

Author! Author!

US : 1982 : dir. Arthur Hiller : 20th Century Fox : 110 min
 prod: Irwin Winkler : scr: Israel Horovitz : dir.ph.: Victor J Kemper
Eric Gurry; B.J. Barie; Benjamin H Carlin; Ari Meyers; Elva Leff; Julia Reardon
 Al Pacino; Tuesday Weld; Dyan Cannon; Alan King; Bob Dishy; Bob Elliott; Ray Goulding;
 Andre Gregory; Ken Sylk; James Tolkan; Tony Munafo; Reuben Singer; Cosmo F. Allegretti

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Pacino and the full brood in conference (Eric Gurry third from left)

Source: John Willis Screen World 1983

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 1996 review:

"Pacino's flaky wife walks out on him and their kids (mostly from her previous marriages) just as his new play is about to open on Broadway. Slight but winning little comedy, with likable performances all around. Written by playwright Israel Horovitz. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to
 above

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"A Broadway playwright has worries about his wife's fidelity. Like a sixties update of "ALL ABOUT EVE", this thin but sometimes witty sex-behind-the-footlights comedy had nothing to offer the general audience of the eighties, and one can only speculate as to why it was made. The acting does help, but it's a long haul."

"In trying to dig a little deeper than the average Neil Simon comedy, it only prepares its own grave."
 - The Observer

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Awful. Awful. Al Pacino plays a Broadway playwright who begins an affair with a Hollywood star, Dyan Cannon, who is to be his next leading lady; and that is fine, because his wife, Tuesday Weld, is also having an affair. But there are several kids involved, one of whom gives Dad advice on his love life. This is about the level of Israel Horowitz's screenplay, which would have seemed a plagiarism of **"SHOOT THE MOON"** had it not come out at the same time. There are a few bright New York show-business jokes to relieve matters."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

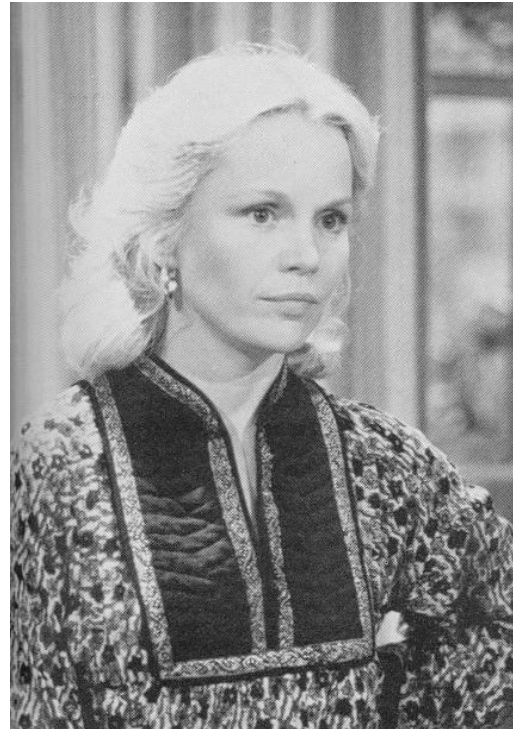
"Often lame comedy with a few funny one-liners. Al Pacino plays a playwright and father, trying to make a home for his son, and four other children who are offsprings from his wife and her various ex-husbands. **1½ "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"Pacino effectively portrays a struggling New York playwright who's gallantly trying to support five children from various marriages. This look at family life is not as compelling as that presented in **"KRAMER vs KRAMER"**, which this film occasionally resembles. Bear with it, however, because this comedy/drama ends with a charming display of warmth and sympathy between Pacino and his kids - who survive in spite of their home life. Tuesday Weld and Dyan Cannon are wasted in their brief roles. **1½ "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"It improves, so sit out the opening credits and the frightful theme song advising that home is where there's "always milk and cookies and a friend". An I-love-New-York movie that takes its pick from **"KRAMER vs KRAMER"**, it stars Pacino as a Broadway writer left by his wife to care for the shared children of several marriages while completing his latest play. Pacino can do you a volatile, middle-class intellectual with one hand behind his back, and along with his streetwise brood has all the best and funniest lines. But the women lose out. Weld's role is simply the necessary evil to prove the point that men are people too. And Cannon is, in her



hairy, furry, woolly way, radiantly two-dimensional."

