



Maldoror and the Complete Works

Comte de Lautréamont , Alexis Lykiard (Translator)

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Andre Breton described *Maldoror* as -the expression of a revelation so complete it seems to exceed human potential.- Little is known about its pseudonymous author, aside from his real name (Isidore Ducasse), birth in Uruguay (1846) and early death in Paris (1870). Lautreamont bewildered his contemporaries, but the Surrealists modeled their efforts after his black humor and poetic leaps of logic, exemplified by the oft-quoted line, -As beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.- *Maldoror* 's shocked first publisher refused to bind the sheets of the original edition--and perhaps no better invitation exists to this book, which warns the reader, -Only the few may relish this bitter fruit without danger.- This is the only complete annotated collection of Lautreamont's writings available in English, in Alexis Lykiard's superior translation. For this latest edition, Lykiard updates his introduction to include recent scholarship.

Maldoror and the Complete Works Details

Date : Published April 30th 2010 by Exact Change (first published 1869)

ISBN : 9781878972125

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Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Poetry, Fiction, Cultural, France, Classics, Literature, European Literature, French Literature

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From Reader Review Maldoror and the Complete Works for online ebook

Liam says

Isidore throughout his Maldoror seemed to be ever trying to convince me as a reader by his narrative commentary as to why I should continue to do so read [extolling his intelligence, wit, ingenuity over most other artistic contemporaries], while not providing any substance except endless speculation over trivialities and obsession with all manner of creatures: sphinxes, seagulls, hyenas, toads, snakes, flamingos, sharks, crabs, snails, bulldogs. The so-called dark/Gothic sections involve dismemberment of limbs, tearing out of eyes, sucking of blood, satin brow, stamping creature into ground by foot, flaying of skin or removal of organs- constantly repeated throughout; one is left thinking Isidore created successive drafts of the same interaction/fight between two creatures with diminutive distinction:

all involve Maldoror being viewed/viewing another stationary under a natural object, or in desperate movement (shipwreck, contest). He then communicates with the object/muses to himself regarding the transitive occurrence within his hierarchical subsumed cogitation; by: (1) asks how it came to be beside him, (2) exalting its presence as a form of nature, (3) ask questions, (4) condemn object for not answering questions, (5) create imagined answers the object could hypothetically give and condemn again, (5) kill object by mentioned above/wish it dead/object disappears/runs from object.

You will be treated to excessive formulations of concepts (wouldn't be condemnatory if they were interesting) as the following *"Two pillars, that it was not difficult, and still less impossible, to take for baobab trees, were to be seen in the valley, taller than two pins. Actually they were two enormous towers. And although at first glance two baobabs do not resemble two pins, nor even two towers, nevertheless, while cleverly pulling the strings of prudence one can affirm without fear of error (for if this affirmation were accompanied by a single iota of fear it would no longer be an affirmation; although the same name expresses these two phenomena of the spirit which present characteristics distinct enough not to be lightly confused) that a baobab is not so different from a pillar as to prohibit comparison between these architectural forms...or both...or neither...or rather, raised and massive forms. I have just found-I don't even claim the contrary-the proper adjectives for the nouns pillar and baobab: let it be known that it is without joy mingled with pride that I address the remark to those who, after waking again, have taken the very commendable resolution to scan these pages while the candle burns-if it be night, or while the sun shines-if day..."(133)*. He goes on to alleviate growing impatience with further pointless prolix *"If the reader finds this sentence too long, I trust he will accept my apologies; but let him expect no servilities from me. I can acknowledge my faults, but not make them graver by my baseness. My reasonings will sometimes clash head on with the jester's bells of folly and the serious appearance of which is, in short, merely grotesque (although according to certain philosophers it is quite difficult to distinguish the jester from the melancholic, life itself being a comic drama or dramatic comedy); however everyone is allowed to kill flies and even rhinoceroses in order to rest occasionally from over-arduous work. Here is the most expeditious, though not the best, way to kill flies: one crushes them between thumb and forefinger. Most writers who have treated this subject thoroughly have calculated with great pleasurable that in a number of cases it is preferable to cut off their heads. Should anyone reproach me for speaking of a radically frivolous subject such as pins, let him note without prejudice that the greatest effects have often been produced by the smallest of causes. And so as not to deviate still further from the framework of this piece of paper, is it not evident that this laboured piece of literature I am bent on composing since the start of this stanza..."(134)*

