

POETIC SYNTHESIS:
A STUDY OF FORM AND SUBJECT
IN THE POETRY OF MARIANNE MOORE

by

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Abstract

One of the popular trends of modern literary criticism has emphasized the unity of form and subject as a first principle of a poem. Marianne Moore provides a thoroughly solid example of this principle in much of her poetry; the moral themes of her poems are reflected in her precise handling of the craftsmanship of the poetic form.

It is the purpose of this essay to review Miss Moore's poetry within the implication of the phrase "poetic synthesis". In order for her poems to work for all levels of critical direction, that is language, metre, rhyme, metaphor, symbol, and philosophic, and in her particular case, moral, theme, the reader must be aware of the singular unity of the poems. In other words, each of the facets of the constructed prism - poem reflects by its construction the light which comes the creative source of the poet; the act of the statement is the essence of the statement. This idea is the controlling method of this particular thesis; the work dealt with includes a range of material from fifty years of Miss Moore's publication of her poetry. For the most part, selections from her Collected Poems provide the basis of discussion. No attempt is made to assess her work chronologically since the selections in the Collected Poems contain works that will have a fixed importance regardless of their time sequence.

The first chapter offers a close reading of poems in terms of the concept

of the poetic synthesis. References are made to the deliberately controlled metric and syllabic system which is found in most of her works as well as to the many types of rhyme that contribute to the structural unity of the poem. Some mention is made of the moral themes which occur in many of the works, often with reference to the "armoured" metaphor of which she is so fond. The second chapter suggests some comparisons between Miss Moore and several of her contemporary writers: William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, to show how, against the Imagist background, each of these poets projects a particular concern in both technique and theme.

No mention has been made of Miss Moore's most recent publication since the thesis had been written and approved before its appearance.

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INTRODUCTION

There are those who will talk for an hour
without telling you why they have
 come. And I? This is no madrigal...
 no medieval gradual.
 It is a grateful tale...
without that radiance which poets
are supposed to have...
 unofficial, unprofessional. Still one need not fail

 to wish poetry well
 where intellect is habitual...
glad that the Muses have a home and swans...
that legend can be factual;
 happy that Art, admired in general,
 is always actually personal.

(A Marianne Moore Reader, p. 73)

Marianne Moore has commented often about the experience of poetry in terms not only of her personal justification to write but also as the creative force of other poets. Her reflections concerning critics and critical literature are available in several of her poems, such as "Critics and Connoisseurs," and in her numerous reviews and articles in The Dial and in more recent journals. The poem, from which this excerpt is taken, written to commemorate a Boston Arts Festival in 1958, is perhaps not one of her better poems although it is not necessarily "unofficial, unprofessional." But it does as Miss Moore bids it - it wishes poetry well in an atmosphere which she knows is conducive to Art and to Learning. The final two lines offer the focal point of the entire poem - lines in which the essence of the poem is made crystal clear - and two lines which may be considered indicative of how the

poetry of Marianne Moore ought to be received by the perceptive reader.

...Art, admired in general
is always actually personal.

One may assume that the poet is referring to both the artist's and the reader's relationship to the particular created work of art. Here she seems to be stressing the individual response to the thing, an attitude which is reinforced by her own art in creative poetry and critical essay. Miss Moore has never been one to limit herself to the rigid taste of a fashionable school or style of critical analysis. The values that she seeks in the work of others are the ones she extols in her own verse: integrity, precision, and self-discipline. She is a moralist of a strong Christian fibre; hence, the reader is struck by her uncompromising insistence on self-discipline as a necessary quality for man if he is to survive meaningfully. She is an artist whose purpose is self-expression and communication, or communion; such a purpose demands integrity so that the need to express what is meaningful to her as a poet does not overwhelm the means of the expression. In short, a disciplined command of the techniques of poetry are as necessary to her as is the compulsion to relate an idea.

She has said that, "One writes because one has a burning desire to objectify what is indispensable to one's happiness to express."¹ In other words, one removes from the intensely subjective grasp of possession an observance, an experience, which will exist more purposefully for the poet when he sets it apart from himself, when he makes it more readily communicable to another. The art of objectifying demands a selection of detail, a restriction of the superfluous, a denial of the wholly emotional self in order to present the experience honestly. Miss Moore's habit is to select an active

experience, such as a visit to a racetrack, or the contemplation of a visual object, an animal or an objet d'art, all of which illustrate a moral or virtue that she considers important. The whole idea behind the creation of a poem and the method used to carry the poem through are essentially paradoxical: Miss Moore feels strongly about the necessity of certain qualities inviolably a part of a moral existence - her belief is intensely personal and is the motivating force of many of her poems. On the other hand, her method is contained in her phrase "a burning desire to objectify" - to remove herself from the subjectivity of the "happiness". Thus, the experiences or descriptions of her poems serve as a means of removing herself as the sole participant and sharing the immediacy and intensity of her experience with the reader. Notably, she places the same amount of emphasis on the importance of the creative impulse "indispensable to one's happiness to express" and the method "a burning desire to objectify".

A further paradox concerns the technical aspects of her method: that is, the objectification of a natural phenomenon; the description - accurately and minutely detailed - of a piece of tapestry, an animal, a seaside town, a horse race; the impression, primarily auditory, that the movement of the poem is more attuned to the language of the essay. There is a freedom of technique that is restricted only by the poet's need to shape her images by precise details, but there is a realization that line lengths are tightly controlled by numbers of syllables and that there is a skilful pattern of rhyme: assonance and half-rhyme somewhat in the tradition of Emily Dickinson, alliteration and vivid metaphor reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins. What

the reader finds in her poetry, then, is a style which is characterized by a controlled freedom of expression and a thematic pattern of symbolic incidents and objects which cloak a deep concern for the moral nature of man. What Marianne Moore is able to do, and why she is worthy of general and private admiration, is to integrate the thematic and stylistic fibres of the artistic process so precisely and so lucidly that her poems become statements about values that are exemplified in the nature of the poems themselves.

A new poet has commented once again that a poem is its own metaphor.² What a succinct way to describe the real merit of Marianne Moore. As the words composing a metaphor are the outward sign of its inner meaning, so the structural form on the page and the pattern of the words are the visible source of the intellectual and emotional understanding of the whole poem. Her compact relationship of idea and form is the source of her economy which leads the reader not to guess at what she might have said but to consider the aptness and responsibility of what she did say. The bulk of her poetry seems to follow her policy of restraint - of limitation in the poem to one object of exploration which calls upon the individual's resources of sensual as well as intellectual appreciation.

The poetry for which she is popularly known is that which deals with animals and rare objects - artifacts, in a sense. The titles indicate the metaphors of the poems: "The Jerboa", "Nine Nectarines", "The Fish", "A Grave", "Snakes, Mongooses", "The Pangolin", "A Carriage from Sweden". A second categorizing would separate those poems whose titles suggest more explicitly the moral theme that is to be explored: "In This Age of Hard Trying", "Poetry", "Critics and Connoisseurs", "In the Days of Prismatic Colour", "People's Surroundings", "Injudicious Gardening", "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing" and so forth. This second division of her poetry is,

however, greatly limited in that quite often the title is part of the first line of the poem so that the central symbolic image of the poem is revealed in the opening statement of the poem. Thus, the poem "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing" says in its first line "is an enchanted thing/like the glaze on a/katydid-wing"; despite the implication of the title, the objectifying device is employed in the complete statement so that one fastens upon the simile of the insect as well as upon the more personal suggestion of the enchanting power of the mind. Occasionally there is little attempt to gain this objective distance between the poet and the experience, as in "Poetry", "Critics and Connoisseurs", "Keeping Their World Large" as well as several of her more recent works which will be discussed later.

The poem which best identifies the philosophy of her poetry is "Poetry",³ a favorite of anthologists as a definitive statement of Miss Moore's kind of poetry. In this poem, she stresses the need for the genuine, including the phenomena that we can -"business documents and schoolbooks" and cannot "a wild horse taking a roll" understand. She cautions, however, against the half-poet who drags such phenomena into prominence; a poet must be responsible, she replies "above insolence and triviality"; he must be a "literalist(s) of the imagination" and thus able to present to the reader "imaginary gardens with real toads in them". The poem itself meets the requirements of Miss Moore's poetic ethic; the poem is a metaphor, an imaginary garden of ironic references to creatures whose behavior is inexplicable and to readers who are mildly contemptuous of the value of poetry. The meaning, the moral source of the poem, offers a credo for the poet: the world of outward appearances as described in the poem must be justified by the purpose of

the poem, which in this case is to defend poetry, as a genuine part of man's experience.

In the poem Miss Moore has borrowed a phrase from W.B. Yeats who commented that William Blake was a "too literal realist of the imagination",⁴ an idea that she has condensed to "realist of the imagination". It is an interesting point to note that one of Yeats' poetic statements about art, "Lapis Lazuli" shares several features with "Poetry": the mood of ironic contemplation, references to the mocking reader in the opening lines, as in Yeats,

I have heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow⁵

which in Miss Moore becomes

I, too, dislike it; there are things that
are important beyond
all this fiddle.

The values of the intelligent response of the reader and the immortality of the created art are stressed by Yeats and are not out of place in Miss Moore's thinking, although one is impressed more by her poem as a defense of an art form in a modern world that is in search of the genuine.

It is important to note here as a means of introducing the poetic sensibility and responsibility of Marianne Moore that she has been concerned with other tasks than the writing of poetry. Her years as the editor of The Dial were productive ones for that publication. Her most recent ambitious effort, other than to try to choose a name for the Ford product that later became the ill-fated Edsel, has been a translation, variously received, of La Fontaine's fables; in 1962 she published a dramatic comedy The Absentee adapted from the novel by Maria Edgeworth. Various publications, recently

the slick magazines, feature articles by her or about her; a recent (December, 1965) issue of McCall's featured "An Interview with Marianne Moore", and Harper's flaunted on its cover "Ten Answers: Marianne Moore". All this is by way of suggesting that Marianne Moore takes an interest in participating not only in the current affairs of literature but also in topics not related or limited to the animal world which had become the trademark of her poetry. We have in her a poet who writes authoritatively about what she thinks is important in a world that she observes both through her extensive reading and her association with many people.

This is not to suggest, however, that Miss Moore is a social critic in the narrow understanding of the phrase since her observations involve things and ideas that may suggest an aspect of universal man, Adam as he should be, rather than man as a member of a particular society. In his profile of Miss Moore in The New Yorker, Winthrop Sergeant in speaking of her verse described it as,

"devoid of anything approaching passionate warmth toward her fellow man; indeed her fellow man very seldom appears in it at all."⁶

By such a remark, Mr. Sergeant reveals a shallow understanding of the underlying metaphor of a great number of her poems in which the object or creature being discussed serves as the illustration of the moral virtue which the poet feels is important to man. Occasionally her concern overrides her customary method of objectification as in "What Are Years?" and "In Distrust of Merits" in which her plea for humanity becomes impassioned. Generally, the "real toads" are unconcerned with sentiment; even the imaginary garden is not a chaotic wilderness but a formal arrangement of hedges and geometric beds of

bright flowers! Wallace Fowlie in the issue of The Quarterly Review of Literature devoted to Marianne Moore referred to her objective description as characterized by her candor and her emotion marked by her reticence.

One might suggest that it is not reticence that accounts for the customary lack of overt passion in her consideration of a topic, but rather her undisguised disinterest in it. She sees her subject, and endeavours to have her reader achieve the same freedom, with unprejudiced eyes and with a mind armed with honest fact. Miss Moore herself notes that the art of writing requires that "one must have clarity, and clarity depends on precision."⁸ Precision in this case refers not only to explicitness of thinking, but to exactness of metaphor and neatness in handling language.

