, Warner was not the only "he" that lived at "the Nest," the family home. Nicknames and gender ambiguity littered the Moore's correspondence and conversations. Marianne was referred to as "Rat," "Uncle," and more often "he" than "she" in correspondence, even long past childhood. This "problem," as Molesworth refers to it, of Moore's gender will continue to resurface in her family – and in her poems such as "Marriage" – throughout her life, much like Warner's male influence. But Warner was only one person; "Marianne grew up in a society of single, educated woman like her mother" (Leavall 44). Of these women, their neighbor Mary Norcross gained the most intimate access to the family of perhaps anyone.

Linda Leavall argues in *Holding On, Upside Down*, and continues this argument in later articles, that 25-year-old Mary Norcross and 38-year-old Mary Moore were in a lesbian relationship, both romantically and sexually, based on Norcross and Moore's letters, many of which have been lost or destroyed, a topic often mentioned today in conversations regarding Moore's feminism. In perhaps their most explicit letter, Norcross writes to Mary Moore: "I feel I shall devour you on Sunday to repay me for my long long wait" (Leavall 45). Leavall asserts that the Victorian era assumed only men were sexual beings, so women holding hands, kissing, and even spending the night in bed together would not be seen as sexual (46). If Leavall's assertions are true, Moore's ambivalence towards marriage in "Marriage" may be partially

explained, for her mother found companionship outside and in face of the institution. Conversely, Molesworth speaks of Norcross as being "on very intimate terms with both Marianne and her mother" as evident by her animal nickname "Beaver" and her role as part of the "innermost circle of the Moore family" (28). He does not reference sexual or romantic relations between the Marys, however, perhaps due to his limited access to unpublished correspondence or a difference in social norms when writing. He does suggest that Norcross played a kind of older sister and second "mother figure" to Marianne, albeit one limited by Mary Moore's protective influence over her daughter (Molesworth 31).

Norcross did, however, introduce Marianne to Bryn Mawr, a liberal arts women's college. At age 17, "underweight and barely pubescent," Marianne Moore started college at Bryn Mawr (Leavall 61). Never before separated from her family, Marianne used the written word to keep her family together. While she began writing when Warner went away to school, she found new fervor at Bryn Mawr. Nevertheless, the freedom of attending university came at a great mental, emotional, and physical cost. Mental anguish and severe "homesickness" threatened Moore her first year. "Under the progressive leadership of M. Carey Thomas, Bryn Mawr was … the most difficult of the women's colleges… and the most radical in redefining women's roles… Bryn Mawr challenged assumptions not only about women's physical and intellectual stamina but also about their sexuality" (Leavall 57). Moore was thrust into the deep end head first. Once she learned to swim, Moore blossomed under her new found independence. She joined the college division of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Christian Endeavor, a Protestant group on campus.

Moore also began to explore her sexuality for the first time, although to what extent is unclear. Leavall digs into Moore's relationship or "infatuation" with Peggy James, the niece of

author Henry James. According to Bryn Mawr's "Bird News" which dealt with all college crushes on campus, Peggy was Marianne's "bird" (Leavall 79). Part of Moore's self-proclaimed "Byronesque side," Peggy visited Moore most evenings, although it is unlikely that Moore thought of it sexually. Moore and James never coupled up, so perhaps Marianne wanted to be Peggy, not be *with* Peggy. In any case, due to this friendship, Moore began to understand her "loathsome possessiveness in her own feelings for Peggy" and thus "Marianne came to view romantic love with deep skepticism, and she ultimately adopted Peggy's uncle as her own model of chastity and literary bachelorhood" (Leavall 84). This "deep skepticism" did not end with Peggy or even after graduation. Moore's reluctance to embrace romanticism remains with her throughout her life, coming through vividly in "Marriage."

Moore graduated in 1909 with a BA in history, law, and politics but struggled academically all four years. She dabbled in biology, painting, and Classics but did poorly in her English classes. One professor chalked it up to "enthusiasm for the peripheral" a "'fatal way of losing the fringe of the important fact;'" her essays were like "unsettled coffee" (Leavall 93). She did, however, write prolifically for the *Tipyn O'Bob*, Bryn Mawr's literary magazine, and later *The Lantern*, the alumnae magazine. Over her four years she published numerous semi-autobiographical short stories and nine poems, most notably "The Jelly-Fish." However, these initial forays into publishing her works did not initially inspire her to become a poet.

Following graduation, Moore attended Carlisle Commercial College for business and secretarial work. While at Carlisle, of her own volition, Marianne moved back in with Mary and never moved on, continuing to live with her mother for the next 37 years, rarely even spending a night apart (Leavall 108). Moore then worked at the United States Indian School at Carlisle. During 1911's summer break, Mary and Marianne visited England and France on an

intellectually transformative trip. “Mary often evoked the metaphor of lovers to describe the family’s closeness in these years” (Leavall 122), meanwhile, Marianne was developing a world outside of the family. In her late twenties while then living in Chatham, NJ with Mary and Warner, Marianne Moore was willing to make sacrifices in her personal life and relationship with Mary but would not compromise her art. Poetry was, in her words, a “place for the genuine” where she could practice the subtle ways of nonconventional combat (Leavall 146). Her literary third person self, “Rat,” was born.

In 1915, *The Egoist* in London accepted three of Moore’s poems; two appeared in the April 1915 edition and the May special Imagist edition contained one, although she did not consider herself an Imagist. She earned money for none of them (Leavall 132). As Linda Leavall puts it nicely, “Floyd Dell [of *The Masses*] was the first professional editor to notice Moore’s poems and Harriet Monroe [of *Poetry*] the first to accept them, but Richard Aldington, poetry editor for *The Egoist*, became the first to actually publish them” (132). Later that same year *Poetry* and *Others* printed Moore’s poems. In 1916, H.D., in *The Egoist,* wrote the first critical notice of Moore’s work as she searched in London for a publisher for a collection of Moore’s poetry. As her poems began to gain traction, her literary circle expanded, both in coterie and in views. Alfred Kreymberg became a mentor and introduced her to new artists and writers in his Greenwich Village apartment qua salon (Leavall 137). Her 1917 *Others* anthology drew attention towards Moore across the Atlantic; Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot began to take notice. Both reviewed the work with glowing remarks in *The Little Review* and *The Egoist*, respectively, with T.S. Eliot placing her among greats such as Pound, James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis as being about to “write living English” (Leavall 169).

During these years, career and family continued to take priority over romance, as Moore defied the social script dictating that marriage should be her chief life goal, a theme seen throughout "Marriage." With Moore's new aspirations in mind, Mary and Marianne left Warner in Carlisle and moved to 14 St. Luke's place in Greenwich Village in 1918, where Marianne worked as a librarian at the Hudson Park branch of the New York Public Library. Mrs. Moore considered the possibility that her thirty-year-old daughter might be able to live alone in New York City but soon convinced herself otherwise and believed that she needed her protection (Leavall 162). Mary wrote to Warner of her decision describing using Marianne's pet name: "Ratty… too little to be chased about by big cats" (Leavall 162). Because of this, Mary saw no need for privacy within the family or home. Marianne and Mary shared everything from a bed to her poetry. Marianne lived as a grown child that Mary still wanted while also serving as the sole breadwinner and husband-figure to her mother, turning their mother-daughter relationship into a homosocial and heterosocial partnership. Thus, in anti-Woolfian fashion, Moore had "no room of her own" until she began to carve out secret spaces in her poems for issues such as freedom, privacy, sexuality, and relationships, both personal and literary. Yet, even then her mother was her "first reader" and most severe critic throughout her life (Molesworth 49). And in contradiction to Virginia Woolf's necessity of 500 British Pounds a year, Mary kept them living an impoverished lifestyle, even as Marianne earned disposable income. Moore published her first poem in *The Egoist* in 1915 at the age of 28, yet when Marianne was 42 and in her fourth year of editing *The Dial*, her mother claimed her as a dependent on her taxes – despite the term "dependent" clearly defined on the form as someone under 18 or "mentally or physically defective" (Leavall 163). Even as she aged, Marianne depended on her mother for all of her

financial and physical needs, a co-dependence both unhealthy and yet the only way Moore was able to gain independence ironically.

Mary was not the only control over Marianne at the time; years earlier, Warner's move to Carlisle, Pennsylvania provided the impetus for Marianne to become acquainted with the City and its intelligentsia. If not for his stationing there, it is likely that Moore would have moved west to follow him and would have not pursued her literary career (Molesworth 130). His vocation as Chaplain in the Navy controlled both Moore's money and movement, as he often supplemented her income and made her financial decisions for her. "At least in her family circle," Moore was thus forced to "conceive of [her] work of a literary career as a spiritual quest" in order to appease Warner and her mother (Molesworth xxi). And while Moore claims to not have wanted to leave her brother, Marianne and Mary would not have later moved to New York City if Warner had not been stationed nearby: "In a way, Moore's career was being paradoxically shaped by Warner's decision" (Molesworth 130). Due to this control, though he may not have seen it as such, Warner felt like a special audience to her poems, perhaps even part author. In this way he took possession of her freedom both literally and literarily, a theme that often comes up in her later works like "Marriage."

Warner's absolute control became short lived, however. In 1918, Warner proposed to Constance Eustis without telling Mary or Marianne, a decision that many cite as a partial impetus for Moore's thoughts on marriage. On Sunday, May 19th of that same year, the Moore women read the engagement announcement in *The New York Times* and *Chatham Press* (Leavall 156). Mary had opposed the pair previously and her opposition to Warner towards his fiancé continued until long after the wedding. She wrote to Constance, saying that "the marriage ought not to be" (Leavall 156). Mary Moore told her: "A heaven-made marriage is the most beautiful thing this

sin-shadowed world has ever seen and it is the one thing I think that a woman is justified in demanding of heaven; that or no marriage at all" (Leavall 156). To Mary and Marianne, Warner and Constance were not "heaven-made." Despite the women's efforts, the wedding took place on July 29, 1918 at the Eustis home and Mary publically supported the couple (Leavall 157). However, letters to Warner during his summer honeymoon did not come. The silence must have been deafening for Warner. Yet, in the years following, Constance Moore grew increasingly jealous of the family's close relationship and attempted to control Warner, forcing separation from his mother and sister. Marianne did not reconcile with Warner immediately, especially as Constance expected a child with a due date less than nine months after the wedding. Marianne wrote this separation and anguish into her famous poem "The Fish," the title of which is one of Warner's family nicknames. Published in the August 1918 *Egoist*, and written in the summer of 1917 during her trip to Monhegan, the poem's date coincides with Warner's wedding. The phrase "beauty / intertwined with tragedy," later omitted from the poem, betrays how Marianne must have felt. And, at least this time, Warner was a special audience to her poem. However, it was not the last time, as Warner appears throughout her works into the twenties, playing a prominent role in her long poems "The Octopus" and "Marriage."

In 1921, H.D. and Bryher, Moore's friends and fellow literatae who called her Dactyl, printed *Poems*, a collection of 24 of Moore's poems, supposedly without her knowledge, although there is some speculation about the circumstances. For, before this, *Others* consumed Moore's social and literary life in the Village (Leavall 171). Through the parties of *Others* poet Lola Ridge, Marianne met Scofield Thayer, the editor and co-owner of *The Dial*, the monthly leading literary "little magazine" of its day. Upon hearing "England" read aloud at such a party, and perhaps after a small nudge from Pound, Thayer admonished Moore to send it to *The Dial*,

for pay (!) (Leavall 172). He printed it immediately. Soon after, Thayer was not only asking for Moore's contributions to *The Dial* but also asking to take her to dinner. Moore became a regular contributor of poems and essays to *The Dial,* at the time the largest subscribed-to little magazine with a readership of 6,374 (Schulze 458). By 1923, *The Dial* had published seven of her last eight new poems and countless works of prose (Schulze 458). Thayer and Sibley Watson, Thayer's co-owner, "had come to view Moore as an exclusive *Dial* product, an arrangement they validated by paying her on many occasions double their usual rate per page for her verse – twenty dollars rather than the usual ten (Schulze 458).

Surprisingly, with a well-regarded magazine offering to pay more than the going rate, dozens of poets and writers lauding her work and Ezra Pound offering to help print her work wherever she chooses, Marianne Moore decided to print her 308-line poem "Marriage" as the third ever *Manikin* pamphlet, produced by her new friend Monroe Wheeler. However, this puzzle of publication has the very same roots as the poem itself. The genesis of "Marriage" not only shapes it language but also its printing. And while some threads remain constant throughout, Moore scholars differ greatly as to what they believe to be the impetus for "Marriage." Marianne Moore began the poem in 1922 and continued to work on it until well into 1923 when it was published in *Manikin Number Three*, and during this time much occurred in Moore's life.

Robin G. Schulze in *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924* attributes great significance to "Marriage" being first printed in Monroe Wheeler's small poetry chapbook *Manikin* instead of *The Dial*. Moore and Wheeler became friends and corresponded regularly before the publication, as Marianne admired *Manikin's* type, spacing, and covers that matched her ideals in color and design (Schulze 456). In early 1923, Moore decided she wanted a pamphlet of her own as she was sure of Wheeler's production and aesthetics matching her own

desires. However, this choice is striking when viewed in the context of her other literary commitments. As mentioned above, the two years prior, Moore wrote almost exclusively for Scofield Thayer and *The Dial*. Schulze claims, like many Moore critics, that Moore could not give the poem to Thayer, as it was based upon the 1921 marriage of convenience between Winifred Ellerman (pen name Bryher), heir to the richest man in England, and writer/editor Richard McAlmon, a scandal in which Thayer was entangled.

In 1920, an unromantic arrangement was set: Bryher would marry McAlmon in exchange for social liberty from her family and she would give him an allowance with which he could write and travel (Schulze 459); Moore hated this arrangement, themes of which would appear in "Marriage" later. They married on Valentine's Day, 1921, at the New York City Hall (Schulze 459). Even worse, the marriage arrangement occurred while Bryher engaged in an ongoing lesbian relationship with H.D., which continued after the wedding. Molesworth asserts: "Like H.D., Bryher had several sexual relationships with men and women. She and H.D. became lovers… virtually a lifetime support" (151). When H.D. and Bryher told Moore of the wedding later that day, Moore declared it "an earthquake" (Schulze 460). At this same party, Bryher attacked *The Dial* in front of Thayer; Thayer responded by printing a scathing, satirical *Dial* "Comment" about the McAlmon arrangement in July 1921 (Schulze 1921). Meanwhile, Moore was heartbroken over the marriage, viewing the affair as tragic; she spoke against Thayer's piece and objected his use of her observations in the "Comment." The piece ran the same month that Thayer went to France to divorce his young wife who had been, with his knowledge, cheating on him with e.e. cummings (Schulze 463). Thus, it was in this light that Moore began to write her poem about marriage in 1922, leading her to share early ideas with Wheeler instead of Thayer who was still in Europe and did not agree with Moore's view of the institution. Wheeler also

lived an open homosexual relationship, that was "true to the spirit of marriage without the benefit of the social contract… like Moore, he was an outsider to the ritual and the institution" (Schulze 464). Thus, Moore opted to give *Manikin* "Marriage" instead of the *The Dial*. Thayer was stunned.

