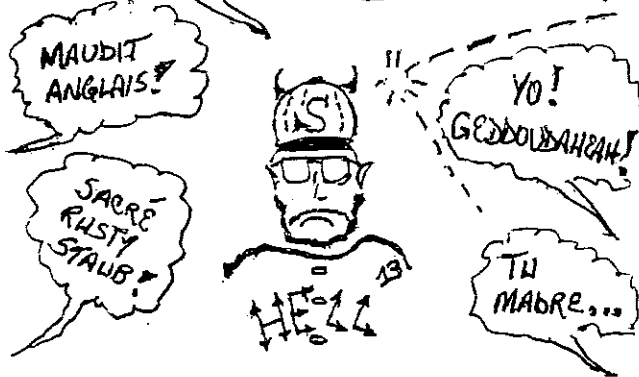


The Devil Advocates ~

SATANIC SATIRE by THE EVIL ONE!
by DR. SETH C. HAWKINS

WHAT ARE THE FANS LIKE HERE?
THEY'RE MOSTLY FROM QUEBEC AND
THE BRONX, SO YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND
A THING THEY SAY.



NOTE: this is not the long-promised two-issue (there is so much to say on the subject) treatment of fan misbehavior. As they say, stay tuned.

Yo! Wimpy Minnesotans! Betcha you gonna sit there and take it, jus' like all da past years, while us guys from da East Coast keep on whippin' yer most cherished anatomical part. Noo Yawk an' Philadelphia intend to keep intack ouh stringa forty-tree consecyativ years in a row of winnin' Major League Baseball's most coveted fan-involvement prize, and dere's not a ting you frozen wishywashy passive-aggressive sissies can do about it.

What? You gonna have an entrant dis yeah? What? You tink ya gotta lock onnit? Geddoudaheah! Fuhgeddaboutit!

The message above, from a chorus of concerned citizens from Queens and South Philly, notable as it is for its manifestation of shared civic pride and zeal, barely conceals a palpable hint of whistling in the dark (and one should whistle in the dark, the better to conceal oneself from vigilantes opposed to that annoying habit). Now, Dr. Hawkins has long concluded that there is already far too much fan involvement, what with All-star ballots and suchlike (as opposed to Such-Like, meaning resemblance to an underqualified pitching coach), but, to coin a phrase, here is an exception that improves the role. The coveted prize alluded to is (need you ask?) the Most Annoying Fan of the Year, an award understandably passed back and forth between New York and Philadelphia. But you Twins fans (please recall that Dr. Hawkins has no affiliation) at last have a chance!

Hey! Time out! I heard that, you two, whispering over in the corner. Dr. Hawkins is easily the most annoying person in St. Paul, and in Toronto and many other places. But when he goes to a MLB game, he annoys only those who annoy him, the unfortunate ones who cannot read the semiotic signals of a man keeping score and a pitch count, with earphones on, almost autistically concentrating on the field, not even looking at foul balls once they have left the playing field, and who, despite all of those obvious Leave Me Alone signs, still try to engage him in witless chatter. Like many past quasi-students who could not follow directions, these intrusive morons learn all too palpably what the term "Mt. St. Hawkins" means. Ignore the little man with the scorebook unless you wish to experience a new level of rhetorical violence.

But you were close. Topologically. By looking at Section 123, Row 16 [really the tenth row to you distant readers], Seat 9, you were only one section and six rows off.

Stew Thornley told me this guy's name, but I won't use it. After you read this encomium to annoyance, most of you will comprehend the prudence involved. But you can spot him easily. He's not behind the screen, even though he could have a better seat, because it would be a barrier to his direct sensual enjoyment, and I have no doubt that he would explain this to his old fraternity buddies (you can easily picture him in Tappa Keega

Day), whilst elbowing them in the ribs and winking, by the use of a crude sexual analogy, which, because of its facile vulgarity, Dr. Hawkins will not explicitly detail. We rhetoricians prefer subtle vulgarity couched in sesquipedalian words. Yours on demand. But you cry, unfair! You have never so much as exchanged a word with this fellow, yet you profess to know about him. Yes, folks, we have a 2300-year-old term and concept in the field of speech, called ethos, for the total set of impressions that a person exudes: you know false ethos by the term "image." And you know that there are people who, to the detriment of their reluctant audiences, project their smarminess obtrusively and maddeningly, in the original sense of the word "broadcast," as in spreading seeds, but in this case, it is greasy bowling balls of personality that are being hurled.

