

# The Fearless Spectator

## Charles McCabe

### Robust Prose

MY FRIEND, Joseph J. O'Donohue IV, of San Francisco, reminded me recently of the decline of sulphurous political comment in our land. As one of the more recent examples of this deadly genre, he recalled the salty words written by his great friend, Lucius Beebe, on the subject of Richard M. Nixon. The words appeared in this very journal.

Mr. Beebe opened up by calling the man, in October 1962, "a rabble-rousing creep." And he continued: "You will understand that there is no taint of political treason in my thinking. I was born a Republican, have consistently voted Republican, including the candidacy of this offensive Nixon, and will die a Republican."



"Simply, this man is an offense, a hypocritical rabble-rousing mucker from the wrong side of the tracks and spattered with moral and factual cow flop from heels to hair. He is a major street accident on the Republican front lawn and should be removed for reasons of ordinary sanitation."

Powerful stuff, to be sure. Not for nothing was Mr. Beebe known as a chap who wore no man's choler but his own. His spleen was of the finest vintage. We just don't have his like any more, and pity. The average political "satirist" today invents people with funny names like Luther P. Logorrhea, and puts vaguely seditious opinions in his mouth, in such a way that neither the left nor the right is too much offended. Such writing tends to give politicians the feeling that the writer is talking not about him; but about the other guy. These writers, some of them admirably skilled, tend to be more a safety-valve than a battering ram.

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AS A DEMOCRAT born and bred, I am stuck on the same dilemma about George McGovern as Mr. Beebe was about the wonder boy from Whittier. I don't feel bilious about McGovern, or particularly angry about him. He just sends me the bad vibes, all the time. The Eternal Scoutmaster makes me uncomfortable every time I see him on the screen, or hear him talk. To be ruled by him would, I think, be like being ordered about by a mass of Jello.

Television and the Gallup poll, the electronic successors to the soapbox and the district captain, have turned politics into a rather dirty little adversary proceeding between the candidate and the electorate. The polls tell the polls how to think on each and every subject. Then he gets on the tube and regurgitates the spinach he has just been fed. This is called leadership.

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THIS DOES, in theory, produce a government by consensus, which is a kind of democracy. The other way of describing the process is: Being all things to all men. This produces a uniquely slippery kind of anti-hero, of which Mr. Nixon is the living definition. From the polls to the telly, and back from the telly to the polls, Mr. Nixon is all blandishments and cajolery.

He wants to make us feel safe with him. He has even discovered the political value of boredom. We are seldom actively mad at those who bore us.

Then, too, thanks to our peculiar electoral system, the first act a President performs on entering the White House is something designed to see that he is elected the next time. A very high percentage of all his acts during his first term is dictated by this same consideration. This is unfair to the President as an administrator, and unfair to the country to be led by a man whose attentions are so greatly diverted to his own succession.

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IT IS MY melancholy view that, come November, no matter which way the vote goes, we are going to be saddled with the worst President the country has ever had. If Mr. Nixon is reelected, and has no place farther to go, it's fair to believe that he will reveal his true colors. I don't like the thought of that glaring palette. We've seen it before. If we get McGovern, we get a cold fish, even now a bit on the turn.