

CINÉPHILIA

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EDITORIAL

52 PICK-UP

by Matthew Clayfield

You know, maybe it's not my place to ask questions, but I feel strangely and irresistibly compelled to. Sure, I've not done VPD or VPP as yet and I'm still only a first-year student, but what the Hell, right? Who knows, maybe I'm overstepping the mark that's been set, but really, I just have to ask: what's the point of making a whiz-bang VPP film if you don't have a decent story (or at least idea) to back it up with?

My unpopular and mostly unshared feelings for last year's so-called *pièce de résistance*, *Dark Water*, have been well chronicled by now (my declaration against student film, which ran in the first issue of this very journal, was almost wholly "inspired" by that film), but allow me to reiterate, however briefly. A film's worth can't and mustn't be gauged solely by what it's been shot on (and nor can its supposed "importance to the film school"). It can't even be gauged, not solely, on what it looks like. For, of course, a film is a whole, a sum of its own parts, and like last year's *Dark Water* (in my opinion, at least), a number of this year's VPP films look to have been conceived with the same depressingly low-aiming "calling card" mentality in mind. To me, this is a crying shame. Clearly, we have a number of talented film technicians among our ranks here at Bond, but I can't help but feel that we're sorely lacking when it comes to talented storytellers. After all, to really get the best out of our technical wizards, the material has to be great to begin with.

This said, I honestly look forward to seeing the VPP films at the end of semester screening, where, hopefully, my suspicions will be proven wrong and the films will be truly outstanding – not only in terms of how they look, but in terms of how they play on the whole.

And then, my God, it'll be the end of the year and we "freshmen filmmakers" will be thrust into the hot seat ourselves! I can only hope that our final projects will be able to live up to the idealistic philosophies that I've voiced so often here in *Cinéphilie*...

Needless to say that this issue contains part three of Adelman's mammoth "Imitation of Sirk" essay (and you should *definitely* track down the two Sirk films that the library carries as they're wonderful!) and – interestingly enough – a piece that sets a new precedent for *Cinéphilie*, our first ever television-centric article, Carson Maddocks' "Oh, My God, You Killed Kenny!"

– m.

TELEVISION



"OH, MY GOD, YOU KILLED KENNY!":
'South Park' & Satire in the '90s

by Carson Maddocks

'South Park' is a multimillion dollar animated social commentary which emerged in the late '90s and has taken the world by storm. Utilising the medium of heavy satire, this relatively primitive cartoon has been used to challenge its audience's opinions on prevalent social issues such as religion, world events and prominent personalities. Through its portrayal of Jesus as a socially inept and ridiculous character, creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker have highlighted the obsolete nature of modern religion in a consumerist society, and through its structure as a post modern pastiche of pop culture, we are shown the relative shallowness of our own values. Though it has certainly made its mark in a controversial and unorthodox sense – causing enormous social upheaval and provoking intense global debate – one must consider the extent to which 'South Park' is really an effective representation of traditional satire, or whether it is rather a crude and offensive cartoon. Does the excessive swearing of eight year olds serve any specific purpose, and why must an audience hear about "carpet lickers," paedophiles and homosexual world leaders? When we compare these facets of the show to traditional satire, a number of discrepancies arise, and their compatibility must be explored. Through this article, the constructs of the show that "broke new grounds for television cartoons" (Miller, Tulloch & Creeber, 2001) shall be expounded and analysed for their relation to satire and its origins.

Satire is a genre which gained notoriety during the Augustan period, as a way of attacking and sending up various facades of human behaviour from a moral standpoint. It embodies a combination of three distinct elements – attack, laughter and morality – and uses a balance of all three to isolate, ridicule and comment on social issues, controversies or personalities (Gordon, 1976). Though formally titled during the 18th Century, Satire has been in existence for centuries, underlining the Greek classics such as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* where the absurd Athenian foreign policy is highlighted by the Spartan and

Athenian women going on a "sex ban" until differences are reconciled. Modern satire can be seen in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which uses the ridiculous "front" of intelligent animals to send up the inconsistencies of a "communist" regime ("All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others...") and expound the corrupting influence of totalitarian power. Satire has carried these common threads of criticism, humour and morality throughout the ages, a powerful tool used to undermine prominent authorities and educate the masses to the inadequacies of the social condition, as I. R. F. Gordon writes, "The satirist creates [awareness] at the same time as he destroys, and this paradox lies at the root of his power to excite our attention" (Gordon, 1976).

