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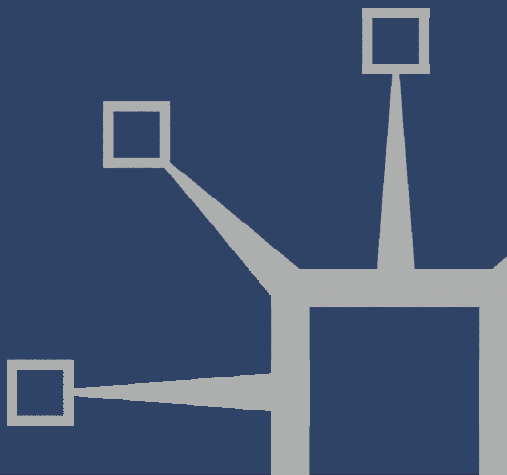
Gentlemen Callers

Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Broadway Drama

Michael Paller



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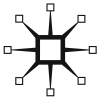

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Contents

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In memory of Bradley Ball
1960–1995

and
for Steven

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I discovered Eric Bentley's books just after graduating from college and read them as quickly as I could buy them. I aspired to the clarity of their expression and the audaciousness with which they stood conventional wisdom on its head. I still do. So it is with much gratitude that I thank him for his friendship and for the shrewd comments he made on the chapters of the manuscript that he read, and also for all of those Saturday night dinners.

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When I started writing this book, my sister, Francie Newfield, gave me a set of *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* as a fortieth birthday present. A decade later, I have something to show for it. My first awareness of theatre, it seems, came when I hurled a block at her head because she and not her three-year-old brother was accompanying our parents to the road company of *My Fair Lady* when it visited Cleveland in 1958. However, Betty Rose and Orrie Paller made up for this lapse hundreds of times over by feeding our appetites for all the arts, and especially for reading. What greater gift can parents give their children than new ways of experiencing and thinking about the world?

Finally, two men. Bradley Ball was there when this book had its first incarnation as my Master's Thesis. He died of complications from AIDS in January 1995 at the age of 34, shortly after my graduation from Columbia and his own from Fordham. Theatre, politics, and gay rights activism were among his passions and some of him, I hope, is in this book. In 1999 I met Steven Melvin. The stability of his love (not to mention his editorial expertise) gave me the strength to finish what I started—but that's just the beginning of what he means to me.

New York City
September 2004

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Note on quotations: Tennessee Williams was very free and idiosyncratic in his use of ellipses. To distinguish his from mine, the latter appear in brackets.

GENTLEMEN CALLERS

Introduction

In 1949, when the esteemed critic and director Harold Clurman approached several publishers with the idea of writing a biography of Eugene O'Neill, one dismissed him with, "Who cares about him today?" Had it not been for José Quintero's productions of *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in 1956, we might still not care about him. It is a truism that an American writer's reputation often reaches its nadir near or at the time of his death. Herman Melville is only the most extreme example; F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway were also considered old-hat when they died, if they were considered at all.[1]

Tennessee Williams suffered a similar fate, all the worse because critics didn't wait until he was dead to demand the embalming fluid. The period of his nadir was gratuitously long and cruel. It began when he had 20 years to live, in 1963, with the failure of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore.* The play opened during a newspaper strike and managed to scratch out 69 performances. It heralded an aesthetic departure and the embrace of new themes, and Williams, determined to improve it, worked hard on a revision. The new version opened on Broadway early the next year, but had the ill luck to appear while the critics were working. It lasted three nights. Was its failure the critics' fault? No; *Milk Train* is a flawed play in either version. But it is a critic's task to sense significant changes in the direction of a major playwright's work and alert the audi-

ence that something new is going on, whether he thinks it succeeds or not. Since most theatre critics don't look beneath a play's surface, however, those in 1964 largely assumed that Williams had lost his grip, and said so to their readers, who stayed away.

From then until his death, Williams endured one commercial and critical failure after another. More than that, something about Williams's post–*Milk Train* work brought out a viciousness just barely latent in many critics, both journalistic and academic. The critics' confusion was avoidable but understandable, if their vitriol wasn't. Each new play that was not *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*—each one that failed to earn a profit or instantly reveal its meaning—brought a chorus of bitter attacks, as if critics regarded each new work as a personal affront. (See, for example, in chapter 6, Stefan Kanfer's review of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel.* To him falls the honor of writing what may be the most vindictive review ever perpetrated on a major American playwright.)

