



# THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

## TOOLKIT



# Welcome!

The materials in this Toolkit introduce essential information about the development of Tennessee Williams' feverishly poetic 1961 drama ***The Night of the Iguana***. Dramaturgical essays and research introduce playwright Tennessee Williams as well as the characters, style, and the fascinating process of writing, rehearsing, and producing the original full-length version of ***The Night of the Iguana***. Archival materials from the Theatre Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library offer a deeper dive into Williams' thoughts and process around the play, in his own words (and sometimes in his own handwriting).

***The Night of the Iguana*** follows a hotel proprietress and the scandal-soaked Southern preacher who turns up on her veranda. A Nantucket portrait artist traveling with her ancient grandfather, a bus full of fuming Texan college administrators, and a party of vacationers collide in this drama about how far we travel to outrun the demons within.

This Toolkit is designed for classroom use as well as for personal enrichment either in preparation for seeing the A.R.T. production of ***The Night of the Iguana*** or as a follow-up to attending the production.

See you at the theater!

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# *The Night of the Iguana:* The Basics

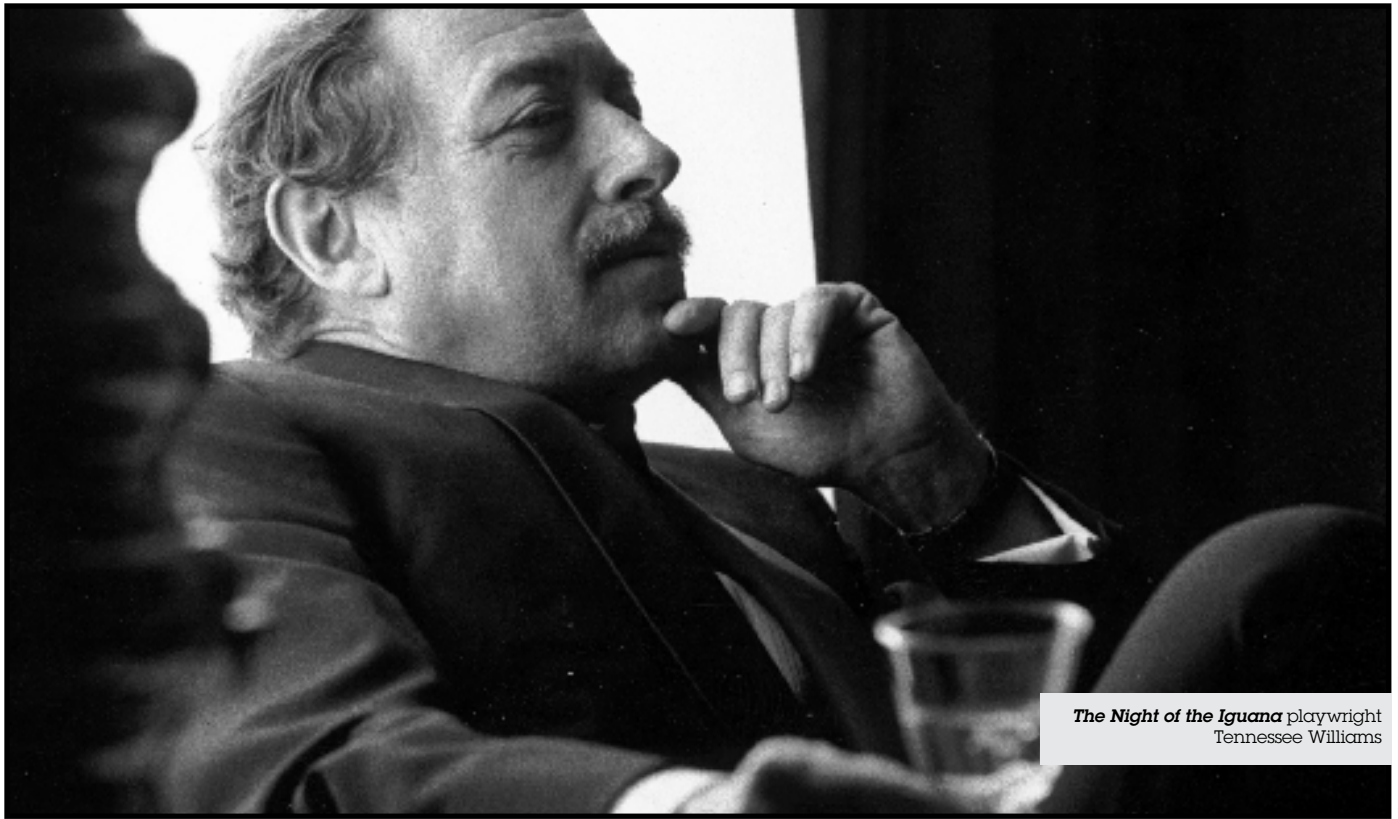


*The Night of the Iguana* playwright  
Tennessee Williams

This section of the Toolkit will introduce you to the essential elements of Tennessee Williams' ***The Night of the Iguana***. Production dramaturg Christopher Baker introduces the playwright (pages 5-6) and the process of developing the play (pages 7-8). Become familiar with the characters (page 9) and synopsis of the play (page 10), and dive into the language with a scene excerpt (pages 11-13) and poetry sample (page 14).

For a more in-depth exploration of the play, see the primary source documents provided in the **Deeper Dive** section of this Toolkit (pages 15-27), and bring the content into your classroom with the theater-integrated lesson plans in the **Educational Activities** section on pages 28-31.





*The Night of the Iguana* playwright  
Tennessee Williams

Photo: Evening Standard

# Tennessee Williams

by Christopher Baker

Thomas Lanier Williams—“Tennessee”—was born in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911. His father was a traveling shoe salesman, his mother the daughter of an Episcopal clergyman. The young Tom lived his first years in the rectory of his grandfather’s parish. His family moved to St. Louis when he was twelve, and though Williams attended the University of Missouri, money was short and he had to drop out. After working in a shoe warehouse for two years until falling ill, he moved in with his grandparents in Memphis, where he wrote his first play, *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!* Short stories began to earn Williams money, and he eventually went back to study at Washington University and then the University of Iowa, earning a degree in 1938. A playwriting contest sponsored by the Group Theatre brought Williams one hundred dollars and the attention of legendary agent Audrey Wood. Williams moved to New Orleans and began writing as “Tennessee.”

In the summer of 1940, Williams’ affair with dancer Kip Kiernan ended, and an anticipated production of his play *The Battle of Angels* stalled. “I am running away,” the discouraged Williams wrote to producer Lawrence Langer, “to Mexico.” It was there, short on cash at the Costa Verde Hotel, that Williams began the story “The Night of the Iguana.” In December, the Theatre Guild staged *The Battle of Angels* in Boston. Though a spectacular failure, it was the promise of important works yet to come. While on contract to MGM, Tennessee fulfilled that promise by writing *The Glass Menagerie*, for which he won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award in 1945. In 1948 he won the Pulitzer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The success of *Streetcar* was followed by *Summer and Smoke* (1948), the novel *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950), and the Tony Award-winning *The Rose Tattoo* (1951). In 1952 he expanded a short play into the full-length fantasy *Camino Real*. His second Pulitzer Prize came in 1955 for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Williams became known for the creation of sensitive or artistic outcasts,

## Tennessee Williams (cont.)

the “fugitive kind”—characters to be found at the centers of *Orpheus Descending* (his 1957 reworking of *Battle of Angels*), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959).

In 1959, Williams returned to the story he began in Mexico. While the short story was eventually published in 1948, Williams continued to develop it dramatically, first as the short play *Quebrada* (the site of the famous cliff divers in Acapulco), then as a ninety-minute one-act for the Two Worlds Festival in Spoleto. The next year, a full-length ***The Night of the Iguana*** (subtitled *Southern Cross*) was performed in a three-act version at Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami. After an eight week out-of-town tour—Rochester, Detroit, and Chicago—it opened on Broadway on December 28, 1961 with Margaret Leighton, Patrick O’Neal, Alan Webb, Patricia Roe and, as the Costa Verde’s patrona, Bette Davis.

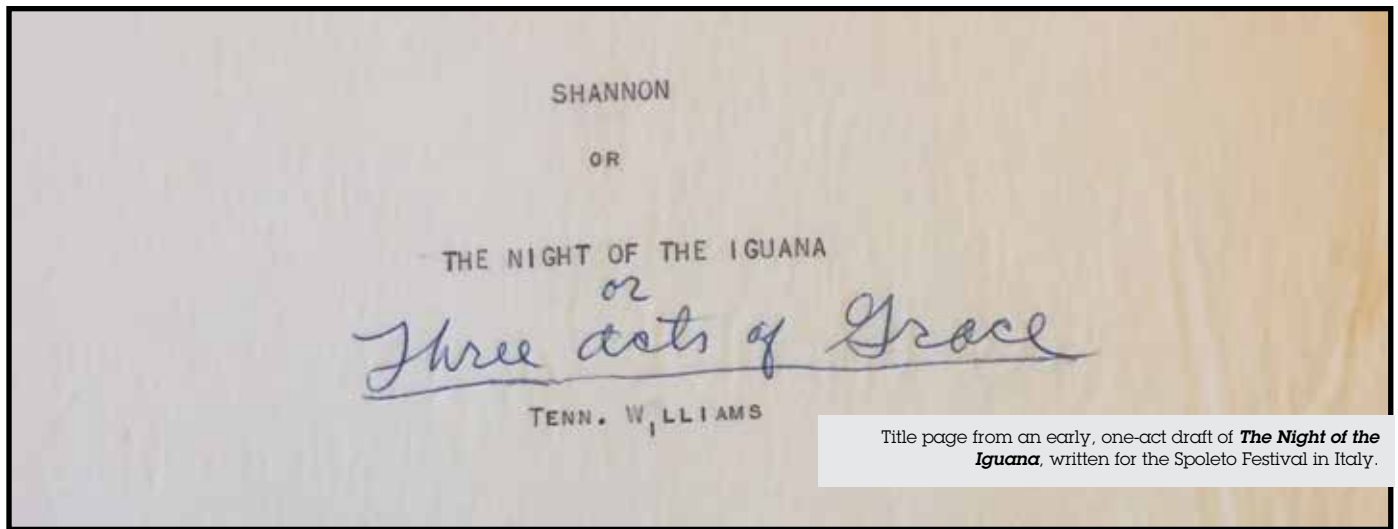
***The Night of the Iguana*** won the New York Critics’ Circle Award, but afterwards Williams’ critical reception—especially on Broadway—began to cool, as his works over the next two decades became more experimental in form. Elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters and honored by President Carter at the Kennedy Center, Williams took on the role of theatrical elder statesmen. He oversaw successful revivals of his works (including the famed 1974 Broadway revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* starring Elizabeth Ashley) and broke sales records with his autobiographical *Memoirs*, while premiering new plays such as *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore*, and *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*. In April 1982, *A House Not Meant to Stand*, based in part on his own family, premiered in Chicago. The following February, Tennessee Williams died, leaving behind more than seventy plays, three novels, eight collections of short stories and poetry, and a legacy that remains unique in the American theater.

