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"A Summer of Discovery": The Exilic and Touristic Poetics of *The Night of the Iguana*

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> Why do you always come here to crack up, Shannon?
> It's the hammock, Maxine, the hammock by the rain forest.
> — *The Night of the Iguana*

> With good reason do Williams' plays, stories and poems take place in motels, hotels, rooming houses, whorehouses, or decrepit and crumbling houses, for it is in these environments that his transients are most vulnerable and most desperate to touch another wandering creature before they are evicted, committed, or destroyed, all the while contesting to the limits of their fragile strength the demons of greed, drink, bad luck, disease, and death.
> — Robert Skloot

Although rarely described as such, *The Night of the Iguana* is very much a travel narrative, inspired by Tennessee Williams's first journeys in Mexico and by his own experience as a sensitive traveler. In an essay titled "A Summer of Discovery" that appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune* on December 24, 1961, just prior to the Broadway opening of *The Night of the Iguana*, Williams describes a series of events two decades earlier that inspired the play—events that prompted his "discovery" of the modern condition of displacement and its possible resolution through travel. In fact, Williams's summer experience contributed key details to the full-length play as well as the story (1948) and one-act play (1959) that preceded it: the recurring seaside setting at the Costa Verde Hotel, the literal and figurative function of the hammock on its veranda, and the dislocation and angst with which the myriad travelers find themselves grappling. In Williams's account of his Mexican travels, we are able to trace how his journey led to three literary works that speak to the modern traveler's vulnerability and desire, volatile turning points (historical and dramatic), and the performativity of travel.

A Summer of Discovery

Williams's first travels in Mexico had less to do with any ideological leanings than with money and with his exilic inclinations. In 1940 Mexico was affordable and, as Williams put it, "it was as far from New York as I could hope to get on the small funds at my disposal" ("Summer"123). Although he does not mention it in the essay, Williams was also fleeing the end of his relationship with Kip Kiernan and was heartbroken when he set out for Mexico. Still, he was able to register the greater troubles around him. In his retrospective view, Williams seems aware that he was witness to a transitional moment in a world that was being quickly reconfigured. Escapist travel assumes a different cast when set against the global backdrop of World War II and the widespread political and psychic displacement brought about by the war.

¶3 Williams'sessay contends that travel is, even as it begins, a performance. He describes his transaction with the travel agency that arranged his transportation as a kind of "audition" for a part in a trip to Mexico. Since this "share-the-expense" travel agency required that he place himself at the mercy of other travelers, it is not

surprising that he took on the role of traveler nervously. He admits his insecurity and embarrassment when describing the preliminary interview, which took place in the lobby of a rather seedy midtown Manhattan hotel:

> It was about as embarrassing as applying for a job, perhaps even more so, for a man who is offering you a job can turn you down with some polite little dissimulation as, "I'm looking for someone with a bit more experience in this type of work." But if you were turned down by a car-owner at this agency, you knew it could only be because you had failed to make an agreeable or trustworthy impression. ("Summer" 123)

Luckily, Williams caught the attention of a bride who appeared "more accustomed to . . . nervous young men," and she persuaded her groom to take him along. And so Williams was matched with "a fantastic young honeymoon couple"—a couple representative of the exciting (and otherwise unconventional) transnational attractions and liaisons of the time. As Williams discovers, "the bridegroom was a young Mexican who had come up to New York to visit the World's Fair, then in progress, and had encountered and almost immediately married a young blonde lady of ambiguous profession whom he was now preparing to take home to meet his parents in Mexico City" ("Summer" 138). He didn't speak English, she didn't speak Spanish, and Williams comments that they didn't speak the same language in more ways than one. The trip would be described in capricious detail in Williams's *Memoirs*: the journey is lengthened by many detours and the young woman is in fact a prostitute who confides in Williams and at one point even makes a pass at him. But here, in "A Summer of Discovery," the couple's role is simply to deliver Williams to the YMCA building in Mexico City and vanish from the text. Traces of the brazen young woman, however, may be found in the assorted female travelers in *The Night of the Iguana*, who will behave even more extravagantly in their liaisons.

¶4 Once arrived in Mexico City, Williams quickly realized that he was not cut out for its high altitude and set out for Acapulco. Unhappy with the first hotel he found in Acapulco, he decided to look for other accommodations nearer the beaches—"And that's how I discovered the background for my new play, *The Night of the Iguana.*" The setting he discovered—"a frame hotel called the Costa Verde on the hill over the still water beach"—retains its name in all three works ("Summer" 125).

