

Rescuing a Poet

and

LUCKY STRIKE GREEN

COPY

INVASION OF THE CLIP-ART PEOPLE

Also an introduction to the adventures of White and Wellington

by

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Rescuing a Poet

At my fifteenth college class reunion I met Salwyn Tomkins for the second time since graduation. I recalled talking to him at the tenth reunion, where he told me that he had completed a program at the University of Michigan that left him with two doctoral degrees—one in medicine and another in computer science. Salwyn was then starting a residency in neurology at Columbia University. It would take three years. At the end of that time, he said, he would use his training in neurology to make computers more like humans.

“I read in the papers that you’ve received a McAllister Award,” I now said. “Seventy-five thousand dollars a year for seven years to do whatever work you please. No restrictions. It’s all based on confidence in your intelligence and potential. Congratulations!”

“I’ve heard of a couple of things you wrote, Mel,” he said. “Why don’t we go off for a cup of coffee and catch up on each other’s lives.”

We knew that we would be interrupted in the hotel. So we left, and walked a few blocks to a coffee shop.

“First let’s hear about your work,” said Tomkins when we were seated.

“There’s nothing remarkable about what I’m doing. I’m writing a biography of Claudia St. Clair, a superb poet, but an extremely neurotic one. All her poems were written on staircases.”

“You must know that I’ve got a special interest in psychiatry,” Salwyn said. “Tell me more about her.”

“Actually she did the writing on staircase landings,” I explained. “But she got her inspiration by climbing or descending stairs. Every flight of stairs produced a line of verse. If she wanted to write a sonnet she looked for a fourteen-story building.”

“Couldn’t she just climb fourteen flights in any tall building?”

“She tried, but the quality of her work suffered badly. She needed a fourteen-story building even if she would never climb to the top for the sonnet. She might climb four, descend four, climb four, and then descend two. But it had to be in a fourteen-story building.”

“Physicians like to have case histories,” Salwyn said. “Tell me about her childhood.”

“She grew up in a two-story house, and almost as soon as she learned to talk, she was shouting couplets at her bewildered parents. She didn’t do anything else really noteworthy until she got to elementary school—a four-story building. The change had a liberating effect on her, and some of the quatrains she wrote are still being anthologized. Her high school was in a five-story building. There she won every limerick contest, but she came to be regarded as frivolous and even salacious. Her academic advisor in high school, an especially astute woman, searched out a college where the English Department was in a fourteen-story building. And that’s where she became the foremost sonneteer in the United States. The building had elevators, six in fact. But she refused to ride in them—even during the year when she broke her leg skiing. She was always late to class—sometimes she never got there—but she became a legend and the pride of her college.”

“She must have developed her abilities further,” said Tomkins. “I recall her winning a prize for some long works”

“When she graduated from college, she headed for New York and haunted the Empire State Building. For the first time she wrote long poems—each, predictably, of 102 lines. In the 1970’s she received the National Book Award for the volume *‘Ad Astra’ and Other Poems.*”

“I know that she has been likened to those romantic poets, like Byron, who died young,” Tomkins said.

“Her doctor warned her that she was putting an impossible strain on her heart, but she wouldn’t stop. If anything, she speeded up her climbing, taking stairs three and even four at a time. On September 4, 1982, she fell dead just after reaching the ninety-third floor of the Empire State Building.”

“I’d like to learn much more about her,” said Tomkins. “Will yours be the first biography of Claudia St. Clair?”

“The first accurate one. Her brother let me see all the family records, as well as what personal papers of hers he inherited. But, please, I want to hear about your work. How far have you gone in giving human qualities to computers?”

“Now everybody is working on that,” Tomkins said. “It has become a major industry. The reason I got a McAllister Award is that I gave my work a novel twist. I’m trying to give humans certain features that we’ve developed in computer programs “

“Please give me some examples, Salwyn.”

“It’s complicated, I warn you. Do you use a computer?”

