

The Maids

By Jean Genet

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The Maids By Jean Genet

Though The Maids (translated by Bernard Frechtman) was his first book to be published in England, Jean Genet was already a legendary figure in contemporary European literature. An illegitimate child born in Paris in 1910, he was abandoned by his mother to the Assistance Publique, adopted by a peasant family in the Morvan and committed to a reformatory for stealing at the age of ten; after many years spent in this and similar institutions, he joined and deserted from the Foreign Legion; and in 1948 only escaped life imprisonment after ten convictions for theft when the President of the Republic - on the petition of a group of eminent writers and artists - granted him a pardon. His work - novels, plays, autobiography - reflects the violence and disorder of his life; but it reflects, too, high and unmistakable literary genius. The Maids is vehement and passionate; obsessed - as so much of Genet's writing is - with the problems of identity, of reality and make-believe, of the complexity of truth. It is both an exciting piece of literature in itself and an admirable introduction to Genet's work as a whole.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Andrew Upton is Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company, where his first play, Hanging Man, was staged in 2002, followed by Riflemind in 2007. He has adapted a number of classics for the company, and in 2007 his version of Gorky's Philistines was seen at the National Theatre in London, followed by Bulgakov's The White Guard (2010) and Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard (2011). He wrote the films Bangers (1999), which he also directed, and Gone (2006), and the libretto for Alan John's opera Through the Looking Glass (2008). Jean Genet was born in Paris in 1910. An illegitimate child who never knew his parents, he was abandoned to the Public Assistance Authorities. He was ten when he was sent to a reformatory for stealing; thereafter he spent time in the prisons of nearly every country he visited in thirty years of prowling through the European underworld. With ten convictions for theft in France to his credit he was, the eleventh time, condemned to life imprisonment. Eventually he was granted a pardon by President Auriol as a result of appeals from France's leading artists and writers led by Jean Cocteau.$$$His first novel, Our Lady of the Flowers, was written while he was in prison, followed by Miracle of the Rose, the autobiographical The Thief's Journal, Querelle of Brest and Funeral Rites. He wrote six plays: The Balcony, The Blacks, The Screens, The Maids, Deathwatch and Splendid's (the manuscript of which was rediscovered only in 1993). Jean Genet died in 1986.

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