Et cetera, et cetera. **His phrasing is such as this constantly, and while I have no disquiet to form nor length, nothing of great erudition is said nor phrased in interesting syntax, nor intellectually stimulating, genuinely entertaining or insightful [in contradiction to his parallel to butterfly effect, his thoughts into minuscule matters are not pertinent to any great effects]. One should acknowledge what**

he himself states on the next page 'I invent nothing' (135); and refrain from reading further. That Isidore manifests pedophilic impulses (173-176) "let him who burns with ardour to share my bed come to find me... he must not be more than fifteen"(174); should confirm that one should not read, or at least oppose, his treatise; despite failed sardonic irony "what matters above all is to have right ideas on the bases of morality"(177). However, Canto Six is a redeemable quality of the composition "the clarion of victory has more than once sounded from my lipless mouth"(204), which could be read alone.

His Poesies consisted of either truisms/tautologies, irrelevant statements except to one of his peculiar taste, while speaking over universal terms (truth, falsity, beauty, love, reason, virtue, order, disorder, vice, virtue) while elaborating no actualized definitions to how he views the terms; nor any context to the assertions made in relevance to them; which is required if he wishes these thoughts to have any validity within his philosophical form. I have found that works portraying themselves with maxims directed to episteme regarding worldly life/action, esoteric or the supraordinate principle as considered in high regard, I think fallaciously as the maxims/aphorisms practiced usually deliberately contradict, deceive, mask or fail to mention foundational premises for the core thought expanded, nor does the corpus inform the sub-premises with enough relational erudition between conflicting advisories-making one think they exploit a readers need to 'identify' with aforesaid; if a concept and its negation are both pronounced one will be regarded as 'true' and other forgotten by the reader.

Consists of naive and contradictory notions such as "*man is a subject devoid of fallacies*"(244), "*no reasoner believes contrary to his reason*"(239, one can have two contradictory positions simultaneously; as relevant to his upholding of a transcendent "Elohim" in Poesies, the absolute/Godhead principle whom he vehemently scorns in Maldoror, while praising 'him' in Poesies- either Isidore is not applying reason in his formulations of an absolute, -by violating Aristotelian non-contradiction which he declares he follows within the Poesies itself "*Contradiction is the sign of falsity. Noncontradiction is the sign of certitude*"(244)- or he is demonstrating falsity, which hence shouldn't be regarded as relevant to contemplate.

I think his Poeses is underlyingly ironic, as if he himself didn't believe his writing, and was holding the reader in contempt - or sometimes with maxim-like works, declaring a negation so one knows the stated incorrectness so to think the truth on his own. **It leads one to argue, why was he so inconsistent in theory between Maldoror and Poesies, why does he not elaborate upon maxims [which in contrary to his assertion that such is all required for truth, they lose any meaning if universal terms are utilized without any concretization to the precepts].**

One of the books which I will follow Hume's adage "*Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.*"

Laura says

Free download in French available at Project Gutenberg.

Roewoof says

There's a certain way to approach this book.

If you try to read it like a normal book, like a regular piece of prose, you'll have to get out a notebook, and then reread the same paragraphs over and over again. It took me a long time to get through this work, because of the nature in which this was written.

This book is extremely beautiful, and very well crafted. However, when you read it, you need to look at it like you would a piece of abstract art. See the whole picture first, then look closer, move away and look at it from far away again, move closer and begin to inspect the smaller working parts.

Looking at abstract art is a lot like meditation for me, which is what this piece felt like. I had to let go of my preconceived notions as a reader. Often you go into a book, trying to guess ahead what will happen, what it all means. I tend to do this a lot, and because of that, I had to work slower towards it's completion.

If like me, you MUST find meaning in things, then this will be slow progress for you as it was for me. And one reading is nowhere near enough. I will be reading this book for a long time. Just as I would meditate on a painting.

Parts of this book are revolting to look at. Horrifying even. I felt like it was staining my soul as I read it, but the narrator warns us of this before we even begin. It's one of the reasons that I see genius running through this piece.

It reminds me of House of Leaves in the sense that it's construction is very much psychological, and a lot of careful thought went into how things were placed in this book.

Highly recommended, but not an easy, quick, or happy read.

