

# **CHRISTMAS PUDDING**

**2021**

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**Robert Middleton**

*Christmas Pudding* is an anthology devoted essentially to aspects of the use of language, particularly in poetry but also in wit and humour. Poetry is a vehicle for sharing ideas and emotions and, as such, is a mark of our civilisation and collective intelligence: it also promotes an understanding of the nature and importance of language, man's highest natural attribute. I am concerned that few people read poetry today and that the contemporary dominance of the visual media poses a threat to our command (and even understanding) of language and to a decline in writing skills.

After studying under Graham Storey in Cambridge, I was deeply influenced by the literary criticism of Yvor Winters at Stanford University in the early 1960s, by his rigorous insistence on the distinction between connotation and denotation in poetry and by his moral crusade against the decline of reason as a precept in art and literature (and life) since the end of the eighteenth century. The accompanying relaxation of content and meaning that characterises verse for the last two hundred years is, at least in part, responsible for a breakdown in communication between writer and reader: today, 'anything goes' - much verse is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose. I share Winters' view that the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century was a golden age for poetry and that several poets of this age developed a 'timeless' medium for poetic expression characterised by the clear communication of ideas and emotion, using words not only for their sound, rhythm and imagery but also to convey meaning. I recognise, however, that the poetry of this period may not be easily accessible to the general reader as a result of unfamiliar poetic conventions and shifts in the meaning of words. I also dissent from Winters' rather pessimistic view that not much of comparable quality has been produced since. Until 2011, *Christmas Pudding* drew heavily on poetry of the 'golden age'; since then I include much modern and contemporary verse that, in my opinion, meets Winters' strict criteria. If I no longer insist on form, my criterion remains nevertheless quality of language and content - and, a new ingredient, wit.

In addition to the desire to entertain and amuse, *Christmas Pudding* has thus a serious intent: I aim to include poems that use language in a rational and comprehensible way, that have a clear meaning with a minimum of decoration and cliché and that express feelings we can share. My choice is intended to show that poetry can be (I would even say, should be) a means of communication between normal rational people.

The inspiration for *Christmas Pudding* is *Christmas Crackers*, an anthology of wisdom, wit and linguistic surprise collected by the late distinguished scholar John Julius Norwich. I have tried to emulate his mixture of humour and erudition, although a significant part of my raw material is drawn from the more mundane spheres of e-mail and the Internet. My title seems to me apposite: a Christmas pudding is full of varied, interesting and sometimes surprising ingredients, is well-rounded, requires a considerable amount of stirring in its preparation, is still good a long time after the first serving and is not heavy if enjoyed sparingly. Moreover, a pudding is the least pretentious of dishes and acknowledges Norwich's superior recipe.



Governments must impose a global moratorium on the international spyware trade or face a world in which no mobile phone is safe from state-sponsored hackers. (*Edward Snowden on NSO Group's Pegasus software*)

I am deeply concerned that they have made a product that can lead people away from their real communities and isolate them in these rabbit holes and these filter bubbles. What you find is that when people are sent targeted misinformation to a community, it can make it hard to reintegrate into wider society because now you don't have shared facts. *Frances Haugen, Facebook whistleblower, speaking to UK parliamentarians (The Guardian, 25 October 2021)*

Facebook "is biased against facts, it is biased against journalism ... If you have no facts, you can't have truths, you can't have trust. If you don't have any of these, you don't have a democracy." *Philippines journalist Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize winner (The Guardian, 9 October 2021)*

One-third of our fellow Americans believe the election was stolen from the rightful winner -- and refuse to acknowledge facts that directly undermine that fantasy. That's a recipe for disaster. (*CNN, 21 June 2021*) - Seventy-eight percent of Republicans believe that Joe Biden was not legitimately elected President. Increasingly, they seem to expect their party's candidates to agree. (*New Yorker 25 October 2021*)

ã Robert Middleton 2021

Cartoons from *The New Yorker*

e-mail [robert@middleton.ch](mailto:robert@middleton.ch)

*All previous editions of Christmas Pudding can be found on*  
<https://pamirs.org/christmas-pudding/>

# CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2021

Spying, the news is full of it. If not international espionage, then the daily accounts of how our private data is hoovered up, processed, packaged and resold by social media and the internet search engines, and how the algorithms of some of these same behemoths stoke false news and hate messages - all in the interest of generating enough clicks to increase their advertising revenue.



I have been interested in spies and spying for a long time, devouring the novels of John Le Carré and non-fiction accounts of the work of the British, US and other secret services. Twice I filled in application forms to join the British Foreign Office - and never sent them. In the course of my work, I met and made friends with many spies in Geneva, in Moscow and in Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> Once, in 1976 in Geneva, I was invited by the Vice-Consul (who subsequently became head of MI6) to work with (or for) the agency - and turned it down.<sup>2</sup> My travels to Eastern

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<sup>1</sup> I once asked the head of the KGB in the Pamirs, Faramoz, what he had learned in spy school. He answered : "To hate the CIA." On another occasion, travelling in a KGB vehicle from Khorog to Osh, I was fascinated to note how, as we approached the Kyrgyz border, the driver got out and rotated the number plate, on a specially made cylinder, changing the jeep from Tajik to Kyrgyz registration.

<sup>2</sup> They never ask twice. In the days when I had a British passport (with many interesting visas) and went to renew it, I was advised that the Vice-Consul would like to meet me; he never followed up and must have checked my card-index entry, summarising the conversation with his predecessor. In 1989, I had lunch with a British diplomat, an

Europe for the ISO<sup>3</sup> and my work for the Aga Khan Foundation during the civil war in Tajikistan gave me sufficient excitement.

Spies and spying are among the main themes of *CP 2021* - perhaps in recognition of the near miss of a spying profession, but mainly drawing attention to the many shocking encroachments on our privacy and individual liberty to which we are subjected today by the spying of 'Big Tech', often with our knowledge, sometimes not - nearly always with our 'consent' to terms we have never read.

I have included extensive quotations from the following: Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Profile Books, 2019; Edward Snowden, *Permanent Record*, Macmillan 2019; Joshua A.T. Fairfield, *OWNED - Property, privacy, and the new digital serfdom*, Cambridge University Press, 2017; and *An Ugly Truth*, Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang, The Bridge Street Press, 2021.

#### T T T T

##### *From Eye In The Sky - The Alan Parsons Project (1982)*

I am the eye in the sky  
Looking at you  
I can read your mind  
I am the maker of rules  
Dealing with fools  
I can cheat you blind  
And I don't need to see any more

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ardent golfer, who was interested in joining my golf club; we talked about my contacts with various British diplomats over the previous 20 years and, by pure chance, as I now know, almost all of them worked for MI6. I asked what the original Vice-Consul who asked for my help in 1976 was doing. Answer: "a job so important I can't tell you" (in 1992, the identity of the head of MI6 was revealed for the first time by Prime Minister John Major - <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/07/world/the-secret-s-out-top-british-spy-identified.html>). I then mentioned my friendship with Paddy Ashdown, the British politician and diplomat who served as Leader of the UK Liberal Democrats from 1988 to 1999; he replied "What were you doing for Paddy?" and the penny dropped. Paddy Ashdown's work for MI6 was not revealed until 2005 (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/world/arid-30218738.html>). Despite this obvious security lapse, my lunchtime guest also went on to become the head of MI6 ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/286128.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/286128.stm)). He was later involved in the furore over the "Downing Street memo" of 23 July 2002 in which he revealed that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed [by the U.S.] around the policy" of removing Saddam Hussein from power (<https://text.npr.org/4661884>).

<sup>3</sup> Including attending as an observer a session of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in Budapest.

To know that I can read your mind ...

**Privacy - Ada Limón (\*1976)**

On the black wet branches of the linden,  
still clinging to umber leaves of late fall,  
two crows land. They say, "Stop," and still I want  
to make them into something they are not.  
Odin's ravens, the bruja's eyes. What news  
are they bringing of our world to the world  
of the gods? It can't be good. More suffering  
all around, more stinging nettles and toxic  
blades shoved into the scarred parts of us,  
the minor ones underneath the trees. Rain  
comes while I'm still standing, a trickle of water  
from whatever we believe is beyond the sky.  
The crows seem enormous but only because  
I am watching them too closely. They do not  
care to be seen as symbols. A shake of a wing,  
and both of them are gone. There was no message  
given, no message I was asked to give, only  
their great absence and my sad privacy  
returning like the bracing, empty wind  
on the black wet branches of the linden.

T T T T

**Jean d'Ormesson (1925-2017) - *Le français est une langue animale***

"Myope comme une Taupe", "rusé comme un Renard", "serrés comme des Sardines"... Les termes empruntés au monde animal ne se retrouvent pas seulement dans les Fables de La Fontaine, ils sont partout.

La preuve: que vous soyez fier comme un Coq, fort comme un Bœuf, têtu comme un Âne, malin comme un Singe ou simplement un chaud Lapin, vous êtes tous, un jour ou l'autre, devenu Chèvre pour une Caille aux yeux de Biche.

Vous arrivez à votre premier rendez-vous fier comme un Paon et frais comme un Gardon et là, ... pas un Chat! Vous faites le pied de Grue, vous demandant si cette Bécasse vous a réellement posé un Lapin.

Il y a Anguille sous roche et pourtant le Bouc émissaire qui vous a obtenu ce rancard, la tête de Linotte avec qui vous êtes copain comme Cochon, vous l'a certifié: cette Poule a du Chien, une vraie Panthère! C'est sûr, vous serez un Crapaud mort d'amour. Mais tout de même, elle vous traite comme un Chien.

Vous êtes prêt à gueuler comme un Putois quand finalement la fine Mouche arrive. Bon, vous vous dites que dix minutes de retard, il n'y a pas de quoi casser trois pattes à un Canard. Sauf que la fameuse Souris, malgré son cou de Cygne et sa crinière de Lion est en fait aussi plate qu'une Limande, myope comme une Taupe, elle souffle comme un Phoque et rit comme une Baleine. Une vraie peau de Vache, quoi! Et vous, vous êtes fait comme un Rat.

Vous roulez des yeux de Merlan frit, vous êtes rouge comme une Ecrevisse, mais vous restez muet comme une Carpe. Elle essaie bien de vous tirer les vers du nez, mais vous sautez du Coq à l'Âne et finissez par noyer le Poisson. Vous avez le Cafard, l'envie vous prend de pleurer comme un Veau (ou de verser des larmes de Crocodile, c'est selon). Vous finissez par prendre le Taureau par les cornes et vous inventer une fièvre de Cheval qui vous permet de filer comme un Lièvre.

Ce n'est pas que vous êtes une Poule mouillée, vous ne voulez pas être le Dindon de la farce. Vous avez beau être doux comme un Agneau sous vos airs d'Ours mal léché, il ne faut pas vous prendre pour un Pigeon car vous pourriez devenir le Loup dans la bergerie.

Et puis, ça aurait servi à quoi de se regarder comme des Chiens de faïence. Après tout, revenons à nos Moutons: vous avez maintenant une faim de Loup, l'envie de dormir comme un Loir et surtout vous avez d'autres Chats à fouetter.

T T T T

### **George Brown**

George Brown, Foreign Secretary under Prime Minister Harold Wilson from 1966 to 1968 (N.B. not Gordon Brown), was famed for his drinking. At the time I worked at EFTA, this was a public secret. Perhaps the best-known (most probably apocryphal) story relates to an official reception on an official visit to Brazil. Spying an attractive person in a red dress, he asked for a dance.

"There are three reasons Mr. Brown, why I shall not dance with you," the object of his affection reputedly replied.

"The first is because, I fear, you've had too much to drink."

"The second is because this is not, as you suppose, a waltz that the orchestra is playing but the Brazilian national anthem, for which you should be standing to attention."

"And the third reason why we may not dance, Mr. Brown, is that I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Sao Paulo."

T T T T

## Winter winds

### **A Winter Passing - *Charles William Jefford* (\*1929)**

In our village the church bell tolls.  
We're sad, for one of us has died.  
It happened in the morning, while it snowed.  
We are summoned, we knew him well.  
His farm lies beyond our garden gate.  
We wrap up warmly and decide  
to walk along the icy road  
to attend the service at 10 o'clock.  
To stop us stumbling, we lock  
our arms and hands together.  
We reach the church, but all too late.  
The nave is full, despite the weather.

We huddle in the porch, and peer inside.  
Where villagers and farmers, seated  
in rows, are staring with eyes wide  
open at a casket adorned with flowers.  
In the crowded doorway, we nod  
at those beside us, who do the same,  
confirming he was one of ours.