Thayer's comments on Bryher's marriage of convenience, and marriage in general, were not the only factor pushing Moore away from *The Dial*. Linda Leavall, who has had the most access to the Moore estate, writes in the most recent account of Moore's life that Thayer's own actions, not in relation to Bryher and McAlmon, provided the incentive for Moore to write "Marriage." Using letters and the unpublished manuscript of Moore's never-printed, 1939 novel *The Way We Live Now,* Leavall paints a picture of Thayer and Moore's relationship unraveling due to Thayer proposing to Moore on April 17, 1921. Thayer and Moore met, as previously mentioned, through literary circles and Moore's submissions to *The Dial*. At the time, Thayer was married to Elaine Orr, who had begun an affair, and had a child, with e.e.cummings three years earlier (Leavall 184). Thayer and Orr kept separate apartments and remained friendly but were not romantically or emotionally "married" for the majority of their relationship. Thayer was aware of her affair and even helped support the child and her second family (Leavall 184). Despite the Thayers unusual circumstances, Marianne and Mary believed that Scofield's increasing affections towards Moore were "harmless" as he was married and "would not permit a breach of any sort" (Leavall 183). However, Thayer's actions suggest something else. He invited Moore over and they were alone in the apartment. Leavall describes the scene: "'I'm not snuggling,' Thayer said as he sat down beside her. 'Snuggling,' she said, 'takes two!'" (184). As Moore's literary life took off, she saw more and more of Thayer. By April of 1921, Mary writes to Warner about "Rat" being asked to the Benedict, Thayer's bachelor pad. Marianne said:

"There is no such thing as platonic friendship, and it isn't fair to a wife to see another woman as often as he sees me" (Leavall 188). Moore did, nevertheless, see Thayer and Mrs. Thayer's marriage as very much a "social contract" versus a loving, sexual relationships– a tension explored in "Marriage." What happened at the Benedict that afternoon is unknown as there is no record of what transpired, however, in her letter to Warner Mary writes: "As it turned out, Mr. Thayer was *not* just pursuing Rat for idle chat" (Leavall 189).

Leavall uses this letter and Moore's novel to flesh out the possible proposal. Leavall writes that in Moore's fiction, a "Thayer-like character presents a Moore-like character with a little round ivory box" (189). In the words of the novel, he presents her with "a pendant of square emeralds set in greenish gold filigree. Her favorite stone" (Leavall 189). Moore's stone of choice was also an emerald. While the novel suggests an autobiographical take on the afternoon, it is unclear what did happen. However, Molesworth says, "Moore's relationship with Thayer had become the subject of Village gossip, some of which even mentioned the possibility of a marriage proposal… Several months later, Mrs. Moore reports Thayer's comment that Moore is the most intellectual person and the most educated woman he knows" (156). In his *Autobiography*, William Carlos Williams mentions, out of the blue, "Scofield Thayer, so the rumor ran, had proposed to Marianne Moore who had begged off, though continuing to work at the Dial office" (163-164). Moore, however, later writes to Williams about the many factual errors in the book (Molesworth 157), but she does not mention what exactly is falsely reported. If it is the case that Thayer proposed to Moore, despite still being in a loveless marriage himself, then the writing of a poem debating the problems with the institution and publication in *Manikin* instead of *The Dial* seems realistic.

But Charles Molesworth suggests yet another reason for the poem: Warner's marriage to Constance and Marianne's trip to Washington to visit him. In 1923, Marianne traveled to Bremerton, Washington for six weeks to visit Warner while he was stationed at the town's naval yard during the summer. He kept the plans from his wife, Constance (Leavall 200); she ended up spending the time in New York, while Mary and Marianne took her place. For the month of August, the Moore's stayed at a cottage with a view of the Puget Sound and Mount Rainer (Leavall 200). It is during this visit that Moore began to write her two longest poems: "An Octopus" and "Marriage." Molesworth suggests that her time spent with Warner was the "immediate occasion for both poems" (184). While Leavall suggests that the phrase "men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it," repeated throughout Moore's poetry notebook, alludes to Thayer (200), it instead could be about the greater control that men in general have over most women's lives, or perhaps, it is an allusion to Warner instead. Warner's marriage to Constance would be on the forefront of her mind, especially as marriage drama dominated her life in Greenwich Village as well. Molesworth posits that while "An Octopus" overtly references and focuses upon Warner, it is less clear how "Marriage" fits in (185). However, the fact that "both deal with major concerns, such as the chief values that sustains one's life" (Molesworth 184), insinuates that the two poems overlap in both topic and inspiration. Much like "An Octopus," "Marriage" dances around the identity of the subjects and how Moore feels about them. Moore leaves open the possibility that she writes about her brother without offending him, but it is unlikely that Warner is the sole or main inspiration of "Marriage" even if he is the muse behind "An Octopus."

While these three events may have each inspired some aspect of Moore's "Marriage," the context in which they occurred cannot be ignored, for Moore did not write in a vacuum. The

poem centers on control, or lack thereof, in relationships. Focusing on the eternal give and take, push and pull, between freedom and constraint, relations and individuality, Moore situates herself between two polar opposites. Moore was forever alone and also had a lifelong companion; she existed liminally as both single and married. Perhaps "Marriage" shows Moore trying to make sense of changing gender roles and societal expectations that were often at odds with each other. Thus, while it seems contrary to Moore for her to write on marriage as she never took a husband, her relationship to Mary bears some resemblance to marriage as a lifelong union. Similarly, Moore's bachelorhood equally inspires her stance on marriage. Together the contextual contrasts illuminate almost more than the events that spurred her putting pen to paper.

Moore's life centered on people controlling her: financially, relationally, sexually, physically, literarily; controlling her privately and publically. Her lack of personal agency and liberty, especially being a small, sickly female, stunted Moore's intellectual growth. The most controlling force in her life at the time of her writing "Marriage," the person who controlled many if not all of the areas listed above, was her mother, Mary Moore. Moore lived with her mother, traveled with her mother, and wrote with her mother over her shoulder. Mary assumed the role as primary reader for Marianne, only surpassed by Sibley Watson briefly (Leavall 197). 14 St. Luke's Place operated under the guise that there was no separation of work and life. Due to this, Moore lacked Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own." She literally and literary shared everything with her mother. And unlike Woolf's ideal female writer, Moore lacked not only her own room but also the fantasized "500 [British] pounds a month" salary. Due to Mary's strict saving mentality and frugal lifestyle, Moore often never saw money sent for her from Warner or friends, as it immediately went into savings (Leavall 199), often at the detriment to Marianne's health. The two women lived in almost abject poverty due to Mary's tight fightedness. At one

point, Marianne was forced by her mother to turn down $5,000 (then the price of a Burmese elephant) from Bryher, the daughter of the richest man in England at the time (Molesworth 182). While perhaps Moore refused to be rescued from her mother, the gift was necessitated due to Mary's financial control over her daughter. Mary's regulation of Marianne extended past monetary decisions, however, as Mary often acted as a gatekeeper towards those who wanted to get close to Marianne. And as Moore grew and gained fame, Mary – and by extension Warner – became obsessed with bringing Marianne back to her "boyhood," illustrating their evasion of the issue of her womanhood, career, and life in the world outside of them (Molesworth 141). Thus, while Marianne no doubt loved her mother and chose to live her life with her by her side, their relationship as "equals and intimates" was built upon "tactic knowledge and emotional reticence" (Molesworth 140).

However, Mary occupied an essential place in Marianne's life. Mary played "mother" long after Marianne should have needed her to; late into Moore's thirties, Mary still cooked for, cleaned for, and even bathed Marianne. Mary provided a one-woman support system for Marianne's moody and sickly life. The closest thing Marianne ever got to a husband or a marriage was Mary, which Mary acknowledged in letters, calling her and her daughter a couple. Mary even went so far as to "invoke the metaphor of lovers to describe the family's closeness" (Leavall 122). And while there is no suggestion that Marianne felt the same way, she tried to foster the "perception that [she] led a chaste and cloistered life" (Leavall xiv), something impossible to do without Mary's presence. And while it is unclear how much was due to Mary or due to Marianne's own beliefs, Moore possessed a "pathological" devotion and love towards her mother (and Warner), so much so that William Carlos Williams complained it stopped her from marrying any "literary guys" (Molesworth 13).

Williams was correct: no evidence suggests that Moore romantically loved anyone, man or woman, or had sexual affairs. R. P. Blackmur declared that "no poet has been so chaste" (Leavall xi). Mrs. Moore wrote that while "many women, more than men, need to be loved… her daughter is different; not only does she apparently not need such supportive love, she is also unlike other women in not being content to settle for a weak spouse just in order to achieve it" (Molesworth 131). Nevertheless, ironically, literary theorist Kenneth Burke called her one of the most sexual women he ever met. According to Molesworth, "he meant… that she was fully aware of all the dimensions of experience, physical, and mental… she knew about the twists and turns" (xxii). Could Moore truly know all the dimensions of the physical and emotional life without romantic involvement with anyone? Perhaps her "literary maiden-aunt persona" (Leavall xi) was just that, a persona, but if so, she did much to ensure that her life was perceived as such.

Proclaiming herself not "matrimonially ambitious" (Leavall 64), Moore took this idea very seriously, extending her hostility to marriage to repression of her own bodily attraction. Leavall suggests that Moore purposefully stunted her sexual and physical maturation by not eating (170). While the lack of development may have been a side effect of her disordered eating instead of the intended result, Moore's body remained youthful and androgynous well past when it should have matured. Furthermore, both in behavior and dress, she did everything she could to discourage sexual advances (Leavall 170). Similarly, Moore had no sexual interest in men or women, whatsoever. Mary said she had "no man-instincts whatever" (Leavall 163). While perhaps Marianne today could be called asexual, Bryher called Moore "a case of arrested emotional development" (Leavall 163). Perhaps it was merely the case that "too little body fat causes… the loss of libido" (Leavall 164). However, Moore's emotions through her poetry appear fully expanded regarding other topics, despite Leavall insinuating her sexual organs may

not be. But, Moore's whole modernist aesthetic was anorexic; she was the physically streamlined twenties woman and literarily minimalist poet. As Warner said, "Starve it down and make it run" (Leavall 165). And her lack of sex did not seem to bother her in terms of sexuality or motherhood potential as she had no interest at all in having a family of her own; Moore believed babies to be "repellent larvae" (Leavall 147).

But it may not be Moore's fault that she believed "there was no more odious institution in modern society than a matchmaker" (Molesworth 81). Hers was a "family of profuse words and inauspicious marriages" (Leavall 12). She knew more about the "genius of disunion" than successful coupling, which is "evident in her poetry of precise distinctions as well as in her distrust of romantic love" (Leavall 14). Her familial situation – an absent father, questionably lesbian mother, and unhappily married brother – did not provide many instances of positive matrimony, nor did the sex-crazed, open-marriage-accepting Roaring Twenties literary circles of Greenwich Village. It seems Moore chose the safety of singleness over the chance of divorce. Thus, it was rare that Moore referenced marriage in correspondence, if ever, and all mentions of it to Warner ended in 1910 (Molesworth 80), suggesting she stopped even entertaining the idea for herself in her early twenties. Later in her life, Mary and Warner discussed establishing a monetary estate for Moore, implying that they also accepted Moore never marrying. So it appears, due to the combination of pre-pubescent sexuality and abhorrence of "bad" marriages, and a lack of necessity due to Mary's presence, Moore chose a lifetime of bachelorhood over wifehood.

In the midst of all these happenings around her, Moore's "Marriage" appeared in the late September 1923 Third Edition pamphlet of Monroe Wheeler's *Manikin*. Published as a small chapbook by Manikin Press, the first edition printing contained only 200 copies mainly intended

for presentation. Unknown to Moore, Bryher paid the printing costs (Leavall 202). Inside the front cover there was a two-page review on Moore's poetry collection *Poems,* written by poet and essayist Glenway Wescott, Wheeler's partner; *The Dial,* ironically, later uses a revised version of his essay (Molesworth 187). While it was well received in literary circles, Scofield Thayer on the other hand, responded with shock. Multiple accounts, including Wheeler's, depict him turning "white as a sheet" with surprise. Molesworth calls this a byproduct of "a focus of envious competition" (187). Leavall also attributes his turning white to being stunned that the poem was published in "book form" before any literary magazines, despite the fact that *Manikin* was a magazine. Wheeler claimed the fact that *Manikin* was unknown to Thayer made the insult worse in Thayer's mind (Leavall 203). However, Leavall goes past this, asserting that the poem's subject matter and focus would "not have been lost on him," alluding that Thayer himself was the motivation behind "Marriage" (203). Despite Thayer's disapproval, the poem's publication met wide-spread, positive success. Regarding "Marriage," T.S. Eliot wrote: "I can only think of five contemporary poets – English, Irish, French, and German – whose works excite me as much or more than Miss Moore's."

Chapter 2:
Serpentine Answers to Flawed Questions

"It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing."

- Marianne Moore

Part 1:
Form

"These poems cannot be taken possession of in the subway, for example."

- Glenway Wescott

In 1922, T.S. Eliot published his seminal long poem "The Waste Land." In 1923, Marianne Moore wrote her own long poem: "Marriage." Partially a response to Eliot's modernist rhetorical strategies, Moore's poem mimics "The Waste Land," but in a way unique to Moore in both style and topic. Read within the context of early to mid-twentieth century long poems, Moore wrote "Marriage" in relation to, inspired by, and part of the zeitgeist of modernism. But unlike most of her male poet colleagues, her work was never as critically nor historically acclaimed. Perhaps, Moore shouted too loud and felt too strongly; perhaps, she was betrayed by her gender. But "Marriage" is a testament to Moore being an extraordinary poet-as-poet, not merely an extraordinary female poet.

Monroe Wheeler's third Manikin in which "Marriage" was the sole poem features an unusual cover. Instead of the expected duo of man and wife or Adam and Eve, subjects relevant to the poem's topic, the pamphlet features a scene from Homer. Pulled from the Ninth Book of The Odyssey, the image is of Odysseus strapped to the belly of a ram with his sword unsheathed, ready for a surprise attack against the blind Cyclops. Most likely Moore empathized with Odysseus at this moment in the epic:

> … [the cyclops] esteeming me a fool that could devise no stratagem to scape his gross surprise. But I, contending what I could invent my friends and me from death so imminent to get deliver'd, all my wiles I wove (life being the subject) and did this approve: fat fleecy rams…These, while this learned-in-villainy did sleep, I yoked with osiers cut there, sheep to sheep, three in a rank, and still the mid sheep bore a man about his belly… I then, choosing myself the fairest of the den, his fleecy belly under-crept, embraced his back… and escaped from death. (Homer's *The Odysessy IX*, 403-433)

The themes of powerful men assuming Moore to be a fool and her subsequent overcoming this through armored animal poetry come through in this image, just as they do in "Marriage." Those who did not understand the relation between cover and poetry most likely did not understand Moore or her poetry. Linda Leavall describes the scene "just as the poet herself lies hidden from her powerful, unseeing adversary," speaking of Moore and Scofield Thayer's then estranged relationship (203), but the image seems to suggest larger forces at work. By evoking a classical, canonical text Moore situates herself in amongst the greats, despite her gender, and subtly jabs at her critics and doubters while also preparing the reader for her own epic inundated with its own historical and literary allusions.

In this chapbook, "Marriage" is 308 lines over 15 pages with 20 lines per page and plenty of white space. Before the poem, readers encounter Glenway Wescott's review of "Miss Moore's *Observations*," what Moore called her "most academic review" (Leavall 203), shaping the way the subsequent poem is read. Wescott argues that you must understand where she is writing from and how you should understand it in order to make sense of the meaning. Yet if you search for obvious emotion and a direct path through the woods there will not be meaning (Wescott). The nuance, surprise, and unusualness of the poem strengthens it. Wescott calls Moore a "poetess Mary Shelley," reanimating words like Frankenstein's monster. Moore's "aristocratic art, emulating the condition of ritual, withdraws down an avenue of preparation and deliberate discipline" (Wescott), just as "Marriage" does. The poems "yield more to leisured thought and memory than to eye or ear" due to their "unfamiliar manner of syntax and punctuation… a set of perceptions in which most persons is rarely awakened" (Wescott). Reading becomes a romp through an "untrampled field of experience" (Wescott). Moore disrupts our linear train of thought, pushing us further into ourselves, forcing self-reflection and doubt: "Alexander the

Great halted an army to look at a plane-tree, with a silent sober up-stoke of his arm. In some such fashion Miss Moore stops a stately movement of social perceptions to startle the mind with somber strangeness…" (Wescott). Readers halt to gaze upon Moore's poetic plane trees quivering with subtle subversion. Most applicable to "Marriage," Wescott writes, "She has… no desire to be radical or secretive of her meaning. She wishes to convey or evoke. If the idea and its emotion seem obscure to anyone it is because they are unusual." The poems are difficult because the emotions are difficult, any easier would do a disservice to the topic. Thus, "the final impression is not only of frank brilliance but of nobility and profound but not irreverent analysis" (Wescott). One cannot merely read Moore's works for by reading her poetry she forces us to interrogate them and in return one's self. "Marriage" is no exception.

