



Editorial¹

Dossier Tennessee Williams: life, work, criticism, and contexts

Volume 8, Issue 2, Revista Dramaturgia em Foco [*Dramaturgy in Focus Journal*] features the *Dossier Tennessee Williams: life, work, criticism, and contexts*. In 2023, we remembered four decades since Williams' death, making this dossier not just a tribute but a reverence to the author's enduring legacy in the global literary and theatrical scene.

Tennessee Williams, a central figure in American Modern Theater, transcends borders, being recognized as one of the most prominent authors in his time. His extensive work spans short stories, novels, poetry, articles, chronicles, screenplays, and most celebratedly, drama.

In the Brazilian context, Williams played a fundamental role in shaping audiences and consolidating theater in the second half of the 20th century. The leading productions by Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia (TBC), Teatro Oficina, Teatro de Arena, and the Escola de Arte Dramática (EAD) from the 1940s onwards solidified his importance in the country. Works such as *The glass menagerie* (1945), *A streetcar named Desire* (1947), and *Talk to me like the rain and let me listen...* (1953) became synonymous of commercial success and artistic challenges for Brazilian actors and actresses, establishing themselves as his most known and staged plays on national stages.

Williams' singular narrative has always been recognized as theatrical innovation. His lyricism, a literary and theatrical reference, created an aesthetic entanglement throughout the various phases of his biography, reflecting the different historical contexts he lived through—from his first published short story in 1929 to his last play, dated one month before his death in 1983. Furthermore, his deep social critique, addressing the moral decay of the American South, class issues, and political complexities, offers a

¹ This text is a translation of the editorial presented in this journal (v. 7, n. 2, 2023), with brief adaptations for better understanding by English language readers.

powerful reflection on human condition and the System structures.

The Dossier has opened the doors to all lines of research related to Williams, his work, and his biography. In this Dossier, the Journal welcomes contributions from foreign authors, providing a multifaceted range of perspectives and enriching the academic approach. The articles, essays, and an interview reflect a diversity of readings, not only from Brazil but also from the United States, France, Italy, Argentina, and Cyprus.

This international exchange both broadens the understanding of Williams' work and highlights the different forms of argumentation and academic presentation. Over fifty percent of Williams' work published in the USA remains unpublished in Brazil, justifying the effort to bring plural judgments and international experiences that delve into a large portion of his corpus. Some researchers have been invited to share their views, promoting interaction among prominent scholars and the wider academic community.

The Brazilian guests are outstanding scholars and professors from the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo (FFLCH-USP): Mayumi Denise S. Ilari and Maria Sílvia Betti. In addition to books, articles, courses, and lectures, they are responsible for supervising undergraduate thesis projects, master's dissertations, and doctoral theses, as well as post-doctoral internships focused on Williams' work and English-language dramaturgy, especially that produced in the United States and Britain.

Considering Williams' legacy as an artistic expression structured by the prevailing sociopolitical and cultural fabric, Mayumi Denise S. Ilari opens the Essays Section with "A Rose for Tennessee Williams," a study of the changes in the same story throughout history. The short story "Twenty-seven wagons full of cotton" and the one-act plays written later *27 wagons full of cotton* and *The unsatisfactory supper or The long stay cut short* and *Tiger Tail*, and the film script of *Baby Doll* are read in light of their contributions to denouncing gender violence and poverty in the context of American tensions in the 1930s-40s, 1950s, and 1970s.

Maria Sílvia Betti, on the other hand, in her essay "The very heart of my life: some considerations about *The two-character play*, by Tennessee Williams," questions whether the play encapsulates the author's anguish regarding his own work and theater, highlighting the fragmented and imprisoned theatrical integrity in opacity in this little-known author's dramaturgy.

In the same section, Thiago Pereira Russo, from University of São Paulo, presents in “De um Liberal da Guerra Fria para um Radical Arisco, com amor’: Arthur Miller on Tennessee Williams” [“From a Cold War Liberal to a Skittish Radical, with love’: Arthur Miller on Tennessee Williams”], (text also published in Spanish under the title “De un Liberal de la Guerra Fría a un Radical Nervioso, con amor’: Arthur Miller sobre Tennessee Williams”), Arthur Miller’s comments on Tennessee Williams’ works and discusses their impact on American Theater and his own writing. Additionally, Russo exposes Miller’s praise of Williams, highlighting his powerful contribution to the political ideas that marked Williams’ dramas.

David Kaplan, one of the invited American authors, is today one of the most experienced directors and researchers of Williams on the global stage. His artistic contribution is extensive both in the United States and in other countries, marked by various books, productions of unpublished plays, and the curatorship of one of the most famous festivals about the author, held annually in Provincetown. With his essay “O que estranho significava para Williams” [“What weird meant to Williams”], Kaplan covers Tennessee Williams’ works connected to the plots, structure, and literary style of the short stories published in the issues of the magazine *Weird Tales* from 1927 and 1928. In Brazil, his work is rarely associated with this magazine and its scatological content, thus providing innovative material for Williamsian readings in the country.

