

MALE **B**EAUTY

Postwar Masculinity
in Theater, Film, and
Physique Magazines



KENNETH KRAUSS

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KENNETH KRAUSS

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P R E S S

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Eventually, my need to look for a more comprehensive collection of these physique publications sent me to a website organized by Tim Wilbur, a bodybuilder who lives in Vermont; timinvermont.com, which was the name of his website, offered hundreds and hundreds of digital copies of virtually every physique magazine published. Without this online archive, I would not have been able to follow the careers of each of the three models about whom I had chosen to write. My dependence on this collection, which is probably more comprehensive than any other on- or offline archive of such materials, is responsible for any of the appearances by the models whose careers I follow that I have missed.

Just as Tim Wilbur's online resources made possible the final section of the book, the New York Public Library's Theatre Research Library made possible the first section of the book. Its holdings of promptbooks, programs, photographs, ephemera, and reviews proved to be the definitive research collection for my exploration of the three plays that I examine early in the book. Toward this end, a grant from The College of Saint Rose, where I have taught theater and literature for more than two decades, allowed me the time that I devoted to the necessary archival research and made possible my stay in Midtown Manhattan. The college also gave me a semester off as sabbatical during which I completed much of the writing of the manuscript.

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Several friends provided early criticism and approval for my initial drafts. David Burke, with whom I attended the University of Sussex as an undergraduate, offered much appreciated praise. Rik Devitt supplied several critiques of my first completed draft; his bar, Bongo Johnny's, on Arenas Road in Palm Springs, supplied some much needed wine as I was working through my revisions. My best friend, Gary Palmer, commented on the final draft and offered much needed support. Last and certainly not at all least, my colleague and dear friend Barbara Ungar was there from the beginning of the research through the book's acceptance by the publisher and repeatedly went through my drafts, providing lively and engaging criticism, as did my friend Stuart Bartow.

This book began when I reached back in my memory to show students in my Gay and Lesbian Literature class what homosexual men used to look at during the 1950s. The proliferation on the Internet of images from physique magazine era reawakened my own memory of what these publications meant and allowed me to present them to my students, who found them interesting and amusing if not exactly evocative. I found that these images unlocked an era that my students never knew, one with which I (who had been a child during the period) had been only somewhat acquainted. To some degree, they deserve my thanks for sending me back to the years when physique models in posing straps represented forbidden desires.

Introduction

This study examines various cultural artifacts from a specific period and geographical situation in order to understand changes within a particular gender construct. The time is the postwar era and the place, the United States; the gender construct is masculinity. Although time and place are easily understood, the gender construct is far more complicated.

Masculinity is difficult to discuss. In their everyday comprehension of the world, most people tend to believe, as Uta Brandes puts it, that “[a] human being must be either male or female and . . . each gender is given characteristics and attributes” (139). This notion of two complementary genders—a binary—is pervasive. So is the idea that gender is innate, essential, something with which men and women are naturally born. Thus, the figure of what many would call a “masculine man” may be construed, according to Giannino Malossi, as “radiating the confidence that comes from an unexamined relationship with one’s own gender” (24). Despite common belief, over the past hundred years, the binary opposition of two sexes and two genders and the notion that gender is purely instinctive, have been subjected to intense scrutiny.

A host of academic writers have explored the nature of gender and of masculinity in particular. In reviewing their work, Todd W. Reeser, in *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, points out how masculinity, in its primary position in binary opposition to femininity, “tends to function as ‘unmarked,’” just as in the binary that opposes heterosexuality to homosexuality, the former becomes the most known and the least different (8). Because of this, modern investigations of gender began not with masculinity (which has functioned as the norm) but with femininity and with gender constructs that differed (due to race, class, or sexuality or other factors) from what was conventionally thought to be masculine.

