

Only The Lonely:
Faxed correspondence 17-19 May 1993

Dear Bill,
Knock, knock.

Richard.
If there are any problems with the transmission of this fax message, please contact me by telephone ... or by fax...

Dear Richard,
Who's there?
Bill.

Dear Bill,
Sam & Janet.
Richard.
Date: Monday evening. A very nice one too.
Number of pages, including this one:
If there are any problems with the transmission of this fax message, please contact me by telephone... or by fax...

Dear Richard!
You've got to do better than that.
Bill.

Dear Bill,
It's true. My neighbour, Janet, has a dog called Sam, though "Janet and Sam" doesn't have quite the same ring as 'Some Enchanted Evening'. Incidentally, what colour is the dog?
Richard.

Dear Richard,
When somebody tells me something is "true" or starts a conversation with "It's true", suspicion rears its comforting head. When the conversation starts with "It's true", *and* "My neighbour" the folkloric tones of urban myths start ringing in some distant part of my head and my attention sharpens because I like urban myths. Now, the problem with this evening and Janet and Sam is that I recollect (and am quite sure about the fact) that you actually do have a neighbour called Janet. What I am not sure about is whether she has a dog called Sam. Well, it's not even a question of

being sure I just don't know. I am left hanging. Half is known, half is not. This situation would normally suggest to me a dog with a colour of black and white but because the names Sam and Janet do also mean "some enchanted" in this particular "maybe" or "maybe not" myth I feel more inclined, no certain, that the colour of the dog is brindle.

Bill.

Dear Bill,

Nice reply. It's true though, I *do* have a neighbour called Janet who has a dog called Sam. But he's not brindle.

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I've just been watching a Red Dwarf tape. Rimmer and Lister are marooned on an ice-bound planet, gradually burning everything combustible to stay alive. Rimmer is trying to persuade Lister to burn his guitar. Lister makes a plea to keep it, saying it's the only thing that has been constant in his life, a life without home, family or education

Rimmer: "No education?"

Lister: "I went to art college"

which I thought was pretty funny since it's near enough the truth from some standpoints. Rimmer leaves for a minute and Lister quickly constructs a fake, a reproduction, and burns that, which seems to validate going to art college (within the foreshortened frame of a T.V. sitcom).

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Did you get the picture I have just sent? It might not have transmitted very well.

The picture is of a modified Reliant Robin forging across St. Katherine's Dock.

Folkloric and epic.

Richard.

Dear Richard,

If the text is important please re-fax or rephrase. Set your machine to half-tone, the picture is very brindley and I can't read it.

Bill.



Dear Richard,

Thanks for the picture. Loud and clear this time. I think the story of Rimmer and Lister and guitar excellent. I was a little worried that the construction of the fake guitar would not avoid the issue of burning the real one eventually. In fact, why were they considering burning the real one if there was material around and available/suitable for constructing the fake? Do you think the fake one would burn as long a time as the real one? Which one would keep you warmest? Which brings me back to the Reliant Robin which in folkloric terms has a reputation for frequent external combustion, but in my mind has a similar status in transport terms (as validated by the challenging picture) as art school does in your (and my) terms of education. Incidentally, what colour is the dog?
Bill.

Dear Bill,

Thanks.

I'm just going out and should be back here by about 1.00. Jacqui wondered if you and Pauline wanted to come over here and then for us all to go in together?

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He made the guitar from Rimmer's mementoes, this was not so much stuff available as appropriated by sleight of hand. Rimmer himself, being a hologram, does not have physical sensations (hunger, cold etc.) so there is some tension in his possession of mementoes of some value - a C19th camphor wood chest and a collection of carved wooden toy soldiers from the Napoleonic wars. (Lister: "You mean you can't take their clothes off like you can with Barbie"). They are museum quality artefacts and have "authenticity" which Lister's guitar - "a genuine fake Les Paul" - does not have. Despite not having physical needs, Rimmer does have strong emotions, thus his attachment to his possessions is of the same sort as Lister's.
Richard.

Dear Richard,

Interesting. A number of points/areas/climates are beginning to intrigue me here. A hologram, as I understand it, cannot be, with present or future technology, because of its definition, a totally independent thing. It has a source. Switch off the source and it no longer exists. A notion of value mixed up with authenticity is heady stuff. The authenticity of the C19th chest and carved wooden toys seems to be understood and taken for granted. The value is not so clear. Are you merely saying authenticity equals financial value ("Mementoes of some value") or are we dealing just with attachment of the emotional sort, being "value", or both? I have this idea that the original authenticity of the chest and toys somehow can actually enhance the authenticity of Lister's reproduction of the Les Paul Copy. Instead of being lost, the

original authenticity is passed on, inherited if you like, by the new object-guitar that Lister makes - a double dose. I think an authenticity of this type might be much more appropriate for today, the passing on being a kind of democratic process that would undermine established values. The Reliant Robin boat thus turns out to be far more authentic than the tug boat Challenge. It has the acquired authenticity of hundreds of previous artefacts giving it a massive new "value". On this basis it may have been wiser for Lister to burn his original "Les Paul Copy". I am also intrigued by Rimmer's motives. Was he A. just helping a close friend to stay alive, B. testing his friends "values" in terms of possessions, C. stating very clearly that he has better taste than Lister etc. etc.? Is his attachment to his possessions of the same sort as Lister's? I think it is a little dubious - a bit museum qualityish.

Bill.

P.S. I am writing with a very beautiful Pelican Fountain Pen, I really like it. I have another pen which I actually value more; it is a hybrid of Mont Blanc and Parker Pen pieces super-glued together from the pieces of two broken pens. Its authenticity is *indisputable*.

