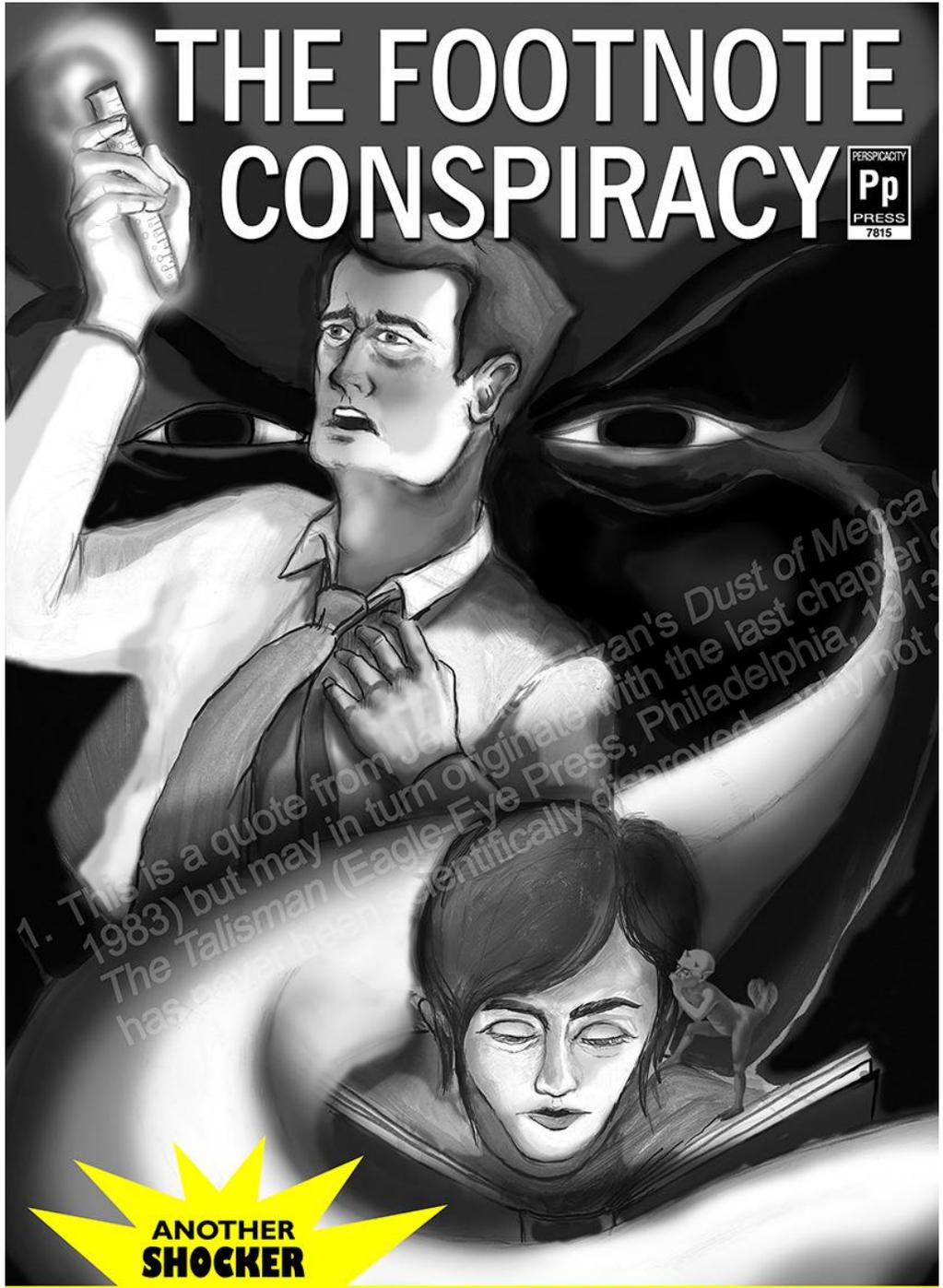


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THE FOOTNOTE CONSPIRACY

PERSPICACITY
Pp
PRESS
7815



**ANOTHER
SHOCKER**

*From The
Publishers Of*

***I MARRIED A
CLINTON CLONE!***

THE FOOTNOTE CONSPIRACY

Perspicacity Press
Burbank, California

Cover art by Cris Shin
www.designhounds.com

With thanks to David Camden-Britton,
Luke Henderson

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Regular Perspicacity readers know we would never muck up an author's prose with a lot of tedious substantiation. We know there will always be nay-sayers, the same ones who scoff at all our pamphlet editions, the ones who snickered when Claude Firkin said the Shroud of Turin was actually the tablecloth at the Last Supper (For Tomorrow We Diet, PP3166), or those who smirked when Estrelle Vivaldi said she'd invented a force stronger than gravity but couldn't demonstrate it for us, claiming she was "holding out for 'Sixty Minutes'" (The Vivaldic Force, PP4982).

We certainly won't bother substantiating THIS piece of prose. Most of our catalog already strains credulity, but I mean REALLY. Frankly this beats all. There are the usual cries of conspiracy, added to which some sloppy science, a laundry list of historical events that obviously didn't happen, and finally a mad twist so odd we can hardly describe it. It's drivel. Balderdash. Guff. Tripe. Twaddle. Claptrap. Hooey. Poppycock. Bunk.

*Yes, at first we didn't believe it. But in fact **The Footnote Conspiracy** may be the most important thing you'll ever read. It may well crack the scientific firmament, spark a reassessment of history, perhaps change the way we live forever. But hey, that's true of everything we publish here at Perspicacity (with the possible exception of **Alien Ghosts of the Playboy Mansion**). What's different here, as the more keen-eyed amongst you have already noticed, is that no author is credited. This booklet was created verbatim from an anonymous manuscript, item AJ3494 of the Los Angeles County Abandoned Property auction of June 2000. (We stumbled across it quite by accident after digging it out of a grocery store recycling bin in Glendale.) The author has apparently left the country, but until he returns rest assured that his share of royalties will be wisely invested, or set aside, or something. Already our printer Ray has his eye on several hot properties in the S&P 500.*

*Meantime, our civic duty compels us to publish his work in the deluxe edition you see before you, reproducing his manuscript exactly as we found it, as bizarre as it may seem. So, skeptic, if it's boring charts and graphs you're after, **Scientific American** is available at your local newsstand. You may as well warm up the car, because this is too important for us to sit around proving. It COULD be true—and that's good enough for us.*

*Bill Slocum
Owner / General Manager, Perspicacity Press*

THE FOOTNOTE CONSPIRACY

I met Laura my senior year, in the fall semester. She was of medium height, yoga-slim, her dark hair in a bowl cut. Her laugh floated across the bar to make the introduction for the rest of her. I saw the faces of Björk and Audrey Hepburn balanced on a fulcrum set about two inches behind her nose. She was drinking with a girl who used to be my lab partner and I bought them both a round. Then a week later at lunch we shared a picnic table. I regarded her face in the full light of day, and saw I had not been imagining things.