Reeser suggests that masculinity is in some ways like an ideology or rather a series of ideologies (20). Masculinity, in this view, exists as a set of beliefs that people accept unquestioningly and experience as ordinary and

genuine; just as Americans consider capitalism as “a normal part of everyday life, . . . a large percentage of people take masculinity for granted as part of real life” (21). However, because “[a] series of ideologies are at play” (28), the discourse of masculinity, subject to shifts in individual component ideologies, is by necessity contradictory (32–33). Resistance to masculinity, in forms that in some way spotlight these contradictions, may come most noticeably from individuals or groups excluded from the construct, but resistance also comes from those included in the construct (34); women, for example, may launch a critique of masculinity, as happened during the late 1960s, but at the same time, so-called “men” may rebel against and defy the gender construct supposedly created by and for them. As sets of ideologies, masculinity and femininity are open to inquiry.

Reeser proposes, in the terminology of Jacques Derrida, that femininity exists as supplementary to masculinity (37) and that even though masculinity may appear to “function alone and on its own terms, it inevitably functions in implicit or explicit relation to a series of others” (41). In other words, masculinity cannot exist without the existence of everything that is supposedly contrary to masculinity. Thus, to some degree, it is logical that someone operating within the gender construct would have to learn (rather than know instinctively) at least some of what is and what is not proper to masculinity. For example, are we born to recognize that certain colors denote specific genders or sexualities, or are we taught these color codes? Perhaps then it is understandable that a male “experiences a nearly consistent move or oscillation between . . . two poles,” that is, between the belief that masculinity is instinctive to males and the recognition that certain aspects of masculinity are obviously learned and acquired (50). A male will also experience in himself and others missteps—momentary lapses or lapses of a longer duration—that appear not to be masculine in nature.

Even so, Reeser indicates, gender fluidity is usually taken as exceptional when in reality it is omnipresent (73). Still, people tend to see masculinity as “coherent” and thus immune to such fluidity because so many aspects of it are repeated “in ways that are perceived as coherent. Once that coherence is imagined, people may . . . ignore or not perceive elements that do not fit in the image that they already have. . . .” As Reeser concludes, “[I]t is the necessity of repetition that reveals the hollowness of masculinity underneath” (82). Nonetheless, if the elements that “do not fit” are so outrageous as to be unavoidably noticeable, people cannot avoid noticing and in some way adjusting their views of the construct.

These are some of the ideas surrounding and governing this study. As I admit in the course of the work, I am largely a proponent of nonessentialist thought—I tend to believe that gender is not born but bred. In any case, what I have chosen to examine are materials that I think not only

carry evidence of a significant change in postwar masculinity but that also contain instructions for the postwar reader or viewer on how to be a man.

On some levels, this book and its contents make sense. I can defend with some logic my selection of specific cultural artifacts and the appropriateness of these choices. Yet, to be perfectly honest, my own connection to this book's overall subject matter and the specific material I examine resonate with personal significance. In the name of academic honesty, I feel obliged to disclose my connections with the material.

I was born into a culture that was emerging from World War II, a culture in which money and morals were tight. There were still strict codes governing how one should behave; one's identity was forged from a variety of details, many of which were expected to conform to what the culture itself apparently demanded. Failure to conform often proved highly problematic, even (in certain cases) fatal.

My personal circumstances, of course, played a large role in how I saw the world: I was the youngest of three children; my brother was 17 years old when I was born and my sister, 12. My mother suffered some kind of breakdown after giving birth to me, so much of my time was spent with my sister. My father worked every day but Sunday, from eight in the morning, when he would open the men's wear shop that he managed, until six in the evening, but on Mondays and Fridays until nine o'clock. When he was home, he did very little although he and my mother often argued. By the time I comprehended that I had a memory, around the age of 3, my brother was gone, off to college and then, because of a serious illness, in the hospital for several years. So the people who raised me were female.

