# TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: "DEFEATED" CHARACTERS IN CONFLICT

by

Neil Matthews

# A STUDY OF CONFLICT IN THE "DEFEATED" CHARACTERS: SELECTED PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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# ABSTRACT

As an expression or, perhaps, confession of his life, Tennessee Williams creates a unique character-type that dramatically represents many of his own feelings, attitudes, conflicts and their "resolutions." The "defeated" or death-oriented character dramatically expresses conflict by externalizing the alternatives to his problems in another character whom I have termed the life-oriented character. The supreme conflict manifested in the "defeated" character is the life-death struggle.

In an effort to understand the "defeated" character more completely, I present the analysis of conflict within the "defeated" character in three chapters. The first chapter defines the concepts of the life and death forces or attitudes and the conflict itself in terms of its dramatic representation in the "defeated" character. The second chapter investigates the psychological foundations of the "defeated" character by examining several important conflicts in Williams' Southern heritage and in his own life. The third chapter integrates the findings of the previous two chapters with a detailed study of eight plays. The Conclusion reaffirms the basic tenet that the "defeated" character, above all else, is an image of modern man struggling to regain a sense of completeness and morality in an incomplete and immoral world.



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## RESUMÉ

Comme une expression ou, peut-être comme une confession de sa vie, Tennessee Williams a créé un type de caractère unique qui représente d'une façon dramatique beaucoup de ses propres sentiments, attitudes, conflits et leurs "résolutions." Le "vaincu" ou le caractère qui est orienté vers la mort exprime un conflit d'une manière dramatique en plaçant les alternatifs de son problème dans un caractère qui trouve la joie de vivre, sans avoir nul regret. Le conflit manifesté dans le caractère "vaincu" est une bataille entre la vie et la mort.

Dans un effort à comprendre complètement le caractère "vaincu" je présente une analyse du conflit dans le coeur de l'être "vaincu" dans trois chapitres. Le premier chapitre définе les concepts des forces de la vie et la mort ou les attitudes et le conflit même en termes dramatiques, comme il est representé dans le caractère "vaincu." Le deuxième chapitre recherche les bases psychologiques du caractère "vaincu" tout en examinant plusieurs conflits importants dans la vie de Tennessee Williams et dans son héritage méridional. Le troisième chapitre incorpore les découvertes des deux premiers chapitres et une étude en détail de huit pièces. La Conclusion met l'emphase sur la règle de base, que le caractère "vaincu," est surtout l'image de l'homme moderne luttant pour regagner le sens complet et moral dans un monde incomplet et immoral.



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# CHAPTER I

# A DEFINITION OF THE CONFLICT WITHIN THE "DEFEATED" CHARACTER

"Character is my specialty, and language."

Williams.

In Tennessee Williams' short story, One Arm, he describes Oliver Winemiller as possessing the ". . . charm of the defeated." Again, in his play, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, he has Maggie employ that exact phrase in describing Brick's nature. While reading the plays, I discovered that the "defeated" characters are the protagonists and that the plays do indeed revolve around their actions. They are the central figures in every respect. Upon closer scrutiny of the attitudes, feelings, and values of the "defeated" characters, I realized that they suffer from deep, paralyzing psychic conflicts that ultimately result in their psychological and, occasionally, physical destruction. Having discovered these deep inner conflicts, I felt that any analysis of the "defeated" characters would necessarily involve a psychological approach. Furthermore, I noted that the "defeated" characters often possess attitudes and conflicts that become the psychological foundations upon which Williams erects their life-experiences. While studying Williams' own life, I "re-discovered" these conflicts. It became apparent to me that to gain a greater insight into the conflicts of the "defeated" characters in Williams' plays, a greater understanding of Williams' life in terms of those conflicts seemed in order. Therefore, I concluded that an analysis of the "defeated" characters in selected Williams' plays would involve three

parts: one, a psychological approach to the understanding of the essence of the conflicts within the "defeated" characters; two, Williams' southern heritage and own life in terms of those conflicts; and, three, the integration of the first two parts with a detailed discussion of selected plays. Thus, after perceiving the diverse manifestations of inner conflict as the principal mechanism of character portrayal subsuming all other attributes, I devote this study to the analysis of Williams' dramatic development and presentation of conflict in the "defeated" characters.

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I

Indeed, inner conflict assumes such a transcendent position in the plays that I believe conflict is life (or the converse). Williams has said that ". . . the heart of man, his body and his brain, is forged in a white-hot furnace for the purpose of conflict (the struggle for creation). . . ."[1] If conflict is, for Williams, essential in life—or if indeed it really is life—and if the consummation of conflict occurs within character (which I believe it does), then the critical examination of these characters devolves upon three pertinent and related questions: What are the conflicts within the "defeated" character? What do the conflicts reveal or reflect in terms of that character and the macrocosm of his society and culture? And what does the "fate" or outcome of the character mean with regard to that character, his society, and humanity in general? If the answer to the first

question does not extend into the remaining two questions, a playwright may simply become financially successful. If the first answer, however, moves beyond the stage into the heart of a culture and taps the undercurrent of gut-level emotion wherein resides universality, then a truly great playwright may emerge. In extensively examining the nature of conflict and its effects in Williams' plays, I am not attempting to assess his greatness. I defer this assessment to the testimony of time when the completed body of his work is available. However, I believe that the quintessence of Williams' dramatic thought will emerge through the persistent scrutiny of conflict within the "defeated" character.

Because I am involved with a playwright and not a novelist, I will also discuss the methodology of the presentation of conflict in character. It is possible to discuss conflict and presentation in terms of the other because they occur simultaneously on the stage—i.e., the externalization of inner conflict is through dramatic technique. This is not to infer that the origin of a given conflict occurs during the play (through the presentation of character), though this is certainly plausible. Considering Williams' predilection for beginning his plays in media res, the conflicts of deep-rooted psychic origin evident in his characters have developed before the action of the play. When the character appears upon the stage, he bears his conflict forward and we perceive the state of his mind through the externalized dramatic representation of that conflict in the opposing character.

I feel it is now necessary to determine what these conflicts are—which is the substance of the first question I proposed.

Basically, the conflicts reveal themselves as dualities, as two concepts or forces or attitudes in polarity and in opposition to each other. This dualistic form, with the inherent proclivity toward struggle and tension, is the most significant aspect operating in the development and portrayal of Williams' characters. Furthermore, many of the characters themselves—and not only their conflicts—are presented with opposing attributes that also create a predisposition for inter-personal strife. In The Glass Menagerie, for example, Laura and Amanda are thoroughly polarized characters. Amanda bears a certain refinement and confidence among her peers and displays an almost natural ease among males. She is a product of a once high Southern culture which stressed poise, affability and the social amenities in general—qualities in which she excelled. However, Laura is withdrawn, quiet, anxious among outsiders (particularly males), awkward in conversation, clumsy in her movements—thus completely lacking her mother's poise and self-assurance. Laura's conflict arises because Amanda persists in exhorting and directing Laura to become someone she is not—namely, another Amanda. Laura's great struggle is whether to embrace the changeless security and safety represented in her inanimate world of glass or to attempt to develop and survive in the social reality beyond her apartment as represented by the gentleman caller and Amanda. Her conflict be-

comes the crux of the play, for all the action is essentially directed toward altering Laura's behaviour.

Another illustration of the dualistic approach to character presentation occurs in A Streetcar Named Desire. Synoptically expressed, Blanche suffers on one level from an inner conflict emanating from moral compunctions over her past experiences (i.e., her treatment of her homosexual husband, Allen). Like Laura, Blanche is a sensitive, "moth-like" creature. She is a descendant of a highly refined Southern culture. Being posited as a delicate creature whose ". . . delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. . . ,"[2] she is at once perceived as the opposite of Stanley Kowalski—her "executioner," as she refers to him. Blanche's moral conflict extends into Stanley's world because he embodies all that she is not. By this I mean that Blanche, like Stanley, is incomplete and the difference between her totality and her present partiality resides within the complementary and opposing character—in this case, Stanley. Because Stanley's attitudes reflect the social reality dominant in the present world (in Williams' estimation), it becomes incumbent upon Blanche to initiate actions toward compromise—for her very life is at stake. An acceptance of part or all of the attitudes and values represented in Stanley would be tantamount to a successful compromise (in which case she would not be psychologically destroyed).

Summer and Smoke also reveals a dualistic conflict between mind and body, sensuality and spirituality, Agape and Eros. Alma

Winemiller is the daughter of a minister. Her conflict is between her Puritan morality with all its restrictions and denials, and her feelings of strong, life-affirming drives—notably, the sexual drive. Cast in a similar mould as Laura and Blanche, she is a sensitive girl who also does not seem to belong in the present world, but rather ". . . to a more elegant age, such as the eighteenth century in France. . . ."[3] Her antithesis is embodied in John Buchanan, a "Promethean figure," who represents the sexuality and sensuality repressed in Alma. If Alma is the soul (which is the meaning of her name in Spanish), then John is the heart. Alma's conflict is whether or not to totally or partially embrace the attitudes of John's world reflected in her acceptance or rejection of John. For Alma to accept and internalize John's world, she must compromise her own life values. John also has the option to compromise his values but there is no necessity or urgency because his attitudes reflect the present-day value system. Thus, the dualism of conflict evident in Alma is externally presented through her relationship with John.

One last example of Williams' employment of dualism of conflict in character and character presentation is found in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Brick is the passive, withdrawn, detached, perhaps too sensitive figure who suffers from moral compunctions over past actions and their social implications (as Blanche did). Basically, his conflict oscillates between accepting the truth about himself or suppressing it in preference or need for illusion. His conflict is

exteriorized in his antitheses, Big Daddy and Maggie. Big Daddy bears a ponderous vitality and aggressivity. He is materialistic and avaricious; he is a prevaricator when pragmatic, yet he can also be brutally honest. Above all else, he is a realist who has learned to compromise and accept "mendacity" as a part of that compromise—something that Brick is unwilling to do. Maggie, as a complementary figure to Brick, is more like Big Daddy. She is loud, domineering, cunning and tenacious in attaining her goals. Like Big Daddy, she is honest; she can confront truth. Brick's moral-social conflict is brought to the forefront of his relationship with Maggie. For to accept Maggie by confronting his truth is to receive understanding, forgiveness, perhaps salvation. To reject her by reinforcing his illusions is to prolong the "punishment" necessary (in his mind) for the "sins" of moral transgressions (with regard to his treatment of Skipper). Thus, his conflict conforms to the prescribed dualistic framework under discussion.

## II

Having summarily discussed the conflicts of the "defeated" characters in some of Williams' plays, I now wish to examine what the inferences and conclusions are concerning dualism in character portrayal, for this will also establish a premise from which I can posit what I believe to be the supreme conflict. Perhaps it is best to permit Williams, himself, to direct us in our present pursuit. One of his short stories affords us an important corollary to his dualistic

presentation of conflict:

> For the sins of the world are really only its partialities, its incompletions, and these are what sufferings must atone for. . . . He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall or a room left unfurnished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it. The use of imagination, resorting to dreams or the loftier purpose of art, is a mask he devises to cover his incompletion.[4]

As I remarked earlier, the difference between a character's totality and his condition of partiality is represented in the opposing character. For, though a character's conflict is entirely within him, it is simultaneously halved in its dramatic presentation and exteriorized in another character (as in the case of Laura-Amanda, Alma-John, Blanche-Stanley, Brick-Maggie and others yet to be discussed). It should be noted that this condition of partiality is also true of Amanda, John, Stanley, and Maggie. Indeed, the theme of man's incompleteness is so central to the works of Williams that it appears in one of his poems:

> . . . for you must learn, even you, what we have learned,
> that some things are marked by their nature to be not completed
> but longed for and sought for a while and abandoned.[5]

After having expressed Williams' own thoughts on incompleteness and having examined several of his plays, I am led to concur with Esther Jackson et al. that inner fragmentation (as expressed in conflict however) most perspicuously describes the state of mind in Williams' characters—particularly the "defeated" characters. Jackson says of these "defeated" characters (her appellation for them is anti-

heroes): "They are each characterized by an inner division, by a fragmentation so complete that it has reduced them to partialities."[6] It is from this generally accepted conclusion that I wish to proceed to develop an approach different from those heretofore taken that will focus on the ultimate conflict within the "defeated" characters of Williams' plays. I believe that the fragmentation presently under scrutiny resulting from the dualistic portrayal and development in character finally extrapolates to the supreme manifestation of that concept in the polar conflict of life and death. The discussion of these terms takes us from the predominant concern of the first question I proposed to the second and third questions which deal with this supreme conflict and its resolution in terms of its societal significance. For the destiny or outcome of each character, though occasionally obscured by Williams' own conflicts and sympathies, bears relevancy not only to the characters in the play but often to the condition of man in the modern world.

When I speak of the life and death forces I am not thinking of Freud's life and death instincts because they are biologically inherent in every human being.* I am positing that the life-death struggle evident in the "defeated" characters exists on the socio-moral level and is not innate or basic in all Williams' characters; for it does not exist in the "defeated" characters' counterparts (i.e., Amanda,

*See Sigmund Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1972), for a complete study of the life-death instinct.

John, Stanley, Maggie, Catherine, Heavenly, Hannah and Chicken). It is only the "defeated" characters who are unable to compromise and adjust to modern society and its values. Their individualized struggles come to represent a consummation, an ultimate and final expression of opposing forces that result from their experiences in life. They are the outcasts and misfits; they are the ones who are plagued, as was Hamlet, by an over-awareness, an excessive introspection, and an often overwhelming sense of morality.

Williams presents the conflict of life and death in the "defeated" characters as two opposing forces struggling for domination over each other. As the two extreme points of a swinging pendulum reflect the nature and properties of that pendulum, so too does a character's oscillation between life and death (physical and psychological) reveal the nature of that character. First one dominates, then the other, and through the scrutiny of this oscillation we come to focus on motivation. What motivates the character to direct himself toward or away from life? I have discussed several of these motivations with regard to conflict earlier in this study. I will examine them again and other plays in detail later to receive a greater understanding of conflict in character.

I associate masochism (introverted aggression), with an emphasis on its social form,* with the death impulse because it seeks the anni-

*See Sigmund Freud's "The Economic Principle of Masochism," Collected Papers, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 262, and Theodor Reik's Masochism in Sex and Society, trans. M. H. Beigel and G. M. Kurth (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), pp. 292ff. for a discussion of social and moral masochism.

hilation of the self. As I noted before, masochism need not resort to this supreme finality. Instead, a character can live a long life suffering self-imposed humiliation, privation, denial and punishment. This is indeed the case with Blanche who, refusing to compromise, lives many years without the surcease of suffering and humiliation obtained in death. Williams has employed several aspects of character and stage techniques to denote a death-oriented character. Homosexuality, passivity, darkness,* withdrawal from reality and physical contact are some of these aspects. The death force becomes an inward thrust, a negation or a disbelief in trust, love and brotherhood. With regard to the life impulse, sadism (extroverted aggression) strives for the preservation of the ego and the incorporation of another ego (the removal of a threat) or its destruction. For example, if Blanche accepts Stanley's attitudes and what he represents, she would be employing sadism as a vehicle to secure her life from the masochistic forces responsible for her suffering. Blanche's refusal to accept certain attitudes of Stanley result in his sadistic attempt to destroy her, for Blanche is a very real threat to this mountain of male ego. While I situate the life-death conflict on a moral-social level within the "defeated" character, I also mentioned earlier that this struggle is simultaneously split in half with the life force manifested in the opposing

*The terms light and dark refer to stage lighting which reflects a character's life or death orientation and not his complexion. For Williams often associates dark complexions with virile, heterosexual, life-directed characters and fair or light complexions with death-directed, "defeated" characters.

character (in this case, Stanley). Thus, to a large degree, aspects of the life force appear outside the "defeated" character in his opposite. It is this externalization of conflict, it will be recalled, that creates the inter-personal drama evident in Williams' plays. The life force, then, expresses itself in heterosexuality, present-day reality orientation, human contact with others, activity, and light. It is an outward thrust, an affirmation of trust, love (both Eros and Agape) and brotherhood. Occasionally, the life impulse asserts itself in a "defeated" character's speech or scene and this is when the ". . . violets in the mountains can break the rocks. . . ."[7] In summation, when I speak of the life and death conflict, I refer to an all-pervasive attitude or outlook on life. As attitudes, life and death become a way of living, of perceiving, or acting and re-acting to environmental and inter-personal stimuli.

III

There are a host of articles, essays and books that cover in impressive detail many essential aspects of Williams' work—particularly character study. Esther Jackson's The Broken World of Tennessee Williams is an excellent study of the plays in terms of the thought and technique of Western drama from the Greeks to our own. Her emphasis, though, is on Williams' own peculiar genius in character development (the "anti-hero") and in his conception of man and his morality in modern times (the "synthetic myth"). She deals extensively with the nature of conflict in character. Norman J. Fedders'

thorough and illuminating book, The Influence of D.H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams, examines the playwright's indebtedness to the novelist. Fedders perceives Williams' conflicts in character, such as the flesh-spirit, as deriving from Lawrence. Signi Falk's Tennessee Williams categorizes the characters in terms of the Southern Gentlewoman (Laura, Amanda, Blanche, Alma), the Southern Wenches (Serafina della Rose and Maggie), and the Desperate Heroes (Val, Kilroy, Brick). Her work displays a sound insight into the characters and the various influences on Williams' work. Nancy Tischler's Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan assumes a biographical approach and chronologically presents and analyzes the plays with mention of the important members of the original casts. However, the study of conflict is noticeably absent. Benjamin Nelson's Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work also chronologically discusses the plays with several interesting insights derived from the examination of Williams' poems and short stories. As in Tischler's book, he quotes several critical reactions to the plays on their opening nights. John Fritscher's essay, "Some Attitudes and a Posture: Religious Metaphor and Ritual in Tennessee Williams' Query of the American God," is concise and perspicuous and, though it draws heavily from Dr. H.C. Rumke's The Psychology of Unbelief, it is an honest and thought-provoking study. Robert E. Jones' "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines" contends that Alma, Cassandra, Blanche and Amanda are actually ". . . the same person at different stages of life."[8] In "The

Plays of Tennessee Williams," Henry Popkin discusses the presentation of physically healthy, good-looking, young males and the older, somewhat faded, neurotic woman in terms of the Adonis-Gargoyle duality (e.g., Stanley-Blanche). He also deals with what he calls the "respectful" and "disrespectful" speech of the characters. "Respectful speech . . . is emphatically Southern. . . . The disrespectful is blunt and direct,"[9] as evidenced in Stanley, Kilroy, and Mangiacavello). This appears as a unique approach to the study of character in Williams. Paul Hurley's "Suddenly Last Summer: Morality Play" views Sebastian's death as a reflection of the character's own ". . . perversity [and] distorted values,"[10] and his perception of life as analogous to the terrifying scene on the Galapagos Island. Hurley also distinguishes Sebastian's death from martyrdom. This is a good essay for it roots the cause of Sebastian's destruction within him and not as a result of a demanding God or Fate. Finally, Joseph Riddle takes issue with Williams' use of Apollonian-Dionysian imagery in his essay, "A Streetcar Named Desire—Nietzsche Descending." Riddle contends that Williams ". . . exploits Nietzsche's metaphor to elucidate and justify his own vaguely formed image of man."[11] This is a well written essay that focusses on the essential question of what Williams' conception of man is as presented in his plays.

This brief review of the important criticism affords me the opportunity to recapitulate my position and direction in character study in contrast to what has already been said. I propose to examine

the inner conflict between life and death in the "defeated" characters and in the externalized dramatic presentation of this conflict. I will approach this study of conflict in character in the plays within the framework of the three questions I proposed at the very beginning (i.e., What are the conflicts within each character? What do the conflicts reveal or reflect in terms of that character and the macrocosm of his society and culture? And what does the "fate" or outcome of the character say in terms of that character, society, and humanity in general?). My concern is primarily directed toward the study of the "defeated" or "damned" character because he represents, in my opinion, the centre and crux of the conflict upon which the play revolves. Though I will concentrate on these characters, I will not exclude other aspects of Williams' drama, for—like all integrated works—the character must also be seen in terms of the entire play.

To illustrate the direction my study of the death force will follow, I will refer briefly to one of Williams' short stories. A union of the death drive and masochism finds expression in the story, One Arm, in which Williams says of the protagonist, Oliver Winemiller:

> He never said to himself, I'm lost. But the speechless self knew it and in submission to its unthinking control the youth had begun as soon as he left the hospital to look about for destruction.[12]

In the story Oliver is literally mutilated by the loss of his right arm, yet he is also psychically mutilated for he did not ". . . consciously know that with it [i.e., the loss of his arm] had gone the center of his being."[13] This passage, indeed the entire story, reflects and supports the inference that each of Williams' "defeated" characters

are psychically wounded. They wander in a world which harbours no equilibrium for them and at best reflects only their own incompleteness. The dubious security of withdrawal or death becomes an overwhelming temptation because the value of life always remains before their worn eyes, just out of reach (as dramatized in Sweet Bird of Youth).

The battle between being and non-being, life and death, does in a very real way suggest the question, "To be or not to be. . . ." For the life-oriented characters the question is answered because they know that it is worse ". . . to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune . . ." than ". . . to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them."[14] These characters (such as Stanley, Tom, Maggie, Big Daddy) sustain life and suppress the death force through their "endurance" as Hannah Jelkes, also life-directed, says. For the damned characters, however, the question—if not consciously asked--is implied through their actions and their answer becomes the theme of my thesis. The inner conflict rooted in this question results in the ineluctable domination of the death force in the "defeated" character. It is largely because Williams' lost souls are unable to firmly and permanently assert their life force that casts suspicion over viewing his characters as tragic figures rather than as pathetic ones.

The plays I plan to study with regard to the life-death conflict are the following: The Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, Night of the Iguana, and Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle), with allusions to several other plays, poems

and short stories. This selection may appear arbitrary but, if it is, it is substantiated by several considerations. Primary among these concerns is my desire to demonstrate particularly strong and recurring patterns or predilections in Williams' formation of character over a period of many years in his literary career. (The present selection covers twenty-three years from his first Broadway production.) A second reason derives from the critical acclaim of reviewers and scholars bestowed upon many of the aforementioned plays. These plays, with the inclusion perhaps of Camino Real, are considered to be his greatest and most influential in terms of theatre and other playwrights. I believe that the study of conflict in these plays reveals the quintessence of Williams' dramatic thought. I shall present these plays chronologically to display patterns or similarities of conflicts and character types. A word or two ought to be said about several of the excluded plays. While Battle of Angels and its rewritten version, Orpheus Descending, present a "defeated" character (Val Xavier), they serve better as supporting and reinforcing works in terms of the presentation of a "standardized image," so to speak, of the "defeated" character. This idea and the religious aspects in these plays will be cited when pertinent to my discussions of the selected plays. I have also omitted the comedies such as You Touched Me!, The Rose Tattoo, and Period of Adjustment because they do not present "defeated" characters as such and, consequently lie beyond the scope of this study. They do contain many of Williams' motifs but they are more effectively developed in the selected plays. (Such motifs are the inability to communicate, the pernicious effect of institutionalized religion, and the loss of youth.) Although I have

omitted Camino Real because there is no "defeated" character present, it is still an important play, for it reflects Williams' conception of the modern world. It posits a curious affirmation—namely, a character's dissociation from a fallen world (in the socio-moral sense) without going insane or dying. Williams permits Kilroy to escape from the corrupted world to the Terra Incognita because he is more allegorical than real. His methods are not viable alternatives for Williams' realistic, "defeated" characters. The difference between Kilroy and the life-oriented character is that he escapes the human condition for an unknown entity while the latter adjusts to it. However, Camino Real is important to my study because, as an image of the real world, it manifests itself in varying degrees in many of the plays I have selected for analysis (such as Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and Suddenly Last Summer). Lastly, I should like to add that this study is not meant as a definitive approach to character analysis; for Williams is still writing plays and is now working on his memoirs.[15]

Because the "defeated" characters' answer to the question, "To be or not to be. . . ?" is expressed in the life-death conflict, I must seek the etiology of that conflict to gain a greater understanding of the characters. For, in Williams' life as in his plays, it is not so much where one is going that is significant; rather, it is where one has come from that holds the key to understanding. The psychic dualities that permeate the lives of Williams' "defeated" characters find their roots in both his Southern heritage and his life.

## Footnotes to Chapter I

[1]Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (Toronto: New Directions, 1966), p. xviii.

[2]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1947), p. 15.

[3]Tennessee Williams, Four Plays (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 167-68.

[4]Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 85.

[5]Tennessee Williams, In the Winter of Cities (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 28.

[6]Esther Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 72.

[7]Tennessee Williams, Camino Real (New York: New Directions Book, 1970), p. 97.

[8]Robert E. Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II, No. 3 (December, 1959), p. 212.

[9]Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," The Tulane Drama Review, IV, No. 3 (Spring, 1960), p. 50.

[10]Paul Hurley, "Suddenly Last Summer: Morality Play," Modern Drama, VIII, No. 4 (February, 1966), p. 400.

[11]Joseph Riddle, "A Streetcar Named Desire—Nietzsche Descending," Modern Drama, V, No. 4 (February, 1963), p. 423.

[12]Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories, pp. 9-10.

[13]Ibid.

(Footnotes Chap. I)

[14]W. Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, eds. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1963), p. 63.

[15]Jerry Parker, "Tennessee," Newsday (October 15, 1972), part II, p. 4.

# CHAPTER II

## WILLIAMS' SOUTHERN HERITAGE AND HIS LIFE

# I

The significance of biographical data and literary tradition in a particular author's work varies with each author. Regarding Williams, many critics have cited the relationships between his characters and his family and expounded on the importance of these parallels (e.g., Nancy Tischler and Benjamin Nelson). Others, notably Esther Jackson, have discussed the literary heritage of Williams' "defeated" characters in terms of the transgression-conscious American writers of the North and South (such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Faulkner). In focussing my attention on the psychobiographical data, I too believe that certain relevant parallels exist between his family and his characters; yet, I question the significance of these parallels in character analysis because a biographical approach is a necessarily limited one that often fails to generate universal appeal. However, when I perceived Williams' family life as a product derived from and shaped by values that occupied the central regions of the traditional Southern mind (a term I will explain shortly), I realized that his family could not be divorced from his heritage without losing valuable insight into the historical framework of his family and his characters. Thus, I have chosen to present Williams' family heritage as the native soil in which strong, opposing forces were sown within his forebears and inherited by subsequent generations down to his own time. While a description of Williams' Southern heritage in terms of dualistic conflicts forms only a part of the understanding of his characters, I

believe it is an important part because it establishes the foundations upon which the playwright psychologically develops his "defeated" characters. The magnitude and strength of those conflicts will become at once clearer and more meaningful as influences upon the developing playwright in the second portion of this chapter when I present Williams' life.

In discussing the primary dualistic conflict that permeated the Southern mind down to Williams' own generation, I am employing a "typical" or "traditional" plantation Southerner who was first and foremost a farmer. For the sake of accuracy, I must define what I allude to when I use the terms "traditional Southern mind" and "traditional plantation Southerner." I am only concerned with the frontiersmen and farmers who, through the generations, developed into affluent owners of large plantations. Further, I am interested in the cultural-psychological conflicts of these plantation owners. For the predominate image of the South presented in Williams' drama is the result of the loss of the plantation South, its culture, and its society. His characters, inheritors of an effete and moribund culture centered upon these plantations, often look longingly back to an aristocratic South, to the life of grace, manners, refinement, and stately appearance. In short, these misfits look desperately back to a time and a place that was even then more fantasy than reality. Through their own perceptions distorted by time, they romanticize plantation life into a kind of panacea for their present seemingly

insoluble troubles. Thus, the use of a "typical" plantation Southerner will help to demonstrate how he was the psychic precursor, so to speak, of Williams' "defeated" characters.

I began the first portion of this study with the essential question, "What are the conflicts within the 'defeated' characters?" Through a slight amendment I will now ask, "What was the conflict within the traditional Southerner?" Developing over a period of several centuries this conflict crystallized itself into two opposing and contradictory forces that, certainly by the time of the Civil War, had become "character traits" of the Southerner. Cash claims that even though the Southerner had to battle the elements of the frontier to establish a prosperous life or at least to assure his survival, his predilection was directed toward pleasure-seeking.

> What is ordinarily taken as realism in him is in fact only a sort of biological pragmatism . . . born of the circumstance that he has nearly everywhere and always been the driven slave of the belly, and confined to the narrow sphere of interests and activities marked out by the struggle for mere animal existence.
>
> Relax that drive a little, let him escape a little from this struggle, and the true tenor of his nature promptly appears: he stands before us . . . as a romantic and a hedonist. . . . It is to say that he is inevitably driven back upon imagination, that his world construction is bound to be mainly a product of fantasy. . . .[1]

Thus, one of the forces apparent in the Southerner's inner conflict is his romantic-hedonistic nature. The plantation youth was a Cavalier; he was a brazen, bold fellow with glittering sword and wit.

His dashing, aristocratic appearance and manners filled them with self-confidence bordering on arrogance. He was a cavorter, a fun-loving, gay, Dionysian youth sowing his wild oats whenever possible. His future was socially and professionally predetermined. He lived in a ". . . world in which horses, dogs, guns, not books and ideas and art, were his normal and absorbing interests."[2]

> To be a captain in the struggle against the Yankee, to be a Calhoun or a Brooks in Congress, or, better still, to be a Yancy or a Rhett ramping through the land with the demand for the sword—this was to be at the very heart of one's time and place, was, for the plantation youth, full of hot blood, the only desirable career. Beside it the pursuit of knowledge, the writing of books, the painting of pictures, the life of the mind, seemed an anemic and despicable business, fit only for eunuchs.[3]

There is another aspect of the South that favoured and perpetuated the romantic nature of the traditional plantation Southerner. This is the very countryside itself. This captivating land created ". . . a sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favor of romance."[4]

> The dominant mood, the mood that lingers in the memory, is one of well-nigh drunken reverie. . . . It is a mood, in some, in which directed thinking is all but impossible, a mood in which the mind yields almost perforce to drift and in which the imagination holds unchecked sway, a mood in which nothing anymore seems improbable save the puny inadequateness of fact, nothing incredible save the bareness of truth.[5]

These sentiments express a South often repeated in Williams' plays. For, even in those plays that do not directly concern themselves with the South such as <u>The Night of the Iguana</u> and <u>The Milk</u>

Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, realism in setting assumes a secondary role to the creation of an atmosphere of unreality. Williams employs the term "plastic theatre" to describe an aesthetic that prefers an anti-realistic mise en scene. His lighting techniques, as in The Glass Menagerie and Streetcar Named Desire, support the creation of a unique reality. The colour blue holds an almost preëminent position in Williams' plays. It is the colour of memory, of the past; it is a delicate colour, soft and fragile. The introduction of strange, primitive human and animal sounds in some plays bombard the spectator's sensoria approximating the total sensory immersion into a play's reality as discussed by Artaud in his The Theatre and its Double. This sensory bombardment successfully created the reality of a lost Southern way of life in many of Williams' most outstanding "defeated" characters and plays (such as The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth).

I have briefly mentioned several characteristics of our "traditional," stereotypic plantation Southerner. To recapitulate, he was always an individualist, a romantic and a hedonist who preferred the unreal setting to the realistic one. Truth, like a strong antidote, was taken only when necessary. Williams incorporates many of these qualities in his characters; yet, these qualities undergo a significant transformation. For example, individualism in the traditional, plantation Southerner involved economic self-sufficiency operating within the

society as a whole. Living on vast plantations, the Southerner had to govern his land, his workers, and buy and sell all the necessities of an agrarian society. Williams, however, presents more urbanized characters possessing an individualism that Esther Jackson associates with the "anti-hero." Williams' "defeated" characters, Jackson's anti-hero, are often portrayed as loners. Many times he travels across the land in search of what Jackson believes is his identity. This loner is never economically self-sufficient and, though he superficially operates within the society, he often reflects values outside the accepted socio-moral code. The bohemian, the artistic nature is very much a part of his character. In Signi Falk's description of the "Desperate Heroes," she captures the essence of Southern individualism transformed by Williams' perception of man in an unacceptable world.

