

Q U A R T E R L Y
P R E S S R E V I E W
FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

SPRING 2014



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Correspondence: tarisz@hotmail.com

Reading After Twitter

by Toby Litt

I was born on 20 August 1968 – eleven months to the day before the first Apollo Moon Landing. The Space Age was always something to which I aspired rather than belonged.

For several years, between approximately 1976 and 1979, I wasn't interested in anything earthbound. The two most important films of my boyhood were *Star Wars*, which showed me where I wanted to be, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which showed me a possible means of getting there.

In preference to Amptill, Bedfordshire in 1979, I would have taken any technological dystopia. There was no armed rebellion against Margaret Thatcher, and even if there had been it would not have involved laser guns.

A couple of years ago, I spent three months playing *World of Warcraft* – partly as research for a short story I was writing, mostly because I became addicted to it. This convinced me of one thing: If the computer games which exist now had existed back in 1979 I would not have read any books, I think; I would not have seen writing as an adequate entertainment; I would not have seen going outdoors as sufficiently interesting to bother with.

Similarly, I find it difficult to understand why any eleven-year-old of today would be sufficiently bored to turn inward for entertainment.

This raises the question as to how future writers will come about, without 'silence, exile and cunning' – without the need for

these things?

I was formed, as a writer, by the boredom of the place in which I lived. Philip Larkin said 'not the place's fault' – but in my case, I think it was. And then, the being taken out of the first place into another place (boarding school) where I was unable to have any privacy. This developed a mania for privacy in me, which began to come out as poetry, as a diary. It's not that I didn't do these things before – they just became essentials for self-creating, self-preservation. That's how I read myself, anyway.

Literature isn't alien to technology, literature is technological to begin with.

Literature depends on technology – a society needs to be able to do more than subsist before it produces a literature. An oral culture, yes, that is possible – but I am referring specifically to words on the page, words on the screen.

The internet connection offers all of us the constant temptation of snippets, of trivia. We don't live, as other writers did in the past, without these particular temptations. They had their own temptations: Byron wasn't undistracted. Yet there were greater acres of emptiness, surely. Travel took forever. Winters isolated. Boredom was there as a resource for daydreaming, trancing out.

I think writers will continue to occur but technology and its trivia will cause us to lose something, just as we lost something when we lost the classical education. We write worse because we cannot write classical prose. Yet classical prose is useless for describing the world of 2014, the world that is there – ready to buzz – in your pocket or bag.

Our perceptions outrun the sedentary sentence by much too much; just as we listen to mp3s to hear what an album *would* sound like were we actually to sit down and listen to it, so we skim-read the classic books to get a sense of what they would be

like were we to sit down and dwell on them.

Readers more accustomed to screens – web pages, iPhone displays – will scan a page of text for its contents, rather than experience it in a gradual linear top-left to bottom-right way. This will make for increased speed and decreased specificity. These readers will be half-distracted even as they read; their visual field will include other things than just the text, because they won't feel happy unless those things are there. A writer of long, doubling-back sentences such as Henry James will be incomprehensible to them. They won't be grammatically equipped to deal with him. They won't be neurologically capable of reading him. Their eyes will photograph fields rather than, as ours do, or did, follow tracks.

This scanning approach will have a bad effect on sentence structure. For these readers, the fact they are reading constructed sequences of words won't matter. They won't even notice. As long as the content is there for them somewhere on the page, the job of writing will have been done.

Perhaps future writers will, therefore, create vague fields of possible meaning; more Charles Olson than Ezra Pound. The exact sequence of sounds, the precise inflection of grammar – these things will seem prissy. We will be back to the eighteenth century, pre-Flaubert.

Isaac Babel's famous sentence from his story, *Guy de Maupassant*: 'No iron spike can pierce a human heart as icily as a period in the right place' is prissy.

The people novels have conventionally been written about are gradually ceasing to exist.

Novels have always belonged to aristocrats of time; not, I say, merely to aristocrats, although they have been disproportionately represented. Our perceptions outrun the sedentary sentence by much too much but to those subjects who have freedom of

choice about how to act within time. The Fordist factory-line workers, performing a repetitive task all day, cannot interest the novel for more than a few moments whilst they are at work. It is only when the machine stops that the story begins. (David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* attempts to make a novel out of the dead time of insanely repetitive deskwork; and it fails, at least in the form of it he left us.)

Proposition: 'The human race is no longer sufficiently bored with life to be distracted by an art form as boring as the novel.'

Perhaps novels will continue, but instead of the machine it will be the connectivity that stops, or becomes secondary.

What we're going to see more and more of is the pseudo-contemporary novel – in which characters are, for some reason, cut off from one another, technologically cut off. Already, many contemporary novels avoid the truly contemporary (which is hyperconnectivity).

The basic plots of Western Literature depend on separation by distance – Odysseus separated from Penelope; the *Odyssey* doesn't exist if Odysseus can catch an easyJet flight home, or text Penelope's Blackberry. Joyce's *Ulysses* doesn't exist if Bloom can do his day's business from a laptop in a Temple Bar coffeeshop.

I don't want to overemphasize this. You could imagine a similar anxiety over how the telephone would undermine fiction. Perhaps it is just a matter of acceleration. But I don't think I am alone in already being weary of characters who make their great discoveries whilst sitting in front of a computer screen. If for example a character, by diligent online research and persistent emailing, finds out one day – after a ping in their inbox – who their father really is, isn't that a story hardly worth telling? Watching someone at a computer is dull. Watching someone play even the most exciting computer game is dull. You, reading this now, are not something any writer would want to write about for

more than a sentence.

In the Preface to Volume 15 of the New York Edition, Henry James writes about ‘operative irony’. It’s a long quote, but try to stick with it because it may contain the whole future of the novel.

‘I have already mentioned the particular rebuke once addressed me on all this ground, the question of where on earth, where roundabout us at this hour, I had “found” my Neil Paradays, my Ralph Limberts, my Hugh Verekers and other such supersubtle fry. I was reminded then, as I have said, that these represented eminent cases fell to the ground, as by their foolish weight, unless I could give chapter and verse for the eminence. I was reduced to confessing I couldn’t, and yet must repeat again here how little I was so abashed. On going over these things I see, to our critical edification, exactly why – which was because I was able to plead that my postulates, my animating presences, were all, to their great enrichment, their intensification of value, ironic; the strength of applied irony being surely in the sincerities, the lucidities, the utilities that stand behind it. When it’s not a campaign, of a sort, on behalf of the something better (better than the obnoxious, the provoking object) that blessedly, as is assumed, *might* be, it’s not worth speaking of. But this is exactly what we mean by operative irony. It implies and projects the possible other case, the case rich and edifying where the actuality is pretentious and vain. So it plays its lamp; so, essentially, it carries that smokeless flame, which makes clear, with all the rest, the good cause that guides it. My application of which remarks is that the studies here collected have their justification in the

ironic spirit, the spirit expressed by my being able to reply promptly enough to my friend: “If the life about us for the last thirty years refuses warrant for these examples, then so much the worse for that life. The *constatation* would be so deplorable that instead of making it we must dodge it: there are decencies that in the name of the general self-respect we must take for granted, there’s a kind of rudimentary intellectual honour to which we must, in the interest of civilization, at least pretend.” But I must really reproduce the whole passion of my retort.’

In the future, *all* novels will invoke a kind of operative irony; post-Twitter, post-whatever-comes-after-Twitter. Who are these ‘supersubtle fry’, your characters, who have all this time in which to become rich, deep selfhoods? Where do you find these interesting subjects of yours?

Or, as Henry James appears to us, so we will appear to the readers of the near future: existing in a different, slow-flowing time that they will need to make an extreme effort of deceleration to access.

I think – as a result of all this – there will be great nostalgia for the pre-trivial age, not even to mention the pre-genetic manipulation age.

Literature can accommodate nostalgia, but only as a houseguest; if nostalgia becomes the landlord, architect and psychoanalyst, literature will have to evict itself. ♦

Great Innovations

by *James Fallows*

The Atlantic Monthly magazine recently assembled a panel of 12 scientists, entrepreneurs, engineers, historians of technology, and others to assess the innovations that have done the most to shape the nature of modern life. The main rule for this exercise was that the innovations should have come after widespread use of the wheel began, perhaps 6,000 years ago. That ruled out fire, which our forebears began to employ several hundred thousand years earlier. We asked each panelist to make 25 selections and to rank them, despite the impossibility of fairly comparing, say, the atomic bomb and the plow.

Any collection of 50 breakthroughs must exclude 50,000 more. What about GPS systems, on which so many forms of movement now depend, and which two panelists recommended? What about the concept of the number zero, as suggested by Padmasree Warrior, the chief technology and strategy officer at Cisco? (She did not rank her 25 items, but 18 of them showed up among the final 50; Michelle Alexopoulos, an economics professor at the University of Toronto, had 21, and Walter Isaacson had 25 of the 26 he submitted.) In addition to coal, how can no one have mentioned paved roads? Or the discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA? Landing on the moon? Or the mathematics of calculus, on which space flight and so much else depended? The more questions and discussions our ranking provokes, the more successful the endeavor will have been.

Popular culture often lionizes the stars of discovery and invention. A century ago, this meant the Wright brothers, Edison, and the auto pioneers; in the Eisenhower years, Jonas Salk and Wernher von Braun; and in the past generation, first Bill Gates and then Steve Jobs. But about technology's onrush in general, cultural and political attitudes have been mixed at best. For each writer or thinker or government leader who has enthusiastically welcomed whatever changes technology might bring, there has been a counterpart warning of its dangers. From Blake to Dickens, from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*, from Upton Sinclair to Rachel Carson, and through a long list of similar pairings, the culture of a technology-driven era has continually played catch-up to correct modernity's destructive and dehumanizing effects.

By expanding the pool of potentially literate people, the adoption of corrective lenses may have amounted to the largest onetime IQ boost in history.

For our era, the major problems that technology has helped cause, and that faster innovation may or may not correct, are environmental, demographic, and socioeconomic. Environmental challenges, because of the unsustainable burden being placed on the world's oceans, skies, soils, and nonhuman life-forms; demographic, because advances in medicine and public health are rapidly pushing up the median age throughout the developed world; and socioeconomic, because a globalized, high-tech economy is widening the gap between rich and poor everywhere.

Perhaps I should not have been surprised that people who have thought deeply about innovation's sources and effects, like our panelists, were aware of the harm it has done along with the good. I found it notable that the technologists I spoke with volunteered lists of innovation-enhanced perils. "Does innovation raise the wealth of the planet? I believe it does," John Doerr, who has helped launch Google, Amazon, and other giants of today's

technology, said. “But technology left to its own devices widens rather than narrows the gap between the rich and the poor.” Despite the prospects for innovation that excite him, he said, “I don’t think there is any reason to assume there will automatically be enough ‘good’ jobs, for enough people, in the long run.” Joel Mokyr pointed out that innovation has always done both good and harm. “You look at antibiotics, insecticides, transportation – every time we solve one problem, a new one comes up,” he said. “Each invention relies on subsequent inventions to clean up the mess it has made.”

Please stop to think about this: Outside of the sciences and technology, and apart from the legacies created in each family, humanity is struggling today for a sense of cumulative achievement. Are today’s statesmen an improvement over those of our grandparents’ era? Today’s level of public debate? Music, architecture, literature, the fine arts – these and other manifestations of world culture continually change, without necessarily improving. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, versus whoever is the best-selling author in Moscow right now? The original, elegant Penn Station, versus its warehouse-like replacement?

A central question for technologists is whether innovation in the material and productive realms can be sustained – or whether we might, on the contrary, already be entering another of the long, stagnant eras that have marked much of human history, including the ones after times of rapid advance. Amid today’s onslaught of the new-and-improved, a slowdown of any sort might seem improbable – but possibly desirable. The argument that a slowdown might happen, and that it would be harmful if it did, takes three main forms.

The first is historical. Some societies have closed themselves off and stopped inventing altogether: notably China after its preeminence in the Ming era, and much of the Arab Islamic world

starting just before the European Renaissance. By failing to move forward, they inevitably moved backward relative to their rivals and to the environmental and economic threats they faced. If the social and intellectual climate for innovation sours, what has happened before can happen again.

The second draws from the visible slowdown in the pace of solutions that technology offers to fundamental problems. Between 1850 and 1950, life expectancy nearly doubled in the United States, thanks to the combined effects of antibiotics, immunization, and public-health measures. Since then, it has only crept up. Between 1920 and 1970, improvements in cars, roads, airplanes, and even railroads made travel faster, cheaper, safer, and more comfortable. Since then, travel in the developed world has improved slowly at best. Crop yields per acre doubled within a generation of the green revolution but have not doubled again.

The third and broadest form of the argument is that a slowdown in, say, crop yields or travel time is part of a general pattern of what economists call diminishing marginal returns. The easy improvements are, quite naturally, the first to be made; whatever comes later is slower and harder.

The most systematic recent presentation of this view has come from the economist Robert J. Gordon, of Northwestern University, who has argued that America’s history as a nation happens to coincide with a rare moment in technological history now nearing its end. “There was virtually no economic growth before 1750,” he writes in a recent paper. This, he said, left open the possibility that “the rapid progress made over the past 250 years could well be a unique episode in human history rather than a guarantee of endless future advance at the same rate.” Tyler Cowen, an economist at George Mason University, says in *The Great Stagnation* that America’s long centuries of rapid growth amounted to harvesting the “low-hanging fruit” of open land, cheap energy,

and industrial-era breakthroughs – harvesting that could not be sustained.

