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CHRISTOPHER DURANG: SATIRE AND BEYOND

ROBERT SPIVAK

A THESIS

IN

THE DEPARTMENT

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PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS AT
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ABSTRACT

Christopher Durang: Satire and Beyond

Robert Spivak

Christopher Durang, a contemporary American playwright who has written over sixteen plays so far, including A History of the American Film, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, and The Marriage of Bette and Boo, writes satiric plays. His objects of satire are mostly institutions of authority, such as the Catholic Church, the family, the educational system, and psychiatry. But many of Durang's plays go beyond satire. In other words, there are moments when satire gives way to dead seriousness and profound sadness.

In this thesis I look at eleven of Durang's plays, which I think are the most important plays in terms of my thesis. Also, I pay close attention to the many filmic, literary, and other allusions in Durang's plays, allusions which, along with the balancing of satire and "beyond satire," are a trademark of Durang.

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INTRODUCTION

Christopher Durang is virtually the only contemporary American playwright who uses satire throughout a substantial body of work. But many of Durang's plays go beyond satire: they include what Durang calls "sadness," seriousness, and aspects of contemporary horror. This paper will not focus on structure, dramaturgy, or poetics, but rather on Durang's use of satire and "beyond satire," what I believe to be the most important aspects of his works.

What I mean by satire, the type of satire which Durang uses, is the castigation of dullness, of foolishness, of fools and, the corollary, of stupidity, idiocy. The four main objects of Durang's satire are institutions of authority: the Catholic Church, the family, the educational system, and psychiatry. Each of these, which are incapable of dealing with (and often cause) human suffering, embody madness, hubris, and idiocy. Part of this concept of satire (Durang's satire), the castigation of idiocy, involves a moral perspective, seen especially in Durang's plays after 1979. For instance, a typical moral perspective in Durang is the harm done by the Catholic Church, the family, the educational system, and psychiatry. For example, the Catholic Church does harm to some people in its positions on abortion, homosexuality, and AIDS, seen especially in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You and Laughing Wild.

It should be pointed out that when Durang satirizes less serious material, such as a Harmonic Convergence ceremony in Laughing Wild or television commercials in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, there is no moral perspective, just the ridicule of folly. But a moral perspective almost always exists in the satiric treatment of the Catholic Church, the family, the educational system, and psychiatry.

What I mean by "beyond satire" is seriousness (which sometimes includes the questioning of the existence of God), sadness, as well as aspects of contemporary horror. For example, in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You there is a moment when all the satire-generated laughter stops, and is replaced by seriousness and sadness as a character describes her mother's death from cancer. In his "Author's Notes" to this play, Durang explains that "The speech has so much charged material" that it "is obviously meant very seriously...."[1]

Similarly, the frantic satire of Baby With The Bathwater comes to a halt as a character says goodbye forever to his mother. In his "Author's Notes" to this play, Durang stresses the need for a director to "balance the 'human' qualities"[2] of the play with its satiric, comic elements: "Don't overdo the sad moments, but don't pass by them."[3] This balance of "beyond satire" and satire is what Durang discovers (in 1984) to be "the approach to take with most of my plays."[4] Often, the "beyond satire," the "human qualities" of Durang's

satires, includes compassion and reconciliation, seen especially in the later plays such as The Marriage of Bette and Boo and Laughing Wild. Clearly, sadness, seriousness, reconciliation, and compassion are departures from the satire in these plays.

Likewise, the many references to contemporary horror found in Durang's plays, such as the reference to a dismembered child found in a garbage can in Baby With The Bathwater, and a reference in Laughing Wild to a student who murders a substitute teacher, are beyond the satire in these plays.

It should be said that the "beyond satire" in Durang's plays is in no way superior to the satire in his plays. As a matter of fact, they often work together. The relationship between "beyond satire" and satire in Durang's plays is an obvious one. The four institutions of authority which fail to deal with, and often cause, sadness and human suffering (including madness) are the same institutions which Durang satirizes consistently in his plays. For example, the institution of the family, which is satirized relentlessly (producing audience laughter) in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, is the very same institution which causes the main character great emotional pain. And so the "beyond satire" of Durang's plays is both thematic and to some extent structural. In other words, the sadness which is caused, or not helped, by one or more of the four institutions of

authority, becomes a theme, and many times a structure, as in the case of the endings of Baby With The Bathwater, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, and the final section of Laughing Wild, the "Dreaming Wild" section.

Of the eleven plays I deal with, six of them---The Vietnamization of New Jersey(1977), Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes(1975), 'dentity Crisis(1978), Titanic(1974), A History of the American Film(1977), and The Idiots Karamazov(1974)---do not go beyond satire. The remaining five plays I deal with---The Nature and Purpose of the Universe(1975), Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You(1979), Baby With The Bathwater(1983), The Marriage of Bette and Boo(1985), and Laughing Wild(1987)---all go beyond satire; they have elements of seriousness, sadness, reconciliation, and compassion.

Durang's more or less chronological movement from satire to "beyond satire" is reflected in the structure of this thesis. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with Durang's plays which are strictly satires, and chapters 4 and 5 deal with Durang's plays which go beyond satire.

Durang's plays, especially those before 1980, make many allusions to art forms, notably to film and literature. In chapter 3, the longest chapter of the thesis, I will consider Durang's use of literary and filmic allusions in relationship to his satire, by looking at two plays which are saturated by them: A History of the American Film and The Idiots Karamazov.

Often, the allusions in Durang's plays are connected to the satire of cultural clichés and icons, hubris, sex, the Catholic Church, and the family.

Because no books have been written exclusively on Durang, my secondary sources are mostly reviews. (Even from these reviews, around fifty of them, there are few which address what I call central issues in Durang, "satire and beyond," but rather focus on acting and direction, which do not serve the purpose of this thesis.) Critical responses to Durang's plays are of course varied, but there are some common elements. For example, several reviewers of Durang's plays before 1980 have labelled the playwright's humor as being of the college sort. Richard Eder in The New York Times refers to Durang as "one of our leading stage practitioners of collegiate humor...."[5] Referring to the 1978 production of A History of the American Film, Brendan Gill writes in The New Yorker that "Durang's skill at parody is on an undergraduate level; what he provides is college humor...."[6] Both John Simon in New York and Mel Gussow in The New York Times label Durang's humor as "sophomoric."[7] Mel Gussow also writes, about the 1977 Yale production of The Vietnamization of New Jersey, that "Durang is less of a social commentator than cutup. His play is where it belongs---on a college campus."[8]

But Gussow's tune changes in his review of A History of the American Film, which he calls "a significant act of film criticism as well as wise social commentary....Durang has the

waggishness of four Marxes and the malice of Jonathan Swift."[9] Interestingly, other reviewers compare Durang's plays to the comedy of the Marx Brothers. Referring to the four Karamazov brothers in The Idiots Karamazov, Clive Barnes in The New York Times writes, "The brothers are more Marx than Karamazov...."[10] Gerald Clarke writes in Time that Beyond Therapy, a play which satirizes psychiatry and Freud, owes as much "to the Marx Brothers as to the Viennese brethren."[11] And Time's William A. Henry III writes that "Durang's comedies have the flavor of Freud filtered through Groucho."[12] (All this suggests that an analogy can be made between Durang and the Marx Brothers' chaotic, satiric attacks on social pretension and order.)

Some reviewers have written about structural problems in Durang's plays. Mel Gussow, being greatly impressed with the rather short play Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, keeps pointing out that Durang "continues to be more effective with a shorter form...."[13] Walter Kerr writes in The New York Times in 1982 that Durang "...is, thus far, a writer of revue-sketch materials who has a rather thin time of it whenever he tries to extend his freehand, coarse-grained caricature over the span of a full-length play."[14] Frank Rich of the New York Times questions whether Laughing Wild, which includes two long monologues, is actually a play:

> If Mr. Durang had only written more jokes and fewer rationalizations for them, the audience would be laughing much too hard

> to ask or care whether "Laughing Wild" is a play.[15]

But not all the reviews of Durang's plays are as negative. Brendan Gill, who once criticized Durang for his collegiate humor, writes in a 1982 review of Beyond Therapy that "Durang's earlier dramatic works have served to establish that he is one of the funniest playwrights alive...."[16] Similarly, Jack Kroll, in Newsweek, asserts that "Durang is one of the most ferociously funny young dramatists...."[17] T.E. Kalem writes, in Time, that Durang "...can mimic and spoof manners, trends and styles of speaking in ways that inflict the sting of truth just as surely as those of a good caricaturist."[18] Michael Feingold writes in The Village Voice that "Durang is a thorough satirist...."[19] In a 1981 review of Beyond Therapy, Edith Oliver writes in The New Yorker:

> Christopher Durang has the wit, the high, rebellious spirits, and the rage of the born satirist. He is also one of the funniest and most original playwrights at work.[20]

Edith Oliver continues her praise six years later in a review of Laughing Wild, stating that "Durang is one of the funniest men in the world, able to make the audience laugh out loud time and time again, taking us by surprise with his one-of-a-kind jokes and his relentless bitter satire."[21]

Some reviewers also praise Durang's use of going beyond

satire. Frank Rich, who usually writes unfavorable reviews of Durang's plays, comments on Baby With The Bathwater:

> A playwright who shares Swift's bleak view of humanity, he conquers bitterness and finds a way to turn rage into comedy that is redemptive as well as funny.[22]

This redemption, which is a reflection of the reconciliation of the main character with his parents, is beyond satire. Similarly, in a New Republic review of The Marriage of Bette and Boo (which a Village Voice critic called the "best play" of 1985[23]), Robert Brustein writes that the play, "...for all its anger and reproaches, is suffused with an aura of understated forgiveness, and it is this element that seems to be new in Durang's work."[24]

As it is apparent by this summary of reviews, most of the reviews are from New York newspapers and magazines. The reason for this is that Durang's plays have been done almost exclusively in New York City. The most significant reviews for the purpose of this thesis are from The Village Voice and The New York Times, the latter having followed Durang's career since the beginning.

Besides newpapers and magazines, the only other critical secondary source I have used (on Durang) is Robert Brustein's book Critical Moments: Reflections on Theatre and Society 1973-1979, which briefly discusses one Durang play---The Vietnamization of New Jersey---in the context of American

theatre in the late 1970s, including Sam Shepard and the emerging Theatre of Images.

An important primary source which I have used is the elaborate "Author's Notes," which explain exactly what Durang's intentions are.

Because no books, and virtually no articles, have been written exclusively on Durang, a playwright who has a substantial body of work, I am intrigued by the subject. There needs to be a detailed synthesis of Durang's plays. But a more important reason to write a thesis on Durang's work is that, I believe, he is a highly original playwright. His balancing of satire and "beyond satire," as well as his many references to art forms, have become Durang's trademark.

CHAPTER 1

THE VIETNAMIZATION OF NEW JERSEY

The reason why I am beginning my thesis with a detailed analysis of The Vietnamization of New Jersey (1977) is that this play is the most relentless example of Durang's satire, which makes this play a good introduction to Durang's use of the genre. The Vietnamization of New Jersey begins with a satire of the political pieties explicit in David Rabes's Sticks and Bones (1972). It then satirizes and burlesques many of the cultural and literary clichés of the 1970s.

Sticks and Bones tells the story of David, a returning, blinded Vietnam veteran whose difficulties adjusting to family life with Ozzie, Harriet, and Ricky, eventually lead to suicide. The plot sounds realistic enough, but the inclusion of the Nelson family, a popular American television family, makes this play unrealistic. This is unlike Rabes's other Vietnam-related dramas, such as Streamers (1976), which are realistic. Rabe uses the Nelson family in Sticks and Bones because they are well known and represent the typical American family. And so when the typical American family refuses to deal with David's shell-shocked emotions, expresses its heart-felt racism concerning David's relationship with a Vietnamese girl, and eventually assists him in his suicide, the typical American family becomes an ugly object of censure. By extension, American society

becomes an ugly object of censure, wholly responsible for the Vietnam war.

Durang does not accept the guilt which Rabe, himself a Vietnam veteran, inflicts on his audiences. In The Vietnamization of New Jersey, Durang satirizes and burlesques the liberal obsession of guilt about the Vietnam war by taking Sticks and Bones a little further than Rabe did. In Sticks and Bones, racism seems to be the underlying cause behind the atrocities in Vietnam. The American people did not stop the atrocities because deep down they viewed the Vietnamese as sub-human. Speaking of the Vietnamese, Harriet says quietly, "The human face was not meant to be that way."[1] But in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, the attack on racism becomes louder, satirical. We see this as David brings home Liat, who is supposed to be Vietnamese. When explaining to his parents how he lost his sight, David says, "One of the gooks --(*To Vietnamese girl.*) I'm sorry, darling -- one of the Vietnamese people blinded me."[2] But David's racism is nothing compared to his mother's, Ozzie Ann, who refers to Liat as David's "Korean friend"(12).[3] She also calls Liat "a chink"(13). Even Liat, who we soon learn is really American, is racist. Commenting on the differences between the South and North Vietnamese, Liat says, "They all look the same to me"(22). And once Et, David's brother, realizes that Liat is not Vietnamese, he tells Liat, "You're much more attractive

without the slant eyes"(23).

Like David in Sticks and Bones, David in The Vietnamization of New Jersey is appalled by his family's attitude towards the Vietnamese. David represses his own racist feelings because he is racked with feelings of guilt about his participation in the war. The second scene of the play begins with David, "kneeling in front of Liat" (14), saying "I hope that she can forgive me for what my country has done to her country" (15). It is exactly this sense of guilt which makes Liat's trip back to the United States a possibility:

> He [David] was already blind, and he had this real thing about feeling guilt about Vietnam, so I just knew the only way I could get him to marry me and to get back to Schenectady, was to tell him I was Vietnamese and blind too. (22)

But Durang doesn't stop here with the satirizing of David's guilt, a guilt which evidently backfires. David goes beyond himself and forces his family to share his guilty feelings. He makes them listen to Liat's story about American atrocities in Vietnam:

> I was just a rittle girl when the American Aramy come to my country. They destroy everything, they pillage the village. They cause much havoc and disappointment. I become a go go dancer at lowlife nightclub. (15)

But David is not satisfied with simply making his

parents understand the other side of the Vietnam war; he instructs his parents to act now:

> You're going to have to make it up to Liat for what America has done to her country. (18)

What follows is an example of Durang's burlesque of guilt, portrayed most wildly. David announces "the beginning of Reparations Day" (18-19), in which Liat will be given a chance to vote for a Vietnamese leader, a vote which was denied the Vietnamese people by the Americans.[4] Later, David forces his family to experience random and specific violence. The black maid, Hazel (who is played by a man), throws Minute Rice on the floor, a re-creation of a rice field, and Liat starts spraying bullets indiscriminately (she is supposed to be blind) in the living room, an example of random violence. Specific violence is acted out on the dark stage as some of the characters engage in hand-to-hand suburban combat. After the living room war, David makes his parents apologize to Liat, kiss her foot, and turn around in order to receive a kick on the behind. Now the reparations are at a close, "The house is purified, the guilt expunged" (21).

But with the suicide of Harry, which is brought on because he feels worthless after losing his job, David realizes that the guilt is not expunged until all Americans are dead:

> Father saw that only by killing ourselves

can we atone for our sins in Vietnam....
(31)

David tries to convince his mother to kill herself with phenobarb, "This is for Vietnam" (34), but the only other suicide will be David, who sets himself on fire at the end of the play.

Durang's satire and burlesque of American guilt about Vietnam does not suggest that the playwright supported the war in Vietnam. The war which Durang supports is the campaign against clichés about the Vietnam war. The cliché of guilt, best expressed in Sticks and Bones is finally exposed and ridiculed in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, leaving the Vietnam war behind us. As Robert Brustein points out, "With The Vietnamization of New Jersey, Durang has declared a separate peace, and as far as American culture is concerned, has finally brought the Vietnam war to a close."[5]

Durang not only satirizes and ridicules clichés about the Vietnam war, but also, he satirizes and ridicules clichés in American drama, especially the failure of communication and the fear of emasculation.

The failure of communication is an over-used theme in films, books, the media, and especially in American drama, seen in Sticks and Bones, in which the word "what" is repeated excessively throughout the play. The failure of communication in The Vietnamization of New Jersey begins in the first scene as Et, whose mouth is filled with cereal,

asks his parents about his brother:

> ET. (*Mouth full.*) When's Davey coming home?
> OZZIE. What?
> ET. (*Mouth full.*) When's Davey coming home?
> OZZIE. Can you understand him?
> HARRY. I'm not a linguist.
> OZZIE. Did anyone say you were a linguist?
> HARRY. You implied it.
> OZZIE. I didn't, I didn't. God knows you're not a linguist. You're a turnip! (8)

Et repeats his question:

> ET. (*Mumbled.*) When's Davey coming home?
> OZZIE. I CAN'T UNDERSTAND YOU!
> HARRY. He's saying, (*Imitates mumbles.*) WnDvyscmghm? (9)

After Et repeats his question another time, and again Ozzie Ann and Harry cannot understand it, the family starts playing charades. This does not help Ozzie Ann and Harry's understanding at all, and so Et repeats the question without mumbling:

> ET. (*Screams.*) WHEN'S DAVEY COMING HOME????
> OZZIE. That's much too loud to comprehend. That is much too loud for the human eardrum, which is what I'm equipped with, for me to comprehend your statement. (10)

Finally, after more arguing, Et is understood, but only by Hazel, who communicates Et's question to Ozzie Ann and Harry, who are not very interested anyway.

Like the failure of communication, the fear of emasculation is a dominant theme in many art forms, especially in American drama. We see it in plays such as Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962) as the overbearing wife, Martha, keeps reminding her husband, George, of his inadequacies, and in Howard Sackler's The Nine O'Clock Mail (1965), a play about a sexually insecure man who is obsessed with receiving as many letters as possible, because he subconsciously confuses "mail" with "male."

This obsession about the fear of emasculation is satirized in The Vietnamization of New Jersey. Ozzie Ann seems to wear the pants in the house; she is always telling Harry what to do. During an argument with his wife, Harry tells Ozzie Ann, in no uncertain terms, that his masculinity is being threatened:

> Go ahead, castrate me, go ahead. (8)

Et suggests that his father was emasculated as he looks for a role model in Harry's macho brother, Larry:

> I never used to have ambition, but now I want to be just like Uncle Larry. I guess this has to do with having the proper male model. Before Uncle Larry, the strongest identity figure I had was Hazel, and a guy can't grow up to be a maid. (38)

Harry's brother, Larry, who is a satire of the macho American soldier, is more than just a role model for Et; Larry becomes a literalization of a symbol.[6] As David

suggests, Larry's arrogance and brute strength are representative of the United States' foreign policy:

> You're the American as imperialist! You think you know what's right about everything, and you go in and keep little people in little countries from voting for who they want and you try to make them just like America and maybe they don't want to be like America. You're an imperialist! Imperialist pig! Imperialist pig! (41)

The symbol of Larry as imperialist is further entrenched as we learn that he manufactured napalm before joining the Mafia. Also, Larry's brutal treatment of David reminds the blind veteran of the Vietnam war:

> I feel that this house is becoming like Vietnam. I am Vietnamese, and Larry is the military-industrial complex, and ahead of us is nothing but terror and destruction. (39)

Larry's literal brutality towards David becomes a symbol of the war, which is further literalized by the "barbed wire in the living room" (44). Clearly, Durang, by satirizing the literalization of symbols, is satirizing our obsession with finding symbols.

