

A Touch Of The Poet

By Eugene O'Neill

Play no. 162

Opening show: 28/01/1959

Translated by: Jonathan Ratosh

Directed by: Peter Frye

Songs arranged by: Zvi Rosenn

Dances by: Ruth Harris

Décor by: Peter Frye

Costumes designed by: Moshe Ben-Shaul

Cast

Mickey Maloy: Pesach Gutmark

Jamie Cregan: Avner Hizkiyahu

Sara Melody: Miriam Zohar

Nora Melody: Bat-Ami

Cornelius Melody: Shimon Fninkel

Deborah (Mrs. Henry Harford): Ruth Schalk

Dan Roche: Rafi Rakowski

Paddy O'Dowd: Albert Cohen

Patch Riley: Naftali Binshtok

Nicholas Gadsby: Baruch David/ Shmuel Rodensky

Act one

Melody's Inn, situated in a little village a few miles from Boston, Massachusetts, USA. The time is July 1828, at 9 am. Cregan, an Irishman who served in the British Forces against Napoleon as a corporal, is talking to Maloy the barman about the past career of Melody the innkeeper, who had been his commanding officer. Staying at the inn is Simon, member of an important family, who has left home and become ill, and is now being looked after by Nora and Sara Melody's wife and daughter respectively. Maloy tells Sara that a distinguished-looking woman has called at the inn. Sara fears that this may be the mother of Simon, with whom she is in love. Her mother enters and they start planning how to overcome their lack of money. Sara grumbles about her father, who lives beyond his means and spends large sums on his thoroughbred horse when they are so badly off. Her father Melody appears and reminds them that it is the anniversary of the Battle of Talavera in which he took part; and that the occasion must be probably celebrated. His daughter Sara tells him that she loves Simon. Their conversation is charged with an emotional tension and the daughter's contempt for her father's illusions can be felt. The father approves of his daughter's choice, remarking that Simon is good enough for his own family, even though he is a "Yankee".

Act Two (Two hours later)

Melody is alone, bitter and disappointed, and naturally drunk. He cannot feel properly at ease in his home. Sara returns from the shop, where she has difficulty succeeded in deferring payment of their account. The argument

between father and daughter is resumed. When Melody is once more alone Deborah, Simon's mother, appears. Melody, not knowing who she is, begins bragging and makes violent love to her. Nora and Sara catch him in the middle of his ridiculous action. Deborah Harford goes upstairs to visit her son while Nora and Sara apprehensively await the outcome of the visit. Melody goes to his room in order to change into the old uniform "of those days". Deborah meeting Sara tells her about the cruel Harford family, and warns her not to marry any of them. Cregan appears, and he and Melody grow drunk in honour of the past.

Act Three (Eight p.m)

Melody is gloriously drunk and loses control of himself. He tells Sara that Simon has asked him for her hand. In his intoxication he expresses his opposition to the match, because he feels sorry for Simon with good family background and wishes to save him from his own sad fate; for a farmer's daughter had caught him too just by becoming pregnant through him. Sara, no less proud and obstinate than her father, tells him firmly that she does not intend to give Simon up at any price. Melody remains alone, declaiming Byron's poems to himself. Gadshy the lawyer appears on behalf of the Harford family and offers Melody a considerable sum in return for "giving up" Simon. He is driven from the inn with contempt, and the insulted Melody forbids the members of his family to meet Simon. He then sets out for the Harford mansion to challenge Simon's father to a duel, as befits gentlemen of honour in his opinion.

Act Four (Midnight)

Nora is waiting for her husband to return from the Harford home. Sara appears and tells her that Simon has offered to marry her after their first night of love together. Simon with his "touch of the poet" is now planning to become a small-scale manufacturer. Cregan brings back Melody, injured, beaten and unconscious, and relates that Melody was beaten by the servants of Harford, and thrown out by the police. In the middle of his story Melody comes to and dashes into the stable. The sound of a shot is heard. He returns and announces that he has shot his thoroughbred. Hitherto he has carefully maintained his upper-class diction and manner of speech, but now he begins talking to his wife and daughter in their own fashion. He tells them that with the horse the nobly-born Major Melody has perished, and a true farmer's child has been born. His daughter Sara, who in her heart had prided herself on her father's noble origin, cannot accept the change that has taken place. While Melody goes into the next room to drink the health of the Democrat candidate, his daughter burst into a fit of bitter weeping.