

ic freedom root and branch, or even as an antiintellectual. But he came close, dwelling plaintively on the virtues of unfettered inquiry.

All in all, Mr. Bundy had no case. Beneath the polished, upper-Bostonian rhetoric

was the gross presumption that the business community should participate in its own murder and support unquestioningly the new patrician class in America, the solons of the academy. He is quite

right that inquiry is presently trammelled on campus, but that is largely because timid corporations have failed to fund the researches and politics that run counter to the Ford Foundation's orthodoxies. □

William F. Gavin

The Art of the Speechwriter

Robert Shrum, Mr. McGovern's senior speech writer, urged the inclusion of the theme, "Come home, America," in the Senator's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. Now, Mr. Shrum said, he questions the political wisdom of such an approach.

New York Times, November 9, 1972

MR. ROBERT SHRUM should be given a place in the Speechwriters' Hall of Fame. He is probably the first speechwriter who has ever publicly admitted that one of his ideas was, perhaps, not entirely useful. Speechwriting is not a field in which the virtue of humility and the readiness to admit failure or even misjudgment are conspicuous. Trying to get his material accepted by the boss and arguing with the boss' other aides who claim to know much more about rhetoric and subject matter than the writer take up most of his time and leave little room for the development of such virtues.

Added to all this is the gnawing doubt, fed by critics who see speechwriting as a rhetorical con-game played on the electorate, that he is doing something disreputable in the first place. Professional pride and a coarse Irish-American prejudice against unemployment tend to make me believe that speechwriting is a necessary and even desirable part of the political process, but it must be admitted that not everyone shares this view. The furor in the press over Vice President Ford's use of a speech drafted by White House writers is an example of the public confusion surrounding the role of the speechwriter.

To judge by media accounts, Ford mindlessly mouthed the words of sinister White House wordsmiths whose commas, semicolons, and rhetorical flourishes were taken as sacred scripture by the zombie-like victim of executive action. I must confess there have been times when I have secretly lusted for such a power over those for whom I have written speeches, but the unromantic facts of speechwriting life are, alas, quite different. Although I have no personal knowledge of the Ford incident, my hunch is that because of his heavy speaking schedule he needed a speech, had some White House writer draft one, looked it over, made some changes, added a few words, read it over a few times, and then delivered it. In short, the White House speechwriters offered this service for the simple reason that somebody has to provide a speech draft and Ford didn't have his own speechwriters at the time. If, on the other hand, it was a case of Ford playing puppet to the writers' ventriloquist, then it is a

glaring exception to the general rule. The relationship between a politician and a speechwriter is something far more complicated than the popular wisdom would suggest. Most speechwriters are neither Svengalis nor Uriah Heeps. They do a personal and often exasperating—but ultimately rewarding—job for someone they not only work for but believe in, neither dominating nor grovelling before their boss.

How does one become a speechwriter? There are, thank God, no courses in Creative Speechwriting in the universities. There is no Speechwriters Union. No employment agency advertises openings in Speechwriting. In my own experience with the Nixon staff, I found myself (a former teacher) working with Bill Safire (a public relations man), Pat Buchanan and Ray Price (former editorial writers for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, respectively), Lee Huebner (a professor and one of the co-founders of the Ripon Society), and Jim Keogh (former executive editor of *Time*). Since I left the White House staff John McLaughlin, a Catholic priest, became one of the President's speechwriters. It seems clear that there is no single background or way of life from which speechwriters come.

Speechwriting, I have found, is a group process at worst and a partnership at best. A good writing team consists of a writer, a political office, a research office, and the boss. The speechwriter must be prepared to contend with and learn from the political advisors to his man, plus those experts whose guidance is necessary in writing about complex fields, e.g., farm policy, and just about everyone who has access to the man—and finally, the man himself. All of this is bad for the ego—and a writer has more than his share of self-esteem—but necessary for the job. The problem is that while few are likely to claim expertise in the field of the novel or political reporting, almost everyone connected with a political office claims to know what makes a speech work. The damndest thing about such claims is they are not wholly wrong. A political speech is such a mystery, such an unpredictable thing, that it very often happens a semiliterate, old-time political hack will be able to smell out a rotten part of a speech draft while someone with a doctorate in English will not. Thus, a paradox: a speechwriter whose strength lies in his individuality, in his own crazy, unique way of looking at the world must at the same time not only tolerate but welcome the advice of others whose literary skills

are, to put it in the mildest terms, questionable.

