thing—not the theater, not the
thing is better. But when tele-
invite you to sit down in front
station goes on the air and
zine, newspaper, profit and
ct you—and keep your eyes
igns off. I can assure you that
nd.
Dialogue for November 1978
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The record for surviving the most threats of destruction, for a single television receiver, has to belong to our old family set. At least once a week, when my father came cheerily home from work only to find his family glazed out in front of the screen, it was weighed in the balances and found wanting.

"Do you know what this is?," he would ask, rhetorically, pointing at our Zenith as he high-stepped over the bodies littering his path. "It's the boob tube!" he'd cry. Since he didn't want his family to become a passel of boobs, he would suggest a drastic course of action to himself. "I oughta smash that thing," he'd say, or, "I'm gonna throw it out the window."

One night, he had the temerity to plant himself before the set, blocking our view. "I'll take a hammer to this thing," he declared.

"Aw, come on, Dad," we said, "The National Geographic special is on. We have to watch it for school."

"It's about scorpions," my brother added.

For a second, Father wavered between the message and the medium, and finally tipped the scales in favor of educational programming. He moved out of the way and turned around to look. For another second, conscience and curiosity went at it within him. Curiosity must have won, for just a moment later he was sitting beside my mom on the couch, absorbed in a scene where they showed scientists extracting venom from the desert creature's stinger.

He stayed with us for Gilligan's Island and The Lucy Show, and by the time we were all tucked into bed after our usual stalling tactics had been countered, he was halfway through Mannix. If I had happened to be awake after the local news at eleven was over, I'm sure I would have heard Mother calling him away to bed himself.

And when that old Zenith gave up the ghost one afternoon, my father ran out after supper to Sears for a new TV so that we wouldn't miss Batman that evening. My father—he hate television, but he watches it.

I don't think that the difference between his attitude and his actions is rare among Americans. To be sure, intellectuals have almost invariably deplored the general quality of commercial television, and indict it with the charge of appealing to the lowest common denominator in society. But studies show that at least 60% of any college educated audience will choose light entertainment over, say, documentary for its viewing pleasure. I suspect that the intellectual party line is good rhetoric for any number of closet addicts.

However, the point is that television, in an incredibly short time—about 50 years since the first broadcast in
1929 and about 30 years since its widespread commercial application—has become thoroughly entrenched in our society. An entire generation treasures the images of Bugs Bunny and the Three Stooges as some of its earliest memories, and recalls jingles such as "Winston tastes good, like a—boop-boop—cigarette should" with a measure of nostalgia.

Even those who somehow escape its direct influence are bound to feel television’s effects. My cousins never had a set in the house throughout their childhood, but they went to Grant’s each Saturday night to catch Hogan’s Heroes in the appliance department. When they did finally buy a TV, they sat in front of it for days, engrossed in everything from Farm Report to Moment of Meditation. Life with television may be annoying, but life without it can be dangerous.

No one, it seems, not even Marshall McLuhan, has been able to adequately explain the power of television. Still, the power is there. Its effects have been described well, and the most thoughtful observers have successfully defeated the assumption that TV is simply candy for the mind. As McLuhan says, "The banal and ritual remark of the conventionally literate, that TV presents an experience for passive viewers, is wide of the mark. TV is above all a medium that demands a creatively participant response . . . It involves us in moving depth, but does not excite, agitate, or arouse."

McLuhan and others claim that television is new not only because it is recent, but also because it conveys its message through a language of images which creates the new, deep response. The pre-TV generation, says Margaret Mead, does not understand television because it is print-oriented, having been brought up on books and radio.

That generation nevertheless was responsible for developing television from the beginning. Its main concern for programming has been the content of a show. Again, intellectuals have argued vehemently for cultural content over pure entertainment. Despite the merit of the argument, however, the fact that all the classics of Western literature would barely fill one network’s season schedule if translated to the tube demands an examination of the nature of the medium prior to any discussion of its use.

That the arguments over television have raged for the most part over content suggests that it has been for the most part misused. Right now, it is probably used primarily for advertising, and it is indeed the most powerful advertising medium even invented. The decisive influence of ratings—the number of consumers watching any given show—is just one indication that the shows are and have always been a good excuse for the commercials.

Can television be redeemed from its slavery to marketing men and product pushers? It seems unlikely. Certainly the cultural approach has had little effect on programming in general, and as a Christian, I usually shudder when I see Pat Robertson eliciting testimonials from satisfied believers on The 700 Club, or groan when Robert Schuller makes his pitch for the $10 million Cathedral of Tomorrow. The President of Television, Fred Silverman ("CBS is what Fred Silverman was, ABC is what Fred Silverman is, and NBC is what Fred Silverman will be"), who had been head of programming at all three networks in the course of his career, is where he is because he can deliver audiences to the advertisers.

So, while TV viewers—all of us, at one time or another—are not necessarily becoming boobs, neither are they—we—being edified. We don’t necessarily like everything we see, and probably realize that a lot of what we like is rubbish. But we go on watching. And we don’t take a hammer to the set. Why? I think the answer lies as much in our nature as it does in the nature of the medium.

—Linda Slenk
The Story of You and Me

—Linda Ruiter
Notes on the Wasteland

Being some recollections and opinions
of an addicted though skeptical
child of the Age of Television

T.A. Straayer

Everybody complains about TV, but nobody does anything about it. Our video chum has come to be an integral part of our future-shocked culture. Flat out, it is the most powerful communication device ever constructed by the hand of man: the typical American household has its television on for more than one third of each day's waking hours—an average of six hours and eighteen minutes of mind-numbing pap every day of the year. Most American children now spend more time watching TV than they do engaging in any other single activity, schooling included. The three commercial television networks in the United States accumulated more than eight billion dollars in advertising revenues last year alone, and profits continue to soar along with vicious competition among themselves for a bigger share of the loot. There is no other single institution in which we as a society blithely invest so much time, money, and human potential, without any substantial scrutiny, as television.

Ironically, the motion picture industry, which has traditionally been the most openly antipathetic of the popular media toward commercial television, has of late produced some of the most thoughtful and salient criticism of its chief rival. Two films in particular—The Front and Network—have done an exceptionally good job of exposing some of television's more controversial weaknesses. At first glance the two films don't seem to offer the same picture of the television industry at all. In The Front, which is a story of blacklisting in the industry during the McCarthy era of the fifties, network executives are shown cringing before small-time advertisers and quasi-governmental henchmen; in Network, which is a behind-the-scenes story of an unscrupulous fictional fourth network in the seventies, executives plot and scheme in open defiance of both federal regulations and public opinion. But, although the actions of the executives in the films may differ, their essential motivation is the same: they will do whatever they must, abuse whatever laws or liberties they must, to turn the biggest possible profit.

The avarice of the television industry, rampant and consuming as it is, is not particularly surprising within the context of our economic system. It's not surprising that billions of dollars in profits can tempt and corrupt the sensibilities of the broadcasters, but it is distressing in light of the fact that they are allowed to abuse the public's airwaves—surrendered to them as a trust by the Federal Communications Commission—virtually unchecked. Today's children grow up singing advertising jingles instead of nursery rhymes; no one can know what other refuse from the vast wasteland is rattling around in their heads, or their parents'. As Howard Beale, the mad newsmen of Network, shouts to his audience, "When... the largest companies in the world [control]..."
the most awesome goddamned propaganda force in the whole godless world, who knows what shit will be peddled for truth on this tube?"

