

Home, Sweet Home:

Dispatches from the Manchurian Candidate Factory: #21

Κύριε, ἐλέησον. (Lord, have mercy.)

My own opinion (borrowing from Richard Wolin) regarding the stuff I write: "Anecdotally rich but analytically impoverished."

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Distribution: Book group, Adams Blvd./Cochran Ave. and Environs, FBI & Justice Dept.(by snail mail), Human Rights Watch, LAPD, Others.

Purpose: To Ridicule Few. To Amuse Many. To Inform All.

A reminder: because of frequent computer malfunctions, when I notice an egregious "printer's devil," I'll **bold** it and add (sic). That'll bitch it.

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My book, now in the public domain: <https://tinyurl.com/Schizophrenia-Weaponized> | My blog: bergendahlhawkins.com

"... You ask yourself how it is that a people of such abilities could be governed by such a grotesque regime and that's saying the least... In fact, you're right. Without a doubt one finds more wisdom in a family of Albanian mountain people than within the assembly which supposedly represents the nation."

— *Le Dossier H*, Ismail Kadare (My somewhat unsatisfactory translation)

One can't well argue the honor and beauty of an act by referring to its usefulness.

— Montaigne

"Alone in a malfunctioning society."

— *57 boulevard Staline*, p. 118, E. et J-P. Champseix (My translation, adapted)

"I will be satisfied if my book, even in a minor way, helps to disprove the notion that any positive result can be achieved by force."

— *Involuntary Journey to Siberia*, author's foreword, Andrei Amalrik

Mon centre cède, ma (main) droite s'affaiblit, situation excellente, j'attaque. (My center is giving way, my right (hand) is weakening, excellent situation, I shall attack.)

— Foch, 1914, adapted from (You'll note the date)

Summary of Contents:

1) Web site searches occasionally return anomalous results 2) Difficulty getting timely advice from Kaiser Permanente 3) Business inquiry calls often not returned 3) eBay account now at risk of being closed 4) A new section with captioned pictures 5) So-called "hot prowler burglary" noticed 6) Increasing activity where mostly trivial items are moved/removed/replaced in bungalow 7) Noise

The Cat Walks (Backward, Natch!):

I remember Irene once telling me in a level voice how she'd been invited for a weekend to the country house of a couple she was acquainted with. Nothing else was even said again by either of us on the subject. Could she have been checking the lay of the land? I'm only now comparing that visit with her "getaway" to the desert with her future husband, *Persio Dello Sbarba*, in 1989(?). After which the two of them took a direct flight to Italy without so much as a phone call to me. I can't help but cast a baleful eye on this parallel. Could the earlier weekend have been the start of Irene's calvary? Just as I strongly suspect the visit to the California desert was the beginning of poor *Persio's*.

Running the Public Transit Gauntlet — A Comedic Adventure:

(9-26-23) Drivers now behaving themselves. Boring, that.

The Eccentric Shaft™: Interactions with my Fellow Crazyies. A-and me a Paranoid Schizophrenic (Credit: Irene Hawkins, personal communication):

(9-18-23) A new neighbor in Anna's former bungalow, here about a week. For several days, I heard loud, long clusters of speech, which turned into brief, loud conversations with Brother *Cantinflas*(?) or her cell phone. Today, as I wash a salvaged milk crate using the hose outside her bungalow, she comes to the window and complains. Unable to make out what she says and not willing to engage her, though I'm only two feet away, I say "excuse me?" She immediately goes to a neighbor and tells him I've let water pool by her back door, adding she doesn't think I speak English. She asks him to alert the manager, he replies he will. Overhearing the conversation feet away from where I'm washing the crate, this time I'm able to make out what she says.

La Rubrique des Gueules Cassées (A Section on War-wounded):

(9-18-23) Scabies may not yet be eradicated. Have ordered new organic insecticide bottles and picked up a refill of anti-scabies prescription, may go to laundromat again. (Update: 9-20-23) Dermatologist says, based on reported symptoms and a brief exam, it's unlikely I have scabies anymore. (Update: 9-28-23) Have felt no itch in the last days.

