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The Glass Menagerie Lecture Series

On March 20th, 2010, as part of Roundabout Theatre Company's ongoing Lecture Series, Ted Sod, Dramaturg for the Education Department, interviewed Dr. Annette J. Saddik, Associate Professor of twentieth-century drama and performance in the English Department at New York City College of Technology (CUNY), about Tennessee Williams and *The Glass Menagerie*. A question & answer session with the audience followed.

Ted Sod: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for staying. We are thrilled to have Dr. Annette Saddik with us again. She's been here before, and she's always risen to the challenge of giving us a lot of information. She was here for our production of *Suddenly, Last Summer* because she's considered one of America's leading experts on Tennessee Williams. She was also my guest for *Waiting for Godot* because she also specializes in Samuel Beckett. Let's get started. Annette, would you tell us a little bit about Williams, for those of us who don't know much about his background?

Annette Saddik: *The Glass Menagerie* is Williams' first successful play. This is the play that made him a successful playwright in America, and he wrote it in 1944. It was first done in Chicago. Claudia Cassidy, one of the Chicago critics, gave it raves. People started to come and see it, and it moved to Broadway in 1945. This is a very autobiographical play. Tennessee Williams' name is actually Thomas. It's Tom, Thomas Lanier Williams. We can see connections between the play and his life. It's not a documentary, obviously, so we have to be careful of making easy connections. But, Tennessee Williams was born in 1911. He lived in Mississippi until he was about eight and then he moved into St. Louis, which is where the play takes place. He didn't much care for St. Louis. He said the older children made fun of him and his sister and their Southern accents. And the family went from this higher social status in Mississippi to a walk-up tenement, much like the one that he describes in *The Glass Menagerie*. You can go and see the apartment building he describes in the stage directions of *The Glass Menagerie*--it's there, in St. Louis—and you can feel the claustrophobia he describes. His mother, Edwina, was a Southern belle, very much like Amanda. And when Laurette Taylor, who was the first Amanda Wingfield, performed her, Mrs. Williams went backstage and Laurette Taylor said, "Mrs. Williams, how did you like yourself?" Edwina got very indignant and said, "Well, that wasn't me. I've never done that. I don't act like that." According to Tennessee and his brother, she did often act like that. That was the way she used language. She had this hysterical, exaggerated air to her. The father was not technically absent; he was a hard-drinking, often-absent, traveling salesman, but he was there. Williams absented him when he wrote the play, so he becomes a photograph on the wall. There was a younger brother, Walter Dakin, who is not in the play, and an older sister who was two years older than Williams named Rose. There are some similarities between Laura and Rose. Again, you can't make these perfect connections—it's dangerous to do that—but it's important to know the information. It does add to the play. Rose's problem was not that she was shy; she was peculiar. She was diagnosed later

with what might have been schizophrenia, something that could easily have been treated with medication nowadays. Also, she was going through some basic teenage rebellion, and her mother didn't like it. Her mother was very puritanical, so Rose would say shocking things just to bother her mother, and her mother felt that she needed to be shut up. If you know *Suddenly, Last Summer*, which was made into a movie with Elizabeth Taylor, there is that constant line, "Shut her up. Cut that story out of her brain," and they're constantly trying to institutionalize Catherine, a stand-in for Rose in that play. That is essentially what happened to Rose. She was institutionalized, she was given shock treatment, and in 1943, she was given one of the earliest lobotomies, which, of course, today is illegal. If you don't know the procedure of a lobotomy, basically two holes are drilled into the head and essentially an ice pick is stuck into the brain and wiggled around. The patient is then calmer. So Rose was given a lobotomy and she was calmer, but at that point she was institutionalized for life. When she died in 1996, she was in Ossining Lodge in Upstate New York. Williams always felt this guilt—and you can see this in *The Glass Menagerie*—for letting his sister go through this. He had had a very strong, constant relationship with her throughout their lives.

