**The Snail**

To grass, or leaf, or fruit, or wall,

The snail sticks close, nor fears to fall,

As if he grew there, house and all

Together.

Within that house secure he hides,

When danger imminent betides

Of storm, or other harm besides

Of weather.

Give but his horns the slightest touch,

His self-collecting power is such,

He shrinks into his house, with much

Displeasure.

Where’er he dwells, he dwells alone,

Except himself has chattels none,

Well satisfied to be his own

Whole treasure.

Thus, hermit-like, his life he leads,

Nor partner of his banquet needs,

And if he meets one, only feeds

The faster.

Who seeks him must be worse than blind,

(He and his house are so combined)

If, finding it, he fails to find

Its master.

—William Cowper

**To a Snail**

If “compression is the first grace of style,”

you have it. Contractility is a virtue

as modesty is a virtue.

It is not the acquisition of any one thing

that is able to adorn,

or the incidental quality that occurs

as a concomitant of something well said,

that we value in style,

but the principle that is hid:

in the absence of feet, “a method of conclusions”;

“a knowledge of principles”,

in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.

—Marianne Moore

**Giant Snail**

The rain has stopped. The waterfall will roar like that all night. I have come out to take a walk and feed. My body—foot, that is—is wet and cold and covered with sharp gravel. It is white, the size of a dinner plate. I have set myself a goal, a certain rock, but it may well be dawn before I get there. Although I move ghostlike and my floating edges barely graze the ground, I am heavy, heavy, heavy. My white muscles are already tired. I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the smallest stones and sticks. And I must not let myself be distracted by those rough spears of grass. Don’t touch them. Draw back. Withdrawal is always best.

The rain has stopped. The waterfall makes such a noise! (And what if I fall over it?) The mountains of black rock give off such clouds of steam! Shiny streamers are hanging down their sides. When this occurs, we have a saying that the Snail Gods have come down in haste. I could never descend such steep escarpments, much less dream of climbing them.

That toad was too big, too, like me. His eyes beseeched my love. Our proportions horrify our neighbors.

Rest a minute; relax. Flattened to the ground, my body is like a pallid, decomposing leaf. What's that tapping on my shell? Nothing. Let’s go on.

My sides move in rhythmic waves, just off the ground, from front to back, the wake of a ship, wax-white water, or a slowly melting floe. I am cold, cold, cold as ice. My blind, white bull’s head was a Cretan scare-head; degenerate, my four horns that can’t attack. The sides of my mouth are now my hands. They press the earth and suck it hard. Ah, but I know my shell is beautiful, and high, and glazed, and shining. I know it well, although I have not seen it. Its curled white lip is of the finest enamel. Inside, it is as smooth as silk, and I, I fill it to perfection.

My wide wake shines, now it is growing dark. I leave a lovely opalescent ribbon: I know this.

But O! I am too big. I feel it. Pity me.

If and when I reach the rock, I shall go into a certain crack there for the night. The waterfall below will vibrate through my shell and body all night long. In that steady pulsing I can rest. All night I shall be like a sleeping ear.

—Elizabeth Bishop

**Considering the Snail**

The snail pushes through a green

night, for the grass is heavy

with water and meets over

the bright path he makes, where rain

has darkened the earth’s dark. He

moves in a wood of desire,

pale antlers barely stirring

as he hunts. I cannot tell

what power is at work, drenched there

with purpose, knowing nothing.

What is a snail’s fury? All

I think is that if later

I parted the blades above

the tunnel and saw the thin

trail of broken white across

litter, I would never have

imagined the slow passion

to that deliberate progress.

—Thom Gunn

**Diamonds**

Is the snail

sharpened

by crawling

over diamonds?

Is her foot

hardened

so it can’t

carry her?

No. Snails

make mucus.

Even the

most precious

barriers

to lettuce

are useless.

—Kay Ryan