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## 'Summer and Smoke'

# Showcasing Life's Little Turnabouts

By WALTER LAZENBY  
 "Summer and Smoke," Tennessee Williams's third play to reach Broadway (back in 1948), contains some of his familiar characters: a fastidious Southern gentlewoman whose behavior represents both puritan aversion from her own sexuality and Apollonian restraint, the free-spirited man who is a Dionysian seeker of pleasures, two stock rivals for his affections, and several comic grotesques to lighten the mood.

Evidently designed to illustrate the William Blake poem quoted in an early scene ("Never Seek to Tell Thy Love"), its plot too schematically develops the situation of two major characters ironically giving up their too limited views of human nature, each without

knowing of the other's change.

What is unusual here — and rather hard to accept — is this drastic change in personality, one character's toward commitment and a new purpose in life, the others' toward acceptance of human limitations, especially those imposed by our sexual natures. The characters, then, are not of the unbending sort who move steadily toward dooms of their own making in tragedy. The ending dwells on the pathos of a missed opportunity for happiness, not on anything that can be called a catastrophe; but it also is tinged with a suggestion of welcome deliverance from neuroticism. The whole is suffused with the atmosphere of a small Mississippi town of some sixty years ago.

Currently occupying the Fine Arts Theatre at Eastern, the play, like "The Glass

Menagerie" and "A Streetcar Named Desire," makes strong demands on the leading actress. She must achieve dignity, not silliness, in uttering far-too-elegant language. She must mimic near-hysteria while revealing the character's curious half-insight into her own neuroticism. She must

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demonstrate strength inherent in the situation of a young woman paradoxically mothering her own demented mother, whose childishness and kleptomania are a cross to bear. When her personality changes, she must not resort to easy stage tricks lest she make the character seem suddenly cheap. And in the play's most

affecting moment she must maintain a facade of imperturbability to hide deep disappointment and perhaps grave inner turmoil.

I am pleased to report that Anne Shapland brings emotional power and an ample measure of professionalism to the role. By bringing out Alma Winemiller's strengths she helps the show avoid sentimentality. In a thoroughly believable performance she exhibits the variety required in such different scenes as her fluttery initial appearance, her ordeal at Moon Lake Casino, and the final confrontation with young Dr. Buchanan. Yet her final parting salute to the statue of the Angel of Eternity which has brooded, symbolically, over every scene did not reveal to me how the actress felt about Alma's significant change (or how the director did).

Randy Arney's understanding of Buchanan's role and his sincerity in it are evident, but his youthful appearance stands in the way of full success.

James P. Kleckner, who has turned in other creditable performances in different sorts of roles in the past, seems ill at ease as Alma's minister-father. The character as presented is unlikely to have inspired Alma's pretentiously stuffy way of talking.

Totally caught up in her tiny role, Joan Allen creates a convincing vignette as Rosemary. Katie Sullivan shows her flair for comic characterization as the catty Mrs. Bassett but allows some inconsistent touches to creep in.

Karen Eubanks provokes appropriate amounts of laughter as Mrs. Winemiller.