

those small things that are occasionally capable of overwhelming with a chilling-sensation of time and space.

He once told me that Rothko had been an influence on him, to which I replied, "Yes, but Rothko in a whisper." Who does not feel a sense of release, of calm and quiet, in looking at these little pieces of our vast and ancient world that one can actually hold in the palm of one's hand?

1967

The Poet's Essay.

- Elizabeth Bishop.

Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore

IN the first edition of Marianne Moore's *Collected Poems* of 1951 there is a poem originally called "Efforts and Affection." In my copy of this book, Marianne crossed out the "and" and wrote "of" above it. I liked this change very much, and so I am giving the title "Efforts of Affection" to the whole piece.

I first met Marianne Moore in the spring of 1934 when I was a senior at Vassar College, through Miss Fanny Borden, the college librarian. A school friend and the friend's mother, both better read and more sophisticated in their literary tastes than I was, had told me about Marianne Moore's poetry several years earlier. I had already read every poem of Miss Moore's I could find, in back copies of *The Dial*, "little magazines," and anthologies in the college library. I hadn't known poetry could be like that; I took to it immediately, but although I knew there was a volume of hers called *Observations*, it was not in the library and I had never seen it.

Because Miss Borden seems like such an appropriate person to have introduced me to Marianne Moore, I want to say a little about her. She was the niece of the Fall River Lizzie Borden, and at college the rumor was that Lizzie Borden's lurid career had had a permanently subduing effect on Miss Fanny Borden's personality. She was extremely shy and reserved and spoke in such a soft voice it was hard to hear her at all. She was tall and thin; she always dressed in browns and grays, old-fashioned, muted, and distinguished-looking. She also rode a chainless bicycle. I remember watching her ride slowly up to the library, seated very high and straight on this curiosity, which somehow seemed more lady-like than a bicycle with a chain, and park it in the rack. (We didn't padlock bicycles then.) Once, after she had gone inside, I examined the bicycle, which was indeed chainless, to see if I could figure out how it worked. I couldn't. Contact with the librarian was rare; once in a long while, in search of a book, one would be sent into Miss Borden's office, shadowy and cave-like, with books piled every-

where. She weighed down the papers on her desk with smooth, round stones, quite big stones, brought from the seashore, and once when my roommate admired one of these, Miss Borden said in her almost inaudible voice, "Do you like it? You may have it," and handed it over, gray, round, and very heavy.

One day I was sent in to Miss Borden's office about a book, I no longer remember what. We continued talking a little, and I finally got up my courage to ask her why there was no copy of *Observations* by that wonderful poet Marianne Moore in the Vassar library. She looked ever so gently taken aback and inquired, "Do you like Marianne Moore's poems?" I said I certainly did, the few I'd been able to find. Miss Borden then said calmly, "I've known her since she was a little girl," and followed that with the question that was possibly to influence the whole course of my life: "Would you like to meet her?" I was painfully—no, excruciatingly—shy and I had run away many times rather than face being introduced to adults of much less distinction than Marianne Moore, but I immediately said, "Yes." Miss Borden said that she would write to Miss Moore, who lived in Brooklyn, and also that she would be glad to lend me her copy of *Observations*.

Miss Borden's copy of *Observations* was an eye-opener in more ways than one. Poems like "An Octopus," about a glacier, or "Peter," about a cat, or "Marriage," about marriage, struck me, as they still do, as miracles of language and construction. Why had no one ever written about things in this clear and dazzling way before? But at the same time I was astonished to discover that Miss Borden (whom I now knew to be an old family friend of the Moores) obviously didn't share my liking for these poems. Tucked in the back of the book were quite a few reviews that had appeared when *Observations* was published, in 1924, and most of these were highly unfavorable, some simply obtuse. There was even a parody Moore poem by Franklin P. Adams. Even more revealing, Miss Borden hadn't seen fit to place a copy of her friend's book in the college library. (Later that year I found a copy for myself, on a secondhand-book table at Macy's.)

The day came when Miss Borden told me that she had heard from Miss Moore and that Miss Moore was willing to meet me in New York, on a Saturday afternoon. Years later I discovered

that Marianne had agreed to do this with reluctance; in the past, it seems, dear Miss Borden had sent several Vassar girls to meet Miss Moore and sometimes her mother as well, and every one had somehow failed to please. This probably accounted for the conditions laid down for our first rendezvous: I was to find Miss Moore seated on the bench at the right of the door leading to the reading room of the New York Public Library. They might have been even more strict. I learned later that if Miss Moore really expected *not* to like would-be acquaintances, she arranged to meet them at the Information Booth in Grand Central Station—no place to sit down, and, if necessary, an instant getaway was possible. In the meantime, I had been told a little more about her by Miss Borden, who described her as a child, a strange and appealing little creature with bright red hair—playful, and, as might have been expected, fond of calling her family and friends by the names of animals.

I was very frightened, but I put on my new spring suit and took the train to New York. I had never seen a picture of Miss Moore; all I knew was that she had red hair and usually wore a wide-brimmed hat. I expected the hair to be bright red and for her to be tall and intimidating. I was right on time, even a bit early, but she was there before me (no matter how early one arrived, Marianne was always there first) and, I saw at once, not very tall and not in the least intimidating. She was forty-seven, an age that seemed old to me then, and her hair was mixed with white to a faint rust pink, and her rust-pink eyebrows were frosted with white. The large flat black hat was as I'd expected it to be. She wore a blue tweed suit that day and, as she usually did then, a man's "polo shirt," as they were called, with a black bow at the neck. The effect was quaint, vaguely Bryn Mawr 1909, but stylish at the same time. I sat down and she began to talk.

It seems to me that Marianne talked to me steadily for the next thirty-five years, but of course that is nonsensical. I was living far from New York many of those years and saw her at long intervals. She must have been one of the world's greatest talkers: entertaining, enlightening, fascinating, and memorable; her talk, like her poetry, was quite different from anyone else's in the world. I don't know what she talked about at that first meeting; I wish I had kept a diary. Happily ignorant of the

poor Vassar girls before me who hadn't passed muster, I began to feel less nervous and even spoke some myself. I had what may have been an inspiration, I don't know—at any rate, I attribute my great good fortune in having known Marianne as a friend in part to it. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus was making its spring visit to New York and I asked Miss Moore (we called each other "Miss" for over two years) if she would care to go to the circus with me the Saturday after next. I didn't know that she *always* went to the circus, wouldn't have missed it for anything, and when she accepted, I went back to Poughkeepsie in the grimy day coach extremely happy.

The Circus

I got to Madison Square Garden very early—we had settled on the hour because we wanted to see the animals before the show began—but Marianne was there ahead of me. She was loaded down: two blue cloth bags, one on each arm, and two huge brown paper bags, full of something. I was given one of these. They contained, she told me, stale brown bread for the elephants, because stale brown bread was one of the things they liked best to eat. (I later suspected that they might like stale white bread just as much but that Marianne had been thinking of their health.) As we went in and down to the lower level, where we could hear (and smell) the animals, she told me her preliminary plan for the circus. Her brother, Warner, had given her an elephant-hair bracelet, of which she was very fond, two or three strands of black hairs held together with gold clasps. One of the elephant hairs had fallen out and been lost. As I probably knew, elephant hairs grow only on the tops of the heads of very young elephants. In her bag, Marianne had a pair of strong nail scissors. I was to divert the adult elephants with the bread, and, if we were lucky, the guards wouldn't observe her at the end of the line where the babies were, and she could take out her scissors and snip a few hairs from a baby's head, to repair her bracelet.

She was quite right; the elephants adored stale brown bread and started trumpeting and pushing up against each other to get it. I stayed at one end of the line, putting slices of bread into the trunks of the older elephants, and Miss Moore went

rapidly down to the other end, where the babies were. The large elephants were making such a to-do that a keeper did come up my way, and out of the corner of my eye I saw Miss Moore leaning forward over the rope on tiptoe, scissors in hand. Elephant hairs are tough; I thought she would never finish her hair-cutting. But she did, and triumphantly we handed out the rest of the bread and set off to see the other animals. She opened her bag and showed me three or four coarse, grayish hairs in a piece of Kleenex.

I hate seeing animals in cages, especially small cages, and especially circus animals, but I think that Marianne, while probably feeling the same way, was so passionately interested in them, and knew so much about them, that she could put aside any pain or outrage for the time being. That day I remember that one handsomely patterned snake, writhing about in a glass-walled cage, seemed to raise his head on purpose to look at us. "See, he knows me!" said Miss Moore. "He remembers me from last year." This was a joke, I decided, but perhaps not altogether a joke. Then we went upstairs and the six-ring affair began. The blue bags held our refreshments: thermos jugs of orange juice, hard-boiled eggs (the yolks only), and more brown bread, but fresh this time, and buttered. I also remember of this first visit to the circus (there were to be others) that in front of us sat a father with three young children, two boys and a girl. A big circus goes on for a long time and the children began to grow restless. Marianne leaned over with the abruptness that characterized all her movements and said to the father that if the little girl wanted to go to the bathroom, she'd be glad to take her.

