CHAPTER FOUR

GOD AND THE GUINEA PIGS

RELIGION AND THE ALIENATED INDIVIDUAL.

Yes, well, now, I can tell you without any hesitation that my son was looking for God, I mean for a clear image of Him. He spent that whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's-nest of the schooner watching this thing on the beach till it was too dark to see it, and when he came down the rigging he said, well, now I've seen Him! and he meant God.—And for several weeks after that he had a fever, he was delirious with it—...He meant that God shows a savage face to people and shouts some fierce things at them, it's all we see or hear of Him.

(Mrs. Venable in Suddenly Last Summer; T. Williams, Penguin Plays (c) 1958), p. 119.

Suddenly Last Summer is a short play of T. Williams in which ideas get the better of characterization, and what has already happened is more important than what is happening. A demented old lady tries to gag certain facts about her son who died while touring Cabeza de Lebo with his cousin-cum-lover Catharine Holly. Facts about Sebastian, her son, are unpalatable not only to the old lady, his mother, but also equally revolting to the modern taste. Sebastian was killed and eaten away by a band of naked children. Catharine, back at her place, begins to give vent to her terrible experiences at Cabeza de Lobo—which does not please Mrs. Venable, the bereaved mother. Through the power of money and influence, she gets her dazed and truth-crazy niece into a private asylum and forces doctors
to administer insulin and electric shocks to her—and now she tries to bribe Dr. Cuckrowicz to conduct a lobotomy on her to remove that tissue from her brain which remembers the incidents concerning her son.

Williams has shed off a lot of his usual redundancies in this play. It has the flash-back symmetry and lapidary art of *The Glass Menagerie*, and also the latter's consistency and precision in use of symbols. The pivotal symbol in this play is the Adamic theme. Sebastian, the Adam figure, surrounds himself with his self-arranged garden that looks "like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin...inhabited by beasts, serpents, and birds, all of savage nature," (1) containing the oldest plants on the earth. The garden conjures up an atavistic vision of Eden. Like Adam, Sebastian tries to know more that he is expected to know, that is, the nature of God—an act of disobedience—and as a result he is driven out of his paradise. He found God on the Encantadas in the Galapagos Islands while accompanied by his mother with whom he, as Williams makes us suspect, had an incestuous relationship. On the beach of the Encantadas, he saw big sea-turtles coming out of the sea, crawling across sands

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to get at rocks beneath which they lay their eggs. Then they buried their eggs under sands and crawled back to the sea. After a particular time, young turtles came out of their egg-shells and desperately crawled towards the sea. But on their way, they were attacked by big, black, flesh-eating birds that were lying in wait for them. They hovered and swooped over those defenceless turtles, "turning sides open and rending and eating their flesh." Only a hundredth of one per cent of their number could escape and get into the sea. Sebastian encountered God in that spectacle, and the price he paid for being so inquisitive was equally gruesome. He was, like a helpless young sea-turtle, assaulted and devoured alive by a band of hungry, naked children that resembled a "flock of plucked birds" and, as Williams suggests, he was martyred like the Christian saint whose name he bore on the beach that was named "La Playa San Sebastian." Williams also tries to convince that Sebastian deserves his punishment—for his hubris, for his pride to feel exalted above his kind, for his cruelty in watching young sea-turtles being devoured by black, predatory birds, in feeding his insectivorous plant, Venus Flytrap, with fruit flies, and above all for his homosexuality. The Edenic/Adamic theme becomes clear when we learn that Williams, in spite

(2) Ibid., pp. 117-18.
of his obsessions with vice, trivialities and perversions, is an incorrigible puritan.

"His Puritan nature," observes Nancy M. Tischler, "still remained the root of his being. For all of his Bohemianism, he was and is a Calvinist, preaching original sin." (3) Sebastian's vision of a God who squeezes the great drama of creation into a pithy rehearsal on the Encantadas, sending birds of prey to rend young turtles, prompting pregnant female turtles to crawl the distance and lay their eggs under the sand to protect them from natural enemies, and guiding those newly hatched turtles to their natural habitat, the sea. And the God that Sebastian discovers is the Old Testament God, Jehovah, who convicts mankind for the sin of their first parents. If God is so cunningly destructive, so ruthless, so cantankerous, He is not going to spare Sebastian, the feelingless voyeur, who trespasses His boundaries and peeps into His mystery.