The pastor mounts the pulpit,  
invokes the name of God.  
Then becomes explicit,  
praising the late departed  
for his demeanor and modest ways.  
To everyone he was open hearted.  
He came from here, a local man,  
he toiled until his final days,  
never seeing reason to doubt  
the scheme of things: God's plan,  
for harvest rich or time of drought.

He came from the earth,  
to which the Lord consigns him.  
The cycle is now complete.  
Outside tractor and wagon wait,  
to take him on his final journey.  
Suddenly, the snow turns to sleet.

We are frozen. We stamp our feet.

We don't want to risk our health,  
we are getting on, in fact, quite old.  
Duty done, we leave with stealth  
to our warm house on the square.  
In the kitchen, we sip a bowl  
of soup, peep through the curtains  
to see a solemn sight, a cortege led  
by a tractor, with wagon and a casket,  
called by the echo of a distant bell.  
In twos and threes they quietly stroll.  
We recognize councilors, the mayor,  
the innkeeper and his wife as well.  
The wagon, black beribboned, turns  
between the houses, and then in a flash,  
procession and mourners vanish.  
  
Leaving behind two survivors, who face,  
and reflect upon the empty space.

**Windy Day - *Charles Simic* (\*1938)**

Two pairs of underwear,  
One white and the other pink,  
Flew up and down  
On the laundry line,  
Telling the whole world  
They are madly in love.

T T T T

**The Age of Surveillance Capitalism**

I have at last acquired a really smart phone. It recognises my thumbprint and my face (sometimes); I can talk to it, go on internet, consult my e-mails and many other things that are much too smart for me for the moment - I can even make telephone calls. BUT - as soon as I want to do anything smart I have to accept Google's terms of service. What do I find here?

"We .... collect the content you create, upload, or receive from others when using our services. This includes things like email you write and receive, photos and videos you save, docs and spreadsheets you create, and comments you make on YouTube videos.

We collect information about your activity in our services, which we use to do things like recommend a YouTube video you might like. The

activity information we collect may include:

- Terms you search for
- Videos you watch
- Views and interactions with content and ads
- Voice and audio information when you use audio features
- Purchase activity
- People with whom you communicate or share content
- Activity on third-party sites and apps that use our services
- Chrome browsing history you've synced with your Google Account (I haven't)

If you use our services to make and receive calls or send and receive messages, we may collect telephony log information like your phone number, calling-party number, receiving-party number, forwarding numbers, time and date of calls and messages, duration of calls, routing information, and types of calls."

And, if I activate the My Location app (I haven't), Google knows exactly where I am and have been and stores this information - it may even know where I'm going before I do.

I find this deeply disturbing (and, as far as Internet searches are concerned, avoid Google and use DuckDuckGo or Startpage and sometimes Tor instead of Firefox). Many of my professional e-mail exchanges are confidential and I would be in breach of my own confidentiality oath to share them with anyone not entitled to receive them (my technically savvy friends tell me that by even downloading them via Gmail I have probably already sold the store).

I was therefore fascinated and (naïvely) shocked by *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff, a Harvard professor and social psychologist.

She defines surveillance capitalism as:

1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales;
2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification;
3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history;
4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy;

5. As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth;
6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy;
7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty;
8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.

Here are a few extracts, from a chapter aptly entitled 'Rendition from the Depths'.<sup>4</sup>

Why did Google devote so much machine power and valuable surplus in order to thoughtfully assist you through your day? The reason is that Google Now signaled a new breed of prediction products.<sup>5</sup>

Google's breakthrough crawler enabled the lightning-fast indexing of the world wide web, the apparatus of ubiquity then enabled new operations to crawl reality, and now in this third phase, distinct supply operations are required to crawl our lives. In Google Now one sees an initial foray into this new space, in which the web crawler's ability to find information combines with new life-crawling operations intended to render, anticipate, and, as we shall see, ultimately modify your behavior. Online and offline behavioral surplus—your e-mail content, where you went this afternoon, what you said, what you did, how you felt—are combined into prediction products that can serve an emerging marketplace in which every aspect of your daily reality is up for bids.

Facebook's "M," launched in 2015 as part of its Messenger application, is another example of this new phase. It was introduced as a "personal digital assistant.... that completes tasks and finds information on your behalf..... powered by artificial intelligence that's trained and supervised by people. Facebook's vice president in charge of messaging products described the company's goals for M by saying, "We start capturing all of your intent from the things you want to do. Intent often leads to buying something, or to a transaction and that's an opportunity for us to [make money] over time." ...

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<sup>4</sup> At more than 650 pages, including notes, the book is unnecessarily long and repetitive, but the message bears repeating.

<sup>5</sup> N.B. Google Now branding is no longer used, but the functionality continues in the Google app and its "discover" tab.

The idea is to "prioritize commerce-driven experiences" and design new ways for users to "quickly buy things" without the tedium of entering credit card information, flipping pages, or opening applications. Pop-up buttons appear during your conversations with friends whenever the system detects a possible "commercial intention." Just tap to order, buy, or book, and let the system do the rest.

In this way the "personal digital assistant" is revealed as a market avatar, another Trojan horse in which the determination to render and monetize your life is secreted under the veil of "assistance" and embellished with the poetry of "personalization." Its friendly recommendations, advice, and eagerness to act on your behalf barely conceal an aggressive new market cosmos hovering over any and every aspect of your daily life. It may be composed of restaurants, banks, plumbers, merchants, ticket sellers, airlines, and a limitless queue of possible strangers summoned by their interests in your behavior: now, soon, and later. They are standing by to cash in on your walk to work, your conversation with your teenager, or your aging running shoes. A digital assistant may derive its character from your inclinations and preferences, but it will be skewed and disfigured in unknown measure by the hidden market methods and contests that it conceals. ...

An Amazon senior vice president comments on the company's voice-activated home devices: "The nice thing about the Amazon device business is that when we sell a device, generally people buy more blue jeans. And little black dresses. And shoes. And so that's good." "Voice shopping," he concludes, is good for business and good for predicting business. ...

Smart-home devices such as Amazon's Echo or Google Home render rivers of casual talk from which sophisticated content analyses produce enhanced predictions that "anticipate" your needs. ... Most importantly, Assistant animates the firm's home device, Google Home. The idea is that in time, the device (or its successor) will claim for rendition a theoretically limitless scope of animate and inanimate domestic activities: conversations, lightbulbs, queries, schedules, movement, travel planning, heating systems, purchases, home security, health concerns, music, communication functions, and more.<sup>6</sup>

There was a time when you searched Google, but now Google searches you. ... "Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and China's Baidu have embarked on a worldwide hunt for terabytes of human speech," reports Bloomberg Businessweek. "Microsoft has set up mock apartments in cities around the

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<sup>6</sup> For a spoof on the "smart home", see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LELq9ZbS8o>.

globe to record volunteers speaking in a home setting." The tech firms capture flows of talk from their smart devices and phones as they record and retain your words. Chinese search firm Baidu collects speech in every dialect: "Then they take all that data and use it to teach their computers how to parse, understand, and respond to commands and queries."

Pieces of your talk are regularly farmed out in bulk to third-party firms that conduct "audio review processes" in which virtual scorers, tasked to evaluate the degree of match between the machine's text and the original chunk of human speech, review audio recordings retained from smart-phones, messaging apps, and digital assistants. Companies such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft use these audio analyses to improve the algorithms of their voice systems. The tech companies insist that such recordings are anonymous, nothing more than voices without identities. "Partners do not have the ability to tie the voice samples back to specific people," one Microsoft executive asserted. But one journalist who signed on to a virtual job as an audio recording analyst concluded just the opposite, as she listened to recordings full of pathos, intimacy, and easily identifiable personal information ...

Prof. Zuboff's epigraph, a poem by W. H. Auden from his "Sonnets from China" is apposite.

Chilled by the Present, its gloom and its noise,  
On waking we sigh for an ancient South,  
A warm nude age of instinctive poise,  
A taste of joy in an innocent mouth.

At night in our huts we dream of a part  
In the balls of the Future: each ritual maze  
Has a musical plan, and a musical heart  
Can faultlessly follow its faultless ways.

We envy streams and houses that are sure,  
But, doubtful, articulated to error, we  
Were never nude and calm as a great door,

And never will be faultless like our fountains:  
We live in freedom by necessity,  
A mountain people dwelling among mountains.

T T T T

**Absturzgefahr** - Auch im Reich der Vögel hat die korrekte Sprache ihre Tücken, Claudia Mäder NZZ 25 June 2021

Reden, wie einem der Schnabel gewachsen ist? Damit ist es definitiv vorbei, das merken zurzeit besonders die Vögel. In Entenhausen ist

kürzlich die Sprachpolizei durchmarschiert und hat das unbedachte Gerede der Tiere auf korrekte Linie gebracht: Seit Dezember sind in der neuen deutschen Ausgabe der "Lustigen Taschenbuch Classic Edition" Veränderungen gegenüber der Originalübersetzung von Erika Fuchs zu bemerken. Zunächst ist in Band 10 der zu starker Adipositas neigende Fridolin Freudenfett unter neuem Namen aufgetreten – das Schwein heisst nunmehr Fridolin Freundlich.

*Dickschnabeliger Langsporn* - Richtig dick kam es aber in Band 12, der im April erschien. Hier sind "Wilde" und "Indianer" genauso ausgemerzt worden wie "Bleichgesichter" und "Zwerge", und selbstverständlich dürfen die Enten bei Ausflügen in die Fremde auch nicht mehr mit "Eingeborenen" in Kontakt kommen, sondern nur noch auf "Ortskundige" oder "Anwohner" treffen. Solche Ersetzungen sind weder Kleinigkeiten, denn sie drohen zuweilen den Sinn zu entstellen, noch handelt es sich um Einzelfälle, wie jüngst die "FAZ" darlegte: Insgesamt einhundertneun geänderte Passagen hat ein Wiener Literaturwissenschaftler in einer Analyse des zwölften Bandes gezählt.

Überboten wird diese Akribie von ganz anderen Vogelforschern: Vor Jahresfrist haben zwei US-Ornithologen einhundertfünfzig Vögel identifiziert, deren Namen an "problematische" Persönlichkeiten erinnern. Daraufhin hat das Inklusions- und Diversitätskomitee der amerikanischen ornithologischen Gesellschaft die Frage vertieft; im April hat ein Seminar zum Thema stattgefunden, ein Expertengremium ist zusammengestellt worden, bis Anfang 2022 sollen umfassende Neubenennungsvorschläge vorliegen. Und bereits ist auch ein Vogel umgetauft worden: Der McCown-Langsporn, der nach einem General der Konföderierten benannt worden war, fliegt jetzt als Dickschnabeliger Langsporn durch die Lüfte. Ob er wie Fridolin Freudenfett unter dem verbalen Fingerzeig auf seine Körpermasse leidet, war nicht in Erfahrung zu bringen.

*Echte Pechvögel* - Da die grossen Probleme der Gegenwart global angegangen werden müssen, macht man sich inzwischen auch im deutschsprachigen Raum Gedanken über inkorrekte Vogelnamen. Besonders verpönt ist in gewissen Kreisen die Hottentottenente, die an die herablassende Haltung der Kolonisatoren gemahne. Auch das niedlich klingende Hottentottenlaufhühnchen trägt diesen Überlegenheitsanspruch im Namen, und überhaupt lauert bei den Vögeln die Absturzgefahr an allen Orten: Zigeunerhühner, Mandarinenten, Mohrenschwarzkehlchen, die Probleme nehmen kein Ende. Bei dem Hickhack, das um sie entsteht, möchte man die Tiere echte Pechvögel nennen – aber genau besehen hat

ja auch dieses Wort keine weisse Weste, und so hält man wohl besser den Schnabel.

T T T T

*James Schuyler (1923-1991)*

**October -**

Books litter the bed,  
leaves the lawn. It  
lightly rains. Fall has  
come: unpatterned, in  
the shedding leaves.

The maples ripen. Apples  
come home crisp in bags.  
This pear tastes good.  
It rains lightly on the  
random leaf patterns.

The nimbus is spread  
above our island. Rain  
lightly patters on un-  
shed leaves. The books  
of fall litter the bed.

**Faure's Second Piano Quartet <sup>7</sup>**

On a day like this the rain comes  
down in fat and random drops among  
the ailanthus leaves—"the tree  
of Heaven"—the leaves that on moon-  
lit nights shimmer black and blade-  
shaped at this third-floor window.  
And there are bunches of small green  
knobs, buds, crowded together. The  
rapid music fills in the spaces of  
the leaves. And the piano comes in,  
like an extra heartbeat, dangerous  
and lovely. Slower now, less like  
the leaves, more like the rain which  
almost isn't rain, more like thawed-  
out hail. All this beauty in the  
mess of this small apartment on  
West 20th in Chelsea, New York.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKXX6YMXHNk>

Slowly the notes pour out, slowly,  
more slowly still, fat rain falls.

