

Philosophical Gas

NUMBER FOUR (if I am not mistaken) APRIL 1971 : BWV 84 Published by John Bangsund GPO Box 4946 Melbourne 3001 Australia, for the Australian & New Zealand Amateur Press Association - Mailing 16

15th March: The drought has broken. I have received a fanzine from England - by airmail, of course. PSYWAR 2, published by Keith Walker, Psychiatric Training School, Burnley General Hospital, Burnley, Lancashire. It seems to be about UFOs, and is produced in the most abysmal British crudzine style. I really did try to read it, but the duplicating is incredibly bad, and the words I could decipher (such as "Tolkein Society" and "sci-fi buffs") didn't excite me. On one of the clearer pages, however, I could see that Keith is trying to establish a British Weird Fantasy Society, and I pass on that information to those of our fraternity who are interested in such things. For all that I failed to enjoy PSYWAR 2 in itself, I was really pleased to see that British stamp.

In the same mail were BETE NOIRE 22, THE NEHWON REVIEW 7 and WE ARE V-R-R-IENDS! OUCH! 1 from Redd Boggs, KIM CHI 19 from Dick Ellington and the Autumn Sale Catalogue from the Myer Emporium. Although the latter has a quite thought-provoking little piece about pocket radios in football team colours, I found the issue as a whole rather less interesting than usual. Some nice colour work, but Mr Myer will really have to try harder if he's thinking of next year's Ditmars. Redd's little Fapazines are as interesting and beautifully produced as ever (how he has the patience to justify his margins in everything he publishes beats me: I did it once, in ASFR 1, and that was enough); the Review has the first background information I have so far seen on Chester Anderson, author of THE BUTTERFLY KID; the Beast sets out very clearly Redd's (entirely adverse) reactions to the film, 2001, which he has just got around to seeing; and the, ah, other publication argues strongly (and I believe convincingly) against the idea of Fapa wait-listers being elevated by vote of the members to the top of the list. Dick's KIM CHI is a model of what a good apazine should be: some personal stuff about pets, cars and work; two brief articles, one on environment (with particular reference to garbage disposal in the US Army 20 years ago) and the other on urban guerrillas; and a stack of that sort of mailing

comments you always wish other people would write about your efforts (though you, of course, are a bit too pressed for time to ever get around to writing them about other people). A vintage mail, all in all, and there were two enquiries from American fans about Comorg, a pamphlet from an airline about its new city office and a letter for Robin Johnson - all obviously delayed by some kindly post office clerk so I wouldn't get the feeling that all-I-ever-get-is-fanzines.

Cleaning up the study/fanzine-factory over the past few days - in order to put together an accurate mailing list for Scythrop - I have turned up quite a few interesting things I had forgotten about. (One of the nasty things that keeps on happening to me is that I never seem to get stuff sorted out from the last time I moved house before I move again, and some of the piles of letters, fanzines and odds-and-ends on the floor of the study date back to 1969 - obviously piles I have been flinging into the car when moving and not sorting out at the new place.) One of the things that turned up was a set of stencils I typed for Lodbrog 2/Crog 7 and thought better of publishing. I'm sure you would be fascinated to read this dismal stuff, but I have cunningly forestalled you by destroying the stencils after running off one copy for myself. But some I will "reprint" here.

Do you remember Lodbrog 1? It was published exactly a year ago, and it's rather croggling to think of what has happened in the time since. For one thing, I had never heard of Shayne Sabina and the Star Trek groups; Neil, Michael and Dennis were Brisbane fans I occasionally had letters from; David and Carey had just published (I think) their first nasty little joint crudzine; and Mike Horvat was one of hundreds of American fans I had heard of but never had a letter from. Eight of our Anzapa members - and all of them have made their marks on Australian fandom in rather less than twelve months.

In Lodbrog 1 I gave something of a run-down on the ancestry of J. Bangsund, mainly for the benefit

of the members of OMPA, which I had just joined, and I didn't mention what "Lodbrog" meant. Someone in OMPA subsequently told pretty much the same story about Lodbrog as I am now about to tell you.

