

**MARIANNE MOORE: NO WAY OUT, GENDERING BODY THROUGH POETICS
AND POETRY AS ECRITURE FEMININE***

MARIANNE MOORE: BAŞKA YOL YOK, POETİKA YOLUYLA BEDENİ
CİNSİYETLENDİRMEK VE DİŞİL YAZIN OLARAK ŞİİR

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Abstract

This study analyzes Marianne Moore's poems *Marriage, To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity* and *Feed Me, Also, River God* from a poststructural feminist framework as posited in the writings of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. The study approaches the poems as examples of *écriture féminine*, which is literally the feminine writing aimed at relocating the feminine and female body back into discourse. Women's non-representation in the male-centered discourse, female essentialization based on her biology and perception of the female body as the locus of male desire are among the primary concerns of these feminist thinkers. In line with the ideas of these theorists, Marianne Moore subverts the traditional patriarchal understanding of what a woman is through her poems and gains poetic subjectivity through re-writing the body. She mimes the language of the father, and masquerades gender roles showing the performativity of these roles while at the same time distorting and revising them to open up space for female subjectivity. Therefore, *écriture féminine* turns into a means to politicize writing and female body through its subversive, revisionary, multiple and fluid aspect.

Keywords: Mimesis, Poststructural Feminism, Female Body, Gender Roles, *Écriture Feminine*

Özet

Bu çalışma Marianne Moore'un *Marriage, To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity* and *Feed Me, Also, River God* şiirlerini, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva ve Luce Irigaray'ın yazılarından yola çıkarak postyapısalcı feminist bir çerçevede incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, bu şiirlere dişili ve dişil bedeni söyleme tekrar yerleştirmeyi hedefleyen ve dişil yazını anlamına gelen 'écriture féminine' örnekleri olarak bakmaktadır. Erkek temelli söylemde kadınların temsil edilemeyişi, yaratılışa bağlı olarak dişilin özcüleştirilmesi ve kadın bedeninin erkek arzusunun nesnesi olarak algılanması bu feminist düşünürlerin temel tartışma noktalarıdır. Bu teoristlerin görüşlerine paralel olarak, Marianne Moore şiirleri aracılığıyla kadının ne olduğuna dair geleneksel fikirleri alt üst eder ve bedeni yeniden yazarak poetik öznelğe ulaşır. Şair, babanın dilini taklit eder, cinsiyet rollerini de maskeleyerek bunların

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edimselliğini gösterir ve bir yandan da dişil öznellik yaratabilmek için bu rolleri çarpıtır ya da yeniden gözden geçirir. Bu yüzden de ‘écriture feminine’ alt üst edici, revizyoner, çoklu ve akışkan doğası sayesinde yazıyı ve kadın bedenini politize etme aracına dönüşür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mimesis, Postyapısal Feminizm, Kadın Bedeni, Cinsiyet Roller, Dişil Yazın

1. INTRODUCTION

Born in Kirkwood, Missouri in 1887, Moore was one of the early modernists. When she published *Selected Poems* in 1937, there was considerable positive reception of her poetic style that was characterized by syllabic lines, irregular rhyming schemes and the assertive style were met with admiration. The following years were full of achievement. She published several poems, won prizes and got high-career jobs. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that she was at the summit of her writing career. At the beginning of the seventies, she suffered from a series of strokes and died in 1972. She left a huge legacy behind, as the companion and friend of many modernists, and an outstanding modernist and feminist poet herself.

Marianne Moore is quite an important poet that fits poststructural feminist analysis as she was against the existing phallogocentric norms of writing and had a tendency to undo these established norms, pushing the mimeticism of male norms to the limit, focusing on pluralities, lyric agency and blurring the very distinctions between I and you, self and the other, fixed and the unfixd. Moore’s poetics both in terms of content and prosodic traditions- in Irigarayan terms- resubmits

herself -inasmuch as she is on the side of “perceptible,” of “matter”-to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language (Irigaray, 1985b:76).

While parodying the language of patriarchy through Irigarayan mimesis or playful repetition, she avoided “a binary notion of empowerment, for herself in relation to traditions of the lyric poem and for her readers” (Miller, 1995:5) through the Kristevan “transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another or passage from one signifying system to another” (Miller, 1995: 5). She also used an irregular pattern of rhyming as opposed to the conventional understanding of regular rhyme schemes and coherence. Diehl posits thus regarding Moore’s poetry: “The imposition of self-created rules speaks not only to Moore’s poetic strategies (her use of syllabics, arbitrary rhyme schemes, and a defiantly idiosyncratic and demotically erudite diction)” (1993:32). Again, concerning her style and how she defies the phallogocentric norm, “In Moore’s poetry, syntax or phrasing, and hence any sense or ‘voice’ or form as an extension of the physical body ...functions in tension with lineation and stanza form rather than in harmony with them” (Miller,1995:74). Moore’s aim in such defiant and non-conventional styles of writing is intimately linked with her desire to create autonomy in her poetry, bring the female body back to speech and she utilizes écriture feminine to create a space of freedom or a locus of exploration of the limits of female desire and female capacity. During this exploration

of the boundlessness of femininity, Cixous and Clement states as regards the female writer thus:

Unleashed and raging, she belongs to the race of waves. She arises, she approaches, she lifts up, she reaches, covers over, washes ashore, flows embracing the cliff's least undulation, already she is another, arising again, ... She has never "held still"; explosion, diffusion, effervescence, abundance, she takes pleasure in being boundless, outside self, outside same, far from a "center" (1896: 90-1).

