



Tennessee Williams on the stages of Buenos Aires¹

Tennessee Williams en los escenarios de Buenos Aires

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Abstract

The impact of Tennessee Williams, and others such as Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, is notable, particularly in the theaters of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In truth, not only his works have been performed with great reception from the local public, they also had an impact on notable Argentine authors. We propose, in this tribute, to make a review of the main versions of his most famous works that have been produced in the Federal Capital, from the middle of the 20th century to 2023, highlighting some aspects regarding their creators and other elements that allow us to understand the production context. We do not intend to carry out an exhaustive study, we would exceed the scope since we should include all the performances that have been staged and are being carried out in all the provinces. We wish to study the scope of its productivity in the local scene and its validity.

Keywords: U.S. theater; Buenos Aires theater; Stagings.

Resumen

El impacto de Tennessee Williams, y otros como Eugene O'Neill y Arthur Miller, es notable, particularmente en los teatros de Buenos Aires, Argentina. En verdad, no sólo se lo ha representado con gran recepción del público local, también ha incidido en autores argentinos notables. Nos proponemos, en este homenaje, realizar una reseña de las principales versiones de sus obras más famosas que se han realizado en la Capital Federal, desde mediados del siglo XX hasta 2023, destacando algunos aspectos respecto de sus realizadores y otros elementos que permitan comprender el contexto de producción. No pretendemos realizar un estudio exhaustivo, nos excederíamos en la extensión pues deberíamos incluir todas las puestas que se han montado y hacen en todas las provincias. Deseamos estudiar los alcances de su productividad en la escena local y su vigencia.

Palabras clave: Teatro estadounidense; Teatro de Buenos Aires; Puestas.

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Introduction

The impact of the American playwright Tennessee Williams, along with others such as Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) and Arthur Miller (1915-2005), is remarkable, particularly in Buenos Aires' theaters. George Woodyard (1996, p. 18) expressed that

Sometimes, theaters in Argentina staged his plays just a few weeks after their premiere in New York, often with an audience as enthusiastic, and sometimes even more than on Broadway. His legacy has been influential on subsequent generations [...] for his daring attitude in exposing the psychological and sexual issues of a generation immersed in clandestine misery.

Indeed, not only has his work been warmly received by local audiences, but it has also influenced notable Argentine authors, such as Ricardo Halac (1935-), Carlos Gorostiza (1920-2016), Mauricio Kartun (1946-), and Roberto Cossa (1934-).

The presence of his dramaturgy from the mid-1940s of the 20th century to the present day, now in the third decade of the 21st century, has not ceased. We depart from the concept of productivity (Barthes, 1987) of a source text with innovative poetics for its time, which has led to rewritings and transpositions (Wolf, 2016) in conjunction with other artistic languages. This work of a dramatic text on language in our case is notable because we have not only seen the great reception of the film adaptation of *A streetcar named Desire* directed by Elia Kazan (1951) among the Buenos Aires audience, but it has also sparked different versions of his major works, with different poetics and even realized in other spectacular forms such as ballet and contemporary dance. In 2019, a North American cast presented an operatic version of this play at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, which was very well received by the local audience.

However in this attraction to Williams' theater, we must consider another fundamental milestone: the arrival in our country of the Austrian-Jewish actress Hedy Crilla (1898-1984), a master of actors in her home country, who was exiled in Buenos Aires after being expelled by the Nazi regime. She worked as a theatrical and film actress in Argentina. In 1947, she founded the Escuela de Arte Escénico de la Sociedad Hebraica. In 1958, the Teatro Independiente La Máscara called her to delve into the Stanislavski Method. Her teachings revolutionized acting, moving from declamation to a live actor on stage. For over forty years, she trained numerous actors, directors, and teachers such as

