

Lemon Hound: On Reviewing: Jennifer Scappettone
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LH: What do you think the purpose of a review is? If you also write about books on a blog, why? What does blogging let you do differently?

In the utopian sense, the purpose is to engage in a more profound dialogue with another writer than can be had in pre- and post-reading moments, across distance and time. In the more mundane sense, the purpose of reviewing is simply to get the word out to reader/viewers overtaxed by stimulation of readerly and non-readerly species. I don't blog because I operate under different time parameters, and find that the injunction toward immediate response and the archive of coterie implicit in the blog tempo often encourages a certain provincialism of both temporal/historical and geographical/social range. At the same time, I'm grateful to those and other online forums for allowing a more fluid conversation to take place on the heels of publication and performance, one hampered or stopped up altogether by bound media.

LH: If you write reviews, how would you describe your approach, or method? Do you offer or engage in exegesis, theoretical, academic, reader response, close, contextual or evaluative readings? If you don't write but read reviews, what aspects of reviewing do you notice?

I think of reviews as essays, whether book-length or microscopic. The word "review" implies a certain audience, a certain market, a certain order of flattery resisted by a lot of the writing that interests me. For occasional work of this order I don't have a prefab method; the material itself determines approach and form, as I attempt in composition to suss out what context, what language of exegesis the work asks for. I don't regard the different approaches listed here as disparate from one another (except the "academic," which I associate with a scholarly apparatus of citation and a sifting, stalling structure of peer review that, for all its merits, tends to hinder distribution and paralyze response).

LH: When you review, do you focus on a particular text (poem, story), the book at hand, the author's body of work? Do you think this choice of focus influences criticism, or your own criticism, and if so, how?

I zoom in and out. My best thoughts arise in states of unfocus, or focus on something utterly unlike (running, chopping, riding a subway), then migrate to unexpected contexts. It would be interesting to do a publication that "reviewed" single lines or sentences.

LH: If you also write non-critical work, how different is the way you approach reviewing or critical writing to the way you approach your own "creative" writing?

The broad curiosities are the same and so is my expectation of surprise in the language produced. "Critical" writing is a site in which I force myself to explore what enthralls or disgusts me for reasons I cannot immediately name or identify, reasons that seem to

strike at the core of a broader trend or situation. “Creative” writing allows me to test hypotheses and answer to problems I cannot solve discursively, to give them a more concrete form by means of the physical manipulation of sound, linguistic history, rhetoric, etc. While I can’t imagine *not* working in both modalities, as otherwise I feel I’d become smug, they are at odds, and oscillation is a continual struggle.

LH: Have you been in a position where you have had to write about a book that you don’t care for, or a book that is coming out of a tradition that you are perhaps opposed to, or resistant to on some level? How do you handle such events? Or how have you noticed others handle these events?

I’ve never “had” to write about a book/tradition I don’t care for; I have chosen to. It is my sense that this should happen much more often. I’m not looking for negative reviews, but for those writing on others and those reading themselves through the words of others to engage more generously with the unordained.

LH: What is the last piece of writing that convinced you to a/ reconsider an author or book you thought you had figured out, or had a final opinion on or b/ made you want to buy the book under review immediately?

Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Post-Impressionism); John Cage, *Lecture on the Weather* (Thoreau); Daniel Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics* (Shakespeare).

LH: Is there a quality you are looking for in a review that you haven’t found?

Passional disinterestedness & its inverse (“It is difficult to be interested as you know”—Gertrude Stein). Research whose range and humor matches that of the original work. Wildness of lexicon, of syntax, of association.

Ongoing examples of what I am looking for: *ON Contemporary Practice*; *Wild Orchids: A Journal of Devotional Criticism*.

One-off, massive examples of what I am looking for: T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death*; Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* and *If Not, Winter*; Leslie Scalapino, *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*; & etc.

LH: Critical work is increasingly unpaid work; will you continue to do this work despite the trend? Do you see this trend reversing, or changing course?

Yes. Not in it for the money. No. Though the embattled relation of literature to the academy in the U.S. complicates “payment.”

LH: What do you hope to achieve by writing about writing? Do you believe that reviews can actually bring new readers to texts?

I hope to honor marginalized or invisible intellectual and aesthetic labor, attract stranger to stranger, & burn through prior horizons of the possible. Yes.

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