In The Night of the Iguana, a character, Reverend Shannon, a Church Father, made love to a very young pretty woman while they were praying together kneeling before the altar. After the love-making he "struck her in the face and called her a damned little tramp." (4) and next Sunday

he climbed into the pulpit and declared to the mass that
he was tired of "conducting 'services in praise and wor-
ship of a senile delinquent!":

All your Western theologies, the whole mythology
of them, are based on the concept of God as a
senile delinquent, by God, I will not and cannot
continue to conduct services in praise and wor-
ship of this...angry, petulant old man. He is
represented like a bad-tempered childish old,
old, sick, peevish man—I mean like the sort of
old man in a nursing-home that's putting together
a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and
gets furious at it and kicks over the table.
Yes, I tell you they do that, all our theologies
do it—accuse God of being a cruel, senile delin-
qu Trent, blaming the world and brutally punishing
all He created for His own faults in construc-
tion.... (5)

The defrocked minister, then decides to go back to the
Church to preach the gospel of God as Lightning and
Thunder.

Both Sebastian and Shannon are obvious alter egos
of the author, and their inner honesty, poetic and priestly
qualities are stressed. One discovers God on the Encanta-
das, the other finds Him a petulant dotard who fails pit-
ifully to set His things in order and instead of admitting
His inefficiency, runs berserk and destroys what He has
created. The author believes (if we assume that he ear-
nestly believes in what he propounds through his protago-
nists) that man has created God in his own image, attribu-
ting to Him all his follies and vices. The seeming system

(5) Ibid., pp. 268-69.
and justice in the divine dispensation are only a human attribute.

Such insight into religion is not very startling and new, at least, for a writer of 20th century America. The Gods of Homer, Hesiod, Virgil and ancient Greek tragedians were no less fallible. Both Jehovah and Zeus were attributed with human short-comings and, though humanized and vulnerable to human emotions, they, quite like ancient emperors, were not bound by human rationality and laws. They could be impulsive, unpredictable, cruel and even stupidly gullible with impunity. They were not subjected to human judgement through sheer power of possessing thunder, sceptre and omnipotence. People cowered and shrank before their wrath and righteous indignation and never dreamt of questioning their authority. Of course, there are examples when, some brave and virtuous people during moments of their extreme physical and mental suffering, threw some of their restraints into the air and questioned the propriety of their undeserving suffering. The Book of Job is perhaps the first book written in the Western world in which the afflicted character raises his voice and questions the validity of the divine judgement, though with due humility. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly." (6)

Job also prays to God to keep His hands off the innocent, defenceless man so "that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day," (7) so that man can maintain his "own ways before him." (8) It is undoubtedly a great leap towards self-assertion, an attempt to preserve human freedom and dignity in the face of an ambivalent and capricious interference of the omnipotent divinity that demands absolute prostration. Such a tone of protest only marks the distance mankind has covered from The First Book of Moses, called Genesis to the Book of Job. God, who drove the first couple out of Eden was the same God, who, after a good deal of oration about His powers and whims, was magnanimous enough to reward Job.

Here in the hand of Tennessee Williams, God seems to have undergone a change, too. God punishes Sebastian, the immaculate poet/priest/pervert for his sin of seeing too closely, and seems to reward Reverend Shannon with a voluptuous nymphomaniac, Maxine Faulk, who can give him a bed, food and her tenants and of course, her own body. He also plans to repent and go back to his old profession as a preacher to preach the gospel of God as Thunder.

It is not attempted here to point out the basic contradictions and incongruities of Tennessee Williams in his notions about God and religion. Like neurosis,

(7) Ibid., 14: 6.
(8) Ibid., 13: 15.
murder, castration, homosexuality, quarrels, cannibalism, prostitution, infidelity and rape—religion is one of his obsessions. It is not simply possible to brand him as a Calvinist or a Puritan. He, like most of his characters and most of his real life contemporaries, swings precariously between belief and disbelief, deification of human dignity and attenuation of human values, romantic, even Platonic love and gross, coarse-grained perversions, child-like wonder and deadening of all sensibilities, attraction for and revulsion to everything holy and malevolent. No doubt, he has a puritanic trait in his character like Reverend Shannon, who can strike the woman after making love to her, because it was the victim who arouses his immoral and irreligious instincts and drags him to the unholy pit of sensuality—a peculiar habit to dump the burden of guilt on somebody else's shoulder.

