

Dear Friends,

Didn't I just get back from Norway? What was I doing in Europe again, five weeks later? Two things, mainly – I wanted to spend some time with my cousin Bill Phillips, who lives in Paris and has a vacation home on Oléron Island off the French Atlantic coast. And there were two heraldic booksellers – one near Antwerp, Belgium, and one deep in the Dutch countryside – whose stock I wanted to see (they had lists, but I can't buy from lists – I have to *see* the book). And conveniently, my brother Christopher was going to be in Holland at the same time I was planning to go there. He is a big fan of all things Dutch, to the point of actually learning the language, and I wanted to see what that was about. So on September 27 I flew to Paris.



I have been coming to Paris (arms at left) since I was seven years old – it hardly seems foreign to me now.¹ I stayed in my favorite (relatively) cheap hotel, on the Boulevard St. Germain, where I first stayed when I was 14. It is a great location – a block from the river, convenient to services and



transit stops, and with a fabulous selection of food shops right at the corner, on the Place Maubert, where provisions can be bought for delicious picnics in the room. There are shops for bread, and cheese, and wine, and fruit, and succulent prepared meats and *pâtés* and sausages and broiled chickens and whatever else a person could possibly want (also a farmer's market three days a week). See photo above. There have been food markets on this square continuously for the past 800 years.²

I wasn't in Paris for tourism – I was there just to enjoy being there. But I did visit the Monets in the Marmottan Museum, and went to the Pompidou Center for a show

¹ The motto FLUCTUAT NEC MERGITUR means roughly *tossed by the waves, but never swamped*. It refers to the ship in the arms – originally the emblem of a guild of boatmen on the Seine – but also to Paris itself. It is a good motto for people too – I try to live by it myself. The medals beneath the shield are the Order of Liberation, the Legion of Honor, and the War Cross (*croix de guerre*) with palm.

² One of my favorite dishes in the local *charcuterie* was [*pâté grand'mère*](#), meaning *like grandma used to make*. It is a riotously flavorful *mélange* of meat, spices, eggs, cream, onions, wine, and what-all. My own very un-French grandmother used to make chopped chicken liver – it was delicious too, but nothing like *pâté grand'mère*.



about the mad genius [Marcel Duchamp](#) (left). He started out as an Impressionist and a Fauve, but compared with others working in those styles he was nothing much. He was a terrific Cubist, though – you can almost watch the movement in his

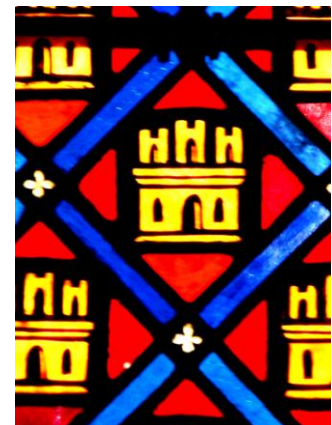
[Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2](#) (1912) (right), as if it were a film. This piece was in the show, and it was good to be able to spend some time with it. Many of Duchamp's other famous works, like [Fountain](#) (1917) (the famous signed urinal that settled the is-it-art question for all time) were there also.³



The [Pompidou Center](#), by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, was the ugliest building in the world when it was opened in 1977, and it still is. The architects thought it would be cool to put all the inside workings of their building – support members, electrical conduits, ventilation structures, elevator motors,



everything – and on the outside (and on the outside of the inside too) where they could be seen. This was an interesting idea, but the result (detail at left) makes it look like a perpetual construction site covered in scaffolding. There is a plastic tube on the outside from which you can see the city – it is like being in a rat cage. Even entering this overbearing structure is so unpleasant I try never to go there.



