

Candy: doesn't make it

Films

Dennis Raymond

1969

"Candy" must be the world's first avant-garde Gallop poll movie; there's something for everybody... dirty old men, freaks, sadists, mom and dad, the kiddies, and homosexuals.

The director, Christian Marquand, started out with a fool-proof formula guaranteed to appeal to the "with-it" film audience. Consider this: the screenplay, by Buck Henry, was loosely based on Terry Southern's notorious best seller; the casting department had lined up no less than Marlon Brando, Richard Burton, Ringo Starr, Walter Mathau, James Coburn, Charles Aznavour, John Astin, Elsa Martinelli, and a much-publicized little Swedish dish, Ewa Aulin, to play the title role; and then toss in all sorts of movie madness...bits and pieces of "Persona," "Dr. Strangelove," "The Graduate," "Barbarella," "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg," a whole segment from "8-1/2," nods to Lester and Godard, and finally, a little "2001" mysticism thrown in for box-office measure.

"Candy" suffers from an advanced case of schizophrenia. It just rambles on and on for over two hours, getting nowhere except progressively worse, until Buck Henry decides to end the whole goddamn mess with a Felliniesque finale. And it's Henry's screenplay that is the basis for this film's failure. Every scene goes too far, and for too long, like some jokester jabbing you in the ribs long after the joke has ceased to be funny.

We all know that whatever Buck Henry does is supposed to be cool beyond question, but I often wondered how the man who wrote for "Get Smart" could also have written "The Graduate"...that is, until I came across Charles Webb's novel and discovered that most of the dialogue was lifted verbatim from the book.

The dialogue for "Candy" sounds like the remains of some old "Get Smart" episode. They should have gone all the way and added the canned laughter.

Oddly enough, when I was trying to describe to a group of friends just how perfectly awful "Candy" was, we all became limp with laughter. The truth is that "Candy" works better in print than on celluloid. The romantic episodes of *The Constant Virgin* seem somehow funnier when you're talking about it than when you see it. The reason for this is, I think, that whereas literature has established for itself any number of sexual cliches through the centuries, the film medium is relatively new in this field.

Terry Southern's heroine ran the sexual gauntlet, satirizing the modern pornographic novel. Candy's exploits were too preposterous to be titillating. But "Candy" as a movie has no real target for its humor. On the screen, the sexual episodes become more and more intriguing, less and less hysterical.

The night I went to see it, the youthful audience drew in its breath and sat aghast as Ringo Starr proceeded to lay Candy on a billiards table.

Surprisingly, when it comes right down to depicting the sexual episodes on the screen, "Candy" is nothing more than a series of compromises. If there was one thing I could admire about "Barbarella," that trashy Roger Vadim-Terry Southern collaboration, it was the utter naturalness of the nudity and -sex. But with "Candy", we are back in the deepest heart of Hollywood.

The sexual elements in "Candy" are of that leering, peek-a-boo, now-you-see-it-now-you-don't variety. And when Anita Pallenberg bares her left breast, the screen is flooded with a close-up that left the audience gasping for air.

The performances in "Candy" are all equally grotesque and humorless. But there's that Swedish ingenue or overgrown infant, Ewa Aulin, with a face as soft and dimply as a baby's bottom...and just as expressive.



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