Private Exchanges and Public Reviews: Marianne Moore's Criticism of William Carlos Williams

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In May of 1951 Barbara Asch from New Directions wrote to Marianne Moore to ask for a statement concerning Book Four of William's Paterson. Moore wrote back: "Not much help this time I'm afraid." Her public silence on this score, however, did not extend to her private correspondence with Williams. In June of 1951, Williams and Moore exchanged several letters on the subject of Book Four of Paterson. On June 19 Williams wrote to Moore to defend his world—though he claimed not to be doing so—and implied that Moore did not "live in it."

To me the normal world is something which to you must seem foreign. I won't defend my world. I live in it. Those I find there have all the qualities which inform those about them who are luckier. I rather like my old gal who appears in the first pages of Paterson IV (if she's one of the things you object to) she has a hard part to play and to my mind plays it rather well."

In her response on June 22 Moore begged the issue of which world either of them lived in, and turned her attention instead to the world of Paterson.

The trouble for me with your rough and ready girl, is that she does not seem to me part of something that is inescapably typical. That is to say, writing is not just virtuosity; but an interpretation of life—protest as you may in the style of our early arguments about the lily and the mud. (One as "lovely" technically speaking, as the other!)

And I take it hard that the technical achievement here, in Paterson IV, is achievement in the early parts, and useful to me. (Ponder this if you will.)

For Moore, "the lily and the mud" do not enjoy equal places in her scheme and because she valued aesthetic consistency, Williams' new beginning in Book Four, his "rough and ready girl," threatened to negate for Moore the technical excellence that she found in this book as well as the earlier ones.

It was late in Williams' career before he publicly acknowledged the extent to which Moore differed from him; and he singled out her private criticism of him rather than her public reviews of his work:

Marianne Moore has always been very out-spoken in her criticisms of me in private letters. Technically, she doesn't see eye to eye with me. She's a splendid poet in her own right.

Moore's criticisms of Williams were not confined to private letters. Frequently she also expressed her ambivalence in her reviews; but her method was such that her criticism could always be at least partially disguised. She chose to veil her ambivalence about Williams' enterprise because of her conviction that criticism—introductions, prefaces, and reviews of one's contemporaries—ought to protect, or provide a kind of armor for, the writer under consideration. When Eliot, for example, wrote the Introduction for her Selected Poems in 1935 Moore thanked him for the armor provided by his Introduction.

Moore viewed the critic, then, as someone who mediated between an author's work and an audience that might be un receptive. Thus when she approached Williams' work, particularly after her 1921 review of Kora in Hell, Moore praised certain aspects of his work but felt compelled to hide her increasing dissatisfaction with his aesthetic.

I begin with Moore's private reaction to Paterson—one that is not incompatible with her public reviews—because to date more attention has been paid to the way they saw "eye to eye" with one another. It has been assumed that Moore's reaction to Paterson was a departure from her earlier reception of his work. In this late negative reaction, however, Moore privately articulated an uneasiness with Williams that she had publicly masked for many years in her reviews. After she reviewed Kora in Hell in 1921, Moore increasingly approached Williams' work with reservations, but she disguised these reservations, in part, by using Wallace Stevens as a mask. When she reviewed Williams' Collected Poems 1921-1931 in 1934, for example, Moore used Stevens' "Preface" to Williams' Collected Poems to frame her own reading, a reading that both supports Stevens' and departs from it. Stevens' perception of "the constant interaction of two opposites" in Williams was in keeping with
Moore's own perception of this quality in *Kora in Hell*. But even more importantly, Stevens became a mask for her, allowing her to disguise her own struggle with Williams by ostensibly paying homage to Stevens' reading.

Williams, however, unlike Moore, wanted to believe, at least up to 1925, that Moore, unlike most of his contemporaries, shared his aesthetic values. In 1916 Williams wrote to Moore and asked her for a contribution to *Others*. The same year Moore wrote to H.D. and indicated that she was "very much interested . . . in William Williams' work but a little afraid to undertake a criticism of it. I feel," she confided, "that I have not seen enough of it to justify my writing one." When she did finally undertake a criticism of Williams' work, it was to do a review of *Kora in Hell* which Williams requested. This was published in 1921 in *Contact*. Two years later in 1923 Williams wrote an essay about Moore which he sent to her in December of that year:

> Read this and comment if you care to. I am revising the other copy—which I have made. I wrote to Eliot telling him he will receive the finished work in a week or so. Hope he prints it for your sake—and for mine. If he doesn't we'll have it appear, even if it must be in *Broom*. Would that shock you?" 

