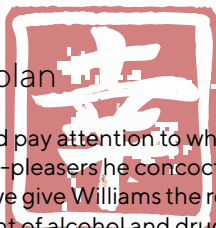


Introduction by David Kaplan



When will we stop paying attention to Tennessee Williams' life and pay attention to what he wrote? When will we stop comparing his wilfully disruptive plays to crowd-pleasers he concocted from The Glass Menagerie (1945) to Night of the Iguana (1961)? When can we give Williams the respect owed him as a human being, unqualified by his sexuality, or his enjoyment of alcohol and drugs, or his lack of prescience for this week's political cause or niceties?

Could we start with this production? Let's pay attention to the actor's unfinished sentences. Connect to the Japanese idea that the reader completes the meaning of a haiku. The Japanese setting isn't arbitrary. Mark, the painter this Bar revolves around, is a displaced Western artist. Western ideas of drama are also being displaced. In 1957, cruising a street in Manhattan, Williams met Yukio Mishima, the seminal Japanese novelist and playwright. Their subsequent conversations and Williams's trip to Tokyo in 1959 to visit Mishima prompted the American master of poetic realism to consider the flamboyant Kabuki, the austere Noh – and it seems the avant-garde Gutai performance artists, who Mark's dealer Leonard describes in Bar – as alternative models with which to express himself.

The break after Iguana with what Williams' audiences and critics expected wasn't easy. When Mark cries "I feel as if I were crossing the frontier of a country I have no permission to enter, but I enter, this, this! I tell you, it terrifies me!" yes, Mr. Williams was talking about himself. Let's imagine he was also thinking about us, now, fifty years later, we who understand that our world has changed and we fear what it has become. The sexual exploits of Mark's fictional wife, Miriam, in the Hamptons – one of Manhattan's summer seaside playgrounds – echo the adventures of Jackson Pollack's gauche mistress, Ruth Kligman. Yet, Mark's collapse and Miriam's bestial animosity towards rule-breaking art, is not biographical, but the personification of a myth. Miriam's the lusty opponent in many of Williams's plays to any poet, painter, or fabulist – anyone at all – who conflates their life with their art, and in so doing, sacrifices their life, like Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer or Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire. Miriam's truth, like Stanley Kowalski's, is body wisdom, opposed to artifice.

In 1957, as Williams finished *Suddenly Last Summer* – in the Hamptons – he was drafting an earlier painter play, *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, set in a Tokyo hotel room. In 1969, he moved the doomed artist downstairs into the hotel bar, getting down to theatrical essence in duels of story-telling, inspired by what he'd learned about Noh Theater from Mishima. In "Bar" the late 1960s resounds in masterful staccato rhythms. Enjoy them for what they are: cracks in the lilt of Williams' earlier dialog, like a hesitation waltz.

Williams' words and stagecraft were derided for what they weren't when Bar premiered off-Broadway at the Eastside Playhouse on May 11, 1969. A revival waited until 1983, three months after Williams died, when South African born actress, Angelique Rokas, performed Miriam in "Bar" with her Internationalist Theatre at London's New End Theatre. In New York, in 2007, the play was revived by the White Horse Theater Company, directed by Cyndy Marion. In 2012, Charles Schick as Mark and Regina Bartkoff as Miriam played 292 Theatre on Manhattan's Lower East Side. 2016 saw two productions of the play being produced, one in Provincetown at the annual Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival directed by Everett Quinton and one in London, starring Linda Marlowe directed by Robert Chevara. Despite few opportunities to see live performances, the play has its critical advocates, among them Allean Hale (1914–2015) who wrote of Williams's work "each new experiment breaks former rules, refuses to fit into previous categories, and demands its own interpretation." This Abrahamse & Meyer production allows Bar to gather more admirers.

David Kaplan is a highly respected theatre director and author. He is the curator of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival in the USA and a leading exponent on the work of Tennessee Williams, he has directed plays from the Williams repertory across the world. In 2008 Kaplan directed & designed the world premier production of Williams' *The Day on Which a Man Dies*. Kaplan is author of the book *Tennessee Williams in Provincetown, TENN Years: Tennessee Williams on Stage* and editor of *Tenn at One Hundred: The Reputation of Tennessee Williams*.