Moore calls "Marriage" a collection of "statements that took my fancy" in the Notes of *Observations*. By guarding herself through this phrase does she exonerate herself from having the poem resolve into a neat conclusion? Is she able to leave the poem dangling, open ended and confusing, through this quote? To some degree, Moore distances herself from the work and successive analysis of the poem but at the same time the statement begs for the poem to be ripped apart and questioned as a result. Even the topic of marriage itself is highly personal and unlikely to be left alone, separated from the poet. Moore wrote: "'Marriage' is not an expression of my philosophy – merely a little anthology of phrases that I did not want to lose," continuing on to say she would "hardly call it a poem… [there is] no philosophic precipitate; nor does it veil anything personal in the way of triumphs, entrapments, or dangerous colloquies" (Marianne Moore Reader). Yet despite these efforts, Moore's poem reads as a way of saying something about a highly personal state of being via commentary on our collective world; the poem uses marriage to comment on larger themes as well as the topic itself and Moore's relations to them

all. Marriage is a vehicle, a bridge, a literal and metaphorical coming together of ideas that she uses to frame as well as deconstruct her poem.

Like most poems, the form conveys content. Perhaps inspired by e.e. cumming's "Puella Mea," his 1921 long poem that had recently appeared in The Dial, Moore wrote: "One feels Spenser's Epithalamion in its presence, and Boccaccio" (Leavall 71). However, while her poem mimics his epithalamium in form, she did not like cumming's work due to its uncomplimentary nature towards women. Thus, Moore's poem becomes the antithesis of cumming's: "Marriage" takes the style of a collaged mock epithalamium that moves forward via dialogue between a pair of speakers, one male and one female.

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry defines the category of epithalamium as a text concerning marriage, though often varied in form and content (Dubrow 452). The word itself is Greek meaning "in front of the wedding chamber," although the form begins in the Bible with The Song of Solomon and Psalm 45 (Dubrow 452). The tradition continues with Greek and Latin poems, especially the Roman poet Catallus' numbered poems 61, 62, and 64 (Dubrow 452). The epithalamium has an early modern era resurgence, most famously Spenser's 1595 Epithalamion written for his own wedding, and then continuing on with John Donne, Robert Herrick, and Ben Jonson and into the 20th century modernists. In addition to a wedding and marriage as the central topic, the form "typically offers a particularly valuable occasion for studying the interaction of literary conventions and social practices and pressures on issues ranging from gender to politics to spatiality" (Dubrow 452). In this way, Moore's take on the form conforms to the tradition despite its mocking tone and metacritique of the form as an antiquated, patriarchal mode. Within the greater category of epithalamium, Moore's falls into the "epic" subsection as her poem

"recounts a mythological story connected with a marriage" (452) due to the characterization of Adam and Eve as the original and epitomical married couple.

However, Moore does not buy into all of the common conventions. While the couple is praised and the mythical marriage figure Hymen is invoked, Moore subverts both conventions by ironically calling Hymen to officiate the ceremony, even as she criticizes him – "Unhelpful Hymen!" – and focuses more on the allusions of danger within the marriage than prayers for children (of which there are none) or the household (although Eden and the Garden are mentioned). Her most central use of the epic poetic form of epithalamium is to situate herself as master of ceremonies. Here Moore is like a creator, a curator, and recorder – creating dialogue from others and constructing a narrative. While Pamela Hadas reads the poem in Marianne Moore, Poet of Affection as more a mythic and epic with a victim and hero and quest than a marriage anthem (149), her need for the reader to fill in the roles herself makes the case seem more tenuous than arguing for the form as an epic mock epithalamium. In addition, Moore includes images of nature, warfare via violent and bellicose language, and politics, most obviously with the final Webster quotation. Together these motifs demonstrate the social aspect of the poem as there is no private audience per se. Moore comments on the private via the public. She also pulls from the pastoral via her signature reliance on natural imagery and Eden, conjuring images of Petrarchan love poetry. Yet she is missing "a countervailing vision in which conjugal happiness replaces the frustrations often… associated with Petarchism" (Dubrow 452). Moore's "Marriage" is almost the opposite, as marriage's frustrations supplant the idyllic conquest for love. Her focus on the green world and the outdoors lets Moore circumvent placing the lover within the domestic enclosed space suggested by the epithalamium title, instead

focusing on the community outside, switching the typical form that Dubrow suggests to allow Moore to avoid her fears of entrapment.

The poem itself must be read on two levels: the macro and the micro. Moore calls readers to hover over her diction and figurative language while never submerging themselves too deeply as to lose sight of the shore, to forget the larger conversation. This duality of reading and juggling of understanding necessitates a primary reading of overall style and theme before diving into close reading. Only after these two planes are mastered can the reader attempt to understand Moore's conclusion, or if there is one at all.

Moore's epithalamium is not just her voice as it relies heavily on collage and allusion throughout, often interchangeably. Oft described as positioning quotes like "flies in amber" (Erikson 94), both with and without quotation marks, Moore uses collage to incorporate disparate quotes, often from male writers on non-marital topics, to provide commentary on the institution of marriage and its emblematic status in relation to the rest of our society. By using no connectors, no bridges linking images or thoughts, Moore assumes that readers want a challenge. She trusts her readers: "by never explaining or visibly pontificating; by sharing carefully selected and suggestive facts, quotations, and images without and by never forcing an issue… she assumes we do not find life boring" (Hadas 150). Quotations are dropped into dialogue disparately or imbedded seemingly at random. Darlene Erikson in Illusion Is More Precise than Precision: The Poetry of Marianne Moore calls the poem a collection of found objects – objets trouves – some mere lines, some heavy allusions, some beautiful prose (112). By including quotations collected and arranged in a new setting, Moore creates in her work a kind of museum. She writes revisionist history, allowing women a seat at the metaphorical table. In Criminal Ingenuity, Ellen Levy uses the term "anthology" for Moore's chosen form, or anti-form (103).

She views "Marriage" not as a poem but an "aesthetically effective means of preserving what otherwise might be lost… a quixotic attempt to preserve cultural materials that might seem to have been destined for inconsequence" (Levy 103), much like the museum metaphor Erikson suggests via her use of the term "collection."

Others view the collage as not so static, however. In his Essays, William Carlos Williams calls "Marriage" an "anthology of transit" (122 quoted in Erikson 103). Bernard Engel feels similarly in Marianne Moore, the first full-length study of Marianne Moore, asserting that "Marriage"'s "suddenness of movement and lack of explanations… abruptness of expression" is its main stylistic feature (96). Erikson almost seems to agree as well, building upon her collection metaphor with one of music. Moore orchestrated "Marriage" like "a great piece of choral music, a polyphonic, one verging on cacophony but held in place by Moore's own subtle harmonies" (104). This quivering and alive noise held in place by the poet seems to merge the idea of the stasis of the museum of quotations and the movement of the sudden leaps between them. Hadas claims that this kinetic energy is the "beauty" in "Marriage": "always to be crouching and waiting for a chance to break in and overwhelm the careful cerebrations, the witty satire, the pure descriptions, in short, all the defensive maneuvers, the silences, the necessary restraints" (Hadas 146). This concept is furthered when Erikson claims that the intersections of these quotations is where the poem sings, in the white light at the intersections (112). The space between exhibits, where you walk between displayed ideas, is where Moore forces you to ruminate on yourself in relation, bringing the past present.

Famed literary critic Harold Bloom, editor of Marianne Moore, describes Moore's poems, notably "Marriage," in his Introduction chapter as allusion based: "allusion was Marianne Moore's method, a method that was herself" (1). Bloom calls the poem "superficially

an outrageous collage but profoundly a poignant comic critique of every society's most sacred and tragic institution" (4). While Bloom writes as if collage and critique are antithetical, perhaps the opposite is true. Through her "outrageous collage," Moore is able to escape thinly veiled criticism and instead dive deeply into the heart of societal issues, using collage as both a vehicle for her own criticism and armor against others.

The anti-formal tendencies due to quoted material reliance and undifferentiated blocks of free verse and use of arbitrary and varying syllabics – rare in English language poetry – emphasize the collage aspect of "Marriage." Elizabeth Joyce in *Cultural Critique and Abstraction: Marianne Moore and the Avant-Garde* defines "collage" as a new relationship between imagination and reality for modernists due to a shifting world view by exploiting the contrast between the conceptual fantastic and the mundane reality of social and cultural history (69). Applied to "Marriage," Moore uses collage to write commentary on the institution of marriage. Quoting Jacob Korg, Joyce explains: "the literary equivalent of the painter's collage is… quotation – not conventional quotation, but the kind that represents itself as an interpolation, interrupting the test, and even conflicting with the writer's purposes, as if it were an eruption of raw reality" (69). In this way, Moore's collection of quotes grounds her in reality while also allowing her to pass judgement upon that same reality. Joyce claims that Moore deflects away from the way the poem uses collage – recall "…statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly" – to criticize marriage in a quiet, dismissive manner (71). What Joyce calls "a tool for political transgressiveness" is Moore engaging in her own brand of subversive, feminist modernism.

The form reinforces the content. Moore's collage undermines social authority. Through collage Moore establishes a duality that plays off the coupling of marriage and Adam and Eve

within the poem as well as the ambivalence of her own opinion on the institution outside of the poem: "her own words tend to mute her disapproval of the marital conventions, while at the same time her revisions of quotations drawn from other sources tend to sharpen her critical stance toward marriage" (Joyce 71). Furthermore, if Marianne Moore used traditional poetic forms she would have upheld the status quo, but her choice of random syllabics, juxtaposition of random ideas, and antilyrical word choice instead undermines it; technical disruptions thus mimic social subversion (Joyce 71). Moore is constantly both undermining and defining marriage. Her use of quotes explore duality, just like her investigation of marriage: the words bear both their original meaning (often unrelated to marriage) and its new meaning within the poem (Joyce 72). This "dialectical interaction between the work and the world," best seen in the argument between male Adam and female Eve, is an essential feature of collage which allows for a "reverberation between intent and context" (Joyce 77 quoting Stephen Bann). Moore often exaggerates this process further by changing the quotations themselves through cutting words or not providing context, even within her own Notes sections at the end of the *Observations* edition. Due to this many of the quotations must be seen in the context of the whole poem, not the micro line level, in order to understand both their significance and the larger poem's. As Joyce nicely puts it, Moore uses the collage technique of dechirage, "to tear out roughly," rather than "to cut out nearly," decoupage (73).

But even the use of quotes within the collaged poem provides an additional level of critique: Moore more often uses quotations to describe Adam and ascribes more quotes to the male speaker. Often using male writers' words, Moore thus undermines both male character within the poem and the greater world while also commenting on male language usage. By having Adam "pontificate[] on subjects about which he knows little and on which he has

misguided opinions" (Joyce 74), Moore subtly digs the not only the authors she samples from but also the father of all manhood – a harsh assessment of masculinity. Yet the collage as commentary also plays the part of distancing the poem from the poet, establishing yet another seemingly contradictory binary. By stepping back from the angry, personal, female voice, Moore can claim that she engages in no direct confrontation while also dramatizing Adam and Eve's relationship. By showing the dissimilarity of the couple who lack the words to express their emotions (Joyce 79), Moore can point to her critiques in the poem's dialogue as simply characterization, not personal opinion, although more often than not she pierces through the armor with her feminism.

The dialogue that runs throughout the majority of the poem allows for Moore to not only incorporate her collage quotations easily but also neatly fits into her generic use of the (mock) epithalamium. While written as a report of a conversation between Adam and Eve, surrogates for all married men and all married women, the "mixture of dialogue and speculation… allow[s] variety and much wit and paradox" according to Bernard Engel (52). Engel is correct in refusing to call the poem a true conversation as it often takes on a question and answer or call and response feeling, as if there are levels of conversation within the dialogue. On one level, the poet or Moore speaks to Adam and Eve, on another Adam and Eve converse, on another the poet and reader speak – and one could argue that on another level Adam and Eve communicate with the reader as well for the poem is not about Adam and Eve but rather but what they think of us. But perhaps even calling the poem a conversation assumes too much. Rather, "Marriage" reads most like a discussion where everyone is speaking but few are listening to each other. It could also be read as a group of soliloquies with actors entering and leaving just in time to miss the previous speech. Moore in this way undermines and demonstrates the colloquialism "communication is

key." By making the original couple unable to speak to each other, it seems as if Moore insinuates that no pairs can communicate well enough to truly fulfill their vows. However, it also seems as if the dialogue is not so much about the couple as it is about the poet. Joyce reads the dialogue as an "adaptation of the Socratic method of refuting all sides of the argument. Dialogue allows Moore to remove herself from the context of the poem so that the critique of marriage implicit in the poem does not reflect on the poet" (77). It is hard to swallow this argument completely. However, Moore's use of armored poetry seen in her other works is evident here as well in her "open warfare" dialogue that pushes responsibility onto her sources instead of her.

Interestingly enough, despite all of the conversation and back and forth, the two central questions in the marriage ceremony are never asked. Moore conveniently leaves out "Will you marry me?" and "Do you take her as your lawfully wedded wife?" Conversely, neither Adam nor Eve says "I do." In this way, "Marriage" could perhaps be read like bad sexual intercourse. There is lots of hope for completion and climax but instead readers experience a slow drop down. The poem builds anti-climax upon anti-climax until it ends with no climax, no resolution at all. Readers are left unsatisfied and that, exactly, is the point. Moore refuses to write conjugal consummation; there is no blood on the sheets as this not a fairy tale. This happily-ever-after most likely ends in divorce or cyclical unhappiness. Much of this reading comes through in Moore's tone. Her tone is humorous and sympathetic but also highly ironic and tongue-in-cheek. She alternates between mocking the reader and the institution of marriage while also granting concessions for those few who do not fit into her critique – the lucky few whose marital relationship fulfills all of her check boxes. This vacillation occurs due to the almost deadpan voice of the narrator, one well suited for the modern 20th century dissociated poet despite their highly emotional poems. As follows, the poem's impersonal narrator acts like a moderator at a

forum full of impassioned critics and fervent lovers of marriage for at times the emotion is so much that it seems like a narrator is not even there, in some ways achieving Moore's goal.

Reading Moore's use of collage requires understanding at many levels: if the first is self-removal and distancing between the poet and the poem, and the second could be veiled critique and undermining tradition through form, perhaps the third is the ability to write from all viewpoints at once – to write contrasting viewpoints without their canceling each other out. To use Moore's own words from "Marriage," she writes the "striking grasp of opposites," yoking together disparate and antithetical beliefs on the institution of marriage both at the level of the line and thematically. Her imperfect coupling of people, lines, and language throughout resonates upward and reflects back her own disunified binary of views for and against marriage. Through her collage, the meaning of the poem becomes less important.

Hadas claims that "Marriage" has to be "necessarily incomprehensible in the end" (144) because the institution, "or should I say enterprise," is just so. Yet through reading the poem it seems like Moore wants us to focus upon everything but the resolution. On the same page, Hadas calls "Marriage" a "set of attitudes towards a hypothesis" (144), which appears more apt. Darlene Erikson similarly claims that "Marriage" "means" nothing, it passes no judgement or makes no claims, solves no puzzles – the poem gives us a means to think about the problem, not the answer (102). Thus for Moore, mental actions take the foreground; she writes about marriage within her mind, marrying her differing attitudes towards marriage versus writing a marriage of different minds.

Calling "Marriage" an "American poem about American-style marriages" (169), Hadas suggests that we must read the poem through the marital lens in terms of form and content. If we extend her claim, the poem can be read as moving through stages of a relationship. The poem

opens with an awkward first encounter, like many relationships, before moving towards attraction then courtship, albeit selfish and uncomfortable. The poem skips over the engagement and marriage, however, to gradual mutual abomination or "unadulterated loathing," like Glinda and Elphaba. There could also be two proposals, both of which lack an affirmation. The typical marriage ceremony and consummation present in an epithalamium most definitely are missing. Moore also omits the "honeymoon" and hints at the potential for divorce instead. She jumps from place to place almost ironically trusting her readers to blindly follow a half step behind, holding her hand.

