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### Tennessee Williams' "Plastic Theater" A Formulation of Dramaturgy for "The American Method" Theater

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Tennessee Williams' "Plastic Theater"  
A Formulation of Dramaturgy for "The American Method"  
Theater

By  
Peter Ashley Philips

Bachelor of Arts, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1959  
Doctor of Medicine, New York Medical College, Flower  
And Fifth Ave. Hospitals, New York City, 1963

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fullfillment of the Requirments  
for the degree of


Master of Arts in Theater

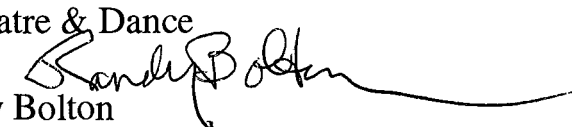
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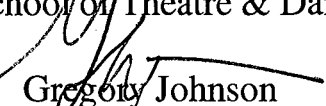
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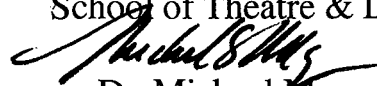
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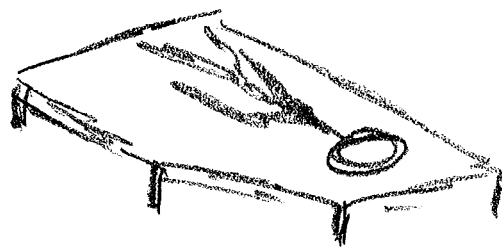
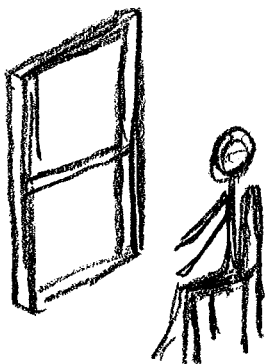
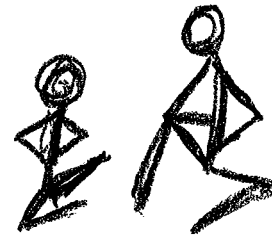
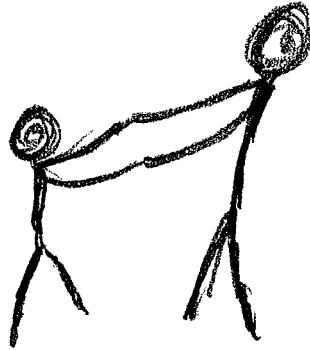
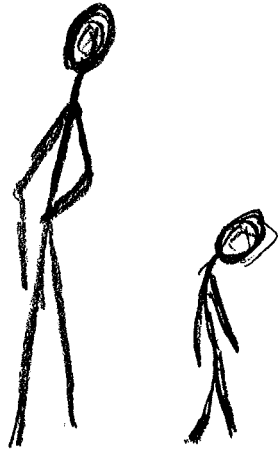
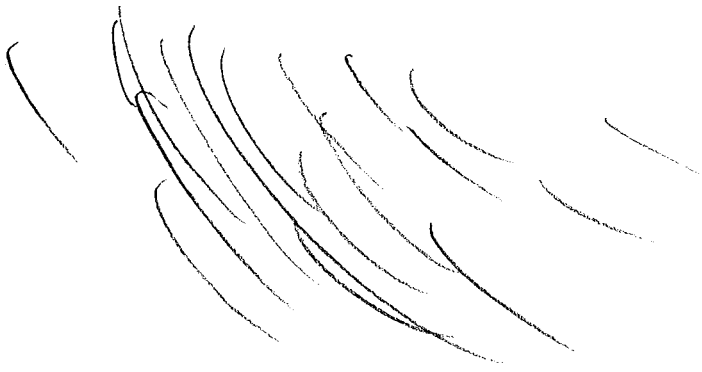
Sandy Ross, Dean  
Graduate School

  
Dr. Bernadette Sweeney, Chair Person  
School of Theatre & Dance

  
Dr. Randy Bolton  
School of Theatre & Dance

  
Gregory Johnson  
School of Theatre & Dance

  
Dr. Michael Mayer  
Department of History



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## **Acknowledgements**

When first arriving in Missoula in November 2010, I had no real thought as to what I was going to do with myself once the domestic settling in needs were met. My first visit was to the Missoula Children's Theater to renew old acquaintances, having performed fairly regularly on their stage before retiring to the Seattle area ten years earlier. That visit resulted in my being offered the character role of General Waverly in *White Christmas* to be performed over the coming year end holidays, and without an audition! Shortly thereafter, I received a telephone call from a graduate student in the Media Arts Department asking me to interview for an elderly doctor's role in her senior film project. She had been given my name by an old friend from MCT. This led to a film debut in her film *Not To Be Taken*. The leading lady in the production was Patricia Zapp, an accomplished actress active in the Missoula theater scene, who put me onto the Golden Age Program at the University which encourages senior academic participation by foregoing full tuition.

I took a chance. From my previous association with the University as Chairmen of the Missoula Symphony and member of the President's Advisory Council I was acquainted with Professor Randy Bolton. I contacted Randy who suggested I enter his Theater Four class, but first to see Erin McDaniel in the department administration who might guide me toward an appropriate starting non-traditional undergraduate curriculum. And thus began a relationship that has been a most decisive strength guiding me these four years. I owe this incredible time of my educational and personal life to Erin for her tireless support and encouragement. Never once has she not been "there" to find answers to questions I thought beyond my capacity to settle.

My sincere appreciation to a superb faculty; Professors Bolton, Hodgkin, Johnson, DeBoer, Alvarez, Carpocca, Campana, Mayer, Ha, and my caring and devoted advisor, Dr. Bernadette Sweeney who as a scholar and teacher has been the most influential and dynamic force in my theatrical education.

This story of Tennessee Williams and *Talk To Me Like The Rain and Let Me Listen* would never have happened without the encouragement and support of those named, and by the devotion and participation of my talented classmates with whom I have had the joy these years of being “one of them.”

## **Preface**

It seems to me that the things that make a man want to write in the first place are those elements in his environment, personal or social, that outrage him, hurt him, make him bleed. Any artist is a misfit (Kazan 1988:495).

In February of 1964, with a ten day vacation allotment following a demanding six month surgical internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, exhausted, depressed, angry, discouraged, I boarded a plane and flew off to Jamaica. It was ten days of sun, sand, and sea ending the last evening in the company of a man who, in the course of the evening, eased my mental anguish over my chosen profession, and was, forty seven years later, to give great emphasis to my quest for a theatrical education.

On my final evening on the island, at a small outdoor garden restaurant in the seaport town of Ocho Rios, I was invited by Tennessee Williams to join him at his table shortly after he had been left to himself by a lady acquaintance. Seeing another individual without a companion, he sent his waiter over with a snifter of brandy, and an invitation to join him. Perhaps he sought to ease the discomfort of being alone for both of us. Shortly

after introductions, on learning of my educational background, he referred to me for the rest of my stay as “young doctor.”

What followed was a five hour evening that included my driving Williams to his Jamaica residence, a conversation that involved telling him all about myself, including the angst I felt about my current working arrangement in New York. My remarks stimulated one or two comments concerning his and family experiences with physicians, reading a number of his poems from *The Winter of Cities*, and finally when he did not return from a bathroom call, finding him asleep in his bedroom. Before leaving the house I removed his shoes, and placed a coverlet over him. To this day I often wonder why I did not attempt to contact Williams again while living in New York, though I have doubts that with the degree of alcohol he consumed that evening he would have remembered me or that moment of a Jamaica evening in my company.

Needless to say, I did return to New York City, and to the Second Surgical Cornell Division at Bellevue Hospital. What followed was four more years at Bellevue and affiliated Hospitals in Long Island and a Children’s Hospital in Washington D.C. However, these five years left me trained as a general surgeon, and I wished for more. From my senior year as a medical student I had been enraptured by the then infant field of cardiac surgery. The head of the medical school’s surgical division Dr. Charles Bailey was a pioneer in heart valve surgery, and as a senior student I spent hours in his operating room learning both the joy and the terror of what those early attempts at heart repair taught. Even after the next two years as a senior cardiothoracic resident at the Montefiore Hospital in New York, there was more to learn, and a fellowship with one of the world’s prominent pioneer heart surgeons in Houston, Texas was obtained. My research hours

had taken me deep into cardiac embryology, and the fascination of interrupted embryonic heart development leading to congenital abnormalities and their surgical correction. My fellowship with Dr. Denton Cooley led to my being his chief resident in that service, enabling me the opportunity to observe a surgical magician operate on tiny neonatal hearts providing what corrective procedures were then available. Although my own cardiac surgical practice did not include such work, from the Houston experience I learned much more than technical expertise. I learned where the human soul resides, and how being so close to that emotional center of the human being affects one given the responsibility of protecting the bodies' inner core. Cooley, before beginning his healing moments, would point to the patient's aorta where it arose from the center of the heart, and proclaim. "Here is where his/her soul resides. Be gentle..."

And so early on, far removed from stage theatricality, I was able to perform in a theater setting much different, but certainly no less intense, as a purveyor of tragicomedy. Moments of sheer joy, feelings of great accomplishment, memorable moments with happy families; always tempered by the loss of a soul, the affect of such loss on one's own now related through having been "touched," even more closely than the grieving families.

And how does this relate so many years later to Williams and this paper? Perhaps my effort to again "touch" a soul as I believe Williams strove to do among a population of people he felt were his brethren. Those on the spectrum of society that sought redemption from the travails of their lives. The Blanche Dubois, "the Sissy Goforths," Princess Kosmonopolis, the mutilated Trinket, Quentin, the little man who loved the cat Nitchevo, Anthony Burns, Tennessee's own sister Rose, and Tennessee Williams



himself.

Cohen Ambrose, a fellow graduate student to whom I had recounted my personal Tennessee Williams story during a green room lunch break, challenged me to “put it in writing.” I did so, developing a performance piece in Dr. Randy Bolton’s theater performance class and presenting the story in the Masquer Theater as my Solo Performance semester final (see appendix N). It was while researching material for this work that I became familiar with Williams concept of sculptural drama, and how he would develop a new non-realistic dramaturgical approach to American theater. In essence what Williams wrote in his notebook in August of 1942 while residing in New York’s Greenwich Village was a dramaturgical blue print of what he was determined his future theatrical stage would represent.

The experimental dramatist must find a method of presenting his passion and the world’s in an articulate manner. Apocalypse without delirium. In considering this problem while at work on new scripts, I have evolved a new method which in my own particular case may turn out to be a solution. I call it the “sculptural drama.” Because my form is poetic. The usual mistake that is made in the presentation of intensified reality on the stage is that of realistic action. . . . a new form, non-realistic, must be chosen. . . . the forming of statuesque attitudes or tableaux, . . . resembling a restrained type of dance, with motions honed down to only the essential or significant (Williams quoted in Leverich, 446).

## **Introduction to Thesis**

### *Sculptural Drama*

The idea of sculptural drama would become Williams’ hypothesis of “plastic theater” a concept Williams introduces in the production notes of *Glass Menagerie* defined as the use of all stage resources, lighting, sound, music, movement, sets and props, in order to generate a theatrical experience greater than realism. Williams believed that to develop a closer approach to dramatic truth beyond the dominant realism of the

American Theater expressionism, employing unconventional techniques, would have to be employed. Only through the use of “other” transformative shapes could poetic imagination define truth, life or reality. Fundamentally, plastic theater may be considered *theatrical theater* as opposed to *literary theater*.

The subject of this thesis is Williams’ concept of “plastic theater,” and its profound effect on “a closer approach” to truth (7). As I studied his written words in plays, short stories, poems and essays, the “truth” for which he strove appeared to me to be that which lives within the individual, the soul of his characters. The truth as determined by the character’s behavior determines the viability of the person, the individual’s own search for the reality of his life. It is through the mechanism of “other forms,” dance, music, color, light, song, the “unconventional techniques,” of which Williams speaks, that character truth can be theatrically staged.

Essentially Williams was describing expressionism, where the artist seeks to depict the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse within the individual. I set out to determine, using the one act play *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*, if I could stage Williams’ perception of “sculptural drama” in the form of live music and body movement added to the poetic realism of the language. Would the subsequent expressionistic performance bestow on characters and audience the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character? For a cognizant response to this hypothesis, I start with Williams’ declaration of “plastic theater” written in his preface to *Glass Menagerie*. This coming of age play breaks the traditional fourth wall in its use of a narrator, and employs screens on which epigraphs are projected between scenes. Next, I delve systematically into his first great experimental piece

*Camino Real* a play suffused with theatrical symbolism, then explore the music and choreography of his very late works. Finally, with the one act play *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*, I create a stage presentation that would provide characters and audience with an expressionistic performance that gives credence to the question asked.

## **Chapter Synopsis**

Chapter one, The First Twenty-Eight Years, will give an overview of Williams' life from the day of his birth to the moment when he was awarded a hundred dollar prize by the Group Theater in New York for sketches in his collection entitled *American Blues*. At that moment in what he termed "manic elation," Williams, for the first time, realized himself as a writer of substance and wrote a manifesto of what he proposed for all the plays and stories to follow. He adapted the name Tennessee, hoping to leave behind "Tom" and those years which had caused him so much emotional torment.

But torment would follow Tennessee Williams in one form or another for the remainder of his life. His phenomenal success over the decades following *The Glass Menagerie* came at a great cost of physical and emotional health, the loss of collaborators, close friends, family members, and critical appreciation, leading to a deepening loss of self worth and loneliness. Many who knew him believed that Williams, out of the "sad little wish to be loved," and having no strangers to depend on took his own life (Lahr 2014:601).

The Second Chapter deals specifically with defining Williams' dramaturgy of Sculptural Drama, referred to in his preface to *Glass Menagerie* and in critical and scholarly works such as those of Harold Clurman and Estelle Jackson as "Plastic

Theater.” Discussion includes reference to late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20th Century symbolic ideology which influenced the writings of Yeats, O’Neill and others, the theatrical theories and designs of Craig and Appia, and the expressionism of Brecht, Meyerhold and Piscator. Walt Whitman’s view of American poetry as theatrical language and the role of the American poet to be the arbitrator of the “transcendent and new” as detailed in his *Leaves of Grass*, is considered an important contribution to Williams’ dramatic conception.

Two methods of Expressionism in Williams’ drama are discussed in Chapter Three using his first true experimental production, *Camino Real* to define “Symbolism as Plastic Theater.” To demonstrate “Music and Choreography as Plastic Theater,” examples of choreographed and operatic interpretations of Williams’ major works, and three late plays which link the subject of youthful death in mystical poetic verse and passionately erotic choreography, are explored.

*Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*, Chapter Four, details the manner by which my thesis research originated, the thought process and variables entertained, discussions and recommendations provided by fellow students and faculty members, the timely and fortunate accruing of the necessary artistic theater talent, musician, choreographer, and our use of rehearsal time. This ensemble effort led to a successful audience attended performance December 6, 2014.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis with a summary of previous discussion and personal remarks concerning my theatrical education empowered by the canon of Tennessee Williams. The happiness of such people is like a “piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting” (Williams 1970:

69)

## **Chapter 1. Tennessee Williams: A “Catastrophe of Success”**

My greatest affliction...is perhaps the major theme of my writings, the affliction of loneliness that follows me like a shadow, a very ponderous shadow too heavy to drag after me all of my days and nights (Williams 1975:99).

On March 26, 1911, Tom Williams was born, the second child of Cornelius and Edwina Williams. He was preceded by his sister Rose by fourteen months, who in early childhood would become his primary playmate and his muse.

The affliction of loneliness, suffered throughout a turbulent and ever changing life landscape, was honed early in the life of Tom Williams. As early as the day of his birth, seeds of family intrigue were sown attributing a sense of self-awareness that would dictate and direct the journey Williams’ life and genius would take. His father Cornelius was both proud and suspicious of his first son. Jealous over Edwina’s dotting affection for baby Tom, she having become more mother to the baby than wife to him, Cornelius early on set the pattern of his relationship with Tom, suggesting to his small daughter “We really do not think much of the new baby, do we?” He added the opinion that the “infant was not good for much” (Williams quoted in Leverich 36).

But Rose was Tom’s salvation in his early childhood. He adored her, she was his only companion. He thought her lovely, she taught him games, the alphabet. They were inseparable. However, in 1943, having fallen into the psychotic world of schizophrenia, for Edwina the “last straw” was being told by Rose how the girls in her private school pleased themselves with candles and hairbrushes, Rose was subjected to a bilateral pre-frontal lobotomy. The procedure provided Rose a more calm demeanor, but as Williams

noted, inwardly she remained inaccessible (Leverich 487). Williams, devastated by the procedure, devoted the remainder of his life to her care. Rose was to become a vital component in many of his writings, poems, plays, and stories.

Williams regarded the first eight years of his childhood living in Mississippi as the “most joyously innocent” (Leverich 1995:43) period of his life. At that time the young family was living with his beloved grandparents, referred to as “Grand” and “Gramps” Dakin. They were two elderly supportive people whose largesse to Tom over the years established much of his generosity toward others. Walter Dakin, an Episcopal minister, established within Williams an inner sense of Puritanism, and from his large library provided Williams access to numerous books that occupied a great deal of his adolescent life.

Shortly after his birth, Ozzie, Tom and Rose’s “beautiful” black nurse joined the household. To the youngsters, Ozzie was a magician in that she could spin spellbinding stories that mesmerized the children. Ozzie would be remembered in his writings long after she disappeared from the Williams home following an incident that would leave Tom with a lasting burden of guilt and shame. In a fit of “childish fury,” he called Ozzie a “big black nigger.” Ozzie left the Williams home and never returned (Leverich 43).

Edwina, his mother, devoted her existence to Tom. His father was away from home for long periods on business, and sought in his relations with fellow business associates, other woman, gambling and alcohol a reprieve from the stultification of his marriage. When home he would terrorize the family with his temper and arguments with Edwin, continuously referring to Tom as “Nancy” in his disappointment with the boy’s lack of interest in sports and other masculine traits. Edwina doted on Tom. When taken ill

with diphtheria for what was to be a long bed ridden period, “Edwina”s overly solicitous attention planted in me the makings of a sissy, much to my father”s discontent” (Williams 1972:12). He was twelve when he wrote his first school composition on a second hand typewriter bought for him by Edwina. The piece, based on a class room picture depicting Tennyson”s heroine *Lady of Shalott*, was well received when presented to the class. “From that time on I knew I was going to be a writer” (Williams quoted in Leverich 64).