I did see some other things. Sainte-Chapelle, the jewel-box of a shrine built around 1248 by St. Louis of France for the Crown of Thorns and other Passion relics, has reopened after restoration. The stained-glass windows, some of the best anywhere, are blocked on one side because the French police headquarters have been built up around the chapel. But the armorial decoration on the windows and floors is still memorable. Right: a window with a castle motif, a badge of Louis' mother Blanche of Castile. Below, the

³

The answer is yes, it's art if the artist says it's art, although it may not be *good* art and you may not like it. Duchamp's art became more and more abstract and intellectual until finally he gave it up altogether and spent the rest of his life playing chess.

locks on the Pont de l'Archevêché – lovers attach them to the bridge railing and then toss the keys into the Seine to show that their love is forever. These have gotten so thick now that locks have to be attached to other locks, and build twisty structures out from the railing. A similar railing somewhere else recently collapsed from the weight of all the locks; even here the bottom-most locks are from only two years ago. Love seems inexhaustible, in Paris anyway.



There was lots more to see and do in Paris, including a productive visit to Librairie Gaston Saffroy, one of the last remaining old-style heraldic bookstores in Europe (meaning anywhere). But as noted the main reason I was in Paris was to spend some time with my cousin Bill (left), and to go with him for a weekend at his country house on Oléron (see the small red



box in the map at right).

Bill is a [painter](#) and photographer, but he's also a partner in a massive international law firm. His work kept him in Paris until late Friday evening, so it was dark when we set out on the mostly empty French highways, through Igny (where we picked up one guest) and Chartres (where we picked up another, the great cathedral silhouetted in the moonlight), and through the night via Orléans and Blois and Tours and Poitiers and Niort to La Rochelle, and then over the bridge to the island.⁴

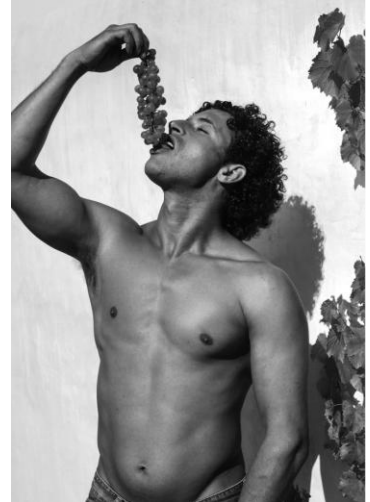
[Oléron](#) is an old fishing community, and it has by general agreement the best seafood (especially shellfish) in France, which is saying quite a lot. The oysters of Oléron deserve their fame. The island relies now more on tourism than on fishing, but the tourism is mainly French, divided as on Cape Cod between short-time vacationers and people (like Bill) with second homes there. Bill's house is in a small community called Domino (probably named after a Dominican convent), about three-fourths of the way north on the Atlantic side. The house is actually a compound of several buildings and secluded courtyards, whitewashed in the Moroccan manner. The sea is close (big, as Hemingway

⁴ I gained two new departments, bringing my total to 48 out of 94 (51%) in Metropolitan France (excluding Corsica and the overseas departments). [French departments](#) are sort of like American states, but smaller – they were created at the time of the Revolution to replace the bad old feudal provinces. The two I added this time were Charente-Maritime, where the island is, and Deux-Sèvres, the department just to the east.

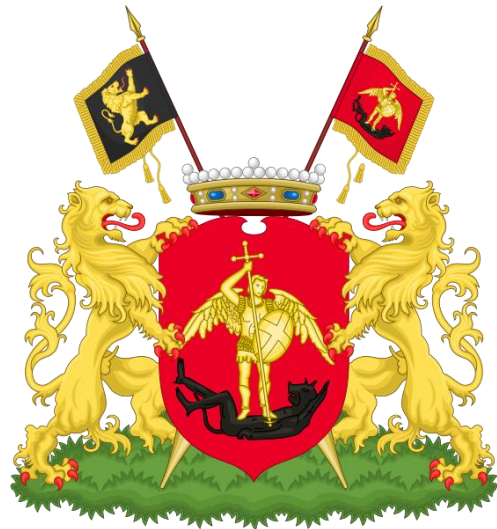
noticed), and the forest runs right up against his back wall, and there is a charming village with old stone houses, and nearby the remains of a fort by [Vauban](#). The village has a market with a superb selection of the best food in France (meaning the best food in the world, period), including many varieties of sausages and shellfish and even vegetables I had never seen before, all very fresh (the shellfish was alive). And delicious French bread. And wine, which I don't usually drink but this time I did. There was a little bar in the square, like a food truck, that served a drink called *pinot* (although pinot grapes do not come from there) – three parts the sweetest, richest (white) grape juice that can be imagined, to one part cognac. *Merveilleux!* I wish I had a glass of it right now. Below: Bill's house, and the tidal flats on the ocean side of Oléron, and some oyster sheds (where they take the barnacles off), and me.



