



CASE-RECORD
from a
SONNETORIUM

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CASE RECORD

from

A SONNETORIUM

CASE

A

BOOKS BY MERRILL MOORE:

The Noise That Time Makes

Six Sides to a Man

Sonnets from New Directions

Poems from The Fugitive

Sonnets from The Fugitive

M: 1000 Autobiographical Sonnets

Some Poems for New Zealand

Clinical Sonnets (Twayne)

Illegitimate Sonnets (Twayne)

RECORD FROM SONNETORIUM

Cartoons by EDWARD ST. JOHN GOREY

Illustrated with Poems by MERRILL MOORE

Consultants: LOUIS UNTERMAYER, *Esq.*

Professor JOHN CROWE RANSOM

HENRY W. WELLS, *Ph.D.*

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, *M.D.*

TWAYNE PUBLISHERS, *New York*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT: to Harcourt Brace and Company for permission to use certain poems from an earlier book of mine *M: one thousand autobiographical sonnets* that is now out of print.

M.M.

DESIGNED BY FRED M. KLEEGERG

Manufactured in the United States of America




To GEORGE E. ARMSTRONG, M.D.

Major General, MC USA

The Surgeon General, Department of the Army

Physician Patriot and Administrator



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ROSTER

<i>Admission Note</i>	Moore
<i>Prognosis</i>	Untermeyer
<i>Overheard in the Waiting Room</i>	Sundry
<i>Cartoons</i>	Gorey
<i>Poems</i>	Moore
<i>Consultant's Opinion</i>	Ransom
<i>Laboratory Note</i>	Wells
<i>Discharge Note</i>	Williams

ADMISSION NOTE

These are not poems about people, as my *Clinical Sonnets* and *Illegitimate Sonnets* were. These are samples of the new and varying forms the sonnet can take when it is freed from the ancient prescription that it *must* have an octet and a sestet to be “regular” (Petrarchan or Italian), and, likewise, that it is “irregular” if it has three quatrains and a couplet (Shakespearean, or English, form). In other words: Give the sonnet a little liberty, and see what happens.

I have never taken the sonnet legislation too seriously, although I am prepared to accept the descriptive dogma of some authorities that all forms other than the “regular” and “irregular” sonnets are “illegitimate” sonnets, which is what I choose to call most of mine.

I accept that dogma. What then? Now let us make a fresh start. Is a poem still a “sonnet” if it has 14 lines and a form of its own? I would say *yes*, and add that in my opinion there can be many sonnet forms—in fact, any combination of lines that adds up to fourteen.

There is no particular relationship between the poem and the cartoon that appears on the page with it. The cartoons have their own continuity. The poems are a sequence in themselves.

Merrill Moore, M.D.

PROGNOSIS

A prognosis, according to Webster, is a verbal *double-entendre*. It means a forecast, omen, or prophecy—and it also means the act of foretelling the course and termination of a disease as well as the outlook afforded by it. I am, perhaps, disqualified as a prognosticator on two counts: (1) I disagree with the psychoanalysts who regard art as a form of disease, and (2) I am partly responsible for the pun which is the title of this book. In fact I wanted to go further. I suggested a subtitle: "Dr. Moore and his Patient Sonnet."

The suggested (and, alas, discarded) subtitle was factually as well as facetiously intended; for the sonnet, that eternally abused, misused, and maltreated form, has responded readily to the ministrations of Dr. Moore. Sometimes the good doctor's handling of the frail form (commonly called "the form divine") is a trifle irregular, even rough, but the sonnet is patient (in the adjectival no less than the nominal sense) and it survives. Some day a complete and revealing examination will be made not only of Dr. Moore's subject but of the psychiatrist himself in relation to his patient. One of the first things that will be discovered is Dr. Moore's identification with his work as creator, critic, and clinical diagnostician. Other poets have written sonnets, but Dr. Moore thinks in them. If his conversations were broken down into their component parts, I am sure that they would fall into units of fourteen lines. I have listened to Merrill Moore ever since he was an undergraduate in Nashville, Tennessee, and I think I can name the year when he stopped talking in prose and started to talk in verse, in loose, senatorial (or sonnetorial) verse.

The poems in this book are, therefore, talking poems. They dispense almost entirely with traditional strophes, resounding rhetoric, and oratorical mumbo jumbo. Instead of purple passages, Dr. Moore employs the homespun of everyday speech. That Merrill Moore has written more sonnets than all the combined sonneteers in any language is an interesting if unproved fact. What is more interesting and far more important is the fact that his sonnets are as spontaneous, as unpredictable, and as honestly improvised as a man's free thought. And that, these days, is something to be deeply cherished.

Louis Untermeyer

OVERHEARD IN THE WAITING ROOM

"A Sonnet is a moment's monument, . . ."

—DANTE GABRIEL ROSETTI

"The Sonnet is the most exquisite jewel of the Muses."

—PIETRO CARDINAL BEMBO

"The Sonnet is the corner-stone of English poetry."

—T. W. H. CROSLAND

"Sonnets are incompatible with the genius of the English language."

—DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

"The history of the Sonnet as a poetic form . . . also confirms the theory that the Sonnet has been the means of sublimating unconscious incest wishes."

—CLARISSA RINAKER

"In truth, the person, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is; and hence to me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground; . . ."

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

"Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute."

—JOHN MILTON

"The Sonnet is the touchstone of great creative artists; a test which many a poet of considerable eminence must decline, or the base alloy of his verse will be detected."

—MENZINI

"Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for
I am sure I shall turn sonnets."

—LOVE'S LABOUR LOST

"Scorn not the Sonnet: Critic; you have frowned
Mindless of its just honours."

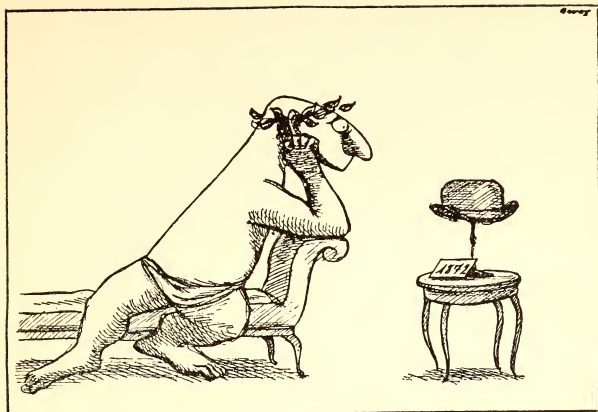
—WORDSWORTH

"A Sonnet ought to be shut with a golden key."

—PORTUGUESE APHORISM

"Sonnets are gimmicks."

—GUNN TRINITY



The Sonnet Has Doubts About Its Present Status.

The Sound of Time Hangs Heavy in My Ears

I am grossly seized by the thought of Time.

Time has camped on the field of my empty hand.
I can see Time (lacking any vision)
Everywhere, apparent in everyone.

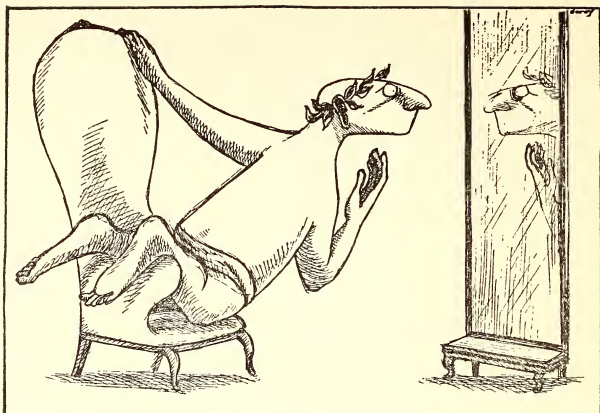
Time shines on us, unlike the reticent sun,
Always—day and night.

Time does not cost
The grief of night, or half the season lost,
As does the sun.

Time has prepared no bull,
Agenda, screed, or issued protocol;

But Time persists, conducts, obtains decrees,
Multiplex phenomena, mysteries.

And if I wander further in despair,
Deceit and death, then Time, already there,
Declares, *I cancel the troubles that you bear.*

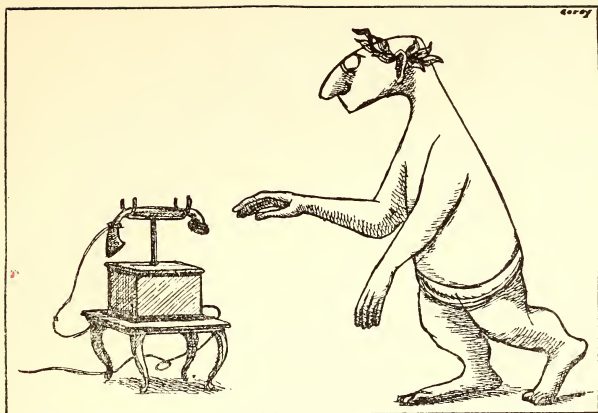


The Sonnet Finds It Has a Problem.

No One Has Tried Harder

No one has tried harder than I have tried
To catch the gleaming images that died:

Were they in the clouds, I caught them there,
And caught them in the flames two times as fair,
And in the earth in geologic straits,
And on the sea-waves where the seagull waits
For his reflection to return to him
That on bright days is bright and that is dim
On dim days in the water where he sleeps
Without a troubled conscience as he keeps
His head tucked in his wing and floats among
Seaweeds greener than the forest's song
At dawn, seaweed in winter that turns brown
And dies and to the ocean's floor sinks down.



The Sonnet Goes to Call the Doctor .

Elizabeth Fox, Single, Age 54

Lives alone (alone) on the fifth floor
 To which she climbs by power of her legs
 After her work at the Five-and-Ten Cent Store
 Where she covers counters with green baize
 After the sales and customers are over.

