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One of Tennessee's Women

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ONE OF TENNESSEE'S WOMEN

A MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS

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ONE OF TENNESSEE'S WOMEN

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Prospectus

ONE OF TENNESEE'S WOMEN

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee: Professor Bryan Reeder
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Tennessee Williams' characters are among the most passionate and multi-faceted found in modern drama. This is especially true of the females. For the performance aspect of my M.F.A. thesis, I propose to play one of the female characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by Tennessee Williams. For the printed portion of my thesis, I will focus on the following: (working title) "One of Tennessee's Women"

Introduction: To include the thesis statement/explanation of the paper.

Chapter One: Tennessee Williams: The Playwright and the Person

Chapter Two: The Women of Tennessee Williams

Chapter Three: The Plays of Tennessee Williams

Chapter Four: (The character that I am chosen to portray, and relationship to the other characters in the play; including character analysis.)

Chapter Five: A Journal of the Rehearsal/Performance Experience

Appendices

INTRODUCTION

The Library of Congress lists over eighty books that deal exclusively with Tennessee Williams. A vast number of these books cover anecdotal information about Tennessee's personal life, experiences, and relationships through his emotionally turbulent life. A great deal of biographical material presents conflicting accounts and many authors claim to have "the real story" on Tennessee's life and loves.

If the reader is interested in titillating tidbits on Tennessee, this is not the paper to read. However, Mr. Tennessee Williams wrote from his heart and his life experiences. Because of this, attention needs to be paid to how he drew his characters to put them so eloquently on the page. Many of his characters were semi-biographical in nature, thus understanding parts of Tennessee's life and relationships will lead to a fuller understanding of his work. Rather than repeating gossip, innuendo, and oft' told stories about Tennessee Williams, this paper is going to take a quarter-turn towards a new direction.

An important theme that will be discussed is Williams' characters' perception of the truth as they see it. The study that follows will deal with the way Tennessee saw his plays, the way the critics saw them, the way the audience perceived and received his work, and how his family and peers viewed the biographical slant in his plays. It is the conjecture of this student of theatre, just as it was of Tennessee Williams, that the truth is how one views it, and there can be many truths to be viewed.

The three plays that will be studied are *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. More in-depth study will be assigned to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. That play will be performed in July of 1999, and this student will portray the character of Big Mama in the production as a part of requirement for this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PERSON AND THE PLAYWRIGHT

Thomas Lanier Williams's life experiences are an integral part of a cogent study of his professional work because he wrote through and about his personal experiences. He also wrote in the same way he lived: with passion, underpinned by a dogged determination that kept him writing throughout his life. The English Department at Susquehana University in Selinsgrove, PA. has compiled a complete listing of his published works. Among this list are over twenty-five published plays. [This list can be found printed in the appendices of this paper.]

The Gateway New Orleans web site summarizes the mass of Williams' published works this way:

> Tennessee Williams' legacy is perhaps far vaster than many of his admirers realize: a complete catalog would have to include more than twenty-five full-length plays, more than forty short plays, a dozen produced (and unproduced) screenplays and an opera libretto. These have been translated into at least twenty-seven languages, including Tamil, Welsh, Marathi and Hindi. In addition, there are two novels, a novella, more than sixty short stories, more than one hundred poems, an autobiography, a published volume of letters, introductions to plays and books by others, and occasional pieces and reviews (gateway).

Donald Spoto, in his biography *The Kindness of Strangers* asserts: "He gave new meaning to the word prolific" (xvii). Williams, in his 1975 autobiography *Memoirs*, describes his prolific work as a compulsion: "Maybe I am a machine, a typist. A compulsive typist and a

compulsive writer. But that's my life, and what is in these memoirs is mostly the barest periphery of that which is my intense life, for my intense life is my work"(85).

Because of the intimate intertwining of Williams's life and his work, it is a daunting task to walk the tightrope of a strictly critical analysis of his work, as that is only a part of his genius. Conversely, to sink into the thousands of anecdotes and stories of his personal life does not do justice to his universal appeal as a playwright.

It is necessary, in order to fully understand his work to marry the two sides of Tennessee Williams, as he did throughout his life. Because in childhood his relationships shaped the style and content of his writing, it is important to first examine the characters from his early life.

THE CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

The Rev. Walter Edwin Dakin (1857-1954): Tennessee's beloved Grandfather/companion.

Rosina Maria Francesca Dakin (1863-1944): Tennessee's Grandmother; affectionately called "Grand" by Tennessee, Rose, and Dakin

Cornelius Coffin Williams (1879-1957): Father of Tennessee Williams.

Edwina Estelle Dakin Williams (1884-1980): Tennessee's mother.

Rose Isabel Williams (1903-): His beloved sister.

Thomas Lanier Williams III (1911-1983)

(Later known as Tennessee): Born in Columbus Mississippi.

Walter Dakin Williams: (1919-): Born in St. Louis, Mo. Tom's brother (Leverich viii.)

Supporting players in Tommy's life (his moniker at an early age) included the children's' nurse: Ozzie, and a girl of Tommy's age: Hazel (Leverich 39+, Williams, Tennessee *Memoirs* 14+.) They both were to have a profound impact on his socialization and his sexuality.

THE EARLY YEARS SHAPED THE WRITING AND THE WRITER

Tommy Williams lived what he considered to be an ideal life with his mother and sister in Mississippi. He was very close to his Grandfather Dakin, who was an Episcopalian Minister, and his "Grand." Tennessee, in *Memoirs*, remembered his Mississippi years this way:

> My first eight years of childhood in Mississippi were the most joyously innocent of my life, due to the beneficent homelife provided by my beloved Dakin grandparents, with whom we lived. And to the wild and sweet half-imaginary world in which my sister and our beautiful black nurse Ozzie existed, separate, almost invisible to anyone but our little cabalistic circle of three. (21)

Edwina Williams, in *Remember Me to Tom*, affirms Tennessee's perception of his early years: "Tom and his sister Rose, only sixteen months apart, were as inseparable as twins and were called 'The Couple.' They were so attuned that when one was ill, the other developed symptoms" (12).

Of his "Grandfads" a middle-aged Tennessee was to recall the feelings he had when the two of them were together: "Grandfather was a wonderful traveling companion. Everything pleased him…All his life he had been in love with life, and just being with him revived my own pleasure in the fact of existence" (*Memoirs* 111).

During the first years of Tommy's life, his father Cornelius traveled frequently, and life was calm and affirming. The infrequent visits of his father to the family are succinctly and gently described in *Tennessee Williams An Intimate Biography*, written by Dakin Williams and Shepherd Mead: "Tom had written, long before his *Memoirs*, that life under soft-spoken and gentle 'Grandfads' had been quiet and peaceful. It was only when Cornelius came home on

weekends that the tranquility was broken, with his heavy footsteps, doors slammed, furniture banged and his father's voice sounding like thunder"(18). Donald Spoto, in *The Kindness of Strangers*, describes the relationship between Tennessee's parents while Cornelius was traveling as one of coolness (8).

Varied descriptions of incidents are related by Edwina, Tennessee, Lyle Leverich, and Dakin, in which Cornelius was said to be drunk, vocally and physically abusive, a womanizer, overly critical of his family and a terror to them. According to Spoto, the relationship between the parents during Cornelius's infrequent visits, was also troubled: "... Cornelius's visits to Columbus became markedly less pleasant, for he returned to the rectory several evenings drunk and incoherent, and there was talk of card games in bawdy houses at the edge of town. The Dakins pretended to take no notice. Their daughter was embarrassed, angry and sometimes frightened" (9). When Cornelius transferred to St. Louis and lived with his family, the verbal and emotional abuse of the family was constant.

Although these experiences were to shape young Tom in a negative way once the family moved to their own home in St. Louis and Cornelius quit traveling, an older more forgiving Tennessee, in *Memoirs* came to terms with the personality of his father: "A catalogue of the unattractive aspects of his personality would be fairly extensive, but towering above them were, I think two great virtues which I hope are hereditary; total honesty and total truth, as he saw it, in his dealings with others" (qtd. in Spoto 19).

After Cornelius's death in 1957, Tennessee, in a *New York Post* interview, laid a loving patina upon the memory of his father: "My father was a totally honest man, he was never known to tell a lie in his life or take an unfair advantage of anybody in business. He had a strong character and a sense of honor. He should not be judged as long as he remains the mystery that he is to us who lived in his shadow. Maybe I hated him once but I certainly don't

anymore" (qtd. in Leverich 26). This forgiving attitude was representational of Tennessee's public comments on the subject of his father after years of humiliating and embarrassing private times experienced in his relationship with Cornelius. The personal influence that Tennessee's' relationship with his father came from: Cornelius's constant bullying of Tommy, calling him a sissy, forcing him to work in the shoe factory at menial jobs for three years, denying him funds for school, often refusing to attend his plays, being parsimonious in regards to his family, and neglecting his beloved sister, Rose. Between Tennessee, Edwina, and Dakin Williams, it was Tennessee who had the greatest sense of forgiveness and understanding of his father's humanity. Edwina, in her book *Remember Me to Tom*, retains a sense of bitterness in regard to her ex-husband, and portrays herself as a victim of his womanizing and tyranny. Dakin, in *Tennessee Williams an Intimate Biography* perceives his father as a kind of monster who, along with Edwina's overprotective nature, helped to shape his brother's life as a homosexual (Dakin Williams 22). Perhaps the most damning comment Tennessee makes about his father, and yet still loving in its humor, is a remark in *Memoirs*: "Mother claims he [Cornelius] remained good-looking till he took to drink. I never saw him during his time of abstention and good looks" (13).

Tennessee was not only aware, but also accepting of the fact that his writing came from personal experience. In an interview with Cecil Brown in 1974, he comments on the necessity of writing from a personal perspective: "...I don't think I would have been the poet I am without that anguished familial situation. Therefore I don't think we should busy ourselves over the sufferings of our familial relationships because they do charge us, you know, with certain dynamism; and if we're really creative people, we release it in our work. I've yet to meet a writer of consequence who did not have a difficult familial background if you explored it" (Brown 260).

Tennessee found a way of coming to a clearer understanding and thus a kind of forgiveness for his father by creating characters with Cornelius's personality in *The Glass Menagerie* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* The character of the absent father who is a traveling salesman in *The Glass Menagerie* is patterned after Cornelius at the time when he was absent from their lives. Though Tennessee claimed in retrospect that his father's absence lent a joyful tranquility to the lives of his family during those first years, his perception in *The Glass Menagerie* tells a slightly different story. Not only does Tom, the narrator in the play, want to abandon his responsibilities to his mother and sister as his father had, but the placement of the picture of the father center stage with a light tells more in it's symbolism than Tennessee ever reveals either in his books or his interviews. Tom in the play is saying that he wishes he, too could escape as his father had.

A cogent analysis of the importance of the absent father in the play is formed in Monarch Notes: "To Tom, his father's picture represents escape. It hangs in front of him like a prize to be won. The more he becomes like his father, the closer he is to freedom." Tennessee, the man, never abandoned any of his family. Tennessee's understanding of the relationship between his mother and father is also examined in *The Glass Menagerie.*

> To Amanda, the picture recalls memories that are both bitter and sweet. Though hurt by his desertion, Amanda considered her husband the embodiment of romance. His picture stimulated thoughts of bygone days on the Mississippi Delta, of gentleman callers and jonquils. Amanda was no longer disturbed by his thoughts because years of absence have preserved only her romantic image of him (Monarch Notes).

It is crucial to remember the words of Tennessee Williams from *The Glass Menagerie*, spoken by the narrator at the beginning, when making exact comparisons between his plays

and his life: "But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He [a magician] gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (I: 2-4). This is Tennessee's way of saying that truth is colored by individual perception. Edwina notes in her biography, *Remember Me to Tom*, that the character of Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was a lot like Cornelius (116). Although she does not elucidate on the remark, when one compares the bold, boisterous, difficult to communicate with Big Daddy, and Tennessee's own reminiscences of his father, the comparison is easy to see. John Fritscher in "Love and Death in Tennessee Williams" echoes the biographical horn: "In his parents Williams found wide personification of the basic imbalances he was later to exhibit in his characters...His mother, though she denies it literally, is Amanda, Big Mama...and the early Blanche DuBois. She is the pre-bitch Williams woman. His father is...the sagging life-force of Big Daddy...He is the older men in Williams' plays" (1). As for perceptions of realities, again Fritcher agrees with Williams: "...for if the esthetic, subconscious, and associational truth be stated, the artist takes his own experienced reality and transmogrifies it to his own creative vision" (Fritscher "Love and Death" 1).

Tommy and Rose's nurse Ozzie, supplied some of his earliest literary adventures. Edwina hired Ozzie when Tennessee was born. Edwina was able to continue with her social engagements and clubs and leave the care of Tommy and Rose in the hands of a loving caretaker. Tennessee was to remember early life with Ozzie and Rose in this poetic way: "...And in the evenings, when the white moonlight streamed over our bed, before we were asleep, our Negro nurse Ozzie, as warm and black as a moonless Mississippi night, would lean over our bed, telling in a low, rich voice her amazing tales..." (qtd. in Leverich 43).

Dakin, in the biography of his brother told of Rose and Tommy's life with Ozzie from his perspective: "He was fond of a pretty black nurse named Ozzie, who would sit beside their

beds in the evening and tell wonderful stories about bears and foxes and rabbits. They all talked like Ozzie " (Dakin Williams 16). According to Dakin, no one knew why Ozzie failed to return one year after picking cotton for the summer with her brothers.

Edwina remembered that Tommy had called Ozzie a "Big Black Nigger", and when Ozzie failed to return the following year, Tommy blamed himself (Leverich 43). Edwina, in her biography of Tom, remembers part of the dramatic incident this way: "Tom loved Ozzie, and I'm sure she felt his love. I think the truth, rather, is that she came to some harm . . . I think she met with foul play at the hands of her brutal brothers" (26). Whatever the truth, and again this comes from individual perception, the fact was that after Ozzie left the family, Tommy came down with diphtheria with complications and was kept in bed for many weeks. Upon recovering from the nearly fatal disease, he had to learn to walk all over again.

During this time, because of the absence of Ozzie, Edwina and Tommy formed a complicated, co-dependant relationship that was to have long lasting effects on Tennessee's writing career. Because Tommy was not allowed to go outside and play with other children he began to write and play quiet games with his mother. She read to him frequently, and let him make up games to play from his vivid imagination. His mother was with him constantly during this period, and according to both Edwina and Tennessee, this bound them together emotionally for life.

Cornelius was unhappy with this situation, not only because it kept Edwina away from him, but also because he felt that Tommy was turning into a sissy. The happy triumvirate of Ozzie, Rose and Tommy had been replaced by the constant companionship between Tommy and Edwina.

Lyle Leverich in *The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, best describes this period of time that was to turn Tennessee Williams in a new direction: "The ultimate effect of the ailment was to

leave both Tom and Edwina emotionally entwined, and turn Tom's childhood energies in upon himself, opening the way to an interior life that would become his own very private world" (43).

Looking back, Tennessee Williams declared that the illness had changed his nature as drastically as it had his health: "Prior to it, I had been a little boy with a robust, aggressive bullying nature." After it and because of it, he became "a decided hybrid, different from the family line of frontiersmen-heroes of east Tennessee" (Leverich 43).

Tommy's beginnings with his mother, sister, grandmother, and nurse, are the ones who nurtured his imagination and loved him devoutly.

Although Tommy's relationship with his Grandfather Dakin was a strong one, and his "Grandfads" spent a great deal of time with him in later life, he was an active minister during Tommy's early years, and by sheer numbers alone, the women were to take a greater role in forming Tommy's personality and penchant for the dramatic flair that would carry him throughout his life.

Cornelius, through his negativity in regards to his son, impacted Tommy in that it led him towards believing what his father said. Negative messages to a young child, often repeated, are forever remembered.

Although Edwina was full of cheerful optimism in regards to her son, after his illness she became protective beyond a fault. When the family moved to St. Louis, she forbade Tommy to play with boys, whom she considered too rough, and disliked the girls, considering them beneath her son's talents (*Memoirs* 14).

Because of Edwina's attitude and the always-prevalent snobbery of St. Louis, life in Missouri was quite lonely for both Tom and Rose. (After Tommy moved to St. Louis he insisted on being called Tom.) It was confusing to the Williams family that their status, which

in Mississippi had been a high one because of the Reverend Dakin, was to be tainted because of a lower economic stature (Dakin Williams 20-3). Allean Hale, in "Early Williams, the Making of a Playwright" describes Edwina's reaction to the coldness of St. Louis society. Hale notes that Edwina reinforced reverse snobbery, that her attitude kept the family on the outside of society, and that the loneliness and alienation that Tommy felt were to become pervasive themes in his plays (12).

It is difficult to imagine transplanting a genteel southern nature, filled with illusion and pretense, into the heart of St. Louis, permeated by a prevailing snobbery, and driven by cold, hard cash. The transition was doomed to failure. Because Cornelius was now at home in the evenings fights and anger was the order of every night, and the joyful peace of the early southern years was shattered forever.

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

Though Cornelius was to thrive at his new job for the first few years in St. Louis, life for the rest of the Williams family was difficult financially, socially, and emotionally.

Leverich quotes Tom's recollection of his first year in St. Louis:

> 'I was scared to death of everyone on earth and particularly of public school boys and public school teachers and public school principals…' When he was hesitant answering a question, his teacher remarked scornfully, 'Anybody can tell you're from the South—you're slow as molasses in January.'…I can remember gangs of kids following me home yelling 'Sissy!' — and home was not a pleasant refuge…[But] it was forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood.'. (Leverich 51)

In spite of the problems inherent in the difference between Mississippi society and St. Louis mores, Tommy Williams began a friendship with Hazel Kramer in 1919, that was to last for eleven years. He also retained a close relationship with his sister, Rose.

In 1919 brother Dakin was born. It is odd that in all of the biographies about Tennessee Williams, and with thousands of interviews about his life, Tennessee talked little about his brother. On the rare occasions when he did speak of Dakin, it was often with a patient, bemused forbearance that an older brother holds for a younger brother that he doesn't quite understand. Tennessee never elucidates the truth of their relationship. Dakin did influence Tennessee in one personal way, by convincing Tennessee to convert to Catholicism in 1969 (*Five O'Clock Angel* 197).

1920 brought a one-year reprieve in Clarksdale for Tommy, because Edwina could not cope with all three children. Her mother came to take care of Dakin, Rose, and Edwina, while Tommy was sent to spend a year with his "Grandfads". While in Clarksdale, Tom began to write a comic paper for his sister Rose. He described his year in Clarksdale, according to Leverich, as one "... where he had begun to find life unsatisfactory as an explanation in and of itself, and he was forced to adopt the method of the artist of not explaining, but putting the blocks together in some other way that seemed more significant to him" (Leverich 61-2). In part it was a true declaration of independence, and perhaps the beginning of what he knew would be his future: "I have just found the beginning of The Rainbow and I hope it [is] so interesting that you won't want me to find an end "(qtd. in Leverich 62). When Edwina read this paper she bought Tom a second-hand typewriter, and he began to follow his rainbow. By the time Tom entered junior high school, he was writing poems and stories in earnest. He would enter contests, and according to Leverich, the typewriter was never silent when Tom was home (65).

At the age of sixteen, while traveling with his Grandfather Dakin through Europe, Tom was to have a profound psychological and religious experience. Leverich, Tennessee, and Dakin each describe the incident in slightly different ways, but because he was alone during the occurrence of the experience, Tennessee's account of the truth of the experience is the one relayed here. Tennessee describes it as "...the most dreadful, the most nearly psychotic, crisis that occurred in my early life" (*Memoirs* 20). Tennessee, in *Memoirs*, explains the incident this way: He was walking alone in Paris one evening, and was overcome with the process of thinking as "...a terrifyingly complex mystery of human life." He began to try to outrun his thoughts, and experience a strong panic attack, which would become stronger and more pronounced until "I was within a hairsbreadth of going quite mad from it." This episode lasted several days (*Memoirs* 20). When the group traveled onto Cologne, Tom entered a famous cathedral and knelt to pray. Tennessee recalls that he truly believed his prayers were answered and that God had graced him with peace of mind (*Memoirs* 20-21).