Despite walking through a marriage from start to seemingly inevitable end, the path from opening line to closing couplet is not easy, much like the relationship in the poem. Much of the emphasis on the couple throughout centers around what Engel calls a "consideration of the need for effort and the nature of aggressions in relationships of love" (96). This same effort is required to read the poem. "Marriage" necessitates being affectionate, and alone, and understanding. Moore situates readers in the liminal, writing discomfort as honesty. Hadas claims this discomfort is required to see the comfort in finding a true marriage – "something too personal for words, in words, in other words, and in yet other words" (147). Ellen Levy's use of Theodore Adorno's definition of modernist art in "Cultural Criticism and Society" helps unpack this discomfort. Adorno writes that modernist poetry "expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (Levy 36). By writing an anti-harmony poem, perhaps another name for a mock epithalamium, Moore writes tension into her form and content. The burdens of the subject confuse and fuse with the style and form – form influences content as content influences form. The most obvious example of this comes through in Moore's leitmotif. The theme of the circle or cycloid permeates the

poem, these are overlapping circles, as everything in the poem is thematically circular but not concentric. The poem, like Moore's circles, lacks a common center: readers are thus left "seeking unity but finding instead the tension of opposites" (Erikson 105). Thus, to push through the uneasiness of the poem requires discipline, yet another subject of the poem required for both marriage and "Marriage." In order to fully understand the paradox that "liberty may be bred by self-discipline, a restraint in action and expression" (Engel 52), readers must control their reading.

But while the poem can be read as tension, as containing a binary or duality of opinions on marriage, paralleling the binary of marriage, critics have fallen to one side or the other in terms of what they view as the most central aspect of the poem, the latchkey for understanding Moore's stance. Hadas, in her chapter entitled "Fighting Affections," reads Moore as doing just that – fighting against affection through her poetic couple of Adam and Eve. Writing that one is left with "the abstract-precise feeling of allegory," Hadas suggests that Moore's abstract tone acts as verbal armor that "displaces our attention form the level of personal desires and quirks to a level of civilized, social, or religious aspiration" (96). Aneila Jaffe in the Myth of Meaning states that this displacement and abstraction is a collective inversion and turning to the inner self (quoted in Hadas 96). Hadas therefore reads "Marriage" as "a woman's bid for power in a man's world, or a poet's bid for power in a prosaic world" (175). But what if she is a female poet in a prosaic man's world? Is she fighting both battles? Should Hadas have written an "and" and not an "or"? Hadas argues that this confusion ends in solitude regardless (147). But while the poet literally went home alone after writing, her stance does not fall solely in the applause of eternal bachelorhood. Moore fights for women, poets, and women poets to have power, both within and outside of marriage.

In contrast to Hadas, Linda Leavall, the most biographically-inclined interpreter of Moore, reads "Marriage" as an "impassioned indictment of all loveless marriages but allows for those rare marriages that exemplify the paradox of 'liberty and union, now and forever'" (64). She acquiesces that Moore was obsessed with bachelordom over the girlhood fantasy of marriage (65), yet understands the poem to be Moore finally finding words for divorce and separation, words for female bachelors, words and opportunities she lacked growing up. In that way, she is not pushing against marriage or pulling for lack of companionship but rather fighting against a certain view of marriage. Leavall writes that Moore was arguing against Irish novelist George Moore's "oriental" view of degrading women due to the Old Testament temptress' sin (as made evident with the inclusion of Eve in "Marriage") and the "if at first you don't succeed, try again" sentiment towards marriage (71). Moore was fighting centuries of patriarchy in not just the poetic canon but also religion, institutional memory, and societal pressures. Similarly, Joyce reads Moore as ridiculing male authority that is often intrinsic in traditional marriages while also admitting to the strength of the institution (72-73). Alternately, Erikson reads "Marriage" as about the non-romantic "marriage" of parent-child relations: "Is Marriage a cry for freedom from Mary's oppressive love… or a celebration of the 'rare,' 'disinterested,' liberating love between a mother and a daughter?" (102). Distinguishing between greedy love (the kind typical in heterosexual, romantic relationships) and heroic love (that of Mary and Marianne), Erikson argues that Moore writes a dialectic on marriage. By giving the reader too much information – what Hartman calls "gossip on the baroque scale" (as quoted in Erikson 102), Moore forces us to decide which love to choose, which ending to choose. She gives readers a choice – a feminist action in it of itself.

Part 2:
Content

"…statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly."

– Marianne Moore

"Marriage" famously begins with the coupled lines: "This institution / perhaps one should say enterprise." The relationship between the dominant and subordinate clauses of the first two lines where the second undercuts the first mirrors neatly the relationship between Adam and Eve introduced later in the poem (Levy 38). Ellen Levy suggests the term "enterprise" comes from a phrase in the wedding service in Book of Common Prayer which warns marriage "is not to be enterprised… unadvisedly," in this case enterprise meaning a "bold, arduous, or momentous undertaking involving risk or danger" (39). With this reading, Moore views marriage, and "Marriage," as grave undertakings, events requiring risk and hazard. But enterprise is not the dominant term – institution is. The "culturally dominant term" for marriage (Levy 39), Moore situates institutions and enterprises as parts of uneven binaries much like public versus private, male and female, Adam and Eve. These binaries are not constant nor wholly representative of the status quo, however, as Moore's biases toward the feminine and the private come to the foreground, at times in favor for and others against marriage; she is perhaps in favor of love over institutions. But in these lines there is no explanation of the distinction between an institution or enterprise – merely evocations of legal and law regulated love versus economic and transactional imagery of romance. The image of institutions further conjures whiteness – a color motif throughout the poem. Starting with the white pillared institutions, Moore builds to connect the paper marriage certificate, white marble town hall, and white clapboard church suggested in the word "institution" to the purity of the wedding dress, initial innocence of Eve, white sheets on a bed, milk of motherhood, oriental mourning, and whiteness of modernity. This sterile beginning and immediate impersonality contrasts the strong, profound, and violent emotion of the rest of "Marriage."

Moore continues her distancing in the opening lines through the end of her clause, building an institutional structure and dichotomy for the rest of the poem:

out of respect for which

one says one need not change one's mind

about a thing one has believed in,

requiring public promises

of one's intention

to fulfill a private obligation:

Calling marriage an "enterprise" instead of "institution" allows for criticism, or is so suggested by Moore. The distancing of this statement comes through in her use of "one," what Hadas calls a "superb lack of passion, on the far abstract end of the continuum of meaning that reaches between it and dream. It is a purely verbal consideration" (142). By arguing the semantics of diction, Moore deflects away from the fact that she immediately begins her poem with a blow against a core societal belief. Bloom dubs this first sentence a "parody of the societal apologia for marriage" (4). But for Ellen Levy, it is more than a blow against matrimony for marriage is the institution upon which all others are founded. It "confers legitimacy on our sexual desires and confirms us as members of the polity. The wish to avoid it, as suggested in Moore's lines above, implies a rejection of both the sexual and social orders… but no one can avoid it entirely: to be a member of society is to be a constituent of this institution" (Levy xxii-xxiii). Moore rejects her gender, sexuality, and cultural identity in this clause; she slowly begins to dismantle the system while not allowing it to fall completely. This tension of holding hands with your captor continues as Moore grapples with how to fight against an institution she partially believes in. The rational that follows her critique appears simultaneously obvious and profound:

why must we publically announce our private feelings? She suggests that the need is commercial, not human. This gap between "inner rationality and the outer reasonableness… leads inevitably to a moral strain… this strain, more than any other, that holds of the fragments of life, a marriage, or a poem together" (Hadas 143). By beginning with anxious binaries of legality and love, public and private, Moore sets up the equivocating and circular tone towards marriage present in the rest of the poem.

From abstraction, Moore turns to the specific: her epitomical couple Adam and Eve. Beginning her musings on modern marriage with "I wonder what Adam and Eve / think of it by this time," Moore forces us to straddle our contemporary conceptions of marriage with the mythical, biblical, and larger-than-life first man and wife. Immediately imbuing marriage with religion, Moore tries to sort truth through fiction. Hadas calls Adam and Eve "absent mentors" (142), protagonists asked to think on conjugal bliss just as Moore's readers are. But Moore's cynicism seems to seep through before she even allows the biblical pair to speak: if they mistrusted the ultimate Truth, the ultimate institution, and turned to the snake, how do they fulfill lesser promises? This may not be solely Moore's doing, however, as the mythic form of the epithalamium calls for questions and begs to be answered. In this way, the poem asks more questions than Moore answers, perhaps because there is no right answer to marriage or "Marriage." Leavall, on the other hand, takes a more pragmatic approach to Adam and Eve's presence. An exhibit on Bibles at the New York Public Library's main branch occurred at the same time Moore was writing "Marriage" and Moore describes in detail in a letter to Warner a particular illustration of Adam and Eve on display, perhaps sparking her imagination (Leavall 71). In many ways, "Marriage," thus, becomes a feminist counternarrative to Genesis.

Regardless of how or why Moore includes Adam and Eve, the poem jumps between interrogations of biblical gendering and modern marriage's manifestation of similar sentiments. Moore's second definition of marriage moves away from the abstract to the physical and symbolic, the wedding ring:

> this fire-gilt steel
> alive with goldenness;
> how bright it shows --
> "of circular traditions and impostures,
> committing many spoils,"

Moore asks Adam and Eve to comment upon all the wedding ring, the universal sign for marital status, has come to mean. Each line building on the next, Moore conflates the wedding ring's golden image with colonization, knowledge, and cyclicality. The language of spoils and impostures evokes images of greed and imperialism, stealing others treasures while the "fire-gilt" golden ring links back more overtly to circular rings and traditions: a union of two circles, two gender symbols overlapping. The circular leitmotif begins. But in a different context, the collaged quotation speaks not of marriage but rather the pursuit of knowledge. As Moore notes in the Notes from *Observations* (there were no notes included in the 1923 Manikin edition), "of circular traditions…" comes from a Francis Bacon quotation from the Encyclopaedia Brittanica:

> I have taken all knowledge to be my province and if I could purge it of two sorts of errors, whereof the one with frivolous disputation, confutations and verbosities, the other with blind experiments and circular traditions and impostures hath committed so many spoils, I hope I shall bring in industrious observations...

Levy interprets this quotation as hinting that readers will go in circles throughout the poem with no linear end (41), but more than this it ties marriage to the story of Eve's fall and quest for answers. By fragmenting the image of marriage by failing to call it by its name and also including an out-of-context fragment of a quote, Moore negates or frustrates the expected aesthetic of the women who only yearns for a ring upon her finger. Moore begins to write Eve, the first wife, as so much more than a spouse, a new prototype for all women and wives to come.

The prevalence of this type of woman – who treats wifehood as life – is not lost upon Moore, even amongst her avant-garde, modernist, Greenwich Village circles. Moore exclaims that singleness, forgoing marriage, is an act "requiring all one's criminal ingenuity / to avoid!" Ending the seventeen line first sentence, Moore situates modern day marriage – for Adam and Eve – as an (almost) inevitable part of American life. She saw marriage as so ubiquitous that it was harder to avoid marriage than to get married, even while speaking from a position of bachelorhood. Levy argues this criminal ingenuity gives Moore an insider status from which she is able to comment on the institution without taking part.

From here, Moore throws us into the deep end with Adam and Eve – flooding us with quotations and conversations, much like the moment in the Garden after biting in the apple when humanity gains knowledge. Almost ironically, Moore stops readers from overanalyzing before she even bestows knowledge: "Psychology which explains everything / explains nothing / and we are still in doubt." But the very inclusion of these lines almost asks the reader to try to psychoanalyze the next lines:

Eve: beautiful woman –

I have seen her

when she was so handsome

she gave me a start,

able to write simultaneously

in three languages –

English, German and French –

and talk in the meantime;

Moore mentions Eve first, unlike in Genesis or subsequent retellings like Paradise Lost. Not only that, but this is not the Old Testament's Eve. Moore pulls her power from the Scientific American's January 1922 article "Multiple Consciousness or Reflex Action of Unaccustomed Range": "Miss A—will write simultaneously in three languages, English, German, and French, talking in the meantime. [She] takes advantage of her abilities in everyday life, writing her letters simultaneously with both hands…" (Observation Notes). Moore not only rewrites Eve but undermines our assumptions about demure Miss Moore herself – this is not your grandmother's poet, although she may dress like it. Moore overtly discusses the fact that women are more intellectual than those portrayed by the great male canonical authors like Homer and Dante and Milton; she is a woman redefining societal conceptions of womanhood. And most importantly, most destabilizing for men, Moore still writes a beautiful Eve. She writes a woman who can be handsome and intelligent, a conversationalist whose beauty has overshadowed her smarts for millennia. Before Adam is even mentioned, his ability to name is rivaled by Eve's command of language (Leavall 72). Moore undermines Anglo-European understanding of Genesis, as written in *Paradise Lost* by giving Eve both brains and beauty, a deeply subversive move to the canon. Under the radar, Moore writes a subtle feminist metanarrative questioning modern, male poetic authority by linking femininity with wordsmithing.

Moore posits that Eve's gifts are equal to Adam's, refusing to settle into the gendered, misogynistic hierarchy that persists in marriage today. Eve is "equally positive in demanding a commotion / and in stipulating quiet" yet she does not get what she demands, her request is denied:

"I should like to be alone;"

to which the visitor replies,

"I should like to be alone;

why not be alone together?"

Placing quotations around the first utterings of Eve and Adam, Moore not only establishes the start of a conversation, she also confuses the reader as to what aspects of her poem are her own words. Mixing quotations, unmarked and marked, with unmarked and marked dialogue, Moore subverts convention in content and form – she refuses to even stick to established rules regarding avant-garde modes such as collage. More so, Moore subverts biblical history when she describes Eve as wanting to be alone and Adam refusing. Moore's Eve wishes for female bachelorhood, some option outside heteronormative marriage. But in some other ways, this is Moore's version of a proposal. Is she writing herself into Eve and submitting that Thayer, or others like her mother Mary, are injecting themselves into her solitary life via "proposals" of their own? If so this section becomes scathing as Adam's proposal response is one of "insidious remoteness and literally embarrassing sentiment" (Hadas 145). This utterly unromantic story of the first couple shifts the tone from serious condemnation and critique to tongue-in-cheek humor, allowing readers a short break from solemnity in tone before returning to it shortly. For Eve never gets to be alone – Adam continues to pop up in conversation time and time again.

After the proposal Moore returns to a strategy reminiscent of the opening lines, creating imperfect pairs through lines and language: "Below the incandescent stars / below the incandescent fruit." Eden's forbidden fruit becomes here incandescent – the good and evil no longer binary but a circle. The apple seems to not be the only forbidden element, however, as Moore continues:

> the strange experience of beauty;
>
> its existence is too much;
>
> it tears one to pieces
>
> and each fresh wave of consciousness
>
> is poison.

Many scholars read this passage as Moore injecting sexuality into her discussion on marriage. Reading "incandescent" as passionate, or "aglow with ardor" (Erikson 110), the line "tearing one to pieces" takes on a duality of meaning. Knowledge is gained but also desire, a feeling poisonous once realized. The inevitability of sexual attraction due to supremely ordained beauty seems to necessitate control. The solution: the institution of marriage (Erikson 110). But what remains unclear is who needs the control, the beholder or the beheld of the beauty (Levy 57). Who is in danger? It seems ironically, Eve, as "Eve… is said (in lines reminiscent to Robinson Jeffers, the only such passage in Moore's published work) to possessed by an almost suicidal beauty" (Engel 52). If at first her beauty did not kill her, knowledge would; either way she cannot succeed. Even Eve suffers the double bind. Engels suggests that "this reflection leads to recollection of her role as the 'central flaw' in Eden – as the cause of that 'lamentable accident' that exempted Adam from primary blame for man's loss in the Garden, an exemption Moore as a woman makes a point of referring to with sarcasm" (52). Bloom claims that here the

detachment of Moore as mere "watcher" is not totally lost but also never fully recovered (5). Even without imbuing herself into "Marriage," the lines seem to be writing against this "poison" of consciousness for without Eve's transgression Moore would not be writing at all.