Christopher Baker (A.R.T. Institute for Advanced Theater Training ‘90) is Production Dramaturg for ***The Night of the Iguana***, and Assistant Professor of Dramaturgy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

For more resources on the development of ***The Night of the Iguana***, see the timeline on the following page and read the correspondences written by Tennessee Williams in the **Deeper Dive** section of this Toolkit.

### DISCUSSION

- What does Baker mean when he calls Tennessee Williams a “theatrical elder statesman” by the time he worked on writing the full-length version of ***Iguana***?
- Based on the information outlined in this biographical essay, what do you think Tennessee Williams draws from in his own life when he writes. If you have read ***The Night of the Iguana***, is there anything from this biography that you recognize in the play?
- What type of imagery does the subtitle *Southern Cross* evoke? If you have read ***The Night of the Iguana***, what do you think this subtitle means in relation to the play or the inspiration Williams draws from in order to write the play?



Letters held in the Theatre Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library

# Dangerous Species: Writing *The Night of the Iguana*

by Christopher Baker

***The Night of the Iguana*** is a play,” Tennessee Williams said, “whose theme, as clearly as I can put it, is how to live beyond despair and still live.” From 1950 to 1961, he developed it from a short story into a one-act and then a full-length Broadway-bound play. It was a tumultuous time, both professionally and personally. Director Elia Kazan, who had shepherded *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth* to commercial successes, turned to projects with other writers. The Kazan-less *A Period of Adjustment* received tepid reviews in New York, fueling Williams’ constant fear of failure. The playwright’s turbulent relationship with his partner Frank Merlo ended. As a new decade began, Williams was in transition, caught between success and failure, security and loss, despair and living. ***The Night of the Iguana*** reflected that conflict and volatility and would itself prove to be a transitional play in many ways: after ***The Night of the Iguana***, Williams fell out of favor, lambasted for his experiments in dramaturgy, rejected for his move to more existentially despairing themes.

The play opened on December 28, 1961, directed by Frank Corsaro and featuring Bette Davis as Maxine, the proprietress of a run-down hotel in the middle of the Mexican forest. It ran for 316 performances, garnered awards and nominations, and was Williams’ last Broadway “success.” To many, it was also his last great work, the final entry in a succession of beautifully lyrical Southern plays that began with ***The Glass Menagerie*** in 1945 and earned two Pulitzer Prizes along the way. ***Iguana*** shares with those plays Williams’ trademark rhythmical and flowing dialogue, heat-soaked passion, and rich characters. It also has Williams’ characteristic animal imagery; the titular iguana joins a sweet bird, glass unicorn, moth, and snake in the writer’s menagerie of creatures that are trapped or in peril, relying on the compassion of strangers or the sensitivity of loved ones to set them free. Thrown together in a jungle resort, ***Iguana***’s characters—from the defrocked minister, Shannon, to the oldest living poet, Nonno, to the lusty Maxine—are all escapees and outcasts, the very fugitive kind that peopled so many of Williams’ earlier works. The playwright, a fugitive kind himself, was dedicated to being their champion and poet laureate.

The play is set in the dilapidated Costa Verde Hotel in the midst of the Mexican forest. The Reverend Shannon has been run out of his church for fornication and unorthodoxy and now acts as a courier and tour guide. At the start of the play he is leading a group of Baptist women through Mexico. Dissipated, on the verge of a breakdown, and surrendering to his

## Dangerous Species (cont.)

desires with a teenage member of the Baptist tour group, Shannon is at the end of his rope, like the iguana tied up under the veranda, whose only hope of freedom is death. Shannon is comforted by Hannah, a transient quick-sketch artist, and her grandfather, the poet Nonno, as well as by Maxine. Also at the hotel are a German industrialist and his family, who celebrate the news of the burning of London. “Fiends out of Hell,” says Shannon of the Germans, “with the voices of angels.” Shannon’s crisis of faith and despair of existence is met with a peculiar kind of faith in Hannah, who trusts that human beings really can reach outside themselves across gateways to one another.

If ***The Night of the Iguana*** is the last of one kind of Williams play, it is also the beginning of another; a gateway to the playwright’s later, more experimental works such as *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore*, *Two Character Play* and *The Gnadiges Fraulein*. The settings of the earlier plays, however fictionalized, are not only recognizable but also function as part of the social commentary of those plays. In contrast, ***Iguana***’s setting, though based on the Acapulco hotel where Williams stayed in 1940, does not seem like a real jungle at all. Rather, like a painting of Henri Rousseau, it is an obviously artificial rendering of natural wildness that is at once both deceptively simple and seductively dangerous. Williams cut his characters off from the real world to contain them in a sweltering observation chamber with lush botanical trappings. They are, says scholar C.W.E. Bigsby, “in a kind of limbo in which causality seems momentarily suspended. They become laboratory specimens.” Even the Nazis seem less like reminders of world politics than dangerous species who broke in from another cage. Williams used this technique before in the fantastical *Camino Real*, in which characters were trapped in the imaginary confines of a walled street. But where *Camino* was peopled with recognizable figures such as Lord Byron, Casanova and *La Dame aux Camélias*’ Marguerite, ***Iguana***’s characters are wholly Williams’ creation, made, it seems, for the purpose of the experiment.

In Williams’ late plays, the playwright often uses techniques associated with Beckett, writing of trapped characters in universes whose logic remains unexplained. Trying to make meaning out of their existence, the characters self-consciously role-play, challenging the differences between reality and the artificial. The characters in ***Iguana*** are also “actors in a play,” explains Williams, “which is about to fold on the road, preparing gravely for a performance which may be the last one.” Though ***Iguana*** is by no means Absurd, it is much closer to Williams’ elliptical later plays than it is to *The Glass Menagerie*.

***The Night of the Iguana***, then, is perhaps best understood as a threshold play, poised between the lyrical, cause-and-effect dramas that secured Williams’ reputation and the departures in form and substance that occupied his later plays. Williams himself described the work as “more of a dramatic poem than a play... bound to rest on metaphorical ways of expression... Some critics resent my symbols, but let me ask, what would I be without them... Let me go further and say that unless the events of life are translated into significant meanings, then life holds no more revelation than death, and possibly even less.”

