

Classic Poetry Series

Marianne Moore
- poems -

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Marianne Moore(November 15, 1887 – February 5, 1972)

Moore was born in Kirkwood, Missouri, in the manse of the Presbyterian church where her maternal grandfather, John Riddle Warner, served as pastor. She was the daughter of construction engineer and inventor John Milton Moore and his wife, Mary Warner. She grew up in her grandfather's household; her father having been committed to a mental hospital before her birth. In 1905, Moore entered Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and graduated four years later. She taught at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, until 1915, when Moore began to publish poetry professionally.

In part because of her extensive European travels before the First World War, Moore came to the attention of poets as diverse as Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, H.D., T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. From 1925 until 1929, Moore served as editor of the literary and cultural journal *The Dial*. This continued her role, similar to that of Pound, as a patron of poetry, encouraging promising young poets, including Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery and James Merrill, and publishing early work, as well as refining poetic technique.

In 1933, Moore was awarded the Helen Haire Levinson Prize from Poetry. Her *Collected Poems of 1951* is perhaps her most rewarded work; it earned the poet the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Bollingen Prize. Moore became a minor celebrity, in New York literary circles, serving as unofficial hostess for the Mayor. She attended boxing matches, baseball games and other public events, dressed in what became her signature garb, a tricorne hat and a black cape. She particularly liked athletics and athletes, and was a great admirer of Muhammad Ali, for whose spoken-word album, *I Am the Greatest!*, she wrote liner notes. Moore continued to publish poems in various journals, including *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *Partisan Review*, as well as publishing various books and collections of her poetry and criticism. Moore corresponded for a time with W. H. Auden and Ezra Pound during the latter's incarceration.

Her most famous poem is perhaps the one entitled, appropriately, "Poetry", in which she hopes for poets who can produce "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." It also expressed her idea that meter, or anything else that claims the exclusive title, "poetry," is not as important as delight in language and precise, heartfelt expression in any form. She often composed her own poetry in syllabics. These syllabic lines from "Poetry" illustrate her position: poetry is a matter of skill and honesty in any form whatsoever, while anything written

poorly, although in perfect form, cannot be poetry:

nor is it valid

to discriminate against "business documents and

school-books": all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry

In 1955, Moore was informally invited by David Wallace, manager of marketing research for Ford's "E-car" project, and his co-worker Bob Young to provide input with regard to the naming of the car. Wallace's rationale was "Who better to understand the nature of words than a poet?" On October 1955, Moore was approached to submit "inspirational names" for the E-car, and on November 7, she offered her list of names, which included such notables as "Resilient Bullet", "Ford Silver Sword", "Mongoose Civique", "Varsity Stroke", "Pastelogram" and "Andante con Moto." On December 8, she submitted her last and most famous name, "Utopian Turtletop." The E-car was finally christened by Ford as the Edsel.

Not long after throwing the first pitch for the 1968 season in Yankee Stadium, Moore suffered a stroke. She suffered a series of strokes thereafter, and died in 1972. She was interred in Gettysburg's Evergreen Cemetery.

Moore never married. Moore's living room has been preserved in its original layout in the collections of the Rosenbach Museum & Library in Philadelphia. Her entire library, knick-knacks (including a baseball signed by Mickey Mantle), all of her correspondence, photographs, and poetry drafts are available for public viewing.

Like Robert Lowell, Moore revised a great many of her early poems (including "Poetry") in later life. These appeared in *The Complete Poems* of 1967, after which critics tended to accept as canonical the "elderly Moore's revisions of the exuberant texts of her own poetic youth." Facsimile editions of the theretofore out-of-print 1924 *Observations* became available in 2002. Since that time there has been no critical consensus about which versions are authoritative.

In 1996, she was inducted into the St. Louis Walk of Fame.

An Octopus

of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies 'in grandeur and in mass'
beneath a sea of shifting snow-dunes;
dots of cyclamen-red and maroon on its clearly defined
pseudo-podia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice-fields from fifty to five hundred
feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy.
'Picking periwinkles from the cracks'
or killing prey with the concentric crushing rigor of the python,
it hovers forward 'spider fashion
on its arms' misleading like lace;
its 'ghostly pallor changing
to the green metallic tinge of an anemone-starred pool.'
The fir-trees, in 'the magnitude of their root systems,'
rise aloof from these maneuvers 'creepy to behold,'
austere specimens of our American royal families,
'each like the shadow of the one beside it.
The rock seems frail compared with the dark energy of life,'
its vermilion and onyx and manganese-blue interior expensiveness
left at the mercy of the weather;
'stained transversely by iron where the water drips down,'
recognized by its plants and its animals.
Completing a circle,
you have been deceived into thinking that you have progressed,
under the polite needles of the larches
'hung to filter, not to intercept the sunlight'—
met by tightly wattled spruce-twigs
'conformed to an edge like clipped cypress
as if no branch could penetrate the cold beyond its company';
and dumps of gold and silver ore enclosing The Goat's Mirror—
that lady-fingerlike depression in the shape of the left human
foot,
which prejudices you in favor of itself
before you have had time to see the others;
its indigo, pea-green, blue-green, and turquoise,
from a hundred to two hundred feet deep,
'merging in irregular patches in the middle of the lake

where, like gusts of a storm
obliterating the shadows of the fir-trees, the wind makes lanes
of ripples.'