According to Paul Mariani, Williams intended to send his essay to *The Dial*, but decided not to when he saw Eliot's short review of Moore's *Poems* and "Marriage" in the December issue of *The Dial*. Instead, he sent it to Eliot, hoping that Eliot would publish it in *The Criterion*. Nothing came of this effort.

In February of 1924 Williams wrote to Moore from Europe to suggest that she publish a book of her poems with the Contact Press that "would have my appreciation of you as a preface." "We would want it," he continued, "to include *everything* of yours that you find good from the beginning up to the present." Williams' "appreciation" of Moore was finally published the following year in 1925 in *The Dial*.

During these early years that Williams promoted Moore and allied his own aesthetic with hers in both *Spring and All* (1923) and his 1925 essay, entitled "Marianne Moore," Moore began her promotion of Williams, but this promotion was fraught with reservations. Moore's reception of Williams begins with her 1921 review of *Kora in Hell*. It is not surprising that Williams asked her to review *Kora in Hell*, for he clearly identified with her aesthetic and had reason to believe she was sympathetic to his enterprise. When he saw the review, however, he hesitated about publishing it in *Contact*. On March 27, 1921, Moore wrote to H.D. about the review and indicated that Williams had reservations about using it in *Contact*:

> I told William that I would review KORA IN HELL since he wished for CONTACT. I have just sent him the review and in writing me about it, he suggests that I send it to THE BOOKMAN; he speaks heartily of it but evidently does not think of using it in CONTACT, so that I fear you may not see it if I do not send you a copy." 

Williams did in fact publish this review in *Contact*, but when he responded privately to the review, he stressed Moore's criticism of his work. After an initial burst of enthusiasm for the review—"You make the blood to flow in my smallest capillaries again by what you say of my book"—he went on to defend himself:

> Your gentleness too makes me stop and think. Perhaps you are right in your adverse view of my sometimes obstreperous objections to decorum. I must think more of that. But each must free himself from the bonds of banality as best he can; you or another may turn into a lively field of intelligent activity quite easily but I, being perhaps more timid or unstable at heart, must free myself by more violent methods. I cannot object to rhetoric, as you point out, but I must object to the academic associations with which rhetoric is hung and which vitiate all its significance by making the piece of work to which it is applied a dried bone. And so I have made the mistake of abusing the very thing I most use." 

Williams is responding to Moore's contention that "Despite Dr. Williams' championing of the school of ignorance, or rather of no school but experience, there is in his work the authoritativeness, the wide silence which knows schools and fashions.

Alluding to Williams' "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell*, where he combatively takes on Pound, H.D., Stevens, and Eliot, Moore suggests that Williams does not take criticism well from those who wish "to improve his work":

> But one who sets out to appraise him has temerity, since he speaks derisively of the wish of certain of his best friends to improve his work and, after all, the conflict between the tendency to aesthetic anarchy and the necessity for self-imposed discipline must take care of itself.

For Moore this early conflict in Williams never did resolve itself. Initially, however, she believed that Williams would eventually correct or modify his rebellious tendencies. This hope may have made Moore more open about expressing her reservations in this first review than she would be in subsequent reviews of his work.
At this stage Moore could both acknowledge Williams’ desire to stand alone—“his passion for being himself”—and connect him with confidence to other writers she admired:

The acknowledgment of our debt to the imagination, constitutes, perhaps, his positive value. Compression, colour, speed, accuracy and that restraint of instinctive craftsmanship which precludes anything dowdy or laboured—it is essentially these qualities that we have in his work. Burke speaks of the imagination as the most intensive province of pleasure and pain and defines it as a creative power of the mind, representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses or in combining them in a new manner and according to a different order. Dr. Williams in his power over the actual, corroborates this statement. Observe how, by means of his rehabilitating power of the mind, he is able to fix the atmosphere of a moment: “It is still warm enough to slip from the woods into the lake’s edge . . . and snake’s eggs lie curling in the sun on the lonely summit.”

