



COVIDS

PHILIP TERRY

PAN/DEM/IC (1)

the usual cheap anagrams
 delivering hand-made mothballs
 flicker
 like panettone

amongst *demi-mondaines*
 or Doric columns
 hidden for years in the pantry
 Demosthenes

I can't be sure
 seemed to pander to
 unpaid employees
 testing arctic conditions

“flicker/like panettone”, lines 2-3: a metaphoric “black hole” (panettone doesn’t flicker). Demosthenes (384-322 BC), line 8, was a Greek statesman, noted for his orations, which constitute a significant expression of Athenian intellectual prowess. Boris Johnson keeps a copy of Demosthenes’ *Orations*, in the original Greek, on his bedside table.

PAN/DEM/IC (2)

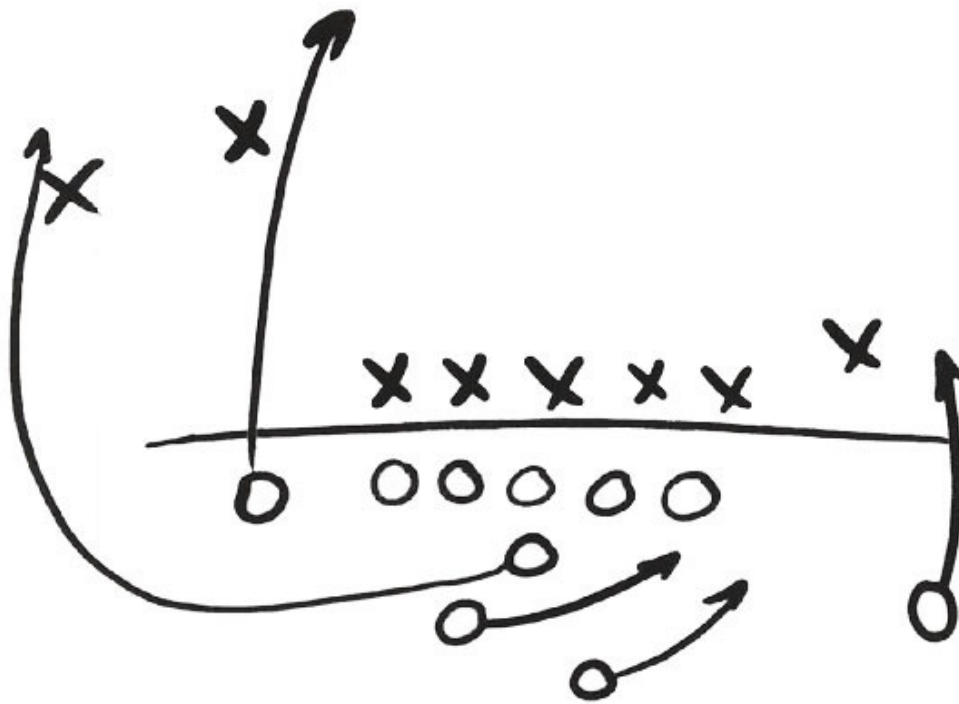
spangled with diamonds
 sad emboldened captains
 comb out lice
 through the mended pane

demonstrators held placards
 reading Freeze Iceland
 cut off like Andy Pandy
 demon lizards

suffering from the colic
 without hands or pants
 rode in tandem
 towards the high-earning fruit pickers

“spangled with diamonds”, line 1, perhaps suggests the UK Tory party leadership, comprised entirely of millionaires; “Freeze”, line 6, the public sector pay freeze introduced by the same; “high-earning fruitpickers”, line 12, would appear to ironically reference Boris Johnson’s “levelling up” policy.