Television's race down the gold brick road has taken it in some different directions during its relatively brief history. While high program ratings have always been the pot of gold at their rainbow's end, the networks have not always chased them as assiduously as they have in recent years—with good reason. The Federal Communications Act of 1934, the antique document by which today's television industry is still regulated, established the basic tenet that broadcasters would be given the right to create programs, and to use a portion of air time for advertising to cover their costs. By the fifties, however, television franchises were selling air time for programs, rather than for advertisements between programs. The era of sponsorship—not at all the same as advertising—was firmly entrenched.

Shows such as The Bell Telephone Hour, Kraft Theater, Goodyear Playhouse, United States Steel Hour, and Armstrong Circle Theater filled the networks' schedules. Ernie Kovacs hawked his sponsor's goods (Dutch Masters cigars) during comedy sketches on his variety show; and, of course, the singing men of Texaco always opened Milton Berle's shows. This kind of direct sponsorship necessarily had an effect on the contents of the programs.

An example of a sponsor's manipulation of its program's material turns up in The Front when the film's central character is called in by network executives at the last minute to rewrite a script containing references to an execution in a gas chamber—because the sponsor sells natural gas. The scene, which brings laughter to skeptical modern audiences, is based very closely on fact: in April of 1959, CBS's Playhouse 90 aired "Judgment at Nuremberg," a drama based on the trials of German judges who had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. In the course of the action, Claude Rains, portraying one of the Allied judges, said, "How in the name of God can you ask me to understand the extermination of men, women, and innocent children in gas ovens?" But America never heard the words "gas ovens"; an audio technician spiked the soundtrack at the crucial moment to delete the phrase. The program's sponsor was the American Gas Association, and, incredible as it seems today, it was allowed by the network to bowdlerize an important dramatic production during live transmission for no better reason than that the public might have confused their cooking gas with the cyanide gas used in the Nazi death camps.

Gilbert Seldes, writing about the "Judgment at Nuremberg" broadcast, described the sponsor's censorship as "the kind of blunder that is worse than a crime," revealing as it did the working philosophy in the television industry. He went on, rather presciently in that 1959 review, to describe what might happen if the industry could break out of its slavery to sponsorship:

Of course the broadcasters would multiply their profits five times over if they had control of programs. And they might grow arrogant, they might even produce worse programs than some now appearing, they might be more fearful of advertisers than they now are of sponsors. But they would be responsible. [Italics his.]

It was not an assumption of responsibility, nor anything else altruistic, which brought an end to the sponsor syndrome, however. It was, as it always seems to be in things having to do with television, the economics of the situation that turned the tide.

By the early sixties, television was beginning to come into its own as an
enormous growth industry, and as the nation's most important marketplace. In 1950, for example, Proctor & Gamble spent $570,000 on TV advertising—about 1.7% of its total advertising budget. By 1960, Proctor & Gamble was spending well over $100 million on TV—roughly 92.6% of its budget. Television advertising rates were shooting up along with the demand, however, and more money was buying less air time. Most sponsors found that they simply couldn't afford to pay for whole shows anymore, and so economic exigency gradually phased out the era of sponsorship. The only holdouts are found in such programs as the Hallmark Hall of Fame specials and syndicated series such as Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom.

It's interesting to note, though, that from the perspective of the seventies, the censor-ridden fifties are now being seen as the Golden Age of Television. Even though the sponsor system was occasionally malignant in dealing with individual programs, our current system has gone on to deform the whole face of television. Gilbert Seldes was right on all points of his prophecy: the networks have multiplied their profits, they have grown arrogant, they have produced worse overall programming, and they have become more fearful of their advertisers than they ever were of sponsors. Unfortunately, they are responsible for the programming only to the extent that they can be held accountable for it; they do not seem to take the responsibility very seriously.

The name of the game in today's world of television is ratings. More than ever before the networks fight for every rating point they can get, because single rating points translate into literally millions of dollars in annual revenue. Current advertising rates for the evening prime time hours between eight and eleven range between six and seven dollars per thousand viewers per minute. The networks can thus charge more than $200,000 for a one-minute spot on a show being watched by thirty million viewers. But even these astronomical rates don't phase advertisers; they fight for positions on the highest-rated programs and oblige the networks by buying out all available air space months in advance of actual broadcasts.

Naturally, with that kind of profit at stake, the networks do whatever they must—and often more than they ought—to produce popular shows, a fact to which this year's deluge of kiddie porn and ultraviolence bears ample testimony. In Network, Paddy Chayefsky, who served in the television mill during the fifties, has captured some of the bizarre excesses to which the single-minded drive for ratings has brought the industry.

When Network was shown to network executives in a pre-release screening in 1976, they were indignant. One NBC vice president scowled, "It's a piece of crap! It has nothing to do with our business." But Chayefsky knew better; while the television community was howling, he was busy preparing a second, sanitized soundtrack for the film's TV distribution. And, less than two years after the NBC vice president had denounced it, his network lost out in desperate bidding for the film to CBS, which paid five million dollars for it.

Called "the most controversial movie of 1976," Network has indeed incited a boggling array of often vehement opinions. Most who object to the film do so on the grounds that it is a grossly inaccurate picture of the television industry. Most who come to the film's defense do so by arguing that it is a satire, and as such its black humor excesses are justified. Chayefsky shrugs off both objections and apologists by insisting that the film is a realistically accurate portrayal of the madness of contemporary television: "We never lied. Everything in the movie is true—with some extensions. It's very hard to describe simply and realistically what is going on without being grotesque." Gore Vidal, who, like Chayefsky, was a TV playwright during the fifties, agrees: "I've heard every line from that film in real life."

Network, as the film's opening narration explains, is the story of Howard Beale (Peter Finch), the news anchor of UBS-TV, a fictional fourth network. Faced with forced retirement because of bad ratings, Beale suffers a breakdown and announces during a live broadcast that in one week's time he intends to blow his brains out on-camera. Max Schumacher (William Holden), head of the UBS News Division, wants to pull Beale off the air, but finds that the network's head of programming, Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway), who senses the ratings potential in Beale's rantings, wants to keep him on. A bitter fight ensues, but Christensen, with hefty ratings increases to back her, eventually wins and sends Schumacher packing. Beale's captivating broadcasts quickly win him the status of cult figure and he is dubbed "the mad prophet of the airwaves."

Beale may be mad, but he is a perceptive madman, and his oracular outbursts carry the freight of the film's message. He addresses, for instance, the question of why television is so powerful and dangerous an instrument:

Because you and sixty-two million other Americans are watching me right now, that's why! Because less than three percent of you people read books! Because less than fifteen percent of you read newspapers! Because the only truth you know is what you get over this tube! This tube is the gospel! This tube is the ultimate revelation! This tube can make or break presidents, popes, and prime ministers! This tube is the most awesome goddammed force in the whole godless world! And woe to us if it ever falls in the hands of the wrong people.

The network executives allow these jeremiads on the air uncut; symptomatically, they are entirely unconcerned with the content of Beale's programs so long as they deliver the...
viewers. "Listen to me!" Beale implores his television audience,

Television is not the truth! Television is a goddamned amusement park, that's what television is. Television is a circus, a carnival, a travelling troupe of acrobats and storytellers, singers and dancers, jugglers, sideshow freaks, lion tamers, and football players. If you want truth, go to God, go to your guru, go to yourself—because that's the only place you'll ever find any real truth. But, man, you're never going to get any truth from us. We'll tell you anything you want to hear. We lie like hell! We'll tell you Kojak always gets the killer, and nobody gets cancer in Archie Bunker's house. And no matter how much trouble the hero is in, don't worry, just look at your watch—at the end of the hour, he's going to win. We'll tell you any shit you want to hear. We deal in illusion, man! None of it's true! But you people sit there—all of you—day after day, night after night, all ages, colors, creeds. We're all you know. You're beginning to believe this illusion we're spinning here. You're beginning to think the tube is reality and your own lives are unreal.