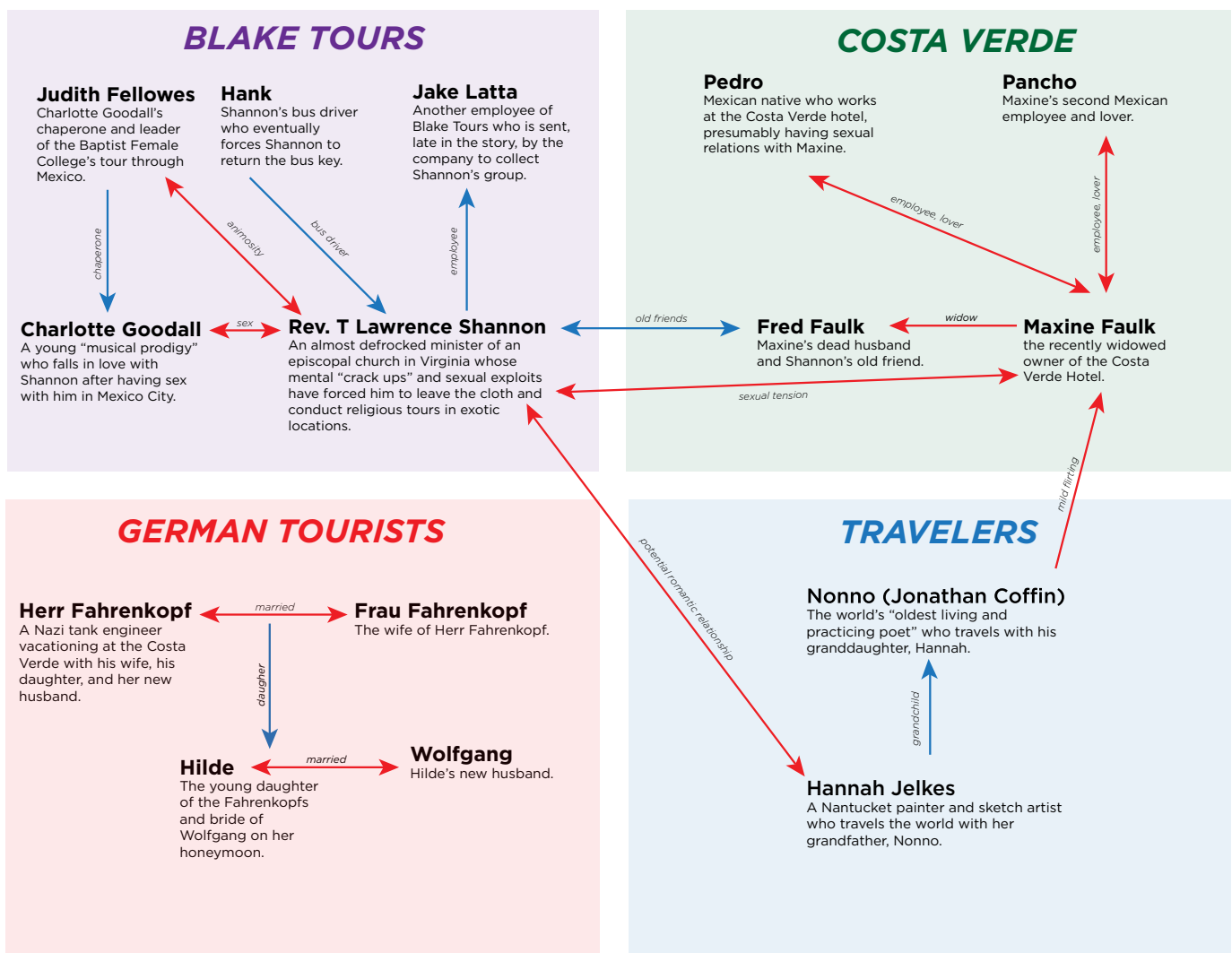
### DISCUSSION

- Based on your knowledge of Williams’ characters and writing style, what do you think “fugitive kind” at the end of the second paragraph describes? Which characters in ***Iguana*** would you describe as “fugitive kind” and why?
- Baker describes Hannah’s faith as a belief that human beings can “reach outside themselves across gateways to one another.” What does this mean, and what are the “gateways” in this context?
- Look at examples of Henri Rousseau paintings. What is the connection with Williams’ writing as Baker describes: “an obviously artificial rendering of natural wildness that is at once both deceptively simple and seductively dangerous.”



# Character Web

This web outline provides descriptions of the characters in **The Night of the Iguana** as well as relationships between characters. While characters are often connected based on familial relationships, many of the relationships in **Iguana** go beyond bloodlines, including tensions between friendship, sexual desire, and ideology. Use this character web as a reference or borrow the format for students to create their own. For a deeper exploration of the interconnectedness between individuals, see the lesson plan on page 29.



# Synopsis

## Act I

Reverend T. Laurence Shannon, a blacklisted priest-turned-tour guide, arrives at the Hotel Costa Verde in Mexico. In the middle of leading a Blake Tour group from a small Texan Baptist college on a trip through Mexico, the downtrodden Shannon seeks the companionship of his dear friend Fred Faulk, who unbeknownst to him died just a week earlier. Shannon meets Fred's lusty widow Maxine, who immediately tries to rope him in amidst violent honking from the tour bus. Shannon, sure that he is about to be fired, has veered off of the group's itinerary as an attempt to escape.

Miss Judith Fellows, a "butch" music teacher and guardian of Charlotte Goodall, a seventeen-year-old "musical prodigy" who had a brief, illicit affair with Shannon, barrels up the hill to confront Shannon. Fellows is furious at the way Shannon has led their guide and demands to call home to Texas.

Enter the "spinster" portrait artist Hannah Jelkes and her 97-year-old grandfather, Jonathan Cotton, affectionately known as Nonno, the oldest living and practicing poet in the world. Maxine notices a connection between Shannon and Hannah and tries with all of her wiles to avoid offering a room to Hannah and Nonno, even though her only other tenants are a lively German family.

Hannah, equipped with her artist's smock, and Shannon, stumbling into his clerical garb, encounter each other in a private pre-supper moment, musing on their kindred needs for kindness and companionship. Suddenly, Maxine's employees Pancho and Pedro burst onto the scene — they have captured an iguana and plan to tie it up under the verandah until the opportune moment to make it into a meal.

## Act II

Blake Tours sends a replacement tour guide, Jake Latta, who arrives several hours after the iguana's capture. Shannon, now with neither gainful employment nor enough money to return to the States, is on his last nerve. Inches away from jumping into the ocean, Pedro and Pancho catch him and tie him up in a hammock, restrained by ropes, just like the iguana. Hannah reaches out to Shannon, offering to calm him with tea and conversation. Shannon accepts her gifts and just when it seems like they might make a permanent connection and plan to travel together, Hannah does not accept Shannon's companionship. Instead, she implores Shannon to release the poor iguana under the verandah, which he does. With few other options, Shannon finally accepts Maxine's invitation to swim in the ocean, implying that he will stay at the Costa Verde with her.

Nonno recites his final poem, which he has been composing and reciting throughout the entire play. These touching words are his last. Hannah, realizing that Nonno is no longer breathing, searches around herself in a panic. She is alone. In the final stage direction, Hannah "bends to press her head to the crown of Nonno's and the curtain starts to descend."

# A Scene from *The Night of the Iguana*

*This scene, taken from the end of the play, occurs right before Hannah's grandfather Nonno finishes his great poem. After just wiggling free of the hammock, Reverend Shannon drinks a rum coco while Hannah tries to understand how cruel people can be to living things: in this instance, tying up an iguana by its neck.*

*As you read, consider the differences between how the two characters communicate and think about what their language communicates about each of their core values. This scene can also be used as inspiration for the scene writing lesson page 31.*

**SHANNON**

It's an iguana. The Mexican kids caught it and tied it up. Do you want to see the iguana? At the end of its rope? Trying to go on past the end of its goddam rope?

**HANNAH**

Why did they tie it up?

**SHANNON**

Because that's what they do. They tie them up, fatten them up, then eat them, when they're ready for eating. And the kids, the Mexican kids, have a lot of fun with them, poking out their eyes with sticks and burning their tails with matches. You know? Fun? Like that?

**HANNAH**

Mr. Shannon, please go down and cut it loose!

**SHANNON**

I can't do that.

**HANNAH**

Why can't you?

**SHANNON**

Mrs. Faulk wants to eat it. I've got to please Mrs. Faulk. I am at her mercy.  
I am at her disposal.

**HANNAH**

I don't understand. I mean I don't understand how anyone could.

**SHANNON**

Miss Jelkes, you're still not operating on the realistic level. You'd be surprised what people will eat if hungry. They'll even — why, I remember conducting a party of — ladies, yes, ladies — through a country that shall be nameless but in this world — we were passing by rubberneck

## A Scene from *The Night of the Iguana* (cont.)

bus along a tropical coast when we saw a great mound of — well, the smell was unpleasant. One of my ladies said, “Oh, Larry, what is that?” My name being Lawrence, the most familiar ladies sometimes call me Larry. I didn’t use the four letter word for what the great mound was. I didn’t think it was necessary to say it. Then she noticed, and I noticed too, a pair of very old natives of this nameless country, practically naked except for a few filthy rags, creeping and crawling about this mound of — and — occasionally stopping to pick something out of it, and pop it into their mouths. What? Bits of undigested — food particles, Miss Jelkes. Disgusting? Nothing human disgusts you unless its—

*(She makes a gagging sound in her throat and disappears for a while.  
Shannon continues, to himself and the moon.)*

I think I first faced it in that nameless country. The gradual, rapid, natural, unnatural — predestined, accidental — cracking up and going to pieces of young Mr. T. Lawrence Shannon, yes, still young Mr. T. Lawrence Shannon, by which rapid-slow process — his final tour of ladies through tropical countries — Yes! It’s always been tropical countries I took ladies through. Always seducing a lady or two, or three or four or five ladies in the party, but really ravaging her first by pointing out to her the — what — horrors? Yes, horrors! — of the tropical country being conducted a tour through... Cruelty. Pity! Which is it? — Don’t know, all I know is fast decay is a thing of hot climates, steamy, hot, wet climates, and I run back to them like a — incomplete sentence...

**HANNAH**

*(from below the verandah)*  
You’re talking to yourself.

**SHANNON**

No. To you. I knew you could hear me.

**NONNO**

Without a cry,  
Without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair

**HANNAH**

*(coming back onto the verandah)*  
I took a closer look at the iguana out there.

**SHANNON**

You did? How did you like it? Charming? Attractive?

**HANNAH**

No, it’s not an attractive creature. Nevertheless I think it should be cut loose.

**SHANNON**

Iguanas have been known to bite their tails off when they’re tied up by their tails.

**HANNAH**

This one is tied by its throat. It can’t bite its own head off to escape from the end of the rope, Mr. Shannon. Can you look at me and tell me truthfully that you don’t know it’s able to feel pain and panic?

**SHANNON**

You mean it’s one of God’s creatures?



## A Scene from *The Night of the Iguana* (cont.)

HANNAH

If you want to put it that way, yes, it is. Mr. Shannon, will you please cut it loose, set it free?  
Because if you don't, I will.

SHANNON

Can you look at me and tell me truthfully that this reptilian creature, tied up down there, doesn't mostly disturb you because of its parallel situation to your Grampa's dying-out effort to finish one last poem, Miss Jelkes?

HANNAH

Yes, I ...

SHANNON

Never mind completing that sentence. We'll play God tonight like kids play house with old broken crates and boxes. All right? Now Shannon is going to go up there with his machete and cut the damn lizard loose so it can run back to its bushes because God won't do it and we are going to play God here.

*(Shannon goes out with the machete. The low, excited mumble in cubicle 4 grows louder. Then Nonno's voice turns to a sudden shout.)*

### DISCUSSION

- Compare the way Shannon speaks — word choice, tone, fluency, etc. — to the way Hannah speaks. How are they similar and how are they different? What does the way each character communicates tell you about their character, their beliefs, or their values?
- Why do you think Tennessee chose to use the iguana as a symbol in this play? Why not choose another animal? What does the iguana mean as a symbol, and what is the significance of the play's title ***The Night of the Iguana***?
- Shannon describes the iguana as "at the end of its rope." What does this expression mean both literally and figuratively? How does the plight of the iguana relate or compare to the characters in the play?
- Williams' plays often include important imagery in the stage directions, and Williams himself has asserted that the stage directions are often more important than the dialogue in ***The Night of the Iguana***. What are some of the stage images and sounds Williams includes in this scene, and what do they do to enhance or inform the environment of the scene? As Shannon recalls a past experience, Williams decides to have the character deliver the line "to himself and the moon." Why would Shannon deliver this part of his monologue to the moon?
- Nonno delivers a piece of a poem in the middle of this scene between Hannah and Shannon. Why do you think Williams decided to include this piece of poetry here? What images or thoughts does it evoke, and how do they relate to the action of the scene?
- Why does Hannah want the iguana to be set free? Does Shannon agree with her or wish to help her? What does this dialogue illustrate about Shannon and Hannah's relationship?