> The freedom of an 'unattached and nomadic existence' has stimulated the imagination of Tennessee Williams almost from the beginning. It epitomizes his romantic view of life. The man who lives uncommitted to the mores and to the responsibilities of American society stands above the average money-mad, sex-starved, high-tensioned, and unhappy job holder. . . .
>
> He is often the man asking the Big Questions; groping for an answer; and, something of a poet, seeking to be articulate. Because he refuses to conform, punch a time clock, and collect a pay check, he may carry worldly goods on his back or as a memento of some past achievement. By ordinary standards he is a failure.[6]

Cash also alludes to the "inadequateness of fact" and the incredibility of the "barrenness of truth." Individualism and truth are indeed

two very significant aspects in Williams' characters. Yet, with regard to truth, I find it most difficult to believe that Williams' "defeated" souls actually seek out their own identity and truth. Cash's historical approach to the Southern mind reinforces not the discovery of truth but the evasion of it, though this evasion may not be conscious. It does not necessarily follow that Williams' "defeated" characters also evade truth because Cash's historical study concludes this. However, in my reading of the plays, I believe that the "defeated" characters do not intentionally seek their own truths but, rather, they prefer to leave their truth where it lies—deep beneath the illusions of their lives. When one recalls the realities of a post-Civil War defeated South were often difficult to confront, it is no wonder, perhaps it is a typical human reaction, that the Southerner chose to cling to a way of life more indicative of former years than post Civil War ones.* Such plays as The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and Suddenly Last Summer deal explicitly with the distinction between truth and illusion, reality and unreality often in terms of the character's Southern heritage.

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*Discussing the post-war South and the Reconstruction, Cash says:

> A growing inclination to withdraw themselves altogether from the struggle, from a world grown too dangerous; to shut away the present and abandon the future; . . . there to retreat behind their own barred gates and hold commerce with none save the members of their own caste. A growing tendency to dissociate their standards wholly from reality, and convert them from living principles of action into mere eidolons.

Williams' own romantic-hedonistic nature is his rebellious side that finds expression in the defeated characters and forms a fundamental force at work within Williams as Nancy Tischler notes in Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan. She quotes Williams as saying, "I am a Puritan, too, but I'm a rebellious Puritan."[7] The great irony and pathos in his work evolves because of the "defeated" characters' persistent, almost frantic, escape from their truth and Williams' overriding demand and expectation that they ultimately confront their reality and true selves. Thus, on one level, his "defeated" characters reflect the romantic-hedonistic attitude while he assumes the opposing Puritanical force that exacts truth before the cessation of punishment.

This discussion brings me to the force opposing the romantic, pleasure-seeking nature of the traditional plantation Southerner. It is the side that one can associate with the Apollonian man; it is the intellectual and civilized aspects of man. The Southerner's intellectual heritage, brought over from Europe and partially retained through the frontier days, still exerted a great psychological influence.

> If he was a hedonist, then, and however paradoxical it may sound, he was also likely to be a Puritan. The sense of sin, if obscured, continued to move darkly in him at every time—not so darkly not so savagely, not so relentlessly as in the New Englander, it may be, but with conviction nevertheless. The world he knew, the hot sting of the sun in his blood, the sidelong glance of the all-complaisant Negro women—all these impelled him irresistibly to joy. But even as he danced, and even though he had sloughed off all formal religion, his thoughts were with the piper and his fee.[8]

This religiosity, this deep sense of moral integrity underlies, or better expressed in terms of its relation to the other force, opposes and confronts the romantic-hedonistic attitude. As the polar opposite force, it functions as an inhibitor and censor of human behaviour. Puritanical ideas permeate Williams' plays in much the same way it permeated the South. It was always there, just beneath the surface. It is not an overt, stentorian voice screaming hell and damnation (with exception to the revivalist movements); rather, it is a subtle, subdued, and omnipresent moral code that asserted itself effectively to control the Southerner's wilder, hedonistic impulses.

I have demonstrated that the plantation Southerner was a chivalrous, romantic, dashing man who aspired to the life of a soldier or a statesman. Part and parcel with this image is the complementary one formed principally by the Puritan ethic. Its perception of the Southern woman stressed chastity, purity, and honour. Williams' female characters often descend from Southern belles and plantation heritages; perhaps a description of those Olympian women and their status is in order.

> She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid. . . . And—she was the pitiful mother of God. Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. There was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with the clashing of shields and the flourishing of swords for her glory. . . .

> 'Woman!!! The center and circumference, diameter and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all our affections!'[9]

With this passage in mind, the characters of Amanda, Blanche, Alma, Cassandra (Carol) and Mrs. Venable assume a greater depth and complexity. Although Amanda and Mrs. Venable may represent Williams' varying perception of his mother, all these women descend from established Southern families whose former status had commanded deep respect and preferential treatment. In presenting these women as "degenerated" descendants of proud—perhaps arrogant—aristocratic and stately families, Williams displays his omnipresent and profound sensitivity for people who are ". . . images of a humanity diminished by time and history."[10] They are characters whose present lives have become a mere pastiche of their family heritage. To endure the indignities of time and history, their illusions replace their present and their past harbours lost happiness.

Thus, the Southern heritage developed distinct social images of man and woman. These images represent the dominant socio-moral and cultural forces existing in the pre-Civil War South. If one were a male, he sought to become the gallant, daring soldier or the rhetorician-statesman. His honour and glory would be distinguishably devoted to the preservation of the values and culture of the South. If one were a woman, she was cast in the image of Olympian beauty, her purity was sacrosanct and her honour worth defending to the death. The entire Southern culture served to develop, reinforce and

maintain these two images. The degree of success attained by the South in preserving these images is impressive indeed, for they appear as significant influences on Williams' life.

The polarity evidenced in the romantic-hedonist-Puritan ethic conflict created a unique psychological equilibrium in our plantation Southerner. Cash comments on this circumstance with his persistently acute insight:

> His [i.e., the Southerner's] Puritanism was no mere mask put on from cold calculation, but as essential a part of him as his hedonism. And his combination of the two was without conscious imposture. One might say with much truth that it proceeded from a fundamental split in his psyche, from a sort of social schizophrenia. One may say more simply and more safely that it was all part and parcel of that naïve capacity for unreality which was characteristic of him.[11]

This psychological development of the Southerner is also unique because it is dialectical in nature. These two paradoxical forces ". . . could and would flow forward side by side, and with a minimum of conflict. . . . In the long run, he succeeded in uniting the two incompatible tendencies in his single person, without ever allowing them to come into open and decisive contention."[12] This dialecticism establishes a fundamental difference between the traditional, plantation Southerner and Williams' "defeated" characters because there is never any real synthesis and mutual compatibility of the opposing forces in these characters. Rather, the forces presented in these damned souls are antagonistic to each other and seek a resolution that affirms itself and denies or suppresses its opposition. There is always open, per-

sistent contention between the life and death forces manifested in the "defeated"characters. Whether or not the absence of a dialectical approach detracts from the plays is a question that merits more attention later.

There is another notable point that I must raise to clarify the proper relationship between the dual psychic propensities of the Southerner and the life-death conflict dramatized in the plays. It is important to understand that the romantic-hedonist-Puritan conflict is not directly applicable to either the life or death force. For the "defeated" characters are often composites of the romantic and the Puritan nature. This is to say that Williams' damned souls display the social schizophrenia that Cash recognized in his historical study of the Southern mind. Blanche, Alma, Val, Brick, Sebastian, Chance and Shannon incorporate a romanticism, an unreality in their lives and actions that constantly struggle with a rigid, demanding Puritanical moral code for dominant, persistent expression. There is no equation as Puritanism = death-orientation and romanticism = life-orientation. Rather, the psychic split between the romantic-hedonistic and Puritanical attitudes establishes a psychological foundation, a base, a state of mind several centuries in the making upon which the ultimate conflict of life and death is constructed and dramatized. Because Williams himself is a descendant of this Southern mind, it is no surprise to witness his characters in the throes of indecision and violent conflict; it is no surprise that his own ambiguities and sympathies deter success-

ful or decisive resolutions of his characters' problems. Williams occludes possible avenues of salvation by presenting the avenues as one-way streets that draw the characters relentlessly forward. For example, Williams employs the vehicle of Puritanism as a moral code that denies or restricts sensuality and sexuality. If one recalls that a principal reason for Williams' adoration of Lawrence is precisely the emancipation of sexuality from the sexually repressive Puritanism of nineteenth century America, it is also not surprising that he should associate a kind of death with the characters possessing the Puritan ethic (such as Blanche, Alma, Brick and Sebastian). Yet, Williams also employs Puritanism as a means of salvation. For as a moral code that demands truth before salvation, he oftentimes directs the characters to confront their own truth, as Blanche and Brick do. Thus the incongruity of a Brick—a "cool," romantic character at first escaping his truth in alcoholic narcosis, then confronting it and demanding the same of his father. Thus the inconguity of a Blanche—a hedonist escaping her "sin" with Allan and her subsequent immoral life, then driven to self-confrontation before her release from the agonizing struggle.

Because Williams employs many of the Southerner's romantic, hedonistic and Puritanical attitudes in the foundation of his "defeated" characters, a greater depth and scope of character analysis becomes possible. For now the characters incorporate not only the present time of the play but also the historical past. The raging conflict be-

tween life and metaphysical death in the damned characters do not reside together without overt contention for dominance. In contrast to the paradoxical compatibility of the Southerner's conflict, Williams' life-death struggle demands resolution through the annihilation or suppression of the opposing force. Given these circumstances, I believe that Williams' own family life must have reinforced and perpetuated these conflicting forces. A short, selected biography of the playwright's upbringing in terms of this conflict and the supreme life-death encounter manifested in his plays will reveal the psychological foundations upon which he later developed his "defeated" characters. I believe, too, that an analysis of his life will disclose a paradox that rarely if at all finds expression in his plays—namely, that his own life-death struggle resulted in an affirmation of life. Yet his "defeated" characters fight their own battles never knowing the affirmation of life that their creator has found.

## II

If life is conflict, if life is a struggle between strong, opposing forces vying for dominant and permanent expression, the study of Williams' life as an unqualified example of character development through inner conflict offers a unique insight into his preëminent concerns in the dramatic presentation of character. Indeed, his life seems plagued by a plethora of irreconcilable conflicts that can not reside within Williams' mind without causing violent and perpetual

struggle. Because Williams was a shy and overly sensitive boy, many events impressed him strongly, leaving indelible memories that a less sensitive boy might have ignored or forgotten. As a young child, he distorted and exaggerated many of the unstable relationships within his family and events occurring outside the home. In short, I do not believe that he was old enough to successfully integrate the tempestuous milieu that engulfed his young life. Thus I will discuss the strong character-forming events that most evidently established, reinforced and perpetuated both the romantic-hedonistic-Puritan conflict of Williams' Southern heritage and the life-death struggle of his life, on a socio-moral level, that manifest themselves in his plays. The most important influences in this regard are the disparate attitudes of each parent, his childhood attack of diphtheria, the move of the family from Clarksdale to St. Louis, his travels through the South and Mexico, and, of course, his sister Rose.

Perhaps the single greatest influence on Williams' life was his parents, for they represent the polarities of the conflict inherited from the traditional plantation Southerner. Though it is difficult to discuss each parent's attitudes as complete and unadulterated reflections of the Southerner's conflict (i.e., the romantic-hedonistic-Puritan conflict) without elements of the other present, it is not an impossible task, for

there are ample factors that, by their very nature, establish such a dichotomy in each respective parent. Indeed, it appears that what Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwina Dakin Williams had most in common were their three children. Rose was the first born, in 1909, while Williams was born second as Thomas Lanier in Columbus, Miss., in 1911. Their third child was Dakin Williams who arrived as late as 1919. From the very beginning, the personalities of each parent were irreconcilable. Their characters were based upon the general socio-moral code of the Cavalier and the Puritan. Cornelius Williams' cavalier ascendants date back hundreds of years. In his article, Robert Rice comments on this ancestry and the character of Cornelius:

> The Williams are an old East Tennessee family, frontiersmen and Indian fighters at first, and thereafter often engaged in the duelling-pistol-and corn liquor brand of politics that is traditional in that state. Williams' great-grandfather, apparently, was one of Andrew Jackson's right hand men, and his grandfather is said to have run unsuccessfully for governor of the state from time to time.
>
> Cornelius Coffin Williams was raised in the tradition that a Williams was expected to see active service in any war his country fought.[13]

Cornelius' upbringing mirrored and reinforced many of the qualities and aspirations of the traditional plantation Southerner. His ancestors aspired to military life or statesmanship. He, too, learned to value the qualities of a soldier over any intellectual pursuit. He was, like his plantation ancestors, a fun-loving, hedonistic man, a loud reveler and a heavy drinker. He learned to work hard and play

hard. Benjamin Nelson offers further insight into a man who appeared to have retained many of the questionable qualities of his ascendants at the expense of losing the more temperate and admirable ones:

> Cornelius Williams, a blunt, stocky man with a quick and violent temper, could trace his ancestry back to one of the oldest and most prominent families in Tennessee. . . . Throughout his youth he always had his way and became extremely domineering. . . . He loved military life, and during the Spanish-American War he abruptly left the law school of the University of Tennessee after a year's study to accept a second lieutenant's commission. A proud and hard man, he liked drink and rough humour, and he used profanity with the ease of a man who knew and insisted upon his place in the centre of the universe.[14]

The various representations of his father in his plays reveals only superficial changes in character with certain fundamental attributes in Cornelius' personality remaining unchanged and permanent in each characterization. Though these plays were written many years after Williams' childhood, I believe a concise examination of several of the father's characterizations will establish those qualities and attributes that remained with Williams into his adult life. One of the first characterizations of his father occurs in the one-act play Last of My Solid Gold Watches. In the play, Mr. Charlie Colton is, like Cornelius Williams, a travelling salesman. He is described as ". . . lavish of flesh, superbly massive and with a kingly dignity of bearing. . . . His huge expanse of chest and belly is criss-crossed by multiple gold chains with various little fobs and trinkets suspended from them. On the back of his head is a derby and in his mouth a

cigar."[15] Mr. Colton is a loud, boisterous, poker-playing, hard drinking salesman who refers to himself as the "last of the Delta drummers." Having been a successful and respected salesman for forty-six years, Mr. Colton is presented to the audience in his declining years, a man who now has the time and the inclination to reflect upon his life on the road and the changing times. His reflections convince him that his glory has passed and now belongs to that past. Toward the end of the play, he realizes the glory of his past as a salesman and the disappointing reality of the present.

> This room was like a throne-room. My samples laid over there on green velvet cloth. The ceiling-fan going—now broken. And over there—the wash-bowl an' pitcher removed and the table-top loaded with liquor! In and out from the time I arrived till the time I left, the men of the road who knew me, to whom I stood for things commanding respect! Poker continuous! Shouting, Laughing—hilarity! Where have they all gone to?[16]

In The Glass Menagerie, Williams presents us with an idealized and romanticized conception of his father. Although Cornelius is not portrayed as a live character, he is symbolically present in the photograph over the mantel which, characteristically for his father, is "larger-than-life-size." The narrator of the play, Tom, says that his father was a ". . . telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town. . . ."[17] There is a sort of romanticism attached to the itinerant father, a sense of freedom—albeit naïve—in being able to leave a way of life that perhaps no longer satisfies or

never did satisfy one's needs. I believe that part of this romantic conception of his father is not only a product of Williams' imaginative mind but also a kind of crystallization of his father's actions in real life that lent themselves to such imaginings. Like his discontented father, Tom leaves his home to travel ". . . in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space"(Sc. vii). This romantic-hedonistic nature of his father is not directly transferable to Tom, for he can not make the clean break with his family and past as his father has done. There is perhaps an element of guilt, of responsibility that tracks Tom relentlessly wherever he goes.

Perhaps the most complete and powerful representation of Williams' father is Big Daddy in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. In many ways, Big Daddy is a compliment to his father. He is an extremely wealthy landowner, a self-made man. Although he incorporates many characteristics of modern day man that Williams deplores such as aggressivity, a material orientation, a lust for power and wealth, he is a highly respected and successful man in the eyes of the world. He is the embodiment of twentieth century man who lives in the present, and not in the past like Mr. Colton. Thus, Williams presents his father in these three plays in three different images. Mr. Colton is oriented toward his past life, Tom's father is a romantic-hedonist, and Big Daddy is a present-oriented man who has adjusted to a changing world. However, the permanent physical and mental characteristics elaborated on in at least two of the preceding plays are quite similar.

The overall picture of his father in his plays reflects a physically large, vibrant, successful (at one time or another), respected man who is above all else life-oriented. He is a non-intellectual who seeks and finds life in action and not in thought.

As I studied the characters in the plays, I realized that the romantic-hedonistic nature of his real father was not predominately centered in the life-oriented characters, but rather in the death-oriented ones. With the exception of Laura in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche, Alma (who becomes a hedonist), Brick ( in his romantic ideals), Val (who has formerly led a hedonistic life), Sebastian, Shannon and Mrs. Goforth all possess a romantic-hedonistic nature in varying degrees. I have two reasons why romanticism and hedonism are associated with the "defeated" characters. One reason is that I believe Williams harboured, at one time or another, angry and perhaps hateful feelings toward his father who overwhelmingly manifested the romantic-hedonistic predilection. The other reason for condemning Cornelius' nature to punishment and death is revealed in the opposing force represented by Williams' mother—that is, the influence of Puritanism. If Cornelius is the descendant of the soldier-cavalier spirit previously discussed as an element of the plantation Southerner, then Edwina Dakin Williams represents the Puritan image of Southern Womanhood. She grew up under the influence of a minister who deplored the life that her husband led. Nelson comments on Edwina's heritage and parents:

> . . . Edwina Dakin's parents were of Quaker-Germanic stock, gentle and patrician. Edwina's mother was a lovely and charming woman, and her father a stately, dignified man for whom the term 'gentleman' was fitting and proper. He was deeply religious but he wore his religion, like his summer suit, easily and unobtrusively. He was proud, self-reliant, yet warm and good-humoured.[18]

In further contrast to his father, Williams' mother was refined, soft-spoken, protective, more loving (perhaps too much), and more moral. Again, according to her representation in the plays, his mother possesses certain ineradicable traits that do not disappear from one characterization to the next, but rather become accented and exaggerated in differing ways. As Amanda in The Glass Menagerie, she is represented as a loving, caring and somewhat over-protective mother who can not effectively separate her past life from her present one. She is not a cruel mother; rather, she is a pathetic one who can not perceive the limitations and uniqueness of her daughter. The realization of Laura's limitations become all too apparent as the play unfolds, yet she is able to exhibit a degree of comfort and compassion for her daughter at the end of the play.

In Suddenly Last Summer, another seemingly different image of Williams' mother emerges; yet, upon closer scrutiny, Williams presents not another image of his mother but, rather, an exaggerated image of her as Amanda. Mrs. Venable is portrayed as an aging, once beautiful woman who has held on to her son beyond a sense of love. Her love is not a healthy love; it is over-powering and destructive. She is a gross exaggeration of the over-protectiveness of

Amanda. She is so self-righteous, so self-centered, so over-protective of Sebastian, and so involved in preserving the illusions of her relationship with Sebastian that she does not ever discover that she is the principal person most responsible for her son's death. At the time Williams was writing this play, he was undergoing psychoanalysis. This may partly explain the creation of such a callous, corrosive mother figure, for the character does reflect a great amount of hostility and antagonism toward his mother. Yet here too, perhaps Williams has crystallized various scenes occurring during his childhood that remained with him and most typified a trait or characteristic of his mother. Perhaps, to a young mind, his mother's constant and overpowering presence felt like the mother he later created in the play. In any case, both Amanda and Mrs. Venable are life-oriented characters, for they will sustain their life and their ability to function in a changing world at any cost. As with the romantic-hedonistic nature of the father, the Puritanism of the mother is noticeably absent or at least not stressed in the life-oriented characters. It is as if the life-death struggle on a socio-moral level, does not exist for these characters. This is not the case for the "defeated" characters, for they possess not only the romantic-hedonistic nature of the father but also the Puritanism of the mother. This idea is reinforced by the example of Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke. In many ways, Alma can be likened to a young Edwina Dakin. She is, like Williams' mother, the daughter of a minister. However, unlike Amanda

and Mrs. Venable, Alma is possessed by an almost paralyzing Puritan morality. The unchecked presence of this moral code is a primary ingredient in rendering Alma a "defeated" character. It now becomes apparent that such a stringent moral code can be just as destructive and lethal as the unchecked romantic-hedonistic code of Williams' father.

Thus Williams grew up under two opposing natures and attitudes, both of which were no doubt exaggerated and distorted in his young, fertile imagination. Neither of these attitudes (i.e., romanticism-hedonism and Puritanism) was entirely acceptable by Williams as a child and an adolescent. His parents remained irreconcilable on many accounts, and at the root of this persistent incompatibility lay the fundamental differences between a Puritan and a Cavalier. Consequently, there was never any kind of synthesis or union of these strong opposing forces during their marriage. When one reads Williams' plays, one feels the tremendous, sincere sensitivity he possesses in creating characters in conflict and in presenting these characters with empathy. Undoubtedly, this sense of identification and empathy emanates from the unexpressed anguish and conflict present in Williams' own life from the earliest times. There were several events in his early life that established or at least aggravated his anguish and helped to sustain his mental torment. Williams' psyche spent several years in a white-hot furnace, so to speak, and from this furnace he forged the life-death struggle in his own life and later projected this struggle onto

the stage.

## III

Tennessee Williams' early life was spent predominately under the influence of his mother and grandmother, for even with his own birth and his sister's before him his father's absence from the home did not abate. As a travelling salesman for the International Shoe Company, he spent most of his time on the road. Because of his absences and the type of man he was, Williams' mother directed her unrequited love and affection, as it were, toward Tom and Rose. In a household dominated by women, young Tom soon learned to align himself with his mother and grandmother against the excesses and uncouth behaviour of his father. As Tischler points out:

> Williams' own attachment to his mother was one of the warmest, yet most unfortunate parts of his youth. His world became increasingly feminine, and he became negatively sensitized to masculine crudities.[19]

The result of constant exposure to a woman's world and learning to perceive the world in much the same way that a woman does, Williams grew to dislike many qualities that his father possessed. His father instilled fear before love. Williams, in short, did not learn how to relate to a father image as a normal child. Nelson comments:

> From infancy, Tom Williams grew to relie upon the presence of his mother, grandmother and sister. His father's presence frightened him not only by its coarseness, but by its strangeness, and from earliest childhood he regarded his father with awe, fear and a definite sense of disgust.[20]

Possibly part of Tom's fear of his father was due to his father's immediate dislike of him even as an infant. Perhaps Tom intuitively felt his father's dislike of him by his father's denial of expressed love and affection.[20] In any event, Edwina Dakin comments on Cornelius' method of consoling Rose concerning the birth of Tom.

> Friction between Cornelius and Tom existed from the start, with Cornelius even unconsciously putting it into words when he tried to reassure Rose upon the birth of her first baby brother. 'He's no good, is he?' All through Tom's life that seemed to be his father's feeling about him.[21]

There is, fortunately, one man in Williams' childhood that he loved and respected a great deal. Until Williams was eight years old, his family lived with his maternal grandparents. His grandfather was a Reverend. This was the man that Williams loved and always remembered with the fondest of memories. Reverend Dakin provided a sharp contrast with his father. I use Williams' own words here to describe the difference between the two men. His words are important because one senses that each man stands for something more than he may be. His father seems to represent turmoil and conflict, while his grandfather seems to personify peace and tranquility.

> My grandfather was a clergyman. It was he that really supported us, although my father must have made good money on the road. My grandfather was a kind man. He was soft spoken and gentle. Somehow he created about the whole house an atmosphere of sweetness and light. Every one in the house

> seemed to be under his spell. It was a spell of perfect peace. There were no angry scenes, no hard words spoken.
>
> Only on those occasional weekends when my father visited the house were things different. Then the spell of perfect peace was broken. A loud voice was heard, and heavy footsteps. Doors were slammed. Furniture was kicked and banged. . . .
>
> Often the voice of my father was jovial or boisterous. But sometimes it was harsh. And sometimes it sounded like thunder.
>
> He was a big man. Beside the slight, gentle figure of my grandfather, he looked awfully big. And it was not a benign bigness. You wanted to shrink away from it, to hide yourself.[22]

Whether or not Williams has accurately described their personalities correctly is of secondary importance (though, according to his mother and others, his reflections are valid). The true importance lies in the very words and dichotomies that Williams establishes. For he perceives things as counter forces, as opposing and complementary attitudes in life that can never reconcile their differences. It is precisely the establishment of conflict as opposing forces that become the crux of the conflicts experienced by the characters of his plays.

Sharp contrasts permeate Williams' life -like molecules in the air. Wherever one looks, a contrast is apparent. His life in the south was spent in several places before his family left for St. Louis. When he was three, his family moved from Columbus to Nashville. Two years later, the Reverend Dakin shuttled the family to Canton, and a year later to the small town of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Clarksdale is the most important southern town in Williams' memory.

It is the "Blue Mountain" of his plays, as Tischler points out. The family lived in the town for approximately two years.

As Blue Mountain in the plays, Clarksdale became a symbol of fond memories, happiness and tranquility for Williams. His family was respected, and they enjoyed what might be termed an upper class status. For, although Cornelius was only a salesman, Williams' grandfather was a distinguished and respected reverend. Clarksdale enjoyed a tranquility, a calmness and tempo of life that was more indicative of last century than the present one. Williams describes this peaceful town and its rural surroundings in the semi-autobiographical story, The Resemblance Between a Violin and a Coffin:

> On one side [of the Sunflower River] was a wilderness where giant cypresses seemed to engage in mute rites of reverence at the edge of the river, and the blurred pallor of the Dobyne place that used to be a plantation, now vacant and seemingly ravaged by some impalpable violence fiercer than flames, and back of this dusky curtain, the immense fields that absorbed the whole visible distance in one sweeping gesture.[23]

In many ways, Clarksdale comes to symbolize more than the place of a personally happy childhood. It represents an ideal South, a pre-Civil War South perhaps. It was a rural town making no pretensions about being a part of this century. It was a place where time moved with the slowness of an oxbowed river, and change came only with the greatest effort.

While Williams was living here, a very important event occurred in his life. When he was five years old, he contracted diphtheria

which partially paralyzed him for two years and caused a kidney ailment. His tonsils also disintegrated. The illness interrupted his formal education, for he had to remain home. His mother and grandmother protected him to a degree that may be considered as his illness was physically damaging. His life became tremendously limited. He became even more introverted and delicate. Benjamin Nelson comments on the psychological topography, so to speak, that developed in Williams' young mind during this period.

> Mrs. Williams was afraid to allow him to play with other children and in his own words he became 'delicate and sissified.' His illness intensified his subjective, highly introspective world and in time his amusements became private and isolate, except for the companionship of his one indispensible playmate, Rose. He became a child living in a semi-solitary universe, hovering delicately between fantasy and reality, and comfortably surrounded by people he loved and who in turn loved him: His grandmother and grandfather, who represented in his child's mind aristocracy and gentility; his mother, the protector and nuturer; and Rose, the sister, playmate, confidante and symbol of beauty and fragility.[24]

It is often difficult to assess the importance of certain events in one's life with regard to one's future occupation and development; yet, in this instance, I do not think the effect of Williams' illness can be limited to the two years he suffered while rehabilitating. As Nelson has demonstrated, the effects of the illness on Williams' mind were so thorough and pervasive and his invalid condition so protracted that his introversion and isolated life became character traits by the time of his recovery. Throughout his life, he has remained

an introspective person conditioned by experience to relate primarily to an inner world rather than an outer reality. In his article on Williams, Rice remarks that "both his writings and his life suggest, though, that the inward world—to his genuine distress—is the one he himself finds the more livable."[25] It is also noteworthy that Williams began, at such an early age, to categorize people and places into certain roles and symbols. In his plays, Williams will use these symbolic impressions of his mother, father, grandfather and sister to develop his aesthetic. Another important aspect during his illness is his continuing and developing relationship with his sister. For, while his illness precluded contact with the outside world, he was still able to maintain human companionship and communication with Rose. No matter how severe his illness became, he was able to combat the greatest existential sickness as reflected in his plays—loneliness. The loneliness he writes of finds its nascency not in this period of his life but during his life in St. Louis and in the psychotic withdrawal of Rose from reality.

When Williams was eight years old, his father was promoted to a desk job in St. Louis as a sales manager of one of the International Shoe Company's subsidiaries. His life in St. Louis, though unfortunate in many ways, is one of the most formulative events of his upbringing. This northern city represented the antithesis of the life and place he had known and loved in Clarksdale. If Clarksdale is metaphysically, as well as realistically, the childhood fantasy,

then St. Louis provides the harsh, adult reality. It becomes the polar opposite force to Clarksdale. These southern and northern cities come to establish and symbolize the irreconcilable dichotomies of fantasy-reality, rural-urban life, and ideal beauty-contemporary ugliness in Williams' work. The move to St. Louis was not just a physical one; it was also a psychological move. It further created and aggravated an already strife-ridden mind with still another abrupt and irrevocable change in his life. Williams writes of this transition:

> It was a tragic move. Neither my sister nor I could adjust ourselves to life in a mid-western city. The school children made fun of our southern speech and manners. I remember gangs of kids following me home yelling 'Sissy!', and home was not a pleasant refuge. It was a perpetually dim little apartment in a wilderness of identical brick and concrete structures with no grass and no trees nearer than the park. In the South we had never been conscious of the fact that we were economically less fortunate than others. We lived as well as anyone else. But in St. Louis we suddenly discovered that there were two kinds of people, the rich and the poor and that we belonged more to the latter. . . .
> But where we lived, to which we must always return, were ugly rows of apartment buildings the color of dried blood and mustard. If I had been born to this situation I might not have resented it deeply. But it was forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood. It produced a shock and a rebellion that has grown into an inherent part of my work.* It was the beginning of the social consciousness which I think has marked most of my writing.[26]

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*Tischler comments on the contrast between what the Mississippi Delta region and St. Louis held for Williams.

> . . . the author was to become increasingly convinced that the mass of men live, not for truth, beauty, integrity, and honor, but for mendacity, materialism, and expediency—the enemies that have rotted civilization from the inside.

Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 20.

Another event of secondary importance that occurred simultaneously with the family's resettlement in St. Louis was that Williams' father now spent most of his time at home for the first time in Tom's life. However, the effect on Tom of having his father home most every evening did not alter Tom's character very much or change Tom's opinion of his father. Williams was now about eight years old, and Cornelius' influence on Williams could eradicate or substantially alter the greater effect that Edwina had on Tom's most formative years.

> But all those years in the rectory, with his mother and sister as his constant, in fact almost exclusive companions, had done their work irreversibly. Williams had a perfectly simple relationship with his father which he described not long ago in perfectly simple words: 'I hated him.'* [27]

I wish to cite here an important incident that occurred in Williams' life while he was in his first year at the University of Missouri because it underscores and focusses upon the single most pathetic characteristic in Williams' relationship with his father—namely, the lack of communication between two people. This is a motif that haunts

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*It is true that in later years, particularly after the death of his father, Williams' attitude toward him changed.

> Maybe I hated him once, but I certainly don't anymore. He gave me some valuable things; he gave me fighting blood, which I needed, and now he has given me, through the revelations of my psychoanalysis, a sense of the necessity to forgive your father in order to forgive the world that he brought you into: . . . Forgiving, of course, does not mean accepting and condoning, it does not even mean an end to the battle.

Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 26.

Williams' work, and undoubtedly the origin of the inability to communicate theme devolves upon the father-son relationship. Briefly, the incident was as follows. Williams was in love with a girl named Hazel Kramer. She had one year of high school left before going on to college. For no apparent reason, Williams' father told Hazel's grandfather (her parents were divorced) that if he enrolled Hazel at the University of Missouri, he would withdraw Tom from the school. The grandfather desisted, and Hazel went to the University of Wisconsin instead. Their relationship came to a sudden and disappointing end. The effect of Cornelius' inscrutable intervention remained with Williams for many years. In 1935, about seven years after this incident, he received word that Hazel had gotten married. Williams had been working at the International Shoe Company for two and a half years and had been spending his evenings writing. It was partly because of this physical strain, coupled with the emotional stress of learning about Hazel's marriage, that led to Williams' first breakdown. His father never really knew how important Hazel was to him. Williams has said less than fifteen years ago that Hazel was "much the deepest love of my life." Upon further reflection at that time, he told his mother the following:

> I still haven't the faintest idea why my father opposed our attending the same university but then there was never any communication or understanding between us, since even being under the same roof with him was acutely uncomfortable to me. As I recall my reaction, it was desolation, not fury. I guess I had begun to regard Dad's edicts

> as being—as far as I was concerned—too incomprehensible and incontestably Jovian to feel about them anything but what a dead-tired animal feels when it's whipped on further. Of course under this hopeless nonresistance there must have been an unconscious rage, not just at Dad but my own cowardice and impotent submission. This I realize because as I have grown older I have discovered a big underground rebellion was there all along, just waiting for a way out.[28]

Although this incident occurred several years after Williams began to write, I believe that the very lack of communication and understanding Williams spoke of always existed and indirectly aided him in turning toward writing as "a way out," as a means of establishing a comprehensible reality that would not be hostile to its creator. However, if Williams' parents—particularly his father whom he rebelled against—were the single greatest influence on his character development, then I believe that his sister Rose was the single most significant influence on Williams becoming a writer. Furthermore, much of Williams' aesthetic, his preoccupation with the beautiful and its destruction, originates with his perceptions of his sister. When Williams was about nine years old, he was sent to his grandparents' home in Clarksdale to lighten his mother's household cares. Dakin was in his first year of life (1919), and Edwina was quite ill from an attack of influenza which gave her a slight case of tuberculosis. Williams loved that year in Clarksdale. However, upon his return to St. Louis, he began to detect slight, subtle changes in his sister's behaviour. Williams wrote of the slow,

irrevocable separation of Rose from him in his short story, The Resemblance Between a Violin and a Coffin. The passage beautifully expresses the sense of loss, the sense of oncoming loneliness, and the sense of confronting some great, incomprehensible event. It is a passage that suggests a major catalyst for Williams becoming not only a writer but a particular kind of writer—one who sees the beautiful and the delicate struggling before the ineluctable forces of destruction.

