

# Anatomy of a Film Rating



BROADWAY AND TV ACTRESS Frances Sternhagen (right) is shown being interviewed for the "Lamp Unto My Feet" TV show by Mary Fickett.

2 Former Classmates and . . .

## Inspiration By Example

New York — Not long ago, a former college classmate gave actress Frances Sternhagen a dramatic example of a woman's power to communicate values. It is a well-known example, but Miss Sternhagen uses it to emphasize the importance of women in the arts.

"She didn't have to do anything but stand there with a black veil and her two children," Miss Sternhagen said. "But I know from letters written to her that many wives who had been thinking of divorce or separation were inspired to stick with their husbands because of her courage."

The woman, of course, was Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. But Frances Sternhagen has done some inspiring of her own, particularly among women who have felt that to be both a successful wife and mother and a competent actress is not possible. For in addition to being the wife of actor Tom Cavan, she is the mother of five children, ranging in age from 8 to 1.

An award-winning off-Broadway actress and a familiar face on TV dramatic shows, Miss Sternhagen will talk about women and the arts on "Lamp Unto My Feet" on CBS-TV Sunday Morning, Aug. 22 (10 a.m. EDT). She will be interviewed by actress Mary Fickett in one segment of a three-part series called "The Evolution of Eve," presented by CBS in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men.

"What your life is can be an influence without your having to say anything at all," she told Catholic Entertainment Features. "Jackie Kennedy proved that just the way she behaved during those four days."

Living in New Rochelle, N.Y., not far from Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart — where some of the mail addressed to Mrs. Kennedy is answered — Miss Sternhagen has seen in writing the impact of one woman's example, and her ability to communicate her values.

"It seems to me all art is communication," Miss Sternhagen went on. "You just communicate to the best of your ability, and you communicate your personality, your values, ethics, your religion."

"I know there are people who think that you shouldn't work if you don't have to, but I feel that if a woman is a creative person in any way, that's as much a part of her as anything else."

Having just completed a seven-month run in two Harold Pinter one-act plays off-Broadway (one critic took the occasion to declare that she is "surely one of the finest actresses on our continent"), Miss Sternhagen is this month appearing with her husband in a musical in Pennsylvania's Bucks County Playhouse, then returns to New York to begin rehearsals for a Broadway play, "The Right Honorable Gentleman," scheduled to open in October.

She finds that one advantage of keeping so busy is that she doesn't have too much time to hear from the neighbors who wonder why she doesn't stay at home with the children, or to read the many books and articles about the "feminine mystique."

"I did read one of those articles not long ago, and, well,

I was impressed for a week," she said. "But I realized, finally, that every working mother, every wife, is an individual, and you have to deal with your own problems and your own personality. I think that one of our big problems is that it is easy to get swamped by other people's opinions. I think we are very much about what people think of us, but you have to maintain your own integrity. I think you've got to leave some of those articles alone to keep your sanity."

Miss Sternhagen has very few second thoughts about being an actress: "I do it because I love it; women shouldn't feel guilty about doing something they love."

Despite her attitude and her rising career, "my children are the most important thing in my life, so I have to take things as they come." She has turned down attractive offers that would have taken her away from her husband or her children for any length of time (they took the children along during their month's stay in Bucks County), and has had to sacrifice what she believes to be the best kind of work for a dedicated actor or actress: repertory theater, in which a variety of roles are played. "But it's too demanding. I couldn't commit all that time, because so many more rehearsals are necessary."

Miss Sternhagen committed herself to acting soon after she graduated from Vassar, a native of Washington, D.C., she enrolled for one course at Catholic University's School of Drama, merely for the opportunity to appear in their plays. She got into two, "The Alchemist" and "The Skin of Our Teeth." It was enough. In the second, she met her future husband.

(Catholic Entertainment Features.)

408 Transfusions  
Pola De Lena, Spain — (NC) — Father Victor Diaz Cerna is off to the Rhodesian missions again, after recovering from a still undiagnosed, ten-year illness during which he received 408 blood transfusions.

By J. D. NICOLA

New York — When the Legion of Decency recently gave an "A-4" rating to "The Knack," a film comedy about sex, it realized that the rating would probably be the most controversial since the "A-4" classification given to "Tom Jones" almost two years ago.

(In the Legion categories "A-4" means morally unobjectionable for adults, with reservations.)

Already, a widely syndicated Catholic film critic, William Mooring, has openly criticized the Legion for not giving "The Knack" a rating of "B" (morally objectionable in part for all) or "C" (condemned).

