

**Tennessee Williams Baptism Collection**

**1 Box, .5 linear feet**

**Special Collections & Archives  
Loyola University Library**

**Collection 53**

# Tennessee Williams Baptism Collection

**Reference Code**

Collection 53

**Name and Location of Repository**

Special Collections and Archives, J. Edgar & Louise S. Monroe Library, Loyola University New Orleans

**Title**

Tennessee Williams Baptism Collection

**Date**

1969

**Extent**

1 box, .5 linear feet

**Name of Creator**

Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J.

**Biographical History**

Playwright Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi. After spending his later childhood in St. Louis, Missouri, Williams eventually moved to New Orleans, a city that would inspire much of his writing. Williams wrote notable plays as *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for which he earned the Pulitzer Prize, and is considered one of the greatest American playwrights of the Twentieth Century.

In 1941, Williams moved to Key West, Florida. After decades of alcohol and drug abuse, as well as struggling with mental illness, William's brother Dakin came to visit in 1969. Having recently been converted to Catholicism himself, Dakin convinced Williams to meet with a Catholic priest, Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. of St. Mary of the Sea church. Five days later Williams was baptized into the Catholic church, even though he had previously been baptized and raised as an Episcopalian. According to Father LeRoy, Williams said he believed he had always been a Catholic, in spirit. Williams claimed later to have never taken his conversion seriously.

In the aftermath and publicity, it was determined that since Williams was likely already baptized as an Episcopalian, Father LeRoy had violated guidelines set forth by the Vatican in 1947 which stated, "indiscriminate conditional Baptism . . . cannot be approved" unless "reasonable doubt persists" as to the previous baptism of the person. Father LeRoy was unaware of these guidelines at the time of the baptism and was thus called forth to explain his actions to Church leaders.

Tennessee Williams died on February 24, 1983, in New York City, apparently from an accident resulting from too much drug and alcohol use.

Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. was a member of the New England Province, had been a missionary to Jamaica and was the Reverend at St. Mary, Star of the Sea church in Key West, Florida.

### **Scope and Content**

This collection contains letters, diary entries, and documents all related to the conditional baptism of the playwright Tennessee Williams into the Catholic Church by the Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. in 1969.

### **System of Arrangement**

The collection is arranged chronologically.

### **Conditions Governing Access**

The collection is open for research use.

## Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

Physical rights are retained by the J. Edgar and Louis S. Monroe Library, Loyola University New Orleans. Copyright is retained in accordance with U.S. Copyright Laws.

## Language and Scripts of the Material

Collection is in English

## Processing Information

Finding aid written by Katherine Kuhl Rivet, 2013.

## Sources Used

The following sources were consulted during the preparation of the biographical note:

Hayman, Ronald. *Tennessee Williams: Everyone Else Is an Audience*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.

## Container List

Box	Folder	Description
1	1	Letters sent to Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. congratulating him on his success in converting Tennessee Williams
1	2	Letters sent to Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. concerning the Ecumenical response in the aftermath of the baptism
1	3	Statements and diary entries by Father Joseph L. LeRoy, S.J. concerning his baptism and relationship with Tennessee Williams