Agustín Alezzo (1935-2020), Carlos Gandolfo (1931-2005), Federico Luppi (1936-2017), and Lito Cruz (1941-2017), who propagated her legacy, transforming the history of acting inside and outside the country. It was so important that it immediately influenced tertiary and university artistic careers in the official management of the Federal Capital; in workshops and private schools led by great masters of the stage where studies related to the world of entertainment (acting, stage direction, scenography, costume design, etc.) were taught. Her teachers, inheritors of her version of the method, in core subjects such as Acting, selected scenes from fundamental playwrights of universal theater and American Drama in their advanced levels. For example, when we taught the subject History of Universal Theater III at the Escuela Nacional de Arte Dramático de Buenos Aires (now the National University of the Arts), we often witnessed Acting III classes where students rehearsed excerpts from *The glass menagerie* (1945), interpreting the conflicts of its characters, especially the children of that American family during the post-war period of World War II, where a young woman (Laura, who was actually Tennessee's sister Rose) takes refuge in the glass unicorn to protect herself from the everyday world. These conflicts during scene practice were essential for the future artists of the Buenos Aires stage. We estimate that the appreciation of his production in these student environments later influenced their professional activities as creators of our scene, and many of the graduates often stage their productions in the independent theatrical circuit.

Returning to the golden age of Independent Theater, in the 1940s, different casts included Williams plays in their theatrical repertoire, not only for the social themes related to the author's context and time but also for the attractive conception of the stage, as elements of European avant-gardes appeared. In this regard, we have analyzed in another work the presence of expressionist scenic-dramatic resources in *The glass menagerie* and *Orpheus descending* (Artesi, 2018). Additionally, official theater and commercial venues included reruns in their programming - and continue to do so - as it is currently conceived as a classic of American Theater, posing a challenge for artists in the Buenos Aires theater scene. In this tribute, we aim to review the main versions of his most famous works performed in the Federal Capital of Argentina, from the mid-20th century to today (2023), highlighting some aspects regarding their creators and other elements that allow us to understand the production context. We do not intend to conduct an exhaustive study, as we would exceed the scope by including all productions staged and performed in all

provinces. We aim to study the scope of his productivity in the local scene and its relevance.

For the first part, we have used the meticulous research conducted by the American scholar Sandra Messinger Cypess (1996), whose work was included in the book coordinated by Osvaldo Pellettieri and George Woodyard (1996), published by Galerna, which can be consulted at the Library of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires. For the second part, we have turned to varied bibliographic material: the Documentation Center of the Teatro Colón Complex in Buenos Aires (CEDOC/CTBA). The personal archive of director Oscar Barney Finn, which has provided us with information and documentary material related to his productions. We have collected information from local journalistic reviews, bibliography, and studies on Williams' theater. Additionally, the works we have presented at academic events and published in journals, specialized books, during our career as a teacher-researcher in local university settings.

His presence in those years of the 20th century

Sandra Messinger Cypess (1996) in her work *Tennessee Williams in Argentina*, through a comparative approach, argues that long before the premiere of his plays in his country, American Theater was already known in Argentina, with twenty-five productions staged between 1946-1955. She compares the premiere dates in the United States with those in Buenos Aires, which occurred almost simultaneously. *The glass menagerie* was first staged in 1945 in the country; whereas, in this capital, as part of commercial theater, it was produced in 1949 by the Margarita Xirgu's Spanish Company. Cypess' analysis estimates that "This actress, so popular among the Argentine audience, surely helped the success of Williams' work" (Cypess, 1996, p. 52). She includes in her work the critique made by the newspaper *La Nación*, where it was described as "good and delicate," "its wretched characters living their small delusions of grandeur" (Diário La Nación, 1947,⁴ *apud* Cypess, 1996, p. 52). It was restaged in 1954 by Teatro Evaristo Carriego cast, directed by Eugenio Filipelli (1929-2021), who was a theater pioneer in the city of Rosario in the Province of Santa Fe, considered an emblematic figure of national

⁴ Diário La Nación (Sección Espectáculos, 20 dic. 1947).

theater. Due to the success achieved, they toured different provinces. It was also performed in 1957 by the Artea Group in Yiddish; it was also produced in English by the Theatre Guild during its South American tour.

Sweet bird of youth (1959) was performed by Pepita Serrador (1913-1964) alongside Carlos Estrada (1927-2001). In the *Vea y Lea* magazine, we extract a comment from the actress titled *Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) by Pepita Serrador*. She expressed:

Williams' theater is, in my opinion, a theater made of memories [...] a single character plays in all his productions. The central female character, who will change in form, age, or social condition, but whose soul is always imprisoned by identical complexes (Serrador, 2023).

