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THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE TRADITIONAL PERFORMING  
ARTS ON TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S LATE PLAYS

by

Sarah Elizabeth Johnson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Theatre Arts (Dramaturgy)  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Dare Clubb

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Sarah Elizabeth Johnson

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Theatre Arts (Dramaturgy) at the May 2014 graduation.

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To my parents

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## INTRODUCTION

While Tennessee Williams has been hailed as one of the greatest American playwrights, critics have generally agreed that he wrote some of his worst plays near the end of his career. From the late fifties and sixties onward, Tennessee Williams's plays did not meet the critical and commercial success that greeted his earlier smash hits. As American theatrical tastes were changing and Off-Broadway experimental theatre was growing, Tennessee Williams's plays began to change, becoming less realistic and more abstract. Puzzled critics and audience members alike found it difficult to categorize these plays and comprehend the theatrical language that Williams was beginning to explore. However, Allean Hale's work has sparked a growing interest in and awareness of the litany of plays produced by Williams in the last two decades of his life. She categorizes the late plays as those written and produced after *The Night of the Iguana*. Almost all of these plays are also generally considered unsuccessful.

*The Night of the Iguana* found Williams enshrined on the cover of the March 9, 1962 *Time* magazine as "world's greatest living playwright." By 1969, after *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, *Time*'s affiliate *Life* was describing him as a burned-out cinder. Although other reviewers were more generous, many agreed with the idea that Williams's career was in an irreversible decline. What was seen as the downward slide began in 1963 with *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. (Hale, "Confronting Williams" 1)

Critics and scholars today are beginning to re-examine these late plays, which have been mostly ignored for decades. Few of these late plays have been produced and very little scholarly consideration has been given to these works. A handful of scholars, artists and theatre festivals are beginning to give the late plays of Tennessee Williams a closer examination. This may have to do with changing theatrical tastes; however, it also seems to be coming from a new openness to considering that the shift in Williams's writing was not solely due to his personal troubles of the time, but perhaps also to an intentional change in artistic consciousness and awareness.

This new style of writing found in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* and subsequent Williams plays is certainly not uniform. However, the distinct differences from the styles of preceding plays stand out. Hale notes that “it seemed he no longer bothered with the dialogue for which he was famous, but wrote in unfinished sentences or let one character complete another’s thought,” (“Confronting Williams” 1). The expectation for Williams’s well-known skill with dialogue was being subverted in these new works. Along with smooth and logically motivated dialogic responses, gone too were the dramatic elements of conflict in his narratives. Hale continues that in his late plays “there was none of the plot development – complications and climaxes – that had propelled his scenes; at times it was difficult to know when a play ended or what it was about,” (“Confronting Williams” 2). This turn away from Aristotelian models of drama indicates that Williams was moving towards a different way of conceiving the theatrical. In general, most of these new aesthetic choices in his writing moved away from the poetic realism Williams had previously been working in towards abstractions and lengthy meditations explored on stage. With most of the more than 40 plays considered “late” Williams’s plays leaning in this direction, these trends, while not universal or unequivocal, indicate that Williams was pursuing new dramaturgy in his later life.

Interest in Williams’s late plays is currently growing, however it is telling that these plays were so poorly received during his lifetime. Thomas Keith notes in his *American Theatre* article “You Are Not the Playwright I was Expecting,” that:

Interest in Williams’s later works has been growing over the last decade, and when the plays are produced they’re sometimes described in the publicity as “lost,” “found,” “discovered” or “unknown,” when in fact, that is rarely the case. Many were performed during Williams’s lifetime, and would be better described as “shunned” or “sidestepped.” (37)

Something about these plays has sparked the interest of artists and scholars today. As more of the plays are performed more frequently and examined more closely, the late plays of Tennessee Williams seem to be becoming significantly more successful both critically and commercially than they were at the time of their writing and premieres.

This burgeoning interest starkly contrasts against the vehemence with which these plays were originally received. One critic's review of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* asks of the then living Mr. Williams:

What has happened? There is a sad moment in the career of an artist of the second rank, a point of no return, beyond which his work ceases to develop. The artist loses his gift for selecting viable new material and begins to go through his old material all over again, reproducing it this time with its salient feature exaggerated in involuntary self-parody. (West 211)

This cry that Williams had lost his artistic talent and was on an inescapable downward trend was echoed by other critics of the time. The reactions to these late plays seemed to indicate that Williams had moved to writing plays with, as this critic goes on to say, "no dramatic substance." However, this interpretation of a lack of dramatic substance relies on the assumption that dramatic substance can only be found in traditional Aristotelian plots with realistic dialogue from which Williams made his name. Something is drawing the artists and scholars of today (even if they are being drawn slowly) towards these later plays. Perhaps it is a dramatic substance other than poetic dialogue in realistic situations.

The late plays of Tennessee Williams do not come off the page as readily as his earlier works. *The Day on Which a Man Dies* ends with a death you've been informed will happen at the opening of the play with no surprises in the narrative. The characters in *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* often do not finish their sentences and complete each other's thoughts with no clear logical explanation as to why. Stagehands not only influence the setting of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, they speak directly to the audience while being invisible to the characters on stage. These techniques are not presented as choices within a defined theatrical tradition. They are not clearly explicated by the surrounding text and seem in direct opposition to the techniques used in Williams's earlier plays. Critics interpreted these new theatrical devices as a sign of the playwright's descent away from art and perhaps into madness. Often attributed to the death of Williams's longtime partner and his substance abuse, these new dramaturgical tactics were held up in comparison to earlier work as examples of his decline.

As these later plays are being reconsidered today, scholars are questioning the way in which critics responded to the plays at the time of their premieres. Michael Paller, in a more recently published collection of essays on the late work of Williams, argues that perhaps the fault of these plays' lack of success lies with the critics rather than Williams's words. He argues that "Williams did not suddenly become inept or tone deaf to the sound of his inner music. The truth was that Williams had written a kind of play that critical ears had not been trained to hear," (25-26). If these critics were missing the training to fully experience and interpret these plays, then perhaps the recent exploration of these works signals a readiness to look for dramatic models outside of the Western Aristotelian tradition. Paller goes on to posit that in writing *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, Williams was writing a *noh* play. This understanding, which lies far from the insistence of the critics of Williams's time to compare these later plays with his earlier works, explodes the idea of this new dramaturgy not only within *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, but in many of his late plays.

It is no coincidence that *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* is seen as the beginning of the end for Williams's career and that its writing so closely coincides with Williams being introduced to and expressing great interest in the theatre of Japan. Some scholars, beginning with Allean Hale and continuing with others like Michael Paller, posit that Tennessee Williams began exploring dramaturgy and dramatic techniques from *noh* and *kabuki* after his exposure to the forms. Williams's documented friendship with Yukio Mishima, one the most well regarded Japanese novelists and playwrights of the time, was a catalyzing event in this exposure to the Japanese traditional performing arts which eventually resulted in several trips to Japan where Williams saw performances of the *noh* and *kabuki* he had read. Perhaps it is this biographical anecdote that is useful to consider when examining the later Williams plays in addition to his grief and declining health.

