

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 slipped from grace and became pejorative. "Don't give me that sentimental slop." And so all the wiser 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 Gramps, and those who felt they were above that kind of adoration said: "Look at that. How corny can anybody get? It's like a Norman Rockwell cover." They cast off sentiment, seeing it as weakness. They cultivated the art of "playing it cool." But the New Sentimentality was growing, without their ever knowing it.

Suddenly it was 1960 and John Kennedy was there, and the wise, the intellectual and the nose-making people did him homage. They didn't think he was a father or Gramps. They liked him because he was tough, because he was all pro, because he was a man who knew what

he wanted and grabbed it. They loved that in him as furiously as the crowds loved Ike. They sentimentalized every power grab. And that was when the New Sentimentality came out in the open.

Old Sentimentality had "values" that everyone could see, bywords that meant the same to all: Patriotism, Love, Religion, Moral, The Girl. The values of the New Sentimentality are not out there emblazoned 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 abiding motivation. In the Old way you had ideals, causes, goals that were in some way beneficent 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 "selling out," which used to drive good men crazy, causing them to cry in their beer and bemoan their wasted talent (writing ad copy, for instance), has disappeared. Now we glory in what pros 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 cookie 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, "Did I have 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, such as Togetherness or 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 jilted us.

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



The Key Couples of the New Sentimentality: They moved us, and taught us the style and the substance. In *Breathless*, we understood Belmondo, because he was cool and tough, but soft in the center. He was destroyed because he let love carry him away. We loved Jean Seberg because she was fragile, but hard.



Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kennedy reached us, because they created a style that succeeded. He, because he was the pro, the operator, the man who made his score. She, because she played the pro's wife with an appreciation of the higher aspects of the situation, and because she looked like a movie star.

by David Newman
and Robert Benton

PATRIOTISM



Old Sentimentality: The American People

Old Sentimentality:

The Fourth of July
Cherry Blossoms

New Sentimentality:

Nothing

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

TRANSITIONAL FIGURE



Marilyn Monroe moved from Old to New. Old in her life, her movies, her men, she became a factor 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 when you screw up your life." We moan her neuroticism.

POLITICS

Old Sentimentality:

Marxism
Pacifism
SANE
Reform movements
Splitting your ticket
to vote for the man

New Sentimentality:

The CIA

We had finally learned the cynicism of politics and there was nothing left to do but romanticize it. No longer shocked by corruption or stupidity in high places, we now admired the smoothie who didn't botch it up, the *coup* that worked.

SOVIETS



Old Marx

New Khrushchev

Old: Karl Marx, who believed in Utopia based on mankind cooperating. All would someday be well. Men, arise. New: Nikita Khrushchev, who knows that tension is the natural condition, that playing angles is the control.

FRIENDSHIP

In the Old Sentimentality, men had buddies and pals, a bunch of "the boys" they played poker with every Monday night, a world without women to retreat to. They treasured a woman had "the girls," and hen parties, and a close girl chum to confide in. In the New Sentimentality, we have accomplices. Friends are not for escape, they are for conspiring. Men have given up the "boys." The wife or the lover is the best friend. Women have given up "the girls." New Sentimental women are men-oriented, they don't like other women very much. The Old Sentimentalists wrote a lot of letters to old pals. New Sentimentalists are lousy correspondents. Old friends are of no value, current collaborators are. The New Sentimentality also puts a high value on friends having an aura of attractiveness. Couples hang together because one man finds the friend's wife attractive and his wife likes the way the husband reacts to her. We also cultivate winners—they are more pleasant than losers. The New Sentimentality allows friendships to change without guilt. Circles are broadened. Nostalgia is for childhood friends, but mostly for childhood enemies. We recall not the kid we were pals with, but the bully that beat us up periodically. Or the girl we played "Doctor" with. What was her name? She was an accomplice.

MYTHOLOGY



Old Sentimentality: The Ox-Bow Incident



New Sentimentality: Shoot the Piano Player

Old Sentimentality: *The Ox-Bow Incident* said that good men must band together, that fair play could prevent evil, that friends should stick together, and fight the system, that love helps. New Sentimentality: *Shoot the Piano Player* showed that getting involved with people meant getting hurt, that love and devotion left you wide open for destruction, that living in disguise was the smart way to be yourself, that being alone was the only way to exist in an absurd world.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

In the New Sentimentality, those of us under analysis are sentimental about our neuroses. We fondly reminisce about our analysts and the exciting day we broke through to recall a trauma. Even the trauma takes on the qualities of a nostalgic event. Old Sentimentality was obsessed with psychiatry and bragged of cures and purges. New Sentimentality brags 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 we mess things up, and we make those failures a part of our style. Take it or leave it.

