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Advertising with Machine Made Words

By T. M. PEARCE

MODERN science and invention have been prolific in the coinage and use of new words. Many of these are common nouns given to new mechanisms or to new manufactured products needing names. Such are the common nouns spinning-jenny, autogiro, orthophonic, escalator, stethoscope, laryngoscope, heterodyne, linoleum, cellulose, and rayon. Many more new forms are proper nouns or trade names copyrighted by commercial institutions who count the use of the name of an article in terms of dollars and cents. Such are Pyrex, a glass capable of withstanding sudden changes in temperature, Cop-r-loy, a copper alloyed steel, Crisco, a cooking oil, Celotex, a fibre board substituting for wall plaster, Duco, an automobile paint, and Odorono, a toilette lotion. This group of words has been called robot words, because they are artificially compounded words, not current in the speech belonging to the body of language. They are proper names like Smith or Jones and not nouns like man or neighbor. The term robot is drawn from the play by Capek, *R. U. R.* or *Ressum's Universal Robots*. Capek's robots were mechanical men produced in the laboratory. Robot words are mechanical words produced from the stuff of language but not really a part of language. Yet there are robots which, like the two individuals in Capek's play, find the spark of life and almost become genuine language. Victrola is one of them; it is almost as much a part of language as phonograph. Frigidaire comes as quickly to our lips as electric refrigerator, and tarvia is interchangeable with asphalt. Oleomargarine, bakelite, pyralin, keds are no longer thought of in initial capital letters. They have become generic terms for the special objects they signify. Yet the majority of robots are still shadow words, skulking around the language world looking for a home, in some cases menacing honest upright

words whose place they will usurp, in other cases, offering to come in and join the family of language sociably and helpfully.

Robots are on every side of us. We cannot go to a grocery store, a drug store, a hardware store, a motor supply office without meeting them. No merchandising spot is free from them, and since none of us can keep out of the marts of business in every respect, robots are dinned in our ears constantly, flashed before our eyes incessantly, and sputtered from our lips inevitably as we try to keep the larder stored, the car running, or the baby well.

BiSoDol, Zinsep, Kisko, Navan, Gastrogen, Skin-Tone, Dentyne, Noxzema, Kigo, Permatex—

Robots to right of us

Robots to left of us

Volley and thunder.

Agarol, Analax, Conoco and Delco, Felstone, Carbona, and Rubifoam—gas and electric signs flash them up and down again:

Robots, robots, moving up and down again

Robots, robots,

There's no dodging them far.

Robots may be classified into three types: those composed of the severed members of other words; those imitating authentic words, sometimes disguised only by simplified spelling; and those devised of original combinations of sound, some of which, like such echo words as pop, rattle, fizz, try to produce by sound something like the effect of the product itself. Representing the first group—derivatives from other words are:

Evenrude—a detachable motor-driven propeller.

Trubite—trade name for a type of teeth.

Talkies—not talking pictures but cough candy.

Walkos—tablets supplying ingredients needed by baby chicks and adult chickens suspected of roup, sneezing, wheezing and colds.

Robots imitating authentic words by combinations like them in sound and appearance are:

Lagarg—a throat alleviant and cleanser.

Playmayd—a trade name for a porcelain washing machine, a word especially subtle because of the delicate balance it achieves between the wash maid at play (even though she be the lady of the house) and the suggestion of the machine itself as a playmate.

Bildcost—the trade name appearing in *Better Homes and Gardens Magazine* for an offer to provide you with plans and build your house.

Lyko—a general tonic said to be "As Strengthening as the Bracing Sea Breeze."

Robots approaching greater originality because they come closer to pure sound values (although their sources are in some cases recognizable) are: Calox, Tanlac, Apco, Usco, and Zupon.

Not all these sounds are unpleasant. True some are scratchy and rasping: Uniflex, Nacto, Calox. Others sound like shell-fire or the thud of gloves in the ring: Kleenex, Sheltex, Gyplak, Socony. But there are siren robots, too, "soothing as the creamy curd," alluring and seductive words like "collyrium," or "calbisma," "octane" and "verazeptol." The last is lovely enough to grace the heroine of a romantic novel. Verazeptol, our heroine, could be pursued by the villain *Gyplak*, rescued by the upright hero *Octane* and triumph over the scarlet vampire *Colbisma* by permission of all the copyright owners.