Ted Sod: Rose, Edwina, and to a certain degree Williams himself, inspired many of the works that he's written.

Annette Saddik: Absolutely, yes.

Ted Sod: He paid for Rose's care when he was wealthy enough to do that. And he did rather well with this play.

Annette Saddik: Absolutely, the proceeds of *The Glass Menagerie* went to his mother so that she could live an independent life, and she did eventually separate from the father.

Ted Sod: The father's name is Cornelius.

Annette Saddik: Cornelius. C. Williams. C.C. Williams. Tennessee Williams did pay for Rose to have private care. He visited her often and took her out. He would take her out, and she would believe that she was the Queen of England, so she'd wave to people as she walked by. It was very tragic; her personality was not intact.

Ted Sod: There are a lot of stories about her: going to a friend's house for dinner with her brother and a huge carpetbag and filling it with anything she could find if she felt like the hostess insulted her. Or, she would go into a store and say, "How many bars of soap do you have?" and they would say, "Forty," and she would say, "Well, that's not enough."

Annette Saddik: Then she'd take them all.

Ted Sod: Let's talk a little bit about the original production of *The Glass Menagerie*. This play is probably based on a screenplay entitled *The Gentleman Caller* and a short story Williams wrote as well, right?

Annette Saddik: There is a short story, some of you may be familiar with it—it's published—called "Portrait of a Girl in Glass." And you can see that the story, just the title, focuses on Laura, whereas here, he focuses more on the illusion, the glass menagerie. The short story was written in 1943, before the play. It was not published until 1948. Williams was in Hollywood before he became a famous playwright. MGM flew him out to Hollywood to write screenplays for them. They wanted him to write a screenplay for Lana Turner. He wrote *The Glass Menagerie*, which he called *The Gentleman Caller* and MGM didn't accept it. They didn't think that this was appropriate because Ms. Turner, and this is a quote, "could only handle two syllable words." Anything more than that was a stretch. And then they wanted him to write a screenplay for child star Margaret O'Brien. That's when he just threw his hands up and ran out and said, "That's it, I'm done."

There are actually two published versions of this play. There's the reading version, which is the one that if you've studied it in high school or college you would have read, and then there's the acting version, which is the version produced by Eddie Dowling on Broadway. Eddie Dowling was the producer, the director, and he played Tom in the original production. He was a busy guy. Originally, the play had these titles and these images much like you would find in silent films, that were supposed to emphasize the mood of the play. The play itself was not meant to be sentimental, but very ironic and anti-realistic. If you know the work of Bertolt Brecht, this follows Brecht's titles that you might see on the screen or the placards he used. Also, the work of Erwin Piscator, that's where Williams learned his technique. He had actually taken classes at The New School for Social Research in 1940 with John Gassner, and he studied Piscator. There were these titles over the characters' heads that were flashed on a screen. For example, when Jim comes on, there are all these pictures before he comes on, of Jim in high school uniforms. And, when Laura's talking about when Jim called her "Blue Roses," there's a picture of blue roses. When they were eating, they didn't eat with real utensils. They only mimed the utensils.

Dowling decided he wanted this to be a realistic play; he wanted people to connect with it, rather than distance themselves from it. If you see the original version with the titles and images, you laugh at these strange moments. Dowling decided to take out these titles and these pictures, he had them eat with real utensils. The acting version of the play is actually much more realistic and is meant to be about a family who just can't adjust to reality, whereas in the original, it's much clearer that this is more of a comment on reality than it is on people who failed to adjust. It is also meant to be a comment on American values. We see this in Jim, there's this constant need to succeed. Take lemons and turn them into lemonade. Everything is an opportunity. Keep going. And yet, this is a play about disappointment.

Ted Sod: The original production was a bit fraught, with Laurette Taylor, who was making a comeback and was also an alcoholic, playing Amanda. Eddie Dowling, as you mentioned, was wearing three hats, and he was probably a bit too old to play Tom. Julie Haydon was playing Laura.

