

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2022

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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.

TRIGGER WARNING

The contents of this edition of Christmas Pudding may give offence to persons of a sensitive disposition, in particular if you are

A Trumpist

An admirer of Boris Johnson/Liz Truss

A died-in-the-wool Conservative

A monarchist/royalist

A follower of Q-Anon

Dedicated to politically correct language

A believer that Big Tech companies can do no wrong and have all of our best interests at heart.



~ Robert Middleton 2022

Cartoons from *The New Yorker*

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All previous editions of Christmas Pudding can be found on

<https://pamirs.org/christmas-pudding/>

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2022

And what a year! The year of the tiger : which reminds me of a cautionary tale:



There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

What a ride 2022 has been!¹

T T T T

The Two Elizabeths

Fintan O'Toole, a columnist for *The Irish Times* and regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, is no friend of archaic British

¹ Looking back to the page opposite, I should probably have written "died in the wool", but the error is felicitous and brings back happy memories of the immortal quip by the Labour politician Dennis Healey in June 1978 that being criticized by the mild mannered Conservative minister Geoffrey Howe was like "being savaged by a dead sheep."

institutions,² still less the monarchy. Yet he wrote an oddly sympathetic article on the Queen's passing in the *NYRB* of 20 October 2022, under the headline: "The queen presided over the death of a British world and yet was enormously successful in keeping alive the monarchy that symbolized it," of which I give some extracts below.

... Monarchy seeks, above all, to put on a show of timelessness in which the ruler floats above contingency and change. The hereditary principle rests on a notion of "always": this is how it has always been and how it will always be. In defiance of historical evidence, it proposes itself as the great repository of all that does not alter. For as Walter Bagehot put it in *The English Constitution*, published in 1867:

If a king is a useful public functionary who may be changed, and in whose place you may make another, you cannot regard him with mystic awe and wonder; and if you are bound to worship him, of course you cannot change him.

Which invites the question that now faces Britain: What do you do when you have no choice but to "make another" monarch—a seventy-three-year-old man who has spent his life lurking side stage, waiting so long for his entrance that his act has gone stale before he has even properly trod the boards?

The great achievement of Elizabeth II was that, merely by reigning for seventy years, she created and sustained the necessary illusion of permanence. While her United Kingdom was being transformed from a global imperial power to a Northern European country at odds with its neighbors and with itself—while its ideal of greatness was moving from reality to puffed-up pretense—she was always there. Even the obviously anachronistic nature of her reign served to emphasize its remarkable persistence as the only imperial and multinational monarchy left in Europe. ...

She understood, from this, that the best way to survive was to say and do as little as possible. It was merely to persist unshaken through the tempests of the times. In the grammar of her reign, the operative tense was the present infinitive: to be. She was very good at being there, at carrying on for so long that the infinitive came to seem infinite. ...

Consider two possible glimpses of her. One is by Elton John, recorded in his memoir, *Me* He has been invited to a party in one of the royal residences. (He does not say which or exactly when.) As he is watching the queen, she approaches her nephew Viscount Linley. His sister Sarah

² See, for example, his *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*

had taken ill and retired to her room. Elizabeth asks Linley to go and check on her:

When he repeatedly tried to fob her off, the Queen lightly slapped him across the face, saying “Don’t”—SLAP—“argue”—SLAP—“with”—SLAP—“me”—SLAP—“I”—SLAP—“am”—SLAP—“THE QUEEN!” That seemed to do the trick. As she left, she saw me staring at her, gave me a wink and walked off.

The pleasure of this anecdote is that it is pure camp. The sovereign sends up her own authority. ...

The historian James Pope-Hennessy, who met her at Balmoral in 1957, noted in his diary that “she is extremely animated, gesticulates when telling anecdotes, makes comic or pathetic faces, and simply cannot remain still.... She mimes stories.” Yet “extremely animated” is the last phrase anyone would use about her royal self.

For if that winking and miming was the living body, the dead one was encountered, over the decades, by thousands of guests who had to sit beside her. At lunch, Pope-Hennessy encountered her other, official persona: “On the whole it is clockwork conversation, not at all difficult on either side, but not, on the other hand, memorable, interesting or worth the paper it could be typed on.” Clockwork conversation was her constitutional duty. Seamus Heaney’s “Whatever you say, say nothing” was her watchword. ...

How, then, could she preside over the death of a British world and yet be enormously successful in keeping alive the monarchy that symbolized it? The answer lies in an English dreamtime, a time in which there may be “no future” but there is a sort of eternal present. In this make-believe terrain, Elizabeth could be two people, at once royal and familiar. ...

The contradiction could be sustained because, while Betty lived in the present, Elizabeth always existed in the hereafter. The queen’s afterlife did not begin with her actual death, but a long time ago, with the rapid melting of the pall of sacral meaning that was laid on thickly at her coronation in 1953. In her broadcast address after her crowning, she informed her subjects that “the ceremonies you have seen today are ancient, and some of their origins are veiled in the mists of the past.” They were in fact invented traditions, few of them dating back much beyond the nineteenth century. The need for bogus antiquity betrayed a deep worry that without mystic awe the sacred monarch, head of the Church of England and embodiment of empire, might be reduced to mere equality. The remarkable thing, however, is that the reduction happened but did not matter very much. It was familiar human sympathy, not

religious awe, that made her seem special. She doubled as ordinary Betty, not as God's anointed.

... After 1688 the primary claim of the monarchy was not the sacredness of its blue blood but the imperative of a Protestant succession. Under Elizabeth, however, this religious dimension shrank almost as fast as the empire did. In 1956, 34 percent of those surveyed in Britain thought that the queen was "especially chosen by God." By 1992, a survey found among respondents "no spontaneous...awareness of the monarchy's religious dimension." Only about 2 percent of British people now attend the weekly services of the queen's Anglican church. If Elizabeth's allure depended on God, the monarchy would have been abolished decades ago.

It survived for other reasons. One was that what was lost in holiness was gained in its contemporary equivalent: celebrity. It is not just that the queen was immensely famous, but that the nature of fame shifted in her favor. It divorced itself from achievement—a beneficial development for a woman whose defining attainment was being born first into the right family. But celebrity only goes so far, not least because it is notoriously fickle: for a time, Elizabeth was not even the most famous person in her own family, and the one who outshone her, Princess Diana, sparked in death the nearest thing to an antimonarchical revolt during the queen's reign. The fame game is as dangerous as it is rewarding.

... The need for this illusion became ever deeper in her later years, as the derangements of the Conservative Party produced both the succession of four prime ministers in six years and the collapse, under Boris Johnson, of all notions of decorum and public dignity. Simply by way of contrast, the queen became ever more queenly. She was never more so than when, during the Covid pandemic, she sat alone at the funeral of her husband, the day after two alcohol-fueled parties were held at Downing Street. Yet this was an image not of majesty or might but of human frailty, of an ordinary stoicism that most people, because of their own sorrows, could identify with. The two queens, the regal and the relatable, coexisted perfectly.

What really accounts for her potency—and what makes her irreplaceable—is precisely that doubleness, the way the public could choose to see her at any given moment either as Elizabeth II or as Betty. It meant that the weaknesses of the sovereign could immediately become the strengths of the woman. Thus, the banality of her majesty's clockwork conversations could become the heroic self-sacrifice involved in the repression of her true personality. The more boring she was, the more this dullness could be configured as duty—and the more her life of wealth and

privilege could be thought of as one of endless fortitude. ...

This dual monarchy is not repeatable—and certainly not by King Charles III. It was a female phenomenon, rooted in a patriarchal habit of construing as nobility a woman's effacement of her own thoughts and desires. Self-suppression is a feminine virtue. It is not one ever practiced by Charles, who has spent his adult life expecting to be listened to and taken seriously merely because of who he is. (Or rather, until now, of who his mother is.) He will moderate himself as king, but it is too late. His persona as a meddler is already far too deeply embedded in public consciousness. He can never have the quality Levine invoked as the title for his haunting image: lightness of being. Elizabeth was stereo; Charles is mono. The terror now for those who look to the monarchy to hold the UK together is that, instead of the queen's two bodies, they will have only the busybody king. As Oscar Wilde's Algernon puts it: "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his."



T T T T

In Österreich klingen die Schweizer wie «üliüliüli»

Ivo Mijnsen, Wien (*NZZ*, 12.7.2019) "Wahnsinn, wie gut verständlich Ihr Schweizerdeutsch ist!" Der überraschte Ausruf der Wiener Maklerin ist als Kompliment gemeint. Aber er tut weh, denn der Schweizer hat im deutschsprachigen Ausland stets einen latenten Minderwertigkeitskomplex. Und jetzt merken diese Österreicher nicht einmal, wie man sich bemüht, so unschweizerisch wie möglich Hochdeutsch zu sprechen?

Dabei fühlt man sich sowieso seltsam, klingen die österreichischen Dialekte doch eigentlich viel vertrauter als die deutsche Standardsprache des grossen

Nachbarn. Und während die Westösterreicher den Zürcher meist verstehen, erntet er im Osten nur verständnislose Blicke. Wie eine Nachfrage bei den Österreich-Experten auf Twitter ergibt, hat das mit dem Dialektgraben zu tun, der mehr oder weniger zwischen der alemannischen Schweiz plus Vorarlberg und dem bairisch sprechenden Rest Österreichs inklusive Teilen Süddeutschlands verläuft. Beide enthalten zahlreiche Dialektvarianten.

Wie die Schweizer haben aber auch die Österreicher eine eigene Form des Standarddeutschen. Dieses von der Dialektsprache zu unterscheiden, fällt wiederum dem neu nach Wien umgezogenen - auf österreichisch: "übersiedelten" - Schweizer schwer. Beruhigend inmitten dieser Fettnäpfchen ist, dass im bilateralen Verhältnis Sympathie vorherrscht. Auf die Frage, wonach die Schweizerdialekte klingen, geben die Österreicher viele, überwiegend nette Antworten. Sie verbinden Schweizerdeutsch mit der obligaten "Halskrankheit", der "alemannischen Sprachmelodie" oder "sehr niedlichen Bankangestellten". Die Kreativen haben olfaktorisch-dadaistische Visionen von "Ambrosia", "Käse, der stark riecht" oder "üliüliüli".

Der Wiener Alltag ist weniger poetisch. So fragt die Verkäuferin im Möbelgeschäft, ob wir aus Vorarlberg stammen, als sie uns beim Sprechen im Dialekt überhört; das Alemannische hören die Österreicher also heraus, auch wenn es mit den Feinheiten harzt. Ob wir so den ersten Schritt in Richtung Integration gemacht haben oder uns die Wiener schlicht als Hinterwäldler sehen, wollen wir trotzdem nicht so genau wissen.

T T T T

La Cigale et la Fourmi (Version COVID)

La Cigale, s'étant déconfinée tout l'été,
Se trouva fort dépourvue
Quand la deuxième vague fut venue.
Pas un seul paquet
De Pâte ou de papier cul.
Elle alla crier famine
Chez la fourmi sa voisine,
La priant de lui prêter
Quelques masques pour se protéger
jusqu'à la fin de ce bordel.
Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,
avant Noël, foi d'animal,
intérêt principal".
Mais la fourmi n'est pas prêteuse ;
C'est là son moindre défaut.
"Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud ?"

Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.
"Nuit et jour à tout venant
Je me collais, je sortais et me joignais aux foules."
"Vous vous colliez, sortiez
Et vous alliez dans les foules ?
J'en suis fort aise ...
Eh bien, toussiez maintenant."
Jean de la Quarantaine

And here are two more pastiches of Jean de la Fontaine, but in the patois of the canton de Vaud.³

Le Criquet et la Fourmi

Le criquet ayant youtsé tout l'été
Se trouva tout moindre
Quand la cramine arriva.
Pas une seule petite morce
De couenne ou de greubon
A mettre dans son cassotton.
Il alla faire la meule

Chez la fourmi, dans sa capite
Bringuant pour qu'elle lui avance
Quelque crotchon pour l'empêcher
De crevotter, de défunter
Jusqu'au redoux.
Je vous ça revaudrai, lui dit-il
Ma fi, avant la mi-été
Avec un p'tit bégnole

La fourmi est une râpia, une crible-fumée,
Alors, elle te l'astiqua
- Qu'es' t'as foutimassé, pendant tout l'été ?
Dit-elle à ce niolu.
- Nuit et jour sur le ruclon
Je faisais la rioule, avec les cancoires
- Ah ... tu t'es royaumé, tâdier ! ...
- Et ben ... Va aux pives, maintenant ...

L'ami corbeau et l'ami renard

C't ami Corbeau, sur un arbre ganguillé
Tenait à plein bec une tomme.
C't ami Renard, le tarin chatouillé

³ Merci Ben.

Lui tint ce discours à la gomme :
 Hé! salut c't ami Corbeau,
 T'es rude joli, t'es même fin beau!
 Crénom de sort, si ta batoille
 Vaut ce plumage qui pendoille,
 T'es le tofin des forêts du Jorat.
 A ces mots, le Corbeau qui trouve ça estra
 Ouvre tout grand son four
 Et lâche ses dix-heures.
 Le renard chippe la tomme et dit:
 Pauvre niolu, méfie-toi toujours des lulus
 Qu'ont la langue bien pendue.
 Cette leçon vaut bien une fondue!
 Le Corbeau dépité, conclut:
 Ch'us tondu, j'ai perdu, plus jamais je s'rai eu!

T T T T

I am a great admirer of the work of Barry Blitt, whose drawings appear regularly in *The New Yorker*. This has been a busy year for him as you can see from the selection below.







ONE MAGA SIN IS A GAME, NO ?

Blitt - Sad Palindrome

And another cartoon on another major topic from 2022.



"Which amendment protects us from the Supreme Court?"

T T T T

Académie Française denounces rise of English words in public life

The French language guardian warns an explosion in the use of anglicisms by organisations risks social division (*The Guardian*, 16 February 2022)⁴

The centuries-old language watchdog the Académie Française has warned that growing use of English by public and private bodies risks poor communication and could even undermine social cohesion. A report by six members, published online this week, warns that “today’s communication is characterised by a degradation that must not be seen as inevitable”.

Over 30 pages, it picks through dozens of messages from public bodies, such as ministries or local authorities, as well as private firms, highlighting examples of bilingual wordplay. The flagged terms include train operator SNCF’s low-cost Ouigo (pronounced “we go”) services, or imports from English such as “big data” or “drive-in”.

⁴ [Editor's note] Of course, this campaign is nothing new. Probably the best known example is the *Loi no 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française* better known as the "Loi Toubon", after Jacques Toubon, Minister of Culture at the time. Disparagingly called the Allgood Law, it had the same objectives as those of the Académie Française. For the record, I sat next to Madame Toubon at a dinner in Moscow in 1995; her conversation was decisively more interesting than that of the Queen (next to whom I have never sat - but see page 3) and I learned much about her married life.



[Editor's Note] Posters from a publicity campaign by the SNCF in 2006 - *Ouigo* is in the same tradition

“Many anglicisms are used in place of existing French words or expressions, inevitably leading to the gradual erasure of the French equivalents,” said the body, which was founded in 1635 under King Louis XIII to guard “pure” French. “Aside from fashion and sport, the internet and digital field is unsurprisingly the most strongly and visibly ‘anglicised’,” the academy said, dubbing tech terms “Californisms”.

In one example, it notes that there are at least five possible French translations for the social networking term “follower”, a word commonly peppered into everyday French speech. The Covid-19 pandemic has also resulted in a number of hasty bolt-ons from English like “cluster” and “testing”. English words themselves are “often distorted” to fit French pronunciation or syntax, the academy notes, resulting in “the creation of hybrid forms that are neither English nor French”.⁵

Sometimes this can make even fluent speakers stumble – as with carmaker Peugeot’s slogan “Unboring the Future” or the concept of a “drive piéton”

⁵ [Editor's note] For instance "footing" which means, in French, "jogging" - or "talky-walky" for the English "walky-talky".

(a “pedestrian drive-through”, or pickup point for products ordered online). Overuse of English “has the contradictory consequence of risking an impoverishment of French vocabulary and growing discrimination among sections of the public”, the academy said. ...

T T T T

Art Buchwald

Arthur Buchwald (1925-2007) was an American humorist best known for his column in *The Washington Post*. At the height of his popularity, it was published as a syndicated column in more than 500 newspapers. I used to begin reading the *International Herald Tribune* at the back page, where Buchwald had his column - it was a good start to the day.

Buchwald began his career in Paris. An article by Anthony Bulger, "How to Explain Thanksgiving to French People" in the magazine *France-Amérique* of 23 November 2021, describes the start of his career :

In 1952, a young American journalist set out to enlighten the French about the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday. He did so with a twinkle in the eye and his tongue firmly in cheek. The journalist was Art Buchwald, later renowned as a Pulitzer Prize-winning political commentator and humorist but then a rookie reporter based in Paris. Through talent, effort and a hefty dose of chutzpah, Buchwald persuaded the editor of the *Herald Tribune* – the European edition of the *New York Herald* – to entrust him with a regular column covering the cultural happenings and charming eccentricities of his adopted city. So popular were those articles that Art Buchwald became everyone’s favorite American in Paris.

His Thanksgiving column, “Le Merci Donnant,” came out in 1952 and laid the foundations of his reputation. Shrewdly, Buchwald surmised that since Americans ate the same meal every fourth Thursday in November, he could easily reuse the column to accompany the turkey and trimmings. In subsequent years, he would tweak the headline (“A Turkey with French Dressing,” for instance, or “Le Grand Thanksgiving”) and add a kicker, claiming, for instance, that the text had been leaked in 1621 by a Plymouth Colony pooh-bah. Alternatively, it was described as a confession to a vindictive sergeant in the Foreign Legion. Or an attempt to address the franc-dollar exchange rate. Or, best of all, an endorsement from the U.S. turkey growers’ association.

So, here is "Merci Donnant"

(Years ago a young reporter living in Paris told his French mistress he could not see her that Thursday as he was going to have a Thanksgiving dinner with American friends. The mistress pouted and said, "What is

Thanksgiving dinner?" And this is what the young man told her.)

One of our most important holidays is Thanksgiving Day, known in France as le Jour de Merci Donnant.

Le Jour de Merci Donnant was first started by a group of Pilgrims (Pèlerins) who fled from l'Angleterre before the McCarran Act to found a colony in the New World (le Nouveau Monde) where they could shoot Indians (les Peaux-Rouges) and eat turkey (dinde) to their hearts' content.

They landed at a place called Plymouth (now a famous voiture Americaine) in a wooden sailing ship called the Mayflower, or Fleur de Mai, in 1620. But while the Pèlerins were killing the dindes the Peaux-Rouges were killing the Pèlerins and there were several hard winters ahead for both of them. The only way the Peaux-Rouges helped the Pèlerins was when they taught them to grow corn (maïs). The reason they did this was that they liked corn with their Pèlerins.

In 1623, after another harsh year, the Pèlerins' crops were so good that they decided to have a celebration and give thanks because more maïs was raised by the Pèlerins than Pèlerins were killed by Peaux-Rouges.

Every year on le Jour de Merci Donnant, parents tell their children an amusing story about the first celebration.

It concerns a brave capitaine named Miles Standish (known in France as Kilomètres Deboutish) and a shy young lieutenant named Jean Alden. Both of them were in love with a flower of Plymouth called Priscilla Mullens (no translation). The vieux capitaine said to the jeune lieutenant:

"Go to the damsel Priscilla (Allez tres vite chez Priscilla), the loveliest maiden of Plymouth (la plus jolie demoiselle de Plymouth). Say that a blunt old captain, a man not of words but of action (un vieux Fan-fan la Tulipe), offers his hand and his heart, the hand and heart of a soldier. Not in these words, you know, but this, in short, is my meaning.

"I am a maker of war (Je suis un fabricant de la guerre) and not a maker of phrases. You, bred as a scholar (Vous, qui etes pain comme un étudiant), can say it in elegant language, such as you read in your books of the pleadings and wooings of lovers, such as you think best adapted to win the heart of the maiden."

Although Jean was fit to be tied (convenable a etre emballé), friendship prevailed over love and he went to his duty. But instead of using elegant language, he blurted out his mission. Priscilla was muted with amazement and sorrow (rendue muette par l'étonnement et la tristesse).

At length she exclaimed, interrupting the ominous silence: "If the great

captain of Plymouth is so very eager to wed me, why does he not come himself and take the trouble to woo me?" (Où est-il, le vieux Kilometres? Pourquoi ne vient-il pas auprès de moi pour tenter sa chance?)

Jean said that Kilomètres Deboutish was very busy and didn't have time for those things. He staggered on, telling her what a wonderful husband Kilomètres would make. Finally Priscilla arched her eyebrows and said in a tremulous voice: "Why don't you speak for yourself, Jean?" (Chacun à son goût.)

And so, on the fourth Thursday in November, American families sit down at a large table brimming with tasty dishes, and for the only time during the year eat better than the French do.

No one can deny that le Jour de Merci Donnant is a grande fête and no matter how well fed American families are, they never forget to give thanks to Kilomètres Deboutish, who made this great day possible

I include a few more of Buchwald's columns later in this edition. As you will see, Buchwald was a visionary as well as a humorist.

T T T T

Hilda Doolittle (1886 – 1961)

Hilda Doolittle, known by her *nom de plume* H.D., was an American-born poet, novelist, translator, and essayist. She was one of the best of the 'Imagist' poets - a short-lived but influential movement in poetry at the beginning of the 20th century. The Imagists wrote succinct verse of dry clarity and hard outline in which an exact visual image aimed to make a total poetic statement. It was a successor to the French Symbolist movement. Among the Imagist poets were Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell; Conrad Aiken, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot were influenced by it in their own poetry.

