The Poetic Vein of Marianne Moore

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to encompass Marianne Moore's poetic vein through six of its idiosyncracies; precision and diligence, imaginative recreation of reality, prosody resistant syllabic, gentle humour, human essence and painstakingly engendered poems. The introduction brings forth her life and activist experience. The forthcoming chapters draw upon the structure and reception of her poetry. The significance of Moore's mentorship and continued commitment to prose and translation is then brought forth.

Insights into Moore's poetic legacy impacted by the works of her prominent poetic contemporaries, as well as correspondences ensuing from their respective poetic pursuits have been provided.

Key words:

Marianne Moore, activist, editor, mentor, poet, translator, modernist poetry, Imagism, *The Dial*, rigorous poetic form, syllabic verse, wit;

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Introduction

Marianne Moore work “tears and jerks” as she herself wittily describes her literary opus. Upon reading through the lens of historical and social ambiance Marianne Moore receives a nuance that is easily overlooked when reading her poetry. A poet whose lifework exceeds norms and standards, whose poems could not be cited without giving the fullness it deserves, captures with gentleness wrapped in visual and textual forms. Most prominently known as a perfectionist in her poetic oeuvre, as well as her role as an editor and critic Moore stays true to herself. Working hard from young age and always interested in the social and political currents, sets platform for the voices of injustice to be heard. Gaining recognition among the general public during her later years, but from early days gaining respect and mutual discourse with fellow authors.

Her voice could be heard through her poems, as well as her actions during her lifetime. Moore was an avid Suffragette Movement supporter, through her poetry calling inequity among social structures and through war poems criticizing. She took on a role as a mentor to Elizabeth Bishop, seeing the potential and skill that Bishop as a Moore’s admirer had. Not shying, but reluctantly and very seriously taking on a role for translation of the fables by La Fontaine, which was years-long task that marked her as an ideal person for tit, but also gave her innate accomplishment as well as external validation from the public. Moore’s poetry has very unique style which could be read through her precision and diligence, her characteristic syllabic form of verses, her gentle humour with animals being the main vessels of her most prominent poems. Marianne Moore remains as an inspiration for a number of analyses from critics and experts, being the voice of women, breaking with tradition and especially her textual forms and style which gave her an exclusive persona that can be read about today.

1. Marianne Moore

1.1.Strong modernist with a Touch of Imagism

Marianne Moore being born on November 15 in Kirkwood, Missouri in 1887 places her in coming of age in the period of modernism. This fast-paced era, which brought upon industrialization never seen before, where technology started to become prevalent in people's lives was a birthing place for new ideas, innovations, breaking traditions, establishing new currents and joining in the horrors of World Wars. Artists from America, being influenced by European colleagues, started experimenting.

Kenner described modernist aestethic as a machine aesthetic. In 1929. Lewis Mumford defined qualities of the modernist era: precision, clean lines, economy and accuracy which were "more austere forms of mathematics and mechanics". (Steinman, 1984:210) Modernist poetry rejected clear speaking voice and an unquestioned relation of speaker to the poet. Poets experimented with linguistic registers and voice (Pond *Personae*, Eliot's early draft title of *The Waste Land* as *He Do the Police in Different Voices*). In the majority of modernist poetry, the lack of narrative and rational argument removed the lyric speaker as the poet himself. Nevertheless, Marianne Moore, like her male contemporaries, breaks from this completely dissociated rule. The voice was constructed not given or discovered. Its revelation of the poet was profound but without confessional reference. (Miller, 2005: 51-52)

Modernists exalted themselves with constant bettering of the works. It was an era where paper was ever-present, when the typewriter come into usage and all texts were revised thoroughly before printing. It was the by-product of the shifting times, as well as the inherent transformation from the romantic idea "of the splurge of the moment/emotion" that literary works have instantaneous gratification. The need to cut, revise, supervise and think became second nature to modernists. If one could talk about only one modernist worthy of revision, that would assuredly be Marianne Moore. (Phillips, 1982)

To say that Marianne Moore was only poetically influenced by modernists was certainly not the case. Her inspiration, visual experimentation, as per her own words comes: "Gordon Craig, Henry James, Blake, the minor Prophets and Thomas Hardy, are so far as I know, the direct influences bearing upon my work" (Stapleton 1978;24)

Concerning the Imagist movement, she insisted that she was not one of the Imagists. Their poetry is described as: language should endeavour to arrest you, and to make you see a physical thing, and prevent you from gliding through an abstract process. On the basis of

these, they could claim Moore as one of their own, but the major reason why she was not a pure Imagist is that she found movement, where Imagists had stasis. (Phillips, 1982: 26)

Imagism was born around 1912 surrounding the literary circle of Ezra Pound, and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) was a prime example of the movement. She and Marianne Moore have been friends since their college days and influenced one another. Imagism was based on separation from the metronomic style of writing, converting to free verse. Their main concern was the image, instantaneous, direct and non-abstract – that means no usage of unnecessary words (which do not contribute the object), surplus dulls the image, the natural object is the only sufficient symbol. Abstraction must be evaded, musicality, if it is used should be with the intention to act as a good musician - to let the rhythm flow from one verse to another. But rhythmic structure must not disrupt the words or the naturalness. Descriptions are unnecessary and detain from the object. (Pound 1913, 200-207)

Moore's early poetry could outwardly fit into Imagist descriptions, but even in these poems Moore's artistic expression went beyond any rule proposed by Imagism's narrowness. Her complexity, loquacity, dedication to precision (but encapsulated with descriptions), abrupt lines, syllabic prosody, juxtapositions and imaginative effort that she brought forward expanded beyond what is considered Imagist.

1.2 Moore's Contemporaries

Marianne Moore's artistic friendships began when she was at Bryn Mawr College, there, one of her classmates was Hilda Doolittle. They became immediate friends and it was that influenced Moore's early poetic endeavours, she also "pushed" (without Moore's knowledge) her first *Poems* in 1921.

Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore all wrote in the same era, even though the personal contact was minimal, their correspondences lasted through years; mainly doing reviews, criticisms, essays…. Marianne Moore had several of her poems published in small magazines *Poetry,* the *Egoist*[1] *Others*[2]. These magazines, and all others, including *The Dial* all had poems and works from these upcoming poets.

During this time Moore also visited the "291" art gallery by Alfred Stieglitz, whose fan she had been since her college days. She met him: "Mr. Stieglitz was…..friendly and……He told me to come back and he would show me some other things." (Stapleton, 1978: 3-7) This was a fruitful time for her as she met a lot of people she admired since her youth and was inspired by their work, seeing it up and personal, living its art form before her eyes. "She had made a literary debut, so to speak, and had experienced at first-hand the cross-fertilization of poetry and painting that was to continue throughout her life as a writer." (Stapleton, 1978: 8)

This was all during 1915, the year when her poetic correspondence with fellow poets also blossomed. In the volume of *Others* –T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams - represented more significant impact than any other. For a long time the relationship between poets was impersonal and indirect, she did not meet any of them until 1930s.

[1] The *Egoist* had as consultants and editors Richard Aldington, T.S. Eliot, E. Pound and H.Doolittle.

[2] *Others* was a more American venture, was new at that time and never had a large audience. Nonetheless Marianne Moore had her rising moment when its editor Alfred Kreymborg loved some of her poems and invited her to New York. Out of all editors she had sent her poems, Kreymborg was the first to recognize her originality. She was thrilled with the Kreymborg and their conversations were about other magazines, writers and editors.

