

## Notes for *The Century of Deception*

### Chapter Two: 'But a Trifle', pp. 33-53.

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- 'But a Trifle' title: *Predictions for the Year, 1708* by Isaac Bickerstaff, p. 5: 'but a Trifle'.

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- First almanac: *Astrology and the Popular Press, English Almanacs, 1500-1800*, Bernard Capp, London: Faber & Faber, 1979, p. 26. Much of the analysis about astrology, and many of the subsequent quotes from sundry almanacs, come from this book [hereafter known as *Capp*]; and also from *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early England*, Patrick Curry, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
- Forty-eight pages: 'The Bickerstaff Caper', W K Thomas, *The Dalhousie Review*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1969, p. 346.
- John Partridge: Sources about John Partridge included *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter known as *ODNB*], Partridge, John (1644–1715); 'The Early Life of John Partridge', George P Mayhew, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Summer, 1961, pp. 31-42; The Wits vs John Partridge, Astrologer, William Alfred Eddy, *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1932, pp. 29-40; Tom Brown and Partridge the Astrologer, William A Eddy, *Modern Philology*, Vol. 28, No. 2, November 1930, pp. 163-8.

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- Death of a King in 1688: *Mene Tekel, Being An Astrological Judgment On the Great and Wonderful Year 1688*, John Partridge, 1688, pp. 5 & 15. He wrote, that there will be an 'alteration in the Government by the death of the then King, Prince, &c.' And later, in the same pamphlet, he expected 'the death of some great man' for the month of October 1688. The latter quote can also be found in *Annus Mirabilis or Strange and Wonderful Predictions and Observations Gathered out of Mr. J. Partridges Almanack 1688*, London, 1689, p. 17.
- 'Civil Death' and 'worse than Death': *The Second Part of Mene Tekel: Treating of the Year MDCLXXXIX*, John Partridge, London, 1689, pp. [A4-5] 'I find some peevish People', Partridge wrote, 'are apt to exclaim against Astrology, because the late King did not dye in October or November, 1688.' He admitted that 'I did think he would have died' but just because he didn't 'is no Injury to Astrology'. In any event James II's exile 'is so like Death', that it is 'indeed a Civil Death', an event 'worse than Death'. For those who don't believe in astrology, even if King James had actually died in October 1688, then they would have 'said it was predicted by chance'. Partridge's reasoning is a variation on the phrase attributed to the 13th century Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas: 'To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary; to one without faith, no explanation is possible.'
- 'the stars incline, but do not compel': *Capp*, p. 35. The phrase Lilly used was *non cogunt*.

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- 'News from France; good enough if it prove true, though perhaps all may not be of my opinion': Cited in 'The Bickerstaff Caper', p. 347: Another example is: 'The end of this month, or beginning of the next, will undoubtedly give Violence and violent Actions, and perhaps private murder and such like, &c.'
- 'Why not an ecclesiastical person, or lawyer, promoted to great honour?': Cited in *Capp*, p. 35.
- John Gadbury: Partridge accused Gadbury of being a papist, pimp, plotter and philanderer, as well as accusing him of murdering his mistress's husband.
- 'wished them so': Cited in *Capp*, p. 36.
- 'wicked people' and 'deluded me': Cited in *Capp*, p. 36.
- George Parker: Parker was a staunch Tory, high church and against the war. Partridge had called him an 'Impudent Jacobite Conjuror' when the latter epithet referred to raising up spirits; and at a time when supporting the Stuart line was extremely dangerous. He also resorted to more personal insults, accusing Parker of abusing his ex-wife and mocking his bankruptcy.
- 'the Troubler of Europe': *Parker's Ephemeris For the Year of our Lord 1708*, George Parker, London, 1708, p. 5. Also p. 7 for the destruction of shipping. Some of Parker's criticisms could be accused of nit-picking. When Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Cloudesley Shovell, lost his life, along with some 2,000 sailors, off the Scilly Isles in October 1707, Parker said it wasn't due to the storms that Partridge had predicted but 'their own Neglect', p. 8.