Tuesday Weld in her thankless role as the selfish mother Source: John Willis Screen World 1983

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

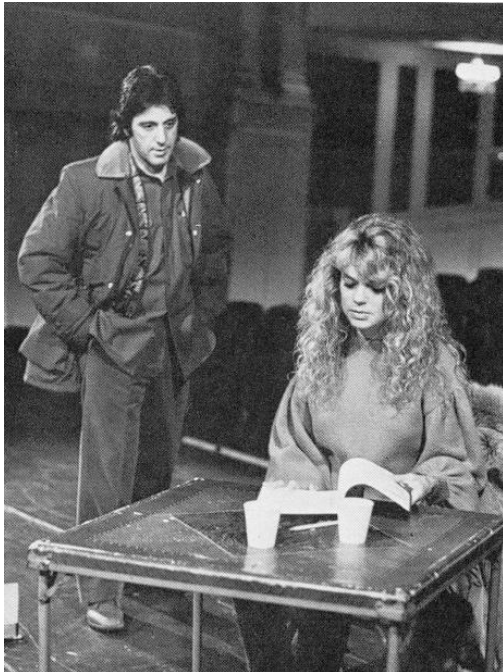
"A marriage-go-round comedy about a Broadway playwright (Al Pacino) trying to tie up all the loose ends of two failed marriages, cope with various troublesome offspring and deliver urgently needed re-writes for his latest play. It seeks to dig deeper than Neil Simon, whose territory this clearly is, but emerges as a bland confection. It is left to the sparkling playing of Dyan Cannon and Tuesday Weld, as the women in his life, to give the film a vitality that's sadly missing in the script. The career of Pacino was really on the skids at this time, following the tedious love story **"BOBBY DEERFIELD"** and the seedy murder thriller **"CRUISING"**, with the mega-turkey **"REVOLUTION"** just around the corner. It would be another seven years before **"SEA OF LOVE"** put him back in the ranks of Hollywood's leading men for keeps. ** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

" **"AUTHOR! AUTHOR!"** is rather a mess, but a quite amiable one. This **"KRAMER vs KRAMER"** multiplied by five kids by no means

approaches its full comic or emotional potential, but Israel Horowitz's marvellous

Source: John Willis Screen World 1983



screenplay and Al Pacino's warm performance provide constant pleasure. Pacino plays a New York playwright who's attempting to get his first play in two years off the ground. Tale runs the course of the comedy's preparation, from initial director change to casting, rehearsals, rewrites and, finally, opening night.

Heart of the film, however, lies in Pacino's domestic life. His wife (Tuesday Weld) leaves him for another man, stranding kids of their own as well as from her previous three marriages. Pacino takes it hard, but is momentarily soothed by the friendly attentions of Hollywood star Dyan Cannon, making the Broadway plunge for the first time in the leading role of the play."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Al Pacino stars as a playwright whose wife (Tuesday Weld) leaves him with five kids (not all his) to raise in this nicely done bittersweet comedy. Dyan Cannon plays the actress with whom he falls in love. Rated "PG" for brief profanity. *** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"Successful playwright Al Pacino attempts to ply his trade, but his neurotic wife, Tuesday Weld, and her pestering but lovable children, the products of her four marriages, continually interrupt him. Just as the writer is about to complete his first play in two years, Weld takes off to live with another man, leaving him to manage the children, rehearsals, and Dyan Cannon, his new leading lady in real life and onstage. Israel Horowitz's script fails to develop sympathetic adult characters, leaving the children to give the film whatever charm it may have. ** "

Credit list courtesy of John Willis 1983 Screen World Film Annual (vol.34):

" "AUTHOR! AUTHOR!"

(20th CENTURY-FOX) Producer: Irwin Winkler; Director: Arthur Hiller; Screenplay: Israel Horowitz; Photography: Victor J. Kempa; Design: Gene Rudolf; Editor: William Reynolds; Music: Dave Grusin; Assistant Directors: Yudi Bennett, Mark McGann; Costumes: Gloria Gresham; Associate Producer: Dorothy Wilde; In TVC Lab Color; 110 minutes; Rated PG; June release.

CAST

Travalian..... Al Pacino
 Alice Detroit..... Dyan Cannon
 Gloria..... Tuesday Weld
 Kreplich Alan King
 Finestein.....Bob Dishy
 Patrick Dicker.....Bob Elliott
 Jackie Dicker.....Ray Goulding
 Igor.....Eric Gurry
 Bonnie..... Elva Leff
 Spike.....B. J. Barie
 Debbie..... Ari Meyers
 Geraido..... Benjamin H. Carlin
 Roger Slessinger.....Ken Sylk
 Lt. Glass.....James Tolkan
 Officer Kapinsky..... Tony Munafo
 Oliver Cromwell.....Reuben Singer
 Fippsy Fippininni..... Cosmo F. Allegretti
 Ted Brawn.....Kevin McClarnon
 Mrs. Woo..... Lori Tan Chinn
 Seth Shapiro..... Richard Belzer
 J.J.Andre Gregory
 Miss Knoph.....Judy Graubart
 Second Taxi Driver.....Jaime Tirelli
 Larry Kotzwinkle..... Frederic Kimball
 and Yudie Bank (Stranger), Denny Dillon (Woman), James Harder (Doorman), Margo Winkler (Millie), James Shaw (Eddie), Orlando