¶5 Williams describes this time as a desperate period in his life, and in "A Summer of Discovery" he attributes his state of anxiety and inner turmoil to "the feeling" that his "career as a Broadway playwright had stopped almost where it had started and what would follow was unpredictable but surely no good" (124). On a far more private level, Williams's letters to Donald Windham (1977) and his journal entries and letters to Joe Hazan (as presented in Lyle Leverich's biography, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*) convey the grief and confusion he suffered after separating from Kiernan. Leverich states, "Alone, isolated, and desolate, he could feel only a gnawing emptiness and a desperate desire to escape, in hopes of alleviating the pain" (Leverich 365). Williams's accounts of his Mexican travels in his journals and letters of the time reveal a brooding, restless, and fragmented version of his experiences that summer. Many years later, however, as he retraced the serendipity and inspiration that came to define that summer for him, he was able to declare optimistically that "it's during such times that we are most alive and they are the times we remember most vividly, and a writer draws out of vivid and desperate intervals in his life the most necessary impulse or drive toward his work" ("Summer" 125).

¶6 In Mexico Williams settled into a daily program ("Summer" 141) and became engrossed in writing the play *Stairs to the Roof* (*Memoirs* 59). In the mornings he would charge his nerves with strong black coffee, go to his portable typewriter set on a card table on a veranda, and work until he was exhausted. Then he would run down

the hill to the beach for his swim. After his morning routine, he would seek companionship, and in this sense the summer of 1940 seems to have been charmed for Williams. He remembers it in "A Summer of Discovery" as the one when he got along best with people. With melodramatic flair, he explains:

> and I would attribute this condition to the fact that I expected to be dead before the summer was over and that there was consequently no reason for me to worry about what people thought of me. When you stop worrying what people think of you, you suddenly find yourself thinking of them, not yourself, and then . . . you have a sort of crazy charm for chance acquaintances such as the ones that were staying with me that crazy summer of 1940, at the Costa Verde in Acapulco. (142)

During this summer, "sick to death" of himself, Williams claims that he "turned to people most truly." He was lucky to "discover a human heart as troubled as [his] own" that was open to his—Andrew Gunn, another young writer of magazine fiction ("Summer" 126).

¶7 Gunn had just arrived from Tahiti "because he feared that the war, which was then at a climax of fury, might cut him off from the magazines that purchased his adventure stories" ("Summer" 126). This crucial detail locates Williams's travels historically. World War II was reconfiguring travel in a way that ruptured certain impulses behind it. The war problematized the individualist search for a more authentic and inspiring base abroad; it was no longer simple, morally or logistically, for travelers to escape conventional society in order to find (and "write") adventure. Adventurous travel was, in effect, being exiled from its artistic base; Williams's companion had grown increasingly despondent to the point that he could no longer write.

¶8 Although Gunn remains anonymous in the essay, his identity has been confirmed by numerous scholars. John S. Bak observes that Gunn is a figure who curiously reappears in Williams's essays, despite the fact that his name "barely figures in any of Williams's writing" (266). But as Bak explains, it was typical of Williams to keep "returning over the years, in essay after essay, to the same people, the same places, and the same year: . . . it was as if Williams's essays formed a compass" (266). As Bak poignantly suggests, whenever Williams "felt lost in the theatre world, worried that another play of his would not be received favorably by the press or by the public, Williams would repeatedly steer his response in an essay toward the direction of the needle, which would guide him safely back to the security of a past just prior to fortune and fame" (266).

¶9 Though this year and this place would figure as a refuge for Williams through his life, his depiction of Gunn would evolve according to his changing state of mind. In Williams's letters to Donald Windham, Gunn is the neurotic young American writer who is "extremely wealthy—but always talking about suicide" and with whom Williams has "a long, dull, complicated affair" (*Letters* 16). With time, Gunn would figure more positively and even heroically, as he does, for instance, thirty-one years later in "We Are Dissenters Now" (1972) in the form of a rebellious young man (and "guru"), "son of a top executive in a great American corporation" whose political self-awareness helps to shape Williams's political mindset ("Dissenters" 162). Certainly, in "A Summer of Discovery" Gunn is presented as an erratic young man, and yet he and Williams are able to find solace in each other. They spend "evenings in adjacent hammocks on the verandah, drinking rum-cocos, and discussing and comparing respective heartbreaks, more and more peacefully as the night advanced" (126). Precisely in this way, the two friends become models for the two male characters in Williams's short story "The Night of the Iguana."

¶10

Meanwhile, Mexico offers Williams respite and redemption, its tropical storms performing a cathartic show and "spectacular" relief.

> It was an equinoctial season, and every night or so there would be a spectacular storm. I have never heard such thunder or seen such lightning except in melodramatic performances of Shakespeare. All of the inarticulate but passionate fury of the physical universe would sometimes be hurled at the hilltop and the veranda, and we were thrilled by it, it would completely eclipse our melancholy. (126–27)

Storms figure greatly in Williams's work and in all the *Night of the Iguana* iterations, and as we see here, they have literary associations that connote apocalyptic turning points that carry within them the hope of release. All that will be needed to carry out the stormy climax of the story is the captive iguana to signify the key characters' plight—that they are all in their own way at the end of their ropes.