From 1929 to 1931, Williams attended the University of Missouri where he enrolled in journalism classes. Although Williams found his school work boring he was soon entering his poetry, essays, stories, and plays in writing contests, hoping to earn extra income. His first submitted play was *Beauty Is the Word* (1930), followed by *Hot Milk at Three in the Morning* (1932).

Williams joined the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, but he did not fit in well. He was a loner who spent most of his time at his typewriter. His father pulled him out of school when he failed ROTC and put him to work at the International Shoe Company factory in St. Louis. His dislike of his new nine-to-five routine drove him to write even more than before, and he set himself a goal of writing one story a week, working on Saturday and Sunday, often late into the night. Edwina recalled his intensity:

Tom would go to his room with black coffee and cigarettes and I would hear the typewriter clicking away at night in the silent house. Some mornings when I walked in to wake him for work, I would find him sprawled fully dressed across the bed, too tired to remove his clothes (Leverich 135).

Overworked, unhappy and lacking any further success with his writing, by his twenty-fourth birthday he had suffered a nervous breakdown and left his job at the shoe company.

In 1936 Williams enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis where he wrote

the play *Me, Vashya* (1937). By 1938 he had moved on to University of Iowa graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

On July 12, 1935, the event that defined Williams' future took place in a private setting. His only collaborative play, *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!* was performed in a friend's back yard in Memphis by the Rose Arbor players. Williams wrote, "The laughter ... enchanted me. Then and there the theatre and I found each other for better and for worse. I know it's the only thing that saved my life" (Williams 1975:42).

After graduation, problems with his father recurred. Cornelius began griping about his son's lack of employment accusing him of being a "parasite." Williams decided he could no longer live at home.

He began to see his father as a failure, as was his father's father, and Williams became increasingly fearful that male family failure might be traditional. Similarly, he feared Rose's increasing emotional instability, requiring hospitalization and the eventual pre-frontal lobotomy in 1943, might well portend his own future psychological incapacity. Within these parameters of paranoia, Williams believed only his exhaustive passion for daily writing could salvage his future. He attributed such burning intensity to write as rage against his father. Although finally reconciling with Cornelius shortly before the man's death in 1957, Williams states in *Memoirs* that despite a "catalogue" of unattractive aspects, the man contained two great virtues which he, Williams, hoped would be hereditary: "total honesty and total truth" in his dealing with others (Williams 1975:13). He would credit his father's harshness and at times brutal boisterousness as traits of strength that he would need later in life to survive. Williams looked toward theater as the frontier that held the promise of setting him free. His concentrated work



ethic was already building an enlarging arsenal of one act and full length plays.

### **The Turning Point**

On March 20, 1939 Tom Williams was notified that he had been awarded a special \$100.00 prize by the Group Theater judges in New York for three of his plays in a collection entitled *American Blues*. One of the judges, Molly Day Thatcher, wife of Elia Kazan and herself an aspiring writer, was impressed enough with his work that she enlisted her friend and theatrical agent Audrey Wood to communicate with Williams. Thus began a dynamic agent-client relationship that bordered on a mother-son bond that would last 31 years until he fired Wood in a drug/alcohol induced outburst at the opening of his play *Out Cry* in 1971 (Lahr 512).

On Easter Sunday of 1939, buoyed by his Group Theater award, and in what he termed “manic elation” he penned a new positive sense of himself:

My next play will be simple, direct and terrible---a picture of my own heart. There will be no artifice in it. I will speak the truth as I see it.---distort as I see distortion---be wild as I am wild---tender as I am tender---mad as I am mad---passionate as I am passionate. It will be myself without concealment or evasion and with a fearless unashamed frontal assault upon life that will leave no room for trepidation---a passionate denial of sham and a cry for beauty (Leverich 301).

At a moment of triumph, his first real recognition as a writer of substance, Williams had written a manifesto for all the plays and stories to follow. And with this new sense of himself, which for the moment allowed him a feeling of accomplishment and hope for the future, he adopted the name Tennessee, leaving behind “Tom” and, he hoped, all those “blue devils” that had haunted and tormented him the first twenty-eight years of life.

In 1943, while in the employ of MGM in Hollywood, Williams began work on a play entitled, *The Gentleman Caller* that would become *The Glass Menagerie*. It opened

on Broadway on March 31, 1945 with the legendary Laurette Taylor in the role of Amanda Wingfield and, within two weeks of its opening, was awarded the year's best play by the New York Drama Critics' Circle.

*The Glass Menagerie* is considered intensely autobiographical. The family portrayed mirrors Williams' own family and is set in St. Louis, a city he detested for its pollution (he called it Saint Pollution), its poverty, its sense of darkness from which people "lost belief in everything but loss" (Lahr 2014:35). While writing *The Gentleman Caller* Williams portrayed himself to a close friend as "both a wild animal and a bundle of emotional dynamite." The anxieties and troubles affecting the Wingfield family are played out against the social and political upheaval of the Depression and the encroaching Second World War. Throughout his writing career social, personal, and political ramifications would bedevil the playwright and be mirrored in whatever he was writing or working to produce at that moment.

As one follows the Williams canon of the forties through the early sixties, a time when he recognized his greatest success, one finds such intense inherent trauma in his life, that even great commercial and theatrical achievement seemed only to incur greater emotional instability. The incredible stress of preproduction ensemble work, less than enthusiastic reviews from out of town previews, and Williams' on again off again personal relationship with his partner of 14 years Frank Merlo, combined to drive Williams to physical and emotional exhaustion. With *Streetcar Named Desire* it was arguments over bragging rights between Elia Kazan and producer Irene Selznick. Difficult casting arrangements had Williams confessing to Audrey Woods "about the biggest headache I've had in my theatrical experience" (Lahr 2014:133) *The Rose Tattoo*,

about the unlocking of a widow's frozen heart, was in balance with Williams tortured awareness of his own stalled life in his relationship with Frank Merlo.

In 1957 with two consecutive Broadway failures to his name, Williams needed a hit. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with Kazan as director would be that hit, but at a cost. Kazan's "remaking" of the third act with the reappearance of Big Daddy and the resulting debates in the press and on the "street" concerning Williams selling out his artistic "soul" for commercial success started a slow but inevitable change in the Williams-Kazan collaboration that would end in 1959 with *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Williams penned a letter to Kazan which in part stated: "Don't try to like me now. My psychic sickness and tensions, failure of analysis, self-facing and so forth, have made me at least temporarily impossible to like" (Lahr 2014:411).

Frank Merlo was one of Williams closest friends and for fourteen years his companion/lover. They met in 1947 in Provincetown, both men at the time in relationships with others. In 1948 they met again in New York and set up housekeeping together. The two were opposites attracting. Williams, being nomadic, was driven by his work whereas Merlo provided constancy, stability, and security for Williams. Merlo was friend, lover, amanuensis, and protector. He essentially took care of all the practical details of Williams' life. At the time of his writing *Rose Tattoo* and *Camino Real* the relationship was at its happiest. Williams dedicated the play and a percentage of the royalties to Merlo. However, there was constant tension. Merlo wanted a stable, monogamous life. Williams was disinclined to give up his promiscuity.

Williams began psychoanalysis with Dr. Lawrence Kubie in 1957, shortly after his father died, which led him into a negative exploration of his sexuality and his

relationship with Merlo. He became increasingly dependent on alcohol and drugs administered by society physician Dr. Max Jacobson which increased Williams' paranoia and promiscuous behavior. This led to violent reactions against Williams by Merlo. In 1961 Williams broke with Merlo who, at the time, had shown signs of declining health. Shortly thereafter Merlo, a heavy smoker, was diagnosed with lung cancer. In September of 1963 he died at Memorial Hospital in New York City. Williams, ridden with guilt by Merlo's death, fell into a very deep cycle of depression and self-destruction. He would later allude to this period as his "stoned age." From then to his death in 1983 Williams, without the stability afforded by Merlo, appeared at ever increasing moments, incapable of coherence in both his writing and his life.

## Chapter 2. Theatrical Sculptural Drama

### The Origin of “Plastic Theater”



Fig. 1. Edward Hopper, *House by the Railroad*, 1925<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning of his career, Tom, later Tennessee, Williams engaged in the formulation of a dramaturgy for his theater. His dramatic texts were written as a series of notations, what he referred to as a score such as would be set down by a composer.

Williams rejected a play manuscript as complete drama basing this rejection on his belief in the surrealist nature of poetic expression. Not unlike Wagner, Williams believed that dramatic content is suprarational, and thus extra-verbal in form. His concept of “plastic theater” deals not just with the rational planes of experience but with the suggestion of an

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<sup>1</sup>In *The Property is Condemned*, Williams writes, “Hopper's Victorian house is closed, isolated, enthroned in a seemingly permanent shadow.”

ambiguous sense of meaning both above and below what he referred to as “accepted levels of reason.” Williams’ writings, not just his plays, but his poetry, short stories and novels, attempt to project onto a “stage” his vision of the entire complex of human experience, as defined years earlier by Wagner as reality that is “unutterable” (Jackson 1966:89).

The idea of a “plastic theater” was not unlike forms shaped and performed by European artists in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wagner in revolting against what he considered the “world-dominated theater” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, worked to create “synthetic symbolic” representation in an endeavor to restore to drama a textural language, a theatrical grammar, which he envisioned as giving expression to “irrational contents in experience” (Jackson 1966:93). Such symbol ideology influenced the writings of Yeats, Eliot, Giraudoux, O’Neill, and the theatrical theories and designs of Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia. Similarly such so-called plastic symbolism is found in the expressionism of Meyerhold, Brecht, and Erwin Piscator. Very early in his career Williams rejected realism, likely influenced by his studying at the New School for Social Research in New York under Piscator, founder of the so-called “epic theater.” Williams’ own strong expressionistic manifesto appears some years later in his preface to *The Glass Menagerie*: “...truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance” (Williams 1970:7). In his effort to develop a more complete theatrical grammar, Williams, as an American, endeavored distinctively to build a theatrical language specifically emphasizing an American method, characterized by its own distinctive style of directing, acting, staging,

design and lighting (Jackson 1966:88-9). As such, plastic theater had a beginning and somewhat different history in America. Eugene O'Neill had described a concept of theater not too dissimilar to what Williams was striving to create. The two American playwrights experimented in patterns and new themes, theatrical techniques of exposition shaped not just in theater, but in the related arts of fiction, poetry, dance, painting, design, lighting, and the developing art of film making. Much of their work evolved through the pattern of American arts and letters of late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, the architectural forms of American painters, sculptors, and architects, writings of such essayists as Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Henry Thoreau, the fiction of Hawthorne, Melville and Poe, with none more influential than the poetic imagery of Walt Whitman (Jackson 1997:193-4).

In his epic poem *Leaves of Grass* Whitman sought to picture the American scene, that is the "totality of its meaning," its past, present, and future within the frame of a solitary plastic form (Jackson 1997:192). Whitman wrote in the 1885 preface to *Leaves of Grass*: "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (Whitman 1982:5) a creation closely imitative of nature... a dynamic form in which the search for individual identity is the defining motif in what is a massive work of art (Jackson 1997:192). Jackson suggests that Walt Whitman "anticipated" American life as the primary mode of art, and the role of the poet as the benefactor to the greater American good. "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest poetical nature" (Whitman 1982:5) As for the poet in this environment Whitman states: "the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. Obedience does not master him, he masters it" (Whitman 2005:8-9).

In the short story entitled *The Poet*, Williams interprets Whitman's definition of a poet:

The poet distilled his own liquor and...whenever fatigue overtook him he would stop at some lonely point and raise the flask to his lips...the world would change...and a great vitality would surge and break as a limitless ocean through him...his senses would combine in a single vast ray of perception which blinded him to lesser phenomena. ...[He] felt that his stories...had been little more than preliminary exercises to some really great outpouring which might be more of a plastic than verbal creation (Williams 1985:246).

Whitman's imagery might be considered as "plastic," composed by synthesizing elements of form in the consciousness of a poetic "I", that is the creator of a "theater of imagination" (Jackson 1997:193). Artists such as O'Neill and Williams undertook to create a dramatic form inspired and conceived after the manner of Whitman's poetry, the transposition of complex images into a textural language of theater. Williams strove to incorporate onto the American stage the attributes of prose and poetry as Whitman detailed, a verbal communication providing speech as the creative factor generating a sensuous theatrical language (Jackson 1997:194). In *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free*, Whitman called for what he termed "dramatic poetry" that shows an expressive relationship to American life, "...of delivering America and, indeed, all Christian lands everywhere, from the thin moribund and watery, but appallingly extensive nuisance of conventional poetry--by putting something really alive and substantial in its place..." (Whitman 2005:1002). Whitman saw drama as the medium that was best suited for giving expressive form to the unique character of the American experience, a "plastic" form of poetry as a mode of free expression of emotion, a poetry as a concretion of patterns originating in the public consciousness, the form of poetic language Williams strove to develop (Jackson 1977:193).



Central to Williams' notion of "plastic imagery" as described in Whitman's prose, is the spoken word. In *Leaves of Grass* the "word" is the source of the creative energy producing the aural, tactile, musical, visual and textural forms. Whitman's imagery grounded through his spoken language served as the stimulus for the creation of complex textural forms. The imagery developed has been described as "plastic." The dramatic form that Williams, O'Neill, Miller and others of their generation worked to define within their theatrical environs was envisioned by the manner of Whitman's poetic authority, described as a "transposition of complex images into the textural language of theater" (Jackson 1997:194).

From his earliest playwriting endeavors, Williams sought to adapt his dramaturgy to the American stage requirements spelled out in Whitman's notion of a "public" language, possessing attributes of prose and poetry:

...the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry. I say the latter is henceforth to win and maintain its character regardless of rhyme...the truest and greatest Poetry can never again, in the English language, be expressed in arbitrary and rhyming meter...the day of such conventional rhyme is ended. In America...it probably fails, and must fail to serve (Whitman 2005:1056).

This "public language" expressed by Whitman and dramaturgically developed by Williams became characteristic of the technique used in Williams' early one act plays, the augmentation of the form and meaning of words with the simultaneous use of other expressive media. He interpreted his written lexis as the creative factor generating a new theatrical language composed of symbolic artistic expressions which became increasingly experimental over the course of his many years of extensive creativity.

### Chapter 3. Methods of Expressionism in Williams' Drama

I believe in Michelangelo, Velasquez and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting and the message of art that has made these hands blessed. Amen.

- Williams quoting Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*

#### Symbolism as Plastic Theater

##### *Camino Real*

*Camino Real* premiered on March 19, 1953 at the Martin Beck Theater in New York City. It is a highly experimental play that "pleads" for the triumph of romantic life over brutal reality. It is Williams' most symbolic drama, emphasizing most emphatically what he had written about as early as in the production notes of *Glass Menagerie*. He had exclaimed against the "exhausted theater of realistic conventions," proclaiming at that moment for his "new plastic theater" which was to become the watch phrase for all ensuing plays. As stated, the sole purpose for the addition of lighting, music, dance, design, lighting, props was to provide for the American stage "a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are" (Williams 1970:7) to a greater degree than can be accomplished by mere realism.

Williams was working with Elia Kazan on *Camino Real* at the time he wrote *Talk To Me Like The Rain*. He described *Camino Real* as a "phantasmagoric mix of Spanish folklore and traditional Christianity, pleading for the triumph of romanticism over the abusive reality" of the era (Kolin 2004:23). Williams sought to illuminate through *Camino* the need for a romanticized attitude toward life. The metaphor he uses of violets breaking through solid mountain rocks is Williams' expression of hope for an outpouring of compassion for the world's most fragile beings and for societal appreciation of beauty

and poetry (Kolin 2004:23-27).

The corrupt society and deceptive characters within *Camino Real* mirror the harsh American politics of the 1950s, the crusade against liberals and homosexuals, the corruption of individual freedoms, and the so called communist “witch hunts” by the HUAC instilling paranoia between neighbors. Williams insisted that the ability “to feel tenderness...the ability to love”...is necessary so that individuals do not “become brutalized” by the exploitative experiences his *Camino* characters metaphorically represent (Kolin 1998:100).

In the forward to *Camino Real*, Williams insists his play “is nothing more than” his conception of the time and the world in which he lives, represented and developed on stage through the symbolic sets, dances, music, lighting and the characters themselves. In the play’s afterword, Williams infers that the representation of reality achieved in *Camino Real* is “organic.” “The color, the grace and levitation, the structural pattern in motion, the quick interplay of live beings, suspended like fitful lightning in a cloud, these things are the play, not words on paper, nor thoughts and ideas of an author” (Williams 2000:747).

Williams’ argument attempts to establish that rather than *Camino Real* deviating from the pattern set by his previous plays, the play is actually a culmination point of his efforts to depict reality “organically.” It is not a fantasy play written by a realist playwright but rather the most radical of Williams’ attempts to impose nonrealistic plays on the essential realistic American Theater. Harold Clurman points out that *Camino Real* is not a maverick but indeed “significant of its author’s seed thoughts” (Clurman 1958). It is an example of the “plastic theater” in its purest form. Williams believed that in the

drama imagined in the images of his characters – Don Quixote, Byron, Gautier, Casanova, Kilroy, etc. – he had achieved “plasticity,” that *Camino* approached the “synthesis “which he considered his ideal theater (Jackson 1966:102).

### **The Conception of a Play**

In August of 1942, a disheartened, lonely, and bored thirty one year old Tennessee Williams, while waiting for his fare home to St. Louis from St. Augustine, Florida worried over how his theatrical world seemed snowed under in the mayhem of the World War. He feared that what he had to offer in his work, what he deemed his poetic truth, would never be seen or heard in the wartime market. During this period of societal stress, [only] “lies and manic laughter and nationalist hoopla are soaring dizzily up!” (Lahr 30). However, the war years presented an eager Tennessee Williams the spiritual challenge he needed. He looked ahead to a different, post war non-realistic theater and was struck with the idea of writing a play about Don Quixote as a “sculptural drama” an experimental new form of presentational theater.