1.3. Marianne Moore Literary Rapport with Contemporaries

One of the landmark events in Moore's poetic career is definitely T.S. Eliot's introduction to *Selected Poems* in 1935. How important this was, by the words of Andrew Kappel, "it has served as the basis of our present understanding of Moore's poetry" (Kineke, 1997:122) Eliot being the voice of the generation, established by the publication of his poem *The Waste Land* in 1922, brought upon a lot of smoke and light around Marianne Moore. She was painfully aware that there might be no *Selected Poems* were it not T.S. Eliot's introduction and editing present, that was how great his presence was in poetic modernist circles. Their communication was mostly indirect and took on different tones, which could be read as few relationships: father-daughter, mentor-apprentice, critic-poet. Although these descriptions seem quite harsh (and they are), for lack of better words, one could only say complex. Moore indirectly shied away from such personal connotations as father-daughter, mentor-apprentice seems a bit stretched since her poetry only received a sterile and negative adjustment, that made no favour for Marianne Moore. Critic-poet seems a bit easier to digest, although Moore was in her own right a very sharp and self-critical poet. (Kineke, 1997:122-136)

Marianne Moore's and Ezra Pound's literary rapport extends over their respective lifetimes. There are over 400 different kinds of correspondences that could be found as early as 1918. Bar-Yaccov sums up their correspondent relationship into four phases: the first phase is between 1918 to 1923 mostly about introduction letters and background back-and-forths. In 1918 Marianne Moore was thirty-two when she got her first letter from Ezra Pound. He had already been following her work, with admiration, since 1915 when she had her poetry out in the *Egoist*. He was willing to help her in all nuances that accompany a kind of mentorship: advice, corrections, publication and even inquiring about literary ancestors outside of the US. Moore's response was characteristically hers: "The resemblance of my progress to your beginnings is an accident so far as I can see…….I like to fight but I admit that I have at times objected to your promptness with the cudgels, I say this merely to be honest.." (Bar-Yaacov, 1988: 511) The second phase is during her editorship at *The Dial* where Moore was insistent on Pound's reluctant contributions. From 1929, when *The Dial* cased, their writing became more personal and detailed over time. "Her gratitude to Pound for unceasing efforts on her behalf and on behalf of all his proteges, combined with her unstinting admiration for his actual

achievements in the arts, moderated her carefully phrased for his attacks on the entire literary and political establishments, including some people who she herself liked and admired." (Bar-Yaacov, 1988: 515) They had their bickering and tumultuous correspondences over various themes, some replies even took years to be addressed. After her exit from editorship Pound tried to scout her to be the editor of other literary journals, especially those he was involved with. During the 1930's this was a common theme of their letters, to which Moore's answer was continually negative: "one cannot clean Augean stables from a distance" (Bar-Yaacov, 1988: 515). They had a break during the war years and continued after all was over. The last phase was during 1967 until their deaths.

1.4. *The Dia*

Literary Magazine

The Dial was an American magazine of literature, philosophy and politics published during the 19th and 20th centuries. The magazine is associated with three magazines published under the same name. First, when it was published as a transcendentalist magazine in the 1840s and edited by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. This *Dial* ceased publishing in 1944, but during the 1960s *Dial* relived again under the Moncure Daniel Conway as a magazine for literature, philosophy and religion. This magazine published 12 issues from January to December of 1960. *The Dial*, significant for Moore, began in 1880, it carried a mix of politics, literature and criticism under various editors, including Marianne Moore in the late 1920s. *The Dial* ceased publication in 1929. (Phillips 1982, 14-15)

Scofield Thyer (who recruited Marianne Moore to *The Dial*) and James Sibley Watson Jr. gained liberties to transform *The Dial* into a "journal of arts and letters". Marianne Moore was one of the first contributors to the magazine; "*England*" and "*Picking and Choosing*" appeared in the April issue of 1920. Thyer was her biggest supporter during those years as a contributor, he provided opportunities to branch out to do bolder pieces and when he stepped down from his position of editor he made her successor. [3] Between 1921 and 1925 Marianne Moore had issued in the magazine twelve poems (such as *A Graveyard, New York, Is Your Town Nineveh*), even serial poems such as *An Octopus* and *Marriage*, which were her culmination point of early poetry. (Stapleton 1978; 29-53)

Thyer and Watson put experimentalist modernist work in an environment that made it easier to digest for a general audience. What *The Dial* succeeded in becoming a norm for establishing modern cannon and modernism. *The Dial* had a mediator role between the avant-garde[4] and the general reader, it was opaque in dealing with the political aspect of the literary scene, their intended reader was well-informed, but not yet completely engaged with literature. *The Dial* was influencing the reception. It could be said that *The Dial* was more conventionally appropriate and even though the contributors were the same, of *The Dial* and

[3] Their friendship and admiration, his belief in her as a poet; In July 1921 he wrote to her apologizing for not saying goodbye and wrote abut her poem *The Grave*; „Mr. Cummings who met me here on my arrival agrees with me that *The Dial* has published nothing whatever finer that *The Grave*" (Stapleton 1978;32)

[4] For example; literary contemporary of *The Dial* was Little review which was avant-garde in its approach to its works. Litte Review was politically engaged, radical, explicit, always on the verge of bankrupcy, its readers already dedicated to literary innovation. (Golding 2005; 44)

other magazines, their works were systematically different. In the first comment section in 1920, lies an explanation of the kind of work the magazine ought to print; work that would in other instances had to be waited upon (years for publication) or those that would not be approved elsewhere. (Golding 2016; 42-48)

This was Marianne Moore's window to the world of editors. She exercised this role from 1925-1930. This marks a significant dent in her poetry since she wrote no new poems during these several years, but it gave her possibilities of practice and immersion into constructive criticism and guidance.

"Moore was renowned for her meticulous readings, if not her finicky comments according to some unsuccessful contributors. This four-year period is filled with professional mail—internal letters, acceptance or rejection slips and proof sheets—which all betray the strongly reductive and corrective tendency of her editorial style. Despite the house policy, which stipulated that a selected text should not be modified, Moore did not hesitate to suggest some extremely precise changes, in an epistolary style that was not any less acute." (Clavier, 2016:9)

Some exchanges with poets, such as Robert Hillyer, were civil and amicable[5] while others had a less friendly sentiment. To later ones, her responses were always exact and firm, with a falsely neutral tone. Moore always stood behind her words, because she was as genuine and sincere in her poetry as she was with her reviews and criticism.

[5] "May we, however, make so bold, despite the exactions of symmetry, as to ask if you would permit us to publish it *without the last line—and would the sequence, to you, be irreparably impaired if the third stanza were omitted*?" (Moore, 1997, 212; emphasis mine) (Clavier, 2016:9)

2.Marianne Moore's Poetic Oeuvre

2.1 Triumph of Life - Becoming a Poet

Mentorship

In Marianne Moore's life, only one person could be considered her true protege whose creative opus she supervised to some degree and with whom she had a protective and close connection. This person was poetess Elizabeth Bishop. They met in 1934 when Elizabeth was 23. The curious circumstance that undeniably pushed Bishop towards Moore in seeking guidance and professional closeness is her mother's death the same year she met Moore. Bishop was familiar with Moore's poetic repertoire, she was amazed when she first read her poems that she read all her work from *The Dial* and *Poetry*. What drew Bishop to Moore were "her manner and mannerism, her fusion of old-fashioned domesticity with forthright notions about writing and style." (Kalstone, 1989; 7) [6] Marianne Moore and her mother corrected a great number of Bishop's stories and poems from 1936 to 1940.

The young poetess was traveling a lot, exploring, never quite settling, she always felt a sense of finding her own place. That is why her poems are not traditional travel poems per se, but rather an expression of finding herself in places. "Moore is constantly in awe of Bishop's travel and casts her a role that is in way intimidating;… Moore women always seemed too ill or too beset to travel… The regular gifts she sent to Moores obviously meant a great deal to them. Their life was of ingestion, of collecting rare specimens, to which Bishop added countless shells, duck feathers, decorated eggs, small carved animals." (Kalstone 1989; 10).

