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'The Chorus Girl Plays' reveal traces of themes and characters in Tennessee Williams' later plays

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'The Chorus Girl Plays' ran as part of the 8th annual Tennessee Williams theater festival at the end of September

Last Thursday, as "The Glass Menagerie" opened to critical raves on Broadway, a world premiere production of an early one-act by Tennessee Williams debuted in Provincetown as part of the seaside town's 8th annual theater festival dedicated to the writer.

Williams lived in Provincetown in the 1940s before he broke through with "Glass Menagerie," which was one of the plays he worked on while there.

The never-seen-before mini-drama, "Curtains for the Gentleman," was one-third of a burlesque revue by Dansloop Chicago, a company known for dance-theater mashups. The troupe framed the early-'40s shorts by Tom Williams (he hasn't become Tennessee yet) as "The Chorus Girl Plays."

Like "Curtains for the Gentleman," the other two pieces in the trilogy, "Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!" and "At Liberty," provided fascinating looks at a writer who was in the process of finding his signature themes and unique poetic voice.

Each short concerned desperate dreamers looking to escape their lots. Characters waited for gentleman callers and spoke of paper lanterns, lurking death and being caught in a trap.

"The past keeps getting bigger and bigger at the future's expense." It's a line from "At Liberty" -- and pure Williams.