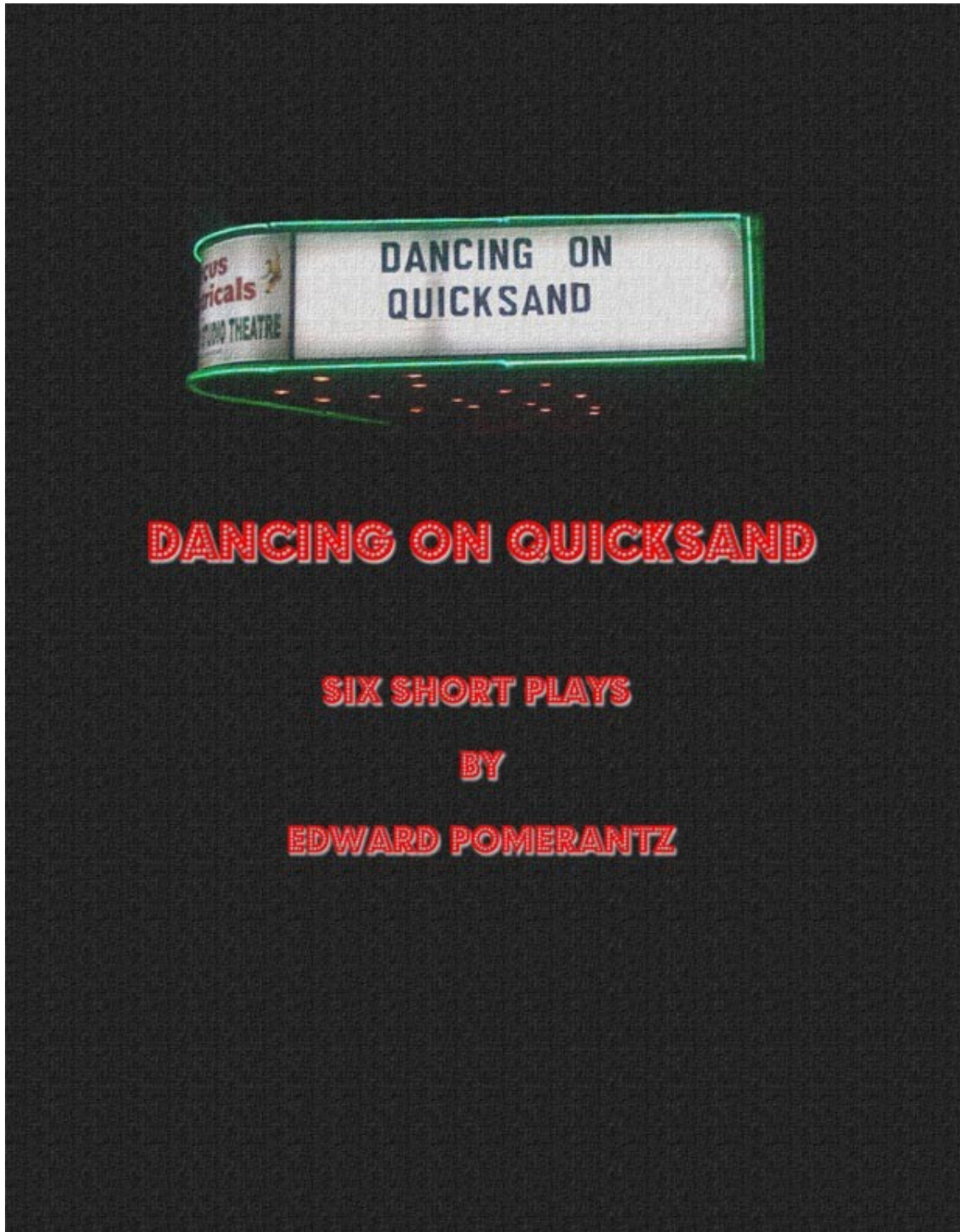




Dancing on Quicksand

Six Short Plays

Dancing On Quicksand

by

Edward Pomerantz

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CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About The Author](#)

[Production and Publication History](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Synopsis of Each Play](#)

Six Short Plays

(to be performed individually, in pairs, or as a complete evening
titled Dancing On Quicksand)

The Bed Plays

[NOTHING PERSONAL](#)

[A CHANGE OF PACE](#)

The Car Plays

[TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU](#)

[I HATE WHEN IT GETS DARK SO EARLY](#)

Two Dramatic Monologues

[A MAN DANCING](#)

[THE PEACEKEEPER](#)

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CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that all plays and the screenplay in DANCING ON QUICKSAND, SIX SHORT PLAYS are subject to a royalty and fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all other countries of the Copyright Union.

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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

Dancing On Quicksand

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 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

NOTHING PERSONAL and A CHANGE OF PACE, originally published by Ms Magazine. Presented at the Aspen Institute in Aspen, Colorado and by Food For Thought at the Players Club and the National Arts Club in New York City. Actors in these performances include Sandra Kazan, Judith Light, Marlo Thomas, Barbara Feldon, Lorraine Bracco, Betty Buckley, and Daniel McDonald.

