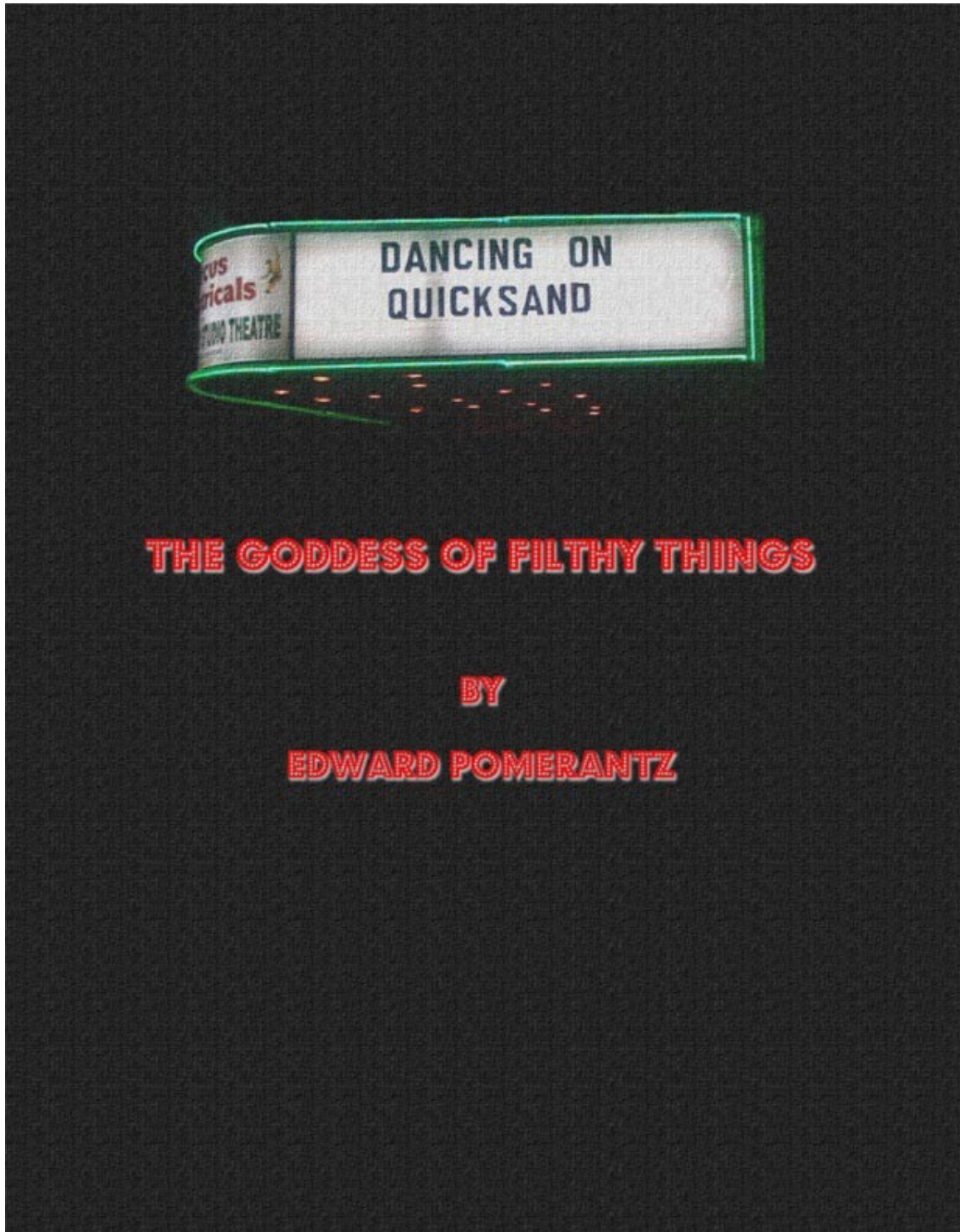




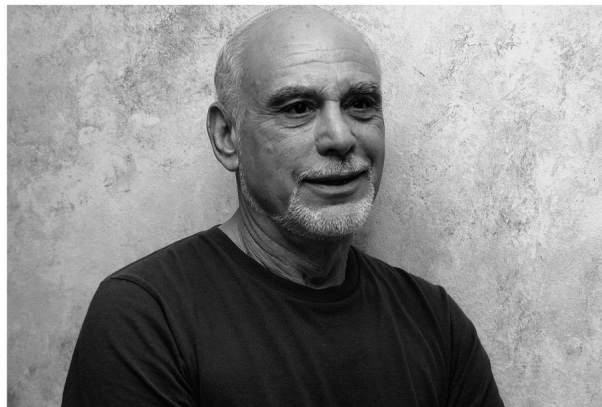
The Goddess of Filthy Things

Edward Pomerantz

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Praise for Edward Pomerantz



THE GODDESS OF FILTHY THINGS

“The whole thing has a terrific heart and depth...interweaving all the characters and their stories to reveal, step by step, through different layers and stories within other stories, one central and powerful story.”

Martin Salinas

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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

Dancing On Quicksand

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

THE GODDESS OF FILTHY THINGS, staged at the Actors Studio in New York City, and at the Edgemar Theatre in Santa Monica, California

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

THE GODDESS OF FILTHY THINGS, 12 characters. A story inside a story inside a story inside a story. A dramatic labyrinth that attempts to bring the density of the novel and the fluidity of the movies to the stage. At its core—a mystery. What happened to Jerry Green, a writer? His daughter Jessica thinks if she can tell her father's story she'll find him and get him back. The only one who can help her is Jack, who, haunted by Jessica since she was a child, is writing a play about her—the play you're watching—about the obsessive nature and power of storytelling itself—what happens when a story seizes your imagination and becomes more real to you than your own life.

THE GODDESS OF FILTHY THINGS

a new play

by

EDWARD POMERANTZ

"An untold story can be a terrible thing.

You have to tell it, if it kills you.

In this case it probably will..."

Jerry Green

Woodland Hills, California

For my daughters

Francesca and Alexandra

Characters

JACK GUNN, a writer and teacher, 20's, 30's, 40's

JERRY GREEN, a writer and teacher, 30's