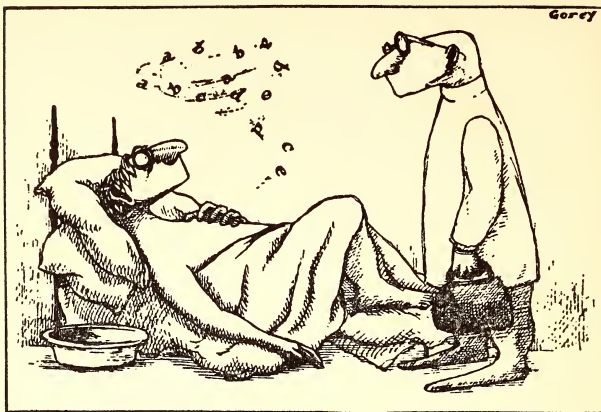
Elizabeth has arthritis and her spine
 Aches at least eight hours out of nine.

Elizabeth Fox was once young; she is old
 Now, her feet and hands are always cold.

The mattress she sleeps on is hard and dirty;
 It was clean and soft when she was thirty.

For supper she eats crackers, some preserves,
 A piece of bacon and some thin weak tea.

Elizabeth, it is not entirely your own fault.



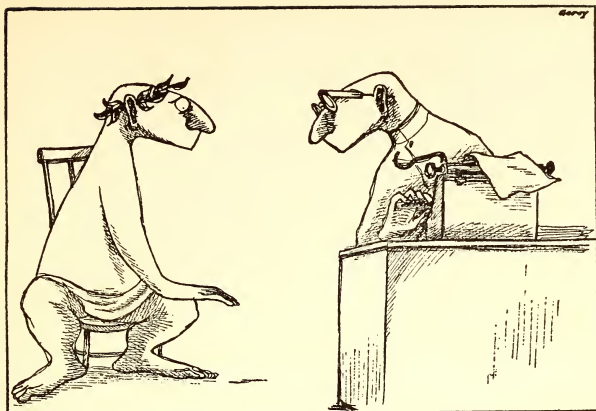
Dr Merrill Moore Visits a Sick Sonnet.

In Charge of Noisy Reproductive Sheep

I did not know my flock would grow so large,
That two sheep would breed four and then some others,
That four sheep would become eight sisters and brothers
And that I should have to keep them all in charge

(For they are sacred sheep, though they must eat
Yet they cannot be eaten, sold or clipped
For profit, and their golden fleeces shipped
To market; and they loudly baa and bleat. . .)

I did not know that they would make such noise
Before dawn, yes, all night through, they converse
In tones more brassy than the human voice,
Less modulous, controllable, and worse
By far than the sweet silence I once hoped
To find in occupation as I groped.



The Doctor Begins to Take Down the Sonnet's History.

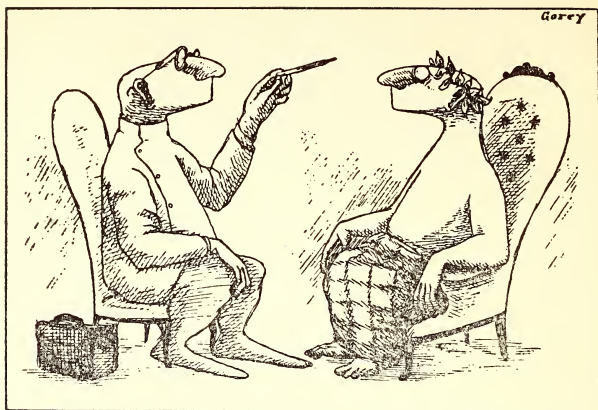
Rats Inherit the Earth

The world is the rats' inheritance, and by rats
 Earth is inherited, rats in their spats
 And velvet overcoats and high silk hats
 And their innumerable *whose* and *whys* and *whats*.

Ours and *us* and *we* always being the answer
 From high good fortune to profound disaster
 For anyone present or absent; rats jeopardize
 The very importance of granaries by their size

Being little and quick and easy and free to come
 And early to go and strong to multiply,
 No matter whether men or mountains go by,

And no matter whether patently or sly
 Events occur that give the world to rats,
 Rats with their canes and overcoats and hats.



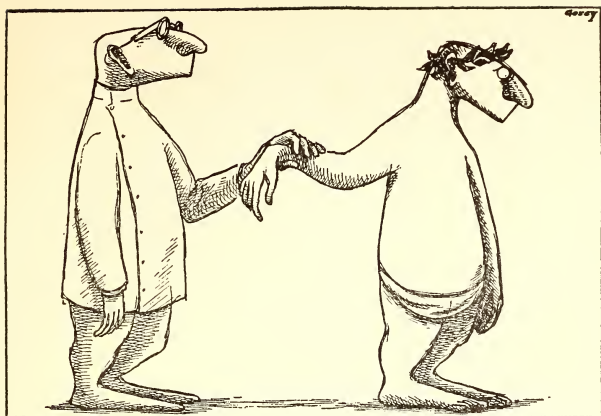
Dr Merrill Moore Takes the Sonnet's Temperature.

There Is a Way of Life

There is a way of life; it is not this
Whereby we meet and hurriedly we kiss,
Laboring for gold and what gold brings
In war and pestilence and loathly things.

It is of happiness, simplicity,
Harvest of the land, yield of the sea,
Youth and strength and rural gaiety,
Pinnacles to fly over with strong wings.

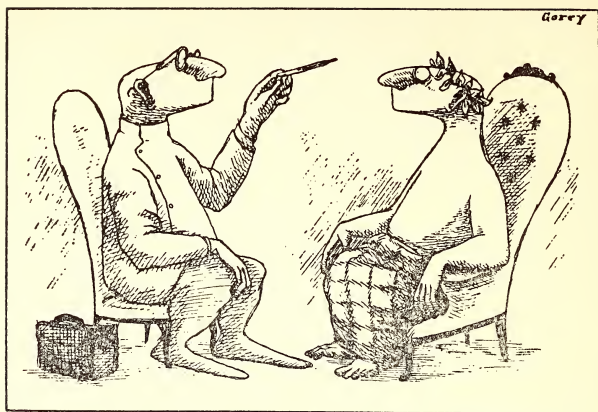
Then peace and contemplation, the pursuit
Not of military conflict or in trade,
But of crafts and arts where men are made
More than men in sunshine and in shade,
Or by the lamps of night whose golden fruit
Feeds the lutanist who can charm the lute.



The Doctor Notes the Sonnet's Feeble Pulse.

Men Are Strange

Men are strange rebellious dutiful
 Creatures, hideous and beautiful,
 Selfish, sacrificing as they go
 From summer youth to winter age and snow;
 Men are strange about their part of the world
 (Beasts and Time are strange too, certainly)
 For furiously men watch the dancers whirled
 Over the banquet tables, then they lie
 Mourning in painful prayer while hours go by,
 Greeting jealous generous days that come,
 Announcing fates, sealing annals' ends
 Bringing banners that hot zeal defends
 As each loves his own throne, his own kingdom
 Best, his own share of divinity.



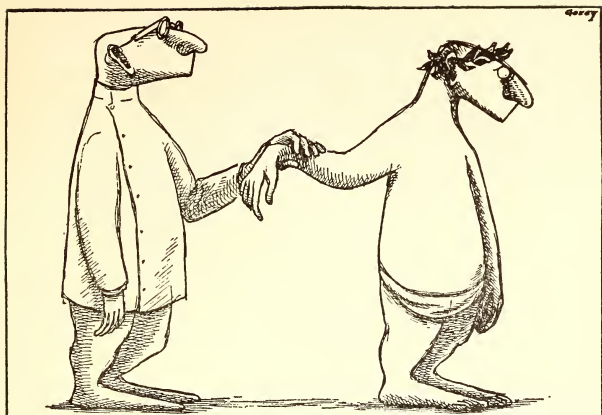
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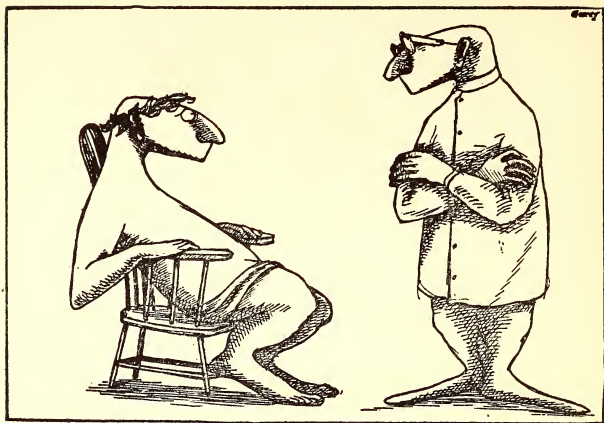
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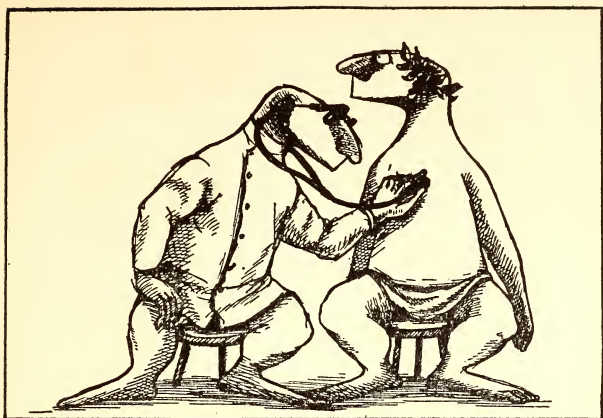
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 Greeting jealous generous days that come,
 Announcing fates, sealing annals' ends
 Bringing banners that hot zeal defends
 As each loves his own throne, his own kingdom
 Best, his own share of divinity.



Dr Merrill Moore Finds the Sonnet Somewhat Anemic.