Indeed, this tendency to explore the limit(lessness) of female creativity characterizes almost all the poems of Marianne Moore since in her poems she delicately handles several issues from sexual to political that are related to women, while at the same time indicating her erudition as a female poet through the combination of high and low culture. In Cixousian terms she writes "her self" and "about women" while at the same time putting, with "herself into the text-as into the world and history-by her own movement (1976:875). Mostly alluding to the authorities of her time and past, Moore both authorizes her writing and paves the way for feminine multiplicity and polyphony. This aspect of Moore's polyphonic and collage-like poetics strengthen Moore's feminine side, since she deviates from the standard patterns of writing and signification.

Moore's intertextuality or collage based poetics mostly depends on quotations taken from unpopular resources and most are inconclusive. The reason for doing so is surely trying to eliminate the male canon in her new discourse. Moore's deliberate habit of giving enormous space to quotations from a wide array of not-so-much popular resources is aimed at blurring the prevalent discourse and form a new epistemology of her own by making changes on the quotations and not presenting them as they are, thereby showing the instability of meaning and unreliability of language. Slatin highlights this by saying: "We must not make the mistake, then, of treating Moore's quotations as performing the literary work of allusion" (1984:274).

Besides, this style of intertextuality through such quotations is not only aimed at blurring the binaries in the prevalent discourse but also aimed at 'de-lyrize', or de-poeticize a poem, "by retracting the reader from the imaginative into the real and pragmatic" (DuPlessis 1988:16). What finally happens is that she becomes the author of a new discourse which she changes at her own will. What comes out becomes a style that is neither in favour of authority (otherwise she would become masculinist) nor exalting feminine values. She abstains from exalting feminine values overtly and she keeps away from romanticizing female body and beauty, which is most possibly due to her eschewing of pre-set norms in writing and poetry. That is why she tends to eliminate gendered distinctions or differences.

Taking into account that Moore belonged to the modernist poetry tradition which was seemingly based on a masculine discourse, it was not easy for her –as a female poet- to represent the 'other' which somewhat was outside the symbolic realm, the realm of the language. As she was not fond of traditional forms of coherence, she instead dealt with a wide array of dualities and multiple voices. She surely was driven by the instinct to create a distinct mode of writing in which she is a sex on her own, not one or the second sex. Though not egoistic, she pays tribute to herself and exalts her own position as the author of her poems, since they are the sole site for her to claim authority in the name of women. In other words, by doing so, Moore tries to assert her ontological position as a female writer without being

marginalized in the world of language that belongs to males. Therefore, rather than overtly and politically stating her feminist position, she tries to reverse and subvert the male order through her unending pluralities and mimicking the Law-of-the-Father to the degree that it begins to lose sense and decay after a while.

It is evident that Moore did not want to write in men's language that is based on hierarchy and in which something is less important or smaller than the other. In other words, she tries to ensure that there is non-hierarchy in her writings, a Cixousian approach to feminine mode of writing. In the same vein, her writing is never overtly gendered. She does not create a politics of writing that defends women's rights or handles female subjugation. Therefore, understanding her feminist side requires a poststructural deconstructionist approach through which we can understand how she makes use of and approaches language to de-phallogocentrize it. Using this approach, we can also see how Moore unfolds the existence of patriarchal ideology in language. She shows us that the very locus for gender struggle is language and that is why she tries to re-establish it and modestly strives at changing the interaction between the signifier and the signified. As a result, Moore tries to manipulate and reverse the significations and representations in the hierarchical male language. Since she avoids being conclusive and behaving as the authority of her texts, her texts are imbued with so much plurality and difficulty and thus her poetry turns into a platform in which the dominant literary tradition and a new boundless subversive female writing are in constant conflict.

As stated previously, her neither overtly political nor feminist poetry is based on her personal experiences and full of imbalance and unknowns. What is more, she leaves all conflicts or incongruities unresolved. In considering her poetics, her unconventional way of dealing with feminine issues can in fact be seen to be her manner of gender politics. Indeed, in Moore, as DuPlessis observes, "stereotypes of masculine and feminine were coming under her increasing scrutiny, and she was trying to build a gender-blurring *tertium quid* between the polarities of masculine and feminine and their problems for poetic representation" (DuPlessis, 2001:44). To Irigaray, such a style allows for fluidity and heterogeneity. In terms of representing dualities and 'heterogeneity' accurately and coherently and deconstructing them, "seeing an object meant speaking of its various aspects on many levels of discourse" (qtd. in Baker, 2014:86).

We can indeed state that Moore and her contemporary female poets were filled with "an ideology fuelled by fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, an ideology of limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and indeed the very materiality of the body" (Bordo, 1993:245). The means used in this ideology is surely writing, as it has the capacity to defy the meanings and impositions conferred upon the female body. She mostly tries to achieve this by mimicking, or parodying. Her sexless voice in her poems most of the time is a means of parodying and transforming the social discourse in which she lives and she cunningly highlights its artificiality and rottenness. Though Moore's poetry is anything but a staged theatricality or parody, she does indeed play with "the mimesis of [especially] prosodic traditions" (DuPlessis 1988:8-9).