According to George Orwell, "The aim of a joke is not to degrade the human being but to remind him that he is already degraded." This is as true to the essence of *Animal Farm* as it is to many facets of 'South Park' – especially its attitude to religion. According to 'South Park,' religion is not only a ridiculous and redundant activity, it is socially disabling, creating marginalised groups which are then subject to ignorant intolerance and persecution. Christianity is subject to severe scrutiny by Parker and Stone. We are presented with a "flesh" Jesus who freely interacts with the other individuals in the show. He is visually distinguished from the other characters through his white robes and halo, however his crude appearance and non-descript person portray him as a "face in the crowd" – a harsh reminder of modern indifference to the higher beings. He is frequently pitched in ridiculous scenarios, such as being the Devil's opponent in an organised fight where the audience places bets upon who will prevail. The very fact that the ultimate pacifist is compliant in a situation whereby gambling and violence are expected and encouraged reveals much about social values and Jesus' indifference shows the slip from moral authority which the Church has recently experienced. Religious decline is further epitomised by the repeated use of the ironic phrase "Jesus Christ" as a derogatory or blasphemous term.

'South Park' spends much time satirizing marginalized religious groups such as the Jews and Mormons. The 'South Park' movie *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* (d. Trey Parker, 1999) introduces us to "God" – a giant and aged cat – who represents the "true" religion of Mormonism. The choice of this obscure and unconventional "cult" as the prevailing world religion is significant as it highlights the ambiguity of

"truth" and says much about the need for tolerance in multicultural societies. The humour in this scenario comes from the "left field" choice of Mormons as the "chosen ones" and the ludicrous suggestion of a domestic feline Creator. Our moral lesson is that we should not only evaluate the reasoning behind our own beliefs, but consider religion as a whole and its place in our life.

Judaism is also heavily satirised, however largely from the perspective of the social reception of marginalised minorities. Stone and Parker send up the impact of a Jewish upbringing in a Christian/Atheistic society through the character of Kyle Broslowski. Kyle's mother's very New York accent aurally accentuates Kyle's Jewish heritage, and Kyle's social alienation is introduced as early as Season 1, in 'Mr. Hanky, the Christmas Poo,' where Kyle is banned from celebrating Christmas because of his culture. He is visually isolated on stage through being frequently shown as the lone figure in the frame, and the intolerance of "friends" like Cartman ("What the hell are you doing? Jewish people can't eat Christmas snow!") not only reinforce his isolation, but also act as a commentary of social bigotry. The fact that older characters in authoritative roles reinforce this aggressive and alienating view point (i.e. Mr. Garrison referring to Kyle's "Chanukah crap") further highlights the fact that ignorance breeds intolerance, and though the situation is made humorous by the appearance of Mr. Hanky, the underlying message of the incoherence of a divided society still rings clear. It is worth noting that every single episode of Season 6 has Cartman addressing Kyle in an accusing, degrading manner; for example in 'Professor Chaos' (Season 6) when he yells, "Oh, yeah! Well you're a stupid Jew!" and in 'The Passion of the Jew' (Season 8), where Cartman blames the Jews for the death of Jesus. Through the satirising of marginalised minorities, Parker and Stone highlight the inconsistency of a nominally educated and multicultural nation, with the reality of inbred prejudice.

Not only does 'South Park' send up traditional religion, but it also satirises our prevailing atheistic world views. In all reality, South Park is a perverted selfish society, which promotes sexual promiscuity (i.e. Chef and Mrs. Cartman), a lack of moral fibre ("Shut your ****ing face uncle ****er") and ignorant intolerance ("[hippies] want to save the earth but all they do is smoke pot and smell bad"). Though each social failing is amusingly disguised in that of an eight-year-old's upbeat tune, such as Chef's 'Suck on My Chocolate Salty Balls,' it is no less prevalent. The complete lack of

credible religion appears inversely proportional to the degradation of social moral fibre, and one must ponder the reason for this.

