

Number Eighteen. Gestetnered by Don Fitch. Writ by Bill Blackbeard. Tamam Shud

GUEST INTERLINEATION BY AL HAIEVY

----- bill donaho for taff, anyone? -----

RANDBAGGED The arguments of most of the pro-Randists in both Apa L & F seem to emphasize one thing -- that the proof of the pudding has to lie in the eating. Having read the Rand texts in detail themselves, it seems essential to them that others should do so before appraising the worth of the philosophy as a whole. Yet this same rationale, extended to other areas, would prohibit us rejecting the social nihilism we call Sadism without reading the multi-volumed oeuvre of the undivine Marquis, or effectually dismissing anti-Semitism without learning German and consulting every page of Der Sturmer.

In actual practice, all of us, Randists included, have to make fundamental decisions in many matters by a firm trust in our initial reactions. The pressure of time, the demands on the attention of all of us, make this mandatory. With books, where we do not have access to the reaction of a known and empathetic critic, we have to depend on our response to a few pages or passages read at random, or -- where an index is present -- to our reference to touchstone concepts. We evaluate a majority of encountered ideas literally on the fly, subjecting them to a quick sift for bias, special pleading, utility in practical application, etc. We are attracted, bored, or repulsed routinely every day on the basis of such hair-trigger workings of the senses and intellect -- and necessarily so, or we would discover little of worth, learn little, get damned little done.

In short, most of the time, for most of us, the proof of the pudding has to lie in the tasting.

The question we all face, of course, is -- how does our cerebral taste match -- say -- our tongue in dependability? We know from the first taste of a bad egg that eating the rest will make us ill, but how do we learn to know the factors in literature and philosophy which, briefly sampled by the eyes and mind, will give us a trustworthy response to the character of an examined work? Through experience, of course -- and our experience is largely obtained from what can most simply be called playback.

The playback process, as we all know, is the pleasure we derive from the books and ideas we are led by initial reaction to read or investigate (if we don't find pleasure in our selections, our instinct clearly is not functioning well, and we re-adjust accordingly) -- or our subsequent unpleasant encounters, in various forms and contexts, with the books and ideas we initially rejected with marked aversion (if, contrarily, we find we have missed something of worth or pleasure by improperly assessing it, we again retool our antennae). By the workings of this process in our formative years, we evolve a fairly sensitive and accurate "snap" judgement in most matters of concern to us.

Playback, naturally, varies in effect from individual to individual. The same data, heard by two different people, can have exactly opposite connotations for each. A new statement or postulate from Ayn Rand, perhaps self-evidently a resurrected school-book cliché from the Harding era to a person who, by his lights, "saw through" the Rand hyperbole on contact, is just as concretely a sober and considered idea from a wise contemporary mentor to the convinced Randist -- not necessarily to be accepted, but certainly to be weighed carefully and utilized in his own philosophy if possible.

Occasionally, however, something is said or written by a strongly

endorsed or rejected author-philosopher, such as Rand, which is not subject to partisan interpretation -- at least not this side of lunacy. The statement is a confirming delight to opponents, a trenchant disaster to supporters. Bertrand Russell, alas, has made one or two nonagenarian statements of this character -- but without demonstrating much more than that he is now a very old man, entitled to say such things with our earned indulgence, as was Shaw.

Ayn Rand, however, has exploded her own intellectual petard in public at what I suppose we must consider her prime, not only not without retraction or reconsideration, but -- as far as I know -- complete unawareness that she has said anything untoward. To many of her supporters, of course, she didn't -- to most of those she was addressing at the time, in fact. But I don't believe -- for reasons I'll discuss later -- that most fan-Randists are of this lowbrow level of culture or degree of social alienation, or that they will fail to share the reaction of most of us to this sadly comic revelation of Randist ideals, this clownish foreshadowing of the Objectivist future.

On his Pacifica Radio review of new mystery and fantasy Sunday before last, Tony Boucher discussed the latest Mickey Spillane novel in considerate and understanding terms, stating that there was a hard-hitting vitality in much of Spillane which detective fiction had lost in great part with the demise of the pulps, and that this quality was refreshing and admirable to many readers, deservedly so. Nevertheless, Tony felt he had to dismiss this most recent Spillane thriller -- a spy novel, incidentally -- as not only lacking his usual elements of pace and reader-involvement, but as openly espousing a system of action which Tony had no qualms about labelling "blatantly fascist."