The European episode strengthened Tennessee's belief in God and in hope, both of which were to become underpinnings in many of his plays. It was at the same time that he wrote a poem that was to be re-printed in many biographies about Tennessee's life. Tennessee, in *Memoirs*, calls this his second miracle of the night:

> Strangers pass me on the street
> in endless throngs: their marching feet,
> sound with a sameness in my ears
> that dulls my senses, soothes my fears,
> I hear their laughter and their sights,
> I look into their myriad eyes:

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things" (Wager 363). Wager presses Williams by asking: "Do you think that you would ever write directly on this question? (meaning politics) " (Wager 363). Tennessee patiently reiterates his style: "I am not a direct writer: I am always an oblique writer, if I can be; I want to be allusive; I don't want to be one of these people who hit the nail on the head all the time" (Wager 363). It is that obliqueness that defines both Chekhov and Williams; working from the inside of the character to portend a larger truth and meaning.

In interviews given throughout his career, Tennessee Williams often spoke as he chose to write. He disliked discussing the themes of his plays, often contradicted himself from interview to interview, and had a great deal of fun, it seems, planting his tongue firmly in his cheek with the most persistent of interviewers. Williams, in an article from the *New York Times* aptly titled "Questions Without Answers" and published in 1948, defends his attitude: "I have never been able to say what was the theme of my plays and I don't think I have ever been conscious of writing with a theme in mind...Usually when asked about a theme, I look vague and say, 'It is a play about life' "(Williams "Questions" 30).

William Inge met Tennessee for the first time in 1944. At the time, Inge was a newspaper reporter and a great fan of the playwright. Inge had lunch with Tennessee to discuss *The Glass Menagerie*, then sat with Tennessee and Donald Windham during the play. Inge's description of their first day together pinpointed the frustration that interviewers must have felt when trying to demystify Williams: "He said it [*The Glass Menagerie*] had something to do with the lives of his own family, that it was a play drawn from his own life" (qtd. in Steen 96). Inge continues: "...I sat in a half-filled theatre, but I watched the most thrilling performance of the most beautiful American play I felt I had ever seen" (qtd. in Steen 96). Inge describes being put-off by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham because they laughed at little mistakes and private jokes throughout the play: "I couldn't stand this because I

was being overwhelmed by this experience" (qtd. in Steen 97). In retrospect (the interview was held with Steen in 1968), Inge decided that Williams and Windham not only had seen the play hundreds of times throughout the rehearsal process, but understood the private biographical humor: "He [Tennessee] is never without humor. I don't know of any of his plays that are without humor...I know how really repelled he is when people don't get the humor of his writing" (qtd. in Steen 117). Inge explains to Steen about the play: "It is out of self, but it's conceived in terms of universality" (qtd. in Steen 98).

In regard to Williams' sense of humor, William Inge, writes of his friend: "I have felt there are circumstances in his life that he must laugh at because if he didn't he would fear that they would destroy him"(qtd. in Steen 117).

Mike Steen and Geraldine Page, in Steen's *A Look at Tennessee Williams* defends the playwright's reticence to explain his writing:

> Steen: 'He never intellectualizes his work or feels obligated to interpret it himself. He would never interpret it himself. He would never explain what he means by some image or symbol.'
>
> Page: 'And that's so wise, because whatever he'd say wouldn't cover it anyway.' Page commends Williams for his instinctive writing, adding: ' ... and even afterwards when he reads it himself he might not be that consciously, intellectually aware of what-all is in it, and he knows that, and therefore doesn't try to chat about it.' (242)

Tennessee Williams was not universally appreciated either for his work or his persona. Everyone did not consider the language of his work poetic. Jack Fritscher points this out: "Critics are often distracted by the sensationalism of (this) surface violence... " He finds an

excellent example of a particularly scathing diatribe from Robert E. Fitch, Dean of Christian Ethics at the Pacific School of Journalism in Berkeley: Fitch, according to Fritscher, calls Williams "the High Priest of La Mystique de la Merde, which he defines as 'the deification of dirt, or the apotheosis of ordure, or just plain mud mysticism' " (qtd. in Fritscher "Towards a Theory of Alienation" 1).

It is Fritscher's contention that Williams' intent is to deliberately provoke his audiences, in order to violate stock stereotypes (Fritscher "Towards a Theory of Alienation" 2). Certainly, he shocked many an audience and critic with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Big Daddy's language and the shocking topic of homosexuality (for the times) were necessary according to Fritscher's opinion. It did draw blood from the likes of Dean Fitch. Williams, in response to critics such as Fitch, took the opportunity to defend his play and his intentions.

Other sources are more mixed in regard to the effect of Williams' work. In the *Critical Survey of Drama*, published in 1987, a more distanced and balanced view of Tennessee Williams' work appears: "Williams was accused of peseudopoeticism, ineffective ambiguity, overly obvious use of symbolism, extremes of violence, and sentimentality, and at his worst, the blame is justified. At his best, however, he was one of the most dramatically effective and profoundly perceptive playwrights in the modern theatre" (2067).

Brewer's Theatre: a Phrase and Fable Dictionary, published in 1994, looks back in time at a view from a prominent Broadway critic: "The critic Eric Bentley commented that Willams' problem was 'an ambiguity of aim: he seems to want to kick the world in the pants and yet be the world's sweetheart … '" (qtd. in Law 505).

Foster Hirsch, in *Colliers Encyclopedia*, also gives a mixed view of Williams. Under the heading of Williams, Tennessee (1911-1983), Hirsch judges Williams' body of work: "Although Williams was guilty of self-parody and repetition and suffered a 20-year

decline…his best work retains a potent theatricality. His position as the leading postwar dramatist and as the only American playwright whose achievement matches that of Eugene O'Neill is secure" (Vol. 23).

Mike Steen's book is a source of positive recollections by those in the theatre that knew him well. Steen explains in his preface: "This book is a one-sided look at Tennessee Williams. It is an honest look, but a far from complete look…I can only say that Tennessee is such a multicolored personality that there is enough about him to discuss without bringing in adverse material" (Steen/preface). Each interview is from a personal perspective. Because each of the interviewees enjoyed either a social or professional relationship with Williams, their informed truth deserves to be heard.

Hume Cronyn was often at the theatre to watch his wife work in the original production of *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Cronyn speaks of the playwright's impact on him personally. In the 1969 interview Cronyn relates: "It was simply that, for me, the plays had a particular kind of magic and very obvious poetry…These plays all had certain things in common, a marvelously lyrical quality and a wonderful evocative use of music, even when only fragmentary" (qtd. in Steen 160).

Cronyn's wife, the esteemed actress Jessica Tandy, also shares her impressions of Tennessee Williams' work. Tandy was the original Blanche on Broadway in *Streetcar.* She enthuses:

> … and the rhythms of everyone's speeches! You can't mess around with that script. No speech of Stella's could possibly be said by Blanche, and visa versa…He really has thought most carefully about it and I am sure that there is music in his head because there is a great deal of music in all of his plays...His poetry seems inevitable. (qtd. in Steen 177)

Karl Malden created the role of Mitch in *Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway, then played the same part in the film. Malden worked with Williams again on the film *Baby Doll.* Malden and Steen talk about Tennessee's propensity for changing endings during productions, and his desire to leave the endings ambiguous. Malden says: "I don't think Tennessee wants to end! I think Tennessee would like to go on and on and on. And if anyone deserves to go on, I think Tennessee should, because I think—we have many great playwrights—but I think Tennessee is the most prolific and the most "honest-to-himself" playwright I've ever met" (qtd. in Steen 5).

Tennessee answers the criticism of his endings by saying that they aren't meant to be endings, in *Theatre Arts* magazine. Some critics had accused Williams in writing Cat *on a Hot Tin Roof* of not resolving the relationship between Maggie and Brick (13). Williams responds: "I don't believe pat conclusions are true, and that all questions should be answered in a play. There should always be an element of the unresolved, for we all go out of life still wondering" (Williams *Theatre Quotebook* 13). This incident was to be typical of Tennessee's written war with the critics.

The truth was different for Tennessee Williams than it was for some of his critics. Both opinions were valid, but each writer was to hold fast, at least in print, to their own sense of truth. Williams believed in the rainbow colors of life that offers many endings, rather than the happy ending scenarios in black and white fiction. Some of his critics preferred convenient fairytale endings; both had a right to their preferences. What each faction in the war of words failed to see was that Williams was mirroring life, not creating a fairy tale.

It would be easy to misconstrue this truth because of Williams' lyricism and heightening of his characters and their situation. Critics could easily confuse his style for one

that is completely outside of life, and thus expect a happy ending to apply to his style. In a sense, they were talking about apples and oranges.

Anais Nin, a writer and biographer of some fame, and of the same era of Tennessee Williams, was an interviewee in Steen's *A Look at Tennessee Williams*, because, as Steen writes: "Of all the people I have met, she is the most perceptive, sensitive, and sincere"(194). She met Tennessee in 1940 and had occasion to see and write to him for many years. She gives one of the most thoughtful analyses of Williams' work in Steen's book. Her interview appears on pages 194-207, and is an insightful, worthwhile read.

In regards to Williams' characters Nin conjectures: "I think what people do not often understand is his tremendous power of heightening, as you say, and dramatization, so that characters become almost mythological. They become larger than nature"(qtd. in Steen 198). To Tennessee's critics Nin explains: "[And] I think that the negative criticism came because people never understood that he was really making mythological symbolic characters" (qtd. in Steen 198).

Two other professional writers deserve special mention here. Both Gore Vidal and Arthur Miller, respected authors in their own right, had great admiration of Tennessee Williams. Vidal, in a 1996 interview in *McCall*'s magazine states unequivocally: "[Williams] is the best playwright the United States has ever produced. And though from time to time fashion goes against him, he is still there, at work, making a world like no other; and we are all fortunate to have lived in his time" (107).

Arthur Miller, the man many consider to be at least Williams' equal in the dramatic literary field, gave a memorial speech to the American Academy in 1988, in which he said: "He did not turn his back on dramatic rules but created new ones... *With The Glass Menagerie*, the

long-lost lyrical line was found again, and values themselves; what he was celebrating was not approval or disapproval but humanity, the per germ of enduring life" (Miller).

Throughout all of the years of criticisms, notoriety, personal attacks and adulation, Tennessee Williams did an amazing thing: He kept writing. He wrote nearly every morning of his life, from the age of twelve. When he was in mental institutions, he wrote...when he was sure that he was dying, he wrote...when he was suffering from alcoholism and drug abuse, he wrote. Prolific is such an inept term for that kind of dedication.

Scott Stanley, Sr. (1919-1988), was a man who dropped out of school at the age of sixteen. He worked as a ditch-digger to support his mother and four brothers, and died a millionaire at the age of sixty-eight. There was nothing famous about this man, except perhaps to his family and friends, and yet he lived by a truth very much like that of Tennessee Williams.

Stanley, like Williams, had a compulsion to work in his chosen field (Stanley worked for forty years in Real Estate), because he was determined to care for his family. This determination and drive, common to both men is expressed through the words of Stanley's favorite poem. Stanley believed in the truth and the advice in the poem so strongly that he had 500 copies printed and gave them to everyone he met for many years. The title is "Press On." Perhaps the lyricism is not on a parallel of Williams, but the content describes the greatness of both men in equal proportion, and is an example of how a personal experience shared, can become a universal truth.

Press On

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common

than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not;

unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not;

the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. (Stanley)

Tennessee Williams deserves the last words in this chapter. In *Memoirs*, he is contemplating the meaning of his life, and writes:

> A man must live through his life's duration with his own little set of fears and angers, suspicions and vanities, and his appetites, spiritual and carnal. Life is built of them and he is built of life. The umbilical cord is a long, long rope of blood that has swung him as an aerialist on all but endless Trapeze, oh such a long, long way, from the first living organism that gave birth to another. (242)

CHAPTER TWO

TENNESSEE'S WOMEN

The women in Tennessee's life had a major impact on his attitudes, his personality, and his writing. His childhood friend Hazel Kramer, his friend Lady St. Just, and his Grandmother Dakin definitively added positive qualities to his life. The most important emotional and inspirational influences in Tennessee Williams' world however, were his sister Rose, and his mother Edwina.

THE CHILDHOOD SWEETHEART

Hazel was a friend from Tommy's early St. Louis years. She met him in 1919 when Tommy was eight years old. The following is Tennessee's account of their first meeting, from *Memoirs*:

> One afternoon I heard a child screaming in the alley back of this street. Some young hoods were, for some unknown reason, throwing rocks at a plump little girl. I went to her defense; we took flight into her house and all the way up to the attic. Thus began my closest childhood friendship which ripened into a romantic attachment (14-5).

Tennessee reiterates the importance of his relationship with Hazel: "I suppose that I can honestly say, despite the homosexual loves which began later, that she was the great extrafamilial love of my life"(*Memoirs* 15).

One of the most precious gifts that Hazel gave to Tommy throughout his St. Louis years was emotional safety. Tennessee recalls, again in *Memoirs* : "Once Hazel said to me… 'Tom, don't you know I'd never say anything to hurt you?' This was, indeed, the truth: Hazel never, never said a word to hurt me during the eleven years of our close companionship" (18).

Considering Tennessee's perception of his St. Louis years and the verbal abuse that he remembered taking place nightly in the Williams household, kindness was at the root of a very special bond between Tommy and Hazel.

Tom dated Hazel for several years and claimed to have had sexual feelings for her. He related in *Memoirs* that Hazel was "wiser on the sex scene than I was" (29) and made a good case for his belief through an incident at a museum. Hazel lifted a fig leaf on a male statue, asked Tom if he was as well endowed as the statue, and Tom's "maidenly blush" was the only answer. As the older Tennessee was wont to do with both people and incidents that were life changing for him, he turned this into a story entitled "Three Players of a Summer Game"(*Memoirs* 29). This can be found published in Williams' book of short stories: *Hard Candy*. Tom Williams believed himself to be in love with Hazel Kramer.

When Tom went to the University of Missouri, Cornelius decided to "encourage" Hazel's grandfather, who worked under him at the factory, to send Hazel to school in Wisconsin rather then to the University of Missouri, as previously planned. Tennessee wrote to Hazel and proposed marriage, but the damage of time and distance had been too great (Leverich 23). The relationship ended and Hazel, according to Tennessee Williams, committed suicide a few years after she married another man (Dakin Williams 101).

According to Leverich, "His memory of her is represented [however] in the reference to a woman named Rose Kramer—in his one-act play "Hello from Bertha," written shortly after Hazel's death … " (Leverich 24).

It is Leverich's conclusion that Tennessee over-dramatized his relationship with Hazel, and though his father did play a hand in breaking up their relationship, that the two were merely good friends. Leverich further conjectures that the two would have eventually gone their separate ways without the parental intervention (Leverich 23).

Tennessee's perception of the truth about his first romantic attraction is a prime example of how a person with Williams' passion and sensibilities could make a larger and bolder statement to illustrate his feelings. No matter the "truth" according to Leverich, it was Williams' perception of the relationship that expanded into a published story and a one-act play. By his very passionate view, he would reach out to others and make a point about love.

THE LADY ST. JUST

Tennessee had many friends that he considered close to him, and most of them would fade in and out of his life. The Lady Maria St. Just (nee: Britneva) could have been described that way by biographers of Williams, except for one major fact: Williams not only named Maria St. Just as a co-executor of his estate and his work, but he also made her the conservator for his beloved sister Rose (Williams *Five* 393 Spoto 148). In a very real sense their relationship extended beyond the grave.

Elia Kazan wrote the preface to *Five O' Clock Angel: Letters of Tennessee Williams to Maria St. Just 1948-1982.* Kazan directed Williams' most famous plays and movies and was privy to the relationship between Tennessee and Maria. Kazan describes Maria as a confidante of Tennessee, one of the few people who Williams would listen to in regard to his work, without being overly sensitive to her criticism. Kazan also claims: "If you've read *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, you've read the author's portrait in Maggie—all the qualities he loved in Maria are highlighted there" (Williams *Five* ix). Kazan asserts: "To the end of his life, whatever distance separated them, he never lost touch with her…The truth saves. So does courage. He could count on her for both" (Williams *Five* ix).

In 1954 Tennessee introduced Maria Britnev to his Grandfather. Maria, in *Five O' Clock Angel*, gives the following account of their first and only meeting: "Tennessee

introduced me with great pride, shouting, 'Grandfather, here is Maria.' Grandfather, stone deaf, yelled back, 'She's just come from Korea?' Tennessee . . . [shouted] 'I said "Maria, Maria"! I told you about her—I have just written a play about her.' Grandfather asked, 'What is it called?' Tennessee said, 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof!' "(107).

St. Just did not publish Tennessee's private correspondence with her until after his death. The letters and notes and poems contained in St. Just's book come together as a whole in what can be imagined as one of Williams' greatest plays. He spares no humor, passion, or lyricism in his letters to a very dear friend.

Maria and Tennessee first met in 1948 in London. They both attended a party given by John Gielgud. Maria's account in the introduction of her book may explain their affinity for each other:

> ...I noticed a little man sitting on a sofa. He was wearing a blue sock on one foot and a red one on the other. He looked unassuming and vulnerable, and nobody was talking to him. I thought that he must be an understudy....He looked at me with his blue eyes, blushed, and asked, 'Who brought you up?' "My grandmother,' I replied. He said, wonderingly, 'My grandmother brought me up too'. (Williams *Five* xviii)

Maria describes her feelings for Tennessee at the first meeting: "Very occasionally one meets someone with whom one feels an immediate, deep rapport. I'd still no idea who he was. He told me that Chekhov was his favorite playwright"(Williams *Five* xviii). From Williams' perspective, according to Maria, he was interested in her because he had never met a Russian before. It must have been fascinating, considering his world renown by 1948, to meet someone in the theatre world who had no inkling as to his identity. This would have been

doubly interesting, because John Gielgud, the host of the party, was directing Williams' London premiere of *The Glass Menagerie* at the time (Williams *Five* xviii).

Tennessee, Maria, and the entire Britnev clan developed a lasting friendship, and Tennessee would often spend time with the family. Tennessee, according to his *Memoirs*, would come to feel safe letting Rose stay at Maria's home. At the time Tennessee encouraged Rose to visit Maria in London, Rose believed herself to be the Queen of England. Tennessee was loathe to let her stay with anyone who wasn't sensitive to Rose's condition (*Memoirs* 244).

Tennessee's letters to Maria give the reader more of a flavor to the intensity and impact of their relationship upon each other than any factual biographical information. It is clear from the tenor of the letters that Tennessee and Maria spent a lot of time together throughout the thirty-four years of their friendship. Maria also was on hand for many of Tennessee's opening nights to help him with his first night terrors. Tennessee would share his deepest fears with Maria in his letters. He would often sign his letters "10", or "Tenn." (Williams *Five* 277-84). Most of Tennessee's friends and family called him "Tom," and so the affectionate signature connotes a special intimacy between the two.

Despite the myriad subjects discussed in his letters to Maria, the overriding tone is one of humor. The two made up nicknames for family members and lovers. Tennessee, in *Memoirs*, at one point refers to Maria as: " … the raging Tartar, The Lady St. Just" (178). They helped each other through many a turbulent relationship.

It is possible to imagine that Maria was indeed portraited as Maggie from *Cat*, for her humor, honesty, steadfast loyalty, and fierce devotion. Although Tennessee never spells out the depth of their relationship, or his abiding commitment to her, the casual way he mentions their activities with each other and their families leads the reader to instinctively know that they had a life-long love for each other. One of his casual mentions of her is: "We became great

friends and are still great friends—she was so honest and beautiful, and still remains so (Memoirs *148*)."

THE "GRAND" ROSE

Rosina Dakin, Tennessee's "Grand, " provided a positive, safe haven and a source of material and emotional security from his birth in 1911 until her death in 1944. Williams declares in *Memoirs*: "All that is not the worst of me surely comes from Grand . . . Whatever I have of gentleness in my nature, and I do have much response to gentle treatment, comes from the heart of Grand " (110-111).

In *Five O'clock Angel*, St. Just inserts a portion of a rough draft that Tennessee left with her for safekeeping. The rough draft was titled *Some Memoirs of a Con-Man*, and was a part of what was to become *Memoirs* (233-43). In this rough draft Tennessee reflected on his grandmother's thoughtfulness. " She had a mysterious way of sensing when my fortune was at the opposite of zenith and at such times she would stitch into the pages of a letter some five-dollar bills which were really a prodigal gift since they were all that she earned as a piano and violin teacher" (Williams *Five* 239).

