

PENGUIN PLAYS

E1360

Tennessee Williams

**Sweet Bird of Youth
A Streetcar
Named Desire
The Glass Menagerie**



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Eugene Ionesco

RHINOCEROS; THE CHAIRS;
THE LESSON

The plays of Ionesco, a Rumanian by origin, when first performed in Left Bank theatres in Paris were very poorly attended. Now regarded as one of the most important writers of the *avant-garde*, Ionesco has a world-wide reputation and his plays, are translated into many languages.

Sir Laurence Olivier took the leading part in *Rhinoceros* when it was produced in London in 1960 at the Royal Court Theatre, where *The Chairs* had already been performed in 1957. *The Lesson* was produced at London's Arts Theatre Club in 1955.

Ionesco himself is hesitant to theorize about his work or assess its importance. His plays represent, he says, 'a mood and not an ideology, an impulse not a programme'. The substance of the world seems to vary, for him, between solidity and illusory unreality and he projects on to the stage, with a strangely universal effect of comedy, his own internal conflict.

His influence can be traced in the youngest generation of English playwrights.

Thornton Wilder

OUR TOWN
THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH
THE MATCHMAKER

Thornton Wilder was born in Wisconsin, U.S.A., in 1897 and, after graduating from Yale, spent a year in Rome and as a result wrote his first novel, *The Cabala*, published in 1926. Next year *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* established him as a leading novelist of the day. *The Ides of March* was published in 1948.

Finding he had ceased to believe in the stories presented on the stage during the twenties, Thornton Wilder set out to make fun of nineteenth-century playwriting and to bring back a quality of universality to the theatre. His characters in a New Hampshire village or a New Jersey suburb stand for all men in all ages.

Both *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* won Pulitzer Prizes when they were first produced in America in 1938 and 1942. *The Matchmaker*, a slightly modified version of *The Merchant of Yonkers*, was first staged at the Edinburgh Festival in 1954.

Arthur Miller

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Death of a Salesman was written in six weeks in the spring of 1948, but it had been brewing in Miller's mind for ten years. Its 742 performances put it among the fifty longest recorded Broadway runs; it received the Pulitzer Prize for Theatre and was later filmed. Miller himself defined his aim in the play as being 'to set forth what happens when a man does not have a grip on the forces of life'.

Also published

THE CRUCIBLE
A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE and
ALL MY SONS

Tennessee Williams

BABY DOLL
SOMETHING UNSPOKEN
SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

The film of *Baby Doll* was produced and directed by Elia Kazan in 1956 from the screen-play contained in this volume – the original one written by Tennessee Williams. The *Daily Telegraph* called it ‘a work of art – an absorbing study in frustration and poverty and racial intolerance’, and *The Times*: ‘That rare thing, a film script which makes easy and vivid reading.’ John Osborne said of it: ‘Williams has hit off the American Girl-Woman of the last hundred years . . . Make no mistake about it – this Baby Doll kid is a killer.’

Something Unspoken and *Suddenly Last Summer* were staged together under the title *Garden District* in 1958. The former is a humorous little vignette of the social manoeuvres of a wealthy Southern spinster. The latter, which was later scripted and filmed, is an intense and moving study of madness, of a man’s escape from a mother-fixation, and of the revenge planned by the mother for the girl who liberated him and witnessed the final drama of his death.

Also published

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
AND OTHER PLAYS
ROSE TATTOO, CAMINO REAL
and ORPHEUS DESCENDING

PENGUIN PLAYS

SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH
A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Tennessee Williams was born in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, where his grandfather was the episcopal clergyman. When he was twelve his father, who was a travelling salesman, moved with his family to St Louis, and both he and his sister found it impossible to settle down to city life. He entered college during the depression and left after a couple of years to take a clerical job in a shoe company. He stayed there for two years, spending the evenings writing. He entered the University of Iowa in 1938 and completed his course, at the same time holding a large number of part-time jobs of great diversity. He received a Rockefeller fellowship in 1940 for his play *Battle of Angels*, and he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 and 1955. Among his plays, *Baby Doll*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Orpheus Descending*, *Something Unspoken*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, *Camino Real*, *The Rose Tattoo* and *The Night of the Iguana* have been published by Penguins. His most recent play is *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. He has also written *Moisè and the World of Reason*, a novel (1976) and his *Memoirs* (1976).