The tragedy of the ideal---the truth of the matter is that all human ideals have been hats too big for the human head. Chivalry [...] democracy [...] Christianity [...] the Hellenic ideal of intellectual purity are too big a hat! [...] but will not the immemorial Don Quixote of the race [...] rebel at wearing a hat that fits with such humiliating precision? No, the hopeful thing is still that we wish we had bigger skulls, not smaller hats to wear (Williams quoted in Leverich 464).

Almost a decade later, *Camino Real* directed by Elia Kazan, would premier on Broadway, bringing what one Williams scholar describes as “existential absurdity” full force into the realism-accustomed New York Theater (Kolin 1953: ix).

The origin of *Camino Real* was the one act play *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*,

one of five short plays in Williams' collection entitled *American Blues*. Williams explained that he had written the play as a first sketch after a visit to Mexico where he had seen people in costumes carrying torches lined up along railroad tracks. He had felt a sense of foreboding at the moment, a fear of "dying in an unknown place" but thinking at the same time "what a beautiful play this would make" (Williams 1975:165). Elia Kazan found *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* when *American Blues* was received by the Group Theater and he used scenes from it for some acting classes at the Actor's Studio. Williams was "fired up" by Kazan's interest and staging the class work, and began developing a full length play with music and choreography. *Camino Real* became a complete change of the Williams theatrical palate. When originally written Williams had thought of combining it with another Spanish themed play with songs and dancing. He had considered naming it "The Blue Guitar" or "The Guitar of Picasso." Williams claimed that working on *Camino* served him as a "spiritual purgation of that abyss of confusion and lost sense of reality" (Lahr 2014:254). For Williams the appeal of this new adventure was a feeling of an "unusual degree of freedom" (Williams 2000:743). In the exuberance of its dreamlike design and in the bold absence of psychology and the realism of earlier Williams plays, *Camino* was becoming what to him was an unfettered journey into his very interior. To Kazan he remarked "This play is possible because it deals precisely with my own situation" (Williams 2004:443). Williams feared that "his" America was "galloping into totalitarianism" (Lahr 2014:254) while at this same moment, having achieved artistic, commercial, and critical success, his emotional insecurity was being heightened by a difficult personal relationship with Frank Merlo, his partner. Williams was unable to write with any sense of accomplishment. This led him to

fear that his theatrical time was running out, that he had already achieved the pinnacle of a writer's career, and if people took him seriously as a writer it was because of what he had written in the past. As he struggled to compose with his usual passion, he was terrified of a desolate future. "I feed on delusion, beg for encouragement," he wrote Kazan (Williams 2004:442). *Camino Real* developed as a "phantasmagoric" expressionistic mirror of Williams' inner life and a censure statement concerning the suppression of societies' dissident voices.

Set in an imaginary town plaza with a central dried up water fountain that causes Sancho Panza to exclaim "the spring of humanity has dried up" (Williams 2000:751). Williams paints a bizarre, dried up landscape where those that dream and create societal disturbance are killed and swept up by street cleaners. Williams' characters are made up of Romantic decadents: Lord Byron, Proust's Baron de Charlus, Casanova, Dumas's Margurite Gautier, outcasts (bums and drunks) and idealists; Don Quixote, Kilroy, all inhabiting a freakish world, desperate, and pitched between desire and retreat. Their struggle for honor in dishonorable circumstances disfigures them. "It is they who have the problem of how to live and how to die, without giving up their identity, even to realize their identity further through death" (Lahr 2014:256). Nothing quite as poetic with symbols, music and choreography had ever been attempted before on the Broadway stage. Williams wrote to Kazan: "This play is moving to me because it describes what is happening in the world to the people I love most in the world...all those blessed nonconformists" (Lahr 2014:258).

Williams for the first time on a Broadway stage included the portrait of an unabashed homosexual, the promiscuous Baron de Charlus. In block four the Baron

replies to Kilroy's statement about the Baron's white suit: "My suit is yellow. My nationality is French. And my normality has been often subject to question" (Williams 2000:772). As such, *Camino Real* is considered by many scholars to be Williams' most controversial and in many respects his most autobiographical play. Williams' romanticized attitude toward life and the basic desire for love, compassion, and personal freedom are considered the central themes of *Camino Real* (Kolin 1998:100).

### **The Importance of Collaborative Mindsets**

Without the guiding hand of a director whose sense of self and philosophic orientation was so in keeping with the internal turmoil of the playwright, it is doubtful that the full expression of Williams' creation could have become the great classic it is, or for that matter have made it to a Broadway opening. Kazan described his own state of mind as he came aboard the project. The year before he took on *Camino*, he had testified before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) revealing his contacts from the two years he had spent as a member of the Communist party, an act that "had separated me from the company and respect of my peers" (Kazan 1998:495). Both he and Williams were outsiders. Kazan states that both men felt vulnerable to the depredations of a world without sympathy, both men were distrustful of their successes, suspicious of authority, fully expecting from their work any and all putdowns from critics and audiences. Kazan "understood" Williams' *Camino Real* very well. Kazan saw it as "a love letter to the people Williams loved most, the romantics, those innocents who become victims in our business civilization" (Kazan 1998:495). Harold Clurman, a founder of the

Group Theater and long time acquaintance of Williams echoed Kazan's impressions of Williams' empathy writing in *Lies Like Truth: Theater Review and Essays*: "It is the peculiar people, the unprotected, the innocently sincere, the injured, the estranged, the queer, the defenseless, the abandoned and the maimed who Williams redeems with his compassion" (Clurman 83).

Kazan became the undisputed authority over the production. Describing the first day meeting of the production team the "admiring" stage manager wrote: "Kazan entered. A small hush. Greets some people. His air is one of unusual power, concentrated force directness over everything: no latitude for anything but the most simple and meaningful communication" (Murphy 1992:86). Kazan, appreciating the "plastic" concept of Williams' dramaturgy did delegate great responsibility, degree of freedom, and authority to the choreographer Anna Sokolow. He allowed her great latitude in directing the street people in all of the large street and fiesta scenes. Her work provided the visual environment for the main action of the play, the pace and tempo of life on the Camino Real. Kazan conceptualized a bizarre fantasy world inspired by the artistic work of Mexican artist Jose Guadalupe Posada with whom he was familiar. "I tried to produce *Camino Real* in the style of the Mexican-Indian figures of death, the candy skulls and the little wooden, dancing skeletons of Posada who is a sort of primitive. I used some of his works, like his dance of death" (Sokolow quoted in Murphy 87). Sokolow knew Mexico well, and gave the play the flavor Kazan sought. Kazan's intention was to move Williams' poetic drama in the direction of dance, appreciating that the choreography was the vital ingredient that would "lift the everyday into the realistic" (Lahr 2014: 271).

There was, however, one glaring weakness that for years after Kazan felt



responsible for not rearranging: that of *Camino*'s design failure. Designer Joe Mielziner had been part of a three person collaboration team with Williams and Kazan on previous Williams plays including *Glass Menagerie*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*. He understood and appreciated Williams' view of expressionistic theater, developing images that corroborated Williams' plastic dramaturgy, bringing presentational set designs and lighting which accentuated the subjectivity of the characters. Although skeptical at first due to how the manuscript made demands on the director, actors and designers, after discussing the play with Kazan he suggested several abstract concepts he felt would serve the artistic expression of the play: "perhaps some sort of ,labyrinth". I hope we could find ways of using projected images and patterns and colors to fulfill your suggestions of the constant changes in the various blocks" (Mielziner quoted in Murphy 68). Mielziner's drawings call the audiences' attention to the stage as a performance space and create the Camino Real as a subjective realm unrelated to time and place. However, producer Cheryl Crawford felt that Mielziner's requested fee was too high, and Lemual Ayers was chosen to design sets, costumes and lighting for *Camino*. Ayers' set, by contrast, was all realism. Stark grey walls and heavily constructed buildings directed the audience to an objective reality of typical Skid Row establishments, a milieu familiar to the audience thus creating an expectation of the production that was not appropriate to the play. Instead of the light bizarre fantasy concept of a Mexican primitive environment the "topography inside the author's head," Ayers' set "made the fantasies that took place inside it seem silly" (Kazan 1998:497).

*Camino Real* opened on March 19, 1953 to reviews that Williams described as reflecting "militant incomprehension" of the New York Critics (Williams 2004:472).

Anticipating the opening, Kazan had a week before he tried to preempt such a response in an essay he wrote for the *New York Times* Sunday theater edition. "I'm not sure *Camino Real* is as much a play as a poem. It has faults, structural faults as a play...but as a piece of direct lyric theater expression, it seems to me to stand rather by itself" (Kazan 1953). Yet nothing prepared playwright and director for the vituperative, hostile response of some New York Critics. Walter Kerr of *The New York Harold Tribune* wrote:

Worst play yet written by the best playwright of his generation...Mr. Williams is hopelessly mired in his new love--symbolism...attempting to apply the methods of lyric poetry, images made of illogical and unexpected combinations, processes of free association, emphasis on mythology---to the spoken stage. But the poetic imagination must have something realistic to exercise its imagination upon, some actuality to serve as a point of departure. *Camino Real* is all departure and no point (1953).

Richard Watts Jr. of the *New York Post* opined:

Mr. Williams' latest offering is...full of sound and fury, signifying very little. Mr. Williams is now taking himself so seriously as an important literary artist, whose every word must be full of the deepest and most significant import that his very genuine qualities of dramatic lyricism are lost in murky ponderousness. I fear he hasn't really the important and significant things to say he thinks he has....no one can accuse it of being a realistic play, but *Camino Real* is an enigmatic bore (1953).

The *New Republic's* Eric Bentley stated: "Camino Real is a serious failure...not the failure of a theme, or even a vision, but the most self-indulgent misuse of a talent" (Lahr 273).

But still, the evening was not a complete wash. Some critics, namely Robert Sylvester of the *New York Daily News* called *Camino* the "first real bop play," (Lahr 273) and Williams' critical "savior" and long time friend and correspondent Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* eloquently wrote:

Looking into the corners of his heart, Tennessee Williams has written a strange and disturbing drama. *Camino Real* is a kind of cosmic fantasy, one must not interpret literally. *Camino Real* goes beyond melancholy into melancholia...the fantasies...have a psychopathic bitterness in them. As theater *Camino Real* is as eloquent and rhythmic as a piece of music. As a writer Mr. Williams has unlocked his mind and told his version of the truth about human destiny. For it is a world surrounded with death and inhumanity, and decked with the flowers of evil. Even the people who respect Mr. Williams' courage and recognize his talent are likely to be aghast at what he has to say (1953).

Soon after the opening evening Williams, terrified for his future as a writer, ran off to the leafy calm of his Key West, Florida studio. Exhausted from the years of the effort required to create and stage *Camino*, his "blue devils" once again consumed him. At this critical moment of his life, discouraged and overcome with paranoid insecurities, he felt "shut out" from the theater world [with] "the door barred against me." He wrote to his publisher James Laughlin. "I have nothing more to expect from Broadway" (Lahr 278).

### **Music and Choreography as Plastic Theater**

I took to the theater with the impetus of compulsion. Writing since I was a child, I had begun to feel a frustrating lack of vitality in words alone. I wanted a plastic medium. I conceived things visually, in sound and color and movement.

- Tennessee Williams, *The History of a Play*

The summer months following my first year as a Theater/Dance Masters student was spent immersed in as much of the Williams canon as three months allowed. Much of the Williams material available in the University library ended up in my small study room at home, or traveled with me on the occasional auto trip to visit friends, family, and favorite areas of scenic beauty. I sat, for instance, in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone

Natural Park devouring Williams' Collected Short stories so that now as I look back over some of them for this dissertation, a particular story recalls the local where I first read it. I began to comprehend Williams' lexis that imply truth, life, or reality is an "organic" thing, that encourages transformative forms on stage by which the playwright can encompass the realism of subjective truth.

Williams called it "plastic theater." He had begun to feel a frustrating lack of vitality in words alone, imagining things visually, organically, i.e. in sound, movement and color. In a 1945 essay entitled "Notes to the Reader" Williams wrote:

When the art of a playwright approaches that of the painter who thinks in terms of balance, harmony, and rhythm, his writing begins to depart from the strict literary province. He begins to enter that of the plastic arts: painting, sculpture, architecture. A plastic theater emerges....a correction of chance by the longing and vision of poets (1945:26).

From great collaborative efforts of directors and designers with similar theatrical philosophies, Williams' poetic lyricism has been configured into presentational forms such as dance and music that express the poignancy of character subjectivity. For example, an opera was made of *A Streetcar Named Desire* composed by André Previn with libretto by Philip Littell in 1995. The opera received its premiere at the San Francisco Opera, September 19, 1988. *Streetcar* was choreographed by Valerie Bettis and presented in New York by the Slavenska-Franklin Ballet Company in March 1953, with Frederic Franklin as Stanley and Mia Slavenska as Blanche. *Dance Magazine* quoted Bettis as explaining:

Williams doesn't write plays that are all tied up with plot and incident. He writes about people and their emotions and their interrelationships. Since most of the excitement of *Streetcar* comes from what transpires in the disintegrating mind of Blanche DeBois, what better way to express it than through dance? The main theme of the ballet is the conflict between Blanche's inner world and reality (Stahl 1953).

A dance-drama version of *Streetcar* with jazz accompaniment focusing on the evening of Stanley's poker party, was choreographed by Gus Giordano in 1969 and performed for the Chicago Festival.

*This Property is Condemned*, the eleventh one act play in the collection *Twenty-seven Wagons Full of Cotton* was choreographed by Donald Saddler in 1957. *This Property* tells the tale of one of Williams' youngest fugitives, an adolescent female Willie, forced by social and family circumstances into a life of tragic abandon. She is unable to grasp the magnitude of her plight as a desolate orphan being sexually abused by her deceased elder sister's numerous "clients," yet attempts to fashion her own survival



Fig. 2. Bettis Ballet



while living in an old condemned mansion fallen into disrepair. She is a dreamer with a vivid imagination that enables her not to see her predicament self-pityingly as abnormal. Although Willie's early demise is suggested by play's end, Willie assures her companion and audience that "I'm going to live a long long time like my sister....when my lungs get affected I'm going to die like she did...with my pearl earrings on an' my solid gold beads from Memphis...." (Williams 1966:197).

In the July 1957 edition of *Theater Arts* the following review appeared concerning Donald Saddler's choreographed Ballet Theater Workshop Off Broadway presentation of

*This Property is Condemned:*

For *This Property Is Condemned*, Saddler had his two principals, Ruth Ann Koesun as Willie, and Ralph MacWilliams as Tom, speak the lines of the play. While this appalled a few purists, it was necessary because *he conceived his work as a play with movement as well as speech*. Had either his choreography or Miss Koesun been anything but brilliant, this could have been disastrous. As it was, the vignette of the child prostitute was superbly heightened in its effectiveness (Coleman:1957).

This review was to play a critical role in determining the development and planning for our performance of *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen*.

When a play employs unconventional techniques it should not be trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality...but should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are... (Williams 1970:7).

Williams was an excellent dancer. He was taught to dance by his sister, Rose, and as a freshman at the University of Missouri, too shy to ask for a date, he was a welcome stag at sorority dances because of his accomplished dance skills. When he went to New York in 1940 to study playwriting at the New School for Social Research, he would spend time at the *Dance Index* office in the School of American Ballet, turning out poems and plays on a borrowed typewriter. In this atmosphere it would have been natural for him to experiment with transposing various play ideas into dance (Hale 2005:1-32).

Williams used body movement as a form of expressionism throughout his writing career. Early efforts such as *Beauty is the Word*, ends with a missionary's granddaughter performing a voluptuous dance on stage at the climax of the play to refute her grandfather's puritanical missionary zeal. *The Purification*, Williams only work written in verse, calls to mind the choreographic studies of Martha Graham, for whom Williams in the 40's wrote a dance drama, *The Paper Lantern: A Dance Play for Martha Graham*. In *The Purification*, words are aligned against music, and gesture is more emphatic than

speech. Important moments in the narrative are configured as dance. The key figure, the girl Elena, is described by Williams in choreographic terms, appearing three times, and not speaking on two occasions. Jim, the gentleman caller of *Glass Menagerie*, teaches Laura to dance to the music heard from the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley from the Wingfield apartment. Blanche “seduces” Mitch by luring him to waltz in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The gypsy’s wild dance embodies “flesh” as opposed to Alma’s “spirit” in *Summer and Smoke* and years later in *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, Williams’ poetic tirade against the totalitarian barbarism he envisaged of America, wild music with an accompanying flamenco dance by King’s young daughter, la Nina, recalls their earlier glory days before the onset of the turbulent era in which Williams sets the play. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, an impressionistic study of the Fitzgerald’s turbulent relationship, recalls the ghost of Zelda Fitzgerald as a dancer (Hale 2005:3).

In the late 80’s shortly before his death Williams sent his publisher, New Directions Publishing Company, three manuscripts entitled “Three Plays for The Lyric Theater.” *The Youthfully Departed*, *Now The Cats With Jeweled Claws*, and *A Cavalier for Milady*. The three are linked by the subject of youthful death, expressed most clearly in *The Youthfully Departed* which is, in fact, a meditation on death performed as a dance. The play’s title, *Nur die jungen Toten*, (*Only Those Who Die Young*), converted by Williams to “The Youthfully Departed,” comes from the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, a Bohemian-Austrian poet. Considered an extremely intense lyric German language writer, his poetry was admired by Williams for its existential “mystical” poetic verse. While Williams invents the background exposition and action of the play, Rilke’s expressionistic description of the Laments and their Land of Lamentations is what the



two protagonists act out in the drama. Williams' stage notes direct:

...a passionately erotic dance between them; it must contain whirls and leaps to evade their captors...at its climax THEY may tear their clothes off, flinging them in the faces of the pursuing ATTENDANTS with savage outcries: then their bodies join...appear to...and a great, startled "Ahhh" rises from their throats and the place itself... (Williams quoted in Hale 2005:8).

Although nudity and sex was no longer considered indecent on the American stage, the particular dance scene as written with its implications of intercourse certainly had the potential to shock audiences. Likely for such reasoning as late as 2005 *The Youthfully Departed* had yet to be produced.<sup>2</sup>

The other two plays, *Now the Cats With the Jewelled Claws* and *A Cavalier for Milady*, fit the experimental mode of Williams' last years to the extent that scholars consider them anti-literary. Gone are the poetic arias and the familiar characters for which Williams became famous. Hale labels all three as "presentational" as Williams utilizes all aspects of ["plastic"] theater. Actors, music, dance, stage effects, symbolism, surprise and shock, create theatrical excitement and express ideas (Hale 2005:28).

