Candy Short Guide

Candy by Terry Southern

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Characters

Candy Christian is the central protagonist. Like Candide, she is a young naif, a willing victim of all the "-isms" and fads abroad (and well touted) in an age of rapid transit and instant communications. Her favorite expressions are backwoods middle-class provincial exclamations: "Darn" and "Gosh" and "Good Grief." She is repeatedly the victim of every con-man in her vicinity, all of whom preach some supposedly pious and self-serving species of so-called "contemporary ethics." In such a novel, there are only two classes of character: the foolish Candy and a herd of knaves. For the rest, incident clearly plays a more dominant role than does character, as is frequently the case in fast-paced satiric novels.

Social Concerns

C andy satirizes everything it can about the emerging age of liberation of the 1960s. It particularly provides a send-up for a number of relevant issues — the pornographic novel itself, and clusters of wildly liberal, leftish fads of the era, such as Zen Buddhism, Taoist mysticism, tourism, Bohemian life in Greenwich Village, pop psychiatry with its experiments and fixation upon sex, group therapy, commune-living and commune jargon, Chinese acupuncture, dabblings in kinky sex, lascivious filmscripts, bathroom comedy of manners, and a quaint fondness for incest and freaks. The era was witnessing the "opening up" of Liberalism — even to the end of its tether — and was bending over backwards to embrace new extremes in theorizing, the sexual revolution, and acceptance of pornography as admissibly possessing "redeeming social values." Candy pillories the entire stock of these fads with flare and tipsy bad taste. It must also be admitted that Candy is nevertheless ambivalent. Like numerous film Westerns of the period, this novel simultaneously spoofs its subject while nonetheless serving loyally as a serious and juicy example of the very genre it portends to roast.

First published in Paris in 1958, it was banned by the French government and reissued there under the title Lollipop in 1962.

Techniques

Following in the steps of Voltaire, the authors create a satiric adventure tale with many of the earmarks of the original Candide. It is deliberately episodic, each chapter detailing a complete new adventure. Furthermore, it is ludicrously fast-paced, events unrolling at incredible speeds. The effect of such rapidity is to reduce actions and events to the level of absurdity and farce. In every single episode Candy is either duped into a sexual imbroglio or naively volunteers her services (without realizing her partners' motives). A recurrent feature of such a fiction is the comic "cognitio." Characters like Daddy, Uncle Jack, Aunt Livia, a guru disappear only to turn up and be suddenly recognized under very astounding circumstances. In addition, a dynamic satiric ploy recurrently utilized is anticlimax; Candy is again and again manipulated into a sexual encounter of great violence, yet most often the event is not consummated; instead, some third character arrives, some catastrophe ensues, and the result invariably is coitus interruptus — and some species of mayhem and letdown. In short, sexual fulfillment is usually nipped or curtailed, and the disruptions can only be conducive to laughter. By such means, of course, the characters, prevalent ideas, and even the pornographic novel itself are tilted, debilitated, and derided.

Themes

Just as Voltaire's Candide had mocked naive eighteenth-century philosophy that "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds," so does Candy mock modern permissive ideas that free love, frantic travel, and rabid experimentation in religions, mores, and life-styles are eagerly-to-be-fostered and endured. Beneath the masks of most "mod" performers is merely the rampant libido of another me-first generation of individuals who will exploit any and all ideas and men (and especially women) for purposes of selfaggrandizement. Yet, disquietingly, as in Voltaire, Nature herself — with accidents, reversals, small floods, and large earthquakes — contributes both to unsettle all things but at times even to advance the sexual promiscuity and carnage. Almost every single piety, faction, movement, and group protestation is reduced to shambles, for behind every civic movement stands a selfish (and sometimes lunatic) manipulator and solipsist. For all of its humor, Candy partly wishes to leave with the reader the least modicum of a bitter taste.

Adaptations

The film of Candy was released in technicolor in the U.S. in 1968 by Selmur. Southern developed the script, and the motion picture featured, among others, Richard Burton, Marlon Brando, John Huston, and Ewa Aulin.

It was a mild success as a picture, by no means so well received as the novel had been when published in the United States in 1964.

Literary Precedents

A major strand of the modern novel has been the picaresque tradition, which uses small, illicit characters as antiheroes or antiheroines, conducting them through a rapid sequence of satiric misadventures. Such is the mythos in Petronius' Satyricon, in the anonymous Spanish Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), in Voltaire's Candide. Dickens's Mr.

Related Titles

The novel Blue Movie (1970) is Southern's satiric examination of Hollywood, its mores, its goals, its conduct, and its values. The film industry is its essential target, and its ideals are presented as consisting of little other than Money and Sex, the chief concerns on the company lots and at Malibu beach parties. In the novel, Hollywood censorship of blatant sexuality is still strong, outside the realm of stag films.

But one of the so-called great directors, "King" B. (Boris Adrian), almost dreamily plans a pornographic film to end all pornographic films, one "noncontrived," "relevant," "beautiful and pure," and dedicated to "art" and "aesthetics." The film, The Faces of Love, is shot on location exclusively in Liechtenstein, without the knowledge of Metropolitan Pictures' top executives.

The film is almost exclusively a raunchy series of mad orgies, entailing massive ensembles of copulation in a Casbah setting, and other heated episodes of sodomy, incest, and lesbian encounters. Only at the last minute is a Papal vigilante team able to assault the offices of the cinemakers, confiscate, and destroy all of the steamy footage.

Hollywood filmland, and its frequent pretentions of devotion to Art and Aesthetics, is the satire's victim here.

But sexual mores generally and society's increasing liberalization of torrid sex on the silver screen also come in for some sound pommeling. Unfortunately, blatant sex and pornography surface almost incessantly, and the satire is finally submerged and nearly lost in the licentious melee. The attempts at comedy in this novel are less successful than in Candy, and the reader is too often left with some lackluster prose and heavy-handed obscene language and violent eroticism. And yet, on the outskirts of the set, the world in this fiction is also portrayed as benighted by chaotic civic actions: processions of anarchists, parades of political factions hailing and condemning acid, war, and the Viet Cong. The landscape outside filmland, it is implied, is equally chaotic, diseased, and obsessed.

The focus of the novel is Boris Adrian, the star director, and his low-grade assistant, the B-filmmaker and crass materialist Sid H. Krassman. Various international stars are solicited for the gala sexual activities — Angela Sterling, Debbie Roberts, Arabella, and Pamela Dickenson. As frequently is the case in satire, these characters are little more than absurd puppets, cogs, so to speak, in an enormous and ever-turning sexual grindstone. Nonetheless, Boris Adrian, as a virtual Ingmar Bergman or Federico Fellini of the triple-Xrated movie, is far more tepid and nondescript than is necessary.

Blue Movie too is episodic, but not so much so, nor so carefully constructed as Candy. It attempts to unfold a single, continuing story, but technical control of the plot is not evident. Like a circus, much of the work's success lies in cluttering its scenes with dozens and dozens of Hollywood types: actors and cameramen and technicians, and loads of extras: black Morrocans, Hamburg whores, and a bevy of translators and

miscellaneous hangers-on. Indeed, overcrowding and exaggerated delineations of sexual encounters — both on and off the set — constitute the novel's primal strategies for generating mayhem and laughter. Too frequently, such maneuvers do not wholly succeed.

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