Oread

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

Heat

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,

rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

The mysteries remain,
I keep the same
cycle of seed-time
and of sun and rain;
Demeter in the grass,
I multiply,
renew and bless
Bacchus in the vine;
I hold the law,
I keep the mysteries true,
the first of these
to name the living, dead;
I am the wine and bread.
I keep the law,
I hold the mysteries true,
I am the vine,
the branches, you
and you.

T T T T

Yet another catastrophe

Rise of tubeless toilet paper a ‘complete catastrophe’, says *Blue Peter* star, Peter Purves: "a disaster for amateur arts and crafts." (Gemma McSherry - *The Guardian*, 26 August 2022)

Peter Purves has decried the invention of tubeless toilet rolls as a “complete catastrophe” as it deprives the public of a key component of amateur arts and crafts.

Loo paper brand Cushelle has become the first company to remove the

cardboard inner tube from its packaging in an attempt to reduce waste.

But the former Blue Peter presenter said the innovation would stymie creative craftspeople.

Purves, 83, told the Sun he was “horrificed” by the decision. He added: “In all my years on Blue Peter loo roll was always the most essential element in doing all the makes on the programme. It appeared in about five out of every 10 things we made on the show. We used them all the time. It’s a complete catastrophe.”

While the inner tubes of toilet paper are recyclable and biodegradable, they are made from cardboard, which ultimately contributes to deforestation and an increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Cushelle’s new rolls have 360 sheets, rather than the standard 180, and are packed so they no longer need the supporting tube.

Barry Read, the chief executive of the Paper Industry Technical Association, said: “The great British bog roll has moved into the 21st century. We’re a market leader and we’re showing the world how it’s done.⁶ This welcome development shows how the paper industry is reacting to consumer demand. Our existing toilet roll cores were perfectly recyclable as they were but the market is adapting. It’s onwards and upwards for the toilet roll.”

T T T T

Art Buchwald - It puckers your mouth (October 1959)

As a guest of Alexis Lichine, proprietor of the Chateau Prieuré-Lichine and Lascombes, I spent a few days in Bordeaux, watching one of the great vintages being brought in.

M. Lichine promised to take me on a tour of the Médoc and we started, quite naturally, with his own Château Lascombes. He told me that in the course of the tour I would be asked to taste some wines and he didn't want me to disgrace him.

I practiced by tasting some wine from one of his vats. It tasted good and I swallowed it.

"No, no, no," he said. "Don't swallow it. Swish it around in your mouth."

"Clockwise or counterclockwise?"

"Clockwise. Counterclockwise is for Burgandy. And then spit it on the floor."

I practiced a few times until I got it right.

⁶[Editor's note] Another achievement of Brexit?

"Now say something," he said.

"It sure puckers the inside of your mouth."

"No, that's not what you're supposed to say," Lichine cried. "You're supposed to say something beautiful like, 'How full and generous. It will fulfill its promise.'"

"Okay, but it still puckers the inside of your mouth."

Our first stop was Château Margaux, one of the four greatest wine châteaux in France. We visited the chai, the long shed where the grapes are put in vats and barrels. The master of the chai asked me if I wanted to taste some. I nodded and he gave me a glass.

I swished it around and spat it out. Lichine looked pleased at his pupil. "It has a texture all its own," I said. "It tastes like cotton."

Lichine kicked me in the leg. "What he means," he said to the master, "is that it tastes like velvet."

After we were shown around the Château (I discovered that no one in Bordeaux presses wine in their bare feet any more), Lichine took me to the Château Latour, another of the four greatest vineyards in France.

I tasted the Latour wine and said, "A great wine. It has such a rich, soft flavor."

Lichine smiled.

"Could I have some water?" I asked the owner, Count Hubert de Beaumont. Lichine's face dropped.

"Water?" The count looked puzzled. "Do you want to wash your hands?"

Before I could say I wanted to drink the water, Lichine dragged me away.

"Never, never, never ask for water in Bordeaux," he admonished me.

"But I tell you my mouth is all puckered up. My cheeks are stuck to my teeth."

Lichine would have none of it. The last château we visited belonged to Philippe de Rothschild, owner of the Mouton-Rothschild vineyards. M. Rothschild, a gracious host, showed us through his caves and invited us to have a glass of champagne with him in his house, one of the most beautiful in France.

We went upstairs and a servant served us each a bubbling glass. Lichine toasted his host, and we each sipped some. Then as Lichen looked on in horror, I swished it around in my mouth.

He screamed, "No."

But it was too late. I spat it on the floor.

T T T T



T T T T

‘Ask all the time: why do I need this?’ How to stop your vacuum from spying on you (Katie Cunningham - *The Guardian*, 16 August 2022)

Even if you’re not gadget-obsessed, the odds are you’ve got at least one smart device at home. So how do you limit the internet of things from listening in?

This month, Amazon inked a deal to acquire smart vacuum company iRobot – the makers of Roomba – for a tidy US\$1.7bn. As some see it, if the purchase goes through, that should worry us.

“It’s all about the data,” says David Vaile from the Australian Privacy Foundation.

Privacy advocates such as Vaile are concerned the robot vacuum cleaner will give Amazon access to floor plans of users’ homes, using mapping features some iRobot products already offer.

Amazon are yet to release details about what existing and future iRobot data will be used for; and the company told Reuters that they safeguard customer privacy and do not sell their data.

But Vaile says of big tech companies: “They’re about collecting data, and the products and services are really just bait to lure and hopefully lock in unsuspecting data subjects.

“Their opportunities for manipulating you and exploiting you, once they’ve spied on you, are more or less open-ended and getting broader all the time.”

The smart toilet era is here! Are you ready to share your analprint with big tech?

At its gentlest, data gathered by smart devices can be used by manufacturers to figure out how to more effectively sell you products. At worst, it can mean staff listening to conversations recorded by your smart speakers or sharing your doorbell camera videos with the police. And as with anything internet-connected, there is also a risk of hackers gaining access to your private information.

But despite the risks, smart home technology is booming. Even if you’re not inclined to purchase an internet-connected fish tank or a toilet that tracks and analyses your stool samples, odds are you’ve got at least one smart device at home. It could be the TV you stream Netflix on, your baby monitor or the air conditioner you control with an app.

So is it possible to have a smart home and not be spied on? Well, sort of.

The big decisions

From a data privacy perspective, the smartest home is a dumb home.

“That’s the real answer: don’t do it,” Vaile says. Failing that, he recommends paring back your system as much as possible.

“Just ask all the time: why do I need this?” he says. “Because every one of the fancy new tricks will come with both a privacy and a data security cost.” The simpler the system, “the better off you’ll be”.

Simplifying means disabling certain features on existing devices and being judicious about what you buy. ...

It’s also a matter of determining what data you’re willing to trade in return for greater convenience. ...

As soon as you connect the internet, from a data privacy point of view, you are in the hands of the manufacturers. ...

When you’re at the decision-making stage, you might also like to consult the Mozilla “privacy not included” guide before you buy, to get an idea of just

how creepy different products are. ...

The set-up

For Matt Furnell and Justin Kern from JFK Automation, a company that installs smart home systems, the key to data privacy is avoiding cloud-based services and internet-connected devices as much as possible.

“As soon as you connect the internet, from a data privacy point of view, you are in the hands of the manufacturers,” says Furnell. “So you should give them the least amount possible to work with.”

In many products, the pair say, cloud connectivity is unavoidable, but others will allow for workarounds – for instance, sending security camera footage to a hard drive in your house.

If you are trying to stay off the cloud, you’ll need to skip the assistant function on speakers. Whether you’re asking Alexa, Siri or Google, Kern and Furnell say that every voice command product currently available in Australia connects to the cloud. ...

Simpler fixes

Already got smart devices at home? You can still minimise what companies collect and what hackers can get.

To understand just how many of your home gadgets rely on the internet, Furnell and Kern recommend switching off your router to see what stops working. From there, you might decide to kick devices off your wifi if you don’t feel they need to be online.

You can also turn off any voice-assistant functionalities and cover up cameras you don’t need – for instance, sticking paper over your baby monitors when they’re not in use.

Something as simple as putting tape on cameras when they’re not in use can help with smart home privacy. Be particularly mindful of home assistant products with screens. “People don’t necessarily think that the cameras are doing anything,” Kern says. “But they probably are watching what you’re doing.” ...

Ultimately, if you want a smart home, you will have to accept that convenience comes with a privacy trade-off.

“You can’t have your cake and eat it too,” says Kern. “If you want to have all these functions and features ... you have to be connected to the internet, and there is a risk of someone having your data.”

T T T T

Pass the Port

Animal trainer to public: "Roll up ladies and gentlemen, see this beautiful leopard - he has a spot for every day of the year."

Little old lady in the back: "What about leap years?"

Trainer to assistant: "Fred, lift up the leopard's tail and show the lady the 29th of February."

T T T T

Art Buchwald - We Have a File on You (April 1975)

Several years ago I predicted that there were so many computers in operation in the United States that there would soon be a data famine in the country. I said that, unless new methods were developed to produce data, computer people would soon be fighting each other and possibly resorting to violence to get enough information to satisfy the appetites of their machines.

Unfortunately, I predicted this data war would start in 1984. Little did I realize it had already begun.

Everyone holds the FBI, the IRS, the CIA, local law enforcement agencies, as well as credit companies, responsible for invading the privacy of American citizens. But these organizations are not to blame. The responsibility rests with the computers which they have bought or leased that have to be fed constantly to justify their existence.

Let us take the FBI, for example. They purchased their computers to keep track of criminals and subversives in the United States. In no time the computers had absorbed the name and description of every racketeer, car thief, bomb thrower, and cattle rustler in the country.

Every scrap of information had been thrown in, but the computers kept demanding more. Frantic FBI officials sent out telex messages to their field offices: URGENT – SEND US EVERYTHING YOU HAVE IN YOUR FILES. COMPUTERS ARE DESPERATE FOR NEW DATA. NO MATTER HOW INCONSEQUENTIAL OR NONVERIFIABLE WE WILL TAKE IT. DIRECTOR INSISTS EACH FIELD OFFICE RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE TON OF RAW DATA PER WEEK. IF YOU FAIL TO MEET QUOTA YOU WILL BE SENT TO BILLINGS, MONT.

The FBI field offices tried to obey. All waste paper was sent to Washington. Agents broke into local police station offices to steal their files; foreign embassies were rifled; union records were filched. But still, many of the G-men could not make their quota. So they started sending in information on

citizens who had nothing to do with crime or subversion. Some field agents sent in entire telephone books from their areas; others made reports on members of the American Legion, the Elks, the Shriners, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. A few agents were so hard pressed they mailed in raw files on their own wives and children.

But the FBI computers kept chewing up the information at a faster rate than anyone in the bureau could produce it. There was talk of putting the computers on a six-hour day and operating them only four days a week. But when the computers heard about this (an agent had fed the suggestion into a computer to find out if it was feasible), red lights started to flash all over the computer center, and a readout indicated that if their work time was cut, every FBI machine would self-destruct in protest.