Annette Saddik: There were a lot of fights backstage. Laurette Taylor was an alcoholic. She would go back into the wings and throw up and then come back on stage. During the dress rehearsal, they didn't think she would be able to pull it off. She was very ill, but what happened

was magic. I don't know if anyone is old enough to have seen this original production. It was not filmed ever, but anyone who's ever seen it says she was the best Amanda anyone could ever ask for. She was amazing. People were just blown away. To have that kind of talent and command over her craft while she was falling apart was amazing. Maybe that even added some realism to her performance. Eddie was always fighting with Tennessee. He didn't like Tennessee's script. He didn't like the changes he made. He wanted to be the one who made the choices. Tennessee, as the playwright, didn't like that. And Dowling and Laurette were always fighting. It was a mess and yet, they pulled it together.

Ted Sod: It ran for just under six hundred performances. It ran at the Playhouse Theatre, which was across the street from the Court Theatre, which is still surviving. And right away, Williams more or less had a different life. Is this true?

Annette Saddik: Immediately.

Ted Sod: The play didn't win the Pulitzer, but the next play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, did. Can you talk to us about his work after this? He was an experimental playwright, that's certainly true in *Camino Real*, which is extremely experimental. But his career bifurcates: the plays that seem to get revived all the time and the plays that were more or less chastised by the critics while he was alive and are sometimes ignored. Can we talk about him as an artist and what he was trying to do as a playwright in this play and others?

Annette Saddik: I think that Eddie Dowling was responsible for making this play a success because he did make it a more realistic play. And even though Williams liked the other version better, (I like the other version better too), in 1945 audiences expected realism. As we saw today, Tom is both narrator and a character, so having a narrator address the audience makes it anti-realistic. Tennessee writes in the production notes about how realism is very photographic. He says that in order to get to truth, we have to distort surfaces a little bit. The play, therefore, is memory. He was never a realistic playwright. What a realistic playwright would strive for is characters who look like the audience, speak the way we would expect them to speak and dress the way we would expect them to dress, so that we are voyeurs in somebody's home. The scenes with Laura and Tom and Amanda when they're at home are done realistically, but he keeps taking us out of that with Tom as the narrator to remind us that this is his memory, this is his version of events.

Once Williams' career took off, he knew he was never going to escape from "the streetcar of success," which he didn't like. He had problems with anxiety. He said it made him very anxious. He had this great quote that whenever someone spoke about his genius, he checked to see if his wallet was still there. He had a lot of hangers on. He didn't trust people anymore. He didn't know who to trust. His early plays were very successful, until 1961. There were fifteen major Hollywood films made of Williams' plays. You know them: *Night of the Iguana*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*. I have to digress about the film of *The Glass Menagerie* for a second. In the film, they changed the ending. If you don't remember this, go back and watch the 1950 film. Hollywood couldn't have Laura just sort of floating there in disappointment and us not knowing what happened. So, what they did at the end was --instead of being devastated by Jim's attentions—she was propped

up, she was excited, and she was let down even further—they had her become well-adjusted and popular. And so she's at the Paradise Dance Hall with all her boyfriends, dancing and she's going to get married. Don't worry about Laura. She's going to be just fine. And Tom doesn't need to feel guilty.

Ted Sod: The ending of *Streetcar* is different as well.

Annette Saddik: It's horrible. I can't watch it. The whole point of *Streetcar* is that Stella's desire wins. Desire is the hero of *Streetcar*, and Stella makes a choice. She says, "I can't believe Blanche's story and go on living with Stanley." She does choose to believe Stanley even though she doesn't really. Hollywood didn't like that either. Desire is bad; it can't win. So at the end, because Stanley had hit Stella and had presumably raped her sister, Blanche is taken away and Stanley goes to embrace Stella and she turns around and says, "Don't touch me. Don't ever touch me again." She scoops her baby up in her arms, and she goes upstairs and says, "We're never going back in there again." And the scene ends, which is completely different from Williams' intentions.