1. MARRIAGE: SEMIOTIZATION OF SYMBOLIC THROUGH MASQUERADE

First published in 1923, *Marriage* is a poem in which Moore depicts her negative attitude towards marriage, though it is a socially approved institution. Besides questioning the usefulness of marriage deeply, the fact that she favours being single as an ingenuous action openly shows her detest and protest against the socially accepted norms. However, as she mentions in the poem, staying single is not something that the society favours and approves. It is contemptible and outside the Law-of-the-Father. It is outside the law firstly and most of all because it is through marriage that women are silenced and forced to remain passive and subjugated. Marriage is –in Foucauldian terms- a panopticon that helps to create docile female bodies to bear and deliver children and to satisfy the male desire. In a letter to H.D., Moore wrote thus: “(There is no such thing as a prudent marriage) marriage is a Crusade, there is always tragedy in it” (qtd. in Bergman, 1988:248).

Moore carefully embroiders these themes into her poetry by making a collage of various voices to highlight the message of the poem, which in turn creates a narration without a center and of varied fragments, which characterize *écriture féminine*. This also helps Moore to disperse authority among multiple centers. This is one of the poem’s most prominent features and it includes multitudes of footnotes and this multiplicity inevitably confuses the readers’ mind as to who said what and the authority within the text. This is surely a deliberate strategy to ensure the implicit politics behind her writing, even if she says “Statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly” as regards the quotations (Moore, 1958:271). This note by the poet can also be read as an attempt to bring together the already told words against her new poetics and language. In other words, amidst a thousand voices skillfully brought together or “arranged plausibly” (this plausible arrangement also is self-conscious so as to emphasize the unnatural aspect of marriage; marriage is also a plausible arrangement to the poet), she aims that her new language be heard and understood. This is surely linked to Irigaray’s mimeticism. She mimes and parodies the already heard and familiar voices to draw attention to their artificiality and their status as exhausted statements. As Bloom states, Moore

chose an unusual format, that of collage, which provided ample opportunity to marry the words of friends with the words of magazines, journals, and books. Moore changes perspective constantly, switching from Adam to Eve to disinterested narrator, and if we are to assume that the narrator is Moore herself, then the narrator places herself in a strange position as the authority on an enterprise into which she never entered (Bloom, 2004:95).

In the opening part of the poem, Moore uses the third person without ever using the subject ‘I’ and stunningly criticizes the institution though seemingly the first part is spared for a brief definition of marriage and how it begins.

*This institution,
perhaps one should say enterprise
out of respect for which
one says one need not change one’s mind
about a thing one has believed in,
requiring public promises
of one’s intention*

to fulfil a private obligation (Moore, 1958:66)

In these lines, Moore looks at marriage as a trade/an enterprise or a transaction. The use of 'one' as a subject- as well as adding indeterminacy- shows us how emotionally and socially Moore is distant to the idea of marriage. Based on this eight-line introduction to the poem, the reader becomes persuaded to think that marriage is a hollow institution without a deep meaning embedded in itself. Indeed, the selection of marriage as a topic does not seem coincidental. Marriage is a place in which female subjugation becomes systematized and institutionalized. Even if it seems to involve meanings at the superficial level, Moore subverts all those meanings to lay bare how void it is. The subversion in the poem does not only function at a thematic level, as is the case with the majority of Moore's feminine poetics. Seeing text as the body, Moore plays with syntax, linearity and grammar to change the internal dynamics of language but paradoxically at the same time she preserves an apparent form and structure in her poetry. Doing this, Moore attains lyrical agency and controls the discourse in the text and opens up an unlimited space for the feminine and repressed to speak. Sielke states that Moore's "passion for language and a concern with form whose predominant effect is not conformity but a transgression of discourse and a destabilization of the speaking subject (1997:5). As Bergman suggests as regards the form of the poem, "Rather than beginning the poem where we might expect, she starts from the end; in short, she enters the subject of marriage where most of us exit" (1988:248).

Moore is not much concerned about the nature of marriage. Rather, she tries to unravel the motives that lead women towards marriage. She is doubtful of the 20th century psychology when she says "Psychology which explains everything/ explains nothing, / and we are still in doubt" (Moore, 1958:62). The leading psychologist and psychoanalyst of the 20th century, Freud, is implied within the fabric of this text. Seeing women as 'lesser man' or 'as objects of desire', Freud's ideas were opposed by leading feminists in the era, since his ideas were nothing more than ideas essentializing women. Withholding or deferring meaning in the depths of her text, Moore deconstructs the naming and linguistic attribute given to Adam and writes

*Eve: beautiful woman-
I have seen her
when she was so handsome
she gave me a start,
able to write simultaneously
in three languages-
English, German, and French and
talk in the meantime (Moore, 1958:62).*

Subverting the whole history of language and disregarding Adam's gift to name things, Moore says it is Eve who taught her to write and talk in three Western languages. Even if we cannot exactly know the reason why Moore chose these three languages as the ones Eve taught her to write and talk, a possibility may be that Moore is acting against the Western phenomenology which traces back language to patriarchal origins. As opposed to the distinction between speech and writing in Western metaphysics, Eve teaches the poet how to

write and speak at the same time, blurring the boundary between writing as a rational and therefore masculine gendered concept and speaking as a bodily and therefore feminine gendered concept.

