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James Hercules Sutton

45 Auden Pondering Channel Swimmers.

The magnitude of what they seek does not
suggest incompetence, but there are days
when those who dare are stranded by the tide.
On days like these, those who call it a sport
speak knowingly of "rest" & "rescue," but
salvation was never the point of it,
and rest is not perfectible among
those who compete with others. The point of
facing the sea is something other than
"an ache to survive," something more than "still
another episode of fang or claw" —
a chance to move against It in a way
 that sets a human limit to Its skin
 & in the act to find . . . Oblivion.

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46 Marianne Moore Explaining Poetry.

As for the song itself, it isn't important.
The name of the bird who sings it was never important.
The fact of importance is whether the bird is singing
& what will happen as soon as singing stops—
a charge of poisonous gases, sudden explosion,
panic. Gradually digging forward *ends*.
Reason enough to honor an anxious creature
useful to miners. The bird legislates nothing,
not even its song, not even its own sensibility
& certainly not the way that any who listen
might feel in the future. Reflecting only the range
of its own confinement, alone in a cage, it sits
arguing with itself; and yet, performing a service,
because its singing prevents the cost of silence.

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47. **Marianne Moore Expounding her Method.**

"Genius is infinite patience."—Michelangelo.

Some hope that what they do will last & last;
they labor in a style so tightly packed
time's acid rain drains off their work so fast
that etchings they engraved remain intact.

Such is the hope a diamond cutter has,
to proffer what he knows will always shine,
because he knows a diamond's polish lasts
from circumstance of birth, defying time.

Unlike a pearl in irritation born,
conceived in darkness & bespeaking pain,
diamonds are born in heat & solar storm,
so when they cool, they always stay the same.

Some never suffer luster to preside;
they polish stars, not what an oyster hides.