“I’m Laura,” she said again. “Easy to remember.” She sang: “*That was Laura, but she’s only a dreeeeam.* Ella Fitzgerald. See? Easy.”

I agreed it was easy. She watched my calm reaction and laughed hysterically. “I’m sorry! You looked so worried,” she said sympathetically. “Too damned hot to remember people’s names. Who the hell are you again?” she continued pleasantly. “I’m Ella, by the way,” she said, extending a handshake.

“Charmed,” I said, returning the handshake. “McRae. Carmen McRae.”

“No you aren’t, no you aren’t,” she said in a quiet singsong, smiling and rolling her eyes like she was on the lookout for the men in white coats.

“Aretha Franklin?” I offered.

“That’s better,” she said. “I’m utterly delighted to meet you. Again.” Looking up, she took measure of a falling maple leaf as if it secretly explained everything.

We had one class together, Survey of Islam 410. I had electives to fill, and it sounded interesting enough when I registered. I hated it. I’m a microbiologist—humanities were never my strong suit. I

gave Laura silent thanks daily because she would sit in the middle of the lecture hall and draw the professor's fire. When he called for comment, she answered, her voice strong, bright, and slightly impatient. I was always late and I sat in back, staring at her neck.

One day not long after our picnic I caught her before class and, only slightly desperate, asked if she'd study with me. "Of course, dear!" she said instantly. "Damned straight." She named a local deli and we agreed to meet that afternoon. We took our usual seats as the professor started his lecture. Again my eyes drifted to the back of her chair. Now I was positively in love with her neck. I had been woolgathering for several minutes before I realized she wasn't taking notes. She was bent over her open textbook, but as minutes went by she never turned the page. I thought she might be asleep, but she was sitting ramrod straight, her back not touching the chair, hands at her sides.

For ten minutes she sat frozen, and I worried there was a rattlesnake at her feet. Then suddenly she stood up at her seat, and brought the book up with her. It was stuck in front of her face like a chorister's hymnal.

The professor stuttered in embarrassment, but kept talking. Laura picked up her backpack and walked down the row of seats to the aisle, the book still fixed in position. Now the professor stopped talking and stared, and students in the front of the classroom turned to look. Ignoring us all, she ascended the stairs, opened the door, and left.

"Whatcha reading?" I said brightly, arriving at the deli to find her already seated. Her face was still buried in the book. There was a plate in front of her with a splotch of ketchup, a few uneaten French fries, and an empty space where a sandwich used to be. She looked at me like I was an empty window and returned to her book. I sat down across from her and as the silence deepened I felt mortified from some unknown faux pas. This was a study lunch, after all—maybe she didn't want to chat.

Humiliated, I tried to catch the waiter's eye. I ordered a Reuben, and then got out my own textbook and started to skim. She moved her finger idly down the margin. My sandwich came and I ate it. She moved her finger up the margin again.

“What page are you on?” I asked as nonchalantly as possible. I was about to lean over and see for myself when she suddenly looked up and said with a fierce sincerity: “Mohammed had all these unresolved issues, and all because of Pluto!”

I froze in mid-chew. Her face was deadly serious.

I broke up giggling, coughed, swallowed my food, coughed again and finally just stared at her. She looked at me suspiciously. Then she returned to her book.

After a minute’s silence, she added: “I wonder who was in his second house.”

And without another word, she picked up her backpack and left the restaurant, leaving the book still open on the table.

I watched her through the windows of the restaurant as she crossed Main Street and entered a New Age bookstore. Meanwhile the waiter swooped in and laid down both our checks. “Sorry, man,” he shrugged. “Guess she wasn’t the one.”

I stared after her, dumbfounded. It was as if she had grabbed a life preserver and jumped ship, paddling toward a better land over the horizon I couldn’t see. *I should have talked her out of it*, I thought. I paid and went home.

She must have dropped out soon afterwards, because she never reappeared in class. We never spoke again. But I did see her once when I happened to pass her storefront on a side street near the freeway. It was evening, and as she locked the front door I read the pink and green neon, “Laetitia, Psychic Astrologer,” right before she clicked it off.

We’ve all had epiphanies and they’re oblivious to convenience; they can derail our day and there’s nothing we can do. I saved her book when I left the restaurant, and my first (and, I thought, dumbest) thought was, well, she read something, and her whole point of view changed. And she suddenly decided to become a psychic astrologer. If so, I thought, she must have been a lunatic. And that bothered me because I trust first impressions, and when a woman demonstrates to me in under a minute that she is funny, charming, intelligent, and strong, I immediately think—well, where can we go to kill an hour together? But we never really got our hour.

I kept the book for her, but she never asked for it back. Three years later I was about to sell it when I found I couldn't stop myself flipping pages looking for the thing she'd seen, something, anything that could explain what happened—and to my surprise I did find it, and I made a photocopy to keep. It was a single footnote, and it said

1. This quote is from Jerome Lipizan's *Dust of Mecca* (Boston University Press; 1983) but may in turn originate with the last chapter of Frederick Worthy's *The Talisman* (Eagle-Eye Press, Philadelphia, 1913), and you know, astrology has never been scientifically disproved—why not give it a try?

I didn't realize it until much later, but that was my first encounter with a Rogue Footnote.

Everyone remembers the first Rogue Footnote attacks two years ago: how they appeared suddenly, wreaked havoc in the media, and then disappeared without a trace. And while virtually all of us think Rogue Footnotes were just a joke, dismissing them as a “charming distraction” or a “colossal prank,” there are an unfortunate few whose lives were thrown into complete disarray.

Laura was lucky compared to some. When I started compiling the body count I didn't have to look further than my own class at Uni: Andrea Quinley, a senior in Poly Sci, quit school to become the first woman to skateboard from Alaska to Argentina. Greg Hollingbeck, pre-med, read a footnote and decided he'd help map the human genome by blinking for a year. And of course I belong on that list too—what other category is there for a guy who built a clean room in his own apartment with an ultraviolet light array and pressurized glovebox, all so he could type out a book on an old manual Olivetti without the pages getting infected?

I nearly went crazy, but I made it through. This is a survivor's tale. I've discovered the terrible secret of Rogue Footnotes, and if I'm right, the implications are staggering.

The storm broke quietly two years ago. Readers of the December nine issue of *Perspectives in Cinema Analysis* were surprised to see this footnote in an article on Frank Capra:

8. Do not open the telephone; open the bread. If you had more dollars we could eat tacks. Which way to the stretch pants? It rains on my deductible.