#### **Chapter 4. *Talk to Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen***

Oh, you weak beautiful people who give up with such grace, what you need is someone to take hold of you, gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of....

- Tennessee Williams, Maggie: *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*

#### **Play Selection**

The first collection of Tennessee Williams' thirteen one act plays entitled *Twenty-seven Wagons Full of Cotton* was published in 1945. Reflecting the itinerant life he lived

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<sup>2</sup> As of the writing of this thesis, I have been unable to identify a commercial production.

at that time, a life style that would become more active and frenetic as he aged, and his experiences in cities like New Orleans and St Louis, provided Williams with the cabalistic systems of survival he would require to subsist in the jungle of the New York Theater and the city itself (Leverich 448). Many of these plays are set in boarding houses or squalid one room apartments in economically depressed locales, and concern the alienation of the individual, the plight of an outsider, the problem of human identity, the dehumanization of the human spirit, an inability to move beyond the status quo and, a theme that runs through most of Williams' works, the reconciliation of the inner spirit with the flesh.

*Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen*, the twelfth play in the series, describes the heartbreaking tale of a young couple living in a furnished room west of Eight Ave. in midtown Manhattan, bound together in an endless cycle by their hopeless poverty. They try desperately to find themselves among the overwhelming forces of big city life, personal desire, and mutual emotional neglect. Temptations, choices, economic privation and the endless ritual of their lives, as individuals and as a pair, render them somnambulists retreating within themselves to the security of their own private worlds. The play begins with the Man awakening from a night of heavy drinking, the Woman sips water, stares out the window and dreams. "Even their efforts to find themselves through sexuality fail" (Kolin 1998:6).

Williams splits his own contradictory male/female persona into two voices: a Man, shown lying on a bed in a small apartment room, and a Woman sitting and staring out a curtainless window at the falling rain. The Man has apparently returned after going on a long drinking binge; he recites an appalling litany of urban sorrows: "People do

terrible things to a person when he's unconscious in this city...I've been passed around like a dirty postcard" (Williams 1966:214). Meanwhile, the Woman has drunk nothing but water for three days. She is wasting away. The Man urges his companion to "talk to me like the rain" (215). And talk she does; a long, extraordinary, heartbreakingly beautiful poetic reverie of escape from the city, from the man, from life itself. "I'll always have clean things," she rhapsodizes. "I'll dress in white. . . I will read long books and the journals of dead writers. I will feel closer to them than I ever felt to people I used to know before I withdrew from the world" (211).

In the intonation of their voices is a form of politeness, a tender formality like that of two lonely children who want to be friends. They have lived in this intimate situation for a very long time, such that what is transpiring between them is a scene that has been repeated often. The implied emotional contents, reproach and contrition, have been so played that the meaning of each has been worn out. Nothing is left for them. They are "rooted hopelessly in an unchanging present" (Kolin 1998:6), left to a futile and hopeless existence between them.

*Talk to Me Like the Rain*, written during a tumultuous emotional time in the playwright's life, underscores Williams' outlook on the futility of existence for people like the Man and Woman in *Rain*, who, living within the confines of a larger macrocosm obsessed with fear and absent of the ability to trust and love, find their own lives void of the basic emotional human desire to share.

The usual mistake that is made in the presentation of intensified reality on the stage is that of realistic action. (Williams 1970:7).

**Presentation and critique from faculty committee, previous venues,**

## Choreographer

I began my theater education Spring Semester of 2011 in courses with Professors Randy Bolton in Acting IV, and Jere Hodgkin in Directing I. A memorable part of that first year was my University Stage debut as Evert in *Crazy for You* directed by Professor Greg Johnson. The next five semesters included a series of courses, graduate and undergraduate, that deepened my understanding and appreciation of the theater arts, ranging from the historical perspective, stage craft, script analysis, directorial arts, and the vitality of research and writing. Stage work included acting experience in *You Can't Take it With You*, *Cherry Orchard*, and *Comedy of Errors*. I also learned how some of the wheels turned within the department, and what was necessary to delve further into particular subjects. In my notes I found a paper titled; Project Proposal for *Talk To Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* dated May 15, 2013 (see appendix A).

This proposal, with the appropriate application form for the use of department theater facilities, was sent to Theater/Dance production manager Jason McDaniel for the sole purpose of requesting the use of the Masquer Theater sometime in the future. A year later, May 5, 2014, in Dr. Jillian Campana's Intro to Grad Studies I discussed proceeding with *Rain* as my Master's Creative Project. I was instructed to submit an updated proposal concerning *Talk to Me Like the Rain* to the faculty committee for evaluation. Two "ideas" for my MA research were subsequently suggested: 1) a critical engagement with Williams' later work, and the relationship between Williams' plays and his life, or 2) a practical engagement, as a director, in interpreting Williams' work for an audience, as exemplified by [my] design proposal (see appendix B).

After receiving these two alternative statements, I was able to focus my view

more directly on the second as the direction my research thoughts were taking. I could not fathom developing the project that eventually resulted without presenting *Talk To Me Like the Rain* before an audience so as to enable and question their most complete objective response (see appendix B).

I began in earnest to develop a hypothesis by which I could demonstrate that Williams' concept of theatrical reality was reproducible within my academic environment. Aware of the importance of academic reproducibility in the medical profession as proof of a research hypothesis, and encouraged by scholarly and critical evaluations of commercially developed and performed ideations of Williams' plays, my intent, as a University student, was to develop a research approach to a Williams work to investigate a similar result. I became anxious to explore and establish how a more subjective expressionistic approach to the poetic realism of Williams' language in a one act play might affect an audience. Although trade newspaper and journal critique was available for analysis, I could find no audience evaluations of the works cited, with success evidenced secondarily by positive commercial assessment.

*Talk To Me Like The Rain and Let Me Listen*, the one act play written by Williams in 1953 at a critical moment in the playwright's evolution to experimental theater, contains a story line that a younger audience might equate with. It seemed the perfect drama for my research. A careful search was made to find venues where *Rain* had been produced. The following were located, performed in accordance with other one act plays. None were found that encompassed either a dance motif in the form of choreographed body movement, or a background musical enactment as part of the actors body work.

1. The Café Voltaire in Chicago. Chris Velasquez, director.
2. The Jungle Theater in Minneapolis, Minn. One of four Williams one acts presented.  
Bain Boelke, director
3. The Coyote Theater Center for the Arts in Boston, Mass. An evening of Williams“  
one act plays. Jeffrey Mousseau, director (dates unavailable 1-3)
4. Westport, Conn. 1958.
5. New York City in 1962
6. London in 1978. (venue and personnel unavailable)
7. Performances found onYouTube:
  - a. Troy University located in Troy, N.Y. Senior Capstone for Troy  
University Department of Theatre and Dance, May 19, 2013
  - b. Performance in Athens, Greece, with English subtitles
  - c. A film entitled *Listen to the Rain and Let Me Listen* by Jennifer Lee, inspired by  
the Tennessee Williams play *Talk To Me Like The Rain and Let Me Listen* Ravensbourne  
University, Greenwich Peninsula, London, U.K., “An impressionistic and surrealistic  
portrait with naturalistic background projections and music,” “*Rain*” 24 by Native  
American Flute, Nov 24, 2011

In Graduate Dramaturgy class taken in spring semester 2014, I had the opportunity to present a dramaturge’s approach to *Rain*. At that presentation I asked a classmate to read parts of a long monologue given by the female character. The fellow student, Kelly Bouma had not been so forewarned. However, being the gifted and intelligent actress she is, her reading portrayed the delicate emotionality of the young woman. As I considered approaching the Master’s faculty concerning my idea for this

project, I had in mind again asking Ms. Bouma if she might be interested in performing the role should the project move forward. First however, in June of 2014, with no knowledge of what it would take to choreograph such a work, I had approached the director of the University Dance Department. Her response was that I wait for fall session to start, then put up a notice requesting a choreographer, likely a department student who might wish to participate. At the moment I could only anticipate the start of school to seek such aid, and to approach my faculty advisors concerning the feasibility of what I was to propose (see appendix C).

However, being a bit impatient, and “purposely” naive, I sent an e-mail to Dance Professor Heidi Eggert with whom I had worked in *Fiddler on the Roof* seeking her advice, and shortly before fall semester began I met with Ms. Eggert and asked if she might have some time before classes began to discuss choreographing Williams’ one act play. She suggested I put my thoughts and ideas along with a copy of the play script in her mailbox which she would look over when she had a moment. Not long thereafter we discussed how I envisioned the words spoken by the actors might arouse body movement expressing their subjective emotionality in the form of a dance. She appreciated my perception and agreed to help develop the performance (see appendix C).

### **Developing a Research Concept, Discussion and Advice**

The poetic conception of stage design bears little relation to the accepted convention of realistic scenery in the theater. As a matter of fact it is quite the opposite. Truth in the theater, as the masters of the theater have always known, stands above and beyond mere accuracy to fact. In the theater the actual thing is never the exciting thing. Unless life is turned into art on the stage it stops being alive and goes dead. Theater....evocative, not descriptive.

- Robert Edmond Jones; *The Dramatic Imagination*

During the Fall Semester of 2014 the three Masters Students met bimonthly with Master of Arts program advisor, Dr. Bernadette Sweeney, to discuss each member's evolution toward establishing a research concept and a plan toward defining that research. This was to prove a more trying task than I first visualized.

In the chapter entitled A New Kind of Drama from his book *The Dramatic Imagination*, Robert Edmond Jones has written:

....beneath the surface of an ordinary everyday normal casual conscious existence there lies a dynamic world of impulse and dream...express[ing] itself to us in our conscious life in a never-ending stream of images...[playwrights] are seeking to penetrate beneath the surface of everyday life into a stream of images which has its source in the deep unknown springs of our being (Jones 1965).

With these words in mind, I sought to develop an approach to comprehending, determining, and demonstrating Williams' dramaturgy in moving from what the critics and scholars termed Williams plays of representational realism to the increasingly more expressionistic "experimental" work he proposed in the preface written for *Glass Menagerie*.

My template for developing a construct upon which to acquire the methodology to explore my rationales was *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*. The short one act play was written at the time Williams was in rehearsal for *Camino Real*, his highly experimental play in which he used a great deal of expressionistic symbolism. *Talk To Me Like The Rain* offered my opportunity to explore the greater ideas of *Camino Real* by highlighting the turbulent emotions of two young characters struggling to endure their relationship within a setting of societal and moral degradation. Could I, using expressionism in the form of body movement and music accompanying Williams' poetic



language, convey subjective human yearnings for love, compassion, companionship and personal freedom to characters and audience by developing a theatrical impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character?

I had my research concept, and the words “music and body movement, accompanying spoken words, to define inner subjectivity,” but no concrete idea of how to develop a process to question the objective.

The bimonthly meetings in Dr. Sweeney’s office provided the support, questions, and advice that set my endeavor in motion. Michael Fink, a fellow Masters candidate, replied to my proposal concerning the body and soul of the dreamer/character with the following critical and questioning analysis. His thoughts and those of Cohen Ambrose and advisor Bernadette Sweeney were significant in heading me in the direction toward the final presentation of the play.

Fink asked how I would determine if my central research question affected the audience as I hoped it would. The consensus of the group was for an immediate after performance question and answer session when people might feel more comfortable expressing their emotional experiences to what they had observed (see appendix D).

As the project progressed and greater understanding of how the ensemble was affected by their work, a two question survey was developed based on cast discussions concerning each members critical and emotional critique. The questionnaire was provided the audience, asking for a written response to the performance, and was incorporated into the half-hour post performance talk back session (see appendix G).

A major question discussed during the faculty and Master’s sessions was would we have two actors reciting the lines while two dancers performed, or would two

actor/dancers integrate dance and language both speaking and using body movement. My personal inclination was using the actor/dancer option, but I had no sense or experience as to what that might entail both physically and emotionally for the two participants. Questions and ideas were asked and suggestions made. The initial thought was to audition for four actors, two speaking their monologues and two creating body movement to the spoken words. However, as our conferences continued thoughts developed such as: Who is the dreamer? “The body and soul of the dreamer” makes me think that both the body and the soul reside in a single place. Would it be easier to “enter the body and soul of the dreamer” (see appendix D) to understand that both body and soul reside in a single entity, if the dreamer was presented in one body? (see appendix D). I agreed with this inspiration. Williams was not a single entity...I doubt if he could have written both female and male passion as he did if he was not “hermaphroditic” within his inner self. How could he write such poetic lyricism as a Blanche Dubois, an Amanda Wingfield, a Violet Venable or in *Something Unspoken* the duo of Ms’s Cornelia Scott and Grace Lancaster, had he not possessed both male and female genetic neurological codes. At the time he was writing *The Gentleman Caller*, referred to as his “quiet little play,” Williams wrote a close friend portraying himself not as a “Gulliver,” Jonathon Swift’s “dynamic outgoing character, but rather to Lewis Carroll’s feminine girl hero, “Alice.” Williams may have understood himself both as a man and a girl. When Williams own life is thoroughly realized, his concern for himself as more an “Alice” than a “Gulliver” is better understood. As a child Williams was a mama’s boy, staying close to Edwina who, rather than his emasculating father, coddled him and encouraged his reading, day dreaming, and study ethic. Disappointed and embarrassed by his son’s lack of what he considered

masculinity, C. C. Williams referred to him often as “Miss Nancy,” more than inferring his son a girl rather than a boy.

In his later years Williams continued to detail his closeness with his sister Rose. He extolled their happiness together as children, sailing paper boats in the bath tub, cutting paper dolls, playing with pets, and most interestingly, collecting bits of colored glass that were diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds. It is suggested their game of collecting these baubles fore tells Laura’s glass collection, and Williams’ youthful enthusiasm in the “treasure” hunt implies that Laura represents a lost part of Williams, rather than of his sister Rose. In *The Glass Menagerie* Laura’s limp is thought to manifest gay identity, a subject Williams could not present on the American stages of the 1940’s and 50’s. But as a girl who isn’t a girl, the playwright was able to begin a conversation of homosexual desire, to depict himself, his passions, desires, and his method of poetic discourse within a feminine portrayal. Much has been written of Williams’ ability to speak so poetically within his female characters, an author of great “feminine” sensitivity. There is such empathy in the prepubescent girl in *This Property is Condemned*, and Clare in *Outcry*. The same with *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*. The young woman’s elegant appeal for a symbolic unreachable world beyond any reality within her reach. Two different people, the Woman living in dreams, the Man in the stark reality of crushing humanity. Character/dreamers! (see appendix D).

And finally, the role of the choreographer. How would Williams’ concept of expressionistic “reality” be interpreted best...by the inherent pure spontaneous body movement of the actor/dancer, or through the construct of a choreographer. Both chosen actors are intensely private individuals who had demonstrated great subjective ability to

build character in previous class and stage work. Prof. Eggert's and my thoughts for *Rain*, were that the principals should use their inherent emotionality to interpret body movement to fit the spoken language. The choreographer would be present in rehearsal to assist their efforts in defining their thoughts and movements, but would not specifically develop the "dance" movements.

On September 24, 2014, having received faculty approval of thesis research, and the use of a stage venue, a list of "parameters for practice as research project" was provided (see appendix E).

### **Cast, Music and Musician**

At this junction, with the proposal accepted and the go ahead for the use of the Masquer, it was imperative to find the correct cast, and a classical cellist who could play the right musical accompaniment and, in so doing, establish a performance empathy with the cast members.

First and foremost was finding the right female protagonist. My preference for the role was Kelly Bouma, who fortunately was cast in another production scheduled some weeks later in the semester for her MFA Senior Project. I met with Kelly and discussed with her my concept of using dance and music as intricate to the performance. Her first words after saying she would be willing to take on the project was that my body movement/language idea was exactly what she had endeavored to do during her graduate work, that is, to be able to use her skills with body movement to express the language she would speak while performing. When I mentioned the male actor suggested by Dr. Sweeney and fellow Master's student Cohen Ambrose, one with terrific performance

skills, Kelly's reaction was immediate and enthusiastic. Mason Wagner was available, and eager to join in a one on one performance with Kelly. Auditions were not needed, and the plans for same were cancelled. The response by my faculty mentor to the acquired talent was "brilliant."

About the same time the search for a musician proceeded. With the assistance of Music Professor Fern Glass, I made the acquaintance of Mr. Eric Russell, a recent Music School Cello graduate, who on November 4<sup>th</sup> texted me, "in as much as [my] schedule [is] pretty empty, I'm in." Fortunately, Mr. Russell was familiar and performance ready with Bach's *Solo Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, the score chosen as the musical background I felt expressed the emotionality of the plays' protagonists, and fitting for Eggert's choreographic work with Bouma and Wagner.

Last and so important to the smooth function of the rehearsal process was a stage manager. On September 28, Sydoney Blackmore sent an e-mail offering her assistance in "whatever way you need me." As an accomplished actor and dancer and with a keen eye toward the needs of cast and crew, Blackmore made it all come together.

### **Rehearsal period, Concepts and Discussion**

The writer must take hold of the raw material of earthly sorrow, which in reality has no earthly form, seldom any poetry, and what dignity exists is only within the "embattled spirits" of those enduring the moment, and transfigure these mysterious pieces into a new order that is congruous with the design which humanity has endured since birth. Reconfigured as an art form, and placed on stage may not change the reality of the tragic event, but now it is invested with properties which give it poetry and meaning.

- Tennessee Williams, *Notes to the Reader*

With participants assembled, rehearsal time and place established, the usual sense of urgency and time constraints pushed for action. During the month of October, table read through, reviews and discussions of dance/language performances brought to the table by Bouma and Wagner were scrutinized and critiqued. Wagner developed his thoughts on Expressionism and questioned how we would approach what he termed “Full Expressionistic Plastic Theater.” That is either by body movement only without language, or as close to “soundscape” as possible with body movement. He raised the question that would lead toward the eventual body work, whether the physical effort would be actual choreographed movement or contact “improv.” Noting Williams’ use of the mandolin in the play, Wagner sent *Window* and *Story Board* by Album Leaf as music that he felt fit the mode of Williams’ written language.