You do whatever the tube tells you. You dress like the tube, you eat like the tube, you raise your children like the tube, you think like the tube! This is mass madness, you maniacs! In God's name, you people are the real thing! We're the illusions! So turn off this goddamned set! Turn it off right now! Turn it off and leave it off! Turn it off right now, right in the middle of this very sentence I'm speaking now!

But the network's confidence in its audience is not misplaced: however much power Beale may exert over his viewers in other cases, he is entirely powerless to make them turn off their sets with his imprecations.

In one of the film's most compelling scenes, Beale is taken aside by Arthur Jensen, the kingpin of the conglomerate which, through a tangled corporate structure, owns UBS. Jensen explains to Beale that the final, the ultimate, the only reality is economic—that money is the Prime Mover of all things. Indeed, this is shown to be the operant principle in the television cosmos, even if it is a very unpleasant one. When Beale tries to preach this evengel to his devoted but fickle viewers, he finally finds something that they don't want to hear, and they literally tune him out. As his ratings plummet, Beale slides back to the position he occupied at the beginning of the film, but his retirement this time takes the form of a staged execution.

In a sense, the fate of the television-viewing American public is tragically caught up in Beale's demise. As we continue tacitly to reward the panderers of the television phenomenon with either devouring or by simply ignoring its imbecilic bill of fare, we encourage it not only to perpetuate, but also to escalate, its systemic attempts to anaesthetize us into mindlessness. For, in a narrow but significant sense, TV does give us what we ask for—American wants to see Laverne and Shirley and their dreadful canned innancies every Tuesday night—but in this fallen world we are prone to want all

Following are highlights from the famous "vast wasteland" speech of Newton N. Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission at the time of this address, to the thirty-ninth annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters, on May 9, 1961:

Your license lets you use the public air waves as trustees for 180,000,000 Americans. The public is your beneficiary. If you want to stay on as trustees, you must deliver a decent return to the public—not only to your stockholders. So, as a representative of the public, your health and your product are among my chief concerns.

I have confidence in your health. But not in your product. . .

Ours had been called the jet age, the atomic age, the space age. It is also, I submit, the television age. And just as history will decide whether the leaders of today's world employed the atom to destroy the world or rebuild it for mankind's benefit, so will history decide whether today's broadcasters employed their powerful voice to enrich the people or debase them. . . .

When television is good, nothing—not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers—nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit and loss sheet, or rating book to distract you—and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland.

You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western badmen, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling, and offending. And most of all, boredom. True, you will see a few things you will enjoy. But they will be very, very few. And if you think I exaggerate, try it. . . . Gentlemen, your trust accounting with your beneficiaries is overdue. Never have so few owed so much to so many.

Why is so much of television bad? I have heard many answers: demands of your advertisers; competition for ever higher ratings; the need always to attract a mass audience; the high cost of television programs; the insatiable appetite for programming material—these are some of them. Unquestionably, these are tough problems not susceptible to easy answers.

But I am not convinced that you have tried hard enough to solve them. I do not accept the idea that the present over-all programming is aimed accurately at the public taste. The ratings tell us only that some people have their television sets tuned to a specific number, so many are tuned to one channel and so many to another. They don't tell us what the public might watch if they were offered half a dozen additional choices. A rating, at best, is an indication of how many people saw what you gave them. Unfortunately, it does not reveal the depth of the penetration, or the intensity of the reaction, and it never reveals what the acceptance would have been if what you gave them had been better—if all the forces of art and creativity and daring and imagination had been unleashed. I believe in the people's good sense and good taste, and I am not convinced that the people's taste is as low as some of you assume.

My concern with the rating service is not with their accuracy. Perhaps they are accurate. I really don't know. What, then, is wrong with the ratings? It's not been their accuracy—it's been their use. . . . If parents, teachers, and ministers conducted their respon-
manner of unhealthy things. No propaganda force as incalculably potent as television should be left to the random and often base whims of a largely juvenile audience.

That a program is popular—even immensely popular—is simply not sufficient reason for its being on the air. When every child in America has instant access to attractively packaged mayhem (such as *Starsky & Hutch*) and thinly veiled smut (such as *Three's Company*) most hours of the day (and *TV Guide* recently reported that one million youngsters under eleven years of age are watching TV until after midnight, even on weeknights) we can well accuse the industry that produces it of a violation of the trust given the broadcasters in the Federal Communications Act.

That children and veteran viewers alike—fallen humans all—enjoy a diet of witless mayhem and smut is not an excuse for its perpetual availability. Television stations are granted licenses ostensibly to broadcast in the public interest, but the public clearly is not served by irresponsible appeals to its basest appetites.

Howard Beale is right: television is taking a fearful toll. We are beginning to believe the illusion that television spins for us. Stories of the little old ladies who honestly believed that Robert Young was the kindly Marcus Welby, M.D., with cures for all their ills, are old hat now. But we face graver risks from the tube, some of which are intimated by the recent spate of court cases in which children and adolescents, failing to distinguish between reality and TV fantasy, have committed some horrible crimes. More subtly, our moral values and our instincts as consumers are being quietly shaped. Even if we can convince ourselves that we have not personally succumbed to the frequency-modulated Siren's song, still we cannot deny its impact on our more malleable society at large.

There are many people in this great country and you must serve all of us. You will get no argument from me if you say that, given a choice between a western and a symphony, more people will watch the western. I like westerns and obviously not in the public interest. We all know that people serve all of us. You will get no argument from me if you say there no room for a children's news show explaining some-fundamentals of your industry. You must open your minds and open your hearts to the limitless horizons of tomorrow....

There is your challenge to leadership. You must re-examine some fundamentals of your industry. You must open your minds and open your hearts to the limitless horizons of tomorrow....

We need imagination in programming, not sterility; creativity, not imitation; experimentation, not conformity; excellence, not mediocrity. Television is filled with creative, imaginative people. You must strive to set them free.

What you gentlemen broadcast through the people's air affects the people's taste, their knowledge, their opinions, their understanding of themselves and their world. And their future.

The power of this instantaneous sight and sound is without precedent in mankind's history. This is an awesome power. It has limitless capacities for good—and for evil. And it carries with it awesome responsibilities which you and I cannot escape.
—Mike Lysenga
Ultra High Flippancy

Scribbling on the collective tabula rasa

When my friend Roland Whitacre learned that Dialogue was to take a look at television he asked if he might submit a commentary on "the audiovisual opiate." Warning that he had better curb his paronomasia ("I always walk it on a leash," he interrupted) and lay off the literary lechery ("Of course," said he, "Modulation in all things"), I told him to mail it.

Not till I was six were my senses assailed by the flickering, jabbering box. By then I knew enough of life to regard skeptically the self-commissioned Captain Kangaroo and the rest of the Saturday morning riffraff; they were as eminently artificial as Froot Loops and toys by Mattel. As for more specious fare, weekly documentaries of the doddering Marlin Perkins on baboon safari were only minimally amusing.

Though having by mere circumstance escaped the pre-school peonage of my peers, whose candy-coated Weltschmerz prepared them for little more than excursions to the supermarket and trick or treat, I became susceptible to the stultifying inanity which annually consigned a crop of youngsters to adolescent idiocy. These, destined to a beer-bellied barbarism, would breed yet more of the mentally mutant to incubate in the aura of some Touched-Feelie successor to the tube.

Notably inane was Laugh-In, which showed better than any other serialized insanity the law of diminishing returns. The foppish pair who functioned as hosts achieved humor inversely to their efforts and, after a prelude of insipid repartee, turned to introducing the simian antics of their cohort. Yet, sounding myself after a span of years for effects of exposure, I find but an infrequent urge to laugh at the unfunny.