Nothing Can Be Too Damnable or Odd

Nothing can be too damnable or odd
To suit the ancient cleverness of God,
Nothing can be too petty or too vain
To please His angels singing in the rain,
Nothing is too sordid or too crude
To mock His devils hiding in the wood,
Nothing is too dangerous or crass
To tire His serpent hiding in the grass;
And so we find there is not any end
To how His powers weave, His forces blend,
And so we see there is not any knowing
The precise way His favor may be going.
There is not any start or any stop
Without Him being bottom, middle, top.

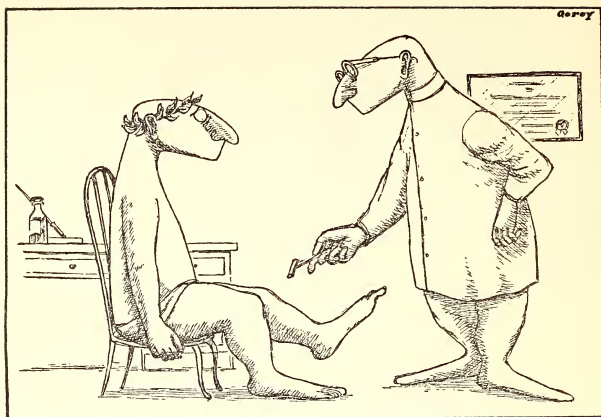


Dr Merrill Moore Listens to the Sonnets' Chest.

The Most Difficult

I know what the most difficult thing in the world
Is: it is to think reflectively,
It is to straighten the slender thoughts that are curled
Deviously about the pole of one's self,
It is to uncoil the hose from its shelf
Of pure thought, the hose of logicality,
With premises and methods all correct,
Impeccably rational with no defect.

That is harder than other things that men
Have tried and failed and tried and failed again.
And who is it wants to think so straight today?
You? And you? Congratulations! Let us pray
For strength to withstand the tempter of the mind
Who loves curves and short cuts, and who, I suspect, is blind.



Dr Merrill Moore Tests the Sonnet's Knee Jerk.

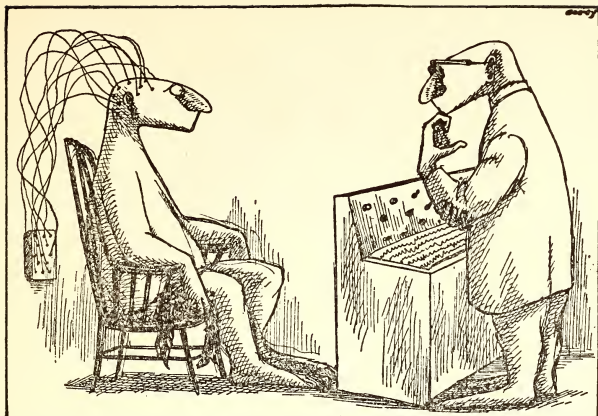
Definition

Information is the dust upon
 The surface of events, the rust upon
 The wheels of time; it is a gust upon
 The surface of the lake that ruffles the lake
 And lets the traveller, who comes to slake
 His thirst there, know the wind is also there.

It is the price of admission to the fair.

Information is the residue
 Of dust upon the leaves along the lanes
 Where prisoners have trampled by in chains
 Towards their execution (it costs too much
 To feed prisoners:

Unlike rabbits in a hutch
 They cannot be eaten after they are fed,
 So prisoners must be shot, then they are dead).



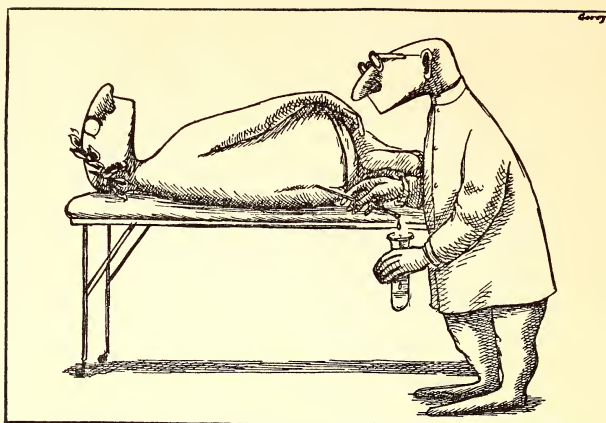
Dr Merrill Moore Reads the Sonnet's Brain Waves.

Poetry

The poetry of ashes staggers me,
 And empty half-pint bottles, telephone books,
 The way of rotting tin, the furtive looks
 That pass across still tables, and the sea
 When rain is on it, newly shaven grass,
 Clouds that disseminate in winds that pass,
 Bricks being laid, sand sifted through fine wire,
 and new-made horses' hoof-prints in the mire.

And the poetry of jewels: rubies, jasper;
 Ceremonies, orgies, mysteries, politics, possession,
 And winter unprepared for, soap and bubbles,
 Dogs and children, people in unnamed troubles—

Knock me down and stifle me for breath
 Pursue and hound me to the edge of Death.



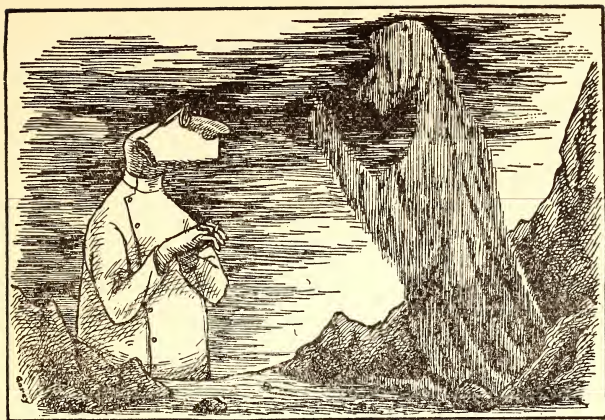
Dr Merrill Moore Does A Lumbar Puncture on the Sonnet.

Women Are Wise

Women are wiser than trees, wiser than brooks,
Wiser than granite, wiser than bricks and rocks,
Wiser than wind, than time immeasurable,

Wiser than ancient houses with grey gables
Where they have lived their long dynamic lives
As mothers, daughters, sweethearts, cousins, wives,
In kitchens, parlors, libraries, dining rooms,
Discovering new and covering up old dooms
Of fathers, sons, and cousins, husbands, lovers,
Stay-at-homes or wanderers and rovers.

Women are wiser, first and second and last,
Than men are; women are surer, but not so fast
As men are (as quick, as sudden), but perhaps
The gods laid other plans upon their laps.



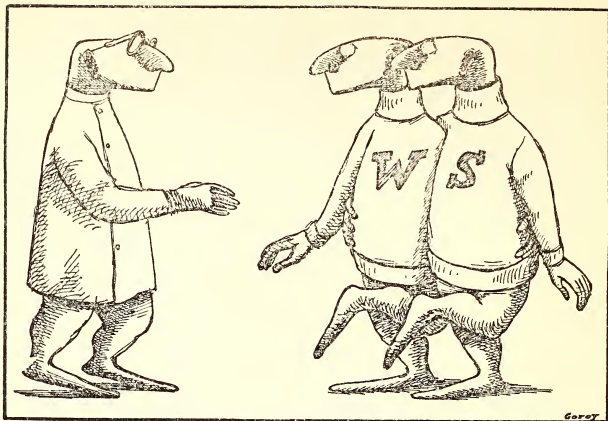
Dr Merrill Moore Consults the Shade of Petrarch.

Night

Night is a torn-off sample of the death
You carry with you while you have your breath
To carry also; the main sheet or page
Is yet to be turned, is yet to come of age
In your vision, but it soon will come.

Soldier, do you hear the rolling drum?
Sailor, do you hear the billows gnash
Their teeth upon the reefs where the waves crash,
Saw-toothed and full-sharked, waiting for your bones
As they waited there for previous ones?

Night is the kerchief wrapped in which you will
Be shrouded or be cast and sunk into
Water deep, dark, innocent and still
As offal from life's picnic, by the crew.



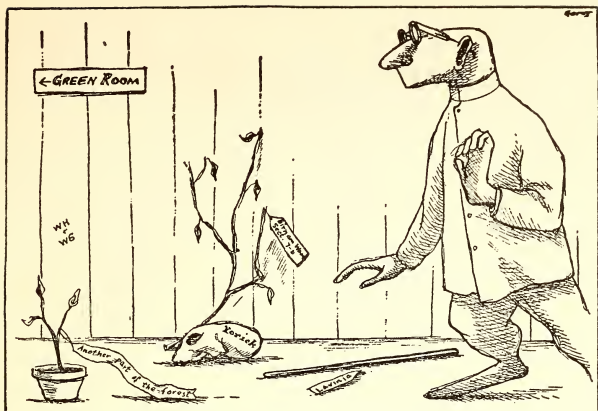
The Sonnet Doctor Approaches Wyatt & Surrey.

Eels

Rather thin, voracious, and suspicious,
 The eels lived in the bottom of the pond,
 The eels lived on the bottom of the pond,
 And never thought much on the world beyond,
 And never knew much of the world beyond;
 The slime and mud was rich and cool there, luscious.

The eels lived by the bottom of the pond
 And never cared much for the world beyond.

That was their home—there they had come to live.
 There they survived or died, as through a sieve
 Water is slowly poured: bait might lure them
 To occasional trappage and death out of the dim
 Waters of their retreat, but usually
 They were uncaught as seasons glided by.



Dr Merrill Moore Seeks out The Bard .

Cave Canem

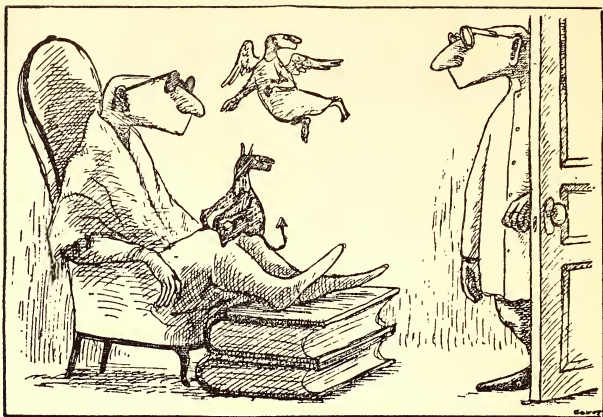
Love (*yes, love*) is a grim (*yes, grim*) affair,

Too often does the serpent in its lair
 Destroy the timid dove that has not flown,
 Quicker than archer's bow, than shepherd's stone.