Moore had praised Williams’ use of compression as early as 1917. “Your compression,” she wrote, “makes me feel that the Japanese haven’t the field to themselves.” And later in the review she comes back to a consideration of Williams’ speed, maintaining that even when we cannot follow him, we are aware of his work’s “crisp exterior”:

The sharpened faculties which require exactness, instant satisfaction and an underpinning of truth are too abrupt in their activities sometimes to follow; but the niceness and effect of the vision which they are responsible, are never absent from Dr. Williams’ work and its crisp exterior is one of its great distinctions.

In addition to praising qualities of Williams’ technique, Moore shows how Williams’ work supports Burke’s ideas about the imagination. Burke, she maintains, recognizes the double function of the imagination: the imagination can represent “things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses,” or can combine “them in a new manner and according to a different order.” Moore then yokes together two separate quotations from Williams to illustrate how Williams “power over the actual corroborates [Burke’s] statement. "It is still warm enough to slip from the woods into the lake’s edge . . . and snake’s eggs lie curling in the sun on the lonely summit.”

Moore also likens Williams to Bacon in that both have “the ability to see resemblances in things which are dissimilar."

“By the brokenness of his composition,” he writes, “the poet makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way.” We do not so much feel the force of this statement as we feel that there is in life, as there is in Sir Francis Bacon—the ability to see resemblances in things which are dissimilar; in the ability to see such differences, a special kind of imagination is required, which Dr. Williams has. Despite Williams’ “special kind of imagination,” Moore also praises him for knowing how to survive without this faculty—“in the direst poverty of the imagination.”

Sandwiched between two statements about Williams’ desire to divorce himself from “schools and fashions,” Moore lists four quotations from Kora in Hell; her improvisation serves to reconcile certain oppositions in Williams’ aesthetic between art (or the imagination) and nature (or the material realm). Moore’s arrangement of these quotations is her own; the quotations do not appear in this order in Kora in Hell:

“Lamps carry far, believe me,” he says, “in lieu of sunshine.”

“What can it mean to you that a child wears pretty clothes and speaks three languages or that its mother goes to the best shops? . . . Men . . . buy finery and indulge in extravagant moods in order to piece out their lack with other matter.”

“Kindly stupid hands, kindly coarse voices . . . infinitely detached, infinitely beside the question . . . and night is done and the green edge of yesterday has said all it could.”

“In middle life the mind passes to a variegated October. This is the time youth in its faulty aspirations has set for the achievement of great summits. But having attained the mountain top one is not snatched into a cloud but the descent proffers its blandishments quite as a matter of course. At this the fellow is cast into a great confusion and rather plaintively looks about to see if any has fared better than he.”

Moore’s mosaic of quotations anticipates Stevens’ argument in his “Preface” to Williams’ Collected Poems by defining Williams’ aesthetic as one that depends on the existence of opposing forces. Artificial light (lamps) can compensate for, or transform, the absence of natural light (sunshine). One indulges in “matter” in the absence of the imagination; notice what Moore’s ellipsis conceals in her second quotation: “But men in the direst poverty of the imagination buy finery and indulge in extravagant moods in order to piece out their lack with other matter.” And we are asked to accept that “the green edge of yesterday has said
all it could.” And finally, to attain “the mountain top” is to recognize that “the descent proffers its blandishments quite as a matter of course.” Moore increasingly came to feel that Williams abandoned this aesthetic of opposites; and in 1951 when Book Four of *Paterson* was published she was convinced of this.

Between 1921 when she reviewed *Kora in Hell* and 1926 when Williams received *The Dial* Award, Moore did not review Williams’ other work. Although she did write an anonymous “Briefer Mention” of Williams’ *In the American Grain for The Dial* in 1925, this did not constitute a full-length review. Between 1921 and 1926 Williams published several works that Moore might have reviewed, but chose not to: *Sour Grapes* (1921), *Spring and All* (1923), and *The Great American Novel* (1923). When Williams received *The Dial* Award, Moore, who was editor of *The Dial* at this time, wrote the Announcement, confirming the honor.