One of her finest poems "The Pangolin" (p. 118) in terms of a harmonic and precise synthesis of all aspects of the poem - mood, thought, and technique - describes the pangolin objectively and vividly, making use of unexpected but highly suitable comparisons.

Compact like the furled
fringed frill
on the hat-brim of Gargallo's hollow iron head
of a
matador, he will drop and will
then walk away
unhurt,

In the seventh stanza she makes man, for whom the pangolin is a symbol, an apparent figure in the poem, and in the eighth, she speaks directly of him bearing in mind particular comparable aspects of both parts of her metaphor.

Bedizened or stark
naked, man, the self, the being we call human, writing-
master to this world, griffons a dark
'Like does not like like that is obnoxious'; and writes
error with four
r's. Among animals, one has a sense of humour.
Humour saves a few steps, it saves years. Un-
ignorant

modest and unemotional, and all emotion,
he has everlasting vigour,
power to grow,
though there are few creatures who can make one
breathe faster and make one erecter.

There are no powerful appeals for an emotional appraisal of either man or pangolin. The first three lines of this passage list man as he appears to man; "writing-master to this world" is a little ironic as are the next several lines which mock his love of intricate juxtapositions of words and his inability to spell a simple word. In the sixth line "one" may refer to either man or pangolin since the following description is applicable to both, although her reference to humour clearly indicates that it is of man particularly that she speaks. Devoid of passion her description may be, but its function is to stimulate an appraisal of man's potential as it appears to her as "everlasting vigour/power to grow".

What has been indicated so far in this introduction to this thesis is that those qualities which are to be examined most closely here are those which set the poet apart from her contemporaries and which make her work highly individualistic. What we admire immediately in reading her work is the use that she makes of language and the ease with which she etches an object for us to see. What we do not see as immediately perhaps, although we may feel it instinctively, is the precision of detailed attention to technical intricacies which underly the often prosaic sentence structure of the stanzas. Furthermore, we are not always aware of the wholeness of the individual poem in which every part succeeds because of its relationship to some other part. Language, thought, rhythm, rhyme and all their modifications merge into a unity - a poetic synthesis that, an armour in itself, defies destruction.

It is the purpose of this thesis, then, to discuss in detail the parts of this poetic synthesis, and to consider as well her poetry in relation to several of her earlier contemporaries. Finally, it is useful to consider Miss Moore's position as a poet over the span of half a century of writing from her entrance in the wake of H.D. and the Imagists to her present stand in the ebb of academic and beat currents. Fifty years ago, her approach to poetry, her manipulation of its substance, set her apart and ahead as one of the new voices in American verse. Fifty years later we are in a position to assess the bulk of her poetry almost in terms of its resistance to later influences and trends. Miss Moore's capacity for incorporating erudition, nice selectivity, moral concern, and good taste will always set her apart as a poet to be acknowledged with admiration in American letters.

FOOTNOTES

¹Marianne Moore, "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," A Marianne Moore Reader (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), p. 169.

²David Bromige, "Some Notes Towards a Poetic" (mimeographed notes distributed at a public poetry reading at U.B.C., 1964, page 1.)

³All reference to the poetry of Marianne Moore will be indicated in the body of the thesis by the page number of the title of the poem contained in Collected Poems published in 1959 by the Macmillan Company of New York. If another volume of her work has been used, full bibliographical information will be indicated in the first reference to the particular work. In this case, "Poetry" appears on page 40 of Collected Poems.

⁴Notes to "Poetry", ibid., p. 157.

⁵W. B. Yeats, "Lapid Lazuli," A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, Oscar Williams, editor (New York: Scribners, 1952), p. 74.

⁶Winthrop Sergeant, "Humility, Concentration, and Gusto," The New Yorker, XXXII, (February 16, 1957), p. 40.

⁷Wallace Fowlie, "Under the Equanimity of Language," Q. R. L., IV, 2, p. 175.

⁸Marianne Moore, "Idiosyncrasy and Technique," A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 171.

CHAPTER ONE

Of prime importance in this discussion of Marianne Moore is the poetic synthesis of theme and technique that create the metaphor of the poem. As has been suggested earlier, the poem "Poetry" demands "imaginary gardens with real toads in them"; that is, a poem which is the property of Art but whose essence is Reality. Hence, the reader knows that he is to be confronted with a poem rooted in both reality and imagination; the themes are moral observations that Miss Moore considers part of one's acknowledgement of the reality permeating man's existence; her handling of these observations, however, is done with her personal resources of the imagination so that the garden becomes the lyrical aspect of the metaphor. The synthesis of both parts of the metaphor, art and reality, is the key to the excellence of her poetry; all too often the ardent critic becomes involved either with the real facts on which the poem is based, or else on the intricacies of the form both in terms of the symbols and the technical devices used.

For example, in her discussion of "The Icosasphere", Marie Borroff suggests that the solving of the poem

lies not in the meaning of the separate statements that constitute the poem, but in the interconnecting of these statements, and particularly their connection in sequence, the "logical" progression from one statement to another.⁹

One should not emphasize the poem as a sort of intellectual poetic brain-teaser although there is a formidable amount of care in the construction of

her verse, with a particular regard for the reader's eye and ear. On the other hand, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation we are told that:

Since neither visual nor audible effect is dominant in syllabic verse, appreciation of its versatility is almost retrospective. We return to evaluate by a mathematical yardstick that shows in its analysis the genius which has produced the poem.¹⁰

Lloyd Frankenburg, writing in the Saturday Review of Literature suggests that:

Marianne Moore is able to impart its (poetry's) rhythms - any rhythm she wishes - and by means of her strict syllabic patterns subject them to a tension that unmistakably differentiates them¹¹ from prose. Her poems are an expansion of the limits of poetry.

Such comments indicate some idea of the poetic technique involved in Miss Moore's poetry, although neither critic emphasizes the naturalness of the lines so that the reader is impressed by the logical flow of thought and the appropriate flow of sound despite the solid foundation of rhyming end words and measured syllabic lines. Moreover if one becomes engrossed with the technical aspect of her poetry alone, he is misled into considering the development of the thought of the poem as manipulated by the rigid considerations of measured line and rhyming word.

In order to establish the first principle of Marianne Moore's verse, that the essence of it lies in the synthesis of thought and form, it is necessary to examine closely several of her poems, to judge the observation and thought of the poet in terms not only of the moral statement as her basic need to express but also of the mathematical yardstick as a necessarily retrospective means of appreciating her poetic versatility. Such a "mathematical yardstick" would have to include the precise syllabic line count employed so often, the many varieties of rhyme - broken, light, near, as well as assonance and alliteration, - the "grace metaphors",¹² and the generally superb use of language that is marked by her ability to express herself clearly without the loss of either immediacy or vividness. The paradox involved, and

Miss Moore is unabashedly fond of the paradox, is the apparent burden of form - syllable count and rhyme particularly - and the impression of free, almost prosaic development of thought. In a more recent article than the one previously quoted, Mr. Frankenburg speaks of the conflict between structure and content in Miss Moore's poetry, noting that the conflict epitomizes a favorite theme of the poet, that necessity and freedom are inextricably linked.¹³ Miss Moore firmly advocates Christian principles; presumably the phrase "in Whose Service is perfect freedom" is meaningful for her in daily endeavors which are carried out, as has been previously suggested, with the same emphasis on the virtues that her poems recommend. In "The Icosasphere" (page 142) the physical, that is technical, characteristics of the poem may be set down as follows: each of the three stanzas has approximately the same number of syllables, the first and second having seventy syllables each, the third having seventy-eight. In each of the stanzas there are two fixed lines with the same number of syllables in each, the first line having seven syllables, the fifth line having nine syllables in each case.

line 1 In Buckinghamshire hedgerows
the birds nesting in the merged green density
weave little bits of string and moths and feathers and
thistledown,

line 5 in parabolic concentric curves

line 1 avid for someone's fortune

* * *

line 5 But then there is the icosasphere

line 1 ball or double-rounded shell

* * *

line 5 or Mr. J. O. Jackson tell us

Comparing the syllable count in the other lines of the three stanzas, we

find a deliberate attempt to produce a consistent pattern of line lengths from stanza to stanza. For example, line two of stanza one has eleven syllables as does line two of the second stanza; stanza three has twelve syllables in line two. In one of two cases where the difference in line length is as much as four syllables, the emphasis on the stressed syllables renders the sound of the line length more equal. For example, in the first stanza the seventh line is made up of the single word "efficiency"; in stanza two, line seven, the single word is "economy"; and in stanza three, line seven, the phrase is "solid granite vertically." Following the natural rhythm and inflexion that the sense of the lines suggests, it is probable that the speaker would emphasize, or at least make precise, each syllable of a word such as "efficiency". However one would not necessarily make prominent the last three syllables of "vertically". It must be acknowledged, of course, that such an argument is specious when one admits that the readings of a poem vary in direct relation with the number of readers. It is more reasonable to emphasize that Miss Moore's goal is clarity of meaning and naturalness of effect and that neither of these is sacrificed to rigid technical conventions.

To illustrate the technique of syllabic measurement as one of the means by which she achieves a unity of structure and of word sense we might note a poem among her later works "Voracities and Verities/Sometimes are Interacting". In this poem, the title is an integral part of the whole unit; there are eight syllables in the first line (of the title) and seven syllables in the second line. What is the first stanza, although it is the second unit of thought, is made up of five lines, of six, ten, nine, five and nine syllables respectively. The second stanza, again made up of five lines, has six, ten, ten, six and eight syllables per line in that order. The final two

lines of the poem, echoing the two lines of the title, have eight and seven syllables respectively. The total effect of such deliberate planning is that we marvel not so much at the mathematical yardstick by which the lines are measured but rather at the arrangement of ideas, the unusual but appropriate comparisons that illustrate her thoughts. Note the progression of the first stanza:

I don't like diamonds;
the emerald's 'grass-lamp glow' is better;
and unobtrusiveness is dazzling,
upon occasion.
Some kinds of gratitude are trying.

The first two lines state a dislike and a preference; the second two lines develop the idea of the first two lines further so that the poet's dislike of the showy paradoxically can be found in that which deliberately decries ostentation. The fifth line gives another example of this paradox, that gratitude which one expects to be gratifying can often be a burden. The metaphor of the first two lines is successfully illustrated in the last three lines. Undoubtedly, the number of syllables in a line control to some extent the melody and content of the line, but it is a credit to Miss Moore's poetic skill that this measuring device attracts and perhaps deserves no more attention than the fact that it does exist.

The rhyming of her poetry constitutes an interesting study because of the many uses of light rhyme and assonance. Sister Carey has produced an informative study of every aspect of the poet's use of rhyme including an interesting discussion of the relationship of rhyme and the meanings of words. Occasionally one feels, however, that Sister Carey is too eager to assign a reasonable justification to every rhyme that appears.

When Miss Moore rhymes "lost-ghost", "least-waist" in "Logic and the Magic Flute" (Like a Bulwark, p. 21) she is attempting to reproduce the elusive quality of atmosphere, and the never wholly comprehensible experience of love and truth in the almost, but never quite perfect expression of word relationships,"¹⁴

contradicts Miss Moore's belief in the ability of the poet's ear to catch the appropriate phrase because it is pleasing to the ear and not necessarily because it is a functional device to be exploited. It is true that Miss Moore is a perfectionist, willing to adjust a line or stanza from edition to edition of her verse, willing to accept useful criticism, and unwilling to sacrifice precision and taste. But there are many examples of light rhyme in many of her poems without their purpose necessarily being the creation of an elusive atmosphere.

