

# THE THEATER

## The Angel of the Odd

(See Cover)

It was at the age of three that Thomas Lanier Williams, later better known as Tennessee, told his first scary story. As his mother recalls it: "We used to go to North Carolina in the summer. The women folk would gather round the fireplace—it was cool there. We had no radios to entertain ourselves with, so we'd tell stories. Tom, who was quite shy, would hide behind my skirts listening. This one night we said, 'Tom, why don't you tell us a story?' We were sure he'd say no. And you know, that little cherub—he had golden ringlets and big blue eyes—launched forth with a story that went on and on. It was about alligators and the jungle and all sorts of animals. Suddenly he said, 'I can't go on further; it's getting scarier and scarier.' And closing his eyes up tight, he said: 'I'm getting scared myself.'"

Tennessee Williams is now 50, still gets scared ("I am a definition of hysteria"), still tells stories that get scarier and scarier—and tells them so hypnotically that the public pays him over \$300,000 a year not to stop. He is the nightmare merchant of Broadway, writer of *Orpheus Descending* (murder by blowtorch), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (rape, nymphomania, homosexuality), *Summer and Smoke* (frigidity), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (impotence, alcoholism, homosexuality), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (drug addiction, castration, syphilis), *Suddenly Last Summer* (homosexuality, cannibalism), and *The Night of the Iguana* (masturbation, underwear fetishism, coprophagy).

Many Americans regard Williams as an erotomaniac, for whom the mildest epithets are "sick" and "decadent." Yet taboo has often been the touchstone of drama. In the profoundest play of Greek tragedy, a man kills his father and marries his mother. Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama drip with gore and violence and flaunt unnatural affections. Other critics think that Williams' choice of themes shows America to be—as angry young British Playwright John Osborne puts it—"as sex-obsessed as a medieval monastery." Yet Tennessee Williams fills foreign playhouses from Athens to Tokyo, and his current play, *The Night of the Iguana*, though it shuns obsession with sex, is a box-office sellout and much the best new American play of the season.

**The Beat of Passion.** The fact is that Tennessee Williams, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes and three New York Drama

Critics' Circle Awards, is a consummate master of theater. His plays beat with the heart's blood of the drama: passion. He is the greatest U.S. playwright since Eugene O'Neill, and barring the aged Sean O'Casey, the greatest living playwright anywhere. Dissenting voices might be raised for a thoughtful and clever shaper of ideas like Jean Anouilh. Yet the 20th century's three greatest playwrights as thinkers—Shaw, Brecht and Pirandello—succeeded less because they brought ideas into the theater than because they squeezed every last drop of passion out of those ideas.

Williams has peopled the U.S. stage



TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AT FIVE, WITH MOTHER & SISTER  
The future would always be trapped in the past.

with characters whose vibrantly durable presences stalk the corridors of a playgoer's memory: Amanda Wingfield, the fussy, garrulous, gallant mother of *Glass Menagerie*; *Streetcar's* Blanche DuBois, Southern gentlewoman turned nymphomaniac, and its Stanley Kowalski, the hairy ape in a T shirt; Maggie, the scrappy cat on a hot tin roof, and Big Daddy, the bull-roaring lord and master of "28,000 acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile." Williams' dialogue sings with a lilting eloquence far from the drab, disjunctive patterns of everyday talk. And for monologues, the theater has not seen his like since the god of playwrights, William Shakespeare.

Williams is an electrifying scenewriter, because his people are the sort who make scenes, explosively and woundingly. In

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy jerks the crutch out from under his son Brick's arm and sends him sprawling in agony; a few minutes later Brick kicks the life out of Big Daddy by telling the old man that he is dying of cancer. In an age that suppresses its tantrums as impolite, part of Williams' cathartic appeal for an audience is to allow it to act out its hostilities vicariously. Above all, Williams is a master of mood. Sometimes it is hot, oppressive, simmering with catastrophe (*Streetcar, Cat*); at other times it is sad, autumnal, elegiac (*Menagerie, Iguana*). To achieve it, he uses the full orchestra of theatrical instruments: setting, lighting, music, plus the one impalpable, indispensable gift, the genius for making an audience forget that any other world exists except the one onstage.

### A Dark & Narrow Vision.

No amount of technical skill can make a major playwright. He must have a vision of life. Williams has one. It is dark, it is narrow, it lacks the fuller resources of faith and love, but it is desperately honest. In the plays, it springs intuitively from the playwright's unconscious. Says Williams: "There is a horror in things, a horror at heart of the meaninglessness of existence. Some people cling to a certain philosophy that is handed down to them and which they accept. Life has a meaning if you're bucking for heaven. But if heaven is a fantasy, we are in this jungle with whatever we can work out for ourselves. It seems to me that the cards are stacked against us. The only victory is how we take it."