Cymru Roberts says

The Count wrote this despicable (and I mean that as a compliment) poetic novel when he was 22 and it shows. It burns with the passion of someone who still believes in absolutes, believes he is cursed forever, has given up trying to reclaim what is already lost (innocence, faith), renounces the world and refuses to repent. In this sense it is both a nice reminder and a grim memory of that turbulent time in life.

Many of the sections read like black metal lyrics, which is cool, but also means they are way over the top. He makes his points early (some good, some debatable or forgettable) and drives them home with blow after blow of vivid misanthropy. This isn't light reading and it isn't accessible. Granted, some sections floored me with their awesomeness, but all in all many were too long and at their worst, even emo.

If I were 22 I would probably give this bad boy 4 or 5 satanic stars. I hesitate to call it "immature," because its best quality is how it harnesses the raw emotion of a young poet filled with hate. At this point in my life, however, it isn't as mind-bottling as it might once have been.

Rimbaudelaire says

Unlike anything I've ever read

buttercup says

i loved this book !! :))) this is easily my favorite book ive read so far in my new lil journey of reading. it is a series of incredibly imaginative, engaging, fascinating, mysterious, sometimes dark and violent, almost always surreal ramblings or little stories, many of which are haunted by the presence of maldoror, a being of evil who seems to take many different forms throughout the book. despite how macabre it is at times, lautreamont's style is often charming and full of personality. i often found the excessiveness of his descriptions quite funny. this book was astounding to me from beginning to end. although i am obviously a reading noob i think it will be very hard for me to find a book i loved as much as this one. it seems incredibly unique. i cant wait to read it again. the other works by lautreamont and the letters and descriptions of the author were really nice additions to the book

Hatebeams says

Lautreamont is an aesthete of the highest order - the most grotesque, sadistic or revolting images will as often as not serve to counter some prior helping of the innocent or exquisite. The result is always something incisive, revelatory, profound. Maldoror's devotion to evil and continuous violations of the good seem to answer an underlying amorality in the universe at large - his philosophy is one of impious disgust at the hypocrisy of a God (represented as a guilt-ridden incontinent syphilitic drunkard) that would leave its creations at the mercy of one so perverse as he.

In short this deserves its reputation, it is a foul book, yet sublime. I read the Lykiard translation, which is excellent.

Brady says

Technically I've not read this in its entirety, but I've read the fantastic bits in it over and over for the last 10 years, so, this must count for something..

M.J. Boyd says

Cruelty is the muse. A book so heinous that after reading it you have no choice but to flee and cling to the good in the world. It worked - I'll absolutely never touch this book again.

D. J. says

Probably one of the most experimental, strange and horrifically beautiful books on the planet. A dream-like monument to man's imagination. One part 'Frankenstein' and one part 'Faust'. Epic in scope. Poetic in form. Gothic in style. Completely surreal.