Dole (Pimp), Jean-Pierre Stewart (Student), Doris Gramovot (Waitress), Rachael Horovitz (Young Lady), Matthew Horovitz (Drug Dealer), Julia Reardon (Girl Scout), Adam Winkler (Bystander), Florence Anglin (Bag Lady), Cristal Kim (Grunella), Chet Carlin (News Vender) ”
[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide"]

The Daily Telegraph reveiuew:

“Rotten-tomato-throwing time for this theatrical clinker as dramatist Al Pacino begins an affair with leading lady Dyan Cannon while his flakey wife, Tuesday Weld, ups and leaves him with a menagerie of children by different marriages. The opening theme song, extolling the virtues of hearth, home, cookies and love eternal, is so awful that the film has nowhere to go thereafter but half a step up. Directed by Arthur Hiller.”

Radio Times reviews:

“Comedy starring Al Pacino as a playwright whose wife has left him and whose latest play is about to open, despite it being seriously under-prepared. ** ”

“Comic drama starring Al Pacino as a single-parent playwright. ** ”

“An ill-cast but effective Al Pacino (the role needed a Jack Lemmon) is having a host of domestic troubles as his new play opens on Broadway. There is a sort of rough-edged charm to this comedy, largely thanks to the blissful performances of clever Dyan Cannon and the sublime Tuesday Weld as the women in Pacino’s life, but the material involving the threesome’s respective offspring is extraordinarily tasteless.¹ Added to that, director Arthur Hiller has a tough time finding the requisite lightness of touch to make all the shenanigans convincing. Contains some swearing. ** ”

The Sunday Times note:

“Writer Al Pacino tries to raise his children, rehearse a new play and carry on an affair with his leading lady.”

¹ What exactly is “tasteless” about those scenes? The fact that “the sublime” Tuesday Weld has discarded all her own children? Or that they say “goddammit” a lot?

What’s On TV review:

“Al Pacino as a New York playwright whose wife walks out and leaves him to take care of their son². This is **"KRAMER vs KRAMER"** with a Broadway twist and there are some truly tacky moments, such as when Pacino explains that his fatherly expertise is due to the fact that he was an orphan. But the theatre stuff has plenty of Neil Simon-style zip and Dyan Cannon and Tuesday Weld provide fine support. This movie was one of several box office clinkers that Pacino made at around the same time – **"BOBBY DEERFIELD"**, **"AND JUSTICE FOR ALL"** and **"CRUSING"** were the others – and almost ended his career. He’s a great actor but he can’t draw flies – even the highly publicised **"FRANKIE AND JOHNNY"**, which is now on release, bombed in the States. ** ”

“Comedy. Al Pacino plays it for laughs in this romp through US theatreland. He’s playwright Ivan Travalian, a man rushing headlong for opening night with no play, a dicky director, five kids to support and a wife who’s left him for Larry Kozwinkle... Tuesday Weld, Dyan Cannon are the women waiting in the wings.”

Pacino does domestic comedy schtick....





.....And frazzled playwright schtick

Source: John Willis Screen World 1983

To discuss the reviews first - **"AUTHOR! AUTHOR!"** is in no way a "sex-behind-the-footlights" comedy, as Halliwell describes it, much less an imitation of **"SHOOT THE MOON"**. It's a comedy of househusbandry, stressing the emotional gains and satisfactions of men taking a pro-active role in family life. As such, its place on the eighties political agenda is quite explicit. Yet none of the above reviews can bring themselves to mention the children as anything but incumbrances - "troublesome", "pestering but lovable" - and only one very grudgingly concedes they are the most sympathetic characters in the film, giving it "whatever charm it may have". One could be forgiven for the impression some male critics go into a mental torpor whenever there isn't a "sublime" actress on screen to watch. Children are mere background noise.

