

An Unappreciated Gem – THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT

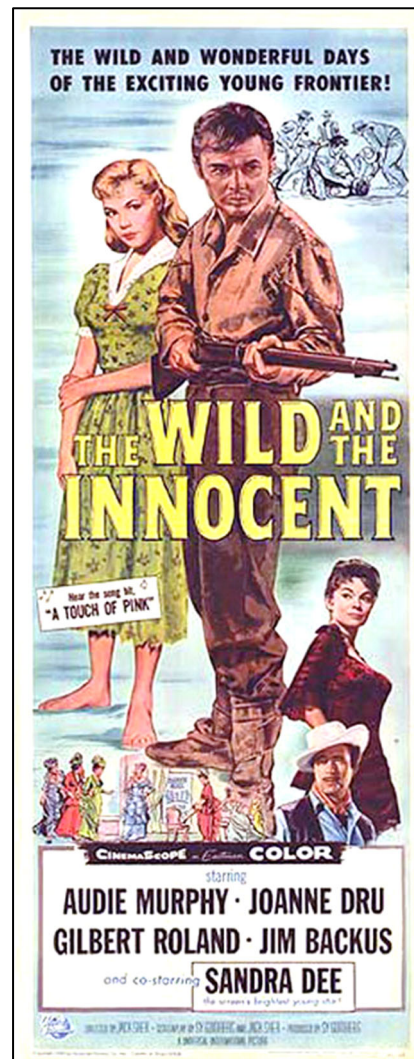
By Richard Rodgers

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board .
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4758>

CHARM AND HUMOR are aspects film goers may not associate with an Audie Murphy movie. This is understandable since Audie is primarily associated as a man carrying a gun – whether on actual World War II battlefields, in Hollywood westerns, war movies, or other cinematic or television dramas. Nevertheless, charm and humor are hallmarks in Audie Murphy’s film “THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT” (1959).¹

The movie was directed and written by Jack Sher. An experienced columnist, screen writer, director, producer, and lyricist Sher wrote for both the big screen and television. His credits include writing for one of the greatest western movies ever made – SHANE.^{2, 3}

In THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT, Sher wisely casts Audie Murphy with teenage actress Sandra Dee. The chemistry between the two is unmistakable. Audie’s laconic, shy boyish manner originating from his early



¹ The WILD AND THE INNOCENT can be viewed free without commercial interruption on the Internet at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibP05c1yuDQ>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Sher

³ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792042/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com



Sandra Dee in 1959. Born in 1942, Ms. Dee would sadly pass away in 2005 after a lifelong battle with anorexia nervosa and kidney disease.

Photo source: Wikipedia

impoverished years in northeast Texas was well suited for the innocent and vulnerable Ms. Dee who was only sixteen at the time of filming.

In the movie, Audie Murphy plays Yancy Hawkes, an inexperienced, young, accordion-playing mountain boy who must travel to the nearby Oglesby trading post on behalf of an injured uncle to sell a load of furs. Confident that he is up to the task, Yancy sets out with several pack mules laden with furs and a list of goods he is supposed to bring back.

Yancy arrives at the trading post but discovers it has been accidentally burned down by intoxicated Indians. The Indians were given “green whiskey” by a weaselly, Kentucky drifter, failed business owner, and moonshiner named Ben Stocker – brilliantly played by Strother Martin. Stocker is on his way to Oregon with a wife and six ragamuffin children to open a store – or so he says.

In a hilarious scene, the unscrupulous Stocker shrewdly sizes up Yancy when they meet. Stocker attempts to trade his wild-haired, unkempt daughter, Rosalie – played by Sandra Dee – to Yancy for half of his cargo of beaver pelts. The dialog between the two is noteworthy.

Stocker [calling to his daughter]:
Rosalie! Rosalie!

Stocker [introducing Rosalie to Yancy]: My Rosalie. I hate giving her up but for – say, half them furs – you’ve got yourself a fine wife!

Yancy: *A wife?!*

Stocker: Sure thing. She can cook, she can sew, she can even plow. And uh, she’s perty – cleaner.

Stocker [annoyed, pulls Rosalie by the arm]: Well, come closer so he can see ya!

Stocker [turns to Yancy and snickers] See? She don’t talk



Dealin' and dickerin'. Ben Stocker, played by Strother Martin, attempts to trade his daughter Rosalie for beaver pelts to a surprised Yancy Hawks who wants nothing to do with the deal.

much – eat much either. Huh?
What do you say? Deal?

