

# Preface

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Between Night and Nothingness:

Tribute to a Non-philosopher and few things in-between

For the two volumes of Mabini Review we are departing from the usual long preface that used to serve as a general preamble to individual essays and articles appearing in an issue. In these volumes, we are reserving a space to pay our tribute to a “man” who will continue to be an inspiration to us, he whose way of looking at things, his way with things, is rather left unexplored to some of his readers.

Alfredo O. Cuenca Jr., Palanca poet laureate, died of lung complications in 2013. He was 76. He left an intellectual and spiritual legacy to us (he was the most active of our editorial consultants) and to our small philosophical community in the Department<sup>1</sup> (or at least in the office of the *Institute for Cultural Studies* where he used to frequent during his spare time). Few months before he died, he had some big news about blackholes and “anti-matter,” interrupting office hours with his usually unkempt hair.

An avowed existentialist in the tradition of Sartre, Cuenca is also an enthusiastic reader of Hegel but whose idea that individual agents are instruments of the Absolute Spirit, living their lives at the behest of History, is for him an elitist philosophy. He cared to read Hegel though under his literary lenses, preferring to filter his philosophy through the works of Pynchon, Nabokov, Marquez; the poems of Rimbaud, Celan, Mallarme, Neruda, Lorca, the beat poets, and the modernism of William Carlos Williams who chose colloquial American English over his

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<sup>1</sup>The Department of Philosophy and Humanities, College of Arts and Letters, Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

contemporary's high intellectual style, T.S. Eliot; the essays of Emerson, Blanchot, and de Quincey, among others. He is also a reader, a near fanatic of Emile Cioran, the literary Nietzschean, perhaps, the only heir to Nietzsche's inimitable prose. Cuenca liked extracting the ecstatic and the erotic, the subliminal and the non-philosophical from, what else, the philosophic without compromising substance. Still for him substance is historical not ontological or metaphysical. Substances are made, not discovered. Hegel did not discover 'something' out there, independently of human dimension. What Hegel discovered is something Cuenca would choose to express in the fashion of Kierkegaard—subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is actuality.

This puts Cuenca truly in league with the poetic, in quest of never-ending virtuality, a nomad in the Deleuzian sense against the territorial dispensation of a philosophy the likes of which Hegel is the epitome. And yet, Cuenca's list of "literary musts" is far from the Deleuzian catalogue of authors who champion minoritarian literature (at least, Cuenca has Kafka on his list), but we can say he knew what the function of literature is—to "invent a people who are missing."<sup>2</sup> I am not sure he ever read Deleuze. But that is beside the point. He is a literary man through and through; a non-philosopher by vocation which gives him the advantage over "the philosopher" or someone pretending to be.

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Arguably, Cuenca was my first mentor in non-philosophy before I went to dabble in the non-philosophy of Francois Laruelle, Deleuze's difficult successor and a rival of Badiou.

In his last collaborative work with Felix Guattari (*What is Philosophy?*) Deleuze took notice of the

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<sup>2</sup>Deleuze (and Guattari) describe this people as "mass-people, world-people, brain-people, chaos-people" (See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], 218).

sophistication of Laruelle<sup>3</sup> who at that time was rather busy demolishing Deleuze himself.<sup>4</sup> After Deleuze, Laruelle shifted his focus on critiquing Derrida whose deconstruction claims that “there are effects of meta-language, but that this meta-language,” according to Laruelle, “is [simply a material] determined and transformed in-the-last-instance by . . . Man,”<sup>5</sup> and, of late, Badiou who by marrying philosophy and mathematics is able to seal the superiority of philosophy in relation to other regional disciplines, with mathematics providing philosophy the theory of the void, a legacy of Cantorian set theory, necessitating an interventionist kind of appropriation. What Badiou did to philosophy by way of set theory is just as fabulous as the creation of the world. The nomination of an infinite empty set that is not a member of any set, to the exclusion of all other sets, a process which begins the whole study of sets, is however by no means conceived mathematically, rather by an act similar to that which has turned the world into a fable. But no philosopher of the highest kind would ever admit of this magical resolution up on his sleeve.

Notwithstanding the disinterest of the dead, let us leave Cuenca for a while to elaborate on this curious thing called non-philosophy.