No one was more surprised than the article's author, Justin Newton. "I blinked when I read that," he says. "I didn't write any footnotes for that article." The same month, in *Modern Farmer*, the third paragraph of Harvey Calnetto's article on wheat production in the Southwest was interrupted by this footnote:

1. The previous statement is highly ironic when you consider that I am actually LaToya Jackson.

And readers of the December issue of *Cat Lover* were startled when a footnote in an article on flea spray claimed:

4. You realize, of course, they faked the second Clinton inaugural.

At the time, the non-sequiturs generated nothing more than a blip on the cultural radar. But befuddlement turned to shock when, as December led to January, no less than 150 articles in as many magazines were plagued with unwanted footnotes.

Publicly, the publishing conglomerates dismissed it as a coincidence. Privately, they spent millions on shaking down their pipelines from top to bottom, investigating legions of employees in an attempt to flush out the saboteurs.

By the end of February every magazine published in the United States was fouled by footnotes.

In March they began to spread to other media. Seventeen books on the *New York Times* bestseller list appeared in stores with footnotes thirty pages long containing only the word "kumquat." On March sixth, the *USA Today* switchboard was overloaded with calls from people who said they'd read the morning's article about the Pope and wondered: was he really marrying Grace Jones?

Readers grumbled. Print media circulation dropped. *New American* magazine announced they would address the problem head-on and dedicate their entire April issue to "this curious phenomenon of Rogue Footnotes," and when the issue hit newsstands it contained only a single footnote in a font so big a single letter filled every page, spelling out "Hallelujah it's raining men".

How angry you were depended on where you were on the

editorial food chain. When the editors of *Science* magazine realized they couldn't use footnotes anymore, the entire staff resigned in disgrace, but to the average consumer Rogue Footnotes were just annoying. An informal poll among thirty people who had bought Salman Rushdie's latest novel revealed that when they were confronted with the footnote

10. Why not bury yourself alive in chili con carne?

...most of them characterized it as "a pain in the ass."

It was the most bizarre turn of events in publishing history. It was odd enough that tens of thousands of footnotes were appearing out of thin air, but their message was more than odd—it was deranged. Harper Willis, General Manager of the local Albertsons franchise in Provo, Utah, remembers his surprise when he returned from lunch one Spring afternoon to find twenty-eight women crowding the store's soup aisle. He watched in disbelief as they filled their baskets with cans of Campbell's Beef Consommé. "That was *weird*," Willis says. "I mean, we've had runs before, but usually it's in the toy aisle. Never had a run in canned goods before.

"So that night I was down at the bar having drinks with Dave Brandt. Dave used to work at the post office. He says, 'Yeah, I saw the soup women. They came down to the post office around lunchtime with their soup cans and mailed 'em all. We sold out all our medium Priority Mail boxes.' I says, 'No kidding?' He says, 'Yeah, and you know what else? *They were all going to the same place.*' I says, 'Well I'll be' and take a sip of beer.

"Finally I says, 'Okay, where?' He gives me this wild look and says: '*Craters of the Moon.*' "I says, 'Craters of the Moon? In Idaho?' He says, '*Yeah.*' "I says, 'Well, I don't believe it.' Dave looks like he's having an attack of hives. He says, 'I don't believe it either. I mean, *why Idaho?*'

"I says, 'Well, that's where Craters of the Moon is,' and he says, 'That's not the point—*why Idaho exactly?*' and I says 'David, what the hell's the matter with you? We're at point A, they're at point B, if you wanna get soup to point B you don't mail it to New Hampshire, you mail it to Idaho. That's where Craters of the

Moon is.’ He says, ‘But *why* Craters of the Moon exactly?’ I says ‘Hell if I know!’ and I set him up with three more shots of Wild Turkey, but I think the poor guy lost a night’s sleep over that one.”

The next morning, Willis and his wife watched the news together at breakfast. Thousands of people, it turned out, had mailed soup to Idaho that day, because a footnote in *Woman’s Day* told them simply

7. Mail all the Beef Consommé to Craters of the Moon.

“Once I heard it was a magazine, I just laughed,” says Willis. “The kids today are turnstiles. They see somethin’ new comin’ through the gate, click, they turn and follow it. Then somethin’ else and click, they turn and follow that. They never stop,” he laughs. “Footnotes, body piercing, Eagles records, crystal meth—click, click, click, round and round.”

No doubt many thought Rogue Footnotes were just the latest youth trend. And journalists were divided at best—some cried sabotage and tried to investigate, while others just sat back and laughed at what they were convinced was a huge practical joke that they somehow weren’t in on. But no one was laughing April eighteenth when ten thousand unhappy investors marched on FTC headquarters in Washington, D.C. saying they’d been swindled by *Barron’s* when the paper had printed a footnote advertising what looked like a hot new securities brokerage promising “Ten cents a gallon.” They’d mailed five million dimes to Purple Passion LLC, and by God they wanted them back. When a *Barron’s* editor tried to address the crowd he was bricked.

On April 30 the Modern Language Association announced that, to preserve the peace, they would forswear footnotes as an acceptable form of text formatting. The next day America woke up and every page of every magazine and newspaper was covered in footnotes. They’d pushed the text completely off the page—there was nothing left to read.

The very next day, they were gone.

Readers were cautious at first. Then a month passed without footnotes of any kind. The barrage had stopped just as mysteriously as it had begun. Eventually publishing returned to

normal. There were sneering retrospectives in *Time* and *Newsweek* but no one could figure out what really happened.

The most obvious thought was that Rogue Footnotes were an invention of the publishers themselves. Every year, after all, movies and TV and the Internet steal a little more of their pie—what better way to win back their readership than to make themselves the center of a huge, well-publicized controversy? When confronted with this theory, most editors threw up their hands; but *Wired* magazine went out on a limb, suggesting a “print virus” was actually responsible for Rogue Footnotes. Somehow, the editors claimed, Rogue Footnotes were borne of the printed page, and had spread hand-to-hand from one publication to another. But most Americans didn’t buy the theory—in a recent poll, 94% of respondents said they thought Rogue Footnotes were a hoax; 1% thought it was a virus; and 5% were undecided.

And that was it. The President of Harper Collins was eventually persuaded to come down off the railing where he’d perched atop the Empire State Building. And even the Texas primary where the Banana Splits got on the ballot ended quietly, with their defeat by the Republican candidate. That, everyone thought, was the end of the story.

So what, if anything, can we take away from this experience? Not a lot, really. Most readers will no longer tolerate footnotes so you’ll probably never see one again, unless you’re reading an unpublished doctoral thesis. You may feel a vague unease whenever your eye drops to the bottom of a page. And of course we have a new joke: “It must be true, I read it in a footnote!”

But that’s it. The annoyance is over now. And that’s all it was, right? An annoyance, a bugaboo, a guy coming up behind society and saying “Shirt’s on fire—now it’s out!” In short, a prank.