A CHANGE OF PACE, published in 35 in 10, 35 Ten-Minute Plays, by the Dramatic Publishing Company.

TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU with Rhonda Ross and Tobias Truvillion, and I HATE WHEN IT GETS DARK SO EARLY with Edward Pomerantz and Sandra Kazan, performed at Food For Thought.

I HATE WHEN IT GETS DARK SO EARLY and THE PEACEKEEPER, Finalists for the Actors Theatre of Louisville Heideman Award.

THE PEACEKEEPER and A MAN DANCING performed by Joyce Griffen and Valery Oisteanu at the Maxine Greene Salon Series, New York City

DANCING ON QUICKSAND, an evening of all six short plays, produced at the Hayworth Theatre in Los Angeles, as part of the Bruno Kirby Celebrity Reading Series, directed by Lisa James, and starring Paul Mazursky, Jenny O'Hara, Gregg Henry, Anita Barrone, Deidre Henry, and Ntare Guma Mbabo Mwine.

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 screenplay, 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
February 19, 2011

SYNOPSIS OF EACH PLAY

NOTHING PERSONAL, two characters. After lovemaking, a wife asks her husband if he’s ever cheated on her.

A CHANGE OF PACE, two characters. After lovemaking, a husband asks his wife if she’s ever cheated on him.

TELL ME SOMETHING I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU, two characters. In a car, on the way to their wedding rehearsal, a young woman asks the young man she’s going to marry tomorrow to tell her something she doesn’t know about him.

I HATE WHEN IT GETS DARK SO EARLY, two characters. In a car, traveling as day turns to evening, a wife tells her husband something she’s never told him, a thought she’s never put into words, spoken aloud. The marriage is shaken. It will never be the same.

A MAN DANCING, two characters. A Nobel Prize Winner, bored to death at a banquet in his honor, reveals the dark truths he’s been hiding behind his “humanitarianism.”

THE PEACEKEEPER, four characters. A translator, haunted by the testimony of a United Nations Peacekeeper charged with the murder of an escaped war criminal who ordered a massacre in Rwanda, keeps breaking into songs as she sits at her breakfast table with her newspaper-reading husband, talking to us.

NOTHING PERSONAL, two characters. After lovemaking, a wife asks her husband if he's ever cheated on her.

NOTHING PERSONAL
a one-act play by
EDWARD POMERANTZ

Scene: A bedroom

ANN and BILL, a married couple in their early thirties, are lying in bed in each other's arms.
A long silence, then:

ANN
Bill?...Bill?

BILL
Mmmmm?

ANN
I'm sorry. I woke you.

BILL
That's okay. What is it?

ANN
Forget it. Go back to sleep.

She smiles at him. He smiles back, kisses her, turns over.

ANN
(into space)
I was just wondering...Have you ever cheated on me?

Bill opens his eyes, doesn't move.

ANN
Bill? You up?

Bill looks at her.

ANN
I'm sorry. Go back to sleep.

Bill holds his gaze, turns over, closes his eyes.

ANN
I was just lying here...thinking... how smug I feel. Past thirty. Eleven years with the same man.
Two kids. Everybody else falling apart. And we're still here. Still making it. Together.

Dancing On Quicksand

She looks at him.

ANN

I don't care if you've ever been unfaithful. At this moment, that's how safe...how loved you've made me feel.

Bill looks at her. She smiles, turns out the light. Silence.

ANN

Have you?

Bill turns on the light.

BILL

Okay. What's going on?

ANN

What do you mean what's going on?

BILL

Something is going on. What is it?

ANN

I asked you a question.

BILL

Some question.

ANN

You don't have to answer it if you don't want to. I told you. It wouldn't make any difference.

BILL

Then why ask?

ANN

(shrugs, laughs)

To see if it would.

They look at each other.

ANN

Let's go to bed.

She turns over. A long silence.

BILL

Have you?

ANN

Have I what?

BILL

Given to the Heart Fund this month.

She looks at him.

BILL

Been unfaithful. That is what we were talking about, wasn't it?

ANN

Don't be ridiculous.

BILL

Wait a minute. Don't be ridiculous what? Don't be ridiculous. I haven't been unfaithful. Or don't be ridiculous. I wouldn't dream of answering such a stupid and/or insulting question.

ANN

I asked you first.

They look at each other.

BILL

Who?

ANN

Who who?

BILL

Who have you been screwing?

ANN

I don't believe you.

BILL

Come on. You can tell me. You wouldn't have asked if you weren't thinking of it.

ANN

You're crazy.

BILL

You want to find out I have so you won't feel so bad. Who? Ben? Robbie? The kid next door?

ANN

I don't think this is funny, Bill. Cut it out.

BILL

The week I went to California. The summer I stayed in the city and worked while you and the kids were on Fire Island.

ANN

What makes you think I wait? You don't have to go to California. Soon as you leave for the office, I call up Whole Foods and have them send over a delivery boy.

BILL

I knew you sounded funny.