



• LODBROG •

LODBROG no.1, dated April 1970, is published by John Bangsund, 44 Hilton Street, Clifton Hill, Victoria 3068, Australia, for the 57th mailing of OMPA and the 10th mailing of ANZAPA, which means that Peter Roberts will get two copies but that can't be helped.

LODBROG means... but why should I tell you? If you read anything else but that mind-rotting science fiction stuff, you would know what it meant; and if you still didn't know, you would have the initiative to investigate at the first opportunity. Go to, thou sluggard!

LODBROG also means that I have started a new fanzine, right at the time when I have decided to cut down on my fanning and do something worthwhile with my time. Still, Ken Cheslin invited me to join OMPA, and how could I resist? And since I wouldn't like to foist an old fanzine on a lot of people I don't know, I've started a new one. My previous publications, for the benefit of all you faceless OMPANS (but I do know Peter, and Beryl, and Ken, and John Brunner - hullo dere! - and perhaps others)(I haven't received my first OMPA mailing at the time of writing), have included THE NEW MILLENNIAL HARBINGER, CROG!, THE COSMIC DUSTBUG, SCYTHROP and... and... I'm sure there was something else, but never mind. Is there anything else I should reveal about myself? Is there anything else I feel like telling you? Aw well, since you're twisting my arm...

I was almost born on Hitler's birthday in 1939, but I had the patriotic decency to wait until the following day, which happened to be the birthday of Her (now) Majesty, Queen Whatsername. (I hate that (now) gimmick, too; I just put it in to annoy you.) This was a smart move on my part, since the most reliable way of remembering my birthday is to wait until I see Her Majesty's reported in the papers; I see how old she is, deduct 13, and there I am. I don't wish to get involved in any arguments about whether Adolf Hitler is or is not alive, but the plain fact is that his birthday is not reported in any paper I read, and I would consequently have lost track of how old I am about 25 years ago if I had been born a day earlier.

I can trace my ancestry back as far as Charles Darwin. Before then it sort of lapses into mythology - or, according to another family tradition, Darwin knew, but he lost the papers. So who knows what long-forgotten royal line I am sprang from, what long-crumbled throne I might be legitimate Pretender to, what far-sunken continent I might have held sway over if so inclined (and properly equipped)(I had in mind aqualungs rather than any innate personal leadership characteristics)? What I do know is that I am sprang from the well-known Hodgkinson clan of old Ireland, the equally well-known Holyoak sept of old Leicestershire, the infamous Prolongeau (I'm not sure how that's spelt even) of old Gaul, the light-hearted Somethingorother-sens of old Denmark (was it Andriessens? - I can't remember), and the finely-muscled, noble-browed, wine-dark Bangsunds of northern Norway. With such an ancestry it seems a shame to have been born in Australia, but that's how it turned out, and through the lack of consideration of all those emigrating Northerners I now have to rake up a whole lot of money for my fare if I ever decide to visit my various homelands. I know a bit about the Bangsund side of the family, which I will forbear to bore you with here; the Holyoaks are supposed to have been cobblers (which gave John Osborne's A SUBJECT OF SCANDAL AND CONCERN added interest for me); the Hodgkinsons (I misspelt the name up there, sorry) were protestant Irish, which I rather resent; the first Australian Prolongeau is said to have come to the country not of his own will, but I have not found his name in the convict records, so put this tradition down to wishful thinking; and the Danish lot were Salvationists and came from the Farøe islands. My mother (and her mother, too) was born on the Ballarat goldfields, my father in Denmark. And that's surely all anyone could want to know about my ancestry.