Just as the late plays are difficult for an untrained ear to appreciate, so is the art of *noh* and *kabuki*. Donald Keene, a scholar of *noh* and translator of Mishima's work, remarks that "the more one knows about a theatre with traditions as deep-rooted as those of Nō, the greater one's pleasure," (9). A knowledge, or even awareness, of the performing traditions associated with *noh* and *kabuki* greatly impacts the understanding of many of Williams's late plays, particularly the plays which directly cite Japanese performing arts in stage directions, titles or theatrical techniques. A far more compelling drama is offered in many of the late plays when we begin looking across the ocean for a way to understand them, rather than comparing them with earlier plays by the same playwright. Williams himself lamented the comparison of these new plays to his older work:

In my early plays, there was a great rush of emotion backed up in me that found release. In later plays, I had to dig deeper, and people were always comparing those plays, which were quite different, with the early work...Under these conditions, the new plays suffered. (Williams qtd. in Christiansen E24)

Instead of reading these plays in reference to how Williams wrote plays earlier in his career, this thesis will examine a selection of these plays as experimentation with and exploration of the dramaturgy of the Japanese traditional performing arts of *noh* and *kabuki*. In Part One, Tennessee Williams and Japanese Traditional Performing Arts, I will look more closely at the biography of Williams and his relationship with Japan, Yukio Mishima and Japanese theatre. I will also break down the dramaturgy and theatrical techniques used in both *noh* and *kabuki* as experienced by audiences situated outside of the cultural background and trained artistic communities of Japanese performing arts. In Part Two, A Few of Tennessee Williams's Late Plays as Seen in Relation to Japanese Traditional Performing Arts, I will offer a reading of three of Williams's late plays in relation to *noh* and *kabuki*. Analytical readings of *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, *The Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, three plays which contain striking connections to *noh* and *kabuki*, provide evidence of this new

dramaturgical model in Williams's late plays. The layered and complex ideas woven in these plays stand out clearly when placed in context of *noh* and *kabuki*. Disentangling an influence from any playwright's work as the single, overarching interpretation of where a play "came from" is impossible. However, by pulling at this particular thread in the tapestry of influence at work in Tennessee Williams's late plays we can see them in a new way, just as they were written in a new style.

PART ONE

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND JAPANESE TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ARTS

## TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND JAPAN

The connection between Tennessee Williams and the theatre of Japan revolves around his relationship with Yukio Mishima. The two famous writers met in 1957 entirely by chance. Their resulting friendship would expose Williams to not only Mishima's plays and novels, but also to the culture of Japan, including *noh* and *kabuki*. Allean Hale has documented the narrative of Williams and Mishima meeting, most notably in her article "The Secret Script of Tennessee Williams." In this article, she describes Williams and Mishima's bizarre first encounter in 1957. Mishima was traveling in New York to promote Knopf's publication of the English translation of his *Five Modern No Plays*. Williams was required to stay close to his psychoanalyst's office during the week, but he and his partner Frank Merlo were renting a place on the West Side for weekend parties. Allean Hale describes Williams's weekend retreat in her article:

In tune with the Zen of the times, he furnished it sparsely in what he called "chop suey modern": mats, bead portieres, paper lanterns. Here he served drinks and deli food to the crowd. One Saturday night when too few showed up, Tennessee himself went out on upper Broadway to round up some interesting street people. He saw coming toward him these two elegant Orientals. "How would you like to come to a party? He asked. So America's leading playwright and Japan's leading novelist spent a congenial evening together watching the bacchanalia, neither knowing who the other was. They met formally a week later in the office of New Directions, where Mishima was discussing the forthcoming publication of his *Confessions of a Mask*. James Laughlin, their mutual publisher, introduced them. ("Secret" 2)

This introduction was the beginning of a long friendship which would lead to Williams taking at least four trips to Tokyo. Mishima also visited New York and saw Williams on each trip. Williams describes their meeting in significantly less detail in a group interview over an international television hookup. He tells Edward R. Murrow that he and Mishima "met in New York, in a rather unfashionable district and in a rather bohemian quarter, but we had a marvelous time," (Williams qtd. in Devlin 69). Due to the privacy of both

individuals, it is difficult to say how intimate or deep their friendship ran, but the evidence of their repeated encounters certainly indicates a certain level of familiarity.

After their chance encounter and coincidental sharing of a publisher, their friendship seemed inevitable. While coming from very different cultural experiences, the two had much in common. They were both successful writers in their home country, and well-known for it. This success was also a burden for them both, weighing heavily on them as they were expected to continue producing hits. Both writers were homosexuals, though they enacted their sexuality in different ways. Mishima was married, though published an expose on the underground homosexual community in Japan. Williams had a longtime partner, though Frank Merlo and Williams's relationship was not stable or widely known to the general public. Mishima and Williams also shared a strong affiliation with traditional culture; Williams with the South, Mishima with the samurai tradition. Mishima and Williams also both made a turn toward the avant-garde in the late fifties, shifting their writing styles. While their disparate cultures and backgrounds make the realization of their friendship a surprise to most, it is easy to see why the two would maintain a friendship over the course of 13 years.

Williams's fourth trip to Japan would be the last time he saw Mishima. Williams writes in his memoir about the experience:

This visit, lasting only a couple of days, was to be my last encounter with Yukio Mishima. I was staying at a hotel in Yokohama while the ship was in port, and Yukio drove out to the port one evening to have dinner with me. At this point I suspect he had already decided upon his act of hara-kiri, which took place only a month or two later while I was still in Bangkok. I noticed when he entered the hotel bar that there was a tension and gravity about him which led me to believe that he had already decided upon the act, which I think was performed not because of political concern about the collapse of the old traditions in Japan but because he felt that, with the completion of his trilogy, he had completed his major work as an artist. (Williams, "Memoirs" 236)

Mishima was the leader of a small group of extreme right-wing political activists. In an "attempted coup d'état," his group took over the office of a commandant in the Japanese Self Defense Force. After giving a short speech, Mishima committed ritual suicide, an act

he had often portrayed as romantic in his novels and plays. Mishima's death was the end of Williams's friendship with the writer, but his fascination with the traditional theatre of Japan would continue, as he made evident in his plays.

Williams had read Mishima's work, including his modern *noh* plays, after meeting him for the first time in 1957. However, it was his first trip to Japan in 1959 that truly introduced him to the possibilities of *noh* and *kabuki*'s dramaturgy. During his stay, he saw *noh* and *kabuki* for the first time. He told a reporter that he went to see a *kabuki* show every afternoon of their two week stay in Tokyo. This love of *kabuki* led him to write an advertisement for the first ever performance of a *kabuki* and *noh* troupe in America, one year later:

The great traditional Theatre of Japan, the *Noh*-plays and the *Kabuki* theatre that grew out of them, deserve to be ranked... with such historical flowering of drama...as the ancient Greek and Elizabethan theatres and the theatre of Chekhov and Stanislavsky. We are receiving a great honor in their coming to America, and I hope that all our theatre artists and craftsman will be as thrilled, influenced, instructed and inspired as I was when I saw them last Fall in Japan. (Williams qtd. in Hale, "Secret" 6)

This influence, instruction and inspiration would become apparent in Williams's next major play, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. What he learned from his exposure to *noh* and *kabuki* while in Japan and through his conversations with Mishima would alter the way Williams wrote his plays. The critics of the time might have missed the complex experiments at work in these later plays. By looking at the aesthetics of the Japanese art forms closely and comparing them with the choices made in Williams's later plays, we can uncover a dramaturgy that has until recently lain hidden beneath the surface.

