

The Eccentricities of a Nightingale

by Tennessee Williams



April 9-25

AUDIENCE GUIDE

*Compiled, Written and Edited
by Jack Marshall*

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, and neglected American dramatic works of the Twentieth Century... what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past artists, nor can we afford to lose our mooring to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all citizens, of all ages and all points of view.

These Audience Guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.

Like everything we do to keep alive and vital the great stage works of the Twentieth Century, these study guides are made possible in great part by the support of Arlington County’s Cultural Affairs Division and the Virginia Commission for the Arts.



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The Playwright | 4 |
| Comparing <i>Summer and Smoke</i> And <i>The Eccentricities of a Nightingale</i> By Richard Kramer | 7 |
| “I am Widely Regarded...” By Tennessee Williams | 12 |
| Prostitutes in American Drama | 13 |
| The Show Must Go On By Jack Marshall | 16 |
| The Works of Tennessee Williams | 21 |



The Playwright: Tennessee Williams

[The following biography was originally written for Williams when he was a Kennedy Center Honoree in 1979]

His craftsmanship and vision marked Tennessee Williams as one of the most talented playwrights in contemporary theater. His dramas, including *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are among the most acclaimed dramas ever performed on Broadway.

Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi, on March 26, 1911, to Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwina Dakin Williams. His father was an aggressive traveling salesman, and his mother was the puritanical daughter of an Episcopal rector. Williams had an older sister, Rose, and a younger brother, Walter Dakin.

Williams once wrote, concerning his parents' relationship, "It was just a wrong marriage." He clearly portrayed the familial conflict in his art. For example, the character, Amanda Wingfield, in *The Glass Menagerie*, is modeled after Williams's mother, and Big Daddy, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, represents his father.

Williams was raised almost entirely by his mother while his father traveled. She was overprotective of her son, especially after he contracted diphtheria when he was five. The family later moved to St. Louis, Missouri. As a boy, Williams would make up

and tell stories, many of them scary.

In the fall of 1929, Williams enrolled at the University of Missouri to study journalism. His father, angry that Hazel Kramer, Williams's childhood sweetheart had also enrolled there, threatened to withdraw him. The romance soon ended, and Williams, deeply depressed, dropped out of school. He decided, at his father's request, to take a job as a clerk in a shoe company. He once recalled this time in his life as "living death."

To vent his frustrations with his unfulfilling work, Williams retreated to his room after work to write. He survived his depression for awhile through his poetry, plays, and stories, but the strain soon resulted in a nervous breakdown. The family sent him to Memphis to recuperate. It was here that he joined a local theater group.

When he returned to St. Louis, he began socializing with a group of poets at Washington University. One of these poets, Clark Mills McBurney, introduced Williams to Hart Crane's poetry. Crane soon became his idol.

Williams decided to return to college in 1937, this time at the University of Iowa. He continued to write an enormous number of plays, some of which were performed on campus. In 1938, he graduated from college, but undermining his success was the tragedy of his sister's insanity. The family allowed a pre frontal lobotomy to be performed, and, as a result, she spent most of her life in a sanitarium.

Williams left home when he was 28, to live in New Orleans, where he changed his lifestyle and his name. He gave several reasons for adopting a new name: It was a reaction against his early inferior work, published under his real name; his new name had been a college nickname; he chose the name because his father was from Tennessee; the name was unique. In New Orleans, Williams wrote stories, some of which would become plays, and entered a Group Theater playwriting contest. His entry

won him \$100 and an agent, Audrey Wood, who became a friend and adviser.

During a visit to St. Louis, Williams wrote *Battle of Angels*, a play that opened in Boston in 1940, but was a disaster and closed after two weeks. He revised it, however, and brought it back as *Orpheus Descending*. A movie version, *The Fugitive Kind*, starred Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani. His success continued when Audrey Wood got him a screenwriting job for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood. Williams made \$250 a week for six months writing scripts for Lana Turner and Margaret O'Brien.

Williams also began working on an original screenplay, but it was rejected. Disappointed, he continued to work on it, turning it into a play called, *The Gentleman Caller*, which evolved into *The Glass Menagerie*. It opened on Broadway on March 31, 1945, revolutionizing American theater and changing Williams's life forever.

