CHAPTER FIVE

"SHEEP BEFORE STORM"*

THE ALIENATED INDIVIDUAL AND TIME

It (the clock) goes tick-tick, it's quieter than your heart-beat, but it's slow dynamite, a gradual explosion, blasting the world we lived in to burnt-out pieces... (Time) Gnaws away, like a rat gnaws off its own foot caught in a trap, and then, with its foot gnawed off and the rat set free, couldn't run couldn't go, bled and 'died....


We have discussed in the previous chapters that the atrophy of faith in the Social Substance (Hegel's term for the objectification of the human spirit, in which the spirit finds the objective form that is essential to its actualization), in other people and in the traditional religious beliefs apotheosised in a benevolent God, has resulted in the individual's feeling alienated from the society, from other people, from religion and consequently from himself. Such feelings of being alienated, of being shoved off from the mainstream, whether geared by an inner necessity for self-actualization or by a sort of painful inability to conform and get lost merrily, sometimes egocentrically deliberate, sometimes dignifiedly spontaneous, seem to have been resolved, more often than

* Title of a Painting by Sidney Cooper, American artist of 19th century.
not, in desperate compromises—through the make-shift agents of escape—drugs, dreams, petty obsessions and intimacies (Williams' term for the physical familiarity) with strangers and interpersonal relationships. These palliatives such as personal relationships and sudden intimacies with strangers and orgasms though relieve them from tension and the feeling of alienation and despair by giving them a sort of euphoria, draws heavily upon the body-lust and the assets of youth which wilts and decays with the ineluctible passage of time—leaving these worshippers of youth in a cul-de-sac of unbearable loneliness. Such characters remind one of frightened sheep in Sidney Cooper's well-known painting—"Sheep Before Storm."

These sheep are struck with surprise and terror when rough winds sweep them off and storm clouds, black and violent, swoop over them. They do not understand such hostile power of nature. They have no power and hope to shield themselves off from the wrath of the invisible forces that threaten to destroy them. They huddle up together, partake of one another's warmth, try to merge into one another—looking at the monstrous formation of clouds, their eyes reflecting a terrible innocence and a reluctant submission to the storm they cannot fight out. Their craving for clinging together is both instinctive and existential. Williams' characters are constantly haunted
by the fear of impermanence. Time is their storm—threatening them with decay and destruction. They run helter-skelter searching for protection in an arid plateau stretching endlessly, get none, then cling to each other, as a last resort, trying to hide themselves ostrich-like in each other's bosom. Life-urge of the mortal creatures vying pathetic defiance the death-urge of the elemental fury of a malignant Nature.

The Princess Kosmonopolis whispers, surrounded by oxygen masks, adrenalin, hashish, wine and cigarettes: "I want to forget everything, I want to forget who I am... (drinking). Please, shut up, I'm forgetting." (Ibid., II, p. 24). Such attempts to forget, such expressions might have aroused fun in the plays of Molier, Chekhov and Oscar Wilde. But Williams repeatedly stresses in most of his plays that characters like the Princess Kosmonopolis, Vee Talbott, Mrs. Goforth, though appear to be a bit ridiculous, should not be taken lightly and they deserve our serious consideration. The Princess here is seriously trying to forget the fact that she has grown old, the fact of her falling out of favour in the gay world. The fact of her decay sticks in her gizzard and she feels restless. The reality is drab and unaccommodating, and oblivion is a solace.

There is no denying the fact that these restless
persons are serious and their concern is for the serious things like decay of youth and facing of the death. They usually give a good fight before they give up. But their desperate struggles against Time and Flux are pathetic, not tragic. While the heroes and the heroines of the tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Strindberg are fighting against imperfections in the human nature and in the universe believing all the while in the perfection and essential goodness of human nature and the universe, taking upon themselves the onerous task of setting right the Time that is out of joint, the heroes and the heroines of Tennessee Williams and also those of most of his contemporary American playwrights are engaged to fight out the guilt in their own psyche. Their condition is like that of soldiers who choose to run away from the battle field and are shot in the back. Then they are aware of the fact that they are doomed and run berserk. Their last fight smacks of a mean desperation. A life time of truancy, narcissism and selfish indulgence is ruthlessly avenged during the miserable moment that crawls between the injury and the death. Margaret observes sarcastically referring to the "spastic colon" of Big Daddy: "Nobody says 'You're dying.' You have to fool them. They have to fool themselves...Because human beings dream of life everlasting, that's the reason. But most of them want it
Williams' protagonists are a bunch of runaway characters wounded by Time. They are too afraid to confront Time and its changes in usual ways. They wish to have the life "everlasting" and youth everlasting, and when their wishes are belied, when their dreams are broken, they, instead of accepting the inevitable course of Time, call it their common enemy and try to fight it out. Had their lives been a confrontation with Life, their confrontation with Death and decrepitude would have acquired a meaningful, even a tragic dimension. But that not being the case, their confrontation with the irreversible events of Time is bound to lose significance. Because what they want is not to stop the wheel of Time completely, but to demand a total physical immunity against time. A very personal immunity. Williams seems to stress in his plays that the old persons are consumed by an implacable hunger for youthful pleasures and are gnawed by a painful feeling of nostalgia, and such obsessions with youth intensify their misery and alienation. Mary Ann Corrigan sums up Williams' conception of time:

*Williams frequently expresses the conflict between real and ideal in temporal terms; time, often an arch-enemy, is ranged with fact, necessity, body, mortality, and locked in combat with eternity, truth, freedom, soul,*
immortality. Williams' dramas are marked by a thematic obsession with time and its effect on human life to such a degree that his whole career can be viewed from the perspective of his changing attitude toward time. (1)

In his first major play, *The Glass Menagerie*, the mother figure, Amanda Wingfield is constantly haunted by her beautiful and romantic memories—Sunday afternoons on the Blue Mountains entertaining her seventeen gentlemen callers, her love for Tom's father whom she chose out of so many richer and worthier wooers. Her present is miserable—poverty, insult of being deserted by her selfish husband, a worthless, and equally selfish son, a crippled, shy morose daughter who cannot get on with strangers, cannot help herself and hangs like a heavy cross upon her, above all her fast fading youth. She perhaps draws her sustenance and tenacity to fight with dignity and heroism for survival from her past. She conjures up the grandeur and romance of the Southern-belle tradition, telling frequently her unbelieving children her chivalrous rejection of many rich suitors and accepting the proposal of Mr. Wingfield for his charm and good-looks, dresses herself in her "terribly old," almost "historical" summer dress, smiles "coyly," shakes "her girlish ringlets" before the first gentleman caller of her daughter,

Laura. Her zest for life, her attempts to defeat or ignore the depression, catastrophe and uncertainty that hang like a dark cloud threatening to engulf her though desperately brave, are really pathetic. (The Glass Menagerie, T. Williams, Penguin Plays, 1945/1970, p. 284).

Amanda Wingfield's "girlish ringlets" lift her temporarily from her ageing, motherly role and place her in a gay southern belle tradition, with its decadent aristocracy and tawdry glitter. For Williams, Amanda is the beginning of an obsession that has not left him till today. Various versions of Amanda, more grotesque, keep on recurring in his plays and stories and novel, and the mother-son relationship changes into, what Henry Popkin calls, a "Gargoyle-Adonis" relationship, and assumes a sort of archetypal pattern. A virile, handsome man in his late twenties or early thirties is confronted with an ageing woman, a spinster, a widow or a married woman with a despised, loveless, impotent husband, a woman who is losing her grip on life and is in desperate need of male virility. The young man invariably possesses, in addition to his physical charm, the innocence of the uninitiated or a semblance of it, and the passionateness of a lover, which the Gargoyle-like/Circe-like voluptuary exploits to her satisfaction. Most often the young man

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happens to be a drop-out in the fashionable world, in the successful, formal and well-adjusted world for his flair of anarchy and primitive unconcern for transparent norms of an over-delicate civilization. He is a lone pilgrim—journeying to an ever receding ideal, vulnerable enough to get stuck like a fly in the marmalade—sometimes knowingly, sometimes in spite of himself—and gets short shrift. Sometimes he, by the sheer force of his virility, dominates the fragile world, by his direct approach insulting its fragility. Stanley Kowalski tells Blanche DuBois about his encounter with a girl who kept on saying: "I am the glamorous type, I am the glamorous type!" I said, "So What?" (Streetcar, Penguin Plays, Sc.2, pp. 136-37). He is simple, straightforward, honest, a little bit on the primitive side on whom a witch of an attractive woman cannot cast a spell. (Ibid., p. 137). They overpower the female Gargoyles, rape or use them and then get rid of them. Sebastian Venable in Suddenly Last Summer, uses his mother Violet, then his cousin Catharine to attract young men for his homosexual acts.

The Glass Menagerie is perhaps Williams' first and last play in which an ageing woman, though she feels nostalgic about her lost youth and grandeur, does not try to get solace in drugs and sex. That is partly because Amanda Wingfield bears the clear stamp of Edwina, Williams' own
mother. The play, as Williams minces no words about it, is dramatization of his family-tragedy—two female characters, Amanda and Laura, are first deserted by the Father and then by the Son.

The play written after it, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, centres round Blanche DuBois who is fast fading. She is exposed to a series of mental and familial calamities—an unhappy marriage with a young homosexual, Alex, who, when exposed, committed suicide; traumatic encounters with death in the family; loss of the ancestral family estate, Belle Reve, to pay off the medicine and churchyard bills and finally her reluctant singleness. Blanche's descent starts, not after the unfortunate death of her young poet husband, but after her experience with death: death of her father, mother, sister Margaret and cousin, Jessie. She nursed them during their dying days, witnessed their desperate struggle with death. She remembers: "Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you, 'Don't let me go!'" Even the old, sometimes, say, "Don't let me go! 'As if you were able to stop them!... I saw! Saw! Saw!... the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!" (*A Streetcar*, p. 127, Sc.1). All her near relatives fought desperately with the Grim Reaper and succumbed. It convinced the lone Survivor, Blanche, that death
is a certainty and is invincible. The last fight of a dying person makes her aware of the fact that the death is like a dark, terrible, strange tunnel into which human victims are pushed violently against their will, and what is in store for them there is shrouded in mystery. This terror of final extrication from a mobile life, from a familiar world, of entering into the terra incognita of stillness and darkness, aggravated, as it were, by its inevitability, forced her to find out certain ways of escape into the light world, or at least make-believe worlds, to forget the nightmarish memory and apprehension of death. Disease is one premonition, ageing is another. Loss of youth, the irreversible flow of Time, her wrinkles, make her instinctively and painfully apprehensive about impending death and as a result, make her grab at the life's joys and possibilities. She wants to reinforce her sagging will with hopes of carving out a niche to hold to. An existential urge for engrossing joys that may make her forget for the time-being the trauma of mortality.

Desire, she realizes, is the opposite of Death. She tells Mitch in a rare moment of lucent soul-searching: "Death— I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are... The opposite is desire! ... Not far from Belle Reve... was a camp where they trained young soldiers. On Saturday nights they would go in town
to get drunk and on the way back they would stagger on to my lawn and call 'Blanche! Blanche!'" (Ibid., Sc.9, p. 206)

She made herself available to the drunken young soldiers and that made her forget, or at least connive at the stark reality of dying groans, deaths, funerals. For Blanche desire, particularly physical desire is a means to counteract the death-awareness. Sex gives an impetus to live, a joie de vivre—and though it cannot vanquish the death-awareness, it can, at best, keep it in abeyance. Sex implies activity, death implies the ceasing of all activity. Sex implies a union, death implies a separation. For a person obsessed with the morbidity of death and fear of annihilation, desire is a proof of the life-force. When she was sinking into the quicksand of despondency, dejection—desire of the body, passions of the mind were her only props. And though such props were not and can never be strong enough to hoist her up from the quicksand, they gave her the joy of hope. It is the preponderance of the death instinct in modern civilization (owing to the cessation of the sublimating power of religion) drives modern man to the refuge of sensations be it in sex, wine or drugs. That is why Sorokin calls it a sensate culture. On the other hand, if we think of Rilke's theme of death, (or even Donne's) it is a manifestation of an ideational culture. These poets
Kazantzakis is of the same category.

Nikos Kazantzakis, in *Toda Raba* relates a peculiar situation of an Indian boatman who struggled for a long time against the current which was pushing his bark towards the cataract and when the great combatant finally understood that his every endeavour would be futile, he crossed his oars and began to sing: "Ah, may this song become my life, I do not hope any more, I do not fear anymore, I am free."