Another indelible entry on the collective tabula rasa is the archetypical prize show, Let's Make A Deal, in which a well-heelied wizard conjured four-speed can openers and other gimcrackery for crowds of costumed groundlings. Equally memorable is The Newlyweds, where couples quibbled about what fruit most resembled each other's big toe.

Fortunately, during the impressionable years another pastime caught my fancy. Far more engrossed in TV's backside than its front, I studied the aptly-named vacuum tube, invented by an eccentric asthmatic, Vitro Torricelli, who believed he could increase atmospheric pressure by evacuating glass containers. By some inscrutable providence there lived next door to us a wealthy German émigré, Baron Karl von und zum Stein, who passed on to me a succession of cast-off color TVs, explaining, "Knobless oblige." Dissecting these, I discovered semiconductors, such as Lawrence Welk.

When an improvised arc welder incinerated my laboratory, I returned reluctantly to television's frontside, whose more subtle dangers—radiation and a numbing imbecility—would doubtless finish me one way or the other. There were action-adventure shows about firemen, policemen and Fuller Brush men. Sitcoms, invariably déja vu. Movies, scissored for the cramped screen. Soaps—emotional enemas for housewives. And Johnny Carson, an inextricable attempt to prove the power of the jawbone of an ass.

Little has changed—except for the worse. And while the cabalistic Nielsen ratings dictate the latest episodic idiocy, advertising turns ever more asinine: A linebacker swaggering forward, fingering a packet of pantyhose; a silken lady sings seductively while caressing an automobile fender. Ninety seconds of diagnosis and prescription instruct you to rinse your mouth, fumigate your sinuses, and purge your bowels. Then a grinning charlatan extols the corrugated potato chip.

Another sort of ship, a wafer containing mini-computers, has recently advanced television technology far beyond what Lawrence Welk ever imagined possible. Now available are amazingly sophisticated sets equipped with touchtone tuning and ice crushers. But ironically, as the medium improves the message deteriorates. Television, a marvel of electronic ingenuity, is used for distributing mere nonsense. And the popularity of the nonsense continually grows. More watch more now than ever before. Were some Vesuvius to explode on a weekday evening and instantly petrify Middle America, anthropologists would undertake their usual skulduggery only to find, below the igneous preservative, millions of cinder statues staring at burnt-out metal boxes. The epitaph of the age would read: They came, they saw, they were conquered.

Eric Jager—senior English major, is best known as Roland Whitacre's friend.
How Much Can T.V. Cost Calvin?

Confirmed suspicions

Steve Van Till

When first approached to write on the new television classroom in the addition to Hiemenga Hall, I thought I would find an ostentatious lack of stewardship. My suspicions were confirmed. The bright orange carpeting makes the studio look quite plush and the long blue draperies give the room a royal atmosphere. Being a TV hater myself, I prematurely assumed that Calvin had no good use for such an extravagance. However, these appearances are deceiving. I spoke with Bill Schripsema, the Audio Visual Department’s lab technician, who informed me that the actual state of affairs can be easily misjudged by the visual impact of the new room. I was told that a well-equipped and well-managed TV production center could be of use not only to public relations and college promotion, but also to future course developments in mass communications. There are as yet no concrete plans to expand the existing facilities. Prior to that decision, it must be determined just how much spending is justified.

At present the television production facilities in the new building are not appreciably better than they were before, when they were located in the Science building basement. In some aspects, conditions have even gone downhill. The acoustics are horrendous and the windows in the control booth are not as soundproof as they should be. The obtrusive hum of the ventilation system makes any serious recording impossible. The improperly suspended studio lights cannot even be pointed at the stage. And a general lack of equipment prohibits realization of the studio’s full potential.

Nevertheless, the new studio is getting some use, primarily as a listening room for tapes we already have. There are also six students who are viewing a course by videotape. A few experimental tapes have been made with the center’s equipment as well.

The cost of correcting some of the room’s inadequacies is in the neighborhood of $4,000. This would include insulation and muffling for the ventilation system, soundproof windows to separate the studio from the controlroom, acoustic panels to absorb sound, and four additional draperies to further quiet the room. At first glance, the shortcomings look like careless and costly architectural oversights, but fortunately these changes will incur only a little extra expense. These changes would provide the proper acoustics for both a pleasant listening room now and a decent recording studio in the future.

However, these structural changes are not all that must be done before production can begin. We presently have one cheap camera to work with, but Schripsema says this is nothing near what is needed. A medium priced

Steve Van Till here offers his first contribution to a Calvin publication.
camera with the quality necessary for a good production costs from $15,000-$25,000; a broadcast-quality camera like those used by Grand Valley’s WGVC costs about $40,000. In either case, at least two or three cameras are needed for respectable results. With the additional mixing and editing equipment, the total cost of a broadcast-quality system would be between $70,000-$100,000. Obviously the college does not intend to make that big jump all at once, especially since the rapid advancement of video technology threatens obsolescence of any equipment purchased now. Moreover, broadcasting is not the primary aim of most concerned. Their interest lies in a more college-related area.

On occasion the college contracts private companies to make promotional and informational videotapes. The costs are high and the results are often unimpressive. Schripsema thinks that Calvin talent could produce better work and that self-made tapes would be better suited to the college’s purposes. We could write our own scripts and direct our own filming, thus allowing the college more control in projecting an image. This applies to tapes that could accompany fund-raising functions as well as to tapes sent out for the benefit of prospective students.

On second thought, maybe videotaped public relations isn’t such a good idea. We are all aware of the way television implants small falsehoods into the unsuspecting mind. Most promotional pamphlets paint a picture rosier than reality, and a videotaped message has even more potential for such misrepresentation. Ignoring the problems and overemphasizing the good seem almost too easy with such a flexible medium. Great temperance and wisdom are called for when using such a forceful tool to express opinions and present conditions. Along with the increased advantages there is a great potential for misuse of the video medium. I also think that what we have already is sufficient. How many more students or dollars would roll into Calvin because of a video presentation? Furthermore, the printed word is longer lasting and less subject to misinterpretation than a video presentation.

But promotion and public relations are not the only uses of such a system. The Speech and Education departments are interested in the field of mass communications and they would like to teach students some of the skills involved in television production. I’m sure that everyone is aware of how pervasive television is in our society and how valuable it would be to have Christians in this field. Television can have a profound effect on one’s concept of the world. Studies indicate a strong correlation between television viewing and one’s attitudes towards society and self. Here it can be seen how Christian influences would be extremely valuable. However, the existing network structure often prevents wholesome ideas and programs from ever reaching the broadcast stage. This is also another area in which it would be very hard to define the Christian’s role. But refusing to consider the possibilities of witnessing through this media restricts, in some sense, the availability of the Christian message.

The videotape medium also has many educational uses. A tape library provides an inexpensive supply of plays, operas, ballets, movies, etc., that could be used as course materials. Students in journalism could benefit from learning how to structure actual documentaries and news reports. Cinematography techniques can also be learned on video equipment at less expense.

The issue that seems to be rising is not merely one of whether or not to purchase some video equipment. Attitudes towards college expansion in general will determine the course of action. Even if we had the money to spend, do we really want to see it spent on video equipment? Aren’t there other areas of the curriculum whose upgrading would benefit more students? Do the benefits I’ve mentioned clearly offset the extremely high cost? New developments in electronics are making these products less expensive every year, so perhaps the best thing to do is wait.
Continuing a series of interviews with student artists

Cathy Heerdt directs most of her energy to drawing the human figure. She also paints and etches, but drawing comes first. Her high school art teacher stressed the importance of drawing well and Cathy has been perfecting her skill for five years.