This is even more apparent in the last line of the play, "It's a mess, it's a mess" (52), spoken by Ozzie Ann, who is playing with Corn Flakes which are scattered on the kitchen table. The real "mess" is, of course, David's pyrotechnic suicide, a result of America's involvement in Vietnam. But

Durang literalizes the symbolic, personal and political "mess" with the disarray of a common breakfast cereal.

Durang uses the literalization of the "mess" of Vietnam earlier in the play as Hazel comments on the nature of her job:

> I've been cleaning up someone else's mess. That is my job. But I'll tell you one thing. Just because people clean up a mess once, don't mean they ain't gonna make a mess again. So they clean up Vietnam, what next? (24)

Durang not only satirizes the obtrusive nature of symbols, but also the way people read symbols. We see this as Ozzie Ann comments on her family's treatment of Liat as reflecting something more universal:

> ...the way we don't welcome Liat into our home shows that we are hypocrites, and by extension, so are the American people, because, of course, she is one of the people that we are supposedly fighting for. (13)

Ozzie Ann seems to say what an audience of The Vietnamization of New Jersey might think, an audience which is prone to look for symbols.[7]

But the great reader of symbols in the Bartholomew family is the high school-trained idiot, Et. This is obvious as Et compares David and Liat's fall into a septic tank to the war in Vietnam:

> You know, Dad, the way that Davey and Liat are stuck in the mire of our septic tank is a bit like the way the American people are stuck in the mire of the political and military lies of America's Vietnam policies. (17)

Et continues:

> And just as the only way to correct Davey and Liat's predicament is to pull them out, so the only answer to the Vietnamese problem is to pull our troops out. (17)

Et makes the comparison between the literal and the symbolic even more obvious as he reflects on the meaning of David and Liat's blindness:

> You know, Mom...the fact that they're blind literally in a way points to the fact that we and the American people are blind figuratively. We suffer, I think, a moral and philosophic blindness. (13-14)

Here Durang quite deliberately uses the words "literally" and "figuratively" in order to make it clear that what is being satirized is the way we look for symbols in schools, in drama, and in other art forms. Et's childlike, innocent tone of voice suggests that our obsession with symbols is essentially immature.[8]

Along with the satirizing of dramatic clichés, what can be called "cultural pieties" are also satirized in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, such as inflation, commercialism, bicentennial patriotism, the obsession with

sex, the family and the Catholic Church.

The recession and inflation of the mid-1970s does not escape Durang's satire. As soon as Ozzie Ann changes the calendar from 1971 to 1974, the family starts to complain about the rising price of food. A carton of milk costs $3.50, celery sticks cost $3.25, and canned potatoes cost $4.98. As Hazel points out, "The price of food is prohibitive!" (25). Ozzie Ann tries to calm Hazel down, explaining that inflation only "means all the money is worth less" (25), but when she realizes that her family can only afford to eat Campbell Chunky Beef Soup for Thanksgiving, she breaks down and sobs uncontrollably:

> We only have chunnnnkkkky soo-oou-oup for diiiiiinnnnnnerrrrrr.... (27)

But Ozzie Ann is not the only one who laments over inflation. When the repossession men come to remove the furniture and car, because the payments on the house have not been met, Harry cries in shame:

> I'm a failure, I'm a failure! I can't support my family! (28)

Harry lost his job five months before, and has been hiding out in the library every working day since then. His shame is so great, he shoots himself in the heart, a satire of the effects of inflation, the obsession with money.

Durang augments the cultural obsession with inflation in

his stage directions, which call for the removal of furniture and even the removal of the walls at the end of act 1. Act 2 features a space where the house was, with a tent in the center. The only appliances left are the staples of suburban living: a refrigerator, a television, and a telephone, "all with extremely long extension cords that trail off-stage" (30).

In spite of being able to afford these articles, the family has no money to buy a coffin for Harry, whose death seems less important than the cost of living. As Hazel points out, "It costs too much to live, and too much to die" (30).

Durang satirizes the recession and inflation of the 1970s because the obsession with money at that time became a cliché; everybody was talking about it. But Durang's satire, his exaggeration and ridicule, brings the obsession with money to a close, giving Durang the last word (as he had with the way we look at the Vietnam war).

Like inflation, the obsession with commercialism is satirized in The Vietnamization of New Jersey. We see this in the first scene of the play as Ozzie Ann and Harry are trying to decipher what Et is saying. Hazel understands that Et is asking about David's return, but she keeps it to herself until Ozzie Ann and Harry force it out of her with a jingle:

> Double your pleasure, double your fun,
> With doublemint, doublemint, doublemint gum.
> Double your ...
> (*Etc. They keep singing until Hazel is driven crazy enough to stop them.*) (10)[9]

Durang's satire of commercials moves from chewing gum to laundry detergent as Hazel and Ozzie Ann wash David and Liat's clothes:

> And now Mrs. B. will soak Davey's sewage-soaked shirt in her detergent, while I'll soak Liat's sewage-soaked dress in my detergent. We'll let them soak for a count of ten. 1-2-3...[.] (17)

Hazel's "all-temperature *Cheer*" finally wins:

> It's completely free of sewage odor. (18)[10]

But the obsession with commercialism is best seen during "Reparations Day," when Liat has the opportunity to vote for Ngo Dinh Diem or Ho Chi Minh. Instead of writing one of these names on her ballot, Liat writes "Coca-Cola." Ozzie Ann is not shocked by Liat's choice of leadership, but she is upset about Liat's spelling:

> Liat, dear, you don't hyphenate *Coca Cola*. (19)

Clearly, commercial products are more important than politics.

As the calendar changes from 1974 to 1976, the bicentennial of the independence of the United States is celebrated by Hazel's "Bicentennial Minute":

> In Arlington, Massachusetts, Abigail Fritchard something something John Adams Boston Tea Party musket in her face and crows nest around her eyes, took her butter churn and Washington Irving and turned the British boats *back* in the harbor. And that's the way it was 200 years ago today. (29)

This is obviously a satire of the patriotic "Bicentennial Minutes" which were overplayed on television in 1976. Hazel's garbled version sounds like what most viewers would retain from these episodes, namely the last sentence.

The "Bicentennial Minute," which is repeated in a different version later on, sets up the greatest satire of American patriotism: Et's pageant, "A American Tragedy."[11] In the pageant, Hazel, Et, and his family represent famous American people in order to show what it means to be American. Hazel plays the part of "a famous colored person" (50):

> I am George Washington Carver, and I invented the peanut. I represent the Melting Pot of America because even though I was born in Africa, I have been accepted in America because everyone eats peanuts. (50)

Liat plays the part of a former president:

> I am Woodrow Wilson, and these are my 14

> points. Point No. 1. Point No. 2. Point No. 3. Point No. 4. Point No. 5. Poi...[.] (50)

Larry is Teddy Roosevelt, "the Bully President..." (50):

> I represent the spirit of '76 cause I got balls! (50)

And Ozzie Ann plays the parts of several first ladies:

> I am the woman behind the man; I am the spirit behind the brawn; I am the Statue of Liberty. Bring me your tired and your poor, and I will give them self-respect, freedom, and a clerk-typist position for the women and a laborer position for the men. I will not give the tired and poor welfare, though, because a country on welfare isn't *well* and a country on welfare isn't *fair* to those who work.(51)

Et's pageant, with its satire of sexual equality and the welfare system, as well as social equality and the melting pot, is Durang's way of saying that the manufacturing of patriotism, as seen in the "Bicentennial Minute," teaches us nothing but the television clichés of the "spirit of '76."

Like patriotism in 1976, the sexual liberation was at its peak. Durang satirizes and burlesques this in the very first moments of the play as Et pours cereal down the front of his pants, and "Begins to eat the flakes from inside his trousers" (7). (Later, Liat eats corn flakes out of Et's pants.) In scene 2, Et takes David's letters and one by one puts them in his pants. Durang's stage directions for Et

often suggest an obsession with sex, as seen in the end of scene 4 as the family leaves the 1960s behind them:

> Ozzie Ann and Liat smile. Hazel looks doubtful. Harry looks sleepy and haggard. Et rubs his crotch....(25)

Everything about Et is sexual. We see this as the family presents speeches at the end of scene 4. Unlike some of the other characters, who speak about America after the Vietnam war, Et shows us what is really on his mind:

> (*Pause, then gives the finger.*) I learned how to give the finger in the seventh grade. And I learned this. (*Puts finger in rounded hole.*) And me and Eddie Duffy took turns laying Eddie's sister under the pool table in their basement, and me and Eddie and John MacMahon and Frank Izzo and Peter Flaherty had a jerk-off contest and ...[.] (24)[12]

Et is an exaggeration of a healthy, normal teenager such as Rick Nelson in Sticks and Bones.[13] Ozzie Ann is an exaggeration of a television-sitcom mother. Harry is an example of the emasculated husband (which brings together emasculation and castration, and also machismo, played by Harry's macho brother, Larry, as "explanations" for American political decisions, especially in Vietnam). And Hazel, who is played by a male actor, is an exaggeration of witty black maids in Hollywood films and television such as Butterfly McQueen, Louise Beavers, and Amanda Randolph. What all this

adds up to is a satire of the family.

Throughout The Vietnamization of New Jersey, there are many references to the sanctity of the family. Ozzie Ann suggests this sanctity as she tries to be optimistic in spite of David's blindness and his marriage to a Vietnamese:

> ...but the important thing is your home, and we're all here, and we're never going to leave here ever again. (13)

For the sake of the family, Ozzie Ann agrees with David "to make it up to Liat for what America has done to her country" (18):

> Oh, anything, Davey, as long as the family can stay together. (18)

After "Reparations Day," David proclaims, "We can be a family again!" (21).

These odes to the family quickly turn into satire as the institution of the family becomes undermined by this atypical family. This is apparent in almost every episode of the play, especially as the family throws cutlery at one another, as Ozzie Ann throws her dead husband into the garbage, as Et lends David matches for his suicide, and as David tries to convince his mother to kill herself. In this last episode, Ozzie Ann asks, "What has happened to the family unit?"(34). But as Ozzie Ann already knows about her family, "we're not typical" (16).

But Ozzie Ann is a typical mother in some respects; she

wants her family to use proper language. Ozzie Ann uses the word "refuse" instead of "garbage." When Larry parachutes onto stage, resembling a deus ex machina, and starts swearing, Ozzie Ann tells Larry that she "normally ask[s] the children not to use bad language in the house" (35). This motherly concern with language becomes satirical as Ozzie Ann keeps asking Larry to use formal words instead of swear words. Ozzie Ann prefers that Larry use the words "feces" instead of "shit," "copulating" instead of "fucking," "ejaculating" instead of "jerk-off," "rectum" instead of "asshole," "gonads" instead of "balls," and "urinate" instead of "piss."[14]

This last example of Ozzie Ann correcting Larry's language occurs after Larry responds to David's desire to set himself on fire:

> LARRY. I'd like to see him on fire. Give me a good excuse to piss on him.
> OZZIE. What is the matter with you? Piss on him! Can't you say urinate? (47)

Ozzie Ann is not bothered by David's suicide threat or Larry's insensitivity; she does not like swear words.

> Piss, fart, shit, ass. I don't like that kind of language, Larry. I WANT NICE LANGUAGE! (47)

As David points out, Ozzie Ann is "a moral idiot" (47), which is confirmed as Ozzie Ann begs David not to kill himself -- on the rug.

Like the institution of the family, the Catholic Church is satirized in The Vietnamization of New Jersey. This is obvious as soon as Father McGillicutty arrives at the Bartholomew household. Father McGillicutty is Ozzie Ann's last hope in helping David adjust to civilian life. Instead of saying something godly, or even insightful, about David's dilemma since Vietnam, Father McGillicutty states the obvious:

> Perhaps his experiences over there bothered him. (45)

Father McGillicutty is a burlesque of Father Donald in Sticks and Bones. Father Donald, who is a sportsman, gives better advice to Harriet about dribbling a basketball than he does to David about his experiences in Vietnam. Father Donald believes that David's problems stem from his relationship with a Vietnamese girl, a relationship which the priest believes is a rejection of one's own race because it embraces the race of another. Father Donald gets his racist ideas from a colorful magazine which he flashes in front of the blind David. This religious figure, whose function in Sticks and Bones is to show the impotence and backwardness of the Catholic Church, at one point, says, "Goddamnit."[15]

Father McGillicutty goes beyond Rabe's satire of the Catholic Church, especially as the priest justifies war and natural disasters:

> Don't you know why God allows wars? God looks down from heaven and sees a poor country with too many people and he says to himself, "Oh dear, think how much poverty and degradation these people are going to face because there are so many of them," and then he whispers into the President's ear at night, and then in the morning there is a war; and when the war is over, there are fewer people, and these fewer people are happier. The same is true of earthquakes, floods, plagues, epidemics. It all has to do with population control. (45)

Because the Catholic Church has always opposed birth control and abortion, Father McGillicutty's speech is satiric, and quite cruel in its philosophy. This satire of the justification of violence almost goes beyond the satire which sets the mood of the play. There is a small trace of seriousness in the priest's speech, but this quickly fades (it will reappear in different forms in Durang's later plays) as Father McGillicutty compares the necessity of "population control" with a traffic jam:

> Have you ever been on a turnpike or a parkway in a traffic jam with all those people in all those cars? And you don't move, and you can't move, and there's all that gaseous air; and some of the people honk their horns, and some swear, and it's just awful....I think to myself, I CAN'T STAND IT, there are too many people alive....But then I get ahold of myself and say, Father, you're a priest, have faith, remember there are wars and floods and pestilences....(46)

This comical sermon on traffic jams changes the mood seen previously (concerning "population control") as the priest makes it clear that he personally dislikes crowds.

Needless to say, Father McGillicutty, like Father Donald in Sticks and Bones, does absolutely nothing to help David. On the contrary, the priest leaves the house quickly, realizing that New Jersey is not the place to be:

> I really don't think I can stand New Jersey another minute, but then I guess I'll have to til I leave. But then that's what being a priest is really all about, isn't it? Goodbye and God bless. (46)[16]

The Vietnamization of New Jersey is not only filled with biting satire on all levels, but also, it contains many casual references to television, film, literature, musicals, and of course, drama.

A reference to television occurs in the first scene of the play as Ozzie Ann complains about the mess in her kitchen, a mess caused by Hazel, who pulls the tablecloth (with everything on it) off the table:

> I'm the worst housekeeper on the Eastern Seaboard. We'll have to pack our bags and move to Anaheim. (8)

This is a reference to a line used often on the Jack Benny Show. This reference is repeated in the second act as Ozzie Ann pulls the tablecloth and complains about the mess:

> ...we're going to have to sell the house and move back to Anaheim. (49)

Like television, references to films are also seen in The Vietnamization of New Jersey. David's donning of Buddhist robes in act 2, scene 2, may suggest Kon Ichikawa's The Harp of Burma (1956), a film in which the guilt of imperialist Japan is explored. Like David, who puts on Buddhist robes and laments over America's involvement in Vietnam, Private Yasui in The Harp of Burma experiences a religious conversion and speaks against imperialism.[17]

Another reference to film occurs in the same scene as Larry tells Hazel and Ozzie Ann what form of vengeance he took against a Mafia kingpin, who decapitated his wife and children:

> I got this horse, ya see, and I cut his head off, and then I put the bloody head in his bed when he was asleep. (42)

Hazel responds, "You saw that in the movies" (42). Of course the movie is The Godfather (1972), perhaps the most famous Mafia film. Durang uses this reference in order to exploit Larry's role as a cliché of a mobster.[18]

Durang also makes references to literature in The Vietnamization of New Jersey (the subtitle of the play is A American Tragedy). One example may be found in the first scene as Et's mumbling about David's return turns into a game of charades. Et holds up ten fingers and Ozzie Ann guesses

that what Et wants to say sounds like "fingers." Harry then suggests that it sounds like "hands," prompting Ozzie Ann to guess "Hans Brinker," a reference to a famous children's story about a boy who sticks his finger in a dike in order to prevent the flooding of Amsterdam.

Another casual reference to literature is seen as Ozzie Ann reads one of David's letters, written in French:

> ...audourd'huit ma mere est morte. Ou peut-etre hier. Je ne sais pas....(11)

Although the spelling is not perfect, this is a reference to the opening lines of Camus' L'étranger.

In act 2, scene 2, Durang makes two references to literature in Hazel's speech about the chaos of contemporary life:

> Mere anarchy was loosed upon the world. And the mayor of Newark was a beast like a lion, and the mayor of Trenton was a beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle, and these beasts were full of eyes before and behind, and....(43)

"Mere anarchy was loosed upon the world" is a line from Yeat's poem, "The second Coming," and the "New Jersey Beasts" are reminiscent of the Four Beasts of the Apocalypse. Durang is satirizing the cliché of apocalyptic literature of the 1960s and 1970s -- such as Thomas Pynchon's concern with entropy in The Crying of Lot 49 (1965) and Gravity's Rainbow

(1973) -- as well as satirizing the cliché about the decline of America.

Durang satirizes apocalyptic clichés with references to popular musicals, as seen in the beginning of Hazel's apocalyptic speech:

> There were Puerto Rican travelling companies of "Hello Dolly," and they would go from town to town, mugging the audience sometime during the "So Long, Dearie" number. There were all-black productions of "Fiddler on the Roof," and there were all Jewish landlord productions of "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black"; and after these performances the blacks and the landlords would meet in empty parking lots and rumble. (42-43)

This is, of course, a satire of culture, an apocalyptic vision of Puerto Ricans, Blacks, and Jews, especially the relationship between Blacks and Jews, the two groups attacking each other.

The frivolous nature of musicals adds to the comic absurdity of The Vietnamization of New Jersey. For example, after Harry's suicide, Ozzie Ann decides that she "won't be licked" (29); she will be a survivor. She then begins to try to sing a song from The Unsinkable Molly Brown (1960), a rags-to-riches musical about a woman who climbs the social ladder of early nineteenth century Denver. Similarly, Liat's obsession with The King and I (1956), a film based on the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, becomes absurd as she plays the part of Anna, with a variation on the song "Getting to

Know You":

> Getting to know chop suey...[.] (48)

Hazel responds to Liat's madness with a line from Hamlet:

> O, what a noble mind is here O'erthrown. (48)

This is an example of one of Durang's casual references to drama. Another example may be found in act 1, scene 1, as Ozzie Ann complains about her life:

> I *was* happy. For a time. (26)

This is a reference to a line spoken by Mary Tyrone in Long Day's Journey Into Night. Mary Tyrone's words are referred to again in the same scene as Ozzie Ann asks Hazel, "why do I feel so alone?" (32).

Like Long Day's Journey Into Night, Death of a Salesman is referred to in The Vietnamization of New Jersey. Uncle Ben, who is Willy Loman's macho brother, is reminiscent of Uncle Larry. But there is a more specific reference in act 2, scene 2, as Larry asks Liat, "Haben-ze das nylons, Fraulein?" (37). In Death of a Salesman, Willy Loman buys the woman in Boston new nylons, while his wife wears tattered ones. For Willy Loman this becomes a source of guilt, a dominant theme in The Vietnamization of New Jersey.[19]

CHAPTER 2

DEATH COMES TO US ALL, MARY AGNES, 'DENTITY CRISIS, and TITANIC

Like The Vietnamization of New Jersey, Durang's earlier plays, such as Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes (1975), 'dentity Crisis (1978), and Titanic (1974), are burlesques and satires, but they do not have the satiric depth and breadth of The Vietnamization of New Jersey. Generally, they are more farcical (there are confusions with identity in 'dentity Crisis and Titanic), but they do make references to other art forms, as well as satirize some of the same subject matter found in The Vietnamization of New Jersey: notably the family and sex.

Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, is a travesty of the family and neglect, disguised as a melodrama. Vivien Jansen-Hubbell Pomme is the malicious, solipsistic matriarch, who once put her infant daughter, Margot, in an orphanage in order to facilitate travelling with her twin sons:

> I realized I have not the temperament to raise girls -- as I did have the temperament to raise boys, my two fine boys, my twin stars. I expect the girl's still there, unless she drowned at sea or died in a car accident.[1]

But Margot's fate is worse than drowning at sea or dying in a car accident; she becomes solipsistic like her mother.

We see this as Margot responds to the maid's interest in her twin brothers:

> Oh, why does everyone always favor my brothers over me? They were always the pretty ones, the ones who were excused when they were bad, the ones who were loved! I want love! (43)

But Margot never gets love. A possible explanation for this comes from Margot's grandmother, who is reminded of what she once said to Margot:

> And I said to you, Grandma, will there ever be anyone in this world who will love me? Love *me* for what I am, and love me and not pity me? And you looked at me and you said, "No," and I said, "But Grandma, Why?" And you said, "Because there never was for me!" (43-44)

This reply suggests that solipsism may be a result of ongoing neglect in Margot's family, an idea which is made obvious as Margot's mother, Vivien, tells her mother, Margot's grandmother, of her insecurities about her sons' love for her:

> Oh, Mother, do you think Tod and Tim love me enough, do you? (56)

Vivien is not even sure about her mother's love:

> Oh, Mother, do you love me?
> Do you love me really? (58)

And alone in her room at night, Vivien addresses her diary:

> Dear Diary, I fear I am not loved enough. I fear it. (58)

The mixture of melodrama and solipsism comes to a climax as Margot's grandmother, who speaks for the first and only time in the play, gives Margot advice, moments before she strangles Margot to death:

> DON'T DEPEND ON PEOPLE! (64)

The fact that the grandmother murders Margot takes the play beyond its melodramatic guise, becoming a satire and a travesty of the family.

Margot's grandmother's advice may also be applied to Jane, in 'dentity Crisis, who is neglected by her mother, Edith (a character reminiscent of Ozzie Ann in The Vietnamization of New Jersey), who is more concerned with blood stains than with her daughter's attempted suicide:

> I got your dress back. I'm afraid the stains didn't come out. You should have heard the lady at the cleaners. What did she do, slash her thighs with a razor blade? she said. I had to admit you had.... It was so awful when your father and I went into the bathroom together to brush our teeth and saw you perched up on the toilet, your pretty white dress over your head, slashing away at your thighs.[2]

Jane is neglected because her mother is too busy accommodating Robert, who quickly changes personalities, from Jane's brother, to her father, to her grandfather, to a European count who wants to marry Jane's mother. At the end of the play, Jane also slips into madness as she loses her identity and becomes Emily Carrot, the discoverer of radium in carrots.[3]

But neglect is most satiric in Titanic, a play, according to Mel Gussow in The New York Times, whose "...target... is not, as one might expect, 'unsinkable' ships but the American family...."[4] The main character in the play is Teddy, a twenty-year-old man, who is dressed as a little boy. Teddy's parents think their son is much younger than he really is. His parents also ignore Teddy's presence, and often say things which are inappropriate for a son to hear. Victoria Tammurai[5], his mother, suggests to Teddy that she conceived him on a merry-go-round, and that Richard Tammurai is not really Teddy's father.[6] Later in the play, this monstrous mother, in a violent frenzy, claims that Teddy is too young to wear long pants. She then "tears off the bottom part of TEDDY's pants legs, making his long pants now short pants."[7]

Like Vivien in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes and Edith in 'dentity Crisis, Victoria gives motherhood a bad name. This is made clear as Victoria asks her husband if he told Teddy "about the bad word beginning with 'm'..."(92).

Richard thinks the word is "menstruation," but is reminded by Victoria that Teddy is a boy, and that the bad word is "masturbation." But all along, Teddy thought the bad word beginning with "m" was "mother."

Teddy is not the only child neglected by Victoria and Richard. Lidia, whose real name is Annabella, is not recognized by her parents. Teddy asks his sister, "Why haven't Mommy and Daddy recognized you?" (84). She replies, "Because they're very bad parents" (84).

Lidia, like Margot, Jane, and Teddy, suffers from neglect. As a result, her outlook on life is quite dark. Even her view of the animal kingdom is pessimistic:

> Did you know that guppy mothers eat their babies? (69)

Lidia periodically laments her fate of being a passenger on a ship, which, of course, was supposed to be unsinkable:

> (*Hating life*) Oh, why won't we sink, why? (79)

At one point Lidia tries to sink the ship by drilling holes in the floor, even though she is several floors above the water.

But unlike Margot and Jane, who are killed and go mad, respectively, Lidia and Teddy do something about their abusive parents. They conspire to kill them, and succeed.

But the psychological scars of neglect are not healed by the death of the perpetrators. This is demonstrated in the last scene of the play as Teddy repeatedly pinches himself as if to escape a nightmare, while Lidia listens hopefully for the sound of a collision with an iceberg (which, of course, is what happened, historically, to the Titanic on its maiden voyage).[8]

Balancing the satire of the family and neglect in Durang's early plays is the farcical satire of sex. In Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, the homosexual, incestuous twin brothers, Tod and Tim, like Et in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, are embodiments of pure sexual appetite. On being reunited with the elderly maid, Margaret, Tod nonchalantly says:

> We've missed you, Margaret. We've had many a wet dream over you. (48)

Later, Margaret offers herself to the twins, only to be rejected and doused with hot tea.

The twins prefer supermarket delivery boys, who become prizes in the game "pot-luck." The rules of the game are simple: a grocery order is made on the phone, and the delivery boy who comes to the door is seduced. But this game turns ugly as Tim's insecurities about his brother, Tod, emerge:

> About last night. I felt sort of funny. I mean, I'm used to having a third in

> with us and all, but last night I got the feeling you preferred the Grand Union [delivery boy] to me. (61)

Homosexual incest is also alluded to in Titanic, as Victoria has sex with her daughter, provoking Richard to call his wife "an incestuous snail" (75). But Richard is not innocent of homosexual incest, especially since he spends much of his time pursuing his son, who is dressed in a sailor's uniform.

'dentity Crisis is not exempt from sexual satire and confusions of sexual identity. This is apparent as Summers, Jane's psychiatrist, and his wife both have a sex change operation. And so the actor who played Summers now plays the wife, and vice-versa. This is further confused as the characters feel uncomfortable in their new clothes, and thus switch clothes. In other words, the man, who was a woman, wears the woman's clothes, and the woman, who was a man, wears the man's clothes.[9]

This switch in sexual identity is augmented as Edith, who makes banana bread by piling up six slices of Wonder Bread and ramming a banana through it, cuts the top of the banana, making Summers (who is played by the woman in man's clothes) cringe:

> *(Screams in agony, holds between her legs.)* That's a very inconsiderate thing for you to do. I'm going to have nightmares now. (82) [10]

Curiously, white, sliced bread (which has a reputation of being bland) is used in another sexual context in Titanic. We see this as Victoria claims that Richard never really had sex with Victoria's lover, Harriet Lindsay; Harriet and Victoria conspired against him:

> You never slept with her. We did it all with mirrors and slices of white bread. (67)

Commenting on Richard's affair with sliced bread, Lidia says, "I'm not an advertising expert, but I don't think that's one of the ways to build a strong body that Wonder Bread had in mind" (69). This satire of sex and commercialism becomes a running gag as the captain, who is always running after Victoria with a dildo strapped to his head, appears on stage "in his underwear with a slice of bread stuck on the dildo on his forehead" (73).[11]

But Lidia, in Titanic, is the best example of the satire of sexual appetite. Lidia's first sexual experience consisted of "a gang-bang with twenty-two Portuguese sailors....and it lasted for two days" (73). Lidia's sexual appetite becomes more animalistic as she tells Teddy more about herself:

> I used to keep a hedgehog up my vagina.... But my parents made me stop because I kept feeding it in public. (68)

Later we learn that Lidia has not kicked the habit of

sheltering animals after she borrows some lettuce from Teddy's plate:

> (*She puts it* [lettuce] *up her dress*) I have a couple of hamsters in here now, and do they make a mess! (69)

Needless to say, Teddy gets bitten by a hamster as he has sex with Lidia.

Lidia goes beyond storing members of the rodent family after she catches a seagull on the deck of the ship. She complains that "It's not sitting well" (79), as "Feathers fall from beneath her dress" (79). And of course Victoria gets bitten by a seagull as she has sex with Lidia. As Victoria says, "a douche is one thing but a vaginal zoo is quite another!" (80).[12]

As well as satirizing sex and the family, Durang makes many allusions to art forms, especially film, in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, 'dentity Crisis, and Titanic.

Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes seems to be influenced by the film Little Foxes (1941), which is based on the Lillian Hellman play of the same name. The matriarchal bitch, Vivien, is similar to the Bette Davis character, Regina, in the film. Both characters are solipsistic, neglect their daughters, and suffer from loneliness in the end. Even the family name is similar; Hubbard in the film, Hubbell in Durang's play. The big difference between the

film and the play is that in the film the neglected daughter escapes her mother's wrath, whereas in the play, the neglected daughter is murdered by her grandmother.

Similarly, Titanic, a play which was performed during the mid-1970s, is based on film.[13] It is a general parody of the disaster movies which were popular at the time, but more specifically, a parody of A Night to Remember (1943) and Titanic (1958), films which are based on the sinking of the Titanic. The title of the play, and the many references to icebergs, as well as the often-played hymn, "Nearer My God To Thee," which was actually played by the orchestra as the ship was sinking, suggest this.

Titanic, which is based on two films, also makes references to other movies, as seen in Teddy's burlesque of a Shirley Temple song:

> On the good ship lollipop,
> It's a short trip into bed you hop
> And dream away, something, something,
> something.... (83)

'dentity Crisis also makes casual references to film, seen in Durang's stage directions as "Edith, Robert, Woman, and Summers keep shaking hands, introducing themselves to each other over and over" (82). This slapstick comedy is reminiscent of a number of Marx Brothers films, notably A Night at the Opera (1935).

But a more obvious tribute to the movies is seen as Summers responds to his wife's new sexual appendage:

> Harriet, is that a banana in your trousers, or are you just happy to see me? (78)

This of course is a tribute to Mae West, who was famous for her one-line sexual innuendos.

But 'dentity Crisis, first performed in 1978, is most reminiscent of the psychological film Sybil (1976), about a young woman who, as a result of bad childhood experiences, develops seventeen different personalities. Durang burlesques the didactic characteristic of modern psychology, seen in Sybil, as the psychiatrist, Summers, and his wife explain Jane's personality switch:

> SUMMERS....When Jane finally released the forces of her libido by whacking off the banana bread...
>
> WOMAN....she freed her imprisoned personality...
>
> SUMMERS....and enabled herself to face...
>
> WOMAN....her festering...
>
> SUMMERS....competition...
>
> WOMAN....with her mother. (84)

Durang is also satirizing the cultural obsession with identity and the affirmation of the self, which was prevalent in the 1970s. The obsession with getting to know oneself is especially satirized by Robert, who conjugates the word "identity," which is reminiscent of Pip, in Chapter 99, "The Dubloon," of Moby-Dick, who conjugates the verb "see":

> Identity. I dentity, you dentity, he she or it dentities. We dentity, you dentity, they dentity. Cuckoo, Cuckoo, Cuckoo. (84)

Like Melville, other literary figures are thrown into Durang's plays, as seen in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes as Vivien recites poetry:

> Tyger, tyger, burning bright; in the forests of the night; who's the fairest in the land? (57)

The reference to Blakes's poem "Tyger, Tyger" (here it is combined with lines from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs) is used again in Titanic as Teddy and Lidia sing a song, suggestive of Lidia's "vaginal zoo":

> Hedgehog, hedgehog
> Burning bright,
> In the forests of the night....(91)

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FILM AND THE IDIOTS KARAMAZOV

It is apparent, so far, that Durang uses many references in his plays. Why? I will try to answer this question by looking at A History of the American Film (1977) and The Idiots Karamazov (1974), two plays which are saturated with references to film and literature.

A History of the American Film covers the "history" of the American film from D.W. Griffith to films like The Exorcist and Earthquake. The play begins in "The Silent Years," with references to D.W. Griffith's Intolerance (1916), Broken Blossoms (1919), and Orphans in the Storm (1922). The orphan, Loretta, reminiscent of the silent movie star, Lillian Gish, is told (via large title cards) that she is too tall to remain in the orphanage, and that she must fend for herself. She then spends all her money to see "A MINSTREL SINGER in black face"[1] sing in the first talking motion picture, a reference to Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer (1927). When the singer holds a note on the word "Mammy," a reference to the popular song "My Mammy," from The Jazz Singer, Loretta breaks down and cries.

The next few scenes take place in Shanty Town, a reference to Man's Castle (1933), which starred another Loretta, Loretta Young. In Shanty Town, Loretta meets the delinquent, Jimmy, who was put in a reform school for

lighting a priest on fire.[2] Jimmy is insufferably macho and patriotic. His response to Loretta's plea for help is "I'm American, ain't I?" (18).

After the leaves of the calendar fall off, signifying the passing of time, Loretta realizes that Shanty Town is not all romance, especially when Jimmy "violently pushes his grapefruit in her face" (22), a reference to Public Enemy (1931), in which James Cagney pushes *his* grapefruit in Mae Clarke's face. Jimmy is a ruthless gangster, and Loretta wants a more legal life:

> I want a proper life. I want every transgression to be punished. I want no conversation to have salacious content. I want never to discuss themes of incest or white slavery. I want to be a married wife and have children and have a bedroom with two beds in it and when you're on the bed you always have to keep one foot on the floor. (25)

This is, of course, a reference to Hollywood's Production Code of 1934.

After featuring gangster movies, A History of the American Film moves towards melodramatic courtroom dramas, seen as the reporter, Eve, informs her contact of the judge's harsh sentencing of Loretta, who was framed for the murder of Jimmy:

> Loretta Moran. No mother. No father. Nobody to love but a gangster husband and, for a few minutes, a baby. But somehow love wasn't enough.... But it wasn't just love that finished off

> Loretta Moran. It was the gangs; it was the system; and it was the world. (*Pause.*) Well, that closes the last chapter on the Loretta Moran case. What? Yeah, I want a chicken on rye with lots of mayo and 86 the pickle. (28)

After the courtroom drama comes to an end, screwball comedies of the thirties become the dominant motif. As indicated in the stage directions, the "ominous-harsh" lighting, reminiscent of early Warner Brothers now "becomes Paramount romantic -- very bright, soft" (28). With appropriate lighting, Durang's screwball comedy is complete with a madcap heiress, a scavenger hunt, and an artist named Abdhul, who is under the patronage of the Mortimer family.

But the most striking resemblance to a screwball comedy belongs to Viola, "a heavy colored maid" (28), who speaks with a "very slurred accent" (29). This archetypal black, comic maid, like Butterfly McQueen (who seems to be the basis for Hazel in The Vietnamization of New Jersey), does not have a last name, which is apparent as Allison Mortimer introduces Viola to Hank and Loretta:

> Oh, and this is Viola. I don't know her last name. (31)

Like her lack of a family name, Viola's dialect resembles that of the Hollywood black maid, seen as Viola complains about Abdhul, who is interfering with her territory:

> Mrs. Mortimer, you bettah come out heah. Abdhul, he in there, and he throwin' this, and he throwin' that. He gwine make a mess in my kitchen. (33)

Mrs. Mortimer instructs Viola, "There is no such word as gwine..." (33).

The frivolous nature of screwball comedies becomes too much for the serious Loretta, who screams, "I HATE SCREWBALL COMEDIES!"(33). Loretta tries to end the silly events on stage by suggesting a plausible ending, which is typical of screwball comedies:

> Look -- Hank and Clara have fallen in love because they're screwballs and social class doesn't matter. (33-34)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And Jimmy marries...well, he can't marry me, so Abdhul marries me, and I'm miserable for the rest of my life...but Mr. Mortimer, on the other hand, is so happy that Abdhul is leaving his house that he takes Mrs. Mortimer over his knee and he spanks her and then The End sign comes down and we don't feel anything anymore. (34)

And so once "The End" sign comes down, the silliness of screwball comedy is not tolerated anymore. Mrs. Mortimer loses her care-free character and screams at Viola, who used to get away with doing things like throwing flour in her mistress' face:

> I will not allow the servants to behave this way. Viola! Go pack your things at once. We're putting you on the first bus back to Georgia! (35)

The next scene begins when "A large map of the United States is lowered" and "A pinspot focuses on Connecticut and moves with determination westward," settling "somewhere around Oklahoma..." (35). There is escape music, barking dogs, and a harmonica, which suggest the atmosphere of an "escape-from-a-chaingang movie," such as I am a Fugitive From a Chaingang (1932), The Emperor Jones (1935), and Fugitive Lovers (1934). Loretta and Hank are of course the escaped prisoners, although women were obviously never put on chaingangs. They arrive at Hank's parents' house, Ma and Pa Joad, somewhere in Oklahoma, a geographical reference to John Ford's film The Grapes of Wrath (1940). Hank tells his parents that he's going to flee the dustbowl and head out to California, not to become a migrant worker, but a movie star.

Appropriately, one of the next movie genres featured is films which are about making movies. During the shooting of a western, Eve tells Hank, who plays the part of a cowboy, "You're insufferably, monosyllabic..."(39).

The play suddenly shifts from the making of westerns to the making of a Broadway show, "Clamdiggers of 1937" (41), of course a reference to the "Gold Diggers" movies which featured Busby Berkeley's extravagant music and dance numbers. Durang alludes to Berkeley's work in a show-tune called "We're In a Salad," featuring the singers dressed as vegetables:

GIRL 1
I love radish,
Red and snappy.

GIRL 2
Only lettuce,
Makes me happy,

GIRL 3
I love dressing,
Tart and sassy,

EVE.
I love God
And I love Lassie....(42-43)

The lines spoken by Eve have no connection to the rest of the song, which is about salad. Like God and Lassie, Busby Berkeley is out of fashion.

The makings-of-a-movie theme continues as the star of a film breaks her leg slipping on a piece of lettuce from the last shooting. As the cliché goes, an unknown actress from the chorus, Loretta, is given the once-in-a-lifetime chance of making it big in Hollywood by replacing the injured star. But as soon as Eve encourages Loretta by telling her to "break a leg" (45), the latter falls, and actually does break a leg. When the director realizes that he has no more suitable replacements, he decides to use a dog instead, and orders his assistant, "Get me Rin Tin Tin" (45).

At the end of the scene, Loretta laments, "sometimes I think that the thirties aren't ever going to be over" (45-46). And the next scene appropriately begins with a reference to a classic film of the 1940s, Citizen Kane

(1941). The scene begins with Bette, who is reminiscent of Susan in this Orson Welles film, playing with an oversized jigsaw puzzle. The bored Bette complains that Jimmy, who resembles Charles Foster Kane, is neurotic because of his obsession with achievement. Jimmy, who, like Kane, wants his talentless wife to be an opera singer, repeatedly chokes Bette, once while the latter sings a scale.

