

PARIS - Eglise Saint-Louis des Invalides,
Sarcophage de l'Empereur Napoléon 1er.

Un Invito

29 Aprile 1992
A Paris, Chiesa Saint-Louis
del Invalidos
20.00 ora

Rispondere per cortesia
alla Manutius

NICK BANTOCK
Byzantium Books
#211 402 West Pendre
Vancouver, B.C.
V 6B 1T6

PER VIA AEREA

93

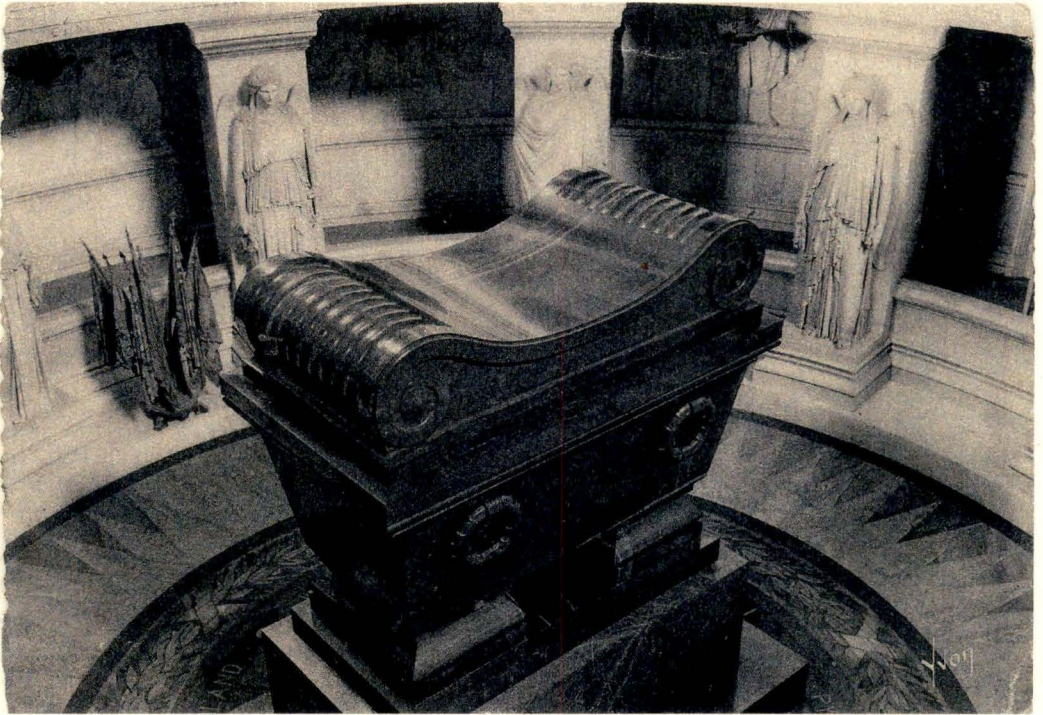
The Forger at Manutius Press

There is no logical reason why playing a trick on someone should be satisfying, but it seems as though humankind takes as much pleasure from deception as it does from truth. The history of fraudulent behaviour is rich with *trompe l'oeil* paintings, counterfeit currencies and forged identities. Whether intentional or not, famous hoaxes such as Orson Welles's 1938 broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, Konrad Kujau's 1980s Hitler diaries, and the early-20th-century prehistoric Piltdown Man succeeded because they played upon the universal desire to believe.

In December 1991, I came up with the idea of hoodwinking my then business partner, Nick Bantock. In the process, did I hope to join the past masters of illusion, or was I being underhanded? Neither. I was simply trying out a different way of giving him a belated Christmas present, a copy of Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. It was his reaction that set me off on some nine months of tomfoolery.

At that time, Nick was overwhelmed by the unbelievable quantities of mail he was receiving in response to his book *Griffin & Sabine*, which had been published that fall. He was also hard at work on *Sabine's Notebook*, the second volume of what was to become a trilogy. Foreign publishers were starting to express interest, so when he received a fax directly from Manutius Press in Milan, nothing could have been more plausible.

