

from *Maud Martha* (1953)
By Gwendolyn Brooks (United States)

Line
5 The name "New York" glittered in front of her
like the silver in the shops on Michigan Boulevard.
It was silver, and it was solid, and it was remote:
it was behind glass, it was behind bright glass like
the silver in the shops, it was not for her. Yet.

When she was out walking, and with grating iron
swish a train whipped by, off, above, its passengers
were always, for her comfort, New York-bound.
She sat inside with them. She leaned back in the
10 plush. She sped past farms, through tiny towns,
where people slept, kissed, quarreled, ate midnight
snacks; unfortunate folk who were not New York-
bound and never would be.

Maud Martha loved it when her magazines
15 said "New York," described "good" objects there,
wonderful people there, recalled fine talk, the bristling
or the creamy or the tactfully shimmering ways of
life. They showed pictures of rooms with wood
paneling, softly glowing, touched up by the
20 compliment of a spot of auburn here, the low
bum of a rare binding there. There were ferns in
these rooms, and Chinese boxes; bits of dreamlike
crystal; a taste of leather. In the advertisement pages,
you saw where you could buy six Italian plates for
25 eleven hundred dollars-- and you must hurry, for
there was just the one set; you saw where you could
buy antique French bisque figurines (pale blue and
gold) for— for-- Her whole body become a hunger,
she would pore over these pages. The clothes
30 interested her, too, especially did she care for the
pictures of women wearing carelessly, as if they were
rags, dresses that were plain but whose prices were
not. And the foolish food (her mother's description)
enjoyed by New Yorkers fascinated her. They paid
35 ten dollars for an eight-ounce jar of Russian caviar;
they ate things called anchovies, and capers; they
ate little diamond-shaped cheeses that paprika had
but breathed on; they ate bitter-almond macaroons;
they ate papaya packed in rum and syrup; they ate
40 peculiar sauces, were free with honey, were lavish
with butter, wine and cream.

She bought the New York papers downtown, read
of the concerts and plays, studied the book reviews,
was intent over the announcements of auctions. She
45 liked the sound of "Fifth Avenue," "Town Hall,"
"B. Altman," "Hammacher Schlemmer." She was
on Fifth Avenue whenever she wanted to be, and
she it was who rolled up, silky or furry, in the taxi,
was assisted out, and stood, her next step nebulous,
50 before the theaters of the thousand lights, before
velvet-lined impossible shops; she it was.

New York, for Maud Martha, was a symbol.
Her idea of it stood for what she felt life ought
to be. Jeweled. Polished. Smiling. Poised. Calmly
55 rushing! Straight up and down, yet graceful enough.

