

Media Transcripts, Inc.

41 West 83rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10024, (212) 362-1481 FAX 799-3482

8

FOR

NEW YORK CENTER FOR VISUAL HISTORY
625 Broadway
New York New York 10012

PROGRAM

VOICES & VISIONS #108
Marianne Moore
In Her Own Image

STATION

DATE

CITY

BEGIN PROGRAM

ANNOUNCER

A presentation of the South Carolina Educational Television network. Major funding for the Voices and Visions series is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and The Annenberg CPB Project. Additional series funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. Special funding for this program is provided by the New York Council for the Humanities, the Seth Sprague Educational and Charitable Foundation and the Axe Houghton Foundation.

(MUSIC)

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(MUSIC)

TITLE: VOICES AND VISIONS

READER

Poetry. I too dislike it. Reading it,
however, with a perfect content for it, one
discovers in it, after all...a place for the
genuine.

TITLE: MARIANNE MOORE
IN HER OWN IMAGE

READER:

(MUSIC)

In the days of prismatic color, not in the
days of Adam and Eve, but when Adam was
alone...when there was no smoke and color was
fine...not with the refinement of early
civilization art, but because of its
originality.

With nothing to modify it but the mist...
that went up. Obliqueness was a variation of
the perpendicular...plain to see and to
account for.

(MUSIC)

It is no longer that.

RICHARD HOWARD

POET/CRITIC

Even as a young woman, she liked to say about her poetry...I'm not sure that this is poetry. I'm not making any claims for it as poetry. It's the way I want it to be. It is language under the conditions I believe in.

And she was extraordinarily, I think we would say, gutsy...about her sense that this is what she wanted. This and no other.

GRACE SCHULMAN

POET

She wanted her poetry to be natural. This was of the greatest importance to her. Natural, straightforward...she said, does this sound natural as though I were talking to you? Well, that's what I think it ought.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

POET

In the air in England when I was...starting
to write poetry was the voice of Dylan
Thomas. And if you turned on the radio, if
you heard poetry at all on the radio, it'd be
Dylan Thomas reading. And everything was so
haughtied up. It was so marvelous to come
across these wonderful cool poems, which at
the same time had a kind of intellectual
passion about them too.

KENNETH BURKE

WRITER/CRITIC

I admire that woman in a way (LAUGHS)...my
God! In every scene that's ever written
about her, she's...she was magic to me. She
was...beautiful woman.

(MUSIC)

READER

Dear Badger: I have an airedale coat. And
I'm going to New York on Monday.

MAN

New York City, 1915. Already the architect's

poem... Bastion of the jazz age... laboratory
for painters, photographers and sculptors.
Everywhere, established methods of design are
being shattered to suit individual visions.

Poets and publishers experimented with Ezra
Pound's credo from overseas... to take the
language... and make it new.

PATRICIA WILLIS

LITERARY HISTORIAN

1915 was a very important year for Marianne
Moore. It was the year of her first
professional publications. And
the... probably the year that she most firmly
realized that she was going to become a poet.

(MUSIC)

MAN

Moore wrote to her brother about her New York
expeditions, which she nicknamed
her... sojourns in the whale.

READER

Dear Badger: Went to 291, to see some of
Alfred Stieglitz's photography. He has a

magnificent little thing of the sea in dark blue, and some paintings of mountains by a man named Hartley. Also some Piccacio's [sic] and Picasso's and so on.

GRACE SCHULMAN

She took the opportunity, in 1915, to insert herself for the first time into that world she was soon to join.

READER

Dear Mr. Pound: I was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1909. My mother and I are living at present in New York in a small apartment. I like New York. The little quiet part of it, in which my mother and I live. I like to see the tops of the masts from our door...and to go to the wharf and look at the craft on the river.

MAN

Working at first in relative isolation, Moore published in such respected journals as OTHERS, THE EGOIST and POETRY. She was soon embraced by a small, but important group of admirers...the other modernist poets.

READER

April 17, 1921. Dear Mr. Elliott: Your letter gives me great pleasure. It is a happiness to know that I am not quite a stranger to you. Were I to publish verses, I should be grateful indeed for the assistance you offer. Your suggestion tempts me almost beyond my own certain knowledge that I have nothing that ought to appear in book form.

MAN

Despite her protests, the first volume of Moore's poems was published by some friends in England.

RICHARD HOWARD

These poems are not outward glances upon the external world.

They are unbelievably, or quite believably...moralizing sentiments about the nature of, I believe, the poet's self. They are extreme emotional statements.

(MUSIC)

MARIANNE MOORE

RECORDED JUNE, 1954

The fish

Wade

Through black jade...

Of the cool blue mussel shells...

One keeps adjusting the ash heaps.

Opening and shutting itself

Like an injured fan.

The barnacles which incrust the side of the
wave...

Cannot hide there for the submerged shafts of
the sun...