The Norwegian Bangsunds are a family of some wealth and position, a solid lot of respectable burghesses up there in chilly Tromsø. (There's a Bill Bangsund in England somewhere, and a former Bangsund is married to someone who teaches at Gordonstoun, so I believe; say hello to these people if you ever run into them, folks, and give them my long-lost black-sheep Antipodean regards.) All this money and status got lost in the translation to Australia, but, at least until the present writer appeared, we retained the respectability. Poor but honest sort of thing. No, in a way I'm respectable, too. (Diane says, "Ha!") I've often wondered where this inner-directed thing I've got comes from, and lately I've begun to suspect the lashings of bourgeois Scandinavian blood, with all its highly-strung standoffishness and other repugnant Nordic traits, I have coursing through me veins and things. What a different person I would be if I were one-quarter Irish, one-quarter French and one-half the rest, instead of one-half Scandinavian, one-quarter English and so on. Still, I yam what I yam, with or without spinach.

So, we lived in Northcote, my family, in a little weatherboard place in Gladstone Avenue. I was pretty clever as a child, which was unfortunate, since I breezed through primary school and the lower forms of secondary school without ever needing to study, and suddenly, at 14, found myself in a position where cleverness was not enough; whereupon I was happy to accept the idea of chucking school and going to work. Later, about 18 and 19, I did study - at a theological college for two years - but that's another story. The main thing is that I am clever still, adaptable, a quick learner, and I've had about twenty jobs since leaving school and socially and economically I'm a nothing. Happy, more or less, but status-wise, nowhere. This year I intend to do something about it: as soon as I've decided on a congenial course which will lead me accurately in the direction of an arts degree, I shall take it. At this stage it looks like the British GCE and a London University degree, by correspondence of course, which will take about seven years. (So don't expect too many fanzines from the Clifton-Hilton, people.)

What else do I need to say about myself? That I'm fat and lazy and out of condition, that I'm married to a very attractive non-fan named Diane, that I currently work as a proof-reader for the publisher of a string of suburban newspapers, that some do say I should get the finger out and write for a living? That I have a cat named Grushenka and 300 classical records, a Raleigh bicycle and a VW 1600 fastback, about 2500 books and an original oil painting of the steamship RELIANCE (of which my grandfather, Sigurd Johan, was skipper) done by someone named Gregory? No, you don't really want to know that. What you really want to know is...

HOW I WAS MENTIONED IN A CONVERSATION IN CALIFORNIA BETWEEN GRETCHEN AND SIR STEVEN RUNCIMAN

Hands up all those who have heard of Gretchen but not of Sir Steven Runciman. Yes, I thought as much. Anyway, here's the story in REDD BOGGS'S own words - followed by some curious remarks about censorship. (And while you are reading Redd, will you pardon me if I nip off and play Hovhaness's "Lousadzak"? A great piece of music, that.)

Gretchen attended the third annual meeting of the Medieval Association of the Pacific yesterday and Friday ((February 27/28)), and encountered the famous historian, Sir Steven Runciman. She conversed with him at first without being aware who he was, since he wore no name-badge, partly because he was being neglected by everybody else who, knowing who he was, stood in too much awe of a Big Name to

approach him. He took her into the banquet and sat her down next to him and chatted with her over the meal and many bottles of wine for a couple of hours. He said he enjoyed the California wine that was served, and talked about other wines; telling her that some Australian vintages were excellent, though the best ones don't travel well.

Because your aerogramme had just arrived that day, Gretchen mentioned Australian censorship troubles, and told of smuggling in Portnoy to you. Runciman had apparently read Portnoy, for he thought this action had done you a signal service. He said he thought Australia had a free and open society for the most part, but that the government had to be repressive about petty matters. He liked Australia, he said, but told Gretchen to avoid New Zealand. "A terrible place, run by puritans," he said.

This is the story of how John Bangsund was called to the attention of Sir Steven Runciman (who, no doubt, will turn out to be a Secret Agent in the hire of the Australian customs service!).