Perhaps a further subversion of the collage form, Moore's next line is a quotation ascribed to "George Shock" in the Notes of *Observations*. Yet despite both the name and the quotation – "'See her, see her in this common world'" – being surrounded by quotation marks, no scholar has been able to gloss the quote. It and Shock appear to exist only in Moore's usage. Moore immediately moves back to Eden and the so-called Fall of Man, thinly veiling her female bitterness against the Western assault on women. Moore reads society as viewing Eve as "the central flaw / in that first crystal-fine experiment." If mankind is a crystal-fine experiment, inherently prone to breakage, Eve is blamed as the first crack in the perfect exterior. By standing next to her, Adam looks like a perfect man and Eve is forced to take the fall. In this way, the first marriage is intrinsically flawed. As Levy says, the whole is now fractured (38). The unifying institution begins as cracked, Adam and Eve split. The futility of their marriage, and perhaps all marriages, continues onto the next lines: "this amalgamation which can never be more / than an interesting possibility." Moore looks at marriage as a Band-Aid, an institution that can never solve the true problem of temptation, the underlying issue that began with her first couple.

Moore goes on to describe this interesting possibility:

as "that strange paradise

unlike flesh, stones,

gold, or stately buildings,

the choicest piece of my life:

[I am not grown up now;

I am as little as a leaf,]

the heart rising

in its estate of peace

as a boat rises

with the rising of the water;"

While the long quotation is ascribed to Richard Baxter's The Saints' Everlasting Rest, as noted in *Observations*, no such quote exists within the book, although the words and themes are present throughout his "Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Heaven." Moore uses his work as a jumping off point to describe both the paradise within "the central flaw," Eve, and within Eden. Using language of the Garden and earthly paradise Moore relates to the epithalamic tradition of describing the sanctuary of the home. Here, however, she doubles her description of the perfect paradise with the fact that the woman is a prisoner, secondary citizen, and temptress within its walls; walls that evoke other forms of female imprisonment via "stately buildings" such as institutional barriers and legal restrictions. Moore's Baxter quote also references other biblical stories like Noah and the Ark rising in the flood waters as mankind fails its experiment. Here the connection to marriage deepens as Moore chooses images of coupling and pairs throughout the Bible, not just in Eden. The least obvious lines above are those bracketed: "I am not grown up now; I am as little as a leaf." Moore includes this couplet in her Manikin version of "Marriage" but it is omitted, without, explanation in all subsequent publications. There is no similar language in Baxter's treatise and it seems to come out of nowhere. Perhaps it is Moore herself, needing to express her emotions after all. The two lines combine images of the fall of innocence – the covering of nakedness with fig leaves – as well as overt references to youthful innocence. It is as if, for Moore, the gaining of

information was a new childhood for Eve. She is not a seductress nor larger than life evil, merely a young girl quaking in her new found female power. The line's sudden honestly seems soul bearing, perhaps too autobiographical for Moore to keep in the poem upon reprints.

Continuing on the same sentence, which covers 21 lines, Moore turns back to the female "flaw." She claims that Eve has not told her side of the story, she has been "constrained in speaking of the serpent." Throughout Moore's poetry, snakes are beautiful and magical but also constricting and evil. This duality of symbols comes into play here as well: Moore reads the snake as the tempting devil who both curses and frees Adam and Eve. The snake's constraining mechanism, tight overlapping coils of scaled, rounded muscle, further evokes the circular constraints of marriage – the golden ring, pregnant stomach. Constraints in terms of speech here are even more specifically gendered as well. Moore writes of the serpent as "that shed snakeskin in the history of politeness / not to be returned to again." The concept of politeness permeates Moore's personal life with her mother and brother, as female etiquette and demureness were valued in her home. Tying this politeness to both speech and dress, Moore effectively critiques modern societies' constraints on women by tying them all the way back to Eve's forced covering of her nakedness in the Garden and her inability to defend herself against the male serpent. Her use of clothing as politics personally seeps into this line as Eve's lack of armor highlights Moore's own usage. Yet simultaneously, we must read these lines with a grain of salt, for the serpent allows us to talk of marriage, clothing, beauty, and intelligence; he gives us serpentine answers to our flawed questions.

However, before readers are able to roll their eyes at Moore's pointing to politeness to exculpate Eve, she turns on Adam. The snake and fall of humanity, original sin, becomes "that invaluable accident / exonerating Adam." It is not that Adam was better than Eve, it was merely

a happy coincidence that he got off scot-free. Eve's seduction freed her and Adam while only making her culpable. Due to this, Adam becomes an idol in his own eyes (Erikson 106). The criticism here is thinly veiled and harshly critical of patriarchal hierarchies.

The exoneration of Adam gives Moore a platform upon which to place him in order to pass criticism and judgement. Like Eve, he is an attractive specimen, filled with gifts; he is someone necessary for the human race to continue despite his grandiose flaws:

> And he has beauty also;
> it's distressing – the O thou
> to whom, from whom,
> without whom nothing – Adam;
> "something feline,
> something colubrine" – how true!

Eve is drawn to him in explicable and inexplicable ways – he is her physical counterpart and aesthetically pleasing. Maureen McLane claims this is Moore's "Eve's Miltonic salutation [that] becomes a kind of semi-ironized, fatal shorthand" of Paradise Lost. Yet, his desirability distresses her, perhaps due to its inevitability. He is both a cat and a snake, a man and a god. Collaging a Phillip Littell quotation from his March 21, 1923 review of Santayana's Poems in The New Republic– "We were puzzled and were fascinated, as if by something feline, by something colubrine" (Observation Notes) – Moore aligns Adam with the satanic serpent in the above lines while also identifying him with an animal that eats snakes. This cannibalistic and twisted duality makes him beautifully sinister, like a charismatic and attractive sociopath. This fear of sexual desire seems inherently autobiographical as Moore was an infamously chaste and asexual woman.

This dark reading of Adam continues into Moore's next image of Adam as a monster within his garden domain. He is the malevolent force in the pages of the Bible. Moore metaphorically describes Adam as:

a crouching mythological monster
in that Persian miniature of emerald mines,
raw silk – ivory white, snow white,
oyster white and six others –
that paddock full of leopards and giraffes –
long lemonyellow bodies
sown with trapezoids of blue.

Her strong words and vivid imagery re-paint Western Biblical imagery into darker, Orientalist fantasies. Adam's beauty and potential to invade Eve's life makes him a monster, but he is a delicious threat. He is the monster in the book insert, the beautiful and gilt manifestation of power and fear, crouching, not yet struck his prey. Due to this, he possesses a beautiful, fear-inducing power; he becomes a demi-God. Moore also continues to incorporate whiteness into poem, this time explicitly listing shades of white. Levy calls this depiction of white Eden as a state of unmeaning between colors (61), moving from the green leaves and snake to the "lemonyellow" and blue bodies of animals. The "Persian-ness" of the Eden is also central to Levy as she calls it an "aesthetic ideal that is at once enhanced and compromised by its association with precious materials" (72). This dual reading mimics the duality of Adam's beauty as both desired and despised. Finally, the self-contained, intricate image of the Persian miniature parallels the collaged sentences of Moore's poem. Each alone tells a developed moment, yet in sequence they form a story.

Moore moves quickly from the Persian paddock to Adam's command of words, "vibrating like a cymbal / touched before it has been struck," giving him a voice that Eve lacks via a circular instrument, ironic due to the circular constraints placed upon her voice box. He prophesies an "industrious waterfall" moving forward, no longer silent, now powerful, "which violently bears all before it, / at one time silent as the air / and now as powerful as the wind."

Moore's command of poetic language seduces you without realizing, distracting you as she moves between censure of masculinity, arriving at some of her most famous lines from the work:

"Treading chasms
on the uncertain footing of a spear,"
forgetting that there in woman
a quality of mind
which is an instinctive manifestation
is unsafe,

Pulled from William Hazlitt's "Essay on Burke's Style" (*Observations* Notes), Moore modifies his original quote: "[Burke's style] may be said to pass yawning gulfs "on the unsteadfast footing of a spear.'" Focusing upon the balancing act between Adam's oratory power and Eve's brilliance, the gulf crossing that requires self-harm, Moore's words serve as meta commentary on both the relationship and on the poem itself. Moore wants readers to traverse her poetic chasms, giving them only tenuous bridges that often require self-inflicted criticism in order to keep reading. Harold Bloom applauds her use of literary giant Hazlitt's quotation as he is able to get joy out of her "borrowings" while she is writing a "corrective polemic against male slandering of women" (5). Moore never lets us forget Eve's intelligence and Adam's ignorance, rewriting Genesis, and male authors like Milton and his epic *Paradise Lost*, with a feminist pen.

Adam's lack of understanding of the female mind, including his wife's, means that he speaks without thinking – pontificating, ironically, for only Eve to hear:

he goes on speaking

in a formal customary strain

of "past states, the present state,

seals, promises,

the evil one suffered,

the good one enjoys,

hell, heaven,

everything convenient

to promote one's joy."

Referencing Richard Baxter yet again, Moore creates her own collaged quote inspired from The Saints' Everlasting Rest as a way to give her critiques some teeth; she can point to Baxter's authority as a way to distance herself from her female-minded critique of Adam while also giving it authority. Hadas reads this as the second proposal scene of the poem, a formal asking to spend eternity being alone together (145). However, Adam keeps talking without realizing he has lost the audience he is proposing to. Adam is a prophet and a sage but does not understand women in all their multitude; he is too prideful in the adoration he has received as the namer of things. Erikson reads this scene not as a proposal but as Adam's declaration of himself as grand master over all of Eden, and thus the world (106). Together, the hubris of Adam and his ignorance of Eve's complexity sow more seeds for their failure as a couple, because this cannot communicate despite Adam's supposed command of language. In this way, Moore blames Adam, not Eve, for the potential fall of their relationship.

Moore's poetic style shifts in the next lines, however. While the majority of the poem prior to this point relies mainly on loose syllabics and no set meter, Moore introduces iambic tetrameter, the meter of hymns, in the line "there is in him a state of mind." Other later lines slip into meter, but here the meter stands out, evoking the original lyric nature of the form and pushing momentum into a moment that otherwise could have lagged. On another level, however, the shift shows how differently Adam and Eve communicate. They are on different planes: his language is not her language. They rely on differing styles and quotations, often misinterpreting each other's responses, moving past each other like ships in the night. This "state of mind" of Adam means that he perceives himself as a grand force and "he experiences a solemn joy / in seeing that he has become an idol." Using a line from "A Travers Champs" by Anatole France in Filles et Garcons, translated from the French (*Observations* Notes), Moore continues to reify Adam's perception of himself as an idol while simultaneously critiquing it, for he is an idol only in his mind.

Adam does, however, begin to understand his own failure to hear or communicate with Eve. Introducing the nightingale, Moore writes a miniature metaphysical conceit regarding two lovers, here assumed to Adam and Eve.

Plagued by the nightingale
in the new leaves,
with its silence --
not its silence but its silences,
he says of it:
"It clothes me with a shirt of fire."
"He dares not clap his hands

to make it go on

lest it should fly off;

if he does nothing, it will sleep;

if he cries out, it will not understand."

Adam cannot conceive why Eve, the nightingale in her new leaf coverings, an allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost, will not speak to him. In the first collaged quotation, from Dr. Hagop Boghassian's Armenian poem "The Nightingale" (*Observations* Notes), Moore seems to discuss the tension Adam feels between anger and desire, the emotions of fire and temptation. While Eve is clothed amongst the trees, Adam burns his clothing. He cannot make Eve come to him nor can he leave her be, and he can't speak with her, only to her. This renders him powerless. The Edward Thomas quote demonstrating this, above, originates from Feminine Influence on the Poets, describing "The Kingis Quair." A poem written by King James I in which he describes his love for Joan Beaufort while watching her from the window of his prison cell (Joyce 75). Joyce describes how Moore quotes the King's lines exactly but twists her description of the nightingale beforehand. Therefore, the quotation goes from gentle love at first sight to frustration: Adam cannot get his bird to sing, the bird being the wife whom he controls (Joyce 75). Thus, his failure to control her makes him look like a mute, paralyzed fool. In this way, a woman can gain independence within marriage, however, the cost is spousal happiness.

"Unnerved by the nightingale / and dazzled by the apple," Adam sits between a rock and a hard place; he is both discouraged by his wife's apathy and enamored with her knowledge. His personal passion weakens him; she becomes his temptation. This antithetical duality burns off the page with the next lines: "impelled by the 'illusion of a fire / effectual enough to extinguish fire," again inspired by Richard Baxter (*Observations* Notes). Adam's overwhelming desire

becomes, in Bloom's terms, "Hercules suicidally aflame with the shirt of Nessus" (7), due to the silence of his emblematic female nightingale. This all-consuming passion, the flame of romance, is compared to "the shining of the earth" which becomes a "deformity." Baxter, in Moore's words, calls this fire "as high as deep / as bright as broad / as long as life itself." However, fire cannot be sustained, thus, Adam "stumbles over marriage," an institutionalized inferno that requires lifelong burning. The female power of sexuality then becomes a strength and a downfall, something to be disciplined in its usage – a uniquely Moore concept of liberated women. Interestingly, 127 lines later, this is Moore's first explicit mention of the word after the title "Marriage." She will only mention it three more times throughout the next 181 lines.

Immediately after reminding readers the poem's central theme, Moore undercuts the enterprise once again, deeming it "'a very trivial object indeed.'" This time using a quotation in its original form and on the subject of marriage, Moore quotes William Godwin, fabled philosopher, challenger of institutions, husband of Mary Wollstonecraft, and father to Mary Shelley: "Marriage is a law, and the worst of all laws… a very trivial object indeed" (*Observations* Notes). This seemingly innocuous quote packs a punch once combined with the fact that it "destroyed the attitude / in which he stood." The trivial nature of Adam's affection for Eve, and vice versa, seems to be an even more barbed critique than Moore's earlier comments. The absence of feeling and emotion and love is even more violent than its presence, especially since Adam "has let himself be dazzled into marriage, a state that is a 'trivial' source for the disruption of the grand role he has enjoyed" (Engel 52). This stepping-down for marriage seems to suggest underlying anger. Taken with the above lines regarding fire and the nightingale, the whole passage is representative of male fear and distrust of the female combined with his obsession and fascination of her and their marital institution. Moore writes male ambivalence

about the female due to his identification with female taboo (Bloom 7). The power of this ambivalence unhinges Adam's "ease of the philosopher" as he becomes "unfathered by a woman." His god-ordained philosophizing is now wrecked by his desire for the female (Erikson 111).

Moore's next transition into a new segment of the poem relates most directly to her epithalamic form: the evocation of Hymen, the mythological god of marriage. However, here Moore calls upon "Unhelpful Hymen!" after the marriage. The ironic or mocking calling for Hymen signifies a shift from pre to post marriage in the poem. The word hymen post-marriage also conjures images of the female anatomical hymen and the breaking of virginity. But whereas Hymen guided couples through marriage in traditional epithalamion, here Adam and Eve find that the counsels of Hymen no longer help (Engel 53); Moore subverts the norm. Hymen has been demoted "by that experiment of Adam's" to:

> a kind of overgrown cupid
> reduced to insignificance
> by the mechanical advertising
> parading as involuntary comment,

Moore, through her re-envisioning of the epithalamium, provides modern commentary on modern marriage by juxtaposing ancient Hymen and Biblical Adam and Eve with American commercialism and capitalism. As Leavall explains, the whole poem spans time and space; there was no culture, "neither high nor low, ancient nor modern, classical nor biblical, oriental nor occidental," that got it perfectly right in Moore's eyes (72). Hence, Moore through writing is conducting her own experiment, her own playing God, creating her own Adam and Eve in order to pick and choose what aspects of marriage to keep and dispose of. The invocation of Hymen

signifies a shift from exploring gender via descriptions of Adam and Eve to a conversation between themselves, allowing Moore to sort through her views Socratically. She writes a dialogue with "ways out but no ways in" for her reader: read it all or leave. Moore becomes a hypnotist, the only one with a "way out and a way in," in Kenneth Burke's words (Observations Notes).