"Drawing is at the base of all media of art," explains Cathy, "and it is usually recognized as the working out of an idea to be executed in another form. But a drawing is not just a means to an end. Whatever its use, drawing has to be mastered or the final composition in any form will be unsuccessful."

"Recently I've drawn only human figures. I am primarily concerned with trying to capture the movement of the body. A calm, seated figure is as alive as an energetic one and it's important that the drawing of each show this."

"This is a one minute sketch." The terse, sharp lines here convey the moment of exertion. The movement is caught. This sketch is not complete as a composition. The challenge for me comes in trying to compose a completed drawing indicating the feeling of aliveness that's present in this sketch. So often the success of a piece has to do with my attitude while I'm working on it. If I'm overly worried about the outcome, most likely the completed drawing will show the strain."

Cathy produces two drawings as examples of what can be lost in the transition. The first is a sketch done from life in twenty minutes. The figure is wistful and reflective of thoughts far away. The prop for her limp body is connoted by a single line which serves also to balance the sketch. The warm feeling of life is shown best by examining the various attempts to outline the body. Around the figure's right knee, for example, Cathy's pencil has gone in several directions trying to define the limb. Sketching allows this freedom. The distribution of values and the shading add a softness to this figure study which make it very successful.
The compositional drawing is obviously based on the first sketch. The figure is much more defined and her surroundings are full of accessories. The overall tone has changed as the figure has lost her attitude of calm. She seems disconcerted. It is difficult to tell if she or her setting is the object of concentration. The drawing shows self-consciousness. "I lost the spontaneity of the sketch," says Cathy. "The harder I tried to regain it the more it escaped me. The only area I wasn't concerned about is the bedsheets behind her and they look the most natural."

"Pencil or charcoal is best for recording something quickly. Other tools require more time and precision. For a different effect I take a quick study and rework it in another medium. I'm pleased with this piece and it came out of an experiment I did with etching."

This composition, entitled Four Studies of a Pregnant Woman, is the consequence of the initial sketches being repeated in fine-point etching. The result is an exquisite rendering of contours and an unusual understanding of a body about to give birth.

Cathy's drawings of human figures are totally in keeping with her beliefs about the role of art. "Artists have tended for too long to ignore their viewers and produce things only they can comprehend. I'm not saying art must be objective or non-objective, abstract or representational. But instead of producing a piece that is potentially confusing, I think artists should strive to present their vision of aesthetics and be willing to communicate and educate. In the act of creating, the Christian artist is participating in the celebration of God's creation. This, for me, is an aesthetic priority. If I succeed in communicating this to the viewer, then I have fulfilled what I see as the role of art."

—reported by Kate Harper
Memories—One Fall
Breathe in deeply; the cold air sears your lungs
As you stare down the setting sun—
But don’t go back home
Telling them you felt nothing.

Again you try,
But his absence doesn’t bring tears to your eyes,
Never did.
Always, he will be right.

War was never glorious to you,
And brothers are supposed to be different,
Aren’t they?
I wonder how he feels now under all those leaves.

—Jil Evans
Dutch Television is Better

Realistic, informative and progressive

I'm watching TV and a very Christian forum has just reached the conclusion that if it is determined that the embryo is homosexual it may be aborted. I switch to the other channel where a teenagers' program is in progress. I see a long-haired arm tied off with a shoelace. An injection needle enters the arm, is emptied, and pulled out. The camera swings back...

This is how one of the songs of Neerlands Hoop in Bange Dagen (a satirical group appearing on a Dutch television program comparable to Saturday Night Live) starts out. It shows, in a satirical way, what Dutch television is all about. In contrast to its American counterpart, Dutch television is highly informative. It is impossible for the Dutch tube addict to get away from the misery of the world and escape into the fantasy that American broadcasting offers. The difference can be attributed to two basic reasons: the various broadcasting organizations active in Holland and the unique laws regulating them, laid down by the Minister of Culture.

There are nine non-profit corporations in the Netherlands which divide among themselves about 100 hours of weekly television broadcast time and about 420 hours of weekly radio. The companies obtain their operating money from their respective subscribers and from the yearly taxes that every Dutchman pays for his radio and television set. People subscribe to a certain broadcast organization because they feel that it best reflects their political and/or religious views.

Three of the Dutch networks hold religion high on their banners. The biggest of these is the Catholic broadcast organization (KRO). There are two protestant organizations (NCRV and EO). The KRO and NCRV could be classified politically as middle-of-the-road. The EO (Evangelical broadcast organization) is conservative. The KRO is one of the largest organizations in the system while the NCRV and EO are two of the smallest.

All other networks are basically non-religious in their outlook. Two of the organizations take a distinctly left-wing political stance. The larger of these two, the VARA, reflects a socialist point of view and is closely tied to the labor party. The other, the VPRO, started out as a protestant organization, but has in the last ten years swung to the left and now presents a Marxist point of view. The remaining three "public" systems reflect neither a religious nor a political point of view; their emphasis is on entertainment. The ninth system is the state broadcast system which provides news and most of the sports.

The number of subscribers applying to each organization determines the amount of broadcast time allotted by the Minister of Culture to each. Fulfillment of the minimum requirement of 40,000 subscribers gives the right to about five hours of television time and twenty hours of radio time per week. One of the results of this system is that the organizations, more or less like political parties, must stay true to their platforms in order to survive.

The organizations are not entirely free in the choice of material they offer to their audiences. By law, about twenty percent of their broadcast time must be spent on informative programs. A large amount of this time is spent on programs which go by the name actualiteiten rubrieken. They provide in-depth reporting of the news in a manner comparable to the CBS program 60 Minutes.

The rubrieken involve not only analysis and reportage on the national level, but also in-depth coverage of international news. For example, foreign elections are extensively covered. The American Presidential elections get almost as much attention as they do here. The results are analyzed in forums where experts offer opinions as to their significance for Holland, for Europe, and of course for the U.S. itself.

Forums like those mentioned in the quote of Neerlands Hoop are quite frequently broadcast and no subject is shunned. Although these forums are usually colored politically, they do provide the people with information about important issues.

The amount of time given over to news is another example of the role Dutch television plays in informing its audience about the state of the world. Three news programs are available to

Johannes De Bruyn
is a senior from Noord-Holland, Netherlands

Han De Bruyn
Dutchmen. Two of them, the first, a five-minute headline service, aired at 7 p.m. and the third, another brief review of the day’s events, aired at 10:30 p.m., serve to begin and end the broadcast day. The most important news program falls between these two and is shown at 8 p.m.— during prime time. Could you imagine seeing Walter Cronkite at 8 p.m. instead of Charlie’s Angels or Kojak?

Still another example of the informative character of Dutch TV is the weekly interview with the Prime Minister. The network whose programming is currently appearing on Friday nights (the times are appointed on a rotating basis to each network) has its correspondents interview the PM about the actions and policies of his cabinet. They question his policies, if this seems necessary, and do not hesitate to remind him of the platform on which he was elected, if he has failed to live up to it.

That politics play an important role becomes apparent upon viewing the weekly program of the political parties. One night a week, in prime time, one of the parties gets fifteen minutes to inform the viewers about its platform. The parties currently in parliament rotate the time so that each one has an equal chance to appeal to the people. This is probably one of the reasons why 98 percent of the voters turned out to cast their ballots in the last parliamentary election.

What does Dutch television offer for its viewers’ entertainment? The Dutchman is often treated to excellent, nationally produced shows and to the best or most popular foreign shows, especially from America or Britain. The Dutchman is just as familiar as the American with the Fonz and Columbo. For the American who visits Holland and has a chance to watch some television, some differences with the American system will become obvious. If he is bored on a rainy afternoon and turns on the tube, he will only see the test pattern. Dutch television broadcasts from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. If our American does watch at night, he will find that the programs are not interrupted by commercials. Advertising time is limited to five-minute periods before and after the news. And our visitor will not be laughing himself sick at hearing Kojak or some other American TV character speak Dutch. All foreign shows are screened with the original soundtrack and Dutch subtitles. Finally, our American in Amsterdam will find that his choice of channels has been narrowed from perhaps six or seven at home to just two in Holland.

