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Saturday Review

October 8, 1966

Cover photo by Pegge Hopper

SR: Ideas

- 29 The New Right: What Does It Seek? by James J. Kilpatrick
- 32 Fouling the Air: An Editorial

SR: Travel

- 35 Fall Travel Issue: America As a Pacific Nation. Articles by Horace Sutton, Arthur Goodfriend, Alan Moorehead, Herbert Gold, Neil Morgan, Anne Swensson, E. J. Kahn, Jr., Stanley Karnow, Richard Hughes, James Cunningham, E. Buzz Miller, Denby Fawcett, and Basil Atkinson.

SR: Communications

- 109 The Television Sports Hoax, by Richard L. Tobin
- 113 The Literary Agent—His Function, Life, Power, by Paul R. Reynolds

SR: Books

- 95 Literary Horizons, by Granville Hicks
- 95 Index of books reviewed

SR: Departments

- 6 Phoenix Nest: Martin Levin
- 14 Top of My Head: Goodman Ace
- 16 Trade Winds: Jerome Beatty, Jr.
- 20 Music to My Ears: Irving Kolodin
- 33 Letters to the Editor
- 90 The Theater: Henry Hewes
- 91 SR Goes to the Movies: Three film festival reports
- 96 Literary Crypt
- 106 Literary I.Q.
- 130 Kingsley Double-Croctic No. 1696

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Mrs. M. Price, N. Y. C.

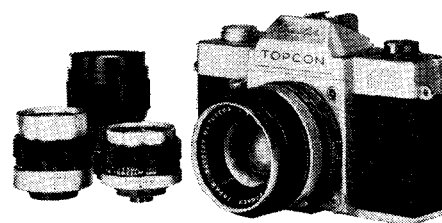
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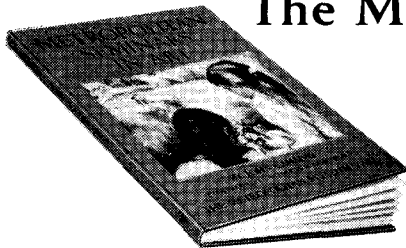
Are you one of many who admire the Mona Lisa for the wrong reasons?

PERHAPS, like so many people, you attribute the Mona Lisa's greatness to her enigmatic expression—to the fact that she "begins to smile," if looked at long enough. Or perhaps you are intrigued because her eyes seem to "follow you around the room" through some technique known only to Leonardo. Both of these common reactions are discussed in the very first portfolio of the Metropolitan Museum's Seminars in Art as prime examples of the superficial fashion in which most people look at paintings. As the portfolio points out, anyone who admires a painting solely because of its technical competence or the appeal of its subject matter is probably missing all that the artist is really trying to convey. A surprising number of otherwise cultivated persons have this blind spot when they stand before a famous work of art.

It was to remedy this situation that the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York devised an unusual program of *assisted self-education* in the understanding and appreciation of art. The invitation below is made to acquaint you with the thorough nature of the program and particularly its unique method of learning by *comparison among great paintings*.



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Out of Sorts

Edited by MARTIN LEVIN

Behind the Hair Curtain

WHEN I visited the Soviet Union recently, I found very few of the Iron Curtain problems I had expected, and I had quite a fine time. I drank a lot of vodka and champagne, and, being an eternally hungry man, I devoured glistening mountains of delicious, fresh, inexpensive caviar, though, unlike one of my Russian table companions, I never tried it for breakfast. I went to ballets and operas, and heard a Faust I'll never forget. I visited Lenin's cool, quiet, eerie tomb in Red Square—and felt self-conscious at having been let in ahead of several hundred waiting Russians. (Visitors accompanied by Intourist guides get special privileges, and nobody seems to mind.)

The hotel chambermaids were the most helpful I've encountered anywhere. They pressed suits at odd hours, and had to be coaxed into accepting tips. Once I left a bathtub full of socks and

underwear; I had no time to wash them so I just put them to soak. When I returned, I found everything had been washed and hung up to dry. Another day, I completed my laundry and went out sightseeing, aware that I hadn't done a good job; the white things looked far from white. When I got back to my room, I found everything had been re-laundered, and the white articles bleached.