¶11 Unfortunately, the equinox "wears itself out," as Williams puts it, by late September and the two travelers return to their gloomy introspection (127). Williams had been living at the hotel on credit and growing more and more anxious as he visited the bank daily, waiting for a check that never arrived. He did not realize that he had failed properly to inform his agent, Audrey Wood, of a change in address, and he assumed that the Theatre Guild had lost all interest in him. His friend, "still unable to scribble a line that he didn't scratch out with the groan of a dying beast, had no encouragement for [him]." Williams continues,

> He felt that it was quite clear that we had both arrived at the end of our ropes and that we'd better face it. We were both approaching the age of thirty, and he declared that we were not meant by implacable nature to go past that milestone, that it was the dead end for us. (144)

Another presence aggravated the young men's malaise:

> Our gloom was not relieved by the presence of a party of German Nazis who were ecstatic over the early successes of the Luftwaffe over R.A.F. When they were not gamboling euphorically on the beach, they were listening to the radio reports on the battle for Britain and their imminent conquest of it, and the entire democratic world. (144)

These Nazis would reappear in the one-act play and, to a lesser degree, in the full-length production playing a similar role: heightening the travelers' sense of political unease and spiritual dislocation.

¶12 Unsurprisingly, Williams's (and his friend's) stay at the Costa Verde Hotel came to its inevitable end when the hotel manager told Williams that his credit had run out and that he must leave the next morning. That last night the two lie in their hammocks and have "rum-cocos until the stars of the Southern Cross, which was visible in the sky from our veranda, began to flit crazily about like fireflies caught in a bottle" (127). As the night goes on, the friend abruptly introduces the possibility of suicide via a "long swim to China"—a comment that links him to Shannon, the protagonist of the full-length play who threatens to attempt suicide in exactly the same way.

¶13 Declaring that Williams is "no more endurably situated on earth" than himself, Gunn tries to convince his companion to join him in the "long swim." Gunn accuses Williams of having "the uncontrolled emotionalism of a minor lyric talent which was totally unsuited to the stage of life as well as the theatre stage" and of being "a cotton-headed romanticist, a hopeless anachronism in the world now lit by super fire-bombs" (127–28). As it turns out, the protagonists in both versions of the play will express feelings of anachronism, sensing in the face of WWII that their type of traveler is on the verge of becoming extinct. The playwright's sympathy for

anachronistic characters is perhaps most evident in his creation of "Nonno," the elderly southern gentleman ranked as "a minor lyric poet."

¶14 Here we clearly see the peculiar state of "exile" that scholar Caren Kaplan has described—exile as defined by the highly dramatized and individualized, solitary, homeless circumstances of the singular traveler (Kaplan 1996). The guise of the exilic tourist is an appealing one for alienated artists, eager to dramatize—and find meaning in—their own wanderings. Williams may have exploited his own exile for its dramatic potential, and yet he was also genuine in his desire to glean redemption through travel. As he writes in "A Summer of Discovery,"

> *The Night of the Iguana* is rooted in the atmosphere and experiences of the summer of 1940, which I remember more vividly, on the emotional level, than any summer that I have gone through before or after—since it was then, that summer, that I not only discovered that it was life that I truly longed for, but that all which is most valuable in life is escaping from the narrow cubicle of one's self to a sort of veranda between the sky and the still water beach (allegorically speaking) and to a hammock beside another beleaguered being, someone else who is in exile from the place and time of his heart's fulfillment. (128)

Twenty years later, this moment of communication between two beleaguered beings forms the crux of the full-length play—this time replayed not by two men, but by female and male travelers, Hannah and Shannon. At the end of "A Summer of Discovery," Williams mentions that he had considered an alternative title for *The Night of the Iguana*: namely, *Two Acts of Grace*, "which referred to a pair of desperate people who had the humble nobility of each putting the other's desperation, during the course of a night, above his concern for his own" (129). He concludes, "Being an unregenerate romanticist, even now, I can still think of nothing that gives more meaning to living" (129). Although Williams describes his construction as allegorical, the setting (veranda and hammock, sky and beach) persists as an ideal space for a particular kind of traveler—one who desires not only escape from a fractured modern experience but also connection with others in a similar state, as he seeks respite and affirmation.

The Story "The Night of the Iguana"

The first version of Tennessee Williams's *The Night of the Iguana*, drafted in 1946 and revised and expanded for publication in 1948, was a short story about a bold yet sexually repressed woman traveler and two gay male travelers. As Brian Parker observes, "It was turned down as too risqué by *Harper's Bazaar* but was published later that same year in *One Arm*, a New Directions anthology of Williams's stories" (iii). Drewey Wayne Gunn, one of the few scholars to analyze the short story in relation to the later plays, concludes that "in spite of its melodramatic overtones, the story, narrated with gentle understanding, is extremely effective" (Gunn 213).