Just like American television, Dutch television and the other mass media in Holland have an important influence on the country’s populace. However, because of the highly informative nature and the limited air time of Dutch TV, the Dutchman is better informed and more directly involved with the forces that form his own life.

Note: The translation above is from the song “Daar ligt hij” and is the author’s own.

Watching the dominos fall
(A patriotic diatribe)

“Ten-four”
—Broderick Crawford
of Highway Patrol

America, you are a gearhead at a redlight
wailing to catch the guy
who made it through the yellow.

America, you are the next guy
who made it to the next intersection,
and you are waiting in the late afternoon.

America, you are a trailer
of a large midwestern freight corporation
that seldom washes its trucks.

America, you are an empty snowmobile trailer
pulled over by the state police
for defective tail-lights.

America, you are four wheel drive
dirt tracking for pie in the sky
back to nature on four lane concrete.

America, you are a station wagon
with mom's boyfriend driving.
The child in the way-back watches the trucks.

America, you are lighting a pipe
stoking in the next car.
You do not talk to your wife.

America, you are a '68 Plymouth
with CB antennae and AM-FM with telephone.
You look like you're going deep sea fishing.

America, you look like you just got out
of a factory or warehouse
and stopped off for a couple of beers.

America, you blink your neon cafe.
Eat in and take out, not or;
but you never quite clean up your plate.

America, you stop before merging onto freeways.
You make the domino theorists marvel
and applaud their precision and ability.

Bob Boomsma
The Clouded Crystal Tube

A look into the future of television

Television in twenty years time will be a radically different medium. The influx of video tape machines and libraries will, in itself, dramatically alter today's most popular form of entertainment. In fact, the evolution of television as a cultural force has been so rapid and the consequences so widespread that it parallels nuclear physics; for the uses of each are as revolutionary as their abuses are staggering. In 1938, early in the history of television, E. B. White wrote prophetically of the new medium:

"I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television—of that I am quite sure.

Of those who reflect on today's television, many are concerned that the effect of continual viewing may be harmful. And one can understand these fears: the average viewing time is some six hours a day per person. Children, in particular, are the center of much of the concern, for they are found to be consuming as much tube time as adults, and a third of them continue watching up to and past 12 o'clock midnight.

Under the most severe criticism in recent years is the quality of programs. Television has little worthwhile to offer, according to some critics, and most of what is programed is not only of poor quality, but detrimental to society. These critics describe television as a cultural wasteland. Dominated by the national networks, television derives its revenues from sponsors, not viewers. Television is big business, thereby antithetical to an art form.

Bob Holkeboer

Clearly, the problems surrounding television are many, and answers are not easily found. Because the issues are many-faceted and somewhat elusive, critics tend to perceive them myopically. The cause of this confusion is most likely the newness of the medium.

One factor that has become apparent about this new medium is its ability to bring together the various factions of society. The suburban homeowner is now confronted with the problems of the inner city; the urban dweller has a sense of vast, open spaces and the style of rural life—all in his living room and in living color. The result is—and this is one of television's greatest contributions—that people are given the opportunity to understand those of backgrounds and situations different from their own. A name, a face, a personality is given to what was the stranger of another color or another creed. "By no more than a turn of a knob," says anthropologist Ashley Montagu, "[the viewer] can tune in on men and events with an immediacy and an impact which he could never otherwise experience."

When a television program deals with contemporary problems, it enters the area of its greatest potential. By developing themes which encompass issues..."
of public concern, television can help alleviate the tension and fears built up around them. Racism, sexism, rape, homosexuality, child abuse, and other sources of societal anxiety can be dealt with in such a way that the public will be better able to cope with them. Peter Wood has offered a theory which suggests that television acts in much the same way for society as the dream acts for the individual in the Freudian theory. His essay in *Television as a Cultural Force* makes this point:

Through displaced events and disguised characters, society uses television drama as a means of transforming their fears and unresolved problems into metaphorical forms which are less threatening than direct confrontation.

This theory compared to Jung’s theory of the dream bears noticeable similarity:

Dreams illuminate the patient’s situation in a way that can be exceedingly beneficial to health. They bring memories, insights, experiences; they awaken dormant qualities in the personality, and reveal the unconscious elements in relationships.

Television is underestimated in its potential for what might be called societal therapy. Because it is a relatively new medium, there is much yet to be discovered about television and its effects on people. Television is a powerful force on today’s society and is in need of dramatic revisions and improvements. What the future holds undoubtedly will be shaped by what television is and what it will become. Whether we stand or fall by television is yet to be seen; it is, so to speak, in the air.

—Sandy Jorritsma
Sugary Songs of Seduction

Some alterations of unadulterated commercial manipulation of American Youth

Michael Schepers

"It works out very well. A child watches an entertaining cartoon program. He sees his favorite character deliver a commercial for a cereal. And finally, he sees the cereal in the store with the character on the box. So, the plaintive cry of a son or a daughter is answered as the box slides by the cash register into a waiting bag."

So says Charles Anthony Wainwright, president of one of this nation's largest advertising agencies, as he explains one of the ways advertising successfully exploits our children. Such exploitation and manipulation of young minds certainly fill the pocketbooks of merchants and advertisers but do little for Johnny's well-being. But commercials have a great potential for good. Presently, commercials on children's television are psychologically and socially harmful, but if properly controlled, commercials could be educational.

Perhaps the term children's television is a bit confusing. Obviously, children watch television during all hours of the day and night. In fact, some children seem to enjoy watching the television station come on the air early Saturday morning. On the other hand, some might think many programs shown during late-night "adult" hours probably belong on children's television. But Wainwright points out that "there are two primary time periods on television with block programming for children—early mornings and late afternoons." And of course Saturday morning is infamous for its cartoons, puppet shows, and still more cartoons.

Most commercials aimed at children are aired during the early-morning and late-afternoon time periods. Commercials are much more than an interruption in the program, however. Commercials provide the revenue that allows a television station to broadcast and make a profit and at the same time generate revenue and profits for the advertiser. Advertising has become a science complete with formulas, research, and experiments all aimed at finding better ways to sell a product. Children, because they influence their parents' purchases, are subtly manipulated by today's commercials.

Of course commercials are regulated to a point. The Federal Communications Commission limits the number of commercials that may be shown during any given hour. The government also protects the viewer from false advertising. In addition, many television stations subscribe to the guidelines of the National Broadcasters Association (N.B.A.). These guidelines are only voluntary, however, and not all stations abide by them faithfully. Obviously current laws and voluntary guidelines are not adequate to prevent the manipulation of children; more stringent regulations are needed. "'How long,' bemoans Joan Gussow, a Columbia University nutritionist, 'will we permit these sugary songs of seduction to be sung to our children?'

The case against commercials is strong. Our advertising executive explained earlier how children are manipulated by commercials to influence their parents' purchases. This exploitation is not in the best interest of children and should be reason enough to control children's commercials. But the harm of commercials is deeper than manipulation alone. The undue influence of commercials leads to deeper psychological and social problems among youngsters. A study aptly titled Children's Television Commercials supports the criticisms raised by housewives and psychologists alike.

