

COLLEGE ENGLISH

Book 6

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Lesson One

TEXT

What' s Wrong with Our Press?

by Marya Mannes

1. Newspapers have two great advantages over television. They can be used by men as barriers against their wives. It is still the only effective screen against the morning features of the loved one, and, as such, performs a unique human service. The second advantage is that you can't line a garbage pail with a television set — it's usually the other way around.

2. But here are some interesting statistics from a little, and little known, survey by Mr. Roper called "The Public's Reaction to Television Following the Quiz Investigations." In it he asks everybody but me this question: Suppose you could continue to have only one of the following — radio, television, newspapers, or magazines — which would you prefer? Newspapers came in second: Forty-two per cent said if they could only have one, they would keep television. Thirty-two per cent said if they could only have one, they would keep newspapers.

3. Even so, newspaper people should be much happier than the magazine people, because only four per cent said they needed magazines, as against nineteen percent for radio.

4. But listen to this. Mr. Roper asked these same harried people: "If you get conflicting or different reports of the same news story from radio, television, the magazines, and the newspapers, which of the four versions would you be most inclined to believe?" Thirty-two per cent believe newspapers as against

thirty per cent who believe television. But then something really strange happens. When Mr. Roper asked his guinea pigs which of these media they would be least inclined to believe, the newspapers topped the list. In a big way, too. Twenty-four per cent don't believe newspapers as against nine per cent who don't believe television. And though I'm as leery of certain polls as anyone, this margin of credulity is too wide to be discounted.

5. The fact is that although network television still allots too little time to the vital service of informing the public, it does a better job in that little time than the nation's press as a whole. And when I speak of the nation's press as a whole, I am not speaking of the five or six splendid newspapers — and the one great newspaper — which serve the world as models of responsible public information. I am speaking of the local press which in hundreds of American communities is the only news available, aside from those recitals of ticker tape that pass for radio news, and which defaults on its obligations to the public.

6. Why do I think network TV does a better job of informing than these papers? Well, let's get the partisan bit over with. Television lives on advertising to an even greater extent than newspapers, and since advertising is big business, advertising is by nature Republican. Yet nowhere in network newscasts or network commentaries on current events have I encountered the intense partisanship, the often rabid bias that colors the editorial pages of the majority of newspapers in this country. Douglass Cater, in his book *The Fourth Branch of Government*, confines himself to only one pungent footnote on this subject. "I have deliberately avoided," he writes, "getting into the predominantly one-party nature of newspaper ownership. It is a fact of life." This particular fact of life is a shameful one; that newspapers whose duty it is to inform the American public give them only one side of the issues that affect them

profoundly — the Republican side. This is shameful not only for Democrats — they have survived it before and will survive it again — but for the maturity of our people. Some of the same papers which loudly extol the virtues of free enterprise and a free press are consistently failing to print the facts on which a people can form a balanced and independent opinion. That balanced and independent opinion is our only real security as a nation.

7. Now, very often, television coverage of news is superficial and inadequate. Very often the picture takes precedence over the point. But by and large the news reports and commentaries on CBS and NBC and ABC make every effort to present viewers with more than one aspect of an issue, either by letting opposing spokesmen have their say, or by outlining the positions held by both major parties on the subject involved.

8. Television also provides a wide range of opinion by setting up four or five experts and letting them knock each other down. What has the local press of this nature? Is it discharging its duty to diversity by printing snippets of opinion from unqualified readers? Is this exploring an issue?

9. Television may not have a Lippmann or a Reston, but then, what papers in America can claim an Eric Sevareid, a Walter Cronkite, a Huntley or a Brinkley, or — although he is invisible — an Edward Morgan?

10. Another thing. Among the leading commentators on television, you find no Pegler, no Winchell, no Fulton Lewis, Jr. . . Fortunately for the American public, television does not tolerate the kind of distortion of fact, the kind of partisan virulence and personal pique, that many newspapers not only welcome but encourage. In its entertainment, television caters far too much to the lowest instincts of man, particularly the lust for violence and — at the opposite end of the spectrum — the

urge to escape from reality into sedation. But there is one appetite it does not feed and which the partisan newspapers of the nation do: the appetite for hate — hate of whatever is different. I do not find on television the kind of editorials chronic in the New York tabloids as well as in many local papers across the country where the techniques of demagoguery prevail: Rouse the Rabble by Routing Reason.