SPORTS



Old: The Mets

New: The Yankees

Old: The Mets. The myth of the lovable 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:

Bad Luck
Maturity
Common Sense
Carrying the Torch
Has-Beers
Loyalty
College Ties
Finding Yourself
Selling Out

New Sentimentality:

Getting Carried Away
Wounding and Being Wounded
Inherent Flaws
Vulnerability
Anxiety
One-night Stands
Change
Going Where the Action Is
Sharpness

LOVE



Old Sentimentality: The Frump

Under the reign of Old Sentimentality, we believed in the efficacy of Whitman's Samplers with sweets for the sweet. We intoned "Diamonds Are Forever." We got dreamy-eyed over dancing, proms, "our song," parking, "best girls," engagement rings. We loved to propose. We subscribed to the theory that self-sacrifice would prove ardency ("I'll go through fire for you"), and to the concept that one could trade on his ardor. We had a vestige of the really old days in feeling that one should have semi-honorable intentions toward his beloved. We believed love had a capital L, that it was true, that True Love was everlasting, that hearts broke, that there was one Great Love, that for every man was a woman, that you didn't say, "I love you," unless you really were positive. That's all gone. The New Sentimentality is organized on other lines. We now get starry-eyed about the fact that everybody is bound to get hurt in an affair, that we can be destroyed, but that we can surely bounce back. We no longer carry the torch. We pride ourselves on our ability to bounce back. We are sentimental about the transient nature of love affairs, we enter them knowing they won't last and loving the impermanence. Under Old Sentimentality, we believed we should keep something in reserve. Now we do our best to Get Carried Away. We assume that going overboard is part of love. We revel in the highs and we revel as much in the lows. We like to tell our lovers that we have moods and a lot of weaknesses. We pray they won't use them to destroy us, but then we do the same thing to them. Love is unsure.

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 Nostalgia of Necking
Your Own Ineptitude
Minor Perversions (yours)

The age of the tramp is gone. To be a " Swinger " is to put yourself on the back and be glad you're weak, kind of, but having a ball. We respect girls who sleep around a little. They are nice. Virgins stare us out of the room. Fun is fun.

SONGS

Old Sentimentality:

One for My Baby (and One
More for the Road)

New Sentimentality:

Surt City

It is no longer the tunes about Mom, or Summer, or That Gal Who Left Me that turn us on. We are capable of being captivated by a Twist lyric, or a quartet screaming "Zam." Rock 'n' roll is calculated, cynical. It's about us, now.

MARRIAGE



Old Sentimentality: George and Cora

Old Sentimentality said that Marriage was an Institution. New Sentimentality says that Marriage is a day-to-day situation. Old Marriage had pipe and slippers, and what's-for-dinner tonight, honey?, and family meetings, and protecting the little woman, and sanctity 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 somebody wants it, on at least one good knock-down, drag-out screaming fight a month just to clear the air, on both partners being kind to weaknesses. We expect our mates to be sophisticated in bed because we still like to preserve the sanctity of the home. New Sentimentality also allows for people to get very sentimental about their divorces. You hear it all the time. As for Adultery, it is an Old phrase, like Extramarital. New Marriage is more faithful than Old, because the people have already had enough affairs. One or two more don't destroy the union, we understand the nature of the impulse.



New Sentimentality: John and Jane

CHILDREN



Old: Sweet Little

New: Cherie Brown

In the Old Sentimentality, we pretended 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 remind 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 Sheep. We want them to be on top of it, for their protection.

TRANSITIONAL FIGURE



The Blaise Erikson

Best of Devil

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 talker, a slammer of authority. New because he always played a good man who was quite unscrupulous, because he grinned at the sexy girl first and then kissed her in sudden passion, because he took the Old Sentimentality of Sam Spade and transformed it into New. Bogart says that a man can both care and not give a damn.