"Voracities and Verities/Sometimes are Interacting", for instance, makes use of two rhyming sounds - "ing" and "on". Hence the words "interacting" "Dazzling" "trying" "reading" and "undying", and "occasion" "one" and "obligation" provide the rhyming unity of the poem and help to unify the poem as a whole. As Sister Carey notes:

Frequently Marianne Moore achieves greater unity by line rhyming through all the stanzas of a poem rather than within a single stanza."¹⁵

It is possible to find almost every type of rhyming device used by Miss Moore. She employs light rhyme as in the final two lines of the second stanza of "Voracities and Verities...": "one - obligation". In "The Icosphere" we find examples of internal rhyme - of a sort, since the rhyming words occur in the middle of one line ("concavity" in line 6) and in the one word of the following line ("efficiency" in line 7). Near rhyme is used in such combinations of words as "thistledown - integration". Babette Deutsch speaks of Marianne Moore's "delight in broken rhyme".¹⁶ However, it is a device used relatively infrequently and one may question the purpose of the

broken word as used for the purpose of rhyme or for the syllable count of the particular line. Certainly it is a device that appears rarely in her later poems. One might note as well that the words that are broken are very often those already split by a hyphen. "The Jerboa" provides several examples of broken rhyme of this fashion: "dog-cats", "duck-heads", "flower-beds", and "silk-worm".

Another of her technical accomplishments is found in her handling of assonance and alliteration. Consider an early poem "No Swan So Fine" (page 25). Alliterative phrases such as "so still" "chintz china" and "lodged in the Louis Fifteenth/candelabrum-tree of cockscomb -/tinted..." contribute to the unity of sound of the poem. Equally effective is the repetition of the long vowel sound "o" in the first stanza, achieved in such phrases as "No water so" "no swan...so fine", and the variations on the sound "o" in the sequence "...one with fawn-/brown eyes and toothed gold/collar on to show whose bird it was."

Miss Moore says that "concealed rhyme and the interiorized climax usually please me better than the open rhyme and the insisted-on climax..."¹⁷ Lloyd Frankenburg repeats this idea in a comment in his article for the Marianne Moore issue of Q.R.L. in which he says, "The climaxes are inside the poems; not so much built up to as built around; inlaid; and come to us often as afterimages."¹⁸ It is presumptuous to state specifically that concealed rhyme and assonance are overt contributing factors to the interiorized climax since climax is an outcome of the development of thought while rhyme is considered part of technical skill. But the very fact that she refers to them in the same comment is an indication that she views thought and manner as being facets of the one prism. It is part of her style to rely on the subtle

device, the rhyme that is not forced, the rhythm that depends more on the phrasing of images and ideas rather than on traditional patterns of regular stressed and unstressed beats. In this way she seems to be trying to achieve the same kind of freedom that Hopkins sought with his "sprung rhythm", although she is much more successful. In the same way the climax of her ideas is not forced to a particular position in the poem if it is forced at all; one observes and reflects along with the poet, image mirrors idea, and the reader is free to contemplate on both in the same instant. One cannot say that she sacrifices poetic quality (that is, in the sense of technique) for the argument of her poem, since there is every deliberate effort to express what she wants to say as rhythmically, as concisely, and as spontaneously as possible. On the other hand, Miss Moore, perhaps more than any other poet of her generation has not been committed to the notion that the flow of ideas of the poem must be controlled by the technical, and traditional, ties of poetry.

Some of her own comments prove most useful here in her justification of what, to her, is a good poem. In "In Distrust of Merits", one of her most popularly received poems, she has dismissed as not really a poem because of its haphazardness.

...as form, what has it? It is just a protest - disjointed,
exclamatory. Emotion overpowered me. First this thought and
then that.¹⁹

She never indulged willingly in an emotional outburst; hers is the measured consideration of a thing, but as the impetus of that consideration, an ear for the music of reflective speech and the ability to recognize the immediacy of the imaginative impulse. In this connection, Robert Duncan provides several reflective comments about the method of Marianne Moore.

The rigorously counted syllables, the certainty of end rimes, the conformation of stanzas arise along lines, not of a self-imposed necessity but of a psychic need.

Stanza must conform to stanza in the work of Marianne Moore wherever the charge of emotion is carried, because awareness at all²⁰ depends upon a character structure that proves itself in awareness.

Although Mr. Duncan exaggerates an uncompromising submission on Miss Moore's part to a sort of Freudian complex about rigid Puritan rules as revealed in her conformity to traditional technical rules of writing poetry, he nevertheless speaks about structure and awareness in a means-to-an-end relationship. Controlled lines suggest controlled emotion; a reasonable appraisal can be made only upon the basis of an unprejudiced observation; awareness of an inherent emotional attitude toward a situation can only come about by a measured and honest assessment of the structure of the situation. Thus her style is a very real part of her attitude toward her subject. An extensive analysis of an early poem such as "The Jerboa" (page 16) reveals an absolute identification between form and matter brought about by the whole tumult of her language when she describes the excesses of Roman and Egyptian civilizations at the height of their decadence; language becomes more precise, her point of view narrows but retains its perceptiveness when she describes the jerboa whom she sees as characterized by abundance despite, or rather because of, its simplicity.

A remark in the same paragraph by Mr. Duncan is noteworthy: "It is not subtlety of movement and interrelation but the challenge of obstacles and particulars that informs her dance."²¹ Presumably he means that the topics which interest her are those which deal with creatures or events or ideas that present a challenge to one's reason; that is, the reality of her imaginary garden is expressed in the symbol of the toad which is popularly

considered to be an ugly creature who must be studied objectively, without prejudice, to be appreciated. The children's fairy tale in which the beautiful princess meets an obstacle or challenge uses such a creature as the symbol of the harshness of reality. In other words, it is the necessity of facing reality, the paramount obstacle of man, which typifies the spirit of her poetry. This is not to suggest, however, that her "dance" is not marked by a technical subtlety of movement and an interrelation of the workings of diction, rhyme, rhythm, and so forth which are precisely the elements which make her dance the highly unified pattern of movement of thought and form that it is. In the current school of modern poetry which Robert Duncan represents, Miss Moore's use of end rhyme no matter how subtle is still not subtle enough. But most important, these traits do not intrude on the unity of the poem; they are contributing factors to the success of the purpose of the poet.

It never occurred to me that what I wrote was something to define. I am governed by the pull of the sentence as the pull of a fabric is governed by gravity. I like the end-stopped line and dislike the reversed order of words; like symmetry.

...I never plan a stanza. Words cluster like chromosomes determining the procedure. I may influence an arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first. Spontaneous initial originality - say, impetus - seems difficult to reproduce consciously later.²²

Although Miss Moore never discusses her definition of "spontaneous initial originality" in specific terms, it may be suggested that its source lies in her ability to hear the felicitous phrase which to her combines both music in the arrangement of the words and perception in the image that the words convey. Her many acknowledgements to books read or lectures heard in the notes to her poems, and in the multiplicity of quotations in the poems themselves testify to her enthusiasm for a variety of subjects which provide a

source for her imaginative ear. It is impossible to state unequivocally the components of the poetic imagination which are essentially involved in the act of creation. However Miss Moore emphasizes the need to absorb details of language, written and spoken, as one way in which to feed the creative impulse.

The accuracy of the vernacular! That's the kind of thing I am interested in, am always taking down little local expressions and accents. I think I should be in some philological operation or enterprise, am really much interested in dialect and intonations. I scarcely think of any that comes into my so-called poems at all.²³

"The Icosasphere" provides a profitable source of illustrations of her ability to hear the right phrase. The first five lines of the poem are a quotation.

In Buckinghamshire hedgerows
the birds nesting in the merged green density
weave little bits of string and moths and feathers and
thistledown,
in parabolic concentric curves.

One can understand why the sentence appealed to her. "Merged green density" is an impressionistic but precise description of the appearance of the hedgerows; the varied quantity of scavengered building materials for the birds' nests is suggested by the repetition of the word "and" as she lists them:

...little bits of string and moths and feathers and
thistledown.

"In parabolic concentric curves" is as precise as a line diagram. The second stanza makes use of the clipped objective language of the newspaper article as she contrasts man's inclination to deny his ability to work honestly and purposefully and instead to commit evil so that he might find easy luxury:

avid for someone's fortune,
three were slain and ten committed perjury,
six died, two killed themselves, and two paid fines for
risks they'd run.

But her poems are not a pastiche of what pleases her despite her statement

that "I scarcely think of any that comes into my so-called poems at all." Although one's first impression of a poem may be of a bewildering juxtaposition of ideas and descriptions of objects punctuated by innumerable quotation marks, a careful assessment of their intellectual relationship along with their metaphoric continuity, that is in terms of their imagery and rhythm, will make obvious Miss Moore's controlling skill.

In "The Icosasphere" as in many other poems, the observation of the poem leads Miss Moore to a reflection that is illuminated by a moral truth. In many of her poems the object described is an animal, very often an exotic one; several of her poems discuss countries, others are built around an objet d'art that has caught her fancy: a Flemish tapestry, a crystal clock. Some of her later poems celebrate special situations and people: Yul Brynner, the rescue of Carnegie Hall, a baseball game with the Brooklyn Dodgers. But in her investigation of such varied topics there is a common method of objective appraisal and a re-echoing of virtues that she sees exemplified in the diversity of subjects that she finds important for man to be reminded of. What is of concern here is how she develops a single poem by describing, or at least drawing our attention to, apparently antithetical objects, yet by her choice of words, her method of handling them and the mood she invokes producing a unified and artistic poem.

"The Icosasphere" appears to be made up of such diverse elements as birds' nests, man's crimes, an economical way to cut steel, and a query about ancient Egyptian engineering practices. The key to the poetic synthesis of the poem, apart from the use of rhythm and rhyme to unify the poem technically, is her judicious use of several words which serve to link the objective images and to suggest the moral that she has perceived in her consideration of these images.

For example, "integration" in line eight of the first stanza aptly suggests the fruitful economy of the birds who make use of feathers, moths, string, and thistledown to build perfect, symmetrical nests. The word also anticipates the conjoined triangles on the surface of the sphere as a design for efficient steel-cutting. "Integration" also ironically suggests the unanimous desire for easy wealth displayed by the men who committed assorted crimes in hopes of gaining it, as described in a newspaper.

The word "avid", implying in this case greed, appropriately characterizes the criminals already mentioned; in contrast we have the phrase "working for concavity" which suggests the birds' ability to consider their needs and how to adapt their environment to those needs. The thematic implication suggested by the poem as a whole is that man has corrupted himself in an evil of sloth and duplicity far removed from the innocence of an Eden where birds, beasts, and man worked together in harmony - and in honesty. One can forgive Miss Moore's naive implication (urging twentieth century man to consider the ways of the birds is not a popular suggestion when man sees himself, as a general rule, as not only superior to and a little embarrassed by such morals, but rather insensible to them as well, since he is a victim of his condition not the creator of it, and hence unable to improve it or himself) because she is obdurate in her expectation of mankind, and is consistently so in all of her poems. As a moralist she finds evidences of virtues in what she experiences in her observations; as a poet she is concerned with communicating what she experiences, as honestly as her craft will allow.

The word "economy" in stanza two recollects the habits of the birds and emphasizes the efficient new means of cutting steel. The thought is

repeated in the words "neat" and "no waste". "One ball" or "double-rounded shell" echoes the "concavity", "the spherical feats of rare ingenuity" thus linking by images the objects of Miss Moore's observation and reflection - the nest and the icosasphere.

