



**A TUNE BEYOND US
OR
WHAT A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS
BY
EDWARD POMERANTZ**

A Tune Beyond Us
Or
What a Revoltin' Development This Is!

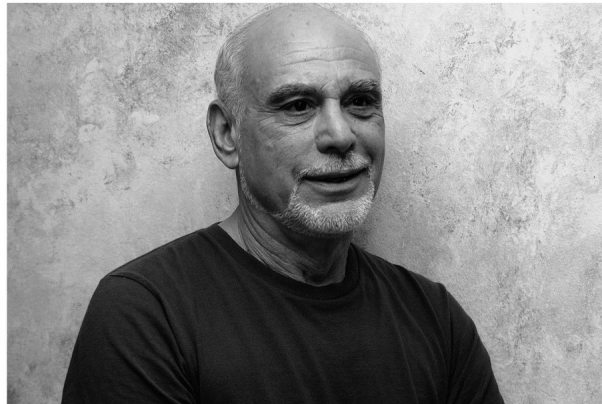
Dancing On Quicksand

Edward Pomerantz

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Praise for Edward Pomerantz



A TUNE BEYOND US

“A play not within a play, but a play on top, on bottom, on both sides of a play...Turns us inside out and upside down...”

Howard Shevrin

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For my parents

Gert and Al Pomerantz

who live and dance in these pages

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe this book to Sandy Kazan, who, for better and for more and less better, has lived with the writing of these plays. And I thank David H. Cohen and Robert Sims for their time, patience, hard work, and wizardry pulling it all together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In addition to the plays and screenplay in this collection, EDWARD POMERANTZ has written

INTO IT, a novel, originally published by Dial Press, reprinted by iUniverse.com

CAUGHT, the movie based on INTO IT, directed by Robert M. Young, starring Edward James Olmos and Maria Conchita Alonso, released by Sony Pictures Classics, and nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards

BRISBURIAL, a play/feast, produced by Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre, published by Magic Circle Press

SWEETHEART, VIRGIN, AND GOD and DO ME A FAVOR, two novellas, published

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by Contact, the San Francisco Collection of New Writing, Art, and Ideas

THE GARDEN and ONLY A GAME, two one-act plays published by Samuel French

THE GARDEN (expanded into a full-length play), First Prize, Samuel French National Playwriting Contest

Over 35 commissioned screenplays and teleplays, including two LAW AND ORDER episodes, THE PRINCESS AND THE CABBIE, a CBS movie starring Valerie Bertinelli, and THE GOLD BUG and NEW YORK CITY TOO FAR FROM TAMPA BLUES, two award winning television adaptations

He was a Playwright In Residence at the Yale Drama School, and has received two Writers Guild Awards

He is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia University, where he teaches Filmwriting, and at SUNY-Purchase, where he teaches Writing for Television

He is the Director and Co-Founder (with Voza Rivers) of the Harlem Arts Alliance Dramatic Writing Academy, a program of free workshops and mentoring, created to find and nurture gifted playwrights, screenwriters, and writers for television, in the Harlem community

He has been a Creative Advisor, Mentor, and Visiting Writer at various international screenwriting labs in Mexico, Spain, South America, England, Germany, and Cuba

He is at work on his new play EL GALLO BRAVO TO GO

For reviews and personal tributes, visit www.edwardpomerantz.com

PRODUCTION AND PUBLICATION HISTORY

A TUNE BEYOND US or WHAT A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS!, presented by Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre at the Theatre of St. Clements, New York City.

INTRODUCTION

Coming Home

When I was sixteen, my playwriting teacher at the High School of Performing Arts

submitted the play I wrote to Samuel French. It was a one-act called *The Garden*, and I got fifty bucks for it. The next one, *Only A Game*, published a year later, made it official. The first was no fluke. I was the real thing—a Playwright, and got seventy-five bucks.