What spot could have merits of equal importance
for bears, elks, deer, wolves, goats, and ducks?
Pre-empted by their ancestors,
this is the property of the exacting porcupine,
and of the rat 'slipping along to its burrow in the swamp
or pausing on high ground to smell the heather';
of 'thoughtful beavers
making drains which seem the work of careful men with shovels,'
and of the bears inspecting unexpectedly
ant-hills and berry-bushes.

Composed of calcium gems and alabaster pillars,
topaz, tourmaline crystals and amethyst quartz,
their den in somewhere else, concealed in the confusion
of 'blue forests thrown together with marble and jasper and agate
as if the whole quarries had been dynamited.'

And farther up, in a stag-at-bay position
as a scintillating fragment of these terrible stalagmites,
stands the goat,
its eye fixed on the waterfall which never seems to fall—
an endless skein swayed by the wind,
immune to force of gravity in the perspective of the peaks.

A special antelope
acclimated to 'grottoes from which issue penetrating draughts
which make you wonder why you came,'
it stands it ground
on cliffs the color of the clouds, of petrified white vapor—
black feet, eyes, nose, and horns, engraved on dazzling ice-fields,
the ermine body on the crystal peak;
the sun kindling its shoulders to maximum heat like acetylene,
dyeing them white—
upon this antique pedestal,
'a mountain with those graceful lines which prove it a volcano,'
its top a complete cone like Fujiyama's
till an explosion blew it off.

Distinguished by a beauty
of which 'the visitor dare never fully speak at home
for fear of being stoned as an impostor,'
Big Snow Mountain is the home of a diversity of creatures:
those who 'have lived in hotels

but who now live in camps—who prefer to';
the mountain guide evolving from the trapper,
'in two pairs of trousers, the outer one older,
wearing slowly away from the feet to the knees';
'the nine-striped chipmunk
running with unmammal-like agility along a log';
the water ouzel
with 'its passion for rapids and high-pressured falls,'
building under the arch of some tiny Niagara;
the white-tailed ptarmigan 'in winter solid white,
feeding on heather-bells and alpine buckwheat';
and the eleven eagles of the west,
'fond of the spring fragrance and the winter colors,'
used to the unegoistic action of the glaciers
and 'several hours of frost every midsummer night.'
'They make a nice appearance, don't they,'
happy see nothing?
Perched on treacherous lava and pumice—
those unadjusted chimney-pots and cleavers
which stipulate 'names and addresses of persons to notify
in case of disaster'—
they hear the roar of ice and supervise the water
winding slowly through the cliffs,
the road 'climbing like the thread
which forms the groove around a snail-shell,
doubling back and forth until where snow begins, it ends.'
No 'deliberate wide-eyed wistfulness' is here
among the boulders sunk in ripples and white water
where 'when you hear the best wild music of the forest
it is sure to be a marmot,'
the victim on some slight observatory,
of 'a struggle between curiosity and caution,'
inquiring what has scared it:
a stone from the moraine descending in leaps,
another marmot, or the spotted ponies with glass eyes,
brought up on frosty grass and flowers
and rapid draughts of ice-water.
Instructed none knows how, to climb the mountain,
by business men who require for recreation
three hundred and sixty-five holidays in the year,
these conspicuously spotted little horses are peculiar;
hard to discern among the birch-trees, ferns, and lily-pads,

avalanche lilies, Indian paint-brushes,
bear's ears and kittentails,
and miniature cavalcades of chlorophyllless fungi
magnified in profile on the moss-beds like moonstones in the water;
the cavalcade of calico competing
with the original American menagerie of styles
among the white flowers of the rhododendron surmounting
rigid leaves
upon which moisture works its alchemy,
transmuting verdure into onyx.

'Like happy souls in Hell,' enjoying mental difficulties,
the Greeks
amused themselves with delicate behavior
because it was 'so noble and fair';
not practised in adapting their intelligence
to eagle-traps and snow-shoes,
to alpenstocks and other toys contrived by those
'alive to the advantage of invigorating pleasures.'
Bows, arrows, oars, and paddles, for which trees provide the
wood,
in new countries more eloquent than elsewhere—
augmenting the assertion that, essentially humane,
'the forest affords wood for dwellings and by its beauty
stimulates the moral vigor of its citizens.'
The Greeks liked smoothness, distrusting what was back
of what could not be clearly seen,
resolving with benevolent conclusiveness,
'complexities which still will be complexities
as long as the world lasts';
ascribing what we clumsily call happiness,
to 'an accident or a quality,
a spiritual substance or the soul itself,
an act, a disposition, or a habit,
or a habit infused, to which the soul has been persuaded,
or something distinct from a habit, a power'—
such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of.
'Emotionally sensitive, their hearts were hard';
their wisdom was remote
from that of these odd oracles of cool official sarcasm,
upon this game preserve
where 'guns, nets, seines, traps, and explosives,

hired vehicles, gambling and intoxicants are prohibited;
disobedient persons being summarily removed
and not allowed to return without permission in writing.'
It is self-evident
that it is frightful to have everything afraid of one;
that one must do as one is told
and eat rice, prunes, dates, raisins, hardtack, and tomatoes
this fossil flower concise without a shiver,
intact when it is cut,
damned for its sacrosanct remoteness—
like Henry James 'damned by the public for decorum';
not decorum, but restraint;
it is the love of doing hard things
that rebuffed and wore them out—a public out of sympathy
with neatness.

Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish!
Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact.
'Creeping slowly as with meditated stealth,
its arms seeming to approach from all directions,'
it receives one under winds that 'tear the snow to bits
and hurl it like a sandblast
shearing off twigs and loose bark from the trees.'
Is 'tree' the word for these things
'flat on the ground like vines'?
some 'bent in a half circle with branches on one side
suggesting dust-brushes, not trees;
some finding strength in union, forming little stunted grooves
their flattened mats of branches shrunk in trying to escape'
from the hard mountain 'planned by ice and polished by the wind'—
the white volcano with no weather side;
the lightning flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak—
the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed,
its claw cut by the avalanche
'with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
in a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall.'

Marianne Moore

Appellate Jurisdiction

Fragments of sin are a part of me.
New brooms shall sweep clean the heart of me.
 Shall they? Shall they?

When this light life shall have passed away,
God shall redeem me, a castaway.
 Shall He? Shall He?

Marianne Moore

Baseball And Writing

Fanaticism?ng is exciting
and baseball is like writing.
You can never tell with either
how it will go
or what you will do;
generating excitement--
a fever in the victim--
pitcher, catcher, fielder, batter.
Victim in what category?
Owlman watching from the press box?
To whom does it apply?
Who is excited? Might it be I?

It's a pitcher's battle all the way--a duel--
a catcher's, as, with cruel
puma paw, Elston Howard lumbers lightly
back to plate.(His spring
de-winged a bat swing.)
They have that killer instinct;
yet Elston--whose catching
arm has hurt them all with the bat--
When questioned, says, unenviously,
"I'm very won."
Shorn of the batting crown, says, "We";
Robbed by a technicality.

When three players on a side play three positions
and modify conditions,
the massive run need not be everything.
"Going, going . . . "Is
it? Roger Maris
has it, running will
never see a finer . . .
"Mickey, leaping like the devil"--why
ould it, although deer sounds better--
snares what was speeding towards its treetop nest,
he-handing the souvenir-to-be
meant to be caught by you or me.

Assign Yogi Berra to Cape Canaveral;
he could handle any missile.
He is no feather."Strike! . . . Strike two!"
Fouled back.A blur.
It's would infer
that the bat had eyes.
He put the wood to that one.
Praised, Skowron says, "Thanks, Mel.
I think I helped a little bit."
All business, each, and modesty.
Blanchard, Richardson, Kubek, Boyer.
In that galaxy of nine, say which
won the pennant?Each.It was he.

Those two magnificent saves from the knee-throws
by Boyer, finesses in twos--
like Whitey's three kinds of pitch and pre-
diagnosis
with pick-off psychosis.
Pitching is a large subject.
Your arm, too true at first, can learn to
catch your corners--even trouble
Mickey Mantle.("Grazed a Yankee!
My baby pitcher, Montejo!"
With some pedagogy,
you'll be tough, premature prodigy.)

They crowd him and curve him and aim for the g
indeed!The secret implying:
"I can stand here, bat held steady."
One may suit him;
none has hit him.
Imponderables smite him.
Muscle kinks, infections, spike wounds
require food, rest, respite from ruffians.(Drat it!
Celebrity costs privacy!)
Cow's milk, "tiger's milk," soy milk, carrot juice,
brewer's yeast (high-potency--
concentrates presage victory

ped by Luis Arroyo, Hector Lopez--
deadly in a "Yes,

it's work; I want you to bear down,
but enjoy it
while you're doing it."
Mr. Houk and Mr. Sain,
if you have a rummage sale,
don't sell Roland Sheldon or Tom Tresh.
Studded with stars in belt and crown,
the Stadium is an adastrum.
□ flashing Orion,
your stars are muscled like the lion.

Marianne Moore

He "Digesteth Harde Yron"

Although the aepyornis
or roc that lived in Madagascar, and
the moa are extinct,
the camel-sparrow, linked
with them in size--the large sparrow
Xenophon saw walking by a stream--was and is
a symbol of justice.

This bird watches his chicks with
a maternal concentration-and he's
been mothering the eggs
at night six weeks--his legs
their only weapon of defense.
He is swifter than a horse; he has a foot hard
as a hoof; the leopard

is not more
could he, prized for plumes and eggs and young
used even as a riding-beast, respect men
hiding actor-like in ostrich skins, with the right hand
making the neck move as if alive
and from a bag the left hand strewing grain, that ostriches

might be decoyed and killed!Yes, this is he
whose plume was anciently
the plume of justice; 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 egg piously shown
as Leda's very own
from which Castor and Pollux hatched,
was an what could have been more fit
for the Chinese lawn it

grazed on as a gift to an

emperor who admired strange birds, than this
one, who builds his mud-made
nest in dust yet will wade
in lake or sea till only the head shows.

□□□□□□

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.

