

SHORT LOAN



# The Mechanical Bride : FOLKLORE OF INDUSTRIAL MAN

by Marshall McLuhan

GINGKO PRESS

Published in the United States of America

GINGKO PRESS, Inc.  
1312 Fifth St., Berkeley, CA 94710  
Phone: (510) 898-1195  
email: [books@gingkopress.com](mailto:books@gingkopress.com)  
<http://www.gingkopress.com>

ISBN 978-158423-243-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2002112107  
The Mechanical Bride  
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Introduction to this edition © 2001 by Philip B. Meggs

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With very special thanks to  
Corinne McLuhan and Matie Molinaro

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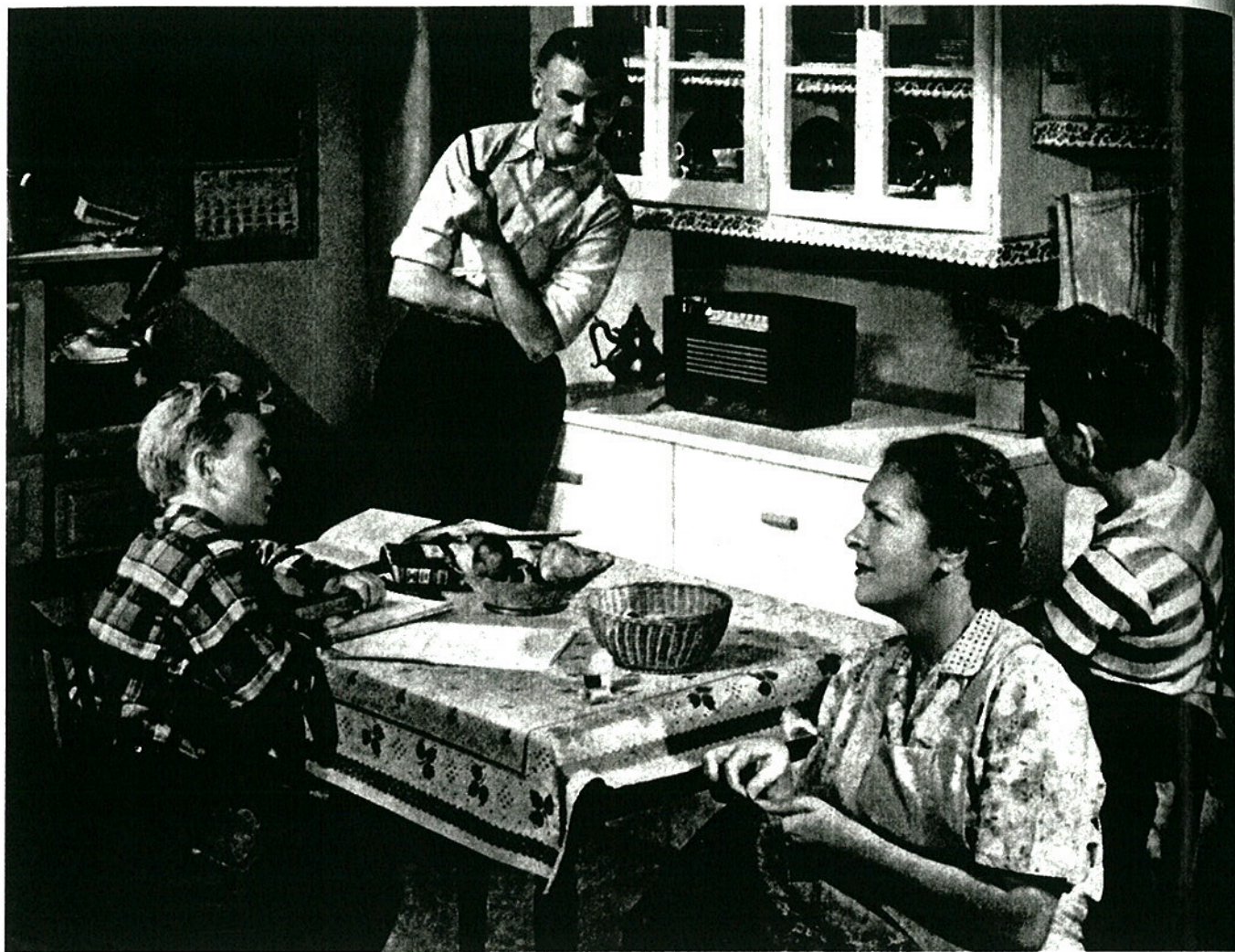
Book design by Julie von der Ropp

Printed in China

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"Our American concept of radio is that it is of the people and for the people"

## ***Freedom to LISTEN – Freedom to LOOK***

As the world grows smaller, the question of international communications and world understanding grows larger. The most important phase of this problem is *Freedom to Listen* and *Freedom to Look*—for all peoples of the world.

Radio, by its very nature, is a medium of mass communication; it is a carrier of intelligence. It delivers ideas with an impact that is powerful . . . Its essence is freedom—liberty of thought and of speech.

Radio should make a prisoner of no man and it should make no man its slave. No one should

be forced to listen and no one compelled to refrain from listening. Always and everywhere, it should be the prerogative of every listener to turn his receiver off, of his own free will.

The principle of *Freedom to Listen* should be established for all peoples without restriction or fear. This is as important as *Freedom of Speech* and *Freedom of the Press*.

Television is on the way and moving steadily forward. Television fires the imagination, and the day is foreseen when we shall look around the earth from city to city, and nation to nation,

as easily as we now listen to global broadcasts. Therefore, *Freedom to Look* is as important as *Freedom to Listen*, for the combination of these will be the radio of the future.

The "Voice of Peace" must speak around this planet and be heard by all people everywhere, no matter what their race, or creed, or political philosophies.\*

*David Sarnoff*

President and Chairman of the Board,  
Radio Corporation of America.

\*Excerpts from an address before the United States National Commission for UNESCO.



**RADIO CORPORATION of AMERICA**

**FREEDOM IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS**



# Freedom to Listen



We're listening. Who hired that big mouth?

The rustic scene accentuates the positively phoney?

Is somebody's formula showing?

Come on, kiddies. Buy a radio and feel free—to listen.

IN HIS testimony to the Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce (December, 1945) the president of the National Broadcasting Corporation ridiculed the proposal to separate business control from program control:

This is to forget that "he who controls the pocketbook controls the man." Business control means complete control, and there is no use arguing to the contrary.

But the present ad, with its home-town flavor, would seem to belie this. It suggests the peace and quiet of farm and village life, which, in turn, evoke the Jeffersonian creed of political independence founded on the economic independence of small cultivators and craftsmen. In his *Notes on Virginia* (1782) Jefferson wrote:

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God . . . Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example . . . Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germs of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.