We stayed through Monday. Bill and I, and Jean-Pierre (a percussion teacher, not Bill's partner of the same name), and Ruxandra (a partner in Bill's firm, from Romania), and Cati (a bohemian aristocrat) made a lively but not scandalous party.⁵ We ate hugely and listened to music, and I sang [Jamaica Farewell](#) over Harry Belafonte's 1956 recording, something I never do at home.⁶ Also present, as [fifth business](#): Bill's *protégé* Mourad, who came to France from Morocco to learn how to repair woodwind instruments, but didn't repair any where I could see him. At right: a picture of him, by Bill.



On Tuesday we came back to Paris, and the next day I went by the Eurostar high-speed train to Brussels.



Above left: arms of Belgium, based on a rather portly lion of Brabant, with the banners of the Belgian provinces at the top. The motto means *Union Makes Strength*. Above right: the arms of Brussels, featuring [St. Michael the Archangel](#) killing the Devil (Brussels is one of many sites in NE Europe dedicated to St. Michael). Left: the colors of the Belgian flag – the most beautiful flag in the world – taken from the arms.

⁵ *Bohemian* in this sense means *free-spirited*, not *Czech*.

⁶ My heart is down, my head is turning around, I had to leave a little girl in Kingston Town.

I hadn't been to Brussels for several years, and it was a pleasure to see it again. Brussels is nothing like as grand and imposing as Paris, but that is part of its charm. The buildings were much more varied than in Paris, where block after block of dignified limestone façades, impressive though they are, can grow tiresome. There is a Dutch flavor to many of the buildings (see photo on page 11), and an agreeable slightly-down-at-the-heels atmosphere. There are broad avenues and elegant residential quarters, but I chose to stay at a small hotel I had used before, very conveniently situated in a small street just outside the historic center. It was now run by the most unfriendly Indian innkeepers I have ever met, who seemed to regard every guest as a despised intruder. But it was adequate and (relatively) cheap, and I was only going to be there for four days, so I lived with it.



The historic center of Brussels is contained in a heart-shaped district, like the old towns of many European cities within what were once the city walls. The center of this district is the [Grand'Place](#), where the municipal palaces are, and the former headquarters of the medieval guilds. Some of the buildings are gilded, and they make a spectacular sight. The Grand'Place is too wide

for a photograph to do it justice, but here's a [painting](#) by Yuri Shevchuk.

Surrounding the Grand'Place is a maze of narrow streets with the names of the old markets they used to hold: *Marché aux Herbes*, *Marché aux Fromages*, *Marché aux Poulets*, *Brasseurs*, *Bouchers*, *Tenturiers*, *Fripriers*, *Harengs*, *Beurre*.⁷ Each street was named in Dutch as well as French (Belgium being in theory a bilingual country): *Grote Markt*, *Grasmarkt*, *Kaasmarkt*, *Kiekenmarkt*, *Brouwers*, *Beenhouwers*, *Kleerkopers*, *Ververs*, *Haring*, *Boter*. Mostly these streets no longer have markets in the old style, but shops and restaurants and cafés. Heaps of delicious mussels (a local specialty, steamed in white wine) were available at almost every bistro, along with rich dark beer.

⁷ Meaning *herb market*, *cheese market*, *chicken market*, *brewers*, *butchers*, *old clothes dealers*, *dyers*, *herring*, *butter*.