The power of the visible
is the invisible; as even where
no tree of freedom grows,
so-called brute courage knows.
Heroism is exhausting, yet
it contradicts a greed that did not wisely spare
the harmless solitaire

or great auk in its grandeur;
unsolicitude having swallowed up
all giant birds but an alert gargantuan
little-winged, magnificently speedy running-bird.
This one remaining rebel
is the sparrow-camel.

Marianne Moore

He Made This Screen

not of silver nor of coral,
but of weatherbeaten laurel.

Here, he introduced a sea
uniform like tapestry;

here, a fig-tree; there, a face;
there, a dragon circling space --

designating here, a bower;
there, a pointed passion-flower.

Marianne Moore

His Shield

The pin-swin or spine-swine
(the edgehog miscalled hedgehog) with all his edges out,
echidna and echinoderm in distressed-
pin-cushion thorn-fur coats, the spiny pig or porcupine,
the rhino with horned snout-
everything is battle-dressed.

Pig-fur won't do, I'll wrap
myself in salamander-skin like Presbyter John.
A lizard in the midst of flames, a firebrand
that is life, asbestos-eyed asbestos-eared, with tattooed nap
and permanent pig on
the instep; he can withstand

fire and won't drown. In his
unconquerable country of unpompous gusto,
gold was so common none considered it; greed
and flattery were unknown. Though rubies large as tennis-
balls conjoined in streams so
that the mountain seemed to bleed,

the inextinguishable
salamander styled himself but presbyter. His shield
was his humility. In Carpasian
linen coat, flanked by his household lion-cubs and sable
retinue, he revealed
a formula safer than

an armorer's: the power of relinquishing
what one would keep; that is freedom. Become dinosaur-
skulled, quilled or salamander-wooled, more ironshod
and javelin-dressed than a hedgehog battalion of steel, but be
dull. Don't be envied or
armed with a measuring rod.

Marianne Moore

Marriage

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 fulfill a private obligation:
I wonder what Adam and Eve
think of it by this time,
this firegilt steel
alive with goldenness;
how bright it shows --
"of circular traditions and impostures,
committing many spoils,"
requiring all one's criminal ingenuity
to avoid!
Psychology which explains everything
explains nothing
and we are still in doubt.
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;
equally positive in demanding a commotion
and in stipulating quiet:
"I should like to be alone;"
to which the visitor replies,
"I should like to be alone;
why not be alone together?"
Below the incandescent stars
below the incandescent fruit,
the strange experience of beauty;
its existence is too much;
it tears one to pieces

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 possibility,
describing it
as "that strange paradise
unlike flesh, gold, or stately buildings,
the choicest piece of my life:
the heart rising
in its estate of peace
as a boat rises
with the rising of the water;"
constrained in speaking of the serpent --
that shed snakeskin in the history of politeness
not to be returned to again --
that invaluable accident
exonerating Adam.
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,
raw silk -- ivory white, snow white,
oyster white and six others --
that paddock full of leopards and giraffes --
long lemonyellow bodies
sown with trapezoids of blue.
Alive with words,
vibrating like a cymbal
touched before it has been struck,
he has prophesied correctly --
the industrious waterfall,
"the speedy stream
which violently bears all before it,
at one time silent as the air
and now as powerful as the wind."

"Treading chasms
on the uncertain footing of a spear,"
forgetting that there is in woman
a quality of mind
which is an instinctive manifestation
is unsafe,
he goes on speaking
in a formal, customary strain
of "past states," the present state,
seals, promises,
the evil one suffered,
the good one enjoys,
hell, heaven,
everything convenient
to promote one's joy."
There is in him a state of mind
by force of which,
perceiving what it was not
intended that he should,
"he experiences a solemn joy
in seeing that he has become an idol."
Plagued by the nightingale
in the new leaves,
with its silence --
not its silence but its silences,
he says of it:
"It clothes me with a shirt of fire."
"He dares not clap his hands
to make it go on
lest it should fly off;
if he does nothing, it will sleep;
if he cries out, it will not understand."
Unnerved by the nightingale
and dazzled by the apple,
impelled by "the illusion of a fire
effectual to extinguish fire,"
compared with which
the shining of the earth
is but deformity -- a fire
"as high as deep as bright as broad
as long as life itself,"
he stumbles over marriage,

"a very trivial object indeed"
to have destroyed the attitude
in which he stood --
the ease of the philosopher
unfathered by a woman.
Unhelpful Hymen!
"a kind of overgrown cupid"
reduced to insignificance
by the mechanical advertising
parading as involuntary comment,
by that experiment of Adam's
with ways out but no way in --
the ritual of marriage,
augmenting all its lavishness;
its fiddle-head ferns,
lotus flowers, opuntias, white dromedaries,
its hippopotamus --
nose and mouth combined
in one magnificent hopper,
"the crested screamer --
that huge bird almost a lizard,"
its snake and the potent apple.
He tells us
that "for love
that will gaze an eagle blind,
that is like a Hercules
climbing the trees
in the garden of the Hesperides,
from forty-five to seventy
is the best age,"
commending it
as a fine art, as an experiment,
a duty or as merely recreation.
One must not call him ruffian
nor friction a calamity --
the fight to be affectionate:
"no truth can be fully known
until it has been tried
by the tooth of disputation."
The blue panther with black eyes,
the basalt panther with blue eyes,
entirely graceful --

one must give them the path --
the black obsidian Diana
who "darkeneth her countenance
as a bear doth,
causing her husband to sigh,"
the spiked hand
that has an affection for one
and proves it to the bone,
impatient to assure you
that impatience is the mark of independence
not of bondage.

