



**Uwe Tellkamp**

**The Slumber in the Clocks**

Novel

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Sample translation by Mike Mitchell

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### **1<sup>st</sup> Vigil: Nemo**

*[illegible]* ... is order. We at Security have never doubted that. He is the Word and the Word is with Him, who sees and hears everything, nothing remains concealed from Him. As from us. We are the workers in the system which comes closest to Him here on Earth, we at Security. It would be wrong to see us as belonging to the Unbelievers. The best heads in our Authority and in the Church, that considers us enemies, have always known that.

The old insecurity overcame me right at the very first bend. Down here there was nothing to hear apart from the trickling and dripping of the water, now and then echoing as if from blasting, a distant whistle from the Black Mathilda whose tunnel ran through the mountain higher up. I took off the helmet and wiped the sweat from my brow, the ventilation shafts hadn't been serviced for ages. Single bulbs like lemons were hanging over the steps and at the passages marked with Roman numerals that led off from the rocky dome; I fished a pebble out of my coat pocket and threw it into the darkness — it took a few seconds before there was an impact, echoes from ever-increasing depth.

Freeing myself from the state of mind tying me to the past not only sounds impossible but as treachery; the Old Man of the Mountain sent me to the Department in order to clear up various matters:

“We have no idea about them,” he said, “our researches have still only just begun. If at first they were still directed at the world outside, at the Other, as we say here, by now they are directed at the Coal Island itself, inwards, and perhaps I am the only one who has been a more passionate explorer than Oldmont, one of my teachers, or 'Nemo', editor and chronicler who enjoyed the protection of one of the mightiest mandarins of our authority, Marn, in charge of the Enlightenment Head Office of Editorial Section 1 in the Literature Combine.”

To call the Coal Island a labyrinth would be an understatement as there are labyrinths threading through the Archipelagus — as we prefer to call our territory — on several vertical and horizontal levels. The simple state name seems unsuitable and all-too superficial to us. When we were negotiating we always bore the whole in mind, not just the blob whose citizens we officially were. Labyrinths, some in the form of spiral shells and disc galaxies, the arms of which are slowly and regularly eating their way into the depths. Like all authorities we were always in need of more and more room: if you looked at its outline the Oceania Section, for example, resembled the cone of a snail and there were rumours that it was possible to go from the passages of our coal islands to those of friendly services, dug over a hundred kilometres from our and their side. Labyrinths that lead into what appeared to be a void, dead areas for decades, the morgues, people said, where no-longer-active documents were stored and, behind sealed doors, the past. In other branches of oppressive constriction many of the senior staff, even the Minister, had their favourite resorts, working happily there in the quiet here below when it was too hot on the surface in the summer.

You had to have mastered it, like a task or a memory, I thought, this system, this bodily system of tracks, gulfs, branches. We down below here, are the lovers of memory and the enemies of forgetting. Here we have one of the best libraries, we have a penchant for Geography, for History, the map workshop with its copperplate engravers regularly receives the thanks of the boss and one of the much desired gift-baskets.

“Good maps are etched on copper and mounted on linen, good maps,” said the Old Man of the Mountain, “are made for eternity. Costs us a hell of a lot of money, but we too have our soft spots and hobbyhorses. Ask Master Hawk about his collection of human abysses. A beautiful old engraving of countryside isn't much compared with his cartographies.

I had once tried draw a ground plan of the area but the Old Man of the Mountains had reminded me of the unwritten laws, one of which was called, though not officially, Sport and Play, and it indicated the freedom created by knowing things off by heart: knowledge and memory, allied with courage, have no need of anything written down, of anything that showed something, nor of anything that betrayed.

