THE NEW SENTIMENTALITY

INTRODUCTION

There is a New Sentimentality, but nobody knows it exists. Once it was a kind of virtue, as in: "He is sentimental; he has a good heart." Then, as times changed, the term stopped from grace and became pejorative. "Don't give me that sentimental slop." And so all the wise people and the intellectuals believed there was no more sentimentality in them. They thought they had replaced it with cynicism and honesty. But they were wrong. They merely exchanged Old Sentimentality for New Sentimentality.

The changeover came in the Fifties. Eisenhower was a key figure, perhaps the last bloom of Old Sentimentality. It was seen that the masses loved him, as a father or maybe a Grandpa. And those who felt they were above that kind of adoration said: "Look at that. How can any man actually get? It's like a Norman Rockwell cover." They cast off sentiment, putting it on the shelf. They deterred the art of "playing it cool," but the New Sentimentality was growing without them ever knowing it.

Suddenly it was 1960 and John Kennedy was there, and the wise, the intellectual and the name-dropping people did him homage. They didn't think he was a father or Grandpa. They liked him because he was young, because he was all that knew what he wanted and grabbed it. They loved him as furiously as the crowd loves the movie star. They sentimentalized every power grab. And that was when the New Sentimentality came in the open.

Old Sentimentality had "values" that everyone could see, bywords that meant the same to all: Preciosity, Love, Religion, Music, The Civil War. The values of the New Sentimentality are not out there embossed on banners. They differ slightly from man to man, because one of the definitions of New Sentimentality is that it has to do with you, really just you, not what you were told or taught, but what goes on in your head, really, and in your heart, really.

Here are its tenets. Personal interest is the starting motivation. In the Old way you had ideals, causes, goals that were in some way beneficial to all. In the New, your primary objective is to make your life fit your style. There is professionalism above all. For example, the Old concept of "acting out," which used to drive good men crazy, causing them to cry in their beer and bemoan their wasted talent (writing an essay, for instance), has disappeared. Now we glory in what poet we are, and a man loves himself for writing the best jingle on the market.

We used to be sentimental about Common Sense. To have it meant you did the Right Thing, considered its effects on all concerned, acted wisely. Now Common Sense has been supplanted by Sharpness. We love ourselves when we are really sharp. We love to see evidence of a sharp look winning the day, as long as he isn't a villain.

Self-indulgence used to be a bad idea. Anybody who was labeled with the term was wasting himself. Now it is a virtue. We think it is worthwhile because it tells us the truth about ourselves, about our drives and appetites. So we swing with it. We say, "I did a wild night!" and we feel pleased. It shows we have a sense of self.

We used to pride ourselves on our ability to maintain a firm position, on anything. Now we pride ourselves on our ability to change. Men who switch jobs aren't drifters anymore; they go where the action is. They're proud of it.

We still get nostalgic, but we no longer get that dreamy feeling about old values and such... Togtherness of Sitting By An Open Fire. We now get nostalgic about old trivia; the movies we saw when we were in high school, the lies we told a girl who phoned us.

We used to feel guilty when we realized that television was destroying "the art of conversation." When the electricity failed, we were exultant to see the old days come back. Now we read books about television and only regret it when the show scheduling conflict.

We deal with God according to our own personal concept, not the minister's. We don't see Evil all around us, but if we suspect a touch of it in ourselves, we are rather glad.

by David Newman
and Robert Benton

The Key Couples of the New Sentimentality: They moved on, and taught us the style and the substance. In Breakfast at Tiffany's we understood what they did, because he was cool and tough, but soft in the center. He was destroyed by his love for her. We loved John Selberg, because she was simple, but hard.

Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kennedy reached us because they created a style that succeeded. He, because he was the man, the operator, the man who made his score. She, because she played the role of the woman with an eccentricity of the highest order of their time, and because she looked like a movie star.
Patriotism

The Fourth of July: Cherry Blossoms

Old Sentimentality: New Sentimentality:
Nothing

Patriotism means commitment to an ideal, to something bigger than yourself and feelings of pride in it. New Sentimentality does not allow for such commitment and blind service. In the New, you are proud only of your commitment to self.

