

Films

Raymond Reviews Two

Dennis Raymond

1969

“The First Time” (Studio-North)

When you see “The First Time” you begin to think that this “Graduate” bit is becoming a pretty poor excuse for a movie.

This time the striking Jacqueline Bisset has the Mrs. Robinson role, and Wes Stern, Rick Kelman, and Wink Roberts all comprise the Benjamin Braddock figure, working under the assumption that three Dustin Hoffmanns are more fun than one.

These kids are so cute and so full of little tricks, like those animals in a Disney movie. They use words like “gosh” and “golly” and “wow” and “swell.” They drink Coca Cola and love their parents and families.

The Perfect Teenagers: bright and shining faces, charming and gawky, a healthy curiosity about sex, but minds as clean and well-brushed as their teeth, smiley and “giggly, a barrel of laughs, inhumanly happy.

What are they? I’ve never met a teenager that talked and acted like that. They’re the Big Lie, like some mush-headed parent’s dream of the ideal child.

Just what is it that makes people buy and actually enjoy a movie like “The First Time?” Its “freshness?”—a freshness so mechanically engineered, so shrewdly calculated that you can just about time the laughs to every 60 seconds.

There’s a chintzy little rock score that’s supposed to inspire us with joy, and some bouncing, colorful photography of Niagara Falls that’s supposed to be full of youthful zest.

So when Wes Stern stands in front of the camera and gives us one of those blank, deadpan stares, the music twangs chipperly, and you can hear all those titters of laughter spreading contagiously through the theatre, like some kind of disease, right on cue.

The first hour or so is really quite charming, in the same way that Bergman’s “Hour of the Wolf” was.

It’s Pavlov movie-making at its most blatant: the makers of “The First Time” turn us into dogs that salivate on signal.

“The Magus” (Madison)

There’s not much to be said about “The Magus” either, except that it never fulfills its initial promises, and the opening does seem promising at the very least.

Based upon the novel by John Fowles and scripted by Mr. Fowles himself, the hero of “The Magus,” like Cocteau’s Orpheus, allows himself to become the pawn of a certain mystic, only to return where both he and the film started, this time, we are told, with a new awareness of poise and intriguing.

With all varieties of gossamer phantoms and hallucinations lurking just beyond the shadows, and the elegant Candice Bergen fluttering about the Greek landscape in circa 1917 gowns like some delicate, but deadly, butterfly, all captured in absolutely lovely, limpid color, “The Magus” makes for a lot of fun trying to guess who is real and

what is actually going on. It's like a fantastic, insane game in which as soon as you think you've caught on, someone changes the rules again.

As long as the movie stays on this level, it works. But Fowles spoils our pleasure by dredging up all sorts of murky bargain-basement existentialism and the film turns ugly, pretentious, and redundant: the last half of "The Magus" is as heavy and laborious as the first half is lovely and ambiguous.

fifth Estate

Dennis Raymond
Films
Raymond Reviews Two
1969

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/82-june-26-july-9-1969/films>
Fifth Estate #82, June 26-July 9, 1969

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)