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A Streetcar Named Desire: The Moth and the Lantern

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had indulged in a more vigorous interpretation of his material, even at the risk of more errors. Had his treatment of the dialogue among various cultural forces (race, gender, class, ethnicity) in vaudeville been as penetrating as his investigation of Keith's and Albee's efforts to reform and sanitize vaudeville and the countermeasures which eventually subverted them, *The Voice of the City* certainly would have fulfilled its promise.

JOHN FRICK
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A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE: THE MOTH AND THE LANTERN. By Thomas P. Adler. Twayne's Masterwork Studies, no. 47. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990; pp. vii + 99. \$18.95.

Thomas Adler's work on *Streetcar* is the first critical book devoted exclusively to that particular play, and it is a solid, rewarding study of this central text in American cultural mythology. Agreeing with Williams that *Streetcar* was his best play, Adler has labeled it a "tragedy of modern civilization" (49) and identified its "commanding themes" as "the saving grace of mutability" as well as the "awful truth of mutability" (83). *Streetcar*'s "final message, its almost apocalyptic warning" (85) is that the forces of brutality and uncaring sexuality threaten to destroy the sacramental power of art and beauty. Because of his androgyny, Williams could create Blanche DuBois, "probably the most memorable and widely known of all American dramatic characters [who] . . . continues to face virtually no challenge to holding the title as our Oedipus and our Hamlet" (6).

Employing a variety of critical approaches, Adler admirably satisfies the general reader's desire to know *Streetcar*'s text and context. His book is organized into two sections, eleven short chapters. In the first, untitled section, three chapters cover historical context, importance, and critical reception. Adler's first chapter starts better than it ends. Placing *Streetcar* within the context of a dehumanizing, technological, post-World War II society, Adler relates Stanley's condition to the return of the disillusioned veterans. The rest of the chapter then veers away from context and toward a survey of Williams's later dramatic accomplishments. To be fair, Adler elsewhere assesses the destructiveness of the myth of the Old South, the barba-

rousness of slavery, and the influence of Chekhov, Strindberg, and Lawrence. However, he should have included more of this material in the first chapter and at least mentioned W. Kenneth Hoditch's 1985 work on Williams in New Orleans. As Williams's spiritual home, New Orleans had a profound influence on *Streetcar*. In the chapter on *Streetcar*'s importance, Adler recognizes Williams's contributions to dramatic technique, stage symbol, and characterization. Arthur Miller found *Streetcar* a tonic that "strengthened" him in writing *Death of a Salesman*. Adler's third chapter, a necessarily much abbreviated history of *Streetcar* criticism, holds up Harold Clurman's comments in *The Divine Pastime* as the "seminal essay review" that "catalogs virtually all of the issues that have since concerned critics and scholars" (13). Chief among these is the problem of taking sides with Blanche or Stanley. Firmly in Blanche's camp, Adler insists that *Streetcar* is her play. Adler's respect for the feminist criticism of Kathleen Hulley and Anca Vlasopolos (listed as Avea on page 14 and Anea on page 95) is widely shared, and Adler himself offers a probing analysis of *Streetcar* as a feminist text in chapter 10 ("Further Perspectives"), arguing that *Streetcar* "proves more amenable than virtually any other American drama to such an approach" (78).

Adler's second section, "A Reading," which deals with structure, style, character, and theme, is superlative. The "chief structural device" that glues *Streetcar*'s eleven scenes together is the "pattern of bonds between people maimed and broken" (23), including male and female bonding. Arrivals and departures are another structural motif, and a few chapters later Adler links *Streetcar* to the summons of death in the morality plays (75). If he is right, then Adler needs to include the Doctor as the Bridegroom Death come to carry Blanche off, but he limits his discussion of death figures to the matron and the Mexican woman. In chapter 5, on style, Adler offers penetrating insights about Williams's organic, highly symbolic theater. The playwright once facetiously observed, "without my symbols I might still be employed by the International Shoe Co. in St. Louis" (29). Adler explicates the symbols that permeate *Streetcar*, with special attention to "perhaps the major" symbol, Blanche's Chinese lantern. Toward the end of this chapter Adler lists twenty-one dichotomies/antinomies between Blanche (Death, Virgo, poetry, streetcar) and Stanley (Desire, Capricorn, poker, locomotive), and he wisely warns that it would be simplistic to divide the characters with these bifurcating either/ors. An unprofessed deconstructionist, Adler maintains that these dualities only

establish the "fragmentation between masculine and feminine in modern life" (56) and that Williams himself was alarmed by the "destructive polarity" of sexual stereotyping (43). To reinforce his consistent reading, Adler subsequently explores the Stanley side of Blanche and the Blanche side of Stanley (54).

