



The Hatred of Poetry

Ben Lerner

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Novelist and poet Ben Lerner argues that our hatred of poetry is ultimately a sign of its continued relevance.

Poetry. Perhaps Marianne Moore said it best: "I, too, dislike it." What other art takes its marginality as a given, and is so widely bemoaned even by its practitioners? Ben Lerner writes, "Many more people agree they hate poetry than can agree what poetry is. I, too, dislike it and have largely organized my life around it and do not experience that as a contradiction because poetry and the hatred of poetry are inextricable in ways it is my purpose to explore."

In this inventive and plain-spoken essay, Lerner takes the hatred of poetry as the starting point of his defence of the art. He examines both poetry's greatest haters (beginning with Plato, who famously claimed that an ideal city had no place for poets, who would only corrupt and mislead the young) and its greatest practitioners, providing inspired close-readings of Keats, Dickinson, Whitman, and others. Throughout, he attempts to explain the noble failure at the heart of every poem: the impulse to launch the experience of an individual into a timeless, communal existence. In *The Hatred of Poetry*, Lerner has crafted an entertaining, personal, and entirely original examination of a vocation no less essential for being impossible.

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