This perhaps may explain, at least in part, my early identification with girls and women, whom I saw as capable and kind. My brother, when I did spend any time with him, was not terribly warm, and my father often lost his temper around me. When I pretended to be a girl, my brother would mock me, and my father became noticeably revolted to the extent that by the time I was 4, I had learned what was and was not appropriate for a boy to do and had begun, somewhat half-heartedly, to create a persona that to some degree appeared to conform to how I thought I, as a male, was expected to act. I write "to some degree" because I never felt fully compelled to take on what turned out to be called masculinity.

One thing that separated males and females was that it was widely known that females could be beautiful, elegant, charming. Males could be handsome, but I had already been warned that handsomeness was not in itself deserving of trust. What a man did determined his worth; indeed, handsomeness in men often was a sign that the man, because of his attractiveness—by this point I knew I was attracted to it—was usually less than he appeared to be.

I had been shielded as a child from all kinds of information, including the facts that my brother had been conceived before my parents had married and that my own conception had been an accident. However, as I grew older, I began to discover all sorts of things. In spite of my efforts to pass as male, I was still thought of as sufficiently unmasculine to become an object of ridicule and contempt at school and on the streets. Even as a late adolescent, I often resisted the kind of behavior masculinity required; as Robert Jensen so eloquently puts it, “somewhere in my gut I knew there was something wrong, not only with my ongoing failure to be man enough but with the whole concept of being a man” (5).

I had been molested by a bellboy at a summer resort when I was 7 but did not really understand what had been going on. Then, while I was 10 and stumbling through puberty, I realized that although I had always felt attracted to females, I was far more attracted sexually to males. The little I knew about my feelings for my own sex told me I could neither speak of nor act on them. In fact, the language of ridicule and contempt to which I continued to be subjected was riddled with words signifying the sort of person who did speak of and act on such feelings. I attempted to deny I had any such feelings. I was made particularly uncomfortable by males whom I sensed might have had similar feelings, much as my father had become infuriated by my performances as a girl. Yet as much as I attempted to contradict my feelings, I could not resist the temptation to satisfy my desires.

This all changed sometime in 1960 when I found in one of the steamer trunks piled into a corner of the attic a large manila envelope that contained a cache of what were then called “physique magazines” and many copies of a questionnaire seemingly intended to be answered by men who engaged in weight lifting—social science surveys perhaps. As I looked through the magazines, I could hardly believe what I had uncovered: Their pages were filled with photographs of young men in swimsuits or posing straps, revealing their bodies and faces to the camera. This of course suggested that I certainly wasn’t the only male in the world (somehow I knew the magazines were intended for males) who had come to appreciate the beauty of males and that there were obviously a sufficient number of such males that magazines were published for them.

However, these were not easy conclusions to maintain. Everything else and everyone around me told me that they could not be true. The world was composed of men and women who married and had children. Of course, I had several aunts who worked in offices every day who had never married, but they always were regarded as exceptions. In fact, my mother would always refer to them as “poor Anne” and “poor Flora.” They were not normal. Normal people lived their lives with their families and created new families. I had known from the time I was 6, when the lady

downstairs became pregnant, that only women had children. So what kind of life could two men have?

Nonetheless, the evidence from the magazines was difficult to dismiss. The black-and-white photos and drawings clearly depicted what I found particularly interesting, and I would come back to them frequently for stimulation. At some point I did recognize that the men in the magazines, many of whom were said to be married, would probably have had the same disgust for me that the boys at school and on the block did. And so, even while I returned again and again to their images, I was not entirely comfortable with where all this could possibly lead me, and I longed to be normal.

Many years later, after I had come out and had several lovers and boyfriends, after I had figured out that what I actually wanted to do was to get a PhD and become a college professor, I found myself teaching a class on gay and lesbian literature—the first of its kind—at the recovering-Catholic institution where I had ended up.