Describing the ritual of marriage, Moore writes a registry, or wedding planner to do list, mocking the so-called requirements, "augmenting all its lavishness," in order to wed someone:

its fiddle-head ferns,
lotus flowers, opuntias, white dromedaries,
its hippopotamus --
nose and mouth combined
in one magnificent hopper,
its crested screamer --
that huge bird almost a lizard,
its snake and the potent apple.

Moore's description of the white wedding dripping in white flora makes us question the true innocence of the bride and groom, the motivations behind the wedding. The mind drifts back to the fiery desire mentioned earlier, sexuality undermining the pure façade. Moving from typical wedding decorations such as flowers to the absurd – a hippo; a large, tropical waterfowl; the devil – Moore demonstrates the obscenity of public rituals for private feelings. She forces a hippopotamus into the room. The couple needs to hear and utter oaths, but also submits to commercialism and commodification. Moore finds problem with ceremony becoming about more than the two people. We are jarred out of the myth and into the harsh light of reality; we

are not in Eden anymore. Despite all the flowers, ceremony, and Pachelbel's canon, Moore suggests weddings and marriage are merely socially acceptable covers for temptation and sexual desires. Once we cut the cake and bite the apple, we find the way out, forced to leave the garden. The passage becomes an example of Bloom's "Moore's Paradox": "marriage, considered from either the male or female perspective, is a dreadful disaster, but as a poetic trope gorgeously shines forth its barbaric splendors" (7).

Moore jumps directly from the wedding ceremony into a conversation between the newlyweds. She switches from Adam to he, Eve to she, blurring the line between the epic and the modern couple. Similarly, she blurs who is speaking throughout, often eliminating pronouns or ascriptions to speakers. This time, he speaks first. However, it is unclear whether Adam or Hymen is speaking:

> He tells us
> that "for love
> that will gaze an eagle blind,
> that is with Hercules
> climbing the trees
> in the garden of the Hesperides,
> from forty-five to seventy
> is the best age,"

The Notes in *Observations* credits this quotation to Anthony Trollope's Barchester Towers, an 1857 satirical novel regarding the fight in the Church of England between the High Church and Evangelical adherents. Hymen's advice, in the form of the collaged Trollope quote, to wed later in life does not apply to the already married couple; his unhelpfulness manifests through his

contradictory advice, as he was present at the ceremony. Moore uses Hymen's advice to argue against love at first sight marriages but the image she utilizes is one of supreme violence. As Erikson explains, Hercules killed his own children and wife Megara in a fit of rage and then did penance through his twelve labors (106). Moore's advice against passion seems minor in comparison, although fearful of male domestic violence.

Hymen moves on to describe marriage through a laundry list of options: "as a fine art, as an experiment, / a duty or as merely recreation." Moore pushes back against immediate criticism of him, or her, by asking readers to "not call him ruffian / nor friction a calamity." She seems to acknowledge through the rest of "Marriage" that no marriage is perfect: there is inevitable conflict and that is not a disaster. This "fight to be affectionate" in marriage seems to be the quest of the poem, a constant losing battle to prove that affection alone is enough. Defining marriage as a love battle demonstrates its violence but also the effort required to continue the siege. She seems to suggest that marriage is like certainty: "no truth can be fully known / until it has been tried / by the tooth of disputation"(a quote from Robert of Sorbonne). Moore sees relationships like trial by combat; you must fight to find out if it works.

Perhaps due to the heavily masculine previous passages, Moore turns her attention back to Eve, granting her power and a voice in the conversation. Setting up the couple as complementary yet contradictory – "The blue panther with black eyes, / the basalt panther with blue eyes," – Moore establishes their equal footing in this moment. She has moved from the white wedding to the darkness of animals in a fight, pacing in circles, waiting to strike: "entirely graceful – one must give them the path." This is not our fight to intercede in. And while Adam had his moment on the pedestal before, the female once again rises as "the black obsidian Diana / who 'darkeneth her countenance / as a bear doth.'" Combining a line (25:23-24) from

Ecclesiasticus, the controversial Biblical book written by Jesus, son of Sirach – "the wickedness of a woman maketh black her look, / and darkeneth her countenance like a bear's" (*Observations* Notes) – with Greek mythology, Moore paints a picture of Diana as a wicked woman due to her Virgin-huntress status. Her refusal to marry inspired cult devotees who dressed as bears, furthering Moore's connection between the biblical and the mythological. By reclaiming quotations from a book that calls female wickedness the highest evil and claims all women want to sleep with all men like thirsty travelers seeing water (Erikson 107), Moore gains power through the use of the same words she heavily condemns. Moore wanted to remind readers that some cultures view women as innately vile and thus we should not be surprised that some women have "a flair for independence" (Erikson 107). Feminism oozes out of her reclaimed words. This independence is further by Moore's use of color; if white signifies marriage, black embodies individuality. Moore herself seemed to believe this as she wore black almost every day of her adult life.

The ultimate female bachelorhood of "wicked" Diana becomes contrast and complement for the passage that follows:

the spiked hand
that has an affection for one
and proves it to the bone,
impatient to assure you
that impatience is the mark of independence
not of bondage.

Moore must make room for the concept that female independence must be exist within the realm of marriage, that Diana's violent virginity cannot be the only option. The spiked, read

ringed, hand in marriage – of wife and poet – reaches to the reader, asking for belief that the possibility that love and independence can exist. Moore attempts to prove that monogamy is not bondage but rather an independent choice that a feminist like herself could make if the situation were ripe.

This independent impatience seems to be the mark of conjugal love for Moore. She writes:

> Married people often look that way –
> "self and cold, up and down,
> mixed and malarial
> with a good day and bad."

C. Bertram Hartman's description of married people's appearance suggests chronic disease, enhanced by the Richard Baxter quote that follows (*Observations* Notes). Moore's use of mixed, imperfect coupling provides contrast instead of complement, much like the couples she describes. Moore seems to blame this upon our culture's insistence upon mass consumption over art:

> "When do we feed?"
> We occidentals are so unemotional,
> we quarrel as we feed;
> one's self love's labor lost,
> the irony preserved
> in "the Ahasuerus tête à tête banquet"

Playing on the idea that a wife should feed her husband, Moore intertwines food consumption and the marriage bed, the apple and post-Eden carnal hungers. Hadas claims that to "satisfy

one's body and to serve another are inseparable in life and ritualized by art" (164), a criticism Moore seems to be forwarding regarding male's idea of the female. This critique seems to be westward-facing, however, as she comments on the unromantic realities of love and conversation. Food for thought appears missing. She yearns for the past, for Shakespeare, as we have not put in the labor and have now lost love. Instead, we, ironically, are left with George Adam Smith's Expositor's Bible (*Observations* Notes). The biblical scene referenced is Ester giving Haman his "just desserts" (Hadas 163). King Ahasuerus cast off his wife Vashti, because she caused him to "lose face" when she was not obedient, claiming her behavior was said to threaten obedience of all Persian women (Erikson 106). Once unwifed, Ahasuerus deflowered a virgin a day for a year until Ester (a Jewess) manipulated him as his concubine and prevented a pogrom by killing Haman, his advisor (Erikson 106). Hadas claims the allusion "emphasizes the power a wife may have over her husband while he still retains the illusion of freedom" (163). Perhaps it is not illusions of power or freedom that Moore seeks to discuss but rather the different agendas between men and women, each using their sexual and emotional skills to manipulate the other.

This manipulative relationship that lacks true communication and instead focuses on selfish consumption does not fare well, Moore chides relationships that seek to make up large issues with tokens, "with its small orchids like snakes' tongues," hinting that it is merely a technique of fake seduction. The dark outlook gets darker: "with its 'good monster, lead the way.'" Moore references Act 2, Scene 2 of The Tempest, in which Caliban thinks he, drunk, has found freedom but in reality it is bondage. Her condemnation continues "with little laughter / and munificence of humor / in that quixotic atmosphere of frankness." Mocking the formality of the relationship,

> in which "Four o'clock does not exist

but at five o'clock

the ladies in their imperious humility

are ready to receive you;"

Moore calls upon Contesse de Noailles' "Le The" in Femina: "Dans leur imperieuse humilite ells jouent instinctivement leurs roles sur le globe" (*Observations* Notes). The impossibility of the statement seems to suggest the impossible nature of a frank relationship.

Moore does not hesitate to be frank, however. In her most pointed line of the entire poem, the gloves come off and claws come out. Following quotations on feeding and wifehood, Moore shows that the situation has not changed, that the wife is still subordinate despite taking small amounts of power when she can. Sick and tired of the treatment of women, the narrator, who in this line is unquestionably Moore, screams out: "in which experience attests / That men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it." Repeated throughout the poetry notebook in which Moore wrote "Marriage" and "The Octopus," the phase seems to seep throughout the surrounding lines and almost entire poem. The thematic undercurrent of gender inequality finally rears its head unobstructed as Moore claims that inequality is suffering for the powerless. Her use of "one" allows for Eve (or so Levy 49 suggests) to become "one," and thus all women as she stands for all of us. Moore's "one" is female. Thus, the universal she of the poem is speaking. But this universal "she" derives her power from Moore herself. Moore's life was dominated by unequal relationships and a need for feminist equality. Her brother Warner controlled her as the male familial authority and early financial gatekeeper. Her mother Mary required complete control of the household and Moore was kept in a mother-child relationship long past adolescence, a fact perhaps suggested in the line "to make a baby scholar, not a wife." Finally, her most important relationship outside of the family, that of Scofield Thayer, was

defined by a power imbalance in terms of friendship and employment as he was her editor and literary policer as well as a lavish gift giver. Moore may have tried to hide behind her collage, but here, undeniably, her tricorn hat peeks through.

The dialogue picks up speed from here, with Moore delineating who is speaking explicitly:

He says, "what monarch would not blush
to have a wife
with hair like a shaving-brush?
The fact of woman
is not `the sound of the flute
but every poison.'"

In a quotation within a quotation, Moore first quotes Mary Frances Nearing's parody "The Rape of the Lock," which Moore herself gave suggestions for, while Nearing quotes A. Mitram Rihbany' 1916 The Syrian Christ, in which the silence of women is said to be "to an Oriental, this is as poetry set to music" which Moore transforms to the flute (*Observations* Notes). This silence directly opposes Moore's loud poem. When "he" or Adam seems to ask for not only a beautiful wife but also one who is mute, or even better dead, "she" or Eve responds, breaking the desired Oriental silence.

She says, "`Men are monopolists
of 'stars, garters, buttons
and other shining baubles' –
unfit to be the guardians
of another person's happiness."

Moore's collaged quotation here is perhaps her most feminist and hyper-critical, regardless of the context in which she places it. Excerpted from Miss M. Carey Thomas' Founder's address at Mount Holyoke in 1921; the full passage reads:

Men practically reserve for themselves stately funerals, splendid monuments, memorial statues, membership in academies, medals, titles, honorary degrees, starts, garters, ribbons, buttons, and other shiny baubles, so valueless in themselves and yet so infinitely desirable because they are symbols of recognition by their fellow-craftsmen of difficult work well done (*Observations* Notes).

Both paying tribute to her fellow feminist but also kicking up her words a notch, Moore criticizes the male obsession with self and group recognition of success as well as the fact that these distinctions do not make them qualified to then control women. Moore uses the male critique of female appearance and voice and twists it upon its head – giving women a voice to comment upon the male appearance.

Moore allows Adam to respond without missing a beat – perhaps as a way for her to think through her opinion but also as a way to guard against critics. She cushions her hits with counterpunches, allowing herself to build armor around her personal feelings versus what the poem espouses. Either way, "he says,"

… "These mummies
must be handled carefully –
'the crumbs from a lion's meal,
a couple of shins and the bit of an ear';

Adam's mummy appears to be his wife, her white wedding dress becoming her burial garb. Moore finds the excerpt "crumbs from a lion's meal…" in Amos ii, 12 of the Expositor's Bible,

translated by George Adam Smith (*Observations* Notes). The passage in Amos is not about marriage, however, but rather punishment for transgressing the Lord for which the punishment is being eaten by metaphorical and literal lions; Moore revises the quote in order to make every man the lion and every woman Israel. Leavall also points to the fact that the quotation from Amos occurs early in Moore's poetry notebook containing "Marriage" interspersed with Bluebeard references, perhaps suggesting the tyranny of husbands (70).

The passage that follows continues the morbid and violent theme of a wife as a corpse: "turn to the letter M / and you will find / that `a wife is a coffin.'" The letter M allows for the reader's imagination to wander to men, marriage, masculinity, money… while also following a string of M's within the poem: "men are monopolists" "mummies must" "meal." Or perhaps Marianne Moore is inserting herself here as she is a double M. The M, presumably for maleness, gets its definition from Ezra Pound who did indeed declare that "a wife is a coffin." The image of the dead woman here is implied; when read literally, the wife is an object, a space for another person which is literally true in terms of the vagina and womb. But Moore does not allow her to be buried. While he babbles on, "that severe object / with the pleasing geometry / stipulating space not people," he is forced to concede in not only the beauty of the "object" (despite the problematic female objectification) he also concedes that she "refus[es] to be buried" and is "uniquely disappointing, / revengefully wrought in the attitude / of an adoring child/ to a distinguished parent." Thus, Moore leaves air space for the female, not allowing her to be buried and instead retort in what Blooms calls a "marvelous exchange of diatribes… weirdly stitched together from outrageously heterogeneous "sources" (8). Moore does not let male power overcome her gender.

The female speaker changes tactics, choosing emasculation and nuance over sheer violence: "'This butterfly, / this waterfly, this nomad / that has `proposed / to settle on my hand for life.'" Joyce claims that aligning man with butterfly both reverses male and female gender roles and dismisses male hegemony (78). Yet the tension in the lines connotes a "desire to own and appreciate the beauty of the 'pest' and the desire to kill for its presumption, its trespassing on one's hand" (Levy 72 quoting Hadas). By playing with Charles Reade's quotation from Christie Johnston "settle on my hand" (*Observations* Notes), Moore conjures images of rings on left hands and proposals. But here the word "proposed" contains a double meaning: the asking of a hand in marriage and a suggestion about what will happen next. The two options may also be one and the same.

Moore coyly then asks, "What can one do with it?" What is a woman to do with the man that has proposed to hold her hand for life? It seems he distracts her. Again she wishes for more time for art and culture, invoking Shakespeare: "There must have been more time / in Shakespeare's day / to sit and watch a play." Reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock: "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo," Moore slips into rhymed meter, perhaps to provide some comfort or relief from the heavy handed collage that came before. The sing-songy lines lighten the mood as readers' minds wander to plays in the round. Moore's connection between marriage and Shakespeare is natural as his plays end with marriage, or death. Moore yearns for intellectual stimulation, something she still would desire in marriage.

When she informs her husband, "You know so many artists are fools," he merely replies, "You know so many fools / who are not artists." Moore flits quickly from poetic imagery to a lover's quarrel and then to seriousness, not letting us forget the gravity of her undertaking despite

her lovers' lack of remembrance: "The fact forgot / that "some have merely rights / while some have obligations." *Observations* attributes this bastardized quote to Edmund Burke. Originally "Asiatics have rights; Europeans have obligations," Moore's altered line connects marriage to European colonialism and imperialism: males, read European males, view themselves as inherently better and condescending towards women, like a country that views itself as superior over its colonies. Here British cultural imperialism is analogous to male hegemony.

The husband's view of self expands past his perceived power, as "he loves himself so much, / he can permit himself / no rival in that love." However, Moore's judgement is passed both ways for "She loves herself so much, / she cannot see herself enough/ a statuette of ivory on ivory." However, why wouldn't Adam and Eve, the implied he and she of the poem, be self-centered? They are the only two people in the world. Eve's whiteness becomes "the logical last touch / to an expansive splendor / earned as wages for work done." Despite their narcissism, loving themselves too much to love each other enough, they do not know anything else. This false or forced love is what Moore critiques, not true love. Ignorance of alternatives impoverishes both: "one is not rich but poor / when one can always seem so right."