Marriage, to the poet, consists of fulfilling (private) obligations, rather than a romantic unity between two people that includes respect and love. Instead, as I mentioned previously, it turns into an institution where hierarchies and classifications are pivotal. This aspect of the poem is also a reference to its mimetic character. Despite establishing a link of resemblance between marriage as an institution and the careful selection of words like promise, obligation, institution, enterprise, the poet in one sense holds the mirror against the prevailing tradition. While at the textual level, the poem seems to be a collection of words as images depicting what marriage is, the unsaid in the text is conceived through a doubleness of meaning and criticism against marriage and the whole history of patriarchy. The poet behaves as if she were a sociologist or anthropologist observing marriage. Taking into consideration the masculine bias of these rational sciences, Moore revolts against the monolithic patriarchal aspect of the Lacanian symbolic order. Marriage is also an artefact of this symbolic order, and therefore phallogocentric. All these combined together, we can appreciate the feminist textual politics of Moore. Without mentioning women or femininity, she attacks the prevalent system in quite a cunning way. Apparently writing in men's language, her *écriture* feminine is in fact a subverted and subliminal text in which the meaning is withheld or somehow deferred.

Moore leaves the readers in shadow as regards the gender of her speakers as the gender performances are ambiguous in most of the places in the poem. Though we tend to relate the business related lexicon –such as institution and obligation- of the first part with masculinity, we cannot avoid the fact that this is a subverted writing that needs to be analyzed through not a structural but a poststructuralist reading. The relation between what the poem says and means is in constant flux and unstable.

There are 41 quotes in the poem and they are from everywhere: high authority philosophers, scientists, poets, writers or the mainstream sources from the low culture. We can see that Moore points her finger towards a multiplicity through the deliberate use of collage which ruptures the body of the text to give birth to the inherent meaning within. The voices who have been excluded from the symbolic have been brought back to speech. Therefore, Moore's marriage poem is a brief but sharp attack on this long history of male-dominated discourse, to reassert female subjectivity and highlight Eve's maternal function to bring up and tame Adam.

Moore uses language in a way that her language cannot directly be alleged to be a feminist manifesto. Rather, the gender roles she depicts are complicated and difficult to pinpoint. However, as well as keeping her stance against writing a manifesto, she keeps away from reinforcing the binaries or creating an essentialized male stereotype. Still, as a result of her deliberate and self-conscious Irigarayan mimeticism, she depicts men as absurd beings while she makes them talk on how important they are. As regards this, Bergman says "Her language and her art are set up against the established institution which would deny her or subordinate her as a woman, and though she will learn from other poets, including male poets, they are not her masters" (1988:254).

While on one hand Moore exalts the feminine, on the other hand she criticizes masculinity. She ridicules it and besides has an anti-stance against gendered performances. Indeed, we observe no instant of time in which marriage is romanticized. By making use of the Adam and Eve story and even through re-writing and revisioning it, she resists against established sites of power. And, through turning her poetry into a carnival of previous, religious, traditional views on marriage, there remains no central authority in the poem that can defend the usefulness of this institution. Yet, one thing is outstanding and it is the female poet's effort to assert her voice in the poem, among many patriarchal voices and authorities. To change something requires handling it. Therefore, to revise the conventional notions of gender and (feminine) writing, Moore combines all authorities in her Kristevan maternal chora to give birth to her distinct writing. In a sense, the quotations and all the other intertextuality in the poem acts as male semen to fertilize the female womb for the sake of a new formation. Nonetheless, this should not be conceived in the traditional Aristotelian contextualization which sees women as womb, as a field where the sperm flourishes. Instead, the female is a progenitor and procreator of forms through mixing matter from various resources.

In the next lines of the poem, Moore quotes from Francis Bacon by using the expression "of circular traditions" and here she emphasizes both the ring and the circularity of patriarchy. By circularity, I mean a tradition that seems to have no beginning and no end. Moore applies this idea of circularity to marriage in a satiristic way by implying the brightness and goldness of the ring in fact entails many spoils.

*I wonder what Adam and Eve
think of it by this time,
this fire-gilt steel
alive with goldenness;
how bright it shows-
"of circular traditions and impostures,
committing many spoils (Moore, 1958:62).*

Here again she wants us to see the hypocritical aspect of a patriarchal institution. By saying that she cannot comply with the roles assigned to a woman in this institution, Moore both criticizes matrimony and the unnaturalness imposed on it by the patriarchy. Eve may be an object of desire thanks to her beauty but she is knowledgeable. However, an implicit criticism again lies here. Though Eve is knowledgeable, learned and speaks three languages, she is not valued as a subject. She gains value on account of her beauty. In other words, she is like a female commodity. Yet, Moore insistently implies the multiplicity of female power since she is a more versatile user of language, more learned and her knowledge is multilayered as opposed to the superficial male knowledge and language. Indeed, the male undergoes a Kristevan fear of castration through marriage, even if tradition imposes on him the vice versa.

