

Two Plays features two dramas, one about American expatriate writers in Paris during the 1920's, the other about American journalists in the Chinese Revolution.

TWO PLAYS
By Gerald F. Sweeney

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TWO PLAYS

Gerald F. Sweeney

Divine Privilege

Expatriate American writers in Paris in the 1920's



A Porcelain to Mend

American journalists involved in the
Chinese Revolution

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First Edition

DIVINE PRIVILEGE

ACT 1

Paris: Late Spring, 1922

- Scene 1 The Bard's Bookshop on the Left Bank
- Scene 2 Montparnasse. A workingman's café
 called Jimmy Jones.

ACT 2

Paris: Summer, 1925

The prosperous-looking *terrasse* of Jimmy Jones Café.

ACT 3

Paris: Summer, 1930

The now somewhat dissipated-looking *terrasse* of Jimmy
Jones Café.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PHIL SUMMERS	A young American writer new in town
REBECCA WATERS	The proprietor of the Bard's Bookshop in Paris
THOMAS DAILY	World famous Irish author, The Harp
TRACE DOMINGOS	A thoughtful young American writer
BOB McCHESTER	A cynical American writer and publisher
FAYE O'BRIEN	A Francophile young American writer and editor
JAKE HATHAWAY	An aggressive young American writer
JIMMY JONES	English café owner and barkeep
BRENDA WILDE	An actress and painter
CAT ROSEN	Famous American poet and writer
TAD HANCOCK	Popular American novelist
LIVINGSTONE LANGLEY	A Black American poet

With an appreciation for Sylvia Beach, Morley Callaghan, George Antheil, James Joyce, Kay Boyle, Robert McAlmon, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Jimmy Charters, Brenda Wilde as one of the New Women (see below), Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes and an irregular authenticity as to history and time.

New Women:

Margaret Anderson, Josephine Baker, Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, Mary Butts, Lady Diana Cooper, Caresse Crosby, Nancy Cunard, Hilda Doolittle, Isadore Duncan, Annie Winifred Ellerman (Bryer), Daisy Fellowes, Zelda Fitzgerald, Nina Hamnett, Kiki, Janet Flanner, Jane Heap.

And Mina Loy, Flossie Martin, Dorothy Parker, Princess Edmond Polignac (Winaretta Singer), Misia Sert, Solita Solano, Iris Tree. Lady Duff Twysden, Dolly Wilde, Thelma Wood.

DIVINE PRIVILEGE

ACT 1: Scene 1

SETTING: Paris, Late spring, 1922. Curtain rises on small section of the stage that features the front desk of The Bard's Bookshop, an English-speaking outpost on the Left Bank. American REBECCA WATERS, in her late twenties, sits at work. Visible are a door to the outside and a front window with books on display. There's a door to an inner room off to the side that's partially open. REBECCA rises, walks to one of the book shelves, takes down a book, examines the contents, replaces it and returns to her desk. A young man PHIL SUMMERS tentatively steps into the shop. All the men in all the acts are wearing suits and ties.

SUMMERS

This must be the place.

REBECCA

Come in. Don't be shy. Welcome to the Bard's lair.

SUMMERS

Miss Waters?

REBECCA

Yes. In all her Yankee glory.

SUMMERS

A pleasure... Word is you maintain a clubhouse for all the literary lights from home...

Gerald F. Sweeney

REBECCA

And far beyond...We entertain readers of all stripes.

SUMMERS

Back in the States, they call you the Bard's bride.

REBECCA

Nay. A maiden yet. But still frisky, mind you.

SUMMERS

You're known for keeping the fire blazing for American writers abroad.

REBECCA

And for others as well including an important Irish literary gentleman you may have heard of... How can I be of help?

SUMMERS

I'm new in Paris. I'm trying to locate a friend of mine, Jake Hathaway. I thought he might be someone who came around to see you.

REBECCA

(Somewhat warily, protecting privacy)

He stops by from time to time. I could certainly give him a message...Perhaps you could leave a note with your address. I'd be happy to pass the information along... Meanwhile, please search around. Maybe something will catch your eye. We also function as a library.

Two Plays

SUMMERS

(With humor)

You and the Bard?

REBECCA

(Lighter)

Yes, He helps me with the cataloguing. And sometimes, I make him wash windows.

She sits at desk. Commences work. SUMMERS inspects books. There's a commotion outside the front window and a man is seen climbing up the facade of the building.

