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**■ In my opinion**

## Making messes with messages

The Emerald's estimated readership is around 10,000. So for the 9,950 of you who didn't make it to the Cultural Forum's Queer Film Festival this weekend, you didn't miss much.

The documentaries were fine. Predictable, but fine. The few films with a narrative thrust were disappointing. As I tried to stay awake during "The Raspberry Reich" — basically a hardcore porno with tongue-in-cheek neo-Communist overtones — I tried to figure out why I had been so bored through the films I'd seen so far.

To begin with, the guy-on-guy action was hardly the best I've seen. But it takes more than mediocre man-love to completely ruin a movie for me. The main problem, I think, is not with these particular movies, but with any narrative film that focuses more on the message than the story.

Films with a "message," more often than not, sag under the weight of their own self-importance. They substitute clichés and tired platitudes for the subtle craft of quality storytelling.

Human beings are storytelling creatures. No known civilization has existed without storytelling. Storytelling exists where the stodgy empirical concepts of nonfiction, facts and science are nowhere to be found.

Deep meaning often comes as a natural byproduct of a good story. Unfortunately, a good story rarely comes from a starting place with meaning. Yet so many of these movies begin with a message and then tell a story, as if it was an afterthought.

When a film is really moving, the audience member discovers his or her own meaning of the story, inspired by



**GABE BRADLEY**  
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

the layers of meaning buried by the filmmakers, often subconsciously. Skillful filmmakers start with the story and let it lead to the message. When filmmakers start with a message and then come up with a story to fit, the story often suffers.

Moreover, since the message is so explicit, the audience is robbed of the joy of personal interpretation. As such, some audience members will be unable to connect with the message while others will feel their intelligence is being insulted. Too often, message movies only end up resonating with people who were already tuned to a particular message and fail to appeal to any sort of wider audience — preaching to the proverbial choir.

And this goes for all message movies across all agendas, not just those I saw this weekend.

The Mormons have terrible message movies. Take, for instance: "The Book of Mormon Movie, Volume I," "The RM," and "Charly." These are but a few of the LDS movies that occasionally show at CinemaWorld at Valley River. I have yet to be impressed by one.

The Protestants have terrible message movies. Take, for instance, the "Left Behind" movies starring Kirk

Cameron, any Focus on the Family production, and that "Apocalypse" movie with Mr. T.

And from the Catholic camp comes the granddaddy of all message movies that suck: Mel Gibson's "The Passion of The Christ."

The same holds for other forms of storytelling, not just movies. J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" is one of the most over-analyzed novels ever written. In his foreword to the second edition, he makes clear that his epic is not a giant, complicated allegory. He didn't start with a message about drugs, nuclear energy, the environment or the military industrial complex. He started with a story that seized his soul and stirred his imagination. Then he wrote it carefully and faithfully to the spirit of adventure that had come upon him. Classics are rarely written with the idea that they will become classics. They are thrilling tales first, and works of great cultural import second.

This is one of the reasons why I think "The Vagina Monologues" is a wretched play (for more on this, see "Vagina Monologues Misspeaks," ODE, Feb. 15). In reaction to the column I wrote on the subject, some have called for my resignation as president of the vagina fan club. However, since differing tastes in theater is neither a high crime nor a misdemeanor, I shall serve out the remainder of my term as president.

The same goes for my term as secretary-treasurer of the guy-on-guy action fan club.

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**INBOX****Students should prepare for an imminent military draft**

A military draft: ominous words of our collective collegiate destiny or merely conspiracy theory? Six months ago I felt draft rumors were the result of savvy political campaigning; scare the college kids to vote liberal. However, the election has now passed, the rumors remain, and an alarming amount of evidence is surfacing that points to Congress re-instituting a military draft.

So, what evidence is there? First, Congress took under advisement in 2002 three different scenarios that could trigger the re-issuance of a military draft. The first scenario entails a prolonged war with Iraq; the second involves expanding U.S. military involvement beyond Iraq and Pakistan; and the third scenario entails another major terrorist attack upon American soil. What is most alarming is that any of these scenarios could easily confront the United States in the near future. It seems the line that separates us from being college students and activated military personnel is thinner than one would like to think.

There exists further evidence for the re-issuance of a military draft. In January, a letter written by the powerful and influential think tank, Project for the New American Century, advised leading members of Congress to "take the steps necessary to increase substantially the size of the active duty Army and Marine Corps." This increase in military personnel far exceeds the total

number of new incoming recruits. Said another way, they are requesting Congress to re-issue the draft.