Considering the poem in terms of the methods by which it is unified then, we see that the poet develops the logic of her thought from a consideration of a natural process (the birds' nesting habits), to a consideration of, to her, an unnatural process (man's evil), to a description of an object whose shape is reminiscent of birds' nests and whose design makes use of both natural economy and the superior use of his intellect of which man is capable, to an ironic conclusion in which the poet asks modern man to remember that ancient races accomplished engineering feats in spite of the fact that we consider ancient methods inferior to our twentieth century scientific skills. The moral of the poem, not stated explicitly, is that man who is naturally capable of wisdom and honesty should not permit himself to be lured by easy success. This type of moralistic tone is frequent in Miss Moore's poetry. As Bernard Engel notes in the first chapter of his book on her work,

The values she would advocate...include courage, independence, responsibility, genuineness, and a certain ardor in the conduct of one's life. Presentation of this ethic is built into her work.²⁴

"The Icosasphere", then, may be seen as a unit, single of purpose and of method; that is to suggest, by means of related observations, that man's natural ability must not be sacrificed or dismissed. As Marie Borroff notes:

The successive objects of his (sic) meditation appear to us in all their concrete individuality, and become related to each other in terms of their physical characteristics as well as their conceptual values.²⁵

Considering "Voracities and Verities..." in these terms, that is that the poet obtains a synthesis of thought and method, we see that her procedure

is somewhat the same, except that her title states the theme so that the reader may assume the rest of the poem to go on to prove the statement, paradoxical, of the title.

Miss Moore begins by suggesting that passion and truth, considered incompatible since the former is subjective and the latter must be objective, can exist alongside each other. She illustrates several examples of voraciousness: diamonds whose reputation and dazzle demand one's attention; the unobtrusive act which by its deliberate effacement becomes prominent; displays of gratitude which should imply a humility but instead become ostentatious - all of these suggestions are examples of an overwhelming appetite for self display. The second stanza deals again with voraciousness, beginning with an appeal to poets whose passion often leads them to overstate, and to assume that poetry is the only means of creative expression. Miss Moore humorously reminds us that an elephant can assert his needs and that a factual book about tigers can be interesting. The concluding stanza illustrates the theme stated in the title. In his brief analysis of the poem Mr. Engel focuses on the part of the last two lines which states "One may be pardoned...for love undying" and remarks that,

The lover is necessarily going to violate the tenets of restraint. But he may be forgiven, for in his aggression he will come to a more profound comprehension, to a greater verity than restraint could provide.²⁶

His conclusion is justifiable since such a paradox is particularly within Miss Moore's thinking. One should not, however, overlook the parenthetical clause which interrupts the statement, "...yes I know one may..." since it is this assertion that is as much part of the paradox of the poem as the rest of the lines. The clause is characterized by a stubbornness of tone in a belief that cannot be explained logically, and for her it is an essential

truth. Consequently, she is taking part in the paradox which is the theme of her poem by affirming her faith in the power of undying love and in the faith that one will be forgiven for such an excessive belief. The poem is an example of her belief in the articles of Christianity and its theme is strengthened by the unity of mood and purpose.

In considering the total poetic synthesis of the poem, it is necessary to look as well to the technical aspects of the poem. The use of the title as the first two lines of the poem has already been mentioned. The lines, measured by syllables, are almost exactly symmetrical; the rhyming sounds of "on" and "ing" are supplemented by use of assonance and alliteration. The images that she brings to our notice are diamonds, emeralds, elephants and tigers who if they have anything in common do at least remind us of Indian jungles and mountains. Speculative analysis of a poem in which a critic presumes a poet's inferences far beyond the circumference of the poem is dangerous and rarely helpful. In this case it is tempting to suggest that Miss Moore's images which might suggest the avarice of jewel and wild game hunters instead are ironical because their environment is India whose people might well epitomize the paradox of the poem. Indian philosophy, wise and ancient, demands insatiable sacrifices of the individual bodily needs to attain knowledge of the eternal truths. This kind of speculation, however, is not reinforced by the poem and is futile. Better to say that Miss Moore used two links of imagery - jewels and interesting animals, and that the unity of the poem is not as tightly enforced as was the case in "The Icosasphere". Mr. Engel remarks that the leaps of the imagination required of the reader are sufficiently directed by the course of the poem and, in fact, the quickness and brevity are suitable to the intricacy of the content. It is not easy to accept Mr. Engel's reasoning: intricacy does not necessarily, if at all,

imply quickness and brevity. It is easier to confess that the poet's concern for economy of language has here outdistanced her care for lucid poetic communication. Although she has followed most of her rules, she has not made her care for the presentation of an image and the consideration of it a responsibility of the poem; consequently the pattern that we have come to associate with her method does not appear. In her effort to be a poet who is not going to make a fuss she leans too far in the other direction and merely leaves her reader unsure of where the poem is leading him and of precisely what the poet is emphasizing. Although the form of the poem creates a logical pattern - the opening and closing pairs of lines are generalized statements supported by the particular references contained between them, - the logic of her thought is not as obvious.

Thus far attention has been directed to the aspects of poetic technique that serve to provide unity to the individual poem. Particular reference has been made to imagery and rhyme as the most obvious and most successful means by which to achieve that unity. Although "Poetry" may be considered a fully adequate statement of Miss Moore's poetic philosophy, she occasionally comments in her other poems about certain aspects of the language that especially appeal to her. Her attempt is always to be natural in her tone; this can be achieved not only by the unobtrusive but rhythmic syllabic line, but also by purposeful yet not didactic language. With particular reference to diction Miss Moore remarked favorably in "England" on the country (America) where letters are written "in plain American which dogs and cats can read!" (page 53). One must admit, however, that the general effect of her language is of an erudite vocabulary where the appropriate word has been selected carefully regardless of its origin in language traditionally poetic, scientific,

or economic. Wordsworth too professed to use "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society", yet the language of his poetry is successful because it is unrestricted by class differences, not because it is colloquial. By the same token, Miss Moore's choice of words depends entirely on the idea that she wishes to convey. The following lines, for instance, would hardly be considered to be "in plain American" or in poetic language, yet they are effective.

A mirror-of-steel un insistence should countenance
continence,

objectified and not by chance,
there in its frame of circumstance
of innocence and altitude
in an unhackneyed solitude.

There is the tarnish; and there, the imperishable wish
(Armour's Undermining Modesty, p.149)

Referring again to her own words, we read in "Picking and Choosing" (p. 51) that Miss Moore believes

...Words are constructive
when they are true; the opaque allusion - the simulated
flight
upward - accomplishes nothing.

It is tempting to use this statement as a standard of her use of words in poetry when in fact she is discussing the attributes of good literary criticism. One can say that she never uses purposely an opaque allusion in her poetry; her standard device is to provide an analogy which contains in her observance of it a moral that she considers important. Morals form what are to her important truths; since she may be considered a moralist, and in that sense a didactic poet, the words she uses are constructive. For example, in her poem "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron'" (p. 102) she describes the ostrich, referring to historical data as well as to scientific characteristics. Her

description leads into her observation that "The power of the visible/is the invisible", and although the poem does not end there, nor is the comment so significant that what she has said before loses its importance, it is nevertheless the moral that she wishes to draw to the attention of the reader. However, the moral need not be stated outright; "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns" (p. 85) and "Rigorists" (p. 100) are two examples of poems in which the description of the creatures, facts about their history and habitat make up the poem. Here, in the reason for her choice of these details lies the truth that she has observed.

The truth of her words does not need, however, to lie in their literal meanings alone. One has learned to expect from this poet a sensitive eye for the colorful and appropriate language that appeals primarily to the sense of sight that delights in movement and colour. "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron'" offers examples of her infinite care for the range and depth of words. In the first stanza she recalls certain extinct birds, the aepyornis and moa, as a contrast with the "camel-sparrow" who still lives, and which she notes is a symbol of justice. Her description of him centers around his protectiveness for his young, and the phrases used to describe him have a faintly Biblical tone:

He is swifter than a horse; he has a foot hard
as a hoof; the leopard

is not more suspicious.

The simplicity of her description which tends to identify him as almost primitive and eternal, fitting qualities for a symbol of justice, is carried over into another comment:

...he
whose comic duckling head on its
great neck revolves with compass-needle nervousness
when he stands guard, in S-

like foragings as he is
preening the down on his leaden-skinned back.

The description is accurate and vivid, and amusing; as well it is an off-beat metaphor of the picture of justice - not a Greek god, blind-folded and self-consciously impartial, but an obstinate Walt Disney animation whose clumsy exterior is characterized by an inner constancy, suggested by the reference to the compass, the leaden-skinned back, and the constancy of his guard.

The seventh stanza offers another example of Miss Moore's fondness for precise detail, used in this case to show man's capacity for show and spoilage.

Six hundred ostrich-brains served
at one banquet, the ostrich-plume-tipped tent
and desert spear, jewel-
gorgeous ugly egg-shell
goblets, eight pairs of ostriches

in harness, dramatize a meaning always missed
by the externalist.

Miss Moore concludes by praising the heroism of the ostrich, but the phrase that attracts one's eye is again an overwhelmingly accurate visual picture of the bird:

...an
alert gargantuan
little-winged, magnificently speedy running-bird. This
one
remaining rebel
is the sparrow-camel.

If it is necessary to suggest why Miss Moore chose to end a poetic tribute to the ideal of justice and heroism (as exemplified in a bird that looks as if it should be extinct) by a description that amuses primarily, one might remember that after all the poet is concerned with man's moral plight, as symbolized by the image of the ostrich. If the ostrich can display a heroic determination to defend his young as well as a stupid naivete to man's decoying tricks, how much more capable man should be in emulating the virtues of a mere

bird! Not only is the metaphor of her intention important but as well the accuracy of her taste for words. "Little-winged, magnificently speedy running-bird" demands a reader's eye which sees the size, motion and character of the bird; the phrase recalls the English literal translations of American Indian tribal names, translations which are charming for their simplicity and their obvious attempt at accuracy.

What has been emphasized so far, then, has been the poetic synthesis that is the basis of Marianne Moore's poetry. Reference has been made to poems which are typical of that unity of theme and form which her philosophy demands. Attention has been paid to the ethical key of each of her observations. The task now is to see her poetry in the spectrum of American poetry from the time she began to publish until the present, with particular reference to one or two writers who are often associated with her, not only because of their chronological place in American letters but because of certain similarities in their poetic philosophies and styles.