(9-20-23) The kefir grains I thought were missing a day ago, I've found in a container deep in the fridge. Same as with the order for a book by eBay customer. I had to cancel as I had not looked thoroughly enough. Another example of my alarming level of absent-mindedness.

In a recent phone conversation with doctor Siegel, my main doctor, he termed my finger's condition "not serious" or "not important," (I'm not sure which). However, during today's dermatology visit, I was referred to the plastic surgery department for a biopsy of the finger and the word "cancer" was mentioned by doctor Cavalier.

(9-21-23) This AM, went to the Kaiser Permanente Cadillac plastic surgery department for my biopsy. Doctor Chu, after asking me, replies emphatically he does not do what others tell him. Adding: "I don't even do what my boss tells me" (a direct quote) and that he does what *he* decides. Continuing in the same loud voice, he repeats himself after I, nonplussed, reply I had been referred to his *department* for the biopsy. I ask for his recommendation. He says he has none to make, and that it's for me to decide. At one point, he mentions the risk of infection were a biopsy to be done and, if I understood correctly, that it does not make sense to probe for something that might not be present. One option offered was for observation. I also think, but am not sure, the words: "further observation"

were emphasized by the nurse who handed me the summary. In the end, no biopsy was done. Minutes after he'd left, while waiting for the nurse, I heard a man's voice outside say: "where's my sauna?" I increasingly think the visit unusual. For me, this experience is a first with an MD.

All in all, after the week's emotional roller coaster I must say my head is spinning; a bit.

(9-23-23) Having a difficult time sleeping lately. With my insomnia not helped by sounds I hear, mostly below the threshold of intelligibility and sometimes just at the edge of audibility. I sometimes hear them for over two hours at night as I try to sleep or during the day when I nap. One could say I'm spending my day recovering from the previous night.

To celebrate 101 years of the film *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horrors), an anecdote from the land of Dracula, then. In the days of Ceaușescu, people the regime did not particularly care for could be summoned to an office, reason unstated. Arriving promptly in the morning, they would be seated and told to wait. Until, the workday over, the unfortunate individual, having cooled his heels all day, might be told to return the next morning. Again, no explanation given. With the *manège* possibly repeated several times. What the person did not know was that on the other side of the wall against which he had been sitting, an X-ray machine was steadily, silently irradiating him. With possible consequences neither he nor anyone else would ever be able to connect to the seemingly purposeless summons. However, as this place is not *Nosferatu* country (as in "Land of the Walking (Un)dead"), that sort of thing could never happen here. Surely not.

The Quotable Other, i.e., *L'Enfer, c'est les Autres* (Hell is Other People) — Sartre:

(9-17-23) According to an Arab saying: "If someone calls you an ass, ignore him. If ten people call you an ass, go out and buy a saddle." Days ago, walking (lurching might be more accurate) on the sand at Santa Monica beach, where I'd been relaxing near the waterline, I overheard someone, presumably referring to himself, comment: "At least I can walk." Yikes. I've also, as mentioned in another HSH, previously seen Tyson the Robot's little boy, a child around ten, imitating my unsteady gait as he walks by my bungalow. To explain, my odd gait's a result of the cumulative impacts of: 1) A botched suicide attempt in 1998-9 which demolished my ankles 2) Months of uncontrolled, sky-high blood sugar levels in the 2000s, leading to neuropathy though blood sugar levels are now under control 3) The mysterious question of stenosis of my spine.

Heard at the beach, years ago, "Sell him to us." An attempt to establish moral equivalence (in my mind, at least)?