Perhaps a case history of one speech might serve as an example of the teamwork necessary to create a useable draft. It is not a typical case history—there is no typical case history—but it does contain enough elements of the speechwriting process to be instructive.

On this occasion, the Nixon campaign staff was in Key Biscayne for a weekend during the 1968 campaign. It was Columbus Day weekend and there were disquieting signs in the polls, not quite ominous (as they later would most definitely be), but nothing to ignore.

I got a call in my room at the Key Biscayne Hotel. Jim Keogh, head of the speechwriting team, told me we were all to meet in the lobby at one o'clock and then go to the Nixon house, about a half mile away. He didn't say what we would be doing once we got there, but it didn't matter. The boss wanted to see the writers and that was that.

We went by car to the Nixon home, where, besides the writing team of Keogh, Pat Buchanan, Ray Price, Bill Safire, and me, there were Nixon's advisors Bryce Harlow, Bob Finch, and Martin Anderson.

The candidate came into the room. He sat in a chair on the side of the room farthest from me, near the glass-paneled doors facing Biscayne Bay. He looked tan and fit. He motioned to Bryce Harlow with his hand. "Bryce, you know this but let me say it so everyone knows." He then spent the next few minutes talking about the need for a concerted effort to be made by all of us during the last three weeks of the campaign. There was to be, he said, a kind of radio blitz in which he would make a half-dozen or more radio speeches of the kind he did before the convention (Ray Price's "Black Capitalism" speech being one of the best-known and best-publicized examples).

After that, the division of labor was made. Price would handle so-and-so, Harlow would do such-and-such. The list of important topics was dwindling. Finally he said, "O.K., let's see, we have—conservation . . . Gavin can handle that." After a few more words he stopped and we all left the house.

I had an assignment. There was only one problem. I didn't know a damn thing about conservation.

I was given a deadline for my draft. We returned to the road and in one stop I locked myself in a hotel room and worked on the speech throughout the night, referring to dozens of memos and position papers and some material that was coming

into the hotel from our New York offices over the "twix," a machine that copies documents that are transmitted by phone.

I finally came out of that room with a draft. I had snipped and cut and scotch-taped whole globs of material from the research and thus learned one of the great secrets of the speechwriter's art: how to use a pair of scissors and rolls of tape.

At this stage of the process, different techniques are used by different staffs. In the case of the conservation speech, we used the Keogh technique which means that once the original draft left my hands I never saw it again. Other staffs use different techniques. My writer's ego prefers another crack at a first draft, but Keogh's policy was reasonable.

The candidate ultimately delivered a speech quite close to my original draft. I mention this not to place undue emphasis on the quality of the draft, but to point out that a writer never really knows just how or even if his draft is going to be delivered until he hears the words coming from the mouth of the boss. Sometimes the spoken words and the words of the original draft are the same. More often than not, however, the boss will have done something different: added, deleted, expanded . . . you never know.

All of which brings me to the final point: a speechwriter has to be sensitive enough to be hurt every time his stuff isn't used, but tough enough to know that there are going to be times when some or even all of his stuff will be ignored by the boss. That is the nature of the business, and those who are not emotionally or professionally prepared to accept that fact should go into another writing field. Political speechwriting demands that the writer recognize that what he is doing is producing raw material from which another is going to pick and choose, to do with as he wants.

All in all, I suppose speechwriters can be divided into two categories: first, there is the speechwriter who puts the emphasis on "writer" as in *speechwriter*. His strength is in his love of words for their own sake, for nuances and cadences and rhythms and the ability and desire to write and rewrite until the thing glows and shines. His drawbacks are that speechwriting simply doesn't allow enough time for the kind of care he wishes to give to his creations.

The second kind of speechwriter puts the emphasis on "speech" as in *speechwriter*. He knows that speechwriting isn't to be confused with poetry or *belles lettres*, that it must stand or fall on its own peculiar rules

and that the most important rule is to get the thing done in good enough shape either to be delivered to an audience or to be reworked by the boss. His strength is in his ability to see speechwriting as a partnership, to be willing to listen to others whose literary taste may be limited, but whose political savvy is priceless. His weakness lies in his inability to transmit to a political speech the kind of outside help it needs, the kind that comes only from an association with and a love of literature and language.