What accounts for the malice with which critics treated Williams, who, if he had written nothing else, had given the world *The Glass Menagerie, Streetcar,* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof?* I contend in chapters 5 and 6 that homophobia had more than a little to do with it. It was never a secret that Williams was gay, and from *Streetcar* on, some critics used this knowledge against him. They also used it against those characters who were gay, by either trivializing their importance or ignoring them altogether. One should not be surprised that straight critics writing between the 1940s and 1970s would behave this way, sometimes out of malice, more often from a simple lack of understanding or even vocabulary. What is stranger is that, in the 1990s, some gay critics took up where their straight predecessors left off. Since then, the problem has been that Tennessee Williams isn't gay *enough;* that he was incapable of producing a "positive image" of a gay person. One of the purposes of this book (also by a gay critic) is to show that none of Williams's gay characters is simply the product of its author's alleged self-loathing, but an amalgam of personal, social, and historical forces. Indeed, I hope to show that any self-loathing that Williams may have had was minimal, and that his work was the place where he struggled with and overcame it.

Evolutions in culture frequently change what a work seems to mean, as if the language it was originally written in has been lost. Sometimes

these changes help us understand what we might have missed the first time. Michael Kahn's 1974 revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at the American Shakespeare Festival, for example, made clear to Walter Kerr of *The New York Times* what he thought had been evasions on Williams's part in 1955. "Was [Brick] or was he not homosexual, did Williams mean him to be but—given the discreet silences of twenty years ago—cautiously refuse to say so?" The answer, Kerr now decided, was yes.[2]

Often, however, time—which Williams declared to be his enemy from the very beginning—takes us further away from a playwright's intentions. Williams's plays with gay characters come to us from a world that is quite different from our own, and were it not for the efforts of gay and lesbian historians to recover that era, those of us born after 1950 would know nothing of it at all. Thirty years of gay liberation, the rise of identity politics, and the creeping assertion in academic and theatrical circles that judgments based on a work's supposed political utility are the most, if not the only, legitimate judgments, have interfered with our ability to see these plays as Williams meant them to be seen. So when we demand that plays written in the 1940s and 1950s fit a contemporary notion of what image a gay character ought to project, we're unlikely to arrive at an assessment that's fair or honest—especially when that character is considered apart from any other aspect of the play. To judge these plays accurately, we should know what Williams intended to say about gay life—if anything—and something about the world he was saying it to. This calls for a careful study of the texts balanced by a sufficiently detailed examination of the cultural, personal, and political times and circumstances of their creation. This book, then, examines the gay characters and, in one case, the lesbian characters, in Williams's plays through the compound lens of his life and times. As such, it is as much a cultural history as a work of criticism.

I don't presume to think that these plays need rescuing by me. My intention is to help readers, theatregoers, actors, and directors recall what Williams intended them to say. Then, we'll be in a better position to judge how they speak to us at our moment in time.

Due to space limitations, I cannot consider *A Streetcar Named Desire* here. Some would say that's fine, as there are no gay characters in it, anyway. But Allan Grey is a major figure in that play, although he is offstage

and dead—a fact used by some scholars to claim the play is an exercise in self-loathing and homophobia. I would like to have mentioned, too, the treatment of gay and lesbian members of the armed forces during and after World War II; it is an important part of the context in which one must consider the Allan Greys of America, circa 1940. I have written about the play in *The Tennessee Williams Literary Journal,* Spring 2003, and for now those who are interested can read about it there. For the story of gay men and lesbians during World War II, there is the excellent *Coming Out Under Fire* by Allan Bérubé.

One more thing: If nothing else, the publisher's response to Clurman's offer to write a biography of O'Neill suggests that a playwright's worth cannot be proven or disproven definitively in a publisher's office, or in the pages of a newspaper, scholarly journal, or book. Only in the theatre can his or her work accurately be measured—and even then only when the production and the audience are equal to the play.

ONE

The Signs Are Interior

I

In September 1941, Tennessee Williams returned to New Orleans. "The second New Orleans period here commences," he wrote in his journal. Nineteen months had passed since his first, abortive, visit: That period had lasted a scant two months, January and February, in 1939. In the intervening months, Williams had experienced the exhilaration of seeing *Battle of Angels* optioned and staged by the Theatre Guild, the "prestige" theatre of Broadway, and suffered the humiliating nightmare of its frigid reception in Boston. The few audience members who remained when the curtain came down after the first performance sat in hostile silence. A week later, *Battle of Angels* closed. It did not come to New York.[1]

Also in those months, Williams finally recognized the nature of his sexuality and had what appears to have been his first homosexual experience. How reconciled he would become to his homosexuality is a matter of dispute; there is evidence on both sides. What one can say

with certainty is that this acknowledgment was arrived at only after a years-long struggle. Williams was now 29 and, in all likelihood, he'd had one physically consummated relationship with a woman, a fellow theatre student at the University of Iowa. His relationships with men weren't many more.