Grand, it seems, gave more than five-dollar bills to Tennessee. In *Memoirs*, he mentions a more generous gift:

> When I was about to set off for college in the early fall of 1929 suddenly there wasn't any money for tuition; if it hadn't been for Grand coming through with a thousand dollars right in the nick of time, I couldn't have gone. … This was just one of many times in my life when Grand . . . brought calm and order to my usually chaotic state … in part because of their [Grand and Grandfather

> Dakin] almost magical power to dispense financial aid from their own small resources. (24)

It is clear from Tennessee's words that his grandmother gave from her heart what Tennessee needed the most when he most needed it.

Dakin Williams confirms Tennessee's view of his grandmother and adds some insight into Tennessee's feelings. In Donald Spoto's *The Kindness of Strangers*, an interview with Dakin brings out those memories of Tennessee and his grandmother's influence upon him. "Mother told me that whenever Tom thought he was misbehaving as a child, he would ask, 'What would Grand think of this?' The possibility of her displeasure would haunt him. She was his conscience and his angel, and she sewed up money in letters and gift packages for him all his life" (12). Spoto adds in a footnote on page twelve: "Rose Dakin (always called 'Grand' by the Williams family) is celebrated in two of Tennessee Williams's most deeply felt short stories, "The Angel in the Alcove" and "Grand" (12).

Spoto further elucidates on Tennessee's feelings for his grandmother. He reports that Grand's visit to St. Louis was particularly meaningful to Tom and Rose. " . . . Grandmother Dakin came from Clarksdale to care for Rose, Tom and Dakin. Her arrival was the happiest moment Rose and Tom had known since the previous July [when the family had lived with the Dakins in Clarksdale]. Grand was a benediction in their lives" (15). Spoto quotes Tennessee Williams as writing in later years: "Her coming . . . meant nickels for ice cream, quarters for movies, picnics in Forest Park . . . 'Grand' was all that we knew of God in our lives" (15). Again, on page fifteen of *The Kindness of Strangers*, Spoto asserts that "Her sweetness, her generosity and her unselfishness embraced them for all the years until her death."

In *Memoirs*, Tennessee Williams sums up the importance of his grandmother's influence during the painful St. Louis years of his life. He uses poetic imagery to impart the

depth of his feelings: "I can recall no roses in all the years I spent in St. Louis...except the two living roses in my life, Rose O. Dakin, and of course, my sister, Rose Isabel" (17).

Through her kindness, her steadfast devotion, and her gentleness, Rosina Dakin exemplified a sensitivity and a caring for others that would come forward in many of his best plays. Without her intervention and influence it would be difficult to imagine Tennessee Williams as the sensitive and caring soul into which he developed.

TOM'S BLUE ROSE

Tennessee loved his sister Rose more fully and unconditionally than anyone else in his life. He recognized and immortalized her fragility in poems, short stories, and plays. As he grew to adulthood he took over the responsibility for her care.

Tommy and Rose, as discussed in Chapter One, were inseparable as children. As they grew older, however, Tom began to fear losing Rose to another man.

In *Tom the Unknown Tennessee Williams*, Dakin remembers a particularly painful incident between Rose and a young suitor. Rose fell in love with a young man named Richard Miles. They were serious about each other, but Richard died. Dakin recounts that incident as " . . . the first of Rose's many disappointments in love" (qtd. in Leverich 63).

"Later", according to Leverich, "Tennessee would write about this time in their lives in a poignant account he entitled 'The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin' " (62).

The fear of losing his sister to another man would have been preferable to the reality that came to pass. Tennessee eloquently describes the period of time that Rose first began to grow apart from him in the following poem, re-printed by Lyle Leverich in *Tom the Unknown Tennessee Williams*:

. . . At fifteen my sister

no longer waited for me,

impatiently at the White Star Pharmacy corner

but plunged headlong into the discovery, Love!

Then vanished completely—

For love's explosion, defined as early madness,

Consumingly shone in her transparent heart for a season

And burned it out, a tissue-paper lantern! (qtd. in Leverich 63-4)

This poem clarifies Tennessee's romantic notions in regard to the relationship between him and Rose.

After Rose had been hospitalized and diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1937, Tom wrote the following poem and sent it to her:

She went with morning on her lips

Down an inscrutable way

And we who witnessed her eclipse

Have found no other word to say.

I think our speechlessness is not

A thing she would approve,

She who was always light of wit

And quick to speak and move—

I think she would say goodbye

Can be no less a lyric word

Than any song, than any cry

Of greeting we have heard (qtd. in Leverich 225)

Rose became increasingly emotionally ill while Tennessee was in college, and beyond, until Edwina decided that a new treatment, a lobotomy, would be performed. This was in 1943 (Leverich 225).

In the foreword of *Memoirs*, Tennessee confirms that his writing was a part of him, and that his reason for writing was more than a vocation. Upon reading his poetry and plays that relate so closely to his life and relationships, (particularly to Rose and Edwina), it is easy to grasp his meaning in the following words: "I have always written for deeper necessities than the term 'professional' implies . . . But truly, I never had any choice but to be a writer" (xvii-xix). Considering his great love for his sister, and his devotion and worry over her, those emotions would have to come out in some form; what better way for Tennessee Williams than through his gift of lyrical writing?

Through some particularly lucid advice Tennessee Williams remembered receiving from Rose, Tennessee was able to create an exquisite and compassionate portrayal of a woman retreating into insanity in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Tennessee writes that he never has forgotten the sage words from Rose, spoken one afternoon in the time of their youth. Rose and Tom were on a ride with two of Tom's friends:

> I remember a drive in the county with young friends. We started, the young friends and I, to laugh at the outrageous behavior of an acquaintance who was losing his mind. Miss Rose turned very grave and stiff in the back seat of the car. "You must never make fun of insanity," she reproved us. "It's worse than death." . . . And that's exactly what Mother said when informed that Miss Rose had dementia praecox. (*Memoirs* 121)

This incident, coupled with Tennessee's memories of his sister's descent into madness, is another example of how Tennessee was able to take the pain and anguish of his personal

life, and create an exquisite gift of beauty and understanding of those who are different, for the world to enjoy.

Rose was to become the model for Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*. One of the following biographical similarities between Rose and the character of Laura is documented in *Tom*: "The jobs that Rose sought during the thirties, she would fail to get because of a lack of self-confidence" (Leverich 141). Rose's inability to get a job compares with Laura, in *The Glass Menagerie*, being so shy that she could not attend typing school. In Act 1, scene one, Amanda comes from the typing school and knows that Laura has dropped out of class without telling her mother. Amanda relates the teacher's description of Laura on line 193: "And she said, 'No—I remember her perfectly now. Her hands shook so that she couldn't hit the right keys. The first time we gave a speed test, she broke down completely—was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash room! After that morning she never showed up any more.'" (Williams *Glass*).

Dakin Williams, in *Tennessee Williams an Intimate Biography by his Brother*, writes of the relationship between Rose and a gentleman caller that is eerily similar to the one in *The Glass Menagerie*. On pages sixty- one and two of his book, Dakin writes of a serious relationship Rose had undertaken with a young man who was a junior executive with the International Shoe Company. As the two became serious however, Cornelius was involved in a scandal that would harpoon his career, and the young man, being an ambitious sort, disappeared from Rose's life. According to Dakin, Rose was heartbroken and retreated further into her illness that had already begun to show (Dakin Williams 62).

This actual episode correlates with the gentleman caller in The *Glass Menagerie*, who is a worker at the fictional shoe factory. Jim, in the play, is otherwise engaged, but Laura retreats further into her private world after the incident. The facts are not exactly biographical, but the

emotions and the results are the same. Williams had a gift of taking the emotions from personal incidents from his memory and creating a haunting story which would carry to audiences, giving a personal and individual meaning to each of them.

C.W.E. Bigsby, in "Entering *The Glass Menagerie*" conjectures: "*The Glass Menagerie* is more than a lament for a tortured sister (Laura is based on William's mentally damaged sister, Rose); it is an elegy for a lost innocence" (36). In essence, Bigsby is saying that Williams has taken his feelings for Rose and transferred them into such a moving portrayal of a young woman, that the symbolism of the character can stand for lost innocence. Bigsby continues in his article to take the idea of "lost innocence" of a character (Laura), and compare it to the lost innocence of post-war America (36). In a very real sense the suffering of Rose, and Tennessee's response to that suffering by writing a semi-biographical play featuring her, extends to a meaning far beyond the Williams family. This ability to touch each audience member in his/her heart and make them look at their own truth was one of William's greatest gifts to the world.

The most poignant and telling lines in *The Glass Menagerie* which directly correlate between Tennessee and his beloved sister come at the end of the play, and are spoken by the narrator Tom (widely accepted by critics to be modeled closely after Tennessee):

> The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street … —anything that can blow your candles out! For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura—and so goodbye . . .. (1959+)

MOMMY DEAREST?

Edwina Williams impacted Tennessee's life in ways that can neither be overstated nor completely understood. It is clear that Tennessee loved his mother, was exasperated by her, confused by her, pitied her, resented her, and in the end took excellent care of her.

A nearly perfect portrait of Edwina is painted by Tennessee through the character of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, which with a few variations is essentially a biography of the Williams family during their St. Louis years.

Virtually every source available on *The Glass Menagerie* makes the comparison between Edwina and Amanda. Two of the more interesting examples of this "truth" come from Edwina Williams, and from Laurette Taylor.

Laurette Taylor played Amanda in the original production of *The Glass Menagerie*. The following account of a meeting between Miss Taylor and Mrs. Edwina Williams is related with slight variations in *Tom*, *Memoirs*, and *Remember Me to Tom*. Edwina attended the Chicago opening of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944 (*Memoirs* 85.) This is Tennessee's version of the incident from *Memoirs*:

> I do not recall her precise reaction to the play but it was probably favorable, for Mother was very concerned with my long-delayed success. I do recall her coming backstage after the performance which she attended and paying her respects to Laurette. 'Well, Mrs. Williams,' said Laurette . . . how did you like yourself?' 'Myself?' said Mother innocently. . . . [Laurette speaking] "You notice these bangs I wear? I have to wear them playing this part because it's the part of a fool and I have a high, intellectual forehead.' Miss Edwina did not pick up on this either. (85)

Dakin, in *Tennessee Williams an Intimate Biography*, remembers this incident in a similar fashion and adds corroboration to a widely held belief that Amanda is Edwina. Dakin recalls from conversations with his mother that Laurette did ask " . . . 'how did you like you'seff, Mis Williams,'" but recounts to Dakin: "I was so shocked I didn't know what to say" (123). Dakin continues to remember his mother's account of the incident: "And even afterward, Edwina said, 'I am *not* Amanda. The only resemblance I have to Amanda is that we both like jonquils' " (Dakin Williams 123). Dakin contends: "But everyone else, including Dakin and Tennessee, knew that she was, and with love, too, as well as with a smile . . .He [Tennessee] knew that she was trying to cling to another time and place" (Dakin Williams 123).

Miss Edwina may have at least pretended not to pick up on the likeness between the character of Amanda and herself, but she did pick up on her son's dressing habits at the New York opening of *The Glass Menagerie*. According to Dakin one press report declared: . . . "He [Tennessee] was wearing 'a gray flannel suit with a missing coat button . . . Mr. Williams appeared more like a farmboy in his Sunday best than the author of a Broadway success . . .' . . . When Edwina, who wasn't there, read about the missing button, she almost cried . . ." (Dakin Williams 125).

Tennessee assigned half of the royalties from *The Glass Menagerie* to his mother with no personal comment to her (the papers arrived in the mail one day) which gave his mother financial independence throughout the rest of her lifetime (Dakin Williams 126).

Upon accepting the premise that the character of Amanda is the portrait of Edwina Williams, a new understanding comes to light about Tennessee's relationship with, and feelings towards his mother. The portrait, although harsh at times, ultimately is one of love and understanding for a woman that has been caught in a terrible loneliness and out of her time.

Monarch Notes, in an analysis of the character of Amanda, captures the relationship between Amanda/Tom and Edwina/Tennessee:

> She [Amanda] knows that her family must be held together at all costs, it is the only thing that she has left. Amanda, though at times proud of her son, is insensitive to his position. She continually badgers him about his eating habits, his reading material, his smoking, his going to the movies, his late hours, and his drinking. The continual friction between Tom and his mother shows her lack of understanding. Almost every encounter leads to a quarrel. For whatever Amanda is or does, she possesses a fighting spirit and a stubborn gallantry in the face of overwhelming odds. (*Monarch Notes*)

Tennessee, in *Memoirs*, succinctly refers to these same qualities in his mother: " . . . I feel that Mother always did what she thought was right and that she has always given herself due credit for it even though what she sometimes did was all but fatally wrong" (85).

In considering the early history between Edwina and Tommy, recounted in Chapter One of this paper, theirs was a deeply difficult, co-dependant relationship. Tennessee's biographical accounting of his life with his family in *The Glass Menagerie* was not only his way of coming to terms with his family relationships while living in St. Louis, but was also a gift to all who have domineering mothers. *The Glass Menagerie*, through Tennessee's memories of his mother reminds us that our mothers, no matter how frustrating and intrusive, have their own sets of baggage from their pasts. If we stop complaining about them and try to understand them, we can appreciate and love them in spite of the fact that they are our mothers.

Perhaps the greatest understanding that Tennessee came to in regard to his mother through writing *The Glass Menagerie* is to be found in a critical analysis of the play written by

Gilbert Rathbun, Director of Drama at Seton Hall University. This analysis highlights the recurring theme of loneliness:

> Amanda's loneliness is caused by a lack of understanding and a need for communication with her children. Necessity has made her a lonely woman. Because of his inability to make Amanda understand his feelings, Tom has also become lonely. Due to his sensitive nature, his loneliness is more acute. He is cursed with a poet's means of communication . . .(Rathbun)

Perhaps Tom, the narrator in *The Glass Menagerie* was "cursed with a poet's means of communication"(Rathbun). However, it is that very gift of poetic communication that enabled Tennessee come to terms with his mother's motivations and personal loneliness. This understanding of his mother enabled Tennessee to continue a close relationship with her until Edwina's death in 1980.

Tennessee Williams' last words in his *Memoirs* are in regard to his sister Rose. They can, however easily to apply to all of his "women." "After all, high station in life is earned by the gallantry with which appalling experiences are survived with grace"(252).

Tennessee, by sharing his experiences with the women in his life through his plays, came to a new depth of understanding in regard to each of them. In doing so, he touched millions of minds and hearts with his words, and hopefully enabled those who would choose to see the ability to begin to understand and embrace the women in their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLAYS

Tennessee Williams' first successful major work was *The Glass Menagerie.* Two of his subsequent plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) won Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. These three plays are renowned not only for their commercial successes on Broadway, but also for their impact upon American Culture. Tennessee Williams employs some commonalties with these plays that not only make them unique to the American Theatre of the 1940's and 50's, but also make them a popular choice for theatres to perform today.

Rather than tracking through the oft' repeated and sometimes bastardized critical analyses of Williams' work, there is a valid way of looking at these plays: formulating a solid thesis as to their longevity through the examination of the critical reviews from the original productions. When combined with comments from Tennessee and the actors involved in the original productions, and an historical perspective, a fuller, more rounded perception of the "truth" of these plays occurs.

IT'S A HIT?

The Glass Menagerie opened on December 26, 1944 at Chicago's Civic Theatre. Philip Kolin writes that *The Glass Menagerie* " . . . revolutionized the American stage with its expressionistic staging and haunting, lyrical dialogue."

The cast included Eddie Dowling as Tom, Laurette Taylor as Amanda, and Julie Haydon as Laura. (Kolin *Glass* 172). In *The Kindness of Strangers* Donald Spoto describes the less than auspicious opening.

The night after Christmas, *The Glass Menagerie* was somehow performed for a

> small, diffident audience. By the afternoon of the twenty-seventh, the box office had taken in only four hundred dollars, and the producers prepared a closing notice. But then [Williams' agent] Audrey [Wood] telephoned them to read two brief reviews . . . Before the end of that day, the mayor of Chicago . . . authorized a fifty-percent ticket subsidy for municipal employees . . .The closing notice was removed – . . . (111)

Spoto correctly asserts that the Chicago reviewers saved *The Glass Menagerie* from closing into oblivion (111).

Edwina Williams saved the Chicago reviews from *The Glass Menagerie*, and relays portions of them in *Remember Me to Tom.* Edwina quotes from Claudia Cassidy's review that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*: "Too many theatrical bubbles burst in the blowing, but *The Glass Menagerie* holds in its [grasp] the shadowed fragility of success" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 150). Edwina brings forth from Cassidy, in a separate review: "It is your play, as it is mine, it reaches out tentacles, first tentative, then gripping, and you are caught in its spell" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 150).

Ashton Steven, in his review from the *Chicago Herald American* concurs with Cassidy: Edwina quotes from his review that was printed on Christmas day: " [*Glass*] removed this first-nighter so far from this earth that the return to this mundane desk and typewriter finds him unaccustomedly dizzy in the head, to say nothing of the heart" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 150). Stevens adds, in reference to *The Glass Menagerie*: "[it is] a lovely thing, and an original thing. It has the courage of true poetry couched in colloquial prose. It is eerie and earthy in the same breath . . . Its unforced wit is as pure as its understated pathos" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 150).

Within the preface of *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams addresses the originality of his

play. In 1947, R.C. Lewis lends credence to Tennessee's originality of style in the *New York Times Magazine* by quoting from Williams' preface:

> " . . . Tennessee Williams' credo": The straight realistic play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice cubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art. (qtd. in R.C.Lewis)

In reference to the character of Amanda, Tennessee addresses courage from a slightly different direction. He attributes the virtue to within the characters, rather taking credit for courage in himself for his style of writing. Asked about Amanda, he says: "I don't think of my little people as damned--not as long as they keep courage and gallantry. Those are important and very Southern qualities, bred in the bones of the people I wrote about, such as Amanda Wingfield . . ." (qtd. in Edwina Williams 213).

The *Critical Survey of Drama* notes that *The Glass Menagerie* is historically unique because the critics had a large hand in bullying the public to come and see it at the Chicago opening (2068).

The Glass Menagerie moved to the Playhouse Theatre in New York on March 31, 1946, and ran for 561 performances (Kolin *Glass*).

Lyle Leverich, interviewed by Scott Simon on National Public Radio in 1996, was asked "[why does] this story of one family in the middle of the country endure for people, hundreds of millions of people, all around the world today?" Leverich responded:

> . . . because it has a universal appeal . . . It's the family. And just listening to those words again is moving, even to me now . . . He had a gift of language that made him unique in the American Theater. He was not just a poet and

> not just a playwright, he was a poet-playwright, and that's what made him the person that we revere, and I think he will last well into the new millennium. (qtd. on *NPR.* "Commissioned ")

Tennessee Williams, in *Where I Live*, (1978) writes about *The Glass Menagerie* and its meaning in time: ". . . [The *Glass Menagerie* is] outside of time, 'a world without time.' A world where 'emotion and action have a dimension and a dignity that they would have had in real existence, if only the shattering intrusion of time could be locked out'" (52).

The perspective of the critics, the biographer, and the author within the time frame of 1944-1996, brings forth a fuller rendering in regard to the longevity and appeal of *The Glass Menagerie.* In examining the sources who were involved with the original production of *The Glass Menagerie*, and exploring opinions from an historical perspective, this play emerges as a classic, poetic story which deeply affects audiences with its story of Tennessee and his family. The "universal appeal" that Leverich speaks of is one of the conflict, courage, and passion that are present in every family.

Philip Kolin remarks in regard to the character of Tom: " . . . he realizes, as did Williams, that he could never extinguish the light of memory that glow with nostalgia as well as pain" (Kolin *Glass*). This provides an appropriate analogy for the success and endurance of *The Glass Menagerie.*

Williams, through his personal memories, has struck a deeply emotional chord that still rings in audiences whenever and wherever the play is performed throughout the world today.

A STREETCAR TOWARDS DESTRUCTION

Tennessee's next major success, and first Pulitzer Prize winner, was *A Streetcar Named Desire.* It opened on Broadway December 3, 1947 and ran for 855 performances. This play

won the Donaldson award and the New York Drama Critics' award as well. *Streetcar* starred Jessica Tandy as Blanche, Marlon Brando as Stanley, Kim Hunter as Stella, and Karl Malden as Mitch (Kolin, *Streetcar*).