MENU

Pan roasted Abalobi fish, fish dumplings,
Asian greens, lemongrass and ginger broth
Sesfikile Chenin blanc / Roussanne 2018

Blackened miso chicken, steamed rice,
shredded vegetables, edamame,
blood orange teriyaki
Koni Shiraz

Forrest berry black tea panacotta,
black sesame frozen yoghurt, yuzu compressed
winter melon, sour meringue.
Guava Sake and yuzu sours

Tennessee Williams

IN THE BAR OF A TOKYO HOTEL

*Directed by Fred Abrahamse
Designed by Marcel Meyer*

Vineyard Hotel, Newlands

12, 13, 19, 20, 26, 27 July 2019
2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17 August 2019

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"How admirable,

He who thinks not, 'Life is fleeting,'

When he sees the lightning!" – BASHO

"A world of grief and pain:
Flowers bloom;
Even then..." – ISSA

DEATH SONG:
"If they ask for me
Say: he had some business
In another world" – SOKAN

"I love hotels. Room service in them and bars. I choose my
choice."
– Miriam In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel

50 years after its world premiere, Tennessee Williams' haunting, poetic 1969 play receives its South African premiere in this immersive staging at the Vineyard Hotel.

In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel is a radical re-working of Williams' earlier 1959 modern Noh play *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, which Abrahamse & Meyer Productions staged to huge critical acclaim in the USA in 2015 and at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2016.

Williams places the action in late 1960s Japan, where Mark, a successful American painter, has holed up in his Tokyo hotel room creating increasingly incomprehensible work. Mark's wife, Miriam, fearful that he will ruin his reputation, and her standard of living, has summoned Leonard, Mark's New York agent, for help. Bored while she waits in the hotel bar for Leonard to arrive, Miriam flirts aggressively with the young Japanese barman.

“When I looked in your room and saw you crawling naked over a huge nailed-down canvas, I thought, ‘My God, it’s time for the.’”
– Miriam In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel.



Production image from *The Day on Which A Man Dies*.
Photo by Ride Hamilton.

“In chaste hearts, uninfluenced by the power of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower that breaths on earth, the air of paradise.” -- Michelangelo (16th c. Italian sculptor, painter, architect and poet) translated by Wordsworth

An Oriental Device with Occidental Variations

Leading Tennessee Williams scholar, Allean Hale, has written extensively about the Asian influences in Tennessee Williams’ plays subsequent to him meeting and befriending prolific Japanese author and playwright, Yukio Mishima in 1957. This meeting and friendship had a profound impact on Tennessee Williams both as a man and as an artist.

Mishima and Williams had much in common: both men were committed to their work above everything else, both had distant, aggressive fathers and overprotective mothers, both were gay (in spite of their respective cultures oppressive attitudes toward homosexuality) and both men drew deeply on their personal lives, loves and desires as inspiration for their work.

Prior to visiting Mishima in Japan in 1959 Williams read Mishima’s Five Modern Noh Plays. In Japan the two writers attended several Noh and Kabuki performances and on his return journey, Williams embarked on writing what he would refer to as “an occidental Noh Play”, *The Day on Which A Man Dies* [1960], which he dedicated to Mishima, “in token of long friendship, and much admiration.”

Along with *The Night of the Iguana* [1961] and *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore* [1963], *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* [1969] was the last in this series of “occidental Noh plays” written by Williams in the decade spanning 1959 – 1969.

Noh Theatre

Noh, a highly stylized genre of classical Japanese theatre, is a drama of soliloquy and reminiscence, with no action or development of conflict as with traditional Western drama. The cast of a Noh play rarely extends beyond six characters. In his introduction to Japanese Noh Dramas Royall Tyler writes that in Noh “one Buddhist issue is often central: attachment, or clinging, to the objects of sense and desire, and the need to renounce this clinging. Since Buddhism teaches that this clinging is a grievous error. In many plays the central character is a spirit still clinging to some aspect of its earthly life and eager to renounce this clinging.” Yūgen, in Chinese philosophical texts means “dim, deep, mysterious” and Noh is regarded as theatre of yūgen. In relation to Noh, yūgen is said to mean “a profound, mysterious sense of the beauty of the universe...and the sad beauty of human suffering.”

