

Reflections on Events at Manor Farm



Donkey Frieze, Franz Marc, 1911

All this happened donkey's years ago, but I will set it down as best as I can remember. My account may differ from that of other witnesses of the events at Manor Farm. But this is my contribution, as best as I can recall. I also give you some preliminary autobiographical information, just to put you in the picture.

As you may know, I claimed to be very honest and unbiased despite my unfashionable given name, Richard. I also am a reasonably accomplished pianist, although I haven't practiced recently due to the awkward fact that my fingers fused together and look like hoofs. Really they are hoofs. Are you surprised?

Some might dispute this, but I will tell you now that I was born a donkey of unassigned gender. I'm sticking to that belief.

In my earliest days, I went and sat in a field at every possible opportunity, and I learned to heehaw from a youngish age.

Then, during my time at childgarten, that is, at early brainwashing, I took to braying, especially at meal times. You can probably imagine how oppressed I must have felt when youngsters and controllers told me to hold my horses. Gilbert the Frog even made unfortunate remarks about me, using impermissible pronouns. But I was not overly concerned with the pronoun goading, as you might think, since I hadn't yet chosen any of the ninety-seven genders then on offer.

Later still, the allusions to my ascent into donkeyhood became more outpouring than the products of a Gaza City Ready-Mix-Concrete contractor.

"Richard, Richard, Heehaw, Heehaw," they would gloat, full of malice. So I had my name changed to Benjamin, a transition which linked me to the bloodline of a famous fictional donkey of that name, way back, before fact and fiction became basically identical.

After I left the brainwashing academy, I turned my forelegs to getting on the occupational ladder, as they say. This was largely a failure. The interviewers were not impressed with my braying and the fact that I put my front hoofs on the desk. I might say in passing that not one rule-enforcer objected to my extensive facial tattoos. These, of course, had become *de rigueur* for job applicants everywhere.

One of these human supremacists flat out told me "Get out of here, you dumb donkey!" It was the word 'dumb' I objected to, naturally. And I got my own back by quoting John Milton at her. "Well, you're a penurious niggard," I said, and stomped out, moderating my career options considerably.

Then I had my ears surgically enhanced so that I more truly took on the facial appearance of the mammal with which I

currently identify. Hoofs alone didn't quite make the grade, you understand. At that time, surgical transmammal surgery and applied hormone therapy were less advanced than now, but I took what was available—life being short.

In the meantime I had taken the plunge, marrying Bluebell, who resided in a nearby cowshed. She would stroll out, and we made eyes at each other, and so on. We were happy as newlyweds, Bluebell being blind and all, and what's more she could talk my hind legs off. But my secret was eventually uncovered, and one wintry day zie announced:

“So I married a jackass?” The tone was more of an accusation than a question. Then zie added, just for spite, “You're a lying, dog-faced pony soldier.” That was the last straw I could chew on. I shut the door and traipsed out into the deep snow, and stared at the equestrian statue of Floyd George in the center of the piazza. The white substance fell softly, and slowly accumulated on the shoulders and arms and around that dignified bronze head, and, need I add, on the horse he road in on. To keep up my spirits I hummed to myself one of the many melodies celebrating the life of that legendary figure. Somehow that simplified everything.

Bluebell and I were divorced shortly after. I got the lion's portion of the divorce settlement, and I'm still braying about it, although Malarky, the judge, gave her custody of the expected offspring. But nothing is settled until it is; that is until at least the fat, gender-unspecified mammal sings.

At the time, of course, the well-known Californian impresario, K. B. Harris, even congratulated me for fighting against injustice. Zie was like a carnivore with immense powers of calculation and few ideas. Also, zie had already had its nose extended into a very fashionable pinnocchio, in line with the then current importance given to showing an outward, third-dimensional projection of one's inmost beliefs and abilities. Zer help was invaluable; employers were easily intimidated by

the hyena-like cackle.

And so I ended up with a career guarding a farmyard of diverse creatures run by a bunch of pigs, who were helped, or so they believed, by a flock of apprentice chickens. Mostly, the requirements were that I bray loudly at the sight of any intruder of any species, historically underprivileged or not. I quickly learnt the ropes. I could kick hard, you see.