260 Cumberland Street

After graduating from Vassar I lived for a year in New York City; I returned to live there from time to time for thirty years or so, but it was during this first year that I got to know Miss Moore and her mother and became familiar with their small apartment in Brooklyn. It was in the fourth floor front of an ugly yellow brick building with a light granite stoop and a big white glass globe on a pillar at either side of the door. (Marianne told taxi drivers to stop at the apartment with the "two

mothballs" in front.) The elevator was small and slow. After I had buzzed, I used to try to get up in it to the fourth floor before Marianne could get down in it to take me up personally, but I rarely managed to. A very narrow hall, made narrower by waist-high bookcases along one side, and with doors to two tiny bedrooms opening off it, led back to the living room. On the end of the bookcase nearest the front door sat the famous bowl of nickels for subway fare (nickels for years, then dimes, then nickels *and* dimes, and finally quarters). Every visitor was made to accept one of these upon leaving; it was absolutely *de rigueur*. After one or two attempts at refusing, I always simply helped myself to a nickel as I left, and eventually I was rewarded for this by Marianne's saying to a friend who was protesting, "Elizabeth is an *aristocrate*; she *takes* the money." (I should like to mention here the peculiar way Marianne had of pronouncing my Christian name. She came down very hard on the second syllable, *Elizabeth*. I liked this, especially as an exclamation, when she was pretending to be shocked by something I had said.)

The small living room and dining room were crowded with furniture that had obviously come from an older, larger home, and there were many pictures on the walls, a mixture of the old and the new, family possessions and presents from friends (these generally depicted birds or animals). One painting of trees and a stream had suffered an accident to its rather blurry tree passage, and Marianne herself had restored this—I felt, unkindly, not too successfully—with what she said was "Prussian blue." She was modestly vain of her manual skills. A set of carpenter's tools hung by the kitchen door, and Marianne had put up some of the bookshelves herself. In one doorway a trapeze on chains was looped up to the lintel. I never saw this in use, but it was Marianne's, and she said that when she exercised on it and her brother was there, he always said, "The ape is rattling her chains again." A chest stood in the bay window of the living room with a bronze head of Marianne on it by Lachaise. The chest was also always piled high with new books. When I first knew Marianne she did quite a bit of reviewing and later sold the review copies on West Fourth Street.

I was always seated in the same armchair, and an ashtray was placed on a little table beside me, but I tried to smoke no more

than one or two cigarettes a visit, or none at all. I felt that Mrs. Moore disapproved. Once, as I was leaving and waiting for the slow elevator, I noticed a deep burn in the railing of the staircase and commented on it. Mrs. Moore gave a melancholy sigh and said, "Ezra did that. He came to call on Marianne and left his cigar burning out here because he knew I *don't like cigars* . . ." Many years later, in St. Elizabeths Hospital, I repeated this to Ezra Pound. He laughed loudly and said, "I haven't smoked a cigar since I was eighteen!" Beside the ashtray and even a new package of Lucky Strikes, I was sometimes given a glass of Dubonnet. I had a suspicion that I was possibly the only guest who drank this Dubonnet, because it looked very much like the same bottle, at the level it had been on my last visit, for many months. But usually we had tea and occasionally I was invited for dinner. Mrs. Moore was a very good cook.

Mrs. Moore was in her seventies when I first knew her, very serious—solemn, rather—although capable of irony, and very devout. Her face was pale and somewhat heavy, her eyes large and a pale gray, and her dark hair had almost no white in it. Her manner toward Marianne was that of a kindly, self-controlled parent who felt that she had to take a firm line, that her daughter might be given to flightiness or—an equal sin, in her eyes—mistakes in grammar! She had taught English at a girls' school and her sentences were Johnsonian in weight and balance. She spoke more slowly than I have ever heard anyone speak in my life. One example of her conversational style has stayed with me for over forty years. Marianne was in the kitchen making tea and I was alone with Mrs. Moore. I said that I had just seen a new poem of Marianne's, "Nine Nectaries & Other Porcelain," and admired it very much. Mrs. Moore replied, "Yes. I am so *glad* that Marianne has *decided* to give the inhabitants of the *zoo* . . . a *rest*." Waiting for the conclusion of her longer statements, I grew rather nervous; nevertheless, I found her extreme precision enviable and thought I could detect echoes of Marianne's own style in it: the use of double or triple negatives, the lighter and wittier ironies—Mrs. Moore had provided a sort of ground bass for them.

She wrote me one or two beautifully composed little notes on the subject of religion, and I know my failure to respond

made her sad. At each of my leave-takings she followed me to the hall, where, beside "Ezra's" imagined cigar burn, she held my hands and said a short prayer. She said grace before dinner, and once, a little maliciously, I think, Marianne asked *me* to say grace. Mercifully, a childhood grace popped into my mind. After dinner Marianne wrote it down.

Of course Mrs. Moore and her daughter were what some people might call "prudish"; it would be kinder to say "overfastidious." This applied to Mrs. Moore more than to Marianne; Marianne, increasingly so with age, was capable of calling a spade a spade, or at least calling it by its archaic name. I remember her worrying about the fate of a mutual friend whose sexual tastes had always seemed quite obvious to me: "What are *we* going to do about X . . . ? Why, sometimes I think he *may* even be in the clutches of a *sodomite* . . . !" One could almost smell the brimstone. But several novels of the thirties and forties, including Mary McCarthy's *The Company She Keeps*, were taken down to the cellar and burned in the furnace. I published a very bad short story a year or two after I first knew the Moores and I was reprimanded by both of them for having used the word "spit." (Two or three years later I was scolded for having used "water closet" in a poem, but by then I had turned obstinate.) Marianne once gave me her practical rules for the use of indecent language. She said, "Ordinarily, I would never use the word *rump*. But I can perfectly well say to Mother, 'Mother, there's a thread on your *rump*,' because *she* knows that I'm referring to Cowper's pet hare, 'Old Tiney,' who liked to play on the carpet and 'swing his rump around!'"

I was shown many old photographs and snapshots and, once, a set of postcards of their trip to England and Paris—at that time the only European traveling Marianne had done. The postcards were mostly of Oxford, and there was a handwritten menu, including the wines, of the luncheon George Saintsbury had given for her. I was also privileged to look into the notebooks, illustrated with Marianne's delicate sketches.

Besides exercising on the trapeze, Marianne was very fond of tennis. I never saw her play, but from the way she talked about it, it seemed as if she enjoyed the rules and conventions of the game as much as the sport. She engaged a young black

boy to play with her, sometimes in Prospect Park and sometimes on the roof of the apartment house. He was finally dismissed because of his lack of tennis manners; his worst offense seemed to be that instead of "Serve!" he *would* say "Okay!"

The bathroom in the apartment was small, long, and narrow, and as if I were still a child, I was advised to go there when Marianne thought it would be a good idea. (Also in subway stations: "I'll hold your bag and gloves, Elizabeth.") In their bathroom was an object I liked, an old-fashioned shoe-shine box with an iron footrest. On one visit this had just been repainted by Marianne, with black enamel, and so had a cast-iron horse, laid out on a piece of newspaper on its side, running, with a streaming mane. It looked as if it might have originally been attached to a toy fire engine. I asked about this little horse, and Mrs. Moore told me that when Marianne was two and a half years old she had taken her to visit an aunt; the horse had had to go along too. Mrs. Moore had gone into the guest room and discovered that Marianne had taken a length of lace, perhaps a lace collar, from the bureau and dressed the horse up in it. "Marianne!" she had said—one could imagine the awful solemnity of the moment—"You wouldn't take Auntie Bee's lace to put on your horse, would you?" But the infant Marianne, the intrepid artist, replied, "Pretty looks, Ma! Pretty looks!"

Mrs. Moore's sense of honesty, or honor, like her respect for the proprieties, was staggering. Marianne occasionally teased her mother about it, even in front of me. One story was about the time Mrs. Moore had decided that five empty milk bottles must be returned to the grocery store, and thence to the dairy. They were not *STORE BOTTLES*, as bottles then said right in the glass, nor the kind that were to be put out on the doorstep, but they all came from the same dairy. The grocer looked at them and pushed them back on the counter toward Mrs. Moore, saying, "You don't have to return these bottles, ma'am; just throw them away." Mrs. Moore pushed the bottles back again and told him quietly, "It *says* BORDEN on the bottles; they belong to the dairy." The grocer: "I know it does, ma'am, but it doesn't say *STORE BOTTLES* or *RETURN*. Just throw them away." Mrs. Moore spoke more slowly and more quietly, "But they don't belong to me. They are *their* bottles." "I know,

480 ESSAYS, REMINISCENCES, AND REPORTING

ma'am, but they really don't want them back." The poor man had underestimated Mrs. Moore. She stood firm, clarifying for him yet again the only honorable line of action to be pursued in regard to the five bottles. Finally the grocer took them all in his arms and, saying weakly, "My God, ma'am!" carried them into the back of the store.

Clothes were of course an endless source of interest to Marianne, increasingly especially so as she grew older. As she has written herself (in a piece for *The Christian Science Monitor*), her clothes were almost always hand-me-downs, sometimes very elegant ones from richer friends. These would be let out or, most frequently, let down (Marianne preferred clothes on the loose side, like the four-sizes-too-large "polo shirts"). The hats would be stripped of decorations, and ribbons changed so all was black or navy blue, and somehow perhaps *flattened*. There was the Holbein/Erasmus-type hat, and later the rather famous tricorne, but in the first years I knew her, only the large, flat, low-crowned hats of felt or summer straw.

