

—explanation of the modest legislative achievement of the Kennedy Administration is the different constituencies of the President and Congress. Congress represents the nation in terms of local groups and interests, while the President represents it as a whole and particularly its *national* interests and currents of opinion. Congress thus has a vested interest in promoting local claims and ignoring national claims, while the President seeks to emphasize national goals and problems at the expense of parochialism. Add to this the rural imbalance that is characteristic of the Senate and, through malapportionment and obsolete district patterns, of the House as well, and the difficulty is compounded.

The President's prime weapon for influencing policymaking is his ability to command and influence a national audience. In theory a public which he has convinced will communicate its desires to Capitol Hill, and action will result. But Congress by its nature is far less responsive to national currents of opinion than to local pressures. Furthermore, well over half the membership comes from safe seats and is immune to anything but a virtual tidal wave of popular demand. Only events, rarely Presidents alone, can produce opinion of this intensity. Finally, many of the most powerful individuals on the Hill, the committee chairmen, are from the safest districts and hence the most insulated from any White House-generated pressure.

THE consequences of recent Supreme Court decisions on legislative apportionment may help make Congress more amenable to the influence the President can bring to bear from the electorate. His basic power position must remain essentially the same, however. He confronts the checks and balances and planned frictions of the American constitutional system, which no degree of mastery of the media or further expansion of the Presidential image can neutralize. Thus, in the last analysis, those who lament the limits of Executive power, rather than those who fear strong Presidents, may have the better case.

Since little is likely to be done constitutionally to strengthen the President's hand, his ability to lead and mold public opinion, for all its inherent limitations, must remain his prime reliance. American parties and the American public will do well to bear this in mind as they act in their mysterious ways to fill the office—and hardly less as they fill the Vice Presidency. More than ever before in the history of the Republic, the times demand strong Presidents, and, more than ever before, the strong President will be the skilful leader and molder of public opinion throughout the country he serves.

SR/January 2, 1965

Meanwhile, Back at the Plot...

By WILLIAM WALDEN

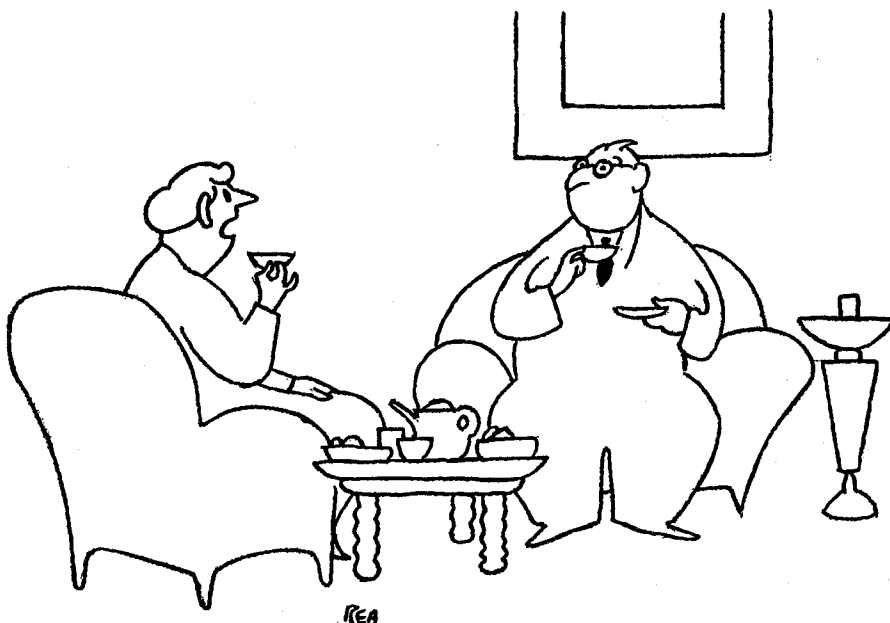
IN THE SHORT STORY I was reading—the author and title of which I shall not identify, for reasons that will be obvious later—the lovely young wife had just confessed, under unremitting pressure from her much older, insanely jealous husband, to having succumbed to the blandishments of his best friend and spent the previous night with him. Would the husband erupt in a towering rage? Collapse in a state of shock? Icily order her out of the house? Search out his best friend and kill him? In an agony of suspense I read on:

For several moments he stared at her, dumb with incredulity. In the unnatural silence, the old clock on the mantel clacked away rhythmically. Downstairs, the swishing of the housekeeper's broom could be heard in a sibilant, mocking refrain. On the next block a motorist blasted his horn at a dilatory pedestrian. Far off, a train whistle hooted faintly and derisively, as if...