Since Eve is more powerful and more knowledgeable, Moore depicts Eve as a different paradise. She is not the old type of woman. She is the new woman that is desirable not because of her jewelry and physical body. In Moore's eyes, Eve is a subject and she is more than her body and ornamentations on the body. Eve in these lines is most possibly the embodiment of

the New Woman figure leading to the male fear of castration. Her power and stance frighten men, who have been used to seeing her as passive and powerless and as solely flesh.

*and each fresh wave of consciousness
is poison.
"See her, see her in this common world,"
the central flaw
in that first crystal-fine experiment,
this amalgamation which can never be more
than an interesting impossibility,
describing it
as "that strange paradise
unlike flesh, stones,
gold or stately buildings (Moore, 1958:63).*

This is not an arbitrary choice of writing but self-conscious. Using this, Moore indeed handles the heteronormative sexuality and marriage, which is the institutionalized form of patriarchy. Besides, a very intricate design happens in the poem. The poem is a collage from various resources, something I mentioned before. Moore documents some of these sources in the notes and this functions to disperse authority in the poem, which functions to blur the demarcating line between Cixousian binaries. Yet, one another trick runs in *Marriage*. Given Moore's familiarity with Milton, she rewrites many parts of *Paradise Lost* in *Marriage*, though quite in a subtle way. Moore critiques and revises Milton, Shakespeare and Bacon who can be seen as patriarchal leaders of writing, besides many other authorities. As evinced by Keller, these people simply represent "the voice of patriarchy, the speech of its intertext, not a great creator but merely the automatic perpetuator of stereotypes that have supported patriarchy for at least two thousand years" (1991:234). Therefore, this kind of a Kristevan intertextuality is a political device used by Moore to indicate that she is knowledgeable about the authorities of writing to able to be accepted in the society of male writers and she can revise and remold it to give her own message. To Bloom, these borrowings function as "corrective polemic against male slanderings of women" (2005:289). To give an example, subverting the male-centred theogony of Christianity, Moore resembles Adam to Satan in the following lines.

*And he has beauty also;
it's distressing-the O thou
to whom from whom,
without whom nothing-Adam;
"something feline,
something colubrine"-how true!
a crouching mythological monster
in that Persian miniature of emerald mines (Moore, 1958:63).*

Though being confused and not knowing what to do, he is the master. Also, from a psychoanalytical feminist perspective, Adam is directly born into language. Taking this into consideration, he does not know the realm of the Kristevan semiotic and therefore he knows no lack and has no desire. Perhaps, Adam is the foremost representative of masculinity as he has had no ties with the mother. He is parented by the masculine God, without any ties with the maternal body. Adam as a representative male relentlessly tries to own everything including even stars.

*She says, "Men are monopolists
of 'stars, garters, buttons
and other shining baubles' unfit
to be the guardians
of another person's happiness" (1958:67).*

In the notes to the poem, Moore acknowledges us about the source of this quotation by Miss M. Carey Thomas. The original quotation goes as

Men practically reserve for themselves stately funerals, splendid monuments, memorial statues, membership in academies, medals, titles, honorary degrees, stars, garters, ribbons, buttons and other shining baubles, so valueless in themselves and yet so infinitely desirable because they are symbols of recognition by their fellow-craftsmen of difficult work well done." (Moore, 1958:272).

Using this quotation, Moore emphasizes the monopoly of men over women. Besides, she highlights that women are seen as commodities and therefore their existence or their status is something to be consumed by men. However, the gendered role of being the guardian of somebody else's happiness is a point to be criticized. Men collect whatever is of use to them just like they collect women. To them, happiness is bound to objects and because of this they cannot perceive women as subjects, which is a point reiteratively reproached by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. And attraction to a woman is indeed a masculine masquerade. In an Irigarayan context of the masquerade, the male is attracted to the physical attributes and gendered performance of women. Moore overtly forms a social criticism as regards the masquerade within the institution of marriage through these lines.

*What can one do for them these
savages
condemned to disaffect
all those who are not visionaries
alert to undertake the silly task
of making people noble? (1958:68).*

Opposing the ideas of marriage rooted in tradition and Christianity, the possession of women by men, men's allowing no space to women, Moore sets up her own truth as regards

marriage. It is not an institution. It is not something that should be fulfilled to abide by the norms of the phallogocentric tradition. It is not a platform to assert masculine superiority and female inferiority. It is radically different from these opinions that are historically held. To Moore, even if culture dictates that marriage legitimizes a person, marriage is in fact a unity of opposites as in the final lines of the poem: "Liberty and union / now and forever" (1958:70). This final attempt by Moore is also a "conjugation of history" (Loeffelholz, 1996:38). This final culmination of the poem is also quite meaningful. After so many disparate voices brought together in the texture of the poem and subverting the stereotyped femininity of Eve, the wife, Moore finally synthesizes all oppositions and brings them into a reconciliation of genuine 'oneness'.

