

Books, books and more books

How to be Preppy

The Official Preppy Handbook
Edited by Lisa Birnbach
Workman Publishing, \$3.95

Some people say they originated in New England, and others say they are just a phenomenon of birth. Whoever they are, you can usually point them out there because of their delightfully stereotypical garb.

Ahh, the top-siders, the Lacoste shirts, the khaki, the clogs... the list goes on; the Preppy wardrobe.

Lisa Birnbach points this out in her book *The Official Preppy Handbook*. A funny conglomeration of all the stuff you've heard in days gone by, the book starts off with a bit of humor and continues throughout to engage the reader in a rather condescending and tongue-in-cheek rehashing (on paper) of the age-old tradition of Preps.

Birnbach initiates the reader to the Prep world by simply stating that "it is the inalienable right of every man, woman, and child to wear khaki. Looking, acting and ultimately being Prep is not restricted to an elite minority lucky enough to attend prestigious private schools..." But, Preppies do have a class of their own.

Without a doubt, Prep dressing is one of the more noticeable and

obvious forms of Prep behavior (just as being a "freak" in high school meant you wore your jeans so the hem slurped dirt under the sole of your shoes).

At one point, Birnbach speculates on why Preppies all dress alike. She mentions that some "amateur historians" have thought that the Prep set wears the same clothes because its members are used to wearing uniforms, but Birnbach points out that Prep homogeneous dressing starts much earlier than uniformed schooling: "Preppies dress alike because their wardrobes are formed according to fundamental principles that they absorb from their parents and their peers."

These "fundamental principles" are: conservatism ("Preppies wear clothes for 25 years"), neatness (Socks, when worn, always stay up), attention to detail ("Everything matches — some Preppies go so far as to change their watchbands every day"), practicality ("Layering is a natural response to varying weather conditions"), quality ("Preppie clothes are built to last"), natural fibers (they look better, require professional maintenance, are more expensive, are "key"), anglophilia ("The British have a lot to answer for..."), specific color blindness ("In some subcultures, hot pink on men might be considered a little peculiar..."), the sporting look ("Even if they've never been near a duck blind or gone beagling, Preppies are dressed for it") and androgyny ("The success of the Lanz nightgown is based on its ability to disguise secondary sexual characteristics...").

Portrayal of the sensed mediocrity of this class continues throughout the handbook. Prep sex is a good example.

"Most Prep men," Birnbach says, "suffer from the virgin/where complex, and only want to have sex with 'bad' women... Prep men will not marry these women; they will marry other Preppies."

There is, of course, much more to the Prep world than clothes and sex. There's the proper Prep pet, what to have and have not in your house (mahogany or macrame?), Prep schooling, fraternal instincts, certain

(acceptable) ways to express drunkenness, where to shop, the country club, sailing, and the like.

Basically, Birnbach's edited version of the Prep set is complete. She points out L.L. Bean, riding lessons, tennis, and using summer as a verb: After reading her book, you'll know what to say, wear, do and think to be Preppy.

The Official Preppy Handbook is hardly intellectual fare, but if you have "wenchy" minutes to dribble away, you might peek in on Birnbach's Prep world; she's awfully accurate.

Erzsi De'ak

Poetry by a Monk

ENOUGH SAID
By Philip Whalen
Grey Fox Press, 1980, \$4.95

As a poet, Philip Whalen is precocious enough to begin a new collection of poems by admitting the book "was written under ideal conditions."

"The author was living a life of elegant retirement in the character of a Zen Buddhist priest at the Hossen Temple in San Francisco and at the monastery of Zenshinji at Tassajara Springs, far in the mountains east of the Big Sur," Whalen explains in the preface to *ENOUGH SAID, Poems 1974-1979*.

"Given ideal conditions, how could life be anything but a joyous round of pleasure. What could possibly go wrong."