I did not hear Dutch spoken very much in Brussels itself, although I did hear it a lot elsewhere. Belgium was created in 1830 out of the southern (Catholic) provinces of the Netherlands. There is a deep division between the Flemings (who speak Dutch) and the Walloons (who speak French), and this division has paralyzed more than one Belgian government. Belgium is always on the edge of coming apart like Czechoslovakia, and is sometimes kept together only by the King (who, being of a German dynasty, can play a role as the “only Belgian”).⁸

Dutch is a fearsome-looking language. Christopher loves it enough to have learned to read and speak it, but I have not. It is possible to figure out bits of it from German, but not that many bits. Here’s what it looks like.

Dutch	English
Onze Vader in de hemel, wij eren Uw heilige naam. Laat Uw Koninkrijk spoedig komen. Laat Uw wil op de aarde worden gedaan, net zoals in de hemel. Geef ons vandaag het eten dat wij nodig hebben. Vergeef ons onze zonden, zoals wij anderen hun zonden vergeven. Laat ons niet in verleiding komen, maar verlos ons van de kwade machten. Want het Koninkrijk is van U en alle kracht en glorie tot in de eeuwigheid. Amen.	Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

We can make sense of *Onze Vader in de hemel*, once we know what it means (*hemel* = German *Himmel*); and can piece together other bits (Give us of-the-day the eating we need-have). But *verleiding*? *kwade*? *kracht*? *eeuwigheid*? Not unless we already know them, or know German. And *zonden* doesn’t mean *debts*, but *sins* (closer to *trespasses* as this passage is sometimes rendered in English). Fortunately English, while not quite as universally spoken as in Holland, is nearly so, and for purists there is always French.⁹

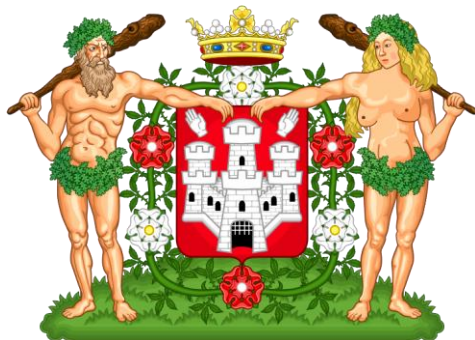
I did some tourism in Brussels, including the flamboyantly designed house of the art-nouveau architect [Victor Horta](#) (1861-1947), and the gloomy military museum in the park (there I was really aiming for the bookstore, which like the other bookstores in Brussels

⁸ I have posted elsewhere on my website an [appreciation](#) of the work of the late [King Baudouin](#) (reigned 1951-1993) as the only Belgian.

⁹ The word *Holland* in this sentence points up a nomenclature problem. The country next to Belgium is called *The Netherlands*. But that just means *The Low Countries*, and Belgium is one of those too – indeed as noted is used to be part of the Netherlands. *Holland*, loosely used to mean the Netherlands, is really only a portion of the country (North Holland and South Holland are two of its 12 provinces). The new word *Benelux* conveniently includes both countries, but includes Luxembourg too.

didn't have much in my line). I rode a lot of buses and trams to the ends of their routes, my favorite way to see a city. It rained, but not much, and snug in my waterproof gear I didn't mind it.

It was fun to be in Paris and Brussels, even choked as they are with cars, and to stroll along the neighborhood streets (even more fun, later, in unchoked Delft). But in recent years strolling has become hard for me – I can hardly go a block without stopping to rest. This can be exhausting as there is usually no place to rest when I need to. I have begun using a special folding cane that opens up into a seat (right) – European museums set them out for visitors, and I ordered one. It has made a huge difference – now, knowing I can stop at any time, I set out confidently and walk where before I stayed inside, or took taxis. An added benefit is that when I stop and rest on my folding seat (often set against a wall) I can watch and absorb the place I happen to be, even if it is a busy street corner, in a way that is hard to do while moving or even just standing up. After a few minutes I feel I have disappeared, and am just part of the scene like a lamppost or a statue. Then I can sit there quite a long time and really experience the place as I could not have done before. So as I enter my 70s and the pleasure of strolling recedes (because in truth even with the cane I don't do it very much), a new pleasure, a more intense way of seeing and relating to my surroundings, opens up.