Split like spun glass...

Move themselves with spotlight swiftness

Into the crevices.

In and out, illuminating

The turquoise sea of bodies.

The water drives a wedge of iron

Through the iron edge of the cliff,

Whereupon the stars ...pink rice grains...

Ink spattered jellyfish.

Crabs like green lillies and submarine
toadstools slide each on the other.

All external marks of abuse are present
On this defiant edifice.

All the physical features of accident,

Like the corners...dynamite grooves,

Burns and hatchet strokes...

These things stand out on it.

The chasm side is dead.

Repeated evidence has proved that it can live
on what cannot revive its youth.

The sea grows old in it.

RICHARD HOWARD

The sea... grows old... in it. Now this is a
program for survival. And she is very
explicit about the...the ruins of experience.

The chasm side is dead, she says...at
twenty-eight.

And I feel that this is a very profound and prophetic poem about the... damages of a lifetime. And the understood and acknowledged and accepted... scars of experience.

(MUSIC)

MAN

Marianne Moore spent her earliest years in Kirkwood, Missouri, in the home of her grandfather, the Reverend John Rittle Warner. Shortly before she was born in 1887, her father, a failed inventor, was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown. And never returned to the family.

CLIVE DRIVER

LITERARY EXECUTOR

Marianne never knew her father. Never met him. And when she was six years old, the grandfather went to a funeral... stood out in the icy rain, caught pneumonia and died... leaving them stranded once again.

Everybody that they had relied upon in their

early life had either died or disappeared.
The three of them clung to one another and
became...just desperately mutually
reinforcing.

MONROE WHEELER

FORMER DIRECTOR OF EXHIBITIONS

AND PUBLICATIONS, MOMA

I've never known a mother and a daughter to
be so close...or to be so happy with one
another and to be so joyful with one another.
Because they were always making each other
laugh.

GLADYS BERRY

Like two sisters. You never saw one without
the other.

MONROE WHEELER

I remember once...when I was there and
Marianne was distressed. Because she'd come
to a halt in a poem that she was writing.
And she couldn't find her way out. And her
mother said quite calmly...well show it to
me. I'll tell you how to get out. And she
did. Right then and there.

(MUSIC)

MAN

In 1905, Moore began study at Bryn Mawr. Denied an English major, she chose history and political economy.

READER

Dearest family: I am not going to discuss my work. There is an appalling amount. It is all interesting and I am doing the best I can.

For our dance, I shall wear my gray lab apron and pin a white paper circle on it, to represent an amoeba...with oceans and oceans of love.

MAN

I think the laboratory methods carried over into the way she worked and the way she wrote.

READER

With Miss Moore, a word is a word most when it is...separated out by science, treated with acid to remove the smudges, washed,

dried and placed right side up on a clean
surface.

Now one may say that this is a word. Now it
may be used. William Carlos Williams.

READER

A jellyfish...visible...invisible...a
fluctuating charm. An amber tintured
amethyst inhabits it. Your arm approaches
and it opens and it closes.

(MUSIC)

You had meant to catch it. And it quivers.
You abandon your intent.

(CLOCK PEALS)

Dear Family: I had an interview today. Miss
Fullerton says, please...a little lucidity.
Your obscurity becomes greater and greater.

I may be over confident. But I think I shall
get there some day in the matter of writing.
If I do not, I shall wonder about the justice
about my having been plagued with the fever.

(MUSIC)

PATRICIA WILLIS

A GRAVE was written shortly after the sinking of the LUSITANIA in 1917, and America's entry into World War I. It's a poem about the sea. And we know that Marianne Moore loved the sea.

But...at about the time she was writing the poem, her brother, who was a Presbyterian minister, took on the role of a Navy chaplain. And was at sea in wartime. So the...the sense of...of the sea as a grave, both a past one and a potential one was very...very true to her.

CLIVE DRIVER

She and her mother were up in Maine and they were...looking out at the ocean. And somebody came along and stood right in front of them. And...her mother made the offhanded comment about how often... people feel they have to stand right in the middle of a thing.

rather than stand back and look at it, which gave her the initial idea for the poem.

(MUSIC)

READER

Man looking into the sea...taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to it yourself. It is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing. But you cannot stand in the middle of this.

The sea has nothing to give...but a well excavated grave.

(MUSIC AND CANNON SHOT)

The sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look. There are others besides you who have worn that look...whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate them, for their bones have not lasted.

Men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave...and row quickly away---the blades of the oars moving

together like the feet of water spiders as if
there were no such thing as death.

(MUSIC)

And the ocean, under the pulsation of
lighthouses and noise of bell buoys, advances
as usual, looking as if it were not that
ocean in which dropped things are bound to
sink...in which, if they turn and twist, it
is neither with volition nor consciousness.