Everyone I spoke with was familiar with such cautionary analyses; none dismissed them out of hand. But when pressed, every one of them said they expected the pace of useful innovation to speed up, not slow down. Again, their explanations took three main forms.

First, and reassuringly, whatever field a panelist knew most about, he or she considered most promising. John Doerr emphasized the transformative potential of radically cheaper and more efficient batteries, which in turn are a crucial element of a cleaner-energy economy. (Wind turbines, solar panels, and other renewable sources don't produce power on a schedule that matches the grid's demands. Modern batteries cost too much, and store too little energy, to be useful in buffering undersupply.) Others I spoke with saw similar prospects in other fields. Elon Musk, not officially one of our panelists, is perhaps this era's most ambitious innovator. He simultaneously heads a company building rocket ships, SpaceX; another making a popular electric car, Tesla; and another that is a leading provider of solar power, SolarCity. When I asked him what innovation he hoped to live long enough to see but feared he might not, he said, "Sustainable human settlements on Mars."

Most of these U.S.-based technologists thought prospects for innovation remained brighter in the United States than anywhere else. And this judgment came from people fully aware of the continued erosion of basic-research funding and other challenges. "We can be concerned about the last 1 percent of an environment for innovation, but that is because we take everything else for granted," Leslie Berlin told me.

Second, many pointed out that ever cheaper, ever faster computing power could in itself promote innovation in all other

fields – much as steam-powered engines did in the 19th century and electricity in the 20th. For one example: Eric S. Lander, the director of the Broad Institute for medical research in Cambridge, Massachusetts (also not on our panel), pointed out that in the past 12 years, the cost of sequencing human DNA has fallen to *one one-millionth* of its previous level. This reduction in cost, he says, means that the next decade should be a time of "amazing advances in understanding the genetic basis of disease, with especially powerful implications for cancer."

Finally, the people I spoke with said that the very concept of an end to innovation defied everything they understood about human inquiry. "If you look just at the 20th century, the odds against there being *any* improvement in living standards are enormous," Joel Mokyr told me. "Two catastrophic world wars, the Cold War, the Depression, the rise of totalitarianism – it's been one disaster after another, a sequence that could have been enough to sink us back into barbarism. And yet this past half century has been the fastest-ever time of technological growth. I see no reason why that should be slowing down."

George Dyson put it a different way, in a sense the most optimistic of all. "I am a technological evolutionist," he said. "I view the universe as a phase-space of things that are possible, and we're doing a random walk among them. Eventually we are going to fill the space of everything that is possible."

What innovation did Dyson most hope to see during his time in the phase-space of the living? He had obviously thought about this before, and answered immediately: "The return of sailing ships as a commercially viable transport system." Even in the days of cloth sails and hemp rope, he said, clipper ships could convert 60 percent of the raw energy of the wind into useful work. With modern materials and design, they could capture more energy than they used en route. "When a fleet of ships got to port, they

could not only deliver cargo but even put energy into the grid.”
This is how innovators think.



1. The printing press, 1430s

The printing press was nominated by 10 of our 12 panelists, five of whom ranked it in their top three. Dyson described its invention as the turning point at which “knowledge began freely replicating and quickly assumed a life of its own.”



2. Electricity, late 19th century

And then there was light .



3. Penicillin, 1928

Accidentally discovered in 1928, though antibiotics were not widely distributed until after World War II, when they became the silver bullet for any number of formerly deadly diseases.

4. Semiconductor electronics, mid-20th century



The physical foundation of the virtual world.



5. Optical lenses, 13th century

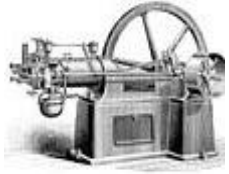
Refracting light through glass is one of those simple ideas that took a mysteriously long time to catch on. “The Romans had a glass industry, and there’s even a passage in Seneca about the optical effects of a glass bowl of water,” says Mokyr. But it was centuries before the invention of eyeglasses dramatically raised the collective human IQ, and eventually led to the creation of the microscope and the telescope.



6. Paper, second century

“The idea of stamping images is natural if you have paper, but until then, it’s economically unaffordable.” – *Charles C. Mann*

7. The internal combustion engine, late 19th century



Turned air and fuel into power, eventually replacing the steam engine.



8. Vaccination, 1796

The British doctor Edward Jenner used the cowpox virus to protect against smallpox in 1796, but it wasn't until Louis Pasteur developed a rabies vaccine in 1885 that medicine – and government – began to accept the idea that making someone sick could prevent further sickness.



9. The Internet, 1960s

The infrastructure of the digital age.



10. The steam engine, 1712

Powered the factories, trains, and ships that drove the Industrial Revolution



11. Nitrogen fixation, 1918

The German chemist Fritz Haber, also the father of chemical weapons, won a Nobel Prize for his development of the ammonia-synthesis process, which was used to create a new class of fertilizers central to the green revolution.



12. Sanitation systems, mid-19th century

A major reason we live 40 years longer than we did in 1880.



13. Refrigeration, 1850s

“Discovering how to make cold would change the way we eat – and live – almost as profoundly as discovering how to cook.”

George Dyson

14. Gunpowder, 10th century
Outsourced killing to a machine.



15. The airplane, 1903
Transformed travel, warfare, and our view of the world.



16. The personal computer, 1970s
Like the lever (No. 48) and the abacus (No. 43), it augmented human capabilities.



17. The compass, 12th century
Oriented us, even at sea.



18. The automobile, late 19th century
Transformed daily life, our culture, and our landscape.

19. Industrial steelmaking, 1850s
Mass-produced steel, made possible by a method known as the Bessemer process, became the basis of modern industry.



20. The pill, 1960
Launched a social revolution.



21. Nuclear fission, 1939
Gave humans new power for destruction, and creation.





22. The green revolution, mid-20th century

Combining technologies like synthetic fertilizers (No. 11) and scientific plant breeding (No. 38) hugely increased the world's food output. Norman Borlaug, the agricultural economist who devised this approach, has been credited with saving more than 1 billion people from starvation.



23. The sextant, 1757

It made maps out of stars.



24. The telephone, 1876 Allowed our voices to travel.

25. Alphabetization, first millennium b.c. *Aa*

Made knowledge accessible and searchable – and may have contributed to the rise of societies that used phonetic letters over those that used ideographic ones.



26. The telegraph, 1837

Before it, Joel Mokyr says, “information could move no faster than a man on horseback.”



27. The mechanized clock, 15th century

It quantified time.



28. Radio, 1906

The first demonstration of electronic mass media's power to spread ideas and homogenize culture.



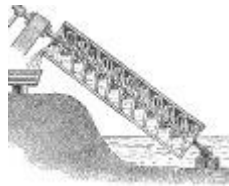
29. Photography, early 19th century

Changed journalism, art, culture, and how we see ourselves.



30. The moldboard plow, 18th century

The first plow that not only dug soil up but turned it over, allowing for the cultivation of harder ground. Without it, agriculture as we know it would not exist in northern Europe or the American Midwest.



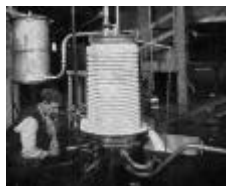
31. Archimedes' screw, third century b.c.

The Greek scientist is believed to have designed one of the first water pumps, a rotating corkscrew that pushed water up a tube. It transformed irrigation and remains in use today at many sewage-treatment plants.



32. The cotton gin, 1793

Institutionalized the cotton industry – and slavery – in the American South



33. Pasteurization, 1863

One of the first practical applications of Louis Pasteur's germ theory, this method for using heat to sterilize wine, beer, and milk is widely considered to be one of history's most effective public-health interventions.



34. The Gregorian calendar, 1582

Debugged the Julian calendar, jumping ahead 10 days to synchronize the world with the seasons.



35. Oil refining, mid-19th century

Without it, oil drilling (No. 39) would be pointless.



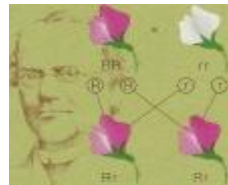
36. The steam turbine, 1884

A less heralded cousin of steam engines (No. 10), turbines are the backbone of today's energy infrastructure: they generate 80 percent of the world's power.



37. Cement, first millennium b.c.

The foundation of civilization. Literally.



38. Scientific plant breeding, 1920s

Humans have been manipulating plant species for nearly as long as we've grown them, but it wasn't until early-20th-century scientists discovered a forgotten 1866 paper by the Austrian botanist Gregor Mendel that we figured out how plant breeding – and, later on, human genetics – worked.



39. Oil drilling, 1859

Fueled the modern economy, established its geopolitics, and changed the climate.



40. The sailboat, fourth millennium b.c.

Transformed travel, warfare, and our view of the world.



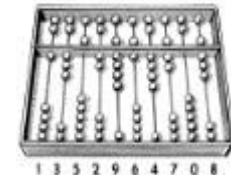
41. Rocketry, 1926

“Our only way off the planet – so far.” *George Dyson*



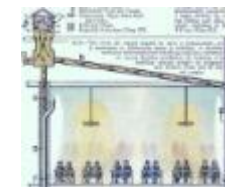
42. Paper money, 11th century

The abstraction at the core of the modern economy.



43. The abacus, third millennium b.c.

One of the first devices to augment human intelligence.



44. Air-conditioning, 1902

Would you start a business in Houston or Bangalore without it?

45. Television, early 20th century

Brought the world into people's homes.



49. The assembly line, 1913

Turned a craft-based economy into a mass-market one.



46. Anesthesia, 1846

In response to the first public demonstration of ether, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. wrote: "The fierce extremity of suffering has been steeped in the waters of forgetfulness, and the deepest furrow in the knotted brow of agony has been smoothed for ever."



50. The combine harvester, 1930s

Mechanized the farm, freeing people to do new types of work. ♦



47. The nail, second millennium b.c.

"Extended lives by enabling people to have shelter." *Leslie Berlin*



48. The lever, third millennium b.c.

The Egyptians had not yet discovered the wheel when they built their pyramids; they are thought to have relied heavily on levers.

Human Engineering and Climate Change

by *S. Matthew Liao*

A widely cited report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 18 percent of the world's greenhouse emissions come from livestock farming, a higher share than from transport. More recently, it has been suggested livestock farming in fact accounts for at least 51 percent of greenhouse emissions. Even a minor (21 to 24 percent) reduction in red-meat consumption would achieve the same reduction in emissions as the total localization of food production – that is, having zero “food miles.” Human engineering could help here.

Eating something that makes us feel nauseated can trigger long-lasting food aversion. While eating red meat with an added emetic (a substance that induces vomiting) could be used as aversion conditioning, anyone not strongly committed to giving up red meat is unlikely to be attracted to this option. A more realistic option might be to induce mild intolerance – akin, for example, to milk intolerance – by stimulating the immune system against common bovine proteins. A potentially safe and practical way of delivering such intolerance might be to produce “meat patches” – similar to nicotine patches. We can produce patches for those animals that contribute the most to greenhouse-gas emissions and encourage people to use such patches.

Human ecological footprints are partly correlated with body size. As well as needing to eat more, larger people consume more energy in less obvious ways. For example, a car uses more fuel per mile to carry a heavier person than a lighter person; more fabric is needed to clothe larger people; heavier people wear out shoes, carpets, and furniture more quickly than lighter people; and so on. A way to reduce ecological footprints, then, would be to reduce size. There are several ways by which we could reduce adult height in humans. While genetic modifications to control height are likely to be quite complex and beyond our current capacities, it nevertheless seems possible now to use pre-implantation genetic diagnosis to select for shorter children. Another method of influencing height is to use hormone treatment either to affect somatotropin levels or to trigger the closing of the epiphyseal plate earlier than normal (this sometimes occurs accidentally through vitamin A overdoses). A more speculative and controversial way of reducing adult height is to reduce birth weight. Drugs or nutrients that either reduce the expression of paternally imprinted genes or increase the expression of maternally imprinted genes could potentially regulate birth size.

Another indirect means of mitigating climate change is to enhance and improve our moral decisions by making us more altruistic and empathetic. Many environmental problems are the result of collective-action problems. If people were generally more willing to act as a group and could be confident that others would do the same, we might be able to enjoy the sorts of benefits that arise only when large numbers of people act together. Whereas altruism and empathy have large cultural components, there is evidence that they also have biological underpinnings. Test subjects given the prosocial hormone oxytocin were more willing to share money with strangers and behaved in a more trustworthy way. Furthermore, oxytocin

appears to improve the capacity to read other people's emotional states. Conversely, testosterone appears to decrease aspects of empathy. These examples are intended to illustrate some possible human engineering solutions. Others like them might include increasing our resistance to heat and tropical diseases and reducing our need for food and water. ♦

Glaciers For Sale

by *Jay McKenzie Funk*

The Canadian dentist behind what may or may not have been the world's first global-warming Ponzi scheme either lives or does not live in Iceland. His name is Otto Spork, and when I first learned of him, in 2008, he had secured the water rights to a glacier north of Reykjavík and quit his dental practice to run the most successful hedge fund in Canada. His Toronto investment firm, Sextant Capital Management – the name was chosen to honor his paternal grandfather, Johan Marinus Spork, a Dutch sea captain – had recently been claiming 730 percent returns for its investors. Spork's sales pitch was simple: the world was warming and parts of it were running dry, so Sextant bought water companies. Hundreds of Canadian and offshore investors were persuaded to buy in – and Spork earned millions of dollars in management fees as money poured into his funds. The arrangement succeeded magnificently until December 8, 2008, three days before Bernie Madoff was arrested, when the Ontario Securities Commission accused Spork of a massive fraud.