## THE AESTHETICS OF *NOH*

Looking at Tennessee Williams's later plays through the perspective of their connection to *noh* requires a basic understanding of the art form as he encountered it: a foreigner coming from a distinct and distant culture with no formal training in the art. As such, this section will grapple with the aesthetic understanding of *noh* I experienced as a Westerner with limited education in the art form. While my fascination with the traditional performing arts of Japan has certainly led me to seek greater understanding through research, my initial impressions of the forms have remained largely intact. I suspect that this has to do with my experience of the art as foreigner. All of the Japanese traditional performing arts are strongly rooted in Japanese cultural knowledge and assumptions about audience cultural experience. In some ways, this means that no matter how much I research, investigate and learn about them, *noh*, *kabuki*, *bunraku* and any other traditional Japanese performing art will ultimately hit me differently than my fellow Japanese audience members. In this way, I believe my understanding of the art form's aesthetics viscerally is connected with the experience Williams had as an audience member of *noh* and *kabuki* performances in 1959 and beyond. I can also see many of the elements I gleaned from my experience as a *noh* and *kabuki* audience member layered into the later plays of Williams. This section will focus on the aesthetics of *noh*, as observed by a foreign audience member, not a native practitioner, and the next section will focus on this same experience of *kabuki*.

*Noh* performances are, on the surface, of a singular structure and style. It is difficult to mistake a *noh* play for anything else and very few *noh* plays surprise their audience with a story or style outside the expected. *Noh* plays fall into one of five categories based on the content of their stories, however the structure of those stories is very similar across all five categories. There are specific roles, such as the *waki* or *shite*, that enact similar roles within a set structure found in all of the known *noh* plays. There

may or may not be subsidiary characters alongside them, but there is always a *waki* who begins the play as a bystander or witness and a *shite*, or “doer” who is the focus of any narrative presented in the play. Other constants of the *noh* play are a chorus of chanters, seated to the side of the stage that explicate the situation, speak for or as the *shite* and give a rhythmic and tonal shape to the play. As such, the chorus shifts between pronouns fluidly, sometimes speaking as an omnipotent narrator describing the *shite* and then in the same sentence speaking as the *shite*. Each play utilizes these roles and staging techniques differently, though their existence is consistent throughout the repertoire. This “sameness” among what can be seen by careful observers as widely different and stylistically unique plays gives a constancy and rigidity to the art form that allows for the variations to become incredibly meaningful.

*Noh* plays explore a dramatic moment before the climax. As such, a narrative build of drama and release of tension through a climactic encounter is rarely seen. Instead, an emotional or dramatic moment is explored through image and poetry and the play ends not in or after a narrative high point has occurred, but in the moments before. The release felt in *noh* is a more abstract aesthetic one, rather than a narrative based one. The exploration of an elongated moment in time is prioritized over a revelation of new information. There is an emotional release through a sensory experience rather than a cerebral one. Storytelling ruminates on ideas and images set within stories well known to the audience.

*Noh* explores strong juxtaposition in staging. While often thought of as a slow moving art form, *noh* actually explores the extremes of tempo. Glacially slow movement is ever so briefly punctuated by fast moving stomping feet or sharp beats of the drum. Over the period of the play, the rhythm of both music and speech increases at an infinitesimal speed, gradually speeding up throughout the play. This movement leads the audience to the explosive (comparatively) dance at the conclusion of the play that is full of drums and swift movements. These extremes in tempo are juxtaposed against the

stillness and slowness found in *noh*. Juxtaposition can also be seen in elaborate costumes placed on a simple and bare stage. Props are minimal and abstract, usually a paper representation of an object, yet the costumes are large and bulky *kimonos* of bright and beautiful design. Silence fills the space frequently, yet shrill sounds from the flute and sharp drums shatter the illusion that this is a quiet theatre. The chorus performs as many chanters of a single voice, and fluidly moves from speaking with the main performer to speaking as her<sup>1</sup>. *Noh* is a masked theatre that has only one character in each play masked (in the majority of instances, though there are a few notable exceptions where two characters will be masked). *Noh* places oppositional staging practices side by side and allows them to coexist in harmony, balancing one another.

Ritual is also a strong component of *noh*. Beyond the art form's long history and an honoring of the traditions developed over centuries, the rituals are an integral part of the mode of storytelling employed in *noh*. The journey from backstage along the bridge itself functions both as a narrative of a character entering the stage and as the transformation of actor into character. The stage itself is reminiscent of both Shinto and Buddhist ritual spaces, and the religions, which have blended and coexisted in Japan since before written history, are embedded in the stories, stage and theatrical experience of *noh*. The codified performance conventions were developed as the arts consolidated into a single art form during the days of Zeami, and have not changed drastically since. *Noh* is considered by some to be "museum theatre" due to its strict adherence to ritual and tradition. It has been performed and taught in the same way through many generations of practitioners.

*Noh* explores reality in a presentational way rather the representational tradition in Western realism. There is an inherent theatricality that draws attention to the performative exploration of story and experience in *noh*. Dramatization of objects,

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<sup>1</sup> I use the feminine here as many *shite* characters are female. However, the majority of *noh* actors are male.

particularly the imbuing of life into the mask, is *noh*'s most recognizable element of presentational theatricality. Abstract props are also interacted with in such a way that imbues them with meaning beyond their physical existence. Other staging practices also draw attention to the theatricality of the performance, including the stage attendants who sit on the sides of the stage waiting for moments to assist with props or costumes.

Wearing the same neutral black robes of the chorus, they are meant to be invisible to the audience. While we can clearly see the stage hands interacting with the actors, and no attempt is made to hide their existence, the audience understands that they are not visible and not a part of the world. This contract between performance tradition and audience calls attention to the performance of the theatre. Characters proclaim their name or defining attributes upon entering the stage and declare their arrival in a location although no scenic elements have changed to indicate this movement. The chorus speaks as a character though they do not consistently embody any specific character within the narrative. Music and rhythm are used in language and underneath language as another mode of expression within the performance. All of these staging practices draw attention to the performative nature of *noh*, asking the audience to experience a presentation of the essence of things rather than the mimicry of reality.

Rightly recognized as a slow moving and contemplative theatrical tradition, *noh* uses the above mentioned techniques and more to cultivate an aesthetic of absence. In the absence of something, we gain a deeper understand of its essential nature. *Noh* strips many staging practices down to a minimum. This focuses the audience's attention acutely on what remains. The mysterious beauty of the oft debated *noh* concept of *yugen* is experienced by being hidden. Absence in *noh* draws us into the performance. *Noh* is filled with long moments of silence. The absence of sound makes us hyper-aware of the sounds within *noh*. Much of *noh* is still, or filled with movement so slow it is barely recognizable. The structure of *noh* stretches out across space and time, filling the stage with the absence of movement and sound. *Noh* creates a negative space and allows the

audience to fill that space with their presence and sensory experience. From my seat in the *noh* theatre, as a Western student of Japanese culture with a surface understanding of the intricacy of *noh*, this aestheticization of absence forms the foundation of the *noh* experience.

THE AESTHETICS OF *KABUKI*

*Kabuki* functions very differently from *noh* in ways striking even to an inexperienced audience member. Rather than embodying the aesthetic of absence seen in *noh*, *kabuki* could be said to explore the aesthetics of presence. Again, this interpretation is based on the experience of being a frequent audience member with a genuine interest in the art form rather than an expert sharing wisdom gained from mastering the art. Much like Tennessee Williams, I found myself drawn to the *kabuki* theatre frequently during my time in Japan. Perhaps the art is more easily grasped by a foreign audience member due to its focus on outward aesthetics of appearance and spectacle. While *kabuki* still has a codified structure and staging techniques that evade many first time audience members' understanding, the performance is compelling on its surface and takes less mental and emotional effort to engage with than *noh*. However, upon closer examination, *kabuki*'s aesthetics function in a layered and complex way. Still far from a Western tradition of realism, *kabuki* draws from Japanese cultural experience differently than *noh*, but just as strongly.

