

OVERRATED & UNDERRATED



THE BUNGLES AT THE OUTSET OF ONE OF THEIR SQUALID ADVENTURES IN 1935.

competent by today's standards, his drawing hardly came up to the cartooning virtuosity of some contemporaries like Billy DeBeck (*Barney Google*), Frank King (*Gasoline Alley*), or Cliff Sterrett (*Polly and Her Pals*), and his humor was hardly ever as surprising as, say, Elzie Segar (*Thimble Theater*) or Milt Gross (*Nize Baby*). Still, the patina of time serves Chic Young's work well; the strip towers like a monument of wit and artistry over most of today's offerings.

Most Underrated Comic Strip: My reservations about *Blondie* have to do with its blandness: It not only portrays tepid middle-class values, it embodies them. Contrast this with my candidate for most underrated comic strip in our history: Harry Tuthill's *The Bungle Family*, a domestic comedy strip that ran off and on from 1924 to 1945 and was fairly popular in its day but rarely gets a mention in books on the medium—and has certainly never been honored with a U.S. government postage stamp, as *Blondie* has. Tuthill's grubby, uningratiating drawing style and the verbose density of his balloon prose hardly make a good first impression; Tuthill's genius was as a writer able to put over one of the darkest visions of American life this side of Nathanael West. The lower-middle-class Bungles, George and Josephine, have no more charm than the style they're drawn in. They're petty, mean-spirited, with no self-awareness, constantly bickering and ackbiting between themselves as well

as with their neighbors and landlords. There is no one panel or sequence that can encapsulate this strip's sardonic qualities: Hell is in the details that accumulate in the repeated daily doses that the newspaper-comics theater can

provide. Tuthill's misanthropic vision (he's the funny pages' Céline) is painfully real, though the strip careened through surreal episodes, especially in its later years, that included visitors from outer space and time travel. Visually deadpan, genuinely hilarious once you tune into its frequency, with a great ear for dialogue and an unsurpassed sense of character, *The Bungle Family* grows on the reader like a fungus until, like all great art, it becomes a central reference point in one's way of understanding the world.

—Art Spiegelman is the author most recently of *Open Me... I'm a Dog!*

Economist

BY JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

Most Overrated Economist: By far the most overrated economist in the Amer-

Fashion Trend

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Fashion trends do not submit to rating—they are for passion, loathing, or indifference—but I will lend myself to the idea for a minute.

Most Overrated Fashion Trend: The alleged abolition of corsets during the second decade of this century. **The Most Underrated:** The permanent shortening of skirts during the same period.

Corseting, which gives a desirable line to the dressed body, has been a feature of human dress for millennia, undertaken by both sexes at different times, and it has never been abolished, only differently applied. In this century, for example, the corset gave way to the bra and girdle, simply moving the constriction away from the center. The vast social and moral significance attached to the temporary shift from small to large female waists around 1913 has always been laughable.

Women's skirts, on the other hand, had also been long for several thousand years, and getting them permanently off the ground was a real triumph for sex, society, and fashion. Women's legs and feet were at last seen to function in ordinary life, not just on the stage. Complete female humanity could not be seen to combine with feminine allure until the head, arms, and bosom were connected to the feet and legs in the ordinary look of clothed women. Pants were only an extension of that initial revolutionary move.

—Anne Hollander is the author most recently of *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*.



CORSETING: NEVER ABOLISHED.

ican tradition but of France, who dominated (as it is no longer). Before then, not getting an award if one was a lawyer. The law of goods and services system enforces by violence. The age of pure demand—no effects.

In 1936 Maynard F. Eral realized undoubtedly its rents, or al to buy to be spent. The disagreeable however de of the time destroyed S

Most Underrated: The permanent shortening of skirts during the same period. The Theory of the market, now g

