



The House with the Green Shutters

George Douglas Brown

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A vigorous antidote to the homely, self-satisfied utopian outlook as portrayed in the 'kailyard tradition' of writers such as S.R. Crockett, John Watson and James Barrie, it offers instead a bleak and uncompromising vision in which there is no united community, only cruel gossip, the failure of youth and a yawning absence of faith in anything. Nowhere is this more evident than in Brown's fictional Barbie, where the hated and envied Gourlay, the successful, domineering and powerful local businessman, looks down on the local people both physically and metaphorically from the house he has built on the brae overlooking the village. The House With the Green Shutters is the story of his downfall, which is set in motion by the arrival of the affable yet corrupt and self-seeking Wilson, who gradually squeezes Gourlay out of one thing after another. Gourlay, an honest man despite his grimness and inflexibility, cannot compete, and his fate is sealed. Outwardly a symbol of order and control, the house with the green shutters is chaotic within; at its centre is a vacuum - 'the gaping place where the warmth should have been' - around which swirls a maelstrom of anger, hatred and resentment. As the story unfolds, Gourlay's son, intelligent and sensitive yet stifled by maternal love and paternal domination, slides emotionally and temperamentally out of control, and it is he who is responsible for the final act in the tragic sequence of events - killing his father in a fit of drunken rage. Although a powerful expose of late Victorian society, many of the criticisms inherent in The House With the Green Shutters are as apt today as they were a hundred years ago.

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