

# Toronto newspapers: 'Smarmy Trash'

ROB KELLY

The purpose of a newspaper is not - despite what the Toronto Sun apparently believes - to excite and outrage its readers. That may indeed be a byproduct of what is read but it should not be a prime target of journalism. Neither is it the business of news media to provide pat opinions for the public: to inform an opinion yes, to deliver it outright no. After all if you're not excited by living or able to express intelligent views, newsprint can't provide it. If you do get your excitement and opinions by print-media express, I think we may have found a definition for the term "brain-dead".

You see, I am not one who has taken the reporter, or newspeople in general, as heroes or even admirable human beings. I've never thought of "Front Page" as a real depiction of the pressman's crusade (more an illustration of print propaganda gone Hollywood) or that the New York Times reports only "the news that's fit to print". Journalists are a suspect lot whose every word and shading thereof ought to be scrutinized and challenged. The assumed rightness of media is its power such that people tend to eat newsprint with the same mediocrity that they inhale fast food. It's just more stuff to kill time with and one's

as good as another. The result of this is that you get a lot of opinionated, yet uninformed buffoons spouting off about things which they know zip about or which they have allowed the media to frenzy them with. And this is by way of understanding the world. Carl Sandburg and later, John Steinbeck, put a lot of stock in what the man on the street had to say; Eric Hoffer went a step further and consolidated pavement wisdom into a philosophy. If they were to confront someone on the streets today for an opinion (on whatever) they'd be treated to the garbled vegarigation and catch-phrase unthinking of some pressman and his

copy editor. As a wiseman once said "Whereof you know not, speak not thereof".

Newspaper reporting is, of course, not easy; you want to be concise, interesting, informative with a minimum of bias, all under threat of a deadline. Hard news is ostensibly separated from opinion by the belly boy of an editorial section and a legion (lesion?) of columnists who make their preferences amply, usually nauseatingly clear. The problem is that the distinction is blurred in the middle pages--by writer and reader--and the two mix. The end product is hard opinion and prejudicial news. A subterfuge of truth all the way to the travel pages. Although we in North America are not subjected to state-owned newspaper and enjoy a largely "free" press, our papers are far from free of the intonations desired by those who operate the darned things. Intelligent people hardly take a propaganda machine like *Pravda* seriously or any of the British tomes with their idiotic Royal frenzies and righteous indignation. This is comedy with a "K". But our press has a subtler stroke for covert colouring of issues and is fearless in its zeal to stir controversy or blacken someone's eye. I mean, it's scary to read Toronto *Sun* editorials--not to mention the letters-to-the-editor and think that something besides a myopic machine wrote it. It is not the Tories who have turned their leadership campaign into a circus but the all-knowing, all-seeing press and their need for an angle. Media tends to trivialize the significant and raise the trivial to apocalyptic pre-eminence. This is not always the case but it does occur with incredible frequency.

Take the controversy which recently blew in one of John Q. Public's ears and out the other concerning Playboy on Pay T.V. WE have stridency and stupidity winning on all fronts and front pages. To some, it was the onslaught of an American porno racket which degrades women; to others, the issue was the advent of a censorial dark age. What garbage. If ever the press flaunted a non-issue, this was it. Unless 95 per cent of the TV viewing public was tortuously attempting to resolve those scrambled lines on their tube into naked bodies, this was an imagined threat. For the 5 per cent who get Pay TV and watched

Playboy, they found milquetoast in the form of a nude soap opera. Big issue. But the papers just had to field it with the seriousness of real news.

The point of this marauing tantrum on journalism is that it is a manipulative, highly-abused medium which serves a vital, laudable function: to inform. People want to know about the world and each other. The simple fact is, you've got to wade through a lot of bullshit to get it. It seems journalists, reviewers and columnists are not satisfied with presenting clear, comprehensive reportage; we must have clever little catch-phrases like "left-lib" and "useful idiots"--which the *Sun* variously attributes to Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Marx, instead of to the actual person who coined it, John Read--we must have bad attempts at poetry, monumental hyperbole and just plain crummy reporting. Instead of trying to present the big picture, we must covertly sponge-bathe our favourite political bodies. Stow it: poets and novelists abound to provide that intellectual baggage.