Thomas Keith, theater professor at Pace University, editor of Williams’ works at New Directions, and author of various prefaces, articles, and book chapters about the playwright, opens the Articles Section by challenging the prevailing idea that Williams was apolitical. In “Marcharei no papel!” – A política de Tennessee Williams” [“I will march on paper!’ – The politics of Tennessee Williams”], Keith argues that, although not known for statements or manifestos, Williams had his own political vision revealed between the lines of his plays, as well as in his personal and public actions. By addressing the entire extent of Williams’ work, the essay exposes a panorama that goes beyond the most well-known canonical plays in Brazil, which certainly contributes to more varied and nuanced discussions.

Despite their already extensive critical fortunes, Williams’ most renowned works continue to stimulate and provide new readings, as demonstrated by the article “Discarded excerpts from *The glass menagerie* for traces of a Plastic Theatre,” by Fernanda

Sales Rocha Santos, from University of São Paulo. Drawing from previously unpublished material in Portuguese, the manuscripts of Williams preserved in the archives of the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, United States, Santos rescues unpublished excerpts from the play to understand the notion of Plastic Theatre, an aesthetic never fully developed but clearly delineated there.

The article “Dramaturgy and space in *A streetcar named Desire*,” by Leonardo Medeiros da Silva and André Carrico from the Federal University of Ouro Preto, delves into the representations of theatrical spatiality in this dramatic text, especially through the stage directions, and consequently, its intricate production of meanings. The same play receives another interpretation in “Absent presence: homosexuality in three plays by Tennessee Williams,” by Adriana Falqueto Lemos and Johnny Cesar dos Santos from the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Southern Minas Gerais. Combining it with *Suddenly last summer* and *Cat on a hot tin roof*, the researchers investigate how the absence of homosexual characters in the actions of the three titles ends up operating as reproductions of their presences, excluded and marginalized.

The representation of homosexuality in *Cat on a hot tin roof* is also studied by João Victor Silva from the University of São Paulo, in “On hot tin lands: homosexuality and property in Tennessee Williams’ *Cat on a hot tin roof* (1955)”. His argument is that the play goes beyond the mere representation of the characters’ subjective processes, relating it to economic and sociological conjunctures. The study criticizes the social rules that limited the free expression of homosexuality in the Southern United States.

This same play is further explored in “Conflict and family drama in *Cat on a hot tin roof* from Norbert Elias’s perspective of Social Figuration,” by Daniele Santos and Leandro Francisco de Paula from the Federal University of Paraná. Taking the Pollitt family as a social configuration, according to the theory proposed by the German sociologist, in a multilateral and non-hierarchical power dynamic that focuses on each member, the authors conclude that Elias’s theory can be applied to this social institution, even though it is a fictional work.

The article “True *Camino Real*: notes on Tennessee Williams, Elia Kazan, and playwriting,” by Dante Passarelli from the University of São Paulo, recalling the seventy years of the play *Camino Real*, points out formal and thematic characteristics that signal its contemporaneity. Additionally, Passarelli critically analyzes the process of its staging by

Elia Kazan on Broadway in 1953.

Williams's work proves equally rich when placed in a comparative perspective. Fernando Bustamante, from the University of São Paulo, explores in "Tennessee Williams and Erwin Piscator: influences, divergences, and the Dramatic Workshop collaboration" (text also available in Spanish titled "Tennessee Williams y Erwin Piscator: influencias, divergencias y la colaboración en el Dramatic Workshop"), the relationship and debates between the American playwright and the German director. Scholar reflects on the influences of Piscator's theatrical thought and practice on Williams, as well as how are reinterpreted.

By proposing a comparison between the work of Tennessee Williams and filmmaker Woody Allen in "Elective affinities: Tennessee Williams and Woody Allen," Marcos César de Paula Soares, from the University of São Paulo, provides a brief analysis of the film *Blue Jasmine*, which revisits themes and forms from the play *A streetcar named Desire*, confronting them with contemporary historical material.

Williams's productions encourage not only examinations of the text but also of the history and historiography of the performing arts. In "The American theater on the stages of London: Tennessee Williams at the Royal Court Theatre" Jonathan Renan da Silva Souza, from the University of São Paulo, presents an overview of the various productions of plays by the American playwright at the renowned Royal Court Theatre in London and their connections to the project of renewing British stages undertaken by members of the London theater.

In turn, David Medeiros Neves, from the University of São Paulo, highlights in his article "The first productions of Tennessee Williams's plays in São Paulo" (also published in Spanish as "Las primeras producciones de obras de Tennessee Williams en São Paulo") the premieres of Tennessee Williams's plays in this state capital city between 1948 and 1964, analyzing their technical details, critical reception, impact on the careers of local artists, and the lasting influence on the theatrical and dramatic narrative aesthetics of the time, thus highlighting Williams's crucial role in the Modern Brazilian Theater scene.