With no doubt, this duo, comprised of this great Argentine actress along with the Spanish actor residing in our country, Carlos Estrada, delivered their best performances of this play. Regarding *A streetcar named Desire*, originally premiered in 1947; in our city, it was performed in 1951 by an Italian theater company, the Diana Torrieri Company. Cypess (1996) highlights the journalistic critique by León Mirlas, an Argentine writer, playwright, and O'Neill scholar, who translated different plays published by Editorial Losada, and also wrote essays on different modern authors. In his review for the newspaper *La Nación*, he expressed "Williams shows 'a magical realism' [...] a kind of 'neo-realism' that he describes as deeply human and at the same time denying reality" (Newspaper *La Nación*, 1951⁵ *apud* Cypess, 1996, p. 53, author's annotations).

We clarify that there was also a version of *Streetcar*, directed by Luis Mottura (1901-1972) in 1952, an Italian actor and director who settled in Argentina, in Mecha Ortiz's (1900-1987) Company. This actress was one of the most important figures in Argentine cinema and theater, considered the *Argentine Greta Garbo*, for the quality of her performance.

Returning to the material from North American scholar, she analyzes the reasons Argentine audience enjoyed his theater from the beginning. She highlights the melancholic-realistic poetry in his production, especially emphasizing a comment by John Gassner about "*Streetcar* 'a poetic drama that becomes a psychological reality' [...] If we want to understand Williams' contribution to American Theater and beyond American Theater, to Argentine Theater, it is important to recognize this aspect of his work"

⁵ Diário *La Nación* (23 sept. 1951).

(Gassner⁶ *apud* Cypess, 1996, p. 51).

She then addresses other works in her study. *Summer and smoke* (1948), which was first performed in Dallas (1947) and then in New York (1948), where it failed. She observes that in Buenos Aires, the Modern Art Institute Group staged it in 1954, directed by Marcelo Lavalle (1916-1979), who was the first theatrical and cinematographic actor in Argentina, directed films during the golden age alongside great figures of the national scene and cinema, and in this first version, the actress Norma Aleandro (1936-) performed, a renowned Argentine actress, director, and screenwriter, internationally awarded for her work in cinema. The North American researcher cites different reviews by critics and scholars of that time. On one hand, the review by the critic and scholar José María Ibañez (1955), a precursor and researcher, former director of the Argentine Federation of Independent Theaters (FATI), who commented on the work in his book *Independent theater*, published by Alpe Ediciones, qualifying it as one of the best works by director Marcelo Lavalle. On the other hand, Cypess (1996) in her research mentions the great scholar of Argentine Theater, Luis Ordaz, who also praised it with expressions similar to those of Ibañez. Lavalle restaged it in 1961, with the cast of the South Group at the San Telmo Theater, repeating the same success, and on this occasion, the actors Ignacio Quirós (1931-1999) and Lydé Lisant (s/d, 2006) starred. Quirós was a Spanish actor who settled in our country, integrated into the Modern Art Institute cast, where he demonstrated his skills as a great interpreter both in independent theater and in other circuits, developed extensive work in local cinema and television. Regarding Lydé Lisant, she was president of the Friends of the Cervantes Theater Association (1984-1996), an actress with an impeccable trajectory, she integrated the National Comedy and created the South Group with Carlos Gorostiza and other notable artists.

Cypess (1996) adds data about the premiere of *Cat on a hot tin roof* (1955), which in our context was staged in 1956 by Francisco Petrone (1902-1967), who was dedicated to theater and cinema, being an actor of strong personality in important Argentine films. Although this play had a great reception, eight months after its premiere, it was censored by municipal authorities due to the homosexuality of the protagonist, Brick Pollitt. To understand this act of censorship that this production suffered, it is necessary to consider that at that time Argentina had experienced on September 16, 1955, an anti-Peronist civic-

⁶ The author does not identify details from Gassner's work.

military uprising against the constitutional president Juan Domingo Perón led by General Eduardo Lonardi. After a week of bloody fighting, the coup succeeded with a toll of more than 150 fatalities. The constitutional president had to go into exile abroad. Finally, Lonardi assumed as provisional president and exercised as de facto president from September to November 1955. In 1956, another military officer assumed as de facto president, Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (1955-1958), during his government not only was Peronism proscribed, but also the world of culture and arts suffered political and moral censorship.