> It was a Saturday morning, I remember, of a hot yellow day and it was the hour when my sister and I would ordinarily take to the streets on our wheels. But the custom was now disregarded. After breakfast my sister seemed somewhat strengthened but still alarmingly pale and silent as ever. She was then escorted to the parlor and encouraged to sit down at the piano. She spoke in a low whimpering tone to my grandmother who adjusted the piano stool very carefully and placed a cushion on it and even turned the pages of sheet music as if she were incapable of finding the place for herself. . . . Finally, I said to Grand, Why can't she practice later? As if I had made some really brutal remark, my sister jumped up in tears and fled to her upstairs bedroom. What was the matter with her? My grandmother said, "Your sister is not well today. She said it gently and gravely, and then she started to follow my sister upstairs, and I was deserted. . . .
>
> In this way was instituted the time of estrangement that I could not understand.[29]

Aloneness. Solitude. Alienation in a world that appeared to hold no place for a young, sensitive, confused boy. For years, Rose was very much a kind of bridge that connected and provided Tom with the necessity of human interaction and communication. Now,

Rose was leaving him. She was more "suited to the wild country of childhood" than an adult world. Williams says in the same story:

> It seemed to me that a shadow had fallen on her. Or had it fallen on me, with her light at a distance? Yes, it was as if someone had carried a lamp into another room that I could not enter. I watched her from a distance and under a shadow. And looking back on it now, I see that those two or three years when the fatal dice were still in the tilted box, were the years of her beauty.[30]

With the realization that Rose, now in puberty and becoming a young lady, was leaving him not only physically but psychologically as well, Tom felt the pressures of an already harsh external reality becoming more relentless and oppressive in its demands to relate to that reality. In another beautiful, almost lyrical passage, Williams recalls his loss of equilibrium, his permanent loss of his closest childhood companion, and his inner desperate need to create his own reality to provide the answers to the questions he posed to an external, inscrutable reality.

> I saw that it was all over, put away in a box like a doll no longer cared for, the magical intimacy of our childhood together, the soap-bubble afternoons and the games with paper dolls cut out of dress catalogues and the breathless races here and there on our wheels. For the first time, yes, I saw her beauty. I consciously avowed it to myself, although it seems to me that I turned away from it, averted my look from the pride with which she strolled into the parlor and stood by the mantel mirror to be admired. And it was then, about that time, that I began to find life unsatisfactory as an explanation of itself and was forced to adopt the method of the artist of not explaining but putting the blocks together in some other way that seems more significant to him. Which is a rather fancy way of saying I started writing.[31]

Thus Williams turned inward to cope with and relate to the outer world. At first, it did not matter in what genre he wrote; it was only important that he write. Indeed, it was essential to his mental health. Williams explained his tremendous need to write during this period of his life in his Preface to Sweet Bird of Youth.

> At the age of 14 I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge. From what? From being called a sissy by the neighborhood kids, and Miss Nancy by my father, because I would rather read books in my grandfather's large and classical library than play marbles and baseball and other normal kid games, a result of a severe childhood illness and of excessive attachment to the female members of my family, who had coaxed me back into life.[32]

His writing not only persisted from this period but it increased in quantity and quality. Even during the years he spent working for the International Shoe Company, he managed to continue writing. He would come home from work and begin writing into the wee hours of the morning, incessantly drinking black coffee. Williams has said that ". . . it was in those years that I first began to write seriously."[33] After three gruelling and exhausting years of working days and writing nights, Williams had his first breakdown, as I noted earlier. This breakdown, in 1935, proved to be a most important event in his life. Williams was sent to recover at his grandparents' new home in Memphis. While he was there, he was introduced to drama by a girl named Dorothy Shapiro who was active in a little theatre group

called The Rose Arbor. He switched his predominant interest from poetry and short stories to playwriting when he returned to St. Louis. He enrolled at Washington University and met a fellow student, Clark Mills McBurney, who introduced Williams to Hart Crane's work. He joined a small theatrical group called The Mummers, and wrote such plays as Candles to the Sun and Fugitive Kind. When his sister was finally removed to a sanatorium, Williams left St. Louis with the financial aid of his grandmother and enrolled at the University of Iowa.* He received his B.A. there in 1938, nine years after entering the University of Missouri. It was during this time and shortly after that Williams finally broke with his family and St. Louis. He began to lead a bohemian life, travelling throughout the south, southwest, Mexico, and California. By now he had changed his name to Tennessee, his college nickname. He has given many reasons for the change. One reason was to acknowledge his Tennessee forebears. Another is that his full name, Thomas Lanier Williams, sounded too much like William Lyon Phelps, a mediocre academic of the period. Still another reason was that the name Tennessee had commercial potential. Williams has said that, "I think it [the name]

*Rice remarks that Williams only remained in St. Louis up to that time because of Rose. "There is little doubt that Williams—who hated his father and who, on reaching his teens, lost touch with his mother whom he had adored as a child—stayed in St. Louis as he did principally on Rose's account. When, at last, she had to be committed to a hospital, a victim of schizophrenia, the only tie that still bound him to his family was dissolved." (Rice, Art. VIII.)

helped me. I think it caught people's eyes."[34] In any event, it was during this nomadic period, which lasted for several years, that Williams discovered the "defeated" people that have come to occupy such a significant position in his plays. This was another important part of his life because it opened an entirely new world for him, one that he could not explore with minimal moral restraints.

> He discovered, during those first French Quarter days and nights, the kind of people whose existence he had not even suspected during his rather prim St. Louis years: prostitutes and gamblers, sailors who wrote verse, poets who traveled in boxcars and unreconstructed Basin Street musicians, sweet old ladies who drank pain-killer all day and nasty old men who quietly molested little boys, alcoholics and hoboes and junkies and pimps and homosexuals, all in all a comprehensive sampling of those who were too brave or too frightened, too pure or too corrupt, too angry or too gentle, too clear or too confused, too creative or too numb to accept the peace and comfort, or the stagnation and rot, of respectability.[35]

Thus, a titanic wave of unfettered freedom engulfed Williams on his sojourn across the southern states. The contrast between his former life and the one he was leading after 1938 was so complete that it was, once again, another antithetical force in his life. It was a sort of reaction-formation to a fettered existence that offered only the narrowest perception of the world. "I found the kind of freedom I had always needed," Williams wrote about this period. "And the shock of it against the Puritanism of my nature has given me a subject, a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting."[36] His journeys into this "underworld," so to speak, was Williams' descent into his

own Hell. It was also a descent into the psychological habitations of his "defeated" characters.

I wish to conclude this abbreviated biography with the emphasis not principally on his literary achievements, but on the inner conflict and struggle within Williams' mind because his achievements were a product of the conflicts raging in his mind, and not the converse. The struggle was, I believe, a kind of life-death conflict. Part of this conflict undoubtedly emanates from the very inter-relationship of his mother and father.

> Thus, while the callousness of city life [St. Louis] may have been partially responsible, I think the widening breach between his parents, and his father's attitude toward him, gave the feeling of loneliness and agony to Tom's boyhood. It made every experience seem a crisis, for when there is too much anger in a home, everything becomes life or death to a child.[37]

I do not think it is an exaggeration to suggest that Williams' early life was a constant fight against negation and rejection from his father. He knew that his father hated what he loved most—writing; he knew that his father loved Dakin and not him. In many ways, Williams fought off capitulation to a greater force and will. Though Williams endured his father's edicts in many important matters (e.g., his relationship with Hazel Kramer), he still fought his father in the pursuit and practice of his writing career. I see this struggle not only as a monumental one, but as one that created Williams' drive and relentless pursuit of life. For what was at stake was Williams'

own developing identity, the image of who he is and what he wants to become or had to become to survive. To capitulate to his father's demands may have earned him love and praise earlier in his life, but to have tenaciously resisted in deference to his own desires preserved his sense of self-dignity and self-worth. In the end, he did receive his father's praise only because he became financially successful. William Henley's poem, "Invictus," aptly presents the determination of a man as unconquerable as Williams:

> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud
> Under the bludgeonings of chance
> My head is bloody, but unbowed.[38]

The greatest irony I have discovered between the creator and his creations is, as I have briefly mentioned before, that while Williams' life is a monument to the preservation of self-worth and the will to live, his "defeated" characters (with remarkably few exceptions) never know this victory. They know only the pathos and the defeat of Rose. Their battle, like Williams and Rose, involves a life-death struggle. And like their creator, they possess a similar psychological foundation. That is, they possess a strong Puritan moral code, a sort of ultra-morality under whose dominance they quake with guilt, and an opposing romantic-hedonistic code that fiercely contends with the former in directing the actions of the torn person. Upon this foundation, each encounters unique experiences in his life that compel him to confront the responsibility of his actions. They

are characters in deep conflict and mental fragmentation who are afraid or unable to confront the external reality or to successfully escape it. For it may be argued that Williams escaped the unpleasant reality beyond his mind through his writing. Yet, to successfully escape that reality one must still be responsible to it—as, indeed, Williams is. His "defeated" characters, however, can neither confront the external reality nor successfully avoid it. They are not permitted to remain upon the fence, so to speak. They must either cope or not cope; they make it or they don't; often in a metaphysical sense, they either live or die. Williams confronts them with the essential question of whether to be or not to be, to retain or seek to regain or defend one's identity at all costs or to escape one's identity out of an overwhelming sense of guilt or for the security of illusions or both. With these thoughts in mind, I now turn to the study of the life-death conflict in the "defeated" characters.

## Footnotes to Chapter II

[1]W.J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 46.

[2]Ibid., p. 99.

[3]Ibid., p. 48.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 117.

[7]Nancy Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), p. 16.

[8]Cash, The Mind of the South, p. 56.

[9]Ibid., p. 89.

[10]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 72.

[11]Cash, The Mind of the South, p. 60.

[12]Ibid., p. 59.

[13]Robert Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee Williams," New York Post, IV (April 24, 1958), p. M2.

[14]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work (London: Peter Owen, 1961), p. 15.

[15]Tennessee Williams, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (Norfolk: New Directions, 1953), p. 75.

[16]Ibid., p. 85.

(Footnotes Chap. II)

[17]Williams, The Glass Menagerie, pp. 5-6.

[18]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 15.

[19]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 19.

[20]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 17.

[21]Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 39.

[22]Ibid., p. 26.

[23]Tennessee Williams, Hard Candy (New York: New Directions Book, 1959), pp. 81-82.

[24]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., pp. 18-19.

[25]Robert Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee Williams," V (April 25, 1958), p. M2.

[26]Tennessee Williams, "Facts About Me," Press Release.

[27]Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee Williams," V, p. M2.

[28]Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom, p. 68.

[29]Williams, Hard Candy, pp. 82-84.

[30]Ibid., p. 86.

[31]Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[32]Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: The New American Library, 1959), pp. ix-x. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[33]Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee Williams," VI, p. M2.

(Footnotes Chap. II)

[34] Ibid., IX.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom, p. 39.

[38] William Henley, Poems (London: David Hutt, 1938), p. 119.

# CHAPTER III

# THE PLAYS

I think the strange, the crazed, the queer
will have their holiday this year,
I think for just a little while
there will be pity for the wild.

I think in places known as gay,
in secret clubs and private bars,
the damned will serenade the damned
with frantic drums and wild guitars.

I think for some uncertain reason,
mercy will be shown this season
to the lovely and misfit,
to the brilliant and deformed—

I think they will be housed and warmed
And fed and comforted awhile
before, with such a tender smile,
the earth destroys her crooked child.

Tennessee Williams

The drama of Tennessee Williams is the presentation of conflict within the "crooked child" and with his inter-personal relations with the other characters. The crooked child is the "defeated" character; he is a particular image of modern man that permeates Williams' work. The first part of this study focussed on the supreme conflict confronting the "defeated" characters—that is, the life-death struggle. The second part provided the psychological foundations of Williams' mind which he later projected into his "defeated" characters. Because Williams is at once concerned with the portrayal of an individualized character in distress and a generalized image of man extrapolated from that individual, a concrete scrutiny of the individual's motives, conflicts, and resolutions

assumes supreme priority. The most efficacious approach in analyzing these three aspects is a psychological one. However, because Williams is a playwright, the study of the "defeated" characters can not be divorced from the dramatic presentation of that character. For Williams employs many dramatic techniques to reinforce and intensify the presentation of conflict in character. Many of his symbols, which are often romantic in conception, are developed and employed as crystallizations of thoughts, as images of truth presented to the audience and frequently shaded from the "defeated" character. Thus the third part will integrate the first two parts with Williams' dramatic technique and aesthetic. It will be of use to keep the above quoted poem in mind because the sentiments expressed in it reflect the basic philosophy of Williams as the spokesman for the damned.

I

The first play I will analyze is The Glass Menagerie, an episodic play that is Williams' least violent and most sensitive study of conflict in character. In the Production Notes to the play, which was Williams' first Broadway production (1945), he states his rationale for his kind of theatre.

> Expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are.[1]

The evocation of truth has always been Williams' rationale for his anti-realistic theatre. His theatre is not, however, purely anti-realistic; for there is a blend of the anti-realistic setting and lighting with the realism of his characters. To better understand what this truth is and how his "plastic theatre" with its particular use of setting, lighting, and music, helps to evoke that truth, a close examination of these theatrical devices becomes necessary. These techniques and others are employed in the play to create the emotion of "nostalgia" and the atmosphere of "memory" (his words). These become the two dominating effects of the play. They are directed toward the evocation of a certain truth. The three questions that I first proposed at the beginning of this study implicitly direct themselves toward the discovery of the "truth" of each play and its relevancy beyond its characters.

The setting of the play is important in reinforcing the image of a confined reality, one that incarcerates people within their apartment-cubicles and their emotions within themselves—waiting for a way out. The setting, an apartment dwelling in St. Louis in the 1930's, expresses Williams' tremendous dislike of urban life. The feeling of alienation, loss of identity, and dehumanization are pervading sensations in the play. Williams' description of the apartment and its surroundings create the generalized effect of perennial depression and desperation.

> The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism.
>
> The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire escape is included in the set. . . .
>
> This building . . . is flanked on both sides by dark, narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clotheslines, garbage cans and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes. (Sc. i)

Indeed, the importance of the exterior setting can not be readily exaggerated or overemphasized. Even in the short story on which the play is based, Portrait of a Girl in Glass, the alley way outside Laura's bedroom was ominously termed "death Valley" for a reason that Williams says is "worth telling." It was in this alley that a large "vicious dirty white Chow" would stalk and destroy the alley cats. The alley becomes a "locked arena" in which this "violent drama" is frequently re-enacted. Because Laura could not tolerate "the screams and the snarls of killing," she kept the shades down and spent her days "almost in perpetual twilight."[2]

This twilight effect is retained and expanded in the play to create the milieu of memory, of some intangible land between reality and personal fantasy. Williams' soft and dim shades offer visual dimensions to the intangible quality of memories. Thus, we see-

obscurity hovering over things recalled; we see some objects exaggerated or understated by memory through focussing more or less light upon them. With regard to lighting and memory, Williams says:

> The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic licence. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominately in the heart. The interior is therefore rather dim and poetic. (Sc. i)

The overall effect of the lighting and setting is to provide a milieu conducive to the recalling and the presentation of events locked within the consciousness of one man, the narrator. So essential is this atmosphere, this audio-visual immersion (for music is used also) into the presentation of carefully selected past events that Williams never changes the exterior or the interior settings. It is from this visual image of time past, clouded by emotion and distorted through memory that the audience views the play. Williams employs a narrator to help bridge the gap between the consciousness of the audience and the evoked reality of the play. The narrator, Tom, is "an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic convention as is convenient to his purposes" (Sc. i). His function is to connect the present with the past. It is an important role because a large part of the emotional intensity of the play emanates from Williams' ability to fuse the "times" of the play, which he tells us is "Now and the Past." The intensity of the pathos of Amanda, the desperation of Tom, and Laura's loss are contingent

upon how completely the audience can unite and empathize with the recalled events. With regard to transporting the audience into past space and time, Tom—as the narrator—reveals his intentions and his techniques in presenting his events—the evocation of truth.

> Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion. (Sc. i)

Tom recalls seven emotionally charged scenes that build in intensity. His asides focus upon the dramatic events in the scenes providing part of the momentum and direction of the play. In the first scene, he introduces the time, the setting, the kind of play it is, and the characters. At the beginning of Scene iii, Tom underscores the impending importance of the Gentleman Caller. The image on the screen* displays a "young man at [the] door with flowers."

*The Screen Device was not employed in the acting version of the play. The device had images and legends projected upon it. The screen was meant to be a "section of wall between the front-room and dining-room areas, which should be indistinguishable from the rest when not in use." Yet, because Williams regarded it as an important device, his reasons for incorporating it in the original should be stated:

> It is to give accent to certain values in each scene. Each scene contains a particular point (or several) which is structurally the most important. In an episodic play, such as this, the basic structure or narrative line may be obscured from the audience. . . . The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely illusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines. Aside from this structural value, I think the screen will have a definite emotional appeal, less definable but just as important. (Production Notes.)

It is through his and the screen's projection of this image into the audience's consciousness that helps create the anticipation and anxiety felt before and during Jim's visit. In Scene v, his aside is ironical in that while he is complaining about a life "without any change or adventure," there is a great change in the making in each member of the family. Tom speaks of Jim's character at the opening of Scene vi and, through his description of Jim, one realizes how different and antithetical Tom—as a character—is from Jim. Tom's last aside occurs at the end of Scene vii. Because it is one of the most important passages of the play in terms of the resolutions of characters, I will discuss it more fully later. As a poet narrator, Tom introduces the audience to this very personal and visionary play; as a character we join him in the events of the play.

Tom is a young, passionate, poetic man who is compelled to remain home supporting his mother and sister because of his father's absence from the home. Like his real counterpart, Williams, Tom works in a shoe factory that he positively despises. He is an angry, frustrated youth who does not have enough time to do what he loves most—writing and fantasizing. To escape the daily unbearable reality of his existence at home, he enjoys the narcotic effects of movies and drinking. He is portrayed as a romantic discontent. His conflict is whether to remain home, working at the warehouse and accepting his mother's demands and edicts, or to leave as his father did and follow his dreams. His conflict also involves his

image of himself and what he actually is, of who he is and who he wants to become. The choice is a difficult one but Tom, like Williams, is a life-oriented character. He already knows what his decision will be when he pays his membership dues in the Merchant Seamen Union instead of the electric bill. The friction that exists between Amanda and himself is poignant and persistent. Tom must contend with a self-opinioned, self-righteous, assertive woman who demands Tom's obedience to her and to the family needs. Furthermore, he must even contend with his mother's censoring his intellectual persuits. For his mother refuses to permit "that hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence. I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them—BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no!" (Scene iii) In the next scene Tom expresses his love of adventure and travel in Lawrencian terms. The exchange is an important one because it delineates the irreconcilable natures of mother and son.

Tom: Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!

Amanda: Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!

Tom: What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?

Amanda: Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys—pigs—

Tom: I reckon they're not. (Sc. iv)

The defiance expressed by Tom in these lines emanates from the very psychological centre of Tom. It is this defiance and Lawrencian life that remains with Tom and enables him to leave his smothered existence.

However, the plot and emotional centre of the play does not rest upon the Tom-Amanda relationship but, rather, upon the Laura-Amanda one. Williams directs every dramatic technique towards the presentation and interpretation of Laura more as a symbol than as a character. "When Williams says the play is not realistic, but is intended to be a sentimental, evocative piece, he must be thinking of Laura. . . ."[3] To demonstrate the preeminence of Laura as the focus of the play, Williams has her standing ". . . with clenched hands and panicky expression" with "a clear pool of light on her figure" (Sc. iii) throughout the first major argument between Tom and Amanda.

In order to receive a greater understanding of both Laura and Amanda, I will again employ the technique of contrast. Amanda is one of Williams' best drawn characters. Williams anticipates her in the one-act play Auto-Da-Fé, as Falk points out. Madame Duvenet lives in a cottage in New Orleans. She is fanatical about cleanliness, purity, and the absence of corruption in her life. In the short story, Portrait of a Girl in Glass, she is described as a ". . . relatively aggressive sort of woman."[4] In the play, Amanda is still a dominating, assertive woman who, if not fanatical about enforcing her values,

is persistent to the point of becoming quite overwhelming. It is a demanding persistence that can easily lead to the smothering of self-expression and self-identity.

Amanda's character is revealed through dialogue and monologue. Through the monologues, her own past life is revealed. The audience learns that Amanda once enjoyed the life of a Southern Belle, steeped in the culture and milieu of a South that has, in the time of the play, essentially disappeared. She is a product and inheritor of the Southern Puritan concept of womanhood as related in the previous chapter. She is accustomed to being treated in a refined and respected manner. Her image is that of a once beautiful, well-mannered, gracious, proper and decorous woman who needs and clings to her glorious, romanticized past life to sustain her present existence. Thus she tells her tales about Blue Mountain, her seventeen gentleman callers, and her mastery of the "art of conversation" with men. Robert Jones discovers two kinds of women in Williams' plays. Amanda certainly conforms to the first type. They are:

> . . . the women who are the relics of the moribund tradition of gentility in which Williams himself was reared, women who are unable to accept the twentieth century and who prefer living in the illusive and legendary world of something that never really was—the mythically cavalier Old South.[5]

Nevertheless, Amanda's dialogues reveals another essential facet in her complex character. Even though she often fantasizes,

she is quite realistic and practical. Her dichotomous nature is thus born out of a certain desperation; for, she is compelled through circumstance to find ways to provide for her family. One way to unite her romanticized past and her harsh present is to shape Laura into an image of herself (i.e., the mother) who is able to function in the twentieth century. Because Amanda is desperate, she is myopic. She can not perceive or respond to Laura's real needs. She is not sensitive to Laura's real limitations. Thus, she refuses to recognize Laura as being crippled; and, when Tom says that "Laura is very different from other girls" and "peculiar," Amanda retorts that ". . . the difference is all to her advantage" and she insists that Tom not say "peculiar" (Sc. v). Amanda, as Tom says, can not "face the facts." It is partly in this sense that Williams says Amanda has ". . . failed to establish contact with reality" and "continues to live in her illusions" (Description of Characters).

Above all else, Amanda is a life-oriented character. She alone does not escape the unbearable reality of their home life. Rather, she exerts great effort to survive in the real world. Her desire to live compels her to make overwhelming and unrealistic demands upon Laura. In attempting to recreate her own image of whom Laura ought to be, she deludes not only herself but becomes the catalyst, the motivating force, behind the life-death conflict in the play and the final catastrophe. For it is the dramatic presentation of the Amanda-Laura conflict that becomes the crux of the play, subsuming

all other conflicts.

Laura is the antithesis of Amanda. Whether or not Amanda is representative of Williams' mother, Laura is unquestionably his sister Rose. Nelson contends that Laura ". . . is the least successful portrait in the play. Too far removed from the world of her brother or mother, she never quite attains a lucid characterization" and ". . . never emerges as a human being in her own right."[6] This criticism is only partially valid. Next to the characterizations of Tom and Amanda, it is true that she is less developed. Being so subjective and withdrawn, her character can not be readily appreciated or understood without the specific aid of Amanda. Williams does tell the audience that she is "exquisitely fragile," that she is "pretty," and that she suffers from a crippled leg. Furthermore, Williams relegates the recurring tune, "The Glass Menagerie," to Laura. It is like "circus music." "It expresses the surface vitality of life with the underlying strain of immutable and inexpressible sorrow. . . . It is primarily Laura's music. . . " (Production Notes). The music tends to underscore Laura's antithetical nature to her mother's. As Amanda's opposite, one can infer from Laura's mannerism and actions that she is a lonely, shy, delicate and withdrawn girl. (She seems to be a less mentally stable and less pretty Matilda of <u>You Touched me!</u>) She is socially naïve and immature, lacking her mother's affability and self-confidence among males. She is also sensitive about herself and her mother. She recognizes Amanda's need to tell her stories

saying to Tom who knows what's coming, "... let her tell it." Unlike Amanda who is driven from a sense of need, Laura suppresses her own impulses and passively acquiesces to her mother's demands, for she can not bear disappointing her mother. Thus she attends Rubicam's Business College and does not tell her that she had dropped out; thus, she submits to having dinner with the Gentleman Caller.

Even though Laura and Amanda engage in conversation, there is little communication. While the dialogue nakedly reveals the irreconcilable natures of the mother and daughter, Laura's movements communicate to the audience what her mother fails to perceive. For instance, when Amanda queries airily, "How many [i.e., gentlemen callers] do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?" Laura replies, "I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother." Williams then has Laura slip alone "... in a fugitive manner through the half-open portieres" drawing them "gently behind her" (Sc. i). Then Laura's theme music "The Glass Menagerie" is played. Without using words Williams instantaneously creates the abyss between the two. Laura's escape into the security of introversion and solitude goes unnoticed by her mother. It is interesting and typical of Laura that at the mention of outsiders; particularly gentlemen callers, her first reaction is to recoil from her fantasized fears of interpersonal relationships.

What is Laura's conflict? As I remarked earlier, she must choose to embrace the changeless security and safety represented in

her inanimate world of glass or to attempt to develop and survive in the societal, work-a-day world of reality beyond her apartment as represented by Amanda and the Gentleman Caller. Everything Williams presents to the audience about Laura points to her choosing the former alternative. Yet she does not choose it readily. What motivates her to make the final attempt at establishing a firm foothold in reality? Although they are not explicitly expressed, I believe Laura is conscious of at least one of the forces at work within her. She has already demonstrated to the audience that she is quite insightful (e.g., when she recognizes her mother's need to tell her stories). Realizing that she is not like her mother, Laura must feel a sense of guilt, a sense of personal disappointment in knowing she can never be the woman her mother wishes her to become. Although there is no direct allusion to guilt in the play, Williams has said that ". . . guilt is universal. I mean a strong sense of guilt."[7] Carrying this point further, Laura feels guilty and inadequate because the only way that she can feel competent and secure (in her solitary world) is closed to her for it would directly conflict with her mother's persistent demands. Thus she forces herself to submit to her mother's orders.

The second, though unconscious, reason that aids her in attempting to relate to the outside world is her own life-death struggle on the socio-moral level. It is obvious from the last scene in the play that

Laura wants life very much. She wants to love and be loved. She wants to live with people and enjoy their world. This is further evidenced by her remaining in high school for as long as she did, by her being in "love" with a high school boy, and partly by her futile efforts to impress her mother. Yet Laura possesses the beauty and charm of the damned. She is presented as a too rarefied creature to withstand the ponderous presence of a crass reality. Her world of glass affords her a world of withdrawn beauty and safety, a world where physical contact is minimal and inanimation permeates ceaseless solitude. The evening with Jim, toward which the entire play has been directed, is the final confrontation between Amanda and her illusions of Laura, between Laura and the external reality, and for Williams, between the beautiful and the real. Williams' poem, "Lament for the Moths," cries out for life, for the strength to survive in the "heavy world." It is, in a very real way, a prayer for Laura.

> Give them, O mother of moths and mother of men,
> strength to enter the heavy world again,
> for delicate were the moths and badly wanted here in
> a world by mammoth figures haunted![8]

The last two scenes of the play, particularly the last scene, bear the entire dramatic weight developed during the previous scenes and intensified through anticipation. For Amanda, the evening is her illusions come true. She fastidiously cleans and decorates the apartment; she wears a ". . . girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue

silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils—the legend of her youth is nearly revived" (Sc. vi). Laura is equally outfitted for the evening. Williams describes her dress and appearance in ominous imagery.

> The dress is colored and designed by memory. The arrangement of Laura's hair is . . . softer and more becoming. A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting. (Sc. vi)

Amanda has Laura wear "Gay Deceivers" to complete the image of illusion. Laura says she feels like a "trap" and Amanda agrees saying, "All pretty girls are a trap. . . " (Sc. vi). Amanda thus persists in presenting the illusions of Laura rather than her reality. Again, Laura acquiesces out of guilt and out of her own desire to possibly possess life and love.

Scene Six opens with a synopsis of Jim's life from high school onwards. He was a well-integrated, extroverted student who ". . . was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas" (Sc. vi). According to Tom, the narrator, "Jim is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from" (Sc. i). Tom also tells us that he is ". . . a symbol; he is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for" (Sc. i). In short, Jim is presented as the American Dream, a boy with a bright future and the will and perseverence to achieve success in the world. He is pre-figured in

some ways in You Touched Me! as Hadrian, ". . . a clean-cut muscular young man."

When the doorbell rings, Amanda demands that the frightened Laura ". . . march right to that door!" Laura says, "Yes—yes, Mother!" This is the first time in the play that Laura meets or talks with anyone outside the apartment. It is the moment when two antithetical realities converge—the external, objective world-at-large reality and the introverted, subjective world of a very personal and inner reality. Williams delays Jim and Laura's interaction until the final scene, thus heightening the emotional stress felt by Laura and projected into the audience's consciousness.

At the beginning of the last scene there is an almost preternatural silence resulting from the abatement of the storm and thunder in the previous scene. The externalized tempest is now internalized. It has become the emotional tempest whirling within Amanda, Tom, and particularly Laura. Williams describes the setting and lighting in terms of Laura:

> The new floor lamp with its shade of rose-colored silk gives a soft, becoming light to her face, bringing out the fragile, unearthly prettiness which usually escapes attention. (Sc. vii)

There is an unearthly romanticism in the setting that complements Laura's ethereal loveliness. A sense of the gothic exists, too—a sense of the horrific, of foreboding and doom. Jim and Laura sit on the floor. A candle provides the shadowed light and the flame to which the moth (Laura) is ineluctably drawn.

Although Jim is totally unaware of this evening's significance to Laura, Williams tells us it represents ". . . the climax of her secret life." Jim's manner is gentle, warm, and inviting. In the presence of such a non-threatening, personable fellow, Laura's defences of withdrawal and muteness dissolve. They sit drinking wine and talking over their days in high school. Laura helps Jim recall that he used to call her "Blue Roses" because of an illness she had at the time (pleurosis). Considering that Williams describes Laura's beauty as "unearthly," it is a fitting name for her because it combines two of Williams' most effective symbols (blue - memory; roses - beauty and fragility) into an unreal one. Laura reminisces that her brace "sounded like-thunder" when she walked through the school. Jim claims that he "never even noticed it" and advises her not to be so self-conscious. He does not understand that Laura's physical lameness is a psychological one as well. To the audience her lameness symbolizes her imperfection and unsuitability in the real world. In her own private world her lameness is as unique as her unicorn.

When Laura learns that Jim is not engaged to a former girlfriend of his, she becomes even more open. Jim's "warmth" and "charm" once again "lights her inwardly with altar candles" (Sc. vii). The mixture of romantic doom and religion in this image is more successful for Williams than at other times (as in the Battle of Angels). The use of the light imagery reveals her efforts to absorb the life

directed forces (such as love, physical contact, and warmth), to feel and to respond positively to them.

The legend now reads, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE SINCE HIGH SCHOOL?" This is a key question that leads directly into Laura's world of glass. Just as Laura begins to mention her glass collection, as if not realizing its importance to her, he tells her that she lacks confidence in herself, and that she should think of herself as superior in some way. His words seem to provide the last impetus Laura needs to fully reveal her pride in her collection of glass. She opens her world to him and his world. In showing him the unicorn she says, "Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks!" (Sc. vii). It is a remark that reflects the delicate inanimation of her glass world and life. Yet, because she has now opened her inner world to Jim with no fear, she gives it to him saying, "I trust you with him!" (Sc. vii).