*Kabuki* uses history and myth as the foundation of the stories it presents. While some stories are recycled from the *noh* tradition, *kabuki* tends to tell more narratively complex stories with subplots and complicated sets of circumstances leading to an inevitable, and often tragic, end. Not all *kabuki* end tragically, some are more heroic with a climactic battle ending the play. Audiences have strong cultural knowledge of these stories, so revelation of plot is not the focus of the storytelling. Just as in *noh*, there is focus on exploring the emotion of a moment rather than surprising an audience with new narrative information. However, in *kabuki* this exploration of an emotional moment is an opportunity for the *kabuki* actor to demonstrate his skill at performing intense emotions. *Kabuki* stories center on clear protagonists whose experience guides us through the play. The characters are obviously good or evil enacting a story that has an inevitable ending,

due to both the audience's knowledge of the narrative and the set of circumstances in place. The story therefore sometimes lacks conflict. The dramatic climax is achieved not through the conflict within a narrative but through the creation of a climactic image. This sensory experience trumps the narrative being presented. As such, the plays will sometimes end just before the climactic moment in the narrative. As we know the outcome of the story, the dramatic experience is created through image and spectacle and can sometimes be best achieved in the emotional high point before the climax. There is rarely a *dénouement* in the *kabuki* theatre.

The ritual of the *kabuki* theatre is just as present as in *noh*, if a bit more rambunctious. *Kabuki* is still considered a "museum theatre", as the performance traditions were consolidated between the 1500s and 1800s and remain in effect today. The theatre was established over a longer period of time than *noh*, and was developed more recently. However, the consistency of performance traditions and rituals of the theatre still in place give *kabuki* a "museum theatre" quality. *Kabuki* is also ritualized by the codified gestures used. Still performed exclusively by men today, in the name of tradition and performance style, the codified gestures are particularly important in the portrayal of women. Certain gestures demonstrate the character's femininity even though the actor portraying her is male. Even the experience of the audience member is codified within the tradition, with many audience members yelling out performer's family names at moments of exquisite skill or climactic movement. This harkens to an earlier performance space in the more rowdy teahouse, giving the audience a role to play in the ritual of theatre attendance. The event of a performance afternoon also has its own rituals unique to the *kabuki* theatre. Beyond the arrival at the theatre and the purchasing of tickets, meals are often consumed in between acts and the boxed lunches bought at the theatre are as much a part of the performance attendance ritual as any moment within the play.

*Kabuki* also draws attention to its performative nature in elements of presentational theatricality. Costumes, sets props and even the preshow painted curtains are elaborate and vivid. Just as in *noh*, there is no attempt to represent real-life situations believably, but there is instead a focus on the presentation of the story. However, *kabuki* goes about this in a very different way. The elements of the theatre are, instead of scaled back and reduced, amplified and intensified. Things may not resemble their real life counterparts and instead go beyond them to show a grander more beautiful and extravagant version of them. Spectacle is a driving force in *kabuki* with many moments of theater magic used in the plays. Trap doors, revolving stages, flying mechanisms and onstage instant costume changes make the impossible possible in reality defying moments of magic only possible on the stage. Music and dance are integral to *kabuki*, reminding the audience of the performative nature of the art. Characters will engage in elongated emotional outbursts often crying, laughing or stomping in rage for minutes at a time. While these moments don't reflect the reality of emotions, they are a presentational device used to explore the theatricality of emotions. Stagehands are used in a way similar to *noh* assisting actors with props and costumes, reminding the audience they are in a theatre. There are also references to authors or actors stage names in a play. "Don't you look like famous *kabuki* actor so and so?" This not only reminds the audience of the performative nature of *kabuki*, but gives the play a life within and without the theatre, crossing the barriers of the narrative into the experience of the stage and theatre. The presentational theatricality is achieved in markedly different ways from *noh*. The emphasis is on exaggeration and meta-theatricality based on spectacle rather than contemplative absence.

This aesthetic of presence, the vitality and exuberance of *kabuki*, activates a different sensory experience from *noh*. However, the focus is still on the sensory rather than cerebral explorations of narrative. *Kabuki* is a loud theatre with music and drums used not only during climactic moments, but as the rumbling of coming doom or triumph.

Movements and vocals are stylized in such a way that removes them from a realistic exploration of daily life. Instead the stylized performance presents an abstraction of reality revolving around performer skill and image-based emotional experience in the audience. Emotions are indicated through codified gestures and explored as performance. While still very far from any realism in the theatre, *kabuki* engages a different extreme than *noh*. The performance tradition revolves around the aesthetics of presence.

PART TWO  
PLAY ANALYSES

## THE DAY ON WHICH A MAN DIES

Tennessee Williams donated *The Day on Which a Man Dies (an Occidental Noh Play)* to a UCLA library in 1970. It was included in a box of original manuscripts sold to finance a trip back to Asia. The play went unperformed and unpublished until 2008, when Annette J. Saddik edited and published a collection of late Williams plays. Allean Hale writes about the play in her article chronicling her discovery and analysis of the script:

Tennessee Williams, who aired publicly the most intimate details of his life, left behind one play that is so private it may never be performed. Locked in a California library, it remains secret because of its form – an experiment few critics would accept – its subject, the playwright’s fear of madness and suicide, and because it involves a fellow playwright who did commit suicide in a violently sensational way: Yukio Mishima. (“Secret” 1)

The play was dedicated to Mishima, and Hale suspects it was written in Japan or soon after returning as a gift to thank him for hosting Williams and Merlo on their trip. The very short two-scene play involves characters in a situation very similar to those of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. Hale and other scholars have argued that this short play was a first draft of or perhaps a first experiment into the emotional core of the play which would fail spectacularly in New York almost a decade later.

Of Williams’s late plays, this one is the most obviously and directly pulling from Japanese theatrical tradition. Williams gave the play a subtitle indicating that the play is to be considered an occidental *noh*. While it is certainly debatable as to whether any occidental play can be a *noh* and vice versa, the subtitle indicates intent. Framing the play as an experiment in the dramatic form of *noh* is a clear statement from the playwright on how to read it. This framing encourages us to view the piece in relation to the aesthetics as well as the dramaturgical structure of *noh*. As Williams also had experiences in the *kabuki* theatre, aesthetic elements from *kabuki* also find their way into the play. However, this is an occidental *noh* play, a contradiction of terms that notes the departure from *noh* into a different cultural experience. The play is opened by the subtitle in a way that

allows us to experience it without either an expectation of poetic realism, Williams's modus operandi, or an expectation of a pure mimicry of *noh*.

From the very beginning of the play we can see this style at work. The "Oriental" character who begins the play situates us in a very specific context for the writing of the play. Reading the play today, when the term oriental has been so rigorously critiqued, the character name is discomfiting (Said). However, this "oriental" character does not enact a stereotype of homogenized Asian culture. He instead names himself in Japanese, using the Japanese word for oriental. Upon entering the stage he says "Tōyōjin" and the word is projected in both Japanese and English. In Japanese, this word is an older, domestically derived name for the people of the Asian continent, rather than the Western imported word "ajya hito" made from combining the Japanese word for people and a word made from the sound of the word "Asia" in English. So, in some way, the character named Oriental is enacting a specifically Japanese self. The term was used frequently in the 60s and only began to receive critique in the 70s and wasn't even removed from legal documents in the United States until as late as 2009 (Wertheimer). It seems as though the choice to name the character the Oriental, instead of the Japanese Person, was not done in a demeaning way, but rather a descriptive way using the language of the moment. Naming him the Oriental also gives him a general name which allows him to shift between specific roles. He begins as the Oriental but then becomes more specific characters and theatrical functions such as a law student or chorus.

