American Life in Poetry
Tennessee Hill’s South emerges in her poem as a character, a personage that haunts and possesses her with beauty and a certain disquiet. Her poem, “Crater Heart”, moves from fragmentary image to simile to metaphor in a seemingly disjointed fashion, that in the end, becomes a composition of arresting beauty: “I have stuffed the South’s nightlights/ in my mouth.” Perhaps this is how she wants us to read her poem of elegant strangeness.

Crater Heart

By Tennessee Hill

Such strangeness these days.

Morning rising over my head
like the quilt sewn of old t-shirts
or saltwater waves
licking our sun-bleached dock.

Then—you absorbing moment, you
harvest queen—the sky is surprised
by evening’s orchard.

I have stuffed the South’s nightlights
in my mouth. Gala of fireflies.

How clumsy I feel in front of God.