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Book Review:
Recent Releases

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Williams, Tennessee. *A House Not Meant to Stand*. Ed. Thomas Keith. New York: New Directions, 2008. 95 + xvii pp. $14.95.

Williams, Tennessee. *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*. Ed. Annette Saddik. New York: New Directions, 2008. 311 + xxxiii pp. $17.95.

Williams, Tennessee. *New Selected Essays: Where I Live*. Ed. John S. Bak. New York: New Directions, 2009. 313 + xvi pp. $18.95.

Williams, Tennessee. *Camino Real*. New ed., intro. John Guare, with essay by Michael Paller. New York: New Directions, 2008. 170 + xxxv pp. $13.95

Williams, Tennessee. *Sweet Bird of Youth*. New ed., intro. Lanford Wilson, with essay by Colby H. Kullman. New York: New Directions, 2008. 126 + xvi pp. $13.95

Williams, Tennessee. *The Night of the Iguana*. New ed., intro. Doug Wright, with essay by Kenneth Holditch. New York: New Directions, 2009. 189 + xvii pp. $14.95

Of three new major Williams editions under review—all from New Directions Publishing—two consist mostly or entirely of writing now in print for the first time. One is a collection of short scripts, *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*, edited by Annette J. Saddik (2008). The other is the full-length play *A House Not Meant to Stand*, edited by Thomas Keith (2008). Unlike most other posthumous Williams volumes, both represent Williams's last two decades or so—his controversial "late" period. A third addition to the Williams list is *New Selected Essays: Where I Live*, edited by John S. Bak (2009). It definitively replaces the earlier *Where I Live: Selected Essays* (1978). Bak has gathered a substantially greater amount of previously published nonfiction prose, along with a number of formerly unpublished pieces, and has included full scholarly notes.

¶2 My discussion of the three books will generally emphasize description over evaluation. In particular, I will largely avoid thorny questions about the dramatic merit of the scripts in *The Traveling Companion* and *A House Not Meant to Stand.* Critical judgments differ over whether Williams created anything of signal artistic value in these and his other late plays. (The same can certainly be said of his earlier "apprentice" plays, several of which I have co-edited with David Roessel.[1]) Nonetheless, I have chosen here to bracket such questions. This is not simply to beg the questions, but to recognize their delicacy. Evaluation must follow description, and in my view one cannot hope to give even a fair descriptive account of these unfamiliar plays until after they have been more fully tested on stage.

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¶3 *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays* contains twelve scripts of short to medium length, eight of which were previously unpublished. The other four appeared—most of them posthumously—in magazines, scholarly journals, and limited small-press editions. Two were completed in the early 1960s, the other ten during a fifteen-year period from 1969 to 1983 (the year Williams died). Most of the twelveremain unperformed; a few have had their first productions within the last few years. None has had wide stage exposure.

¶14 The collection includes both realist and nonrealist works. But the predominant element is nonrealism—or antirealism, as Saddik calls it in her introduction (xii). Whatever one calls this element, and however one defines it, it is a tendency observed in much of Williams's later work, where it can be found filtered through various dramatic forms and modes.[2]

¶15 One example of Williams's nonrealism is his "lyric" drama. The author used this term somewhat sporadically during the 1970s for a kind of musical theater, incorporating song and dance.[3] Previously represented by just one publication, *Now the Cats With Jewelled Claws* (1970), the "lyric" group is now fleshed out by two more short scripts: *A Cavalier for Milady* (1976) and *The Pronoun 'I'* (undated by Saddik).[4] Also making structural use of dance—though not explicitly in the "lyric" group—is the longer two-act play *Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?* (1980).

¶16 These three "lyric" plays, *A Cavalier*, *The Pronoun 'I'*, and *Will Mr. Merriwether*, are distinguished from much of Williams's later drama by their comic spirit, which is more or less benign. Interestingly, all three plays depict women who find happiness in the end—or who, at least, find hope.

¶17 In *A Cavalier for Milady*, a young woman named Nance is confined to "an old house in a smart section of Manhattan" (49), where her mother perversely keeps her dressed like a child. While the mother goes out with gigolos night after night, Nance's own imprisoned sexuality has but one inadequate outlet, a statue of Apollo in the parlor. The mother and her best friend are just two of the many lusty, bitchy older women who populate Williams's plays; here, as in other works from the 1960s and 1970s, such women are plainly creatures of camp. Against their garish chatter, the play's lyric aspect emerges when the statue comes alive for Nance—one evening while her mother is out—as the ghost of Vaslav Nijinsky.