The "combatant" here is very much conscious of the fact that his bark is drifting towards the cataract that would destroy him and his struggle to escape would not yield any result. He crosses his oars and sings not exactly to cheat himself. To call it a self-swindling will be a cruel indictment on human helplessness in face of ineluctable and unsurmountable universal calamity. It would be rather more appropriate to call this action of the "great combatant" a final attempt to live the last few moments at his disposal intensely, engrossingly--so that when the bark would drift near the cataract, he may face his death with courage and a song of freedom, and not with cowardice and terror. Chris Flanders in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, the self-appointed angel of death, moves from one dying monster to another, and tries to fortify
their sagging spirits and advises them to face death as they have faced life.

The intention of giving this example is not to compare the "great combatant" on his bark with Blanche and her tribe, but to contrast them. Their differences are stressed in their attitudes. Both are brave, both are aware of an impending calamity, both give a good fight before resigning, before crossing their oars. But while Blanche shrinks, the oarsman expands; while she hopes too much, he does not hope at all; while she tries to cover up her nervousness with a blanket of implacable lust for life, unable to see the reality, tries to find out a "cleft in the rock of the world" to hide herself in, to give and get the "magic," not to speak the truth but "what ought to be the truth," (A Streetcar, Sc.9, pp. 204-205), the oarsman faces the cataract without fear. The oarsman dies a richer, a better, a free person. On the other hand, Blanche, in order to overcome or allay the trauma of death, picks up drunken soldiers at Belle Reve, a very young boy student in her school, and many customers in notorious hotels in Laurel, such as the Flamingo. The customers in Laurel were her gentlemen visitors who wanted dates with her and then laid her and rejected her.

Such encounters with men instead of rescuing her
from the fatal quicksand helped to drown her, precipitated her fall. "People don't see you"—she tells Stella frankly, "don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you have got to have your existence admitted... You've got to be soft and attractive. And I... I'm fading now." (A Streetcar, Sc.V, p. 169). She is scared now because she is losing her charm and youth to attract men. She again informs Mitch in a tone of confession and self-justification: "Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection." (Ibid., Sc.IX, pp. 204-205).

Williams leaves no room, nor is there any point to judge Blanche's actions, her passionate overtures from a moral standpoint. Morality apart, her life is a series of tricks and escapes and self-defeating contradictions. She is portrayed as a puritanic, delicate, sophisticated, aristocratic southern Belle, but at the same time she chooses to sell her virtues cheap—seducing young boys, making herself easily available to strangers as whores do, shrinking from the light lest it should reveal her fading youth, resorting to falsehood and deceit. John Gassner is justly bewildered while considering the character of Blanche. He points out that a young, puritanic woman who was shocked and disillusioned after discovering
that her young husband was a pervert, a passive homosexual, and drove him to suicide by taxing him about his sexual deviation, has no reason to turn a nymphomaniac after that shock. "I would sooner conclude," observes Gassner, "that such disenchantment with marriage would have cooled her sexual ardour instead of permanently inflaming it...and I shall not even stop to consider the subtle question of how a nymphomaniacal lady can, strictly speaking, be violated."  

The brave "combatant" in Kazantzakis' parable does not succumb to despair in the face of impending death; his resigning to the current is prudence, like the attitude of a fighter for a cause, who is facing execution, and smilingly places his head in the block when the axe of the executioner is raised. He knows that any amount of desperation, scratching, wailing, resistance would not alter his destiny. The inevitable must happen, and it is wiser to accept it with courage, than with trembling and jitters. Blanche tries to runaway from reality. Like Laura Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, she recoils into the twilight world of illusion and make-believe. Illusion can never be a substitute for reality, nor can it obliterate reality. At best it can placate reality for the time being. A person counting on illusion to escape the stern reality,

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only connives at the fact, averts his look from the inexorable catastrophe. Such persons are invariably doomed and defeated. As their chance liaisons with strangers do not endure, they land them in a worse plight. Williams invariably crowds his stage with the miserable characters who cannot bear the sight of a wrinkle on their bodies. These intrepid existentialists are always on the prowl for titillations, orgasms—jumping nervously from one distraction to another—searching for a point of satiety. Williams has all sympathy for such defeated, unhappy, doomed persons, and tries to arouse the sympathy of his readers and the audience. But sometimes their relentless preoccupation with decrepitude and death, and gratification, impairs their credibility. And, in spite of the fact that Williams overdoes their paranoia and their narcissistic indulgence, their problems in facing death and decay, in coping with the loss of the paradise of youth, their failures to strike up a lasting rapport with the world outside—all contributing to their alienation—seem to give their individual misery a broader significance.

Chance Wayne in his last speech implores the audience to recognize him in themselves. He is the representative of all humanity seized by Time from within—Time that operates imperceptibly to destroy them. He says, "I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding—"
even that—no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all." Williams unmistakably speaks in Chance Wayne, trying to stress his point that the suffering of the hero is symptomatic of persons living in Time, hence universal. (Sweet Bird of Youth, Act III, Penguin Plays, p. 111).

The "Gargoyle-Adonis" pattern is clearly visible in A Streetcar Named Desire. Blanche DuBois is the ageing and fading woman. Alex, the beautiful, poet-husband, the 17-year school boy, Mitch and Stanley—are Adonis type—young, attractive. Alex died young, and her flirtation with her young student was brief, though it threw her out of her job. Both Mitch and Stanley are virile, strong-bodied, young males—desired by Blanche. She flirted with Stanley—had a love-hate, appreciation-depreciation tension with him. Though she was raped by him, it was she who played the seducer. She gave him the clue and he rose only to her expectation. "The only way to live with such a man," observes Blanche, "is to--go to bed with him!" (A Streetcar, Sc.4, p. 161). This attitude corroborates excellently and appropriately Stanley's words when he rapes her: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Ibid., Sc.10, p. 215). She tries to bewitch an inherently good and innocent Mitch. But the flirt in her triumphs over the beloved in her. Stanley breaks the
match, but he is as much to blame for shattering her last hope for a foothold as she is to blame for posing and hiding and lying. She is not cut out for being a domesticated wife of a person like Mitch. She is a fugitive, a typical Williams' fugitive like Val Xavier, who when she tries to settle down in a normal fashion goes against her grain and gets destroyed. She is straitjacketed and Val is burnt alive.

In another play—Sweet Bird of Youth (1959), Williams presents the gorgon Alexandra Del Lago, the ex-film and ex-stage actress moving with her pseudo name The Princess Kosmonopolis and Chance Wayne, a male-at-stud. "I knew in my heart," she tells Chance, "that the legend of Alexandra Del Lago could not be separated from an appearance of youth." (Sweet Bird, Penguin Plays, Act I, Sc.1, p. 32). She cannot bring herself to admit the fact that she has grown old and wrinkled, and is no more in demand in the gay world of the theatre and cinema. She tries to convince her young male partner that she is not actually old, but she is not young enough, not as young as she was. She vividly describes her first discovery of her loss of youth when the brutally truthful camera advanced for a close-up on her face, light blazing on it, and all her "terrible history" screamed when she smiled. Unlookers looked aghast, terribly embarrassed. She heard
their shocked whispers": "Is that her?" (Ibid., Act I, Sc.1, p. 34).

She wanted to hide herself and started running. She has never stopped running for a jiffy, changed her name so that the legend of Alexandra Del Lago would not be associated with the decay of youth. She wanted to forget that traumatic moment of truth, drowning her senses in wine, all sorts of narcotic drugs, hasish, cigarettes, trying to calm down her turbulent passion. "You see," she informs Chance, "I couldn't get old with that tiger still in me raging." (Ibid., Act I, Sc.1, p. 33). She feels lost in a world where people stare at her altered body, not with envy and desire, but with pity. She desperately tries to run away from her familiar world and from herself. She, like Blanche DuBois and Amanda Wingfield, creates a make-believe world, but such a world only accommodates her for a while, and then jettisons her to the blazing reality. The tiger never stops raging.

She discovers in sex a more lingering sedative. The play centres round her confrontation with a handsome, young man, Chance Wayne. Williams also points out that Chance is not so young, and is suffering from the same sort of fear. He has run away from Laurel, his native town, after infecting his beloved, Heavenly Finley, with venereal disease. Heavenly, the daughter of Boss Finley, a powerful demagogue
of the town, had her uterus removed and her father tried
to get Chance castrated. Chance, after leaving his town,
made his looks and virility his profession. As a veri-
table male-prostitute, he sold his sexual prowess to rich
widows and sex-starved women. He informs The Princess
Kosmonopolis that from his very birth, he was meant to
be different from others—a twelve-pound baby with type
'X' in his blood—the best-looking lad of the town:
"Maybe the one one I was truly meant for, love-making...
slept in the social register of New York! Millionaire's
widows and wives and debutante daughters of such famous
names as...I gave people more than I took. Middle-aged
people I gave back a feeling of youth...." (Ibid., Act I,
Sc.2, p. 45).

The Princess Kosmonopolis hires him for her hed,
hoping that love-making can give her an illusion of
youth. Second, her dalliance with a young, dashing,
virile man can give her a feeling that they are two
ardent young lovers and enable her to get a glimpse of
the love which she lacked in her youth. It is evidently
a chance encounter of an aged woman who can buy, with a
man who is very cheaply purchasable. Both flaunt their
charm, physical beauty and intrepid youth which they are
fast losing. He is no more the most attractive man in
the town, balding prematurely. She is no more young to be
desired by young men. Like two declined whores, one male; one female, they are no more wanted by their customers, and cling to each other to assuage their personal despair. Old Casanova and old Marguerite Gautier in Camino Real—are drawn to each other on the arid plaza of Camino Real—not because they choose each other for the love-play, but because they have no one else to go to—faded, as they are, beyond recognition. Marguerite, after being swindled by a young man, comes back to her old lover Casanova and observes cynically: "Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for." (Camino Real, T. Williams, Penguin Plays, Block 7, p. 174).

Tennessee Williams seems to implore his audience and readers to look at these troubled, suffering characters with sympathy and understanding, to see the skull beneath the skin. They are different from the common lot who take their physical changes easy, or are at least emotionally incapacitated to bother too much about old age and death—and their uniqueness rests primarily on their inability to cope with the current that sweeps them down. They do not check the current nor swim upstream, and are swept away just like their more numerous and yielding brethren, but they, more than others, feel their plight. Reluctant to be swept away so ignobly,
they rage a little, scowl a little, splash around a little—and when they fail, they quickly go to distractions as a means of escape. They cannot take their defeat lying down. As we have discussed earlier, such characters populating Williams' stage, are defeated, and their defeat tortures them. They sometimes steal our sympathy; sometimes, by their paranoic angularity and over indulgence, forfeit our sympathy. Amanda and Laura in The Glass Menagerie, Hannah Jelkes in The Night of the Iguana, Catharine Holly in Suddenly Last Summer, Kilroy in Camino Real, Lot Revenstock in Kingdom of Earth and Serafina in The Rose Tattoo—get our sympathy because they fight bravely against insurmountable odds, and their suffering and punishment exonerate them from their vulnerability and eccentricity. On the other hand, Princess Kosmonopolis and Chance Wayne in Sweet Bird of Youth, Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire, Marguerite Gautier in Camino Real, Val Xavier and Lady Torrance in Orpheus Descending, Mrs. Sissy Goforth and Christopher Flanders in The Milk Train, Reverend Shannon in The Night of the Iguana, Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer, Miriam in In The Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Trinket and Celeste in the Mutilated, The Gnadiges Fraulein in the play The Gnadiges Fraulein, Leona and Violet in Confessional and Mrs. Stone and Paolo in the novel The Roman Spring of
Mrs. Stone--fail most often to arouse our credence and sympathy because their sufferings lack direction, their characters and minds are tangled skeins of self-defeating contradictions which prevent our empathetic participation in their problems. They appear to be types collected without much insight from the realm of abnormal psychology, a grotesque parade of inmates of an American Bedlam. They are not evil; they are not hatable; they are not lovable either. They are weird puppets, unreal, abnoxious, crazy. They are a burrow of trapped rats scampering helter-skelter for an outlet, finding none, bumping into one another, straying into blind alleys, bent upon striking up mutual intimacies to tolerate the sense of confinement, frisking, fantasticating, fornicating and malingering to kill time, to forget the fear of uncertainty.