The dove, white-feathered, delicate and soft,
 Is caught and quickly vanquished and too oft
 Destroyed *in toto*, maimed beyond repair,
 When Serpens takes Columba in her lair.

Serpent cold and wise with glittering eyes
 Knows intuitively his simple prize,
 Seeks, knows, slays it early, and it dies:
 Nor does the world emit cries of surprise.

Love (*yes, love*) is no innocent affair.
 Mortals, beware! Beware, mortals, beware!



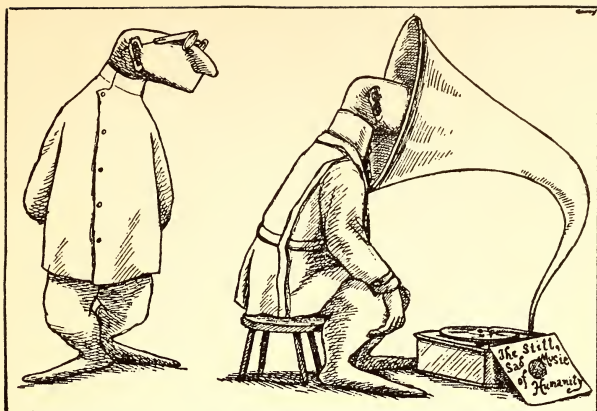
Milton Is Sought Out For His Advice .

Music Carries Us Back, at the Symphony

To hear that burden after each has paid
 His fragment of the cost that is defrayed
 By common finances as it is played
 In large and small jets for ears large and small

That come and fill the corners of this hall.
 Hold of a vast ship, Music, that careens
 Liquor-wise across the various screens
 Each wind presents.

Now Music, on and on,
 Drive until you reach the coast of dawn
 Where childwise each disembarks into the hands
 Of father and mother in the simple lands
 Of home and early childhood, infancy,
 Then that most dark and that least turbulent
 Body of waters, the amniotic sea. . . .



The Doctor Waits upon Mr Wordsworth.

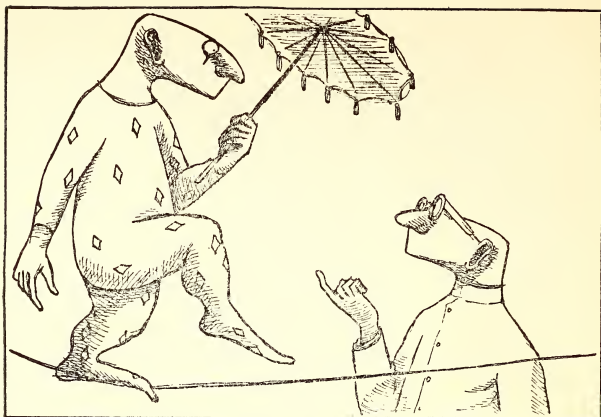
About a Bath

No, there is nothing strange about a bath.
 You go into the bathroom, draw the water,
 Undress, and slip in the tub or under the shower,
 Bathe with soap, rinse off, step out and dry
 In the cool air with a towel clean and furry,
 Deep and sweet; you feel refreshed, revived,
 Clean and new and whole and ready to go
 Anywhere.

There's nothing about a bath
 Strange except the water, it is strange,
 And you, and the soap, the towel, the strange feeling
 Of wonderful rebirth—what are they all?

Water, what is water? What is soap?
 What is the towel, the feeling? What, how, why?

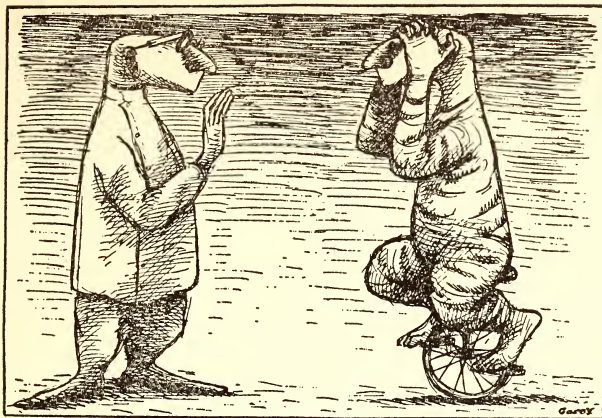
Why, they are what is strange, they all are strange.



Dr Merrill Moore Invokes the Comic Muse.

Leave the Telling of Jokes

Leave the telling of jokes to the tellers of jokes
And the tales of seduction to men whose lecheries
Have merited them more of virtue than yours have;
And leave the lonely club-room and the smoke
Of idle cigars to those who love to smell
The sulphur fumes that blow from out their hell.
And come; I can show you the rock where off one fell
Whose strange attractions made the masses weak,
The masses who were strong, too strong to break
Apart at the tread of a god's advancing foot,
Too strong to relinquish grasp upon the root
Of evil in their cities; come with me
To where a sermon has becalmed the sea
And listen with me to the emphatic rain.



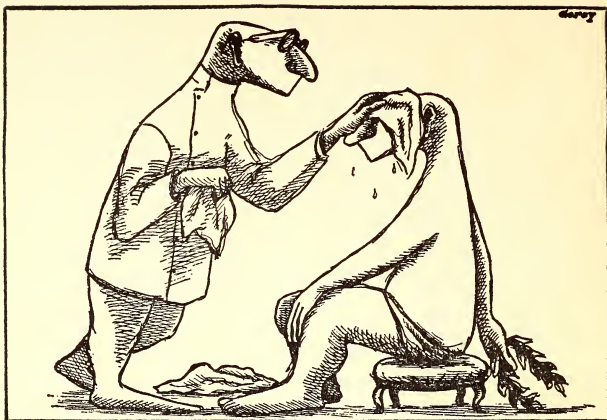
Dr Merrill Moore Invokes The Tragic Muse.

The Difference Between Our Minds

Your mind at work is the committee meeting
Of a directors' board in a formal room
In a wealthy bank in a metropolitan
Building of marble, velvet, electricity, and steel.

A thought arises—he is chairman-director,
He formulates in definite set phrase
Business of the fiscal year, its measured days;
He is seconded; it is tabled; he sits down.

My mind is extremely different!
It is a fist-fight in a smoky cave
Crowded with robbers and thieves. One flickering candle
(That may go out any minute) lights the scene,
And what they are fighting over is possibly gold,
But it is in a sack that has not been opened yet.



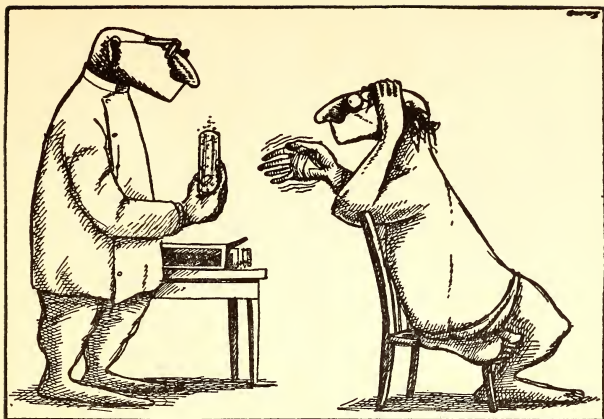
The Doctor Wipes the Bennet's Fevered Brow.

Green and Red Are Always Alternates

On certain days the truth of traffic lights
Is always green and obstacles dissolve
In speed of passing and the gasoline
In tanks is full to slopping and the wind
Is warm and diffident, even heightening
To pleasure, and the joy of living is there
Buffeting and supercharging air
Beyond the scope of simple poetry,
Beyond the realms of fine photography.

Then other days when the lights are always red;
And there is always a headache in the head
Or cold winds and rough sea beside the sand;
And only tiresome hills astride the land

And the tank is empty and the motor cold.



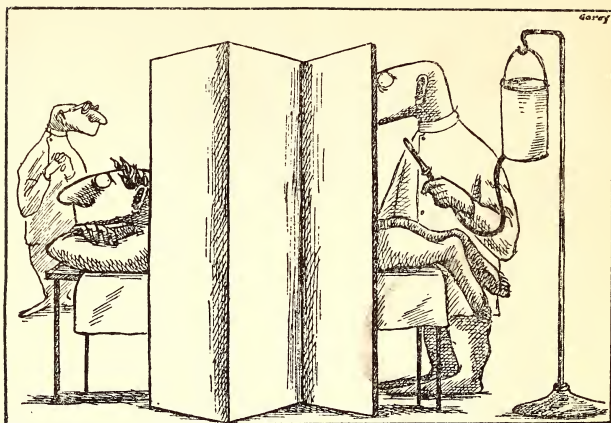
Dr Merrill Moore Gives the Sonnet an Alka-Seltzer.

Nothing Is Free; You Always Have to Pay

You pay. Never let anyone convince
You that you do not. Morning is tipped with gold,
But it comes from your store. The new, the old,
Are charged to you and someone collects somewhere.

There have been brave men who did not wince
And you can be like them; but you must pay
Even for that, and if you do not care,
Somehow you must also pay for that some day.

The sky is turquoise and the sun's a ruby
And you will have a silver moon tonight,
But each one costs—is an expensive jewel
That you will receive the bill for, kind or cruel,—
Whether bright the day or dim the night
Your nails dig out, your fingers polish the ruby.



Dr Merrill Moore Recommends an Enema for the Sonnet.