The farm managers usually went by the names of Snowball and Nancy. Both had other names, which I have forgotten, and both gloried in being rare breeds of the Berkshire and Tamworth varieties. But not to pin too fine a tail on it, they were mostly unavailable, being often inebriated or involved in translating short stories from the French, and twitching their fake dorsey beards so as to look important. Anyway, they spent much of their time at the *Red Lion* in the nearby village of Willingdon, discussing Julius Caesar's maneuvers during the recent war in France, and waving their trotters in time to the thud of the juke box. When the patrons ran out of yuan tokens to activate that dispenser of musical entertainment, they would burst into a refrain of "Floyd George knew my father, father knew Floyd George," as one does, especially on mandated pilgrimages involving long bus journeys.

But I was in clover. I was now almost a fully-fledged donkey on the outside, as well as by inclination. "This is the life! The life of Blinton Fiddle," I repeated to myself. And there were few unwonted visitors for me to practice my hoofs on.

But one day, a resident rooster, named Mo, got horribly on my nerves (I believe he was of the breed "Scots Dumpy," but my eyesight is not of the best, and my glasses haven't been adjusted to stay on my nose too well; they slide all the way down and somehow get caught in my nostrils).

I think the feeling was mutual. He would crow like a deranged horse-fiddle, and when I chased him across the cobbled yard,

he would flutter up into a disused grain silo, out of reach of my anger. My hoofs made climbing a real challenge, you see.

Mo would screech out, calling to his chicken harem, the members of which prostrated themselves weirdly.

I think Snowball and Nancy were equally angered by the intrusive crowing. Snowball tried to sell the bird to Nancy, but they couldn't decide on the true value of such a large and annoying bird.

The ensuing events are by now too well known to be retold in detail here. They involved the dunking of the large bird into a 94-gallon barrel of rainwater and then weighing the displaced contents. The bird sued for damages since it was deeply offended, some would say 'triggered.'

I was present at the trial, and I can tell you only that the session ended in total confusion. The case was finally dismissed by Malarky, the famous Judge. If you want to know about these events in more detail, please see [here](#). That's where you can learn some of the background to the hate-crime charges, in case you're interested. But please be warned, that account is not totally reliable.

I then decided to take things into my own hoofs. To get this giant rooster to cut out his caterwauling, I gave him an ultimatum. I said to Mo one day:

"I want you out of here by sundown," and gave him an uncharitable look. I said that in such a way that I thought he could not argue.

Well, he didn't. He just stretched out his very sharp claws and went for my forelegs, which was something he was practiced at. His beak was sharp too, a thing I discovered to my great annoyance. And you may be sure that Mrs. Jones, the veterinarian, and incidentally, wife of a previous owner of Manor Farm, took a keen interest in my anguished fetlocks.

I won that battle, I think, since Mo scampered off after I inflicted a heavy kick to his ruffled feathers.

The publicly acceptable explanation for Mo's aggressive behavior was his relative youthfulness; his frontal lobes not having fully formed, and also the fact that he had recently graduated from Princesston University, under the careful tutelage of Michael Oblabamba, PhD.

I may have won the battle, but I'm uncertain who will win the war.

I later discovered Mo's curriculum vitae hidden beneath one of the horse troughs, one of those near which the lizard men were reputed to slink. The CV described in detail his background, and boasted of his upbringing on a farm in Iowa, and of his unwelcome behavior at the small detached house of an aging widow in suburban Des Moines, and of a train journey in which he gained the upper claw over a defenseless indigent, and much else besides (for details of these events see NER, Chicken Pieces, Dec 2018 and Freight Train Blues, April 2020).

The CV went on to clarify his objectives with regard to agricultural improvements in general. These included the long-term goal of taking over the farm from the pigs and constructing more grain silos with the enforced help of human and mammal labor.

Well, that's my story. I may be a complete jackass, but I do know that chickens may come home to roost. And so I grazed on, nose against the pasture, kicking back ceaselessly at the transformed currents of our lives.