Paul says

Definite 4.75

Which modern artists has not been grazed by the breadth of this beacon of pure & wild voltage. Lautreamont's intelligence cuts to the bone of previous geniuses. He wears their epidermis like a morbid costume sniffing about the insides of their fatty & decaying residuals. He transposes the projection of earth's rotation & builds his own orbit into the future. He purposely attempts difficult structures of syntax which can lead the reader astray or turn the casual reader off. He spins the looms of bold new abstractions. He has constructed a literary Frankenstein, so morbid, so strong, so beautiful, so monstrous, so deadly. A discombobulated assembly of the torsos & limbs & dead gray matter of so many authors before him, the references become dizzying. His humor is quite caustic. His words waft with the scent of a morgue. He is powerfully demonic. His satire is a blade which you do not see slit your throat until you are left gasping through rich blood for frightened air. Lucid in absolute madness. Divine clarity in the demonic. So just in amorality. So sinister in a holy wake. So lewd in his cleanliness. Vicious in calm calculated terror. Obscene but only as a mirror to nether regions that possess us all. The era in which he wrote this could no doubt have been shocked & this is why I find some elements of the book even shocking still. One must realize it is a role. A role masterfully portrayed. Thumbing his nose at convention. Truly challenging the norms of society. Which, to me, begs the question, if we are baseless in some instances, why not be baseless in all. What are these hypocritical standards we cherish & propagate so. For if we were to rise, why not rise truly. If we were to be debauched, why not sink into the most decrepit state. Why must we half succeed. Why must we settle in either pursuit. There is no subject too taboo. In fact he revels in shocking or perhaps he is confident enough in his perverse mindset that it irks the prudence of this modern human conditioning. His flesh withers. His flesh gleams in brilliance. His flesh strips the cornerstones of rigid institutions & defiles them lewdly, sexually, grotesquely, though with the class of a bourgeois surgeon mutilating the pristine anatomy of a model. The pond of his mind is a dreary place, but when one comes to gaze as Narcissus, we find the reflection mesmerizing enough to seep into its tenebrous glory. To drown in the bleak yet luxurious fluid which baptizes the consciousness in forces of almost unbearable awareness. He tills the dirt of firmly implanted notions &, in destroying them, cultivates something altogether new, nourishing with a superior crop. He self-deprecates & self-edits throughout Maldoror which seems unique & quite modern for the time of its construction. It is quite a modern mind this man possesses. It is no wonder it has taken this long to catch up. He is the prime saint of heretics. He is the antichrist in drag pirouetting down pews lit ablaze with the halo of Lucifer touting with swollen breast to the heavens how unsorry he is for remaining this faulty sack of flesh which corrodes & yet he realizes he is taunting a higher power a power which will never be subdued. He takes on more humanistic tones in his Poesies which are less blasphemous to an enlightened being which can still reserve spirituality without conceding to obvious erosion of organized religions. He breathes this paranormal air as if he had stolen the eyes of a malicious poltergeist. And yet his poetry defines varying elements at the very essence of man. Because so little is known of him, his flesh dissolves leaving only the literary entity. Mystery shrouds his personal character. There is much speculation into the details of this man's life. His mysterious life only adds to the legend. Ducasse, who died at the ripe age of 24 of unknown causes, dwells until this day in the mists of mystery but this book shares some personal letters & recollections of those who vaguely remember the lad which adds insight into the personality of the mind who created such a feat. The letters in the back of the book give a slender glance into his character outside of literature. I learned of him from many different artistic influences. All of whom hold him in the highest regard. It is ridiculous how many great minds hold him in the pantheon of untouchables. Rightfully so, within context. Here we have a man with whose alienation I soundly identify with. He cleared a path in the dark wood. A bond ferments within this reader. The oddity which he wishes to reflect resonates well with me. We, two odd balls like peas in a pod. I wish he had lived to create more but, alas, we are left with a masterpiece & that is all one can ask from such an incendiary being.

Lee says

I read this because Vollmann talks about it so much, and this book itself is filled with "beautiful sentences," as William T likes to talk about, plus it's published by Exact Change, AKA Damon & Naomi, formerly of Galaxie 500.

Henry Martin says

What to say about Maldoror that hasn't been said yet? What to say about the mysterious son of a diplomat who appeared in France, wrote this book and died, vanishing from the world, yet leaving his mark for decades and centuries yet to come?

The first time I had the pleasure of reading this exceptional work, I was taken aback. Barely seventeen, I hungrily swallowed the disturbing images leaping at me from the pages, not to fully comprehend them until years later. This work, over a century old, is believed to be the first work, the foundation stone of the surrealist movement, a movement that penetrated into every aspect of art, life, being; whether we are willing to admit it or not, this work is as important today as it was when originally published in 1868 (well, at least a part of it was). The world was not ready to receive the complete self-awareness of evil Maldoror so fully comprehends, and the world is still not ready. This work is certainly not to be read by a "closed" mind. It is said that to be creative, one must borderline insanity, yet, Lautreamont was playing with genius; a genius of a caliber capable of scaring away even the most immodest of us. But get deeper into his work, walk past the disturbed images, surpass your fears and you shall see the light. This work cannot be ignored, cannot be left to collect dust. I have owned several copies over the past twenty years, and I am still finding new meanings, new passages, and new understanding in this wonderful work. This truly is the one book that will never get old, that will always keep on giving, as long as one is ready to listen.

Printable Tire says

Man, where to start? First off, admittedly superficially, I hate the edition of the book: I hate its stupid awkward size, I hate the sleep-inducing font, I hate the snotty and obscure introductions, I hate the David Lynch ripoff cover.