Towards the end of her work, the American scholar points out the repercussion of his works in national dramaturgy. She takes into account the Argentine researcher Osvaldo Pellettieri, who in his works recognized the need for the modernization of independent theater, thanks to the new dramatic forms developed by Arthur Miller, Bertold Brecht (1898-1956), Tennessee Williams: "Pellettieri refers to Carlos Gorostiza's *El puente*, premiered in 1949, to indicate the beginnings of the relationship between national productions and the North American theater of Miller and Williams" (Cypess, 1996, p. 58).

The presence of his works at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century

In this section, we selected plays with the greatest impact that have been directed by prestigious directors in local scene, both in the official and commercial circuits of Buenos Aires, as well as in independent theaters off Avenida Corrientes, the main artery of the city where very important theaters are located. Although we adopted this selection criterion, we decided to incorporate some experimental productions.

As we clarified at the beginning, we consulted the Documentation Center of the Buenos Aires Theater Complex, "Ana Itelman," an archive where materials can be consulted about theater and dance productions performed and continue to be staged in the different venues of the Complex. If any reader wishes to visit their website (CEDOC-CTBA, 2023), they can see online photographic material, hand programs related to the productions (scenery-costume-lighting) that have been performed in the CTBA venues, as well as some books related to North American Theater.

As we observed in the first part of our work, Williams plays that have had the greatest impact on the local audience have been restaged and are still today. We reiterate

that *A streetcar named Desire* is practically the favorite. In 1977, an independent group staged it. In a journalistic critique without a signature, appearing in the newspaper *La Nación* (1977), its staging was described as “A Tennessee Williams devoid of poetry.” It was directed by Jorge Hacker (1931-2021), with a recognized career in theater, cinema, and television. It was staged at the old Odeon Theater (built in 1891), located in the downtown microcenter, on Esmeralda Street near Corrientes Avenue, which unfortunately was demolished in 1991. In 1986, the prominent Argentine director Hugo Urquijo and Graciela Dufau staged it, artists we will mention later.

Perhaps the producers and artists of the CTBA decided to revive it, influenced by the success of the new version made for American television in 1995, directed by Glenn Jordan, starring Alec Baldwin, Jessica Lange, John Goodman, and Diane Lane, which followed the 1951 adaptation starring Marlon Brando and a TV adaptation in 1984. There was also another version on Broadway in 1984, starring Baldwin and Lange. Indeed, in 2000, Mauricio Wainrot (1946-) adapted the play into the language of modern dance. *A streetcar*, a version performed by the San Martín Theater Contemporary Ballet, in Martín Coronado Hall, with Bela Bartók music. The interesting thing about this recreation: the choreographer recreated the piece, focusing on its protagonist, Blanche Dubois, when she is in the asylum, aspects that the original play does not address because in the end the nurses take her away. Due to the great reception it had, and in the centenary of the birth of the great American author in 2011, it was restaged on October eighth of that year, in the same venue. The title of Martin Wullich’s review reveals its striking presentation, “*A Streetcar Named Desire*, exciting adversity”: “The staging, in gray tones and pale colors, with dim light and movements that speak of lack of control [...] generates a tremendous image from the beginning” (Wullich, 2011). In another passage, he expresses, “The beauty of the images, in the form of strong and striking realistic paintings, subjugates and moves. Debating the spectator between drama and emotion” (Wullich, 2011). The scenic conception of the famous Argentine choreographer displayed great creativity, accompanied by dancers with acting skills, demonstrating the potential of Williams’ drama as a source of inspiration to achieve scenic success. On the website of the CEDOC/CTBA, all visual documentation can be consulted, including hand programs, scenic plans, and costumes. In 1984, Theater Company of Venezuela presented at the CTBA a version of *Cat on a hot tin roof*, directed by Horacio Peterson (1922-2002).

In the same year as the ballet version mentioned above, Daniel Veronese (1955-) – an actor, director, and contemporary Argentine playwright who enjoys adapting classics – staged it at the Apolo Theater, a venue in the commercial circuit also located on Corrientes Avenue, a few blocks from the CTBA. We were able to see it and were struck by the director’s choice of Diego Peretti (1963-) in the role of Stanley and Erica Rivas (1974-) in the role of Blanche, both very famous performers from Argentine cinema and television at that time. In one of our works, we studied this version and pointed out:

We focus on the gender perspective presented in the production for its exaltation of the intuitive and the animal, evident in the particular selection of actors, their acting styles, the use of local Buenos Aires slang, and other techniques that seek to impact the male and female spectators (Artesi, 2012, p. 71).