Bouma provided the beautiful Frantic Assembly choreographed production of *Lovesong*, a gorgeous production of dance and language separately performed. In providing works by Pina Bausch and Mary Wigman, Bouma explained:

... how amazing would it be to have it juxtaposed to the poetry given to us by Williams? And an experiment for us as actors Mason, to see how movement informs our process. We are often labeled as actors and therefore innately disconnected from our bodies...we are both intuitive artists and I believe this will give us a platform for exploring the idea of EMBODYING the text (see appendix C).

For the titled “director,” reading these words and hearing the cast’s enthusiasm was pure joy and encouragement, for it underscored my own thoughts and convinced me that our venture would be successful. It also established in my mind, that aside from my own research, what we were embarking on was an individual “research” endeavor where each ensemble member could develop his subjective body expression in accordance to how he was inspired by Williams’ words and the presence of the musical background.

An important beginning to putting the “page on the stage” is script analysis with an understanding not just of the written word, but what was the motivation behind the writing of the words. In so many of his writings, Williams’ characters reflect the playwright’s complicated emotional personality. Their lives and stories are driven by their need to survive within divisive living spaces in which they are given almost no opportunity to control. Along with the script, I asked each ensemble member to read three of Williams’ short stories. One, the *Poet*, is a lyrical absurdist autobiography in which Williams’ character carries a self-produced elixir that when ingested allows him to live immune to the influence of states and organizations, and lecture to an as yet unadulterated young audience his teachings against the ills of their adult societies. The other two, *The Vine* and *Sand*, are similar to *Rain* in that each tell the stories of two people, one a very old couple separated by disability, yet held together by love and a need for companionship, and a young urban couple growing away from each other, but soon finding themselves alone, lost, and desperate without their relationship. The latter two stories are not dissimilar to the two protagonists in *Talk To Me Like The Rain*, people

needing each other, yet not reaching each other. I believed *Vine* and *Sand* would help our two actor/dancers to further comprehend Williams' sense of the misbegotten and aid in their character development.

### **Directorial philosophy and rehearsal directions**

Rehearsals began on Monday November 10<sup>th</sup> in McGill 125, the floor of which had been taped accordingly the day before. By this time all had agreed that there would be two protagonists interacting with one another, speaking their lines and working toward developing the appropriate body movement while reciting their words. During the first week the ensemble met three times, with Eggert present the first day only. These sessions involved table reading of the play and thoughts involving individual character personalities. We discussed where the play took place, the society in which the participants lived, the economic conditions of their lives, the pattern of their relationship,



**Fig. 4. Bouma and Wagner**

the meaning of the inclement weather as a metaphor to their existence, and the emotional emptiness felt by each character as indicated by their monologues. From these



discussions came suggestions concerning room space and set design that would enhance the emotional atmosphere of the lives of the protagonists.

On the first few evenings, the cellist played portions one, three, five and six of *Bach's Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*. These four suites, chosen earlier with Heidi Eggert, best underscored the emotion of the plot. The final music was decided upon over a lengthy period of rehearsal as musician and characters adjusted their language/movement to the music until the three participants were comfortable with music/language/body harmonization. From that point the effort of the two character/dreamers and cellist was to find an appropriate rhythm ebb and flow, and fortissimo/pianissimo volume of musical accompaniment, as language and body movement progressed. The cello was used for sound effects as well as mood swings within the play. This meant that at moments the cello strings were plucked, as when rain was called for, or in certain areas of the Woman's long monologue when she described her reflection in the mirror.

A significant moment of cello-character coordination occurs when the cellist moves to Bach's Fifth Suite. The cellist, Eric Russell, had stated that he would need to retune his instrument to play the Fifth Suite correctly. It was felt this particular suite fit a moment in the young woman's story so well that it was decided to halt the words, as though of a thought, while the cello was retuned. This abrupt change occurs when the young woman shifts from conversation with her partner to a dream state in which she tells a heart breaking tale of moving toward a brighter, warmer, more comfortable existence. A precarious theatrical decision was made which could have had significant consequences for my research question. The change might distract the audience and the

two protagonists at a critical moment risking their concentration on the emotionality already established. Nevertheless, it was decided to proceed with the retuning, considering that at that moment of the story a scenic discord between the Man and Woman was being developed.

On November 11, the ensemble met in the Masquer Theater to envision acting space and set design (see appendix H). It was agreed that very few items were necessary to tell the story. A large old weathered wood window frame suspended from the ceiling down stage right, a rusted fold up bed upstage left, a glass of water and an old chair positioned at the window would suffice. Costumes consisted of a white blouse and white knee length bathrobe for Bouma, and a pair of old white long johns for Wagner, all personal belongings. The cellist's position on stage was to be determined during rehearsals. Ms. Ruby Sweeney-Ferriter would be the child singing "rain, rain go away come back another day" to be taped and played at performance by stage manager Sydoney Blackmore, and lighting would be developed by lighting student Karl Boveng per faculty parameters (see appendix E). While Russell played the cello so as to give a sense of the room's acoustics, Bouma moved about the area inspired by Russell's playing. It occurred to me at that moment that Bach's music would lend itself well to body movement inspired by Williams' language (see appendix L).



**Fig. 5. Bouma and Russell in rehearsal**

### **Audience participation, questionnaire response**

Early in the rehearsal process it was decided that the audience would be positioned as a close-in thrust configuration. Bringing the audience directly up against the edge of the playing stage would enhance their perspective of the intensity of character image. A two query survey was given to each audience member, and a short introduction by me prior to the performance explained the research aspect of the project. I explained that what they were about to witness was an experiment in language, music, and body movement. The questions asked the audience how they related to the play, what images were evoked by the actor/dancer's performance, and did they as individuals feel as though they were drawn into the body and soul of the character/dreamer (see appendix G).

The audience numbered approximately 75 people, more than the number of chairs put in three rows about the stage area. Sixty-eight responses were obtained. Typical of the majority is the following:

It was beautiful. The intimacy of the space brought me so close to everything that there was no way for me to miss a single detail. Everything from Kelly's eye movements, even when they were closed, to Mason's diaphragm as he took a breath, help add to the complete awareness of the breathtaking experience. The body language mixed with the voice of the cello that is Bach made the intimacy of every moment so much stronger. The low notes on the cello gave me chills because it was a note I could truly feel (see appendix M).

And answering the question concerning entering the body and soul of the character/dreamer, the following:

...the moment Kelly spoke about being taken away by the wind. She let her arms out and Mason took her like the wind and she just gave in completely. Watching the performers use their bodies to portray these emotions, thoughts, imagery, etc. was beautifully done and communicated well....there was the image of the wind. The relationship that was performed by Kelly and Mason brought the images of constraint but forever reaching for something. The imagery of the rain was wonderfully reinforced by the staccato of the cello. Kelly gazing out the window and Mason's repetition of talk to me like the rain, and let me listen. The image of Mason desperately trying to enter Kelly's dream world...Mason would appear in her dreams suddenly, and therefore being drawn back to reality...(see appendix M).

### **Faculty Impressions**

Faculty response, although for the most part positive, was more didactic and less emotional. All agreed that the concept was good and the overall performance beautiful. There was some criticism concerning the cello, from playing too loud and covering the words of the performers, to one who felt the cello should have been off stage. During rehearsal, Russell was moved from one part of the stage to the other as we attempted to find the best locals where his playing would not interfere with the thought process of the two actors. We also experimented with placing a damper on the strings. With the audience close against the stage, I felt placing the cello upstage center was preferable, rather than to either side of the performance space where the music might hinder what that audience segment heard of the language. However, my mistake was not having him

dampen the strings. At times the cello sound did drown out Bouma's and Wagner's words for those sitting furthest from the stage.

One respondent told me that she would have liked to see more interaction between the two protagonists and the cello, that although she appreciated him on stage, he really was not "part of the play." She wondered if he might not have been incorporated into the character performance as part of the actual story rather than just as a musical accompaniment. I was also informed that the cello actually did not need to be retuned for the Fifth Suite, and could have been played with very minor and non-appreciated changes. Prof. Glass did find the onstage retuning a definite distraction in that, for her, it stopped the forward motion of the story. She went on to say she had discussed with Mr. Russell the need for retuning for the Fifth Suite, had suggested against it, and was surprised that the process was included.

## **Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusion**

What elements have we but words, images, colors, scratches, upon the caves of our solitude?

- Tennessee Williams, *The Misunderstanding and Fears of an Artist Revolt*

The endeavor developed in this thesis began as a thought in the spring of 2013. I had sent a proposal and request through the Theater/Dance department for the use of a performance venue for sometime the following year. My thinking was that perhaps I would get the opportunity to develop a project that could be staged. I had been told by a graduating MFA friend that the earlier one put in such request, the better the chances of success. I began to wonder if I might be a candidate for the Masters of Theater Art program. I had completed five semesters of undergraduate work, had appeared in a

number of productions, and in essence had rediscovered the deep love of the theater arts enjoyed so much earlier in my life. I wanted more opportunity to read, research and write myself into whatever theatrical experience was available to me. I approached Professor Jere Hodgkin and asked his opinion. He knew me from class and stage work, and was encouraging. I went ahead and applied, and was accepted for the two year educational effort.

In Professor Bernadette Sweeney's Dramaturgy class in the Spring of 2014, I presented a dramaturgical discussion of Williams' one act play *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*. The conversation that ensued included aspects of my research of the play which led eventually to my proposal for applying dance and music to Williams' words. During that spring and summer, I devoted the majority of my time to Williams research which included applying for a yearly subscription to the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review* by way of communicating with Dr. Robert Bray, a leading Williams scholar. Semester meetings with Dr. Sweeney, department faculty members, and fellow Master's students, led to the development of a research question which found acceptance by the faculty committee. Essentially, my effort for the project "is to determine if expressionism in the form of dance and music will bestow on characters and audience the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer."

My research included much of the Williams canon, biographies, stories, novellas, poems, and plays, and provided a greater understanding of the playwright as a human being. Chapter One details the first twenty-eight years of Williams' life, a critical time in his growth and writing development that created in him a complex personality that at times clashed with his world, its habitants, and with himself as described in the later

portion of the chapter. The Second Chapter explains the artistic influences that inspired the development of his professional dramaturgy, the origin of his “plastic theater” concept.

I chose *Camino Real* to discuss how Williams’ most symbolic drama, and experimental play, pushed his concept of plastic theater “against the exhausted theater of realistic conventions” (1970:7). As discussed in Chapter Three, Williams insisted *Camino Real* was metaphorical of the time and world he himself inhabited, represented on stage through sets, dances, music lighting, and the myriad of character identities displayed.

*Camino Real* was written in 1953, the same year as *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*. I saw in this small one act play similar manifestations of societal pressures on the two young protagonists as what Williams’ characters deal with in *Camino Real*. If such theatrical forms could be developed in a large production, could not I develop a much smaller but no less intense exhibition using music, body movement, and language to portray a similar symbolic environment.

The second part of Chapter Three dealing with music and choreography as plastic theater, details Williams’ plays developed into large operatic and choreographed pieces. Andre Previn developed an operatic *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Valerie Bettis and Gus Giordano developed choreographic pieces for the play. Donald Saddler’s *This Property is Condemned* had the two principals speak lines as they performed their dance. The later Williams pieces were increasingly experimental, with great emphasis on dance and music performed as chants and hymns as in *Three Plays for a Lyric Theatre*.

As described in my thesis, the work ethic and fervor for the project developed in our small ensemble provided their eventual audience with the expressionistic experience I

sought. As I delved into the production life of *Camino Real*, I found that I had taken a page from the role played by Elia Kazan. Kazan was a very definitive personality in his own way, where for the most part it was “his way or the highway.” Nevertheless his appreciation of Williams’ “plastic” concept allowed him to delegate great responsibility to members of his ensemble who he knew had greater experience than he in certain aspects needed to put the play on stage. A great deal of the music and dance was allocated to his choreographer, with very little input from Kazan. For me the only way I could allow my premise to develop was to encourage and watch as Bouma, Wagner and Russell developed their music/body movement/ language coordination. Not until the final week of rehearsal did the dance configuration develop a persistent pattern, beautifully coordinated with either the plucking or bowing of the cello’s strings. Prof. Eggert worked delicately with the movements developed by the two actors, suggesting various responses to the words spoken. My contribution was more of instilling my thoughts of what emotional conflicts drove the two young people to speak the poetry written by Williams.

*Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen* is one of thirteen one act plays published in 1945 in a first version collection entitled *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. In this group of one acts, Williams writes tales of adultery, sexual violence, incest between brother and sister, crimes of passion, lesbianism, bestiality, loneliness of separation, troubled relationships, and societal degradation. *Rain* describes the psychological and emotional forces pulling at a young Man and Woman confined to a tiny apartment in a big city, suffering from personal longing and mutual emotional neglect, dealing with their personal alienation and isolation by retreating to a sense of security within their own private worlds.



How do we as audience, either individually, when reading a novel, short story, poem, listening to a piece of music, observing a painting; or as a large group, witnessing a play, a reading, attending a symphony concert or solo recital, respond to what we take in? How does the language spoken and the objectivity of what we witness impress us? Is there a difference between the objective reality we see before us and what subjective emotions we feel from the world we have entered? What emotional or psychological mechanism allows us the suspension of disbelief? No two people are going to equate subjectivity the same, but if realism can be joined with a subjective response to the word, the sound, the observation of an on stage character, will the audience likewise be drawn into what I have endeavored to describe for this thesis, the “body and soul” of the character/dreamer?

Very early in the process of developing my research conception, of all the works I have read by Williams *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen* was perfect to test my hypothesis. It told the right story, the language is elegiac, and the play is short. Fortunately, my ensemble were talented students of deep subjective intensity with knowledge of their passions, physicality, and the power of their lives. Within each of the protagonists was an inherent sexuality that lent their body movements a verbal expression, an erotic texture that exposed the depths of Williams’ emphasis on the passions of the flesh and the importance of physical transcendence. Short stories such as *Desire and the Black Masseuse*, is an example of the psychodynamics of mutual desire. *One Arm* presents frustrated desire and incompleteness, a study of unreciprocated love. *The Field of Blue Children*, tells of a failed romance, and the play *Night of the Iguana* describes sexual repression. In all these one finds Williams’ idea of character

“incompleteness,” people who lack the ability to form lasting relationships. *Talk To Me like The Rain And Let Me Listen* encompasses all these aspects of Williams’ persona, and the play, as portrayed by Bouma and Wagner, epitomized these human foibles.

Support and encouragement from gifted and devoted faculty from Dance, Theater, and Music contributed to the project, and its success. Yes! From the response provided by the audience I would say the performance given did indeed stimulate within the majority of those present, moments of subjective emotion that undeniably carried them into the character lives portrayed on stage (see appendix M). In all honesty, for a real objective response to my inquiry, such a performance should be taken from an academic environment to a commercial venue. As one member of my faculty group reminded me there is a very real difference in the two schools of theater, and what may be successful in one, does not preclude success in the other. But what was encouraging to me as a template for starting on this quest were the previous Williams plays that have been choreographed, made operatic, and developed as screen plays, all with exceptional commercial success.

### **Personal Thoughts**

What is very clear and undeniable to me at this late stage of my life is that this quest started not in 2011, but on that Jamaican evening in 1964 when I sat, drank, chatted, listened to, and removed the shoes of one of the most tormented, daring, heroic, creative geniuses that has ever written for the stage.

If I was a true believer in fate, I would suggest that all this was preordained, but I am not of such a mind. I was brought up in a family where the arts were critical for the

education of all, adults and children, and within the confines of a city where to walk the streets was to be surrounded by art. Theater was my mantra, and though the path diverged in both form and distance, theater was always the passion that beacons. I will admit that my interest and subsequent study of Tennessee Williams, his life and work, may very well have been influenced by our brief encounter on that Jamaica Holiday so many years ago. However, I must conjecture this realization a “memory or ghost play” as Williams might have called it, for I will deny a conscious motivation. My return to theater academia was instituted well before my trip to Jamaica. I have lived “theater” one way or the other my entire life with Mr. Williams one stop along the way. However, once given the opportunity to delve into the life story and the psychological forces responsible for his creativity, I felt an emotional identity with more than his written word. Within my own “character/dreamer” I discovered a fellowship with much of the subjective emotionality of Tennessee Williams, and have come to realize that so much of my own philosophy toward life and those inhabiting my world are indeed those with fervor for the desires of “the spirituality and the flesh.”

In all human experience, there are parallels which permit common understanding in the telling and hearing, and it is the frightening responsibility of an artist to make what is directly or allusively close to his own being communicable and understandable, however disturbingly, to the hearts and minds of all whom he addresses (Williams 2009:167).

## Appendices

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# Appendix A.

Project Proposal

Presented by Peter A. Philips

May 15, 2013

## *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* by Tennessee Williams

*Talk to Me Like The Rain...* one of eight one act plays written by Williams in the 1950's features a small-scale, bare-room situation. It involves an unnamed man and woman who are bound together in an endless cycle by their hopeless poverty. Major William's themes are explored in the man's alcoholism and the woman's desperation. Williams splits his own contradictory male/female persona into two voices: the man, shown lying on a bed in a small hotel room, and a woman sitting beside him. The man has apparently returned after going on a long drinking binge; he recites an appalling litany of urban sorrows ("People do terrible things to a person when he's unconscious in this city. . . . I've been passed around like a dirty postcard . . . . Meanwhile, she has drunk nothing but water for 3 days. She stares out the window. She is wasting away. The man then urges his companion to "talk to me like the rain." And talk she does: an extraordinary, long, and heartbreakingly beautiful poetic reverie of escape--from the city, from the man, from life itself. "I'll always have clean things," she rhapsodizes. "I'll dress in white. . . . I will read long books and the journals of dead writers. I will feel closer to them than I ever felt to people I used to know before I withdrew from the world . . ." And as they talk, a child's voice (here the voice of a young woman) gently sings, "Rain, rain, go away . . ."

A window suspended in space represents the view of the world outside the liminal like room the two characters share. They are trapped with each other in this room while talking of the world outside both lamentfully and whistfully. Through the window, the audience at first sees a New York rainstorm: the real world, cold, gray, overcast. As the woman talks of her dream-life, the window might transform into a portal to a dream world depicted as landscapes, clouds, images such as a seascape, contrails and birds, possibly as a mélange of color or high-contrast black and white time lapse video projections. The lighting should set a mood through blues and whites, and cast the two figures in their own frames, shadows, and colors to amplify their tragic, isolated state. Music background; Mahler: Final movement of 9<sup>th</sup> symph.



