



## Tennessee Williams and the Theatre of Excess: The Strange, the Crazyed, the Queer

By Annette J. Saddik

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The plays of Tennessee Williams' post-1961 period have often been misunderstood and dismissed. In light of Williams' centennial in 2011, which was marked internationally by productions and world premieres of his late plays, Annette J. Saddik's new reading of these works illuminates them in the context of what she terms a 'theatre of excess', which seeks liberation through exaggeration, chaos, ambiguity, and laughter. Saddik explains why they are now gaining increasing acclaim, and analyzes recent productions that successfully captured elements central to Williams' late aesthetic, particularly a delicate balance of laughter and horror with a self-consciously ironic acting style. Grounding the plays through the work of Bakhtin, Artaud, and Kristeva, as well as through the carnivalesque, the grotesque, and psychoanalytic, feminist, and queer theory, Saddik demonstrates how Williams engaged the freedom of exaggeration and excess in celebration of what he called 'the strange, the crazyed, the queer'.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Annette Saddik's lucid and vital assessment of the misunderstood, mysterious later plays of Tennessee Williams opens the door for a new generation of appreciation for the entire body of his work. A wonderful and eye-opening achievement for those of us passionate about the plays that poured out of him in the twenty years of life that remained after his last 'so-called' success, *Night of the Iguana*."

John Guare, author of *The House of Blue Leaves* and *Six Degrees of Separation*

"Annette Saddik midwives the rebirth of Tennessee Williams as poet and avant-garde icon, as she rehabilitates the soul and honor of America's greatest playwright."

Lee Breuer, Mabou Mines Theater Company

"In her groundbreaking new book, Annette Saddik proves that Tennessee Williams is the greatest unknown playwright America has produced. She demonstrates so beautifully and persuasively that for the length of his career, Williams was a writer less of lyrical realism, than the grotesque. His later works, on which her book focuses, are thus not aesthetic failures but richly imagined, experimental plays written for an experimental theatre. By so rethinking the whole of Williams's career, Saddik sheds a different light on his most popular plays and reveals to us a new and thrilling Tennessee Williams."

David Savran, City University of New York

"Annette Saddik is a rare scholar. Not only does this book demonstrate her qualities as a meticulous theatre historian and Tennessee Williams specialist, but every page bristles with ideas. This book is of utmost importance for understanding the development of Williams' dramatic output and of the confluence of twentieth-century American and European performance."

Martin Halliwell, University of Leicester

#### About the Author

Annette J. Saddik is Professor of English and Theatre at the City University of New York (CUNY), where she teaches at the CUNY Graduate Center and New York City College of Technology. She is the author of *Contemporary American Drama* (2007) and *The Politics of Reputation: The Critical Reception of Tennessee Williams' Later Plays* (1999), the first exploration of Williams' post-1961 reputation. She is also the editor of *Tennessee Williams: The Traveling Companion and Other Plays* (2008) and has published essays on various playwrights in journals such as *Modern Drama*, *The Drama Review (TDR)*, and *South Atlantic Review*, as well as in numerous critical anthologies and encyclopedias. She serves on the editorial boards of *Theatre Topics*, the *Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, and recently received the 2015 McAndless Distinguished Professor Award to serve as scholar-in-residence at Eastern Michigan University.

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