In 1947, his second masterpiece, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, opened, becoming even more successful than *The Glass Menagerie*. The play won him his second Drama Critics' Award and his first Pulitzer Prize. During the years following *Streetcar*, a Williams play opened on Broadway almost every other season. His work also continued to flow from stage to screen.

Along with success, however, comes failure. In 1948, *Summer and Smoke* failed on Broadway, but became hugely successful in an Off-Broadway revival and made Geraldine Page a star. *The Rose Tattoo* followed, along with *Camino Real*, a failure in 1953, but revived as a classic at Lincoln Center in 1970, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, winning him his third Drama Critics' Award and his second Pulitzer, *Orpheus Descending*, *Garden District*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Williams also continued to experiment with writing other genres. He wrote two novels, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* and *Moise and the World of Reason*, short stories, including "One Arm" and

"Hard Candy," a book of poetry called *In the Winter of Cities*, the film, *Baby Doll*, and his autobiography, *Memoirs*.

In the last years of his life, Williams divided his time between his residences in New York and Key West. He also kept an apartment in New Orleans's French Quarter. In 1981, his *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* was produced Off Off Broadway at the Jean Cocteau Theater, and the following year, his final play, *A House Not Meant to Stand* premiered at the Goodman Theater in Chicago. Williams died at his New York apartment in 1983, at the age of 71.

Comparing *Summer and Smoke* and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*

I. *Summer and Smoke* and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*

[From *Tennessee Williams: A Guide to Research and Performance*
Edited Philip C. Kolin; Greenwood Press, 1998.]

By Richard E. Kramer

BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Like most of Williams writing, *Summer and Smoke* and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* contain elements of his life. The foundation of both plays is Edwina Williams's tales of her youth in Port Gibson and Natchez, Mississippi. In 1916, the Williamses were living with Edwina's parents, the Dakins, in Clarksdale, Mississippi, the town that became Glorious Hill. Like Rev. Winemiller, Rev. Dakin was the Episcopal minister of the town, and like Alma, Williams grew up at the rectory. Dakin's father had been a smalltown doctor like the Drs. Buchanan, and Rose Otte Dakin had taught piano and voice like Alma. Rosa Gonzales shares her first name with Williams's sister and grandmother,

and Williams himself had a hot-tempered lover, Pancho Rodriguez y Gonzalez, in the 1940s.

Both Mrs. Winemiller and Alma manifest characteristics of Williams's sister and mother. The older woman is drawn from the later, clearly disturbed Rose, but Edwina Williams's depiction of her daughter's overreaction to illness echoes Alma's. Much of Alma is also drawn from Edwina Williams, the smalltown minister's daughter with a streak of puritanism who had been called a nightingale, though Williams also insisted, "I'm Alma". The egocentric, carousing hedonist of *Summer and Smoke*, John, is a portrait of Williams's father, who lost part of his ear in a fight over a card game, while John is knifed in a drunken fight while gambling.

Both *Summer and Smoke* and *Eccentricities* derive from "The Yellow Bird," a story first published in 1947. Though they both differ in style and resolution from the story, the two plays are closely linked bibliographically if not chronologically. *Eccentricities* premiered in 1964, more than fifteen years after *Summer and Smoke*. The most salient differences between them are the elimination of several characters--chiefly the senior Dr. Buchanan, Nellie Ewell, and the Gonzaleses--and the addition of Mrs. Buchanan. There is also no longer a stabbing or shooting, and the Moon Lake Casino episode has been replaced with a visit to a cheap hotel. John is less amoral and tempestuous in *Eccentricities* than in *Summer and Smoke* and more controlled by his mother than his counterpart is influenced by his father; Alma is less proper and prim and more peculiar.

Themes

Summer and Smoke, like *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, shows conflicts between soul and body, with some critics even calling these works morality plays. Donahue sees them as an "allegory of good and evil", reflecting Williams's Puritan/Cavalier heritage; Tischler asserts that the theme is "Puritanism in battle

with Lawrencian sex". Boxill points out that Williams's plays also deal with illusion versus reality and past versus present, noting that time is a constant theme. Debusscher similarly asserts that the original play's title "evokes . . . a world long past its apogee and now declining". From his Freudian point of view, Sievers suggests that Alma's neurosis results from sexual repression and that she loses John because she becomes his "mother-image". He also lists children contending with controlling parents and the repercussions of inhibited sexuality as other Freudian themes in Williams. Using Jung's theories, Spero interprets *Summer and Smoke* as a journey to self-knowledge. The would-be lovers are "opposites" in a conflict that is not the spirit/flesh dichotomy but the struggle "to achieve a higher consciousness".