The character names in this play are all allegorical and symbolic. The Oriental is later joined by the Man and the Woman. While these characters exist in specific realities with identifiable personal histories in the play, they are named in a way that extends them beyond the play. This Man is one man; however, he can also be seen in some ways as every man, as the first man, as the last man. The Oriental in particular is functioning within this play as multiple discreet characters, as well as in the allegorical way. Williams uses the Oriental as an expedient stage device, having the character function as a narrator,

stagehand and minor supporting characters. The Oriental is also a manifestation of the Japanese influence on the play as many of the theatrical conventions of *noh* and *kabuki* in the play are enacted by this character.

As the play begins, the Oriental enters the stage and names himself in Japanese and proceeds to tell us the eventual end to the play.

ORIENTAL

Tōyōjin

(He then moves several paces aside and beneath the title in Japanese appears the title in English, projected in a vividly contrasting color.)

ORIENTAL

(as Chorus)The day on which a man dies begins at the midnight which closes the day before his death-day.

This naming and plot description mimic the *noh* convention of characters naming themselves as they enter the stage. Traditionally, the *waki* character, who is typically a travelling priest who encounters and speaks with the main *shite* character, enters the space first and tells us who he is and where he is going. Here, the Oriental names himself and then tells us both where the play and plot are going. When he speaks of the “the day on which a man dies” he could be speaking of both the play and the day itself. In both readings we are being informed of the outcome, which mimics the pre-knowledge of story found in the majority of Japanese *noh* and *kabuki* audiences.

After this introduction to the play world and its theatrical conventions, we are introduced to the Man and Woman whose quarrel we will follow through the rest of the play. The Man is described in detail in the stage directions. He is wearing:

flesh-colored tights on which are painted in color his anatomical details: pink nipples, blue outlines of skeletal prominences, arteries and musculature, blond hair at armpits. A vivid green silk fig leaf covers his groin. He is still young, his physique muscled and tendoned as if his work were a laborer’s. His face is ravaged by the rage apparent in the canvasses. (Williams, “Travelling” 16)

This artist is costumed in a presentation of the human form rather than a representation of it. This mimics the abstract and theatrical *kabuki* make-up where a representation of the

character is painted on the actor's face in order to give the audience information about the character as well as present these characteristics in an aesthetically interesting way. The silk leaf used to censor his genitals is also a codified cultural icon, similar to the personality information found in *kabuki* makeup. We have a complex set of cultural associations connected to the use of a fig leaves in censoring anatomical features. This use of culturally codified gesture reflects ideas from aesthetics of both *noh* and *kabuki* and is the most clear example within the play of an "occidentalization" of *noh*.

As the action of the scene begins, the Woman enters the scene and the Oriental shifts into the character of a Japanese law student. This ability of the character to shift from a generalized abstraction into a discreet individual is reminiscent of the role of the chorus in *noh*. The shift between characters is reminiscent of the shift between pronouns as the chorus moves from a narrator and commentator to embodying and speaking for the *shite*. The Oriental will fluidly enact these shifts throughout the play, returning as other characters and stagehands and resuming his position as narrator and chorus. The Oriental is left on stage to sit silently next to the action that happens between the Man and Woman, visually resembling the chorus seated to the side of the action in *noh*. The first moment of dialogue in the play then begins between the Man and Woman:

WOMAN

(opens the sliding door in the partition) *Ha!*

MAN

(staring straight ahead of him fiercely) *You still don't know that-?*

WOMAN

The hotel-manager told me-

MAN

(his face quivering with rage) *I can't be interrupted when I'm-*

WOMAN

That you were destroying your-

MAN

At WORK!

-Room! WOMAN  
 I have always locked my studio against you. MAN  
 This is not- WOMAN  
 GET THE- MAN  
 A studio, this is- WOMAN  
 FUCK OUT! MAN  
 A room in a hotel. WOMAN  
 Where I work is my- MAN  
 You've had the furniture removed? WOMAN  
 Studio! MAN  
 This isn't work, this is- WOMAN  
 (fists clenching) OUT. NOW! OUT! MAN

This overlapping dialogue engages rhythm in the sonic world of the play. In combination with the Japanese music used to highlight specific moments, this rhythmic dialogue activates musicality. Throughout the couple's fight, doors are slammed using sound to punctuate the argument much as the drums are used to punctuate moments in *noh*. While not a direct quote of the chanting and rhythmic drums in *noh*, this could be seen as another element of occidental exploration of the form, adapting the rhythm into the dialogue. The overlapping sentences also function in multiple ways linguistically. By piecing together the interrupted sentences they can be read as complete and spoken by a single character. The sentences can also read as completed by the other character. The

Man might be saying “I can’t be interrupted when I’m at work!” or the Man and Woman’s lines can be read together as “I can’t be interrupted when I’m that you were destroying your at work” which sounds, while grammatically ungraceful, like “I can’t be interrupted when I’m destroying my work.” The overlapping dialogue not only moves the scene into a rhythmically rich place, it also moves it into the realm of multiple and layered meanings derived from the reading of sentences as both continuous and interrupted, dialogue as both conversation and monologue. This fluidity of meaning is often found in the poetic writing of *noh* as well as in the shifting between pronouns in the chorus.

The play continues in this vein of overlapped dialogue with pronounced moments of silence or shifts to longer monologues. The juxtaposition of these writing styles is reminiscent of the sharp changes in tempo in both *noh* and *kabuki*. Early in the play the Man uses the spray paint he has been working with on his paintings to spray a bright red paint all over the woman in her purple sequined gown. This visual effect of this would be stunning, reminiscent of the silk blood used in *kabuki* and as visually compelling as the vividly bright costumes used in both *noh* and *kabuki*. After spraying her, the Man makes rapid shifts from rage to humor:

MAN

Red paint on purple sequins! *Marrrrrr*-velous!(He throws back his head and laughs so hard that he staggers.)

This larger than life laughter, which is so big that it causes him to stagger, is mimicking not only the exhibition of skill through large laughs by *kabuki* actors, but also the sudden shift in tempo and emotion that comes with the *noh* actor stamping his foot on the resonant stage. This and other emotional outbursts throughout the play read as out of character or anti-realistic when one attempts to rationalize them psychologically. However, when one looks at them as a reference to *noh* and *kabuki* techniques they begin

to come across as shifts in rhythm and tone and contribute to the sensory experience of the play.

The fight between the Man and the Woman throughout the first scene does not result in a change of perspective or a resolution of conflict, as we so often see in Western realism. This argument is a suspension of a moment in the couple's emotional reality. The plot does not progress throughout the fight; rather, we explore the moment of the fight, the emotional reality of these two individuals. As such, the Man and Woman circle around their positions, the Man repeating his struggle with his work and need for solitude, the Woman repeating her need for a legal position in the man's life for a secure future. This operates much in the same way as *noh* does, ruminating on a feeling, or a moment before action. Instead of resolving the conflict, the Man and Woman continue arguing and attacking each other physically and verbally until the final moment of Scene One. With no prompting, the Man enters the Woman's room and both sit "side by side in grave silence." A stage assistant enters and removes a panel to reveal a painting of a tree in bloom. This revelation of a direct reference to the tree painted on the *noh* stage in this climactic image of the first scene reminds us of our physical and theatrical context. The stage assistant then places a flower in a vase between the couple which Williams calls the "pale, delicate, and sorrowful flower of reconciliation." The Man and Woman make a gesture of reconciliation by holding hands. This silent moment to end the first scene does not address the plot preceding it, but instead is an image that we have been emotionally prepared for by the argument. Just as in *kabuki*, the final climactic image, often a tableau, is the emotional climax of the play, not a narrative-based revelation.