Although this sounds very much like Hemingway's "grace under pressure," there is a vast difference between the two writers. Hemingway's winners took nothing, but he was for the winner; Williams' special compassion is for "the people who are not meant to win," the lost, the odd, the strange, the difficult people—fragile spirits, who lack talons for the jungle. If Williams wins an audience's sympathy for these people, it may be because he speaks to a common condition: loneliness. All his characters yearn to break out of the cell of the lonely self, to touch and reach another person. "Hell is yourself," says Williams. "When you ignore other people completely, that is hell." The revelation towards which all of Williams' plays aspire is the moment of self-transcendence—"when a person puts himself aside to feel deeply for another person."

**Four Who Live Through.** *The Night of the Iguana* is Williams' greatest play of self-transcendence. Esthetically, it is a comeback from recent plays (*Sweet Bird of Youth, Suddenly Last Summer*), in which he seemed to confuse assaults on the nerves with cries from the heart. In-



ANTHONY ROSS, LAURETTE TAYLOR, EDDIE DOWLING & JULIE HAYDON IN "MENAGERIE"  
Out of a mythic South, incessant chatter.

stead of willful self-destruction, the characters in *Iguana* are bent on living through and beyond despair.

Four of them gather on the veranda of the Costa Verde Hotel near Acapulco, in Mexico. The hotelkeeper, the Widow Maxine Faulk, played by Bette Davis, is a hostage to devil-in-the-flesh sensuality. T. Lawrence Shannon (Patrick O'Neal), a defrocked clergyman turned tourist guide, is spooked by guilt. As a man who was barred from his church for committing "fornication and heresy in the same week," O'Neal seems agonizingly nailed to a cross of nerves. Nonno (Alan Webb), a 97-year-old poet, is the prisoner of art and age, struggling between memory lapses to finish a new poem. Hannah Jelkes (Margaret Leighton), Nonno's spinster granddaughter, has invested her emotional life in selfless care of the old man. Leighton's acting has the purity of light.

There are some Williams-patented shockers in *Iguana*, but they are muted in the air of near-Oriental serenity that envelops the play. There is a speech of Widow Faulk's in which she tells of over-hearing Shannon's account of how his mother caught him practicing "the little boy's vice" and spanked him with a hairbrush for angering "both God and Mama." Shannon's explanation of his adult behavior is that he "got back at God by preaching atheistical sermons and got back at Mama by starting to lay young girls." Then there is what Williams calls "the dunghill speech," a not-for-the-squeamish passage in which Shannon relates to Hannah how he once saw the natives of an unnamed country scavenge a dung heap for undigested food. In the internal logic of the play, the speech is fully justified, for Shannon is testing Hannah and her previously stated creed that "nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind."

*Iguana* has the hue of hope. At the end, Shannon stays with the Widow Faulk to help make a go of the hotel. Nonno completes his poem. Though he dies and Hannah must go on alone, she has been

given the strength to do it. Yet it is the anguished daily testing of existence itself that Hannah seems fearful of as she utters the last lines of the play. Lifting her eyes toward the heavens, she pleads, "Oh God, can't we stop now? Finally? Please let us! It's so quiet here now!"

"I Don't Like Myself." It is a plea from a driven, riven man—although outwardly Williams does not seem that way. He has ready good humor and an explosive laugh. His drawl is as smooth as the good bourbon with which it is usually enriched. He stands 5 ft. 6 in., weighs 155 lbs., and like most Americans worries about his weight. He is darkly good-looking, and might in another era have passed for a Mississippi riverboat gambler.

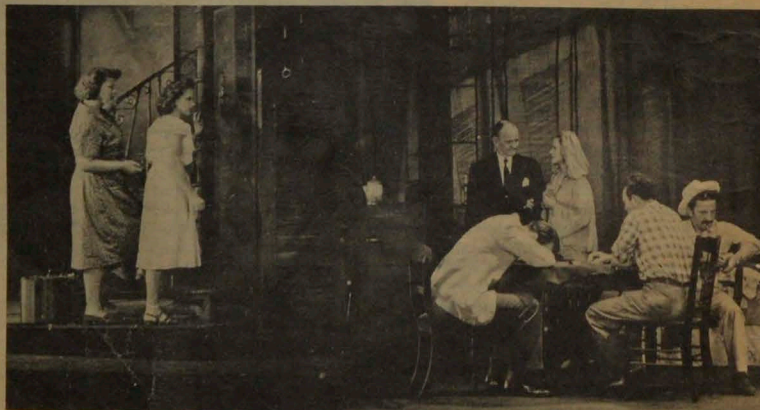
Williams retains tension the way some people retain fluids. To ease the strain of meeting people and facing the world, he relies partly on cigarettes (two packs a day), but mostly on drink and pills. A trifle defensively, Williams puts his intake of liquor at half of a fifth a day. "It's more like half a fifth of bourbon

and half a fifth of vodka," says a friend. Williams at times takes half a Dexamyd to "pep up," 1½ Seconals a day "to smooth things over," and two Miltozins with Scotch to go to sleep.