Water is the medium of climate change – the ice that melts, the seas that rise, the vapor that warms, the rain that falls torrentially or not at all. It is also an early indicator of how humanity may respond to climate change: by financializing it. In the year following the release of Al Gore's 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, at least fifteen water-focused mutual funds were created. The amount of money controlled by such funds

ballooned from \$1.2 billion in 2005 to \$13 billion in 2007. Credit Suisse, UBS, and Goldman Sachs hired dedicated water analysts. A report from Goldman called water “the petroleum for the next century” and speculated excitedly about the impact of “major multi-year droughts” in Australia and the American West. “At the risk of being alarmist,” it read, “we see parallels with . . . Malthusian economics.”

In the summer of 2008, I was starting work on a book about climate change when a Spork tip came in from a sales executive at the trade publication *Global Water Intelligence*. “The transportation of potable water is becoming increasingly popular as a solution to cases of acute water shortage,” wrote the salesman as he tried to entice me with a \$1,060 subscription. The tankers that had sailed that spring between Marseille and a drought-stricken Barcelona had eventually been outcompeted by rainfall, he admitted. But “one of our subscribers (and the sponsor of our most recent conference in London), iGlobalWater . . . has recently been heavily involved in such projects.” He claimed that iGlobalWater – unlike the handful of stillborn bulk-water schemes in decades past – had moved beyond the planning stage. The company was already shipping water from Iceland. I didn’t buy a subscription, but I was intrigued.

The website *iglobalwater.com* was registered to something called Spork Capital. The name Spork led to Sextant Capital. Sextant and iGlobalWater turned out to be on the same floor of the same office tower at the Royal Bank Plaza, Downtown Toronto’s most prestigious address. (It would later become clear that iGlobalWater’s global headquarters consisted of half of a long table inside Sextant.) I phoned and emailed both companies repeatedly. No one ever responded. A few months later, the securities-fraud charges were unveiled and I began to understand why Spork had stonewalled me. According to his lawyers, Spork

had moved to Iceland. It was the beginning of a five-year chase.

The dentist ignored Canadian authorities too, skipping meetings with investigators and appearances before the Ontario Securities Commission. On May 18, 2011, with almost \$100 million from Sextant investors still unrecovered, the Ontario Court of Justice found him guilty. Nearly all Sextant’s funds had been funneled into two Icelandic water businesses that Spork himself controlled through a web of shell companies in Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands, and the dentist and his family had paid and loaned themselves close to \$50 million. What wasn’t clear was whether Sextant had been a kind of Ponzi scheme from the start – or had Spork really believed he could sell Icelandic water to a drought-stricken world?

I decided to fly to Iceland with my friend Damon Tabor, a fellow journalist who had shared my Spork interest from the beginning, to see if we could find him and discover the truth. It was a small country. We would bring cameras and voice recorders and GPS units and binoculars and walkie-talkies. Before we left, we consulted the financial journalist Sigrún Davíðsdóttir, one of the few Icelanders to report on Spork. She told us about the poet Einar Benediktsson, who at the beginning of the twentieth century had gathered a bunch of Swiss investors and tried to sell them the northern lights. “What I think of Spork?” she wrote in an email.

It pains me to say (because also I would most certainly like to see the water export pump money and jobs) that I think he is, what we say in Icelandic, a “Northern Lights-salesman.”

Spork’s glacier was on the Snæfellsnes, a peninsula a few hours north of Reykjavík that is dominated by Snæfellsjökull, a 4,744-foot volcano that stars in Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. We set out for it one afternoon in a rented Chevy Spark, taking a tunnel under one fjord and skirting the next, then turning

off onto a narrow road that climbed the flanks of the volcano. The grass was replaced by rock, and there were waterfalls and patches of snow. The road became gravel at a pass and then dropped to the shoreline, where we zipped past dark beaches with breakers rolling in. When we neared the fishing village of Rif, we saw a harbor and the massive, half-built shell of a factory: Spork's water plant. In this spare landscape, the 100,000-square-foot plant was incongruous, a gleaming, hangarlike edifice of sheet metal on the tundra. Next to it, two short waterfalls emerged from two black pipes, dumping clear, cold glacier water into the harbor at a rate of 86,000 gallons an hour.

Iceland has more water per capita than any other country on earth: 142 million gallons of annual runoff for each of its 300,000 residents, roughly six times more than water-rich Canada, fifty times more than the United States, 250 times more than China, and 25,000 times more than the United Arab Emirates. Until the global financial crisis that locals call the *kreppa* – from a verb meaning “to clench” – Iceland also had more bubble per capita: there was no country more in the thrall of commercial banking and paper wealth. In 2008, three formerly high-flying banks had to be nationalized, the International Monetary Fund stepped in with a bailout, and the government collapsed. All this helped explain why no one in Iceland seemed worried about building an economy on water, not when the last one had been built on air.

In Rif, Damon and I met with Mayor Kristinn Jónasson, the man who in 2007 had granted Spork an exclusive ninety-five-year water lease. Locals called him the Major because in Icelandic *j's* sound like *y's* and they would overcorrect when translating to English. He was waiting in his office when we arrived. “Do you want water or something?” he asked. He popped into the next room, returning with two full glasses.

“I think the next war in the world is about water,” he said.

“Because, you know, you need water if you want to live.” The Major is one of the longest-serving mayors in Iceland: he has run the 1,700-person, 260-square-mile Snæfellsbær municipality since 1998, when he was thirty-three. Water seekers had come to Rif from all over the world. “Companies from England, from Norway, from Denmark,” he said. “An Arab from Kuwait. An agent for a guy from China, or something like that. Most of them, they are thinking the same thing: using old oil ships. Old oil ships, they have just one hull” – considered unsafe and outlawed in the United States after the *Exxon Valdez* spill – “so they have nothing to do now.” If the Arctic melted enough, Iceland could become the next Singapore, and ships conveying bulk water could go to Asia over the top of the world. But there were no publicly announced water deals with China yet. Only rumors. “Before, people said, ‘We have a lot of Arabs who want to buy water,’ ” the Major told us. “Now, they’re not talking about Arabs. Now it is China.”

Many had come, but Spork was the first outsider to build anything tangible here. Under the terms of the lease, Iceland Glacier Products – a sister corporation to iGlobalWater – would give Snæfellsbær \$50,000 a year plus twenty-three cents per thousand liters of exported water. Snæfellsbær also received a million shares of IGP, or about 1.4 percent of the company. The venture crashed before exports began, but Spork paid at least the first \$50,000, and he paid most of the workers who built the multimillion-dollar plant and million-dollar pipelines. He had also erected a billboard near the plant:

ICELAND GLACIER WATER

CAPTURED AT THE SOURCE OF SNÆFELLSJÖKULL

In the middle of the billboard was a corporate seal that depicted what looked like an eagle with its wings raised above the word SPORK.

“Otto was always very nice with me,” the Major said. “I cannot be angry about what happened, because, you know, in Iceland, we had the *kreppa* – we lost so much money in the bankrupt.” Had Spork come a few years earlier, he might already be exporting their water. “I have heard about the court in Canada and everything about that,” the Major said, “but I believe in the good in every person.”

He had not seen Spork in months, but he told us where he lived. “Otto has a house, a big house,” he said. “It’s in a willage . . . how do you call it in English? A willage?”

A village, I said.

“A willage near Reykjavík,” he said.

One guess as to how Spork the dentist was transformed in 2006 into Spork the hedge-fund manager is that he emulated a Canadian self-made billionaire named Eric Sprott. Spork knew Sprott: for almost thirty years, his sister Anne was Sprott’s deputy. While Otto filled cavities, she co-managed a Sprott hedge fund, investing in such commodities as molybdenum, a trace element crucial to the global desalination boom (each new reverse-osmosis plant requires as much as a million pounds of it). Anne helped the fund grow by 600 percent over the course of a decade and became supremely rich in the process. Sprott had later hired Spork’s eldest daughter, J’Aime, to work at Sprott Asset Management headquarters in Royal Bank Plaza. (Spork sometimes got Sprott’s mail.)

Sprott had made wildly successful bets on gold and silver; in 2011, *Bloomberg Businessweek* reported that his company “oversaw more gold than Brazil held in its reserves.” He and a thirty-five-year-old protégé named Kevin Bambrough had authored “Investment Implications of an Abrupt Climate Change” in 2006 – one of the first reports of its kind. “Harsher summers and intense winters are in the offing,” wrote Sprott and Bambrough,

“and they generally cause agriculture yields to drop sharply. Rising sea levels that intrude into coastal aquifers and lead to hotter summers also sap water resources. Mankind is staring starkly at the possibility of a severe crisis in water and food supply.”

Unlike Spork, Sprott never found the right way to invest in water. “Governments get involved and don’t allow companies to raise prices exorbitantly,” Bambrough explained to a reporter from the *National Post* in 2007. “It’s hard to make outsized returns.” Instead, Bambrough and Sprott began investing in farmland as the grain belt moved north. In 2009, they founded One Earth Farms, leasing cheap, underutilized lands in Canada’s prairie provinces from First Nations tribes. The company now controls more farmland than anyone else in the country.

I called Sprott to run my Spork origin story past him. “Yes, he might have tried to copy something that we did,” Sprott granted, “but you have to figure that out when you talk to him. I mean, lots of people invest in commodities. I have no idea why he moved into [my] building – I really don’t know. He goes from being a dentist to a hedge-fund manager. That’s quite a leap. I guess he was driven. I guess that’s the word to describe it.” Sprott assured me that Anne Spork, an apparent straight arrow with plenty of money of her own, had nothing to do with anything at Sextant. As for Otto, “he was kind of a fun-loving guy,” said Sprott. “He – he might’ve – well, he was a fun-loving guy. He was a fun-loving guy.”

Sprott had never talked to Spork about Sextant. But the plan to export Icelandic glacier water did not strike him as too outlandish. “There are all sorts of waters that we get all the time, and they’re all from some special goddamn place,” he said. “Iceland might make some sense.”

The willage the Major had mentioned, Mosfellsbær, could more aptly be described as a suburb: tidy rows of single-story, single-

family homes – big for Iceland, average for the United States or Canada – set between a bay called Leirvogur to the north and Highway 1 from Reykjavík to the south. Alone at the end of a winding street was an ultramodern villa unlike any other home in the neighborhood, with slate paneling and mirrored-glass windows that reflected the snowfields of a distant ridge. The house bore the address listed for Spork in Iceland’s handy national phone book, and it was where Canadian authorities had tried (unsuccessfully, as usual) to serve him with papers. Spork had bought his lair, the rumor went, from a local couple who built it during the boom times. Spork’s Icelandic fixer had appeared at their doorstep and made them a generous offer, and they promptly moved out.

Damon and I sat a few hundred feet from the property in the Spark, surveying the area with my camera’s telephoto lens. There were no cars out front, no lights, no movement. Clusters of yellow flowers were sprouting in the gravel driveway, and the grass was getting long. A few doors down, a girl bounced on a trampoline. An old couple strolled past and gave us a funny look.

The Spark began to feel cramped, and we got up the nerve to go to the door. OTTO ROBERT SPORK, HELEN EKONOMIDIS SPORK, read a plaque above the mail slot. There was no answer when I knocked. We wandered around the perimeter of the house, peering through one of the few windows without blinds. On a dark granite countertop in the kitchen, across from an oven mitt shaped like a gingerbread man, was a glass bottle of water. Atop a white piano were five family photos, three of which featured the family poodle.

I had a file on the poodle. I had first noticed it in the archives of Canada’s *Globe and Mail*, in a photo accompanying a 2007 article with the headline “Fears Make Resources Sparkle.” The photo shows a gray-haired Spork sitting in front of three white

Samsung computer monitors. The top button of his shirt is undone, and his jowly, bespectacled face is staring intently at the nearest screen. Behind him, next to some boxes, is the poodle, staring intently, and cutely, at the camera. Dogs were not allowed in the Royal Bank Plaza towers, but he brought the poodle to work anyway. Find the poodle, Damon and I joked, and we’ll find Spork.

We listened for yips at the door. There were none. Stymied, we returned to our cheap hotel in Reykjavík and looked up every website registered under the name Otto Spork. For ninety-nine dollars, I got a list of twenty domains – sporkdonations.com, ibulkwater.com, sporkwildlifefund.com, sporkinfo.com, sporkag.com, – but no physical address other than that of the house in Mosfellsbær. I called the number listed for Spork in the phone book. It rang and rang. I found some old press releases for Iceland Glacier Products and called the local and Canadian numbers listed there for Dino Ekonomidis, Spork’s brother-in-law. (A vice president at Sextant, Ekonomidis had also been charged with fraud, and he had also been dodging summonses from the OSC.) A male voice answered at the Canadian number. I asked for Dino. “Uh, he’s not here,” the voice said after a long pause. “Can I take a message?”

Sextant Capital Management, like Madoff Securities, was a family affair. Ekonomidis was second-in-command, charged with drumming up buyers for Sextant’s funds. Spork’s younger daughter, Natalie, until her unlikely promotion to president in May 2008 following her father’s departure for Iceland, was Sextant’s marketing assistant. Helen, Spork’s wife, had no title but was always around. The poodle was on the floor. Sextant also hired an amateur bodybuilder named Randy, unrelated to the family, to help with sales. The chief compliance officer, Robert Levack, who later settled with the OSC, attested that in its early days Sextant

engaged in perfectly legitimate trades – mainly in the gold and molybdenum markets – five or six times a week. The firm’s turn toward Icelandic water – and, eventually, toward self-dealing and fraud – happened because Spork frequented a Toronto bar called Little Anthony’s that was popular among the financial set. There he met someone who worked at a company called Icelandia, which was planning to export water running off Iceland’s Snæfellsjökull volcano. Icelandia had an exclusive ninety-five-year water lease with Mayor Kristinn Jónasson and the municipality of Snæfellsbær: \$50,000 a year, twenty-three cents per thousand liters.