The breaking of the unicorn during their dance provides a powerful image. The actual breaking of the glass piece symbolizes the clash between two opposite realities—the objective world reality and the subjective personal reality. For Laura to possess the externalized realistic world represented by Jim, she would have to forfeit her inner, imaginary abode. At this point in the play Laura is quite willing to replace her lonely, loveless life for one with companions and love. She happily says that, "Now it is just like all the other horses," and that it may even be a "blessing in disguise" (Sc. vii). Laura's words and reactions are now completely opposite to her former self

(as presented in previous scenes). She is less shy, more confident, more at ease. She displays an outward force, a life force that seeks warmth and quiet togetherness with another. Although she does not initiate the actual kiss (which is understandable in any case), she now appears to be more real and more physical than at any other time in the play. Thus Jim's kissing her does not seem inappropriate or ludicrous. Rather, it is a serious and solemn scene for Laura. She sinks back on the sofa with a ". . . bright, dazed look." Jim finally realizes that he has gone too far with her. He makes feeble attempts to extricate himself from his position. He informs Laura that he is engaged to be married to Beatty, his all-American counterpart. He then talks of what love is, as if Laura did not know. Feeling more comfortable now, he fails to perceive how troubled and shaken Laura has become. One can imagine her running wildly and desperately back into her solitary, safe world—closing doors in the world's face. Using his religion-love metaphor again, Williams says, "The holy candles in the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation" (Sc. vii). This is the time when Williams' foreboding description of Laura at the very beginning of the scene attains its greatest effect. Her "unearthly prettiness," "like a piece of translucent glass," dissolves visually and symbolically. When love and the life force is denied her through Jim's admission, Laura first looks to the broken unicorn—the fragile security of inanimate beauty. By focussing the audience's attention on the broken glass

and the subsequent withdrawal of light, Williams creates an overwhelming sense of loss, pathos and sorrow.

When Amanda learns that Jim is engaged to be married, she rants at Tom for not knowing that fact about someone he considered a friend. Amanda, perceptive at times, reveals Tom's own unreal outlook on life. She yells, "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!" (Sc. vii). As usual, Tom exits out the fire escape to withdraw from a reality that Amanda—despite her illusions—has learned to confront squarely.

The final part of the last scene is done in pantomime by Laura and Amanda, while Tom talks as the narrator. Amanda has gone over to Laura on the sofa and appears to be comforting her. "Now that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty" (Sc. vii). It is at this moment that Amanda ". . . emerges as a noble and strangely tender figure."[9] Though foolish and insensitive at times, she is a woman who has achieved a sense of dignity through loss. She progresses from illusions to truth, from denial to acceptance. She finally, though belatedly, realizes that Laura will never live her youth as a Southern belle. The price of acceptance and truth is high, though. She loses her illusions, her family and ironically Laura.

Benjamin Nelson claims that "Laura's personal dilemma is part of a greater dilemma: the destruction—slow and remorseless—of a family."[10] While the dissolution of a family is indeed a misfortune,

it does not supersede the predominant conflict of the play that exists between Laura and Amanda. The entire play revolves around the Laura-Amanda relationship. I believe that Williams took great effort to establish opposing, irreconcilable characterizations. It may be argued that Tom is also antithetical to Amanda. Yet I do not think he is so to the extent that Laura is because he is, in the final analysis, a life-oriented character. Even though his escape from home may not be heroic or noble or as complete as his father's, it does insure his survival in the external world. Williams still "punishes" Tom for running away from the home and his responsibilities to it by having him admit, as the narrator, that he is ". . . more faithful [to Laura] than [he] intended to be!" (Sc. vii). He goes to movies, bars, and buys drinks to achieve oblivion—to make Laura's candles blow out. Amanda must also account to Williams' Puritan code. Part of Amanda's pathos rather than tragedy is that in attempting to infuse Laura with a "pre-recorded" life, she unwittingly causes Laura to recede from the world. Williams' moral heritage compels Amanda to accept her "punishment" of loss for over-directing, dominating and destroying a life (i.e., in a socio-moral way). Her salvation is acceptance and compassion.

Laura's resolution is typical of the "defeated" characters, though it is more subtle and subdued. Her choice is a socio-moral demise. She chooses withdrawal from the social reality, life in shadows among inanimate objects, and minimal physical contact. The

price is high, for there is no salvation. Unfortunately, her demise becomes an affirmation of the inner world, the world of solitude and quiet desperation. It is a negation of the outer world, the world of Jim, of light and love. Her journey into her separate reality is a quiet, non-violent one. As a symbol, Laura is the too fragile beauty that cannot thrive outside its rarefied atmosphere. The life-death motif evident in this play persists throughout all Williams' major works—for Laura's candles are blown out again and again in succeeding "defeated" characters by the whirling winds of a threatening reality represented in the opposing life-oriented characters.

II

Summer and Smoke was written in 1946, but its Broadway opening was postponed until 1948 because Williams chose to present A Streetcar Named Desire first (1947). Because I am presenting the plays in the order in which they were written, rather than in the order in which they were performed on Broadway, I will discuss Summer and Smoke before A Streetcar Named Desire.

Summer and Smoke does not compare favourably with The Glass Menagerie in terms of symbology and character development. The main characters, John and Alma, are too constricted and contrived. In having the two main characters represent ideas and ideals in conflict rather than two people caught in a life-space situation, they lose verisimilitude. There is certainly an allegorical element in this play,

for the characters not only represent certain irreconcilable concepts and institutions, but they also operate from these concepts throughout the performance. Despite the play's inherent weaknesses, it is an important work in further defining the essence of the life-death conflict in the "defeated" character. In no other play is this conflict so lucidly and obviously presented. Perhaps, however, the conflict is overstated with too controlled and perfected a demarcation between life and death orientation which ultimately detracts from the play's aesthetic and public success.

The entire play revolves around the relationship between John Buchanan and Alma Winemiller. The Prologue is effective in establishing the fundamental natures of each character as counterpointed forces. Alma is only ten years old, yet she already possesses the ". . . dignity of an adult; there is a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her, which must set her distinctly apart from other children."[11] When John first enters he says, "Hi, preacher's daughter." Thus the audience instantly learns that Alma is the daughter of a minister. During this first exchange they sit by the stone angel and read the worn inscription on the pediment—"Eternity." Alma then defines eternity as ". . . something that goes on and on when life and death and time and everything else is all through with. . . . It's what people's souls live in when they have left their bodies" (Prologue). Alma concludes saying her name is Spanish for soul. John's reply to Alma's feelings about the soul and

eternity is, "Hee-haw! Ho-hum!." We now learn that John is the son of a doctor. At the very end of the Prologue John proposes that they kiss each other. Alma turns away, but John ". . . seizes her shoulders and gives her a quick rough kiss." Alma turns to the stone angel "for comfort" and ". . . touches the inscription with her fingers" (Prologue). Thus, within a very short time, Williams establishes the two counterpointed, opposing natures both on a realistic and allegorical level, and their reactions to each other's attitudes. One can conclude that Alma is identified with the soul, religion and Religion as an institution, and Puritan morality with particular regard to sex. Williams identifies John with science and Science as an institution, the body, and a physical-sexual orientation. Because Alma and John are polar representations of certain concepts and institutions (Religion, Science, Morality), they can be best understood through their inter-relationship on the two levels previously mentioned.

As a young boy, John was filled with adventure and a romantic image of travel. He expressed his desire to ". . . go to South America in a boat." He also said that he would never wish to become a doctor like his father. Yet, almost as if John really didn't know what he wanted (and perhaps he still doesn't), he has become a doctor. He is a man of Science, of empirical proof relying on his senses for his beliefs. As a young man in Scene i, he is a towering image of masculinity and romantic wildness.

> He is now a Promethean figure, brilliantly and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one, it will burn him up. (Scene i)

Counterpointed to this Lawrencian image of manhood, Alma's young womanhood appears all the more abnormal and inappropriate. There is also a presentiment of doom and impending pathos.

> Alma had an adult quality as a child, and now, in her middle twenties, there is something prematurely spinsterish about her. An excessive propriety and self-consciousness is apparent in her nervous laughter; her voice and gestures belong to years of church entertainments, to the position of hostess in a rectory. . . . Her true nature is still hidden from her. (Scene i)

Henry Popkin gives Alma's and John's natures more graphic delineations. He refers to John as an Adonis figure. The Adonis is first and foremost ". . . young and extraordinarily virile and muscular. His magnificent physical endowments make him unusually self-confident. He is cool and tough. . . ." This type of creature is "untamed" and often ". . . threatened by corruption."[12] John possesses many of these characteristics. He is strikingly handsome, physically impressive, and possessed of a "cool" and somewhat aloof nature. He is young and vibrant with ". . . the fresh and shining look of an epic hero" (Scene i) John also possesses what Popkin terms the "disrespectful" style of speech. The "disrespectful" style is blunt and direct (Kowalski, Mangiacavallo of The Rose Tattoo, and Kilroy of Camino Real, are its masters). John's speech is straightforward with no Southern affectation.

Alma, on the other hand, is the Gargoyle, named ". . . after the grotesque by-products of medieval architecture."[13] She is the ". . . beautiful hero's appalling destiny."

> The Gargoyle is invariably as nervous as Adonis is cool. . . . Their nervousness reflects a terrible distress. They are prisoners of the past, and they have tragically found themselves in a nightmarelike present which they have never anticipated. Adonis usually lives in the present, the Gargoyle always lives in the past.[14]

Alma possesses many of these traits. She is uneasy and nervous to the point of developing a slight heart disorder. She is not as "well-favored" and " . . usually not so young," as Popkin says, as the Adonis. Even though Alma is young in years, Williams explicitly says there is ". . . something prematurely spinsterish about her "(Sc. i). Like the Gargoyle, she belongs to another age. She ". . . seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the eighteenth century in France" (Scene i). Her speech is the "respectful" style which is "emphatically Southern." "In Alma's voice and manners there is a delicacy and elegance, a kind of 'airiness' which is really natural to her, as it is, in a less marked degree, to many Southern girls" (Scene i). Blanche DuBois, among others, also possesses the "respectful" style which ". . . can become an index of the Gargoyle's bondage to the past." (The "disrespectful" speech, likewise, ". . . can be a reflection of the Adonis's freedom.")* Thus further distinctions appear between Alma and John. And they are ominous distinctions.

*For a complete study of this approach see Henry Popkin's "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, III (March, 1960).

There are several symbols associated with either Alma or John throughout the play that reinforce their respective realistic selves and allegorical representations. Many of the most pervasive and important symbols are incorporated in the mise en scène. Williams states that there are two "interior" sets. One is John's house whose bedroom window faces Alma's. The anatomy chart hangs on one wall and symbolizes the Flesh and Science. The other set is Alma's house, the episcopal rectory. In between the houses of Science and Religion is the fountain and stone angel situated on a promontory. The statue is a ". . . symbolic figure (Eternity) brooding over the course of the play" (Production Notes). Williams considered the sky an important element in the play. "There must be a great expanse of sky so that the entire action of the play takes place against it. . . . During the day scenes the sky should be a pure and intense blue. . ."(Production Notes).

The stone angel is a fitting symbol for Alma. The statue is a cold, inanimate monument from another time and world. All passion and emotion are absent. The stone of the statue is as impenetrable and unresponsive to love and life as the skin of Alma. The angel is a woman set apart and raised above the mundane world. Alma, too, is ". . . distinctly set apart from other children" and adults because of her nature. While the statue emphasizes the dense externality of stone, the anatomy chart reveals the interior, the substances of life. It is a male image conforming to John's sex. It displays in detail

the centres of thought, hunger and sex. Allegorically, then, Alma is the Soul or Spirit and John is the Flesh. She is Religion and he is Science. As irreconcilable as these ideas and institutions have been throughout the centuries, Alma's and John's lives allegorically and realistically reflect the distance between their opposing natures.

Williams ultimately reveals his preference for John's attitudes over Alma's. As Jackson points out, Williams suggests ". . . that the moral failures of John Buchanan are yet more acceptable to society than the spiritual eccentricities of Alma Winemiller."[15] There are several reasons and events that support this supposition. The most prominent reason, in my opinion, is because John is a life-oriented character. Why is he a life-oriented character? First of all, he exudes sexuality and physicality. The tremendous sex drive, indeed the life force—the libido, dominates his actions. He is not shackled to the stifling, life-denying morality of Puritanism. He lives in the present and often for the moment. Even though his excessive power has not "found a channel" (until his father's death), his passionate and promiscuous life is not death-oriented. His amorous and sexual nature favours a Latin girl—Rosa Gonzales. Popkin correctly asserts that ". . . the foreign name means life" while ". . . the Anglo-Saxon name may mean stagnation."[16]

Another indication of his life-orientation is his attitude toward institutionalized religion. He perceives religion as the abode for hypocrisy and pretense. He castigates Alma for her reliance on religion

as a panacea for unanswered, powerful, physical-sexual drives.

> You—white-blooded spinster! You so right people, pious pompous mumblers, preachers and preacher's daughters, all muffled up in a lot of worn-out magic! And I was supposed to minister to your neurosis, give you tablets for sleeping and tonics to give you the strength to go on mumbling your worn-out mumbo-jumbo! (Sc. viii)

A great deal of the contempt expressed in John's speech reflects Williams' own disgust with institutionalized religion. Williams will often counterpoint institutional responsibility with personal integrity (epitomized in Shannon in Night of the Iguana). He believes that a personalized discovery of God within the individual, with a unique definition of God for that individual, is infinitely more meaningful than simply accepting pre-recorded dogma. The idea of God in man as the ultimate aim of the religious experience is implicit in his work. Significantly, God is internalized through the organic and spiritual growth of the characters. Thus, while Alma precariously holds on to her inherited religious concepts of God and morality, John integrates a personalized religion through organic and spiritual growth. This kind of religious experience is life-oriented because it develops within and is not brutally or indiscriminately forced upon him as is the custom of established religions.

John's anatomy "lecture" is worth discussing because it characterizes his essential nature and Alma's secret self. He likens the image on the chart to a tree with three birds in it.

> The top bird is the brain. The bird is hungry. He's hungry for something called Truth. . . . This bird underneath is the belly. He's hungry too, but he's the practical bird, just hungry for food!—And down here's the lowest bird—or maybe, the highest, who knows? . . . he's hungry, too, hungry as both the others and twice as lonesome! What's he hungry for? Love! . . . —Well—I've fed the birds, . . . You've fed none of them, nothing! —Well—maybe the middle bird, the practical one. . . . But love? Or truth? Nothing—nothing but hand-me-down notions—attitudes—poses! And two of the birds in your tree are going to die of starvation before the tree falls down—or gets blown over! (Sc. viii)

This passage epitomizes John's nature and his allegorical representation. He is Science and the flesh incarnate. He is the down to earth, physical, gut level attitude to life—a perhaps too simplistic concept of human existence. Still, his force and attitudes are direct appeals to life and procreation. To Alma who is unable to admit it to herself, he is life incarnate, uninhibited sex and sensuality. He possesses a daring freedom and wildness that repulses Alma because it elicits her greatest fear—the fear of living. However, as I said in the first part of the study, her internal life-death conflict is split in half and externalized in her opposing character—John. Thus neither is complete. This does not necessarily imply that John must adopt a death orientation for totality but, if he adopted the spirituality associated with Alma, he would become a more integrated person. However, there is no urgency for him to make these changes because he essentially reflects the present social reality and value structure. The fact that he does make compromises (adopting a belief in the soul), reveals more about Williams' thinking than John's character. None-

theless up to the point of his conversion, he is first and foremost a symbol of life for Alma.

Alma, as a "defeated" character, is death-oriented and consequently the polar opposite force in the play as I have demonstrated. In the very first scene John tells her that she possesses a "doppelgänger." I believe that this other Alma is the one represented as John's character. In short, the doppelgänger is her polar opposite force externalized in John. As I discussed earlier, Alma possesses both the Puritan heritage and the Cavalier spirit of the "traditional" plantation Southerner. The romantic-hedonistic spirit, however, is stifled and suppressed by her Puritan upbringing. So great is the raging conflict within her that her reactions to situations are marked by a peculiarity and strangeness. For instance, John's knee accidentally touches Alma's while they are watching the July 4th fireworks. "The effect [of the touching knees] upon her is curiously disturbing" (Scene i). Noticing the effect, John asks if she has a "chill." Alma says hurriedly, "Why, no!—no. Why?" When John says that she is "shaking" Alma only replies that she has a lingering "touch of malaria." Another time, she threatens to deny her "perversely childish" mother more cigarettes and ice cream if she repeats that she (Alma) is in love with John. In order to calm the raging battle within her she begins to take sleeping pills. As the play progresses, she needs them more and more frequently.

Like all the "defeated" characters Alma is alienated and fragmented from the other characters. Outside the Moon Lake Casino, she admits that she's only ". . . gone out with three young men at all seriously, and with each one there was a desert between us" (Scene vi). John asks what she means by a desert. She sullenly replies, "Oh—wide, wide stretches of uninhabitable ground" (Scene v). And "enormous silence" would frequently fall between her and her date. Alma does not have the freedom that other girls her age possess. Rosa Gonzales and Nelly are types of foils to her. Both represent simplified attitudes unclouded by conflict. Rosa is a sensualist, a lover of sex and pleasure. Nelly is a simple, good-hearted girl who has no psycho-sexual conflict. She will simply wait until marriage to indulge in sexuality. To Alma, both lives are enviable for there is no conflict, no raging tension; yet, both lives are not viable alternatives. Locked within her conflict she is unable to move and act. She knows only frustration, anger, and guilt.

What then is Alma's conflict? It is whether or not to totally or partially embrace the attitudes of John's world, which although not perfect or complete, is the present day world-at-large. If she accepts and integrates his world she must compromise a part of her own. Is she free to make this choice? This is a difficult question. In attempting to answer it I must refer to Norman Fedders who maintains that Alma ". . . is in a sense the second stage in the decay of the Southern aristocrat—beginning in the neurotic withdrawal from reality of Laura

in The Glass Menagerie," and ". . . ending as Blanche" being "escorted to the state's asylum in A Streetcar Named Desire."[17] As a character at least partially developed from Laura, Alma is given a choice. Instead of retreating before Jim as Laura did, Alma confronts John with her truth. Once again, Williams has directed the characters toward a moment of truth before salvation. No longer able to withstand the loneliness of looking out her bedroom window into John's bedroom and meeting his silent stare, no longer able to live shackled to her Puritan heritage, no longer able to live vicariously, she grasps at life, at John in Scene xi which is the climax of the play. The time of the play has progressed from summer to winter around Christmas, and there is now a sense of rebirth, of new life in Alma and John. Just prior to this scene, Nelly tells Alma that she is responsible for John's becoming a serious doctor and for taking over his father's practice.

Shortly after this scene begins, there is a "sound of wind" across the stage. It is the same Gulf wind that heralded the arrival of Rosa Gonzales in Scene i. The wind symbolizes the sensual tropics, the land of passion and sensuality. In this scene it symbolizes Alma's apparent conversion. It heralds in her new image. Alma says that last summer she thought that she was dying. "But now the Gulf wind has blown that feeling away like a cloud of smoke, and I know now I'm not dying, that it isn't going to turn out to be that simple. . ." (Scene xi). While John is examining her with the stethoscope, she kisses him on the lips. John is visibly surprised. Alma tells him

that they were once ". . . so close that we almost breathed together!" Driven by desperation and blind to where her prison-freed emotions are taking her, she says, "Forget about pride whenever it stands between you and what you must have!" (Scene xi). Her words reveal a greatly altered morality. She is now willing to shed her old self for her "doppelgänger." If her words suggest a new-found attitude that may result in degradation, it still demonstrates her frantic and sincere grasp at life, at surviving with love. Yet her new credo is belated because John is not the same person he was in the summer. He tells her that she won the argument. He now believes that there is something not shown on the chart—something intangible yet just as real and perhaps more important than the palpable organs. He says that he's ". . . come around to your [Alma's] way of thinking" (Scene xi). He now feels that only a spiritual bond can exist between them instead of the more physical relationship that Alma seeks. Out of her frustration and feared isolation, Alma strips away all pretence. She calls out for unabashed honesty. Speaking in a manner reminiscent of John's anatomy "lecture," her words are passionate, memorable, and admirable.

> . . . It's no longer a secret that I love you. It never was. I loved you as long ago as the time I asked you to read the stone angel's name with your fingers. . . . Yes, it had begun that early, this affliction of love, and has never let go of me since, but kept on growing. (Scene xi)

John replies to Alma in words and sentiments that were heretofore associated with Alma. If there is a physicality in Alma's words,

there is now a spirituality in John's. He says that Alma possesses something beyond the physical that is her gift to others. He confesses that he doesn't:

> . . . understand it, but I know it was there, just as I know that your eyes and your voice are the two most beautiful things I've ever known—and also the warmest, although they don't seem to be set in your body at all. . . . (Scene xi)

Alma, now resolved to never having John the way she wants him, utters one of the dominant motifs in Williams' work—the lack of communication between people.

> You've come round to my way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each one finding the other gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell. (Scene xi)

The play ends with another bitter irony for Alma. In the last scene, she now waits at the stone angel at dusk unwrapping a package of sleeping pills. A travelling salesman enters. She engages the salesman in conversation, which is in itself indicative of Alma's metamorphosis. She takes a pill and offers one to him saying, "You'll be surprised how infinitely merciful they are. The prescription number is 96814. I think of it as the telephone number of God!" (Scene xii). When the salesman asks what there is to do in the town after dark, Alma suggests the Moon Lake Casino. She goes off with him to lead the life of Nellie's mother. Earlier in the play, she ironically and unwittingly prophesies her fate as she righteously and condescendingly discusses Nellie's widowed mother's life.

> They say that she goes to the depot to meet every train in order to make the acquaintance of travelling salesmen. Of course she is ostracized by all but a few of her own type of woman in town, which is terribly hard for Nellie. . . . Father didn't want me to take her as a pupil because of her mother's reputation, but I feel one has a duty to perform toward children in such—circumstances. . . . (Scene i)

Thus, Alma's last frantic grasp at life-orientation ends pathetically. In the short story, The Yellow Bird, Alma (the same name) is also a minister's daughter who leaves the fold, so to speak, for a promiscuous life. She has a son and becomes extremely wealthy before her natural death. In the play, Alma leaves the fold also but not for life but for a socio-moral death-orientation. Williams' treatment of the "defeated" character is mixed with sympathy through identification. Yet his moral fibre compels him to deny salvation to the damned, the death-oriented characters. John, however, is life-oriented and receives salvation from the corruption around him. He finds love, marries Nellie, and discovers his direction in life. The strength that Alma projects in Scene xi is transient. For she is, in her own words:

> . . . sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. . . . (Scene xi)

> I lived next door to you all the days of my life, a weak and divided person who stood in adoring awe of your singleness, of your strength. (Scene xi)

Alma comes to know that her great failing is her division in her socio-moral nature. Despite her condemning John for the life he for-

merly led, she now admires these virtues and seeks to incorporate them into her life. However, she is unable to accept who she was and who she is becoming. Her fragmentation is so complete and her conflicts so overwhelmingly powerful that no life-directed alternative is available to her.

Alma, perhaps more than Laura—for she is so personal a character, is a product of a socio-cultural heritage. As an allegorical representation of Religion and the Spirit, she is a cultural anachronism in an age that reveres Science and Materialism (i.e., John Buchanan). She reflects institutions and notions that no longer possess the socio-moral influence they once had. Like the institutions she represents, she must make substantial alterations in her character to survive in the modern world. In terms of her own character, her Puritan morality and beliefs become her nemesis because they deny the life force. At the end of the play, Alma has discovered her degrading truth, "the true nature" that Williams said was hidden from her when the play first begins. In Williams moral hierarchy Alma has led a life of "sin" because she has denied the life forces—the libido, the body, Lawrence's sexual-instinctual credo and the pleasure associated with these life-directed impulses. The "punishment" Williams provides for her is severe and unrelenting. She must remain a prisoner of her past and a victim of her present. She is condemned to emotional fragmentation because of insoluable moral conflicts. Her strong sex drive will be stifled and perverted whenever it momentarily surfaces.

Her life force will remain subjugated to her inner Puritan censors and overwhelming guilt. Her present life is one of growing frustration and desperation. Drugs provide a buffered avenue through a repugnant, threatening reality. They serve to not only plot out her awareness of her former self but also to mitigate her guilt, thus permitting her to partake of fleeting pleasure. Unable to return to a purely religious life, she is also unable to live a hedonistic one without guilt (as Rosa Gonzales does). By the end of the play she is now a lonely, lost and pathetic figure seeking companionship and forgetfulness with strangers. Alma's pathos and punishment is her inability to extricate herself from her constricting Puritan heritage so that she can choose life-orientation as externally represented by John. She remains a corrupted character, a fallen image of humanity unable to adapt to the accelerated changes of present-day life. Fittingly, as Williams would have it, Alma suffers the fate of the "defeated," a metaphysical demise.

III

> Lament for the velvety moths, for the moths were
> lovely.
> Often their tender thoughts, for they thought of me,
> eased the neurotic ills that haunt the day.
> Now an invisible evil takes them away.
>
> Williams.

A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams' third Broadway production, is technically and dramatically his greatest play. It is a study of disintegration involving powerful, irreconcilable forces within charac-

ter and society. It is a play that, with some qualifications, operates successfully on the realistic and allegorical levels. Furthermore, this play approximates a tragic element that imbues it with a stature not frequently attained in Williams' other works. Williams has said himself that ". . . Streetcar . . . said everything I had to say. It has an epic quality that the others don't have."[18] Yet Blanche DuBois is not realistically or allegorically tragic. Rather, her life is pathetic with only the possibility of tragedy and not its consummation.

The setting, atmosphere, and mood of the play are essential elements in creating the non-verbal definitions of the two opposing characters—Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. The play begins in spring, a time of birth and concludes in autumn, a time of dying. The "weathered grey" white, two-story house on a street called Elysian Fields in New Orleans is old and worn, yet is possesses a "raffish charm." The sky is a blue colour, ". . . almost a turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay."[19] Around the corner from the house, Negro entertainers play a kind of music ("Blue Piano") that infuses the scene with ". . . the spirit of the life which goes on here" (Sc. i). The mood of the play harmonizes with the grace and lyricism of the setting. It produces a quiet intensity, a foreboding, a sensation of imminent violence amid a tranquil, easy-going, simple life style. Within this setting of semi-tropical cultural decay, seething with an all-pervasive primitivism, Williams begins his ritualistic play in media

res. The ritual of dying is not unique to this play for there are many common elements of the ritual in other plays involving the "defeated" characters. The ritual of dying involves the "defeated" character and his opposite--his externalized self who represents all that the damned character is afraid or unable to become. In this two-character, dualistic framework, other characters are introduced into the action. They occupy an important position in the development and understanding of the externalized conflict. In many instances they serve as foils to the main characters living, in the eyes of the defeated soul, a less violent and simpler life.

Blanche DuBois is undoubtedly one of Williams' most brilliant and fascinating creations. Her development occurs in a number of Williams' works. The one-act play, The Lady of Larkspur Lotion (1939), presents Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, a crumbling Southern ex-belle attempting to cling to respectability and status in a battered down, cockroach infested rooming house by harbouring illusion of receiving dividends from her rubber plantation in Brazil. In Portrait of a Madonna, Miss Collins, an aged Southern spinster, suffers from the delusion that she has been raped by a young man she had loved as a girl. She now believes she is going to have his child and claims she has dropped the charges against her lover. The play ends with her being taken to an asylum. However, Blanche is more than either of these two women. She is a complex composite of many of Williams' women—Myra Torrance and Cassandra Whiteside (Battle of Angels),

Laura and Amanda Wingfield, and Alma Winemiller. Blanche, the ". . . neurotic Southern white woman of aristocratic origin"[20] is Williams' most renowned character type.

In an interview with Rex Reed, Williams discussed Blanche and the play. "At that time [i.e., during the writing of the play] I was under the mistaken impression that I was dying. . . . Without that sense of fatigue and that idea of imminently approaching death I doubt I could have created Blanche DuBois."[21] I believe this is the essential characteristic of Blanche. Her nature is imbued with a sense of dying—an aura of finality presented in subdued colours, carefully monitored emotions and actions directed toward the ritualistic presentation of metaphysical demise.

The play possesses an inherent momentum, a flight forward towards the future. Because there are no act divisions in the play, each scene progresses with a rhythmic flow into the next like a huge wave building in force and momentum before crashing upon the shore. Blanche reflects this dramatic technique because she is running from her past sin-stained life into her future yearning for the surcease of her inner conflict. Yet, before this cessation she receives her ritualized punishment. The element of time is important not in the play per se but in establishing a climactic effect in the audience. Her punishment mounts with a quiet, seething intensity that climaxes in the rape scene.

The setting, in helping define character, parallels Blanche's development. Its effect of submerging an ideal in a primitive reality proceeds with the calculated precision of a clock. The play opens upon a world vastly different from the one Blanche and Stella had known during their upbringing. Williams informs us that Blanche's appearance accentuates this difference. Wearing a dainty ". . . white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat. . . ," Blanche's ". . . appearance is incongruous to the setting. . ." (Sc. i). Williams juxtaposes her own delicate nature against the stable, secure foundations of a rock-bottom existence where primary colours and primitive responses predominate. "Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth" (Sc. i). Blanche's description subtly portends destruction. While it is important that Blanche's undoing is subtle, it is essential to perceive her—even in this first scene—in the throes of a quiet, unceasing desperation that has been stalking her panther-like through the last several years of her life.

Where does this desperation originate? There are two levels to this question—the realistic and the allegorical, both reinforcing death orientation in character. On the realistic level, Blanche's desperation first appears after her marriage to Allen Grey. At this time Blanche sought life and love, not death. When she fell deeply in love with Allen "it was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something

that had always been half in shadow. . . " (Sc. vi). In this instance as in others (e.g., "the holy candles in the altar of Laura's face") light is identified with warmth and love, with life-orientation. When she discovers Allen's homosexuality she commits, in Williams' eyes an immoral act. At the dance held at Moonlake Casino, her life force suffered irreparable damage.

> He stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired—so that the back of his head had been—blown away!
> It was because—on the dance-floor—unable to stop myself—I'd suddenly said—'I saw! I know! You disgust me. . . .' And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle. . . (Sc. vi)

Her sin was that she had ". . . failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of" (Sc. vi). This event terminates not only her life force—symbolized by the loss of light but conceives her desperation and unmitigated sense of guilt.

On the allegorical level Blanche also moves from life orientation to socio-moral disintegration. Walcott Gibbs, writing in The New Yorker, correctly perceives the play as the ". . . disintegration of a woman, or if you like, of a society."[22] Disintegration is the key word in understanding what happens to Blanche on both levels. As an allegorical figure of the South, Blanche possesses a highly developed culture, a refined life replete with the highest traditions of plantation life. Unable to adapt to a changing world, the ante-bellum South

(Blanche) refused to grow old and integrate change in order to insure successful survival. Instead, the South (Blanche) desperately clung to traditions and delusions. On both levels Blanche is a relic of the moribund tradition of gentility, an older woman dressed in youthful appearance and flattering delusions, yet dying from inner disintegration. Thus, when she relates the loss of their family and Belle Reve (an intentional misspelling to further emphasize inner decay), she is also relating a loss or death of part of herself.

> I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way!... You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths—not always.... Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!... How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? (Sc. i)

Thus to combat such a repulsive reality fraught with death and dying, Blanche creates a world of illusions that enable her to remain on the tightrope between the real world and total delusion or insanity. Her world now craves for the shadows to silence the glare of life's brutal intensity. Her dislike of light becomes the basis of her attitude on life. She exclaims to Mitch:

> I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! —Don't turn the light on! (Sc. ix)

These two levels are integrated in Blanche's actions and words. Her Southern heritage not only aids in defining her character and motivations for her actions, but also creates a vivid dissonance between her life-style and the one Stella has chosen. Stella is a kind of foil to Blanche. She comes from the same family, and was instilled with the same value structure as Blanche. Yet she is younger and this may explain her ability to choose freely. She left Belle Reve quickly, thus extricating herself from a moribund world. Her life is so totally different from Blanche's that she attempts to warn Blanche of these differences. She asks Blanche not to ". . . compare him [Stanley] with men that we went out with at home" (Sc. i). For she is still keenly aware of the differences between herself now and as a teenager living in a plantation house. Yet, she is able to compromise her values for a fertile, loving life. Though she has sacrificed culture, the intellectual life, and refinement inherited from an effete world, she has gained a great deal—a productive life and love symbolized by her pregnancy. She is happy, something that Blanche is not. If she can not have a dashing cavalier husband, she will, nevertheless, still have a loving husband. If she can not have erudite and well-mannered friends, she will still have caring friends. Blanche can not comprehend what Stella has done. She firmly believes that Stella is not living in her best interests. She contends that Stella is married to a "madman." She claims that Stella is in a worse fix than she is. Blanche assures Stella that she is going to ". . . get hold

of myself and make myself a new life!" (Sc. iv). Stella tells her sister that she is ". . . not in anything that I want to get out of"(Sc. iv). Thus, while Blanche constantly refers to her life as a "trap" that she must escape to begin a new life, she does not perceive the realistic alternatives. This may be due to her inability to accept the fact that she must compromise a great deal—for changing one's image involves the partial metaphysical death of the sacrificed portion. Unable to alter her image and burdened by the subsequent frustrations, she talks more than acts. Stella, on the other hand, acts more and talks less. She succinctly and pragmatically states that, "The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche" (Sc. i). An essential difference between the two women emerges during their discussion of Stella's relationship with Stanley.