I never learned what the wronged husband did, for at that point the story and I parted company. I could have exercised the reader's prerogative of skipping ahead, but years of overexposure to fiction have bred in me a violent antipathy to certain narrative tricks. The dead-weight space filler that is planted at suspenseful moments, like that quoted

above, is, in my opinion, the most underhanded of them all.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me hasten to explain that I have no quarrel with exposition that, however indirectly or remotely, creates background, rounds out character, or is otherwise pertinent to the story. The author may be as oblique or circuitous as he pleases in telling his tale without offending me. What I cannot abide is deliberate padding—the bit of pseudo-atmospheric detail, unconnected with the rest of the story, flung lumpishly into the narrative stream, usually at a critical juncture, for the sole purpose of exploiting the reader's interest. A son angrily accuses a father of having callously driven his wife into an early grave; the ominous silence that follows is broken by the racking cough of a neighbor in the next apartment—a neighbor never previously mentioned and almost certain never to be mentioned again. A thief, having just murdered a storekeeper, stares, sweat-drenched and horror-stricken, at the dead body; at that precise moment a rat begins to gnaw at the plaster in the wall. A child is about to topple to his death from an open window; a delivery boy whistles blithely as he bicycles along with his groceries in the street below. (The rat is one of the shortest-lived in the annals of zoology, being born an instant before he gnawed the plaster and dying an instant after. As for the delivery boy, he belonged on



"You always have to have the middle word in an argument, don't you?"

the other side of town, where the lady who ordered the groceries resides, but he had been summoned to the street of the teetering child by an implacable pen.) These gratuitous observations are literary detritus strewn deliberately in the reader's path to retard the climactic revelation. The storyteller, having reached a crucial point, attempts to keep the reader dangling on the hook as long as possible.

This device is not only shoddy and exasperating (to me, at least), but singularly lacking in originality, being confined generally to a limited range of subjects. The old reliable, and by far the most frequently used, is the weather. During tense pauses, it is routine for wind to whistle around eaves, rain to slap against windows, or thunder to growl ominously in the west. Sometimes sleet pelts against a roof, or a finger of lightning stabs through the velvet blackness outside. During narrative crises, the weather almost invariably takes a quick turn for the worse.

THE next most popular topic of these verbal quagmires is transportation. Though no hint has previously been dropped that a railroad exists anywhere in the neighborhood, the moment a climax is reached, train whistles scream shrilly, shriek stridently, or moan poignantly from afar. Let the briefest silence occur, and immediately ambulance sirens start to wail, fire engines snarl, fog horns bellow in the harbor, heavy trucks rumble by (shaking the house), obsolescent trolley cars clang, horses'

hoofs clomp, brakes screech, planes roar, and automobile horns toot like crazy. The endless, vociferous comings and goings of extraneous vehicles have stretched many a flimsy story and many a reader's patience.

Animals are likewise heavily overworked during pregnant pauses. Dogs yelp, whine, or bark, and cats mew, meow, or miaou. In stories about farms, any domesticated animal may be dragged in to punctuate a silence. In the woods, this function is generally reserved for wildlife. Crying babies tend to favor cities, especially slums, but, if needed badly enough, will operate in almost any environment. Other noisemakers are creaking floorboards, telephones that ring insistently but are seldom answered, loudly ticking clocks, coughs, sneezes, lushing brooms, steeple chimes, church bells, and echoing footsteps. Fireplaces may offer a rich lode; in a story I read recently, a defective damper in a chimney received more attention from the author than the leading character of the plot, and was far more vivid than either. Sometimes a suspenseful pause is filled with an eerie silence whose eeriness is described at length. Cigarettes and liquor are favorite spur-of-the-moment fillers. At tense intervals, characters who until then were innocent of vices suddenly start lighting or snuffing out cigarettes, or pouring with shaking fingers and draining at a gulp. Characters who would shudder at the thought of merely breathing someone else's tobacco smoke have been forced by their desperate creators to huff and puff like locomotives,

while others have been driven to drink in moments of stress on the part of their authors. As soon as the crisis is over, of course, these characters return to their normal weed-hating, teetotaling selves.