In its update, authorized by the North American agency managing the rights, the spatial conception was modified by removing the upper floor where the neighbors lived, achieving a significant theatrical economy as everything happened in Stanley-Stella’s house. Some symbolic scenes were even eliminated, for example, the visit of the Mexican flower seller (which functioned as an anticipation of Blanche’s symbolic death). Daniel Veronese expressed in a note:

He is a very sanguine, visceral, and emotional author. There are certain moments of rupture that are wonderful, like the way the character of Blanche is portrayed, for example. There are times when one finds that an author takes a very bold step in a completely risky and probable direction at the same time (Schoo, 2011).

An important aspect in this version: the scene of Blanche’s rape that Stanley performed offstage in the original version (following the decorum of Greek tragedy), this time transformed into an explicit image where Stanley rapes her in the living room of the house, thus imposing his patriarchal authority while destroying Blanche and kicking her out of his home.

At some point, some local critics objected to the choice of Erica Rivas in the role of Blanche, alleging extreme youth and beauty, finding it implausible—within the sexist pattern—because they conceived the character as “an expert seductive woman” (Finn, 2023). In our work, we acknowledged that the director had decided to depart from the mythical traditional cinematic version, as he was inspired by the feminist versions

performed in New York and Los Angeles in the 70s, where this heroine was represented with youthful features; in this way, Veronese achieved greater identification with the audience in Buenos Aires. Erica Rivas pointed out in an interview:

Tennessee Williams knows what violence means, because he too was relegated his whole life. He understands women perfectly, he knows how we end up: dead, raped, or in a mental institution. A happy ending would be false, because that's the ending he also had in his life. For a person who has the intensity he had (and that Blanche also has), it is very difficult to live in this life. With a poetic ending, in this play (Méndez, 2011).

The critic Ernesto Schoo in the newspaper *La Nación* noted: “Veronese’s direction is competent, more effective in the scenes of violence – tremendous, resolved with efficiency [...] In part, perhaps, because Erica Rivas is too young” (Schoo, 2004), criticizing this production despite its great box office success. We believe that in this updated version, the director tackled a social conflict that had significantly impacted the media in our country at the time. We refer to the reports of rapes and femicides that led to changes in our legislation: in 2012, law 26.791 was passed, incorporating the concept of femicide into the Argentine Penal Code. Clearly, Veronese wanted to bring this classic into the present, aiming for the audience to identify with and reflect on this social issue.

Another Argentine director who has explored the world of Williams is Oscar Barney Finn (1938-), a filmmaker, television, theater, and opera director, and screenwriter who has taught and won numerous awards. In 1983 (from April 8 to 25), he premiered *¡Oh, querido Tennessee!* at the Buenos Aires Book Fair, where Argentine actress Graciela Dufau played various characters. Another homage, in 1985, *¡Oh, querido Williams!* at the National Theater Festival. In that same year, he revived the show as part of the North American Literary Autumn Cycle at the Teatro Nacional Cervantes. His creation repeated during the season at Sala Enrique Muiño, from 1983 to 1988, though directed by Javier Torre (1950-). He cast two great actresses of the Argentine stage in leading roles: María Rosa Gallo (1925-2004) and Inda Ledesma (1926-2010). In 1990, he moved it to the Teatro Regina, with other actors of extensive national film and theater careers: Alejandra Boero (1918-2006), Elena Tasisto (1948-2013), Graciela Araujo (1930-2019), and Pablo Alarcón (1946-). In 2007, he adapted and directed *Cat on a hot tin roof* at the El Portón de Sánchez Theater. In 2008 and then in 2014, he did it in Chile.

