

ONE ARM

BY
MOISÉS KAUFMAN

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY
AND SCREENPLAY BY
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS



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PLAY SERVICE
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ONE ARM
by Moisés Kaufman
based on the short story and screenplay
by Tennessee Williams

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Produced in New York City
by The New Group (Scott Elliot, Artistic Director)
and Tectonic Theater Project (Moisés Kaufman, Artistic Director)
by arrangement with the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

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ADAPTOR'S NOTE

In 1942 Tennessee Williams wrote a short story entitled “One Arm.” This story must have stayed with him, because twenty-five years later, in 1967, he wrote a screenplay based on it. Although he tried for the rest of his life to get this movie made, he never succeeded.

When I first read the screenplay, I was struck by its frankness and emotional rawness. In it Williams portrays a world he knew intimately with remarkable honesty and candor. And it felt revelatory to me, not only about Williams himself, but about an often overlooked narrative thread in American history.

This adaptation is not — nor does it pretend to be — a realistic play. I’m interested in exploring theatrical forms (as was Williams himself), and in that context this adaptation uses the stage to allow the audience to imagine the movie that was never made. In this experiment, the actors use the tag lines from the screenplay, the voiceover narration, and the text Williams wrote as stage directions to allow the audience to imagine the film. By doing this, we’ve created a sort of “theatrical screenplay.”

Working with dramaturgs Jimmy Maize and David Schultz, we located several drafts of the screenplay in libraries and private collections at Harvard University, Columbia University and the New York Public Library. Each version led us to a deeper understanding of the story, characters and themes Williams was exploring.

In this adaptation I’ve used texts from these different drafts, as well as sections of the short story.

A short design note: In production, we found that having the stage loosely suggest a prison (without realistically depicting one) allowed us the possibility to easily create all the other locations called for in the text.

ONE ARM received its world premiere in Chicago, Illinois, presented by About Face Theatre and Tectonic Theater Project, at the Steppenwolf Theatre on December 2, 2004. It was directed by Moisés Kaufman; the set design was by Derek McLane; the costume design was by Janice Pytel; the lighting design was by Mike Baldassari; and the sound design and music were by Andre Pluess. The cast was as follows:

Marilyn Bielby, Josh Bywater, Jason Denuszek, Steve Key, Sandra Marquez, John McAdams, David Parkes, Reynaldo Rosales, Kelli Simpkins, Michael Stahl-David, Joe Van Slyke, Eltony Williams and Shané Williams.

ONE ARM was subsequently presented by The New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Geoff Rich, Executive Director) and Tectonic Theater Project (Moisés Kaufman, Artistic Director; Greg Reiner, Executive Director; Tiffany Redmon, General Manager) at the Acorn Theater in New York City, opening on May 19, 2011. It was directed by Moisés Kaufman; the dramaturgs were Jimmy Maize and David G. Schultz; the set design was by Derek McLane; the costume design was by Clint Ramos; the lighting design was by David Lander; the music and sound design were by Shane Rettig; the production stage manager was Valerie A. Peterson; and the associate director was Jimmy Maize. The cast was as follows:

NARRATOR / SEAN / ENSEMBLE Noah Bean
WILLY / SAILOR / ENSEMBLE K C Comeaux
OLLIE OLSEN Claybourne Elder
LESTER / CHAPLAIN / ENSEMBLE Steven Hauck
DIVINITY STUDENT / SAILOR / MIDDLE-AGED
HOMOSEXUAL / ENSEMBLE Todd Lawson
PRISON GUARD / YACHTSMAN /
ENSEMBLE Christopher McCann
CHERRY / MAN IN THE PARK / MIDDLE-AGED
HOMOSEXUAL / MRS. WIRE / THE WARDEN /
ENSEMBLE Greg Pierotti
LILA / GIRL IN THE FRENCH QUARTER /
NURSE / ENSEMBLE Larisa Polonsky

CHARACTERS

OLLIE

NARRATOR/SEAN

SAM a hot tamale vendor

WILLY, another male hustler

A MIDDLE-AGED HOMOSEXUAL MAN

SAILORS

A STRIPPER

THE YOUNG MAN IN THE PARK

BARTENDER

THE YACHTSMAN

THE GIRL ON THE YACHT

ANOTHER MIDDLE-AGED HOMOSEXUAL MAN

LESTER, a middle-aged homosexual

A GIRL IN THE FRENCH QUARTER

CHERRY, an old queen

THE PRISON GUARD

THE PRISON CHAPLAIN

THE DIVINITY STUDENT

SEVERAL VOICES

MRS. WIRE, a landlady

THE WARDEN

ONE ARM

The company of actors enters the stage. The Narrator holds up a copy of the screenplay and says:

NARRATOR/SEAN. *One Arm*, an unproduced screenplay by Tennessee Williams. (*He reads.*) Fade in. Close up on Ollie. (*Ollie steps center stage.*) A voiceover narration begins. (*The Narrator sits down as his table and reads from the screenplay. While he reads, the other actors surround Ollie and buckle a leather strap around his right arm to prevent its mobility.*) The young man, so young you could call him a boy, is an actor, of course, and in the part that he's going to perform he's supposed to have only one arm. He's supposed to have only one arm except in a few short scenes that will show how the arm was lost. In the film you'll notice that one of his arms is never lifted, never used. Think of it as an arm that doesn't exist. Dissolve to interior. Prison. Day. Ollie is alone. The cell is the "birdcage," reserved for the soon to be executed — no windows. (*Ollie is alone in his prison cell.*)

GUARD. Letters for you. Quite a few.

OLLIE. I been all around the country and made lots of friendly contacts here and there.

GUARD. Want to keep 'em or have 'em burned?

OLLIE. I want to keep them. They're mine.

GUARD. Very interesting.

OLLIE. What?

GUARD. No return addresses.

OLLIE. So?

GUARD. And such fine paper. Mmmm. They smell good.

OLLIE. Give me my letters. (*The guard gives them to Ollie. He opens and reads a letter.*)

CORRESPONDENT 1. "Dear Ollie, I saw your photograph in a newspaper and of course I recognized you at once. I can't believe what

they are saying about you. It's like a bad dream. The Ollie they are describing is not the person I know. I am certain there must be some sort of mistake. Are they planning an appeal? Is there anything I can do to help?" (*Ollie puts down the letter and opens another, reading.*)

CORRESPONDENT 2. "Dear Ollie, I can't believe this is happening to you. I've been following your story every day. Can what they are saying be true? It can't be. Thinking back on New Orleans, all I remember is what a friendly sort of fellow you were and what a good experience knowing you was. Is there any chance left of an appeal?" (*Ollie crumples up the letters and throws them into the trash.*)

Transition into Canal Street.

COMPANY MEMBER. Dissolve to exterior. New Orleans. Canal Street. Day.

OLLIE. (*Calling to someone in the street.*) Hey, Sam! (*A hot tamale vendor, Sam, enters and rolls his steaming cart to the curb where Ollie stands.*) Gimme half-a-dozen tamales. Need something hot in my belly. Whoever said you don't freeze y'r balls off in this town never hit it in winter.

SAM. Whyn't you wear something' warmer?

WILLY. (*Entering.*) Ollie's gotta show his merchandise.

OLLIE. Unpeel these fo' me, Willy.

WILLY. (*Unpeeling a tamale.*) You know, I seen a guy with no arms in a sideshow that could cut and butter a piece of toast with his toes.

OLLIE. I ain't in no sideshow. (*Willy is eating the tamale himself.*) What the fuck you — ?

WILLY. Took a percentage for labor. (*He has unpeeled the second tamale; he tries to stick it in Ollie's mouth for him.*)

OLLIE. (*Abruptly savage.*) Quit clowning! (*He seizes the tamale from Willy and wolfs it down. He grimaces.*) This stuff's rat meat an' pepper but it warms your stomach. You can have the rest. (*We hear a sea gull's thin, anxious cry.*) Somebody tole me that if you stand in one place long enough near the sea or the Gulf — (*He grins slowly.*) a sea gull will fly over and shit a pot of gold on you. (*He laughs harshly.*) Is that a fact or a fiction? (*Willy laughs bleakly.*) You scored yet today?

ONE ARM

by Moisés Kaufman

based on the short story and screenplay
by Tennessee Williams

7M, 1W (doubling)

Based on Tennessee Williams' unproduced screenplay of his own classic short story, this new adaptation from pioneering theatrical auteur Moisés Kaufman follows Ollie, a young farm boy who joins the Navy and becomes the lightweight boxing champion of the Pacific Fleet. Soon after, he loses his arm in a car accident, and he turns to hustling to survive. One of Williams' most searing character studies, ONE ARM takes us through Ollie's odyssey in a disenfranchised American underworld before the Second World War.

"Moisés Kaufman's fast, fierce, brutally beautiful stage adaptation of an unproduced screenplay by Tennessee Williams is more than a play: It's a time machine. ONE ARM is nothing less than the late-Williams play that the latter-day Williams himself wasn't capable of writing."
—New York Magazine

"... a fascinatingly lurid, provocative and fatalistic piece of theater. Somehow, it captures the complex, oft-destructive energy of its author, while adding just enough metatheatric remove that we get to ponder and critique the strange, complex context of the original while also enjoying much of its sensual heat."
—Variety

"A labor of love and deep empathy [from] Moisés Kaufman ... A clash of sensibilities becomes a keening paean to all the loves lost, the fear, contempt and inhibition."
—The New York Times

Also by Moisés Kaufman

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