Yancy: People can't get married like this!

Stocker: Why not?

Yancy: Well - they've got to love each other – that's why!

Stocker [laughing]: *Love?!* That's a good one. Now who told you that mush?

Yancy: Never you mind!

Stocker [still laughing]: Well, believe you me – it's a lot of hog wash!

Yancy [pushing Stocker]: Get away from me!

Stocker [apologetically while backing off]: Now, hold on. Hold on. Uh, maybe I's wrong. Maybe half of them furs is too much fer her. I'm willin' to dicker!

With disgust, Yancy shows no interest and sends Stocker packing.

Unfortunately, with the trading post burned down, Yancy is now forced to



Devastated. Rosalie is stunned as she listens to her father trying to trade her to a stranger for a pile of beaver pelts.

Photo source: screen capture.

extend his journey by an extra week. Having never visited a town before, he pushes forward toward Casper where he has been told he can trade his furs at the general store located there.

In the meantime, Rosalie runs away from her family – knowing her father is now willing to trade her off to any stranger he can profit. She backtracks at night to a sleeping Yancy who she hopes will help. When Yancy wakes up at his camp in the morning he is startled to discover Rosalie trying to be useful by starting a fire and making him breakfast.

Not accustomed to being near young girls Yancy is distressed and demands that Rosalie explain herself. With a lot of stammering, Rosalie manages to finally ask Yancy if he will let her ride along to Casper where she can find a job and earn her own keep.

Yancy firmly refuses while Rosalie – with large sad tear-filled brown eyes – stays quiet. Even still, Rosalie’s troubled and innocent stare seem to unsettle Yancy. He struggles to find an adequate reason not to take her to Casper.

Yancy: Stop looking at me like that. I said stop it! Look – I can’t take you. I never took a girl anywhere before. What’d I do with you? And another thing – you’re awful dirty!

Rosalie: We had soap, but the baby ate it!

Yancy: I don’t care what the baby did! I’ve got to go to Casper and be back in a week and – I told you to stop staring at me like that. Don’t just stand there. If you’re gonna cook breakfast before we go, then go ahead and cook it!

Soon the two start their journey to Casper together. On the night before arriving at Casper, A more relaxed Yancy, while playing his accordion, unknowingly enchants Rosalie as she quietly cooks. As the last note of his accordion fades out she says ...

Rosalie: That’s prettier than anything I’ve ever heard. Where’d you learn it?

Yancy: Uncle Lije⁴. We play it most every night.

⁴ A shortened form of Elijah.



Mesmerized. In this movie lobby card, Rosalie, shortly after finding Yancy on the trail, is captivated by his music and the discovery that he can read.

Rosalie: Oh, that must be wonderful. We never had no music at all.

Yancy: Not even singing?

Rosalie: No. Pa don't hold much for singing 'cept when he runs across a prayer meeting maybe... [she sighs] but I could listen to it all the time. I don't know why.

Yancy: Music's wine for the thirsty soul.

Yancy [pauses and shyly looks away from Rosalie]: I read that in a book once.

Rosalie [moves closer to Yancy asking incredulously]: You – you *can read too*?

Yancy [thoughtfully]: Some. I read the bible. Pilgrim's Progress and Ivanhoe twice. There's beautiful things in books.

Rosalie [closes her eyes]: Oh, I wish I could read!

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com



An eager reading student? Rosalie learns that Yancy is literate and that she doesn't care how long it will take for him to teach her to read. *Photo source: screen capture.*

Yancy: Maybe you can learn someday.

Rosalie: Oh, I'd like to – mightily!

Yancy: It aint easy. Uncle Lije taught me my letters from printing on snuff cans.

Rosalie: Could *you* teach somebody to?

Yancy: I guess so if there's enough time.

Rosalie: Oh, *I wouldn't care how long it takes Yancy!*

Realizing the unexpected direction their discussion is taking, Yancy abruptly ends

the conversation. Even still Yancy is kindhearted and is becoming more comfortable being with Rosalie. The two are developing a friendship.

Yancy and Rosalie arrive the next day amazed at the wild and bustling western town of Casper on the eve of a raucous 4th of July celebration. Neither have the maturity or experience needed to recognize or deal with the public laughter directed at them – or the dangers that await.

