



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

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Jacqueline Antaramian • Photo by Gary Isaacs

DOROTHEA: Go on, we must just go on, that's all that life seems to offer and... demand.
—A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur

A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur

Jan. 13 - Mar 12 • Jones Theatre

DOROTHEA: What is the “long run,” honey?

BODEY: The long run is...life.

—A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur

The time is a beautiful Sunday in June 1935; the place is St. Louis, Missouri. Dorothea (Dotty), a high school civics teacher, shares an apartment with Bodey, a German-American woman of indeterminate age, who acts as Earth Mother. As Bodey prepares fried chicken for a picnic at Creve Coeur (an amusement park) where the two will be joined by Bodey's brother, Buddy, Dorothea waits for a phone call from an uncommitted and faithless beau. The morning is interrupted by Helena, a fellow teacher at Dorothea's school, who plans to whisk her friend to a posh, elegant duplex (which she can ill-afford) and a sterile spinster life. The group is completed by Sophie Gluck, a newly orphaned and distraught German-speaking neighbor, whom Bodey comforts with coffee and crullers while Helena mocks them both.

In one of Tennessee William's late plays, pathos is linked with comedy in a sweet, honest and compassionate play.

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Highlights in the Life of Tennessee Williams

1911 — Thomas Lanier Williams is born on March 26 in Columbia, Mississippi, to Cornelius Coffin and Edwina Dakin Williams.

1911-1918 — Because his father is on the road as a traveling salesman, Tom and his sister Rose live with their mother and her parents, the Reverend and Mrs. Walter Dakin, in the Episcopal rectories of various Southern towns. At five, Tom has diphtheria with complications that leave him an invalid for two years.

1918 — The family moves to St. Louis, Missouri, to live with his father who has been made branch manager of the International Shoe Co. Tom's father terrifies him, taunts him and calls him "Miss Nancy."

1919-1929 — Tom writes various short stories and articles for school newspapers and magazines.

1929 — Tom is admitted to the University of Missouri in September, joins a fraternity and receives honorable mention in a playwriting contest.

1932 — Father withdraws him from the university, presumably for failing ROTC and more probably because of the Great Depression. Tom goes to work for the International Shoe Co. and spends his nights writing.

1935 — Tom fakes a heart attack and is sent to recuperate at his grandparents' home in Memphis.

1937 — His first full-length plays, *Candles to the Sun* and *The Fugitive Kind*, are produced by the amateur group the Mummers in St. Louis whose director, Willard Holland, becomes an influence on Williams. Tom transfers to the University of Iowa where he studies playwriting and production, graduating in 1938.

1939 — Tom lives briefly in several places in the Midwest, South and West, including the French Quarter in New Orleans. It may have been here that he had his first homosexual experiences and it is there that he first used the name "Tennessee" in a publication.

1940 — He moves to New York to enroll in a playwriting seminar taught by John Gassner at the New School for Social Research.

1943 — He returns to St. Louis where his sister Rose is institutionalized for schizophrenia and undergoes a prefrontal lobotomy, an event that will mark his life as much as hers forever. He begins work on a play called *The Gentleman Caller* which will become *The Glass Menagerie*.

1944 — *The Glass Menagerie* opens in Chicago with Laurette Taylor in the leading role of Amanda Wingfield. It is immediately recognized as a great play by the *Chicago Tribune* critic Claudia Cassidy. Tom's career is virtually assured.

1945 — *The Glass Menagerie* opens on Broadway and wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play. Tom begins work on *A Streetcar Named Desire*, originally titled *The Poker Night*.

1947 — *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens in New York starring Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, Karl Malden and Kim Stanley. It wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play, the Donaldson Award and the Sidney Howard Memorial Award. Tom meets Frank Merlo and begins a 14-year relationship.

1948 — His play *Summer and Smoke* opens in New York.

1951 — *The Rose Tattoo* opens in New York

Highlights in the Life of Tennessee Williams

C O N T I N U E D

and wins a Tony award.

1955 — *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens in New York and wins the Pulitzer Prize.

1956 — The film *Baby Doll* is released. Tom's relationship with Merlo is deteriorating and the playwright is close to a nervous breakdown.

1958-59 — The film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opens, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman. His play, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, opens in New York.

1961 — *The Night of the Iguana* premieres and wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

1963 — Frank Merlo dies of cancer and Tom enters a lengthy period of depression.

1966-1974 — Productions are mounted of various new plays including *Slapstick Tragedy*, *Kingdom of Earth*, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* and *Small Craft Warnings*.

1975 — There are successful revivals of *Summer and Smoke*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

1979 — Tom is honored at the Kennedy Center by President Carter.

1981 — *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, opens. It his last play to be produced in New York during his lifetime.

1983 — Tom dies at the Hotel Elysee in New York City after choking on a cap from a medicine bottle. He is buried in St. Louis.