Because a large part of my background was in theater, I had always included in my teaching of literature much visual imagery. It was only when I got to the part of the class that dealt with a homosexual novel written in the 1950s that I remembered the photographs I had studied so many decades before. Most of them had floated onto the Internet, from which they were easily circulated and downloaded. As I re-examined them, this time from the point of view of someone trying to describe mid-twentieth-century gay culture to students who had been born in the 1970s, I began to understand them better: These were artifacts of a time through which I, who was barely cognizant of what these pictures really signified, had lived.

What I came to understand then, as an adult looking back on photos that had been prominent features in the lives of many of the men who had gazed on them, was that these images constituted an aesthetic that was in many ways antithetical to the aesthetic prevalent among males who identified themselves as men—that is, as normative heterosexual males whose sexuality and gender conformed to the strictures that American society had ordained. The physique magazines carried images that were not merely sensual and/or sexual—they were images of males that the gazers found beautiful. Like many other languages, English plays fast and loose with gender when it comes to certain adjectives: A woman may be judged to be beautiful, but a man must be said to be handsome; nonetheless, the images in physique magazines, whether of handsome, sensual, or merely available males, represented what was received as male beauty.

In that same class I taught three plays by Tennessee Williams, whom I regarded not merely as a playwright who happened to be gay but also as one who actually wrote about sexuality and gender from the perspective of a gay man. It occurred to me that what I had witnessed in the beefcake

magazines printed for homosexuals was apparent, although less blatantly so, on the stage at the same time, and after watching the film made by Elia Kazan based on Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, I saw it in this and also in other movies.

Yet the crucial event that had released this profusion of art works became clear to me only when I went back a decade earlier: It was clearly the war. The shift in masculinity from the traumatized 1930s to the burgeoning 1950s was prompted by the vast and brutal event known as World War II. The great irony was that this conflagration, which had tragically taken the lives of millions of people, had necessitated changes in social attitudes and conventions that had previously seemed so unalterable. As a child, I had no way of knowing that what I was experiencing was actually in part a reaction to the social upheaval that the war had initiated. The women's movement would see in the domestication of women in the 1950s an attempt to make them forget that, as they had proven throughout the war, they could work as well as men might. Similarly, the intense pressure to go back to the notions of home and family as they had been understood two decades before made my mother call Auntie Anne "poor."

The war required soldiers and sailors, pilots and marines, who were young men, some of them still teenagers. They were so young that they were referred to, affectionately, as "the boys." Traditionally, young men had been considered boys, but the sacrifices they were obliged to make required society to see them as fully developed examples of the male gender construct—in short, as men. Thus masculinity became younger, and thus a plethora of traits that had previously excluded these boys from manhood had to be construed anew and in a very different way.

Many felt, once the war was over, that the servicemen who had functioned as men should go back to being boys. One way to do that was to send them to college, which the government did in great numbers. Recasting them as college boys set them into an educational context in which they could be trained to find their places in the hierarchy that they had left behind in order to fight overseas. They would emerge from universities ready to fit into the social order, assume a career, begin a family, and preserve life as it had been lived, or rather as some wished to remember it had been lived, before the war.

Of course, that never happened. As hideously repressive as the 1950s were, there was no way to go back to a mythologized past. The town of Bedford Falls in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* looks as if it has reverted to the values and ideals that its residents had previously cherished, but the film, made in 1946, actually forecasts a world in which the changes from the war would be instated to create a more egalitarian world. Even with the reactionary leadership of a Republican administration, the witch-hunting

of the FBI and congress, the insistence on conformity, the anti-communist resurgence of religion, and the power of racist and sexist institutions, there remained meaningful acts of resistance that occasionally manifested themselves before being eradicated. I already knew that one of the prime causes of the explosive 1960s was the repressive 1950s.