Almost ironically due to her earlier critiques of colonialism, Moore calls these fake lovers "savages," rephrasing Eve's question "What can one do with it?" to encompass her as well: "What can one do for them?" Erikson reads these lines not as the desire to imperialize self-interested savages but rather to civilize the primal urge (111). By associating narcissism with barbarity, Moore makes self-absorbed love, or impurity, into a dark other that must be whitened by ritual lavishness and rules: don a white dress, wait until marriage, wear a band, practice ceremonial religious services. Yet at the same time, she questions the assumption that it is our job "to undertake the silly task / of making people noble." Neither option appeals to her, thus,

she places the criticism back upon those who indulge in this form of love as well as the lack of solution. In "Marriage," marriage is not a solution to a problem. It is an answer one comes to only once all other problems are solved.

Calling Eve, the woman of the poem, "this model of petrine fidelity," Moore continues to question the institution of marriage as one of subjugation. While unclear if Moore means Petrine to be read as St. Peter the apostle, and subsequently the office of the modern day Pope, or Peter the Great of Russia – although it is most likely the former – Moore places the woman in a submissive role to a man. Eve's sexual faithfulness and loyalty is to a powerful man regardless of the allusion. However, the next line subverts this extreme devotion: "who 'leaves her peaceful husband / only because she has seen enough of him.' Taken from a line by Simone Puget in an advertisement entitled "Change of Fashion" in the English Review, June 1914 - "Thus proceed pretty dolls when they leave their old home to renovate their frame, and dear others who may abandon their peaceful husband only because they have seen enough of him" (*Observations* Notes) – Moore lays on layers of commentary about marriage, capitalism, and society. While some scholars read this line as divorce or separation, Eve leaving Adam, it can also be read as a split within the marriage, not its demise. Moore's parents separated but never divorced, thus allowing her mother to live simultaneously as single and married. However, the tone suggests that this is not the ideal marriage for Moore, just a lesser possibility allowed for within the institution. Resisting the idea of the quotation signifying divorce due to the next lines, "that orator reminding you, / 'I am yours to command,'" Moore allows Adam to work to patch the marriage back together. Readers might be sympathetic to Eve leaving Adam as he is the only person in her life, and understandably sick of him, but also commiserate with Adam's pleading tone: they are the only two that can be together. The word "orator" however insinuates that

Adam is speaking to a crowd, almost ignoring his audience of one. This image of oration will reappear later in the poem, perhaps linking Adam to the men of the future.

The following lines signify a shift in tone, according to Leavall. She writes that after 264 lines, the tone shifts from satire and comedy, biting tongue-in-cheek conversation, to seriousness due to Moore's deference to science (Leavall 72). The lines in question – "'Everything to do with love is mystery; / it is more than a day's work / to investigate this science'" – are a quotation from F.C. Tilney's Fables of La Fontaine, "Love and Folly" Book XII, No. 14 (*Observations* Notes). While there is no doubt that Moore's love of science permeates her work, most specifically her animal poems, it seems that the tone does not change so much as the urgency. Marianne Moore moves from writing about weddings and the fall of mankind, circuitously touching on marriage, to direct confrontation with the subject. "Marriage" becomes about marriage, about two people's attempt to square the circle, about the seeming impossibility of making two different people into one cohesive unit. Erikson also reads the Tilney quotation as a disclaimer on the collection of phrases (102). The same warning on investigating marriage applies to her poetry – it cannot be understood on first reading but requires interrogation and experiment, just like relationships.

Moore's experiment on marriage – "Marriage" – appears throughout the poem and comes to a head here, around line 270. In trying to resolve the marriage paradox, she writes the paradox: "One sees that it is rare – / that striking grasp of opposites." This line encapsulates the entire poem. "That striking grasp of opposites" is the couple, Adam and Eve, but also the poem's vacillating feelings regarding marriage, Moore's own feelings, the paradox upon which the poem revolves. It is the chasm we try to tread on a spear and through being alone together and independent bondage. It consists of public promises and private obligation. It is, as the sentence

continues, being "opposed each to the other, not to unity." Moore writes the truth of hating the person but loving the relationship. She calls this "cycloid inclusiveness," a term apt for the marriage and poem alike. "Marriage" is a storm of arguments that pulls you in via the promise of the calm in the center eye, the "I." The cyclone also represents the fight to be seen in the eye of the other, to constantly be pulled in and spun around while trying to find the calm in yourself via the other. Her circular leitmotif comes full circle.

This marital cyclone's grasp is so rare that it "has dwarfed the demonstration / of Columbus with the egg." In other words, it is so infrequent to see two people come together in union, not in disunity, that Moore mocks the occurrence with Columbus's demonstration allusion. The story goes that Spanish nobles told Columbus if he had not found the Indies, any other man would have done it (due to its inevitability). Columbus responds with a request for an egg, saying, "'Gentlemen, I will lay a wager with any of you, that you will not make this egg stand up as I will, naked and without anything at all.' They all tried, and no one succeeded in making it stand up. When the egg came round to the hands of Columbus, by beating it down on the table he fixed it, having thus crushed a little of one end; wherefore all remained confused, understanding what he would have said: that after the deed is done, everybody knows how to do it…" (Benzoni 17). While on one hand, Moore could be suggesting that once a marriage succeeds, all can succeed by mirroring their behavior, the poem may also imply a darker reading underneath: a marriage will only stand if it breaks. Moore once again relies on the color white and motif of the circle, but this time by staining the whiteness with yolk and shattering the orb. At this point in "Marriage," the new world has been found, readers have fully left Eden, and our paradise remains flawed.

However, Moore also applauds this new world order, calling Columbus's response, and perhaps modern marriage, "a triumph of simplicity." By defending achievement through rule bending, Moore seems to assume some destruction in the building of a marriage. She calls it "that charitive Euroclydon," referring to a tempestuous, Biblical wind from Acts 27 that almost kills the disciple Paul as he sails near the island of Crete. Love is read as a force that humans, mere mortals, cannot control, a force simultaneously destructive and constructive – a whirlwind affair that ends in disaster yet not death. Paul almost dies, just as marriages almost fail. Engel understands this allusion as a call for "impersonal though passionate love" as the ideal (53). Love ensures that the relationship, makes it to shore, while impersonality prevents people from being completely drowned in emotion. The call for a lack of all-consuming love in marriage scares most people, Moore realizes. Thus, she writes "of frightening disinterestedness / which the world hates." An assurance for her ideal couple, and the reader, Moore understands that the outside world would hate their lack of concern for each other but their marriage would simply triumph regardless. Again, as in most of the poem, Moore is also writing about "Marriage." She builds in meta-commentary, admitting that people will hate the paradoxical and unresolved nature of the poem, especially its refusal to be completely interested in tone. By refusing to place her poem or its stance on marriage into the neat binaries of good or bad, pro or con, she isolates and confounds her readers. Her critique thus far is of a patriarchal institution hesitant to mutate for modernity, not of her attempt to write a feminist version of a conjugal couple. However, this liminality is essential for the final speech of the poem to be understood.

Quotations begin to reappear at this point as someone – it is unclear if it is Adam, Eve, or the narrator – admits:

"I am such a cow,

if I had a sorrow,

I should feel it a long time;

I am not one of those

who have a great sorrow

in the morning

and a great joy at noon;"

Revisions of remarks made about Edna St. Vincent Millay in conversation that Moore jotted down, according to Leavall (74), the annotated quotation often misleads readers due to its dense syntax and mocking tone. Known for her disdain of "bohemians," like Millay, for their sexuality and sentimental emotionality in their poetry, Moore seems to reject the need for overt emotion in her poetry and ideal marriage. However, it is unclear how much of the quotation is directed at a female audience or speaker – are women the cows? Is she spurning, like Lady Macbeth, "the milk of human kindness"? Or is the revisionary zeal of her quotation directed savagely and suavely at both sexes, as we have seen her condemnation of the inherently narcissistic behavior of both men and women throughout "Marriage"? Or are men the cows, mere animals in relationship needs?

Moore then moves, or so it seems, to explain her earlier quotation, although the explanation does more to muddle the meaning that elucidate it. She claims the earlier quote rejects overly passionate and emotion laden marriages. She explains that her triumph of simplicity, the frightening disinterestedness of her ideal marriage can be found: "'I have encountered it / among those unpretentious / protégés of wisdom…" Moore suggests an intellectual approach, a decision of the mind, not heart. Here she combines the orator Adam with his more educated later counterparts, "where seeming to parade / as the debater and the Roman"

he is transformed into a scholar and politician. She argues for "the statesmanship / of an archaic Daniel Webster" as it "persists to their simplicity of temper / as the essence of the matter." The cold calculations of thinkers and writers make for great loves, not lust and romance. Leavall writes how the disinterested Euroclydon looks to this to see paradox, passion, and triumph of simplicity as good while arguing against all but the rarest of marriages (75). Moore does not ask for a loveless marriage, however, just one well thought through that treats distance as essential as love between equals. Moore's marriage concept hinges upon her need for privacy, her feminist desire to be equal with her spouse, and her ambivalence towards the need for romantic and sexual love in her life. This ideal is not the type of marriage that Thayer promised, hence Moore's rejection, or so Leavall claims. It's ironic, therefore, that Thayer then became her biggest cheerleader, getting her published, selling out her first edition, and seeing that she won The Dial Award before making her Acting Editor of The Dial the following summer (Leavall 76).

Daniel Webster's statesmanship, known for its fierce defense for Union preservation as a Senator during the Civil War and diplomacy as a three-time Secretary of State, seems to embody what Moore strives for in marriage: the union remains if diplomacy ensues, even if the two parties oppose each other. His statue in Central Park bears the inscription: "Liberty and union / now and forever" (*Observations* Notes), a phrase Moore caught while ice skating with her mother. The statement's paradox, and its application to history, life, and marriage, inspired Moore, highlighted by its placement set apart via spaces from the former and latter lines of "Marriage." The ironic rhetoric of resistance and succession parading as unity, in terms of Civil War discourse, highlights the paradoxical nature of the marriage that Marianne Moore advertises. Erikson calls the quote when applied to marriage an "impossibly circular quest" (111). Hadas

almost pokes fun at its obviousness and humor in a marital context, dubbing the section: "Marianne Moore, a Secretary of State" (176). But while it seems contradictory to have complete unity and complete liberty, that is exactly her point. Desire for total freedom or total commitment in marriage is oxymoronic. Her critique is not of marriage her but the institutionalized ideals we place upon it. She desires a union in which she as a female has liberty, both today and in the future. Moore takes issue with living by tradition and motto, with institutions being immutable and culturally fixed like the white marble statue of Webster. While it may seem like a platitude, as there is no perfect "now and forever" for the poem's couple or our country, Moore knows that people want, and need, to believe its sentiment.

"Marriage" does not end on Webster's quotation, however, as it finishes with two images over two lines: "the book on the writing-table; / the hand in the breast-pocket.'" The image is of a wedding: the book is the Bible, the hand is in marriage. Engel claims that this final passage suggests an "old-fashioned wedding picture" (53), with a bible in the foreground and a constructed pose of happiness. Harold Bloom somewhat agrees with Engel, viewing the unrhymed couplet as Webster's hand and God's Bible, emblems of societal benediction upon marriage (9). For Bloom this suggests, even more so than "The Waste Land," the permanent, long, ironic decline of the West (9), however his doom and gloom seems too heavy handed for Moore and "Marriage." Erikson, on the other hand, reads "Marriage"'s ending as a summation of a conversation demonstrating the idea that words attempt to show logic and feelings but people "seldom really touch each other" (104). Yet, while wisdom can be gleaned from Moore scholars, Marianne and her family read the ending slightly differently. Mary wrote to Bryher regarding the poem shortly after publication saying: "the latter part is a stand on Marianne's part, I take it, for the individuality of the married pair, despite a thousand fallings apart that are hinted at in the first

of the poem… [she] thought the notion [‘liberty and union, now and forever’] was as appropriate to the family as to the state” (Leavall 73 quoting Mary’s letters). She connects the paradoxes of marriage and democracy by omitting the third phrase from Webster, “one and inseparable,” as the contradiction would be lost and the possibility of divorce precluded.

Mary’s reading is further enhanced when combined with Marianne’s take on the institution several years later:

> I don’t like divorce and marriage is difficult but marriage is our attempt to solve a problem and I can’t think of anything better. I think if people have a feeling for being married they ought to be and if they have made a mistake, or if one of them is not on a marriage level, there may have to be a separation. (Leavall 74)

Deemed her “Baucis-Philemon notion of marriage,” referencing the ideal, mortal married couple of Greek mythology, Moore looked for positive “marriages” in her life for her definition, which often ironically consisted of unmarried pairings such as the gay couple Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott (not truly married due to its then illegal status) and Mary and Marianne themselves, a success story of cohabitation and love, although unromantic and not sexual in nature. Leavall explains Moore viewed a conjugal match as a success if one or both parties is unselfish and love was not required in her book for, as she said, “one may wish to leave love alone” (74). Thus, it seems Moore ends with a cryptic and resigned acceptance of the institution, but only her version of the enterprise. In true Moore fashion, she calls for discipline as it allows for freedom of the self within a relationship larger than the individual; she attempts to write liberty into union, privacy into the collective, and equality into a hierarchy. Moore’s feminist reclamation of the collage form, the epithalamium, Genesis, and male voices allow her to subvert convention without betraying her own need for privacy and armor. By making the personal

political, and the political personal, Moore concurrently allows readers to view the poem as individual to them, universal to all, and ambiguous as to the author's own stance. Her definition is complex, unclear, and a work in progress because the content of her poem is complex, just as a married relationship is complex. For Moore, writing a simple poem about marriage wouldn't be true.

Coda:
The Female Poet, Feminism, and Moore

"You do not seem to realize that beauty is a liability rather than

an asset,

…Your thorns are the best part of you."

– Marianne Moore

While at first Moore's biography seems separate from her often cryptic poetry, it is paradoxically understanding Moore's milieu, family, and experiences that opens up the feminist reading of the text itself. In 1923, Moore needed feminism as a woman and as a writer and as a female writer, although she may have not claimed the term herself. Her goals for the institution of marriage are the same as her poetic goals for "Marriage." Lynn Keller in "'For inferior who is free?': Liberating the Woman Writer in Marianne Moore's 'Marriage'" asserts that the "patriarchal notion of influence," or graceful borrowing that does not hinder the poet's individuality, "would seem to inspire in Moore… ambivalence: she needs to establish her right to be influenced within the dominant tradition, yet remaining within that male tradition would stifle her" (226). Similarly, Moore wants the choice to take part in the societal institution of marriage, but embracing the institution, without egalitarian change, would hinder her. Hence Moore advocates what theorists would call "the sex/gender system of companionate marriage." However, the poem's modernist form and duplicitous dialogue so often confuses readers and scholars alike that Moore's feminist double consciousness is read as ambivalence or outright denial of the enterprise of marriage, not a critique of its current form and suggestions for improvement. By situating female sexuality and male possessiveness in marriage in the larger context of patriarchal society, Moore asserts a need for a new kind of marriage and literary canonization, the founding institutions of American social and intellectual society, in order to change the status quo and give women back their knowledge in both the home and on the page.

"Marriage" can best be read as feminist through her "subversive modernism," to use Taffy Martin's term from *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist*, in both form and content. Modernism is inherently rebellious, fighting against prior formal social and literary prescriptions, yet Moore's modernism subverts more than just poetic form and genre as she also rebels against

patriarchal societal institutions and assumptions. Hence, formal difficulty becomes a reflection of challenging content as the form reinforces the multilayered opinion Moore takes on the institution of marriage as well as her transgressive, feminist ideal of the institution. Martin puts it nicely when explaining why this subversion is so misunderstood: "the entire history of Moore criticism reveals a pattern of misperception installed as fact… Moore's elaborate constructions became defensive, virginal attempts to escape from the chaos in which, they decided, she was distressed to find herself" (x). But her "elaborate constructions" and subversive decisions signify much more than escapism.