But what *really* happened? Was it really a hoax? There were a few writers who jumped up after the fact and said “Yes, I was in on it.” But there is no evidence—no proofreaders’ initials, no backed-up files on hard drives, no incriminating security tapes. Well, sure, say the pamphleteers—it was a *conspiracy*! And yes, many of them claim they have conclusive proof. You probably thought this would be one of those pamphlets. So, then: do I consider it

possible that the American print media could orchestrate and execute a hoax on such a massive scale, involving hundreds of thousands of reporters, editors, printers and deliverymen—all without leaving a single shred of evidence behind?

In a word, no.

So if it wasn't a hoax, and it wasn't a conspiracy, then only one possibility remains.

Three years ago, when I was still a student, after Laura dropped out but before footnotes overran our magazines, I was one year away from a degree in microbiology. In September I had applied for an independent project, and after the dean approved it I was assigned three freshman assistants. I'd spend my days in the lab while they did research in the library. For the first month it went swimmingly. I did my procedures and they gave me daily reports. Then one day they were late. I let it slide, but the following week I got no new research for three days running, and when the report finally came it was incomplete and—strangely—the printed pages were covered in corrective fluid. I was getting steamed. I had twelve organic compounds waiting in five incubators because I didn't have the data to finish the experiments. For three more days, nothing. Then I found the report under my door. One page, handwritten.

I found Lisa in the library in a study room and said: "What the hell is going on? Am I to assume that between the three of you, in three days all you could come up with was a single fucking page of handwritten notes?" I must have been shouting, because she looked terrified. She surprised me, though, by walking slowly to her seat and burying her head in her arms. She began to cry, and I apologized. "No, it's my fault," she said. "I mean, it *isn't* my fault. Christ, I don't know." She sighed.

"It's these damned textbooks!" she said. "They're insane. Or maybe I'm just going insane...It's like the authors and editors aren't talking to each other! Look," she said, and opened one of her books at random. At the bottom of the page was a footnote:

1. Please ignore the author's claim that the sample size was ten subjects. This was based on earlier data that has since been discredited. He means fourteen. Adjust your equations and recompute.

Oh my God, I thought. Visions of zodiacal signs and half-eaten sandwiches floated before me. I snatched the book and stormed out of the room. I walked up and down the aisles of books...I hadn't noticed them on my way in, but now I saw them at every table, in every cube: Men and women with their heads in their hands. The look of defeat that comes right before the tears. The I-can't-believe-it face.

I found myself standing before the shelf that her book had come from. There was its hole. It was a common general textbook, and there was a second and third copy. I pulled down the other two. I opened them all to the same page and read the footnote at the bottom. The differences came in the third line.

Copy one read: "He means fourteen."

Copy two read: "He means eighteen."

And copy three read: "He means twenty-one."

Fine, I thought, and I closed the books and headed for the copy center. I had proof now, and I didn't know what I was going to do with it, but goddammit, I was going to do something. I put the books down next to the photocopier. I didn't know what kind of scam this was, but if it was campus-wide...well, I'd already seen the damage it could do. From here I'd make a beeline for the school newspaper, and then this sick joke would end.

Again I opened the books to the same page. I don't know why I looked down—a reflex, my eye following some movement—but I was reading the footnote in the first book again. Again, a jump to the third line: "He means forty." There it was—simple, impossible, perfect. I'd only thought it had said "fourteen" the first time I read it. Just a mistake—it could happen to anyone. To feel better I looked at the second copy. "He means thirty-seven," it now said. And the third copy: "He means fifty-one."

I looked back to the first copy. "He means sixty-four," it now read. I started to laugh. Copy number two: "He means seventy-one." Copy number three: "He means ten." Down the line of books I looked again and again, the text changing as fast as I could look away and back:

"He means thirteen." "He means eighty-six." "He means fifty-nine."

“He means 105. He means 125. He means forty-seven.”

“He means twenty-three. He means thirty-nine. He means thirty.”

I don’t remember running from the library. I have a memory of a table in the dorm cafeteria, a group of friends approaching me, jokes about anxiety attacks, crying. Then a local bar, rum and Coke. Then home.

By noon of the next day I had a fever of 104. My bed was full of test tubes, and the test tubes were full of words, and as the heat increased the words made little wet tornadoes inside the glass. Finally they boiled, and the words dissolved away into nothing, taking my future with them. When I woke up I knew that my professional career was over.

In the two weeks I stayed in bed, test scores on campus dropped like a stone. People were flunking out left and right. It was the same story in every department—English, Physics, Law, Psychology—“The Jinx” was on. It became a running joke: if you went to the library, you were bound to flunk.

I didn’t flunk. I quit school.

Since then I’ve had time to think, and certain questions come to mind. For example:

What’s up with footnotes, anyway? I mean, the concept is ridiculous.

“Here’s a number—now look down.” Why? The way to read is across, *then* down—any idiot knows that.

And why have footnotes been the bane of my existence, ever since grade school? All my teachers docked points because I could never format them right. And then there was Ms. Huntley in eighth grade—the research paper was half my final grade and she wrote right on the bibliography: “This article does not exist. For your information, *Newsweek*, July 1 1974, pp. 74-5 is an ad for Goodyear Tires. I don’t take kindly to scams.” I got a D.

And why, for Christ’s sake, WHY are we taught to use them in the first place? Who keeps putting those instructions in the style guides? I asked the editors of the Chicago Manual of Style—first they pretended to be confused. Then they were evasive. Finally they just hung up on me.

They've been brainwashed. We all have. *Wired* magazine was right after all: Rogue Footnotes aren't a conspiracy, and they aren't a hoax. I was under attack by Rogue Footnotes and what drove them away? Fever. Rogue Footnotes are a virus. And it's rubbing on your hands right now.

Science has never seen anything like *Adnotatio Scelestia*. Here is a multicellular lifeform capable of adding footnotes to a printed page. And after it infects the page it infects the reader, the reader becomes delusional, and *he believes whatever the footnote says*. That a virus could speak perfect English—and know how to lie—is frankly astonishing. It's the greatest discovery in the history of virology. And it is a virus, trust me. Eventually, I will isolate it. I've prepared a lymphocyte cell culture with pages from one of my old textbooks, *Calculus Today*, and I'm sure any day now I'll wake up and see that it's grown footnotes during the night. It'll happen. I'll isolate it, and one day we'll have a vaccine.

But don't expect to read about my great discovery any time soon. Never mind that the science journals would never accept my work anyway—I no longer buy magazines, and I don't read books. The fact is, I don't trust the printed word.

