

FATHER OF THE BRIDE

Directed by Charles Shyer

Produced by Carol Baum, Nancy Meyers, and Howard Rosenman

Distributed by Touchstone's Buena Vista Pictures

Released in 1991

Some movies just impart good feelings. *Father of the Bride* boasts a user-friendly narrative. From the beginning we know how it ends, and the protagonist explains to us how he is feeling all through the movie, so it's impossible to get lost. Additionally, millions of American dads watching this movie have seen their sweet little girl grow up and get hitched; once these proud papas catch the spirit of the movie and find themselves identifying with the likable protagonist, they'll project their own experiences onto the canvas of the story. And so they'll be shedding a tear for, or laughing at, the memories of their own lives. They'll be enjoying the movie they want to see.

But the apparent intent of director Charles Shyer to make the characters universal renders them bland. Even the wedding vows are complicit: "I, Bryan Mackenzie, take thee, Annie Banks, to be my wedded wife, to love and to comfort from this day forward." And then Annie says the same thing. There's no mention of fidelity, riches/poverty, sickness or health. There's no 'til death' and, of course, there's no 'love, honor, and obey' nor 'God.' These vows are toothless.

Of course, such plastic wedding vows could be a reflection of the filmmaker's beliefs, rather than an instance of self-restraint for the sake of broad box office appeal. Notice the characters never talk about how important marriage is. When George wrestles with supporting Annie's decision to wed, the audience laughs at George's illogic and blustery discomfiture. The wedding dominates everything. The marriage is an afterthought. A significant appraisal of the institution is never presented, and the wedding is the star, just as it was for millions of unhappy American newlyweds who now marvel at the warped priorities of their engagement.

Offending people is inevitable. Make the couple intimately familiar with each other and conservatives frown. Make the couple intentionally chaste and liberals are insulted. Carrying forward the idea of making the film as accessible to as many different people as possible, drop the scene where, after meeting Bryan, Steve Martin and Diane Keaton discuss their pre-wedding sexin' (it's a momentum killer anyway). Then imply that Annie and Bryan have plenty of the motive, means, and opportunity, with the evidence of execution just out of reach. All it would take are some slight adjustments to the dialogue:

- "Remember that place we stayed in Tuscany?"
"That was very good of Michael and Luisa to come along."
- "I came to get my sneakers. *I think* I left them in Annie's room last night. *All I know is I left here barefoot.*"
- "Remember to fasten your condom."
"Dad!"

"Seatbelt! I mean 'seatbelt.'"

"Don't worry, Mr. Banks, Annie's in good hands with me, like Nina was with you."

But, really, *Father of the Bride* is hard to fault. It's funny, boasts an outrageously original supporting turn by Martin Short, moves briskly, and wisely limits our perspective to George Banks and his daughter. It establishes the protagonist's world as ideally secure—great job, great town, great car, great house, great wife—so when his daughter drops the engagement bomb, we can understand George's reluctance to face this big an adjustment. And it features some truly cinematic moments, such as George seeing his grown-up daughter as a little girl in pigtails, and the backyard barbecue wedding reception. While taking notice that all movies say something even when the filmmakers hope to say nothing, *Father of the Bride* is to be enjoyed and revisited, especially when real-life wedding bells are ringing.