The collaged mock epic epithalamium form of "Marriage" acts as both a subversive feminist shield as well as sword. Her collaged incorporations of disparate quotes from male writers on non-marital topics provide critical commentary on the institution of marriage and its emblematic status in relation to the rest of our society, especially in terms of the inequality of gender roles. Similarly, the epic epithalamium of Adam and Eve undercuts arguably the most canonical literary text ever, the Bible (and its most influence interpretation *Paradise Lost)* and undermines its societal interpretations in terms of conjugal relations. But in addition to the obvious social critique, the poem also functions as a commentary on poetry itself and Moore's need for feminism in modernist literary practice as well as in marriage. Keller argues that Moore's "usage of quotations and notes embodies her analysis of how issues of gender relations affect literary traditions and conventions, and it displays her conscious concern with the place of her poem and of women's writing more generally in an expansive and literary intertext" (220). Moore simultaneously needs quotes from the male literati in order to bulwark her opinion as a woman writer while also documenting her creation of a "social text, in dialogue with its society's values, participating in current and longstanding debates on social issues" (Keller 221). This dual

motive for her formal choices mimics the duality of Moore's beliefs on both marriage and her place in the canon. She does not write against marriage, just its societal stricture; analogously, she does not write against being a member of the literary avant-garde, just rejects phallocentric editorship.

Thus, she makes the personal nature of being a female poet of marriageable age a political situation, writing poetic politics that are inherently feminist. She evokes Milton and Shakespeare like "membership credentials" to claim her own place in the economy of patriarchal tradition due to an anxiety of non-influence, not worrying about the distancing of literary forefathers, as Harold Bloom posits. Moore legitimizes space for herself as a woman writer: "associating an influence based understanding of literary history with the perpetuation of patriarchal power and of women's silence, she employs an essentially intertextual model and method as a subversive tool that permits a better understanding of the woman artist's position" (222). This same understanding can also be applied to Moore's take on a wife's position. Hence, her ideals for marital success are the same as her poetic goals. If, as Keller suggests, the "patriarchal notion of influence would seem to inspire in Moore… ambivalence: she needs to establish her right to be influenced within the dominant tradition, yet remaining within that male tradition would stifle her" (226), then the same could be said about a wife wanting to participate in the societal institution of marriage yet at the same time feeling the institution, without change, would repress her.

This subversion of form and content is often missed, however, due to Moore writing from the place of both the contemporary female poet and traditional male poet writing a female muse, a kind of female double consciousness. Maureen McLane outlines the "women" of "Marriage" in "My Marianne Moore":

> Woman as ideal, as bane, as muse, as mother, as lover, as daughter, as harpy, shrew, whore, and bliss. Woman under erasure… Female narcissism. The feminine as narcissism. Woman as lack. What sentient woman does not know all about this, does not live this out? What man does not also, in another way, live this out? The horrible endless iteration of it all. The Dark Continent of It All endlessly explored. What do women want?... Woman as a mess of contradictions, as She Who Does Not Know Her Own Mind: viz. Moore's Eve…

Moore writes the male via the internalized misogyny of the female, often confusing readers who view her Eve and Adam as two sides of the debate, not intrinsically linked in her critique. Yet through writing adopted patriarchal ideas of womanhood, often via the misogynistic words of the men she quotes, Moore writes her way out of the poem and the societal constrictor of marriage. She puts forward a radical idea for 1923: egalitarian matrimony, a companionate marriage, or "the union of two individuals bonded through sexual love, rather than the traditional institution of childbearing, kin, and property relations" (Simmons). This is a revolutionary and feminist idea for a poet deemed conservative by her contemporaries and later poetic peers.

The desire to fight the patriarchy via poetry is not unique to Moore. Moore's first wave feminist colleagues, such as Edna St. Vincent Millay, wrote poems fighting the male gaze and the assumed intellectual superiority of men. Moore did the same, in her poem "Roses Only" for an example, and went one step further, participating in the political fight for suffrage – the central first-wave feminist issue. Moore publicized the fact that she "paraded with the suffragettes, led by Inez Milholland on her white horse" and was a member of the college division of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (Leavall 120, 89). There is no

doubt that Moore, and her mother, ran in first wave feminist suffragette circles, despite Moore never calling herself a feminist.

However, Moore's feminism did not translate well in for subsequent generations of readers and critics. As mentioned in the introduction, the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's did not bode well for Moore's poetry in terms of feminist critical reading. The new era of identity politics and identity poetics sidelined Moore to the niche of poet's poets, far from her well-read pre-World War II status. She did not fight for open sexuality or overt female anger. She objected to lewdness as she believed it dehumanized women, a uniquely traditional yet feminist stance. Moore refuses to change her poetry to be confessional, sexual, or overtly "female" in topic nor form. In addition, the liberalism of sixties feminism clashed with Moore's inherent conservatism. Her tricorn hat and prudish nature – "famously advising Elizabeth Bishop to delete 'water-closet' from her poem 'Roosters'" (McLane) – clashed violently with the youth culture of anti-war protests and free love. However, Moore did support Planned Parenthood, arguably her most second-wave feminist act. Furthermore, she did not fully understand the new confessional verse form, the kind that she said "whines and wanders and merely ceases, instead of concluding" (Leavall 374). Perhaps most importantly, however, Moore refused to play poetic fairy godmother to second wave feminism's literary darling Sylvia Plath. Plath aspired to one day be a female poet of Moore's rank and in June 1958 she and her husband Ted visited Moore at her apartment at 260 Cumberland (Leavall 375). Later, Plath sent Moore her poetry, and Moore ripped Plath apart, calling her work "grisly," "unrelenting," and later commenting on Plath's poetic project: "you are not subsidized for having a baby… you should look before you leap and examine your world-potentialities…" (Leavall 375). Moore's

denial of Plath's genius helped cement her as a former-feminist, no longer welcome in the modern movement after her death in 1972.

The feminist movement is no longer in its second wave, however. Third and fourth-wave feminism's emphasis on diversity and individuality in terms of viewpoint and beliefs leaves room for a feminist like Moore. If feminism is defined as the desire to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes, then Moore fits the bill. While lacking in terms of the intersectionality that helps define third-wave feminism – although one could argue her ambiguous sexuality does provide an additional lens readers must understand – we need to read Moore in her social, political, and historical context and give her some leeway. No feminist is perfect and Moore is no exception. While some of her ideas today are antithetical to the feminist movement, such as her reluctance to accept other women's sexuality at times, we must not deny her a place among those women fighting for women. Poems like "Marriage" manage to carve spaces for women in the canon and redefine how men and women understood and understand modernism. Moore seeks female social, political, personal, and economic equality through "Marriage" in terms of both marriage and letters, an inherently feminist undertaking.

But the second-wave should not forget nor reject Moore either. While undeniably a first-wave darling, although arguably for her prominence as a poet not a feminist poet, her work is undeniably doing much of the same heavy lifting as novelists and writers of the sixties and seventies. While not a confessional poet, Moore in many ways follows the vein of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwomen in the Attic* in their urging women to reclaim the female via literature. Moore situating herself as a new Milton rewriting *Paradise Lost*, especially due to her use of the epic epithalamium form, or even a new biblical author, follows the same thread of

writers like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Yet the second-wave feminist, academic project of the late-seventies and eighties reclaiming female writers ignored her. She was too hard and highbrow to need to be reclaimed (she won a Pulitzer after all) as compared to the lowbrow or popular writers that were the target. But yet Moore is not celebrated as being difficult like her male contemporaries Eliot and Pound; instead, she is critiqued for not being emotional enough! Once Modernism and her avant-garde literary coterie died out, Moore's acclaim as a poet did as well. The modernists remembered the men and the feminists the overtly female, and Moore slipped through the wide crack in the middle.

Perhaps Moore begs a question of us as modern feminist readers: Do you have to be feminine to be claimed as feminist? Do you have to write about female issues and womanhood? Does your poetry have to be labeled by yourself or others as feminist? The answer should be no. Why do we require three yes's?

Fans of Moore ill-serve her when they "put her on the mantle with Aunt Jennifer's tigers, precious and breakable and old-fashioned, or see her as a specimen of loveable eccentric poetic Americana" (McLane). Moore is contemporary and immediate. Moore is a feminist who almost 100 years later still remains relevant, and should be read and celebrated as such. "Marriage" should be read as a progenitor of the next generation of feminist poetry, a mother to "Lady Lazarus," not a poem to be written over and forgotten. Marianne Moore needs to be read to influence future generations of women; Moore and the poetess of today Rupi Kaur should be read side by side on Instagram and in classrooms, debating both the form and content of feminist poetry. Marianne Moore is not the past of American female poets but the future, a template upon which to apply the next wave of feminism, the burgeoning fourth wave. Let us not forget that

Marianne Moore's words apply today as they did in 1923, for my experience also attests "that men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it."

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Appendix I

Marriage by Marianne Moore

This institution,
perhaps one should say enterprise
out of respect for which
one says one need not change one's mind
about a thing one has believed in,
requiring public promises
of one's intention
to fulfill a private obligation:
I wonder what Adam and Eve
think of it by this time,
this firegilt steel
alive with goldenness;
how bright it shows --
"of circular traditions and impostures,
committing many spoils,"
requiring all one's criminal ingenuity
to avoid!
Psychology which explains everything
explains nothing
and we are still in doubt.
Eve: beautiful woman --
I have seen her
when she was so handsome
she gave me a start,
able to write simultaneously
in three languages --
English, German and French
and talk in the meantime;
equally positive in demanding a commotion
and in stipulating quiet:
"I should like to be alone;"
to which the visitor replies,
"I should like to be alone;
why not be alone together?"
Below the incandescent stars
below the incandescent fruit,
the strange experience of beauty;
its existence is too much;
it tears one to pieces
and each fresh wave of consciousness
is poison.
"See her, see her in this common world,"

the central flaw
in that first crystal-fine experiment,
this amalgamation which can never be more
than an interesting possibility,
describing it
as "that strange paradise
unlike flesh, gold, or stately buildings,
the choicest piece of my life:
[I am not grown up now;
I am as little as a leaf,]
the heart rising
in its estate of peace
as a boat rises
with the rising of the water;"
constrained in speaking of the serpent --
that shed snakeskin in the history of politeness
not to be returned to again --
that invaluable accident
exonerating Adam.
And he has beauty also;
it's distressing -- the O thou
to whom, from whom,
without whom nothing -- Adam;
"something feline,
something colubrine" -- how true!
a crouching mythological monster
in that Persian miniature of emerald mines,
raw silk -- ivory white, snow white,
oyster white and six others --
that paddock full of leopards and giraffes --
long lemonyellow bodies
sown with trapezoids of blue.
Alive with words,
vibrating like a cymbal
touched before it has been struck,
he has prophesied correctly --
the industrious waterfall,
"the speedy stream
which violently bears all before it,
at one time silent as the air
and now as powerful as the wind."
"Treading chasms
on the uncertain footing of a spear,"
forgetting that there is in woman
a quality of mind
which is an instinctive manifestation

is unsafe,
he goes on speaking
in a formal, customary strain
of "past states," the present state,
seals, promises,
the evil one suffered,
the good one enjoys,
hell, heaven,
everything convenient
to promote one's joy."
There is in him a state of mind
by force of which,
perceiving what it was not
intended that he should,
"he experiences a solemn joy
in seeing that he has become an idol."
Plagued by the nightingale
in the new leaves,
with its silence --
not its silence but its silences,
he says of it:
"It clothes me with a shirt of fire."
"He dares not clap his hands
to make it go on
lest it should fly off;
if he does nothing, it will sleep;
if he cries out, it will not understand."
Unnerved by the nightingale
and dazzled by the apple,
impelled by "the illusion of a fire
effectual to extinguish fire,"
compared with which
the shining of the earth
is but deformity -- a fire
"as high as deep as bright as broad
as long as life itself,"
he stumbles over marriage,
"a very trivial object indeed"
to have destroyed the attitude
in which he stood --
the ease of the philosopher
unfathered by a woman.
Unhelpful Hymen!
"a kind of overgrown cupid"
reduced to insignificance
by the mechanical advertising

parading as involuntary comment,
by that experiment of Adam's
with ways out but no way in --
the ritual of marriage,
augmenting all its lavishness;
its fiddle-head ferns,
lotus flowers, opuntias, white dromedaries,
its hippopotamus --
nose and mouth combined
in one magnificent hopper,
"the crested screamer --
that huge bird almost a lizard,"
its snake and the potent apple.
He tells us
that "for love
that will gaze an eagle blind,
that is like a Hercules
climbing the trees
in the garden of the Hesperides,
from forty-five to seventy
is the best age,"
commending it
as a fine art, as an experiment,
a duty or as merely recreation.
One must not call him ruffian
nor friction a calamity --
the fight to be affectionate:
"no truth can be fully known
until it has been tried
by the tooth of disputation."
The blue panther with black eyes,
the basalt panther with blue eyes,
entirely graceful --
one must give them the path --
the black obsidian Diana
who "darkeneth her countenance
as a bear doth,
causing her husband to sigh,"
the spiked hand
that has an affection for one
and proves it to the bone,
impatient to assure you
that impatience is the mark of independence
not of bondage.
"Married people often look that way" --
"seldom and cold, up and down,

mixed and malarial
with a good day and bad."
"When do we feed?"
We occidentals are so unemotional,
we quarrel as we feed;
one's self is quite lost,
the irony preserved
in "the Ahasuerus tête à tête banquet"
with its "good monster, lead the way,"
with little laughter
and munificence of humor
in that quixotic atmosphere of frankness
in which "Four o'clock does not exist
but at five o'clock
the ladies in their imperious humility
are ready to receive you";
in which experience attests
that men have power
and sometimes one is made to feel it.
He says, "what monarch would not blush
to have a wife
with hair like a shaving-brush?
The fact of woman
is not `the sound of the flute
but every poison.'"
She says, "`Men are monopolists
of stars, garters, buttons
and other shining baubles' --
unfit to be the guardians
of another person's happiness."
He says, "These mummies
must be handled carefully --
`the crumbs from a lion's meal,
a couple of shins and the bit of an ear';
turn to the letter M
and you will find
that `a wife is a coffin,'
that severe object
with the pleasing geometry
stipulating space and not people,
refusing to be buried
and uniquely disappointing,
revengefully wrought in the attitude
of an adoring child
to a distinguished parent."
She says, "This butterfly,

this waterfly, this nomad
that has `proposed
to settle on my hand for life.' --
What can one do with it?
There must have been more time
in Shakespeare's day
to sit and watch a play.
You know so many artists are fools."
He says, "You know so many fools
who are not artists."
The fact forgot
that "some have merely rights
while some have obligations,"
he loves himself so much,
he can permit himself
no rival in that love.
She loves herself so much,
she cannot see herself enough --
a statuette of ivory on ivory,
the logical last touch
to an expansive splendor
earned as wages for work done:
one is not rich but poor
when one can always seem so right.
What can one do for them --
these savages
condemned to disaffect
all those who are not visionaries
alert to undertake the silly task
of making people noble?
This model of petrine fidelity
who "leaves her peaceful husband
only because she has seen enough of him" --
that orator reminding you,
"I am yours to command."
"Everything to do with love is mystery;
it is more than a day's work
to investigate this science."
One sees that it is rare --
that striking grasp of opposites
opposed each to the other, not to unity,
which in cycloid inclusiveness
has dwarfed the demonstration
of Columbus with the egg --
a triumph of simplicity --
that charitive Euroclydon

of frightening disinterestedness
which the world hates,
admitting:

"I am such a cow,
if I had a sorrow,
I should feel it a long time;
I am not one of those
who have a great sorrow
in the morning
and a great joy at noon;"
which says: "I have encountered it
among those unpretentious
protegés of wisdom,
where seeming to parade
as the debater and the Roman,
the statesmanship
of an archaic Daniel Webster
persists to their simplicity of temper
as the essence of the matter:

`Liberty and union
now and forever;'

the book on the writing-table;
the hand in the breast-pocket."

Appendix II

Collaged images, fleeting emotion
because
“men are powerful,
and women are made to feel it.”
Mother, brother,
Thayer, Bryher;
this imperfect coupling
of perfect diction:
man and wife,
poetry and poetess.
This endless circle,
perhaps
one should say enterprise.

- *Marianne Moore would hate this*