

Letter should be returned to sender

Letter From Wingfield Farm
By R.D. Needles
At the Palmerston Library Theatre
Closes Saturday

By LORRAINE WHELAN

Two weeks ago, theatre designer and former York professor Philip Silver delivered a "Prime Time" lecture which stressed the absence of characterization in works by new playwrights. The lecture seemed particularly applicable to Dan Needles' first play *Letter from Wingfield Farm*.

The play is about the recollections of a country newspaper editor and the reenactment of incidents which his former boss from the city relates to him through letters. Or is it? The play could equally be about how a former city-dweller, (who also happens to be an eccentric businessman) living happily on a useless farm writing letters to a former employee, now editor of a weekly country paper. Ostensibly, the play seems to be saying that people become slightly moronic if they move to the country.

Regardless of what the play may or may not try to be, it doesn't come off as being much. It is not the story of a wealthy businessman's reasons for leaving the rat race and finding a haven, despite the struggle, on Wingfield Farm, nor is it the story of this man revealing his problems and joys to a close friend—it is made explicit that the editor had been a mere underling in the city.

Enough about the plot, or lack thereof. The worst problem with the script is its dull repetition: the letter reenactments had the same intensity (imagine a series of one-liners as being intense); but worst of all, there was little or no differentiation between the two main characters, the editor and Walt (the businessman-farmer).

Granted this is a one-man show, but even K. Reed Needles' acting couldn't hide the poor characterization. Perhaps the editor and Walt were meant to be twin souls; at least then, their inexplicable arrival to the same area, lifestyle, happiness with simplicity, and basic personality would make sense. Quite simply, not enough information is given about either men to be a character study, and not enough causes are available to give reason for the effects.



K. Reed Needles, the lone wolf of *Letter From Wingfield Farm*: good acting, bad play.

Being an editor himself, Needles should have applied some of this skill to *Letter from Wingfield Farm* and showed more concern with writing a play, instead of a poor attempt at theatrical stand-up comedy.

Cockroach's critics critiqued candidly

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Drama has always had to concern itself with credibility. Even non-realistic theatre must be to a degree, believable, and the characters true to life. Alan Williams, the British-born playwright who achieved fame for his outrageous *The Cockroach Trilogy*, believes that one can take the credibility issue too far. Williams feels that the criticism leveled against his latest play, *The Warlords of Willowdale* is a case in point. Critics have called the play "skin deep," and claim that the play's characters are improbable portraits of Willowdale suburbanites.

"People come to the play and leave saying 'I don't see what was so Willowdale about them.'" Williams says that these people are missing the point, that the setting was chosen primarily because of its name, which would smack of the suburbs even to the uninitiated observer. The locale was meant to imply a sort of suburban universal, to be a metaphor for a particular type of person and a particular set of values. He feels that a playwright should focus on the strength of characterization and that excessive attention to realism and regional idiosyncrasies can be counterproductive.

Williams, a nominee for Britain's 'most promising playwright' award, stands by his work, saying that it is better than its critically-acclaimed predecessors. He feels it has a more universal message, and that it doesn't rely on audience participation for its impact. Williams says that too many plays rely on cheap laughs to entertain the audience, that too many playwrights throw in redundancies in an effort to make the play popular. *Warlord* avoids the overdone bourgeois cynicism and focuses on the human being beneath the seemingly bland exterior.

"Behind every seemingly boring person are these incredible struggles about life, etc. Get one of these people going and they're unstoppable," he says.

Williams feels that Canadian audiences are "too damned sophisticated for their own good." In paying too much attention to detail and style, they lose sight of the deeper thematic dynamics of the play. "Canadian audiences tend to judge characters by what they say. This

is really a difficulty with this play because the characters are lying all the time. They just don't see what's behind it."

While Williams sees some scripting problems in the new play he feels it is well acted and basically sound—he sees the audience's problems as self-generated.

"I can see how the play might get some people's back up because we're not allowing them to be elitist. We avoid playing to their self image as social critics, and they don't like that." Williams resents the idea that he must flatter his audience before they accept what they see as realistic. With *Warlord* he feels that the viewer has been rightly deprived of that luxury. Without a lower class metaphor for their own difficulties, the audience is forced to accept the problems as their own.

Perhaps it is the Canadian obsession with a cultural identity that makes geographical and stylistic concerns distracting. "I don't think there is really any such thing as Canadian theatre," says Williams, "and that gives drama in this country a lot of freedom. I don't know why you're so obsessed with the idea of a national character. Canadians wouldn't know what to do with one when they found it."

In *The Warlord of Willowdale*, Williams used a style of writing pioneered in Britain by Mike Leigh in the late '60s. Characters are created by the actors and the plot falls into place around the relationships they forsee. Williams, whose one man *Cockroach* performances have shown him to be an accomplished actor, was attracted to the style because of what he has learned in a dual role.

"It's great because you can write something, and you know it is going to be said exactly like you want it to be said. It can take days to teach an actor that." Not only does the scripting method cut down on production problems but it also helps to generate a good deal of the play's dramatic situations. In developing *Warlord* the actors found that the characters they created would end up hating each other, and determined the play's ultimate ending.

Williams' play, *The Warlord of Willowdale* is currently playing at the BackSpace at Theatre Passe Muraille.

Dead director's better half dashes debut with discordant Dirty Dishes

Dirty Dishes (La Jument Vapeur)
Directed by Joyce Bunel
French with English subtitles
Carlton Cineplex, opens tomorrow

By IAN CLARKE

Director Joyce Bunuel, wife of late Spanish director Luis Bunuel has created a very disturbing film in *Dirty Dishes*, but for all the wrong reasons. Wave after wave of unoriginality crashes down like so many reruns of *Gilligan's Island*. It's swamped with incredibly predictable dialogue and retrained dramatic conflicts. But the real nightmare begins when you realize this film takes itself seriously.

What might have been an intelligent portrayal of a housewife's disillusionment with domestic life is transmogrified into a kind of

National Geographic treatment of the many pertinent problems raised by modern feminists.

Armelle (Carole Laure) aspires to become more than a woman who cleans up after hubby and the kids. Her idea of a night out has been reduced to a trip to the laundromat. Despair seems to permeate every nuance of her existence. We have seen her face before, notably in *A Woman Under the Influence*. Armelle acquires an illicit lover to gratify her loneliness and not only neglects household duties, but declares nuclear war on her kitchen appliances. The fact that she develops (within an unbelievably brief period of time) into an ostensible lunatic naturally undermines her frustration as being a statement against a chauvanistic society. Her psychological stability is at the forefront of our concerns. Perhaps her husband is a part-time creep, but

her pyrotechnic breakdown is no less reprehensible, especially in regard to their children.


Carole Laure is a strong contender for the Meryl Streep/Jill Clayburgh award for uncontrollable weeping. Her performance (aside from the waterworks) is sincere but debilitated by the shallow dimensions of the script. She must have winced when first saying such a line as, "After spending eight years in the kitchen, I have not seen one sunset."

Director Bunuel is unobtrusive to the point of weariness. The camera work is in keeping with the sluggish narrative.

Only a feminist who paraded Helen Reddy's vacuous *I Am Woman* anthem as contributing to the Movement could realize *Dirty Dishes* as anything more than simplistic fluff. It is better seen as a disposable made-for-TV movie than an appreciable cinematic production.



Carole Laure.



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