Friendship

In the Old Sentimentality, men included and past a bunch of "the boys" they played poker with every Monday night, aworld without women to retreat to. They measured as women had the "girls," and her parties and a close girl chum to console in. In the New Sentimentality, we have accomplishments. Friends are not for escape, they are for consoling. Men have given up the "boys." The wife is the lover and the best friend. Women have given up the "girls." New Sentimentality is for women who are not oriented. They don't like other women very much. The Old Sentimentalists went a lot of letters to old men. New Sentimentalists are for correspondents Old friends are of no value, except collaborators. The New Sentimentalists adores put a high value on friends having an aura of attractiveness. Couples have together because one man finds the woman's attractiveness and his wife likes the way the husband reacts to her. We also cultivate women—they are more pleasant than others. The New Sentimentality allows friendships to change without guilt. Cures are bromidized. Nostalgia is for childhood friends, but mostly for childhood memories. We recall the kids we were privy with, but the boys that beat us up periodically. Or the girl we played "Doctor" with. What was her name? She was an accomplice.

Transitional Figure

Marilyn Monroe moved from Old to New. Old in her life, but moves, her men, she became a figure of the New in her death. When she died, we did not react by saying, "How tragic." We said and felt, "Look what can happen to you if you screw up your life." We mean her as a cautionary.

Politics

Old: Martin Pacifer SANE Reform movement
New: The C.I.A.

We had hardly learned the essence of politics and there was nothing left to do but recognize it. No longer shocked by corruption or mendacity in high places, we now admired the smoothie who didn't bosh it up; the coup that worked.

Soviets

Old: Karl Marx, who believed in democracy and cooperation. All would someday be well. Men, arise. New: Nikita Khrushchev, who knows that tension is the natural condition, that playing angles is the control.

Sports

Old: The Mets
New: The Yankees

Old: The myth of the likable loser, the good old underdog. New: The Yankees. To win is everything. To be hard is to be in charge. Money talks.

Life Patterns

Old Sentimentality: New Sentimentality:

Bad Luck
Merit

Common Sense
Carrying the Torch
Has-Benos

Loalty
College Ties
Funding Yourself

Selling Out
Getting Carried Away
Wounding Art
Being Wounded
Inherent Flaws
Vulnerability

Anxiety
One-night Stands
Change
Going Where the Action Is
Sharpeness

Psychoanalysis

In the New Sentimentality, those of us under analysis are sentimental about our neuroses. We finally return from our analysis and the evening day we broke through to recall a trauma. Even the trauma is the quality of a nostagic event. Old Sentimentality was obsessed with psychiatry and images of cure and purges. New Sentimentality is vague about the problems. We tell new friends about it so they'll know they are in the company of people as hung up as they are. We have learned how to wear things up, and we make those failures a part of our style. Take it or leave it.
LOVE

**SEX**

**Old Sentimentality:**
- Good Girls vs. Bad Girls
- The Whore With a Heart of Gold
- Honorable Intentions

**New Sentimentality:**
- People Who Taught You How To Make Love
- The Marriages of Medfac
- Your Own Implant
- Minor Permutations (Your)

The age of the tramp is gone. To be a "vintagist" is to get yourself on the back and be glad you're weak, kiss 'em, but loving a bull. We expect girls who sleep around a little. They are easier. Virginia gures us out of the room. Fun is fun.

**SONGS**

**Old Sentimentality:**
- One for My Baby
- Old Rain

**New Sentimentality:**
- Surf City
- I'm on the Bus

It is no longer the time for Mom, or Summer, or That Girl Who Left Me that time. We are capable of being taken by a hair, by a train, or a quarter screaming "Jump in the bed." It's our love for the moment.

**MARRIAGE**

Old Sentimentality: Great and Cruel
New Sentimentality: Nuthin'

Old Sentimentality said that marriage was an institution.
New Sentimentality says that marriage is a day-to-day situation. Old marriage had pipe and plungers, and what-for tablespoons and glasses, and family meetings, and promoting the little woman, and variety of the home above all else.
New marriage believes that things will work out, but it will not be easy, that crises will be forthcoming constantly, that love will help to hold it together but more is needed. New marriage is based on privacy when everybody wants it, on at least one good knock-down, drag-out screaming fight a month past to clear the air, on both partners being kind to weaknesses. We expect our mates to be overexcited in bed because we still like to preserve the sanity of the home. New Sentimentality also allows for people to get very sentimental at their divorces. You hear it all the time. As for Adultery, it is an Old poin't, like Extramarital. New marriage is more faithful than Old, because the people have already had enough affairs and then avoid the union, understanding the nature of the temper.

