

FEATURE

'Crime' comedies eschew taste, depth

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each review includes the USCC and the Motion Picture Association of America ratings.

Eight Heads in a Duffel Bag

Sophomoric black comedy about a gangster (Joe Pesci) pursuing a vacationing medical student (Andy Comeau) who accidentally took a duffel bag containing the heads of eight rivals the gangster was to deliver to a mob boss. Writer-director Tom Schulman's tasteless chase comedy finds redundant humor in the horrified reactions of a half-dozen people who chance upon the heads but never bother to notify the police. Brief violence with frequent mistreatment of body parts for comic effect, much profanity and some rough language. The USCC classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Grosse Pointe Blank

A cold-blooded hit man (John Cusack) lodges rival assassins (including Dan



John Cusack plays a cold-blooded hit man in director George Armitage's black comedy "Grosse Pointe Blank." Hollywood Pictures

Aykroyd) out to kill him while trying to win back an old flame (Minnie Driver) at his home town high school reunion. Director George Armitage's empty black comedy romanticizes a killer as a lovable fellow whose success at murdering for profit is

seen merely as a minor character flaw. Morally bankrupt characters, some nasty violence, brief sexual situations and recurring rough language. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

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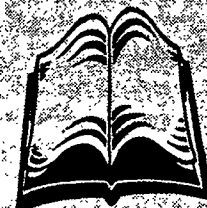
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Friends recall cardinal's life

I am your Brother Joseph: Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, by Tim Unsworth. Crossroad (New York 1997). 154 pages. \$9.95 (paper).

The Word of Cardinal Bernardin, by Paolo Magagnotti. Center for Migration Studies (New York 1997). 226 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Joseph R. Thomas
Catholic News Service



BOOK REVIEW

These two books, written by friends of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, are as different as the sun and the moon, although each is luminous in its own way.

Tim Unsworth's personal reflection — too thin to be considered a full biography — is by far the more interesting. Unsworth was close enough to the cardinal to have him as a private dinner guest in his home many times over the 14 years of their friendship.

His is a loving portrait of a revered pastoral leader, a sensitive, prudent, articulate bishop with an immense capacity for personal growth and a remarkable ability to mediate differences and forge consensus. Although mildly critical at times, Unsworth leaves no doubt about his admiration for the man.

By way of contrast, Paolo Magagnotti's book, dedicated to the cardinal's mother (the journalist and the cardinal's parents are from the same region in Italy), is somewhat stiff and concerned with the cardinal as teacher without, however, losing sight of his pastoral touch. A brief biographical sketch is followed by 30 chapters summarizing the cardinal's views on subjects as diverse as abortion, AIDS and Vatican II.

All but the last two chapters were compiled before 1993 and were edited by the cardinal, according to Father Lydio F. Tomasi, head of the Center for Migration Studies. The book is one of a number of titles dealing with the Italian-American experience.

Presumably drawn from his speeches and writings, it lacks the human touch of Unsworth's volume. Although indexed, it is not the useful reference it could have been had Magagnotti provided information on original sources. Direct quotation is mixed with paraphrase and whether paraphrase is based on one source or many is left unanswered. The cardinal's phrase-making skills have been lost along the way.

In his book, Unsworth succeeds brilliantly in capturing the man behind the pectoral cross. He draws on contemporary accounts, on other writers, and of his own friendship with the cardinal and of the cardinal's associates. His insights are deft and couched in the language of a man who cares about words.

Thus, in recalling a time when the cardinal plunged into a crowd to shake hands, Unsworth writes that while the cardinal seemed embarrassed when people tried to kiss his ring, "he didn't stop them (because) he understood the frail packages in which faith is carried."

Unsworth admits that his portrait of the cardinal "is hardly an objective treatment." He recalls with particular admiration the very public manner of the cardinal's dying and his handling of the sexual abuse charge leveled against him.

Touching on the cardinal's unique mediating influence within the body of bishops, Unsworth observes that he "served as a patient, consensus-building oil can to the sometimes squeaky machinery of church politics."