

summer and smoke by tennessee williams

Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams: A Deep Dive into a Complex Classic

summer and smoke by tennessee williams is a play that offers a captivating exploration of human desires, spirituality, and the complexities of emotional repression. Written by one of America's most renowned playwrights, Tennessee Williams, this work stands out as a nuanced portrayal of the contrasts between body and soul, passion and restraint, and the eternal struggle for self-understanding. Whether you are a student, theatre enthusiast, or someone curious about American drama, understanding the themes and characters of *summer and smoke by tennessee williams* can enrich your appreciation of this timeless classic.

Understanding the Context of Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams

When Tennessee Williams penned *summer and smoke*, he was already a celebrated figure in the world of drama, known for works like *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This play, first performed in 1948, reflects Williams's signature style—poetic dialogue, deep character studies, and a Southern Gothic atmosphere. Set in a small Mississippi town, the play captures the oppressive heat of summer, which metaphorically mirrors the intensity of emotions simmering beneath the surface of the characters' lives.

The Setting and Its Symbolism

The setting of *summer and smoke* is crucial to understanding its deeper layers. The sweltering summer heat is not just a backdrop; it symbolizes the inner turmoil and suppressed desires of the characters. The "smoke" in the title can be interpreted as the haze of illusions, misunderstandings, and spiritual confusion that envelops them. This juxtaposition of summer and smoke creates a mood that is both suffocating and elusive, much like the emotional states that Williams explores.

Exploring the Central Themes in Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams is known for his ability to delve into complex human emotions, and *summer and smoke* is no exception. The play tackles themes that resonate universally but are expressed through the specific lens of its characters.

The Duality of Spirit and Flesh

One of the most prominent themes in *summer and smoke by tennessee williams* is the tension

between the spiritual and the physical. The main character, Alma Winemiller, embodies this conflict. Alma is a minister's daughter who is repressed and yearns for a deeper connection beyond the physical. Her struggle represents the conflict between societal expectations of purity and the natural human desire for intimacy and passion.

On the other hand, John Buchanan Jr., a doctor and Alma's counterpart, represents the physical world. His more pragmatic and sensual nature contrasts sharply with Alma's idealism. Their interactions underscore the play's exploration of human duality—how the body and soul often exist in conflict within the same person.

Loneliness and Desire

Loneliness is a pervasive theme that drives the characters' actions in *Summer and Smoke*. Alma's isolation stems from her inability to reconcile her spiritual beliefs with her desires. Similarly, John's loneliness arises from his detachment and inability to commit emotionally. Tennessee Williams masterfully portrays how this loneliness leads to misunderstandings and missed opportunities for connection.

The Passage of Time and Regret

Another poignant theme is the inevitability of time and the regrets it brings. The characters in *Summer and Smoke* confront the consequences of their choices too late, highlighting the bittersweet nature of life and love. Williams uses this theme to comment on the human condition—the elusive nature of happiness and the pain of lost chances.

Character Analysis: The Heart of Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams

Understanding the characters in *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams is key to grasping the play's emotional depth and thematic richness.

Alma Winemiller: The Tragic Idealist

Alma is a deeply complex character whose purity and innocence are both her strength and her curse. She yearns for transcendence but is trapped by her own rigid moral code and fear of physical intimacy. Alma's journey is heartbreaking as she moves from idealism to despair, embodying the tragic consequences of emotional repression.

John Buchanan Jr.: The Worldly Realist

John serves as a foil to Alma. He is pragmatic, sensual, and somewhat cynical. Yet beneath his

exterior lies a vulnerability shaped by his own loneliness and search for meaning. His relationship with Alma is fraught with miscommunication and missed timing, making their dynamic a compelling study of human frailty.

Supporting Characters and Their Roles

While Alma and John dominate the narrative, supporting characters like Mrs. Winemiller, the minister's wife, and Rosa Zacchara add depth and context to the story. They reflect societal pressures and the cultural setting that influence the main characters' decisions.