Bishops' style grew with their correspondences. She had notebooks filled with observations inspired by Moore. But her descriptiveness had to find an authenticity that showcased her poetry. Bonnie Costello points out "Moore's descriptions were mostly edited for her, a lens of print focusing her subject; she did much of her exploring through catalogues, journals, museum documents, exhibitions. Bishop, in her poems, was less poised researcher, less the orchestrator of varied ensemble of fact. For her the descriptive style was to be most

[6] „Miss Moore's „architectural" method of conversation, not seemingly much for the sake of that she says as the way in which it is said: indifferent subject matter treated as a problem in accuracy, proportion, solidity, balance. If she speaks of a chair you can pracitically sit on it when she has finished- It' s still life, easel painting, as opposed to common conversational fade-out". (Kalstone 1989; 12)

valuable when it grew out of mysterious and engaging encounters in her daily life and travels. She would use observation as a kind of tentative anchorage, as a way of grasping for presence in the world." (Kalstone 1989; 36) They were vastly different. Bishop had a lot more to learn, about herself and her own expression. Their dynamic consisted of a playful niece attitude, who was more often than not searching for mischief. The other side – the professional side - was Moore's kind and protected criticism as well as encouragement.

Some disagreements that they had were about various reasons either of a technical nature, about the terms, selection of words, intention and even some serious mentor-apprentice rifts. One of her comments on Bishop's poetry [7] "methodically oblique, intent way of working…like vegetable-shredder which cuts into the life of a thing" (Kalstone 1989; 40). Bishop's poem *Valentine I* met Moore's criticism in its baroque erotic play:

"One asks a great deal of the author - that he should not be haphazard but considered in his mechanics, that he should not induce you to be interested in what is restrictedly private but that there should be the self-portrait: that he should pierce you to the marrow without revolting you. Miss Bishop's sparrows (*Valentine I*) are not revolting, merely disaffecting" (Kalstone 1989; 41)

Love with his guilded bow and crystal arrows

Has slain us all,

Has pierced the English sparrows

Who languish for each other in the dust,

While from their bossoms, puffed with hopeless lust,

The red drops fall.

These clashes in themes, expressions and differences in approaches to poetry sometimes met with mild opposition and other times resulted in silences. Moore over the course of few years led Bishop to numerous editors and journals. [8] Moore's efforts were always an anchor that Bishop could fall back to even when she strayed far from her writing. In 1936 she had a writing crisis, feeling hopeless and unaccomplished in this field, she wanted to give a hand at

[7] Anthology called *Trial Balances* that appeared in the fall of 1935, where thirty-two young poets between ages of twenty and twenty-five were introduced by more established poets. (Kalstone 1989; 40)

[8] Bishop's works appeared in almost all magazines Moore recommended her: *The Man-Moth (*1936) and two stories, *The Baptism* (1937) and *The Sea and Its Shore* (1937) appeared in *Life and Letters Today*, a magazine founded by Moore's friend Brhyer….(Kalstone 1989; 42)

science, but Moore's clam and insisting push: ""I feel you would not be able to give up writing, with the ability – for it that you have….To have produced what you have-wither verse or prose is enviable….." (Kalstone 1989; 43) In these confused times, Moore suggests sending some poems to *Poetry* and pleads to see her new works. Also, it marks the turning point in their closeness as Moore, for the first time, addresses her by her name in their correspondences. Furthermore, she not only offered corrections but did the submissions of her poems to the magazines. During the next four years, Bishop's works went under detailed scrutiny from Moore, but their friendship remained strong. It was a delicate balance, where Bishop during these years was more emotionally correlated to Moore as she felt immense gratitude for putting her work in print, although their respective poetry had massive differences. It was either the choice of words, placements, rephrasing, internalizing, expressiveness, thought behind. There as a breach of trust when Bishop sent her short story *In Prison* to *Partisan review* without checking with Moore and without giving her any insight into her work. When she first read it in the magazine's issue in 1938 she followed it with the longest critique of Bishop's work[9]. It would pass a great deal of time before Bishop published another story. But, not all was frictive between them, still the sturdy foundation of mentorship and fondness remains. In January 1937 she wrote thanks to Moore regarding her comments on "*The Sea and Its Shore*". (Kalstone 1989; 43-62)

"This morning I have been working on *The Sea and Its Shore* –or rather making use of your and your mother's work- and I a suddenly afraid that at the end I have stolen something from *The Frigate Pelican*……It was not until I began seeing pelicans that my true source occurred to me." (Kalstone 1989; 62).

This over-analysis Bishop thought, about stealing from the source, is her indebtedness to her mentor. She is indeed conscious that Moore's influence is like a collage of her poems that she, in admiration, engraved in her poetic machinery. Later, she vicariously borrowed imagery of *The Frigate Pelican* to her poem *Florida*; not just the birds, the way they flew, the charring, but the mangrove swamps and the rising moon. (Kalstone 1989; 63)

[9] „although…am one of those who despise clamor about substance – to whom treatment really is substance - I can't help wishing you would sometime in some way ask some unprotected profundity of experience; or…..some characteristic private defiance of the significantly detestable". (Kalstone 1989; 58)

2.2 Prose in-between poetry

If she could not have been a writer, Moore wished in her early years to be a reviewer. One such attempt was in 1916 when she campaigned to do such kind of work for Philadelphia newspapers. The attempt did not go through, but her next step was to send her prose to the *Egoist*, even sparking interest in novels to Hilda Doolittle. What remains as her forte, in terms of prose, are reviews, essays and edited interviews. Her prose enabled her to give a different connection to the reader, one that is separate from poetry. What remains as the main source of information would predominantly be dialogues with fellow poets, correspondences and letters. *The Egoist* did accept her essay *The Accented Syllable*, soon after her poems appeared in *The Dial*, Pound pushed Scofield Thyer to attain some of her prose. Thyer provided Moore with important books to review and accepted her essays. The reviews were a hard chore, especially since these were books that had to be reviewed on the monthly basis of the magazine. During her editor times at *The Dial* she wrote unsigned *Comment* section and *Briefer Mentions*, for which she was not paid. After *The Dial* ended, she mainly wrote reviews for *Poetry* or *Nation* or *New Republic*, and essays for *Hound and Horn* or *Criterion*. Her professional opus included criticism of contemporaries, which she skilfully did. (Stapleton 1978; 52-53).

In writing criticism, essays on contemporaries one had to have a good balance of seeing the excellence in the words of others, or to be so precise to offer disagreements but on a level that still holds to the respect and appreciate the art of others. When she did write her words were always veiled as to not cut too deep, but still grasp the essence of what needed to be addressed.

She wrote essays on Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens[10] and her protegee Elizabeth Bishop. Her essays were always guided by a strong moral conviction and her mastery of technical front and her "belief that charity is inherent in imagination". (Stapleton 1978; 55) She had an interesting touch of discovering writers' logic of inclination. As with Eliot "while she was reviewing his *Collected Poems* (1936); were for stillness, intellectual beauty, spiritual exaltation...the glory of the hummingbird, childhood, and wholeness of personality" (Stapleton 1978; 55) Moore did not think it credible to be a writer or poet without thinking about technicalities of one's own work.

[10] George Moore, Shaw, E.A. Robinson, Vachel Lindsay, Hardy, Yeats, Gertrude Stein

Her way of expressing admiration or sense of content when reading others' work is "detains attention" and "commends itself", which are expressions ardently hers. Never too much or too little, always with a dose of caution, but grounded upon mutual respect and need for praise.

Regarding her style of prose -the metaphors provide attention-grabbing. She constructs metaphor with diction: "the swarming madness of excellence stays with one", same syllable-syllable composition, as in poems. Her quotations, in prose, are used as a means of diversion, of inserting unexpected, veiled with in kindness in humour. Quotations could also serve as metaphor. She also paid attention to the acceleration of tempo (especially in poems). These technical maneuvers were there to be used and seen by poets, to appreciate and to work on their own skills. She showcased possibilities, especially regarding construction, execution, lyricism, rhythm. (Stapleton 1978; 61)

Nevertheless these mechanic skills could not be separated from her experience that she continually worked on; through reading, analyzing, revising, collecting, persisting, staying authentic, bettering, questioning and reflecting.

