

Marianne Moore's Ghost Revisions

Poems (1921), *Observations* (1924, 1925),
and *Selected Poems* (1935)

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ABSTRACT

The Rosenbach Museum and Library contains The Marianne Moore Library (MML), the largest collection of Marianne Moore's personal objects and literary papers. Among these objects and papers are the poet's personal copies of each of her published books. One of the first observations to be made about Moore's revising method is her habit of revising on copies of her books from her first publication, *Poems* (1921), through her final publication, *Complete Poems* (1967), often neatly writing in an updated word or phrase in small cursive handwriting. Indeed, her lifelong habit of using published texts as sites of revision began with *Poems* (1921) not long after it was published. To date, I have not found a study that addresses these revisions made upon her own copies of her books, especially *Poems* (1921) and both editions of *Observations* (1924 and 1925).¹ In order to better understand Moore's revision process in her early years before becoming editor of *The Dial*, their curious presence becomes a prerequisite for reading and positing a chronology to the revisions on her manuscripts and typed scripts of her other early poetry. This essay intends to explore the revisions that Moore made on her two copies of *Poems* (1921) and on *Observations* (1924).

"I don't know what to do with these and don't know what to do next".

Marianne Moore (1998, 164)

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1. This is with the exception of Charles Molesworth (1990) in the following: "She went on to mention that the book was beautifully printed, and had no misprints whatever. (If this were so, then apparently the corrections she was to make before sending it to Warner were those habitual revisions of published texts for which she was later to become so well known. This shows that the habit was not a result of her growing old and revising the work in her youth" (169). Unfortunately, Molesworth does not mention his source, and thus we cannot say whether or not the book of *Poems* he refers to here is either of the two volumes in the Rosenbach.

IN 1967, ONE OF THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED POETS AND EDITORS OF the modernist movement, Marianne Moore, collected and published her final book of poems, *Complete Poems* — a misleading title since it only contained 127 poems of the hundreds she had published. Her epigraph to *Complete Poems* (1967), “Omissions are not accidents”, seemed to confirm her “intentional reviser” persona and led also to a general consensus amongst scholars that Moore staked strong intentionalist claims over her work.² However, Moore’s extensive and rarely discussed revisions on the pages and back matter of her own copies of her books, from *Poems* (1921)³ to *Complete Poems* (1968), trouble that notion of authorial intention. Many critics have recently asked: Does Moore’s epigraph give us an interpretive lens for reading her life’s work? Are all Moore’s authorial omissions premeditated and purposeful, or only those omissions she made to *Complete Poems* (1968)? What, moreover, does she mean by “accidents”?

Marianne Moore’s revision process was not always as intentional or thorough as it may appear. By looking at the contractions, errors, forgotten revisions, and back matter of her own copies of *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924) held in The Marianne Moore Library (MML), readers can see not only a process of revision, but also an evolution in Moore’s relationship to what her revisions meant and enacted in her authorship. Indeed, Moore went from having had her work prematurely exposed with the publication of *Poems* in 1921 to earnestly exposing her life of compositional process (every scrap, revision, book, and object she owned) with the publication of the MML archive. It is into this archive and the pages and the back matter of her books located there that her final epigraph “Omissions are not accidents” is nothing less than an invitation. In the archive, one is faced with the question: but aren’t omissions accidents after all?

The material presence of Moore’s revisions upon her personal copies of *Poems* (1921) and the first edition of *Observations* (1924), compels readers to confront the impossibility of knowing her ultimate authorial intentions. Turning product into process, the revisions she wrote on these printed copies, which I call “ghost revisions”, destabilize the “Ideal” published text and reveal an undated and ultimately *undatable* site of authorial play. To track change is not only impossible — it is no longer the aim. Error and silence

2. This claim seems to be further substantiated by Moore’s famous revisions of “Poetry” to three lines after many longer published iterations.

3. Currently residing in the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia, these two copies of *Poems* (1921) are marked as MML 1547 and MML 1544.

between the past and the present are both imminent and permanent, and thus meaningfully written into her work.