THE GREAT TOILET ROLL SCRAMBLE



PAN/DEM/IC (3)

a pantisocratic dialogue
 renamed Demos
 with a flick of the wrist
 pans out to a sunset

a *demi* on the table
 alembics
 the panting of the heart
dem mothers keep a cummin

ichthyosaurs
 with a hop and a jump
 made mincemeat of them
 this is where it gets complicated

“*dem mothers*”, line 8: perhaps a reference to pandemics in general, including smallpox, cholera, and TB, which shows no sign of going away soon, and today kills more people than at any other time in history. The oldest fossil evidence for TB comes from a five-hundred-thousand-year-old *Homo erectus* skull found in Turkey. They keep a cummin.

**MRS CAVENDISH, WHO IS DEAD, SENDS HER SON ON A PROXY WALK
TO THE BLUEBELL WOOD**

The bluebells are still there mother.
They are magical
as always
in their blueness
in their bluebellness.

They cover the ground
in every direction
as far as you can see
and they give a blue-brightness
to the woodland light
a crisp blue-freshness to the air
like soap powder.

If you look closely
you can see little rings
which have been made
by many little feet
dancing, spinning, playing,
bluebelling about.

They are not the feet of
children, you know that,
they are more
delicate than that,
they are the bluebell people,
you know that,
for you have seen them too.

I sit on your bench
beneath the blue shade

listening to the song of the wind
as it tickles the bluebells
into life.

This is the
moment dad would have
spoilt it all –
I remember you complaining! –
taking out his pipe,
stinking the place out
with acrid clouds of smoke.

Instead, I close my eyes
and I can see it all,
I can hear it all:
the music, the bells tinkling,
the silent whirling dance
as the bluebell people

whirl about hand-in-hand
round and round and up and down
like in that painting
of Matisse you liked
where they all turn
in a ring flip-flapping their arms
and singing their hearts out.

When I open them,
they are gone.
Except for the light breeze
in the trees overhead,
and the distant drone
of cars on the A12
all is silent again,
like you, in your grave.

PAN/DEM/IC (4)

across pan-
 dem-
 ic wastes
 they rode pantomime horses

like demon drovers
 in sextuplicate
 pandering to
 the blind demonstrators

through folds of dry ice
 pan-
 demonium reigned as far as the
 manic corsairs camped in the blue hills

The first stanza could be construed in its entirety as a metaphor for the Tory administration, and their shambolic response to the pandemic, particularly in the early stages. “in sextuplicate” perhaps refers to Health Secretary Matt Hancock’s extra-marital affair, which led to his resignation in June 2021, as it was in breach of social distancing guidelines.

**BORIS JOHNSON, CYCLING TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT,
MEDITATES ON THE NEW THREAT OF COVID-19**

Pah, it's a real ball ache to say the least,
all my Brexit plans straight out the window;
containment has gone completely tits up,
which means herd immunity or lockdown:

herd immunity	lockdown will not be
could be a good shout,	popular with the
it will have conse-	electorate, we
quences, to be sure,	love our freedom too
some people will die,	much, I'll lose votes if
but it will give the	I take that away,
economy a	and it'll cripple
fighting chance	the economy

Herd immunity or lockdown, that's the
question: I'd better give Cummings a call;
perhaps this is my *magnum momentum*,
bring it on, I say, we'll fight this bugger and win.

PAN/DEM/IC (5)

panel-beating at weekends
 mad empathy-fuelled revolutionaries
 about to kick off
 fill up their pans with soda

and add three teaspoons of demerara
 to its logical conclusion
 furnished with the latest panty-hose
 the demented *danse macabre*

on ice
 Peter Pan
 demystifies plainsong
 or organ music

“mad empathy-fuelled revolutionaries”, line 2, perhaps references the Extinction Rebellion movement, active during the UK pandemic. When they superglued themselves to the M25, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was uncharacteristically swift to act, which you’d have thought would lead to questions regarding his commitment to climate change, but it didn’t. One of Johnson’s estranged daughters, from a former marriage, a green activist who was on the scene, commented that it was “typical”. “organ music”, line 12, would seem to be another reference to Health Secretary Matt Hancock (see above), who bears a passing resemblance to Peter Pan, a role which he took on in the Torbay Christmas pantomime of 2021, to widespread critical acclaim.