**Closed Gentian Distances**

A nothing day full of  
wild beauty and the  
timer pings. Roll up  
the silver off the bay  
take down the clouds  
sort the spruce and  
send to laundry marked,  
more starch. Goodbye  
golden- and silver-  
rod, asters, bayberry  
crisp in elegance.  
Little fish stream  
by, a river in water.

T T T T

**Edward Snowden - *Permanent Record*, Macmillan 2019**

You will understand, then, when I say that the Internet of today is unrecognizable. It's worth noting that this change has been a conscious choice, the result of a systematic effort on the part of a privileged few. The early rush to turn commerce into e-commerce quickly led to a bubble, and then, just after the turn of the millennium, to a collapse. After that, companies realized that people who went online were far less interested in spending than in sharing, and that the human connection the Internet made possible could be monetized. If most of what people wanted to do online was to be able to tell their family, friends, and strangers what they were up to, and to be told what their family, friends, and strangers were up to in return, then all companies had to do was figure out how to put themselves in the middle of those social exchanges and turn them into profit.

This was the beginning of surveillance capitalism, and the end of the Internet as I knew it.

Now, it was the creative Web that collapsed, as countless beautiful, difficult, individualistic Websites were shuttered. The promise of convenience led people to exchange their personal sites—which demanded constant and laborious upkeep—for a Facebook page and a Gmail account. The appearance of ownership was easy to mistake for the reality of it. Few of us understood it at the time, but none of the things

that we'd go on to share would belong to us anymore. The successors to the e-commerce companies that had failed because they couldn't find anything we were interested in buying now had a new product to sell.

That new product was Us.

Our attention, our activities, our locations, our desires— everything about us that we revealed, knowingly or not, was being surveilled and sold in secret, so as to delay the inevitable feeling of violation that is, for most of us, coming only now. And this surveillance would go on to be actively encouraged, and even funded by an army of governments greedy for the vast volume of intelligence they would gain. Aside from log-ins and financial transactions, hardly any online communications were encrypted in the early twenty-aughts, which meant that in many cases governments didn't even need to bother approaching the companies in order to know what their customers were doing. They could just spy on the world without telling a soul.

The American government, in total disregard of its founding charter, fell victim to precisely this temptation, and once it had tasted the fruit of this poisonous tree it became gripped by an unrelenting fever. In secret, it assumed the power of mass surveillance, an authority that by definition afflicts the innocent far more than the guilty.

It was only when I came to a fuller understanding of this surveillance and its harms that I became haunted by the awareness that we the public—the public of not just one country but of all the world—had never been granted a vote or even a chance to voice our opinion in this process. The system of near-universal surveillance had been set up not just without our consent, but in a way that deliberately hid every aspect of its programs from our knowledge. At every step, the changing procedures and their consequences were kept from everyone, including most lawmakers. To whom could I turn? Who could I talk to? Even to whisper the truth, even to a lawyer or a judge or to Congress, had been made so severe a felony that just a basic outlining of the broadest facts would invite a lifetime sentence in a federal cell. ...

The freedom of a country can only be measured by its respect for the rights of its Citizens, and it's my conviction that these rights are in fact limitations of State power that define exactly where and when a government may not infringe into that domain of personal or individual freedoms that during the American Revolution was called "liberty" and during the Internet Revolution is called "privacy." (pp. 4-7)

Our mission was pretty much appliance-based on this one afternoon I'm

recalling—we were at Best Buy. Having settled on a new microwave, we were checking out, on Lindsay's healthful insistence, a display of blenders. She had her phone out and was in the midst of researching which of the ten or so devices had the best reviews, when I found myself wandering over to the computer department at the far end of the store.

But along the way, I stopped. There, at the edge of the kitchen-ware section, ensconced atop a brightly decorated and lit elevated platform, was a shiny new refrigerator. Rather, it was a "Smart-fridge," which was being advertised as "Internet-equipped."

This, plain and simple, blew my mind.

A salesperson approached, interpreting my stupefaction as interest—"It's amazing, isn't it?"—and proceeded to demonstrate a few of the features. A screen was embedded in the door of the fridge, and next to the screen was a holder for a tiny stylus, which allowed you to scribble messages. If you didn't want to scribble, you could record audio and video memos. You could also use the screen as you would your regular computer, because the refrigerator had Wi-Fi. You could check your email, or check your calendar. You could watch YouTube clips, or listen to MP3s. You could even make phone calls. I had to restrain myself from keying in Lindsay's number and saying, from across the floor, "I'm calling from a fridge."

Beyond that, the salesperson continued, the fridge's computer kept track of internal temperature, and, through scanning barcodes, the freshness of your food. It also provided nutritional information and suggested recipes. I think the price was over \$9,000. "Delivery included," the salesperson said.

I remember driving home in a confused silence. This wasn't quite the stunning moonshot tech-future we'd been promised. I was convinced the only reason that thing was Internet-equipped was so that it could report back to its manufacturer about its owner's usage and about any other household data that was obtainable. The manufacturer, in turn, would monetize that data by selling it. And we were supposed to pay for the privilege.

I wondered what the point was of my getting so worked up over government surveillance if my friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens were more than happy to invite corporate surveillance into their homes, allowing themselves to be tracked while browsing in their pantries as efficiently as if they were browsing the Web. It would still be another half decade before the domotics revolution, before "virtual assistants" like Amazon Echo and Google Home were welcomed into the bedroom and

placed proudly on nightstands to record and transmit all activity within range, to log all habits and preferences (not to mention fetishes and kinks), which would then be developed into advertising algorithms and converted into cash. The data we generate just by living—or just by letting ourselves be surveilled while living—would enrich private enterprise and impoverish our private existence in equal measure. If government surveillance was having the effect of turning the citizen into a subject, at the mercy of state power, then corporate surveillance was turning the consumer into a product, which corporations sold to other corporations, data brokers, and advertisers.

Meanwhile, it felt as if every major tech company, including Dell, was rolling out new civilian versions of what I was working on for the CIA: a cloud. (In fact, Dell had even tried four years previously to trademark the term "cloud computing" but was denied.) I was amazed at how willingly people were signing up, so excited at the prospect of their photos and videos and music and e-books being universally backed up and available that they never gave much thought as to why such an uber-sophisticated and convenient storage solution was being offered to them for "free" or for "cheap" in the first place.

I don't think I'd ever seen such a concept be so uniformly bought into, on every side. "The cloud" was as effective a sales term for Dell to sell to the CIA as it was for Amazon and Apple and Google to sell to their users. ...

Read your terms of service agreements for cloud storage, which get longer and longer by the year—current ones are over six thousand words, twice the average length of one of these book chapters. When we choose to store our data online, we're often ceding our claim to it. Companies can decide what type of data they will hold for us, and can willfully delete any data they object to. Unless we've kept a separate copy on our own machines or drives, this data will be lost to us forever. If any of our data is found to be particularly objectionable or otherwise in violation of the terms of service, the companies can unilaterally delete our accounts, deny us our own data, and yet retain a copy for their own records, which they can turn over to the authorities without our knowledge or consent. Ultimately, the privacy of our data depends on the ownership of our data. There is no property less protected, and yet no property more private. ...

Meanwhile, the private sector was busy leveraging our reliance on technology into market consolidation. The majority of American Internet users lived their entire digital lives on email, social media, and e-commerce platforms owned by an imperial triumvirate of companies (Google, Facebook, and Amazon), and the American IC was seeking to take

advantage of that fact by obtaining access to their networks—both through direct orders that were kept secret from the public, and clandestine subversion efforts that were kept secret from the companies themselves. Our user data was turning vast profits for the companies, and the government pilfered it for free. I don't think I'd ever felt so powerless.

...

Law enforcement's use of surveillance cameras on public property was originally conceived of as a crime deterrent and an aid to investigators after a crime had occurred. But as the cost of these devices continued to fall, they became ubiquitous, and their role became preemptive—with law enforcement using them to track people who had not committed, or were not even suspected of, any crime. And the greatest danger still lies ahead, with the refinement of artificial intelligence capabilities such as facial and pattern recognition. An AI-equipped surveillance camera would be no mere recording device, but could be made into something closer to an automated police officer—a true robo-cop actively seeking out "suspicious" activity, such as apparent drug deals (that is, people embracing or shaking hands) and apparent gang affiliation (such as people wearing specific colors and brands of clothing). Even in 2011, it was clear to me that this was where technology was leading us, without any substantive public debate.

Potential monitoring abuses piled up in my mind to cumulatively produce a vision of an appalling future. A world in which all people were totally surveilled would logically become a world in which all laws were totally enforced, automatically, by computers. After all, it's difficult to imagine an AI device that's capable of noticing a person breaking the law not holding that person accountable. No policing algorithm would ever be programmed, even if it could be, toward leniency or forgiveness.<sup>8</sup>

I wondered whether this would be the final but grotesque fulfillment of the original American promise that all citizens would be equal before the law: an equality of oppression through total automated law enforcement. I imagined the future SmartFridge stationed in my kitchen, monitoring my conduct and habits, and using my tendency to drink straight from the carton or not wash my hands to evaluate the probability of my being a felon. (pp. 191-196)

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<sup>8</sup> I am reminded of the dystopian film *Minority Report*, especially the scene in which Tom Cruise is walking past electronic billboards advertising products - as he passes each one, it calls out, through his permanent headset, his name and advises him of what might interest him, based on the data on his file.

T T T T

**In memory** of the dear friends and family who died in 2021:

*Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905-2004)*

Do not stand at my grave and weep  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die.

*Francine Carrillo*

Cherche encore, va devant  
Passe les vallons, foule l'herbe des champs  
Enjambe l'horizon, épouse le vent  
Et tu verras que chaque pas est une moisson.

**April - Cynthia Zorin (\*1959)**

Now out of this vast silence  
the cherry trees scraping their gnarled limbs  
on the sky, and the wind hurls down  
a flurry of petals, a snowstorm really,  
a thousand prints on the wet pavement,  
each one a pair of white shutters, opening.  
Numinous, the souls of the dead, and now you,  
. . . among them—an intake of breath.  
How little it seems to me now,  
we knew each other.  
But still, it is so beautiful, the place where you were—  
a table, two chairs, a tree growing up  
right through the floor, and outside,  
a flicker of swallows in the hedgerows,  
the tulips' purple chevrons a row of arrowheads.  
. . . It is wherever you  
want to be, although by now you are  
beyond wanting. Or at least that's

what they say of the dead.  
The place where you were holds the light  
the way the leaves do after dusk  
when small animals conduct  
their assignations—the shrew, the mouse, the mole  
running their études in the mossy shadows.  
. . . You were always so  
afraid of falling short. If only you hadn't  
done such a good job of dying.  
But it is so  
beautiful where you were, above  
the garden, where it is snowing, this morning in April,  
on the bleached white pansies,  
the downed cherry blossoms . . . .  
where you so often sat,  
talking and talking.

**The Terrace - *Charles William Jefford* (\*1929)**

The crowd has gone from the terrace,  
only glasses and plates remain.  
Crusts of bread and crumpled napkins  
are disturbed by the rising breeze.

Caught up, like birds, they fly  
into the summer haze,  
towards the blue horizon,  
where distant sail-boats ply.

Wind-borne they merge as one  
into a ball of light,  
brightening until it shines,  
refulgent, white.

Its dying rays fall upon  
chairs askew and table bare,  
casting shadows of friends long gone,  
and past joys once shared,

and cries, still heard,  
that clutch the heart.