CELEBRITIES



Old Sentimentality: John Wayne

New Sentimentality: Timothy 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 rotten movie, so what? In the New Sentimentality, our celebrities come from the Underground. A minor character actor who happens to excite us in a personal way is a real celebrity. If we see somebody like Timothy Carey, the scared soldier in *Paths of Glory*, we react. We save our adulation for the man who happens to say something directly to us, not for the man who grabs the masses. We may therefore ascribe heartfelt sentiments to diverse people, like Al Capone, Abbott but not Costello, Barton MacLane, Ringo.

PLACES



Old Sentimentality: Manhattan



Old Sentimentality: San Francisco



Old Sentimentality: Jazz Festival



Old Sentimentality: Ferry (also, Hometown)

New Sentimentality: No place

The Old Sentimentality always had us seeing you in all those old familiar places, cozy bars, certain hills and lovers' lanes, great steel-canyon cities that pulsed with glamour, colorful settings, simple streets where dear hearts and gentle people lived, crowded rooms where we saw a stranger one enchanted evening. In the New Sentimentality, all the places are inside you. There are no more "settings" against which we play our little dramas. We can be sentimental in our kitchen if we feel in 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 lousy one. It has nothing to do with the Staten Island Ferry. Nothing at all.

DIVERSIONS

Travel: The Old Sentimentality about travel was the delight derived from visiting colorful countries, seeing the natives. In New Sentimentality, all the romance is in the traveling itself. The airport is as exciting as the destination. The idea of flying across the world is better than landing any place. We do not paste stickers on our luggage, but we tell our friends about the movie we saw on the flight. We are not in love with the foreign girls as much as with the stewardesses. The idea of going is what we like best.

Television: The Old Sentimentality watches CBS Reports and Sunday afternoon cultural programs and educational TV. The New Sentimentality watches *The Beverly Hillbillies* not because they like it, but because they admire its success. Late-night movies and afternoon reruns are the most beloved.

THE PAST



Old: Tolstoy



New: Proust

The Motherland, the adulteress, the man of the soil, the intellectual, the Hero—these are Tolstoy's creations in Old Sentimentality. The operator, the manipulation of people in love, the vision of love as a fleeting episode in which any commitment brings pain and ineptitude, and most important now, the sense of the past as no different from today in terms of human behavior—that is all in Proust. He was the visionary of the New.

WRITERS



Old: Ernest Hemingway

Bravery above all. Dying well. Honor as an eternal value. Hunting Bulls.



Old: Dorothy Parker

Cynicism used for shock. A *weltanschauung* for failures. Emancipation of women.



Old: Arthur Miller

Inner honor. Suicides. Social poeizing. New Deal. American tragedies. Find yourself.



Old: T. S. Eliot

Love is like a flower, or a mountain. Love as a gift. Condemnation of compromise.



Old: John O'Hara

Singing destroys. Myth of respectability as a façade. Sex as Evil. Class system.



Old: Jack Kerouac

Joys of the open road. Excess as a positive. Myth of the glamorous wastrel. Zen.



Old: Ezra Pound

Death as poetry. Hellenic legends apply to our time. Mystique of "The Artist."



New: Robert Lowell

Beauty of destruction. The sanitarium as a setting for a poem. The order of chaos.

American writers are almost entirely of the Old Sentimentality. They gave us values to create conflicts. Their heroes rebelled against some existing order—social, psychological, romantic, familial—and were meaningful thereby. The new 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 (*Invitation of a Small Guest*) and New (*Invitation of a Small Guest*), 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.

ART



Old Jackson Pollock



New Roy Lichtenstein

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, sees terror in humor, has no values. Balbus is New because he likes Evil.



Old Andrew Wyeth



New Balbus

HEROES



Old Ben Hogan



New Sonny Liston

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. That is Very Old Sentimentality. New Sentimentality: Sonny Liston was the man nobody liked, but of whom people said, "You've got to hand it to him." A hero without heroics, his defeat was right in the tradition.

PROPAGANDA



Old Sentimentality: La Dolce Vita



New Sentimentality: L'Avventura

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

FASHION



New The Pucci 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 dress is all about women's structure. It respects the body and makes it look female. There are cheap dresses that do this, but they can't do it for the woman you love.

THE PROBLEM



Old James Baldwin



New Malcolm X

James Baldwin is Goodness. He is typecast. He is the ideal Idealist and he writes, too. His novels and his new play are corny. Malcolm X is for self-defense and no sweet solutions. He is rough. He splits with the cause when it holds him back. He gets publicity and fights.