So it went—one pleasant experience after another. But there was that Hair Curtain, which I encountered in, of all places, a post office.

Visitors in the Soviet Union are not permitted to receive mail at their hotels. They don't even know which hotel they will be assigned to until they arrive. Each visitor is given a number, designating a postal station at which he must call in person in order to receive his mail. Every day in Moscow my guide, a willowy blonde, escorted me to the station, and for the first few days I found letters awaiting me. But several I had been expecting had not yet arrived, and on

my last day, when we went to inquire, I was told there was nothing for me.

The postal clerk, whom I had not seen before, was a young girl with an unbelievably large mop of coarse, brown hair which fell to the sides, and forward, from a central part, and completely obliterated her face as she sat hunched over a sorting table. I watched, fascinated, as she started through the large stack she had pulled from a pigeonhole marked "J." She would lift one letter from the stack, brush her hair back, peer out at the address, and set the letter aside. Again and again the slow process was repeated. It was amusing for a few moments, but then I grew impatient—and fearful.

"Are you sure she has my name right?" I asked the guide.

"She has it," came the firm reply.

"But I have a last name for a first name," I said. "Sometimes that confuses people."

"I told her your name—both of your names."

"Perhaps you'd better write it out for her," I suggested.

Reluctantly, she printed my name on a note pad, underscored the last name, and held it out for the girl to see. After several thrashing motions of hands toward head, the girl looked at the note pad, nodded, and went back to more sorting and thrashing. When she reached the last letter she reported something in Russian to the guide, who told me that there was nothing for me.

"But I'm sure I must have something there," I said. "Would you ask her to look through the letters again?"

After a rather lengthy exchange in Russian, the clerk again started through the letters, of which there must have been fifty. Time dragged on, and it almost seemed as if her hair had become thicker, and longer. With every letter lifted from the stack came the frantic brushing back, a shake of the head, and the slow scrutiny. Maddening! Once more, as she reached the last letter, a negative report.

I looked sternly at the guide and expressed my doubts. Would it be possible, I asked, for *me* to look through the stack?

"There is obviously nothing for you," she said.

"But perhaps she missed some," I said. "She—"

"You *saw* her. She has looked *twice*. I don't believe you have any letters here today."

"But I *must* have," I said. "My wife writes frequently—nearly every day—and I haven't had a letter from her for several days. Surely they . . ."

"If she wrote you letters, and mailed them, they would be here," she said.

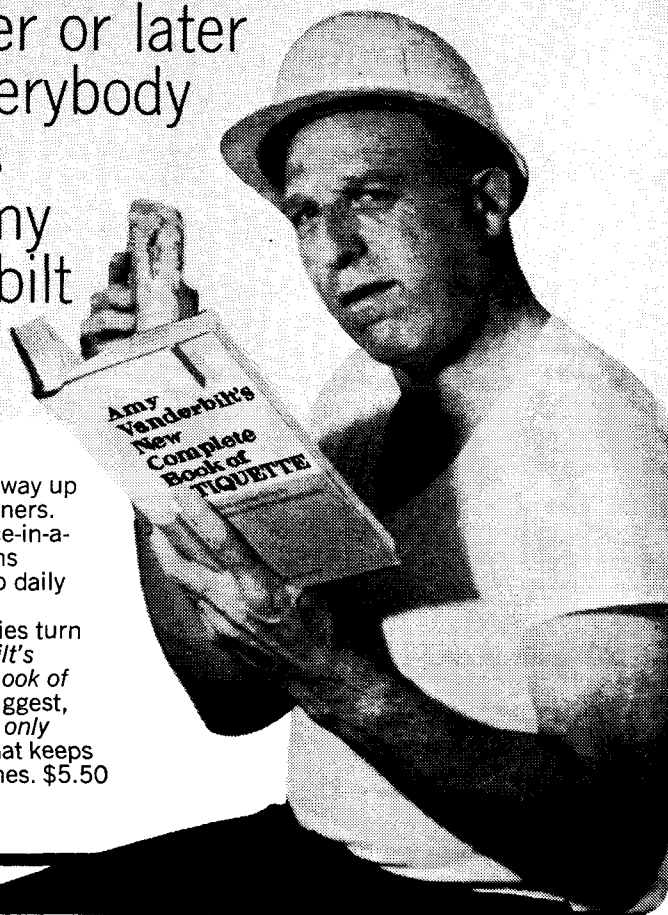
"But—"

She looked at her watch. "It is time

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now for us to continue your tour," she said. "We missed St. Basil's Cathedral yesterday, and you wanted to see it. If we—"

"Forget St. Basil's," I said. "I'm leaving here early tomorrow morning. If letters do arrive, can I have them forwarded to me in Leningrad?"