In 2011, in a tribute to Tennessee Williams for the centenary of his birth, he staged *Roman nights* by Franco D'Alessandro (1967-), an American author, a play based on the friendship between Williams and the Italian actress Ana Magnani (1908-1973), translated by Hugo Zanón. He first performed it at the BAC (British Art Centre), in a semi-staged format with very simple scenic elements (a pouf and a large balcony); the lead roles were played by actress Virginia Innocenti (1966-), who portrayed Ana Magnani, and actor Paulo Brunetti (1973-), as Tennessee Williams. He then revived it at the Centro Cultural de la Cooperación in Buenos Aires (2013-2014).

Finally, he adapted *Sweet bird of youth* (2018), with a translation by Cristina Piña (1963-), poet, essayist, professor, and translator. He directed it at the Centro Cultural 25 de Mayo (a theater located far from the center, in the northern part of the city), set in the segregationist South, where the author reflected on the loss of that golden age. In an interview by journalist Cecilia Hopkins, published in the Buenos Aires newspaper *Página 12*, the director expressed “another step in my long relationship with this playwright [...] from the time when, along with maestro Carlos Gandolfo and other directors, they sought to experiment with his plays” (*Diario Página 12*, 2018). Notable artists like Silvia Spelzini (visual artist and actress, 1971-); Sergio Surraco (1978-), Argentine actor; Carlos Kaspar (1965-) – actor, director, and Argentine playwright; Malena Figo, Argentine actress and photographer, currently starring in *The glass menagerie* (we refer to the production review later). Williams’ text is rarely performed, perhaps because it was censored at the time, where the female character of Alexandra, an actress in full decline, was somehow the author’s alter ego, as she said: that she wasn’t old, but no longer young, an expression the director quoted, since in today’s world, neither the media nor theater depict people going through old age.

In our research, we contacted Sandra Cafarelli and Mariano Oropeza, who are preparing a book about Barney Finn’s⁷ multifaceted career, set for publication soon. We thank them and the director because they provided excerpts of their personal interviews, later transcribed in a Word document, where the artist talks about his recent productions. At one point, they asked him about his scenic tools:

⁷ We thank Ms. Sandra Cafarelli and Mariano Oropeza, who have provided us with excerpts from the personal interviews, later transcribed, where Oscar Barney Finn talks about his productions.

What role do you play in your productions?

I cannot separate work in any medium—cinema, theater, or television—from the concept of unity and an aesthetic vision. This aesthetic vision integrates all elements. In theater, creating the right atmosphere with set design is crucial. I'm not necessarily talking about physical sets; these could be elements where lighting becomes even more significant. It's the lighting that sets the tone (Finn, 2023).

He further commented on how he handles space in his productions, where stripped-down settings prevail: "Lighting plays a vital role because it helps create atmospheres in these spaces" (Finn, 2023). He gave examples from some of Williams' plays he staged:

When I staged *Sweet Bird of Youth*, I had to adapt to the Teatro 25 de Mayo. The same thing happened with other Williams' plays. I didn't want to change the sets because I didn't like it; I didn't find it necessary and also because it was less economical. When I adapted *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, I thought everything should happen in their room: the birthday, the party, everything that happens to them. So that I eliminated everything unnecessary and created a space around that room where everything could occur. Then the Blacks and children disappear—they're present in the sound, not physically. When I adapted *Sweet Bird of Youth*, I focused on what happens in her room, in the room they have in the city. As Americans do their conventions in big hotels, I set up the hotel, and within that hotel, a room (Finn, 2023).

He then discussed the need for a great economy of scenic resources:

With Daniel Feijoo, we created a place with sliding transparent doors, the palm tree hotel Williams wanted is present in those palms, there's atmosphere, suggestion, and a great cart I had built, managed by a kind of *maitre* filled with bottles and glasses that goes back and forth (Finn, 2023).

As we mentioned previously, *The glass menagerie* was another play staged in Buenos Aires shortly after its original presentation. We believe that the 1987 film adaptation, directed by Paul Newman and starring actors like Joanne Woodward, John Malkovich, and Karen Allen, had a significant impact in Argentina. Soon, the play was staged under the remarkable direction of Hugo Urquijo—a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, teacher, and Argentine theater director with a long career in the Buenos Aires scene, awarded many times for his productions of diverse international authors like Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Bernard Shaw. "However, Tennessee Williams has always been the author who most captured his interest" (Urquijo, 2023). Previously, he staged *A streetcar named Desire* with Graciela Dufau, an actress in film, theater, and television who played various

female characters created by Williams. Urquijo directed *The glass menagerie* from 1991-93 at the now-defunct Teatro Bauen on Ave. Callao near Ave. Corrientes. Hugo Soto played Tom; Inda Ledesma, a leading actress and theater director, played Amanda; Ingrid Pellicori, an Argentine actress and psychologist, played Laura; and Mario Pasik, a renowned Argentine actor, played Jim. Urquijo had also staged the play in 1976. In 1999, he directed *Suddenly last summer* at Teatro San Martín, featuring a cast of well-known actors.