# Nonno's Poem

By Tennessee Williams

*The following poem is spoken by Hannah's grandfather Nonno toward the end of the play, marking one of the seminal dramatic moments of the piece. The poem is adapted from an earlier poem that Williams had written during his stay at the Costa Verde Hotel in Mexico in 1940. During this trip, Williams struggled with and then overcame a physical ailment that led him to doubt whether or not he would survive the summer. Williams later decided to include the poem in his full-length version of **The Night of the Iguana**. For a theatrical, deeper engagement with this poem and its themes, see the lesson on page 30.*

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

Sometime while night obscures the tree  
The zenith of its life will be  
Gone past forever, and from thence  
A second history will commence.

A chronicle no longer gold,  
A bargaining with mist and mould,  
And finally the broken stem  
The plummeting to earth; and then

An intercourse not well designed  
For beings of a golden kind  
Whose native green must arch above  
The earth's obscene, corrupting love.

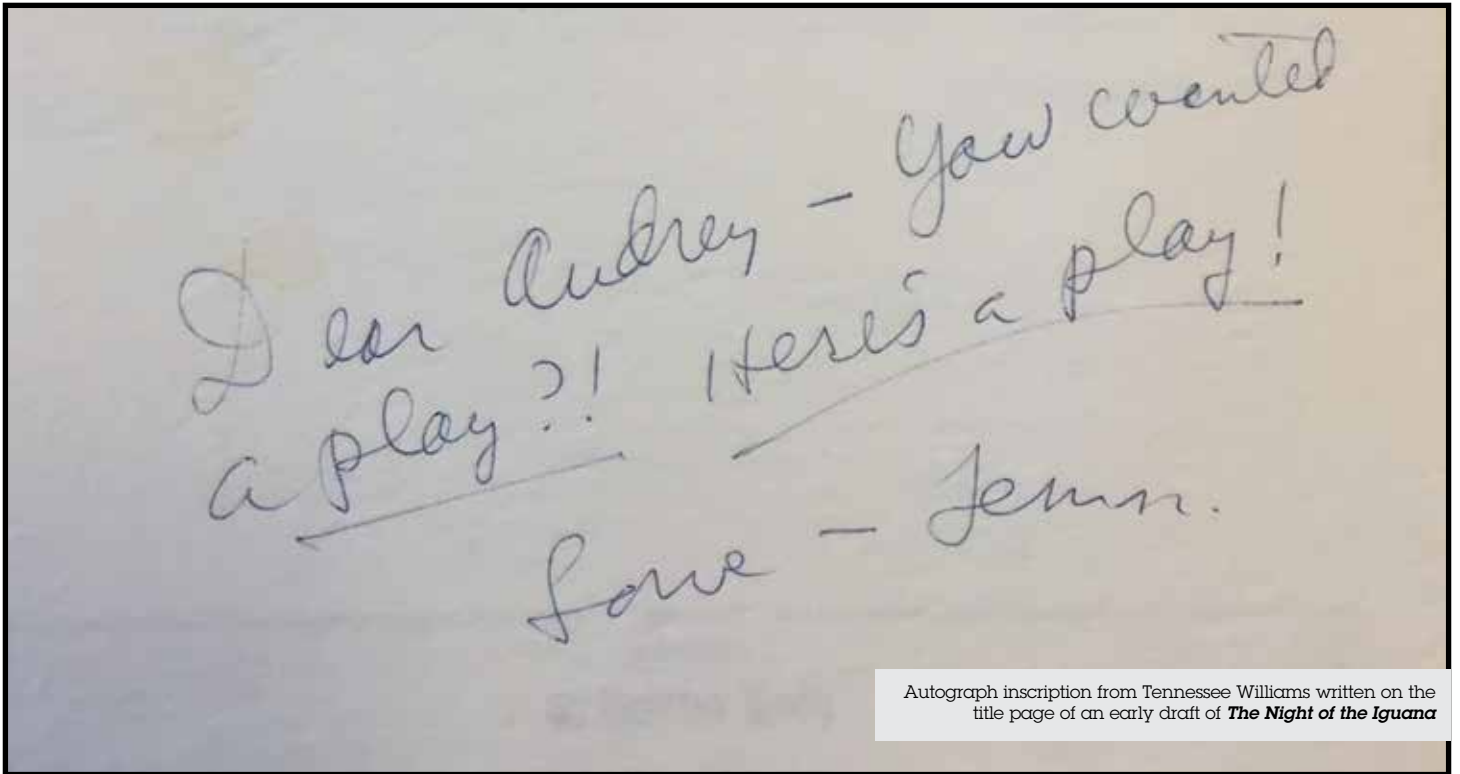
And still the ripe fruit and the branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair.

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?

## DISCUSSION

- What are the predominant images and metaphors in this poem, both tangible and intangible? What feelings or ideas do these images and metaphors evoke? How would you describe the atmosphere of this poem?
- What is the cycle that is outlined in the poem, and how does the poet characterize this cycle? Is it hopeful or hopeless, humble or grand, etc.?
- What does the poet mean by "a second history" in the second stanza?
- What is the significance of the repetition between the first and fifth stanzas?
- In the last stanza, the poet sends an invocation to "Courage." What exactly is the poet asking or hoping for, and why does the poet choose to send this request to Courage specifically?
- What does this poem tell you about what Nonno is thinking or feeling in the play?

# *The Night of the Iguana:* A Deeper Dive



The **Deeper Dive** section of the Toolkit builds on the essential information in the previous section. Utilizing primary source documents from the Harvard Theatre Collection at Houghton Library, get a sneak peak into the inner-workings of Tennessee Williams' process writing ***The Night of the Iguana***. This section includes an in-depth development timeline (pages 16-17), an excerpt from the early short story version of ***Iguana*** (page 18), a collection of archival letters and essays drafted by Williams himself (pages 19-23), the original *New York Times* review of the Broadway production (pages 24-25), and Williams' reflections on a major theme in his later plays: death (pages 26-27).

To bring the play into your classroom, see the lesson plans in the **Educational Activities** section (pages 28-31).



Table reading of *The Night of the Iguana* with (above, L-R) Margaret Leighton, Tennessee Williams, Patrick O'Neal, and Bette Davis.

Image: New York Public Library Billy Rose Theater Division

# Iguana in Process

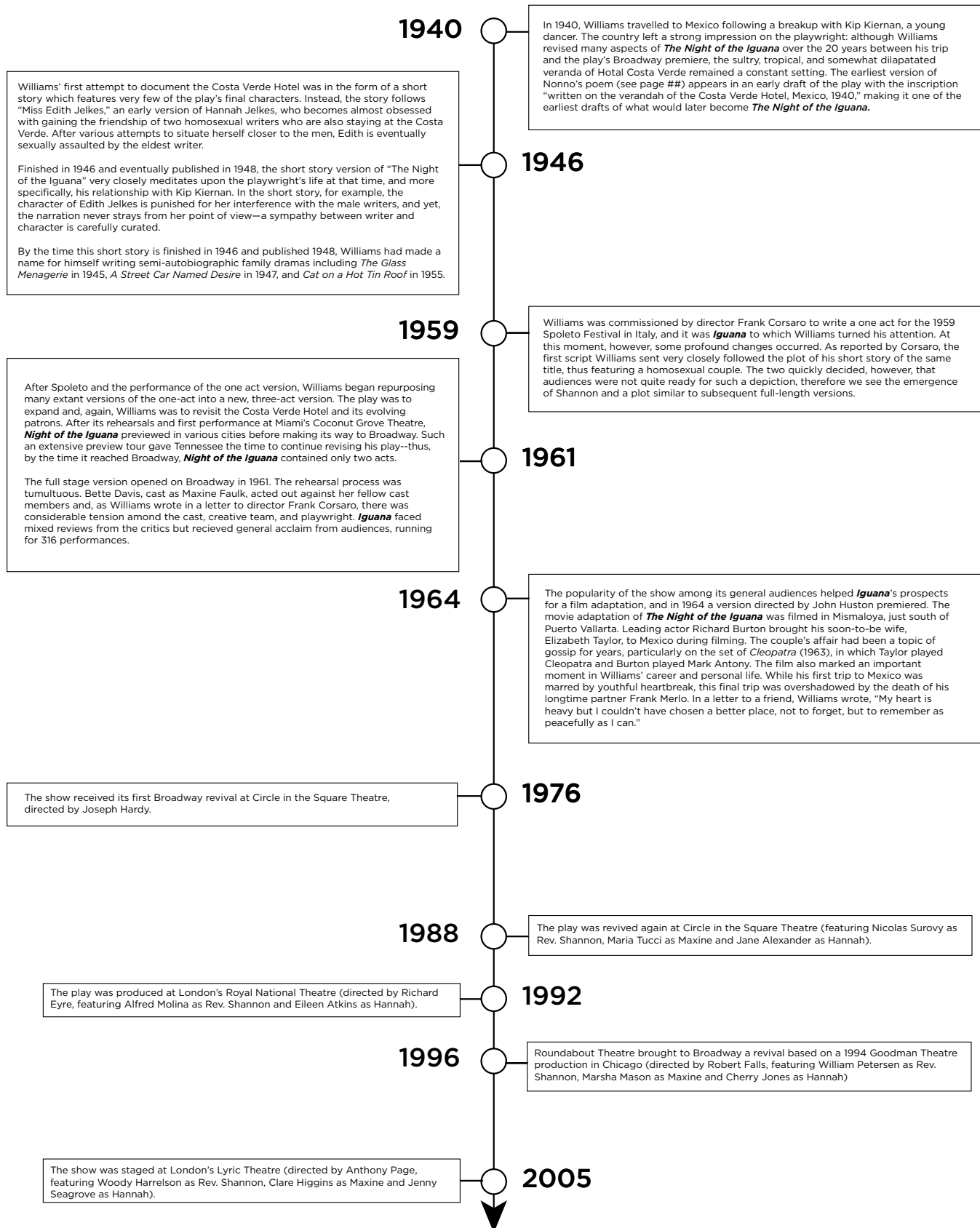
## A Timeline

*The Night of the Iguana* was one of Tennessee Williams' longest lasting projects, starting with a poem, building to a short story, many drafts of a short play, and even more drafts of a full-length play. The timeline on the next page outlines the development of **Iguana** from Williams' trip to Acapulco in 1940 through the tumultuous Broadway premiere in 1961, the film debut in 1964, plus major revivals of the production.