Lodbrog, as I'm sure you will have discovered for yourself by now, is named after Ragnar Lodbrog, or Ragnar of the Hairy Brecks, who was one of the first of those nasty Viking chaps who invaded England during the Ninth Century. It seemed a sort of appropriate name to give to this publication, in view of its purpose, and in view of the fact that no Australian approaching the horrific stature of Ragnar has ever invaded England. (You don't really think I could call it "Jack Lindsay" or "Charles Mackerras" or "Barry McKenzie", do you? There's not quite the ring about those names that I wanted.)*

One of the first books I can remember reading as a child was Eleanor Hull's THE NORTHMEN IN BRITAIN,** and since I know you are dying to discover why Ragnar was called "Hairy Brecks", let me quote from her book:

"It is said that the King of the Swedes, who was fond of hunting in the woods, brought home some up snakes and gave them to his daughter to rear. Of these curious pets she took such good care that they multiplied until the whole countryside was tormented with them. Then the King, repenting his foolish act, proclaimed that whosoever should destroy the vipers should have his daughter as his reward. Many warriors, attracted by the adventure, made an attempt to rid the country of the snakes, but without much success.

"Ragnar also determined to win the princess. He caused a dress to be made of woolly material and stuffed with hair to protect him, and put on thick hairy thigh-pieces that the snakes could not bite. Then he plunged his whole body, clad in this covering, into freezing water, so that it froze on him, and became hard and impenetrable. Thus attired, he approached the door of the palace alone, his sword tied to his side and his spear lashed in his hand. As he went forward an enormous snake glided up in front, and others, equally large, attacked him in the rear. The King and his courtiers, who were looking on, fled to a safe shelter, watching the struggle from afar like affrighted little girls. But Ragnar, trusting to the hardness of his frozen dress, attacked the vipers boldly, and drove them back,

* Even "John Brosnan" doesn't quite convey the idea I had in mind.

** The picture opposite, used as a cover for Lodbrog 1, is from this book.

killing many of them with his spear.

"Then the King came forward and looked closely at the dress which had withstood the venom of the serpents. He saw that it was rough and hairy, and he laughed loudly at the shaggy breeches, which gave Ragnar an uncouth appearance. He called him in jest Lodbrog (Lod-brokr), or "Hairy-Brecks", and the nickname stuck to him all his life. Having laid aside his shaggy raiment and put on his kingly attire, Ragnar received the maiden as the reward for his victory. He had several sons, of whom the youngest, Ivar, was well known in after years in Britain and Ireland, and left a race of rulers there."

So, as well as being one of those nasty Viking chaps (as I said), he also invented them.

Chorus Of Decent Average Australians: "Invented what?"

Myself: "Chaps. Have you never read Zane Grey then, you louts?"

Professor Furbelow (late of Oxford): "I descry a pernicious pun, than which no form of wit is said to be lower, on the word 'chaparral', which means..."

Myself: "That the chaparral punning meant should be abolished?"

Last night (1st May, yes), three members of the Clifton-Hilton Kuhn-Kan Klub - Diane, yrs truly and that towering intellect Leigh Edmonds - went to see Hamlet. Was he well? you ask. Indeed and that he was, I reply. The film, for film it was we saw, was that of the celebrated Roundhouse performance, with Nicol Williamson in the lead role, Marianne Faithfull as Ophelia, Roger Livesey as 1st Player/Gravedigger and... the rest I forget. Ask Lee Harding. Tony Richardson was the director. The same Tony Richardson who...? The same. Ned Hamlet, Prince of Bushrangers. Something like that. Wasn't John Lennon in that? Some pop group, I forget. No matter.

Bob Toomey raved about this HAMLET, which he had the privilege of seeing live in London, in Scythrop 21. Williamson, said Bob, "was angry, slashing, sarcastic, bitter, responsive, wild and hilarious". This was HAMLET, he said, "done, and done beautifully, as a musical comedy. You would have had to see it to believe me." I saw it, and I see what Bob meant, but I wouldn't use quite that description.