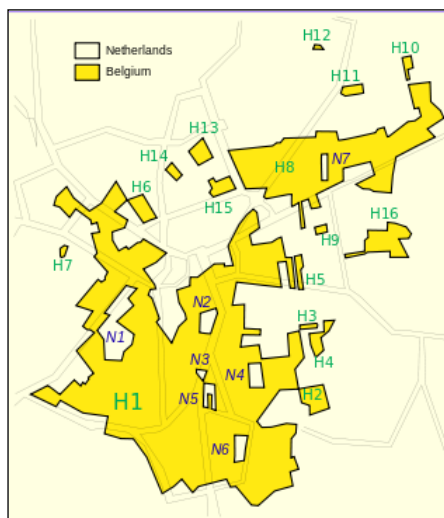
As mentioned, one of the main reasons for coming to Europe at all was to meet with two heraldic book-sellers and see their stock. They published lists, but I can't buy from a list, especially books in foreign languages – I have to see the book, and hold it, and page through, and listen to it murmur. So on my last morning in Brussels I picked up a car at Avis and headed out, led by my trusty GPS. My first stop was in Antwerp

(arms at left), where I stayed in a remarkably cheap commercial hotel near to the port (free parking!). I checked out a few bookstores (one had quite a lot of heraldic material, the only commercial bookstore I visited in Benelux that did), and found time to visit the [Plantijn-Moretus Museum](#), which preserves one of the most important printing workshops of the 16-17th centuries (right). I remember well, many years ago but not that many, learning letterpress printing on equipment that looked almost exactly like this.



Next the kind lady on the GPS guided me to Wijnegem, not far from Antwerp, where I had an appointment to see the heraldist and heraldic publisher Marc Van de Cruys in his snug suburban home, and where I spent a happy hour or so sorting his books into three piles: yes, no and maybe. In the end all the maybes became yeses (it was hard to say no – when was I going to come this way again?), and I filled two substantial shopping bags with Dutch heraldic books.¹⁰

After that it was the open highway – I was looking forward to some rural scenery as I headed toward the Dutch border not far away. However, Dutch towns are built so close together that there isn't much rural scenery before you're in another town. Except for an occasional pasture, there is room only for suburbs, business parks, and one traffic circle after another. This is not true of all of Benelux but it was true of the part I was in, plus it was raining hard. So (not for the last time) I abandoned thoughts of rural idylls and just headed for where I was trying to go. That was Delft, where Christopher had use of a house by a quiet canal. I was more than ready for some down time.

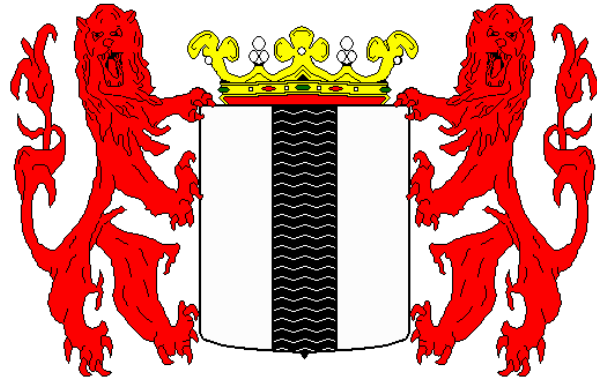


On the way there I made it a point to pass through Baarle, a town divided in a needlessly complicated way between Belgium ([Baarle-Hertog](#)) and the Netherlands ([Baarle-Nassau](#)). Border towns, although appealing to boundary mavens, are not that much of a novelty, but Baarle is a throwback – when the old metes and bounds that divided up feudal manors and demenses were rationalized and superseded, around the time of the French Revolution, somehow they missed Baarle, which is still a maze of enclaves and exclaves, the way large parts of Europe used to be in the old days.¹¹ It sounds like a fascinating place to visit, but it isn't – there's not much to see except a model of the town where the Belgian parts rise up half an inch (or sometimes don't)

¹⁰ True, I can't read Dutch, mostly, but I can make out the captions and I can look at the pictures. Often the main point of interest in foreign heraldic works, even basic primers, is the choice of images, very different from the usual choice in English books. There was something of enduring interest accessible to me in every one of the dozens of heraldic books and pamphlets I bought in Benelux.

