

## Pamela White Hadas: On "No Swan So Fine"

"No Swan So Fine" asserts that there is no live swan, "no swan, / with swart blind look askance / and gondoliering legs, so fine" as the china one among its finely sculptured and polished flowers in the Louis XV candelabrum. The last half-line of the poem reads, simply and abruptly, "The king is dead." A way of life that went along with the king's life is also dead. The swan is alive only insofar as art is, but dead in its extravagant finality of form. Insofar as kings represent unprogressive ceremony and permanent superfluity, the swan and the king share a fate. The poem is a compression of an important ambivalence toward animals petrified as art. This swan appeals to Marianne Moore with its delicacy, elegance, and perfection; it appeals more than a live swan with "gondoliering legs." Yet, attractive as it is to her, she must admit that it is dead; it represents, more than a way of life, a royal fatality. The attraction is vital and fatal.

From *Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection*. Copyright © 1977 by Syracuse University Press.

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