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Tennessee Williams' St. Louis

I am glad that I received this bitter education for I don't think any writer has much purpose back of him, unless he feels bitterly the inequities of the society he lives in.

—Tennessee Williams,
in a biographical note, 1955.¹

In 1918 C. C. Williams, Tennessee's father, took a position at the International Shoe Company in St. Louis. Thus, many of the places mentioned in the play were very familiar to young Tom. Because of the dim, dingy little apartments in which they lived, Tom became aware of the fact that his family was economically less fortunate than others and of the nature of class conflict between rich and poor.

The family settled at 4633 Westminster Place (now called the Glass Menagerie Apartments) and Tom attended Eugene Field Elementary on Olive Street. In 1924 the family moved to 5938 Cates Street so sister Rose could go to Soldan High School and Tom could attend Ben Blewett Junior High. Searching for a prestigious high school for her son, Tom's mother Edwina moved the family to 6254 Enright Avenue in University City so that Tom could attend University City High School. Now demolished, this apartment was the site of *The Glass Menagerie* where Rose had plenty of gentlemen callers who never called again, not because she had a gimpy leg, but because she was a full-blown schizophrenic.

She was hospitalized at Barnes Hospital, as was Tennessee many years later, but as teenagers they spent time in Forest Park, in the Art Museum and the hill in front of it, Art Hill.

Tom graduated from high school in 1929 and, interested in studying journalism, enrolled at the

University of Missouri at Columbia. After two years there, he was forced to drop out because of the Great Depression and take a job at the International Shoe Company. Though a job was a precious commodity then, to Tom it was an indescribable torment. He would often take long walks in the evening along Delmar Boulevard which he described as "that long, long street which probably began near the Mississippi River in downtown St. Louis and continued through University City and on out into the country."²

In 1934 the family uprooted again to 6634 Pershing, which seemed almost palatial compared to the apartment on Enright Street. When Tom was diagnosed with a heart palpitation, he was allowed to leave his job and attend Washington University. Two of his plays were produced by the Mummies, an eccentric little theatre group, but were given an unkind review in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

While growing up in the St. Louis he despised, Tom probably drank beer from the Anheuser-Busch brewery, longed to live in La Due (a tony suburb), shopped at Scruggs-Vandervoort Department Store and visited Creve Coeur, a park still in operation. The park, located at Marine Avenue and Dorsett Road, means "heartbreak" but boasts 1200 acres of green space including areas for fishing, wild life, a sand beach, twelve picnic sites and a lake.

Tennessee Williams wished to be cremated and his ashes scattered over the Caribbean Sea but when he died in 1983, his brother Dakin ignored his will and had him buried next to his mother in Calvary Cemetery. His name, along with William Inge, Ulysses S. Grant, Eugene Field, Charles Lindbergh and others, is on the St. Louis Walk of Fame at 6200 Delmar Boulevard.

Women in the Great Depression

I see one third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.
Franklin Delano Roosevelt,
Second Inaugural Address,
Jan. 20, 1937

The Great Depression affected the day-to-day lives of 13.7 million people and by 1932, they were out of work. To the middle class, it was the loss of status and pride. Egos and dreams were bruised and shattered and, for many, the Depression left a scar of shame and fear that never disappeared.

Both Bodey and Dorothea in the play are very fortunate. The available jobs for women were usually blue-collar factory jobs, the kind that Bodey could succeed in and middle class women disdained. In Dorothea's case, education became more of a necessity after 1915. In that year teacher-training standards were raised; research in learning skills and styles increased; states and localities lengthened the school year, and the legal dropout age was raised. The increasing immigrant population demanded education for their children, so the curve of high school attendance continued to rise until 90% of 14 to 17-year-old students were in school. Thus, teachers were fairly secure in their positions.

Economically, the Great Depression does not seem to affect the women of the play in that they manage to maintain decent living standards. However, in Dorothea's case, the economics of dating play a significant role. "The cash calculus that some men and women saw in dating might also have established a scale of sexual permissiveness based on the expense of the date."¹ In the 1930s if a man bought a lady two drinks, he expected a sexual commitment from her. In addition, class dis-

tion and consciousness also figured into the sexual element of a relationship. Men who considered themselves of a higher class than their companion often thought they deserved "more sexual activity from their partners than they might have from women of their own or a wealthier class."² Thus, in Dorothea's case, she is blindsided by her beau, Ralph Ellis, on two counts.

For many women survival was so difficult that they had honed their feelings down to a kind of bitterness that rejected all traditional values. They didn't want to marry or have children. They felt that men were helpless and could not provide the means for a family, or hold a job. So these women lived alone, fearing the risk of a defeated marriage.

We sure liberated hell out of women. True, part of this is the Depression but where were we when that happened? ... I am wondering as I walk whether our part of it is part of the price we women are paying for this freedom.