“For all that, we down here are obsessed with written matter,” said Oldmont, “only what is written exists, that, ironically, is also one of the unwritten commandments. You have to sit at the typewriter or cover the sheet of paper with handwriting, then you can build yourself a place to stay here. We value elegance, we suspect where it might be possible, but we only encounter it rarely,” Oldmont had gone on, “we have a great sense of aesthetics. While I was illuminating the pathways with my miner's lamp, I recalled that on the East Coal Island they still had the habit of keeping files in the Prussian and Austrian manner; the latter, with the Imperial-and-Royal knots for files. There is much that links us with Vienna and the Minister is not the only one who regrets that it is not still occupied by our friends, the Soviet comrades. A city just made for us. I understand that Oldmont has made a formal request that steel pen-nibs be reintroduced; such writing implements, dipped in the office ink of Baroque Ltd., improves the quality of the texts immeasurably, though in this respect there are the blue-ink and the black-ink fractions: the one side preferring the dark blue mixed — in order to improve the brilliance of the colour — specially for us with expensively imported indigo instead of home-produced reseda, the other the centuries-old ink made from oak-apples and green vitriol, though this, of course, has the disadvantage of rusting and ruining the paper. Oldmont and 'Nemo' have the ability to sit for hours examining old documents, carried away by the beauty of the handwriting used for fair copies, the elegance of its flourishes and the fineness of its strokes with which people in the past, when it was still well-known

that speed alone is nothing but impatience, beguiled their prey. For a while people down here considered returning to the old, Gothic Sütterlin script.

“If the Americans should kidnap us one day,” Oldmont said, “they’ll find nothing but balderdash. The Americans simply can’t manage the Sütterlin script. They’re after our materials and legacies, they think they understand something about the Third Reich, want to get something out of us, but nothing will come of that once we finally start to adopt the script of our fathers. Did you know that Hitler hated Gothic type, calling it Schwabach Jew-letters. Yet for all that Gothic type is inextricably associated with the Third Reich, every Film director who is half-aware of clichés knows that and when he wants to present Germany under the Nazis has a sign with Gothic script held before the camera. And of course it says: 'Work makes you free' or 'To Each his Own', certainly never 'I love you'. The Gothic script has passed away undeservedly, we should let justice be done to it. Any graphic designer will tell you that the Gothic script looks much better than the round scripts we have gone over to since then. Life writes in broken script anyway. But that is all preaching to deaf ears.

He didn’t mean mine by that. We in the editorial sections have reintroduced the old handwriting. Oldmont, tactful as he is, kept quiet about the fact that even on the Coal Island there is laziness and stupidity, lack of understanding and even enmity between various departments: for ages now the Kleist Organization has been throwing everything that comes from the editorial sections in the waste bin; those who called themselves the practical set believe that we, the theoreticians as they say, are nothing but underoccupied, overpaid screwballs whose orbit is as far away from reality as Pluto’s from the sun.

My work is not solely in the Editorial Sections but also in the Chronicle, in the Temporary Workers’ Collective, we down here have our inclinations, one of which is occupying ourselves with clocks. They are one of the most fascinating human inventions. We have a not insignificant collection and we have always been full of admiration for the clockmakers from Glashütte, real artists in their field. The main occupation of the Temporary Workers’ Collective is the Utopian Project that in the various departments is known as the Historical-Philosophical Combine, employing the accurate designation of a dissident artist who shares with us a liking for caves and dividing up thought into

centuries. This project enjoys the favour of influential circles, even of the Minister, who is the subject of many jokes about his ability to make our work here more intellectually profound. But he too knew what our task is: the *Fundamental Task*, as it is called in the departmental missives that regularly appear in turn.

I was feeling my way forwards. Even right at the top, I thought, there is much appreciation of combinations of precision and whimsicality, that many of them file under 'special relationship'. The noise from the Black Mathilda had died away. The ticking of the Tower of Fools could be heard, that clock too being one of the specialities of the Coal Island.

— There is no greater secret than that of time, as Oldmont used to say, when we were sitting with our evening coffees in the Vienna Library, before us the dreams of the seafarers and geographers, the night with its plans and notes, its sleeplessness, and behind us one of the days that ought to bring us closer to the truth.