RICHARD HOWARD

When she's writing about the sea, which is
her...one of her great subjects...and one of
her consistent thematics, it seems to me that
she sounds more like Whitman than anyone else
has ever sounded like him. And that she
understands his diction and his natural
rhythms and his breathing. And it is very
close to her own.

And those are moments when I love her very
much. And where I feel that she...escaped or
evaded her own...what I'm calling, her own
propriety.

CLIVE DRIVER

I...I think not only will a...a close study of particular poems reveal the nature of the person, but also the environment in which she lived. And in particular, her bed sitting room, which after her death, was moved intact to Philadelphia...and is preserved with every object exactly in the place in which she left it.

(MUSIC)

In a way in which no other format can quite convey, I think walking into that room... gives you a very real sense of what the person was like.

TODAY SHOW, 1967

MARIANNE MOORE

I get up early...

INTERVIEWER

How...what is early?

MARIANNE MOORE

Oh, six, sometimes earlier...or seven. I drink a little orange juice...eat some Farina...eat a banana. And then, I...get out

my work. I'll (LAUGHS) worked till... I have
to sleep!

INTERVIEWER

You got at it like... it was a regular job.
Get the work and get it done.

MARIANNE MOORE

Exactly. People think that's not romantic.
No, it isn't. But that's the way I am.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I thought you sat down and... and these
beautiful thoughts...

MARIANNE MOORE

Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER

...would come to your mind.

MARIANNE MOORE

They flow into the mind. And you have a
nice, clean piece of paper. No, indeed. I
save up things that I like pretty well, until
I need them.

INTERVIEWER

How do you save them? Do you... do you have a

little catalog?

MARIANNE MOORE

No, I have a little book. It's
called...SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS.

MONROE WHEELER

Well she was always...darting about, from one
thing to another...making her own
discoveries. We would go see a...a certain
exhibition. But she would always find
something else that she liked better.

She loved Joseph Cornell, who was a kindred
artist. It was the same kind of
creativity...this seeking out...things that
appealed to her...and assembling them.

MAN

As she collected them, she would begin to put
things together that...had associations, only
in her own mind. And then, eventually, out
of a collection of very disparate things. I
mean, photographs, postcards, tear sheets
from magazines, newspaper clippings.

advertising leaflets that she got in the mail. Out of... the association between all of these things, would eventually come a poem.

PATRICIA WILLIS

One of my favorites is a clipping showing a _____ basilisk... on the hand of a zookeeper. And not only does the _____ basilisk work itself into a poem, but the very caption used by the journalist for this basilisk becomes a line in her poem about it.

CLIVE DRIVER

The poem, NO SWAN SO FINE, for example... she had clipped a photograph of... the fountain in front of the Palace at Versailles. And she had written across the top of the clipping, "there is no water so still as the dead fountains of Versailles."

PATRICIA WILLIS

Then, at about the same time, in the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, she saw an ad for a sale at Christie's Auction House. And one of the things being offered for sale was... a

pair of candelabra Because she apparently didn't own that magazine, she took out her notebook and made a drawing.

GRACE SCHULMAN

Now according to an entry in the poet's notebook, the swan had decorated a Louise XV candelabra, owned by Lord Balfour. She was dejected about the passing of Lord Balfour. And she was also dejected about the impending cessation of POETRY magazine, as she wrote to her brother.

(MUSIC)

READER

So these images of passing are present, and became the poem about a swan candelabra and it shows how it remains, because it is something beautiful and somehow sturdy enough, although fragile to survive.

(MUSIC)

NO SWAN

No water so still as the dead fountains of Versailles.

No swan with swart mind look askance and

gondoliering legs...

So fine as the chintz china one, with fawn
brown eyes and toothed gold collar on
To show whose bird it was.

Lodged in the Louis XV candelabrum tree
Of coxcomb tinted buttons, dahlias, sea
urchins and everlastings,
It perches on the branch and foam of
polished, sculptured flowers...

At ease...and tall.

(MUSIC)

A king is dead.

PATRICIA WILLIS

AN OCTOPUS is a poem that grew out of... two
wonderful trips Marianne Moore took to
Seattle, in the early 1920's.

(MUSIC)

She went by train, through the Canadian
Rockies. And then by boat to Seattle.

READER

August 25, 1923. When we got to Seattle, we
were overwhelmed with joy to see Warner on

the dock.

PATRICIA WILLIS

The occasion was very special. Marianne, her mother and her brother had not been alone together in their...original family unit for several years. And they decided to go up to... what's called Paradise Park, on the side of Mount Rainier.

(MUSIC)

READER

September 6, 1923. We are having sunshine all the time...and views of Mount Rainier, with pale rose shadows on it, with delight even my seared-to-nature heart. And after dark, it is so cold we have to have a fire indoors.

(MUSIC)

PATRICIA WILLIS

Paradise Inn is located just below the Nisquali [sic] Glacier, which is one of the most dramatic of the eight major glaciers that make up the eight armed octopus.