**CHILDREN**

Old Sentimentality: Top Prize
New Sentimentality: Nuthin'

In the Old Sentimentality, we presumed that children were cute "little people." In the New Sentimentality, we see that kids are kids, and they've got their own problems. They are not little grown-ups, but they remain us of ourselves because we see our own problems forming in them. We used to raise our children to be Good Citizens, to be loyal to our values. Now we know better, having seen the results in ourselves. So now we raise our kids above all else, to be sharp. We want them to be on top of it, for their protection.

**TRANSITIONAL FIGURE**

The Aftershow Finisher: Meet the Dead-end Charley
Bogart makes the jump from Old to New. He was always a bit of both Old because he was a man's man, a tough guy with the ladies, an arrogant ruffler, a swagger of authority.
New because he always played a good man who was not unaccompanied, because he grinned at the sexy girl, and then kissed her in sudden passion, because he took the Old Sentimentality of Sara Spake and transformed it into New.
Bogart says that a man can both care and not give a damn.

**CELEBRITIES**

Old Streamline: John Wayne
New Sentimentality: Timmy Carey

The Old Sentimentality said that anybody who was famous was a celebrity and therefore possessed glamour and excitement. It didn't matter what we personally thought of them. We idolized movie stars because they were movie stars and if it was a western movie, so what? In the New Sentimentality, our celebrities come from the Underground. A minor character who happens to excite us in a personal way is a real celebrity. If we see somebody like Timmy Carey, the scared soldier in Paths of Glory, we react. We live our solution for the man who happens to say something directly to us, not for the man who says the lines. We are therefore capable of putting the emotions of people like Al Capone, Abbott and Costello, Bogart.
The Old Sentimentality always had us seeing you in all those old familiar places, on the boat, over the hill, in the land, great city, great city streets that pulsed with literature, colorful settings, simple streets where clear hearts and gentle people lived, crowded rooms where we saw the stranger one enchanted evening in the New Sentimentality, all the places are made you. There are no more "settings" against which we play out, little dramas. We are sentimental in our kitchen, if we feel the mood. Life doesn't "play better" against a moonlit sky anymore. There are no places, we make our own. We have learned that you can have a beautiful time on the Staten Island Ferry, or a lovely one. It has nothing to do with the Staten Island Ferry. Nothing at all.

American writers are almost entirely of the Old Sentimentality. They gave us values to create conflicts. They have rebelled against romantic, idealistic, imaginative—and were meaningful thereby. The new young writers are much the same, even the surrealists who deal with the bizarre as a mirror of reality are upset about values. They chronicle their decay. The writers of the New Sentimentality appear in Europe. Few are good at it. Beckett is, Colette was becoming. The case of Nabokov is interesting. He is Old (Finn, The Gift) and New (Lolita, Pale Face), but he is never entirely one or the other. That is a measure of his greatness, no doubt about it. Robert Lowell is our most New Sentimental writer. He sees it happening.
Pollock is Old because he was in the tradition of the Romantic Artist, the life burned out, the garret. Wyeth is Old because he proffers the Romance of Loneliness, Isolation. Lichtenstein is New because he puts art on, and terror in horror, but no values. Balthus is New because he likes Evil.

Old Sentimentality: Ben Hogan is the fallen hero, a victim of Bad Luck, who fought his Way to the Top again and was an Inspiration. This is Very Old Sentimentality. New Sentimentality: Sonny Liston was the man nobody liked, but of whom people said, "You've got to hard it to him." A hero without heroes, his defeat was right in the tradition.

New Ting Faux Dress

Women dressing for women are not in the New Sentimentality. The designer Pucci was the first to realize that what men love about women is not their chic, or their correctness, but their bodies. Men are sentimental about bodies. The Pucci dresses tell all about women's structure. It exposes the body and makes it look female. These are cheap dresses that do this, but they can't do it for the women you love.

New Sentimentality: "La Dolce Vita" Old, because its point of view was from the outside looking in at decay. It put the blame on society, evil, war, money, and bed companions. New Sentimentality: "L'Avventura" dealt with the same subject from within. It said that decay was coma, ennui, lack of purpose—in other words, people. It said love was selfish.