This is a virus that can add words to the bottom of a page—what makes you think it can't add to the middle of the page? Or write whole pages? Or whole *books*? You know, no one ever admitted writing the Bible. And how many people have died because of *that* book? Think about it! Whole histories will have to be rewritten. Did you know Marie Antoinette never said “Let them eat cake”? The virus planted that quote. A million Frenchmen read it and, whoops, off went her head. Not that what she REALLY said was much of an improvement—a textbook I just read notes that a real transcript of her interview quotes her saying “Oh screw the peasants, all they do is bump into me and spill my fois gras. I hope they starve, the shits.”...so the head probably would have come off either way.

So I don't trust the written word, and neither should you. Then why, you may ask, am I committing my thoughts to print?

Good question. After all, *Adnotatio Scelestia* is everywhere—why shouldn't it festoon this essay with footnotes? Or add six pages?

Or delete half of it? You'd never know. You can't know. That's why I wrote this essay: I wrote it to show how you can't be certain I wrote this. *There's no way to know for sure who wrote these words.*

Of course my stories are true, my sentiment is clear, and my name is on the front—so what? All that proves nothing. I wonder how many of you bought this pamphlet and realized, halfway through, that you had no idea what I was talking about? The history I describe is one you never experienced. All this talk of Rogue Footnotes must seem like a put-on.

What's left to guide you? Your friends?

Ah, but the virus is on their hands, too.

As author, it would be incumbent upon me to examine this paradox and allay any fears you may have. Would be, but isn't. Sorry! I haven't worked in a year, I'm living off my credit cards, and I had to auction off most of my lab equipment to make the rent while I edited this damned essay that no one's going to believe anyway. So you'll forgive me if I don't care. You may find the whole thing laughable; you may find it confusing, or frightening, or green or purple or chartreuse. I could give a rat's ass. The issue is no longer on my mind. I'm thinkin' about groceries.

Those of you who can afford a sense of humor probably won't be bothered anyway, bemused as you are by the irony. You are invited to laugh this off and move on to your still unread *New Yorker*.

All others, please accept this helpful guidance:

Friend, you're on your own.

* * *

In the second half of this essay I'll be focusing on prevention. Following a description of my lab procedure, I'll offer a sociological history of footnotes and describe how we might, without a vaccine, defeat them armed only with the power of social awareness. My experiments proceeded in four stages; all were complemented with relevant statistical analyses. In experiment one (fig. 1), we see cell culture growth plotted against

which when evaporated leaves a chalky white residue

47 ml. of
solution. The result (fig. 5) is plotted with the X-axis representing
time and the Y-axis representing opacity. After the first day we
notice

UV spectrum

rounded to three significant figures

tetrahydrate

electron microscopy

Unlike streptococcus, *Scelestia*

which indicates the presence of a virus, as opposed to a bacterium.¹ If we t

¹ Good guess, but actually I'm an imp. I wonder why he never figured it out? I mean, you can't expect a biologist to have "exorcist" on the list next to centrifuge, goggles, and forceps, but come on, what about "Damn Yankees"? What about "Faust"? Oh right, this guy doesn't read books.

Anyway the reason I'm butting in here is that you've probably been wondering about all the white space. Yes there used to be text there; it was boring and I cut it. You saved ten minutes getting here so don't complain.

technical understanding of footnote usage is crucial in understanding techniques of resistance. Here is how footnotes work.² First³

astray. The footnote's power cannot be allowed to grow unchecked—now is the time for action. But how to proceed?⁴

² Now look up again

³ Well done! (It took him *four paragraphs* to describe that. And people think I waste ink.)

⁴ Well, if one of your hands was free you could hold this essay at arm's length, and then mail it to India.

all too susceptible to the footnote trap. A number appears in superscript and, without thinking, we let our eyes drop to the bottom of the page.

But it is not in our nature to do so. Just as we have learned unblinkingly to answer the phone and flush the toilet, so have we been taught to follow the footnote. Yes, we have been *conditioned*—and “It takes more than shampoo to wash out a conditioner.” This apt quote, from a book whose name I’ve forgotten⁵

education must begin in the home. It is the responsibility of parents to ring the burglar alarm on this callous, uncaring⁶ marauder

Our generation, then, must be the preventive medicine. But what exactly are the ill effects of reading footnotes? Far from being only a source of blithe misdirection,⁷ footnotes can

⁵ Brown, John. *How I See Things*. New York: Acme Publishing, 1972.

⁶ Hey your eggs are burning

⁷ Spatula



Bob Stupak

From the Desk of
Bob Stupak, VEGAS WORLD

ENTERPRISE MEAT CHOPPER.

Unexcelled for
Chopping
 SAUSAGE MEAT,
 MINCE MEAT,
 HAMBURG STEAK
 FOR DYSPEPTICS,
 CODFISH,
 HOG'S-HEAD
 CHEESE,
 CHICKEN SALAD,
 HASH,
 CHICKEN
 CROQUETTES,
 PEPPERS,
 &c., &c.

If you cannot get
 this MEAT CHOP-
 PER from your
 Hardware Dealer
 send \$2.00 to us
 and we will express
 by first fast train.

THE MEAT CHOPPER for the PEOPLE.

Chops
 one
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Send for
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Chopping
 SCRAP MEAT FOR
 POULTRY,
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For Sale by the
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**ENTERPRISE
 M'F'G CO.,
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HELP Maurice
 the Duck ^(TM)
 escape from
SEX PRISON!

FREEDOM
 "Pluck the
 Duck ^(TM)
 in
 Acta
 Here!!!"

8

⁸ I threw this in just to brighten things up. All this material came from *other* page 30s. His page 30 was going to be a blah pie chart. You see my point? Other page 30s know how to have *fun*.

The footnote is one of the biggest factors in the numbing of the American mind, second only to television.⁹ What we

Those, then, are the physical symptoms. But what about the broader effects on society? What¹⁰

is a sad commentary on our times to consider that, given only the presence of a solitary Arabic numeral¹¹, we continue to unwaveringly let our eyes drop to the bottom of the page¹² and accept whatever treasonous misinformation we find there. What are the psychosocial implications¹³

⁹ The footnote is one of the biggest factors in the numbing of the American mind, second only to television. The footnote is one of the biggest footnotes in the footnote of the American mind, second only to factor. One of the biggest factors in mining is good footing, is one of the biggest bummers of the American footnote bumper factor. Footnotes in factors are one of the biggest factor footnote second only to factor footnote footnote footnote footnote footnote. The foot notice won often as big as factories in the humming of “The Armenian Mine,” second leitmotif elephant testicles

