

Bed-hopping Beatty comes clean in 'Shampoo'

Shampoo has been offered up as a new-generation, naughty sex satire on fickle, modern Southern Californian (American) mores. It isn't, and I imagine that a lot of those who stood out in long lines to see the picture have come out more tired than teased.

The movie is entirely pat and predictable, but it is turning out to be somewhat of a phenomenon, probably because of the myth Warren Beatty has set up around himself.

Beatty got his start in

movies doing gigolo roles, of sorts, and his real-life bed-hopping is well known, especially his affair with Julie Christie. Yet I cherish the irony of the fact that in his two best movie roles, in *Bonnie and Clyde* and Robert Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (also opposite Julie Christie) Beatty played impotent characters.

Here he has no trouble. He is George, a free-spirited hairdresser who fools a lot of people because they think he's gay. If they only knew. With

his hair dryer as a new phallic symbol, Beatty spends more time on his motorcycle than in bed—but we get the idea.

Dumb-blonde type

Goldie Hawn is wasted as a dumb-blonde type who thinks she's Beatty's "steady" and is highly offended when she realizes she isn't. Christie is one of his former lovers who comes back to kindle whatever real feeling Beatty has in the movie. Lee Grant plays his third lover, a rather middle-aged looking lady, the wife of a wealthy businessman (Jack Warden) from whom Beatty is trying to get the money to start his own hairdressing shop.

The movie was produced by Beatty, after an idea that had been with him for several years. It might look like he's indulging in his own fantasies but it's probably closer to straight autobiography. Hal Ashby directed but his influence seems limited. Beatty wrote the screenplay along with Hollywood's hottest screenwriter, Robert Towne (who did *Chinatown* and also teamed up with director Ashby on 1974's *The Last Detail*).

The trouble with *Shampoo* is that it never goes all the way. It's really quite tame, with only a few groans in the

darkness and Beatty mooning us a couple of times. It is a '60s light-sex comedy that has adorned itself with depressing pretensions. The movie takes place on election eve 1968, and Nixon and Agnew haunt the background as the film looks back in masochistic hindsight at where we were during that era.

Constant interruptions

The movie is one constant interruption. When Beatty's

greg lukow
key grip

lady friends give him the eye and request him point blank for his services, we know exactly when its coming and the big break-in scenes, where girlfriends or husbands arrive just as Beatty is getting his pants down, are just as predictable.

There was only one scene that came close to the comic satire the movie was trying for. During a Republican election eve party, a partly drunk and completely horny Christie

crawls underneath a table to perform a well known immoral act on Beatty. She tries to blah his blah, as Lenny Bruce would say, but even that is cut short. In the end *Shampoo* fails because it has no real guts for its subject and comes up too tired and shy to reach orgasm.

The film's final shot, with a forlorn Beatty standing on a hilltop watching Christie leave with the Jack Warden character, turns out to be a very moralizing twist. The movie, however, pretends to be chic enough so that it won't appear that way.

George, in the end, is a hesitant, insecure and lonely man who can't seem to get out of his own way. He reacts, blank-eyed, to all that goes on about him and says little more than "Yeah, that's great."

Ultimately, when his phallic calling card has been taken away and the stud is put out to pasture, the movie wants us to feel sorry for him. We can't but I admire Beatty for bringing his character around so we can really look at him.

Sorry for him? No, although actually maybe I envy him since the only remaining issue in *Shampoo* is whether or not Beatty and Christie were really doing it.

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