

## DONATO MANCINI / from *The Young Hate Us {2}*: In the Cultural Afterlife of Poetry

in the arithmetic of value  
*was-it-good-for-you* reviewing  
plus  
*it-was-better-in-the-old-days* criticism  
plus  
*we-against-the-fool-farm* poetics  
equals what

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Truth, Judgement, Affect. Begin auto-autopsy. Crack of the book, smell the glue, taste the predestinarian para-prose, admire the author photo (she's lost weight), read the author bio, feel the Truth of it and re-blurbitate to poetry-lovers hey crush hot coals to your chin stab a jackknife through your wrist if this book doesn't split your seams better call your family mortician.

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This poet conveys with gifted words the deep and meaningful spirit of what true and lasting love is, in a book at once insistently engaged and essentially human. The earthy wisdom of a grounded life lies close to the emotional core of this fine book, from a solitary poet who speaks with fierce eloquence of the individual's experience against that of the tribe. This poet is a distinguished artist, born of the body and soul, wrestling with the effort for truth and the true; in the intensity of the struggle language forges a poetic shape worthy of both labels *profound* and *beautiful*. If beauty is rooted in vision, sight is realised in the heart, and, as part of the soul of Nature, \_\_\_\_\_'s poetic wisdom is for everyone who knows we are fundamentally alone. This admirably slim volume is an accessible journey on the winding byways of love, sharpened with measures of the hard glare of reality, brought to crisp perfection with a soothing dash of universal spirit.

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the 4-part structure of *conscience*:

moral competence.

moral reasoning.

moral affect.

moral identity.

*aesthetic conscience*.

*aesthetic conscience* assumes the homology of morality and aesthesis.

aesthetic competence.

aesthetic reasoning.

aesthetic affect.

aesthetic identity.

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Personal Experience: Everyone's Had One. There is, after all, what you feel. What you feel  $\neq$  or doesn't have to = what you believe. I.e. I feel Quality but I don't believe in It. I feel OK but I don't believe in It. Belief is only evidence of belief. A church is held together not by force of the believed Thing, but by the indigestive synergy of Belief and Law.

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Antiquarian & connoisseurist modes of criticism take *judgement* as prime directive, and/or the only good reason to spend Quality Time With Great Art.

The totalising sum of connoisseurist reasoning: that "the functional sociality of artworks is *lost when* concepts like value, content, communication, beauty, ad nauseum [add museum], are re-framed within a critique of ideology." (T. Eagleton)

Or lost when barfingly ejected altogether.

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Gross inattention transforms even that special category of “importance” into the kin of others, like “red,” like “large,” like wow. Importance as a flavour. Profundity as a style. The poetic as an affect not an effect.

Isn't it bizarre, the oh congratulations you won the Largest Prize for the magnum opus of yours what's it called congratulations do you have anything new in the works?

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“The enthusiasm of fans for their favourite rock star and the religious trance of the devout Catholic in the presence of the pope are libidinally *the same phenomenon*; they differ only in the different symbolic network which supports them. Sergei Eisenstein's provocatively titled essay ‘The Centrifuge or the Grail’ aims precisely at emphasising this ‘unhistorical’ neutrality of ecstasy (his name for *jouissance*)...first we have the experience of objectless ecstasy; subsequently this experience is attached to some historically determined representation—here we encounter an exemplary case of the real as that ‘which remains the same in all possible (symbolic) universes’. So, when someone, while describing his profound religious experience, emphatically answers his critics: ‘you don't really understand it at all! there's more to it that words cannot express,’ he is the victim of a kind of perspective illusion: the precious *agalma* perceived by him as the unique ineffable kernel which cannot be shared by others (non-believers) is precisely the *jouissance* as that which always remains the same. Every ideology attaches itself to some kernel of *jouissance* which, however, retains the status of an ambiguous excess. The unique ‘religious experience’ is thus split into two components, as in the well-known scene from Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* in which the food on a plate is split into symbolic frame (a colour photo of the course above the plate) and the formless slime of *jouissance* that we actually eat.” (S. Žižek).

Don't read poetry with “quasi-religious wonder, instead of [as] a human sign to be understood in secular and social terms.” (E. Said)

Don't try to get from Wagner what she gets from Metallica what he gets from Henri Chopin, when if Wagner makes you sign petitions if Metallica makes you drink Heineken if Chopin makes you fall into chopped mattresses.