"Married people often look that way" --

"seldom and cold, up and down,
mixed and malarial
with a good day and bad."

"When do we feed?"

We occidentals are so unemotional,
we quarrel as we feed;
one's self is quite lost,
the irony preserved

in "the Ahasuerus tête à tête banquet"
with its "good monster, lead the way,"
with little laughter

and munificence of humor
in that quixotic atmosphere of frankness
in which "Four o'clock does not exist
but at five o'clock

the ladies in their imperious humility
are ready to receive you";

in which experience attests
that men have power

and sometimes one is made to feel it.

He says, "what monarch would not blush
to have a wife

with hair like a shaving-brush?

The fact of woman

is not `the sound of the flute
but every poison."

She says, "`Men are monopolists
of stars, garters, buttons
and other shining baubles' --
unfit to be the guardians

of another person's happiness."
He says, "These mummies
must be handled carefully --
`the crumbs from a lion's meal,
a couple of shins and the bit of an ear';
turn to the letter M
and you will find
that `a wife is a coffin,'
that severe object
with the pleasing geometry
stipulating space and not people,
refusing to be buried
and uniquely disappointing,
revengefully wrought in the attitude
of an adoring child
to a distinguished parent."
She says, "This butterfly,
this waterfly, this nomad
that has `proposed
to settle on my hand for life.' --
What can one do with it?
There must have been more time
in Shakespeare's day
to sit and watch a play.
You know so many artists are fools."
He says, "You know so many fools
who are not artists."
The fact forgot
that "some have merely rights
while some have obligations,"
he loves himself so much,
he can permit himself
no rival in that love.
She loves herself so much,
she cannot see herself enough --
a statuette of ivory on ivory,
the logical last touch
to an expansive splendor
earned as wages for work done:
one is not rich but poor
when one can always seem so right.
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?
This model of petrine fidelity
who "leaves her peaceful husband
only because she has seen enough of him" --
that orator reminding you,
"I am yours to command."
"Everything to do with love is mystery;
it is more than a day's work
to investigate this science."
One sees that it is rare --
that striking grasp of opposites
opposed each to the other, not to unity,
which in cycloid inclusiveness
has dwarfed the demonstration
of Columbus with the egg --
a triumph of simplicity --
that charitive Euroclydon
of frightening disinterestedness
which the world hates,
admitting:

"I am such a cow,
if I had a sorrow,
I should feel it a long time;
I am not one of those
who have a great sorrow
in the morning
and a great joy at noon;"
which says: "I have encountered it
among those unpretentious
protégés of wisdom,
where seeming to parade
as the debater and the Roman,
the statesmanship
of an archaic Daniel Webster
persists to their simplicity of temper
as the essence of the matter:

`Liberty and union
now and forever;'

the book on the writing-table;
the hand in the breast-pocket."

Marianne Moore

Nevertheless

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

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

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

hazelnuts? Frost that kills
the little rubber-plant -
leaves of kok-sagyyz-stalks, can't

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

leaf clinging to a barbed wire,
a root shot down to grow
in earth two feet below;

as carrots from mandrakes
or a ram's-horn root some-
times. Victory won't come

to me unless I go
to it; a grape tendril
ties a knot in knots till

knotted thirty times - so
the bound twig that's under-
gone and over-gone, can't stir.

The weak overcomes its
menace, the strong over-
comes itself. What is there

like fortitude! What sap
went through that little thread
to make the cherry red!

Marianne Moore

Nine Nectarines And Other Porcelain

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;
although not uncommonly
the opposite is seen—
nine peaches on a nectarine.
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 gray by the
uninquiring brush
of mercantile bookbinding.
Like the peach Yu , the red-
cheeked peach which cannot aid the dead,
but eaten in time prevents death,
'the Italian
peach-nut, Persian plum, Ispahan

secluded wall-grown nectarine,
as wild spontaneous fruit was
found in China first. But was it wild?
Prudent de Candolle would not say.
One perceives no flaws
in this emblematic group
of nine, with leaf window
unquilted by curculio
which someone once depicted on
this much-mended plate
or in the also accurate

unantlered moose or Iceland horse
or ass asleep against the old
thick, low-leaning nectarine that is the

color of the shrub-tree's brownish
flower.

A Chinese "understands
the spirit of the wilderness";
and the nectarine-loving kylin
of pony appearance—the long-
tailed or the tailless
small cinnamon-brown, common
camel-haired unicorn
with antelope feet and no horn,
here enameled on porcelain.
It was a Chinese
Who imagined this masterpiece.

Marianne Moore

No Swan So Fine

"No water so still as the
dead fountains of Versailles." No swan,
with swart blind look askance
and gondoliering legs, so fine
as the chinz china one with fawn-
brown eyes and toothed gold
collar on to show whose bird it was.

Lodged in the Louis Fifteenth
candelabrum-tree of cockscomb-
tinted buttons, dahlias,
sea-urchins, and everlastings,
it perches on the branching foam
of polished sculptured
flowers--at ease and tall. The king is dead.