I propose to stage this piece in the Masquer Theater for a minimum of two evenings. I believe that it can be done effectively with a minimalist set design that gives the impression of unkempt poverty with few furniture pieces, single clothing items, lighting sufficient to underscore bleakness, and a suspended window through which both a real and imagined world can be appreciated by an audience. The strength and success of the staged play must lie in the poetic language of the character's monologues, and thus the experience and maturity of the actors is essential.

## Appendix B.

Hi Jillian, Jere and Peter, ( 9 pages)

I just had a meeting with Peter where he presented to me the document you mentioned Jillian, detailing a production of Talk to me like the rain, with a design concept, for that december masquer slot.

Cohen and Kate have set the precedent for what that slot can be used for, and typically the MA student can get in there on Sunday, and show the work on Monday evening of the last week of term. The MA student also gets some rehearsal space for about 5 weeks or so I think...

My concerns, as I explained to Peter on reading his proposal, was that it was a full direction proposal, which would demand d/t support.

But my bigger concern is that I am not sure that that proposal would serve his research, or what he has articulated his research area to be, up to this point.

As I see it, and as I described to Peter just now, he is wrestling with two ideas for his MA research:

- 1: a critical engagement with Williams' later work, and the relationship between Williams' plays and his life
- 2: a practical engagement, as a director, in interpreting Williams' work for an audience, as exemplified by his design proposal

While there is obviously a strong relationship between these two ideas, they are not the same thing.

I think Peter's practical work, if focused on idea 1 -working to understand the play, could be a studio process piece, that need not come before an audience per se but maybe become an open workshop in mcgill/schrieber, or maybe never be open, but closely documented by peter and the actors

Idea 2 then moves the research into the area of a director's relationship with Williams' play[s] which could very well benefit from an unsupported [!] one night performance in the masquer before an audience, but becomes a very different thesis

I think we need to work together to make sure that Peter's ambitions can be realized within the parameters of the MA and its limited resources re practice, time, thesis credit loading, etc.

Once that is decided, his proposal can be amended for operations committee.....

Feedback welcome

Thanks all

*From Bernadette*

## Appendix C.

~Professor Kauffmann...

My name is Peter Philips, I am a Masters Graduate student in the Theater department. First, I apologize for interrupting your busy teaching schedule this afternoon, and appreciate your suggestion I send this e-mail

My interest and one part of a two part thesis project is directing a one act play by Tennessee Williams. The department has allocated me the use of the Masquar Theater on December 7 and 8, with a five week rehearsal allotment. The title of the play is *Talk to Me Like the Rain, and Let Me Listen*. The play explores the troubled relationship of two young people living in a Manhattan setting of near squalor. Williams wrote the story in 1953 the same year he wrote *Camino Real* when his dramaturgy began to diverge from what the critics referred to as his "Broadway" phase. Essentially, his work over time became increasing experimental, wherein he moved from representational realism to presentational expressionism.

The play has just two people, with two long monologues, particularly the young woman. All versions that I have been able to find are with the two protagonists as written. My approach will be with a minimum of five characters, two giving their lines, while three others move through the words spoken as figments of the imaginations of the speakers. The thought occurred of the possibility of putting dance movements to the monologues. I have no idea if such is possible, but the words spoken by the young lady are so lovely and lyrically poetic, that I wonder at the possibility.

Williams production notes call for a thin sounding mandolin and a child offstage singing the *Estrillita*. To that or on its own during the long dreamscape of the woman's monologue, I considered the fourth movement of Mahler's ninth symphony. The long slow string sections seem to fit the spoken words and the play's theme perfectly.

At any rate that is what I wished to chat with you about this afternoon. If you feel this project feasible I would be happy to provide you a script and my project proposal. I welcome your advice.

Many thanks for your time.

P.Philips~

June 19' 2014

~Karen....

Thank you for your informative note.

Yes, I will be looking for a choreographer who might be able to program a dance pattern to the words spoken by the two protagonists. I have recently come across references discussing Valerie Bettis' choreography of "A Streetcar Named Desire," and two other works by Williams, "Purification" and "This Property is Condemned." I anticipate I will find these journal/encyclopedic articles in the library.

Have chatted with Erin, and we will be putting forth a descriptive notice at the start of the semester.

Again, my thanks for your assistance.

Peter~

June 24, 2014

~Hi Heidi....

This is a note from the "Rabbi" in *Fiddler!* That in the way of an introduction so you do not have to get to the end to see who is writing.

Heidi, as you may know I am entering my last year as a Master's candidate, and needless to say am looking forward to a very busy time. The theater folks have allotted me the Masquer Theater on Dec. 7 and 8 to present a one act play by Tennessee Williams as part of my thesis project. The play is a two character one act named *Listen to the Rain, and Let Me Listen*. Essential it is the story of two young people living in squalor somewhere on the West Side of Manhattan. She is literally starving, and he has just returned from what we learn is a deplorable situation at a hotel party He is coming off a drunk. There are two heartbreaking monologues, hers being the longest, detailing a dream scape she imagines as a way out of her current existence. The writing is eloquent poetic lyricism as only Williams could write, and potentially a beautiful presentation.

My research has taken me deep into the theatricality of Williams and his concept of the "plastic" theater, essentially moving from theatrical realism to more of an expressionistic presentational aspect. Much of his later work has involved dance, and as you may know, a number of choreographers and dance companies have presented his work in dance form. I am currently trying to obtain the Valerie Bettis production of *Streetcar Named Desire* through our intra library loan system, but have been denied the copies available in that the libraries who have copies won't lend them.

Earlier this summer I communicated with Karen concerning this project, and she suggested that I place a note through the e-mail system and bulletin board for a student who might be interested in working on the project as choreographer and/or dancer. What I have in mind is putting Williams' words, particularly the young woman's expressions into dance. I would have the two characters deliver their lines while a dancer would perform an interpretation to what is being said. Williams, in his stage notes, has offered certain music, but as I have imagine the piece I am inclined to music such as the fourth movement of Maller's ninth symphony which I find underscores the mood of the play. I wonder if you might have sometime before school starts to read the play...I can put the script in your mail box, or sit with me for a few moments and discuss the project. Once school starts for everyone I foresee mayhem in my life to establish auditions, rehearsal schedule and study methodologies along with class work, as well as obligations for other students and faculty. Essentially I am asking for guidance to whether this project is reasonable and appropriate for a dual department project.

Hope you have a moment to advise. Would be greatly appreciated.

Peter Philips~

July 29, 2014

Dr. Pete,

**COUNT ME IN!**

How many dancers do you envision? Just the one? One for each of the protagonists?

I look forward to meeting with you and discussing it further. This will be great, I'm glad you invited me into the process.

Heidi

Sept. 5, 2014

~Hi Heidi....

Fabulous! I am most appreciative of your interest.

I am looking for two dancers and two actors. Concerning the choreography, I will abide by your advise concerning the reality of the degree of dancing required to tell the spoken story.

As I mentioned I have a DVD copy of the Giordano version of Williams' "Streetcar Named Desire" which I can leave with or view with you when we meet. I have touched base with Jason concerning time slots available for rehearsal and planning, and he has promised to get back to me once the dust settles on these first few hectic semester start-up weeks.

My schedule gives me freedom Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, or every afternoony but Monday after 2:00. Let me know what looks like a convenient time for you to go through the material with me.

Peter~

From: Kelly

To:

Cc: Ensemble

Subject: Re: Friday

Okay, after doing a little digging myself, I realized something big: If we are going to use movement to express the emotions of these characters, it's going to be ugly. AND I LOVE IT. When I say ugly...I mean exposed, raw, angst ridden and personal. Williams' poetry is beautiful in the way deep sadness is felt through the sound of words and rhythm of the text. So what if we didn't have text? See video links below (I'm sure you are familiar with these examples Heidi and I hope you all have seen Pina) to get an idea of the raw emotion coming out of these women's movement/ "dances." The reason why I put "dance" in quotations, is because these examples are so far from what I think of when I think of dance...to me, these examples SHOW, REVEAL what's going on underneath. I believe it's what we artists (actors, dancers, painters, etc) strive to do, but how often are we given permission to present such emotion in its distilled form (without a script or set choreography)?

Pina Bausch:

<http://www.pina-bausch.com/>

Mary Wigman:

<http://www.marywigman.com/>

In my rambling...it dawned upon me: "Well, here's our chance." And how amazing would it be to have it juxtaposed to the poetry given to us by Williams? And an experiment for us as actors Mason, to see how movement informs our process. We are often labelled as actors and therefore innately disconnected from our bodies...we are both intuitive artists and I believe this will give us a platform for exploring the shit Randy so often tries to pull out of us. And he hardly disregards the words. The complete opposite. He teaches (or tries to get into our heads, rather) the idea of EMBODYING the text. So, I would like to second (or third) the idea of doing this piece twice. Once, with a full or partial text with movement (Expressionist or whatever you want to call it) and then perhaps without it, but see how it informs our second performance and therefore the reaction of the audience (or witnesses as I think we should call them).

I also found some beautiful music from a cellist, Elinor Frey. She has an album of solo cello, but it was on another album she collaborated with David Fung which really struck a chord with this piece and perhaps the more "avant garde" approach we are taking (but who needs a label!). I listened to them on Spotify, but here is a link to youtube (this version is performed by other musicians, but it's the same composer, Kaija Saariaho. So disturbing, and yet resolves often...or could be juxtaposed by a softer quality at different points of the piece.

Some other terms which caught my eye:

individual perspective

expression of self

not realism

the unconscious

depiction of fear

Mason, I thought you had brilliant thoughts- this email is simply a yes, AND!! I'm so excited ya'll-

Kelly

*Fern Mason*

**Sent:** October 22, 2014 4:35 PM

**To:** Eggert, Heidi; Felt, Z.; ...

**Subject:** Re: Friday

Hi all!

After doing a little bit of research on Plastic Theatre itself, I'm excited to find how important atmospheric sounds and images are. So, keeping Talk To Me Like The Rain, at the forefront of my mind, I've been looking into the soundscape that we are to create. Of course, of course, this discussion can be tabled until later if need be, but I wanted to share a few of the pieces I've been listening to and some thoughts I've been having.

Taking the stage direction of the mandolin literally may not be effective, but I do feel that the sparseness of sound one instrument has is something we should strive for. It creates a loneliness, a futility amongst the sounds of the rain as it can easily be drowned and muddled. Metaphorically, in this case, the rain would be indicative of the forces of the world which our two characters have succumb to - the singular instrument, or soft sounds of music, would be the love and interaction of our characters in the face of it all. (Any and all interpretations are welcome - I hope - as Williams intended with Subjectivism and Plastic Theatre) So, will there be sounds of rain amidst music? Will there be music?

This brings me to a question. Is our employment of choreographed movement, or contact improv - whatever it shapes out to be between Kelly and I - just a different aspect of Plastic Theatre, akin to the incorporation of sound, projections, shadows, etc. which Williams calls for in his introduction to The Glass Menagerie? Something to push the evolution of Expressionism even further? If so, would it be more effective to study ONLY the movement sans music within the piece? Or should we try to get as close to the soundscape as possible in conjuncture with our movement? I'm curious what we're after in this regard. Is the crux of the research on the abstracted movement? Or are we after a fully-realized Expressionist Plastic Theatre product?

All that being said, here's the piece of music Williams' references directly in Talk To Me Like The Rain. It's called Estrellita, a Spanish fiddle song. I really like it, but it sounds a little full with the violin (maybe why Williams indicated a mandolin, a plucking sparse sound)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pgr0rFJhE>

Here are a couple examples that have been in my head after initially reading the piece, and especially after watching *Lovesong*. They're both by a Solo recording artist called The Album Leaf.

**Window:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqXPrv1Wk5E>

**Story Board:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUjDzn0TrVs>

They are a bit newer than Estrellita. Which brings me to one final question, are we applying this to the 1950's? Or is it a contemporary take on the story? I feel that the choice makes a significant difference in regards to music, speech, and audience relationship.

Thoughts anyone?

Thanks for letting me spew,

Mason

**Sent:** October 23, 2014 12:02 AM

## Appendix D.

I'm not sure that these questions have or need answers, but I thought them and am putting them here to help keep you sparked!

### Question

“entered the body and soul of the dreamer”

I like this line and feel like you should talk about what it means

If you are trying to see if the use of expressionistic dance bestows the audience with the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer how are you going to know that it did? If one of the audience members uses language other than “I feel like I entered the body and the soul of the dreamer,” how will you know that they did? What will you accept as confirmation of having received that impression? What kind of language do you suspect you might hear in their responses?

### Research Precedent

Your use of *This Property is Condemned* seems like a good choice because it is so close in nature to what you are proposing. I am interested in what the article is about.... Is there also a recording of the performance?

### Discussion with Heidi

2. - I am interested in the fact that you are now entertaining these other ideas. And that you are moving forward in an open-ended way that will take into account the developing parameters of the experiment. I am now thinking that your research will head toward whichever scenario is deemed most conducive to lending the audience this impression of having entered “the body and soul of the dreamer”.

Who is the dreamer? This was my question during our last session and I think it might be useful when considering 2 or 4 characters. “The body and soul of the dreamer” makes me think that both the body and the soul reside in a single place – in the dreamer. If I am seeing two people dance alongside two people speaking lines am I to think that one set is the “soul” and the other set is the “body” and that they are fused together in a non-embodied “dreamer”? Will I think that the dancers are performing the “souls” of the actors – and that the actors are both “body” and the larger “dreamer” with disconnected “souls”? If the actors are only reading the lines and not moving on stage will I think that their voices are those of the “dreamer's” and that the dancers are the “soul” and the “body”? I think that splitting these things apart in any way – body/soul/dreamer – might invite questions like this. Perhaps these are good questions though. When the body and the soul reside in a single actor/dancer I automatically no longer think that one set of actors or dancers is interpreting the internal state of the other. That one is the real person and that the other is an interpretation of the inner state of that person. Would it be easier to “enter the body and soul of the dreamer”, to understand that both body and soul reside in a single entity, if the dreamer was presented in one body?

3. - I might suggest both recorded talkback AND questionnaire. I personally don't like to take up much room in a talkback and prefer to listen to others. My thoughts are better



formed later. And hearing the audience responses often changes them. In a survey I am given room to reflect at my leisure – perhaps an online survey? But I love to hear initial responses and am willing to bet that many people will feel much more comfortable just telling you what they thought right after the performance.

5. your blurb about *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* is interesting. I think that the way you set up your interpretation – man of dark force and violence – starving frail woman – is interesting, almost as two ends of a spectrum. It makes me wonder if in these two people Williams is already trying to present two aspects of a single entity. That he as author is the dreamer and here are his body and soul. Housed in his ramshackle tenement tenement self. You have clearly decided though that both of these characters are real individuals. Right?

### Method

The language “figments of the imaginations of the speakers” makes me think of my earlier question and gives it an answer almost. Makes me think that you are viewing the dancers as part of the dreamer, and that the speakers are the dreamers, the truer embodiment of the character.

How will you show that they are “figments of the imaginations of the speakers”? Don't you actually mean that they ARE the speakers? A part of the speakers?

“Figments of the imagination” makes me think that the actors will freeze for a moment and that a little thought bubble will appear above their heads as they imagine dancers. That the dancers are constructions of the speakers rather than actually a part of them.

Slightly confused about Heidi's role if the dance is going to be developed in the rehearsal process? Will she be at each rehearsal to facilitate the dancers own interpretations- or will she be selecting from their interpretations and using them to stitch together a completely choreographed piece? Just curious what she has “designed”.

Cool Peter! Hope that is helpful- really just my thoughts as I made my way through it. Again I apologize for missing our meeting on Wednesday! Let me know in person or email if you want any more clarification on anything here. Hope you're well!

-Mike

## **Response:**

~Mr. Michael...

My sincere thanks and am honored that you would take the time and effort to put your incredible thoughts on paper concerning my *Rain* project.

How can I answer this...let me try.

Since getting your note I have put a great deal of thought into what you are asking and suggesting. First, the easiest. No, there is no recording of *This Property is Condemned*, but my research and with the help of Tammy Revis's folks at the library articles were found in various Dance publications when searching such material. We found most from the mid fifties including Valarie Bettis choreography of *Streetcar Named Desire*, and Guy Giordano's jazz version of *Streetcar*. There are such recordings, but only the Chicago group (Giordano) would lend, and I did get a DVD recording from them which I managed to copy to VCR. It is an amazing work, truly lovely, done strictly with dance and no language.

I do not know how to answer your question concerning how I would appreciate how my audience will enter the "soul and body" of the protagonists. To be honest, as catching for you and Bernadette as that phrase appears to have been...I do not know where it came from, but your comments are the first that has made me consider just what it is I am trying to relate. The more research into Williams...and my summer was living in the library, combing the scholar literature, digging ever deeper into the various bibliographies that each article contains, even using Amazon to build my own library....the more confused I became as to what Williams was striving for during his long life and the myriad of emotions the man lived from childhood to his death. Seriously, what I am trying to do falls within the range of Cohen's work of intersubjectivity...that is, the inside out and the outside in. I need to find the subjectivity of the inner person to get close to what I "need" to make this project a reality, and only by deciding Williams for myself via his short stories, later plays, and poems will I find exactly what it is I am trying to bestow to an audience. As I know ballet and dance, that is the reaction of the body to emotions incurred via one's experience and approach to life, can I imagine accomplishing such an endeavor. Language is only objectively a means of explanation...other than poetry of the likes of Hart Crane or Maire Rainer Rilke...words beyond my comprehension, and yes Williams too...could such subjectivity be expressed, and I am not of such comprehension to offer such discourse nor would my audience be able to appreciate it. But dance, and music...the human form was dancing, singing, and drawing before they found speech.

Excellent point about the dreamer. I don't know...in reality is it the young woman...but is it not me as well. Am I the dreamer in search of a calling...is this why I am back here putting this ancient body and withering brain through the agonies of a late secondary education...and is not the character a sublimation for me? Was not Williams the ultimate dreamer for a theatrical world he found increasing more and more frustrating to project as his critics condemned the very purpose of his life? Are we all not dreamers and our lives reflect the way we strive for that dream.

