

# Bey Pamphlet

Let-down from TAZ

John Filiss

1995

a review of

*Radio Sermonettes*, Hakim Bey, The Libertarian Book Club, (339 Lafayette St., Room 202, New York NY 10012), 40 pp., \$3.50.

Hakim Bey's earlier work, along with his more recent *Radio Sermonettes*, reflects the outlook of one who has centered himself in two often disparate schools of thought—Eastern mysticism and anarchism. And, while the (sometimes) richness of these two fields should promote an interesting cross-fertilization, Bey's oft inability to pare down to the vital essence of the ideas he works with has seriously hindered his accomplishments.

Perhaps more relevant than Bey's mysticism (or intimately interlinked with it) is his contact with people not yet laden with modernism, or the angst and cynicism of modern life—cultures still infused with poetry, art and myth. Much of his theory attempts to recreate that sense of life through often similar means/ends in the context of our current day society. This presents an underlying question to the reader of which Bey himself is more than aware: Are art and myth in any of their forms inherently liberatory, the begetters of a life which is more deeply felt and lived, or are they mere offshoots and crystallizations of an inner richness which must be nurtured elsewhere?

The distance between T.A.Z. and the later *Radio Sermonettes* (RS) may not give a definitive answer to this question, but it might give some idea of Bey's own successes. Less certain, less inspired, at times hollow, perhaps the first letdown of RS is the quality of the prose itself. Bey's earlier work contained some of the most beautiful writing, as writing, to ever appear in the anarchist milieu. Bereft of metaphor and flight, poet become talker, RS is a disappointment by contrast.

Though RS ranges over a number of different areas, from Lascaux to Chinese Tongs, the main topic is the introduction of what Bey calls Immediatism, or, as he writes, "We nevertheless declare without hesitation (without too much thought) the founding of a 'movement,' IMMEDIATISM." Not only this excerpt, but what follows gives the sense of something thrown off rather than inspired. And though he makes some broader hints, Immediatism comes down in further description as essentially a closed-circle creative art club, with some curious and oft paranoid arguments in favor of secrecy.

The closet qualities of Immediatism bear some analogy to the attitudes of other underground and even some not-so-underground movements, which, always fearful of being pulled in by the Spectacle, learn that symbolic rebellion is, after all, symbolic.

Certainly there's a deeper pleasure value in the secret, the forbidden, or the hard to obtain. An aged grimoire like "The Sacred Magic Of Abra Melin, The Mage" is far more intriguing as a very rare, old and musty book passed carefully from hand to hand than as a \$9.95 paperback which can be ordered from any bookstore, although, obviously, the innate value of the writing within remains the same. What this says to me, is that representation is just that, and life goes on elsewhere. The bonds lying within the social and the personal are not to be grasped and torn asunder with the completion of some forbidden fetish totem.

It's really not much of a surprise, as these things occur constantly in books, that the piece which contains the statement, "this monster called WORK remains the precise and exact target of our rebellious wrath ... we must also learn to recognize work when it's disguised as 'leisure— should be followed two sentences later by "To struggle to come together every Monday night (or whatever)...that struggle is already Immediatism itself."

It appears that Bey has never gotten down to the substance of work (or the sine qua non of civilization): effort. Nor is he seriously seeking its antithesis, the moment where the movement of life becomes effortless.

Physical disciplines which stress rotations of the hips and Feldenkrais movements, hatha yoga and qui gong, are just one sliver of the whole of what we "should" be doing, of where effort would take us if there were enough hours in the day and time within the moment...all so that sometime, somewhere an effect should be made, a level of freedom reached. Never mind that these efforts themselves become an imposition, a new prison within the fabric of our day-to-day existence.

Efforts, programs, and promissory notes: authors everywhere have used this same schtick for eons, though not always as vehemently in favor of struggle as Bey. He writes as if we had something more we would like to toss into the crucible. I don't.

What is most frustrating about Bey (more so in RS than T.A.Z.) is that he handles such vital and interesting topics so superficially. So, often he seems on the verge of a breakthrough, of saying something really profound, and then he gets lost. On the positive side, his focus on the here-and-now, his continual attempts at offering solutions (possibly the most telling lack in anarchist literature) are commendable, and probably among the better to appear.

Though his work remains intelligent and engaging, *Radio Sermonettes* is perhaps too shorn of analysis to be taken all that seriously.

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