Jonathon Swift said of satire, "[it] is a sort of Glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's Face but their own" (Swift, 1704). This is precisely the problem with the more "political" or "populist" elements of this television show. Aiming to please a largely uninformed and diverse audience, Stone and Parker often play to popular opinion, as opposed to sending it up. 'South Park' aims to be cathartic by expounding common views, as opposed to attacking them from behind a proactive or enlightened view point. A good example of this is the show's portrayal of Saddam Hussein. The (ex) Iraqi leader is portrayed as a sex-crazed and deceitful homosexual, with striking "Canadian" resemblances. It is certainly humorous and indeed confronting to see the enemy of the first world in bed with Satan ("Hey Satan, I got some new luggage for our trip up to Earth. Let's fuck to celebrate"), however this portrayal is aimed to feed the public's dislike of this infamous figure, as opposed to enlighten us as to the flaws in his regime or his place within the "War on Terror". Similarly, the entire "Canadian race is immaturely insulted and ridiculed, under the guise of satire. Parker and Stone appeal to the popular, and somewhat light-hearted "resentment" of their Canadian neighbours, by visually distinguishing them (with detachable heads) and saying things like "When Canada is dead and gone, there'll be no more Celine Dion" and "The Canadian government pleads for a peaceful resolution, but naturally, we're not listening". Through feeding popular opinion in a way that proves inoffensive to internal American foreign policy, Stone and Parker are able to engage a wider audience without attracting overtly hostile national attention. In this way certain aspects of the film certainly subvert the satire genre, utilising it as a guise for populist appeal.

Says Gordon, "The satirist sees through man's affectations, and sets out to expose them to laughter and scorn. He does not do this out of meanness or envy but because he feels indignation at the wastage and corruption of human potential." Certainly many aspects of 'South Park' share this integrity to enlighten the audience to social failings and moral lapses. The hypocrisy of modern religion and human lawlessness provides a solid plane for Stone and Parker to work from, and they use marginalized minorities such as Jews and various world religions to highlight social intolerance and philosophise on the nature of religion and belief. However, there is another side to

the argument, which exposes 'South Park' as a crude and popularist show which aims to entertain the public through exaggerating popular icons and ridiculing prominent personalities. In this way, elements of 'South Park' can certainly be categorized as satiric, however the influence of a commercial market within a diverse and largely uneducated environment cannot be overlooked.

FILM ANALYSIS



IMITATION OF SIRK

Part Three

by Sam Adelman

Many of Fassbinder's films could be considered thematic remakes of Sirk's films in they contain similar themes as well as visual motifs. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) is the only Fassbinder film that is a remake, in the traditional sense, of Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (1955). The general plot, as well as themes and characters are very similar. Both films basically tell the story of a man and a woman who fall in love even though their friends, family, and society deem it unacceptable. However, Fassbinder is able to expand upon the story and characters with his film, thereby integrating more themes and ideas.

Most of the discussion on comparing these films comes down to the characters. In *All that Heaven Allows*, Rock Hudson stars as Ron Kirby and Jane Wyman as Cary Scott, the film's central characters and lovers. As Fassbinder states in his essay, Ron Kirby is the only man of importance in the film (Reimer). The opening scene of the film has Kirby in the background, as Cary and her friend walk by, paying him little attention. Though he may be out of focus, like an extra, he is still established a presence and is the catalyst of the film. Ron is basically a living version of Walden. When Cary asks Ron's friend about Walden she replies, "Ron hasn't read it. He lives it." He lives a carefree, naturalistic lifestyle, alone but not lonely. But most importantly, he lives separate from the town and mainstream society. In a sense, like Thoreau, Ron goes against the grain of popular culture. He rejects materialism and the class system, two driving forces in 1950s America. If the statement, opposites attract is true than Ron and Cary were made for each other.

Cary, unlike Ron, lives a typical, unexciting, middle class life. As a widow, with children growing up, she lives a lonely life in a large house (symbolic of her rigid life style). She basically

spends her time gossiping and going to parties with dry, boring, and generally cruel people, whom she calls her friends. She grows tired of her existence, and when she finds Ron she also finds an escape. In the film, Cary is the one who has to change. Ron is already set in his ways and lives happily; it's up to Cary to reject her current lifestyle and live free of societies constraints. Unlike Ron, she has made her life too complicated to enjoy (Reimer).