The New Orleans web-site, Gatewayno.com, claims *A Streetcar Named Desire* to be: "The most effective of all Williams's works . . . a compelling portrait of personal disintegration, which drama, like *The Glass Menagerie* . . . has a cast of naturalistic characters whose personalities are illuminated by imaginative staging."

Streetcar is set in the French Quarter of New Orleans, and was to establish Williams' reputation as the purveyor of Southern settings.

The settings and the characters of Williams's plays are almost exclusively Southern. Williams has explained the reasoning behind this many times, but one of the clearest answers is to be found in an interview with Arthur Waters in *Theatre Arts Magazine*, published in 1955. Waters asks Williams why his three most prominent plays dealt with southern characters, and Williams responded: "Because I know and understand their moods and personalities better and because I am both familiar and in complete sympathy with the flavor and mode of their speech" (73).

Though there is a commonality of Southern characteristics, naturalistic characters, and innovative sets, *A Streetcar Named Desire* differs significantly in tone from *The Glass Menagerie* in its passionate story line, the onstage violence, and with the inclusion of overt sexual content.

The *Facts on File Yearbook* for 1947 headlined the play as " . . . oversexed school teacher flees reality in New Orleans" (qtd. in NPR "Fifty").

The Encyclopedia of the American Theatre, published in 1980, notes that Tennessee Williams, in writing *Streetcar*, " . . . ungirdled the muse to soul-searching nudity"

(Bronner 580).

Another striking difference between *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Williams' other works is that, once rehearsals began, the script was never rewritten. Donald Spoto reports that the reasons for "freezing" the script were two-fold: "At Williams's insistence (and with Kazan's quick approval), the script was frozen – as much because there was no need of alteration as because the author said this was his last play, that he was dying, and that he had no energy for any more work" (Spoto136).

National Public Radio produced a program entitled "Fifty Years of Desire," in November of 1997. Guests on the program included Elia Kazan (the director of *Streetcar*), Kim Hunter, Wendy Wasserstein (feminist playwright), and World War Two historian Stephen Ambrose.

Kim Hunter describes the first two weeks of rehearsal for *Streetcar*:

> We were on stage, in a semi-circle, facing the audience. The tables were in front of us and Kazan and Williams . . . were sitting with their backs to the audience. And we read the play. We stayed in that position for ten days. Never got up. The whole first ten days of rehearsal were extraordinary. It was exploring. I mean, trying to find out who we were, what our relationships were to the other characters. What is going on in the play, what our needs were . . . So that actually, when we got up, after ten days, into a taped-out set on the stage, Kazan didn't have to block the play. I mean, we knew where we were. (NPR "Fifty")

Kazan, on the same NPR program, recalls the excitement of finding Marlon Brando. He claims that Williams was quite thrilled with the choice of Brando for the part of Stanley Kowalski. Stephen Ambrose quotes a telegram from Tennessee Williams that was sent to

Marlon Brando on opening night: " . . . ride out boy and send it solid. From the greasy Polack, you will someday arrive at the gloomy Dane. For you have something that makes the theater a wold of great possibilities. Ever Gratefully . . . " (qtd. in NPR "Fifty").

Ambrose places *A Streetcar Named Desire* into historical perspective with the era. The following conversation from NPR between Ambrose and moderator Susan Stamberg lends some understanding to the character of Stanley:

> Stamberg: None of them suspected they were working on something that would become a classic, a masterpiece that emerged, among all the other happenings of that Cold War year . . .
>
> Ambrose: And America, in 1947, was full of hubris. That was the generation that had stood up to and finally licked the Depression, and then stood up to Hitler and Tojo and licked 'em. And the attitude of America in 1947 was "what's the next problem? And we're gonna get after it."
>
> Stamberg: Stanley is the new American. Well, the new American, after World War II, was, in many ways, was Stanley Kowalski, with the self-confidence, the boldness, the swagger, the belief in himself, the belief in his luck. And he believes he deserves everything.
>
> Stamberg: And into Stanley Kowalski's world, with its grubby rooms and the rattle-trap streetcar that keeps clanging past the scummed walls, arrives his fluttery, nerve-wracked sister-in-law, Blanch DuBois. (NPR "Fifty")

This interview presents a logical view of what *A Streetcar Named Desire* means, but biographer Lyle Leverich claims that Tennessee was not trying to make such a pinpointed statement. Leverich, on another NPR broadcast, claims that Tennessee goes beyond the times of the play and gives *Streetcar* a larger; timeless meaning:

> The plays of the thirties and many in the forties too, for that matter, have struggled with the need to resolve the plot and so forth. And Tennessee felt . . . that people were enigmatic and that particularly in *Streetcar* he didn't want—in fact he was very careful to say that he did not want to side with one or the other character; he simply wanted to show which was his main point—the breakdown of communication. To him, the lack of communication in our society between people on every level is part of our tragedy as a race of people, you know; we don't communicate. (NPR "Commissioned")

Leverich's interpretation of Tennessee's meaning, coupled with their relationship as biographer/subject, carries more weight. This is a matter of perspective of truth however, and is another example of how Tennessee's work takes on different meanings to those who view it.

Stephanie Ambrose and Wendy Wasserstein, through the NPR *Streetcar Anniversary* broadcast, weigh in on Blanche's character from a current perspective with the following conversation:

> Ambrose: I think Blanche is a pain in the ass, who should have gotten her act together long ago. And admittedly, she was in a desperate situation, but she was the one who made it . . . I think Blanche is a terribly unsympathetic person.
>
> Wasserstein: Well, yes, I mean, if she came for dinner to your house, and you know, started flirting with everybody and drinking too much and ruined your family history . . . (NPR "Fifty")

Perhaps Ms. Ambrose and Ms. Wasserstein should re-read Blanche's line: "Whoever you are -- I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams *Streetcar* 178).

The content, language, and situations in *A Streetcar Named Desire* were not universally praised at the time of its premiere and Tennessee, always sensitive to criticism of his work, did not take kindly to a discussion of his new play during the New Haven try-outs. In *The Kindness of Strangers* Spoto pointed to an incident that highlights Tennessee's sensitivity to criticism in regard to *Streetcar*, as well as his sense of humor:

> In New Haven Williams offered a spirited defense of the play and its characters to his colleague, the venerable Thornton Wilder, who came to a rehearsal and objected to Williams that the situation of Stella DuBois Kowalski was incredible: a genteel Southern girl like her, he objected, would never link herself with the scornful, proud, violent physicality of Stanley. "This man," Williams said to bystanders when Wilder had stepped away, "has never had a good lay!" (137)

Edwina Williams, in *Remember Me to Tom*, weighs in on the issue of good taste with respect to *Streetcar*. She quotes her son as defending himself justly when accused of writing about "sordid" characters. Edwina says that Tennessee did not believe Blanche to be sordid but "rather noble"; he did not think that deeply troubled people were sordid. She continues in this same vein with a quotation from Tennessee: "I think pettiness and meanness is sordid . . .I would never choose a person of that sort for a main protagonist because they don't interest me" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 193). Tennessee, again according Edwina, explains: "Tom has described Streetcar as a 'tragedy of incomprehensions,' the inability of people to understand one another" (192). Edwina next adds critic Brooks Atkinson's words in order to champion for her son: "Blanches' sex preoccupation is merely the most conspicuous

symptom of the harrowing disease of disintegration that is consuming her. . .she is in a panicky flight from the catastrophe of a genteel way of life that no longer can sustain her in an animalized world" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 194).

Despite grumbles from some critics of Tennessee's penchant for violence and "sordid characters," the major opinion was, and still is that *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a major contribution to the American Theatre.

Donald Spoto comments on the opening night, and some of the reviews:

> --the audience at the Barrymore on December 3 applauded for a full half-hour. . .the theatre had not only a solid commercial success but a play almost universally proclaimed great. Brooks Atkinson in the *Times* called *A Streetcar Named Desire* "a quietly woven study of intangibles" . . .Howard Barnes, in the *New York Herald-Tribune*, described it as a play of "heroic dimensions. . . Williams is certainly the Eugene O'Neill of the present period . . . {*Streetcar*} is a savagely arresting tragedy. . .a work of rare discernment and craftsmanship.". . . And The *New Yorker's* critic, Wolcott Gibbs, called it "deeply disturbing. . .a brilliant, implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or, if you like, of a society." (qtd. in Spoto 138)

There is strong, albeit anecdotal evidence that Tennessee wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a way of dealing with what he thought was representative of his own death or destruction.

Spoto believed this of his friend, citing that Williams believed that he was going to die, that this would be his last major play, and that a serious relationship between Tennessee and a companion was breaking up in an emotionally violent way at the time. Spoto continues:

> [*Streetcar* was]—a work whose conflict (of desire and sensitivity against brutality) he associated with death. In his creative struggles with himself and in his domestic struggles with Pancho[his live-in companion], in his desire for security and in his inclination for multiple and casual sexual partners, he met both the protective and the destructive Stanley, and the gentle, needy, spiritual but manipulative sensualist Blanche. And he was convinced that death was the term of his struggle. (Spoto 139)

Williams' philosophy lends credence to Spoto's assertion. In the very beginning of *Memoirs*, Williams makes the following pronouncement: "My thing is what it always was: to express my world and my experience of it in whatever form seems suitable to the material" (xvii). Spoto quotes Tennessee as saying similarly: "I draw all my characters from myself. . . . I can't draw a character unless I know it within myself " (qtd. in Spoto139).

Elia Kazan takes this theory a step further, according to Spoto. Kazan claims: "Blanche DuBois, the woman, *is* Williams. I saw Blanche as Williams, an ambivalent figure who is attracted to the harshness and vulgarity around him at the same time that he fears it, because it threatens his life" (qtd. in Spoto 139).

The Critical Survey of Drama ascribes traits to Blanche that could describe Tennessee's life during the years he wrote *Streetcar*: "Blanche's defense of culture, of the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of life, may be pathetic coming from one who has become a near-alcoholic prostitute, but it is nevertheless genuine, important, and valid" (2071).

Donald Spoto's analysis of the impact of *Streetcar* is perceptive, and one of the clearer "truths" in regard to Tennessee Williams' life and career: "Viewers and readers of the play . . . sense that *A Streetcar Named Desire* dramatizes the eternal clash within everyone. Williams knew it most deeply in himself. . .he was always being *almost* broken by it"(141).

In 1953, Tennessee ironically acknowledged the *almost* in Spoto's analysis. After the premiere of *Camino Real*, which was panned by the critics, he wrote on his mother's program: "Bloody but Unbowed (or more literally) Eggy but unbeaten" (Edwina Williams 206).

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was Tennessee's second Pulitzer Prize winner and his favorite play. In *Memoirs* Tennessee explains that he is often asked which is his favorite play, and that sometimes he just picks the one that's currently playing on Broadway. Williams continues: " . . .or I succumb to my instinct for the truth and say, 'I suppose it must be the published version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*' . . .I believe that in *Cat* I reached beyond myself, in the second act, to a kind of crude eloquence of expression in Big Daddy that I have managed to give no other character of my creation" (169).

Cat was to capture more heat from the critics than Tennessee had experienced with either of his other two Broadway blockbusters. It opened on March 25, 1955, at the Morosco Theatre. Elia Kazan again directed. According to *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* the play starred " . . . Barbara Bel Geddes as Maggie, Ben Gazzara as Brick, Burl Ives as Big Daddy, and Mildred Dunnock as Big Mama" (Kolin *Cat*). *Cat* ran for 694 performances (Kolin *Cat*).

There were several controversies over this play and its production. The language of Big Daddy, as Tennessee admitted, was much more potent than that of Stanley in *Streetcar*, drawing a lot of fire when the play first opened on Broadway.

Probably the most amusing incident in regard to the politically correct language police at the time is related in *Theatre Arts Magazine*. The play, in most of its current forms includes a ribald joke (mild by today's standards) involving an elephant in heat, and the size

of it's genitalia. The article claims: "No elephant since P.T. Barnum's Jumbo has stirred up as much interest on the entertainment scene as the one which was discussed . . .in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*" ("Exit"). The writer of this article explains that New York's Commissioner of Licenses heard of the joke and asked for a copy of the script, asked that it be removed from the script, and then created a "tempest in a teapot" because of protests from the artistic community about "censorship." The article sums up this controversy in grand style:

> Nobody knew why the story was in the play and nobody knew why it came out. Possibly the only person who made much sense out of the situation was Margaret Truman. The ex-President's daughter said she hadn't seen the play while the elephant story was in and she didn't know what the elephant story was about, but added that she approved of its removal. As a matter of principle, she said, she always favored the removal of elephants. ("Exit")

Another change in the script, much more serious than the last one described, was the revised ending of the last act. It is clear through all of the sources reviewed that Elia Kazan precipitated this change. In the original version Big Daddy does not reappear. The ending is much less hopeful between Brick and Maggie, and the audience member is not treated to a happy ending. According to Philip Kolin, Kazan wanted to make Maggie more sympathetic.

According to Tennessee Williams, who wrote an explanation to accompany both endings in the reading version of the play, Kazan did ask that the changes be made, and Tennessee acquiesced because he wanted Kazan to remain as the director of the production (Williams "*Cat*" *Theatre Arts* 62-3).

Kazan claims that he offered Tennessee the option to retain the original ending many times and that Williams was perfectly happy about the changes (Spoto *Kindness* 197).

Arthur Waters, in *Theatre Arts Magazine* judges the Kazan inspired ending: "Cat . . . has a relatively cheerful conclusion" (Waters 74).

The truth is judged by personal perception.

The truth, by any perception it seems, is that the reviews were decidedly passionate. Although many critics sang the praises of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, those on the negative side of the play were just as passionate in their vitriol.

Theatre: Stage to Screen to Television, contains snippets from some of the most eloquent original reviews. George Jean Nathan from the *New York Journal American*, volleys for the negative camp: "I am no psychiatrist and don't know what Tennessee Williams [in his] almost maniacal preoccupation with the more emphatic impulses and sensational aspects of sex, is trying to prove to himself " (qtd. in Leonard 272).

From the *New York Journal American*, comes a separate article by John McClain that judges a little less harshly: " Tennessee Williams is a playwright who can sock you and shock you and he has never exhibited these abilities to better advantage than he did last night in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' . . ." McClain notes: " . . . you are torn between fascination and revulsion, but you are held. On the bright side of the agenda it seemed to me that Williams has fashioned his most compelling characters and brought them into clearer focus than in any of his previous efforts." McClain next seems to contradict himself as he accuses Williams of oversimplifying issues, and writing characters that "display an absence of warmth and tenderness." Then McClain commits the sin of oversimplification in the following analyses: "[Brick] finds himself unable to rid himself of an infatuation for his college roommate." Gooper is dismissed by McClain as "an orthodox married man." The final analysis is the stinger, as he complains that the play contains " . . . unnecessary vulgarity and embarrassing expletives" (McClain).

Robert Coleman, in The New York *Daily Mirror*, was decidedly on the negative side of the fence. He writes: "Tennessee Williams has penned a bitter play about mean people . . .Williams doesn't call a spade a spade, but rather a steam shovel. We came away with the impression that Tennessee is disturbed about death and the shoddiness of women." Next Coleman attacks the language: "Much of the language is right from the barnyard and such as would never be heard in a decent aristocratic home"(Coleman).

The reviewer for *Time Magazine* tends to straddle the fence: " [Tennessee Williams'] . . . writing is more of a demonstration than an achievement with a 'little too much of everything' "(qtd. in Leonard 272).

The nastiest review of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is served up by Maurice Zolotow, in *Theatre Arts Magazine*. Zolotow claims that Tennessee Williams must have a Jekyll/Hyde personality, and that the Hyde side wrote *Cat*. He continues with his theory, claiming Williams' alter ego to be that of Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire*; accounting for the offensive, repetitive language, situations, and homosexuality in the play (Zolotow 22-3). This review is worth the time it takes to read, simply for the bizarre tack it takes.

Even the originality of the writing comes into question in the following entry of "Theatre Quotebook" from *Theatre Arts Magazine*:

> We spot a trend and, frankly, we don't know if it's good, bad or so-what. The trend has to do with the way plays are being written. Tennessee Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof grew out of one of his short stories after Henry Hews, the alert drama assessor of The Saturday Review, suggested that it might be adaptable. But, as Williams readily admits, his new play now has very little relationship to the short story with which he started. ("Variations")

An appropriate answer to the "observer" is the following analogy: A seed is planted, it sprouts, is watered, fertilized, weeded, pruned, and nurtured. From this seed, with time and patience, comes the rose. Just as a rose becomes the end result of the seed, so does an artist's work, with the proper work and care, become a play.

Equally strong in their opinions, the lovers of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* answered with passionate praise.

The *New York Times* Critic writes:"Williams has matured into an astute observer, reflecting . . .not only part of the truth of life; it is the absolute truth of the theatre" (qtd. in Leonard 272).

The author of the *Life Magazine* article, not to be outdone by the *Times*, exclaims: " [Tennessee Williams] . . .adds another page to his almanac of agony, bristling with brutal language, violent action, and an unorthodox story." The writer continues: "Tennessee Williams is more concerned with 'the flickering interplay of live human beings in the thunderclouds of a common cause' than in pat conclusions" (qtd. in Leonard 272).

William Hawkins, in the *New York Word-Telegram*, praises the acting in *Cat*, by pronouncing: "The most astonishing performance of the evening is that of Mildred Dunnock as the mother. She manages to be tasteless, rowdy and featherbrained in a horrifying manner, which is yet always genuine"(Hawkins).

Mildred Dunnock, in an interview with Mike Steen, admits that she was not the first choice for the part of Big Mama. She confides to Steen that she asked Elia Kazan if there was a part for her in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and that Kazan replied that they needed a fat woman for Big Mama; however, she was too tiny. Dunnock seems to delight in reminiscing that no fat women auditioned, and that she won the part by using a largeness of personality to win the role. Dunnock tells Steen: "I did do Big Mama and I adored her. She had an

element of women in her that I feel is so real: that capacity, that desire, to pull down the curtain on things that they don't want to see . . . She had guts of her own, which matched those of Big Daddy" (qtd. in Steen 302). Dunnock, however, gives the greatest praise to Williams: " . . . Tennessee does that. It's his art, his great talent, that creates his women so that they never lose their character" (qtd. in Steen 303).

William Hawkins, again in his *New York World-Telegram* review, gives high praise to the emotion of the play. "The play functions like a snake charmer. It holds one's hypnotized and breathless attention, while it writes and yowls and bares the souls of its participants with a shameless tongue" (Hawkins).

Edwina Williams brings forth Brooks Atkinson as her favorite reviewer of Tom's work. "[Williams'] craftsmanship is now so much a part of his writings that he can forget it. . . .being crystal-clear in his own mind, he speaks directly and vividly to the minds of the theatregoers" (qtd. in Edwina Williams 207). Mrs. Williams pulls out the big guns to support her son with a quote from "Mrs. Roosevelt" (first lady of the country at the time). It said, in part: "Tennessee Williams is showing us the difficulty of communication between people who spend their lives saying and doing things they do not mean and do not feel . . .how difficult it was for [the people in *Cat*] to be honest with each other, probably because it is so difficult to be honest with oneself " (qtd. in Edwina Williams 208).

Tennessee, in a lengthy interview with Arthur Waters, addresses the language and sexual insinuations in his *Cat*:

> I would regret it very much if this new play had to rely, even in a minor degree, on the public's appetite for salaciousness. In fact I feel so strongly on the subject that I suggested we take out most of the four-letter words that were in the original script. I conscientiously believed they helped establish

> some of the characters, most of all the crude and uncouth Big Daddy. I still feel that a number of these were quite in character and, to my mind, unobjectionable. But when I heard that word was getting around that we had a dirty show filled with dirty dialogue, I strongly advised their removal. (qtd. in Waters)

Is *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* smut, or finely tuned, realistic language? Is homosexuality a subject not to be alluded to in public? These are questions that seem patently absurd to even ask in 1999. In 1955, however, Tennessee was using his poetic genius to cover some here-to-fore taboo subjects. Lucy and Ricky were sleeping in separate twin beds, Beaver's strongest language was "Gee Whiz," and television was in black in white.