Concerning Moore's work on translation: "Translation requires that one put at service of something not one's own, the most sharpened and excellent tools in one's armoury: that is to say, there's character rather than good fortune in translation of finish" (Stapleton 1978; 63)

Translation

Moore's first large leap in translation was by the offer of Wystan Hugh Auden. This offer was to translate La Fontaine fables. Having no previous experience with translation, in her enthusiasm and vigour Moore sent W.H. Auden a list of English verse that she respected and adored. It was an arduous endeavour, of which she initially was not aware, she started translating fables during her fifty-eight year and finished eight years later.

Translation is a difficult task, not taken on by many writers or poets, and even then translation requires originality within one's own language and masterwork with diction and style, grammar and vocabulary. If she did not take on this ardous literary journey she would not have creative motivation to write *Tom Fool at Jamaica* or *Logic and Magic Flute.* In these poems it is evident how her new encounters with translation made impact on her poetry.

For Moore, Pound was exemplary translator, although she was aware that he was far better master at Italian than she was at French.[11] "For rhythm and syntax she used his *Guido Cavalcanti*, *Seafarer*, and certain French songs - the natural order of words, subject, predicate, object; the active voice where possible; a ban on dead words, rhymes synonymous with gusto. In fact, these principles govern her own earlier poetry as well." (Stapleton 1978; 162)

Regarding her compatibility with La Fontaine as a translator, a lot of first thoughts go to the animals as a connective tissue between Moore and La Fontaine. But these animals were in different worlds; scenarios, they were not treated equally in the works of these authors. La Fontaine's animals had human traits, they were representations of human characters animal shapes. Moore's animals were exactly that, animals in their natural habitats, observed, only used to draw comparisons - antithesis to human agencies.

The real gem and uniqueness why Moore was the ideal translator is that she could produce consonances, melodies, syncopations varying the patterns she had already mastered. She also shared with him a love for simplicity and aversion to human exploitation, to vainglory and hypocrisy. (Stapleton 1978; 164)

[11] He sometimes had to expand or contract a phrase; he was often hard pressed to find an English equivalent for an Italian word. He resorted to archaic forms and to an inversion of noun and verb in order to get something closer to the alliterative patter of *The Seafarer* or to the sequence of rhyme nad rhythm in troubadours.

2.3 Reception and Impact of Her Poetry

The public greeted Marianne Moore with recognition, but also with a reserved image. Even as a young woman Moore had an inclination to voice her standing regarding issues that were still neglected in the 20th century. She and her mother, and their friends were active in the Woman's Suffrage Party of Pennsylvania. Being an active member of the Committee to Organize Cumberland County she went to fairs, distributing leaflets, talking to farmers and wrote party notes. Her association with the Suffragette movement dates back to her college years. In a letter from 1907, she describes attending a lecture by progressive reformer and Hull House founder Jane Adams. Also, upon arrival to New York in 1909 she listened to a number of speeches by prominent suffragist supporters[12]. "Suffrage is not a question of superiority or the lack of it; it is question of personality and that the woman is as sacred as the man" (by Molesworth 42 as cited in Redding 2012: 299). Moore would be coming back home with enthusiasm instilled in her by speeches and lectures that she heard during her stay in New York. By 1913 Moore was an ardent supporter and participant; she wrote to her brother[13] about selecting a woman Suffrage program and she marched with fellow colleagues (artists and authors) against Woodrow Wilson's newly elected campaign. Her brother warned her about her open demonstration of revolt, which could negatively affect her teaching job at the Carlisle Indian School; as a firm believer in equal rights, she could not remain passive and she quit her job that year and devoted herself to the cause. This was also seen through her poetry and her correspondence with fellow authors. (Redding, 2012:299-304)

These activities were precursor to her growing repertoire of works dedicated to public issues: "the fascination of using words in a way that would be effective" was her agenda. Continuing to 1918 when she joined gatherings of writers and artists concerning the historic preoccupation of Henry James. Her essay, in 1934, aligns with her motivation to call out false narratives, how it is not enough for one to "Belligerently glow with one's country" to be American, but "to be 'intrinsically and actively ample…reaching westward, southward, anywhere, everywhere,' with a mind 'incapable of the shut door in any direction.'" (Phillips, 1982:157)

The thought for the injustice of social structures was also highlighted in her poems: *The Jerboa* and *Camelia Sabina. The Jerboa* in the first part showcases wealthy abundance,

[12] John Dewey, Harriet Stanton Blach (the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton), and Mr. Charles Zeublin, a professor of sociology at the University of Chicago. (Redding, 2012: 299)
[13] John Warner Moore

fifteen of seventeen stanzas are dedicated to grandeur of ancient civilizations: Rome, Egypt, the Pompeys, Queens and royals. This picture can parallel the United States in the thirties, which was a sight to observe exploitation, slave economy and enormous wealth. Architectural monuments express the dynamics of economic power. A similar thought could be said for *Camelia Sabina,* which did not get as much recognition as *The Jerboa. Camelia Sabina* was partly a response to what happened in the harvest season of 1932, when there were protests against unpaid war services, and insubstantial prices for framers' products and Congress did not act upon it. (Phillips, 1982:178-189)

Following the 1940s and the World War II crisis, which reflected on all spheres of the society, Moore's most recognized poem *In Distrust of Merits* was her war-cry.

In Distrust of Merits

…The world's an orphan's home. Shall
we never have peace without sorrow?
without pleas of the dying for
help that won't come? O
quiet form upon the dust, I cannot
look and yet I must. If these great patient
dyings — all these agonies
and wound bearings and blood shed —
can teach us how to live, these
dyings were not wasted

The whole poem is an open wound pleading for closure. It has been called one of the greatest poems of WW II. In her 1960s interview, when asked what she thought about the poem, she replied: "a testimony - to the fact that war is intolerable, and unjust…What has it? It is just a protest, disjointed, exclamatory. Emotion overpowered me." (Phillips, 1982: 199) Again, being the critic and always self-aware, in 1966 she said she disliked the didacticism that the poem held. Several poems were also inspired by what war brought: *The Mind is an Enchanting Thing* (1943), *He Digesteth Harde Yron* (1941) and *Elephants* (1943). Not all are explicitly war poems, but there are elements which have their references. (Phillips, 1982:199-207)

War poems brought her recognition that she did not enjoy before. She gave a number of interviews to the smaller magazines regarding issues she thought were important and she could contribute to.[14] Her light-hearted humour of the current made her famous amongst people who would have never heard of her otherwise (it was mostly based on horses and baseball, which she enjoyed).

[14] Religion and the intellectuals (1950), women and machine civilization (1963), war in Vietnam (1967) (Phillips 1982; 209)

3. Idiosyncrasies of Marianne Moore's Poetry

3.1 Precise diction and diligence

Moore's most notable adjective given to her style and poems is precision. One's thought runs to the detailed descriptions of numerous animals in her poems. Precision can be seen through various aspects: her ability to not over-explain verses, the exact and meticulous (thoroughly researched) depiction of well-known, but mostly rarely spoken about animals, the skill of contracting images and a plethora of meaning (references) to handful of words and could be also said about her precise criticism towards her own work, but also justly to others.

Moore is not a poetess whose lines could be read just once, scanning superficially, but a poetess whose poetry is a reflection of her own strict (but fluid), organized (but organic) and voiced (but silent) creation, which she unveiled in her lines.

"Hid by the august foliage and fruit of the grapevine

Twine

Your anatomy

Round the pruned and polished stem

Chameleon……." (*Chameleon*)

Almost, as reading through the lines, it seems an image is painted, piece by piece. Precision in choosing these exact words to illustrate chameleon, as well as the way words are positioned on the paper. Another example, not from the animal kingdom, is:

To a Steam Roller

The illustration
is nothing to you without the application.
You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
into close conformity, and then walk back and forth
on them.