In retrospect, I realize that my choices of the material I examine in this book were hardly random. With regard to dramatic literature, each of the plays that I discuss had some meaning in my life. I first watched a scene from Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* as a junior in high school and immediately identified with the son in the play, who was struggling to leave home and family behind. Although I had never seen or read Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* until I was an adult, I knew about it because the movie version had been shown at the camp I attended a few weeks before I arrived there; I am sure on some level, someone in charge had thought it a good way to teach the boys to differentiate between homosocial and homosexual emotions they might be feeling, but repeated references to the film made me paranoid. Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* seemed to me, when I first read it at the age of 25, a rather cryptic piece, and yet it always remained a fascinating work that I continued to teach. Little had I realized that the one-act's depiction of masculinity (or rather, masculinities) was what made me keep coming back to it.

The choice of Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and James Dean for the section on men on screen in some ways seemed obvious. As a child, I was kept away from most of Brando's movies—I remember my mother refusing to let me attend a matinee of *A Streetcar Named Desire* because I was "too young" to understand it—but eventually my parents took me to see *Sayonara*, and I wondered what all the fuss had been about. I later saw Brando in *The Young Lions*. I was impressed with his portrayal of a German soldier, but I identified with the character played by Montgomery Clift who was, like myself, Jewish and sensitive. I first encountered James Dean a year or two after he had died. My sister took me to a screening of *Giant*, which I found so huge and long that I couldn't understand what it was about. I remember that as I watched the film, I recalled the news stories on television about Dean's car crash, and I was confused as to how I could be watching someone who seemed so alive but who was in fact dead. I think I was 7 years old.

In the final section of the book, in which I look at three men who were models in physique magazines, my selection process had begun very early. As a 12-year-old, my first glimpse of John Tristram, who was featured on the back cover of *Tomorrow's Man*, was startling: He was photographed standing on a beach in a tight black swimsuit that laced up the sides. He looked so tough and so sexy I was immediately drawn to his image. Many

years later I would learn that he was one of the few homosexual bodybuilders who appeared in these magazines. Glenn Bishop also figured among the young men whom I discovered within the cache, but at the time I didn't find him all that attractive; many years later, when I discovered through various websites an abundance of nude shots of him, I began to appreciate his looks and his grace.

The one man whom I didn't know from these magazines was Richard Harrison, who after playing a few small parts in Hollywood, went on to become, like Steve Reeves and many other musclemen, a star in Italian and other foreign B movies, including gladiator films, spaghetti westerns, spy intrigues, and ninja adventures. I discovered an early photo of him in a book about beefcake magazines published in the 1990s. But eventually I recalled that in the late 1950s I was taken to see the movie version of *South Pacific* and that early in the picture a good-looking blond pilot with blue eyes was flying John Kerr to an island. I remember being terribly disappointed to find out that John Kerr (who ironically had made his name in the play and film versions of *Tea and Sympathy*), and not the handsome aviator, was one of the leads and that I would never see the pilot again; the flier was played by Richard Harrison.

These are some of the personal circumstances that led me to write this book. Although I do not regard this work as a personal history, I do believe my motivations for writing it were as much personal as scholarly. If I do, from time to time, revert to my own memories related to the subject matter, it is merely to reiterate my firsthand knowledge and understanding of what I am writing about, not to tell my own story.

My own story is not as significant as the larger story I am trying to tell, which concerns how the imagery of masculinity began to change with the end of the war. To do so, I look at different phenomena drawn from different cultural contexts in postwar America, high culture (the theater), popular culture (the cinema), and the gay subculture (the physique magazines). Each of these phenomena illustrates how American manhood became younger and more aesthetically attractive and sexually ambiguous after the war. Despite the repressive world in which I remembered growing up, the artifacts of the time reveal mixed, often confusingly contradictory messages. I did not start receiving any of these diverse transmissions until I was a teenager in the 1960s—or perhaps it would be fairer to say that I received them from the time I was born but could not make sense of them until later. Even then I was never sure on how to construe them.