SUMMERS

(Astounded)

You have a visitor. Climbing up your rain pipe. Looks like some kind of giant spider.

REBECCA

(Undisturbed)

That's just George. He must have forgotten his key again. He's my absent-minded tenant.

SUMMERS

And potential mountain climber.

REBECCA

My very own second story man.

Gerald F. Sweeney

They proceed with their tasks. REBECCA suddenly remembers something, walks to table, picks up Abstract Review and opens to a picture and story by her young visitor.

I thought you looked familiar. You must be Phil Summers. I recognize your picture.

SUMMERS

My Hollywood portrait. Shades of the Great Profile.

REBECCA

Your story has caused quite a stir...What brings you to us?

SUMMERS

I've come to climb the literary barricades. The Muse has been calling me.

REBECCA

Kidnapped you, has she? We send her out across the world to seduce you creative types. We've accumulated a bumper crop this season on the Left Bank.

SUMMERS

Coming to France has fortified some of my better dreams. I had to get away from America. Our girl Columbia is losing her soul to business. I was desperate enough to swim across.

REBECCA

Is that where you knew Mister Hathaway?

Two Plays

SUMMERS

Yes. We were working stiff s at home. On the same newspaper. He's my boxing partner.

REBECCA

I know he favors blood sports – boxing, and bullfighting. Hunting and fishing and all that. Barbaric men's activities.

SUMMERS

I was in the ring with him once, and caught him flat-footed, and knocked him cold. He got so mad, he didn't talk to me for weeks.

REBECCA

I try not to think about male aggression...Did you know his first collection of short stories is just out?

SUMMERS

I didn't know.

REBECCA

Rises and locates HATHAWAY book

Here it is. *Upcountry*.

SUMMERS takes book and thumbs through

SUMMERS

I'll want a copy. Did you publish it for him?

REBECCA

No... but I would have done so in a flash. I think he's special.

Gerald F. Sweeney

SUMMERS

People say that you always give more than you receive.

REBECCA

That's how it goes in the literary nourishment business...You'll have to keep in touch. We regularly round up all the English-speaking writers, including Americans like yourself, plus the Irish – and mix them all together with their French counterparts so they can share each other's work.

SUMMERS

You're much applauded in America for publishing *River Liffey*.

REBECCA

An honor and a privilege. Paris is probably the only place in the world open and tolerant enough to have printed it.

SUMMERS

Surely the century's best novel...Does Thomas Daily come by often?

REBECCA

Frequently. To check sales on his *Liffey*.

*There's a scraping of a chair in the next room. Both
look up.*

SUMMERS

Do they really call him The Harp?

Two Plays

REBECCA

Probably because he sings so well. (Lowers voice) I call him Jesus behind his back. I believe part of his brain resides in a medieval library.

SUMMERS

And how about the poet, Cat Rosen, does she come by?

REBECCA

Yes. Actually, she was my first customer. You may not know, but she's more famous here for her art collection than for her writing.

SUMMERS

I didn't know.

REBECCA

She and her brother have been collecting young artists for ten years – Matisse, Picasso of course, Braque. You name a modern painter and she has one of their paintings. Luckily, she shares them. She shows them off at her Saturday night soirees. Visiting writers have a hard time keeping their eyes off the walls while she interviews them for signs of talent.

SUMMERS

You must be close with her.

REBECCA

(Lowers voice)

Once, but no longer. She was furious when I published *River Liffey*. She abandoned me. You probably know that the two of

them, Miss Rosen and Mister Daily – both touchy virtuosos - are great rivals.

SUMMERS

Paris is lucky to have the two of them living here.

REBECCA

Yes, it's a remarkable community. You'll enjoy getting to know the players.

SUMMERS

I'm hoping to catch some of their energy. Theirs and Proust's and Pound's... Learn to loosen my hair shirt.

REBECCA

Paris is as good a place to work as any if you can avoid the distractions.

SUMMERS

I want to wake up every morning and just be wrapped in its sun, and smell the vegetables in the market. Where I can jump out of bed and know something good is going to happen that day. See an old friend or find a new one. Maybe discover a new painting or song...Since arriving, I feel like I've been baptized in firewater and waiting for the resurrection.

REBECCA

You'll find the arts are welcoming. They offer a warm embrace in our cold water garrets.

Two Plays

SUMMERS

Fuel for the imagination...I know something new is going on here –as if nothing like it ever happened before.

REBECCA

Let's hope your searching brings you some relief...You seem to have the right appetite.

SUMMERS

I intend to eat the whole pie.