FOOTNOTES

- ⁹Marie Borroff, "Moore's 'The Icosasphere'", Explator XVI, Item 21.
- ¹⁰Sister M. C. Carey, "The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study of Her Verse, Its Sources and Its Influence" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1959), p. 92.
- ¹¹Lloyd Frankenburg, "Meaning in Modern Poetry," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXIX, no. 12, (March 23, 1946).
- ¹²Robert Frost, "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," (an address given at Amherst College in 1930 as reprinted in The Norton Reader, New York, 1965) p. 217.
- ¹³Lloyd Frankenburg, "The Imaginary Garden," Q. R. L. IV, 2, p. 213.
- ¹⁴Sister M. C. Carey, ibid., p. 123.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 86.
- ¹⁶Babette Deutsch, Poetry Handbook (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1962), p. 121.
- ¹⁷Marianne Moore, "Feeling and Precision," Predilictions (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 8.
- ¹⁸Lloyd Frankenburg, ibid., p. 199. In his Form and Value in Modern Poetry (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1952) R. P. Blackmur suggests that the climax of the poem, the "surd" of the "poetry" in it occurs most often and most effectively in the final two lines. "The rest both leads up to it and is suffused by it. The rest is nothing without it, and it would itself remain only a dislocated aphorism, lacking poetry, without the rest." (p.231) A study of all of her poems would deny the prevalence of this device.
- ¹⁹Marianne Moore, "Interview with Donald Hall", A Marianne Moore Reader (New York: The Viking Press, 1961) p. 261.
- ²⁰Robert Duncan, ibid., p. 4.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Marianne Moore, "Interview with Donald Hall", op. cit., p. 263.
- ²³Ibid., p. 254.
- ²⁴Bernard F. Engel, Marianne Moore (New Haven: College and University Press, 1964), p. 17.
- ²⁵Marie Borroff, ibid., Item 21.
- ²⁶Bernard Engel, ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER TWO

In his introduction written in 1934 for her Selected Poems, T. S. Eliot remarked that "Miss Moore has no immediate poetic derivations," but suggested a possible influence of H.D.²⁷ Miss Moore herself admits no influence although she is quick to acknowledge friendships and common interests. In his discussion of her place in the tradition of English poetic literature, Bernard Engel noted an alliance linking William Blake, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore - an alliance characterized by the Romantic sensibility in which the power of the imagination and the spiritual fountain-head of man are recognized.²⁸

For example, a belief in the overwhelming power of the imagination and a delight in the flow of language, in the device of analogy and metaphor, in the moral precepts that man needs to fulfil his divine destiny are shared by William Blake and Marianne Moore. It is the intensity which lies at almost opposite poles, or rather the means and necessity of expressing that intensity. Every maxim, every analogy, every myth drawn by Blake reveal his passionate wish to break the inhibitions of the confining life of material existence around him - for him, imagination opened into reality. It seems unnecessary to comment that this desire to break through the outer world is not part of Miss Moore's belief or practice; the real world of objects, of animals, of experiences is the reality that she acknowledges first. To realize the

spiritual source behind the world of real objects, one must perceive objectively the characteristics of its outer surface, in a sense its armor. "The power of the visible is the invisible"; however, the strength of Miss Moore's poetry lies in the delineation of the visible object through which the reader's perception of the moral truth of the theme must come.

It would be of advantage to see Miss Moore's poetry in terms of its immediate appearance in American letters. She began to write and publish actively in a poetic era marked by the influence of the new poets of the 'Twenties, among whom the Imagists stimulated by Ezra Pound and popularized by Amy Lowell must be counted as significant. It would be impossible to deny that Miss Moore was aware of these people; in her years at the Dial, although postdating the feverish activity of the Imagist movement, she was able to encounter some of the most important writers of both current American and European literature.

She has acknowledged her regard for Ezra Pound in an essay reprinted in A Marianne Moore Reader.²⁹ As is typical of her critical style she comments on what she approves of, and, as might be expected, those criteria that Pound sets out for poetry are criteria that she has acknowledged - the importance of the natural rhythmic line; the natural shape, sound, and meaning of words; the "fluid content" of a poem rendered in symmetrical forms; direct treatment of a subject. Pound's critical writings make articulate the principles of modern poetry with which she was concerned, yet her development as a poet has been peculiarly her own. Her moral observations, her preference for the minute details that make up an object that she confronts are not legacies from any predecessor or contemporary. Her growth as a poet is marked by an increasing awareness of her need to present her objects lucidly, to encourage the reader to appreciate the significance of her observations, and

to realize the ethical source of the observations as a spirituality which it is man's duty to see within himself. One cannot divide the metaphor by setting the object being observed apart from the reason it is being observed; the strict letter of the Imagist code, however, demands an entire concentration on the object itself.

R. P. Blackmur in his comprehensive essay on the method of Marianne Moore goes so far as to say that Pound may have derived his method in the later Cantos from her, and to suggest as well that it is a pity that Pound did not benefit more! Blackmur's argument is that the substance of the elements is insufficiently present in Pound's test, and that the substance of Miss Moore's poetry although disparate in source are "sufficiently present in the poem to compel conspiracy and co-operation".³⁰ It is impossible to argue with this critic unless one takes into consideration a whole range of the Cantos. In another essay Mr. Blackmur refers to the Cantos as "a rag-bag of what Mr. Pound thinks is intelligent conversation about literature and history".³¹ The nature of his critical tone leads one to suspect Mr. Blackmur of a fondness for the precise method of Miss Moore; it is doubtful if he could ever accuse her of merely thinking that she is making intelligent conversation. What is important is that both poets were interested in each other's work, Pound as an early admirer and exponent of the kind of poetry that Miss Moore was writing, Miss Moore as a firm supporter of Pound both in her capacity as editor of the Dial and later when he was incarcerated in an American mental hospital. It would be impossible to state which poet had a particular influence on the other at any specific date. We may assume that Pound's forming of the Imagist credo would be duly noted and appreciated by a young reader and writer of poetry in the second and third decades of the

twentieth century. Too, Miss Moore was first published in 1915 in The Egoist and in Poetry, both popular with the readers of the avant garde; Bernard Engel notes that as early as the same year, Ezra Pound had written to Miss Moore "praising her titles".³² It is entirely without question that both poets along with William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens and so many others were the new wave of poetry, rebelling against the same artifices of nineteenth century verse and creating new and often similar means of expression.

Marianne Moore is often discussed in association with Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. Several of Stevens' comments about poetry echo expressions by Marianne Moore; for instance, "In poetry at least the imagination must not detach itself from reality",³³ and Miss Moore's desire that poets present for inspection "'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'" are similar in their expectations of the poetic task. On the other hand, when Stevens says "Ethics are no more a part of poetry than they are of painting,"³⁴ he is voicing an opinion quite contrary to Miss Moore for whom the moral is the base of man's spirituality, and consequently of her poems, since it is man's condition with which she is concerned. To compare both poets in terms of style is to recognize their appearance in the literary world at the time when "objectivism" and "imagism" were popular terms of two poetic persuasions, a common characteristic being the need to dispense with the restrictions of traditional verse form in an effort to present a primarily visual expression of an object that was meaningful to the poet.

"The Indigo Glass in the Grass" of Wallace Stevens may be compared with "An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish" (p. 90) or "The Steeplejack" by Marianne Moore noting that both poets have presented significant images in order to comment on that significance. The rhythm of the

lines in the three poems is closest to that of the natural flow of prose; rhyme is unobtrusive; images are precise. Wallace Stevens presents two objects: an indigo glass bottle and an arrangement of three objects that is one image, a "pot of geraniums, the/stained/mattress and the washed overalls drying in the sun?" To his query of which "truly contains the world", that is reflects the sum of all experience and reality, his answer is "Neither one, nor the two together." That is, reality is not only the object perceived whether it be a work of art or evidence of mundane living. Stevens commented that "reality is a vacuum" suggesting that the power of the imagination is to imbue superficial reality with a significance that is not immediately discernable. In the same way, Miss Moore is endowing the seaside town of students and heroes, of steeplejacks and henhouses and flowers with a significance that she believes it to possess. The real world that she sees is made purposeful by the spirit of those who live in the town; just as the gilded star stands for hope, the outer confusion of the town masks an ordered existence characterized by the desire to persevere. In "The Hero" which was originally part of the same poem, Miss Moore speaks of the hero "not out/seeing a sight but the rock/crystal thing to see." Both poets may be said to concern themselves with "the rock crystal thing to see", yet it is Miss Moore who makes use of the precise object, the sharply drawn image rather than Stevens who becomes involved with abstractions, with deliberately ambiguous statements.

R. P. Blackmur comments that the most striking thing about Stevens' verse is its vocabulary, and develops the notion that the most important feature of language as used by an individual is his faithfulness to the dictionary meaning of the words:

Good poets gain their excellence by writing an existing language as if it were their own invention and as a rule success in the effect of originality is best secured by fidelity, in an extended sense, to the individual words as they appear in the dictionary.³⁵

The same comment might refer to Miss Moore's poetry, but the intensity of the language is not as vivid in her work primarily because, like all the other aspects of her poetic form, it is controlled by the objective but nonetheless descriptive image that is at one with the rhythmic and logical development of the poem. Stevens believed that, "In poetry, you must love the words, the ideas and the images and rhythms with all your capacity to love anything at all."⁵⁶ Miss Moore may feel the same passion, but it is dominated by her need for precision, for scrupulous regard to proportion.

In the introduction to the Selected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Randall Jarrell makes a deliberate association with Williams, Stevens and Miss Moore in terms of their Imagist impetus and their personal adjustments to their own poetic needs.

Stevens, with his passion for philosophy, order, and blank verse was naturally least affected by the atmosphere of the time, in which he was at most a tourist; and Marianne Moore synthesized her own novel organization out of syllabic verse, extravagantly elaborated, half-visual patterns, and an extension of moral judgement, feeling and generalization to the whole world of imagist perception. Williams found his own sort of imagism considerably harder to modify. He had a boyish delight and trust in Things: there is always on his lips the familiar, pragmatic, American "These are the facts" - for he is the most pragmatic of writers, and so American that the adjective itself seems inadequate...one exclaims in despair and delight: He is the America of poets. Few of his poems had that pure crystalline inconsequence that the imagist poem ideally has - the world and Williams himself kept breaking into them; and this was certainly their salvation.³⁷

Jarrell then goes on to characterize particularly Williams' poetry by its "empathy, sympathy, its muscular and emotional identification with its subject."³⁸

The immediate contrast between Williams and Miss Moore is obvious, since the latter takes every care not to reveal any kind of personal identification with her poetic material. She chooses the subjects of her poems

carefully, creatures or objects which are symbolic of virtues that man is able to achieve. Yet there is a notable similarity in the objects of her attention: one cannot become involved with things such as zoo animals, Christmas wishes and antiques alike to the same degree that one can become caught up in situations or environments that appeal to the emotions. A glance at Williams' titles reveal the difference in their basic approach to the metaphor of poetry: "January Morning", "Spring Strains", "Smell", "A Coronal", "Portrait of a Lad", "El Hombre", "Spring and All". Most often Williams is so intent on communing with the nature of things that he makes use of the metaphor of the poem, that is the discernable object which masks the inner meaning, only so far as is necessary to communicate his own realization of its significance to his reader. In a sense, Miss Moore expects a broader comprehension of her reader in that she is careful to present only the thing itself, as uninfluenced as possible by her emotional perception of it. However, when Williams uses a typical spring scene to describe rebirth in Nature, he not only includes details of the scene before him but comments as well on his reactions to that scene by ascribing to the scene emotions and postures which are, in reality, the poet's own. In "Spring and All" (p. 32) spring is "sluggish" and "dazed", spring enters with "stark dignity". Miss Moore, however, is less romantic; her description is no less colourful but it is more impersonal.

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines _____

Although this picture of spring is presented clearly, the details are part of an Impressionistic water colouring instead of Miss Moore's fine line strokes

of an etching. The next verses of the poem are particularly typical of Williams:

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches ———

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all

save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind ———

The primary purpose here is to evoke a correspondence of awareness between poet and reader, an awareness primarily emotional. In this sense, neither Williams or Miss Moore may be considered Imagists or Objectivists as such since the avowed aim of the Imagists was to free poetry from the encumbrance of romantic and moral attitudes. Concentration on the image being drawn for the reader was the essential force of Imagist poetry; while it is true that both Williams and Miss Moore demand concentration on the object or scene being described, both are equally concerned with the tenor of the metaphor: what moral statement is being made through an observation of Miss Moore; what kind of appeal Williams is making to the poetic sensibility. Although both poets are trying to communicate a truth behind and by means of a metaphor, their means are different: Miss Moore approaches her truth through an appeal to reason, Williams moves by way of the heart.