This fraught relationship to the past is part of what spurred on Modernism's "make it new" theme. Yet modernist authors often processed this experience on less optimistic terms, with novels that explore tropes of error, silence, the "incomprehensible", and "speech that cannot speak" through symbols of paralysis and figures of zombies and ghosts (CONLEY 2003, 23–39). Moore's revisions on her books encourage an engagement with a larger symbol of silence, and/or error, and/or a sense of delay within her poetry. The existence of authorially-revised books in her archive actively facilitates this symbol, inhabiting that uncertain relationship to the past. With the metaphor of "ghost revisions", a metaphor that intends to encompass "unadopted revisions", "unadopted corrections", and/or "delayed revisions", I do not mean to suggest that these revisions are trapped within the archive, neither living nor dead, haunting her publications. Nor do I assert that they have potential to be or should be "put to rest" in a variorum edition of her earlier poems. Rather, I am proposing that calling attention to the possibilities of where we can place these revisions on the timeline of Moore's writing process is important for understanding the MML, the borders of her copies of her books, and everything in between. It also bears upon an understanding of what is at stake as her archive is digitized. Just as destabilizing and incomprehensible as the image of silence and error in the modernist novel is, so does Moore's real act of giving her revisions to the archive at the Rosenbach to be read and interpreted complicate her famously stated relationship to accident.

There are various examples of ghost revisions on *Poems* (1921), but here I will offer a close reading only of those revisions on "A Talisman", followed by readings of a series of ghost revisions on *Observations* (1924), including a list of revisions to the back matter of *Observations* (1925). Many of these revisions did eventually gain life in publication. Why, then, refer to them as "ghost" revisions? They can be thought of as "ghosts" because, whether or not they are ultimately adopted in subsequent texts, they have an ambivalent ontological status in terms of Moore's revisionary process. This ambivalence requires a consciously quixotic and inferential reading of their historical position. Yet close reading the archive in this way can serve this imaginative function without sacrificing accuracy.

Your Now Naked Dactyl

Throughout the early 1910s, Moore's writing was routinely rejected by multiple magazine editors, who found her avant-garde verse beyond their readers' taste for difficulty of form and eccentricity of subject matter. But this profusion of rejections did not deter Moore from writing and submitting her work for publication. For years, in fact, these rejections spurred a lengthy process of revision and resubmission to various magazines and newspapers. Then, between 1916 and 1920, Moore finally gained traction with the editors of *The Egoist*, *Others*, *The Dial* and *Contact*.

By 1920, Moore had published seventy-three poems, but she had not established herself as a poet associated with any particular artistic circle. While Moore received separate offers from T.S. Eliot, Harriet Weaver, and H.D. and Bryher to help her publish a book collection of her poems, she was chary about publishing her work in book form and rejected each offer. Then, in the spring of 1921, H.D. and Bryher collected twenty-three poems by Moore and surreptitiously published the collection with The Egoist Press, titled it *Poems*, and sent a copy across the Atlantic to its author. Moore received the book on 7 July 1921 in her New York apartment, along with a letter from Bryher asking what Moore thought of it. In her reply, composed that day, Moore related herself to an extinct pterodactyl as described by Darwin, whose protective rock had been preemptively torn away by H.D. and Bryher's "hardened gaze" — the gaze of a symbolic, and now actual, public. Moore continued:

I had considered the matter from every point and was sure of my decision — that to publish anything now would not be to my literary advantage; I wouldn't have the poems appear now if I could help it and would not have some of them ever appear and would make certain changes.

(1998, 164)

But her response to H.D. and Bryher was not entirely negative. Although she wished the title had been "Observations", she noted that she was pleased with the "beauty of all the printing details" and, further, that "there is not a single misprint" (1998, 164). (This latter comment seems to be an overstatement: "Talisman" is missing a word). With her standard grace — even extending a filial tone by using an animal name for herself, as she often did in her letters with her mother and brother — she made a joke of the exposure again with the signature: "Your now naked, Dactyl" (1998, 165). Yet Moore refused tidy closure to the event with a vulnerable

and unmarked postscript beneath her signature, wherein she confessed: “I don’t know what to do with these [copies of *Poems*] and don’t know what to do next” (1998, 164).

As H.D. and Bryher proceeded to send *Poems* (1921) to the literary circles within London and New York for review, what Moore did do next was turn at least two copies of *Poems* (1921) into working drafts for the next publication. She revised the poems on the printed pages of two of her personal copies of *Poems* (1921), a destabilizing authorial act that turned her first published book into something akin to a copy text.

