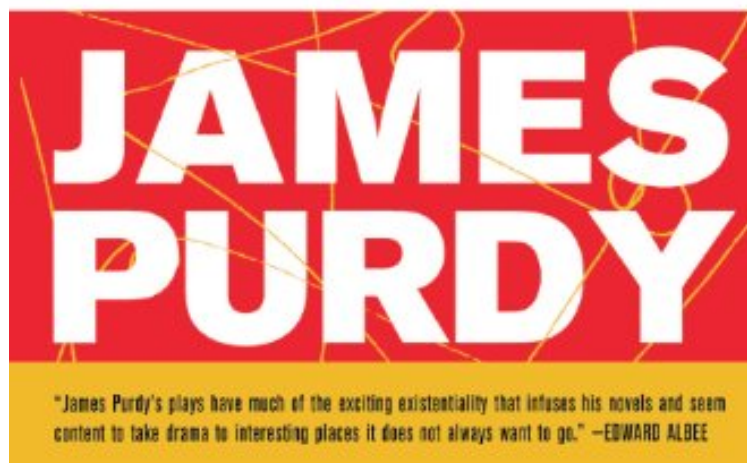


## James Purdy: Selected Plays

James Purdy

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**James Purdy : James Purdy: Selected Plays** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised James Purdy: Selected Plays:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. FAMILY TIESBy GideonOhio-born author James Purdy died on March 13th 2009, leaving behind a legacy comprising numerous works. Among them are sixteen novels, seven books of stories and plays and five books of poetry.Discovered in the 50s by DAME EDITH SITWELL (nemo propheta in patria), praised in his lifetime by DOROTHY PARKER, GORE VIDAL and PAUL BOWLES, Mr Purdy lived a maverick life that swiftly earned him cult status and the reputation of a literary outlaw. Never one to kowtow to the

powers that be, he often described his work as "an underground river, flowing often undetected through the American landscape". It is high time that more people found out about this river. If you need a reason to do it, you only have to read one book by Purdy and then compare it to the canon of THE GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS: you will discover that some of them are a little too tame and ordinary for comfort. A little too corny, even. This beautiful volume by Chicago publisher IVAN R. DEE goes in the right direction, as far as reappraisal is concerned. It is the first time that these plays have resurfaced in a new edition in the United States. Written between 1989 and 2001, they are a perfect starting point for any newcomer to Purdy's work, as well as an utter delight to the aficionado. In the - alas - too brief preface by editor JOHN UECKER we learn that James Purdy - who is chiefly considered a novelist - started his adventure in literature as a playwright, a role he would return to on and off throughout his career, once even after being BEGGED to write drama by none other than TENNESSEE WILLIAMS. So this book collects no secondary work, but an essential part of our Ohio Bard's oeuvre. These four plays should be more precisely described as TRAGEDIES. Of course they do not respect the aristotelian unity of time/space/action and their characters are not kings and princes, but their essence is deeply tragic and immensely affecting. Two of them also turn out to be new and inventive takes on stories already developed by the Stratford Bard himself, a.k.a. William S.: RUTHANNA ELDER, for instance, is a ROMEO AND JULIET with a twist set in a rural community in 1919, while reading THE PARADISE CIRCUS one cannot help thinking of a deft, mesmerizing reincarnation of KING LEAR. Of these plays only RUTHANNA ELDER has a straight tragic ending with blood on stage, in apt senecan mode. The two remaining works (BRICE, WHERE QUENTIN GOES) are more experimental. We like to think of them as SILENT TRAGEDIES, as there are no violent external events that precipitate their ending. Here the main characters undergo a psychological implosion and create a sudden, silent void on stage by actually running away, thus leaving the others to deal with the consequences of their flight. And it is often through this implosion/disappearance that we understand that these were the main characters after all; Purdy's ability to mask their role up to that point definitely produces shocking surprises, such that can rattle one's bones. As for themes, FAMILY is the burning core of SELECTED PLAYS. This is family that binds and gags at the same time, family exploding to create new forms of itself, family threatened by external love and devoured by internal lack of it. All the characters struggle to find their own identity, revealing snatches of their lives via vibrant confessionals. Their turmoil is channelled through a hypnotic language, based on a flexible form of American colloquial; every cue snaps into place with a perfectly nuanced twist, putting the reader in contact with vivid, living speech. There is also a tense erotic drive in almost every scene, which is sustained by a careful choice of words and turns of phrase, thus creating a subtly tantalizing atmosphere. It is therefore impossible to summarize this reading experience without resorting to the highest forms of praise. Mr Purdy has always been an extremely surprising author, and this volume is no exception to the rule. It should not stop here, though. We definitely need more texts - all the other plays, the poems - to resurface in new editions, as well as a stubborn, brave academic to take up the challenge of writing a full biography of this compelling author. Oh, and more readers, more people to become aware of Mr Purdy's importance in the landscape of American literature. In this regard we would like to suggest some further reading, as far as the novels are concerned. If you want a softer start try our man's 1960 classic, THE NEPHEW, a work imbued with beautiful melancholy at times raped by harsh truths. Or if you are ready for something more hard-edged and harrowing (in a good way) try NARROW ROOMS (1978), a book that, especially in its final part, easily outstrips all those scribblers who pretend to dabble with fear and horror (you know who they are, they even sell millions). If one or all of these suggestions work for you, rest assured: you will always want to quench your thirst at this rich underground river. Mr Purdy will be then yours for life. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. May his name not be writ in water. By GODFREY H. An unseeing genius of metaphysical American Gothic. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. TWO WONDERFUL PLAYS BY A MASTER By CHESTER PAGE JAMES PURDY WAS AN ORIGINAL. HE WAS UNIQUE, WRITING STRANGE, OFTEN UNPOPULAR WORKS APPRECIATED BY AN UNDERGROUND BASE OF ADMIRERS.

Hailed as a creative genius (TLS) and a singular American visionary (New York Times), James Purdy may be best known for his remarkable novels, but he is also an astonishing playwright who has written nine full-length and twenty short plays. Purdy is one of the few contemporary American writers capable of writing tragedy-Tennessee Williams called him a uniquely gifted man of the theater. This collection presents four riveting and beautifully crafted works: Brice, The Paradise Circus, Where Quentin Goes, and Ruthanna Elder. Each explores a range of emotional and familial tangles, as fathers betray their sons and squander their inheritances, siblings compete for parental affection, and husbands and wives try to salvage meaning from their broken marriages. The plays are written in Purdy's authentic idiom, which Paul Bowles called the closest [we have] to a classical American colloquial.

James Purdy's plays have much of the exciting existentiality that infuses his novels and seem content to take drama to interesting places it does not always want to go. (Edward Albee) James Purdy is an authentic American genius. (Gore Vidal) James Purdy's Selected Plays will break your damaged little heart. (John Waters) Purdy is a writer of the highest rank in originality, insight, and power. (Dorothy Parker) One of the greatest writers produced in America during the

past hundred years. (Dame Edith Sitwell) These four darkly shimmering plays are a very welcome addition to Purdy's shelf of novels and stories, and once more reveal him to be a pure, unique, and unforgettable voice in the literature of our time. (Bradford Morrow) "James Purdy is an authentic American genius." "James Purdy is an authentic American genius." "James Purdy's Selected Plays will break your damaged little heart." "Purdy is a writer of the highest rank in originality, insight, and power."