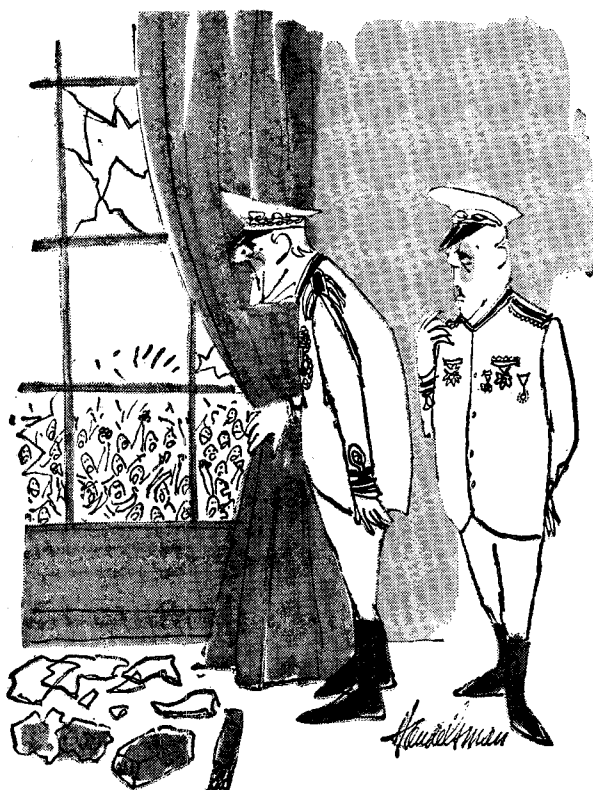
Someday I shall have my revenge on these space-stuffers in a story of my own. Its plot and principal scene are clearly fixed in mind: Eddie Stone, a young man recently out of prison for armed robbery, has been trying to go straight since his release so he can marry the girl he loves, who knows nothing about his past. Weasles, the tough leader of Eddie's old gang, tells Eddie that unless he joins the gang in a \$2,000,000 jewel robbery, Eddie's girl will be told that he is an ex-convict. Crisis: Eddie is clearly on the spot; what will he do? O.K., Weasles has just tossed the ultimatum right into Eddie's face, which turns white. Now go on with the story:

For several seconds Eddie simply stood there numbly. Down in the street, a truck driver raced his motor wildly and it backfired several times, sounding like a machine gun. Across the alley, a man sneezed, and Eddie resisted an idiotic impulse to shout "Gesundheit!"

Eddie lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. He knew that Weasles was waiting for an answer, but his brain refused to function. In a nearby apartment, a baby started to cry. An airplane roared overhead. Around the corner, a lady who had just bought a red hat protested volubly that she had been shortchanged. In Central Park, a man tripped over an exposed tree root and cursed foully. The sky over Canarsie grew threatening, and in Forest Hills a sudden gust of wind tore a few leaves from a tree. Eddie blew a circle of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Well?" Weasles demanded impatiently. The question pulled Eddie's thoughts, which had started to wander, back to where he was. He went to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a stiff drink, which he downed in one swallow, after first removing from his mouth the cigarette he had been puffing on. In the hallway just outside the door, a tenant clumped up the stairs, his slow footsteps vividly conveying that he had had a hard day at the gas station and been unable to secure a seat on the subway coming home. Through the dirty window, Eddie saw a piece of newspaper float by, borne on a vagrant breeze. It seemed an omen of some sort—just what, Eddie couldn't figure out. A baby carriage with wheels that badly needed oiling squeaked past on the sidewalk below, while in the gutter an iceman's horse and wagon clattered and clomp-clopped anachronistically along. Out in the harbor, tugboats beeped dismally in the fog, while in Arkansas a farmer who was chopping . . .

That's the general idea, but of course it's only a beginning.



"Don't ask me what to do. You're the dictator."

SR Recommends

BOOKS

Nonfiction

THE FOUNDING FATHER: THE STORY OF JOSEPH P. KENNEDY, Richard J. Whalen. New American Library-World, \$6.95 (SR, Dec. 19)—The mystery surrounding this controversial parent is somewhat dispelled by Mr. Kennedy himself, who hints at the truth in his own self-assessment: "The measure of a man's success in life is not the money he's made. It's the kind of family he's raised."

