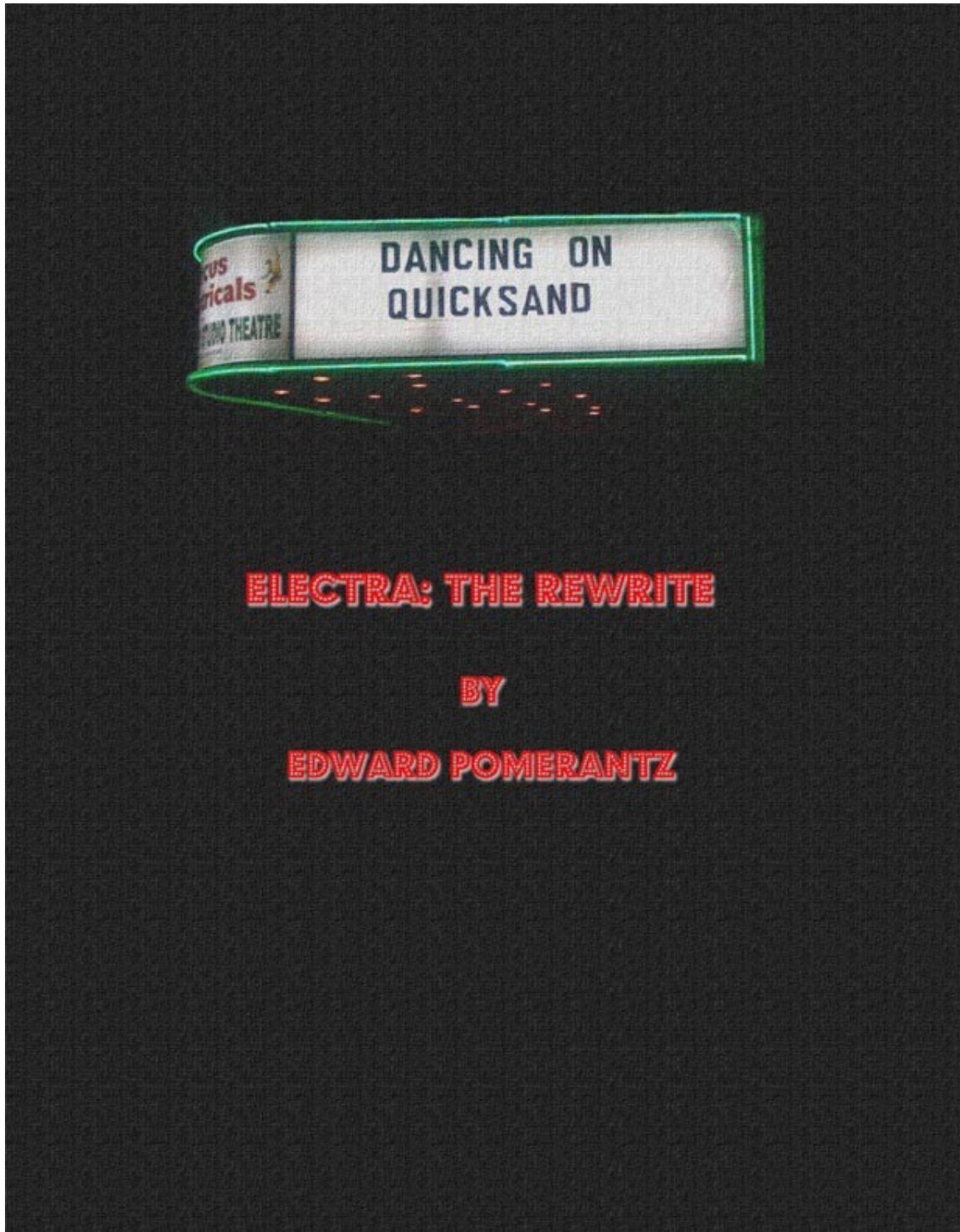




Electra: The Rewrite

by

Dancing On Quicksand

Edward Pomerantz

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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 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

Dancing On Quicksand

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

ELECTRA: THE REWRITE, directed by Edward Pomerantz, and produced by Kinitiras, at the 2010 Athens Fringe Festival, Athens, Greece.

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.