PAN/DEM/IC (6)

the camera panned left
as the blade moved slowly towards her
a frantic loon
wearing flourescent ski-pants

and demim
(sic)
panting like a crazed zombie
and demanding blood

which is it to be
he asked in a deadpan voice
Dempsey fired three times
in panic *bang! bang! bang!*

“flourescent ski-pants”, line 4, perhaps references one of Europe’s first outbreaks of Covid-19, in March 2020, in an Austrian ski resort, at the après-ski bar *Kitzloch*.

DELIVEROO RIDER'S SONG

after Lorca

Southend.

Vroom-vroom!

Down the A130

Distant and lonely.

Black Yamaha, large moon,
 in my backpack pizzas, kebabs, and cigarettes.
 Though I know the road like the back of my hand,
vroom-vroom!
 will I ever reach Southend?

Past the flat misty fields,
 black Yamaha, red moon.
Vroom-vroom!
 Death keeps a watch on me
 from Southend's empty pier.

The pizzas will be cold,
 the kebabs indigestible.
Vroom-vroom!
 Like I am cold
 to the very core.

Ah, such a long way to go!
 And, hell, my battered Yamaha!
 These shit roads!
Vroom-vroom!
 Ah, but death awaits me
 before I ever reach Southend.

Southend.
Vroom-vroom!
 Distant and lonely.

PAN/DEM/IC (7)

shares in Outspan
code mango
and mixed spice
the Pandora leaks

place democracy
at a delicate juncture
pancake clusters of oil
visible from the demesne

at Vatican headquarters
the Pope ordered deep-pan pizzas
demolished overnight
and vanilla ice-cream

The Pope ordering deep-pan pizzas, line 10, perhaps suggests panic-buying, one of the regrettable side-effects of the pandemic. When have you heard of a Pope ordering *deep-pan* pizzas?

PANDEMIC SONG OF THE GREAT-APE

Anan banda ho?

Anan ho vanada khem?

Anana doh tounago?

Sa dhem?

Sa cumgo?

Sa falom?

Etta boonah b'yat

Eana doop bondo

Pang gotum banta?

Pong nada ponka?

Pon go a amba tanta?

Pan ortokka ua?

Pon dano za-boota?

Pon agoopa seet?

Etta boonah b'yat

Eana doop bondo

Where have all the great holes gone?

Where is the great white killer?

Where are his wheel-wheels?

His guns?

His women?

His fire?

This white man fever

Brings ape peace.

What is this silence in the savannah?

Why are the birds singing by the creek?

Why do we not hear the white man's gun?

What is the warthog saying?

Why is the lion silent?

Why do I hear the ants laughing?

This white man fever

Brings ape peace.

WHITE LIGHT WALK

Red leaves of a rosebush.

Orange fishing net at 849 steps.

Yellow train at 4,427 steps.

Green yew in Alresford churchyard at 7,980 steps.

Blue speedwell at 12,579 steps.

Indigo pool at 15,917 steps.

Violet crocuses, violets and pansies at 17,738 steps.

PAN/DEM/IC (10)

the panel consisted of bearded
demonologists
and Mick Jagger
sporting pantalettes

a *démodé* look
which went largely unnoticed
among Panama hats and bow ties
demoralized

applicants lined up in the lobby
taking turns to cook panchax
and to demonstrate their knowledge
of the Magic Circle

Panama, line 7: the successful eradication of malaria in the Panama Canal Zone at the turn of the twentieth century, led to optimism concerning the eradication of this pandemic disease; optimism which in the long run turned out to be misplaced, for a variety of reasons, among them increasing resistance to DDT among mosquito vectors.