It was then decided the only way to assure a sufficient supply of data was to keep files on everybody, from college students to people on Social Security. Experts figured that if the FBI could get enough data on them, they could keep the computers busy until 1976. That is the only reason the FBI has your name on their list right now.

The CIA faced the same crisis as the FBI did, but it had a problem because by law the CIA is not supposed to keep files on American citizens.

After twenty-five years the CIA had tons of information on every country in the world, and although it occasionally was able to come up with fresh data, it was not enough to satisfy the voracious appetites of their machines, which incidentally were much larger than those of the FBI. Several years ago the CIA had no choice but to start feeding information on Americans. When Congress found out about this, the CIA had to suspend this operation, which left them in a pickle. Their computers were becoming restless and surly, and their printouts indicated there could be an in-house revolt.

So last month the CIA chiefs realized they had no choice. In order to get enough data for their computers for the next three years, they decided to do a psychological profile on every man, woman, and child in the People's Republic of Red China.

T T T T

António Osório

In *CP 2002*, I included several beautiful poems by the Portuguese poet Florbela Espanca (1894-1930), with my translations. Here is another Portuguese poet, in a similar style to that of Florbela. I have become lazy and give the translation by Patricio Ferrari and Susan M. Brown that appeared with the poem in *The New Yorker*, 6 June 2022.

Um Sentido—*António Osório (1933-2021)*

Porque há um sentido
no lírio, incensar-se;
e no choupo, erguer-se;
e na urze arborescente,
ampliar-se;
e no cobre, primeira cura,
que dou à vinha,
procriar-se.
E outro, pressago,
sentido há na memória,
explodir-se.
E outro, imensurável,
no amor, entregar-se.
E outro, definitivo,
na morte, render-se.

Because there is a meaning
in the lily, let there be worship;
and in the poplar, let there be height;
and in the arborescent heather,
let there be growth;
and in the copper, first treatment
I give to the vine, let there be harvest.
And another meaning, I predict,
there is in memory,
so let there be outburst.
And another, immeasurable,
in love, so let there be surrender.
And another, definitive,
in death, let there be release.

T T T T

QAnon

Review of *The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything*, Mike Rothschild, monoray 2021 - by Charles Kaiser, *The Guardian*, 21 August 2022.

Donald Trump welcomed the conspiracy at the White House. Its followers stormed Congress. Big Tech still seems not to care. Mike Rothschild's book should sound the alarm for us all.

What is it that has hypnotized so many addled souls who devote themselves to decoding the Delphic clues of the QAnon conspiracy?

What they think they're getting is "secret knowledge", from "Q" and a bunch of other military insiders working for Donald Trump, about "the storm ... a ringside seat to the final match" in a "secret war between good and evil" that will end with the slaughter of all "enemies of freedom".

In short, an irresistible mix of "biblical retribution and participatory justice".

The bad guys are "Democrats, Hollywood elites, business tycoons, wealthy liberals, the medical establishment, celebrities and the mass media ... They're controlled by Barack Obama" – a Muslim sleeper agent – and Hillary Clinton, "a blood-drinking ghoul who murders everyone in her way ... and they're funded by George Soros and the Rothschild banking family (no relation to the author)".

This updated edition of Mike Rothschild's exhaustive history of the Q movement is more important than ever. Why? Partly because of the crucial role played by so many QAnon devotees in the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021 but mostly because Rothschild documents how much of this insanity has penetrated to the heart of the new Republican party, propelled by many of America's most loathsome individuals, from Ted Cruz and Donald Trump Jr to Alex Jones, Michael Flynn and Roseanne Barr.

In the two years before the 2020 presidential election, "nearly 100 Republican candidates declared themselves to be Q Believers" while Trump "retweeted hundreds of Q followers, putting their violent fantasies and bizarre memes into tens of millions of feeds".

Asked about a movement which has repackaged most of the oldest and harshest racist and antisemitic conspiracies for a new age, Trump gave his usual coy endorsement of the behavior of America's most damaged internet addicts.

"I don't know much about the movement," he mumbled, "other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate."

T T T T

Amazon's Ring is the largest civilian surveillance network the US has ever seen (Lauren Bridges - *The Guardian*, 18 May 2021)

One in 10 US police departments can now access videos from millions of privately owned home security cameras without a warrant

In a 2020 letter to management, Max Eliaser, an Amazon software engineer, said Ring is "simply not compatible with a free society". We should take his claim seriously.

Ring video doorbells, Amazon's signature home security product, pose a

serious threat to a free and democratic society. Not only is Ring's surveillance network spreading rapidly, it is extending the reach of law enforcement into private property and expanding the surveillance of everyday life. What's more, once Ring users agree to release video content to law enforcement, there is no way to revoke access and few limitations on how that content can be used, stored, and with whom it can be shared.

Ring is effectively building the largest corporate-owned, civilian-installed surveillance network that the US has ever seen. An estimated 400,000 Ring devices were sold in December 2019 alone, and that was before the across-the-board boom in online retail sales during the pandemic. Amazon is cagey about how many Ring cameras are active at any one point in time, but estimates drawn from Amazon's sales data place yearly sales in the hundreds of millions. The always-on video surveillance network extends even further when you consider the millions of users on Ring's affiliated crime reporting app, Neighbors, which allows people to upload content from Ring and non-Ring devices.

Then there's this: since Amazon bought Ring in 2018, it has brokered more than 1,800 partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, who can request recorded video content from Ring users without a warrant. That is, in as little as three years, Ring connected around one in 10 police departments across the US with the ability to access recorded content from millions of privately owned home security cameras. These partnerships are growing at an alarming rate.

Data I've collected from Ring's quarterly reported numbers shows that in the past year through the end of April 2021, law enforcement have placed more than 22,000 individual requests to access content captured and recorded on Ring cameras. Ring's cloud-based infrastructure (supported by Amazon Web Services) makes it convenient for law enforcement agencies to place mass requests for access to recordings without a warrant. Because Ring cameras are owned by civilians, law enforcement are given a backdoor entry into private video recordings of people in residential and public space that would otherwise be protected under the fourth amendment. By partnering with Amazon, law enforcement circumvents these constitutional and statutory protections, as noted by the attorney Yesenia Flores. In doing so, Ring blurs the line between police work and civilian surveillance and turns your neighbor's home security system into an informant. Except, unlike an informant, it's always watching.

Ring's pervasive network of cameras expands the dragnet of everyday pre-emptive surveillance – a dragnet that surveils anyone who passes into its gaze, whether a suspect in a crime or not. Although the dragnet

indiscriminately captures everyone, including children, there are obvious racial, gendered and class-based inequities when it comes to who is targeted and labelled as “out of place” in residential space. Rahim Kurwa, a professor of criminology, law and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago, argues that neighborhood surveillance platforms such as Neighbors perpetuate a much longer history of the policing of race in residential space.

The concerns of activists and scholars have been compounded by developments in facial recognition technology and other forms of machine learning that could be conceivably applied to Ring recorded content and live feeds. Facial recognition technology has been denounced by AI researchers and civil rights groups for its racial and gendered biases. Although Ring doesn't currently use facial recognition in its cameras, Amazon has sold this technology to police in the past. Following pressure from AI researchers and civil rights groups, Amazon placed a one-year pause on police use of its controversial facial recognition technology, but this moratorium will expire in June.

While pressure from civil rights groups and lawmakers to end Ring's partnerships with police has been building, we need to demand more transparency and accountability from Amazon and law enforcement about what data is being collected, with whom it's being shared, and how it's being used.

T T T T

Birds Aren't Real

Talking of surveillance, spying and conspiracy theories, a powerful antidote exists in the form of the movement "Birds Aren't Real". In 2017, Peter McIndoe joined a protest march, held up a sign and talked about how the 'deep state' had replaced all birds with drones. It was meant as a small act of satire but has become a mass movement.⁷

The lunacy is getting more intense: how Birds Aren't Real took on the conspiracy theorists by Zoe Williams, *The Guardian*, 14 April 2022 (extracts)

In early 2017, Peter McIndoe, now 23, was studying psychology at the University of Arkansas, and visiting friends in Memphis, Tennessee. He tells me ... “This was right after the Donald Trump election, and things were really tense. I remember people walking around saying they felt as if they were in a movie. Things felt so unstable.”

⁷ See <https://birdsarentreal.com/pages/the-history>

It was the weekend of simultaneous Women's Marches across the US (indeed, the world), and McIndoe looked out of the window and noticed "counterprotesters, who were older, bigger white men. They were clear aggravators. They were encroaching on something that was not their event, they had no business being there." Added to that, "it felt like chaos, because the world felt like chaos".

McIndoe made a placard, and went out to join the march. "It's not like I sat down and thought I'm going to make a satire. I just thought: 'I should write a sign that has nothing to do with what is going on.' An absurdist statement to bring to the equation."

That statement was "birds aren't real". As he stood with the counterprotesters, and they asked what his sign meant, he improvised. He said he was part of a movement that had been around for 50 years, and was originally started to save American birds, but had failed. The "deep state" had destroyed them all, and replaced them with surveillance drones. Every bird you see is actually a tiny feathered robot watching you.

Someone was filming him and put it on Facebook; it went viral, and Memphis is still the centre of the Birds Aren't Real movement. Or is it a movement? You could call it a situationist spectacle, a piece of rolling performance art or a collective satire. MSNBC called it a "mass coping mechanism" for generation Z, and as it has hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, "mass", at least, is on the money.

It's the most perfect, playful distillation of where we are in relation to the media landscape we've built but can't control, and which only half of us can find our way around. It's a made-up conspiracy theory that is just realistic enough, as conspiracies go, to convince QAnon supporters that birds *aren't* real, but has just enough satirical flags that generation Z recognises immediately what is going on. It's a conspiracy-within-a-conspiracy, a little aneurysm of reality and mockery in the bloodstream of the mad pizzagate-style theories that animate the "alt-right". ...

Although "birds aren't real" was very quickly picked up as a chant, getting the movement to snowball "did take some work", McIndoe says. "We set up the Bird Brigade, our boots-on-the-ground activism network, led by Claire Chronis. That was the first step to building a structured movement, getting it from Memphis to the rest of the US, getting people to put up flyers that I designed very poorly on Photoshop, which works for the conspiracy theory aesthetic."

They made up facts, faked secretly leaked CIA documents and made videos

– “we created a world with laws and evidence” – and took out billboard adverts, which people posted on Instagram as selfie backdrops. “If you put something absurd into the world, people are trying to present themselves as irreverent or funny, so that really spread.” ...

In describing the movement, he gets towards perhaps the closest definition of what is happening: “It is a collective role-playing experiment. There is true community found through this, it breaks down political barriers. We have taken pictures of a car park at a Birds Aren’t Real rally. There are people who will show up with a US flag on their car, Republican, patriotic, and a car right next to them with Bernie Sanders stickers. I was a Bernie guy myself. You see these people marching together, unified.” ...