AN AMERICAN FAMILY, Ishbel Ross. New American Library-World, \$6.50 (SR, Nov. 28)—About a family named Taft, whose collective achievement is so far surpassed only by the Adamases, and whose political survival is attributable to the sensible, solid models each generation set up for the next.

THE KENNEDY YEARS, text by the *New York Times*, prepared under the direction of Harold Faber; photographs by Jacques Lowe and others. Viking, \$16.50 (SR, Dec. 19)—Somewhat sketchy and unorganized in its editorial focus, this is nevertheless a superb pictorial record of the life and career of a dynamic and photogenic President.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE: THE GREAT REPORTERS AND THEIR TIMES, John Hohenberg. Columbia, \$8.95 (SR, Dec. 12)—Nothing can replace the eyewitness account of history; this book by a former newspaperman, now a faculty member at the Columbia University School of Journalism, records the adventures and evaluates the significance of the men who were there.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION: EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, Philip Coombs. Harper & Row, \$2.95 cloth, \$1.45 paperback (SR, Dec. 19)—A call to action by the former Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, who warns that U.S. policy seriously underestimates the importance of the exchange of scholars and creative talents.

THE DIARIES OF PAUL KLEE, 1898-1918. Edited, with an introduction, by Felix Klee. University of California, \$10 (SR, Nov. 28)—Replete with intimations of the future, these writings reveal how closely were enmeshed the man, writer, and artist, whose methods were as varied and unorthodox as the reasoning that inspired them.

THE FUTURE OF MAN, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, translated from the French by Norman Denny. Harper & Row, \$5 (SR, Dec. 19)—A Jesuit priest and paleontologist predicts a day when all mankind will be harmonious.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF EMERSON AND CARLYLE. Edited by Joseph Slater. Columbia, \$10 (SR, Dec. 19)—A record of a remarkable friendship that illuminates important intellectual aspects of the nineteenth century.

THE DANGEROUS SEX: THE MYTH OF FEMININE EVIL, H. R. Hays. Putnam, \$5.95 (SR, Dec. 12)—Despite some frailty in argumentation and susceptibility to fancy, this mythical explanation of the relentless battle between the sexes is plausible, entertaining, and provocative of more rigorous investigation.

COMMUNIST CHINA: THE EARLY YEARS, 1949-55, A. Doak Barnett. Praeger, \$6.95 (SR, Dec. 12)—One of the leading authorities on contemporary China furnishes a seasoned interpretation of Communism on the Mainland during its formative and most crucial years.

MEMOIRS: 1921-1941, Ilya Ehrenburg, translated from the Russian by Tatania Shebunina with Yvonne Kapp. World, \$6.95 (SR, Dec. 5)—These memoirs by the intellectual godfather of the post-Stalin thaw do for culture

what Khrushchev's 1956 speech did for politics—and with a similar dichotomy between revelation and concealment.

MY FRIEND DEGAS, Daniel Halévy, translated and edited by Mina Curtiss. Wesleyan, \$6 (SR, Dec. 5)—A charming domestic portrait of the enigmatic artist and of a friendship that began when Halévy was a boy of sixteen and Degas fifty-four and half blind.

THE BARRYMORES, Hollis Alpert. Dial, \$7.95 (SR, Dec. 5)—Detailed, lively, and warm account of the Barrymore legend—presented in all its glamour but not without the shadows and the sometimes less than noble motivations behind it.

Fiction

EUGENE ONEGIN: A NOVEL IN VERSE, Aleksandr Pushkin, translated with commentary by Vladimir Nabokov. Pantheon, 4 vols., \$18.50 (SR, Nov. 28)—In this quest for literal accuracy, language and syntax often suffer distortion, but the exhaustive analysis given the famous work re-establishes the translator as a man with wit, style, and a first-rate mind.

ART

Exhibitions

TREASURES FOR TOLEDO, Toledo Museum of Art—Impressive array of 100 works acquired by the museum during the last five years. Particularly notable are paintings by Primaticcio, Mattia Preti, Pietro da Cortona, and Cézanne.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPANISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING, Newark Museum—Loan exhibition stressing the seventeenth century, when Spain was celebrated for its distinguished school of still-life painting. Closes Jan. 26.

