

# 'Diary' is simplistic

"Diary of a Mad Housewife," Frank and Eleanor Perry's first effort since "Last Summer," is a disappointment. Like "Joe" and a number of other films in this lean year, "Diary" contains the seeds of real drama. But it opts for easy definitions, histrionics, and appeals to the audience (the night I went there were hoots for the villain), and invalidates its dramatic premise. Because it's by the Perrys it can't be utterly dismissed—and it has sporadic moments of power. But the overall effect is depressingly amateurish and slick.

"Diary's" main problem is the unevenness of its dramatic texture. Like a warped mirror, it does not so much reflect as distort reality. Scott Langley recently referred to the "general artificiality of Mrs. Perry's scripts (which) has become stylization." The point is that it has not become stylized, for stylization requires artistic integrity. It implies that a film is one or more steps removed from, but parallel to, reality, and that it keeps its distance at every point. George Stevens' 1939 "Gunga Din" is stylized. So, too, is "Medium Cool," though in a more complex way. In "Diary," however, the stylization is only partial. Stanley Kauffman, in a review in The New Republic, puts his finger on the movie's main flaw. Specifically, the "mad housewife" is not mad—and putting her into a world of stylized evil results in nothing more than the destruction of stick figures. Hence, instead of being a dramatic experience, "Diary" panders to its audience—supplies them a stylized villain to hate and a flesh-and-blood heroine to love—and deteriorates into the kind of simplistic assertiveness which is meaningless in a complex world.

"Diary" is about Tina, the repressed woman who is wife-mommy-slave for her family. She spends most of her time bearing up patiently under the strain, yet, when we ask why, the film has no answer. Kauffman suggests that Tina's endurance presupposes an audience. This is the crux of the film, for if Kauffman is right, as I think he is, "Diary" ceases to be drama and becomes merely a demonstration of a thesis. And the thesis itself is unbelievable when we perceive how contrived the film is. For if Tina does not in some way "deserve" her husband's tyranny—if her husband is merely a grotesque, and her marriage a situation which has been inexplicably imposed upon her, like prison or disease—then the husband-wife

situation ceases to be creditable. I don't mean to preclude character development on Tina's part. But character development is exactly what we lack; and it is not, at any event, the same thing as mythmaking. This particular myth—that of the competent, mature woman who, for reasons no one can explain and which never reflect on the insufficiency of her judgment, lets a puerile, odious husband domineer over her—this, I think, would be heady stuff even for a female liberationist.

Yet this is the dialectic of the film. The Perrys constantly force the audience to identify with Tina; the camera virtually shrugs for her—captures the utter normality of her boredom as she faces the inanities of married life—as if she were to whisper us an aside: "You see what nonsense I have to put up with!" If the Perrys would just let Tina bear some responsibility for her predicament, or relent and let the husband be ever so slightly human, "Diary" might suddenly burst into drama. Instead, all is black and white, and we get agitprop.

Given this kind of simplemindedness as the film's premise, everything else in "Diary" becomes questionable. Tina has an affair—of course; but a little late and a little too unimportant. When she and George finally break up, she calls him a sadist, and he replies that she's a masochist, and that she likes being brutalized. Psychologically, this makes perfect sense; it explains her marriage. But dramatically it's false. We don't see Tina as a masochist; it we did, we wouldn't identify so sympathetically with her. The Perrys try to have it both ways, and only wind up in a contradiction.

Frank Perry's direction is generally adequate, though flawed by mannerisms I mentioned earlier. In addition, it has a tendency to be too awfully cute. For

instance, he cuts from a scene in which Tina finally starts to lose her temper with her husband, as she keeps repeating sarcastically, "What you say has a certain ring of truth"—to George's ringing telephone with, you guessed, Tina calling to make their first rendezvous.