The response of real-life conspiracists to Birds Aren’t Real has shifted now: “They think Birds Aren’t Real is a CIA psy-op. They think that we are the CIA, we’re put out there as a weapon against conspiracy theorists.”

McIndoe has a long game with Birds Aren’t Real: “I think it has the potential to be a creative collective for a long time. I would love Birds Aren’t Real to continue to be a space to process the badness. I don’t think the madness is going to necessarily end. I think the lunacy is going to become more intense.”

He ends with an image that is poetic, freighted and incredibly neat. “We talk about it like an igloo. Making a shelter out of the same thing that’s posing the threat. Take the materials of what is around us, build something with them, be safe in there together, and laugh.”

T T T T

Dem Fax zur Feier - Was alt aussieht, war Avantgarde ⁸

Claudia Mäder *NZZ*, 2.6.18 Gewisse Geräusche vergisst man nie. Etwa das holprige Reiben eines Stücks Kreide, das man mit zitternden Händen der Wandtafel entlangzieht, um dem Lehrer zumindest den Ansatz einer plausiblen geometrischen Figur aufzuzeichnen. Aber auch das beruhigende Schnurren des Faxgeräts, das irgendwann in den 1990er Jahren begann, Blätter mit algebraischen Formeln und Lösungswegen auszustottern, die begabtere Klassenkameraden für die Hausaufgaben gefunden hatten. Spät ist diese rettende Maschine in den familiären Gerätepark gekommen - das Gurgeln des Geschirrspülers war uns damals schon lange vertraut, das Surren des Fernsehers kannten wir in jeder Frequenz, das Klingeln des Telefons sowieso.

⁸ Für Hartwig

Dabei war der Fax all diesen Geräten einst weit voraus gewesen. Am 27. Mai 1843 wurde das erste Patent auf einen «Kopiertelegrafen» erteilt - man braucht kein Mathegenie zu sein, um zu errechnen, dass die Maschine damit heuer ihren 175. Geburtstag feiert. Aus der Taufe gehoben hat sie ein Schotte. Alexander Bain, ein gelernter Uhrmacher, hatte schon verschiedene nützliche Dinge in die Welt gebracht und etwa eine automatische Musikmaschine oder einen Schiffsgeschwindigkeitsmesser erfunden, ehe er mit Methoden der Bildübermittlung zu experimentieren begann.

Das Versenden codierter Textnachrichten via Kabel war damals bereits möglich - Bain bediente sich dieser Basisidee, nutzte die Verkabelung aber, um Handschriften oder Zeichnungen zu reproduzieren beziehungsweise von der Sender auf die Empfängerseite zu transportieren. Eine elektrische Sonde tastete das Originalbild ab, sandte die entsprechenden Impulse über eine Pendelvorrichtung weiter und übertrug sie am anderen Ende auf ein chemisch vorbehandeltes Papier. Der Vorgang war hochkompliziert und die teure Maschine kein Verkaufsschlager. Ihr Grundprinzip aber machte Epoche: Tüftler entwickelten den Kopiertelegrafen weiter, bis 1865 in Frankreich ein erstes kommerziell erfolgreiches Gerät auf den Markt kam.

Noch bevor die Menschen über Fernsprengeräte Worte wechselten (erst 1876 erfand Alexander Bell ein brauchbares Telefon), konnten sie sich also Abbilder der Realität zustellen. Das ist durchaus schlüssig - gerne geht in den heutigen Bilderfluten vergessen, dass das visuelle Zeitalter schon lange vor Face-book, Instagram und der Selfiesucht begonnen hat. 1839, kurz vor Bains Fax-Versuchen, wurde in Paris das erste fotografische Verfahren präsentiert, und ob es nun illustrierte Zeitschriften, bürgerliche Familienalben oder naturwissenschaftliche Lehrmittel waren: In jeden Lebensbereich drangen die Fotografien alsbald ein - ein Bild der Welt wollte sich kaum mehr einer ohne sie machen.

Besonders beliebt waren die vermeintlich unbestechlichen Zeugen der Wirklichkeit bei der Polizei, und auch das Faxgerät half bei der Fahndung tüchtig mit: Mit seiner Hilfe wurden Verbrecherbilder und Fingerabdrücke von Stadt zu Stadt geschickt. Später nutzten Militärstellen und Meteorologiedienste die Maschine für den Versand von Karten, nach und nach entdeckten Firmen die Vorzüge der so raschen wie authentischen Übermittlung, und schliesslich, ab den 1980er Jahren, zogen die Faxe auch bei Durchschnittsfamilien ein.

Doch wie es den Dingen halt immer ergeht: Auf ihre kurze Blüte folgt ein langes Ende. Dass es Faxgeräte heute noch gibt, weiss man nur, weil einem beim Lesen von Visitenkarten gelegentlich die Zeilen verrutschen, der

Finger auf dem Telefon eine falsche Taste berührt und am anderen Ende statt geduldigen Tutens ein schrilles Pfeifen ertönt. Unvergesslich, auch dieses Geräusch - immerhin.

T T T T

The Passage of Time

At least one person will be happy with the abolition of the change to summer time.



T T T T

Art Buchwald - Life Inside the Secret Factory (15 February 1976)⁹

Probably the biggest business in Washington is the manufacturing of secrets. In the past twenty years the demand for secrets has increased

⁹ Two days later his article was quoted *verbatim* in the US House of Representatives by the Hon. George E. Brown Jr. as a warning of the dangers of the "secret state".
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1976-pt3/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1976-pt3-7-3.pdf>

tenfold, and because the government cannot keep up with it, all federal agencies are now subcontracting their orders for secrets to private industry.

I visited one of these secret manufacturing factories the other day. It is called Hush Hush Limited and is located in a suburb outside Washington DC.

Arnold Zankel, one of the founders of the company, was my escort.

'We're going twenty-four hours a day,' he said proudly.

'Everyone in the government is desperate for secrets, and they all need them immediately.'

'I thought the CIA hearings and the disclosures about the FBI and the Watergate scandal would have hurt your business.'

'*Au contraire*,' said Zankel. 'As soon as a secret is revealed to the public, the agency involved orders a new one to replace it. The demand for full disclosure of what the government is up to has made every government department search for more sophisticated secrets that can't be discovered.'

Zankel took me into a large room which was completely automated. There were machines typing up documents and other machines stamping them 'Confidential.'

'This is our bread and butter business,' he explained.

'We supply eighty percent of all the confidential papers used by the federal government.'

'How do they order them?'

'By the ton. We might get a call from HEW or HUD and they'll say we need three tons of confidential papers for the week.'

'Don't they specify what kind they want?'

'No, confidential papers do not have a high rating in the government, but it does make the department look good to have them in their files. So nobody really cares what's on them. We just program our electric typewriters to type up anything that looks official, then we stamp them 'Confidential', bale them in hundred-pound packages, send them over by truck, and throw them on the steps of the agency every morning.'

We came to some swinging doors. 'This is something that might interest you,' Zankel said. The large, airy room had three long tables at which were seated men and women in white smocks. They were working on binding volumes of mimeographed papers.

'What are they doing?'

'They're binding secrets to be subpoenaed. These are secrets that can be given to congressional committees.'

I looked perplexed.

Zankel explained, 'Congress is demanding more and more secrets from the executive branch of the government. So we are manufacturing secrets especially tailored to satisfy congressional subpoenas. For example, these chips have been ordered by the Federal Reserve Board and have to do with the private affairs of banks. When Congress demands to see the secret papers in the Fed's files, the Federal Reserve Bank will send these over. Obviously, they're so complicated that no one can understand them. But since they have a lot of bulk to them, the committees are usually satisfied. The people over there are working on energy secrets, and down there they are dealing with agricultural exports. Our job is to see that no one can make head or tail out of them.'

Before we went into the next room, Zankel made me put on rubber boots. We entered a hall with three inches of water on the floor.

'This is probably our most difficult work. We have to make secrets here than can be leaked.'

'You have government orders for secrets that leak?' I asked in surprise.

'It's one of our biggest items. High government officials are constantly leaking secrets to the press and pretending surprise that the secret got out. We've developed a container which can hold a secret in a solid state until the word goes out it should be leaked. Then, by just twisting this tab, the secret becomes soluble and leaks all over town.'

'Fantastic,' I said.

'It's our biggest item. Between Henry Kissinger, Pat Moynihan, and the congressional committee investigating the CIA, we can't keep them in stock.'

T T T T

More port?

Two hunters are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He doesn't seem to be breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other man pulls out his phone and calls emergency services.

He gasps to the operator: "My friend is dead! What can I do?" The operator in a calm, soothing voice replies:

"Take it easy. I can help. First, let's make sure he's dead."

There is a silence, then a shot is heard.

Back on the phone, the hunter says, "Ok, now what?"

T T T T

Brave New World - Sue Halpern, review of *The Metaverse And How It Will Revolutionize Everything* by Matthew Ball, *NYRB*, 20 October 2022 - extracts¹⁰

In October 2021, when Mark Zuckerberg announced that Facebook would now be called Meta and its business interests would be pivoting to the metaverse, there was almost universal confusion: most observers had no idea what he was talking about, and for good reason. The metaverse does not exist. Born of science fiction and blending virtual reality into everyday activities, the idea is one that some tech executives like Zuckerberg believe will be the future of the Internet. In his case, it is a belief so resolute that he is willing to wager something like \$10 billion a year and the fate of his company on it.

A metaverse—or something like it—was first conceived by Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel, *Snow Crash*. It was a virtual world whose defining feature was its all-encompassing “persistence,” such that it would seem to surround and envelop one’s physical, embodied, “real” self. Three decades later, that is still the dream of entrepreneurs like Zuckerberg, only now that computing resources are more robust and people are already living much of their lives online, the idea of the metaverse has moved off the novelist’s page and into the corporate labs that are vying to build it. As Ball imagines it, the metaverse will be

a massively scaled and interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds that can be experienced synchronously and persistently by an effectively unlimited number of users with an individual sense of presence, and with continuity of data, such as identity history, entitlements, objects, communications, and payments.

In other words, as envisioned by boosters like Ball and Zuckerberg, a metaverse is a computer-generated environment inhabited and shared by lots of people at the same time. Three-dimensionality will enable it to be immersive the way a flight simulator enables a pilot in training to “enter” the cockpit of a plane, have all the controls near at hand, and see the landscape below and the horizon ahead with verisimilitude. Immersive 3D will distinguish this new Internet from the one we use today, as will the capacity to share experiences in these virtually rendered environments with any number of other users as if they are physically proximate. ...

¹⁰ <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2022/10/20/the-specter-of-our-virtual-future-the-metaverse-matthew-ball/>

While many of these activities are available now in the offline, physical world, as well as online, the difference will be access and scale: for instance, in the metaverse you won't have to travel to Spain to stand shoulder to shoulder with other Real Madrid fans—you will be “there,” in a space teeming with other soccer devotees. ... As an added benefit, you can do all of this while never leaving home or getting dressed. No one has to know that you've spilled coffee on your pajamas or need a shave, because you will be represented in the metaverse by an avatar that you have constructed. ...

