

## The One Exception

women's Xmas, off

- you are miss - ?
- Viola Shield, yes. I'm sorry to have had to put you off till today but when a painter is preparing for an exhibition, in process of hanging -
- ok?
- yes. There's very limited time for other matters
- your coat?
- No, thanks, the place is ~~so~~ <sup>too</sup> chilly.

(Viola Shield enters, a ~~smiling~~ <sup>am</sup> energetic woman of forty, followed by a distraught-looking woman in her fifties, May Swenson.)

Why, it's so barely furnished, you must be just moving in.

May (lowering her voice) not staying but a few days. She has to be removed to an institution repeat and my leave of absence from is over. ~~My~~ <sup>My</sup> light is up. Baptist

Viola - Evangelist, are you? 2

May - No, no, it's a Houston hospital. (works in the psychiatric ward.)

Viola - Hmm.

(wind whines.)

You'd better have your heating system adjusted. Hmm. So she has to be put away?

## Editor's Note to *The One Exception*

Robert Bray

*The One Exception*, dated by the author as January of 1983, is one of the many Tennessee Williams manuscripts located in The Houghton Library at Harvard University. The ms. exists in typescript with handwritten additions and alterations and is listed as Williams's last one-act play completed before his death on February 25, 1983. Despite its significance as Williams's final one act, very little is known about this previously unpublished play. Although a few other Williams specialists have examined the manuscript, my own research, including inquiries through the usual network of Williams scholars, produced scant information. One problem is clear—toward the last several months of his life, Williams became more and more dissociated and less inclined to answer correspondence involving his work. During this period Williams listlessly traveled from Key West to New Orleans to New York, and at one point he was confined to a hospital for exhaustion and alcohol/drug detoxification.

Mental institutions furnished the setting for several of Williams's late plays. Around 1973 he wrote a screenplay for television entitled *Stopped Rocking* (New Directions, 1984), in which a character named Janet Svenson (note: same last name as May in *The One Exception*) closely resembles Kyra, the mental patient in *The One Exception*. About seven years later he wrote another one-act play entitled *Some Problems for the Moose Lodge* (later expanded to the full-length *A House Not Meant to Stand*), as well as the full-length *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, both of which deal to some extent with asylums and insanity.

*The One Exception* appears to draw at least obliquely from Williams's own visits with his sister Rose, who was institutionalized for decades. In this play, the less-threatening euphemism for Kyra's impending institutional confinement is called "The Lodge," which may be a reference to Stony Lodge in Ossining, New York, where Rose spent many years of her life. One can speculate that Williams's own collapsing mental condition during these last months of his life may also have provided him with some characteristics he would write into Kyra. In fact, Williams scholar Allean Hale asserts that at one point Tennessee Williams contemplated spending his last days with Rose in an institution. Although readers may find the play's tone rather bleak and the situation somewhat distressing, *The One Exception* is certainly not without moments of Williams's dark humor so characteristic of his later works.

In editing the play I have honored Williams's myriad deletions (typically made by his hand-crossing out passages of dialogue), even though the expunged material might have helped to explain some of the reasons behind Kyra's confinement. I felt that in his revisions Williams chose to obscure some of Kyra's "history" and to make the already ambivalent relationship between

Viola and her more ambiguous as well. In virtually every instance I have retained the vagaries of Williams's punctuation, as I felt that obvious glitches such as comma splices and run-on sentences may have been put there for a reason. I wish to thank The University of the South as well as The Theatre Collection of Harvard University for allowing readers (and perhaps eventually performers) access to this final one-act play by Tennessee Williams.