This was in the early 50's, when the American Theater was an exciting place to find a home in. Until then, I was a movie kid, going to double features at my Washington Heights Loews and RKO every Saturday from the day I was born. But now, a drama student at a pioneering new public high school at Broadway's epicenter on West 46th Street, I was a Saturday matinee kid, getting up at dawn to stand on line for standing room or the last row in the second balcony, where I had my heart broken by Julie Harris in *A Member Of The Wedding* and Bert Lahr in *Waiting For Godot*, my view of reality expanded by Jo Mielziner, his set for the bedroom in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* an open space, no pretending to look like a real bedroom, just Maggie the Cat in a white slip down left on a thrust stage, her husband Brick, drinking, on a bed up right, nothing but isolation and distance between them.

I was lucky. It was Jacob Weiser, the playwriting teacher, who saw a gift in me I didn't know I had, and mentored me (every day after school in his parked convertible on Riverside Drive) through a long process of endless rewriting, scene by scene, line by line. It's all Jack Weiser's fault. Instead of the next Gene Kelly, I would have to settle for being the next Eugene O'Neill.

Then Time happened. After the one-acts, I expanded *The Garden* into a three-acter, and won First Prize in the Samuel French National Playwriting contest, which led to interest in the play by Kraft Television Theater and an offer to go to Hollywood to be a contract writer for one of the Studios, neither of which happened. Instead, I ended up with an MFA from the Yale Drama School, where I returned six years later, when Robert Brustein took over, to be a playwright-in-residence and write my play/feast *Brisburial*. By now, it was the late 60's, and except for two one-acts in this collection and a production of *Brisburial* at Woodie King, Jr's New Federal Theatre in the early 70's, I didn't write or have another play produced for over twenty-five years.

I did, however, remain a storyteller—writing two novellas and my novel *Into It* (Dial Press), and over thirty commissioned screenplays and television scripts, some of which have been produced (most not), some winning awards. Which jump-cuts me to the mid-90's, when *Caught*, the movie I wrote based on *Into It*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was released by Sony Pictures Classics. It was around then, after 20 years (and drafts) fighting to get the movie made, I returned to *The Goddess Of Filthy Things*, a play in my head and on scattered pieces of paper that demanded my attention and jeopardized my sanity until I finally “saw the forest for the trees” and figured out what all the voices and unconnected monologues, notes, stories-inside-stories were telling me. Most important, and we're coming around full circle now, I figured out how to travel through the play--through open space, the space Mielziner opened for me when I was a kid in the second balcony watching *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* forty-five years earlier.

With the writing of *The Goddess of Filthy Things*, I had come home. And “home” is where I've stayed since then, writing all the plays in this collection (except for the two one-acts written in the early 70's). I've also included *Man Running*, an original screen-

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play, which began many years ago when Bob Young, my treasured friend and director of *Caught*, brought me the gift of his idea for it. Decades later, it remains unfilmed. But that could be a “blessing in disguise.” What you have here is the latest draft written in the last year (There’s always a scene, an inspiration, a truer and funnier way to do it that makes me and Bob laugh, keep working on it).

Play. Novel. Screenplay. I’ve written them all with the deepest pleasure and satisfaction. Why then, in these last years, has the stage become the only arena for my ideas? Stories? Imagination? Why now, when I close my eyes, it’s always that open space I see, giving me the same freedom movie writing gives me—to move fluidly through time and place—meeting and merging with what prose gives me—the music and density of language, the rhythmic force and driving flow of narrative. And even though the neighborhood movie palace was my cathedral, and the Josephs, Conrad and Heller, changed my life, it’s the Theater—the public event, the human voice—out there, filling the space, the happening now, right now of it—that keeps me coming back to it. It’s the space where all my writing—screenplays, novel, and plays-- intersect. The space where I can create what Matthew Ritchie, the painter, calls “a landscape...designed to produce adventures inside itself, adventures of information,” where, like Ritchie, I can “dream the whole thing up as a way to express just how much fun you can have thinking.”

Adventure. That’s the key word here. Every play in this collection began with a question, a strong scene, image, or situation that haunted me, whose mystery could only be solved by writing it, moving step by step into unknown territory, emboldening me with clues and discoveries, as I moved forward, loving the danger of it, dancing on quicksand. “We’re lucky,” William Carlos Williams tells us, “when we catch the evasive life of the thing.” With these plays, and the one I’m writing now, I feel lucky to still be spending my days in pursuit of it.