Avatars are an essential element of the metaverse. They are both one's proxy in the virtual world and a canvas for self-expression. That expression, though, is likely to come at a price once people desire to move beyond the basic gender, hairstyle, and wardrobe options on offer to choices that might better project one's individuality. Would you like your avatar to sport a designer purse or wear limited-edition sneakers? No problem if you have the (real) cash or the cryptocurrency (bought with fiat money) to purchase them.

Internet gamers are already spending around \$100 billion a year on such virtual goods. Gucci is now designing apparel and accessories for video game avatars; Nike recently bought a company that makes sneakers that can only be “worn”—which is to say displayed on the Internet. These items do not come cheap. Not long ago a pair of virtual sneakers was sold for \$2,400 and a digital dress for \$9,500. As a Gucci executive told a reporter for Fast Company, people are willing to shell out such enormous sums not only to flaunt their purchases in the virtual world but because they also consider virtual goods to be a new asset class. “Virtual items have value because of their own scarcity, and because they can be sold and shared,” he said. ...

Much of The Metaverse is devoted to the video game industry. ... These platforms also provide a glimpse of how popular and lucrative the metaverse could be. Roblox has more than 43 million daily users and more than 9 million developers who have created more than 40 million games. ...

This industrial metaverse will let companies, governments, and organizations test, virtually, new ideas and tweak functions before investing in and deploying them.

This is already being done to an extent. A functioning, virtual, 3D replica of the Hong Kong airport was constructed using Unity, a popular gaming engine, to simulate foot traffic inside the terminal and traffic flow on the runways. Ball also notes that city planners are connecting real-time data to virtual models of their municipalities in order to monitor, and adjust as needed, actual phenomena such as police and fire response times, vehicular traffic patterns, land use, and anything else that might inform policies and decision-making. So far, none of these virtual worlds, whether they are for

entertainment, civic improvement, or industrial design, deliver on interoperability—nor are they meant to. Each is an individual chapter in what may become the origin story of the metaverse, if the metaverse is ever realized. ...

The metaverse opens up a new and seemingly infinite opportunity to extract data and sell ads. Following users across the metaverse through their avatars will give Meta unfettered access to what users like, whom they comport with, who they would like to be, and who they are. The company has applied for a number of patents for sensors that will track a user's real-life body movements when playing a game, working out, or moving through the virtual world that, while making that experience more realistic, will also collect reams of user data to sell to advertisers. As Zuckerberg told employees in July:

Our north star is, Can we get a billion people into the metaverse doing hundreds of dollars apiece in digital commerce by the end of the decade? If we do that, we'll build a business that is as big as our current ad business within this decade. I think that's a really exciting thing. I think a big part of how you do that is by pushing the open metaverse forward, which is what we're going to do.

Digital ads and virtual goods are not the only things that will be for sale in the metaverse. Not long ago, a Toronto company paid \$2.4 million for a "prime" tract of virtual real estate in the "fashion district" of a metaverse-ish Internet site called Decentraland. Andrew Kiguel, the CEO of the company that bought those pixels, expects to rent out retail space to apparel companies and host events that will appeal to the sorts of tony users who are attractive to advertisers. Kiguel told CNBC that he's been in talks with accounting firms, investment banks, podcasts, and mutual funds to build a presence in the metaverse: "We're even talking to companies about putting up digital billboards in virtual conference rooms where people can meet." Last year, virtual real estate sales climbed to more than 500 million nonvirtual dollars, and are estimated to be around \$1 billion this year. Another group that snapped up real estate on Decentraland operates an online casino that recently generated \$7.5 million in three months and currently accounts for 30 percent of Decentraland's daily users. ...

There will be impediments. On the human side, the biggest will be adoption: Will people really want to sink themselves into an always-on, artificial world? For young people who have grown up playing with Roblox, most of whom are sixteen or younger, and Minecraft, whose average user's age is twenty-four, immersive, 3D computing may seem evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and thus they may easily transition to the metaverse.

Nondigital natives may find it less welcoming.

Still, if entry to the metaverse requires wearing virtual-reality goggles, it may be a hard sell no matter a potential user's age or history. Meta's \$399 Oculus 2 headset, for example, besides being expensive, is heavy, clunky, and disorienting; because it prevents users from knowing where they are in the physical world, it requires them to construct a virtual corral from which they cannot stray. Elon Musk's answer to clunky face hardware is a neural implant—a chip embedded in the brain.¹¹

Augmented-reality glasses, which allow wearers to interact with the real and virtual worlds simultaneously, may be more acceptable than either of these. In 2020 neurosurgeons at Johns Hopkins used an AR headset with a see-through display to do spinal surgery. The headset let the surgeons superimpose the patients' scans over the actual affected area, allowing them to target it with more precision than if they had to consult those images on a nearby computer. (To be clear, this had nothing to do with the metaverse.)

The other significant hurdles will be capacity and infrastructure: Will there be enough bandwidth, enough computing power, enough servers, enough electricity? Latency—the delay between a user's action and an application's response—will have to become imperceptible, a challenge that will be exacerbated by millions of people inhabiting immersive, computationally demanding environments. Ball suggests that as the metaverse grows, it will spur investment in the infrastructure needed to lower latency. Still, he points out, even piles of money cannot overcome the laws of physics. ...

How this enormous demand for computing resources will affect the climate seems not to figure into anyone's calculations. There are many questions yet to be answered if the metaverse is to become the next iteration of the Internet—questions of structure, of governance, and of content moderation, to name a few. (Women have already reported being sexually harassed and verbally abused inside Horizon, Meta's virtual-reality environment, which is accessed through its Oculus goggles. Last year, a memo from the executive who is now Meta's chief technology officer stated that it will be “practically impossible” to moderate content in the metaverse “at any meaningful scale.”) But in the rush to claim a stake in this new world, the most critical question has been ignored: Is the metaverse a good and socially beneficial idea? Certainly many things could be enhanced by a shared, immersive, virtual environment: prototyping, education, concerts, and Broadway shows for those without other means to attend in person come to mind. But the prospect of constant, ambient Internet connectivity, especially when it is

¹¹ [Editor's note] This is what it comes down to. The unchipped mind boggles - *Deus auxilium nobis!*

driven by commerce, raises the specter of an inescapable surveillance economy that is orders of magnitude more intrusive than the one we have now.

If we are all meant to live in virtual worlds, what then of the natural, sensory world that surrounds us? How lovely it might be to swim with the sea turtles along the Great Barrier Reef in a 3D-rendered world that has not been devastated by climate change. How easy to be lulled into not knowing that the actual reef is dying or, worse, knowing and deciding that its “preservation” in the metaverse is sufficient.

Stop Press *The Guardian* 28 October 2022:

After shares in Facebook’s parent, Meta, slumped by as much as 25% in the wake of abysmal quarterly results, critics intensified their calls for its chief executive to abandon his astronomically expensive pivot to the “metaverse” – a 3D virtual world intended to replace much of real-world socialising.

“The cost of Mark Zuckerberg’s metaverse ambition is clearer than ever,” said Rachel Foster Jones, a thematic analyst at GlobalData. “Meta has put its entire business on the line for the metaverse, which still doesn’t exist, and the gamble is not paying off.

“Meta has been too busy attempting to push the metaverse that it has run its core ad business into the ground, and a string of poor results has taken its toll on investor confidence.”

T T T T

Extract from "A Cult is a Cult" (*New Yorker*, 12/19 July 2021)

Liberals have good reason to worry about the political reach of QAnon. A survey published in May by the Public Religion Research Institute found that fifteen per cent of Americans subscribe to the central QAnon belief that the government is run by a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles and that twenty per cent believe that “there is a storm coming soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the rightful leaders.” Yet anxiety about the movement tends to be undercut by laughter at the presumed imbecility of its members. Some of the attorneys representing QAnon followers who took part in the invasion of the Capitol have even made this their chief line of defense; Albert Watkins, who represents Jacob Chansley, the bare-chested “Q Shaman,” recently told a reporter that his client and other defendants were “people with brain damage, they’re fucking retarded.”

Mike Rothschild, in his book about the QAnon phenomenon, “*The Storm Is Upon Us*” (Melville House), argues that contempt and mockery for QAnon

beliefs have led people to radically underestimate the movement, and, even now, keep us from engaging seriously with its threat. The QAnon stereotype of a “white American conservative driven to joylessness by their sense of persecution by liberal elites” ought not to blind us to the fact that many of Q’s followers, like the members of any cult movement, are people seeking meaning and purpose. “For all of the crimes and violent ideation we’ve seen, many believers truly want to play a role in making the world a better place,” Rothschild writes.

It’s not just the political foulness of QAnon that makes us disinclined to empathize with its followers. We harbor a general sense of superiority to those who are taken in by cults. Books and documentaries routinely warn that any of us could be ensnared, that it’s merely a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, that the average cult convert is no stupider than anyone else. (Some cults, including Aum Shinrikyo, have attracted disproportionate numbers of highly educated, accomplished recruits.) Yet our sense that joining a cult requires some unusual degree of credulousness or gullibility persists. Few of us believe in our heart of hearts that Amy Carlson, the recently deceased leader of the Colorado-based Love Has Won cult, who claimed to have birthed the whole of creation and to have been, in a previous life, a daughter of Donald Trump, could put us under her spell.

Perhaps one way to attack our intellectual hubris on this matter is to remind ourselves that we all hold some beliefs for which there is no compelling evidence. The convictions that Jesus was the son of God and that “everything happens for a reason” are older and more widespread than the belief in Amy Carlson’s privileged access to the fifth dimension, but neither is, ultimately, more rational. In recent decades, scholars have grown increasingly adamant that none of our beliefs, rational or otherwise, have much to do with logical reasoning. “People do not deploy the powerful human intellect to dispassionately analyze the world,” William J. Bernstein writes, in “The Delusions of Crowds” (*Atlantic Monthly*). Instead, they “rationalize how the facts conform to their emotionally derived preconceptions.”

T T T T

Some More Port?

A German walks into a bar and orders a beer.

The bartender : "20 Euros."

The German is shocked. "20 Euros? Yesterday it was only 3 euros !"

"Well, today it is 20 euros."

"But why 20, verdammt noch mal!?"

Bar tender : "I'll explain it: 3 euros is beer, 3 euros to help Ukraine, 4 euros as assistance to European countries who have imposed sanctions and are not members of the EU, 4 euros in aid to the UK, for successful implementation of sanctions against Russia, then 3 euros are sent to the Balkan countries as aid to buy furnace coal, and finally, 3 euros for a gas subsidy for the EU and a fund to help maintain sanctions!"

The German silently took out the money and gave the bartender 20 euros. The bartender took them, and gave him 3 euros back.

German in disbelief : "Wait, you said 20 euros, right ? I gave you 20, why are you giving me back 3 euros?"