“All the time, especially as a word processor in my writing.”

“When you are doing word processing and you make a mistake, you use the command ‘Delete,’ don’t you? Wouldn’t it be marvelous if people could as easily delete mistakes in their lives?”

“What other computer commands are you thinking of, Salwyn?”

“Many. But I’m particularly fascinated with ‘Undo.’ When you give a command with a word processor and then regret it, you can revoke it with ‘Undo.’ Say you delete a passage of writing and then change your mind. You give the command ‘Undo,’ and the deleted passage reappears. Some word processing programs now have one hundred levels of ‘Undo.’ With them you can go back to the way your document was a hundred commands ago.”

“I understand. You want people to be able to undo actions in their lives—say as many as a hundred past actions.”

“Why only a hundred? Why not a thousand? And you could even program in the types of actions subject to ‘Undo.’ At her very last moment Claudia St. Clair could have undone climbing that ninety-third flight—and survived.”

“Your invention would greatly change society,” I told him. “Now when a challenge arises, what is most admired in a man or woman is a snappy ‘Can do!’”

“We’d soon learn to appreciate a snappy ‘Can undo!’” said Salwyn. “Just think of the applications. For example, after the ‘Can do’s’ got the United States deeper and deeper into the war in Vietnam back in the 1960’s, nothing would have been more welcome to President Lyndon Johnson. As a matter of fact, the U.S. State Department and the Army are very much interested in my research.”

Salwyn and I exchanged addresses and promised to keep in touch with one another. He wanted to read my book on Claudia St. Clair as soon as it was available. And I was pondering an unanticipated question. Would the possessed author of “Ad Astra,” feeling sharp chest pains on the ninety-third landing of the Empire State Building, have allowed herself an “Undo”?

Lucky Strike Green

“What are you doing this year?” I asked Salwy when we met for dinner in New York City fourteen months later. I was still writing my biography of Claudia St. Clair, but my writing had slowed in the past year because I had to teach several new courses at the University of California in Los Angeles. Salwyn, meanwhile, had been given laboratory and office space at the Columbia University Medical School, where he was taking his residency.

We sat together in the Balzac restaurant in Greenwich Village, he wanting to hear mostly about Claudia St. Clair, and saying that we could talk about his work later in the evening. While he munched at his salad, he repeated a current joke reflecting the old warfare between science and theology. A preacher asks a scientist, “Are you saved?” And the scientist replies, “No, but my data is.” Alluding to his long-term researches, Salwyn said: “I would have answered the preacher, ‘It will be a lot easier to be Saved than to be Saved As.’ He did not offer to clarify his comment, as he was more concerned with his current work. Nevertheless I gathered that he was hoping to develop this command so that people could hold on to their careers even while experimenting with changing them.

“Right now I’m working on the ‘Delete’ command,” he later said over liqueurs in his apartment. “Think of the human brain as the hard disk of a computer. When the disk gets cluttered with all sorts of data you don’t need, you delete the unwanted material. I hope to be able to give a person ‘Delete’ pills for specific data.”

“That would be a marvelous coup in medical technology,” I said. “Think of the millions of men and women who would like to get rid of the shipwrecks of old love affairs. How far have you progressed?”

“I’m well along with the biochemistry and the means of identifying data in the memory. A month ago I got a volunteer for my first trial, a seventy-year-old man named Michael who wants to get rid of a lot of advertising slogans that are cluttering his mind.”

“He’s certainly taking drastic measures. Most of us have learned to live with them.”

“He’s a retired professor who has taken up painting. Two months ago he was painting a landscape, trying to get dozens of different shades of green just right, when a cigarette advertising slogan from 1942—lucky Strike green has gone to war!’—popped into his consciousness.”

“I’ve heard that one. Some time after Pearl Harbor the makers of Lucky Strike cigarettes redesigned their package. They took out the olive-green color and substituted white. Then they spent a fortune airing a radio commercial which started with the strident ‘Lucky Strike green has gone to war! Yes, Lucky Strike green has gone to war! And soon you’ll see our new package...’ The slogan irritated many people, since Americans were being killed every hour. The advertisers’ theory must have been that the more a commercial irritates you, the better you’ll remember it.”