The individual in question is easily spotted, often attempting without success to conceal his multi-chinned girth in a uniform shirt worn open, an affectation that fools no one and impresses even fewer than that. One must admit, it is remarkable to see a lunatic (in the earliest sense of "moon-shaped") visage with a thin ichtyial smirk, but there it is. But you cry, unfair! That's an ad hominem: you're making fun of the way the guy looks. And Dr. Fan replies, at the risk of being mistaken for hoi polloi [no "the" is correct], what is your point? You may contend that one doesn't have to look at him, but oh, one does, as one is drawn to stare at a repulsive auto wreck. The actual problem (you knew this was leading somewhere) is that one is drawn to look by the seemingly constant disturbing of one's peripheral vision by an ethos driven to draw attention to itself at all costs, often by trying to force irrelevant connections between it and the proper object of focus, the action on the field.

Now and then, a fan will give in to the temptation of getting up and doing one of those silly little dances; of shouting and posturing as if there were some intimate connection between himself and a player; of pointing, grimacing, blocking the sightline in a pathetic attempt to get on the video screen. But here we have someone who re-invents the temptation every half-inning, who imagines himself a beloved wise guy. It is distracting, and old in a hurry. At least the Sign Man at Shea had something to say, endlessly repetitive as it was (haven't seen him in years; maybe, if there is a just force in the universe, he is dead). So it is a problem both of kind and of degree.

Now, I was going to let this go. But as you know, there is often, to coin a phrase, the straw that clogs the canal's backflow, that last annoyance that is, as the British so aptly put it, "over the top." One night, a particularly sharp foul rearranged someone's nose, a bloody mess, but not life-threatening. Despite the disclaimers on the ticket back, and the pre-game announcements, some management, like the Twins, hurriedly dispatch ushers and medical personnel, automatically, when such a foul ball is hit. But our fellow in question pointedly stood out in the aisle, and in an imperious manner, waved his index fingers aloft and made little circles in the air, as if his authoritative decisiveness would both more quickly summon the paramedics, and make them work more seriously and diligently . . . on the nosebleed. What gall, what pretentious officiousness. That did it.

Gentle readers, perhaps you have just resisted the temptation to form a common seven-letter anatomical colloquialism with your voice, to which one replies, yes, but not defining enough: so many, many fans are that (sigh). The more astute have now tried "egotist," but not all egotists are so infuriatingly non-productive; for all that we may despise Ted Turner's ego, he has, largely because of it, won us the America's Cup; given us (in the face of derision by the non-visionary) marvels such as CNN; made the Braves into an artistic success, and given us the chance to see NL baseball in our homes without being subjected to the eldest Caray; and perhaps most altruistically for an egotist, gotten Jane Fonda off the dating circuit. We owe Ted a lot, come to think of it. Well, yells someone in the linguistic luxury boxes, try "narcissist." Well, no, for most narcissists are passive: they much prefer to gaze into mirrors (real and metaphorical), in rapt and non-intrusive self-absorption. No, what we have here is a solipsist: one who believes the universe to be an extension and projection of himself, and whose actions are based on that assumption. Watch this guy: that term does explain it all.

Well, we could bribe Phil Huelbner not to tell this guy when we get the new ballpark: he'll show up at the empty Metrodome and wonder why no one is there to pay attention to him. But Stew Thornley had a better solution: the most hurtful thing you can do to a solipsist is to declare him irrelevant. So we've named him "Irrelevant ____." One night, we stood up (it was between half-innings) and yelled (it was easy to fix his gaze): "Sit down and shut up, ____: you're irrelevant!" And, you know, it worked: the look of frightened terror at being called that before 14,372 was worth the price of admission.

We'll keep working on him.