Yes! Your point very well taken concerning the four people. Who or what is the body, who or what is the soul? Terrific...I needed to understand that...I never gave that thought. Will your concept interfere with the "dreamer" as both soul and body. Kelly wants to do

both...that is she wants to recite and dance. Mason told me he can dance.....but, apparently has had some back problems from last summer and is concerned with how much he made be able to do...I am sure Heidi can handle that from her choreographing...and at this moment I am leaning toward that type of performance encouraged by your thought. As for the four people...I had liked very much the idea of juxtaposing the four during the performance depending on the particular lines being delivered...that is still an idea I would like to investigate...the soul and the body intermingling, finally becoming a single force by the end of the presentation....I don't know...

Also your thought about the two people being a single entity...as you know Williams was not a single entity...he could never have written both female and male lyricism as he did if he were not "hermaphroditic" within his inner self. How could he write such poetic lyricism as a Blanche Dubois, or a Miranda Wingfield, or a Violet Venable had he not possessed both male and female genetic neurological codes. The same with *Rain*...the young woman's elegant appeal for a symbolic unreachable world beyond any reality within her reach. Yes, two different people, the one living in dreams, the other in the stark reality of crushing humanity.

Mike....all these questions need be answered for me to make this a go, and with Kelly, Mason and Heidi I will find these answers because I will be able to take all my studying and reading and thinking onto a stage and through sight, motion, and sound put all this current mental muddle into some perspective. Your comments hit like a cool breeze this weekend, and although I am greatly indebted to Bernadette...who I really believe is beginning to believe in me...I have not had such comments from any of the other participants with whom I have met and chatted.

Perhaps you will come by during rehearsals, listen and watch, give me feedback. I do plan a questionnaire, but must get by my own questioning first. As for a talk back...God knows...I have no idea what to expect from those watching. For the most part they will be students, elders I invite, hopefully faculty...I will push hard for that.

Again, my sincere appreciation for your time and thoughts.

Peter~

## **Appendix E**

NOTES FOR PETER SEPT. 24, 2014

### **PARAMETERS FOR PRACTICE AS RESEARCH PROJECT**

- . Rehearsals starting no more than 4 weeks prior to the showing date.
- . No more than 10 hours of rehearsal per week.
- . No more than 6 performers.
- . No technical aspects: lighting on and off only and any sound run either by Peter, a cast member, or recruited SM.
- . No designers. (none even solicited)
- . We have reserved the MQT but perhaps McGill or Sch is more appropriate.
- . Any casting should be run-through us prior to be undertaken-he should get us a list of hopeful participants Oct.15.

Good evening & welcome! I'm Rita Phillips and I thank you for being here  
I am truly honored by your presence  
What you will witness this evening is a research endeavor

*Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen*  
by Tennessee Williams

Appendix F

Van

My effort for this project is to determine if expressionism in the form of body movement and music will bestow on characters and audience the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character.

Don't

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have one aim, the closer approach to the truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques it should not be trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are. Truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.

Throughout his long career Williams used dance a great deal, from the earliest plays to the last written before his death. He wrote a dance drama for Martha Graham, Laura dances in *Glass Menagerie*. Blanche dances at the Blue Lake Casino, Nijinsky is a ghost figure in *Cavalier for Milady*. The *Purification*, the only play he wrote in verse, is a one act dance celebrating the American Southwest. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *This Property is Condemned* have been choreographed by leading dance ensembles in the U.S. and abroad.

In your  
Playbill

Please find a two question inquiry ~~in your playbill~~ which I ask you to answer. Your replies are a ~~essential~~ critique for my research project. Your help is needed and greatly appreciated. If any wish to stay for a few minutes discussion after the play, I will happily oblige, however, this being finals week, it need be a short session as other tasks await the many.

Please enjoy our presentation

## **Appendix G**

### **Audience questionnaire**

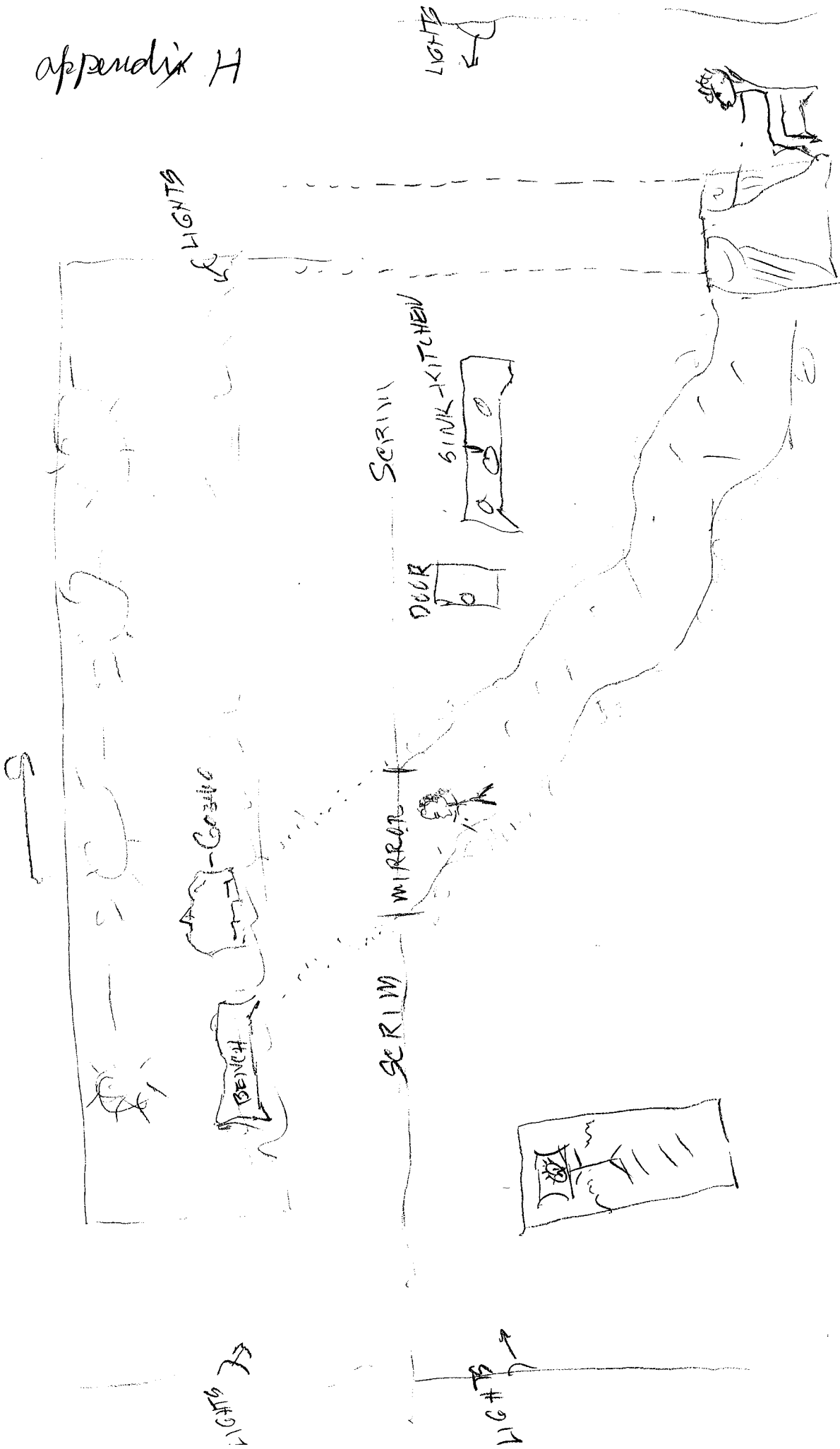
**How did you as an audience member relate to the play? Please take a moment and answer these questions.**

1. My effort for this project was to bestow on audience and character the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character. What was your experience?

2. What images were evoked by Kelly and Mason's performances?

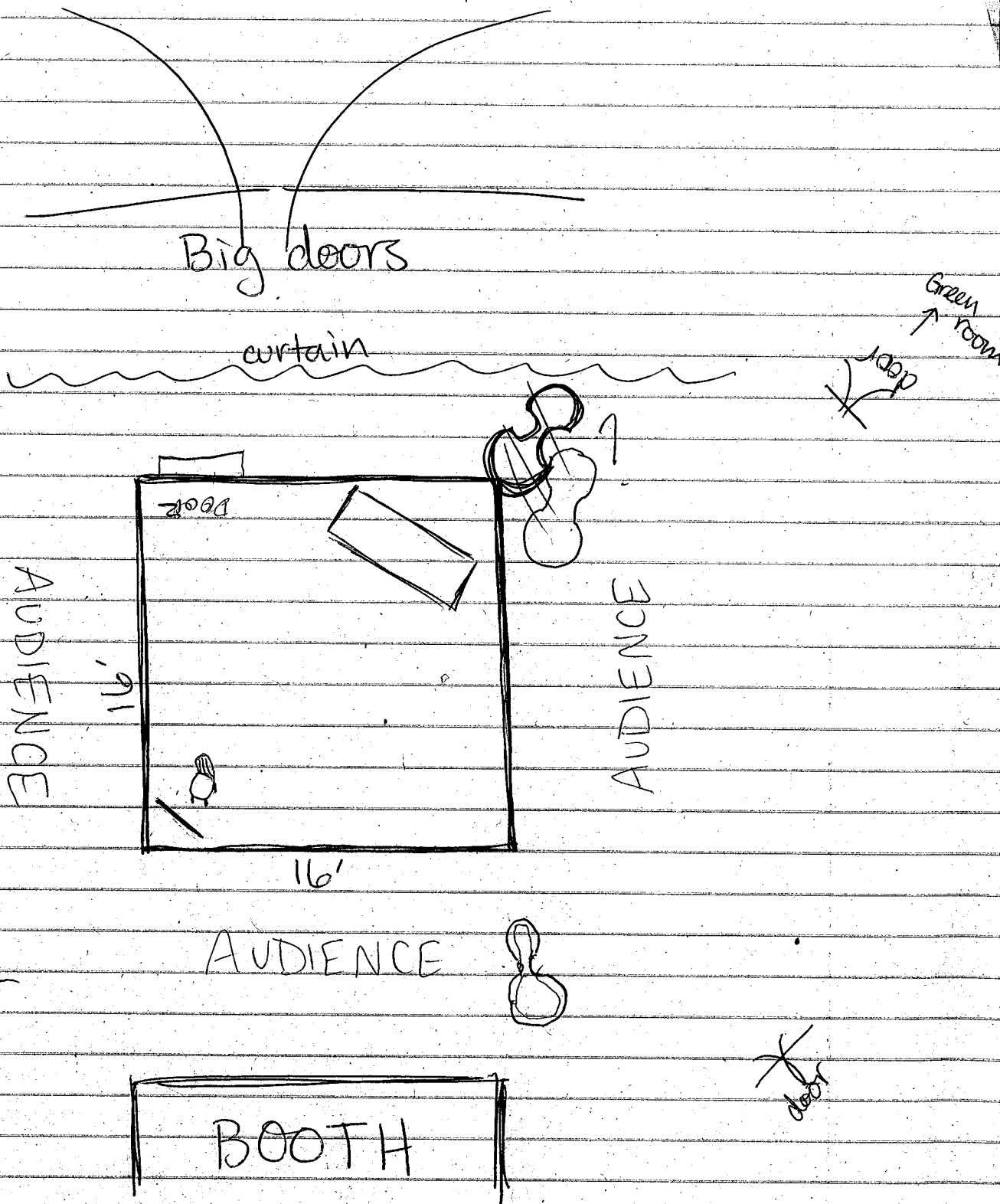
Thank you!~

appendix H



Early lot Concept  
May 2014

# MASQUER



Final Masquerade set for Rain  
Nov. 2015



Appendix I

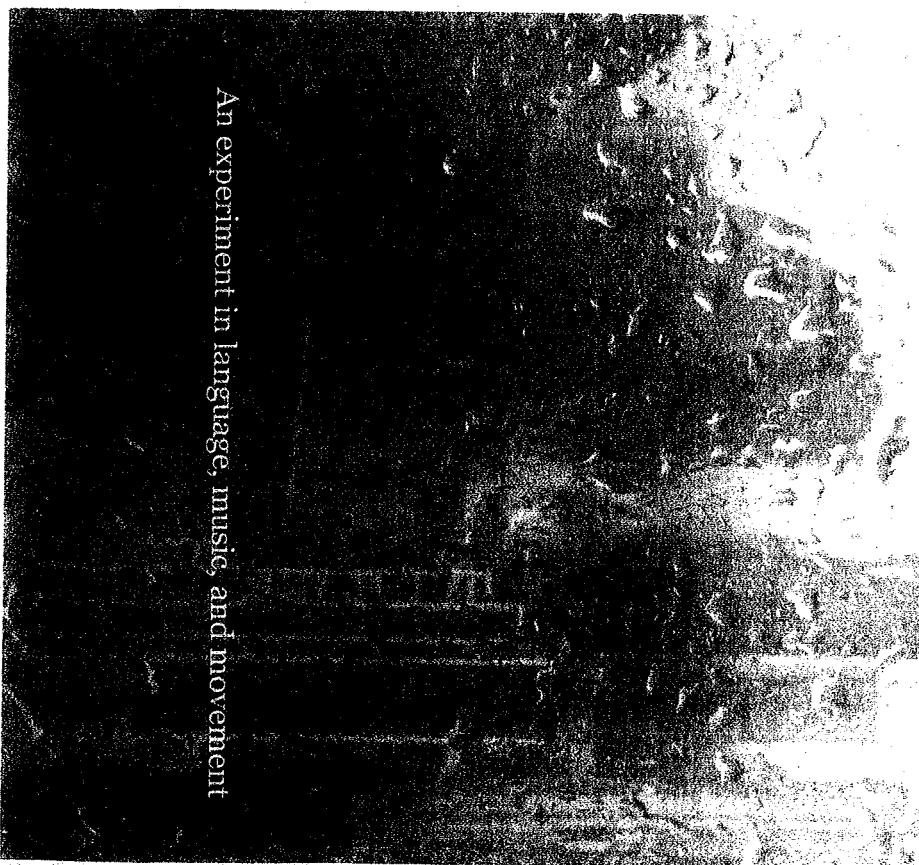


Talk to Me Like the Rain And Let Me Listen...  
TENTATIVE Rehearsal Schedule as of 11/10/14

NOVEMBER	10	11	12	13	14	15
ALL REHEARSALS IN MCG 125 UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED	7-9 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi, Sydoney, Pete		6-8:30 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Sydoney, Pete			12-1:30 Kelly, Eric, Sydoney, Pete 1:30-3 +Mason, -Kelly
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	7:30-10 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi (8:00), Sydoney, Pete		Kelly, Eric, Heidi, Sydoney (8:00), Pete 7:30-9 +Mason, -Kelly	6-9 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Sydoney, Pete		
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	7:30-10 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi (8:00), Sydoney, Pete	25 Xmas Carol Opening! 5:30-7 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi(?), Sydoney, Pete		THANKSGIVING! Enjoy your time off and all the things you're thankful for		
30	DECEMBER	2	3	4	5	6
12-4 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi(?), Sydoney, Pete	7:30-10 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi (8:00), Sydoney, Pete		6-9 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi(?), Sydoney, Pete	6-9 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Heidi(?), Sydoney, Pete		6 In the Masquer?? 3-6???
7 In Masquer Thr BUILD AND TECH! WHOOP!	8 In Masquer Thr PERFORMANCE NIGHT! Call: 6:00 House: 7:00 Curtain: 7:30	9	10	11	12	13
3-9 Kelly, Mason, Eric, Sydoney, Pete						

Talk to Me Like the Rain  
And Let Me Listen ...

By Tennessee Williams



An experiment in language, music, and movement

**UM Theatre & Dance**

Director	Peter Philips
Choreographer	Heidi Jones Eggert
Cellist	Eric Russell
Man	Mason Wagner
Woman	Kelly Bouma
Stage Manager	Sydney Blackmore

#### A Note from the Director-

"Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. Truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other art forms than those which were merely present in appearance." -T. Williams

When Williams wrote *Talk to Me Like the Rain And Let Me Listen*, he was beginning to move away from theatrical realism. He began experimenting with a form of expressionism utilizing various theatrical genres; music, design, stage configuration, lighting, sound, and dance. These theatrical modalities he referred to as "plastic theater."

Our research project is to determine if Williams' poetic language expressed with body movement and music touches the very body and soul of performer and spectator.

The happiness of such people is like a "piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting."

-T. Williams

#### Special Thanks to:

Karl Boveng, Mike Fink, Fern Glass, Brian Gregoire,  
Jere Hodgkin, Erin McDaniell, Jason McDaniell, Dan Norton,  
Bernadette Sweeney, Ruby Sweeney, Dani Warmuth

P. Philips



CHARACTERS

MAN

WOMAN

CHILD'S VOICE  
(off stage)

Clutch

Wm. Law  
Carmel

Ruby

1915/14

# Talk to Me Like the Rain And Let Me Listen...

SCENE: A furnished room west of Eighth Avenue in midtown Manhattan. On a folding bed lies a Man in crumpled underwear, struggling out of sleep with the sighs of a man who went to bed very drunk. A Woman sits in a straight chair at the room's single window, outlined dimly against a sky heavy with a rain that has not yet begun to fall. The Woman is holding a tumbler of water from which she takes small, jerky sips like a bird drinking. Both of them have ravaged young faces like the faces of children in a famished country. In their speech there is a sort of politeness, a sort of tender formality like that of two lonely children who want to be friends, and yet there is an impression that they have lived in this intimate situation for a long time and that the present scene between them is the repetition of one that has been repeated so often that its plausible emotional contents, such as reproach and contrition, have been completely worn out and there is nothing left but acceptance of something hopelessly intolerable between them.

MAN: (hoarsely) What time is it? (The Woman murmurs something inaudible.) What, honey?

WOMAN: Sunday.

Clutch  
Wm. Law  
Carmel

W.C.

Expecting?  
Slightly?

(The Woman stretches a thin bare arm out of the ravelled pink rayon sleeve of her kimono and picks up the tumbler of water and the weight of it seems to pull her forward a little. The Man watches solemnly, tenderly from the bed as she sips the water. A thin music begins, hesitantly, repeating a phrase several times as if someone in a next room were trying to remember a song on a mandolin. Sometimes a phrase is sung in Spanish. The song could be Estrellita.)