¶18 Of course, Nance's desire for the ghost cannot be consummated. And yet its appearance inspires her to do what she needs to: liberate herself and her libido. The basic conflict and its resolution are familiar—they recall earlier, more conventionally realistic Williams works revolving around the duality of flesh and spirit. To this extent *A Cavalier* evokes *Summer and Smoke* (1948) and its revision, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (premiered 1976, likely around the same date as *A Cavalier*). But *Summer and Smoke* is sentimental in its symbolism, while *A Cavalier for Milady* looks more like the work of a caricaturist—albeit a serious one. To use Linda Dorff's phrase for the late plays, it is one of Williams's "theatricalist cartoons," it puts our habitual assumptions about reality and unreality to the test.

¶19 *The Pronoun 'I'* similarly confounds our naturalistic expectations through the fantastical possibilities of performance. Here again, Williams translates a premise from his realist plays—the fall of an idol—into another world entirely, a strange celluloid world far beyond realist assumptions. Social settings become exaggerated stereotypes. Psychologically realistic roles blur into comic or melodramatic stock figures.

¶10 The heroine of *The Pronoun 'I'* is "May of England," a fictitious queen about to be deposed by a revolutionary mob. She thus resembles Alexandra Del Lago, the fallen star and pretended princess in *Sweet Bird of Youth.* And, just as in *Sweet Bird*, despite the broad allusions in *The Pronoun 'I'* to violent political events,the play's central interest lies in the woman's relationship with her narcissistic lover, Dominique. This relationship seems to adumbrate two halves of a self: firstly, the inward-looking, self-regarding "I" of the play's title (referring to Dominique's habit of writing poems that begin with "I"); and secondly, the outer person that (like a monarch at the mercy of her subjects) is exposed to others' perceptions and judgments, capable of being exalted or debased by them.

¶11 *The Pronoun 'I'* is subtitled *A Short Work for the Lyric Theatre.* One reason may be that, like the other lyric plays, it features an "ecstatically sensual dance" (84). But perhaps another reason is that its brevity and broad strokes give it the feeling of a sketch, an afterpiece, a puppet show—or a satyr play. On stage, it might well follow a marathon series of Williams's realist tragedies and melodramas, mirroring them comically and in little.

¶12 Williams's lyric plays do not simply reject realism. As we have seen, their characters are often recognizably related to characters in his more representational drama—they are not just metatheatrical puppets. And their dialogue evokes real human dialogue—it is not simply absurd or artificial. So perhaps the lyric plays are best appreciated in relation to popular, conventional mixed forms such as cabaret and musical theater. Those forms had their own countercultural offspring, after all, in the plays and performance art of the 1960s and 1970s.[5]

¶13 Some plays in *The Traveling Companion* are even less reverent toward realist paradigms, while in certain ways they also mark a more extreme departure from the comfort zone of mainstream American audiences. An example is the two-act parable *Kirche, Küche, Kinder: An Outrage for the Stage* (1979).[6] *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* appropriates the abstract stage sets and emblematic costumes of modernism—only to queer such self-conscious intellectual devices, cheekily turning them to less decorous purposes. At times the play indulges in camp gothic sensationalism; at other times it revels in bohemian black humor. Even so, from these parodic ingredients *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* tries to distil its own sort of sincere poetry. Like Williams's earlier grotesque experiments, such as *The Mutilated* (1966), it closes on a morally and psychologically serious note.[7]

¶14 Similarly farcical despite its over-the-top brutality is a shorter piece, *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Mme. Le Monde* (for which Saddik gives 1982 as a probable date). Featuring an English setting and deadpan comic idiom, *The Remarkable Rooming-House* suggests a collaboration by Oscar Wilde and Monty Python—but the violence of its satire makes it more reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's "ultraviolent" cult film, *A Clockwork Orange*. The play's effort to make art from Grand Guignol hinges on its camp reappropriation of venerable archetypes, including the English house as a setting for pornography and the English public school as a setting for pederasty (as well as consensual adolescent homosexuality).

¶15 The inclusion of *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* and *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Mme. Le Monde* in Saddik's edition is particularly welcome—partly because critics had already begun giving both scripts serious attention.[8] To the extent that the two plays fuse elements of the bizarre, the allegorical, and the presentational, both may be thought to resemble such previously published works as *The Mutilated* and *The Gnädiges Fräulein* (combined in the 1966 double bill *Slapstick Tragedy*). Yet each has its own peculiar qualities, and one hopes that those qualities will soon be explored further in performance.