A DEEPER DIVE



# Iguana In Process (cont.)



# “The Night of the Iguana”

## An Excerpt from the 1948 Short Story

by Tennessee Williams

*The excerpt below is from the short story version of **The Night of the Iguana** by Tennessee Williams, which was originally published in “One Arm and Other Stories” in 1948. The short story follows Miss Edith Jelkes (the precursor to Hannah Jelkes in the play), described as a spinster of 30, who had been an art instructor at an Episcopalian girls school in Mississippi and found her way to the Costa Verde Hotel near Acapulco, which is real-life inspiration Williams used to write the full-length play. Earlier in the story, an iguana is tied up by its neck under the verandah and a storm, described in the story as a “white bird” has descended on the hotel. Miss Jelkes struggles to understand cruelty towards any living thing whether animal or human. In trying to understand this, Miss Jelkes confronts both a younger and an older writer who brush her off. After spying on the two men, the older writer thrusts himself upon her. Miss Jelkes returns to her room. The following excerpt is what happens next. Compare this excerpt to the scene from the full-length play on pages 11-13.*

*I don’t belong here, thought Miss Jelkes, and suiting action to thought, she slipped quietly out the screen door. She did not turn back into the room immediately adjoining but ran down the verandah to the room she had occupied before. She threw herself onto the bed which was now as cool as if she had never lain on it. She was grateful for that and for the abrupt cessation of fury outside. The white bird had gone away and the Costa Verde had survived its assault. There was nothing but the rain now, pattering without much energy, and the faraway sound of the ocean only a little more distinct than it had been before the giant bird struck, she remembered the Iguana.*

*Oh, yes, the Iguana! She lay there with ears pricked for the painful sound of its scuffling, but there was no sound but the effortless flowing of water. Miss Jelkes could not contain her curiosity so at last she got out of bed and looked over the edge of the verandah. She saw the rope. She saw the whole length of the rope lying there in a relaxed coil, but not the Iguana. Somehow or other the creature tied by the rope had gotten away. Was it an act of God that had effected the deliverance? Or was it no more reasonable to suppose that only Mike, the beautiful and helpless and cruel, had cut the Iguana loose? No matter. No matter who did it, the Iguana was gone, had scrambled back into its native bushes and, oh, how gratefully it must be breathing now! And she was grateful, too, for in some equally mysterious way the strangling rope of her loneliness had also been severed by what had happened tonight on this barren rock above the moaning waters.*

*Now she was sleepy. But just before falling asleep she remembered and felt again the spot of dampness, now turning cool but still adhering to the flesh of her belly as a light but persistent kiss. Her fingers approached it timidly. They expected to draw back with revulsion but were not so affected. They touched it curiously and even pityingly and did not draw back for a while. Ah, Life, she thought to herself and was about to smile at the originality of this thought when darkness lapped over the outward gaze of her mind.*

# "Dearest Cheryl"

## A Letter from Tennessee Williams

The following is a letter that Tennessee Williams wrote to "Cheryl" — most likely his longtime friend and producer Cheryl Crawford, wherein he discloses his feelings on the development and rehearsal process of **The Night of the Iguana**. Pay particular attention to Williams' handwritten revisions as well as his thoughts on suspense and stage directions.

Dearest Cheryl: [Crawford?]

Your notes are excellent as ever and so were Corsaro's. The only one of yours that I question is the one about creating suspense. There are two kinds of suspense: if that's the right word for it. One is being uncertain about the resolution of a dramatic situation and we are so constantly exposed to it in films and TV that it has all but worn itself out, it's rarely difficult to guess how things will arrive at some kind of pat resolution, but the other kind of suspense, as I see it, in *Iguana*, is waiting for revelation of characters that have caught your interest and empathy, your sense of truth in them, and so the problem is not to create uncertainty but to create sympathetic identification with the dilemma of each. This does limit the audience somewhat, not to those in similar situations but to those who are in them and are willing to face them.

As I said to Corsaro, the main thing wrong with this play is that I should have written it five years ago, before Big Daddy Time had chopped away at my energies to the point where it takes me weeks to do what I could do then in a couple of days.

Still I think my love of these <sup>tenants</sup> prisoners of their separate cubicles will somehow make it possible for me to squeeze blood out of a stone, and project the truth of the play strongly enough to make it a dramatic poem with "tragic stature": this is my present obsession.

I think the play's too long and sprawling and now it must be retracted, even though it should run half an hour under the conventional length and require a curtain-raiser or an off-Broadway production. The problem there is that it requires a female star. I wrote it for Hepburn and I still can't quite see anyone else achieving that odd combination of the astringency and the lyric feeling that Hannah should have; and the coyness and strength. Rosemary Murphy was good but miscast: she suggested Miss Alma too often.

Only Pat O'Neal struck the true note: the set was a straight-jacket: and while Corsaro's staging was intelligent and sensitive, it was curiously uninventive, especially when he chose to disregard my stage-directions in the script which I think are better than the dialogue. I'm not blaming him. I should have been at rehearsals as I have been always before, but especially with this one. But I suspect that Corsaro does have an urge to "correct" a playwright even when the work is so intensely personal that only the playwright could have a true, clear conception of it. He said to me: "We young directors want to get away from Kazan." I spoke up and said, "Well, you'd better not get too far away from him until you are damned sure you're better." - The shape, the design, the balance of a scene, and the stressing of its important points with a correspondingly pointed staging of them are not things to be discarded by "we young directors" simply because they were done so superbly by Gadg. On the other hand, Kazan would never have done this play, I suspect. And Corsaro has, repeatedly. I just hope that the next time I can manage to be with <sup>him</sup>.

Devotedly, *Tenn.*

Letters held in the Theatre Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library

A DEEPER DIVE



# "Author's Impression of Production as it Now Stands"

## A Letter from Tennessee Williams

In the following letter, which may or may not have been sent to his intended recipient, Williams divulges his expectations for the stage production of *Iguana*, focusing primarily on the production and acting values in Frank Corsaro's staging.

### AUTHOR'S IMPRESSION OF PRODUCTION AS IT NOW STANDS.

ONLY ABOUT HALF THE IMPORTANT PRODUCTION VALUES ARE WORKING FOR US NOW, AND THIS IS A DANGEROUS SITUATION SINCE THIS PLAY, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER I'VE WRITTEN, IS DEPENDANT FOR ITS ALLUSIVE MEANINGS AND BEAUTY ON A FULL REALIZATION OF ITS "PLASTIC" VALUES. IT WAS CONCEIVED AND WRITTEN AS A THEATRE PIECE THAT IS COMPOSED AS MUCH OF SOUND AND VISUAL EFFECTS AS OF SPEECHES AND STAGE BUSINESS.

SPECIFICALLY, WHEN THE LUSH FOLIAGE REPRESENTED ON THE STAGE IS UTTERLY MOTIONLESS AND THERE IS NO AUDIBLE WIND SOUND, A RIDICULOUS IMPRESSION OF IRREALITY IS CREATED WHEN A REFERENCE IS MADE TO A BREEZY VERANDAH AND WHEN A STORM BREAKS WITH A REALISTIC RAINFALL AND FLASHES OF LIGHTNING AND CLAPS OF THUNDER AND ~~THE~~ NOT A LEAF STIRS. THIS IS A CONTRADICTION WITHOUT ANY LOGIC IN IT. THE AUDIENCE'S SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF IS EASILY BROKEN BY SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

PERFORMANCES: THE BEST SO FAR WAS THE PRE-VIEW IN ROCHESTER. DESPITE GOOD CUTS, STILL CONTINUING, ALL OF THE PRINCIPAL'S PERFORMANCES, EXCEPT FOR MR. WEBB'S, ~~MR. BOWEN'S, MR. BOWEN'S, MR. BOWEN'S~~, HAVE FALLEN OFF IN STYLE AND CONCENTRATION. SOMETIMES THEY ARE DOWNRIGHT FLACCID AND LAUGUID, AS IF THE PLAYERS HAD LOST HEART AND FAITH IN WHAT THEY ARE DOING. THE TEMPO IS GETTING STICKY, EVEN IN THE SCENES WHICH ARE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE. THERE IS, AS I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU, A GOLDEN MEAN BETWEEN "PUNCHING OUT" A SCENE IN THE STYLE OF ETHEL MERMAN AND PLAYING IT WITH A NATURAL VITALITY AS IF IT TRULY MATTERED.

LINE-REHEARSALS ARE BADLY NEEDED TO CORRECT VARIOUS LITTLE DEVIATIONS FROM THE SCRIPT WHICH MAKE IT SEEM CARELESSLY WRITTEN. WHEN A PARTICULAR LINE DOESN'T SUIT AN ACTOR, HE SHOULD GO DIRECTLY TO THE PLAYWRIGHT AND SAY SO, AND THE PLAYWRIGHT WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE IT AND MAKE IT MORE PLAYABLE.