#### *Encircling the need for ascertainment*

Rohde preferred certain paths, he would turn up with the punctuality of the monks at the fork in the path where I was lying in wait for him, differently dressed than by day, without his golf-ball pipe but with the dilapidated briefcase in the front left-hand compartment of which were the *Old German Poems*, that provided the authentication of his first existence, up there, in the Legend that was woven round him like a cocoon of spider's silk. He would get down by the former air-raid passage, with candle stubs, dead mice and mouldy copies of that Nazi rag the *Völkischer Beobachter* lying around — Meno Rohde, my enemy, my love, my shadow. Now I saw him. He seemed uncertain — the inquiries, the clarifications, the individual administrations — even as someone who was familiar with them you could easily get hopelessly lost in these passages if you didn't take care. Rohde also had a helmet and a miner's lamp; he took a piece of paper out of his coat pocket and studied it in the light of his lamp. I could calmly wait, remaining concealed; when he went on I saw that he was taking one of the old passages that were marked with stonemason's signs. I knew where they led. He disappeared down the passage with the catfish mark, Rohde was going to see Vogelstrom, not however to the spider's-web house but farther down, into the depths, to the Spring of the Copper Sister that is one of the eight arms of the River Elbe that flows through the Archipelago. There

was the gigantic hall where we celebrated our feasts, the new year's intake were sworn in, the yearly conferences of the Coal Island held, there Vogelstrom painted the studies for the panorama of the Revolution in the White Pavilion outside Barsano in East Rome, there he painted the piece at the heart of the Panorama, the altar.

I watched the Light Brigade appearing at the arch of the Rotunda across the hall that the passage led to; as ever work was being done by the men in their grey-blue overalls carrying masses of light bulbs without a sound, which, given the sharp hearing of the walls and vaults down here, was astonishing. I watched them as they went about their business that started with the raising of an index finger, respectfully and yet authoritatively, like a conductor's baton, at which the light-bulb, that could otherwise only be reached with a ladder, started, as if of its own accord, to twist itself out of the socket and sink down into the light-cleaner's open hand waiting to receive it. There were several passages branching off from the rotunda. There were winged shadows moving close to the Light Brigade and I wondered whether Rohde had by now managed to get unlimited authorization for tours. He probably only has the B-variant I thought. Even though he is protected by Marn (I was on the track of the secret between the two of them, there were enough hints in the files) but it's hardly imaginable that he has access to all districts of Coal Island. I, on the other hand, was in possession of the A-permit, that wasn't issued all that often and even granted me entry to the Minister's anteroom. The authorities took a long time checking, the issue of that document was a mark of favour and one of the highly desired ones. The Light Brigade isn't up to much, I thought, it's been left a bit short, its members are picked up here and there — failures who had the opportunity of proving themselves here with us, of showing the authorities, and with that the state, that they deserved the favour which, moreover, is no such thing. The Old Man of the Mountain told us how the members of the Light Brigade, after they'd finished their shift, were often found sitting together to think about their situation and function over a glass of beer. They themselves were the grace-and-favour philosophers, no-one else. It was not unknown that the members of Line XXV (Caretaker Department) were in wage group 2B, one of the highest: low pay? — You must be joking.

“They have inferiority complexes,” the Old Man of the Mountain had said, “they love complaining and yet no one's annoyed with them; there's a lot of sense here in the art

they've made of their work. It's not the case that authorities, especially those here, can't do anything with the beautiful, apparently superfluous or useless sides of life. Moreover the light-bulbs from Narva, our lighting factory, are better than their reputation.

It seemed to me as if the speeches of the Old Man of the Mountains and Marn were echoing along the corridors from which fresh air was blowing over me, so I must be near to a ventilation shaft. Still, even after the many years I'd been going to and from down here, I felt the need to check and ran my hand over the corridor walls, stroking the stone that was already damp in some places, checking the surface of the stonework. On this level the passageways were still walled, only farther down, below the Telephone Department, the Cinema and the Food Store, did one come across parts hewn through the rock, many still shored up with the original woodwork. I put my hand on one brick, it was pleasantly cool, I could only push my pocket-knife a few millimetres into the mortar, and as always, I found that satisfying, as did the fact that the masons had been unstinting in their use of mortar, there were bulges of it sticking out between the edges of the bricks. In those places where a bulb threw its light the lichen that was everywhere down here, was to be seen, Rohde had noted it with his scientist's eye — it was the same matted, discoloured type as in the Sanatorium and I had been astonished at Rohde's assertion that he hadn't found it classified anywhere; he'd given it the name Griselda, the Grey. The Old Man of the Mountain had been amused by that: "You will get to know even more different flora down here, my dear Rohde, not to mention the fauna! A real treasure trove for a zoologist. Especially for one like you."