Williams is a gentle man who seethes with inner violence and something akin to self-hatred. "I was brought up puritanically," he explains. "I try to outrage that puritanism. I have an instinct to shock. I think it's a constructive thing. Hit them with something." To Williams, "them" is the middle class, which is "self-deluded and not facing its basic motivations." As for himself: "I always feel that I bore people and that I'm too ugly. I don't like myself. Why should I?" Except for dimming eyesight (his left eye has been damaged by cataracts), Williams has the assurance of doctors that he is in good health, but he remains a confirmed hypochondriac: "I've always been obsessed that I'm dying of cancer, dying of heart trouble. I think it's good for a writer to think he's dying. He works harder."

Williams is one of the wealthiest playwrights in recent history, but he is fearful that he will die destitute. He has earned some \$6,000,000 during his playwrighting career, owns only the house in Key West and a house in Miami. After years of popular and critical success, he has virtually no confidence in his talents and is self-deprecating to the point of abasement: "I always expect total failure. I'm not a good writer. It's incredible that I've managed to write as long as I have. I don't believe it when people say they like my work. I don't believe it."

When this ordeal by tension brought him close to crackup in 1957, Williams went to the late Moss Hart's psychoanalyst, Dr. Lawrence Kubie. Characteristically, Williams broke off the analysis when Dr. Kubie hit him where he lives, his work. Said Kubie: "You've written nothing but violent melodramas, which only succeed because of the violence of the time we live in." Williams' younger brother, Dakin, an amiable East St. Louis attorney and a convert to Roman Cathol-



KIM HUNTER (SECOND LEFT), JESSICA TANDY (CENTER) & MARLON BRANDO  
In an age that suppresses his tantrums,



WEBB, DAVIS, O'NEAL & LEIGHTON IN "IGUANA"  
Toward the moment of self-transcendence.

icism, drops broad hints in person and in print as to how Tennessee can achieve peace of soul. Says Tennessee amusedly: "If it would make him happy, I would have a deathbed conversion. It might help to distract me too."

**Five Good Days a Year.** The only religion that works for Williams is his writing, and he practices it four hours a day, day in, day out, year in, year out, as if he had taken a vow of discipline.

Whether the day begins in his cluttered fifth-floor apartment in a Manhattan upper East Side brownstone or in his white frame cottage in Key West, Williams brews up a pot of Stygian coffee and plants himself in front of a Smith-Corona electric. He has no set output and contends that "out of a year's writing days, there are only five good ones." He may work on any one of three or four manuscripts. Last week, in Key West, he was working on his next play, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*, about a rich, much-married ex-Follies star in her 60s who lives in an Italian villa and re-

covers her "capacity to feel again" with a handsome young freeloader.

After about an hour and a half of writing, Williams chases away the first tension spook of the day with an ice-cold martini. He saves part of every afternoon for his only hobby, swimming. In New York, he may go to the theater or a movie in the evenings. In Key West, he barhops or sits home listening to records with his long-time secretary, Frank Merlo, a slight man with steel-grey hair. The rest of the household consists of two playful bulldogs, Mr. Moon and Baby Doll, and a parrot.

Williams completes a play about every two years. But before that, he marinates impressions, characters, experiences. *Iguana* emerged from a 1940 trip to Acapulco. By 1946, it was a short story. By 1959, it was a one-act play, produced at a theater festival in Spoleto, Italy. Four separate versions followed, and to compare them is to watch sand turning into Baccarat crystal. Says Williams: "It takes five or six years to use something out of life. It's lurking in the unconscious—it finds its meaning there." Essentially, Williams has been chosen by his subjects.

**His Life in a Play.** The play that best proves it is *The Glass Menagerie*. In it, Williams held a mirror up to memory and caught upon it the breath of three lives: his mother's, his sister's and his own. In a lower-middle-class apartment in a Midwestern city, Amanda Wingfield ("an exact portrait of my mother," says Williams) tries to cope with a peevish present by chattering of a fancied past. The son Tom (Williams) suffocates in a shoe factory and goes to movies to daydream of escape. The daughter Laura (Williams' sister Rose) has a mind and a personality as fragile as the little glass animals that deck her room. But the mother dragoons Tom into bringing home a marriageable "gentleman caller" for Laura. When the caller turns out to be engaged, and unintentionally breaks the pet unicorn in Laura's menagerie, the girl's future can be read in the fractured glass. At play's end, Tom lunges free of family, but for the

playwright-to-be the future would always be trapped in the past.