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- 'a Ring to prevent Cuckoldom, very useful for all married Persons': *A Comical View of the Transactions That will happen in the Cities of London & Westminster*, ascribed to Silvester Partridge. Republished in *The Works of Mr Thomas Brown in Prose and Verse*, London, 1707, p. 50. Other citations are: 'If rainy, few Nightwalkers in Cheapside and Fleetstreet' (p. 44); 'Great jangling of Bells all over the City from Eight to Nine' (p. 45); and "Ministers Preach against Sins, but the People still Practice it" (p. 49).
- Jonathan Swift: Information about Jonathan Swift came from a number of sources, including the *ODNB*, Swift, Jonathan (1667-1645); The Introduction to *Jonathan Swift: English Political Writings 1711-1714*, Edited by Bertrand A Goldgar and Ian Gadd, Cambridge University Press, 2008; 'Politics and History', David Oakleaf; and 'Swift and religion', Marcus Walsh from *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, Edited by Christopher Fox, Cambridge University Press, 2003; *Jonathan Swift: Parodies, Hoaxes, Mock Treatises*, Edited by Valerie Rumbold, Cambridge University Press, 2013; and 'Burying the fanatic Partridge: Swift's Holy Week hoax', Valerie Rumbold, *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives*, Edited by Claude Rawson, Cambridge University Press, 2010. Valerie Rumbold was kind enough to correspond with me over some queries that I had.

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- 'On the Glorious Union of the Two Kingdoms': *Merlins Liberatus: Being an Almanack For the Year of our Blessed Saviour's Incarnation 1708*, John Partridge, London [nd], pp. [6-7]. Parts of this poem are redacted in the almanac.
- 'but not on a sudden': *Ibid*, p. 19: Other citations are for the month of February: 'rather have no Peace than not to have a durable one' (p. 11). In March he postulated the likelihood of more blood being spilt because of 'some Divisions in the Councils of those Countries' (p. 13) involved in the war.

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- Partridge relishing debate: Partridge's 1697 almanac had even gone so far as to list notorious cheats, including many of his fellow practitioners
- *Predictions for the Year 1708* by Isaac Bickerstaff: Full title is *Predictions for the Year, 1708*. Wherein the Month and Day of the Month are set down, the Persons named, and the great Actions and Events of next Year particularly related, as they will come to pass. *Written to prevent the People of England from being farther impos'd on by vulgar Almanack-makers. By ISAAC BICKERSTAFF, Esq; Sold by John Morphew near Stationers-Hall, 1708* [hereafter known as *Predictions*, 1708].
- The name Bickerstaff: An editorial note written during Swift's lifetime purported to convey Swift's own explanation 'that the Author, when he had writ the following Paper, and being at a Loss what Name to prefix to it; passing through *Long-Acre*, observed a sign over a House where a Locksmith dealt, and found the Name *Bickerstaff* written under it: Which being a Name somewhat uncommon, he chose to call himself *Isaac Bickerstaff*.' Cited in 'The Bickerstaff Caper', p. 349. It has also been suggested (p. 350) that he chose Isaac, as the Hebrew original means to 'laughter'; and 'Bickerstaff' combines a skirmish (to bicker) whilst simultaneously beating someone with a stick. If this was true, it was a literary paradox that no-one, at least publicly, unravelled at the time
- Face value: Certainly there is no hint of any irony in *The Dublin Intelligence* for 14 February, 1708 where it was advertised as '*The Predictions of Isaac Bickerstaff Esq; for the Year 1708. Shewing the most remarkable Events that shall happen in Europe, the Month, Day and hour of the Death of Several Potentates, &c.*'

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- Planetary influence: Even the reliable comet was under attack. *Miscellaneous Reflections, Occasion'd by the Comet which appear'd In December 1680*, Mr Bayle, London, 1708, p. 27. The author poured plenty of wit and ridicule on astrological predictions that were made in its wake. He wrote that any prognostications based on a comet were 'extremely ridiculous', going on to proclaim that there was 'never any thing so chimerical as Astrology' and 'never so great a Scandal upon human Nature'.