The fax appeared to be a reprint of an unidentified article about the close ties between the events and characters in *Griffin & Sabine* and the Knights of the Templar and the Rosicrucians. As well, it made a connection with Foucault's enduring proof of the Earth's rotation, the pendulum installed in Saint-Martin-des-Champs at the Musée des Arts et



métiers in Paris. The article implied that Nick must be a Templar, and that there was a hidden message for all Templars in his book. What he did not know was that Manutius Press was the fictional publishing house featured in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Arriving at the same time as the fax was a Federal Express package from Milan containing a copy of *Foucault's Pendulum*. Had Nick read the book then, rather than later, he would have realized right away that the sender, A. Garamonde (modified from Eco's Signor Garamond), was a fictional character, that Manutius Press was a self-publishing house with a number of dubious titles, penned by authors who never would have been published unless they had paid for the privilege, and that someone was pulling his leg. However, he put the book aside and set himself up.

Around mid-February, the mail contained one of our own envelopes, originally addressed in Nick's writing to A. Garamonde in Milan, but with the addition of a post office label: "Rinvio: Indirizzo insufficiente," "Return, Inadequate address." Nick had responded to the fax by writing to Signor Garamonde and, of course, the address did not exist. Because Garamonde had become something of an alter ego for me, I had no guilt about contravening basic privacy rights and immediately opened the envelope to see what Nick had written. The fish had taken the bait. I was free to start in on the next stage: a post-card campaign.

In my collection of Paris ephemera, I found a postcard of the Eglise Saint-Louis des Invalides, not an especially suitable stand-in for Saint-Martin-des-Champs, but it sufficed. On its reverse I pasted a cancelled Italian stamp and a typewritten invitation to an unspecified event at the église on the 29th of April, 1992, RSVP to Manutius Press. A rubberstamped "M" and a stylized rose surrounded by a roughly cut rectangular border gave Manutius a corporate identity. I then left the card for Nick to collect at his leisure.

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21st Jan '92

A. Garamonde
MANUTIUS PRESS

Thank you for the book and the press cutting.
Please tell me something of the Manutius press.
I had not seen the cutting before, which publication did it come
from?

yours

Nick Bant



RETOUR
RINVIO

Cocher la mention utile
Segnare l'indicazione utile

C 33/CP 10
(Mod. 24 B)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Refusé - Rifiutato
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non réclamé - Non reclamato
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non admis - Non ammesso
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inconnu - Sconosciuto
<input type="checkbox"/>	Absent - Assente
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Introuvable - Irreperibile
<input type="checkbox"/>	Décédé - Deceduto
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adresse insuffisante - Indirizzo insufficiente
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adresse inexacte - Indirizzo inesatto
<input type="checkbox"/>	Signature - Firma

avion

A Garamonde
Manutius Press
Via Marchese Gualdi
MILAN
Italy

Nick read the card's message out loud. I made the appropriate noises of interest and urged him to fly to Paris, vowing that I'd go, if I received such an invitation. When he shook his head, I began thinking of ways to lure him into going, then lost my nerve—how dare I encourage him to set out on an expensive wild goose chase?—and instead concentrated on the postcard messages.