Performance and Adaptations: Bringing Summer and Smoke to Life

Summer and smoke by tennessee williams has seen numerous revivals and adaptations since its debut. Each production offers a unique interpretation, often emphasizing different aspects of the play's rich emotional landscape.

Stage Productions

The play's lyrical language and psychological complexity make it a favorite for theatre companies interested in character-driven drama. Directors often highlight the Southern Gothic elements and the intense emotional conflicts to create a haunting atmosphere that resonates with audiences.

Film and Television Adaptations

Notably, summer and smoke was adapted into a film in 1961 starring Geraldine Page and Laurence Harvey. While the movie attempts to capture the essence of the play, many critics argue that the live theatrical experience better conveys the subtleties of the characters' inner worlds and the poetic quality of Williams's writing.

Why Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams Still Matters Today

More than seven decades after its premiere, summer and smoke remains relevant because it addresses timeless aspects of the human experience. Its exploration of identity, desire, and societal expectations speaks to contemporary audiences navigating similar emotional landscapes.

Insights for Modern Readers and Viewers

- The play invites reflection on the balance between spiritual beliefs and physical needs, a topic still pertinent in today's discussions about personal freedom and cultural norms.
- Alma's story encourages empathy towards those struggling with internal conflicts and societal pressures.
- John's character reminds us of the importance of vulnerability and honest communication in relationships.

Tips for Studying or Watching Summer and Smoke

If you plan to engage with *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams, consider these approaches to deepen your understanding:

- **Pay attention to symbolism:** Notice how the heat, smoke, and setting reflect the characters' emotional states.
- **Focus on dialogue:** Williams's poetic language reveals much about the characters' inner lives.
- **Consider historical context:** Understanding the 1940s Southern setting enhances appreciation of the societal constraints depicted.
- **Reflect on character motivations:** Try to empathize with both Alma and John to grasp the play's emotional complexity.

Engaging with the play through these lenses can transform it from a simple story into a profound experience.

Final Thoughts on the Enduring Power of Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams

The richness of *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams lies in its ability to capture the fragile beauty and pain of being human. Through the interplay of characters, themes, and symbols, the play offers a mirror to our own struggles with identity, love, and acceptance. Whether encountered on stage, screen, or page, it invites us to ponder the delicate balance between spirit and flesh—and the smoky haze that often clouds our understanding of ourselves and others.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of Tennessee Williams' 'Summer and Smoke'?

'Summer and Smoke' explores themes of desire, spirituality, repression, and the conflict between the physical and the emotional aspects of human nature.

Who are the main characters in 'Summer and Smoke'?

The main characters are Alma Winemiller, a refined and spiritual young woman, and John Buchanan Jr., a passionate and rebellious young man.

How does Tennessee Williams portray the conflict between Alma and John in 'Summer and Smoke'?

Williams portrays their conflict as a struggle between Alma's desire for spiritual purity and John's pursuit of physical pleasure, highlighting their incompatibility and emotional tension.

What role does setting play in 'Summer and Smoke'?

The setting, a small Southern town, emphasizes the themes of social expectations, repression, and the clash between traditional values and personal desires.

How does 'Summer and Smoke' reflect Tennessee Williams' own life and experiences?

'Summer and Smoke' draws on Williams' exploration of human fragility, emotional isolation, and the complexities of love and desire, themes recurrent in his own life and works.

What is the significance of the title 'Summer and Smoke'?

The title symbolizes the contrast between warmth and passion (summer) and the ethereal, elusive nature of Alma's desires and spirituality (smoke).

How does the character of Alma evolve throughout the play?

Alma transitions from a repressed, idealistic woman to someone who confronts her own desires and vulnerabilities, ultimately experiencing a painful awakening.

What is the role of religion and spirituality in 'Summer and Smoke'?

Religion and spirituality serve as a backdrop for Alma's internal conflict, representing her struggle between societal expectations and personal longing.

How was 'Summer and Smoke' received when it was first

performed?

Initially, the play received mixed reviews but has since been recognized as a significant work that showcases Williams' poetic dialogue and psychological depth.