Once when I arrived at the Brooklyn apartment, Marianne and her mother were occupied with the old-fashioned bit of sewing called "making over." They were making a pair of drawers that Marianne had worn at Bryn Mawr in 1908 into a petticoat or slip. The drawers were a beautiful garment, fine white batiste, with very full legs that must have come to below the knee, edged with lace and set with rows of "insertion." These I didn't see again in their metamorphosed state, but I did see and was sometimes consulted about other such projects. Several times over the years Marianne asked me abruptly, "Elizabeth, what do you have on under your dress? How much underwear do *you* wear?" I would enumerate my two or perhaps three undergarments, and Marianne would say, "Well, I know that I [or, Mother and I] wear many too many." And sometimes when I arrived on a cold winter evening dressed in a conventional way, I would be greeted by "Elizabeth, silk stockings!" as if I were reckless or prone to suicide. My own clothes were subject to her careful consideration. The first time I ever met a publisher, I reported the next day by telephone and Marianne's first question was "What did you wear, Elizabeth?"

Marianne's hair was always done up in a braid around the

crown of her head, a style dating from around 1900, I think, and never changed. Her skin was fair, translucent, although faded when I knew her. Her face paled and flushed so quickly she reminded me of Rima in W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*. Her eyes were bright, not "bright" as we often say about eyes when we really mean alert; they were that too, but also shiny bright and, like those of a small animal, often looked at one sideways—quickly, at the conclusion of a sentence that had turned out unusually well, just to see if it had taken effect. Her face was small and pointed, but not really triangular because it was a little lopsided, with a delicately pugnacious-looking jaw. When one day I told her she looked like Mickey Rooney, then a very young actor (and she did), she seemed quite pleased.

She said her poem "Spenser's Ireland" was not about *loving* Ireland, as people seemed to think, but about *disapproving* of it. Yet she liked being of Irish descent; her great-grandfather had run away from a house in Merrion Square, Dublin (once, I went to look at it from the outside), and I remember her delight when the book in which the poem appeared was bound in Irish green.

[She had a way of laughing at what she or someone else had just said if she meant to show outrage or mock disapproval—an *ab-ho* kind of sound, rough, that went with a backwards and sideways toss of the head toward the left shoulder. She accepted compliments with this laugh too, without words; it disparaged and made light of them, and implied that she and her audience were both far above such absurdities. I believe she was the only person I have ever known who "bridled" at praise, while turning pink with pleasure. These gestures of her head were more pronounced in the presence of gentlemen because Marianne was innately flirtatious.]

The Moore *chivoiserie* of manners made giving presents complicated. All of her friends seemed to share the desire of giving her presents, and it must sometimes have been, as she would have said, a "burden." One never knew what would succeed, but one learned that if a gift did not succeed it would be given back, unobtrusively, but somehow or other, a year or two later. My most successful gift was a pair of gloves. I don't know why they made such a hit, but they did; they weren't actually worn for a long time, but they appear in a few of her photographs,

held in one hand. Marianne brought them to the photographer wrapped in the original tissue paper. Another very successful gift was a paper nautilus, which became the subject of her poem "The Paper Nautilus":

... its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-
laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse . . .

Fruit or flowers were acclaimed and examined but never, I felt, really welcomed. But a very unbeautiful bracelet from Morocco, alternate round beads of amber and black ambergis on a soiled string, was very well received. I was flattered to see this worn at a poetry reading, and afterwards learned that, as it was too loose for Marianne's wrist, Mother had carefully sewn it onto the edge of her sleeve. But another friend's attempt to give her a good gramophone was a disaster; a drama that went on for months. Eventually (it was portable but very heavy) it was carried back by Marianne to the shop in New York.

She liked to show her collection of jewelry, which had a few beautiful and valuable pieces. I once gave her a modest brooch of the semi-precious stones of Brazil, red and green tourmalines and amethysts; this she seemed to like so much that I gave her a matching bracelet. A few years later I wrote her from Brazil asking what I could bring her on my return to New York, and she wrote back, "I like *jewels*."

Knowing her fondness for snakes, I got for her when I was in Florida a beautiful specimen of the deadly coral snake with inch-wide rose-red and black stripes separated by narrow white stripes, a bright new snake coiled in liquid in a squat glass bottle. This bottle sat on her hall bookcase, at the other end from the bowl of nickels, for many years. The colors gradually faded, and the formaldehyde grew cloudy, and finally I said I thought she could dispense with the coral snake. A mutual friend told me that Marianne was relieved; she had always hated it. Perhaps it had only been brought out for my visits. Marianne once told me a story on herself about her aversion

to reds. Her physician in Brooklyn for some years was a Turkish woman, Dr. Laf Loofy, whom she often quoted as a great authority on health. Dr. Loofy had prescribed for Marianne a large bottle of red pills, but before taking one, Marianne would wash it thoroughly until all the shiny red coating had disappeared. Something, perhaps digestive symptoms, made her confess this to Dr. Loofy, who was incredulous, then appalled. She explained that medical genius and years of research, expressly for Marianne's benefit, had gone into developing the red enamel-like coating that she had deliberately washed away. Marianne was completely stoical about herself; once, at a New York doctor's office, she proved to have a temperature of 104 degrees. The doctor wanted to call a cab for her for the long trip back to Brooklyn, but Marianne would have none of it. She insisted on returning by subway, and did.

Despite what I assumed to be her aversion to reds, she once showed me a round, light tan, rather pig-like piece of luggage, bought especially for her first trip to give readings on the West Coast, saying, "You will think this too *shabby*, Elizabeth." The long zipper on the top could be locked with a bright red padlock. I said no, I thought it a very nice bag. "Of course," Marianne said, "the red padlock is the very best thing about it."

One winter Mrs. Moore was sick for a long time with a severe case of shingles. She was just recovering from this long illness when she also had to go to the dentist, whose office was in Manhattan. A friend who had a car and I went to Brooklyn to take Marianne and her mother to the city. Mrs. Moore was still feeling poorly. She was wearing a round flat fur cap, a very 1890-ish hat, mink, I think, or possibly sable, and since she couldn't bear to put her hair up yet, the remarkably un-gray hair hung down in a heavy pigtail. The dentist's office was high up in a tall office building. There were a good many passengers in the elevator and an elevator boy; we shot upwards. What I remember most is that at the proper floor, as the passengers stared, Marianne and her mother both bowed to the elevator boy pleasantly and thanked him, Mrs. Moore the more profusely, for the ride. He was unaccustomed to such civility, but he was very pleased and tried hard not to push his handle or close the doors as quickly as on the other floors. Elevator

men, subway changemakers, ticket takers, taxi drivers—all were treated to these formalities, and, as a rule, they were pleasantly surprised and seemed to respond in kind.

A very well known and polished writer, who had known Marianne since he was a young man and felt great admiration for her, was never invited to Cumberland Street although his friends were. Once, I asked innocently why I never saw him there and Marianne gave me her serious, severe look and said, "He *contradicted* Mother."

The atmosphere of 260 Cumberland Street was of course "old-fashioned," but even more, otherworldly—as if one were living in a diving bell from a different world, let down through the crass atmosphere of the twentieth century. Leaving the diving bell with one's nickel, during the walk to the subway and the forty-five-minute ride back to Manhattan, one was apt to have a slight case of mental or moral bends—so many things to be remembered; stories, phrases, the unaccustomed deference, the exquisitely prolonged etiquette—these were hard to reconcile with the New Lots Avenue express and the awful jolting ride facing a row of indifferent faces. Yet I never left Cumberland Street without feeling happier: uplifted, even inspired, determined to be good, to work harder, not to worry about what other people thought, never to try to publish anything until I thought I'd done my best with it, no matter how many years it took—or never to publish at all.

To change the image from air to water: somehow, under all the subaqueous pressure at 260 Cumberland Street—admonitions, reserves, principles, simple stoicism—Marianne rose triumphant, or rather her voice did, in a lively, unceasing jet of shining bubbles. I had "taken" chemistry at preparatory school; I also could imagine that in this water, or heavy water glass, I saw forming the elaborate, logical structures that became her poems.

Writing and a Few Writers

On the floor of the kitchen at 260 Cumberland Street I once saw a bushel basket, the kind used for apples or tomatoes, filled to overflowing with crumpled papers, some typed, some covered with Marianne's handwriting. This basketful of papers

held the discarded drafts of one review, not a long review, of a new book of poems by Wallace Stevens. When it was published I found the review very beautiful, as I still do. Nevertheless, Marianne chose to omit it from her collected essays; it didn't come up to her standards.

If she was willing to put in so much hard work on a review running to two or two and a half pages, one can imagine the work that went into a poem such as "The Jerboa," or "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron'" (about the ostrich), with their elaborate rhyme schemes and syllable-counting meters. When not at the desk, she used a clipboard with the poem under construction on it, carrying it about the apartment, "even when I'm dusting or washing the dishes, Elizabeth."