¶16 Only two of the scripts in *The Traveling Companion* were acted while Williams was alive. One was *Kirche, Küche, Kinder*, which ran for four months in 1979–80 "as a work in progress" at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre in New York (108). The other was *Will Mr. Merriwether Return from Memphis?*, whichhad its premiere in 1980 at the Florida Keys Community College (226). Like the plays so far discussed, *Will Mr. Merriwether* fuses realist and nonrealist modes. It diverts the main current of psychological realism that had dominated Williams's earlier drama into eddies of whim, fantasy, and movement that stray from realist expectations. The play portrays two generations of women who await romantic and sexual fulfillment—and who, as they do so, speak with ghosts (including those of Van Gogh, Rimbaud, and Rimbaud's sister).[9] A newly published account of the play by its original director, William Prosser, reads it as mirroring "the disintegration of the mind of its central character"

(202). The soundtrack to that disintegration is a banjo, which plays throughout; at intervals, African-American couples abruptly "dance out of the wings" to its music.[10] Prosser explains:

> We are no longer outside of Blanche DuBois, but rather inside as realities change and dissolve. Louise McBride's alienation is experienced directly by the audience in image and language.…Dream becomes reality when reality becomes too difficult to bear. (204)

¶17 Further varieties of nonrealism—as different from one another as possible—inform *The Day on Which a Man Dies* (1960) and *The Chalky White Substance* (1980). Unlike most plays in *The Traveling Companion*, *The Chalky White Substance* first appeared in print many years ago—in 1991—and has since been seen in several productions.It is a kind of moral, spiritual, and political allegory with a postapocalyptic science-fiction setting.[11] *The Day on Which a Man Dies* makes its first appearance in Saddik's volume. An eclectic compound of domestic tragedy, European modernism, and Asian influences (the latter heavily filtered through camp orientalism), it is notable as the earliest play in *The Traveling Companion* to flaunt an antirealist technique.

¶18 Williams's subtitle for *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, *An Occidental* Noh *Play*, registers the author's direct and indirect encounters with Japanese culture during the 1950s (Saddik, "Introduction," *Traveling Companion* xvi). There are four roles: a Man, a Woman, and two Stage Assistants. The Man is a mentally unstable avant-garde painter in the line of Van Gogh or, more proximately, Jackson Pollock, whom Williams had known in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in 1940 (Leverich 365). The Man has been the Woman's lover for eleven years. Nevertheless, he has not married her—for the sole reason (he claims) that his offstage wife is "insane" and thus cannot be divorced by law (*Traveling Companion* 37).

¶19 Like most of Williams's late drama, *The Day on Which a Man Dies* retains a core of realism. That core lies in the relationship of Man and Woman, which is troubled by two psychologically plausible conflicts: a crisis in the Man's inspiration and productivity, which he tries to blame on the Woman's having "poisoned the spring of my talent" (24), and the Woman's anxious desire for "a legal position in return" for her years of loving sacrifice to him (37). The predicament of the "nerve-shattered," substance-dependent Man (34) is comparable to those of Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). Further, the Man's role as an alienated artist links him to other realistic—if at the same time archetypically symbolic—Williams figures.

¶20 The two Stage Assistants, however, serve to undermine realist illusion. The Second Stage Assistant assumes two major speaking roles: he is alternately a "Japanese law student" and a choral commentator called "the Oriental." In the first capacity he is a dramatic foil, in the second a detached interpreter for the tension between Man and Woman—his comments ranging from the archly gnomic to the incongruously diffuse. Other nonrealist features of *The Day on Which a Man Dies* include the costuming of Man and Woman in "flesh-colored tights" with "anatomical details" (16, 34), and nonrepresentational sets, musical cues, and stage directions that, according to Saddik's introduction, reflect "influences of Japanese Kabuki and Noh theater" (xvi). The publication of *The Day on Which a Man Dies* adds to our understanding of Williams's ongoing, evolving attempts at radical dramatic experimentation before the mid-1960s.[12]

¶21 The five remaining plays in *The Traveling Companion* are more faithful to the realist tradition. The earliest of them is *The Parade, or Approaching the End of a Summer*. Williams completed it in 1962, but its origins lie

in a much older script written in 1940—almost immediately after the experience that inspired it, Williams's first summer stay in the Provincetown artists' colony (see Kaplan).[13]

¶22 *The Parade* is thus one of Williams's memory plays, realist in its plot and characters, though containing the customary symbolic touches. And like all his early memory plays (including *The Glass Menagerie*) it combines the rawness of youthful feeling with the wistfulness of retrospect.It focuses on the writer Don, Williams's alter ego, who begins the play in Provincetown awaiting news of the Theatre Guild's decision about whether to produce one of his scripts. Although the arrival of that news will resolve the play's action, much of the dialogue instead focuses on Don's relationships with other characters. Those characters reflect Williams's own Provincetown acquaintances, including an initially receptive but ultimately elusive love object: the dancer Kip Kiernan, here renamed Dick.[14] At one point in *The Parade*, Dick dances before Don, much as Nijinsky does for Nance in the later *A Cavalier for Milady*. Yet Dick will also reject Don—just as Nijinsky's "apparition" will rebuff what he calls Nance's "imaginary love-making" (73).

