

The Negative

*unfortunate notoriety
highly comfortable*

Despite the ~~disgrace~~ that ensued from his involvement in a police raid on a very posh house of male prostitution in Knightsbridge, Lord Amberly remained a peer of the realm and allowed no one to forget it.

He went for cocktails at the fashionable hour at Claridge's, no longer with a sycophantic group but with a slightly faded and consequently frightened young man named ~~Jimmy Dobson~~ *Tonio Maresca*

'Aren't you rather young to have a touch of gray at your temples?' he had asked ~~Jimmy~~ *Tonio* *Tonio had*

'I'm thirty-three,' ~~Jimmy~~ *Tonio* replied, 'but premature gray hair runs in the family.'

'Well, it won't do. You are going tomorrow to my hair-dresser's.'

'What will he do with my hair?'

'He will have his instructions.'

Lord Amberly's own hair, at the age of of seventy, was of a brilliant blond ~~he~~ *his* and was artfully waved.

'Just lie back in the chair and close your eyes till it's finished,' *said the hair-dresser*

Tonio ~~Jimmy~~ fell asleep in the chair. Awakened by the hair-dresser and hour later, the image of his altered appearance in the mirror was frightful to him. *his hair* ~~it~~ was the color of Lord Amberly's and the same artificial waves had been set in it.

He exclaimed: 'But I'm not like that, it's not at all suitable to me. For God's sake change it back to the way it was.'

'Lord Amberly would be outraged. Besides, we're closing, *so* if you're displeased, you'll have to *complain* ~~express it~~ to him.'

As he rose from ~~the~~ *Tonio* chair, ~~Jimmy~~ *Tonio* observed that the hair of the hair-dresser corresponded to Lord Amberly's hair and now to his own *and the* alteration he felt was more than one of outward appearance

Editor's Note to "The Negative"

Robert Bray

Tennessee Williams's previously unpublished short story, "The Negative," is part of the vast Williams holdings in Harvard's Theatre Collection. The typed and handwritten manuscript dated November 1982 exists as Williams's last completed short story before his death on February 25, 1983. I initially read "The Negative" while examining manuscripts at Harvard's Pusey Library, but I was not the first Williams specialist to have seen this story. Williams scholar Allean Hale contributed a synopsis of "The Negative" for John Lahr's *New Yorker* article (12/19/94) entitled "The Lady and Tennessee." Lahr cites the story to support his view that by the time of his death, Williams was souring on Maria St. Just and that Mona, one of the main characters in the story, is actually a very unflattering and thinly disguised portrait of Maria St. Just. Coincidentally, St. Just in her epistolary collection entitled *Five O'Clock Angel: Letters of Tennessee Williams to Maria St. Just* erroneously "glosses" a Williams letter in which he mentions a play he was working on in 1982, entitled *The Lingering Hour*. She writes, "unfinished and unpublished, *The Lingering Hour* is also called *The Negative*" (390). Actually, *The Lingering Hour*, Williams's last unfinished play, is also located at Harvard's Pusey Library and is scheduled to be published by Yale's *Theatre Magazine* this September (1999).

New Directions, Williams's chief publisher, initially considered but later rejected "The Negative" for the *Collected Stories*. Gore Vidal alludes to "The Negative" in two different 1985 pieces, "Immortal Bird" in *New York Review of Books*, and in his Introduction to Williams's *Collected Stories*. In the *Review* Vidal quotes from the last sentence of the story and has this to say:

"The Negative" was written when Tennessee was seventy-one; he deals, as he so often came to do, with a poet, losing his mind, art; at the end, "as he ran toward this hugely tolerant receiver, he scattered from his gentleman's clothes, from their pockets, the illegibly scribbled poetry of his life."

In Vidal's Introduction to Williams's *Collected Stories*, first published by New Directions in 1985, it would appear that Vidal assumed the story would be included as part of the collection, as he writes, "The stories are arranged in chronological order. The first was published when Tom was seventeen; the last was written when Tennessee was seventy-one." Since the last story in the collection, "The Killer Chicken and the Closet Queen" was written in 1977 (when Williams was 66), one might assume that Vidal, like others, had mis-

judged Williams's age—were it not for the fact that Vidal begins his Introduction by setting the record straight on Williams's actual year of birth, 1911. Since Vidal's quote from the Introduction is actually very similar to his brief discussion of "The Negative" in his essay written around the same time, perhaps Vidal was merely paraphrasing himself.

In any case, as more of Williams's unfinished and unpublished work finds its way into print and production, inevitable questions will arise over the judgment of offering these works for public view, just as mixed opinions are currently being voiced over the posthumous publication of unfinished works by Hemingway, Ellison, O'Neill, and others. However, some gambles produce terrific payoffs, as with *Not about Nightingales*. Since the inaugural issue of *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review* printed Williams's first extant published short story ("Isolated," written when he was twelve), we are pleased with this second issue to publish his last short story, written when he was seventy-one. My thanks go to The University of the South and to Harvard's Houghton Library Theatre Collection for allowing readers to form their own estimations of this final short story by Tennessee Williams.