T T T T

**OWNED - Property, privacy, and the new digital serfdom**, Joshua A.T. Fairfield, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017, pp. 1-12

There is a myth - perhaps you saw a version of it in the movie *Braveheart* - told about the abuses of feudal lords, about the *droit du seigneur* or *ius primae noctis*: the "right of the lord" or the "right of the first night." A feudal lord supposedly had the right to sexual relations with the bride of a newly married peasant couple. The lord's power over the land on which his tenants lived and worked extended, in this story, to the power to interfere in even the most intimate and personal moments of a couple's lives. The story is just a myth - there is no record of the *ius primae noctis* being exercised in medieval times. It seems to have developed later as a popular and salacious description of the boundless arrogance and power of feudal lords over every detail of the lives of those who lived on their land.<sup>9</sup>

But this is no myth: on September 13, 2016, as I was finishing this book, the Chicago Tribune reported that a class action lawsuit had been filed on behalf of tens of thousands of people against the makers of We Vibe, a popular couples' erotic massage device. WeVibe was discovered to have been extracting the most intimate data possible from the device: date and time of each use, level of vibration intensity, vibration mode or pattern selection, even the temperature of the device and the email address of the user. The data were apparently collected for purposes of market research. The manufacturer of WeVibe - a company called Standard Innovation - was able to do this as a technical matter because the device was web-enabled, controlled wirelessly by a smartphone application, called We-Connect. Standard Innovation buried software in the device that communicated the intimate details to We-Connect, and We-Connect then secretly forwarded the details to SI's own servers. SI claimed the legal right to do this because of terms hidden deep within the app's software license. Never mind that no one reads such terms, or that no one could understand them even if they did. Standard Innovation believed that merely in installing and using its app, users agreed to permit the company to intrude and spy on communications between themselves and their lovers.

This is digital *ius primae noctis*. With all of the brazen arrogance of a digital feudal lord toward his peasantry, SI felt justified in conducting the most gross invasions of privacy and property, in surveilling the most intimate moments between its customers, merely because of the power it holds as

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<sup>9</sup> The aristocracy's supposed abuse of the *ius primae noctis* was a theme of Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* (see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/essentiels/beaumarchais/mariage-figaro>). A critic wrote that in the play one can already hear the click of the guillotine.

the owner of the intellectual property embedded in the device, and as the drafter of clauses buried deep within its license agreement. ...

As I describe in this book, with every new push of software into everyday life, the owners of intellectual property assert more control over the daily lives of people who use their products. Smart televisions report on the conversations of people who are merely standing within earshot. Smartphones report the real-world location of users to manufacturers, operating system designers, and app providers. The supposed owner often has less say in what a device or product is doing than does its manufacturer. The "owner" is a source of data to be harvested. As one commentator put it, many social networks and search engines "have turned into nothing more than the 21st century's mining companies, constantly mining for the next nugget of gold."

We own and control fewer and fewer of the products that we must use to function in modern society. Many computing devices (iPads, for instance) run only those programs approved by the device seller. We cannot even tell our devices not to reveal our personal data. The only guaranteed way to stop a smartphone from reporting on our web searches, web traffic, real-world location, texts, and surrounding ambient sounds and sights is to pull out its battery or not to carry one. This is an untenable position in an information-age society. In the United States alone, two-thirds of Americans own a smartphone and use it as "a key entry point to the online world." ...

To fix this, we must re-establish control of our digital and smart property at the most basic level. We must restore everyday property ownership. If we do not take back our ownership rights from software companies and overreaching governments, we will become digital peasants, only able to use our smart devices, our homes, our cars, and even our own software-enabled medical implants purely at the whim of others. Like the serfs of feudal Europe who lacked rights in the land they worked, without digital property rights, we aren't owners - we're owned. ...

Information about consumers became the currency of the internet, and commercial surveillance became its funding model. User information was increasingly gathered by software embedded first in internet websites, and later into the very devices that consumers purchased to access and use internet technologies. That information could then be monetized through targeted behavioral advertising. By watching everything a consumer did, an advertiser could make enough enhanced revenue through targeted sales that it was willing to provide the relevant software (say, the operating system for a mobile smartphone) at a steep discount - or subsidize it for

software companies. This is how Facebook monetized its services. By knowing everything about the consumer, companies could charge consumers more if they were likely to pay more (Mac users pay more for hotel rooms booked online), or offer consumers deals that they would be unlikely to resist (comparison shoppers pay more for airfare because their browser histories indicate they are very interested in certain flights). The consumer therefore does not pay directly for use of internet technologies, but pays by being surveilled to such an extent that she may engage in an increased number of costlier deals than would have been the case had she not been subject to surveillance by her own devices. ...

What is needed is an escape mechanism - a way out of the trap of device-based surveillance. This book proposes that such an escape-would have four necessary components. They are simple extensions of the property rights that people have traditionally enjoyed over their possessions. First, people have the right to modify their own property. Second, they can sell it to others, free and clear, when they are done with it. Third, they can use it and enjoy it free from the interference of others. Fourth, they can exclude others from using it without their consent. These four basic rights that all of us have over our ordinary property - the right to modify, the right to sell, the right to use, and the right to exclude others - are the foundation of this book's attempt to create a metaphorical escape button for an Internet of Things that overrides personal control and ownership. ...

Life in the digital age does not require a regression into a time when individuals - we the people - have little or no control of the resources around them. The laws currently governing smartphones do not have to become the laws governing drones and voice-reading television sets. It is not set in stone that companies and governments will invade our devices at their whim. It is possible to avoid a future in which we are digital serfs, owning no digital property and using our devices only as long as we follow others' rules. We can return to normalcy, where we have the right to do as we wish with what is ours and to keep others from spying on us by using our own property against us. But if we don't want to get owned, we are going to have to do something about it.

**T T T T**

## **Pass the Port**

Liz Truss, UK Foreign Secretary, was visiting a former colony. Her trip involved a visit to a model dairy farm, funded from her Ministry.

It was a long dusty ride on unpaved roads, until the convoy arrived at the farm. Crowds of local people had gathered to meet them and were shouting

"Dumbadumba, Dumbadumba". The Foreign Secretary asked the local Minister what that meant. "Oh," he said, "they are expressing their deep appreciation for the generous gift of the fine people of the UK." More shouts of "Dumbadumba, Dumbadumba"

"Unfortunately," the Minister explained to the Foreign Secretary, "the money ran out before we could complete the road to the farm so we will have to walk the last hundred yards through the fields past the cattle - but mind you don't step in the dumbadumba."

T T T T

Le corbeau sur un arbre était perché  
À ne rien faire toute la journée.  
Un lapin voyant ainsi le corbeau  
L'interpelle et lui dit aussitôt :  
Moi aussi, comme toi puis-je m'asseoir  
Et ne rien faire jusqu'au soir ?  
Le corbeau lui répond de sa branche :  
Bien sur, ami à la queue blanche.  
Je ne vois pas ce qui pourrait, mon beau,  
De la sorte t'empêcher le repos.  
Blanc lapin s'assoit alors par terre  
Et sous l'arbre reste assis à ne rien faire.  
Tant et si bien qu'un renard affamé  
Voyant ainsi le lapin somnoler,  
S'approchant du rongeur en silence,  
D'une bouchée en fit sa pitance.  
**Moralité** : Pour rester assis à ne rien branler, mieux vaut être  
très haut placé.<sup>10</sup> (*Anonyme*)

T T T T

### Poems for children (and other people)

*Michael Rosen (\*1946)*

Down behind the dustbin  
I met a dog called Ted.  
'Leave me alone,' he says,  
'I'm just going to bed.'  
Down behind the dustbin  
I met a dog called Roger.  
'Do you own this bin?' I said.

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<sup>10</sup> Merci Eddy !

'No. I'm only a lodger.'  
Down behind the dustbin  
I met a dog called Sue.  
'What are you doing here?' I said.  
'I've got nothing else to do.'

### **The News**

Here is The News:  
'Two incredible shoes.  
Two incredible shoes.  
That's The News.

When it rains  
they walk down drains.

They glow  
in the snow.

They grizzle  
in a drizzle.

They sneeze  
in a breeze.

They get warm  
in a storm.

They go soggy  
when it's foggy.

They've even hissed  
in a mist.

But  
(sad to say)  
there came a terrible frost.  
This is what happened:  
they got lost.'

That was The News.  
Two incredible shoes.  
Two incredible shoes.  
That was The News.

### **Frogs - *Norman MacCaig***

Frogs sit more solid  
than anything sits. In mid-leap they are

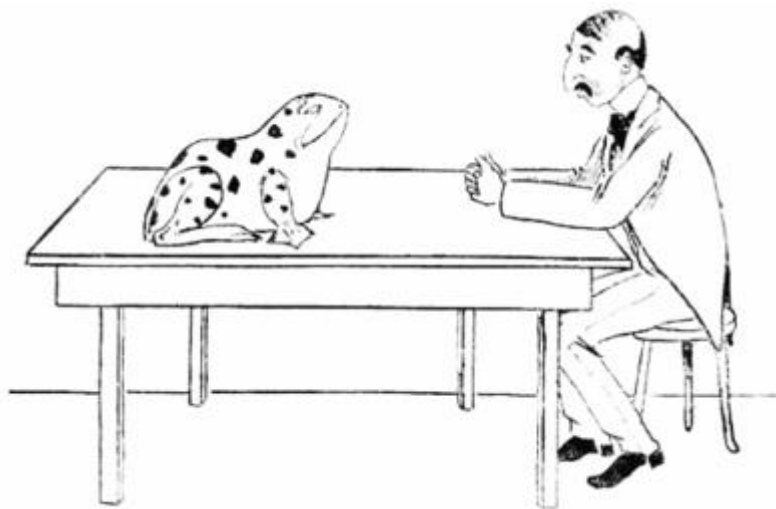
parachutists falling  
in a free fall. They die on roads  
with arms across their chests and  
heads high.

I love frogs that sit  
like Buddha, that fall without  
parachutes, that die  
like Italian tenors.

Above all, I love them because,  
pursued in water, they never  
panic so much that they fail  
to make stylish triangles  
with their ballet dancer's  
legs.

*Anonymous*

What a wonderful bird the frog are -  
When he sit, he stand almost;  
When he hop, he fly almost.  
He ain't got no sense hardly;  
He ain't got no tail hardly either.  
When he sit, he sit on what he ain't got almost.



Hilaire Belloc - *A Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1896)

**About the Teeth of Sharks - John Ciardi**

The thing about a shark is—teeth,  
One row above, one row beneath.

Now take a close look. Do you find  
It has another row behind?

Still closer—here, I'll hold your hat:  
Has it a third row behind that?

Now look in and...Look out! Oh my,  
I'll never know now! Well, goodbye.

***Shel Silverstein (1930-1999)***

Somebody has to go polish the stars,  
They're looking a little bit dull.  
Somebody has to go polish the stars,  
For the eagles and starlings and gulls  
Have all been complaining they're tarnished and worn,  
They say they want new ones we cannot afford.  
So please get your rags  
And your polishing jars,  
Somebody has to go polish the stars.

**My Sneaky Cousin**

She put in her clothes,  
Then thought she'd get  
A free bath here  
At the launderette.  
So round she goes now,  
Flippity-flappy,  
Lookin' clean—  
But not too happy.

**Early Bird**

Oh, if you're a bird, be an early bird  
And catch the worm for your breakfast plate.  
If you're a bird, be an early early bird—  
But if you're a worm, sleep late.

**The Centipede - Mrs. Edmund Craster (?-1874)**

The Centipede was happy quite  
Until the frog, for spite,  
Said "Pray, which leg comes after which?"  
Which wrought his mind to such a pitch,  
He lay distracted in the ditch,  
Considering how to run.  
While lying in this dreadful plight,  
A ray of sunshine caught his sight.  
He dwelt upon its beauties long,  
Till, breaking into happy song,  
Unthinking, he began to run

And quite forgot the croaker's fun.

T T T T

### **More port?**

Three men were playing golf one morning and one of them hit his ball into a pond. As they walked up to the pond, they saw a frog that said as they approached: "I will fetch your ball but then you must kiss me and I will grant you each a wish".

The player whose ball was in the pond said OK and, after retrieving his ball, kissed the frog which immediately turned into a beautiful fairy. "Right, tell me your wishes", she said.

The first player said he would really like to be a bit better-looking and it would be good if his IQ could be raised a notch. BOOM – there he was looking pretty good and with a new light of intelligence in his eyes.

The second player was so impressed he said he wanted to be five times more handsome and intelligent and with a pleasant and agreeable character as well. BOOM – there he was looking like the centrefold of "Playgirl", quoting Shakespeare and doing calculus in his head, radiating strength and happiness from his sensitive, confident face.

The third player – having seen all this – asked to be ten times more of everything. "Um," said the fairy, "I think you should reflect a bit before you ask for that – are you absolutely sure that's what you want?" "Yes", said the other "why on earth not?". "Well", said the fairy, you may be a bit surprised about the outcome". "No, no", said the golfer, "I'm absolutely sure".

BOOM – suddenly the golfer was turned into ..... a woman.

T T T T

### **Prose or Poetry?**

In my preface, I express the opinion that "much verse is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose." Can you tell the difference?

