

## THE REBEL YELL

4505 Maryland Parkway  
Las Vegas, NV 89154  
(702) 895-3479 office  
(702) 895-1515 fax  
e-mail: ry@nevada.edu

**Erin J. Niemeyer**  
Editor-in-Chief

**Claudia E. Salas**  
Managing Editor

**Darryl Richardson**  
News Editor

**Ray Brewer**  
Sports Editor

**Jeff Hoskin**  
Opinion Editor

**Jennifer Evans**  
A&E Editor

**Aleza Goldsmith**  
Features Editor

**Danny Kim**  
Variety Editor

**Tammi Brunner**  
Office Manager

**Ruchirawan Phonphongrat**  
Advertising Manager

**Shawn Takiguchi**  
**Jason B. Roth**  
Advertising Staff

**William Puchert**  
Production Manager

**Gregg Benson**  
**Peter Jonas**  
**Richard Panganiban**  
Photography Staff

**Mary Hausch**  
Faculty Advisor

**Jim Moore**  
Business Manager

**Staff Writers**  
Jaymes Aimetti  
Lea Blink  
Tiffannie Bond  
Angie Douglas  
Eric Gruzen  
Katherine Keller  
Brian Kuchar  
Michael Melissa  
William Puchert  
Jason Sheehan  
Chad Simmons  
Richard Summers  
Pauline Villapando  
John V. Wylie

Letters to the Editor should be typed and be fewer than 300 words. Each letter must include name, address and telephone number. Writers affiliated with UNLV must include class and major or faculty/staff position. Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity.

## Are literate students an endangered species?

By Mark Clark  
Staff Opinion Writer

In the March 13 issue of *The Rebel Yell*, there appeared an article concerning UNLV students' propensity to read outside of their classes. The article contained various quips and quotes from students around campus who had been asked about their outside reading habits by *The Rebel Yell's* roving band of survey-takers. The results were far from surprising.

One statement in particular caught my eye: An education major emphatically declared that she does not like reading at all. I hope that my children, when they grow older and go to school, have a love for literature rather than a dislike for it. And I certainly hope this education major doesn't wind up being their teacher. I began wondering why people who are currently part of the educational system, or those who will be soon, would harbor such a distaste for reading. I think the answer has to do with some of the very fundamental changes occurring today in the world and especially in America. These changes have to do with technology and attitudes. Gone are the days when reading a book meant only that one

could pick up a paperback made from cheap paper and digest it quietly. In today's world, books have a much more profound presence. One can buy books read aloud on cassette tape, see the movie, which is practically a play-by-play of the book upon which it's based or read a smaller book summarizing the main one. It seems like quite a roundabout way to avoid reading, though these alternatives to reading require the same amount of time and effort.

This is not to say that audio books and movies don't have their places. Many times a movie brings a book into the mainstream where people who normally wouldn't be exposed to the classics may benefit from at least a smattering of culture. Audio books certainly allow one to perform a sort of "convenience reading," while driving long distances or exercising.

Summary books like the popular "Cliff's Notes" series allow a person to gain a more thorough understanding of difficult works, including the language, exegesis and thoughts of the author. But what about those who actually enjoy reading books? What are the alternatives? Spending entirely too much money at an overpriced

yuppie-coffee-prude book store seems to be one major option. A second is tramping all over town going to used book stores hoping to find a readable copy of whatever you are looking for. Libraries anymore seem to be understocked with the titles people *ought* to read and instead are filled with what people *want* to read. To access the few classics that can be found on the shelves of public libraries, you must have background screenings, blood tests and a note from your grandmother because they contain some words or concepts that offended some goofball in Arkansas.

Are books dead? Has written literature gone the way of the dodo bird? Certainly the skill of reading has not passed away. Literacy is now extremely vital to productivity. An illiterate individual is a waste of good carbon. Any decent career requires the ability to read. Computer work, business and science all hinge on literacy. Microsoft hasn't made the world that easy to use yet. But books themselves seem to have become either an expensive hobby, a faux-beatnik pastime or a completely foreign anachronism. Information is relayed from one city to another by voices over the radio and tele-

vision airwaves. The Internet contains hundreds of thousands of volumes and yet it actually doesn't take up any space. Many book stores have become clique factories where everyone can buy the latest self-help book, computer operation tome or volume containing historical French philosophy from the early post-revolutionary period.

Whatever happened to just being able to sit down and get swallowed up with an inexpensive, non-offensive, normal piece of human fiction? Actually, the question should be, what happened to the people who enjoy doing that? I don't foresee anything in the future to cause any lack of written literature. Ancient cultures can be compared by when they developed reading and writing, paper, the printing press and other factors linked to books. Anyone who wishes to write a book may do so, as there are hundreds of publishers looking for the newest fad. If none of them like the work, the Internet can expose it to the world. But for now, it has become nostalgia to remember the first time I read Tolkein's *The Hobbit* or Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, holding a solid, well-bound book.

