

## Texts for *Descriptions of the Moon*

### I. Dante and Beatrice set foot on the moon

We seemed to be enveloped by a cloud  
as brilliant, hard, and polished as a diamond  
struck by a ray of sunlight. That eternal,

celestial pearl took us into itself,  
receiving us as water takes in light,  
its indivisibility intact.

from *Paradiso*

Dante Alighieri, trans. Mark Musa

### II. Dialogue (Concerning the Two Chief World Systems)

Just as the moon supplies us with the light we  
lack from the sun a great part of the time, and by  
reflection of its rays makes the nights fairly  
bright, so the earth repays it by reflecting the  
solar rays when the moon most needs them,  
giving a very strong illumination.

from *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World  
Systems*

Galileo Galilei, trans. Stillman Drake

### III. Simple

Of cool sweet dew and radiance mild  
The moon a web of silence weaves  
In the still garden where a child  
Gathers the simple salad leaves.

A moon dew stars her hanging hair  
And moonlight kisses her young brow  
And, gathering, she sings an air:  
*Fair as the wave is, fair, art thou!*

Be mine, I pray, a waxen ear  
To shield me from her childish croon  
And mine a shielded heart for her  
Who gathers simples of the moon.

from *Pomes Penyeach*

James Joyce

### IV. Then it wasn't true?

Then it wasn't true  
that God lived on the moon?

from *The Book of Questions*

Pablo Neruda, trans. William O'Daly

### V. the Cambridge ladies

. . . . the Cambridge ladies do not care, above  
Cambridge if sometimes in its box of  
sky lavender and cornerless, the  
moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

from *Tulips and Chimneys*

E.E. Cummings

### VI. Reflection of the Moon

He stood staring at the water. Then he stooped  
and picked up a stone, which he threw sharply at  
the pond. Ursula was aware of the bright moon  
leaping and swaying, all distorted, in her eyes.  
It seemed to shoot out arms of fire like a  
cuttlefish, like a luminous polyp, palpating  
strongly before her.

from *Women in Love*

D.H. Lawrence

### VII. Girl's Melancholy (Interlude)

His smile was so soft and fine:  
like gleaming on old ivory,  
like homesickness, like a Christmas snowfall  
in the dark village, like turquoise  
around which many pearls are fashioned,  
like moonlight  
on a favorite book.

from *The Book of Images*

Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. Edward Snow

### VIII. To Jane

The keen stars were twinkling,  
And the fair moon was rising among them,  
Dear Jane.  
The guitar was tinkling,  
But the notes were not sweet till you sung them  
Again.

As the moon's soft splendour  
O'er the faint cold starlight of Heaven  
Is thrown,  
So your voice most tender  
To the strings without soul had then given  
Its own.

The stars will awaken,  
Though the moon sleep a full hour later  
To-night;  
No leaf will be shaken  
Whilst the dews of your melody scatter  
Delight.

Though the sound overpowers,  
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing  
A tone  
Of some world far from ours,  
Where music and moonlight and feeling  
Are one.

from *Poetical Works*  
Percy Bysshe Shelley

...aerial-bright above dark-round...  
...soft-amberish-celestial...

from *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*  
Jorge Luis Borges, trans. Andrew Hurley

### IX. The Distance of the Moon

My thoughts were filled only with grief at  
having lost her, and my eyes gazed at the moon,  
forever beyond my reach, as I sought her. And I  
saw her. She was there where I had left her,  
lying on a beach directly over our heads, and  
she said nothing. She was the color of the  
Moon; she held the harp at her side and moved  
one hand now and then in slow arpeggios. I  
could distinguish the shape of her bosom, her  
arms, her thighs, just as I remember them now,  
just as now, when the moon has become that  
flat, remote circle, I still look for her as soon as  
the first sliver appears in the sky, and the more  
it waxes, the more clearly I imagine I can see  
her, her or something of her, but only her, in a  
hundred, a thousand different vistas, she who  
makes the Moon the Moon and, whenever she is  
full, sets the dogs to howling all night long, and  
me with them.

from *Cosmicomics*  
Italo Calvino, trans. William Weaver

...Upward, behind the onstreaming it mooned...

from *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*  
Jorge Luis Borges, trans. Andrew Hurley