This vision of human integrity based on a non-commercial way of life remains the core of the American dream. As such, it haunted Henry Ford. As such, it is constantly tapped by the advertising agencies and the movie industry in order to sell products. In this ad it serves to lull suspicion. Here it is the juicy bone held out to quiet the growling of the house dog. Home-town sentiment, the Pilgrim Fathers, Paul Revere, Valley Forge, and so on, provide an ample stock of juicy bones for the ad agencies.

In the same way, the David Harum brand of cracker-barrel wisdom thrives in soap opera, and the folklore of the frontier pours from the ad agencies in horse-opera variants. As the industrial market extends its power and control over thoughts and earnings alike, it swathes itself increasingly in the archaic garments of pre-industrial man.

It would seem that there is some sense of compulsion among the marketeers to assume the appearance of Little Red Riding Hood's granny. But this fear of detection is groundless. The modern Little Red Riding Hood, reared on singing commercials, has no objection to being eaten by the wolf. "Freedom to Listen," in a world where effective expression via newspaper or radio is reserved only for a tiny minority, is freedom to put up or shut up.

The ordinary person senses the greatness of the odds against him even without thought or analysis, and he adapts his attitudes unconsciously. A huge passivity has settled on industrial society. For people carried about in mechanical vehicles, earning their living by waiting on machines, listening much of the waking day to canned music, watching packaged movie entertainment and capsulated news, for such people it would require an exceptional degree of awareness and an especial heroism of effort to be anything but supine consumers of processed goods. Society begins to take on the character of the kept woman whose role is expected to be submission and luxurious passivity. Each day brings its addition of silks, trinkets, and shiny gadgets, new pleasure techniques and new pills for pep and painlessness.

*Vogue* is a perfect expression of this state of mind and body. It often plans whole months for its readers, giving exact instructions for what to see, say, eat, read



or wear for each hour of the day. It deals with its readers as a Sultan with his harem, just as *Time* deals with its readers as a Sultan with his eunuchs. *Vogue* and *Time*, like the radio, are major political forces shepherding their flocks along the paths of comfort and thrills.

Mr. Charles Siepmann, in *Radio's Second Chance*, explores behind the radio façade, exposing many of the shams and frauds of pretended freedom in this third estate of the public domain. Morris Ernst's *First Freedom* did the same for radio, and also for press and movie, centralization. Concentration of power and control is a universal trend in these fields, with monopoly resulting in monotony. And both authors agree that decentralization would result not only in greater richness and variety of product but would best promote the social conditions for enterprise and opportunity. Wide legal experience in these fields permits them to make specific proposals for attaining freedom and variety of expression.

But these writers are typical of many reformers in having isolated only a very small segment of facts for analysis. The present book intends to illustrate, tentatively, a technique for handling a much wider set of facts and related situations. The reformer looks at the effect of industrial techniques on the passive citizen and shudders. He overlooks the fact that industrial technique was born of a pre-industrial appetite—in the Newtonian age—for mechanical order and power. That passionate dream of unlimited monopolistic power still carries over into the new age of relativity physics. But the dream of relativity physics is not of centralism but of pluralism. It is not centralist but distributist in the matter of power and control. And to see this new vision at work side by side with the old one is to permit the reformer a sure method of diagnosis and therapeutic suggestion. It permits the reformer to co-operate with the same forces that have produced the disease, in order to point the way to health.

Thus, as passivity becomes extreme in the bulk of society, a sizable segment of citizens detaches itself from the dream-locked majority. As vulgarity and stupidity thicken, more and more people awaken to the intolerability of their condition. Much can be done to foster this state of awareness, even though little can be done directly to change the policies of those in control today of the media of communication.

In fact, Mr. Siepmann provides much evidence to show that, even if policies of entertainment and communication control were changed, no improvement would follow at present. Why? Because there are no standards of admitted excellence. "The Federal

Communications Commission has failed, in the eleven years of its history, to define any such elementary standards." Few can agree on what is good entertainment or what is a sound educational program for the airways.

That should suggest to the reformer that his discontent with administrative policies is a very superficial affair indeed. The level at which change and awareness are needed is much deeper. The super-highways of thought and feeling which have been stretched across the contemporary mind are even more menacing than financial or bureaucratic concentrations of power. They can scarcely be expected to encourage the development of spontaneity or sensitive taste. And while standards of excellence, like criteria of freedom, are not merely an affair of private but of social growth, they can exist only in individual minds.

No standard of taste can be defined by a vote unless the voters are persons of trained perception and judgment. Lacking such recognized standards, the program sponsors feel entirely justified in equating public interest in radio with low sales resistance. Programs are tailored to evoke and to maintain just those states of mind which can be induced in the largest possible audience that can be led to buy a specific product. Since this policy is bad for the audience, it is also bad for business in the long run. It creates apathy through monotony, and boredom through excessive sensation. Horizons narrow. Imagination flickers out. Markets contract, as the movie industry had begun to discover even before television. But business does not take long views. It has to have quick turnovers. However, this is not a situation peculiar, for example, to the radio, movie, or book industries. And real reform can come only by awareness of the widest bearings of one situation on another. With this awareness there comes the gradual formation of a surer taste, and a stronger sense of what standards are relevant to any particular situation.

Thus, for example, it is not listening-freedom to be able to turn on or turn off the unweaned whimperings of hit-parade crooning. It is, relatively, freedom to be able to "place" them for what they are in relation to the range of human experience. It is not listening-freedom to hear or not to hear a Gunther giving the inside trot talk on global conditions, but it is, relatively, freedom to be able to understand the extreme limitations of such reportorial techniques. Freedom, like taste, is an activity of perception and judgment based on a great range of particular acts and experiences. Whatever fosters mere passivity and submission is the enemy of this vital activity.



In *Time and Free Will*, Henri Bergson puts this question: Suppose some mischievous genius could so manage things that all the motion in the universe were doubled in speed, and everything happened twice as fast as at present? How could we detect this fraud by which we would be deprived of half our lives? Easily, said Bergson. We could recognize the impoverishment of our conscious lives. The contents of our minds would be reduced.

Apply that criterion to those caught in the success trap, where speed is of the essence. What is the state of their minds? What is the content of their lives? Do they not rather despise anybody who pauses long enough to acquire a mental content from reflection or to win a wisdom which will only cut down his speed in making for the goal? And is it strange that those who travel so fast and so light should arrive in a nude and starving condition?

The very conditions of success render the rich suspicious of those failures whom they might be expected to assist. They have no training or taste which would enable them to select struggling artists or writers who might be worthy of aid. In these matters, therefore, they work through the dealers in old pictures or distribute many tiny gratuities through bureaucratic foundations which are run on the most finicky, academic lines. This, of course,

overlooks these endowments for hospitals and libraries which are intended as family monuments. And it is not true to say that the rich are niggardly. The point here is simply that they are timid and unresourceful in a way which stands in stark contrast to the zip and push that has put them where they are.

