

62 QUOTATIONS



Marianne Moore

(1887-1972)

Marianne Moore is an original Modernist poet, a modest unmarried librarian with an elegant personal style who invented her own metric system and exercised great critical authority during the peak of the Modernist movement in the 1920s as Editor of *The Dial*. A close associate of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, she is both an intellectual Expressionist like Eliot and the early Pound, and rigorously objective in her observations like Williams. Eliot wrote introductions to both her collections of poems. Her aesthetics—orderly, economical, urbane, calculated, objective, precise, restrained—are strongly Neoclassical like Eliot, and yet, paradoxically, she is able to make her witty poems seem whimsical, conversational, and spontaneous. Her popular image as an apparently sweet lady poet and New York Yankee baseball fan was misleading—as a critic she could be thorny and sharp. The formless, self-absorbed free verse characteristic of Postmodern poets disgusted her.

ORDER OF TOPICS: character, travel, responding to new poets, Neoclassicism, Modernism, psychology, gender, human nature, love, highest standards, poetry, writing poetry, Postmodernism, Political Correctness, critics, transcendence, death:

CHARACTER

Your thorns are the best part of you.

There never was a war that was not inward.

Impatience is the mark of independence, not of bondage.

I must fight till I have conquered in myself what causes war.

When one is frank, one's very presence is a compliment.

My father used to say superior people never make long visits.

If you will tell me why the fen appears impassable, I then will tell you why I think that I can cross it if I try.

The Irish say your trouble is their trouble and your joy is their joy? I wish I could believe it; I am troubled, I'm dissatisfied, I'm Irish.

TRAVEL

In 1911. My mother and I went to England for about two months.... We went to Paris and we stayed on the Left Bank, in a pension on the rue Valette.... I have been much interested in Sylvia Beach's book—reading about Ezra and his Paris days.

I had met no writers until 1916, when I visited New York, when a friend in Carlisle wanted me to accompany her.... She was most skeptical of my venturing forth to bohemian parties.

RESPONDING TO NEW POETS

["Do you read new poetry now?"]: I am always seeing it—am sent some every day. Some good. But it does interfere with my work. I can't get much done. Yet I would be a monster if I tossed everything away without looking at it. I write more notes, letters, cards in an hour than is sane.

NEOCLASSICISM

I think I should be in some philological operation or enterprise, am really much interested in dialect and intonations. I scarcely think of any that comes into my so-called poems at all.

I thought, in fact, of studying medicine. Precision, economy of statement, logic employed to ends that are disinterested, drawing and identifying, these at least have some bearing on the imagination, it seems to me.

Do the poet and the scientist not work analogously?

MODERNISM

Didn't Aristotle say that it is the mark of a poet to see resemblances between apparently incongruous things? [Neoclassicism and influence of T.S. Eliot]

If you have a genius of an editor, you are blessed: e.g., T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

I took a great liking to Hart Crane. We talked about French bindings, and he was diffident and modest and seemed to have so much intuition, such a feel for things, for books—really a bibliophile—that I took special interest in him.... Anyhow, *The Bridge* is a grand theme. Here and there I think he could have firmed it up.

Wallace Stevens was extremely friendly.

It was some time before I felt that way about T.S. Eliot.

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology which explains everything explains nothing, and we are still in doubt.

The self does not realize itself most fully when self-realization is its most constant aim.

GENDER

You are not male or female, but a plan deep-set within the heart of man.

HUMAN NATURE

The hands are the heart's messengers.

It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing.

If illusions of magnitude could be transmuted into ideals of magnanimity, peace might be realized.

LOVE

Love can make one bestial or make a beast a man.

The heart that gives, gathers.

HIGHEST STANDARDS

I disliked the term 'poetry' for any but Chaucer's or Shakespeare's or Dante's.

With no integrity, a man is not likely to write the kind of book I read.

POETRY

Poetry is all nouns and verbs.

A place for the genuine, hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that can rise.

Poetry is the art of creating imaginary gardens with real toads in them.

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

I see no reason for calling my work poetry except that there is no other category in which to put it.

Wallace Stevens was really very much annoyed at being cataloged, categorized, and compelled to be scientific about what he was doing—to give satisfaction, to answer the teachers. He wouldn't do that. I think the same of William Carlos Williams.

WRITING POETRY

I certainly never intended to write poetry.

I don't know that I submitted anything that wasn't extorted from me.

["Was Imagism a help to you?"]: No. I wondered why anyone would adopt the term.

Ezra Pound said, Someone has been reading Laforgue, and French authors. Well, sad to say, I had not read any of them until fairly recently. Retroactively I see that Francis Jammes's titles and treatment are a good deal like my own. I seem almost a plagiarist.

If technique is of no interest to a writer, I doubt that the writer is an artist. [Modernism]

In a poem the excitement has to maintain itself. I am governed by the pull of the sentence as the pull of a fabric is governed by gravity.

I never knew anyone who had a passion for words who had as much difficulty in saying things as I do and I very seldom say them in a manner I like. If I do it's because I don't know I'm trying.

A felicitous phrase springs to mind—a word or two, say—simultaneous usually with some thought or object of equal attraction: “Its leaps should be *set* to the flageolet”; “Katydid-wing subdivided by *sun*/till the nettings are *legion*.” I like light rhymes, inconspicuous rhymes, and un pompous conspicuous rhymes. Gilbert and Sullivan.

I have a passion for rhythm and accent, so blundered into versifying. Considering the stanza the unit, I came to hazard by hyphens at the end of the line, but found that readers are distracted from the content by hyphens, so I try not to use them.

Never, never “plan” a stanza. Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure. I may influence the arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first. Spontaneous initial originality—say, impetus—seems difficult to reproduce consciously later. As Stravinsky said about pitch, “If I transpose it for some reason, I am in danger of losing the freshness of first contact and will have difficulty in recapturing its attractiveness.”

I like the unaccented syllable and the accented near-rhyme.

A writer is unfair to himself when he is unable to be hard on himself.

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

Any writer overwhelmingly honest about pleasing himself is almost sure to please others.

I think each time that I write that it may be the last time.

POSTMODERNISM

This sick scene.

Egotism is usually subversive of sagacity.

We are suffering from too much sarcasm.

They become so derivative as to become unintelligible.

I am hard to disgust, but a pretentious poet can do it.

We do not admire what we cannot understand.

They fought the enemy, we fight fat living and self-pity.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

The passion for setting people right is in itself an infective disease.

The enslaver is enslaved, the hater, harmed.

CRITICS

It is quite cruel that a poet cannot wander through his regions of enchantment without having a critic, forever, like the old man of the sea, upon his back.

TRANSCENDENCE

Beauty is everlasting and dust is for a time.

DEATH

You're not free until you've been made captive by supreme belief.

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