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Non-philosophy is arguably the most advanced philosophical theory today (a misnomer for the uninformed). Its roots are not entirely unfamiliar however to serious readers of philosophy, classical, modernist, and postmodernist, or any point in between. Since philosophy’s inception (we mean “in” the West), non-

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 220, n. 5.

<sup>4</sup>See Francois Laruelle, “I, the Philosopher, Am Lying”: Reply to Deleuze,” in *The Non-Philosophy Project*, trans. Gabriel Aikon and Boris Gunjevic (New York: Telos Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup>See Francois Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: Univocal Press, 2011), 55.

philosophy is already providing philosophy its essential background and context of determination.

Readers of philosophy are well familiar with philosophy's definition as "love of wisdom." It is against this background though that there is nothing more seriously damaging to philosophy (philosophy is through and through the opposite complement of what it has come to be recognized, yet even philosophy represses it; we will elaborate this in a little while) than the commonplace association of wisdom with reason.

Where wisdom is associated with truth, philosophy is defined as love of wisdom. Yet the wisdom of truth is unmistakable—the world is not constituted for truth, rather the reverse. Truth is constituted for the world; it lends "substance of reality or of the World" to the world.<sup>6</sup> Plato was aware of the pretensions of philosophy in this sense in that he had to keep his discovery of the Father and Maker of the Universe<sup>7</sup> to himself if not to the esoteric corners of the Academy. Modern non-philosophy however differs from Plato's or the Neoplatonist in the sense that "non-philosophy is the reduction of philosophy's pretensions with an eye to ensuring the practices' safeguarding against those pretensions."<sup>8</sup> In other words, non-philosophy is against the radicalization of philosophy such as Badiou's version of militancy.



For his part, Cuenca's non-philosophy is right at his fingertips, his literary works most notably *Ways to Become Christ and Other Poems*. A benign heresy, a collection of poems of becoming divine, becoming-god, becoming other than human, interlaced with a creeping nostalgia for lost love, Cuenca's *Ways to Become Christ* arguably finds its missing (formal) non-philosophical

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>7</sup>See Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Tradition* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

<sup>8</sup>Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 124.

complement in Francois Laruelle's *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, by far his most readable work.

For Cuenca, who has never read Laruelle, there can never be a true atheist or militant philosophy. Heresy is the highest achievement it could ever achieve. Any philosophy that claims atheism thus loses its fundamental precondition—namely, that philosophy can only produce conjectures, objective hallucinations, if you will, masquerading as ontological materials for thought, and that instead of determining reality is unilateralized by it. But if reality is also a conjecture, are we not falling back on Hegel's absolute idealism? Let us interrupt Cuenca's limelight again.

Indeed, reality is a conjecture but it also has in itself a distinctive decisional property. In the same manner, all philosophies are decisional in the sense that they produce difference which is relational, such as the relation between X and Y. All hitherto existing philosophies have never thought it possible that X and Y can ever exist in a non-relation precisely because philosophy in general "consists in an interpretative practice of thought that already presupposes reciprocity. . . between thought and the real."<sup>9</sup> What founds the relation between X (thought) and Y (the real) is nothing less than a decision which produces difference (X and Y). The decision is itself the origin of the relation.

This is not to say *a la* Fichte (in the background of German Idealism) that reality is a mere self-positing activity. It is helpful to cite here Laruelle's own observations on Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics:

To abandon the end of philosophy to metaphysics alone, to repeat the gesture of self-positing in a nihilist mode and turn it into a gesture of self-repudiation is to fail to see that this end still harbours a sense for the last-instance-for man-in-man—but this is precisely a non-philosophical or

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<sup>9</sup>Francois Laruelle, "What Can Non-Philosophy Do?", *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 8, no. 2 (2012): 170.

other than. . .[sic]philosophical sense. With the end of philosophy it becomes easier to see the extent to which philosophy exerts its “grip” on the radical human subject.<sup>10</sup>

In more contemporary terms, this decisionality of philosophy reaches its zenith in Badiou’s theory of the event.<sup>11</sup> We are not at liberty to discuss the full extent of this aspect between Laruelle and Badiou, but suffice it to say that philosophy, as it is conceived in militant terms, is generally oblivious of its hallucinatory character. Yet this forgetfulness is a decision that eventuates philosophy itself. One can immediately notice here the marked difference with Heidegger—forgetfulness is a conscious act of forgetting, a decisional appropriation of the originary Event that throws Dasein into the world, first without vision or speech. What we are not allowed to suspect here is that philosophy can become the greatest enemy of historical memory.