Instead of tracking back and forth over the poetic / aesthetic / sludge of jouissance in historically varied feathers, poets should build registers of experience completely unavailable outside of the reading of that particular poem. Rather tinkering-the-pseudo-science than romancing-the-suedeo-science.

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The Crowd is not "the masses" except for those eager to sell a million tickets. The Crowd is just too many people to try to have a conversation with all at once. The Crowd is the core weakness of voter politics.

In contrast, the Coterie needn't be an elite. It only needs be a specific. Coterie as communitarian, particularist, non-elitist. Focused. Focalised.

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*technocratic*. "We have the knowledge."

*special people*. "We have the magic."

*power*. "We have the guns, we have the money."

These are —————→ *modes of elitism*.

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*the pizza effect*. By which a mediocre, bready recipe becomes more popular outside of Italy than inside, causing the recipe to eventually become a cultural keystone at festivals of the Italian within and without the boot. (Also known as culinary blow-back.)

*the [lawrence paul] yuxwelupton effect.* By which the First Nations Canadian painter is unrewarded by The Man on his own unceded territory, therefore leaves the province, becomes celebrated elsewhere, returns full force to local fortune and acclaim.

*the [toru] takemitsu effect.* As above, and by which the composer is unrecognised on his home island until after the colonial powers of Europe recognise him.

*the [johann sebastian] bach effect.* By which a certain idiosyncratic counterpoint of a long-maligned composer becomes institutionalised as the exact practical definition of good counterpoint against which other counterpoints become incorrect or idiosyncratic. (Also known as the institutional construction of Quality.)

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Great Writings (The Canon) are obviously great because they obviously have the obvious characteristics of Obvious Greatness [non-exhaustive]: atheism, bad taste, camp, circuitousness, contradiction, cruelty, despair, digression, dimness, dishonesty, disorder, dissonance, fascist cravings, flakiness, foolishness, horror, idiocy, illogic, incest, lust, mental illness, misanthropy, obscurity, oppositionality, palimpsestuousness, pettiness, polysemy, poly-vocality, pretentiousness, self-indulgence, sexual deviance, strangeness, stupidity, substance abuse, tonal discord, violence, vengefulness.

Culture is ordinary.

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This is the review, then. This looks bad. Your bumper-pool career stinks. The moral disease has spread to your Acknowledgements Terminal.

A virtuoso belch in the colonial-anachronistic style such as “Verse is a Dying Technique,” then, bursts within a promise: the un-scratched patch of a *Fucked-4-Life* Scratch ‘n’ Lose.



The precise meaning of “Metaphor is on Life-Support and Fading Fast” is whatever is believed to be at stake in the statement itself.

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Take Ezra Pound, for example. On the one tentacle there is an odious contraption like *The Pound Era*, on another tentacle there’s Pound’s anti-Semite fascism, on another there are [insert marginalised group] people using collage techniques drawn directly from *The Cantos* to write new poems that are then published in photocopied magazines that you should really get your hands on.

The latter is not appropriation of Pound; it’s Pound’s concrete reception. Between these, the difference, in the gaps, is the actual literal living material cultural struggle over the meaning of Ezra Pound. Cultural struggle = reception = cultural struggle.

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Pop fiction, movies, light non-fiction, Freeto Lay, etc., mainly presume the consumer will ingest the product only once. First time. Full disclosure. Clear. Direct. Simple. An arresting image in every line. A devastating crunch in every chip.

But “A poetry collection is like a record collection” (R. Maurer). Bafflement, puzzlement, difference, strangeness, unfamiliarity raise curiosity, invite longterm engagement. “Love don’t come easy” (P. Collins). Poetry is not a consumable. “It’s a game of give and take” (ibid).

The imperative of poetry as a praxis is not in reading—first encounter, first impressions, thumbs up, thumbs down—but in *re-reading*.

A conversation, not a referendum.

[On the other hand, Soft Rock mainly hopes / presumes you’ll be forced to listen to the same song 1,600 times until it is memorised will nil.]

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Counter-review. Symmetrical. Cleanliness neatness sharpness—symmetry is the psychedelically least tiring way to make a made thing appear to possess that [brutalising] thing: Innate Quality.

Symmetry is facile. Symmetry is stultifying. Symmetry is the order of He Who Does Not Exist except as oppressive illusion with concrete social effects. “Imaginary garden, real toads” (M. Moore). Imaginary gods, real churches.

