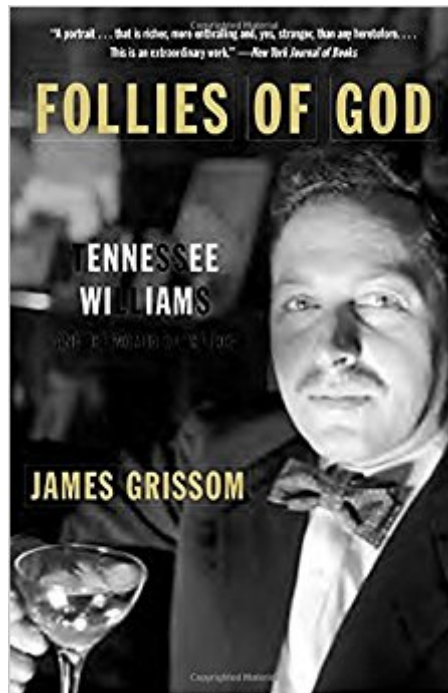


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# Follies Of God: Tennessee Williams And The Women Of The Fog



## Synopsis

This remarkably illuminating portrait of Tennessee Williams lifts the veil on the heart and soul of his artistic inspiration: the unspoken collaboration between playwright and actor. At a low moment in Williams's life, he summoned to New Orleans a young twenty-year-old writer, James Grissom, who had written him a letter asking for advice. After a long, intense conversation, Williams sent Grissom on a journey on his behalf to find out if he or his work had mattered to those who had so deeply mattered to him. Among the more than seventy women and men with whom Grissom talked were giants of American theater and film: Lillian Gish, (the escort who brought me to Blanche), Jessica Tandy (the original Blanche DuBois on Broadway), Eva Le Gallienne (She was a stone against which I could rub my talent and feel that it became sharper), Maureen Stapleton, Julie Harris, Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn, Elia Kazan, Marlon Brando, John Gielgud, and many more. *Follies of God* provides dazzling insight into how Williams conjured the dramatic characters and plays that so transformed American theater.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Back in 1982, Grissom wrote to the great American playwright, seeking his advice on a writing career. Instead, Williams suggested Grissom could be of help to him. "I need to know that I mattered," Tennessee explained. "Be my witness." In the months that followed Williams gave him the names of scores of actresses who had inspired him to create his legendary characters. "The true story of my life is one that should be told through my influences." By the end of the

same year, Williams was dead, leaving Grissom with scores of bluebooks filled with stories and names. It was now time to honor Tennâ™s request to interview the women that meant most to him. What Williams and Grissom have created here is a history of mid-century American theatre, and it is quite amazing. The actresses who came out of his personal fog included Lillian Gish, Jessica Tandy, Julie Harris, Geraldine Page, Kim Hunter, Kim Stanley, Marian Seldes, Mildred Natwick, Francis Sternhagen, Katherine Hepburn, and more. In many cases we get to hear their opinions of each other personally and professionally. Williams tells of his deep personal friendship with Maureen Stapleton and his long, intimate relationship with playwright and competitor William Inge. Considerable light is shed on the success and failure of Actorâ™s Studio, and had Lillian Hellman been a part of this story, we would have record of the three great American playwrights working in the 1950â™s and 1960â™s. Unexpectedly, we even get to hear Williamsâ™ admiration for the plays of John Guare and Edward Albee. The most curious omission is of any mention of Williamsâ™ last great play, âœThe Night of the Iguana,â• especially since it starred two women mentioned respectfully elsewhere: Margaret Leighton and Bette Davis.

This is not an ordinary book - it is a rarity. I liken it to a marvelously unique, new quilt fashioned from precious, extraordinary, sometimes antique fabrics and pieces of tapestries - all sewn together to create a cohesive, one-of-a-kind whole. This is not a biography - it is a collection of interviews and reflections with Tennessee Williams himself and all those women who truly mattered and deeply affected him. Williams sent Grissom off on a quest to find those women and discover if he and his work truly mattered to them. As Tenn states, ". . . we remain blind, without identity, until someone witnesses us. . . I'm afraid that only in the company of these people, all of our witnesses, many of whom frighten us, can we learn who we are and what we've done." Grissom met with Williams briefly toward the end of his life. Grissom's mission, imposed on him by Williams, ended up covering a period of 25 years - with remarkable, illuminating interviews with our greatest actors, directors and artistic luminaries: Kim Stanley, Lillian Gish, Maureen Stapleton, Marion Seldes, Lois Smith, Eva Le Gallienne, Katherine Hepburn, Jessica Tandy, Elia Kazan, Kim Hunter, Jo Van Fleet, Geraldine Page, among others. Comparisons to Lahr's biography on Williams are irrelevant. This is not a traditional, chronological biography, but yet it is biographical in the highest sense because no book I have read helps you to understand William's psychology and process as this one does. The section on Jessica Tandy and the evolution of "Streetcar" is revelatory.

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