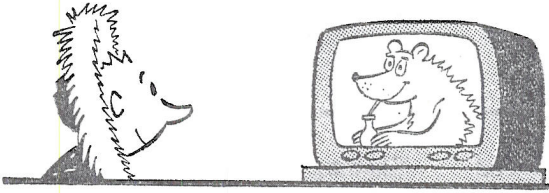


# Terrence O'Flaherty



## I'd Rather Be Right Than Rather

THIS IS the first week of a presidential election year and already it is evident that television is going to be the amphitheater in which it is won or lost.

Down in Texas Lyndon Johnson is taping another of his knotty-pine conversations with Walter Cronkite titled "Lyndon Johnson Talks Politics" — gabbing away with the happy abandon of a man who stepped out of the smoke-house just before lightning hit it.



President Nixon

Over on ABC, newsman Howard K. Smith was deflating both Mr. Nixon and Senator Edmund Muskie by saying neither one is a winner on his own and predicting this will be the first election decided by the Vice Presidential Candidates.

Meanwhile, the personality of Richard Nixon is thawing noticeably under the TV lights. Sunday's session with CBS's Dan Rather displayed him in fine form as the only politician in history who begins his answer before the reporter has finished his question. (He can always "qualify" it to the press the next day.)

NEWSMAN RATHER handled his scoop with assurance but I noticed that he asked his most touchy question from behind the protection of his competitors: "Before we went into this broadcast — I sought questions from many of my colleagues in the White House press corps and I think I should tell you that the following question was among the most popular of those submitted . . ." "Popular with THEM," interrupted Mr. Nixon.

"Yes, and I hope it will be with you. Public opinion polls have indicated that the American people in an overwhelming majority give you high marks for decisiveness and a willingness to change but in the case of the Harris Poll about 50 per cent said that you have failed to inspire confidence and faith and lack personal warmth and compassion. why do you suppose that is?"

"Well, it's because people tell the pollsters that, of course, so that's what the people must believe," said Mr. Nixon. "But on the other hand, without trying to psychoanalyze myself — because that's YOUR job — I would simply answer the question by saying that my strong point is not rhetoric. It isn't chop and chip. It isn't big promises — those things that breed the glamor and the excitement that people call charisma and warmth.



Dan Rather

"My strong point — if I have a strong point — is performance. I always do more than I say and I always produce more than I promise. Oh, I don't mean that from to time I haven't made promises I was unable to keep but generally speaking whether in the foreign or domestic field I believe that actions are what count and also I think that's what the country needs at this particular point."

THE FINAL QUESTION in a fast moving hour was the only one which caused Mr. Nixon to pause:

"Mr. President I'm going to be in trouble at home if I don't ask this question . . ."

"Home at CBS?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"No home with Mrs. Rather . . . some political leaders and some others have taken to not addressing women by 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' but have gone to 'Ms.' Why not with White House letters?"

(Long pause) "Uh, I, I guess I'm a little old fashioned, uh, but, uh, I rather prefer the Miss or Mrs. But if they want to do it the other way of course we accept it. I can assure you some of the things that come in letters are quite amusing . . . But I want to help you with Mrs. Rather when you go home, and simply say as far as I'm concerned I have the greatest respect for women in both capacities — those who are home-makers and those who decide to go into politics or business — but let us have freedom of choice for women."

"Thank you, Mr. President," said Ms. Rather's husband.