

Desire Under the Elms

A REVIEW

by Michel Guite

as plagiarized from J. Wood Krutch



"DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS" "Like the hectic in my blood he rages". (Risley Photo)

In this age of intellectualized Art, there is an inevitable but unfortunate tendency to assume of O'Neill that his greatness lies in the greatness of clarity of his thought. "A tempestuousness in his nature made him a brother of the tempests, and he has sought, wherever he could find them, the fiercest passions," — less anxious to clarify their causes for those who love peace than eager to share those passions, and happy if he could only be exultantly, a part of their destructive fury.

O'Neill proceeds from violence to violence and makes human torture and suffering not so much the occasion of further dramatic development as the raison d'être of Drama. The meaning and unity of his work lies not in any controlling intellectual idea, nor in any "message" but rather in the fact that each play

is a series of experiences, each of extraordinary intensity.

In "Desire under the Elms" O'Neill has shown that "Souls confined in a nutshell may yet be lords of infinite space," that a spirit confined by lack of worldly release, explodes with the greatest spiritual violence. To portray his discovery of this truth the author has limited the horizons of his characters both physically and spiritually, to a tiny New England farm and made their intensity spring from the limitations of their experience.

The idea of setting the stage with a single permanent scene, and exposing the farmhouse interior effectively draws attention to the controlling circumstances of the play. A story of human relationships, it becomes intolerably tense, because intolerably close and limited — and emerges as a powerful portrayal

of the possessive instinct, — grown inhumanly powerful, because the opportunities of its gratification are so small — and of physical passion, so terribly destructive, because so long restrained by a sense of sin.

To the young Ebon Cabot (George Sperdakos,) the stoney farm is all the wealth of the world and his young step-mother, Abbie (Dawn Greenhalgh), all the lust of the flesh. In that tiny corner, each character finds enough to stimulate passions which fill the Universe.

By half a century of labor, Ephraim, the father (Bernard Behrens), has transformed his few barren hillsides into a meaning of life, killing two wives in the process, but growing himself only harder in body and mind, and more fanatical in his possessive passion for the single value in his existence.

Two of his sons, rebelling against the hopelessness of their lives, leave for the Californian goldfields; the third who remains in dogged determination, to inherit the farm, he hates; he marries once more, in the hope of creating in his old age, a son of whom, as part of himself, he can leave his property without ceasing to own it. He has not however, considered the possessive instinct of his own wife, and thus, between the three, in an atmosphere charged with hate, is fought out the three-armed battle for what has come to be the symbol of earthly possessions.

Love springs up between the wife and her step-son, but in such a battle, the most hardened wins, and love, confusing the aims of these two exacts their tragedy, while to the old man is left the barrenness of triumph.

Unlike the others, he has a God — the hard God who hates the easy gold of California, and looks with stern favor upon souls barren like his soil, and a life void of love.

It may, with reason, be argued that O'Neill's plays are too crowded with incidents, but to overlook this brings compensation; its harsh primitivism seeks to lay bare a crippling Puritanism, to insistently paint a quaint New England landscape of mind and will. It is a significant dramatic work, competently acted, elevated by the performance of Bernard Behrens, and thus very much worth seeing.

THE LISTENING POST

by ANDY WHITE



Hall Girls: Human or Divine?

At about this time a lament can usually be heard emanating from certain of the denizens of Shirreff Hall concerning the behaviour of many of the male members of the student body. These wretches, so it is alleged, actually seem to prefer the company of such "non-U" groups as nurses, or -horrors!- working girls, truly an example of "lesser breeds without the law".

MALE STUDENTS WITHOUT TASTE

The intelligence, let alone the morals of these offenders is held up to grave doubts, as the lasses form the feet of South Street vent their anger and their frustrations on the ears of all who happen to be within range at the time. In view of the heavy preponderance of male students at Dalhousie, this state of affairs seems to be a real nonsequitur, and requires an explanation.

INTROSPECTION ADVISED

Rather than blame the boys, girls, why not look at yourselves for a change? If an unexpected event keeps a boy from keeping a date, even if he calls and makes a full explanation, he is written off as little better than a cad, and might even be told, as actually happened once this year, that his outlook is "as different from mine as Germany is from France". Absolute promptness, admittedly a virtue, is demanded of him who dares to invite a Typical Hall Girl to any function from a walk around the block to a formal ball. Not only that, he is expected to be both unctuous and generous, too, and woe betide the lad who makes the frightful, unthinkable and unforgivable faux pas of making an innocuous advance on his first date! He is banished into that outer darkness where, supposedly, he will join the many others who are passing their time there, weeping, wailing and gnashing their teeth.

Yet what happens when the shoe is on the other foot, and it is the lass in question who must alter an engagement? Why, her prospective date (The Lucky fellow!) is simply given an offhand "Sorry!" and that is usually that.

NOT ONLY HALL GIRLS

The same general outlook is also typical of certain of our local ladies, who are almost inevitably members of certain well-known social organizations. These, the "golden girls" of Dalhousie Society, often affect a sort of lofty superiority, based, as far as can be made out, upon the fact that their families are usually rather comfortably off. In terms of anything that counts, from background to ability, these pretensions are, almost inevitably, without the slightest foundation.

NATO GIRLS

Another source of complaint is the so-called NATO-girl. In this connection NATO means No Action; Talk Only, and applies to the girl who acts very much the woman of the world-in Big Daddy's Canteen. However, on a date, her behavior more closely resembles a combination of Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White minus the Seven Dwarfs. At this point it must be laid down that the vast majority of male students do not expect their dates to read like one of the more lurid passages from Mell Flanders or Fanny Hill; however, the girl who acts in public as described above is only asking for the inevitable consequences; therefore, when a date gets rough, as sometimes happens, such a girl has only herself to blame.

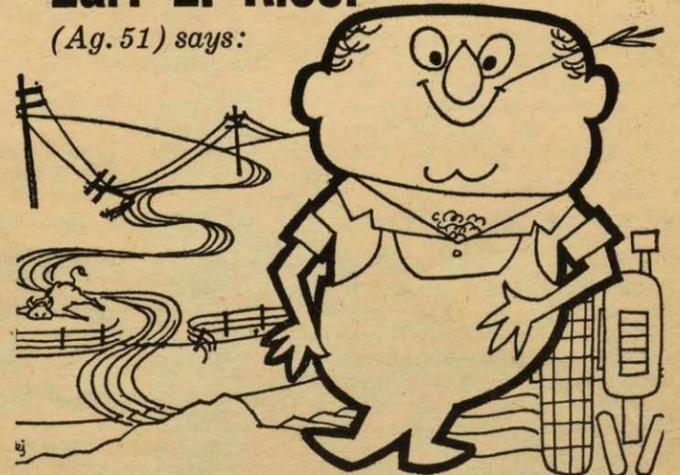
COLUMNIST NOT WOMAN-HATER

Lest we seem, by virtue of this column to be a misogynist or even worse, we hasten to say that we are able, willing, nay, eager to prove the contrary to be the case.

As has already been stated, the above description is a general one, and, as in all generalities, there are many exceptions to it. But, if you feel you are among the exceptions, fair reader, first take a long hard look at yourself in the mirror. And if the cap (-tion!) fits — wear it!

Earl E. Riser

(Ag. 51) says:



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