Edward Pomerantz
New York City

A TUNE BEYOND US or WHAT A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS!, 8 characters. A ghost and gangster picture show. Spanning generations, the epic saga of a Jewish Crime Family, with deadly rivalries, multiple scenarios and narratives. Tonight's the night. Jerome Greenspan, aka Cody Jarrett, will take revenge for the murder of his childhood bodyguard Fat Jack The Nail. The same night his sister Midnight Flower and his aunt Shonda The Mother Killer will play out their dream of revenge—against the same enemy, Mose The Nose Weinstein, returning to take his revenge after fifteen years in prison. But before the night is over, there are stories to tell, unwritten screenplays, all merging into a theatrical picture show, the characters fed and fueled by movies, the power of movies to ignite our imaginations, shape our identities.

A TUNE BEYOND US
or
WHAT A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS!
a ghost and gangster picture show
by
EDWARD POMERANTZ

For my ghosts
And for my grandchildren
Jesse, Graeme, Zachary, and Madelyn

...“But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are.”
Wallace Stevens
The Man With The Blue Guitar

“What a revoltin' development this is!”
James Durante

CHARACTERS

Dancing On Quicksand

CODY JARRETT, a Professor of Film Studies and Bar Mitzvah Boy, late 30's, played by the same actor as

JEROME GREENSPAN, Cody when he was 13

MIDNIGHT FLOWER, an Amerasian gang leader, Cody's sister, mid-30's, and 17

MOSE THE NOSE WEINSTEIN, a New Jersey Gang Boss, Cody and Midnight Flower's father, 40's, then 70's

SHONDA THE MOTHER KILLER, a New Jersey Gang Boss, 40's, then 70's

THE SHAMMES, a synagogue sexton, 103

FAT JACK THE NAIL, an assassin and surrogate father to Jerome, 40's

TWO THUGS (also MALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT and THE RABBI)

The audience enters to a picture show of scenes from classic movies and newsreels on a large movie screen down center.

The movies include dialogue and action scenes from White Heat, The Godfather 1 and 2, Scarface (the original and remake), Cattle Queen of Montana, Forty Guns, The Violent Men, The Roaring Twenties, Public Enemy, Jimmy The Gent, Angels With Dirty Faces, The Furies--in short, any classic gangster movie and western, particularly with James Cagney and Barbara Stanwyck.

The newsreels, intercut with the movie scenes, make the real world and the world of the movies indistinguishable, all of it a movie, as they take us through decades of riots, bombings, lynchings, strikes, protests, assassinations, wars, building to the climax of White Heat, Cagney shouting "Made it, ma! Top of the world!", exploding in flames.

Suddenly, JEROME GREENSPAN, 13, with a Durante nose, jumps through the screen out of the exploding Cagney. He's wearing a t-shirt with Cagney holding a gun. The t-shirt reads JAMES CAGNEY is CODY JARRETT in WHITE HEAT. His New Red Hot Hit from Warner Bros.

JEROME

(calling, to the Projectionist)

Okay! Freeze it!

Cagney freezes, in flames, large and iconic, behind him.

JEROME (cont'd)

(to us, doing his Jimmy Durante)

I got a yarn to unravel! And we don't have much time.

(he checks his watch))

Two hours...and the guy who's me when I grow up could be dead meat like I woulda been if Fat Jack didn't take the bullet for me that night instead of whacking me like he was supposed to.

Lights up down left on FAT JACK THE NAIL, a tall slim elegantly dressed gangster in his late forties, long and thin as a finishing nail, staring out, puffing on a Havana cigar.

JEROME (cont'd)

(going to Fat Jack)

Fat Jack The Nail. My pal. And partner. Only one ever gave a shit about me.

He gives Fat Jack a playful punch. Fat Jack gives him a jab back. They laugh. Fat Jack resumes staring out, smoking.

JEROME (cont'd)

(going back to screen)

Things go right tonight, Fat Jack's gonna end up here. In our movie. Along with Mose The Nose. And Ghost Eye. And Billy The Yid. And Yip and Yank. And Solomon and Sheba. And Shonda The Mother Killer. They're all gonna be in it. The whole mishpucheh. Including me. Jerome Greenspan.