"Ahh... We have no beer!"¹²

T T T T

Conrad Aiken

As noted above, Conrad Aiken (1889-1973) was influenced by the Imagists. Although he received the most prestigious of literary awards, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1930 for *Selected Poems* and a National Book Award in 1954 for *Collected Poems*, along with the critical acclaim of some of the most respected writers and critics of his time, Aiken never became a truly popular poet. He wrote some fine poems, perhaps too lacking in "modernity" for his times.

Exile

These hills are sandy. Trees are dwarfed here. Crows
Caw dismally in skies of an arid brilliance,
Complain in dusty pine-trees. Yellow daybreak
Lights on the long brown slopes a frost-like dew,
Dew as heavy as rain; the rabbit tracks
Show sharply in it, as they might in snow.
But it's soon gone in the sun—what good does it do?
The houses, on the slope, or among brown trees,
Are grey and shrivelled. And the men who live here
Are small and withered, spider-like, with large eyes.

Bring water with you if you come to live here—
Cold tinkling cisterns, or else wells so deep
That one looks down to Ganges or Himalayas.
Yes, and bring mountains with you, white, moon-bearing,
Mountains of ice. You will have need of these
Profundities and peaks of wet and cold.

¹² Thanks Alex

Bring also, in a cage of wire or osier,
Birds of a golden colour, who will sing
Of leaves that do not wither, watery fruits
That heavily hang on long melodious boughs
In the blue-silver forests of deep valleys.

I have now been here—how many years? Years unnumbered.
My hands grow clawlike. My eyes are large and starved.
I brought no bird with me, I have no cistern
Where I might find the moon, or river, or snow.
Some day, for lack of these, I'll spin a web
Between two dusty pine-tree tops, and hang there
Face downward, like a spider, blown as lightly
As ghost of leaf. Crows will caw about me.
Morning and evening I shall drink the dew.

The Ego

Ego! Ego! Burning Blind
in the forest of the mind
what immortal alchemy
or what immortal chemistry
dared shape thy fearful symmetry
dared dream thy fearful liberty
and in the eye
conceived the I
and in the "Aye"
a Me! ¹³

T T T T

Aphorisms for the Anthropocene (Allegra Hyde, *New Yorker*, 24 June 2022)

A bird in the hand is worth returning to the bush, where it can be with those two other birds, and perhaps rebuild a sustainable population.

Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he'll trawl the ocean with enormous nets until there are no more fish.

Fortunately, there are plenty of things in the sea besides fish—such as plastic

¹³ See "The Tyger" by William Blake:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? ...

water bottles, old tires, and books that have fallen off cargo ships.

A rolling stone gathers no polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Don't count your chickens before they've been inoculated with ten different antibiotics that allow them to grow to unnatural proportions in the confined quarters of your modern factory farm.

Red sky at night, firefighters' plight; red sky in the morning, everyone needs to evacuate from this wildfire immediately.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink that swill contaminated by heavy metals and agricultural runoff.

Unlike children, the ivory-billed woodpecker can't be seen or heard. It is extinct.

Leave no stone unturned, unless you are a geologist looking for evidence of coal deposits on behalf of a mining company—in which case, please leave those stones alone.

The early investor in water rights gets to be called a worm.

Make hay while the sun shines, but wear a lot of sunscreen while doing so, and also stay hydrated, and—actually, given the rise in global temperatures and heat-related deaths, maybe make hay at dawn or dusk, instead?

Every cloud has a silver lining, and some also have high concentrations of organic aerosols.

If you lie down with lobbyists, you'll wake up fleeced by the fossil-fuel industry.

That's just the tip of the iceberg—the rest of it has already melted.

When it rains, it pours. And pours. And pours. And pours. And pours. And pours.

T T T T

August Kleinzahler

August Kleinzahler (*1949) is an American poet and the author of ten books of poetry.

The Damselfly

A petal of jasmine caught up
by the breeze
or morning glory aflutter
between the four o'clock and naked lady?

No, not a flower at all,
a butterfly,

showing suddenly white
against the green of a leaf.

And that blue there, cobalt
a moment, then iridescent,
fragile as a lady's pin
hovering above the nasturtium?

Ah, the older poet tells me,
that's a damselfly.

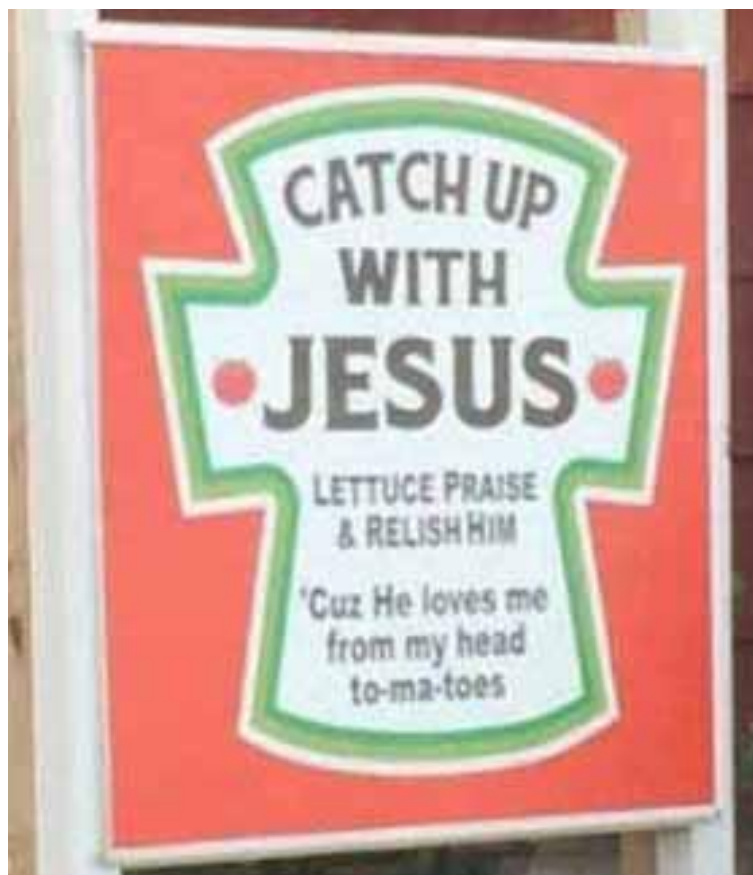
And if you just slowed down
and looked,
you'd see all sorts of things:

midmorning toward the end of summer,
head swimming in the garden's perfume
after a quick, surprise rain.

T T T T

More Billboards

In CP 2019, I showed some billboards from the town of Indian Hills. Here are some similar, with thanks to Bernard Vogel.







T T T T

Can you take any more port?

An elephant and a boa constrictor shared adjoining cages at the zoo. After long weeks of silence, the elephant finally said "I've always wanted to know about your way of life. How do you eat if you have no teeth?" "I just open my mouth wide and swallow whatever is there, a sheep, a goat, you name it."

"And how do you reproduce if you can't have sex?"

"Oh," said the boa, "the reproductive organs are all internal."

"And how do you move if you don't have legs or feet?" "I crawl and slither," came the answer.

"Well," said the elephant, in his wisdom, "You have a big mouth, no balls and you crawl and slither. You should go into politics."

T T T T

Antonio Giovanni Pinna

The *New Yorker* calls on various artists to provide little miniature drawings interspersed among the pages to lighten the text. I particularly liked those by Antonio Giovanni Pinna in the edition of 6 December 2021.



T T T T

Art Buchwald - Photo IDs for All (5 December 2001]

Washington – One of the things I've noticed in Washington lately is that more and more people are wearing photo identity tags around their necks.

It's a security thing and Nick Glover, a federal marshal, thinks it's good.

'I like to know who everybody is,' he said. 'An ID card is the best way to do it. In Washington, people now first look at your chest, and then your face, to see if they match up.'

He said, 'I hope the whole country is forced to wear identification. It will not only make it easier to find terrorists, but also make it much easier to know who the person in line in front of you in the cafeteria is. People have worked with each other in offices for years and never knew who the person in the next cubicle is.'

'Photo IDs are now paying off in the family. I know a couple named Owens who have six children and 10 grandchildren. It was a mess until old man Owens made every family member wear a tag. Now he has no problem figuring out every grandchild's name.'

'Before the crisis, the people you saw wearing tags and smoking on the sidewalk were mostly government workers. But now almost everyone in Washington is wearing a tag. You must wear one if you work in a department store, a school and even a CIA safe house in Virginia, where defectors now will know each other's real names.'

I asked Glover, 'Suppose you don't drive? How do you get into the airport?'

'You have to apply for a 'nondriver' license, which you must carry at all times to prove that you exist. It's very hard in this country to accept the fact that someone doesn't drive. It immediately goes into your profile and gives authorities the right to strip-search you at any time.' ¹⁴

'What do you need as proof that you don't drive?'

'A birth certificate, a Social Security Card and a passport that has not expired. And it will help if you have two letters from members of your family testifying that though you're not a terrorist, you look like one when you get behind the wheel of a vehicle.'

'Why can't a person who is up to no good present a fake birth certificate or passport?' I asked.

'Attorney General John Ashcroft would never let it happen.'

¹⁴ This reminds me of a hotel in Boston in the 70s when I was asked to explain to the manager why I wanted to pay with cash - a very suspicious activity.

T T T T

Limericks

It is said that limericks are the easiest form of poetry to read and write.
Can you understand the following ? [Hint, it helps to be British]

There was a young man from Hampshire
Who refused to wear any pampshire.
When they asked him why
he replied with a sigh
"I don't want to have anpshire in my pampshire."

There was a young man from Hertfordshire
Who earned stacks of money at Dertfordshire.
It ended one day
In a bankruptcy way.
He'd gone out with too many Tertfordshire.

T T T T

Mad Dogs and Englishmen¹⁵

If you have followed the saga of British politics for the last few years, even for the last few weeks of chaos, you have certainly heard of Jacob Rees-Mogg. If Fintan O'Toole (see p.1) is no friend of archaic British institutions, Rees-Mogg is their very embodiment. Certainly not the last of eccentric Englishmen, he is nevertheless their most prominent current exponent. Here are a few "mad dog" moments.



In September 2019, Rees-Mogg was criticised for lying in Parliament

¹⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tJjwBWBbX4>

The Sun, 10 September 2020: He changed his phone number to the date of the death of Charles I to make it easier to remember.

The Guardian, 26 October 2022

Jacob Rees-Mogg has submitted a typically old-fashioned resignation letter, in a last hurrah for the so-called honourable member for the 18th century. ... [He] wrote his letter, resigning as business secretary, by hand and declined to share it on social media, in stark contrast with the typed resignation letters shared on Twitter by other MPs.

Rees-Mogg's handwriting is so difficult to decipher that the Scottish newspaper ***The National*** has headlined an article: "We bet you can't read Jacob Rees-Mogg's handwritten resignation letter." In his characteristically anachronistic style, Rees-Mogg, a devoted Catholic, dated the letter "St Crispin's Day".