Her use of "light" rhymes has been written about by critics. On principle, she said, she disapproved of rhyme. Nevertheless, when she read poems to me, or recited them, she obviously enjoyed rhymes very much, and would glance up over her reading glasses and exclaim that *that* was "gusto"—her favorite word of praise. With great gusto of her own, she read:

Strong is the lion—like a coal
His eye-ball—like a bastion's mole
His chest against the focs:

Strong, the gier-eagle on his sail,
Strong against tide, th'enormous whale
Emerges as he goes.

She admired Ogden Nash and liked to quote his poem about the baby panda for the sake of its rhyme:

I love the Baby Giant Panda;
I'd welcome one to my veranda.

Once, I found her consulting a large rhyming dictionary and she said, yes, it was "indispensable"; and I myself was congratulated on having rhymed "antennae" with "many."

Besides "gusto" she admired the "courageous attack," and for this reason she said she thought it a good idea to start off a poem with a spondee.

In *Observations* she seems undecided between free verse and her own strict stanza forms with their variations on "light"

rhyme. Although she still professed to despise it, rhyme then seemed to win out for some years. However, by the time *Collected Poems* was published, in 1951, she had already begun a ruthless cutting of some of her most beautiful poems, and what suffered chiefly from this ruthlessness were those very rhymes and stanza forms she had so painstakingly elaborated in the years just before.

A conflict between traditional rhymes and meters came during the seven years (1946-53) Marianne worked on translating La Fontaine's *Fables*. For my own amusement, I had already made up a completely unscholarly theory that Marianne was possessed of a unique, involuntary sense of rhythm, therefore of meter, quite unlike anyone else's. She looked like no one else; she talked like no one else; her poems showed a mind not much like anyone else's; and her notions of meter and rhyme were unlike all the conventional notions—so why not believe that the old English meters that still seem natural to most of us (or *seemed* to, at any rate) were not natural to her at all? That Marianne from birth, physically, had been set going to a different rhythm? Or was the explanation simply that she had a more sensitive ear than most of us, and since she had started writing at a time when poetry was undergoing drastic changes, she had been free to make the most of it and experiment as she saw fit?

When I happened to be in New York during those seven years, I was usually shown the fable she was working on (or she'd read it on the phone) and would be asked to provide a rhyme, or to tell her if I thought the meter was right. Many other people must have had the same experience. These were strange requests, coming from someone who had made contemporary poets self-conscious about their crudities, afraid to rhyme "bone" with "stone," or to go *umpty-umpty-um*. Marianne was doing her best, one saw, to go *umpty-umpty-um* when she sensed that La Fontaine had gone that way, but it seemed to be almost—I use the word again—physically impossible for her to do so. If I'd suggest, say, that "flatter" rhymed with "matter," this to my embarrassment was hailed as a stroke of genius; or if I'd say, "If you leave out 'and' or 'the' [or put it in], it will go *umpty-umpty-um*," Marianne would exclaim, "Elizabeth, thank you, you have saved my life!" Although I

too am mentioned in the introduction, I contributed next to nothing to the La Fontaine—a few rhymes and metrically smoothed-out or slicked-up lines. But they made me realize more than I ever had the rarity of true originality, and also the sort of alienation it might involve.

Her scrupulous and strict honesty could be carried to extremes of Protestant, Presbyterian, Scotch-Irish literalness that amazed me. We went together to see an exceptionally beautiful film, a documentary in color about Africa, with herds of gazelles and giraffes moving across the plains, and we loved it. Then a herd of elephants appeared, close up and clear, and the narrator commented on their feet and tread. I whispered to Marianne that they looked as if their feet were being lifted up off the ground by invisible threads. The next day she phoned and quoted my remark about the elephants' walk, and suddenly came out with, "Elizabeth, I'll give you ten dollars for that." There was often no telling how serious she was. I said something like "For heaven's sake, Marianne, please take it," but I don't believe it ever made an appearance in a poem. I confess to one very slight grudge: she *did* use a phrase of mine once without a note. This may be childish of me, but I want to reclaim it. I had been asked by a friend to bring her three glass buoy-balls in nets, sometimes called "witch balls," from Cape Cod. When I arrived at the old hotel where I lived, a very old porter took them with my bag, and as I watched him precede me down the corridor, I said to myself, "The bellboy with the buoy-balls." I liked the sound of this so much that in my vanity I repeated the phrase to Marianne a day or so later. You will find "The sea- / side burden should not embarrass / the bellboy with the buoy-ball / endeavoring to pass / hotel partronses" in the fifth stanza of "Four Quartz Crystal Clocks." It was so thoroughly out of character for her to do this that I have never understood it. I am sometimes appalled to think how much I may have unconsciously stolen from her. Perhaps we are all magpies.

The deepest feeling always shows
itself in silence;
not in silence, but restraint.

These lines from her early poem "Silence" are simply another

one of Marianne's convictions. Like Auden, whom she admired, she believed that graceful behavior—and writing, as well—demands a certain reticence. She told me, "Ezra says all dedications are *downy*," but it was surely more than to avoid downiness that caused her to write this postscript in *Selected Poems* (1935): "Dedications imply giving, and we do not care to make a gift of what is insufficient; but in my immediate family there is one 'who thinks in a particular way' and I should like to add that where there is an effect of thought or pith in these pages, the thinking and often the actual phrases are hers." This postscript was obviously meant for Mrs. Moore, and after her mother's death in 1947, Marianne became more outspoken about dedications; however, when she wrote an acrostic on the name of one of her oldest and closest friends, it too was semi-concealed, by being written upside down.

The first time I heard Marianne read poetry in public was at a joint reading with William Carlos Williams in Brooklyn. I am afraid I was a little late. There was a very small audience, mostly in the front rows, and I made my way as self-effacingly as I could down the steep red-carpeted steps of the aisle. As I approached the lower rows, she spotted me out of the corner of her eye and interrupted herself in the middle of a poem to bow and say, "Good evening!" She and Dr. Williams shared the rather small high stage and took turns reading. There were two high-backed chairs, far apart, and each poet sat down between readings. The decor seemed to be late-Victorian Gothic; I remember a good deal of red plush, dark wood, and Gothic points, knobs, and incised lines. Marianne, wearing a hat and a blue dress, looked quite small and seemed nervous. I had the impression that Williams, who was not nervous in the slightest, was generously trying to put her at her ease. As they changed places at the lectern, he would whisper to her and smile. I have no recollection of anything that was read, except for a sea-monster poem of Williams's, during which he gave some loud and realistic roars.

She seldom expressed opinions of other writers, and the few I remember were, to say the least, ambiguous or ambivalent. She developed the strategy of damning with faint praise to an almost supersonic degree. One writer whom I rather disliked, and I suspect she did too, was praised several times for

her "beautifully laundered shirtwaist." One day when I was meeting her in New York, she said she had just run into Djuna Barnes again, after many years, on the steps of the Public Library. I was curious and asked her what Djuna Barnes was "like." There was rather a long pause before Marianne said, thoughtfully, "Well . . . she looked very smart, and her shoes were *beautifully* polished."

I do not remember her ever referring to Emily Dickinson, but on one occasion, when we were walking in Brooklyn on our way to a favored tea shop, I noticed we were on a street associated with the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and I said famously, "Marianne, isn't it odd to think of you and Walt Whitman walking this same street over and over?" She exclaimed in her mock-ferocious tone, "Elizabeth, don't speak to me about that man!" So I never did again. Another time, when she had been talking about her days on *The Dial*, I asked how she had liked Hart Crane when he had come into her office there. Her response was equally unexpected. "Oh, I *liked* Hart! I always liked him very much—he was so *erudite*." And although she admired Edmund Wilson very much and could speak with even more conviction of his erudition, she once asked me if I had read his early novel *I Thought of Daisy*, and when I said no, she almost extracted a promise from me that I would *never* read it. She was devoted to W. H. Auden, and the very cat he had patted in the Brooklyn tearoom was produced for me to admire and pat too.

Lately I have seen several references critical of her poetry by feminist writers, one of whom described her as a "poet who controlled panic by presenting it as whimsy." Whimsy is sometimes there, of course, and so is humor (a gift these critics sadly seem to lack). Surely there is an element of mortal panic and fear underlying all works of art? Even so, one wonders how much of Marianne's poetry the feminist critics have read. Have they really read "Marriage," a poem that says everything they are saying and everything Virginia Woolf has said? It is a poem which transforms a justified sense of injury into a work of art:

This institution . . .
I wonder what Adam and Eve
think of it by this time . . .

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 . . .

Do they know that Marianne Moore was a feminist in her day? Or that she paraded with the suffragettes, led by Inez Milholland on her white horse, down Fifth Avenue? Once, Marianne told me, she "climbed a lamppost" in a demonstration for votes for women. What she did up there, what speech she delivered, if any, I don't know, but climb she did in long skirt and petticoats and a large hat. Perhaps it was pride or vanity that kept her from complaints, and that put her sense of injustice through the prisms dissected by "those various scalpels" into poetry. She was not too proud for occasional complaints; she was humorously angry, but nevertheless angry, when her publisher twice postponed her book in order to bring out two young male poets, both now almost unheard of. Now that everything can be said, and done, have we anyone who can compare with Marianne Moore, who was at her best when she made up her own rules and when they were strictest—the reverse of "freedom"?

