

Generating “The Genesis Children”

Director Billy Byars, Jr., rankles over the rating of his film.

by Viola Hegyi Swisher

“Frankly,” protested Billy Byars, Jr., Texas molecular biologist turned international film producer, “I don’t think a view of a young boy’s penis is going to destroy the mind of anybody.”

Byars let his steak sandwich grow cold on the plate while he grew hot under the collar.

With true grit, Texas style, he resisted taking the Motion Picture Association of America’s X for an answer to his Lyric Films International feature, *The Genesis Children*, which he made in Italy with eight adolescents on an allegorical adventure of self-discovery.

The MPAA X-rating hinges on what Byars refers to as “a nude ballet” of the eight boys. Actually, it isn’t ballet at all, but a romp in the Mediterranean waters and on the sands of an isolated beach below Salerno. While the kids cavort in and around the cave-framed shores, Byars’ alert camera focuses on every possibility of the scenic skinny-dipping.

“In the first place,” the tall Texan objected with the urgency of strong personal conviction, “this whole thing of ratings is absurd. If, however, ratings must be made, I think my film should have a new one: an M-rating. That means *Mandatory*. Especially for young people.

“I really believe that what I say in the film is good—certainly it’s not bad—for adolescents. I feel it’s criminal to lock out the very audience that would most benefit from seeing *The Genesis Children*.”

Up to a point, the Motion Picture Association of America spokesmen agree with Byars.

“In giving the film an X-rating,” said Dr. Aaron Stern, director of MPAA’s code and rating administration, “we are basically defending the boundaries of the R-category from invasion by hard-core material. Personally, I’m opposed to the

X-rating. It doesn’t actually differentiate between hard core and R-category material. The singular designation X may go beyond the necessity to protect children. And it has no business determining judgments for adults.

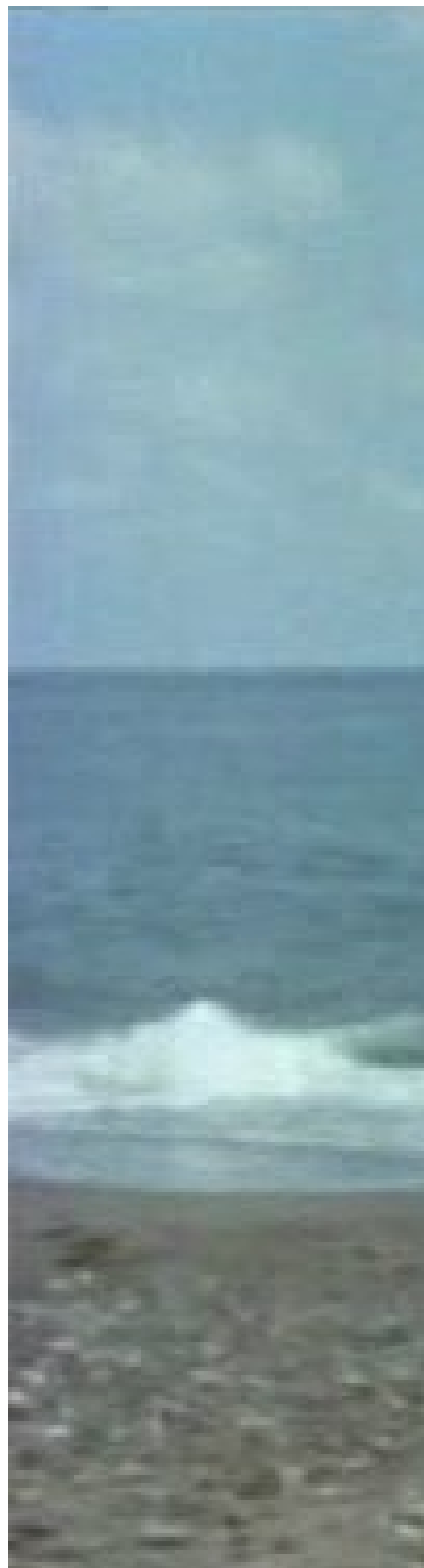
“The X,” he continued, “should not be more than a guide. It should not deprive a child of the right to attend certain films, as it does—even if his parents want to take him. It should determine *no* decisions of that nature, nor any value judgments. Shouldn’t intrude upon that area at all. Nor can we use use [sic] artistic merit as the basis for making an X or R decision. We just have to follow the ground rules defining those categories.