Tennessee Williams splashed vivid color and brutal reality onto the stage with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* In fact, the very theme of *Cat*, softly moaned by Brick, and bellowed by Big Daddy is mendacity (Williams Cat, 50-1 58-59). It was the tenet of the times to cover up any unpleasant subjects. The adage: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all," was used by mothers all over the country.

Donald Spoto, in *The Kindness of Strangers*, expresses Tennessee's intent and contribution to the theatre in writing *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

> Williams showed that if he could not experiment with structure for his "fresh way," then he would portray characters in recognizable but unconventional situations. For an audience he considered emotionally hard of hearing, he wanted to shout; for those blind in their smugness, he drew large and startling figures. His enemy was complaisance, and he fought with shock tactics. (200 -1).

Tennessee brought his perception of truth to the 1950's theatergoers, by illustrating how humanity continually covers up and lies. He may have stirred up a hornets-nest, but his contribution towards truth in the American Theatre, by any perception, is priceless.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYZING THE CHARACTER

The true key to understanding a play is to analyze the script. This would include several readings of the script then using an organized system of analysis of the reader's choice. It follows then, that if an actor/actress is to properly prepare for a part, a character analysis is crucial.

Francis Hodge has written a book for directors entitled *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style.* "The Hodge Method" is a thorough and concise way to dissect a script and its characters. When used properly, this method will lead to a full comprehension of the entire play. The director, prior to rehearsals in order to aid in production of the play and direction of the actors uses both the script and character analyses. The actor should do a character analysis in order to facilitate a better grasp of his/her role.

For purposes of this thesis a character analysis of Big Mama in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, along with a pertinent portion of the script analysis, lends an understanding of how to perceive the role.

ACTING AND REACTING THROUGH ACTION

Hodge, in *Play Directing*, defines the word character this way: "A character is made up of all the dramatic actions taken by an individual in the course of a play. Therefore, *character* can be defined as a *summary statement of specific actions* (39).

When doing a script analysis based on Hodge's premise, one of the processes helpful to the director is assigning an action verb to each line in the script. Hodge explains the rationale for this method: "Every speech of every character throughout the play . . . contains a dramatic action" (Hodge 34). He continues to elucidate this theory by defining the

dialogue as a series of actions that " . . .[in] each speech contains a forcing--an action--and it is directed toward another character." (Hodge 34).

As the director/actor assigns a verb to each line a clear vision of the action, or acting of an emotion, forms. It is easy to feel emotions on stage, but *acting* them, knowing precisely what action the actor is taking, carries clearly across to the fourth wall to the audience.

Big Mama is an ambiguously written supporting character. In a surface reading and in the author's notes, she is a fat, silly, sometimes grotesque woman. In using the Hodge method, a fleshing out of her character occurs. Her motivations and actions are understood to be much more than silly.

Any actor can play the surface of a character. It is much more difficult perhaps, but much more satisfying to the actor, and the audience, to add levels to even the most well written character. Upon proper studying and analyzing of Big Mama, come the layers and ambiguities that make her real.

Before applying the Hodge method to an actor's character, the first step in understanding that character is to read the entire play many times. Oftentimes an actor has a tendency to read just his/her part, and in doing so will miss an important tool in creating his/her character. How the other characters feel about his/her character will lend an understanding to how his/her character reacts to the other characters in the play.

It is necessary to break any speeches of consequence into "beats." Many experts (Stanislavsky and Hodge included) recommend defining a series of lines done by one character into sections that delineate different moods. This is an excellent method of breaking up what would seem to be a long narration into an interesting, complex, series of thoughts and actions. Almost always, a playwright puts some of his/her most important

meaning into long speeches. In order to get the audience to listen, it is crucial to divide each separate thought process, so as to keep the audiences attention.

Next in the process is the "verbing" of each line the character speaks. It is sometimes helpful to obtain the verbs from the director of the other characters' lines around the assigned character. Every character is either initiating the action or reacting to the others onstage. If the other character is reacting to a line just before or after the assigned one, then it is important to know the verbs assigned to the lines of the other character as well. This will give the actor a well-defined picture of his/her character in relationship to the others onstage.

The following are examples of the verbs assigned by the actor in preparation to perform the character of Big Mama in the play: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* (Note: All citations are from the working version used for the Lindenwood University production.)

Act I; Big Mama's first scene:

> MARGARET. You know, Big Mama, Mae and Gooper's so touchy about those children, that you just don't dare suggest that there's any room for improvement in their . . . *Defends*
>
> BIG MAMA. Brick, hurry out! *Stomps* Shoot Maggie, you just don't like children. *Snorts*
>
> MARGARET. I do SO like children! Adore them! — well brought up . . . *Alludes*
>
> BIG MAMA. Well, why don't you have some and bring them up well, then, instead of all the time pickin' on Gooper's an' Mae's? *Assigns* (20)

Looking at this scene through the verbs the action is as follows: Margaret defends;

Big Mama stomps; Big Mama snorts; Margaret alludes; Big Mama assigns. Each of these verbs gives an action to perform, but they do more than that. A picture through the verbs gives actors a piece of their character.

In the case of Big Mama, the verbs are: stomps, snorts; assigns. These words lend towards a personality that is no-nonsense, probably not particularly educated or classy, and straight to the chase. As Margaret alludes, which is a much gentler verb, Big Mama says what she means. Margaret defends, then Big Mama stomps; we see who is determined to be in charge of this particular scene. In just this short scene, through the verbs, the actor sees Big Mama as a bulldozer, intent on setting the record, as she sees it, straight.

Because characters often change and evolve throughout the play, a fuller understanding comes with each scene.

Act II

BIG MAMA. Wha's my Brick, wha's mah precious baby!! *Crows*

BIG DADDY. Sorry! Turn it back on! *Smacks*

(unspoken action of *Winces*, then *Regroups*, in response to smack)

BIG MAMA. Here he is, here's my precious baby! *Embraces*

What's that you've got in your hand? *Wags*

You put that liquor down, son, your hand was made fo' holdin' something' better than that! *Claims*

GOOPER. Look at Brick put it down! *Dunks*

(unspoken action, Brick *Defies*)

(unspoken action towards Gooper: *Ignores*)

BIG MAMA. Oh you bad boy, you, you're my bad little boy! *Sighs*

Give Big Mama a kiss, you bad boy, you! *Reclaims* —

Look at him shy away, will you? *Blusters*

Brick never liked bein' kissed or made a fuss over, I guess because he's always had too much of it. *Defends*

Now what'm I sittin' down here faw? *Re-arms*

I want t' sit next to my sweetheart on the sofa, hold hands with him and love him up a little. *Targets* (67-68)

Through the verbs in Act II, the picture becomes clearer through Big Mama's reaction to the others on the stage. Big Daddy smacks; Big Mama winces, then re-arms. Big Mama coos, then claims Brick. Brick defies, Gooper dunks. Big Mama's reaction to each nails her relationship to each: In reaction to Big Daddy's smack, she winces, then regroups. To Brick she sighs, reclaims, then forgives; She ignores Gooper. Next, she targets Big Daddy. Big Mama clearly loves Brick, is deeply affected by Big Daddy, and ignores her first-born son. Her reaction to Big Daddy's joke at her expense is voiceless, as is her reaction to Gooper's negativity. Her reaction to Brick's drinking is one of denial, in that she treats it as something he has control over, then tries to gloss over the problem by asking for a kiss, in effect ignoring the drinking by reclaiming Brick and then forgiving him.

Act III is an important one for Big Mama because her character transforms when she is faced with a devastating situation: the imminent death of Big Daddy. She begins, after hearing the news, in denial: In the midst of attempts to bring her back to reality and deal with the facts, Big Mama holds onto her last vestiges of denial with the following three lines:

It's all a mistake, I know it's just a bad dream. *Prays*

Yes, it's just a bad dream that's all it is, it's just an awful dream. *Recedes*

Just a dream, a bad dream. *Singsongs* (148)

Big Mama, however, when pushed to the limit by her son Gooper and her daughter-in law Mae, not only faces reality but also determines to hold her family and her husband's legacy together. This speech is an example of Big Mama in transition:

> Brick is Big Daddy's boy, but he drinks too much and it worries me and Big Daddy, and, Margaret, you've got to cooperate with us, you've got to co-operate with Big Daddy and me in getting Brick straightened out. *Acknowledges*
>
> Because it will break Big Daddy's heart if Brick don't pull himself together and take hold of things. *Crowns* (152)

Note that although Big Mama acknowledges Brick's alcoholism she still calls forth Big Daddy as the major force in the family.

This speech exemplifies the true character of Big Mama:

> Now you listen to me, all of you, you listen here! *Erupts*
>
> They's not going' to be any more catty talk in my house! *Ascends*
>
> And Gooper, you put that away before I grab it out of your hand and tear it right up. *Commands*
>
> I don't know what the hell's in it and I don't want to know what the hell's in it. *Slashes*
>
> I'm talkin' in Big Daddy's language now. *Transforms*
>
> I'm his ***wife***, not his ***widow***, I'm still his ***wife***! *Names* (160)

Through the verbing of these few lines a clear picture of a worthy adversary emerges; a matriarch of note to be reckoned with, evolves. Through crisis and grief Big Mama grows

out of the stomping, forgiving, covering, denying wife from the previous two acts. She has finally earned her name.

THE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION PROCESS

Hodge explains, in *Play Directing*, the need for verbing and then describing the character:

> Describing a character by writing it down in your own words is the best way to assure yourself that a character analysis is fully developed and nothing has been missed. But you must be absolutely certain that you determine what a character is by giving the principal attention to an analysis of the action, as has been previously emphasized, for you will be strongly tempted to read the description authors sometimes insert in their plays. . . . You must remember that a character is determined *only after* his actions, not before. (44)

With the verbing completed then, the next step includes five sections. They are: Desire, will, moral stance, decorum, and summary adjectives (Hodge 44-5).

HER HEART'S DESIRE

To determine the *Desire* of Big Mama, the actor needs to look at what she truly wants. Hodge warns the reader: "He may appear to want a material possession, but this is superficial; what he wants is usually far less tangible . . ." (44). This is an important warning in regard to Big Mama, because tangible things are not of great importance to her.

On the surface, from Big Daddy's speech in Act II in which he claims that Big Mama bought almost everything available in Europe, it would seem that acquisitions are very important to Big Mama. However, buying "things" is merely Big Mama's way of attempting to fill the void left in her heart from the lack of love in her life. This is a social phenomenon

common to women. Big Mama is not conscious of replacing absent love with tangible purchases, and Big Daddy couldn't even begin to understand the reasoning for Big Mama's shopping sprees. Consequently, Big Daddy's perception is that Big Mama merely loves to spend money.

When determining the desire of Big Mama, it is crucial to back this information up with lines from the script. Otherwise, the actor could be picking desire out of the air and that is not true to either the play or the playwright.

Big Mama's desire is added upon in each of the three acts. In Act I, Big Mama, having learned through previous action (information alluded to that happens before the play begins,) that Big Daddy is not going to die. Her outward desire is now to straighten out the marriage of her son, Brick, and daughter-in-law Maggie. Examples of this are found in the following lines:

> (Big Mama looks at Margaret and points to the bottle)
>
> MARGARET. Hmmmm?
>
> BIG MAMA: Shoot! Stop playin' so dumb! I mean has he been drinkin' that stuff much yet?
>
> MARGARET. Oh—I think he had a high-ball after supper.
>
> BIG MAMA. Don't laugh about it! Some single men stop drinkin' when they git married, and others start. Brick never touched liquor until . . .
>
> You're childless and my son drinks. When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are *here*, right *here*! (22)

Big Mama does want her son and his wife to be happy and produce a grandchild, but there is a second, stronger desire. That desire is to be a part of her son's life, and to be let

into his heart. This is exemplified in the following lines that are scattered throughout the scene:

> I just had t' run up an' tell you right this —
>
> What's this door doin' lock faw?
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> . . . it won't be the first time I've seen Brick not dressed. Come on, open this door!
>
> [. . . .]
>
> Brick! Hurry on out of there son . . .
>
> I hate locked doors in a house.
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> Brick, hurry out!
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> Son? Can you hear me in there?
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> Can you hear me son? (19-20)

It is clear through these lines that Big Mama wants in – into the room, into Brick's presence, and into his heart.

Act II compounds the evidence that Big Mama's desire is to be let in, in fact loved, by Brick, and adds her desire to be loved by Big Daddy. The first set of lines shows again, Big Mama's desire to be loved:

> BIG MAMA. Here he is, here's my precious baby!
>
> [. . . . . .]

I want t' sit next to my sweetheart on the sofa, hold hands with him and love him up a little!

[. . . . . .]

Give Big Mama a kiss, you bad boy you! (68)

[. . . . . .]

(Said to Big Daddy): *In all these years you never believed that I loved you*?? (80)

[. . . . . .]

(Spoken to Big Daddy): Hey! Let me in! (98)

Important shading of this need to be loved comes with Big Mama's definite desire added in Act II, to deny anything that goes against the idea that Big Daddy or Brick might not want to love her.

BIG MAMA. Look at him shy away, will you? Brick never liked bein' kissed or made a fuss over. I guess that's because he's always had too much of it.

[. . . . . .]

BIG DADDY. I told you to stop it, quit this --!

[. . . . . .]

BIG MAMA. Big Daddy, I will not allow you to talk that way, not even on your birthday I ---

BIG DADDY. I'll talk like I want . . . Ida, and anybody here that don't like it knows what they can do!

BIG MAMA. You don't mean that!

BIG DADDY. What makes you think I don't mean it?

BIG MAMA. I just know you don't mean it!

BIG DADDY. You don't know a goddam thing and you never did!

BIG MAMA. Big Daddy, you don't mean that. (77-8)

[. . . . . .]

BIG MAMA. Sweetheart? Sweetheart? Big Daddy? You didn't mean those awful things you said to me? – I know you didn't. I know you didn't mean those things in your heart. . . . (98)

In the beginning of Act III, Big Mama again does everything she can to deny what she does not want to hear, when the family tells her that Big Daddy is dying of cancer:

BIG MAMA. Yes, it's just a bad dream that's all it is, it's just an awful dream.

[. . . . . .]

Just a dream, a bad dream. (148)

[. . . . . .]

GOOPER. Mama, those tests are infallible!

BIG MAMA.Why are you so determined to see your father daid? (151)

[. . . . . .]

BIG MAMA. Big Daddy ain't going to leave the place in anybody's hands; Big Daddy is not going to die. I want you to get that in your heads, all of you! (153)

Through the examination of the previous lines, Big Mama's will is two-fold: To be loved and accepted by her husband and her youngest son; to deny anyone or anything that would prevent her from believing that Big Daddy and Brick love and accept her.

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT IT?

The next step in the Hodge method of character analysis is *Will.*

Hodge's explanation of will is short and to the point: "*Will* is a character's relative strength in attaining his desires. How strong or weak is his inner strength? Is it strong enough to push him to the full limit, or will he compromise? (Hodge 42-3)

Big Mama's *Will*, while unshakable through Acts I and II, reaches a compromise in Act III.

During her brief scene in Act I, Big Mama's desire to be let in and to fix her son's marriage, is battened by strong, decisive speeches. Big Mama is very much in charge with regard to Margaret, and hits her target in regard to the fact that Brick needs to stop drinking and Maggie needs to get pregnant.

This scene does not illustrate a true test of Big Mama's will, because Margaret's will is precisely the same. And, although Big Mama is let into the room, her will is not strong enough to force Brick out of the bathroom. She decides to ignore this slight by shouting through the door and assigning Maggie the task of taking care of Brick. Lines to support these theories follow:

BIG MAMA. ... "Come on, open this door!" (19) Before Maggie manages the door, Big Mama has gone to the other door to get in; her will strong enough to make it into the room.

BIG MAMA. (in response to Gooper's pleas that she come downstairs) "Tell 'em to hold their hawses, I'll be down in a jiffy!" (20).

BIG MAMA. (again in response to Gooper's hollering for her to come down): "Hold those people down there! Don't let 'em go!" (21). Big Mama is determined, or willful enough, to stay in Maggie and Brick's room, despite a party of people downstairs, and pleas from her older son.

When Big Mama gets tired of Gooper's pleas, she shouts: "I'm comin!" (22).

Even after Big Mama has shouted this line, she stays until after she has made her point with Maggie.

Big Mama's will is insurmountable in Act II. She is bound and determined to stay in Brick and Big Daddy's sphere of attention and denies that they would prefer that she be anywhere else but with them.

After Brick deliberately downs his drink in response to Big Mama's request that he "put that thing down..." (68), she responds with an attempt to gain Brick's affection: "Give Big Mama a kiss, you bad boy you!" When Brick deliberately slights his mother by not kissing her, she covers for him: "Look at him shy away, will you? Brick never liked bein' kissed or made a fuss over . . ." (68).

After being shunned by Brick, Big Mama immediately sets her sights on Big Daddy:

" . . . Now what'm I sittin' down here faw? I want t' sit next to my sweetheart on the sofa, hold hands with him and love him up a little!"(68).

When Big Mama looks at Big Daddy's response to her talk about joining him on the sofa she realizes that he does not want her there, and so seeks to diffuse his anger by making a joke. She also doesn't want to risk rejection from Big Daddy, having just experienced a rebuff from Brick.

Big Mama's pretense that she can control Big Daddy's language shows the strength of her will to deny the reality of the relationship. The following sequence of lines between Big Daddy and Big Mama illustrates Big Daddy's lack of regard, and Big Mama's denial of that fact:

BIG MAMA. "Big Daddy, you are off the sick-list, now, and I'm not going to excuse

you for talkin so –"

BIG DADDY. "Quiet!"

BIG MAMA. "--- nasty in front of preacher."

BIG DADDY. "Quiet!" (75-6).

Big Mama's iron will is best expressed after Big Daddy rips her to shreds with brutal words, and Big Mama comes back twice within the same act with words of love , forgiveness, and denial. When Big Daddy locks Big Mama out of the room and tells her he won't let her in, she responds: "Sweetheart? Sweetheart? Big Daddy? You didn't mean those awful things you said to me? I know you didn't. I know you didn't mean those things in your heart. . . ." (98). After leaving for awhile, Big Mama hears her husband shouting and bursts into the room again with the words: "Why are you shouting like that . . . I just cain't stainnnnnnd--- it!" (105).

In Act III Big Mama retains her will in regard to denial until Gooper pushes her to the limit by planning to take the estate away from Brick and Margaret. For the sake of her love for her son Brick, Big Mama faces Brick's drinking problem, Gooper's nastiness, and admits that Big Daddy is going to die. In essence, her love for Brick and Big Daddy enables her to overcome her denial, and redirect the strength she's been wasting in denying the truth. Big Mama turns into a steely matron who is ready to do battle with anyone for the love of her youngest son and her husband's wishes.

The following lines illustrate this point.

> BIG MAMA. Brick is Big Daddy's boy, but he drinks too much and it worries me and Big Daddy, and, Margaret, you've got to cooperate with us, you've got to cooperate with Big Daddy and me in getting Brick straightened

> out. Because it will break Big Daddy's heart if Brick don't pull himself together and take hold of things. (152)
>
> [. . . . .]
>
> BIG MAMA. *Nobody's goin' to take nothin'!* — till Big Daddy lets go of it— maybe, just possibly, not—not even then! No, not even then! (160)

The most important aspect of Big Mama's will is that, having faced the truth of her family, she still makes the following plea, borne of a wisdom here-to-fore unsuspected by the audience:

> Time goes by so fast. Nothin' can outrun it. Death commences too early — almost before you're half acquainted with life — you meet the other. . . . Oh, you know we just got to love each other an' stay together, all of us, just as close as we can, especially now that such a *black* thing has come and moved into this place without invitation. (162)

Big Mama's final words in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, show a level of love and tenacity of will far beyond the norm. After all the anger and hate from Big Daddy; after he shuts her out time after time, Big Mama ends her stay on Williams' stage with the words: "Sweetheart, sweetheart, sweetheart---can I come with you?" (168).

A LADY OF GREAT MORALS

Moral stance is described by Hodge as: " . . .the stance that will strongly affect the attainment of his desires---consists of his values. How honest is he with others and with himself? Does he have any sense of moral responsibility to others?" (43).