Soon after I met Marianne in 1934—although I concealed it for what seemed to me quite a long time—somehow or other it came out that I was trying to write poetry. For five or six years I occasionally sent her my poems. She would rarely say or write very much about them except that she liked such and such a phrase or, oddly, the alliteration, which I thought I tended to overdo. When I asked her what the poems she had written at Bryn Mawr were like, she said, "Just like Swinburne, Elizabeth." Sometimes she suggested that I change a word or line, and sometimes I accepted her suggestions, but never did she even hint that such and such a line might have been influenced by or even unconsciously stolen from a poem of her own, as later on I could sometimes see that they were. Her notes to me were often signed "Your Dorothy Dix."

It was because of Marianne that in 1935 my poems first appeared in a book, an anthology called *Trial Balances*. Each of the poets in this anthology had an older mentor, who wrote a short preface or introduction to the poems, and Marianne, hearing of this project, had offered to be mine. I was much too shy to dream of asking her. I had two or three feeble pastiches of late seventeenth-century poetry called "Valentines," in one of which I had rhymed "even the English sparrows in the dust" with "lust." She did not like those English sparrows very much, and said so ("Miss Bishop's sparrows are not revolting, merely disaffecting"), but her sponsorship brought about this first appearance in a book.

One long poem, the most ambitious I had up to then attempted, apparently stirred both her and her mother to an immediate flurry of criticism. She telephoned the day after I had mailed it to her, and said that she and her mother had sat up late rewriting it for me. (This is the poem in which the expression "water closet" was censored.) Their version of it arrived in the next mail. I had had an English teacher at Vassar whom I liked very much, named Miss Rose Peebles, and for some reason this name fascinated Marianne. The revised poem had been typed out on very thin paper and folded into a small square, sealed with a gold star sticker and signed on the outside "Lovingly, Rose Peebles." My version had rhymed throughout, in rather strict stanzas, but Marianne and her mother's version broke up the stanzas irregularly. Some lines rhymed and some didn't; a few other colloquialisms besides "water closet" had been removed and a Bible reference or two corrected. I obstinately held on to my stanzas and rhymes, but I did make use of a few of the proffered new words. I am sorry to say I can't now remember which they were, and won't know unless this fascinating communication should turn up again.

Marianne in 1940 gave me a copy of the newly published *Last Poems and Two Plays*, by William Butler Yeats, and though I dislike some of the emphasis on lechery in the poems, and so did she, I wrote her that I admired "The Circus Animals' Desertion" and the now famous lines "I must lie down where all the ladders start, / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." She replied:

I would be "much disappointed in you" if you *could* feel about Yeats as some of his acolytes seem to feel. An "effect," an exhaustively great sensibility (with insensibility?) and genius for word-sounds and sentences! But after all, what is this enviable apparatus for? if not to change our mortal psycho-structure. It makes me think of the Malay princes—the *horde* of eunuchs and entertainers and "bearers" of this and that; then suddenly the umbrella over the prince lowered, because a greater prince was passing. As you will suspect from my treachery to W. B. Yeats, I've been to a lecture on Java by Burton Holmes, and one on Malay . . .

One day she abruptly asked me, "Do you like the *nude*, Elizabeth?" I said yes I did on the whole. Marianne: "Well, so do I, Elizabeth, but *in moderation*," and she immediately pressed on me a copy of Sir Kenneth Clark's new book, *The Nude*, which had just been sent to her.

Some Expeditions

This was a story told me by Mrs. Moore, of an outing that had taken place the summer before I met them. There had been a dreadful heat wave, and Marianne had been feeling "overburdened" (the word *burden* was an important one in the Brooklyn vocabulary) and "overtaxed." Her mother decided that Marianne "should take a course in the larger mammals" and said, "Marianne, I am going to take you to Coney Island to see Sheba," an unusually large and docile elephant then on view at a boardwalk sideshow. Coney Island is a long subway ride even from Brooklyn, but in spite of the heat and the crowds, the two ladies went. Sheba performed her acts majestically, and slowly played catch with her keeper with a shiny white ball. I asked about the elephant's appearance, and Marianne said, "She was very simply dressed. She was lightly powdered a matte rose all over, and wore ankle bracelets, large copper hollow balls, on her front legs. Her headdress consisted of three white ostrich plumes." Marianne was fond of roller coasters; a fearless rider, she preferred to sit in the front seat. Her mother told me how she waited below while the cars clicked agonizingly to the heights, and plunged horribly down. Marianne's long red braid had come undone and blew backwards, and with it went all her cherished amber-colored "real tortoiseshell"

hairpins, which fortunately landed in the laps of two sailors in the car behind her. At the end of the ride, they handed them to her "very politely."

Two friends of Marianne's, two elderly Boston ladies, shared an exquisitely neat white clapboard house in northern Maine. I once spent a day there, and they teased Marianne about her habit of secreting food. She laughed, blushed, and tossed her head, and did not seem to mind when one of them told of going into Marianne's room for a book only to discover two boiled potatoes lying on the dresser. Some years later the older lady phoned Marianne from Boston and told her she was dying of cancer. She was perfectly stoical about it, and said she was in a hospital and knew she could not last very long. She asked Marianne to come and stay near her until she died, and Marianne went. At the hospital, she told Marianne that while she would be grateful to her if she came to see her every day, she knew that Marianne couldn't possibly spend all her time with her, so she had arranged for her to take driving lessons. Marianne, who must have been nearly seventy at the time, agreed that this was a good idea; she had always wanted to learn to drive, and she did, with a lesson at the driving school every day and a visit to the hospital. A day or so after her friend died, Marianne passed her driving test. She said she had a little trouble with the lights in Copley Square and confessed she thought the "policeman" giving her the test had been a little overlenient. I said I hoped she hadn't driven too fast, and she replied, "A steady forty-five, Elizabeth!" On her return she proudly showed her driving license to her brother, Warner, and he, sounding no doubt very much as her mother used to sound, said, "There must be some mistake. This must be sent back *immediately*."

Marianne was intensely interested in the techniques of things—how camellias are grown; how the quartz prisms work in crystal clocks; how the pangolin can close up his ear, nose, and eye apertures and walk on the outside edges of his hands "and save the claws / for digging"; how to drive a car; how the best pitchers throw a baseball; how to make a figurehead for her nephew's sailboat. The exact way in which anything was done, or made, or functioned, was poetry to her. / She even learned to tango. Before she acquired a television

set of her own, she was in the habit of going down to the basement apartment at 260 Cumberland Street to watch the baseball games with the janitor and his wife, who had a set. During one of the games there was a commercial that advertised a Brooklyn dancing school. Any viewer who telephoned in was guaranteed a private tango lesson at a Brooklyn academy. Marianne announced that she had always liked the tango, and hurried to the fourth floor to put in her call, and got an appointment. The young dancers, male and female, may have been a little surprised, but soon they were competing with each other to dance with her. She was given a whole short course of lessons. I asked about the tango itself, and she allowed that they had felt perhaps it was a little too strenuous and had taught her a "modified" version of it. She had also learned several other steps and dances in more current use, and insisted everyone had enjoyed himself and herself thoroughly.

In the late winter or early spring of 1963, when I was in New York, one evening around eight I emerged from a Lexington Avenue subway station on my way to a poetry reading at the YMHA. Suddenly I realized that Marianne was walking ahead of me over half a block away, alone, hurrying along with a bag of books and papers. She reached the YMHA before I did, but she was not present at the function I was attending; I wondered what she could be up to. Later she informed me that she was attending the YMHA Poetry Workshop, conducted that term by Louise Bogan. She said she was learning a great deal, things she had never known before; Miss Bogan was another of the people she considered "erudite." Shortly afterwards I met Miss Bogan at a party and asked her about the workshop and her famous student. Poor Miss Bogan! I am sure Marianne never dreamed what suffering she was causing her. It seemed that Marianne took notes constantly, asked many questions, and entered into discussions with enthusiasm. But the other students were timid and often nonplused, and so was Miss Bogan, besides feeling that she was sailing under false colors and never knowing what technical question she might be expected to answer next.

I attended very few literary events at which Marianne was present, but I did go with her to the party for Edith and Osbert Sirwell given at the Gotham Book Mart. I hadn't intended to

go to this at all; in fact, I really didn't want to, but Marianne, who was something of an Anglophile, was firm. "We must be *polite* to the Sirwells," she said.