The parallels to **"KRAMER vs KRAMER"**, which proved such a success for Dustin Hoffman three years earlier, have already been noted. The core situation of both films - befuddled, abandoned husband forges a warm and intimate bond with his child(ren) while coping with career crisis - is not the only point of comparison. Although Pacino's character, Ivan Travalian, is identified as Armenian, the dialogue has that East coast jewish zing (hardly surprising from playwright Israel Horovitz) which one can so easily hear Hoffman playing, and prompting analogies with Neil Simon. It is obvious Woody Allen territory by the same token, except that Allen would have focussed on the fractious dialogues with his selfish wife and the affair with his leading lady, and written the kids out of the situation altogether. Has he ever played a father on camera?

But what so exasperated those critics is chiefly what makes the film attractive from the archive's point of view - the writer's relationship with his five kids (only one, the eldest, his own, and not by his present wife.) Iggy (Eric Gurry), Spike (B J Barie), Debbie (Ari Meyers), Bonnie (Elva Leff) and Geraldo (Benjamin Carlin) are a tight-knit group, despite being the by-blows of five different marriages. When Gloria (Weld) walks out on them again, they are the least surprised in the house - "My mum's not coming back. She never comes back. She just leaves." Though less than thrilled at the prospect of being packed off to live with their respective fathers, only Geraldo, the youngest, remains behind with Iggy and Ivan. The film's funniest scenes are between these three.

In the bustle of the family bathroom, young Geraldo finds it difficult to pee in peace. Ivan asks why it takes him so long – “I don’t know OK? Because I’m Spanish!” the boy retorts hotly. This is presumably what we must file in the box *extraordinarily tasteless*. It is in any case funny, and Carlin is a delight with his con gusto ripostes: “Give me ten more seconds to pee! That’s all I need to pee goddammit!”. Gurry too is charming as Travalian’s own son Igor, about 14, steadfastly loyal underneath all his leaden irony and wry observations on adult mores. “Are we getting divorced again?” he sighs wearily to Pacino at one point, and later confides: “The only thing I regret about your being my father is that I inherited your tremendous nose.” (Gurry has a whopper, but he wears it well.)

With a less personable cast, or more Disneyfied repartee, these family scenes would have been merely cloying, but the chemistry between the three, and to a lesser extent the other children, who quickly bounce back from their respective natural fathers, is very disarming. The kids are sassy without being pugnacious, outspoken but not little nuclear piles of self-conceit, which is unfortunately how latterday American children all too often project themselves on screen. Their pranks on Ivan are warm and affectionate ones, not havoc for havoc’s sake. It is sugar-coated reality of course, but one expects that in domestic comedy.

Theatre-based films misfire as often as not – see “**CRITIC’S CHOICE**” for a prime example of deadly unfunny comedy – and Broadway’s early antithesis with Hollywood has not evaporated altogether. Here too the theatre scenes, despite Horovitz’s theatrical credentials, are neither interesting nor convincing, and what snatches we hear from Travalian’s new play give us no reason to credit it will be a smash hit, though of course we know it will be (this is a feel-good movie heart and soul). For some reason even yet, Hollywood can do hospitals, prisons or police stations far more persuasively than theatre life.

As for Pacino himself, he does make an appealing fist of his role, but hasn’t quite the comic touch necessary, or perhaps it’s simply that we’re not used to accepting him in that vein, a role that in previous decades would have been earmarked, not for Jack Lemmon, but Cary Grant. It’s no easier to accept him as an insecure 43-year old playwright whose stock line in the first half is “I’m so depressed”, or who becomes so obsessed with his wife’s suspected infidelity that her lover’s name creeps into his every conversation and the rewrites of his play. When she finally decamps, as the children warned him she would, Ivan takes refuge in a flirtation with Alice Detroit, his leading lady (and she does the flirting). For a brief while she moves in with the family, but finds his devotion to the kids too much competition, and is relieved to move out again.

A contrived “filmic” climax is delivered when Ivan, Iggie and the two girls all take refuge on their rooftop to prevent the girls’ father reclaiming custody of them – a scene better suited to a Neil Simon farce like “**PLAZA SUITE**” than to this piece – but such hamfisted touches only make the film patchy, they don’t negate its charm altogether. “**AUTHOR! AUTHOR!**”’s appeal is in large part a measure of Pacino’s personal affability, but it also works as a superior sitcom, with snappier family dialogue than we’re used to from the oatbox in the corner.

The following year Eric Gurry appeared in “**BAD BOYS**”, with Sean Penn. Holmstrom has nothing to say about him, Barie or Carlin. Julia Reardon has a momentary appearance as a girl scout who comes to the Travalians’ door at the wrong moment. Nothing else is known of Ari Meyers or Elva Leff.

See subject index under **COMEDY, DIVORCE / CUSTODY BATTLES** and **LARGE BROODS**.