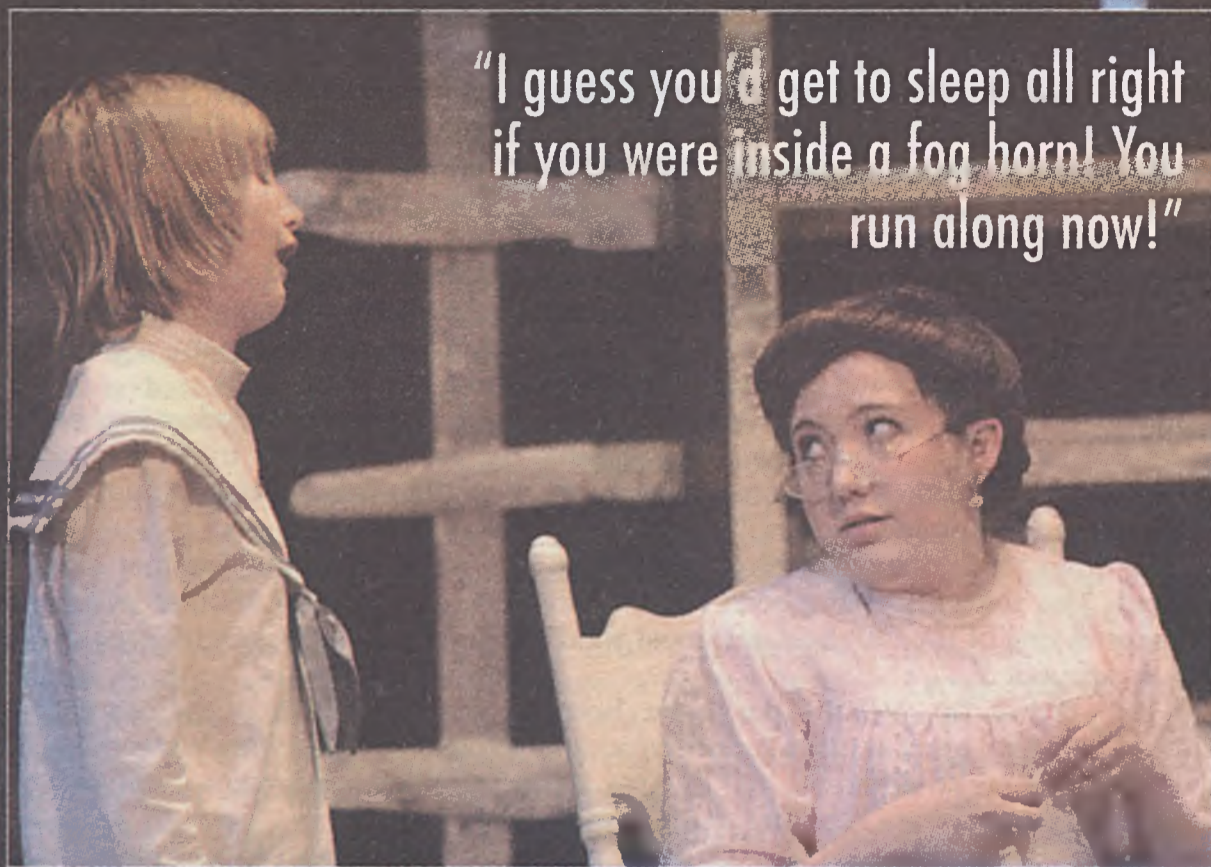


AH, WILDERNESS

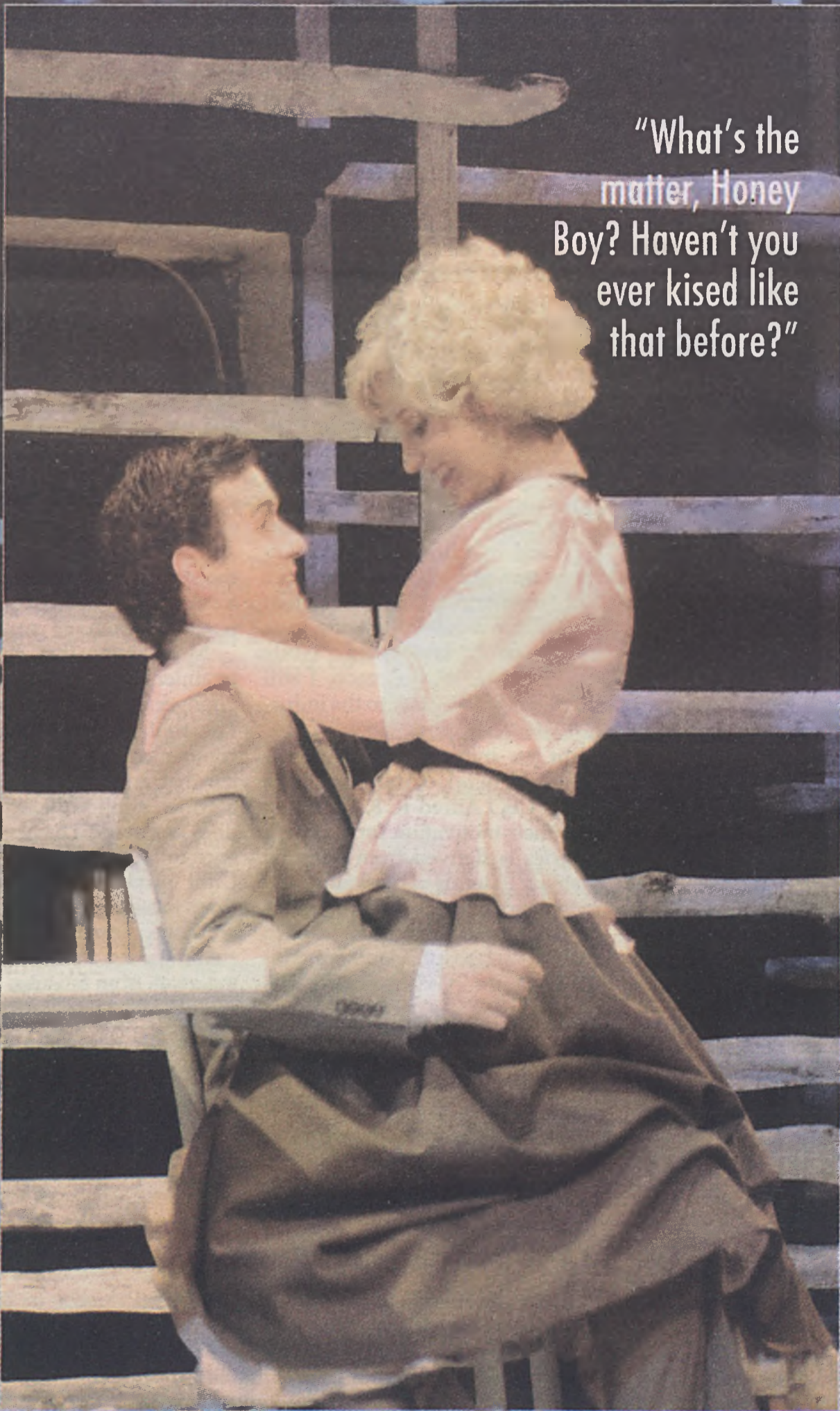
A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread – and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness –
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise now!

