

Passing of the Post

By Father John S. Kennedy

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aspects. What it records is guerrilla warfare occasionally giving way to pitched battle.

The editors were up against management's policy of secrecy and sudden unpleasant surprises. Executives were constantly plotting against one another. Lines of authority were bewilderingly blurred. Obedience to those apparently in charge was rewarded with punishment.

The follies of supposedly shrewd and solid businessmen are riotously exemplified in this book. Thus, we see the creation of meaningless managerial titles in the hope of solving problems; which, of course, remain unsolved. We see, too, the hiring of consultants at fat fees (\$1,000 a day in one instance) who accomplish nothing.

The frenzy came to a shattering climax with the arrival of Martin Ackerman, reputedly a financial wizard. Ackerman declared himself determined to save the magazine and to pour millions into the task. He had an ingratiating way of introducing himself: "I am Marty Ackerman. I am 36 years old and I am very rich." He had "a guileless, almost childlike belief in the mesmeric powers of his own self . . . [and an] equally guileless, equally childlike belief in the mesmeric powers of money."

There were some notable features of his short reign. One was the drive to cut down the number of subscriptions, riding the magazine of the boobies and retaining the sophisticated and affluent people whom big advertisers want to reach. Among the disqualified and undesirable people eliminated were Winthrop Rockefeller, the millionaire governor of Arkansas.

Another was Ackerman's determination to give his own personal aura, as he put it, to the magazine. To that end, he took over the editorial page and graced it with expressions of that aura, all ghost-written of course.

But Ackerman's genius did not keep the Post going. The magazine folded a few months after he first blew in. While the longtime employees mourned, Ackerman was being cheered, elsewhere, as the recipient of a human relations award.

Friedrich's book is almost 500 pages long, but it is readable throughout. The Post was an American institution for decades, and an account of its ultimate failure in a society different from that in which it had prospered, is of some moment. Friedrich has all the information necessary for such an account; he was acquainted with all the principals, be they heroes or villains; and he writes uncommonly well.

Jerry Della Femina, author of "From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor" (Simon and Schuster, \$6.50), does not write well at all. In fact, what he does here bears more resemblance to hash-slinging than it does to even rudimentary literature.

Della Femina heads a New York advertising agency, and is a veteran in the field. Such slight merit as his book has, derives from its insider's view of that peculiar line of endeavor. Advertising is so important a feature of American life, and its influence on each of us is so great, that we should know as much about it as possible. And certainly Della Femina is qualified by experience to instruct us.

His book is instructive. But it is also tasteless, crass, needlessly and repeatedly offensive. It is absurdly jargonistic; the style is evidently meant to reproduce that of the trade lingo. The meaningless use of the word "like" is incessant. Della Femina does not say, for example, "Ron was destroyed for three days after that." No, it has to be "Like Ron was destroyed for three days after that." Money is always "bread," \$1,000 is always a "big one," and people are always being "zonked."

Obviously the business is hectic. Ad writers, it seems, have short careers and are likely to be paranoid. Account executives live in fear, can be fired quickly and easily, and can count on a short career at best. The advertising world is ruled by rumors, and for most of those involved it is a feast-or-famine existence.

Della Femina maintains that there is no point in doing good advertising for a bad product, since the consumer will quickly detect the product's worth. He says that good advertising comes from a good subject. He is against truth in advertising and in packaging laws, against censorship of advertising commercials on TV. He praises advertising which "has that feeling that the consumer is bright enough to understand what the advertising is saying."

All very pious. But he delights in describing a campaign of his own which was aimed at selling electric sewing machines to Indians in Peru, despite the fact that the Indians had no access to electric power. Hilarious, zonking the lunkheads like that!

Brash, boastful, crude, this is a wretched performance of what might have been a bright and beneficial piece of work.

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