"Yes, of course," she said. "You must leave your forwarding address here, and there is a fee you must pay."

More conversation, in Russian, with Miss Mopnik, who groped around under the counter and finally came up with a form on which I wrote my name and Leningrad postal station number. I paid the small fee, and we started to leave.

"Wait," I said at the door. "I'm sure there must be some mail here for me. I'd like to look through those letters, myself. Please?"

"You will miss St. Basil's and the Exhibition of Economic Achievements, too," she said.

"Forget St. Basil's! And forget . . . achievements!" I sputtered. "I'm interested in my mail, and that's all!"

She shrugged, and we went back to the counter. The Hair Curtain was still lowered, and two fumbling hands beneath it were trying to rearrange the stack of letters. More Russian dialogue followed; I couldn't understand a word



of it, but it was long, and seemed to have sharp edges. At last the stack was shoved across the counter to me.

I began to go through it, slowly. There were letters from everywhere, and in all sizes and colors. Some of them were addressed in undecipherable handwriting, and many, I noted, were more than a month old. After I had looked, wistfully, at about a dozen, a familiar script

appeared, and there it was—a letter from my wife. I continued on, and found another, and directly beneath it, still another. By the time I had reached the bottom of the stack, I had found seven letters, each clearly and correctly addressed to me. One had been forwarded from Sydney, and another from Bangkok; the rest were directly from New York.

As I rammed them into my pocket, I couldn't resist a smug, satisfied glance at my guide, who merely shrugged. I glanced at the clerk, too, but of course she could not see me. She was waiting on someone else now, and the Hair Curtain was down. We left her there, thrashing and peering. We had time for a few minutes in St. Basil's, but we had to skip the Exhibition of Economic Achievements. —HAYES B. JACOBS.

The Prints and the Paupers

THE New York City administration's latest money-saver calls for important visitors to receive prints of City Hall instead of the usual key to the city. The keys used to run around \$17, but *Life* magazine has given some 500 prints to the Lindsay people for nothing.

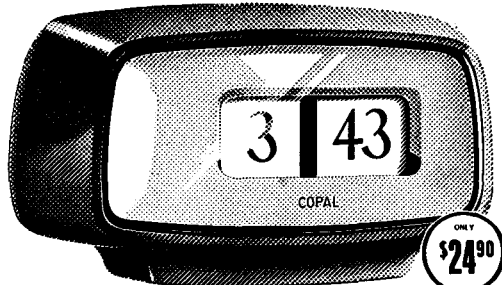
However, it still costs the city \$3 for the picture frame and the case, representing a net saving of \$14 for each customer or \$70 a year, since the city gives the glad hand to about five dignitaries annually—not counting Arabian monarchs.

A little quick arithmetic shows the city won't soon run out of prints. At the present rate there's enough on hand to last 100 years—well beyond the time old City Hall will have been torn down. With the \$3 as a base expenditure, the city can throw a little knickknack or trinket into the deal and still hold the overall cost around \$4.85 per king, or whoever else comes along. Even the \$4.85 doesn't necessarily represent a loss. There's a good chance that the city will break even or possibly make a profit on the visitor. If he blows into town with a sizeable retinue or goes on a spending spree, the city sales tax will easily nick him of \$4.85.

But there's a negative side to the new print arrangement. How can the mayor be sure he won't run into a little embarrassment? "From *Life*?" some potentate might thunder, tearing his print into little pieces and dropping them at the mayor's feet, "Why just last month we kicked their correspondent out of my country." And, of course, a visiting dignitary may not feel he's on the receiving end of something unique when Mayor Lindsay peels one of the prints from the pile. "Take one," he might say, "There's plenty more where this came from."

—J. J. HAGGERTY.