I'll read an entire page and totally forget what I just read completely. Nothing is holding my interest! Very rarely can I not simply ABSORB what I'm reading; here it just washed over me without sinking in. The only other time I can remember this happening is with my other "currently reading" book Wanderer by Sterling Hayden: it's hard to actually formulate an opinion with these two books because for some reason I can't concentrate on them at all!

(Again, superficially, I partly blame the editions, the cover of Wanderer I had looked like a Lulu.com job. Also I learned that the author of Maldoror was only 24 so now I think he's a whiny teenager and I'm furious they published his ramblings because it's "edgy.")

Magdelanye says

Back in the day, when I was young and passionate, I decided I had to read this book, and so I ordered it from our local bookshop and waited 7 weeks until I finally was summoned to come and get it.

That evening when the house was finally quiet, I built up a nice fire and poured myself a glass of wine. Cozy and prepared for an exquisite read, I was surprised to read first the author's note: reader, if you love this life, do not read this book. But I am brave, I thought, continuing.

A few more pages, the author entreats again, gentle souls, do not read on. I considered myself a fierce and not gentle soul, I read another page...and had a vision, prompted by what I was reading, of an old, creaking door closing on the sunshine of day, a shadow zooming over my life. I felt depression looming and when I read yet another warning, I made a desperate choice. In a spontaneous move, I ripped the book in half and threw it in the fire.

That was the beginning of a new direction for me.

Alex Obrigewitsch says

This volume is excellent for studying the small volume of works by Lautreamont/Ducasse (who I shall henceforth refer to as L/D; the shifting displacement of identity is central to these works).

In a sense these works are at the heights of literature, dissolving in their very creation or unfolding. As well, they seem to have consumed their writer to the point of his non-existence. Having left no memoir (as he says in the *Poésies*), all that is left of him, all that remains, are these two short works. For L/D, creation is intimately bound up with destruction; this makes him a writer par excellence.

Destruction, that is, not only of biography, but of tradition, form, and language itself. The Surrealists adored L/D for his writing's ability to obscure and dissolve reality and reason, law and humanity. *Le Chants* destroys any sense of continuity, of sequential time, of all previous narrative forms. Through these destructions the space is opened for the creation of the work that we may read, that opens with the strange statement of the *Noli me legere*, which exists as an experiment in writing which opens us up to the experience of the vacuous void that is at the heart of writing. L/D's destructions attempt to claw us back to the origins of all writing.

A similar though different attempt is made through the later *Poésies*. Here the destruction of Romanticism and language is sought as a way out, a way forward, towards the infinite. Writing is here viewed as an infinite motion. L/D distorts and destroys tradition through his plagiarism, though harnessing it to "correct" these writings, in order to say something different. He taps into the infinitely shifting motions of language, the vacuous depths of iterability.

It would seem that L/D's destructions are always aimed at a further creation, reaching towards an infinite outside. How we are to understand the radical shift between the two works cannot be definitively said, however. Was the shift premeditated, a mere act or ruse? Did something occur that caused L/D to transform his life and views? A disillusionment? We can never know for certain, for with L/D there is never any certainty. Death encircles all his writings. Lautreamont died writing *Les Chants*, disappeared to allow it to come forth. Ducasse died writing the *Poésies*, leaving them ever but a fragment, ever unfinished. In a sense the work itself has yet to even begin.

All is shrouded in question. Death exudes from these pages. They open onto the unique space that is at the heart of writing; a space that is nowhere and nothing at all. The void of creation at the heart of destruction. They must be read, thought through again, creating yet another shift. These works are the (un)working of difference.

Matthew says

Perhaps there's a reason why Lautréamont's celebrity never reached the heights achieved by his contemporary Athur Rimbaud. Les Chants are uneven and sometimes of suspect quality: this is especially seen in the second section of Canto II, where, after giving a typically Ducassian, abandon-all-hope warning diatribe, Ducasse devotes a few pages to the horrors of... writer's block. These are the "poison-filled pages" I've been warned about? A horrific description of Lautréamont's stalled creative process? Later in Canto III a lay is devoted to the supreme evils of... mathematics. And it's about as interesting as a high school Algebra class. Hoo boy.

On the other hand, there are times when Ducasse makes good on his promise of debauchery and some truly disturbing prose is presented. Ducasse has the most success here with his Sade-like depictions of sexual perversion, rape and body horror. To witness the cool nonchalance with which Maldoror cuts a bloody grin from ear to ear on *his own face*, just to see himself smile, is a revelatory moment.