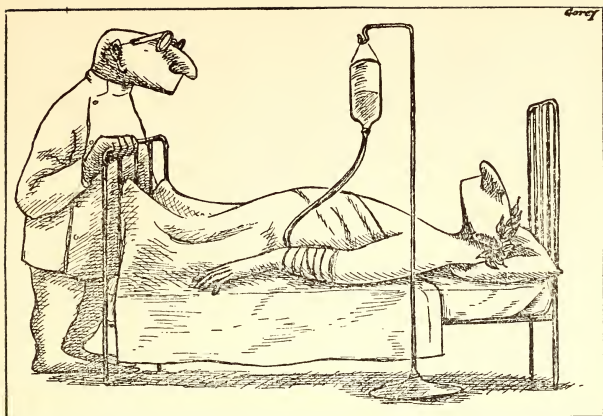
The Opposite of the True Is Also True

I believe that in this reactive universe
 Good may come of evil, better of worse,
 Blessings may develop from a curse
 And bounty fall out of the devil's purse;

Scorpions can produce offsprings of doves,
 Hate leaps rampant from two mighty loves,
 Jungles grow in neat and sacred groves,
 And happiness wells out of poisoned gloves;

Blows in jealousy turn into kisses,
 Agonies turn into endless blisses,
 Applause may end what started out with hisses,
 He catches a better train than the one he misses;

Because, in this reactive universe,
 Good may come from evil, better from worse.



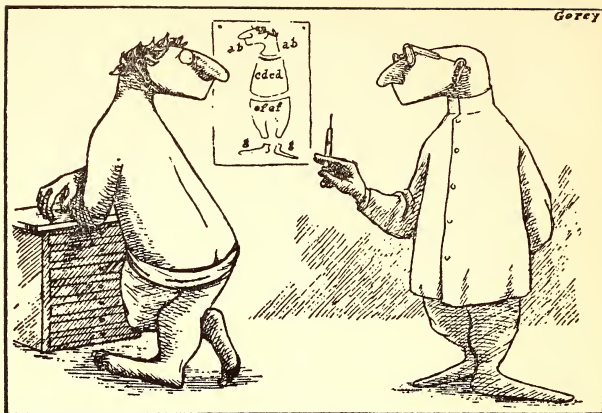
Dr Merrill Moore Gives the Sonnet A Blood Transfusion.

She Said "He Shamed Me!"

"That terrible man possessed me with his eyes
 And spent his terrible lust upon my face,"
 The lady ventured to tell me in the place
 Of what I expected to hear when she started to cry.
 And so I answered, "Well, between rape of that kind,
 And the other widely known, of newspaper fame,
 Which would you choose? Do you really mind
 Being so ravished without the attendant shame?"

"It's not," she managed to utter between sobs,
 "The loss I suffered." (I listened.) "It's not that!
 He saw my glance and he did not tip his hat,
 He glowered on me like an evil hawk that robs
 A feeble fowl of its choicest possession."

It was hard to say just what was her obsession.



Dr Merrill Moore Gives the Sonnet Penicillin.

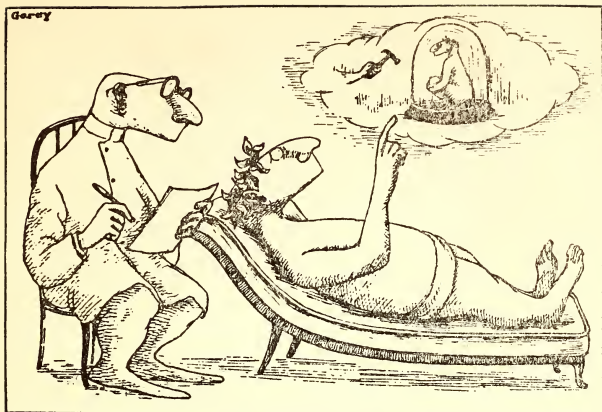
De Spectris

When lived at its fullest there is not enough time,
 Lived at its best life is too legerdemain,
 The maple sugar man melts in the rain,
 One finally forgets the nursery rhyme.

There is peace and, inevitably, there is quarrelling,
 There are bottles seized and lifted to the lips;
 There is swing and machination of the hips
 And thighs in dancing (and in coitus)—
 In the end, there is very little left of us,

Except remains, except the derelict
 Pale faces of old people: O so brief
 The language and the entry on the sheaf!

So rigorous the rules and all too strict
 The vessel breaking on the coral reef.



Dr Merrill Moore Psychoanalyzes the Sonnet.

Returning Always and Forever Dawn

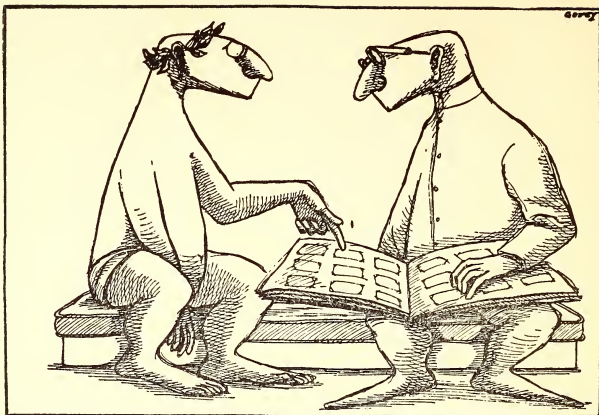
Dawn is an old theme I have abused,
 Dawn is an old part mechanics used
 Repairing the universe:

Dawn is the word,
 The first one, that the waking mortals heard
 Who shivered by the Tigris in the weeds,
 Eating river roots and poppy seeds.

Dawn is the prologue to all the rest,
 Symphonic or discordant, worst or best,
 The day affords in sound; it is the dim
 Antiphonal and prothalamion
 Of day's intense display of awkwardness
 Against dawn's grace;

the beauty of dawn's dress
 As she appears in spite of what is done

Interminably so and simply dawn.



The Sonnet Shows the Doctor Its Snapshot Album.

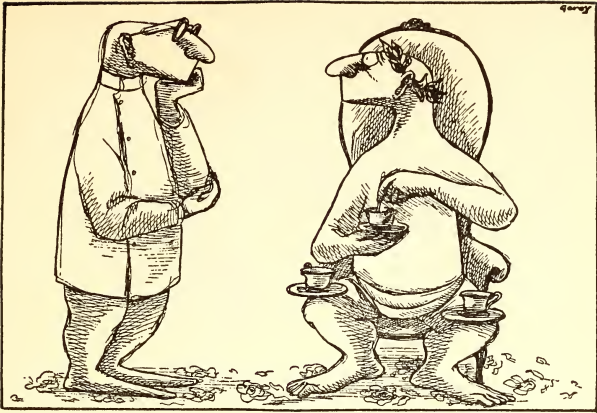
Cardigo Now Is Dead

Cardigo now is dead. No more will he
Do all the things that he did with the zest
He used to do them with; the jollity,
The ribaldry, the frank profanity,
The popularity, the luxury
Of all his life—the charm, the gaiety.

He will sail no more on the *Saturnia*
With all its food. He will no more attend
London, New York theatres without end;
No more at Nice, or Danzig go to spend
A fortune in an evening. His great appetite
For life and living—eating, doing everything
Is sated now by death,—its venal sting!

His spirit lashed his tired body so!

In fastest sleeping is locked Cardigo!



The Doctor Decides the Sonnet is Suffering an Excess of Discipline.

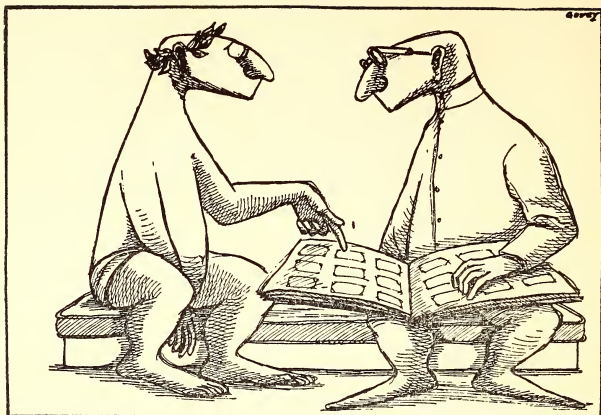
Snow Melts and Leaves the Branches Glistening

How quick the season turns without a sign!
 Last night it was warm, but this morning snow
 On signs helps point travellers where to go
 Whatever direction taken, yours or mine:

Snow unannounced and snow authoritative,
 Sedate-arrived and ready to give
 Refulgence to what little light there is,
 To soften somewhat the hard-furnished skies
 With its endeavor, with its restraint in being

Snow, a substance winter can disclaim
 If winter wishes, a topic that the sun
 Orders to move from branch and twig and beam;

It goes and leaves them freshened, every one
 Wet and glistening with spring begun.



The Sonnet Shows the Doctor Its Snapshot Album.

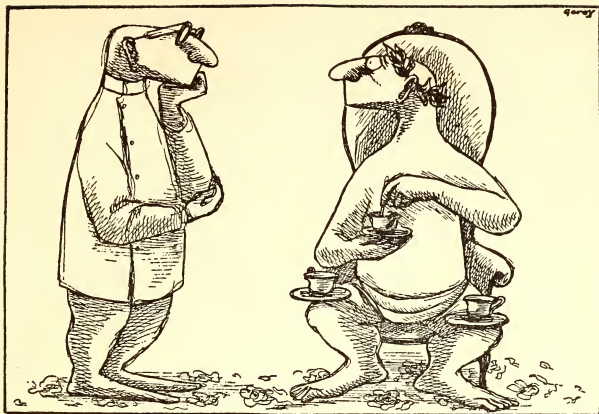
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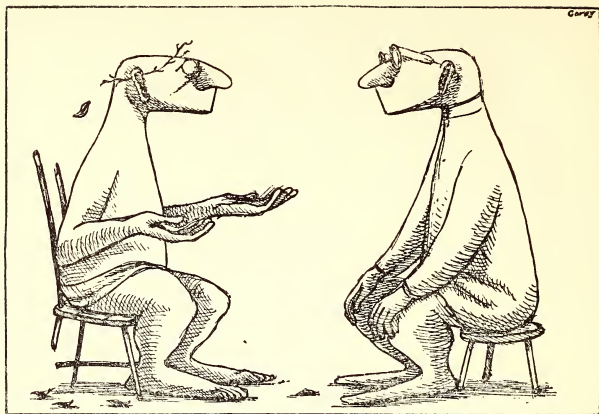
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The Sonnet Tells the Doctor How Neglected He's Been.