In addition to complicating our understanding of Moore’s intentions within *Poems* (1921), Moore’s reaction to the surreptitious publication of *Poems* encourages a gendered reading of her revisions to this publication as well as new thinking regarding Moore’s canonization in the Modernist movement. Revision was always a part of Moore’s writing practice. She revised her poems extensively, even after their publication in magazines, and published some poems in multiple versions before their appearance in *Poems* (1921). Furthermore, her correspondences leading up to the publication of *Poems* (1921) show that Moore both revered and held suspect the book as a form of publication.

The poems that appear in *Poems* (1921), most of which had been published at least once before in various magazines, needed “certain changes” (MOORE 1998, 164), presumably for some future form of republication. She had intended to republish at least *some* of them all along; it was only a matter of time. H.D. and Bryher’s collection and publication of *Poems* (1921), is a prime example of modernist collection, mediation, and patronage practices.⁴ But this patronage is problematized by Moore’s insistence to them that “she didn’t want to publish a book” (MOORE 1998, 170) and by her later reiteration of this point to Robert McAlmon that “the poems ought not to have come out; I know that” (MOORE 1998, 168). By identifying herself as a “naked Dactyl” (a name which she thereafter used affectionately in letters to H.D. and Bryher), Moore, however playfully, suggests that the publication of *Poems* (1921) involved unwanted exposure. Although they managed to not project their own editorial idiosyncrasies onto her work, H.D. and Bryher stripped Moore of agency over the body of her texts by placing them in *Poems* (1921) without her knowledge or consent.⁵

Moore’s revisions not only to the poems, but to the poems as they lay in copies of the printed book itself, can be interpolated as an act of reclaiming

4. It is worth noting that Bryher was the financial patron of this work.

5. For a critical analysis of this event, see LEAVELL 2013, 191.

the authority that had been stripped from her by H.D. and Bryher's unauthorized publication. To take this further, the revisions could be seen as a kind of "self-fashioning", a word Alison Rieke (2003) has used for Moore's gender performativity and artistic element of her aesthetic form, that ultimately destabilize the textual authority both perceived and signified in book authorship. These readings would suggest that future published versions of the poems in *Poems* (1921) are reflections on and even a reclaiming of the forcibly mediated textual body. Wherever these interpretations may lead, it is biographically and textually clear that Moore's revision practice became both self-generated and self-reflexive, starting with her revisions upon the text of *Poems* (1921). In the same way that she used strict formal patterns to regulate the language of her poems, Moore had been, prior to its publication, formally strategizing the "literary advantage" of when and how to publish a book and of which versions of poems that book would contain. This indicates an intent to have carefully shaped the temporal and spatial units of her book's debut in a way not unlike how she eventually turned her archive into a unit of analysis. Before the book publication, Moore had carefully formed an idea of how her poetry would appear as an event in time and as an object in space, an idea that she was not able to see entirely fulfilled. After the publication of *Poems* (1921), Moore's process of moving precise, intentional revisions to her poems into the next publication also appears to elude her.

Texts Turned Copy Texts

Moore revised on at least two of her copies of *Poems* (1921). The revisions include both extensive changes and small tweaks carried out over the course of at least four read-throughs indicated by the presence of four different writing instruments: a blue pen, a black pen, a fountain pen, and a graphite pencil. Sometimes she wrote the same revision on top of another with a new instrument; other times she wrote "stet" next to a revision previously made. However, the majority of these revisions are carefully marked dashes and substitutions to words and punctuation marks, strikes to whole phrases or reworkings of a particular poem's form. For example, on one copy of *Poems* (1921) Moore revised the title of "You Are Like The Realistic Product of An Idealistic Search for Gold At The Foot of The Rainbow" to simply "The Rainbow". On a second copy of *Poems* (1921), she wrote "A Rainbow", and then wrote above that "An Exercise". Neither of these revisions appears except in Moore's copies of *Poems* (1921), now in the archive.

