

# Curiosity

ALBERTO MANGUEL

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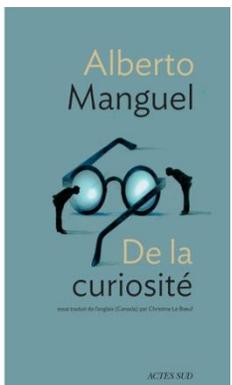
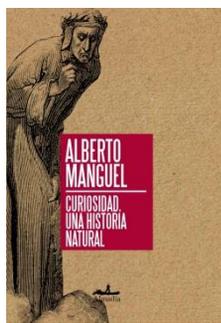
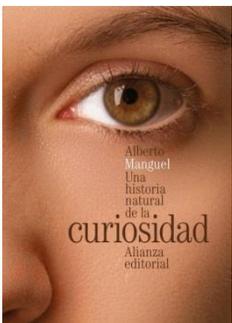
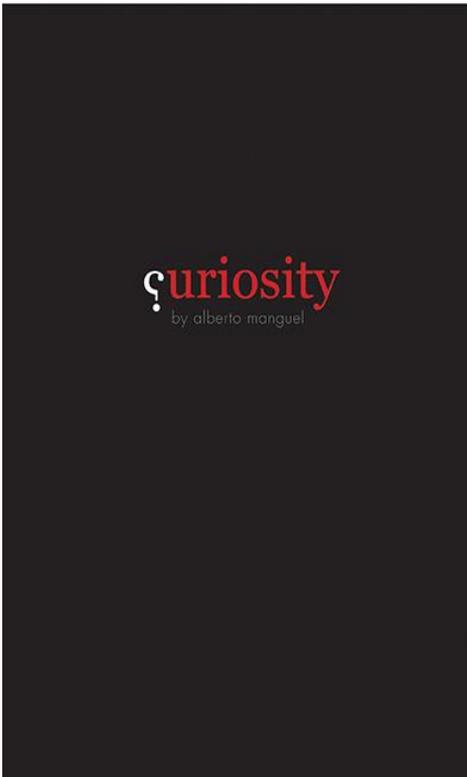
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## Praise for *CURIOSITY* by ALBERTO MANGUEL

"How wonderfully appropriate that the endlessly inquisitive Alberto Manguel should consider the fascinating concept of curiosity. Fueled by a lifetime of reading, and with Dante as his guide, he embarks on an elegantly conceived excursion of the mind, driven by a single, timeless word – why?" - **NICHOLAS A. BASBANES, AUTHOR OF *ON PAPER AND A GENTLE MADNESS***

"Manguel travels through books in the same way as he travels through various countries. He meets new friends and asks questions of them about himself, and about life. In a style which is all his own, he delights us with the unlimited bounds of human curiosity" - **LINA BOLZONI, SCUOLA NORMALE SUPERIORE, PISA**

"Alberto Manguel is a wanderer among books, immensely curious in such an intriguing way that he lets his readers easily discover the fruits of his curiosity." - **ROBERTO CALASSO**

"Manguel vaults over the traditional fences of genre, literary history, and discipline with breathtaking virtuosity. He is the Montaigne de nos jours and, as regards this latest effort, if they put another rover on Mars they should call it 'Manguel'." - **JOHN SUTHERLAND, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

"For Alberto Manguel reading is a pilgrimage, a secular-sacred encounter with mystery, and a way of reinvigorating the dead. Dante and Montaigne and Pinocchio's Collodi are his guides and his intimates in this passionate quest for knowledge, but it is the state of inquiry itself and even doubt that define for him the pleasures of curiosity. With his loving, keenly felt, highly enjoyable delving into writers and their writings, Manguel argues for literature's revelatory illusions, its epiphanies and its testimony." - **MARINA WARNER, AUTHOR OF *STRANGER MAGIC: CHARMED STATES THE ARABIAN NIGHTS***

"This is a dynamic, lively book that leads the reader to appreciate the pleasures and the power of curiosity. In writing its remarkable history Alberto Manguel sees it both as a primary passion and as a force behind all intellectual experiences. In a sort of encyclopedic narrative Manguel journeys over the most distant places-- from Dante's Florence to Rome, Jerusalem, Athens, and Latin America etc. and he invites us to a grand tour of wonders and surprises." - **GIUSEPPE MAZZOTTA, YALE UNIVERSITY**

"Certain books are so absorbing, and so wide-ranging, that even the index at the back becomes entertaining. Curiosity (Yale University Press), a new work by Alberto Manguel, falls in that category." —**ROBERT FULFORD, NATIONAL POST**

“Elegant and erudite, his book is a celebration of critical reading—a challenging, enjoyable and essential craft that is in danger these days of becoming a lost art.” **GLENN ALTSCHULER, *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY***