In what ways does 'Summer and Smoke' differ from Tennessee Williams' other plays?

'Summer and Smoke' is more lyrical and symbolic compared to Williams' other works, focusing heavily on internal emotions and spiritual themes rather than overt drama.

Additional Resources

Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams: A Critical Exploration of Desire and Identity

summer and smoke by tennessee williams stands as a poignant and complex work within the American playwright's oeuvre, showcasing his enduring fascination with human vulnerability, spiritual conflict, and the elusive nature of love. Written in 1948, this play diverges in tone and theme from Williams's more famous works like "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "The Glass Menagerie," yet it encapsulates his signature exploration of fragile characters caught between societal expectations and personal longings. This article delves into the multifaceted layers of Summer and Smoke, offering an analytical perspective on its themes, character dynamics, and literary significance.

Contextual Background and Literary Significance

Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams emerged during a period when American theater was grappling with shifting cultural norms post-World War II. The play originally premiered on Broadway in 1948, followed by a revised version titled "The Eccentricities of a Nightingale" in 1964. Though it never achieved the commercial success of some of Williams's other masterpieces, it remains a compelling study of emotional restraint and spiritual yearning.

Williams's writing in Summer and Smoke is marked by poetic dialogue and symbolism, reflecting his Southern Gothic roots. The play's setting—a small Mississippi town—serves as more than mere backdrop; it intensifies the characters' internal clashes and societal constraints. The contrast between the oppressive heat of summer and the ethereal quality of smoke encapsulates the tension between corporeal desires and spiritual aspirations, a recurring motif in Williams's work.

Plot Overview and Narrative Structure

At its core, Summer and Smoke tells the story of Alma Winemiller, a young woman torn between her religious moralism and deep-seated desires, and John Buchanan Jr., a doctor who embodies sensuality and cynicism. The narrative follows their intertwined lives, marked by miscommunication and missed opportunities for connection.

The play unfolds in two acts, reflecting a transformation in both characters. Alma's initial repression

gradually gives way to awakening, while John's initial hedonism reveals a capacity for tenderness. Williams uses this structural duality to highlight the fluidity of identity and the tragic consequences of societal judgment.

Thematic Exploration in Summer and Smoke

Conflict Between Body and Soul

One of the most prominent themes in *Summer and Smoke* by Tennessee Williams is the conflict between physical desire and spiritual purity. Alma represents the "smoke," symbolizing ethereal, intangible aspirations, while John signifies the "summer," embodying warmth, passion, and earthly existence. This dichotomy is central to understanding the characters' internal struggles.

Williams uses religious imagery and symbolism throughout the play to underscore Alma's repression and her quest for transcendence. Her adherence to Christian morality clashes with her emerging sensuality, creating a poignant tension that drives much of the drama. Conversely, John's detachment from spiritual concerns masks a deep loneliness, suggesting that neither extreme offers true fulfillment.

Isolation and Communication Breakdown

Another critical element in *Summer and Smoke* is the failure of communication. The characters often misinterpret or fail to articulate their true feelings, leading to missed connections and emotional isolation. This theme reflects Williams's broader preoccupation with loneliness and the human need for understanding.

Alma and John's interactions are marked by irony and missed timing. For example, Alma's initial rejection of John due to her moral convictions contrasts sharply with her later realization of love when John has emotionally withdrawn. This tragic timing amplifies the play's melancholic tone and highlights the fragility of human relationships.

Societal Expectations and Gender Roles

Set in a conservative Southern town, *Summer and Smoke* also critiques rigid social norms, particularly regarding gender roles and sexuality. Alma's struggle to reconcile her desires with societal expectations mirrors the broader cultural repression of female sexuality in mid-20th-century America.

Williams subtly challenges these norms through Alma's character development. Her journey from repression to self-awareness questions the validity of the moral codes imposed upon women and exposes the emotional cost of conformity. John's character, too, subverts traditional masculinity by revealing vulnerability beneath his outward bravado.