I, for one, am sick of the smarmy, slanted trash which permeates the pages of Toronto's newspapers turned ad supplements passed off as journalism. It is possible to report the news cleanly, clearly and within the comprehension of anyone reading it. I find only a morbid glee in perusing this city's dailies and laughing 'til I collapse. Indeed, there is a way to inform people and stimulate them without the shoddy tactics of six-inch rape-and-murder headlines or griping, whiny columnists. A total waste of space. Like this.

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## Illness is potentially life-threatening

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emphasis on fitness has "turned into more than just health."

Anorexia and bulimia are not diseases that you can 'catch'. Likewise, it is equally absurd to contend that social factors alone can instigate these illnesses. Granted, the pursuit of the 'ideal' body form (i.e., thin) can provide a catalyst for the decision to diet. However, there seems to be another necessary precondition, for the fact remains that 1) Not all dieters become anorexic, and 2) not all anorexics are conscious dieters. Anorexia and

bulimia are clearly much more than merely "dieting gone haywire".

Although there are general patterns of behaviour that these eating disorders follow, it must be remembered that each case has individual causes, and hence, individual solutions. Therapy must be individualistic, because one of the main factors of anorexia and bulimia is a lack of self-identity. It is generally agreed that anorexia and bulimia are attempts to cope with the patient's feelings of ambiguity, unassertiveness, and lack of definition in a social/family context. The desire for self-control is personified through

eating behaviour. Dr. Garner advises that the patient must learn self-acceptance (of her body image) as well as gain self-esteem through constructive behaviour. The all-encompassing energy which anorexia and bulimia require must be rechannelled through positive outlets.

### Self-help possible

The medical success rate for treatment of anorexia and bulimia is 50 per cent. Thirty per cent of patients show a "modest improvement", while 20 per cent remain ill or die. Garner said, "We do not have adequate treatment facilities available." Yet, even worse, is that often patients "are not admitted into hospitals until their bodies are in extreme danger." The further the illness is allowed to progress, the worse the prognosis is. "Fortunately," Kaplan adds, "most of the effects (of bulimia and anorexia) are reversible." Patients are not considered cured until body weight and functions return to normal. Kaplan stated that self-curing is possible. The difficulty is in determining when medical intervention is required. Words to the wise and concerned: "Better safe than sorry."

If not cured, both anorexia and bulimia are potentially life-threatening. Even when medical attention is received, the after-effects of anorexia and bulimia can remain in the depths of one's psyche long after normal eating patterns and weight are restored.

The *Excal* staffer will take out his university press pass and tuck it away in a safe place. Years later, as he hacks away on some overnight shift, he'll think of it and be reminded of the *Excal* deadlines he missed, the stories he never filed, the goofy opinions he committed to paper. He'll be reminded too of the need for *Excal* to be taken more seriously by its staff and the university.

Student newspapers fill a function more important than training young and not-so-young cubs in the fundamentals of journalism. They inform the university about itself and help make it less impersonal; they take the edge off of the "diploma mill" syndrome.

They also remind you of the need to be punctual.

An editor comes in and wonders if there's more to type on this final deadline day.

No, there isn't much more to write. But there's a hell of a lot more to think about. Thanks, York. Thanks, *Excal*.

### Excal writer reflects

## There's lots to think about

DAVID CHILTON

It's mid-April and an *Excal* staffer types his final 30. Summer beckons. There'll be customers to serve at his summer job; there'll be tenters to hook him as he waits to hear from the journalism schools; there's a beautiful new son to take to the park and show what dads ought to do; there'll be some thoughts about York and *Excal*.

And what will he think?

He'll think about line-ups and bad food and 30-below weather. He'll think about dopey profs and rising tuition fees and the blatnat discrimination foreign student will have to suffer next year. Wake up, Queen's Park! The money invested in foreign students now will be paid back many times later on.

In a few years these self-same foreign students will be heading government departments and looking at bids for tenders. But what does Bette Stephenson care? By that time she will have retired to that place old politicians go where she'll spend her sunset years having her armour replated. And so it goes.

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