These two central characters, The Princess and Chance, in _Sweet Bird of Youth_, feel acutely alienated even while making love, because they mate like two animals, without the slightest understanding of each other's minds. Each feels exploited by the other, each wants to exploit the other. After every bout of love-making, both of them feel castrated. The Princess informs Chance that if he stays back in Laurel, Boss Finley would have him castrated. "That can't be done to me twice," retorts Chance. "You did that to me this morning, here on this bed!" "Age does the
same thing to a woman" laments the Princess. (Ibid., Act III, p. 108). Chance had contaminated Heavenly with an incurable venereal disease and doctors had to "castrate" her to save her life. Boss Finley who declares himself to be the self-styled Messiah to protect the purity of the Southern white blood, picked up a Negro youth at random and got him castrated. The theme of "castration" is the clue to understand the play. Time castrates ageing people, men castrate young people. Castration is not only physical, but also mental and symbolic. The castration that Chance talks about is mental. He is hired by a nymphomaniacal old lady to make love to her whenever she likes, whenever she feels that she is rendered sexless by Time, whenever she recovers from her drugged euphoria. He is the paid gigolo, he is a type of drug. Sex is degraded to sheer carnality. He feels bitterly that he is very disposable and dispensable—as easily available as a plastic male organ sold in the department stores. Such sordid misuse of his virility emasculates him emotionally.

The Princess, on her part, also feels sexually enucleated by Time. For her hired bed-mate, she is not a woman but a female genital. She knows she is pitied, even despised by the man who makes love to her. Physical intimacy, if it's not accompanied and replenished by
mental intimacy, gives a sinister hangover, a feeling of utter emptiness—and psychologically, such aberrations, if carried to any great length, deaden sensitivity and impoverish the mind. This old Gorgon has no glut in her desire for sex, as she has no glut in her desire for narcotics. She is castrated both by her age and her emotional bankruptcy.

Castration is symbolic in the sense that these people, though indulging incessantly in love-making, do not create. Sex, divested of its role as a creative force, as a uniting force, is dull, mechanical, irrelevant and barren. This feeling of barren-ness renders all their actions meaningless. They are invariably disgusted with themselves, they disgust each other. The creative and sustaining force of humanity disowns them, rejects them. "Monsters don't die early;" The Princess tells Chance, "they hang on long. Awfully long. Their vanity is infinite, almost as infinite as their disgust with themselves...." (Ibid., Act III, p. 104). They, when they begin to hate themselves, and try to use others as gadgets of their meaningless titillations, have nowhere to go—and in the process are alienated from themselves and from others. Time threatens them with decay and annihilation, and they reckon its invincible sway. Then desperately and selfishly they grab at petty distractions of pleasure and
oblivion to forget the pain of their being victimized by Time. But these petty distractions fail utterly to accommodate these fragile butterflies against the inclemency of change—for they are anchored on plasé narcissism which is indistinguishable from self-disgust.

When Blanche says that desire is the opposite of death, she perhaps refers to that sort of desire which can be an adequate force to counteract death—a fiery biological—emotional urge that is like a burning hearth—dispelling darkness and iciness of the underworld—giving as much light as heat.

But Blanche can be equivocal, or she is indulging in one of her intellectual make-believes. She makes a genuine statement—impossible to refute. Desire undoubtedly is the sine qua non of existence. But Williams does not help us to believe at least in his plays that the desires weird characters hold fast to can be powerful enough to fight out their feelings of insecurity and death. The ageing lady—young gigolo—archetypal pattern pervading his plays debases desire: a fatal sport of two monsters/pleasure-hunting animals preying upon each other. Williams states frequently through his characters that a lasting bond between two persons, their emotional, spiritual, biological étreison can endow their actions and lives with an authenticity, and that authenticity can fight out the
terror of ageing and death. In *Summer and Smoke*, Alma tells John Buchanon: "There are some women who turn a possible beautiful thing into something no better than coupling of beasts—-but love is what you make it...Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some people, there are some women, John—who can bring their hearts to it, also—who can bring their souls to it." (*Summer and Smoke*, New York, New Directions, 1948). Just in the same manner Blanche tells Stanley Kowalski: "A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life—immeasurably! I have those things to offer...Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart—and I have all of those things—aren't taken but grow! Increase with the years!" (*A Streetcar*, Sc.10, p. 211). Williams through Alma and Blanche defines desire in its noble, beautiful form which can enrich the lives of lovers.

It is quite unlikely that these two genteel Southern ladies with such potentiality for love and enduring relationship, such subtle understanding of the nature of the death-defeating desire, can turn out to be prostitutes--to decide to cast their "pearls before swine!" (*Ibid.*, Sc.10, p. 212). Do they rise up to their own expectations? Or does their author succeed in making his heroines healthy
enough to carry the burden of his ideals? The author, like his heroines, seems to have fobbed us off with fortuitous rhetorics, with empty promises he never wants to keep. If love is so pliant and brittle, how can it save its adherents from the powerful calamity of decay and death? How can it give them an illusion of authenticity they badly need? Persons capable of love, must be capable of suffering. Suffering, occasioned by the denial of love, leaves no room for alienation and feeling of being lost. But these two advocates of love—after mouting high terms like—mind, heart, soul, richness of spirit and "beautiful thing,"—when disappointed, turn quickly to base palliatives—flirting with strangers, becoming prostitutes. Prostitution is not and cannot be a substitute for love, cannot be synonymous with the "desire" that Blanche talks about. It is the very negation of both. "Prostitution," observes Fritz Pappenheim, "...presses the sexual life of the individual into forms which allow only a completely impersonal relationship and represent the deepest negation of a genuine love bond." (4)

The debasement of desire goes side by side with the unwillingness to suffer. The pleasure is pursued to avert unpleasant reality. In the dramatic world of Williams, pleasure is also debased into perversions of all

imaginable types. Again, the strangers, the lonely persons turn to for support, most often turn out to be "the surrogates of that Death which haunts both Williams' imagination and the world of his plays." (5)

The word "perversion" smacks of a sort of ethical judgement. Before we dub a particular sexual behaviour as perverted, we believe in normal or more common forms of sexual behaviour. In a work of art the deviant sexuality in a character resides in the mind of the artist and in the attitude of the character himself. A relationship between two individuals, male-male, female-female or female-male, remains normal as long as the writer and these characters take it to be normal and spontaneous. Only when the writer and his characters, with puritanic and obscurantistic predilections, are gnawed by a sense of guilt, the sexual behaviour loses its healthy spontaneity and becomes a sick perversion. In a story—"Daphnis and Chloe"—Greek writer Longus (2nd century A.D.) introduces homosexual love. The young man, Gnatho who is in love with the irresistible boy, Daphnis, defends his passion before Astylus: "We lovers, Sir, are never curious about such things as those. But wheresoever we meet with beauty, there undoubtedly we are caught." The young man does not understand why his sincere passion for a boy lovelier than

any girl, with blond hair and marble-smooth cheeks should be looked down upon while the love between Daphnis and Chloe is celebrated. Here the author rises above the puritanical characters by making Gnatho a credible person who deserves our deep sympathy. The character is not a pervert because he is not bitten by a sense of guilt, because his heart is as pure, his love is as intense as that of the pair of heterosexual lovers. Homosexual heroes of Shakespeare and Marlowe do not arouse our disgust, because these writers do not think them to be disgusting. Plato in *The Symposium* describes the nature of the homosexual love—a sort of necessary and healthy intimacy between two males:

...the men who are a section of the male, and while they are young, being the piece of the man, they hang about him and embrace him, and they are themselves the best of boys and youths, because they have the most manly nature...And when they reach manhood they are lovers of youth, and are not naturally inclined to marry or beget children, which they do, if at all, only in obedience to the law, but they are satisfied if they may be allowed to live unwedded; and such a nature is prone to love and ready to return love, always embracing that which is akin to him. And when one of them finds his other half, whether he be a lover or youth or lover of another sort, the pair are lost in amazement of love and friendship and intimacy...yet they could not explain what they desire of one another. For the intense yearning which each of them has towards the other does not appear to be the desire of intercourse, but of something else which the soul desires and cannot tell, and of which she has only a dark and doubtful presentiment. (6)

In the same book Alcibiades sportively narrates his several attempts to seduce Socrates. The wise, ancient Greek audience that listens to such confessions—does not look down, does not protest. The hoary elders might have smiled with a mild rebuke. The homosexual relationship, as we have seen in Plato, Longus, Shakespeare and Marlowe, is not tainted with moralistic indignation, hence has purity, dignity and "tragic" possibilities.

Tennessee Williams, on the other hand, is very much conscious of the fact that homosexuality is unnatural and sinful, is hell-bent to exonerate the deviant sex. A close reading of his plays and stories reveals that Williams, despite his polemics about "benevolent anarchy," "dynamism," nonconformity, avant-garde barbarism, (7) despite his flouting of 'decency' (Val in Orpheus Descending: What's 'decent' it's disgusting....p. 181, Act 2, Sc.2) and "modesty" (Mrs. Goforth in The Milk Train: Modesty? Modesty? I wouldn't expect you to suffer from modesty, Chris...Sc.VI, p. 215), he always remains a puritan, a sleezy-headed puritan as much as his grandparents. His statements such as "I don't believe in 'original sin.' I don't believe in 'guilt'. I don't believe in villains or heroes—only right or wrong ways that

individuals have taken, not by choice but by necessity or by certain still-uncomprehended influences in themselves, their circumstances, and their antecedents," (8) sound like condescending observation of a psychoanalyst. First, all possible vices, even the darkest of the kind, seen through the broad spectrum of Williams' definition, would glow like rainbows. Second, the predatory characters like Boss Finley, the Nazis of The Night of the Iguana, Cooper and Mae in Cat, Jabe Torrance in Orpheus Descending and Stanley and his tribe in A Streetcar who are described as vile, may have their own reasons to be 'wrong.' He remains an incorrigible puritan, and thinks that the deviant and corrupt behaviours deserve punishment. His heroes and heroines never escape punishment, and what is interesting, the author very cryptically suggests that they suffer for their guilt. Shannon suffers the pain of crucifixion on a hammock, perhaps, for his own sins—fornication and heresy, and even decides to go back to preach. Sebastian is eaten away alive by a gang of beggars because he is a homosexual, and wants to know about God more than he is permitted to know. Val Xavier is burnt alive by the blow-torches because he is entangled in a clandestine sexual relationship with someone else's wife. Chance Wayne is castrated because he infects

(8) T. Williams, Where I Live, pp. 91-92.
his lady-love with an incurable venereal disease, because he sells his physical charm and virility to rich old ladies. Blanche DuBois is straitjacketed because she makes herself easily available to strangers. Undoubtedly these characters suffer or die for more reasons than one—caught inescapably in complex, dramatic situations, but the dramatist always hints that they are destroyed by the poison which springs from their own guilt as much as it springs from the corruption of other people. Puritanism is so much entrenched in his nature, that it gets the better of him when he writes a creative piece—a story, a play, a novel. He is very conscious when he sits down to write an essay, to theorize, to write a preface or to give an interview. He is perhaps ashamed to admit that entrenched puritanism in him and tries to cover it up. Harold Clurman observes that his characters are torn between the god-seeking impulse and pull of desire and that reveals Williams' "puritan consciousness." (9) Not only his tormented character's soul and body are at odds, but his constant conflicts of what he should become and what he has become, his judging self and his acting self, his moral nature and his immoral pursuits of pleasure—do not lead him to a point of truce.

Blanche's husband Alex, a very beautiful young

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(9) Quoted by Robert W. Corrigan.
A poet—a type described by Plato—is discovered by his wife while indulging in a homosexual activity. When he is informed that she has seen it, he is so much ashamed that he immediately kills himself. Rosario, the Son in the one-act play—"The Purification..." is implicated for having committed incest with his sister Elena. When asked to plead his case, instead of confessing it outright, he tries clumsily to hide beneath wet and lacquered poetry and finally kills himself. Brick's intimacy with Skipper, as it is hinted in the play, can be very pure and Platonic. Brick laments that the society infected with mendacity and a prurient puritanism, cannot accept the fact that two friends can love each other in a healthy manner. He is quite right in his condemnation. If these two friends are above the mean, suspicious puritanic society, if they truly believe that they are drawn to each other for nobler reasons than sheer carnality— they have no reason to take the world's accusations so seriously. Skipper kills himself out of shame and self-disgust. Brick keeps on drinking to forget his shame. It is not the "mendacity" of the world and other people, but their own "mendacity," their sense of guilt that torments them and destroys them. Because of their own strong puritanic attitudes, their suffering and death taint them with corruption rather than exonerate them. They
disgust us because they are disgusted with themselves owing to their corruption.

Williams, in all of his stories and plays, parades before his audience a long line of aberrations, sexual or otherwise: fetishism, onanism, rape, castration, prostitution, sadism, masochism, cannibalism, mutilation, sadomy, lesbianism, incest, murder, adultery, alcoholism, drug-addiction, transvestism, neurosis, paranoia, schizophrenia and nymphomania. An art connoisseur Leonard talks to Miriam about his art collection, in *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*:

Leonard: My gallery has exhibited the work of painters that painted with their toes. We even have one that paints with his penis.