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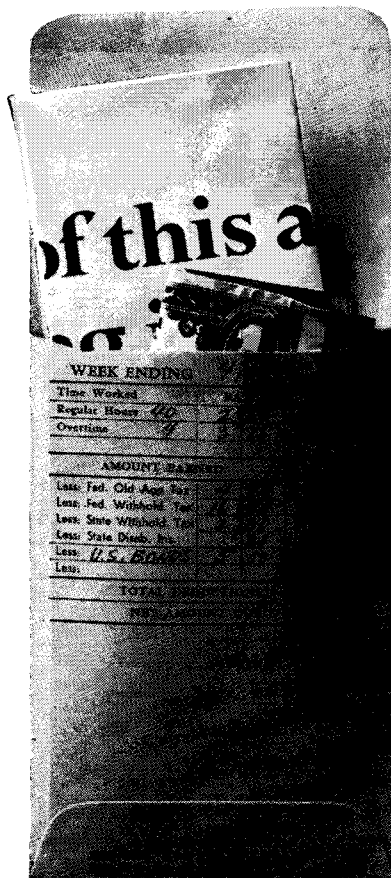
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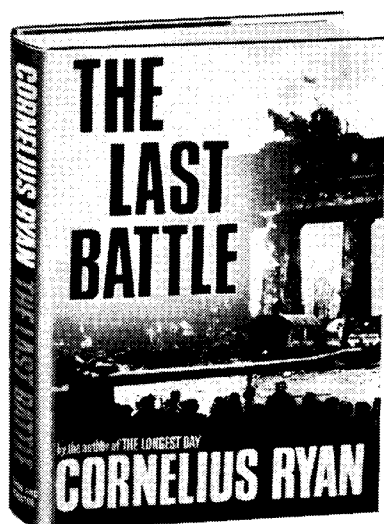
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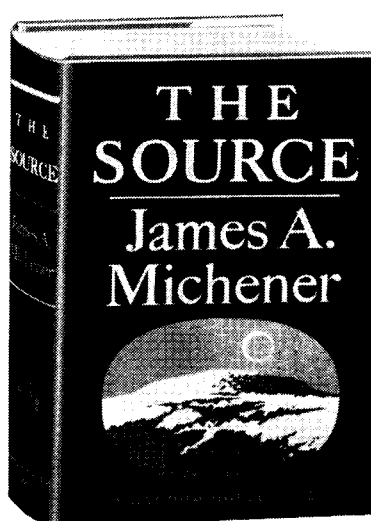
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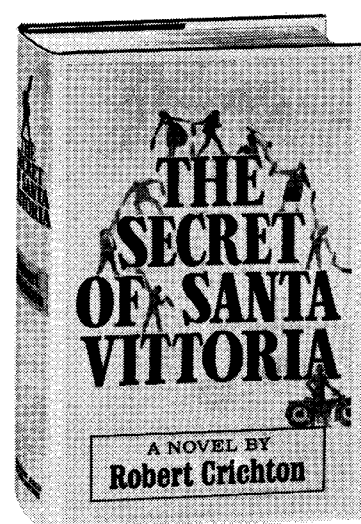
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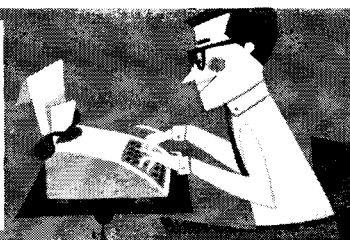
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Top of My Head



Sunset

IT ALWAYS SEEMS so damned unfair. So unprepared are we for the sudden news of a death, that even now it is difficult to accept the passing of Gertrude Berg. We know too well the inexorable pattern which in *finite* gathers us all to mother earth. But not Molly! Not so soon! She herself was mother to all earthlings.

It was only a year ago this month that Gertrude Berg sat quietly huddled in a remote corner of a TV studio in Brooklyn where they were preparing the Perry Como program. I came over and stood behind her, watching her softly rehearse to herself the lines she was to speak when she assumed the warm, matronly mantle of the universal mama, Molly Goldberg.

"What worries me most," she said to me, "is the singing. I never sang in public before. Do you think I'll be?"

I remembered that when she bustled busily around her kitchen her sentences had a way of ending like that.