This Announcement is then her second review of his work, though this time she does not focus on one text, and as editor she left the piece unsigned. Here Moore is no longer directly critical of Williams’ defiant posture, but her tone and method reveal an ambivalence that may not be immediately apparent. For example, she detachts herself by quoting other people on Williams. In one instance, she applies something Williams said about Poe to Williams himself: “His ‘venomous accuracy,’ if we may use the words used by him in speaking of the author of The Raven, is opposed to ‘makeshifts, self-deceptions and grotesque excuses.’” And she quotes an unnamed “connoisseur of our poetry” who is reputed to have compared Williams to Chekov: “‘This modest quality of reality which he attributes to ‘contact’ with the good Jersey dirt sometimes reminds one of Chekov,’ says a connoisseur of our poetry. ‘Like Chekov he knows animals and babies as well as trees. And to people who are looking for the story his poems must often seem as disconnected and centrifugal as Chekov’s later plays.’” Moore quotes “William Marion Reedy, who died in 1920: ‘He is forthright, a hard, straight, bitter javelin,’ said William Marion Reedy.” Williams’ combativeness is nicely conveyed by this phrase of Reedy’s.

Toward the end of the review Moore sets up an analogy between Williams and Sir Thomas Browne.

We have said that Carlos Williams is a doctor. Physicians are not so often poets as poets are physicians, but may we not assert confidently that oppositions of science are not oppositions to poetry but oppositions to falseness. The author of *Religio Medici* could not be called anything more than he could be called a poet. “He has many verba ardentia,” as Samuel Johnson has observed—“forcible expressions, which he would never have found, but by venturing to the utmost verge of propriety—and flights which would never have been reached, but by one who had very little fear of the shame of falling.”

As Moore quotes Samuel Johnson on Browne’s “forcible expressions” we are reminded of Williams’ “venomous accuracy”; and Williams, we infer, has also ventured “to the utmost verge of propriety,” and like Browne, has “very little fear of the shame of falling.”

Moore’s method of quoting other people’s judgments in this announcement instead of merely offering her own serves to distance her from the subject at hand—Williams’ poetry and prose up to this point—and to conceal her ambivalence about this subject. This is most apparent when she quotes Wallace Stevens. After a lengthy catalogue of Williams’ subject matter—“fences and outhouses built of barrels and parts of boxes,” “The Passaic, that filthy river,” “hawers that drop and groan,” and “a young horse with a green bed-quilt on his withers”—Moore remarks, “We need not, as Wallace Stevens has said, try to . . . evolve a mainland from his [Williams’] leaves, scents and floating bottles and boxes. What Columbus discovered is nothing to what Williams is looking for.” This critical alliance with Stevens is worth examining. Moore seems to suggest here that Stevens would advise us not to seek some overall unity in Williams. In fact, Stevens, in the private letter to her that Moore quotes publicly here, said just the opposite.

Some time in 1925 Moore must have written to Stevens from *The Dial*, soliciting a review of Williams’ *In the American Grain*, for Stevens wrote to her on November 19, 1925:

> And I feel sure that one of the things I ought not to do is to review Williams’ book. What Columbus discovered is nothing to what Williams is looking for. However much I might like to try and make that out—evolve a mainland from his leaves, scents and floating bottles and boxes—there is a baby at home.

Stevens does not say here, as Moore says he does in her review, that one need not try to find out what Williams is searching for; rather he says that if he were to attempt to discover “what Williams is looking for” he would have to “evolve a mainland from his leaves, scents and floating bottles and boxes.” Moore misrepresents Stevens in order to justify her own reticence about approaching Williams; her identification with Stevens’ private admission sanctions her public need not to figure out “what Williams is looking for,” the implication being that the search might be in vain.
Moore continued to want Stevens to write something for The Dial about Williams. We can assume that she wrote to him again after her 1925 request for a review of In the American Grain because Stevens wrote to Moore on December 3, 1926:

I am incessantly and atrociously busy—else I should like more than I can say to act as mid-wife for Williams' spirit. I have not the time. I don't say that I could bring the burden forth: merely that I have not the time to try.28

Here, Stevens expresses more explicitly his possible reservations about the critical enterprise of launching Williams, reservations Moore considered to be implied in the earlier letter.