Miriam: Erect or soft?


The playwright is criticized for wearing his heart on his sleeves for his inability to maintain a minimum artistic distance from his dramatic alter egos. And for his peculiar ability to skip from love and pure interpersonal relationships to the abyss of all imaginable forms of perversions, from spirit to flesh, with an embarrassing ease, one may suspect it to be a failure of artistic sensibility. As we have stated earlier, cruelty and perversions have their rightful place in the works of
art, because they are a part of life. We find them in plenty in the Greek dramatists—Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, in Seneca, in Shakespeare, Webster, Marlowe, in the later period in Strindberg, Marquis de Sade, Lorca, Albert Camus, Henry Miller and O'Neill. It is the way the author looks at his themes, at the world around him, at life itself—that makes the difference. It has to be considered whether the writer who portrays all types of evil themes, has a vision that can contain God in the Heaven, Man on the Earth and the Devil in the underworld simultaneously and judge their power, their possibility and their limitation. In the hand of a writer devoid of such a vision, ugly themes would appear uglier, violent themes more violent, vile themes more vile. Brooks Atkinson observes that Williams' works after The Glass Menagerie, began to display a "streak of savagery. The humour is bitter. The ugliness is shocking. He has come a long way since 1945—growing in mastery of the theatre, developing power widening in scope....(But), believing in the validity of what he is saying, Mr. Williams has made an art out of malignance and maleficence, like Remy de Gourmont or Baudelaire." (10) Most of Williams' protagonists belong to the category of deeply disturbed people. They brood too much.

(10) Contemporary Authors, "T. Williams", p. 1255.
talk too much about their misery and also suffer too much. They also try to convince us that they have enough reasons to feel disturbed, and the people are to blame if they fail to understand them and show concern for them. Sometimes they suffer for general causes such as human decadence and mortality, the enigmatic nature of the Universe and God, Gipsy tells Kilroy in Camino Real:

"We're all of us guinea pigs in the laboratory of God. Humanity is just a work in progress... Baby, your luck ran out the day you were born." (Camino Real: Penguin Plays, Block 12, pp. 203-4). Val informs Lady..."We're under a life-long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth." (Orpheus Descending, Penguin Plays, Act II, p. 284).

Chance Wayne implores the audience to recognize the enemy, Time, in them all. Of course, they speak more or less the same thing, that man is damned from his birth. Sometimes they suffer for particular causes—such as the cruelty of others, their being exploited and maltreated by predatory persons, and their guilt-consciousness, their smitten conscience for not being what they ought to be. But, for all such theorizing on sombre issues like Time, God, Mortality, Human Guinea Pigs and Nature of Guilt, Tennessee Williams is no philosopher, nor does he pretend to be one. The reason is that for all these mind-boggling
issues he has a quick solution, a piece of advice: "Mortals, make the best of what you have yet to spend. All-annihilating catastrophe is coming up. But, mind you, whatever you do, do with a heavy heart. You're not like ordinary, well-adjusted mortals who enjoy and live flam-buoynantly."

Williams' protagonists do not fit into the normal, ship-shape world. They are always after some ideals. Kilroy snubs Rosita: "I have ideals." (Camino Real, Block 3, p. 144). They have hearts as big as the heads of babies. They are great dreamers and want to actualize their dreams. They invariably believe that most people have no such high ideals, their hearts are as small as pea-nuts and they are downright realists. These idealistic dreamers also indulge in self-loathing and self-disgust, often deriving a vicarious pleasure out of it, while other people are quite contented with themselves. They are always avid for experience, dynamic and restless while others are stagnant. Williams confesses that he cannot handle people in routine situations. He dislikes the monotonous individual and praises, as Signi Falk says, "the irresponsible vagrant who walks alone in search of experience and high-pitched emotion and who indulges in self-loathing, self-worship, or self-pity." (11)

(11) Ibid., p. 1255.
Signi Falk is right. These "irresponsible vagrants" wander around to bump into strange circumstances and collect experiences. Polly, the society Editor of the Cocaloony Gazette, is out searching for scandals for her gossip columns, loses concentration while synchronizing rockers with a slovenly bitch called Molly, cries "Moooo" like a cow in heat at the sight of the stud, Indian Joe who repeats—"I feel like a bull"—and follows him to be fucked by him in the dormitory. (The Gnadiges Fraulein: Dragon Country, New York, New Direction, 1970).

It is interesting to see a character, searching for scandals, to get the first hand experience by being entangled in a scandal. Polly is a case in point. She can be taken as a symbol, a representative of all those Williams' "permanent transients" who grope for experiences simply for the sake of them. This is absurdity in the absolute sense. Experiences, if ever they would have any relevance for life, for meaning, for art, have to be harvested in the process of living. "High-pitched emotion" and sensations come to persons, both in life and in drama, who least expect them and who have no presentiment to go searching for them.

Regarding 'ideals,' Williams has little to offer in the way of explanation. What exactly can be the "ideals" of Blanche DuBois, Kilroy, Tom, Val Xavier, Chance Wayne,
Chris Flanders, Mrs. Goforth, Sebastian and Reverend Shannon? Williams keeps us guessing. Freedom from the family, from the Church, from the social taboos? Search for Truth, for Life, for Meaning, for God? Can suffering and death make martyrs of those who seek without knowing what they are seeking, who struggle without knowing what they are struggling for? Of course, it is not in the fitness of things to praise or blame a play for what is not there. But it is worth trying to find out the "ideals" in Williams' plays when all of his protagonists are going crazy over them. Mrs. Goforth, through with her salacious life-story, suddenly finds herself searching for "The Meaning of Life" as if it is a morphine tablet dropped from her hand. (The Milk Train, Sc. 5, pp. 178-79). Perhaps, she begins searching for "the Meaning of Life" when she shuns her film career, never goes beyond the words, forgets as quickly as she remembers, or having realized that she cannot get the Meaning of Life, she reaches for alternatives--recounting her juicy past, injecting morphine into her blood and informing Chris: "Y'know what I need to shake off this depression?... I need me a lover," (p. 158) again: "I do need male company, Blackie, that's what I need to be me." (p. 148).

These eternal wanderers in the forest of modern scientific-technological civilization are doomed from the
very beginning not because they fail to reach their destination but because they have no destination at all. Even when defeated, the seeker for a goal has a significance. But a wanderer in search of experiences, becomes protean during his endless wanderings, secedes from the centre, from society, from belief, from self, from family, counting on the kindness of strangers profiting temporarily from such odd encounters, and finally experiences an emptiness. Val Xavier compares himself with a tiny bird that has no feet, no ability to walk on the ground, it keeps on flying in the high air until it dies and falls on the ground. Both Lady and Val want to be such birds so that they won't be "corrupted." (Orpheus Descending, Act I, p. 279). If the bird can be taken as a symbol, God's "perfect creature," it stands for the freedom, a sort of ethereal freedom, far above the corruption of the earth, living and dying in the air: a symbol which Williams' fugitives aspire relentlessly to attain. Lady, an earthy and almost "settled" woman, is prepared to sacrifice all her assets to have a brief taste of such perfect freedom. Williams seems to stress that these characters are constantly pulled by two polarities—their downright earthiness and their inner aspiration for higher altitudes, and their misery begins when they, in their frantic bid, attempt to surrender their earthiness
and conformity and are poised for the flight. Val and Lady are killed when they attempt to follow the trail of the bird. Most of his fugitive characters, sometimes tired of their excessive indulgence in ephemeral pleasures, sometimes shocked by the discovery of their falling-worth in the youthful world and sometimes unable to get along with the world because of their built-in angularities, spread out their wings to escape into aereal heights of freedom, and perish en route. Like trained falcons, they try to fight out their allegiance to their falconer, the world, burning with the desire for the vastness of the sky. Williams' plays most often centre round such queer, confused birds who, when on earth look longingly at the sky and when on the sky look longingly at the earth. They never get beyond such dilemmas, such an attraction—revulsion syndrome. The dramatist seems to capitalize on their dual allegiance—their swinging between their body-urge and soul-urge. He is so much preoccupied with such dramatic tugs-of-war, he does not bother much about defeat or victory. The act of tugging seems to be self-contained. Such preoccupation with the struggle, though it gives his plays an engrossing theatricality, limits their dimension.

As we have discussed earlier, Williams' protagonists search for "ideals" for the sake of ideals, search
for pleasure for the sake of pleasure, search for freedom for the sake of freedom. In their haste and tension, they fail to analyse and approximate the exact nature of their searchings, their ideals, their pleasures and freedom. They all feel or their author makes them feel that there is something wrong, something retarding about their lives—which others, being coarse, do not have the privilege to feel—that they, being more sensitive, have every reason to feel disturbed, and consequently alienated.

But what seems to have escaped both the author and his protagonists is the fact that a thing pursued for itself, be it freedom or pleasure, has no relevance outside of itself. It has to relate itself to something higher, something universal to acquire authenticity. Freedom is essential for any kind of growth, but never can be a mission and self-substantive goal. Pleasure, likewise, when instead of being a byproduct of meaningful occupation, becomes an end in itself, is bound to be pathological, and may lead to all types of aberrations, such as, animalism, homosexuality, sadomasochism and narcissism. We find them profusely in the plays of Williams. Such morbid preoccupation with an excessive indulgence is followed by a vexation of spirit which leads to a state of alienation. Such characters living in excess of youth are unable to cope with its decay. They try to create a
world of make-believe into which they recoil to escape the bright light of reality. Their hysterics and neurosis are a facade behind which they conceal themselves.

Jean Paul Sartre, writing about "authenticity," observes that a man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver. A person who wills freedom for itself ignoring freedom of others commits an error of judgement, and his action lacks authenticity. (12)

When a person is capable of relating himself to others in a meaningful way, when he is willing to love something or someone outside of himself, a cause or an individual, not by making himself completely available to the loved object, not by trying to possess it/him symbiotically, but by surrendering his narcissism, when he chooses not to remain at the receiving-end but at the transmitting-end, then his life instead of becoming a tangled skein of hungers, whimpers and orgasms, becomes a chapter of significant suffering and creative joy. Not through selfish appetites and their appeasements, but through an extension of the self and an appreciation of appetite of others, can a person attain authenticity. Love, as the term is implied here, does not mean either to lose one's identity or to make

someone else to lose his identity. It is the capacity
to demand a great deal from one's own self and to inspire
that capacity in another—thereby establishing a link
that connects one's own inner needs with those of another,
and helping both to escape the snares of selfish love.
Here it would be necessary to revert to the central pre­
mise of the chapter—that the lack of authenticity in a
character's attitudes, actions and occupations is the
cause of his feeling alienated.

Tennessee Williams, as we have discussed earlier,
brings upon the stage a set of protagonists who seem to
be bedevilled by their own fickle pursuits. They are
sensitive enough to feel the agony of estrangement, more
bitterly than others who take it lying down. But their
high sensitivity, instead of propelling them to self­
scrutiny, pushes them to the petrifying edge of neurosis—
they invariably indulge in the self-evasive polemics and
self-justifying rigmaroles, and they do not improve their
condition. Either Williams tries to reveal through the
catastrophes that befall his characters that evasion is
not enough, that evasion is not a force to counteract the
corrosive force of Time, or he, like his doomed characters,
believes it is—we cannot be sure, but whatever be his
intention, his way of presentation convinces us that these
characters mean what they talk, what they suffer, that,
what Signi Falk says, he seems "to glamorize decay in a kind of specious, poetic writing." (13)

Williams is at his poetic best when he glamorizes sex. Most of his characters believe that they are confined in their skin-cage, sentenced to the solitary confinement inside their own skins. And as Francis L. Kunkel notes:

Parole is by way of sex; they regard sex as a means of salvation. They make love in order to interrupt loneliness. Some, like Blanche DuBois and Alma Winemiller, fail altogether to communicate with another human being: they stumble on angst and quail before the void. The sexual union, which they fastidiously mistake for a more encompassing one, destroys them. Some achieve rapport with another human being, but most of those who do, like Val and Chance, pay a terrifyingly high price for it. Sex leads to violent destruction and terrible punishment. (14)

Williams' attitude towards sex as a means of salvation and damnation, is highly confusing. Not only the deviant sex, but also regular sex, is associated with a feeling of guilt and retribution. The Stanley—Stella relationship, though it seems to be culmination of Lawrentian body-worship, is viewed with lack of sympathy. Stanley is coarse-grained and comes with low animal groans; beats his wife, then makes a hasty truce with her; unbuttons her blouse and reaches for her breasts when she breaks

(13) Contemporary Authors, p. 1255.
(14) Francis L. Kunkel, Passion And the Passion, pp. 105-106.
down into a sobbing fit when her sister is sent to a lunatic asylum. Stella’s voluptuous masochism is perfectly matched with the virile sadism of Stanley. Stanley is the "gaudy seed-bearer" and Stella is the fertile field who enjoys thoroughly being ploughed. "There are things," confesses Stella, "that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant." (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 162, Sc.4). She also tells Blanche: "Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our wedding night—soon as we came in here—he snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing the light-bulbs with it...I was—a sort of—thrilled by it." (Ibid., p. 157). Blanche, flabbergasted by such facts and the pride and impudence with which her own sister, a member of the Belle Reve aristocracy narrates them, strikes back: "What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another... A man like that is someone to go out with—once—twice—three times when the devil is in you. But live with! Have a child by? ... I tremble for you! I just—tremble for you." (Ibid., p. 162). Stanley is born under the sign of Capricorn—the Goat. He is the ape-man, the survivor of the Stone-Age. His friend, Steve, is also a goat; frequently
beats his wife and runs after her for a quick, sexy truce.
Stage direction reads: "Steve bounds after her (Eunice)
with goat-like screeches and chases her around corner."
(Ibid., p. 172).