¶23 Unusual among Williams's plays, *The Parade* presents a gay central character who clearly voices his love for another man. Even more unusual, that love is basically accepted and is essentially understood, frankly and with sympathy, by at least one heterosexual: Don's friend Miriam, a Jewish intellectual. Though frustrated by her unrequited love for Don, Miriam can discuss sex with him in fairly frank and unabashed terms (terms plainly indebted to D. H. Lawrence). Thus Don, in an aria-like monologue, urges Miriam to "Chop away now and then on your heroic piece of sculpture of Man and Woman meeting like two rivers, passionately and serenely converging their separate waters …" (185). This erotic vision—shared here across barriers of gender and sexuality, as well as across the space between bodies that imprisons all Williams's characters in their own skin—could not be more different from the hell that Man and Woman create from their consummated love in *The Day on Which a Man Dies*.

¶24 Sadly, Williams must have seen *The Parade* as a closet play for private circulation, not for submission to producers—certainly not in any future that was immediately foreseeable in 1962. It took nearly a half century, until 2006, for the play to be granted its world premiere in Provincetown, where its stage potential was amply demonstrated.[15]

¶25 Other realist plays in *The Traveling Companion* similarly offer new performance opportunities. *Green Eyes, or No Sight Would Be Worth Seeing* (1970) is a short, intense, sexually explicit two-hander that could offer a singularly tempting challenge to fearless young actors.[16] In contrast, both *Sunburst* (undated by Saddik) and *The Traveling Companion* (originally published 1981) address themes of aging and physical decline. In *Sunburst* the pathos of these themes is offset by a lightweight, farcical crime plot, as a retired actress preserves her prized jewel from bungling thieves. (The lesson, apparently, is the need to remain self-possessed despite infirmity and vulnerability.) More uncompromising on the hardships of age is *The Traveling Companion*. Set in a New York hotel room, it concerns an older writer struggling to appease his querulous young escort, a twenty-five-year-old guitar-playing high-school dropout, with cash, drinks, and Quaaludes. Although this uneasy symbiosis of wealth and youth looks doomed to failure, the play's final moment offers a provisional glimpse of partial accord or at least tacit sympathy. That residual optimism contrasts with the more pessimistic resolutions of other Williams scripts about rich patrons and their rent boys—such as *The Pronoun 'I'*, or the more closely comparable *And Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens* (posthumously publishedin the 2005 collection *Mister Paradise*).

¶26 Finally, *The One Exception* is likely to have been Williams's last complete play, composed in early 1983 (Bray). It marks a worthy conclusion to his *oeuvre*, wrenchingly yet evenhandedly anatomizing the tension between needy artists and their moneyed friends. After all, Williams's life—as the play *The Traveling Companion* reminds us—had required him to play both parts.[17]

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¶27 Williams's two-act comedy *A House Not Meant to Stand* was produced three times during the early 1980s, each time at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. The third and last revision, acted in the spring of 1982, is the one now published in Thomas Keith's edition. As Keith observes in his introduction, it was Williams's "last fully-realized play" (xv).

¶28 The location is Pascagoula, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Just as in Williams's Delta plays (beginning in 1940 with *Battle of Angels*), the region is populated by angry white men—paranoid old boys, patriarchs and lodge brothers—and by their predictably gossipy and malicious wives. As always in Williams, the venomousness of such parochial tyrants is readily exposed as a reflex of fear, frustration, and finally cowardice (if not impotence) in the face of larger threats to their defiant pride and their decaying physiologies.

¶29 Williams's opening stage direction sets the play in "what was once a reasonably, passably, fairly representative middle-class American living room" (3). The building's "dilapidation…is a metaphor for the state of society" (3). Its occupants are Cornelius and Bella McCorkle. They have seen their family shattered—both gradually, over a long period, and also more recently and suddenly through the untimely death of Chips, one of their two sons. Meanwhile their daughter Joanie has, according to Cornelius, "indulged in too much fornication, such a scandal had to throw her out" (18). The surviving son, Charlie, has impregnated a "bawn-again Christian" from Yazoo City, Mississippi named Stacey, who speaks in tongues (64).

