

Home, Sweet Home: Dispatches from the Manchurian Candidate Factory: #7

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*

Distribution: Book group, Adams Blvd./Cochran Ave. and Environs, Selected (wouldn't want to get me face bashed in) Tenants of My Apartment Complex, Relevant Organizations, Others.

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):

Recently initiated contact with a neurologist in New Zealand, looking into the possibility of improving the state of my health in general of my spine in particular.

Sassenach and His Yankee Damyankee Tricks:

(10-8-22) During today's forty minute Skype w. Irene, she seemed upset; operating in (reluctant) talk-outta-both-sides-of-your-mouth mode, nervously rubbing her forehead throughout. I surmise that these Gentlemen of the *Securitate*TM, having had years if not decades to prepare for this here eventuality, by now have Irene fully on board (or as much as, ahem, constraints will allow for the time being). I have only once seen her as nervous as this. And why is it that, nowadays, after practically every conversation with her I feel saddened, worried, confused? Poor devil; no blame attaches. Seems to me, the longer you are in thrall to the Organs of State SecurityTM (likely any of them), the greater their hold on you. Debt peonage of a kind.

Juegos de Manos, Juegos de Villanos:

What happens to a *Chekist* when it can no longer be assumed he has the might of the Sixth Fleet behind him? You may have heard jokes about canceled Czechs; well, can there be such a thing as a canceled *Chekist*? Or do they somehow get recycled, Eh? Or is there the equivalent of *ronin* status for these *osobist*-types? Is there a law of conservation of *Chekists* in which these unfortunate creatures, incapable of being destroyed, their number thereby remains constant? I'm almost afraid to ask.

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

Nothing of substance to report. With the emphasis on the word substance.

Speed Bumps on the Road to Ragnarök:

(10-2-22) It seems the City of Santa Monica, in its majesty and as ably represented in the person of Ms. Favre-Smith, had been, until a month ago, unaware that I planned to sell a book and only a book. Tonight, after finally reading Ms. Favre-Smith's email (of last month, I'm ashamed to say), I provided yet another clarification, hoping to clear up this latest misunderstanding. (Update 10-11-22) This afternoon I received by email my business license from the city. I think I still need a street selling license and a refund for the excess charge I paid over a month ago.

(10-3-22) Fixing lunch in the kitchen, I look at the floor, repaired many months ago by the landlord's handyman after a monstrous water leak and think: “He did a nice job.” Question is, for whom? You see, the workmanship has a distinct whiff of the slap-dash about it. In fact, on closer examination, I'm awestruck. The handyman's name is José Nava and, waxing churchillian for a moment, I draw meself up and say: “We shall Nava surrendah!”

(10-7-22) Today, with several color-coded trash bins waiting at the curb, I'm outside, among the bungalows. When Brother *Cantinflas*, neighbor in an adjacent bungalow, comes to me and says: “Excuse me. When they dump the black ones, I'm going to wash/clean them out.” I remain silent. Then, minutes later, as I'm outside again, I hear a voice sounding like a radio announcer's, coming from Lady Lurk's bungalow, across from mine. Amid a steady patter, I distinctly hear: “He's/you're so quiet.” I wonder just how many human beings (metaphorically speaking and otherwise), if any, were in the loop on this one?

(10-8-22) Increasingly having small problems with mouse cursors moving as I type. Some peculiar spelling mistakes noticed as well.

(10-8-22) As I lie abed, masturbating, I notice sounds coming from outside the bungalow, sounds synchronized to my movements. Gentle ReaderTM, I ask you, is nothing sacred anymore? *Peccavi!*

If the above anecdote is a representative sample of what these jokers will get up to in the current situation, what on *earth* do our Gentlemen of the *Securitate*TM, those able defenders of our freedoms, think up when they have the client all to themselves, away from prying eyes?

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

(10-10-22) First there were the well-known *Спартакиада (Spartakiada)*, the Soviet Union Olympics), then came the less well-known “*Ivankiada*” of *Vladimir Voinovich* in which book he chronicles his *démêlées* with a particularly agile bureaucrat by the name of Ivan. Here, Voinovich writes of his dealings with this Soviet-era *jobnik* in his attempts at securing a Moscow apartment. I now give you the saga I call the “*CVS-kiada*.” Hold on to your hats folks, we're in for a rough ride as I visit my friendly, local CVS pharmacy to buy lice medication. Yes, Gentle ReaderTM, lice. Must be the company I keep.