Since Citizen Kane was made in 1941, it is only a matter of moments before the bombing of Pearl Harbor becomes an issue in A History of the American Film. The involvement of the United States in the Second World War changes Hollywood forever. Patriotic army films move away from the domestic problems seen in movies such as Citizen Kane, The Grapes of Wrath, Public Enemy, and Man's Castle. Now everyone must work together against the enemy. And so, as Jimmy suggests, the rivalry between Loretta and Bette is put on hold for the war effort:

> I want you both to put aside your differences until the war is over. Because we all have to act as one nation now....(53)

Because of the war, Jimmy realizes that his delinquent past was wrong:

> I realize now that when I killed people in the early 1930s, it was wrong because it was done for selfish reasons, for personal gain. However, I find that my years as a gangster were an excellent training for dealing with these stinkin' Nazis. (55)

Even the jocular Eve, a takeoff on Eve Arden (who was famous for her wisecracks), changes:

> I never joke anymore. (56)

The war effort, like Hollywood war films, brings out a heightened patriotic sentiment, demonstrated by Mickey as he explains what the war is for:

> It's so that a little kid in Kansas can grow up on a farm and be President or Senator or dog catcher or whatever he wants to be. It's for that lady with the light, it's for the Fourth of July and the Declaration of Independence. It's so a young girl...can be free to buy herself an ice cream soda in a soda shop in Vermont. (52)[3]

During the wartime years, there are references to two famous films made in 1942: Now, Voyager and Casablanca. In the film Now, Voyager, there is a famous scene in which Paul Henreid lights two cigarettes and gives one to Bette Davis. And in A History of the American Film, Victor Henreid lights two cigarettes, but Loretta responds, "I'm sorry, I don't smoke" (62).

Similarly, there is a reference to Casablanca as Jimmy plays Bogart:

> Loretta, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that. (66)

Loretta asks Jimmy, "What about beans?" (66), and tells the Piano Man, who is reminiscent of Dooley Wilson in Casablanca, to stop playing the piano. Loretta also wants to know what "Here's looking at you" (66) means.[4]

The post-war period in A History of the American Film begins with Andrew Sisters clones, who sing "Apple Blossom Victory," a song which includes the words, "Don't sit under the atom bomb with anyone else but me..."(67). The post-war period is filled with neurotics and alcoholics. As Loretta explains, "When the war was on, none of us had time to be neurotic. But now that it's over, there is just all this time..."(72). We see Hollywood's post-war obsession with personal problems as the Academy Awards nominations for Best Actress are introduced:

> Bette O'Reilly as an unhappily married woman still in love with her former husband Jimmy but fast forgetting him due to several rounds of shock treatment in "Love Me or Leave Me in the Snake Pit."... Eve Sheridan as an alcoholic spinster shamefully in love with a Catholic Priest and fast finding her wisecracks unable to protect her from an empty bed in "Losing Her Sense of Humor."... Clara Mortimer as a dimwitted socialite who can't cope with her husband's losing his hands in the war in "We the Victors."... Loretta Moran as an alcoholic ex-ingenue who must overcome polio in "I'll Cry With a Song in My Heart Tomorrow." (73-74)

And of course the winner is Loretta Moran, who has polio, because in order "To win an Oscar now you must overcome great personal difficulties" (73), a reference to post-war Hollywood films dealing with overcoming mental, personal, and physical problems, such as The Snake Pit (1948), a film about a mental breakdown, I'll Cry Tomorrow (1955), a film about marital and alcoholic problems, and With a Song In My Heart (1952), a film about coping with life after a crippling accident.

In the remainder of the play there are many references to movies, but the references are more disjointed. As Richard Eder in The New York Times notices, "Some of it is parody that does no more than make itself recognizable...."[5] For example, Durang briefly introduces a robot "from the planet Zabar" (70), which warns earthlings of the dangers of radiation, a reference to the science fiction films of the 1950s, as well as a reference to a well known Upper West Side food emporium. Jimmy briefly takes on the roles of James Dean (74) in Rebel Without a Cause (1955) and Marlon Brando (75-76) in On the Waterfront (1954). Biblical epics are alluded to as we hear the voice of God thunder, "Thou shalt have no molten images" (78), a reference to The Ten Commandments (1956) and the "holiness" of Hollywood images. There is even a reference to Psycho (1960), as Hank talks to his imaginary mother, brandishes a knife, and suggests that Loretta take a shower (80). Other films are alluded to such

as Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967) (83), The Exorcist (1973), in which Bette screams, "I'm the devil, fuck me, fuck me!" (84), as she sticks her tongue out and tries to make her head turn around completely. And of course there is a reference to Earthquake (1974); the set falls apart (85), and the characters must start a new world, based on the perfection of Hollywood (87-90).

Why does Durang make so many, often comic, references to movies in A History of the American Film? First of all, he is, of course, paying homage to the American film industry. But he is also satirizing the American obsession with Hollywood films, the ridiculousness of many of these films, and Hollywood's detachment from contemporary American history.

The satire of the American obsession with Hollywood is evident from the beginning of the play, in that there are movie theatre seats on stage, on which are seated actors who are watching the play. When these actors have a part to play in the play proper, they leave their movie seats and walk into the action of the play. This seems to suggest that the line which separates the audience from the spectacle, in this case movies, is a fine one. In other words, the audience participates in the action, if only in fantasy. Certainly Bette cannot separate herself from "molten images":

> I'm tryin' to sound like Kim Novak in "Picnic." Actually she didn't talk that way. It's more like Marilyn Monroe in

> "Bus Stop." Do you think I look like her? Maybe I'm Carroll Baker in "Baby Doll." (79)

Similarly, Jimmy wants the new race, following the earthquake, to "have spiritual values... like Spencer Tracy in 'Boys Town,'" to "be idealistic... like James Stewart in 'Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,'" to "be for racial tolerance... like Gregory Peck in 'To Kill a Mockingbird'" (87), etc. Clearly, Durang is satirizing the fact that Hollywood, to some extent, defined American fantasies.

Durang also satirizes the ridiculous nature of Hollywood films. Jack Kroll, in Newsweek, points out that A History of the American Film "...show[s] us how silly we are by showing us how silly are the movies we loved."[6] This is simply done by re-creating scenes and moods from dated Hollywood films, like Man's Castle and Public Enemy, which look even more ridiculous on stage because of the loss of the controlling "eye" of the camera. Add to this some of the conventions of Hollywood films which are satirized, such as the "fluffiness" of screwball comedies, the patriotism of war films, and the fact that characters get killed and then come back to life, and we are left with what Stanley Kauffmann, in New Republic, calls a "...burlesque of things that Hollywood has implanted in the world's store of images...."[7]

Durang also satirizes Hollywood's detachment from contemporary history, by introducing aspects of American

history into A History of the American Film, which were virtually ignored by Hollywood. For example, in scene 16, Hank's mother, Ma Joad, is brought before "The House Un-American Activities Committee" (76), and accused of being a communist, a reference to post-war paranoiac witchhunts, such as the Parnall Committee and the McCarthy hearings. Of course, this subject was not used in Hollywood films of the 1950s. Similarly, the American internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War was not a subject for war-time films. But in A History of the American Film, Durang introduces the subject immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor is known, as Bette's butler informs her of the fate of her Japanese Opera coach and lover, Ito:

> I've taken the liberty of firing Ito, Madam. We've placed him in a camp. (51)

In spite of the fact that Durang satirizes Hollywood's failure to address contemporary events, some of its dated, ridiculous films, and the American obsession with Hollywood, Durang, who is himself an obsessive moviegoer, manages to balance his satire with his homage to Hollywood.[8] As Clive Barnes in The New York Times writes about A History of the American Film, "The tone is satiric but affectionate."[9] And it is perhaps this balance of affection and satire, satire on three different levels, which may explain the many references to movies in this play, as well as in Durang's other plays.

Like A History of the American Film, The Idiots Karamazov, co-written with Albert Innaurato,[10] is filled with references not so much to movies, but to literature and literary figures. The Idiots Karamazov makes references to O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night, Constance Garnett and her translations of nineteenth century Russian literature, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Anaïs Nin, Hemingway, and more. The Idiots Karamazov seems to be entirely about literary references.

The Idiots Karamazov, which uses Dostoevsky's The Idiot and The Brothers Karamazov to form its title, actually makes as many references to O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night as it does to Dostoevsky's works. The references to Long Day's Journey Into Night in The Idiots Karamazov are not subtle. The matriarch of the Karamazov family is appropriately named Mary Tyrone Karamazov, who glides on and off the stage, complaining about the fog, concerned with her son's cold, and generally speaking about the past:

> I had a talk with Mother Elizabeth. She is so good and sweet. I told her I wanted to be a nun. I explained how sure I was of my vocation. I had prayed to the Blessed Virgin to make me sure. And I had a true vision of her when I was praying.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Mother Elizabeth told me I must be more sure than that. She said I should put myself to a test and go home after I graduate and live as other girls live.

. . . . . .

> That was the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with Fyodor Karamazov and was so happy for a time.[11]

Mary Tyrone Karamazov's words are close to Mary Tyrone's final speech in Long Day's Journey Into Night. Some passages are taken verbatim. This seems to be simply an homage to O'Neill's play. But not everything concerning Mary Tyrone is strictly an homage.

This is suggested as Mary Tyrone Karamazov expresses concern about Edmund:

> James, Edmund is not well.
> I don't think it's a summer cold at all.
> It's snowing outside. (36)

Aside from Russian winter weather conditions not making "a summer cold" possible, the fact that Mary Tyrone Karamazov addresses the dead Fyodor, whom she calls James, suggests that this Mary Tyrone is an object of ridicule.

Mary Tyrone's obsession with her rheumatic hands is referred to in The Idiots Karamazov. This is introduced as Alyosha mentions a dream he had "About my mother and her feet!" (21). This confusion of hands and feet, along with the confusion of rheumatism and gout, is repeated as Mary Tyrone Karamazov continues to speak about the past:

> When I was at the convent, I used to play the piano with my feet until I got gout.

> Mother Elizabeth used to say, you don't mean your feet, you mean your hands. I never did though. (25)

But perhaps the most exaggerated treatment of Mary Tyrone concerns her drug addiction. Like Mary Tyrone in Long Day's Journey Into Night, Mary Tyrone Karamazov announces that she must get something at the drug store (24). But unlike the original Mary Tyrone, this satiric clone shoots up in front of the audience, as indicated in the stage directions:

> Mrs. Karamazov goes rifling through her carpetbag, finds a hypodermic, and shoots up. (23)

At one point, Mary Tyrone Karamazov "tries to plunge [a] pestle into her veins" (47), as she is suffering from withdrawal.[12] She screams, "Oh, shoot me up, someone, shoot me up" (48).[13]

Like Mary Tyrone, Jamie and Edmund Tyrone are referred to in The Idiots Karamazov. Similar to Jamie in Long Day's Journey Into Night, Ivan Karamazov treats his mother's addiction with a wry, bitter sense of humour, as seen when he questions his mother's need of a bag to carry her needles:

> Have you then resumed your..."knitting"? (23)

But Ivan does not always use euphemisms in dealing with his mother. Unlike Jamie, who once refers to his mother as a

"hophead" in Long Day's Journey Into Night, Ivan tells his mother, to her face, that she is a "pathetic heroin-stuffed old rag" (24).

At this point, Alyosha, who is reminiscent of the sensitive Edmund, slaps Ivan in the face, to which the latter responds, "Thanks, kid, I needed that" (24), a reference, of course, to Long Day's Journey Into Night. But the relationship between the brothers becomes satiric as Ivan, like Jamie, warns Alyosha, who is like Edmund, about himself:

> I love your guts, kid, but I gotta warn you. I hate your guts, you goddam bastard. (*Hits Alyosha over the head with the pestle.*) Gee, kid, I'm sorry, I love your guts. (49)

This is a satire of the cycle of causing pain and begging forgiveness in Long Day's Journey Into Night. The characters in that play are constantly hurting each other and forgiving each other. But the depiction of this cycle in The Idiots Karamazov, the pain being caused by a pestle, is too quick to be taken seriously.

Like Long Day's Journey Into Night, the Victorian translator, Constance Garnett, whose works have held a monopoly over Russian-English translations for much of this century, is satirized. Garnett's English is now old-fashioned. Her use of words such as "especial" (6) and "vouchsafe" (46), as well as her description of The Brothers

Karamazov as being "one of the greatest novels ever writ in any tongue" (22) suggest this. But more focus is placed on showing Garnett's incompetence as a translator and her out-of-date Victorian sensibility.

Constance Garnett's competence as a translator is questioned as soon as she introduces herself in the beginning of the play:

> I am Constance Garnett, Bart., eminent translatrix from the savage tongues -- the Russian, the Lithuanian, the Polish, the Serbo-Croation -- into the hallowed language we are now speaking. French. (5)

There is no such word as "translatrix," and Constance Garnett, who was British, is speaking in English, not French.

But this satirical translator often confuses her languages, as seen when she translates chapter 1 of The Brothers Karamazov:

> Alyosha Karamazov was the third son of Fyodor Karamazov, a landowner well known in our district in his own day, and still remembered entre nous parce que son morbidetza et tragica moribunda. Dans le jardin Karamazovi steht der junge Alyosha and his brother Ivan. (8)

Constance Garnett's confusions with languages --- English, French, Italian, Spanish and German --- is reminiscent of her confusions with Russian titles, such as "Tolstoi's War and Women," "Chekhov's The Three Siblings, Uncle Sea Gull, and many others" (6). Garnett refers to the

"Song of the Volga Boat Men" as the "Song of the Olga Boat Men" (6), Olga being one of the sisters in Chekhov's Three Sisters. Garnett even mistakes the author of The Brothers Karamazov as being "Fyodor Karamazov" (8).

The Idiots Karamazov also satirizes Constance Garnett's understanding of the Russian language, seen as the Victorian translator is struggling with a Russian verb:

> Now, the Russian verb CHALIAPIN, meaning to be murdered by one's own son with a pestle: CHALIAPINE, CHALIAPINSKI, CHALIAPINSKIYA, CHALIAPINSKOI... CHALIAPINSKINSKI --- that's past perfect --- having had killing one's father with a pestle. (18)

Not only is Garnett's English poor, "having had killing," but also her use of the non-existent verb "CHALIAPIN" --- who was actually a famous Russian opera singer best known for his interpretations of Boris Gudunov --- suggests that her Russian is not up to par. Similarly, Garnett "conjugates" another name, although she calls it a verb:

> I shall now conjugate the verb Karamazov. Karamazov. Karamazas. Karamazat. Karamazamus. Karamazibus. Karamazibutis. Karamazatishibilititis serunt ...[.] (57)

Quite often, Constance Garnett confuses Russian words with people, as seen in her translations:

> Galina Vishnevskeya Irena Archipova loiblu liubasha grigory warfa evgeny atlantov. Rimsky-Korsakov modeste cui mussprovsky pushkin, solugub afrodesiac

> leningrad rasputin. This means: Once again must I return to thee, land of my fathers, etcetera. (22)

Garnett's Russian may not be sound but her listing of famous Russians is impressive, such as the writers, Pushkin and Solugub, and those connected to music, such as Rostropovich's wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, and three of the composers known as "The Five": Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Mussorgsky, and Cesar Cui. Later, Constance Garnett explains the meanings of Russian "biographical" words:

> The Russian word for overcoat is Gogol. The Russian word for epileptic is Dostoevsky. The Russian word for accident at the train station is Anna Karenina. The Russian word for bumble bee is Rimsky-Korsakov. The Russian word for an hysterical homosexual is Tchaikovsky. (46)

Clearly, there is the suggestion that not only is Constance Garnett slightly insane, but she has the power to do whatever she wants with her translations, seen when she has difficulties with a passage in The Brothers Karamazov concerning the existence of God:

> When translating, I had great difficulty with this passage. So I have had to select and simplify. The Russian original goes on for pages and pages, questioning our Savior's existence in a variety of ways, but it seemed to me that it all boiled down to feet. (35)

Garnett even lets her personal feelings about translating enter her work, seen as Ivan questions Alyosha's belief in God:

> Oh, Alyosha, how can you look at this barren untranslatable Russian idiom around us, and still believe in God? (9)

Like her incompetence as a translator, Constance Garnett's Victorian sensibilities (at one point she is dressed like Miss Havisham from Great Expectations) are dramatized, especially her puritan attitude towards sex. We see this as Garnett quickly switches the topic from the conjugation of the "verb" "Chaliapin" to her feelings about sex:

> Chalia --- look at me, do I need sex? No. Writing is all. A writer must save himself. A writer must at all costs save herself from the exhausting impure advances of others. A man came to me once and insisted that I --- pure then, a maiden --- undress for him. Insisted, I tell you, and told me the law of heaven and earth was on his side. The law indeed! Chaliapinskos. Just because he was my husband he thought that gave him the right to make free with the delicate membrane, the vulgar call the body. Even this odoriferous word makes me shudder. The body... oooh! (*Shudders in her wheelchair.*) (18)

Clearly, not only are the Victorian translations of Constance Garnett under fire, but also, her aversion to sex, and her consequent projection of this aversion into her

translations, are satirized. This is made clear as Garnett continues to translate The Brothers Karamazov:

> Dmitri and the others, cynics all, had repaired to a whorehouse... (*Stops.*) Oh dear. That is an archaic word which is no longer in use in our tongue. Whorehouse means... "warehouse." (22)

And of course the next scene takes place in Grushenka's warehouse.[14]

Like Constance Garnett, The Brothers Karamazov is satirized relentlessly.[15] Father Zossima's religious mysticism is an object of ridicule, seen as the priest preaches to Alyosha as the two are having a picnic with two altar boys:

> Everything in the world has a purpose and meaning, Alyosha. This ground we sit on has meaning. This crucifix around my neck has meaning. (*Points to boy.*) This child on my right has meaning. (*Points to other altar boy.*) This child on my left has meaning. (*Picks up a sandwich.*) This has meaning. (*Picks up another sandwich.*) This has meaning. (*Picks up salt shaker.*) This has meaning. (*Carrot.*) This has meaning. (*Celery.*) This has meaning. Everything that God created has a meaning. Even the smallest hair on one's head (*He pulls a hair from his head.*) has a meaning. (*Pulls another.*) And this one. (*Another.*) And this one. (*Another.*) And this one. (*Another.*) And this one. (*Another.*) And this one. (*Alyosha pulls one from his own head.*) And that one. (*Another.*) And this one. (13-14)

Later, Zossima gives meaning to his coughs:

> I cough. (*Coughs.*) This cough has meaning. (*Coughs.*) And this cough. (*Coughs.*) And this cough. It means I am coming down with pneumonia. (47)

This satiric mystic, who wears blue contact lenses, is not meant to be in a cloister. He sells the monastery, which is turned into a munitions factory. When Alyosha asks his mentor if that is moral, the latter replies, "I no longer judge anything" (40).[16]

Even Father Zossima's death stench is referred to in The Idiots Karamazov. We see this as Anais Pnin thanks Alyosha for bringing her the corpse of Dmitri, whose body, like Father Zossima's in The Brothers Karamazov, putrifies quickly:

> Thank you! I collect death stenches. (28)

The satire of the death stench is repeated as Zossima reflects on the odor of Alyosha's dead bird:

> Death stench. Your bird is not a saint. (43)

Some of the questions concerning the nature of God, found in The Brothers Karamazov, are referred to in The Idiots Karamazov. For example, the question of how God can allow cruelty to children is raised by the intellectual Ivan:

> I've seen a mother embroidering take her needle and jab it into the eye of her daughter. I've seen a *father* embroidering

> take a needle and jab it into the other eye of the same child. I then saw this child bitten viciously on the thorax by a rabid seminarian chopping wood. And then this same child was scalded by a peasant woman flinging Russian borscht from her moving troika. (42)

This passage, which is a comical collision of Dostoevsky's notions on the cruelty of children and Gogol's famous images of troikas and Russian cuisine, raises the question, how can there be a God if there is such terrible suffering? Alyosha, who has an aversion to feet --- which not only root us to the earth but have a tendency to smell --- slightly modifies this idea:

> Oh --- how can there be a God if there are feet! (34)

A similar variation on the theme of God occurs after Djuna Barnes dies a death from insecticide, a play on the words "infanticide" and "patricide." At this point Ivan shouts, "Djuna dead, therefore everything permitted" (55), and then sprays his father with insecticide, killing him. This is of course a reference to the idea in The Brothers Karamazov that if God is dead, everything is permitted, including patricide. This idea is further burlesqued in the play's last song, which contains a verse that makes a reference to Dostoevsky's famous "Grand Inquisitor" chapter:

> Everything's permitted,
> All is a la carte,
> And nothing has been fitted,

All things fall apart,
Inquisitors are grand,
Christ gets nailed up twice,
A plague is on the land,
The world is far from nice. (54)

The references to Russian literature specially focus on The Brothers Karamazov, but there are also references to Chekhov's plays. We see this in the beginning of the play as Ivan, Dmitri, and Smerdyakov sing "O we gotta get to Moscow" (7), a reference to Three Sisters, in which the sisters are always talking about going to Moscow. Of course the fact that three men are parodying the three sisters, "Bored three sisters we" (7), ridicules the Chekhov play. In this song the brothers make other references to Chekhov and his plays. They sing of "a check-off list" (7), a list of what to bring to Moscow, and they sing, "we'll sell the cherry orchard" (7) and "Uncle Vanya, don't you cry now" (7), references to The Cherry Orchard and Uncle Vanya, with a touch of a negro spiritual. A more physical reference to Chekhov occurs when Ivan takes out a pistol and shoots at the ceiling, from which a sea gull falls, of course a reference to The Seagull.