JESSICA GUEST, Jerry's daughter, 15, 19, 22, also FEMALE STUDENT, BRIGIT, YOUNG WOMAN (The Girl In Jake Gold's Story)

JESTER GARDEN, a movie director, 20's, 30's, 40's

MARGO, Jack's wife, 30's, 40's

ELLEN, Jerry's wife, 30's

BERNIE CATES, a literary agent

YOUNG MAN, also SOLDIER, HIPSTER, EL PADRE, PATRICK

EL TORO, also MEL BERNSTEIN, CHRIS ROGERS, THE MAN

LA BRUJA, also BERNIE's SECRETARY, MUSEUM GUIDE, COOKIE ZANG, ANDEAN DRESSMAKER

ARCHIE, Jack and Margo's son, 13

TWO BLACK AND HISPANIC TEENAGE GIRLS

TWO BLACK AND HISPANIC TEENAGE BOYS

Dancing On Quicksand

Note:

ELLEN and MARGO can be played by the same actress with a distinct change in appearance.

The TEENAGE BOYS AND GIRLS will double as waiters, bandits, peasants, guards.

The play will be performed on a bare stage. A minimum of props and furniture will be used as indicated.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

The stage is in blackness.

ANCHORMAN'S VOICE

And now for a Special Report on the escalating war in the Andes...Here's frontline correspondent Chris Rogers.

On a TV screen on the center back wall, CHRIS ROGERS, a newsman in helmet and fatigues, is reporting from an Andes hilltop.

CHRIS ROGERS

Thank you, Bob. The war in the mountains here gets grimmer every day. Another massacre took more than a hundred lives at dawn this morning when the Para-militaries, suspecting an entire village of harboring Marxist guerillas, burned down homes and farms, killing innocent women and children.

Footage of burning village, an Andean mother wailing over the bloodied body of her dead child.

CHRIS ROGERS (cont'd)

Adding fuel to this explosive crisis is El Padre, the leader of a rebel group called Los Bandidos, who, according to authorities, is looting and selling cultural treasures to buy arms for the villagers to protect and defend themselves.

Blow-up of clay flute with the face of a puma.