The relative helplessness, social isolation, and irresponsibility of the rich highlights the same situation among those who are striving toward that goal. The circumstances of the struggle insure that the winners will arrive in no condition to enjoy their advantages.

Except in an economic sense, the rich do not even form a class, as, for example, the "film colony" does. So that when distinguished foreigners come to America they naturally seek the company of movie stars rather than of the wealthy. The stars have a personal symbolic relation to the currents of national life which the remote and anonymous figures of celestial finance do not. The stars are distinct individuals wearing human masks that represent some aspect of the collective dream. But the rich are dim and obscure, sharing the tastes and make-up of the very people above whom they have risen, and yet deprived of the satisfactions of mass solidarity in an egalitarian society.

## Men of Distinction



Is it what's in the jigger that makes them bigger?

Why pick on the arts? Hasn't anyone in science or industry ever distinguished himself by drinking whiskey?

What about "Grow old along with me" for a whiskey ad, you snob sifters of the copy agencies?

Swank in every swig or the jig is up? Kilroy was here?





MR. VINTON FREEDLEY, THEATRICAL PRODUCER



MR. RUSSELL PATTERSON, DESIGNER AND ILLUSTRATOR



MR. ADOLPHE MENJOU, MOTION PICTURE ACTOR



SIR HUBERT WILKINS, EXPLORER



MR. HIRAM U. HELM, RANCHER



MR. ROBERT F. SIX, AIR LINES PRESIDENT



MR. ARTHUR LITTLE, JR., PUBLISHER



MR. DANTON WALKER, JOURNALIST



MR. PAUL LUKAS, STAGE AND SCREEN ACTOR

## *For Men of Distinction...LORD CALVERT*

It is only natural that Lord Calvert is the whiskey preferred by so many of America's most distinguished men. For this "custom" blended whiskey... so rare... so smooth... so mellow... is produced expressly for those who appreciate the finest. LORD CALVERT IS A "CUSTOM" BLENDED WHISKEY, 86.8 PROOF, 65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS. CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., NEW YORK CITY



SNOB APPEAL might seem to be the most obvious feature of this type of ad, with its submerged syllogism that since all sorts of eminent men drink this whiskey they are eminent because they drink it. Or only this kind of whiskey is suited to the palate of distinguished men, therefore a taste for it confers, or at least displays an affinity for, distinction in those who have not yet achieved greatness. If greatness has not been thrust upon you, it is no fault of this ad, which generously thrusts the inexpensive means to greatness upon you. From that point of view there is nothing basically different here from the glamour ads, where *chic* models in posh surroundings prove their automatic mastery over any and every male by embalming themselves in some cream, deodorant, pancake mix, soap, hair wash, or other. Here, it is: "what's in the jigger that makes him bigger?" instead of "what's the trick that makes her click?"

What really emerges from this item is the notion of distinction and culture as being a matter of consumption rather than the possession of discriminating perception and judgment. That brings us to what some anthropologists call "cultural regularity," which is to say, a basic pattern lurking in a seemingly eccentric instance.

This whiskey ad bristles with techniques of persuasion. It is a blatant proclamation on culture as understood today. Consumers of expensive and refined clothes and whiskey, as pictured here, are cultured. They are distinct from the herd.

Recently there has been some panic about a tendency for culture to get out of hand. Russel Lynes, an editor of *Harper's* (*Harper's*, February, 1949), wrote an essay in which he claimed with some alarm that there was in America an emergent intellectual elite. These high-brows he distinguished from middle- and low-brows. Then *Life* (April 11, 1949) backed up the Lynes report with a loud bray that: "These are three basic categories of a new U.S. social structure, and the high-brows have the whip hand."

To help the readers find their places Lynes, an upper middle-brow, has worked with *Life* to prepare a guidance chart. And for a spirited defense of the high-brow by *Life's* own high-brow, Winthrop Sargeant, turn to page 102.

That is the way the consumer's strait jacket gets tied on. That is the totalitarian technique of stratification by arbitrary cadres and ranks, just as it is the age-old dictator method of "divide and rule." Carve men up into middle-brow Midwestern dentist, or low-brow Eastern salesman, or high-brow Southern agrarian, and you can lead them around by the nose. Any fraction of a man can be sent to war against

some other segment of himself; or any group can be panicked by a report about any other group. And, the more superficial the marks of difference, the more ferocious will be the hostility. The guidance chart by which *Life's* readers are to "find their places" is a pictorial one in accordance with consumer categories of clothes, furniture, useful objects, entertainment, salads, drinks, reading, sculpture, records, games, and social and political causes.

In accordance with that chart twenty million *Life* readers tied on their mental strait jackets with mingled feelings of disdain, envy, and shame. (But notice that the wealthy are not included anywhere on the chart.) In so doing they looked furtively at their friends, who, they hoped, were not observant enough to have noticed their partiality for some "lower middle-brow" salad.

This is much more insidious stuff than intelligence-rating or personality quotients. Of course, the fact is that everybody at some time "consumes" nearly everything on the entire guidance chart. The "high-brows" certainly do. But the items in the high-brow section, at once cheap and eccentric, mark these "high-brows" as "the enemies of democratic ways." Such real high-brows as Jefferson and Adams are deprived of their citizenship by this chart, which is an insult to any thoughtful person of any economic or consumer status. By proclaiming a set of social and intellectual distinctions in accordance with consumer goods, the chart ignores and conceals any real basis for such distinctions with a loud Bronx cheer. This is ever the way of *Time* and *Life*, and such is also the way of our cynical ad men.

It would be nonsense to pretend that culture ratings à la Emily Post are not often made in accordance with the consumer mentality. The present ad is only one of thousands which loudly insist on depriving men of their birthrights by rating them in accordance with their supposed preference for some purchased product. And to do so is perhaps a weakness inherent in any market economy. If success can be measured only by purchasing power, then the intellectually creative men with whom the future of mankind always rests will be regarded only as floperooes. Living as they do on \$3,000 or so a year without respectful attention to current merchandise, they are easily felt to be unpatriotic: "Oh, our ways aren't good enough for you?" say the satisfied consumers of well-known brands.

The other side of that picture presents the phoney intellectual who takes unto himself the consumer features of the "high-brow"—the pictures, books, and music he hates. In England in the twenties it got so that all the studios of Bloomsbury and Chelsea were



crowded with artist apes, millionaire bohemians who paid rentals so high that the real artists had to move out. Something like that happened in Greenwich Village about the same time. Real artists are never interested in arty surroundings.