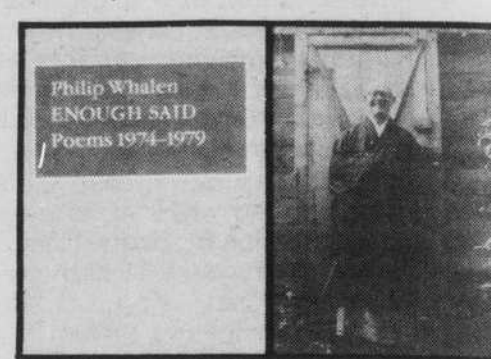
In Whalen's view of life — that of a Zen priest — nothing can actually go wrong. But of course, most of us at times perceive things as going wrong. The poems that Whalen takes from this paradox comprise a sizeable number of the collection's 60-some poems.

One of the best is "Waste. Profligacy. Fatuity." The first five lines are: *We get ourselves into a mess when we say*

"Thank God that's over," "Never again will I do this & so," "Nothing is over or under; things is and then change, We think of ourselves as we used to be What is we now?"

In other poems, such as "How Many Is Real," Whalen takes a more formal

philosophical stance: *Whether we intended it or liked it or wanted it We are part of a circle that stands*



beyond life and death Happening whether we will or no We can't break it, we are seldom aware of it And it looks clearest to people beyond its edge.

They are included in it Whether or not they know

Whalen often struggles with the gap between the philosophical stance he describes in poems such as "How Many Is Real" and the less abstract activities of everyday life. And getting the two to overlap requires a letting go. The first two stanzas of "Wandering Outside" read:

Purples flags for the luxurious color Extravagant form; and then I calmly Empty dead tea leaves into the toilet I hate the world I hate myself the dragon wind I allow everything to happen

I want luxury, extravagance, to use To give to you, A wild naked leap in moonlight surf Wildflower meadow, swim in alpine lake Stand under waterfall

The joyous poems in which Whalen successfully transcends that gap — and there are several — are best represented by the one-line poem "The Inspection of the Mind in June":

All of me that there is makes a shadow. The best poems in the collection are marked by similar simplicity and clarity — characteristics that can't be fully appreciated or understood without struggling through the more dense philosophical poems.

One of the best of these is "The Laundry Area":

Each time I hang up a washboard

The slenderest thread of cold water Runs down my wrist and into my armpit Without wetting my clothes.

Glenn Boettcher

Of reggae and ganga

Reggae Bloodlines
In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica
By Stephen Davis and Peter Simon
Anchor Press/Doubleday, \$6.95

Reggae is Jamaican ghetto music, a relative of American rock and roll and soul music, with the accent on the second and fourth beats.

Reggae Bloodlines is an effort by Stephen Davis and Peter Simon to point out both the sociopolitical and musical origins of reggae. Well intentioned though it is, the book is severely damaged by the superficiality of the authors' understanding of the culture they are trying to describe. And the book is sloppily organized.

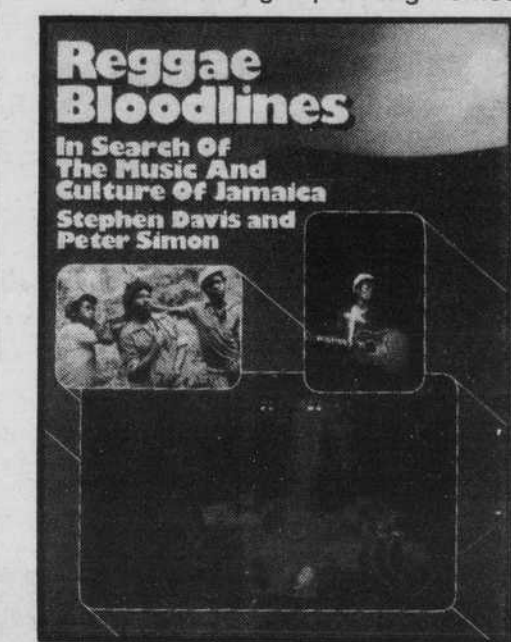
Writer Davis and photographer Simon spent, in their words, "most of the winter of 1976 in Jamaica, visiting and talking with... reggae master musicians as well as the producers, ganja traders, Rastafarian brethren and elders, and even a politician or two... We tried to penetrate Jamaican life to the roots..."

The contradiction, not to mention arrogance, inherent in those two sentences is staggering. Davis and Simon expected, in the space of a few months, to be able to penetrate to the roots of a culture developed over hundreds of years. That they didn't succeed hardly needs to be mentioned.