"Rohde, our observer," the Old Man of the Mountains said to Marn, "is a born observer," and Marn confirmed that: "Yes, Rohde loves slowness, he knows that patience is one of the best gifts to humankind, most of whom ignore that gift. Everything should go at top speed, at the double, better helter-skelter and hurry-scurry rather than solidly and slowly. This sickness had already begun in classical times, had not yet reached its peak, we were still in for some surprises.

"Our mills grind slowly," the Old Man of the Mountain had said, everything goes slowly and that makes it holy (he laughed at that), and one should be thorough. The game is wary and anyone who wants to hunt it has to have patience, precise knowledge, otherwise it's bound to give you the slip or never turn up.

“Dedication and patience are our virtues,” The Old Man of the Mountain had said, “devotion to the cause, we are the sword and shield. We are a Service and Service is higher than everything else, apart from the Idea, of course, that it serves. It is satisfying, profoundly satisfying to be absorbed in the Service, to know that there is a before and an after, which cancels out the limited state of the individual, the often more obstructive rather than beneficial conditions of their existence, makes their outline unrecognisable and blurs it in the Great Whole, of which we yet remain part, gratefully serving, thanked by the Service.

“You have to bring time with you, but you are also granted it. Ten minutes at the top — hours down here, the mighty present of time. I’m getting ahead of myself,” the Old Man of the Mountain had said, “for you there are other matters in store. You will be apprenticed and have to prove yourself.” Thus said the Old Man of the Mountains, how many years ago? I thought.

I was still waiting for the Light Brigade to leave. The internalised conspiracy: anyone who is seen has made a mistake. I was still on the first level and would soon come across the extensions of the state of light as the language of the files described increasing brightness. Before you could get to the mine cages and thus down onto the deeper levels, you had to register a second time even if, like me, you had at your disposal a key to the special access points, to the staircase systems by which, to be sure, it took much longer to accede to the lower depths. There was not only the gate-keeper up in the main hall of Coal Island, there were his colleagues in the passages here and they were no less conscientious in carrying out their duty, even though service below ground is less popular among them than that on the surface. There was a whole system of gate-keepers, of arrivals and departures and it was only on the bridge to East Rome that things seemed to have recently become more lax. On Coal Island, however, the controls continued to function perfectly, there seemed to be an ambition in that respect, a control ambition, the authorities had become all the more strict as far as controls and their internal system were concerned the more perceptible the dissolution outside, on the surface was.

— “We have to show that lot what composure is,” one of these porters, who carried out his duty in one of the most distant lodges of the first level, had said to the Old Man of the Mountain and me as we were doing a round. “Who, Comrade Oldmont, should



maintain this composure if not us. The things that go on, it's beyond bearing, never mind comprehension, what will happen.”

“Bravo, comrade, that is a Japanese attitude, I like it,” the Old Man of the Mountain had said, praising the porter. “The Japanese never give up, they are superior to us Europeans in discipline and their sense of honour, I'm surprised they haven't made us into sushi yet. That's perhaps still to come.”

“Do you know, Comrade Oldmont,” the porter said, “that it takes ten years to become a master of sushi cuisine? Before that you're nothing but an apprentice and novice — the Master orders the muck to be cleared away and the novice has to clear the muck away. The Master orders the knives to be cleaned, the novice bows before the Master and before the knives and polishes the blades without protest. We ought to introduce that here, that would be an excellent way of getting rid of slackness and negligence. The Oceania Section has left the light on again, even though I've issued umpteen circulars and nailed them to their doors.

Rohde had disappeared, but I saw his signature in the little notebook which *Barnowl*, the porter pushed over to me for my signature. I didn't see Vogelstrom's signature, so I wondered whether Rohde did actually intend to go down. He knew that Vogelstrom wasn't happy with people looking at his pictures without him. Moreover Rohde loved the painter's explanations, his observations on the history of painting and its techniques, his sharp and extremely well-read mind. No one got past the porters without registering. Which meant that either Vogelstrom wasn't down there or that he possessed a key to the special routes but I would have known that, the applications for them ended up in the Enlightenment head office. Had I been passed over? I found that idea unsettling. At the same time, however, that gave me the opportunity to go to Rohde's little room and rummage through his papers a bit. There were two little rooms: the one up in the House of a Thousand Eyes (but there it was possible I might be caught by the terrible Mrs Honich, the head of the Pioneers) and the one down here, his place of work on Coal Island. At this time there was little going on in Main Section XX, responsible for Art, Culture, Church, Apparatus of State and Underground.