So openly fascist, in fact, that Ayn Rand felt called upon to denounce the novel in a recent Objectivist Newsletter, and to disengage herself from previous endorsements of Spillane's work. Tony remarked on this public relations panic with amusement, then recollected a study group meeting held by young Randists a number of months ago, which Ayn Rand and Mickey Spillane had come to address in tandem before the schism, and which Tony had visited out of the same interest in contemporary pathology that has motivated Jack Harness to attend local Objectivist lectures.

Tony heard an earful of pathology, as it developed -- and within minutes of the opening of the group meeting. Ayn Rand had no sooner been introduced and stepped forward to introduce Spillane in turn than the stunning words were said.

"Mickey Spillane is the greatest living writer of our time," Ayn Rand said in cold, grim sobriety. "I look forward to the day Mr. Spillane and I will be the recognized fashionable leaders of our culture."

That was all. Spillane stepped up and a general discussion of mores and morals began. But that, certainly, was enough.

If Ayn Rand had ever been known, anywhere, to make a joke -- had a trace of humor ever graced a page of hers, this could possibly, somehow, be dismissed as a wild attempt at a gag opening which failed -- failed, for as Tony recalled, not a whisper of laughter or hoot of incredulity followed this bravura proclamation, only enthusiastic applause.

But, clearly, comedy was not intended. Ayn Rand is, on the strength of her own words, so divorced, not simply from the sanity of humor itself, but from the whole structure of literary taste and judgement of our time, that one must of necessity ask if she may not be equally divorced from any realistic understanding of contemporary social and economic dynamics, if her dreams for a just and ideal society may not be as flamboyantly romantic and ridiculous as her ringing assessment of Mickey Spillane's literary stature and her ambitious hopes for cultural eminence?

Some of us find it necessary to think so -- and

feel ourselves sufficiently confirmed in our initial reaction to Randism to at least feel free to disregard any further words from her pen or lips -- if not from paying some occasional serious attention to the Objectivist ideas and arguments of such of her supporters in fandom as have earned our respect for their general level-headedness and lucidity in most matters. Here we deal, of course, with individual -- often highly individual -- interpretations of the Rand doctrines (Stiles', Bailes', brown's, for example) which, each in its own way a reflection of the character of its proponent, are not, as a result, particularly objectionable or absurd in themselves. It is clear that many of the obscurantist Rand statements quoted by these fans are not understood fully for their real point, or are not followed through to their grim payoff in rejection or negation of fundamental justice and freedom, but this is not a matter for discussion now.

In sum, this statement of Ayn Rand's quoted here has cleared the air in the Objectivist debate enormously. We know that the fountainhead of the philosophy is something of an intellectual cretin, and must formulate our subsequent opinions of her ideas accordingly.

Debate, anyone?

REDD ELLERT: An Elish Tale The wide-eyed child tugged at his nurse's dress. "Please, ma'am," he said with a worried frown, "is it true what you said at tea, that -- "

"It's true, Ellerbert," the old nurse said firmly. "No matter what those children from the playground tell you, there is no Moor of Boggs. Nowhere. Neither this side of the Bay nor the other. You'd best forget all about it."

"But the Moor sounded so real, the way they talked. With wonderful Black Beasts and Spirit Cats and all -- "

"Horse tales, the lot of it. They want to get you into their dreadful club down there in Lozenge Lees, and make a smogluger out of you, like themselves. They're using Gretchen's Law on you -- "

"What -- what's Gretchen's Law, nurse?"

"It's here in the Infancyyclopedia. It says, 'Gretchen's Law: The tendency, when a number of apa members are equal in requirement-fulfilling power, but unequal in intrinsic value, for a more valuable member, if kept from apa-earance for a number of consecutive distributions or mailings, to excite the remaining members into an acute sense of Apa Loss, and perhaps to depress the L Aver quality of the apa, bringing some members to a state of desperate illusion in their hope of the absent member's return. Also known as Gretchen's Responsibility.' Does that answer your question?"

"Let me use my 9-year-old I. Q. You mean, they want so much to believe that the Moor of Boggs they tell me exists really does exist, that they're using their stories to me to convince themselves?"

"I'm afraid so. Many of them must have been brooding on the matter for weeks. Fantasy does that to children. Don't be surprised to see one or two of them fall on their knees and cry for Boggsheesh in the Boggsheesh in the Lozenge Lees streets..."