Marianne Moore

Peter

Strong and slippery, built for the midnight grass-party confronted by four cats,
he sleeps his time away -- the detached first claw on his foreleg which
corresponds

to the thumb, retracted to its tip; the small tuft of fronds
or katydid legs above each eye, still numbering the units in each group;
the shadbones regularly set about his mouth, to droop or rise

in unison like the porcupine's quills -- motionless. He lets himself be flat-
tened out by gravity, as it were a piece of seaweed tamed and weakened by
exposure to the sun; compelled when extended, to lie
stationary. Sleep is the result of his delusion that one must do as
well as one can for oneself; sleep -- epitome of what is to

him as to the average person, the end of life. Demonstrate on him how
the lady caught the dangerous southern snake, placing a forked stick on either
side of its innocuous neck; one need not try to stir
him up; his prune shaped head and alligator eyes are not a party to the
joke. Lifted and handled, he may be dangled like an eel or set

up on the forearm like a mouse; his eyes bisected by pupils of a pin's
width, are flickeringly exhibited, then covered up. May be? I should say,
might have been; when he has been got the better of in a
dream -- as in a fight with nature or with cats -- we all know it. Profound sleep is
not with him, a fixed illusion. Springing about with froglike ac-

curacy, emitting jerky cries when taken in the hand, he is himself
again; to sit caged by the rungs of a domestic chair would be unprofit-
able -- human. What is the good of hypocrisy? It
is permissible to choose one's employment, to abandon the wire nail, the
roly-poly, when it shows signs of being no longer a pleas-

ure, to score the adjacent magazine with a double line of strokes. He can
talk, but insolently says nothing. What of it? When one is frank, one's very
presence is a compliment. It is clear that he can see
the virtue of naturalness, that he is one of those who do not regard
the published fact as a surrender. As for the disposition

invariably to affront, an animal with claws wants to have to use
them; that eel-like extension of trunk into tail is not an accident. To

leap, to lengthen out, divide the air -- to purloin, to pursue.
to tell the hen: fly over the fence, go in the wrong way -- in your perturbation -- this is life; to do less would be nothing but dishonesty.

Marianne Moore

Poetry

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

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in

it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes

that can dilate, hair that can rise

if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are

useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,

the same thing may be said for all of us, that we do not admire what

we cannot understand: the bat

holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under

a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a

flea, the base-

ball fan, the statistician--

nor is it valid

to discriminate against 'business documents and

school-books'; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,

nor till the poets among us can be

'literalists of

the imagination'--above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them', shall we have

it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,

the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

Marianne Moore

Rosemary

Beauty and Beauty's son and rosemary -
Venus and Love, her son, to speak plainly -
born of the sea supposedly,
at Christmas each, in company,
braids a garland of festivity.
Not always rosemary -

since the flight to Egypt, blooming indifferently.
With lancelike leaf, green but silver underneath,
its flowers - white originally -
turned blue. The herb of memory,
imitating the blue robe of Mary,
is not too legendary

to flower both as symbol and as pungency.
Springing from stones beside the sea,
the height of Christ when he was thirty-three,
it feeds on dew and to the bee
"hath a dumb language"; is in reality
a kind of Christmas tree.

Marianne Moore

Roses Only

You do not seem to realize that beauty is a liability rather than an asset - that in view of the fact that spirit creates form we are justified in supposing that you must have brains. For you, a symbol of the unit, stiff and sharp, conscious of surpassing by dint of native superiority and liking for everything self-dependent, anything an

ambitious civilization might produce: for you, unaided, to attempt through sheer reserve, to confuse presumptions resulting from observation, is idle. You cannot make us think you a delightful happen-so. But rose, if you are brilliant, it is not because your petals are the without-which-nothing of pre-eminence. Would you not, minus thorns, be a what-is-this, a mere peculiarity? They are not proof against a worm, the elements, or mildew; but what about the predatory hand? What is brilliance without co-ordination? Guarding the infinitesimal pieces of your mind, compelling audience to the remark that it is better to be forgotten than to be remembered too violently, your thorns are the best part of you.

Marianne Moore

Silence

My father used to say,
"Superior people never make long visits,
have to be shown Longfellow's grave
nor the glass flowers at Harvard.
Self reliant like the cat --
that takes its prey to privacy,
the mouse's limp tail hanging like a shoelace from its mouth --
they sometimes enjoy solitude,
and can be robbed of speech
by speech which has delighted them.
The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence;
not in silence, but restraint."
Nor was he insincere in saying, "' Make my house your inn'.
Inns are not residences.

Marianne Moore

Spenser's Ireland

has not altered; -
a place as kind as it is green,
the greenest place I've never seen.
Every name is a tune.
Denunciations do not affect
the culprit; nor blows, but it
is torture to him to not be spoken to.
They're natural,-
the coat, like Venus'
mantle lined with stars,
buttoned close at the neck,-the sleeves new from disuse.

If in Ireland
they play the harp backward at need,
and gather at midday the seed
of the fern, eluding
their 'giants all covered with iron,' might
there be fern seed for unlearn-
ing obduracy and for reinstating
the enchantment?
Hindered characters
seldom have mothers
in Irish stories, but they all have grandmothers.