My lack of surety was a result not merely of the strength of the training of the postwar culture but a product of the pronouncements of the new culture that was coming into being in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In various identity wars waged by women, African Americans and Hispanics,

and also gays and lesbians, the new culture called for an eradication of previous ideas and the installation of new precepts. Thus, women who raised children at home were seen as reactionaries, Louis Armstrong was dubbed an “uncle Tom,” and gay history was said to have begun with the Stonewall Riot (or to put that event in the later language of correctness, the Stonewall Rebellion or Uprising). Previous experiences did not count; any experience that did not completely challenge the culture at large was always suspect.

In the 1980s, a reevaluation of the past slowly took shape. Initially, the very criteria that had dismissed all that had come before remained in play, even as they were applied (perhaps more gently now) than they had been a decade earlier. Thus, some of the works that I examine were offered a more complex analysis before being dismissed almost entirely. Yet other studies followed that illuminated the connections between the near and distant past and that showed how the events at the Stonewall Inn were less motivated by the death of Judy Garland than by a decade and a half of gay culture and politics.

This study strives to examine that period between the war and the early 1960s when American culture, perhaps largely unwittingly, underwent a significant revision in its view of males and masculinity. Such a revision helped in itself to allow additional cultural factors to change. And the iconography of masculinity after the war led to further transformations, which in turn led to a prolonged period of social revolt through which our understanding of identity seriously altered.

At the same time, as the book’s title indicates, one of the important aspects of the study is to document that in the wake of the war, there came a tacit, often wary, realization that men were and could be beautiful. Manhood’s admirable qualities in the past included strength, loyalty, and wisdom, but beauty was always regarded, especially from a male point of view, as dubious. The postwar shift in masculinity changed that.

CHAPTER 1

Seeing Through
The Glass Menagerie

The Emerging Specter of Male Beauty

Re-readings

In Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, written and first produced before World War II had ended, the figure of the defiant, nonconformist young male, which would haunt American culture during the late 1940s and through the 1950s, first appears on stage; presciently, Williams creates a character who will dominate much of the literature of the postwar period. The young man who escapes the traditional, approved social and sexual norms and attempts, through his alienation, to thwart the middle-class rules that impose themselves on the individual, remains a romantic emblem of youthful defiance in an oppressive and repressive era. Tom, the narrator of the play and a character in it, and his father, in whose footsteps he follows and whose likeness he bears, anticipate a long line of angry young men that would give meaning to a generation struggling through the age of conformity.

In the midst of this drama, is the image of the handsome, grinning man, the attractive but dangerous icon around whose memory Tom and his family live their lives. The handsome face of the escapee, of the absent yet present father, whose image hangs on the wall in an enlarged photograph, becomes central to the play. Thus, the notion of male beauty is introduced as not merely attractive but dangerous as well.

Tom's gender and sexuality in the context of the culture surrounding him are especially radical in this wartime work. In *The Glass Menagerie*, connections and disconnections between gender and sexuality play out in a complex and sometimes ambiguous way. Although his later works would more overtly portray the interplay between these two separate but related constructs, Williams's first Broadway success quietly but seriously questions

how men and women become who and what they are. If the writing seems more implicit and less controversial in *The Glass Menagerie* than in those later, often sensational plays, it is nonetheless highly revealing here: Our inner desires and our performances of them for the outer world combine in an uneasy alliance, the latter striving to hide and shield the former, the former seeking fulfillment in spite of the latter.

The Glass Menagerie may at first glance seem a strange place to look for evidence of a questioning of gender and sexuality, for the traditions of watching and reading that have surrounded this text have helped shape generations of responses to it that rarely lead to such a question. As Michael Paller puts it in *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Broadway*, the “perception of *The Glass Menagerie* as a pleasant, non-threatening affair stems from the reactions of the newspaper and magazine critics who witnessed the first production. . . .” At the same time, readers of what Paller calls Williams’s “nice play” (33) seem to miss the references that would lead them to an understanding of how the play comments on what at the time were considered not-so-nice subjects. The apparent understatement in both the play’s dialogue and visual elements is, in fact, a careful encoding of issues that Williams wished to explore. These wary inquiries, about sex and the objects and practices of sexuality and about the nature of masculine and feminine behavior, were intended to communicate to audiences—perhaps specifically to important subgroups within those audiences—in a time when any serious interrogation of gender and sexuality was, at least on stage, usually taboo.

