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since 1983

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The display advertising deadline is the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue.

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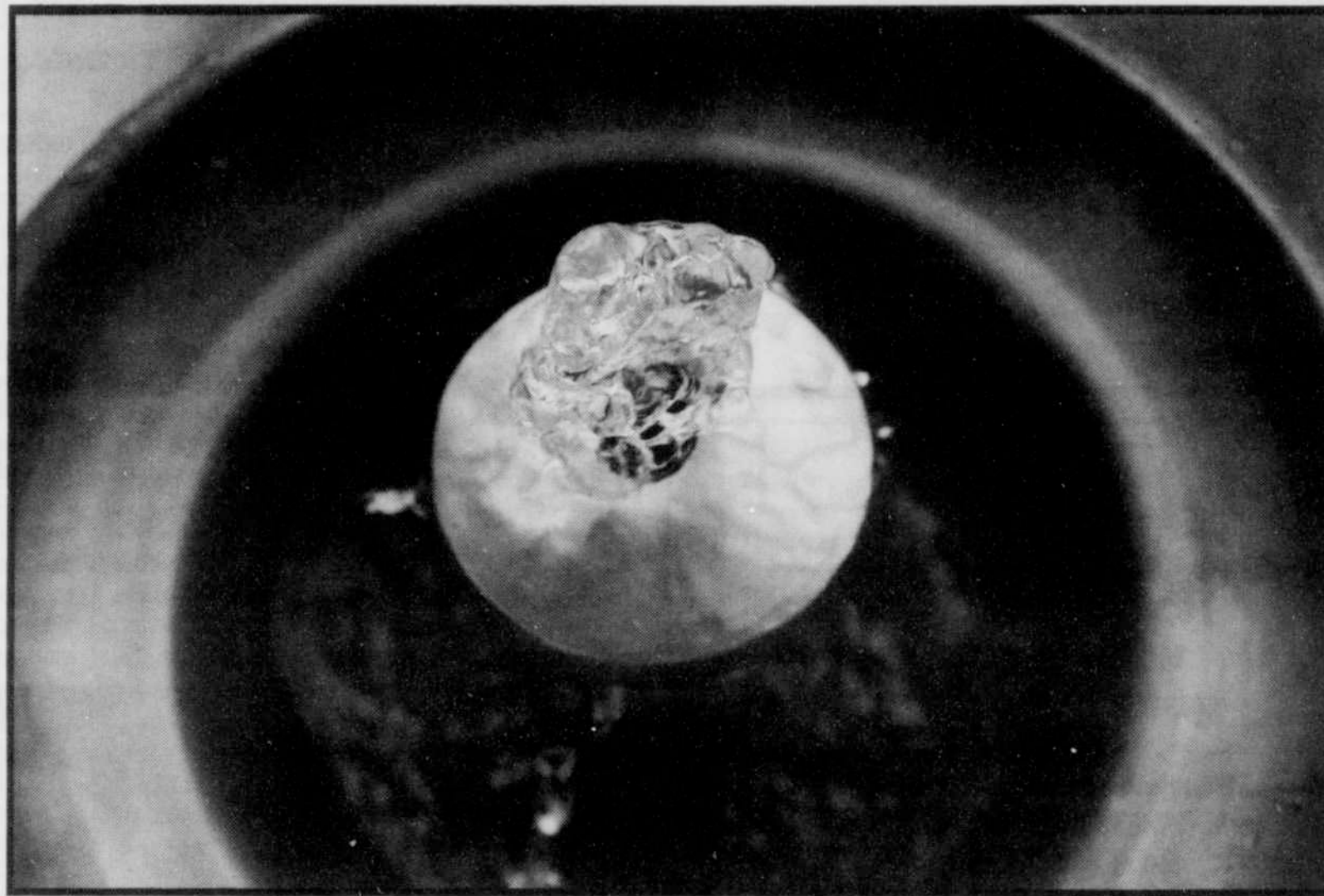


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

Preserving history

Our help is needed once again—this time to bring the biography of one of our greatest writers to completion

by Dale Reynolds

Chosen by the late gay playwright Tennessee Williams to write a two-part biography on his life, Lyle Leverich assumed he would be given carte blanche by those closest to Williams.

After the playwright's death in 1983, the estate, which controlled access to all of Williams' published works, was essentially taken over by one of Williams' closest friends, Maria St. Just. For nearly a decade she stopped any and all scholarly use of his plays, letters and journals, including those Leverich was previously authorized to use. It wasn't until she died in 1994 that the material was freed up for research.

Leverich was finally able to put the finishing touches on his huge tome, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*. It is thought to be the greatest biography published on the author of *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Night of the Iguana* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Volume one of the biography, which appeared in 1995, covers Williams' life through 1945. Volume two is supposed to cover from 1945 to the playwright's death.

The tale of why this second and last volume has not yet been written, let alone published, is complicated. One publisher after another contracted for the rights to print the book, but the stalling of the project by St. Just's refusal to allow Leverich access to the research materials he needed forced them to pull out of their agreements. Leverich approached publisher W.W. Norton, who advanced a huge amount of money to secure the

rights. The now 75-year-old Leverich has been forced to pay back the money previously advanced for the second volume, leaving him quite a bit shy of what he needs to produce a thoroughly investigated biography. It is ironic that a widely lauded author, living only on his Social Security money, lacks the necessary funds to pay the comprehensive research expenses needed to produce a book as detailed as the first volume.

The San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum has established the Lyle Leverich Research Fund. The fund has been endorsed by such heavyweights as playwrights Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, both contemporaries of Williams.

Williams was one of the most important U.S. literary figures of this century and was the most openly gay playwright before Stonewall. Today a Terrence McNally or a Mart Crowley or a Tony Kushner can be as openly gay as they want and no one bats an eye. Progress is slow, and history needs this second volume on the life and works of Thomas Lanier Williams, who early on took the moniker of "Tennessee."

Preserving our history is an important investment for our community to make.

Dale Reynolds is a contributing writer for Just Out. The San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum can be contacted at 399 Grove St., San Francisco, CA 94102, (415) 255-4800.

contents

VOL. 14 NO. 22 SEPTEMBER 19, 1997

FEATURE

Autumnal arts

Breezing through an eclectic selection of art events that may get buried in the mainstream press
(p. 21)

DEPARTMENTS

World news

Princess Diana's death saddens queers worldwide; Arab emirate of Dubai expels HIV-positive foreigners
(pp. 4-5)

National news

Political scientists report on shifts in public attitudes on sexual minority issues; queer journalists bask in mainstream media acceptance at Chicago conference; U.S. Circuit Court orders feds to pay attorneys' fees for Keith Meinhold
(pp. 7-11)

Local news

The Portland bi community is flourishing; officials announce decrease in AIDS deaths for 1997 but emphasize the battle is far from won; RTP dinner will honor Elli Work, PFLAG; Friends of PWAs auction is set for Oct. 5
(pp. 15-19)

COLUMNS

Reasons for hope

While debate continues on the possibility of an HIV vaccine, development and testing proceed
(p. 13)

My queer life

Writer's block sends one columnist to a cooking class—with slippery results
(p. 33)

ARTS

Cinema

Tom Selleck and Frank Oz dish the inside dope on In & Out; Ted Sod discusses Crocodile Tears, his film about an HIV-positive man's pact with the devil; and more Sensory Perceptions reviews: Leather Jacket Love Story and Some Prefer Cake
(pp. 29-31)