

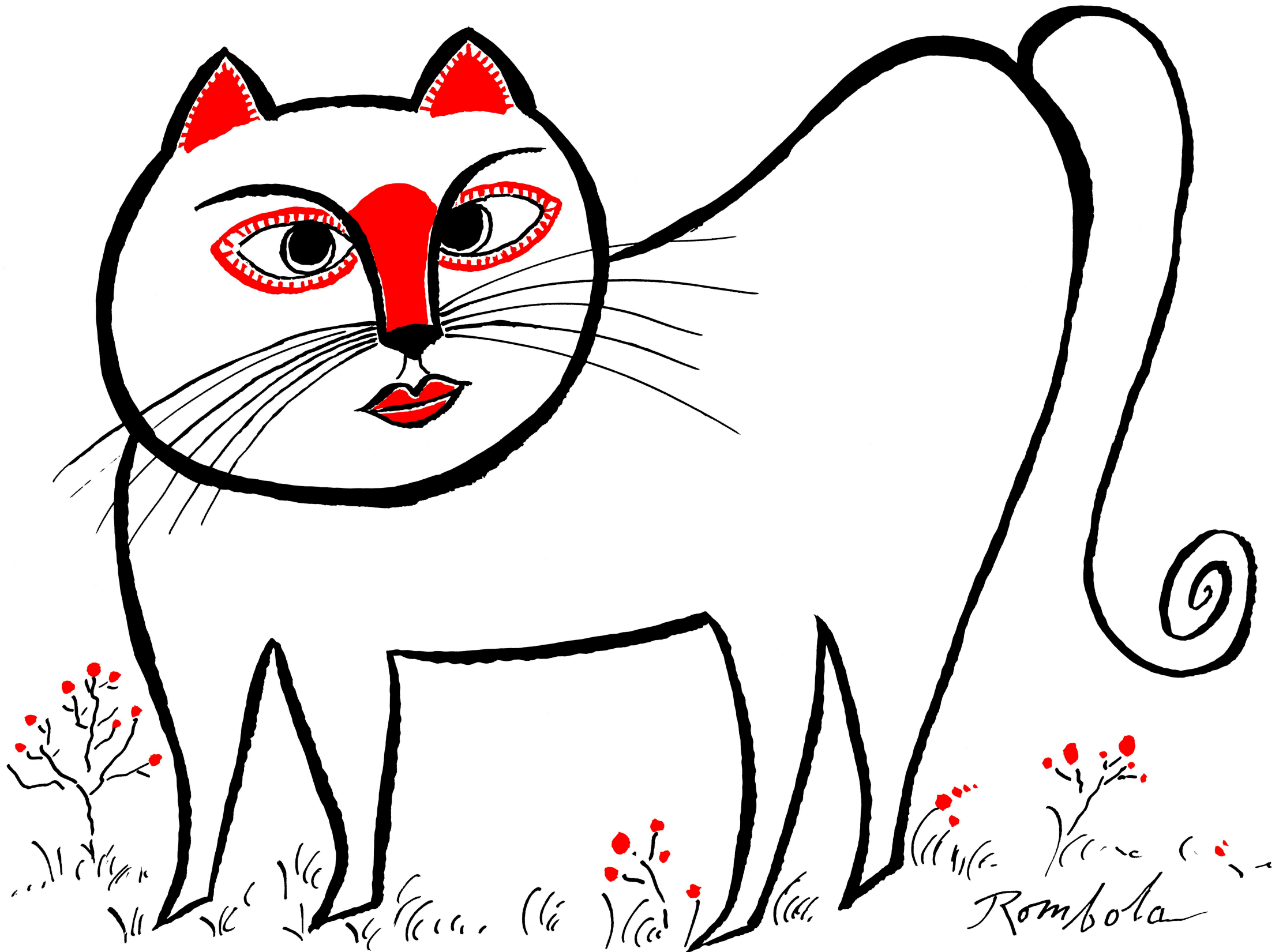
STEREO INTENDED FOR USE ON EITHER STEREO OR MONAURAL PHONOGRAPHS

CAEDMON
TC 1380

TOBERMORY AND OTHER STORIES

by Saki

READ BY KEITH BAXTER



TOBERMORY AND OTHER STORIES

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SIDE 1	TIMING
1. Tobermory	19:38
SIDE 2	
1. The Background	8:23
2. Reginald on Besetting Sins	5:20

THE smiling bitter rubaiyat from which Hector Munro took his pseudonym were effectively symbolic of his own gift. The empty glass we turn down for him is the fragile hollow-stemmed goblet meant for driest champagne; it is of finest crystal. Occasionally at his table we are aware that he was also a still wine of elect vintage; but for the most part he preferred to sparkle and fume with incessant bubbles of wit; a wit for which such words as satire, cynicism, sophistry, are all too gassy.