Williams demonstrates that the two opposites, according to Thomas P. Adler, must integrate before either Alma or John can become whole beings. "The spiritual," Adler insists Williams is saying, "can only be reached via, in union with, the physical".

Another common interpretation of Williams's writing, which he vehemently denied ("Let Me Hang It All Out"), is that his women are really men, engendering examinations of his "Albertine Strategy". Though in *Acting Gay*, Clum maintains that Williams disguises his gay men as straight women, he later posits that in *Summer and Smoke* and *Eccentricities* Williams is "exploding gender distinctions".

Characters

Alma has been seen as the southern gentlewoman, the Puritan, and an avatar of the soul. Though she espouses its ideals, the community distrusts and misunderstands her, the outsider reaching for "something beyond the earth". John, who clearly represents the body, reality, and the present, is cast as a radiant primitive", a "male animal, brutal and coarse".

The fathers, according to the critics, are the representatives of the mainstream who victimize the outcasts. Rev. Winemiller

represents the church; Dr. Buchanan, Sr., the establishment. The mothers, Sievers suggests, are the "heavies"; Mrs. Winemiller, for Londré, acts like a "perverse child" in *Summer and Smoke*, but in *Eccentricities* she becomes "a social liability". Mrs. Buchanan, domineering, disagreeable, and somewhat foolish, assumes Dr. Buchanan's function in *Eccentricities*.

The literary circle foreshadows Alma's destiny. These misfits are to art what Rev. Winemiller is to spirituality: travesties whose prissiness contrasts with John's brawling and gambling. Nellie and Rosa, however, are natural women who instinctively know that sex is healthy. Donahue, in fact, calls Nellie the "healthy yeasayer of the universe", and Latins like Rosa represent "elemental" humanity to Williams.

Symbols

The central symbol in both plays is the stone angel (Eternity) that embodies the gulf between Alma and John (on stage, there is Eternity between their houses). At once upwardly oriented (an angel, its wings lifted) and earth-bound (crouching, facing the ground), it connects the world of the spirit (the rectory) and that of the body (the doctor's office), forming part of the body-soul-eternity triad of the plays (Bigsby70), which Thomas P. Adler sees manifested in the set design, "an altarpiece-like triptych". Griffin notes that the angel also symbolizes the two sides of Alma: cold stone and life-giving water. John's anatomy chart depicts the physical and represents science, and the Cavalier's plume epitomizes freedom from society's restraints.

Fireworks, a recurring symbol of sexual climax, imply illumination, expansiveness, and an upward "extratemporal" impulse. The sky, heaven, and the stars are further imagery of loftiness and spirituality, "non-earthly symbols for the pure". Though also phallic, the Gothic cathedral, symbol of timelessness, and the church steeple exemplify man's higher aspirations.

The nightingale signifies "ecstasy carrying one beyond the present" and is Williams's private code word for sexual climax. Summer and winter echo the two aspects of Alma, fire and ice, and the passage from one to the other accompanies Alma's passing from "bloom to . . . decay". Time, in Williams's epistemology, is "life's destroyer", the human spirit the adversary of its passage. This, as Thomas P. Adler notes, is a recurring motif in Williams.

II. From Clive Barnes review of the Broadway premiere of *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* in 1976....

Perhaps the most eccentric thing about Tennessee Williams' new (yes new) and pungently atmospheric play *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is its provenance. It opened at the Morosco Theater last night and, I suspect like most people, I had been expecting a rewrite of *Summer and Smoke*. It is really no such thing, but a different play with different characters and even a different theme.

The story of how the play came to be written is interesting. It started as a rewrite for the London production of *Summer and Smoke*, obviously a radical rewrite. But that production was already deep into rehearsal when Mr. Williams arrived with his revised script. This was put away and did not emerge until years later. Now Mr. Williams has worked further on the script—one speech, I understand was actually added over this last weekend-- and the resultant new play has precious little to do with *Summer and Smoke*.