Moore's interest in Stevens' aesthetic made her eager to see what he would, or could, do with Williams.27 Thus when she reviewed Williams' Collected Poems in 1934, Moore framed and concluded her own discussion with references to Stevens' Preface.28 Moore privileges Stevens' Preface for several reasons. Stevens articulates ideas about Williams' aesthetic that Moore had addressed, in a less expository fashion, when she reviewed Kora in Hell in 1921. Still another reason for Moore to consider Stevens' Preface is that for her, prefaces and introductions become part of the text and must be contended with. Also, by paying homage to Stevens' Preface Moore could conceal her own ambivalence about Williams, or at least shield herself from immediate detection by hiding behind the mask Stevens' Preface provided.

Williams had asked Stevens to write the Preface. Later, however, in I Wanted to Write a Poem, he reacted with displeasure to it:

I was pleased when Wallace Stevens agreed to write the Preface but nettled when I read the part where he said I was interested in the anti-poetic. I had never thought consciously of such a thing. As a poet I was using a means of getting an effect. It's all one to me—the anti-poetic is not something to enhance the poetic—it's all one piece. I didn't agree with Stevens that it was a conscious means I was using. I have never been satisfied that the anti-poetic had any validity or even existed.29

Williams' contention here that "the anti-poetic is not something to enhance the poetic—it's all one piece" is a public version of his early private arguments with Moore about "the lily and the mud"—"One as 'lovely' technically speaking as the other!" Williams would have been even more displeased with Stevens' Preface if he had seen a letter Stevens wrote to T. C. Wilson in March of 1935:

... it would suit me very well to go over [Moore's] poems, because I think what she does is really a good deal more imp-

Moore, of course, begins his Preface by identifying Williams as a romantic poet. But, he maintains, he "is rarely romantic in the accepted sense... The man has spent his life in rejecting the accepted sense of things." Williams, Stevens argues, is a romantic because "he has a sentimental side." But he is not merely sentimental; he combines "a little sentiment, very little, together with acute reaction." Williams' aesthetic, according to Stevens, involves a "passion for the anti-poetic."31 Yet Stevens contends: "Something of the unreal is necessary to eucata the real; something of the sentimental is necessary to eucata the anti-poetic." Thus, for Stevens, Williams' poetry grows out of "the constant interaction of two opposites." Finally for Stevens, a romantic poet is one who "dwell in an ivory tower, but who insists that life would be intolerable except for the fact that one has, from the top, such an exceptional view of the public dump and the advertising signs of Snider's Catsup, Ivory Soap and Chevrolet Cars."32

Like Stevens, Moore points in her review to Williams' sentimental side, and importantly, like Stevens she sees this sentiment tempered by what Stevens calls "acute reaction." Williams, Moore observes, can be "sorry for the tethered bull, the circus sea-unicorn, for the organ-grinder 'sour faced,' for the dead man 'needing a shave,'"33 but she reminds us "the pathos is incidental. The 'ability to be drunk with a sudden realization of value in things others never notice' can metamorphose our detestable reasonableness and offset a whole planetary system of deadness."34 In an earlier review Moore had also praised Williams for his ability to transform the quotidian, for "his manner of contemplating with new eyes, old things, shabby things, and other things."35

Moore ends her review with a reference to the importance of prose from a poet like Stevens:

Dr. Williams does not compromise, and Wallace Stevens is another resister whose way of saying is as important as what is said. Mr. Stevens' presentation of the book refreshes a grievance—the scarcity of prose about verse from one of the few persons who should have something to say. But poetry in America has not died, so long as these two 'young sycamores' are able to stand the winters that we have, and the inhabitants.36

Moore is undoubtedly referring to Stevens' refusal to contribute prose—particularly about Williams—to The Dial.
While Moore certainly agreed with Stevens' reading of Williams, it was not the only reading she would endorse of Williams in 1934. Although Moore frames and concludes her review with references to Stevens' "Preface," some of her judgments of Williams differ from Stevens.'

Stevens finds that Williams "is commonly identified by externals" such as "abortive rhythms, words on several levels, ideas without logic, and similar minor matters," but he concludes "when all is said," these "are merely the diversion of the prophet between morning and evening song." Moore does not share Stevens' dismissive attitude about Williams' technique. In fact it is one of the things she champions in this review:

Disliking the tawdriness of unnecessary explanation, the detracting compulsory connective, stock speech of any kind, he sets the words down, "each note secure in its own posture—singly woven." These were the same values Williams identified and praised in Moore's work in 1925.