11. A newspaper has the right — the duty even — to assume an attitude, to take a position. But it has an equally sacred right to explain that position in the light of the opposing one, to document that position, and to bolster it, not with emotion but with fact.

12. Here, of course, is where background information helps the public to draw its conclusions. TV does a great deal of this in the form of documentaries, and you can of course say that they have the time and the money to do this and you haven't. Yet across this wide country, and with the exception of a handful of syndicated columns, I fail to find in any local paper any attempt, however minimal, to strengthen this muscle of digestion, without which news can neither nourish nor inform. It can only stuff. Between the opinions of the editor and the bare statements of the wire services there is nothing, nothing, that is except a collection of snippets used as fillers between the ads and picked at random.

13. One of the greatest and most justified criticisms of television has been that in appealing to the largest audience possible, it neglects minority audiences and minority tastes. This is still largely true. But there is, perhaps, one program a day and many, of course, on Sunday which an intelligent man or woman can enjoy and derive interest from. In my trips east or west or north or south, I pick up the local paper to find this enjoyment or interest — in vain. Now, surely there's something wrong here.

Many of these places I've visited — and I'm sure this is true of the whole country — have college communities where highly intelligent and talented people live, whether they are teachers or doctors or lawyers or musicians or scientists. What is there for them in the paper, usually the only paper, of their town? What features are provided for these people? What stimulation? How many times have I heard them say: "If you want to see what a really bad paper is like, read our sheet." When a local paper has a monopoly in a region, as most of them do, why is it necessary to aim at the lowest common denominator?

14. I believe that over a period of decades newspapers have become a habit rather than a function. They have held their franchise so long that change has become inadmissible. I do not know, in fact, of any medium that has changed as little in the last twenty years as the daily press. And this resistance to change is the end of growth — which, in turn, marks the end of usefulness.

15. Change means trouble, change means work, change means cost. It is easier to print wire services dispatches than have a reporter on the beat. It is easier to buy syndicated columns than find — and train — local talent. It is easier to let the ads dictate the format than develop a format that elevates news above dogfood. It is easier to write editorial copy that appeals to emotion rather than reason. And in handling straight news, it is easier to assume the pious mantle of objectivity than to edit. To quote Eric Sevareid: "Our rigid formulae of so-called objectivity, beginning with the wire agency bulletins and reports — the warp and woof of what the papers print. . . our flat, one-dimensional handling of news, have given the lie the same prominence and impact that truth is given. They have elevated the influence of fools to that of wise men; the ignorant to the level of the learned; the evil to the level of the good."

This featureless objectivity is nothing less than the editor's abdication of responsibility and is just as dangerous as the long and subtle processing of fact to fit a policy that characterizes certain weekly magazines. The one is dereliction; the other is deception. And both may provide a reason for the decline of public confidence in their press.

16. This is, to me, a tragedy. I am a printed-word woman myself, and I still think the word was not only in the beginning but will be in the end. No picture can ever be an adequate substitute. The word will prevail; that is, if you, who are its guardians, treat it with the respect it deserves. For if you degrade and cheapen the word too long, the people will turn to the picture. They are beginning to turn to the picture now. Not in New York, maybe, not in Washington, D. C., or St. Louis, or two or three other cities, but in hundreds of towns across the country. Oh, they will buy your papers — to hold up at breakfast or to line the trash can or to light a fire. But not to learn. And you may wake up one day to find you have lost the greatest power entrusted to men: to inform a free people.

About the author:

Marya Mannes (b. 1905) was educated at private schools in New York City and has lived in various European countries. She has written novels, essays, satirical poems, and many articles. For some time she was a staff writer for the *Reporter*, and she has appeared widely as a lecturer and panelist.

Mannes has been described as a "questioner", and many of her essays and speeches question the myths and practices of government, business, and other institutions. "What's Wrong with Our Press?" was first delivered as a speech in 1960 to the Women's National Press Club. The speech, which is now part of the collection *But Will It Sell?* (1964), was printed by only a

few newspapers and magazines at the time. But the comparison Mannes makes between television reporting and the news coverage by most newspapers is still a subject for discussion and controversy.