Ted Sod: Williams had to be complicitous with these changes because he sold the rights.

Annette Saddik: He did. He wanted his plays to be made into films, and he knew he had to compromise.

Ted Sod: Let's talk about how many different wonderful actors have taken on these roles. You mentioned the 1950 film with Gertrude Lawrence and Kirk Douglas.

Annette Saddik: Kirk Douglas is the gentleman caller.

Ted Sod: And Jane Wyman is Laura, the one who was dancing at the Paradise Ballroom in the Hollywood version. You'll see a pattern of interesting actors taking on this play. In fact, this play comes back almost every ten years to New York after its premiere happens in 1945. So in 1956 there's a production with Helen Hayes at City Center, and in the 1960s and 1970s, Maureen Stapleton plays the part, once with Rip Torn and once with George Grizzard.

Annette Saddik: She was in a lot of his plays. She was in *The Rose Tattoo*. He loved her.

Ted Sod: She was an interpreter, more or less. And then in the 1980s, Jessica Tandy, who was the original Blanche, plays it. Then, in the 1990s, Roundabout does a production with Julie Harris.

Annette Saddik: I saw that. That was good.

Ted Sod: And Željko Ivanek plays Tom, and Calista Flockhart plays Laura. And in 2005, there's a Broadway production with Jessica Lange and Christian Slater.

Annette Saddik: And Jessica Lange had just done Blanche years before that with Alec Baldwin.

Ted Sod: And there are a number of television versions. The one that I'm most curious about—I'm sure they have it at the Paley Center—is Shirley Booth playing with Hal Holbrook, for which she won an Emmy around 1966. Shirley Booth is best known for her work on the TV series *Hazel*. And the William Inge play *Come Back, Little Sheba*. And then there's the Katherine Hepburn version, which she does with Sam Waterston. And the Joanne Woodward version with John Malkovich which Paul Newman directed. And then of course, we have today's actors who are just phenomenal.

Annette Saddik: Phenomenal. I know the play and at the end, I'm crying. My heart is breaking for Laura.

Ted Sod: This is the second New York production in this particular decade, so maybe we're starting a fashion that it'll be brought back every five years. Let's talk about the power of this play because *The Wall Street Journal* theatre critic recently wrote an article about the last ten years of regional theater producing. He said that for the last ten years, regional theaters have produced mostly contemporary work like *Doubt* and *Proof*, etc. The one classical play that gets done on a consistent basis—it's in the top ten produced plays—is *The Glass Menagerie*. Why do you think this is?

Annette Saddik: I think it works on several levels. On one level, we can recognize these characters: Amanda is a mother. We can relate; we can connect. On another level, I think it's a comment on the struggle that all the characters have. Williams—and we see this in the play—calls Jim the only realistic character. But he's not. He's living his own illusion of the American dream, that he's going to be an executive someday even though he's eight years out of high school and, by his own admission, hasn't live up to his potential. Laura, of course, has her own illusion: the menagerie. Tom has his movies and his adventure, his need to escape, and his writing. And Amanda is living in her illusion of the past and the old South and her seventeen gentleman callers. So they all have their need to hold on to some kind of illusion in order to go on and survive. I think the tension between disappointment and hope is at some level what everybody has to struggle with. It's also a play about a young man who has to make his own way and escape his situation. I think these are social and emotional conditions that are timeless.

Ted Sod: It's time for you to ask some questions now. I see there are a number of hands up.

Audience Member #1: Is this play often cut in productions? I know I've seen it several times, but there was a lot I didn't remember.

Annette Saddik: If you know the original script or if you've seen other productions, you know that Gordon Edelstein, the director of this production, was very creative in terms of his concept of having Tom write the play in a hotel room—the set is supposed to be a New Orleans hotel room—and then have the scenes of memory happen in the same space. Williams did actually write this play in a New Orleans hotel room. The opening scene is part of the director's concept so you wouldn't recognize it from other productions.