The past, in Williams' real life, starts with a genealogical treeful of romantics, adventurers and notables: Poet Sidney Lanier, some Tennessee Indian fighters, an early U.S. Senator, and, way back, a brother of St. Francis Xavier. More prosaically, his father was a salesman for International Shoe Co. "C.C." (for Cornelius Coffin) Williams was a gruff, aggressive man with a booming voice who was happiest, says Tennessee, "playing poker with men and drinking." His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, was petite, vivacious, genteel and prim; she nourished rather illusory memories of a grand and gracious Southern past, of going to dances in Natchez and Vicksburg "on those big, beautiful plantations."

"He Practically Died." C.C. was forever on the road with his shoe line, and Edwina Williams lived with her father, a patrician Episcopal preacher who restlessly changed parishes about every two years. Thomas Lanier Williams was born in 1911 in his grandfather's rectory in Columbus, Miss. He and his older sister Rose absorbed their mother's lofty sense of status as the daughter of a clergyman in Delta country. Tom loved to tag along after the Rev. Mr. Dakin on parish calls and listen to the conversations. "Tom always was a little pitcher with big ears, and I think he still is," says Mrs. Williams. Years later, until the old man died at 98, Williams kept his grandfather with him six months a year, took him to Key West and abroad (and modeled *Iguana*'s Nonno on him). "My grandfather was not the most masculine sort of man," says Williams. "He was not effeminate, but there was nothing that delighted him more than to receive a bottle of cologne or silk handkerchiefs as gifts."

At the age of five, Tom caught diphtheria. "He practically died," shudders his mother. "I slept with him those first nine nights, applying ice packs to his throat to keep him from choking to death. The fever finally passed, and I thought he had re-

(SECOND RIGHT) IN "STREETCAR"  
vicarious hostility.

covered. One day I noticed he was crawling along the floor after his toys, I said, 'Why, Tom, whatever is the matter with your legs?' and called the doctor. His legs were paralyzed. Apparently, during Tom's diphtheria, he swallowed his tonsils.\* They poisoned his system. It was two years before he could walk normally." During that convalescence, Mrs. Williams read to him constantly: "We used up all the children's books, and I had to turn to Scott, Thackeray, Dickens." Tom's grandfather, who knew Milton's *Paradise Lost* by heart, recited poetry to him. "Grandfather was crazy about Poe. He was interested in the macabre," says Williams.

In 1918, C.C. was posted to St. Louis as a branch sales manager, and Tom and his sister were uprooted once again. Gone were the sunlit spacious backyards of Mississippi, replaced by rows of brick flats the color of "dried blood and mustard." The children sang in the Episcopal choir, but were made to feel like social untouchables. At home, the parents often "quarreled horribly," and C.C. grew more and more dissatisfied with his son. He felt the boy was "sissified," wanted him to play baseball, took a bitter delight in calling him "Miss Nancy."

**Into Print.** With characteristic self-dramatization, Williams dates his urge to write from his sister Rose's arrival at puberty, leaving him behind in "the country of childhood." (It happens that his mother bought him a \$10 typewriter around the same time.) His first writing coup was of a sort to make his father apoplectic. Pen-named as a woman, the 14-year-old Tom won a \$25 *Smart Set* contest on the subject "Can a Good Wife Be a Good Sport?" He went on to be published in a magazine called *Weird Tales*, with a story titled *The Vengeance of Nitocris*. Opening sentence: "Hushed were the streets of many-peopled Thebes."

From the age of twelve, Tom had spent a lot of time at the home of a girl named Hazel Kramer, "an incredibly lovely person, tremendously understanding, a terrific sense of humor." C.C. did not like her. When he heard that she was entering the University of Missouri with Tom, he pressured her grandfather, who worked for International Shoe, to send her to

\* Her account; medically impossible.



FATHER & GRANDFATHER  
Poker and *Paradise Lost*.

another school. She married someone else, and died while still young. That was the closest Williams came to marriage, though certain actresses have since had crushes on him. Says Anna Magnani, for whom he wrote *The Rose Tattoo*: "Tennessee is the only man I would marry immediately, if he asked me, because he is so full of emotion."

**Into Shoe Biz.** Williams stayed at the University of Missouri for three years. Then his father, who had been a second lieutenant in the Spanish-American War, yanked him out of school for flunking R.O.T.C. and put him to work in the shoe company.

