TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
1911 - 1983
A TRIBUTE
ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL • JACKSON SQUARE • NEW ORLEANS
4 P.M. SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 1983
PART OF A HERO

I don't suppose that he will be able to build these fires much longer as part of himself must burn like a match struck to light them,

and yet I continue to see him every morning collecting dry sticks for his tiny conflagration.
And when it is lighted, he crouches before it and shivers, humming a single, thin note that comes and goes as though he moved in long, irregular circles, a mournful song that comes from a shivering monkey, a monkey not of the tropics but of the poles...

Still he would seem to suppose poor Tom's a-cold, or that something he once took for something of God in his heart has only him to warm it, an obligation too sacred for him to ignore, and so each morning out he creeps once more to collect and set ablaze this silly pile of debris as earnestly as God must have built the sun.

Each fire may be fatal to him, becoming his auto-da-fe, but if he's aware of this danger, it doesn't appear to disturb him, it certainly fails to deter him,

and when that distinguished time comes, the one that's final, I think we might suitably honor his passing with a modest but dignified service.
I don't suppose there will be much left to dispose of, and handful of powder, bluish and very dark, and light on the dropping of sparrow.

Still, as he goes, as the sable-plumed wind removes him with that mechanical mourning sound of air's motion,
I will remark to myself, He has gone beyond us.
I may even feel a touch of his exaltation.

And though I may not in the least understand for what reason he made his choice, or thought it incumbent upon him, this much will be clear as any of his lost mornings, that he did own one essential part of a hero,

the idea of life as a nothing-withholding submission of self to flame.