The event precipitating the end of Williams's first New Orleans sojourn was Mardi Gras. Traditionally during that week, inhibitions—not strong to begin with in the Crescent City—went entirely by the boards. The playwright loathed the bacchanalian atmosphere. Lyle Leverich, Williams's most thorough biographer, speculates that the atmosphere in New Orleans generally, and the frenzy of Mardis Gras in particular, edged Williams closer to the recognition of his homosexuality—a recognition for which he was not entirely prepared. And so Williams did what he would habitually do when feeling psychologically threatened: He fled.

Still, the city made an impression on him. He said later that in New Orleans, "I found the kind of freedom I had always needed. And the shock of it against the Puritanism of my nature has given me a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting." The tension created by this collision of freedom and the consequent shock, the instinctive lure of sex and an almost ingrained repulsion by it, would be necessary before Williams could do his best work.[2]

Williams's adjustment to his homosexuality was not made easier by a love affair that had left him deeply scarred. In Provincetown during the summer of 1940, the young playwright fell in love with a Canadian dancer, Kip Kiernan, who for a time returned Williams's affections. Barely a month had passed, however, when Kip told the love-starved, sexually aggressive playwright that the affair was over. The dancer had been warned by a woman friend that he was in danger of being turned into a homosexual, and he didn't want that. He broke with Williams and, in a rage, Williams hurled a boot at the girl who had destroyed his happiness. The intensity of his desire and the nearly insatiable sexual appetite it awoke was as shocking to him as Kip's rejection was devastating. From this moment, Williams would protect his heart against such an intensity of longing and hurt, yet he would do so with regret. In *Vieux Carré,* written in the last decade of Williams's life, The Writer, a young man coming to terms with his homosexuality and need for love, would say, "You have

to protect your heart." Nightingale, an older painter bent on seduction, remonstrates, "With a shell of calcium? Would that improve your work?"[3]

The circumstances of Williams's childhood made his sexual formation more fraught with anxiety than many of the other men and women born in the deep South in the early years of the last century. His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, was the deeply repressed, puritanical, often hysterical daughter of an Episcopal minister. Williams's father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, came from pioneering Tennessee stock and temperamentally was Edwina's exact opposite, as unlikely a husband for her as could be imagined. Cornelius's mother died when he was five, leaving him, as Williams wrote, without the "emolient influence of a mother." It became nearly impossible for Cornelius to express love or other tender emotions. He grew into a hard-drinking, profane, restless young man who served in the Spanish-American War and, at the time of his marriage to Edwina, was working as a manager for the Cumberland Telephone and Telegraph Company. Very soon, like his absent stand-in in *The Glass Menagerie,* he fell in love with long distance, and traded his desk job for the itinerant life of a traveling salesman. C. C., as he called himself, was happiest on the road, showing his wares—men's clothing—and playing cards and drinking with his fellow drummers. His stays at home with Edwina, in her father's rectory in Columbus, Mississippi, were stuffy and confining, and they grew shorter and shorter. He came to resent the Episcopal propriety and uprightness of rectory life. Worse, Edwina hated sex and submitted to it (when she did) with the most reluctant sense of duty. In time, sex between them would stop altogether and they would keep separate bedrooms. In later years, Williams remembered that as a boy he would hear terrible sounds coming from their room as Cornelius forced himself on his wife. Eventually, the playwright would recognize both sides of the family in himself: the Dakin sensitivity and puritanism, and the Williams aggression and toughness.[4]

During his earliest years, however, it was Edwina who set the tone in the Williams house, and it was stifling. She succeeded in passing on to all

three children her own guilt and shame regarding sex. Her fanatical hatred of sex would contribute heavily to the mental illness of her daughter Rose; her younger son, Dakin, would be a virgin when he married in his late thirties.