“*The Genesis Children* is really a very benign film. It was only the cumulative amount of nudity and the closeup shots of the pelvic area that brought about the X decision. Even the violence of the scene in which the boys attack the bus is well within the R category.”

The bus Dr. Stern referred to is cast in the film as a symbol of our paradoxical civilization. In the scene he was talking about, the boys-wantonly or defiantly-ram the car into a huge boulder. Their act of violence is not directed against a fellow human being, yet because of the way they fling their lighted torches into the shattered bus, the scene takes on the character of a fiery orgy of destruction as the car turns into a flaming ruin.

Added Dr. Stern persuasively, “A rating system is preferable to telling people you can or cannot do this or that. The system is simply a way of giving potential audiences information and then, ideally, letting them make their own choices.”

But Billy Byars has countered with the claim that the MPAA ratings aren’t working because they’re based on a false premise: the premise that “the public



wants misguided moralists to protect it.”

Byars is profoundly sure a society that wants to protect itself from itself is in trouble. A panoramic glance across our societal checkerboard, with its violently contrasting nihilist-Establishment pattern, suggests that he might well be right.

Billy's film was scarcely out of its first rough-cut stage when he previewed it in Hollywood, taking a series of samplings of public reaction—a factor something as traumatically different from the reaction of, let's say, employees.

“The greatest shock of my life,” Billy flinched half in jest, half in earnest “came the first time I showed my film publicly. There happened to be some people in the screening room who didn't like it. I had theorized—rationalized—beforehand that there could possibly be some people who might not like my film. But when I came face to face with them— intelligent men and women—people who knew what I was trying to say and yet were not interested or didn't like the way I said it, their reaction struck me with the force of a great blow.

“I discovered that one of the most valuable lessons any newcomer to film making can learn is this: the day of the yes man is still with us. The people associated with the industry; the people working with producers, patting them on the back and saying, ‘What a work of art!’

are not the same people who buy tickets, sit in the general audience – and make their own independent judgments.

“The making of a film becomes so personal, yet the mission of that film must be very public,” he observed. “It's the man in the street who has final authority over whether this highly personal creation—*my* creation, in this instance—shall survive in the life-giving climate of public acceptance or die in the killing climate of public rejection.

“Unquestionably, if ten million people see my film, all but one will say, ‘I would have done this and that differently if...’ The one exception would be me, I think. No, let me take that back. I'll say it too. I would have done my film differently if...”

If what? He didn't say.

Molecular biologist Billy Byars came to movie making with a background in biophysics, bacteriology, protozoology, virology, geology, astronomy, mathematics, entomology and weight lifting. He also exercises great expertise at the racetrack and in Las Vegas, computing odds. In more orthodox veins, he's a painter, art photographer, camera expert and color connoisseur.

His outlook on practically everything is provocatively off-center.

Being a theoretical field, research science is, Byars says, an art. Researchers, it follows, may be likened to

artists, while those engaged in “practical fields”—engineers and practitioners of medicine, for example—are artisans.