Moore differs from Stevens' assumptions in still another place as well. Stevens situates Williams, like other romantic poets, "in an ivory tower," gazing from afar at the "public dump." Moore, who agreed with Stevens concerning the necessity of cultivating a distance, had felt for a long time that Williams flirted a bit too much with the dump. And now she was convinced of this: "His uncompromising conscientiousness sometimes seems misplaced; he is at times almost insultingly unequivocal." For Moore this tendency was another example of what she referred to in 1921 as Williams' "aesthetic anarchy." Although Moore recognized the perils of excessive evasiveness in writers as different as Stevens and Pound, she also knew the danger Williams ran by not being evasive enough. Not surprisingly, in the letters she wrote to Williams after 1934, Moore brought this issue up again.

Moore never wrote another full-length review of Williams after 1934. She did, however, continue to react privately to his work. When Ronald Latimer, who was at the Alcestis Press, published Williams' _An Early Martyr_ in 1935, Moore wrote to him:

You and Dr. Williams are surely to be congratulated on the title of this book—_AN EARLY MARTYR_. William Carlos Williams in himself is one who makes one not ashamed of being an American. I wish in his desperation against the unchangeable and the abominable he need not come so near running his thrust. There is nothing like it when it comes straight.

Just what Moore meant by "he need not come so near running his thrust" may be seen in a longer letter she wrote to Williams about the book ten days later:

You are doing here what you seem to think Gertrude Stein is doing, in making words live. ITEM is for me one of the most consoling and eloquent things in existence; impressive indeed as springing not from the splinters of battle but from the heat of the mind. THE LOCUST TREE IN FLOWER is the complete manual of poetics, (the delicacy of the added article in itself is indicative); FLOWERS BY THE SEA, a very strange apex on one of the things you have always done best. The title, AN EARLY MARTYR perfection—with a note in it of the whole thing. I could go on this way, of every one; nearly every one; for there are some I shall never understand; nor why it is necessary you should do a certain thing. One's compulsions are tyrants; one suffers for them. D. H. Lawrence certainly did and one cannot have contempt for him. I should say it is easier to avoid the ignoble public than to punish it. And I cannot get rid, in such outrages of conscience, of the fact of myself. I do not care to become a polecats in order to make polecats admit they are that, and confess their injuriousness. I cannot see that art is in any way different from the rest of life, from conversation or from the strategies of solitude; and it is an unending query with me why a person would say on the page what he has never been known to say to your face. I hope you won't dislike me too much for saying to your face what I don't say on the page. Moore, who a year earlier had begun her review of Williams' _Collected Poems_ by maintaining that "struggle...is a main force in William Carlos Williams," now contends that Williams' "Item" is impressive "as springing not from the splinters of battle but from the heat of the mind." She now praises Williams for his distance from the battle, or struggle. Moore places Williams back in Stevens' ivory tower, implicitly advising him to maintain "his exceptional view of the public dump." But this is only part of what she writes to Williams about his current enterprise; the praise of the first part of the letter is belied by what follows. For Moore, all too often, Williams still does write "from the splinters of battle" and in these moments, he loses his necessary perspective and his compulsions become tyrants. Moore maintains "it is easier to avoid the ignoble public than to punish it." She implicitly advocates that Williams adopt a mask, instead of insisting on becoming "a polecats in order to make polecats admit they are that."

When Williams received Moore's letter he wrote back immediately:

I'm glad you have the book and that you liked it well
enough to speak freely about it. I thoroughly sympathize with your position. But to me a book is somewhat of a confessional. It is just because I do not say things—that—I would—say that I must write them. It would not be fair to a reader for me to hold back knowledge of the matrix from which comes the possible gem.