“Spork was a dentist,” recalls Bob Heward, a former Icelandia director who now runs a website called sextantcapitalfraud.com. “He didn’t know the first thing about water.” But Spork’s climate report had just come out, and so had *An Inconvenient Truth*. Spork was interested.

Monetizing the melting Snæfell glacier had not been Heward’s idea. The pioneers were David Powley, an American veteran of San Pellegrino and Shasta Beverages, and Birgir Halldórsson, or Biggi, an Icelandic entrepreneur known for introducing prepackaged deli sandwiches to the country’s gas stations. The pair had signed a water contract with Snæfellsbær in the early 1990s, but back then they had planned only for bottling operations, not bulk shipments throughout a warming world – and in any case, their plans never got off the ground.

Icelandia was formed in 2005 by Biggi, Powley, Heward, and a former ExxonMobil logistics manager named Madeline Vinski, Heward’s girlfriend at the time – “a gathering of titans,” according to a press release. Its confidential business plan, shown to potential investors who included a British defense contractor and an American investment bank, envisioned three revenue streams. First would come “super-premium bottled water” branded with

such slogans as “Drink the Glacier” and “Born of Ice.” Next would be “small bulk” sales, in which standard shipping containers would be filled by 20,000-liter plastic bladders. In time would come the third and most lucrative stream, “large bulk”: converted oil tankers as big as 130,000 tons. Because of the target clientele, Heward had a British law firm declare Icelandia sharia-compliant. In the optimistic projections of the business plan, each tankerload sold would net \$1.5 million in profits, and Icelandia would run three tankers more than 300 days a year. Before a single drop was bottled, a U.S. valuation firm declared that Icelandia’s Snæfellsjökull deal was worth \$432,144,520.

Heward was the first Icelandia director to meet with Spork – he remembers distractingly perfect teeth and a sizable gut – and he later introduced him to Biggi and Powley. In late 2006, in a swank restaurant in Zurich, Heward agreed to sell Spork and Sextant \$500,000 worth of Icelandia stock. But the money – much needed to begin construction of pipes and a plant – never appeared. Instead, Spork double-crossed him. Heward claims – and leaked emails appear to confirm – that Spork, Biggi, and Powley successfully colluded to bankrupt Icelandia and drive out Heward and Vinski. By mid-2007, Spork, Biggi, and Powley appeared in Icelandia’s place, signing a strikingly similar water contract with the Major and producing a strikingly similar business plan. Eventually, multiple sources told me, Spork forced Biggi and Powley out too, offering them a payoff in the low millions of dollars – a fraction of what they believed the company was worth. (The pair would not talk to me, citing nondisclosure agreements. “Also, quite frankly, I get nauseated when I think about Spork,” Powley said.)

After the takeover, Sextant issued a triumphant press release:

Sextant Capital Management Inc., led by founder Otto Spork, announces he has gained a position in a Luxembourg based private Water Company,

which has the ability to deliver a hundred gigalitres per year of pure glacier drinking water anywhere in the world.

The moneyed public was invited to get into global-water-crisis profiteering on the ground floor. “Invest in Pure Water with Sextant Capital,” read another release. “Otto Spork, President and founder of Sextant Capital, says: ‘Investing in Sextant Capital Funds today is like buying a 1982 Lafite Rothschild Bordeaux wine in 1985.’” Lafite Rothschild Bordeaux, it explained, was pretty much the best wine ever.

The number of weekly trades at Sextant soon dropped to approximately zero, but the OSC, like so many regulators in those heady times, was nowhere to be seen. Sextant’s funds, successful on paper and prescient in their play on drought, attracted such luminary investors as Baron Philippe Lambert, heir to a Belgian banking fortune, and Bill Linton, the CFO of the Canadian telecom giant Rogers. There is a photograph from this period in which Spork and his wife, Dino Ekonomidis, the Major, and other men in suits are standing on the gravel of the Snæfellsbær construction site. Spork is shaking hands with the man in the middle of the frame – Icelandic president Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, a prominent voice on climate change and one of the few national leaders to survive the *kreppa* – and grinning at the camera with very white teeth.

On our next visit to Mosfellsbær, we parked the Spark on a side street and approached Spork’s house on foot. It was a beautiful Arctic June afternoon, the sun hanging immobile in the sky, and I was hopeful until the moment we rounded the corner: again an empty driveway, again a lifeless house. We went through his recycling bin. Along with an empty carton of tomato juice were two parking stubs dated December 24. Nothing else. I began taking note of what I hadn’t wanted to see before: the unplugged Christmas lights ringing the house, the snow boots near the door,

the festive pinecone near the entryway.

Back in the capital, I called Spork’s onetime fixer, a Rif native turned Reykjavík banker named Sverrir Hermann Pálmarrsson, and asked him to meet me and Damon for coffee. A former employee of both Icelandia and IGP, Sverrir now worked on foreclosures at Iceland’s Landsbanki, one of the three banks that had failed during the *kreppa*. The foreclosure division was booming. “When I started, we were two persons,” he said. “Now we have sixty.”

Sverrir did not know where Spork was, and he said he never wanted to see him again. But he believed that Spork was something more complex than a Ponzi schemer. “Otto could sell the northern lights, he was such a good salesman,” Sverrir said, “but I think he was trying to honestly establish this company. We worked long hours. He worked long hours with us. Maybe Otto was five or six years too early, because I think the price of water is going up.” In fact, Sverrir himself was a consultant on a new water project involving Chinese buyers.

He had heard that the dentist was moving around a lot, that he still had his house and Porsche in Luxembourg.

“Is that his main residence?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I think so,” Sverrir said.

“We thought he was here,” Damon said.

“Too bad for you,” Sverrir said.

Sverrir and another former Spork employee, Guðjón Engilbertsson, had started their own bulk-water venture in the Westman Islands, fifteen or so volcanic lumps off Iceland’s southern coast. Guðjón was friendlier than Sverrir. “I will give you a tour of the Westmans,” he said when I called. We bought ferry tickets.

After the hour-long crossing, Guðjón, who had white hair and blue eyes, picked us up in a new Toyota Land Cruiser. Before entering the water business, he said, he had worked in fisheries. In

the surrounding ocean there lived a small, sardinelike fish, the capelin, whose value was far greater than Icelanders had initially understood. “When the first Japanese came,” Guðjón explained, “they saw all the roe flowing into the waste at the processing plant, and they scooped it up with their hands and ate it like there was no tomorrow!” The roe, known in Japanese as *masago*, is a staple in sushi restaurants. In addition to undertaking the water venture with Sverrir, Guðjón was again helping set up a fish plant, this one in northern Norway. It was a good time to be back in fish; as the ocean warmed, many species were moving north. “Mackerel is totally new,” he said. “It was never here before.”

Guðjón followed a winding road through a lava field covered in purple lupines. He parked at the edge of a precipice. “There is the Eyjafjallajökull glacier,” he said, pointing toward a volcano on the mainland, “and the pipe starts there and comes directly in here and into the city water system.” He traced its undersea route with his finger. It had been upgraded in 2009, he said. The water now came from a reservoir 600 feet up the volcano; gravity and pressure alone brought it to the Westmans – no pumps needed. Except during the two-week peak of the capelin-processing season, the islands had much more water than they could use.

Guðjón, like Sverrir, did not want to talk about the new project, but he talked freely about the past: He got into the water business after answering a help-wanted ad placed by Icelandia, which was seeking an operations manager for its planned bottling plant in Rif. Guðjón, with his fish-plant experience, was a shoo-in. Soon, he said, “Otto came in with a big chunk of money from his funds and things started to roll. We had plans for Suezmax tankers – 130,000 tons.”

At some point after the takeover in Snæfellsbær, Spork began “looking around for more water to export,” and Guðjón realized the Westmans were perfect. “We have a water pipeline,” he said.

“We have a great harbor. We could do it right away, just very simple and easy, just in containers.” He and Sverrir negotiated a water-rights contract with the local utility and entered into what they believed to be an equal partnership with Spork, incorporating a new small-bulk water-export company, Iceland Global Water, or IGW, in Luxembourg. The documents were in French. Guðjón and Sverrir could not read French. They later discovered they had been given shares of nonvoting Class B stock and had been tricked out of their company.

We drove down to the bay, to the water plant Guðjón had helped build for IGW. It was many times smaller than the facility in Rif – two stories, four garage doors – but it was more than an empty shell. Through a window I saw a fire extinguisher on the wall, concrete floors, and what seemed to be industrial-grade plumbing. Though Guðjón drove us there, he was reluctant to be seen hanging around outside. It wasn’t his anymore – it was Spork’s.

Only one Sextant investor was willing to talk to me. Jeremy Charlesworth was CEO of Moonraker, a U.K.-based investment firm, and when I cold-called him in London one afternoon, he was delighted to know that there were other people still stuck on Spork. In 2007, he decided to bet his fund’s funds on water. He landed on Sextant, which was then sending out press releases with such titles as “Water Shock has Sextant Global Water Fund on Fire.” Spork seemed to ignore typical water investments – the utility stocks, the desalination companies, the makers of valves and gaskets – in favor of the thing itself. “Of the seven or eight funds we looked at, he was the only one who actually had water rights,” Charlesworth said. “The rest were plays on utilities” – political plays, really, because governments, not markets, set utility prices. “You can invest in gold shares,” he said, “or you can invest in gold.”

Before Moonraker bet millions on Sextant, it did its due diligence on Spork's career as a dentist, which Spork once explained to *Worth* magazine by saying, "I got caught up in the competition and the prestige of getting into dentistry." Charlesworth hired a private investigator who came back with a glowing report. "We were told that clients came from abroad just to have their dental work done by him," he said. But the investigator either overlooked or downplayed an important fact: that Spork was censured by Ontario's Royal College of Dental Surgeons, the OSC of teeth, at least three times. In 1984, after he charged "excessive or unreasonable" fees and repeatedly neglected to take X-rays, Spork had his license taken away for five months. In 1993, he was found guilty of allowing employees to work without a license and again of charging excessive fees. In 1998, he "recommended and/or provided an unnecessary dental service."

The office Spork ran before launching his hedge-fund career occupied a small strip-mall storefront near a dry cleaner, a Subway, and a Sherwin-Williams in the rundown city of Brantford, Ontario, about an hour east of Toronto. In August 2005, a Romanian immigrant named Marius Beca bought the practice from Spork for \$828,000 and paid Spork a \$100,000 consulting fee. Beca was told it had 1,800 to 2,000 active clients; in fact, it had about 200. He was told that the practice usually acquired thirty to forty new patients a month; in fact, it usually acquired zero new patients a month. He was told that it had accounts receivable totaling about \$40,000; in fact, it had debts totaling \$347,257.50. He was shown hundreds of patient records – but most turned out to belong to another dentist. The practice's sterilizer and other equipment were sold to him broken, and he was saddled with Spork's \$1,334 phone bill. Spork or his wife also gained remote access to the office computer after the sale, whereupon they added a bunch of fake appointments to the

calendar.

Beca sued Spork. In the case file at the Brantford courthouse I found a stack of a hundred returned letters that Beca had sent to nonexistent patients reminding them of nonexistent appointments. Beca's lawyer, Peter Quinlan, told me that they had tried many times to serve Spork with court papers, without success. During one attempt, Spork's lawyer acknowledged being Spork's lawyer – but he denied being his lawyer in this particular matter. When Quinlan finally won a \$600,000 default judgment, a new lawyer showed up to argue that Spork had never been served, and a judge ruled in Spork's favor and threw the previous decision out.

As the OSC began investigating Sextant, Beca and Quinlan tried to secure an injunction to keep Spork's assets from following him out of Canada. A judge denied them one for lack of prima facie evidence; it was one man's word against another's. "The guy skeedaddled on us," Quinlan said, "and eventually Marius gave up chasing the shadow."

In August 2008, on the verge of the global financial crisis, Spork sent his funds' clients an upbeat newsletter: "Even though the broad markets are down and most commodities have been heading for a 50% retrenchment from their recent highs," he wrote, "I am very happy to report to you, the Investors in our Sextant Funds, that you are invested in 'Water'. Congratulations!!!" The letter enumerated the reasons for water's rise as a commodity – climate change, population growth, pollution, urbanization, China – and disparaged desalination as pumping out a product that tasted bad and a byproduct, brine, that was bad for the environment. "This month's return for your Fund is, we believe, only the tip of the iceberg," Spork continued. "Consider adding to your investment before the rest of the world discovers us."

By the summer of 2008, at least one investor, Baron Lambert,

began to think that Sextant's numbers were too good to be true. The baron asked Dino Ekonomidis to explain how the funds could possibly be doing so well. He was ignored. He then asked for his \$7 million investment back, plus any profits. He was again ignored, until late September, when Dino issued an official notice of redemption – only to then claim he lacked the authority to actually release Baron Lambert's money. Like Beca, Lambert filed an injunction in an unsuccessful attempt to get his money back before Spork disappeared.

Other investors were shown letters of intent from three of the thirstiest water utilities on the planet: the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the San Diego County Water Authority, and the Orange County Water District. "Whereas, IGP is the exclusive provider of the pure water derived from the Snow Mountain Glacier in Iceland and delivered in bulk," read the LADWP letter, "and it makes these waters available globally in all packaging sizes; and whereas, Mr. Wally Know is a qualified business entity . . ." The letters looked official, but the LADWP commissioner's real name was Wally Knox. They were forgeries.