2. TO BE LIKED BY YOU WOULD BE A CALAMITY: THE POET'S FEMININE SELF-POSITIONING

To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity (1916) is an interesting poem by Moore in that she does not overtly deal with gender issues but her concise yet effective juxtaposition of ideas entails a feminist manifesto that can be read and analyzed in multiple levels. To Hicok, the poem "conveys the feistiness of the New Woman and focuses on a contentious sparring between men and women" (2008:48). In this poem she alludes to Thomas Hardy while saying "Attack is more piquant than concord", the English poet and novelist. In Hardy's *Blue Eyes*, "the inexperienced young heroine Elfride Swancourt finds herself attracted to Harry Knight, an austere, sharp tongued intellectual, after she has already promised to wed Stephen Smith, the simple son of a mason who adores her unreservedly (Schulze, 2002:219). Elfride writes medieval romances but Harry Knight criticizes these writings solemnly. Basically, what Hardy seems to be suggesting through this work is that a man who uses words aggressively is more stimulating and exciting to a lady than a man who uses harmony and courtesy and it seems that Moore reverses the aggression on her side.

We cannot truly know what Moore's expectations of a true man was, since she did not have any long lasting relationships with men and nor got married. She was even called the spinster poet of modernism. Though the context drawn by Hardy may bring into mind a desire for an oppressive man by the poet, the ensuing lines of the poem show the opposite. There is a reversal and rewriting of Hardy's lines by Marianne Moore. Moore protests the fact that concord is a behavior expected from women. Subverting Hardy's lines, Moore defends a woman should 'attack' through silence rather than display gendered and submissive behavior. If she submits to the male desire and does not attack in her own language, she can never become a true subject and explore her own sexuality. Instead, she will always have to remain as an object of desire. As Cristanne Miller suggests "The speaker chooses not to engage in a duel – the field of masculine honor par excellence- but instead to redefine the mode of combat, and thus demonstrates her or his superior effectiveness and strength (1995:108). Heuving also suggests that "although Moore's poetry is not primarily concerned with subjects of sex and gender, this absence does not mean she writes a poetry according to boys' rules (1987:119).

Cixous defines the realm of men as the realm of property, in which he possesses, manages and exerts control over women. What Marianne Moore simply revolts against is the fact that she is commodified in the patriarchal realm. "You tell me frankly that you would like to feel / My

flesh beneath your feet” (Moore, 2016:34). The female body is something only to be exploited, which we understand from the words “beneath your feet”. While the male can articulate his desire for the female flesh, she only has to remain submissive. Tragic though, the female body is somehow associated with edible animal meat, something to satisfy hunger. When this flesh is finished, the consumer male will find newer flesh to consume. Narrating the oppression against her body through metaphor and such cunning style, Moore multiplies her language against a mentality that solely feeds on flesh. To Heuving, who also emphasizes the multiplicity of the language in the poem, the poem’s “melangé of languages create uncertainty as to whether the poem is to be read literally, allegorically, or symbolically (1992:75).

As Cixous states in “Castration or Decapitation”, “Unable to speak of pleasure = no pleasure, no desire: power, desire, speaking, pleasure, none of these is for woman” (1981:45), women are systematically excluded from discourse and culture. All the institutions in the Western culture, history and textuality have been shaped around this closure: to ban the women from speech and articulating her desire. Inspired by Elfride’s effort to make her writings accepted among men, Moore too undergoes an anxiety of authorship. Moore, however, does not give up. She is ready for a struggle when she says “I’m all abroad; I can but put my weapon up, and / Bow you out” (2016:34), since it seems that there is kind of a violence directed against the speaker of the persona of the poem. However, the persona defuses this violence through speech, instead of mutual combat. Besides, the divorce of the linguistic object from the line of the subject while saying “You tell me frankly that you would like to feel / My flesh beneath your feet” must be another textual strategy of Moore’s to relocate the “flesh” into the discourse as a subject. In other words, Moore politicizes the poetic space to assert her subjectivity that is enriched by her flesh. As Cristanne Miller states in “What is War for? Moore’s Development of an Ethical Poetry”, “Moore’s speaker wittily employs gesture to refuse to engage in violence, turning aside her interlocutor’s threats while maintaining the principle of her own difference (2005:65).

It should be kept in mind that writing is the utmost tool for these poets to assert their existence and to defy against a convention that has muted them for ages. In Churchill’s words, “Rejecting certain ideas, attitudes and behaviours rather than attacking specific individuals, these poems (the early poems of Moore) are not antagonistic, but they are oppositional (2006:156).

What Moore tries to tell in this poem is that though the female body has been regarded as docile and valueless as it can be something to tread on, the fact is totally different. The female body is not flesh nor an object of desire. On the contrary, in Cixous’s view, the female body is productive and reproductive and not solely a material. Moore entirely removes “her body as the material basis for men’s discourse, by making it her own means of bodily and unreasoning self-expression” (Heuving, 1992:77-8). Therefore, when an assault comes by the male, the female resists it immediately through her body. The object of desire therefore turns into an active agent of defence. Moore inserts her subversive style well into the poem and even the title of the poem is a locus of resistance in itself as the poet overtly challenges the idea of being liked by a male, as that liking is no more than the abuse of the female body and a severe attack on her identity. In Gilbert and Gubar’s words, the “spinster poet bows herself out of the plot of erotic liking and so avoids calamity” (qtd. in. Zuba, 2016:47). Yet, even though she

seems to be speechlessly surrendering on the face level while saying “Let unsheathed gesticulation be the steel / your courtesy must meet” (Moore, 2016:34), the poem “actually drives forward with the acoustics of counterattack” (Swigg, 2012: xvi).