Of the four chapters on the major characters, the longest is devoted to Blanche. An actress playing many roles in her own drama, Adler's Blanche is both director and stage manager, decorating the set with appropriate props of the heart. Elaborating his theatrical view of Blanche, Adler observes that when she is "positioned on the other side of the curtain [in the Kowalski apartment], Blanche becomes audience/voyeur . . ." (37). Blanche's histrionics, however, are well-defined symptoms of clinical hysteria, and Adler interprets Blanche's flamboyant yet dependent behavior in light of studies of hysteria by the psychiatrist Paul Chodoff. Unlike Hannah Jelkes, Blanche could not accept anything that was disgusting, even if it was human. Ultimately, however, Adler finds Blanche an ambiguous character who is unable to reconcile the oppositions in her being ("tigress and seductress"/fragile artist), and he states that Williams "leaves open the question" (49) of her tragic nature. Such a conclusion seems too tentative, given the overwhelming orchestration of triumphant suffering at the end of the play.

Unlike Blanche, Stanley "chooses the ideology of power in preference to the way of love" (53), expressed in his "rituals of machoism" (poker, eating, drinking). Adler invokes Arno Gruen's *Betrayal of the Self: The Fear of Autonomy in Men and Women* to document Stanley's use of power and his domination as he affirms his masculinity and denies his fear of helplessness. Just how much sympathy the audience should have for Stanley is a leading question Adler raises and answers. Adler believes that Marlon Brando's performance may have gone against Williams's text by giving Stanley a mitigating tenderness his brutality would not admit. In light of Adler's overall closely reasoned interpretation, his assertion that Stanley "as the agent of democratization . . . would be attractive to a middle-class audience" (65) seems ill-founded.

Though more concerned with *Streetcar* as literary text than as a play in performance, Adler nonetheless incorporates information on production to substantiate his conclusions. He refers to Kazan's notebook, Tandy's interpretation of Blanche, and Mielziner's seminal scrim. A perceptive reader of Williams's stage symbols, Adler identifies an an-

alogy between Stella being lifted off her feet by Stanley in scene iii and Blanche being ominously carried away by Stanley in scene x. Adler deserves applause for his reading of this great American play.

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SHAKESPEARE'S AMERICA, AMERICA'S SHAKESPEARE. By Michael D. Bristol. London and New York: Routledge, 1990; pp. x + 237. \$42.50 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

STAGES OF HISTORY: SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLISH CHRONICLES. By Phyllis Rackin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990; xiv + 256. \$10.95.

"Always historicize," Brecht urged; and Shakespeareans, for the last dozen years, have taken this dictum to heart. The two books under review are retrospective, summing up previous scholarship in different ways. Michael Bristol's *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* examines the American fascination with Shakespeare from its origins up to the New Historicist moment. The Shakespeare Americans have venerated, collected, and studied, he argues, "constitute the love-object of traditional humanist scholarship" (19). Phyllis Rackin's *Stages of History* discusses Shakespeare's history plays after a decade of "oppositional" histories of the stage and of historiography itself. The result is a "resituating" of the plays that emphasizes their challenge to the "official" voice of their sources and their responsiveness to the "silenced" voices of women and common people (xi).

Bristol, too, characterizes his book as a "contribution to an oppositional practice and to the possibility of an alternative political culture." He acknowledges a link to the "feminist project . . . in the field of cultural studies" and to Marxist critique, although he confesses to adopting "the methodological pessimism typical of an older critical theory" (7-8). Rackin shares Bristol's oppositional perspective, but not his pessimism. She devotes her final two chapters to feminist analysis of Shakespeare's histories and to recovery of the nameless, unhistorical soldiers and others excluded by narrative history but included on Shakespeare's variously populated stage. America's Shakespeare, for Bristol, remains, despite the