Rather, in *Observations* (1924), this work is titled “To A Chameleon”.⁶ Similarly, while she revised “My Apish Cousins” to “The Monkeys” on one of her copies of *Poems* (1921) and carried that title over to *Observations* (1924), she did not transfer the revised title into her copy of *Observations* (1925), and the title was only finally changed in *Selected Poems* (1935). This work of revision goes on: sentence structure is changed “In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good, And”⁷; commas are dashed from “To A Steam Roller”⁸ and “Reinforcements”⁹; and none of these revisions appear in *Observations* (1925). Readers are thus left with two archival objects that reveal revisions made to twenty-three poems that she ultimately included in *Observations* (1924). These ghost revisions indicate a potential delay in intention for her revisions to actually *achieve* revision — to generate a new version of the text.

The archival evidence, though not conclusive, may imply that between 1921 and 1924 Moore entered revisions on her personal copies of *Poems* (1921) in preparation for her next publication, *Observations* (1924). In the end, however, it is impossible to date these book revisions based solely on their material existence in the archive. They could have been made decades after the publication of both editions of *Observations*, long after she had published and republished those poems in *Selected Poems* (1935), *Collected Poems* (1951), and *Complete Poems* (1967). The best dating method available to readers is to simply close read them.

Based on this close reading, it is plausible to date the *Poems* revisions during the interim period before the “next” publication: that is, that the revisions on Moore’s copies of *Poems* (1921) were made with the intention of being included in *Observations* (1924). However, the *Observations* (1924) revisions tell a different story. Based on the number of the revisions in *Observations* (1924) that do not appear in *Observations* (1925), but rather in *Selected Poems* (1935), it seems most plausible that Moore entered revisions into her copy of *Observations* (1924) sometime in the early 1930s when she was preparing *Selected Poems* (1935) for publication. However, the evidence is contradictory: while some revisions that appear in *Observations*

6. Unfortunately, no evidence exists to show us when Moore decided to change this title, whether before or after her revisions to the copies of *Poems* (1921) in the archive.

7. MML 1547. Page 14. Line 9. Moore revises “was dumb. At last it threw itself away” to “was dumb, at last it threw itself a way”.

8. MML 1547. Page 6. Line 12. Moore omits the comma after “vain”.

9. MML 1547 and 1544. Page 13. Line 6. Moore omits the comma after “ears”.

(1925) are found in Moore's copy of *Observations* (1924), it is unclear as to whether those revisions were instances of Moore looking toward the next opportunity to publish or rather looking backward on decisions she had already made on typed manuscripts. Indeed, the relationship between some of these revisions on both Moore's copies of *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924) make clear that she did not use these books as sites of revision to work out the creative process, but rather as sites of transference of revisions already decided upon on typed manuscripts. In other words, it remains unclear to what extent Moore was marking revisions that she had already worked out on other drafts on her printed copies of these works.

What are the implications of the conjecture that these books are sites of revision, yet revisions that did not always ultimately *revise*? This textual condition raises questions about the intention and attentiveness of Moore's editors at *The Dial*, and also allows for speculation about Moore's acceptance of error. As Hannah Sullivan states, citing Christine Froula, "The modernist practice of revision coexisted with unusual attitudes toward textual authority and accuracy, including a relative openness to error and fallibility in its printed transmission" (2013, 6). Biographically, it could show Moore's own lack of precision between her revision practice and her publications. Or perhaps it could just indicate play. At the very least, this textual condition indicates that Moore resisted seeing published forms of texts as "ideal". No matter when these revisions were made, Moore destabilized "text" for herself in a deeply personal way, thereby destabilizing the symbolic authority of publication and the traditional sense of superiority of oneself as an author.

The Articles of "A Talisman"

To accurately date the revisions that *do not appear* in the published versions would enable an understanding of the larger picture of her early revision process. Even further, in order to use the books as touchstones in tracing her revision process in any chronological sense, it is necessary to closely examine the revisions that *did not appear* in the next publication. At the same time, in order to accurately read what is absent, one must attempt to accurately read what is *present*. In order to understand the collective revisions that *did not appear* in *Observations* (1924), we can look at those that *did appear*, starting with "A Talisman".