Another writer who is referred to in The Idiots Karamazov is the Spanish-French-American diarist, Anaïs Nin, who, in the play, is called Anais Pnin, a collage of Nin and the title character of Nabokov's novel Pnin. The excessive length and randomness of Anaïs Nin's diaries are satirized. Father Zossima is invited to Pnin's "party for everyone in

volume 23 of her famous diary" (20). At one point in the play, Pnin gives birth to volume 99 of her diary, and says, "That save me writer's cramp" (53). Referring to Alyosha's singing voice, Pnin says, "Whether he can sing on pitch or not is an aspect of probability theory and thus expresses the randomness of art in our time more clearly than anything except my diaries" (38-39).[17] This randomness is demonstrated as Pnin reads from her diary:

> Oct. 26, 1894. Today I had a glass eye made in case I lose my real eye. I play marbles with my glass eye, it reminds me of clairvoyant who play at games with his second sight. Now I put glass eye in my navel[18] and pretend I Indian deity, Siva. (45)

Another American writer referred to in The Idiots Karamazov is Hemingway, who is played by Constance Garnett's butler, Ernest. As Fyodor and Dmitri are preparing to cut Grushenka in half, Ernest smiles and says the following:

> Reminds me of the safari. Actually reminds me of Zelda and Scott but that's not polite. A pee-wee woman once gave birth, quite simply in this fashion. African sundown, heat, bug bites, woman's labor pains and me, I was the tent. Dias, my friend, took the meat cleaver and she gave birth to twins, handsome devils both. Maybe I should use this in a short story about bullfighting. (17)

Hemingway's criticism of Fitzgerald, his own prose style, and especially his machismo are alluded to here. Constance

Garnett refers to Ernest as being "so moody" (46), and of course she is offended by his macho writing, seen as she scolds Ernest for wrapping himself up in the bloody sheet used for Grushenka's division:

> Ernest! Ernest! What were you doing in that bloody sheet? I hope you weren't doing research for a new novel, the others were bad enough. All that masculine nonsense. (18)

And what would a dramatization of Hemingway be without an allusion to his suicide. Towards the end of the play, Ernest aims a rifle into his mouth and kills himself offstage.[19]

After Ernest's suicide, Constance Garnett seems to lose any sanity she may have had before. She begins translating The Brothers Karamazov from the beginning, which becomes an encyclopedic collage of first lines from some of the great books, many of which are long. She begins with the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word" (56). She then makes a reference to A Tale of Two Cities: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (56). Garnett makes references to Moby-Dick and Notes From Underground:

> Call me Ishmael. I am a sick woman. I am a spiteful woman. (56)

She quotes directly from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was, there was a moocow coming down along

> the road and this moocow that was coming down the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo.... (56)

Garnett makes a reference to Anna Karenina: "All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion" (56), and to Ulysses: "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather" (57). Constance Garnett then "conjugates" "Karamazov," as the lights dim.

What do the literary references in The Idiots Karamazov (as well as in other Durang plays) have in common? There are four elements which tie many of these references together: the satire of cultural clichés and icons, hubris, sex, and the satire of the Catholic Church and the family.

Many of the references in The Idiots Karamazov express cultural clichés and icons. Much of the literature referred to in The Idiots Karamazov, such as Chekhov's plays, the Bible, Moby-Dick, and Ulysses, are monuments of western literature. Similarly, the two literary works most often referred to in The Idiots Karamazov are cultural icons. Many critics consider Long Day's Journey Into Night to be the only great American tragedy. And The Brothers Karamazov is considered by many to be the greatest novel ever written. And so because these works are considered to be indisputed masterpieces, and subsequently taught and over-analyzed in schools and universities, references to these works have

become cultural clichés. For example, the famous lines in Long Day's Journey Into Night, such as Jamie's "I love your guts....I hate your guts," and Ivan's realization in The Brothers Karamazov that everything is permitted if God is dead, have been quoted so many times that they have become clichés. Durang (with Innaurato) satirizes these cultural clichés in The Idiots Karamazov as well as in his other plays, such as The Vietnamization of New Jersey, in which allusions are made to Hamlet and Death of a Salesman, and 'dentity Crisis, in which allusions are made to Moby-Dick and Blake's "Tyger, Tyger," all examples of famous works.

Along with cultural clichés and icons, another common element which connects some of the literary references in The Idiots Karamazov is hubris. Certainly, the satirizing of the narcissism of Anaïs Nin and the machismo of Hemingway suggest this. Forms of hubris are also found in Uncle Larry's machismo in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, the solipsism of several characters in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, and the authoritarianism of educators and high school administrators in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, and Baby With The Bathwater.

Sex is another common element which Durang refers to in The Idiots Karamazov. The satire of Anaïs Nin's alleged bisexuality, and Father Zossima's homosexuality and cross-dressing are some examples. Of course the satire of sex is

found in almost every Durang play, from Titanic and its "vaginal zoo" to Naomi in the Living Room and its reversal of sexual roles, and is frequently a part of Durang's satire of the Catholic Church.

The fourth common element which ties together some of the literary references in The Idiots Karamazov is the continuing satire of the Catholic Church and the family. Even though Father Zossima is a Russian Orthodox priest, not a Roman Catholic priest, the satire of the religiosity of this figure transcends divisions in Christianity, and can be compared to Durang's other ridiculous and insane priests, such as Father McGillicutty in The Vietnamization of New Jersey and Father Donnally in The Marriage of Bette and Boo. Similarly, the satire of the family is found in The Idiots Karamazov. The characters are constantly fighting with each other, calling each other names, reminiscent of the many unhappy families portrayed in Durang's plays, such as the Jansen-Hubbell Pomme family in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes and the Mann family in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe.

CHAPTER 4

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE UNIVERSE AND SISTER MARY IGNATIUS EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU

The Nature and Purpose of the Universe (1975) and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You (1979) both go beyond satire while containing what have become the now recognizable objects of Durang's satire: sex, the Catholic Church, the educational system, and the family. It should be noted that the institutions that Durang satirizes are authoritarian, and that sex is part of a satire of authoritarian institutions as well as partially having to do with sexual confusions and identity.

The Nature and Purpose of the Universe is a play which satirizes and burlesques the obsession with sex. Homosexuality is alluded to as Gary Mann and his boyfriend, Ralph, share the Prime Minister of Iceland's son. Lesbianism is suggested as Elaine May Alcott,[1] who plays the prostitute Crystal, makes a pass at Eleanor, the matriarch of the Mann family:

> Have you ever made it with another woman?[2]

Sexual perversion is hinted at as Donald tells his mother that the "Prime Minister says he's willing to give me five dollars if he can urinate in your face..." (33).

Eleanor, who gets raped by the high school coach, is usually the victim of other people's obsessions with sex. We see this as Elaine, who later plays the census woman, torments Eleanor with various questions about her sexual activity with her husband:

> Do you have oral sex? Do you have anal sex? Do either of you use chains?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Have you ever had nasal intercourse? (24)

The obsession with sex, especially sexual positions, is further satirized by Elaine, who plays the part of the Icelandic cabaret singer, Dame Olga Rheinholtenbarkerburkeruurr:

> How do I love thee?
> Let me count the ways.
> One. Two. Three. Four, Five, six...
> Seven. Eight. (31)

Steve pitches in:

> Hey! Don't forget nasal intercourse! (31)

This satire of sexual obsession alludes to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Kama Sutra.[3]

Like The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You satirizes the obsession with sex, especially the Catholic Church's obsession with sex.

Sister Mary Ignatius seems to be obsessed with sex as she asks her pupil, Thomas, what the sixth and ninth commandments are ("Thou shalt not commit adultery," and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife", respectively).

But Sister Mary's obsession with sex is most obsessive in her tirades against homosexuality, seen in her speech on Sodom:

> Sodom is where they committed acts of homosexuality and bestiality in the Old Testament, and God, infuriated by this, destroyed them all in one fell swoop. Modern day Sodoms are New York City, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Los Angeles,... well, basically anywhere where the population is over 50,000. The only reason that God has not destroyed these modern day sodoms is that Catholic nuns and priests live in these cities, and God does not wish to destroy them. (33)[4]

Sister Mary's contempt for homosexuals (reminiscent of Father McGillicutty's contempt for crowds of people in The Vietnamization of New Jersey) moves from theory to practice as the nun comes face to face with the homosexual Gary, a former pupil who was seduced in seminary school and then "went to New York and ... slept with five hundred different people" (45)[5]. Sister Mary Ignatius suggests that Gary is gay:

> You do that thing that makes Jesus puke, don't you? (44)

Not only Gary, but Diane and Philomena have sinned

against Catholicism. Diane had two abortions (one because she was raped and the other because her psychiatrist seduced her) and Philomena had a child outside of marriage. The only former student, of the four, who did not commit a mortal sin is Aloysius, an alcoholic who beats his wife and contemplates suicide (which is condemned by the Catholic Church). Referring to Aloysius, Sister Mary Ignatius boasts, "At least one of my students turned out well" (44). But to the others, Sister Mary Ignatius says, "you've all sinned against sex.... Why this obsession with sex?" (45). According to Sister Mary Ignatius, "Our Lord loves celibate people" (51).

But the fact that the play ends with Thomas sitting on Sister Mary Ignatius' lap seems to undermine her campaign against sex. Frank Rich in The New York Times suggests this:

> The nun... tends to fondle little Thomas just a shade too playfully --- thus allowing Mr. Durang to score his wicked points about the hidden sexual quotient of ostensibly sinless celibacy.[6]

Like the satire and burlesque of the obsession with sex, the satire and burlesque of the educational system is present in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You.

This is evident in the stage directions of The Nature and Purpose of the Universe as the high school student, Andy, who lost his penis in a reaper accident (an early example of Durang's emasculated males, like Harry in The Vietnamization

of New Jersey, and Daisy in Baby WIth the Bathwater), is disciplined for exposing himself (another example of sexual obsession):

> Elaine [playing the school secretary] sits at a desk, ripping up papers and/or shooting rubber bands into the air. Andy's shirt is off, and Coach Griffin is whipping him on the floor. (13)

The authoritarian nature of high school administrators is presented by Elaine, who plays the part of the secretary, playing the part of the principal:

> I'm Miss Mansfield, Mr. Watson's secretary. Mr. Watson is on sabbatical this semester, and in his absence I have complete power. (*Looking around room, cheerfully awed.*) I don't know what to do with it all, really. (13)

Miss Mansfield (another literary name) uses her power to punish Andy for his indiscretion: Andy must wear girls' clothing for a month (a combination of emasculation and sexual confusion). When asked by Eleanor if this punishment is constructive, Miss Mansfield replies, "I don't know" (15).

Like Miss Mansfield, Sister Mary Ignatius inflicts cruel and unusual punishment on her pupils. She would call Philomena "stupid" as well as hit her. (If she had the means, Sister Mary Ignatius would "cure" Gary's homosexuality by "shock treatments and aversion therapy" [46], forms of therapy which were popular in the 1960s and 1970s.) But

Sister Mary Ignatius' cruelest streak is seen in her refusal to allow Aloysius to go to the bathroom:

> There were sixty children, and I sat in the back of the room; and I did raise my hand, but you never acknowledged me. Every afternoon my bladder became very full, and I always ended up wetting my pants. (46)

The same sadistic scene is played out years later as Sister Mary Ignatius aims a gun at Aloysius, who is now a full grown man:

> Stay where you are. Raise your hand if you want to go to the bathroom, Aloysius, and wait until I have acknowledged you. (50)

Of course Sister Mary Ignatius never does acknowledge Aloysius, and the play ends with Thomas aiming the gun at Aloysius, while the latter tries not to wet his pants.

Like Sister Mary Ignatius' methods of punishment, her teaching methods are satirized. She keeps feeding Thomas cookies when he gets the right answer, a method somewhat Pavlovian. Also, the nun drills her teachings into her students until memorization becomes more important than understanding. We see this in Thomas' answer to Sister Mary Ignatius' question about how we know Christ loves us an infinite amount:

> Because you tell us. (32)

Sister Mary Ignatius' corruption of Thomas, and her cruelty to other students is a satire of an educator who is not fit to teach. (She teaches her students that "celibate" rhymes with "celebrate.") Diane tells Sister Mary Ignatius, "You shouldn't be teaching children. You should be locked up in a convent where you can't hurt anybody" (46).

Perhaps Sister Mary Ignatius' sad family life turned the nun into a religious despot:

> I come from a large family. My father was big and ugly, my mother had a nasty disposition and didn't like me, and there were 26 of us. It took 3 hours just to wash the dishes....We lived in a small, ugly house, and I shared a room with all my sisters. My father would bring home drunken bums off the street, and let them stay in the same room as himself and my mother....Sometimes these bums would make my mother hysterical, and we'd have to throw water on her. (30)

This satire of the family (it is also a satire of the Catholic Church's ruling on birth control) becomes more exaggerated as Sister Mary Ignatius tells us more about her family:

> From my family 5 became priests, 7 became nuns, 3 became brothers, and the rest of them were institutionalized. My mother was also institutionalized shortly after she started thinking my father was Satan. (34)

Here, Durang draws a parallel between religion and madness (both connected to institutions), but he also suggests that

the family unit has lost its respectability as an institution.

Satire of the family exists in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, but it is more forceful in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe. Steve Mann is the abusive husband, Andy Mann is the emasculated, youngest son, Gary Mann is the homosexual, middle son, Donald Mann is the oldest son, a pimp and drug pusher, and Eleanor Mann is the mother and housewife who is abused by her family. The fact that the family name is Mann, mankind, suggests that this family is representative of all families. But the violence in the Mann household is too exaggerated to be taken completely seriously.

Here are some instances of violence against Eleanor: Donald "Hurls her to the ground" (8), Donald "kicks her" (9), Steve "kicks her" (9), Donald "hurls his mother to the ground" (10), Donald "pushes her slightly" (16), Donald "kicks her a little" (18), Donald "hurls her to the ground" (18), Donald "slaps her face lightly but continually" (18), "Steve pushes Donald away and gets on top of Eleanor, slapping her" (19), Steve "kicks her" (21), Steve "throws her to the ground" (33), and Steve, Donald, Gary, and his boyfriend, Ralph, "kick her lightly on the ground" (33).[8]

This satire and burlesque of domestic violence may be distasteful for some, as it is for Richard Eder of The New York Times:

> There is a suggestion of the distasteful.... It is not in the play's subject matter but in the nature of theatre itself. Like it or not, there are human beings on stage. Ellen Greene [the actress who played Eleanor] is playing a totally burlesque mother, and the abuse she is constantly subjected to is often hilarious. And yet it becomes too much: The second or third time that she is reduced to weeping helplessly on the floor, it is a woman that we see, weeping helplessly on the floor --- and to no purpose.[9]

But according to Durang, the purpose of the violence, which should be "sufficiently distanced/or theatricalized,"[10] but not "totally fake or simply too mild,"[11] is to show "the humor... of how *preposterously* awful Eleanor's life is."[12] This idea of laughing at misfortune is expounded on by Durang:

> ... as I started to write *Nature and Purpose*, suddenly the extremity of suffering made me giddy, and I found the energy and distance to *relish* the awfulness of it all. This "relish" is something that audiences do not always feel comfortable with, and I find that some people, rather than simply disliking my work, are made furious by it.[13]

The idea of relishing the "awfulness of it all" goes beyond satire, especially as Durang turns from the family to the Catholic Church, and particulary to The Book of Job.

In order to further dramatize the awfulness and extremity of human suffering, Durang uses The Book of Job as a point of reference. (Similarly, Durang uses the Book of

Job as a definer of human suffering in order to negate it. In Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, Diane calls it "a nasty story"[49].) Eleanor's life is reminiscent of Job's, who is made to suffer by God's command. In The Book of Job, God idly steps aside as Satan inflicts horrible economic, social, and physical torments on Job. In The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, God's agents play similar parts. Elaine, like Satan, inflicts pain on Eleanor. Elaine plays the part of Mrs. Ackerman, who stabs Eleanor with a hypodermic. She plays the part of the school secretary, who tells Eleanor that "parents are frequently partly to blame for the failings of their children..." (15). She plays the prostitute, Crystal, who tells Eleanor "if you didn't have such dish pan features, you could almost be attractive..."(16). She plays the part of the census woman, who asks Eleanor, "WHY DO YOU CONTINUE LIVING, MRS. MANN?" (25).[14] She plays the part of Sister Annie de Maupassant (yet another literary name),[15] who reminds Eleanor that "...you will have no rest because you are not meant to have any rest.... You are supposed to suffer, you stupid, stupid woman!" (30). God's other agent, Ronald, is reminiscent of God in The Book of Job. Job has hope that God will relieve his suffering. In The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Ronald plays the part of the Fuller Brush man, who promises to take Eleanor away from her hardships. And like God in The Book of Job, Ronald plays a passive role, as seen in Durang's

"setting" instructions:

> Throughout the play...there should be a chair stage left for Ronald to sit in and watch the action whenever he is not in a scene or is not addressing the audience. (7)

There are other similarities between The Book of Job and The Nature and Purpose of the Universe. After Eleanor throws out Donald's hypodermic, and is assaulted by her son, Steve tries to console his wife:

> STEVE. Don't despair, Ellie. Have faith. God provides.
> ELEANOR. I know, but look what He's provided!
> STEVE. (*Furious.*) Don't you dare to talk against God, you whore of Babylon. (9)

This dialogue seems to be influenced by a conversation which Job has with his wife, who speaks against God, who has allowed Job's entire body to be covered with boils, biblical size:

> Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak...." (Job 2: 9-10)

Eleanor's relationship with her family and neighbours is also reminiscent of Job's, who complains about God's treatment of himself:

> He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged

> from me. My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me. (Job 19: 13-14)

But the fact that Eleanor's life is a steady movement from bad to worse most resembles The Book of Job. Job first loses his assets, then his family and friends, and finally his health. Job wants to die:

> Why is light given him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it comes not...? (Job 3: 20-21)

But Job's relief finally does come as God's test is over, and He restores Job's wealth, health, and happiness.