Sparkling chips of rock
are crushed down to the level of the parent block.

Were not 'impersonal judgment in aesthetic
matters, a metaphysical impossibility,' you

might fairly achieve
It. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
of one's attending upon you, but to question
the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists. (1915)

To a Steam Roller seems direct but also subdued. It is exactly this precision in making statements (As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive of one's attending upon you) sharp and concise, that Moore is valued for. The use of satire (were not impersonal judgements in aesthetic matters, a metaphysical impossibility, you might fairly achieve it) is in her moral insight allowed: "In art there is no place for gossip and but a small place for the satirist" (Phillips 1982,76) This precision, of carefully selected words that fit into this short poem, and making such bold statements is her forte. It could seem that these poems sound undemanding as they seem short, but knowing the process of Marianne Moore's creativity this statement falls short.

"She is sharp in the distinctions she illustrates, yet the discriminations are finely drawn and so inextricably linked that it is difficult to quote anything less than a complete poem. It is also difficult to comprehend the work without attending to the discriminations and subtleties by which they are linked within the individual poems. She compared her work to research. "I want," she said, "to look at the thing from all sides…They were ways of knowing the world and, since she was often the person looking, ways of knowing herself…"" (Phillips, 1982: 78)

Her approach to writing is, as he herself said, a form of research and research requires a lot of dedication, analyzing, rewriting, observing and consequently it never seems ultimately finished. She began writing some of her poems even years before they have seen the light of the press, her revisions (even the extreme ones) were always an act to self-imposed improvement.

Diligence is intently linked to precision - Moore's ability to be exact, sharp and meticulous. Diligence in her work, outside of poetry towards exploration, learning, acquisition, reading, writing, studying. We are now used to calling Marianne Moore an observer with unique precision" (Evelyn Feldman and Michael Barsanti, by Natalia Cecire, 2011: 83) Observations

collide two worlds that she adored: science and poetry. The amount of research that went into the construction of a single poem is remarkable and admirable.

"Preparation for writing *The Plummet Basilisk* began in the summer of 1932 and went on simultaneously with the finishing of *The Jerboa*. A visit to the Natural History Museum two weeks earlier had afforded numerous observations, including a sight of a live scorpion. There were kangaroo rats and pocket mice but no jerboas. In the reptile section she saw the "*diving feather basilisks in which I am interested"* ". (Laurence Stapleton, 1978:81-82)

She worked on poems for years, visiting museums, watching movies and reading literature, her fascination never stopped and it translated into her works. Moore would simultaneously work on several pieces at once, including review and essays and comments. It could be said that her work was a vocation she happily exercised in all spheres of her life.

Another instance of her diligent and precise characteristic is the number of quotations she used in her poems. In her words: "As for quotations, sometimes I think a triviality gains a little weight by quotation marks; for the most part, however, my quotations have authority" (Stapleton 1987, 36)[15]. By 1923 her technique of quotation reached its potential: poem *Novices* (1923) where the last thirteen lines are passages adapted from other writers to acclaim. But these lines in *Novices* do not call upon the reader to connect with them, while in *Marriage* a play between subject and the text she incorporates have instantaneous dynamic that translates to the reader.

"*Marriage* is an assemblage of which Moore said, "I was just making a note of some things I'd come on that took my fancy – either the phrasing or the sound. Words that I didn't want to lose...and I put them together as plausibly as I could." (Phillips 1982; 45) A collage of statements, chaotic and witty cleverly accentuates the notion of marriage. The main actors in the poem are Adam and Eve: with Eve having forty lines of dialogue, Adam sixty-nine.

"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,

[15] She would also record conversations by her friends, neighbours, by college professors, athletes…. Comic descriptions of people and their trivialities should found interesting. This was especially important to her, as she was planning to write autobiographical novel *My story*, but this was never completed or published. (Stapleton 1978; 93))

describing it

as "that strange paradise

unlike flesh, gold, or stately buildings,

the choicest piece of my life:

„unlike flesh, god, or stately buildings, the choicest part of my life“ is an excerpt from Protestant Devotional literature *The Saint Everlasting Rest* (1650) by the word of Richard Baxter

without whom nothing -- Adam;

"something feline,

something colubrine" -- how true!

Adam is compared to the poetry of twentieth-century philosopher George Santayana in describing Adam as something feline and colubrine. Richard Baxter again in the following lines;

hell, heaven,

everything convenient

to promote one's joy."

The lines bode heavily on the institution of marriage, where one part describes Eve and other Adam in their respective qualities.

"he experiences a solemn joy

in seeing that he has become an idol."

This excerpt is allusion to Anatole France's book for children *Filles et Garcons* (1900) – that any girl knows that „man's joy“ is that he is a baby boy. This is Adam’s perspective where he relishes in his magnificence, but “stumbles” upon marriage.

"as high as deep as bright as broad

as long as life itself,"

he stumbles over marriage,

"a very trivial object indeed"

“a very trivial object indeed” is an excerpt from nineteenth-century rationalistic anarchist William Godwin, who said about the institution that is a trivial object. These are just some of the allusions, excerpts of her collage for the poem. As the poem moves rapidly through phrases, descriptions, metaphors Moore encompasses the turbulations, hypocrisies, full of symbolism is an account of such institution. This was a provocative poem, full of criticism and justified questioning, about the nature of such endeavour, about complexities, egos, inequalities, love, myths… But *Marriage* provides the best example to her quotation formula. It is a scrapbook, glued together with her precision and quick wit. *Marriage* also has a beaming social and critical view on several themes connected to human attributes. Although the title *Marriage* evokes an idea that the poet’s theme will be one of the oldest “institutions”, Moore questions whether it really is a poem and explains that it does not provide a theory of marriage, not even close.

Moore was a hardworking poetess - her imaginative mind could not be expressed in a better voice than her diligent and relentless way. Through her constant self-imposed improvements, criticism, practice, surveying Moore’s opus is today one of the ample contributions to poetry.

3.2 Imaginative Recreation of Reality

Imagination is rightfully a tool without which any artist cannot do their work. “Literalists of imagination” is what Marianne Moore calls poets. Literalists of imagination sounds contradictory, but entails purposely why poets have the idea and manner to execute. Looking at her explanation in *Poetry:*

> “-above
>
> insolence and triviality and can present
>
> for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads
>
> in them.” (*Poetry*, 1919)

Imaginary gardens with real toads in them describe what poetry is ought to do. To combine actual and abstract, to give life to lines and create a world that can live in reader’s minds. Poets need to be above the arrogance and irrelevance. Creating a breathing picture from observation and imagination, with clear precision, so that the reader can go through feeling the same as poet is breathing into her lines.

“Imagination, then, must be looked upon, as the force which blends the other qualities together; through imagination the experienced, the observed, the studied are brought into a single heightened experience, which enhances the singularity of the idea of a thing while discarding much that has adhered to it though constant usage and causal observance.” (Rees, 1984; 232)

What Rees suggests about Marianne Moore is that her emphasis on imagination is similar to a “glue” that links or sets in place numerous themes and subjects, images in just one poem. Imagination is a force that needs to awaken in the mind of the reader as well. Reader may struggle to see the connection between numerous objects, animals, things, characteristics and motifs of her poems, because she makes swift and precise jumps from the lines. Imaginative cleverness is the idea behind her efforts, imagination as an adhesive in the poet’s mind transversing to the reader. Imagination allows to see the value in written words, to give a breath of realization to the forms and rhymes.