Remarkably, teachers of philosophy tend to forget that teaching the discipline requires a serious knowledge of the non-philosophical genealogy of its practice. Nonetheless, the true non-philosophical structure of philosophy can never give license to incompetence in terms of invoking the right of non-philosophy treated in the most vulgar sense, *the right of someone who does not know philosophy*, a scammer of Napoles type, *to teach philosophy* in the classroom. Mind you, scammers garner the highest appreciation rating from their audience in the same manner showbiz politicians get themselves elected in the Senate.

And where memories are repressed, “a people” is made to bear the whole weight of history such as generative of incompetence which is generative of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>11</sup>A voluntarist theory in the sense that philosophy bases its decisions after its own declarations. See Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy*, trans. Robin Mackay (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 38.

injustice, itself productive of ignorance, and of the highest type—that which sustains the most uncaring kind of administration; in Laruelle’s words: “The crime of crime.”<sup>12</sup>

This crime is the very crime of philosophy. If today’s emphasis on philosophical teaching has focused on ethics, this only goes to show that philosophy’s crime has triumphed over the sciences (with their emphasis on epistemology), its greatest rivals to decisionality. Recall here Badiou’s subsumption of regional sciences under the suturing power of philosophy whose radical expression is the ethicality of the philosophical decision, where ethics retains its Kantian voluntarist flavour in which everything is subordinated to freedom or practical reason,<sup>13</sup> to extract a historical value from, say, science, politics, art and love, the four conditions of truth. Philosophy then becomes *de facto* above if not supreme to all conditions of truth.<sup>14</sup>

The difference between philosophy and science lies on the scope of decisionality: scientific decisionality is regional (epistemic) compared to the universal (ethicality) of the philosophical decision. It is understandable however if non-philosophy would first side with the sciences,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Francois Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (London: Continuum, 2010), 74.

<sup>13</sup>See Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 266.

<sup>14</sup>See Justin Clemens, “The Conditions,” in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, ed. A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 25-37.

<sup>15</sup>The sciences are basically non-philosophical and yet unaware of the decisionality that constitute their discipline, making them in form also philosophical. In fact, when science starts to believe in the reality of its findings as independently real, there it shares the decisionality of the philosophical in the sense that it believes in the hallucinations that shapes its findings as objectively real. What we are not allowed to suspect here is that the objectively real is real only from the standpoint of being unilateralized by reality whose nature is always foreclosed to thought. For a short but substantial exposition of the transition of Laruelle’s thought, see Anthony Paul Smith, “The Philosopher

talking here of *science as a distinct development of non-philosophy*, except that even the sciences have to be reduced to their ultimate determining instances, to their most objective hallucinatory contents, to their unilateralized status as knowledge – unilateralized by the One.<sup>16</sup>

The One (which is reality under a universal name) is a conjecture, something that is always returned to man (who is always the victim of an apprehensional process) vis-a-vis the Real, if you will, whose essence is that it has no essence. Let us imagine the One as God or Christ. As Laruelle begins in *Future Christ* –

What illusion or what ruse . . . Is this not the “Why” of the victim which, already being the response, expects nothing to come from its desperate question, questions that are infantile in the measure of that expectation. “What is philosophy?”, “What is the World?”, or even “What is Christianity?” are among the most infantile and the most clever (sic) as they create hope for a promise to come instead of making the declaration, in-the-last-response, Man-as-Future-Christ.<sup>17</sup>

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and the Heretic: Translator’s Introduction,” in Francois Laruelle, *Future Christ*, xi-xxv.

<sup>16</sup>“The One, a name taken from philosophy but ultimately forgotten by it in favour of Being and Alterity, becomes a privileged name for the Real in non-philosophy because it is beyond Being and Alterity. It refuses to split and is at the root of other words . . . Keep in mind in French the One is *l’Un* and that this definite *Un* is the indefinite article of those other words that bear witness to the radical immanence of the lived, meaning here the “lived-without-life” or the actuality of the lived without the transcendental guarantee of life” (Anthony Paul Smith, “Thinking From the One: Science and the Ancient Philosophical Figure of the One,” in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012], 25-26).

<sup>17</sup>Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 1.