“Well, Michael was furious—that hateful slogan had become part of him. When he read about my work, he telephoned and asked me whether I could delete it from his mind.”

“You said that he wanted to get rid of a lot of slogans, not just that one.”

“He’s especially upset by a Charmin toilet paper advertisement he once saw on TV. A grocer is protesting to a woman who is fondling a six-pack of toilet paper. ‘Pe—lease, don’t squeeze da Charmin!’

“‘What’s that doing in my mind?’ Michael said to me. ‘How many bytes is it taking from my memory?’”

“Maybe Michael found himself singing Thomas Moore’s tender love lyric as:

‘Believe me if all those endearing young Charmins
Which I roll out so fondly today
Were to flush by tomorrow...’”

Salwyn laughed. “That’s the point. Michael loves landscape, painting, poetry, and music. He tries to furnish his mind with thousands of memories of awesome scenery, exhilarating poetry, and ecstatic melodies. And he insists that advertisers’ skits, slogans, and jingles are viruses in the hard disk of his cerebrum.”

“What other advertising slogans anger him?”

“Dozens. He says he can’t open a fortune cookie in a Chinese restaurant without remembering ‘There’s a Ford in your future.’ He’s so obsessed that he wants me to develop a single vaccine that will inoculate people against the viruses of advertising slogans, measles, and polio.”

“Don’t do that,” I warned Salwyn. “If you do, you’ll be attacked as anti-modern, anti-business, and anti-American. Tell Michael that this is ‘Marlboro country,’ and he can ‘love it or leave it.’ Has he considered moving abroad?”

Michael won't leave the country. He says that he has fantasies of going off to the middle of the Sahara Desert, pitching a tent, and living there—but it wouldn't do any good. He'd be harassed by an ancient cigarette slogan 'I'd walk a mile for a Camel.'

Copy

After I completed my biography of Claudia St. Clair, I went to Paris for a year to teach American literature at the Sorbonne. I corrected the proofs in Paris, and when the book was in print, had the publisher rush Salwyn Tomkins a copy.

Tomkins, now in the third year of his McAllister grant, read it at once and sent me a long, favorable commentary. Again he offered the opinion that Claudia St. Clair might have saved her life had she, like a computer, been able to “Undo” her actions. He believed that at the instant she felt a sharp pain in her chest she might have “Undone” climbing her last flight of stairs. But I, knowing how obsessed with achievement St. Clair was, expressed my doubts.

Salwyn also wrote me that if a command “Save As” were available for humans, it would work wonders in marital and vocational counseling. It might even have led Claudia St. Clair to a less stressful career. “But it’s easier to be ‘Saved’ than to be ‘Saved As,’ he wrote—virtually repeating a remark he had made to me at dinner a year before. He was never to mention “Save As” to me again, and I thought it tactful not to broach the subject.

My year’s teaching at the Sorbonne was extended to two. At the end of the second year I returned to an associate professorship at Columbia University, and within a week telephoned Salwyn. Since I had not yet gotten my new apartment furnished, we repeated the procedure of our last meeting—dinner in a favorite restaurant, and serious conversation afterwards in comfortable club chairs in Salwyn’s spacious apartment.

“From the comments in your letters, I assume that you’ve made a lot of progress,” I said as we sipped Coindreau from crystal glasses. “But you’ve also had some frustrations.”

“I’ve done enough with ‘Delete’ to win a Nobel Prize in medicine if there’s any justice in the committee’s selection. The command will make a huge difference in psychiatry. As a result of experiments on Michael, he is a happy man today. You remember Michael. He’s the man who was bothered by memories of old advertising slogans like ‘Lucky Strike green has gone to war!’ Now he goes about proclaiming ‘My mind’s my own! My mind’s my own!’”

