

A PASSAGE FROM *PROCRUSTES STRETCHED*

by A\*n R\*nd

I wrote this passage in 1955. It was, for reasons of space, deleted from the final draft of my novel, *Procrustes Stretched*. It has never before appeared in print.

I present it as an example of Romantic writing at its best.

Romanticism, which has always been my philosophy of art, takes as its goal the portrayal of man as a *heroic being*. The Romantic artist selects facets of reality and reassembles them ``in order to create in concrete form the abstraction which is his *sense of life*'' (*The Virtue of Rudeness*, p. 178). Note this: he selects, much as a physicist selects the numbers that go into his mathematical equations.

Romanticism's antithesis is Naturalism. The Naturalist holds that every snippet of reality, no matter how trivial, is worthy of inclusion in a work of so-called art. The difference between the two philosophies is most evident in music. The Romantic pianist carefully chooses the notes he will play, while the Naturalist attempts to strike all of the notes at once.

The first approach produces music; the second, cacophony.

The reader must decide for himself whether these paragraphs better exemplify the tenets of Romanticism, or of its opposite, Naturalism.

The context of the passage is as follows. Ellis Island has gone into hiding, taking with him the secret of his process for getting blood from a turnip. Canada has declared itself to be a Fool's Paradise. Dallas Stank is heading west, searching for a scientist able to reconstruct the ultimate mousetrap whose plans she and Nk Rrdn found in the abandoned factory.

---A\*n R\*nd

``Who is John Goat?''

Dallas turned from the window and looked at the man in the seat beside her. He had got on at one of the stops outside New York City, but she had not noticed him before now. He had a bald head that seemed to rest, like an opaque percolator bulb, atop a pillow of fat that had once been a neck. His eyes were pale and lifeless.

``Pardon me?''

``Who is John Goat?''

``I don't know. Besides, those words are meaningless nonsense.''

The man nodded. His nod seemed to reject the possibility of objective knowledge.

Dallas turned back to the window and gazed out upon the vast, blank prairies.

A lighted billboard flickered by. Her heart trembled, and she remembered the first time she had ever heard a radio commercial.

Her brother had told her that bird songs were prettier. But Francisco had laughed and said, ``When I grow up, I will make birds out of copper and sell them for money.''

And, the next day, he had presented her with his first copper bird, made from metal he had mined with his own hands.

``Does it know any songs?'' she had asked.

``Only radio commercials.''

And then they had made love . . .  
``Pardon me, miss.''  
It was the bald man.  
``Yes?''  
``My name is Waldo Mudge. What's yours?''  
``Stank. Dallas Stank.''  
``Stank? The Stank who runs the railroad?''  
``The same.''  
Dallas proudly threw back her head.  
``Hmph!'' Mudge sniffed.  
``What do you do for a living, Mr. Mudge?''  
``I'm a humanitarian. I live for others. Why do you look at me that way? I give all my blood to the poor. Organs, too. Right now, I'm nothing but an empty balloon. Don't look at me like that. Do you want to know what keeps me alive? My love for mankind---something you would never understand!''  
``You're right, I . . . What's that hissing I hear?''  
``Hissing? What? Oh, no!''  
Suddenly, Waldo Mudge deflated.  
Dallas turned away, overcome with disgust. A voice inside her head seemed to whisper, ``*This* is what altruism leads to.''  
But---the whole world was deflating---being sucked down an infinite black hole of misery and despair. Nothing worked anymore. Dallas couldn't even get men to wash her train windows . . .  
Wait, she thought: Her window was clean. She leaned closer.  
It was perfect: not a single streak or water spot. It shone, and with an energy that was more than reflected light.  
It shone with the energy of intelligence.  
Yet the window puzzled her. It was almost *too* clean.  
That was it. It was too clean: it had been washed on the outside, and quite recently.  
National Directive 1089 forbade window-washing on the outside of a moving train.  
*One of her men had broken the law to do his job.*  
Dallas knew that she had to find him---for her sake, and her windows'. She opened her window and climbed outside.  
The wind nearly blew her off the train. She only smiled, and lighted a cigarette.  
She remembered the old man, in New York City, who had once owned a cigarette factory. It had gone bankrupt when all of his customers died of lung cancer---but that had not broken his spirit . . .  
She finished the cigarette and threw it down. She saw the window washer then.  
He was on the next car, at the end of the train. He was clad in what Dallas recognized to be the robe of a Capuchin monk. She climbed toward him.  
She reached the gap between the cars, and hesitated. She had been good at car-jumping once. That had been years ago. Could she still do it? She softly whispered her grandfather's motto.  
``I think I can, I think I can.''  
She sprang. The earth and the train screamed past her as she hurtled through the rushing air. A fingernail snagged on the aluminum of the next car, and she pulled herself to safety. In minutes she was at the side of the window washer.  
``I want to give you a raise,'' she said.  
``No, Miss Stank.''  
And he threw back his hood and laughed.  
His face was like one she had never seen, but always known. It was

a proud face, with hard, angular cheeks and cold, clear eyes; and it was crowned with black, angular hair. Intelligence shone from it like light from an expertly-cleaned window.

``Why not?''

``Because my mind is not for sale.''

``I don't understand.''

``Do you see these tools?''

He held up his belt of window-washing tools.

``Who do you think made them? Man did; or, man's mind did.

Squeegee, wash bottle, soap---each is the product of man's mind.

Man makes his tools with his mind. With his mind, man makes his tools.''

He lifted the belt higher. ``But man, who makes his tools---with his mind!---can also discard them. Like this.''

He hurled the belt into the darkness.

``Who is John Goat? If you really want to know, you'll have to come with me, Miss Stank.''

He tore the robe from his body, and was naked.

Dallas gave him her hand, and he took it. They leapt from the train together, and rose into the objective moonlight.

-----By Michael Wilson  
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