It is hardly a surprise, then, that Tennessee Williams would struggle for years over the issue of his sexual identity. Until he was past his middle twenties he was attracted to women as well as to men. Still, lonely and alienated as he was, sex with a woman could be deeply disturbing, and his years at college did not clarify matters. Indeed, they only seemed to confuse him further. In *Tom,* Lyle Leverich writes that while Williams began to experience a growing attraction to his own sex at college, he could not understand it himself. He tried to keep his increasingly homoerotic impulses at bay by surrounding himself with girls.[5]

Edwina Williams's neurotic attitudes imposed on Tom a deep ambivalence about sex. This feeling, it should be noted, was not about homosexuality; it was about *sexuality.* It was a tangled nexus of feelings from which he never entirely freed himself—and it has led some critics to mistakenly conclude that he was filled with self-loathing.

In June 1939, four months after leaving New Orleans the first time, Williams had the first homosexual experience he mentions in any of his journals. It was traumatic. He wrote that it "confused and upset me and left me with a feeling of spiritual nausea." For days the memory of it haunted him and plagued him with guilt. Very soon, however, gay sex would nauseate Williams no longer. By the end of July he was infatuated with Kip. Writing to his friend Donald Windham in late June 1940, Williams describes sex with Kip in ecstatic terms. He compares his body to Greek statuary and the Statue of Liberty and details the intimacies they shared two or three times a night. As important as the physical sensation, however, was Williams's conviction that Kip loved him, and when this proved to be an illusion, the consequences were disastrous.[6]

According to Windham, with whom the playwright would soon be cruising Times Square, and who knew the playwright better than anyone else in those years,

> Tennessee was full of guilt about sex; he was full of guilt about numerous aspects of his life and character; but homosexuality, being homosexual, en-

> joying the friendship of people who shared his desires, was what he loved more than he loved any specific persons, more than he loved anything, in fact, except his writing.[7]

But the emotional intensity that would accompany the break-up with Kip left him doubting his sexual identity again. He wrote in a journal entry that he expected to wind up with a woman. "I feel now it will be a woman I will finally go to for tenderness in life. The sexual part—if there has to be any—would probably adjust itself in a while, since I am so easily directed in that way." Even here, he is reluctant to embrace any kind of sexuality: *if there has to be any.*[8]

The roots of sexuality, as well as one's response to it, are complicated affairs in any individual. They are made more complicated by the society in which one lives and from which one receives hundreds of daily messages about what constitutes masculine and feminine, proper and improper, behavior. Williams was born into a sexually dysfunctional family amid a deeply conservative Southern society in 1911, and to argue that this environment did him no psychological harm, or that Williams lacked any trace of homophobia, would be foolish. The society that provided Tennessee Williams with so much of his material also did him considerable psychic damage. More important than the homophobia Williams could not help but absorb, however, was his battle against the myriad examples that would confront him. Perhaps he never entirely accepted his homosexuality; but he also rejected the prejudice against it that was so pervasive in his lifetime as to be practically invisible.

If one wanted to formulate the intricate, inevitable associations between Williams, the society he lived in, and his work, the formula would be this: The society into which Williams was born was deeply homophobic. Williams could not help but absorb some of those homophobic attitudes. But he did not accept them. Rather, he fought against them and his struggle is reflected in his work. A corollary to that formula then suggests itself: Williams's struggle against the homophobia that surrounded him transmuted that homophobia into something subtler and more complex. Homophobia and self-loathing became part of a whole continuum of feeling regarding his sexuality, from revulsion to joy, from negative to positive, but in no orderly, linear progression. This continuum

was messy, dynamic, and unruly; it would turn back on itself, and move ahead again in the direction we would consider "progress" (that is, from less accepting to more) before backtracking, and then making "progress" once more. Perhaps, indeed, it was less a continuum than an evolutionary ebb and flow.

This battle for self-acceptance is one that Williams probably would have been happy to avoid, could he have done so. But the struggle occurred, and the creative work that resulted was deep and rich. The struggle encompassed a world as broad as the society in which he lived and as intimate as the acts of creation with which he responded.