RELIGIOUS ART: FROM BYZANTIUM TO CHAGALL, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo—One hundred forty works dating from the eleventh century to the present include important paintings and a large collection of rare Greek and Russian icons. Closes Jan. 10.

MARCEL DUCHAMP, 1904-1964, Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery, New York—About one hundred works, many never shown before, by the legendary *avant-garde* artist. Covers everything from paintings to Ready-Mades. Opens Jan. 14.

18TH CENTURY FRANCE: PAINTINGS FROM THE LOUVRE, Nelson Gallery and Atkins Museum, Kansas City—Twenty Rococo canvases lent by the Louvre range from the incomparable Watteau through Pater, Boucher, and Fragonard to their lesser-known contemporaries. Closes Jan. 10.

Publications

INDIAN ART IN MIDDLE AMERICA, Frederick J. Dockstader, New York Graphic Society, \$25—Handsomely illustrated book by the director of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, deals with Pre-Columbian and contemporary arts and crafts of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Prepared for the intelligent layman, the text is refreshingly simple, informed, and illuminating.

ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECTS, Bernard Rudofsky. Museum of Modern Art, hardcover, \$6.95; paperback, \$3.95—A book of remarkable photographs and terse explanatory text accompanies an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art that surveys spontaneous communal architecture from all times and all places.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Exhibitions

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD HEALD, Worcester, Massachusetts Art Museum—One-

man show honoring a native Worcester "amateur" who graphically interprets the changing season in New England and Europe. (All prints, color and black-and-white, made by Heald in his own home darkroom.)

Publications

THE SILENT MIAOW, text and 200 photos by Suzanne Szasz, translated by Paul Gallico. Crown, \$3.95—Fine teamwork between pen and lens in a cat story.

THE GREEK ISLANDS, introduction by Joannes Gaitanides; eighty photographs by Hanns Reich, etc. Hill and Wang, \$4.95—Newest title in Terra Magica series inspires picking up stakes (and camera) and going straight to the islands.

THEATER

MAN AND SUPERMAN (SR, Dec. 27)—Fine revival of Shaw comedy, with *Don Juan in Hell* added as subplot.

THE NEW PINTER PLAYS (SR, Dec. 27)—*The Room* and *A Slight Ache* moodily explore the danger areas around two complacent marriages.

OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR (SR, Oct. 17)—The utmost theatrical imagination is used to recreate the comic absurdity and tragic waste of World War I.

ABSENCE OF A CELLO (SR, Oct. 24)—Interesting new comedy about an impractical scientist trying to foil big business.

Also . . . THE FANTASTICKS, HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING, THE KNACK, DUTCHMAN, THE TROJAN WOMEN, THE SUBJECT WAS ROSES, and, if you can get tickets, **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF** and **LUV**.

MOVIES

GOLDFINGER (SR, Dec. 12)—Extraordinarily improbable but suspenseful stuff, with 007 (Sean Connery) saving Fort Knox.

ZORBA THE GREEK—Michael Cacoyannis, a triple-talented Greek, wrote the screen adaptation and directed and produced 1964's finest film, a zesty tale set on Crete.

THE IMAGE OF LOVE—Survey of most of the more obvious aspects of love from caveman to movie queen through an imaginative mingling of graphics, sculpture, and old film clips. Narrated by Anthony Newley.

SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON—Fine, shuddery, English melodrama in which a demented spiritualist tries to prove her powers by kidnapping a child. Kim Stanley is the spiritualist, Richard Attenborough her compliant husband.

MY FAIR LADY (SR, Nov. 14)—Lavish, tasteful, and abundantly appealing adaptation of the Lerner-Loewe musical. Rex Harrison is again the perfect Professor Higgins, Audrey Hepburn a slightly less perfect Eliza.

MISCELLANEOUS

Poetry Center, New York

DENISE LEVERTOV, Jan. 11, 8:30 p.m., \$1.50—Poet, author of *O Taste and See*, recently published by New Directions.

JOHN DOS PASSOS, Jan. 18, 8:30 p.m., \$2—Author of *Manhattan Transfer* and the *USA* trilogy, reading from and commenting on his work.