A community organization in Eugene is taking steps to help people of draft age (18-26) to prepare against being drafted. The Community Alliance of Lane County has increased its staffing of draft counselors and will hold a Draft Education Forum to educate students on ways to prepare for a draft. The meeting will be held March 3 at 5:00 p.m. in Esslinger 116. CALC also offers free drop-in counseling every Tuesday from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. at its office located at 458 Blair St.

I strongly encourage University students to take advantage of this Draft Education Forum and the free drop-in counseling provided by CALC. I am sure for many students it is hard to believe they would be drafted. Many Vietnam vets thought the same thing, but many were drafted. And when drafted and forced to fight in Vietnam, many thought they would never get hurt, but many were injured or never came back. It is incumbent upon the students to take actions to protect themselves against succumbing to a similar fate.

**Rodney Yoder**  
Eugene

**Commentator treatment balances hate with hate**

One needs leave the University for no more than a fortnight to gain an invaluable perspective on the sheer

imbecility and shocking audacity of its leadership. Perhaps living in Asia has given me an even more striking comparison to the volume of stupidity that seems to permeate the halls of our sacred institution of learning.

Given the venom and acid of the words spoken and written by PFC member Mason Quiroz, there can be little doubt, at least to anyone looking from the outside in, that there is little, if any, love lost between Quiroz and the Commentator. Yet no one seems courageous enough to challenge him on his hatred of the group. So, let me see if I have understood this correctly: It's okay to hate, as long as you hate the right group.

The danger in that thinking is so obviously apparent as to flabbergast the reasoned mind; and yet, as is typical of the intellectual elite at the University, hatred and intolerance is nonetheless encouraged toward groups that refuse to fall in line with the most recent PC hyperbole. What you are saying, in essence, is that it's quite all right to hate conservative groups because they hate, and hate for hate balances out. How enlightened. Students at the University should be frightened not of the sarcastic humor of groups like the Commentator, but rather at the ease with which those who govern their resources are willing to collar speech and expression when it doesn't suit their fancy.

**Scott D. Austin**  
Luodong Town, Taiwan

**■ Editorial**

## PFC lacks more than money for programs

The students in charge of distributing incidental fees in a timely and viewpoint-neutral manner have made an appalling mess of the budget and now must find a way to recover the tens-of-thousands of dollars already promised to student groups.

Apparently nobody at the ASUO Programs Finance Committee bothered to keep track of the money they were dishing out — we are hardly surprised — and now the unthinkable has happened: They are scrambling to find a way out. Making matters worse, the PFC has wasted the entire month of February dealing with injunctions and launching inappropriate attacks on free speech, and now they have less than a week to submit and implement a solution.

Many suggestions were batted around during Friday's brainstorming session, none of them ideal, many of them potentially destructive. One suggestion was to take 2 percent from every group's budget, a problematic solution that could have left certain line items under-funded. Programs that deservingly received small increases should not have their budgets decreased just because the PFC gave generously to one of their pet projects.

The second suggestion was for the PFC to blindly sign off on all ASUO Executive recommendations. That PFC members would even contemplate shirking their responsibilities, after failing to do their jobs in a spectacular display of incompetence, is beyond comprehension. Why have a PFC if it is going to rubber-stamp the Executive recommendation? Why have months of hearings? Why even allow student programs to make a budget request if the PFC is simply going to "listen to the controllers," as embattled Vice Chair Mason Quiroz suggested? The members of the PFC need to do their jobs once and for all and stop passing the buck.

The third suggestion — and the one accepted — was to rework the stipend model. If the PFC were to figure out a system, it could potentially fill the funding gap without sacrificing programming. Of the three imperfect solutions on the table, this is the one the PFC wisely chose to execute. If a group is unable to find energized volunteers and poorly paid leaders then maybe that is a group that doesn't deserve student money in the first place.

The Emerald has additional suggestions. First, all PFC members should have their wages garnished as punishment for their criminal ineptitude. Second, they should issue a formal apology to every student group for wasting their time over the last several months. Third, they should issue a second formal apology to all University students for treating their money like it was a game of Monopoly. Fourth, they should hold a town hall-style public meeting so they can answer student questions and hear student criticism.

The Emerald has already called for an outside facilitator to conduct PFC meetings in the future in order to ensure that its members understand and follow rules on viewpoint neutrality. Perhaps another outside facilitator is needed to help PFC members count.

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