Notes

- 1) Douglass Cater --- (b.1923) American writer, editor and government official. His publications are *Ethics in a Business Society*, *The Fourth Branch of Government*, and *Power in Washington*.
- 2) the one great newspaper --- It refers to *The New York Times*.
- 3) the five or six splendid newspapers --- such newspapers as *the Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Herald Tribune*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Los Angeles Times*
- 4) CBS and NBC and ABC --- They stand for The Columbia Broadcasting System, The National Broadcasting Company and The American Broadcasting Company respectively.
- 5) Lippmann --- (b.1889) American Journalist, educated in Harvard University, special writer for *New York Herald Tribune* (1931-1967)
- 6) Reston --- (b.1909) Scottish-born American Journalist, head of *New York Times* Washington Bureau (1953-1964)
- 7) Eric Sevareid --- (b. 1912) American News correspondent, attached to CBS Washington Bureau (1946-1959), roving European Correspondent, London (1959-1961) and a moderator for various broadcasts in New York (1961-1964)

- 8) Walter Cronkite — (b.1916) American television correspondent

Exercises

I. True or false:

- 1) The author's remark in the first paragraph about the newspapers' advantages over TV is not meant to be taken seriously.
- 2) According to Mr. Roper's survey, radio ranks third among the major forms of mass media in terms of popularity.
- 3) The same survey reveals contradictory responses to the credibility of newspapers and television.
- 4) Television gets much of its financial source from advertising and is by nature more Republican than the newspapers.
- 5) The author has encountered intense partisanship in television newscasts and network commentaries on current events.
- 6) Many newspapers are owned by one party.
- 7) Television is more dependent on advertising than newspapers.
- 8) The author thinks that one of TV's advantages over papers is its wide range of entertainment for the public.
- 9) Documentaries on TV help the audience to digest the news and come to its own conclusions.
- 10) TV neglects minority tastes while the local papers are usually able to provide stimulation for the readers.
- 11) Subtle distortion of fact and irresponsibility of editors under the pretext of objectivity have caused public distrust in the press.

- 12) In New York, and in a couple of other cities in the U. S. , the newspapers have ceased to play a significant role as a medium.

II. Explain the italicized parts:

- 1) When Mr. Roper asked his *guinea pigs* ... (Para. 4)
- 2) Well, let's get *the partisan bit* over with. (Para. 6)
- 3) Very often *the picture takes precedence over the point*. (Para. 7)
- 4) ... letting them *knock each other down*. (Para. 8)
- 5) ... the kind of editorial *chronic in New York tabloids* ... (Para. 10)
- 6) ... and with the exception of a handful of *syndicated columns*, ... (Para. 12)
- 7) ... to strengthen this *muscle of digestion* ... (Para. 12)
- 8) What *features* are provided for these people? (Para. 13)
- 9) ... than find — and train — *local talent*. (Para. 15)
- 10) ... that *elevates news above dogfood*. (Para. 15)

III. Questions for discussion:

- 1) List the points of difference that the author finds between press and television news coverage in the United States.
- 2) The author excludes the “ five or six splendid newspapers — and the one great newspaper” when she says that television “does a better job than the nation's press as a whole.” Why?
- 3) What in the author's view is the reason for a “decline of public confidence” in the American press?

Lesson Two

TEXT

What to Listen for in Music

by Aaron Copland

1. We all listen to music according to our separate capacities. But, for the sake of analysis, the whole listening process may become clearer if we break it up into its component parts, so to speak. In a certain sense we all listen to music on three separate planes. For lack of a better terminology, one might name these: (1) the sensuous plane, (2) the expressive plane, (3) the sheerly musical plane. The only advantage to be gained from mechanically splitting up the listening process into these hypothetical planes is the clearer view to be had of the way in which we listen.

2. The simplest way of listening to music is to listen for the sheer pleasure of the musical sound itself. That is the sensuous plane. It is the plane on which we hear music without thinking, without considering it in any way. One turns on the radio while doing something else and absentmindedly bathes in the sound. A kind of brainless but attractive state of mind is engendered by the mere sound appeal of the music.

3. You may be sitting in a room reading this book. Imagine one note struck on the piano. Immediately that one note is enough to change the atmosphere of the room — proving that the sound element in music is a powerful and mysterious agent, which it would be foolish to deride or belittle.

