

Abstracts

GIULIANA MUSCIO, A Transcultural Perspective on the Casting of *The Rose Tattoo*

The film *The Rose Tattoo* (Daniel Mann, 1955), based on a play written by Tennessee Williams specifically for Anna Magnani, constitutes a transcultural experience both in the narrative, since it is set within an Italian-American community, and in the performance style, because of the import of neorealist actress Anna Magnani, and of an emerging personality of Italian cinema such as Marisa Pavan. They were surrounded by actors and actresses coming from the Italian immigrant stage like Sandro Giglio (Father De Leo), Mimì Aguglia (Assunta), Rossana San Marco and Augusta Merighi (two actresses from the Broadway cast, who play the old women “chorus”). The presence of these performers, in addition to recovering the history of the Italian immigrant stage on American media, allows us to reconsider the impact of the Italian performance style in Hollywood cinema, and compare two “realist” approaches: the American one, at that time strongly affected by Lee Strasberg’s Method Acting (Actor’s Studio) and the neorealist approach.

ALESSANDRO CLERICUZIO, Tennessee Williams and Luchino Visconti: Various Stages of Outrage – and Censorship

The essay traces the early history of Williams’ theatre in Italy, on the background of the cultural conditions of the country in the PostWar years. *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* were presented to Italian audiences for the first time by Luchino Visconti, in some memorable productions in Rome and Milan (1946, 1949, 1951). The director’s aura, together with the novelty of the plays, caused very different reactions in critics and reviewers.

Many were outraged either by the subject matter or by the original style of the plays, and turned their attention to Visconti as the only real artist involved in these shows. The powerful connection of Visconti and Williams, though, also attracted the attention of the Bureau of Censorship, that had something to say on each and every project that involved the two artists.

CHRISTOPHE COLLARD and LAURA MICHIELS, *Complicity Across the Atlantic: A Literary Liaison between Two Androgynous Artists*

Never anxious about artistic ‘borrowing,’ Tennessee Williams reputedly considered himself heir to this perennial practice as he lavishly ‘littered’ his own ‘original’ works with overt and covert references to literary luminaries from past and present. And yet, it is safe to state that much of his cultural renown is due to his unique artistic sensitivity. However, with one fellow artist this barefaced borrowing takes on a reciprocal turn – nurtured by a shared fascination with the mythological figure of Orpheus, an ambitious adaptation of *Streetcar* by one of them, an equally shared admiration by and fascination for the actress Tallulah Bankhead, and finally a conspicuous copying of significant chunks from *The Eagle Has Two Heads* by the other. Indeed, the artistic interactions between Tennessee Williams and the French paragon of modernism Jean Cocteau strike by their repeated returns. This essay therefore picks up where leading Williams scholar Gilbert Debuscher’s analysis about the impact of Cocteau’s *Eagle* on *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore* left off thirty years ago. By both retracing the intricacies of their mutual influences while assessing the stylistic and semiotic means with which these came into being, it purports to present an analogy-based reassessment of the Williams-Cocteau interchange and of the so-called ‘problem of influence’ alike.

LORENZO PICIARELLI, *Orpheus et les autres: Repression, Racism, Alienation and Superstition in Orpheus Descending and La Putain Respectueuse*

In 1975, in the pages of his memoir, Tennessee Williams acknowledged the strong influence that the existentialism in Jean Paul Sartre’s theater had on his

activity as a playwright. Starting from this, the essay aims to analyze the many analogies between *Orpheus Descending* and *La Putain Respectueuse*. In a historical and political context common to both works, the two authors decided to stage topics such as repression, racism, alienation and superstition, while building two stories which are apparently very distant from each other but that, when carefully analyzed, seem to walk on parallel tracks, directed toward common goals. Despite the numerous stylistic differences, and different choices of registry (which makes *La Putain* an example of engagement, while pushing *Orpheus* towards a more psychological and introspective level), these two plays are twin creatures, driven by the same intention: the harsh critique against a strongly racist and narrow-minded America.