Williams got \$65 a month as a clerk-typist and odd-job man. Though he now jokes about his rise "from shoe biz to show biz," he hated the job. He would begin the day dusting shoes, "thousands and thousands of shoes." Nights, right after supper, he would go to his room, which was just big enough to hold a bed, table and chair. Primed with coffee and cigarettes, he would type out poems till 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. When his mother opened his door in the morning, calling out "Rise and shine, rise and shine," as Amanda does in *Menagerie*, stale smoke billowed out, and she would sometimes find Tom sprawled across his bed still clothed.

After three years, says Williams, "I guess I willed myself into a nervous breakdown." Recuperating with his grandparents in Memphis that summer, he wrote his first play: *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!*, about two sailors who pick up a couple of girls. He had never seen a sailor. In the

next few years, returning to St. Louis, he churned out scripts about miners (unseen), munitions makers (unseen), prison convicts roasted alive (unseen) and a flop-house (visited). A quasi-bohemian theater group called the Mummies staged them.

He also belonged to the St. Louis Poets Workshop, a group of young poets who believed, even as young poets still do (see Books), that they were part of a poetic revival. Williams' poetry, then and later, was lyrical, evocative and intensely personal.

Williams worked at that time in a kind of basement garret with Clark Mills, a fellow poet. Mills introduced him to a one-foot shelf of influences: Rimbaud, Rilke, Lorca, Chekhov, Melville, D. H. Lawrence and Hart Crane, who became Williams' poetic idol. Tom introduced Mills to Rose. As Mills recalls it, Mrs. Williams "commanded Tom to bring home 'gentleman callers,'" as Tom Wingfield does in *Menagerie*; "Williams' poor sister was dressed in old-fashioned Southern costumes. She was very lovely. She never talked at all. Mrs. Williams never stopped talking—empty verbiage about their status in the South. The mother didn't give her a chance."

Rose, suffering from schizophrenia, became convinced that people were trying to poison her, that men were following her. Psychiatrists gave the Williamses two alternatives: commit Rose to an asylum or risk a prefrontal lobotomy, a much-questioned operation. Williams' parents signed the paper for the operation, which left Rose calmed, often lucid, but incapable of recovery. Guilt at his inability to help his sister engulfed Williams, and she still haunts his memory and imagination. Rose is now in a mental hospital in Westchester County, N.Y., and Williams pays upwards of \$1,000 a month for her care. When in New York, he visits her every Sunday.

**Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo.** By 1938, Williams had managed to finish his schooling, at St. Louis' Washington University and at the University of Iowa, and he applied for a job with the WPA writers' project. He was rejected for lack of "social content," and settled for work as a waiter in a 25¢-a-meal restaurant in New Orleans. There he dived into a world of jazz, bars, pimps and sexual outcasts that populate his first short-story collection, called *One Arm*. He also officially adopted his nickname of Tennessee ("Tom Williams was rather dull").

From New Orleans, he submitted four full-length plays and a batch of one-acters to a New York contest being judged by Harold Clurman, Irwin Shaw and Molly Day Thatcher (Mrs. Elia Kazan). Then he headed for California in a 1934 Ford owned by a clarinet player named James Parrott. It was a Kerowacky rhapsody of the road. They siphoned gas out of parked cars, once were shot at by a blowzy landlady while making a 4 a.m. getaway without paying for their pad. But Williams was a fastidious hobo who sent his laundry home to mother and was regularly bailed out of

total penury by \$10 bills in letters from his grandmother. While in California, Tennessee got a telegram announcing that he had won the New York contest and a prize of \$100. "I remember," says Parrott, "that he had a handful of letters from agents asking to handle his writing and he took them and went 'eeny, meeny, miney, mo.'" Mo turned out to be Audrey Wood, a shrewd New York agent who has been a devoted godmother to Williams ever since.

**A Burned-Up Audience.** In a little more than a year, a full-length Williams play, *Battle of Angels*, opened in Boston. For a third-act climax, a zealous stage-hand had overstocked his smudge pots to simulate a stage fire, and smoke billowed out over the footlights to choke the audience—but it hardly mattered; they were already burned up. The Theatre Guild, which had produced *Battle*, shot off an unprecedented letter of apology to its subscribers and closed the play.

In the next four years, Williams collected the job labels that are pasted on the luggage of itinerant U.S. writers. He worked as a restaurant cashier, usher in Manhattan's Strand Theater, Teletype operator, apartment-house elevator operator, and as a poetry-reciting waiter in Greenwich Village's Beggar Bar—where he wore a black eye patch with a libidinous white eye painted on it; he had undergone the first of four eye operations. Moving on to Hollywood, he wrote unused film scripts for M-G-M, until he was fired. One of the scripts was titled *The Gentleman Caller*, which became *The Glass Menagerie*.