Les Casses de l'Oncle Sam (Uncle Sam's Robberies (Credit: Harriet Beecher Stowe, adapted from)):

Lost and (sometimes) found (again), a few trivial things:

1. A black dress shoe missing, later found on lowest shelf in bathroom. This is reminiscent of an abortive eBay sale of a software package. Unable to find the item, I had to refund. Months later I found it, again on the lowest shelf of a bookshelf not long after I moved in.
2. Days ago, a pair of jeans I'd washed and left in the living room. As a counter to this "inventory shrinkage," maybe I should wear multiple layers of clothes to bed. That'll bitch it. A-and, from a practical point of view, it also makes sense as the weather is getting colder and I have no heat.
3. The plunger for my *nice* Cuisinart food processor, a present from Colette who scavenged it in Santa Monica, years ago. I later found it behind my fridge.
4. A small digital scale has been gone from my kitchen for weeks or more.
5. A plastic screw-on cap for a glass jar I use to ferment milk.
6. A translucent envelope with stamps. I was forced to buy more before I could mail a check.
7. Several yellow envelopes.
8. Part of a burgundy T-shirt I'd been using as a napkin (*faute de mieux*). Won't some kind souls pitch in so I can afford another?
9. (9-28-23) The lid of my tea kettle is missing, I noticed after getting up early this morning. Though I did search for it in the kitchen for some time I now consider it "posted missing." (Update: 9-28-23) In the evening I found the kettle top under my rolling cart in the kitchen.
10. (9-28-23) At least one top of a glass jar used to hold the *rillettes* I made last week was partly loose when I reached for it in the fridge, also this AM.

*Sassenach*TM and His ~~Yankee~~ Damyankee Tricks:

Reading *Feeding you Lies* by Vani Hari, a food activist, I came across a phrase: "drive-by" (intimidation, my clarification). During her investigations of food companies, she reports cars would occasionally drive by her house to that end. An experience I share, only with me it involves cars with impossibly loud engines roaring by, at speed, and at all hours.

(9-19-23) Colette, an insomniac who often looked tired, complained of experiences I increasingly share: 1) Loud neighbors, in her case the teenage daughter of the two Brits next door, frequently talking on her phone late at night with windows open 2) Another neighbor's loud radio on the other side of her bedroom wall, forcing her to cover it with felt 3) I once heard one of the British neighbors using a rake one night as she and I walked into her apartment 4) I also heard the same neighbor's dog barking, its owner repeating: "come inside, come back inside!" Colette was visibly disturbed. My environment and problems sleeping now resemble hers.

Daffynition: *Ersatz* CrazyTM: e.g., some bus passengers, Lady Lurk, the Banshee(s), et al. I've run into so many over the years.

Contrasting efficiencies and patterns of behaviors; then and now, a sample (A veritable war of nerves, and me a schizophrenic):

Who:	Then:	Now:
Police	Mugged in Echo Park, cops arrest two suspects minutes later, both later plead guilty	After repeated burglaries and (unrelated) attacks by a tenant and another individual in my complex, no arrests made. Police have even asked for my help in locating the suspect, a man who lives in my small housing complex. Was unable to get a report or incident number after last 911 call
Metro bus/rail	Service excellent, good routes, clean, AC, new rail sys., cheap	System at times unusable, drivers occasionally baiting me. Buses fail to stop: up to seven in a row
Kaiser Permanente	Colette Walczak's experiences: touchingly good. Personnel generally very human & efficient. Kaiser Permanente has very good reputation among MDs	a) <u>Aberrant behavior</u> by two MDs I nicknamed " <i>Frau Doktor</i> ," both named in my book. b) I'm lied to: 1) Told I must file complaint against psychiatrist if I want another 2) Told Venice/Cadillac location has no nurse's station for weighing c) Tergiversation: 1) Messages not always forwarded to recipients 2) Boilerplate from nurse received instead 3) Told "No MDs with open panels" at Venice/Cadillac facility, assigned MD in Inglewood instead 4) Unable to get costs of procedures though I provide procedure numbers given by MD

LA Public Library	Efficient, convenient, free, librarians very helpful	Inglewood branch incident: clerk attempts to check out books returned and return books I was checking out
USPS	Efficient, fast and reliable. No complaints, postmen always friendly	Now many obstructions, unreliable, sometimes baited, some items shipped are reported by customer as arriving severely damaged
eBay	Member for over 20 years, very good service.	Increasingly arbitrary application of rules. Account broken into (reported to FBI), complaint referred to eBay Fraud Dept. (reference #1-466106379961), never got response. Listing of book restored is identical to what was objected to and removed a month earlier, again without explanation. Told on 9-27-23: "seller's account is now at risk" though positive feedback rating is 100% and I've been a member since 6-26-2000

Juegos de Manos, Juegos de Villanos:

An excerpt from an exchange with landlord, Tiffany Anderson:

Yesterday afternoon, 6/29/23, the son of the suspect in the battery case (Tyson), a boy of about twelve named Xavier, while playing outside with a toy pistol of some kind, began shooting at my bungalow, hitting the side and windows. This went on for a long time. Nothing damaged.