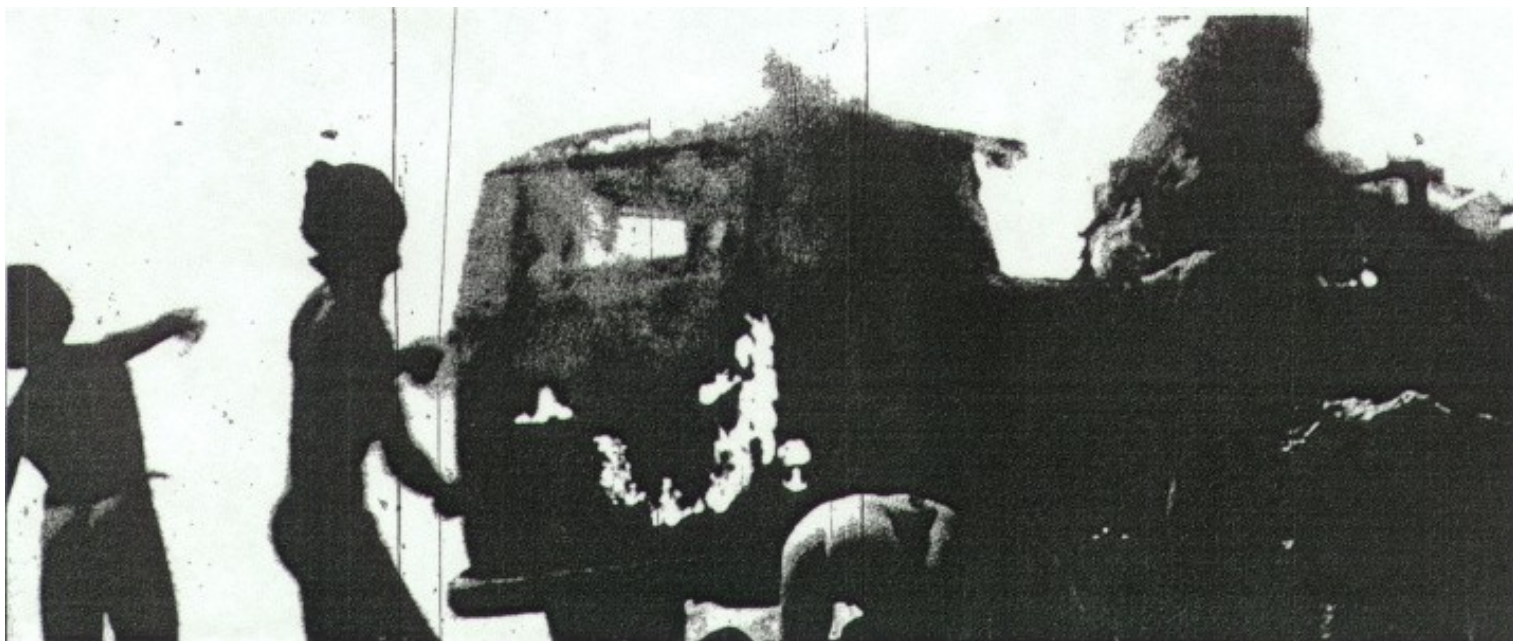
As he sees it, nature has laws, no structure. Nature itself is, however, an ultimately functionable science

Billy feels that a man's ultimate wisdom is in knowing himself and his universe, not—definitely not—in understanding infinity.

His bachelor pad in the Hollywood hills boasts massive oaken beams and other touches of baronial elegance, but on the road, locating in Eastern Europe, he's likely as not to hole up in a modest youth hostel.

Tyler, Texas, wildcatter Billy Byars, Sr., who made what seems a lasting fortune from acres of oil wells, adopted Billy, Jr., from the Edna Gladney Foundation in Fort Worth. Beginning with nothing, Byars, Sr., became a millionaire at twenty, went broke at twenty-one and hit millionaire status again by age twenty-five. Friend of presidents and other Establishment VIP's, he was also a great amigo of revolutionary Pancho Villa.

Billy describes his adoptive mother as having been “an elegant but colorful woman” of Irish heritage. His equally colorful Texas sister and her husband raise prize cattle. Not long ago one of their prize bulls, a creature of distinguished bovine lineage, beat out



John Wayne's bull in a competition for a world championship.

In the process of an investigation to trace his own natural lineage, Billy has become convinced that he's from a family composed entirely of black sheep. Chances are that, like their X-provoking, movie-making descendant, they were very forthright black sheep, acting always upon passionate private conviction and not out of hypocritical public pretense. It is precisely this presumed family characteristic that's triggered Billy's encounters with the Motion Picture Association of America.

"You know, this is the most incredible thing," he brooded. "It's just unbelievable to me that the MPAA would comment to me that this film is dangerous, that it deserves an X. I think the MPAA has been the sole critic of my use of the young boys."

Byars' next film venture is an already filmed documentary he has titled *The Russian Adventure*. It unreels as a story of the travels of an International Boyhood group, filmed not only in Russia, but elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Still in the early planning stage is a ballet feature to be filmed in the desert. Nude. Of course.

Opposite page:
The burning of the truck symbolizes the boys' defiance of contemporary values.

Below left:
Billy Byars, Jr., (left) chats with actor Vincent Child on location in Rome for "The Genesis Children."

Below right:
Max Adams and David Johnson speculate about their new life in "The Genesis Children."