*Menagerie*, with its tender burden of Williams' life and family confidences, opened on Broadway one night in the spring of 1945, and since that moment the front rank of U.S. playwriting has been wherever Tennessee Williams stood. Laurette Taylor, making a comeback as Amanda, became the first and greatest of the actresses—Jessica Tandy, Maureen Stapleton, Barbara Bel Geddes, Geraldine Page, Margaret Leighton—to play one of Williams' incomparable theater roles for women.

After *Menagerie*, Williams went on to his biggest hit, 1947's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Powerfully directed by Elia Kazan, it marked the beginning of the dynamic Williams-Kazan entente that would dominate Broadway for more than a decade. Ups and downs of critical approval never dampened the excitement of a Williams opening; 1948's *Summer and Smoke*, 1951's *The Rose Tattoo*, 1953's *Camino Real*, 1955's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1957's *Orpheus Descending*, 1958's *Garden District*, 1959's *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and 1960's *Period of Adjustment*.

When *Iguana* opened in late December 1961, Williams proved to be in his best dramatic form since *Streetcar*, with the debatable exception of *Cat*. By echoing a strain of gentleness unheard since *Menagerie*, *Iguana* served to bracket the whole range of Williams' achievement, a body of work so substantial that it now casts a larger shadow than the man who made it. In that shadow lies a form of theater as



"Siamo arrivati da Milano ieri sera"  
—on SAS, of course

At the Holmenkollen ski jump, Oslo, the competitor from Italy tells the reporter "We arrived from Milan last night—on SAS, of course... and I can tell you it's hard to keep in condition, the way they feed you. If I don't do well, blame that *delizioso* SAS cuisine!" Skiers from a score of countries also chose SAS. Like so many in international sport, they're great travelers. They compare notes—and give first place to SAS. With such winning features as exclusive Maître de Cabine service and cuisine honored by La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, who'd disagree?

Next time you fly anywhere, plan with your SAS travel agent, or the Scandinavian Airlines System office. SAS Caravelle jets speed throughout Europe and the Middle East. SAS DC-8 jets link five continents, and fly around the world.

SAS — GENERAL SALES AGENTS FOR GUEST  
AEROVIA MEXICO AND THAI INTERNATIONAL



Roussin mae. Margaret scene  
Act I

MAE  
MAGGIE, YOU CHANGIN' YOU CLO'SE.

MARGARET

MAE  
HOW Y' MEAN?

Yes, obliged to, mae.

SAMPLE WILLIAMS REVISION OF "CAT" SCRIPT  
With each succeeding version, sand changes to crystal.



ALLAN GOULD

WILLIAMS IN RESTAURANT AT KEY WEST  
"Hushed were the streets of many-peopled Thebes."

well as a series of plays, the theater of Chekhovian sensibility mated with the Freudian irrational unconscious. The champion of the rival Ibsenite theater of social engagement, and Williams' only U.S. playwright rival, Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*) has been silent on Broadway for more than six years.

"Poor Devil—Hopeless." Modern drama specializes in the smaller-than-life hero, the stunted image of man. When a Hamlet or a Lear falls in the fatality of his overmastering will, the seismic shock rips open the earth's crust like a giant grave, and half a dozen other men tumble to their doom. The fall of a modern playwright's hero is about as exalted as a sheeted patient's being wheeled out of the operating room with the surgeon shrugging "Poor devil, his case was hopeless. He never had a chance."

This is the theater that Williams heads, with its image of man as prey, a victim of the wayward id. Williams' typical hero merely waits to be physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom with a self-immolating passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure.

True tragedy cannot exist in a deterministic universe, where the hero lacks the will to be responsible for any part of his fate. Despite this, Williams has restored certain of the necessary elements of tragedy. The Greeks made myths out of crimes; Williams makes myths out of vices. Crimes and vices turn strangeness into size, create the distance of awe between the beholder and the hero, and make his fall a destiny rather than an accident. It is precisely because the hero has been set apart from others (and he can be separate as a Delta monster as well as a Theban king) that he moves and shakes the audience with pity and terror when he falls to the common lot of human suffering and death. What Williams' heroes and heroines lack in loftiness they partly

make up for in the horrifying retributions of their declines. The playwright punishes their aberrant behavior with atonements (cannibalism, castration) that are quite as terrible as the blood that pours down the face of the self-blinded Oedipus.