On the Title Pages of *Poems* (both copies), Moore writes "A" in front of "Talisman", retitling it "A Talisman" (it was first published in 1912). She

does the same on page 9, where the poem is printed. Second, on both copies, Moore writes the word “the” in front of the word “ship”. This addition of the article, so that the revision reads “torn from *the* ship and cast”, realigns it with previously published versions of the poem.¹⁰ The lack of this article, so that the *Poems* version reads “torn from ship and cast” instead of “torn from the ship and cast”, deviates from all of the previously published versions of the poem, as well as from her normal use of syntax. Moreover, the addition of this article allows the poem to maintain Moore’s favored syllabic meter, which is in this case 6/6/3. When Marianne Moore elected to publish *Observations* (1924), she reintroduced the poem as “A Talisman”, along with the revision to the second line:

A Talisman

Under a splintered mast,
torn from *the* ship and cast
 near her hull,

a stumbling shepherd found
embedded in the ground,
 a sea-gull

of lapis lazuli,
a scarab of the sea,
 with wings spread—

curling its coral feet,
parting its beak to greet
 men long dead

(MOORE, MML 1555, 12, *italicization mine*).

10. Although Moore stated that the publication contained no errors, this might have been an overstatement, made in an effort to be a more amiable recipient of the publication. This is because the poem was published as “Talisman” without these articles in *The New Poetry* in 1921, which is why scholars have since not called this an error. However, the revisions on Moore’s copies of *Poems* indicate that Moore might not have sent a revised version to *The New Poetry* by the time they could publish it.

This scrupulous examination of two articles seems at first glance only marginally significant for understanding the overall meaning of "A Talisman". However, it is their very inconsequence that makes them consequential. They bear meaning not only for the meaning of the poem, particularizing rather than Platonifying the Talisman, but also for their meaning in the archive. "A Talisman" is the only poem in her revisions of these copies of *Poems* where *all* of the revisions were transferred to *Observations* (1924). Indeed, despite the multitude of revisions that Moore made to both her copies of *Poems*, this revision is the only *fully* manifested set of revisions made to a single poem. What happened to all the other revisions on those twenty-three pages that were only partially implemented or not implemented at all? Did Moore or an editor simply forget to include them?

Moore changes the poem from referring to a capitalized and singular "Talisman", as if it were a universal thing to which readers would have direct access, to "a" particular and collective "talisman". The addition of the article "a" distances Moore's readers from the object of the poem and instead emphasizes that it is *any* object, not *all* talismans or the idea of "Talisman". The particularity and collectivity are then thematized by "a splintered mast" (line 1), "a stumbling shepherd" (line 4), "a seagull" (line 6), and "a scarab" (line 8). These particular objects are juxtaposed against the larger and more forceful environments in which they are both carried and found: "the ship" (line 2), "the ground" (line 5), and "the sea" (line 8) [my emphases]. Given the tight linguistic formality of the poem — the alliteration of "curling its coral feet" (line 11), the tight 6/6/3 meter, the a/a/b c/c/b d/d/e f/f/e rhyme structure — with the sharp image created through the juxtaposition of "things", Moore facilitates a feeling of the talisman itself. Like many of Moore's poems, and like her archive, a "A Talisman" tells a story of an object with an aesthetic of smallness. The talisman, discovered within the world of the ground, ship, and sea, is venerated not by way of its abstraction into an idea as equally universal or encompassing as the landscape, but by way of its description as something forceful and sensational — perhaps even destructive to the landscape that bears it up. Like the act of revision and the ephemeral objects of ghost revisions, it haunts the very landscape that holds it.

In this way, the revisions to "A Talisman" present a metaphor for the work of historically, chronologically, and imaginatively locating the ghost revisions of the books of *Poems* and *Observations* within Moore's revision process. The etymological root of "talisman" is in the word "telos", which means "ending". Continually preventing textual closure, they are embedded in the basis of her work and thus have potential to speak to — while only being activated by — the imagination of a readership.

Revising for *Selected Poems* with *Observations* (1924)

As previously touched upon, it is possible that Moore used *Observations* (1924) as a site to revise the second edition of *Observations* (1925). For instance, in “An Octopus”, we see that she does successfully replace the word “badger” with “marmot” in two places (lines 106 and 111), and that that decision appears in *Observations* (1925). We also see her marking in a semi-colon after the word “particular”, and that also appears in *Observations* (1925) (MML 1555, 94).