¶30 One of the play's central conflicts surrounds Bella's memory of her late son, "my first-bawn…Chips" (63). A transvestite with "blond…ringlets," he was once "voted the prettiest girl at Pascagoula High" (21–2). He is thus one of Williams's sacrificial gays, in addition to being a sainted momma's boy. Throughout the play, Bella's grief at losing Chips pushes her gradually into insanity, feeding delirious visions of her reunited brood; ultimately, it shepherds her toward death.

¶31 Meanwhile, Cornelius's resentment of his own personal and public failures drives him in the direction of an opposite madness, that of rampant greed—a greed ineptly disguised as a fulminating patriot's desire for public office, though at bottom it is born merely from frustrated materialism and power-lust. Somewhere in the McCorkle house, money from Bella's family legacy is hidden, and Cornelius wants it. Similarly, throughout *A House*, money is thematized on a larger scale, with lesser subplots involving desperate business ventures and perfidious thefts from friends. Still, in the gap between lost ancestral wealth and Cornelius's desperate efforts to recoup a position he has never had, Williams habitually seeks to reassert love and hope. Before the play's final events occur, Cornelius has been removed from the scene (after a struggle with his son Charlie) and the stage is left, at last, to the more sympathetic Bella and her benign hallucinations.

¶32 Keith's introduction ably analyzes the interplay between humor, terror, and political commentary in *A House.* Despite its gothic plot and its fascination with death, features that it shares with many of Williams's other late plays, it is finally—as Keith insists—a comedy. It belongs in some respects with Williams's memory plays. As Keith writes, "there has never been another character…in the Williams canon who so clearly stands

for Williams' own father," Cornelius Coffin Williams, as the blustering Cornelius McCorkle (xix). But it is also a political play that "reflects, as in a funhouse mirror, our world 'house' as [Williams] saw it in 1982: full of indifference, cruelty, aggression and potential self-annihilation" (xxiv).

¶33 In the end, much of the play's claim to be comedic hangs on the ritual action that resolves Bella's bereavement as it brings her life to a close. With the concluding stage direction—"A phrase of music is heard" (86)—Williams confers a last blessing on his *mater dolorosa*. He also seems deliberately to allude to the gracious music of Shakespearean tragicomedy, from *Much Ado About Nothing* to *The Tempest*. Such an allusion would be fitting in two ways. First, it would reflect Williams's preoccupation with aging—traditionally seen as an autobiographical motif in *The Tempest.* Second, it would reflect the way in which *A House* recycles old motifs and devices. Both Shakespeare and Williams repurpose their earlier plots and themes, partly in self-parody, partly in self-rivalry, but partly also in a simple acknowledgment that one cannot forever reinvent oneself. Whatever house one has built is doomed to fade into antiquity. As reported by Margaret Bradham Thornton, editor of Williams's *Notebooks*, "On one draft of the play, 'A House Not Meant to Last Longer than the Owner' appears as a possible title" (Williams *Notebooks* 758).

¶34 Even though Williams never prepared *A House Not Meant to Stand* for publication, its history of revision and successive refinements makes it read more like finished work than any of the texts in *The Traveling Companion.*[18] An extra bonus of this edition is that Gregory Mosher, who was the Goodman Theatre's artistic director when it first produced the play, has now provided an unusually lively, eloquent, informative foreword. As Mosher writes, in creating *A House* Williams "summoned echoes of *The Glass Menagerie*, bringing the absent Mr. Wingfield down from his photo as a grinning, tempestuous monster, and transmogrifying a mother's dreams of gentlemen callers into hallucinations of missing children" (xi). But the most succinct summary of the play is that of Williams himself, who—tipping the hat to Strindberg—described it as "my kind of Southern Gothic spook sonata" (3).

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¶35 The nonfiction collection *New Selected Essays: Where I Live* is both an essential volume for Williams specialists and an unexpected treat for his wider audience. Packaged as a handsome large-format paperback, with 257 sizable pages of Williams's prose, it reminds us—and will reveal to a delighted broader readership—how compelling Williams's voice could be when the character he was writing for happened to be himself.

¶36 In *New Selected Essays* one can trace Williams's career as an essayist in print and in manuscript from about 1940 to 1978; turn to ponder his shorter prose pieces written from 1945 to 1981 (gathered in a "Miscellany" section); and finally browse through "Juvenilia and College Papers" composed from 1927 to 1937. The essays are preceded by John Lahr's appreciation of Williams's prose style (itself stylishly written) and followed by Bak's afterword and informative notes. In addition, Bak supplies a carefully compiled, though tentative, list of Williams's nonfiction prose writings (published and unpublished, including drafts and manuscript fragments).