“A profound, insightful look into the human proclivity for questions, through literature.”—**NOAH CRUICKSHANK, *SHELF AWARENESS FOR READERS***

“Reading Mr. Manguel is like taking a city walk or an unhurried meal with an erudite, cosmopolitan friend... Few cultures or historical periods are closed to him. He hops knowledgeably and divertingly from topic to topic. Yet he never strays far from his true interest, reading itself.— **THE ECONOMIST**

“*Curiosity* is a book about the Talmud and the Mars rover, sophistry and knot-languages, David Hume and reading machines, Zoroaster and Pinocchio — and, periodically, curiosity and Dante. [Manguel] embraces the character of his own thinking — miscellaneous, excursive, fragmentary. . . . Closing the last page of this book, I wondered if perhaps Manguel intended to demonstrate curiosity in the behavior of his prose more than to discuss it. In many ways the book ought to be approached as a charming portrait of the curious man.”—**ROBERT MINTO, *OPEN LETTERS MONTHLY***

“[Manguel’s] ‘writing with what others have written,’ his insistence on being called a reader rather than a critic or an editor, is a noble stance, and he has been faithful to it. May he and his library long flourish.”—**PHILIP MARCHAND, *NATIONAL POST***

“An eloquent blend of philosophical review, literary audit and memoir. . . . There are plenty of intriguing images and illustrations embedded within the text that help to place us in an earlier time, but a reader’s experience with language can also be constructively reset with the help of Manguel. . . . Reading Manguel’s book is a pleasing reminder that time, as much as anything, changes our relationship with art, ideas, but also with language itself.”—**IAIN REID, *TORONTO GLOBE & MAIL***

# CURIOSITY

[Alberto Manguel](#)

NON FICTION. YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015.

382 PAGES.

Curiosity has been seen through the ages as the impulse that drives our knowledge forward and the temptation that leads us toward dangerous and forbidden waters. The question “Why?” has appeared under a multiplicity of guises and in vastly different contexts throughout the chapters of human history. Why does evil exist? What is beauty? How does language inform us? What defines our identity? What is our responsibility to the world? In Alberto Manguel’s most personal book to date, the author tracks his own life of curiosity through the reading that has mapped his way.

Manguel chooses as his guides a selection of writers who sparked his imagination. He dedicates each chapter to a single thinker, scientist, artist, or other figure who demonstrated in a fresh way how to ask “Why?” Leading us through a full gallery of inquisitives, among them Thomas Aquinas, David Hume, Lewis Carroll, Rachel Carson, Socrates, and, most importantly, Dante, Manguel affirms how deeply connected our curiosity is to the readings that most astonish us, and how essential to the soaring of our own imaginations.

# Dante's Dog by Alberto Manguel on the NYR Blog

Adapted from a chapter of Alberto Manguel's *Curiosity*

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## Dante's Dogs

Alberto Manguel



*Tate, London*

*William Blake: Cerberus; from his illustrations to Dante's Divine Comedy, 1824-1827*

Of all the insults and derogatory comparisons Dante uses in the *Commedia* on both lost souls and evil demons, one recurs throughout. The wrathful, according to Virgil, are all “dogs.” From then on, in his travel notes through the kingdom of the dead, Dante echoes his master’s ancient vocabulary. Thus, Dante tells us that the wasteful in the seventh circle are pursued by “famished and fast black bitches”; the burning usurers running under the rain of fire behave “like dogs who in the summer fight off fleas and flies with their paws and maw”; a demon who pursues a barrater is like “a mastiff let loose,” and other demons are like “dogs hunting a poor beggar” and crueler than “the dog with the hare it has caught.” Hecuba’s cry of pain is demeaned as a bark “just like a dog”; Dante apprehends the “doglike faces” of the traitors trapped in the ice of Caïna, the unrepentant Bocca “barking” like a tortured dog, and Count Ugolino gnawing at the skull of Cardinal Ruggiero “with his teeth,/which as a dog’s were strong against the bone.”

Angry, greedy, savage, mad, cruel: these are the qualities that Dante seems to see in dogs and applies to the inhabitants of Hell. To call a person a “dog” is a common and uninspired insult in almost every language, including, of course, the Italian spoken in Dante’s thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscany. But mere commonplaces are absent in Dante: when he uses an ordinary expression, it no longer reads as ordinary. The dogs in the *Commedia* carry connotations other than the merely insulting, but overriding them all is the suggestion of something infamous and despicable. This relentlessness demands a question.