“That will be a good slogan when you start advertising ‘Delete.’”

Salwyn laughed, but added seriously, “I’d never play that kind of trick on Michael. What’s more, I agree with him one hundred percent on those advertising slogans being viruses.

“As for the command ‘Undo,’” he went on, “I’ve had a lot of success with the physiological aspects. But my greatest success in the past two years has been with the command ‘Copy.’”

“On my Macintosh computer,” I said, “all I do is drag one ‘icon’ and place it on top of another. I can copy from hard disk to floppy disk and vice versa, and if I had a second hard disk, I could copy to and from it in the same way.”

“Yes, and you can copy a single folder or an entire file. As long as you have enough unused space on the disk you’re copying to. Well, I’ve been able to imitate that.”

“You mean,” I asked in amazement, “that you’ve succeeded in quickly transferring data from one brain to another?”

“Quickly and perfectly,” said Salwyn, putting his drink aside. “I haven’t done it with humans, but I’ve done it with rats and chimpanzees. It took two weeks to teach rat one to find its way through a maze. When I ‘Copied’ to rat two, the second rat found its way perfectly the first time.”

“And the same thing happened with chimpanzees?”

“Professor Sheila Richardson, of the University of Florida, in Gainesville, let me work with her chimpanzee Myra. She has taught Myra to speak a few hundred words in sign language. From another source I borrowed Lulu, a friendly chimp who had never been taught any language. Within a few minutes, Lulu had Myra’s entire vocabulary, and the two were discussing a dozen topics—cages, food, the weather, even me.

“Then I removed the recent data from Lulu’s brain, as completely as you might from a disk in your Macintosh—and Lulu was her former self again. Copying from brain to brain is amazingly quick and easy now that I’ve developed the instruments.”

“You’ll revolutionize education, Salwyn. When will you try ‘Copy’ on humans?” “I won’t ever.”

“You won’t?”

“Absolutely not. And I hope nobody else learns to copy from brain to brain for a long time.”

“But just think of how many years people spend in learning, say, a language. With your instruments a professor of French could in one minute transfer all the French he knows to a student.”

“Yes, and you’ll tell me that a twelve-year-old could master Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and what not, in only a few hours—provided that he has enough megabytes available in his cerebrum.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“So all he will need to do is play tennis or billiards, or loll at the beach?” “For some kids, yes. Others will find other things to do.”

“Getting an education should have a moral foundation. It should be an outgrowth of character. I spent seven years getting an M.D. degree and a Ph.D. in computer science. And three years doing a residency in neurology. Why should I give all I’ve learned to some twerp in three minutes?”

“You wouldn’t have to. You could choose the people you’d give the data to, and you could give only what you wished. Your only criterion could be the progress of civilization.”

“No, no, Mel! That’s not the way the world works. Politics would come into play, and the U.S. Congress—to say nothing of dictators abroad—would decide who gives and gets what.”

“To some extent, yes. But you have to measure the good you’d do...”

“Do you know that when you’re drafted into the U.S. Army, your body doesn’t belong to you any more. You’re ordered to whip yourself into shape physically. If the Army decides you need a surgical operation, you’re ordered to submit to it. If the Army needs translators of Russian, you can be ordered to learn Russian, or teach it. Don’t think for a moment that any army on Earth wouldn’t dictate ‘Copying’ if that met its needs.”

“How long can you delay technology, Salwyn?”

“For a while, anyway. Right now nobody knows much about this discovery of mine. You know more than anyone else, Mel, and you know nothing about the technical side.” “Don’t worry about me, Salwyn...”

“Remember when I said I’d like to rescue some future Claudia St. Clair with the command ‘Undo’? Well, I’ve been like St. Clair, compulsively driven ‘ad astra,’ towards greater and greater achievement. That’s probably why I’ve been so interested in her. I don’t know whether she would have retreated, but I’ve decided to ‘Undo’—not all my work, of course—but all on

copying data from cerebrum to cerebrum. I've used you as a sounding board because I've come to respect your judgment and trust you. But now please try to forget about my work on 'Copy.'"