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- 'the sickliest Season of the Year': *Predictions*, 1708, p. 3: '*This Month a certain great Person with be threatened with Death or Sickness*', even though 'no Month passes without the Death of some Person of Note'; and 'the Almanack-maker has the liberty of chusing the sickliest Season of the Year where he may fix his Prediction.'
- '*God preserve King William from all his open and secret Enemies*': *Predictions*, 1708, p. 3: 'if the King should happen to have died, the Astrologer plainly foretold it; otherwise it passes but for the pious Ejaculations of a Loyal Subject.'
- Venereal disease: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 3: 'Advertisements about *Pills and Drink for the Venereal Disease*.'
- Forecasts to friends: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 3: 'All which I shewed to some Friends many Months before they happened...and there they found my Predictions true in every Article, except one or two.'
- Cheat if he fails: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 4: 'hoot me for a Cheat and Impostor if I fail in any single Particular of Moment.'
- Matter-of-factly predict them: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 4: He intoned that he would 'talk more sparingly of Home Affairs', as 'it would be dangerous to my Person' to disclose 'Secrets of State'. But of smaller matters that were 'not of publick Consequence' and 'the most signal Events abroad', he would 'Predict them in plain Terms'.
- Stars only incline: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 4: 'the Stars do only *incline*, and not *force*, the Actions or Wills of Men.'
- Overcoming planetary influence: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 4: He cannot be absolutely certain that 'the Events will follow exactly as I predict them'. This he contended is because man's free will can overcome 'the Influence of an over-ruling Planet'. He acknowledged that 'the great Events of the World' were dependent on 'Numbers of Men'; and they can't all be expected to behave in the same way.

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- 'natural year' and 'the *Sun* enters into *Aries*': *Predictions*, 1708, p. 5.
- 'but a Trifle' and 'of a raging Feaver': *Predictions*, 1708, p. 5: 'It relates to *Partridge* the Almanack-maker; I have consulted the Star of his Nativity by my own Rules, and find he will infallibly dye upon the 29th of *March* next, about Eleven at Night, of a raging Feaver.'
- 'a Tertian Ague and Fever': *Merlins Liberatus: Being an Almanack For the Year of our Blessed Saviour's Incarnation 1708*, John Partridge, London [nd], p. [15]. As usual, Partridge had covered himself by wishing 'it may not prove a Malignant Fever'.
- 'thousands': *An answer To Bickerstaff. Some reflections upon Mr Bickerstaff's predictions for the year MDCCVIII*. By a Person of Quality. 'I doubt not but some thousands of these papers are carefully preserved by as many persons, to confront with the events, and try whether the astrologer exactly keeps the day and hour.' 'I believe it is no small mortification to this gentleman astrologer, as well as his bookseller, to find their piece, which they sent out in a tolerable print and paper, immediately seized on by three or four interloping printers of *Grub-street*, the title stuffed with an abstract of the whole matter, together with the standard epithets of *strange* and *wonderful*, the price brought down a full half, which was but a penny in its prime, and bawled about by hawkers of the inferior class, with the concluding cadence of "A halfpenny a piece!"'

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- 30 March: *The Daily Courant*, 30 March 1708.
- *The Black Life of John Gadbury*: Full title is *Nebulo Anglicanus: Or, The First Part of the Black Life of John Gadbury*, J. Partridge, London, 1693.
- *The Whipper Whipp'd*: Full title is *Flagitiosus Mercurius Flagellatus, Or, the Whipper Whipp'd: Being an Answer to a Scurrilous Invective. Written by George Parker in His Almanack for MDCXCVII*, John Partridge, 1697.
- 'odd': *Mr Partridge's Answer*, p. 4: 'However it looks something odd, that the Stars can find no body else to kill all over Christendom, but a Poor *Almanack-maker*.'

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- 'sparingly of Home Affairs': *Predictions*, 1708, p. 4.
- Frivolous: *Predictions*, 1708, p. 5. 'On the 14th, a great *Peer* of this Realm will dye at his Country House'. Also, 'On the 23rd, a famous Buffoon of the Play-House will dye of a ridiculous Death' (p. 6); and 'that near the End of this Month much Mischief will be done at *Bartholomew Fair*, by the Fall of a Booth' (p. 7).
- 'on the supposed Death of Partridge, the Almanack-Maker': Full title is *A Grub-Street Elegy. On the supposed Death of Partridge, the Almanack-Maker*. 1708.