The common theme throughout this film is, in the words of Thoreau, "To thy own self be true." Ron already lives his life by this phrase (it's even his motto). It's through the character of Cary that the audience sees just how difficult, and rewarding, it is to live a life like Ron. The theme of living a false life is quite common throughout Sirk's films. Characters in Sirk's films are essentially blind, surrounded by artificiality, yet unable to see it (Fischer, p.255). This is portrayed aesthetically with unrealistic lighting and sets, but also in the films story. In *All that Heaven Allows*, Cary has to realize that she has been living a lie; pretending to be satisfied and happy but really living a miserable life.

Due to the age and class difference between Ron and Cary their romance causes controversy throughout the community. Ron, already an outsider, is unaffected by the rumours and gossip, therefore the weight of the romance is put on Cary's shoulders. She not only conflicts with the community but also with her children, and even with herself. At one point Carrie brings Ron to one of party in an effort to gain acceptance and show him off. As the two approach the party, the townspeople comment on Ron's muscular physique, calling him a savage and "Jungle man". They already pass their judgment on him based solely on the fact that he is a gardener and not of the same social class. While at the party, Ron is constantly looked down upon and unaccepted. However, this is not Ron's life therefore he can just walk away from it all. This cannot be said for Cary though. When word of her romance gets out she is the subject of gossip and somewhat ostracized from her social group. Even her best friend pretends to support their romance but constantly reminds her, "What will people say?"

"The point is: are children really pure? I don't think so. The innocence they have will be destroyed. They are symbols of melancholy, not purity (Halliday, p.107)." In *All that Heaven Allows*, Sirk practically makes the children the antagonists. They represent the conservative lifestyle that is holding Cary back from being happy and true to herself. They both want Cary and Ron to break-up for selfish reasons.

Ned thinks their marriage is disrespectful to their late father and goes against family tradition. When Cary mentions selling the house he becomes very offended.

It's as if he doesn't want Cary to get rid of her rigid middle class life. Cary's daughter, Kay, also is against the marriage because she's afraid how it will affect the rest of her life. The final blow comes when Ned buys Cary and television for Christmas. The gesture can be interpreted as the children trying to cheer their mother up, but only making it worse by further trapping her. "Life's parade at your fingertips", as the TV salesman says, only now does Cary truly realizes what she is missing by not being with Ron. After Christmas, Cary gets word that Ned is going to study abroad and decides to sell the house. Kay, also, has plans of getting married and moving out. As Sirk says, "Children are symbolic of melancholy, not purity", in the case of *All that Heaven Allows* they are also narcissistic and selfish.

In addition to her children and her social peers, Cary is also subconsciously against the relationship due to her social engineering. Though she wants to be with Ron, she also feels a strong need to be a part of her society and peers. Unlike Ron, who as an outsider has no basis to claim the relationship wrong, Cary comes from a middle class life where that type of relationship is taboo. As Fassbinder states, "Human beings can't be alone, but they also can't be together either." Though there's no questioning Cary's love for Ron, her actions sometimes do otherwise. For example, while getting ready for a party Cary says to Ron "I want to show you off." She doesn't say it to be mean or demeaning; however the statement does reinforce a barrier between them. It demonstrates that she does still consider him somewhat of an oddity. Later, another class conflict emerges as they decide which car to take; Ron's old station wagon or Cary's Mercury. Of course, Ron doesn't care, but the fact that the argument arose shows that Cary is not only still conscious of the class differences, she's also uneasy about them.

In *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* Fassbinder manages to expand upon the themes and characters of *All that Heaven Allows* and crafts a tale that is just as powerful and socially conscious, if not more so. In *Ali*, Fassbinder increases the age difference, changes the setting, and also adds a racial slant to the story. Fassbinder once stated, "After Douglas Sirk's film [*All that Heaven Allows*], love seems to me even more to be the best, most sneaky and effective instrument of social oppression (Toteberg)." This statements speaks very true of Fassbinder's film, while Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* seemed more focused on alienation, *Ali* is focused on alienation as well as oppression and discrimination.

