

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Maids (1947) **Jean Genet** (1910-1986)

Fifty years after the revolution brought into western thinking by the experiments and discussions made familiar by Sigmund Freud, it was high time to carry evolving proposals into the new fields of technical mental understanding. No longer did it make sense, forever, simply to say of Shakespeare, for that instance, simply to expostulate that he had 'plumbed the depths of the' human soul,' It became relevant to show some wider technical understanding of the habitual operations of the human soul--whatever the view of Freud on it be. One need only look into the work of a dramatist like Ibsen, a contemporary of Freud, to sense the differences left by Freudianism on the entire fabric of the modern dramatic tradition. Without attending only to Freud and Ibsen, particularly, Ibsen has absorbed the Freudian perspective hand and glove.

The passage of a century, since the death of Freud, will by now have left Freud's world view, psychiatric pragmatism, as a legacy to the human condition. So routine have become the central tenets Freud maintained--the clash of ego with id; the omnipresence of sexuality in human behavior and motivation, the omnipresence of the unconscious in human behavior--that the deep presence of sexuality in the human condition is no longer up for doubting. When we join Freud and Ibsen in one thought and attempt to start into the origins of century shared by--think back to the origins of the sexual liberation movements a century ago about the limits--we can trace the dissolutions of many assumptions about the limits of human behavior. It astonishes few, nowadays, that the once supposedly rock stable notion of gender is up for grabs. We can attribute this breakdown in part to changes in society, which now dictate various notions of an open society, in which it is accepted that people make their own societies, and are free to make them as they wish. The broad, and of course contentious, point being made here backgrounds a cultural setting in which the male-female dichotomy no longer dominates the scene.