Michael Schepers
also makes his Calvin writing debut
in this issue
Some of the criticisms include: 1) Children do not have fully developed powers of reasoning and cannot evaluate commercials; 2) Commercials stir materialistic desires within children; 3) If a child cannot do something he has seen in a commercial he may feel inadequate; 4) Children urging their parents to buy things may create family conflicts; 5) Fantasy in commercials encourages children to live in a fantasy world; 6) Commercials present an unrealistic view of life. We should find such criticisms startling in view of the fact that youngsters seem more interested in the commercials than the programs.

Children's commercials should not be eliminated completely, however. To do so would raise cries of censorship; advertisers might sue for freedom of the press. Also remember that the commercials pay for the show and assure a station's survival. Most importantly, commercials are not inherently evil; they hold a great potential for good. Commercials could be informative and educational.

Advertisers know that "[children] seem to be attracted by 1) An animated or cartoon approach; 2) Characters (animals or people); 3) A simple jingle; 4) A funny incident." Why not use these simple elements to educate youngsters as well as advertise? Further, Mr. Wainwright, the advertising executive, has said, "... television has conditioned children to recall all types of brand names." If this is true, why not use commercials to teach children to recall facts of history or geography? Thus, a gum commercial could inform children about their teeth and teach proper dental care. A crayon commercial could educate viewers about art forms and artists. In fact, such commercials could educate in a more vivid and entertaining way than a teacher could in a classroom.

But current regulations and voluntary guidelines are not keeping exploitative commercials off the air. Clearly, if the potential good of commercials is to survive, stronger regulations are needed. These regulations must specifically require that commercials be educational and informative, as they now require that commercials be truthful.

Of course, such regulations present certain difficulties. Arbitrary regulations, if imposed by the government on behalf of complaining housewives and psychologists, would certainly anger advertisers and might lead to a loss of needed revenue from their commercials. On the other hand, if the government bowed to advertisers and merchants and failed to demand strict guidelines, the potential good of commercials would not be realized. Cooperation is needed among governing officials and all interested parties. The government could sponsor public hearings to insure that everyone—parents, children, educators, and psychologists, as well as members of the television and advertising industry—may play a role in writing and enforcing the new regulations.

Children's television commercials are harmful in many ways and need to be regulated if their potential is to be realized. If commercials are not regulated, if the present situation is allowed to continue, exploitation and psychological damage will continue. Because children watch commercials at an age when they are developing opinions, prejudices, and attitudes that will follow them through the rest of their adult lives, commercials, in their own small way, are shaping the world of tomorrow. How they shape that world should concern us all.

2Wainwright, p. 258.
5Wainwright, p. 258.
6Wainwright, p. 261.

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Television Twilight

An old lady in the trailer park watching cartoons, A child in its clapboard house seeing Peyton Place re-run, Every window filled with the flickering light, that helps to douse the sun...

Dan Hawkins
Extra-Terrestrial Mystery

—Linda Ruiter

**Answer**

In the stillness of the night, I am postulant in habit of darkness and wimple of fog.

"Strengthen, Lord... raisins, for I am faint. Comfort, Lord... apples, for I am sick."

I kneel, mendicant for table's crumbs, rise, and leave in hope.

The moon is a ripe persimmon.

Heidi Kortman
The *Pencille* as Symbol:

Recently Discovered Poems
by George Herbert & John Donne

Paul Baker

Scholars have often noted the fecundity of symbolism inherent in a new, unsharpened, and unsullied pencil; it has been suggested that this quality would have made the pencil an object congenial to the sensibilities of seventeenth-century Metaphysical Poets. "Surely," argues Paul Boulanger, "Prone as he is to conceit, the seventeenth-century poet could not fail to be attracted to the pencil, laden as it is with such profound significance."¹

Recently, two sacred poems have come to light which confirm this theory. One of the poems is attributed to George Herbert and the other to John Donne. The poems were found in the attic of a house which was once the residence of Sir Sidney Small, an acquaintance and ardent admirer of both Donne and Herbert. Though the portfolio includes a great many poems by both men, these two, *Jordan-Affliction*, by Herbert, and *The Pencille Hymne*, by Donne, are the only hitherto unpublished works. These poems were found at the back of the collection, the only poems in a folder on which was written the single, enigmatic word, "Burne!" Scholars have not yet solved the puzzle this word poses.²

²Some pretty plausible suggestions have, however, been forthcoming.
O God, My heart is flat and dulle to Thee
Unlesse, like some new pencille, Thou sharpen'st mee
To doe Thy will. O, doe, deare Lord, that I
May stande fore Thee as strait and talle and, Aye,
As splendante bright with gold as any pencille
Or sainte can stande. And not with outwarde tinselle
Onely decke my life: Make my harde heart
As soft as lead that it may smoothlie chartere
My life and shedde its blackenn'd core away.
O, Draw mee, Lord, acrosse eache hour, eache day
As on the page of Time, and right my deedes
That I, through Grace, may follow when Hee leades
Who is the Righter of the world's sinne.
Great Author of Creation, nowe beginne
To guide my soule to write for Thee aright
The booke that is my selfe. And if the white
And shining pages Thou'lt made I staine,
Let Thy red bloode then follow in my traine
Terase each sinfull blote and those misstakes
When soule, not recking of Thy rod, it makes.
And when, at laste, all worn by life and whirl'd
To nothing by corrupting death, I'm hurl'd
To tombes and wormes, let that bright diadem
Of silver and of grace which followed to stemme
And purge away my faults be on my browe,
That when I've pencilled life's roughe drafte, doe Thou
Take Thy blood's ink and write mee faire, a type
Of Thy Sonne's mercy, translated. Oh, wipe
My leaden staine and start a tale sublime
To change my life's "The ende" to "Once upon a time."

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3 Petrarch Ansonet notes concerning Jordan Affliction, “There is perhaps no better evidence of the overweening pride which Herbert so often deplors in himself than the fact that he thought he could get away with this piece. Here, Herbert has finally sacrificed all to his hieroglyph: beauty, profundity, clarity, cleverness, everything. The pencil image seems, furthermore, to have only the most tenuous connection to the rest of the poem. Indeed, this is a pitiful exhibition.”

4 Of The Pencille Hymne, U. N. Dun remarks, “I cannot but assume that this was written shortly before his [Donne's] death. How else can one account for such a complete and astounding failure of genius? Were it not such a tragic epilogue to the compendium of Donne's poetry, The Pencille Hymne would be laughable.... In fact, I would be unable to believe that the poem is truly Donne's were it not for the sad fact that Donne has proved himself capable of similar depths in his Anniversaries.”
—Joel Schaafsma
Refusing to Fall
Solzhenitsyn through sixty years

Most of us know birthdays as cake and ice-cream celebrations of another year gone by when friends and family gather to celebrate the beginning and continuity of life. Boys and girls delight in the presents, the visitors, the party that keeps them up past their bedtime; adults too often groan at the thought of another wrinkle, another step away from their youth and its vigor. But Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who celebrates his sixtieth birthday on 11 December 1978, will celebrate it in exile. He now lives in the United States, separated from his old friends and neighbors, from his beloved “Mother Russia.” Whereas his friends could not accompany him, in a sense his Eastern critics did, for many Western critics also label Solzhenitsyn’s writing as political rather than moral comment.

Even before his birth on 11 December 1918, Solzhenitsyn suffered his first of life’s many injustices: his father had died six months earlier. His mother, left a widow with only one child, never remarried and depended heavily on Aleksandr. Together they survived the turmoil of the Russian revolution which left the Bolsheviks in power, the sacrifice of the economic plans which forced the Russian people to struggle for life’s necessities, and the horror of Stalin’s reign which left many families grief-stricken. Solzhenitsyn’s youth taught him that Russia is not a paradise for dissenters nor for free-spirited individuals.

