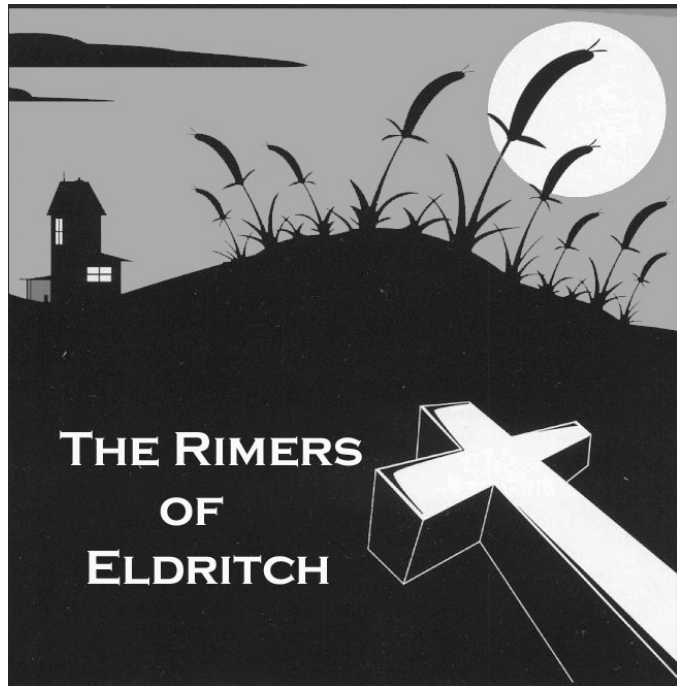


Lanford Wilson's



A Playgoer's Guide

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."
– Jeremiah 8:20

The story

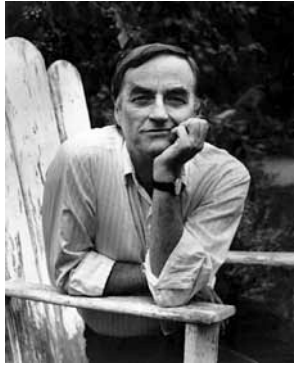
The Rimers of Eldritch concerns the tiny town of Eldritch and its citizens' search for answers in a man's murder and the sexual assault of a teenage girl. The play's plot, at first glance, appears simple: a man has been murdered and a girl assaulted. The mystery: Are these crimes related? Who is the murder victim? Who is his killer and what were the circumstances surrounding the murder? As the play progresses, Wilson paints a picture of a tiny midwestern town where everything is not quite as it seems: A middle-aged woman falls in love with the young man working in her café. Another woman deals with her senile mother who is obsessed with ominous visions of evil present in the town of Eldritch. Young men torment the village derelict. A tender relationship develops between a young man and a dreamy, crippled girl. The events of the play occur around an ongoing court trial as intermittent flashbacks that serve to uncover the events leading up to the murder.

The play is set in the south-central portion of Missouri where Lanford Wilson grew up. The name itself comes from the town of Eldritch, which is not far from Lebanon, Lanford Wilson's hometown.

Because of its setting in a small, American town, the play has frequently been compared with Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, William Inge's *Picnic*, and Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*. Wilson writes about community with such an edge an audience or reader will never forget the dark and deadened atmosphere of Eldritch.

The material that Wilson uses in the *Rimers of Eldritch* is all ordinary but Wilson organizes it into a baroque chamber piece, in which scenes and themes are repeated and enlarged on, voices speak and echo, and lines move back and forth in time. The effect projects the quality of the people, not the minor details of the plot. With this play Lanford Wilson explores false morality and loss of innocence in this small mid-western town. Throughout the play, Wilson uses images such as rusty metal and chipped paint as metaphors to show physical and spiritual decay. His town is filled with hypocrisy, devastation, pervasive moral corruption and formidable apathy.

Lanford Wilson



Born on April 13, 1937, in Lebanon, Missouri, Lanford Wilson began writing at the University of Chicago in 1959 after enrolling in a playwriting class. After graduation he moved to New York City when he became involved with Café Cino, a tiny coffeehouse Off-Off Broadway that presented edgy works. His first play, *So Long at the Fair*, was produced at Café Cino in 1963. In 1969, Wilson co-founded Circle Repertory Company (see more information below) with a group of friends.

The company's first major success was Wilson's *Hot L Baltimore* (1973). It ran for 1,100 performances and eventually transferred to Broadway. Other works include *Talley's Folly* (1979), *Burn This* (1987) and *Redwood Curtain* (1993).

An important figure in modern drama, he is a master of realistic dialogue in which monologue, conversation, and direct address to the audience overlap. Frequent themes include decay, alienation, dissolution, loneliness, loss and crumbling illusions, and he addresses such issues as American conformity, family conflicts, and the plight of social outcasts.

Wilson won the 1967 Vernon Rice Award for *Rimers of Eldritch* as an outstanding contribution to off-Broadway. *Hot L Baltimore* won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Outer Critics' Circle Award, and the Obie Award. Wilson's 1979 play, *Talley's Folly*, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Wilson still writes today, his most recent play being 2001's *Rain Dance*.

The Bible Belt

In the United States, roughly defined regions that have a feature in common are colloquially called "belts", after the article of clothing. The common feature may be cultural, economical, geographical, or

some combination of the three. The term is applied metaphorically to contiguous geographic regions; it is unrelated to the geologic or astronomical use of the term. Some regions in the United States are not formally defined; they frequently overlap each other and have vaguely defined borders. Many "belts" are neologisms coined by tourism or commercial promoters or by writers ad hoc.

The first such coinage was the Bible Belt, which has a clear east-west orientation, perhaps contributing to the use of "belt" as a metaphor. A Bible Belt is an area in which Evangelical Protestant Christianity is a pervasive or dominant part of the culture. The best-known Bible Belt covers a number of Midwestern and Southern states in the United States; other countries, including Canada, Australia and some parts of Europe also have regions whose culture can be described in similar terms. The name derives from the (perceived) overriding importance of the Christian Bible among Evangelical Christian thought and practice.

eldritch, adj : suggesting the operation of supernatural influences; "an eldritch screech" – dictionary.com

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