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Co-producer/ director, Paul Bowles: The Complete Outsider

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Remembering Tennessee Williams

Playwright John Patrick Shanley, referring to Tennessee Williams as a "gorgeous unstoppable beast," recounted an incident in a restaurant when he, a budding writer, maybe thirty feet away from the master dramatist, could not bring himself to say hello. Such is the power of "influence" that any person in theater would stand in awe of this writer of poetry, short stories and the extraordinary body of plays for which he is best known.

Shanley was among two dozen speakers who paid tribute to Tennessee Williams at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine on Thursday evening, themselves a Who's Who of American theater: Vanessa Redgrave who had originated the role of "Lady" in "Orpheus Descending" read from "Not About Nightingales," Marian Seldes who created the role of Blackie in "Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore," Sylvia Miles performed her role, Mrs. Wire, from the 1978 London production of "Vieux Carre." Tandy Cronyn presented a postcard Tennessee had sent her late mother Jessica Tandy, the original Blanche DuBois, from Italy, reveling in how Blanche would love Rome. Her father Hume Cronyn had been instrumental in keeping the young starving playwright alive, optioning his 9 one-acts. Eli Wallach performed a scene from one with his daughter Kathryn. Eli and Ann Jackson who was in the audience met doing that play. Olympia Dukakis read from "Milk Train," and John Guare read "As I stood in my room tonight."

David Kaplan, curator of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, read from an essay Tennessee had presented at the cavernous Saint John the Divine in 1971, "We are Dissenters Now" protesting the Vietnam War; overall, Williams proclaimed, "love for humanity will prevail." On Sunday, Tennessee Williams will be inducted into the Poet's Corner, among Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton, and other American literary giants, becoming the first poet/ playwright to be so honored

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