As robots float in the air or drift before the eye, most of us are aware of occasional sonorous wordbodies, reminiscent of the hours we sat before commentaries, letters, orations in a language now formally pronounced dead. And if we stress certain trade robots like *Mercurex*, *Rexall*, *Acqua Velva*, *Verichrome*, *Penachrome*, *Lux*, *Thermafill*, we immediately recognize the classic tradition in modern advertising.

In an age in which the classics are notably slighted, in which dead languages flew out the window when up-to-date education came in at the door, it is somewhat impressive and puzzling to find these cast-out tongues stealing back, not as beggars or vagabonds, but in bright and shining prosperity on the polished surfaces of widely purchased contemporary products. The isolated teacher of Caesar, Cicero, Horace can look with some amusement at an industrialized and commercialized world flocking to purchase both its necessities and its luxuries in the tag ends of the noble speech of Antony and Virgil. But who furnishes this pedlar-Latin and pedlar-Greek? Probably not the surprised teachers of these neglected subjects. We know that college laboratories have named the graded scale of elements in chemistry and the classifications in the other sciences as well. Perhaps it is the college trained men in commercial laboratories who do the christening of standard brands when they go to market. How nice to be in at the christening of a new throat spray or a new mouth wash like Extol or Emeleo! Is there some little ceremony, some few words of dedication, some gently breathed hopes for the future of the infant as it launches into the cold, cold world, where there are so many other children good and bad who will compete with him; and a final benediction that whether little Extol or little Emeleo is popular or not he will never bring reproach upon the noble house that sends him forth?

Our modern Renaissance has produced "the language of the machine" built with the cold precision of the scientific mind and the hectic and florid imagination of the sales agent. What can we expect of modern style when the ears of all of us ring with these strange polysyllables, these whimsies of sound, this thundering jargon of antiquity? Let me illustrate from an advertisement of one of the best known present day makes of automobile:

The rear springs, with transverse double cantilever shackling at both ends for free movement, is held in

spring perches that extend back of the axle, and is slightly bowed outward enabling it to clear the differential housing. All driving and braking stress is brought to the heavy frame cross member through the torque tubes and radius rods. Four of the newest type of Houdaille double-acting, self-adjusting, hydraulic shock absorbers are used, etc., etc.

"Thermostats", "synchronizing", "toggle grips", and "air drag", add to the air of heavy information and erudition. The staunchest layman becomes hypocritical when he faces a conversation with phrases like synchro-mesh, helical gears, pantherized, microphytic, germ-processed oils, iso-octane and heptane fuels, pyro-action plugs, and Servo internal-expanding centrifused drums.

The learned ogre of the service station or the repair shop is the new pedant. The automobile salesman is the new scholastic, conjuring miracles of salesmanship with a vocabulary the very sound of which would frighten a Bacon or an Aquinas. These are the new language improvers, beside whom the greatest Latinist in our colleges will be a linguistic patriot.

It is all the language of the machine—whether in the measurement of mind or of generator current—marvellous in its combination of explicit definition and dignified generality. A term like transmission, for instance, covers all the co-ordinated parts which, supplied power and given direction, go to make the machine move. But it is a word of much deeper significance as well. There is philosophic import in it. We can imitate success. Everyone has a transmission; let him improve it with synchro-mesh and free wheeling and helical speed gears. Why remain, symbolically speaking, in the stages of the old model T? What we all need is better torque tubes, universal joints, and spring shackles, either front semi-elliptic overslung type, or rear semi-elliptic under-slung type, with solenoid or electric magnet operated starters and dash push button controls, steeldraulic brakes, multi-beam headlights equipped with assymetrical passing

light, twin tail lights, electric gasoline gauges, fender lights, and batteries under front seat, with twin synchronized horns, greater generator capacities, and by all means radio sets built in for long and short waves with distant range aerial controls.

U. S. 40

By JOHN VAN MALE

It closes down flat on the earth
No sky it lies over the earth air and earth as one
Prairie the plains no place on earth so strongly grips
All gray brown blue dissolved together faded by everlasting
 sun
No life except in this machine the horned larks scattering
Ten miles to Deertrail miles and miles again
A scuttling bug across it trailing dust
Buffalo by the million Cheyennes Arapahoes
Hostile silent subdued but hostile still
Unbroken Comanches Utes deep irony and hate
It won't relent a spell an Indian land theirs still
Slow down nothing but light just light.