Reflections on Noh Theatre:

“Noh is the very essence of Japanese entertainment: it requires actors to remain still when they move, that gestures made visible relate to an inner immobility, and that the absence of gesture indicates inner turmoil.” ICHIKAWA ENNOSUKE III [Famous Kabuki Actor]

“Noh developed into an essentially symbolic theatre, where both the texts of the plays and the gestures of the actors were intended to suggest unspoked, indefinable realities. The world of the dead was perhaps uniquely suited to the peculiarly remote, symbolic nature of Noh, and the separation between life and death, the dead and the living, has never been more touchingly depicted than in Noh.” – DONALD KEENE [American born Japanese Scholar & Translator]

“At the back of the stage, a wooden wall called Kagami-ita (Mirror wall) harbours the divinity: an aged pine tree painted on this wall symbolized the residence of the Kami. The stage represents the world of the present, and the backstage the world of the dead.” – ARATA ISOZAKI [Leading Japanese architect]

“In Noh theatre, the mask most laden with meaning is that of the young woman. It symbolises Japanese theatre by itself. Because it is completely ambiguous, it is seen as its most faithful expression. The ambiguous smile of the Noh woman is therefore connected to the idea of sin and redemption in Zen. It is the final state of all Japanese smiles.” – DOMINIQUE BUISSON [Professor in visual arts and author on Japanese Aesthetics]

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS CHRONOLOGY

1911	Born Thomas Lanier Williams III March 26 in Columbus, Mississippi	1963	<i>The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore</i> opens on Broadway
1918	The Williams family moves to St. Louis	1964	Film version of <i>The Night of the Iguana</i> released
1939	<i>A Field of Blue Children</i> (short story) Published under his new name: Tennessee Williams Receives \$100 award from Group Theatre for <i>American Blues</i> , a collection of plays	1967	<i>The Two Character Play</i> opens in London
1940	Completes <i>Battle of Angels</i>	1968	<i>Kingdom of Earth</i> opens on Broadway as <i>The Seven Descents of Myrtle</i> Film of <i>Milk Train</i> released under the title <i>Boom!</i>
1943	Lobotomy performed on his sister Rose		
1944	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i> opens in Chicago	1969	<i>In the Bar of A Tokyo Hotel</i> opens Off-Broadway Film version of <i>Kingdom</i> released under the title <i>The Last of the Mobile Hot Shots</i>
1945	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i> opens on Broadway Winner of the Drama Critics Award		<i>Small Craft Warnings</i> opens Off-Broadway
1947	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> opens on Broadway Drama Critics Award & Pulitzer Prize	1972	
1948	<i>Summer & Smoke</i> opens on Broadway	1973	<i>Outcry</i> , revised version of <i>The Two Character Play</i> opens on Broadway
1949	<i>One Arm and Other Stories</i> published <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> opens in London	1975	<i>Moise and the World of Reason</i> (novel) and his <i>Memoirs</i> published
1950	<i>The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone</i> (novel) published	1976	<i>Red Devil Battery Sign</i> staged in Boston
1951	<i>The Rose Tattoo</i> opens on Broadway Tony Award Best Play Film version of <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> released	1977	<i>Vieux Carrè</i> opens on Broadway
		1979	<i>A Lovely Sunday for Creve Couer</i> opens Off-Broadway
1953	<i>Camino Real</i> opens on Broadway	1980	<i>Will Mr Merriweather Return from Memphis?</i> opens in Key West, Florida
1955	<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> opens on Broadway Drama Critics Award & Pulitzer Prize Film version of <i>The Rose Tattoo</i> released		<i>Clothes for a Summer Hotel</i> opens on Broadway
1956	His film <i>Baby Doll</i> released	1981	<i>Something Cloudy, Something Clear</i> opens Off-Broadway
1957	<i>Orpheus Descending</i> opens on Broadway	1982	<i>A House Not Meant to Stand</i> opens in Chicago
1958	<i>Suddenly Last Summer</i> opens Off-Broadway Film version <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> released	1983	23 February: Dies in New York City
1959	<i>Sweet Bird of Youth</i> opens on Broadway Film version <i>Suddenly, Last Summer</i> released	1996	<i>The Notebook of Trigorin</i> opens in Cincinnati
1960	<i>Period of Adjustment</i> opens on Broadway	1998	<i>Not About Nightingales</i> has its world premiere at The Royal National Theatre in London
1961	<i>The Night of the Iguana</i> opens on Broadway Film versions of <i>Summer and Smoke</i> and <i>The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone</i> released	1999	<i>Spring Storm</i> world premiere in Austin, Texas
		2011	Tennessee Williams centenary celebrated <i>One Arm</i> opens Off-Broadway
1962	Film versions of <i>Sweet Bird of Youth</i> and <i>Period of Adjustment</i> released	2012	<i>In Masks Outrages and Austere</i> opens Off-Broadway



“ – There’s an edge, a limit to the circle of light. The circle is narrow. And protective. We have to stay inside. It is our existence and our protection. The protection of our existence.”