Ted Sod: There's a wonderful cache of interviews on our website <http://www.roundabouttheatre.org>; if you go to "Education" and then "Publications," there are

interviews with Judith Ivey, Gordon Edelstein, Patch Darragh as well as the set designer, Michael Yeargan and they all talk about how this concept came to be. Gordon, wanted, he said, for the longest time to try this idea of the play happening in the hotel room, mostly because he saw a difference between the monologues that Tom speaks, which he thought were highly poetic, and the scenes of family life, which were more realistic, to borrow Annette's term. He wanted to find a way to justify that. He thought if he could stage it in the hotel room where it was written—Lyle Leverich's biography from 1995 is probably the best account that we have of this happening—that it would open up the play in a different way. And it also gave him and the actors and designers a new way to explore the play. The way that people make entrances and exits, that's all very different. Where the fire escape is, is imaginary. So it may have felt different to you if you'd seen it before.

Annette Saddik: The monologues are done to the audience very often. Tom's reading them here, and so that alters the play.

Ted Sod: And the way in which he speaks simultaneously with the characters as if they're coming out of his memory is new.

Annette Saddik: In this version, they brought out the gay subtext in the play, which has always been there. One interesting bit of information is that Tom always goes to the movies. At some level it was a lie. Amanda thinks it's a lie because he comes home drunk. In the stage directions, it says he takes his key out, all of the movie stubs fall out, so he is spending a lot of time at the movies. In the 1940s, that's where gay men went to get together. Williams has a series of short stories—*Hard Candy*, *Mysteries of the Joy Rio*—in the 1940s about men who go to the balconies of movie theaters and hook up with each other. So it's there. There's also that scene between Jim and Tom, and I think it becomes clear that Tom, as played by Patch, is nervous around Jim. There's something going on there.

Ted Sod: When I watch Patch's interpretation and the direction, I sense that Tom is in love with Jim, that he has great affection for him. The way he handles the magician's scarf told me there may have been something sexual there. But that's my own interpretation. Williams has often said of his homosexuality that he didn't have to write about it. But he did write about it. It's obviously present in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. That was a break through really—1955.

Annette Saddik: And *Streetcar*. I think one of the differences between the early and the late works was in style. He became much more of an anti-realist after 1951—even as early as 1953 with *Camino Real*. He was an anti-realist and experimental playwright from the beginning, but it became much overt in the post-1961 plays. This volume which I edited, *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*, came out two years ago in 2008. It is Williams' plays of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s that are not your mom's Tennessee Williams. They're very overt, they're very anti-realistic, and homosexuality is not coded in these plays. Part of the reason for that is that they didn't need to be. Williams was never closeted, I would say. He never denied being gay and he never went out and yelled about it. In 1970, David Frost asked him about rumors about his homosexuality, and he more or less came out on television. Frost asked "Are you a homosexual?" And Williams laughed and said, "Well, I don't want to cause a scandal, but I've covered the waterfront." In 1970, after Stonewall, after Gay Liberation, he could write about

openly gay characters. He never denied it, but it's just that until 1968 there were laws in the United States and Britain that you could not mention or depict in any way sexual perversion, which included homosexuality.

Ted Sod: It wasn't until the 1970s that homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness in the diagnostic manual. In 1963 Williams' lover, Frank Merlo, who he was with since 1947, dies of cancer. Toward the end of the 1960s, Dakin, his brother, has him institutionalized because of his own addiction problems.

Annette Saddik: In 1969, yes.

Ted Sod: And around that time he converts to Roman Catholicism, mostly because of Dakin's influence.

Annette Saddik: He was on drugs and drunk, and he was locked up in an asylum. Dakin comes to him and says, "Oh, you need to convert to Roman Catholicism." And he says, "Ok." So he did convert, but he's always said the conversion never stuck. It wasn't sincere.