## Log-book

*1/8/2015 Saturday*

Sea calm. Castor and Pollux in the Gemini constellation above Taurus whose main star is following the Pleiades. Map drawn by Argo von Treva.

*2. 8. 2015 Sunday*

Conclusion of the first version of my contribution to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reunification. This version will — after control and checking of all the data, — be put into our pneumatic dispatch system, the procedure then following is called: The Approval, Map drawn by Brenta von Treva.

*10. 11. 2021 Wednesday*

How it began. Why am I sitting here, in the year 2 Corona, in a cabin scrubbed with brushes from the brushmaker Zwazl (see: Operational Process 'Cleaning') and 'Naval' soap from the supplies of the Fleet Office, searching for clarity in my notes?

Me: Fabian Hoffman, b. 1968, from Dresden, film projectionist, dissident, member of the Novalis Class of Coal Island, chronicler. Who first saw the code name 'Nemo' on a sheet of paper in December 1989 and then decided during the night of his last presentation in the Urania Cinema to follow 'Nemo' even if that would mean entering Coal Island. To become one of them in order to be able to follow 'Nemo'. The new Coal Island would serve democracy. To follow 'Nemo': to security. All the way down, if it had to be, right to the bottom.

The Chronicle is partly in quarantine, partly in the Home Office, the latter for an indefinite period. The Chronicle has always been under threat. Not everyone has an interest in the depiction of the things that were — even if it is at all possible to depict what was. Not everyone likes to be confronted with memory. I am no longer an official contributor to the Chronicle and therefore no longer an employee of the Arabian-Nights Department. I have lost my flat in the Republic of Sea Monsters and live, with all my bits

and pieces in the kitbag made by Muriel, on the 'Nimrod'. Treva has changed. To me the years before 2015 seem like a time sinking into the unreal, hardly believable any more. What has happened, where does this gloom come from?

Arms of writing feeling their way through the darkness, where are you, is someone there, am I a planet orbiting a sun, that, from an appropriate distance, feeds it with warmth and threatens it with annihilation? Am I a being of the deep sea, drifting in its natural environment, equipped with sufficient, though rudimentary sensory organs compared with the living beings up there? Does anything come down here from them? Oh yes, the confetti of their dissolution. Am I an inhabitant of a flowing mine, its vast mighty, waters veined with deep currents, as Péter Nádas writes, the undertow of which catches me, this familiar struggle similar to a wooing?

Ad fontes. Where 'Nemo' is at work, 'Nemo' whose traces I am following, my companion down here, my shadow. I will continue the Night Watches, will follow the voices of the unofficial collaborators, the threads, the *Fundamental Task*.

3/8/2015 Monday: *The Treva News Agency*

That which is. However that which is, is in the form of news. Welcome, I said to myself every day when I passed through the High Gate of the Gatekeepers, welcome to the Treva News Agency, tna in brief, our intelligence service, our quasi monopolist. I passed the security sluice-gates, in which control was carried out by Line XXV, to which the gatekeepers and the in-house Security now belonged. I got myself registered, as on hundreds of days before, thought — also as I had on hundreds of days before — about conversations I had had in the Treva News Agency (or that had been had with me) about scraps of dialogue, scenes, about what it was that made us up. As so often the Colonel appeared before my inner eye, Ferenc Rainer de Manko-Bük, my boss in the Feet Office and senior editor of the Treva News Agency as a part of the Thousand-and-One-Nights Department, a newsman of the old school such as hardly exist any more. He had a liberality in the British style with a touch of French *esprit*, if by that you understand love of one's nation in the good sense. Like many bosses with long service he loved to tell younger colleagues, who could (or had to) listen, tales from his meandering life, during which certain maxims kept returning of course, which always got me reflecting on how

all lives, whether they last threescore years and ten or fourscore years, as it says in the Bible, shrivel up in retrospect to a few moments, a few existential moments and experiences from which axioms for the following generation are squeezed out — which the following generation often hear with one eye on the clock.

