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The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia (review)

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Modern Drama, Volume 48, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 219-221 (Review)

Published by University of Toronto Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2005.0021>

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South Pacific are “[f]orced to don a single stereotypical mask and to interact with white characters within a realist dramaturgy” (158). The one-dimensional portrayals in *South Pacific* are not “realist dramaturgy” and are hardly comparable to the multi-dimensional characterizations limned by Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, Miller, and other realist playwrights. In addition, the book’s characterization of Jewish Depression-era social consciousness, while perspicacious, is so broadly construed that its applicability extends to non-musical entertainment as well. If, as Most suggests, the characters in *Babes in Arms* explore the “real test [of] whether you have the guts to take the chances life offers and do something with them” (99), then the same can be said of Clifford Odet’s 1935 play *Awake and Sing*. Cinema, too, demonstrated Jewish immigrant influences, represented by Harry Cohen, Louis Mayer, and the Warner Brothers, among others. The book provides little if anything to distinguish the genesis of Broadway musicals from dramas and films developed by Jews during the time. Finally, while the book insightfully pinpoints the social and ethnic self-consciousness of the musical’s creators, the importance of Yiddish language and music is missing. For this, one has to turn to Jack Gottlieb’s *Funny, It Doesn’t Sound Jewish*, which examines *Yiddishkeit* (“Yiddish-ness”) by Jewish songwriters and their Broadway musicals. Still, *Making Americans* is well worth reading for its copious research and wealth of original observations regarding the place and significance of Jewish artists who wove musical theatre into the fabric of American society.

PHILIP C. KOLIN, ed. *The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. Pp. xxix + 350, illustrated. \$89.95 (Hb).

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Tennessee Williams has been enjoying something of a posthumous critical renaissance. In the wake of the 1994 death of Williams’ self-styled literary executor, Lady St. Just (Maria Britneva), scholars gained new access to Williams’ unpublished papers, and New Directions published a series of important apprentice plays (*Not About Nightingales*, *Spring Storm*, *Stairs to the Roof*, and *Fugitive Kind*). Lyle Leverich’s definitive biography of Williams’ early years, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, appeared in 1995, while monographs by such scholars as David Savran, Ann Fleche, and Nicholas Pagan brought queer, poststructuralist, and postmodern perspectives to bear on their subject. And whereas the critical consensus used to be that Williams’ creative achievement was over by the early sixties, the later plays have been plausibly reassessed.

No one has energized Williams studies more than Philip C. Kolin. In addi-

tion to writing numerous essays, Kolin has authored a book on *A Streetcar Named Desire* for Cambridge University Press' Plays in Performance Series (2000) and edited two important collections: *Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism* (Greenwood, 1998), and *The Undiscovered Country: The Later Plays of Tennessee Williams* (Peter Lang, 2002). Now *The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia* joins yet another Kolin-edited text, *Tennessee Williams: A Guide to Research and Performance* (Greenwood, 1998), as an essential reference work on this giant of American theatre.

Williams presents a staggering challenge to such a project. He wrote at least seventy plays, two novels, five collections of stories, and two volumes of poems, as well as essays, memoirs, letters, and journals. The Encyclopedia's stated goal is therefore not comprehensiveness – clearly impossible in a single-volume work. Rather, the work's fifty-seven contributors and 162 entries aim to "provide essential, basic information to help readers understand the context and performance of Williams's work and the contours of his life into which it fits" (xi). Seeking to balance biography, cultural history, and literary exegesis, Kolin opts for four types of entries: on individuals, on places, on works, and on concepts. Kolin has sought out recognized authorities in each sub-area, ensuring factual accuracy and cutting-edge analysis.

While the Encyclopedia covers the biographical waterfront – roughly half of the entries are on individuals important to Williams, ranging from writers, publishers, agents, and theatre people to family, friends, and lovers – fifty-four of the entries, one-third of the total, are on named Williams works. (Williams' one-acts receive extensive coverage but are not always listed individually.) Useful entries on plays both prominent and obscure provide brief production histories, along with concise explication, selective bibliographies, and a production still. Extensive attention is paid to Williams' fiction (in several entries), poetry, and essays, as well as to his journals, memoirs, correspondence, and even paintings. Film adaptations of Williams' plays are treated in a single, illuminating entry.

Psycho-biography is alive and well in these pages, as motifs in the work are continually traced back to authorial neuroses. Those who believe that Williams criticism has yet to free itself from the outsize Williams persona – arguably the writer's own best creation – may occasionally grow impatient, even while recognizing the conflation of man and work inherent in the volume's title. Seasoned Williams scholars seeking new perspectives will be drawn to the entries on key ideas, themes, ideologies, and theatrical techniques. As the preface claims, "these conceptual entries are both a synthesis of contemporary scholarly commentary on Williams and a synoptic guide for readers" – a book within a book (xiii). While these mini-essays occasionally devolve into catalogue, several are original and provocative. Here I would single out John Clum's "Gender and Sexuality," Brenda Murphy's "Politics," Kolin's "Race,"

and Thomas P. Adler's "Religion." One wishes that space could have been found for censorship, comedy, and stage technique. Pointedly, the encyclopedia lacks an entry on criticism; those seeking to trace Williams' critical reception must look elsewhere.

The Encyclopedia provides a fine biographical essay on Williams by Felicia Hardison Londré; a useful chronology (although performance-run statistics are inconsistently given); a somewhat erratic Guide to Related Topics ("Mythology" appears under "Family and Early History," while the "Awards, Collections, and Festivals" list omits "Manuscript Collections"); and up-to-date bibliographies of primary and secondary sources. Entries are helpfully cross-referenced. The entry on manuscript collections is especially welcome, but I missed a checklist of the various Williams newsletters and academic journals.

Occasional typos mar an otherwise exemplary edition. For instance, *Suddenly Last Summer*'s Catharine appears throughout as "Catherine" or even "Catheriene," and we learn that *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Mme. Le Monde* "has never been preformed" (216). The stray gaffe has slipped in, too, as when the "Journals" entry credits *You Can't Go Home Again* to Tom (rather than Thomas) Wolfe. No doubt the next edition will receive the scrupulous proofreading attention this outstanding work of scholarship deserves. Meanwhile, for students and scholars of American theatre, the appearance of *The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia* is cause for celebration.