Catalina Julia Artesi, from the Universidad de Buenos Aires, in her contribution "Tennessee Williams on the stages of Buenos Aires" (also published in Portuguese as "Tennessee Williams nos palcos de Buenos Aires"), provides another panoramic review of the main productions of Williams's most famous works staged in the Argentine capital

from the mid-20th century to 2023. Artesi highlights their directors and strategies that allow understanding the context of the staging, examining the extent of their influence on the Argentine scene and their current relevance.

“O uso de linguagem de prestígio em *Um bonde chamado Desejo*, de Tennessee Williams” [“The use of prestige language in Tennessee Williams’s *A streetcar named Desire*”], by Stuart Noel, from Auburn University, presents the duality between illusion and reality through the character Blanche DuBois. The analysis focuses on the struggle between truth and beauty, revealing Williams’s ability to personify artistic and existential decline through language, framing it as a partial projection of the author himself.

“Sobre *pré*-performances *pós*-modernas: as personagens tardias de Tennessee Williams e a ‘atuação plástica’” (also available in French as “De la *pré*-performance *postmoderne*: les personnages tardifs de Williams et le ‘jeu d’acteur plastique’” and in Spanish as “De las *pre*-performances *pós*-modernas: los personajes tardíos de Williams y la ‘actuación plástica’”), by Anaís Umano from the University of Lorraine, proposes a reflection on the actor’s responsibility in the face of the challenges presented by Williams’s late works (written between 1962 and 1983), which radically subvert the hegemonic realistic order with which his works have been read. Thus, it exposes the new and post-modern imaginary of these texts, examining their practical implications.

Also situated in the French context, John Bak from the University of Lorraine, and Margarita Navarro Pérez from the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, explore in “‘a vastidão deles me afoga’: Tennessee Williams e a Síndrome de Stendhal, 1928” [“‘their vastness drowns me’: Tennessee Williams and the Stendhal Syndrome, 1928”] the struggles that Tennessee Williams faced in his youth with mental health issues, especially during his trip to Europe in 1928. Bak and Pérez interpret them through the prism of the Stendhal Syndrome, a condition related to psychosomatic symptoms after exposure to works of art, to explain them, thus showing their profound implications in the dramaturgical composition and in the understanding of dystopian experiences about this journey, and in Williams’s work as a whole.

Villanova University researcher Bess Rowen, in “‘Não são engraçadas as peças que a sua memória prega?’: estruturas dramáticas da memória traumática nas peças de Tennessee Williams” [“‘Isn’t it funny what tricks your memory plays?’: Dramaturgical structures of traumatic memory in the plays of Tennessee Williams”], exposes how

Tennessee Williams's traumatic memory has served as a mold for his plays, based on the experiences of creating the character Tom Wingfield, from *The glass menagerie*. Rowen demonstrates how memory has contributed to the internal logic of the plays, revealing valuable insights for their staging.

Alessandro Clericuzio, from the Università degli Studi di Perugia, also delves into *The glass menagerie* and *A streetcar named Desire*. In the article "Adereços adequados: objetos em circulação em *O zoológico de vidro* e *Um bonde chamado Desejo*" ["Proper props: circulating objects in *The glass menagerie* and *A streetcar named Desire*"] (also published in Italian under the title "L'oggetto perfetto: la circolazione di oggetti nello *Zoo di vetro* e *Un tram che si chiama Desiderio*"), he examines the scenic materiality of both plays, and how certain objects from the sets and costumes evoke and reflect power dynamics and the deep gender inequality of 1940s American society.

In a metaphysical prism, Anthoullis Demosthenous, from the Ministry of Education of Cyprus, uses *Suddenly last summer*, *The night of the iguana*, *The milktrain doesn't stop here anymore*, and the short story "The Malediction" to reflect on the relationships between animals, mythical beasts, and symbolic creatures with the animic characterization of Williams's characters in his article "Criaturas simbólicas: espiritualidade e evanescência em peças e contos de Tennessee Williams" ["Symbolic creatures: spirituality and evanescence in Tennessee Williams's plays and short stories"], also published in Greek as "Όντα Του Συμβολικού Κόσμου: Πνευματικότητα Και Υπερφυσική Δράση Στα Θεατρικά Έργα Και Διηγήματα Του Τένεσι Ουίλιαμς".

Finally, in the Interview Section, Luis Marcio Arnaut de Toledo from the State University of Campinas documents an enlightening dialogue about playwriting, theatrical direction, and interpretation with actor and stage director André Garolli. The renowned artist comments on Williams, his particular vision of the American author's work, and how he has worked on this dramaturgy, both as an actor and as a theatrical director, in successful productions with audiences and critics in São Paulo.

In launching this Dossier, *Dramaturgia em Foco* not only pays homage to Tennessee Williams but also aims to foster an international dialogue, bringing together researchers from diverse backgrounds around his legacy. May this volume lead to new reflections, debates, and discoveries about the many contributions of Williams to world dramaturgy.

We thank all the scholars and contributors who made this Dossier possible and hope that readers enjoy this timely exploration of the Tennessee Williams's Works universe.

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