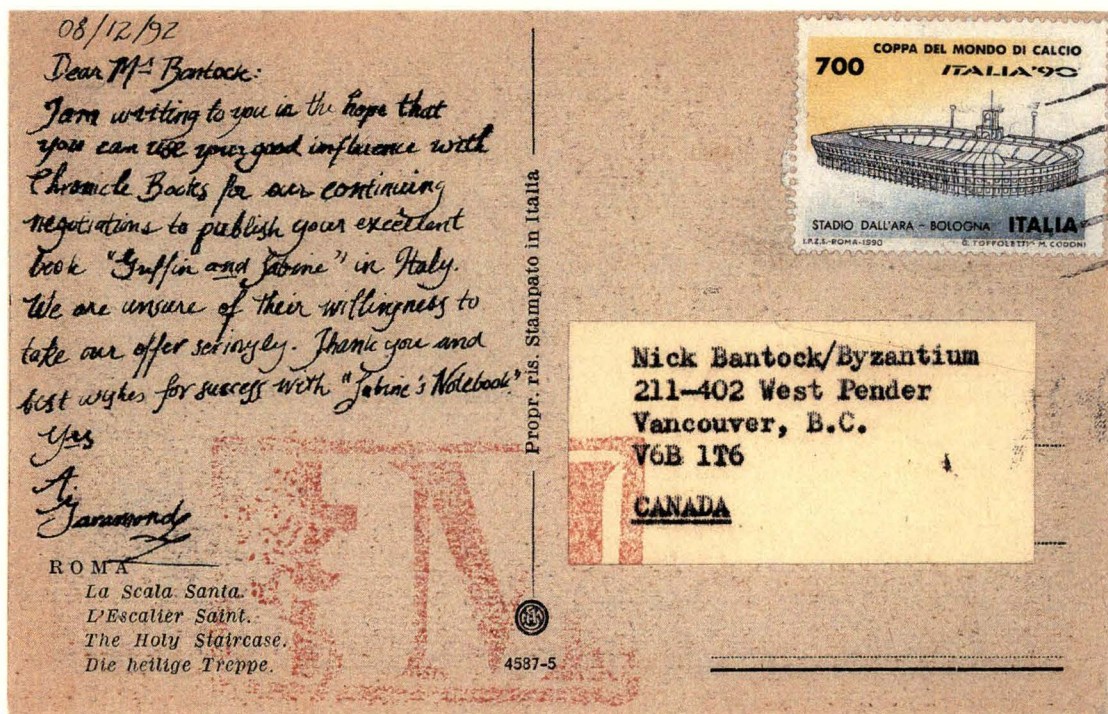
Faking postcards intended for a postal connoisseur is tough work, so I recruited a friend to send postcards from Italy for me. I equipped her with a couple of pre-prepared cards, which she obligingly popped into the mail from Florence and from Venice.