¶16 Williams begins the story by introducing Miss Edith Jelkes, an artist (formerly a teacher), who "having suffered a nervous breakdown . . . has begun to wander about the world, painting and idly living on her small inheritance" (Gunn 212). Drifting to Acapulco, she takes lodging at the Costa Verde Hotel. Once there, "since she needs desperately to keep in contact with other people, she is disconcerted to find herself . . . with only two young writers at her hotel, both of whom pointedly ignore her." As Gunn further observes, "she twice tries to return to Mexico City, where she has made friends in the Anglo-American colony but for some reason . . . she cannot leave the two men, whose relationship she has begun to understand" (Gunn 212). Indeed, Miss Jelkes, apparently ignorant of the fact that they are lovers, is naively curious about the eroticized intimacy between

them. In her loneliness, she intrudes upon them, insisting on sharing their company and artistic inclinations. The male characters are clear counterparts to Williams and his companion in his 1940 Mexico travels, whereas Miss Jelkes is a mysterious presence; there is no parallel character in "A Summer of Discovery." Leverich argues that Williams actually began to write "The Night of the Iguana" while at the Costa Verde Hotel, giving it precisely the same setting (376). Williams doesn't identify when he wrote the story; he simply recognizes it as one of the few "mementos" of the summer and a work that has "very little relation" to the play, "except the same title and a bit of the same symbolism" ("Summer" 126).

¶17 And though Miss Jelkes seems to be the only character in the short story without a real-world counterpart in Williams's essay, she is the sole character who reappears in *The Night of the Iguana*, though with a different first name and slightly shifted demeanor. It is interesting that Williams must stage an encounter with this woman and travel across the tantalizing homoerotic narrative landscape that she disrupts in order to arrive at the full-length play. Rather than abandon his bothersome creation (for she is very bothersome to the male characters) he instead chooses to transform her. Twenty years later, Miss Edith Jelkes will be redesigned and redeemed as the noble Miss Hannah Jelkes.

¶18 Tennessee Williams scholars have had little to say about the first Miss Jelkes except to observe that she is another character based on Williams's sister Rose (Leverich 376), "another variation of his neurotic Southern woman" (Gunn 212). Leverich suggests that she is another incarnation of a woman from New Orleans named Irene, who will ultimately materialize as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (376) and who also appears in Williams's story "In Memory of an Aristocrat."Those familiar with Williams's intense affair with Kip Kiernan might also wonder if she is not somewhat based on the young woman who came between Williams and Kiernan, creating an awkward triangle. A friend of Kiernan's, this young woman had shown up in Provincetown and had "intruded upon the scene" by confronting Kiernan about his relationship with Williams and warning him that Williams was "in the process of turning him homosexual" (qtd. in Leverich 365). As a result, Kiernan ended his relationship with Williams, telling him that "he had seen enough of that world to know that he had to resist it"; moreover, he planned to marry (qtd. in Leverich 365). As Edith Jelkes takes shape in the story, however, it is impossible not to recognize the traits—the painful sensitivity, the nervous condition, the desire for connection, the loneliness—that she shares with Williams himself. It is not surprising, then, to find the author and narrator mocking her prudish ways and criticizing her for her trespasses, while simultaneously empathizing with her.

¶19 Miss Jelkes's transformation from short story to play can also be considered a reflection of the changing politics of gender and travel. More precisely, she highlights the intrusion of the woman traveler into a previously masculine travel arena. As "Iguana" itself travels across genres, it reflects an era in which young artistic and professional women were becoming more mobile. Both short story and play, moreover, depict a form of travel that is riddled with modernist themes such as exile, alienation, primitivism, and sexual experimentation. Significantly, the travelers' identities, both male and female, are significantly defined by their sexuality.

¶20 The male travelers' sexualities are especially at stake—to the extent that their very visible homosexuality in the story had to be excised when Williams rewrote the story for the stage, in order to conform to postwar America's homophobic social politics and constraints. As Brian Parker explains, the one-act version of the play was at first more like the story, but "Williams decided that audiences might not yet accept the version's open

homosexuality, so he began to redraft the play" (Parker iii–iv).[1] Even in the story, however, the writers keep separate rooms out of a sense of propriety, and as bits of the male couple's background and history begin to filter through Miss Jelkes's eavesdropping, the reader gathers that Williams's representation of male-male desire is carefully and purposely troubled. The younger man, Mike, is recently divorced and prone to tantrums directed against his older companion. It seems that "some argument [is] going on intermittently between them." In such instances, the male characters' lingering, personal angst appears symptomatic of "the impact of society's often limiting approach to non-conventional romantic options" (Peters 111). Williams's story thus acknowledges homosexual desire and employs it to fuel the story's sense of intrigue and wonder, even as it demonstrates how "the (overwhelmingly negative) perceptions of homosexual intimacy" will mark "American attitudes of the late 1940s and '50s" and disrupt homosexual intimacy and its literary representation (Peters 118). At the same time, the presence of the two male travelers helps to define the Costa Verde Hotel's liminality—along with the travelers' off-season stay and the hotel's physical marginality. As Leverich has written, Mexico is where Williams first experienced "an openly primitive and uninhibited sexual experience with native youths, similar to that which his idol Hart Crane had also encountered in Mexico, as being in 'the fullest masculine tradition'" (Leverich 378). Philip Kolin concurs, observing that Mexico "allowed Williams to enter the liminal world where his sexual and political anxieties, triggered by conventionalism, could be expressed and eased" (Kolin 35). At the Costa Verde Hotel, Williams's characters' sexual anxieties are similarly expressed and eased.