REBECCA

One piece at a time, my young friend.

SUMMERS

A pleasure it would be, to call you friend...Do you do any writing yourself?

REBECCA

No. And if I did, my work would probably sit on the shelf like dust moles. I'd rather distribute my stories in conversation. And help others tell their tales.

Wild piano music is heard upstairs. GEORGE is playing Antheil's "Airplane Sonata" on the piano.

SUMMERS

Sounds like we have a new kind of music to go along with all our new literature and art.

REBECCA

That's George practicing his latest piece. He accompanies my customers up and down the aisles.

SUMMERS

There's something miraculous going on in Paris. As if there's some hidden prize waiting to be found. Like searching for treasure. You come to believe that somewhere along these crooked streets, you'll bump into your best self.

REBECCA

If that's how you feel, I think you'd better come along with me this evening to Jimmy Jones and meet some of your fellow travelers.

SUMMERS

I'd like that...Where's that exactly?

REBECCA

A café in Montparnesse. Near Raspail...But while you're here, don't forget to leave your address. And sign up to become a member of our library if you'd like.

SUMMERS goes to desk, signs up, passes some money.

Negotiates for purchase of the HATHAWAY book. Fills out address form.

SUMMERS

Will Jake be there at the cafe?

REBECCA

Most likely...

Two Plays

SUMMERS

Who else, do you think?

REBECCA

The usual crowd. Probably Bob McChester, the short story writer. He's also Mister Hathaway's publisher. You might want to be on your toes with him. You've probably heard of Trace Domingos and his war novel (SUMMERS nods). And Faye O'Brien with her short stories in *This Quarter* (SUMMERS nods again). A few others. Maybe Pound or Picasso or Bill Williams...Ezra Pound is the captain of our expatriate fleet... Would you like to subscribe to our library?

SUMMERS

Most certainly. You can put my name down.

REBECCA

Accepts money and gives him a membership card.

There you are. You're now an official member of the Paris crowd.

Hands him purchased copy of Upcountry

And remember it's best to read good work slowly.

SUMMERS

No, speed reading the Classics?

REBECCA

Savor every word. Make it last...Might bring back some of that wonder you had when you were a child. And, if you're lucky,

Gerald F. Sweeney

maybe even balance something in your head and your heart...
See you later at Jimmy's.

SUMMERS

I look forward to meeting your friends...(Holds up book) And
thanks. I'll read it carefully.

REBECCA

About five.

SUMMERS leaves and REBECCA resumes tasks.

*The door of the inner room opens and out steps The
Harp himself, THOMAS DAILY, frail with a brogue
and smoky glasses.*

REBECCA

There you are. Did you hear our latest pilgrim?

TOMMY DAILY

He's so young. He doesn't even know he's not fully formed yet.

REBECCA

He wants to be a writer, poor thing.

TOMMY DAILY

To have such unfinished talent.

REBECCA

Maybe another of your young artist portraits.

Two Plays

TOMMY

The audacity of the young - so naïve and unafraid. To have that flash of fire again raging in your blood. It's almost enough to go through the pain of adolescence all over again.

REBECCA

I've invited him to Jimmy's.

TOMMY

He'll like that. Thinks he's been elected to the Round Table. He'll set off riding around the realm, stacking up a woodpile of virtuous acts. He may even get to think his writing qualifies as a good deed.

REBECCA

Yours is. You've opened up the way for all of them.

TOMMY

The virtues. Hard to find such high-blown attributes. The one I find most appealing in you is your steadfastness. You've become the loyal daughter of modern literature.

REBECCA

Only because the subject's so enticing...Back in the stacks, did you find what you were looking for?

TOMMY

No. I'm trying to find Plotinus in the original.

REBECCA

Perhaps it's available at the University.

TOMMY

If it isn't asking too much, Miss Waters, do you think you'd be able to help me locate it there?

REBECCA

Certainly, Mister Dailey. A pleasure.

TOMMY

That would be ever so kind.

REBECCA

Anything else I can help you with?

TOMMY DAILY

Right now, I'm still unhappy that no one can find that portrait I sat for, the one we were going to use in the serialization. How could a three by four-foot painting go missing?...But I'm mostly concerned about that swindler in America who's hi-jacked my book and printing it without permission.

REBECCA

I have to admit, he's cut into our sales, even after discounting the government censorship. I've sent out warning letters to the bookstores in New York and everywhere else...And as to the painting, I'm sure it will turn up. Probably sitting in the back of some studio.