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- 'Here, five Feet deep...or Shoes;' Sadly for Partridge this is how posterity now principally remembers him; in spite of the pompous engraving on his actual tombstone, where he claims, although there is no supporting evidence for it, that he held a doctorate from Leiden. The words on his actual tombstone are: 'Johannes Partridge astrologus et medicinæ doctor, natus est apud East-Sheen in comitatu Surrey 8° die Januarii anno 1644, et mortuus est Londini 24° die Junii anno 1715. Medicinam fecit duobus Regibus unigue Reginae Carolo scilicet Secundo, Willielmo Tertio, Reginaeque Mariae. Creatus medicinæ doctor Lugduni Batavorum.'
- *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr Bickerstaff's Predictions*: Full title is *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr Bickerstaff's Predictions, Being An Account of the Death of Mr Partridge The Almanack-Maker upon the 29th Instant. In a Letter to a Person of Honour. Written in the year 1708*.

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- April Fool's Day: *Modern Philology*, May 1964, 'Swift's Bickerstaff Hoax as an April Fools' Joke', George P Mayhew, pp. 270-280. It would seem that *An Elegy* and *The Accomplishment* were published around 30 March 1708.
- 'there is no such Man as Isaack Bickerstaff, it is a sham Name' and 'Rogues': From a letter which is reproduced in "'There is No Such Man as Isaack Bickerstaff': Partridge, Pittis, and Jonathan Swift', John McTague, in *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Duke University Press, Volume 35, Number 1, Winter 2011, pp. 92-3. Partridge also writes: 'I dont doubt but you are Imposed on in Ireland also by a pack of Rogues about my being dead' and 'to undeceive your Credulous friends that may yet believe the death of y<sup>r</sup> Reall humble servant John Partridge.'
- 1709 Almanac, *Merlinus Liberatus*: Full title is *Merlinus Liberatus: Being an Almanack For the Year of our Blessed Saviour's Incarnation 1709*, John Partridge, London, [nd].
- 'base paper': *Ibid*, p. 1: 'I am Living, contrary to that base Paper said to be done by one *Bickerstaff*.'
- second Bickerstaff may appear: *Ibid*, under February 1709: 'Much lying News dispersed about this time; and also Scandalous Pamphlets. Perhaps we may have a second *Bickerstaff* appear.'
- 'the same Villain': *Ibid*: 'You may remember there was a Paper published predicting my Death on the 29<sup>th</sup> of *March* at Night 1708, and after the day was past, the same Villain told the World I was dead, and how I died; and that he was with me at the time of my death. I thank God, by whose Mercy I have my Being, that I am still alive and (excepting my Age) as well as ever I was in my Life, as I was also at that 29th of *March*.'
- 'an *Impudent Lying Fellow*': *Ibid*: 'And that Paper was said to be done by one *Bickerstaffe*, Esq; But that was a sham Name, it was done by an *Impudent Lying Fellow*. But his Prediction did not prove true: What will he say to excuse that? For the Fool had Considered the *Star of my Nativity* as he said.'

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- *A vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff*: Full title is *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff Esq; Against What is Objected to Him by Mr. Partridge, in his Almanack for the present Year 1709*. By the said Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq., London, 1709.
- 'Brevity, Perspicuity and Calmness': *Ibid*.

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- 'no man alive': *Ibid*: 'At every Line they read they would lift up their Eyes, and cry out, betwixt Rage and Laughter, "They were sure no Man alive ever writ such damn'd Stuff as this." Neither did I ever hear that Opinion disputed.'
- 'since before the *Revolution*'. *Ibid*.
- *Merlinus Liberatus*: Full title is *Merlinus Redivivus: Being an Almanack For the Year of Our Blessed Saviour's Incarnation 1714*, John Partridge, London, [nd].
- 'in the Language of Mr *Bickerstaffe, Dead*'; 'notorious Cheat' and 'will do Justice to Your Revived Friend, and Servant, John Partridge'. *Ibid*.

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- *Gulliver's Travels* was true: 'A Bishop here said, that book was full of improbable lies, and for his part, he hardly believed a word of it.' Letter from Swift to Pope, 27 November 1726, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, Volume III 1724-1731, Edited by Harold William, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 189.