> Stella: But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant.
>
> Blanche: What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another. . . . (Sc. iv)

For Stella love is life, compensating for any inadequacies Stanley may have. For Blanche, love no longer connotes happiness and life; rather it is only desire, a physiological need tantamount to animal instincts. Blanche's attitude is ironic, as Nelson notes, because Blanche professes to abhor the desire evident in the Kowalskis' relationship; yet, she is leading a life filled with a desire that is truly

perverted and detestable in her own eyes. As her "executioner," Stanley remorselessly strips away her wardrobe of delusions until she is faced with the abhorrent fact that what she detests in the Kowalskis is her disgust with her own actions, and her smug devaluing of their love is a reaction to her deep-felt shame and self-hate. Stella reaffirms her love for Stanley, his life and theirs together by embracing Stanley ". . . with both arms, fiercely and in full view of Blanche" (Sc. iv) after Blanche has expressed her violent and primitive image of Stanley as a beast suitable for anthropological studies. When juxtaposed to Stella's, Blanche's predicament receives greater frustration and intensity.

If each of Williams' "defeated" characters journey through a personalized hell as a punishment for their actions, Blanche is already well into her descent when the play opens. She has recently lost Belle Reve, the last tangible possession of her Southern heritage. She has frequented the Flamingo, a second class hotel in Laurel". . . which has the advantage of not interfering in the private social life of the personalities there" (Sc. vii). Having become a "town character" whose home was called "Out-of-Bounds" for a nearby army camp, she was ". . . practically told by the mayor to get out of town" (Sc. vii). Furthermore, she has lost her teaching position at the high school because of her affair with a seventeen year-old boy. Thus her life has degenerated from a respected teacher living in a plantation house to an unemployed neurotic using her sexuality to reaffirm her

youth and simultaneously to punish and humiliate her for her moral transgressions. She has already taken to alcohol to relieve the quotidian pressures and numb her awareness of a generally too demanding reality. She comes to us as a woman no longer sure of anything; she stands on the precipice throughout the play. Her trap is her life of moral paralysis, her inability to leap to destruction or to step backward from doom for other alternatives. The principal reason for her paralysis in the play is due to the approach-avoidance conflict she develops with Stanley. Blanche's conflict is the following: either she accepts the real world, its values, its crass and unrefined nature, compromising most of her own values or she refuses any such compromise thus endangering her survival. The dramatic technique of the play develops through the externalized representation of this conflict in another character. Thus Stanley comes to represent Blanche's alternative. Now the battle rages both within Blanche's mind and dramatically outside of it.

From his very first appearance bearing home the packaged meat, hollering at Stella and then throwing the food for her to catch, Stanley epitomizes the primitive, basic elements of man. He lacks refinement and culture, wealth and prominence. Created by Williams as a single alternative to a specific conflict, Stanley is also an incomplete character. Lacking Blanche's sophistication and plantation heritage, Stanley creates an image antithetical to Blanche's self-conception. Nelson claims that though Stanley is a realist, he too has an illusion.

> He is an animal and he knows it; and he equally knows that he is a louse. This is how he will have it, not because he wants it this way, but because he feels in his heart that he can never be anything more. . . . And out of this he creates the illusion of Stanley Kowalski, the illusion that if he is an animal then everyone else is also, and by God, he's going to be the biggest and best animal of all.[23]

Williams himself describes Stanley with Lawrencean overtones. He is a man who relates to others on a physical and not mental plane—one who places more faith in the tangible than the impalpable. He possesses the cunning, the strength, and the physicality of an animal in its prime.

> Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. . . . He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them. (Sc. i)

If Stanley knows exactly what kind of woman Blanche is ("I've been on to you from the start"), Blanche also has Stanley pinpointed. Williams displays his acute psychological insight into character by having Blanche intimately describe what her alternative is as manifested in Stanley. In one of Williams' most powerful speeches Blanche describes Stanley's animalism in vivid, frightening terms. She delivers this speech passionately and with deepest sincerity because, I believe, she is aware that he is the new world that she is afraid to enter.

> He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There is even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet. Yes, something—ape-like about him. . . . Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you—you here—waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night!—you call it—this party of apes! Somebody growls—some creature snatches at something—the fight is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella—my sister—there has been some progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . Don't—don't hang back with the brutes! (Sc. iv)

Norman Fedders* suggests that if Blanche is the Lawrencean moth doomed to psychological destructions, then Stanley is the fox and the agent of her destruction. If Blanche represents Apollonian civilization, Stanley represents Dionysian primitivism as discussed by Riddle** in his essay. Finally, if Blanche symbolizes the effete, moribund culture of the post-Civil War South, Stanley is the virile, thriving progenitor of a crass, materialistic hard-headed and hard-speaking world of today as symbolized by his foreign extraction and disrespectful speech noted by Popkin. They stand in relation to each other as two irreconcilable forces of a single conflict that cannot synthesize into harmony and

*See Fedders, The Influence of D.H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966).

**See Riddle, "A Streetcar Named Desire—Nietzsche Descending," Modern Drama, V, No. 4 (February, 1963).

equilibrium. For they each threaten the other's psychological existence. Stanley fears that Blanche will undermine Stella and his world by reviving a conflict that Stella has long since resolved. Feeling that his world is being attacked, he finds it necessary to remind Stella of where she now truly belongs.

> When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all okay til she showed here! (Sc. viii)

Blanche is also threatened by Stanley because he represents the modern world. To leap into his alien world is to lose her self-concept. To accept Stanley's life orientation she must compromise many of her cultural and sophisticated ideals. Furthermore, to accept life in this new world she must relinquish her death-oriented life. Rather than accept life, she employs it to consummate her metaphysical destruction.

Why and how does Blanche accomplish this irony? She is driven to exact her own metaphysical demise because of her moral compunctions and subsequent guilt over her affair with Allen Grey. On the allegorical level she is a too proud South standing before a present world that demands, in her eyes, humiliating and unacceptable compromises. Her Puritan heritage, though not emphasized in the play, is evident in her guilt. Her guilt over losing Belle Reve (through no fault of her own, though she feels otherwise), and Allen's death result

in the methodical, ritualistic progression toward metaphysical self-destruction. The essence and means of her own destruction is social or moral masochism. A basic ingredient in this form of masochism is to suffer publicly. She has already wallowed in masochistic destruction in Laurel. She comes to her sister's for relief, yet finds her executioner expressing his life orientation sadistically. That is, he will insure his and his marriage's survival at any cost. Perceiving Blanche as a threat to his world he seeks to destroy her.

Although Blanche seeks punishment, it is not until Scene x that she loses hope for life. Thus she makes a desperate attempt to establish a pure relationship with Mitch, a good moral mother's boy. She wishes to be another woman with him, a woman that may once have existed but now no longer does. Her crushed and stifled life impulse still beats. When Blanche says to Mitch, "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!", she is filled with a sense of belonging and communicating with someone whose needs have also gone unanswered for years. Unfortunately, Blanche's past pursues her present like hounds on the hunt. This predetermined feeling pervades the play creating the sensation of having one's back to the wall waiting for the fierce blow. Stanley, with the cunning of a fox on the kill, methodically uncovers her pretenses and delusions. By informing Mitch about Blanche's real life, he denies her an alternative that would preclude her confronting him. Also, I believe he would not want Blanche living so close to Stella because he still fears her influence.

With the loss of Mitch Blanche stands alone before Stanley. The entire play has developed and progressed with a growing intensity toward the rape scene. Stella has gone to the hospital to deliver her baby, a symbol of the Kowalskis' fertile, sexual orientation. All through the play, Blanche has made suggestive moves toward Stanley with impunity because someone was always present. One example of her coquettish nature occurs when Blanche teasingly sprays him with perfume. Stanley responds, "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!" (Sc. ii). Now that they are alone, Blanche continues to indulge her fantasy. She tells Stanley of her new life with Shep Huntleigh, an acquaintance of hers who is more fictional than real. She quickly switches to castigating both Stanley and Mitch for not appreciating her. She comments on Mitch's audacity in appearing before her in his work clothes and repeating the vicious stories Stanley had told him. She again exercises her affinity for the fantastic by telling Stanley that Mitch returned with flowers to ask her forgiveness. Blanche then asserts a truth about herself. She says, "Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and it is the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty" (Sc. x). While she may be guiltless of that behaviour, Stanley is not. He comes into the bedroom brutally telling her "not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes" (Sc. x). At this point the scene takes on a primitive, unreal quality. There is an Artaudian effect created by the use of multi-sensorial stimuli. This "poetry in

space," as Artaud refers to it, is a "complex" and "difficult" poetry that ". . . assumes many aspects: especially the aspects of all the means of expression utilizable on the stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting and scenery."[24] Williams' description of the rape scene includes many of these Artaudian aspects.

> (Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form. . . .
>
> The shadows and lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces.
>
> Through the back wall of the rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. . . .
>
> The barely audible "blue piano" begins to drum up louder. The sound of it turns into the roar of an approaching locomotive. . . .
>
> The "blue piano" goes softly. . . . The inhuman jungle voices rise up.) (Sc. x)

Through the use of unrealistic settings and sounds, Williams creates an atmosphere and mood that reflects and reinforces the human emotions being presented on the stage. Furthermore, the introduction of these unreal aspects parallels the growing emotional intensity of the characters. During this scene Blanche desperately attempts to receive help by calling Western Union and screaming that she is "caught in a trap." Meanwhile, Stanley is stalking Blanche with the power and confidence of an adept killer-beast. He grins at her, moves toward then away from her. Stanley finally stands by the bedroom door pre-

venting her from passing. She demands that he permit her to pass. He moves back a little and smiles. "Get by me," he says. "Sure. Go ahead." Then, he takes a step toward her. In overwhelming fear, she breaks a beer bottle and points the jagged edge toward his face. He springs toward her, overturning the table. Preventing her from cutting his face with the broken glass he says, "Tiger-tiger! Drop the bottle-top! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Sc. x).

While Scene x may be the rape of the Apollonian by the Dionysian, the rape of civilization by its baser components, it is first and foremost the supreme masochistic act of the play—and, in that regard, the greatest assurance of Blanche's metaphysical death. Under the heavy burden of guilt Blanche stands before Stanley with fear and crushing anxiety awaiting the surcease of conflict obtained after this final punishment. Having enticed and stimulated Stanley several times during her visit she now discovers her fantasies are swiftly approaching reality. I do not believe it is invalid to surmise that Blanche is both physically and intellectually attracted to Stanley (intellectual in the sense that Stanley's more honest, simple and less pretentious life holds attraction for her). Furthermore, she is a woman prone to fantasy, a woman who—without compunction—will distort reality until it appears positive and non-threatening. Thus, if she cannot accept Stanley's world, she can have her own world reaffirmed at the expense of her life orientation. I used the passive here because Blanche, like

many of the other defeated natures, prefers passivity to initiating action. This is not to say that Blanche never initiates action. Indeed, she does but always with an ulterior motive—to cause the person to react in a specific way at a subsequent time when she may attempt to deter that reaction. For example, Blanche truly does not want to be raped but she does court self-destruction. Perhaps unconsciously, Blanche provides the sense of irrevocability to the rape scene by "setting-up" Stanley to destroy her despite her own wavering commitment. Thus, she has engineered her own destruction preventing her threats from dissuading Stanley's will.

The inconsistencies cited by critics such as Tischler, Nelson, and Riddle are only partly valid. Tischler questions the author's attitude—is he for sexuality or against it? or, is Blanche the heroine or villain? Nelson finds Blanche's complex nature bordering on the "incredible." Riddle expresses concern about the intellectual Nietzschean overtones (i.e., the Apollonian-Dionysian conflict) in an anti-intellectual play. It may also be argued that the play's ending is too ambiguous. Will Blanche recover? Has she resolved her conflicts? However, much of this criticism dissipates when one recalls Blanche's psycho-historical lineage. She possesses the romantic-hedonistic spirit and the Puritan moral code. She is a promiscuous lover, perhaps a nymphomaniac, and a romantic at heart. Yet she is bound by a strict morality that censors and punishes her hedonistic life. These powerful forces apply their strength in the rhythmic undulations of passion and punishment.

To escape the bitter reality of her promiscuous life, her Puritan nature fabricates illusions that protect her from the truth. As Williams demonstrated in an earlier one-act play (The Lady of Larkspur Lotion), illusions are necessary but self-destructive. Blanche's illusions remain intact until Stanley methodically strips her of them in Scene vii, culminating in her rape. Joseph Wood Krutch comments that "Blanche chooses the dead past and becomes the victim of that impossible choice. But she does choose it rather than the 'adjustment' of her sister. At least she has not succumbed to barbarism."[25] I disagree with this opinion because Blanche only created the circumstances through which other natures destroyed her. There is never a clear cut decision on her part because this is the crux of her conflict—to join Stanley's world (life-orientation) or to remain in her own dying one (death-orientation). Thus she can not act directly. The conflict overwhelms her. She delegates Stanley to execute her.

Why is Blanche not a tragic figure? For a number of apparent reasons, she is not tragic in the Aristotlean sense. In his "common man" tragic concept, Miller writes that as ". . . long as the hero may be said to have had alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seems to me that in this respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role."[26] Miller contends that when people are "divested of alternatives" then tragedy becomes impossible. Like all Williams' characters in general Blanche lives in a deterministic world that she must adapt to in order to in-

sure her survival. But she is "divested of alternatives." She is not free to choose. Rather, Williams' Puritan nature oversees his characters, directing them into their individualized hells as punishment for their sins. Blanche is provided with only one choice—to live in a brave new world. As the allegorical representation of civilization, Blanche approximates the tragic, for she prefers metaphysical death to a barbaric reality. As a character, "Blanche is fascinating, vibrant, pitiful, and her suffering is intensely real, but there is no growth through this ordeal. Things happen to her, until she is destroyed."[27] I believe that there is no personal growth because she does not resolve her conflict. She enters the play as a "defeated," lonely character desperately in search of answers and she leaves the play as defeated and alienated—perhaps more so. For she has slipped into insanity—the abode of the misfits. Still, the play triumphs in its study of the disintegration and metaphysical demise of a character from her inherited world—a woman whose pathetic life advises people to consider what they would and would not do to insure their survival. In short, what price life?

## IV

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."

T.S. Eliot from "The Four Quartets"*

La Madrecita utters these words in Camino Real (produced in 1953). It is a thematic statement of that play, yet it also applies to

*T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.), p. 4.

most of Williams' work. In a play such as Cat on a Hot Tin Roof reality is the individualized perception of truth. The truth-reality relationship is the metaphysical burden of the "defeated" character. In this regard, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof had the potential to be as great a play as A Streetcar Named Desire. Unfortunately, the reasons the play does not attain this greatness, the tragic element, or a satisfying resolution of conflict devolves upon Williams' own inconsistent and conflicting ideas on the very subjects he raises. If he falls short of this goal, the play still provides ample proof that Williams is a master not only of dialogue but of character portrayal. As Tischler notes, this play ". . . came as a relief to Williams fans who had begun to fear that his talent was limited to the portrayal of psychopathic Southern belles."[28] Besides focussing on male characters in a powerful way, the play also reflects Williams' endeavours to say something about humanity; for he proceeds from the specific to the general seeking to present the metaphysical condition of his characters as a reflection of the modern world.

A play which unfolds within one evening and concerns itself with such metaphysical concepts as Truth, Mendacity, Life and Death and problems like homosexuality and terminal disease may call for an anti-realistic setting. Williams comments on this point:

> The set should be far less realistic than I have so far implied. . . . I think the walls below the ceiling should dissolve mysteriously into air; the set should be roofed by the sky; stars and moon suggested by traces of milky pallor.

> . . . The designer should take as many pains to give the actors room to move about freely (to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out). . . [29]

Williams' predilection for anti-realistic settings reflects his desire to create the proper atmosphere and effect for the evocation of certain concepts and problems represented through character. Williams further defines his set by stressing the importance of the lighting which should be "tender." It should offer "reassurance." "For the set is the background for a play that deals with human extremities of emotion, and it needs that softness behind it"(Production Notes). Thus, the unrealistic setting offers an openness, a sense of extension beyond the temporal, individualized conflicts within character toward a more permanent expression of the human condition.

Marya Mannes claims that the play is a ". . . special and compelling study of violence. . . ."[30] Esther Jackson believes that ". . . the true themes of the drama are metaphysical loneliness, nausea, and despair."[31] I perceive the play as a composite of both, though perhaps more the latter, and as a study of the nature of truth and the necessity for illusions. The ultimate conflict arising in the presentation of such irreconcilable forces as truth and illusion takes the form of life or death orientation. In fact, Brick Pollitt comes the closest of any of Williams' "defeated" characters to admitting his disgust with life and his desire for a metaphysical demise. The play focusses on two sets of relationships—Brick and Maggie, and Brick and Big Daddy. In this instance, both Maggie and Big Daddy repre-

sent the life force while Brick alone reflects the defeated nature. Each life-directed character possesses attitudes and values that inevitably conflict with Brick's perceptions of his needs. Both Maggie and Big Daddy manifest half of Brick's inner conflict (the life aspect of the life-death struggle). It is the inter-play of the two life characters with Brick that creates the drama and force of the play.

Because this play begins in media res, like all Williams' plays, the first act serves to acquaint the audience with the former events upon which the play is based. Maggie the Cat dominates the entire act revealing the necessary information through what is almost a monologue. The audience learns that Brick, one of Big Daddy's two sons, and an ex-football hero, has broken his ankle while attempting to jump hurdles at the high school track in a drunken state. His father has just returned from the Oschner Clinic to determine if he is suffering from cancer. We learn that Gooper, Brick's brother, his pregnant wife Mae, and their five children have arrived ostensibly to celebrate Big Daddy's sixty-fifth birthday. Maggie, however, is convinced that they have come en masse to insure their becoming the primary beneficiary of the old man's mammoth Mississippi Delta plantation-estate. Gooper and Mae realize that Brick is Big Daddy's favourite but they are relying on Brick's alcoholism and childless marriage to dissuade the father from seriously considering him as a responsible inheritor. They also know that while Maggie will fight them for the inheritance, Brick does not care about it at all. Furthermore it is no secret that

Brick's and Maggie's marriage is in serious trouble. We learn that their conflict concerns Brick's blaming Maggie for Skipper's death. The scene ends with Maggie telling Brick that her time for conception has again arrived. Unable to tolerate the taunts and jeers of Mae and her five "no-neck monsters," Maggie insists they must have a child. She admits that trying to have a child by a man that "can't stand" her is a "problem" she'll ". . . have to work out " (Act I).

The first act is quite important in another respect. It delineates the opposing natures of Brick and Maggie. Maggie the Cat is also Maggie the Lawrencian fox. She is a Strindberg woman, though more attractive. In the short story, Three Players of a Summer Game, Williams describes their relationship in a manner that sheds some light on their characterizations in the play.

> Two sections of an hourglass could not drain and fill more evenly than Brick and Margaret changed places after he took to drink. It was as though she had her lips fastened to some invisible wound in his body through which drained out of him and flowed into her the assurance and vitality that he had owned before marriage.[32]

The short story studies the ". . . deterioration of Brick Pollitt and the increasingly mannish domination. . ."[33] of Maggie. In the play Maggie is still dominating. Though she is portrayed as being more feminine, she is still assertive and most determined to have what she wants. Unlike Blanche, Amanda, and Alma, Maggie is very much a realist, a modern Southern woman with no destructive illusions. As a child, her family never possessed the wealth to which she has now

grown accustomed. She "always had to suck up to people I couldn't stand because they had money and I was poor as Job's turkey" (Act I). If she has any illusions, it is that money can buy everything and become a panacea for all problems. She claims that, "You can be young without money but you can't be old without it" (Act I). Despite this illusion she is an "honest" woman. She tells Brick the truth, as she knows it, about her evening with Skipper. Suspecting Skipper of latent homosexual feelings toward Brick, she tells him to ". . . STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE'S GOT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM! . . ." (Act I). She discovers for herself that she can accept what happened in Brick's and Skipper's relationship but insists that she and Brick must continue to live their lives. Above all else Maggie believes in life. She desperately and tenaciously yells, "Skipper is dead! I'm alive! Maggie the cat is—alive! I am alive, alive! I am . . . —alive!" (Act I) while Brick makes threatening gestures toward her. Maggie's words are echoed by Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending. Carol says that the dead ". . . chatter together like birds on Cypress Hill, but all they say is one word and that one word is 'live,' they say 'Live, live, live, live, live!'"[34] Maggie's character reflects life orientation because she seeks healthy heterosexual love, physical contact, assumes an active role in directing events, and demands pregnancy—a symbol of life. Yet she is in a difficult position. Her relationship with Brick is likened to a cat on a hot tin roof. She is unable to jump off because "just staying on it . . . as long as she

can . . ." provides her with a "victory" (Act I).

By far the most complex character in the play is Brick Pollitt. Brick's behaviour conforms to the apparent rule that the very nature of the "defeated" character is rooted in deep psychic conflict. The picture Maggie presents of Brick's actions does not reveal his conflicts; rather, they mask them. For even Brick's behaviour is an illusion of his well being. Commenting on Brick's behaviour, Maggie says:

> Yeah, a person who didn't know you would think you'd never had a tense nerve in your body or a strained muscle. . . . Of course, you always had that detached quality as if you were playing a game without much concern over whether you won or lost, and now that you've lost the game, not lost but just quit playing, you have that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people, the charm of the defeated. —You look so cool, so cool, so enviably cool. (Act I)

Williams reinforces this image of Brick's detachment and charm which masks inner conflict in people who have relinquished their struggle. "But now and then," he writes, "when disturbed, something flashes behind it like lightning in a fair sky, which shows that at some deeper level he is far from peaceful" (Act I). Like Laura, Alma, and Blanche, Brick has part of his psychic roots in characters conceived in Williams' short stories. Brick, suffering from a broken ankle, reminds one of Oliver Winemiller in One Arm. In this story Oliver is a young boxer who loses his right arm. Williams writes that Oliver knew he lost his right arm, ". . . but didn't consciously

know that with it had gone the center of his being."[35] Indeed, his crutch is a symbol of his incompleteness. Like Oliver, Brick's physical lameness symbolizes a deep psychological wound that has shaken the very foundations of his existence. He too has lost his psychic equilibrium.

The symptoms of Brick's deteriorated "condition" are apparent. Jackson sights Brick's metaphysical loneliness from his ". . . friend, wife, father, mother, and God through a series of clinically described symptoms."[36] He experiences existential nausea, a sense of being without purpose in a world woven from the fabric of mendacity and avarice. He is a withdrawn character who "draws aside . . . from all physical contact" (Act III). No longer a part of the whole, he is a fragmented image. It is as if the mirror he viewed himself in for years had been smashed. Now, wherever he looks, he sees only parts of himself, distorted and without perspective. His eyes turn away quickly relieving him of the necessity to confront his problem.

Another symptom of his deep psychological distress is his alcoholism. Like Alma who grows dependent on pills, and Blanche who uses liquour to anaesthetize her feelings of guilt, Brick imbibes to numb himself not only from others but also from his own resurging self-awareness. It is evident that he is still having problems suppressing his threatening thoughts because we learn that he hasn't experienced the "click" yet, even though it is almost evening. Using Blanche's metaphor of light, Brick describes the "click" as ". . . turning the hot

light off and the cool night on and—(he looks up, smiling sadly)—all of a sudden there's—peace!" (Act II). One senses that Brick, like Blanche, is more at home in the valley of shadows than in the light of life.

What is Brick's conflict? On the realistic level of character Brick suffers because he believes he is guilty of a crime, a moral transgression. He has never confronted his own feelings and involvement with Skipper; furthermore, he has never come to terms with his friend's untimely death. Rather than face the truth as Maggie and Big Daddy advise, he seeks to conceal it in illusions. Maggie and Big Daddy represent that part of Brick which he has the most difficult time suppressing. They speak the "threatening thoughts" to which I just alluded. To accept what Maggie suggests, to confront his complicity, his truth would then permit him to live without the crushing destructive forces of guilt and punishment. Yet it is his overwhelming guilt and sense of moral transgression that precludes such a choice. Thus follows his paralysis between choosing life or death orientation, between choosing love, sex, physical contact, light or sexual abstinence, guilt, and withdrawal from physical and emotional contact.

Why doesn't Brick (and the "defeated" character in general) confront his conflict? It should be noted that Esther Jackson claims that the damned characters do ". . . confront hidden truth." She writes:

> If the willingness to engage inner conflict is the nature of heroism in the theatre of Williams, his organization of character is designed to reveal such action by exploring, in relation to the protagonist, the full range of possibilities affecting his moral choice. The anti-hero [tantamount to the "defeated" character], in this sense is not a man; he is a schematic presentation of extended moral possibilities.[37]

While I believe that the "defeated" character ". . . presents an image, a montage of the roles which together comprise the anti-heroic character,"[38] I do not agree that any of the "defeated" characters express a willingness or determination to engage in and resolve inner conflict. Never is there even a suggestion that they want to at least confront their conflicts let alone attempt to arrive at the truth. Compare the natures of Oedipus, a man who sincerely sought truth at any price, to three of Williams' "defeated" characters:

> Jocasta (white with terror): What does it matter
> What man he means? It makes no difference
> now. . .
> Forget what he has told you. . . . It makes no
> difference.
>
> Oedipus: Nonsense: I must pursue this trail to the
> end,
> Till I have unravelled the mystery of my birth.[39]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Blanche: I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes,
> yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I
> misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth.
> I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is
> sinful, then let me be damned for it!—Don't
> turn the light on! (Sc. ix)
>
> . . . . . .

Big Daddy: That's not living, that's dodging away from life.

Brick: I want to dodge away from it. (Act II)

. . . . . .

Catherine: He! [i.e., Sebastian Venable]—accepted! —all! And thought nobody had any right to complain or interfere in any way whatsoever; and even though he knew that what was awful was awful, that what was wrong was wrong, and my Cousin Sebastian was certainly never sure that anything was wrong! —He thought it unfitting to ever take any action about anything whatsoever! —except to go on doing as something in him directed . . . [the drive toward metaphysical and physical death].[40]

It is undeniable that the ideas of self-confrontation and self-truth pervade Williams' plays. Furthermore, it is evident that Williams regards these concepts with the utmost respect and with an intrinsic understanding of their value in human life. He demands truth from his characters although they will do anything and every thing to avoid it. In the passionate encounter between Brick and Big Daddy, Williams poses his own question to the audience. Brick's question also suggests his answer.

Big Daddy: Anyhow now! —we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself.
You! —dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it! —before you'd face the truth with him!

Brick: His truth, not mine!

Big Daddy: His truth, okay! But you wouldn't face it with him.

Brick: Who can face truth? Can you? (Act II)

The confrontation between Brick and Big Daddy is extremely well presented. The dialogue flows naturally and easily, building in intensity and purpose. It is a scene of anguish, of almost tragic stature. Certainly part of the reason for the scene's success is Big Daddy—Williams' finest male creation. Mannes says that the play is in part a study of the violence of an ". . . obscene gargantuan, perceptive man" fighting ". . . against his body's end, against his own frustrations, against the trap of his family."[41] One senses, though, that he has always been a loud, violent man, but not mean or vindictive. He is full of the passion of life. He represents modern man—even in his illness. He is the Horatio Alger story rising from rags to riches. He is now worth "close on ten million in cash an' blue chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile" (Act II). Yet, he becomes disillusioned with money, realizing that ". . . a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life with it when his life has been spent. . ." (Act II). Williams symbolically portrays Big Daddy's heretofore unquestioned loyalty to Mammon and materialism by striking him with terminal cancer. Despite his inner disintegration, Big Daddy is a life-oriented character. He attempts to revitalize Brick's own languishing life force. "Life is important," Big Daddy says. "There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing away his life. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto. . ." (Act II). Even in a world fraught with mendacity and pretence, Big

Daddy believes in life. He accepts the world as it is; yet he, too, can be brutally honest. Because he loves Brick, he seeks to discover why he drinks. He confronts Brick about the homosexual inferences in his relationship with Skipper. Their relationship is unique for they have always been "honest" with each other. Yet it becomes increasingly difficult to answer Big Daddy's probes because he himself (i.e., Brick), according to Jackson, fails to ". . . understand the nature of his own existence—a failure which the playwright describes as 'latent homosexuality'" (Act II). Williams appears to come to Brick's and perhaps his own rescue. Instead of directly confronting the specific issue at hand, Williams opts for the generalization of the crisis. It is at this point that one senses that Williams himself is not dealing with these subjects honestly. He writes:

> The thing they're discussing, timidly and painfully on the side of Big Daddy, fiercely, violently on Brick's side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them. The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to 'keep face' in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the 'mendacity' that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with. It may be the root of his collapse. Or maybe it is only a single manifestation of it, not even the most important. The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent—fiercely charged!—interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis.* Some mystery should be left in

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*See Marya Mannes' article, "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams," for a discussion on how "common" Williams' dramatic experiences are in the everyday world.

> the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself. (Act II)

By not specifying Brick's problem, by not having the two characters focus upon Brick's own attitude toward being involved with at least certain elements of homosexuality, Williams may succeed in creating a generalized existential "sickness unto death" but he also relieves the characters of the obligation to discuss and resolve the truth. Williams evades the entire question of homosexuality in American society. He has, in a way, opted out from offering any conclusions about homosexuality and its effect on Brick. In remaining unspecified, Brick's problem loses its form, its psychological foundations. At any rate, Brick tells what he understands to be "the truth." He believes that Maggie was jealous of his and Skipper's relationship she ". . . had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed, which is not much closer than two cats on a—fence humping. . ." (Act II). He further claims that she poisoned his thinking by pouring ". . . in his mind the dirty, false idea that what we were, him and me, was a frustrated case of that ole pair of sisters that lived in this room, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello!—He, poor Skipper, went to bed with Maggie to prove it wasn't true, and when it didn't work out, he thought it <u>was</u> true!" (Act II). Thus, by continuing to blame Maggie for Skipper's death, Brick never has to confront his own involvement and re-

sponsibility. It is at this point that Williams abruptly deviates from Brick's problem, leaving it unresolved throughout the remainder of the play. Brick now vindictively turns the tables on Big Daddy. Having stood under the intense glare of introspection long enough to dislike it, Brick tells him he won't be having any more birthdays. As if to console his father, Brick comments that, "Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an' death's the other. . ." (Act II). Brick then confesses what I believe is his own death orientation. It is an admission of defeat, of giving up the struggle, of preferring an anaesthetized existence to a feeling, aware one.

> Brick: I'm sorry, Big Daddy. My head don't work any more and it's hard for me to understand how anybody could care if he lived or died or was dying or cared about anything but whether or not there was liquor left in the bottle and so I said what I said without thinking. In some ways I'm no better than the others, in some ways worse because I'm less alive. Maybe it's being alive that makes them lie, and being almost not alive makes me sort of accidentally truthful. . . . (Act II)

Considering that Act II is such a powerful and moving piece, director Elia Kazan felt that Williams ought to rewrite the last act to reflect certain effects resulting from the father-son confrontation. He had three major suggestions.

> . . . one, he felt that Big Daddy was too vivid and important a character to disappear from the play. . . ; two, [he] felt that the character of Brick should undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father. . . . Three, [he] felt that the character of Margaret, . . . should be, if possible, more clearly sympathetic to an audience. (Notes of Explanation)

Williams admits, however, that he agreed with the third suggestion only because Maggie had become ". . . steadily more charming . . ." to him. Because I believe that the original third act (not the Broadway Version) reflects Williams' dramatic thought best without external influences, I have chosen to stress the original version.

In both versions Brick continues to drink because he has still not felt the "click." When questioned about why Big Daddy was shouting "liars," Brick says in the Broadway Version that he "didn't lie to Big Daddy" (about his condition). Brick says, "I've lied to nobody, nobody but myself, just lied to myself." This is as clear-cut a statement about himself that Williams permits him to make. It certainly reveals that his confrontation with Big Daddy has altered his perceptions about himself. He even agrees that it may be time for him to enter Rainbow Hill, an asylum for alcoholics. In the original version, this entire exchange is absent. In both acts Mae and Gooper assemble with Maggie, Doctor Baugh, Reverend Tooker and Brick to tell Big Mamma that Big Daddy is dying from cancer. After she is told Gooper presents her with a "plan" to provide for the settlement of the estate. Big Mamma refuses to listen. Perceiving the need to reinforce her chances of inheriting most of the estate Maggie tells a lie. She says, "Brick and I are going to—have a child!" (Original Version). Gooper's and Mae's reactions are, of course, similar in both versions but Brick's is different. In the original he says nothing, but in the Broadway Version he comes to Maggie's defence. Respond-

ing to Gooper's and Mae's allegation that they don't sleep together Brick says they may be "silent lovers" and that, though they often fight, they may sometimes come to a "temporary agreement." In the Broadway Version Big Daddy is present when Maggie mentions her pregnancy. At this point he leaves the stage asking to meet with his lawyers in the morning presumably to make Brick the inheritor.