(Rain begins; it comes and goes during the play; there is a drumming flight of pigeons past the window and a child's voice chants outside—)

W.C. CHILD'S VOICE: Rain, rain, go away!

(The chant is echoed mockingly by another child farther away.)

MAN: (finally) I wonder if I cashed my unemployment. (The Woman leans forward with the weight of the glass seeming to pull her; sets it down on the window-sill with a small crash that seems to startle her. She laughs breathlessly for a moment. The Man continues, without much hope.) I hope I didn't cash my unemployment. Where's my clothes? Look in my pockets and see if I got the cheque on me.

WOMAN: You came back while I was out looking for you and picked the cheque up and left a note on the bed that I couldn't make out.

MAN: You couldn't make out the note?

WOMAN: Only a telephone number. I called the number but there was so much noise I couldn't hear.

MAN: Noise? Here?

WOMAN: No, noise there.

MAN: Where was "there"?

WOMAN: I don't know. Somebody said come over and hung

11/30/14  
Claudia?  
212  
W.C. 11/14  
some glass  
W.C. 11/14

W.C. 11/14

MAN: When I woke up I was in a bathtub full of melting ice-cubes and Miller's High Life beer. My skin was blue. I was gasping for breath in a bathtub full of ice-cubes. It was near a river but I don't know if it was the East or the Hudson. People do terrible things to a person when he's unconscious in this city. I'm sore all over like I'd been kicked downstairs, not like I fell but was kicked. One time I remember all my hair was shaved off. Another time they stuffed me into a trash-can in the alley and I've come to with cuts and burns on my body. Vicious people abuse you when you're unconscious. When I woke up I was naked in a bathtub full of melting ice-cubes. I crawled out and went into the parlor and someone was going out of the other door as I came in and I opened the door and heard the door of an elevator shut and saw the doors of a corridor in a hotel. The TV was on and there was a record playing at the same time; the parlor was full of rolling tables loaded with stuff from Room Service, and whole hams, whole

turkeys, three-decker sandwiches cold and turning stiff, and bottles and bottles and bottles of all kinds of liquors that hadn't even been opened and buckets of ice-cubes melting. . . . Somebody closed a door as I came in. . . . (The Woman sips water.) As I came in someone was going out. I heard a door shut and I went to the door and heard the door of an elevator shut. . . . (The Woman sets her glass down.)—All over the floor of this pad near the river—articles—clothing—scattered. . . . (The Woman gasps as a flight of pigeons sweeps past the open window.)—Bras!—Panties!—Shirts, ties, socks—and so forth. . . .

WOMAN: (famously) Clothes?

MAN: Yes, all kinds of personal belongings and broken glass and furniture turned over as if there'd been a free-for-all fight going on and the pad was—raided. . . .

W.C. 11/14

WOMAN: Oh.

MAN: Violence must have—broken out in the—place...

WOMAN: You were—?

MAN: —in the bathtub on—ice... *Touch of summer*

WOMAN: Oh...

MAN: And I remember picking up the phone to ask what hotel it was but I don't remember if they told me or not...

*STB*  
*W*  
*W*  
*W*  
*W*  
Give me a drink of flat water. (Both of them rise and meet in the center of the room. The glass is passed gravely between them. He rinses his mouth, staring at her gravely, and crosses to spit out the window. Then he returns to the center of the room and hands the glass back to her. She takes a sip of the water. He places his fingers tenderly on her long throat. *Now I've recited the litany of my sorrows!* (Pause: the mandolin is heard.) And what have you got to tell me? Tell me a little something of what's going on behind your—(His fingers trail across her forehead and eyes. She closes her eyes and lifts a hand in the air as if about to touch him. He takes the hand and examines it upside down and then he presses its fingers to his lips. When he releases her fingers she touches him with them. She touches his thin smooth chest which is smooth as a child's and then she touches his lips. He raises his hand and lets his fingers slide along her throat and into the opening of the kimona as the mandolin gathers assurance. She turns and leans against him, her throat curving over his shoulder, and he runs his fingers along the curve of her throat and says—) It's been so long since we have been together except like a couple of strangers living together. Let's find each other and maybe we won't be lost. Talk to me! I've been lost—I thought of you often but couldn't call you, honey. Thought of you all the time but couldn't call. What could I say if I called? Could I say, I'm lost? Lost in the city? Passed around like a dirty postcard among people?—And

then hang up... I am lost in this—city...

WOMAN: I've had nothing but water since you left! (She says *she never holds her tight to him with a soft, shocked cry.*)—Not a thing but instant coffee until it was used up, and water! (She laughs convulsively.)

MAN: Can you talk to me, honey? Can you talk to me, now?

WOMAN: Yes!

MAN: Well, talk to me like the rain and—let me listen, let me lie here and—listen... (He falls back across the bed, rolls on his belly, one arm hanging over the side of the bed and occasionally drumming the floor with his knuckles. The mandolin continues.) It's been too long a time since—we levelled with each other. Now tell me things. What have you been thinking in the silence?—While I've been passed around like a dirty postcard in this city. Tell me, talk to me! Talk to me like the rain and I will lie here and listen.

WOMAN: I—

MAN: You've got to, it's necessary! I've got to know, so talk to me like the rain and I will lie here and listen, I will lie here and—

WOMAN: I want to go away.

MAN: You do?

WOMAN: I want to go away!

MAN: How?

WOMAN: Alone! (She returns to window.)—I'll register under a made-up name at a little hotel on the coast...

MAN: What name?

WOMAN: Anna—Jones... The chambermaid will be a little old lady who has a grandson that she talks about... I'll sit in the chair while the old lady makes the bed, my arms will hang over the—sides, and—her voice will be—peaceful... She'll tell me what her grandson had for supper!—

tapioca and—cream . . . (The Woman sits by the window and sips the water.)—The room will be shadowy, cool, and filled with the murmur of—

MAN: Rain?  
WOMAN: Yes. Rain.

MAN: And ~~the~~ ~~Woman~~ ~~Anxiety~~ will—pass-over!

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: After a while the little old woman will say, Your bed is made up, Miss, and I'll say—Thank you . . . Take a dollar out of my pocketbook. The door will close. And I'll be alone again. The windows will be tall with long blue shutters and it will be a season of rain—rain—rain . . . My life will be like the room, cool—shadowy cool and—filled with the murmur of—

MAN: Rain . . . *Little Rain at 10*

WOMAN: I will receive a check in the mail every week that I can count on. The little old lady will cash the checks for me and get me books from a library and pick up—laundry ~~that~~ I'll always have clean things!—I'll dress in white. I'll never be very strong or have much energy left, but have enough after a while to walk on the—esplanade—to walk on the beach without effort ~~that~~. In the evening I'll walk on the esplanade along the beach. I'll have a certain beach where I go to sit, a little way from the pavillion where the band plays Victor Herbert selections while it gets dark. I'll have a big room, with shutters on the windows. There will be a season of rain, rain, rain. And I will be so exhausted after my life in the city that I won't mind just listening to the rain. I'll be so quiet. The lines will disappear from my face. My eyes won't be inflamed at all any more. I'll have no friends. I'll have no acquaintances even. When I get sleepy, I'll walk slowly back to the little hotel. The clerk will say, Good evening, Miss Jones, and

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99. Book by G. G. G. G. G.  
100. Book by G. G. G. G. G.

I'll just barely smile and take my key. I won't ever look at a newspaper or hear a radio; I won't have any idea of what's going on in the world. I will not be conscious of time passing at all . . . One day I will look in the mirror and I will see that my hair is beginning to turn grey and for the first time I will realize that I have been living in this little hotel under a made-up name without any friends or acquaintances or any kind of connections for twenty-five years. It will surprise me a little but it won't bother me any. I will be glad that time has passed as easily as that. Once in a while I may go out to the movies. I will sit in the back row with all that darkness around me and figures sitting motionless on each side not conscious of me. Watching the screen. Imaginary people. People in stories. I will read long books and the journals of dead writers. I will feel closer to them than I ever felt to people I used to know before I withdrew from the world. It will be sweet and cool this friendship of mine with dead poets, for I won't have to touch them or answer their questions. They will talk to me and not expect me to answer. And I'll get sleepy listening to their voices explaining the mysteries to me. I'll fall asleep with the book still in my fingers, and it will rain. I'll wake up and hear the rain and go back to sleep. A season of rain, rain, rain. Then one day, when I have closed a book or come home alone from the movies at eleven o'clock at night—I will look in the mirror and see that my hair has turned white. ~~It will be~~ absolutely white. As white as the foam on the waves. *(She gets up and moves about the room as she continues—)* I'll run my hands down my body and feel how amazingly light and thin I have grown. Oh, my, how thin I will be. Almost transparent. Not hardly real any more. Then I will realize, I will know, soft of dimly, that I have been staying on here in this little hotel, without any—social connections, responsibilities, anxieties or disturbances



of any kind—for just about fifty years. Half a century.

Practically a lifetime. I won't even remember the names

of the people I knew before I came here nor how it feels

to be someone waiting for someone that may not come . . .

Then I will know—looking in the mirror—the first time has

come for me to walk out alone once more on the esplanade

with the strong wind beating on me, the white clean wind

that blows from the edge of the world, from even further

than that, from the cool outer edges of space, from even

beyond whatever there is beyond the edges of space . . .

(She sits down again unsteadily by the window.)—Then

I'll go out and walk on the esplanade. I'll walk alone and

be blown thinner and thinner.

MAN: Baby. Come back to bed.

WOMAN: And thinner and thinner and thinner and thinner

and thinner! (He crosses to her and raises her forcibly from

the chair.)—Till finally I won't have any body at all, and

the wind picks me up in its cool white arms forever, and

takes me away!

MAN: (presses his mouth to her throat.) Come on back to

bed with me!

WOMAN: I want to go away, I want to go away! (He releases

her and she crosses to center of room sobbing uncontrollably.

She sits down on the bed. He sighs and leans out the win-

dow, the light flickering beyond him, the rain coming down

harder. The Woman shivers and crosses her arms against

her breasts. Her sobbing dies out but she breathes with

effort. Light flickers and wind whines coldly. The Man

remains leaning out. At last she says to him softly—)

Come back to bed. Come on back to bed, baby . . . (He turns

his lost face to her as—)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Wife  
2 more  
person

Start of  
years  
Crying  
a shaft

Woman

Man  
Wife  
2  
person

Robert  
John  
Wanda  
Helen  
Mary  
John  
Helen  
Mary  
John  
Helen  
Mary

Large  
year

Back to chair

Force  
be from bed  
to bed

John  
John

Back to window  
out to bed  
Gue to bed

3 or 4  
over  
be of on  
be of on

## **Appendix L**

### **Rehearsal and Dance YouTube**

1. Performance: <https://youtu.be/k2br3ccZvEQ>
2. Rehearsal 1: <https://youtu.be/cUj2n6LZooU>
3. Rehearsal 2: <https://youtu.be/5aOsrVPmLl8>

## Appendix M

2. What images were evoked by Kelly's and Mason's performances?

The over all image evoked by Kelly and Mason was the picture of intimacy and tension in love and the escape from the reality that is life. It was simply beautiful.

Also, Kelly did feel and look like she was getting lighter as she was letting go of life and moving more into the dream world. I could not take my eyes off of what was going on, every moment created was never lost.

---

How did you, as an audience member, relate to the play? Please take a moment to answer the two questions below. Thank you!

~Peter

1. My effort for this project was to bestow on audience and character the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character. What was your experience?

It was beautiful. The intimacy of the space brought me so close <sup>to everything</sup> that there was no way for me to miss a single detail. Everything from Kelly's eye movements, even when they were closed, to mason's diaphragm as he took a breath, helped add to the complete awareness of this breathtaking experience. The body language mixed with the voice of the cello that is Bach made the intimacy of every moment so much stronger. The low notes on the cello gave me chills because it was a note I could truly feel.

~OVER~

“My dear friend. I must tell you that I was so impressed with you and your teams work last night. A gorgeous piece that has not left my mind since leaving the theater last night. I took the form with me so I could spend a little time filling it out. Can I put it in your mail upon its completion?”

Sam: Dec. 9, 2014 (text message)

How did you, as an audience member, relate to the play? Please take a moment to answer the two questions below. Thank you!

~Peter

1. My effort for this project was to bestow on audience and character the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character. What was your experience?

This direction of performance fascinates me. I want to work in this way!

SOME NOTES:

- I wanted distinction between a character's natural movement in a space and intentional highlighted movement.

---

- one example of perfection: water glass handoff.

- I tended to feel that the performance got muddy when text and movement by an actor happened at the same time. Separate was clearer for me.
  - Music was stunning, especially the intentional absence of it. Live cellist absolutely key! Perfect.
  - With stage-level seating, the actors disappear when they're at the floor. Mason was gone for half the play. Maddening!  
~OVER~
- Well done! Beautiful! - Steve

2. What images were evoked by Kelly's and Mason's performances?

I don't know if I can specify images, there were so many emotions they brought to me. I saw lovers, but at times they were strangers. I saw them run away from each other but I also saw them clinging to each other. Honestly the eb and flow of it evoked so much inside me, and it still hasn't settled, I need time to take it in because it was beautiful, heart-breaking, heart-warming and so much else - all at once, and wow, they just wanted me.

2. What images were evoked by Kelly's and Mason's performances?

THIS  
The most compelling images were created by the movement and music. When Mason and Kelly were caught twice in this circular embrace almost. The eye contact they brought this image of someone reaching out pulling and another wanting but only dreaming. The other image was toward the ending when Mason picks up Kelly off the chair and carries her across the stage slowly while she still ~~squats~~ sits, sitting up the next few lines with her on the bed. It's in line with her words about the ocean, because the ~~dance~~ <sup>dance</sup> reminded me so much of waves pulling and pushing without expectation. The dream state was very real here.

2.

How did you, as an audience member, relate to the play? Please take a moment to answer the two questions below. Thank you!

~Peter

1. My effort for this project was to bestow on audience and character the impression of having entered the body and soul of the dreamer/character. What was your experience?

~One specific moment that I feel brilliantly exemplified this was the moment Kelly spoke about being taken away by the wind. She let her arms out & Mason took her like the wind and she just gave in completely. Watching the performers use their bodies to portray these emotions, thoughts, imagery, etc. was beautifully done & communicated very well.

~OVER~

11/15  
#2



## Appendix-N

Solo Performance Masquer Theater May 2012

A Conversation

Cast:

Williams....Peter Philips

Peter.....Eric Hersh

Scene 1

Bedroom:

A bed is positioned in the center of the room. Williams lies on his back, fully clothed, arms at sides, mouth open, snoring quietly. He is lying awkwardly on the black cape, partially wrapped about his chest, partially hanging off the side of the bed. Peter enters, moves to the bed, finds a coverlet and covers Williams, then moves to the corridor, and leaves the room.

Williams

Monologue: Why am I a writer.. D.H. Lawrence: *I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix*

Scene 2

Setting: Five hours earlier:

An out door restaurant on an island in the Caribbean. At a table lit by an oil lamp sit two men. The older figure wears a black beret, worn rakishly to one side of his head. A black cape is worn about his shoulders, held in place by a black twist cord tied about his upper chest. In one hand is a half filled brandy snifter.

His companion, a young man of about 32, wears a short sleeved blue collared shirt with the figure of an alligator over the left breast. Khaki trousers and sandals worn without socks completes his appearance. He also holds a brandy snifter.

Williams

So, young doctor, at college you were a science major and a member of the Dramatic Club. What did you do as a member of the Dramatic Society.

Peter

Paul Newman sponsors a Best Student actor award which I won my senior year for portraying the old man in Ionesco's *Chairs*. Led to my meeting him in New York while he was in *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Williams

Did you discuss your interest in theater?

Peter

Oh, yes. Told him I had applied to Drama School after winning the award although I had already been accepted to medical school.

Williams

And what was his response?

Peter

Advised me to study medicine. Theater was a less secure future.

Williams

Ah, good advice. I can talk to that!

Monologue: Quentin: *Small Craft Warnings*

Scene 3

Living room:

Williams enters carrying two books. Two soft chairs. Brandy snifters. Peter dressed as before.

Williams

Come in, young doctor. Would you like to hear some poetry? Here, from my collection; *In The Winter of Cities*.

Poems: *Lament for the Moths, Covenant or Descent*

Williams

Now, young doctor, you will have to excuse me...I have to pee.....

Scene 4

Bedroom

Williams leaves living room..proceeds to bedroom.

Williams

Monologue: *Glass Menagerie*

Poem: *Shadow Wood*

Scene 5

Living Room

Williams & Peter Poem: *Old Men Are Fond*

Appendix O


Collaborative Agreement for *Talk To Me Like the Rain And Let Me Listen*

I, the undersigned hereby consent to a Collaborative Agreement with Peter A. Philips, Kelly Bouma, Mason Wagner, Cohen Ambrose, Heidi Eggert, Sydney Blackmore, Eric Russell, Michael Fink, Jillian Campana, Jere Hodgins, Bernadette Sweeney regarding the planning, rehearsal and performance of *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen*. This agreement grants to Peter A. Philips permission to use my name and selected interview and written material when referring to the collective development of the play, *Talk To Me Like The Rain And Let Me Listen* when referenced in Peter A. Philips' Masters Thesis, "Tennessee Williams' 'Plastic Theater,' A Formulation of Dramaturgy for The American Method Theater."

I acknowledge that Peter A. Philips and the University of Montana hold a copyright to the Master's Thesis document.

Signed,

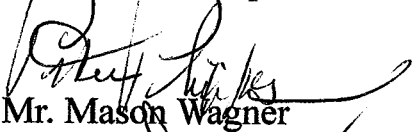
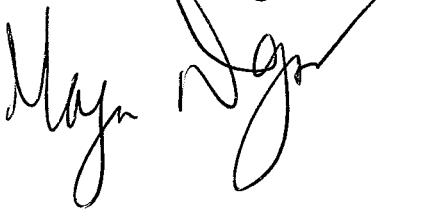
Mr. Cohen Ambrose



Ms. Kelly Bouma



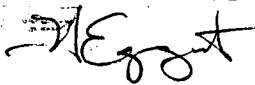
Dr. Peter A. Philips

  
Mr. Mason Wagner

Dr. Jillian Campana



Prof. Heidi Eggert



Mr. Eric Russell

Ms. Sydney Blackmore



Mr. Michael Fink



Dr. Bernadette Sweeney