In December 2008, Sextant issued a final public statement, with the title "Sextant Categorically Denies Any Wrong Doing and Will Vigorously Defend the Unproven Allegations to Protect Its Investors and Reputation." The OSC uncovered the rest of the story: Investors learned that more than 90 percent of their money was tied up in two Spork-controlled companies, IGP and IGW – a breach of securities laws against self-dealing. Sextant's returns were so high because Spork overstated the value of the underlying companies; IGP's value jumped 984 percent before the pipelines were even in place. Regulators failed to notice. Companies hired to determine the market value of Sextant's funds – Investment Administration Solutions, Spardata, and Hempstead – relied exclusively on numbers provided by Spork himself. BDO

Dunwoody, the Canadian branch of one of the world's biggest accounting firms, used something it called probability-weighted sensitivity analysis to establish what Sextant's investment in IGP was worth – and magically came up with the same number Spork had provided, \$23.3 million. The effect of juicing Sextant's returns was that Spork's own fees – the hedge-fund manager's standard 2 percent of total holdings plus 20 percent of any gains annually – were juiced as well.

But perhaps Spork, rather than being a Madoff-style con man, had simply run short on cash for his water businesses. Eric Sprott thought so: "Maybe he said, 'Well, shit, I'll just say that the value is ten million dollars higher, and I'll pump the two million dollars the fund owes me into the plant.'" Investigators eventually showed that much of the money Spork was paid by Sextant was indeed reinvested in the water ventures. And according to the Major, construction in Rif continued well after the OSC filed charges and Sextant was put into receivership. This supported the argument that Spork, though willing to cut corners, was no Ponzi schemer.

The press releases also continued after the OSC investigation began – only now in the name of IGP.

Iceland Glacier Products: Fresh Drinking Water for Asia Available

Iceland Glacier Products: Fresh Drinking Water for the Middle East

Iceland Glacier Products – A Solution for Water Shortages

As time passed, they seemed increasingly desperate – unedited, ungrammatical. An April 2010 release said:

Water keeps cells hydrated and capable of fighting harmful disease-causing substances . . . IGP's water is unchallenged in its Ancient Purity Unchanged the Crème de la Crème of Waters.

The tone had become pleading.

PLEASE contact us if your community is experiencing a water crisis. It cannot hurt to get a quote. The sooner the better, so fresh drinking water can

be provided for your people as soon as possible.

There was a problem that neither Spork nor any of the other bulk-water schemers readily discussed: water is heavy. A gallon weighs 8.3 pounds, and whether by pump or pipeline or tanker, it is not easily moved. In Reykjavík I met a recent business school graduate who had written his thesis on small-bulk exports. “Everywhere in the world,” he told me, “it is cheaper to do desalination.”

The man who has thought more than almost anyone about how to convey freshwater across oceans of salt water is Terry Spragg, the inventor of the Spragg Bag. He got his start in bulk water in the early 1970s, after a friend mentioned that the RAND Corporation was studying the possibility of towing icebergs to California. Spragg talked his way into a job with Iceberg Transport International Ltd., a company founded by Prince Mohammed bin Faisal Al-Saud. In 1977, the prince flew a small iceberg to Iowa, where chunks of it floated in cocktails at the first international conference investigating their use as a water source. (Presentations included “Laboratory and Field Study of Iceberg Deterioration,” and the succinctly titled “Calving.”) The next year, Spragg got the California State Legislature to endorse iceberg towing. But then he lost faith in the idea: icebergs melt too quickly. Why not tow a giant water-filled bag instead? He began envisioning enormous floating polyester bladders the shape and size of a nuclear submarine connected in fifty-bag trains and deposited one by one in water-bag depots worldwide. But after Spragg’s most successful prototype was towed across Puget Sound to Seattle in 1996, a tugboat ran into it. He had no insurance, and he has been trying to raise money for another test for the past seventeen years. Someone from Spork’s office called him once. He remembers only the name Spork, not the conversation, but it is likely that he told the caller what he told me: From Iceland seems like a very

long way to drag a bag.

The swords-into-plowshares dream of enlisting single-hull oil tankers is no more realistic than a water bag. Old tankers may be inexpensive to buy, but they are very expensive to retrofit. The ships’ holds need to be cleaned, and their pipes, pumps, valves, and washers all need to be replaced. Most are so old that they have only a few years of service left. There is a reason water has yet to be shipped around the world like oil.

For nearly three years, Sextant and its Canadian assets were in receivership; a court order put a senior vice president at PricewaterhouseCoopers, Andrew Wilczynski, in charge. His task was to get as much money as possible back to Sextant’s investors, though the task was complicated by the fact that he billed at \$650 an hour. PwC and its lawyers would eventually take a \$1.7 million cut from Sextant (\$1.85 million if you include the service tax), leaving little more than \$200,000 to return to its 246 Canadian investors – less than a hundredth of what they put in. In the Cayman Islands, Sextant’s offshore funds were overseen by Kenneth Kryz, called “the Controller” in court documents, who had just played a similar role unwinding Madoff’s largest offshore feeder funds. The amount Kryz will return to Sextant’s investors has yet to be determined.

Spork had long ignored the receiver and the controller, once even standing them up at a meeting in his lawyer’s office in Reykjavík. But then there appeared what the court called the “prospective purchaser,” an entity that might buy IGP, its Snæfellsjökull water lease, its pipelines, and its factory: Moonraker, the fund run by Jeremy Charlesworth.

Wilczynski and Kryz had their first phone call with Spork in September 2010, and in January 2011 they met him in the flesh in London. “It was a special moment,” Kryz told me. “I’d almost wondered if he was real.” According to another of the meeting’s

attendees, Spork seemed a man deflated; he was contemplating giving up his dream in Rif. Soon, Wilczynski and Kryś were deflated, too. They learned that Moonraker had decided not to buy IGP. Instead, Charlesworth had persuaded the Major to void IGP's lease, and Moonraker had just signed its own lease – exclusive for sixty-five years – to the water running off Snæfellsjökull. What Spork had taken from Biggi and Powley, and Biggi and Powley and Spork had taken from Heward and Vinski, had now been taken from Spork.

In July 2011, little more than a month after the OSC found Spork guilty and a few weeks after Damon and I returned from Iceland, Spork, Wilczynski, and Kryś finalized their settlement. Their hand was forced; bad publicity from the OSC was eroding any value the water companies still had. From Spork, the receiver and controller got a check for \$1 million – actually two checks, because the first one he sent was invalid – along with all his shares of IGP, which, stripped of its water lease, soon went bankrupt. Spork got to keep his heavily leveraged houses and his two Porsches – and all of IGW in the Westman Islands. A year later, the OSC decided on its sanctions against Spork: trading bans, fines, fees, and a clawback of Sextant bonuses. Spork owed the Canadian government \$7.7 million. But from the safety of Iceland, or wherever he was, he directed his lawyer to appeal the penalty, and the likelihood that the OSC will ever collect from him is small. It appears even less likely that criminal charges against Spork will ever be filed.

I asked Kryś, who had just wrapped up his work on Madoff when I called, whether Spork was an unusual case. “Down here,” he said, “he’s quite normal – normal for the jobs we get. People come up with a great dream, then they get into that dream.” That is, so into their dream that they try to realize it at any cost. The line between visionary and swindler is frightfully thin. In twenty

years in the Caymans, Kryś had seen true Ponzi schemes only half a dozen times. “Spork inflated fees – that was his rip-off,” he said. “But Madoff never invested his money. It just sat in his bank accounts.” Spork spent his money – nearly all of it – and he seemed to still be scheming. “I just don’t think he’s given up the dream of selling Iceland’s water,” Kryś said.

I had failed to get my man, but for a long time I couldn’t let go. I went down to Palm Beach to stare at Spork’s empty condo. I found Dino Ekonomidis’s house in a small town south of Toronto, but he shut the door in my face.

I called Jeremy Charlesworth in London, and he passed along a few Spork stories. “I heard the dog in Canada died,” he said, “so they got themselves another one.” Charlesworth emailed me photos of Moonraker’s new facility in Rif: a bottling plant at first, but bulk would come – that was the dream. He mentioned that Spork had showed up in Iceland just days after Damon and I left. Charlesworth had seen him with his own eyes. “It was in June,” he said. “I went to the coffee shop in Mosfellsbær on my way to Rif – they have great coffee – and there he was.” Charlesworth hadn’t known what to do, so he walked up and said hello. “Otto looked like he’d seen a ghost,” he said.

In the winter, Damon and I reunited to make a pseudonymous offer for the Web domain sporkwildlifefund.com. Spork ignored it. We left messages for him, his wife, and Dino Ekonomidis at various email addresses and numbers. They went unanswered. We attempted to reach almost a hundred Canadian former Spork associates and Sextant investors. Nearly all declined to talk. We finally decided to go through Spork’s lawyer, who would not speak on the record but promised to forward his client an email from us. The response came a few days later from Helen Spork, who had apparently copied Damon and me by mistake:

Hi Jay.

This is the em from Damion I never acknowledged. Talks about people he spoke to while in Iceland.

Sent from my iPhone

It was the first time I knew for sure that the Sporks knew about me, knew about Damon, knew we wanted to hear the real story from them – and didn't care.

Eventually, I simply became like Canada and its regulators: Spork outlasted me. I couldn't keep up the hunt.

Late one night, a few weeks after we received Helen Spork's email, I decided to check in on iglobalwater.com one more time. For many years it had been dark, but now it was back. Spork was back. "Let it SNO!" proclaimed a banner, and little snowflakes cascaded down the screen. The site advertised Icelandic water for export straight from the legendary slopes of Eyjafjallajökull and invited visitors to stop by the Iceland Global Water booth at the upcoming Food & Drink Expo in Birmingham, England. SNO bottled water was already being sold at the U.K. supermarket chain Tesco, the second-largest retailer in the world. IGW had a new slogan: "We challenge you to taste water for the first time."

For now it's just bottles – stage one of Spork's plagiarized business plan – but iglobalwater.com and a newer companion site, iglacierwonders.com, advertise bulk sales too: "Now you can have pure luxury, pristine glacier water delivered in bulk directly to [your] home estate, condo, hotel, villa, yacht or any location you choose." According to recent press releases, SNO has a high oxygen content of 13.3 mg/L, a perfect pH level of 7.4, and a nitrate concentration of zero – "making it suitable even for infants." SNO is supposedly coming to America in 2013. It may already be here.

It was too late for me to get to the Food & Drink Expo in time, but Charlesworth was there. Spork's booth was adjacent to that of the baked-goods retailer Honeybuns. It was staffed by his

new Icelandic fixer, a man named Pétur Júlíusson, and by two blonde models who handed out free samples. Southern England was experiencing a severe drought at the time – "I could get fined a thousand pounds for running my garden hose!" Charlesworth told me – and Thames Water, the utility serving Greater London, would soon put out a request for proposals for bulk-water imports. Spork's booth was wildly popular. His blondes ran through their samples. Charlesworth stopped by three times. "His water," he admitted, "was the best water at the show." ♦



Side by...

Boswell's Grand Tour

by *Robert Zaretsky*

COME SUMMER, EUROPE buckles under the annual migration of students now roosting at their universities. According to the Institute of International Education, more than a hundred and forty thousand students participated in this vast movement in 2009. We might take a moment to reflect on the history of this phenomenon. The struggle between language lessons and café crawling, old ruins and youthful desires, the road of high culture and back alleys of low culture is hardly new. Ever since Augustine, who feverishly made his way to Rome, torn between intellectual and carnal pleasures, Europe has been the great stage to such journeys.

This itinerary's modern iteration was created two hundred and fifty years ago when young Brits began to launch themselves across the Channel for extended periods of study. These youths wound their way across France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy, making dutiful visits to museums, galleries, natural and architectural wonders, as well as taking tutorials devoted to geography and history. What came to be known as the Grand Tour soon became a rite of passage for the sons of aristocratic, and increasingly, middle-class British families. Though no statistics exist, observers spoke of 'swarms' of British tourists milling about the continent. More jaundiced viewers spoke of a veritable plague. As the British envoy in Dresden complained: 'I have within this month had an inundation of English who have nearly eaten me

...by side

James Boswell jutalomútja

fordította *Tárnok Attila*

HA ELÉRKEZIK A NYÁR, Európa hétrét görnyed az egyetemisták évenkénti népvándorlása alatt. A Nemzetközi Oktatásügyi Intézet adatai szerint 2009-ben több mint 240 ezer diák ragadott vándorbotot, ezért talán nem hiábavaló áttekintenünk e kulturális sajátosság történetét, hisz a nyelvórák és a kávéházak, az ősrégi műemlékek és az ifjú vágyak, a magas kultúra sugárútjai és a síkátorok mélykultúrája közti ingadozás egyáltalán nem újkeletű. Szent Ágoston óta, aki szellemi és testi örömök közt tépelődve, lázasan tette meg az utat Rómáig, Európa a hasonló utazások nagyszerű színpada.

Ágoston útjának újkori újjászületése úgy kétszázötven évvel ezelőttre tehető, amikor a brit fiatalok kezdtek átitorlázni a La Manche-csatornán, hogy tanulmányi idejüket a kontinensen meghosszabbítsák. Keresztül-kasul bebarangolták Franciaországot, Svájcot, Németországot és Olaszországot; kötelességtudóan végiglátogatták a múzeumokat, a művészeti gallériákat, a természeti és az épített környezet csodáit, és mindeközben földrajz- és történelem- szemináriumokat hallgattak. Az évek során Grand Tour néven elhíresült utazás idővel minden előkelő családba született fiatalember beavatási szertartása lett, sőt később egyre több középosztálybeli ifjúé is. Jóllehet pontos számadatok nem állnak rendelkezésünkre, megfigyelők szerint a brit turisták állítólag „előzönlöttek” a kontinenst. Az epésebbek valóságos járványról beszéltek. A

out of house and home.’