Dear Bill,

I'm not sure it's as clear as that - if I switched you off wouldn't you also cease to exist? Rimmer does confuse price and value: "It's priceless, it's the only thing my father ever gave me". Authenticity is a quality derived from our given criteria, which is why I used scare quotes. For sure the market is one way of measuring the criteria but, knowing Rimmer from previous episodes, the likelihood of the chest and toys actually being C19th is marginal. Hence their price might well be close to that of a Les Paul Copy. Also, this being set far in the future price actually has no meaning, money has no value. £20,000 has been burnt earlier, but not before a collection of second rate paperbacks and a complete works of Shakespeare. (In answer to the question, by Lister, as to whether Rimmer has actually read any Shakespeare, the only thing he can come up with is a grunt from the beginning of Richard III's soliloquy). The only object that actually survives the fire bucket is Lister's guitar - Rimmer having been so moved by what he thinks of as Lister's sacrifice that in go the toy soldiers to the accompaniment of a hummed 'Last Post'. (The chest is already ruined having been cannibalised for the fake). After watching Red Dwarf I was looking at Chomsky's programme which had a lot to say about the internalisation of values. I liked the Reliant Robin boat and I liked the Challenge tug - both seem to be connected to values I admire, making do and getting by in the case of the Reliant (though I detect a slight whimsicality in my feelings) and a kind of gritty self-determination in the case of "Challenge". The tug is not, after all, called "Reigning Champion".

As regards your pen, one seems to be a Pelican and the other a Bill Woodrow. Mont Blanc by the way is a mountain which I admire - it's not after all some little hillock

and the logo on the pen is a great combination of ink blot and the glacier system on top of the mountain. The logo, perched on top of the pen is an abstraction and miniaturisation I've always thought was pretty good. Your hybrid undoubtedly exhibits all the skill, cunning and ingenuity that I have come to admire so much. Plus it works, which Lister's copy didn't. The original did - though he played it pitifully badly. (His execrable playing was in part that which drove Rimmer away, allowing Lister the time needed to make the simulacrum).

Richard.

Dear Richard,

Yes - I would cease to exist if you "switched me off". What I want to know is, where is my switch? The things that can "switch me off" I see as being internal - the switches are inside me -you have to break my surface to get at them. I saw Rimmer as having a switch not at all part of him - nowhere in the vicinity, so to speak. In a way, I warmed to him once I read that you doubted, due to his previous form, that the chest and toys had the potential to be not as he described them. He came unstuck though with the question of Shakespeare. I may be reading too much between the lines but I imagine he was trying to get away with the idea that it was fine to burn it as he knew it all. I would advocate to anyone to be completely honest about never having read Shakespeare or not remembering the little one has read. I *do* admire the wit of the grunt but think it would have carried much further had it been the opener on the topic of Shakespeare rather than the worm at the end. The fire bucket has an interesting role and somewhat temporary value in all this. A little like the hole in the centre of a wheel. The humming of the 'Last Post' seems to indicate that, after all, Rimmer's feeling for his wooden soldiers was pitched pretty much at the right level even though he had been duped into burning them. I laughed a lot when I read the bit about the humming!

Now that you have mentioned Chomsky I'm going to write about the pens again. I too like the Mont Blanc logo for the reasons you list but also that the colour (white) of the logo always surprises me, even though I understand the snow/ice connection. Perhaps it suggests invisible writing. I am now thinking of a logo for the hybrid.

Bill.

Dear Richard,

All your faxes arrive with a thick black line down the left hand side. Is your paper running out?

Bill.

Dear Bill,

No - I think it's a transmission fault. Time for some maintenance.

Richard.

Dear Bill,

No, Rimmer knows nothing very much but he aspires to knowing. He doesn't want to burn the books but in the hierarchy that develops, after the immediately available detritus has been burnt, culture is the first to go, followed by money, lastly by valued possessions, personal icons or whatever we call them. There's also a nice moment when, the other food having all gone, Lister is about to eat a tin of dog food. This is happening at the same time as the books are being burnt.

Chomsky's point (that he made in a variety of ways during a two-and-a-half hour programme -some marginalisation - though I suppose it was Channel 4) was about internalisation of values, self regulation. He may or may not be right, but I'd doubt the truth of your assertion that "you" are internally constituted. That is, what "I" am, isn't just a biochemical process that happens internally, otherwise surely the Woodrow/Deacons would be more separable into constituents than it seems to me they are. Obviously I know and you know, but a lot of people don't - or get it wrong. A.K.A. Les Paul Copies.

Richard.

Dear Richard,

I feel sympathetic to Rimmer's aspirations to knowing. Would he have read the books anyway ... or were they always destined to be cultural cosmetics?

In a similar situation I think I would have cooked the tin of dog meat over the burning books before eating it.

Chomsky's, I have never read any (Shakesby and Chomspeare alike), but saw one very good interview with him on television, seemingly continuous engagement with Self versus State I found very admirable. One "goes with the flow" for so much of the time, relying on an ability to swim to the bank, dry off, and scan the horizon for other routes and sources of nourishment. Most of the time I am capable of this. The real problems start when I have to decide if I have enough strength to dive back in the river and swim once again and tell other people what I have seen, or just walk off alone to the next river.

It's not the swimming but the telling that is the most exhausting and, of course, ultimately the most rewarding. This seems to back up - and I agree - that what "I" am, isn't just a biochemical process. Initially I think I was trying to establish for myself that Rimmer "is" merely technology despite having been given emotions or rather the circuits etc. to establish the appearance (and for him the tensions) of emotions. I still think Rimmer is only a product of technology and that it is very important not to lose this fact under the crossfire of their human and anthropomorphised dialogue...

Some guitarists much prefer the best Les Paul Copies to the real thing.

A.K.A. ain't nothing like the real thing.

Bill.