And you get up close to the glacier, which is often clouded over, and then there it is. This huge crevice. And snow and ice, creeping slowly, as she says in the poem, down the mountainside.

And that, she certainly saw. Because we have pictures of her seated at the...the very rock that is the furthest point you go to, to look at the glacier.

And then, Marianne and her brother rented whatever hiking gear they needed, to go on a visit to the ice caves. And she describes them in the poem as the grottoes, which make you wonder why you came. They're...they're so cold and...and icy, of course. Even though this was the middle of summer.

A very different set of...of sceneries, than one sees in the beautiful wild flower gardens around Paradise Inn. More the dark side of the mountain, the threatening side, that

becomes important in her poem.

One of the most important influences on the finished poem, AN OCTOPUS, was a brochure put out by the National Park Service, about Mount Rainier.

One of the subheadings in the description of the mountain is, "an octopus of ice". And that became Marianne Moore's title. And the first two words of the first line of the poem.

On the cover is an aerial map of Mount Ranier. And it's very obvious that there are eight major glaciers running down the sides.

(MUSIC)

READER

AN OCTOPUS

An octopus of ice...

Deceptively reserved and flat.

It lies in grandeur and in mass.

Beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes...
Dots of sicklim [sic] and red and maroon,
On its clearly defined sudapodga [sic],
Made of glass that will bend...
A much needed invention.

Comprising twenty-eight ice fields,
From fifty to five hundred feet thick,
Of unimagined delicacy.

Picking periwinkles from the cracks,
All killing prey with the concentric crushing
rigor of the python,
It hovers forward, spider fashion,
And its arms, misleadingly like lace.

Its ghostly pallor changing
To the green metallic tinge of an anemone
starred pool.

The fir trees, in the magnitude of their root
systems,

Rise aloof from these maneuvers, creepy to

behold...

Austere specimens of our American royal
families...

Each like a shadow of the one beside it.

CHARLES TOHLINSON

Miraculously, she could take something from
the National Parks Regulation, or whatever,
and...by her cutting of it...'cause she
doesn't always quote direct. And we...often
when she quotes Ruskin, she'll cut him down.
She'll cut all that eloquence out.

It's as if she can...she can subject this
whole thing to...herself. And yet have this
nice tension between what somebody else has
said and the way...she looks at it.

READER

Completing a circle.

You have been deceived into thinking that you
have progressed,

Under the polite needles of the larches...

Hung to filter, not to intercept the
sunlight.

Met by tightly wattled spruce twigs,
Conformed to an edge like clipped cypress,
As if no branch could penetrate the cold
beyond its company.

And farther up, in staggered bay position,
As a scintillating fragment of these terrible
stalagmites...

Stands the goat...

Its eye fixed on the waterfall, which never
seems to fall.

An endless skein, swayed by the wind...

Immune to force of gravity, in the
perspective of the peaks.

PATRICIA WILLIS

The discovery that...at least two-thirds of
the poem...is quotation of one kind or
another, I think, is...is very important to
...our understanding of the author's...
bringing together disparate material to make
what becomes a seamless whole.

CLIVE DRIVER

It's as though the...actual physical
experience had to still be reinforced by
documentary evidence.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

She just wanted to take chunks of her reading
then, and...and simply put it...side-by-side,
like a cubist collage. And let you run
straight away through it.

READER

Distinguished by a beauty of which the
visitor dare never fully speak at home, for
fear of being stoned as an imposter.

Big Snow Mountain...is the home of a
diversity of creatures.

PATRICIA WILLIS

Right in the middle of the poem, there is a
reference to the Greeks. I worried about
that for a long time. And one day, after a
walk in the woods next to the house, I
suddenly realized...Dante. That's quotation
from the INFERNO.

READER

Like happy souls in hell,
Enjoying mental difficulties,
The Greeks amused themselves with delicate
behavior.

Because it was so noble and so fair.

Not practiced in adapting their intelligence,
To eagle traps and snow shoes,
To alpen stocks and other toys contrived by
those alive
To the advantage of invigorating pleasures.

The Greeks like smoothness...
Distrusting what was back of what could not
be clearly seen.

PATRICIA WILLIS

Although on one surface, the poem is almost
entirely the work of an astute observer of
nature, it is also a statement that...there
is a natural paradise that we can observe.
And we, the observer, are responsible for its

being maintained as a paradise, or becoming a
hell.

READER

Is tree the word for these things?

Flat on the ground like vines?

Some, bent in a half circle, with branches on
one side,

Suggesting dust brushes, not trees.

Some finding strength in union,

Forming little stunted groves,

Their flattened mats of branches shrunk

In trying to escape from the hard mountain,

Planed by ice and polished by the wind.

(MUSIC AND AVALANCHE SOUND)

The white volcano with no weather side.