"I'll respect your confidences for as long as you ask," I assured Salwyn. "I don't know what Myra will decide. But as for me, 'can undo!'"

Invasion of the Clip-Art People

“In making humans more like computers,” Salwyn Tomkins said, “I’ve discovered huge hazards in clip art. Do you know what I mean by ‘clip art’?”

“You probably mean the stock drawings used in desk-top publishing.” Only the week before, by a coincidence, I had received an offer of clip art through the mail—40,000 images on four CD ROM disks—all for \$59.95. I went to my desk, picked up a large blue and white envelope, drew out several sheets of samples, and handed them to Salwyn. Then I went to another side of the room to bring out some liqueur and glasses.

Our conversation took place five months after my return from Paris. We were in my three-room apartment, in New York at 114 Street and Riverside Drive, by the Hudson River, and a few blocks from Columbia University. Earlier in the evening we had enjoyed dining together at Chez Marianne, near Seventieth Street and Broadway. Salwyn was in the fourth year of his McAllister grant.

Along with astounding triumphs he was experiencing unexpected pitfalls in his projects, many of them scary. He did not want most of the developments in his work to become public knowledge yet, he told me, but he needed to discuss them with someone who shared his values. So he appreciated my willingness to listen and offer counsel.

After I had given him a glass of Coindreau, his favorite liqueur, and poured another for myself, we settled into our armchairs to talk. Salwyn had been studying the display sheets of clip

art I had given him “What is the most striking feature of these figures?” he asked, handing the sheets back to me.

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Consider the drawings of humans. Does any of them ever interest you the way a drawing by Rembrandt or even a snapshot of some man or woman at a picnic might?” “No, far from it.”

“Why not?”

“I’d say it’s because the figures are generic. Look at this drawing of a chef. You get a cook’s hat, a round face, and a few dots and minimal lines for eyes, eyebrows, ears, nose, mouth, and double chin. There is no shading or detail.”

“Is there anything at all about the figure that provokes interest or calls for interpretation?”

“No. Someone might say that none of these human figures has a mind.”

“You’ve got a collection of doctors, barbers, musicians, dancers, businessmen, athletes, jockeys, whose eyes and faces are not extensions of their brains. The cartoonist did not begin with the idea that he was representing people with brains.”

“It’s not only the people—everything in the clip art collection is generic, Salwyn. The palm trees are generic, the sailships are generic, the race horses are generic, the dogs are generic, and if they’re poodles, the poodles are generic.”

“Have clip art figures like these ever frightened you?”

“No, I’ve hardly thought about them at all.”

“One of my patients is terrified by them.”

“You’ve never said a word about this patient.”

“I don’t usually talk about my patients, except with their consent. Michael, from whose memory I deleted the ‘Lucky Strike green’ advertising, asked me to publicize his case. Let’s call the present patient Albert.”

“Albert, you say, is terrified by clip art.”

“He’s a nineteen-year-old student who was transferred from his college’s infirmary to the psychiatric ward of Columbia’s Medical Center. He had just viewed the contents of a disk of clip art in his computer and was sobbing uncontrollably. The attending physician, Don Stevenson, managed to gather that Albert thought that he himself had become a clip-art figure. Since Don knew that I was working on relations between computers and humans, he called me in for a consultation. Now he has put me in charge of the case.”

“Can you do anything for Albert?”

“I’ve gotten him out of his hysteria, but maybe only temporarily. The problem is that Albert, a remarkably intelligent and sensitive young man, is basically correct. There are forces that are turning him into a clip art figure. It’s obvious to me now, but it required a sensibility of Albert’s order to perceive it. My task is to convince him that he is not yet such a figure, and that there are means to resist becoming one.”

“You’ve got my head spinning, Salwyn.”