On the face of it, that may seem an exaggeration. The central characters are still there with the same names living in the same Southern small town just before World War I. The heroine is still a frustrated vocal teacher living with her minister father and crazy mother, and while the doctor hero may have lost a father, he has gained a mother. Some scenes have gone completely, others have been left vestigially but entirely rewritten, and, in

some, even whole patches of dialogue have been retained, including most of the final scene.

Yet this is now of interest only to scholars, for the new work effectively knocks *Summer and Smoke* off the map, except as a literary curiosity. The old play contrasted man's soul and his body, and pointed out, with fairly heavy symbolism, the dangers of dividing the two. The new play is a straightforward conflict of two people--one hot and one cold, a woman at base nervously confident, and a man at base confidently nervous.

These two characters, the warm-hearted ugly duckling and the gentle, reserved mother's boy are far more complex and credible than their counter-parts in the earlier play, and the resolution of their conflict is far neater and more satisfying. It is as if a rather suaver Gentleman Caller from *The Glass Menagerie* had met a rather younger Blanche DuBois before she finally became Blanche Dubois....”

“I Am Widely Regarded as the Ghost of a Writer...”

By Tennessee Williams

[Six years before his death, playwright Tennessee Williams authored this essay, appearing in the New York Times Review of Books, reflecting on his diminished artistic status, and his reaction to a production of The Eccentricities of a Nightingale]

Of course no one is more acutely aware than I that I am widely regarded as the ghost of a writer, a ghost still visible, excessively solid of flesh and perhaps too ambulatory, but a writer remembered mostly for works which were staged between 1944 and 1961.

Of course this is a matter of some chagrin to me and also of some exasperation since I have remained continually a living and

practicing writer all this time since. I suspect that what happened is that after "Night of the Iguana" in 1961, certain radically and dreadfully altered circumstances of my life compelled me to work in correspondingly different styles. There has surely been sufficient exposure in print of my misadventures in the 60's for that subject to be no more than mentioned at this point.

The plays by which I was known in the middle 40's through the first year of two of the 60's were categorized as works of "poetic naturalism." In their written form as well as in their staging, most notably by Elia Kazan, these plays, except for "Camino Real," were of practically the same genre as say, Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" or William Inge's "Come Back, Little Sheba."

Once his critics, his audience and the academic communities in which his work is studied have found what they consider a convenient and suitable term for the style of a playwright, it seems to be very difficult for them to concede to him the privilege and necessity of turning to other ways. He truly must make these departures from his past ways, for just as his life has encountered a sudden deviation from its previous course, as if I went on with my work and am still going on with them both.

But my dreams are full of alarm and wild suspicion. The world about me seems hostile: I react to unimportant defects and half-imagined slights with an indignation, sometimes exploding into fury not wise in a man with vascular problems. To choose a somewhat amusing incident, Key West's newest and most adventurous dramatic group, the semi-pro Greene Street Theater, quite recently put on a generally admirable production of one of my favorite and most difficult works, "The Eccentricities of a Nightingale."

I attended the opening and soon became so annoyed by technical deficiencies (no fireworks projected on the scrim, no bells and horns at midnight of New Year's Eve, a rather large white turkey feather instead of a sweeping plume on Miss Alma's rebellious hat) that I stalked out of the theater without a word to actors or director and elbowed my way ungraciously through the genial

audience about the doors. An acquaintance asked me, "Hoe actors?" and I replied snappishly, "I thought they showed a great deal of endurance and so did I!"

Of course I detest this sort of behavior and tried to make up for it by excessive effusions to the leading lady whom I encountered at a restaurant the next day. I told her not to wait to be cued by other players but get off the fly-paper, honey, and just fly, fly, flyially when influenced by noon wine, is only a pretense. In my heart an inscrutable bird of dark feather seems to have built a nest which I can never quite dislodge, no matter how loudly I cackle or how widely I grin.