The same may be said for readers: Mark Lilly, for example, suggests that “gay readers can see the various meanings . . . in a way unperceived by heterosexuals . . .” (153). In any case, initial reactions to the play and subsequent reception of additional stagings, along with readings of the scripts, helped create the myth that this script was, despite the playwright’s subsequent career, somehow innocent of the rather adult themes that characterized his subsequent oeuvre.

Indeed, according to one late twentieth-century literary critic’s reckoning, “Williams’s first Broadway success, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944),¹ is rare among his works in that the sexuality of his characters is not a significant factor” (Fisher 15). Such a statement conforms to the long-time practice of how this script is interpreted. In reality, however, not only are the sexuality and the gender of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* a significant factor, but also as in all Williams’s work, they probably constitute *the* significant factor. That they and their importance are not immediately obvious to many make them perhaps even more significant.

Any discussion of the play’s dramatic, as well as theatrical, text is complicated by the fact that there are two “official” versions, both printed

within a year of the play's Broadway premiere, a "reading" text prepared by Williams in 1945, in which he attempted to restore many of the cuts and changes made by the first production, and a "performance" text from the same year, which reflects the changes made to and also the original direction of the premiere production.² Choosing between the two is difficult, for the reading text includes many of the innovative stage techniques Williams had first envisioned in composing the work; the performance text incorporates many of the alterations made by Williams and others before the play first opened in New York. Most who have read the play know it from the reading version; most who have seen the play know it from the performance edition.

Because my intention is to discuss *The Glass Menagerie* not merely as a text assigned to students but rather as the basis of stage performances, I rely on the performance text. This version of the script is very close to the reading version. Where the two coincide, I first note the page number for the performance version, then for the reading version. Where the two diverge, I will indicate any significant inconsistencies parenthetically.

In examining the written text(s) of this play, I attempt to locate (as most critics try to do) certain signs, some linguistic, some visual, some nonverbal, to support my thesis. Nonetheless, there remains one sign that is conspicuous not because of its presence but because of its absence. This forbidden topic, the great unmentionable, is appropriately signaled by an apparent lack of signs, and this lack has been traditionally read to point to something left indeterminate. This absence, still, is telling. Indeed, in an earlier work, Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*, a prolonged lack of sound that is dramatized in the form of a whispered conversation between two characters whom the audience cannot hear, serves to name the particular perversity from which two other characters allegedly suffer. Similarly, in *The Glass Menagerie*, "the love that dare not speak its name" echoes through the artifice of euphemism and the profound silence that inevitably and unavoidably name it. For Hellman, such silence was a matter of taste and tact—she was able to "name" the characters' supposed "crime against nature" without offending anyone; for Williams, however, this silence is part of an ongoing defensive strategy in an era when homosexuality was almost universally despised.

For more than half a century, then, the prevailing method of interpreting *The Glass Menagerie* was to preclude that which is unspoken and unseen. "If Williams had wanted us to know what Tom does when he goes out at night, he would have told us or showed us," goes the self-fulfilling explanation. Yet much of the play is clearly devoted to the meaning of absence and to the presence of that which is not there. Even if we would like to stand by Lear's assertion that "nothing will come of nothing," we cannot avoid the fact that "nothing" is certainly capable of signifying "something."

If Tom's rebelliousness is due, at least in large part, to the conflict between his feelings about his sexuality and his attempt to "perform" a "masculine" role, much the same may be said of Williams himself, whose ambivalence and marginalization as a homosexually identified male cast him, certainly in his own eyes, as an outsider. Nonetheless, neither he nor the character is the gay liberator who would emerge in the late 1960s. Williams firmly believed, in contrast to the identity politics that would later gain currency, that one should not be identified by one's sexuality because sexuality was highly private, even idiosyncratic, and peculiar to oneself.