But in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, there is no relief. Towards the end of the play, Elaine prepares to sacrifice Eleanor, an allusion to the story of Abraham and Isaac, in which God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in order to test Abraham's faith. And like the biblical story, Eleanor's sacrifice is commuted at the last second, as Elaine starts to lower the knife:

> BUT WAIT! And God said to Elaine, spare this woman's life, for I am merciful. And sing forth my glories and my praise, for I am God of Gods, the Father of his children. (34)

But unlike the relief felt by Abraham and Isaac, Eleanor would prefer to be sacrificed. Her last words, the last words of the play, suggest this:

I don't want to live. Please kill me. Kill me! (34)[16]

Within this context of human suffering, made more poignant by allusions to the Bible, there still remains a satire of the Catholic Church, especially its clergy. The satire of the clergy is best seen in the character of Sister Annie De Maupassant, who plans to kill the pope, who "speaks with the Papal wee wee" (12). Sister Annie De Maupassant announces that she is "the true and only Pope" (13),[17] as "She throws a handful of glitter into the air" (13) and speaks in tongues:

Bon jour, Jean. Comment ca va? Auf wiedersehn. Oh my God, I'm speaking in tongues....Moo goo gai pan....Yo. Inga Swenson gunnar cheese....Flores, flores para los muertos. (13)[18]

The legitimate pope's monks also speak in tongues, Latin:

Amo, amas, amat
Amamus, amatis, amant. (22)

The Latin conjugation of the word "love," an earthly word, is reminiscent of the pope's Latin conjugation of the word "farmer":

Agricula,
Agriculae,
Agriculae,
Agriculam,
Agricula, Ah-men. (22)

The pope, "...dressed in a gold outfit with gold slippers and a diamond tiara and droop earrings" (22), then blesses the air of New Jersey:

> My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are gathered here in Weehawken in the face of this smog, which is a symbol of evil in this world....God created man, and the word was made flesh, and it was in the beginning and in the middle and I feel faint. (23)

The pollution of New Jersey overwhelms the pontiff, who is soon kidnapped and killed by Sister Annie De Maupassant, who becomes the new pope, saying things like "Charity schmarity" (30).

Unlike the satire of the Catholic Church and its clergy, the satire of Eleanor's Christian beliefs has elements of sadness. Durang himself suggests this:

> The impetus for the play was the suffering of a friend of my mother's --- a lovely woman, age twenty-five, who had five children and an alcoholic brute of a husband. She had asked the local parish priest, a nice and admirable man in most respects, if she could perhaps use birth control to protect herself in case her husband raped her in a drunken rage: the priest thought about it over dinner, then said no. The husband did force himself on her, and she had a sixth child. Although the play is not about the chains of child-bearing, it *is* about a life with nothing but pain and disappointment, and how the Catholic Church sometimes fosters a masochistic acceptance of this....[19]

This "masochistic acceptance" is seen throughout this play.

Similar to The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Durang's treatment of the Catholic Church in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You is complex. Durang satirizes Christian doctrine and the clergy (a nun with a gun), but he also takes the play beyond satire as real pain concerning belief and the benevolence of God are explored.

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You opens up with the nun giving a lecture on heaven, hell, and purgatory. She also speaks about limbo:

> There is also limbo, which is where unbaptized babies were sent for eternity before the Ecumenical Council and Pope John XXIII. The unbaptized babies sent to limbo never leave limbo and so never get to heaven. *Now* unbaptized babies are sent straight to purgatory where, presumably, someone baptizes them and then they are sent on to heaven. The unbaptized babies who died before the Ecumenical Council, however, remain in limbo. (28)

Although Durang is not inventing anything about the Ecumenical Council's decision on unbaptized babies, the tone is satirical. Sister Mary Ignatius is presumably speaking to children, and so her tone of voice, combined with the subject matter (the clergy changing the order of the universe), sounds ridiculous to adults.

A similar example of the satirizing of doctrine occurs as Sister Mary Ignatius explains the nature of mortal sin:

> ...mortal sin... is the most serious kind of sin you can do --- murder, sex outside of marriage, hijacking a plane, masturbation --- and if you die with any of these sins on your soul, even just one, you will go straight to hell and burn for all of eternity....If, as many of you know, you are on your way to confession to confess a mortal sin and you are struck by a car or bus before you get there, God may forgive you without confession if before you die you manage to say a good act of contrition. If you die instantaneously and are unable to say a good act of contrition, you will go straight to hell. (31)[20]

Sister Mary Ignatius later applies the Church's doctrine on mortal sin to her own crimes as she shoots Diane dead:

> Ta-da! For those non-Catholics present, murder *is* allowable in self-defence, one doesn't even have to tell it in confession. (50)

Sister Mary Ignatius then asks Gary when he last went to confession, concerning his homosexuality. Gary replies that he went in the morning. After making certain that Gary has not sinned since then, Sister Mary Ignatius shoots him dead and boasts, "I've sent him to heaven!" (51). She then justifies her action:

> I'm not really within the letter of the law shooting Gary like this, but really if he did make a good confession I have sent him straight to heaven and eternal, blissful happiness. And I'm afraid otherwise he would have ended up in hell. I think Christ will allow me this little dispensation from the letter of the law,

> but I'll go to confession later today, just to be sure. (51)

Sister Mary Ignatius quite often steps out of the bounds of doctrine. She claims that "In private Christ stoned *many* women taken in adultery" (43). She believes what she wants to believe. Durang suggests that Sister Mary Ignatius believes in astrology as the nun responds to a letter on the subject:

> It is a sin to follow your horoscope because only God knows the future and He won't tell us. Also, we can tell that horoscopes are false because according to astrology Christ would be a Capricorn, and Capricorn people are cold, ambitious, and attracted to Scorpio and Virgo, and we know that Christ was warm, loving, and not attracted to anybody. (33)

Clearly, Sister Mary Ignatius knows more about horoscopes than a nun should.

Sister Mary Ignatius also questions the authority of the pope as she responds to a letter about the revoked sanctity of Saint Christopher:

> The name Christopher means Christ-bearer and we used to believe that he carried the Christ child across a river on his shoulders. Then sometime around Pope John XXIII, the Catholic Church decided that this was just a story and didn't really happen. I am not convinced that when we get to heaven we may not find that St. Christopher *does* indeed exist and that he dislikes Pope John XXIII. (34)

The clergy and the Catholic Church's doctrines are satirized, but Durang takes the play beyond satire as he repeatedly questions the nature of God. We see this as Sister Mary Ignatius ignores the following question from her "little file cards" (30):

> If God is all powerful, why does He allow evil in the world? (30)[21]

Later, Sister Mary Ignatius ignores the same question again, which gives the unanswered question the status of an echoing theme.

A variation on this theme is the question, "Are all our prayers answered?" (34). Sister Mary Ignatius answers this question:

> Yes, they are; what people who ask that question often don't realize is that sometimes the answer to our prayer is "no." Dear God, please make my mother not be crazy. God's answer: no. Dear God, please let me recover from cancer. God's answer: no. Dear God, please take away this toothache. God's answer: alright, but you're going to be run over by a car. But every bad thing that happens to us, God has a special reason for. (34)

This indifferent, somewhat malicious nature of God, which Sister Mary Ignatius describes, goes beyond satire. The orthodoxy of the Catholic Church is explained, but the abrupt answer, "no," to examples of human suffering is not comic or satiric; it suggests a sadness beyond satire and burlesque.

It is exactly this merciless quality of God which Diane questions in her moving speech about her mother's death from cancer. Diane prayed that her mother's "suffering be small" (47), but her mother "was in bad pain for half a year, and then terrible pain for much of a full year" (48). Diane questions Sister Mary Ignatius' teachings:

> God always answers our prayers, you said, He just sometimes says no. But why would He say no to stopping my mother's suffering? I wasn't even asking that she live, just that He end her suffering. And it can't be that He was letting her suffer because she'd been bad, because she hadn't been bad and besides suffering doesn't seem to work that way, considering the suffering of children who've obviously done nothing wrong. So why was He letting her suffer? Spite? Was the Lord God actually malicious? (48)

To make matters worse, Diane was raped and cut up by a maniac on the day of her mother's death:

> Somehow the utter randomness of things -- my mother's suffering, my attack by a lunatic who was either born a lunatic or made one by cruel parents or perhaps by an imbalance of hormones or whatever, etc. etc. --- *This randomness seemed intolerable.* (49)[22]

Diane's rage against Sister Mary Ignatius' teachings, against God, is felt by the audience, an audience which at this point is not laughing. As Terry Curtis Fox (a playwright) in The Village Voice writes, Durang "...has...

dared to let the laughs drop for part of his play in order to make his audience squirm."[23] It is this uncomfortable silence we find in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You and The Nature and Purpose of the Universe which will distinguish Durang's later plays such as Baby With The Bathwater, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, and Laughing Wild as being beyond satire.

CHAPTER 5

BABY WITH THE BATHWATER, THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO, and LAUGHING WILD

Like The Nature and Purpose of the Universe and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, Baby With The Bathwater (1983), The Marriage of Bette and Boo (1983), and Laughing Wild (1987) are also satires which go beyond satire. In these plays, there are the typical Durangian objects of satire, such as the family, psychiatry, education, sex, and of course, the Catholic Church. But Baby With The Bathwater, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, and Laughing Wild also contain serious questions about God, sober reflections about violence, madness, and moments of profound sadness and reconciliation, which transcend satire, a trademark of Durang.

Baby With The Bathwater and The Marriage of Bette and Boo are primarily satires of the family, especially of marriage and parenthood. In the beginning of Baby With The Bathwater, Helen tells her husband, John, that she wants a divorce because the latter called their baby "a baked potato."[1] The marriage of Helen and John goes from bad to worse, seen as Helen describes her "passive aggression" (27) towards her husband:

> He says to me, did you make dinner, I lie down on the rug and don't move. He says, get up. I don't move a muscle. He gets on top of me and starts to screw me. I pretend it isn't happening. (27)

At one point, John responds to Helen's "passive aggression" by smashing their child's toys, one by one.

The marriage of Bette and Boo is not much better. Boo is an alcoholic and Bette is an incessant nag. Like Helen and John, they have problems communicating, seen in one of their many arguments about Boo's drinking problem:

> BOO. You are obsessed with drinking. Were you frightened at an early age by a drunk? What is the matter with you?
> BETTE. What is the matter with *you*?
> BOO. What is the matter with *you*?
> BETTE. What is the matter with you?
> BOO. What is the matter with you?[2]

Bette finally divorces Boo, and later, after being "lonely and unhappy for several years" (57), marries another alcoholic. That marriage also ends in divorce. As Bette's mother warned her in the beginning of the play, "marriage is no bed of roses" (14).

This is certainly true for Bette's sister, Joan, whose husband keeps disappearing, and for Boo's parents, Karl and Soot. Karl continuously insults Soot, who he refers to as "the dumbest white woman alive" (13), who "hasn't said one sensible thing in thirty years of marriage..." (24). Soot responds to these insults as if she were being flattered,

saying "Oh, Karl" and laughing. But neither is happy in this marriage. Soot likes the fact that she is going deaf so that she will not be able to hear Karl's insults, and Karl remains pessimistic about marriage, advising his grandson, Matt, not to "expect much" (53) from one's spouse, and never try to change them. Clearly, Matt is telling the truth when he says "I don't know any happily married couples. Certainly not relatives" (50).

Matt's parents, Bette and Boo, are not only unfit for each other, they are unfit to be responsible parents. Even Bette's motivation for having a child is questionable; she thinks a baby will bring her and Boo closer together. As Bette's father, Paul, a stroke victim, points out in his almost incomprehensible pronunciation, "That's not a very good reason to have a baby..." (16).[3] Also, Bette's choice of her child's name, Skippy, is irresponsible. She chose that name because it is the name of her favorite movie. Matt tells his mother, "My favorite movie is *Citizen Kane*. I don't call you *Citizen Kane*" (56).

Boo is not any more competent as a parent. At one point, he tries to vacuum gravy which spilled on the floor. But even worse, his excessive drinking is a bad example for Matt, who, Bette worries, will "grow up neurotic..." (28).

Matt's parents are not evil people. They even mean well. But as Matt realizes towards the end of the play,

"meaning well is not enough" (51).

This is the same thing that Daisy realizes towards the end of Baby With The Bathwater:

> ... I suppose my parents aren't actually evil....They're not evil, they're just disturbed. And they mean well. *But meaning well is not enough*. (39)

But Daisy's parents are much more incompetent than Bette and Boo. They are not sure if the baby is a boy or a girl because "They didn't want to intrude" (36). When Daisy is a child, his parents think he is a girl, but when Daisy is seventeen years old, we find out that he has become a young man.

Daisy's father, John, is a drug user and an alcoholic who keeps a bottle of vodka in a toy duck. He has difficulties facing up to his responsibilities as a father. He is unemployed, and spends much of the day with his head under a pillow. When he does look after the baby, such as changing it, he does things like putting "its feet in the armholes" (16). And his idea of a lullaby is somewhat violent:

> Hush little baby, don't you cry,
> Mama's gonna give you a big black eye...[.] (8)

But Daisy's mother, Helen, who drinks cocktails for breakfast, does not know any lullabies. She sings to her

baby, "There's no business like show business" (7), a song made famous by Ethel Merman, who was not known for having a soothing voice. Helen is a would-be novelist, who wishes she had written Scruples (1978), a Judith Krantz best-seller, instead of having a baby. Like John, Helen, who practices "passive aggression," is not a good example for a child. At one point, when Daisy is ignoring his mother, the latter screams, "DO AS I SAY NOT AS I DO" (27), and then threatens to step on Daisy's back.

Because Helen and John cannot cope with raising a child, especially changing diapers, they decide to hire a professional, a nanny who is just as incompetent as they are. When Nanny enters the Dingleberry household, she gives the baby a gift, a trick jar from which a snake pops out. Of course the baby cries, to which Nanny screams "SHUT UP!" (9). Nanny lets the baby play with a little red toy, which "Contains lead, asbestos, and red dye #2" (21), and at one point tosses the baby "into the bassinet" (13).

Daisy is not unscathed by his horrible upbringing. At an early age he develops the suicidal habit of running in front of buses. Later, he spends thirteen years in college, trying to finish a paper on Gulliver's Travels (which is reminiscent of Matt in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, who never seems to finish his paper on Hardy). And like many of Durang's characters, Daisy seeks help from a psychiatrist.

The psychiatrist in Baby With The Bathwater is never

seen, but heard through a loud speaker, speaking in a "detached, business-like manner" (35). By using only the voice of a psychiatrist, Durang seems to be suggesting that psychiatrists are cold, impersonal. This psychiatrist is also a bit of an idiot, whose only advice on beginning the paper on Gulliver's Travels is "to begin at the beginning, follow through to the middle, and continue on until the ending" (37) (which is not only a joke about the psychiatrist's inability to give advice, but also a reference to Aristotle's Poetics). At one point the psychiatrist gets so frustrated with Daisy's problems, that he begs, "Please, *please*, I need a vacation" (40). After ten years of trying to help Daisy, the psychiatrist loses all patience and screams, "PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER!" (41), to which Daisy responds "FUCK YOU!" (41).[4]

In Laughing Wild, the Woman also has a low opinion of her psychiatrist, especially after the latter interprets the Woman's elaborate dream in which her father, who is inside a baked potato, is crying while the Woman is eating dessert:

> And then my therapist said my father cried because he was unhappy, and that I dreamt about the cake because I was hungry. I think my therapist is an idiot.[5]

Along with psychiatry, madness is a dominant theme in Durang's later plays. The Woman in Laughing Wild "had been

in mental institutions" (8), and the Man's family all "were borderline schizophrenic..." (26). In The Marriage of Bette and Boo, Matt realizes that his family is not mentally well, and in life "one should always try to avoid crazy people, especially in marriage or live-in situations..."(51).[6] And in Baby With The Bathwater, everyone seems to be insane. John claims, "I need professional help" (7). Nancy warns Daisy, "Don't depend on mommy.... She's not all there" (10). And John tells Nanny that "Helen and I have both decided that you're insane" (22). Even Daisy realizes that his mental health is not sound as he repeatedly sings, "I'm half-crazy..." (88).

Durang combines insanity with the satire of the educational system in the character of Mrs. Willoughby, the school principal. After the sympathetic teacher, Miss Pringle, expresses her concern about Daisy, to the principal, the latter responds as if she were on the telephone:

> Yes. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yes, I see. Uh huh. Uh huh. Go on. (32)

And then after Miss Pringle reads aloud Daisy's essay, which is filled with morbid recollections of childhood, the principal responds, "I'd give her an A....It's sort of an intriguing combination of Donald Barthelme and Sesame Street" (34). The principal is not concerned about Daisy's emotional problems, but rather, about the possibility of Daisy becoming

"The next Virginia Woolf, the next Sylvia Plath" (35) (two writers who committed suicide). Miss Pringle responds, "Dead, you mean" (35), to which the principal says, "Who cares if she's dead as long as she publishes?" (35).[7]

The principal is also an object of sexual satire. She keeps interrupting Miss Pringle, in order to tell her male secretary things which are not job-related, usually with sexual connotations (a reversal of female secretaries being sexually harrassed by male bosses). For example:

> Henry, sweetie, I want you to buy my husband underwear. Pink. The bikini kind. (33)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Henry, I have taken out a black candle and I am thinking of you. (33)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I have legs and feet, Henry. (33)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Henry, you don't think I'm a lesbian, do you? (33)

Similarly, Nanny is an object of sexual satire. On her first day on the job, she asks John, "You want a quick one?" (10). She doesn't believe sexual infidelity is wrong:

> There is no right or wrong, there's only *fun*! (14)

Nanny points out to John that in The Brothers Karamazov, Ivan

"...realizes that because there is no God, everything is permitted" (14).[8]

Like Nanny and the principal, Daisy is sexually satirized.[9] Because of the confusion of his sex, he keeps changing names "...from Rocky to Butch to Cain to Able to Tootsie to Raincloud to Elizabeth the First to Elizabeth the Second to PONCHITTA PEARCE TO MARY BAKER EDDY!" (41), who was the creator of Christian Science. By the time he gets married, Daisy sleeps with 1,756 people, of which 877 are women. Daisy is obsessed with sex because "...there's always 10 or 20 seconds during which I forget *who I am* and *where I am*" (39).

Like Daisy, the Man in Laughing Wild is "attracted to women and to men" (27). And like Daisy, he never seems to be satisfied:

> Of course, one can just do one's best to have sex wth the person, and that assuages some of the longing. But the problem is, that sexual longing has no real assuagement ever, it's like longing for the moon.... (26)

But the Man's dissatisfaction with sex is less satiric than Daisy's, who has slept with an exaggerated amount of people.

Similarly, the Woman in Laughing Wild is dissatisfied with sex:

> Have you all wondered why sexual intercourse sometimes makes you want to commit suicide? That is a universal

> feeling, isn't it? Or is it just me? (13)[10]

But the Woman has not completely lost her sense of humor about sex, especially when she complains about the growing popularity of the diminutive sexologist, Doctor Ruth Westheimer:

> Eventually we'll see her on *Password* where no matter what word she's trying to communicate, she'll only talk sex. Say, the word is "nicotine." Her first clue will be "clitoris." Then "stimulation." Then "cunnilingus." Her partner will be totally baffled, especially when the host says, "No, Marjore, I'm sorry, the word was nicotine." Then Dr. Ruth will laugh like crazy, just like me. AHAHAHAHAHAHA! (14)

The Woman is critical of another popular contemporary figure, Mother Theresa, especially her Catholic views on abortion:

> I'd like to take all the unwanted children in the world who some right-to-lifer keeps from being aborted, and send them all to Mother Theresa. Let her cope with the screaming, squalling little infants; she said in some interview that people who didn't want their children should send them to her rather than have an abortion. I'd like to see her dealing with three thousand shrieking infants yelling nonstop for days on end, then I hope she'd be sorry for saying such a goody-goody, disgusting thing. (12)

Later, the Woman says, "*I want Dr. Ruth Westheimer and Mother Theresa to fight to the death in the colliseum!!!*" (14).

