

"Love" — death throes of a green thumb

"Love in a Greenhouse" is now in its final death throes at the Walterdale Playhouse.

Few will feel much pain because of its run coming to an end. "Love in a Greenhouse" was either an exploration into ultra-avant-garde theatre or a disastrous attempt to conventional comedy. In either case the play was a failure.

If the play was "camp theatre" it failed because the audience has not yet acquired the necessary taste needed to fully appreciate the blending of early I Love Lucy humour and late Howdy Doody plot techniques. If the play was intended to be comedy it failed because it was trite and dull.

The play was written by an Edmontonian, Mr. Warren Graves who also directed the Walterdale

production. While it is rewarding to see an amateur playwright get his work produced, it is also rather disappointing to discover that his play is so weak. The kindest thing I can say about "Love in a Greenhouse" is that the play is very well suited for amateur productions.

Structurally the play is quite simple. It takes place in one room, during one day, and needs only six actors. The action of the play begins when would-be artist Austin and mistress Maia move into brother Brad's greenhouse-converted-studio. Brad is not too pleased with the situation because his reputation as a member of the school board, planning to run in the next provincial election may suffer. However, his unsatisfied wants-to-work wife Elly is de-

lighted. Later in the day a very rich Mrs. Henderson arrives with her daughter Lindy, whom she wants Austin to paint. Lindy, whose ideas of artistic creativity have little to do with paint, tries to seduce Austin, later discovering she cannot go through with it. Elly tries to get a job at Eatons, finds she cannot go through with it. Maia goes out with Brad. Finally, all the tensions in the relationships have been overcome and Austin proposes to Maia. End of play. Forgive me if this summary sounds a little shaky; the play was not much better.

The play might have been successfully constructed upon this rather unconvincing one day plot but it was not. The playwright did at times try to add some elements of seriousness. These were so few and so poorly done that the result was more embarrassing than illuminating. The humour of the play was wholly dependent upon overworked jokes passed off as wit and equally overworked humorous situations. Each of the scenes ended upon a weak surprise entrance. The biggest laugh of the night was when Maia entered unexpectedly and exclaimed "Shit". What marvelous humor! What subtle wit!

The acting in "Love in a Greenhouse" was as uninspired as the play was unfortunate. Eileen Yonkers (Elly) was at least a consistent if not too polished performer. John Rivet (Austin) and Bev Graham (Lindy) were at times almost noteworthy. Patricia Baker (Maia) was much too strained, too self-conscious to be very convincing. Richard Wray's role of Brad was very poorly done and Maria Wynia (Mrs. Henderson) was disastrous. All six at times stumbled over lines and no one gave the impression of being other than an isolated individual reciting on stage. The lack of unity in the play (partly though the fault of the playwright) is finally a result of the cast's inexperience or inability.

A good word must be put in concerning the setting and lighting of the production. The Walterdale theatre is not the easiest place in which to stage a play and the production here showed good taste and great ingenuity.



LOVE IN A MEDIEVAL GREENHOUSE Dig It!!!

Films

Rachel, Rachel, at the Odeon, is almost too good to be true—the directional debut of a Hollywood actor, so modestly and tastefully contrived that it renews one's hopes for an anti-Hollywood American realist cinema.

The director, of course, is Paul Newman; Rachel is his wife Joanne Woodward. The film is based on—wonder of wonders!—a Canadian novel: Margaret Lawrence's *A Jest of God*.

I've not read the novel; I understand it's set in the Canadian West. Newman keeps the locale in a sense vague, but the film is built out of exact evocations of those features of small-town life which are equally common to Illinois and Saskatchewan.

I won't say anything about the plot, which sounds much more depressing in summary than it is in fact. One tends not to notice until the end what a succession of small crucial victories Rachel has snatched from the yellowing jaws of defeat.

But I should mention that the film gets away with two techniques normally squirm-raising—disembodied "thought" speeches from the inside of the heroine's mind, and flashbacks to heroine as Sweet Little Girl—sheerly on the strength of the control of detail which Newman maintains, precise enough to lift the shadow of sentimentality bound to hover over stories of middle-aged spinster schoolteachers.

Incidentally, the film includes an appropriately cruel put-down of the sort of group-think love-fest I was waxing hostile about last week. But I was amazed at the film's suggestion that the tie-in with drugs we usually associate with the "liberal" version of this phenomenon now characterizes some "fundamentalist" groups too. Can anyone tell me if this is accurate?

Studio 82 is to be complimented on its Garbo festival, which brought us a set of five films from that legendary career. I got to four of them, reluctantly missing *Grand Hotel*.

Mata Hari is superbly preposterous, suffering a good deal from the late Roman Navarro (who was murdered, chillingly enough, the night I saw the film) as baby-faced romantic lead.

There are two great moments. Garbo and Navarro embrace, their image fades into what for a second we see as stars—only to find that it's water glistening on the trees under which a damp detective dedicated to destroying Garbo is hiding. And at the very end, as Garbo bids farewell to the blind Navarro, who is kept ignorant of the fact that she's going before a firing squad, she saves a very plummy scene by dropping into a tone more natural than anything in the film. Electrical!

Camille is a more mixed experience, much of it being so good; its descents into pathos are correspondingly hard to take. It's late Garbo; weirdly, she looks much younger, without the sternness which the other three roles variously drew from her.

What made Garbo great was her ability to suggest that beyond the imperfections of the current vehicle lay a realm in which the worn emotions she was forced to project lay shiny and renewed. *Camille* at its best suggests what we have lost in cutting ourselves off from the high romantic style, silliness transmuted into flame.

Which leaves *Ninotchka*, an unqualified gem.

Garbo was primarily a comedienne—the funny moments in her tragic pictures look more and more intentional, or at least calculated to rouse a double response—and here she had a miraculous script to work with, a comedy about Stalinism which (alone among the American films on the theme I've seen) never becomes crude or snarly.

Hard to imagine, say, a contemporary Frenchman making a comparable film about Lyndon and Dick's America. A lot of good-nature has evaporated since the '30s.

—John Thompson



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