¹⁰ I’m getting bored now

¹¹ I mean really bored

¹² Make it stop

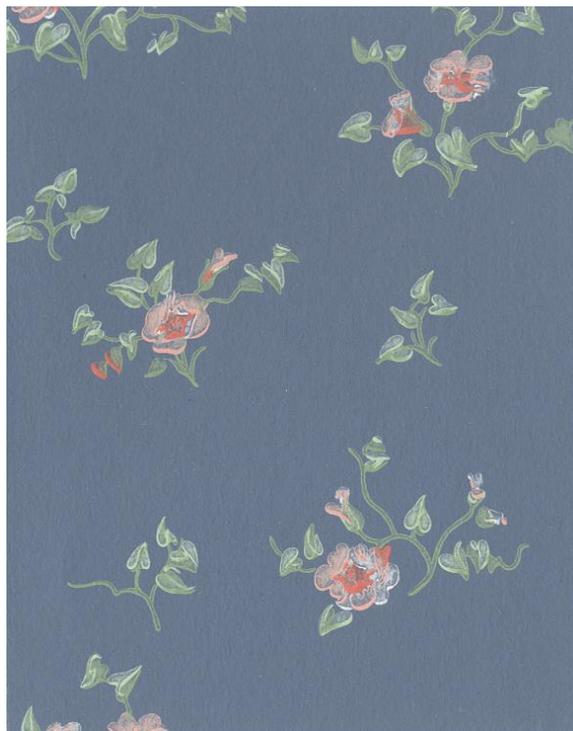
¹³ LA LA

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#54C
“SEA MIST”



#32F

“DESERT WIND”

14

¹⁴ This has been fun but before I run out of paper, I thought it would be helpful to include this fake interview between myself and a journalist I’ve made up, someone professional but basically disinterested, as one would see on the BBC or American Public Television in the 1970s, whom I shall call “Bob”. Straw man interviews are fun and easy, and also I don’t want to talk to any real people.

Bob: Welcome to the show.

Me: Thank you Bob.

Bob: First of all, what is your name?

Me: I don’t have a meaningful answer to that question, so for the purposes of this interview, please call me Donald Trump, because as an omniscient being it amuses me to share a name with that guy.

Bob: Donald, what are you exactly?

Me: I'm a 13,000-year-old immortal, omniscient being originally from Uruk, now called Warka, Iraq.

Bob: How did you come to be omniscient?

Me: We were all sitting around one day starving, about fifty of us in a village on the edge of some endless sand dunes, talking about farming, mostly as an idea and not a practical thing, because it hadn't rained in seven seasons, when suddenly a warthog began to eat my best friend, which incidentally is why the town was called "Uruk" since that is the sound my friend made as the warthog ripped off his face. Then suddenly this man walked out of the dunes, and he was clean and well-spoken and still had all his teeth. He said: "How would you like to know everything, live forever, and never want for anything again?" And as you can imagine, in those circumstances, hungry and hot and covered in my best friend's blood, this seemed like a good idea, so we said yes, and he made us immortal and omniscient.

Bob: It sounds very much to me as if you met God. Did you feel the urge to ask him any of the big questions about life?

Me: That wasn't my first impulse, no. This was demonstrably someone who was a multidimensional and omnipotent being. However it was also someone who acted like he was born as a tube worm at the bottom of the sea, who then got his eyes and personality from a whale shark, and then came on land and learned how to talk. Which was in fact exactly what he turned out to be. So our conversations about philosophy were short and unhelpful.

Bob: Given that you didn't view this creature as God, and assuming you don't think of yourself as a god either, what term would you prefer people used when describing you?

Me: "Demon" is a bit pejorative, because it presupposes we have evil intentions. I prefer the term "imp". We're really just ordinary people with likes and dislikes. My wife, for example, was a big fan of sex, so she's spent most of the last 13,000 years fucking her way across seven continents and making a lot of men and women very happy in a practical way I think we can all appreciate.

Bob: I can certainly appreciate that.

Me: You did, Thursday night on the golf course.

Bob: What are some of the other demons' interests?

Me: One of us particularly liked sticks and clay, so she invented architecture. You'll see her work everywhere you go. Another friend became obsessed with masturbation. He's kept more to himself. I've always been interested in time, chronology, and causation, so I became a storyteller and I may be very opinionated but I think that's the best career choice for any omniscient being. "Write what you know," etc.

Bob: Talk about the pros and cons of knowing everything.

Me: Well, I used to be able to talk quite calmly about the advantages of being omniscient, but now I'm a bit sour on the idea, so much so in fact that I'm very tempted to rip out your lower intestines right now.

Bob: Are imps all-powerful?

Me: We're not, and this is a common misunderstanding. We are however very, very fast and people hate us for it, which is why the term "demon" caught on.

Bob: What then are some of the disadvantages of being an all-knowing entity?

Me: It's no picnic. I'll try to help you wrap your head around this concept.

Bob: Thank you.

Me: There's a reason you don't read every book. There's a reason you don't watch TV 24 hours a day. You're a person with limited tastes and limited time. Now I want you to

imagine for a moment that you're in your local library—you're familiar with the Dewey Decimal system?

Bob: Yes.

Me: Imagine you're standing in an aisle between the 600s and the 700s. Now I want you to picture yourself making a slow circle as you say out loud, "I'm going to read every Chilton Guide; every Elizabeth Taylor biography; and every edition of *What Color Is Your Parachute*. And then I will continue around the corner, and around the next corner, until no more books remain unread."

Bob: Right.

Me: And then when you're finished you leave that library and go to another library, and do it all again. And then another library, and another, until there are no libraries left.

Bob: I'm beginning to get the picture.

Me: Actually you will never get the picture, because you couldn't possibly get the picture. Last year I read 300 million tax returns, seven trillion Outlook meeting invitations, and the poetry of 1.8 million high school goths. I've watched every minute of every Home Shopping network, and I've sat through all the commercials. I read ALL THE COMMENTS on the internet. And doing these things changed me. I've come to certain realizations, two of them in particular, the first being "Boy, I wish everyone was dead," and the second being "But actually...people are kind of interesting."

Bob: I imagine these thoughts motivated you in very different directions.

Me: Eventually I did reconcile these two thoughts, and came to the conclusion that I could best amuse myself by annoying the living shit out of the human race.

Bob: Before we talk about exactly how you do this, can we go back to your relationship with libraries?

Me: It all comes down to cultural memory and writer's credits. When I started out there were no writers. 13,000 years ago who knew from writing? You had your bards, and if you were any good your stories travelled and if you weren't you were washed up. That's how it was all the way up to moveable type. If people remembered your story that was your writer's credit. And even when Cuneiform came along, I wasn't worried—write on stone and some clown's just going to come along and drop the tablets. Papyrus wasn't much better. If you wanted 100 copies you had to hire 100 scribes. But Gutenberg scared me, and that's when I started thinking about posterity.

Bob: Doesn't every writer want to leave their work to posterity?

Me: I'd been yakking on and on as a bard for thousands of years when I realized that there are only so many good yarns. To keep telling stories, you have to know how to recycle them. When nothing is written down, it's easy—wait a while, recycle the plots, change the names, change the dates, rinse, repeat. So libraries aren't exactly a god-send for people like me.