All that is known of He Who Does Not Exist is His odious Law, because that’s all He Who Does Not Exist is. The formal art law of He Who Does Not Exist is symmetry. He Who Does Not Exist is Law, symmetry is He Who Does Not Exist’s legal aesthetic form. So writers (too often) see stasis as balance, symmetry as stasis, balance as Quality.

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Quality is Our Prime Directive.

Hammering Home the Quality.

Here Be QUALITY.

Where Quality Counts.

Where Quality Can Be Counted.

Number #1 in Quality.

Quality is Never an Accident.

Quality is Our Recipe.

Great Leaders in Quality.

Our Commitment to Quality.

Lots of Qualities.

Mad Cow Disease —————→ My Beef with Quality.

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The crypto-artisanal concept of craft, as it's normally abused, bends attention to pseudo-materiality (or let's say "materialness") of language, for comparative valuation of imagined linguistic materials.

Language as a kind of Stuff from which to make a Thing. Vigorous verbs. Robust adjectives. Solid nouns. Greasy adverbs. Slithering participles. Feminizing semicolons. Fruitwood. Soapstone. Ebony. Agony. Chuck eye.

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*Craft*—the trope, I mean—damages brains with fumes of promise: total control of affective outcomes. Most dangerous and common side effect is mean-minded administrative hope of stable rhetorical functionality, a square-head cabinet dream of poetry as a made thing that can perform reperform reperform the (more or less) same emotional event at each reading.

What craft functions could these crafted objects have? An ornate brick for tossing through the window of the Gap? Smooth hammer for breaking the Olympic rings? A bookmark exclusively for use in copies of *No Logo*? Opening the cleansed cupboard doors of perception into the emotional pantry of the poetry-lover's heart?

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Excess of talent has ruined more writers than lack of. Glibness the worst. Facility the pits. Success death.

A musical analogy: "They were a passably mediocre band until they learned to play their instruments; then they became a force of evil." (See: *the u2 effect* a.k.a. *the red hot chilli peppers effect* a.k.a. *the rolling stones effect* a.k.a. *the aerosmith effect* a.k.a.)

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Avant-Garde®. Social movements retro-fitted as mere style. Hard-won techniques as neat-o discursive gadgets. Experimentalism as pop culture. Sound poetry as kitsch.



The Antonin Artaud Lookalike Contest Theatre of Wild Wicked Wacky Enthusiasm.

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*Killed by Description: a Narrative Poem.*

*Mergansers Waddle Down Just On Time: a Story Poem.*

*Lineated Fiction Screams POEM: a Narrative Story Poem.*

Narrative and story differ. But story and narrative are both forms of ideology, or, are ideological forms.

Narrative is the forward flow of time time time, the impossibility of repetition, which conditions any reading experience as narrative, even the repetition of a single word word word word.

Story is the *petit-rationaliste* cultural legacy of Disney World pseudo-intellectual narrative coherence, all elements newly remastered magic mechanically clicking together everything in place books all balanced profits soar.

Story is not narrative but a formal order to which writers are conscripted.

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*narrative as ideology.*

*story as ideology.*

story, by which I don't mean narrative, as a specific type of ideological structure.

Ideology is not a pejorative here, just a necessary brain and body social bond. The problem is that judged against novels every human life makes for a poorly-crafted novel, less than formally balanced less than beautiful less than coherent less than our business: Quality. If it weren't for the ideology of story, activists wouldn't burn out, artists despair, introspectors plunge. When will this episode end?

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There is a common error that often produces a model of the literary text as a kind of utterance. With this particular error, critics can find themselves again caught in fantasies of conscious intention and authentic speech that return the author to the position of supreme point-original and point-terminus of a text's true meaning. Literary works, in this mistake, then, can have only a very limited shelf-life; they lose "meaning," like freshness of bread, as time passes. Soon, they become inedible/illegible to any critical practice except a historicist one, caught on the eternal treadmill, always trying to recover a disappearing point of origin.

Meaning is not something that has to be constructed, discovered, uncovered, made, puzzled, determined, narrated, resuscitated etcetera—is *hetero*.

Meaning is irrepressible.

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*intentional fallacy.*

*affective fallacy.*

*integral fallacy.* The latter loosely defined in relation to the *argumentative fallacy*—which maintains that the poem should, and must, if the poet is doing his job, make instrumental sense, and that if the argument of the poem is foolish in any way the poem is foolery that would require an official Standards Waiver (stamped) to pass through the Gates of Excellence, *integral fallacy* is the critical error that the poem contains everything that is necessary to understand or to know the poem, which knows itself better than the reader can know it, and, further, that it is possible to isolate the poem and its constitutive elements from any context and spatialise then itemise its parts in working out the symbolic algebra of its meaning and the arithmetic of the poem's Quality, as in delicious

egg metaphor

times

three allusions to biblical narratives

divided by

an overall tone of leavened scepticism

*equals*

a poem of nascent & suppressed religious longing.

