

the audience, and put into the final sound-track the degree of applause that *should have happened* for this show.

Not surprisingly, the sweetening machine has come to be used even during live broadcasts. By the mid-'70s the US network people were slipping a little sweetener into the Rose Bowl Parade to get that little ripple of applause that should happen as each float goes by. A sweetening technician is now always on hand at the Academy Awards to spice up the production and save-face for anybody who cracks a dumb joke, giving them a small dose of laffs so that the home-audience, at least, doesn't think they're total jerks. In Canada, the sweetening machine helps along the live broadcasting of events like telethons and awards ceremonies (the Junos, the Genies, etc.). "We use it," says one technician, "because it's difficult to mike an audience, especially if there's an orchestra. We may use some of the live response, and then boost it with sweetener."

Of course, if sweetener is used for parades, telethons and awards ceremonies, might it not also be used for other live broadcasts like political conventions, public speeches by politicians, etc.? "Not to my knowledge," says Peter Campbell, "but that doesn't mean it isn't done. Just that I've never heard of it."

In a way, the sweetening machine is a useful metaphor for the institution of television itself—which has more to do with wish-fulfillment than reality. At a critical juncture in its past, the industry abandoned production values that highlighted live reality in all its messy, complex, error-laden but risky and human vitality. In place of that, the industry adopted production conventions that guarantee tight control and "perfection"—indeed, all the illusion-making apparatus of Hollywood itself. The result is that TV offers (not only through its chosen content but also through its style of production) a smoothly-running, error-free, sweetened world in which every problem is easily solved, every mistake is erased and eliminated, every event is controlled and made perfect by whatever means necessary, and human complexity is ironed flat. Rather than examine the real conditions of our lives, exploring in-depth the problems that confront us all, TV has become the rose-coloured glasses for society, or (mixing metaphors) the saccharine solution in which the status quo hangs suspended. By comparison, live reality is harsh, messy and bitter indeed. No wonder so many North Americans choose to spend their time in TV's world rather than work to make the real world sweeter.

Joyce Nelson

The Last Post in Retrospect

The Last Post is like Christ; it's not dead but merely sleepeth. Watch for the Second Coming. Admittedly the people who wrote for it have disappeared into darkest concubinage or have become victims of that lamentable activity described by actors as "doing a nine-to-five" or worse still become teachers or work in media, possibly some of these latter holding onto that illusion perpetrated by "Red" Rudi Dutschke of conducting "the long march through the institutions."

This will not then be by way of a post-mortem; there's no body to be exhumed and in any event, even if there is a death, I'm fortified by something I came across the other day from the Sicilian novelist Giuseppe Lampedusa: "*Finche ch'e morte, ch'e speranza*"—so long as there's death, there's hope.

The particular work from which that's drawn, *Il Gattopardo*, The Leopard, is described in my *Penguin Companion to European Literature* in words that seem remarkably apt as a summation of the Canada into which *The Last Post* was born in the early '70s: the book is "a bitter-sweet sceptical picture of an insular world where, in spite of major political and social upheavals, nothing changes that really matters."

After the euphoria of 1967, after the Toronto media screamed for Jean Drapeau to be next Prime Minister—that was before the bills came in—Canada was well on the way to becoming what the philosopher Ortega describes as an invertebrate state. The magazine's attitude to this state of affairs was best symbolized by Terry (Aislin) Mosher's cartoon of the House of Commons—never having been to the Common House before, he was taken aback at what he saw and heard there. He showed the Honourable Members ranged on both sides of a vast swimming pool on the floor of the House, into which from time to time, the defenders of our way of life were seen to be taking a dive.

And then of course Quebec happened. Here *The Last Post's* coverage was, I think, both informed and cogent. Bolstered by the good knowledge of Montreal and entirely alienated from the smugness of the Anglo-Saxon elites, the *Post* proved to be an excellent disseminator of informed attitudes about the maelstrom there. It was probably the only part of its work it took with a high degree of seriousness and, I suspect, it is for that it will be remembered. During the week of the War Measures Act we distributed from the back of a truck a special issue of the magazine. The invocation of the WMA was described in bold—even cheeky—

headlines as THE SANTO DOMINGO OF PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU.

I mentioned cheeky deliberately; it's the only way I have of describing the flavour of the *Post*. At the risk of blasphemy, I should venture to say that the *Post* had an American attitude to government: that is to say, a political game between two parties to get power for their friends, while the United Church, disguised as the NDP, bemoans the whole thing from the pews of the left aisle.

