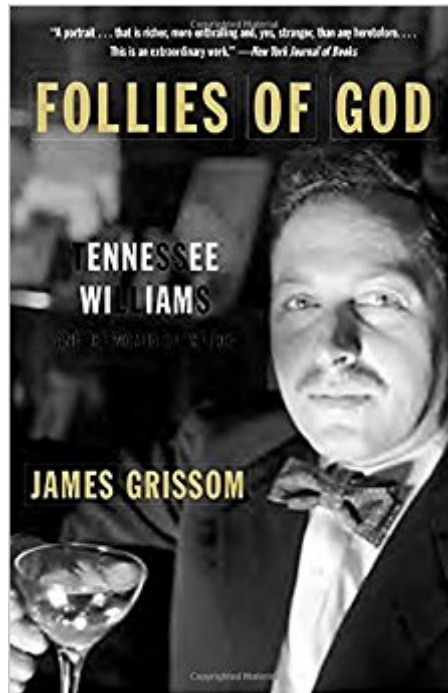




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# **Follies Of God: Tennessee Williams And The Women Of The Fog**



## 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

"A portrait of Tennessee Williams that is richer, more enthralling and, yes, stranger, than any heretofore. . . . This is an extraordinary work. Not only for those who love theater, but also for those who would seek an understanding of the mind of the artist." —New York Journal of Books "Amazing and quite wonderful. . . . A unique and stirring examination of the profound effect of numerous talented actresses on Williams's memorable work. . . .

Grissom's book is among the most surprising and provocative journeys into the soul of a writer.

Peter Bogdanovich "Grissom magically captures the vein and even voice of Tennessee in this beautifully written book about the actresses in his plays. Would that I had been one of them! There is no greater American playwright and *Follies of God* reveals why."

Jane Alexander "There have been plenty of books written about Williams over the past three decades, but few weave so many voices into an original and compelling portrait. Grissom honors the life and achievement of his doomed correspondent."

Kirkus Reviews "A unique personal blend of road trip and literary history. . . . Philosophical, pragmatic, funny, and devastating. . . . Grissom has succeeded in creating a kaleidoscope meditation on the people who entered Williams's imagination." "Æthe fog to become his signature characters."

Publishers Weekly "Imagine: a great playwright nearing the end of a troubled life charges a young writer with the quixotic task of tracking down the playwright's favorite actresses and finding out if he mattered to them. It sounds the stuff of fantasy. But young James Grissom took up Tennessee Williams's request and decades later has produced the result of that quest in an original, hypnotic, sui generis, bound-to-be-controversial document that becomes the history of his education as well as the illumination of ours. Thank you, James Grissom, for honoring the promise."

John Guare, author of *The House of Blue Leaves* and *Six Degrees of Separation* "Extraordinary. . . . Grissom manages the remarkable feat of unlocking the creative process of America's foremost dramatist. . . . A highly idiosyncratic journey into the nature of creativity."

James Fisher, Theatre Library Association "A great work. . . . It takes a humane artist to capture the quality of another, and Grissom is surely that."

Gay City News "Memorable. . . . Provides new and valuable insights into the playwright's psyche and life."

Library Journal "Grissom had amazing access to Tennessee Williams and to the great actresses who starred in his plays. His revelations about these remarkable talents coping with the passage of time are moving and often shocking in their truths. A dazzling piece of writing."

Lee Grant "Always thoughtful, sometimes stunning, I see *Follies of God* as a kaleidoscope for viewing Tennessee Williams, and his time and place in American theater. A little turn, a new surprise, another view forms itself. There's nothing like it."

Lois Smith "Grissom's electrifying and wonderfully readable book is the real thing. He has caught the voice, the man, the artist, exactly as I remember him. . . . Few people have captured so well Tennessee's strange mixture of fear and admiration for

women, his profound understanding (rare among men) of what drives them, their dominating presence in all his work, and his miraculous ability to work the magic of their strengths and weaknesses into some of the most powerful roles in the American theater. Michael Korda, author of *Clouds of Glory* "Grissom's book is peerless . . . in both what it says about the creative sources of America's greatest playwright and in the way that it says it. . . . A magisterial summing up of a tormented soul for whom salvation was to be found only through language. . . . Reveals Williams to us fully as artist and human being: a flawed, fearful, self-destructive, achingly vulnerable, gallant, forever questing pilgrim: a genius and a visionary who tragically could never seem to take the measure of his own unparalleled gifts. This is an unexpected masterpiece." Foster Hirsch, author of *Otto Preminger and The Dark Side of the*