4. The surprising thing is that many people who consider

themselves qualified music lovers abuse that plane in listening. They go to concerts in order to lose themselves. They use music as a consolation or an escape. They enter an ideal world where one doesn't have to think of the realities of everyday life. Of course they aren't thinking about the music either. Music allows them to leave it, and they go off to a place to dream, dreaming because of and apropos of the music yet never quite listening to it.

5. Yes, the sound appeal of music is a potent and primitive force, but you must not allow it to usurp a disproportionate share of your interest. The sensuous plane is an important one in music, a very important one, but it does not constitute the whole story.

6. There is no need to digress further on the sensuous plane. Its appeal to every normal human being is self-evident. There is, however, such a thing as becoming more sensitive to the different kinds of sound stuff as used by various composers. For all composers do not use that sound stuff in the same way. Don't get the idea that the value of music is commensurate with its sensuous appeal or that the loveliest sounding music is made by the greatest composer. If that were so, Ravel would be a greater creator than Beethoven. The point is that the sound element varies with each composer, that his usage of sound forms an integral part of his style and must be taken into account when listening. The reader can see, therefore, that a more conscious approach is valuable even on this primary plane of music listening.

7. The second plane on which music exists is what I have called the expressive one. Here, immediately, we tread on controversial ground. Composers have a way of shying away from any discussion of music's expressive side. Did not Stravinsky himself proclaim that his music was an "object," a "thing," with a life

of its own, and with no other meaning than its own purely musical existence? This intransigent attitude of Stravinsky's may be due to the fact that so many people have tried to read different meanings into so many pieces. Heaven knows it is difficult enough to say precisely what it is that a piece of music means, to say it definitely, to say it finally so that everyone is satisfied with your explanation. But that should not lead one to the other extreme of denying to music the right to be "expressive."

8. My own belief is that all music has an expressive power, some more and some less, but that all music has a certain meaning behind the notes and that that meaning behind the notes constitutes, after all, what the piece is saying, what the piece is about. This whole problem can be stated quite simply by asking, "Is there a meaning to music?" My answer to that would be, "yes." And "Can you state in so many words what the meaning is?" My answer to that would be, "No." Therein lies the difficulty.

9. Simple-minded souls will never be satisfied with the answer to the second of these questions. They always want to have a meaning, and the more concrete it is the better they like it. The more the music reminds them of a train, a storm, a funeral, or any other familiar conception the more expressive it appears to be to them. This popular idea of music's meaning — stimulated and abetted by the usual run of musical commentator — should be discouraged wherever and whenever it is met. One timid lady once confessed to me that she suspected something seriously lacking in her appreciation of music because of her inability to connect it with anything definite. That is getting the whole thing backward, of course.

10. Still, the question remains. How close should the intelligent music lover wish to come to pinning a definite meaning to any

particular work? No closer than a general concept I should say. Music expresses, at different moments, serenity or exuberance, regret or triumph, fury or delight. It expresses each of these moods, and many others, in a numberless variety of subtle shadings and differences. It may even express a state of meaning for which there exists no adequate word in any language. In that case, musicians often like to say that it has only a purely musical meaning. They sometimes go farther and say that *all* music has only a purely musical meaning. What they really mean is that no appropriate word can be found to express the music's meaning and that, even if it could, they do not feel the need of finding it.

11. But whatever the professional musician may hold, most musical novices still search for specific words with which to pin down their musical reactions. That is why they always find Tchaikovsky easier to "understand" than Beethoven. In the first place, it is easier to pin a meaning-word on a Tchaikovsky piece than on a Beethoven one. Much easier. Moreover, with the Russian composer, every time you come back to a piece of his it almost always says the same thing to you, whereas with Beethoven it is often quite difficult to put your finger right on what he is saying. And any musician will tell you that that is why Beethoven is the greater composer. Because music which always says the same thing to you will necessarily soon become dull music, but music whose meaning is slightly different with each hearing has a greater chance of remaining alive.

12. Listen, if you can, to the forty-eight fugue themes of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavichord*. Listen to each theme, one after another. You will soon realize that each theme mirrors a different world of feeling. You will also soon realize that the more beautiful a theme seems to you the harder it is to find any word that will describe it to your complete satisfaction. Yes, you will cer-