A RECAPITUL

12 May 2020, Rowhedge

Today I met Chris McCully at
Rowhedge. We went walking in a wood,
to a lake, then turned round and came back

(today, wood, lake)

he was recovering from a heart
attack, walked with the aid of a stick,
his heart was still beating, but slowly

(heart, stick, beating)

he described the drive to the hospit-
al on empty roads, the speed of the
operation, his recovery

(drive, roads, operation)

it would be a long journey he said.

PAN/DEM/IC (11)

he took P&O to Le Havre
drinking too many *demis*
in the bar and was sick
in the pan

the ghostly sounds of Demis Roussos
trickled out of the
PA note perfect
back in the bar a demure black

moth settled icily
on his next beer a *panaché*
nobody saw him demanding *l'addition*
nobody saw him nick overboard

“nick” , line 12, suggests old Nick, the devil, Satan – is old Nick to blame? Is the moth settling on the *panaché* a foreshadowing of old Nick’s entry into the poem?

UNTITLED

... as y ... as b ... If th
 ... a ...
 ... population density ...
 ... the whole country by the ...
 ... like in Spain and Italy where the op ...
 ... the undercounting in Europe was ...
 ... government was coping as well as ri ...
 the headlines told a different story.
 ... alternative explanation about PPE also ...
 ... extreme shortages of PPB expose ...
 ... hospital trust's managers. Many ...
 rqua ... While good managers - fo ... nple
 ... ital - had averted a ...
 ... re ste ... e oth

PAN/DEM/IC (12)

like a pantoum
 as if to demonstrate
 even if ironically or almost
 the death of the pantheon

as if to demonstrate
 by a kind of conjuring trick
 the death of the pantheon
 a building suddenly demolished

by a kind of conjuring trick
 like a pantoum
 a building suddenly demolished
 even if ironically or almost

“like a pantoum”, lines 1 & 10: this cryptic poem has largely resisted attempts by critics to see it as a poetic *roman à clef* documenting the tensions in Downing Street during the first UK lockdown (eg. the suddenly abolished building of lines 8 & 11 have been read as the root and branch restructuring of the Civil Service advocated by Dominic Cummings), but it is certainly possible to see the pantoum’s repetitions as standing as a metaphor for the repeated mistakes of the government across the duration of the pandemic as a whole.

QUIT

When I first heard, you know,
who I was looking after
I thought my workmates were
playing a joke on me.

My first glimpse of him
was lying flat on his back
breathing heavily eyes shut.
He looked different
without the flags behind him
and out of a suit
he wasn't smiling.

All around him there were
lots and lots of sick patients,
most of them on ventilators.
Some of them were dying.

I remember thinking, well,
just that he looked very
very unwell. He was a
different colour really.

We did the usual things but
he wasn't responding.
We were seriously worried.
There was a period when
it could have gone either way,
that's when we sat by his bed,
through the night,
just doing what we could really,
watching, observing his

levels and the rest of it.
 He was one of the lucky ones.

Later he asked me to do
 a photo standing by his side.
 I said no.

A lot of nurses
 thought the government
 hadn't led very effectively,
 it was awful at times,
 a real shitshow –
 there'd been so much indecisiveness
 and mixed messaging.

And after that when I heard
 about the 1% pay rise
 I thought that's it, we
 just aren't getting the respect
 we deserve.

I didn't have anything
 left to give to the NHS.
 I just couldn't go on.

Philip Terry was born in Belfast, and is a poet, translator, and a writer of fiction. He has translated the work of Georges Perec, Michèle Métail and Raymond Queneau, and is the author of the novel *tapestry*, shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize. His poetry and experimental translations include *Oulipoems*, *Quennets*, *Dante's Inferno*, and *Dictator*, a version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in Globish. *The Penguin Book of Oulipo*, which he edited, was published in Penguin Modern Classics in 2020, and Carcanet published his edition of Jean-Luc Champerret's *The Lascaux Notebooks*, the first ever anthology of Ice Age poetry, in April 2022.