Perhaps I've expressed this better in a passage of a poem I worked on last night when I was unable to sleep:

*The negative. Oh once
I did attempt to speak but what I spoke
seemed to confuse you more. I think I saidlley-
cat distinguished by a curve of white up turned
at each side of its mouth, which makes it seem to grin
denial of its eyes: the negative, un-homed.*

Prostitutes in American Drama: Williams Breaks the Mold

When New York Governor Eliot Spitzer managed to detonate his political career by being exposed as a customer of high-priced prostitutes, American sensibilities were once more focused on the complex issue of prostitution and the women who practice it. Spitzer's paid consort, this being values-muddled 21st Century America, became an instant star for at least fifteen minutes and will undoubtedly craft some kind of Jessica Hahn-like career appearing on cheesy reality shows and in sub-Playboy fold-outs. Bloggers and libertarians, almost all of them men, trotted out their arguments on why prostitution is "victimless" and ought to

be legalized. All of this is all cultural static as one tries to understand the perspective of the women who become prostitutes in classic American plays.

There are a lot of prostitutes in famous American plays, but not very many stage portrayals of vivid human beings practicing the “oldest profession,” at least since the 1920s. Male playwrights have usually used prostitutes as a means to an end, without any genuine interest in the women themselves. They represent the end of innocence, as in O’Neill’s *Ah, Wilderness!*, or temptation, or local color. William Saroyan made the rescue of a young prostitute from the sex trade by the strength of true love a central plot in *The Time of Your Life*, but the character of Kitty Duvall is neither memorable nor complex. Eugene O’Neill probably is the American record-holder for prostitute characters, and he created one of the most interesting in *Anna Christie*, who descends into prostitution after being seduced by a cousin as a young teen. But O’Neill wrote *Anna Christie* (1921) during a period in which prostitution was receiving a lot of attention as a difficult social problem, and the expanding women’s rights movement, progressive politics, and concern over crime and sexually-transmitted disease had caused a brief explosion of so-called “brothel dramas.”

These often sensational American plays are explored in Katie Johnson’s fascinating 2006 book, *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America, 1900-1920*. *Anna Christie*, the author argues, marked both the high point of the “brothel drama” period and its end. The awarding of the Pulitzer Prize to “*Anna Christie*” represented the legitimizing of the prostitute as a stage character, but *Anna Christie* was a *repentant* prostitute. One year later, Sholom Asch’s *The God of Vengeance* hit the stage with a decidedly unrepentant prostitute as its central characters, and it also included lesbian content. That play resulted in the conviction of the production manager and actors on charges of obscenity when it was staged in English in New York in 1922. “By the time the Progressive Era came to an end,” Johnson writes, “what was left in its wake was

not a tidy trajectory of native drama or a surgical excision of prostitution, but rather lingering ambivalence regarding prostitution, sexuality, censorship, and women in the public sphere."

Tennessee Williams doesn't use prostitution this way in *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, though it can be argued that he did in the play's earlier incarnation, *Summer and Smoke*. In that drama, Alma Winemiller's transformation from church singer into town whore is presented as a cautionary tale about the perils of separating spirit, passion and body. Once again, prostitution is used as a final and unambiguous degradation. At the end of *Eccentricities*, however, it does not seem that Alma regards her current state as less desirable than her earlier path as a repressed "old maid" and eventual "eccentric." In this she approaches the post-feminist position of expressing sexuality in her own way, no longer dominated by her oppressive parents or intimidated by society. And though she is lonely, she may not be as lonely as she was or would have been had she never experienced sexual release. It seems that Alma has made a choice. She is the play's heroine, yet she has chosen to be a prostitute.

The final scene is undeniably sad, but not tragic. Williams does not romanticize prostitution or celebrate it, but for one character at least, Williams seems to be saying that there are worse things than being a small town hooker.

"The Show Must Go On!"

By Jack Marshall, Artistic Director

"There are so bewilderingly many laws in the Outside World. We of the circus know only one law—simple and unfailing. The Show must go on." Josephine Demott Robinson (1865–1948), U.S. circus performer. *The Circus Lady*, ch. 1 (1926).

As the tradition that a fallen Marine never leaves a fallen comrade defines the Corps, the edict that “the show must go on” has come to be the theater profession’s creed. The performance of Vanessa Bradchulis as Alma in TACT’s current production of *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, just a week after emergency abdominal surgery (for a ruptured appendix), is consistent with an unwritten rule of the stage that is far, far older than the famous quote that embodies it.

