

TELEVISION

'Comedy of Errors' Loved for Broad Farce

By Henry Herx

New York (NC) — Two pairs of identical twins, separated as infants in a shipwreck, cause all manner of confusion when their paths finally cross in "The Comedy of Errors," the current attraction in the series of BBC "Shakespeare Plays," airing Monday, Feb. 20, 9-11 p.m. on PBS.

The play begins with a merchant (Cyril Cusak) being condemned to death by the duke of Ephesus for an unpaid debt — the tragic finale to a series of misfortunes that began with his loss of wife, twin sons and the twin sons of a servant in a shipwreck 20 years before. As he speaks, his woeful tale is mimed by a troupe of revelers whose pranks continue in the background during much of the comedy.

Moved by the man's story, the duke decides to cancel the execution provided the

merchant find someone willing to make good the debt.

All this is necessary prologue for the absurd tangle of mistaken identities that follow. A merchant from Syracuse, one Antipholus (Michael Kitchen), and his servant, Dromio (Roger Daltrey), arrive in Ephesus where they are mistaken for a local Antipholus and servant, Dromio.

Because they are identical not only in physical appearance but also in clothing and even in name, the boys from Syracuse bring utter consternation to their twins in Ephesus, a situation perplexing to friends, a wife and fiancée and, most of all, to each other. It may sometimes prove confusing even to the audience who from the beginning have known the secret of these long-lost twins.

One of Shakespeare's earliest efforts at comedy, the

play's humor depends upon a willingness to accept a series of outrageous coincidences. Granted that suspension of disbelief, there is much pleasure to be gotten from this zany farce of mistaken identities, slapstick silliness and terrible puns. Anyone who likes broad humor will be fully satisfied.

Central to the success of the enterprise are the two actors playing dual roles. Kitchen does extremely well in defining two different characterizations for the Antipholus twins. Daltrey, better known as a rock singer than an actor, good-naturedly mugs his way through the Dromio roles, one indistinguishable from the other, not that it matters much in such broad comedy where farcical situations require reacting more than acting.

All ends happily, of course, with the unfortunate merchant reunited with twin sons and wife who in the interval had become an abbess. It is she who saves them all from the wrath of the duke. In the role, Wendy Hiller brings this hectic farce to its conclusion with a welcome bit of dignity and a lot of class.

Although the time of the play is that of antiquity, producer Shaun Sutton has placed the action in Italy during the Renaissance. This adds a lot of visual color and affords greater opportunity for buffoonery than would have been possible with the original. Director James Cellan Jones keeps the action moving smartly in and out of the houses bordering around a plaza which serves as the play's central set. It may be a modest production but it works just fine and is a lot of fun.



Love for the Land

Florence Jordan talks about the strong guiding spirit behind her husband's dream community, a communal farm in South Georgia based on a New Testament concept of sharing in "Enough to Share: A Portrait of Koinonia Farm" Feb. 21 on PBS. The story tells of the farmer's affection for the land and his fellow human beings. (NC Photos)

NC Peace Documentary Takes Top TV Award

Washington (NC) — NC News' television documentary, "Religion in America: Fighting for Peace," won the 1983 International Film and TV Festival of New York competition in the syndicated news special category.

The nationally syndicated news documentary was selected from among more than 700 television programs entered in the 26th annual awards festival.

Marist Father Richmond Egan, NC News broadcast department manager, and the documentary's producer-director, Emil Gallina, received the award at a banquet in New York.

"Religion in America: Fighting for Peace" is a one-hour report examining the role of American churches in the nuclear arms debate. The program focuses on moral issues relating to war and peace and gives a historical background for religious involvement in the issues.

The program was aired last spring on many PBS-member stations and was hosted by broadcaster Paul Anthony. Gallina and NC correspondents Carol Pearson and Sean-Patrick Lovett also reported.

BOOKS

"An Apology For the Value of Human Life," by David C. Thomasma. Catholic Health Association (St. Louis, Mo., 1983). 169 pp., \$18.

Reviewed by William E. May
NC News Service

Thomasma's book is well intended. Its stated purpose is to stimulate its readers to reflect critically on the life-destroying tendencies of our culture and to encourage them to rededicate themselves to the "dignity and value of human life." Moreover, the author himself clearly holds that human life is intrinsically worthwhile, and in the central chapters of the book seeks to marshal evidence from our religious, philosophical and political heritages to support the credibility of his belief in the inherent value of human life.

Despite its good intentions, however, Thomasma's book is quite confused and confusing and in the end is quite inimical, in my judgment, to the value of human life, in particular to the value of unborn human life. For Thomasma, who frankly acknowledges that abortion is immoral, nonetheless concludes, however reluctantly, that respect for the unquestioned value of human freedom and dignity morally requires us to accept as public policy the liberty of women to abort their unborn children.