Dancing On Quicksand

Edward Pomerantz
New York City

ELECTRA: THE REWRITE, 8 characters. A wild mix of Greek Tragedy, Vaudeville, and Bob Hope Road movies. Electra, sick of waiting for the return of Orestes to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus for the murder of Agamemnon, decides to rewrite what the gods have written and take vengeance with her own hands. Enter Bobhopecles, Apollo's Top Banana, and his sidekick Jerrycolonnus, two entertainers for the Trojan troops, who wander into Agamemnon's courtyard on their way home to Troy. (Bob, a battle-shocked amnesiac, can only speak in one-liners). Perfect timing! Two "actors" to help Electra carry out her fatal plan, but the script doesn't quite work out as she expected when Bob and Jerry turn her Greek Tragedy into Musical Comedy.

ELECTRA: THE REWRITE

by

EDWARD POMERANTZ

For my loved and loving family

With thanks and apologies

to

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Homer, Seneca, Robert Graves, Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna, Paramount Pictures, The Yiddish Theater, Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen, Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz, Irving Berlin, Al Jolson, and Henny Youngman

CHARACTERS

ELECTRA, long-grieving daughter of her murdered father, King Agamemnon

CLYTEMNESTRA, Agamemnon's co-murderer and widow

AEGISTHUS, Clytemnestra's lover and accomplice

THE COURT BARD, an old man in his hundreds

BOBHOPECLES, Apollo's Top Banana, entertainer for the Trojan troops fighting the Greeks at

Illium, currently a wandering battle-shocked amnesiac who can only speak in one-liners

JERRYCOLONNUS, Bob's sidekick, straight-man, and Second Banana

TWO CRONES (also GUARDS, a SLAVE, and AGAMEMNON'S GHOST)

SCENE: The courtyard of Agamemnon's palace, occupied by his murderers--Clytemnestra, his widow, and her lover Aegisthus. The entrance to the palace is up right. ELECTRA, Clytemnestra and Agamemnon's daughter, is stage center, on her knees, in rags and dirt, head down, wild-haired. Down left, TWO CRONES sit plucking chickens.

From inside the palace, we hear the ecstatic moans of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus's fervid love-making. With each cry of growing pleasure, Electra lets out a wail and cry of her own, smears her body with dirt. The ecstasy and grief compete and build in counterpoint as the crones sigh and pluck.

CRONE 1

Here we go again.

CRONE 2

That we should live so long to have to listen to this.

CRONE 1

Every day.

CRONE 2

For seven years.

They sigh, pluck. The competing cries of ecstasy and grief escalate, intensify.

CRONE 1

If it isn't one war it's another.

CRONE 2

Between us and our enemies.

CRONE 1

Or mother against daughter.

CRONE 2

Every thrust of the mother's lover

CRONE 1

A sword in the daughter's heart.

Another cry of mounting pleasure from inside the palace. Another piercing wail from Electra that tops it.

CRONE 1

Gods have mercy. When will it end?

CRONE 2

What will it take to give us some peace. And quiet.

Dancing On Quicksand

CRONE 1
(to the gods)
The son! And brother!

CRONE 2
Where is he?!

CRONE 1
When will he return?!

CRONE 2
At last?!

CRONE 1
To do what's right!

CRONE 2
What's written!

CRONE 1
When a mother and her lover murder a king, a father.

CRONE 2
And keep shtupping!

CRONE 1
For seven years.

CRONE 2
Twice a day.

CRONE 1
Three! On holidays!

CRONE 2
Just to rub it in!

CRONE 1
Twist the sword!

CRONE 2
Drive a daughter crazy!

Electra, raising her head, tops her mother's final orgasmic cry with an orgasmic wail that makes the palace shake. A beat, then covered with dirt, exhausted, to the crones, with a bitter laugh.

ELECTRA
Well? How was I? Too over the top?
(indicating her dirt-smeared body)
A little "much" with the self-debasement? Speak, Critics! The Gods have cursed me with a long run. If I'm going to be stuck in this fucking role, instruct me in how to play it. A little less Medea? A little more Antigone? Shall I be mad? Or just act mad? Just enough to keep you guessing.

The two crones eye each other, fearful.