Given such a low-minded view of the matter, it is not without significance—there's a typical *Last Post* opener right there: "it is not without significance that Lougheed's name starts with an L, just like Lochinvar"—it's not without significance that one of the *Post's* most successful innovations was a gossip column. It was called, of course, "Last Psst."

More generally, the *Post* frowned upon a peculiarly Canadian 'love of discipline,' a love symbolized by a hundred-dollar bill featuring the backsides of animals ridden by the leading police force. Such a jaundiced view of authority was not, I hasten to say, the particular preserve of the *Post*. Indeed the *Canadian Forum*, with the awful daring of a moment's surrender, published the Gray Report on foreign ownership six months before the Cabinet received it.

However, the cheekiness of the *Post* also sprang from another source. It saw itself as being, if not rootlessly cosmopolitan, at least ruthlessly internationalist in its perspective. This displayed itself most immediately in its response to the Canadian media, whose attitude to their readers and viewers was, as the *Post* saw it, analogous to that of a lazy farmer towards his seeds: "Cover them in shit, keep them in the dark and hope they grow." And there were targets aplenty. Looking back, who would believe that the media would carry without question this bromide from the usually amiable Jean Marchand: "These people (FLQ) have infiltrated every strategic place in the province of Quebec, every place where important decisions are taken . . . There is an organization which has thousands of guns, rifles, machine guns, bombs and . . . more than enough ammunition to blow up the core of downtown Montreal." Aislin's cartoon in response has become a piece of history: a pipe-smoking Marchand cradling the Montreal phone book and intoning: "*Maintenant nous avons la liste des suspects.*"

But such an attitude also meant that the *Post* was going to stomp on the toes of potential friends as well—I say stomp, not step on, because as Robert Chodos, one of the board's most active members, put it: *The Last Post* doesn't expose, it punishes." The Waffle Manifesto of 1969 set in motion, along with the Committee for an Independent Canada, a wave of feeling that wavered—if that's what a wave does—between the rhetoric of anti-colonialism and the latest cyclical manifestation of Canada first-ism; as a result a lot of bad novels got written and praised to the skies, a lot of nine-

day wonders came and went, some of them indeed not waiting out the requisite nine days. Keith Davey's desire to fix up the Canadian newspaper called "Keith Davey saved from drowning," a title from a Renoir film by way of an American short story writer (Donald Barthelme) who'd done a thing called "Bobby Kennedy saved from drowning."

And so we would write our own spring publishing lists, parodies of the new nativist efforts, replete with such titles as *Old Barns of Ontario*, or *The Best Toilets on the 401*, etc. A work as mediocre as Stephenson's *A Man Called Intrepid* would be transformed by *Last Post* alchemy into *A Man Called Inspid*. Larry Zolf's one-paragraph review of the *Memoirs of Arnold Heeney* still stands as a model of this genre: "As a paid-up insomniac, I, Larry Zolf, do hereby swear that the *Memoirs of Arnold Heeney* put me to sleep." And so on. We even found poems buried in the editorials of the *Globe and Mail*; and these we called found poems.

James Eayres it was who pointed out that nothing identifies a Canadian more quickly than the saying, "I'm not an economist, but . . ." Well, I'm not an economist, but I do think that in part the *Post* was a product not only of a sense of outrage at the mediocrity of public life but also of a time when the economy was such that many people thought that the quality of life was a priority item. We were wrong.

Of course, it should be said that magazines are about writing, and we were all writers and the magazine was readable; while attitudes are important, attitudinizing is the ureaformaldehyde of the magazine world. Politically, we had a shared view that we would not fight the Cold War; economists and political scientists were not allowed to write—except for Mel Watkins and Larry Pratt, the former because he was a bad economist but a good writer, the latter because he was libelous, a definite plus in the *Post's* case since none would sue us because we didn't have any money. (When Pratt tried the same tack at the CBC, only then did the writs begin to fly.)

The Last Post moved from Montreal to Toronto and soon began to die. As I knew it would. My perfectly cogent observation that Goethe had remained in Weimar and did not relocate to Berlin fell on deaf ears.

Still, I find nothing unhealthy about magazines appearing and disappearing. They should be like catherine wheels, crackling and illuminating the surrounding dark for a while, leaving behind them a good, acrid stench to remind newcomers that righteous indignation had once been felt here. If I may make an observation: it's a mistake for small magazines to think of themselves as organisms that should grow in size and circulation until that happy day when they take over from Peter C. Newman. A small catherine wheel is better than a big, damp squib.

Patrick McFadden