The party was given by *Life* magazine and was rather awful. The photographers behaved as photographers do: strewing wires under our feet, calling to each other over our heads, and generally pushing us around. It took some time to separate the poets, who were the subjects of the picture, from the non-poets, and this was done in a way that made me think of livestock being herded into cattle cars. Non-poets and some real poets felt insulted; then the photographer announced that Miss Moore's hat was "too big." She refused to remove it. Auden was one of the few who seemed to be enjoying himself. He got into the picture by climbing on a ladder, where he sat making loud, cheerful comments over our heads. Finally the picture was taken with a sort of semicircular swoop of the camera. Marianne consented to let a friend and me take her to dinner and afterwards back to Brooklyn in a cab. I had on a small velvet cap and Marianne said, "I wish I had worn a *minimal* hat, like yours." The taxi fare to Brooklyn at that time was something over five dollars, not counting the tip. That evening my friend was paying for dinner and the cab. Between comments on the Sirwell party, Marianne exclaimed at intervals, "Mr. W——, this is *highway robbery!*"

She told me about another, more elegant literary party she had been to in a "penthouse," to celebrate the publication of a deluxe edition of a book, I think by Wallace Stevens. The chairs were upholstered in "lemon-colored velvet," there was a Matisse drawing she didn't altogether like, and she had taken a glass of champagne and regretted it all evening; it had made her face burn. I asked for further details. She became scornful: "Well, we signed our names several times, and after *that* thrill was over, I came home."

Sometimes we went to movies together, to *Kon-Tiki* twice, I recall. I never attempted to lure her to any dramatic or "artistic" films. Since Dr. and Mrs. Sibley Watson were her dearest friends, she must have seen his early experimental films, such as *Lot in Sodom*. I heard the sad story of two young men, however, who when they discovered that she had never seen Eisenstein's *Potemkin* insisted on taking her. There was a short

before *Potemkin*, a Walt Disney film; this was when the Disney films still had charm and humor. After the movies they went to tea and Marianne talked at length and in detail about the ingenuity of the Disney film, and nothing more. Finally they asked her what she had thought of *Potemkin*. Her opinion was brief but conclusive: "Life," she said, "is not like that."

Twice we went together to the Saturday-morning lectures for children at the Museum of Natural History—once, to see Meshie, the three-year-old chimpanzee, who came onstage pedaling her tricycle and offered us bites of her banana. And once to see a young couple I had known in Mexico show their collection of pets, including Aguilla, the bald-headed American eagle they had trained to hunt like a falcon, who had ridden all the way to Mexico and back perched on a broomstick in their car. There were more lovable pets as well: Marianne held the kinkajou in her arms, an affectionate animal that clutched on to one tightly with his tail. In a homemade movie the couple also showed us, the young man himself was shown in his library taking a book from the shelf. As he did so, he unconsciously blew the dust off the top of its pages. Marianne gave one of her laughs. She loved that; it was an example of the "spontaneity" that she admired as much as she admired "gusto."

The next-to-last outing I went on with Marianne was in the summer of 1968. This was long after her mother's death, when she had moved from Brooklyn and was living at 35 West Ninth Street in Manhattan. I was staying nearby in the Village, and one day she telephoned and asked me if I would come over and walk with her to the election polls; she wanted to vote. It was the first time, I think, she had ever actually asked me for assistance. It was a very hot day. She was ready and waiting, with her hat on. It was the usual shape, of navy-blue straw, and she wore a blue-and-white-checked seersucker suit and blue sneakers. She had become a bit unsteady and was supposed to use a cane, which was leaning against the door frame. She hated it, and I don't think I ever saw her use it. The voting booths were quite near, in the basement of a public school off Sixth Avenue; there were a good many people there, sitting around, mostly women, talking. Marianne made quite a stir; they seemed to know who she was and came up to talk to her

and to ask me about her while she voted. They were Greenwich Village mothers, with intellectual or bluestocking types among them. I thought to myself that Marianne's was probably the only Republican vote cast there that day.

It was the originality and freshness of Marianne's diction, in the most casual conversation, as well as her polysyllabic virtuosity, that impressed many people. She once said of a well-known poet, "That man is freckled like a trout with impropriety." A friend has told me of attending a party for writers and artists at which she introduced a painter to Marianne by saying, "Miss Moore has the most interesting vocabulary of anyone I know." Marianne showed signs of pleasure at this, and within a minute offhandedly but accurately used in a sentence a word I no longer remember that means an addiction, in animals, to licking the luminous numbers off the dials of clocks and watches. At the same party this friend introduced the then comparatively young art critic Clement Greenberg; to her surprise and no doubt to Mr. Greenberg's, Marianne seemed to be familiar with his writing and said, on shaking hands, "Oh, the *fearless* Mr. Greenberg."

There was something about her good friend T. S. Eliot that seemed to amuse Marianne. On Eliot's first visit to Brooklyn after his marriage to Valerie, his young wife asked them to pose together for her for a snapshot. Valerie said, "Tom, put your arm around Marianne." I asked if he had. Marianne gave that short deprecatory laugh and said, "Yes, he did, but very *gin-gerly*." Toward the last, Marianne entrusted her Eliot letters for safekeeping with Robert Giroux, who told me that with each letter of the poet's she had preserved the envelope in which it had come. One envelope bore Marianne's Brooklyn address in Eliot's handwriting, but no return address or other identification. Within, there was a sheet of yellow pad paper on which was drawn a large heart pierced by an arrow, with the words "from an anonymous and grateful admirer."

Last Years

The dictionary defines a memoir as "a record of events based on the writer's personal experience or knowledge." Almost everything I have recorded was observed or heard firsthand,

mostly before 1951-1952, the year—as Randall Jarrell put it—when “she won the Triple Crown” (National Book Award, Bollingen and Pulitzer Prizes) and became really famous. She was now Marianne Moore, the beloved “character” of Brooklyn and Manhattan; the baseball fan; the friend of many showier celebrities; the faithful admirer of Presidents Hoover and Eisenhower and Mayor Lindsay; the recipient of sixteen honorary degrees (she once modeled her favorite academic hoods for me); the reader of poetry all over the country, in settings very unlike the Brooklyn auditorium where in the thirties I heard her read with William Carlos Williams. She enjoyed every bit of the attention she received, although it too could be a “burden.” After those long years of modest living and incredibly hard work, she had—until the helplessness at the very last—thank heavens, an unusually fortunate old age.

She once remarked, after a visit to her brother and his family, that the state of being married and having children had one enormous advantage: “One never has to worry about whether one is doing the right thing or not. There isn’t time. One is always having to go to market or drive the children somewhere. There isn’t time to wonder, ‘Is this *right* or isn’t it?’”

Of course she did wonder, and constantly. But, as in the notes to her poems, Marianne never gave away the whole show. The volubility, the wit, the self-deprecating laugh, never really clarified those quick decisions of hers—or decisive intuitions, rather—as to good and bad, right and wrong; and her meticulous system of ethics could be baffling. One of the very few occasions on which we came close to having a falling out was when, in the forties, I told her I had been seeing a psychoanalyst. She disapproved quite violently and said that psychoanalysts taught that “Evil is not *evil*. But we know it *is*.” I hadn’t noticed that my analyst, a doctor of almost saintly character, did this, but I didn’t attempt to refute it, and we didn’t speak of it again. We never talked about Presbyterianism, or religion in general, nor did I ever dare more than tease her a little when she occasionally said she believed there was something *in* astrology.

Ninety years or so ago, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a letter to Robert Bridges about the ideal of the “gentleman,” or the “artist” versus the “gentleman.” Today his ideas may

sound impossibly Victorian, but I find this letter still applicable and very moving: “As a fact poets and men of art are, I am sorry to say, by no means necessarily or commonly gentlemen. For gentlemen do not pander to lust or other basenesses nor . . . give themselves airs and affectations, nor do other things to be found in modern works . . . If an artist or thinker feels that were he to become in those ways ever so great, he would still be essentially lower than a gentleman that was no artist and no thinker. And yet to be a gentleman is but on the brim of morals and rather a thing of manners than morals properly. Then how much more must art and philosophy and manners and breeding and everything else in the world be below the least degree of true virtue. This is that chastity of mind which seems to lie at the very heart and be the parent of all good, the seeing at once what is best, and holding to that, and not allowing anything else whatever to be even heard pleading to the contrary . . . I agree then, and vehemently, that a gentleman . . . is in the position to despise the poet, were he Dante or Shakespeare, and the painter, were he Angelo or Apelles, for anything that showed him *not* to be a gentleman. He is in a position to do it, but if he is a gentleman perhaps this is what he will not do.” The word “gentleman” makes us uncomfortable now, and its feminine counterparts, whether “lady” or “gentlewoman,” embarrass us even more. But I am sure that Marianne would have “vehemently agreed” with Hopkins’s strictures: to be a poet was not the be-all, end-all of existence. (I find it impossible to draw conclusions or even to summarize. When I try to, I become foolishly bemused: I have a sort of subliminal glimpse of the capital letter *M* multiplying. I am turning the pages of an illuminated manuscript and seeing that initial letter again and again: Marianne’s monogram; mother; manners; morals; and I catch myself murmuring, “Manners and morals; manners *as* morals? Or it is morals *as* manners?” Since like Alice, “in a dreamy sort of way,” I can’t answer either question, it doesn’t much matter which way I put it; it *seems* to be making sense.

c. 1969

Elizabeth Bishop,
Selected Poems

The Map

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
drawing it unperturbed around itself?
Along the fine tan sandy shelf
is the land tugging at the sea from under?

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.
Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,
under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.
The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
—the printer here experiencing the same excitement
as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.
These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger
like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,
lending the land their waves' own conformation:
and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,
profiles investigate the sea, where land is.
Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?
—What suits the character or the native waters best.
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.