¶21 Having wandered into this liminal, homosocial setting, Miss Jelkes finds herself in a fascinating fix. She has finally come upon a scene into which she cannot fit. Williams goes into great detail to establish the kind of traveler that Miss Jelkes is and to describe her predicament. She is very much a southern belle and powerfully anticipates *Streetcar*'s Blanche. She is "delicately made," with great translucent gray eyes, cloudy blond hair, and a style of dress that matches her "unearthly type" (230). She has perfected her social skills through travel: she knows how to strike up acquaintances, has "a fresh and witty way of observing things," and the many places she has traveled have "supplied her with a great reservoir of descriptive comment and humorous anecdote" (231). "Whenever she came into a restaurant or theatre or exhibition gallery, she could hear or imagine that she could hear a little numerous wave of appreciation." This "was important to her"; it had become "one of her necessary comforts" (230). She is also a sexually naïve spinster; Williams introduces her with the line, "Miss Jelkes was outwardly such a dainty teapot that no one could guess she could actually boil" (230).

¶22 Indeed, part of Miss Jelkes's growing desperation stems from her frustrated sexual curiosity; she does not yet realize that simply being a heterosexual woman excludes her from the men's interest. She is especially drawn to the older writer. As the story proceeds, the narrator reveals that she empathizes with him and longs to tell him "incommunicable things." But he already has a companion—the "massively constructed" and extravagantly sensual young Mike—making her irrelevant (234). Miss Jelkes lays "siege" on the coupled writers in order to integrate forcefully among them; she engages in a kind of territorial battle as she changes her painting, bathing, and lounging routines in order to encroach more immediately upon the spaces they inhabit. While this behavior is twisted, it also has a positive side effect: in order for Miss Jelkes to enter the intriguingly sexualized, homoerotic, homosocial travel space that the men's intimacy and eroticized beach bodies define, she must also stretch her own boundaries.

¶23 Ultimately, Miss Jelkes secures a territorial triumph. Horrified by the captive iguana scratching beneath her room, she takes a room next to the two men's respective bedrooms. Thus the iguana serves as a catalyst and

excuse for Miss Jelkes as she advances in her territorial siege. She is tantalizingly close to satisfying her curiosity: "If she could have risen from bed and peered through one of the cracks without betraying herself she might have done so, but knowing that any move would be overheard, she remained on the bed and her mind was now alert with suspicions which had before been only a formless wonder" (241). When she hears the men whisper rude things about her (Mike has already hurt her feelings terribly by calling her "Goldilocks"), she knocks boldly on their door and rushes in to protest. Mike storms off, and she is left face to face with the older writer, finally able to share time alone with him. It is a remarkable moment, for after very little small talk, Williams permits Miss Jelkes to engage in a surprisingly candid conversation. She pointedly asks, "Your friend — . . . Is he the—right person for you?" He answers straightaway that he is attracted to Mike because Mike is helpless, and he is always attracted to helpless people. Unsatisfied, she persists, until she is able to ask, "But you . . . How about you? . . . But isn't it possible that with somebody else, somebody with more understanding, more like *yourself*—!" "You mean you?" he answers bluntly (243–44). Miss Jelkes is "spared the necessity of answering," because a storm suddenly unleashes its great violence outside the screen door. The story reaches its climax, quite literally, as the writer sexually assaults Miss Jelkes and "thrust[s] at her like the bird of blind fury," while drawing up her skirt and ejaculating on her (244). The writer's assault may remind the reader of the connection between violence and desire that exists in other Williams plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*; as Brian Peters has noted, "only through intense physical contact, often painful contact, are emotional connections forged" (Peters 110). The writer's assault and Miss Jelkes's "fierce little comedy of defense" also reveal the two characters' unresolved sexualities (244). Significantly, this violence breaks down the writer; Mike returns to see the older man sobbing and asks several times, "What is it?" while shaking him, but his older friend cannot stop crying (244). The story may be read as another "articulation of homosexuality that reveals the downfall of the queer character—a character who reaches this downfall, who is even destined towards this downfall, because of society's limitations and scorn of male-male intimacy" (Peters 111).[2]

¶24 Miss Jelkes, however, reaches a turning point as she finally comes to understand, "*I don't belong here*, . . . and suiting action to thought," she slips quietly out the screen door (245). Outside, the storm has ceased its fury: "The white bird had gone away and the Costa Verde had survived its assault" (245). She discovers that the iguana has been set free by the storm and wonders if it was freed by an act of God or if "only Mike, the beautiful and helpless and cruel, had cut the Iguana loose?" (245). The narrator reveals that Miss Jelkes is also relieved, in a sense, "for in some equally mysterious way the strangling rope of her loneliness had also been severed by what had happened tonight on this barren rock above the moaning waters" (245). Lying on the cool bed, she feels "again the spot of dampness, now turning cool but still adhering to the flesh of her belly as a light but persistent kiss" (245). Strikingly, although "her fingers approached it timidly," expecting to "draw back with revulsion," instead "they touched it curiously and even pityingly and did not draw back for a while" (245).