The justifications for the Tour then were as grand and wobbly as they are today. Travel, advocates insisted, deepened the student’s understanding of the world, widened his acquaintance with other peoples, and polished his character. William Bennet, an Anglican bishop, insisted that travellers ‘always buy experience which no books can give’, while Peter Beckford, a typical traveller, claimed that travelling ‘improves and enlarges the understanding’.

Sceptics countered that the only thing improved was the bank accounts of foreigners, and the sole thing enlarged was the livers of dissolute British youths. Echoing the doubts of many parents today, Edward Mellish’s father told his son: ‘I do not apprehend real advantages from seeing fine paintings and buildings can yet be of any real advantage to you.’ Travelling, he warned, might well improve other qualifications, but never ‘the most essential, which is solid good Judgement’.

Lord Auchinleck, the father of James Boswell, shared these doubts. Indeed, his scepticism had only deepened ever since the day his son, at the tender age of sixteen, clambered with a friend to the top of Arthur’s Seat, the mossy bluff that looms over Edinburgh, and shouted to the skies: ‘Voltaire, Rousseau: Immortal Names!’ and pledged that they would go to Europe to meet these great thinkers. ‘There’s nae hope for Jamie, mon’, Auchinleck periodically burst out to friends about his wayward son; ‘Jamie is gane clean gyte.’

Young Boswell may well have been delirious but he was also determined to do the Grand Tour. A practical man, Auchinleck had no illusions about the value of travelling: ‘There is no end nor use of strolling through the world,’ he wrote to his son, ‘to see sights before unseen, whether of man, beasts, birds, or things.’ When his son proved deaf to this particular nugget of

drezdai brit küldött így panaszkodott: „Az elmúlt hónapban elárasztottak az angol látogatók, kis híján kiettek a vagyonomból.”

Az érvek a Nagy Út mellett éppolyan grandiózusak ám egyúttal ingatagok voltak, mint manapság. Az utazás, hangzott a támogatók véleménye, elmélyíti a diákok világlátását, megismerteti őket más népekkel és csiszolja a személyiségüket. William Bennet anglikán püspök szerint az utazó „olyan élményhez jut, amit könyvekből soha nem szerezhetne meg”, egy tipikus utazó, Peter Beckford pedig így vall: az út „fejleszti és tágítja az értelmet.”

A szkeptikusok erre azt felelték, hogy a családok külföldi bankszámláján kezelt pénzüsszegek zsugorodnak, csupán a kicsapongó brit fiatalok mája növekszik. Sok mai szülő kételkedését halljuk ki Edward Mellish fiához intézett szavaiból: „Fel nem foghatom, miként válhat a javadra, ha mégoly kiváló festményeket és épületeket bámulsz is meg.” Az utazás valóban fejleszthet bizonyos képességeket, figyelmeztetett, de soha „nem a legfontosabbat: a helyes értékítéletet.”

Lord Auchinleck, James Boswell apja osztozott e kételyekben. Rosszallása csak nőttön-nőtt miután fia egy ízben, tizenhat évesen felkapaszkodott az Edinburgh mellett égnek meredő, Artúr Széke elnevezésű, mohaborította hegyfokra és elkiáltotta magát az ég felé: „Voltaire, Rousseau! Halhatatlanok!” Azzal megfogadta, hogy áthajózik Európába és felkeresi a két filozófust. „Kedvesem, Jamie reménytelen eset – fakadt ki az apa időnként, ha nyakas fia került szóba. – Jamie teljesen meghibbant” – mondta a barátainak.

A fiatal Boswell csakugyan megittasult lehetett, de elhatározása, hogy megteszi a Nagy Utat, szilárdnak bizonyult. Auchinlecknek, gyakorlati emberként, nem voltak illúziói az utazás értékeit illetően: „Se haszna, se értelme bejárni a világot

wisdom, Auchinleck threw another one, harder and faster: 'In general, I must tell you that travelling is a very useless thing.'

Young Boswell still would not listen. As a result, Auchinleck cut a deal:

if Jamie spent a year in Holland to swot law texts in preparation for his career as a lawyer – Scotland's legal system, like that of the Netherlands, was based on Roman jurisprudence – Auchinleck would grant his son permission to travel. In the summer of 1764, after a year of study in Utrecht, Bozzy eagerly clambered into the carriage of a family friend (George Keith, the tenth Earl Marischal – a flinty Jacobite who was a diplomat in the court of Frederick the Great) to start an adventure that would last more than a year. The young Scot could scarcely contain his excitement and imagination. When the carriage reached an inn in Hanover and Boswell lay down to sleep he confided to his journal that he was filled 'with much contentment and much health'. That his bed was a pile of straw in the stables, with 'on one side of me eight or ten horses, on the other four or five cows' and 'an immense mastiff chained pretty near the head of my bed [who] growled most horribly' hardly dampened his spirits. A crust of bread quieted the beast, while the sight of a star-strewn sky fed Boswell's fancy: here, he jauntily told himself, 'the great Boswell lay'.

The odd blend of rustic lodgings and cultivated company was not unusual:

such contrasts were a constant of the Grand Tour. Indeed, given the frequently noisome and nasty nature of inns, where fleas and filth were as frequent as strange bed companions and surly employees, stables often made for a welcome alternative – even when, as in Brunswick, Boswell was nearly trampled to death. Nor were the ups and downs, both literal and figurative, to Boswell's experiences on the road all that different from other

csak azért, – írta fiának – hogy olyan dolgokat lássunk, akár emberi, akár állati vagy tárgyi vonatkozású, amiket korábban nem láthattunk.” Mivel fia süketnek bizonyult a bölcs intelmek iránt, Auchinleck még egyszer megismételte, ezúttal egyértelműbben: „Általánosságban hadd áruljam el neked, hogy az utazás, úgy ahogy van, teljességgel haszontalan.”

De az ifjú Boswell hajthatatlan maradt. Auchinleck ezért alkut ajánlott: ha Jamie egy évig Hollandiában magolja a jogtudományt, megalapozandó későbbi hivatását, hisz Skócia jogrendje csakúgy, mint Hollandiáé a római jogon alapult, Auchinleck engedélyezi fiának, hogy utazgathasson. Így történt, hogy 1764 nyarán, egy évi utrechti tanulmányok után, Bozzy kalandra szomjasan helyezkedett el a család egyik barátjának, George Keithnek, Skócia tizedik Lord-marshalljának hintójában (a gróf kőkemény Jakab-pártiként Nagy Frigyes, porosz király udvarában szolgált mint diplomata), hogy megkezdje európai barangolását, ami végül több mint egy évig tartott. A skót fiú alig tudta magába fojtani izgalmit. Amikor este a kocsi megállt egy hannoveri fogadónál, Boswell a naplójában rögzítette érzéseit: „csupa egészség és elégedettség vagyok.” Az sem lombozta le, hogy az ágya csupán egy halom széna az istállóban, „az egyik oldalon nyolc-tíz ló, a másikon négy-öt tehén, és egy hatalmas véreb szörnyűségesen viczorog a fejemtől nem messze, láncra kötve.” Egy darabka kenyér lecsendesítette a fenevadat, és a csillagos ég táplálta Boswell képzeletét: „itt pihent meg a nagy Boswell” – jegyezte fel vidám jókedvvel.

A rusztikus szállás és a csiszolt társaság keveréke nem volt különlegesség, a Nagy Út állandó velejárója mindkettő. A fogadók gyakran zajos, kellemetlen légköre, a bolha, a piszok, az elviselhetetlen lakótársak és a barátságtalan alkalmazottak helyett sokan részesítették előnyben az istállót, még akkor is, ha – ahogy ez Boswellel is megesett Brunswickban – az embert kis híján

British tourists. Boswell devoted too much of his time and his father's money to finding coaches or wagons, many of which were little more than flatbeds driven by undependable postilions.

There was, also, the biting cold that pierced Boswell's great-coat when he travelled in these 'Postwaggons' during the winter. On his way to Dresden, Bozzy spent an entire night on one of these contraptions and barely survived to tell the tale. 'I awaked much out of order. My blood was quite stagnated, and my teeth were loose. I was alarmed.' When the wagon finally came to a halt, Bozzy leapt off, his teeth still chattering and 'danced with much vigour, which by degrees brought me to my self'. It was a self, moreover, reluctant to change clothes, much less bathe, in such rough conditions. Bozzy described his German stint as 'campaigning', exulting that he had 'not been undrest for ten days'.

At least the wintry blasts also froze solid the muck and mud, and evened the ruts and holes that afflicted Europe's roads. The night Boswell spent in a 'dreadful rain' in Germany after his wagon broke its axle in a great pothole and nearly overturned often made, he noted, for 'sad travelling'. Despite the network left by Rome's imperial engineers, travelling in Italy was not much better. In the north of Italy, a steady rain turned roads into sloughs, while the farther south Boswell wandered, the more fictitious the time schedules – and, for that matter, the roads – became.

Yet none of this dampened the Scot's spirits, who was no more immune than his contemporaries to Italy's romantic pull. The sons of British gentry who clamoured to visit Italy for its artistic and literary sites were the precursors to American youths in the 1970s who wished to subscribe to *Playboy* in order to read John Updike's fiction. Sexual adventure was no doubt Italy's greatest attraction for young British travellers. Yet, as the histo-

agyontaposták a lovak. A Boswellnek is kijáró szerencse és balszerencse ugyancsak végigkísérte minden fiatal brit utazó útját. Jamie idejének és apja pénzének jó részét hintók és fogatok bérlésére költötte, melyek némelyike egyszerű, oldalváz nélküli, megbízhatatlan lovászfíú által hajtott kordé volt csupán.

Egy téli utazás az efféle 'postakocsin' alaposan próbára tehetette Boswell türelmét. Útban Drezda felé az egész éjszakát egy ilyen tákolmányon töltötte, és épphogy életben maradt. Így mesél: „Amikor felébredtem, nem éreztem jól magam. A vérkeringésem szinte leállt, a fogaim meglazultak. Megijedtem.” Végre valahára megállt a kocsi, Boswell leugrott, a fogai még mindig vacogtak, és, mint mondja, „szilaj táncra perdültem, amitől lassanként visszatért belém az élet.” Mindazonáltal ilyen irgalmatlan körülmények között vonakodott ruhát cserélni, mosakodni még inkább. A németországi szakaszt „hadjáratként” írja le, és leginkább azon örvendezik, hogy „tíz napig egyszer sem kellett levetni a köpenyét.”

De a téli csípős szél legalább a sarat és a ganéjt is keményre fagyasztotta, aminek következtében a kátyúktól és gödröktől hemzsegó európai utak kissé járhatóbbá váltak. Az egyik németországi éjszakán könnyörtelen esőben kellett virasszon, miután a keréktengely egy kátyúba zökkenve eltört, és a kocsi kis híján felborult; az ilyen esetek okán jegyzi fel, „kellemetlen az út”. A Római Birodalom mérnökei által tervezett úthálózat ellenére, az olaszországi utazás sem volt sokkal előnyösebb. Itália északi részén az állandó esők az utakat kivájták, míg délebbre az időbeosztás, sőt maguk az utak váltak kiszámíthatatlanná.

De a skót fiatalembernek mindez nem szegte kedvét: éppúgy megfertőzte őt a vonzalom Itália iránt, mint a kortársait. A brit köznemesség gyermekei úgy fedezték fel maguknak az olasz művészeti és irodalmi remekeket, ahogy kései amerikai utódaik

rian Jeremy Black notes, the ‘vast majority of the journals that have been preserved relate to blameless or apparently blameless tourists’. Boswell’s journal, however, makes for a dramatic exception: the pages that span his Italian interlude abound not just with his many pursuits of aristocratic women, but his repeated bouts of whoring. By the time he reached Rome he swore he would have a woman every day – an ideal that, for Boswell, was easily reached. As for his vows to change his ways – ‘Night, new girl. Swear no women for a week’ – they were as redundant as they were risible. His repeated efforts to follow the straight and narrow only succeeded when he contracted venereal disease and paused from his predations to take a mercury cure.

On the subject of the Grand Tour, Samuel Johnson grew simply splenetic. In one of his Idler essays, he declared that most travellers have nothing to tell because ‘their method of travelling supplies them with nothing to be told’. Lumbering into one town or city at dusk, racing to a cathedral or ruin the following morning, then clambering back into their carriages for the next stop on their itinerary. And, yet, this kind of traveller insisted on writing about his experiences! ‘Let him,’ Johnson growled, ‘be contented to please himself without endeavouring to disturb others.’