The lightening flashing in its face.

Rain falling in the valleys and snow falling
on the peak.

The glassy octopus, symmetrically pointed...

Its claw, cut by the avalanche,

With a sound like the crack of a rifle.

In a curtain of powdered snow,

Watched like a waterfall.

(SOUND OF AVALANCHE)

MAN

I think she found, in the behavior of
animals, an inspiration for the direction in
which human behavior ought to... be
comported.

READER

The zebras, supreme in their abnormality. If
compression is the first grace of style, you
have it.

RICHARD HOWARD

Her poems are really not about animals. Her
poems about...are about herself. And she
uses this extraordinary manner of...appearing
to describe exactly in what I call a "zoo-o-
phrasty". A world of suffused
understatement, about herself.

READER

Another armored animal,
Scale lapping scale,
With spruce cone regularity,
Until they form the uninterrupted central
tail row.

This near artichoke, with head and legs...

PATRICIA WILLIS

Her emotions are armored slightly. So that
we have to dig quite deeply to realize
the...the relative depth of an emotion that's
being expressed.

MARIANNE MOORE

The jerboa, Miss Donnelley of Bryn Mawr said,
we like your animals, but don't you ever
write about anything else?

(LAUGHTER)

(MUSIC)

READER

He feared snakes and tamed Pharoah's rat,
The rust-backed mongoose,
No bust of it was made.
But there was pleasure for the rat,
Its restlessness was its excellence,
It was praised for its wit,
And the jerboa, like it, a small desert rat
and not famous,
That lives without water...has happiness.

By fifths and sevenths,
In leaps of two lengths,
Like the uneven notes of the Bedouin flute,
It stops its gleaning on little wheel casters
And makes fern-seed footprints
With kangaroo speed.

Its leaps should be set to the flageolet,
pillar body erect, on a three-cornered,
smooth-working Chippendale claw.
Propped on hind legs and tail,
As third toe...between leaps to its burrow.
(MUSIC)

CLIVE DRIVER

She was often asked about technique, because
of the particular brand of...syllabic verse
that she had invented.

GRACE SCHULMAN

That is a pattern in which...the numbers of
syllables determine the line, rather than
stresses.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

In one line, you have six, another you have

three, another you have nineteen or something. Now if you're writing iambic pentameter, all right, you start by counting on your fingers. But then it becomes natural. And you can just write in iambic pentameter.

But I think you have to keep going back. And remind yourself, you know, no, this is nineteen syllables. Now I go down to three. I don't think you can carry all that in your head so easily.

So I think there's a certain distancing of it all in the act of writing.

MONROE WHEELER

I had published some little pamphlets of poems by friends of mine, when I was very young. Because no one else would publish them. And she liked the pamphlets. She called them...they were...this size. And she called them...dinky deluxe.

And I said, well Marianne, I want you to write one for me. And...so she said she would.

GRACE SCHULMAN

You know, she often talked about poetry as prose. She would say...her poem MARRIAGE, for example, is just a collection of prose statements...statements she wished to keep, that she couldn't bear to lose.

MONROE WHEELER

It's Marianne's view of marriage. From every angle. And, as anyone will see when he... reads it, she had reservations about the whole subject. And...wrote...wrote about it brilliantly and so wittily. And there's some very, very amusing lines in it.

MARIANNE MOORE

I'm the last person to speak with authority, when I ask a question or...buy something... purchase something from a stranger, I'm always answered, yes miss. Or no miss. And I think it is the height of temerity to

marriage for me to read this.

(LAUGHTER)

You can imagine the lines that end with a
question mark. Or you can say sour grapes.

And I'll take it in good thought.

(LAUGHTER)

(MUSIC)

Marriage. What an institution.

Perhaps one should say enterprise.

(LAUGHTER)

Enterprise requiring public promises
Of one's intention to fulfill a private
obligation.

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

(LAUGHTER)

MARIANNE MOORE

The poem itself is...is sub...subdivided into
about ten sections. And each one has its own
separate approach. And that's why
it's...it's so variously entertaining...as
you read from one section to the other.

(MUSIC)

READER

This fire guilt steel, alive with goldeness.
How bright it shows, of circular traditions
and in postures committing many spoils.
Requiring all one's criminal ingenuity to
avoid.

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

Eve, beautiful woman... I have seen her when
she was so handsome, she gave me a start.
Able to write simultaneously in three
languages... English, German and French.
And talk in the meantime.

Equally positive in demanding a commotion and
in stipulating quiet.

(MUSIC)

I should like to be alone... to which the
visitor replies,

I should like to be alone.

Why not be alone together?

(MUSIC)

Below the incandescent stars...

Below the incandescent fruit...

The strange experience of beauty.

Its existence is too much.

It tears one to pieces.

(MUSIC)

She says. Men are monopolists of stars,

garters, buttons and other shining baubles...