¶25 In the story, then, the Costa Verde Hotel becomes a transgressive space in which desire can follow its circuitous paths and sexuality hovers as a kind of question. Perhaps it is a question about dislocation; the desire to share "incommunicable things"; and the need for companionship that transcends sex. The story speaks to the realization of erotic attraction and sexual freedom abroad; as Kolin argues, Williams "invokes a world beyond Anglo repression" in "an Hispanicized America . . . through actual geographical space" (Kolin 35, 36). The story also highlights the transformative potential of travel. But the two male travelers cannot stay at the Costa

Verde Hotel forever; their liminal idyll has been disrupted by the arrival of Miss Jelkes as much as by the historical circumstances closing in on them.

Traveling On: The Play *The Night of the Iguana*

Although "Iguana"—the short story—differs significantly from the full-length play, it stands nonetheless as a fruitful progenitor. Gunn argues that "as Williams developed *The Night of the Iguana*—first as a one-act play for the Festival of Two Worlds in 1959 and then into a three-act production that opened on Broadway in late 1961—only the symbols of the storm and the iguana remained" (Gunn 213). First published in 2001, the one-act shows, in Brian Parker's assessment, what Williams "first considered [the play's] imaginative core—especially the long third scene of Shannon and Hannah's conversation"; it also "makes clear the elements he must have decided to add or elaborate later" (Parker iv). Here we encounter the key conflicts and the key players that will define that fateful night—"the night of the iguana"—in the full-length play.

¶27 Their presence introduces a degree of poignancy: Nonno has convinced Hannah to take him to Mexico and the sea—"the cradle of life"—in the hope that there he may finish his last poem. This poem, finally complete, closes both versions of the play. As Leverich reveals, Williams himself wrote the poem during his stay at the Costa Verde Hotel: "On the original version, he made the notation 'Written on the verandah of the hotel Costa Verde, over the Pacific Ocean, as I watched the daylight fading on a tree of big golden lemons'" (Leverich 379). It is a lovely poem about a "lemon [later revised to an orange] on the branch" that quietly "observes the sky begin to blanch / Without a cry, without a prayer, / with no expression of despair!"—despite the arrival of night and the inevitable fall to the earth, which will embrace it in its "obscene, corrupting love." The poem ends with the plea: "O courage could you not as well / select a second place to dwell, / Not only in the lemon tree / but in the frightened heart of me?" (Leverich 379–80). Although Williams does not mention the poem in "A Summer of Discovery," the work encapsulates the themes of endurance and creative triumph. In both versions of the play, the lemon tree becomes an orange tree and the poem is recited in its entirety near the close of the play; in addition, it trails from the grandfather's room in fragments throughout the one-act version. Its words comfort Hannah and Shannon, expressing the momentary respite, meaning, and grace that the key characters achieve together.

¶28 Both the 1959 one-act and 1961 full-length play are set in the very same rustic seaside resort perched upon a cliff with the rainforest as its backdrop. Written in the late '50s and early '60s, however, they express some of the cultural anxieties of the time—as well as the "tourist explosion" discussed by scholars like Maxine Feifer (1985). Although travel for pleasure came nearly to a halt during the Second World War,

> when the war was over, tourism experienced its typical resurgence. Prosperity and optimism bloomed; the mobile middle class was bigger than ever. More important, there was a revolutionary infrastructure set out across the globe: planes and airfields, now lying idle, ready for new passengers. (220)

In this way, the plays straddle historical moments—set in the early 1940s but written and performed two decades later. To reflect the changed politics, the short story's plot and characters morph in fascinating ways.

¶29 The key change has to do with the gender dynamic that determines the balance between the principal male and female travelers; between them the crisis of the play will unfold. In the short story, a woman traveler intrudes upon two male travelers; in the plays, a male tour guide is "surrounded" by women travelers who

nearly cost him his job and sanity. He arrives at the Costa Verde in a feverish state, expecting to find solace in the company of the hotel's owner, Fred—only to learn that his old friend is dead. Fred's widow, Maxine, wishes to snare him as her lover; Charlotte, meanwhile, has already seduced him. Sparks fly as Shannon attempts to disentangle himself from these complications. In the short story, a single woman had to contend with two men; in the plays, Fred's death has dissolved the male pair, leaving Shannon to face the demands of several women. The tables are turned, and we encounter a very different battle of the sexes.