“I’ll explain it to you the way Albert explained it to me—though he didn’t do it all at once, but over a period of weeks, while he was having fits of hysteria.

“Do you remember,” continued Salwyn, “what Descartes offered as proof that he existed?”

“Yes, he said, ‘I think. Therefore I exist.’”

“He meant ‘I am conscious. Therefore I exist.’ But Albert, from some need to make a point, tries to improve on Descartes. He interprets the maxim as ‘I reason. Therefore I exist.’ Then Albert goes on to ask: ‘How do I know that I think?’”

“What’s his answer?”

“He says that he can’t know this through his own inner consciousness. To know that he thinks he needs confirmation from society.”

“Where does that lead him?”

“According to Albert, society doesn’t credit him with thinking.”

“How so?”

“Suppose we start with the way Albert describes U.S. politics. In an election the candidates appeal almost entirely to mass emotions and group prejudices. They treat him as a species of generic man—a clip-art figure with no brain.”

“Albert’s right, I’m afraid.”

“Then he talks about the behavior of U.S. government itself. When it wages war— and sometimes even before a war is declared—political harangues and military songs and music pressure him to support it. The army drafts him with threats of imprisonment. Even in peacetime, the government employs threats and terror to collect taxes.”

“So again he’s not being treated as someone who thinks.”

“In our economy, goods and services are not marketed to Albert through appeals to his mind. Advertisers don’t sell tobacco—they sell virility. They don’t sell soap or mouthwash—they sell sex. Nobody addresses Albert as anything but a generic man.”

“What about his parents and teachers?”

He has read B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. That book and afterwards his disk of clip art brought him near psychosis."

"You don't have to tell me about Skinner's book. I read it years ago and was almost in despair over it. Skinner strips us of any good opinion we have of ourselves; he says that we act, not from free will, but from society's conditioning of us for its purposes."

"Yes, and Albert sees his parents and teachers as having simply conditioned him," Salywn said. "Of course," he added, "Albert's parents and teachers didn't have much insight into how the social organization was manipulating everything and everyone."

"But again," I said, "Albert sees himself as having been treated as generic man—a clip-art figure."

"You've got it."

"How are you going to help him?"

"I've told him that he has misinterpreted Descartes. But he replies that he has merely redefined Descartes' term *think* for his own inquiry."

"So he's not naive about Descartes' meaning. What now?"

"I've promised not to publish a case study about him. By doing that, I hope to show him that he's not just a generic patient I'll use to advance my career."

"That shouldn't do any harm, anyway. What else will you do?"

"Right now, to tell the truth—I can only try to heal myself—I'm finding Albert's distress highly contagious. If and when I recover, I'll try putting Albert on whatever therapy worked for me."

I smiled at what I hoped was a joke. "You'll recover, Salwyn," I told him.

“One sure thing,” Salwyn muttered, “we can’t look to the Army to stem the invasion of the clip-art people.”

White and Wellington

I

You may find it incredible that Ronald White and Sol Wellington were members of the same college class as Salwyn Tomkins—White who discovered William Shakespeare’s autobiography and journals—and Wellington, who once offered single-handedly to pay a year’s interest on the U.S. national debt. But their accomplishments begin to be understandable when you learn that both White and Wellington were students of Professor William Gaudi, and members of his college seminar “Unattached 3.”

Professor Gaudi held a split appointment in the Physics and Psychology Departments. But both were uneasy with the directions in which he sought to extend their disciplines. For Gaudi’s non-traditional attitude he may have been indebted to his distant cousin Antonio Gaudi i Cornet (1852-1926), the Catalan architect best known for his Church of the Holy Family, in Barcelona. No traveler who has seen it will forget its fantastic lines and curves. A well-known art historian once commented that the church leads one to wonder whether Gaudi i Cornet studied architecture on another planet. The shell was nearly complete and the grandeur evident when Gaudi i Comet was struck and killed by a trolley car on a street fronting the church. To the present day his edifice stands unfinished, for no architect has been able to complete it.