Later, when I went outside to check on some drying clothes, he shot at me several times, hitting me with some kind of pellets. I was not hurt. I asked him to not aim at me, to which he did not reply.

There was also a second person outside at this time, a young woman, sibling of Xavier. Two toy pistols were in use; their father may have been nearby though I did not speak to him.

This behavior was repeated during the evening when, for an hour or more, I could hear the rat-a-tat-tat of a toy gun just outside my bungalow. Again, the side and windows of the bungalow were hit. Present throughout this second incident was a witness, a customer by the name of Flo Selfman, visiting me for computer work.

Cannot something be done?

Ms. Anderson's reply:

Good Afternoon Mr. Hawkins,

I'm sorry that that happened. Do you know if the child was a tenant in the complex and if so, do you know what unit he is in?

Tiffany Anderson -Manager

Some background: Tyson's been a tenant here for many years, he is sought by LAPD detective Hargrove who has complained Ms. Anderson does not reply to his requests for information though I too have also sent her emails about him. Notice how her answer is deceptive and mealy-mouthed. She knows who I'm referring to, having refused to contact the LAPD about him but pretends not to know.

Tyson Agonistes.

- (8-31-23) At 7AM, as I'm perched on a ladder outside complex, taping fliers to a light pole, Tyson comes charging down the walkway. Says "What the f**k are you doing?" He shakes the ladder, though not hard enough for me to fall off you'll note. He hits me once on the side of the head with his fist, not hard, mind and pulls down the two fliers mentioning him and an acquaintance who had shot me in the forehead with a Nerf gun, then leaves.
- I immediately call 911, police arrive. I hear Tyson say to them: "he looks at my daughter's behind." Just exactly who was not specified.
- Neither an incident number nor a police report were made available (though Officer *Ramírez* promised one by email...). I was told: 1) Consider moving – repeated three times by *Ramírez*, he added that he too had had problems with a neighbor, mentioning a window broken 2) He uses the words "mental illness" twice, refers to Tyson as a "big man" 3) Before leaving, Officer Bautista asks me to translate some Italian words on a flier, one of two I had handed him. The words: "*Ecco la Trappola*" (behold the trap).
- (9-6-23) While I'm in bed, I hear a peculiar voice, continuous, as though reading from a script, with a curious cadence. Beginning before midnight, I hear what sounds like Tyson speaking in a loud, strange monologue. Though I cannot understand most of it, I do make out an occasional word: "*cabrón*," among others. I hear an occasional Caribbean accent. In all, two clusters of near continuous speech of about an hour each.
- (9-18-23) A couple days ago, as he walks by my bungalow, I hear: "the next move is up to him."

Speed Bumps on the Road to Ragnarök:

An escalating series of problems with: a) eBay sales b) Post office and mailman c) eBay site malfunction d) eBay customer service:

1. An eBay customer in Spain reports one of two displays (new, open box) is damaged. I send another. He's nice enough to pay for shipment.
2. A California eBay customer, is unable to program the PALCE22V10 parts I sent as his programmer is not compatible. He tells me I misled him. I send compatible parts from another manufacturer. He offers to return incompatible parts at his expense, I accept and make another listing for the troublesome chips.
3. *Daniel Souza*, eBay customer in Spain, says the LCD display (new, open box) is defective, sends pics to confirm. I offer two free replacements with shipment at no charge. He refuses, wants his money back though my listing clearly says "no refunds." Asked how to handle refund, I reply: file a case through eBay, adding "make it official." eBay's decision: no refund necessary, I need do nothing, case closed.
4. Unable to use eBay to ship to Spain due to bug in eBay software (for me, an occasional problem for about a year). I'm forced to go to post office. Eventually got refund from eBay for difference in shipping costs.
5. Two packages with postage bought through eBay, left on mailbox for postman were picked up, then returned to my mailbox on the same day without explanation. A check of tracking numbers shows neither had been entered into system. By message at USPS site, I file a complaint (not at my local branch). A day later, with packages still in my bungalow, the postman comes to screen door and asks if I have anything to ship. I hand him both.
6. A customer makes two offers for a book on eBay. Unable to find it, I do not respond to offers. I had not looked for it thoroughly enough. My fault.
7. In the space of a few weeks, two packages: one for 2626 Dunsmuir, the other for 2626 Burnside, are left at my doorstep. I hand carry the first, though not the second, to the right address, one street down.
8. Last winter, postman tells me there is a package for me from "U-something," she later corrects this to "Ukraine." I refuse, as package is opened and I expect nothing from there. When I call Irene to check with her, she *urges* me to accept the Christmas present. On the next day, the package is returned to my doorstep, I accept it. It was from Irene. Not sure about that Ukraine business.
9. (9-19-23) I call TAPtogo, the people who run the Metro bus card payment system, having lost mine on September 6. I was told a replacement had been mailed on September 13. As of this morning, have not received it. (Update: 9-19-23, later in the day) The replacement came in the mail. Not the first time an item, late in delivery, shows up immediately I check on its whereabouts.

10. (9-27-23) In an email, eBay tells me my seller's account is at risk of curtailment or closure. Reason: performance below acceptable. See Figure 2.

Benelux: A Kushi, it's True, but a Nice One:

La Rabbia Felix or My Snappy (but very much canned) Comebacks:

- (Met with obstructionism, I reply:) Thank you! Before briskly walking away. (A favorite of mine)
- Top o' the mornin' to ye [and isn't it a shame wot *Sassenach*TM is doing to us?] <= (Optional)
- Yes? No? Maybe? (In answer to the above question, if no reply is forthcoming)
- (In answer to question: "How are you?"): "I'm all right (*Jack*. [Pause] Your name is Jack, isn't it?)" <= (Optional)
- [After obviously wrong statement denied, e.g., name's not Jack] Och! I've been misinformed... Once again.
- What the problem is, you ask? I'm not all there. [Pause] In fact, I'm all here. *That's* the problem.
- No tricks, please! (Occasionally said to bus drivers as I board. Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn't.)
- Hi folks, how'm I doing? (Sometimes, as the occasion warrants, said to bus passengers)
- My name is Lawson Bergendahl *Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Hawkins y Cabeza de Vaca* (but you can call me *Tuco* for short)
- Excuse me? (*da capo, sine fine*. Which, by the way is also a telling comment on my by-now legendary rigidity. Sigh.)
- I'm celebrating milestones in writing my book. (Reasons for signs on window)
- Not me bloomin' fault. (Occasional aside to eBay customers after some SNAFU)
- I'm still warm, thank you. (In reply to question: "How are you?")
- Easy does it.
- That's the ticket!
- Beer, beer! Thank you.
- Слава Украине!
- *Kannitverstan!*
- I plead the 6th.
- Didja see that?
- Let's backup a minute.
- Oh?
- Good!
- Action this day!
- Is anyone getting off?
- ... I say again ...
- Never a Dulles moment, wot?
- I don't hear so good sometimes.
- One side, fellow peasant <=(optional).
- Ô Bibi! Where are you? Thank you.
- My name's Berg (as in Nuremberg).
- I. Have. Eaten. The. Frog. Long. Enough!
- *Bergie*'s my name, schizophrenia's my game.
- My name is *Bergie* Hawkins and I. Am. Crazy!
- Jes' passin' through folks, jes' passin' through.
- Will there be anything else. (Mostly said to landlord)
- Use email please, unless it's v. urgent. (Mostly to landlord)

Wink-wink. Nudge-nudge:

Having finally found the right nickname for my irrepressible and increasingly restless neighbor: "Tyson the Robot" aka "Tyson the *Golem*," I just remembered an iconic presence: *Phoolan Devi, the Dacoit Queen*. Problem is, I have no suitable candidate for this "hanging nickname." Ya gotta help me out, folks.

