

Home, Sweet Home: Dispatches from the Manchurian Candidate Factory: #6

Κύριε, ἐλέησον. (Lord, have mercy.)

My own opinion regarding the stuff I write: “Anecdotally rich but analytically impoverished.”

— quoting Richard Wolin in: *the wind from the east*

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

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“Having gotten mixed-up in writing, I have been punished for my impudence;
Refractory, I have offended my era's mentality.
The accumulated calumnies could very well get the better of my carcass;
As useless as it may be, my voice will nevertheless survive in these pages.

— Lu Xun's autograph/poem (1933) My translation from the French

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

The LAPD used to call that hospital in the ghetto: King Drew Medical Center, “Killer King” on account of the perhaps less than satisfactory survival rate of patients brought there. Were any *Frau Doktor* types worknig (sic) there? (An aside: I thought I had written “working” just now, what actually appeared on the page illustrates an increasingly frequent phenomenon, text corrupted in real-time.)

Sassenach and His Yankee Demyankee Tricks:

Running the gauntlet at Costco the other day, that is to say shopping for me monthly groceries when, on reaching the checkout line, I begin hearing a peculiar laugh which one of the cashiers repeatedly deploys. A cluster of “microwave moments” with the payoff, after I have been suitably “warmed up,” happening once I reach the head of the line. The cashier proceeds to inform me that my Jarlsberg cheese cannot be charged as it has no barcode. I try to turn it to humor with a pretend auction in which I offer a reasonable sum (Walras' *prix crié au hasard*) but to no avail, the next customer in line even assures me, with a most earnest mien too, that the cashier is not allowed to take part in auctions.

I find my computer making a bit too free with the cursor lately. With sometimes puzzling or disquieting results when I re-read the mangled text I thought I'd written correctly. As though the computer were sending me messages. An oh-so-tentative opinion I definitely *won't* insist on, for obvious reasons... Eh?

Dernièrement, après avoir essuyé le feu (parfois nourri) de certain conducteurs de bus, j'ai pris l'habitude de faire le signe de la croix en montant. Ah, les carambars d'antan (an obscure reference to an anecdote in my book). *Qu'est-que vous voulez, c'était une toute autre vie! Une vie dont le dernier témoin reste ma soeur.* (Lately, after having withstood the (occasionally sustained/heavy) artillery(?) fire of some bus drivers, I have gotten into the habit of crossing myself before boarding. Ah, those caramel candies of yesteryear. What can one do, that was an entirely different life! A life to which the last remaining witness is my sister.)

Juegos de Manos, Juegos de Villanos:

Inaugurating yet another section. It is (past) time, unfortunately. Nufink to report (so far) unless, that is, one counts the LAPD detective who called last week, telling me he is poised to issue a warrant for long-suffering Tyson (a “Known Dacoit”), my neighbor and, it would appear, sometime devotee of the Thuggee religion. (Update 9-28-22) Detective Hargrove informs me this morning that he has so far been unable to reach my landlord, Ms. Tiffany Anderson of AFJ Investment to get Tyson's full name and conclusively identify my assailant. In the fullness of time, perhaps.

In “*Following the Equator*,” Mark Twain wrote about an 1839 government report by William Henry Sleeman: [48]

There is one very striking thing which I wish to call attention to. You have surmised from the listed callings followed by the victims of the Thugs that nobody could travel the Indian roads unprotected and live to get through; that the Thugs respected no quality, no vocation, no religion, nobody; that they killed every unarmed man that came in their way. That is wholly true—with one reservation. In all the long file of Thug confessions an English traveller is mentioned but once—and this is what the Thug says of the circumstance:

"He was on his way from Mhow to Bombay. We studiously avoided him. He proceeded next morning with a number of travellers who had sought his protection, and they took the road to Baroda."

We do not know who he was; he flits across the page of this rusty old book and disappears in the obscurity beyond; but he is an impressive figure, moving through that valley of death serene and unafraid, clothed in the might of the English name.

We have now followed the big official book through, and we understand what Thuggee was, what a bloody terror it was, what a desolating scourge it was. In 1830 the English found this cancerous organization embedded in the vitals of the empire, doing its devastating work in secrecy, and assisted, protected, sheltered, and hidden by innumerable confederates—big and little native chiefs, customs officers, village officials, and native police, all ready to lie for it, and the mass of the people, through fear, persistently pretending to know nothing about its doings; and this condition of things had existed for generations, and was formidable with the sanctions of age and old custom. If ever there was an unpromising task, if ever there was a hopeless task in the world, surely it was offered here—the task of conquering Thuggee. But that little handful of English officials in India set their sturdy and confident grip upon it, and ripped it out, root and branch! How modest do Captain Vallancey's words sound now, when we read them again, knowing what we know:

"The day that sees this far-spread evil completely eradicated from India, and known only in name, will greatly tend to immortalise British rule in the East."