Unfit to be the guardians of another person's
happiness.

He says, these mummies must be handled
carefully...

The crumbs from a lion's meal,

A couple of shins and the bit of an ear.

Turn to the letter M,

And you will find that a wife is a coffin.

(MUSIC)

She says, this butterfly... this waterfly...
this nomad

That has proposed to settle on my hand for
life... what can one do with it?

There must have been more time in
Shakespeare's day
To sit and watch a play.
You know so many artists who are fools!

He says, you know so many fools who are not
artists.

CLIVE DRIVER

One of the great curiosities is that...when
her mother died in 1947, and she ordered the
gravestone for her mother, on which her name
was also to be inscribed, she instructed the
stonecutter to leave a space, under her
name...for the name of her husband, should
she marry.

She was sixty years old at that...particular
moment.

READER

Everything to do with love is mystery:
It is more than a day's work to investigate
this science.

(MUSIC)

RICHARD HOWARD

There is no such thing as a writer who is not erotic. Because language, itself, is an expression of eros. And Marianne Moore is not only no exception, but she's a splendid example of a writer who is charged with erotic energy.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

There's a famous... occasion when she had that snake you know... and they put it around her neck. And... said to her, well, what does he feel like? And she said, it feels like rose petals.

And, you know, that sense of things--feeling like rose petals. All over the place you find this... extraordinary sense of what an animal feels like... what a certain light is like. Lots of color. But I think... the woman is very, very... very, very sensuous. Though whether it's erotic, I suppose, is another story.

KENNETH BURKE

She was a special creature in the face of the earth. She... she was... I'd never say... she... I never saw a more... sexual woman who... who... who was remote from all those things. (LAUGHS)

Every damn thing was turned into little twisted turns.

(MUSIC)

CLIVE DRIVER

When she first went to work at the Dial, she informed Sibley Watson, one of the owners of the Dial, that one of the things she had to have time off for, was a series of tango lessons that she was then taking.

PATRICIA WILLIS

The Dial Magazine, in 1920, was on its way to becoming the... most highly revered magazine of arts and letters of the period.

MAN

In May 1925, Moore left her job at the Public Library to become acting editor of The Dial.

From modest beginnings, Moore became one of the most powerful arbiters of modernist verse.

MONROE WHEELER

Marianne and her mother both were extremely puritanical. And there were stories that were submitted to the Dial, which she found objectionable. And she was very severe about it. And she turned down a lot of first-rate literature.

GRACE SCHULMAN

There was nothing flippant about her... disapproval or rejection. It was always based on principle...and on good principle.

KENNETH BURKE

She was too good a poet to be a perfect editor. I think Gilbert Sellers [sic] was the best editor we had. He wasn't a poet. But he...you had to be looser in your attitudes.

Marianne Moore had a...every damn sentence had to be right, you know. And it...of

course, you can't...edit a magazine that way.

MAN

In July, 1929, the Dial folded. As editor, Moore had written nearly two hundred prose pieces. But no poetry.

PATRICIA WILLIS

That left Marianne Moore without a job. And it would seem, from what I can glean from letters and notebooks that...that it...it was a depressing period...that she came out of by ...about 1932, when she began to publish again.

(MUSIC)

READER

Decorum marked the life on Clinton Hill in the Autumn of 1929, when my mother and I came to Brooklyn to live. A city of churches, Brooklyn might also be called a city of trees.

PATRICIA WILLIS

If you happen to know, for example, that the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn was undergoing steeple repair, in

about 1930 or 31...because the subway was
being dug underground nearby and was
upsetting the footing of the church itself.
You begin to realize why a steeplejack might
have some meaning in Marianne Moore's
immediate world.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

A steeplejack in red has let a rope down as a
spider spins a thread. You might be part of
a novel, but on the sidewalk, a sign says, C.
J. Pool, Steeplejack, in black and white.
And one in red and in white says, danger.

You keep thinking the sentence is coming to
an end. And she keeps giving you a bit more.
And when you've gotten down to...and in white
says...you think, oh...she...she goes a bit
further... leaps over a...a stanza
break...with the word, danger.

GRACE SCHULMAN

"The steeplejack is both Brooklyn and various
New England sea coast towns I had visited",
Miss Moore once wrote to a reader, named

Barbara Kurtz. The whales had been found in
Brooklyn Bay.

WOMAN

And that would be an...an amazing event for
someone with her interests. So we began to
realize that the poem grows out of her real
life.

(BELL RINGS)

THE STEEPLE JACK

READER

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

A sea, the purple of the peacock's neck,
Is paled to greenish azure,
As Dora changed the pine green of the tyrol,
to peacock blue and guinea gray.

(SOUND OF THUNDER AND RAIN)

The whirlwind life and drum of the storm,
bends the salt marsh grass...
Disturbs stars in the sky and the star on the
steeple.
It is a privilege to see so much confusion.