As Scene Two begins we find the woman in tights painted with anatomical details like the ones the man began the play in. This costume shift not only indicates the post-coital moment we begin the scene in, but also a shift in tone. *Noh* plays are often divided into two parts, with the *shite* entering in a new costume as a different representation of their character, often their true supernatural self. The structure of this play experiments

with this dramaturgy. Throughout the following scene, the Oriental reminds us of the Man's fate, his impending suicide. The Oriental takes a more involved role in this scene as narrator, speaking long monologues over the top of silent action from the couple.

After the Woman exits the scene, leaving the Man in his misery, the Oriental begins to narrate the set of unavoidable actions set in motion at the beginning of the play. Just as in *kabuki* and *noh* the narrative is unavoidable both through circumstance and the audience's awareness of the story's conclusion; we know that the Man will be committing suicide. We have been told from both the play's title and second spoken line that the Man will die today, and suicide has been the topic of conversation throughout, used as a weapon in the argument between the Man and Woman. This only leaves the completion of that action by the Man. In the traditional structure of *noh*, the final moments are the *shite*'s climactic dance. The Man's suicide functions as that dance in this play. He drinks the Lysol which has been on stage from the very beginning. The Lysol was a looming threat since the Woman described it as an instrument of suicide the Man kept nearby to torment her. As he writhes in his dance of death, the stage assistant brings down three rice paper sheets onto which an image of the Woman's body is projected. He breaks through the paper three times with accompanying percussive music. Williams writes this long set of stage directions describing the death

The percussion is augmented by wind instruments, grotesquely lyrical and mocking. It takes some moments longer for the man to crash through this third projection, and when he does, he's dying. He has his hand in his mouth to gag his cry, and his teeth have drawn blood. The percussion is still building. The man collapses onto his knees and now he tries to cry out but hasn't the breath. He crumples: dies. An abrupt stillness.

This climactic build of rhythm and movement and shift to an abrupt stillness and silence bring us to where a *noh* or *kabuki* play would traditionally leave its audience: at a climactic final image with no dénouement or resolution of events.

However, this is an occidental *noh* play, so Williams does explore a resolution of sorts by allowing the Woman to have a long monologue of her own, a kind of final dance

for her character. She goes through her own struggle of accepting her love of the Man and finally returns to wail over his dead body in an iconic image of grief. This final moment of the play leaves the audience listening to the Oriental expounding on the ideas of life and death while a very simple stage image exploring the emotion of grief is presented. As the curtain falls, the Man has died in fulfillment of the narrative promise of the title and the Oriental. However, the play's subtitle has also been manifested.

Williams wrote an occidental *noh* play in all of its contradiction. *The Day on Which a Man Dies* exists as both a *noh* (and *kabuki*) play infused with Western cultural ideas and theatrical techniques as well as a Western play infused with Japanese cultural ideas and theatrical techniques.

## IN THE BAR OF A TOKYO HOTEL

*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* was first performed in 1969 after Williams's career had already taken a turn for the worse. While there is no specific textual evidence or quotes from Williams indicating that this is a longer, more fully realized version of *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, the striking similarity of plot, tone and characters seem to indicate that the two plays were at least related. The play's title resists being as direct a reference to *noh* as the subtitle of *The Day on Which a Man Dies*. The reference to place in the title still gives the reader and audience member a clue as to the stylistic source of the piece. The style of the titles also connects *The Day on Which a Man Dies* and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. The first describes the moment in time the play will explore, while the second describes the location of theoretically the same event.

The play opens on a beautiful woman and Japanese Barman in the location described in the title. The Barman begins the action as "he raises a metal shaker, a few moments after the rise of the curtain, as if to signal the start of the scene," (Williams, "Theatre 7" 3). This image of raising the shaker to above his shoulder, the same position of the traditional drums used in *noh*, and making a percussive sound to start the action of the play is a direct quotation of the drummers in *noh* beginning the play with sharp strike of the drum. In a playful twist this action is given to the Barman, who functions in the play similarly to the Oriental in *The Day on Which a Man Dies*. The Barman also resembles the Oriental in his allegorical general naming. He has no character beyond being the Barman, no specific personal history. He also enacts many of the *noh* theatrical techniques in the play, such as naming himself directly, commenting upon and describing action in the play by verbalizing character's intentions. However, the action of percussively starting the play with the metal shaker is a poignant reference and a manifestation of the influence of *noh* on the play. The movement functions both stylistically and meta-theatrically in the play. The metal shaker sets up the importance of

alcohol in the play and references the theatrical traditions that are going to be used throughout.

The play's opening dialogue sets up the rhythm and repetition that the play uses. Miriam, the partner of the artist Mark who is not yet on stage, talks with the Barman:

	MIRIAM
I like this room.	
	BARMAN
Thank you.	
	MIRIAM
There is an atmosphere of such vitality in Tokyo.	
	BARMAN
Thank you.	
	MIRIAM
You understand and speak English remarkably well.	
	BARMAN
Thank you.	
	MIRIAM
You have a very impressive suicide rate.	
	BARMAN
Thank you.	
	MIRIAM
I don't think you understood what I said.	
	BARMAN
I was.	

This exploration of rhythm from the start of the play in short statements and replies as well as the repetition of "thank you" over and over again introduces us to the style of dialogue Williams is experimenting with. Moving against realism and the lyrical poetry he was known for, this dialogue is focused on the rhythm of sound and repetition. What matters more than what is said is what is unsaid, the dramatic tension flowing underneath the seemingly empty dialogue exchanges above the emotional exchange. This exploration

of an aesthetic quality of absence and space will continue through the play, particularly in the unfinished sentences that Williams used in in most of his late plays. The unfinished sentences found throughout this play end with the punctuation of the period but without the completion of the thought. Each character does this at least once, but the Barman and Miriam often speak in incomplete sentences. In this exchange from early in Part I, the Barman begins to exhibit discomfort at Miriam's advances.

BARMAN

Excuse me while I. (He carries a tray of drinks offstage)

MIRIAM

Yes. The best idea. Cable to Leonard. Place in his hands (The Barman returns with the tray. She observes him in the mirror.)Hmmm. Your activity with the shaker is very distracting.

BARMAN

Pardon me. I am the Barman.

MIRIAM

"Inner resources of serenity." Some professor mentioned them to me once. Hog-wash, wash a hog in it, don't turn it on me. "Inner resources of serenity" is a polite way of describing a lack of vital energy. There may be exceptions but.

BARMAN

The light from the mirror is in my eyes.

MIRIAM

For the light in your eyes be grateful. I am happy to lower the focus of the. Don't stand behind the bar.

BARMAN

My instruction is.

MIRIAM

Your employer wouldn't object if you stood in front of the bar.

These unfinished sentences have an openness that allows multiple readings of meaning and intent. Some feel like a character is being cut off, some like the character trails off, some as though the rest of the sentence is so apparent that it does not need to be spoken aloud. The audience is given the space to complete the sentence silently. Just as *noh* removes stage trappings and movement to create theatricality in absence, Williams

removes the ends of sentences to create space for the audience to meditate on the lack of words and the importance of the unsaid. Statements can also be completed by other characters, though not necessarily in the same way the sentence would have been completed if spoken by only one character. When Miriam states that “there may be exceptions but” her statement can either be read as completed in silence or completed by the Barman. The Barman’s response makes the statement “there may be an exception but the light from the mirror is in my eyes.” This reads very differently with more poetic meaning than narrative fulfillment. This ability for statements to drift between characters reflects the use of language and voice in *noh*. The characters are not necessarily talking to one another, but completing each other’s ideas, a very different use of dialogue from poetic realism. This feels antirealistic, yet somehow grabs at the truth of these characters. Like the concept of *monomane* in *noh*, the imitation of the essence of things, this style of communication goes beyond the surface of characters communicating with one another through dialogue and moves toward presenting an essence of their relationship through language use.