It was Irish;
a match not a marriage was made
when my great great grandmother'd said
with native genius for
disunion, 'Although your suitor be
perfection, one objection
is enough; he is not
Irish.' Outwitting
the fairies, befriending the furies,
whoever again
and again says, 'I'll never give in,' never sees

that you're not free
until you've been made captive by
supreme belief,- credulity

you say? When large dainty
fingers tremblingly divide the wings
of the fly for mid-July
with a needle and wrap it with peacock-tail,
or tie wool and
buzzard's wing, their pride,
like the enchanter's
is in care, not madness. Concurring hands divide

flax for damask
that when bleached by Irish weather
has the silvered chamois-leather
water-tightness of a
skin. Twisted torcs and gold new-moon-shaped
lunulae aren't jewelry
like the purple-coral fuchsia-tree's. Eire-
the guillemot
so neat and the hen
of the heath and the
linnet spinet-sweet-bespeak relentlessness? Then

they are to me
like enchanted Earl Gerald who
changed himself into a stag, to
a great green-eyed cat of
the mountain. Discommodity makes
them invisible; they've dis-
appeared. The Irish say your trouble is their
trouble and your
joy their joy? I wish
I could believe it;
I am troubled, I'm dissatisfied, I'm Irish.

Marianne Moore

The Fish

wade
through black jade
Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
adjusting the ash heaps;
opening and shutting itself like
an
injured fan.
The barnacles which encrust the side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the
sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating
the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff; whereupon the stars,
pink
rice-grains, ink-
bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like green
lilies, and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.
All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of
ac-
cident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm-side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what can not revive

its youth. The sea grows old in it.

Marianne Moore

The Mind is a wonderful Thing

is an enchanted thing
like the glaze on a
katydid-wing
subdivided by sun
till the nettings are legion.
Like Giesking playing Scarlatti;

like the apteryx-awl
as a beak, or the
kiwi's rain-shawl
of haired feathers, the mind
feeling its way as though blind,
walks along with its eyes on the ground.

It has memory's ear
that can hear without
having to hear.
Like the gyroscope's fall,
truly equivocal
because trued by regnant certainty,

it is a power of strong enchantment. It
is like the dove-
neck animated by
sun; it is memory's eye;
it's conscientious inconsistency.

It tears off the veil; tears
the temptation, the
mist the heart wears,
from its eyes - if the heart
has a face; it takes apart
dejection. It's fire in the dove-neck's

iridescence; in the inconsistencies
of Scarlatti.
Unconfusion submits
its confusion to proof; it's
not a Herod's oath that cannot change.

Marianne Moore

The Pangolin

Another armored animal—scale
lapping scale with spruce-cone regularity until they
form the uninterrupted central
tail row! This near artichoke with head and legs and
grit-equipped gizzard,
the night miniature artist engineer is,
yes, Leonardo da Vinci's replica—
impressive animal and toiler of whom we seldom hear.
Armor seems extra. But for him,
the closing ear-ridge—
or bare ear licking even this small
eminence and similarly safe
contracting nose and eye apertures
impenetrably closable, are not;—a true ant-eater,
not cockroach-eater, who endures
exhausting solitary trips through unfamiliar ground at night,
returning before sunrise; stepping in the moonlight,
on the moonlight peculiarly, that the outside
edges of his hands may bear the weight and save the
claws
for digging. Serpentine about
the tree, he draws
away from danger unpugnaciously,
with no sound but a harmless hiss; keeping
the fragile grace of the Thomas-
of-Leighton Buzzard Westminster Abbey wrought-iron
vine, or
rolls himself into a ball that has
power to defy all effort to unroll it; strongly intailed, neat
head for core, on neck not breaking off, with curled-in feet.
Nevertheless he has sting-proof scales; and nest
of rocks closed with earth from inside, which he can
thus darken.
Sun and moon and day and night and man and beast
each with a splendor
which man in all his vileness cannot
set aside; each with an excellence!
"Fearful yet to be feared," the armored
ant-eater met by the driver-ant does not turn back, but

engulfs what he can, the flattered sword-
edged leafpoints on the tail and artichoke set leg-and
body-plates
quivering violently when it retaliates
and swarms on him. 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, although if unintruded on,
he cautiously works down the tree, helped
by his tail. The giant-pangolin-
tail, graceful tool, as prop or hand or broom or ax, tipped like
an elephant's trunk with special skin,
is not lost on this ant-and stone-swallowing uninjurable
artichoke which simpletons thought a living fable
whom the stones had nourished, whereas ants had done
so. Pangolins are not aggressive animals; between
dusk and day they have the not unchain-like machine-like
form and frictionless creep of a thing
made graceful by adversities, con-
versities. To explain grace requires
a curious hand. If that which is at all were not forever,
why would those who graced the spires
with animals and gathered there to rest, on cold luxurious
low stone seats—a monk and monk and monk—between the
thus
ingenious roof-supports, have slaved to confuse
grace with a kindly manner, time in which to pay a
debt,
the cure for sins, a graceful use
of what are yet
approved stone mullions branching out across
the perpendiculars? A sailboat
was the first machine. Pangolins, made
for moving quietly also, are models of exactness,
on four legs; on hind feet plantigrade,
with certain postures of a man. Beneath sun and moon,
man slaving
to make his life more sweet, leaves half the flowers worth
having,
needing to choose wisely how to use his strength;
a paper-maker like the wasp; a tractor of foodstuffs,

