

FACEBOOK TRIBUTES

TENNESSEE AND BALTHUS

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Tennessee and Balthus. In NYC: discovered an artist, Balthus, being given a show at The Metropolitan Museum. Loved his work. Young girls with cats. Very Lolita-like stuff. Innocence plus (panty-glimpse) tinge of the erotic. Dark and spare and disturbing. The Met continues to astonish. Not only is the art mind blowing, but the settings for the art have the power of staged installations. One can truly spend a week there and not exhaust the treasures.

Son Rico joined us, on his way to Amsterdam. Huge, huge, huge high for the Mum and Da. Rico took us to a Tribeca restaurant (half owned by Robert DiNiro) that was terrific and (on a Tuesday night yet) was packed with youngish New Yorkers making noise (and possibly whoopee, later on). We took Rico to the Met Balthus show and Rico, too, was amazed — also didn't know the artist. And Rico knows everything.

And we also attended the opening at the Frick Museum of "*The Girl With The Golden Earring*." This Dutch Mona Lisa rates, and got, her own room in the exhibit.

Rico got us tickets to "*The Glass Menagerie*." Wednesday matinee. Sandy and I walked from Penn Station to the Booth Theatre on 45th (Shubert Alley) and struggled through a tsunami of people and noise, Noise, NOISE! A Disneyland babel environment! Hard for this aging playwright to take any longer. But the production was worth it. Cherry Jones's Amanda was excellent — alternating between galling and moving.

The younger actors were superb. And, with all the confrontations and bickering, there was much love in that doomed family, on that stage. Very taken with Zachary Quinto, Celia Keenan-Bolger and Brian J. Smith (The Gentleman Caller: keep an eye on this actor). For the first time, in my experience, the Gentleman Caller seemed part of that doomed environment.

The set, lighting, costumes, sound design were first-Broadway-rate, contributing to the memory aspects of the play, yet keeping it grounded somehow in the present tense, to the play's doomed curtain. And the director, John Tiffany — besides navigating his unique conception — got wonderful performances from each actor and helped make it an ensemble play.

“Menagerie” has never been a Williams favorite of mine (too small, too delicate, too realistic, too lacking in event — *I thought!*): *“A Streetcar Named Desire”* is my Williams favorite and, in my opinion, one of America's greatest plays. I find the *“Streetcar”* structure phenomenal. But this *“Menagerie”* won me over (some wonderful stylized, choreographic movement that linked scenes, and that I think would have delighted Tennessee: the movement seemed very organic — especially Tom's often agonized and antsy moves, as if some pressured inner need to get out was moving him around constantly—even when sitting still).

The fire escapes climbing to the sky, and all surrounded by darkness. was a stunning image that I keep returning as I now (often) conjure up this production. In fact, it would have made sense to me (if it had been possible) for Tom to make his final speech at the very top escape. It is as if the play takes place in orbit. I love that. It is what I feel about my own plays — where they should take place.

“Menagerie” is bigger than I thought — delicate still, yes — but unflinching, tough, as well. And it closes with a Williams line that has great meaning for me these days:

“. . . for nowadays the world is lit by lightening.”

I got the feeling that the packed audience knew it was in the presence of a master playwright with a unique voice — still — and they responded accordingly.

In this case, the standing ovation was earned.

To Pittsburghers reading this — additional pride in this production: Cherry Jones, Zachary Quinto and an understudy, Nick Rehberger, are all Carnegie Mellon graduates. FG

