

Poetry, Poetic Justice and Angel Di Maria's World Cup Final Goal in 2022

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I once described a friend of mine, a French skier, as 'poetry in motion'. What did I mean by that? Can an athlete truly be a poet? After all, a poet is someone who generally takes great time and care to craft a gem, a poem, a creation to be polished and refined with pumice, as the famous Latin poet Catullus wrote: [āridā modo pūmice expolitum](#). A craft defined by contemplation, meditation and revision, an exertion not dependent upon the exigencies of the moment, but of a larger conception of time.

When I described my skiing friend Alain, was I christening him as a true poet? What makes poetry? What makes a poet? What does a poet make?

After all, the words 'poem' and 'poetry' are derived from a Greek root that means 'to create, to make'.

Is a bricklayer a poet? Hmmm ...

When I thought of Alain's skiing, I thought of something that was graceful, beautiful and possessed of a certain kind of light, perhaps even of symmetry. I did not think of brute force, of hammer blows, of a monstrous subjugation of the snow-clad mountains of Taos Ski Valley, but rather of a display of exquisite subtlety and skill and adaptation to the terrain. Even when Homer, the G.O.A.T. in poetry, dealt with the savage brutality of the Trojan War in his *Iliad*, he transformed this brutality into something transcendently poetic.

'Poetic justice,' on the other hand, connotes something different: closure, a neat declaration of the laws of Karma, a tidy wrapping up of things, a reestablishment of order in a world that was careening into chaos.

Argentina's wild and improbable run to victory in the football (soccer) World Cup of 2022 provided us with many examples of football grace, football force and football justice. The incomparable Lionel Messi finally achieved his much-desired goal after much travail in a

concluding match with France that featured more moments of thrill and drama than I had remembered in a sporting event. Up 2-0 in the second half, Argentina seemed to be assured of a clear cut win, until a careless penalty was awarded to France and, 97 seconds later, a natural goal was volleyed home by a resurgent Kylian Mbappe to level the score. In extra time Messi struck and Argentina again seemed to have the game in hand before an unlikely Argentinian handball in the box gave France the opportunity to equalise.

Thus the game was reduced – and I use this term deliberately – to a penalty shootout, where luck and fortune have as much weight as skill. Nonetheless, the Argentinians emerged victorious.

Was this poetic justice for the Lionel Messi who had laboured for so many years scoring goal upon goal and registering assist upon assist for his club teams and the national team, whose vision on the soccer pitch was breathtaking? Perhaps. Whatever it was, I believe that the better team in the end did indeed merit the honour of hoisting the trophy.

For me, however, it was the magnificent play of Angel Di Maria that pushed my thoughts into the direction of poetry. Di Maria had been wreaking havoc upon the hapless French up until minute 65, when he was taken off. His speed and ability to thrust unsettled the French, and his creative manoeuvres led to the first Argentinian goal, having drawn a penalty converted by Messi. But it was his breathtaking finish to a play that began with Emi Martinez, the Argentine keeper, and progressed back and forth across the vast pitch to culminate in a strike that justified visions of poetry.

It was the goal of the tournament, a thing of beauty, a creation that emerged from nothing, from the unpredictable chaos of the game into a sublime and unforeseen event.

And isn't this just what true poetry really is? The distillation of the complexity and messiness of the world into an essence of beauty and truth? Well, we may argue about whether football produces truth, but we really can't argue about the spontaneous eruptions of beauty, dependent upon the laws of chance and the skill of players prepared for the vagaries of fate.

After he scored [this magnificent goal](#) Di Maria used his hands to create the image of a heart.

It was the fitting exemplar of a majestic culmination.

Di Maria, Messi and Argentina's manager Lionel Scaloni all hail from the city of Rosario in Argentina, a trio that joined forces, ultimately, in the service of poetic justice and display.

After all, true poetry is nothing more or less than a novel distillation of our disorderly world into that thing of beauty which the great English poet Keats rightly called a joy forever. By these standards Di Maria, Messi and the entire Argentinian team were poets, forged in the crucible of spontaneous necessity, and rendering unto us, we eager spectators, renewed hope in the capabilities of humankind and the exquisite existence of a transcendent and aesthetically delightful order.

Vamos Argentina, vamos Angel Di Maria, vamos poesía!

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