Why does this tradition exist? Part of it, undoubtedly, is economics. If the show doesn’t go on, ticket money has to be refunded, and few theater companies can afford to do that very often. There is also the matter of pride. Actors and artists in the theater generally labor under the misconception of their non-theater acquaintances and family members that performing and producing stage works is not the difficult, frustrating, exhausting, often unappreciated work that it is, but is instead “fun”--- a lark, nothing like a *real* job, such as driving a bus or selling insurance. Actors embrace “the show must go on” as a way to prove their dedication, discipline, courage and work ethic, to show everyone that a life in the theater is not fun and games. Most of the tradition, however, is based on the ethical principles that support professionalism. Theater artists have a relationship of trust with audiences, who travel to a venue in response to a promise that there will be a show. If the show does not go on, for any reason, no matter how legitimate, that bond of trust may be weakened.

As “first do no harm” is the prime directive of medicine, and “represent your client zealously” is the number one priority for lawyers, “the show must go on” trumps all other theatrical considerations, including, at times, the quality of the resulting performance and the physical and emotional health of the actors. Audiences seem to appreciate and understand this... so well, in fact, that the efforts of a beleaguered cast to put on a show in less than ideal circumstances will sometimes inspire and amuse ticket-buyers more than the normal show ever could. In such

situations, a theatrical performance becomes a quest in which finishing the journey becomes the main objective, and the purpose of the journey is forgotten.

The American Century Theater, like any theater company that has been around for awhile, has had some notable “show must go on moments”:

- In 1995’s *The Pirate*, the director/set designer/costume designer walked out of the production minutes before opening night curtain, leaving unfinished costumes and a major set piece that had fallen apart. The show went on.
- The next season’s closing performances of Saroyan’s *My Heart’s in the Highlands* went on without leading man Michael Repogle, who had been injured in an automobile accident trying to get to the theater in a snow storm.
- That same season, the entire sound system crashed in Act 2 of *Moby Dick Rehearsed*, a major setback because the play depended on sound to evoke the ship, the ocean, and the whale. The actors finished the show, making the sounds themselves.
- A sudden medical emergency struck the actress playing Topsy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and cast member Christian Yingling stepped into the large role with two hour’s notice and a well-hidden script.
- Twice, in *The Cradle Will Rock* and *Call Me Mister*, musical soloists lip-synched to the off-stage voice of musical director Tom Fuller, so the show could go on.

And, sometimes the show *can’t* go on, no matter how hard you try. In 1995, TACT’s outdoor production of what would later become *Laughter at Ten O’Clock* risked electrocution of the actors by continuing to perform in a lightning storm, until more rational heads prevailed (yes, I wanted the show to go on) and it was halted. The following night was rained out as well. Power outages have caused the cancellation of several performances, although the staff seriously discussed trying to

do the shows with flash-lights. Opening night of *The Emperor Jones* was cut short when an over-enthusiastic smoke machine created a smoke-choked Theater Two, set off alarms, and summoned the fire department, which ejected cast and audience. Until it did, though, the gallant actors kept performing (and the gallant TACT audience kept watching), though it was too smoky to see and the alarms made it impossible to hear any lines.

On-stage accidents are not as rare as you might think, and usually a cast will soldier through. In TACT's *The Sign in Sydney Brustein's Window*, "Sydney" fell on his head during a performance and momentarily lost consciousness behind a sofa, mid-scene. He recovered and finished, then got several stitches in his head afterwards. But when an actor carrying another draped over his shoulder tripped and fell on-stage during a performance of *Dear World*, swinging his cargo's head onto the wooden floor of the stage with a loud *crack*, TACT's stage manager was so unsettled that she stopped the show and called the EMTs. (She thought the unconscious actor might be dead.) He quickly regained consciousness, and actually would have finished the show, concussion and all.

He wanted the show to go on.

One of the goals of Actor's Equity is to protect performers from getting killed and injured by "show must go on" zealots. One infamous example was Orson Welles, who famously insisted that his production of *King Lear* on Broadway continue after he had broken his leg: he played Lear in a wheelchair, a stunt duplicated by Danny Kaye when he ripped some ligaments playing Noah in the Broadway musical, *Two by Two*. Welles trained his actors in the "show must go on" tradition: when Welles, playing Brutus, nicked Julius Caesar's artery as he stabbed him in Welles' Broadway production, the actor lay motionless in a spreading pool of his own blood until the curtain came down (and he could be rushed to the hospital).

“That was magnificent!” Orson reportedly crowed.