A reader of Cuenca's collection plucks a similar tone in *Ways to Become Christ*:

Cuenca's Christ . . . speaks with the voice of the *alter christus*, the Christ with a small "c" that is present in every human being, that is every human being. This is the Christ in the act of becoming, in the process of evolving into the Christus with a capital C, into the Christos of the universe.<sup>18</sup>

In his own words, Cuenca surprises us with by far his most non-philosophical words. In his poem *Christ to Magdalene, I*, he names God as a stolen property, that which by virtue of its partaking in a crime cannot be offered as a gift:

I cannot bind you to wounds,  
Nor seal you to my truths;  
I cannot give you what men call love,  
And each man far more worthy of you.

It is nothing, it is not even a gift.  
It is a name, a name I have stolen from the gods:  
It is the name of God.<sup>19</sup>

God as a non-gift: this is Cuenca's heresy, antidote to amnesia.

In *Future Christ*, Laruelle defines heresy as "Man defined as a victim."<sup>20</sup> Yet the victim is "the true cause which determines the real content of investigation and

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<sup>18</sup>Leonida Benesa, "Introduction," in Cuenca, *Ways to Become Christ and Other Poems*. Illustration by Alejandro Hufana (Manila: Unknown Publisher, 1973), 8.

<sup>19</sup>Cuenca, "Christ to Magdalene, I," in *Ways to Become Christ*, 42.

<sup>20</sup>Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 74.

instruction.”<sup>21</sup> In Cuenca, the heretic is Christ. In Laruelle, Christ is the Man in-the-last-response, the “unredeemed who determines in-the-last-identity a non-Christian ... treatment of philosophy.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, philosophy has consistently evaded the question ‘what is Man?’, this last-instancing, in favor of electing the transcendent, thereby concealing a grave responsibility no transcendent could own up to.

A non-Christian or totally immanent treatment of philosophy can reveal, among others, how philosophy has ignored the past, if it has not reduced it yet to an anthropological faculty as “[a function] of worldly time.”<sup>23</sup> We can refer once again to the questionable integrity of a practice of philosophy (teaching philosophy should be a practice of philosophy), or that which has come down to the classroom of *today* (worldly time), vulgarized by scamming types *a la* Napoles, those who justify a validity claim to a philosophy subject with scarcely a knowledge of its non-philosophical genealogy. With history at his disposal, a wordly time whose essence a businessman can grasp, a scammer teaches philosophy without fear of disciplinal interruption; he who determines the “real content of investigation and instruction” by vulgarizing Man in-the-last-instance as his own instance; who scams because he knows people are oblivious of history, oblivious of Man, thus totally awake to the transcendent that alone should bear the responsibility, the mother of all scams; he who has learned that “everything is philosophizable”<sup>24</sup> in the sense that everything about responsibility can be concealed or better yet transferred to the transcendent.

But scammers can also come from philosophy’s own ranks and there are too many of them. Philosophers themselves are to blame for the popular ignorance of philosophy’s own non-philosophical genealogy. Laruelle

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>24</sup> In Anthony Paul Smith (trans.), “The Philosopher and the Heretic,” in *Future Christ*, xiii.

observes: "A genesis of philosophy is impossible as long as the starting point is still philosophical...as long as philosophy still has the pretention to effectively encompass [*englober*] all other practices without remainder."<sup>25</sup> If teaching philosophy today has nothing to say about the genealogy of its discipline, how its objective hallucinations constitute the decisional structure of philosophy, of the true non-relation between "thought and real," a correlation whose reciprocity is assumed rather than discovered, and how this very structure has come to be understood as that which constitutes the Real (the "real" that admits of no "remainder"), no wonder everyone can become philosophers. Or, as Laruelle would put it, everything becomes philosophizable. And so, a scammer when caught, or the executioner brought to trial, cries foul when justice is meted to him or her. *Why only me?* (Napoles complains when arrested). *Is it a crime to follow orders?* (Eichmann defending his actions in Auschwitz).

Cuenca has an odd description of this philosophizability in his short poem "To Please the Critics": "*Beholding myself in the mirror/ I saw faintly outlined/ ... sudden flash of a brilliant meteor/ Dazzle the firmament.*"<sup>26</sup>

*Continued in next volume.*

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<sup>25</sup>Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 123,

<sup>26</sup>Alfredo O. Cuenca, Jr., "To Please the Critics," in *Collected Prose and Poetical Works* (Manila: 1993).