William Gaudi came to our college with a doctorate in physics from Harvard. Almost immediately after he received a full professorship in the Physics Department he started work on

a doctorate in psychology at Columbia University. So highly did his Columbia professors recommend him for his work on cognitive psychology that our college's Psychology Department was delighted to accede to his request for a joint appointment, in physics and psychology.

Soon thereafter Professor Gaudi's interests in both subjects stopped being mainstream. Certainly his papers on cognition remained landmarks in psychology. But all his later investigations were in parapsychology. In physics his driving interest was in speculating about other universes. He would produce a spark of static electricity, usually by rubbing on a scraggly piece of cat fur, then tell his students that the spark might represent the birth and of a-universe. When they protested that the spark and the time involved were mottle, he would answer that perceptions of time and space are relative.

"That spark you saw may have been a 'Big Bang' that produced a universe," he would say. "Thousands of generations of humans may have lived and died before that Universe disappeared—in what for us is three seconds.

"Just so," he would add, "our universe may be minute and momentary in some macroworld."

When the students would go to other members of the Physics Department for their views on microworlds and macroworlds, these others would reply that physics was concerned with what could be measured. No one could point to such other worlds, they would say. Consequently, there could be no measurements.

When Professor Gaudi proposed a seminar linking cognition with the existence of microworlds and macroworlds, neither the Physics nor the Psychology Department would list it. Still, Gaudi's work in conventional aspects of both their fields was outstanding, and no one thought him a fraud. Among his colleagues the usual comment was that he had his "foibles."

Sam Gordon, the college dean, was in the Philosophy Department. A philosopher himself, Gordon concluded that Gaudi was having a fling at metaphysics—and why not? Since Gaudi’s approach wasn’t welcome in the Philosophy Department either, he offered Gaudi a seminar—“Unattached 3” it was called, as there were already two other courses that couldn’t be fitted into any department.

Ronald White and Sol Wellington were Gaudi’s favorite students. Both had taken physics and psychology courses with him, and both enrolled in Unattached 3 in their junior years and took it for two semesters. Then, in their senior years, they enrolled for honors work with Gaudi.

I had taken one of Gaudi’s psychology courses along with White and Wellington, and we sometimes had lunch together. With us were several other friends and acquaintances, among them Salwyn Tomkins, generally considered the most brilliant student at the college, who had taken Gaudi’s course in parapsychology. But Tomkins’ major interests were medicine and computer science, and he did not enroll in Unattached 3. Neither did I, for my majors were literature and history. My only knowledge of Unattached 3 was from talks at lunch with White and Wellington.

In May of our senior year Professor Gaudi was killed in a traffic accident. He had gone to a conference in London, on astronomy, and while crossing a street in the city had been struck by a lorry. The London *Telegraph* reported that he had looked in the wrong direction before crossing. In a lengthy obituary the *New York Times* noted that the professor was a descendant of the architect Gaudi i Cornot. It commented on the irony of both men being killed in traffic accidents and both leaving ambitious work uncompleted. Two months later the paper reported that William Gaudi in his will had left his papers to two of his students, Ronald White and Sol Wellington.

II

“Have you seen the latest issue of *Time* magazine, with Ronald White’s picture on the cover?” Salwyn Tomkins asked me.

I had come to his apartment for tea and conversation on a Wednesday night six months after he told me of his fears about the “Copy” command. Salwyn had unexpectedly telephoned to invite me that very afternoon, and asked me to come alone; he was in a mood for substantive conversation, he said. But he needn’t have told me that—he nearly always was. When he went to a cocktail party, it was only to relieve tension so as to work harder the next day.

Salwyn handed me a copy of *Time* and said, “I noticed the picture when I stopped at a newsstand this morning.”

On the magazine cover I read: “Ronald White: the Historian as Wizard.” On opening the magazine to the story about him, I found the heading “White Finds Haystacks in Needles.”