TOMMY DAILY

It's all made my life difficult.

REBECCA

(Sensing what's coming)

Two Plays

I know. A shame after producing such good work to have someone illegally print it. And your picture stolen.

TOMMY DAILY

Things have been difficult...I'm wondering, Miss Waters, if you might be able to help, perhaps provide an advance to cover the rest of the month?

She opens a drawer with a key, pulling out money.

Blessings on you and your house of books...what would we do without them?... Probably choke.

CURTAIN

A PORCELAIN TO MEND

A Play in Three Acts

by

Gerald F. Sweeney

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Chinese Child	
Second Sister	Gilly's daughter, Ching-Ling, a Chinese Revolutionary
The Premier	A Communist leader in China
Grif Wren	Co-Editor/Owner of newsweekly magazine. <i>WORLDVIEW</i>
Hank Ward	Grif's partner and Co- Editor/Owner
Gilly Han	Head of the Overseas Chinese in Sun Yat-sen's time
Meilin Han	Gilly's third daughter and future wife of the General
Archie McDuff	Foreign Editor of <i>WORLDVIEW</i>
Wu Lin	A member of China's Scholar-Gentry Class
Jane Jackson	Editor in NY and with U.S. State Department in China
The General	The Nationalist leader in China

The Senator	Head of Senate Investigating Committee
Harry Ward	Hank's grandson
Wu Chingling	Young Revolutionary
Others in Act 1	Sing, Gunman
Others in Act 2	Premier's guard, Phil Chang, General's aides
Others in Act 3	Victim, Two student Red Guards, Uniformed Red Guards # 1 and #2, Police Officer and Policeman

PROLOGUE

SETTING: Two elderly Chinese, Shanghai, late 1974. In a formal setting. They are sitting in the woman's living room. Behind them is a decorated screen. There is also a portrait of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, Father of Chinese democracy on the wall. Below, a remembrance table with an unlit candle. The woman is CHING-LING HAN, SECOND SISTER, a famous Chinese Revolutionary. She is talking to the country's PREMIER, deathly ill, whose visit is a way to pay his final respects. He has three scrolls with him and a Proclamation.

SECOND SISTER

Finally, Premier - two old revolutionaries as if all our young fires are embers – still my memory burns with such brightness at the sight of you? ...Remembering us, young and riding out on our tall horses...so many enemies we didn't know which way to turn.

PREMIER

Like battling lightning flashes that streak in a storm

SECOND SISTER

Yes...

PREMIER

The beginning of the Revolution - an eruption. Like the creation of new mountains.

Gerald F. Sweeney

SECOND SISTER

Yes, a rising mountain.

PREMIER

Tearing at the earth's crust. Peaks exploding upwards. Now after fifty years, the air is clear and it's our mountain that first catches the morning sun when the east is red.

Hands her a Proclamation

I'm here to remember your work in that upheaval.

SECOND SISTER

You honor me. I do not deserve it. I must not accept it. I am not worthy.

PREMIER

Not only worthy but long overdue. You cannot refuse it. The highest council demands you accept this honor and it is my privilege to notify you...officially.

SECOND SISTER

But the title? Honorary President?

PREMIER

Yes.

SECOND SISTER

And you with such heavy weight on your shoulders. You should not have come to visit me on a day like this, I know you have not been well.

Two Plays

PREMIER

Mine is only one life. But you have inspired many. In the villages, they call you Mother China.

SECOND SISTER

Now *that* is a burden...all of China. No wonder I'm so tired.

PREMIER.

The matter is settled. Honorary President!

SECOND SISTER

For recognizing my husband's work as well as my own (indicating Sun Yat-sen). In his name will I accept the honor if you think I should.

PREMIER

We still need the courage of your convictions and your loyalty. Because our work is not complete...I may not see it to the end, but you must.

SECOND SISTER

Yours was the greatest spirit to lead us to the new China.

PREMIER

No, that honor is the Chairman's.

SECOND SISTER

You have inspired many.

PREMIER

But words mean little without the force of action. For me, winning the Revolution was the fulfillment of the promises I made to myself when I was young.

SECOND SISTER

Yours has been the steady hand.

PREMIER

And I have always been amazed how you managed to juggle all your duties...to the Han family...sisters and brothers, your husband, and our long fight.

SECOND SISTER

Not so successful with my family, but always a willing wife. I had hoped to be loyal to my family, but I had to choose a different political path from them after Doctor Sun died.