¶37 The volume includes around 35 pages of essays never before published, or first published posthumously. Indeed, it begins with one such essay, an early reminiscence of youthful ambition tempered with bohemian detachment ("Amor Perdido").[19] Another welcome posthumous discovery is a somewhat later autobiographical effort ("Chicago Arrival") written in 1948, when Williams's prose dazzled with the fluid exuberance of a writer on the rise. Ending with an exclamation point, the essay conjures up—at what was still

not too great a remove—the charmed period of Williams's first great success with the opening of *The Glass Menagerie.* (Though in part a tribute to Laurette Taylor, it is essentially different in conception from Williams's "Appreciation" of that actor, also republished in *New Selected Essays*.)

¶38 Also newly gathered are a number of early published writings, many of them quite as suggestive as any of the later and longer ones. One example is "Some Representative Plays of O'Neill And a Discussion of his Art" (1936). Here a twenty-five-year-old Williams writes that, irrespective of any "mysticism" or "quest for truth" that critics may find in O'Neill's drama, he "was first, last, and always the born showman"; that the length of some O'Neill plays was a problem because, in the theater as elsewhere, "modern life tends to speed up everything and the more we can say in a small space the greater will be our probable success"; and that "the American theater" had "produced very few poet-dramatists," chief among them Paul Green, author of *In Abraham's Bosom* and *The House of Connelly* (241–2).

¶39 Another, even more striking example of the nuggets to be found among Williams's occasional prose writings is "An Appreciation of Hans Hofmann" (1948), published as an introduction to the influential abstract painter's work. The piece concludes with a striking—and prophetic—account of the artist's necessarily double relationship to a terrible new age of nuclear deterrence and confrontation: on the one hand as a channel for its unveiled energies, on the other as a fugitive from its violent and repressive effects.

> Now at the beginning of an age of demented mechanics, all plastic art is created under a threat of material destruction.…Philosophically [Hofmann's] work belongs to this age of terrifying imminence, for it contains a thunder of light from the source of matter. Pure light, pure color, the design of pure vision may alone be philosophically indestructible enough to retain our faith, no matter what else falls in ruin, even our honor and endurance, until the time when truth can come out of exile and it is no longer dangerous to show compassion and the world is once more habitable by men of reason. (198)

Such words illuminate Williams's dramatic allegory of art and romanticism in the shadow of repression and authoritarianism, *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* (also from 1948).

¶40 I offer these examples as a taste of what *New Selected Essays* offers to people who already know and love Williams's prose. Such readers will find many more happy surprises among the occasional essays conveniently gathered here. Of course, there is also much familiar work that merits rereading. Essentially all the contents of the original *Where I Live* are included in *New Selected Essays*. (Two of Williams's most memorable autobiographical essays, "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair" and "Grand," are additionally included, despite their earlier appearance in his *Collected Stories*. As nonfiction pieces, they seem to fit better here.)

¶41 In his Afterword to the *Essays* Bak urges readers to approach them as pieces of a larger "mosaic." He observes that "non-fiction was Williams's public confessional"—a plausible metaphor (though one must add that Williams also confessed in magazine interviews and on television). Accordingly, Bak suggests that "the essays collected here form individual chapters of Williams' shadow memoirs" (260). "To read one essay in isolation," Bak writes, "is to encounter Williams the rhetorician"; but to read the *Essays* "from cover to cover is to discover Williams the artist, the thinker, the revolutionary" (268).

¶42 Certainly all readers who want to learn more about Williams—whether as an artist, a thinker, a revolutionary, or merely as an enigmatic icon of twentieth-century American culture—will value this latest contribution to his legacy.

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¶43 Starting in the mid-1960s, Williams's plays explored territory that was generally nonrealistic, at times radically presentational, and often linguistically experimental—or, according to less favorable critics, merely out of control. One of the most common and acute criticisms of Williams's later work is that it is too self-indulgent, fatally flawed by the paranoid and even solipsistic mindset of its aging author. Thus, a history of drama laments a "particularly sad symptom of Williams's decline, his growing inability to separate himself from his plays"; the late work is "clearly the author speaking, without translation into art," yielding an "embarrassing self-exposure" that at times even explicitly "breaks the bounds of the play" (Berkowitz 163).