"You'll be, you'll be," I said. "I'm sure you'll be."

"Yes?" she asked. Molly always had that quizzical look when you spoke to her, as if she were listening not only to what you were saying but also to what you were thinking.

She wasn't sure. She was worried. The duet which she and Perry were to sing that night was "Sunrise, Sunset," from *Fiddler on the Roof*, a haunting melody with poignant lyrics.

Sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years.

This was strange to her. And with the usual and painstaking care of a mistress of her craft she was wrestling with a new problem. Words set to music. Actually it wasn't the singing that should have troubled her. The lilt and the lament for the years that fly so swiftly had always been in her voice. But pacing lyrics to the tempo of music—this was something

else again. Softly she tried the line for me:

Sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years.

"Wonderful, Molly," I said. She was a tiny bit off key—ever so slightly—but it was truly and unmistakably Molly. And, of course, when they sang it, Perry would easily cover for her. She had been a guest on many of Perry's shows through the years and had always brightened the hour with her warmth and mama philosophy.

"It'll be like always, Molly. You've always been wonderful every season," I said.

She *kvelled* a little as she continued:

*One season, following another,
laden with happiness and tears.*

I reminded her that many years ago she had been a guest on the show and had brought along the two children of her radio program—Rosalie and Sammy. She nodded and smiled nostalgically.

*Where is the little girl I carried
where is the little boy at play?*

But now, several years later, both she and Perry were grandparents.

*I don't remember growing older,
when did they?*

Both were so suited to the tender pathos of the music and accompanying sonnet they were to perform that evening. It was destined to be a memorable three minutes of the hour.

The show itself was to be a happy meeting between Perry and Molly. It was the Thanksgiving program. According to script, Molly was to come on to invite Perry to the Goldberg home in the Bronx to a Thanksgiving dinner.

"This year," she said to Perry, "you're coming to my house for Thanksgiving, I hope?"

"I'm sorry, Molly," said Perry, "but I already have a dinner invitation. I'm eating with some friends."

Molly persisted:

"But Perele," she said, "you can't go out to eat on an empty stomach. Come to my house. I have a big turkey—I'll roast you—I'll stuff you. In all these years you've never been to my home."

Sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years.

Her audiences always purred with delight. Here was everyone's mother—who gathered her children to her ample bosom. And all was right with the world.

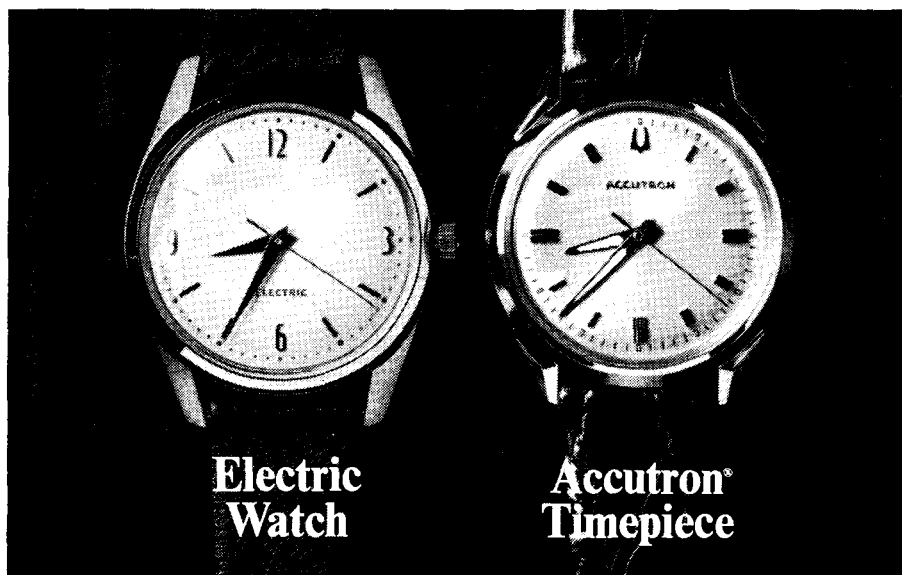
Sunrise . . .

Goodbye mama.

. . . Sunset.

—GOODMAN ACE.

SR/October 8, 1966



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