In a rare practice, Monsignor Thomas F. Little, executive secretary of the Legion, opened the Legion file on "The Knack" to Catholic Entertainment Features. The purpose was, specifically, to offset misinformation about what the Legion's rating of "The Knack" and generally, to provide an understanding of how the Legion attempts to arrive at a fair rating on films that must, by their nature, offend some Catholic moviegoers, but which may, at the same time, have merit for other Catholics.

"The Knack," which stars Rita Tushingham, is based on a play by Ann Jellicoe. The story centers on two young men in London, one of whom has a knack with women, while the other does not and wants to learn how to get it. A girl from the suburbs arrives on the scene, and the rest of the film is concerned with which of the two boys will win her.

Some Legion reviewers saw the film as an attack on "the highest teachings of the Judeo-Christian world toward chastity," as one Jesuit priest-reviewer observed in voting "C."

HOWEVER, all Legion ratings are a consensus. Msgr. Little noted, and reflect the opinions of many Legion reviewers, rather than those of one person. This, then, is how they voted and what they said after seeing "The Knack":

In all, 42 Catholic reviewers cast ballots on "The Knack," with the following results: 11 voted for an "A-3" (morally unobjectionable for adults) rating; 14 thought it should be "A-4"; 6 for "B" and 11 for "C." Thus, 28 Legion reviewers thought it should be in an "A" category, as opposed to 17 who placed it "B" or "C."

But in coming to a final decision, the Legion's executive staff does more than count ballots. It gives attention to the reviewers' comments on some as brief as several sentences, some as long as two typewritten pages, single-spaced.

And to be as fair as possible, the Legion draws its votes and comments from a wide range of reviewers: the regular board of

women reviewers from the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (7 in this case) and from the Legion's board of consultants, made up of priests, educators, lay teachers, textbook editors, secretaries, professional film critics for Catholic and secular publications, writers and researchers for news magazines, lawyers, advertising people, and even a family-court judge. Here is how they saw "The Knack," in excerpts from the file:

"Sex for sex' sake, and holy matrimony is not mentioned once in 84 zippy minutes," commented one consultant in her mid-twenties who voted "C."

Another consultant, a priest voting for "C," summed up: "This seems to be 98% sex and its by-ways. Many scenes are lengthy buildups to double-entendres, while others are just plain sex talk and banter. At times it seems to be just a terrific satire, but I don't know if the average audience would understand it as such. Promiscuity comes across as just a lot of fun, with no moral overtones involved."

This was the line of reasoning in the ballots cast for "C" or "B," as a Jesuit voted because "most intelligent people would consider the whole thing offensive."

BUT THEN came the votes and commentaries for an "A-4" rating, given to films that are not "morally offensive in themselves, but which require some analysis and explanation to the uninformed against wrong interpretations and false conclusions."

"I honestly cannot conceive of anyone being morally harmed by this inane production," a Jesuit priest commented. "There are no scenes which can be regarded as really objectionable in the sense that they would arouse or display indecent emotions, nor are they strongly suggestive, even."

A religious brother and educator saw it as "a satirical slap at a sexually-overconscious society. I do not think that it is obscene, or in poor taste, or over-drawn, or offensive in any way. . . . In exploding the sexual myths and symbols that have supplanted religious values in our society, 'The Knack' sustains a commendable satiric commentary frequently couched in a delightful brand of fantasy."

One of the strongest commentaries for an "A-4" rating came from a long-time female reviewer who is also a professional film critic. "Though the film is about pre-occupation with eroticism," she wrote on her ballot, "it is non-erotic and even anti-erotic in tone and its main thrust is to debunk the contemporary pre-occupation with sex. I don't see it as a threat to anyone's moral values."

When all the votes were in, the Legion rated "The Knack" "A-4" and when all the comments were weighed, this observation was made:

"Audience reaction to this film will vary greatly. Some will be outraged by its apparent immorality and vulgar suggestiveness. For others it will be a heavy-handed satire, bur-

dened with a confusing mixture of hyper-subtleties and avant-garde symbolism. Yet others will hail it as a brilliant comedy in the advanced mode of filmmaking. An objective evaluation from a religious standpoint must grant that this satiric commentary effectively ridicules the sexual pre-occupation of our times; yet it must also express a certain reservation that, for the immature at least, the film may seem to contradict basic religious teaching on pre-marital sex."

Far from complaining that the Legion was "wrong" or misled in its rating of "The Knack," one priest-reviewer concluded: "I wouldn't argue with any rating; it's that kind of film."

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