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Tennessee: Williams

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Tennessee: Williams : VIEUX CARRE: before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised VIEUX CARRE::

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Reflections on Williams' "Real" Home - New OrleansBy Shannon L. YarbroughBased on Williams' own real life experiences while living in a boarding house at 722 Toulouse Street in New Orleans briefly in the late 1930s, Vieux Carre is one of his lesser known "memory plays."It is somewhat narrated by "the writer" as he interacts with his land lord Mrs. Wire, her maid, and several other tenants. There's a sexually charged couple - Tye and Jane - and another older couple of female crones who think they are high society but are actually extremely poor. There's also a gay artist suffering from Tuberculosis who has a brief sexual encounter with the writer, the only homosexual scene Williams ever wrote for onstage.Obviously being a script, much is left up to interpretation. This play isn't as full as Glass Menagerie, but it still has its moments to shine. I'd still love to see this live on stage some day, but those curious readers who don't know much about the "real life" events of Williams life that inspired this work might find themselves bored or lost.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Vieux CarreBy Robin FriedmanTennessee Williams' plays after "The Night of Iguana" in 1961 were not commercially successful. Williams wrote "Vieux Carre" in the mid-1970s, drawing from his diaries and journals and from earlier plays and stories. The play failed on Broadway but had a successful run in 1978 in London.The play consists of two parts and twelve scenes. Although it is intimate in tone, it requires a cast consisting of five men and five women. The play is autobiographical. Williams revisits has days between winter 1938 and spring 1939 as a young and poor writer in a shabby rooming house in New Orleans' French Quarter. Williams gives the specific address: 722 Toulouse Street, but the portrayal is meant to be universal. Williams writes, "In the barrenness there should be a poetic invocation of all

the cheap rooming houses of the world." The play moves between the particulars of Williams' life as a young man of 28 and broader themes. The primary character is Williams himself but he is called simply and more suggestively "Writer". He speaks directly to the audience as a narrator, on occasion, as well as being a participant in the play. The remaining characters in the play are tormented, each in their own way, as is the Writer. They include, the delusional, witchlike, and greedy landlady, a figure who symbolizes rooming house landladies everywhere, and her long-suffering aged servant Nursie, an African American woman who suggests she would rather be a bag lady than to continue working in the rooming house. Besides the Writer, the other boarders in the house include Nightingale, a painter suffering from tuberculosis with whom Writer has his first, and unhappy, homosexual experience. Other boarders are two elderly and impoverished spinsters, and Jane and Tye. Jane is a designer from the northeast who comes to New Orleans when she learns she has a serious disease of uncertain nature. She becomes romantically involved with Tye, an addicted and criminal drifter who works as a barker for a strip club. The play develops the tensions of each of the boarders among themselves and with the landlady. The plot of "Vieux Carre" is loose and disjointed with more of a focus on characterization and language. Williams mostly avoids sentimentality as he remembers his bohemian years and he also captures a degree of detachment in his memory. Loneliness and desperation form much of the lot of the Writer and of the other characters. In scene two, the stage directions describe the Writer as making a "sound of dry and desperate sobbing which sounds as though nothing in the world could ever appease the wound from which it comes: loneliness, inborn and inbred to the bone." In the following scene, where the Writer visits Jane and Tye, the young woman describes herself as "frantic with loneliness". Their lives play out for a short time with the writer faring better than the others. He meets a young musician, Sky, and is able to travel with him west to California to the call of a clarinet to begin the next stage of his life. The writer sees the door opening before him as offering a "desperate undertaking". The writer looks back and forward -- to a life which he didn't know at the time would bring him success together with a great deal of misery. He remembers that old companions "remain with you only as ghosts; their voices fading but remembered." In his new biography, "Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh" (2014), John Lahr describes "Vieux Carre" as "a crepuscular spectacle of dead souls, [which] includes among its spectral figures the jejune Writer himself." Although the play failed on Broadway, Williams' writing had beauty and strength. Lahr quotes New York Times reviewer, Walter Kerr: "Tennessee Williams' voice is the most distinctively poetic; the most idiosyncratically moving, and at the same time the most firmly dramatic to have come the American theater's way -- ever. No point in calling the man our best living playwright. He is our best playwright and let qualifications go hang." "Vieux Carre" is a movingly effective play about loneliness and about the perils of creativity. Those who love Williams' more famous works will enjoy getting to know this under-appreciated play. It is available in this separate volume and in the second of the two Library of America volumes devoted to the plays of Tennessee Williams. Robin Friedman⁴ of 4 people found the following review helpful. You Can Die of Loneliness By Gary F. Taylor VIEUX CARRE was originally produced on Broadway in 1977, where it was a notable commercial failure at five performances. The play requires five women and five men and is performed on abstract set representing a decayed boarding house in the New Orleans French Quarter in the late 1930s. Williams had tremendous success in the 1940s and 1950s, but he struggled to find a commercial voice in the 1960s and 1970s. VIEUX CARRE is in some ways typical of his output at this time: long on atmosphere and character, short on actual plot, and more interested in tone than tangibles. Although a nameless writer is technically the central character, the play is really an ensemble piece, a collage of the desperate. Mr. Nightingale is a sketch artist who refuses to believe he is dying of tuberculosis; the sisters Mary Maude and Carrie are so poor they are literally starving to death and trying to get by scraping through trashcans on the street; Jane is a society girl on the run from a terminal medical condition. All of them are dominated by the landlady, Mrs. Wire, a half-crazy, half-sly woman who bends the tenants to her will with constant threats of eviction. Williams was noted for the often sordid nature of his work, and it would be hard to imagine characters and situations more sordid than those presented here. The circumstances are nasty, hard, and cruel; the characters are ineffectual, desperate, and (as Mrs. Wire, the landlady, points out) "dying of loneliness." It is a place where the only hope one can have is for subsistence survival. It is not difficult to see why the play was unsuccessful; it is very dark, very impressionistic, and is more a series of vignettes than it is a seamless whole. Nonetheless, this is very likely the best of William's later plays. Strongly recommended. GFT, Reviewer