Maggie's nature is softened in the Broadway Version. She has locked up the liquour and refuses to give it to Brick until they make love. Brick says he "admires her." She then utters a sentiment that remains throughout Williams' work as a fundamental tenet of the defeated nature.

> Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you—gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of—and I can! I'm determined to do it—and nothing's more determined than a cat on a hot tin roof—is there? (Broadway Version)

However, in the original version Margaret is more assertive and aggressive in her speech and actions. She demonstrates her insight into each of their natures saying, "I used to think you were stronger than me and I didn't want to be overpowered by you. But now, since you've taken to liquor—you know what?—I guess it's bad, but now I'm stronger than you and I can love you more truly! Don't move that pillow. I'll move it right back if you do!" (Act III). She also locks the liquour away refusing to give it to him until they make love. When Maggie says they will ". . . make the lie true" and then get drunk,

Brick's only response to Maggie's question, "What do you say?" is, "I don't say anything. I guess there's nothing to say" (Act III).

In order for Kazan to have felt it necessary for Williams to rewrite the original version, he must have felt that both Big Daddy and Brick confronted their truth, thus warranting a change in behaviour. While it is true that Big Daddy learns about his condition, what does his appearance add to the Broadway Version? He enters the scene, tells a dirty joke, and leaves after he learns of Maggie's "pregnancy." I prefer the first version because it is a more honest expression of Williams' feelings about the characters' developments. Williams, himself, comments on Brick's character and the inconsistency and dishonesty of altering his nature.

> . . . and I felt that the moral paralysis was a root thing in his tragedy, and to show a dramatic progression would obscure the meaning of that tragedy in him and because I don't believe that a conversation, however revelatory, ever effects so immediate a change in the heart or even conduct of a person in Brick's state of spiritual disrepair. (Notes of Explanation)

The play has many inherent weaknesses. It has been condemned for its evasion of Brick's problem which is probably the most critically discussed point. It also makes pretense to incorporate such metaphysical concepts as Truth, Hypocrisy, Life, and Death. Unfortunately, however, they often remain as abstractions. Furthermore, the play presents sensationalism at the expense of verisimilitude. Still, the play ". . . succeeds in attaining a great deal to which it aspires," as Nelson notes.[42] The play presents us with a spiritually

"defeated" character. Brick has committed a sin which is similar to Blanche's—he was unable to help his friend in his moment of need. Furthermore, he still cannot face his own feelings about his problem and his involvement with Skipper. His Puritan moral code demands punishment for his past actions. He receives his punishment submissively in a socially masochistic manner. He is publicly known as a drinker. The newspapers have written of his escapades on the high school track. His family knows that he won't sleep with Maggie. Brick's character is similar to Eloi's in the one act play, Auto-da-Fé, in that his idealism shelters him from the corruption that surrounds his existence and blinds him to his own inner disintegrated nature. Still Brick is unable to completely block his awareness of his corrupted nature. It is his awareness of his fallen condition that results in his death-oriented punishment. His alternative to metaphysical demise is to accept Maggie's and Big Daddy's attitudes which, on one level, are the externalized opposing conflicts to his present behaviour. To do so he must confront himself which he is unable and unwilling to do. Instead, he prefers the passive role. He is acted upon by Maggie, the director. She will lead him toward life but there is no assurance that Brick will ever enjoy happiness in that life. As a character within the American society, he lives with a socially unacceptable and dreadful sin. Homosexuality is still considered deviant and perverse behaviour. He is an outcast from his own family and society. If homosexuality represents Brick's inability to ". . . under-

stand the nature of his existence" (Act II), the audience can relate to it because the problem has been abstracted to the point of acceptability. If the crux of the play revolves solely around" . . .'mendacity,' an image of falsity in life,"[43] its effect upon the audience increases. The play then becomes a statement about a society that needs illusions and lies instead of its truths to survive. In some ways, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is another scene in Williams' Camino Real conception of the world. It is a world in which mendacity, avarice, hypocrisy and alienation from others as well as oneself flourishes. Yet there is a sense of dignity, hope, and love in Camino Real that seems to rise above man's fallen condition. This sense of hope and love exists in Cat . . . for Maggie. Brick Pollitt may never know a life free from guilt and punishment but Williams does seem to insist that these values can survive and perhaps flourish in a world that tends to negate them. Williams wrote the following about his intentions in the play.

> I meant for the audience to discover how people erect false values by not facing what is true in their natures, by having to live a lie, and I hoped the audience would admire the heroic persistence of life and vitality; and I hoped they would feel the thwarted desire of people to reach each other through this fog, this screen of incomprehension. . . I want people to think, 'This is life,' I want to offer them my own individual attitude toward it.[44]

I believe the only way to appreciate and fully understand the life force of the play, partly suggested by the impending love scene between Maggie and Brick, is to perceive the death force both physically in Big Daddy and metaphysically in Brick's defeated nature.

# V

"... God Shows a savage face to people ..."

Williams

Referring to Suddenly Last Summer, Nancy Tischler says that "... no other play by Tennessee Williams so directly calls for the adjective 'sick.'"* Critic Richard Hayes asserts that the play, "... with its obsessive emphasis on exposure, often seems close to a scandalous private fantasy...."[45] Still, Brooks Atkinson, always sympathetic to Williams, writes that "... as an exercise that is both literary and dramatic, this brief, withering play is a superb achievement."[46] Perhaps more than any other of Williams' plays, Suddenly Last Summer is a study of alienation and punishment from society and God, a study of inner corruption exposed to the unmitigated demands of a fierce and ultra-moral divinity. It is a short, powerful confessional play that Nelson claims "... is the most perfectly realized play he [Williams] has ever written."[47]

The immediate history of the play is worth noting because important events were happening in Williams' life. In the summer of 1957 Williams began psychoanalysis and continued with it for almost an entire year. There may be several reasons for his need of psychological help. In 1955 his grandfather, the Reverend Dakin, succumbed to a stroke at the age of ninety-eight. Although the Reverend had led a long and full life, Williams was deeply saddened by the loss, for

*For a complete study of Tischler's criticism, see her Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), pp. 251-262.

he was a man whom Williams always loved and respected. They both always maintained a deep mutual admiration for each other's work. Then, in 1957, Williams learned of his father's death in Knoxville, Tennessee. If Williams hated his father in life, he grew to understand him in death to the point where he could say his father was always "totally honest," possessed of a "strong character" and "sense of humor." He was a man Williams no longer hated. Another serious incident occurred in the spring of 1957. Orpheus Descending, the reworked version of Battle of Angels (opened in Boston, 1940), encountered neither much critical or popular success. Williams was very disappointed and began to feel that perhaps his creative powers were waning. Other disturbing matters at the time were his institutionalized sister, Rose, and his own rapidly deteriorating psychological condition. He began to suffer from a host of anxieties and phobias, among them heart attacks and clastrophobia. At any rate Suddenly Last Summer opened with a shorter play that had been written years earlier, called Something Unspoken (under the billing Garden District).

The play is presented quite simply and straightforwardly, revolving around a mother's obsessive desire to have her dead husband's cousin, Catherine Holly, undergo a prefrontal lobotomy for her hideous story regarding Sebastian Venable's death. The play proceeds toward the truth and the eventual release of Catherine from the asylum where she has been placed because of a breakdown. However, if the plot is simple and direct, the setting assumes great sophistication and exper-

tise in eliciting certain desired effects and moods. The play is a mood play and, in Jackson's words, ". . . an ordered progression of concrete images, images which together give sensible shape to the lyric moment."[48] In this play the lyric moment and the dramatic climax occurs during the revelation of truth concerning Sebastian's last summer and death as recounted by Catherine Holly. The beauty of truth is set against the ugliness and savageness of the tropical garden which was excellently designed by Robert Soule for the play's opening night. The garden, perhaps more than any other facet of the set, becomes the all-pervasive symbol of exposed corruption and decadence in society to its people. It is truly Hamlet's ". . . unweeded garden/ That grows to seed; . . . "[49] Williams describes Mrs. Venable's Victorian Gothic style mansion and the garden as more of a blending of images than a distinction.

> The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beast, serpents and birds, all of savage nature. . . .[50]

Thus, when the curtain rises, one is presented with two juxtaposed images that tend to unite and complement one another in a way that does not elicit an inconsistent or disparate effect. There is an

uncanny rapport between the primitive and the civilized images whose overall effect is to create a sense or a state of opulent decadence, a lushness of life that somehow exceeds itself.

If the garden is a metaphor of the human condition, a condition of over-life, of carnivorous and savage relationships, then Mrs. Venable exemplifies or embodies those conditions. She is a life-oriented character but she is too refined and civilized. Thus she is in a degenerative condition like the tropical garden. Her very nature is also like the garden in its savage and implacable demands that one be strong and persevering to survive. Unfortunately, she is strong at the expense of Sebastian. One senses that Mrs. Venable would never permit her son to live a life that excluded her. One also feels that their relationship was more parasitic than symbiotic because each produced psychologically damaging effects on each other and, in Sebastian's case, physiological destruction as well. Mrs. Venable also possesses illusions like many of the other life-oriented characters. It is precisely the maintenance of the illusion that Sebastian was chaste and pure that dominates her words and actions. I call this an illusion because I believe that Mrs. Venable was at least partially aware of Sebastian's perversion. If she is not aware at all there can be no illusion because an illusion conceals that which is consciously abhorred.

The life-death conflict evident in the play occurs between Sebastian and Catherine, and not between Sebastian and his mother. It is important to note that because Sebastian is already dead during the play's

action, the life-death conflict presents itself in the words and actions of both Catherine and Mrs. Venable. Williams employs the narrative technique to elicit both women's perceptions of Sebastian. Ironically, Mrs. Venable recounts incidents that tend to direct the listener to the conclusions and truths expressed by Catherine. As the externalized representation of life in Sebastian's conflict (in short, to live or die), Catherine knows best what is the truth about Sebastian's life and his innermost secrets.

What do we learn about Sebastian? His most important characteristic is that he is a professional poet whose ". . . life was his occupation" (Sc. i). He is a fastidious person with a condescending nature: "He was a snob, all right" (Sc. i). He possessed a sordid and thorough dislike of humanity. He was a man who ". . . had to go out a mile in a boat to find water to swin in" (Sc. iv). He kept his garden in a manner that causes Doctor Cukrowicz to comment that ". . . it's like a well-groomed jungle" (Sc. i). Mrs. Venable's immediate reply to this sentiment reveals great insight into Sebastian's character. "That's how he meant it to, nothing was accidental, everything was planned and designed in Sebastian's life and his—" (Sc. i). One feels the urge to complete the sentence with the word "death" because the association is apparent and, more importantly, because Williams provides other passages that suggest Sebastian's precognitive awareness of his demise. It is an awareness that emerges from the fulfilment of an image that Sebastian has of himself—an image of sacrifice.

Mrs. Venable also informs us that she and Sebastian always spent the summer months travelling. During this time Sebastian would complete a poem. He wrote only one poem a year. By the time of his death he had written twenty-five poems under the title of Poems for Summer. ". . . the other nine months of the year were really only a preparation" (Sc. i). She, herself, comments that the nine months is the length of a pregnancy. The Doctor queries if the ". . . poem was hard to deliver?" (Sc. i). Mrs. Venable unequivocably responds, "Yes, even with me. Without me, impossible, Doctor! —he wrote no poem last summer" (Sc. i). Mrs. Venable's remarks certainly suggest an unhealthy aspect in her relationship with her son. Although it is difficult to believe that the poem is a metaphor for Sebastian's incestuous relationship with his mother, it is not inappropriate to infer that Mrs. Venable provides the necessary fertility for Sebastian's creative life.

During one summer vacation long ago, Mrs. Venable recalls their journey to the Galapagos Islands. Like Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, this play is even more steeped in Darwinian naturalism. The passage reveals Sebastian's corrupted equation of a deterministic evolutionary occurrance with his distorted perceptions of the moral nature of his "God." It also comes to reflect his conception of life.

> We saw the great sea-turtles crawl up out of the sea for their annual egg-laying. . . . Once a year the female of the sea-turtle crawls up out of the equatorial sea onto the blazing sand-beach of a volcanic island to dig a pit in the sand and deposit her eggs there. . . . She never sees her offspring, but we did. . . .

> And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and—swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing their undersides open and rending and eating their flesh. (Sc. i)

When further questioned by the Doctor as to the fascination the scene held for Sebastian, Mrs. Venable boldly asserts that her son sought an image of God.

> . . . I can tell you without any hesitation that my son was looking for God, I mean for a clear image of him. He spent that whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's nest of the schooner watching this thing on the beach till it was too dark to see it, . . . 'Well, now I've seen Him!' and he meant God.— And for several weeks after that he had a fever; he was delirious with it.— (Sc. i)

It is important to focus upon Sebastian's moral and religious attitudes because it is through these attitudes that Williams chooses to most clearly and thoroughly define his "defeated" character. For, indeed, Williams has Sebastian go into a delirium not unlike those experienced by the ecclesiastical martyrs. Furthermore, he dies as a martyr to the cause of his God as faithfully as did his namesake. John Fritscher offers a clear insight into Williams' dual conception of God. In his study of the plays, Fritscher discovers God represented in two forms: "God is perceived either as an Old Testament God of Wrath ruling over a semi-Calvinistic cycle of guilt-submission-atonement-uncertainty [embodied in Big Daddy and Boss Finley] or a New Testament God of Love offering a cycle of need-submission-communication-salvation—"[51] symbolized by young, virile, sexually

active males like Val Xavier, Chance Wayne, Sebastian, and Chris (in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore). I agree with Fritscher in relating the ". .. eschatological deity of the Old Testament"[52] with the Venables' image of God.

Why, however, does Sebastian choose this image of God and not the other? To gain a greater understanding of Sebastian's nature than is available in the play, I would like to draw some parallels between his character and other earlier and similar types. Sebastian resembles Eloi in the one act play, Auto-Da-Fé (which comes to mean the public burning of a heretic). In this early study of decadence Eloi is markedly disturbed at his mother's apparent oversight or unawareness of the corruption that surrounds their home. Yet, there are suggestions that Eloi is more angry at himself because he senses his own inner corruption. In order to purify his nature he runs into the house and sets it ablaze. He dies in the holocaust. In the short story Desire and the Black Masseur Williams studies the sado-masochistic relationship between Anthony Burns (the masochist) and the black Masseur (the sadist). Burns exemplifies the passive nature receiving punishment and suffering for his incompleteness. The Masseur, the ". . . instrument of atonement" beats Burns to death and devours all his flesh.

Both Eloi and Anthony Burns possess traits that unite in the psychological composition of Sebastian. He has the passive nature and the sense of inner corruption that demands atonement and suffering. Catherine Holly, Williams' spokesman in the play, focusses on

Sebastian's passivity. "He!—accepted!—all!—as—how!—things!—are!...—He thought it unfitting to ever take any action about anything whatsoever!" (Sc. iv). His passivity, however, was directed toward a specific goal—self-destruction. In this way he would be "completing—a sort of!—image!—he had of himself as a sort of!—sacrifice to a!—terrible sort of a—...—God ...—a cruel one" (Sc. iv). Like Anthony Burns, Sebastian, the poet-priest, finds atonement in the "... surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt."[53] Indeed, Falk comments on Sebastian's unmitigated sense of guilt claiming it demands "... such appalling retribution" that it "... is the most horribly described illustration of a perverted Puritanism to be found in Williams."[54]

Sebastian is presented as an almost thoroughly "defeated" character. We learn this, as I said, through the narratives of Catherine and Mrs. Venable. When Catherine speaks the truth about Sebastian "... the raucous sounds in the garden fade into a bird-song which is clear and sweet" (Sc. iv), Williams effectively correlates Mrs. Venable's and Catherine's sentiments with specific sounds. When either of them speaks, Falk notes that "... the recital is [occasionally] heavily orchestrated with jungle sounds; there are harsh bird cries for the brutal phrases, sweet bird songs for honest statements or tender sentiments."[55] Sebastian's death orientation gains support when Catherine suggests that he was emotionally withdrawn. When Catherine "... made the mistake of responding too much to his kindness, of taking

hold of his hand before he'd take hold of mine, . . . of appreciating his kindness more than he wanted me to. . ." (Sc. iv), Sebastian ". . . began to be restless." He also began to realize that he ". . . wasn't young any more. . ." (Sc. iv). Still, Catherine sought to love him although he only liked her. She loved him "the only way he'd accept: —a sort of motherly way" (Sc. iv). Thus Sebastian is not capable of feeling love or performing it heterosexually. As I remarked earlier in this study, heterosexual love is associated with life-oriented people and homosexuality with the defeated.

Sebastian's life is an inward journey, for he is only concerned with completing his own personal image of himself. His private vision alienates him from not only his mother and Catherine but also from society. Paul Hurley suggests that "Sebastian's isolation from society is symbolized by his homosexuality . . ." and becomes ". . . the symbol of a moral disorder rather than the manifestation of psychological abnormality."[56] He leads a pleasure-oriented, hedonistic life with superficial and promiscuous relationships. However, as a "defeated" character, Sebastian possesses the dualistic conflict evident not only in the traditional plantation Southerner but more closely in Williams' own mind. Sebastian's promiscuous life is an affront and a disgrace to his deeply ingrained Puritan morality. It is Williams' perception of the omnipotent Old Testament God that demands punishment for Sebastian's isolation from society and God. Cash tells us that it is a God ". . . who might be seen, a God who had been seen.

A passionate, whimsical tyrant, to be trembled before, but whose favor was the sweeter for that. A personal God, a God for the individualist. . . ."[57] Sebastian carries this image of God one step further. He adapts God to his own specific needs. Thus Hurley tells us that, "Sebastian, exulting in his own depravity, created God not in man's image but in his own."[58]

There is only one incident in Sebastian's life that appears incongruous with his nature. While under the only lighted area on stage (a symbol for the possessor of truth), Catherine tells us that when the naked native children assembled outside the restaurant playing home-made musical instruments, Sebastian rose from his chair and prepared to leave. He was no longer able to tolerate looking at them or hearing their grating music. "This was the first time that Cousin Sebastian had ever attempted to correct a human situation!—I think perhaps that <u>that</u> was his fatal error. . ." (Sc. iv). Why does Sebastian do this? I believe this event exemplifies the residue of a life force asserting itself for the first and last time. Sebastian's life is a methodical progression toward self-destruction. He created a specific image of sacrifice to atone for his specific sins. He possesses the three essential elements for a masochistic character: the fantasy, the suspense factor, and the demonstrable feature.* His fantasy is the "something" Catherine refers to that makes him do what he does. It is a private, personal vision of public sacrifice and death. The <u>demonstrable feature</u> is the actual acting out of the fantasy with all

*For a complete analysis of these terms see Theodor Reik's <u>Masochism in Sex and Society</u>, trans. by M.H. Beigel and G.M. Kurth (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), Chapters III - VI.

the essential components in reality. The suspense factor involves the growing anxiety that develops while awaiting the predetermined and sought for end. When the anxiety becomes too great, it is relieved through performing the demonstrable feature in reality. Thus Sebastian's attempt at correcting a human situation appears to have actually been the final effort to reduce an overwhelming anxiety. For the closer he came to living his fantasy, the more anxious and "restless" (Sc. iv) he became.

Sebastian's character exhibits another element of social masochism. Theodor Reik notes that there are significant relationships between the masochist and Christ, the martyr.* There are good reasons why masochists identify with Christ. Reik contends that what the masochist is ultimately seeking is pleasure and victory through apparent defeat. Even though Christ was publicly crucified, he conquered the world. Knowledge of the final victory is inherent in the fantasy. "The unconscious guilt-feeling is to be satisfied by this discomfort and this self-conquest. The pleasure, immediately following such surrender, can be postponed, the reward can be promised for a distant future and can be enjoyed by phantasied anticipation only."[59] This may partially explain why Sebastian did not want his poetry published until after his death. Thus in his perverted fashion, Sebastian denies this world for the next. He suffers here for the expected purity in the next world.

*For a more detailed account of the martyr-masochist relationship I refer the reader to Chapter XXVI in Theodor Reik's Masochism in Sex and Society.

Sebastian's conception of life reinforces his own masochism and inherently provides for his destruction. It also becomes a fitting conclusion to his life and provides the play with a sense of completeness and unity of symbol. Sebastian's life-death struggle is symbolically portrayed in the scene he witnessed at the Galapagos Islands many years ago. For Sebastian, like the female sea turtles, once a year

> . . . crawls up out of the equatorial sea [mother's womb] onto the blazing sand-beach of a volcanic island [the raging conflicts in life] to dig a pit in the sand and deposit her eggs there [the unfinished poem]. It's a long and dreadful thing. . . . And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea [the mother], while the birds . . . swooped to attack . . . turning them over [Sebastian, dying] to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh [which strongly connotes emasculation]. (Sc. i)

I do not intend to stress a purely Freudian approach, but there are elements that undeniably involve at least an appreciation of Freud's psycho-sexual insights. In many ways Sebastian possesses many feminine qualities. Every year he delivers a poem through a union with his mother. At the same time he is the poem, the final expression of his life as an artist. Unable to enjoy heterosexual love with any woman, Sebastian must deny this facet of the life force. His yearly dying may be the result of his guilt feelings over still desiring a woman sexually and emotionally, particularly Catherine. For he never permits anything to develop between them, fearing the jealousy

and wrath of his mother. At any rate, Catherine tells us of Sebastian's last day alive. She is standing in the only lighted area on stage while the other actors are in the shadows. She recalls the day as being ". . . not a blazing hot blue one but a blazing hot white one" (Sc. iv). The image Williams seeks for the final scene in Sebastian's life is the fiery metamorphosis of sin into purification. Sebastian runs out of the restaurant telling Catherine that he ". . . want[s] to handle this thing" (Sc. iv). He starts running up the hill. He is caught and partially devoured by the native children, thus completing the image of Christ on Golgotha. The image of the sea birds devouring the turtles is also consummated in this scene because Williams describes the children in bird imagery. The children ". . . looked like a flock of plucked birds" (Sc. iv). They ". . . made gobbling noises" (Sc. iv). Finally, on this hot white blazing day, the children pursued and overtook him. He had disappeared in the ". . . flock of featherless little black sparrows" (Sc. iv).

Although the play has been criticized for lacking dramatic movement, I agree with Brooks Atkinson's sentiments that the play more than adequately compensates through the narrative and dialogue.

> He [Williams] creates moods, colors, shadows, manners, odors, relationships out of words. He even creates motion out of them. For once it gets going the recollected story of Suddenly Last Summer moves with a mad, headlong pace toward damnation, which it reaches with an explosion of words. [60]

Furthermore, even though the play concerns itself with such unsavory and sensational topics as cannabalism and homosexuality, I do not think its merits ought to suffer because of it. I believe this to be a short yet powerful play, full of emotional intensity. Sebastian Venable, the effete homosexual with a curious relationship with his mother, is still accessable to the audience as an artist. For on one level this is a play about the role of the artist in society. Paul Hurley notes that part of Sebastian's moral failure develops because he ". . . fails to communicate with his audience . . . because he has separated himself from their concerns and has replaced love for them with contempt."*[61] Unable or unwilling to integrate himself with humanity, he loses his own. Mrs. Venable is credible as a wealthy, decadent woman willing to bribe the medical profession into performing a prefrontal lobotomy on Catherine to ". . . cut this hideous story out of her brain" (Sc. iv). She is a woman willing to do anything to defend and preserve her dead son's reputation and her own illusions. As an institutionalized girl who has had a breakdown because of what she saw

*The relationship between the writer and the audience, as Williams conceives it, is suggested in his article, "Person-to-Person," Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1955), pp. viii-ix. He writes: "There is too much to say and not enough time to say it. . . . I think of writing as something more organic than words, something closer to being and action. . . . I have never for one moment doubted that there are people—millions!—to say things to. We come to each other, gradually, but with love. It is the short reach of my arms that hinders, not the length and multiplicity of theirs. With love and with honesty, the embrace is inevitable."

happen to Sebastian, Catherine Holly is not only believable but able to evoke the audience's sympathy through her desperate appeals.

However, above all else, the play succeeds best on the moral and allegorical levels. In some ways this play is similar to the world created in Camino Real. The world in Suddenly Last Summer is an evil and decadent one in need of atonement. Sebastian incarnates that evil which is partly symbolized by his homosexuality. In order for an audience to relate to Sebastian's "sins" it would have to understand Sebastian's homosexuality as a moral disorder, as a metaphor for alienated people who desperately seek reintegration into society through the purgation of sins. However, in Sebastian's case, his private vision demands his life for atonement. Although Sebastian's God is stern and almost vindictively cruel, Williams does not altogether abandon this image. The fierce Old Testament God appears more subdued and less demanding in the later plays, but He is still present, particularly in Night of the Iguana.

Furthermore, even though the play revolves around death-orientation, the play itself asserts life. Catherine Holly will most likely not undergo a lobotomy. She will probably be sent home shortly. These inferences are valid because she has been the keeper of the truth and the truth has won out. She provides not only the victory of the play but also its message. ". . . It's a true story of our time and the world we live in . . ." (Sc. iii). In a world where people such

as Mrs. Venable resort to bribery to assert her will, in a world where one's own brother (George Holly) will encourage lying to reassure an inheritance, Williams creates Sebastian Venable as the incarnation of many of the socio-moral values he most dislikes and brutally punishes him for those moral transgressions. Thus ". . . by capturing in his play a shocking sense of moral perversion could he succeed in forcing audiences to recognize the horror of individuals' separation from all human concerns."[62] Sebastian's private vision casts him as the martyr of mankind. Yet from the audience's perspective his destruction is due to his own personal sense of corruption. His death reaffirms Atkinson's sentiments that this play is his ". . . most devastating statement about corruption in the world, and his most decisive denial of the values by which most people live."[63] Catherine Holly reaffirms Williams' highest respect for truth. Although she admits that she ". . . failed him," that she ". . . wasn't able to keep the web from—breaking . . ." (Sc. iv), the fault truly lies with Sebastian. For she offered him life and he refused it.

## VI

Williams was still undergoing psychoanalysis when he wrote Sweet Bird of Youth which is an adaptation of the unpublished shorter play, The Enemy: Time. Many people interested in Williams and his work felt that his therapy would help him in his efforts to write a comedy or more light-hearted drama. However, this was not the case. In fact, his therapy may have been partly responsible for many of the play's obvious inconsistencies and lack of direction and its subject matter. At any rate I do not agree with Brooks Atkinson's statement that this play is ". . . one of his finest dramas."[64] Unfortunately, the Chance-Boss Finley conflict is not developed to its fullest potential. Instead of concentrating on the development of a two-character play, which I believe is his forte, he dissipates Chance's force and conflict through his relationship with Princess Kosmonopolis, the aging film actress. However, the play is significant in reinforcing some of the basic motifs in Williams' drama.

The play is first and foremost a study in Time and, in conjunction with that, Good and Evil. The conflict essentially asks whether or not Good can survive in a world of Evil, despite the passing of Time. Chance Wayne and Heavenly Finley represent Innocence Corrupted and inherent Goodness. Boss Finley is the allegorical incarnation of Evil. The entire play ought to focus on the confrontation of these two forces and their resolution but it does not. Still, the importance of the Princess in the play can not be underestimated because

she represents a life force, she dominates a good deal of the play, and she is the keeper of the truth. Through the juxtaposition of her attitudes and insights with Chance's values, a clearer and more valid understanding of Chance's defeated nature emerges.

The play opens on Easter Sunday and the religious significance of the day permeates the play as in Orpheus Descending. When the Princess (her adopted pseudonym in the play) wakes up, she is disoriented. She doesn't remember where she is or who Chance is. She is only vaguely aware that Chance is primarily a momentary relief from some recent and repelling event that she has managed to temporarily block. Williams describes Chance as the Princess awakens so that both the fading actress and the audience simultaneously acquaint themselves with a character who is remarkably faithful to the defeated image.

> . . . He is in his late twenties and his face looks slightly older than that; you might describe it as a 'ravaged young face' and yet it is still exceptionally good looking. His body shows no decline, yet it's the kind of a body that white silk pajamas are, or ought to be, made for.[65]

Chance adheres to the physical characteristics of a Brick Pollitt or a Val Xavier or an Oliver Winemiller (from the short story, One Arm). Though he professes to be an actor, his present occupation is that of a gigolo, an image that is repugnant to him. Still, that is all he can be. The Princess, the priestess of truth, tells us what has been Chance's nemesis and pride—his beauty. "Say it," she says. "Say it. What you had was beauty! I had it! I say it, with pride, no matter

how sad, being gone, now" (Act I, Sc. ii). She informs the audience that Chance was ". . . born of good Southern stock, in a genteel tradition, with just one disadvantage, a laurel wreath on your forehead, given too early, without enough effort to earn it . . ." (Act I, Sc. i). His acting career seemed promising at first. He sang in the chorus of Oklahoma in New York. Yet, even at this early age, he was aware that he was getting by on his transient beauty. He knew too well that his youth would not last. Indeed, it was his reflections upon his fleeting youth during his service in the Navy that resulted in his "breakdown" and subsequent early discharge. He confides to the Princess that what he gave to the people he met was companionship and affection.

> I gave people more than I took. Middle-aged people I gave back a feeling of youth. Lonely girls? Understanding, appreciation! An absolutely convincing show of affection. Sad people, lost people? Something light and uplifting! Eccentrics? Tolerance, even odd things they long for. . . . (Act I, Sc. ii)

Chance's sentiments recall similar feelings expressed by the receivers of this "giving" in the short story One Arm. Oliver Winemiller whom Williams first labelled as possessing the "charm of the defeated," is sentenced to prison for murder. Before his execution he receives letters from many of the people he had known. Williams suggests a Christ-like image in Oliver's character. The image is one that suits Chance's nature as well.

> They made allusions to the nights which he [Oliver] had spent with them, or the few hours which they almost invariably pronounced to be the richest of their entire experience.[66]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To some he became the archetype of the Savior Upon The Cross who had taken upon himself the sins of their world to be washed and purified in his blood and passion.[67]

Chance is also the Lawrencian moth and the Princess is the fox, but she is not a cruel or mean one. It is true that she is a kind of Strindberg woman. She is stronger than Chance and more domineering, yet she is capable of sympathy and love. She is also perceptive enough to see that Chance's attempt to blackmail her for possessing hashish is not only feeble but totally unconvincing. She notes that he is "trembling and sweating . . ." and having a generally difficult time playing the forceful, aggressive role. She claims that, "When monster meets monster, one monster has to give way, AND IT WILL NEVER BE ME" (Act I, Sc. i). She then places sexual expectations on him if he is to receive any spending money from her. He, of course, complies. He possesses the passive nature of the defeated; he also possesses, as we shall see, a sense of guilt.

In terms of the life-death conflict which is only partly developed in Chance's relationship with the Princess and Boss Finley, there are two incidents in the first act that capsulize and further define that life-death orientation of the characters. The first remarks come from the Princess. Even though she is a fading, decadent and aging actress, fleeing from her movie debut which she believes to have been a fiasco,

she retains her desire for life. Even though she indulges in smoking hashish and drinking liquor, she still believes in herself. Although she suffers from heart trouble that requires the intermittent use of an oxygen mask, she refuses to concede to death. In defining her relationship with Chance she sternly demands that there be "no mention of death, never, never a word on that odious subject. I've been accused of having a death wish but I think it's life that I wish for, terribly, shamelessly, on any terms whatsoever" (Act I, Sc. i). This is one of Williams' boldest and most straightforward affirmations of life over death. It is the basic tenet of all life-oriented characters. Juxtaposed to this attitude is the more complex one associated with the "defeated" character. The occasion for Chance's expressing the "defeated" sentiment occurs while he is recalling his last meeting with Heavenly. Chance recounts that he went out to the sandbar, called Diamond Key, to meet with Heavenly. She drove up to the beach in her boat.

> Chance: . . . She stood up in the boat as if she were waterskiing, shouting things at me an' circling around the sandbar, around and around it!
>
> Princess: She didn't come to the sandbar?
>
> Chance: No, just circled around it, shouting things at me. I'd swim toward the boat, I'd just about reach it and she'd race it away, throwing up misty rainbows, disappearing in rainbows and then circling back and shouting things at me again. . . .
>
> Princess: What things?