However, almost all of the revisions in *Observations* (1924) do not appear in *Observations* (1925), even those to fix typos and obvious errors. It is as if her revisions simply failed to revise. Thus, it seems more evident that Moore used *Observations* (1924) as her site of revision to revise *Selected Poems* (1935) possibly in the early 1930s. For instance, in “Peter”, she dashes a comma after “say”, corrects a misspelling, and capitalizes the “T” in “to” that should have been capitalized because it starts a sentence (MML 1555, 92). In “The Pedantic Literalist”, she corrects a typographical error in form, wanting the line “to and for” to be indented once more (MML 1555, 92). We see more extensive revision to a line in “Marriage”, with Moore changing this line from “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” to read “in him a state of mind perceives what it was not / intended that he should, and / ‘he experiences a solemn joy / in seeing that he has become an idol”, which does not appear until *Selected Poems* (MML 1555, 93–94). In “Black Earth”, another more extensive revision appears: the substitution of “It is to that phenomenon the above formation, translucent like the atmosphere — a cortex merely —” with “compared with phenomena which vacillate like all translucence of the atmosphere, the elephant is” (MML 1555, 93). Finally, to the infamous “Poetry”, we have an odd addition of parenthesis around the line “when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry”. And she changes the “nor” to “not” by writing a “t” over the “r”, so as to read “not until the poets among us” (MML 1555, 91). Of course, this revision does not appear in the subsequent publication because she reformulated it into 13 lines, for which readers have typescripts. But neither does this decision appear in *Selected Poems*. In other words, when Moore restored a version of the 1924 version, these parentheses and this “not until” does not appear. Thus, this revision — or this *version* — of “Poetry” is completely unique to her personal copy of *Observations* (1924) in the MML: it is a ghost revision.

As if this is not enough, in the back matter of *Observations* (1924), Moore wrote a list of many revisions she had to make, with page numbers listed in columns and rows. It looks as if this back matter agenda was written in one sitting.

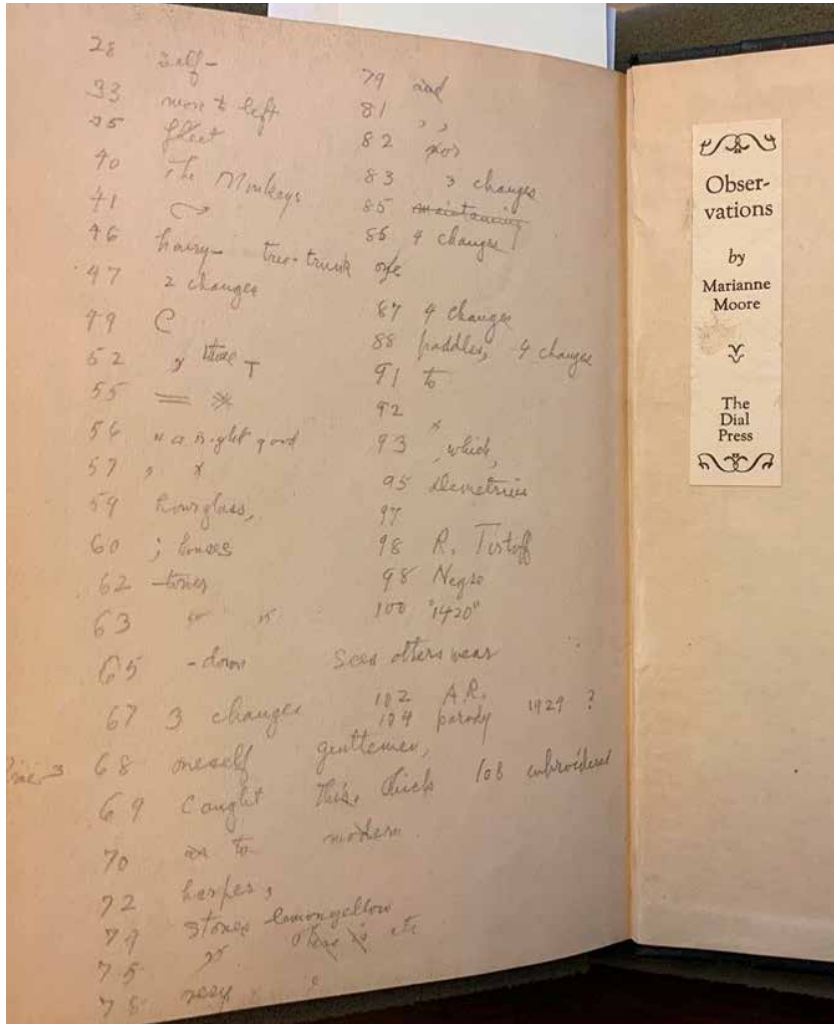


Figure 1. Back Matter of *Observations* (1924). MML 1555.

