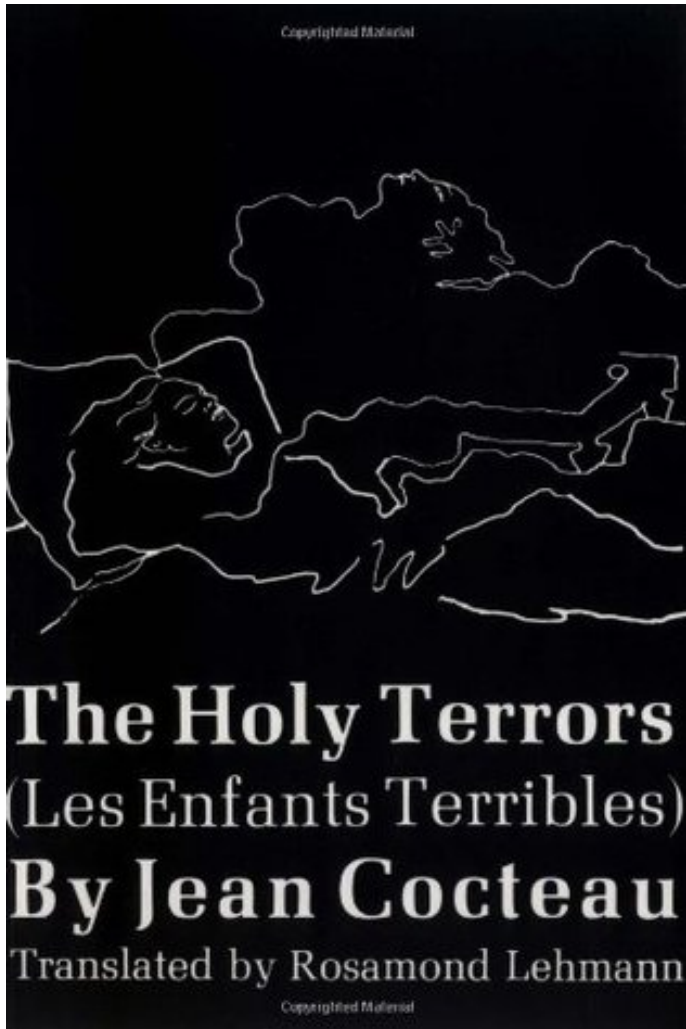

Jean Cocteau

The Holy Terrors



Title: The Holy Terrors

Author: Jean Cocteau

Format: Paperback

Language: English

Pages: 184

Publisher: New Directions Publishing Corporation (NY), 0

ISBN: 0811200213

Format: PDF / Kindle / ePub

Size: 5.6 MB

Download: allowed

Description

Les Enfants Terribles holds an undisputed place among the classics of modern fiction. Written in a French style that long defied successful translation - Cocteau was always a poet no matter what he was writing - the book came into its own for English-language readers in 1955 when the present version was completed by Rosamond Lehmann. It is a masterpiece of the art of translation of which the Times Literary Supplement said: "It has the rare merit of reading as though it were an English original."

Miss Lehmann was able to capture the essence of Cocteau's strange, necromantic imagination and to bring fully to life in English his story of a brother and sister, orphaned in adolescence, who build themselves a private world out of one shared room and their own unbridled fantasies. What started in games and laughter became for Paul and Elisabeth a drug too magical to resist. The crime which finally destroyed them has the inevitability of Greek tragedy.

Illustrated with twenty of Cocteau's own drawings.

Insightful reviews

Nicole~: **3.5 stars**

A Bizarre Story-

In 'Les Enfants Terribles', Cocteau gives the reader a melodramatic view of adolescence, void of innocence and filled with darkness; a peculiar relationship between brother and sister of excessive indulgence, petulance, childish pettiness and selfishness. Paul and Elisabeth contrive and control their fantasy games in the 'Room' that cocoons them from the world, a place where they feel most alive - a comfort zone. Their individual existences are simultaneously symbiotic and parasitic - a constant 'give and take' revolves around them, matched in strength by the innate need of one to feed off the other.

Their games are initially mischievous, innocuous, anywhere from benign tricks and silly fights to squabbling and name-calling, making faces at strangers and petty thievery, one-upping the other with ever-increasing risk. The ridiculous behaviors don't cease into their adulthood but rather become more frenzied, more sadomasochistic, more psychotic.

The story's strange interplays have the resemblance of drug-induced hallucinations, which might well have been intentional on the author's part. For example, one might recognize an allegorical suggestion at the beginning of the story, in the *snow* scene where Dargelos, whom Paul admires, injures him with a *snowball* blow to the chest, leaving him permanently and morbidly ill. His days are spent in bed, wasting away. He would suffer trance-like states and sleepwalk at night. The end is also tragic partly due to a 'poisonous substance', again, provided by Dargelos.

Paul's voice was loud, aggressive. "Glorious stuff, poison! I was always dying to get

hold of some when I was at school." (It would have been more accurate to say that Dargelos was obsessed by poisons and that he, Paul, had copied Dargelos.)

Paul and Elisabeth's unity and possessiveness goes undeniably beyond the boundaries of sibling love or rivalry. When one tries to leave the 'cocoon', the other must invariably follow. For instance, when Elisabeth marries her wealthy fiancé and moves into his mansion, she must make a room for Paul, who would fashion it to duplicate the old 'Room'. Later on, as Agatha confesses her love of Paul, Elisabeth vengefully retaliates like a jealous lover.