JAZZ



Old Count Basie



New The Modern Jazz Quartet

Old Sentimentality: Count Basie is playing controlled emotion. The hotter it is, the tighter the arrangement. One dances to it. One fantasizes "The Free Spirit." Hot jazz assures that you need the music for a cathartic, 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 suspends you. The formalization of the M.J.Q. is not sentimental, but the clarity is. At best, the music reveals a note, crystal clear, hanging in space, ready to be broken. We want that in the New Sentimentality, because it's like us: fragile but rooted 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 stand for past 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 going. Best of their breed, they gave us the living manifestations of the Old Sentimentality.



Mr. and Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower

To Old Sentimentalists, they will always be Ike and Mamie. They are red, white and blue; apple-pie American; Gettysburg farm grandchildren; West Point; Western novels; simple decency; Republican.



Gene Kelly

He is the happy sailor, muscular ballet, 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.



Dance Kings

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



Adlai Stevenson

He is Honorable Man; myth of the egghead; Lincoln, the lost leader; Old Liberalism; wise.



Tom Doolley

He is triumph of Love; embodiment of Charity; Cuts, aid to weak; Romantic Medicine.



Rodgers and Hart

They were sophistication for the little man, waltzes, torch songs; *Blue Room*, *Little Girl Blue*, marriage is for sweet lovers, *Falling In Love With Love*, the romantic aura of bittersweet love; Manhattan.



Rodgers and Hammerstein

They were Inspirational, singing of nuns, dancing cowboys, *Cheer Every Mountain*, a song from the heart, *You'll Never Walk Alone*; Mary Martin; popular religion, the U.S.A.



Landon Johnson

He is IDR; the big ranch king; cowboys. *The Last Hurrah*, humble beginnings.



Pete Seeger

He is the dust bowl; a rebel with a cause; the hobo mystique. Old Left Wing, strikes.



The Clans

They are Boys' Night Out, the gang, the Buddy System, the romance of booze, practical joking, The Playboy Philosophy, Nouveau Riche, the idea of Organized Fun, millionaires, Show Biz.



Glen-Gary Rovenst

He is Puccini, schmaltz; a Culture Concept; *Amahl*; sweet mutes and cripples.



Criss Kelly

She is our Cinderella; the Princess; the retired Movie Star; Only in America; Family.

PURVEYORS OF NEW SENTIMENTALITY

These are the givers of the New Way. They have enlisted our interest all along without our realizing the changes they were making. They are the vanguard of a different set of rules, of concepts, and, most importantly, of attitudes. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, they have been teaching us the value system of the New Sentimentality.



The Pur-On

They are the Pur-On, the big laugh, a slap in the face. Professionalism, the new idea of the Celebrity, Ringo's looks, "We're not any good, 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 as art.



Martin Buber

He is the lost man with his own God; the existential Jew; I to Thou as dialogue; lup religion.



The Union-babies

They are the Real Idea of Television; the violence, Love gets in the way and ruins the schizmo; Ness as cynical do-gooder. The Rotten Twenties; the Cult of the Criminal; kicks for art's sake.



Audrey Hepburn

She is Holly Golightly, big sunglasses, beauty of the unbeautiful, the fragile that is tough.



Vittorio Gassman

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



Maria Callas

She is the cusk of Arrogance, the Professional; the subjugation of Nice to Tops; temper.



Michelangelo Antonioni

He is the sentimental eroticism; the condition of Alore; going overboard; Monica Vitti.



Clint Eastwood

He is the Unlikely Winner; the hard and mean sound; Sharpness; the end of Authority; rock.



Jeanne Moreau

She is Woman as wrathful, vengetful God; the love that devours; Pierre Cardin, *Jules et Jim*.



Francis Truffaut

He is Style over Content; the idea of the *Leons*; Women are fatal; the past is new.



Lucy Bess Johnson

She is "no conflict of interest"; the queer tycoon (radio stations); Muzak; not just a wife.



Lemmy Cauley

He is the hipster; the trouble with cops; Improvisation; a summit of Style; anger.



Lee Castelli

He is the giver of Pop; money made in neckery; the Painter as anti-Hero; Power.



Jean Shrimpton

She is the Age of the Model; the Queen of English fashion; the Look; awareness of aloofness; physical attractiveness as an End; cold perfection; the beauty as a tough cookie; Makeup all day long.