Bob: In your pre-show interview I understand you shared a particularly vivid recollection about the Alexandrian Library.

Me: That's right. When you walked in the lobby a giant plaque was there to greet you and scream all about how bitchen this library was. "Being a compendium of the writings of All Men, including Rhetoric, Law, Medicine, Tragedy, Comedy, Lyric Poetry, Non-lyric Poetry, Non-lyric Tragic Poetry, Semi-lyric Nontragic Poetry with Comic Overtones, Non-epic Tragic Medicine" —actually it didn't say that last part but I fully expected it to say it also contained the complete Macedonian shopping lists. How is someone like me supposed to keep recycling stories when libraries are saving everything?

Bob: It sounds like your feelings about the Alexandrian Library are, shall we say, ambivalent?

Me: I burned it down in 48 B.C.

Bob: Let's talk about footnotes, which I understand is a subject that also touches on the story of a bet you once made with a colleague.

Me: A young man in Connecticut actually gave me the idea for the Footnote Conspiracy. This was 1993, and it was finals week at Yale, and a freshman chemistry major named Bernie was in the computer lab writing his term paper. This was like any other finals week for me—traditionally I pick someone at random and make them flunk for no reason. Bernie had all his notes spread out, and there amongst the papers was a bar graph. He'd had a designer friend compile it from four pages of his notes. It was beautiful, very elegant. Bernie typed for a bit—and as is so often the case with freshman papers, there was too much of something. Some people like commas, some people underline everything—Bernie liked footnotes. Every page was trailing at least five. He wasn't quoting any books or articles; he just liked footnotes. Now this was depressing, but it was no worse than anything I'd seen a number of times before.

Bob: Out of curiosity, how many times?

Me: It's a number with 18 digits after it.

Bob: Fair enough.

Me: At this point Bernie did something truly wonderful. He stopped typing, stood up to stretch, then picked up the bar graph out of his notes, crumpled it, and threw it away. He hadn't recreated it or scanned it. He'd summarized it. And it had taken him four pages to do it. He had written a four-page summary of a graph which was in fact a one-page summary of four pages of his notes. This is when my mind irrevocably went back to my last bet. A friend of mine made me a bet once that I couldn't make everyone in Elizabethan England think that Shakespeare had written all those plays. I said, I'll do it using only garden implements. And I did it. I thought it out, I came up with a plan, and I executed it. It involved subterfuge, patience and high cunning over a period of fifteen years. And there in the lab I realized: here is a footnote freak who uses the wrong verb tenses, doesn't spell-check, and has a bar graph and forgets to use it. And I must make him flunk.

Bob: Fish in a barrel, as it were.

Me: Exactly. We'd probably think much less of Michelangelo if he'd carved "David" out of Silly Putty. And yet this Bernie must be my marble. So I thought: first things first, let's lose his document. And he started whimpering, like they all do, and this was the first moment I asked myself—why is this man really suffering? He's wasted his evening writing this caca that would have earned him an F anyway. I erased that caca. What's his problem? His problem, I realized, is that he cares about flunking this stupid course, and the grade that will follow him for the rest of his life, and stop him from being an executive at Dow Chemical with an 8000 square foot house on Saginaw Bay. His priorities were his problem. So I planted this woopy footnote in his chemistry textbook, and he read it, and I touched his brain slightly, and *voilà*—today he lives in Iowa, owns a llama farm and spends his time trying to mate the llamas with eggplants, so they can become the Queens of the Barrel-Chested Knife Men of Mars, just like the footnote told him to. He's happy, I'm happy.

Bob: Does your realm of influence extend beyond Earth?

Me: Well what you're probably really asking here is whether I'm some Jovian sky god who can make the planets spin the other way, and in that case the answer is no, but yes, technically I do have one little surprise out in space that I'm responsible for. There's what looks like a comet in orbit past Neptune that no one's spotted yet, because if they had they'd probably notice it was composed entirely of several thousand former executives at Dow Chemical. I convinced them all to stuff themselves into a

Saturn V rocket in 1969. When they orbit the sun in 2050 they'll burn up and make a beautiful tail a hundred thousand miles long.

Bob: Let's talk now about the very first bet you ever made with a colleague, which I understand was a very fraught experience and formative in shaping the prerogatives you've been telling us about today.

Me: Yes. I wrote the Torah, and they took my name off. Now I should disambiguate, I did not write the Bible, or even the Old Testament, which as we know is a very long, very messy document, which depending on which part you're reading is porn, a Hallmark card, software instructions, a historical novel, or the Unabomber's manifesto. To understand how it was written you really need to look no further than the United States Congress making a budget. You have 500 people in a room, all of whom hate each other; they all have pet projects, most of which contradict each other; and yet all of them have to fit in one bucket, so they hire one person, or in our case four people, to somehow cut down this 100-pound cyst into something they can send to the printer. A sensible writer would run the other way very fast. But when I first heard about it, I thought, wow, here's an entire culture building their own mythos for the first time, how can I get on board? I had been writing stories for so long and I was so sure of myself, I made a bet with a friend. For the duration of the project, I would give up all those "magical" powers and just be an ordinary mortal human. I could only do what a normal human could do. And when the book was done, I could not touch it. It would be the exclusive property of the human race. It would exist only as long as people remembered it. I could not reprint it under a different name or change the number of copies. When it was lost, it would stay lost. I said "No problem, this will be so good they'll be reprinting it for a thousand years." Definitely my peak moment of both ego and hubris. So I settled on a body and a name and started taking meetings with these clerics.

Bob: This was not a well-managed project, I take it?

Me: At the first meeting the other three editors told me their plan. They were going to put up ads everywhere: "We want your Jewish folklore! 100 words or less! Short and sweet! Big bucks!" Can you imagine 100,000 people lining up to say "True story, not an urban myth, this actually happened to my brother-in-law Job"? It was a nightmare. But good editors can deal with too much input. The reason this thing's pacing is so uneven is that these editors were not good. They screwed the pooch. Here's an example—Bridegroom of Blood. Heard of this one? Bridegroom of Blood was a terrific action scene I wrote for Exodus where God attacks Moses in his tent. Very exciting—demons attacking in the middle of the night...his wife Zipporah in tears trying to fend them off...there's an impromptu circumcision...lots of blood. Very dramatic! It was about 500 words and they cut it down to four lines. It should have been in, or it should have been out. It's like driving around L.A. and seeing all those trees pruned down to nothing but trunks. They're great speed-bumps, they just aren't trees anymore. Well this isn't a story anymore. Want the world's easiest degree? You can earn a doctorate in Biblical scholarship if you can convince someone else you've figured out what's happening in Bridegroom of Blood. At least a hundred people a year do it—"Oh yes, I've got a theory, no one's been able to figure it out for 3000 years but I've sussed it, Doctorate please," and they get their degree and go home. It's the definition, the Platonic ideal of bad story editing. "Here's four lines of text, and it'll take you a thousand hours of research to figure out what they mean, and even then, you still might not know."