There is an unmistakably apparent 'forbidden' sexual element to the characters' relationships, starting with the Paul -Dargelos connection in the opening scene. *"He was looking for Dargelos, whom he loved. It was the worse for him because he was condemned to love without forewarning of love's nature. His sickness was unremitting and incurable-a state of desire, chaste, innocent of aim or name."*

With Paul and Elisabeth, an incestuous undertone is strongly present.

"...Elisabeth and Paul took possession of the bedroom, leaving the bathroom to Gérard. By nightfall, the situation had deteriorated; Elisabeth wanted a bath and so did Paul. They sulked, raged, turned on one another, flung doors open, slammed them again at random, and ended finally at opposite ends of the same boiling bath, with Paul in fits of laughter."



From the illustrated Kindle version
The Holy Terrors (Les Enfants Terribles) by Jean Cocteau

Freud is so present in this novel. The book comes to a suspenseful conclusion, still leaving the reader a little perplexed about its purpose.

Cocteau's strange tale may portray some very dark and self-serving human behaviors, some of which, for an adolescent, might be misdemeanors easily overlooked; the adult, however, might be sent to Purgatory, a more permanent tragic end.

In an alternate view, 'Les Enfants Terribles' may possibly be the author's psychological comparison of destructive behaviors from childhood to adulthood - that an adult is the malignant version of its younger self; the behaviors don't really change over time, just that their outcomes become lethal.

Amber: I get the feeling that Cocteau started with one idea in mind and it slowly transformed, like the visions in his films, into something else.

Still, this is no bad thing. This entire novella reads like a kind of beautiful nightmare, full of strange images, menacing metaphors, and pre-Freudian psychologies.

What I liked best about it, though, was the pitch-perfect representation of child consciousness. Not idyllic, not angelic, not scatter-brained and lisping - but cunning, self-absorbed, trivial, competitive, magnifying, obsessive, instinctively territorial and often cruel. Elisabeth and Paul do not belong to society. They have been sequestered away from it and are thus, like most children half their age, human in the raw.

How Cocteau has woven this raw instinctive humanity with illusion, beauty, and metaphor I suppose is his particular gift. The first chapter was a half-sketched slog, but beyond that - I loved this. Did Melville do a film version? I have to see that now too.

MJ Nicholls: First, Cocteau's sumptuous, surreal little pearl of a novella, in peerless translation from Rosamond Lehmann. Next, Gilbert Adair's affectionate rip-off [The Holy Innocents](#) (spot the pun). Next, Bernardo Bertalucci's film [The Dreamers](#), with a screenplay by Gilbert Adair. Next, Gilbert Adair turns his screenplay (or re-edits his original novel) into a novelisation of [The Dreamers](#). Not a dud in the bunch. An Olympic relay of sultry, challenging art. What better?

Amerynth: I completely loved Jean Cocteau's "The Holy Terrors" -- such impressive writing quite elevates what's a bit of basic tale so it turns into magical. The novel facilities on Elizabeth and Paul, siblings who've a totally beside the point relationship. they're normally except the area and fully enmeshed in every one other-- quite a bit in order that they by no means appear to develop up yet proceed to play a adolescence video game of frustrating one another up to possible, with disastrous consequences. There are a few actually great pictures elicited by means of this book. it really is one i feel i will certainly get extra out of with one other reading. relatively stress-free stuff.

Phillip Frey: sturdy outdated Jean Cocteau; by no means comprehend what to anticipate from him. The Holy Terrors (Les Enfants Terribles) is a fantastic read, with Cocteau having performed his personal illustrations. This tale of a brother and sister ends up in unforeseen tragedy.

Alejandro Sosa: Cocteau is a type of writers which have been accused, in accordance with his Paris evaluate interview, of being very corpulent. i feel the 'corpulent police' are regularly at the glance out for sentences showing long, maybe a semi colon rather than an entire cease and those are people who simply appear to govern our industries - natural pencil pushers. in the event you do not enable your self to be taken on Cocteau's lengthy and languid descriptions, info and digressions than one has neglected the point. Cocteau has to take the reader on a web page description approximately this room, or a facet of it, as that's what he does. His paintings constantly sounds like poetry, simply because he's attempting to, or turns out to, are looking to describe a dream in a sense. In that his phrases are constantly pulling in the direction of a better motif of beauty. American writers, for example, will be simply as digressive, yet Cocteau

does it with a extra seductive edge. A author equivalent to David Foster Wallace used corpulence for whatever completely different, yet essentially an analogous reason: to set a temper and describe the recommendations that stir complexly of their minds, extra simply. the place i believe this ebook is this kind of attractive piece of paintings is in it is defiance; it wishes a leeway for digressions because the tale is one immense digression - one by no means quite is familiar with what the most element is. And it is because this novel is so startling and this kind of delicate piece of work, albeit taboo subject. The e-book is in simple terms discussing concerns concerning siblings, yet what happens is that we obtain rules on marriage, suicide and jealousy. Cocteau is a enjoyable Artist. His work, similar to his paintings, and the drawings that went with the replica i've got are full of life and flowing with motion. i really imagine that as writers develop into extra David Foster Wallace esque and extra ruled via advanced neurosis, Cocteau will be learn instead, probably on bended knee. New novels infrequently and authentically posses this a lot style. In his soul the writer used to be a poet, and this manifests in each note of this prose. Why is that this idea now not governing extra of modern-day literature? Why can we have a lot paintings that lacks style? it sounds as if while I learn prose, equivalent to this, i might like to take a chair and simply sit down on this planet created by way of the writer. i can't say this of many present writers. aside from: Amis, Zadie Smith, so much books on Dalkey Archive and maybe a number of more, i will not reflect on correct now. This booklet will be pressured upon those writers. convey us your soul!

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