

**CONFESSIONAL:  
AND OTHER  
AMERICAN PLAYS**

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Confessional: And Other American Plays by Percival Wilde

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**PERCIVAL WILDE**

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# CONFESSIONAL

*And Other American Plays*

BY

PERCIVAL WILDE



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*Published February, 1916*

**To**

**WALTER**

**MORE THAN BROTHER—FRIEND**





## PREFACE

TOGETHER WITH "THE SMILE OF RHADAMANTHOS,"  
AN EGYPTIAN MORALITY, NOW FOR THE FIRST  
(AND LAST) TIME ENGLISHED.

THE writer of one-act plays is in a peculiar position. No other department of the drama has been so long and so disastrously neglected. The world's great one-act plays may be checked off on the fingers of one hand. Schnitzler, Synge, perhaps Sudermann, and not more than one or two others may claim that they have done work of more than passing merit in this field; but the list ends there, and at that, it would be difficult to cite five titles without including plays whose right to figure in the illustrious minority would be very seriously and very justly questioned.

Where there are no standards, each must shift for himself. The writer of one-act plays must venture into uncharted seas. He must dare, as a man who knows not on which side the dangers lie, with the full knowledge that a mistake will be fatal.

Yet this is no unmitigated evil. He cannot profit by the faults of the past; but he can, nevertheless, com-

mit faults which others may avoid. It may be unfortunate for the individual; it cannot be so for the mass. In the last analysis bad writing is possibly as useful as good writing. The sure pilot who first steers a true course does not, perhaps, render so great a service to his successors as the unlucky navigator who comes to grief on a hidden rock, and remains, for years afterwards, a warning of what *not* to do.

To set a good example is excellent; but to set a bad example for the future admonition of others is an enduring benefit. Buoys mark dangers—not safety. The wake of him who has passed through unscathed is but a ripple on the face of the waters, useless except to his immediate followers. And the prudent voyager bears in mind that every passing gust also produces a ripple, and locates the channel by guiding between the wrecks on either side.

These premises, then, we take for granted: that the one-act play is an independent art form; that it is capable of producing effects totally foreign to the longer drama; that the very special class of material which naturally falls into the one-act play form can in no other way be as potently dealt with.

With much of the same false reasoning that holds that a story is the miniature of the novel, the one-act play has been considered a condensation of a larger work. Nothing could be more unjust. The one-act play moves within bounds of which the writer of long plays knows nothing. It is not an abbreviated play; much less, as a rule, is it the material out of which a longer