This is quite a distance from its creation its production its ingestion, from the hot zone of its contested reception, ignoring the well-known *known* that the poem is but a whole fragment never a whole *whole* of a particular social / cultural / biographical situation that the whole of the situation / context is never inferable from the poem's semiotic DNA.

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"...a successful [poem] would thus consist not of a succession of ideas or theses but would have the same kind of existence as an object of the senses or a thing in motion, which must be perceived in its temporal progression by embracing its particular rhythm and which leaves in the memory not a set of ideas but rather the emblem and monogram of those ideas." (M. Ponty)

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*At the Ranch of the Lonesome Reader.*

[Apologies first of all if any of this initially seems compatible with the phantasmic *free reader*, i.e. the essentially free subject who creatively re-creates the text at spelling bee in a totally private, agonistic bliss of voyage and recognition.]

From another premise, flirting with determinism, the aestheticistic mystical-esque reader who reinvents the text is not an individualised reader, not the free Liberal subject, even when / although something dialogically specific, something only that person can know, happens for that specific reader.

See? If that toxic secretion called soul is not purified or anodized by the beatific aesthetic object—like, say, a description of a *Grand Theft Auto: Miami* sunset—neither does the reader experience a moment of lonesome edifying autonomy.

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“Books are written by communities.” Misremembered adage became whole way of struggle for some. Books are not just enabled by, nurtured by, informed by, resisted by, but *written* by.

Individuality is not a complete fallacy. In some very limited ways individuality might be a substantially real possibility, perhaps. (Although, that’s not to say aloneness is real; the experience / feeling of aloneness is a prime constituent of individualist ideology.)

It is that for socialised humans, there is no solitude. Notwithstanding that I think we’re alone now, notwithstanding human children raised by paper snakes. Solitude is a cultural impossibility.

You are never (not) alone. Starting with the house of language you live in: the result of thousands of years of social processes, human thought; a *direct* connection with other people at all times.

Or literacy itself. Every book that touches your reading forms your writing. The archive is a literal human community.

This inky or pixelly community of kinships, antagonisms, sedimentations, permissions, poisons, balms, mice and dusts write *their* books through a *grammatical* (hands on the joystick) you.

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“Get rich or move to the suburbs.” (B. Rennie)

“Get profound or die trying” (USD \$0.50 Cent).

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*synthesis, poetry of.*

*exclusion, poetry of.*

*inclusion, poetry of.* Poetry which includes the discordant qualities and contents of experience and, even with great moments of *synthesis* on local levels (phrase; line; pixel; smirk) refuses to use the leukaemia box microwave of poetic imagination to resolve these discords into puddles of reflective orange unity.

Contrasts with *false synthesis*, or in other terms *poetry of proximity*, which appears to follow the non-hierarchical principles of the *poetry of inclusion* but in fact, merely places diverse items in proximity with each other, hoping that some synthesis (local or general) will occur in the mind of the poetry-lover.

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Three abnormative dictates.

*Poetry should always be ethically problematic. 3.*

*Poetry should never allow itself the aristocratic privilege of righteousness. 2.*

*Poetry should not feed readers it should make them know their privations. 1.*

Proprioceptively: bad aesthetic conscience and personification of a lexicon. Poems so culturally acidic everyone's critical vocabulary gets an ulcer.

[If you know a parable fable joke extended nonliterary remark about an indecisive person who starves to death before a menu, please insert it here.]



•

wit, *poetry of*. A poetry unblinded to multiplicity, undeaf to ideological contradiction, unwilling to say no to the impossible.

"I'm just a prole whose intentions are skewed

Oh Lord, please don't let me be understood." (E. Burdon)

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Exchange value = testable knowledge

Use value = untestable knowledge

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Reflexivity. Reflexive reading.

Content and form together are what is seen.

Apparatuses & senses converge to produce the eyes that see.

Readers experience the seeing and the seen as distinct, because readers cannot see their own eyes watching.

The goal is to learn the reflexive contortion of watching your own eyes see.

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*For poetry reimagined as social theory.*

*For reading reimagined as social practice.*

*For writing reimagined as social action.*