Ali is much harsher tale than *Heaven*, partially due to the setting of the film. While Sirk's film took place in a quaint New England town where everyone knew each other, *Ali* takes place in Munich, a large city and a much less forgiving environment. When Sirk's film ends, there is a

sense of friendliness and forgiveness as the representatives from the community come to Ron's aide. By placing Emmi and Ali in the lower middle class in Munich, the small town friendliness is gone. The mean spirited nature of those around Ali and Emmi is not masked by polite social formulas (Reimer). From the first scene, Emmi walks into a bar and exchanges stares with the patrons. It's clear that the theme of "us against them" will be consistent throughout the film (Ebert).

The "us against them" and oppression themes are shown throughout the film in a variety of ways, the simple act of looking being the most prevalent. The relationship with Ali and Emmi and the rest of the world is based primarily upon people looking at each other (Haynes). Society sees the couple as an oddity, and through their stares they convey their lack of acceptance.

TO BE CONCLUDED...

CINEMA NOTES

AFTERNOON DELIGHTS

by Matthew Clayfield

1. *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (d. Adam McKay, 2004)

Call me crazy, but I'm a really big fan of the sophomoric Ferrell-Stiller-Wilson-Vaughn boys club that continually finds its members appearing in one another's movies, basically having a really good time and engaging in some completely bizarre and random humour. It might just be the schoolboy in me, but their penchant for just filming themselves while trying (and sometimes failing) to be funny is something that I really get a kick out of. I wasn't a huge fan of *Zoolander* (d. Ben Stiller, 2001) and haven't yet seen *Old School* (d. Todd Phillips, 2003), but I really enjoyed *Starsky and Hutch* (d. Todd Phillips, 2004) and *Meet the Parents* (d. Jay Roach, 2000) and liked *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story* (d. Rawson Marshall Thurber, 2004) for the most part.

Surely, however, the pinnacle of this group's collective sub-genre oeuvre is *Anchorman: The Legend on Ron Burgundy*, a film that finds itself going off on so many tangents and indulging itself in so many digressions (the jazz flute rendition? the gladiator battle? the animated Pleasureland sequence? the group sing-along description of love?) that, even though it misses it a lot of marks (a lot more than some of their other films do, in fact), one can't help but feel that there's something inspired going on here, on a level of absolute purity and unadulterated idiocy, that can't be found in such abundance in the other films, nor anywhere else in the cinema today. Does this redeem the film's terrible plot and its anticlimactic and relatively unfunny climax with the Kodiak Bears? Maybe not, but it doesn't matter (for a start, the film isn't about plot); *Anchorman*, this

strange, strange movie, taps into something – not always, but often – that Monty Python proved with their three masterpieces back in '75, '79 and '83: a man being silly is funny, but a group of men being silly's hilarious.

2. *Vertigo* (d. Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

The first time I saw Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) was early in the afternoon, maybe one or two years ago, in my bedroom at home. With the sole exception, perhaps, of *North by Northwest* (1959) (don't quote me on that), it was to be the first that I'd been exposed to Hitchcock. And I was really let down. It wasn't that I thought the film was particularly "bad" or anything (mind you, that's not to say that I liked it either), but that I was just absolutely confused as to what it even was, let alone to how people could speak of it so highly.

I watched it again just recently, hot on the heels of *Marnie* (1964), which I was disappointed with, and *The Birds* (1963), which and loved. Let's just say that I was probably too young for *Vertigo* when I first saw it – not knowledgeable enough about Hitch, about cinema, about mise en scene and all that jazz to really see what the guy was really doing. He's working overtime in *Vertigo*. The mirrors, the spirals, the constantly shifting level of mental subjectivity; Hitchcock is just all over this film and you can't help but be impressed by it. What's more, his take on San Francisco is pure gold and the film's tone – which is more genuinely troublesome and disturbing than it is in his other pictures – is so completely out of the blue and unexpected that it sort of takes your breath away.

I'd still take *Rear Window* (1954), *North by Northwest*, *The Birds* and maybe even *Notorious* (1946) over *Vertigo* (another viewing or two might change that, however), but this "second-time-round" viewing has certainly change my perceptions.

CINEMA CLUB SCHEDULE

Weeks 10, 11 & 12

Nov. 17: *Alphaville, a Strange Case of Lemmy Caution* (d. Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)

Nov. 24: *Dark Passage* (d. Delmer Daves, 1947)

Dec. 1: *Irma Vep* (d. Olivier Assayas, 1996)

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