like the ant; spidering a length
of web from bluffs
above a stream; in fighting, mechanicked
like to pangolin; capsizing in
disheartenment. 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 humor.
Humor saves a few steps, it saves years. Unignorant,
modest and unemotional, and all emotion,
he has everlasting vigor,
power to grow,
though there are few creatures who can make one
breathe faster and make one erecter.
Not afraid of anything is he,
and then goes cowering forth, tread paced to meet an obstacle
at every step. Consistent with the
formula—warm blood, no gills, two pairs of hands and a few
hairs—that
is a mammal; there he sits in his own habitat,
serge-clad, strong-shod. The prey of fear, he, always
curtailed, extinguished, thwarted by the dusk, work
partly done,
says to the alternating blaze,
"Again the sun!
anew each day; and new and new and new,
that comes into and steadies my soul."

Marianne Moore

The Paper Nautilus

For authorities whose hopes
are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
teatime fame and by
commuters' comforts? Not for these
the paper nautilus
constructs her thin glass shell.

Giving her perishable
souvenir of hope, a dull
white outside and smooth-
edged inner surface
glossy as the sea, the watchful
maker of it guards it
day and night; she scarcely

eats until the eggs are hatched.
Buried eight-fold in her eight
arms, for she is in
a sense a devil-
fish, her glass ram'shorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed;
as Hercules, bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively
watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,--
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.

Marianne Moore

The Past Is The Present

If external action is effete
and rhyme is outmoded,
I shall revert to you,
Habakkuk, as when in a Bible class
the teacher was speaking of unrhymed verse.
He said - and I think I repeat his exact words -
"Hebrew poetry is prose
with a sort of heightened consciousness." Ecstasy affords
the occasion and expediency determines the form.

Marianne Moore

The Steeple-Jack

Dürer would have seen a reason for living
in a town like this, with eight stranded whales
to look at; with the sweet sea air coming into your house
on a fine day, from water etched
with waves as formal as the scales
on a fish.

One by one in two's and three's, the seagulls keep
flying back and forth over the town clock,
or sailing around the lighthouse without moving their wings --
rising steadily with a slight
quiver of the body -- or flock
mewing where

a sea the purple of the peacock's neck is
paled to greenish azure as Dürer changed
the pine green of the Tyrol to peacock blue and guinea
gray. You can see a twenty-five-
pound lobster; and fish nets arranged
to dry. The

whirlwind fife-and-drum of the storm bends the salt
marsh grass, disturbs stars in the sky and the
star on the steeple; it is a privilege to see so
much confusion. Disguised by what
might seem the opposite, the sea-
side flowers and

trees are favored by the fog so that you have
the tropics first hand: 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,
striped grass, lichens, sunflowers, asters, daisies --
yellow and crab-claw ragged sailors with green bracts -- toad-plant,
petunias, ferns; pink lilies, blue

ones, tigers; poppies; black sweet-peas.

The climate

is not right for the banyan, frangipani, or
jack-fruit trees; or for exotic serpent
life. Ring lizard and snake-skin for the foot, if you see fit;
but here they've cats, not cobras, to
keep down the rats. The diffident
little newt

with white pin-dots on black horizontal spaced-
out bands lives here; yet there is nothing that
ambition can buy or take away. The college student
named Ambrose sits on the hillside
with his not-native books and hat
and sees boats

at sea progress white and rigid as if in
a groove. Liking an elegance of which
the souch is not bravado, he knows by heart the antique
sugar-bowl shaped summer-house of
interlacing slats, and the pitch
of the church

spire, not true, from which a man in scarlet lets
down a rope as a spider spins a thread;
he might be part of a novel, but on the sidewalk a
sign says C. J. Poole, Steeple Jack,
in black and white; and one in red
and white says

Danger. The church portico has four fluted
columns, each a single piece of stone, made
modester by white-wash. This would be a fit haven for
waifs, children, animals, prisoners,
and presidents who have repaid
sin-driven

senators by not thinking about them. The
place has a school-house, a post-office in a
store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted schooner on
the stocks. The hero, the student,

the steeple-jack, each in his way,
is at home.

It could not be dangerous to be living
in a town like this, of simple people,
who have a steeple-jack placing danger signs by the church
while he is gilding the solid-
pointed star, which on a steeple
stands for hope.

Marianne Moore

To A Steam Roller

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

Sparkling chips of rock
are crushed down to the level of the parent block.
Were not 'impersonal judgment in aesthetic
matters, a metaphysical impossibility,' you

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

Marianne Moore

To An Intra-Mural Rat

You make me think of many men
Once met, to be forgot again
Or merely resurrected
In a parenthesis of wit
That found them hastening through it
Too brisk to be inspected.

Marianne Moore

What Are Years

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt, —
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
encourage others
and in its defeat, stirs
the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be,
in its surrendering
finds its continuing.
So he who strongly feels,
behaves. The very bird,
grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

Marianne Moore