ELECTRA

(with contempt)

Just as I thought. Like all critics. Good for nothing but plucking chickens.

(sudden fury, flinging dirt at them)

Away! Before I have your eyes plucked!

The Crones rush off.

ELECTRA

(calling after them)

You want a good cry? Get it from Oedipus! The Gods have milked me dry! You've seen my last performance!

(alone, to herself)

I swear it. I've sworn it before. But this time...Enough! Enough show! Instead of action! Wasting my youth, my talent, on just kvetching! And geshrying! Enough! Playing by the Gods' rules! By the book!

(to audience)

Tell me. I defy you. Where is it written? On what tablet? That a sister must wait. For her brother. A pussy. A mama's boy. To take revenge for their father's murder. Do the job for her. Who says? Who says that a daughter can't bloody her own hands? That only a mother can trap and slaughter! Needing a man beside her to give her the balls to do it!

The COURT BARD, an old man in his hundreds, comes on writing furiously in his tablet crossing the stage to a tree down right where he sits and keeps writing, crossing out, thinking for a moment, writing again.

COURT BARD

(suddenly inspired)

To be or not to be!

(snapping his fingers)

That's the question!

He writes, excited, then reading it, reconsiders and rejects it, crosses it out. Another beat as he thinks, then comes up with another inspired idea, writes.

COURT BARD (CONT'D)

You say eether and I say eyether. You say neether and I say nyther. Eether, eyether, neether, nyther...

He stops, stuck, crosses the whole thing off.

ELECTRA

You! Old Bard!

The Old Bard looks up.

ELECTRA

My father, the great Agamemnon, entrusted you, his faithful poet, with the telling of his story. As his daughter, I command you. To stop all this scribbling and scrawling! And get on with it!

Before I break your fingers like twigs for being as useless as your testicles!

OLD BARD

(holding up his hands, shielding himself)

Dancing On Quicksand

Wretched Electra! Forsooth! You know in my heart, my kishkes, your pain is my pain. Why make me your scapegoat? We're on the same page. Me and you. In the same straitjacket. Doomed to wait. For what happens next. As the Gods foretold it.

ELECTRA

And what if the Gods got it wrong?! Or they're lying to us just to keep us in our place? If we live by what's foretold, we have no choice but to act out the Gods' scenario. What's to prevent us from testing the Gods? Inventing our own story? Rewriting what's written.

OLD BARD

(looking around, terrified, stuttering)

Re...re...wri...writing...wh... what's writ...writ...

(slapping his face to stop the stuttering)

Written?! Mmmmaking up your own sssss...

(another slap)

Tory?! Are you mad, King's daughter? The Gods must be deaf today, for surely if they heard you, your brain would burst into flames or your tongue turned to chopped liver for even thinking such a thought.

ELECTRA

Old woman! Antique wimp! And you call yourself a poet. You're nothing but a secretary. Taking dictation. A true poet defies the Gods! Lets his heroes act for themselves. Make their moves without stage directions. Take their cues from their hearts.

OLD BARD

M...m...m...

(slapping his face)

Moves?! You're mmmmaking an old bard tremble, King's daughter. And I have enough trouble keeping a quill in my hand. What moves are these, impatient Electra, that would so change your father's story? So drastically and dramatically?

Electra laughs.

ELECTRA

When I make them, I'll tell you. And you'll write it down. So that thousands of years from now, it will be a daughter and sister who's the hero, not a son and brother.

(looking up, hearing someone coming from inside the palace)

But quick. For now, back to your scribbling. Here comes the bit player...the pathetic chorus boy...who thinks he's the star of this drama.

Enter AEGISTHUS from the palace, with an enormous codpiece, every inch a King, but at the moment, depressed and depleted, too preoccupied with his despair to notice Electra and the Court Bard behind the tree.

AEGISTHUS

(a sigh)

All this fucking fucking.

(to his father in heaven)

Is that it? Is this my reward? My father and director. My ungrateful Thyestes. You made a deal with the Gods. A son to take revenge on your brother Atreus. For slaying your infant boys and serving them for your supper. I did what I was born for. Took double revenge. First, when I was seven. Blindly following your command and stabbing Atreus in the back as he prayed to the Gods. Then later, not yet twenty, fucking my way into this palace, the home of his son