In order to compare their poetic methods, one might consider a poem which is built upon the poet's consideration of an object perceived in winningly sensual terms. "VII" in Selected Poems is a poem about a rose; in it, Williams shows a marked similarity in style - that is in the language and line structure - and in theme to many of Miss Moore's poems. In "Nine Nectarines" she is holding for our inspection a plate with a picture of a branch bearing a colourful, almost symmetrical arrangement of nectarines, which is to

be contrasted with a kylin which is superbly enamelled on a piece of porcelain. The poem follows her characteristic format of unobtrusive rhyme. Throughout the poem the precise description of the object appeals to the visual sense of proportion as well as colour. Such lines as the following emphasize her efforts to present a graphic almost scientifically objective impression of what she sees:

Arranged by two's as peaches are,
at intervals that all may live ---
eight and a single one, on twigs that
grew the year before - they look like
a derivative;

or

Fuzzless through slender crescent leaves
of green or blue or
both, in the Chinese style, the four

pairs' half-moon leaf-mosaic turns
out to the sun the sprinkled blush
of puce - American-Beauty pink
applied to bees-wax grey.

The first stanza of Williams' "VII" is very similar in tone and language:

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge, the double facet
cementing the grooved
columns of air - The edge
cuts without cutting

Williams does not attempt to use the more intricate arrangement of syllables by line as Miss Moore does; yet there is a unity of sound built up by his use of variations on the vowel: the "o" in line 1, "e" in line 2, and by the use of alliteration: "each petal ends in/an edge", "cuts without cutting". The same sound is familiar in Miss Moore's cadence of "half-moon leaf-mosaic".

However the difference lies in their use of the object. Miss Moore is contrasting a badly printed print of nectarines which look too perfect to

be real with an enamelled piece of porcelain of the "nectar-loving kylin/of pony appearance". The latter, to her, is a masterpiece of Chinese skill because "A Chinese 'understands/the spirit of the wilderness'". The picture of the plate and the plate itself, on the other hand, serve to remind the poet that man's attempts to imitate Nature fail badly; that perfection in Art requires more than skill with the brush but appreciation of the spirit of the subject as well. The "unenquiring brush/of mercantile bookbinding" was incapable of a realistic presentation of the fruit which had been painted, along with some indistinguishable horse sleeping beside the shrub of the nectarine on a plate which is now "much-mended".

Williams, however, explores the nature of the rose in a lyrical version of Gertrude Stein's gruff appraisal. Williams moves from a precise description of the appearance of the petals of the rose to a consideration of them as recreation in Art by man. In the sixth stanza he refers to the timeless association of love and roses, commenting that

It is at the edge of the
petal that love waits.

It is here that Williams acknowledges the essence of the rose to be impossible to define or to recreate. Such an endeavour "to engage roses/becomes a geometry". The description of the rose in the first part of the poem changes; the poet no longer attempts to define its precise objective shape alone but speaks of it in sensual terms "fragile/plucked, moist, half-raised/cold, precise, touching". Finally he creates the figure of the rose combining both concrete and abstract images:

From the petal's edge a line starts
that being of steel
infinitely fine, infinitely
rigid penetrates
the Milky Way

without contact - lifting
from it - neither hanging
nor pushing

His final comment, like that in Miss Moore's "Nine Nectarines" sounds a final note of the theme.

The fragility of the flower
unbruised
penetrates space.

Both poets make use, in these specific cases of two opportunities to state their provoking thought behind the image. In "Nine Nectarines" Miss Moore notes that "A Chinese 'understands/the spirit of the wilderness'" (using single quotation marks for emphasis) and concludes "It was a Chinese/ who imagined this masterpiece". Yet Miss Moore is always concerned with the nature of the thing perceived in an objective sense. She offers no direct personal observation although she intimates her meaning by her comment on Chinese wisdom. Williams does not hesitate to reveal his efforts to try to arrive at a comprehension of the thing that is a rose; it is this emotional intrusion that marks the difference between the poets. Both poets in these poems seem to be concerned with the nature of an object: Miss Moore with what is genuine and real in the object itself as opposed to what is a careless artifice in another object; Williams with what is limited by sensual perception and that which must be perceived through love. It is with this kind of poem that Williams may be linked in the Romantic tradition with William Blake whose double vision enabled him to see beyond the limitations of the finite senses. Both Miss Moore and William Carlos Williams are alike, too, in their need to see the inner meaning of the outward form; it is in relation to the outward form that they differ since Miss Moore is, despite her eye and ear for figurative language, essentially matter-of-fact in expression and objective in her approach, while Williams is emotional, seemingly more anxious to communicate

what he sees and believes.

So many of Williams' poems seem characterized by his immediacy in the scenes that he describes. Miss Moore avoids the subjective insinuation unless for the sake of irony. However, such a poem as "A Grave" may be seen in comparison to Williams "Flowers by the Sea" not only in terms of the similar theme, but in terms of the imagery used. Williams apprehends the nature of the sea by describing the flowers growing in the pastures beside it. To him, the flowers are moving constantly "tied, released", so that they are seen as an area of colour and movement, "or the shape/perhaps - of restlessness". On the contrary, the sea is almost motionless; when it moves, Williams does not see the crests of the waves, the foam, or hear the thunder; he sees "the salt ocean/lift its form" and he concludes by saying that "the sea is circled and sways/peacefully upon its plantlike stem". The poem is one of his closest approximations to the pure imagist form. Concentration on the object is reinforced by the distinct words and the unobtrusive rhythm. There is no more "message" to the poem than the explicitness of the images themselves. In his poem "The Yachts", the sea becomes a deliberate symbol of teeming life where those who maneuver the yachts are the wealthy profiteers of society who are totally unconcerned about the welfare of society as a whole. In "Flowers by the Sea" he intends no more than the suggestion of the automatic motion of a large one-hued body which implies peacefulness as opposed to the vivid restlessness of fields of flowers. Perhaps we are to think of the relative immobility of life in general as opposed to the confusion and movement of individuals, but the implication is unnecessary for a satisfactory comprehension of the poem.

In "A Grave" and again in "The Fish" Miss Moore uses her imagery

specifically to make a statement about the nature of the sea. "The Fish" is more closely related to the Imagistic focus on the object itself since only in the final stanza does the poet assess the image of the sea and the cliff. It is obvious that she has meant to point out the indestructibility of the cliff, and of the sea, by her images of the creature which are battered about by the sea and of the scars on the cliff made by man. In a sense, both Williams and Miss Moore are commenting on the same realization: that the sea is inviolable, a unity that cannot be disfigured by man. This idea is expressed more explicitly in "A Grave" in which the sea is described as "a collector, quick to return a rapacious look". Just as Williams remarked on the restlessness of the flowers beside the ocean, Miss Moore described the continuous pattern of life moving above, beneath, and beside the sea. She concludes by noting that things, be they men's fishnets, ships, or bodies, if dropped into the ocean are bound to sink and

...if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition
nor consciousness.

It may be concluded that William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore, as well as Wallace Stevens, are diversified products of the Imagist theory. Each one adapts those parts of the credo that suit him best and dismiss others. It is Miss Moore who regards the objectivity of her image most necessary but she expects as well an intelligent appraisal of the meaning of the object as exemplifying her perception of its symbolic value. Pound believed in the natural object as the perfect symbol as long as the symbolic function did not obtrude. In such poems as "A Grave" or "The Fish" the symbol and the natural object are indistinguishable, and in Pound's terms the poems are successful. In other cases, and often in her later career, Miss Moore is open to justifiable criticism.

FOOTNOTES

²⁷T. S. Eliot, Introduction to Selected Poems by Marianne Moore (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), ix.

²⁸Bernard Engel, ibid., p. 18.

²⁹Marianne Moore, A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 149.

³⁰R. P. Blackmur, "Masks of Ezra Pound", Form and Value in Modern Poetry (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1952), p. 93.

³¹Ibid., p. 248.

³²Bernard Engel, ibid., p. 33.

³³Wallace Stevens, "Adagia," Prose Keys to Modern Poetry, Karl Schapiro, editor (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 157.

³⁴Wallace Stevens, op. cit., p. 158.

³⁵R. P. Blackmur, ibid., p. 183.

³⁶Wallace Stevens, op. cit., p. 157.

³⁷Randall Jarrell, "Introduction", Selected Poems of William Carlos Williams, (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. xi.

³⁸Ibid., xii.

CHAPTER THREE

In this third part of the thesis I will consider Miss Moore's poetry in the spectrum of the fifty years that she has been publishing in American literature with particular reference to her most recent poetry.

Robert Duncan refers to the "unnecessary conventionality" of her most recent work whose themes she cadges "window shopping among the ads of the New Yorker".³⁹ When so many young North Americans concern themselves with the specific moral issues that modern society has made transparent, Miss Moore's consideration of the Arctic Ox may seem irrelevant; yet the themes of at least a few of the poems despite Mr. Duncan's protest, are assuredly relevant to man's moral condition. If Miss Moore's precept that poets must be "literalists of the imagination" who are "above insolence and triviality" is to be meaningful surely she would be violating her own standards if she were to indulge in mere fancy. Kenneth Koch, commenting on Like a Bulwark speaks of her most recent poetry as an imitation of itself, and more specifically that she seems to have applied her themes to her subject matter instead of allowing the moral and intellectual comments to grow out of the details that preceded them.⁴⁰ Since the integration of theme, image, and technical skill is the basis of the excellence of her poetry, these comments would be damaging to a possible attribute of consistency in her expectations of her own poetic skill. Hence, it is necessary to examine her more recent poems closely in order to be reassured that her efforts are still committed to the values that were the stimulation of her earliest poetry and to the style that best exhibits those values.

Her latest book O To Be a Dragon appeared in 1959 containing fifteen poems. A first impression might be that the forms of the poems are simpler with several poems restricted to the two-line rhyming stanza. The first five poems in the volume range in length from four to twelve lines, and two of that group Mr. Engel notes have been resurrected from Miss Moore's earliest days: "I May, I Might, I Must" and "To a Chameleon" - the former an assertive statement of man's ability to reason and persevere, the latter a skilful description of the chameleon. However if unity of form and thought is a criterion, in some of her later poems there are failures. For instance "Hometown Piece for Messrs. Alston and Reese" is a fan's tribute to baseball and to Brooklyn; but the subject is too topical and the style too forced to establish the poem with the same degree of excellence found in earlier poems. It may be argued that Miss Moore's intention here was not to produce a "serious" poem but rather to amuse her fellow New Yorkers and baseball buffs. In this case she may have succeeded. "The Arctic Ox (Or Goat)" follows her device of describing an animal and elaborating on its significance, but it is, as she admits an advertisement. If her moral is that man should make use of natural products without killing animals, the poem will be of concern to antivivisectionists only; if she is praising the natural and condemning the synthetic, twentieth century man will laugh; if her object is to share with her reader her pleasure in the antics of the creature, then we can join in her amusement with her, but the topic is a little trivial.

The three wish poems "O To Be A Dragon", "Saint Nicholas" and "For February 14th" are more like the early poems of Collected Poems. Here the form is less obtrusive and the matter of the poems is more provocative. "O To Be A Dragon" is brief, six lines, each of a different length. Consequently the rhythm of the poem is uneven; the effect is of a statement of a

desire that impresses us by its brevity, and sincerity of tone. Rhyme is unobtrusive: "dragon", "Solomon" and "phenomenon" are the rhyming end-words. The alliterative effects of the poem recall one of Miss Moore's particular poetic devices in which the key words of a line are emphasized by the use of the same sound at the beginning of each word. Occasionally the alliterative words echo in a phrase or sentence that runs on into a second line as in "symbol" and "silkworm", or "immense" and "invisible". The final line of the poem is, simply,

Felicitous phenomenon.