(9-30-23) The wife of *Gadiel Velásquez* I've nicknamed: "the Goose-stepper" due to her loud walk as she storms past my bungalow. Must be the heels, wot?

My new neighbor I've taken to calling: "Mrs. Decibels-without-Content" or "Mrs. Deci-Belle" or just plain "Belle" as the occasion warrants. She moved into our complex in August, making herself immediately noticed with her loud, shrill, near-monologues with little intelligible content I can discern. The question being, are these Gentlemen of the Organs of State SecurityTM looking to be "saved by the 'Belle'?" Stay tuned.

(9-18(?) -23) At the Kaiser pharmacy to pickup a refill. I'm at the checkout counter, minding me own business, waiting for my prescription, when someone steps up to the next window and fairly shouts to the startled clerks something like: "you're doing an excellent job, thank you!" Never a Dulles moment, wot?

For those of you *still* unfamiliar with the habitual and colossal cheek of this place's security services. I've heard that, asked by Congress for the number of people currently monitored here, the NSA refused to reply as it would violate the privacy of the individuals concerned. Apocryphal or true?

The Provocation Will Not Be Televised or Mine de Rien (While Pretending Nothing is Going on):

(9-18-23) Recently had to call the Los Angeles library, downtown branch, to reserve a book, *The Thirty Years' War* by Wedgwood as my search had only turned up a reference copy. A librarian, though, was quickly able to find one available to loan.

(9-??-23) In my living room this week, sometime in the night, I begin hearing sounds. At first faint and maybe irregular, they increase in volume until I make them out to be someone using a rake outside. Raking, around 9PM.

Shooting Fish in a Barrel I am, A-and Getting Pretty Good at it, Too (e.g., Bus Driver's Words: "We Don't Need Your Mouth." Had I Hit a Nerve?):

(9-22-23) As part of my Transparent ManTM initiative, I've put a new desktop background on my computer: "The Contents of this Disk are in the Public Domain." That'll bitch it.

Pictures:



Figure 1: The latest flier I'm distributing, corrected (I'd coded the QR for HTTP: instead of HTTPS:).



Figure 2: Viva *Fidèle!*



Figure 3: A QR code *Aktion* with the following progression (left to right): *Düppel* (Chaff) => *Confetti* => "Galaxies like Grains of Sand" (Credit: Brian Aldiss) My blog URL, progressively shrunk, finally condensed to a harmless level? Regardless, all sizes now ready for dissemination.

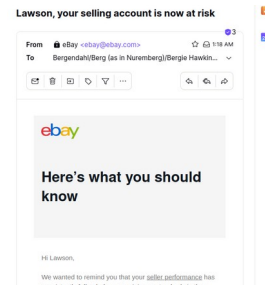


Figure 4: Is the ax about to fall? Stay tuned for the next episode brought to you by the folks at eBay.

Though I’ve weathered concerted efforts to this end over the last few years, I believe I cannot *at this time* be forced out of my bungalow legally. Neither, I suspect, can I be forced out illegally, though exactly why is, for me, a deepening mystery. Making things so unpleasant that I leave of my own accord may thus be the only option left to these Gentlemen of the Organs of State Security™. For one such effort, see the section *Juegos de Manos*. For another, in which I offer evidence of still more “hot prowling burglaries,” see *Les Casses de l’Oncle Sam*.

Hospitalized in 1998-9, after my most serious suicide attempt, I heard a nurse comment on a famous man’s infidelities: “He’s fouling his own nest,” she said. This now strikes me as a succinct description of what our Gentlemen of the *Securitate*™ have been up to. *Le mot juste* (The right word at the right time).