Yancy and Rosalie are quickly targeted by the locals and manage to survive a fight with bullying cowboys. Rosalie also catches the lecherous eye of the town boss and saloon owner – who happens to be Sheriff Paul Bartell. Sheriff Bartell seems nice enough, but Rosalie's



Can you help me? Rosalie seeks Yancy's help lacing up a corset. Neither Rosalie or Yancy know what the purpose of the garment.

demeanor suggests she may be suspicious of the lawman.

After selling his pelts at the general store and buying the requisite supplies listed by his uncle Yancy purchases a nice suit from St. Louis for himself and – on a whim – a pretty dress for a pleased Rosalie but, as he quickly explains, only to help her find a job. Back at the hotel, both Yancy and Rosalie struggle to put on their fancy clothes which neither have any experience wearing. In a memorable scene, Rosalie walks into Yancy's hotel room where Yancy is standing in front of a mirror trying to decide if he looks good

in his worsted suit, shiny shoes, and derby hat. Surprised, Rosalie exclaims ...

Rosalie: Oh Yancy!

Yancy [expecting criticism]: All right. Go ahead and say it.

Rosalie: *You look beautiful!*

Yancy [surprised]: Beautiful?

Rosalie: Oh, yes!

Yancy [pleased]: Do you think so?

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com

Rosalie: Oh, I do indeed! Why, I aint ever seen anybody that looks the way you do!

Yancy [approvingly to his image in the mirror]: Yeah. Why, I guess I don't look so bad at that!

[Yancy turns away from the mirror and sees Rosalie struggling with the lacing of her own clothing.]

Rosalie: Can - can you help me? I can't tie this.

Yancy [pulling some strings]: What is this thing?

Rosalie: Well, Mrs. Forbes calls it a corset.

Yancy: What's it fer?

Rosalie: Well she said its to hold you up.

Yancy: Hold ya up where?

Rosalie: I don't know – she didn't say.

[Rosalie exits the room]

Yancy [to himself]: Women sure dress foolish.

[Rosalie soon returns in a well-fitting yellow dress. Yancy is astonished.]

Yancy: What did you do?!

Rosalie: Do?

Yancy: Yeah! You're – you're – *so clean!*

Rosalie [lowering her head but smiling]: Do you like my dress?

Yancy: Yeah! You look pretty.

Rosalie [happily]: *You mean it?*

Yancy: One thing, though.

Rosalie: What?

Yancy: You ought to take that corset off. It sure makes you bulge in places.

Oblivious to Rosalie's growing affection toward him, more mayhem quickly ensues when Yancy becomes infatuated with a well-dressed but older woman.

Yancy intends to ask a dance hall lady to go with him to the 4th of July Celebration. He tells Rosalie he doesn't want her "tagging along." Yancy fails to recognize the disappointment that registers on her face but magnanimously gives her five shiny silver dollars and tells her to spend them anyway she wants during the festivities. The coins do not cheer Rosalie.

About this time, there is a knock on the hotel door and Yancy invites into the room a well-dressed, buxom woman



Sizing Rosalie Up. Ma Ransome, played by Wesley Marie Tackitt, sizes Rosalie up and decides to hire her for dancehall work.
Photo source: screen capture.

claiming she heard Rosalie was looking for work.

Without understanding the repercussions, Yancy unwittingly introduces Rosalie to the town madam – Ma Ransome – who secretly has come at the directions of the saloon owner – Sheriff Bartell. Rosalie remains quiet while Yancy explains her domestic talents which include cooking and cleaning – duties Ma Ransome states Rosalie will not need to perform.

Ma Ransome hires the silent Rosalie on the spot after one quick look. Yancy, satisfied that his referral has done some good, departs to find the other saloon girl. Yancy fails to recognize that his own behavior is not too terribly unlike Rosalie's father's – although Yancy's motives are different. A reluctant and depressed Rosalie is led away by Ma Ransome.

Despite Yancy's failure to see the danger he places Rosalie in, Yancy has a redeeming quality: he is a man of his

word and is determined to keep his promise to Rosalie. He will not leave her until he sees she is in a stable situation and capable of taking care of herself. Unfortunately – not knowing the specific details of the dancehall industry – Yancy is satisfied that Rosalie is now gainfully employed and has good prospects and a bright future.