Character Analysis: Alma and John

Alma Winemiller: The Ethereal Seeker

Alma is arguably one of Tennessee Williams's most nuanced female protagonists. Her complexity lies in her dual nature—she is both a symbol of innocence and a figure wrestling with forbidden desires. Alma's spiritual aspirations and repression make her a tragic figure, embodying the pain of self-denial and unfulfilled love.

Her characterization is enriched by Williams's lyrical language, which often conveys her inner turmoil through poetic monologues and vivid imagery. Alma's journey is not just about romantic awakening but also about self-acceptance and the reconciliation of conflicting impulses.

John Buchanan Jr.: The Earthbound Romantic

John serves as a foil to Alma's ethereal qualities. He is pragmatic, sensual, and somewhat cynical, yet beneath his rough exterior lies a yearning for genuine connection. His profession as a doctor symbolizes a rational approach to life, but emotionally, he is equally vulnerable.

Williams crafts John as a figure caught between societal expectations of masculinity and his own emotional needs. His eventual recognition of love and regret adds a layer of pathos to the narrative, illustrating the consequences of emotional aloofness.

Comparative Perspectives and Adaptations

Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams has been subject to various interpretations and adaptations, each emphasizing different facets of the play's rich text. The 1964 revision, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, altered the tone to highlight the comedic and eccentric elements, though it received mixed critical responses.

Comparing Summer and Smoke to Williams's other works reveals its unique position in his canon. While plays like *A Streetcar Named Desire* focus on overt psychological drama and social decay, Summer and Smoke offers a more introspective and symbolic meditation on desire and spirituality. This makes it a valuable study for scholars interested in the evolution of Williams's thematic concerns.

Stage and Screen Interpretations

Over the decades, Summer and Smoke has seen numerous stage productions worldwide, each bringing new insights into the characters' emotional landscapes. Notably, the play's subtlety and poetic style present challenges for directors aiming to balance its symbolic depth with audience engagement.

Film adaptations, while less frequent, have attempted to capture the play's atmospheric tension and character complexity. These adaptations often underscore the visual contrasts between heat and smoke, reflecting the central metaphor of the narrative.

Relevance and Legacy in Contemporary Theater

Summer and Smoke continues to resonate in contemporary theater due to its timeless exploration of human emotions and societal constraints. Its themes of identity conflict, repression, and yearning remain relevant in discussions about gender, spirituality, and emotional authenticity.

Modern productions often highlight the play's psychological depth and poetic language, attracting audiences seeking nuanced and character-driven drama. Additionally, the play's Southern Gothic elements contribute to its enduring appeal within American cultural and literary studies.

In summary, Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams exemplifies a rich, layered work that challenges audiences to contemplate the complex interplay of body, soul, and society. Its enduring legacy is a testament to Williams's profound understanding of human frailty and the eternal quest for love and meaning.

Summer And Smoke By Tennessee Williams

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams
James Mountcastle, Tennessee Williams, 1990

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Summer and Smoke, Acting Version, Play in 2 Parts, by Tennessee Williams. [New York, Music Box Theatre, October 6, 1948].
Tennessee Williams,

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THE STORY: A play that is profoundly affecting, SUMMER AND SMOKE is a simple love story of a somewhat puritanical Southern girl and an unpuritanical young doctor. Each is basically attracted to the other but because of their divergent attitudes toward life

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Tennessee Williams Tennessee Williams, 1976
summer and smoke by tennessee williams: The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams Matthew C. Roudané, 1997-12-11 This is a collection of thirteen original essays from a team of leading scholars in the field. In this wide-ranging volume, the contributors cover a healthy sampling of Williams's works, from the early apprenticeship years in the 1930s through to his last play before his death in 1983, *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*. In addition to essays on such major plays as *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, among others, the contributors also consider selected minor plays, short stories, poems, and biographical concerns. The Companion also features a chapter on selected key productions as well as a bibliographic essay surveying the major critical statements on Williams.

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summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Summer and Smoke, [by] Tennessee Williams, 1958 Commenced 25 June 1958, Willard Hall.