**Moral Symbolist.** Williams has been called a poetic realist, but he is more exactly a moral symbolist. His terrors are not of the South but of the soul. His people journey over a symbolic landscape amid the strife-torn dualities of human nature. The duel is between God and the Devil, love and death, the flesh and the spirit, innocence and corruption, light and darkness, the eternal Cain and the eternal Abel. These concerns, if not his gifts, link Williams not to any other playwright, though he comes closest to O'Neill, but to three 19th century U.S. moral symbolists: Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, whose eyes were fixed on the dark side of existence and of American life.

With them, Williams shares transcendental yearnings, the sense of isolation and alienation, the Calvinist conscience, the Gothic settings and horrors, the restless, demonic voyaging coupled with the longing for a home, the rebel need to say "no in thunder" (as Melville wrote to Hawthorne), the pervasive fear of an Old Testament God whose existence is half doubted and half believed, a romantic sense of a lost paradise of innocence, and a nagging suspicion that the seemingly infinite possibilities of the American Dream have been betrayed. Williams belongs with this triumvirate of disquietude, in the minority tradition of naysaying in U.S. letters.

The same Hawthorne who wrote the Puritan allegory of *The Scarlet Letter* wondered, in another story, whether the "A" of adultery might not stand for admirable. Williams is full of similar moral ambivalence. His oppressive, superheated tropics are Poe's "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir," and his characters some-

times seem like Poe's spectral phantoms of a locked-in ego, walking somnambullically to their dooms. Williams shares Melville's somber cosmic dread. It was of the Encantadas, the desolate islands of the Galapagos, that Melville wrote: "In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist." And it is "on the beach of the Encantadas" that Sebastian, the poet of *Suddenly Last Summer*, who later would himself be eaten, saw, as his mother relates it, a skyful of carnivorous birds swoop and attack myriads of newly hatched sea turtles, "tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh . . . and when he came back, he said, 'Well, now I've seen Him'—and he meant God . . ."

Poe in *The Business Man* and Melville in *The Confidence Man* aimed scathing, satirical barbs at the rising commercial spirit of the 19th century. Williams finds an ethical void at the heart of urban industrial civilization and poses against it the values—the honor, gallantry and chivalry—of the dead agrarian Southern past. "Let there be something to mean the word honor again," pleads Don Quixote in *Camino Real*.

D. H. Lawrence said of the great 19th century U.S. writers: "You must look through the surfaces of American art and see the inner diabolism of the symbolic meaning. Otherwise it is all mere childishness." In Williams' case, the childishness is to assume that he has devoted a life span of writing to the creation of a cartoon strip of regional ogres with which to titillate jaded libidos.

**Danger: Narcissism.** Williams sometimes runs a purple ribbon through his typewriter and gushes where he should dam. Occasionally his characters are too busy striking attitudes to hit honest veins of emotion. His symbols have been known to multiply like fruit flies and almost as mindlessly. His chief danger is the unhealthy narcissism of most modern art. From the caves of Altamira to the Apollo Belvedere, pagan art looked outward and celebrated man. From the cathedral of Chartres to the music of Bach, religious art looked upward and glorified God. Modern art looks inward, contemplating the artist's ego, to the point of myopia and hallucination. Williams has often come close to drowning in introspection. But he has always been saved by his urge to reach out and touch his audience and thus achieve his own surest moment of self-transcendence.

On the rack of guilt, in the slough of doubt, more homeless than any migratory bird, Tennessee Williams wrestles with his fears. "I pray a lot, especially when I'm scared," he says. No one who sees *The Night of the Iguana* will need to be told the words. They are in Nonno's poem:

*How calmly does the orange branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair . . .*

*O Courage, could you not as well  
Select a second place to dwell,  
Not only in that golden tree  
But in the frightened heart of me?*

## MUSIC

### "March, American March!"

Since 1952, when the Boston Symphony toured Europe in triumph, visiting U.S. orchestras have repeatedly demonstrated that they are now the world's best. But few orchestras have attracted quite the attention accorded the 87-member Eastman Philharmonia, which returned home last week after a 13-week, 34-city tour. Though Europeans expect excellence from the U.S., they were unprepared for such quality from a student orchestra, most of whose members are in or barely out of their teens.

Organized four years ago, at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, the orchestra's function is to round out the students' musical education by giving them practice in the full orchestral range. Its public appearances were so successful that the State Department decided to sponsor a full-scale European tour. At first, Eastman's Howard Hanson, who directs both the school and the orchestra, worried that three months was a long time out of school. The tour turned out to be an education in itself.

At a concert in Madrid, the lights went out during a performance of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*; the orchestra played on in the dark from memory. When a flight to Luxembourg was canceled, the orchestra arrived by bus 15 minutes before concert time and with no luggage. The musicians played in sweaters and slacks. In Seville, the orchestra arrived during a flood (the concert became a benefit for flood victims), and in Aleppo, Syria, a bomb exploded outside the hall during the concert. Inside, the orchestra played calmly through a new orchestral version of the Syrian national anthem, hastily drafted by Conductor Hanson. Syrians liked it so much that it will probably be adopted as the official orchestral version.