The acting is mostly satisfactory. Carrie Snodgrass is attractive and sincere, but doesn't seem to have much range. Frank Lagella, as the lover, is also good. But the main weight of the film, surprisingly, rests on Richard Benjamin's performance as the husband, and here the kind of evaluative problems I mentioned before come up. Scott Langley criticizes Benjamin for being "very poor...his inadequacies seriously damage many scenes." But the point is that there is no way of knowing if Benjamin is poor. His is the kind of role that can kill a career, because we hate him—or the character he portrays—without quite separating the two. If "Diary" were consistently stylized, or Benjamin's role humanized, this problem wouldn't arise. But amid the equivocations of the film, Benjamin gets caught. It is he, in the opening scenes, who must abuse Miss Snodgrass's (and the audience's) common sense with lines like: "For God's sake, Teen, snap to it...I'm really worried about you, you don't look well...You've gotten so bloody skinny, (and you have to realize that) you're Mrs. Jonathan Balser, MY WIFE." Later, at breakfast, to his children: "Your mother made Phi Beta Kappa at Smith, but she can't make a four-minute egg." Or, to Tina, at a party: "God, did you ever see so many names in one place? Isn't it marvelous we've developed such an exciting social life?" What can you do with such stuff?

If Tina, under this onslaught of self-parody, starts yawning, is it any wonder if the audience does, too?

The International Student Center and the Carolina Union are sponsoring a movie about the role of Cuban youth in the modernization of Cuba. "Companeras and Companeros" will show at 8 p.m. on December 3, Thursday, in 111 Murphey Hall. Twenty-five cents admission will be charged.

All people interested in selling at the International Handicrafts Bazaar, Dec. 4-6 must come to the General Sales meeting to be held Tuesday night at 7:30, Gerrard Hall.

The Graduate, returning to this area for the first time since 1968, will have an exclusive engagement here in Chapel Hill on December 7, 8, and 9. The movie will be shown at 7:00 and 9:30 P.M. each evening in the Great Hall of the Carolina Union. Tickets which are \$7.50 will go on sale at the information desk of the Union on Tuesday, December 1st.



## The Daily Tar Heel

# On The Outside

## Egypt spurns extension

CAIRO—President Anwar Sadat said Monday Egypt will not accept another extension of the Middle East cease-fire unless a timetable is worked out for Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territory.

The Middle East News Agency said Sadat made the statement in a speech to Egyptian troops stationed on the Suez Canal.

"I will not accept an extension of the ceasefire except in one case—when we have a timetable for withdrawal," Sadat said.

"Otherwise I will never agree to another extension because the matter will be turned into a series of delays and procrastinations which could go on for another 20 years."

Middle East analysts said Sadat's statement indicated a hardening in Egypt's position.

## Army may have 'secret police'

NEW YORK—A number of former military intelligence agents have claimed that the army had built up what amounted to a "secret police" force in recent years to gather information about the antiwar and civil rights movements and also about elected public officials.

The former agents, some of whom asked that their identities be concealed, said the military intelligence operatives conducted detailed spying at the funeral for Dr. Martin Luther King, the Poor Peoples Campaign, antiwar demonstrations throughout the country, and protests and demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the inauguration of President Nixon in 1969.

Five former agents made the disclosures on the NBC television program "First Tuesday," to be broadcast tonight.

## Germans meet as Berlin tenses

BERLIN—West German Christian Democrat members of Parliament met in Berlin Monday despite Soviet and East German opposition and Communist harassment of Western traffic to the isolated city.

The official East German news agency (ADN) said the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin had rejected a Western allied protest against interference with Berlin traffic. It said the Soviets considered the American, British and French notes delivered late Sunday "unsatisfactory" and inconsistent with the stated Western aim of reducing tension here.

ADN repeated the Communist contention that the West German political meeting in West Berlin was a "provocation" and violated the status of the divided city.

The East Germans began Saturday to delay the passage of Berlin traffic through their highway checkpoints.

## Court asked about bribe case

WASHINGTON—The Justice Department asked the Supreme Court Monday to decide whether a member of Congress can be legally prosecuted for accepting a bribe without violating his constitutionally protected congressional immunity.

It appeared an Oct. 8 ruling which dismissed bribery charges against former Sen. Daniel B. Brewster, D-Md., for allegedly accepting \$24,500 to influence his vote on postal legislation.

Judge George L. Hart Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia held that a member of Congress cannot be prosecuted for any legislative act he performs even if he has accepted a bribe for the act.

Allan I. Baron, special government prosecutor, said the ruling on a pretrial motion amounted to "a license to steal" for congressmen.



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