Old Sentimentality: Count Basie in playing controlled emotion. The hotter it is, the tighter the arrangement. One dances to it. One imagines "The Truth." Hot jazz assumes that you need the music for a catharsis, for a release. But nobody jumps at one o'clock anymore. New Sentimentality: The Modern Jazz Quartet plays music that doesn't release you. It propels you. The formulation of the MJQ is not sentimental, but the clarity is. At least, the music reveals a concrete, clear, hanging in space, ready to be broken. We want that is the New Sentimentality, because it's like us. Fragile, huddled in blues, ordered but given to flights of fancy, insecure, but heading in some direction. Problem swing.
PURVEYORS OF OLD SENTIMENTALITY

These are the people who stood for our values. They are role players. In some cases, they played that role purposefully and aggressively. In others, they didn't plan it. They were of their time and that time is gone. Best of their breed, they gave us the living manifestations of the Old Sentimentality.

Mr. and Mrs. Douds D. Strickland

He is Honorable Man, myth of the old guard, Lincoln, the lost leader, Old Liberalism: wise, Aspinwall.

Mr. and Mrs. Douds D. Strickland

James Caan

He is the happy sailor, occasional athlete, MGM, open smile, lover of ideal woman.

Jackie Robinson

He is the American Way, the Hard Road Up, courage, the very legend of the athlete.

Dame Keely

He is Children Are the Same, the Whole World Over, a smile and a song, Universal Language of Love, Uncle Sam, beloved by royalties, the warm heart with the funny face, sweetness and light.

Admirable Man, myth of the old guard, Lincoln, the lost leader, Old Liberalism, wise.

Vera Zorba

He is the last battle: a rebel with a cause, the hobo mystique, Old Left Wing, strikes.

Sargeant and Bunt

They were sophisticated for the little man, waiting, torch songs, Blue Room, Little Girl Blue, marriage is for most lovers, Falling In Love With Love, the romantic aura of brotherly love, Manhattan.

Royce Johnson

He is FDR, the big man, king, cowboy. The Lost Maraud, humble beginnings.

The Groom

They are Burt Nightly Our, the gang, the Buddy System, the romance of horses, practical joking, The Pleasure Mechanism, Noa Noa, the idea of Organized Fun, millionaires, Show Biz.

Gene Kelly

He is Puccini, schmaltz, a Culture Concept, Amahl, sweet singles and cripples.

She is our Cinderella, the Princess, the red-headed Movie Star, Only in America, Family.
PURveyors of NEW SENTIMENTALITY

Those are the givers of the New Way. They have enlarged our interest in living without revealing the changes they were making. They are the vanguard of a different set of roles, of concepts, and, most importantly, of symbols. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, they have been teaching us the value system of the New Sentimentality.

The Beatles
They are the Por-Oh, the big laugh, a slap in the face. Postmodernism, the new idea of the Celebrity. Kojak says, "We're not easy girls, but we're having a good time." Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

Alfred Hitchcock
He is the manipulation of the audience, the humor of horror, cynical control, tension at art.

Mach Baker
He is the loner with his own God; the existential Jew, the Thomas du dialogue, hip edginess.

The Unknowns
They are the Real Idea of Television: the violence, Love enters in the way and prints the scheme. Nuns as cynical do-gooders. The Rotten Twenties, the Cult of the Criminal, kicks for art's sake.

Ami Boghi
She is Holly Golightly, big angles, beauty of the unattractive, the fragile that is tough.

Cissy Ross
He is the lover in a new guise, the husband of Sophia, big Italian bankroll, Rona.

Marina Ciccia
She is the cult of Arrogance, the Professional, the subjugation of Nice to Tops, temper.

Michael Ansara
He is the sentimental executor, the combination of Aroused, going overboard, Monte Vitt.

Elia Lucia
He is the Unlikely Winner, the hard and mean sound, Sharpshott, the end of Authority, rock.

James Mason
She is Woman as warmth, verbal, God's love that devours, Pierre Cardin, Jules et Jim.

Ferris Walder
He is Strike over Context, the idea of the hero. Women are in the past is here.

Lupe Ventas
She is the conflict of interest: the, given, of screen radio stations, Mauk, not just a wife.

Louise Stahl
He is the hipster, the trouble with cops, Improvisation, a survival of Style, anger.

Lee Costi
He is the giver of Pop, money made in necessity, the Eros as anti-Hero, Power.

Jean Shrimp
She is the Age of the Model: the Queen of English fashion, the Lord, awareness of lighthness, physical attractiveness as an End: cold perfection, the beauty as a rough texture, Makeup all day long.