Yet Johnson sensed Boswell would not be part of this benighted herd. Just months after they first met in 1763, when Boswell was still stunned by the ‘association of so enormous a genius with one so slender’, Johnson urged his young friend to travel to the Continent: ‘I think your breaking off idle connections by going abroad is a matter of importance. I would go where there are courts and learned men.’ While travelling, Johnson continued, Boswell must ‘read diligently the great book of mankind’. In a word, Johnson dismissed the attractions of landscapes and ruins, galleries and museums. Instead, as Johnson told Boswell, go abroad to visit great minds.

fizettek elő a *Playboyra* az 1970-es években, hogy John Updike szövegeit olvashassák. Az érzéki örömök kalandja, semmi kétség, Itália legnagyobb vonzereje lehetett a brit fiatalok számára. Ám miként a történész, Jeremy Black rámutat, „a fennmaradt naplók java részben feddhetetlen vagy legalábbis feddhetetlennek tetsző brit utazókról mesélnek.” Boswell naplója azonban alapvetően különbözik a többiekétől: az olasz utat leíró részek hemzsegek az előkelő hölgyek és, ismétlődően, a prostituáltak kegyeit kereső író élményeitől. Fogadalmat tett, hogy Rómáig minden nap nővel alszik; ezt könnyedén meg is valósította. Az ellenkező irányú célkitűzés azonban – „újabb éjszaka, újabb nő; ígérem, egy hétig rájuk se nézek” – éppoly megmosolyogtató, mint amennyire hiábavaló volt. Ismételt erőfeszítései, hogy az egyenes utat kövesse, csak akkor bizonyultak sikeresnek, amikor nemi betegséget kapott, és a ragadozó életmód helyett higanykúrára szorult.

Ha a Nagy Út témája felvetődött, Samuel Johnson egyenesen ingerlékennyé vált. Egyik esszéjében kijelenti, hogy a legtöbb utazónak azért nincs mit mesélnie, mert „az utazási módszerük nem biztosít számukra mondanivalót.” Estére elküszködik magukat egy városig, másnap reggel villámgyorsan vetnek egy pillantást a katedrálisra vagy egy romra, és már ugranak is vissza a hintóba, hogy a következő célvárosig utazzanak. Ugyannakkor valamiképpen ez a fajta utazó mindig szeret írni az élményeiről. „Tegye – szörnyülködik Johnson. – Csak elégedjen meg annyival, hogy magát bosszantja, és hagyjon mindenki másnak békét.”

Ám Johnson úgy érezte, hogy Boswell nem ehhez a szellemi sötétségben élő falkához tartozik. Csupán néhány hónappal azután, hogy 1763-ban először találkoztak, amikor Boswell még meg volt győződve róla, hogy „kettejük ismeretsége egy hatalmas zseni és egy ostoba tökfilkó találkozása”, Johnson arra

Johnson's pitch deeply appealed to his young friend. Keeping his journal, Boswell wrote, was like tracing the history of his own mind. His ambition differed from most of his fellow travellers, who simply retraced the routes already blazed by others. Paul Fussell has written about the impact of Lockean psychology on eighteenth-century tourism: if knowledge was, in fact, the fruit of external sensations, the bigger the harvest, the better. And, of course, it was important to share these harvests of firsthand impressions for the benefit of those who did not travel; hence the proliferation of journals, correspondence and travel accounts in Georgian England.

Boswell certainly shared this conceit. When still on the German leg of his tour he excitedly jotted in his journal one night an idea he had had earlier that day: 'I considered that mankind are sent into the world to gather ideas like flowers. Those who take them from Books have them at second-hand as flowers from a stall at Covent Garden.' Yet, while Boswell may have been Locke's grandchild, he was more importantly the child of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was as if he took Locke's imperative and turned it inward: his task was not so much to gather impressions of the world as his responses to those impressions. When he crossed over the Alps he saw them through the eyes of Rousseau: a sublime screen on which to project his emotions and thoughts. If Mallory climbed Everest because it was there, Boswell crossed the Alps because he was there – there to receive its massive impression, there to translate the experience through his own senses and sensibility.

Historians like Alain Corbin have made much hay of modern 'discoveries' of geographical places that had always been under our collective noses. Mountains or coasts, wilderness or oceans, Corbin argues, surged into the consciousness of a growing middle class that had the time and means to read about and travel to

biztatta fiatal barátját, hogy utazzon el a Európába: „Fontosnak vélem, hogy külföldre kerülj. Hogy a léha kapcsolataidtól megszabadulj. A helyedben királyi udvarokat látogatnék és tanult emberek társaságát keresném.” Útja során, folytatta Johnson, Boswell „szorgalmasan olvassza az emberiség nagy könyvét.” Más szóval, elvetette a gyönyörűséges táj, a műemlékek, a gallériák és múzeumok látogatását. Ehelyett, javasolta, Boswell külföldön a kimagasló gondolkodókat keresse fel.

Johnson tanácsa mélyen megérintette fiatal barátját. A naplővezetés, írta Boswell, saját szellemi fejlődésének nyomon követése. Utazásának célja eltért a kortársakétól, akik egyszerűen felkeresték a korábban már mások által felfedezett úticélokot. Paul Fussell a lélekbúvár Locke a század utazási szokásaira tett hatását boncolgatja: ha az ismeretszerzés valóban a külső érzékelés gyümölcse, akkor annál jobb, minél gazdagabb a termés. Természetesen az is fontos, hogy ezeket a közvetlen benyomásokat megosszuk azokkal, akik nem élvezik az utazás előnyeit; innen eredeztethető a György-kori Anglia naplóinak, levelezésének és úti beszámolóinak tömeges megjelenése.

Boswell nyilván magáévá tette ezt az álláspontot. Egy éjjel, még a német útszakasz során, izgalommal rögzíti naplójában aznapi meglátását: „Úgy vélem, az emberiség célja a világban, hogy összegyűjtse a gondolatokat mint egy csokor virágot. Azok, akik ezt Könyvekből szerzik be, másodkézből jutnak hozzá, úgy, mintha a Covent Garden-i virágárusnál vásárolnának.” Es jöllehet felfoghatjuk Boswellt mint Locke örökösét, fontosabb, hogy közvetlen elődje Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Úgy tűnik, mintha kifordítaná Locke felszólítását: fő feladatának nem annyira a külvilágban szerzett benyomások összegzését tekinti, sokkal inkább azt, hogy saját véleményét formálja e benyomásokról. Az Alpokon átkelve mindezt Rousseau szemével látta már: egy fenséges hátteret látott, amire saját érzelmeit és gondolatait

these places. In Bozzy's case, though, the geography was internal: like Peter Pan chasing his shadow, he barrelled across Europe in search of his own self. Or, more accurately, he was in search of truths to which he could hitch his self. He was far less interested in seeing what he called 'inanimate subject matter' than pursuing and conversing with the animate sort.

If his peers were the distant ancestors of today's backpackers, garbed in Patagonia's bright colours and a copy of Europe on \$100 a Day in hand, Bozzy was a traveller apart, the precursor to our own post-war and pre-Woodstock dharma bums. He inhabited the Enlightenment yet was never entirely at home with it. The Scot was marked, on the one hand, by his era's belief in the power of reason and scorn for superstition. Yet, on the other hand, truth was bound to have a religious slant for a young man raised in the dreary and dreadful tradition of the Church of Scotland.

Boswell's dilemma was his inability to reconcile the truths of his era with the deepest needs of his soul. A rational worldview may well be liberating but did little to ease Boswell's fears concerning death. No matter where his travels took him, Boswell never escaped his Calvinist past; obsessed with the fate of his soul, he was equally tormented by his future. The metaphors used by his enlightened contemporaries were worse than useless: 'If my mind is a collection of springs, these springs are all unhinged, and the Machine is all destroyed; or if my mind is a waxen table, the wax is melted by the furnace of sorrow, and all my ideas and principles are dissolved. Good GOD, what horrid chimeras!'

One of the Enlightenment's severest critics, Thomas Carlyle, dismissed the era as the 'Sceptical Century; in which little word there is a whole Pandora's Box of miseries. Scepticism means not intellectual Doubt alone, but moral doubt; all sorts of infidelity, insincerity, spiritual paralysis'. Boswell would certainly have

kivetítheti. Mallory azért mászta meg a Himaláját, mert ott volt, és hogy befogadja a rettentő élményt; Boswell Rousseu miatt kelt át az Alpokon, és arra törekedett, hogy saját érzékenységgel értelmezze az élményt.

Némely történész, többek között Alain Corbin, ízzé-porrá zúzza az érvelést, miszerint az időtlen idők óta körülöttünk elterülő földrajzi táj az újabb korok 'felfedezésére' várna. Érvelése szerint az óceánok, tengerpartok, hegyek és vadregényes vidékek csupán azért kerültek a középosztály látóterébe, mert az embereknek hirtelen kedvük támadt olvasni és meglátogatni ezeket a helyeket. Boswell esetében azonban, a földrajzi érdeklődés belső indíttatásból fakadt; miként Pán Péter a saját árnyékát, úgy kergette Boswell Európa-szerzte a saját személyiségét. Pontosabban, olyan igazságokat keresett, amelyekhez kötődni tudott. Sokkal kevésbé érdekelték – az ő kifejezésével élve – „az élettelen tárgyak”, mint a párbeszéd az élőkkel.

Ha a kortásai a mai, élénk patagóniai színekben pompázó, európai útikönyvvel felszerelkezett, hátizsákos turisták korai elődei, akkor Boswell a kiránduló különc, a háború utáni, de Woodstock előtti dharma-csavargók egykori őse. A felvilágosodás szülte, de soha nem érezte otthon magát a korban. Megjelölte a racionalizmusba vetett hit és minden babonát elutasított, ám egy olyan fiatalember számára, aki szigorú presbiteriánus értékek mentén nevelkedett, az igazság óhatatlanul vallásos színezetet kapott.

Boswell legnagyobb problémája éppen az, hogy képtelen összebékíteni a korszak igazságai és saját lelkének belső szükségletei között húzódó különbségeket. Bármennyire felszabadító legyen is a racionalista világlátás, alig oszthatja el a Boswellbe ivódott halálfélelmet. Bármerre vitte is az út, kálvinista múltjától soha nem szabadult, folyamatosan

agreed with Carlyle's observation that spiritual paralysis – what Bozzy called hypochondria and we call depression – came from intellectual malaise, and not, as we tend to believe, the reverse. When afflicted by this 'foul fiend', he wrote, 'all the doubts which have ever disturbed thinking men come upon me. I awake at night dreading annihilation, or being thrown into some horrible state of being'.

Boswell's travel journals teem with his recurrent bouts of doubt and qualms about religious truths, and his anguish and horror over the possibility they did not exist. As he was preparing to leave for Holland, the first step on his tour, Boswell was already steeling himself: 'Never despair. Remember Johnson's precepts on experience of mankind. Consider there is truth.' More than two years later, during his climactic meeting in Corsica with the revolutionary leader Pasquale Paoli, Boswell could not help but confide to his host how much he 'had suffered from anxious speculations'.

Sandwiched between these two moments are countless others when Bozzy is either interrogating himself or others about the ultimate disposition of his soul. There are dozens of walk-ons in this ongoing drama. There is the German chemist, Andreas Margrave, who, in the midst of a thunderstorm, bellowed: 'I love to see my God in flames!' Or there was the British political exile, John Wilkes, with whom Boswell toured in Italy. When he queried Wilkes about the sticky issues of fate and free will, the older man burst out: 'Let 'em alone!' If that didn't work, Wilkes continued, 'dissipation and profligacy' would do the trick.

The two men most qualified to answer Boswell's questions and end his torment, however, were the same men whose names he shouted from the top of Arthur's Seat: Voltaire and Rousseau. The alpha and omega of the Enlightenment, these thinkers held radically opposed appreciations of the roles played by human rea-

foglalkoztatta a lelki üdvösség, és rettegte a jövőt. A felvilágosult kortársak által hangoztatott metaforák teljességgel haszontalanok voltak számára: „Ha agyunkban rugók dolgoznak, akkor ezek a rugók teljesen szabadon állnak és tönkreteszik a Gépezet működését. Illetve ha az agy nem lenne más, mint egy viasszal bevont asztal, akkor a viaszt a szomorúság kohója már rég felolvasztotta volna, és minden elvem, gondolatom semmivé válna. Édes jó Istenem, micsoda örült kitalációk ezek!”

A felvilágosodás egyik legszigorúbb kritikusa, Thomas Carlyle a kort skeptikus évszázadnak nevezi. „Ebben az aprócska szóban nyugszik Pandora szelencéjének minden nyomorúsága. A szkepticizmus nem pusztán az értelem kételyeit jelöli, de erkölcsi kételyt és mindenféle hűtlenséget, őszintétlenséget, szellemi paralizist egyaránt.” Boswell minden bizonnyal egyetértett volna Carlyle megállapításával, hisz ez a szellemi paralízis, amit ő maga hipochondriának, mi depresszióknak hívnánk, elsősorban az értelem betegsége és nem megfordítva, bár néha hajlamosak vagyunk az ellenkezőjét feltételezni. Ha látogatást tesz nála „a gonosz démon – írja –, az emberiséget valaha foglalkoztató összes kétely rám telepszik. Éjszaka a megsemmisülés rettenete vagy valami szörnyű elváltozás képzelete riaszt fel álmomból.”

Boswell útinaplója hemzseg a visszatérő kételyek és a vallási igazságokat érintő lelkiismereti aggályok felsorolásától; riadtan gyötrődik annak lehetőségétől, hogy ezek az igazságok esetleg nem is léteznek. Már a hollandiai indulás előtt, az út legelső lépéseként igyekszik erősíteni magát: „Soha el ne keseredj! Emlékeztess magad Johnson tanácsára az emberiséget illetően! Indulj ki abból, hogy van igazság!” Több mint két évvel később, a forradalmár vezetővel, Pasquale Paolival történt korzikai találkozása során kénytelen megosztani házigazdájával, mennyire „szenvet az aggasztó képzetektől.”

A két feljegyzés közt eltelt időben számtalanszor faggatja

son and divine will in our world. For Voltaire, reason was the weapon with which humankind would vanquish what he called 'the infamous thing', or superstition; for Rousseau, reason was the wrecking ball with which we had demolished our original relationship with the world and our own selves. (That these two towering figures also utterly despised one another played no small role in their philosophical differences.)