— Nothing new under the sun. But under the moon. After all we're all romantics, aren't we? And he'd caught one of his Uzbek lung-wheezes he got from a shop in Brenta that, apart from tobacco and magazines, also sold tickets for Aeroflot. The Colonel was a member of the Marine Club, where we amused ourselves with our own satirical magazine, *The Shining Pig*, read the *Times*, the *Prague Daily*, the *Red Flag*, drank a toast to the old warhorses who, depicted on a large-scale daub, had brought whole continents into the possession of the crown, in the course of which they'd brought about the odd massacre but had treated their captives perfectly correctly. No women were allowed in that club, on which the Colonel openly expressed his great satisfaction. By then, he said, even the Vienna Philharmonic had admitted women into its ranks, the Treva Philharmonic had given way ages ago, he'd known the last male harpist. A tragedy this decline in common decency. Uzbek cigars, I thought as I walked on, you don't naturally connect them with our newsroom where there's one monitor beside the next and our hipsters, unruly and idealistic as they are, juggle with the pictures from the picture agencies. But even the Scotch, that Colonel Rainer always had within reach, wasn't something you automatically connected with the newsroom in its cleanliness, its shimmer, brought on by glass fibres, with which a new, completely incomprehensible generation is growing up in a completely natural way. Ferenc Rainer had grown up with typewriters, he had still seen times when there had been teleprinters and reports from Kairo or Cape Town had been dispatched by press-telegram.

Yet he was neither sentimental nor nostalgic, he was, like all journalists, keen on new things and had nothing against progress in technology. We called the Colonel, Ferenc Rainer, ffolkes after a character played by Roger Moore, ffolkes with two small fs. Rufus Excalibur ffolkes loved cats, drank whisky without recourse to a glass, couldn't stand women and at his Scottish castle drilled a private unit for tasks slightly beyond the limit of legality. When he wanted to concentrate, he took out an embroidery frame and carried on embroidering the picture of a cat that he'd been working on for years. The

*Times* crossword took him less than ten minutes. Ferenc Rainer, our folk, used to ask female trainees with distinctive curves whether they'd had themselves tested for silicone intolerance; trainees with less distinctive curves he asked why they refused to accept their masculinity. He took no account of decrees that ran against his sense of justice and reality or encroached on his freedom, one of which was the freedom of his Scotch from purity regulations. The business model of the Treva News Agency was under threat: the appearance of the internet meant that the value of news as a commodity had sunk rapidly. The things for which we demanded money, it was said, could be obtained free on the Net. Suddenly good journalism found it had to justify itself, show that it was necessary. Advertising, which was the main source of finance for newspapers, dropped with the result that the newspapers dropped us, arguing that no reader missed the articles of the Treva News Agency, indeed, that no readers even knew that those articles were by us and not by an editor of the newspaper in question. Many newspapers started to reinvent themselves, wanting to be unmistakable, and in their search for unmistakability we, with our scarcely individual news, were just a hindrance. Rainer had noticed this trend very early on and tried to counteract it but without any great success unfortunately. The markets had not only become weak and demanding but — and that was the main problem for the Treva News Agency — more and more differentiated, using fewer and fewer of the news items offered by the Agency, criticising the prices: they didn't want the service as a whole but just to pay for the few cherries they picked out. They complained that the quota of material used was declining — if, in order to meet the wishes of our customers, we were to increase what was on offer, without the newspapers increasing their size, then the quota of material used was bound to drop.

The Colonel knew that news agencies die slowly. It wasn't heart attacks or strokes that were characteristic of their death throes but a gradual slipping away. United Press International, the UPI, where Rainer had started, once one of the biggest and proudest news agencies, was by now owned by the so-called Unification Church of the Korean Sun Myung Moon. The letter that Virgil Pinkley, Vice President of United Press and their General Director for Europe, had once written to a precursor of the Treva News Agency was there, framed, on the wall of Rainer's office.

A business model under threat: the principles that had once been formulated in the *Codex for the Ethics of Journalism* of the Wisconsin University Press and were read out to everyone working for the News Agency, and not only them, when they were appointed: “It is our view that a newspaper should publish the whole truth and nothing but the truth in all matters ... In our view the success of a democracy depends on having a well-informed public opinion; a newspaper should ... contribute to the creation and maintenance of well-informed public opinion.”