A STRICT DEFINITION OF EVERY BIT OF STAGING DOES NOT MAKE THE PLAY SEEM FROZEN OUT OF LIFE: ON THE CONTRARY, THROUGH PRESENTING A CLEAN-CUT DESIGN, IT BRINGS THE PLAY INTO A CLEAR POETIC REALITY. WITHOUT SHARPNESS OF DEFINITION IN EACH BIT, THE PLAY CAN SEEM LIKE A FUZZY PICTURE, AN AWKWARD IMPROVISATION, STUMBLING AND FALTERING ABOUT.

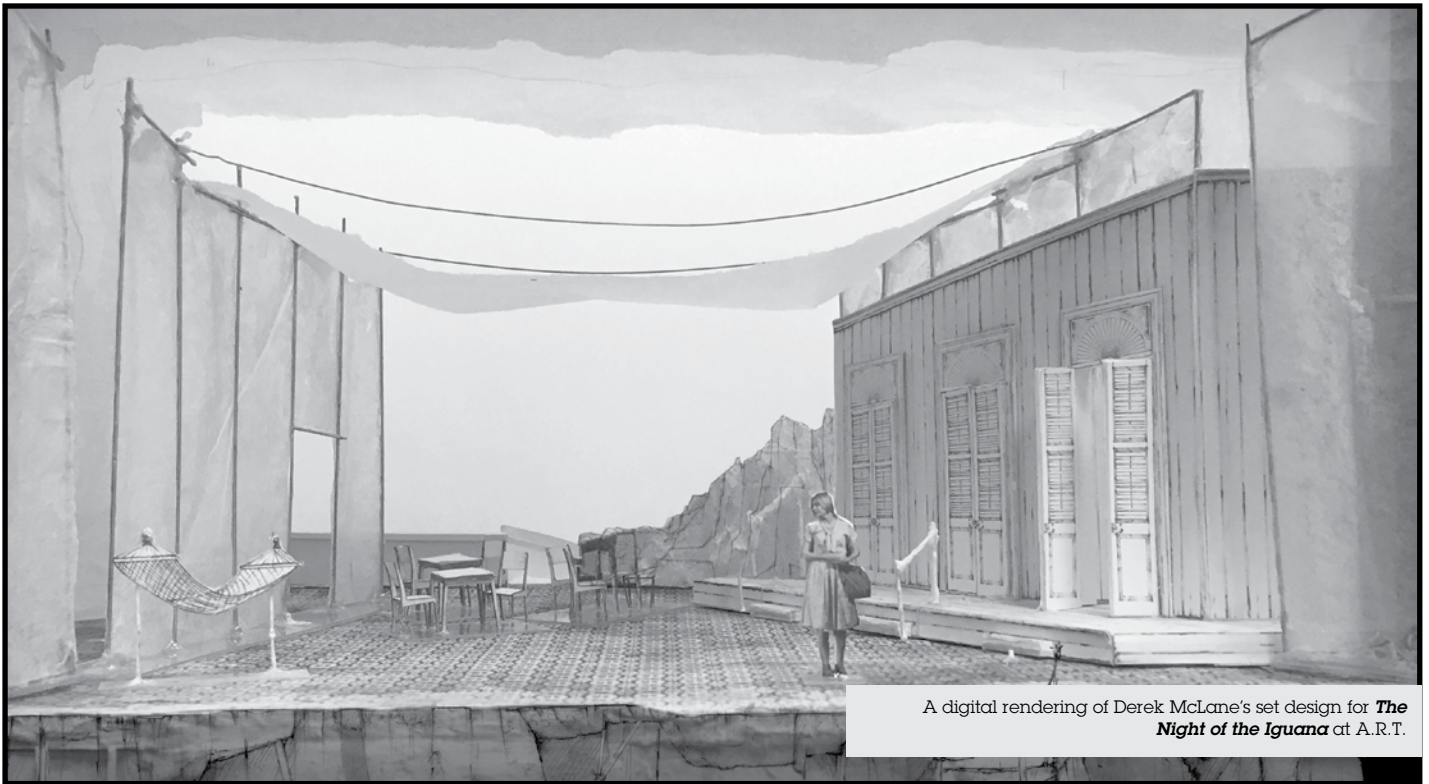
WITH SO MUCH AT STAKE FOR US ALL, I AM OBLIGED TO OFFER THESE CRITICISMS AND TRUST THAT THEY WILL HELP YOU, NOT OFFEND YOU.

I WOULD RATHER OFFEND YOU THAN NOT DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP YOU AND THE PRODUCTION. IF I DIDN'T HAVE RESPECT FOR AND FAITH IN ALL OF YOUR TALENTS AND CAPABILITIES, I WOULD JUST GO AWAY AND NOT BOTHER.

Letters held in the Theatre Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library

A DEEPER DIVE





# A Summer of Discovery

By Tennessee Williams

*In the following essay from 1961, just prior to the Broadway debut of **The Night of the Iguana**, Williams describes the process of developing the play. Williams places particular focus on his 1940 stay at the Costa Verde Hotel in Acapulco. The visit was a formative moment for playwright, who was battling grave physical illness as well as an intense fear of failure that would follow him throughout his life. During this trip, Williams began drafting a short-story version of the play, and the backdrop of the hotel provided many of the atmospheric and character influences that would later show up the full-length play.*

In Acapulco, I spent the first few days in a fantastic hotel near the central plaza. All the rooms opened onto a large patio-garden containing parrots, monkeys and the proprietor of the hotel, who was so fat that he could hardly squeeze into a room at the place. Much of his time was devoted to cosmetic treatments which were administered in the patio. Every morning a very lively young barber would arrive to touch up the proprietor's hair with henna and give him a marcel wave and a cold cream facial. Since the dyed, waved hair was quite long and the proprietor spoke in a falsetto voice and was always clad in a bright silk kimono, I wasn't quite sure of his sex till I heard him addressed as Señor something or other by one of his employees.

The steaming hot squalor of that place quickly drove me to look for other accommodations, nearer the beaches. And that's how I discovered the background for my new play, The Night of the Iguana. I found a frame hotel called the Costa Verde on the hill over the still water beach called

# A Summer of Discovery (cont.)

Caleta and stayed there from late August to late September.

It was a desperate period in my life, but it's during such times that we are most alive and they are the times that we remember most vividly, and a writer draws out of vivid and desperate intervals in his life the most necessary impulse or drive toward his work, which is the transmutation of experience into some significant piece of creation, just as an oyster transforms or covers over, the irritating grain of sand in his shell to a pearl, white or black, of lesser or greater value. [...]

What was important to me was the dreamworld of a new play. I have a theory that an artist will never die or go mad while he is engaged in a piece of work that is very important to him. All the cells of his body, all of his vital organs, as well as the brain cells in which volition is seated, seem to combine their forces to keep him alive and in control of his faculties. He may act crazily but he isn't crazy; he may show any symptom of mortality but he isn't dying.

As the world of reality in which I was caught began to dim out, as the work on the play continued, so did the death wish and the symptoms of it. And I remember this summer as the one when I got along best with people and when they seemed to like me, and I would attribute this condition to the fact that I expected to be dead before the summer was over and that there was consequently no reason for me to worry about what people thought of me. When you stop worrying what people think of you, you suddenly find yourself thinking of them, not yourself, and then, for the time that this condition remains, you have a sort of crazy charm for chance acquaintances such as the ones that were staying with me that crazy summer of 1940, at the Costa Verde in Acapulco.

By the middle of September the bleeding lungs had stopped bleeding, and the death wish had gone, and has never come back to me since. The only mementos of the summer are the scar on the X-ray plate, a story called "The Night of the Iguana," and now this play which has very little relation to the story except the same title and a bit of the same symbolism. But in both the short story and the play, written many years later, there is an incident of the capture of the iguana, which is a type of lizard, and its tying up under the verandah floor of the Costa Verde, which no longer exists in the new Acapulco.

Some critics resent my symbols, but let me ask, what would I do without them? Without my symbols I might still be employed by the International Shoe Co. St. Louis. [...]

Our gloom was not relieved by the presence of a party of German Nazis who were ecstatic over the early successes of the Luftwaffe over the R.A.F. When they were not gamboling euphorically on the beach, they were listening to the radio reports on the battle for Britain and their imminent conquest of it, and the entire democratic world.

My writer friend began to deliver a pitch for suicide as the only decent and dignified way out for either of us. I disagreed with him, but very mildly.

Then one day the manager of the hotel told me that my credit had run out. I would have to leave the next morning, so that night my friend and I had more than our usual quota of rum-cocos, a drink that is prepared in a coconut shell by chopping off one end of it with a machete and mixing the juice of the nut with variable quantities of rum, a bit of lemon juice, a bit of sugar, and some cracked ice. You stick straws in the lopped-off end of the coconut and it's a long dreamy drink, the most delectable summer night's drink I've ever enjoyed, and that night we lay in our hammocks and had rum-cocos until the stars of the Southern Cross, which was visible in the sky from our veranda, began to flit crazily about like fireflies in a bottle. [...]

*The Night of the Iguana* is rooted in the atmosphere and experiences of the summer of 1940, which I remember more vividly, on the emotional level, than any summer that I have gone through

## A Summer of Discovery (cont.)

before or after—since it was then, that summer, that I not only discovered that it was life that I truly longed for, but that all which is most valuable in life is escaping from the narrow cubicle of one's self to a sort of verandah between the sky and the still water beach (allegorically speaking) and to a hammock beside another beleaguered being, someone else who is in exile from the place and time of his heart's fulfillment.

A play that is more of a dramatic poem than a play is bound to rest on metaphorical ways of expression. Symbols and their meaning must be arrived at through a period of time which is often a long one, requiring much patience, but if you wait out this period of time, if you permit it to clear as naturally as a sky after a storm, it will reward you, finally, with a puzzle which is still puzzling but which, whether you fathom it or not, still has the beautifully disturbing sense of truth, as much of that ambiguous quality as we are permitted to know in all our seasons and travels and places of short stay on this risky planet.