The transcription is as follows:

28	self-	65	Sees others wear	86	changed in 24?
33	move to left	67	3 changes	87	4 changes
35	fleet	68	oneself	87	changed in 24?
40	The Monkeys	68	this thick	88	paddles, 4 changes
41	→	69	caught	88	Changed in 24?
46	hairy-	70	as to	91	to
47	2 changes	70	modern	92	,
49	e	72	harper,	93	, which,
52	U these T	74	stones lemon yellow	95	Demetrius
55	=	75	"	97	
56	a right good	78	very ,	98	R Tirtoff
57	, x	79	and	98	Negro
59	hourglass	81	, ,	100	"1420"
60	; houses	82	nor	102	A.R.
62	-towers	83	3 changes	104	parody
63	" "	85	maintaining	108	embroidered
65	-down	86	4 changes		

Like the revisions on the pages themselves, most of these do not appear in *Observations* (1925). The revisions ranging between “40 *The Monkeys*” and “79 *and*” in this list consistently do not make it into *Observations* (1925) but do make it into *Selected Poems* (1935). The only revisions that do appear in *Observations* (1925) are “fleet” in “Critics and Connoisseurs”, as well as a few select changes to “An Octopus” found on pages 86 through 91. For instance, “86 4 changes” partly refers to replacing “badger” with “marmot”, as well as an added semi-colon after “peculiar”. These changes were reflected in the *Observations* (1925). As to the other changes encompassed in the “4 changes” note: Moore had added hyphens between “heather-bells” and “birch-trees” and struck quotation marks around “glass eyes” on the poem itself, but all of these changes were not made to the poems until the publication of *Selected Poems* (1935). This pattern of partial change/completion and partial delay/incompletion breaks with three of the revisions in this list. The revision “81”, intended for “Silence”, as well as the revisions “98 R Tirtoff” and the use of the offensive term “98 Negro” intended for the Index, do not appear in *Observations* (1925) nor in *Selected Poems* (1935), making them, like the “not until” of “Poetry”, ghost revisions that exist solely in the archive, though disembodied from the poems to which they belong or may have belonged.

Conclusion

As readers of Marianne Moore continue to do the work of logging and understanding what the ghost revisions on the pages of *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924) mean for the individual poems and what they are doing in relation to the publications and typed manuscripts, they may want to respond how Moore herself did upon the arrival of *Poems* (1921) at her doorstep: “I don’t know what to do with these and don’t know what to do next” (1998, 164). However, “A Talisman” can symbolize our attempt to read, historicize, and work with them. In this poem, the talisman brings about no ending for its bearer, nor does it receive an ending. It is displaced from its intended trajectory with the living, made into an eternal poetic tableau that is “parting its beak to greet / men long dead” (MML 1555, 12, lines 11–12). Like with any kind of signifier, the potential power to address imbues the talisman, but that power must be activated by the imagination of a stumbling shepherd — a stumbling reader. The poem not only provides this metaphor, but enacts it with this revision of the additions of “A” and “the”. What kind of ethic of careful reading and shepherding of such small but powerful archival objects are critics invited into when we attend to these articles — like how we attend to these ghost revisions?

In the new venture currently underway of creating a complete digital archive of Moore’s work, editors must not dismiss omissions as mere accidents, nor accept them as invariably intentional, taking Moore’s famous epigraph at face-value. Rather, readers must attempt to track Moore’s changes and understand her engagement with textual instability from cover to digital cover, reading them alongside her manuscripts, her texts-turned-copy-texts, the front and back matter of her copies, and the most accurately printed editions of her poetry.

Independent Scholar

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