## Hip, hip hooray for sex and violence

By J.J. Wylie  
Staff Opinion Writer

A recent article appearing in *The Las Vegas Sun* quoted Louis Giannetti, a university professor and author of the textbook *Understanding Movies*, on the subject of sex and violence in American film: "It's the backbone of the American cinema," Giannetti said. "Sex and violence have always been in films."

Let me just say that, while this isn't exactly a groundbreaking revelation, it's very good news.

Movies such as *The Wild Bunch*, *Lost Highway* and David Cronenberg's *Crash* were cited in the article, written by Amy Biancolli, from Albany, N.Y., as evidence supporting Giannetti's argument. It concluded with another statement by Giannetti: "There is a fundamental American hypocrisy at work here," he said. "Americans complain about these films, and they overwhelmingly go to see them." (One is reminded of former Sen. Bob Dole (R), castigating the entertainment industry for not promoting "family values" even as he embraced the most recent Schwarzenegger shoot-em-up—which Dole hadn't even seen. Perhaps this could be explained by Arnold's support of the Republican party. Talk about the pot and the kettle.)

I think there are only two real subjects of art: love and death. And, of the two, death is the thing that gives the other its significance.

See, it is our own mortality that makes how we love and live our lives (and die) so important. Our limited lifetimes limit our choices, making those choices that we make significant because we only get so many of them.

If we were immortal, we could do whatever we wanted because we would never run out of choices. Thus, our infinite life spans would

make us limitless, and it's limits which define us. You couldn't have the "Love of Your Life" if your life was long enough to defy definition. (Perhaps this explains the rise in divorce rates: We're living long enough to act on our second thoughts.)

So, is it any wonder that sex and violence are so prevalent in the most pervasive art of our time? Both are manifestations of the two most significant phenomena in our lives. And if there's anything an artist strives for, it's significance. No painter does what he or she does so that their hard work will match your couch. If anything, a painter would rather that you see your life (at least for the moment) in terms of the painting. Art isn't about decoration; it's about meaning (or lack thereof).

Now, I'm treading a very fine line here, because those who argue for censorship do so on the grounds that art affects behavior. And I am so anti-censorship that I think broadcasters should be able to broadcast whatever the hell they want, warts and all. (I may think Howard Stern is a gasbag, but I support his right to say *especially* those things with which I don't agree.) But I admit, art does seek to affect behavior. It can corrupt as well as enrich.

Well, so be it. A Judas Priest lyric may encourage an addled adolescent to swallow a shotgun blast, but I would submit such susceptibility would only be a symptom of a larger problem in that kid's life. The rest of us listen to heavy-metal noise and shake our heads (without necessarily "banging" them). And I would argue that we are richer for doing so because our imaginations are enlarged by the revelation that heavy-metal headbanging is possible, even if we don't embrace its earnest dissonance. To put it another way, watching the news does not turn

us into gun-wielding sociopaths who have to be brought down by SWAT snipers, no matter how much crime-scene footage we are subjected to.

But there are those who argue that we are literally deluged with art that is full of "meaningless" sex and violence. Well, Zen haikus are often meaningless. That is, they contradict themselves or operate in ways that prevent any meaning to be drawn from them (other than to comment on the artificiality of meaning). But they are also often beautiful.

A lot of violent or sexually-explicit movies operate the same way. They are meaningless, except for being violent and/or sexual, which I guess can be taken as a comment on the significance of sex and violence themselves. (After all, how else do you explain the career of slash-master Wes Craven?) But are they beautiful? Well, they're enough to get plenty of us to pay admission, regardless.

Sex and violence are prevalent in American film because they are supposed to be. Sex and violence are prevalent in American life (and Chinese Life, French Life and the

lives of the inhabitants of Easter Island—get it?). Just as art is an expression of life, so love and death are what art is all about. And the perceived prurience of American films is to me proof that cinema is a viable art. People wouldn't react so strongly if it weren't.

We are a lusty, murderous species. Who is surprised that our art resembles the Sodom of our psyches? But we are supposed to know the difference between what happens onscreen and what happens down the street. We can't all be Schwarzenegger, who gets to blow people away both in movies and at political conventions. (Imagine being married to a Kennedy-in-law, and yet lining up on the opposite side of the aisle. It's like being an actor who plays both Conan the Barbarian and the twin of Danny DeVito...)

Besides, I'd rather be Mel Gibson. Both he and Schwarzenegger talk funny, but Gibson can do Hamlet. And I can't wait for the next *Lethal Weapon*. I hope it contains a lot of sex, um, love, as well. I need some wholesome entertainment after all the crap I've been reading in school.