CHRIS ROGERS (cont'd)

Like this sacred flute stolen by Los Bandidos from the hand of a five-hundred year old human sacrifice in the local archeological museum here.

Blow-up of FROZEN 500-YEAR OLD ANDEAN TEENAGE GIRL in a cage in a deep-freeze showcase.

CHRIS ROGERS (cont'd)

Right now, to prevent any further desecration, this young girl found frozen on a mountaintop for five centuries, has been moved...without the flute...to the Metropolitan Museum in New York where she's currently on exhibition in a deep-freeze showcase. Reporting from Boca del Monte in the Andes, this is...

The screen goes black. Lights up on JESSICA GUEST, 22, a striking young woman with dark brown hair and big black eyes.

JESSICA

Sixteen years ago, when I was six, a young writer named Jack Gunn came to visit my father who even though he wasn't that much older than Jack had once been his teacher. We were living in California at the time, and while my father, a writer himself, sat by our pool telling Jack the story he was working on, I lay there on my raft, drifting, listening. It was a long story and he'd been working on it for a long time. Trying to find the way in, he said. The way to tell it.

(a beat)

A few months later, Tillie, my two-year old sister, drowned in the pool, and a few months after that, my father left... and took his story, still in his head, still unfinished...with him. I never saw or heard from him again.

(a moment to let this sink in, then crossing down left)

Eventually...this will be the story of another young writer--who tries to find her father, and of a young girl found frozen on a mountaintop, the sacrifice to an Indian God hundreds of years ago. Eventually...the two stories and my father's will become one. But right now...

A blank computer screen, wider than the TV screen, fills the back wall. A beat, then we watch letters becoming words as they're typed. An untold story can be a terrible thing. You have to tell it if it kills you.

JESSICA (cont'd)

Right now...

Sounds of early morning city traffic. JACK GUNN, a good-looking Irishman, late thirties, enters from up right and comes forward, energized and animated by the story he's telling us.

JACK

7:30. Archie off to school. Deep and warm inside his parka with knapsack and soup.

JESSICA goes off. The words on the computer screen are replaced by

Jack's Story

JACK (CONT'D)

(stopping center, staring out)

Naked at the window I watch him make his dent in the snow, climb aboard the school bus...

(crossing to Margo)

...then slip back into bed and inside his mother.

Lights up on MARGO, Jack's wife, late thirties, an attractive redhead. They begin to kiss. The phone rings.

JACK (cont'd)

Shit. Who the hell is that?

MARGO

This early, somebody died.

Lights up on JESTER GARDEN, a flamboyant movie director, same age as Jack and Margo, sleek and tanned, black-maned like a stallion. Sitting back in a lounge-chair up left, he shouts into space.

JESTER

Jack?! Jack, that you?! This my Jack?! Jack the Gun?! The writer?!

Dancing On Quicksand

JACK

(out front, no miming of phone)

Jester?

MARGO looks at JACK, surprised.

JESTER

(a laugh, like machine-gun bullets)

Long time between phone-calls, old buddy. Didn't wake you, did I? You're up and fucking.

Right?

JACK returns MARGO's gaze.

JESTER (cont'd)

Listen, you undiscovered New York genius son-of-a-bitch. It's two-thirty in the morning here on Bora Bora, and I just finished reading your goddam book.

JACK

My book?

JESTER

Song And Dance Man.

(holding up book, reading)

"A first novel by a born story-teller. A writer with a future," it says on the jacket. That's yours, isn't it? You wrote it, didn't you?

JACK

I sent it to you. Almost ten years ago.

JESTER

I'm a slow reader.

(another laugh)

You dumb bastard. I never got it. Lucky for you, I just made a picture in New Guinea...stopped off in Tahiti for a few days on my way back to Los Angeles. It was just sitting there in the local junk-shop under a moldy Bible and some old Hustler magazines.

JACK

What was?

JESTER

Your book, goddamit! If that doesn't kick you in the head and give you a karmic hardon, try this: I not only found it...in the middle of a fucking ocean...I love it. Wanna buy it. Turn it into a movie!

JACK

A movie?!

JESTER

You've seen one, haven't you? Now's your chance to write one!

JACK

Wait a minute! This isn't one of your fucking jokes, is it? You on something?