One of the "high-brow" products of this century is James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In that work Joyce uses the symbolist techniques which Mallarmé, the great French poetic discoverer, had seen in the daily newspaper of 1890. The hero of *Ulysses* is a "middle-brow" Dubliner with a very "low-brow" wife. There is also the ironically presented Stephen Dedalus, the esthete-artist who corresponds to *Life's* resentfully romantic image of the high-brow. But Joyce was a real high-brow, a man of real distinction; that is to say, he was a man who took an intelligent interest in everybody and everything. He occupied simultaneously every corner of *Life's* big consumer chart for helping its readers to find their own isolated cultural category. He was very high-brow, very middle-brow, and especially very low-brow. To write his epic of the modern Ulysses he studied all his life the ads, the comics, the pulps, and popular speech. Nobody who had read Homer or Joyce could be taken in by the chart hoax.

In his admirable book *Music Ho!* Constant Lambert notes again and again that "the most striking feature of the art of our time is the way in which the popular, commercial and low-brow arts have adopted the technical and spiritual sophistication of the high-brow arts." Jazz, he argues, was born from Debussy, and Debussy is to music what Mallarmé is to poetry. Further analysis would have revealed to Mr. Lambert that this process is not just a filtering down from high-brow to low-brow arts but equally a nourishing of the esoteric by the popular.

The few must depend on the many as much as the many stand to gain from the few. That, it is to be hoped, is shown many times in this book.

With this in mind, let us note the trick in the chart hoax which Russell Lynes and *Life* cooked up for more than twenty million readers. By putting the "high-brow" at the top of the consumer list in *place of the rich*, the reader was discouraged from noting that all the other ratings were in terms of economic status. That is why the rich were not fitted into this chart at all. The mythical high-brow had alarmingly usurped the rightful role of the rich. And by representing the "high-brow" as "holding the whip hand" over all consumer categories, they immediately conferred on him the odium of an irresponsible upstart without any claim to the respect which goes to the tough boys who actually do hold the whip hand in business and who can afford to buy "the best."

In America, low, middle, high are consumer ratings, and nothing more. But woe to the indigent intellectual who accidentally acquires a "high" rating without the economic appendages. He is undermining the system. In England, low, middle, and high are caste ratings. So that a low-class English gent feels that for him to pretend to brains would be as absurd as for a poor man to pretend to shrewdness. But those who, like Mr. Lynes and *Life*, pretend to use low, middle, and high as real indications of levels of intellectual activity, are corrupters of the currency of speech and thought. The mind is, in varying degrees, dead or alive, and high and low may be used as an index of vitality. Naturally, the low-vitality mind tends toward the robot categories of Lynes and *Life*, regardless of economic or consumer status. And, just as naturally, the alert and detached mind ignores such categories.



# How Not to Offend



A message for all thinking and/or stinking people?  
Why all this camp-meeting hysteria about personal hygiene?  
Everybody's lonesome because he's a polecat?  
If even your best friends won't tell you, and four out of five  
have it, who is a dog's best friend?  
Now we know why Little B.O. Peep lost her sheep?

CLOSELY related to the combination of moral fervor and know-how is the cult of hygiene. If it is a duty to buy those appliances which free the body from toil and thus enable housewives not to hate their husbands, equally urgent is the duty to "be dainty and fresh." Under the scream caption we are told in tones of Kaltenborn unction:

Too late, when love has gone, for a wife to plead that no one warned her of danger. Because a wise, considerate wife makes it her business to *find out* how to safeguard her daintiness in order to protect precious married love and happiness.

It would take much space just to list the current words and phrases related to B.O. and to "leading the life of Life Buoy." Mouth washes, gargles, tooth pastes, hair removers, bubble baths, skin cleansers, and dirt chasers are backed by long-standing national advertising campaigns. "Even your best friends won't tell you." "Why be an Airedale?" and so on.

The present ad for Lysol, "a concentrated germ-killer," is typical of the shrill melodramatic warnings that accompany these products and should be thought of in connection with the agonies of the daytime soap serials. The colored comics in the Sunday supplements frequently carry six or eight frame spot-

dramas of the terrible penalties and dazzling rewards that life hands out to those who are neglectful or careful, as the case may be. In one of these, entitled "Georgie's Black Eye," a twelve-year-old boy is bragging to his mother how he got a shiner for defending her honor at school. Some of the fellows were sneering that her husband was running out on her. She didn't have what it takes to keep a man. Mom, mortified, gets busy with the tooth paste. Soon Dad is waltzing her around the living room and Georgie calls in the fellows to see for themselves. "Gosh," they say, "looks like he's going to haul off and kiss her."

Most of these ads feature ravishing chicks left in sordid isolation because they "offend." Or a young couple on a bench sitting too far apart, the boy sulking. Overhead an old owl says, "Ooh, ooh, no woo." Or a handsome lad with dance card asks, "May I have the last waltz?" to an indignant girl who raps out, "You've *had* it!" Again, two girls are making up a party list and one says, with disgust on her face: "Invite *him*?—Over my dead body!" Of course, he was a swell kid, but: "Of late he had been pretty careless about a rather important thing, and the news got around fast. . . . While some cases of halitosis are of systemic origin, most cases, say a number of authorities . . ."



Another full-page spread shows a threesome in a panic: "Here comes Herb! For Pete's sake duck!" After Herb goes back to his big car, they go on to say, "There ought to be a law."

Nair, a "cosmetic lotion to remove hair safely" pictures the sun leering at a pair of legs: Have "Second Look" legs! . . . leaves legs smoother . . . more exciting.

For Legs that Delight  
Use Nair Tonight

Pages could be filled with familiar items like "Kissing is fun when you use . . ." and "Keep daintier for dancing this way," and "Their lost harmony restored by . . ." and "Use Fresh and be lovelier to love."

It all adds up to this, that when the hideous specter of body odor looms, all human ties are canceled. The offender, whether parent, spouse, or friend, puts himself outside the law. And when lovely woman stoops to B.O., she is a Medusa freezing every male within sniff. On the other hand, when scrubbed, de-loused, germ-free, and depilatorized, when doused with synthetic odors and chemicals, then she is lovely to love. The question remains as to what is being loved, that gal or that soap? There is an age-old notion that healthy body odor is not only an aphrodisiac but a principal means of establishing human affinities.

Implied in the cult of hygiene is a disgust with the human organism which is linked with our treating it as a chemical factory. D. H. Lawrence, rebelling against the puritan culture in which he was reared, insisted all his life that industrialization was linked to the puritan hatred of the body and detestation of bodily tasks. This, he claimed, not only was reflected in our hatred of housework and physical tasks but in our dislike of having servants smelling up our houses while helping with that work. So that the small, hygienic family unit of our cities and suburbs is, from this viewpoint, the realization of a Calvinist dream.