*It would be hard to word a claim more modestly than that for this most noble work.
— Chapter xlvi, conclusion*

— from Wikipedia (underlining mine)

Is it perhaps not too late to take a leaf from the British Civil Service of India in the nineteenth century and revive the Thuggee and Dacoity Department?

Been talking on Skype with my sister, Irene, at more regular intervals recently. Some of Dear Irene's ideas:

1. The Endearingly Silly: Suggested I get a new cell phone to cure the ills of my old one. Mwahahahaha!
2. The Merely Spendthrift: Said I, *pobrecito que soy!* should invest in a \$200 pair of walking shoes.
3. The Downright Suicidal: Proposed I get an electric scooter to improve my mobility. Yes, mobility, I assume; as in the upward mobility of a *Himmelfahrtkommando*. Presumably by means of yet more bike accidents (I had four last year and am not exactly anxious to repeat the experience). For anyone to think I'll ever again risk life and limb on/in a 2, 3 or even 4-wheeled vehicle of *any kind* is outlandish; I simply don't have the backbone spine, as it were... I know I've led a charmed life but still, to suggest something like this is just plain ridiculous. Henceforth: We Walk! So to speak...

Irene (upon whose enemies, confusion) owe one of her nicknames ("*la souris*) *Saugrenü*" to such suggestions as the above are but samples of.

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

Inaugurating another section in which I, Numinous Negro™ that I am, *étale* (put on display) my inherent goodness, fitness for purpose and general haplessness for all to see. As I once said, I feel I'm like my neighborhood, a bit shabby perhaps but not dangerous. To which the person I had addressed the remark to, bless her departed soul, replied silently with a decidedly skeptical look. What could she have been alluding to? Just how bad must it be when a guy like me is considered "presentable"? It's got to be pretty late in the day is all I can conclude.

Les Casses de l'Oncle Sam (Uncle Sam's Robberies). With Apologies to Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frédéric Dard:

Y'en a qui sont là pour empoisonner l'existence d'un cabrón. Bon, j'veux bien, mais alors est-ce que ça vaut vraiment le coup? Si il est vrai qu'il s'agit d'un cabrón, pourquoi s'évertuer a lui empoisonner la vie, Hein? Ou alors, dans le cas contraire, pourquoi le traiter de cabrón? De deux choses l'une, messieurs! (There are those whose purpose is to make life hard for a *cabrón*. OK, I'm alright with it, but then is it really worth it? If it's true that you're dealing with a *cabrón* why, then, be hell-bent on making his life difficult, Eh? Or else, the opposite being the case, why insult him by calling him a *cabrón*? Gentlemen, it's the one or the other. (A poor translation, best I can do, though).

Speed Bumps on the Road to Ragnarök:

(9-30-22) Picked up some Iranian food in Santa Monica today. Well worth the wait... 'Nuff said! Though I confess to having resorted to some of that ole' (very old, in fact) *wu wei*. A reactionary trick much frowned upon by that fellow my aunt Irene used to call "Mousy Tongue." I fear further resort to this trick may get me demoted from a mere *H. culpabilis* to a full-fledged *H. ventrambulans*. I tremble for my very soul.

Conclusions:

I imagine none of what little I've accomplished would have been possible without extensive, long-term support, both domestic and foreign. The latter was the case with *Doina Cornea*, the Romanian dissident whose life I'm interested in. And that kind of support may not come cheap. See, for example, the trajectory of Britain in WWII with the concessions, one after the other, made by Churchill to Roosevelt. Or, for further confirmation, think of the extensive effort, decades later, made by the US to support Yeltsin during the attempted coup. In which effort the Americans, sparing little, apparently revealed much of their monitoring capabilities within Russia. Look at the price he and Russia later paid.

It is presumptuous of me in the extreme to even attempt to comment and share my opinions on the subject of the above paragraph; on the ultimate outcome of this endeavor; and, last and not least, the fate of that "peculiar institution" which, for lack of evidence shall remain unnamed for now. That "peculiar institution." Evocative, no? Presumptuous of me because marinated as I suspect I have been, for how long, I don't know, in an intoxicating atmosphere, I feel lucky if I know up from down anymore.

Though for now, I'm only dimly aware of her ghastly life, I think a retelling of Colette Walczak's (I once heard her referred to as "Miss search and destroy") story would be a most damning indictment of this place. And no, I suspect it is not merely the result of a malfunctioning "peculiar institution." That's too pat an interpretation. An interpretation along the lines of the comment made about Hitler's Germany by a young man I once spoke with. "*Es war nur ein paar verrückte*" (It was only a few crazies). His exact words, that was his blithe conclusion.

Anyways, enough of my Obscure and Pretentious Malarkey™ (for now).

(signed)

Veux Nö ← An honest-to-goodness trilingual pun, folks. My very first. Not bad, huh? They say Johnny von Neumann was full of 'em. And, as this is likely to remain my only one, could it also be said of me that I'm "full of it"?

P.S. To my sisters, Irene and Colette (the latter dead of breast cancer in 2018): May our wordless tears, both yours and mine, eventually prove invincible.