The quote accurately suggests that there is a degree of madness in “the show must go on,” and indeed there is. It is this madness that inspired Noel Coward to write his song, “Why must the show go on?,” which argues persuasively that the ethic is over-rated:

Why must the show go on?
It can't be all that indispensable,
To me it really isn't sensible
On the whole
To play a leading role
While fighting those tears you can't control,
Why kick up your legs
When draining the dregs
Of sorrow's bitter cup?
Because you have read
Some idiot has said,
'The Curtain must go up!'
I'd like to know why a star takes bows
Having just returned from burying her spouse.
Brave boop-a-doopers,
Go home and dry your tears,
Gallant old troupers,
You've bored us all for years
And when you're so blue,
Wet through
And thoroughly woe-begone,
Why must the show go on?
Oh Mammy!
Why must the show go on?

...

Why must the show go on?
The rule is surely not immutable,

It might be wiser and more suitable
Just to close
If you are in the throes
Of personal grief and private woes.
Why stifle a sob
While doing your job
When, if you use your head,
You'd go out and grab
A comfortable cab
And go right home to bed?
Because you're not giving us much fun,
This 'Laugh Clown Laugh' routine's been overdone,
Hats off to Show Folks
For smiling when they're blue
But more comme-il-faut folks
Are sick of smiling through,
And if you're out cold,
Too old
And most of your teeth have gone,
Why must the show go on?
I sometimes wonder
Why must the show go on?

THE WORKS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1911~1983)

1930s

"Beauty Is the Word." 1930. *The Missouri Review* 7 (1984)

"Hot Milk at Three in the Morning." 1931. *The Missouri Review* 7
(1984)

Candles to the Sun. Full-length play. 1st prod. The Mummies of
St Louis.

Fugitive Kind. Full-length play. 1st prod. The Mummies of St Louis.

Spring Storm. Full-length play. Read at E. C. Mabie's seminar in playwriting, U of Iowa.

American Blues. (5 one-act plays). 1939. In *American Blues: Five Short Plays.*

1940s

Battle of Angels. Drama. 1940, pub. 1945.

27 Wagons Full of Cotton. One-act play. 1966.

The Glass Menagerie. Drama. 1944.

"The History of a Play (With Parentheses)." 1945. In *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Documentary Series Volume 4: Tennessee Williams.*

A Streetcar Named Desire. Drama. 1947.

Summer and Smoke. 1947.

One Arm. Fiction. 1948, rev. 1954.

1950s

The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. Novella. 1950.

The Rose Tattoo. Drama. 1950.

I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix. Drama. 1951.

Camino Real. Drama. 1953.

Hard Candy. Fiction. 1954.

Orpheus Descending. Drama. 1955. (Rev. version of *Battle of Angels*)

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Drama. 1955. (Pulitzer Prize).

In the Winter of Cities. Poems. 1956.

Baby Doll. Film script. 1956. (Based on two of his one-act plays).

Suddenly Last Summer Drama 1958.

Something Unspoken. Drama. 1958.

Sweet Bird of Youth. Drama. 1959.

Triple Play. Drama. 1959.

1960s

Period of Adjustment. Drama. 1960.

The Eccentricities of a Nightingale. 1964. (Rev. version of *Summer and Smoke*).

The Night of the Iguana. Drama. 1st performed New York, 1961.
(Based on an earlier short story).

Slapstick Tragedy. 2 short plays, *The Mutilated* and *The Gnädige Fräulein.* 1965.

The Knightly Quest. SF novella and 4 stories. 1966.

Kingdom of Earth. Drama. 1968. (Acted in shortened form as *The Seven Descendents of Myrtle*).

In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel. Drama. 1969.

The Two-Character Play, 1969.

1970s

Small Craft Warnings. Drama. 1972.

Outcry. 1973. New version of *The Two-Character Play.*

Eight Mortal Ladies Possessed. Fiction. 1974.

Memoirs. 1975.

Moise and the World of Reason. New York: Simon, 1975.

Androgyne, Mon Amour. Poems. 1977.

Letters to Donald Windham. Ed. Donald Windham. 1977.

Where I Live: Selected Essays. New York: New Directions, 1978.

1980s

Will Mr. Merriwether Return from Memphis? Drama. Produced
1980.

Something Cloudy, Something Clear Drama. Produced 1981

A House Not Meant to Stand Drama. Produced 1981