In 2002, Alicia Zanca – an actress and theater director – restaged it at Teatro Presidente Alvear, part of the CTBA, and later at the Teatro Regio within the same complex. The renowned playwright, director, and writer Mauricio Kartun adapted it. Notable Argentine artists such as Claudia Lapacó, Laura Novoa, Claudio Quinteros, and Fernando Ramírez starred in this production, which won two Teatros del Mundo awards. The Grupo Actoral 80 from Venezuela presented *Suddenly last summer* in 1993 at Teatro San Martín (CTBA), directed and starred by the great artist Juan Carlos Gené.

Later, in 2005, at the Buenos Aires International Festival (FIBA), the CTBA presented a controversial experimental version titled *Endstation Amerika*, directed by German director Frank Castorf.

We clarify that the Complex plans to present a version inspired by *A streetcar named Desire*, titled *On the kindness of strangers*, which refers to Blanche DuBois' final words in the original play. Alejandro Genes Radawski, a writer and director of cinema and theater based in Poland, created this adaptation, which has not yet premiered and has received local and international awards.

In 2023, we happily witnessed Gustavo Pardi's production of *The glass menagerie* in tribute to the 40th anniversary of Williams' death. Pardi, one of the founders of Banfield Teatro Ensamble in the southern part of Buenos Aires Province, is an actor known for his roles in Argentine television and film, including a movie shot in Southern Argentina with Geraldine Chaplin (*Winding road*, directed by Juan Pablo Kolodziej, 2018). The production took place at El Picadero, located near Ave. Corrientes and Callao, a venue with a dark history as it hosted the famous Teatro Abierto 81, an artistic resistance movement against the genocidal civic-military dictatorship (1976-1983), which was burned and destroyed in 1981 by the regime. Fortunately, the space was rebuilt and reopened in 2012, becoming a place for prestigious productions in Buenos Aires.

As a director, Gustavo Pardi has tackled both classic and national texts. He directed *The glass menagerie* with great success, receiving praise from critics. Journalist Carlos Pacheco highlighted Pardi's directorial work: "He defines the qualities of each character very clearly" (Diario La Nación, 2023). Pardi used Mauricio Kartun's version, produced by the CTBA (2022). In another interview, Kartun quoted,

I have been very respectful of this text, which has always fascinated me. I updated some conventions that seemed less contemporary and kept everything else. The complication in Argentina and Uruguay with our 'vos' is that any text using 'tú' sounds affected" (Pacheco, 2023, author's emphasis).

The production starred Ingrid Pellicori (Amanda Wingfield), whom Carlos Pacheco (2023) described as "imposing with overwhelming characteristics". Pellicori, an experienced stage actress, had previously portrayed Laura in Hugo Urquijo's production we mentioned earlier. Agustín Rittano played Tom and recently acted in the film "Argentina 1985" (2022) by Santiago Mitre, and in "Las ciencias naturales" by Tenconi Blanco at Teatro San Martín. Finally, Malena Figó (Laura) and Martín Urbaneja (Jim) stood out as "the scenes between Laura and Jim O'Connor are extremely poetic," according to Carlos Pacheco (2023). We believe that this play by the Southern playwright remains relevant, as we live through a major global crisis caused by the Ukraine-Russia War, similar to the one during the 1930s, which Williams portrayed in his drama.