(BIRDS CHIRPING)

The college student named Ambrose,
Sits on the hillside with his not-native
books and hat...
And sees boats at sea progress, white and
rigid, as if in a groove.

Liking in elegance, of which the source is
not bravado,
He knows by heart the antique sugar bowl-
shaped summer house of interlacing slats...
And the pitch of the church spire...
From which a steeplejack in red is letting a
rope down...
As a spider spins a thread...
(MUSIC)
He might be part of a novel.

But on the sidewalk, a sign says,

C.J. Pool, Steeplejack.

In black and white.

And one in red and white says,

Danger.

(BIRDS CHIRPING)

The place has a school house,

A post office and a store.

Fish houses, hen houses, a three-masted
schooner on the stocks.

The hero, the student, the steeplejack...

Each, in his way, is at home.

It could not be dangerous to be living in a
town like this,

Of simple people, who have a steeplejack
placing danger signs by the church,

While he is gilded the solid pointed star,

Which on a steeple stands for hope.

CHARLES TOMLINSON

I mean, I've not been back to that part of
Brooklyn, but...but going down that street
with its wooden facades and its wooden

balconies, up to that fifth story where she lived. I...I felt it...it felt like a real neighborhood.

And then we went out to a little cafe and so on. I...I think the fact was, she was rooted in a way Pound never was. I mean, she...she was rooted in Brooklyn. And she insisted she lived in Brooklyn, not in New York. "I don't live in town. I live in Brooklyn."

MONROE WHEELER

I would be dining with Marianne. And I would leave the museum and take the subway to Macy's. And there, I would provide myself with my gifts for the evening, which were apricot juice, which was their favorite beverage.

One of the delights of my life was to see the relish with which they consumed these things. They sipped...sipped like...like a... hummingbird...this apricot juice. They loved it so much.

GRACE SCHULMAN

T.S. Eliot would come...maybe a couple of times during the year. And he would say to her, when you finish your book, let me have one. And when I finish mine...I will send you one.

GLADYS BERRY

MOORE's HOUSEKEEPER ('36-'72)

I think Marianne Moore really loved T.S. Eliot. I really do. And...they seemed to enjoy each other so much...to...being together.

But when she had the message he had married, that was...a little more than, I think, than she could take. It...she felt quite bad about it for quite a while...quite a while.

(MUSIC)

PATRICIA WILLIS

The New York Telephone Company included a little flyer, in with the phone bill one month. And it offered information about four quartz crystal clocks, and explained that...

these clocks were used to maintain the most accurate time anywhere.

(MUSIC)

RECORDING

At the tone, the time will be ten forty-six, and thirty seconds. (BEEP)

CHARLES TOMLINSON

Well it's typical isn't it that she takes a pamphlet put out by the Bell Telephone Company. Where you wouldn't...go for inspiration, would you? And yet, she finds it there.

And I...I think it's this whole thing that... she can take something which isn't inspired, and use it. I mean, she...she uses so many phrases from pamphlets. And yet, again, you've got her...own voice in the whole poem.

(MUSIC)

READER

There are four vibrators...the world's exactist clocks. And these quartz timepieces, that tell time and troubles to

other clocks...these worksless clocks work
well.

Independently the same, kept in the forty-one
degree Bell Laboratory Time Vault.

MAN

The whole...theme of the poem is accuracy...
that if...if the time given isn't accurate,
it's no good. Then she has...she apparently
goes off at a tangent, saying that...for...
for a scientist, accuracy is the thing.

And she says, the lemur [sic] student can see
that an eye-eye [sic] is not an ang-gwang
[sic] tibo, potto or lorist [sic]. And she
goes on with other examples of...the way
accuracy can make you clear-headed, she says.

And in saying it, I think she's got the most
wonderful noise in there...nobody else made
the noise like this. But it's a noise which
has got a meaning.

She says, "the seaside burden should not
embarrass the bellboy with a boy ball,
endeavoring to pass hotel patronesses
is...nor could a practiced ear confuse the
glass eyes for taxidermists...with eye
glasses from the optometrist."

Well, all the time she's talking, one's...the
mind's got to dance around and distinguish
these things from one another.

(MUSIC)

READER

And as Meridian seven, one two, one two,
gives each fifteenth second in the same
voice, the new data...the time will be, so
and so...you realize that...when you hear the
signal, you'll be hearing jupiter...or jour
pater [sic], the day God...the salvaged son
of Father Time...telling the cannibal
Chronos, eater of his proxine [sic] newborn
progeny...that punctuality is not a crime.

(MUSIC)

RECORDING

At the tone, the time will be five...o'clock.

(CHIMES)

PATRICIA WILLIS

As Mrs. Moore had become ill, Marianne took up translating the fables of Lafontaine to distract herself from the...the pain of this.