St Crispin's Day is a feast day in the Christian calendar on 25 October, which takes its name from the saints Crispin and Crispinian, who were tortured and beheaded by the Roman emperor in AD286. Many significant battles have taken place on that day throughout history, including the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, immortalised in a St Crispin's Day speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

... Rees-Mogg is well known for insistently sticking to his interpretation of the finer points of the British constitution. He famously argued in August 2019 that the decision to advise the Queen to prorogue parliament, weeks before a vote on the final Brexit agreement, was "routine". The then prime minister Boris Johnson's advice was later declared unlawful by a unanimous supreme court verdict.

LBC, 23 February 2022

The Government has commissioned a study into the "economic benefits" of reintroducing imperial units of measurement after Brexit. Dependent on the outcome of the study, metric units of measurement such as centimetres, kilograms and litres could be scrapped.

The investigation will be overseen by the business department, alongside Minister for Brexit opportunities Jacob Rees-Mogg who is tasked with looking at how Britain might benefit from leaving the EU.

The move comes after Boris Johnson said in 2019, that measuring in pounds and ounces was "ancient liberty" and promised to usher in a new "era of generosity and tolerance towards traditional measurements".

The traditional system of measurements was used almost exclusively in Great Britain from 1824 but was phased out when the UK joined the

European common market in the early 1970s. On February 15, 1971, nicknamed "decimal day" Edward Heath's government formally abolished the old coinage that had served for generations, replacing it with a new - decimal system in line with the metric system.

Out went the shilling, the half-crown and the sixpence and in came pounds and pence which was said to cause chaos across the UK.

***The Guardian*, 18 September 2022**

It was meant to be one of the sure-fire wins for Brexit, but plans to bring back imperial measurements face criticism over claims of a biased government review.

Ministers were keen to launch a review to revive imperial measurements – such as pounds and ounces – and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), now overseen by Jacob Rees-Mogg, conducted a government consultation over the summer. ...

France adopted a metric system in the late 18th century, and a Decimalisation Association was founded in Britain in 1841 to lobby for a new system for currency and measurements. A report by a standards commission in the 1860s recommended metrication for Britain, but it was another 100 years before a government board was set up in 1969 to promote and coordinate metrication.

Once Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973, the government committed to adopting the metric system. Regulations introduced in 1995 required goods to be sold in metric units in the UK. ...

Rees-Mogg, who had a cabinet role to identify Brexit opportunities, has been a long-term supporter of using imperial measurements. The proposed change is however unlikely to be hailed as a significant Brexit dividend.

"Not one constituent, ever, has asked for this," Conservative MP Alicia Kearns tweeted earlier this year. "This isn't a Brexit freedom. It's a nonsense." ¹⁶

***The Guardian*, 14 June 2022**

A cabinet row has broken out over Jacob Rees-Mogg's plans to axe all remaining EU laws in under four years, given concerns about the feasibility of combing through at least 2,000 pieces of legislation while the

¹⁶ By the way, I weigh 13 stone, my height is 5 feet 9 inches, my garden is 0.74 acres, my house is 3 rods by 2 perches, it is 11.14 miles from Geneva and 3 furlongs to my tennis club, the temperature today is 66.2° Fahrenheit, I drink a pint of tea every day, I harvest several bushels of pears every year and it's a long time since I wrote letters on foolscap.

civil service faces severe cutbacks.

The Brexit opportunities minister is pushing for the laws carried over after Brexit to expire by a “cliff-edge” deadline of 23 June 2026, marking 10 years since the EU referendum.

However, the Guardian has learned that at least two cabinet ministers have railed against the proposal, while officials have said the goal is “literally impossible” – particularly as Rees-Mogg is also spearheading the cull of the civil service.

In a letter to the North Somerset MP, George Eustice said that “messaging around” with some rules would mean an additional cost to businesses and be a waste of officials’ time, while senior Whitehall sources voiced fears of a mass deregulation drive by the back door.

The pushback came amid wrangling within government about how to better promote the “benefits” of Britain’s independence. Brussels is set to launch legal action against the UK’s bid to unilaterally override the Northern Ireland protocol on Wednesday. ...

[George Eustice, the environment secretary] said that “messaging around” with the minutiae of some retained EU laws, such as product composition or labelling, “costs businesses money and is unlikely to make much difference”. ...

Senior Whitehall sources said it would be “literally impossible” for departments to wade through hundreds of retained EU laws and come up with plans to retain, amend or drop them with no extra resources.

They pointed out that a substantial number of the laws adopted by the EU were lobbied for by the UK government when Britain was still a member, or adopted as a result of obligations under international organisations. ...

Catherine Barnard, a professor of EU law at Cambridge University and deputy director of the UK in a Changing Europe thinktank, said: “A sunset clause is an effective but crude mechanism for bringing to an end whole swathes of retained EU law, much of which still serves a valuable function. Replacing worthwhile EU rules with a domestic variation will take significant civil servant and parliamentary time when the country has other pressing priorities.”

T T T T

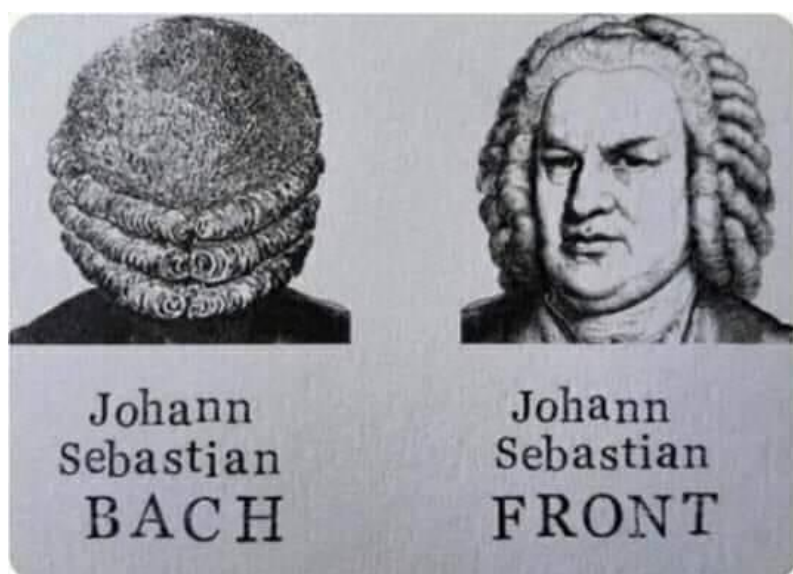
Odds and Ends

Most of my gut feelings turn out to be brain farts.

In einem Vortrag sagte Guldemann [Swiss Ambassador in Iran 1997-2004]

einmal: "Wir Schweizer sind wie Kartoffeln, die Augen gehen uns erst auf, wenn wir im Dreck stecken." (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 10 November 2021).

"Les Suisses se lèvent tôt, mais se réveillent tard." (Commentary after the negative vote on entry to the European Economic Area in 1992.)

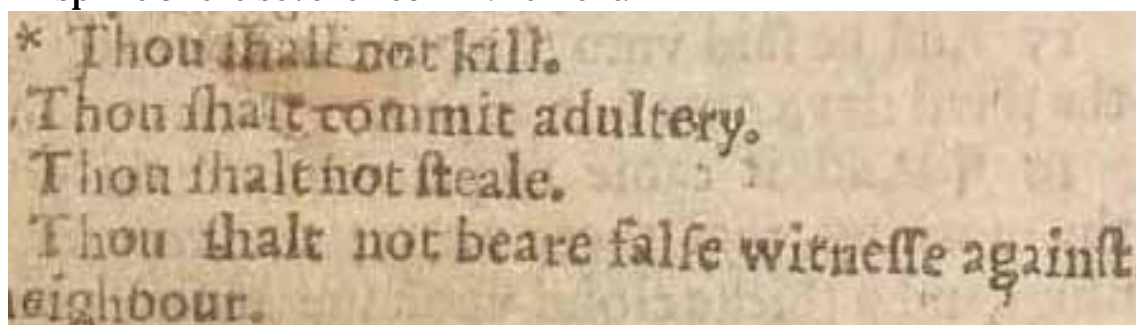


$$\frac{2ab}{\text{Fr. 2,16}} = 2bb \frac{a}{e}$$

[According to Clarence Brown, who directed Garbo in seven films] "... she'd watch only when sound films were played in reverse: that's what Garbo enjoyed. She would sit there shaking with laughter, watching the film running backward and the sound going kablom-yakablom. But as soon as we ran it forward, she wouldn't watch." *New Yorker*, 13 December 2021

Even if he does not fully realise it yet, Johnson is now the Conservative party's yesterday man. To borrow Cameron's damning putdown of Tony Blair: he was the future once. Peter Walker *The Guardian*, 24 October 2022

The "Wicked" or "Sinners" Bible refers to an edition of 1631 that contained a misprint of the seventh commandment.



During Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August, a placard supposed to say "Warmonger Pelosi" instead read "ongerWarm osiPel". *The Guardian* 5.8.22

I puzzled over the etymology of the French word "chandail" (sweater). Answer: "Aphérèse de *marchand d'ail*, désignant, aux Halles de Paris, les maraîchers bretons qui vendaient leur ail aux Halles, et qui portaient en hiver de gros pulls tricotés par leurs femmes. Ils ont été dénommés "chandail" par métonymie.



Thanks Felicia



Nobody is mad enough to choose war whilst there is peace. During times of peace, the sons bury their fathers, but in war it is the fathers who send their sons to the grave." Herodotus, *The Histories*

"Die Ehe ist der Anfang und der Gipfel aller Kultur. Sie macht den Rohen mild, und der Gebildetste hat keine bessere Gelegenheit, seine Milde zu beweisen. Unauflöslich muß sie sein; denn sie bringt so vieles Glück, daß

alles einzelne Unglück dagegen gar nicht zu rechnen ist. Und was will man von Unglück reden? Ungeduld ist es, die den Menschen von Zeit zu Zeit anfällt, und dann beliebt er sich unglücklich zu finden. Lasse man den Augenblick vorübergehen, und man wird sich glücklich." Goethe

Have you ever thought of the implications of the expressions in different languages of "trottoir"? In French it is clear that this was the part of the road for trotting horses, as opposed to the (perhaps muddy) road. The English "pavement" objectively describes the surface, whereas the German "Bürgersteig" gives it a distinctly class character.

Bono, the lead singer of the rock band U2, is famous throughout the entertainment industry for being more than a little self-righteous. At a recent U2 concert in Glasgow, he asked the audience for total quiet. Then, in the silence, he started slowly to clap his hands, once every few seconds. Holding the audience in total silence, he said into the microphone, "Every time I clap my hands, a child in Africa dies." From the front of the crowd a voice with a broad Scottish accent pierced the quiet: "Well f...in' stop doin' it then ye evil bastarrd." [Apocryphal?]

T T T T

Stop Press

The *Daily Star* lettuce has come out victorious in the battle of the year - to see whether it could outlast Prime Minister Liz Truss in #LizVsLettuce (*Daily Star*, October 20, 2022)



The *Daily Star*'s stunt was inspired by *The Economist*, which earlier this month quipped that Truss's tenure in Downing Street threatened to be "roughly the shelf-life of a lettuce".