“It is her entirely social shuttling from the actual to the imagined, or from what is imaginable in the actual, to its actuality, that is at once the key and the meaning to her

charmed movement between the human and animal kingdom." By the wordy of Vivienne Koch (Rees, 1984; 237)

A Jelly-fish

Visible, invisible,
A fluctuating charm,
An amber-colored amethyst
Inhabits it; your arm
Approaches, and
It opens and
It closes;
You have meant
To catch it,
And it shrivels;
You abandon
Your intent—
It opens, and it
Closes and you
Reach for it—
The blue
Surrounding it
Grows cloudy, and
It floats away
From you. (O to be a Dragon 1959)

A Jelly-fish was one of her early and shorter poems but, as one can discern her imaginative beginnings, even here Marianne Moore provides a visual likeness of the jellyfish. *Visible-invisible,* juxtaposed qualities of the animal. *Fluctuating* (used cleverly to describe the sensation of the sea), again with the *amethyst* (revealing the colour, when the animal is visible), charm- attractiveness of the animal, fascination with the colour and its ability to camouflage. And the rest of it is human reluctance to touch, almost skittishly, animal leaves untouched. Moore provides imaginative situation for the reader, simultaneously grasping the essence and appearance of the jellyfish. In this poem, abstraction could be seen as the encounter, the feeling of hesitation even at the sight of something intriguing.

The Fish [16], also a poem from her early years, depicts her initial desire to use visual lyricism. It could also be seen in *To a Chameleon.* The form of the poem is intricate, like a fish moving through water; its flow gliding through verses. This poem is the closest association to the Imagist movement since the imagery is exact and instantaneous, fast-paced and fluent. Each stanza describing a picturesque moment that the reader can envision; "barnacle that encrust the side of the wave", "move themselves with the spotlight swiftness into the crevices-", "the sea grows old in it". Every verse exploding with imaginative abundance, but still remaining exact. It is like reading still images that form in the reader's head. Even without depicting the biological aspects of the animal, Moore succeeds to represent its nature, environment, gesture (hiding into the crevices), zoology of the marine life. Also, the deep truth behind the sea- everything grows old, rusts, withers and with every movement there needs to be stillness in the end. "Marks of abuse"- an unforgettable remainder, everything leaves a trace, even in the calmest waters (dynamite groves, hatchet strokes, burns). Moore's talent in delivering exactness, realness, astuteness in the form that imaginative minds can decipher, leaves speechless.

Nevertheless

you've seen a strawberry
that's had a struggle; yet
was, where the fragments met,

a hedgehog or a star-
fish for the multitude
of seeds. What better food

than apple seeds - the fruit
within the fruit - locked in
like counter-curved twin

hazelnuts? Frost that kills
the little rubber-plant -

[16] Found on page 31-32.

leaves of kok-sagyyz-stalks[17], can't

harm the roots; they still grow
in frozen ground. Once where
there was a prickley-pear -

leaf clinging to a barbed wire,
a root shot down to grow
in earth two feet below;…… (*Nevertheless* 1944,)

Nevertheless is a different mode of imaginative creation; *The Fish* and *The Jelly-Fish* had animals as the main theme, but here we have a still-nature; not completely, since there are animals present (hedgehog, starfish, rams). Moore was influenced also by painters and artifacts, she found creativity all around. She had fascination with anything that moves people to create, whether nature, objects, people or literary pieces. *Nevertheless* looks like a painter's inspiration. The poem starts with strawberry that struggled (winter-frost, frozen ground), but is similar to a hedgehog, who curls himself into a ball. Strawberry has seeds outside just as a hedgehog or star-fish has spikes or prickly-per-leaf or a barbed wire. Prickliness to protect themselves from danger, or to provide danger. It all connects to the circle of evolution from the seeds, protected in their cocoons, when fruits wither they remain to grow anew. Strong imagery is placed in each verse, still nature, frozen nature, but nature that survives. The realism of life sparked with the imaginative effort to provide the reader and equal experience through images that stay still, but move with nature (kills, clinging, shot down, grow).

[17] An Asiatic dandelion cultivated for its fleshy roots that have a high rubber content and are rather difficult to eradicate, frost doesn't harm the roots. (Phillips 1982;42)

3.4. Prosody Resistant Syllabics

"*Form is synonymous with content-must be.*" (Phillips, 1982:25) This quotation is what Marianne Moore thought about the art of any period. The form is a crucial part of Moore's poetry even though she denied it formal precedence, giving it to rhythm. As Phillips (1982) cleverly writes, Marianne Moore's poems do not look identical as some other poets' works do. In following her own system of poetic creativity, she did not duplicate anything, regardless of the same "formula", even less in her later years.

The most radical aspect of "observations, experiments in rhythm, or exercises in composition" was her reliance on syllabic over accentual-syllabic or accentual verse forms. She stressed each syllable and word in a natural dialogue way (or a free verse), but what she did control is the number of syllables appearing in a single line (Phillips, 1982: 60). This was her own stamp to poetry, which is assimilated to most of her poems. But she, herself, admitted she hated the syllabic method in 1969. She was not the first one to create this method[18], but she was the first American poet that implemented it.

What are Years

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt, —
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
encourage others
and in its defeat, stirs
the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality

Syllabic rhythm develops through the fixed number of stressed and an indefinite number of unstressed syllable per line -6/6/7/9/5/9/7/5/6/6/6/7. Another example from:

[18] **S**prung rythm- an irregular system of prosody developed by the 19th-century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. It is based on the number of stressed syllables in a line and permits an indeterminate number of unstressed syllables. (Britannica)

The Wood Weasel

emerges daintly, the skunk--
don't laugh--in sylvan black and white chipmunk
regalia. The inky thing
adaptively whited with glistening
goat-fur, is wood-warden. In his
ermined well-cuttlefish-inked wool, he is
determination's totem. Out-
lawed? His sweet face and powerful feet go about
in chieftain's coat of Chilcat cloth.
He is own protection from the moth,

Syllabic rhythm here is sustained by interchangeable sets of stressed syllables per line: 8/10/8/10/8/10.

Phillips writes about syllabic verse giving Moore a poetic freedom that she aspired to but also discipline which was her *forte.* Rhythm was her prime objective. “If I succeeded in embodying a rhythm that preoccupied me, I was satisfied”, she exclaimed. This freedom of conversational speech in poetry was closer to prose, which was disliked by many seeking in poetry its musicality. “My work jerks and rears” is probably best description of her own poetry. Although she wrote free verse, by 1929, she completely ceased to write it. (Phillips, 1982: 61) One example of her earlier poems of the free verse is *A Grave*:

A Grave

Man, looking into the sea—

taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have it to yourself—

it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing

but you cannot stand in the middle of this:

the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.

The firs stand in a procession—each with an emerald turkey-foot at the top—

reserved as their contours, saying nothing;

repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea;

the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look….

One could see here the long lines that there is syllabic parallelism, lines are long and have directness of the rhythm but are not bound by the form's structure.

Explaining to Ezra Pound (who questioned her metric), she said that each verse was "an arrangement of stanzas, each stanza being an exact duplicate of every other stanza." The original stanza was "a matter of expediency, hit upon as being approximately suitable to the subject".[19] Example:

The Fish

wade
through black jade.
Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash-heaps;
opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.
The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness

[19] According to Phillips (1982) "in 1960 Marianne Moore told Donald Hall that she never "planned "a stanza, although she might influence an arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical worth the first. Spontaneous initial originality-say impetus- seemed difficult to reproduce later."

into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating

the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff; whereupon the stars,

pink
rice-grains, ink-
bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.

All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of

ac-
cident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is

dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it. (1918)[20]

[20] Number of syllables for each stanza: 1/3/9/6/8

Each stanza has almost identical form to the previous one, number of syllables is the same in each stanza: (wade-an, one syllable). When reading through the poem, if willing to read line by line, the poem stops at quite ill-sounding places. Marianne Moore's poems should be read, not once, because the form is a tongue twister, especially when the vocabulary is up to par. Poems should be read with naturalness of speech.[21]

One should read *The Fish*:

> Fish wade through black jade;
>
> Of the crow-blue mussle-shells;
>
> One keeps adjusting the ash-heaps;
>
> Opening and shutting itself like an injured fan

Which sounds like a natural speech pattern, rhythm flows through lines with easiness one cannot discern upon reading the poem at first glance.