In Dante’s time, life in most Tuscan households continued to be relatively simple and informal. Depictions of interiors in Florence, Siena, and other Tuscan cities in the thirteenth century show sparsely furnished rooms, sometimes decorated with a few tapestries and trompe-l’oeil paintings, often with colorful vases full of flowers. Pets were common. Birds hung in cages by the window, as shown in frescoes by Masaccio and Lorenzetti. Cats snuggled up by the fireplace in the bedroom. (The Florentine

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<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/mar/10/dantes-dogs/>

## **Kirkus Review**

**January 4th, 2015**

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“An erudite analysis and exploration of curiosity through the author’s own works and those countless others.”

### **KIRKUS REVIEW**

An erudite analysis and exploration of curiosity through the author’s own works and those of countless others.

Manguel (*A Reader on Reading*, 2010, etc.), an Argentina-born Canadian essayist, translator, critic and editor, tackles a variety of difficult questions: Who am I? What is language? Where is our place? How are we different? Why do things happen? What can we possess? What comes next? In each of his 17 chapters, the author focuses on a different question posed by a curious mind, and each begins with a brief and sometimes-poignant anecdote from the author’s youth. Chief among the curious minds that fascinate Manguel is that of Dante, whose quest in *The Divine Comedy* is spiritual and who serves here as the author’s constant companion. It is worth noting that one of the book’s charms is the presence of numerous unusual illustrations, including many woodcuts from a 15th-century edition of Dante’s work. Among the fictional or mythical characters that readers meet on this journey through the history of mankind are Eve, Pandora, Ulysses and Ebenezer Scrooge, as well as a host of real scholars, religious figures, authors, poets, artists, philosophers and even economists. Human beings are, Manguel notes, self-conscious animals, capable of experiencing the world by asking questions and putting our curiosity into words, then turning those words into stories that lead to further questions. A fair sample can be found here. The author’s personal library is said to contain more than 30,000 volumes, and the wealth of references in this book demonstrates that he is indeed a voracious reader.

For casual readers, the brief personal passages may provide welcome pauses in what is a highly literate and demanding text perhaps best appreciated by followers of Manguel’s previous works.

**Cruzada para salvar la curiosidad**  
Winston Manrique Sabogal  
*El País*

“Pocos libros ofrecen tantas lecturas, a partir de su estructura, como el nuevo de Alberto Manguel: *Una historia natural de la curiosidad*.”

April 13th, 2015

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## Cruzada para salvar la curiosidad

• Alberto Manguel reflexiona en su nuevo libro sobre “el motor de nuestra existencia”

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El escritor Alberto Manguel, a su paso por Madrid. / ALVARO GARCIA (EL PAÍS)

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La curiosidad, “motor de nuestras vidas”, ha entrado en el ocaso. Pocos libros ofrecen tantas lecturas, a partir de su estructura, como el nuevo de Alberto Manguel: *Una historia natural de la curiosidad* (Alianza). Es un homenaje y objeto de 17 capítulos-preguntas con seis lecturas paralelas: 1, un asomo al mundo de Dante; 2, relatos de

Libros

# 'Quienes se contentan con las respuestas son los muertos'

□ Alberto Manguel reivindica la interrogación perpetua como motor humano en su nuevo trabajo, 'Una historia natural de la curiosidad'



“Interrogación y diálogo, dos ingredientes con los que el argentino canadiense Alberto Manguel ha fraguado una pequeña maravilla.”

***“Quienes se contentan con las respuestas son los muertos”***

**Matías Néspolo**  
***El Mundo***

March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015

[Hyperlink](#)

## In praise of serious noticing

Laurence Scott

Financial Times

May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015

[Hyperlink](#)

“*Curiosity* is animated by the sheer vigour of Manguel’s range. The work flexes with quotations and digressions that on occasion are electrifying.”

May 15, 2015 6:02 pm

# In praise of serious noticing

Review by Laurence Scott



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## Two leading critics celebrate the intersections between literature and life

**C**uriosity, by Alberto Manguel, *Yale University Press*, RRP£18.99/\$30, 392 pages

**The Nearest Thing to Life**, by James Wood, *Jonathan Cape*, RRP £12.99/Brandeis \$19.95, 144 pages



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A priest once told Alberto Manguel that a hive of bees must be informed when their keeper dies. Ever since, Manguel admits, “I’ve wished that when I die someone will do the same for me, and tell my books that I will not come back.” At the opposite end of a bibliophile’s life-cycle is the critic James Wood’s recollection of his adolescent self smuggling a fresh haul of classics, with all their scandalous, blasphemous liberties, past his devout parents, “these paperbacks glowing, irradiated by the energy of their compressed contents, seething like porn”.

If not death and sex, then death and the triumph over death are central to the two writers’ latest collections. Manguel’s *Curiosity* is a wide-ranging work of literary