¹¹ [Wikipedia](#) says: "The border's complexity results from a number of equally complex medieval treaties, agreements, land-swaps and sales between the Lords of Breda and the Dukes of Brabant. Generally speaking, predominantly agricultural or built environments became constituents of Brabant, other parts devolved to Breda. These distributions were ratified and clarified as a part of the borderline settlements arrived at during the Treaty of Maastricht in 1843."

when you press a button, and tourists milling around hoping for something else to look at, and not finding anything. The owner of the kiosk where I bought a Dutch phone card said he never could figure out why people came to Baarle.



After Baarle I was in the Netherlands (arms above left).¹² After a couple of hours more on the highway in the rain I arrived in Delft (arms above right). Christopher's house was on a disused canal evocatively called *Oosteinde* (meaning *East End*), presumably once filled with barges carrying cargo freshly unloaded from the Spice Islands (Dutch until the late 1940s), but filled now instead with algae and ducks.¹³ Although it is not the exact canal shown at right, it looked just like it.



Delft was quiet without being sleepy, calm without being static, gentle without being dull, bite-sized without being quaint. Christopher says it sums up what he likes about Holland, which he likes a lot. I was charmed and delighted, and enjoyed as much strolling

¹² The motto JE MAINTIENDRAI means *I will maintain*, and referred originally to the promise of a previous dynasty (Châlon) to maintain itself. But it didn't maintain itself, and the motto was inherited, with the principality of Orange in southern France, by the present Dutch ruling House of Nassau in 1544. Film at 11.

¹³ The [Dutch East Indies](#) (now Indonesia) proclaimed independence in 1945, after the defeat of the Japanese who had driven out the Dutch. The Dutch accepted this only in 1949, after an unpleasant war.

as I was able to do. In the Oude Kerk (old church) I visited the graves of the genius painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-75), and of [Antonie van Leeuwenhoek](#) (1632-1723), who invented the microscope.¹⁴ I rode around the canals on an excursion boat named for [William the Silent](#) (1533-84), who led the Dutch in revolution against their Catholic Habsburg overlords. Christopher and I planned to go on an expedition to St. Philipsburg, out among the windmills in the reclaimed polders, but opted instead for a lazy day by the canal.¹⁵

My last adventure in Holland was to meet with the heraldist Ralf Hartemink, whose [Heraldry of the World](#) website is a major resource for civic heraldry, and then drive to a small Dutch village to see Rob Meijerink, the other heraldic bookseller. Meijerink was not on the Internet, but had circulated a typewritten list of titles. As with Van de Cruys, I had to see the books before deciding, so I went out there and bought enough books from him that, with what I had bought before, I now needed an additional suitcase (which I found in Delft).

I was going to continue to Amsterdam, but after a confusion about my hotel I bagged that and went home a few days early.¹⁶ It was time to leave anyway – the suitcases were full, and I would have had to put any overflow in my coat pockets, or stuff them in my cheeks like a hamster. All told I brought home 75 books and pamphlets, some remarkably beautiful.¹⁷ On the next page I reprint a page from one of them.

David

November 2014



BRUSSELS

¹⁴ To save space, which was expensive, Vermeer was entombed standing upright.

¹⁵ [Polders](#), a Dutch specialty, are land areas reclaimed from the water and enclosed by dikes.

¹⁶ The hotel had booked me into a dormitory room with six backpackers! Not acceptable.

¹⁷ They weighed over 100 pounds.

ARMES & COULEURS DE L'ÉTAT



Typ. Attinger frères.

Maurice Tripet fecit.

Plate X from Maurice Tripet, *Les Armoiries et les Couleurs de Neuchâtel 1034-1891*