> Chance: Things like, 'Chance go away.' 'Don't come back to St. Cloud.' 'Chance, you are a liar. . . .' 'My father's right about you! . . .' The last time around the sandbar she shouted nothing, just waved good-by and then turned the boat back to shore. (Act I, Sc. ii)

Williams presents us with an image of contentment, satisfaction and peace as always lying just beyond the reach of the "defeated" character. Laura never realizes her love with Jim. Alma loses John, the man she is convinced can give her the love and happiness she desperately needs. Blanche also makes desperate overtures to Mitch, her last hope for a good and happy life. Brick comes close to understanding his problem and achieving a degree of happiness but Williams denies him and withdraws the opportunity. Catherine offers Sebastian help and love but, driven by his own inner need for atonement, he refuses. Here, too, Chance returns to St. Cloud again and again with the hope of achieving happiness and life-orientation. Indeed, the only reason he returns is for her love. "Yes, after each disappointment, each failure at something, I'd come back to her like going to a hospital" (Act I, Sc. ii). Finally, Williams denies Chance life and love with Heavenly. Boss Finley refuses to allow Heavenly to marry for love; instead, he desires her to marry for position and money. In order to prove himself worthy of Heavenly Chance left St. Cloud to "compete," to ". . . make himself big as these big shots . . ." (Act II, Sc. i). Heavenly angrily tells her father that when "the right doors wouldn't open . . . he went into the wrong ones . . ." (Act II, Sc. i).

Chance possesses ". . . some kind of quantity 'X' . . ." in his blood that is a ". . . wish or need to be different . . ." (Act I, Sc. ii). It is essentially the same wanderlust found in Val Xavier, Blanche DuBois, and Sebastian Venable. It is the search for happiness. However, not only does Williams deny Chance this happiness but he presents Chance as the destroyer of the love and happiness that he so desperately seeks. He is responsible for Heavenly's contracting venereal disease and subsequently undergoing a "whore's operation" (a hysterectomy). Heavenly now contemplates entering the convent for she no longer feels like a complete woman. Chance's responsibility in infecting Heavenly is the principal cause of his deep and destructive sense of guilt.

Although there is a ". . . complete change of subject with the second act,"[68] Williams attempts to unify these disparate elements through conflict and theme. It is a difficult assignment because one wonders what two aging performers have to do with the racial issues of the Deep South. If there is a unifying element it is Boss Finley and his daughter, Heavenly. He assumes thematic significance as the polar opposite force to Chance. He is a Southern racist politician who claims to have received a "call" to preach his "Voice of God" speech to the masses. He has power and not the illusion of power (Act II, Sc. i). He uses that power in both politically evil (white supremacy) and morally evil (preventing Heavenly from marrying Chance) ways. Nelson also perceives the struggle of Good and

Evil as the essential characteristic of Chance and Boss Finley's relationship but he does not carry the conflict to its ultimate conclusions. He correctly asserts that "experience is on the side of evil because the only experience on earth is the experience of eventual corruption."[69] Not only is Boss Finley a bigot and an adept manipulator of events but he is in many ways a greater performer than Chance. (Williams often alludes to Boss Finley's "public personality" being very much "on" when he appears at the Royal Palms Hotel for his nationwide T. V. coverage.) In this Camino Real world of avarice, mendacity, cruelty, and hatred Boss Finley is very much at home. Williams permits Chance to voice the essential difference between the two of them: "He [Boss Finley] was just called down from the hills to preach hate. I was born here to make love"(Act II, Sc. ii). Aunt Nonnie corroborates Chance's image of inherent goodness when she recalls that he was ". . . the finest nicest, sweetest boy in St. Cloud" (Act II, Sc. i) until Boss Finley began preventing Heavenly from seeing Chance. Heavenly attests to Chance's purity in an angry response to her father: "Papa, you married for love, why wouldn't you let me do it, while I was alive, inside, and the boy still clean, still decent?" (Act II, Sc. i). Thus, not only are the battle lines distinctly drawn but the battle is again sex-oriented. In a world that supports and cheers a Boss Finley, the slayer of love and innocence, Chance Wayne is an outsider, a misfit born to lose his goodness and innocence.

What is Chance's conflict? He once represented Goodness; now, he and Heavenly are Innocence Corrupted. Still, when he returns to St. Cloud this last time, he has solved his conflict which is to defeat Boss Finley through his marriage to his only true love, Heavenly. The Princess utters a discomforting and perhaps ominous statement about her own losses: "Well, sooner or later, at some point in your life, the thing that you lived for is lost or abandoned, and then . . . you die, or find something else" (Act I, Sc. i). Chance refuses to believe that he has lost Heavenly. He is willing to risk castration for her by remaining in St. Cloud telling everyone Heavenly is still his girl. In order for Chance's desire for Heavenly to appear credulous under the circumstances (the risk of castration), it is probable that she represents even more than her name suggests. Williams provides us with additional insight into what Heavenly may mean to both Chance and perhaps himself. He writes:

> All my life I have been haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible, if not a probable, loser of what you most want. (Foreword)

Thus Heavenly is a gamble for life-orientation. When Chance speaks of his love for her, he is speaking of his memories of happiness. He constantly refers to his flashlight photograph of Heavenly in the nude taken when she was fifteen and pure. His idealistic, romantic nature speaks the truth about the real values in life. He speaks of the most important aspect of life with Lawrencian overtones.

> Princess, the great difference between people in this world is not between the rich and the poor or the good and the evil, the biggest of all differences in this world is between the ones that had or have pleasure in love and those that haven't and hadn't any pleasure in love, but just watched it with envy, sick envy. (Act I, Sc. ii)

Chance claims that he has had this kind of love with Heavenly many, many times. She becomes his meaning for living. Without her he cannot live. Not only does Boss Finley subvert his attempts to love and marry her, thus denying him life, but Chance also prevents himself from achieving this goal. This is an unpleasant irony that develops through a past event. When he learns that he has been the cause of Heavenly's contracting venereal disease, a deep and destructive sense of guilt emerges. Although he has lived a hedonistic and promiscuous life for many years, his Puritan moral code is still very much intact. When the Princess enters the night club at the Royal Palms Hotel, Chance has already been drinking and taking "goofballs." He looks distraught and anxious. Sensing danger, she implores Chance to leave town with her. For she recognizes ". . . a true kindness in [him] that [he has] almost destroyed, but that's still there, a little . . ." (Act II, Sc. ii). Chance refuses her offer and remains in the night club taunting Boss Finley's son, Tom. Tom tells Chance that he infected his sister. Chance's reply is that he left town before he knew. At this moment the thematic music of the play is heard. It is called "The Lament." The Princess again interrupts the two men and provides the lyrics, so to speak, for the music. She says that, "All

day I've kept hearing a sort of lament that drifts through the air of this place. It says, 'Lost, lost, never to be found again. . . . Oh, Chance, believe me, after failure comes flight" (Act II, Sc. ii). Chance again refuses to leave with her. She then says to him that ". . . there's no one but me to hold you back from destruction in this place" (Act II, Sc. ii). Chance's response to this is typical of the "defeated" character. Like Brick who says he wants to dodge away from life and Sebastian who must go on ". . . as something in him directed," Chance simply yet doggedly says, "I don't want to be held [back from destruction]" (Act II, Sc. ii). Although Chance provided a reason for remaining in St. Cloud saying, "I go back to Heavenly or I don't. I live or die. There's nothing in between for me" (Act II, Sc. ii), he senses that his choice has already been determined. For his ultra-moral Puritan code demands that he pay for what he has done.

In the final act of the play Chance and the Princess are again alone in their hotel room. Chance calls up one of the Princess' reviewer friends to inquire whether or not her movie comeback was successful. The Princess learns that, despite all her anxieties, her movie was a box office success. She is at once ecstatic. She sees her life as full of purpose. She quickly turns upon Chance claiming that while her life has true meaning, his is worthless. He came back to St. Cloud and infected the girl he loved so that ". . . she had to be gutted and hung out on a butcher's hook like a chicken dressed for Sunday . . ." (Act III). Chance's reaction is impotent rage when

directed outward. He ". . . wheels about to strike her but his raised fist changes its course and strikes down at his own belly and he bends double with a sick cry" (Act III). Although Chance can not strike out effectively, his rage is painful and destructive when turned inward upon himself. The truth has pierced his defences causing anguish and regret. He knows what she says is true despite the fact that he was unaware of his infecting Heavenly. Still, the Princess asks Chance to come with her because she knows that ". . . her future course is not a progression of triumphs" (Act III). She knows that like Chance, she is ". . . equally doomed" though not immediately. Williams tells us that both are faced with castration, with a sense of loss. Still if one concedes that the Princess may survive longer and more happily than Chance, one realizes that he is irrevocably lost. He refuses to leave St. Cloud because he has not secured his first love. Now he must pay the price for his "sin" against her. Boss Finley, as a kind of corrupted Old Testament, Calvinistic, God image, exacts a cruel punishment—castration. Chance knows this fate is inevitable if he remains in St. Cloud. He stands to lose not only his manhood but the psychic equilibrium that Williams speaks of with regard to Oliver Winemiller in the short story One Arm.

Toward the very end of the play, Williams introduces the sound of a clock ticking louder and louder. This gives rise to Chance's comment on the loss of innocence to time.

> It goes tick-tick, it's quieter than your heart-beat, but it's slow dynamite, a gradual explosion,

> blasting the world we live in to burnt-out pieces. . . . Time--who could beat it, who could defeat it ever? Maybe some saints and heroes, but not Chance Wayne. (Act III)

What Chance is saying is that time corrupts one's nature--except for the select few. At the end of the play he says directly to the audience that he does not seek their pity" nor their "understanding" as much as their ". . . recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time in us all" (Act III). Harold Clurman plays the devil's advocate in his essay, "Theatre." He asks:

> What is it we are asked to recognize in ourselves? That we are corrupted by our appetite for the flesh and clamor of success? That we are driven to live debased existences by the constrictions and brutality which surround us? . . . And that we have an inordinate fear of age, for the passing of time makes us old before we mature?[70]

It is true that the ending of the play is somewhat ambiguous but then it never really possessed any clear-cut direction. Furthermore the characters, Boss Finley and Chance and Heavenly, are too distorted and simplified. The effect is to perceive not an interaction of two people on a human level or even ". . . a clash of opposing universal forces of light and darkness." Nelson further contends that Chance's ". . . struggle with his universe becomes little more than a travesty of this struggle."[71] The play does not in any way demonstrate an advance in Williams' dramaturgy. Instead, it reinforces old beliefs about the interactions of people in a fallen and corrupt world. It is probably the restating of these beliefs that holds the significance of the play in terms of Williams' overall development. Time, the destroyer

of innocence, the lack of communication between people, the inscrutability of God, and the open, irreconcilable contention between Good and Evil are the dominant themes. The sweet bird of youth is the same legless creature that never touches the earth as Val Xavier notes in Orpheus Descending. Chance Wayne not only touches the earth, but he lives on it. His character reveals personal weaknesses. Williams does not succeed as well in this play as in others in generalizing a truth from the specific. His inductive approach leaves one wondering exactly what it is we are to identify with and recognize. The only valid conclusion is that Chance Wayne is a "defeated" character who blames everything else—time, Boss Finley, etc.—for his own failings. Still one can't help but feel that Williams' image of time as the slayer of innocence emanates from his own life and his own vision of his sister Rose who symbolizes Innocence and Beauty Corrupted. Indeed, Rose's illness has so thoroughly affected Williams' work that I find myself often feeling that each "defeated" character was once as pure and innocent as his conception of Rose. Unfortunately, these considerations are tangential to the play and without them the play, though a financial success, is lacking in direction, focus, and intent.

## VII

> And this is true, no man can live
> Who does not bury God in a deep grave
> And then raise up the skeleton again,
> No man who does not break and make,
> Who in the banes finds not new faith,
> Lends not flesh to ribs and neck,
> Who does not break and make his final faith.
>
> Dylan Thomas*

The appearance of Night of the Iguana in 1961 was a reaffirmation of Williams' ability to add an important play to his opus and the American theatre in general. He won the New York Drama Critics' Award for the play. Perhaps more than anything else the play concerns itself with time. Williams brings disparate and unique characters together to express past events that form the unity and the purpose of the play. It is also a play about people communicating and reaching out towards each other—even if it is only for one night. The life-death struggle evident in his previous plays appears in this one although it undergoes alterations. Jackson says that the theme of the play is ". . . the growth of tenderness for mankind."[72] I agree that this is a significant element because it reveals Williams' changing perceptions and attitudes toward humanity. However, Jackson also states that Night of the Iguana is a study of redemption. I do not believe this is the case although I can understand how she may have

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*Dylan Thomas: The Poems, edited by Daniel Jones (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1971), p. 55.

arrived at that conclusion. When Williams writes that ". . . there is no way to beat the game of being against non-being, in which non-being is the predestined victor on realistic levels,"[73] he may be focussing his remarks on physical death; but this attitude also permeates his conception of the physical world creating a diminishing image of humanity in man's quotidian reality. Man must settle for that incomplete image for, in Williams' universe, he is predestined to never know the totality of being during his brief existence on earth.

The plot is very simplistic, and in F. Leon's opinion ". . . one of the flimsiest in the Williams canon."[74] The Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, a defrocked minister, is one of several tourist guides working for Blake Tours. He brings his busload of girls from the Baptist Female College to Maxine Faulk's rustic hotel for the night. Here Shannon meets Hannah Jelkes and her poet-grandfather, Nonno. In the ensuing night Shannon desperately seeks to straighten out his life. After their one night together and Nonno's death, Hannah leaves the hotel. Shannon, now fired from his Blake Tours, remains behind as a companion for Maxine and an aging stud for prospective female hotel guests.

Once again, if the plot is simplistic, the setting is not. The setting is designed to elicit a feeling of alienation and loneliness, a sense of being far removed from the din and amenities of civilized life. Williams' anti-realistic settings evoke the appropriate feeling to support or help elicit the specific truth he is seeking. Jackson

comments that ". . . the central problem of his anti-realistic dramaturgy is how to reconstitute felt experience in such a manner as to reveal—or to create—absolute truth."[75] I believe Williams' set is quite effective in this play. The compartments or bedrooms open onto the verandah of the hotel. Each compartment is a cell-like cubicle that contains one human being. The "cells" symbolize man's alienated and lonely condition and provides another image for Val Xavier's remark in Orpheus Descending that humanity is ". . . under a life-long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!"[76] The verandah is an open space that affords the characters an opportunity to both physically and spiritually touch each other. The jungle, representative of the primitive aspect of man surrounds the hotel. The German visitors serve to reinforce the remoteness of this hotel from the outside world. Indeed, Williams attributes ". . . a touch of fantasy" to them because the outside world and the war (i.e., the second World War) seems fantastic and irrelevant to the events occurring in the microcosmic world of the Costa Verde Hotel. In an allegorical sense, the hotel is a sort of oasis in the desert of darkness where wayfarers stumble upon each other for comfort and human contact.

The proprietress of the Costa Verde Hotel is Maxine Faulk. "She is a stout, swarthy woman in her middle forties—affable and rapaciously lusty."[77] She is a loud outspoken woman, world-wise and very realistic. Although her husband has died quite recently, she

does not reveal any remorse or sorrow. When Shannon says to Maxine that she doesn't seem ". . . inconsolable about it," she replies that ". . . Fred was an old man, baby. Ten years older'n me. We hadn't had sex together in . . ."(Act I). Maxine's attitude about Fred underscores the basic pleasure orientation of her character. As an earthy, lustful woman who satisfies her sexual needs with her two young Mexican "helpers," she stands as a foil to Hannah Jelkes. She is most threatened by Hannah's presence because ". . . in that New England spinster she recognizes an identical disturbing part of Shannon's ambivalent nature, sensitivity."[78] Although Williams loads the dice against Shannon, the interactions of Shannon, Maxine and Hannah create a realistic event and invite a contrasting analysis of Shannon's developing relationship with both women. By this I mean that while Shannon remains with Maxine, Williams demonstrates that Shannon has reached a level of communication and feeling in one night that he has never attained in all the years he has known Maxine. Despite the fact that Maxine is a promiscuous and hedonistic person, she does not suffer any compunctions or guilt over her actions. She is not possessed by a "spook" or "blue devil" as is the case with Shannon and Hannah. She is, in the final analysis, a simply constructed life-oriented character satisfying basic needs. She lives on what Shannon calls the "realistic" level of life.

The life-death conflict in the play involves Shannon and Hannah. Shannon is, of course, the "defeated" character. He is considerably

older than most of his "damned" predecessors (Val, Brick, Chance, Blanche, Alma, and Laura). He is also not as much an Adonis figure as the younger "defeated" male characters were. Another important aspect of his character is his internalization of religion represented by his profession. This development stands in direct contrast to Williams' formerly presenting institutionalized religion outside the "defeated" characters. Thus, by internalizing organized religion in Shannon, Williams has Shannon directly confront his own confusing conflicts about the nature of God. Fritscher notes that the "defeated" character in most of Williams' plays lives near churches or churchmen. He writes that nowhere does Williams present the religious question so concisely as in this play ". . . where the battle between institutional responsibility and personal integrity is waged within the protagonist, Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon."[79]

Everything that we learn about Shannon reveals a person who is neurotic and in desperate need of someone or something to restructure his life. He has lost his foothole on the craggy cliff of life. His arms are outstretched grasping the rocks and his head is bathed in sweat. His face displays the emotions of fear and terror. Williams' description of Shannon as he first appears to the audience in his crumpled white suit reflects my metaphorical picture of his psychological state.

> He is panting, sweating and wild-eyed. . . . His nervous state is terribly apparent; he is a young man who has cracked up before and is going to crack up again—perhaps repeatedly. (Act I)

Shannon, himself, tells us that he has reached his nadir. He says to Maxine, "I lose this job, what's next? There's nothing lower than Blake Tours . . ." (Act I). He has journeyed to the last circle in his personalized version of Hell. Jackson refers to the hotel as a ". . . mystical way station in his [i.e., Williams'] progression of of understanding."[80] While he is at the hotel, he again displays an anxiety that Maxine knows only too well. Maxine says that he ". . . cracks up like this so regularly that you can set a calendar by it. Every eighteen months he does it, and twice he's done it here . . ." (Act III). He has once even gone to an asylum, appropriately called Casa de Locos. His state of mind receives no compassion from Miss Fellowes, the masculine "butch" director of the girls in Shannon's tour group. He receives humiliating and tormenting remarks from her about his having been defrocked and losing his parish. She also condemns him for having had an affair on the tour with Carol Goodall, an underaged girl from the Baptist College. Shannon lashes out at Miss Fellowes pleading yet also demanding that she not "Break! Human! Pride!" (Act I).

While Miss Fellowes continues to vex Shannon about the unacceptable conditions existing at the Hotel, he finally admits to her that his ". . . life has cracked up on [him]" (Act I). Still, he receives no understanding from Miss Fellowes. Williams has Shannon employ a metaphor that describes the psychological conditions of Hannah, Nonno, and himself as well. Shannon says to Miss Fellowes that, "I mean

I've just confessed to you that I'm at the end of my rope. . . " (Act I). More than anything else, Shannon appears before us as a fragmented, directionless, and distraught man whose problem is to find and answer ". . . the need to believe in something or in someone—almost anyone—almost anything . . . something" (Act III). Jackson correctly notes that Shannon and the "defeated" characters in general are ". . . each characterized by an inner division, by a fragmentation so complete that it has reduced them to partialities. They are 'unbeings,' caught in the destructive life process."[81]

Williams presents Shannon and Maxine before Hannah and Nonno for dramatically effective reasons. By describing and visualizing Maxine as an earthy, lustful woman and Shannon as on the verge of another breakdown, a point of comparison vividly emerges when Hannah and Nonno make their delayed appearance. All that precedes their entrance is a prelude, so to speak, to the real drama. The first twenty odd pages establish the physical and, more importantly, the psychological scene for the two "spiritual" characters and the communicative evening between the two opposing natures of Shannon and Hannah.

In many respects Hannah Jelkes is at once most like Shannon and also most unlike him. Although she travels a great deal with Nonno, she is probably as lonely and as in need of emotional contact as Shannon is. However, on another level, she is quite different from Shannon. As earthy as Maxine is, Hannah is made of a finer dust.

> Shannon looks down at her, dazed. Hannah is remarkable-looking—ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic Cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine and yet androgynous-looking--almost timeless. (Act I)

Hannah Jelkes first appeared as Edith Jelkes in the short story Night of the Iguana which provided Williams with the scene and general idea for the play. In the short story Edith Jelkes is a descendant from an historical Southern family ". . . of great but now moribund vitality whose latter generations had tended to split into two antithetical types, one in which the libido was pathologically distended and another in which it would seem to be all but dried up."[82] Edith Jelkes conforms more to the latter type. Although Edith is also presented as an unearthly creature, she does not display the moral strength and self-assurance attributed to Hannah. She relies on pills to ease her life and her Puritan nature prevents her experiencing love and enjoying life. Hannah Jelkes, on the other hand, is a New England woman with a strong moral fibre. She is also an artist and, in spite of her unearthly appearance, she has known love (although of a peculiar kind). Thus Hannah is transformed into a stronger, more honest, and more compassionate character in the play.

I believe, however, that Hannah's most remarkable quality emerges through Shannon's perceptions of her; for it is through him that we learn what Hannah represents. When Shannon first sees her, he is "dazed." The second time Hannah appears helping Nonno up the jungle

path, Shannon looks upon both of them ". . . with a relief of tension almost like that of someone going under hypnosis" (Act I). It is the Madonna image that is most characteristic of Hannah. She is an image of comfort, understanding and maternal love. Her image harmonizes with Shannon's Christ-image. Their relationship throughout the night is a pure and chaste one. Shannon admits that he could not have a sexual relationship with her (Act III). They come toward each other both in need of human contact but one senses that Hannah is the stronger one who offers more to Shannon than he can offer her. Nonno, the poet-grandfather cannot be underestimated in the play. Williams allocates the poetic vision of truth to him. His poem is the climax of the play and contains Williams' change in attitude about death from one of fear and trembling to acceptance and a kind of faith.

Shannon, as the "defeated" protagonist, is the most complex character in the play. Even his concept of reality is split. He claims there are two levels of reality—the "realistic and the fantastic." He believes that the fantastic level is actually the real level yet ". . . when you live on the fantastic level as [he] has lately but have to operate on the realistic level, that's when you're spooked, that's the spook . . ." (Act II). It seems that the fantastic level is literally a fantasy level. The spook is a kind of personification of Shannon's guilt over living on the fantastic level. I believe that the fantastic level also permeates Shannon's conception of God. Shannon lost his parish because of "fornication and heresy . . ." (Act II); yet, it is not

so much the fornication as it is the heresy that disturbs him. He relates the speech he made on that Sunday morning when he preached his condemnation of the Western God instead of his prepared apology for his immoral actions.

> . . . I'm tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent— . . . All your Western theologies, the whole mythology of them, are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent. . . .
> I mean he's represented like a bad-tempered childish, old, old, sick, peevish man—I mean like the sort of old man in a nursing home that's putting together a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table. (Act II)

The impotence and inscrutability of God is a major motif in Williams' dramaturgy. In Summer and Smoke John Buchanan condemns Alma for still believing in ". . . a lot of worn out magic" and ". . . worn-out mumbo-jumbo" (Sc. viii). Esmeralda, in Camino Real, asks Kilroy if he thinks ". . . they've got the Old Man in the bag yet?"[83] Kilroy doesn't understand the reference so Esmeralda says, "God. We don't think so. We think there has been so much of the Mumbo Jumbo it's put Him to sleep."[84] Catherine attests to God's incomprehensibility saying, "We're all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks!" (Sc. ii). The Heckler in Sweet Bird of Youth emphasizes God's indifference to man. "I believe that the silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the world is lost because of. I think it's yet to be broken to any man, living or any yet lived on earth, . . ."(Act II, Sc. ii). In Suddenly Last Summer Williams demon-

strates an image of God that may be cruel and indifferent but at least comprehensible in terms of natural phenomena. Shannon also rants against the inscrutability of God and replaces a vague image with his own comprehensible and vivid one.

> It's going to storm tonight—a terrific electric storm. Then you will see the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon's conception of God Almighty paying a visit to the world he created. I want to go back to the Church and preach the gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder . . . and also stray dogs vivisected. . . . (Act II)

In his capacity as a tourist guide he tells Hannah that he is ". . . collecting evidence" about the nature of God. When the violent and terrible storm occurs at the end of Act II Hannah says, "Here is your God, Mr. Shannon." Shannon quietly replies, "Yes, I see him, I hear him, I know him. And if he doesn't know that I know him, let him strike me dead with a bolt of his lightning" (Act II). These sentiments recall Sebastian's personal vision of God. When Sebastian descends from the riggings of the ship after the birds have devoured the baby turtles on the Galapagos Islands, he says, "Well, now I've seen Him!" (Sc. i) Even though when Shannon begins to discuss his ". . . personal idea of God" and ends in an incomplete sentence. Fritscher proposes that the sentence can be completed in one of two ways. God is either ". . . the Old Testament God of Wrath" or a ". . . New Testament God of Love. . . ."[85] Williams seems to pit both conceptions of God against the other. Many of his "defeated" characters reflect a Christ-image (Val Xavier, Brick, Sebastian, and Chance) battling

against the father image of God as presented in the Old Testament. While Val and Chance are physically mutilated by a vengeful God and Sebastian's life is taken, Shannon's need for atonement is milder. Esther Jackson notes that ". . . Shannon's sins are not, in Williams' view, deadly. He stands accused of venial faults."[86]

Thus Shannon's God is also visually terrifying; yet, his God is not as cruel as Sebastian's. Shannon, himself, is a different Christ-image than most of Williams' other male "defeated" characters in that he is older. His punishments are also not so severe. Hannah, always perceptive, expresses this sentiment.

> Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha. . . . There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock—no nails, no blood, no death. (Act III)

She also refers to Shannon's threat to swim to China as "another painless atonement" (Act III). What is it that drives Shannon to seek atonement? Maxine claims it is due to Shannon's mother discovering him masturbating as a child. His mother "whaled" him and said ". . . she had to punish [him] for it because it made God mad as much as it did Mama, and she had to punish [him] for it so God wouldn't punish [him] for it harder than she would" (Act III). Because this is a type of confessional play, Maxine's reason is an important one. Another reason is most likely due to the fornication and heresy Shannon committed in his parish. Jackson says that Shannon is ". . . alienated

from inner peace"[87] because of his sins of lust and incontinence. Although Shannon's sins are not deadly sins in Williams' eyes, he still suffers fragmentation, alienation and a deep sense of loss of human contact. His religious self will not permit him to reintegrate his life with others or with himself, for this is indeed part of his atonement.

What is Shannon's conflict? In short, it is whether to incorporate the attitudes and the values of Hannah or to refuse them and remain with his own values that reflect anger, guilt, and a need for atonement. The journey to Maxine's hotel is as much allegorical as it is realistic. Hannah, the artist of truth, tells Shannon of journeys to places like the Costa Verde Hotel that ". . . the spooked and bedeviled people are forced to take through the . . . the unlighted sides of their natures" (Act III). Although Hannah is in as much need of human contact as Shannon, she has never cracked up over her loneliness and alienation. Her "blue devil" has never overcome her because she says she couldn't afford to lose. She claims that enduring the "blue devil" will earn his respect. She is a life-oriented person whom Jackson refers to as one of Williams' "good beings" possessing "moral strength."[88] Norman Fedders believes Hannah is ". . . the strongest figure in the Williams' spiritual pantheon—and perhaps the most admirable."[89] Hannah offers Shannon life-oriented alternatives to his angry and frustrated existence. She tells Shannon that when he returns to the church he will not deliver vengeful or angry sermons; rather, she says that he ". . . will throw away the violent, furious sermon, [he'll] toss it into the chancel, and

. . . lead them beside still waters because he know[s] how badly they need the still waters. . ." (Act II). Thus, Hannah suggests a Christ-like attitude and approach to God, full of compassion, understanding and quiet faith.

Hannah and Shannon reach a very deep level of human communication during their one evening together. They not only give words to each other but ideas, feelings, and tenderness as well. Desperately seeking to understand himself, Shannon asks Hannah what is his problem. As the externalized representation of Shannon's alternatives, Hannah knows exactly what Shannon's needs are. Hannah says his problem is ". . . the oldest one in the world—the need to believe in something or in someone—almost anyone—almost anything . . . something" (Act III). When Hannah claims that she herself has come to believe, Shannon asks what is her belief. Hannah replies, "Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night" (Act III). At this point it is apparent that there are no closed gates between them. Sensing an alternative to his own life values and problems, Shannon asks if Hannah has ever loved anyone. It is a very personal question, and Hannah replies honestly and sincerely. She relates her encounter with a perverted Australian salesman in Singapore who attained sexual orgasm through the use of her underwear. Shannon, astonished that Hannah considers this a love experience, says, "That, that . . . sad, dirty little episode, you call it a . . . ?" (Act III). Still, Hannah contends that it was love for she

had never previously imagined that anyone could be as alienated and lonely as the salesman appeared. It does not even "disgust" her, as Shannon puts it. Hannah confides to Shannon that "nothing human disgusts [her] unless it's unkind, violent" (Act III). Thus, Shannon learns that giving to a person in need and alienated from people is a form of love—perhaps the highest.

At this point in their conversation, Shannon feels that Hannah can truly and positively affect his life. She becomes his last chance to adopt a life vastly different from the one he has previously known. He asks her if he could travel with her without any sexual commitments. She says that it wouldn't work because he is not ". . . well enough to travel anywhere with anybody right now" (Act III). Once again, Williams denies his "defeated" character a life-directed opportunity. The playwright denied Laura a life with Jim, Blanche a life with Mitch, Sebastian the love of Catherine, and Chance a life with Heavenly. During the storm scene in Act II, Williams positions Shannon on the very edge of the verandah and graphically depicts Shannon's thwarted existence. Shannon ". . . lowers his hands from his burning forehead and stretches them out through the rain's silver sheet as if he were reaching for something outside and beyond himself. Then nothing is visible but these reaching-out hands." Now, Shannon may believe that he honestly wants Hannah but Williams will not permit this alienated character to achieve his desires. Rather, he is only permitted to see what he can never join to his life. Without Hannah Shannon is

unable to alter his life because her character is basically his projected life-directed alternatives.

Two climactic events of considerable significance occur almost simultaneously at the very end of the play. Hannah asks Shannon to cut the tethered iguana free. Shannon frees the iguana claiming that because ". . . God won't do it . . ." they ". . . are going to play God here" (Act III). Thus, while the iguana attains freedom, Shannon is still trapped in his thwarted existence. Shannon claims that Hannah wanted the iguana freed because it parallels her ". . . Grandpa's dying-out effort to finish one last poem . . ." (Act III). If this is true then her grandfather does find freedom and peace because at the very moment that the iguana is cut loose Nonno completes his poem and quietly dies thereafter. In Esther Jackson's opinion the poem reflects a ". . . lyric theme: his [Williams'] search for truth and meaning within the moment of poetic vision."[90] The poem is recited in full by Nonno just before he dies. I have quoted only the last two stanzas of the poem because they carry the message.

> And still the ripe fruit and the branch
> Observe the sky begin to blanch
> Without a cry, without a prayer,
> With no betrayal of despair.
>
> O Courage, could you not as well
> Select a second place to dwell,
> Not only in that golden tree
> But in the frightened heart of me? (Act III)

The apostrophe in the last stanza is a plea for Courage to enter the heart of a man to fortify and enable him to accept the inevitable—

death. It is only in the very last line that the human element enters as the emotion of ". . . a fear ('the frightened heart of me') of his inability to imitate once and for all nature's reconciliation of extremes [i.e., life and death]."[91] Although Nonno displays the quiet courage and tranquility of his end, the poetic truth of acceptance through courage eludes Shannon. Instead of pursuing a life directed toward this goal (which I believe is inherent in Hannah also), he must now 'settle' for Maxine. Maxine, always operating on Shannon's "realistic" level, ". . . knows the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone. . . . We've both reached a point where we've got to settle for something that works for us in our lives—even if it isn't on the highest kind of level" (Act III). Realizing that he can not travel with Hannah, Shannon accepts a life with Maxine that will not lead to the resolution of his raging conflicts. Yet in the sense that it is better to live with "someone" rather than "something," Shannon does receive less of a punishment than many of his "defeated" predecessors. He will live out his life in the relative comfort and security promised to those who have retired from the battle. While Maxine entertains the "male clientele," he will ". . . take care of the women that are with them" (Act III).

There is no clear-cut resolution of Shannon's conflict. His life will remain incomplete like the very sentences he can not finish about the nature of God. Although he has written several letters to the Dean of his Alma Mater with the prospect of returning to his religious pro-

fession, one senses that he will never return. He is now an outcast living away from the mainstream of society and settling for something no more than a travesty of human interaction. His ". . . infantile expression of rage at Mama and rage at God and rage at the goddam crib, and rage at the everything . . ." (Act III) results in an overwhelming feeling of guilt that erodes his "endurance" to combat his "spook." The "spook" will appear again and again in his life and all that he can do to alleviate that guilt is to temporarily escape to the "fantastic" level. Shannon may have buried ". . . God in a deep grave," as Dylan Thomas says, but he has not raised ". . . up the skeleton again" or made ". . . his final faith."[92] He has lost or rejected preconceived notions and values about the nature of God and his own life but he has not replaced them with another set of beliefs. He remains a victim of life rather than a victor in life.