Actually I have heard more references lately to Portnoy than I did previously, when it was a bestseller in hardback. Gretchen and I, still hobnobbing with the Great and Near-Great, attended a poetry-reading Wednesday last by Robert Creeley, who drew a crowd of about 400 people. (400 people? At a poetry-reading? Even so.) Afterward, Gretchen went down and greeted Creeley, an old friend from New Mexico (he once tried to throw her out of the second-story window of his home), and while she chatted with him, I eavesdropped on a couple of students standing nearby. There was a weird-looking girl who by her accent and gestures was not only Hebrew but from Brooklyn, and a bearded young man. The girl had just remarked, "I just read the first ten pages of PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT..." when Gretchen dragged Creeley over to meet me. When I got back to my eavesdropping, the conversation had progressed some distance and the bearded young man was telling the girl, "...That was my mother's favorite part of the book!" My god, what part was that? I'll never know!

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Redd continues with some interesting remarks about censorship, occasioned by my sending him Max Harris's and Geoffrey Dutton's book, AUSTRALIA'S CENSORSHIP CRISIS, but since Anzapans (at least) waste too much time preaching to the converted on that topic, and since there are other things I want to say, I will omit the rest of Redd's letter.

PORTNOY I enjoyed. I don't think it's a great book, but I do think it's a good one. It's just as funny as everyone overseas has said it is, but mostly I found it sad. I also found it somewhat superficial in its treatment of Portnoy's (and of course just about everyone else's) character. Okay, maybe I have to wait for someone to smuggle me a copy of Brian Aldiss's HAND-REARED BOY before I can read something un-superficial about this subject - and I'm not all that sure that the subject interests me sufficiently anyway. And there is also the fact that lately I've been finding all kinds of highly-revered works of art superficial. It started when I used that word in connection with BLOW-UP, for which Harding has never forgiven me. More recently, I had the same feeling about THE MIDNIGHT COWBOY. Never having been in tune with the McLuhanist philosophy, it could be that there is something about modern media which is quite profound but which quite escapes me.

You argue about that if you want to. I will talk about Peacock. (Now there's superficiality for you, say the knowing ones.)

An English lecturer at the University of Kent, Dr Howard Mills, has recently published the first lengthy study of Peacock since J B Priestley's volume in the "English Men of Letters" series (1927). It is called PEACOCK: HIS CIRCLE AND HIS AGE (Cambridge UP, 55s0d/\$8.10), and a fine eye-opening piece of work it is, too.

I am afraid it hasn't given me any further clues at all for my study of "The Precursors Of The Religious Body Known Simply As Disciples Or Churches Of Christ In English Fiction", but it has certainly made my view of Peacock a deal clearer.

Dr Mills gives the impression in his book that he has been merely limbering up for an attempt at a definitive critical biography. The book is far too short - even for someone who is not as curious about every last detail of Peacock's life as I am. It's terribly tantalizing to learn, for example, that the good man was imprisoned during his earlier years, apparently in connection with his treatment of a young lady. Fascinating! I had seen Peacock's description of himself as "the Universal Lover" before, but I had no idea that this phrase was to be taken literally. Apparently he was quite a one with the ladies in his youth; an impression the reader would never gain from his novels, which are all as essentially sexless as 98-percent of science fiction.

I read, many years ago, Peacock's biography of his friend Shelley, but I seem to recall that I skimmed through it very quickly after reading Maurois's much longer biography, and the extent of the friendship had not really registered with me. If Dr Mills is correct, it was precisely Peacock's friendship with Shelley that inspired him to start writing in earnest. (That's a bad sentence - it's awfully late and it's been a torrid day in the reading-room; I was referring to Peacock's starting to write in earnest.) Also, I had not fully appreciated that other characters in the novels besides Scythrop in NIGHTMARE ABBEY had been more or less based on Shelley.

But the really mouth-watering aspect of Dr Mills's book is his chapters about Peacock's non-fictional writings - and particularly his music criticism. Peacock must have been one of the most astute listeners of his time. He appreciated composers like Mozart, Haydn - even Beethoven - when they were the cacophonous Stockhausens, Messiaens and (insert your most detested modern here) of their day. Some of these ephemeral writings were reprinted in the Halliford edition of Peacock (10 volumes, 1924-34 - and if you see a set for sale, please reserve it for me!), but many have never been reprinted at all. From the passages Dr Mills quotes, it would seem that a volume of these articles would make very interesting reading indeed.