Three years ago White had won the Pulitzer Prize in history for his book *The Sinking of the Maine*. The U.S. battleship *Maine* had been sent to Cuba to protect United States life and property during a revolution by Cubans against Spain. On February 15, 1898 it was destroyed by an explosion which killed 260 men. A U.S. naval inquiry found that the ship had been blasted by an underwater mine in the harbor, while a Spanish naval inquiry found that it had been destroyed by an explosion in the forward magazine. The sinking of the ship helped to bring the United States into war against Spain.

White’s *The Sinking of the Maine* presented letters and records showing that neither naval inquiry had been honest. It also presented three letters between a New York newspaper publisher and a U.S. businessman speculating on whether the United States would go to war with Spain if the *Maine* were destroyed in Havana harbor. In addition it produced documents showing that the

same businessman had sent large sums of money to a Cuban revolutionary leader some time before the *Maine* was destroyed.

Since that time White had published three articles on William Shakespeare in a leading American literary review. One described the first production of *Hamlet*, and drew heavily on hitherto undiscovered theater records. Another offered five letters between Shakespeare and the playwright Ben Jonson, which were notable for Shakespeare's reminiscences of the deceased playwright Christopher Marlowe. And a third article described Shakespeare's funeral; it was based on two letters by members of his theatrical company.

"Is it true that White is going to teach Shakespeare in Columbia's Graduate English Department?" Tomkins asked me.

"He has asked to," I said. "But there has been opposition by professors who say he's a historian, not a literary scholar. There's a lot of anger too. Some people argue that he doesn't share his sources and methodology with his colleagues in the Columbia College History Department, and probably won't with his graduate English students."

"What do you think about that?"

"White's methodology is a mystery to me. How does he find so many forgotten letters and documents in abandoned trunks in dilapidated warehouses and cottages?"

"He and Wellington learned a good deal from Professor Gaudi. I've always regretted not taking Unattached 3 when Gaudi invited me to. At the time I thought I couldn't—I was a pre-med and computer science major, and anxious to get to medical school on schedule. If I had it to do over again, I'd take Unattached 3 and Honors with Gaudi, and graduate in five years instead of four.

"What makes you think that White may have gotten his methodology from Gaudi?"

“For years after he and Wellington inherited Gaudi’s papers, they asked me unusual questions about the human brain, and I told them what I knew. From their questions I formed ideas about the work they were doing.”

“Gaudi was concerned with microcosms, macrocosms, and parapsychology.”

“He had an idea that what transpires in this world also transpires in other worlds. In countless microcosms and macrocosms you and I haven’t yet been born. In others we died long ago. So in a sense there is no death. Everything is eternally recurring in universes of different ages.”

“How did Gaudi link these universes with parapsychology?”

“Suppose you could establish contact with cosmoses like ours in different stages of development?”

“You could learn our own past and our future.”

“Precisely. White and Wellington must have known that by questioning me they were giving me insight into their methodology. But they trusted in my discretion. Besides, they knew far more about Gaudi’s work than I did. And I had no actual evidence that they were tapping sources of information in other cosmoses.”

“So thanks to Gaudi, you think, White has become a ‘wizard historian’ and Wellington a multibillionaire.”

“Wellington went into commodities trading. With knowledge of the future, how can you fail in the futures markets? He got his picture on *Time*’s cover years ago, you probably remember, when he superseded William Gates as the richest man in the country.”

“White and Wellington seem to have divided eternity between them—White got the past and Wellington the future.”

“I must say Wellington has tried to be generous with me. He offered to give me a lifelong grant like the McAllister, along with all the laboratory facilities I might need.” “Have you accepted his offer?”

“I told him that a bit of economic concern serves as an incentive to me. And it’s the truth. If I had accepted, it would have been as a favor to Wellington—he seemed at a loss as to what to do with all his money.”

“I wonder how happy White and Wellington are?”

“They’re old friends of yours too. Why don’t you ask them?”

(To be continued)