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A YEAR OF POEMS

**THE MOON -
FAMILIAR FRIEND OR LONELY STRANGER?**



**‘The Moon has a face like the clock in the hall;
She shines on thieves on the garden wall,
On streets and fields and harbour quays,
And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees ...’
Robert Louis Stevenson (1885)**

**by Penelope J. Corfield
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One cold, crisp, cloudless night recently revealed a massive silver Moon, looking down impartially upon the sprawling metropolis of London. Everything looked superbly wonderful in its gleaming light. I greatly enjoyed the spectacle.

What's more, the Moon did appear to have a familiar face, reminding me of our childish belief that the lunar contours did indeed portray the 'Man in the Moon'.

Robert Louis Stevenson's poem (quoted above) captures that sense of familiarity. 'The Moon has a face like the clock in the hall'. And the poem continues to salute both the night-life that routinely flourishes under the light of the Moon, even while children and flowers 'close their eyes' until daylight.

But I equally love the alternative vision that sees the Moon, not as a familiar friend, but as a lonely stranger. Here the seminal poem is that by Percy Bysshe Shelley (published posthumously, 1822).

It addresses a question directly 'To the Moon', which is viewed as a lonely and elusive celestial wanderer:

**'Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, —
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?'**

The beauty of the poem is so haunting that I capitulate entirely. The Moon is not only a familiar friend, but is also a forlorn solitary object, 'wandering companionless' through the skies. Nothing can hold its interest. Its eye is permanently joyless.

From that point of view, the intermittent human 'race for the Moon' is an appalling intrusion into the space of Planet Earth's nearest

neighbour. It does not intrude into human life, even though, on clear nights, it does throw a cold silvery light upon our nocturnal doings.

There are far more poems about the Moon than I have ever read ... or will find time to read.¹ But they all acknowledge that it's a major fixture - even if an enigmatic moving fixture - in the close environs of Planet Earth. So it must be treated with due respect. The Moon, whether familiar or lonely - is not a toy; not a reservoir of raw materials to be used by some humans and kept from others; not a potential military base; and certainly not a potential battle-ground or killing-field.²

Global citizens have a global interest in respecting the Moon as an integral feature of global existence. It is inescapably wedded to our Planet. The Moon does not belong to anyone. But it does share its celestial journeys intimately with us all. The Moon, in all its beauty, is the 'familiar stranger' that is known to all humanity. And long may it flourish as such!

ENDNOTES:

¹ See various options within helpful websites: <https://poets.org/poems-about-moon> and <https://www.poemhunter.com/poems/moon> (viewed 30 March 2026).

² See e.g. essays in Melanie Vandenbrouck, Megan Barford, Louise Devoy and Richard Dunn (eds), *The Moon: A Celebration of our Celestial Neighbour* (2019); O. Morton, *The Moon: A History for the Future* (2019); and M. Shindell (ed.), with D. Sobel, *Lunar: A History of the Moon in Myths, Maps and Matter* (2024).