In the second stanza of the poem, Moore pays more attention to the ability of the body to communicate and implies the fact that the female body has been silenced and seen solely as a means of fulfilling male desire. Language is limited and does not have the ability to represent the abject female. In order to represent herself, she has a language of her own. This is the language of the mother which functions not on words but silence and the body. In Irigarayan terms, the body at stake in this poem is a body that is unrepressed and auto-erotic. By auto-erotic, I mean that it does not need another body or another interlocutor to make its language and existence mean something. It is already there (da-sein) and is self-existent as opposed to the male language whose existence is dependent on the phallus, the transcendental signifier.

One another aspect of the poem that relates it with *écriture féminine* is that it resists a linear or sequential reading and the meaning is not organized in a hierarchical manner. As Churchill states,

The tone and meaning of a quotation can even shift within the space of the poem as in “To Be Liked by You Would be A Calamity”, which begins with the apparent assertion that “Attack is more piquant than concord,” only to refute the notion and express a preference for bowing out of a confrontation. These shifts and reversals require us to read spatially rather than sequentially. Until we have examined the entire composition, we cannot be sure whether the speaker is quoting in order to endorse, contest or transform the meaning of a statement to suit the context of the poem (2006:157).

The genders in psychoanalysis are not necessarily linked with biological sexes and have deeper levels of meaning. Here in this poem it is clear that there no genders as male or female. However, it is apparent that there are two binaries: one dominating and the other being dominated. In line with the premises of psychoanalytical feminist theory, I read the one attacking and treading on the flesh as male and the one resisting against this torment in an alternative way and calling for courtesy as female. The expression “unsheathed gesticulation” is also worthy of attention here. Moore here alludes to the realm of the imaginary in which things have their core values and are unspoiled. If “unsheathed gesticulation meets courtesy”, then the one sided monolithic discourse can turn into a two-way communication. Besides, the poststructural feminist reading of the poem unfolds the multiplicity of female intelligence and perception when we read the expression “Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my senses / Are a shout”(Moore, 2016:34). Even though the male recipient cannot truly understand these words and thinks that the woman is passive, she is in fact restraining against the violence in an aggressive way. The female has a multi-sensory and multi-productive capacity and therefore her language does not merely consist of words but also of silences, rhythm, melody of the Kristevan maternal chora and appearance representing the body as can be seen from the rightward orientation of the stanzas. What is more, Moore here represents the hysteric female speaker whose words are unintelligible to the male listener. Hysteria means speaking through the body, not in the language of the father’s discourse. This being the case, communication between male and female falls into jeopardy and in a similar vein, the female poet has difficulty

in making the language of her poetry be understood by her male counterparts; it speaks for and to itself.

3. FEED ME, ALSO, RIVER GOD: EXILED DAUGHTER'S INVOCATION TO THE GOD (M)OTHER

Feed Me, Also, River God (1916) is a poem by Marianne Moore which again –on the surface level- seems to be gender neutral, since Moore generally likes “simultaneously protecting and revealing her identity as a woman” (Ambrozy-Lis, 2009:4). However, her use of gendered connotations when she says “I become food for crocodiles” (Moore, 2017:182) brings into the mind how she has been disempowered and susceptible. The location of ‘also’ in the title makes us suppose that this maternal River God feeds some people and that is why the poet also expects to be fed. Besides, the River God also acts as maternal in that the poet requests protection from the crocodiles.

The poem's signification capacity is multiple since it can be either read as a female author's desire to reposition herself among the society of male writers, or an invocation to the River God(dess) for a language that may empower her among her male counterparts, or the poet may desire and pray for the intelligibility of female discourse among a society of crocodiles. In an Irigarayan outlook, a woman-to-woman relationship saves women and daughters from the roles defined by patriarchy and is “an indispensable precondition for our emancipation from the authority of fathers” (Irigaray, 1991:50), as it is men's language that “separates her from her mother and other woman” (Irigaray, 1991:101).

Pushing the violence of male imagery to the limit through the metaphor crocodile, Moore also reminds us that she is within that river, i.e. the legion of the poets, which most possibly have led her to invoke the River God(dess) to obtain recognition. Because she has to remain within that realm, she has to call for assistance from a female deity to be able to produce a language that will redeem her as a feminine poet. Cristanne Miller expresses this as regards Moore's stance and feeling of subjugation in the poem: “Read as an autobiographical statement, this poem suggests that after years of having her submissions to literary magazines, rejected, Moore sees herself as despised, outcast, a minority-like the Jews (1995:107). Opposing the literary conventions of her time and the fact that women should deal with sentimental writing, Moore in Gilbert's words, “created a different female persona, that of ‘antipoetess’ which allowed her to blur these distinctions, ...in this way voice her suspicion of the limitations imposed on women poets by the cultural standards of her time” (qtd. in Ambrozy-Lis, 2009: 7).

