

# Mills on Media 'Dolls' a placebo

by Stephen Mills

Last week the Students' Council ran "Valley of the Dolls" in the McInnes Room. The movie was a disaster and hardly worth mentioning.

The book of the same name on which the picture was based is another matter. It too was a disaster but is worth mentioning because it, along with many of today's best-sellers, is a placebo. You will see the significance of this assertion once I explain what a placebo is and why I rate "Valley of the Dolls" as such.

Placebo is a somewhat antiquated medical term used to describe brightly colored pills with absolutely no medicinal value which are given to a patient to make him think he is getting better. Such a practice would be scandalous were it not true that in a remarkable number of cases, placebos work; the patient recovers through his own mental resources.

Unfortunately, the placebo principle can be employed in the novel-writing business. That is, an author offers the public what looks like a good novel and what the reader is expected to believe is a good novel, but it is actually pure shit (a non-medical term I usually don't use but that describes so well what I am talking about.) Let me show you what I mean with our example "Valley of the Dolls."

This book by Jacqueline Susann is simply pornography but no one (but me) would class it as such because it is not packaged or promoted like simple pornography. It was first issued in hard-cover, printed on quality paper, well-bound and cost around six dollars. For six dollars, people expected a lot of good writing, especially when they were thrown un-subtle hints that the novel was "controversial" and a "sizzling expose".

"Sizzling expose" it was, but all it exposed was the stupidity of so many people in believing that a novel filled with sexy sob stories could be good.

Susann, of course, is not the only one peddling trash for cash to an easily duped public. Perhaps the biggest money maker in the racket is Harold Robbins ("The Carpetboggers", "Never Love a Stranger") who holds the number one spot this week (according to Time) with "The Inheritor" Robbins has made a mint and paved the way for many other pseudo-author exploiters.

Of course I am not the first to notice this tragic trend. Last year, the editors of Newsday noticed it and found it so hard to believe that they decided to test it for themselves. Asking several wellknown authors to

contribute, they pieced together a book entitled "Naked came the Stranger" and published it under the pen-name Penelope Ashe. The contributing authors did their best to produce their worst and, not surprisingly "Naked Came the Stranger" was a huge financial success. (so successful, in fact, that a sequel is planned. Apparently the public was forgotten when the money began rolling in.)

Normally at this point in a discussion, I try to find something nice to say about my topic but I don't mind saying I find nothing commendable about books like "Valley of the Dolls", and find their author repulsive. Unlike medical placebos, literary ones are advantageous to only one person, the immoral author who stoops so low as to capitalize upon and promote the public's baser motivations. To for such people, I have no compliments and no sympathy. I would dearly love to see them penniless and the abominations they produce banned from the shelves and stacks forever.

To conclude, let me stretch my opening analogy one step further. While medical placebos, often make you well, literary placebos always sick you in mind and soul. Catch on before it's too late.

# Where the power is

Most people don't know it, but there is a committee on campus which affects their daily lives.

The Committee on Studies, consisting of six faculty members and two undergraduate students has fantastic potential power.

It can assess credits for classes, taken, approve honour programs varying from specific regulations and determine eligibility for supplemental examinations.

It is also within their power to examine the results and attendance of students and advise or require them to alter their programs or withdraw from the university.

Some people feel that these powers are too great. Prof. A. C. Thompson, Chairman of the Committee, admits that when it comes right down to courses, the committee does have the final decision as to whether a student will be allowed to take a particular course.

However, he feels there must be some general control of the granting of degrees, selection of courses, etc.

"The regulations are laid down with the average student in mind", he said. "There are bound to be students who don't fit in. These are the students we see; we never hear about the students who fit into the system."

Prof. Thompson explained that the relatively small number of students who come before the committee have run into trouble with courses. Usually they have found they have not fulfilled the requirements for their program or that they wish to change courses after the deadline.

Prof. Thompson said that the committee has been improved by the student representatives. He feels they provide a different slant to the ordinarily academic perspective of the faculty members.

One area currently under study is correspondence courses. Liz Cusack, one of the student representatives, explained that at present Dalhousie only gives credit for courses from Queen's.

She went on to explain that one of the main recommendations the committee has passed lately about credits from other universities was sent back from the Senate. They had suggested that transfer students get credit for five courses, one of which could be in the major.

"A lot of kids come from other places with at least six credits I can't see any reason why they shouldn't get recognition for those courses. I think it's school snobbery."

Rick Rofihe, the other student representative, accused the Committee of not wishing to establish precedents that would start a flow of similar requests.

"They don't go far enough in overstepping red tape. There is a wall of academic pomposity that is hard to break through," he said. Rofihe is not sure how effective, the committee is.

"Our recommendations go to faculty Council which is a slow smoke-filled room where changes take a long time to materialize." However, he does admit the students are better off because the committee exists.

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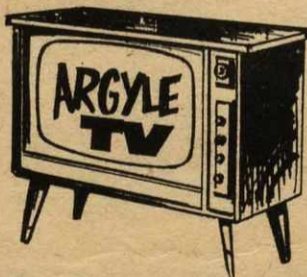
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