## VIII

> I think that life just don't care
> for the weak. Or the soft. A man
> and his life. Like I said, a man
> and his life both got to be made
> out of the same stuff or one or the
> other will break and the one that breaks
> won't be life.
>
> from Kingdom of Earth

The decade of the Sixties was a slow, seemingly inexorable progression toward drug addiction and suicide for Williams. Although he

had been sick all his life (diphtheria, cataracts, nervous breakdowns, etc.), nothing equalled the psychological stress and emotional exhaustion he experienced during the latter part of the decade. "Baby, I was out of my skull. I could no longer remember how many pills I had taken, and the liquor I washed them down with had a synergistic effect."[93] In 1969 he was finally committed to a psychiatric hospital where he had ". . . three convulsions and two heart attacks in three days." Williams readily admitted in 1971 that ". . . the past few years have been suicidal. I was living a life during the Sixties that was virtually an obliteration of life. . . ."[94]

It was only a year before his entering a psychiatric hospital that Kingdom of Earth opened on Broadway (1968). Although the play offers nothing new in terms of Williams' dramaturgic development, it does reveal Williams' less severe treatment of the "defeated" character. The play tends to crystallize and reinforce his preconceived notions of avarice and deceit in people and the need to survive and endure the hardships of life. The plot is quite simple. The story occurs during an impending disaster. The flood waters of the Mississippi River threaten to overwhelm the farmhouse and destroy all the inhabitants. Lot Ravenstock returns to his dilapidated Mississippi farmhouse with his new wife, Myrtle, to make certain that when he dies his half-brother, Chicken, will not inherit the farm. Realizing that he formerly agreed in writing to bequeath the farm to Chicken, Lot now plans to replace his wife as beneficiary. To make certain that Myrtle will inherit the farm, he

tells her to steal the notarized paper from Chicken—thus removing Chicken's only legal claim to the land. During Myrtle's descents from the bedroom to the kitchen, she develops a liking for Chicken that threatens her relationship with Lot. She soon realizes that only Chicken can save her from the inevitable flood waters of the Mississippi. Chicken finally asks her if she could live with a man who is part Negro. She has difficulty believing he is part Negro because she ". . . has the typical southern lower-class dread and awe of Negroes."[95] However, she doesn't permit that possibility to dissuade her from living with him instead of dying with Lot who is suffering from terminal tuberculosis. At the end of the play Lot descends from his mother's bedroom dressed in her clothes with a wig and make-up on his face. He enters the parlour in a daze, sits in a chair, then rises and falls to the floor dead. As the play ends, Chicken surveys his land and his new woman with satisfaction. The noise of the floodwaters begin to boom as the curtain falls.

As usual, the setting is more complex than the plot. Williams admits that ". . . it is a difficult set that requires the inventions of a very gifted designer" (Sc. i) Williams describes the set as follows:

> It is the back of a Mississippi Delta farmhouse, a story and a half high, its walls gray against a sky the same color. On either side of it stand growths of cane, half the height of the house, rattling in a moaning wind. . . . This back wall of the house, except for a doorway, is represented by a scrim that will lift when the house is entered. Then the interior will be exposed: a kitchen to the right, a mysterious little 'parlor' to the left, a narrow, dark

> hall between them: a flight of stairs to an upper hall and a low, slant-ceilinged bedroom to the left. The right side of the upper half-story is never used in the play and is always masked. (Sc. i)

Williams creates a set that ". . . has the mood of a blues song whose subject is loneliness" (Sc. i). The gray house and sky and the uninhabited set (when the curtain first rises) adds a feeling of sombreness and forlornness to the stark scene. Having set the scene in his expressionistic manner, Williams begins the play with a dialogue between a passing car full of passengers and Chicken who enters from offstage. The short exchange between the fleeing neighbours and Chicken provides Williams with an opportunity to vividly describe Chicken's character. Chicken explains to the audience through the device of the neighbours how he received his name. He says he doesn't fear the flood because he can ". . . climb on the roof and set on the roof with the chickens till the water goes down" (Sc. i). When the neighbours tell him that he will become quite hungry up there, Chicken replies, "Shit, if I got hungry I'd bite the haid off one of the other chickens and drink its blood" (Sc. i). One neighbour says he saw that done in a "freak show." His female companion adds that Chicken could do it and "enjoy it." They drive off leaving him alone. If this isn't a vivid enough picture of a crude, animalistic man driven more by "instinct" than reason for survival, Williams adds a character description of Chicken that recalls the brutish nature and physique of Stanley Kowalski. When Chicken enters the

house and lights the oil lamp, ". . . the flame makes grotesque shadows on his dark face. He is a strange-looking young man but also remarkably good-looking with his very light eyes, darker-than-olive skin, and the power and male grace of his body" (Sc. i).

Williams' presentation of Chicken as a man who would rather drink chicken blood to survive instead of leaving the farmhouse until the flood waters subside is at least as vivid and powerful an image of primitiveness and brutish behaviour as Stanley's entering the set in A Streetcar Named Desire bearing a package of raw meat that he throws at Stella to catch. Chicken also possesses Stanley's brute masculinity, his strength, his youth, and his virility. Indeed, Chicken appears to be a more primitive specimen of man than Stanley. Yet, more significant than these analogies is Chicken's possession of Stanley's almost instinctive sense of survival, of life. This life-orientation is his greatest asset and it is the one that typifies the essential difference between himself and his half-brother, Lot.

Williams introduces Lot and Myrtle immediately after his description of Chicken. He describes both Lot and Myrtle at the same time in the play.

> Myrtle is a rather fleshy young woman, amiably loud-voiced. She is wearing a pink turtle-necked sweater and tight checkered slacks. Her blond-dyed hair is tied up in a wet silk scarf, magenta-colored. Her appearance suggests an imitation of a Hollywood glamor-girl which doesn't succeed as a good imitation. (Sc. i)

Myrtle is a likeable figure, simple and friendly. Her chatter is often shallow and inane, yet never really harmful. She was once in show business, singing in a travelling group composed of three other girls. Her stage name was The Petite Personality Kid which is a little ironic because her personality is rather tepid and her build is certainly not petite. She and Lot were married on a television show receiving a host of electrical appliances as a gift. At that time she had no idea that Lot married her principally to prevent Chicken from inheriting the farm. It is through her journeys from the upstairs bedroom where Lot spends most of his time to the Kitchen where Chicken spends most of his that Myrtle creates the dramatic elements of the play. She is a kind of go-between. I do not believe that she ever realizes exactly what is at stake regarding the two half-brothers. It is not only the farm that is at stake, but also a greater battle regarding two antithetical attitudes on life.

The two juxtaposed descriptions of Chicken and Lot delineate the battle lines. Lot is the antithesis of Chicken in every way. Williams says that Lot ". . . is a frail, delicately—you might even say exotically—pretty youth of about twenty. He is ten years younger than Myrtle and his frailty makes him look even younger. Myrtle dominates him in an amiable way" (Sc. i). While Chicken is a virile, powerful, and healthy male, Lot is a sickly, frail, pale youth who is constantly out of breath and suffering from tuberculosis. Sexual intercourse is a chore for him and he has difficulty satisfying Myrtle's passionate nature. He

tells Myrtle that if Chicken asks if he is a "strong lover" to say that he satisfies her. His nature is decidedly feminine. Myrtle says he is as ". . . refined and elegant as this parlor" (Sc. i). Her description of Lot reflects his feminine appearance. He is ". . . the first, the most, the only refined man in my life. Skin, eyes, hair any girl would be jealous of. A mouth like a flower" (Sc. i). Lot, himself, admits that he resembles his mother, called Miss Lottie. Thus, it is as if Lot and Chicken were halves of a single entity. They represent opposite and conflicting forces that cannot live in harmony. Lot's nature is soft while Chicken's is hard; Lot seeks elegance in an uncouth world while Chicken assumes the Hobbesian attitude that life is ". . . short, nasty, and brutish." Lot displays his recognition of their antithetical natures when he claims that Chicken is his ". . . opposite type" and that he ". . . hate/s/ that man with a passion" (Sc. v).

It is obvious that there is no romantic-hedonistic-Puritan schism within either character. This does not negate my contention that Lot represents death-orientation and Chicken life-orientation, for there are other elements that support this premise. One important element is the set itself and the characters' positions in the set. Lot spends most of his time above the ground in his bedroom which still possesses ". . . the aura of its former feminine occupant" (Sc. ii), his mother. His life in his mother's bedroom is literally and metaphorically above the cruder elements in life. He tells Myrtle what his goal has been in life.

> You've married someone to whom no kind of sex relation was ever as important as fighting sickness and trying with his mother to make, to create, a little elegance in a corner of the earth we lived in that wasn't favorable to it. (Sc. ii)

If Lot represents the Kingdom of Heaven which implies a greater concern for the after-life, then Chicken represents the Kingdom of Earth which implies a greater regard for life on this earth. That which is secondary to Lot's purpose on earth, i.e., the sexual relationship, is primary with Chicken. Chicken's dialogue with Myrtle in Scene vii recalls John's attitude in the Alma-John, soul-flesh conflict featured in Summer and Smoke. He tells Myrtle about a preacher who came through their region a year ago.

> That preacher . . . claimed that we had to put up a terrible struggle against our lustful body. . . . And they [the preachers] also believe that we have spiritual gates, and they preach about how you should haul down those spiritual gates on your lustful body. . . . Those are two opposite things and one of 'em's got to be stronger if they're in the same body. One's got to win and one lose. (Sc. vii)

Chicken admits that he attempted to "haul down" his "spiritual gates" but says that he was ". . . reaching up for something that wasn't in [him]" (Sc. vii). He no longer denies or represses his Lawrencian attitudes about love. In fact, he expresses his view that a man-woman relationship can be the most important and most meaningful aspect of life. His views are reminiscent of Stella's attitudes on life in A Streetcar Named Desire. In that play Stella says, ". . . there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort

of make everything else seem—unimportant" (Sc. iv). Chicken expresses an elaborated version of this attitude that reveals his essentially life-oriented nature.

> I'll tell you how I look at life in my life, or in any man's life. There's nothing in the world, in this whole kingdom of earth, that can compare with one thing, and that one thing is what's able to happen between a man and a woman, just that thing, nothing more, is perfect. The rest is crap, all of the rest is almost nothing but crap. (Sc. vii)

The play progresses toward its climax like the very floodwaters that threaten the farmhouse and the lives of the characters. The feeling of suspense and impending doom builds in the play through Williams' intermittent introduction of wind, floodwater noises, and Chicken's persistent allusions to the destructiveness of a flood. Myrtle's hydrophobia adds to this feeling of dread and fear. A similar sense of an ominous confrontation exists between Lot and Chicken. Both characters undergo transformations, so to speak, that reinforce their basic antithetical natures to the point where one must break and give way before the other. The most striking changes occur in Lot. Williams presents Lot as possessing feminine aspects in his physical appearance and nature. Lot even dyes his hair blonde and often assumes a "Mona Lisa" smile. Still, he is presented as a male. Yet by Scene v he appears ". . . still smoking with his mother's ivory holder and wearing now her white silk wrapper. His 'Mona Lisa' smile is more sardonic and the violet shadows about his eyes are

deeper." Later in the scene Lot claims that ". . . once in a while the moon comes out of those fast-moving clouds, and it—says things to me in the soft voice of my mother. . . ." It is as if Lot were slowly leaving this world for a spiritual one that condemns his relationship with Myrtle. At the end of the scene Lot is certain that Myrtle enjoys her descents to the kitchen. He angrily asserts that he has ". . . married a prostitute and brought her home for Chicken." By the end of Scene vi he is saying the same thing but now he adds that his delivering a woman to Chicken is a ". . . present from the dying." In the next scene Lot's withdrawn attitude and far-off countenance suggest his imminent encounter with the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chicken's appearance and actions do not change as much as Lot's but Williams does describe Chicken with a progressively greater use of animal imagery. In Scene i Chicken is hiding in the kitchen listening to Lot's and Myrtle's conversation. Williams describes him as leaning over to hear better ". . . like a crouched animal." In the beginning of Scene ii he is carving a lewd picture on the kitchen table with a "wolfish grin" on his face. At the same time Myrtle tells Lot is was unfair to bring her to the farm house with ". . . that animal, down there." When she descends for the first time Williams describes Myrtle as feeling as if she were ". . . approaching a jungle." It is interesting to note how closely Chicken's nature approximates Stanley Kowalski's. Williams employs animal imagery to describe both men. Indeed, Myrtle's descent to Chicken recalls Stella's descent to Stanley

after their boisterous, violent fight. When Stella and Stanley come to each other at the bottom of the stairs it is with ". . . low, animal moans." Then Stanley ". . . lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat" (Sc. iii). In Scene v Chicken expresses an attitude toward life that acts as a sort of justification for his brutish nature. It is an attitude that reveals Chicken's basic drive to preserve and maintain life at all costs.

> Well, I got to be hard. A man and his wife both got to be equally hard. Made out of the same hard thing. Man, rock. Life, rock. Otherwise one will break and the one that breaks won't be life. The one that breaks is the soft one and that's never life. If one is the soft one, the soft one that breaks will be man, not life, no, no, not life! . . . (Sc. v)

In the last scene of the play Chicken asks Myrtle is she would "stay on" at the farm after Lot dies. Although she dislikes discussing the topic she is flattered and suggests that she will. Despite the fact that Chicken believes Myrtle is "weak" (or because of that fact), he is willing to live with her. He possesses the Lawrencian attitude that love between a man and a woman can be one of the most important aspects of life. Immediately after Chicken tells Myrtle that having a woman to love is receiving a ". . . square deal out of life . . ," Lot descends from the upstairs to the parlour. He is now the image of death. He has made a complete transformation which denies his sex and ultimately his life. Williams writes:

> Lot appears like an apparition in the pool of cool light at the stair-top. He has put on the gauzy

> white dress to conjure an image of his mother in summer. . . . The effect is both bizarre and beautiful. Then Lot descends the stairs. With each step his gasping for breath is louder, but his agony is transfigured by the sexless passion of the transvestite. He has a fixed smile which is almost ecstatic. . . . At the foot of the stairs, Lot turns blindly towards the parlor. His gasping breath is now like a death rattle. (Sc. vii)

Myrtle is "terrified" at the scene and cries to Chicken to "stop him." Chicken is ". . . impressed but not surprised" at Lot's appearance. He refuses to intervene with Lot's performance. Indeed, at this point it is almost impossible for either Myrtle or Chicken to intervene because Lot is now ". . . past hearing any remark." Lot sits on one of the little gold chairs in the parlour, then rises and falls to the floor dead. Chicken goes to the lifeless body lifting it "almost tenderly" and places it on the sofa. Myrtle is in a state of shock and leaves the parlour for the kitchen. Chicken walks toward the kitchen ". . . with dark satisfaction." He talks to Myrtle about having children. Myrtle implies that she would want them too. Chicken goes outside to check the flood crest and to view his land. "There is a great booming sound" (Sc. vii) that brings Chicken back into the house. He calls out, "Up! Quick!" (to the roof) as the curtain descends.

Since Williams' psychoanalysis with Dr. Kubie in 1957-58, Sweet Bird of Youth is his last violent major work. There is no doubt that psycho-therapy has tempered Williams' hostility and rage. Nancy Tischler quotes Williams as follows:

> Bestiality still exists but I don't want to write about it any more. I want to pass the rest of my life believing in other things. For years I was too preoccupied with the destructive impulses. From now on I want to be concerned with the kinder aspects of life.[96]

Since 1959 Williams' plays display more compassion and tenderness for the "defeated" character. Although Williams always felt sympathy for the damned character earlier in his dramatic career, he still permitted them to suffer physical mutilation, psychological breakdowns, and death. This attitude is no longer the case with regard to "defeated" characters like Shannon and Lot. In these two plays, with emphasis on the present one under discussion, Williams reaffirms life. Even though Lot dies, his death is not violent.

Lot and Chicken possess attitudes that define their irreconcilable and antithetical natures. Williams seems to be saying that it is better to be like Chicken than Lot. Chicken is a more primitive Stanley Kowalski, another life-oriented character. He is the animal component of man more tuned into his senses and primary drives than his intellect. He may be brutish, primitive, uneducated, and id-oriented but above all else he possesses a knowledge of life and what it takes to survive. He also understands the meaning of love and the need for it in a lonely world. Lot represents the two refined, over-civilized man who relies more on intellect than visceral, gut-level actions to direct his life. His illness suggests his inner state of disintegration and corruption. Although the play concludes with Lot's death, the message of the play is life. Lot's death and the destructive forces of the flood serve as

a reaffirmation that life and being have won out, at least temporarily, over non-being. The unfortunate aspect of the play with regard to Lot is that he is not able to become a life-oriented character. Lot remains as an implacable image of death. As represented by Chicken and his attitudes, Lot's life force is, like his death, beyond the point of recall.

## Footnotes to Chapter III

### I — The Glass Menagerie

[1]Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (Toronto: New Directions, 1966), p. ix. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[2]Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions Book, 1954), pp. 99-100.

[3]Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), p. 76.

[4]Williams, One Arm . . . , p. 97.

[5]Robert E. Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), p. 211.

[6]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work (London: Peter Owen, 1961), p. 95.

[7]Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1959), p. xii.

[8]Tennessee Williams, In the Winter of Cities (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 31.

[9]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . . , p. 100.

[10]Ibid., p. 99.

### II — Summer and Smoke

[11]Tennessee Williams, Four Plays (New York: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p. 159. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[12]Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," Tulane Drama Review, III (March, 1960), p. 46.

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[13]Ibid., p. 45.

[14]Ibid., p. 48.

[15]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 139.

[16]Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," p. 57.

[17]Norman Fedders, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p. 89.

III — A Streetcar Named Desire

[18]Robert Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee Williams," New York Post (April 30, 1958), p. M2.

[19]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: New American Library, 1947), p. 13. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[20]Robert E. Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), p. 212.

[21]Rex Reed, "Tennessee Williams Turns Sixty," Esquire (September, 1971), p. 220.

[22]Walcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXII (December 13, 1947). (Quoted in Benjamin Nelson's Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work.)

[23]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 134.

[24]Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 39.

[25]Joseph Wood Krutch, Modernism in Modern Drama (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 128-129.

(Footnotes Chap. III)

[26]Arthur Miller, Collected Plays (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 32.

[27]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . . , p. 139.

IV — Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

[28]Tischler, Tennessee Williams : Rebellious Puritan, p. 140.

[29]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1955), p. xiii. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[30]Marya Mannes, "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams," The Reporter, XII (May 19, 1955), p. 41.

[31]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 62.

[32]Tennessee Williams, Hard Candy (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 14.

[33]Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 103.

[34]Tennessee Williams, Orpheus Descending (with Battle of Angels) (New York: New Directions Book, 1958), p. 28.

[35]Williams, One Arm . . . , p. 9.

[36]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 62.

[37]Ibid., p. 83.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Sophocles, The Theban Plays, trans. E. F. Watling (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 55.

(Footnotes Chap. III)

[40]Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1958), pp. 88-89. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[41]Mannes, "The Morbid Magic of Tennessee Williams," p. 41.

[42]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 186.

[43]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 63.

[44]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 188.

V — Suddenly Last Summer

[45]Richard Hayes, "An Infernal Harmony," The Commonweal, LXVII (May 30, 1958), p. 232.

[46]Brooks Atkinson, Review of Suddenly Last Summer, New York Times (January 8, 1958), p. 23.

[47]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 214.

[48]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 39.

[49]W. Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, eds. Louis B Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (New York: Washington Square Press, inc., 1963), p. 12.

[50]Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, p. 9.

[51]John Fritscher, "Some Attitudes And A Posture: Religious Metaphor and Ritual in Tennessee Williams' Query of the American God," Modern Drama, XIII (September, 1970), p. 204.

[52]Ibid., p. 208.

[53]Williams, One Arm . . ., p. 85.

[54]Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 151.

[55]Ibid., pp. 149-150.

[56]Paul Hurley, "Suddenly Last Summer as 'Morality Play,'" Modern Drama, VIII (February, 1966), p. 396.

[57]W.J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), p. 58.

[58]Hurley, "Suddenly Last Summer as 'Morality Play,'" p. 396.

[59]Theodor Reik, Masochism in Sex and Society, trans. M H. Beigel and G.M. Kurth (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), p. 347.

[60]Brooks Atkinson, Review of Suddenly Last Summer, New York Times (January 8, 1958), p. 23.

[61]Hurley, "Suddenly Last Summer as 'Morality Play,'" p. 398.

[62]Ibid., pp. 401-402.

[63]Brooks Atkinson, "Garden District," New York Times (January 19, 1958), sec. 2, p. 1.

VI — Sweet Bird of Youth

[64]Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre: Portrait of Corruption," New York Times (March 11, 1959), p. 39.

[65]Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1959), p. 18. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[66]Williams, One Arm . . . , p. 13.

[67]Ibid., p. 14.

[68]Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 157.

[69]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . . , p. 236.

[70]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, CLXXXVIII (March 28, 1959), pp. 281-282.

[71]Nelson, Tennessee Williams . . ., p. 240.

VII — Night of the Iguana

[72]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 151.

[73]Williams, The Rose Tattoo (New York: New Directions Book, 1951), p. ix.

[74]Ferdinand Leon, "Time, Fantasy, And Reality In Night of the Iguana," Modern Drama, II (May, 1968), p. 87.

[75]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 30.

[76]Williams, Orpheus Descending (with Battle of Angels), p. 47

[77]Tennessee Williams, Night of the Iguana (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961), p. 9. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[78]Leon, "Time, Fantasy, And Reality In Night of the Iguana," p. 90.

[79]Fritscher, "Some Attitudes And A Posture: . . .," p. 202.

[80]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 85.

[81]Ibid., p. 72.

[82]Williams, One Arm . . ., p. 170.

[83]Tennessee Williams, Camino Real (New York: New Directions Books, 1953), p. 123.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Fritscher, "Some Attitudes And A Posture:. . . ," p. 204.

[86]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 152.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., p. 153.

[89]Fedders, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams, p. 113.

[90]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 28.

[91]Leon, "Time, Fantasy, And Reality In Night of the Iguana," p. 95.

[92]Dylan Thomas: The Poems, ed. Daniel Jones (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1971, p. 55.

VIII — Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)

[93]Rex Reed, "Tennessee Williams Turns Sixty," Esquire (September, 1971), p. 105.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Tennessee Williams, Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle) (New York: New Directions Book, 1968), p. 98. All subsequent references to the play are from this edition.

[96]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 290.

# CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

What is life to Tennessee Williams? I believe the essence of his concept of life involves a progression from personal loss (of status, identity, values, youth, etc.) toward conflict and then toward moral paralysis and ambiguity. Williams dramatizes this sense of loss through the passing of time with its diminishing and eroding effect on the innocent, the beautiful, and the young. As early as 1945, Williams wrote that ". . . the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, loss, loss unless you devote your heart to its opposition" (Prologue to The Glass Menagerie, p. xix). To understand what the "opposition" is, one must first realize what "loss" connotes to Williams. It is not too great a leap to suggest that loss is a kind of death. Each present second slips into the unchangeable and irretrievable past. The ineluctable reduction of life into death confirms Williams belief that ". . . there is no way to beat the game of being against non-being, in which non-being is the predestined victor on realistic levels."[1]

However, there are other "deaths" that may occur in life before one's final end. One kind of death or loss may involve growing up in one culture or environment and moving into another region that is vastly different. (I have noted the effects of Williams' moving from the South to the North in the second part of Chapter II.) Another sense of loss in Williams' life and works is the loss of Religion as an effective administrator and delegator of moral behaviour. Although

Williams grew up with a Puritan heritage, he never expressed a desire to adopt its moral code as a way of living. Lastly, the loss of personal identity in growing from childhood into adulthood involves the "death" or metamorphosis of one's self into another. Like Blake, Williams attaches a kind of innocence and beauty to childhood while experience and a "fallen" condition occur in adulthood. Perhaps Williams' witnessing his sister Rose's low and unfortunate withdrawal into psychosis as she reached adolescence is responsible for his perceiving time as the destroyer of the innocent and beautiful.

Most of Williams' "defeated" characters experience a kind of death with the loss of a superimposed structure in their lives. Sometimes it is a cultural framework that collapses (i.e., Alma and Blanche). The loss of a religious structure also results in disorientation (i.e., Alma and Shannon). At other times it is a loss of personal identity that proves destructive (i.e., Brick, Chance, and Lot). Laura's and Chance's losses reflect the destructive effect of time more than the causes of that destruction. When one loses the security of what structures one's life and who one is, one is lost. Conflicts arise because now there is no reservoir of answers to rely upon when encountering life. The individual stands alone, disoriented and morally fragmented.

Williams' plays begin <u>in media res;</u> that is, they begin in the second stage of conflict within character. The sense of loss, which is the first stage, has already been experienced by the "defeated" characters. Laura has become crippled due to a childhood illness. Blanche

has suffered the loss of Belle Reve, her wealth and her teaching position. Brick has lost his best friend. Chance has experienced the unfortunate loss of Heavenly Finley. Shannon has become a wandering, neurotic man after the loss of institutionalized religion. Lot has lost his mother and is dying from tuberculosis. I do not mean to imply that the life-oriented characters remain above loss. They, too, experience loss but they do not plunge into paralyzing indecision or guilt. Amanda has lost the South of her youth. Stella left Belle Reve and plantation life for a more fertile realistic life with Stanley. The primary differences between the life-oriented and death-oriented characters are twofold: one, the "defeated" characters' inability to confront their truths and then make the necessary compromises of their values and attitudes to preserve or create a psychologically healthy and happy life; and, two, Williams' own predilection to punish the "defeated" characters for their immoral actions by denying them inner peace and happiness (see pp. 167-168).

In order to vividly and dramatically demonstrate the individualized conflicts of the "defeated" characters, Williams externalizes the antithetical natures of the protagonists into another character. If the "defeated" character is withdrawn and fearful (e.g., Laura), then the other character is extroverted and more certain of life (Amanda). If the protagonist is refined and cultured, beset by moral conflicts (Blanche), then primitivism and moral certitude become attributes of the other character. If one is passive (Laura and Brick), then the

others are active (Amanda and Maggie). The ultimate confrontation of this coupling of opposing natures and attitudes involves the life-death conflict. The "defeated" character, steeped in his pit of whirling conflicts, perceives an alternative to his disoriented and self-destructive existence in his opposite. The supreme conflict for the protagonist involves the choice of life as represented by the contrasting character or metaphysical death (although sometimes it is physical) as manifested in their own attitudes and actions.

Williams has a profound respect for life and a corresponding hatred of death.* I believe that the "defeated" characters also possess a great love of life and a "normal" dislike of death. Given this information, one might very well ask why a "defeated" character chooses metaphysical death over life. This is a difficult question that requires a knowledge of the moral elements in Williams' plays. Most of the protagonists have committed what Williams considers to be moral "sins." Blanche failed to understand and help Allen Gray. Instead, she condemned a human being in need of understanding and perhaps compassion. Brick shrank away from his responsibility toward his best friend, Skipper, when he needed Brick's understanding. He also withdrew himself from his family and wife. Sebastian placed his image of God before all else. He also alienated himself from meaningful contact with humanity. Shannon destroyed religious concepts without

*See Rex Reed's "Tennessee Williams Turns Sixty," Esquire (September, 1971), p. 105 and Edwina Dakin Williams' Remember Me to Tom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 252.

knowing what to substitute. It is while the "defeated" characters conceal their "sins" or their loss of identity and values that they are beset by the feelings of inner fragmentation and disorientation that Jackson alludes to in The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. Their individual moral "sins" are their incompletions that their ". . . sufferings must atone for."[2] They are presented with deep psychic conflicts that often reflect Williams' own conflicts in life such as the contrast between a hedonistic father and Puritanical mother and a youth in one culture (South) and adulthood in another.

When Williams advises us to ". . . devote your heart to its [i.e., loss'] opposition," he means that the opposition to loss or death is life. While he gives this advice to his readers he does not aid his "defeated" characters in achieving this goal. The "resolutions" he offers his protagonists reveal his own ambivalent feelings about their deserving life-orientation. This brings us to the final stage of the "defeated" characters' progression. In most cases they move from conflict into ambiguity and moral paralysis (with the exceptions of Laura, Sebastian, and Chance, whose resolutions are at least more apparent). Williams once wrote, "It is not the essential dignity but the essential ambiguity of man that I think needs to be stated."[3] Blanche's end is ambiguous. She certainly has experienced a severe breakdown but none of her conflicts has really been resolved. Furthermore, there is even a suggestion that she will be released from the hospital in a relatively short while. Alma suffers because she is

never free enough to choose the kind of life she wants. At the end of the play she appears to have "chosen" a life that is neither religious nor free from moral guilt regarding her actions. Brick may recover from his "confrontation" with his truth and lead a happy, fruitful life, but we do not know. Shannon appears to have decided not to return to the church, but he has had a kind of "religious" encounter with Hannah Jelkes.

It is apparent that Williams harbours a deep and sincere sympathy for his "defeated" characters. Although Williams believes that most of his protagonists have committed moral "sins" (such as mendacity, hiding from the truth, withdrawing and not communicating with people, preferring illusions to reality) and deserve punishment, he understands their need for illusions and self-deception. In his one act play, The Lady of Larkspur-Lotion, the writer says to Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, the proprietress of the boarding house:

> What if there is no rubber king in her life [i.e., in the life of Mrs. Wire, another boarder]. There ought to be rubber kings in her life! Is she to be blamed because it is necessary for her to compensate for the cruel deficiencies of reality by the exercise of a little—what shall I say?—God-given—imagination?[4]

Thus, it appears that Williams presents characters that suffer from moral paralysis and ambiguity. The "defeated" character may know the causes of his guilt but he is unable to decisively resolve them. I agree with Jackson that ". . . Williams has attempted to restore to the theatre . . . its moral function and its ritual power of

catharsis."[5] Even Jackson's contention that his most technically and dramatically greatest plays ". . . retain a fundamental internal antagonism, an inner conflict between experience and meaning, poetry and logic, appearance and reality"[6] is beyond questioning. Yet, on the ultimate level of inherent antagonism between life and death, the "defeated" characters are unable to decide which they deserve based on their past actions. Furthermore, it is this moral paralysis and ambiguity that denies his "defeated" characters tragic stature.

As I have stated previously, the "defeated" character is an incomplete figure in the sense that his opposing attitudes and values are externalized into another character, i.e., the life-oriented figure. One may correctly argue that the life-oriented characters are incomplete in themselves. It is this very circumstance, coupled with the moral paralysis of the "defeated" characters, that preclude tragedy. For the sins of the world are its incompletions, Williams tells us. The universe is fragmented and Man enters the world suffering from incompletion. Nelson claims that:

> Everything that governs human action emanates from this broken condition which is the root condition of the universe. . . . There is no sense of individual responsibility in this deterministic view of existence, and without this responsibility no one can attain tragic fulfillment."[7]

Nelson believes that if there is a tragedy it is a ". . . tragedy of circumstance rather than character."[8] Laura's situation may be tragic but she is not. Blanche is trapped by her past and her guilt but her

actions in the play are not as tragic as they are pathetic.

What, then, has been Williams' contribution to American theatre and Western drama in general? I believe his creation of the "defeated" character exemplifies his contribution. The "defeated" character represents Man stripped of the security and morality inherent in religious faith and static cultures. In a world characterized by rapid change in mores and values, the "defeated" characters fear that change, that loss of security. His violent and visceral theatre relies on an adept synthesis of realism and expressionism to create the human condition. The condition is incompletion. The "defeated" character lives in an incomplete world seeking or needing integration. Unfortunately for the "defeated" character, there is no synthesis of the opposing and contrasting attitudes expressed in himself and his life-oriented counterpart. For integration to occur, Williams' "defeated" character would ultimately become life-oriented. In all of Williams' plays that present the "defeated" character, this integration never occurs. A play written in 1970 still alludes to the basic irreconcilable forces of life and death, light and dark.

> —There's an edge, a limit to the circle of light. The circle is narrow. And protective. We have to stay inside. It's our existence and our protection. The protection of our existence. It's our home if we have one. . . .[9]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The circle of light stays with me. Until. Until can be held off but not forever eluded.[10]

No complete analysis of Tennessee Williams' plays can appear until the full body of his work is available. Yet it is safe to say that his greatest effect on American drama rests on his past achievements. In this regard; the "defeated" character remains Williams" greatest contribution. For the "defeated" character is a part of all of us. His battle reflects our own individualized efforts to combat the darker forces in our own selves.

## Footnotes to Chapter IV

[1]Tennessee Williams, The Rose Tattoo (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. ix.

[2]Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 85.

[3]Tennessee Williams, "Tennessee Williams Presents His POV," New York Times Magazine (June 12, 1960), p. 19.

[4]Tennessee Williams, Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One-Act Plays (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1953), p. 70.

[5]Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, p. 157.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Nelson, Tennessee Williams: His Life and His Work, p. 253.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Tennessee Williams, Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 5.

[10]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

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