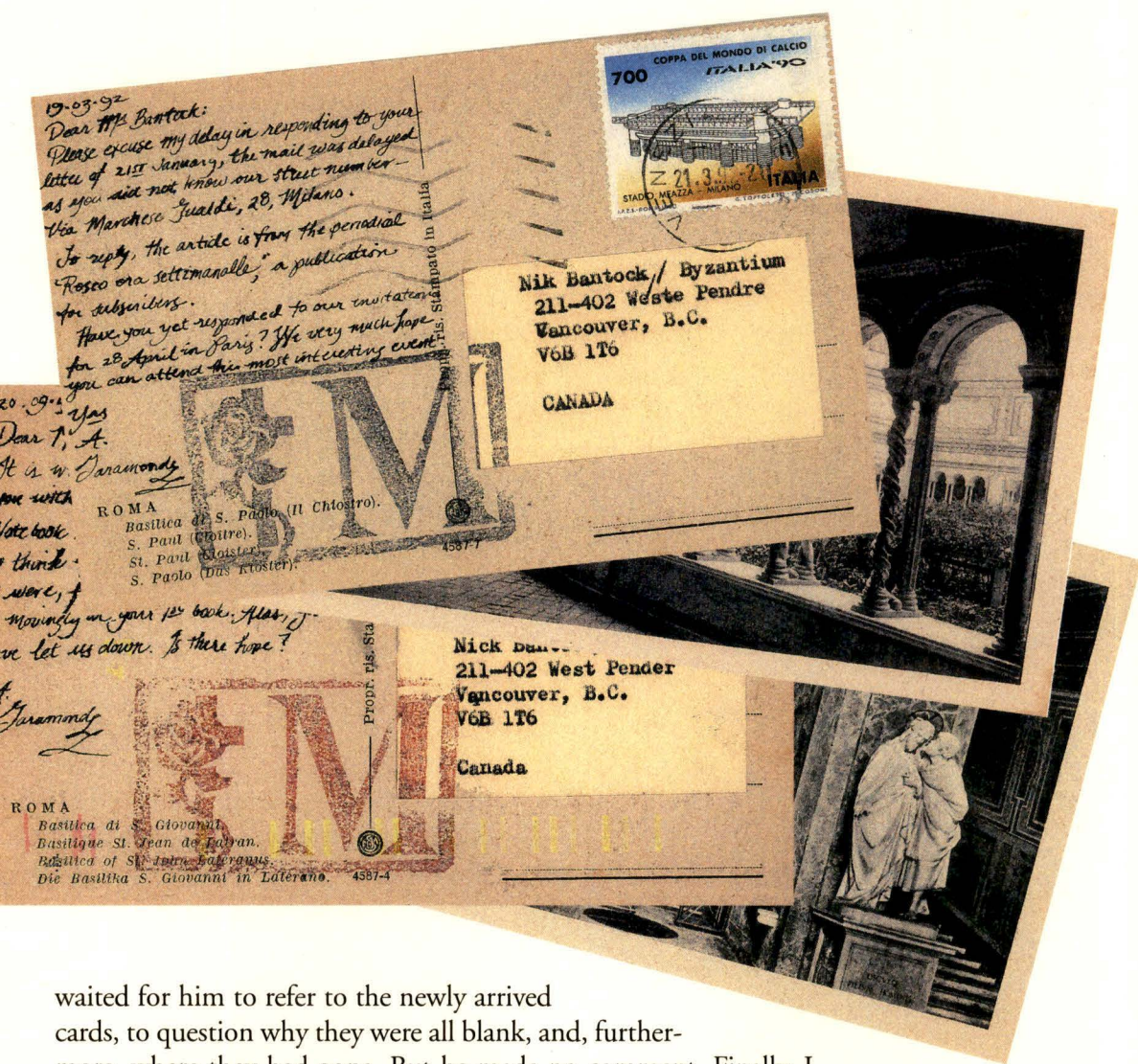
The cards arrived around the end of March, one with a clear postmark and one without. I immediately used the one postmarked 21 March 1992 for another note from Garamonde. Dated a couple of days earlier, it acknowledged receipt of Nick's January letter and supplied a more complete address for Manutius Press. It also answered Nick's question of where the faxed article had originally appeared. That it was from the periodical *Rosea ora settimanale*, *The Rosy Hour Weekly*, was intended to excuse the numerous errors in spelling and grammar that I had not caught in my rush to perpetrate the hoax.

Later on in the year, I turned the second postcard into a request from Garamonde that Nick help him in negotiations with his publishers, Chronicle Books, for the Italian rights to *Griffin & Sabine*. As no one at Chronicle was party to these negotiations, Nick was at a loss over how to help.

In August, a second acquaintance was off to Italy, so I gave her seven cards to mail. Unfortunately, this accomplice had little finesse in the art of deception, and she mailed all of the postcards at the same time, from the same place. They arrived when I was away from the studio. By some awful coincidence, Nick collected the mail that day. He left the cards sitting on his shelf, and when I saw them, all seven of them together, my heart sank.

Thinking that the game was up, I removed them from the shelf and, on one, penned a farewell message, insinuating that Nick had let down the secret society that had so counted on him to carry their message. He read it through it the next time he came in. I anxiously





waited for him to refer to the newly arrived cards, to question why they were all blank, and, furthermore, where they had gone. But he made no comment. Finally, I could not stand it any longer. I confessed that I was Manutius Press and that I was telling him because of the blank cards. His expression of utter surprise revealed that he had never suspected that Manutius was a hoax. I had not realized that Manutius Press had been enough of an enigma on its own to account for such an oddity. How vexing that I had given up so easily.

The process of creating a deception like Manutius Press taught me that more than timing, artistry or credibility, the success of a well-conceived hoax depends on what the victim wants to believe. I also learned that a hoaxer must combine elements of truth with the falsehoods, and that s(he) needs nerves of steel to persist, even if it seems as though the deception has been exposed. And because of the great deal of time required to perpetrate a convincing hoax, it's even more rewarding if a number of people can be fooled at once. What better training for a novelist?

Barbara Hodgson is currently working on her next book, Trading in Memories: Wanderings through a Scavenger's Favorite Places.

For an excerpt from Nick Bantock's new novel Windflower, see page 5.