He too is guilty of retrospection as the light fades,  
in that hour in winter or summer  
before they bring in the candles,  
when earth and sky melt,  
when the fluttering heart of the bird on the bough calms and  
slows,  
and the night-walking animals stir and stretch and rouse,  
and the eyes of cats shine in the dark,

when colour bleeds from sleeve and gown into the darkening air;  
when the page grows dim  
and letter forms elide and slip into other conformations,  
so that as the page is turned the old story slides from sight  
and a strange and slippery confluence of ink begins to flow.  
You look back into your past and say,  
is this story mine . . . ?<sup>11</sup>

Our magazine was merely an overture to the night and the party. I had predicted disastrous expense: a planetary certainty, according to Prospero's book. Jupiter and the full moon conjunct oppose Venus. Disastrous expense according to that book. Especially for me.

The conjunction combust my natal Sun. Venus pinned exact on my mid-heaven. For a wait-and-see astrologer, so what? Touch of a bat's wing easily exorcised. Our Chaucer would have stayed at home with his Dante. Locating the planets more precisely, he would have pondered it deeper. What else? I left it for serious astrologers to worry that conjunction, conjunct with your native ruling Mars.<sup>12</sup>

Crossing gate,  
Then warehouse  
Before the big station :  
He lets down the window –  
Beyond the platform  
Steam issues from sleeping cars.  
Vague pigeons change perches  
Under the glass dome.  
A girl,  
thrusting nimble fingers  
Under her glossy black belt,  
Talks to a man.

One of these August days:  
The fourth – exactly at twelve,  
For he heard the clock chiming –  
Preceded slightly by the factory bell.  
The heat  
Fouled by exhaust fumes  
And unwashed by the slightest breeze  
Rises at him

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<sup>11</sup> Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror and the Light*

<sup>12</sup> Ted Hughes, *St. Botolph's*

Like the heat from a liftshaft.  
Perhaps it is the same everywhere  
On these August days.<sup>13</sup>

I sat all morning in the college sick bay counting bells knelling classes to a close. At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home. In the porch I met my father crying—he had always taken funerals in his stride—and Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow. The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram when I came in, and I was embarrassed by old men standing up to shake my hand and tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.

Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest, away at school, as my mother held my hand in hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs. At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived with the corpse, stanched and bandaged by the nurses. Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops and candles soothed the bedside; I saw him for the first time in six weeks. Paler now, wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple, He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot. No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear. A four-foot box, a foot for every year.<sup>14</sup>

The way we experience the death of public figures is private,  
even intimate.  
Part of it is that the death of one person  
revives the memory of the death of another.  
Loss is like that –  
cumulative,  
each new bereavement containing those that went before.  
I remember how many of those  
who filled the streets in the strange, intense week  
that followed the death of Diana in 1997  
confessed to grieving for someone  
other than a lost princess.  
On TV they looked like they were sobbing for an estranged royal,  
but for many there were tears within those tears –  
for a husband,  
a mother,  
a son.<sup>15</sup>

T T T T

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<sup>13</sup> John Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*

<sup>14</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Mid-Term Break*

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Friedland "Le Carré's death touched me. It feels like the grownups are leaving the room" - *The Guardian*, 19 December 2020

## **Do have some more Port**

The chief of an Indian tribe was being interviewed on a US TV programme. Sensitive to indigenous people's feelings, the interviewer asked him how he felt about his tribe being called "Indians".

The chief replied: "I'm sure glad Columbus wasn't looking for Turkey."

**T T T T**

### **Seaside Golf - *John Betjeman***

How straight it flew, how long it flew,  
It clear'd the rutty track  
And soaring, disappeared from view  
Beyond the bunker's back -  
A glorious, sailing, bounding drive  
That made me glad I was alive.

And down the fairway, far along  
It glowed a lonely white;  
I played an iron sure and strong  
And clipp'd it out of sight,  
And spite of grassy banks between  
I knew I'd find it on the green.

And so I did. It lay content  
Two paces from the pin;  
A steady putt and then it went  
Oh, most surely in.  
The very turf rejoiced to see  
That quite unprecedented three.

Ah! Seaweed smells from sandy caves  
And thyme and mist in whiffs,  
In-coming tide, Atlantic waves  
Slapping the sunny cliffs,  
Lark song and sea sounds in the air  
And splendour, splendour everywhere.

### **The parody - *Robin Butler (\*1938)***

How low it flew, how left it flew,  
It hit the dry-stone wall  
And plunging, disappeared from view  
A shining brand new ball -  
I'd hit the damned thing on the head  
It made me wish that I were dead.

And up the fairway, steep and long,  
I mourned my gloomy plight;  
I played an iron sure and strong,  
A fraction to the right  
I knew that when I reached my ball  
I'd find it underneath the wall.

And so I did. I chipped it low  
And thinned it past the pin  
And to and fro, and to and fro  
I tried to get it in;  
Until, intoning oaths obscene  
I holed it out in seventeen.

Ah! Seaweed smells from sandy caves  
They really get me down;  
Incoming tides, Atlantic waves  
I wish that I could drown.  
And Sloane Street voices in the air  
And black retrievers everywhere.<sup>16</sup>

T T T T

### **The White Man's Burden**

Who said the following?

"The continent may be a blot, but it is not a blot on our conscience. The problem is that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more."

"No doubt the AK47s will fall silent, and their pangas will stop their hacking of human flesh, and the tribal warriors will all break out in watermelon smiles to see the big white chief touch down in his big white British taxpayer-funded white bird."

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks Michael. Betjeman's poem was inspired by the 13th hole at St. Enodoc golf course in Cornwall. The parody was written by a fellow member for the club's centenary celebrations in 1990. Early in the latter's government career, he was occasionally confused with his namesake Rab Butler, the British Conservative politician. Memos for Rab Butler, some highly sensitive, ended up on his desk, and some of his ended up on Rab's. It was agreed that all memos ambiguously addressed to "R. Butler" should go to Rab's office first, and then Rab's office would send on any intended for the other R. Butler. One day the young Butler, who was still playing first class rugby, received a letter that read: "You have been selected for the Richmond 1st XV on Saturday. Please be at Twickenham by 2pm." Underneath, in Rab's distinctive handwriting, was the message: "Dear Robin, I am not free on Saturday. Please could you deputise for me? Rab"

Boris Johnson (yes, you guessed right) loves Kipling<sup>17</sup> - in addition to soft-soap, he probably also uses the Pears version.



The first step towards lightening  
“The White Man’s Burden”  
is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness.

**Pears’ Soap**

is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place—it is the ideal toilet soap.

All sorts of people use it, all sorts of stores sell it.

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<sup>17</sup> His recital in a Myanmar temple of Kipling's poem *The Road to Mandalay* was so embarrassing the UK ambassador was forced to stop him. See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/30/boris-johnson-caught-on-camera-reciting-kipling-in-myanmar-temple>

**The White Man's Burden - Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)**

Take up the White Man's burden—

Send forth the best ye breed—

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives' need;

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild—

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden—

In patience to abide,

To veil the threat of terror

And check the show of pride;

By open speech and simple,

An hundred times made plain.

To seek another's profit,

And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—

The savage wars of peace—

Fill full the mouth of Famine

And bid the sickness cease;

And when your goal is nearest

The end for others sought,

Watch Sloth and heathen Folly

Bring all your hopes to nought. ...

Enough? I hear you cry "Enough!"<sup>18</sup> - but try this one, before you leave the page (or stop reading *CP* altogether):

***Reginald Heber (1786-1826)***<sup>19</sup>

From Greenland's icy mountains,

From India's coral strand;

Where Afric's sunny fountains

Roll down their golden sand:

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<sup>18</sup> To read it all, see [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems\\_burden.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_burden.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Reginald Heber was an English bishop, man of letters and hymn-writer. After 16 years as a country parson, he was consecrated Bishop of Calcutta in October 1823. His ardent evangelism in an inhospitable climate probably led to his death after only three years in the post.

From many ancient rivers,  
From many a palmy plain,  
They call us to deliver  
Their land from error's chain.  
What tho' the spicy breezes  
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;  
Though every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile?  
In vain with lavish kindness  
The gifts of God are strown;  
The heathen in his blindness  
Bows down to wood and stone.  
Shall we, whose souls are lighted  
With wisdom from on high,  
Shall we to men benighted  
The lamp of life deny?  
Salvation! O Salvation!  
The joyful sound proclaim,  
Till earth's remotest nation  
Has learned Messiah's name.  
etc.

I am sure Johnson also resonates to Evelyn Waugh.

The history Lady Seal had learned in the schoolroom had been a simple tale of the maintenance of right against the superior forces of evil and the battle honours of her country rang musically in her ears - Crecy, Agincourt, Cadiz, Blenheim, Gibraltar, Inkerman, Ypres. England had fought many and various enemies with many and various allies, often on quite recondite pretexts, but always justly, chivalrously, and with ultimate success. Often, in Paris, Lady Seal had been proud that her people had never fallen to the habit of naming streets after their feats of arms; that was suitable enough for the short-lived and purely professional triumphs of the French, but to put those great manifestations of divine rectitude which were the victories of England to the use, for their postal addresses, of milliners and chiropodists, would have been a baseness to which even the radicals had not stooped. The steel engravings of her schoolroom lived before her eyes, like tableaux at a charity fête - Sydney at Zutphen, Wolfe at Quebec, Nelson at Trafalgar (Wellington, only, at Waterloo was excluded from the pageant by reason of the proximity of Blücher, pushing himself forward with typical Prussian effrontery to share the glory which the other had won) and to this tremendous assembly (not unlike in Lady Seal's mind those massed groups of wealth and respectability portrayed on

the Squadron Lawn at Cowes and hung with their key plans in lobbies and billiard rooms) was added that morning a single new and rather improbable figure ... [*Ed. Boris Johnson?*] (*Put out more flags*, p. 19)

*Carlos D. Stuart (1820-1862)*

Who are the nobles of the earth,  
The true aristocrats,  
Who need not bow their heads to lords  
Nor doff to kings their hats?  
Who are they but the men of toil,  
The mighty and the free,  
Whose hearts and hands subdue the earth,  
And compass all the sea?

Who are they but the men of toil,  
Who cleave the forests down,  
And plant, amid the wilderness,  
The hamlet and the town, -  
Who fight the battles, bear the scars  
And give the world its crown  
Of name, and fame, and history  
And pomp of old renown ?

These claim no gaud of heraldry.  
And scorn the knighting rod;  
Their coats of arms and noble deeds,  
Their peerage is from God!  
They take not from ancestral graves  
The glory of their name,  
But win, as once their fathers won  
The laurel wreath of fame.

T T T T

### **Help yourself to Port**

The plane is ready for take-off at John F. Kennedy airport. A hostess checks on the passengers and discovers that a blonde is sitting in First class but only has a ticket for Economy. She refuses to move to the back of the plane.

In despair the hostess calls the purser, who talks briefly with the blonde. She gets up without a fuss and moves to the economy section.

"How in hell did you manage that?" asks the hostess.

"I told her that the front part of the plane doesn't stop in Denver."

## T T T T

**An Ugly Truth** (Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang, The Bridge Street Press, 2021)

From the start of Trump's presidential campaign, his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and digital manager, Brad Parscale, put the majority of their media funds into the social network. They focused on Facebook because of its cheap and easy targeting features for amplifying campaign ads. Parscale used Facebook's microtargeting tools to reach voters by matching the campaign's own email lists with Facebook's user lists. He worked with Facebook employees who were embedded in Trump's New York City campaign headquarters to riff on Hillary Clinton's daily speeches and to target negative ads to specific audiences. They bought thousands of postcard-like ads and video messages. They were easily reaching bigger audiences than on television, and Facebook was an eager partner. Trump became an inescapable presence on the platform.

The 2016 U.S. presidential election would stamp out any doubts about the importance of social media in political campaigns. By early 2016, 44 percent of all Americans said they got their news about candidates from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. (p. 15)

In the company's weekly Q&A, the topic of the News Feed was raised again and again by employees concerned about the kinds of stories going viral on the platform. The topic came up so frequently that on June 18, 2016, Boz posted a memo on one of the Work-place groups addressing the subject of Facebook's responsibility to its users.

"We connect people. Period. That's why all the work we do in growth is justified. All the questionable contact importing practices. All the subtle language that helps people stay searchable by friends. All of the work we do to bring more communication in. The work we will likely have to do in China someday. All of it," Boz wrote.

"So we Connect more people," he declaimed in another section of the memo. "That can be bad if they make it negative. Maybe it costs someone a life by exposing someone to bullies. Maybe someone dies in a terrorist attack coordinated on our tools. And still we connect people. The ugly truth is that we believe in connecting people so deeply that anything that allows us to connect more people more often is de facto good."

