Velz Notes Candy's Two Worlds

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"Is 'Candy' a work of satire or of pornography? Perhaps we should say that she exemplifies the better parts of both worlds."

This idea about the literary merit, or lack of such, in the controversial best-seller by Southern and Hoffenberg was one of several discussed by Dr. W. Velz of the English Department in his entertaining and informative analysis of "'Candy': A Study in Pornography and Satire."

Sex Satirized

One of the areas of great uncertainty concerning 'Candy' is: just what does the book satirize? Professor Velz posed these questions. "Is it a satire of the classic literary seduction scenes? Is it a satire on the Freudian concepts of human behavior and motivation (the novel can be considered an erotic dream, as Candy "flits about" from situation to situation)?"

"Is the novel having its fun at the expense of the Greenwich village pseudo-intellectual? Is it a satire, with current significance, on "over-sexed" English professors arousing prurient interests in their students? A satire on Zen Buddhism? Or is it rather nothing more than a satire on Candy herself, who relates the giving of sexual favors to terms of human need?"

Experience Negated

Dr. Velz hastened to point out that real sexual experience is always negated in "Candy." The heroine confuses sex with all types of things that are not sexual in nature: education, medicine ("and this is Ben Casey with a vengeance"), humanitarian impulses in general (her affair with the hunchback), social service (the "Cracker Foundation," and other groups of young people going out to save the world), and, of course, "the ubiquitous Daddy."

Throughout the novel, there is a general utilization of sex-substitutes, ranging from "the marvelous hyperbole of the bar stool" to the final Rabelaisian scene with the Buddha's nose in what must surely be one of the most spectacular denouncements in letters, an "apocalyptic vision of the decline of religion!" Velz commented, "To the extent that Candy denies sex is real because her only need is to be needed, she is a comic character in the classic tradition."

Velz also analyzed the significance of the book's title, relating it to "Candide," Voltaire's hero who goes on strange journeys looking for evidence that this is the best possible world; and to the Shaw drama "Candide," which contains a heroine who, when forced to choose between husband and lover, makes her choice on grounds of "who needs me most."

There is also the obvious connection with "the saccharine imagery" that runs through the novel. "Candy is sickly sweet, and the sexual imagery is handled exclusively in sugary term."

History Traced

The remainder of the discussion was given over to a brief history of the literary use of pornography and scatology for satirical purposes; Velz cited authors such as Chaucer and Swift, as well as several religious allegories.