



The Maids

Jean Genet

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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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