

the village Voice

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The Night People

by Jean Shepherd

Voice from within a Cocoon

[The following curious document was found in a Piet's bottle washed up on Staten Island. It was unsigned and was apparently written in great haste.—J. S.]

I HAVE a rather difficult confession to make. This has been bothering me for some time now, and I might as well spill it before it backs up and really clogs my pipes worse than ever. It has to do with how I am and how I came to be this way. The comforting part of this simple exposition of frailties is that I do not stand alone.

Briefly it comes down to this: I have begun to realize that my philosophy of living is based largely upon a firm bedrock foundation of comic-strip ideologies. This includes many subtleties of Right and Wrong or Good and Evil as evidenced in politics or just daily living. I find that many of my pronouncements upon issues of our times have tinges of dialogue left over from Little Orphan Annie or Little Annie Rooney or The Little King or maybe Pogo. And, as I say, I'm not alone. Millions of Americans of my age bracket, the 30's, are obviously living in the same pulp-paper dream world where Right always triumphs over Evil and Daddy Warbucks shows up invariably at the right perilous moment, just in time to have Punjab behead the Evil Ones. Punjab always does so without consulting such old-fashioned Democratic relics as juries or judges or lawbooks, and seems to function independently of even laws of gravity.

The Way to Do Things

Occasionally I find myself believing that this is the way to do things—you know, really get things done. Then when I come to my senses I feel the gnawing bite of worry. Another thing that bothers me is that Punjab has the habit of appearing magically and disposing of the Evil Ones the same way. There are never embarrassing questions afterward, and no one seems to come around to inquire as to whether Punjab had an official or moral right to act as he did in this beheading business, even if the Evil Ones were sworn Little Orphan Annie enemies, and smugglers to boot.

I have no idea what would happen to Annie if Daddy failed to show, or if Punjab's magic words blew a fuse, but I don't like to think about such things. In fact I won't. I'll trust to Daddy to do the right thing when things are rough, and I won't ask questions. Good old Daddy! You can understand why I worry about myself occasionally.

It's easy to see how I got this way. From the first time I could

and finally admit that Annie is always right and will fall into line with us behind Daddy. But I can't help having an occasional sneaking thought that they might not. So much of the thinking of many of us is a cloudy hazy mixture of Cecil B. De Mille, L'il Abner, The Bobbsey Twins, the Boy Scout Oath, General Motors ads, Superman, Walt Disney, Dick Tracy, and all the calendar slogans ever penned by Ben Franklin, that it is no wonder our average brain has gone on a permanent three-day week-end in the country and has left the shop in care of a stack of Mottos for Every Occasion.

I must admit that I am no exception and I guess that is why I can recognize Good and Evil so well and so quickly. I've read my Dick Tracy long and hard and know that Evil looks evil. He wears a funny hat or has a face that resembles a 45-r.p.m. record player and has a name to go along with it, perhaps Grooves, and I know he will get his in the end. This is infinitely comforting. First of all, it is great to know Evil when it shows up, since this has been a point that foolish non-comic-strip philosophers have



been fighting over for centuries, and secondly, it makes things easier to know that Evil is bound to get a shot in the head by Dick before he gets too out of hand. Not only that, I have also found that Dick and myself are always on the side of Good. This is nice to know, since it prevents confusion. I guess, really, I'm silly to have any of those little worries I mentioned a while back, now that I think about things. Forget it. Who wants to go down with me to that joint on the corner for a coconut-taffy apple? They're great!!

Will See the Error
Well, I'm sure the Evil Ones will see the error of their ways

The lively arts

by Gilbert Seldes

YOUR assignment for today is a study (in depth, I hope) of the mind of the advertising man and, if you get through it; a parallel study of what the advertising man thinks the mind of the American public is composed of, except green cheese.

For the past ten days I have heard on the air and seen in print the words "Newest Buick Yet."

After the fifth time I got the idea that the latest model of the Buick car was going to be put on sale. (I was right.)

After the fifteenth time something went wrong with my responses. I am as good a subject for hypnosis as anyone else, but you have to put a bright sparkling object in front of my eyes to make me go to sleep.

"Newest Buick Yet" doesn't sparkle any more.

The newestest . . .

SINCE it is next year's model, what the hell else could it be but the newest yet? What's the superlative doing in there? I can figure out a dozen intentions in the phrase: basically, I suppose we are meant to understand that this new Buick differs more from previous Buicks than they, when they were new, differed from their predecessors.

But "newest Buick yet" has all the effectiveness to me of "the Fridayest Friday Yet."

When teen-agers used to say that somebody was "the most," I followed like a shot. They were, after all, trying to express the sheer inexpressibility of something or other. But a motor car has parts, powers, colors, forms. (It was either the Buick or another car revealed during the same period that had an "off-the-shoulder" look on its front seat. My eyes, full of tears over the newest Buick yet, couldn't focus on the picture to see what this meant).

. . . newest column . . .

IT HAS been demonstrated that showing a child using a cake-mix is more effective than showing a chef doing it. I gather that the natural skepticism of the American public is aroused by the sight of the chef—and the natural tendency to believe that if a child can do it, I can do it, too. So we are children.

But how childish do we have to get? The slogan is perfect in its way. It says nothing whatever. It seems to have vast implications. It is easy—dead easy—to remember. It is better than "the Buickest Buick Yet" because it has one syllable less. It will probably sell 10 billion Buicks.

. . . yet!

CONGRATULATIONS, everybody! We have arrived at Nirvana. No more damn nonsense about torsion and super-roadability and economy sizes. Just words.

At that, we would go further, and I suspect someone will. Why bother about the first syllable anyhow. Why not "the ESTEST Thing on the Market." You get rid of the "b" in best. It's more effective than shaving peaches.

ASSUMING you've read this far, I want to thank you. Because this is the newest column yet and I'd hate to think you didn't like it. But I promise you one thing Buick can't: I'll have a newestest newest column next week. Maybe better tempered, too.

Sick, Sick, Sick

by Jules Feiffer