Audiences everywhere were impressed by the orchestra's youth and skill. Even in Germany, musicians confessed that there is no student orchestra with the Eastman's professional polish. "It got to the point," says Hanson, "where if we didn't have five or six encores and a standing ovation, the students thought the concert was a failure." Nowhere was the Eastman a bigger hit than behind the Iron Curtain. In Lvov, Russia, the theater management had to turn off the lights before the audience stopped demanding encores. And in Moscow, the audience shouted "March, march, American march!" at concert's end, clamoring for the stirring piece of U.S. music that had been the Eastman's show stopper in other cities. The march: John Philip Sousa's *The Stars and Stripes Forever*.

### Classical Records

**Toshiro Mayuzumi: Nirvana Symphony** (Time Records). A 1958 composition in which avant-garde Japanese Composer Mayuzumi mixes orchestra and male chorus with purely electronic beeps, whistles



LACKENBACH—BLACK STAR

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Unfazed by power failures, floods or bombs.

and growls as a means of "creating my own musical Nirvana." Whatever he created (he also refers to the piece as "a sort of Buddhist cantata"), the music is fascinating—full of swelling sonorities and eerie spatial sounds.

**Moreno-Tórroba: Sonata, Nocturno, Suite Castellana** (John Williams, guitar; Westminster). A remarkable young (20) Australian guitarist in three nice pieces by Spanish Composer Federico Moreno. The tones are water clear, the style one of caressing delicacy, and the whole reminiscent of a precocious Segovia, who in fact taught Williams at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana of Siena.

**Victoria de los Angeles and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in Duets** (Gerald Moore, piano; Angel). A beautiful introduction to a part of the vocal repertoire now only rarely heard in the concert hall. Purcell, Bach, Beethoven, Berlioz and Tchaikovsky are among the composers visited, and Soprano de los Angeles and Baritone Fischer-Dieskau do well by them. Pianist Moore is pictured on the album cover with his two singers, a recognition he deserves but one that he and his fellow accompanists rarely receive.

**Verdi: Un Ballo in Maschera** (Birgit Nilsson, Carlo Bergonzi, Cornell MacNeil, Giulietta Simionato, Sylvia Stahlman, Fernando Corena; Chorus and Orchestra of L'Accademia di Santa Cecilia conducted by Georg Solti; London). A rather studied approach and over-resonant sound take some of the flash out of this performance, but Soprano Nilsson and Mezzo Simionato remain joys to the ear, and Tenor Bergonzi sings with distinction.

**Daniel Pollack: Piano Recital** (Artia). Another U.S. pianist who got his first big boost in Russia—a prizewinner at the 1958 competition won by Van Cliburn, and as this reissue of a 1939 recording recalls, no other reading is likely to seem right beside it.

ges-born Pianist Pollack dips into Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin, shows a ringing tone, a fleet touch, and a natural temper for the romantics. At 27, one of the most gifted—and least appreciated—talents around.

**Gunther Schuller: Music for Brass Quintet and Fantasy Quartet for Four Celli** (Composers Recordings Inc.). Composer Schuller, a onetime first-chair hornist for the Metropolitan Opera, explores the potential of brasses in a fragmented *Quintet* that is by turns haunted, anguished or raucously jeering. The fine *Fantasy Quartet*, with its dynamic rhythms and attenuated lines, finds the composer in a less ruffled but consistently moving frame of mind.

**Beethoven: Missa Solemnis** (Eileen Farrell, soprano; Carol Smith, contralto; Richard Lewis, tenor; Kim Borg, bass; the New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting; Columbia, 2 LPs). An admirable balanced reading of the Beethoven masterpiece, less densely dramatic than most, more cohesive in feeling. Bernstein keeps orchestra, soloists and the Westminster Choir working in effortless agreement, and Soprano Farrell is in the kind of form that can melt a listener.

**Maria Callas: Great Arias from French Operas** (Orchestre Nationale de la Radiodiffusion Française, conducted by Georges Prêtre; Angel). Callas deserts the Italian roles in which she became famous for the heroines of Gluck, Bizet, Gounod, Charpentier. The voice is predictably wobbly in spots, but the interpretations are uniformly superb, suggesting that Callas may still have a new repertoire to explore.

**Schubert: Piano Sonata in D Major** (Artur Schnabel, piano; Angel). Schnabel's Schubert was like nobody else's, and as this reissue of a 1939 recording recalls, no other reading is likely to seem right beside it.