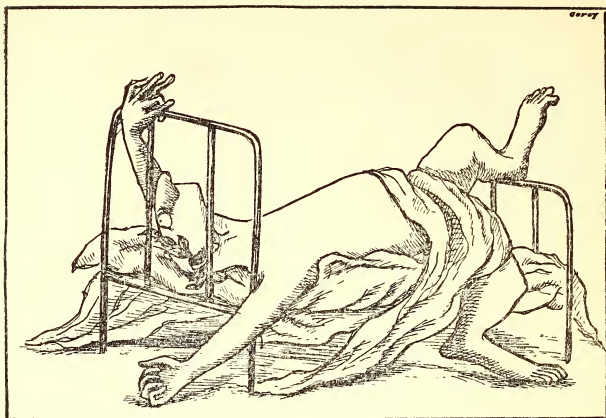
It Is Written in the Elements Very Plain

The whole articulate legend, every word,
Is played in chords that never shall be heard,
And every tremulous fragment of the whole
Is put together, body, mind, and soul,
Whenever the dust of the earth is put together
By wind, rain, hail, and snow or any weather,
Into the sphere this is that we are on
Down the ages ceaselessly to roll—

Night and Dusk, the brothers, Day and Dawn,
Recurrent sisters, where now is their story?

It is written now in the dust of the earth,
In stones and water, air and trees, since the birth
Of grass now growing, now withering precipitously,

It is all written in Nature and very plain.

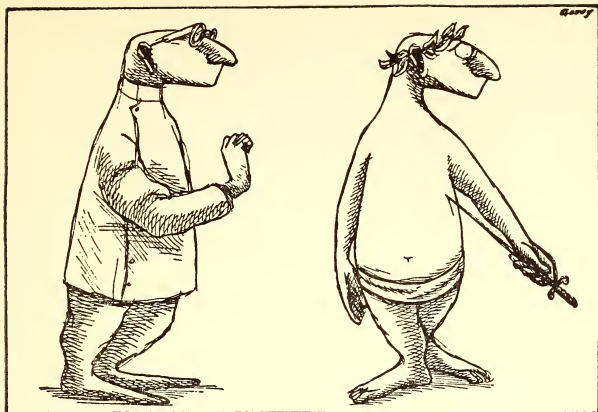


The Sonnet Has a White Night.

Now It Is Morning

Now it is morning, and the softened air,
Softened by blowing in darkness through the night,
Is warmed and tempered by the rays of light
From the buoyant sun whose eager fair
Face glows through the trees along the piny ridge
And sets afire the stricken window ledge
That it has fallen on and made to glow.

Mortals go out for water, and as they go
They smell the air that's odorous with cut hay,
And wonder what's to happen, what shall we find
Today in what we're given? a bitter rind
And sour juice or something sweet to taste
In this unopened fruit that is Today,
That we must take and use or take and waste.



The Sonnet Toys with Thoughts of Suicide.

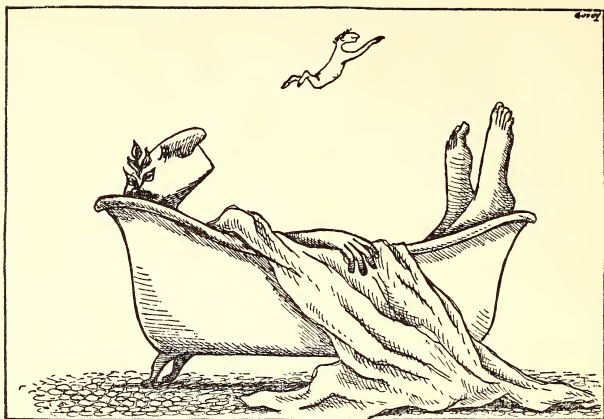
Breakers

Breakers, in your rapid desperate
Surge upon the body of the beach,

I see your frantic fingers claw and reach,
Curling, falling, to lie insatiate,
Then disappear in foam and roll away,
Detritus, that the tide will not obey. . . .

I know no theatre like this one where men
Can see such tragedy as water knows;
There is no audience to come again
And see the margin where the deep tide rose,

Then swept and fell away with no receipt
Except a memory in the minds of some
Who heard the breakers, saw the breakers come,
Then sweep away to where they had come from.



The Sonnet Has a Dream of Being Dead.

Tell Me, Vera, Is This Really the Truth . . . ?

Tell me, what is she like—a pleasant voice?
In the forest of knowledge between the trees of fact
A girl walked—what was her name?

Her name was Vera.

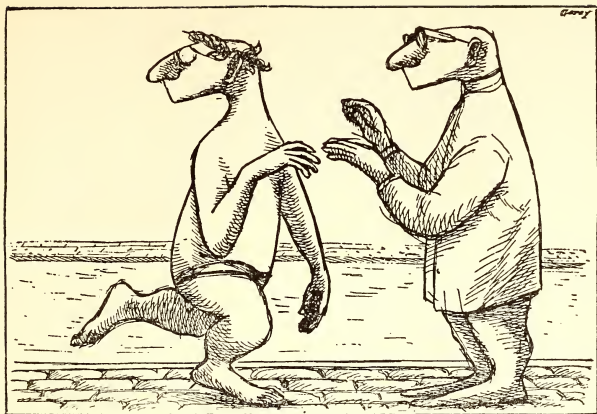
(Scholars, look it up in your dictionaries,
Or beg the question of the antiquaries.)

It was very peculiar, the way she would act;
When I wasn't looking directly at her
I could always see her out of the corner of my eye,
Slinking about, or maybe walking by,

But if I tried to look directly at her
Or called her name, *Vera, Vera, Vera*,
Echo replied;

and she had disappeared
Behind the trees of facts, the branches of words,
The leaves of thought, and it was as I feared:

All one could see or hear was the twittering birds.



The Doctor Halts the Sonnet in its Flight from Reality.

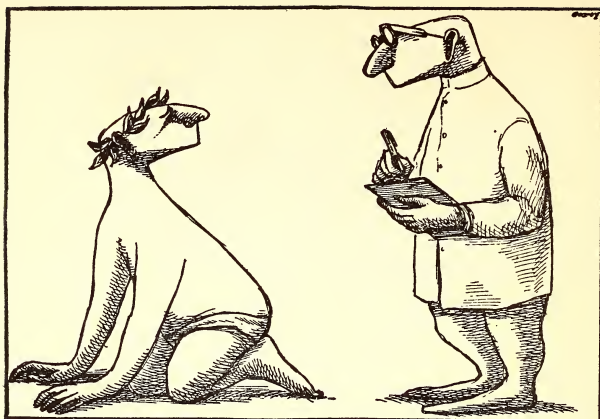
The Curtain Fell

The curtain fell and then the light, a flood
Of brilliance, burned my eyes until the tears
That stood in them were turned to drops of blood,
And then I saw and wished I had not seen.

Here was all divulged, the dissonance
And harmony of heaven and of hell,
The ways and means of sorrows and of tears,
And all the human joys that ever fell
From nature's lap into the hands of men!

And I stood there filled with regret that chance
Had ever let it be that I was given
So much to see and know, so little to tell
Because so much was indescribable:

So I stood there silent, long after it had fallen.



The Diagnosis Is Super-Inferiority Complex.

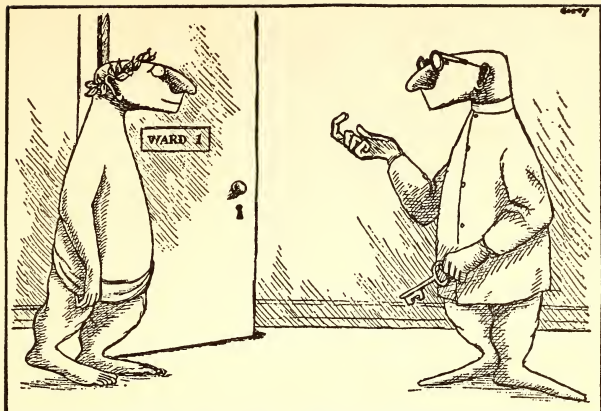
Even the Stars, the Moon, Even the Sun

I see no way to salvage you from Time;
 Iron cannot do it nor can rhyme,
 Music cannot do it, epithets
 Wisely given, towers and minarets
 Sagely built;

I see no way at all
 To keep your name from rotting off the wall
 Of stone where it is carved: the sentiment
 It carried and the words that with it went,
 These too will turn to dust no matter how
 They might have been originally meant;

They have to go, as they are going now:
 For Time will have his way eventually,
 Against the least or most determined one,
 Even the stars, the moon;

even the sun.

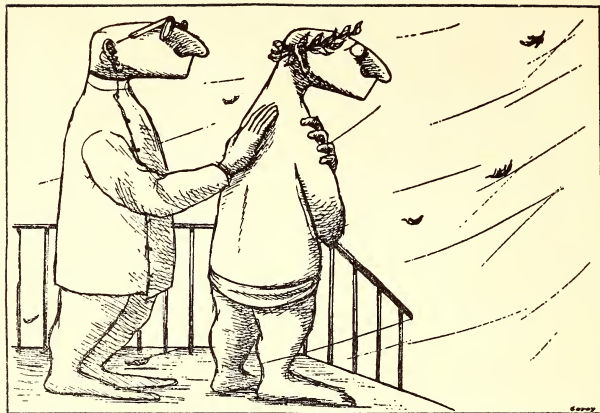


Dr Merrill Moore Releases the Sonnet from Confinement.