Using the Desire and Will sections of the analysis, it is easy to ascertain that Big Mama has a high moral stance in regard to those she loves. She has to go through the

specter of her husband's death to be honest with herself, and even then chooses to believe that he loves her. Maybe he does, in his own way and that is enough for her. The fact is, that no matter what they do, or what they are, she is loyal to those she loves, and eventually, suffers no fools. It may seem amoral that she treats Gooper and Mae with such disdain, but by Big Mama's moral code, anyone who would hurt Big Daddy is off her moral checklist. There are layers to her loyalty. When Margaret tries to comfort Big Mama at her greatest point of crisis, she responds not with hate, but with honesty: "No, leave me alone, you're not my blood"(148).

But Big Mama, when calmer, calls for Margaret to sit with her and accepts Margaret's comfort gratefully. By many family's standards, blood is always first; that is not considered amoral. When Big Mama is over the first big shock that Big Daddy has cancer, she sees who loves her and responds in kind to Margaret.

Big Mama's greatest virtue within her morality is her unswerving loyalty to those she loves. No matter how they shun or verbally abuse her, she believes that she sees through to their hearts, and that the mutual love between them will remain.

YEAH, BUT IS SHE FAT?

Decorum, according to Hodge: ". . . describes a character's physical appearance—what he looks like, his manners and his poise"(43).

In the case of Big Mama it would be simple to conclude that she is a fat, or at least ungainly woman. This physical description could fit with the lines in some versions of Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

Mildred Dunnock played the original role on Broadway (Steen 203). She was a tiny woman, physically. In the movie version, Judith Anderson is Big Mama, and though

a large-boned woman, she is not fat.

In the case of the actor playing the part of Big Mama for her thesis requirement, padding could have been added. It would be easier to justify Big Daddy's disdain towards his wife if she were fat or ugly.

The path less chosen is the path taken in this production. Big Mama is not fat, or thin for that matter. She is short of stature, and middle-aged. Big Mama in the script is sixty-three, (Williams *Cat* 95) so some aging may be added to the hair and face. But in this case, Big Mama's physical appearance belies her name.

An important aspect in this production of Big Mama's decorum is the way she moves; the way she carries herself, and her mannerisms. This particular Big Mama tries to carry off the stature of position as wife of the very wealthy Big Daddy. She dresses elegantly, and wears a lot of jewelry.

Her speech contradicts the dress and diamonds. Big Daddy and Big Mama have been married for forty years, and so she was with him before he attained his wealth. Her mannerisms and vocal patterns are similar in lack of culture to those of Big Daddy's; evidenced by Williams' dropped endings and the pronunciation changes of their words.

Big Mama is uncomfortable in dressy clothes, bites her nails, and is constantly forgetting to cross her ankles "like a lady" should. Her voice is loud and booming, and her speech patterns are graceless. Any attempt at physical grace is destroyed when she shouts across the room, or pulls the preacher onto her lap.

Big Mama's walk is a funny mix between what she has been taught, and who she really is. When she knows others are watching her, Big Mama attempts to glide gracefully into a room. When she has something else on her mind, or is alone with Maggie, she strides

like a person with a purpose. Big Mama's strides are almost longer than her legs, as she attempts to keep up with her roiling thoughts. She walks normally when speaking to Maggie because she truly likes her daughter-in law and knows that Maggie likes her as well. Big Mama feels no need for pretense with Maggie, as she does with all the others in her life, and this creates a special bond between the two of them; indicated in Big Mama's speech and movement in her scene with Maggie in Act I.

Big Mama's grace and beauty come through from inside her physical structure. Her regal bearing is that of the soul, not the body. Her beauty is in her unconditional love for her husband and youngest son, not the diamonds she constantly jiggles. Tennessee Williams created a character in Big Mama that doesn't need to be fat or thin --short or tall. In fact the juxtaposition of being physically small, yet big in personality and love gives the audience a truth to discover about her. How boring it would be to give the audience a superficial Big Mama.

As Big Mama faces the fact of her eldest son's betrayal, her youngest son's alcoholism, and her husband's imminent death, she becomes more graceful in demeanor. She no longer pulls at her jewelry, worries about crossing her ankles, or bites her nails. Her qualities of inner beauty shine through, and she is a character to admire and appreciate no matter what physical size she may be.

"ADJECTIVELY" SPEAKING

Hodge recommends that the actor/director come up with a summary list of adjectives to describe the character. He warns: "Do not set down a character's dramatic actions, but only the traits of the character they reveal" (43).

These adjectives, which lend a true understanding to the character, can only be

arrived at after doing the previous exercises outlined by Hodge. His process is one of layering, and it aids the actor to come to an unfolding of the character as he/she works each section of his process. Utilizing Hodge's method gives the actor an experience which is much like an unfolding to the audience when the actor performs onstage.

A summary of adjectives to describe Big Mama is: Boisterous, Humorous, Frightened, Vulnerable, Devoted, Denying, Straight-speaking, Good-hearted, Wise, and Loyal.

The complete method of character analysis shown in Hodge's book when done properly and thoughtfully will bring an intellectual knowledge to the actor that would not be possible from merely reading and rehearsing the character.

"Feeling" the character the actor is performing onstage is not enough. The days of the actor who just gets up on the stage and emotes are over. There is much studying to be done in addition to rehearsals before an actor can properly perform his/her character. True understanding of a character leads to much more than a superficial rendering. It is only when the actor truly understands his/her character that he/she can fully convey the character to an audience. The "smart" actor has arrived.

CHAPTER FIVE

The following journal is an account of the time between June 4, 1999 and July 18, 1999. It is this student's personal experience through the audition, rehearsal, and performance process for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Because it is primarily from a personal perspective of truth in regard to the experience, it will be written in first person, and much as I might attempt to be objective, I work from a mix of intellect and passion when rehearsing a play, and suspect it might lean towards subjectivity. However because this is a chapter in a M.F.A. thesis, I will endeavor to add the perspective of others involved in the process from time to time.

THE JOURNAL

6/3/99: Preparations for the audition: The audition is Sunday at 1:00 p.m. . I read the play, and because I have finished the research for the entire thesis, save the character analysis, I believe I have a solid understanding of the play and the characters--as much as anyone can have before actually playing a part. I have chosen a monologue from *Streetcar* that is about 45 seconds in length. Bryan (the director and my mentor, department chair, and friend), has always said that shorter is better. Because I am auditioning for two roles, and prefer one to the other, I have to switch characters in the middle. I'm going to do the first half as Big Mama and the second half as Maggie. I'm going to wear a slimming dress with a jacket over it, and take the jacket off for the Maggie section, using it to "entice" the unseen Brick. I consider Big Mama to be the more interesting character. "Star" roles never meant much to me. I would rather have the more challenging role. Not that Maggie isn't challenging, but at the age of 45, (46 by the time this is submitted), I have been there and done that on the sultry vixen circuit. I

am also concerned about the age differential--however, that would depend on who Brick. is. I have the monologue down cold and have been going over it several times a day.

6/6/99: The auditions were held today. They were from 1:00-4:00 p.m. and there was a good turnout, considering the publicity was almost nil. About 20 people came and fortunately, almost all of them were very talented. The cast is comprised totally with Lindenwood alumni and students. Now that I have been cast as Big Mama (yes!), the real work begins. Bryan and I have already talked about character. He wants her to be totally over the top in the first act, and very real in the third act. He has done the script analysis, and as I do my character analysis I am sure I will come to understand much more about her character. He is still intent on making her heavier. The lines call for that, but my research showed that the women playing her in the major professional productions were almost petite. The lines were changed. Ah well, I'm going to trust him, because he's one of the best directors I've had the opportunity to work with. Tonight is the first blocking rehearsal.

6/6/99: The first blocking rehearsal was a long one, thanks to Mr. Tennessee Williams' penchant to please everyone. There are so many different versions of *Cat*, and the version that came in the current script form from the publisher was significantly different from Bryan's copy. Bryan kept his cool and learned to skip minor problems caused by small line changes, but it was still painful for all. Funny though, one of Bryan's tough rehearsals is better than any other director's normal rehearsals. So we were still in and out in four hours with Act One blocked. He gave us Act Three in his form so it will be much easier to block. He gave me some good ideas on voice. He wants a repeating bird rather than a bulldog, but a low voice.

6/7/99: Bryan gave us Act II in his form as well, and we got a lot more work done tonight. His form of the script has the "fat" lines about Big Mama in them, but he's agreed that they can come out. Suki, Matt, Gina, John, and I were talking before rehearsal about

Bryan's plan to set the play in the 1990's. I asked Bryan after rehearsal if we couldn't set it in the 50's if we could get the right costumes ourselves, and he agreed. I think there is a charm and feeling to the 50's, that is particularly effective when juxtaposed with the events in this play. John (Big Daddy) is going to be phenomenal. He listens well to Bryan and seems to catch right on to Bryan's suggestions. The Hodge method gives Bryan the background to really know what he's talking about. It is clear that when a director has really done his homework the play has a real chance of coming to life as the playwright would have wanted. Now come lines, lines, lines. Now that we have two Acts in Bryan's version, I'm going to copy off Act I, and put it all in a large notebook. I have tomorrow night off, so will concentrate on lines today and tonight.

6/10/99: We finished blocking last night. Act III is very emotional for everyone, and particularly Big Mama, as she has to face the truth that Big Daddy is dying. She also has to face that her first-born son and his wife are greedy monsters. Bryan talked to us about relationships and diction. There is a difficulty inherent in the Southern dialect: lazy mouth. I listened to the others while not on stage and everyone sounded like a mush-mouth. I'm sure I did too. It fascinates me that experience so definitively connotes quicker blocking rehearsals. Gina (sister woman) has mentioned that she feels intimidated and has a lot to prove. She is very young, (supremely talented) and this is her first show with Bryan. Bryan is very patient with her, and as always, teaches her well.

6/12/99: We ran the whole show for blocking tonight. One of my greatest pet peeves is when the actors continually apologize if they lose their place or move in the wrong place. I would imagine that we had thirty minutes taking up by this attempt at grace. Bryan asked us not to act, but to go through the show at a fast pace in order to get through in two and half-hours. We made it in three hours. Gads, I hope the show isn't going to run four! He is right

in acknowledging that actors want to "act", however…we all became enmeshed in our characters, and would slow down to "emote"! When we started to run out of time he illustrated an Italian run, and that helped us slog through most of the third act in better time. Now comes the scut work of learning lines. His blocking gave me some wonderful character ideas and feelings. I disagree with him that I need to be nasty with Maggie about having children, and when we have time will discuss it with him. I really believe that Big Mama wishes she could be like Maggie. Also, with Big Mama's child-like intuition, I believe that she knows Maggie and Brick to be the two good people in her family, and that is why she is continually drawn to them. We'll have fun with this discussion.

6/17: We were off two days because of a family emergency for Bryan. It gave me a chance to further study the entire script, and learn lines and blocking. Tonight, therefore was a tad rough for everyone; more so for those that did not study their parts in the interim. Bryan has some ideas in regard to Big Mama that I disagree with and I need to talk to him soon. I think Big Mama is fond of Margaret, and that Big Daddy really does love Big Mama. Bryan has decided that Big Mama is cruel with Margaret. Why, then would she call for Maggie to sit with her for comfort in Act III, and why would Big Mama bother to coach Margaret in the what-fores of marriage in Act I?

6/18: Had a good conversation with Bryan in re: the relationship between Maggie and Big Mama, and Big Daddy/Big Mama. We will not agree on whether BD loves BM or not, but came to a compromise of sorts in Act I when BM is telling Maggie to have children. Rather than deliberately being cruel, I will try a snort and then straight talk to Maggie…we'll see. Also a good reminder from the conversation was that Bryan has to look at the entire picture, whereas I am tunneling into Big Mama's motivations and relationships. They have to come together for the entire picture.

6/19: Some wonderful relationships started gelling in rehearsal today. Maggie and Big Mama are showing a nice need for each other, and the dislike is palpable between Gooper and Big Mama. We worked on Act III, and Bryan reminded us that this is when everyone and everything explodes. I felt really good about the rehearsal, as did Bryan. Suki is lowering her pitch as Maggie, and sounding the way Bryan wants her to. Diction is still a problem for everyone at one level or another. The southern dialect is so lazy! Hopefully, it will come along. Bryan wants everyone to use a cork in their mouth to warm up before coming to rehearsal. Have to dig mine out from *Hay Fever*, but I know it works well to get the mouth muscles working. From Tuesday on we are off-book and the real magic can start to occur. I am exhausted, as we re-ran the toughest scenes for motivation from each character…but it was a high exhaustion. I have to start watching my voice. I'm straining it with this character with her growling and shouting. Bryan warned me to use my diaphragm more, and I will.

6/21: Had a "surprise" rehearsal. Apparently Bryan told us to come every time Big Daddy and Brick only for Act II were listed, and I misunderstood. Fortunately, Suki checked, and all but Gina made it. Big Mama is starting to "flesh out"! Bryan wants a layer of practiced elegance to her, which is a brilliant idea. I'll work on this tomorrow. Also, we're getting together for line drill before and after rehearsal…Suki (Maggie) needs people to run lines with her. Some people are developing a pattern of being late, and it's frustrating for others when we don't get started on time. Ah well, I have to try that much harder to stay on the ball, rather than sink to being lazy. Did well with Act II lines last night. Act III is going to be the killer.

6/22: Bad news: Dr. thinks I might have polyps on my throat. Won't know for sure until July 1. Have to really take it easy on the voice in the meantime, and the growl I had used is out! It pays to be flexible. We did Act II as planned, but then worked on Act III. Bryan cancelled group rehearsals after tomorrow until Monday. I used a less stressful voice, but am

not comfortable with it yet. It's not quite, but darn near starting over again. Also, I'm concentrating on not pushing from the throat, but going back down through the diaphragm, which is better no matter what voice I use. I did add some "studied elegance" to the character, and that seems to work well. The cast is coming together as an ensemble, and reactions are becoming telling about relationships. Still, I'm frustrated about the voice. A restart on a character at this late date is a real challenge, but I'll keep at it. Bryan is setting the show in 1999. This will be easier for costumes, but there is a certain loss of nostalgia and charm from the 50's. Jeff, who plays Gooper, may have a new job…if this happens, Bryan will step into the role. Wow!

6/23: We worked on Act I tonight. We spoke to Bryan of wanting the play to be set in the 1950's. The costumes can be a problem, so we're assembling a set for each era and letting him decide. Act I is an easy line load for me, but tougher character wise, because I have to establish Big Mama's character in a strange light. BM goes after Maggie in a big way about the problems in the marriage and Brick's drinking. I'll keep at it, but felt okay about it tonight. It is one long, long act with just Brick and Maggie for most of it. I watched Matt and Suki, and paid close attention to Bryan's technique with them. Suki (Maggie) still has a tendency to have an explanation when Bryan gives her notes, rather then making sure she understands and just trying to do what she asks. She is improving, and Bryan has worked with her, so knows what to tell her and when. He also has a good idea of when she will come into the character and how to be gentle with her until she reaches that point. His patience is really something to behold. Now comes a four- day break. That's scary, in that we open on July 16th. I'm still working on Act III lines, and realized that by not going over Act I for several days at home, I was very rusty this afternoon before rehearsal. I must do every act every day from now on.

The voice is a little more comfortable. Bryan says "bellow", and I was pretty low into the diaphragm, though my throat still hurts. I'm resting it during the day as much as possible.

6/28: We have been off several days, but moved into Jelkyl today, and ran Act I. It went surprisingly well for the time we had been off. Blocking was adjusted to fit the larger stage. There is more space in some ways, but the bar and the platform are different, and difficult to maneuver. Maggie (Suki) and Brick (Matt) worked with Bryan while we were off, and Suki's character is becoming delightful. She's relaxed, allowing herself to be sinuous and sexy, and yet still has that little girl quality about her. Her pacing is better as well. The relationship between Maggie and Big Mama is becoming warm and genuine, and yet does not seem to conflict with Big Mama's insensitivity in the 1st Act...in fact, it almost makes the words she says to Maggie more painful because they obviously do enjoy and love each other.

6/29: Act II started off very rough and difficult, and I think the adjustments to the stage were more difficult. There is much more movement with a lot of people on stage, and we had to re-do a lot of blocking while remembering lines, character, etc. However, we got there, and it is going to be up to par soon, I think. Bryan let us go pretty early so that we can all go nuts over Act III lines. We haven't done that off book yet, and I suspect it's going to be pretty scary. Jeff (Gooper), John (Big Daddy), Suki (Maggie) and I have, in various configurations, been meeting at Ginghams before rehearsal to run lines. It really makes a big difference. Jeff (Gooper) and I almost always meet, and it is much like a second rehearsal. I like him, because he takes his work seriously. In fairness, the others can't meet with us often because of their work schedules. My work schedule is brutal, but at the same time flexible. I write on the thesis every day and study lines. It sounds so simple, but anyone who has tried to knock out a decent thesis in two months, knows how many hours must go into it. Tonight,

after rehearsal, we went to Charlie's pub and continued working on lines for Act III. Everyone is freaked over this act.

6/30: Ah man, we had a roller-coaster rehearsal tonight. We started, because everyone was so nervous, with a walking line drill. Cynthia was giving Maggie (Suki) way too much information when Suki would call for a line, and Suki got frustrated and a little snappy with her. Not a good idea as Cynthia tends towards the overly sensitive, and perhaps is not premiere stage manager material. Another problem was backstage talking, resulting in people missing entrances and lines. Personal conversations in the midst of any rehearsal, much less this one, are just plain wrong. Those on stage could hear chatting while we were trying to concentrate on stage and it was distracting. Gads! We were frustrated, Bryan was lost as to how to help us, and finally told us to carry our scripts but not look at them. Cynthia decided to give a "work with me" speech. Thank goodness, with our security blankets, we came alive. We felt like we had overcome a mountain. Tomorrow is the Dr. appt. for the voice and a run of the whole show....

7/1: Good news/Bad news from the ENT specialist. Good news is I don't have nodules. The bad news is that I've done some serious damage to my throat over the past year, and am on voice rest every day for the next two weeks. Then I have to back and get a scope. After that, if the damage is starting to reverse (which he could not say for sure would happen, I believe the expressions was 'I hope it will'), I will have to go to a voice therapist and retrain my voice. Apparently, when I did the *Fantasticks* and *Wedding Bandit* back to back, and played men in each play, I whacked out my vocal chords pretty badly. That, combined with smoking, drinking coffee and tea, and the voice strain in this show could destroy my voice. In order to have a voice to use, he warned, I have to do this day rest thing and severely cut back on

smoking, tea, coffee…gads. The choice was to do that or give up the show, and there was no way I was going to do that.

The rehearsal went really well for our first time through the whole show! Paul Stewart (co-producer) was there, and seemed pretty impressed. Act II, says Bryan, "sucked", but Acts I and III were really good. Cynthia was a little nuts that Gina, Jeff, and I played fast and loose with the lines in a fast-paced section of Act III, but we were pretty proud that we had worked on it enough to get all the lines in; albeit not in quite the right order! Bryan, last night, told us to just remember the sequence of what happens, and that's what we did…sort of. Anyway, we are off for several days now, and that will keep me from being tempted to talk. I won't use my voice at all until Sunday night, and then only for a couple of hours. It should make a significant difference. I'm not even answering the phone. It is pretty funny, that with my penchant for constant conversation, I would be the one stuck with the voice rest! I will work on lines a couple of times each day, but have reached the point that I could obsess over them and screw up if I go over them too often now. It's a strange tightrope to walk with lines…acting is an instinctive business, combined with hard work…but if you get the combination out of whack it just doesn't come across well. I am starting to really believe that we have a fine product coming from all of the hard work and talent on and offstage. It's getting exciting.

7/2, 7/3, 7/4: I have been working on lines each day. I just finished the rough draft of Chapter Four on my thesis. It was the character analysis portion, and was so enlightening to me as an actor. It was a fresh reminder of how invaluable Hodge's method is. I had done most of the work on the chapter in shorthand, because I needed it for performing, but putting it in full form really helped me put a voice to what I had been doing in re: Big Mama. I like her more and more. Mostly, I guess, because of her loyalty. And I admire the fact that she

grows into a valuable human being by the end of Act III. Her relationship with Maggie was the hardest to voice, but I know that theirs is a special one, and finally was able to figure out part of the proof for that in the way Big Mama walks when she is talking just to Maggie. She is much more herself when they are alone together, and she is not focusing on Brick or Big Daddy or the part of society matron. She is truly able to connect with Maggie without fear of being rejected. That scene makes Big Mama loveable, if done properly, in the very first act, because they get a glimpse of her not as an appendage to Big Daddy and Brick, but as a woman with real feelings and compassion for another woman. Granted the section of the scene doesn't last long, but I think it is crucial to both Maggie and Big Mama, because it is one moment when they are not performing for those that they need approval from. We have rehearsal tonight.