The way the character of Stanley is treated, the
chiselled speeches of Blanche in which she flouts Stanley's
barbarism, his roles of being a rapist, a feelingless
womanizer, an ego-maniac, a villain who snatches off the
last prop of an unfortunate cripple like Blanche—there
is no doubt that the author considers Stanley a sick by-
product of a dehumanized society, that he is what Chris
Flanders calls The Witch of Capri, "the heart of a world
that has no heart." (The Milk Train, Penguin Plays, Sc.V,
p. 192). The sensual bond that holds Stanley and Stella
together, their mutual pride and faith in each other which
makes other things look unimportant, are not, as Williams
asks us to believe, civilized. Their clinging together
reeks of lust, of animal warmth, of gross, greasy sensua-
lity unredeemed by the subtle and ennobling qualities of
love. In The Rose Tattoo, Serafina's Sicilian husband,
Rosario seems to be more virile than Stanley, who not only
made love to her every night for twelve years (she counts:
"Four thousand three hundred and eighty times."), but also
carried on with other woman regularly. Serafina, a volup-
tuous plump woman, a more sensual Stella Kowalski, wor-
shipped him when alive, and his ashes when he is dead. Her memory of his sexual prowess keeps her chaste—until she meets Alvaro, a clumsy country buffoon. She throws away the "sacred" urn containing her husband's ash when his infidelity is revealed, and goes to her new lover with a vengeance. The sexually satisfying conjugal relationship of Rosario and Serafina is ridiculed and dashed—perhaps, because it was not accompanied by genuine feelings of love, because it was based upon sheer carnality. Neither Stella nor Serafina, neither Stanley nor Rosario has any attraction for Williams—though he expends a lot of his poetic energy in glamorizing their sex-life, their mutual adoration—women being sexually delectable, men being full of coarse, animal virility—women being coy, demure masochists and men being implacable, sadistic symbols of phallus. Williams repeatedly stresses that such relationships nourished by insatiable appetites and their cloying, by itches and scratches--are not normal. He seems to say with Blanche that there has been some progress, after such coarseness: "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 make grow!" and seems to warn us not to "hang back with the brutes!" (A Streetcar, sc.4, p. 164).
If we expect coherence of attitude and consistency of vision from Williams, we may be intrigued by the fact that a writer who holds conjugal bonds founded on unimaginative sexuality in such a low esteem, should consider sexual unions, both aberrant and bisexual, a significant armour against the hostile arrows of alienation, existential angst and privation—all occasioned by the fears of decay and death. Blanche herself makes available to the drunken soldiers at Belle Reve, to many customers in the Flamingo hotel of Laurel, to young boys in her school—and flirts with Stanley, Mitch and the Young Man who is collecting for the Evening Star. She tries to help Stella to get rid of Stanley, by pleading for the norms of culture and civilization, by reminding her sister that their way of life not only negates all virtues of civilization, but also takes it back to the Stone Age barbarism. She pretends, lies, covers herself with rich perfumes and dim light—always trying to appear what she is not. If we believe the playwright, Blanche had only an unlucky marriage with a pretty homosexual who killed himself and had undergone the agonising experience of watching her family members dying for their "epic fornications"—and they cannot be, by any stretch of imagination, sufficient reasons to turn an inherently romantic virgin into a neurotic nymphomaniac. Stella’s defence of Blanche—
Blanche was innocent, tender and trusting, and people like Stanley have abused her and forced her to change (Ibid., p. 198, Sc.8)—is bloodless and untrue. Stella thinks Blanche has fallen, and Blanche, on the other hand, pities Stella for her humiliation and degradation in the Stanley household. Blanche does not think she has fallen; she is too delicate to admit even to herself that she had sufficiently lowered herself.

In Tom Wingfield, Williams attempts a self-dramatization, and in Blanche DuBois, he attempts a sort of self-justification. The privilege of self-justification is denied to other characters; only Williams' favoured protagonists, like Blanche, Chance Wayne, Val Xavier, Reverend Shannon, Chris Flanders and Brick Pollitt have all the privileges to be wild, to be guilty, to be neurotic, to make themselves available cheaply, to feel alienated, to feel righteous and indignant, and finally to indulge in self-justification and prevarication, putting all blame on the factors, outside themselves—on the society, on the church, on the family, on the other people. For such favoured protagonists, sexual acts including perversions are only desperate attempts to alleviate the excruciating agony of feeling alienated, of feeling lost and rootless—of being propelled by an existential urge for survival. Blanche tells Stella: "People don't see
you—men—don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you've got to have your existence admitted... You've got to be soft and attractive." (Ibid., Sc.V, p. 169). True to her word, she had her "existence admitted" by Laurel by making a whore of herself. Williams repeatedly informs his readers and critics that these delicate, dreamy individuals though lie to others, never lie to themselves. He seems to beg sympathy. Lying is lying whether a person is engaged in "truth game" with himself or not. And Blanche here is not begging our pity, but trying to justify her descent into the underworld—and is obviously demanding our sympathy. If she does not think her past so ignoble, she has no reason to tremble at the mention of the Flamingo hotel. Blanche is sincere when she explains (like a school teacher that she was!) to Stella that Stanley and his poker-game and his behaviour conjure up a vision of the Stone-Age hunter, the ape-man—sharing his quarry with his fellow ape-men round a fire—that the present civilization has come a long way since then. She is also equally sincere while justifying her promiscuity. It is not only the ambivalence in Blanche's character, but also the ambivalence in the attitude of the author towards sex which confuses the reader. Sex is not life-giving, it is primitive and destructive. Those who resort to sex as a means of escape from the
miseries of existence, those who resort to sex as a means of asserting their identity—are destroyed. Sandra, a typically Williams' brittle and anaemic butterfly-female, notorious for her sexual looseness, warns the new-comer Val Xavier: "Don't you know what these women are suffering from: sexual malnutrition! They look at you with eyes that scream 'Eureka'!" (Battle of Angels with Orpheus Descending, New Directions, 1958, p. 136). Sandra in Battle of Angels (1940) who later becomes Carole in Orpheus Descending (1955)—is, like Blanche DuBois, an aristocratic Southern belle—and like all decadent Southern belles, she is bent upon offending the public morals—goes "jooking" (15) with strangers. In these two plays, the sexuality of Williams' fugitive characters such as Val, Sandra/Carole and Myra/Lady is stressed, more than the sexual malnutrition of neighbourhood women or the women of Memphis society. Sandra also tells Val: "They have passed a law against passion. Our license has been revoked. We have to give up or else be ostracized... Whoever has too much passion, we're going to be burned like witches because we know too much." (Ibid., Act III, p. 215). She advocates for passion, and passion is in the way of parole; passion is a means to defeat the terror of extinction, of decay. But does her term "passion" exclude sexual promiscuity? If her "lips have been touched

by prophetic fire," both Myra/Lady and Val are "burnt" like witches for their "Passion"—which obviously does not exclude sex. These lovers are inspired by the desperate ethics of Mrs. Goforth (Mr. Williams too!) "grab, fight or go hungry—nothing else works" (The Milk Train, Sc.V, p.197) and try to grab whatever comes near them until their "fingers are broken"—(Orpheus Descending, Act III, p. 216).

Williams' protagonists as we have hinted earlier, have a dual conception of sex. The marital sex—the intimate sexual relationship of Stanley and Stella, Rosario and Serafina—is held in disrespect and is exposed finally as false. The well-adjusted couples are animals—bound together by carnal desire. "Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for," Marguerite tells Casanova (Camino Real, Block 8, p. 174). Blanche, Alma and Hannah Jelkes who inform their male counterparts—Stanley, John and Rev. Shannon that the intelligent, subtle, sensitive women like them can enrich men's lives, can give their souls along with their bodies to their lovers/husbands—are ironically never married, cannot also establish an enduring rapport with any male. Blanche, like a laboratory mouse bumps into wrong doors, loses the sense of reality and is straitjacketed. Alma, whose name means soul, who stands for love and eternity, is rejected by
John and decides to become a tart. And Hannah, a self-less, inherently noble, ageing spinster, after a flicker of intimacy with Shannon, drifts into her alone-ness. Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* who might have made an excellent wife is left with her menagerie and glass collections and old phonograph records. Carol/Sandra would not marry. Heavenly Finley and Chance Wayne (*Sweet Bird of Youth*) are not united in marriage. Heavenly has a whore's operation and Chance is castrated. There is not a single situation in all of Williams' plays and stories where conjugal sex and happy adjustment of a couple are shown to be possible and desirable. *A Period of Adjustment*, a comedy centering on two married couples, reveals the author's overt and grim cynicism more than his comical flair. He considers conjugal unions as desperate truces—the condition of two ship-wrecked individuals clinging together, most often drowning together. Beulah and Dolly, two married women, talk about the conjugal life of Lady and Jabe Torrance which is true not only for them but also for most of married couples in the dramatic world of Williams:

Beulah : ...Why there's couples that loathe and despise the sight, smell, and sound of each other before that round-trip honey-moon ticket is punched at both ends, Dolly.

Dolly - I hate to admit it but I can't deny it.

Beulah - But they hang on together.

Dolly - Yes, they hang on together.
Year after year after year, accumulating property and money, building up wealth and respect and position in the towns they live in and the countries and cities and the churches they go to, belonging to the clubs and so on and so forth and not a soul but 'em knowin' they have to go wash their hands after touching something the other one just put down! ha ha ha ha!

_(Oroheus Descending, Act I, p. 251)._ 

This is Williams' squint-eyed generalization about marriage—a sort of psychologically compensatory gratification of an old bachelor to find fault with the conjugal adjustment. It is interesting to see how he dubs sex as crudely animal in married people and glamorizes sex when it happens between two individuals outside of the wedlock—in other words, extra-marital sex. He seems to believe that the well-adjusted or socially united couples go to sex as a routine, as a rule—compelled by the fact of their living together for practical reasons, and their bodily urge gets precedence over, even negates mental/emotional considerations. That is why it impoverishes them, degrades them to apes—and both partners tap clandestine sources to strike up relationships, gladly betray their spouses. Stanley betrays Stella by raping her sister, Rosario betrays Serafina, and Serafina betrays her dead husband. Boss Finley betrays his wife. Lady and Jabe betray each other. The women of Memphis are suffering from sexual frustration and look at Val Xavier greedily. Baby
Doll would not sleep with her husband, Archie Lee and readily yields to Silva Vacarro. Tom's Father (The Glass Menagerie) deserts his mother and children. Big Daddy has no love for his doting wife, Big Mama, and considers her an amicable female vampire. Brick hates Maggie, the Cat, and Maggie seems to dote on Brick to get pregnant.

The marital bond between a newly married couple--Lot and Myrtle (Kingdom of Earth)--breaks like dry reed when Chicken interferes. Chicken represents a Stanley-like bohemianism and raw virility, and Myrtle falls an easy prey to his sadistic overtures. Period of Adjustment, a bawdy, satire on the tinsel nature of wedded love, reveals Williams' attitudes to so called married couples. George and Isabel, a newly married couple, are going for their honeymoon driving a funeral limousine. The play, which reminds one of Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, holds two pairs of wedded couples in an inescapable grip of high tension, in a twilight mood of betrayal, desperate truces, squeamish quarrels and confused loyalties, and when, exasperated, these two couples jump into two separate beds, separated by a cardboard wall, and indulge in routine whispers of excited lovers, then the house begins to sink.