Chez Wingfield

The first act or part (act in the performance version, part in the reading text) of *The Glass Menagerie* follows life inside the apartment of the Wingfield family in Saint Louis. Amanda, a former Southern belle who has been abandoned by her alcoholic husband some years earlier, is striving to take care of her two grown children, Tom, who fancies himself a poet but currently clerks in a shoe warehouse, and Laura, a sickly, desperately shy girl with a limp. As scene follows scene into the intermission—in the performance version, Scenes 1 to 6, in the reading version Scenes 1 to 5—the principal action builds from Amanda's realization that Laura is incapable of earning her own living to Amanda's plan to try to marry her off; Amanda hints to Tom, whose unhappiness at home and work becomes increasingly observable, that once Laura has secured a husband, he may leave.

In the second act or part of the play, Tom brings home to dinner a work acquaintance, who turns out to be the very young man with whom Laura was once infatuated in high school. The meeting ultimately turns disastrous when Jim, Laura's would-be gentleman caller, reveals that he is already engaged.

This summation necessarily excludes the better part of the play, which is dramatized in a somewhat fragmented way and with the device of Tom, at a later age, telling the story. George W. Crandell asserts that "[t]he success of . . . [this narration] depends upon willing subjects, viewers who will permit the fictional character, Tom Wingfield, to define the spectators' point of view" (6). Yet others, such as Brian Richardson (683) and Nancy Anne Cluck (84), remind us that, as Williams himself cautions, "The narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic convention is convenient to his purposes."³ The self-conscious monologue that sets up the opening scene is addressed directly to the audience:

I have tricks in my pocket—I have things up my sleeve—but I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that

has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion. (Performance 11; Reading 144, with slight variations)

This comparison of a magician's routine with a dramatic performance, which implies that traditional stage realism is nothing more than a set of illusions that give the impression of reality and that reality itself is highly illusory, is continued later in the play, when Tom speaks to Laura about a stage magician, Malvolio, whom he has just come from seeing; however, coming as they do at the beginning of the play, of course, these lines seem enigmatic, and the succeeding information does little to clarify them: Tom speaks of the play being set in "that quaint period," the Great Depression, "when the large middle class of America was matriculating from a school for the blind" (11; 145, with "huge" instead of "large" and the period described as "the thirties"). Tom makes references to the Spanish Civil War and to American labor conflicts, and declares, "This is the social background of the play" (11; 145). "The play is memory," he announces, and relates the dim lighting, the sentimentality, the lack of realism, and the music, which has just begun to be heard, as stage conventions consistent with memory. He then introduces himself and the three other characters, Amanda, Laura, and Jim, calling the audience's attention to "a fifth character who doesn't appear other than in a photograph hanging on the wall" (11; 145).

The picture, an oversized portrait of Tom's father, "is the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap" (10; 144), the stage directions tell us. The father, who "left us a long time ago" (11; 145), will reemerge metaphorically in the context of the stage magician. Mr. Wingfield's "vanishing act" will become the one trick that Tom wishes Malvolio would teach him—that is, how to disappear without harming anyone or anything. Such a feat is, in real life, impossible, Tom suggests, and his "very handsome" father⁴ has come to symbolize just how hurtful escape can be to those left behind.

As rambling as the opening monologue may sound, a central trope does emerge as the speech unwinds. The whole idea of hiding tricks in one's pocket and things up one's sleeve refers to the illusion of sudden "magical" manifestation, pretending to conjure what is absent into something that is present. The middle class had "matriculated from a school for the blind," but its sightless members were "having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy" (11; 145); in other words, the experience of trying to read the invisible but decipherable signs of the truth is painful and difficult. The violent visual image of "revolution" in Spain (11; 145, the name *Guernica* is also invoked) and of the less horrific but analogous "shouting and confusion" in Midwestern cities, amplifies the

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