And when her mother died, it meant a necessary change in her life. She'd lost her...her best friend...her best critic...the most important reader of her verse.

And we do begin to see a change after 1947, when this wonderful audience was taken away from her.

GLADYS BERRY

And it was...I felt so sad. I really felt sorry for her. And she cried many, many...many, many nights. Many nights.

(MUSIC)

PATRICIA WILLIS

In 1951, Marianne Moore's book, the collected

poems, won the Triple Crown...the National Book Award...the Ballingham Prize and the Pulitzer Prize.

And this brought her a kind of celebrity that was...a quantum leap, greater than that which she had had before. And she became the media's darling.

(MUSIC)

CHARLES TOMLINSON

You know, from the beginning until about 1935, you've got this poet of great probity and care...with a personality held at a distance.

Then she's discovered by the NEW YORKER and she appears in the newspapers. And she wears her big hat. And she's at the ball game and so on. And she becomes a national pet.

KENNETH BURKE

Her obsession with baseball, of course, and her...Brooklyn Dodgers is...known...known everywhere...thanks to the poem that she

wrote about it.

READER

Fanaticism? No. Writing is exciting. And baseball is like writing. You can never tell with either, how it will go, or what you will do.

(CROWD CHEERING)

MARIANNE MOORE

All those Dodgers...if I did...Gil...Pee
Wee..

INTERVIEWER

Roy Campanella was one...

MARIANNE MOORE

...and Roy...first of all...he's the...he's
the first that got me so bewitched about it
all.

MAN

She was an adorable old lady. We needed a
grandmother in our poetry.

And even... someone, I mean, someone who
admired and understood her true subversive
and radical and... wrenchingly emotional

qualities, like Elizabeth Bishop, in her poem to Marianne Moore.

The...what is it? The "INVITATION TO MISS Marianne MOORE...PLEASE COME FLYING." That poem did more harm than good, I think, in the sense of describing her as a kind of...benevolent witch...Glinda the Good, who's going to come to New York and fix up everything.

PATRICIA WILLIS

Ford Motor...Motor Company had had a wonderful success with the Thunderbird. The name alone, not to mention the...the styling, had sold many sports cars. And now it was time, they hoped, for another wonderful name for a sports cars. And they engaged Marianne Moore to create a name.

(MUSIC)

READER

I am complimented to be recruited in this high matter. I have seen and admired the

Thunderbird as a Ford designation. It would be hard to match. But let me, the coming week, talk with my brother, who would bring ardor and imagination to bear on the quest.

MONROE WHEELER

She thought this was a...was a marvelous assignment. She was so excited by it. And she just looked forward to the conclusion of...of, you know, a tri...triumphant...

(LAUGHS) naming of the...of the new car.

And she submitted hundreds of names to them. And she would telephone me and read off these names, which are the most improbable names for an automobile that anyone had ever conceived.

PATRICIA WILLIS

And she did a great deal of research, in the library and with botanical books and zoological books. And came up with names like, THE UTOPIAN TURTLETOP. Or the MONGOOSE CIVIQUE.

And time passed. And Ford finally had to choose a name. And they wrote to Marianne Moore and said:

MAN

"our name, Dear Miss Moore, is...Edsel. I hope you will understand."

RICHARD HOWARD

Her interest in images extended to her own persona...from at least the time when she was in college, she was intensely interested in devising the way she appeared.

Sometimes she would put together a whole outfit. And then she would go down into the subway to one of these little...booths, where you could take your own picture, to see whether or not the effect she wanted to achieve by this outfit...came across in photography.

WOMAN

The photographer who began the...the process of helping Marianne Moore define her image was George Platt Lines, who created her most

famous photograph of herself in a tricorne hat and cape.

READER

November 2, 1950. Dear George: There is a very fine modesty about these pictures. The designs have authority. And I thank you, hand on heart, for the Helena Rubensteining of difficult assets like eyelashes, furrows of thought.

As for the focus on the hem and seaming of the gloves, it about does away with my fondness for fog and furry effects.

INTERVIEWER

You like big hats.

MARIANNE MOORE

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

MARIANNE MOORE

Because they hide my face somewhat.

INTERVIEWER

Oh... (LAUGHS)

MARIANNE MOORE

(LAUGHS) That's why I feel more...I feel at
home under one.

(MUSIC)

READER

A face. I am not treacherous, callous,
Jealous, superstitious, supercilious,
Venomous, or absolutely hideous.
Studying and studying its expression,
Exasperated desperation...
Though at no real impasse,
Would gladly break the glass.

When love of order, ardor,
Uncircuitous simplicity with
An expression of inquiry,
Are all one needs to be.

Certain faces...a few...one or two,
Or one face, photographed by recollection
To my mind ...to my sight...
Must remain a delight.

(MUSIC)

ANNOUNCER

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(MUSIC)

END OF PROGRAM.