VINCENZO BAVARO, Chinese Affection: Tennessee Williams's *Eccentricities of a Nightingale* in Hong Kong

In 2003, established American director David Kaplan directed at the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre a production of Tennessee Williams's *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. By envisioning, and to some extent producing, a conversation between Williams's play and the city of Hong Kong, with its audiences and its social fabric, this essay hopes to reveal some heretofore underexplored threads in the play itself, and in the very act of cultural trafficking which is embedded in much of globalized dramatic practice. While much of the first half of this essay is devoted to an analysis of the play, its genealogy, and its critical history, the second half attempts a few interpretative moves, which draw connections between Hong Kong contemporary society and David Kaplan's directorial decisions. I will argue that while a few dynamics staged in Williams's play may already resonate with the Hong Kong audience, Kaplan's local production powerfully interpreted and developed some of the most significant threads running through it, namely a critique to gender conformity and to social propriety.

DJELAL KADIR, *A Transnational Streetcar Named Desire: An Omnibus Premiere, Mexico City, 1948*

The 1948 premiere production of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* in Mexico was an international event. This first Mexican-Spanish production was directed by the Japanese director Seki Sano, who had immigrated to Mexico from Japan in 1939. An avid student of the theatrical technique of the Russian Stanislavski, Seki Sano founded the Mexican semi-professional Teatro de la Reforma. This was the group that performed the Spanish premiere of Williams' *Streetcar* in the Palacio de Bellas Artes of Mexico City between December 4 and December 12, 1948 (ten performances in all). The extraordinary success of this *Streetcar* not only introduced Tennessee Williams to Mexican audiences in Spanish, it also made it possible for the Japanese immigrant Seki Sano and his group to revolutionize Mexican theater. Adding to the international dimension of this Spanish-language premiere of Williams' *Un tranvía llamo deseo* was the Polish-Mexican actor, and friend of Tennessee Williams, Wolf Ruvinskis in the lead role of the play's Stanley Kowalski. The significance of this event for Tennessee Williams' work as an international phenomenon cannot be overestimated.

MICHEL HUYSEUNE, "This country, where many things are strange and hard to understand:" Booker T. Washington in Sicily

The Man Farthest Down (1912), which narrates the 1910 visit to Europe of the prominent African-American leader Booker T. Washington, includes an important section on Sicily. The book focuses on social conditions in Europe and within this framework Sicily and the Sicilians firstly appear as a negative counter-image of the African Americans in the United States South. The island's poverty results from the traditionalism of its population, its instrumental religion and lack of morality. Washington refuses, however, to racialize this negative image, and at a second level of his narrative he deploys Sicily as a case to deconstruct stereotyped representations, while comparisons between Sicily and the United States also provide covert critiques of social conditions, especially of African Americans, in the latter country. At a third

level, Washington also frequently provides positive images of Sicilians. These images reflect his genuine understanding for Sicilians as a downtrodden group, and his appreciation of their human qualities. This layered description undoubtedly influences Washington's analysis of the causes of poverty in Sicily. The traditionalism and alleged lack of morality of its population, the causes originally outlined, at a second level become consequences of the neglect and oppression of the Sicilians. He remains, however, surprisingly silent about possible remedies for Sicily's problems, and ignores in fact movements for change that were effectively occurring on the island. We can assume, however, that his moderate programme in the United States, proposing uplift of the African American community through education and self-help, made it difficult to endorse radical changes in an island whose conditions he had constantly compared to the American South.

ANDREA CAROSSO, *Denied Citizenry and the Postnational Imaginary: Arab-American and Muslim-American Literary Responses to 9/11*

This paper documents the emergence of a new sub-genre of U.S. literature, encompassing narratives focusing on the social and cultural backlash on Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This body of literature, produced by a new generation of authors of Middle Eastern descent writing in as well as outside the U.S., engages the problematic construction of the Middle Eastern (often summarily stereotyped as "Arab," "Islamic" or "Muslim") in the U.S. as disidentified citizen in the age of the War on Terror. In so doing – and more importantly – this new sub-genre calls for an urgent revision of notions of national literature, as it reflects new modes of diasporic citizenry in U.S. society and its representation in the new century. Deeply confronting conflicting notions of denied citizenry and exclusion in post 9/11 U.S., recent works by Mohsin Hamid, H.M. Naqvi and Moustafa Bayoumi (among others) bring to the foreground the emergence of what I call, after Donald Pease, a Postnational Imaginary, and engage literary studies to reassess the role of the postcolonial in twenty-first century American Studies as a scholarly discipline.