

Ilya Smirnov
Hector Servadac

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Lily Robert
18 rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, 75004 Paris
Wed–Sat 2–7PM and by appointment

Jules Verne started working on *Hector Servadac* around 1860, releasing the novel only in 1877 after multiple alterations forced upon the author by his publisher. In its original concept, the plot revolves around a gargantuan golden comet threatening the earth with inevitable collision, subsequent devaluation of gold and a total economic collapse. The protagonist's uncommon last name is, in fact, a mirror word for *cadavres*, corpses.

As Robert S. McIvor states in his paper (2005JRASC..99...87M), the comet associated with Caesar was not fictitious. Astronomy can explain numismatic artwork of the eagle standing on the globe of the Earth as the constellation-figure of Aquila. Indeed, multiple Roman coins contain an image of a comet accompanied by an eagle. I guess every global political change, especially the one leading to its monumentalization in the design of currency, was strongly connected or even brought about by a cometary event. There's a 185 BC Chinese Atlas of Comets where each cometary shape is associated with different effects like war, hunger or a change of Emperor. A universal state symbol such as the eagle is a reference to the specific constellation that marked the celestial position of the state-installing comet in relation to Earth.

Religious iconography is also not immune to the cometary effects. There is a certain group of Byzantine icons with two symmetrical sky objects in the background that supposedly register a closely passing comet in a parallax view from Earth, when cometary dust and ion tails appear to point in opposite directions. The main icon of Mithraism in all of its variations contains a similar repeating element, torch-bearers Cautes and Cautopates. Cautes holds his burning torch raised up, while Cautopates holds his torch pointing down.

Diagnosed with dementia praecox, Emma Hauck was incarcerated in Heidelberg's psychiatric clinic on her thirtieth birthday in 1909. There, for many years she wrote the letters consisting of obsessive repetitions of a simple imperative—komm (come), Herzensschatzi komm (sweetheart come). In 1910 Earth was passing through the tail of Halley's comet. There is a speculation that Emma's letters were actually addressed to the comet, pleading it to come closer to earth. Emma's text is linear and overlapping. Maybe she'd had better luck if she used spiral-like writing, which is characteristic for Middle Eastern incantation bowls from late antiquity. These were little plates designed to attract and capture demons among other things. Less than two thousand traps are discovered at a given time, among which fewer than five hundred are described.

Ilya Smirnov (b. 1984). Lives and works in Moscow. Holds BfA in Art and Digital Media from Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna and Master's Degree in Classical Philology from RSUH, Moscow. Late exhibitions include *Ruminations of the Midnight Stroll*, 2018, No. 29 Marefield Gardens, London; *DOUBT* (w/ Vitaly Bezpалov), 2018, llil.space, Rostov-on-Don; *The malignancy of stupidity: the cutest evil*, 2017, Lily Robert, Paris; *Il Futuro Era Bellissimo Per Noi*, 2016, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris; *Mechanics Alley*, 2015, 63rd–77th STEPS, Bari, Italy.