I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that can rise if it must, these things are important not because a high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible, the same thing may be said for all of us—that we do not admire what we cannot understand. The bat, holding on upside down or in quest of something to eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base-ball fan, the statistician—case after case could be cited did one wish it; nor is it valid to discriminate against “business documents and school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry, nor till the autocrats among us can be “literalists of the imagination”—above insolence and triviality and can present for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand, in defiance of their opinion—the raw material of poetry in all its rawness, and that which is on the other hand, genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

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About this Poem:

"Poetry" was published in Others for 1919: An Anthology of the New Verse (Nicholas L. Brown, 1920), edited by Alfred Kreymborg.

Author:

Marianne Moore

Born in 1887, Marianne Moore wrote with the freedom characteristic of the other Modernist poets, often incorporating quotes from other sources into the text, yet her use of language was always extraordinarily condensed and precise

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