

Exploring the aspirations of

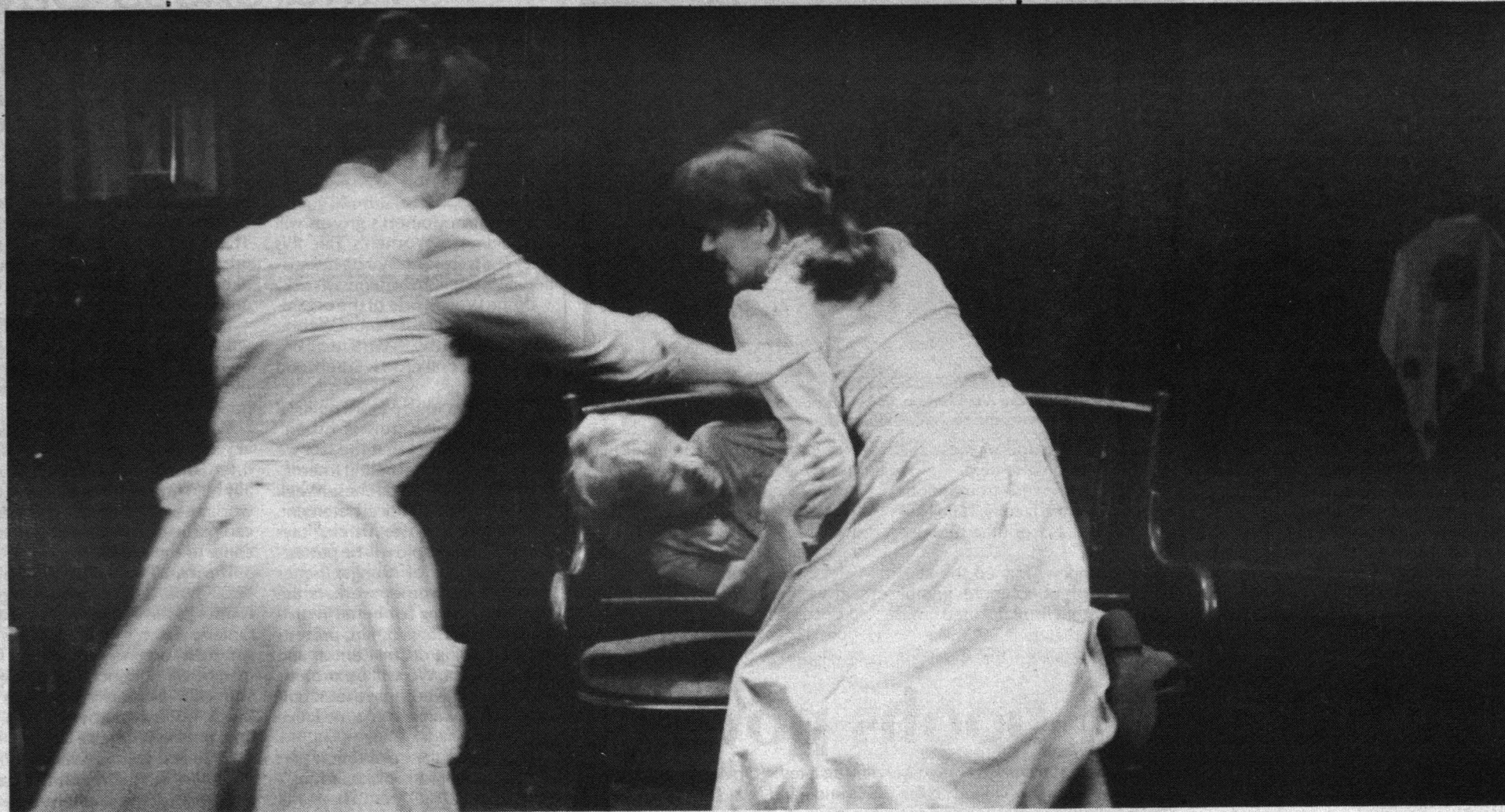


Photo Alex Miller

Exposures Citadel Theatre Rice Stage

review by Dean Bennett

"A little fire is quickly trodden out
Which being suffered, rivers cannot quench."
—Henry VI, Part 3

Exposures is William Chadwick's interpretation of the true story of Emma Orr, a disillusioned turn-of-the-century Canadian woman frantically hopping from one flickering pool of hope to another in a desperate attempt to avoid the plunge into the black reality of isolated existence in backwards Galt, Ontario; a reality that includes prying neighbors who can hear "birds fornicatin' in trees," a languid yet pompous husband, a terse teenage daughter who moonlights as the town tease, and an impudent younger son with a voice that repeatedly achieves the exact octave necessary for the sound to penetrate one's skull like a dagger.