A special mention goes to an experimental production based on *The notebook of Trigorin* (1981), Williams' free adaptation of Anton Chekhov's classic *The seagull* (1896). Williams aimed to bring the play closer to contemporary audiences, making it more accessible than any production he had seen in the United States (Williams, 2011, p. 145). The play premiered posthumously in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. Later, in 1996, it was performed in Cincinnati and, more recently, in 2013 in New York. In another work, we noted that Chekhov's perspective permeates Williams' entire oeuvre through his perception of the tragic. Ernesto Schoo (2004) expressed this sentiment:

[...] What his *Memoirs* and, above all, his plays reveal is the tragic sense of life: 'The major theme of my plays is the pain of loneliness, which follows me like my shadow, a formidable shadow too heavy to drag along with me every day and night.'

Marcelo Savignone (1973-), an Argentine actor-director and teacher, studied neutral masks and Balinese masks, and improvisation, participating in various international festivals. In early 2015, we watched his *Essay on The seagull* at La Carpintería, an off-Corrientes circuit venue. The play received several ACE (Association of Entertainment Critics of Argentina) nominations in various categories. Savignone incorporated Williams' work into his production, using physical theater that interacted with the characters' dialogues, utilizing cinematic and dancing elements. This approach added a third level of metatheatricality to the Chekhovian and Williamsian metatheatricality. The production showcased the experimental nature of contemporary Buenos Aires theater to a predominantly young audience. In that study, we highlighted that

The unfulfilled love that Chekhov and Williams portrayed in their plays intensifies in these 'rehearsals:' the sentimental aspects become more pronounced. The loneliness, failure, and anguish of the young Konstantin seem to be reiterated in each of the choreographies designed and performed by Marcelo Savignone, who, with his 'freak' poetry, offers other interpretations of this piece (Artesi, 2015, p. 71-78, author's emphasis).

Final reflection

In this tribute to Tennessee Williams, we focus on his constant presence on the stages of Buenos Aires, from the mid-20th century to the present, in the third decade of the 21st century. We observe that, in the previous century, local productions often followed shortly after their premieres in the United States. These diverse productions featured independent ensembles, commercial theaters, and notable actors and directors from Argentina and Spanish-speaking countries, as well as foreign companies. We note not only the impact on the Buenos Aires audience but also his significant influence on important Argentine playwrights.

For 21st-century versions, we start with the concept of productivity, which allows us to appreciate the various rewritings and transpositions of Williams' theater into other artistic formats (ballet, cinema, opera). Other aspects we have considered include the changes in acting methods due to the introduction of Konstantin Stanislavski's Method and the teachings of the great Austrian acting teacher Hedy Crilla. Crilla trained directors of the independent theater in Buenos Aires, who in turn taught in artistic educational institutions. This revolution shifted acting from declamation to an organic conception,

essential for interpreting the new trends from European and American Theater of that time.

We then examine the plays that have had the greatest impact on our stages, noting that certain works are particularly favored by Argentine directors. Williams' theater poses a significant challenge, adapting such a powerful classic with its blend of realism, symbolism, poetry, and mythology, with elements of Greek tradition and modern theater. These revivals demonstrate Williams' significant contribution to theater, as his themes remain relevant and continue to resonate.

Professor Dr. Rolando Costa Picazo,⁸ in a tribute by the American Studies Association, compared the debut of *The glass menagerie* to the impact of Corneille's *The Cid* (1636) or the revival of Chekhov's *The seagull*. He stated, "[...] these plays marked the beginning of a new era in Western Theater. Williams was aware of his objective" (Picazo, 2012, p. 15). To illustrate this, he transcribed a fragment in English and his own Spanish translation⁹ from Williams' production notes for *The glass menagerie*. We present the original in English here:

These comments are not a preface to this particular play. They pertain to the conception of a new theater that must take the place of the exhausted theater of realistic conventions, if the theater is to resume its vitality as part of our culture (Williams, 1945, p. xix-xxii).

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⁸ Rolando Costa Picazo (1931-2022): He was an Argentine scholar and translator. He taught North American Literature at the University of Buenos Aires and was a member of the Argentine Academy of Letters. He published several books on his specialty and on Argentine poets. Until his death, he presided over the Argentine Association of American Studies.

⁹ "Estos comentarios no son un prefacio a esta obra en particular. Tienen que ver con la concepción de un nuevo teatro que deberá ocupar el lugar del exhausto teatro de las convenciones realistas, si es que el teatro ha de resumir su vitalidad como parte de nuestra cultura" (Williams, 1945, p. xix-xxii *apud* Picazo, 2012, p. 15).

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