"I -- I guess you're right, ma'am. But -- some of them are planning an expedition into the foghooded Burglary Hills to see if there isn't at least a little moor -- somewhere. The members have been given a Redd Ellert, and -- "

"Let's talk no more about it. It's time for you to go to bed and say your prayers. Do you know what to ask Ghu for tonight?"

"Yes, ma'am -- O yes, I do."

You listening, ~~Redd~~ Ghu?

A BEM'S INVICTUS

(after years of what he
considers scandalous mis-
representation)

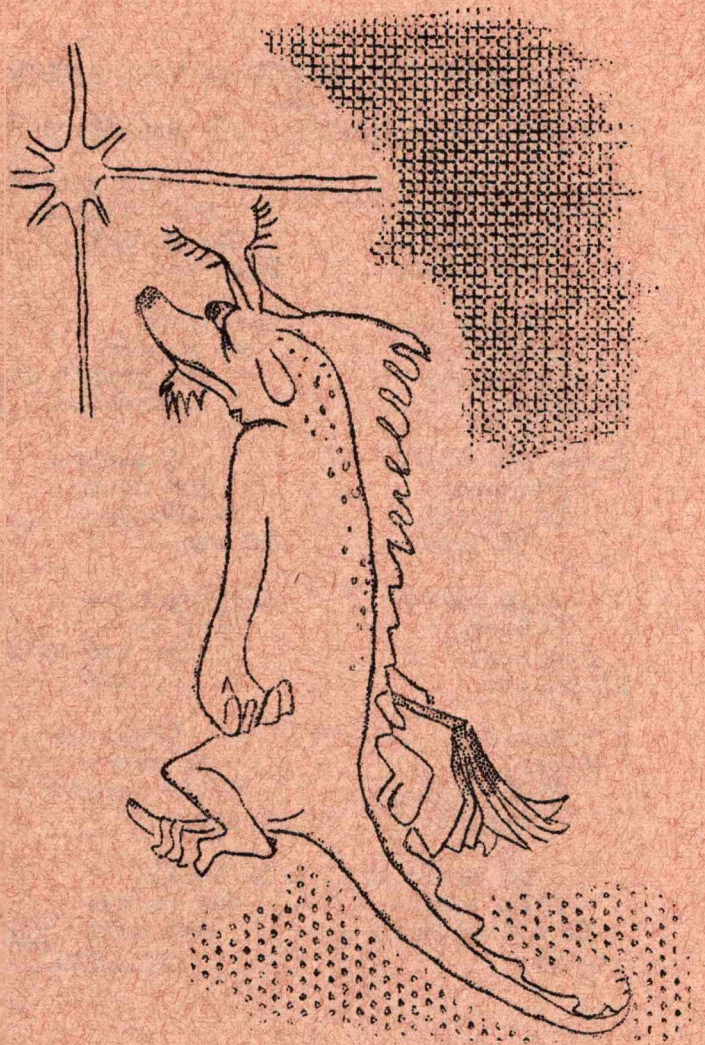
From deepest Space that covers me,
Black as the pit from Poul to Pohl,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unslanderable soul.

In fell burlesque of crueler pens
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
In baleful gleams of lurid prose
My crest is gaudy, but unbowed.

Beyond this bale of fearful yarns
Looms but the shape of worlds unmade;
But years will read my beauty right,
With my antennae still unfrayed.

It matters not how far from grace,
How stacked the cards, when presses roll.
I am the measure of my face,
I am the caption of my soul.

-- LARRY GURNEY



A L'OMBRE D'UN DESSIN DE NOËL BJOUTE
OR
BOW DOWN TO GOURMANDY, 'TIS BANQUET'S GHOST

From Ulthar, (His goblet's
From Oz, Gorballed;
From Faerie, His gorget
From Boz, Engorged;

Comes Bjo: Gorblimey,
Stencil No wonder
With pencil His grin's so
To gloss... Gorgeous...)

Limns she one A query:
Fifteenth How does
Of an ell He manage
Of Yule: To sup

An elf to Keeping can-
Bedeck, dles kin-
Bedizen, Dled and hol-
Bjool... Ly up?

A tapered "Yule love this,"
Toper, He says;
With pipped "It's Bacchus
Piglet, I stoop

He lifts his To holly,
Pink toes Wax merry,
In a Christmas And stand al-
Jiglet... laz occi!



A little Christmas
Spirit sketched
for Bill Blackbeard
by Bjo
(*about 3' high)*