

# Arts & Entertainment

## 'Summer and Smoke' a melodramatic joke

By Mona Z. Koppelman

In Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* there's a line that says something like, "I think we should wish for everything and prepare to get nothing."

Audience members who went to the UNL theater department's production of Williams' play with that attitude probably weren't disappointed.

Those who went expecting more than nothing

### Theater Review

probably were disappointed.

Lack of solid characterization, slow pacing and melodramatic direction turned a classic play by a master playwright into a made-for-television production.

*Summer and Smoke* is about Alma Winemiller, a frustrated dixie spinster hopelessly in love with John, the boy next door. John returns to their small Mississippi town after attending medical school in

the big city. Always a hellion, John's interests center on drinking, gambling and loose women. Alma, the prissy and affected daughter of an Episcopal minister, can find no way to win John's heart — though he comes to admire her in his own way.

Williams' characters are complex humans who feel and think on many different emotional and intellectual levels. Friday night, I could tell the actors had done a lot of work on characterization, then promptly forgot about it the minute they walked onstage.

Carolyne Hood in her MFA role as Alma, did the best job of expressing the complexity of her character. But she unfortunately interpreted Alma as prissy and bubbling, instead of as a confused woman trying to deal with her own sexuality.

Jill Ehrisman as Alma's mother had a small part but good characterization. Ehrisman stole the show during several scenes as she parroted Alma's pretentious language and gestures.

Two small parts that needed a lot of work were the father and daughter Gonzales team. Who devised those cheap Mexican accents anyway? These accents (straight out of a bad Western) were particularly disruptive during the pivotal murder scene in the second act.

The weak characterizations may in part result from slow pacing. The play seemed to drag. It was obvious that director Constance Hill had decided to pick up the pace between scenes, but the real sluggishness was between cues. Many scenes seemed overly dramatic, with time for heavy sighs accompanied by fidgets, smothered yawns and program shufflings in the audience.

Technically, the set crew did its usual fine job of designing and building a solid, versatile set. The only thing that seemed out-of-place was the multicolored backdrop.

The costuming was lovely, turn-of-the-century and southern bellesque. The jaunty hats sometimes over-shadowed faces, but not distractingly so.

Two big bellyaches: First, the pyrotechnics could have been done differently or eliminated all together — unless the director wanted laughs from the audience, the oohs and ahs were a little much.

My biggest gripe concerns the soap opera music played between scenes, for entrances and exits, and in every instance except during Alma and John's first kiss (I was surprised at the omission). Even ABC wouldn't have dared to treat Tennessee Williams like *One Life to Live*.

## Native American writer says poetry can heal, bite conscience

By Jackie Fox

Laura Tohe is a Native American poet who originally is from the Navajo reservation in New Mexico.

She now lives in Omaha and commutes to UNL, where she is working on her master's degree in English. Her work has been published in Southwestern literary journals and in *The Greenfield Review*, a New York publication which features Native American artists. In addition, she will be featured in *All My Grandmothers Could Sing*, an anthology of Nebraska women poets to be published this summer through Free Rein Press.

A good friend encouraged Tohe to be a writer. "I always wanted to be an artist of some sort," she said, "but never felt like I had confidence to write, or

### Nebraska Poets

that anything I wrote would mean anything."

Her friend told her how easy it was to get into writing, so she signed up for a writing class at the University of New Mexico. The class was taught by Rudy Anaya, a prominent Chicano writer in the Southwest.

Tohe's first short story was one her mother had told her. "(It was) a Navajo creation story which I put into contemporary terms. He (Anaya) really liked it, and it was published. Then he and some other minority writers took interest and encouraged me. That's when I got started," Tohe said.

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### At Mexican Springs

Up here I can see the  
glimmering lights of Gallup calling the reser-  
vation  
like a whore standing under a light post  
the way they do in Juarez  
in Gallup when our sons are born they say,  
"she gave birth to a wino."  
Gallup steals our children  
returns them empty and crumbled