There is an old Huguenot hymn which goes: "Everybody stinks but Jesus." And Kenneth Burke, in his *Ideas in History*, argues that the very synonym for scrupulous cleanliness, "a Dutch kitchen," means a Calvinist kitchen, and that the puritan world has merely substituted soap for the confessional. In the same way, Lewis Mumford in his *Culture of Cities* notes that: "Today, the degradation of inner life is symbolized by the fact that the only place sacred from interruption is the private toilet." Yet in the seventeenth century, when personal privacy was much valued, the highest classes of society openly performed acts of excretion at their *bidets* beside



## TOO LATE TO CRY OUT IN ANGUISH!

Beware of the one intimate  
neglect that can  
engulf you in marital grief

TOO LATE, when love has gone, for a wife to plead that no one warned her of danger. Because a wise, considerate wife makes it her business to find out how to safeguard her daintiness in order to protect precious married love and happiness.

One of the soundest ways for a wife to keep married love in bloom is to achieve dainty allure by practicing effective feminine hygiene such as regular vaginal douches with reliable "Lysol."

### Germ destroyed swiftly

"Lysol" has amazing, *proved* power to kill germ-life on contact . . . truly cleanses the vaginal canal even in the presence of mucous matter. Thus "Lysol" acts in a way that makeshifts like soap, salt or soda never can.

Appealing daintiness is assured, because the very source of objectionable odors is eliminated.

### Use whenever needed!

Gentle, non-caustic "Lysol" will not harm delicate tissue. Easy directions give correct douching solution. Many doctors advise their patients to douche regularly with "Lysol" brand disinfectant, just to insure daintiness alone, and to use it as often as they need it. No greasy aftereffect.

For feminine hygiene, three times more women use "Lysol" than any other liquid preparation. No other is more reliable. You, too, can rely on "Lysol" to help protect your married happiness . . . keep you desirable!

For complete Feminine  
Hygiene rely on . . .

**"Lysol"**  
A Concentrated  
Germ-Killer

Product of Lehn & Fink



### NEW! . . . FEMININE HYGIENE FACTS!

FREE! New booklet of information by leading gynecological authority. Mail coupon to Lehn & Fink, 192 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, N. J.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
D.M. 4911

crowded dining tables. But today privacy stinks. The privacy that was once the refreshment of the mind and spirit is now associated only with those "shameful" and strenuous tasks by which the body is made fit for contact with other bodies. The modern nose, like the modern eye, has developed a sort of microscopic, intercellular intensity which makes our human contacts painful and revolting:



"We might have had a wonderful life, but now she puts out both the cat and me." This is the world of Jonathan Swift, who foresaw and foresmelt these horrors. His Gulliver in the land of the giants records his disgust with the huge pores and monstrous smells of the Brobdingnagian beauties exactly in the spirit of current ad-agency rhetoric.

Clifton Webb as Lynn Belvedere recently enacted for the movies the role of the impeccable gentleman. In creating this role he has at once embodied mechanical efficiency, moral disdain for ordinary humanity, and horror at human messiness and dirt. He masters people and problems by sheer contempt. This witty role provides genuine insight into the cult of hygiene and the puritan mechanisms of modern applied science. Mr. Webb, as it were, satirically unrolls an entire landscape of related activities and attitudes. In that landscape human reproduction would be effected, if at all, by artificial insemination. "Sex pleasure" would be entirely auto-erotic. The feeding of babies would dispense with the foulness of the human and animal secretion known as milk. The preparation and consumption of food would be conducted in a clinic by white-coated officials. And excretion from the cradle to the grave would be presided over by a special caste of robots, who would care for the victims of such necessities in germ- and odor-proof laboratories.

Fear of the human touch and hatred of the human smell are perfectly recorded by Mr. Webb in his role of Lynn Belvedere, the super baby trainer. They are also a principal theme of Dr. Mead's *Male and Female*, where the reader will discover her indignation that the child's earliest notions of virtue are associated with punctual urination and excretion:

The clean white-tiled restaurant and the clean white-tiled bathroom are both parts of the ritual, with the mother's voice standing by, saying: "If every rule of health is complied with, then you can enjoy life."

The bathroom has been elevated to the very stratosphere of industrial folklore, it being the gleam, the larger hope, which we are appointed to follow. But in a world accustomed to the dominant imagery of mechanical production and consumption, what could be more natural than our coming to submit our bodies and fantasies to the same processes? The anal-erotic obsession of such a world is inevitable. And it is our cloacal obsession which produces the hysterical hygiene ads, the paradox here being much like our death and mayhem obsession in the pulps on one hand, and, on the other, our refusal to face death at all in the mortician parlor.

## Li'l Abner



Will Capp be the first stripper to get a Nobel prize?

Must Capp, like William Faulkner, wait for the French to discover him?

Is there anybody in the audience who knows of anyone who has done more for sanity than Al Capp?

You like Capp? Then you'll like *Finnegans Wake*.



# The Mechanical Bride



Noticed any very spare parts lately?

Have you got what it takes to hook a date? See us for the highest bid on your old model.

"The walk," "the legs," "the body," "the hips," "the look," "the lips." Did she fall off a wall? Call all the king's horses and men.

ANYBODY who takes time to study the techniques of pictorial reportage in the popular press and magazines will easily find a dominant pattern composed of sex and technology. Hovering around this pair will usually be found images of hectic speed, mayhem, violence, and sudden death. *Look* and *Life* are only the most obvious places in which to study this cluster of interests. Amid what otherwise may appear as a mere hodgepodge of isolated events, this very consistent pattern stands out. I do not pretend to understand all of it, but it is there for everyone to study, and it is certainly linked to the patterns noted in "Love-Goddess Assembly Line." Many a time have the legs in this exhibit stood on their pedestal by the tall column of *Life's* staff, emblemizing the trick that keeps the big team clicking. They are the slick and visible sign of the dynamo purring contentedly in the Time and Life building, but not only there. And they need to be seen in association with those window displays of car engines on a revolving pedestal, with pistons sliding smoothly while a loudspeaker conveys Strauss waltzes to those on the sidewalk.

To the mind of the modern girl, legs, like busts, are power points which she has been taught to tailor, but as parts of the success kit rather than erotically or sensuously. She swings her legs from the hip with masculine drive and confidence. She knows that "a

long-legged gal can go places." As such, her legs are not intimately associated with her taste or with her unique self but are merely display objects like the grill work on a car. They are date-baited power levers for the management of the male audience.

Thus, for example, the legs "on a Pedestal" presented by the Gotham Hosiery company are one facet of our "replaceable parts" cultural dynamics. In a specialist world it is natural that we should select some single part of the body for attention. Al Capp expressed this ironically when he had Li'l Abner fall desperately in love with the pictorial scrap of a woman's knee, saying (January 21, 1950), "Why *not*? Some boys fall in love with the expression on a gal's face. Ah is a knee man!" Four months and many lethal and romantic adventures later, Li'l Abner was closing in on the owner of the knee.