Poets Share Their Eyes

Poets have rather unusual eyes
 That look at things in individual ways;
 Then, by a method that we do not know,
 They record what they feel and what they see
 In words for other people to buy and read.
 Their tools are simple. Poetry is hand-made,
 A rather crude art of words, and all they do
 Is make us look at things that they have seen
 With a peculiar clairvoyance of their own.

Poets make us see and look at things—
 That is about all that poets do—
 Things around us we have never seen.
 Poets tell us in words, our words, what they
 Have seen with their own eyes to help us see.

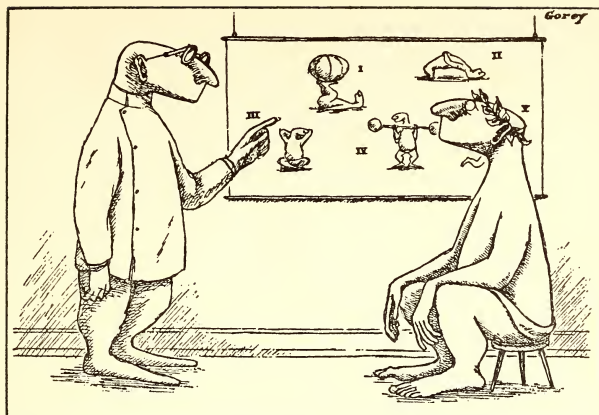


The Doctor Urges the Sonnet to Go out in the Open Air.

And If I Would, I Know Not Where to Hide Me

From my needs (of something to worship) that sit beside me
 (When I travel alone—on railway trains)
 And talk to those who populate inside me
 And all of us twiddle our thumbs and cudgel our brains
 In brown studies as the world rolls by,
 As the rails click and telephone poles flit by
 And wires and fences rise and fall in the sky
 And engines roar and rush incessantly—

And my needs of something to worship that run beside me
 (When tired of sitting they run, and *vice versa*),
 That treat me as a cashier or a bursar,
 Saying: "Here is a penny!" or "Give us one
 For God or the deity behind the sun!"
 —Tragically and terribly they chide me.



Dr Merrill Moore Recommends Exercise for the Sonnet.

He Lived in a Cardboard Box Until Too Late

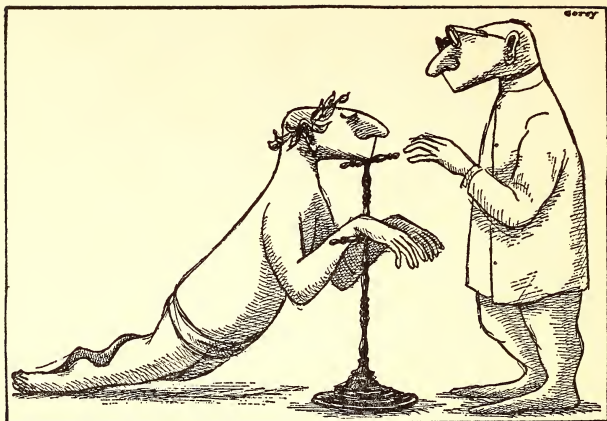
His life, that is, reality, to him
Was something very delicate and dim.

He lived enclosed by four thin paper walls
That shielded him from dissonance and brawls.

His life had never flowed in pebbly channels;
It was a pool closed in by paper panels,

Four that were intact and were suitable
Until onto him Time and trouble fell.

First, a stone was thrown through panel one.
Next, a bird flew through another one.
Bang! The wind blew down the other one.
Flash! A match ignited the remaining one
Then his pool was surrounded by no panels
And then it was too late for other channels.



The Doctor Teaches the Sonnet to Relax .

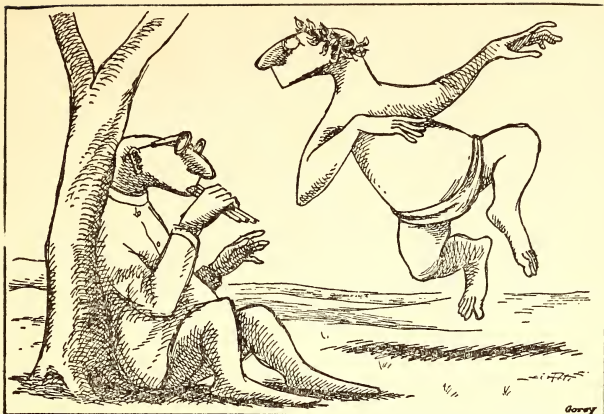
Part of Him Was Artist and Part was Artisan

He saw a man die and made a vase of that,
 He saw a child born and made another one;
 Some of his vessels were made of clay glazed and baked,
 Some of the rare ones were carved out of elephant-bone;

He had a collection of them, all sizes and shapes,
 Decorated all ways, never two the same—
 Some had fabulous titles and many of them were
 Innominate, completely without a name.

And sometimes he wove cloth instead of making pottery,
 Sometimes he broidered and wove on a loom so large
 It might have produced a sail for Cleopatra's barge
 Or its fruit might have been the prize at a lottery;

And sometimes, tired in the spring or in the fall,
 He merely rested and turned out nothing at all.



The Doctor Assists the Sonnet in Pastoral Play.

A Thousand Poets with a Thousand Pens

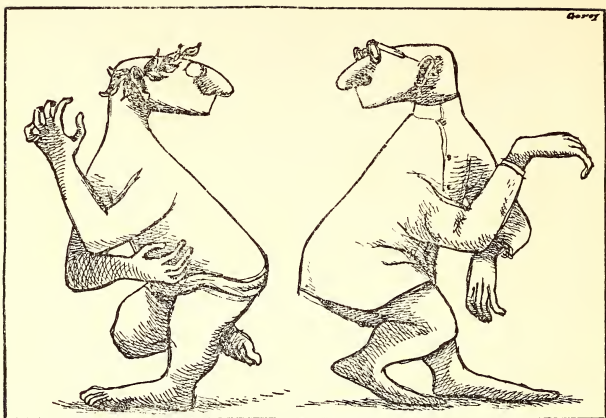
Could never tell the glitter ocean gives
In moonlight under the prismatic lens
Of moon above the clattering of the waves

The foam and wave crest tied in mobile sheaves
That wind takes only a second to cut down
After each is ripe and ready grown.

They fall upon the sand, the drenching sand
That sea-wind lifts in granules by the hand
To blow in dunes far inland, bury trees,

And there deface the crude monstrosities
Of human fence and house across the way
That rise up from the east side of the bay

To sink far inland on the driven west
Horizon at the doorway of the blest.



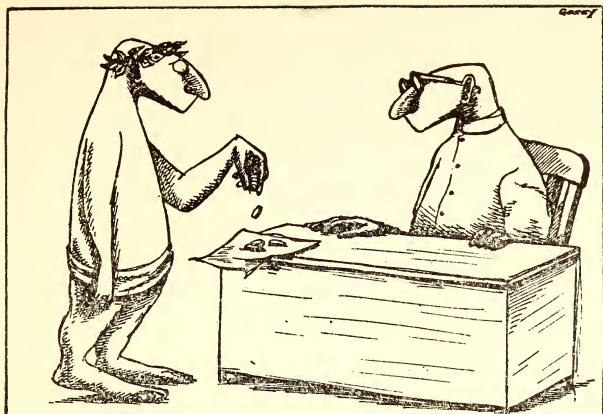
The Doctor Teaches the Sonnet to Rhumba.

So Innocent We Were (or Thought We Were)

When life was a matter of French exercises
 And morning cereal steaming on the plate,
 I woke with a fresh, with an intense elation
 And hurriedly went outdoors, could hardly wait
 To face the morning in my consternation
 And joy of living, unquestionably too great
 For one who meant to win so many prizes
 At lessons, in the city and the state,

In games, in play, in government, at schools,
 By law, examples, exigencies, rules.

So I rose—and Ten Years (as Wordsworth says)
 Have cast a pane of glass across the past
 Through which I peer and am not sure I knew
 What I once knew—it seems so far away
 And we were all so innocent at play.



The Sonnet Slowly Pays the Doctor's Bill.

The Costliest Winter of All, Eternity

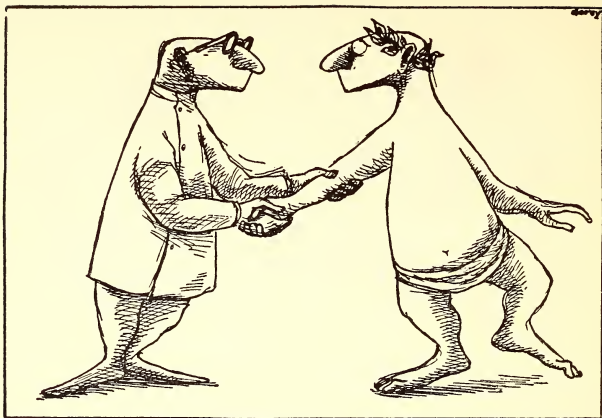
You have eyes to seine the fishy skies,
You have ears to listen for your fears,

You have a mouth to find where is the south
By vintages, your skin was made to feel
The difference that iron has from steel,

Your nose was made to tell you (and it can)
Dwellings tenantless from those that man
Has lived in, like a dog's, along the way
Stretching farther out than yesterday.

Road builders, we, who build that path at length
As long as we can call and answer strength
In muscles to be submissive to our mind,

Building in winter and expensively,
The costliest winter of all, eternity.



The Doctor Bids the Sonnet A Fond Farewell.

L'Envoi

When the white of this age is turned a little gray
And the leaves of the world are a little frayed at the edges,
It will be very seamy then, there will be no pay,
Only sea water lapping at the ledges
Of the rocky Atlantic seaboard, and Hemingway
Will be safely interred (but let us hope not forgotten),
And the flesh of others will long be lost and rotten,
And the visiting Marines will have gone away.