Well the Treva News Agency wasn't a newspaper, at least not yet (though recently there had been rumours that our already close collaboration with *Truth*, the flagship of journalism in Treva, would become even closer). I had learnt from the Secretariat for Fusion that plans were afoot to merge the Treva News Agency and *Truth*. Many journalists on *Truth* had started with the Treva News Agency; contrarily our journalists went in and out at the Spearhead where *Truth* had its offices. We call that 'outside representation'— in brief: Outside One (the *Truth*) and Outside Two (the *Treva General*). As far as the interconnection between *Truth* and the Treva News Agency on the one hand and the Thousandandonenights Department on the other was concerned, many *Truth* journalists published books and articles, that were too extensive for *Truth*, with the publisher Hermes; some journalists were formally employed by 1001 (our usual abbreviation), but mainly wrote for *Truth*, some were formally employed by *Truth*, but mainly wrote for us, worked as editors or in the Treva News Agency.

I watched our hipsters in the newsroom, the monitors flickering: news, pictures by the second, and I thought of a comment by Lionel after one of our fencing bouts, that not only the link between the Thousandandonenights Department and *Truth*, that by now was on the way to becoming a media conglomerate (just as the Treva News Agency no longer offered just texts and pictures but blogs, vlogs, streams, audio files, graphics, portfolios for so-called non-media- markets, mostly business concerns) whereupon the combination of the Treva News Agency and *Truth* became a tna-Truth, as Lionel said, and the tna-Truth for its part combined with the 1001 (our abbreviation), so that then not only did these combinations of combinations make progress but also the combinations of the pictures — that is of those they supplied — Lionel went on to say that he didn't know whether there were any more independent agencies apart from our

agency, Central Image, an offshoot of the Treva News Agency and our great rival Getty Images. The Colonel pointed out the websites of the picture agencies: Mauritius: images and plainpicture, Stocksy and FI online, Shutterstock, Bulls Press and the specialist picture agencies of Stockfood (often booked by restaurants for flyers and menus) then Okapia (animal photos), laif (photos for reports), Disability Images (photos of people with impairments), pixathlon (sports pictures), Mother Image that propagated women's lifestyle. The Colonel thought that by now they all belonged to Zentralbild. News reports he considered (first of all and fundamentally) to be errors, he told the volunteers, while making an aeroplane zoom round the room, not a drone but a plastic model he was holding on his outstretched arm.

“It is an error, ladies and gentlemen, if you think that Truth is automatically sitting on the wings of News. News items can lie, that's a trivial statement and not what I'm saying. There are a few hundred passengers sitting in this aeroplane we call News and only a few of them are working for the truth, the others are tourists dreaming of their holiday, lobbyists, who are travelling for the firm that built the plane in which they're sitting, businessmen who don't deal in Truth but in fruit, fireworks and oil, mainly, however, in weapons and cosmetics and there's certainly one or the other terrorist among them, whose instruments of truth we hope haven't made it through Airport Security. Then of course the crew and those who sell the seats in the aeroplane and whose outermost heralds rake over our luggage at check-in, assuming it hasn't had to go to the desk for bulky luggage.”

News items, he went on, were the fish caught in an ocean full of shoals of fish. Individual fish, however, could not represent the whole shoal, even though the ocean had long since been overfished and granted that one mackerel was as good as any other. What he meant by that, he said, was that a news item was always just the visible part of the truth.

Presumably few of the people who opened or clicked on a newspaper in Treva gave any thought to where their daily news came from. Perhaps they looked over the names of the correspondents reporting from Peking or Moscow, New York and Istanbul, but there could only be a handful among these few who were interested in the initials or abbreviations under the articles that didn't come from one of these correspondents: tna, AP or AFP, dpa, TASS, ANSA, PAP, Reuters and Belga, Xinhua, KNA, EFE — and perhaps

a couple of this handful would be happy to think they were abbreviations or names of journalists. I've always been amazed at how little most people knew about news agencies, even though they watched TV, went round the Net, read dailies, listened to the radio and clicked more and more often on the videos embedded in articles. No daily paper or TV station could manage without news agencies and only a few newspapers could still afford foreign correspondents, which meant that most newspapers that wanted to have foreign news resorted to agency material. In the same way that was also true of home news. The Colonel associated the stream of news with the four rivers flowing out of the garden of Eden: Pison, Gihon, Euphrates and Hiddekel, all of which combined their waters in one single river washing over the whole world: Twitter, Facebook, Google, AP, alias Associated Press, Reuters, AFP alias Agence France-Presse and the tna, the Treva News Agency. To count the tna among the big players would be presumptuous, especially when the Colonel didn't mention the biggest news agency, the Xinhua, New China. And what he likewise left unmentioned was where the news agencies actually get their news from.