The play recounts how Emma (played by Gale Garnett) makes her last attempt to escape the tediousness of provincial life. She pines for the bright lights of the major metropolitan areas. A photographer named Sid-

ney Trevelyan (Geoffrey Saville-Read) comes to town and sweeps Emma off her feet.

Sid wants his own studio in Montreal but he is stuck in Galt doing catalogue shots to earn the money to move to Montreal. Emma wants to go East also and to speed things up, she decides to let Sid take nude pictures of her. Sid promises her that there's big money in these kinds of pictures and Emma wants out via the quickest way possible.

Sid agrees to retouch the photos so that Emma is unrecognizable. Unfortunately, before he can do this, the pictures are stolen and presumably fall into the hands of Emma's husband, Tony (David Main) and his frothing pack of prudish relations.

Emma has taken the ultimate gamble to save herself but loses. Although no stranger to running away with strange men, Emma has now gone too far, shaming herself and her family while Sid has taken the 2:15 to la Belle Province. The only route left is death and Emma goes full fare.

Gale Garnett turns in a splendid performance in the lead role. Her acting style is impressive for the little things she does, the subtle mannerisms that lend believability to the characters she portrays. For example, in her first meeting with Sid, Emma unconsciously wipes her hand on her skirt before shaking hands. The play is set in hot, dusky Ontario, and it's only natural that

palms would get sweaty with work. Garnett knows her part and is always conscious of what's happening around her character. These kinds of gestures, therefore, come easy to her.

Garnett's performance is rivalled only by that of Christopher Moore as Jim Allison. Jim is the backward country farmhand in the service of the Orr family.

Although participating in a secondary role, Moore almost steals the show with an endearing performance that never slips into the easy stereotype. Jim is the hard worker possessing little schooling and few friends. He makes no enemies and his only request from life is that he be left alone to work the garbage cart with his father. "Gentleman Jim" is the title given him by Emma and it is certainly fitting. He disturbs no one yet is still chided and abused by members of Emma's family. This is why we feel vicariously satisfied when he smacks Emma's daughter Maggie (played by Myfanwy Meilen) after she teased and taunted him.

The structure of the play itself, however, proves its demise. There are too many scene changes, too many pauses in the action to allow the plot to build. Taken by themselves, the scenes are well acted and directed, but they don't come together to form a tight piece of theatre. What this play could do with is some quick edits.

Also it appears that the normally technically impeccable Citadel fell down for this performance. It was interesting to listen to the Victrola magically begin playing when Emma played with the kerosene lamp or opened the front door. This transgression was further compounded during a set change in the first act. The lights went down on the actors and a blue light came up on the running crew as the duo of singers — Alix Bean and Michael Becker — crooned on in the dark. Oh, well, nice to know the Citadel is human, too.

The principal theme of *Exposures* is the nature of traps and how dreaming can only perpetuate them. Unfortunately, this theme is presented in too straightforward a manner and leaves little to conjecture. Maggie complains that living in Galt is a trap and that she would do just about anything to escape. Jim, in a discussion with the son, Norman (Spencer Mather) pronounces that he hates to see animals in traps and if he sees an animal in a trap he shoots it. The foreshadowing is crystal clear.

Exposures is a play of anachronisms. Just as Emma's collection of classical literature seems out of place on a far-removed farm, so both she and her dreams fade in harsh glare of her disconsolate existence.

Exposures runs through to Mar. 17.



GATEWAY LITERARY CONTEST

CASH PRIZES FOR EACH OF THREE CATEGORIES:

Short poem — maximum 32 lines
Short story — maximum 3000 words
Long poem — maximum 200 lines

FIRST PRIZE (each category) — \$150
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RULES

1. Open to all persons attending a post-secondary educational institution in Canada, except the employees of the Students' Union of the University of Alberta and writers who have earned more than two thousand dollars from their craft in 1984.
2. All entries must be typed with double-spacing on a single side of good quality bond paper. The name, address, and phone number of the author must appear on each page submitted.
3. All entries must be submitted by noon, March 14, 1985. No late entries will be accepted.
4. Each writer may submit a total of three entries in aggregate.
5. Submissions may be in French or English.
6. The winning entries and additional entries selected by the judges will appear in the Gateway Literary Supplement on March 28, 1985. The Gateway shall hold only first North American serial rights to any entries that appear in this issue. All other rights will remain with the author.
7. Entries shall not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
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