Quotations from Chairman *Miaou* (Those of you with either a long memory or a guilty conscience will get the reference):

- Listening to music on YouTube, I’m reminded of an anecdote: A gentleman of the Hindu persuasion is brought to a classical music concert by a European friend. Afterwards, the friend asks which piece he liked best. To his astonishment the Indian replies: “Of the three pieces, I preferred the first.” For, you see, there had only been two in the program. Evidently the man considered the interval in which musicians tuned their instruments to be music *and preferred it*. I often feel this way myself, only about this life in general. I remember my father, too, more than once remarking he was born in the wrong century (a PaleoNegro™, perhaps?).
- Hoping the likes of “McLuhan’s Children™” (if you don’t know what I mean by that, search for an arresting New Yorker cartoon featuring people at night, walking alone, faces bathed in the glow of their cell phones. Nomadic monads?) will read what follows may be asking for the moon.
- Nevertheless, here goes. A (mandatory?) reading list followed by a few (optional) profundities from yr. Turbulent Dunce™.
 1. *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* (The Great Miseries of war), a series of 17th Century engravings by Jacques Callot, from Wikipedia.
 1. *The Grey Eminence* by Aldous Huxley, a biography of a French diplomat and Catholic mystic(?), Richelieu’s right-hand man.
 2. *The Thirty Years’ War* by CJ Wedgwood, a literary historian (of the first water, she).
 3. *The Adventurous Simplicissimus Teutsch* by von Grimmelshausen. The story of a kid caught up in the Thirty Years’ War. A book described by Wedgwood as a “nightmare novel.” Considered one of the most significant works of German literature (Credit: britannica.com).
- I’ve recently become interested in this most famous war of the 17th Century. An interest piqued by the central character in Grimmelshausen’s novel, one who reminds me of the protagonist in another novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*. Huxley’s biography of that curious man, known to us as the Grey Eminence, is also interesting.
- From what little I’ve gleaned about the period from Wedgwood’s fine book, ruling elites in those days were hamstrung by an inefficient bureaucracy and resulting lack of funds for military operations. While on campaign, their armies were thus frequently forced to live “off the fat of the land,” i.e., those peasants unlucky enough to cumber a theater of operations. And, as to what the peasants themselves, once stripped of every bit of sustenance by these, these, these *bewaffnete Heuschrecke*™ (armed locust) had to live on? One could say they sometimes took in each other’s laundry...
- So here you have it: the 17th Century peasant as “fat of the land.”
- Moving forward to the French revolution and the Napoleonic era, I’ll ask you to consider one line in the original French national anthem (before it was bowdlerized): “*Qu’un sang impure abreuve nos sillons*” (May an impure blood water our furrows). I’d always thought the “impure blood” bit referred to the enemy; not so. The author is expressing the wish that, for a change, the blood of *commoners* be spilled in defense of the nation. At that time, a new idea as, traditionally, it had been the aristocracy’s job along with, of course, mercenaries. Damn-clever Frenchman.
- Now we have the 18th Century peasant become “cannon fodder,” i.e., “*foin, blé, foin, blé.*” Never mind the meaning of this learned bit.
- Bringing in a famous quote of Hegel’s: “History came to an end with the battle of *Jena*.” (My all-time favorite phrase, though not true). This battle, another of Napoleon’s stellar victories, had *Valmy* as its prototype. For it was at *Valmy* that a *ramassis* of Frenchmen, admittedly braced by a few professionals, turned back a traditionally-composed invading army led by aristocrats; the sort of force that had, until then, usually prevailed.
- Looking back, could one say that the road to *Passchendaele* began at *Jena*? And that *Passchendaele* was, in turn, the gateway to the 20th Century?
- Finally, should the progression I’ve clumsily but, I hope, not too inaccurately, sketched out above be considered an improvement in our lot, i.e., that of “We the Peasants?” I, of course, have no answer but asking the question is certainly permissible...

As I sit finishing up the above, occasionally obscure, malarkey, the strains of *Ein feste Burg ist unser Berg*, pardon me, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, echo ‘round my bungalow and I think to myself: aren’t I a damn-clever Negro? Damn clever for a Negro, that is.

(signed)

Lawson Bergendahl *Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria* (Ramírez? Did someone say Ramírez?) Hawkins y *Cabeza de Vaca* (but you can call me “*Tuco*”)

P.S. To my beloved sisters, Irene and Colette (and two other unfortunates as well: Mari Berg and *Elmira Izmailova*): May our wordless tears, yours and mine, eventually prove invincible.