Such a technique, like all her other techniques, does not intrude in the development of the thought of the poem but is present by virtue of its being a natural means of conveying what the poet wishes to say. An earlier poem, "Voracities and Verities..." uses the same device, as in line 3 of the first stanza:

impelled to plod in the poem's cause,

or in the final stanza, line 2:

preserve paradise-birds with jet-black plumes⁴¹

With reference to the "wish" poems, however, although there is evidence of the same concern for the efficient and meaningful use of technique to unfold the theme, one is struck more by the personal tone of the poems - a tone in which the feelings of the poet are suggested more overtly than in most of her previous poems. The tone is whimsical with an underlying seriousness that is apparent only at the conclusion of each poem. In "For February 14th" the poet asks Saint Valentine which of several varied gifts he might prefer, thus reversing the usual procedure of demanding of him. The point of the poem is made in the final line when the poet remarks that we should remember not just that the animals were in the ark (neatly identifying

Saint Valentine - the patron saint of birds and beasts) but that the ark was saved: a token of God's love, a reminder of his promise to man, then is the gift that Miss Moore would have us remember. Similarly in "Saint Nicholas" a religious theme underlies the poem so that the playfulness of some of her wishes for Christmas gifts develops into a devout prayer for a divine vision.

A second general impression of the poems published during the fifties and sixties is that there is more emphasis in recounting incidents which have a special significance for Miss Moore. "Enough" commemorates the first settling of Jamestown; "Hometown Piece..." is written for the Brooklyn Dodgers; "In the Public Garden" was written for presentation at an arts festival in Boston; "Carnegie Hall: Rescued" recounts a cultural battle waged to the advantage of art; "Rescue With Yul Brynner" is a tribute to an actor interested in helping refugees; and "To Victor Hugo of My Crow Pluto", written in crow-esperanto, is a tribute to a charming pet. All of these poems are purposeful and skilful comments concerning events and persons that Miss Moore has found noteworthy; however, their virtue lies not in the timelessness of the subjects but rather in the enthusiasm with which the poet attributes their importance in that sphere of human concern in which she is interested. This is not to say that the topicality of the subjects always overshadows a more fundamental significance: the rescue of Carnegie Hall from "the cannibal of real estate" is a vivid reminder of the materialistic lust which disregards both Art and History. "Enough" by reminiscing about some of the hardships encountered at Jamestown notes that "one can be stronger than events" and concludes by reassuring the reader of the confidence of the early settlers in the importance of their work by the words:

It was enough; it is enough
if present faith mend partial proof.

The change in subject material from Miss Moore's early work to her latest might be summarized in our awareness that she has abandoned the imaginary garden with its exotic creatures and curios for the outside world of situations. One cannot say that her concern for man has in any way abated; indeed by referring more directly to his activities she seems to be approaching him less gingerly. As she does so, however, her objectivity, her sense of restraint and control in the texture of the poem seems to have been neglected and the reader is overwhelmed by the emotion of the poet as in "Hometown Piece..." or the bantering tone as in "The Arctic Ox (Or Goat)"; "Tom Fool at Jamaica" or "Style" require the reader to study the notes to follow the poet's intricate references although this in itself is no fault if the notes are necessary for elaboration only and not for a basic understanding of the development of thought.

It is well to remember the method by which she creates the synthesis of thought and technique that constitutes the wholeness of her poetry and consequently its excellence. Lloyd Frankenburg approaches his appreciation of its unity by remarking on the way one perceives the image and the central thought of a poem.

From appearance to significance, in her poems, is not a distance but, like those figures that as we look at them turn from convex to concave, a change in our own focus.⁴²

In such a poem as "Melchior Vulpius", then, his analysis fits the form and development of thought of the poem. A description of the musicians's art "this mastery which none can understand" becomes a building up to the final magnificent chorus of a great fugue; the procession of mighty words is the procession of the mighty peals of the organ.

Mouse-skin-bellows'-breath
expanding into rapture saith

"Hallelujah." Almost
 utmost absolutist
and fuge-ist, Amen; slowly building
from miniature thunder,
 crescendos antidoting death-
 love's signature cementing faith.

The anthem of Melchior Vulpius that is "best of all" to Miss Moore is the one praising God for "conquering faith", that is, overcoming man's inability to acknowledge the power of faith; the final line reaffirms God's omnipotence by saying that it is love that establishes faith. It is God's love for man that Miss Moore wishes to acknowledge just as she did in "For February 14th". This, then, is the significance of the poem that we see from the focus that reads just as we look at the "appearance" of the poem. In this case we hear with the poet the music of the composer who is proving his love for God and his faith by the power of his music.

In such a poem as "Style"⁴⁴ however, the intricate images of the tennis-player, skater and dancer that are intertwined exist as images appreciable by vision only, reinforced by the metaphors and rhythm of the poem but revealing no inner significance. Miss Moore seems content to assail the reader with clever images: "Escudero's constant of the plumbline", "like a letter from Casals", "As if bisecting a viper" or "the equidistant three tiny arcs of seeds in a banana had been conjoined by Palestrina"; but she seems to have no other object than to present metaphors with which to describe the style of her athletes, and no comment on the essential unity of style and meaning. Mr. Engel declares that Miss Moore's repetition of the names of her performers implies "that better than attempting to describe the indescribable is a simple citation of examples."⁴⁵ It may be argued that instead of pretending to surrender to the impossible the poet has been overcome by the

overabundance of her examples of style, as the reader has been overcome by the pointlessness of the poem. Clever similes are very well but an underlying purpose is especially important to the unity that one comes to expect from Miss Moore's work.

Mr. Frankenburg's perceptiveness is reinforced by his reference to lines of Miss Moore's already quoted in much the same context in this thesis. "Image and idea fit so intimately (like "counter-curved twin hazel-nuts") that they exchange characteristics."⁴⁶ Miss Moore expresses the same idea in yet another poem referring directly to the poetic performance, "The Past is the Present" (p. 93):

'Hebrew poetry is
prose with a sort of heightened consciousness'. Ecstasy
affords
the occasion and expediency determines the form.

It would seem that if either ecstasy or expedience becomes dominant, the fine balance of the poem is lost. Evidence of both mishaps may be found in her later poems.

For example, overwhelming emotion is the outstanding feature of her poem about baseball, emphasized by the rhyming chant of the lines. A tendency to be cute in the manner of Ogden Nash overwhelms any virtue of her dissertation on the Arctic Ox:

Camels are snobbish
and sheep unintelligent;
water buffaloes, neurasthenic--
even murderous.
Reindeer seem over-serious,

The virtue of the "whole poem" is lost in many cases. The vitality of the inner consciousness meditating on a thing or an experience that was meaningful to her has weakened a little to permit the occasional flirtation with a topic or a style unimportant except to the readers of The New Yorker. Marianne

Moore once remarked that

Principally throat, sophistication is as
it al-

ways has been - at the antipodes from the initial great truths.

One can only conclude that either she has since forgotten that statement or else is no longer as interested in the communication of great truths. In referring to her poem on Carnegie Hall Miss Moore remarked that it was a subject that aroused her, and rightly so.⁴⁷ But the emotion is inconsistently proud, playful, and sentimental; the allusions are obscure to those who have not read a particular issue of The New Yorker; and the general effect of the poem is that the poet is more concerned with the particular incident than with the more profound fact of Materialism's nonchalance about the preservation of Art. It is true that Miss Moore has always provided notes for those interested in her references since she is scrupulous to the point of compulsiveness about acknowledging her sources; yet it would seem that if notes are necessary for any kind of comprehension then the poem does not exist in its own right. On the contrary, a poem such as "The Jerboa" describes the opulence of Roman and Egyptian civilizations and contrasts the simple needs of the desert rat. Notes to this poem elaborate on several of the objects that the poet has found interesting, but the notes are not necessary for the reader to understand the overabundance that she is criticizing. One need not object to a poet's eagerness to elaborate beyond the body of a poem, but to make such elaboration part of the reader's intellectual equipment for appreciating the poem is to lessen the spontaneity of the poem and the poetic perception of the reader.

Not all of Miss Moore's recent poetry, of course, may be disappointing to the reader accustomed to her earlier work. "Charity Overcoming Envy"⁴⁸ with the note beneath the title (Late-Fifteenth-Century Tapestry, Flemish or

French, In The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum)"devotes twenty-six of its lines to a description of the tapestry and the incident that it depicts, and four lines to draw the moral that Miss Moore finds there. The unity of the form is achieved partly by the use of rhyme or near-rhyme at the ends of the lines, the "y" sound occurring ten times, and in three consecutive lines, the end words "hurt", "shirt", "hurt", followed later by the end words "plot" and "cut". Since the characters depicted are Envy and Charity, who is also referred to as Deity and Destiny, the repetition of the "y" sound does not seem laboured. The development of the poem follows the pattern of appearance to significance so that the first and longest section of the poem describes in detail the incident where Envy, riding on a dog, is slightly wounded by Charity, seated on an elephant. Envy, as Miss Moore notes wryly, is obsessed by a greed which suffers because

since of things owned by others
he can only take some.

The background of the tapestry is fully described - the flowers that make up the "filigree" - so that the figures of Charity and Envy stand out in both visual and contextual relief from the intricacy of the embroidery:

Charity, riding an elephant
stands on a "mosaic of flowers," facing Envy,
the flowers "bunched together, not rooted."
Envy, on a dog is worn down by obsession,
his greed (since of things owned by others
he can only take some). Crouching uneasily
in the flowered filigree, among wide weeds
indented by scallops that swirl,
daisies, pink hareballs, little flattened-out
sunflowers, thin arched coral stems, and -
ribbed horizontally -
slivers of green, Envy, on his dog,
looks up at the elephant,

The names of the flowers listed one after the other suggest the appearance of the flowers on the tapestry - a "mosaic of flowers". The device recalls one of

Miss Moore's earliest poems which contained a similar passage, deleted in Collected Poems, but revived in A Marianne Moore Reader in "The Steeple-jack" (p. 3).

...the trumpet-vine,

fox-glove, giant snap-dragon, a salpiglossis that has
spots and stripes; morning-glories, gourds
or moon-vines trained on fishing-twine
at the back

door; cat-tails, flags, blueberries and spiderwort,
stripped grass, lichens, sun flowers, asters, daisies -
yellow and crab-claw ragged sailors with green bracts - toad-plant,
petunias, ferns; pink lilies, blue
ones, tigers; poppies; black sweet-peas.⁴⁹

The effect in both instances is pleasing: in the former poem, the incidental descriptive words such as "scallops", "little flattened-out", "thin arched", and "slivers" suggest the intricacy of the tapestry; in the latter example, the emphasis is on size and ironically on animals with such phrases as "fox-glove", "giant snap-dragon", "cat-tails", "spider-wort", "crab-claw", "tigers".

The longest section of "Charity Overcoming Envy" continues with a retelling of the incident in which Envy complains bitterly because Charity has grazed his cheek with her sword. Miss Moore views the situation ironically. Envy, barely scratched, is protected by "chest armor over chain mail, a steel shirt to the knee"; the poet remarks that the elephant is "at no time borne down by self-pity" suggesting that the dog is, as well as by the encumbrance of the armor. Envy is reassured that Charity is not plotting against him; that is, that Envy's burden of self-pity is unnecessary. Charity is of necessity bound to Envy since where there is love there is greed. The final four lines of the poem reveal the significance of that bond and of the freedom that Charity may obtain by convincing Envy that her generosity in dealing him rebuke will not destroy him.

The narrative tone of the first section is replaced by three assertive statements.

The problem is mastered - insupportably tiring when it was impending.

Deliverance accounts for what sounds like an axiom.

The Gordian knot need not be cut.