It goes further than that with me. There is a good deal of rebellion still in what I write, rebellion against stereotype poetic process—the too miraculous choice among other things. In too much refinement there lurks a sterility that wishes to pass too often for purity when it is anything but that. Coarseness for its own sake is inexcusable but a Rabelaisian sanity requires that the rare and the fine be exhibited as coming like everything else from the dirt. There is no incompatibility between them.42

Williams, unlike Moore, does not see any need to cultivate a mask, or to keep his distance from "the ignoble public." Rather than residing in an ivory tower, Williams maintains "It would not be fair to a reader for me to hold back knowledge of the matrix from which comes the possible gem." Denying Stevens' dichotomy between the anti-poetic and the poetic and reactivating their old argument about "the lily and the mud," Williams claims that "a Rabelaisian sanity requires that the rare and the fine be exhibited as coming like everything else from the dirt." And finally this was not the first time he had written to Moore about his "rebellion against stereotype poetic process."

In retrospect it can be seen that Moore's reaction to Paterson in 1951 could have been predicted. For Moore the gap between the aesthetic Williams defined in Kora and Hell and Spring and All and the poetry he subsequently produced only widened. Over the years Moore became increasingly uncomfortable with what Williams chose to write about even though she continued to admire his technique.43 "Some of your 'everyday' images," she wrote to him in 1941, "I would say are too everyday to be condoned."44 Yet publicly in her reviews, Moore chose to avoid this issue altogether, or to disguise her ambivalence about it. But in her letters to Williams, particularly after 1954, she made no attempt to hide her criticism of his work.

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1 Rosenbach Museum and Library (RML), T.L.C., Marianne Moore to Barbara Asch, May 22, 1951.

2 RML, T.L.S., William Carlos Williams to Marianne Moore, June 19, 1951.

3 RML, T.L.C., Marianne Moore to William Carlos Williams, June 22, 1951.


7 RML, T.L.S., William Carlos Williams to Marianne Moore, May 9, 1916.

8 RML, T.L.C., Marianne Moore to H.D., November 10, 1916.

9 RML, T.L.C., Marianne Moore to H.D., March 27, 1921.


12 RML, T.L.S., William Carlos Williams to Marianne Moore, February 10, 1924.

13 RML, T.L.C., Marianne Moore to H.D., March 27, 1921.

14 RML, T.L.S., William Carlos Williams to Marianne Moore, May 23, 1921.

15 Moore, "Kora in Hell by William Carlos Williams," Contact, No. 4 (Summer 1921), 7.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 5.

18 Ibid.

19 RML, A.L.S., Marianne Moore to William Carlos Williams, April 16, 1917.


21 Ibid., 5.

22 Williams, Kora in Hell, rpt. in Imaginations, ed. by Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 35.


24 Moore, "Announcement," The Dial, 82 (January 1927), 88–89.


26 Ibid., p. 248.

27 See Moore's copy of Kora in Hell at the Rosenbach: Kora in Hell: Improvisations (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1920). In the back of her copy of Kora in Hell, Moore makes one reference to Williams' "Prologue"; she refers to Stevens' letter about Williams' poems which Williams reprinted in that "Prologue."


29 Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, p. 52.
Marianne Moore and E. McKnight Kauffer: Two Characteristic Americans

GRACE SCHULMAN

Early in the nineteen-fifties, Marianne Moore wrote that "a few real artists are alive today," and listed among them E. McKnight Kauffer, the graphic designer, along with Casals, Soledad, Hans Mardersteig, Alec Guinness and the Lippizan horsemen. In a catalogue note for an exhibit of Kauffer's drawings, the poet wrote: "Instinctiveness, imagination, and 'the sense of artistic difficulty' with him, have interacted till we have an objectified logic of sensibility as inescapable as the colors refracted from a prism."

In the preceding decade they had become close friends, supporting one another in personal crises that were also times of spiritual renewal and growth. Moore once wrote to Kauffer of their common belief, despite affliction and suffering, in "anastasis—the going forward," and in what John Fiske, the American philosopher, had called "the reasonableness of God's work." She wrote: "So let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Meeting and corresponding frequently, the two artists found stimulation in each other's thoughts about books, events and mutual friends. Often they expressed deep concern about one another's well-being. For example, Moore was troubled about her slender colleague's tendency, like her own, to neglect meals when he was preoccupied. With characteristically serious, genuine affection, she mailed ten dollars to Kauffer with instructions to go to Miss Hettie Hamper's restaurant "for a meal (say once a day?) and you will like her food." Then, quoting Frances Steloff, of the Gotham Book Mart, Moore told Kauffer: "'Her