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Sweet Bird of Youth
A Streetcar Named Desire
The Glass Menagerie

EDITED BY
E. MARTIN BROWNE



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For repertory and amateur inquiries:

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SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

*Relentless caper for all those who step
The legend of their youth into the noon*

HART CRANE

TO CHERYL CRAWFORD

FOREWORD*

WHEN I came to my writing desk on a recent morning, I found lying on my desk top an unmailed letter that I had written. I began reading it and found this sentence: 'We are all civilized people, which means that we are all savages at heart but observing a few amenities of civilized behaviour.' Then I went on to say: 'I am afraid that I observe fewer of these amenities than you do. Reason? My back is to the wall and has been to the wall for so long that the pressure of my back on the wall has started to crumble the plaster that covers the bricks and mortar.'

Isn't it odd that I said the wall was giving way, not my back? I think so. Pursuing this course of free association, I suddenly remembered a dinner date I once had with a distinguished colleague. During the course of this dinner, rather close to the end of it, he broke a long, mournful silence by lifting to me his sympathetic gaze and saying to me, sweetly, 'Tennessee, don't you feel that you are blocked as a writer?'

I didn't stop to think of an answer; it came immediately off my tongue without any pause for planning. I said, 'Oh, yes, I've always been blocked as a writer but my desire to write has been so strong that it has always broken down the block and gone past it.'

Nothing untrue comes off the tongue that quickly. It is planned speeches that contain lies or dissimulations, not what you blurt out so spontaneously in one instant.

It was literally true. At the age of fourteen I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge. From what? From being called

* Written prior to the Broadway opening of *Sweet Bird of Youth* and published in the *New York Times* on Sunday, 8 March 1959.

a sissy by the neighbourhood kids, and Miss Nancy by my father, because I would rather read books in my grandfather's large and classical library than play marbles and baseball and other normal kid games, a result of a severe childhood illness and of excessive attachment to the female members of my family, who had coaxed me back into life.

I think no more than a week after I started writing I ran into the first block. It's hard to describe it in a way that will be understandable to anyone who is not a neurotic. I will try. All my life I have been haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible, if not a probable, loser of what you most want. Let's leave it like that. That block has always been there and always will be, and my chance of getting, or achieving, anything that I long for will always be gravely reduced by the interminable existence of that block.

I described it once in a poem called 'The Marvellous Children'.

'He, the demon, set up barricades of gold and purple tinfoil, labelled Fear (and other august titles), which they, the children, would leap lightly over, always tossing backwards their wild laughter.'

But having, always, to contend with this adversary of fear, which was sometimes terror, gave me a certain tendency towards an atmosphere of hysteria and violence in my writing, an atmosphere that has existed in it since the beginning.

In my first published work, for which I received the big sum of thirty-five dollars, a story published in the July or August issue of *Weird Tales* in the year 1928, I drew upon a paragraph in the ancient histories of Herodotus to create a story of how the Egyptian queen, Nitocris, invited all of her enemies to a lavish banquet in a subterranean hall on the shores of the Nile, and how, at the height of this banquet, she excused herself from the table and opened sluice gates

admitting the waters of the Nile into the locked banquet hall, drowning her unloved guests like so many rats.

I was sixteen when I wrote this story, but already a confirmed writer, having entered upon this vocation at the age of fourteen, and, if you're well acquainted with my writings since then, I don't have to tell you that it set the keynote for most of the work that has followed.

My first four plays, two of them performed in St Louis, were correspondingly violent or more so. My first play professionally produced and aimed at Broadway was *Battle of Angels* and it was about as violent as you can get on the stage.

During the nineteen years since then I have only produced five plays that are *not* violent: *The Glass Menagerie*, *You Touched Me*, *Summer and Smoke*, *The Rose Tattoo*, and, recently in Florida, a serious comedy called *Period of Adjustment*, which is still being worked on.

What surprises me is the degree to which both critics and audience have accepted this barrage of violence. I think I was surprised, most of all, by the acceptance and praise of *Suddenly Last Summer*. When it was done off Broadway, I thought I would be critically tarred and feathered and ridden on a fence rail out of the New York theatre, with no future haven except in translation for theatres abroad, who might mistakenly construe my work as a castigation of American morals, not understanding that I write about violence in American life only because I am not so well acquainted with the society of other countries.

Last year I thought it might help me as a writer to undertake psychoanalysis and so I did. The analyst, being acquainted with my work and recognizing the psychic wounds expressed in it, asked me, soon after we started, 'Why are you so full of hate, anger, and envy?'

Hate was the word I contested. After much discussion and argument, we decided that 'hate' was just a provisional term and that we would only use it till we had discovered the