The title of the memo was "The Ugly." (pp. 84-85)

Throughout Facebook's seventeen-year history, the social network's massive gains have repeatedly come at the expense of consumer privacy and safety and the integrity of democratic systems. And yet, that's never

gotten in the way of its success. Zuckerberg and Sandberg built a business that has become an unstoppable profit-making machine that could prove too powerful to break up. Even if regulators, or Zuckerberg himself, decided to one day end the Facebook experiment, the technology they have unleashed upon us is here to stay.



*"Thank goodness Facebook is back. For a few hours I had no idea where to direct my rage."*

One thing is certain. Even if the company undergoes a radical transformation in the coming years, that change is unlikely to come from within. The algorithm that serves as Facebook's beating heart is too powerful and too lucrative. And the platform is built upon a fundamental, possibly irreconcilable dichotomy: its purported mission to advance society by connecting people while also profiting off them. It is Facebook's dilemma and its ugly truth. (p. 300)

T T T T

**Philip Pullman calls for boycott of Brexit 50p coin over 'missing' Oxford comma** - Alison Flood, *The Guardian* 27 January 2020

It is a debate that has torn the nation in two, ripped friends and family apart, and entrenched deep and uncrossable lines throughout the land. Should the Royal Mint have used an Oxford comma on its Brexit 50p piece?

Three million coins bearing the slogan "Peace, prosperity and friendship with all nations" are due to enter circulation from 31 January, with Sajid Javid, chancellor of the exchequer, expressing his hope that the

commemorative coin will mark “the beginning of this new chapter” as the UK leaves the European Union.

However, early responses include *His Dark Materials* novelist Philip Pullman’s criticism of its punctuation.

“The ‘Brexit’ 50p coin is missing an Oxford comma, and should be boycotted by all literate people,” wrote the novelist on Twitter, while Times Literary Supplement editor Stig Abell wrote that, while it was “not perhaps the only objection” to the Brexit-celebrating coin, “the lack of a comma after ‘prosperity’ is killing me”.

The quote echoes Thomas Jefferson’s first inaugural address as US president in 1801, when he laid out the “essential principles” of his government – including (and note the comma usage) “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.” A plan to produce a commemorative Brexit coin last year had to be abandoned because it was marked with the original departure date of 31 October.

The criticism of the new coins follows the Bank of England’s decision to use a quote on its Jane Austen bank note about the joys of reading – apparently unaware that the character who utters the words has no interest in reading. Ireland’s Central Bank, meanwhile, misquoted Ulysses on a commemorative coin intended to honour James Joyce.

The Oxford, or serial, comma is included before the final “and” in lists. It has fierce defenders and equally fierce detractors – in 2011, when it was erroneously reported that the Oxford comma was being dropped by the University of Oxford style guide, one punctuation lover asked: “Are you people insane? The Oxford comma is what separates us from the animals.”

According to the Guardian style guide, straightforward lists do not need an Oxford comma, but it can sometimes help the reader – and it is sometimes essential. “Compare: ‘I dedicate this book to my parents, Martin Amis, and JK Rowling’ with ‘I dedicate this book to my parents, Martin Amis and JK Rowling’.” ...

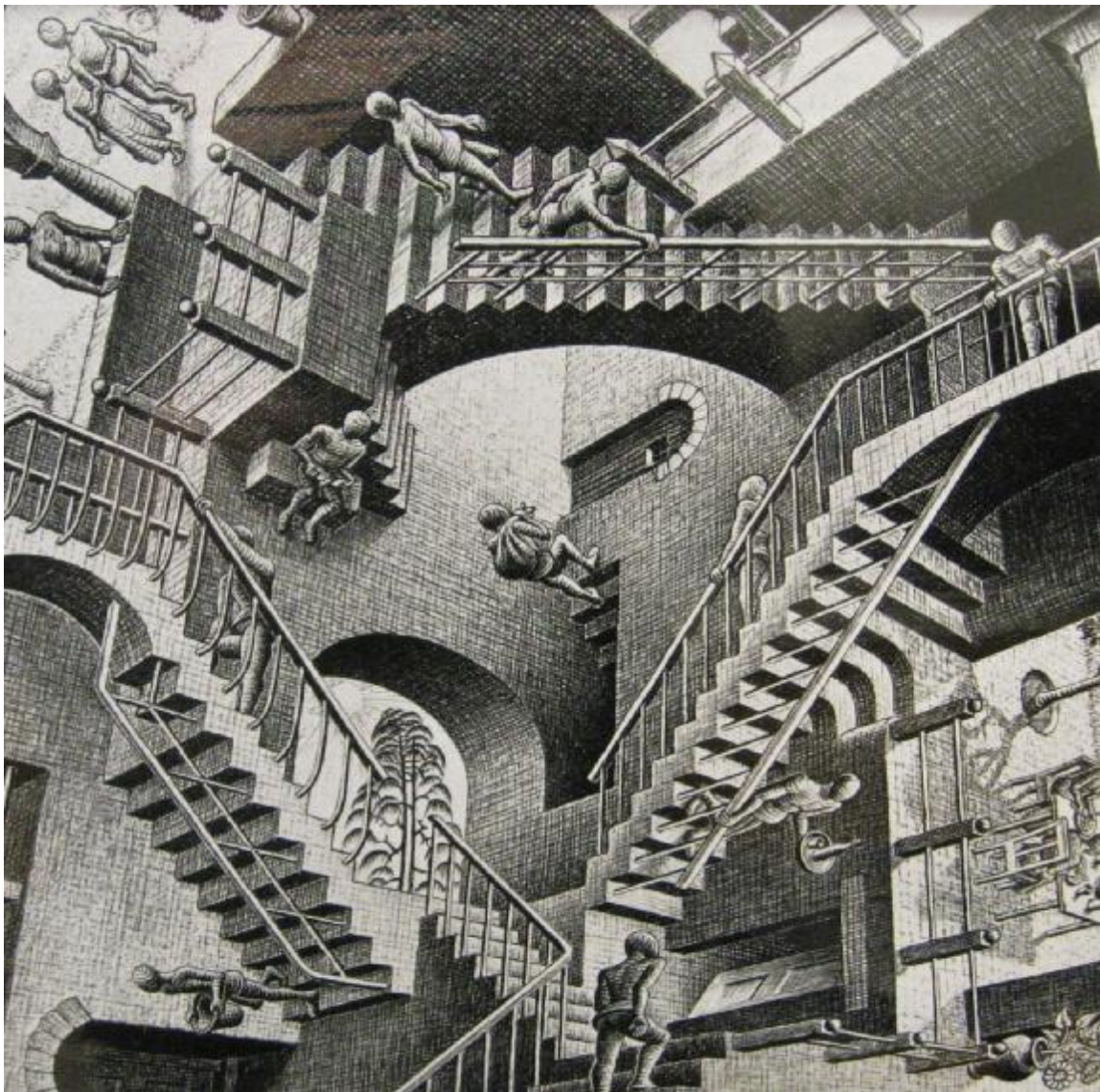
In 2017, however, the lack of an Oxford comma helped a group of Maine dairy drivers in a dispute about overtime pay. The state’s law had said that the following activities did not count for overtime pay: “The canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution of: (1) Agricultural produce; (2) Meat and fish products; and (3) Perishable foods.” The drivers had said that because there was no comma between “packing for shipment” and “or distribution”, the law was referring to the single activity of “packing”, not to “packing” and

“distribution” as two separate activities. And as the drivers distributed, but did not pack, the goods, this would make them eligible for overtime pay. The judge sided with the drivers. “For want of a comma, we have this case,” he wrote.

T T T T

## M.C. Escher

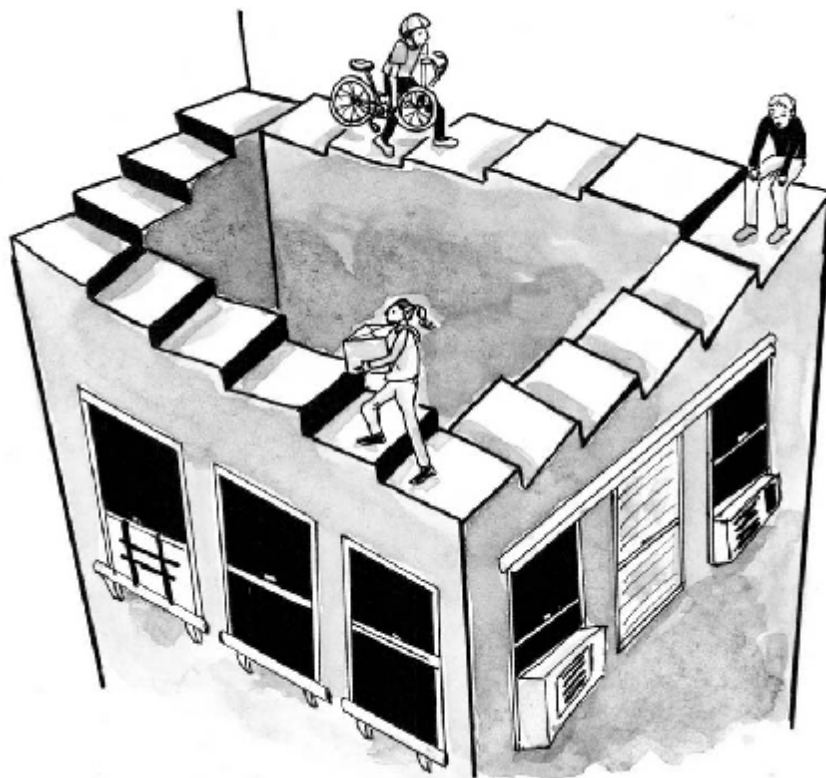
M. C. Escher (1898-1972), a Dutch graphic artist, was a master at distortions of reality. He made mathematically inspired woodcuts, lithographs, and mezzotints. Despite wide popular interest, Escher was for most of his life neglected in the art world, even in his native Netherlands. He was 70 before a retrospective exhibition was held. In the late twentieth century, he became more widely appreciated, and in the twenty-first century he has been celebrated in exhibitions across the world. His work features mathematical objects and operations, including impossible objects.<sup>20</sup> I show a few below.



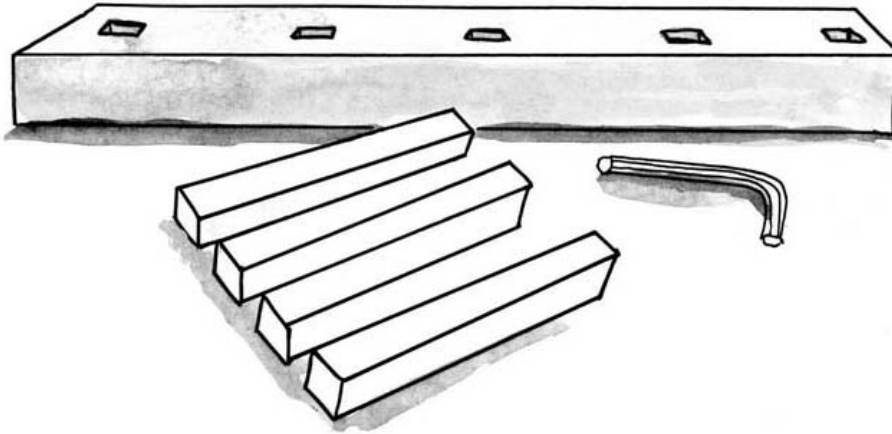
<sup>20</sup> See <https://mcescher.com/>



Ali Solomon, a cartoonist for *The New Yorker* has tried his hand at emulating Escher.



*Did your second-hand bed come with three slats or four?*



T T T T

### **Some More Port?**

Two ladies meet in Heaven.

Hi! Wanda.

Hi! Sylvia. How'd you die?

I froze to death.

How horrible!

It wasn't so bad. After I quit shaking from the cold, I began to get warm and sleepy, and finally died a peaceful death. What about you?

I died of a massive heart attack. I suspected my husband was cheating, so I came home early to catch him in the act. But instead, I found him all by himself in the den watching television.

So, what happened?

I was so sure there was another woman there somewhere that I started running all over the house looking. I ran up into the attic and searched, and down into the basement. Then I went through every closet and checked under all the beds. I kept this up until I had looked everywhere, and finally I became so exhausted that I just keeled over with a heart attack and died!

Too bad you didn't look in the freezer. We'd both still be alive today!