When Mark, Miriam’s husband, enters the bar later in Part I, wind chimes are heard. This musically and rhythmically marks his entrance which also happens in *noh* when characters enter. This not only signifies the importance of his character, but the sound of wind chimes also pulls the natural world into the play, as happens with the trees planted along the bridge to the stage and nature imagery in *noh* plays. While Miriam goes into longer memory-filled monologues right before Mark enters, the dialogue between Mark and Miriam returns to a short and rhythmic style. Going beyond the incomplete sentences between Miriam and the Barman, Mark doesn’t even complete words.

MARK

For the first time, nothing that sep, sep!

MIRIAM

Are you trying to say separates?

MARK

Yes, separates, holds at some dis!

MIRIAM

To translate your incoherence, holds at some distance, is that it?

MARK

You understand what I'm trying to say.

This completion of words mimics what the audience is doing to understand the incomplete sentences. The relationship between Mark and Miriam is such that unfinished words cannot get in the way of communication. It is in what is unsaid and incomplete that they truly understand each other and are able to complete each other. Williams is using the *noh*-like aesthetic of absence to communicate something about these characters' relationships. He is presenting their relationship in language use rather than realistic dialogue.

Just as the *noh* play and consequently *The Day on Which a Man Dies* has two parts, so does *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. After a climactic argument between Miriam and Mark in front of the Barman, Mark flings Miriam off stage. While certainly not in line with the more meditative approach to theatre in *noh*, this recalls some of the climactic endings of intense emotional moments followed by a dramatic exit found in *kabuki*. The second part of the play begins with Miriam and the Barman in the bar once more. The scene mimics the narrative structure of the first part but with an increased tempo and more language filling the space. This escalation of language in longer statements and responses mimics the increase in speed felt incrementally throughout a *noh* play.

Leonard, Mark's agent, has come to Tokyo to help get Mark home to recover from his apparent mental and physical illness. This introduction of a new character in order to explain the background of a narrative or give new narrative information is also found in *noh* with the *ai-kyogen* character found in many plays. Leonard is not a developed character in this world, but a theatrical device. He gives the audience information and the characters a location to send their language and emotions towards.

Miriam uses Leonard's presence and absence from the stage as a motivator to narrate her experience in the moment. As he exits the scene she expresses her figurative transformation into a ghost:

MIRIAM

Some women grow suddenly old. They go to bed young, well, reasonably young women and when they wake up in the morning and go to the mirror, they face – what? – A specter! Yes, they face a specter! Themselves, yes, but not young, reasonably young, women, no, not anymore!

This shift she is describing reflects the shift of the *shite* from a human into their true supernatural self. This shift also happens in a way when Mark inevitably dies, just as the Man inevitably died in *The Day on Which a Man Dies*. Mark goes from alive to dead, a revelation of his truth in some ways. Since he is fated to die from the beginning of the play, his transformation into death is in some ways a revelation of his true supernatural existence as a ghost-like presence hovering over the end of the play.

Mark's death is not built towards and treated as a climactic event. While Mark has been seriously ill throughout the play and his death is no surprise, it happens with no grace or ceremony in the narrative. He is speaking about death metaphorically, saying he is finished with pretension. Wind chimes are heard as his voice dies out marking that something of importance is about to happen. He then simply says:

MARK

Put the words back in a box and nail down the lid. *Fini*. –Wait for me just ten minutes. Watch the clock and clock me. I'll remove the tissue and talcum my face and be back in ten minutes, exactly.

(He staggers and falls to the floor. Leonard crouches over him quickly, and feels his pulse. Leonard motions to the Barman.)

The Barman helps carry the body offstage and the death of Mark is complete. There is no climactic dance of death, but a simple and narratively unexplained collapse. There are no extreme reactions, no screams and characters rushing to save him. He simply falls over, his pulse is checked, and his body is carried off stage. This exploration play is an exploration of dramaturgy that relies on the images preceding and proceeding the event

rather than the narrative importance of the event itself. This takes the focus away from revealing new information in a story and allows the theatrical event to enact a meditation on image and sensory experience.

## THE MILK TRAIN DOESN'T STOP HERE ANYMORE

In the published version of the play, Williams includes a quote from *Sailing to Byzantium* by William Butler Yeats as an epigraph.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
 And fastened to a dying animal  
 It knows not what it is; and gather me  
 Into the artifice of eternity. (Yeats qtd. in Williams, "Theatre 5" 1)

The poem is appropriate as it thematically links to the play, which revolves around a dying diva. Quoting Yeats also has additional significance because of the influence of *noh* on Yeats's own work. *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* is the first of Williams's major staged works to show significant influence from the traditional theatre of Japan. While there are elements of *noh* explored in the play, most of the theatrical techniques reflect those of *kabuki*. Williams even mentions *kabuki* in the author's notes. He describes the stage assistants as a pair that "function in a way that's between the *Kabuki* Theatre of Japan and the chorus of Greek theatre. My excuse, or reason, is that I think the play will come off better the further it is removed from conventional theatre, since it's been rightly described as an allegory and as a 'sophisticated fairy tale,'" (Williams, "Theatre 5" 3). These stagehands are used in the same way as in *kabuki* and act as theatrical expedients to deal with props and costumes. They are in this way "invisible" to the audience. The manifestation of the seen and unseen simultaneously references the ideas of absence Williams is experimenting with in these later plays. However, these stagehands also manifest cues, telling actors to do things and adding an element of meta-theatricality that reminds us we are watching a performance. The exaggerated costumes and jeweled and exotically clothed characters also explore the hyper-theatricality of *kabuki* and its aesthetic of presence.

The play begins with a prologue where the stagehands describe their function in the play. This immediately disrupts any expectation in the audience for a representation

of reality. They perform a flag raising ceremony, a ritual that begins and ends the performance. The ritual elements pull from the old Elizabethan tradition of raising a flag at the theatre on performance day while also signaling the start of a day within the narrative of the play. The stagehands, named generically One and Two in the script, narrate their actions and provide information about the setting and characters. Continuing in the *noh* tradition of declaiming names and places, they also introduce themselves as a theatrical device.

	ONE
We are also a device	
	TWO
A theatrical device.	
	ONE
A theatrical device of ancient and oriental origin.	
	TWO
With occidental variations, however.	
	TOGETHER
We are Stage Assistants. We move the screens that mask the interior playing areas of the stage presentation.	
	ONE
We fetch and carry.	
	TWO
Furniture and props.	
	ONE
To make the presentation – the play or masque or pageant – move more gracefully, quickly through the course of the two final days of Mrs. Goforth’s existence.	

These theatrical devices explain themselves and the style of the play in the first moments. Williams draws the audience’s attention to his exploration of *kabuki* and *noh* staging techniques at the opening of the play. When One describes the stagehands as “a theatrical device of ancient and oriental origin with occidental variations” Williams is showing his hand as a playwright and offering an explanation of dramaturgical intention to the audience. This prologue also contains the information that we are about to witness the

final two days of Mrs. Goforth's life. This information removes the need to follow the plot for a narrative understanding of the play. Williams is telling us to place our focus elsewhere, since this play, like the plays of *kabuki*, assumes the audience already knows the outcome of the story and is viewing the play for a sensory and emotional experience.

