

Revisiting the Theatre of the Absurd in Christopher Durang's *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls* (1993) and *Desire, Desire, Desire* (1995)

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Abstract:

Contemporary American playwright and actor, Christopher Durang (1949-) has carved himself an important niche in the American theater. He has been awarded several writing fellowships and grants. Noted for his outrageous and absurd comedy, his plays have been produced nationally and internationally. He has been influenced by Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994) and Tom Stoppard (1937-). His plays satirise preconceived ideas and institutions which lend themselves to the Theatre of the Absurd that deliberately parodies all the traditional assumptions of Western culture. This present study attempts to read Durang's *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls* (1993) and *Desire, Desire, Desire* (1995) as different manifestations of the Theatre of the Absurd. The former play is an eccentric comedy about a troubled parent-child relationship which spoofs Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). As to the latter play, it is a parody of several Tennessee Williams' plays: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) as well as Marsha Norman's *Night, Mother* (1983). It tackles a tensed marital relationship. Thus, through the deft use of parody, Durang satirises man's difficulty of accepting reality and the impossibility of true escape. As a result, it is perceived that Durang has delineated the Absurd Theatre from extreme farcical boundaries through parodying the inconsistencies in institutions and the human condition.

Keywords: absurd, comedy of errors, memory play, parody