Thomasma's conclusion is, I believe, the result of the confusion that characterizes much of the book. This confusion can be illustrated by looking at some key claims he makes.

He claims, first of all, that in some instances (e.g., in war and presumably in every act resulting in an abortion), "we must act immorally." In other words, he thinks that immoral activity is at times morally necessary. His position here stems from his belief that every action leading to the death of a human being is immoral. What Thomasma fails to do is to distinguish between actions whose purpose is precisely to kill innocent human beings (intrinsically immoral actions; cf. "Gaudium et Spes," n. 27) and actions whose purpose is precisely to protect and

preserve human life, even though it be foreseen that an innocent person's life may be taken (e.g., removal of a cancerous uterus with subsequent death to the unborn child), and actions whose purpose is defensive and intended to ward off from innocent persons the unprovoked and unjust attacks of others (cf. "Gaudium et Spes," n. 79).

Second, he gratuitously and woefully misconceives what those who seek to protect unborn life are trying to do. Thus he claims that "pro-life crusaders are acting against violations of their own beliefs," in contrast to those in the civil rights movement who "acted against violations of a constitutionally recognized liberty." What pro-life crusaders actually are trying to do is to extend to the unborn the constitutional protection they merit as human beings, just as those who fought slavery sought to extend to slaves the protections of the constitution.

Third, Thomasma is quite confusing on the status of the unborn. At one point he speaks of the fetus as being "not clearly a person, not, that is, to everyone involved in the debate." It is true, of course, that not all involved in the abortion debate recognize the personhood of the unborn, but this in no way shows that the fetus is not clearly a person. But he then continues to say that the fetus "is clearly not a person," but is rather a "not-yet personal form of human life." Since he gratuitously denies personhood of the unborn, his contention can gratuitously be rejected.

Despite his good intentions, his final argument that we are morally required to accept as public policy one that grants women the liberty to abort their unborn children is quite flawed. It is really not argued for, but is rather asserted, and is dependent upon the author's claim that lack of public consensus over the status of the unborn requires acceptance of their nonpersonal status. This is like arguing that the failure of a society to recognize the personhood of certain races requires acquiescence to slavery.

There are numerous errors in the work, e.g., Thomasma's claim that Catholic moralists used to argue that a mother's life had to be sacrificed for that of the unborn (p. 74). Its rambling, confusing argument and use of false dichotomies (e.g., the three types of ethical positions the author sketches) contribute to its anti-life conclusion. In short, the work, intended as a defense of human life, ends up by supporting the life-destroying tendencies of our age. This truly is a tragedy.

(May is associate professor of moral theology at The Catholic University of America. His most recent book is "Sex, Marriage and Chastity" (Franciscan Herald Press).)

"Maybe a Second Spring," by Edward Fischer. Crossroad (New York, 1983). 200 pp., \$14.95.

Reviewed by Father Charles Dollen
NC News Service

Is there really something mysterious about China, or is it simply a Westerner's dream that it should be mysterious? Any number of books have been published this winter to help us unravel that distant land, China.

Politicians, historians and economists have all had their say. Now Ed Fischer tells us about that land from the viewpoint of the man in the street. He details the 50 years that the Columban Sisters have spent working in China and for the Chinese.

Mother Mary Patrick, a co-foundress of the Columban Sisters, began her work during World War I. She had an aristocratic background and her husband had been the governor of the Windward Isles in the Caribbean. When she was widowed, she turned her eyes toward a life of service.

It was 1926 before the first Columban Sisters arrived in China. They didn't concentrate on the big cities, but worked out in the provinces in towns whose names never appear in the Western press.

The nuns survived the warlords, the Japanese invasion and the horrors of World War II. Only the communists finally

had the power to exile these hard-working women. The nuns then turned their activities to Chinese people living beyond the communist wall and to other sections of the Far East.

While this book will appeal most to people who know the Columban Sisters, the story is one of universal mission appeal. Fischer makes their lives and their motivation an open and fascinating story. Parish libraries should find this a very popular title.

(Father Dollen is the book review editor of The Priest magazine.)

Capsule Reviews

By Michael Gallagher

"Angel" (New World)

The ad copy, "High school honor student by day, Hollywood hooker by night," tells you all you need to know and more about this dismal effort about a young prostitute who helps a detective catch a psychopathic killer. The movie is directed by Robert Vincent O'Neil and written by O'Neil and Joseph Cala. Because of nudity, graphic sex, and violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R, restricted.

"Hot Dog" (MGM-UA)

This is a kind of Animal House on skis: rivalry between clean-cut, honest — if lecherous — American skiers and some sneaky and unsportsmanlike Europeans making for a mindless diversion featuring action on the slopes by day and in hot tubs by night. Directed by Peter Markle and written by Mike Marvin, it is classified O — morally offensive, by the U.S. Catholic Conference because of nudity and graphic sex. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.