

Phoenix Nest

Edited by Martin Levin

Byzantium or Bust

"The father divests himself of his factories, and also takes off all his clothes in the middle of a railway station. The climax of this undressing sequence is one of the most spiritual feet-shots in the picture, apart from an unsettling close-up of the bottoms of his bare soles on each side of a back view of the head of the visitor—an image that alludes simultaneously, I think, to homosexual love, the Gospels, and an esthetic of feet that goes back to Byzantium."

—PENELOPE GILLIATT, on Pasolini's *Theorem*, in *The New Yorker*.

FRIENDS OF Miss Gilliatt are worried about the intrusion of "I think" into the above passage. Is she losing her grip? Perhaps it will comfort her if I transcribe, and translate, a tape recording smuggled from the set of *Theorem*:

PASOLINI: Quiet, everybody. We have a long day's obfuscation ahead of us, and I want to begin with an image that alludes simultaneously to homosexual love, the Gospels, and an esthetic of feet that goes back to Byzantium. Any ideas?

(Five minutes silence.)

FIRST VOICE: I see a couple of queers cutting each other's toenails under a withered fig tree, beside the Bosphorus. But will it fit the script?

PASOLINI: What script?

SECOND VOICE: It's the Byzantine bit that's difficult. Does this esthetic have to go back all that way?

PASOLINI: Byzantium or bust.

THIRD VOICE: Could we have some more coffee?

FOURTH VOICE: There are two bare soles, see, with human expressions like in the foot powder ads. Byzantine faces, kind of leering at each other, across the head of John the Baptist.

FIFTH VOICE: How obvious can you get?

PASOLINI: It's a starting point, anyway. We can refine it as we go along. Pietro, find me a couple of lewd feet. A left and a right.

SIXTH VOICE: For my money, it's a marvel of multiple metaphor, but is the public going to understand it?

PASOLINI: I'm making this one for Miss Gilliatt.

SEVENTH VOICE: How do you know she won't take it as a simultaneous allusion to *Portnoy's Complaint*, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and

an esthetic of decapitation going back to the Druids?

PASOLINI: I have full confidence in Miss Gilliatt. Do not bother to come back after lunch.

At this point the tape recorder was spotted and had to be rushed from the set. The pursuers were handicapped by the spirituality of their bare feet.

—E. S. TURNER.

But What Goes After the Third Line?

ANYBODY HERE want to make an easy \$5, \$10, \$25, or \$50, or any amount at a party? Or not at a party—anywhere. Turn to the next man or woman and say, "I'll bet you can't sing the *Little Orphan Annie* theme song." This bet must be made only with people who were children during the Thirties and early Forties. All people during that period, budding delinquents, safe-crackers, stock market manipulators, or whatever, listened to *Little Orphan Annie*.

The chances are that the person who takes the bet will begin with:

Who's that little chatterbox?
The one with pretty auburn locks?

And then get stuck, stopped cold. Your sucker will flounder around, saying, perhaps, "I think, 'Cute little she . . .'" and then stop again. "OK, here's your money," he will say, grudgingly. And, sometimes: "I'll bet you back, double or nothing, you can't sing the whole goddamned thing."

This is the moment when you sing, in strong or weak voice, the entire lyric, which is as follows:

Who's that little chatterbox?
The one with pretty auburn locks?
Cute little she,
It's Little Orphan Annie.
Bright eyes, always on the go,
There's a sort of healthiness handy.
Mite size, cheeks a-rosy glow,
If you want to know,
"Arf!" says Sandy.
Always wears a sunny smile,
Now, wouldn't it be worth your while
If you could be
Like Little Orphan Annie?

Immediately after you have completed your rendition, a heated discus-

sion will arise. First off, someone will bet that you can't remember the name of the man who sang the song. Do not take this bet. I checked with all three major networks, and nobody I talked to at any of them could remember. At one network, a man actually said, "Do we still carry that? Did we ever carry it? You got me, pal"—and hung up. It is equally impossible to learn the name of the organist who accompanied this unforgettable song.

Lyrical speaking, or rather, speaking prosaically of the lyrics, there are a few other points about the song that nobody else will think to bring up:

1) Annie, neither in the comic strip nor on the radio, ever was a chatterbox. Her lines usually were confined to expressions of mystification or astonishment or extreme excitement, such as "Leapin' lizards!"

2) Annie's eyes were anything but bright. First off, they had no pupils. They were as expressionless as a pair of small ironstone dishes.

3) Annie was not "always on the go." She and Sandy frequently took walks at a leisurely pace, or lay down and had naps together.

4) Annie's cheeks were not "a-rosy glow." They were as colorless as her vacant smile.

5) Sandy, her dog, who had eyes as blank as Annie's, explained absolutely nothing by saying "arf." No dog in the annals of dog history has ever said, "arf," any more than one has ever said, "bow wow."

6) Annie did not always wear a sunny smile. When she was downcast or threatened, she frequently turned down the corners of her mouth.

