

Marianne Moore **1887-1972**

Marianne Craig Moore's life began in Kirkwood, Missouri on November 15, 1887. While not always an easy life, it was one filled with activity, intellectual stimulation, praise and controversy. At seventy she learned to drive a car, and at eighty- one she threw out the first ball for opening day at Yankee Stadium. Moore's father, John Milton Moore, was an engineer and inventor. He married her mother, Mary Warner, in 1885, but two years into the marriage had a nervous breakdown after the failure of his business and was committed to a mental institution. Marianne's mother took her son John Warner and moved in with her father, Reverend Dr. John Riddle Warner, a Presbyterian minister, in whose house Marianne was born. She never knew her father. When Moore was seven, her grandfather died, and the family moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Mary Moore taught English at Metzger Institute for Girls.

The influence of literature in Marianne's life was always present. Not only did Marianne's mother teach English, but Reverend Dr. Warner also had had a high regard for books and music. He had sent his daughter to study at the Mary Institute, a school endowed by T.S. Eliot's grandfather, the Unitarian Dr. William Eliot. Marianne's mother then began teaching her children French and piano when they were very young. Additionally Marianne's paternal grandfather, William Moore, owned a large library and was a voracious reader. (William Moore was the brother of the steamboat pilot under whom Samuel Clemens was apprenticed.)

Moore attended Bryn Mawr College, the only time she did not live with her mother until her mother's death in 1947. There she majored in biology and histology graduating in 1919. She said in a 1961 interview that those scientific studies had influenced her poetry. "Precision, economy of statement, logic employed to ends that are disinterested, drawing and identifying, liberate—at least have some bearing on—the imagination." (DLB 45, p.279) Her early work was published in the Bryn Mawr literary magazine.

After Bryn Mawr Moore attended Carlisle Commercial College from 1909-1910 where she took a business course. After that she and her mother spent the summer of 1911 in England and Paris. Upon returning to Carlisle, Moore taught typing, stenography, bookkeeping, commercial law, and commercial English at the United States Industrial Indian School. She also fixed the typewriters and coached the boy's field sports. All the while she was contributing to the Bryn Mawr alumnae magazine.

Then in the April 1915 issue of London's *Egoist* two of her poems were published. Later the same year they published five more. The December issue of *Others*, edited in New York, included five of her poems as well that year, and *Poetry*, in Chicago printed another four. Marianne Moore had arrived on the literary scene. More publication followed over the next two years. Meantime Moore and her mother had moved to Chatham, New Jersey to be housekeepers for her brother, newly ordained by Yale Divinity School as a Presbyterian minister. When he joined the navy and became engaged in 1918, Moore and her mother moved into a basement apartment in Greenwich Village. She lived there until 1929. Moore made

friends with many artists, writers and critics at bohemian parties. She took work as a librarian and while she was published less often in the small presses, she continued to write, and to rework previously written pieces, as was always her way. 1921 saw the publication in England of her first book, *Poems* followed by *Observations* published in the United States in 1924. Also in 1924 Moore received a \$2000 award from the Dial Press for “distinguished service to American letters.” (DLB 45, p.286)

In 1925 Marianne Moore became the editor of the *Dial* magazine. She held that position until publication ended in 1929. While editor there she had the opportunity to work with the most promising writers of the day. The lengthy list includes T.S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, W.B. Yeats, D.H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. She also represented a number of artists’ work including Max Weber, Wyndham Lewis, Picasso, Cocteau, Georgia O’Keefe and even American Indians. Her work at the *Dial* won her international recognition and allowed her to support herself and her mother by writing after the editor’s position ended. Moore continued to work as a writer of verse, reviews, and essays until 1970 when she became a semi-invalid. Her poetry, known as innovative and experimental, made her one of the most widely recognized modern poets of the 20th century. She experimented with syllabic metrics and stanza form; her subjects ranged from an interest in animals to concerns about values and marriage. Nothing was off limits. Her awards included the National Book Award (1952), Pulitzer Prize (1952), and the Bollingen Prize for Poetry (1953). Marianne Moore died in New York City on February 5, 1972. She was eighty-five.

--L. Margaret Pomeroy

Sources Used:

Phillips, Elizabeth. “Marianne Moore,” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, (1986 ed.), XXXXV, 277-300.