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Title: Letter from Marianne Moore to James Watson

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260 Cumberland Street
Brooklyn, New York
March 12, 1937

Dear Mr. Watson,

I admire Djuna Barnes' line-drawings, a poem called "Pastoral," and accurate descriptions such as the one of the circus-horse which you quote; but in "Nightwood," reiterated grossness of statement is to my mind impropriety of art as well as of behavior; I regret anyone's tendency to curse back at accusers, however severe or insulting an injustice to be avenged may have been, and I doubt that your resistance to such protest could be greater than mine. I read your review with deep interest, heartily approving until I came to the part where you make "Nightwood" companion piece to "The Waste Land." Having won a hard-fought fight over himself and perceived in some other mind an effect of solitary warfare, T. S. Eliot is perhaps over-conscientious. But I know how hard it is to get publishers to let one have a thing as one would wish it to be, and Djuna Barnes has the air, ^{to me} of an honest fighter inured to distrust; therefore I feel an almost personal sense of relief in seeing the mythical chance to be accepted and sent on one's way fed, afforded her by Faber & Faber. It is however with a sense of trust and confidence that I make any of the above admissions and as a beneficiary and carefully faithful reader of yours, that I encroach on your kindness with all this "thinking."

You would perhaps not guess how much I feel I owe to the serious view taken by you of my book, and for your daring regarding certain "characters" of the writing world; Ford Madox Ford for instance; not to mention even more prevalent notables of the scene.

You incline to satirize my interest in the Brooklyn Eagle, but I affirm it by reason of several members of the staff. I did, as Mr. Gilmore told you, ask the Macmillan Company if my book might be addressed to you, and I could not say how much apprehension I feel in the suggestion that he himself may leave the paper. His writing seems to me not only fertile but disciplined; I hope his leaving is but a rumor.

I have not seen the Oxford Book of Modern Verse, but ^{having} after many heresies against Mr. Yeats for this reason or that, I have come to feel that his curiously poetic egotism leads him to say things in a way which is its own justification.

I understand your temptation to avoid the thankless mêlée of the good and the bad, but hope you will be patient; for a strong sense of responsibility in reviewing is an invaluable incentive both to writer and reader; one tends, indeed, to labor gratitude to you, casual or deflected reviewing being the death of confidence.

Sincerely yours,

Marianne Moore