A raw, realistic play about social injustice and exploitation

The Van Paemel Family

CYRIEL BUYSSE

'The Van Paemel Family' is a naturalistic play about a family of tenant farmers who jump through hoops to avoid utter ruin, but are still overwhelmed by misery. Sickness and death, rape, illegitimate children and bankruptcy – the family is spared nothing. In 'The Van Paemel Family', Cyriel Buysse addresses the social exploitation and immense poverty of the rural population.

A moving play

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Buysse offers no solutions to the conflict, but merely paints a picture of how the farmer becomes ruined and his family falls apart as a result of socioeconomic conditions. He shows how powerless the older generations are, who accept their fate as a punishment from God. But there is a glimmer of hope: a couple of the children refuse to accept their fate and are able to escape by emigrating to America.

Generational conflict is timeless. However, this is not the only thing that makes this play still so engaging today. There is also the mixture of profound tragedy and Buysse's typical, humoristic elements that provide some relief. This 1902 play has since found a firm place within theatre repertoire and was adapted for a 1986 film with a script by Hugo Claus.

CYRIEL BUYSSE

Het Gezin Van Paemel

drama in vier bedrijven

Gent, Volksdrukkerij, Hoogpoort

AUTHOR

Cyriel Buysse (1859-1932) became known as a naturalist writer and playwright in the tradition of Émile Zola. His novels and plays are infused with a deep sympathy for the common man and his fate, which he describes vividly and realistically. In his later work he evolved from a naturalistic narrator par excellence to a true pioneer of the modern Flemish novel. Photo Collection Letterenhuis, Antwerp

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