The Catholic Church's views on birth control are satirized again in Laughing Wild, as the Man dresses up as the Infant of Prague, "...a 17th century artist's invention of what the Christ Child, triumphant, might look like" (43):

> When people ask me, the Infant of Prague, for advice on sexuality, I sometimes think to myself, what do I know about sex? -- I'm an infant. What's more, I'm the Infant of Prague; I can't sit down, let alone have sex....But what people don't realize sometimes is that God my father has a holy and blessed purpose to the mystery of sexuality, and that purpose is to create other little infants like myself to glorify God and creation. That is why condoms are wrong because anything that intercepts -- or *contra*-cepts -- this process is deeply wrong. (46)

When asked about the risk of contracting AIDS by having unprotected sex, the Infant replies "We must instruct people at risk to abstain from sex" (47).[11] The Woman then mentions that this is impractical, to which the Infant responds, "The Divine *is* impractical, that's why it's divine" (47).

Similarly, in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, the Catholic Church's ruling on birth control is satirized. After Bette gives birth to her third consecutive still-born, Soot reflects:

> Catholics can't use birth control, can they? *(Laughs.)* That's a joke on someone. (42)

The only advice that Bette's priest, Father Donnally, can offer is, "Have you tried the rhythm method?" (43).

Similarly, Father Donnally doesn't offer Bette much good advice about her horrible marriage to Boo:

> Anna Karenina should not have left her husband, nor should she have jumped in front of a train. Marriage is not a step to be taken lightly. The Church does not recognize divorce....(46)

Father Donnally, like Father McGillicutty in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, is a satiric figure. Modern conveniences (but not birth control) are more important for him than his religion:

> I know I'm glad to be living now when we have cured pork and plumbing and showers rather than back when Christ lived. Many priests say they wish they had lived in Christ's time so they could have met Him; that would, of course, have been very nice, but I'm glad I live now and that I have a shower. (45)

But Father Donnally's most satiric moment occurs during a newly-wed retreat as the priest imitates bacon frying in a saucepan, "...making sizzling noises and contorting his body to represent [bacon] becoming crisp" (45). Bette's sister, Joan, later points out that Father Donnally "makes a better piece of bacon than he does a priest" (47).

Nuns are also ridiculed in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, seen as Matt recites his essay, "My Very Favorite

Movie":

> My very favorite movie ...are... *Nights of Cabiria, 8 1/2, Citizen Kane, L'Avventura, The Seventh Seal, Persona, The Parent Trap, The Song of Bernadette, Potemkin, The Fire Within, The Bells of St. Mary's, The Singing Nun, The Dancing Nun, The Nun on the Fire Escape Outside My Window, The Nun that Caused the Chicago Fire, The Nun Also Rises, The Nun Who Came To Dinner, The Caucasian Chalk Nun, Long Day's Journey Into Nun, None But the Lonely Heart, and The Nun Who Shot Liberty Valance.* (19)

But Matt is bitter about the Catholic Church, which he sees as being responsible for his parents' misfortunes:

> Perhaps blame can be assigned totally to the Catholic Church. (25)

Matt is also bitter about God, especially after his mother gets cancer:

> I think He punishes people in general, for no reason. (57)

This apathetic image of God is seen with more definition in Laughing Wild, as the Man expresses his feelings about the Almighty:

> And think about God. You know, it was nice to believe in God, and an afterlife; and I'm sometimes envious of the people who seem comfortable because they still have this belief. But I remember when everybody won Tonys for *Dreamgirls*, and they all got up there thanking God for letting them win this award, and I was thinking to myself: God is silent on the holocaust, but He involves himself in the Tony awards? It doesn't seem very likely. (24)

Later, the Man speaks about religious teachings concerning homosexuality --- according to the Book of Leviticus, "homosexuals should basically be put to death" (28) --- and then imagines God and Gabriel having an unlikely conversation about the creation of AIDS:

> God sits around in a lounge chair chatting with Gabriel, planning the fall foliage in Vermont --- "I think a lot of orange this year" --- when suddenly he says: Boy oh boy do I find homosexuals disgusting. I'm going to give them a really horrifying disease!
>
> And Gabriel says: Oh yes?
>
> [God] Yes! And drug addicts and ... and ... hemophiliacs! (*Gabriel looks fairly appalled.*)
>
> [Gabriel] But why hemophiliacs?
>
> [God] Oh, no reason. I want the disease to go through the bloodstream and even though I'm all powerful and can do everything cause I'm God, I'm too tired today to figure out how to connect the disease to the bloodstream and *not* affect hemophiliacs. Besides, the suffering will be good for them. (29)

Of course the Man is being satirical: he does not believe God has this decision-making power. He does not believe God can exist in the midst of such "randomness" as AIDS:

> Now surely...God can't exist --- I mean, surely the Christ who said "Blessed are the merciful" could hardly have come from such a raging, spiteful God. (31)

According to Michael Feingold in The Village Voice, Laughing Wild, unlike Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, which ultimately does not reject God, makes a break with Christianity:

> When Sister Mary Ignatius was asked about the problem of evil, she just kept flipping that card to the back of the pile; here the Christian idea of God is faced, disproved, and decisively rejected once and for all, which leaves Durang, like his male character, adrift and aimless, if vaguely hopeful.[12]

In a world where God lacks mercy, violence runs rampant. In Laughing Wild, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, and Baby With The Bathwater, random violence and senseless deaths are always on the periphery. In Laughing Wild, the Man tries to think positively, but somehow cannot refrain from reflecting on the 1986 nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, and about something he read in the newspaper:

> ...I read in the newspaper about this fourteen-year-old boy in Montana who shot his geometry teacher ---*to death*--- because the teacher was flunking him. Now that is crazy enough --- but it seems that this particular teacher didn't come to school that day, and so this fourteen-year-old boy shot the substitute teacher instead. Shot her dead. I don't know how to cope with that. (23-24)

In The Marriage of Bette and Boo, there is mention of another senseless death, albeit not murder, but nevertheless random, seen as Father Donnally talks about a conversation he

had with his "colored garbage man..." (40):

> "Good morning, Father," he said, "Nice day." "And what's your name?" I said. "Percival Pretty, Father," he said. I smiled a little more and then I said, "And how are you --- Percival?" And he said, "I'm doing the will of God, Father. God saw fit to take my little Buttermilk to Him, and now I'm emptying the garbage." "And who is little Buttermilk?" I said, and he said, "Why, Buttermilk was my daughter who broke her neck playing on the swings." (40)

In Baby With The Bathwater, another random recreational accident is mentioned by a woman in the park, Kate, who speaks of her relative, Fred, a roller skating fanatic, who "skated right under a crosstown bus" (25). Kate's friend, Angela, outdoes Kate's story as she mentions something she read about a child "found dismembered in the garbage cans outside the 21 Club" (28). Angela finds the randomness of contemporary life dispiriting:

> Everything's so outside our control. Chemical explosions in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Somebody killed Karen Silkwood. There are all these maniacs stalking Dolly Parton, the poor woman doesn't feel like *singing* anymore. John Hinkley, David Berkowitz, Ronald Reagan. It's difficult to maintain "joie de vivre" in the face of such universal discouragement. (29)

Here we see an example of Durang's style, typical of his later plays, which combines satire and "beyond satire" in the same speech. Angela speaks of truly awful things such as

chemical explosions, the murder of Karen Silkwood (who was killed supposedly because she spoke against the dangerous working conditions in an Oklahoma nuclear processing plant), celebrity stalkers, John Hinkley (who tried to assassinate Ronald Reagan), David Berkowitz (the infamous Son of Sam killer), and, a name which doesn't really fit, Ronald Reagan. Of course by ending a list of disasters, stalkers, and killers with Ronald Reagan, who was the President of the United States at the time of this play, Durang is combining satire with some of the hazards of contemporary life, which are, of course, beyond satire.

Speaking about the hazards of living, the Man in Laughing Wild asks, "how do you protect yourself from these sorts of things?" (24). Matt, in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, offers some advice about protecting oneself from the "dangers in the world" (51):

> One must always be careful crossing streets in traffic. One should try not to live anywhere near a nuclear plant. One should never walk past a building that may have a sniper on top of it. In the summer one should be on the alert against bees and wasps. (51)[13]

While Matt's speech has elements of satire --- the sudden transition from snipers to insects --- it goes beyond satire because it suggests that there is no such thing as full protection against danger, a realization which is given, and meant to be taken, seriously, without satire.

Similarly, the doctor's unceremonious "deliveries" of still-born babies on the hospital floor in The Marriage of Bette and Boo is meant to be taken seriously. Although the doctor drops a bundle, actually a beanbag, which is a non-realistic representation of a doctor's bedside manner after delivering a still-born, the message is clear: the baby is dead. In his "Author's Notes," Durang writes, "For all the oddness of my representing the babies' death the way I have, it does still communicate that Bette has lost a child."[14] And so while there exists a satiric, non-realistic image of a baby falling to the floor with a thud, there also exists a sadness which this "thud" conveys.

This formula of non-realistic satire turning into real sadness exists in Baby With The Bathwater, which for the most part is non-realistic, suggested by the improbable characterizations of John and Helen, as well as the wildly comic cartoon characters, Nanny and the principal. But the satiric elements of the play come to an abrupt halt, seen in the stage directions as Daisy leaves his mother for the last time:

> At the door he stops and looks at his mother. She looks hurt and bewildered. He looks at her with regret, and some awful combination of dislike and tenderness. (47)

In the last scene of the play, Daisy is married and singing a lullaby to his baby. He begins the lullaby like

his father once did:

> Hush, little baby, don't you cry,
> Mama's gonna give you a big black....(49)

But, unlike his father, Daisy realizes that a violent lullaby is not appropriate. He improvises, finally creating a moving lullaby which signifies his break with his parents, a lullaby which suggests that the cycle of child abuse and neglect, which is portrayed satirically in the play, will not continue:

> Hush, little baby, don't you cry,
> Mama's gonna give you a big black poodle,
> And if that big black poodle should attack,
> Mama's gonna teach you to bite it back,
> And when baby grows up, big and strong,
> Baby can help mama rewrite this song....(49)[15]

Similarly, the ending of The Marriage of Bette and Boo, a satirical play which has non-realistic moments such as the dead babies and a scene in which Matt sits at a table with two dead relatives (scene 30),[16] is realistic and sad. The last scene takes place in a hospital, in which Bette is dying from cancer. Having been divorced from Bette for several years, Boo, holding flowers, visits her. Boo tells Matt, who is also in the hospital room, "Your mother still looks very pretty" (59). Bette and Boo reminisce about their lives together, including the time when Boo tried to vacuum the gravy. Boo smiles, "We had some good times" (59). This is the only time in the play when Bette and Boo get along,

actually quite beautifully. Bette asks Matt, "It's nice seeing your parents together, isn't it..?" (60). Matt is a little surprised by this question, but realizes that it is nice, a realization which suggests a warm reconciliation between Matt and his parents. Matt has forgiven them. As Julius Novick points out in The Village Voice, "...Mr. Durang goes beyond blame... into compassion."[17]

By going "into compassion," Durang is going beyond satire, seen moments later, after Bette's death, as Matt delivers his final speech --- the last words in the play --- a eulogy, to the audience:

> Bette passed into death, and is with God. She is in heaven where she has been reunited with the four dead babies, and where she waits for Boo, and for Bonnie Wilson, and Emily, and Pooh Bear and Eeyore and Kanga and Roo; and for me. (61)

Regardless of all the satirical references in The Marriage of Bette and Boo to the Catholic Church, Father Donnally, nuns, and God, Matt's eulogy is without a trace of satire. Durang explains this in his "Author's Notes":

> His [Matt's] final speech... has *no* irony in it. The impulse behind it is to share with the audience the only comfort human beings have found to cope with death --- the belief in an afterlife. Matt has made clear that he doesn't seem to believe in all that, *but the fact doesn't belong in this moment*. The moment is about sharing with the audience the sense of loss; perhaps for the moment, Matt decides to believe in heaven --- or to speak as if

> he believes because it's the only comfort available, the only thing he can think to say. Any sense of Matt-looks-down-or-separates-himself-from-those-who-believe... is totally at odds with what I mean by the moment.[18]

Like The Marriage of Bette and Boo and Baby With The Bathwater, Laughing Wild moves from satire to "beyond satire." The speeches given by the Woman and the Man are filled with satiric complaints about contemporary life, such as police brutality, the thinning of the ozone layer, the difficulties of finding a job, acid rain, and the dangers of taking New York taxis. But the one complaint that both the Woman and the Man share, centers on an incident which occurred in the supermarket: the Woman assaulted the Man in front of the tuna fish section.

But towards the end of the play, in which the Woman and the Man are dreaming about the Harmonic Convergence ceremony in Central Park, the disparity of the two characters fades, as does the satire. The Woman tells the audience, "I dreamt that the Man in the tuna fish aisle was suddenly empathetic with me" (53), and the Man tells the audience, "I dreamt that the Woman and I were...in Central Park and she was...weeping, but I felt this sudden wave of empathy for her" (53-54). This sudden "harmonic convergence" between the Man and the Woman gives the characters, who have been up to this point darkly pessimistic, hope, as expressed by the Woman:

> I hope that the pounding in my head stops. And I hope that people will not spit on me as I pass them in the street. And I hope that someone gives me a job. And I hope that I have more good days than bad days. That I learn to say this glass is half full, it is not half empty. And to hell with my half full glass --- I want a *full* full glass, I want it overflowing. And I want to feel joy like I did that one summer day for ten minutes right before I decided life was horrible and I went crazy. I want to recapture the feeling of *liking* to be alive. I want to feel joy that looks like this. (54)

The Woman then "throws her head back and spreads her arms wide in an exuberant, open, receiving position" (54). Immediately after, the lighting suggests that the sun is rising, and the Man and the Woman breathe together in rhythm, marking what Durang writes in the stage directions as "the first time they've had agreement on anything ever" (55). This ending, like the endings of Baby With The Bathwater and The Marriage of Bette and Boo, suggests a reconciliation, but it is not overly optimistic. As Michael Feingold writes in The Village Voice, "...because the play has to end someplace, they [the Man and Woman] surprisingly begin to crawl toward a wan glimmer of mutual understanding, based on the fact that if nothing else, both are at least still breathing" (105-106).[19]

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in Durang's plays, satire is the dominant genre used by this playwright. Durang satirizes and burlesques contemporary life, literary clichés and genres, seen especially in The Vietnamization of New Jersey and The Idiots Karamazov; our obsession with Hollywood, seen in a concentrated form in A History of the American Film; and sex, which is seen in almost all of Durang's plays from Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes and Titanic to Laughing Wild. But Durang spends most of his creative energy satirizing and burlesquing institutions of authority, such as the Catholic Church, the family, the educational system, and psychiatry.

The satire of the Catholic Church is seen in the portrayals of Father McGillicutty, in The Vietnamization of New Jersey, and Father Donnally, in The Marriage of Bette and Boo, as well as in the Man's tirades about God in Laughing Wild. But the most sustained satire of the Catholic Church is found in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, plays which focus on the liturgy and the clergy of the Catholic Church.

The institution of the family is satirized in almost all of Durang's plays, especially in Baby With The Bathwater and The Marriage of Bette and Boo, plays which are primarily about parenthood and marriage.

The satirizing of the educational system is seen best in the portrayal of the high school principal's secretary in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, the high school principal in Baby With The Bathwater, and the authoritarian teachings of the nun in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You.

And the institution of psychiatry is satirized in 'dentity Crisis, Baby With The Bathwater, and Laughing Wild, plays in which psychiatrists are crazy, apathetic, and ineffective, respectively.

But it should be obvious by now that Durang's plays are more than satires. Not only are his plays encyclopedic --- they are rich in allusions to art forms, especially to film and literature --- but plays such as The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, Baby With The Bathwater, The Marriage of Bette and Boo, and Laughing Wild all go beyond satire --- that is, they have elements of seriousness, sadness, reconciliation, and compassion, which most of Durang's early plays lack. The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, and Laughing Wild seriously question the nature of God and human suffering. And Baby With The Bathwater and The Marriage of Bette and Boo soberly deal with family problems, such as child abuse, alcoholism, and divorce. It is interesting to note that the very same institutions which Durang satirizes in his early and later plays are treated with seriousness and sadness as they are

taken beyond satire. It is this balancing of satire and elements beyond satire, as well as the many allusions to art forms, which make Durang's plays interesting, and make this playwright highly original, easily recognizable.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Christopher Durang, "Author's Notes" to "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You," Two Plays, by Christopher Durang (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1982) 55.

[2]Christopher Durang, "Author's Notes" to Baby With The Bathwater (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1984) 56.

[3]"Author's Notes" to Baby With The Bathwater 62.

[4]"Author's Notes" to Baby With The Bathwater 62.

[5]Richard Eder, rev. of The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 24 Feb. 1979: 15:4.

[6]Brendan Gill, rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, The New Yorker 10 April 1978: 91.

[7]John Simon, rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, New York 17 April 1978: 100.
Mel Gussow, "Stage: Shorter 'Titanic,'" rev. of Titanic, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 11 May 1976: 26:3.

[8]Mel Gussow, rev. of The Vietnamization of New Jersey, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 27 Jan. 1977: 30:1.

[9]Mel Gussow, rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 11 Nov. 1974: 42:1.

[10]Clive Barnes, rev. of The Idiots Karamazov, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 11 Nov. 1974: 42:1.

[11]Gerald Clarke, "Scatcom," rev. of Beyond Therapy, by Christopher Durang, Time 7 June 1982: 70.

[12]Williams A. Henry III, "Mad House," rev. of Baby With The Bathwater, by Christopher Durang, Time 18 April 1983: 68.

[13]Mel Gussow, rev. of Beyond Therapy, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 7 Jan. 1981: C18:4.

[14]Walter Kerr, "A Lesson In How Actors Cope With Tedium," rev. of Beyond Therapy, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 6 June 1982: 11:3:1.

[15]Frank Rich, rev. of Laughing Wild, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 12 Nov. 1987: C23:5.

Frank Rich's unflattering criticism of Laughing Wild, as well as other Durang plays he had reviewed, drove the playwright to criticize Rich and The New York Times for abusing their power of influencing the theatre-going public. In his "Author's Notes" to Laughing Wild, Durang refers to Rich as "His Pontiff"(60), the "Great Deaf Ear..."(57). Durang is not exaggerating the weight of Rich's reviews. In an early 1992 review of Donald Margulies' play Sight Unseen, Rich commended the play, which resulted in an extension of the show. As Margulies himself says, referring to Rich's favorable review, "a very, very delicious thing...has happened..." (The Village Voice 11 Feb. 1992: 96).

[16]Brendan Gill, "Growing Up," rev. of Beyond Therapy, by Christopher Durang, The New Yorker 7 June 1982: 112.

[17]Jack Kroll, "With Malice Toward None," rev. of The Actor's Nightmare and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, by Christopher Durang, Newsweek 9 Nov. 1981: 101.