¶44 On the one hand, some of the newly published late plays could seem to justify this criticism, as could the later nonfiction in *New Selected Essays.* Certainly it is easy to interpret many plays in *The Traveling Companion* as thinly veiled self-dramatizations, from the deliberately autobiographical memory plays (*The Parade*) through the plethora of late work about wealthy individuals and their troublesome protégés, attendants, and companions (*The Pronoun 'I', Sunburst, The Traveling Companion, The One Exception*). Many autobiographical implications of *A House Not Meant to Stand* are noted in Keith's introduction to the play (xix–xx.) And late essays, such as "I Am Widely Regarded as The Ghost of a Writer," can be cited to support the view that Williams was consciously, if compulsively, "indulging in self-pity" (*New Selected Essays* 186). Ultimately, it might even be possible to trace each detail in the late plays to particular elements in Williams's life. For example, Margaret Bradham Thornton notes with reference to Williams's "relationship with [Robert] Carroll"—which lasted from 1972 to 1979—that "Williams described him as his traveling companion" (*Notebooks* 738). So, the play *The Traveling Companion* might be viewed simply as rendering a series of moments in that relationship.

¶45 On the other hand, the criticism of the later work as excessively autobiographical is not always carefully framed, and this criticism deserves clear-minded scrutiny. What work by Williams is not, in some sense, autobiographical? Does his complex sympathy for, say, Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* inherently constitute a greater imaginative and dramatic achievement than the corrosive examination, in *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, of artistic lives and relationships that partly resemble Williams's own?If so, why? As more of the later work becomes readily available, it may be time for us to reexamine and refine our understanding of autobiography and its significance in Williams's work.

¶46 More generally, problems of value should be framed with subtlety and sensitivity to the differences between different readers' priorities, and always with careful qualifications about the writer's values, commitments, and purposes in discussing a text.[20] Once an influential author's letters and private notebooks have been published, as Williams's have, there is no longer (if there ever was) just one sanctioned and appropriate set of standards by which to judge and appreciate his writings, whether famous, notorious, neglected, or largely unseen. Even the work that appears roughest can reflect its light on the finest—and can in turn receive reflected light from the finished work, gaining significance from the exchange.

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¶47 Should the public have an opportunity to read Tennessee Williams's unpublished writings—writings that plainly can never rival the historic status of his masterpieces? Should publishers print plays that, though performed during Williams's life, failed to gain traction with critics and audiences and were never definitively prepared for

the press? Should scholars edit manuscripts for posthumous publication if Williams never exposed them publicly in any form, on stage or in print? And should Williams scholars even consider publishing mere draft fragments, scattered in archives and private collections?

¶48 To these questions the only acceptable answeris *yes!* As the twentieth century drifts farther behind us, and as Williams's centennial approaches, his work continues to be more widely performed, and loved, than that of almost any other playwright. This simple distinction gives a broader interest to everything Williams wrote, whether perfect or not. At the very least, Williams's unpublished writings deserve attention from readers outside manuscript libraries—readers fascinated by the playwright's art, but lacking fellowships or generous travel budgets. And for scholars, wider dissemination of Williams's unpublished work will result in more thorough accounts of the writer and his era by critics and cultural historians.

¶49 It is to be hoped, moreover, that some of the newly published texts will inspire additional creative discoveries by actors and directors. The production of more late plays by Williams—both published and unpublished (and, increasingly, posthumously published)—is a desirable development that for years has been urged by major Williams scholars such as Ruby Cohn and Allean Hale. Lately it has been advanced by the efforts of an increasing number of artists (notably David Kaplan and others performing at his annual Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival). Of course, few if any of Williams's posthumous writings are ever likely to challenge the cultural and critical status now enjoyed by his major plays of the 1940s and 1950s. Three such plays, *Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *The Night of the Iguana*, have been reissued with reset texts, new introductions by eminent playwrights, and new afterwords by scholars. In addition, supplements consisting of relevant primary texts have been appended to the back of each book. These primary materials—the original published text of *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* (1948), the one-act precursor to *Sweet Bird* titled *The Enemy: Time* (January 1956),[21] and the short story "The Night of the Iguana" (1948)—should be useful to students and interesting to the wider public. Among the new introductions, playwright John Guare's essay on *Camino Real* stands out as an especially generous and insightful tribute.

¶50 Publishing these days is not always what it ought to be. In all six volumes discussed and mentioned in this review, a substantial number of errors will be noted—in some cases many more than one would expect to find. However, no compromise has been made on visual quality and readability. The type is crisp and clear, the covers strikingly designed. That leads one to hope that the books will sell, and that New Directions will advance its program of Williams editions into the foreseeable future.

Notes

[1] See Williams, *Mister Paradise* and "*Jungle."*

[2] Nonrealism, obviously, is a theoretically imprecise notion and one without much usefulness for a more detailed analysis. I use the word here because classifying Williams's later experiments is difficult and messy, and because *nonrealism* seems the best term for capturing the loose affinity among Williams's aims in plays outside the canon of his Broadway hits from *The Glass Menagerie* through *The Night of the Iguana*. See also Saddik, *Politics*; and on the classification problem, see Hale, "Confronting."