7) Her millionaire benefactor, Daddy Warbucks, seldom appeared in either the comic strip or the radio program. How he came to be her benefactor never was explained. Nor was the presence of his hulking Hindu, whose name was something like Punjab or Jubjub. Whenever Daddy did manage to put in an appearance, the Hindu, turbaned and sworded, always was at hand, causing Annie to wear her sunny smile. Daddy Warbucks, who must have been named that because he had made his money in munitions, was—I am convinced—the model for Mr. Clean. What Annie saw in him is hard for me to say.

8.) No, it wouldn't be worth anybody's while if he or she could be like Little Orphan Annie. Disaster was always imminent in her life, or sorrow at Daddy's frequent disappearances, which in my view occurred only because he wished to get the hell away from his ward.

So much for Orphan Annie. Anybody for bets on Chandu the Magician?

—RICHARD GEHMAN.



Top of My Head

Goodman Ace

A Letter to His Readers From a Constant Writer

THIS IS MY first fan letter to what I've always considered the most literate and perceptive group of mail-senders who ever put poisoned pen to paper.

But, boy, did you readers ever flunk out in your latest batch of bombardments. In the column of June 7 there were listed the names of some of the hundreds of renowned artists who appeared at Carnegie Hall since it opened in 1891. In this there was incorrectly, and purposely, inserted the name of the Italian violinist and composer, Signor Niccolò Paganini. He died in 1840.

It seems to this constant writer that the readers are not doing their required research, if indeed it took any research at all. Any kindergarten child who knows the lyrics to "Happy Birthday" would have known that the Signor was in no condition to have appeared at Carnegie Hall in 1891.

But only one complaining letter came, and she complained about the wrong thing. Mrs. M. Londeberg Smith of Edina, Minnesota, wrote: "A list of names is a bore. As a writer, I understand why you did it. An easy deadline," she accuses. My answer to that is: "Oh yeah, Mrs. Smith?" And that's only for openers. "Which do you think is easier to spell, Serge Koussevitzky or Tom Smothers, Giulio Gatti-Casazza or Samuel Finley Breese Morse? To say nothing of doing research in a book called *Portrait of Carnegie Hall*.

"That easy deadline took twice the usual time anything else would have taken, Mrs. Smith, as it would have you, too, and I'm willing to bet you the ten irretrievable bucks it cost me to buy that book."

I write this fan letter not in anger, readers, because your envelopes, if I may paraphrase your letters, are "the first I turn to," when our mailman remembers to saunter by and drop them off here. I open each in gleeful anticipation, with just a soupçon of "What did I do wrong now?"

And when your letters tell me in no uncertain terms where I went astray I say, "How true!" and "How lucky I am to have such bright and helpful readers who take time out of a busy life to tell me off." And then I murmur, "Que sera, sera. Why me, why me?"

Some of the letters get here before the print on the magazine and your

blood pressures have had time to gel, if that's the word I want. (Hold it! I'm not asking, you understand.)

The column offering to send you the "word" the Smothers Brothers used on their TV show is a point in case. Would you believe the requests for the word came three-to-one from women? They did. Including one from a fair lady in Elmira, New York, with an italic typewriter, who insisted I send the naughty word in a love letter.

A pleasant and fringe benefit of this job is that I learn a lot from the readers. However, your letters on the unfortunate S. F. B. Morse caper of last April, which you all remember with great glee as the high point of my stupidity, when I referred to Samuel Finley Breese Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, as Robert Morse—even proofreaders don't read me—did much to confuse me even more.

Especially these two letters, one from Howard Whetsel of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the other from Alan M. Dorhoffer of Post Washington, New York.

Mr. Whetsel writes that the telegraph was invented by a Teuton named Friedrich Gauss, who probably didn't tap out "What hath God wrought!" but "Gott im Himmel!" He also says that Mr. Gauss had a brother who was the really brilliant one: "He was the kind of a fellow who could give you the square root of boxcars as they passed the station," writes Mr. W.

Now Mr. Dorhoffer writes: "The apparatus used by Morse was developed not by Morse, but by Alfred Vail of Speedwell, New Jersey, and by Ezra Cornell, who later founded Cornell University. They developed the pipe-laying device that would carry the telegraph wires. Although Vail and Cornell devised the system and made it work, their chief verbal partner and associate, S. F. B. Morse, is credited with the entire system."

Well, before I tap myself for another ten bucks for another book to research all that, I'm going to tap myself out an SOS. Whetsel meet Dorhoffer, and may the best man win.

For now—(Hold it again! I just saw that. "May the better man win.") For now, thanks for your patience with my informational gaps. After all, you've been reading much longer than I've been writing. To err is human, to forgive is divine mail.

John Kenneth Galbraith

How to Control the Military

During fiscal 1968, the Pentagon awarded over 57% of the nation's defense contracts (24 billion dollars worth) without competitive bidding. Today, nearly 700 generals, admirals and navy captains are employed by the ten largest defense contractors. Citing these facts in the midst of the continuing ABM controversy and the ever-escalating arms race, John Kenneth Galbraith gives a concise history of how the "military-industrial complex" in America has grown to overwhelming size and power. Most important of all, he proposes ten steps we can take now to break it up.

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