The subtitle of the grim comedy is "High Point over a Cavern"--and the author stresses obliquely that such on-the-bed-in-the-dark adjustments are bound to collapse
because they are founded on treacherous grounds. Particular failures of marriages are twisted symbolically into universal failures. What happens to these two bed-crazy couples, happens to all couples. Gerald Weales observes in this connection—"the playwright indicates most clearly that what he has been talking about all along is not simply the special pain of an eccentric out-group but the human condition as he sees it."

Death and damnation pursue such married couples when they jump into bed to iron out their rucked-up relationships—when the all concealing darkness and all obscuring heat of sexual orgasms give them a momentary sense of wellbeing. The chasm of the earth swallows them up when they are still on bed—making love. On the other hand, Williams', lonely fugitives cling to each other to break barriers of skin, to establish an emotional rapport, to get solace—pursued by the fears of death and decay and extinction. Williams clearly suggests that the latter group—the "out-group" as G. Weales calls them—has some valid reason to go to sex while the former group has none.

Blanche DuBois, Val Xavier, Reverend Shannon and Chance Wayne—to name only a few—have some weirdly attractive traits, some artistic, intellectual aspirations, some

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peculiar notions about individualism and freedom—which make them different from others, which also make them irresistibly wanted by others. Blanche stands for an already vanished Southern plantation aristocracy, its values, its refinement, its "tawdry glitter" and also its sensuality. Her helplessness in a mechanical civilization, her transparent delicacy, her sensitivity—score a point over Stanley's primitive egomania and ruthless efficiency. Stanley rapes her to assert his ego which was badly bruised when it clashed with the quiet pride of aristocratic refinement and subtlety. Stanley's boorish manners and clumsy violence seem more boorish and primitive when placed near the sophisticated manners of Blanche. When Stella and Blanche criticize Stanley for his table manners—his ego gets a jolt: "Don't ever talk that way to me! 'Pig--Polack--disgusting--vulgar--greasy!'—them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said—'Every Man is a King!' And I am the King around here, so don't forget it!" (A Streetcar Named Desire, Sc.8, pp. 195-96).

This is perhaps a rare occasion in Stanley's life when he is humbled, when his pride is wounded—and he tries desperately to salvage his pride. These two sisters strike him as a pair of queens—survivors of an extinct Southern
elitist culture—with their easy grace and spontaneous feeling of superiority—reminding him of his commonness. He is only a king in a very limited sense—king of a little family. His only weapon to defend his ego is his virility. Mitch is also a common byproduct of the mechanical modernity, and he is awed and embarrassed by the "queenly" condenscesion with which Blanche treats him. He realises that he is no match for a member of Belle Reve. Even when he refuses her offer of love and matrimony, he is surprised by her stern refusal/rebuff to his sexual advances.

Val Xavier is an outsider in the Gomorrah—like town of Memphis. Apparently he is not much above the moral standard of other people. He is very conscious of his sexual efficiency—to burn down any woman with his canine-heat. "My temperature," he flaunts, "is always a couple of degrees above normal the same as a dog's, it's normal for me the same as it is for a dog... Well, they say that a woman can burn a man down. But I can burn down a woman... Any two-footed woman." (Orpheus Descending, Act I, pp. 273-77). Partly for this type of self-advertisement, partly for his easy availability—he creates a commotion in the sleepy town of Memphis like a fox in a chicken coop. He also steals and gambles and indulges in gratuitous self-justification. But he is different from others—
because he is a chased person, chased like a runaway
convict or a fox by blood-hounds, because he is reluctant
to settle down to be a purchasable commodity, because he
is profoundly dissatisfied with domesticated society and
hopes something beautiful to happen, because he has the
unique ability to keep his head above the water of corrup-
tion by remembering his other self, his pure and artistic
self. "I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted. Here
is why. (Picks up his guitar.) My life's companion! It
washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched
me." (Orpheus Descending, Act I, p. 274). He is exonerated
by the purifying power of music.

Reverend Shannon is defrocked for committing two
sins—fornication and heresy. After a long career as a
preacher, he quite suddenly realises that God is a senile
delinquent and the church is unnecessary—and he feels
the urgency to transform the church into a brothel by raping
a chorus singer in front of the icon. He becomes a tourist-
guide and again rapes a young girl, has a sort of vulgar
familiarity with Maxine Faulk—an ageing nymphomaniac who
uses her servants and male customers as studs. He, like
Blanche DuBois and Val Xavier, is an outcast, a "chased"
person, ostracized by the church, misunderstood by other
people. His inner goodness and nobility, his troubles are
understood by only one sensitive and subtle person—Hannah
Jelkes as Blanche is understood by Stella and Val is understood by Sandra/Carole and Lady Torrance. He is not corrupted though he lives in corruption because he is linked inextricably with something pure and high.

Chance Wayne launches into life with one trump-card, his physical beauty. A veritable Dorian Gray, and as spoilt. Falls in love with Boss Finley's daughter, Heavenly; contaminates her with an incurable venereal disease, flees his home town and capitalizes on his physical charm by becoming a gigolo. He meets his rival in an old actress, Alexandra Del Lago—who hires him for his youthful looks and virility. He tries to exploit her and blackmail her—and they finally part company. Chance, then is gathered by Boss Finley's men to be castrated. He is different, too, from others because he is exploited by others and fallen and is bitterly aware of his being exploited. He is sensitive enough to feel the schism caused by his actual condition and his ideal condition—by what he wants to become and what he has already become driven by circumstances. Every time he yields to the old woman's desire, he feels emotionally bankrupt and castrated. When she warns him—"castration, if you stay here"—he reacts promptly: "That can't be done to me twice. You did that to me this morning, here on this bed, where I had the great honour."

(Sweet Bird of Youth, Act III, p. 108). He finally prefers
actual castration to the symbolic/emotional castration--in a fit of respectability and desperate courage. He is prepared to face life, however dangerous and unpleasant, instead of running away from it. This final act of courage and dignity exonerates him from the guilt of cowardice and easy surrender.

Brick Pollitt (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof) keeps on drinking throughout the play to get the "click" which will make him forget the mendacity people live with. Other characters try to speculate why he is drinking and avoiding his beautiful, young wife, but they all think that his drinking and his rejection of his wife have something to do with the suicide of his best friend, Skipper. He is adored by his wife and his mother; he is also liked by his cynical father, Big Daddy. Gooper and Mac look at him with envy. He rejects all, and even pretends to reject his father's property. That sort of other worldliness and child-like "detachment"--makes him attractive to other characters, and makes him also different from others. His relentless condemnation of "mendacity" of others is as pointless and unfounded as his relationship with Skipper. He meanly retaliates his father when the latter pinches his most sensitive spot by suspecting his unnatural intimacy with Skipper. He also stoops very low by lying about Maggie's pregnancy at the most strategic
moment—thereby inheriting his father's twenty-eight thousand acres of land. Though there may be difference of opinion about him, he can be suspected of being cautious and patient when Gooper, Mae and Margaret are grossly tasteless and impatient to get the dying tycoon's favours and property. His quiet subterfuse befuddles a die-hard skeptic like Big Daddy. He not only succeeds in getting his father's favours but also succeeds in winning clamorous clapping from an equally intrigued audience. If other-worldliness and drunken defiance can bring so much sympathy and wealth, can be so rewarding—it is stupid to be worldly and obsequious.

Alma Winemiller (Summer and Smoke and The Eccentricities of a Nightingale) swings between two polarities—the prudery of her parents and the earthiness and philistinism of Dr. John who refers to the anatomy-chart to define his attitude to man—the brain, the belly and the genitals—and no "Alma"—Spanish for soul. She revolts against the prudery of her parents—and tries to educate John about spiritual and Platonic ideals. Then a peculiar metamorphosis takes place—a metamorphosis more weird and atrocious than that of Gregor Samsa—and, Alma and Dr. John swap roles, attitudes, ideals. She becomes carnal and promiscuous—he becomes spiritual and ideal. Rejектор is rejected. Alma is more sinned against than sinning
because she erroneously believes that her lover remains the same flesh-hungry philanderer when she decides to change. A theme which might have been treated as a comical intrigue and sheer expediency in the short plays/stories of Chekhov and Oscar Wilde—is treated with a pious high-seriousness by Williams for whom characters and plots have no use unless they are complex and shady. Alma, jilted by her lover, turns into a prostitute. The play reels under unresolved ambiguities: Does the author believe that the anatomy chart—with its head, belly and genitals—is the correct assessment of man? Williams would certainly say no. Then there is no dramatic exigency to reduce Alma who symbolized/advocated for soul, eternity and platonic idealism into a tart. But Williams asks us to believe that Alma is different from others who tread the primrose path because she is so out of sheer desperation, out of bitterness towards blase orthodoxy, out of a painful feeling of alienation. And promiscuity is only a form of protest.

Chance Wayne informs Princess—"...the age of some people can only be calculated by the level of rot in them. And by that measure I'm ancient." (Sweet Bird of Youth, Act III, p. 110). The Young Man who just had a homosexual act with an uninitiated boy confesses: "I've lost the capacity for being surprised, so completely lost it... There's a coarseness, a deadening coarseness, in the
experience of most homosexuals. The experiences are
good and hard, and brutal, and the pattern of them is
practically unchanging." (Confessional' in, Dragon Coun-
try, New Directions, New York, 1970, p. 178). He is
right. Williams has accumulated a great deal of "rot" in
his process of ageing, and a "deadened coarseness" has
come over him through the prolonged career as a homosexual--
and that perhaps prompted him to heap an amount of unwar-
ranted sympathy over the degenerated characters. The soul
is gayly capitulating to the body--to the anatomical chart
of John Buchanon. Confessional, a play written twenty-three
years after A Streetcar, is crowded with characters more
crazy, more neurotic, more nymphomaniac than Blanche DuBois.
Women are sexy bitches: men are either studs or bullies,
either grown-up toddlers or deadened homosexuals; a doctor
who is always inebriated, "cannot tell the appendix from
the gizzard" (Confessional, p. 165)--and Monk, the bar
owner, an alter ego of Williams himself, whose sympathy
for all such "raffish bunch" does not slacken.

Leona, a large, ungainly woman strikes Violet because
she has seduced her stud, Bill, and she (Violet) has the
habit of holding the genitals of men sitting next to her at
the table. She is observing the death anniversary of her
blond young brother who was a musician--as ethereal and
unreal as Blanche's husband and Val's "pearly white" girl
on the bayou, Kilroy's "real true woman," his wife, (Camino Real, Block 3, p. 143) and Chance Wayne's first true love, Heavenly. Though she lives in the lowest rung of corruption (she, being 'fat' and 'ungainly,' pays her studs/customers.), she is saved from corruption through the memory of her brother. "Everyone needs!" she tells Bill, her truant stud, "one beautiful thing! In the course of a life-time! To save the heart from colluption!"

Bill: What is 'colluption,' fat lady?
Leona: CORRUPTION! Without one beautiful thing in the course of a life-time, it's all a death-time. A woman turns to a slob that lives with a slob, and life is disgusting to her and she's disgusting to life.

(Confessional, Sc 1, p. 168)

Leona tells Bill that though she is corrupt, she knows purity, she has the ability to recapitulate her past which was glorious and beautiful—whereas he has none. Williams also tells us that though these "criminal degenerates" look like others, they are not like others—because they are linked with something beautiful, and they are deeply alienated persons because they are corrupt in spite of themselves, always hoping to be better than what they seem they are.

There is a very interesting and revealing discussion among Tom Junior, Scudder and Boss Finley about the sanity of Chance Wayne. When Scudder says that the law courts should decide whether Chance is sane or insane,
Boss Finley makes an intelligent observation. "Take it to the Supreme Court," he tells them, "they'll hand you down a decision on that question. They'll tell you a handsome young criminal degenerate like Chance Wayne is the mental and moral equal of any white man in the country." *(Sweet Bird of Youth, Act II, p. 57).* But he being thoroughly evil, is incapable of understanding the unique tension in the inner gestalts of Chance. To put such a disparaging remark in the mouth of an inveterate villain reveals the playwright's intention. Chance Wayne, Williams establishes, is capable of connecting himself with the ideal, his love for Heavenly, even when he sinks helplessly into the bog of baser inclinations.