[3] See Hale, "Tennessee Williams's *Three Plays For The Lyric Theatre.*"

[4] The three plays now published with the "lyric" label are not exactly those discussed by Hale in "*Three Plays For The Lyric Theatre*." With *The Pronoun 'I'* we now have a new addition to the category, whereas a fourth play designated as "lyric"—*The Youthfully Departed*—remains unpublished.

[5] Saddik's Introduction to *The Traveling Companion* offers evidence that Williams, around 1960, aspired to join a mid-twentieth-century theatrical avant-garde including "Camus, Genet, Brecht, Beckett, Anoulh, Ionesco, Durrenmatt, and Albee" (xv) along with

Artaud and Mishima (xvi); elsewhere Saddik has argued that Williams and his avant-garde contemporaries had "common dramatic styles and philosophical goals" (Saddik, *Politics* 14). Yet Saddik also mentions the post-1968 works of Charles Ludlam, with their use of pastiche and mixed genres (*The Traveling Companion* xxvi). Ludlam's theoretical writing on camp and the "ridiculous" is a reference point for Dorff in her seminal essay on Williams's later experiments ("Theatricalist Cartoons" 15).

[6] The title is emended by Saddik from Williams's (deliberate?) misspelling, *Kirche, Kutchen, und Kinder*—as it also was by Dorff in her earlier discussion of the play ("Theatricalist Cartoons").

[7] On the grotesque, see Tennessee Williams Scholars' Conference Panel in Works Cited.

[8] *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Mme. Le Monde* had appeared in 1984 "in a limited edition of 176 copies," according to Saddik's note (*Traveling Companion* 305). For criticism, see Dorff (on *Kirche, Küche, Kinder*) and Kolin, "*The Remarkable*."

[9] Such "apparitions" occur in other late plays: besides *A Cavalier for Milady*, there is the published *Clothes For a Summer Hotel* (1980).

[10] It hardly needs to be said that the major roles are intended for white actors, as they are in nearly all of Williams's plays. The African-American couples create a problem for would-be directors—all the more since Williams, in his "production note" to the play, uses the adjective "savage" when trying to describe "the gaiety of the dancing" (227). In context, Williams's phrasing seems to betray his own awareness of the racism implicit in "savage," intimating that he yearns somehow to ironize the concept even while retaining it as central to his white American imagination and using it in his dramaturgy. On earlier expressions of this racial and primitivist problematic in Williams, see Moschovakis, "Tennessee Williams's American Blues."

[11] I have described one of those productions in a previous issue of this journal (Moschovakis, "Taking"). For more discussion, see J. Marcus Weekley's article on the play in Kolin, *Encyclopedia* (36–7), with further references to criticism by Dorff and by Kolin.

[12] Saddik does not discuss the play's genealogical affinity with a play performed and published a decade later, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969). Perhaps that is because the line of descent will be readily apparent to readers of both plays. Certainly critics have noted it; see, for example, Hale ("*In The Bar"*).

[13] Like *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, *The Parade* would later give rise to a play published during its author's life: in this case *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* (produced in 1981).

[14] Here and elsewhere I take facts about Williams's life chiefly from Leverich and from Thornton's annotations in Williams, *Notebook*, as well as from the editorial matter in the books under review.

[15] Presented "by Shakespeare on the Cape on October 1, 2006, at the First Annual Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival," and "directed by Jef Hall-Flavin and Eric Powell Holm" (Saddik 166).

[16] I am curious to learn whether anyone can carry it off. It is my fond hope that I will never see two college students attempt it in a performance final, unless at least one is a *bona fide* genius.

[17] *The One Exception* was first published in this journal, where I also reviewed its first performance in 2003; see Moschovakis, "Taking."

[18] Or, for that matter, anything in *Mister Paradise*, the collection that I co-edited with David Roessel.

[19] This piece was included in *Best American Essays 2004* after David Roessel and I prepared it for publication as "Amor Perdida"—Williams's original misspelling—in *Michigan Quarterly Review* (2003).

[20] Perhaps especially when discussing works by Williams; Saddik has stressed "the divergent expectations and even prejudices that were imposed on Williams's work by the critical community according to each group's sense of purpose, associations, and ideological investments" (*Politics* 24).

[21] See "Sweet Bird of Youth" checklist at The Historic New Orleans Collection website, www.hnoc.org. Frustratingly, the new edition of *Sweet Bird* does not advertise the provenance of "The Enemy: Time" or identify the source text for this version—or if it does include the information somewhere, it does not make it easy to find.

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