Reggae Bloodlines begins promisingly enough, with a brief outline of the history of Jamaica. Davis traces the development of the music as mento (a relative of calypso, mixed with American rhythm and blues, eventually producing ska), a quick, party-oriented music which evolved into the slower rock-steady, and finally reggae. He gives a reasonably lucid overview of the Jamaican subcultures which produced and embraced

reggae. Then the book falls apart. Where it would seem appropriate to examine more deeply the cultural phenomena he has outlined, Davis jumps to an interview with Bob Marley. He begins the chapter by referring to himself in the second person: "You scream into Jamaica over an aquamarine Caribbean mirror..." It's an interesting approach, but Davis doesn't even bother to sustain it for a chapter, much less for the length of the book. A mere 16 pages later, Davis switches to the third person, and seven pages after that he and Simon are "we."

This literary laziness is annoying, and is present throughout the book. During an interview with singer Max Romeo, Davis brings up a song Romeo



wrote about socialism. Davis reprints the interview verbatim in question-and-answer form, and never does get around to mentioning the name of the song, or exactly how it treated the issue.

Davis' insistence on merely printing interviews without really examining what his subjects are saying means that Joe Higgs and Peter Tosh can, in separate conversations, each claim to have created the Wailers, and Davis will never even attempt to resolve the contradiction.

For all the flaws in the text, *Reggae Bloodlines* deserves praise for pointing out some of the major forces in reggae music. Most of the artists whose

records are fairly easy to find on these shores are mentioned — Marley, Tosh, Burning Spear, Toots and the Maytals, the Heptones — enough to give the novice reggae buff a good start on a record collection.

But even this virtue is diluted. A "Jamaica Discography" is listed in the table of contents as appearing on page 211. It doesn't appear at all.

The nonexistent discography is a final symptom of the carelessness which ruins what could have been a useful, informative study of a culture and its music.

Phil Bernstein

Fun with Fanny

Fanny
By Erica Jong
New American Library

Vice. Debauchery. Lust. Love. Moralism. Adventure.

All this and more is seen through the eyes of an 18th-Century maid, told in the manner of the 18th-Century novel, and set in the rank, putrid and barbaric ways of 18th-Century England.

Fanny, being The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones, is Erica Jong's best-selling novel rivaling that of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. In her slightly epic but racy adventure, Jong successfully portrays a woman's life in an era when women suffered far greater oppression than they do today.

Complete with all the standard plot conventions, moralistic diversions, exclamations and of course, Proper Capitalization, *Fanny* is at times a tedious adventure, but well laced with scenes one often finds dog-eared after some readings. And in the course of reading one may find every possible synonym for both male and female genitalia.

Fanny, seduced by her step-father (Lord Bellars), finds herself a runaway, dressed *en homme*, on the road to London. Along the way she encounters witches, highwaymen (notably Lancelot Robinson and his band of Merry Men), and the notorious Mother Coxtart, whose famous Brothel becomes Fanny's second home.

Her Fortune now fixed as a Whore,



Fanny takes on the position famously, entertaining such notables as Jonathan Swift and William Hogarth. She nearly escapes to join her true love Lancelot as a pirate on the high seas, but Fate leads Fanny to Lord Bellars as his mysterious mistress. Her only happiness is the birth of her daughter, but is soon dashed when the child is kidnapped by a crazed wet-nurse.

Fanny's adventures now take her on the high seas in search of her daughter, where she is held captive by a perverse and depraved Captain, becomes a pirate herself, and joyously is reunited with Lancelot and his Merry Men. Together they rescue the baby and make their way back to Fanny's childhood home, Lymeworth. Of course, everyone's true lineage comes to light and most everyone (who is left alive by this time) ends up living happily ever after.

Although novels of this nature can at times be predictable and tedious, *Fanny* is a well-executed blend of tasteful erotica, historical adventure, and feminist philosophy. There is, basically, something for everyone on an unpretentious but edifying level.

Those readers who enjoyed Jong's previous works, *Fear of Flying* and *How to Save Your Own Life*, may find *Fanny* a bit shallow. Yet Jong incorporates the feminist views of today into a first-rate, light novel — at some points thought-provoking and controversial, and at others whimsical and, of course, quite erotic.

Jerril Nilson

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