Nicol Williamson took some getting-used to. I finally adjusted by deciding, okay, I'm watching this film about a guy named Hamlet, and by trying to forget that play of the same name we've all read. Even then it didn't quite work. With a



• LODBROG •

bit of effort you can work out fairly well what the play is all about, but the film was not easy to work out, and I'm still trying to make up my mind about whether Tony Richardson knew what he was doing, or whether he was relying on viewers' memories of the play to fill in the gaps. The main impression the film gave me was that it was about this bloke who wanted to kill his mother's second husband, partly out of respect for his father, partly out of jealousy. The film probably would have made just as much sense without the Ghost, or, looking at it as I am more and more inclined to, just as little.

In Bob's list of adjectives you will notice that one word missing is "mad". It is perhaps my main criticism of Williamson's otherwise very impressive acting that at no time was I really convinced that Hamlet was either mad or pretending to be.

Watching this film I began to understand the expression "HAMLET without the Prince of Denmark". The play, as I read it, is as much to do with the problem of the succession in Denmark as anything else, yet this wasn't stressed at all in the film. The entire Norwegian business - Fortinbras, the old king of Norway, the Poles, the ambassadors and so on - hardly got a look in. The film ended with Hamlet's death; it omitted his appointment of Fortinbras as his successor. The fact that Hamlet himself was the heir to the throne, that Claudius was a usurper, did not emerge at all.

I realize that to cram a four-hour play into a two-hour film you have to make some cuts, telescope scenes and so on. But this film seemed to leave out such important parts of the play, parts which earlier films left in, and which, omitted, leave gaping holes in the fabric of the thing. As an example, Act 3 Scene 3, in which Claudius kneels at prayer and Hamlet, observing him, decides not to kill him for theological reasons, is transposed after Scene 4 and Hamlet doesn't even appear. (And was Shakespeare's Claudius a Catholic? It seems most unlikely. Although it would be quite within Shakespeare's power to show Claudius's Catholicism as one more example of his perfidy, there doesn't seem any indication of it in the play.) One of the gravediggers didn't appear, which meant that there was no impression given of Ophelia's having been a suicide, and most of the philosophical talk in the graveyard scene was cut out.

Diane assures me that this kind of talk is nit-picking, and I must admit that it's a bit like talking about Holy Writ, but HAMLET is such an intricate play, in which clues to the many strands of the plot are scattered everywhere and

in which no slice of dialogue is without importance, that to hack it down to size is a very hazardous task.

I suspected at times that extra words and phrases had been added here and there to make things flow a bit more smoothly. I can't prove it, except in one solitary and glaring instance. During the play scene, which is telescoped very well in many ways, Hamlet tells Claudius what is happening and says, "This is one Lucianus, broth... nephew to the King". Well, that's a neat way of underlining Hamlet's intentions for 1970 audiences, but it's not Shakespeare.

In many ways it was an excellent film, and I did enjoy it, but, as I remarked to Leigh when the lights came on, I'd still like to see HAMLET.

Chorus of Decent Average Australians: "Did they leave the dirty bits in?"

Myself: Doctor Bowdler would have been fairly happy about the whole thing, with the probable exception of 'Her privates we'.

Chorus: "The dirty bits is the best part of Shakespeare, really, isn't it?"

Myself: "And what about the sword fights, then?"

Chorus: "Oh yes, the sword fights is good, too. Yes."

Myself: "Breaks up the monotony, that sort of thing, doesn't it?"

Chorus: "Did you get a good butcher's 'ook at Marianne Whatsit's bangers?"

Myself: "Diane claims she heard my eyes popping."

Chorus: "Awful thing really, her and her bosoms hangin' out and takin' drugs and all that, and what she sees in that long-aired queer Mike Jagged I'm damned if I know. Bloody insult, 'im playing Ned Hamlet, don't you think? A insult to our glorious hairytich, ain't it, eh?"

Myself: "If you say so."

I'm rather glad I found those stencils, if only to find out exactly how John Ryan felt last time when he realized he was reviewing a book for the first time. At least, I don't think I have ever written at such length about a film before.

By way of a general mailing comment (being a bit pressed for time, you understand): This was the first mailing I have missed completely; last time, if you recall, my post-mailing arrived before the mailing; but I was delighted and a little alarmed to realize that my absence could quite easily go unnoticed. There's a nice community feeling about Anzapa these days, and everyone's becoming quite competent. Maybe it's about time we had another feud to stir things up again? (Exeunt Omnes)