The "Phantom Pencil Seam Nylons" ad presents another set of spare parts against a romantic landscape. Some people have heard of "Ideas with legs," but everybody today has been brought up on pictures like these, which would rather appear to be "legs with ideas." Legs today have been indoctrinated. They are self-conscious. They speak. They have huge audiences. They are taken on dates. And in varying degrees the ad agencies have extended this specialist treatment to every other segment of the feminine anatomy. A car plus a well-filled pair



of nylons is a recognized formula for both feminine and male success and happiness. Ads like these not only express but also encourage that strange dissociation of sex not only from the human person but even from the unity of the body. This visual and not particularly voluptuous character of commercially sponsored glamour is perhaps what gives it so heavy a narcissistic quality. The brittle, self-conscious pose of the mannequin suggests the activities of competitive display rather than spontaneous sensuality. And the smartly turned-out girl walks and behaves like a being who *sees* herself as a slick object rather than is aware of herself as a person. "Ever see a dream walking?" asks a glamour ad. The Hiroshima bomb was named "Gilda" in honor of Rita Hayworth.

Current sociological study of the precocious dating habits of middle-class children reveals that neither sex nor personal interest in other persons is responsible so much as an eagerness to be "in there pitching." This may be reassuring to the parents of the young, but it may create insoluble problems for the same youngsters later on. When sex later becomes a personal actuality, the established feminine pattern of sex as an instrument of power, in an industrial and consumer contest, is a liability. The switch-over from competitive display to personal affection is not easy for the girl. Her mannequin past is in the way. On the male, this display of power to which he is expected to respond with cars and dates has various effects. The display of current feminine sex power seems to many males to demand an impossible virility of assertion.

*Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,  
And beauty draws us with a single hair.*

Men are readily captured by such gentleness and guile, but, surrounded by legs on pedestals, they feel not won but slugged. To this current exaggeration of date-bait some people reply that the glamour business, like the entertainment world, is crammed with both women-haters and men-haters of dubious sex polarity. Hence the malicious insistence on a sort of abstract sex. But whatever truth there may be in this, there is more obvious truth in the way in which sex has been exaggerated by getting hooked to the mechanisms of the market and the impersonal techniques of industrial production.

As early as 1872, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* explored the curious ways in which machines were coming to resemble organisms not only in the way they obtained power by digestion of fuel but in their capacity to evolve ever new types of themselves with the help of the machine tenders. This organic

character of the machines, he saw, was more than matched by the speed with which people who minded them were taking on the rigidity and thoughtless behaviorism of the machine. In a pre-industrial world a great swordsman, horseman, or animal-breeder was expected to take on some of the character of his interests. But how much more is this the case with great crowds of people who spend their waking energies on using and improving machines with powers so very much greater than theirs.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to equate the intensity of the current glamour campaigns and techniques with any corresponding new heights of a man-woman madness. Sex weariness and sex sluggishness are, in measure at least, both the cause and increasingly the outcome of these campaigns. No sensitivity of response could long survive such a barrage. What does survive is the view of the human body as a sort of love-machine capable merely of specific thrills. This extremely behavioristic view of sex, which reduces sex experience to a problem in mechanics and hygiene, is exactly what is implied and expressed on all sides. It makes inevitable both the divorce between physical pleasure and reproduction and also the case for homosexuality. In the era of thinking machines, it would be surprising, indeed, if the love-machine were not thought of as well.

Woman appears as a disagreeable but challenging sex machine in Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County*. But the hero, as an expert sex machine, does a skillful job on a variety of these coldly intricate and maxfactorized products of the assembly line. There may be some relation between the fact that England, the first country to develop know-how and industrial technique, was also the first to develop the *ideal* of the frigid woman.

In Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*, Kit, the heroine, is fascinated by the ferocious little robot that is Sammy. She hates him but is curious to know what it would be like to have this dynamo of pep and drive roaring inside her. With situations of this sort we move over into territory somehow allied to sex and technology but also very closely related to destruction and death. There are some signs that sex weariness may be a factor in the cult of violence, although Wilhelm Reich, the psychologist, argues that it is a mere substitute for sex in those who have acquired the rigidities of a mechanized environment. This view is ably sponsored in G. Legman's *Love and Death*, a study of violence in comic books and literature. And his book certainly doesn't contradict anything said here. But there is surely much to be said also for the view that sadistic violence, real or fictional, in some situations is





GOTHAM HOSIERY COMPANY, INC.  
 200 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK 16, N. Y.  
 ALSO MANUFACTURED BY  
 GOTHAM HOSIERY CO. OF CANADA, LTD.

an attempt to invade persons not only sexually but metaphysically. It is an effort to pass the frontiers of sex, to achieve a more intense thrill than sex affords. There was certainly a good deal of destruction intermixed with the pleasure ideals of the Marquis de Sade.

A news item of March 2, 1950, reported the five-hour flight of a jet Vampire from coast to coast. When the pilot climbed out, he said only that "It was rather boring." For the satiated, both sex and speed are pretty boring until the element of danger and even death is introduced. Sensation and sadism are near twins. And for those for whom the sex act has come to seem mechanical and merely the meeting and manipulation of body parts, there often remains a hunger which can be called metaphysical but which is not recognized as such, and which seeks satisfaction in physical danger, or sometimes in torture, suicide, or murder. Many of the Frankenstein fantasies depend on the horror of a synthetic robot running amok in revenge for its lack of a "soul." Is this not merely a symbolic way of expressing the actual fact that many people have become so mechanized that they feel a dim resentment at being deprived of full human status?

This is a different way of phrasing what is for Wilhelm Reich only a behavioristic fact. Too simply, he thinks of our machine landscape as an environment which makes people incapable of genital satisfaction. Therefore, he says, they break out in fascist violence. Complete and frequent genital satisfaction from the cradle to the grave is the only way, he suggests, to avoid the recurrence of the age-old vicious circle of patriarchal authority and mechanical servitude. Reflecting on *Moby Dick* in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, D. H. Lawrence saw deeper:

So you see, the sinking of the *Pequod* was only a metaphysical tragedy, after all. The world goes on just the same. The ship of the soul is sunk. But the machine-manipulating body works just the same: digests, chews gum, admires Boticelli, and aches with amorous love.

Was it not the mistake of D. H. Lawrence to overlook the comedy in a situation of this type? The human person who thinks, works, or dreams himself into the role of a machine is as funny an object as the world provides. And, in fact, he can only be freed from this trap by the detaching power of wild laughter. The famous portrait of a "Nude Descending a Staircase," with its resemblance to an artichoke doing a strip tease, is a cleansing bit of fun intended to free the human



robot from his dreamlike fetters. And so with Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God*, Picasso's *Doll Women*, and *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce—the latter especially being a great intellectual effort aimed at rinsing the Augean stables of speech and society with geysers of laughter. It is not a laughter or comedy to be compared with the whimsy-whamsy article of James Thurber or Ogden Nash. For the latter kind is merely a narcotic which confirms the victim in a condition he has neither the energy nor appetite to change.