At one point in the composition of this work it had an alternative title, *Two Acts of Grace*, a title which referred to a pair of desperate people who had the humble nobility of each putting the other's desperation, during the course of a night, above his concern for his own.

Being an unregenerate romanticist, even now, I can still think of nothing that gives more meaning to living.

*Williams' essay appeared in the New York Herald Tribune in 1961, just prior to the Broadway opening of **The Night of the Iguana**.*

### DISCUSSION

- Williams uses an oyster metaphor to describe desparation. What does this metaphor illustrate about his writing process and state of mind while working on ***The Night of the Iguana***?
- What is the “dreamworld” Williams mentions in the third paragraph, and why is it so important to him? If you have read or seen the play, what are the elements of ***The Night of the Iguana*** that make up the “dreamworld”?
- How does Williams connect his writing to themes of life and mortality?
- Based on this essay, which elements from Williams' real-life experience in Acapulco does he include or adapt in ***The Night of the Iguana***?
- Why do you think Williams uses the subtitle *Southern Cross* for this play?
- What does Williams mean when he mentions the “narrow cubicle of one's self” on the last page?
- What is Williams' perspective on discovering and using metaphors and symbols in his plays?





After a tumultuous rehearsal process, ***The Night of the Iguana*** premiered on Broadway in 1961 featuring a cast including (above, L-R) Patrick O'Neal (Shannon), Alan Webb (Nonno), Margaret Leighton (Hannah), and Bette Davis (Maxine).

Photos: The Library of Congress; Friedman-Abeles © The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

# “Night of the Iguana” Opens

A Review by Howard Taubman

*This is the New York Times theater review of **The Night of the Iguana**, which was published the day after the first performance on Broadway. While Tennessee Williams always staunchly defended his choices as a playwright, he was also concerned about garnering critical acclaim for his plays. Read Taubman's review and compare it with Williams' own accounts on pages 21-23.*

By the time he reaches the second half of his new play, “The Night of the Iguana,” Tennessee Williams is writing at the top of his form.

He is still grappling with the human mysteries that have always haunted him: man's incommunicability to man, the futility of the helpless helping the helpless, the effort to break loose from the rope that tethers us.

But the mood has changed. The violence is leashed. A muted, autumnal poetry murmurs through the lines. The explosive, shocking gestures that have marked so many of Mr. Williams' earlier plays are dispensed with. They are only implied in understated tensions and furies and in subtle victories and defeats.

A DEEPER DIVE



## Review: “Night of the Iguana” Opens (cont.)

If “The Night of the Iguana,” which opened last night at the Royale, is slow in arriving at its dramatic focus, it may be because it is an expansion of a short piece Mr. Williams wrote for the Spoleto Festival several years ago. It may also be that the playwright has deliberately chosen to eschew the eruptions of mood and action that have made for gripping effects. Whatever the explanation, the pace at the outset is deliberate.

The skill at evoking a mood is still there. The atmosphere of the west coast of Mexico in an out-of-the-way hotel overlooking a rain forest and the sea is conveyed in all its sultry languor. With an eye and ear for detail and a gift for probing phrases, the characters are introduced.

The essential ones are four. They are Maxine, the owner of the hotel, a determined, lusty widow; the defrocked Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon, now leading a tour of female schoolteachers from Texas and on the verge of another of his recurrent breakdowns; Hannah Jelkes, a spinster of about 40, who wears an air of cool reserve like a carapace; and Nonno, her 97-year-old grandfather, a fragile quavering “minor poet with a major league spirit.”

There are others needed for the action and to shed light on the principal figures. Among these are two of the traveling teachers — the harassed, frantic moral leader of the group and the girl with whom Shannon has a brief adventure — and both are revealed in short, striking confrontations. There is also a German party; this is 1940 and they are disporting themselves and gloating over the radio reports of the burning of London. But they are peripheral, serving no purpose in the central drama.

In the final half Mr. Williams draws the threads together. In one of the most beautiful passages he has ever done he gives us a hushed, rending, sustained scene between Hannah and Shannon. They are the chief maimed ones of Mr. Williams’ story.

He is being devoured by fever and by torments of the soul. Seemingly resigned to a barren way of life, she reaches out in an attempt to help him. For a shimmering moment their needs graze. But then it is over and they are lost, still panicky and mercilessly alone.

Shannon submits to Maxine’s pervasive protection but only because he is irretrievably beaten. Hannah knows that she must go off into a hopeless future. But they have been granted a moment of grace. And Nonno has had his flash of fulfillment, for he has finished his “last and loveliest poem.” Then his rope, like the one that held captive an iguana (a large Mexican lizard), caught by the Mexican boys for future eating, had been severed. Another of God’s creatures has found the freedom he yearns for.

Some remarkable performances animate and deepen the sensitive, restrained writing of the central roles. Margaret Leighton is magnificent as the cool, saintly spinster with a wisdom born of anguish. Patrick O’Neal plays Shannon with a furious, trembling, hysterical intensity. Bette Davis, with flaming red hair and in a daringly unbuttoned blouse, is the earthy, practical sensualist. Alan Webb has touching dignity as the gentle old poet. Patricia Roe as the frantic teacher and Lane Bradbury as the girl are admirable.

Frank Corsaro is credited with the direction. Oliver Smith has designed a set as realistic that one can feel the heat of the tropics. When a storm breaks, water actually falls through the gaps in the veranda roof.

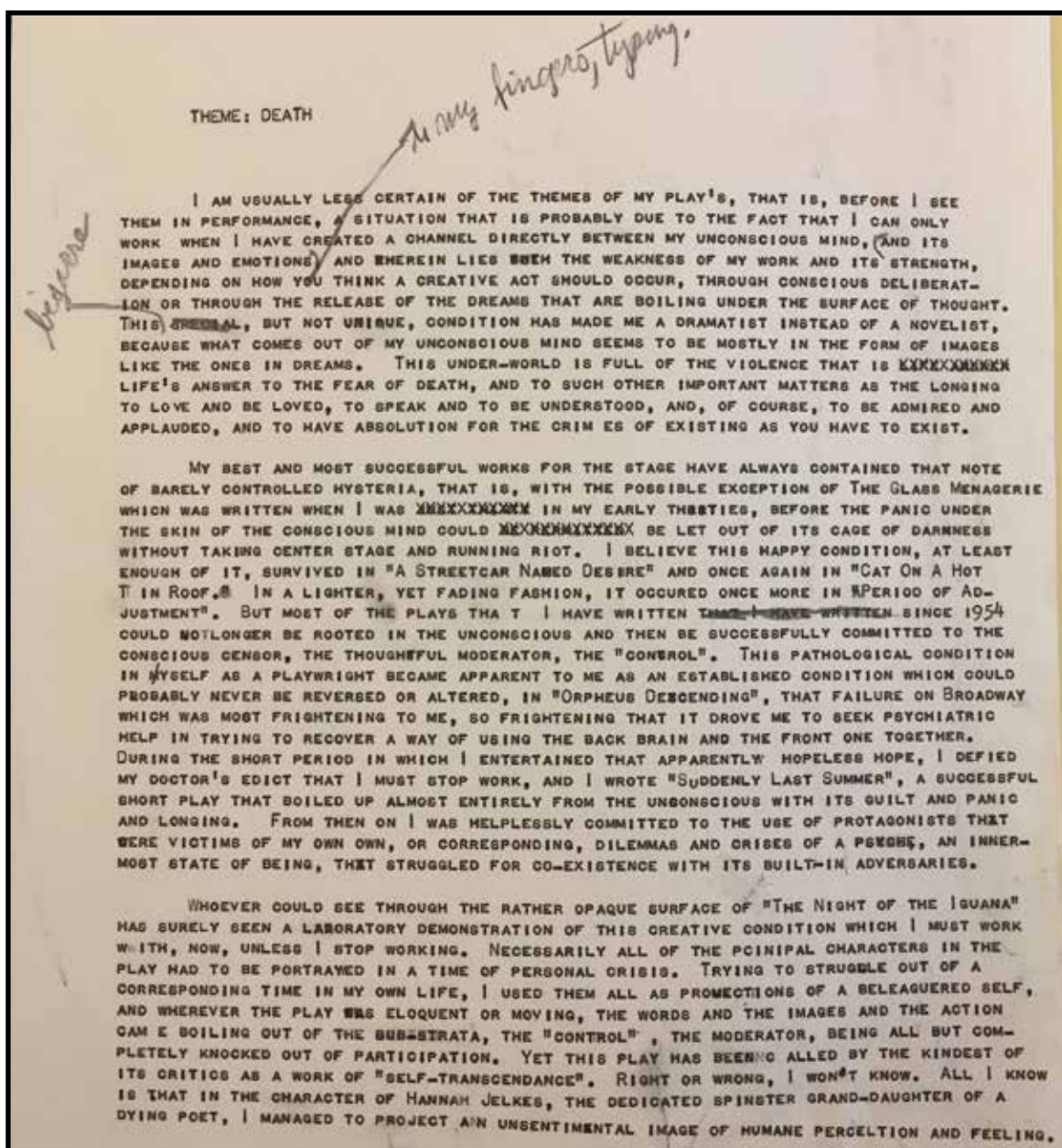
Although it takes its time in getting to the heart of its theme, “The Night of the Iguana” achieves a vibrant eloquence in declaring its respect for those who have to fight for their bit of decency.

*This review was originally printed in The New York Times on December 29, 1961 after the Broadway premiere of **The Night of the Iguana**. For a digital copy of the review, visit [www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/31/specials/williams-iguana.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/31/specials/williams-iguana.html)*

# "Theme: Death"

An Essay Draft by Tennessee Williams

The following essay was likely drafted by Williams between the 1961 Broadway opening of **The Night of the Iguana**, and the 1964 film adaptation of the play. In this essay, Williams recounts the genesis of the play. Read the essay and consider the definitive change Williams senses within himself and his work.