1. Entering the premises, I turn to a clerk at a checkout stand, asking where the medication might be found. Befuddled, she quickly gets an assist from the customer whose purchase she is handling. “Try Ralphs,” (a supermarket across the street) he says helpfully. Words she immediately repeats to me.

2. With a brisk “Thank you” and an equally brisk escape, I make my way to the pharmacy, hoping for a change of luck there.
3. I patiently wait in line, graciously affecting not to notice the older black woman who brazenly cuts in ahead of me.
4. Reaching the counter, things begin on a hopeful note as the pharmacist, a stocky Asian man says: “Medication for lice? Don’t go away” as he makes for the shelves.” From there on, though, it was steadily downhill.
5. Returning, after what seemed to me like an unconscionable delay, he directs me to a cashier nearby before changing his mind as I follow him, making a swift U-turn to keep up. Holding the medication, he now leads me in the opposite direction, to the main checkout counters.
6. Handing the cashier, the same woman I had earlier drawn a blank with, the package (which I have not seen yet), he excuses himself, leaving me at the counter.
7. To make sure I’ve got the right item, I ask the middle-aged Hispanic if I can see the box as she rings up my purchase.
8. To my surprise, the label clearly states that the product is not for use on people. Being a disinfectant spray.
9. I return to the pharmacy section and speak with another employee who mentions something about scabies, neglecting to offer a reason for her opinion.
10. After shooting more than a few daggers at me with her eyes, she eventually relinquishes the floor to the original pharmacist.
11. This time, asking for a product meant for human beings (I manage to repeat myself several times), I point out that what he had so thoughtfully carried to the cashier without giving me a chance to look was a product clearly marked for application to fabric and furniture, not people.
12. We go back and forth a bit on this point.
13. At one point, he actually suggests I go to a hospital emergency room as CVS does not carry lice medication. An emergency room. For lice.
14. In an even tone, characteristic of my demeanor nowadays, I reply that having already called a hospital pharmacy, I was told an over the counter medication would be available from CVS, among others. The poor man seems a bit startled at this.
15. After more confusion on my part if not on his, he deigns to go back to the shelves, emerging many minutes later with another box. This after having assured me that the previous item was all CVS carried.
16. Now on my guard, I ask to see the package which request, after a bit of dancing back and forth, he complies with.
17. Having confirmed the product is one meant for “human beings,” we return to the counter. This time with me firmly holding the box in my sweaty little hands. For what seems like a small eternity, I wait in line as an older black man ahead of me struggles with the credit card machine.
18. During the extended wait, a customer in line behind me begins showing signs of St. Vitus’ as he wiggles various parts of his carcass before approaching. He touches me on the shoulder several times, my attention being directed elsewhere just then, to point out that a cashier is available. I hesitate, but before his repeated reminders and shoulder taps become too pointed, another cashier directs me to a young woman patiently waiting for me custom.
19. Consummation of transaction occurs with only minor further incidents.
20. I finally make good my escape to the strains of what I believe is a chorus of angels singing something out of The Cranberries’ repertory. Unless, of course, I’m mistaken and it really was The Cranberries singing *Dreams* over the PA system...

The story of a prior infestation, of bedbugs, not lice, will now bear retelling. In a period of at most a year, I recently suffered from four infestations in all, with the most “interesting” outbreak happening in Idaho. Interesting as during the first night of my stay, there were none present in the bedroom I was assigned. It was not until the second night at Colette’s father’s house that the bedbugs came out, in droves. A latency period perhaps? Or was the delay merely to determine which bed I’d be sleeping in? Curious.

A fine kettle of fish this is.

Conclusions

One of the essential(?) underpinnings of this whole business reminds me of a fraud on the public perpetrated during the South Sea Bubble. A fraud in which some enterprising fellows, perhaps carried away by the general enthusiasm, solicited investment. With the nature of the business to be conducted described as: “No one to know.” People bought, apparently. Sounds to me a bit like a time-honored practice of our Congress. Ah, the power of the ~~ent~~purse!

Hesitantly dipping into the murky waters of semiotics, I divine another possible interpretation of those frequently heard refrains, “*jPerro!*” and “Out!”: Is someone unconsciously(?) aping Shakespeare? As in “out, out, damned Spot.” (with Hamlet as the play in question; Lady Macbeth, the speaker and “Spot” being a dog’s name, of course).

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

(signed)
the Chickamauga Kid

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.