Ducasse also finds success on a technical level. His successful elimination of an established narrative perspective anticipates Joyce's by 50 years. A simple look at the title of the work reveals how twisted his web is: the book is in praise of Maldoror, a fictional demon, and is supposedly written by a man named Lautréamont, who is never mentioned in the work itself. The name-game web is further complicated upon learning that the real author's birth name is Isidore Ducasse- or "I.D."

Les Chants also anticipate a very 20th century phenomena among novelists: the obsessive and morbid cataloging of arcane myths and old prophecies from various sources. The same subjects that fascinated Ducasse (Biblical accounts of demons, gothic poetry, existential ruminations on birth and death) would inspire H.P. Lovecraft, Dylan Thomas, Jorge Luis Borges, William S. Burroughs and Philip K. Dick a century later.

Les Chants de Maldoror, despite its warts, is a highly entertaining and nourishing work.

Alejandro Saint-Barthélemy says

1) *Before reading Rimbaud I thought I would see fireworks; the problem was that I had read Lautréamont first.*

(Michel Houellebecq)

2) *After reading the last part of "Les Chants de Maldoror" I thought of giving up literature due to embarrassment of my own literary achievements.*

(André Gide [in a diary entry, in 1905])

3) *Lautréamont has been the biggest influence on my writing career. My books are toys for adults who have read Lautréamont.*

(César Aira)

This book embraces both classical rules of art (craft, depth and beauty [beauty whereas in the classic sense, such as when writing about the ocean, or modern one, meaning Picasso's, Baudelaire's, Dalí's... diabolical one) and contemporary ones (modernity, originality and provocation) brilliantly.

It was half a century ahead of its time, after all (surrealists in the 1920's were the first one's to consider it the visionary masterpiece that it is).

It may not be as deep as Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* (Caravaggio)

... but it's far more creative (El Greco).

Rimbaud focused on psychological miserability, introspection and analysis, in the work of art as a finished object, marble block, last will... On the other hand, Lautréamont focused on imagination, ideas, surprises, in the work of art in progress, as a process.

Both Rimbe and Isidore were highly intelligent and crazy (in the words of Argentinian author César Aira: *So many people write, but so little is worthy... Why? I think it's because in order to write something valuable one must posses two opposite qualities: you must be as intelligent as possible (because writing is not easy) and, at the same time, as crazy as possible (for the writing to matter).*

The gate-master of tomorrow's literature , said Nobel Prize Winner André Gide, this is a book which fans of modernism, postmodernism, metaliterature, etc., should totally savour as one of the precursors of those movements (with its many passages about the very process of writing) that it is (needless to say, a must-read for poetry lovers too).

My review of Lautréamont's "poems":

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Simon says

Comte de Lautréamont has to be the single most perplexing yet obviously talented author I've discovered since Louis-Ferdinand Céline. (why are these types almost always French?) Since he died at the age of 24, his complete works fit into less than 400 pages the bulk of which is taken up by a bizarre gothic novel titled "The Songs of Maldoror".

The title character is an Antichrist-like figure who does not just oppose the Judeo-Christian god, depicted here as a cross between the less moral gods of Greco-Roman antiquity and a decadent aristocrat, but also shuns all conventional morality in favour of what might be called a more bestial set of values. Maldoror actually reminds me quite a bit of Friedrich Nietzsche's archetype of the Übermensch, though I can't find any hard evidence that either author read the other's work. His adventures are written in absolutely beautiful prose, yet so extreme in structure and content that much of it reads less like what any normal Earthling might consider literature than the inner monologue of a brilliant sociopath.

Adding to further confusion are the author's poetic writings and letters to his editors, written under his real name Isidore Ducasse, which suggest that "The Songs of Maldoror" might be meant as an aggressive satire of the type of novel it purports to be... if one played with utmost deadpan. This is some very weird stuff even by the standards of what's basically post-modernist literature written a century early, as in before modernism itself had the chance to form, but definitely an impressive literary achievement.

Bernardo Mozelli says

I legit feel like I've been trolled. At some point in the book even Lautreamont himself admits he's just an

edgy fuck who likes to ramble on. I'm not even gonna bother giving this shit one star.