7/5/99: Okay, hard work pays off. I hate it when cliches come true! Rehearsal went fairly well. The warm-ups were outstanding. Bryan led them and we did part of the "Anderson" technique, I believe. I need to find out more about it. We were raring to go. Nothing beats a good sound warm-up...it is crucial to a good start of a rehearsal or play. I felt so good about Act I with Maggie's and my scene. I finally am clicking into our relationship and Bryan liked it. It was the extra work on the character analysis...felt like the difference between twilight and the mid-day sun. Act III seemed very off, but maybe because I was struggling with a cough. The Dr. helps the throat, but kills me on the cough because I can't take the allergy meds. I love this show, and can't believe the professionalism in this cast. Still, we can use the next twelve days to work hard and be even better...I know you are never truly where you want to be. I need to ease up on lines, or I'll psyche myself out. It's time, after all of the hard work, to relax and let myself act. The roots are planted, the flower is out,

now it's time to nurture it and let it bloom. If I screw around with worrying about it too much, it'll die.

I will go over my chapter on character analysis and my lines, but that's it. I think looking at the character analysis just reinforces the character I'm starting to feel at home with. Bryan reminded us to take time away from everyone and focus on our individual characters before each rehearsal and show now. It made a big difference, and everyone is taking this very seriously. That's where the joy comes in.

7/6: We ran the whole show again. The show is too long, and Bryan is talking about cutting some lines. We started way late because of a photographer. It is important to look good for pictures, but I think there needs to be a balance of time spent on getting ready for pictures and being ready to rehearse. The set was wet, and some of Maggie's (Suki's) costumes were stained -- very frustrating for her I know. Me too, as one of them was mine. The characterizations are coming along well for everyone, now it is a matter of fine-tuning and projecting. There are lines I still can't understand while sitting in the audience. A friend of mine watched the rehearsal for awhile tonight, and was really blown away by Maggie (Suki) and Big Daddy (John.) They are really getting to be fine in their parts, as is everyone else. We spent almost an hour working on props needs and various little difficulties—I get really impatient with that kind of stuff, because everyone has to have a comment in regard to every request.

7/8: Woweeee……I think we're gonna get this monster! Another photographer tonight, and almost an hour before we started rehearsal. That is so frustrating. There are still some skipped lines because of non-attention, but the consensus is that we'll just skip any lines that don't come right away in Act III, because pandemonium is occurring anyway. The voice is worse, and it's so frustrating to have to worry about it while trying to do a character well.

We did Act I and Act III. The time is better on each, and Bryan seems to think that's about as short as we're going to get it. We now have two days off.

7/11: We had technical rehearsal today. It was a cue to cue, and full dress/makeup. We had an hour and a half while the crew worked, so ran lines and looked at our scripts. Patience was the word for the day. Patience between cast members as well as between cast/crew. Nerves are getting pretty frayed as we grow closer to performance, and people have a tendency to snap at each other. I've seen the phenomenon before, but am surprised a bit that it is happening with this cast. However, we went out to eat afterwards, and I think settled everyone back into normalcy again. There is still much to be done on the set. Most of the problems now are technical; the phone needs to be added, the door needs to be fixed, we need more set dressing.

John, (Big Daddy) has been away on a business trip for several days, and so we haven't had a chance to do Act II for quite awhile. That is a little scary for tomorrow night.

7/12: There were a few technical glitches tonight, and the pace was abysmally slow in Act III for a bit. I went up on a line and didn't realize it, so used the old trick when there is silence of throwing out a line that didn't belong in that spot. That is my way of indicating to the rest of the cast that I have no idea where we are. Gooper (Jeff) caught the signal and on we went. This is an excellent sign that we are ready to go on with an audience. In fact, I'm afraid we are getting pat and stale. At least, I know I am. I'm going to study the script thoroughly before the Tuesday dress, and come up with a few new line readings in order to freshen up Big Mama.

7/13: It was an entirely fresh and super show tonight. Almost everyone came up with new things tonight, and it was exciting. Bryan said he had been bored the night before, but was excited that it was "fresh" and "interesting" all over again. Not everything I tried was a

keeper, but there is a section in Act III when I blow up that was starting to sound like a singular emotional note, and I varied that. I tried using some opposites of outward emotion with the same anger underneath, and it really worked. I also finally came up with the feeling and reading for the line, "...where is my *only son.*" We are as ready as we will ever be to open. Niki, our costume fairy, came in and saved our bacon by making new pajamas for Brick, (the others were white-on-white floral and too short), and will find a dress for Big Mama that is a little less trendy. Just looking over lines each day is not enough. Really reading them in the script and envisioning what you are going to do keeps the character fresh and helps you to grow.

There were a few technical glitches with the music not coming on, but we covered pretty well. The fact is, technical snafus will happen during the show, and we need to be prepared to cover for them. Every single one of us forgot our cue to make backstage noise at the end of Act I. My guess is that this will never happen again.

Probably the most exciting phenomenon of the evening, and one that does not always happen within a show, is that we became a true ensemble tonight. People looked at each other, truly listened, and reacted according to what was being said and how it was being said. This makes the show really outstanding to the actors, and most importantly, to the audience.

7/14: This was our final dress rehearsal. We were each a little let down that the magic of the night before didn't occur, but reminded each other that there are nights that will be up to our expectations, and nights that won't be. The audience would have still seen a fine show. The great thing about this cast is that we each want the show to be its very best for every performance.

I was able to really "click" with Doc Baugh (Jim) tonight. He hasn't had many rehearsals and up to now we were a little unsure of our timing with each other. His character,

though small in lines, is 100% in quality. He also helps in the make-up room by doing Big Daddy's makeup. This is another example of everyone coming together to form a true ensemble. Each time, throughout this process something hasn't felt quite right on-stage, every actor has taken the initiative to meet with the others involved in the scene to make sure we are on the same wavelength. No one has waited to hear from the director when we know we can fix a delayed line or entrance. We have each tried new and innovative ways to keep the show fresh, or flesh out each other's characters. When we go out for a bite to eat after rehearsals, the main topic of conversation is always what we did during that night's rehearsal and what we can do better the next night.

We now have an A.S.M. backstage, and it is comforting just to have someone keeping an eye on us back there. It seems silly, knowing we are each highly responsible, but in the end I believe all actors are children and have a vulnerability that responds well to having an "adult" around during the show.

Nikki came up with a fabulous dress that is from the 1950's to wear. It is elegant, but makes me look just dumpy enough to appear as if Big Mama isn't quite comfortable in her expensive clothes. She loaned me some of her personal jewelry that sets the look off just right, and checked everyone's makeup. She also made Brick's (Matt's) cast.

Truly that woman belongs exclusively in the costume shop and the theatre department. I could not have asked for a finer experience in which to complete my M.F.A., and will be proud to go onstage for our opening Friday night.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

7/16: Opening Night. This was the beginning of the culmination of all of our work. Everyone was ready; no one was overly nervous. There was a pervasive feeling that our time

was here. The house was well stocked with friends and relatives, but also a lot of people that just wanted to see a good play—and they saw the best that we had to give. The audience listened. That is probably the best compliment I can give to an audience. They didn't giggle at inappropriate times, they didn't fan themselves or cough from boredom. The response was phenomenal. The cast gave them the best we had to give; we didn't push or rush, or overdo our roles out of nervousness. We did what Bryan had trained us to do—and it was a dream come true. Tennessee Williams would have been proud that we presented his play with such loving care. We were proud of all of our work, were comfortable in the skins of our characters, and reminded the audience and ourselves what fine drama is all about.

The word "ensemble" is over-used, but is as cogent description that I can use for what we have become. Each of us listens to the other and responds accordingly. We feed off of each other's emotions and react within the confines of our characters. This is a living, breathing piece of art—a rarity not only on college campuses, but anywhere on the non-professional theatre scene.

The challenge, of course, is not to rest on our roses, but to give just as fine an effort on Saturday night. The house is supposed to be a little smaller, (we had about 100 tonight), and absent most of the husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers that attended this evening. I believe that if we each keep faith in the work we have done and <u>think</u>, we will have no problems. It is a lousy phenomenon that every cast goes through to let down on the second night. Most of us have had enough experience to know this, and will, I trust, guard assiduously against it.

7/17: There was no second night slump. In fact, generally speaking, the show was a better and different one than opening night. Bryan challenged us to keep growing and to make the show fresh and better.

The first act, according to Suki (Maggie) "sucked", but she has had a pretty insular view of the show for quite awhile. I listened from backstage and thought the pacing was good for the act. I do know that Acts II and III were dynamite, with an even closer ensemble effort than the night before. It is almost as if we climb into these characters and become them for awhile.

The audience was about twenty less than the night before, with less family in the audience, so there was more objective reaction of the play and the performance. They started out pretty quiet, but when Gina (Mae) came on, she kicked up the energy level and the audience perked up. They were having fun with Big Mama's character as well. We established our characters enough in Act I that the audience was really with us throughout the rest of the play.

A light bulb blew out in the booth, and there were sparks and smoke. Jeff (Gooper) went up and checked out the problem during intermission, however, and said not to worry. Indeed, the lights were fine for the rest of the show. Cynthia (stage manager) is not highly experienced with lights and was naturally concerned until Jeff reassured her.

We did not realize that the critic from the *RFT* was in the house, which was good. I truly believe that a performance becomes less of an ensemble and more of a "star" show for a critic, when the performers know that he/she is in the audience. I do believe however, that he saw the best that we had to give tonight, and we can be proud of our play.

There are inherent weaknesses in any play that we tend to overlook, as we are so close to the play. This critic may well point those out, but we have to deal with whatever he says and go on, as the review will come out before the start of the second weekend. To take any critique too seriously is a death knell; whether the review is positive or negative we need to stay

with what we have been taught and trust the director, each other, and ourselves. Judging from the audience reaction we have a truly fine play.

7/18: Today was a matinee. We were expecting about one hundred and fifty people, but only sixty or so came. Apparently, about one hundred tickets were given away to a nursing home and they decided not to come to the show. No matter, the audience was supportive.

This was Maggie's (Suki's) best performance to-date. She was sinuous, multi-faceted, and on top of her lines. Her diction was outstanding, and her voice ran the gamut of levels and emotions. For a Sunday matinee, everyone had a lot of energy and did their level best to meet or exceed the quality of the Saturday night performance. That, however, is always somehow difficult to do on a Sunday afternoon. I don't know if it's the time of day, the generally more genteel mood of the audience, or just a Sunday curse. It has just always been that way.

I had a difficult time with getting my words out, and stumbled occasionally on my tongue. Big Daddy (John) forgot to give me the cake during Act II. That was easy to fix, as I just changed my final exit to a cross and grabbed the cake to use as part of the exit line. We all had a great warm-up and no one stayed out too late after Saturday's show, so we had a high energy level. Gooper (Jeff) transposed his lines to me in Act I, and Doc Baugh (Jim) was a little late on a couple of lines--not enough for the audience to notice, but our timing was a little off. Despite these normal glitches, that are liable to happen in any given performance, I believe the audience responded enthusiastically, and we have nothing to be ashamed of.

The last several weeks of rehearsing and the first week of performing have been both a learning experience of note, and a blessing.

I learned that actors come to their characters at different times, and to be patient. I learned to focus on the other actors, as well as my own part off-stage as well as during

rehearsals and performances. The truth is, it is easy to become insular within one's own performance and not realize that everyone else in the cast has similar insecurities and concerns. To truly become an ensemble it is necessary to give and take in the dressing room as well as on the stage. For example, a simple: "You are really doing a great job tonight," or "I was listening back-stage and I loved that scene," or "Did you get some rest last night?" goes a long way towards building trust and camaraderie. These must be genuine expressions, given from the heart; the result is that trust is built which carries not only through the performances, but also an added bonus of friendship occurs.

No matter how talented or physically appealing an actor may be, he/she is not in an isolated situation. No one person on stage is the "star." When an actor finishes his/her major part in the play, the responsibility to continue to concentrate and support the other actors still remains. Even an actor that has only a few lines in a scene has an incumbent duty to be aware and in character for the others. One never knows when the audience is looking at a particular actor on the stage, whether that actor is vocally involved in the scene or not.

Self-focus is an important tool in preparing for a performance. But ensemble effort before and after that focus is required to create the unique and joyous experience that we have attained in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* The joy is not in creating a singularly fine performance by a single actor, but rather from creating an entire piece worthy of an audience's attention.

In a very real sense, this is the theme of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Tennessee Williams' major goal in this play is to illustrate the difficulty of real communication and honesty between people.

We, as a cast, went a long way towards developing that communication and trust with each other off-stage. The resulting effect was an extraordinary dynamic on-stage.

I would like to say that there was one hundred percent participation in this effort; this would not be the truth. The gift given by anyone that did not contribute to the effort of supporting and communicating to the others in the process, however, was a glaring illustration of the need to care for each member of the cast and crew. The absence by a few of full participation in the ensemble effort pointed out the necessity to be respectful and caring for every member of the team. If everyone had been completely communicative and supportive, I would, perhaps, never have been able to pinpoint the need to reach out and make an effort to be an active member of the ensemble. This is the lesson I will carry forward in my teaching, acting, and communications, throughout the rest of my career. I know that I am grateful to Tennessee Williams for creating this truly fine piece of art that will carry well through the millenium for actors and audiences to appreciate and learn the value of honesty, caring, trust, and communication. I am proud to name Big Mama on my resume as my M.F.A. thesis role.

I would like to think that Tennessee would have been proud of his work that is being illustrated so beautifully by this cast/crew/and director on the Lindenwood University stage.

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The following appendix is a complete listing of Tennessee Williams' published works.

THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

(Susquehana University)

PLAYS

Baby Doll & Tiger Tail

Camino Real

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Clothes for a Summer Hotel

Dragon Country

The Glass Menagerie

A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur

The Read Devil Battery Sign

Small Craft Warnings

Stopped Rocking and Other Screenplays

A Streetcar named Desire

Sweet Bird of Youth

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME I

Battle of Angels, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Glass Menagerie

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME II

The Eccentricities of a Nightingale

Summer and Smoke

The Rose Tattoo

Camino Real

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME III

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME IV

Sweet Bird of Youth, Period of Adjustment, The Night of the Iguana

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME V

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Her Anymore

Small Craft Warnings

The Two-Character Play

Kingdom of Earth

(*The Seven Descendents of Myrtle*)

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME VI

27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other Short Plays

THE THEATRE OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, VOLUME VII

In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel and Other Plays

The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, VOLUME VIII

Vieux Carre, A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur, Clothes for a Summer Hotel, The Red Devil Battery Sign

27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other Plays

The Two-Character Play

Vieux Carre

POETRY

Androgyne, Mon Amour

In the Winter of Cities

PROSE

Collected Stories

Hard Candy and Other Stories

One Arm and Other Stories

The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone

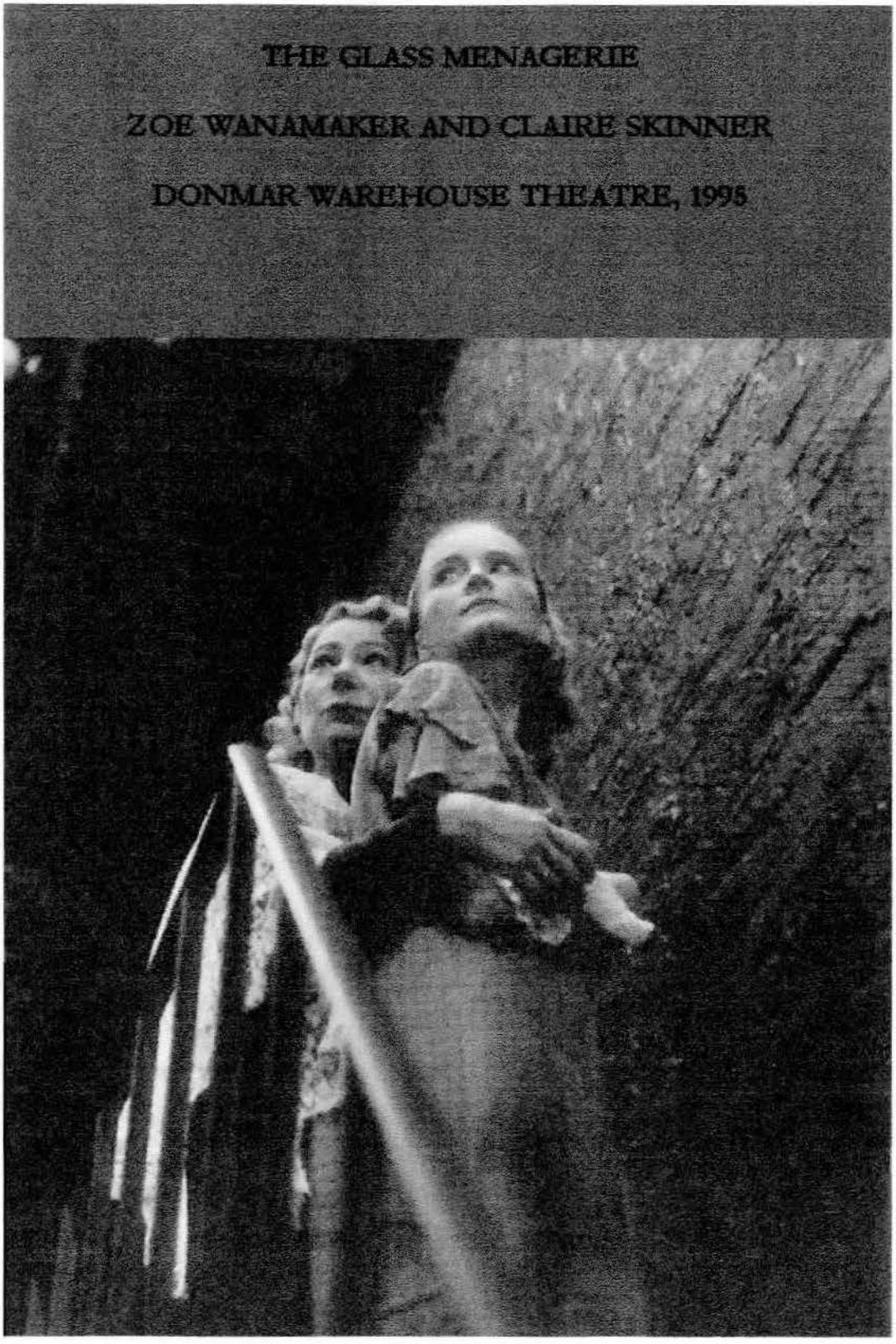
Where I Live: Selected Essays

The following pictures are of theatrical productions from Tennessee Williams':