—Adela Rogers St. John.
The Honeycomb

Themes of the Play

I draw every character out of my multiple split personality. My heroines always express the climate of my interior world at the time in which those characters were created.

—Tennessee Williams, in an interview, 1973¹

Verna Foster in her essay “Waiting for Buddy or Just Going On in *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur*” writes that the women of the play are all waiting for something. While waiting, each of the quartet stays busy: Dorothea exercises; Bodey cooks; Helena insults and tries to reason with Dotty, and Sophie simply seeks company. In the depiction of the characters, Williams works out the existential themes of loneliness, anxiety, limitation and confinement.

Loneliness, according to the playwright, haunts everyone and is a driving force in most of his major characters. Bodey and Helena, both fearing loneliness, compete for Dotty’s future. Bodey wants Dotty to marry her fat, beer-swigging, cigar chomping twin brother Buddy and bear little children she can mother. Helena, on the other hand, wants to spirit Dotty to an expensive apartment, a female lifestyle and possible spinsterhood. Dotty, no longer youthful, must have a man to be fulfilled, so the life offered by Helena is an unpleasant alternative. Sophie, hysterically fearful of being alone in her spooked apartment, represents the most terrifying possible future for all the women: “a life without companionship as bulwark against the imaginary horrors generated by one’s own mind.”²

The setting of the play in the 1930s Depression illustrates the limitations and con-

finement the characters face. Bodey, Dotty and Helena cannot leave their jobs and move on because employment is so scarce. Their salaries provide just enough for acceptable living and little else in the claustrophobic apartment; even Helena must seek Dotty as a roommate to afford the upscale address. Sophie is limited by her lack of English and her hysterical personality. Only Dotty has a choice: survival with Buddy or nobody.

The anxiety of the play comes from sight and sound. The apartment is a “nightmare of clashing colors: purple carpet, orange drapes, yellow daisies on lamp shades, and roses on the wallpaper.”³ The garish decor assaults the audience’s senses. In addition, the audience’s ears are attacked by Dotty’s shouting at Bodey to make herself heard; Dotty’s panting and counting as she exercises; Buddy’s voice barking from the dangling telephone; Bodey’s screeching hearing aid; Helena’s unpleasant laugh, and Sophie’s wailing and moaning. The effect of both sight and sound to the audience is the feeling of oppression. But the audience cannot help but sympathize with the disappointments and limited opportunities of all the women.

We usually learn to wait only when we have no longer anything to wait for.

—Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Aphorisms* (1893)

Tennessee Williams: Later Life and Later Plays

I'm quite through with the kind of play that established my early and popular reputation. I am doing a different thing, which is altogether my own, not influenced at all by other schools of the theatre.

—Tennessee Williams
in a 1975 interview with
Charles Ruas

From 1970 to his death in 1983, Tennessee continued to work at writing every day with his habitual, insistent energy. Only rarely, however, was the result satisfactory to him, to audiences or to critics. He was mentioned as the great American playwright whose work went into decline after 1969 and, in some ways, that was true.

Williams suffered a great personal loss in the 1960s. His lover and companion of 15 years, Frank Merlo, died in 1963 of lung cancer. As a result, Tennessee became a virtual recluse, depressed and sustaining himself on drugs and alcohol. In 1969 he was hospitalized at Barnes Medical Center in St. Louis by his brother Dakin “for violent, destructive and possibly suicidal behavior.”¹ The doctors ordered a complete withdrawal from drugs—especially Doriden, a hypnotic pill used for sleep. This cold-turkey approach caused Williams three *grand mal* (schizophrenic) seizures and a heart attack; not everyone was certain he would survive. But slowly he did recover and when he did, he castigated his brother for hospitalizing and confining him, something he feared because

of his sister, Rose, who had been institutionalized early in her adult life. Shortly after, Dakin Williams was excised from his brother’s will.

Tennessee’s concern for his sister Rose, the subject of many of his plays, was paramount in his life. After she was lobotomized and moved from one institution to another, Williams had her transferred to an upscale facility in Ossining, NY, where he paid her regular visits. He often brought her to Manhattan for movies and shopping and wrote her letters on his travels.

After Tennessee emerged from his breakdown, he found the 1960s had altered the entire culture. The theatre, especially, had changed radically. “Nonprofit theatres had proliferated; old fashioned producers were no longer producing; long and expensive road tryouts were no longer possible...”² Williams never really understood these changes, though he wanted his plays to be taken seriously. There seemed to be no market for him and, naturally, he was upset.