The curious thing is that to read his *Memoirs* and other autobiographical writings is to get the impression that no such battle ever was fought. The book leaves the impression that Williams recognized his homosexuality even as a teenager and, although he was also attracted to girls, he accepted his condition. By the time he went to college, he writes, he had accepted his gayness. He mentions appreciating the bodies of boys when he was 15. He relates an episode at college in which a sleepwalking roommate stumbled into the young writer's bed, cried out in dismay, then stumbled away. Williams concludes this story by saying that he waited for several nights, hoping that the incident would happen again. Then there was the infatuation with a college roommate he described as having "very large and luminous green eyes," although he writes that the infatuation was "a mostly sublimated attachment [. . . .]" He portrays himself as being so well-adjusted to his homosexuality in those years that he could even give advice to a troubled friend: When a fellow student confessed to him about going to another man's room and wanting to touch him "like a man does a woman," Williams had a sage answer. "When I finally spoke, I said to him, 'There's nothing about it to be upset over.'" The friend responds that his feelings were unnatural. But, Williams tells him, "It's perfectly natural and you are just being silly." Lyle Leverich, combing through Williams's journals and conducting interviews with people who knew him during his college years, could confirm none of these episodes.[9]

In his *Memoirs,* Williams never hesitates to discuss his homosexuality, but the pain and confusion he experienced while coming to understand his nature are completely elided. Perhaps he omitted them because after a

lifetime the pain and confusion were still sharp. Perhaps he wanted to be known as the "founding father of the uncloseted gay world," as he called himself in a letter to Maria St. Just, and founding fathers are not supposed to harbor doubts. Perhaps he was unaware that these events had never occurred: He would hardly be the first person to unconsciously rewrite his own history. "I suspect what I am haunted by is something that I am concealing from myself, unconsciously but wisely," he wrote in the *Memoirs.* Whatever the reason for speaking of his early awareness of his homosexuality, Williams is engaging in what had been, from his earliest work, his principal dramatic strategy: to reveal a little while concealing a great deal more. There is a fundamental tension, in other words, found in Williams's best plays, between the need to reveal and the urge to conceal. However, far from being the serious flaw that some critics interpret it to be, this tension proved to be not only necessary, but fruitful and positive.[10]

II

When Williams returned to New Orleans in 1941, opportunities abounded for a young gay man to satisfy his sexual appetite while protecting his heart. On Labor Day, September 1, President Roosevelt declared in a radio broadcast that, "we must do our full part" to conquer Hitler's "forces of insane violence." "There has never been a moment in our history," he declared, "when Americans were not ready to stand up as free men and fight for their rights." New Orleans was ready to do its part. Three hundred thousand National Guard troops were billeted upstate in Alexandria and regularly traveled to New Orleans on weekend passes, increasing the passenger traffic on the railroads entering the city 20 percent over the previous year. The shipyards along the industrial canal were expanded and rebuilt, providing jobs for 1,650 men; in November, some 33 Liberty ships were scheduled to be built. In addition, on the average, 23 passenger and freight ships were arriving in the port each week. The New Orleans autumn of 1941 offered Tennessee Williams many opportunities for temptation, and Williams, whatever his ambivalence, rarely had trouble giving in. However, the city was also awash in military police and the shore patrol, whose job it was to keep their men out of trouble,

and out of gay gathering places. Gay bars were frequently raided, and Williams often barely escaped arrest.[11]

Despite the sexual distractions New Orleans offered and the sharp mixture of pleasure and guilt they provided, Williams devoted most of his days to writing. He was slowly acquiring a name for himself, but he was still quite poor. For a few weeks, he subsisted on checks from the actor Hume Cronyn, who had optioned some of his one-acts. The checks were only intermittent; more than once he had to hock his typewriter and write with a pencil. He moved from rooming house to rooming house, barely scraping together the rent. One such rooming house was on Royal Street. Williams wrote to his friend Paul Bigelow, "'Cher,' I have a room on Royal right opposite *the* gay bar—The St. James, so I can hover *like* a bright angel over the troubled waters of homosociety and I have a balcony and everything but a mantilla to throw across it. But I *do* wish you would mail me my laundry. You don't want people to whisper—'The poor girl's putting up a very bold front, but actually doesn't have a *shirt* to her *back!*'" Bigelow mailed the laundry that Williams had left behind during a stay in New York. Indeed, he mailed it several times to each of Williams's new addresses. Each time, it was returned to New York unclaimed.[12]

Williams's attitude toward sex and homosexuality varied almost as much as his address. He was continually attracted to gay bars like the St. James, and almost as often, came away filled with loathing. The struggle occupied much of the time he did not devote to writing, which he did steadfastly, every day. His journal reflects the intensity of the battle between his puritan nature and his powerful desires. In September, he records a discussion with his friend Oliver Evans, with whom he'd often cruise. After a visit to the St. James, Evans declared, "We ought to be exterminated for the good of society." Williams objected: If homosexuals were exterminated, society would lose most of its artists and its spiritual values. "We are the rotten apples in the barrel," Evans insisted. "We ought to be exterminated at the age of 25." "How many of us feel this way, I wonder?" Williams asked himself:

> Bear this intolerable burden of guilt? To feel some humiliation and a great deal of sorrow at times is inevitable. But feeling guilty is foolish. I am a

> deeper and warmer and kinder man for my deviation [. . .] Someday society will take perhaps the suitable action—but I do not believe that it will or should be extermination.—Oh, well.[13]

He sought out sex, usually with success, but it left him unsatisfied. "I had another friend last night," he wrote a short time after his colloquy with Evans. "The cold and beautiful bodies of the young! They spread themselves out like a banquet table, you dine voraciously and afterwards it is like you had eaten nothing but air." Early in October, *"Saturday* Night, I cruised with 3 flaming belles for a while on Canal Street and around the Quarter. They bored and disgusted me so I quit and left Saturday Night to its own vulgar, noisy devices and went upstairs to my big wide comfortable bed [. . . .]"[14] A week later:

> Love-life resumed with a vengeance last night—2 in the night, 1 in the morning. Enjoyed it, the first couple. Then a bit sordid. Ah well, I guess it comes under the heading of fair entertainment. [. . .]
>
> Love is what makes it still seem nice after the orgasm. Then is when sex becomes art—after the orgasm. One must be an artist to keep it from falling to pieces uglily. Up to then it is simply craftsmanship and of a pretty crude and simple kind. It is also art, of course, when you first meet the person—selecting the attitude and sticking to it.[15]

Sex was a game, a role, a play, in which Williams portrayed a fictional character, reserving the truth of himself for himself. Another week passes. "Had a pretty satisfactory 'roll in the hay' this evening—then a long, dull round of the gay places to kill time. I have nothing to say to these people after I've been to bed with one of them—then it all seems utterly vacuous."[16]

As Williams's attitude toward gay sex alternated between joy and a kind of objectifying indifference, his work began to be constructed around the poles of revealing and concealing. Two of his new friends, Bill Richards and Eloi Bordelon, moved into a rooming house at 722 Toulouse. This was the house in which Williams had rented a room during his first New Orleans period. Williams would visit them there, and later remembered the name of the landlady (new, since his stay), Mrs. Louise Wire, who would lend her name to the landlady in the story, "The Angel in the Alcove" and the play *Vieux Carré.* When, during the

seven months of his second New Orleans sojourn, he wrote the one-act *Lord Byron's Love Letter,* he remembered a story he'd heard as a child from his grandfather about an old woman who claimed to have a love letter from the famous Romantic poet; and he would remember, too, his room in the ramshackle house at 722 Toulouse. That room, in which he wrote compulsively, lacked even a door. Separating him from the hallway was only a tattered curtain. A similar curtain plays a crucial role in the one-act comedy. There are no gay characters in *Lord Byron's Love Letter,* but the play is a significant metaphor for the way in which Williams would write about them. Its action is almost entirely concerned with revealing and concealing.

Lord Byron's Love Letter takes place in the French Quarter during Mardi Gras late in the nineteenth century. Two women, one a fortyish spinster named Ariadne, the other a crone simply called The Old Woman, live a threadbare existence in a rundown apartment. What money they have they earn by displaying a love letter allegedly written by Lord Byron and the journal of the woman, Irénée Marguerite de Poitevent, to whom it was written. That is to say, they earn their meager living as Williams himself did: by trying to sell writing.

Two tourists arrive to view the letter. They are a married couple from the Midwest, typical of the "squares" who pervaded Williams's work: insensitive, obtuse, at best emotionally destructive, at worst physically violent. Here, the Husband (the only name Williams gives him; he calls the woman the Matron) is a drunken lout; the wife an earnest dullard. Given the plays that would come later, one might assume that this comedy's conflict would be prototypical: the insensitive squares versus the sensitive, delicate creatures, with affairs ending badly for the latter. But Williams is not interested in that conflict here; it never occurs. Indeed, the contact between these two camps is perfunctory. The Husband, present at the exhibition under duress, falls asleep until the noise of an approaching parade wakens him, at which point he dashes out. The Matron appears to have no more than a vague high-school knowledge of Byron: since he was a poet, even a love letter written by him is bound to be edifying, and of cultural interest. More concerned with her husband's behavior than with the letter, however, she runs after her mate, neglecting to pay the two women for the privilege of seeing Lord Byron's letter. Her