¶30 A number of character transformations mark the evolution from short story to play. Almost as if she has traversed the course of the story and learned its lessons, Edith Jelkes evolves into "ethereal, almost ghostly" Hannah Jelkes. Hannah is a noble and far more enlightened figure than the original Miss Jelkes. Gunn makes the amusing observation that "significantly, this woman comes from New England; Williams's Southern neurotic is now a man, the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, defrocked for fornication and heresy" (Gunn 213). A very minor character in the story, the Mexican hostess, or patrona, who sees nothing odd about the two male companions but laughs at Miss Jelkes's complaints and prudish ways, later turns into what Shannon describes as the "bigger than life and twice as unnatural" Maxine, the hostess of the Costa Verde Hotel. The short story's homosexual partners are present, in a sense, in Miss Fellowes—but while they were "out," Miss Fellowes is sexually repressed and in denial about her attraction to Charlotte. Repression does not prohibit aggression; Shannon describes Miss Fellowes as "a bull elephant on a rampage." Finally, one might argue that Williams's depiction of himself in "A Summer of Discovery" informs his characterizations of both Shannon, the defrocked minister seeking to restore his sanity abroad, and Nonno, the lyric poet. Having arrived at the sea to complete his last poem, Nonno is literally on the verge of extinction, like the outdated and "unregenerate romanticist" that Williams believed himself to be ("Summer" 129).

¶31 Whereas in the story, only Miss Jelkes and the two writers—eccentric, exilic, artistic travelers—are found at the Costa Verde Hotel, Williams assembled a crew of characters in the plays that playfully highlights a transitional moment in tourism. There are globetrotting adventurers who make their way by their talents and wits (Shannon, Hannah, and Nonno); a young Western schoolgirl on the loose in the tropics (Charlotte); a lusty, bohemian, expatriate innkeeper (Maxine) who keeps two young local men as house servants and lovers; and mass tourists (the group of fussy women travelers, teachers from a female college in Texas).

¶32 Shannon both precipitates and embodies the conflict between traveler and tourist. He is not the typical minister or the typical tour guide: he is clever and sexy and has a tendency to eschew itineraries in order to introduce his tourists to "real" places. His clash of wills with Miss Fellowes reveals her repressed desire for Charlotte and Shannon's inability to contain his passionate and impulsive nature. This nature is, in part, what defines Shannon as a traveler rather than a tourist. Reckless but brilliant, he has the ability to "see" Mexico and the other places he visits with a perceptive eye, coupled with an irrepressible desire to share this vision with others. Yet selfishness mingles with selflessness. As Hannah Jelkes observes of Miss Fellowes and her ilk: "I don't like those ladies any more than you do, but after all, they did save up all year to make this Mexican tour, to stay in stuffy hotels and eat the food they're used to. They want to be home away from home, but you . . . you indulged yourself, Mr. Shannon. You did conduct the tour as if it was just for you . . ." (*Iguana* 1961 100). Though she is a more adventurous traveler, Hannah understands the tourists' right to their preferences and to accommodations that please them, including tour buses and package deals.

¶33

Shannon's inevitable surrender to the preferences of his tour group mirrors larger patterns in postwar American society. Intellectuals of the time lamented the demise of the true traveler. Consider Daniel Boorstin's definition and analysis of the new tourist in his book *The Image* (1962):

> Where the old-style traveler was "active," searching for different people and new knowledge, the modern tourist is "passive": He expects interesting things to happen to him. The guided tour guarantees excitement without risk. One never encounters the natives, just one's fellow passengers. Normally, the tourist is isolated from the landscape he traverses . . . [T]he airplanes that . . . stock the same magazines . . . the international hotel chains with their identical interiors differentiated only by an inoffensive bit of "local" atmosphere . . . sightseeing buses, the obsession with taking pictures and buying postcards, all conspire to transform the external world into a movie set, and travel itself into a montage of illusions. (quoted in Pells 226)

Williams's play outlines the cultural clash somewhat simplistically—but, as Gunn concedes, "the playwright's portraits of the women tourists, though intentionally overdrawn so as to be comic, perfectly delineate at least one type of tourist" (Gunn 215). Indeed, in the end, the battle between traveler and tourist allows Williams to speak to a greater issue: how to survive panic and alienation.

¶34 Following a confrontation with Miss Fellowes, Shannon is fired and the tourists depart, leaving Hannah and Shannon (along with Maxine and Nonno) to survive a stormy tropical night together. On this perilous night, with Shannon tied up in his hammock (after attempting "the long swim to China") and Hannah exhausted from her travels and from caring for her ailing grandfather, all pretenses are dropped. Hannah and Shannon discuss the loneliness of travel, even in a crowd; what constitutes "home"; and the "impermanence of things" in a quickly modernizing present (111). The two share intimate details about their sexual histories, Shannon's crisis of faith, Hannah's relationship with her grandfather, and their battles with the "spooks," or personal demons, that haunt them.