For Bozzy, the Grand Tour would be truly 'grand' only if he met and conversed with Voltaire and Rousseau. Not only were their names 'immortal', but they also held the key to the Scot's fears concerning his own immortality. In December 1764 Boswell made the long trek on horseback to Môtiers, the snow-bound hamlet in the Swiss Jura where Rousseau had taken refuge from both French and Genevan authorities two years earlier. Boswell came armed not just with a dashing red waistcoat edged with gold lace and green greatcoat, but also with his good natured obstinacy and a long list of questions, many of which revolved around faith and melancholy.

Upon arriving in Môtiers Boswell settled in the local inn and drafted an introductory letter to the reclusive Rousseau. He opens with his melancholic disposition ('a family trait,' he explains), turns to his gloomy upbringing ('the eternity of punishment was the first great idea I ever formed,' he avers) and, several pages later, concludes with an ardent plea: 'O charitable philosopher, I beg you to help me ... Kindle [my] soul and the sacred fire shall never be extinguished.' Clearly, this was a request Rousseau could not refuse: he invited Boswell to make a short visit. Yet no sooner had he made his way into Rousseau's cottage than Bozzy, in his Scottish-tinged French, demanded to know if his host was a Christian. Garbed in a flowing Armenian tunic he had lately taken to, Rousseau dramatically struck his breast: Indeed he was!

Boswell then went to the heart of the matter: Would a virtuous

önmagát vagy másokat alapvető lelki hajlamait illetően. Rengeteg mellékszereplő tűnik fel ebben a végtelenített színdarabban. Ott van a német gyógyszerész, Andreas Margrave, aki egyszer zivatarban így kiált fel: „Szeretem a lángoló Istent!” Vagy a brit politikai száműzött, John Wilkes, akivel Boswell Itália vidékeit járta. Egyszer, amikor az idősebb férfit a sors és a szabad akarat sikamlós kérdéseiről faggatta, Wilkes kifakadt: „Ne foglalkozz velük!” És ha ennyi nem elég, még hozzátette, „a tékozlás és a kicsapongás” mindenre választ ad.

Leginkább az a két gondolkodó lehetett alkalmas rá, hogy Boswell kérdéseit megválaszolja és véget vessen szenvedéseinek, akiknek neveit egykor a fiatalember az Artúr Széke-csúcsról a felhőkbe kiáltotta: Voltaire és Rousseau. A felvilágosodás alfája és omegája: a két filozófus radikálisan eltérő véleményt alkotott az emberi értelem és az isteni akarat világra gyakorolt hatásáról. Voltaire számára az értelem volt az a fegyver, amellyel az emberiség leigázhatja a babona „gyalázatát”, míg Rousseau számára az értelem pöröly volt, amivel megsemmisítjük a világhoz és saját lelkünkhöz bennünket fűző eredeti viszonyt. (Nem kevés szerepe volt a filozófiai nézetkülönbségek alakulásában annak a ténynek, hogy e két kivételes személyiség egyenesen megvetést érzett egymás iránt.)

Boswell számára a Nagy Út csak úgy grandiózus és valóban 'Grand Tour', ha találkozhat és beszélhet Voltaire-rel és Rousseau-val. Nem csupán azért, mert a két filozófust halhatatlannak hitte, de azért is, mert ők voltak a kulcs saját halhatatlanságának kétségeit illetően. 1764 decemberében Boswell hosszú utat tett meg lóháton Môtiers-be, a svájci Alpokban fekvő, behavazott városkába, ahova Rousseau a francia és a genfi hatóságok elől menekült két évvel korábban. Boswell aranyszegélyű, rikító piros selyemmellényt és zöld köpenyt viselt; megátalkodott konokságával hosszú kérdéssort

man, he asked the creator of the Savoyard vicar, be rewarded in his afterlife? ‘We cannot doubt we are spiritual beings,’ Rousseau replied. The souls of good men, he explained, ‘will enjoy the contemplation of happy souls, nobly employed.’ After the two men rattled through several other subjects as they paced up and down the floor in Rousseau’s room, Boswell inevitably returned to his favourite subject: James Boswell. He asked Rousseau to be his confessor – a request the ailing philosopher turned down. He knew his man too well and was clearly relieved to see him off a few days later.

From Môtiers, Boswell spurred his horse in the direction of Ferney, the estate near Geneva where Voltaire had moved more than a decade before. When the Scot arrived in Geneva on Christmas Eve 1764 he immediately called on Voltaire, but was disappointed by his inability to spend time alone with him. The problem was that Ferney, like a rococo ancestor of reality shows, housed more than fifty family members, sycophants, hangers-on and servants, as well as Voltaire’s niece and mistress, Mme Denis, a destitute grand-niece of the playwright Corneille, and a defrocked Jesuit, Père Adam, who when not playing chess with Voltaire served as his foil for anti-Catholic jibes.

Bozzy had better luck in his second assault a couple of nights later on the great philosophe. As the guests gathered, Boswell positioned himself next to Voltaire to ‘put him in tune’. When the other guests retired to dine, Boswell remained glued to his host’s side in the drawing room.

Intent on picking up with Voltaire where he had left off with Rousseau, Bozzy dragged an enormous Bible over to his host in order to dispute the Scriptures. ‘For a certain portion of time there was a fair opposition between Voltaire and Boswell,’ he boasted to his journal, adding less confidently:

‘The daring bursts of his ridicule confounded my understand-

állított össze, melyek nagyrészt a hit és a melankólia témakörébe tartoztak.

Môtiers-be érkezve a helyi fogadóban szállt meg és bemutatkozó levelet fogalmazott a remeteéletet élő Rousseau-nak. Azzal kezdi, hogy melankolikus hajlamú, „családi vonás”, magyarázza, aztán komor neveltetésével folytatja: „legelső meglátásom az volt, hogy a büntetések örökké tartanak”, állítja, majd néhány oldallal később szenvedélyes kérelemmel zárja levelét. „Ó, kegyes filozófus, könyörgök, segítsen rajtam... Gyűjtsa lángra szívemet és esküszöm, a szent tűz soha nem fog kialudni.” Rousseau nyilván nem utasíthatott el egy ilyen kérést, rövid látogatásra meghívta Boswellt magához. Ám a fiatal ember, amint megérkezett a Rousseau-házba, skót akcentusú franciaságával rögtön azt firtatta, vajon vendéglátója keresztény vallású-e. A hosszú örmény kaftánt viselő Rousseau teátrális módon a mellét döngötte: De még mennyire!

Ezt követően Boswell a lényegre tért. „Részesülhet-e jutalomban az erényes ember a túlvilágon?” – kérdezte a *Savoyai vikárius* szerzőjét. „Kétségünk sem lehet afelől, hogy szellemi lények vagyunk” – válaszolta Rousseau. A jó emberek lelke, magyarázta, „nagylelkűen boldog lelkek társaságát fogja majd élvezni.” Miután a két férfi, fel-alá járkálva a szobában egyéb hasonló témákat végigtárgyalt, Boswell nem meglepő módon rátért az őt örökké foglalkoztató kérdésre: saját személyisége kérdésére. Arra kérte Rousseau-t, legyen a ’gyóntatópapja’, ám a kérést a gyengélkedő filozófus elutasította. Túlságosan is kiismerte látogatóját, és örült, amikor néhány nap múlva elköszöntek egymástól.

Môtiers-ból Boswell Ferney irányába sarkantyúzta a lovát; több mint egy évezrede erre a Genf melletti birtokra költözött Voltaire. A skót ifjú 1764 karácsonyán, rögtön amint Genfbe ért, felkereste Voltaire-t, de mélységes bánatára, képtelen volt

ing.’ Yet the young Scot persisted, demanding to know the aged thinker’s true sentiments concerning religion. Like his nemesis, Rousseau, Voltaire ‘expressed his veneration – his love – of the Supreme Being’ whom he wished to resemble by being good himself. Unlike Rousseau, though, Voltaire refused to reassure Boswell on the vexed subject of the soul’s immortality: ‘He says it may be, but he knows nothing of it. And his mind is in perfect tranquillity.’

Perhaps, but Boswell’s mind certainly was not. Shortly after leaving Ferney (his last words to a bemused Voltaire were ‘When I came to see you, I thought to see a very great, but a very bad, man’) Boswell wrote to the great scourge of established religion, again insisting on the soul’s immortality. Voltaire replied in his inimitable English: ‘I do not protest you; I know nothing of it, nor whether it is, nor what it is, nor what it shall be. Young scholars and priests know all that perfectly. For my part, I am but a very ignorant fellow.’

Although he may have come to accept the response over the years, at the time Voltaire’s letter annoyed Boswell. Indeed, towards the end of his life, he noted that he had ‘wished for something more than just the common course of what is called the tour of Europe’. Though no less disturbed at the end of his life by the same existential questions which harried him as one of those ‘young scholars’ barrelling across Europe, Boswell may have realised the ‘something more’ he sought was the ignorance that Voltaire claimed as his own. May a few of our own young scholars abroad follow the same arduous path taken by Bozzy. ♦

egyetlen percet kettesben tölteni vele. Ferney, akár egy valóságshow rokokó őse, több mint ötven családtagnak, talpnyalónak, lábatlankodónak és cselédnek adott otthont, itt élt továbbá Voltaire unokahúga és kedvese, Madame Denis, a drámaíró Corneille szűkölködő unokahúga, valamint a jezsuita Adam atya, aki ha nem sakkozott Voltaire-rel, a katolikus-ellenes vélemény-tükörképéül szolgált.

Második nekifutásra, néhány nappal később Boswellnek több szerencséje volt. A gyülekező vendégek között a filozófus mellé manőverezte magát, hogy jobban befolyásolhassa a beszélgetést, és amikor a többi vendég vacsorázni vonult, Boswell Voltaire-hez szögezve a szalonban maradt.

Azzal a szándékkal, hogy mindent ott folytat, ahol Rousseauval abbahagyta, egy óriási méretű Bibliát cipelt magával, a Szentírás bizonyos részeit megvitatandó. „Egy ideig meglehetősen nézetkülönbség uralkodott Voltaire és Boswell között” – büszkélkedik naplójában, majd kevésbé nagyképűen hozzáteszi: „Gúnyos kirohanásai érthetetlenek voltak számomra.” De a skót ifjú nem adta be a derekát. Ragaszkodott hozzá, hogy az idős gondolkodó fedje fel valódi érzelmeit a vallást illetően. Miként vetélytársa, Rousseau, Voltaire is „kinyilatkoztatta mélységes tiszteletét és szeretetét a Mindenható iránt”, akihez jóságában hasonlítani kívánt. Ám Rousseau-tól eltérően, nem oszlatta el Boswell kételyeit a lélek halhatatlanságának kérdésében: „Azt mondja, lehetséges, de ő semmit sem tud róla, és a lelki nyugalma tökéletesen zavartalan.”

Voltaire-é talán igen, de Boswell lelki nyugalma egyáltalán nem volt zavartalan. Röviddel azután, hogy elhagyta Ferney-t, ahol utolsó szavaival – „amikor meglátogattam Önt, azt hittem, egy nagyszerű, de hitvány embert látogatok meg” – csodálkozásra készítette Voltaire-t, levelet írt a vallás-ostorozó filozófusnak, amelyben a lélek halhatatlansága mellett érvelt.

A NAGYVILÁG MÁRCIUSI SZÁMÁBAN:

SIEGFRIED LENZ Tervezet (Tatár Sándor fordítása)
GRZEGORZ KWIATKOWSKI versei (Nagypál István fordításai)
NEMES ANNA Philip Roth *Ellenélet* című regényéről
PHILIP ROTH A levegőben (Nemes Anna fordítása)
RAJNAVÖLGYI GÉZA Az első trubadúr énekei
CHARLES BOYLE Budapest (Katona Teréz fordítása)
MIHAIL JURJEVICS LERMONTOV versei
(Lángi Péter fordításai)
BOZÓK FERENC Kutyák a világlírában

KISS GÁBOR Az ember és árnyékai – Northrop Frye és az
irodalmi szimbolizmus Chamisso *Peter Schlemihl*ének példáján

S. KIRÁLY BÉLA Egy konzervatív forradalmár magyar
pályarajza – M. Szebeni Géza: *Charles de Gaulle*.
Egy konzervatív forradalmár.

PETRŐCZI ÉVA Spanyol világsiker – magyar „nyitánnyal” –
Javier Cercas: *Szalamiszi katonák.*

Voltaire utánozhatatlan angolsággal válaszolt: „Nem szállhatok vitába Önnel, hisz semmit nem tudok az érintett tárgyról, sem azt, hogy létezik-e, sem azt, hogy milyen vagy milyen lesz. Ifjú tudósok és papok mindent tökéletesen ismernek a kérdésben. Ami engem illet, belátom, hogy ostoba, tudatlan ember vagyok.”

Jóllehet évek múltával Boswell talán megbarátkozott Voltaire véleményével, a levél kézhezvételekor még bosszantotta. Élete vége felé így ír: „fiatalon valami többet szerettem volna megvalósítani, mint egy közönséges európai körutazás.” Ekkor már – bár nem kevésbé zavartatva ugyanazoktól az egzisztenciális kérdésektől, amelyek mint ’ifjú tudóst’ foglalkoztatták – Boswell talán felismerte, hogy az a ’valami több’, amit egykor keresett, nem más, mint a tudatlanság, melyet Voltaire magáénak mondhatott. Bárcsak néhány mai ifjú tudós külföldön ugyanolyan rögs utat járna, mint Boswell a maga idejében! ♦