We shall hear of F. Scott Fitzgerald (and faith we shall need it!),
Remembering Kipling, and Omar, and the rest;

We shall think no more of truffles and guinea breast,
But sit in the corner and have to learn to wait
As old men do, in sepia prints on the wall,
Beginning to stoop, who once were straight and tall.

The Noise That Time Makes

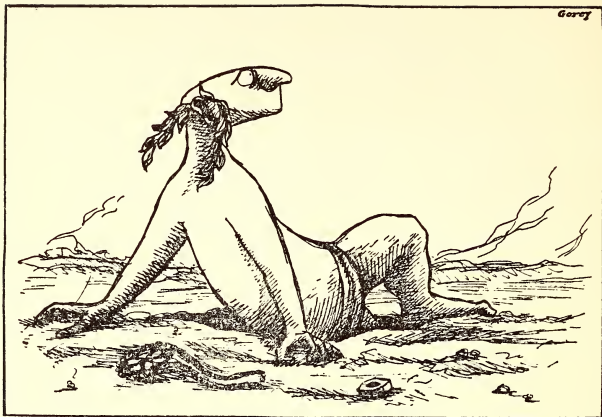
The noise that Time makes in passing by
Is very slight but even you can hear it,
Having not necessarily to be near it,
Needing only the slightest will to try:

Hold the receiver of a telephone
To your ear when no one is talking on the line

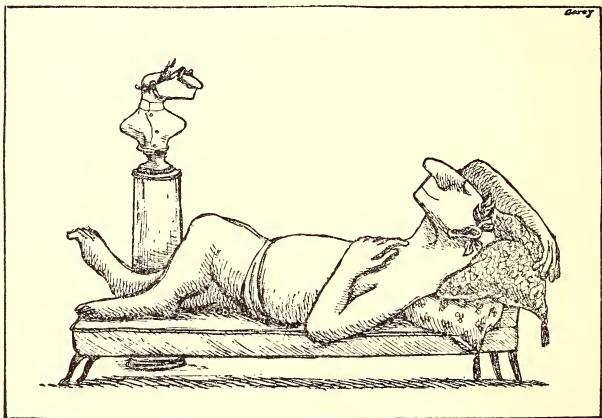
And what may at first sound to you like the whine
Of wind over distant wires is Time's own
Garments brushing against a windy cloud.

That same noise again but not so well
May be heard by taking a small cockle-shell
From the sand and holding it against your head;

Then you can hear Time's footsteps as they pass
Over the earth brushing the eternal grass.



*The Sonnet finds itself at last revived ,
Having Wars (and the Machine Age) survived.*



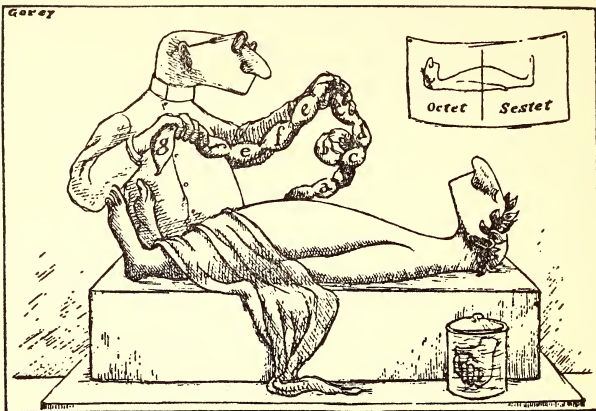
*The Sonnet Sweetly Dreams, Its Illness O'er,
Rejoicing in the Name of Merrill Moore.*

CONSULTANT'S OPINION

Merrill Moore, M.D., is a "modern" poet in the good sense: He has a fresh and living language rather than a "literary" or "poetic" one, and he uses it directly on his own actual materials. He also has an original mind. Therefore he is able to make something altogether vital out of that somewhat worn and too-studied form, the sonnet. It is odd that the most spontaneous poet should adapt himself to this most formal medium. But he is completely at ease within it. He has written many thousands of these characteristic sonnets. (I do not know whether the number can still be expressed in five figures, or whether now it takes six.) His mastery of the form is such that he knows how to isolate and ticket the thought, or the feeling, that occurs to him as he goes about his busy everyday life, to turn it over to his unconscious, and presently when he is at leisure to read off its vivid expression in exactly fourteen lines; a very great skill is indicated. His literary personality is just what that of a psychiatrist ought theoretically to be. He has perfect access to his unconscious, which is the deep-self that poems have to come out of. It is inevitable, it is right, that his poems increasingly reflect his medical experience. Where could you find a more human material than that? And what sort of monster would the doctor be whose practice was not humanized by all these tangential incidents in his professional labors?

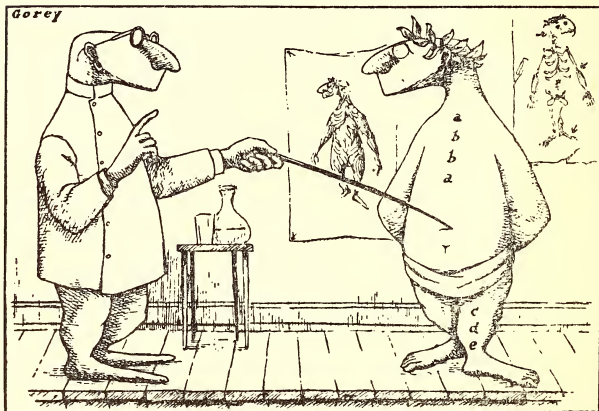
John Crowe Ransom

Gorey



Dr. Merrill Moore Dissects a Sonnet.

Gorey



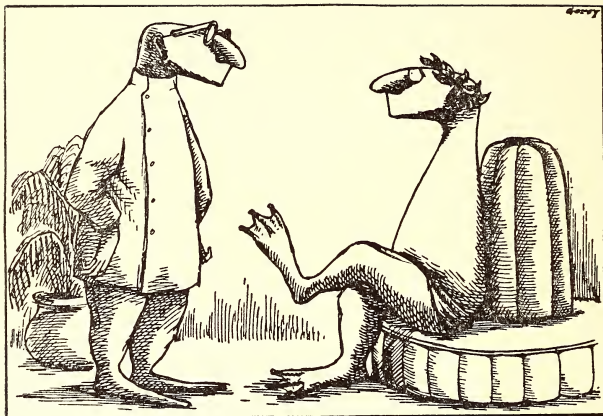
Dr. Merrill Moore Presents a Sonnet Clinic.

LABORATORY NOTE

More than anyone else, John Keats infected English poetry with the illusion of poetic cultism, or hyper-professionalism in the art, whereby a poet becomes a poet's poet. This infection, fanged with a delaying action, became all the more violent when at length it exerted its predominance. More than anyone else, Dr. Merrill Moore has given sick poetry an antitoxin, curing its morbidity, restoring it to good health, its proper function, and a potential public significance, with a poetry for men and women who know equally what poetry is and what it is not. It is not the enervated cultism of Keats or Eliot; it is the vitality of the human imagination made articulate in its infinite, lambent, healing play of mind. Dr. Moore is the voice of true felicity crying all-too-little heeded in a waste land, today one of the most significant figures in the imaginative life of America.

His poems are not "literary" poetry; they are, instead, valid poetry. The familiar he makes luminous and magical; the obscure he makes intimately familiar. Intelligent, ironical, eloquent, insinuating, witty, supremely perceptive; magical, responsible, irresponsible, philosophical, dramatic, affectionate; sane, fanciful, moral, psychological, mystical, even in moments religious, he is an artist poised, versatile, accomplished. His finest book is his longest: *M: A Thousand Autobiographical Sonnets*; but he is prolific in books, all are rich in gold; and the quality increases.

Henry W. Wells, Ph.D.



Dr Merrill Moore Encounters a Somewhat Unusual Sonnet.

DISCHARGE NOTE

Yes, the sonnet *was* sick! By sheer persistence Merrill Moore has saved his life, made him a useful citizen. I don't think he would even LIKE to go back to his happy past if he could. That is a triumph of therapy: to have the patient not even WANT to be young again but to wake up to what there is left to him, without regrets.

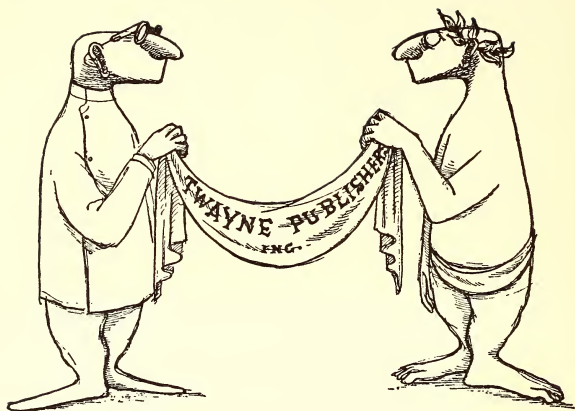
That's where the disease lay. Regrets. Nostalgia for the past. By attacking that virus in the very SPLEEN where it lay hid, pulling it out into the light (through examination of the BLOOD smear) and applying the radium of his enlightened thought, Moore has CURED him! O modern triumph!

That the malignancy will certainly in the end destroy him is not the question: he may and no doubt will long outlast many of his contemporaries. Young as they are, with blood counts showing haemoglobin of 95% to 105% and normal differentials, they may succumb to war, to wine or to women and all the ills of exhaustion to which they subject us. But he, mellowed and secure, will continue to years that they shall never see.

So, I salute Merrill Moore, Master Poet and Physician. He has devoted his life doubly in this occasion to the service of a distinguished patient. Modest though he has been, displaying the abnegation of the true servitor of mankind, Moore has taken a noted invalid, full of years, one who has served well—and given him a new life.

It is wonderful to see the old boy hale again.

William Carlos Williams, M.D.





BROWSING ROOM

Date Due

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Case record from a sonnetorium main
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