These alienated characters in their desperation to externalize their inner dichotomy do not appear very credible—they often fob us off with the pleadings of their credibility. They are exhibitionists. The substance of a character comes not out of his tongue-wagging, out of his pleadings and platitudes, but out of his life-style, actions and suffering. Chance tells Princess: "I'm pretentious. I want to be seen in your car (A Cadillac convertible.) on the streets of St. Cloud. Drive all around town in it, blowing those long silver trumpets and dressed in the fine clothes you bought me...a wad of dough to flash in their faces." *(Sweet Bird of Youth,*
Act I, pp. 50-51). Carol tells Val that she is a "Christ-bitten reformer," a "kind of benign exhibitionist"... "now I'm not a reformer anymore. I'm just a "lewd vagrant"... I've told you my story, the story of an exhibitionist." (Orpheus Descending, Act I, pp. 266-67). Blanche confesses before Stella how she pretends to entice Mitch: "What I mean is—he thinks I'm sort of—prim and proper! (She laughs out sharply.) I want to deceive him enough to make him—want me..." (A Streetcar Named Desire, Sc.V, p. 171). Sebastian, Val Xavier, Chris Flanders and Shannon are often exhibitionists—and make a 'goddam' show of themselves. "I turned into a peacock!" says Catharine Holly and adds, "of course, so was he one too...." She means Sebastian. (Suddenly Last Summer, Sc IV, p. 148). Val flaunts about his sexual efficiency, ogles at and flirts with school girls and ladies who come to the shoe-store. Shannon urinates over the luggage of ladies and suffers crucifixion when tied down to a hammock. An exhibitionist is a person who does a nice thing and talks nicely to impress others—creating at the same time a world of make-believe for himself. He lives perpetually in front of a mirror and uses others as his mirrors. He evades reality—not for sport but for sheer survival. He bluffs a great deal, glitters a great deal. Williams writes:

Fear and evasion are the two little beasts that chase each other's tails in the revolving wire-cage of our nervous world. They
distract us from feeling too much about things. Time rushes toward us with its hospital tray of infinitely varied narcotics, even while it is preparing us for its inevitably fatal operation... So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensibility of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue.... (17)

When the protagonists of the play in "the tragic tradition" confronted "fear," the protagonists of Williams' plays invariably evade it, by taking "narcotics." Both protagonists face destruction "inevitably." Whereas the former's destruction has an element of dignity and purity, whereas their defeat contains the seeds of victory, of invincibility, of the triumph of the human spirit over the elemental hostility of destiny and Time, the latter's defeat has no redeeming quality. They quit ignobly, anonymously.

Joseph Wood Krutch compares Shakespeare's _Hamlet_ with Ibsen's _Ghosts_. "No increased powers of expression, no greater gift for words, could have transformed Ibsen into Shakespeare. The material out of which the latter created his works--his conception of human dignity, his sense of the importance of human passions, his vision of the amplitude of human life--simply did not and could not exist for Ibsen, as they did not and could not exist for his contemporaries." (18) This is as much true for Ibsen

(17) T. Williams, _Where I live_, Selected Essays, pp. 53-54.
as for Williams. The vision of the creative writer has narrowed down to a very low level, not entirely because of the artist’s sympathy for petty, neurotic creatures, but because of the fact that the artist himself has failed to see what lies beyond the pettiness and neurosis, but because the artist seems to revel in such miseries of helplessly small persons. God and Destiny have been replaced by syphilis and sexual perversions. The characters of Williams are not noble and heroic because he believes that human beings are not and can never be noble and heroic. The character who proudly declares and displays his narcissism and exhibitionism is an alienated one—who lives in a false world, who bothers for himself. Other people matter to him so far as he can use them. Heroes of the "tragic tradition" represented the humanity—its values, its problems, struggles and suffering. And the protagonists of Williams represent, as the Carollers announce, "the strange, the crazed, the queer," "the wild," "the wounded," the "fugitive," "the solitary" and "the mutilated." (The Mutilated: The Dragon Country, New Directions, New York, 1970, pp. 81, 102). Celeste, a professional shoplifter, a cheap whore and a parasite, informs us, "we all have our mutilations." (Ibid., Sc 1, p. 87). By "mutilation" Williams does not mean what writers in "the tragic tradition" mean by hubris and the tragic flaw.
Here a woman has one of her breasts removed in an operation. She is "mutilated." She is sex-starved, but she cannot have a lover because the lover may know about her mutilation. She is constantly blackmailed and exploited by another woman who knows her secret. The play ends when these two dead-beat schizoids resume their relationship for the advantage of both—and in a bizarre ritual, feel the presence of Mother/Virgin Mary in their room. They smell roses and burning candles, and very miraculously the pain in Trinket's breast is gone.

This play, The Mutilated (1967), was written by Williams after twenty-three years of the publication of The Glass Menagerie (1945) and twenty years after A Streetcar (1947). It is a sick play, a thoroughly bad play. Instead of showing the growth, it shows decadence, a sort of mental dotage. The "mutilation" of Trinket is peculiar to her, and can never be elevated to a symbolic or universal level; again, her fear to face the reality of her mutilation, her paranoid obsession with her own misery, make her a doomed character from the beginning—and finally, the invisible presence of "Our Lady" to cure her, to solve her problem—is a sinister form of spiritual quackery. Such weird solutions may sound all right for the Nursery Rhymes, but to get them from the so-called "greatest" playwright of America is embarrassing and puzzling at the same time.
In such plays both God and Man, the divine and the human, are vulgarized, distorted. "To-day's theatre," observes a critic, "does not even worship man; it lives, precariously, by holding him in contempt... and few deny that the American theatre suffers from a sickness of the soul." (Time, 11 April 1960, pp. 76-78). Particularly in Williams' plays—there are set patterns, a terrified bevy of fatigued females meeting a group of crudely debauched or faulted males—and indulging in endless exchange of dialogues. Though there are highly poignant dramatic situations, characters do not grow, do not get beyond their quarrels, confessions and compromises. Characters are so ruffled in the beginning that other situations in the course of drama cannot possibly ruffle them anymore. There is neither courage nor excitement nor hope nor honest despair. The dominant theme in most modern plays is a "kind of bored preoccupation with familiar vices, treated with tabloid sensationalism, or written off in psychological cliches...." (Ibid., 11 April 1960, LXXV No. 15, pp. 76-78).

The reason why characters do not grow in the course of drama is, perhaps, the playwright's over-emphasis on psychology, particularly abnormal psychology. When Williams says that normal people do not interest him, he means people who are not neurotic or schizophrenic. At
any time it is not possible to banish psychology from the realms of literature. An insight into character invariably implies his psychic plumbing—his reactions, his drives, his uniqueness, his eccentricity. But in good drama and fiction, usually the person comes first, his humanity, his noble traits come first—and psychology comes next—emerging, as it were, from the sum-total of his actions, from his total personality. In Williams, conversely, psychology is thrust upon the character. As the play opens, we see Laura is a moron, Blanche is neurotic, Brick is limping for a "click," Chance, Val, Princess, Lady, Carol/Sandra, Chris, Mrs. Goforth, Shannon are at the end of their tethers, dead-beats, and what happens to them on the stage is less significant than what has already happened before the play begins. Psychology deprives the characters of their free-will, of spontaneity, of their ability to react without premeditation—reducing them to typically psychic traits. Such characters are schematized, and refuse to change through dramatic encounters. When we learn what has already happened to Blanche from dialogues, what is happening to her on the stage such as the refusal of Mitch and cruelty of Stanley would not surprise and shock us unless we are moved, like Williams, by facile and lackadaisical emotions. We may ask like Gassner how "a nymphomaniacal lady can strictly
speaking, be violated." A heavy dose of psychology reduces characters into puppets and their struggles into "case-history." "Psychological drama," writes Gassner, "then, has ultimately impoverished rather than enriched, dehumanized rather than deepened, and dulled rather than sharpened; it has even cheapened the realistic theatre." (19)

Such obsession with the abnormal psychology not only makes Williams a scare-mongering, sensation-oriented writer but also reduces his characters into vehicles of his ideas, into puppets who fail to impress us about their authenticity—into personifications of abstract forms of mental sickness the like of which we find in the morality plays. The author, sometimes, attributes his characters varied, contradictory roles that do not mix well. The committed homosexual, Sebastian, is a poet, a searcher of God; Shannon is a disillusioned priest who is fond of raping young girls, of quarrelling with God, of striking up a true relationship with Hannah, of playing God—and finally of running to the beach with Maxine Faulk. Val Xavier is an outlandish poet, a musician with a guitar,—who can be proud of his sexual potency to please women, can steal money and watch and gamble with the stolen money and at the same time can symbolize Christ, Orpheus and Adonis. Chris Flanders, the Angel of Death, is an odd

melange of many roles. John Gassner, writing about Chris, observes: "The roles of a parasitical hanger-on of the idle rich, pathetic poet, "Death" and compassionate para-clete simply do not fuse in one flesh-and-blood character... Mr. Williams contrived rather than created him. He has forced a variety of roles on him that have little reality and a considerable degree of pretension." Gassner could have added, Chris is also a maker of mobiles, a mechanic and a male-stud who is up to self-appointed mission to popularize euthanasia.

The characters on the stage, like persons in real life, are capable of changes and of containing contradictions in the process of maturity. Mr. Jekylls and Dr. Hydes can live in one person. In real life as well as in drama there can be persons who very successfully play many roles. But when a playwright projects such a complex person on the stage, he treads on trecherous grounds, and if he is not wary, he may lose perspective and flounder and make his audience and readers lose theirs. The roles ought to be such that they may not blur and violate each other. A thin line separates a complex character from a contrived character. Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear are highly complex characters. Hamlet cannot kill a murderer--King while praying, yet can send two persons--Rosencrantz

(20) Ibid., p. 580.
and Guildenstern to death. He can be cruel to Ophelia and can jump into her grave and invite Laertes for a duel to show his love for her. And at the same time, he is peculiarly Hamlet. As a hero, Hamlet does not care for consistency and try to justify his inconsistency. That is possible because Shakespeare does not meddle with his hero's affairs and allows him to be, allows him to react impulsively to challenges and situations. Hamlet, with all his complexities and contradictions, clarities and confusions, strikes us as authentic and credible—whereas Williams' protagonists are like Polonius, the rats behind the arras, who cannot fuse their roles as righteous/dignified persons with polemics, as volte-face ministers, cringing, obsequious yea-sayers and mean voyeurs. Polonius's death matches with his contradictory life-style, his inauthentic life-style: a poetic justice. He cannot coordinate and fuse his platitudes to Laertes about dignity with his cowardice in the court.

Williams' characters are weighed down by roles they cannot integrate—they cannot live up to their ideas. Like the death of Polonius, their deaths, instead of arousing tragic emotions, arouse easy pathos. They make no great impressions when they fall. Blanche's confinement may make many in the audience heave a sigh of relief, like Stanley and Stella. Whatever may be her connections with
ante-bellum Southern aristocracy, with refinement, civilization and romance—she is simply an intolerable person.

If Stanley is the survivor of the Stone-Age barbarism, Blanche is a survivor of or the advocate of a very sick tradition, of a very effeminate and pseudo-chivalrous mentality. When she flouts Stanley's way of life and attitudes, she has to offer values/norms that can make up for the vacuum created by the audience's rejection of Stanley.

People who live intensely and honestly each moment of their lives are not affected by the corrosive force of Time. Each new day brings to them new experiences and sensations which enrich them psychologically, intellectually. It does not make much difference whether he is a villain like Macbeth or hero like Macduff, whether he is an evil-doer like Edmund or a noble person like Cordelia as long as he puts his entire personality, his heart into his action. Time, for such persons, is not measured by the clock and the calendar, quantitatively but by the maturity of the mind, the richness of vision, and the capacity of intimacy with their inner selves, with others, with the events of the universe. "Bergson calls it duration, not time; it is time translated into psychic relations, time penetrated by the intuitions that reveal to us the essence of our existence amid a world of sensations
furnished by our encounter with things, people, events. It is time distilled by consciousness." (21) On the other hand, people who live on the surface of life, evade confrontation with life, whose life is a race after grossly sensual pleasures—are apt to view Time quantitatively. They cannot reconcile themselves to their physical decay. Time is not distilled by consciousness. Time is their enemy because it takes away their youth. Their life is a chapter of emptiness, inauthenticity, evasion, conceit and camouflage. Mary McCarthy's observations on A Streetcar Named Desire are true of all Williams' plays. She writes: "Williams is addicted to the embroidering lie, the stark contrast, the jagged scene, the jungle motifs, (They come together with low, animal moans.) to suicide, homosexuality, rape and insanity. His work creates in the end that very effect of painful falsity which is imparted to the Kowalski household by Blanche's pink lamp-shade." ('On Broadway and Williams," Time, 11 April 1960, pp. 76-78). These characters in order to forget unpleasant facts of decay and death keep themselves engrossed in ephemeral, physical distractions. When they do not help, they turn neurotic and go hog-wild. They focus their attention on their own peculiar problems, and in the process, turn self-centred.