T T T T

### **Reilly, Ace of Spies**

I came by chance on a British TV series from 1983, *Reilly, Ace of Spies*,<sup>21</sup> with a charismatic actor, Sam Neill, in the title role. I put it in the same category as the adventures of John Buchan's Richard Hannay in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* :

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<sup>21</sup> Thames Television 1983, DVD 2007.

entertaining but implausible. I was wrong. Further research, involving several remarkable books, revealed a fascinating and historically relevant story. Almost all of the seemingly implausible accounts in the TV series are based on fact. Sidney Reilly (1872-1925?), born Sigmund Rosenblum, illegitimate son of a Jewish doctor in Odessa, with a fake Irish passport,<sup>22</sup> became one of the greatest spies ever to work for the British.<sup>23</sup> The father of one of the authors cited below,<sup>24</sup> the diplomat and journalist Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, worked closely with Reilly in 1917-1918 as British Vice-Consul in Moscow. Lockhart was a close acquaintance of Ian Fleming, inventor of James Bond, and recounted to Fleming many of Reilly's espionage adventures. Fleming acknowledged that his fictional James Bond was based on the real Sidney Reilly and is quoted by Lockhart: "James Bond is someone I dreamed up in my imagination - he's not a Sidney Reilly."

The theme music to the TV series is the beautiful romance movement from Dmitri Shostakovich's score for the 1955 Soviet film *The Gadfly*.<sup>25</sup> This is no coincidence.

*The Gadfly* was a novel by Ethel Lilian Voynich (1864-1960), Irish novelist and supporter of several revolutionary causes. It became hugely popular in her lifetime, especially in Russia. According to Robin Bruce Lockhart, Reilly and Voynich had a passionate love affair, during which Reilly revealed to her the story of his espionage activities. The central character of *The Gadfly*, Arthur Burton, was based on Reilly

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<sup>22</sup> As with many things about Reilly, his origins are far from certain. An amusing anecdote is told of one of Reilly's visits to Prague. While in the Czech capital he entertained several of the staff of the British Legation to luncheon. Over some excellent food and wine he talked for once about himself and admitted that he was born near Odessa. At the luncheon was a young secretary who had that morning been arranging a visa for Reilly. He had seen Reilly's passport.

"How comes it, Mr. Reilly," he asked across the table, "that your passport gives your birthplace as Tipperary when you just said you were born near Odessa?"

Reilly laughed. "I came to Britain to work for the British. I had to have a British passport and needed a British place of birth and, you see, from Odessa it's a long, long way to Tipperary!" (pp. 125-126)

<sup>23</sup> He also worked with J. Arthur Ransome, subsequent author of many popular children's books (see below, pp. 50-53).

<sup>24</sup> Robin Bruce Lockhart, *Reilly, Ace of Spies*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1967; R.H. Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent*, Folio Society, London 2003; Giles Milton, *Russian Roulette - How British Spies Thwarted Lenin's Plot for Global Revolution*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2015; Roland Chambers, *The Last Englishman - The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*, Faber and Faber, London 2009.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sBKW7jMyLM>. Somewhat pretentiously, the film credits Harry Rabinowitz, not Shostakovich, with composition of the music.

Some highlights among Reilly's exploits:

In 1905, Reilly obtained for the British (and, he hoped, the Russians as British allies), under the noses of the French, the concession rights to the Iranian oil fields. Dressed as a French priest seeking donations for charitable work in Africa, he boarded the Rothschild yacht in Cannes and made a counter offer to William Knox D'Arcy, holder of the concession. Lockhart notes that

Reilly never received the massive reward for which he had hoped nor any congratulations from the Tsar although he was, as usual, commended by "C" [head of British espionage] for successfully completing another assignment. Perhaps he had only been a messenger, but what might have been the consequences to Britain had he failed to deliver the message in time? A man of lesser resource might not have boarded the Rothschild yacht until it was too late!

Reilly's old bitterness returned—a bitterness which flamed again both in 1907 when the Anglo-Russian Entente was signed and in 1914 when the British Government acquired a direct interest in the Persian oilfields, a move which was considered as farsighted as Disraeli's purchase of the Suez Canal. Every step Reilly had urged years earlier had been taken. Except for C's congratulations, there had been no recognition. The rewards of the successful secret agent are indeed intangible.

D'Arcy, on the other hand, was repaid all his earlier cash outlay and given £900,000 worth of Burmah Oil shares. A director of Anglo-Persian, he died in 1917 an exceedingly rich man.<sup>26</sup>

Great Britain was less prescient in the matter of the Saudi-Arabian oilfields. This concession might also have been Britain's for the gift of £20,000 in sovereigns to King Ibn Saud, but the Treasury refused the necessary exchange control permit. The concession went instead to Standard Oil of California .... (pp. 50-51)

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<sup>26</sup> Lockhart notes: "In the early 1930's a widely circulated and quite untrue story began to appear in books and in the press both in Europe and in America that D'Arcy, having found oil in Persia, had gone insane with the excitement and become a religious maniac. It was said that Reilly, disguised as a priest, had followed D'Arcy around the world, become his father confessor and persuaded him to part with his concession in the belief that profits would go to religious charities. At the time this story was circulating, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was engaged in delicate negotiations with the Shah of Persia for a new concession. In official quarters it was thought that this wildly distorted story had deliberately been put out by the French Foreign Office in order to discredit the British in the hope that the Shah would not grant them a new concession."

In 1909, disguised as a Baltic shipyard worker by the name of Karl Hahn, Reilly obtained a low-level position as a welder at the Krupp Gun Works in Essen, where he photographed Krupp's designs and sent them to London. In 1911, in a new role as a legitimate businessman, he became the St. Petersburg agent for the Hamburg shipyard of Blohm & Voss in the tender for supplying ships to the Russian navy - in this way, the designs of the latest German vessels came into his hands and were similarly dispatched to London.

In 1917, Reilly infiltrated the German General Staff. Posing first as a corporal, he was assigned to drive a colonel to the German High Command. Reilly faked an engine failure. Lockhart describes what happened next.

The colonel whose uniform looked both smart and commanding even in the twilight, got out of the car, drew off his leather gloves, which he placed carefully on the running board, and bent down to peer inside the engine. He stared at the spot to which the driver was pointing with a greasy finger.

If the colonel felt the heavy spanner which cracked his skull as he peered at the magneto, it could only have been for a fraction of a second.

The driver wiped his hands, carefully stripped the colonel of all his clothing ... and proceeded to dress. The boots pinched a little but everything else seemed to fit perfectly.

From under the driver's seat, the corporal turned colonel pulled out what looked like a large tobacco pouch. With the aid of its contents and the use of the driving mirror, he made some simple but effective alterations to his facial appearance. The light was almost gone, but he had practised his disguise so thoroughly that he could have made the changes equally as well in total darkness.

At the headquarters of the German High Command the sun shone brightly as the clock struck ten. At the great rectangular table in the large conference room were assembled, together with their principal aides, the galaxy of field-m Marshals, generals and admirals who controlled Germany's armed forces; Von Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Von Scheer, Hipper—all were there, as well as a man with a pointed beard and a withered arm, His Imperial Majesty Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The chairs round the conference table were all occupied save one. The meeting had been in progress nearly half an hour but the representative of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria's staff had not yet arrived. Von Hindenburg was scowling: it was inexcusable for so junior an officer not to be on time.

The clock had barely finished the last stroke of ten when the door of the

conference room was thrown open. A click of heels, a smart salute and the absentee officer strode into the room. With a hangdog look on his face, the colonel apologized profusely for being late. On the journey up from Bavaria, his driver had been taken ill; he had had to drop him off in hospital and drive the rest of the way himself.

With a nod of greeting to one or two of his colleagues, the colonel sat down in the vacant chair ... Sidney Reilly had joined the counsels of the German High Command. (pp. 18-19)

In 1918, Reilly almost overthrew the Bolshevik régime. Lockhart explains:

Allied Governments were convinced that the Bolshevik regime could not endure and that the old order would be restored. In London, at the Foreign Office, there was no-one who could even speak Russian. In the Cabinet Offices, Lord Carson, who had never heard of a Marxist, asked what was the difference between a "Marxima-list" and a "Bolshevik"! ....

In January, 1918, over the heads of the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office Chiefs, Lloyd George sent Bruce Lockhart, former Consul-General in Moscow, into this maelstrom as head of a special mission to establish relations with the Bolsheviks. His brief from Lloyd George was to keep Russia in the war. ....

In London, opinion hardened in favour of intervention. At all costs, the Bolsheviks must be made to resume fighting or be overthrown. Bruce Lockhart was labelled a pro-Bolshevik and nearly recalled. While plans for intervention were being prepared, something had to be done at once to expedite the fall of the Soviet Government.

This was the task of Sidney Reilly, code name "S.T.I.". .... At the end of April 1918, armed with a pass from Litvinoff, the representative of the Bolsheviks in London, to whom Lloyd George had recommended him, Reilly set out for Russia on the biggest assignment of his career. ....

Reilly arrived in Moscow on May 7th. .... Everything Reilly did was invariably done in the grand manner. If it was Bolsheviks with whom he had to deal, then he would start at the top. Although it was late in the evening when he reached Moscow, Reilly went straight to the Kremlin. Banging on the great red gates, he demanded of the astonished sentries to see Lenin at once. It is unfortunate that Lenin was not available—the two were destined never to meet—as it would have been interesting to have known Lenin's opinion of the man who planned to topple him from power. Reilly, however, did succeed in seeing Bonch-Brouevich, Lenin's closest personal friend. He told him he had been specially sent out by Lloyd George to obtain first-hand information about Bolshevik aims. The

British Government was not satisfied, he said, with the reports it received from Bruce Lockhart. ....

For some time, Reilly lived in Petrograd as Mr. Massino and in Moscow as Mr. Constantine. Travelling south to Moscow, he used the identity papers of Mr. Massino, but on arrival in Moscow, Massino would "disappear". When journeying from Moscow to Petrograd, he would show the papers of Mr. Constantine who would similarly "disappear" on arrival in the former capital. ....

In Moscow, Reilly held secret meetings with most of the leading counter-revolutionaries. He was surprised at the widespread anti-Bolshevik feeling even among the working classes. This gave him complete confidence that he would not fail in his mission. If his great hero, the obscure junior officer from Corsica, could conquer France and most of Europe, he saw no reason why he himself should not capture Moscow. As Bruce Lockhart later said of him, he was a man cast in the Napoleonic mould. ...

By mid-July, it was clear that a landing of Allied troops in North Russia was imminent. ...

On August 4th, the Allies landed at Archangel, but in pitiful numbers—a move doomed to failure from the start. Soviet reaction was quick. Bruce Lockhart's headquarters were requisitioned by the Bolsheviks, the Cheka raided the British Consulate-General where Boyce's clerical staff who sent Reilly's reports to London only just managed to burn their ciphers in time.

... Reilly's grand plan was to arrest all the Red leaders in one swoop on August 28th when a meeting of the Soviet Central Executive Committee was due to be held. Rather than execute them, Reilly intended to de-bag the Bolshevik hierarchy and, with Lenin and Trotsky in front, to march them through the streets of Moscow bereft of trousers and underpants, shirt-tails flying in the breeze. They would then be imprisoned. Reilly maintained that it was better to destroy their power by ridicule than to make martyrs of the Bolshevik leaders by shooting them. ....

From then on events moved with unexpected speed.

The day after Reilly left Moscow, and unknown to him until a few days later, the Cheka swooped on the French Secret Service headquarters in Moscow. De Vertement made a dramatic-escape over the rooftops but Dzerjinsky's men found a quantity of explosives and captured six French agents who were accused of taking part with Lettish agents in an Allied plot to overthrow the Soviet Government. ... The following day, Reilly finalized his plans in Petrograd but he was alarmed to find that two of his hide-outs in the city had been raided. Evidently the Cheka were after him.

[On] August 31st, Dora Kaplan, a Social-Revolutionary, fired two bullets at point-blank range at Lenin as he was leaving a meeting in Moscow. It was a miracle he was not killed outright and his chances of living were considered slight. During the night, Bruce Lockhart was arrested at gun-point and taken to Cheka headquarters in the Loubianka. There he was placed in a room in the "Kennels" with Dora Kaplan and interrogated by Peters, Vice-President of the Cheka and Dzerjinsky's chief assistant. Peters, wearing a leather jacket and khaki trousers and carrying a huge Mauser, wanted to know what his relationship was with Lenin's would-be assassin and where Reilly was. Bruce Lockhart insisted on his diplomatic privileges and refused to answer. He destroyed a compromising notebook in the Cheka lavatories in full view of two armed guards. The Cheka did not run to toilet paper and the use of the notebook pages instead aroused no suspicion. Bruce Lockhart was released but his freedom was to be only temporary. While he was in the Loubianka, his flat had been ransacked. ....