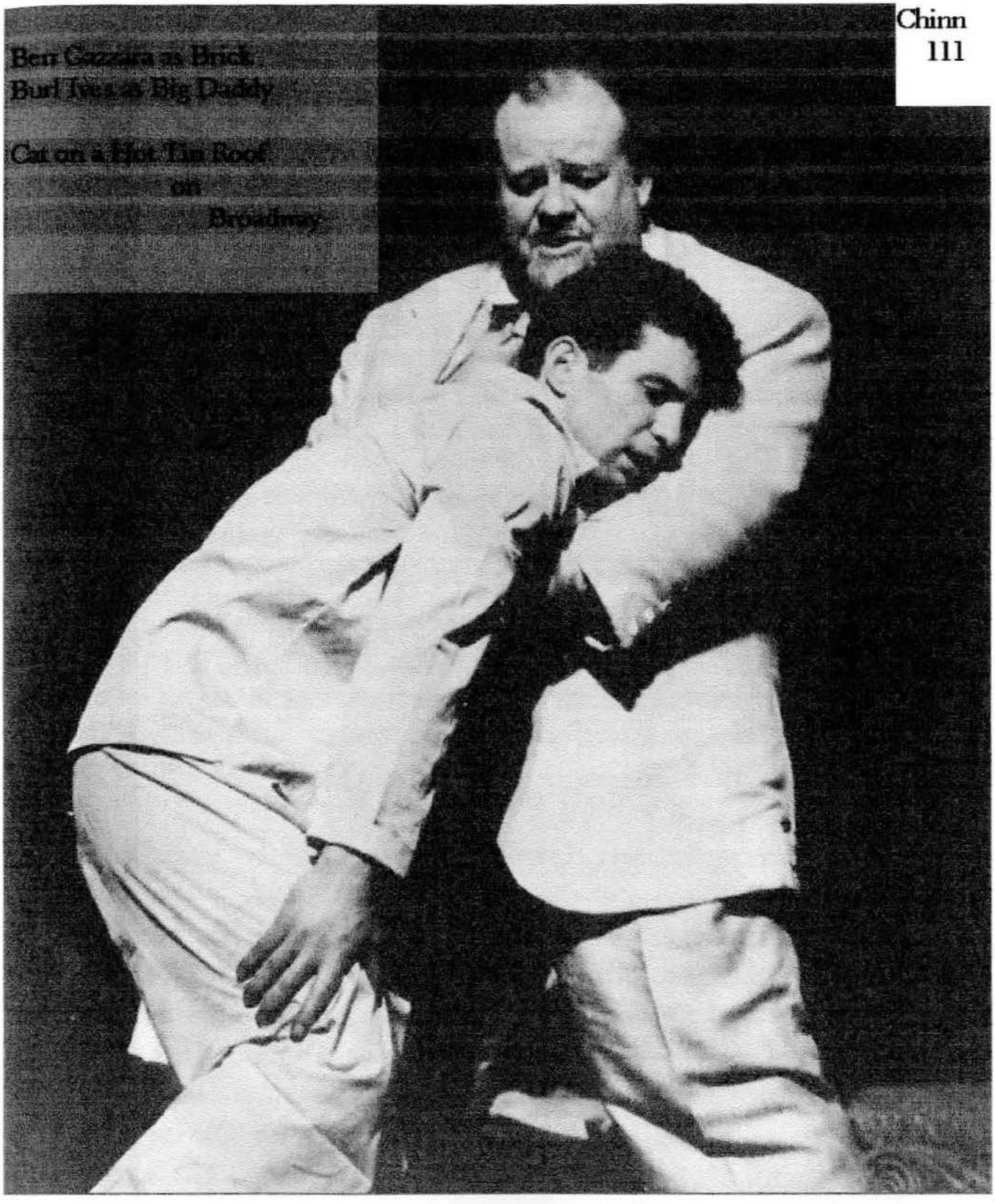
The Glass Menagerie

A Streetcar Named Desire

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof


THE GLASS MENAGERIE
ZOE WANAMAKER AND CLAIRE SKINNER
DONMAR WAREHOUSE THEATRE, 1995

Karl Malden as Mitch
Jessica Tandy as Blanche
A Streetcar Named Desire on Broadway



Ben Gazzara as Brick
Burl Ives as Big Daddy

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
on
Broadway

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS WITH HIS MOTHER AFTER A LONG CHAT

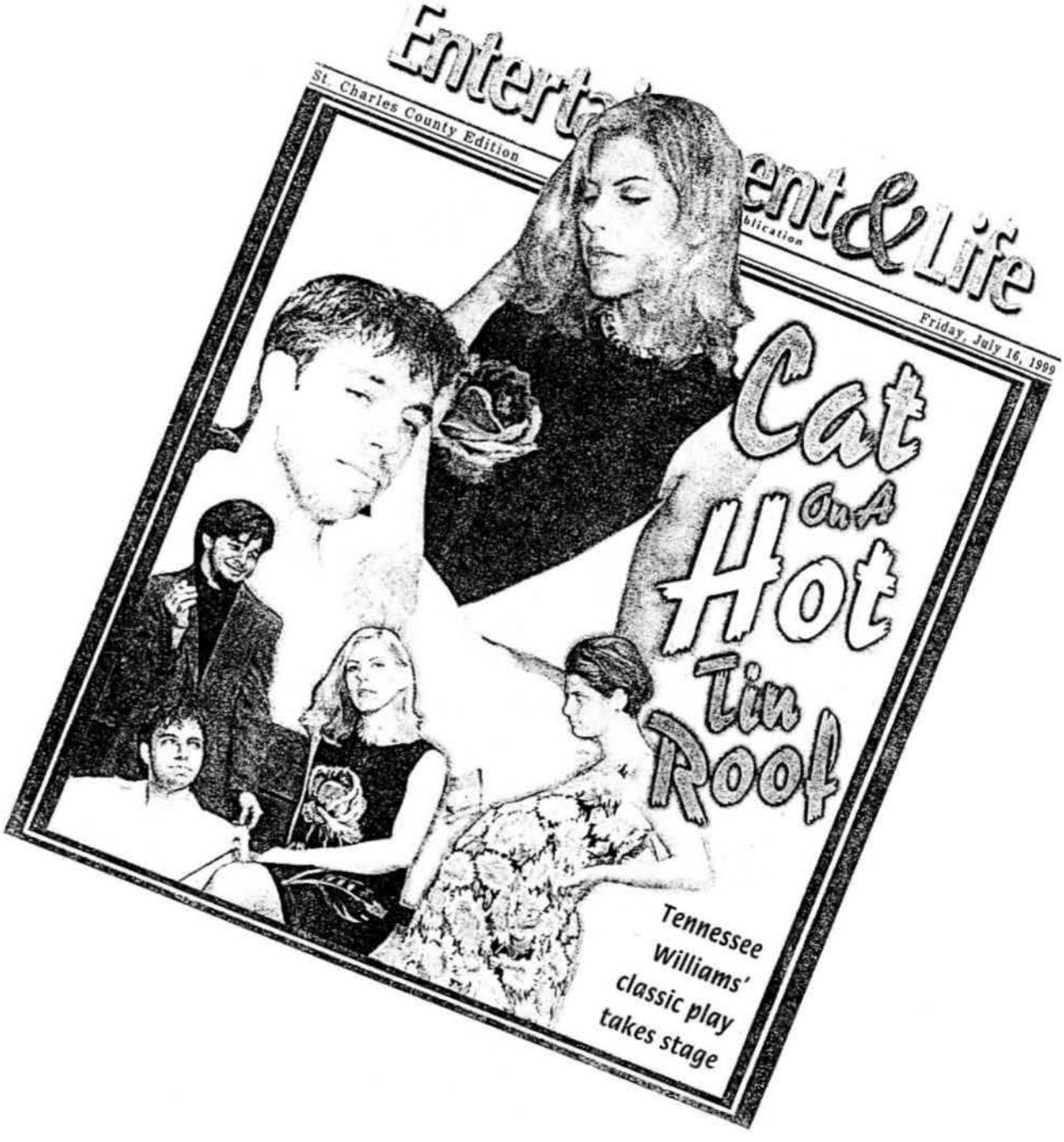
The following appendix is a variety of advertising and publicity

for the

Lindenwood University

production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*


Lindenwood University Theatre Department and
St. Charles Repertory Theatre Company
CAT
ON A HOT
TIN ROOF
BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
Presented at Jelkyl Theatre, Lindenwood
University, St. Charles, MO.
JULY 16, 17, 18, 23,
24, 25, 30, 31, &
AUGUST 1
Fridays at 8:00pm
Saturdays at 8:00pm
Sundays at 2:00pm
For Tickets and
Information call
Paul Stuart at
314-928-1883
or the Lindenwood
University Theatre
Office at 314-949-4966
Wood University and the St. Charles Repertory Theatre
proudly present
PRIZE winning play by Tennessee Williams
CAT
ON A
HOT
TIN ROOF
Produced in cooperation with Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
Lindenwood University's Jelkyl Theatre (located in Roemer Hall)
July 16, 17, 23, 24, 30, 31 at 8:00 p.m.
&
July 18, 25, and August 1 at 2:00 p.m.
Ticket Price: $10 - General Admission
$5 - Students, Seniors, and Groups (10 +)
For More Information Please Call - 928-1883
* Does contain some adult situations and language *


Entertainment&Life
St. Charles County Edition
Friday, July 16, 1999
Cat On A Hot Tin Roof
Tennessee Williams' classic play takes stage

Chinn 116

Maggie the Cat stalks theater stage

Lindenwood hosts Tennessee Williams' prize-winning play

By Ronnie Roy
Staff writer

The St. Charles Repertory Theatre and Lindenwood College continue their summer theater series with Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer-Prize winning drama, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

"I think it's rather bold that we're doing this. Most theaters are afraid to offer serious plays over the summer," said Bryan Reeder, director of Lindenwood's theater department and director of the play.

"We're doing it because we're just musicaled out all over the place. We just did 'Sound of Music' and it was received well, so we want to see if audiences want something different," Reeder said. "At Lindenwood, the lesser-known shows are often the best attended."

"It's a heavy and hard-hitting play," added Paul Stuart, theater company executive director. "We wanted the greatest plays of each genre for this season, and ended up with "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" as our serious drama."

Written in 1955, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" is set in a Southern plantation house, where the Pollitt family has gathered for the 65th birthday party of "Big Daddy." The play examines the personal turmoil surrounding the family.

The play contains mature situations and adult language and is not intended for children.

"It's a riveting play that examines personal relationships between imperfect people," Stuart said. "People work through their difficulties and grow and change in the process."

"On television, everyone is witty, beautiful and intelligent," Stuart said. "In a Tennessee Williams play, people are just people.";

"It's very moving, very poetic and very funny, too — something I did not realize until we started work on it. Tennessee Williams is truly a unique voice in American theater," Reeder said.

He said the play is about honesty, lying and the difficulty of communicating. "It's about how people hide behind their words and don't say what they actually mean."

The cast includes Susan Lammers as Maggie, better known as Maggie the Cat; Matt Kahler as her husband, Brick; Jeanne Chinn as Big Mama; Jeff Coriveau as Gooper; Samantha Greene as Dixie; Jim Hurley as Doctor Braugh; Joshua Rowan as Rev. Tooker; Gina M. Shannon as Mae and John Vullo as Big Daddy.

"The cast is absolutely terrific," Reeder said. "You couldn't ask for a better cast. It's an ensemble cast, and they're all strong. They hold their own on stage."

Cynthia Harper serves as stage manager with set design by Lo-Kuo Hao and lighting design by Hsin-Chih Cheng.

"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" will be performed at 8 p.m. on July 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 and 31 and at 2 p.m. on July 18 and 25 and Aug. 1. All performances will be in Jelkyl Theatre in Roemer Hall at Lindenwood University, 209 S. Kingshighway in St. Charles.

Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for students, seniors and groups of 10 or more. For more information, call Stuart at 928-1883.

Roy Sykes photo

Susan Lammers and Matt Kahler in a scene from the St. Charles Repertory Theatre Company's production of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," opening tonight in Jelkyl Theatre in Roemer Hall on the campus of Lindenwood University.

On the cover

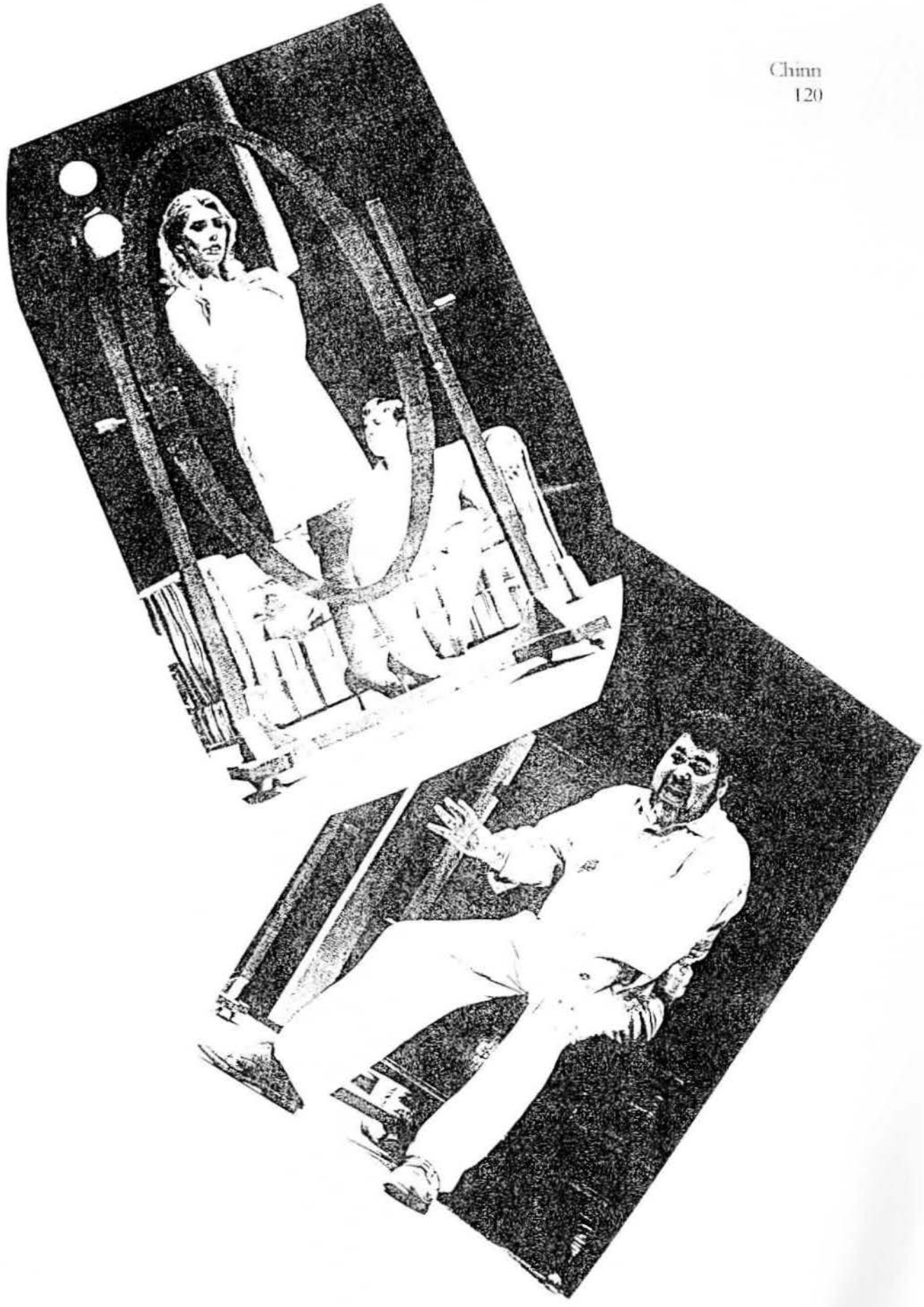
Susan Lammers, Matt Kahler, Joshua Rowan and Gina Shannon in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." For ticket information, call 928-1883.

The following appendix includes some of the production photos

for the

Lindenwood University

production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*



The following appendix is a partial program

for the

Lindenwood University

production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

Lindenwood University Theatre Department

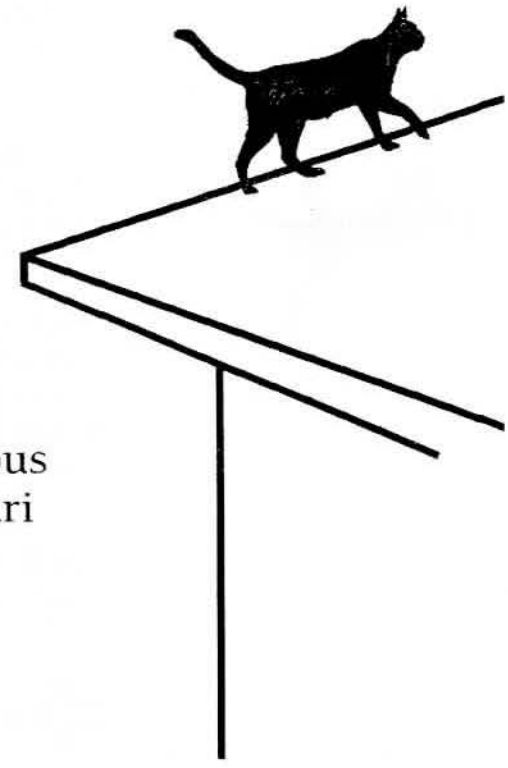
in partnership with

St. Charles Repertory Theatre Company

PRESENTS

Tennessee Williams'

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof



July 16-18, 23-25,
30,31, & August 1

Jelkyl Theatre,
Lindenwood Campus
St. Charles, Missouri

WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

Jeanne E. Chinn
Playing the part of Big Mama is Jeanne's final step in earning her Master of Fine Arts at Lindenwood. Her plans are to teach on the University level. In her two years at Lindenwood, Jeanne has appeared in: "Hay Fever," "Macbeth," "California Suite," "The Fantasticks," "The Wedding Bandit," and "Uncle Sam." She has also directed "The "American Dream." "As I close out a challenging, exciting, and rewarding two years, I want to thank Bryan Reeder for his mentoring and his genius as a teacher/director, Niki Juncker for sharing her endless wealth of knowledge, and my husband, who not only is footing the bill for this mid-life odyssey, but has patiently and loving held down the fort so I could follow my dream."

JEFF CORRIVEAU
Jeff is glad to be back on the Jelkyl stage since graduating with his M.F.A. in Directing from Lindenwood University. For the last three years Jeff has been teaching and directing at Mineral Area College and is looking forward to moving and stepping back into professional theatre. Past acting experience includes "Equus," "A Christmas Carol," and "Enter A Free Man." While at Lindenwood he directed "The Belle of Amherst," "A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story," and his favorite "The Boys Next Door."

SAMANTHA GREENE
Samantha is eight years old and will be a third grader this fall. "Cat" is her third stage experience. She has appeared in "Playing for Time," and "Cinderella." She would like to thank her Mommy and Daddy.

JIM HURLEY
Jim is a second year graduate student working towards his M.A. in Theatre. In addition to graduating with a BFA in Theatre at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia, Jim has had special training at The H. B. Studio in New York and The Goodman Theatre in Chicago. His credits include "Two by Two," "And a Nightingale Sang," "Loot," "My Fair Lady," and "The Dresser."

MATT KAHLER
Matt is a senior at Lindenwood University. Matt has appeared in "The Zoo Story," "The Boys Next Door," and "The Mousetrap." He would like to

thank Mom, Dad, Emily, Bryan, Val, Josh, and Baron. "Wyatt, I stand corrected. You're an oak."

SUSAN M. LAMMERS
Susan is delighted to return to the Jelkyl Stage in her dream role of Maggie the Cat. Previous roles include: Lucille in "The Rehearsal"and the third witch in "Macbeth." Her directing credits include: "The Monkey's Paw," "Miss Julie," "The Mousetrap," and "Hay Fever."

JOSHUA ROWAN
Josh is a junior theatre major at Lindenwood University. His acting credits include "The Zoo Story," "Hay Fever," and "The Mousetrap." Josh is a nice guy. "Yeah, I'm an oak alright."

GINA M. SHANNON
Gina is a junior at Lindenwood University. She has participated in not only Lindenwood productions, but also productions at the St. Charles County Community College. She has had a great time working with the cast and crew and she would like to thank her family and friends for all their support.

JOHN VULLO
John is pleased to be playing the part of Big Daddy. John is a first year graduate student at Lindenwood University, and he is working toward his M.A. degree in Theatre. John is a board member of the St. Charles Theatre Company where he feels fortunate enough to have performed many wonderful roles, including Tito in "Lend Me a Tenor," Lenny in "Of Mice and Men," and Henry II in "The Lion in Winter." Recently you may have seen John as King Francois I at the St. Louis Renaissance Fair in Wentzville. His directing credits including "Harvey," "Blithe Spirit," "Godspell," "Guys and Dolls," and "Born Yesterday." John would like to thank his wife and children who are allowing him the time to pursue his dreams.

Cast

Margaret. . . . . .Susan M. Lammers

Brick. . . . . .Matt Kahler

Mae, sometimes called Sister Woman. . . . . Gina Shannon

Big Mama. . . . . .Jeanne E. Chinn

Dixie. . . . . Samantha Greene

Big Daddy. . . . . John Vullo

Rev. Tooker. . . . . Joshua Rowan

Gooper, sometimes called Brother Man. . . . . Jeff Corriveau

Doctor Baugh. . . . . Jim Hurley

TIME: Now

Place: Margaret & Brick's bedroom in the Pollitt House which rests on twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the Valley Nile.

There will be two 10-minute intermissions

INTERPRETERS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED *Friday, July 23rd*