In a story called "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes," by Fritz Leiber, an ad photographer gives a job to a not too promising model. Soon, however, she is "plastered all over the country" because she has the hungriest eyes in the world. "Nothing vulgar, but just the same they're looking at you with a hunger that's all sex and something more than sex." Something similar may be said of the legs on a pedestal. Abstracted from the body that gives them their ordinary meaning, they become "something more than sex," a metaphysical enticement, a cerebral itch, an abstract torment. Mr. Leiber's girl hypnotizes the country with her hungry eyes and finally accepts the attentions of the photographer who barely escapes with his life. In this vampire, not of the blood but of spirit, he finds "the horror behind the bright billboard. . . . She's the eyes that lead you on and on and then show you death." She says to him: "I want you. I want your high spots. I want everything that's made you happy and everything that's hurt you bad. I want your first girl. . . . I want that licking . . . I want Betty's legs. . . . I want your mother's death. . . . I want your wanting me. I want your life. Feed me, baby, feed me."

As an instance of how the curious fusion of sex, technology and death persists amid the most unlikely circumstances, the reader may be interested in a display of "Ten Years of *Look*" (October 29, 1946), in which the central picture was a wounded man coming home "to face it all another day down another death-swept road." Flanking him was a sprawling pin-up: "Half a million servicemen wrote in for this one." And underneath him in exactly the same posture of surrender as the pin-up girl was a nude female corpse with a rope around the neck: "Enraged Nazis hanged this Russian guerilla." If only "for increased reading pleasure" readers should study these editorial ghoul techniques—conscious or not as they may be—and their poetic associations of linked and contrasting imagery.

Perhaps that is what the public wants when it reaches out for the *inside* story smoking hot from the entrails of vice or innocence. That may well be

what draws people to the death shows of the speedways and fills the press and magazines with close-ups of executions, suicides, and smashed bodies. A metaphysical hunger to experience everything sexually, to pluck out the heart of the mystery for a super-thrill.

*Life*, on January 5, 1948, ran a big picture captioned "Ten Seconds Before Death." A Chicago woman called the press and told them she was going to commit suicide. A photographer rushed to her apartment and snapped her. "Just as he took this anguished portrait, she brushed by him, leaped out the third-story window to her death."

This is merely an extreme instance of what is literally ghoulishness. The ghoul tears and devours human flesh in search of he knows not what. His hunger is not earthly. And a very large section of the "human interest" and "true story" activity of our time wears the face of the ghoul and the vampire. That is probably the meaning of the popular phrases "the inside dirt," the "real inside dope." There is very little stress on understanding as compared with the immediate bang of "history in the making." Get the *feel* of it. Put that sidewalk microphone right up against the heart of that school kid who is looking at the Empire State Building for the first time. "Shirley Temple gets her first screen kiss in a picture you'll never forget," and so on.

In all such situations the role of modern technology in providing ever intenser thrills is evident. Mr. Leiber has thus written a very witty parable which shows an intuitive grasp of the mysterious links between sex, technology, and death. Many people were disagreeably surprised by the similar parable of Charlie Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. The wistful, self-pitying, chivalrous little figure had gone. Here instead was a lady killer in every sense. As Parker Tyler pointed out in his book *Chaplin: Last of the Clowns*, the early Charlie was a man-child seeking the security of the womb in a harsh world. In *Monsieur Verdoux* he in a sense exchanges womb for tomb. In order to have material comfort and security, he is ready to kill. But womb, tomb, and comfort have always been interchangeable symbols in his world. He was the giant killer in his first pictures, the lady killer in his last. The same mechanism of sentimentality dominates both. In other words, his is a popular dream art which works trance-like inside a situation that is never grasped or seen. And this trance seems to be what perpetuates the widely occurring cluster image of sex, technology, and death which constitutes the mystery of the mechanical bride.









## Freedom . . . American Style

IT'S the feeling you have when you get up in the morning and stand at an open window—the way you breathe in God's sunlight and fresh air. It's whistling before breakfast, disagreeing with the bank over your monthly statement, leaving a tip for the waitress if you feel like it.

It's working hard now with the idea of quitting someday. It's living where you like. It's looking forward with confidence—even while you willingly put up with gas rationing — to packing a lunch again and

piling the family in the car for an outing.

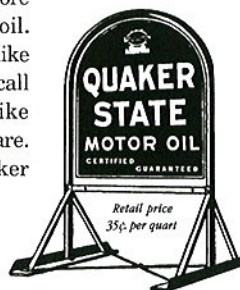
It's keeping your car in condition against *that day*. It's realizing this is a nation on wheels that must be kept rolling—and that *your wheels* are part of all the wheels.

It's an oil company spending more money to make a better motor oil. It's giving that oil a brand name like Quaker State and being able to call it to your attention at a time like this, when your car needs extra care.

It's stating facts—that Quaker

State is refined from Pennsylvania Grade Crude Oil; that it has won for itself, by its performance over the years, a reputation second to none in the field.

It's asking you to *try* Quaker State—in order to care for your car for your country in the best way possible. And, of course, it's your right to disregard this friendly advice if you feel so inclined. That's freedom—American Style! Quaker State Oil Refining Corporation, Oil City, Pa.



OIL IS AMMUNITION—USE IT WISELY



# Freedom—American Style



The Utopia of the picnic inherited from the aristocratic pastoral convention?

Did Whitman give America the poetry of the open road?

What happens when the ad makers take over all the popular myths and poetry?

Are ads themselves the main form of industrial culture?

LET'S set this one up for an adult discussion group:

Study the items in this scene. What is intended as the general effect? Gaiety amid a fruitful and prosperous countryside?

What would you say was the income level of this family group? Estimate this from the car, the Scottie, the portable radio, and the appearance of the family. If this is "freedom . . . American Style," then is it not freedom and not American to have less money and fewer possessions? Was Henry Thoreau un-American?

What proportion of Americans enjoy this style of freedom?

Is there anything about the family group which is different from the Bumstead family?

Is there any basic connection between freedom and prosperity? Would Dagwood be free if he had the same job and the same thoughts, and earned a million a year?

Why take a radio into the countryside? Fear of boredom? Silence?

Looking at the standardized equipment of this family and their standardized pattern of living, discuss how far they can be said to be free as human beings. Consider whether a uniform educational system can be said to make for freedom. Does "freedom" mean the right to be and do exactly as everybody else? How much does this kind of uniformity de-

pend on obeying the "orders" of commercial suggestion? If it takes a lot of money to conform in this way, does conformity become an ideal to strive for?

Discuss the habit of isolation of the American family. Consider the "Henry Aldrich" program or "One Man's Family." Why is there no sense of community in our festivities and relations? Whence this trait of "keeping it in the family?"