Tennessee was always restless and nervous. In 1980 while his play, *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, was in rehearsal in Vancouver, he vanished — first to San Francisco, then New York, then Chicago, then to his home in Key West. He often became paranoid and wouldn’t open his mail; he often forgot practical details and accused people of stealing from him. He fired his long-time agent, Audrey Wood, for not dedicating more time to him and hired a new one. Finally, he felt the New York critics hated him. When Walter Kerr, drama critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, was asked about this allegation, he replied: “That’s so silly. If anything, we were overeager to see [him] do well.... But the talent isn’t always there every time you turn on the faucet.”³

In 1982 Williams had resumed regular megadoses of pills for both sedation and alertness

Tennessee Williams: Later Life and Later Plays

C O N T I N U E D

— mostly Nembutol, Ritalin and Seconal along with other paraphernalia associated with hypochondria. With the help of so-called “friends” he was able to obtain cocaine. For his true friends (and critics) the conventional wisdom regarding the failure of his plays in the 1960s and after was that his drug-crazed state kept him from thinking and writing coherently.

But Annette J. Saddik argues with this conventional wisdom in her book *The Politics of Reputation*. She postulates that Williams was experimenting with theatrical convention and ironic, fragmented language in a departure from his realistic plays. This was seen in his play *Camino Real* which Williams called “an elaborate allegory” written with “freedom and mobility.”⁴ When *Camino Real* was produced in 1953, the country was being introduced to plays by Beckett, Ionesco and Genêt — plays which challenged realistic representations of language, time, space and reality to try to express living in an absurd and fragmented world.

When *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* was produced in 1963, it combined elements of allegory, Kabuki theatre structure as well as realism. More and more, Williams began to replace the emphasis on reality with experimental alternative structures in such plays as *Dragon Country* (1970) and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1970).

In *The Two-Character Play* (1969) and *I Can't Imagine Tomorrow* (1966), Williams turned away from long, poetic speeches toward a more minimalist approach; he began to rely more on silences, pauses, and indirect implications to express emotion accurately and adequately. Feeling alienated from his audiences, he was attempting to express his ideas and emotions in a new way to a new generation. However, the critics were unhappy and audiences unimpressed, and such negative reception of his plays would often plunge Williams into “an

almost psychotic state of gloom.”⁵ In his desire to recapture critical favor, he turned back to his traditional style and subject matter in *Vieux Carré* (1977) and *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* (1978).

Saddik concludes her argument with a gibe at critics who, after a period of bafflement, gave praise to the works of Beckett and Pinter, but did not extend the same courtesy to the later plays of Tennessee Williams.

There's nothing worse than
a brilliant beginning.

—Pablo Picasso

German Words and Phrases in the Play

Kirche, Küche und Kinder — church, kitchen and children

Grosser Gott! — Great God!

Sie hat die Tür in mein Kopf zugeschlagen! — You have closed the door in my face!

Diese frau ist ein Spion — This lady is a spy.

Verstehen Sie? — You understand?

Vom Irrenhaus — from the lunatic asylum.

Sie ist hier mich noch einmal — to take back to the hospital.

Alte böse katze — You old nasty cat.

Eine Woche vor — Sonntag meine Mutter — One week before Sunday – my Mother!

Gertorben! — dead!

Ich weiss — I know.

Ich bein allein, allein! In der Welt, freundlos! — I am alone! In the world, friendless!

Ich habe niemand in der Welt! — I have no one in the world!

Verstehst du? — Do you understand?

Mein zimmer is gespukt! — My room is haunted!

Heisser Kaffee gibt mir immer Krampf und Durchfall — Hot coffee always gives me cramps and diarrhea.

Kann Nicht Warten! — I can't wait!

Badezimmer! — Bathroom!

Beide wasser rennen — While the water is running.

Halte das wasser! — Turn off the water.

Das wust — What a mess.

Ich kann nicht — I cannot.

Nimmer, nimmer - kahn nicht — Never, never - cannot.

Activities

1. In this character driven play, what similarities do you see between the four women and women that you know today?
2. Do you think that the characters in the play have been shaped by their generation? What similarities do you find in your generation? How have you been shaped by your generation?
3. Do you think that these characters represent universal women's traits?
4. Helena is a cool, smart, uptown woman who is trying to persuade Dotty to share an expensive apartment with her. What is style and how do we achieve true happiness?
5. Who demonstrates the greatest insight in the play? Support your answer.
6. Body is partially deaf and tries to hide her hearing aid with a large flower. Are people today over concerned with imperfections?

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<p>Administration 303/893-4000 Box Office 303/893-4100 www.denvercenter.org</p>	<p>Katharine Tyson • <i>Director of Communications</i> Tracy Witherspoon • <i>Editor</i> Sally Gass • <i>Contributing Writer</i> Dane Witherspoon • <i>Audience Development Manager</i> Tina Risch • <i>Community Outreach & Director of Group Sales</i> Megan Cranston • <i>Designer</i></p>	<p>STEINBERG CHARITABLE TRUST INTERLINK </p> <p> </p>
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