The Man-Moth*

Here, above,
cracks in the buildings are filled with battered moonlight.
The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat.
It lies at his feet like a circle for a doll to stand on,
and he makes an inverted pin, the point magnetized to the moon.
He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties,
feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold,
of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers.

But when the Man-Moth
pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface,
the moon looks rather different to him. He emerges
from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks
and nervously begins to scale the faces of the buildings.
He thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky,
proving the sky quite useless for protection.
He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb.

Up the façades,
his shadow dragging like a photographer's cloth behind him,
he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage
to push his small head through that round clean opening
and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the light.
(Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.)
But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although
he fails, of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt.

Then he returns
to the pale subways of cement he calls his home. He flits,
he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains
fast enough to suit him. The doors close swiftly.
The Man-Moth always seats himself facing the wrong way
and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed,

without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort.
He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards.

Each night he must
be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams.
Just as the ties recur beneath his train, these underlie
his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the window,
for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,
runs there beside him. He regards it as a disease
he has inherited the susceptibility to. He has to keep
his hands in his pockets, as others must wear mufflers.

If you catch him,
hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.
Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.

*Newspaper misprint for "mammoth."

The Fish

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,

3

the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

The Weed

I dreamed that dead, and meditating,
I lay upon a grave, or bed,
(at least, some cold and close-built bower).
In the cold heart, its final thought
stood frozen, drawn immense and clear,
stiff and idle as I was there;
and we remained unchanged together
for a year, a minute, an hour.
Suddenly there was a motion,
as startling, there, to every sense
as an explosion. Then it dropped
to insistent, cautious creeping
in the region of the heart,
prodding me from desperate sleep.
I raised my head. A slight young weed
had pushed up through the heart and its
green head was nodding on the breast.
(All this was in the dark.)
It grew an inch like a blade of grass;
next, one leaf shot out of its side
a twisting, waving flag, and then
two leaves moved like a semaphore.
The stem grew thick. The nervous roots
reached to each side; the graceful head
changed its position mysteriously,
since there was neither sun nor moon
to catch its young attention.
The rooted heart began to change
(not beat) and then it split apart
and from it broke a flood of water.
Two rivers glanced off from the sides,
one to the right, one to the left,
two rushing, half-clear streams,
(the ribs made of them two cascades)
which assuredly, smooth as glass,
went off through the fine black grains of earth.

64

The weed was almost swept away;
it struggled with its leaves,
lifting them fringed with heavy drops.
A few drops fell upon my face
and in my eyes, so I could see
(or, in that black place, thought I saw)
that each drop contained a light,
a small, illuminated scene;
the weed-deflected stream was made
itself of racing images.
(As if a river should carry all
the scenes that it had once reflected
shut in its waters, and not floating
on momentary surfaces.)
The weed stood in the severed heart.
“What are you doing there?” I asked.
It lifted its head all dripping wet
(with my own thoughts?)
and answered then: “I grow,” it said,
“but to divide your heart again.”

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Thus should have been our travels:
serious, engravable.

The Seven Wonders of the World are tired
and a touch familiar, but the other scenes,
innumerable, though equally sad and still,
are foreign. Often the squatting Arab,
or group of Arabs, plotting, probably,
against our Christian Empire,
while one apart, with outstretched arm and hand
points to the Tomb, the Pit, the Sepulcher.
The branches of the date-palms look like files.
The cobbled courtyard, where the Well is dry,
is like a diagram, the brickwork conduits
are vast and obvious, the human figure
far gone in history or theology,
gone with its camel or its faithful horse.
Always the silence, the gesture, the specks of birds
suspended on invisible threads above the Site,
or the smoke rising solemnly, pulled by threads.
Granted a page alone or a page made up
of several scenes arranged in catty-cornered rectangles
or circles set on stippled gray,
granted a grim lunette,
caught in the toils of an initial letter,
when dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves.
The eye drops, weighted, through the lines
the burin made, the lines that move apart
like ripples above sand,
dispersing storms, God's spreading fingerprint,
and painfully, finally, that ignite
in watery prismatic white-and-blue.

Entering the Narrows at St. Johns
the touching bleat of goats reached to the ship.
We glimpsed them, reddish, leaping up the cliffs
among the fog-soaked weeds and butter-and-eggs.

And at St. Peter's the wind blew and the sun shone madly.
Rapidly, purposefully, the Collegians marched in lines,
crisscrossing the great square with black, like ants.
In Mexico the dead man lay
in a blue arcade; the dead volcanoes
glistened like Easter lilies.

The jukebox went on playing "Ay, Jalisco!"
And at Volubilis there were beautiful poppies
splitting the mosaics; the fat old guide made eyes.
In Dingle harbor a golden length of evening
the rotting hulks held up their dripping plush.
The Englishwoman poured tea, informing us
that the Duchess was going to have a baby.
And in the brothels of Marrakesh
the little pockmarked prostitutes
balanced their tea-trays on their heads
and did their belly-dances; flung themselves
naked and giggling against our knees,
asking for cigarettes. It was somewhere near there
I saw what frightened me most of all:

A holy grave, not looking particularly holy,
one of a group under a keyhole-arched stone baldaquin
open to every wind from the pink desert.
An open, gritty, marble trough, carved solid
with exhortation, yellowed
as scattered cattle-teeth;
half-filled with dust, not even the dust
of the poor prophet paynim who once lay there.
In a smart burnoose Khadour looked on amused.

Everything only connected by "and" and "and."
Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
Open the heavy book. Why couldn't we have seen
this old Nativity while we were at it?
—the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
and, lulled within, a family with pets,
—and looked and looked our infant sight away.

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—and looked and looked our infant sight away.

The Bight

[On my birthday]

At low tide like this how sheer the water is.

White, crumbling ribs of marl protrude and glare and the boats are dry, the pilings dry as matches.

Absorbing, rather than being absorbed,

the water in the bight doesn't wet anything,

the color of the gas flame turned as low as possible.

One can smell it turning to gas; if one were Baudelaire one could probably hear it turning to marimba music.

The little ocher dredge at work off the end of the dock already plays the dry perfectly off-beat claves.

The birds are outsize. Pelicans crash

into this peculiar gas unnecessarily hard,

it seems to me, like pickaxes,

rarely coming up with anything to show for it,

and going off with humorous elbowings.

Black-and-white man-of-war birds soar on impalpable drafts

and open their tails like scissors on the curves or tense them like wishbones, till they tremble.

The frowzy sponge boats keep coming in

with the obliging air of retrievers,

bristling with jackstraw gaffs and hooks

and decorated with bobbles of sponges.

There is a fence of chicken wire along the dock where, glinting like little plowshares,

the blue-gray shark tails are hung up to dry for the Chinese-restaurant trade.

Some of the little white boats are still piled up

against each other, or lie on their sides, stove in,

and not yet salvaged, if they ever will be, from the last bad storm, like torn-open, unanswered letters.

The bight is littered with old correspondences.

Click. Click. Goes the dredge,

and brings up a dripping jawful of marl.

All the untidy activity continues,

awful but cheerful.

7

while horns are resounding in your beautiful ears
that simultaneously listen to
a soft uninvented music, fit for the musk deer,
please come flying.

From Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,
please come flying.
In a cloud of fiery pale chemicals,
please come flying,
to the rapid rolling of thousands of small blue drums
descending out of the mackerel sky
over the glittering grandstand of harbor-water,
please come flying.

Whistles, pennants and smoke are blowing. The ships
are signaling cordially with multitudes of flags
rising and falling like birds all over the harbor.
Enter: two rivers, gracefully bearing
countless little pellucid jellies
in cut-glass epergnes dragging with silver chains.
The flight is safe; the weather is all arranged.
The waves are running in verses this fine morning.
Please come flying.

Come with the pointed toe of each black shoe
trailing a sapphire highlight,
with a black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots,
with heaven knows how many angels all riding
on the broad black brim of your hat,
please come flying.

Bearing a musical inaudible abacus,
a slight censorious frown, and blue ribbons,
please come flying.
Facts and skyscrapers glint in the tide; Manhattan
is all awash with morals this fine morning,
so please come flying.

Mounting the sky with natural heroism,
above the accidents, above the malignant movies,
the taxicabs and injustices at large,

For whom the grim museums will behave
like courteous male bower-birds,
for whom the agreeable lions lie in wait
on the steps of the Public Library,
eager to rise and follow through the doors
up into the reading rooms,
please come flying.
We can sit down and weep; we can go shopping,
or play at a game of constantly being wrong
with a priceless set of vocabularies,
or we can bravely deplore, but please
please come flying.
With dynasties of negative constructions
darkening and dying around you,
with grammar that suddenly turns and shines
like flocks of sandpipers flying,
please come flying.
Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,
come like a daytime comet
with a long unnebulous train of words,
from Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,
please come flying.

Questions of Travel

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams hurry too rapidly down to the sea, and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion, turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

—For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains, aren't waterfalls yet, in a quick age or so, as ages go here, they probably will be. But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling, the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships, slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? Where should we be today?

Is it right to be watching strangers in a play in this strangest of theatres?

What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life in our bodies, we are determined to rush to see the sun the other way around?