"...Peacock found in Beethoven the revolutionary genius in music that he did not find in the literature of his age." Alas, Dr Mills just about proves that Peacock didn't have quite the eye for what was both revolutionary and good in literature that he had the ear for in music. He couldn't bring himself to read Keats, for example, "if he lived to the age of Methusalem". Ah well, all of our gods have feet of clay. And few of them write like Thomas Love Peacock.

I gather that a French gentleman named Mayoux has published an exhaustive volume about Peacock. I'm wondering if my French will improve sufficiently to understand this book before a Peacock Revival sets in and some enterprising British publisher gets out a translation. But there are probably other good reasons for learning French, so I shall persevere.

The last few weeks have provided me with an orgy of delectable reading, and at the moment (1 a.m., 19.3.70, to be exact) I am about a hundred pages into the autobiography of one of my other art heroes - Berlioz. I can't help wondering

whether the young Peacock was as fanatical a music-lover as the young Berlioz. Until reading Dr Mills's book I would have imagined Peacock as archetypal an Olympian or Apollinian as Berlioz was a Romantic or Dionysian, but now I'm having my doubts. Perhaps young Tom, too, interjected at concerts - stirred the theatre with loud remarks about the absence of trombones or presence of cymbals when the score which he held opened before him clearly indicated the opposite? In Berlioz's case, at least once such an interjection started a riot which only ended with the musicians' instruments trampled to pieces! Those were the days. I doubt if anything like that has happened in the Melbourne Town Hall - though I must not forget the much rougher and zanier things that happened back in the gold-rush days - and certainly the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra has often enough deserved such violation.

Young Hector once took a friend to the Opera whom he was trying to convert. It didn't quite work out, but the man sitting next to his friend was clearly just as wild an enthusiast as Berlioz. The friend became concerned about the man's comments and his obviously most intense emotions. Peeling an orange (!), the friend remarked:

"My dear sir, do be calm."

"No, it's too much. It's tremendous, overwhelming."

"Really, you know, you shouldn't get so worked up. You'll make yourself ill."

"Leave me alone..... Ah!"

"Cheer up. After all, it's only a play. May I offer you a piece of this orange?"

"God, it's sublime!"

"Maltese."

"Perfection!"

"Do have some."

"The music, I mean."

"Yes, it's not bad."

'While this incongruous exchange was proceeding,' Berlioz continues, 'the opera had reached the lovely trio "O doux moments" which follows the reconciliation scene. The extraordinary sweetness of the music, with its simple yet insidious melody, was too much for me. I hid my face in my hands and wept like a man overcome with grief. As the trio ended, two powerful arms lifted me bodily off my seat, nearly crushing my ribs. It was the unknown enthusiast. Unable to contain his emotion any longer, he had noticed one among all the audience around him who felt as he did, and was now frantically embracing me and blurting out, "B-b-b-by Heaven, sir, isn't it beautiful?" Not the least taken aback, my face disfigured with crying, I answered by asking him, "Are you a musician?"

"No, but I feel music as deeply as any man."

"Yes, that's what matters. Give me your hand, sir. You're a splendid fellow." Thereupon, regardless of the stares and sniggers of our neighbours and the blank astonishment of my orange-eating neophyte, we whispered together for a few moments; I gave him my name, he told me his and his profession. He was an engineer, a mathematician! What strange habitation will true feeling choose next!"

That kind of thing probably only happens at rock festivals these days, and, I would hazard the guess, for much the same reasons. The emotion is all. I, and I think Peacock, too, have far too much of the Apollinian in my make-up to allow my enthusiasm to bubble over like that in public.

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And that will have to be all from me this time, if I'm to make the OMPA deadline. Next time, I promise (but not necessarily faithfully), some mailing comments. This alien typewriter, incidentally, was hired on the NSFC account in order to produce the EasterCon handbook. It confirms my rather low opinion of secondhand IBMs.

KONK OMPAX!

(And, for that matter: KONK ANZAPAX!)