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Jennifer Banach, 2009 Tennessee Williams is recognized as one of America's greatest dramatists and

as an innovator of post-World War II theater. He looked for a mechanism for portraying the truth in theater at a time when traditional approaches no longer worked. Both in form as well as in subject matter, Williams confronted audiences with what had been taboo topics and underrepresented domestic and social realities. His notable contributions to literature include *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Coverage of Williams's major works and suggested essay topics will be invaluable to students and researchers.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Summer and Smoke Tennessee Williams, 2012-03-19 *Summer and Smoke* is a two-part, thirteen-scene play by Tennessee Williams, originally titled *Chart of Anatomy* when Williams began work on it in 1945. In 1964, Williams revised the play as *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. *Summer and Smoke* is set in Glorious Hill, Mississippi from the turn of the century through 1916, and centers on a high-strung, unmarried minister's daughter, Alma Winemiller, and the spiritual/sexual romance that nearly blossoms between her and the wild, undisciplined young doctor who grew up next door, John Buchanan, Jr. She, ineffably refined, identifies with the gothic cathedral, reaching up to something beyond attainment; her name, as Williams makes clear during the play, means soul in Spanish; whereas Buchanan, doctor and sensualist, defies her with the soulless anatomy chart. By play's end, however, Buchanan and Alma have traded places philosophically. Fuji Books' edition of *Summer And Smoke* contains supplementary texts: * *I Rise In Flame*, *Cried The Phoenix*, a one-act play by Tennessee Williams which presents a fictionalized version of the death of English writer D. H. Lawrence on the French Riviera; Lawrence was one of Williams' chief literary influences. * An excerpt from *The Glass Menagerie*, by Tennessee Williams. * A few selected quotes of Tennessee Williams.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Tennessee Williams Robert F. Gross, 2002 Tennessee Williams' plays are performed around the world, and are staples of the standard American repertory. His famous portrayals of women engage feminist critics, and as America's leading gay playwright from the repressive postwar period, through Stonewall, to the growth of gay liberation, he represents an important and controversial figure for queer theorists. Gross and his contributors have included all of his plays, a chronology, introduction and bibliography.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: The Theatre of Tennessee Williams Brenda Murphy, 2014-01-16 This book is open access and available on www.bloomsburycollections.com. It is funded by Knowledge Unlatched. Perfect for students of English Literature, Theatre Studies and American Studies at college and university, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* provides a lucid and stimulating analysis of Williams' dramatic work by one of America's leading scholars. With the centennial of his birth celebrated amid a flurry of conferences devoted to his work in 2011, and his plays a central part of any literature and drama curriculum and ubiquitous in theatre repertoires, he remains a giant of twentieth century literature and drama. In Brenda Murphy's major study of his work she examines his life and career and provides an analysis of more than a score of his key plays, including in-depth studies of major works such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and others. She traces the artist figure who features in many of Williams' plays to broaden the discussion beyond the normal reference points. As with other volumes in Methuen Drama's *Critical Companions* series, this book features too essays by Bruce McConachie, John S. Bak, Felicia Hardison Londré and Annette Saddik, offering perspectives on different aspects of Williams' work that will assist students in their own critical thinking.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Tennessee Williams: One Act Plays Tennessee Williams, 2020-01-30 The peak of my virtuosity was in the one- act plays. Some of which are like firecrackers on a rope. Tennessee Williams Tennessee Williams's lesser-known one-act plays reveal a tantalising and fascinating perspective to one of the world's most important playwrights. Written between 1934 and 1980, the plays of the very young writer, then of the successful Tennessee Williams, and finally of the troubled man of the 1970s, this volume offers a panoramic yet detailed view of the themes, demons, and wit of this iconic playwright. The volume depicts American life during the Great Depression and after, populated by a hopelessly hopeful chorus girl, a munitions manufacturer ensnared in a love triangle, a rural family that deals justice on its children, an