In an interview in 1969, while discussing her methods, she said, quite nonchalantly "after the thing is done, I suppose I count the syllables" to know just how close she followed the rhythm and form of the first stanza, but she never thought about it only after she had written a poem. (Phillips, 1982: 62). This confirms, in an oddly contradictory way that Moore's systematic writing was spontaneously deliberate. It could signify that through her extensive research and methodically writing and revising, once she had set upon writing the poem, her trained ear gave her the freedom of placing rhythmically fluent and syllabically similar stanzas without initially thinking about them as such. Another possibility was that she wrote what sounded natural and after she revised everything, she shaped it into a form of her liking. When asked if she hears the number of syllables in a line without counting them, she confirmed it, so the first possibility sounds more Moore's.

[21] Even better if readers listen Marianne Moore's reading while simultaneously following the lines. It provides a far better insight into the rhythm's flow.

3.5. Gentle Humour

"Humour saves a few steps" (The pangolin)

Humour is a difficult thing to achieve, especially within the domain of universally acceptable idea of what can pass as light and evoke amusement. The thing with Marianne Moore is that humour is not often mentioned, as she is seen as a rather serious and methodical writer, which is true to some extent, but it strips her of personality which she had abundance of. "One of Moore's charms as a person was the confidence with which she was genuinely, honestly, naturally herself" (Phillips, 1982:74).

Based on Rebecca Price Parkin (1966) one of the characteristics of Moore's humour is the metaphor. What is fairly mentioned is that her humour is extracted from her observations and in most cases that could be confirmed. R. Price Parkin takes *The Pangolin* as an example, where the pangolin is compared to an artichoke, which is a very well rounded visual comparison of pangolin. The next step further is the comparison of the artichoke, or walking artichoke to Leonardo da Vinci (his replica)

The Pangolin

Another armoured animal – scale
lapping scale with spruce- cone regularity until they
form the uninterrupted central
tail-row! This near artichoke with heads and legs and
grit -equipped gizzard,
the night miniature artist engineer is
Leonardo's - da Vinci's replica – (1936)

Moore's humour, as cleverly noted by R. Price Parkin, teaches as well as it amuses. The absurdity of pangolin's comparison to Leonard da Vinci bears resemblance on some level. As the poem progresses, so does the detailed description of the pangolin. In her quest to educate, even those readers who probably have not seen the said animal, can visually see it through detailed descriptions. (Price Parkin, 1966: 403-406) As it happens with her poetry, the lines end with a serious note or a moral message.

...Beneath the sun and moon,

man slaving
to make his life more sweet, leaves half the flowers
worth having,
needing to choose wisely how to use his strength
…
like a pangolin; capsizing
disheartenment.

It is these fine lines that provide a humoristic view of the world around us. The absurdity of obstacles at every step, but facing each with persistence (Price Parkin, 1966: 403-406). She writes two significant lines:

...Among animals, one has a sense of humour.

Humour saves a few steps, it saves years.

What differentiates humans from animals is the humoristic side, laughing in the face of interference, laughing at banal comparisons and laughing to make a day a bit easier. These are all worth the effort, the effort every animal gives, but only human takes with a smile.

Also, the humour Moore encapsulates is not of ridicule and she does not want to minimize the object of humoristic comparison. This can be highlighted in her poem *The Wood Weasel*.

The Wood Weasel

emerges daintily, the skunk —
don't laugh — in sylvan black and white chipmunk
regalia. The inky thing
adaptively whited with glistening
goat-fur, is wood-warden. In his
ermined well-cuttlefish-inked wool, he is
determination's totem. Out-
lawed? His sweet face and powerful feet go about
in chieftain's coat of Chilcat cloth.

He is his own protection from the moth (*Nevertheless* 1944)

Moore justified not naming skunk in the title of the poem to leave space to reintroduce the animal in the following line, since skunks are ill-famed joke to the Americans. She uses the word *daintily*, which has a tangible sophistication to it, just to elate the subject - skunk. It seems comedic to use this adverb to describe emerging but she exclaims- *don't laugh*- to showcase that this is not place for ridicule. Even the tone of the poem seems playful, as if a watching an animal from a child's perspective. *Inky thing, regalia, wood-warden* all seem dressed up words for an animal that seeks treasures in abandoned waste. This innocence is humorous as it collides with pre-imposed attitudes towards these creatures.

"Deeper potential for commonality in the poem comes not from the opportunity to share in derisive laughter at the skunk's expense, but from Moore's invitation to join the skunk — and the speaker of the poem — in their play. By telling the reader, "don't laugh," Moore has it both ways, invoking and dismissing uncharitable laughter to introduce and contrast with her own more collaborative humour. The poem consists largely of comparisons. By the end of the poem, the skunk has been called or likened to a weasel, a cuttlefish, a goat, a chipmunk and an otter. But the shifting identities of the skunk turn out to be constitutive of its real nature. Its strength comes from its flexibility, which Moore links to its playfulness." (Trousdale, 2012: 167)

To a Prize Bird

You suit me well, for you can make me laugh,

Nor are you blinded by the chaff

That every wind sends spinning from the rick. (*Selected Poems* 1935)

To a Prize Bird addresses mentioned before the playfulness of the poet with her words and with the object in the poem. Laughter is an indicator of closeness and openness, which she mentions is the means for things to be suitable to each other. If read without the title of the poem, readers can translate these words into their own world. Almost seems like a dialogue between the poet and the audience, laughter is connection to both worlds.

Pigeons

….Yes, the thus medievally
two-colored sea-pie-patterned semi-swan-
necked magpie-pigeon, gamecock-legged
with long-clawed toes, and all
extremes—head neck back tail
and feet—coal black, the
rest snow white, has a surpris-
ing modernness and fanciness
and stateliness and…. Yes indeed;
developed by and humbly dedicated to
the Gentlemen of the
Feather Club, this is a dainty breed.

Pigeons is one of Moore's less-known poems but it highlights her humoristic play with words, especially long attributes of objects/subjects she describes. It portrays an endless line of tongue-twisting phrases that follow stark and precise depictions. Her play on words can also be play for the reader, a challenge to visualize and follow. She, again, uses adjectives uncommon to the animal world *humbly dedicated, dainty* which translates as sympathizing with and honouring these fellow animals. *The Gentlemen of the Father Club* is such an effective title for the well-known all-present birds. Her wit in constructing well-rounded and clever phrases for common and uncommon themes, solidifies her as an innovative and smart poet.

On the other hand, Moore's humour does not solely belong to her "lighter" poems, but is also sewn into more complex ones, even though it is usually an introduction. Moore's descriptions

of situations, attitude, attributes, commonalities what carries lightness and provides relatable onset for the words that convey heavier motif as the poems progress. In *My Apish Cousin:*

My Apish Cousin

winked too much and were afraid of snakes.

….

it is not for us to understand the art; finding it

all so difficult, examining the thing

as of it were inconceivably arcanic, as symmet-

rically frigid as if it had been carved out of chrysoprase…. (1917, *Selected Poems*, 1935)

The first line seems familiar and playful, relatable to readers' own experiences. To make ancestors painted in realistic fears and in amusing way, almost as if one can picture the situations where these happened. The last several lines draw upon serious meaningful commentary. It is in these instances that Moore's unrecognized skill of using humour as buffer for seriousness comes to surface. The lightness combined with complexity is one of Marianne Moore's telling artistic strokes. By Trousdale's words: "Humour is a rare means to intimacy in the poet's world, a form of communication at once private and public, accessible only to the eyes of like-minded reader. And in some of Moore's most serious poems, this lighthearted capacity for insight and intimacy is what makes us human." (Trousdale, 2012: 121).