The copy under this scene announces that freedom is

the feeling you have when you get up in the morning. . . . It's whistling before breakfast, disagreeing with the bank over your monthly statement, leaving a tip for the waitress when you feel like it. . . . It's working hard now with the idea of quitting someday. It's living where you like.

It's an oil company spending more money to make a better motor oil. . . .

It's asking you to *try* Quaker State—in order to care for your car for your country in the best way possible.

The big hefty heartiness of this is very familiar in the radio commercials. The loud, confident self-congratulation that we are as we are and that only a cheap



sneak would ask any questions. The style of the old patent-medicine man has certainly been getting slicked up by those college men in the ad agencies. And the star-spangled scene of the free man cussing the bank or gypping the tired waitress who didn't sparkle and zip around is a curious way of getting at the essence of freedom.

As for working hard with the idea of quitting some day, that would not seem to be the idea of a

man who loves his work. As for living where you like, there would seem to be relatively few people in this category, since nobody can do much about changing the noisy and unsalubrious character of the big cities in which most of us live and work.

The writer of the ad, in short, takes a dim view of the capacities of his readers, especially when he makes his final gesture of including, as it were, a can of motor oil in every picnic hamper.

## Cokes and Cheesecake



Lead, kindly coke?

Love that bottle because of your baby training?

How about a shot of Abe Lincoln looking starry-eyed at a coke?

Is coke culture feminine? Is Coca Cola best because mother knows best?

In *God Is My Co-pilot*, the G.I.'s agreed that what they were fighting for was, after all, the American girl. To us, they said, she meant cokes, hamburgers, and clean places to sleep. Now, the American girl as portrayed by the coke ads has always been an archetype. No matter how much thigh she may be demurely sporting, she is sweet, nonsexual, and immaturely innocent. Her flesh is firm and full, but she is as pure as a soap bubble. She is clean *and* fun-loving.

In short, she is a cluster-symbol which embraces at one extreme Abe Lincoln's "All that I am and all that I hope to be I owe to my darling mother," and, at the other, Ziegfeld's dream of the glorified American girl as a group of tall, cold, glittering, mechanical dolls. The gyrations and patterns assumed by these dolls in a revue is intended to convey, if not the Beatific Vision, at least a Jacob's ladder of angelic hierarchies linking earth and heaven. We are pictor-

ially encouraged to meet and mingle with these divine creatures in a sort of waking sleep, in which the male is not emotionally committed and in which the innocence of the doll is as renewable as a subscription to *The American Home*.

Coke ads concentrate on the "good girl" image as opposed to the dominant "bad girl" of popular entertainment—though there has been some recent tendency in Hollywood to blend the two types. The "good girl" is the nineteenth-century stock model which has long been merged with the mother image. So Margaret Mead's observations in *Male and Female* are especially relevant to understanding the success of coke ads. It is, she suggests, a result of our child-feeding habits that "Mouths are not a way of being with someone, but rather a way of meeting an impersonal environment. Mother is there to put things—bottles, spoons, crackers, teethers—into your mouth." And so, she adds, the

Ice.





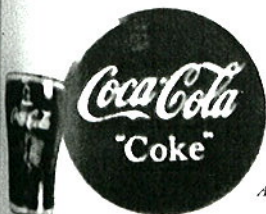
## Refreshment...real refreshment

Ice-cold Coca-Cola—the real thing—never leaves you in any doubt...

or unrefreshed. It tingles with a delicious taste all its own and smacks

of continuous quality in every drop. Ice-cold Coca-Cola

gives you *the pause that refreshes.*



**5¢**

*Ask for it either way... both trade-marks mean the same thing.*



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American G.I. abroad puzzled foreigners by endless insistence on having something in his mouth most of the time. Gum, candy, cokes.

Apparently this has proved to be good advertising for Coca Cola. The coke has become a kind of rabbit's foot, as it were, for the foreigner. And *Time's* cover (May 15, 1950) pictures the globe sucking a coke. Love that coke, love that American way of life. Robert Winship Woodruff, coke executive, says, "We're playing the world long." That would seem to be a very small gamble, with the globe itself becoming a coke sucker.

It is easy to find the romantically immature Shelley conjuring up the same kind of infantile vision in "I rise from dreams of thee." It was new then. Further, it had a different sort of spice for Regency rakes. The Byronic dandy was a disillusioned worldling, who, hating the smell of adult flesh, got a special bang out of innocent girlhood as a vivid foil to his much-slaked lust. It was Byron who first promoted that image of the girl-wife later exploited by Thackeray and Dickens; and the Victorian male gratefully accepted these suggestions as the pattern of moral hygiene for his home life. "Real life" often appears, at least, to be an imitation of art. Today, of poster art.

The divorce, then, between the cloistered purity of the home and the cynicism and lust of the great battle raging in the world without is perhaps the most expressive dramatic feature of the nineteenth century. Without an understanding of the bearing of that drama, even such things as coke ads and Powers models are undecipherable hieroglyphics.

Here is how Frank Norris's tycoon Jadwin, in *The Pit*, saw it when inviting Laura to teach in his Sunday School:

It's the indirect influence I'm thinking of—the indirect influence that a beautiful pure-hearted noble-minded woman spreads around her wherever she goes. . . . Men need good women, Miss Dearborn—men who are doing the work of the

world. I believe in women as I believe in Christ. But I don't believe they were made, any more than Christ was, to cultivate—beyond a certain point—their own souls. . . . The men have all the get-up-and-get they want, but they need the women to point them straight and to show them how to lead that other kind of life that isn't all grind.

The willful self-deception, the obtuseness, and the ad-agency hamminess of these words are all to be found in the feminine images of our ads and magazine covers. Only, with us, there has been a shift from religion to soap as the guarantee of pure-hearted womanhood. For the rest, we are Jadwins.

The present coke ad features a Laura Dearborn, an old-fashioned mother-cum-sweetheart type, a dream drinking. This is the type portrayed by Ingrid Bergman. Recently, the furore over her Rossellini affair was an interesting example of what happens when two dreams get crossed up. She wantonly stepped out of her Hollywood stereotype, endangering a large investment. Rita Hayworth's stereotype, on the other hand, was not shattered by her affair. In presenting *Stromboli* to the American public, however, everything was done to cash in on the lurid possibilities of "good-girl-on-the-rampage."

Cokes as a soft drink naturally started out to appeal to the soft emotions. The wholesome harmlessness of the drink is insisted upon most successfully by the wholesome girls and situations which envelop the drink. These, in turn, have become linked to the entire range of home-mother-hygiene patterns which embrace a wide range of basic thoughts and feelings. So that it would be hard to suggest a more central item of current folklore, or one more subtly geared to evoke and release the emotions of practical life today.

Whether the drink was always as wholesome as the ads has been a matter of dispute among food analysts.