During Scene One, a stranger named Chris enters Mrs. Goforth's villa to the sound of a sea wave crashing below the mountain. In *kabuki* percussive instruments and loud rumbling drum rolls are used to create the sound various water noise, such as rain, rivers or waves. This sound is usually heard underneath a scene as the emotion builds towards a climactic expression in a stylized gesture called a *mie*. This sound of waves crashing occurs exponentially more frequently until Mrs. Goforth's death. The build in tempo and emotion feels similar to the *kabuki* build towards a *mie*. While no character strikes a highly stylized pose and crosses their eyes as they do in *kabuki*, Chris always verbalizes the wave crashing by saying the word "boom." No other character seems to hear his onomatopoeia of waves crashing below. The "booms" exist as markers for the audience foreshadowing Mrs. Goforth's impending death, happening more frequently as the death draws nearer. The vocalization of the sound is a stylized way of marking the moment theatrically.

The impending death, of which the audience is acutely aware throughout the play, is also marked in Mrs. Goforth's name. The aptonym relates to Mrs. Goforth's journey towards death. As she "goes forth" into the life beyond she spends the majority of her time reminiscing about the past, particularly in the writing of her memoirs. In speaking to her friend, the spectacularly named Witch of Capri who also goes by Connie, she describes how memory is all of her life.

#### MRS. GOFORTH

Has it ever struck you, Connie, that life is all memory, except for the one present moment that goes by you so quick you hardly catch it going? It's really all memory, Connie, except for each passing moment. What I saw just now said to you is a memory now – recollection. Uh-hummm... (She paces the terrace.) –I'm up now. When I was at the table is a memory, now. (She arrives at the edge of the

lighted area downstage right, and turns.) – when I turned at the other end of the terrace is a memory, now... Practically everything is a memory to me, now, so I'm writing my memoirs... (She points up.) Shooting star: it's shot; -a memory now. Four husbands, all memory now. All lovers, all memory now. (Williams, "Theatre 5" 46-47)

This passing of life into memory is the same as Mrs. Goforth's journey towards death.

The movement of the play as a journey towards death and into memory is reminiscent of the journey many *noh* plays take towards ghosts as characters move towards death and the supernatural.

Near the end of scene three, *The Witch of Capri* reveals Chris's character as a kind of Angel of Death, visiting women two days before they die. This makes sense out of the "booms" and foreboding crashing waves that have sounded since Chris's entrance and makes Chris into a trickster character who reveals their true nature. This revelation of a trickster is a common trope in *Kabuki* plays, with the trickster normally revealed as a fox, considered a supernatural creature in Japanese mythology capable of magic which is normally used to fool people. Chris, while not a fox, is revealed to either be an omen of death or a cause of it somehow. In the telling of this information, the *Witch of Capri* ventures into stylized storytelling. The stage assistants place braziers with blue flames next to the Witch. "The flame flickers eerily on the Witch's face as she tells what she knows of Chris. Music plays against her stylized recitation," (Williams, "Theatre 5" 51). This stylized recitation highlights the play's exuberant theatricality, another example of *kabuki*'s influence on the style of the piece.

The stagehands break into the theatrical world on occasion, sometimes as minor characters, other times as more abstract theatrical devices. They interact in scenes in ways that bring attention to the exploration of hyper-theatricality in *kabuki*. Near the end of the play, as Mrs. Goforth is approaching death, the stagehands stand beside the banner of Mrs. Goforth raised at the opening of the play, a symbolic act that will also accompany her death. They begin the scene by crassly describing the current situation.

ONE

Cable her daughter that the old bitch is dying.

TWO

The banner of the griffin is about to be lowered.

BLACKIE

(as if translating their speech into polite paraphrase) Cable Mrs. Goforth's daughter at Point Goforth, Long Island, that her mother is not expected to survive the night, and I'm waiting for – immediate – instructions.

This cuing from both within and without the scene is an enactment of the theatre of presence *kabuki* embodies. Blackie's "translation" highlights this action of cuing. The "invisible" stagehands are directly impacting the language of the play without directly engaging with other characters. They seem to go unheard by the other characters while catalyzing events in the scene. Their simultaneous enactment of both visibility and invisibility turns the audience's attention to their theatrical, presentational nature and that of the play's style as a whole.

The play ends again with an unavoidable death, known to the audience from very early in the play, perhaps a frequent theme in Williams's later plays. The stage assistants lower the banner at the moment of Mrs. Goforth's death, bookending the play in the ritual significance of the act. In the final moments of the play after her death, Chris once again utters the word "boom" after the sound of the crashing waves. However, this time someone hears him.

CHRIS

*Boom!*

BLACKIE

What does it mean?

CHRIS

It says "Boom" and that's what it means. No translation. No explanation, just "Boom."

The "boom" that Chris has been vocalizing, the sound of the waves, means nothing more than "boom." Williams offers no further explanation vocalized by the characters. There is no translatable "meaning" to the sound. This expression of sound through language as an

emotional sensory experience, the audience and characters feeling what “boom” means instead of translating it, is getting at the core of the *kabuki* experience. There is a visual and emotional build up and release rather than a narrative climax and catharsis from that cerebral understanding of the events. Instead *kabuki*, and in some ways *noh*, builds towards a climax visually and emotionally and then concludes with an exploration of that moment. All you have experienced previously was preparing you to experience that final moment. For me, the final “boom” is that moment in this play. Williams has used the theatrical tactics of *kabuki* to move slowly and build incrementally towards that final “boom.” While Mrs. Goforth’s death is the narrative climax of the play, the knowledge given to me at the beginning of the play makes this an inevitable end and decreases that moment’s emotional effect. Instead, Chris’s final “boom” is the emotional conclusion to the play. The “boom” manifests the layered meaning and aesthetic of presence built towards throughout the play allowing for an emotional, but not narratively earned catharsis.

## CONCLUSION

In his late plays Williams was perhaps working within the freedom experienced by the Man in his new style of artwork in *The Day on Which a Man Dies*. While the critics weren't appreciative, he was clearly doing something of artistic worth and that work deserves to be considered in every possible interpretation. Looking at Williams's late plays with an understanding of the dramaturgical models he was exploring opens new ways to appreciate these under-produced and under-studied works. Connecting these plays to a different element of the playwright's biography doesn't negate the influence that drugs and mental decline had on his work. It expands the interpretation of where these works come from and what part of Williams's creative genius they were channeling. This move out of poetic realism can be read in many ways, but I believe an appreciation for the traditional performing arts of Japan gives significant insight into these later plays and these three plays in particular. The influence of *noh* and *kabuki* on Williams's writing speaks to the global nature of performance and the ability of theatre to transcend cultural and political differences and give us a language to explore together. Japanese theatre offered Williams a new way to experiment with his writing, opening the door to explore space, stillness, silence and meta-theatricality in his work. Earle Ernst, in his article "The Influence of Japanese Theatrical Style on Western Theatre" writes:

The traditional theatre of Japan, however, continues to attract those Western theatre workers who are searching for a new style, completely free from the limitations of realism. Realism removes poetry from the theatre, for "real men" do not speak in blank verse or in alexandrines. It limits the setting to the photographic. It requires, within a given act or scene, that the time passing on the stage closely resembles that passing in the auditorium. It reduces stage space, and the actor within it, to the dimensions of real life. Thus it is technically impossible in the context of realism to create a theatrical image larger than life, for the shape, size, and texture of the image must give the impression of corresponding with actuality. (Earnst 138)

*Noh* and *kabuki* try to go beyond mimicry of reality and dive into the essence of a thing poetically and emotionally. This presentation of reality, rather than the representation of

it, was appealing to Williams at this time of his life. As quoted earlier in the thesis, Williams said to a reporter “in my early plays, there was a great rush of emotion backed up in me that found release. In the later plays, I had to dig deeper,” (Williams qtd. in Christiansen E24). Williams was getting at something deeper in these later plays. In his search for a dramaturgy to support these deep discoveries, he had to look halfway around the world in a culture very different from his own.

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