3.6. Human essence

-This is mortality, this is eternity ("What are years?")-

This is one of the most sensible and sensitive directions in her poetry, which is sometimes (more often than not) hard to discern among all references, quotations, picturesque imagery and form, but nonetheless very essential element of her creative work. Humanity and humans paint a very heavy content with blazing messages, but remain fogged (not diluted), unless one reads them with the author's guidance.

What Are Years (1941) even begins with an impactful word – innocence:

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
    naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt—
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
    encourages others
    and in its defeat, stirs

    the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
    accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment, rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be,
    in its surrendering
    finds its continuing.

    So he who strongly feels,
behaves. The very bird,
    grown taller as he sings, steels

his form straight up. Though he is captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

Innocence, followed by guilt. She begins her poems with a strong message which is followed through the end, but is scattered in bits. ”All are naked, none is safe” is a proclamation that none is spared from guilt. To have the courage even in the face of death. Moore makes it almost like a whisper, but also encouragement and remembrance. She questions the inevitability, but also states it in the last two lines: “This is morality, this is eternity”. As a bird in a cage can sing free, so can a human in these expendable years be free. To find joy is what one should strive for, even in the direst circumstances, like a glimmer of hope. This poem summarizeds the human experience in the deepest thought, but makes it comfortable, comfortable in the truth of what it truly means.

She constructs a punchline in the beginning, a question that is hard to answer, but stays like a residue upon the reader’s mind. These philosophical questions were also ever-present in her “lighter” poems. The struggle of human duplicity and human nature, as well as striving for simple, attainable goodness is Moore’s *forte*. Striving for simple and humble (hardworking) aspects is a theme that she usually sifts through her various animal patterns:

To a Snail

If “compression is the first grace of style”

you have it. Contractility is a virtue

As modesty is a virtue…. (1935, *Selected Poems*)

Contractility as a feature of the slow animal, Moor praises as a virtue. Virtue that symbolizes modesty, just as a snail retracts to his shelter, so should the human ego retract and leave space for humility. This short poem, as Moore is an expert in concise wording, proves her ability to “compress” thoughts, ideas and moral inclinations in seemingly “simple” works.

The Jerboa

….a small desert rat,
and not famous, that
lives without water, has
happiness. Abroad seeking food, or at home
in its burrow, the Sahara field-mouse
has a shining silver house

of sand. O rest and
joy, the boundless sand,
the stupendous sand-spout,
no water, no palm-trees, no ivory bed,
tiny cactus; but one would not be he
who has nothing but plenty…. (1935, *Selected Poems)*

As mentioned before *The Jerboa* has a plethora of meaning about the hierarchy, luxury, human abundance in the first parts of the poem (Rome, Pompeyes, Thebe, making colossi, gold-foil wings,…) juxtaposed with the simplicity of the small jerboa- a desert rodent. The perfection of the creature that lives in sand, without anything remotely luscious around it, still enjoys the abundance of delight, more than any riches of the civilizations that rose before it, or after it.

A Grave

Man looking into the sea,
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to yourself,
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,
but you cannot stand in the middle of this;
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave….

„It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing" – sounds enigmatic, but powerful. People's desires to be in the centre, to be seen, heard, to be the central figure.[22] But humans

[22]Anthropocentric view of nature in the presence ruthless, grasping, impersonal beauty of the ocean.(Phillips 1982; 32)

cannot stand in the middle of the sea, the sea does not have a central point, it just consumes. The sea is vast and has „nothing to give but a well excavated grave“. Sea fluctuates in the naturalistic order, it does not have morals, does not grieve or does not have sympathies. It is a harsh truth, but humanly just. The sea is the silencer but also a provider, humans disturb its peace.

the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.
There are others besides you who have worn that look—
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate them
for their bones have not lasted:
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave,
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such thing as death.

„the sea is collector“ sounds threatingly accurate. The sea collects whatever falls, whatever is lost. It also returns a rapacios look, just as a human does. There are also people who wear that look perpetually. Humans are unconscious that they are „desecrating a grave“, almost naively, they are doing whatever they want. Their fragility against the vastness of the sea, like marbles that get lost at the bottom. Moore describes perilousness as well as the greatness of the sea and the significance (insiginificance) of people on it. It is a gentle warning „whose expression is no longer a protest“, like gentle caress on the shoulder; be wary, you are small.

3.7. Scalpeling Poems

Revision is a word that could be best attached to Marianne Moore's poetic opus. During her lifetime, Moore never ceased to revise, correct, omit or change drafts of her works, even published poems. One could say her eager and constant need to better, the technical matter or the subject matter. Revision is a tool that was already necessary for true poets, especially during the modernist era, but her "scrutinizing" went into great detail. Radical and authentic, she always worked diligently for her craft which was only deepened by her role as an editor for *The Dial.*

The most prominent revision is for her poem *Poetry* when she published revised version in *Complete Poems 1967:*

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

The original version from 1924 sounds:

> I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in
> it after all, a place for the genuine.
> Hands that can grasp, eyes
> that can dilate, hair that can rise
> if it must, these things are important not because a
>
> high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
> useful; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible, the
> same thing may be said for all of us—that we
> do not admire what
> we cannot understand. The bat,
> holding on upside down or in quest of something to
>
> eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
> a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the

base—
ball fan, the statistician—case after case
could be cited did
one wish it; nor is it valid
to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,
nor till the autocrats among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present

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

The change over the span of almost 50 years, resulted in a poem that rises contrary opinions. Was this alteration too radical? Moore without a doubt had her experience and intention to radicalize whatever she thought necessary. Even the altered version provides, upon closer inspection, the impact and purpose original offered.

Her other alterations were not as drastic. For example in *Marriage (*1923) published in *Observations (*1924):

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.”

In Selected Poems (1935):

In him a state of mind

Perceives what it was not

Intended that he should

“he experiences a solemn joy

In seeing that he has become an idol.“

Even the smallest details, comma, article, a word, especially poem’s titles… could be changed in the next publication. Lauren Frey analyzed *A Talisman* (first published in 1912): Moore adds *the* in front of the ship so that the revision reads “torn from the ship and cast”, exclusion of the article was not published in any later versions. Addition of article maintains syllabic meter 6/6/3. Also the inclusion of article “a” in the title, ties juxtaposition of things; a splintered mass, a stumbling shepherd, a seagull – the ship, the ground, the sea. (Frey 2021; 181-184)

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

Conclusion

Poetry is a form of expression that Marianne Moore took to another level. Her textual and stylistic form, read with naturalness of speech, revised and edited makes her a known figure that she is today. Influenced by numerous authors, she made her own impact, her style that is remarkably hers and distinctive from any other poet of her time.

Guided by moral compass she fought through injustices by being activist and a voice for the unequal, especially her involvement with suffragettes and the voice for women. Her correspondences with fellow poets provide an insight into the sharpness and wittiness of her responses and critical remarks she wasn't afraid to call upon. Editorship for *The Dial* made her in the league of her own, making the last few years of the magazine Moore's years where she had the opportunity to hone her own skills and translate it into her own poetry, mentorship of Elizabeth Bishop, reviews and translation. Being the editor and critic sharpened her already natural skill of nuanced criticism towards others' works.

Nonetheless her "sharpness" comes with a gentleness she often displayed her gentle humour in poems and through her activism for the weak, oppressed and voiceless, as well as her fascination with the world surrounding her. Meticulous research done by visiting museums, galleries and libraries separates her from the rest of the poets because she thoroughly enjoyed the process.

Being born in the era of modernization, surrounded by new Imagist movement, Marianne Moore escapes traditional framework of "poetry making" and subduing herself to rules, creates fascination and bewilderment in readers as well as critics. Making name for herself even during her lifetime, she remained strenuously herself: remains as one of the greatest modernist influences and examples of endowment, hard work and diligence.

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