Their link with others, with themselves, with God, with family slowly atrophies and finally snaps—and they feel alienated and lost.

As a concluding summation, we find Williams' protagonists are constantly plagued by two things: fear and guilt. Fear is occasioned by the apprehension of death and the inevitable decay of youth. This fear is intensified when they experience that true love and genuine understanding are not possible on earth. Byron's description of Shelley's funeral, the impending deaths of Jabe Torrance and Big Daddy, Blanche's description of deaths in the family, gruesome deaths of Sebastian and Val and Mrs. Goforth—to quote some—show his morbid obsession with death. Decaying characters like Alexandra Del Lago, Casanova, Marguerite, Mrs. Goforth, Mrs. Stone, even Blanche DuBois and Maxine Faulk—show his preoccupation with decay. Love has failed them, drugs have failed them and sex also fails them. These failures fill them with a sense of fear. Their lives are rendered inauthentic by their senseless pursuits, by their vain attempts to perpetuate them. They sink slowly and inexorably under the marsh of their own despair, sundered from their own self, from the other people, from God, from family.

"It is not simply the loss of youth and beauty that preoccupies him," writes a critic, "It is the fact of death..."
Williams' conception of man is of one dogged by the knowledge of death and, hence, scarcely able to live the little life he has." (22)

On the other hand, Williams' protagonists are constantly plagued by a feeling of guilt. It arises out of their failure to live up to their aspirations. Their hearts are a wire-cage where two little creatures—promiscuity and puritanism—keep on wrestling endlessly. These two antagonists like the alienated protagonists of Williams are not endowed with the talons and the sharp teeth so essential for self-defence. Hopeless victims in a predatory world, these rabbit-like creatures are not only incapable of defeating each other, but also are haunted by moods of doubt about the very cause of their quarrel. Sheer fatigue separates them temporarily, but their habits die hard. Blanche DuBois, Val Xavier, Chance Wayne and Reverend Shannon—each of them contains both of these quarrelling creatures—a puritanic and refined sensibility poised side by side with an aberrant promiscuity and coarse-grained coquetry; a quest for the ideal, an invidious innocence pitted against a wild bohemianism and clumsy efficiency. Shannon can get perverse, Val can gamble successfully, Blanche can lie shrewdly and Chance

can blackmail. "In his mental battle field," writes Kenneth Tynan, "the real is perpetually at war with the ideal; what is public wrestles with what is private, what drags men down fights with what draws them up. This struggle is an allegory, by which I mean that it reflects a conflict within Williams himself. He cannot bring himself to believe that the flesh and the spirit can be reconciled...." (23) When Maxine asks Shannon why he is after young girls only, he says, "I don't want any, any--regardless of age... People need human contact, Maxine Honey." (The Night of the Iguana, Act I, p. 239). A priest is fed up with the divine contact and is crazy for the human contact--regardless of age--and that sort of revelation prompts a bawdy Maxine to tempt him to tread into the shoes and socks of "Old Fred," her dead husband. And finally he does. He also informs her that these young girls seduced him, and his Brick-like passivity, the charm of the defeated, inflames the desire of the predatory, Maggie-like Maxine. The role of a passive, passionate, easily vulnerable phallic man, the feeling that he is dragged into corruption--go favourably with his monkish disposition. The guilt is one of yielding to the temptations, not one of running after temptations--one of weakness that cannot resist evil, not one of courage that can

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choose evil. This is true for Val, Chance, Chris, Paolo, Brick and Kilroy. Gnawed by the desire for the forbidden pleasure, enfeebled mentally to fight out that desire, they masochistically long to be led, to be laid. Those who tempt them are to blame. Their reluctance, their meek and mild attempts to hold on to their badges of honour, purity and individuality though they exonerate them to some extent from the burden of guilt yet they stress their moral and intellectual flabbiness. "Williams' ideal hero," observes a critic, "is the incestuous homosexual, who, however guilty he may feel at being tempted to break the gravest of our taboos, runs no risk of leaving behind a proof of his misconduct. This lack of risk becomes, in Williams' writing, a kind of school-boyish glee, otherwise inexplicable." (24) Such wishy-washy subterfuges of these protagonists make them stop a little short of the ultimate courage which might have enabled them to let one force overwhelm the other. Such courage to reject or to accept helped the tragic heroes of the Greek and Elizabethan tragedies to make great demands on their resources, to soar into dizzy heights, defying the law of gravity, piercing the clouds of mystery. Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, Othello and Faustus are never passive; they never allow

circumstances to overwhelm them. They act and keep on acting—though their actions lead them to their inevitable doom. On the other hand, Ted Kalem trenchantly writes:

Modern drama specializes in the smaller-than-life hero, the stunted image of man. When a Lear or a Hamlet falls in the fatality of his overmastering will, the seismic shock rips open the earth's crust like a giant grave, and half a dozen other men tumble to their doom. The fall of a modern playwright's hero is about as exalted as a sheeted patient's being wheeled out of the operating room with the surgeon shrugging—'Poor devil, his case was hopeless. He never had a chance.' This is the theatre that Williams heads, with its image of man as a prey, a victim of the wayward id. Williams' typical hero merely waits to be physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom with a self-immolating passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure. (25)

Though these flawed protagonists and their author graze on a limited pasture, they keep on tugging at the tether that limits them. Williams has a limited repertory—a sort of hedged-in perspective, and within it he performs well. He seems to inform his readers and audience through his plays that the modern world is peopled by small persons with very small problems, by nervous and anxious people who have no presentiment to confront, by neurotic people who shun reality. They are alienated from their families, from other people, from themselves. They cannot be heroes of tragedies. The modern world can only

create pieces of men, not the whole man. Williams is perhaps true. He is at least true so far as the modern American society is concerned. During last fifty years, the entire bunch of playwrights have succeeded in giving us rags, tainted wethers of the flock, meetest for sacrifice, what a critic calls "Pink Puppets." "Of all the puppets on the Broadway stage—the psychology-prattlers, and sociology-spouters, the junkies, the drunks, the rebellious adolescents, the child-eating moms, the vicious generals, and sweet-souled "liberals," the organization men who want to sell-out and the staunch little women who won't, the inarticulate minorities and their articulate champions—of all these, the most significant are the puppets maneuvered by T. Williams." (26)

Working in such a milieu, Williams readily picks up his models from the underdogs of the society—people, who, like the freshly hatched turtles on the beaches of the Encantadas, are wounded by "carnivorous" people, by the follies of the people, senseless dogmas of the institutionalized religions, by the talons of Time. If they are confused, if they have lost faith in religion and in other people, if they are afraid and guilty—they are living in a society which, like them, is confused, cynical, afraid and guilty. They are sick, and the nature of

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their sickness is such that it would always elude a pat
diagnosis. Something rots in the very core of their
being, a malignant abscess, and they cannot spot it,
nor can their author.

Whether these pathetic protagonists spot their
wounds or not, they suffer all the same. Williams ushers
us into the surgical ward where patients toss, shriek,
groan, gasp for wind, complain about the corruptions and
apathy of the hospital staff, indifference of the healthy
world. Lawrence, in the small play I Rise in Flame,
Cried the Phoenix (1951), like most of Williams' epilep-
tic artists, is invalidated by illness and age, but is
unable to get used to it, to calm down the "trapped
tiger" in him.Like Williams, Lawrence in this play
pretends "to be waging a war with bourgeois conception
of morality, with prudery," but actually fights with "the
little old maid," the breathless little spinster" in him-
self. (p. 63). He bellows out insults at his two atten-
ding women Bertha and Freida: "You're both so fat, so
rapacious, so vivaciously healthy and hungry." (p. 65).
These poor patients are too obsessed with their private
pain to commiserate with one another, and when they turn
to others, it is for the physical/sexual contact—quick,
greedy and orgiastic, just like turning to pain-killing,
sleep-causing pills. Someone is wheeled out, another is.
wheeled in. They have little or no chance. They never like to give up and grab at life till their fingers are broken. They plead for pity, for kind words from those who watch them suffer. The author also advocates for them, manipulates our pity to the point of fatigue.

It has to be admitted that Williams succeeds in his mission—to extract our pity for these miserable sufferers. In his *Camino Real* and *The Night of the Iguana*, the moments of understanding between Casanova and Marguerite, Shannon and Hannah, mark, though temporarily, the triumph of asexual intimacy over sexual infatuation. Hannah Jelkes is perhaps the only female in the whole bevy who is asexual, complex, serenely understanding, warm and self-less—and at the same time so human. Shannon calls her "Thin-Standing-Up-Female-Buddha." She understands people, so she forgives them. This single character, Hannah, forces us to look at Williams from a different angle, helps us to reassess this Shannon-like daemonic Williams. Williams' problem, like Shannon's, is the "oldest one in the world—the need to believe in something or in someone—almost anyone—almost anything—something... Broken gates between people so they can reach other, even if it's just for one night only...the journeys that the spooked and bedevilled people are forced to take through the...the UNLIGHTED sides of their
natures." (The Night of the Iguana, pp. 308-309). Though she is pure in the most generous sense of the term, she is never fussy. She is lonely and understands the loneliness of others who lack her ability to resist and fall into queer distractions. "Nothing human disgusts me," she tells Shannon, "unless it's unkind, violent." (Ibid., p. 318). One thing that shines like a piece of gold in the junk heap of sensationalism, sexual permutations, grizzly violence, and diluted sentimentalism, is his obsessed concern for the underdog, for the tainted, sensitive people, stabbed by Time curled up in agony. When so many writers in America and Europe deny any hope for such doomed persons, he is capable of harbouring such a hope, such a subjective concern. This concern though humble and private, secures a relevance for Williams in the modern world. "Like the bedevilled Swede, August Strindberg," writes Corrigan, "with whom he has so much in common, Williams may be justly accused of having a limited perspective on the alternatives of the human condition, but within the limits of the world he has chosen he has probably achieved more than any other living American dramatist." (27)

It is refreshing to note that like Hannah in The

Night of the Iguana, there are characters in many of
Williams' plays who understand these suffering, alie­
nated individuals. These characters certainly have
dramatic necessity, but at the same time, they represent
that part of the playwright's personality which hungers
for the sympathy and understanding of the audience/readers.
Like the chorus in the Greek tragedies, Horatio in Hamlet
and Fool and Edgar in King Lear, they try to take us
nearer to the perturbed protagonist, to help us to see
them as they see them. They are invariably straitfor­
ward, sober and resourceful—and these qualities give
them a sort of credibility which is their due. Stella
in A Streetcar Named Desire, Blackie in The Milk Train,
Carol in Orpheus Descending, Aunt Nonnie in The Sweet
Bird, Doctor Cukrowicz in Suddenly Last Summer, Leonard
in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Bertha in I Rise in Flame,
Monk in Confessional, Father De Leo in The Rose Tattoo,
Old Man in the one-act play "The Strangest Kind of Romance" and The Writer in the one-act play "The Lady of the
Larkspur Lotion"—are compassionate characters—capable
of seeing the skull beneath the skin, and they inform
us that the world Williams projects, is not without a
ray of companionship—that people can, if they try, get
at one another. Leonard tells Miriam about the artist,
Mark—"A painter with Mark's talent and originality is
a restless creature that lives in his private jungle." (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Part I, p. 34). Monk reflects over the demented Violet comparing her with a "dirty, worn-out slipper that's still being worn, sour-smelling from sweat from being worn too long, but still set down by the bed to be worn again the next day, walked on here and there on--pointless errands--till finally the sole of it's worn through. But even then you can't be sure that it will be thrown away, no, it might be resoled or just padded with cardboard, and still be put on to walk on, till it's past all repair--all repair." (Confessional, Sc II, p. 196). Monk shows us a chink through which we can pry into the irreducible essence of Violet's personality--into her very humanness which still carries a heart that can feel, a mind that can think, a body that can burn in passion and a soul that can aspire the beyond.

The presence of these compassionate, Horatio-like characters, who try to weather the storm that rages in the gestalts of the alienated protagonists, to focus a search-light on the hitherto unexplored, twilight zones of their being, not through the condenscending detachment of professional psychotherapists, but through love, sympathy and quiet understanding, give us an attitude to
reconsider them, to look at them from a new angle, and 
also to hear the sound of water beneath the rock-bed of 
the playwrights' bizarre sensationalism and perversions. 
This perhaps helps Christine Day to find in Williams' 
plays a "tenderness toward humanity, a sympathy for 
human frustration that, perhaps, can result only from 
a personal understanding of human weakness." (28)

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Where I Live, Selected Essays by Tennessee Williams, 