Ted Sod: The family on the mother's side was High Anglican, which he thought of as sort of a Catholic kind of religion anyway.

Annette Saddik: His grandfather, who was an Episcopalian minister was very sympathetic and supportive of Williams' work, his writing, his homosexuality, everything. And if you know *Night of the Iguana*, the grandfather in that play is modeled on his grandfather.

Ted Sod: You probably know that Williams died accidentally at the Hotel Elysee here in our city, which was his home in New York, by swallowing the cap of eye drops accidentally.

Annette Saddik: Actually, we know more now. It sounds like a bizarre story and it is a bizarre story. Basically what Williams died of was Seconal intolerance. It was kind of a Michael Jackson situation but not as drastic. He was taking Seconal to help him sleep and he was drinking. So his body shut down. When this happened, John Uecker, who was his companion and assistant at the time, was still around and told the medical examiner, "Look, people are going to think it's suicide or AIDS or something bizarre and we don't know what happened." So the medical examiner, said, "Ok, he choked on a bottle cap." But really his body just gave up and the eventual diagnosis was intolerance.

Ted Sod: There's a wonderful article by John Waters, of all people, where he asks if Williams had survived would he have had the second chance that Albee had? Because Albee's work was chastised during the 1970s and 1980s, until he wrote *Three Tall Women*. Even John Guare went through a patch where people were not appreciating his work, and then he had a very high profile revival of *The House of Blue Leaves*, so he sort of caught fire again. I know it's hard to have a crystal ball, but do you think this would have happened to Williams?

Annette Saddik: I think that once culture and society had changed, Williams would have been more accepted. He would have been allowed to write in a different way. So, yes, I think he would have had a renaissance.

Audience Member #2: Why exactly did the critics not like his later works?

Annette Saddik: There were several reasons. They were very anti-realistic in terms of character, action, costuming. Characters weren't meant to be seen as full psychological human beings but rather they were mouth pieces, they were ideas, they were symbols. He had one play, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, which was, in 1969, just trashed. It was also a rewrite of a play called *The Day on Which a Man Dies*, which is published in *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*. And critics didn't know what to do with it. Tennessee Williams was supposed to keep writing *The Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar*. He was supposed to bring us Southern belles and sentimental characters and these brutal men we can relate to. And all of a sudden he's doing something else. Another reason I alluded to earlier was he was more openly gay in his later writing. He was writing gay plays in the style of Charles Ludlum and the Ridiculous Theater that were going on in the 1970s. He was borrowing from the style of Albee and Beckett and Pinter and Theatre of the Absurd. They just didn't understand: how could Tennessee Williams do this? He felt that the kinds of things the younger playwrights were doing were more succinct in terms of getting across the truth of what it meant to be alive in the world. Again, it's about distorting the surface of reality, distorting language and appearance in order to get to an essence or deeper truth.

Ted Sod: This is a man who has a biological need to write. He talks about his early influences being Chekhov, Hart Crane, D.H. Lawrence. In the later plays, his subconscious gets broken open.

Annette Saddik: They're dream-like.

Ted Sod: And they're not easy to stage.

Annette Saddik: No. And they're bawdy. There was one, *The Remarkable Rooming-House of Madame Le Monde*, in 1982 that is just freaky. It's so disturbing, but it's so funny at the same time. And it's so cruel and disgusting, but you want to laugh. I hesitated to publish it because New Directions gave me a lot of leeway in terms of what I could choose, and I thought, "Oh God, what is this? No one can ever do this." I read it over and over and I really liked it. I saw it staged in Provincetown as a world premiere in September. It was fantastic. The whole audience got it, and at the most cruel scenes, people were cracking up laughing. That was the tragicomic sense that Beckett also had.

Ted Sod: Williams was notorious for going to rehearsals and these peals of hysterical laughter would happen at the most inappropriate times. The actors would freeze and go, "What was that?" It was Williams, right?

