



Heavy Petting: reflections on a period of sexual repression

BROWN

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flashing a tight smile and reminding Johnny, "I know who you are on the inside." Even Drones, though, has to pronounce the operation's results "fucking amazing." Johnny, now as handsome as Mickey Rourke, gets a job and dates a sweet office worker (Elizabeth McGovern).

Hill works with tight closeups and elegant compositions, but he's unable to maintain tension, and when the ending finally limps into view, it's a real downer without any cathartic power. Rourke generates sympathy enough, but the sluggish

FILM

script fails to give Johnny potency. Rafe and Sunny's sheer nastiness is comic-book stuff, yet Hill seems riveted by it. Here is a strong cast wasted.

For *Heavy Petting*, their satire on sex in the dark ages of the '50s, Obie Benz and Josh Waletzky have put together a pretty heavy cast, too. Following lead-talking head David Byrne come such high school heroes and nerds as Sandra Bernhard, Spalding Gray, Ann Magnuson, Josh Mostel, and Laurie Anderson. Posed tastefully against *Reds*-style black, most are quite funny about the painful business of adolescent sex—or sexual rites and etiquette, anyway.

William Burroughs may be both funniest and truest when he just winces as Allen Ginsberg describes telling a girl, "Boy, you've got big breasts!" and getting smartly hit with her bookbag. In this film homosexuality is just a gleam in the beholder's eye. This cute and coy documentary (from an idea by *The Atomic Cafe*'s Pierce Rafferty) doesn't want to get into anything, well, heavy.

These may be real people (one trusts) but here they're tightly edited performers, deftly turning any ill effects of so much pressure and taboo into amusing anecdote. Byrne describes the mysteries of impregnation ("If we went skinny dipping... what if I would leak or something?") and of masturbation ("You had a certain amount in you, and you'd use it and go dry about 18"). Cinematographer Sandi Sissel's perspective on pregnancy was somewhat starker: "Mother said she'd rather me get run over by a car." Judith Malina recalls the night she and Julian Beck saved her mother's life: "Open the windows, turn off the gas, we'll get married!"

Woven between the interviews are quaint clips from instructional films (such as *How To Say No* and *Physical Aspects of Puberty*), period newsreels, and B movies. The soundtrack—songs such as "Annie Had a Baby," "Blueberry Hill"—reinforces a point. Youngsters would be entertained and reassured. *Heavy Petting* makes an entertaining health ed film. ■

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