The *speechwriter* can grind the stuff out and most of it is pretty good; the *speechwriter* doesn't work so well on demand but comes up with phrases that are alive and jumping up and down all over the text waiting to become sounds. A lucky politician has one of each on his staff. A really lucky politician has one writer who is both.

The speechwriter must try to solve the big problem: you have to give the boss what he wants—but you also have to give him what he needs. They are not always synonymous. The second worst mistake a speechwriter can make is to begin to think that he knows better than the boss what the boss needs; the worst mistake is to give him only what he thinks he wants. □

Paul P. Somers, Jr.

Necroliberation: A Theory of Justice

ONE OF THE MOST oppressed segments of the American population today is the dead; no other group has contributed so much and received so little in return. For the extinct, segregation and blatant discrimination have been primary characteristics of American political and social life since that English settlement vanished from Roanoke Island nearly four hundred years ago.

In no state of the Union, for example, is a dead person permitted to own property, no matter how much he might have accumulated during his lifetime. *Robbery* is the only term for this grave crime committed by a greedy state on behalf of grasping heirs.

A full chronicle of the raped rights of the dead would fill a law library, but a few representative statutes will give some idea of the scope of these infringements. In Indiana, for example, it is unlawful to dance with a dead person. Deceased persons, referred to hereafter as DPs, may not purchase liquor by the drink in Louisiana. California forbids a DP to register at a hotel or motel. Similarly, it is illegal there for a person who is living to share a hotel or motel room with one who is not. In New Mexico, Nevada, and Connecticut, a dead one may not succeed himself to state or national elective office. Georgia will not permit a DP to play in a marching band, while in neither Florida nor New Hampshire may one who is no longer living ride in a railroad passenger car. DPs in Michigan may not massage or be massaged for pay by a member of the opposite sex. The state of New York forbids them to drive

cars, but a person who becomes deceased on an underground passenger train is entitled to ride through to his stop, provided he has retained his ticket stub.

The federal government has also kept its oppressor's eye on this class of outcasts, providing prison terms for DPs found guilty of assembling in groups of five or more. Such outrages are common, with the Deadmann Act, which makes it a federal crime to transport a dead person across state lines for immoral purposes, being one of the most notorious.

"But what can I do?" you ask, wringing your little hands, "I, who am, after all, just one person, one atom in the manswarm?"

To begin with, we can all watch our language. How many times have you found yourself saying: "That guy's a dead ringer for my Aunt Laverne?"

Now, think how that must hurt.

Or, have you ever . . . I must admit that I have . . . have you ever been in "dead earnest?" Do you have trouble getting off "dead center?" Probing still deeper into your secret prejudices, ask yourself if you'd want your daughter to marry one.

The road of the righteous is a narrow one, and greasy water flows deep in the gutters.

Yet, it's not enough that we merely raise our own level of consciousness; we must act forcefully for positive social good. The next time you hear a mummy joke, gently remind the would-be humorist that departed denizens have rights and feelings, too. And if that doesn't work, ask him if he'd like to meet his ancestors.

There are still other, more emphatic ac-

tions, like taking a defunct one to lunch. Think how bored and hungry they must get, hanging around all the time without any rights or highs or anything. Help a DP change a tire or cross the street. A concerned woman knowing a dead lady who's been letting herself go, might give her some hair-styling tips, or show her how to apply eyeshadow.

The final stage in the struggle is, of course, political involvement; revolutions aren't won by making Johnny Carson apologize for smirking as he says: "my monologue is dying." Terminated taxpayers are exploited because they are politically powerless. And it's no wonder: without due process, their names are removed from the voter lists (except in Chicago) as soon as they die. Surely, one good court case should be sufficient to end this travesty. When the Declaration of Independence sets forth certain inalienable rights, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," it nowhere excludes the no-longer-with-us from the umbrella of its benefits. Obviously, removing the dead from the voting rolls deprives them of liberty, which is dearer than life.

While the courts are deciding this issue, other steps may be taken. DPs should refuse to relinquish their suffrage, making it plain to living kin that any effort to report their death will be resisted. If the government isn't informed of the death, it can't steal the vote. DPs as well as their living advocates should immediately begin writing to their elected officials. Just imagine the impact on a congressman who receives