The problem with Marianne Moore is that she does not overtly deal with sexual matters and sexuality of her poems, which must have been the main reason as to why she has been labelled as the ‘spinster poet’. The psychoanalytical feminist theory, nevertheless, provides us with some telescopic lens to handle the hidden issues of sexuality in Marianne Moore's poetic legacy. Since the psychoanalytical framework does not only evaluate the matters of gender and sexuality within the framework of male-female relations but also in terms of how language is constructed vis-a-vis the male subjectivity and female objectivity and the re-positioning of the female self in a society which allows her no space, it facilitates our understanding of Moore's poetry. As Irigaray puts it “Femininity is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by

male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her part” (1985b:84). This is the reason why Moore writes poems that are not easy to define and categorize in terms of gender and sexuality.

In the last stanza of the poem, writes Moore “I am not like / them, indefatigable, but if you are a god, you will / not discriminate against me” (2017:182). Confessing her weak status as a woman and that she cannot cope up with the physical strength of the opponent, she expects equal treatment from the maternal God. The expression “If you are a God” is quite challenging in that it states her expectation of equality from God. This statement alone can be read as a reprimand against the patriarchal discourse which does not permit female representation and sees the female as secondary to the male. Pushing the Lacanian ‘mirror-image’ theory to the borders, it can be said that upon seeing her image on the waters of the river, Moore demands for (aesthetic) self-confirmation. Now that the phallus is the transcendental signifier in patriarchal phenomenology, Moore re-directs herself to the Goddess to be able to find a locus of representation. This indeed acts as a ritual of initiation on the poet’s behalf or rebirth-from water. She will be initiated into the masculine realm of writing, into the Word through the body of water, which Irigaray sees as amniotic fluid, and thus her writings will be more than illegible gibberish.

A second focal point in the poem is surely Moore’s allusion to Isaiah in these lines:

You remember the Israelites who said in pride

*and stoutness of heart: “The bricks are fallen down, we will
build with hewn stone, the sycamores are cut down, we will
change to cedars”?(2017:182).*

The verse in Isaiah (8:7) goes as “therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks”. The context for the verse is that Isaiah reproaches the Northern king of Israel for being too proud of himself and his people when they think they can easily repair the damage brought about by water. The verse goes on as

*All the people will know it -Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria— who say with pride
and arrogance of heart, The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone;
the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars (Isaiah: 9:9-10).*

These lines herald the abyss the Israelities will undergo since they have opposed the will of God and behaved arrogantly. So, how can we combine this religious text with Moore’s political aim as a female writer and where can we locate Moore’s allusion to a religious text to claim her position as a writer? Firstly, it is water, the source of all life, which has ruined Samaria. Given the feminine nature of water, it is both constructive and deconstructive. It is constructive because all living things thrive through water. It constitutes our bodies and flesh. It is at the same destructive of cities, which are man-made, and other sites of culture. Yet, the feminine water has multiple powers. On the other hand, the pride of the city dwellers or the male writers within the context of this poem is only destructive. Therefore, what befalls upon a writer should be humility and knowing one’s limits, without asserting authority over the disenfranchised or creating a legion of superiors. Moore here masquerades a saintly position. However, considering her autobiography and the fact that so many of her writings were rejected

by the male legion uncovers the existence of a female desire to represent herself utilizing religious texts.

3. CONCLUSION

Despite not being overtly related to issues of sexuality and femininity, Marianne Moore's poems are quite suitable for poststructural feminist analysis in that she focuses on subverting the male norms of writing mainly through poetics and mimeticism and in her writings the dualisms of I and you, self and the other become eschewed. She is the spinster poet of modernism and her poems are invaded with metaphors of nature that signify female empowerment and she cunningly decentralizes the centres of power through her intertextual readings of high and low culture. Her poetry, in a sense, turns into a crucible from which the patriarchal language is transformed into a centerless, multi-layered and rhythmic utterances, reminding us of the Kristevan maternal chora.

Moore benefits highly from mimesis, which implies that the feminine features and roles attributed to women are imitated in her poems and that the masculine order can be shaken by this imitation. She takes the feminine roles attributed to women to the upper limits in her poems. Because only when this mimetic tendency is maximized, its meaninglessness can be realized and the masculine order can be deconstructed. Moore shows us in her poems that gender roles are socially constructed and female subjugation and her absence from the discourse are things stemming from the patriarchal systems of thought.

Her poetics opposes the conventional understanding of rhyme schemes and functions as a space for Moore to reposition herself among the society of male poets. Writing poetry empowers her and gives agency to her. Being able to narrate condense phenomena such as politics and religion in her usually page-length or even shorter poems consisting of a few stanzas, Moore utilizes poetry as a space of freedom. Her paying attention to the physicality of her poems is associated with her desire to bring the long repressed feminine body and voice into discourse, which is the main implication of *écriture féminine*. This politically imbued writing style asserts itself through the unresolved conflicts, incongruities and multiplicities of meaning. Besides, Moore's intertextuality and collage poems function as the intermediary to her political purposes in writing. Enriched with end-notes, her poetic texts instigate ambiguity in the reader's mind as to what is said by whom. Due to this, the text turns into a polyphonic platform in which it is difficult to locate a central authority.

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