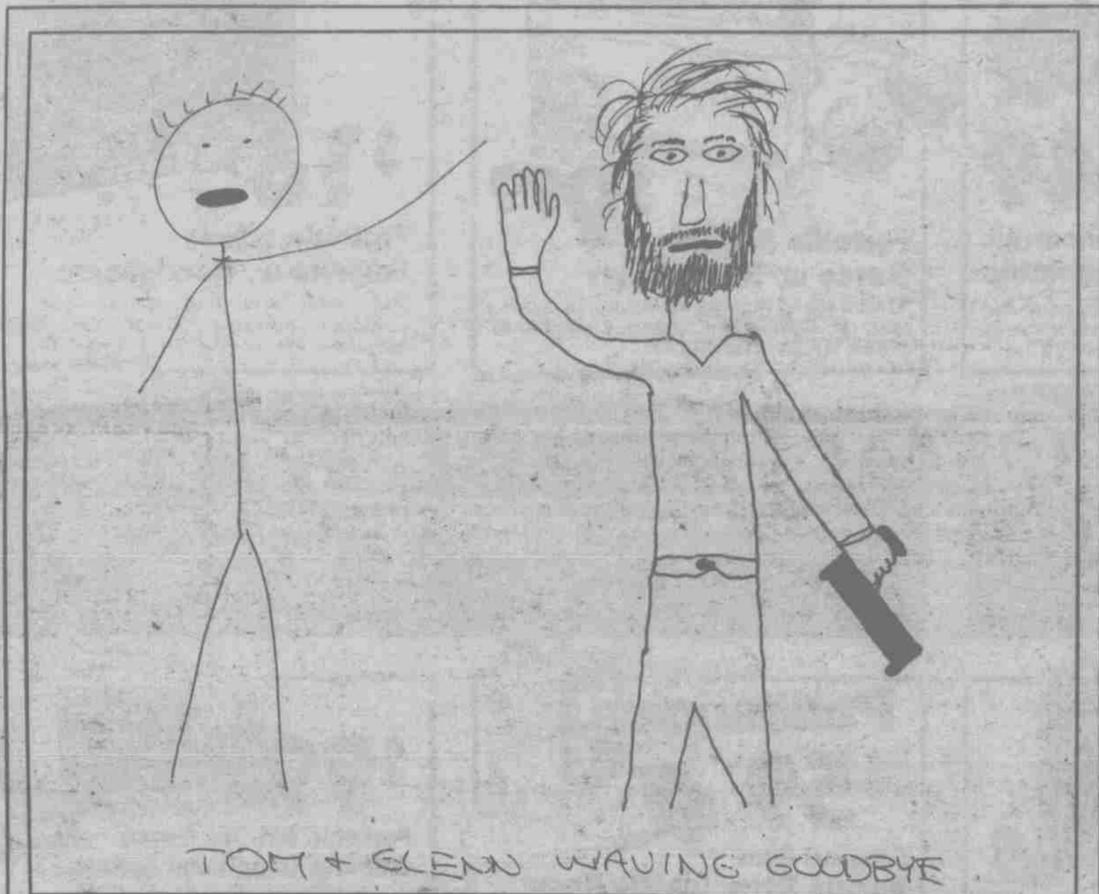
But here the hills are quietly breathing  
the earth is a warm glowing blanket  
holding me in her arms

It is here among the sunset in  
every plant  
every rock  
every shadow  
every movement  
every thing

I relive visions of ancient stories  
First Woman and First Man.  
their children stretched across these eternal  
sandstones

a deep breath  
she brings me sustenance  
life  
and I will live to tell my children these things.

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## Cheap beer & war ahead in '84

Glenn: This school year is coming to a close, and I, for one, am sad. It reminds me of the transitory nature of our existence. Tom tells me that his mother said she would be pleased if we did just one substantive column this semester. Well, here it is, Mrs. Mockler. The column filled with substance that you and all our adoring fans have been waiting for.

Tom: What column is that, Glenn?

Glenn: This one. Rather than wind up with commentary on the past, Tom and I are going to make predictions on the future. We will see with

### Tom Mockler & Glenn Stuva

our all-seeing eyes what lies ahead in the nebulous reaches of time.

Tom: You sure are long-winded, Glenn.

Glenn: Brevity isn't always the soul of wit.

Tom: I thought you were going to write about predictions, not assault my character. You pig.

Glenn: Right, old sport. Predictions. I predict that Ronald Reagan will be voted out of office, and his beautiful wife Nancy will be so disgusted with him that she will leave him and marry an Arab oil sheik.

Tom: That's a stupid prediction.

Glenn: All right, then. I predict Ronald Reagan will be voted into office and will launch a ther-

monuclear war, just for kicks.

Tom: I predict that no one will vote this time. Everyone will forget to.

Glenn: Well, now that's just a little hard for me to believe — I mean, there are some 230 million people in this great land of ours — somebody's got to.

Tom: Not necessarily.

Glenn: Twirp.

Tom: I predict that Hegelian dialecticism will produce a new dance craze.

Glenn: I predict that Bob Kerrey will marry Catherine Deneuve, and that a jealous Debra Winger will try to publicly disrupt the wedding.

Tom: I predict that Bob Kerrey will attempt to get the Falstaff brewery put under public ownership and control. This, of course, would once again thrust Bob Kerrey into the limelight, because it would be the first attempt of its kind.

Glenn: Yes, wouldn't that be wonderful — government-subsidized beer — just pennies a glass. Glass after glass after golden, bubbling, delicious glass of Falstaff beer . . . .

Tom: But remember, these are merely predictions — they haven't happened yet.

Glenn: Debra Winger will agree to star in another Lincoln movie, *Attack of the Amazon Woman*. The movie will be directed by James L. Brooks, and will be even more successful both critically and popularly than *Terms of Endearment*.

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