“If there's something you don't understand, you have to go *ad fontes*,” he used to quote. *Ad fontes*: to the sources. He was doubtless actually a Romantic. The truth about conditions did not correspond to the perceived truth about conditions. News met with doubting readers and viewers. Yet how should they, the readers and viewers, even know that behind quite a few items of news from the Treva News Agency was the information service of the oil industry, for which some specialists from the Raw Materials section of the Department of Trade and Industry were working.

I halted. And just standing still like that attracted notice here, where everything was in motion. Where the writers, as the editors are called here, were constantly telephoning, translating, structuring rearranging texts, quickly going through the spellchecker then handing them for review to the head of office, the Slotter, who was sitting at his screens, staring at the input device, also called the slot. Böblinger, an ever-optimistic man who knew all about news and could sort out items at top speed (to me they seemed like intuitive reflex actions but I knew that he was acting on experience); the unusable ones went under the delete key of the slot, the usable ones that required little correction onto the editorial computer next to it, where he immediately worked on them himself; those



reports that needed more to be done went to the screens of the writers with a brief comment attached. Reports that needed translating he printed out; these often came from Our Man in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. He only spoke English and normally transferred his reports to Our Man in New Delhi, who translated the reports, improved them and passed them on to head office.

Böblinger's arms were in constant motion between the in-basket and the out-basket: as things dwindled in the in-basket, they grew in the out-basket, with those that dwindled in the out-basket seeming to grow again in the in-basket, and that without the assistant — a young fellow with a beard and much knowledge about fair trade, traditionally known as the Writer's cabin boy — refilling them to the same extent as Böblinger removed things or the baskets, traditionally known as the themselves removed them with the aid of one of Böblinger's hands (the hand moving in curves like the dreamily flying paper that our computers took in as they downloaded data). The printer printed out official announcements, Böblinger collating them with his left hand while the right reallocated papers according to the period of validity, for which two wooden panels, known as Bingo and Bongo, served as filing trays: on Bingo all the short-term official reports, which were only of immediate significance, on Bongo on the other hand all communications which, because they had to be observed over a longer period, would be of interest for the colleague who would relieve Böblinger.

*4/8/2015 Tuesday: The Sea-Mines Department*

Navy Office, Petroleum Information Service, the Commissariat for Currants in the Ministry of Trade and Industry with its hoverfly researchers, who have been going through a lot of red tape with the Navy Office for years, the Pankhurst Section, the Thousandandonights Department and its editorial sections: sometimes I wonder whether we actually exist, and if so, then in what form. There is a basic uncertainty about my contracts, my jumble of contracts, as the Colonel puts it: on the one hand I am a contributor to the Chronicle, which the Colonel also calls our 'War-diary and War-Archive Section', just as there were such sections during the First and Second World War; on the other hand I collaborate with the Navy Office in the Section for Sea-mines, the Clothing/Equipment Unit, but on closer inspection this contradiction (or split)

resolves itself: the cipher 1001 can be found in the internal reports, we belong to the Coal Island, to Security and are, at least according to official channels, obliged to report to the Ministry of Defence. In the Ministry of Defence, that has even closer links with the Coal Island West, known as 'The Eye', than with the Coal Island East, known as 'The Ear', there is a certain uncertainty with regard to us, there are constant questions, requests for revision; whenever a new head (at the moment Brigitte Ursula von Cremmen) sets up in the Ministry of Defence new advisors are brought in from outside who are to go through and clear out the whole 'outfit' — as we in the Defence Ministry (abbreviated 'Demini') are often called — from top to bottom. However, since we have our own advisers among the advisers from outside; the Colonel is a patient man and as far as I know has only once let himself be so far carried away as to initiate the so-called 'Operation Black', the general result of which is the resignation of the Minister of Defence.