

Frank Gagliano

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Actress Olympia Dukakis died on May 1, 2021. . . .In 1967 Dukakis created the roles of all four women in the Off-Broadway, American Place Theatre premiere production of my play, *“Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry,”* at St Clemens Church on West 46th Street, NYC. At that time, Dukakis was just starting her Off-Broadway and stage career, but already had the chops to play all four female characters In *“Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry.”*



(Eugene Roche, and Dukakis as Debden, the woman he’s keeping:
“I’m a witch Morden. I can make people die by wanting it badly enough. . .
Let us go, Morden. . .”)

Later, on stage, Dukakis was to star in American world classic plays and in such hit movies as, *“Moonstruck,” “Steel Magnolias,” “Mr. Holland’s Opus”* and *“Look Who’s Talking.”* Dukakis won the Best Supporting Actress award in the film *“Moonstruck,”* at both the Academy Awards and the Golden Globes.

With Olympia Dukakis’s death, the entire ’67 *“Uxbridge”* cast, director and producer have now died. And I mourn them all. But Ms Dukakis’s passing, particularly, brings back magical moments of the rehearsal period, and those inevitable rough production moments, of a play that was a breakthrough for me. But it also brings back that 60’s Vietnam War period when theatre, and just about everything in theatre — was changing and in revolt. And filled with possibilities. (And affordable) The thing that rings in my mind’s ear is Ms. Dukakis’s opening line of *“Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry,”* —the way she phrased it; the snotty, snotty and faux elegance and superiority of a cruel, self-centered boss-person.

It's one of those lines, as a playwright, you hope drops in to trigger the action of a play—but rarely does. This one does at the top of the play.

"MRS BETHNAL GREEN (To Morden, running the old-fashioned apartment building 1967 elevator): "Well, Mr. Morden, and how do like being replaced by an automatic elevator?"

Morden doesn't like it at all. And somehow, Dukakis made you believe that *she* was the victim — because the letter firing Morden had gone astray. By end of scene, Morden is about to kill her when the elevator stalls and the play moves into high gear.



PHOTO BY MARTHA HOLMES

Olympia Dukakis and Eugene Roche in a scene from the American Place Theatre production of "Father Uxbridge Wants To Marry." Set designed by Douglas Schmidt.

Dukakis's talent grew and she put it all together in *"Moonstruck"* —A movie I love. Like *"My Cousin Vinnie," "The Shop Around The Corner," "The Bandwagon."* Fellini's *"Amarcord,"* I love (and repeat views of) *"Moonstruck"* —script, direction, ensemble cast, the romance and Italian-American comic-sad tone— and especially the magic of Olympia Dukakis.

Dukakis reflected on her success in a 2001 interview with the London newspaper , The Guardian. *"Maybe good fortune comes to you for the same reason as bad," she said. "It's all about understanding more: You learn a lot of things when you're struggling, and other things when you're what the world calls successful. Or perhaps it's just something that happens. Some days it's cold, and some days it's hot."*

I'll be reminiscing more about *"Father Uxbridge Wants to Marry,"* and on that 60's period, and on Olympia Dukakis's performance in future postings; and on Johnny Mercer's, "door marked 'never more' (from his *'Days Of Wine And Roses'*) *that wasn't there before*" and that Olympia Dukakis —RIP—just walked through.

As will we all.



(As wife Stepney, clutching the TV set she loves more than her husband: "It's dead, Morden! I told you the tube was dead!— You itchy fungus you!")

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<https://www.nytimes.com/.../movies/olympia-dukakis-dead.html>)

