

## View from Queen's Park

KITCHENER - WATERLOO RECORD

## These sick films have no redeeming values

**A**s the father of three young daughters, Premier Bob Rae missed an important political event this week that could have real implications for his own children. Rae skipped a screening of Beel Hatred, put on through the efforts of two women, Pat Herdman of Wellington County and Valerie Smith of Brampton.

He missed quite a show: many in the packed audience found they couldn't sit through the film, and all of us who did felt physical relief when the lights finally came on and the flickering images stopped.

We'd seen a sampling, some 25 minutes from three movies. But it was enough to stoken me. The movies have three basic themes: women as a source of food, women as a source of body parts which are then sewn together to create a "perfect" corpse and just plain killing women in vast numbers and in graphic detail. They're called slasher films and there are hundreds, readily available at neighborhood video stores in Brampton, North Bay, Guelph, pretty well any community you can think of.

The evening began with a film from Vancouver called Possession, in which a young man kills 10 women and three men.



**Catherine Thompson**

The men die quickly and are fully clothed. The women are beautiful, nude, half-nude or scantily clad — three of them are killed in bathtubs or showers — and they all die horribly. In one clip, the man heats a poker red-hot then sticks it into the abdomen of a woman he's got pinned against a wall.

Then on to Bloodfeast, a cheesy 1980s film now being dumped on the market for \$5. Scenes include a woman whose tongue gets ripped out of her head, complete with graphic and lingering closeups, and another bathtub murder in which a woman's eye is gouged out and her limbs lopped off.

But the final film was most horrific in its re-creation of a so-called "snuff" movie. While the film crew looks on, a woman is pinned down, her fingers snipped off with wire-cutters (in close-up), her hand cut off with a buzzsaw and finally, she is eviscerated to

the triumphant cries of her tormentor.

As a journalist, the idea of banning anything goes against the grain. But these pictures offer nothing redeeming or artistic, and much that is deeply disturbing. They are cheaply made and poorly written. Their thin plots lack even suspense and there's often little or no sex. They're made for one reason only, to make money, and they offer one simple message: killing and mutilating women is not only OK, it's actually kind of neat. Come and watch.

Ontario is no protected idyll: it's a place where young women like Kristen French, Leslie Mahaffey and Lynda Shaw really do die horrible deaths at the hands of real people. In such a world, how can it be acceptable to celebrate such brutality?

These films would certainly fall outside the limits of what's called "community standards." I have no doubt your average person in any Ontario community would find these films sickening. What is horrifying, then, is that these films are readily available — not in seedy back-alley videotshops, but in franchises like Jumbo Video and Videos for You, and even in stores like Zeller's.

They fall almost entirely outside current regulation. Two of the films shown were

rated for 14-year-olds and up, the third had apparently bypassed the rating system altogether. Police say they're powerless to ban them: there's not enough sex for them to be deemed obscene and, although they're clearly misogynistic, they fall outside hate laws which apply only to race and religion.

There were few politicians at the screening. But two opposition MPPs said they would bring the issue to their colleagues at the legislature. It wouldn't take much to get changes: stronger directives to the Ontario Film Review Board, pressure on the feds to redefine obscenity to include films in which a predominant feature is the killing and mutilation of members of an identifiable group, including women. What's more obscene? A woman's breast being caressed or the same breast being lopped off?

The middle class is too often tempted to turn away and deal with tricky issues like these by avoiding them. But as Herdman, who like Rae is the parent of three girls, said this week, "I live in the same world as people who find slasher movies entertainment.

We're all affected by that. Our children are. Rae should stick the videotape Herdman sent into his VCR, watch it for as long as he can, think of his three daughters, and act.