*Screen*

JAMES GRISSOM studied at Louisiana State University and the University of Pennsylvania. He has written for HBO, Showtime, CBS, and NBC. He lives in New York. [Jamesgrissom.blogspot.com](http://Jamesgrissom.blogspot.com)

James Grissom took a huge chance by sharing so much of his research work on Facebook during the many years he spent putting together *Follies of God*, the fantastic new book about Tennessee Williams and the actresses who inspired the playwright. Grissom's social network page has been full of wonderful excerpts from interviews he's done over the past four decades, generating a tremendous amount of buzz within the theatrical community, but also risking a feeling of déjà vu when we finally got our hands on the book itself. Well, *Follies of God* lives up to all of the anticipation Grissom has generated. The notes and thoughts he shared on Facebook over the past few years in no way diminish the experience of enjoying some of the best writing on theatre and actresses you will ever encounter. Indeed, much of the social network material turns out to have been background notes and show business digressions that didn't make it into the book. The project began more than 30 years ago when Grissom wrote a letter to the playwright and was invited to join Williams in New Orleans and then given an assignment to convey the writer's gratitude to the great performers such as Maureen Stapleton, Jessica Tandy and Katharine Hepburn who helped him create many of his most indelible characters. Grissom wrote down everything Williams said to him during those few days in 1982, and then was stunned by the writer's death the following year. The project was put

aside for a while, as Grissom moved from Baton Rouge to New York and held down a variety of jobs. He had reams of comments that Williams wanted him to convey to *the women of the fog* but it took him many years to do the interviews and then construct a book which is part biography, part memoir and part actress profiles. Judging by the intimacy and depth of the interview material, Grissom established immediate trust in the actresses Williams sent him to. And as word got out about the project, other major figures, such as Marlon Brando, reached out to Grissom and spoke frankly about acting, Williams, the Actors Studio and many other theatre topics with remarkable candor.

This is the best book I've ever read regarding the theatre and it offers incredible insights into Tennessee Williams and his female friends. Why he needed them. What he received from them. Don't expect a memoir or biography. He was born, lived and died. It's way more than that. If you are, like me, a playwright, this book acts as the best teacher you'll ever have. I don't read books more than once.... but I will this one. And more. Tomas

This is like literary crack. The best book there is about Tennessee Williams and his world. I was sorry when I reached the final page. I enjoyed it much more than John Lahr's *Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*. A masterful achievement by James Grissom.

James Grissom devoted years of his life to the legacy of Tennessee Williams and has produced a work, the caliber of which Williams deserves. Here is the playwright in moments of audacity, insecurity, self-awareness, and despair; yet always seemingly within arms' reach of the women who could nourish him with the strength and courage to continue his work when the rest of the world had turned its back on him. I called the book a labor of love. It is also a work of reverence for the artist and his muses.

One of the best books written about a writer by a writer. This book captures Tennessee Williams like no other that I've read. The insecurity, fear and doubt that plague so many writers is on full display. In his later years, after tremendous success and accolades, Williams was emotionally tortured by the thought that possibly he'd be forgotten and that his plays would no longer matter. His best works were behind him and he wanted to know that he had mattered particularly he wanted to know that he mattered to the women who'd been his emotional touchstones as he created his female figures. Grissom became Williams' recruit -- the young man whose assignment it was to contact the people

who'd meant so much to Williams and his work and to present to them with Williams' own thoughts about them and their influence and then to record their reactions. Grissom does a fine job of not sugarcoating anything -- the ladies, the men who helped/influenced Williams or Williams himself as he allows the reader to know that Williams was drinking and using drugs during their conversations and Grissom's note-taking sessions. A very important book for anyone who wants to know about Williams and his plays. Overall this book provides the clearest path to understanding how Williams created, wrote and why he wrote.

Fascinating look into the creative process of Tennessee Williams and the many actresses who inspired him. It's truly a remarkable book, with many insightful portraits of the leading figures of the American stage from the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. A great companion piece to John Lahr's *Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*.

Follies should be a required text for every drama/theater/writing major. James Grissom's experience with Mr. Williams translated on the page through these collections of stories about the women and men in Tennessee Williams' world, a world James Grissom entered as his own creative arc began to unfold as his mentor's was receding. Loved it and the website; an entertaining read I savored.

This book is the definitive book on Tennessee Williams. Mr Grissom writes with beauty and intelligence. He is a soul brother to Williams. Williams, in my opinion opened his heart and mind to him. A rare occurrence.

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