¶35 As the full-length play begins, the reader (or audience) is introduced to Shannon, the male protagonist, as he arrives at the Costa Verde Hotel with a highly conventional party of lady tourists. Of particular note is a very angry Miss Fellowes, who has been competing with Shannon for the attentions of Charlotte, the youngest and most desirable member of the group. Penniless Hannah Jelkes, a spinster and sketch artist from Nantucket, arrives with her elderly grandfather, Nonno, and convinces Maxine, owner of the hotel, to let them stay for a night as well.

¶36 Hannah discusses "the tricks that panicky people use to outlast and outwit their panic": "poppyseed tea or rum-cocos or just a few deep breaths. Anything, everything, that we take to give them the slip, and so to keep on going." Shannon earnestly asks, "To where?" Hannah offers Williams's answer: "To somewhere like this, perhaps. . . . this verandah over the rain forest and the still-water beach, after long, difficult travels" (107–8). Here Williams reveals that Hannah does not "mean just travels about the world"; for Shannon and Hannah, travel signifies not only movement abroad, or even a kind of modernist exile, but "subterranean travels [as well], . . . the journeys that the spooked and bedeviled people are forced to take through . . . the *unlighted* sides of their natures" (108).

¶37 As the play sustains these fragile figures, it recalls Williams's early Mexican travels. The protagonists are like Williams himself in 1940—vulnerable expatriates who are self-conscious about their role in a changing world. Significantly, Williams's travelers find themselves deeply embedded in the industry of tourism; to survive economically, they must cater to tourists. Maxine, for example, is mindful that she is using her "talents"

as a hostess/bartender to attract a certain type of client: "I've got five more years, maybe ten, to make this place attractive to the male clientele, the middle-aged ones at least" (126). This understanding bonds the travelers, even as their panic heightens when the tourists—their source of income—leave. Shannon tells Hannah, "By God, you're a hustler, aren't you, you're a fantastic cool hustler," and Hannah answers, "Like *you*, Mr. Shannon" (62). Although Williams maintains the binaries that traditionally distinguish "true" travelers from tourists—soulfulness vs. superficiality, art vs. commerce, preference for "real" places vs. "pseudo-spaces," etc. —he also demonstrates that, as Caren Kaplan contends, such distinctions have become more difficult to maintain as tourist and traveler infrastructures become almost inextricable (Kaplan).

¶38 And still—the travelers appear to be rooted in and performing a modernist sensibility. While sketching Shannon, Hannah recalls that "when the Mexican painter Siqueiros did his portrait of the American poet Hart Crane he had to paint him with closed eyes because he couldn't paint his eyes open—there was too much suffering in them and he couldn't paint it" (58). Here Williams invokes the history of legendary figures that have traversed Mexico's exilic travel scenes, further defining Shannon, Hannah, and even Nonno and Maxine as exiles who are artistic, sensual, and spirited but also tormented within. These travelers continue to search for sources of authenticity and meaning to repair the fragmentation they suffer in a rapidly changing world. As Hannah observes,

> We go back to a hotel where we've been many times before and it isn't there any more. It's been demolished and there's one of those glassy, brassy new ones. Or if the old one's still there, the manager or the Maitre D who always welcomed us back so cordially before has been replaced by someone new who looks at us with suspicion. (111)

Her kind of traveler is regarded with suspicion because, having been replaced by "the tourist," he or she now figures as out of place and queer.

¶39 Williams, however, celebrates the fact of his protagonists' exile by creating a space where they can find and reaffirm one another. The hotel and veranda between the sky and the still water beach from Williams's 1940 Mexico travels reappear to (re)construct this space. And Hannah's reaching out to Shannon across "broken gates between people . . . even if it's just for one night only . . . on a verandah outside their . . . separate cubicles" serves on many levels as the resolution of the Western traveler's nightmare—dislocation, strandedness, and fear —with the traveler's dream: a moment of meaning between sensitive people in an alienated world (106). Although characterized by its easygoing, almost bohemian sense of travel (and Williams's unruly sense of humor), *The Night of the Iguana* upholds its protagonists' impulse to "reach out across broken gates" as an act of grace. And thus, as we return to Williams's essay and read it in relation to his story, one-act play, and full-length play, we see that, remarkably, the exilic and touristic poetics of Williams's "summer of discovery" *will* translate across shifting travel scenes and prevail in each.

Notes

[1] The one-act play was first published in 2001 in the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, with an introduction by Brian Parker.

[2] Peters's words are from his essay on "One Arm" and "Desire and the Black Masseur," but his comments are relevant in reading "The Night of the Iguana" as well. Peters makes the important point that "for many writers of the postwar decades, stories of same-sex attraction are inevitably stories of disappointment and disaster, implying the strong cultural fear of male homosexuality in their contemporary worlds" (111).

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