

Should Media Influence be Controlled ?

The Tenant, a film by Roman Polanski, is now playing or has played at certain Island theatres. This film is as far removed from the pioneer horror classics (Frankenstein, Dracula, Phantom of the Opera and so on) as Hyde from Dr. Jeckyll. The traditional opposition of good and evil has been superseded by the attempt to contrive a sensation of total depravity. If this is accepted as its aim The Tenant might well be judged a success.

I am not learned in the devices of film criticism. Perhaps if I were more abreast of developments in the film industry, more familiar with the "pace-setting" trends, I might have been more comfortable or even pleased.

a crabbit old woman

(This is a copy of an enclosure in a letter from Art Laffin, leading player in last year's Panthers who is now a player-coach for a basketball team in Holland. Art has always been interested in the plight of the neglected elderly and wrote a long article for the Cadre early in the 75-76 school year. This OUGHT to be food for thought for those who have "thought about" going to the Provincial Home for the Aged but who just havent managed to make it so far.)

The below appeared when an old lady died in the Geriatric Ward of a hospital near Dundee, Scotland. It was felt that she had left nothing of any value then the nurses going through her possessions found this poem. The quality of it so impressed the staff, copies were duplicated and distributed to every nurse in the hospital.

CRABBIT OLD WOMAN WROTE THIS

What do you see nurse, what do you see? Are you thinking when you are looking at me - a crabbit old woman, not very wise. Uncertain of habit, with far away eyes, who dribbles her food and makes no reply when you say in a loud voice - "I wish you'd try". Who seems not to notice the things that you do, and forever is losing a stocking or sho..... Who, unresisting or not, lets, you do as you will, with bathing and feeding, the long day to fill. Is that what you are thinking, is that what you see? I

with the character and quality of the movie. As it was I found it disturbing and it raised in my mind some disturbing questions.

The raw power of the media of film is truly extraordinary. As an art it is still in its infancy and as techniques become more and more sophisticated the range of possibilities grows. It has been said that photography acts as a kind of time machine by capturing on film, in the minutest detail, the events of the past; there to be shared for posterity. If this is so then the medium of film extends this power immeasurably by enabling us to experience the unimaginable, the unreal, the 'never was', with all the force

tell you who I am as I sit here so still; I'm a small child of ten with a father and mother, a young girl of sixteen, with wings on her feet. Dreaming that soon now a lover she'll meet; abide soon a twenty-my heart gives a leap, Remembering the vows that I promised to keep; At twenty-five now I have young of my own, who needs me to build a secure, happy home; A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast, Bound to each other with ties that should last.

At forty, my young sons have grown and are gone, But my man's beside me to see I don't mourn; At fifty, once more babies play round my knee, Again we know children, my loved one and me. Dark days are upon, me, my husband is dead, I look at the future, I shudder with dread. For my young are all rearing young of their own, and I think of the years and the love that I've known. I'm now an old woman and nature is cruel - 'Tis just to make old age look like a fool. The body it crumbles, grace and vigour depart, There is now a stone where I once had a heart. But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells, And now and again my battered heart swells. And I remember the joys, I remember the pain, And I'm loving and living life over again. I think of the years all too few gone too fast, And accept the stark fact that nothing can last. So open your eyes nurses, open and see. Not a crabbit old woman, look closer - see me!

and clarity available to us through the senses of sight and hearing.

What are the effects or possible effects of this presentation of the unreal or the 'never was' on society, on the real world in which we live? Are the feelings (the joys, hopes and fears) of our age natural and instinctive or are they learned? Can new feelings be implanted? In the face of such a possibility ought some control be exercised over the film industry and other centres of media influence? If so what sort of controls would be feasible and how ought they be arrived at and implemented?

These are not just questions of censorship or of freedom of artistic expression. Movies are by now an important part of modern culture. The media in general might be said to be the single most dominant influence on modern culture. We know that just as man creates his culture it in turn shapes him. Seen in this light the act of artistic creation,

particularly when intended for mass consumption, becomes an act of self-creation, with wide-ranging consequences for the whole culture and the whole species.

The controversy is more akin to that raging over the desirability of continuing to advance research in the field of genetics (test-tube conception, artificial breeding, etc.) or that over the prolongation of life by artificial means. Must every avenue of artistic expression be explored, simply because it is technically possible or is it wiser, in certain cases, to exercise discretion, preferring for fear of the consequences, "not to know"?

These are questions to which the answers are difficult and uncertain. For the purposes of dialogue I invite your comments and response.

Frankenstein may have been supplanted as a box office attraction by movies like The Tenant but these movies themselves have raised Shelley's theme in a much more frightening guise, as a real threat, not just an illusory one.

Scott Sinclair



"THE LITTLE BUGGER DESERVED IT!!"