In other words, problems that are so burdensome as to seem impossible to solve can be solved judiciously without resort to illogical force. The poem, its method and its ethic, are "typical" of what one expects of Marianne Moore at her best. The pattern is familiar - from appearance to significance, precise imagery, ironical humour, an underlying moral for the observant, the key statement, here at the conclusion of the poem that contains the kernel of her idea and image - the knot, an invisible tie encompassing Charity and Envy, Good and Evil, which can be unravelled in one uses one's common sense and knowledge of man's weakness - in this case, Envy's self-pity.

This section has been concerned with the status of Miss Moore's poetry as it appears now, not so much as it contrasts or compares with other poetry written today but rather as it stands up to the expectations she, and her readers, set up for it when she published her first collection of poems in 1921. The standard that is most obvious is the very care for the unity of the whole poem, although contemporary verse tends to deal in fragments of experience as more realistic of poetry as a reflection of man's opinion of himself and of his world. However, Miss Moore's world is an ordered one by reason of her own need for order; her vision of experience is stimulated by her belief in a Christian God; consequently, her poetry is as ordered as the pattern of her activities and her beliefs. Discipline and integrity are qualities of both poet and her poetry, and it is these qualities that the reader may expect to

find in her work that is best. To say that she has not been consistent is only fair since there are enough examples of careless poems where discipline and a sense of proportion in all aspects of the poetic sensibility are missing. The very unkind critic will say that now she has received a measure of recognition (and there is no dispute that she does not deserve as much as she has received, and more) she has become careless in her obligations to her poetry, and has allowed herself to become enticed by the Scylla and Charybdis of the fashionable literary seas, that is The New Yorker and Harper's magazine. After all, any poet who wears velvet tricorns and frequents Yankee Stadium deserves a little more than passing interest.

Any of her critics who have dealt with the person and the poetry of Marianne Moore, however, will find that such a weakness as attention to flattery is not possible in her. She seems often to overstrive to be humble - published interviews reveal this trait - and she is amenable always to the suggestions of others about her work. It would be more reasonable to suggest that Miss Moore has discarded some of reticence about dealing with man the animal, instead of studying the habits of other animals and seeing there traits of man. Her style which demands precision is more suited to the kind of particularization that characterized her early poems; when she becomes involved with the larger world of events -- horse-races and baseball games included -- the habit of dealing with the details that make up the collage of her observations is out of place and the reader is left with a series of images that have no connection, like the game that children play by connecting a series of dots to form a picture. If she becomes engrossed with such a world so that her objectivity deserts her and she becomes just another spectator in the stadium, albeit a clever spectator, her enthusiasm overpowers her

attention to the synthesis of all the parts of the poem - the style, the image, the thought, as well as the emotion. Miss Moore once quoted Daniel Berkeley Updike's remark that "style does not depend on decoration but on simplicity and proportion".⁵⁰ Not only style but the thought of the poem itself depends on proportion. Dr. Warlow wrote that

To Miss Moore precision, sometimes referred to as rigor or exactitude or scrupulosity, is the most important aspect of manner or style and very nearly equates with them and with discipline and technique. It insures concreteness and detachment...⁵¹

But as he later notes, precision carried to excess creates merely the illusion of energy.⁵² Not only is useless energy produced on the part of the poet but on the part of the reader who tracks in vain through the maze of Miss Moore's allusions and clever images. An early critic quoted by Dr. Warlow seems to have scored a point of criticism, no matter in how foul a fashion when she said of Miss Moore:

Even a gymnast should have grace...we prefer to see the well-muscled lady in tights stand on her head smilingly, with a certain nonchalance, rather than grit her teeth, perspire, and make us conscious of her neck muscles. Still we would rather not see her at all...She shouts at our stupidity...and we yawn back at Miss Moore's omniscience.⁵³

The critic expresses an opinion which is shared by the many who do not appreciate Miss Moore's verse. The technical details, the attention paid to minutiae, the juxtaposition of seemingly irrelevant observations, a predilection for the language of prose are all strange characteristics of poetry as it is popularly read. Miss Moore demands no more of her reader than he give her his attention and an objective mind ready to perceive what she presents. If Miss Strobel is conscious of neck muscles and sweat only, she has missed the point of the entire performance in which movement was graceful and flowing. Better to compare Miss Moore's art with one of her descriptive passages in "Style" -

"glassy lake and the whorls which a vertical stroke brought about,/of the paddle half-turned coming out."

Criticism such as expressed by Miss Strobel reflects the opinion of the larger reading public. Although poets such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams have commented favorably about her work, there have been no imitations of her; she is the founder of no school whose poets attempt to reproduce her measured syllabic line or engage in observation of beasts and birds.⁵⁴ Poetry traditionally concerns itself with man's aspirations and defeats; although Miss Moore's themes are concerned with the moral virtues with which a man may arm himself to deal with society and ultimately to realize his own salvation, she rarely deals with man outright, preferring to use the analogy as a less personal device and as more suitable to her.

FOOTNOTES

³⁹Robert Duncan, ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰Kenneth Koch, "New Books by Marianne Moore and W. H. Auden," Poetry 90, 1957, p. 47.

⁴¹This technique is a familiar one in the history of English verse. Like Miss Moore, Gerard Manley Hopkins also gloried in the sounds of words and in their meanings; his style was sufficiently free so that he would hyphenate pleasing combinations of words. Consider, for instance, his lines

This darksome burn, horseback brown
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home

in comparison with those of Marianne Moore:

3

A brass-green birdwith grass-
green throat smooth as a nut springs from
twig to twig askew, copying the
Chinese flower piece - businesslike atom

or

The pin-swin or spine-swine
(the edgehog miscalled hedgehog) with all his edges
echidna and echinoderm in distressed-
pin-cushion thorn-fur coats, the spiny pig or porcupine

⁴²Lloyd Frankenburg, "The Imaginary Garden," Q. R. L., IV, 2, p. 194.

⁴³Marianne Moore, "Melchior Vulpus", A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴⁴Marianne Moore, "Style", A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 58.

⁴⁵Bernard Engel, ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁶Lloyd Frankenburg, ibid., p. 196.

⁴⁷Marianne Moore, "An Interview With Donald Hall", A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 259.

⁴⁸Marianne Moore, "Charity Overcoming Envy", The New Yorker (March 30, 1963).

⁴⁹The second stanza quoted here (... "cat-tails...black sweet-peas") did not appear in Selected Poems. Presumably Miss Moore has lengthened the description of the seaside to achieve unity of appearance.

FOOTNOTES

⁵⁰Marianne Moore, "Humility, Concentration and Gusto" from Predilections as reprinted in A Marianne Moore Reader, op. cit., p. 123.

⁵¹F. W. Warlow, "Marianne Moore: Unfalsifying Sun and Solid Gilded Star" (unpublished dissertation, The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1959), p. 100.

⁵²Ibid., p. 103.

⁵³Marion Strobel, assistant editor of Poetry, as quoted by F. W. Warlow, ibid., p. 154.

⁵⁴R. P. Blackmur suggests that the later Cantos of Pound show the influence of Miss Moore's attributes of neatness of finish and accuracy, in other words, her precision of form and thought. See his chapter on her method in Form and Value in Modern Poetry, op. cit., p. 249.

CONCLUSION

In his chapter entitled "The Method of Marianne Moore", R. P. Blackmur speaks of her method as

...not only pervasive but integral to her work. It is integral to the degree that, with her sensibility being what it is, it imposes limits more profoundly than it liberates poetic energy.⁵⁵

It has been the purpose of this thesis to defend Miss Moore's poetry against a charge of limitation in any sense, and to set forth the first and most significant premise of her work as a desire for a poetic synthesis, a harmony of all parts of form and matter. It is this principle that liberates the poetic energy that is acknowledged by Miss Moore as the source of her poetry, her "spontaneous initial originality". It would seem to many that synthesis, that is a deliberate unified and interrelating pattern, and spontaneity of the imaginative impulse are incompatible. Poetry is often regarded, especially by our own troubled generation, as a release for the burdened psyche. Consequently, Miss Moore may seem to many to be old-fashioned, quaint, a symptom of an earlier era in which rationalization was as important to a poem as the quality of its description, and in which a moral as such was not out of place. The incredulous reader may have to be reminded that Miss Moore was long considered avant-garde, and that even in the light of very recent poets, her verse is still "free verse" in the sense that it does not impose restrictions on the imagery and logical flow of the poem.

What has been stressed is the need to understand that any restriction that may seem to exist with regard to form or to emotional involvement of the poet in her subject is a restriction only to the reader who is not aware of what Miss Moore is trying to say. Miss Moore is always aware of the ethical obligations and need of man; such an awareness, after all, is said to be the first step in bringing order to confusion, whether in the whole of civilization or in the conduct of one individual. Christian faith goes even farther to assert that the observance of an ethical code is a response to man's origin in a divine power, that man is closest to God when he observes the moral virtues that are characterized by lack of self-preoccupation and humility. Miss Moore concerns herself with subjects, no matter how widely varied, that stress those virtues although they may be obscured by a superficial appearance. Just as an underlying order is the strength of her philosophy, an underlying order of form is the foundation of her poetical method to express that philosophy. Language and rhythm flow naturally, charged with the significance of the ideas that they impart, but they are incorporated within a form that is neither so subtle that it is self-destructive nor so blatant that it overpowers the ideas that direct its course. If the virtues she admires and deems necessary for man are humility, integrity, independence and purposefulness, then those virtues will be found in her poetry. Precision is said to be her concern, precision that admits no excess but is a means to and an expression of purposeful direction. Her poems are precise; her references may seem incongruous at first glance but there is an essential order in their appearance.

It may be concluded then, that although an initial spontaneity of impression is important to the poet, what she does with that impression is as

important to her as the original impetus. She has verified that the natural music and combinations of words, in terms of meaning, of the conversation about her, as well as the prose works of other writers, provide a stimulus for her creativity. Her sense of order, her need for the symmetrical expression is brought to bear on the language she hears; yet, order, because of its rooted place in her own personality, does not bring a restriction to her creative effort. That is, integral to the understanding and appreciation of her poetry is the realization that aspects of technique and thought merge and unify to exhibit the poetic synthesis that is the whole force and beauty of her poetry. It is not enough to speak of the suitability of her language or the effectiveness of her borrowed quotations as a means of conveying the substance of her thought and the power of her imagery, nor is it enough to comment respectfully on the intricacy of her poetic technique. Miss Moore is determined to pierce through the world of outer appearances to the inner world of spiritual significance, a dual world where one is the shell to contain the other. Similarly her poetic form is the shell that protects the virtues that, in turn, protect and invigorate man in his spiritual quest. Reference has been made to specific poems that best reveal the unity that is her ultimate purpose, and although there is a consistency throughout her fifty years of writing poetry, it is her earlier poems that most effectively reveal the synthesis that characterizes what is her best work.

It is not necessary to fit her work into a scale of popularity that measures one poet in terms of another, nor should we assume that one poet's influence upon another or upon many is a test of his greatness. T. S. Eliot has spoken of her "genuineness", best described as her unshakeable belief in the integrity of the poem as a vehicle for the most profound observations of

the poet. Miss Moore's poems at their best are free from any charge of sophistication and triviality. Her subjects always involve man, although he may not appear directly in the poem; certain animals are discussed because they possess qualities which man would do well to cultivate in his own character. Above all, her means of carrying out her philosophy of poetry which she has expressed in both poetry and prose, has been an ideal expression of that philosophy; her poems have both imaginary gardens and real toads, both equally necessary for the whole experience which she has committed herself to bring to the attention of others.

FOOTNOTES

⁵⁵ R. P. Blackmur, "The Method of Marianne Moore", Form and Value
in Modern Poetry (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1952) p. 156.

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