There is something of great encouragement in this renewed republication of his tales. One might have thought that to the rising generation he would speak an unassimilable language. Like certain beverages now almost mythical in the United States, he is genuinely pre-War; genuinely Scotch too. At least one reader is taken back by him to the vanished world of an Oxford common-room when copies of the *Bystander* or the *Westminster Gazette* occasionally printed his grave mockeries. More often, though, it was the *Morning Post*. The faithful and severe anti-Americanism of that journal caused it to be read by some Rhodes Scholars as a carminative. It was worth it, for there one discovered Saki.

In recent revivals of his books distinguished enthusiasts have spoken handsomely of his urbane malice and charm. But in all those comments the friendliest critics have shown themselves instinctively puzzled how to proceed; all have fallen back upon quotation of Saki's own felicities. This is inevitable. The fact is there are few writers less profitable to write *about*. Saki exists only to be read. The exquisite lightness of his work offers no grasp for the solemnities of earnest criticism. He is of those brilliant and lucky volatiles who are to be enjoyed, not critic-handled. He will be instinctively recognized and relished by those capable.

Mr. E. V. Lucas, expert on both mirth and grimness, long ago described the perfect hostess as one who puts by the guest-room bed "a volume either of O. Henry or Saki or both." It is all right to put it there, but one hopes it will be brought downstairs the next morning, for Saki's most perfect felicity is to be read aloud in a house-party setting. The bracketing with O. Henry is not just casual; though the two are as different as Texas and Surrey, both are instinctive story-tellers dealing perfectly with their chosen material. (Both also did all their best work for newspapers.) The English country-house hostess, chambermaid, or candidate standing for a "bye-election" are creatures as wild and strange to an American reader as O. Henry's ranchman and medicine-show grifters to the London congregation of W. H. Smith. Both Saki and O. Henry are masters of the park-bench setting. Saki was less insistent on twisting the story's tail but an equal master of surprise when he chose. Let the lover of O. Henry read Saki's *Dusk*, or *The Mouse*, or *The Reticence of Lady Anne*, or *The Open Window*, and see what I mean. The English flapper or Nut of pre-War days was anatomized by Saki as shrewdly as—and less sentimentally than—O. Henry's shepherd or shopgirl. He

could purge the decorous amenities of an English week-end party with blasts of cyclone farce. He could show the conversation of a few ladies at bridge as deadly and quick on the trigger of concealed weapons as a Western bar-room brawl.

There is no greater compliment to be paid the right kind of friend than to hand him Saki, without comment. Particularly to those less familiar with the mysterious jungles of English humour, a savage country with birds of unexpected plumage, Saki's insouciant spoof may be a revelation. Many who believe the famous phrase "no more privacy than a goldfish" to be inalienably American will be surprised to find that Saki used it in 1903 or thereabouts. (Though I dare say it may really date from Alexander Pope.) Delicate, airy, lucid, precise, with the inconspicuous agility of perfect style, he can pass into the uncanny, the tragic, into mocking fairy-tales grimmer than Grimm. His phrases are always urbane and usually final. "His hair and forehead furnished a recession note in a personality that was in all other respects obtrusive and assertive." Probably more than any writer who ever lived he has made a study of aunts and nephews. His sister's biographical sketch, which tells with moderation of the appalling auntly regime of their childhood, gives us a clue to this. Aunts and werewolves were two of his specialties. Of what other writer can it be said that his Life could not be written until his aunts had died.

There are certain social types whom Saki cooks and serves for us as absolutely as perfect asparagus and hollandaise. Even their names are genius, as every critic has noted. Sir James Beanquest, Mrs. Thropplestance, Ada Spelvexit, Mrs. Quabarl, Clovis Sangrail, Comus Bassington, Blanche Vavvel, Hortensia Bavvel—can you resist the desire to be introduced to these? Clovis, Playboy of the Week-End World, I have always supposed to be so called because he was so appallingly frank.

Saki writes so lightly that you might hardly notice how beautifully also. And here and there, beneath so much enchanting play upon words, you will be startled and embarrassed by play upon hearts. Let me repeat what I once put into the mouth of the "Old Mandarin" in a pseudo-Chinese translation:

*There is something specially Chinese
In Saki's Tory humour,
He has the claw of the demon-cat
Beneath his brilliant robe.
Suavest comedian, silkiest satirist,
Smooth as a shave
With a new razor-blade.*

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

The article printed above is Christopher Morley's Introduction to *The Short Stories of Saki* and is reprinted here courtesy of The Bodley Head.

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**TOBERMORY
AND OTHER STORIES**

by Saki

Read by Keith Baxter

TC 1380-A

Side 1

19:38

1. Tobermory

LONGPLAYING • 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM • MICROGROOVE

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TC 1380-B

Side 2

13:43

1. The Background
2. Reginald on Besetting Sins

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