[18]T.E. Kalem, "Avaunt, God," rev. of The Actor's Nightmare and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, by Christopher Durang, Time 9 Nov. 1981: 119.

[19]Michael Feingold, "Force of Habit," rev. of The Actor's Nightmare and Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, by Christopher Durang, The Village Voice 26 Oct. 1981: 87.

[20]Edith Oliver, rev. of Beyond Therapy, by Christopher Durang, The New Yorker 19 Jan. 1981: 91.

[21]Edith Oliver, rev. of Laughing Wild, by Christopher Durang, The New Yorker 23 Nov. 1987: 155.

[22]Frank Rich, "A Question of Sanity," rev. of Baby With The Bathwater, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 9 Nov. 1983: C21:4.

[23]Julius Novick, "One Man's Family," rev. of The Marriage of Bette and Boo, by Christopher Durang, The Village Voice 26 May 1985: 108.

[24]Robert Brustein, rev. of The Marriage of Bette and Boo, by Christopher Durang, The New Republic 1 July 1985: 29.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

[1]David Rabe, Sticks and Bones (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1979) 78.

[2]Christopher Durang, The Vietnamization of New Jersey: A American Tragedy (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1978) 12. All further references will be cited in the text.

[3]Durang reverses the names and roles of Rabe's characters. Ozzie and Harriet become Ozzie Ann and Harry. Perhaps Durang does this to emphasize that his play is bouncing off of Rabe's. But it should be noted that Durang uses the reversal of sexual roles and cross dressing in other plays, such as The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Titanic, Baby With The Bathwater, Naomi in the Living Room, etc.

[4]Durang is satirizing the notion that Americans make a fetish out of democracy. (They try to impose democratic values and structures on societies, ignoring the societies' culture and traditions, etc.)

[5]Robert Brustein, Critical Moments: Reflections on Theatre and Society 1973-1979 (New York: Random, 1980) 118.

[6]What I mean by the "literalization of a symbol" is that which is normally symbolic, such as imperialism, becomes literalized by a physical stage presence, such as Uncle Larry.

[7]This is, of course, a satire of academia, especially how students, who learn about symbols from their teachers, see symbols everywhere, especially where there aren't any.

[8]Even by saying this, I am subscribing to academia, by looking for symbols, which Durang is satirizing.

[9]This same "Doublemint" jingle was used by Peter Shaffer in his play Equus (1973).

[10]Durang's satire of commercialism bounces off of Sticks and Bones, in which Harriet cleans Ozzie's egg-stained jacket:

> Meyer Spot Remover.... It gives just a sprinkling ... like snow, which brushed away, leaves the fabric clean and fresh like spring. (70)

[11]"A American Tragedy" seems to be an allusion to Dreiser's novel, An American Tragedy, and perhaps an allusion to the film, An American Tragedy (1931), and the remake, A Place In The Sun (1951).

[12]The satire of sex in Durang's plays is usually an attack on cultural pieties, and is often connected to the satire of the Catholic Church.

[13]It is important to point out that Rabe, in Sticks and Bones, satirizes the animalism and sexuality of Rick Nelson, who is always eating fudge and ice cream, and at one point tells his father, "I had the greatest piece of tail tonight, Dad.... What a beautiful piece a ass" (75). Durang takes the sexual satire of Rabe a little further.

[14]Durang seems to go beyond satirizing motherhood into areas of social satire. Ozzie Ann's aversion to bad language suggests an American reactionary response to art and culture of the 60s and 70s (such as the profanity of Lenny Bruce, etc.), decades which were filled with debates about anti-obscenity laws. (In A History of the American Film, Durang satirizes another kind of anti-obscenity law known in early Hollywood as the "Production Code," in a song called "Euphemism.")

[15]Rabe 59.

[16]Durang's satire of the Catholic Church, which runs throughout Durang's plays, seems to have germinated in the playwright's exposure to the films of Fellini, who in one film, Fellini's Roma (1972), stages an ecclesiastical fashion show:

> I became fascinated by the movies of Fellini, who dealt with Catholicism pretty heavily. The fact that his movies were so accepted and highly praised made me realize that you can concentrate on your ethnicity and audiences won't feel left out. (Christopher Durang, interview, American Theatre Oct. 1991: 38.)

[17]The Buddhist robe which David wears is also a reference to the Vietnamese Buddhist priests, who, like David, set themselves on fire in protest against the war.

[18]Larry is also a cliché of the macho American male seen in American drama, such as Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire and Clint and Ricky in Ted Tally's Hooters (1978).

[19]Larry speaks in German to Liat because he confuses her real name, Maureen, with Marlene, "Lilli Marlene," the famous German song which was later made into the movie Lilli Marlene (1950).

NOTES

CHAPTER 2

[1]Christopher Durang, "Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes," Three Short Plays (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1979) 45. All further references will be cited in the text.

[2]Christopher Durang, "'dentity Crisis," Three Short Plays 70. All further references will be cited in the text.

[3]This is a reference to Marie Curie, the discoverer of radium. Perhaps Durang is making an allusion to the film Madame Curie (1943).

[4]Mel Gussow, rev. of Titanic, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 17 March 1976: 34:1.

[5]Tammurai, which sounds like samurai, may be an allusion to Japanese films about samurai, such as Kurosawa's The Seven Samurai (1954).

[6]Victoria also reminds her husband that he may not be Teddy's father. This seems to be an allusion to some of Strindberg's plays, such as The Father and The Ghost Sonata, in which a mother tries to destroy her husband with doubt concerning the child's father.

[7]Christopher Durang, "Titanic," Christopher Durang Explains It All For You (New York: Avon Books, 1983) 92. All further references will be cited in the text.

[8]The unhappy families portrayed in the three early plays dealt with in this chapter are a prefiguration of the unhappy families in Durang's later plays, such as Baby With The Bathwater and The Marriage of Bette and Boo. But the treatment of neglect in these later plays is more subtle, more sad.

[9]This confusion of sexual identity is seen much later in Naomi In the Living Room (1991), in which John wants to completely identify with his wife, Johnna, and so puts on a dress and imitates his wife.

Also, the idea of portraying a psychiatrist as being more crazy than the patient is an idea which was turned into a main theme in Durang's Beyond Therapy (1981).

[10]Durang is, of course, satirizing the sexual cliché of the banana as a phallic symbol.

[11]The dildo strapped on the captain's head seems to allude to The Glass Menagerie, in which the gentleman caller accidentally breaks a part of Laura's glass animal collection, the unicorn's horn, a phallic symbol, which resembles the captain's head wear.

[12]Lidia's "vaginal zoo" is, of course, a joke about sexual appetite, animal desires, and perhaps, with regard to the "storing" of rodents, a joke about the vagina being called a "beaver," another member of the rodent family. Durang's satires of sex often include women as sexual animals.

[13]Titanic also seems to be faintly influenced by The Importance of Being Earnest, in terms of the various disguises, mistaken identities, and the final realizations of who is who.

NOTES

CHAPTER 3

[1]Christopher Durang, A History of the American Film, music by Mel Marvin (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1978) 15. All further references will be cited in the text.

[2]As in some of his other plays, Durang scores satiric points against the Catholic Church and the educational system. Responding to Loretta's question about whether or not the burning priest died, Jimmy replies, "It's hard to kill priests" (19). And responding to Loretta's question, "did reform school change you?" (19), Jimmy answers, "Yeah, I'd never try to burn somebody anymore. I'd shot 'im" (19).

[3]Durang augments this patriotic sentiment by changing the play from black and white to color. Until the war breaks out, the costumes, the props, and the set are black and white. Color is introduced by an enormous American flag, which is lit by red, white, and blue light bulbs.

[4]What Durang is doing with Now, Voyager and Casablanca is re-creating almost identical situations and words, which are now clichés, and adding a new twist, like a non-smoker and a music-hating woman who questions Bogart's words. As Gerald Clarke in Time magazine says, concerning Durang's treatment of movies, "...there is nothing so funny as the cliché of a different color." (Gerald Clarke, "The Reel Truth, As Time Goes By," rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, Time 23 May 1977: 108.)

[5]Richard Eder, "Screen and Scrim," rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 31 March 1978: C3:4.

[6]Jack Kroll, "Sprocket Yocks," rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, Newsweek 10 April 1978: 63.

[7]Stanley Kauffmann, rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, New Republic 22 April 1978: 25.

[8]Woody Allen also balances homage and satire in his films, especially in The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985), in which a moviegoer becomes entangled with a film character.

[9]Clive Barnes, rev. of A History of the American Film, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 21 March 1977: 41:1.

[10]Innaurato's plays since The Idiots Karamazov went off into another direction, using the melodramatic form of grand opera to create structure.

[11]Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato, The Idiots Karamazov (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1981) 39. All further references will be cited in the text.

[12]Throughout the play there is a running joke about pestles, which is a comment on Constance Garnett's mistranslations, which will be dealt with later.

[13]It is important to remember that in Long Day's Journey Into Night, we never see Mary Tyrone inject morphine. This action is only alluded to. But in The Idiots Karamazov, this is more explicit. By showing Mary Tyrone Karamazov shooting up, Durang and Innaurato break a convention which O'Neill used --- allusion. Because Mary Tyrone Karamazov's drug abuse is exposed to the audience, this central tragic character in Long Day's Journey Into Night is ridiculed by the mundane act of shooting up.

[14]Like some of Durang's other plays, such as The Vietnamization of New Jersey, Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, 'dentity Crisis, and Titanic, there is sexual satire in The Idiots Karamazov. But because The Idiots Karamazov is primarily a play about literature, the sexual satire in the play is satire about sex and literature. There are satires of Anaïs Nin's alleged bisexuality in The Idiots Karamazov, in which she controls an army of leather girls and has an affair with Djuna Barnes. Father Zossima's spiritual interest in Alyosha in The Brothers Karamazov becomes a homosexual interest in The Idiots Karamazov, which is suggested as Zossima excitedly rubs his naked feet against Alyosha's. At one point Father Zossima dresses in drag as St. Joan, a reversal of Joan of Arc, who dressed as a man, in armor. There is also a sexual satire of the loose woman, Grushenka, from The Brothers Karamazov, whose body is cut in

half in order to appease both Fyodor and Dmitri, who each take a half, a burlesque of sensualism (as well as a reference to the Solomon parable about two women who claim to be the mother of the same child).

[15]Even the length of the book is ridiculed as Constance Garnett refers to "Page 1803" (55) of The Brothers Karamazov, an exaggeration, although the book is almost a thousand pages.

This aversion to long books is reminiscent of Loretta's comment, in A History of the American Film, about Hugo's Les Miserables, which is more than a thousand pages, as being "a trifle long..." (55).

[16]Father Zossima's reply reflects the subjectivism of the 1970s, "The Me Generation," and also seems to be a satiric reference to the pacifist attitude seen in Beat literature.

[17]The "randomness of art" seems to be a reference to post-modernism and artists who use randomness and chance in their art, such as Merce Cunningham in dance and Jackson Pollock in painting.

[18]The glass eye is probably a reference to Joe Orton's play Loot (1967), in which a glass eye falls out of its socket from a hidden corpse.

[19]Clearly, by having Hemingway kill himself in the play, Durang and Innaurato seem to be enjoying a form of satiric revenge against a writer whose monumental reputation has become overblown.

NOTES

CHAPTER 4

[1]Like many of the names used in The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Elaine May Alcott is a literary name, suggesting Louisa May Alcott, author of Little Women. But Elaine May Alcott is also a reference to Elaine May of Nichols and May, team directors Mike Nichols and Elaine May. This double reference is typical of Durang, especially in A History of the American Film and The Idiots Karamazov, in which Anaïs Nin and Nabokov's Pnin become Anais Pnin.

[2]Christopher Durang, "The Nature and Purpose of the Universe," Three Short Plays 16. All further references will be cited in the text.

[3]Elaine May Alcott frequently makes literary allusions, seen as she finds out that Steve Mann is a salesman. She says, "Attention must be paid, my ass!" (24), a reference to Death of A Salesman.

[4]Christopher Durang, "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You," Two Plays (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1982) 33. All further references will be cited in the text.

[5]The many people that Gary slept with is reminiscent of Daisy in Baby With The Bathwater, who slept with 1,756 people.

[6]Frank Rich, "Double Comedy," rev. of Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You and The Actor's Nightmare, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 22 Oct. 1981: C21:1.

[7]The whipping of Andy, bringing back images of the Spanish Inquisition, may also be a joke about Catholicism.

[8]In spite of all this violence, Steve maintains, "we've got to keep the family together at all costs" (28). As Elaine ironically points out, "The family is the essential unit of man. When the family crumbles, society crumbles" (28).

[9]Richard Eder, rev. of The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, by Christopher Durang, The New York Times 24 Feb. 1979: 15:4.

[10]Christopher Durang, "Addenda" to The Nature and Purpose of The Universe, by Christopher Durang, 35.

[11]"Addenda" 36.

[12]"Addenda" 36.

[13]Christopher Durang, introduction, Christopher Durang Explains It All For You, by Christopher Durang, (New York: Avon Books, 1983) xii.

[14]This kind of question is reminiscent of the Taunters in The Book of Job.

[15]Durang probably uses De Maupassant's name because it is well known that this French writer suffered from satyriasis, a continuation of Durang's sexual satire.

[16]Durang also deals with suffering, as seen in the last chapter, as a convention in 19th century Russian literature, such as Dostoevsky and Chekhov. But whereas the suffering in The Idiots Karamazov is always satirized, the suffering of Eleanor is ultimately taken seriously.

[17]Perhaps Laurence Durell's translation of Emmanuel Royidis' book Pope Joan (1961), about a supposed female pope, is being alluded to.

[18]Speaking in tongues, which is usually associated with Protestant Fundamentalists, is of course also a joke about popes being able to speak many languages.

[19]Christopher Durang, introduction, Christopher Durang Explains It All For You, by Christopher Durang, xi-xii.

[20]Sister Mary Ignatius makes a distorted distinction between mortal and venial sins (31), but the distinction, part of Catholic doctrine, is cruel and meaningless. Her series of mortal sins--- "hijacking a plane, masturbation" ---- are, of course, satirized.

[21]This kind of question was asked especially by theologians about the Holocaust.

[22]Diane's experiences with "randomness" may sound exaggerated, but of course these things, and much worse (as we will see in Baby With the Bathwater) do happen, as is apparent by reading any newspaper from a big city, such as New York.

[23]Terry Curtis Fox, "Parochial wisdom," rev. of "The Invitational," a quadruple bill including Life Boat Drill by Tennessee Williams; Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You by Christopher Durang; Shoeshine by David Mamet; and The Laundromat by Marsha Norman, The Village Voice 24 Dec. 1979: 93.

NOTES

CHAPTER 5

[1]Christopher Durang, Baby With The Bathwater (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1984) 5. All further references will be cited in the text.

[2]Christopher Durang, The Marriage of Bette and Boo (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1985) 37. All further references will be cited in the text.

[3]Similarly, Bette's mother, Margaret (whose prototype seems to be Vivien Jansen-Hubbell Pomme in Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes), is selfish concerning her children, who provide her with company in an otherwise lonely house:

> Sometimes I'm afraid if I had to choose between having my children succeed in the world and live away from home, or having them fail and live home, that I'd choose the latter. (38)

[4]Once again Durang introduces a psychiatrist who seems more troubled than the patient, a theme with a larger scale in Beyond Therapy.

[5]Christopher Durang, Laughing Wild (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1988) 41. All further references will be cited in the text.

[6]One person in Matt's family who is particularly not mentally well is his aunt, Bette's sister, Emily, who spends all the play apologizing for insignificant things, such as forgetting a cello composition, etc.

[7]The principal's twisted priorities are reminiscent of the Man's criticism, in Laughing Wild, of the Secretary of Education, who "...doesn't want schools to educate students about the dangers of nuclear proliferation, but instead to focus on how terrible the communists are" (24).

[8]The Dostoevskian theme of everything being permitted if there is no God is, of course, not only referred to, but abused, in The Idiots Karamazov.

[9]The confusion of Daisy's sex, is of course, another example of Durang's sexual confusions, seen in 'dentity Crisis, Titanic, The Idiots Karamazov, Naomi In The Living Room, etc.

[10]Durang may be making a reference to 17th century metaphysical poets who viewed sexual intercourse as a kind of death.

[11]The Infant of Prague is, of course, referring to homosexuals, who are at risk of contracting AIDS. The singling out of homosexuals by the Catholic Church is also seen in Sister Mary Ignatius' repugnance of homosexuals, and is satirized in Laughing Wild, which will be dealt with soon.

[12]Michael Feingold, "Feat of Klee," rev. of Laughing Wild, by Chirstopher Durang, The Village Voice 24 Nov. 1987: 105.

[13]Of course snipers cannot be prevented. Perhaps Durang is referring to the 1966 massacre at the University of Texas, at which a sniper killed 16 people from a firing position on the top of a tower, or the 1984 incident at a California McDonald's, where 21 people were shot dead. The point is, Durang is not "making it up" that there is a real danger from snipers.

[14]Christopher Durang, "Author's Notes" to The Marriage of Bette and Boo, by Christopher Durang, 76.

[15]While Baby With The Bathwater is primarily a satire, it does have elements of farce, such as its frantic, high speed pace, and its cartoon characters. But Daisy is not a farcical character. He is the only three dimensional character in the play. As Erika Munk writes in The Village Voice, Daisy "...creates an aura of 'realism' and kills off farce" (22 Nov. 1983: 111). Because Daisy's character is able to maintain "an aura of 'realism,'" in spite of the strange, cruel farcical events which surround him, Durang refers to Baby With The Bathwater as "Weird farce with one foot in reality suddenly switching to sadness with *both* feet in reality...." ("Author's Notes" to Baby With The Bathwater 62).

[16]Sam Shepard uses similar non-realistic techniques in his plays such as Fool for Love (1983).

[17]Julius Novick, "One Man's Family," rev. of The Marriage of Bette and Boo, by Christopher Durang, The Village Voice 26 May 1985: 108.

[18]Christopher Durang, "Author's Notes" to The Marriage of Bette and Boo 78.

[19]Like the ending of Laughing Wild, the title of the play is Beckett-influenced. "Laughing Wild" comes from Beckett's Happy Days, in which Winnie laughs at Willie's mispronunciation of the word "fornication." Willie says "formication," which starts both of them laughing, which reminds Winnie of a Thomas Gray poem, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," in which the words "laughing wild amid severest woe" occur. The Woman in Laughing Wild quotes Beckett in her monologue:

> I had such high hopes once.
> AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! She said, throwing her head back, madly. Laughing wild amid severest woe. (12)

The idea of "laughing wild amid severest woe" does not purge pain, but as Michael Feingold suggests, "...the laughter does allow us to tolerate it more easily..." (The Village Voice 24 November 1987: 87). This idea may be applied to most of Durang's later plays, which produce laughter, even amid painful subjects, such as child abuse, alcoholism, the existence of God, etc.

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APPENDIX

A List of Durang's Plays
(In order of first performances)

The Idiots Karamazov (1974) (Co-written by Albert Innaurato)

Titanic (1974)

Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes (1975)

Das Lusitania Songspiel (1976) (Co-written by Sigourney Weaver)

The Vietnamization of New Jersey (1977)

'dentity Crisis (1978)

A History of the American Film (1978) (music by Mel Marvin)

The Nature and Purpose of the Universe (1979) (Radio version, 1975)

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You (1979)

The Actor's Nightmare (1981)

Beyond Therapy (1981)

Baby With The Bathwater (1983)

The Marriage of Bette and Boo (one-act version, 1974) (1985)

Laughing Wild (1987)

Naomi in the Living Room (1991)

TV Or Not TV (1991)