It does not take long for Yancy and Rosalie to discover that city folk dressed in fancy clothes, jewelry, or wearing a sheriff's badge are not always what they appear to be. They learn that sometimes would-be benefactors have evil intentions and are prepared to exploit others. Before the night is out this reality becomes apparent. After a series of disappointments and violent encounters during the evening's celebration Yancy



Gainfully employed. A miserable Rosalie begins working at the local dance hall dressed up in fancy clothing and jewelry provided by the sheriff.



Lecherous eyes on the prize. Sheriff Paul Bartrell, played by Gilbert Roland, sips his whiskey as he watches Rosalie get fitted for her dancehall dress.

Photo source: screen capture.

finally wises up. To his shock, he learns the truth about the life he has committed Rosalie to. Without hesitation he goes to the dancehall to rescue her just as she falls into the clutches of the ogling sheriff – who is actively trying to wine and dine her into submission.

At the film's conclusion, all things work out for the better, villains are vanquished, and Yancy sets things right and keeps his promise to Rosalie.

In just a few days Yancy and Rosalie have learned much about themselves and the world. Yancy atones for his earlier mistake by helping Rosalie find reputable employment as a clerk with the Casper general store owners, Mr. Forbes and his wife. On the other hand, Yancy still fails to openly acknowledge the strong feelings Rosalie has developed for him – and that he may have for her.



New employment. Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, played by Jim Backus and Betty Harford, owners of the general store, provide a reputable source of employment to Rosalie at the end of the movie.

Photo source: screen capture.

In an emotional farewell outside the general store, Yancy tries to say his goodbyes to a silent Rosalie while tears brim in her eyes.

Yancy: You better get on back inside. They'd be needing you.

[Rosalie remains silent – her eyes pleading.]

Yancy: Mrs. Forbes said she'd teach you how to read and write and maybe you can even write me a letter. All right?

[Still silent, Rosalie is on the verge of crying.]



Broken hearted and miserable. Rosalie tearfully watches Yancy as he tells her goodbye. This scene has elements similar to the conclusion of SHANE and is emotionally powerful.

Photo source: screen capture.

Yancy: Now you stop that! No need for you to be bawling – none at all.

[Heartbroken, Rosalie remains silent and only stares at Yancy.]

Yancy: And don't you look at me that way! I got a long ways to go to get home and I don't have nothing on my mind except getting there. Didn't you hear what I said? Just stop looking at me like that!

[Rosalie tries to blink back her tears but one escapes and rolls silently down her cheek.]

As the scene closes, the audience feels as devastated as Rosalie. Only one more brief scene remains before the film concludes and things do not look good.

Without completely revealing what happens, THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT concludes in a manner fitting to the finale of SHANE where the young Brandon De Wilde – who absolutely worships the heroic figure Shane – watches the hero depart. The youngster calls to him over and over as Shane rides off into the distance never looking back. In Rosalie's case, it is her eyes that does the calling.



Jack Sher gets dunked. In a light-hearted moment between scenes, director/writer Jack Sher is the victim of Audie Murphy's practical joke. The director is lifted and placed into a bathtub of water during the filming of one of the movie's scenes.

Photo from the collection of Darlene Gorcyca.

There is no doubt that the level of emotion in the ending of the two films are worth comparing and it is no accident the same writer helped create both scripts. But there are significant differences too and writer/Director Sher includes one extra unexpected twist to *THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT*. When he does, even a family of humorous skunks are satisfied with the finish.

In summary, the movie is well made and has never received the full credit it

deserves. Billed as a low-budget film, *THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT* never fails to keep the audience's interest. Anyone watching will likely become emotionally invested in the growing relationship between the naïve, honorably intentioned Yancy and the innocence and vulnerability of Rosalie. Jack Sher does well by casting the two together. While the storyline may have some limitations and could have been better developed in places, the light-hearted nature of the script, its great

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com

theme song “A Touch of Pink”⁵ and the endearing performances of the thirty-three-year-old Audie Murphy and the sixteen-year-old Sandra Dee – deftly and competently managed by Director Sher – are more than enough reason to watch this movie again and again.

- *Richard Rodgers*

⁵ The original lyrics of this song were written Jerry Wallace, one of Audie’s good friends. The two often collaborated when writing songs. To hear Wallace’s recorded version of “A Touch of Pink”, follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_z_U9gbf3k