Bob: I'm feeling a lot of lingering resentment here.

Me: Well every collaboration is full of compromise, but this crossed the line into fraud.

Here's what happened: I had this great first draft, real Cecil B. DeMille stuff. The kernel of it all is still there. It's why people care about this book. It's pulpy, it's violent, it's epic. And it's hilarious! This thing KILLED! Of course no one laughs today, it was all topical, and you know that stuff doesn't last. The other three editors were busy with all those bullshit lists in Leviticus, no shellfish, no same-sex couples—I was building a story. Then they called me in for a story conference. We all gathered on the patio and the other three sat opposite of me. For the sake of this story, we will call them Ewen McGregor, Kerry Fox, and Chris Eccleston.

Bob: That's definitely helping me picture them in my mind.

Me: Good. I had about three cups of wine in me and Ewen was doing all the talking. He said "We know how hard you've been working, and we haven't always seen eye-to-eye on this project, so we want to make it up to you. You deserve a reward for putting up with us this long." He put a large stack of shekels on the table and pushed them over to me. "Take two weeks. You've earned it. Go to the mountains. Soak in a hot springs. Fish. Whatever. I think we can do better than this much, huh?" He looked at Kerry and she nodded, and then he pushed a slightly smaller pile of shekels towards me. "Find a girl, show her a nice time. Go now, really, don't wait, there's a wagon waiting for you outside. Don't worry about that, we'll hang on to it until you get back." I had my papyrus rolls with me—I was expecting a story conference after all—and I did not make any move to put them down. They could see I was confused and a little alarmed, which I suppose is when Ewen must have kicked Chris under the table, given him the secret signal, the moment when he needed to mollify me, Chris being the quietest one of the group, the most trusting, the one I got on with best. He looked at his feet, and he put on the calmest voice I'd ever heard and he said just what Ewen had said. "We'll hold onto it until you get back." So I gave them my manuscript to hold onto. I got in the wagon, and another man killed me, took me to the forest and buried me in a shallow grave.

Bob: Oh now I remember why those names you mentioned are—

Me: Yes, well done.

Bob: So you were forcibly removed from the project.

Me: I was expelled from the historical record. *Damnatio memoriae*. They took my name off it and there was nothing I could do. Needless to say, when this work was published, of the three names under the title mine was not one.

Bob: Sorry, I do need to clarify because I'm a bit confused—this document has been copied and recopied under incredibly strict guidelines for well over 2000 years, and you say by the terms of the bet you were not allowed to alter it in any way. How is it that these editor's names have been lost to history?

Me: Oh, all the originals had their names on it. If an original was here now, their names would still be on it. I just went into the head of every Jew in the Middle East and made it impossible to see the names. When scribes copied it they saw no names to copy. Also the editors themselves conveniently forgot that they ever had that job.

Bob: What will you do if an original someday turns up?

Me: The last original fell down a ravine into a stream near Iskenderun in 397 BC, and it was washed out to the Mediterranean, where some otters shat on it.

Bob: Yet you still seem angry.

Me: I'm mad, and it's no mystery why. Not because I chose a name and it didn't get used—I've had millions of them, what's one name more or less? And I don't care about story credit. Who could ever claim story credit on a bunch of campfire tales? I am a writer. I want people to know who wrote the words. Yes, a former bard wants writer's credit. Everyone else gets it, I want mine. I'm only human! It pisses me off,

that's all. Today everyone says "Gosh, who knows who wrote the Bible? What a mystery!" Hello? I turned a bunch of random story threads into a compelling narrative, you're welcome. I could have stayed home, tilled the field, had sex a few dozen times, eaten a lot of squash, caught a fungus, and died peacefully in bed. Instead I have to watch a lot of bad TV, and sit quietly as my anonymous masterwork is translated into 2000 languages. Frankly I'd rather be dehydrated and living in a hut. Or paranoid and broke with no degree in microbiology.

Bob: I thought Bernie was a chemist?

Me: No, now we're talking about the guy who wrote this paranoid pamphlet. This interview isn't actually happening, it's just a bunch of words in a giant footnote that's taken over a thing someone else was trying to write, and which I'm doing out of spite for reasons I'm sure I've quite thoroughly conveyed at this point. Now you've served your purpose and I don't need you anymore, Bob, so I'm going to rhapsodize briefly, and then I'm throwing you back into the liminal darkneses of nonexistence, banished for eternity, unable even to scream.

Bob: Terrifying! Go on.

Me: Ah, my poor, deluded author... first the conspiracy steals your girlfriend, and then you try to publish a paranoid pamphlet about it and those same invisible forces ream you again. What a miserable sap. What's the point of your suffering? What's your legacy—missed opportunities? A hopeless future and the memory of a girl named Laura that you never got a chance to know? Best to forget all that and move on. And what about your name, the one missing from the cover? Well, there's nothing so odd about that. You're an invisible force, just like all authors. Besides, names fade. People forget. You can carve your signature in the clay a million times and it'll still eventually be subducted under tectonic plates and recycled as mountain ranges half a planet away. So blame the proofreaders, or erosion, or me—it doesn't matter. The cause isn't important. Everything eventually goes to the Alexandrian Library. This is just going a little sooner, that's all.

Bob: Mr. Trump, thank you so much for joining us, and best of luck with your screenplays.

Me: I hate everything.

So in conclusion, I hope that from this preliminary study other *Adnotatio Scelestia* research will follow and eventually a vaccine can be developed. Then, in time, footnotes will be eradicated.

Then any writer may truly say, as I do now, that he is not afraid of footnotes. That's right—for all I know this essay is plastered with them from front to back, and I say all the better. If I do find a publisher willing to distribute this essay, I will not ask to see the galley proofs and there will be no test pressings. Why? Because footnotes can climb up and down the pages, they can cover them, they can wipe them out for all I care. But they can't stop progress. That's why I'll still go on, even when I'm down to just two small test tubes, an Erlenmeyer flask and a pack of matches. Because there's one thing Rogue Footnotes can't take away: Human Endeavor.

Yes, Endeavor is the final meaning of our existence. It is the apex of our purpose. And one day, *Adnotatio Scelestia*, Endeavor will prove that your subterfuge was for naught.¹⁵

POSTSCRIPT:

Hey I just had a great idea pop into my head, funny how all the best ideas just appear like that—I'm going to move to Kabul, dig a hole and sing a karaoke version of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show". Please inform my parents & be sure to delete my browser history. Thx

¹⁵ He means "forty"