overconfident mob dandy, a poor couple who quarrel to vanquish despair, a young spinster enthralled by the impulse of rebellion, and, in *The Magic Tower*, a passionate artist and his wife whose youth and optimism are not enough to protect their 'dream marriage.' This collection gathers some of Williams's most exuberant early work and includes one-acts that he would later expand to powerful full-length dramas: 'The Pretty Trap,' a cheerful take on *The Glass Menagerie*, and 'Interior: Panic,' a precursor to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Plays included are: *At Liberty*, *The Magic Tower*, *Me, Vashya*, *Curtains for the Gentleman*, *In Our Profession*, *Every Twenty Minutes*, *Honor the Living*, *The Cast of the Crushed Petunias*, *Moony's Kid Don't Cry*, *The Dark Room*, *The Pretty Trap*, *Interior: Panic*, *Kingdom of Earth*, *I Never Get Dressed Till After Dark on Sundays* and *Some Problems for The Moose Lodge*. The volume also features a foreword by Terence McNally.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Tennessee Williams' the Eccentricities of a Nightingale (summer and Smoke). Goodman Theatre (Chicago, Ill.), 1967

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summer and smoke by tennessee williams: Tennessee Williams Philip Kolin, 1998-10-28 The plays of Tennessee Williams are some of the greatest triumphs of the American theatre. If Williams is not the most important American playwright, he surely is one of the two or three most celebrated, rivaled only by Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. In a career that spanned almost five decades, he created an extensive canon of more than 70 plays. His contributions to the American theatre are inestimable and revolutionary. *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) introduced poetic realism to the American stage; *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) explored sexual and psychological issues that had never before been portrayed in American culture; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) dared to challenge the political and sexual mores of the Eisenhower era; and his plays of the 1970s are among the most innovative works produced on the American stage. But Williams was far more than a gifted and prolific playwright. He created two collections of poetry, two novels, four collections of stories, memoirs, and scores of essays. Because of his towering presence in American drama, Williams has attracted the attention of some of the most insightful scholars and critics of the twentieth century. The 1990s in particular ushered in a renaissance of Williams research, including a definitive biography, a descriptive bibliography, and numerous books and scholarly articles. This reference book synthesizes the vast body of research on Tennessee Williams and offers a performance history of his works. Under the guidance of one of the leading authorities on Williams, expert contributors have written chapters on each of Williams' works or clusters of works. Each chapter includes a discussion of the biographical context of a work or group of writings; a survey of the bibliographic history; an analysis of major critical approaches, which looks at themes, characters, symbols, and plots; a consideration of the major critical problems posed by the work; an overview of chief productions and film and television versions; a concluding interpretation; and a bibliography of secondary sources. The volume concludes with a selected, general bibliography and a comprehensive index.

summer and smoke by tennessee williams: *Intercourse* Andrea Dworkin, 2009-09-14

Intercourse is a book that moves through the sexed world of dominance and submission. It moves in descending circles, not in a straight line, and as in a vortex each spiral goes down deeper. Its formal model is Dante's Inferno; its lyrical debt is to Rimbaud; the equality it envisions is rooted in the dreams of women, silent generations, pioneer voices, lone rebels, and masses who agitated, demanded, cried out, broke laws, and even begged. The begging was a substitute for retaliatory violence: doing bodily harm back to those who use or injure you. I want women to be done with begging. The public censure of women as if we are rabid because we speak without apology about the world in which we live is a strategy of threat that usually works. Men often react to women's words - speaking and writing - as if they were acts of violence; sometimes men react to women's words with violence. So we lower our voices. Women whisper. Women apologize. Women shut up. Women trivialize what we know. Women shrink. Women pull back. Most women have experienced enough dominance from men - control, violence, insult, contempt - that no threat seems empty. Intercourse does not say, forgive me and love me. It does not say, I forgive you, I love you. For a woman writer to thrive (or, arguably, to survive) in these current hard times, forgiveness and love must be subtext. No. I say no. Intercourse is search and assertion, passion and fury; and its form - no less than its content - deserves critical scrutiny and respect.---- PREFACE.

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