

Journalism

A 'fallacy of the grand design'?

Greg Saville

Encounter Canada topped off last week's festivities with a seminar about responsible journalism, featuring Carleton University journalism professor Wilfred Kesterton, associate editor of "The Albertan" Peter Hefner, and *Globe and Mail* editorial assistant (and former *Excalibur* editor) Oakland Ross. It brings a story to mind.

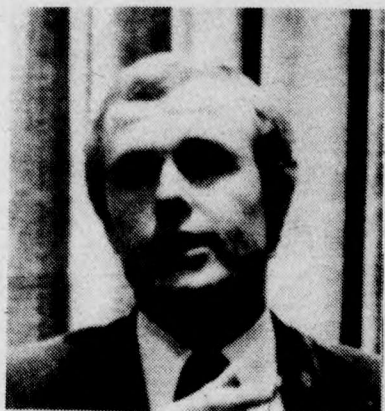
Once upon a time, as tall stories begin, the Ottawa police called newsmen to a press conference about the apparent sexual activities of a dozen or so not completely unknown Ottawa gentlemen. In this tall tale it's not clear who's the good guy and who's the bad. It was at the time, because those gentlemen were arrested and charged with gross indecency, but it isn't so clear now. Because nothing ever happened. The charges were dropped.

Well, almost nothing happened. A few days later, the following story appeared, buried well into the news section, in the *Globe and Mail*.

"OTTAWA-A civil servant fell or jumped to his death hours after being arraigned in provincial court for a charge of gross indecency in connection with a teenage male prostitution ring, police said Monday." (Sex Suspect Civil Servant Falls to

Death, March 19, 1975, *Globe and Mail*.)

This tall tale is worth about 13 stories, because that's how far Warren Zufelt, 34, fell, or probably jumped, after he was charged in this affair. His name appeared in papers across Canada, unfortunately, before the charges were dropped against those dozen or so gentlemen.



Bryan Johnson

Oakland Ross

Speaking at Vanier College seminar last Thursday, Oakland Ross made it clear this was what he considered an example of irresponsible journalism. To him, the bad guys in this story are obvious. Regretfully, this tall story is true.

"In retrospect," said Ross, "I think anybody would say there's no way the right of the public to know some speculative details

about the apparent sexual proclivities of men they don't even know should take precedence over the right of the individual to privacy. I think the press, in this case, acted irresponsibly."

He cited other examples of irresponsible journalism and emphasized what he called the "fallacy of the grand design."

"There is a mistaken response from readers that the press is a more sophisticated and more competent institution than in fact it is," he said.

Peter Hefner also described his feelings on who the press should be responsible to. "The press is a mirror of society," he stated. Then, a short while after, his colleague from a paper on the other side of the continent echoed similar sentiments.

"To say the press is as responsible as the people of Canada," said Ross, "you also have to take the corollary and say that the press is as vague, as unsure of itself and as full of stupidity, as the Canadian people."

The panel then fielded questions about investigative journalism. ("Investigative journalism is at a low ebb in comparison to the Watergate era," said Ross. "It is a very costly pursuit.") to questions about the

gay rights magazine *Body Politic's* court case.

"I think people at *Body Politic* have their own values and as long as they don't impose their philosophies on their readers," said Professor Kesterton, "I think it's fair comment. Their article on pedophilia, for which they went to court, was responsible."

"You have to make a choice," said Ross in conclusion, "do you

want an aggressive press, a relatively free press, with a certain amount of license that plays its own public with sometimes inconsistent, contradictory information but gives its public freedom in choice...or do you want a press that doesn't give its public any choices at all?" The panel, and the audience, seemed to know which choice to make.

Fun city

Those who are interested in going on the Fine Arts trip to New York, but haven't signed up, had better act quickly.

There are now four buses going (instead of the original three) and space, while still available, is becoming scarcer. Janis Roy, coordinator of the trip, advises signing up by Nov. 23, even though Nov. 30 is officially the last day.

Roy also stated that prices for the fourth bus will be slightly higher than the original three. Previously, the prices ranged from \$92 to \$144.

Buses leave York at 9 pm, Dec. 13 and arrive back on the morning of Dec. 18. Janis Roy is located in Rm. 219, Fine Arts.



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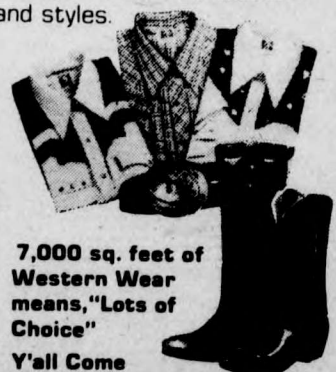
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