The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?

To stare at some inexplicable old stonework, inexplicable and impenetrable, at any view,

instantly seen and always, always delightful?

Oh, must we dream our dreams and have them, too?

And have we room for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity not to have seen the trees along this road, really exaggerated in their beauty, not to have seen them gesturing like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.

(8)

—Not to have had to stop for gas and heard the sad, two-noted, wooden tune of disparate wooden clogs carelessly clacking over a grease-stained filling-station floor. (In another country the clogs would all be tested. Each pair there would have identical pitch.)

—A pity not to have heard the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird who sings above the broken gasoline pump in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque: three towers, five silver crosses.

—Yes, a pity not to have pondered, blurr'dly and inconclusively, on what connection can exist for centuries between the crudest wooden footwear and, careful and finicky, the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.

—Never to have studied history in the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.

—And never to have had to listen to rain so much like politicians' speeches: two hours of unrelenting oratory and then a sudden golden silence in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

*"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right about just sitting quietly in one's room?"*

*Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?"*

The Armadillo

for Robert Lowell

This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear.
Climbing the mountain height,
rising toward a saint
still honored in these parts,
the paper chambers flush and fill with light
that comes and goes, like hearts.

Once up against the sky it's hard
to tell them from the stars—
planets, that is—the tinted ones:
Venus going down, or Mars,

or the pale green one. With a wind,
they flare and falter, wobble and toss;
but if it's still they steer between
the kite sticks of the Southern Cross,

receding, dwindling, solemnly
and steadily forsaking us,
or, in the downdraft from a peak,
suddenly turning dangerous.

Last night another big one fell.
It splattered like an egg of fire
against the cliff behind the house.
The flame ran down. We saw the pair

of owls who nest there flying up
and up, their whirling black-and-white
stained bright pink underneath, until
they shrieked up out of sight.

The ancient owls' nest must have burned.
Hastily, all alone,
a glistening armadillo left the scene,
rose-flecked, head down, tail down,
and then a baby rabbit jumped out,
short-eared, to our surprise.
So soft!—a handful of intangible ash
with fixed, ignited eyes.

*Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!
O falling fire and piercing cry
and panic, and a weak mailed fist
clenched ignorant against the sky!*

Sandpiper

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake.

The beach hisses like fat. On his left, a sheet
of interrupting water comes and goes
and glazes over his dark and brittle feet.
He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his toes.

—Watching, rather, the spaces of sand between them,
where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains
rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,
he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear. The tide
is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
His beak is focussed; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.
Poor bird, he is obsessed!

* The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.

One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
faces, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

Crusoe in England

A new volcano has erupted, the papers say, and last week I was reading where some ship saw an island being born: at first a breath of steam, ten miles away; and then a black fleck—basalt, probably—rose in the mate's binoculars and caught on the horizon like a fly. They named it. But my poor old island's still un-rediscovered, un-renamable. None of the books has ever got it right.

Well, I had fifty-two miserable, small volcanoes I could climb with a few slithery strides—volcanoes dead as ash heaps. I used to sit on the edge of the highest one and count the others standing up, naked and leaden, with their heads blown off. I'd think that if they were the size

I thought volcanoes should be, then I had become a giant; and if I had become a giant, I couldn't bear to think what size the goats and turtles were, or the gulls, or the over-lapping rollers—a glittering hexagon of rollers closing and closing in, but never quite, glittering and glittering, though the sky was mostly overcast.

My island seemed to be a sort of cloud-dump. All the hemisphere's left-over clouds arrived and hung above the craters—their parched throats were hot to touch. Was that why it rained so much?

And why sometimes the whole place hissed? The turtles lumbered by, high-domed, hissing like teakettles. (And I'd have given years, or taken a few, for any sort of kettle, of course.) The folds of lava, running out to sea, would hiss. I'd turn. And then they'd prove to be more turtles. The beaches were all lava, variegated, black, red, and white, and gray; the marbled colors made a fine display. And I had waterspouts. Oh, half a dozen at a time, far out, they'd come and go, advancing and retreating, their heads in cloud, their feet in moving patches of scuffed-up white.

Glass chimneys, flexible, attenuated, sacerdotal beings of glass . . . I watched the water spiral up in them like smoke. Beautiful, yes, but not much company.

I often gave way to self-pity.

"Do I deserve this? I suppose I must. I wouldn't be here otherwise. Was there a moment when I actually chose this? I don't remember, but there could have been." What's wrong about self-pity, anyway? With my legs dangling down familiarly over a crater's edge, I told myself "Pity should begin at home." So the more pity I felt, the more I felt at home.

The sun set in the sea; the same odd sun rose from the sea, and there was one of it and one of me. The island had one kind of everything: one tree snail, a bright violet-blue with a thin shell, crept over everything, over the one variety of tree, a sooty, scrub affair. Snail shells lay under these in drifts

and, at a distance,
 you'd swear that they were beds of irises.
 There was one kind of berry, a dark red.
 I tried it, one by one, and hours apart.
 Sub-acid, and not bad, no ill effects;
 and so I made home-brew. I'd drink
 the awful, fizzy, stinging stuff
 that went straight to my head
 and play my home-made flute
 (I think it had the weirdest scale on earth)
 and, dizzy, whoop and dance among the goats.
 Home-made, home-made! But aren't we all?
 I felt a deep affection for
 the smallest of my island industries.
 No, not exactly, since the smallest was
 a miserable philosophy.

Because I didn't know enough.
 Why didn't I know enough of something?
 Greek drama or astronomy? The books
 I'd read were full of blanks;
 the poems—well, I tried
 reciting to my iris-beds,
 "They flash upon that inward eye,
 which is the bliss . . ." The bliss of what?
 One of the first things that I did
 when I got back was look it up.

The island smelled of goat and guano.
 The goats were white, so were the gulls,
 and both too tame, or else they thought
 I was a goat, too, or a gull.
Baa, baa, baa and *shriek, shriek, shriek*,
baa . . . shriek . . . baa . . . I still can't shake
 them from my ears; they're hurting now.
 The questioning shrieks, the equivocal replies
 over a ground of hissing rain
 and hissing, ambulating turtles
 got on my nerves.

When all the gulls flew up at once, they sounded
 like a big tree in a strong wind, its leaves.
 I'd shut my eyes and think about a tree,
 an oak, say, with real shade, somewhere.
 I'd heard of cattle getting island-sick.
 I thought the goats were.

One billy-goat would stand on the volcano
 I'd christened *Mont d'Espoir* or *Mount Despair*
 (I'd time enough to play with names),
 and bleat and bleat, and sniff the air.
 I'd grab his beard and look at him.
 His pupils, horizontal, narrowed up
 and expressed nothing, or a little malice.
 I got so tired of the very colors!
 One day I dyed a baby goat bright red
 with my red berries, just to see
 something a little different.
 And then his mother wouldn't recognize him.

Dreams were the worst. Of course I dreamed of food
 and love, but they were pleasant rather
 than otherwise. But then I'd dream of things
 like slitting a baby's throat, mistaking it
 for a baby goat. I'd have
 nightmares of other islands
 stretching away from mine, infinities
 of islands, islands spawning islands,
 like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs
 of islands, knowing that I had to live
 on each and every one, eventually,
 for ages, registering their flora,
 their fauna, their geography.

Just when I thought I couldn't stand it
 another minute longer, Friday came.
 (Accounts of that have everything all wrong.)
 Friday was nice.
 Friday was nice, and we were friends.
 If only he had been a woman!
 I wanted to propagate my kind,
 and so did he, I think, poor boy.

He'd pet the baby goats sometimes,
and race with them, or carry one around.
—Pretty to watch; he had a pretty body.

And then one day they came and took us off.

Now I live here, another island,
that doesn't seem like one, but who decides?
My blood was full of them; my brain
bred islands. But that archipelago
has petered out. I'm old.
I'm bored, too, drinking my real tea,
surrounded by uninteresting lumber.
The knife there on the shelf—
it reeked of meaning, like a crucifix.
It lived. How many years did I
beg it, implore it, not to break?
I knew each nick and scratch by heart,
the bluish blade, the broken tip,
the lines of wood-grain on the handle . . .
Now it won't look at me at all.
The living soul has dribbled away.
My eyes rest on it and pass on.

The local museum's asked me to
leave everything to them:
the flute, the knife, the shrivelled shoes,
my shedding goatskin trousers
(moths have got in the fur),
the parasol that took me such a time
remembering the way the ribs should go.
It still will work but, folded up,
looks like a plucked and skinny fowl.
How can anyone want such things?
—And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles
seventeen years ago come March.

Night City

[From the plane]

No foot could endure it,
shoes are too thin.
Broken glass, broken bottles,
heaps of them burn.

Over those fires
no one could walk:
those flaring acids
and variegated bloods.

The city burns tears.
A gathered lake
of aquamarine
begins to smoke.

The city burns guilt.
—For guilt-disposal
the central heat
must be this intense.

Diaphanous lymph,
bright turgid blood,
spatter outward
in clots of gold

to where run, molten,
in the dark environs
green and luminous
silicate rivers.

A pool of bitumen
one tycoon
wept by himself,
a blackened moon.