Letters held in the Theatre Collection at Harvard's Houghton Library

A DEEPER DIVE

## “Theme: Death” (cont.)

AND THAT SHE PURIFIED THE TROPICAL STORM THAT RULED THE HEARTS OF THE OTHERS, THEIR LUSTS, THEIR SELF-CONDEMNATION, AND THEIR IRRATIONAL DEMANDS OF THEIR SELF-CENTERED LIVES. WITHOUT A GREAT ACTRESS SUCH AS MARGARET LEIGHTON IN THE PART OF HANNAH, I WONDER IF THE TROPICAL STORM ON THAT MEXICAN VERANDAH COULD HAVE BEEN ~~SO CLEAR~~ CLEARED AWAY ENOUGH FOR THE BEST OF CRITICS TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SEE THE DESIRE FOR CLARITY OF HEART, AND THE COMPASSIONATE UNDERSTANDING THAT ~~ONE~~ COMES WITH IT, TO HAVE MADE THE PLAY'S CONCLUSION A TRUE AND MEANINGFUL CATHARSIS OF THE TEMPESTUOUS CONFUSIONS IN SO MUCH ~~MYSTERY~~ THAT TOOK PLACE BEFORE IT.

Death was not the theme of that play, but how to live next to death and beyond despair.

In the play which I am now offering the theme is centered more directly on human mortality.

### DISCUSSION

- Which definitive changes in himself and his work does Williams describe in this essay?
- Can you summarize the differences and tensions Williams feels between the conscious and unconscious mind? Based on the tone with which he writes, how do you think Williams feels about or deals with these tensions? Does he embrace them or fight against them?
- What does Williams describe as an “under-world”? What does this description imply about Williams’ state of mind while writing and reflecting on *The Night of the Iguana*?
- Williams notes that most of his plays contain an element of “barely controlled hysteria.” What, if anything, in *The Night of the Iguana* contributes to this feeling?
- Williams mentions that there is a “rather opaque surface” on *The Night of the Iguana*. What do you think he means by “opaque” in this context, and what does Williams think this “surface” is covering up in the play? What lies beneath the surface?
- The last two sentences of the essay define the central themes of two plays. What, in Williams’ mind, is the central theme of *The Night of the Iguana*, and in which ways does this theme differ from the play that he is “offering” at the time of writing this essay?

# Educational Activities

## Lesson Plan Index

### CHARACTER WEB

Page 29

*This close reading and creative activity allows students to character relationships, whilst making connections in their own lives.*

*This activity is designed as a follow up seeing or reading **The Night of the Iguana**, and would best be used to start a follow up discussion of the play.*

### NONNO'S POETRY

Page 30

*This close reading and creative activity allows students to analyze a piece of text, and then implement the techniques used in poetry of their own.*

*This activity is designed as a follow up seeing or reading **The Night of the Iguana**, and would best fit in a poetry curriculum. This lesson however can be adapted for students to analyze any poem already integrated into the classroom curriculum.*

### BECOME THE PLAYWRIGHT

Page 31

*This creative activity is meant to place the student in the seat of the playwright, director, actor, and stage manager. Students will work together in a team in order to write (and possibly stage) their own scene.*

*This can be used as an extension of **The Night of the Iguana** or on its own as a writing and team-building activity.*

# Lesson Plan: Character Web

## OBJECTIVES

*This close reading and creative activity allows students to character relationships, whilst making connections in their own lives.*

*This activity is designed as a follow up seeing or reading **The Night of the Iguana**, and would best be used to start a follow up discussion of the play.*

## MATERIALS

Copies of **The Night of the Iguana Character Web** found on page 9.  
Paper  
Markers, Colored Pencils, Etc.

## PROCEDURE

### Setup

Students work independently or in small groups.

### Process

1. Pass out copies of the **Character Web**.
2. Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to become familiar with the characters in the play and to think about the many different ways that characters (and people) relate to each other.
3. Divide the class into groups of 3-4.
4. Read through each character on the web. Make sure to draw certain attention to the four categories included in the web.
5. Give the students 4-7 minutes to make a list of as many different “groups” of people that they find in their lives. These groups should be based on the relationship the student has with other people and could be based on specific relationships (i.e. family, friends, teachers), locations (i.e. school, home, church), activities (i.e. basketball, dance) and more. It may help to provide examples.
6. Have the students share the groups they came up with and write all of them all on the board.
7. Give the students 10-15 Minutes to decide on 4 “groups” and tell them to come up with 3-5 people in their life to place in these groups. Each person should have a one sentence description following their name.
8. Once everyone is done, pass out the medium sized pieces of paper. Ask them to design their own character map of their life. This may take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes depending on the desired amount of design detail.
9. Have the class refer back to the character map of The Night of the Iguana and compare it to the one they made.
10. Ask the following questions:
  - What are the similarities? Are there similarities in the relationships you have with those that the characters have?
  - What are the differences? Are there any differences in the relationships you have with those that the characters?
  - Which character in the play do you feel you are most like? Why?
  - Are all of the connections on your web based on familial relationships? Is there any overlap between the categories you chose?
  - Are there any characters from the play that are similar to people on your own web? Explain.
11. Give the students the option to display their character maps, or take them home.



# Lesson Plan: Nonno's Poetry

## OBJECTIVES

*This close reading and creative activity allows students to analyze a piece of text, and then implement the techniques used in poetry of their own.*

*This activity is designed as a follow up seeing or reading **The Night of the Iguana**, and would best fit in a poetry curriculum. This lesson however can be adapted for students to analyze any poem already integrated into the classroom curriculum.*

## MATERIALS

Copies of **Nonno's poem** found on page 14  
Large Pieces of paper  
Markers

## PROCEDURE

### Setup

Students work primarily in small groups interspersed with individual and full-class work. Students should have room to move around.

### Process

1. Pass out copies of Nonno's poem and read it out loud as a class.
2. Explain to the students that the purpose of this exercise is to analyze and embody this poem as well as use it as inspiration for their own writing.
3. Read the poem aloud as a class and discuss the following: rhyme scheme, images, metaphors, style, tone, etc.
4. Divide the class into groups of 4.
5. Assign each group a stanza at random.
6. Explain to the students that they must take the stanza assigned and create a tableau. This is like an acted-out scene, but everyone in the scene is still, like a photograph. Students may choose to play particular "characters", interpret the poem literally, or they may represent the feelings of their stanza more figuratively. This may take between 2-10 minutes depending on the amount of instructor coaching required.
7. Once the time is up, every group will present their tableau. You may choose to have groups present in the order of their stanzas within the poem.
8. With each group that presents, assign another group in the class to be "responsible" for the group that's presenting tableau. Have them write down what they see.
9. Instruct the students to go back to their groups. Individually, each student should write one line/sentence inspired by the tableau that they were responsible for. They have 2-5 minutes to do this.
10. Each group must then work together to string the four lines they have written into one stanza. They have 2-5 minutes to do this.

**Extension Option:** For more advanced writers, challenge students to craft their stanzas with a similar rhythm and rhyme scheme to Nonno's poem.

11. Provide the students with a large piece of paper and have them write their stanza on it.
12. Collect the large pieces of paper and post them at the front of the class.
13. Instruct the class that you all are going to work together to put the stanzas together in a particular order. You may choose to make these decisions based on majority consensus.
14. Have 4-5 volunteers read the class poem out loud.
15. You have created one class poem, from the inspiration of Nonno's poem in the play!

### Starting Points for Reflection

- How did it feel to write poetry in this way? What was challenging? What was fun?
- How does Nonno's poem relate to the plot and themes of **The Night of the Iguana**?
- How does your group poem relate to Nonno's poem? Are there any similar or different themes, images, or metaphors between the two poems?

# Lesson Plan: Becoming the Playwright

## OBJECTIVES

*This creative activity is meant to place the student in the seat of the playwright, director, actor, and stage manager. Students will work together in a team in order to write (and possibly stage) their own scene.*

*This can be used as an extension of **The Night of the Iguana** or on its own as a writing and team-building activity.*

## MATERIALS

Paper and Pens (or a word-processor)

Copies of the scene from **The Night of the Iguana** on pages 11-13

## PROCEDURE

### Setup

Students work in small groups.

Students should have room to move around.

### Process

1. Pass out copies of the scene from **The Night of the Iguana**
2. Divide the class into groups of 4.
3. Each group reads the scene out loud: one person reads the stage directions and the other three choose a role (Shannon, Hannah, or Nonno). Allow up to 5 minutes for reading.
4. Provide paper to each group.
5. Inform the class that it is their turn to write a scene. This may take anywhere between 15 and 30 minutes. Each scene must have the following (adjust the number of items to be higher or lower depending on the amount of time you have in class):
  - 10-15 lines (Each character must have at least 3 lines)
  - Three named characters
  - At least two stage directions explaining nonverbal action
  - A surprise entrance
  - An argument
  - An agreement
  - A dramatic exit
  - An iguana

**Extension:** For advanced writers, ADD more ingredients, for example:

- A maniacal laugh
  - An explosion
6. Once each group has finished writing, encourage each group to read through their whole play. Allow them time to make up to 3 corrections.
  7. Collect the scenes, shuffle them, and pass the scenes out randomly. The scene a group received is the one they are responsible for.
  8. Give groups 5 minutes to read through their new scenes
  9. Build in time at the end of the lesson for each group to present and discuss their work.

### Starting Points for Reflection

- What was it like to write your own scene? What was challenging? What was fun?
- Was it helpful to have guidelines? Do you think Tennessee Williams used any guidelines or restrictions when writing **The Night of the Iguana**?
- Explain what it felt like to see someone else rehearsing a scene you wrote without giving feedback on their interpretation.
- Were there things you wish you could change about your scenes now that you have seen them? How do you think this feeling is similar or different to rehearsing a new play?
- What does the Iguana represent in **The Night of the Iguana**? What did the Iguana represent in your scene, if anything?