On the same day that Bruce Lockhart was arrested, Reilly, who was still in Petrograd, realized that his plans had gone wrong. Unshaven and disguised as a workman, he tried to make contact with Captain Cromie in his office at the former British Embassy. He was too late; Cheka gunmen, searching for Reilly, had raided the premises. The gallant Cromie had resisted to the last; with a Browning in each hand he had killed a commissar and wounded several Cheka thugs, before falling himself riddled with Red bullets. ....

In revenge for the attempt on Lenin, Dzerjinsky's firing squads went into action again; 500 people were shot in Moscow and a further 700 in Petrograd. Elsewhere in Russia, over 8,000 were said to have been executed in a systematic annihilation of Bolshevism's possible enemies. In Moscow no prominent Social-Revolutionary remained except those who lay on or in the ground with bullets through their heads. ....

The Moscow papers were full of what they called the "Lockhart Plot". In banner headlines, the Russian press denounced the "Anglo-French bandits" who had plotted to murder both Lenin and Trotsky and overthrow the Soviet Government. Bruce Lockhart was named as the arch-criminal and Reilly as his chief spy. (pp. 79-96)

A counter-factual approach to history permits the conjecture that Reilly might have headed an anti-Bolshevik government in Moscow in 1918.

T T T T

## **Shortage of Lorry Drivers**

Thousands of Germans who live in the UK have been written to by the government asking them to drive lorries in an attempt to ease the UK fuel

crisis, even though the majority have never been at the wheel of an HGV.

One 41-year-old German man, who, along with his wife, received a copy of the letter at their London home on Friday morning, [told the Independent](#): “We were quite surprised. I’m sure pay and conditions for HGV drivers have improved, but ultimately I have decided to carry on in my role at an investment bank. My wife has never driven anything larger than a Volvo, so she is also intending to decline the exciting opportunity.”



Boris Johnson has also been active.<sup>27</sup>



As have the Coastguard Agency and the Immigration service.

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<sup>27</sup> Thanks PhilBibi.



T T T T

## COVID spreads through speech

As Covid-19 infections remain high at home and around the world, scientists have found that the virus is being spread not only by coughs but by people talking to each other. Studies show that consonants project the virus for much greater distances than vowels and that certain consonants, the so-called plosive sounds, are the worst of all. Each time someone makes the sound 'p', 't' or 'k' they can project the virus up to three times further than when they use softer consonants such as 'f'.

Based on this new evidence, the government is introducing new rules, in stages, to make people's speech less dangerous and slow the spread of COVID-19. Announcing the new rules, health secretary, Matt Hancock, said: "During the first stage, or tier 1, the consonant 'p' will be banned. It must always be replaced with a softer sound 'f'. Anyone sfeaking to other feofle in a fublic flace will have to stof using the flosive sound. Failure to do so could lead to a fine or even frison.

The whole fofulation, even members of Farliament will all have to flay their fart in this.

After a feriod of a few weeks, we will move to tier 2. Tier 1 rules will continue to affly. In addition, the sound 't' will be banned and must be reflaced by the sound 'n'. Although this may cause some initial confusion -

now, for example, teachers in schools will face challenges when teaching the new names table - we are confident any problems will be temporary. Measures under tier two will help turn the tide of this pandemic. After a further brief period, we will bring in tier 3. The rules under tiers one and two will continue with the addition of the sound 'k' being banned, to be replaced by 'l'.

We have considered these measures carefully, in line with recommendations from professors at Cambridge University. These new rules will apply not only to English but also to other languages spoken in this country, including Turkish, Polish, Portuguese and Italian. I urge people to stay calm and carry on. Together we may conquer this COVID pandemic and return to normality in no time at all."

Thank you. (*Culled from Facebook - at last it serves a purpose*)



*Sign in Dubai international airport - perhaps exaggerating the threat ...*

T T T T

## The Last Englishman

Arthur Michell Ransome CBE (18 January 1884 – 3 June 1967) was an English author and journalist. He is best known for writing the *Swallows and Amazons* series of children's books about the sailing and related adventures of children, mostly in the Lake District and the Norfolk Broads.

Starting out as an author and editor of biography, Ransome entered an unhappy marriage with Ivy Constance Walker, who resented the time he spent writing. In 1913, Ransome left his wife and their daughter and went to Russia to study its folklore. In 1916, he published *Old Peter's Russian Tales*, a collection of 21 Russian folktales.

In 1914, he became a foreign correspondent for *The Daily News*, a radical newspaper, and covered the war on the Eastern Front and the Russian Revolutions. He was sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause, and became close to a number of its leaders, including Lenin, Trotsky and Radek, in the course

of which he became the lover of Evgenia Petrovna Shelepina, Trotsky's personal secretary, who subsequently became his second wife.

Ransome worked as an informant for the British Secret Intelligence Service, although some of the senior officers considered him a Bolshevik because of his close relations with the leadership and his opposition to the allies' intervention in the Russian civil war. In March 1919, he was actually interviewed by the Service and threatened with exposure as an agent. However, his articles revealing sympathy for the Bolsheviks certainly had the objective of ensuring his continued access to the leadership.

In October 1919, Ransome returned to Moscow for *The Manchester Guardian*, where he was approached by the Estonian foreign minister Ants Piip with a secret oral message to the Bolsheviks proposing an armistice ending Estonia's participation in the war on the side of the White Russians. Ransome crossed the battle lines on foot and, thanks to the esteem in which he was held, was able to deliver the message to Maxim Litvinov in Moscow, the Soviet government's plenipotentiary representative in Great Britain. Piip's conditions for peace were accepted and Ransome returned again across the battle lines to deliver the reply - the Bolsheviks allowed Evgenia Shelepina to escape with him to Tallinn; a gesture of unexpected gallantry from the ruthless Soviet leadership.

The following are extracts from *The Last Englishman. The Double life of Arthur Ransome*, Roland Chambers, Faber and Faber, 2009

Arrested by the Bolsheviks [on his way to deliver the Estonian message], Ransome was informed that he would be shot as a spy, but succeeded in delaying his execution just long enough to be presented with a filthy brew of cherry leaves and to explain that he was no ordinary newspaper reporter. Lenin, he assured his captors, would be 'very angry' if he was shot. 'He won't be angry with me for obeying orders,' replied the platoon commander.

'Perhaps not,' agreed Ransome, quietly sipping his tea: 'But here I am. I have crossed the front already, and told you that I am going to Moscow. If you shoot me and find out afterwards that it was a mistake, you won't be able to put me together again. If, on the other hand, you don't shoot me and find out afterwards that you should have shot me, that is a mistake you will easily be able to put right.'

Faced with the irresistible logic of this argument, the soldiers refilled Ransome's glass, and shortly afterwards, after further friendly banter, sent him on his way. [p. 288]

Chambers is as dismissive of the quality of Ransome's information as of his

motives:

[It] - often misguided, wholly insignificant in terms of the national security either of Russia or Britain - is less arresting than his motives for giving it. His appeal to the Cheka was obvious. At one time or another he had enjoyed a personal acquaintance with every official that might have excited Dzerzhinsky's interest, from Basil Thomson at Scotland Yard, through Major Gregory of the Foreign Office's Northern Department, to Ernest Boyce, head of British intelligence in Russia - by now considered a family friend. As for Ransome's reasons for co-operating, it is possible that his concern for the safety of Evgenia's family was a factor. In 1920, Iroida [Evgenia's sister] had transferred from Kabul to the headquarters of the NKVD, the Commissariat for the Interior, which controlled the Cheka, and she would certainly have been expected to make herself useful. There was also Ransome's long-standing commitment to the 'Anglo-Russian friendship', which he had defended ever since the Tsar first declared war on Germany. But his most powerful motive for ingratiating himself with the Cheka was almost certainly personal advancement, a straightforward self-interest which Ransome never owned to but which explains his dealings with the British and Soviet intelligence services far more comprehensively than any other. As an agent of MI6, his recruitment had benefited nobody as materially as himself, while his admiration for the Bolsheviks was measured against no consistent ideal. Following a series of peasant revolts, workers' strikes, and most recently, the rebellion of the Kronstadt sailors, Lenin had been forced to abandon communism in favour of a limited form of capitalism, or the so-called New Economic Policy, but Ransome - weary of statistics - scarcely touched on the subject for several months. Kronstadt, meanwhile, had not shaken his commitment to the Soviet project any more than the Red Terror. Reinstalled by *The Guardian* in March, he echoed Dzerzhinsky in describing the uprising as a wholly anomalous distraction, fomented by a foreign power (the French). [p. 308]

T T T T

### Did you know?

Until modern times, birds had first names, perhaps because people felt much closer to nature than today, e.g. Tom-tit, Robin-redbreast, Jack-daw, Philip-sparrow,<sup>28</sup> Jenny-wren<sup>29</sup> and Mag-pie (Mag is a short-form for Margaret –

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<sup>28</sup> John Skelton (1463-1529) wrote the poem *Phyllyp-sparrow* around 1500; it was very popular at the time (see <http://www.skeltonproject.org/infophyllypsparowe/> and <https://www.exclassics.com/skelton/skel026.htm>).

<sup>29</sup> My grandparents always used the name Jenny-wren.

pie from the pied colour of the plumage). Later, some of the "familiar" names were dropped (Sparrow), others remained, either separately (Robin) or combined (Jackdaw, Magpie).

T T T T

## Odds and Ends

The surest recipe for killing a lie is to multiply the witnesses to truth. *Charles James Fox (1749-1806)*

To know another language is to possess another soul. *Charlemagne*

Chaque année il y a de plus en plus de cons. Mais cette année, j'ai l'impression que ceux de l'année prochaine sont déjà arrivés ! *Coluche*

The US is currently in the grip of two interlocking addictions - greed and anger. An alliance between greed-addicted rich people and anger-addicted not-rich people constitutes the Republican party. *Ian Frazier, review of Billionaire Wilderness - The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West (New York Review of Books, 17 December 2020)*

Jane Austen: Run mad as often as you choose, but do not faint. (*Love and Friendship*) - A woman, especially if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can. (*Northanger Abbey*)

I have a friend who just won two tickets in the lottery for finals day at Wimbledon. Unfortunately, it coincides with his wedding day. If anyone is interested to replace him it's at the parish church in Harpenden on Saturday 9 July at 14h30; the girl's name is Jennifer.

One way children hold on to the edge of the world is by believing that they are at the center of it. *Hilton Als, An Awful and Beautiful Light - New York Review of Books 17 December 2020.*

Reden ist sähen - und schweigen/zuhören ist ernten - Seeds are sown by words - we keep silence for the harvest. *Lao-Tse, (6th century BCE Chinese philosopher.)*

H.L. Mencken's warning from 1918 will never perish: "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary." British Conservatives and the US Republicans have added a modern game to the demagogic playbook. They are creating an imaginary fear that elections are being rigged in order to rig elections. They will protect democracy by removing the right to vote. *Nick Cohen, The Guardian 11 July 2021.*

"Y'a pas d'hélice, hélas !", "C'est là qu'est l'os". Échange, devant un hélicoptère hors d'usage, entre le peintre en bâtiment un peu naïf Augustin

Bouvet (Bourvil) et l'acariâtre chef d'orchestre à l'Opéra de Paris Stanislas Lefort (Louis de Funès) lors de leur fuite devant les troupes allemandes dans *La Grande Vadrouille*. C'est aux frères André et Georges Tabet, auteurs des dialogues du film, que nous devons cette savoureuse et étonnante paronomase.

"The article on pidgin English and the Chinese mixing of L and R [CP 2020] reminded me of our time in Kenya where the Kikuyu tribe (the most numerous and powerful, the tribe of President Uhuru Kenyatta and his father Jomo) habitually invert L and R; we had great fun in 2018-19 with the national elections, the biggest elections in the nation's history." *Peter Burgess*

L'humanité préfère à la vie des raisons de vivre. *Simone de Beauvoir, Le deuxième sexe*

So the two of them went to London by the early morning train. 'Let's surprise her,' said Nigel, but Cedric telephoned first, wryly remembering the story of the pedantic adulterer - 'My dear, it is I who am surprised; you are astounded.' *Put out more flags - Evelyn Waugh*

Comment voulez-vous que nos enfants nous écoutent : Tarzan vit à moitié à poil... Cendrillon rentre à minuit... Pinocchio passe son temps à mentir... Aladin est le roi des voleurs... Batman conduit à 320 km/h... La Belle au bois dormant est une grande flemmarde... Blanche neige vit avec 7 mecs... Le petit Chaperon rouge n'écoute pas sa mère - Sans oublier Astérix qui se dope à la potion magique fournie par un dealer qui est le curé du village. Et nous nous étonnons quand nos gosses font des conneries. [*Merci Ben*]