Annette Saddik: Blanche was going to the asylum and Williams would be cracking up in the back row. People would turn around to see who this rude person was, and it would always be Tennessee Williams.

Audience Member #3: The lighting is incredibly dim. Is that really in the stage directions or is that something to accommodate Jennifer Tipton's vision? And then, along the same lines, there's a tremendous focus on the photograph of the father and I was wondering if that was in the stage directions as well?

Annette Saddik: Williams does describe the lighting as mood lighting and as romantic. So that's up to the lighting designer and the director to see how far to go with that, but it is described as dim at some points. Again, what does "dim" mean? But yes, it was following, as far as I know, what it was supposed to be doing.

Ted Sod: There's the blackout. What's interesting about the blackout is even though the evening is over, it sort of comes back to light. The blackout happens in the house, but it's not happening in the hotel room. So to me, it justifies the use of candlelight in some ways because of the memory.

Annette Saddik: As for the father, it would be interesting for you to go to the acting and the reading versions. I think it's in the reading version that the picture of the father is highlighted more often. I'm not sure, but there's definitely a thread where Williams says the light goes on the father's picture. Again, it's up to a director to decide how much, how often. Williams does have it in the script.

Audience Member #4: What led you to your life's work being Williams?

Ted Sod: That's a great question.

Annette Saddik: I liked the way he romanticized the outsider. And he shows this kind of strength and endurance. When I was, I guess, eleven or twelve, I really got into Tennessee Williams. I went to the public library where I grew up in New Jersey, and I read everything they had, including the late plays, which no one had ever heard of. I just loved his sensibility, and I connected with it. I loved that the people on the margins of society, no matter what their issue was or how they were living, were being seen as the real heroes. There was a sense of beauty and honor and dignity about that life and about all people. I connected with that. I loved it.

Ted Sod: We have so many of these people among us—fantastic minds and wonderful speakers—who have devoted their lives to the work of other people. It's very beneficial to someone like myself -- a theater geek who loves to read dramaturgical information. That's how I found Annette. Stella Adler, who was a brilliant acting teacher, said that no one, whether it's a director, actor, or designer, can ever understand the play they are working on without understanding the playwright first. Do you want to show them some of your books?

Annette Saddik: Sure. When I was in graduate school, I wanted to write my dissertation on Williams. I did and several years later, I turned it into a book, which came out in 1999, called

The Politics of Reputation: The Critical Reception of Tennessee Williams' Later Plays. It talks about *The Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar* and how they're different from the ones that came later like *Out Cry*, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*...

Ted Sod: ...*Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, which is about one of his first lovers, right?

Annette Saddik: Kip Kiernan. And, in fact, he had written an early play in the 1940s, which he then revised in 1962 called *The Parade* which is a beautiful play.

Ted Sod: He was notorious for revising and revising. There must be a tremendous amount of variation in the plays.

Annette Saddik: For every play, I had ten versions and had to find which was the best; it was incredible. He was still rewriting *Streetcar* in the 1980s. He said the conversation between the sisters didn't work. And then, a book that came out in 2007, *Contemporary American Drama*, is a critical study and analysis of how American identity has been performed on the stage from World War II to the present. I talk about writers like Beckett and Albee, new performance artists and hip hop.

Ted Sod: I've read this book, and it follows trends as well. It gives you an idea of why these things might be happening at the time that they're happening.

Annette Saddik: Politically and socially.

Ted Sod: Because you talk about Amiri Baraka and other writers of that ilk who never made it into the bourgeois consciousness, really.

Annette Saddik: Right. I talk about the Black Arts Movement, I talk about immigration, I talk about what was going on in culture and society and how this all flowed. And then I have *The Traveling Companion and Other Plays*, which is Williams' late plays from the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s.

Ted Sod: I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Saddik for joining us today. And thank you for coming to the Roundabout. Our next lecture is on April 10th for *Sondheim on Sondheim*, and our guest will be Peter Filichia, who's quite an expert on musical theater. We'll see you then.