-Omar Khayyam

STORY BY
Simon Kelly



"I guess you'd get to sleep all right
if you were inside a fog horn! You
run along now!"



"What's the
matter, Honey
Boy? Haven't you
ever kissed like
that before?"

Are you exuberant, yet at your wit's end? Are you exhilarated, yet terrified by the thought that everything you love will be wrenched away, perhaps by the ones that you love the most? Are you, or have you ever been, a 17-year-old growing up in small town America?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then the Guilford College theatre studies department's production of Eugene O'Neill's "Ah Wilderness," debuting this Friday, Nov. 9, in Sternberger auditorium, should resonate for you on some level.

The play, which derives its title from the lines excerpted from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam above, chronicles the experience of one New England family's Fourth of July in 1906, capturing O'Neill's rumination on his own youth and coming of age. Centering on the hopes, fears, and romantic quandaries of the young Richard Miller, Ah Wilderness will appeal to anyone who has ever felt suffocated by the banalities of middle class family life.

"It's a memory play, so we've made the production abstract, like a dream," said David Hammond, the play's director and professor of theatre studies at Guilford and artistic director emeritus of Playmakers Repertory Company at UNC Chapel Hill.

To contribute to this lucid dream aesthetic, the set is minimal, allowing the greatest emphasis to be placed O'Neill's dialogue. While light-hearted and comedic in comparison to that of his other more tragic works, it is also full of emotional poignancy.

"I've never seen anything that made me think more, or remember more about my own childhood experience," said Derek Loehr, a senior theatre studies major who plays the role of the father.

While its themes of love, angst, and family tension would seem to place it in the category of trivial melodrama, "Ah Wilderness" should not be dismissed as a nostalgic period piece.

"Ah Wilderness" is full of sentiment but (is) not sentimental," Hammond said. "It is not romanticized either, which is often the interpretation lent to this play."

Written during one of the rare moments of bliss in O'Neill's life, who had rather rough family history himself, Ah Wilderness can be seen as a true departure from the usual themes of despair and disillusion in his previous works. O'Neill once described the play as "a sort of wishing out loud ... the way I would have liked my childhood to have been."

"The brilliance of the play is that in the character of the father, everybody can find their father, and in the character of the mother, everyone finds their mother," Loehr said. "That is why this play is so affecting and so beautiful."

The entire cast is enthusiastic and invested in making this a memorable performance – for them, opening night couldn't come any sooner.

"I think the play is about people connecting with one another," said Hannah Jeffrey, a senior theatre studies major who also has a role in the play, "which is why people should take time to support community theater."

The Guilford College players are no amateurs on the stage; each character is rendered with tact and insight, no matter how big or small.

In keeping with this spirit, when asked who the lead roles in the play were, Hammond looked around the room and said, "Oh, they're pretty much all leads."

Tickets are \$5
Guilford students admitted for free

Center: Richard, played by Scott Lyman, reaches for the moon while contemplating a turbulent evening.

Top Left: Young Tommy, attempts to convince his mother, Mrs. Miller (Allison Martin) to let him stay up late for the Fourth of July festivities.

Left: In the back room of the disreputable Pleasant Beach House, Belle (Jordan Spoon) works her charms on the naïve Richard (Scott Lyman).

Top Right: Mr. Miller, played by Derek Loehr, delivers a forboding letting from his son's romantic interest.

Middle Right: Arthur, played by Jacob Martin, warns Uncle Sid (Ryan Furlough) to behave homoably around Lily (Caitlin Allen).

Bottom Right: Uncle Sid repents to Lily about his drunken misconduct.