PREMIER

Family conflicts like chicken fights...What did the Westerners call your father...Charlie? Such a force he was in the beginning – Charlie Han. But so divisive after your Third Sister married the General, when he followed the Nationalists instead of us, leaving the Chairman without his support during the Long March.

PREMIER rises and displays the scrolls on the screen. There are three of them but he makes a space between the second and third scroll as if one were missing.

PREMIER (Continuing)

So many hoofbeats ago. But think of the foreigners we have ushered in and out of the country... a parade...in the regalia and raiment of their regiments – Americans and British and Russians and the armies of Japan. We have created a legend...escorting the great powers from the house of China.

SECOND SISTER

Bringing peace and unity.

PREMIER

Yes. I would like to think there is some magical go-down where the welfare of the people is stored. Some warehouse filled with enough rice to feed a generation – where the spirit of harmony lies in silk – along with stores of medicines and herbs...enough to cure our sick...and bricks for all...Abundant benefits for our people.

SECOND SISTER

We have seen China stand up...and soon there will be plenty for the Hundred Old Families.

PREMIER

The old ones... (ruminates) When I was young, filled with revolutionary zeal, I owned a piece of porcelain that captured the harmony we loved about old China and I would study this plate and its picture of some long forgotten spring scene and continually ask myself if what we were doing was right...because we were also part of the violence.

SECOND SISTER

You never wavered.

PREMIER

We are all children of doubt, but I carried that porcelain for twenty years – but it was smashed by the Red Guards. I managed to piece it together and in the end sent it to our American friend, Jane Jackson.

SECOND SISTER

We all carry some treasure like that in our hearts.

PREMIER

Second Sister, (pause) we may not meet again. I have brought you the Ming scrolls...one painting still missing...Perhaps you can find a way to complete the series. May I pass that labor on to you?

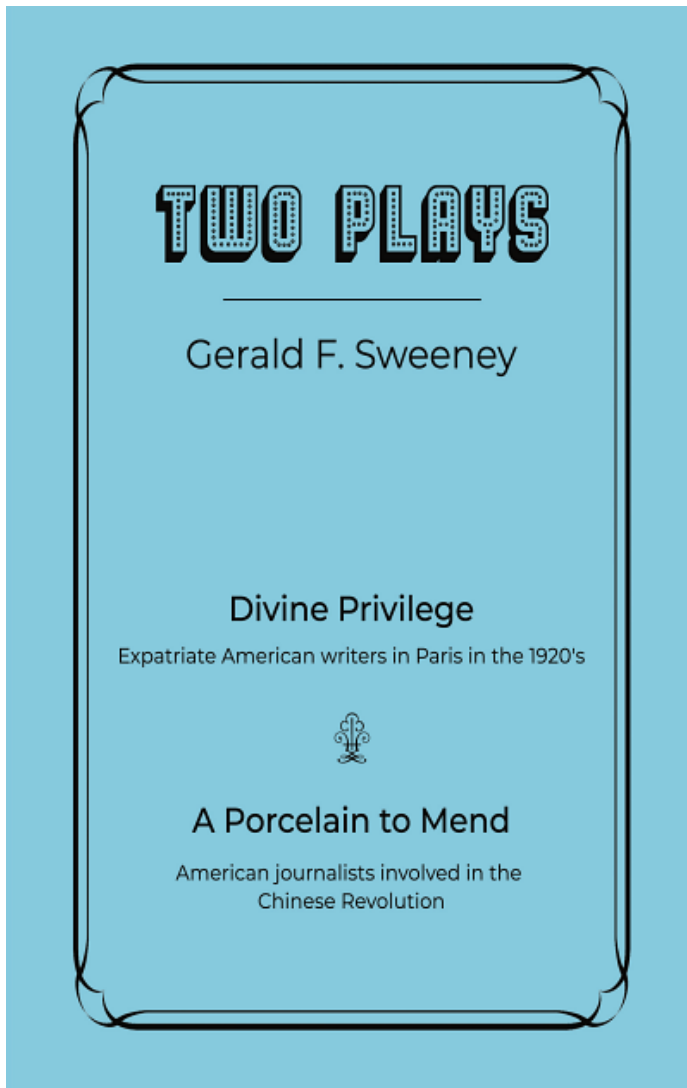
SECOND SISTER

I will continue the search...The missing scroll probably had a destiny of its own.

PREMIER

(Bowing to one another) We will honor the journey of its soul when we see it circling home.

CURTAIN



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