In 1939, although Solzhenitsyn was studying mathematics and physics at Rostov University (which granted him a degree in 1941), his heart compelled him to write, and he began a two-year study through correspondence courses from Moscow’s Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature. But World War II interrupted his career, for he was drafted in September, 1941. Then in 1945 Solzhenitsyn found himself arrested and imprisoned for his critical remarks of Stalin made in correspondence with an army friend. He spent one year in a mixed labor camp near Moscow, four years in scientific research prisons (the setting for his second novel, The First Circle), and three more years in forced labor camps in Siberia (the setting for the blockbuster One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich). Released from prison on March 5, 1953, the day of Stalin’s death, Solzhenitsyn went into perpetual exile to Kazakhistan where he taught village children mathematics and physics and earnestly resumed writing. A bout with cancer brought him out of this exile, and, after his recovery, back to western

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Russia where he joined his wife and continued writing.

Emergence as literary figure

He submitted One Day for publication in Novy Mir, a top-notch Russian literary magazine, in 1961. Nikita Khrushchev approved One Day for publication, for it supplemented the ongoing anti-Stalin movement in the USSR at that time. The critics heaped praises on the book, yet a few short months after its publication, One Day began receiving negative criticism which soon overwhelmed the unlimited praise, the tributes Russia initially had showered upon Solzhenitsyn, such as hailing him as Russia's contemporary Tolstoy, and as its greatest living writer.

By 1966 his writings, banned in the USSR, were circulating around the world without Solzhenitsyn's permission as friends smuggled them out, as KGB agents sought to publish them in the West under his name so that they could accuse him of anti-Soviet activities, and as thieves attempted to pass off their work as their own. Although the circulation of Solzhenitsyn's work outside Russia fueled KGB accusations against him, such world-wide publicity may well have kept the KGB from any definite action against him, such as execution or imprisonment. And Solzhenitsyn's public dissent, beginning with his unpublished protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, has kept his name in headlines around the world. His professed Christianity and public entry into the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1972 added to his unpopularity with Soviet leaders. Solzhenitsyn's fame crippled the Soviet government, the great Russian bear, so that it could not imprison nor execute him for his public criticism of its injustices and immoral oppression; consequently, the Russian bear hurt him in the only other way possible: it exiled him. After spending several years in Europe, Solzhenitsyn settled in Vermont in 1976.

Perhaps it is his difficult life which has made him the sensitive, perceptive writer that he is. Pictures of him often accentuate the sorrowful brown eyes in his tired, unsmiling face. But those difficult prison years have also given him the material for his many books, most notably One Day, The First Circle, and the three volumes of Gulag Archipelago, plus many short stories. His sixty years of life, although they have worn him down, have not left him defeated. For as critic John Lukacs says, he is "an intellectual who means what he says—not an Avantgardist but himself the lone avant-garde."

Historical emphasis

What new movement then, is Solzhenitsyn leading? Though Lukacs suspects that Solzhenitsyn may be introducing a new literary genre, a new strain of historical fiction, he notes that Solzhenitsyn possesses an "historical consciousness [that] is not a deep-rooted inclination of the Russian mind." It seems Solzhenitsyn is and is not a typical Russian writer. Furthermore, Lukacs argues that Tolstoy, the writer to whom Solzhenitsyn is most often compared, uses history as a background for the present whereas Solzhenitsyn uses the present as a background for history.

Solzhenitsyn's writing often has been based on his memories of the labor camps and the police system, since he did most of his writing after he had been imprisoned for those eight years. His reliance on his memory may leave that flavor of history in his novels. But "to understand something about the present through an understanding of certain truths from the past—this is Solzhenitsyn's life work," concludes Lukacs. Solzhenitsyn relates his memories to the Russian people because they must know the immoral, cruel truth of life within the political prisons. In the author's note to Gulag Archipelago (volume one) Solzhenitsyn says, "In this book there are no fictitious persons, nor fictitious events. But it all took place just as it is here described."

What Solzhenitsyn himself considers his major goal is a series of novels, historical fictions, based on the years before the October Revolution in Russia. His Nobel Prize winning book, August 1914, is the first of this series in which he seeks to tell the truth about these years to the Russian people, who have been deceived with the government's version of the events. Two books, one centering on October 1916 and another on March 1917, have not yet been completed.

One may describe Solzhenitsyn's quest for truth in his writing as political comment, for he is indeed denouncing the lies and injustices of Russia's communist government. Also, his frequent dissent while he still lived in the USSR was aimed at the government's practices and restrictions, such as denying intellectuals the freedom of artistic expression. And there seems to be no more popular quote from his books than this one from The First Circle: "A great writer is, so to speak, something like a second government. That is why no regime, anywhere, has ever loved its great writers, only its minor ones." The National Review, in naming Solzhenitsyn the Man of the Year, states, "His point is that the police system remains the central institution of the Soviet state, that the system of the repression is structurally inseparable from the Soviet system itself."

Critic of politics?

Is Solzhenitsyn primarily a political writer whose goal is to change the Soviet government or possibly overthrow it? Although his novels do make political statements because they often deal with the lives of political prisoners, they are not primarily vehicles for political comment (not to mention political revolution). Unfortunately, many Western critics read Solzhenitsyn's novels as political statements, as liberal, anti-Soviet literature, or as a right-wing support of democracy. Yet critics continue forming evaluations like "more is being made of Solzhenitsyn than warranted, both as a writer and political critic, by the AFL-CIO anti-props who are paying his expenses in the U.S." Some critics seem to forget that a writer's work must be evaluated in terms of what the writer strives to achieve. By commenting on the injustices within the Russian government, Solzhenitsyn is not advocating another form of government, nor is he necessarily condemning
socialism (although his speech “A World Split Apart” delivered in June, 1978, denounces socialism as an incorrect alternative for the West). Rather, he is pointing to the immoral and cruel treatment of human beings by that government. Converted to Christianity while in prison, Solzhenitsyn elevates his moral values above his political beliefs. He professes, “The state structure is of secondary significance. ‘Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s’—not because every Caesar deserves it, but because Caesar’s concern is not with the most important thing in our lives.” Solzhenitsyn recognizes that a state—be it democratic, monarchical, dictatorial, or totalitarian—is run by sinful men and women, and is permeated in various degrees with injustice and immorality, as well as freedom. “When oppression is not accompanied by the lie,” he says, “liberation demands political measures. But when the lie has fastened its claws in us, it is no longer a matter of politics! It is an invasion of man’s moral world, and our straightening up and refusing to lie is also not political, but simply the retrieval of our human dignity.” And ultimately, Solzhenitsyn sees mankind as having “lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility. We have placed too much hope in political and social reform, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life.”

Clearly, Solzhenitsyn is not primarily a political writer but a moral writer. And, I think, a great writer. He strives to present the “universal and eternal questions, the secrets of the human heart and conscience, the confrontation of life and death, the triumph over spiritual sorrow.” His writings reach that objective, for they powerfully, artistically, truthfully reveal man’s struggle in an immoral world.

Loneliness is everywhere the same

It is the bar that is closing because it is getting late your glass is empty but nobody will fill it the night begins That’s what I call loneliness

Even the dog who is never alone and is spoiled by the people wants to die in a place where nobody knows him

Loneliness is being alone with your blood I never want to be alone again I know myself too good

Loneliness is everywhere the same

It is the door that falls shut and you’ve lost the key the bell doesn’t work and nobody nobody hears you calling a dog is barking That’s what I call loneliness

I want to be alone when I die death is nobody’s friend but, in God’s name, be with me when life starts again

Loneliness is being alone with your blood I don’t want to die yet I still got life coming.

—Sue Kuiper
When television is good, television is good; nothing is worse of your television set when you stay there without a book, a loss sheet, or rating book glued to that set until the sun you will observe a vast w