(doing his Cagney)

The kid who dreams he's Cagney...

(doing his Durante)

...and looks like Durante.

JEROME AND FAT JACK

(to each other, doing their exasperated Durantes)

What a revoltin' development this is!

They laugh, slap five. Fat Jack resumes staring out, smoking.

JEROME

(going on about himself)

Not laid or even Bar Mitzvahed yet. But old enough for certain close relatives... namely my father and my aunt...to think whacking a son or nephew is a small price to pay for showing the world who's Boss, who gets to eat the maraschino cherry on top of the hot fudge sundae.

(a resigned shrug)

Hey...The family I come from...Spilling blood is like putting water up for tea. What's important is the movie. That's why Fat Jack took the bullet. So I could live to make it. The first All True Greatest Story Never Told Jewish gangster picture. Up there...

(indicating Cagney behind him)

With the big boys!

Fat Jack looks at his watch, pulls out an imaginary gun, aims it at Jerome, "shoots" him. Jerome, shot, does his Cagney dance of death, collapses. Fat Jack laughs, blows on the muzzle, puts the gun back in his pocket, goes off.

JEROME (cont'd)

(getting up)

Tonight's the night. The guy who's me when I grow up? He's got the guts, he'll show up and give us our ending. Make the bad guys pay for Fat Jack's murder.

(doing his Cagney)

Made it, Fat Jack! Top of the world!

(he revels in the fantasy, then to us, back to reality)

Don't go away. He ends up dead like I was supposed to...The first great Jewish gangster picture...It's not dying with him. It's leaving here...

(he points to his head)

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With you.

He runs off after Fat Jack, as Cagney is instantly replaced by Barbara Stanwyck shooting it out in Cattle Queen Of Montana, and MIDNIGHT FLOWER, an Amerasian gang leader in her mid-30's, comes through the screen, out of Barbara, dressed exactly like her in riding britches, cowboy hat, boots, only instead of a rifle, she's got a Mini Uzi, and like Jerome, a Durante nose.

MIDNIGHT FLOWER

Fucking putz!

(shouting after Jerome)

Pisher!

Barbara freezes on the screen, large and iconic, behind her.

MIDNIGHT FLOWER (cont'd)

(to us, a laugh)

He thinks this movie is his. Well, what he's gonna find out--before the night's over--is thanks to a little war in Vietnam he's got a sister.

(shrinking violet)

Midnight Flower.

(Barbara again)

That's me. Fathered by the same circumcized Prick...Last of the Big-Time Shtarkers...who, when he comes home tonight, after fifteen years on the inside, has got a Big-Time surprise waiting for him. A daughter he never knew he had. Who's Boss now. And has the one thing he wants.

(giving us the finger, displaying the diamond, ruby, and sapphire ring on it)

This ring. Taken before he was born from a dead man's pinky. The ring he says is his grandfather's and murdered my mother for.

(suddenly gripping the Uzi)

My mother. This movie's for her. A Hollywood first.

(indicating screen behind her)

Starring me up there. Doing my Barbara. The real deal. No fucking Sandra Bullock with slanty eyes. The first gook to cop the Oscar. The first yellow Halle Berry.

(a laugh)

Stick around. Not every day a daughter gets to meet her long-lost daddy, her mother's killer.

She loads and locks the Uzi, smiles.

MIDNIGHT FLOWER (cont'd)

Should make a great last scene. Barbara woulda loved it.

She goes off, as the screen flies up out of sight, revealing a curtained Ark, and

THE SHAMMES, an old synagogue sexton, around 103, with thick glasses, payis (long curly sidelocks), a yarmulke and long tattered coat comes rushing down the aisle.

SHAMMES

(to members of the audience)

Go home...Go home...This tsedrait story. This fecockteh movie...You don't want to hear! See! Better you should be blind and deaf. Not know from such things. Better you should go to shul than the movies.

(going up on stage, muttering to himself)

Terrible. Terrible...

(taking out prayer shawl from his coat pocket, wiping his forehead with it, putting it back)