Williams is an agnostic. Like all agnostics he holds the view that we know nothing of things beyond material phenomena—that the cause and effect of things, and the world that lies beyond the inverted bowl called the sky, the fate that awaits the man when he leaves the world, and the powers invisible, are unknown and unknowable. Such an attitude does not leave any room for theological, religious and eschatological considerations. Williams' frequent allusions to and aspersions on God, Christ and Theology
reveal his desperate attempt to obliterate that stain of orthodox and puritanic influence inculcated from his association with his mother, Edwina, sister, Rose and grand-father, and the society. But these stains—or it would be better to call them pictures—are almost tattooed in his mind and they refuse to be obliterated by his cavalier, bohemian and agnostic way of life; hence there is a continuous battle of conflicting impulses and values. He, like his audience, is aware of that battle and, though the issues are never resolved with absolute defeats and victories, his agnostic aspect always gets the upper hand. Williams himself observes: "Roughly there was a combination of Puritan and Cavalier strains in my blood which may be accountable for the conflicting impulses I often represent in the people I write about." (9)

Again, because of these conflicting impulses, he never leaves God and Christian saints alone in any of his plays. He perhaps believes that the only way to invest characters with multilayered symbolism is to connect them with Christian saints, God, Christ and other mythological figures; sometimes one character is burdened with many such allusions and becomes a nuisance not only to himself,

but also to those who have naivete to find coherence in the character. One such character is Valentine Xavier in *Orpheus Descending*.

Like Catharine Holly in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Williams believes that human beings are "children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks"--fumbling, as it were, between two theological conceptions--the God of the Old Testament, enigmatic, irascible, and full of highly inflammable temper--and the New Testament God, the Christian God who is full of love, understanding and compassion, between the God who created man out of his own image and the God who was created by man in his own image. And it is also apparent that there would not be an end to such fumbling because the alphabet blocks are wrong. Though Williams holds the view that God is unknowable and beyond a ship-shape definition, he chooses to imagine God as wrathful and cruel.

"In the plays of Tennessee Williams, the enfeeblement of sex is exceeded only by the enfeeblement of God," observes a critic, and adds that the "most felicitous simulacrum of this occurs in his 1972 play, *Small Craft Warnings*, when a hooker who has just jerked off a client is said to have God in her hands." (11) The fate of Jesus Christ

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(10) T. Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*, p. 130.
and other Christian saints is equally deplorable in Williams' hands. Sebastian is a rejector, a crafty homosexual and a fop, and he discovers God in the flesh-eating birds devouring young sea-turtles. Valentine Xavier in Orpheus Descending and The Battle of Angels, a pathetic wreck of man, a wastrel, a thief, a gambler, a tall-talker, is frequently alluded as a Saviour, and he calls himself God and his sexual partner, Lady.

Val: God, I--! Lady, you--!
Myra: God you an' lady me, huh. I think you are kind of exaggerating a little in both cases.

(T. Williams, Battle of Angels (New York: New Directions, 1958), Act I, p. 149.)

Christopher Flanders in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, nick-named Chris is the self-appointed angel of death, though in reality he turns out to be a mean trickster and a clumsy kleptomaniac and gigolo. And Reverend Shannon, a preacher, is accused of heresy and fornication.

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In the dramatic works of Williams, the image of God and the spirit of Christianity have degenerated beyond recognition. Christ and Christianity have lost their purity and God and old theology have lost their relevance. But they keep on haunting the imagination of most of the characters and of the author himself. Williams' attitude
towards God and religion is not one of total rejection. He, perhaps, attempts to chalk out a new image of God who can contain immaculate spirit and lustful bodies, of religion which can admit of human vulnerability to sensual attraction and man's aspiration beyond the flesh. Such dual attitude on the part of the author can be attributed to his puritanic upbringing and his infatuation with earthly pleasures. But looking at this deterioration of the institutionalized religion and the image of the supreme deity from a broader angle, we can see that Williams wrote his plays in the middle of the 20th century America, and that he is more or less influenced by the secular ideas that have gradually been snowballing since the seventeenth century. American tradition, religious or otherwise, is a corollary of the European tradition. American writers and thinkers have always looked upon Europe for inspiration and ideas, and are glad to be influenced by European ideas.

Here I try to trace the beginning of the secular thinking in Europe, and its steady progress. The process of secularizing religion to replace authoritarian religion with humanistic religion, to divest the orthodox, faith of its superfluities and fanaticism started in the 16th century and began gathering momentum in the course of history and precipitated with the advent of the Age of
Enlightenment in the 18th century and Free Thought in the 19th century.

The Gods of ancient Greece and Rome and God, Jehovah of the Old Testament were taking an active interest in the affairs of human beings. Though gods were taking sides, were unpredictable in their show of favours and wrath, they were held in awe and reverence. Humans were feeling a sense of security. This feeling of security was strengthened by the advent of Christianity. God sent down His only begotten Son to redeem man from the original sin, imprinted upon him for the act of disobedience committed by his first parents—Adam and Eve. In the Ptolemic cosmology, all the heavenly bodies, stars and the sun revolved round the earth: "The saints, angels, and the Lord of creation were all within calling distance and a long arm's reach—He was at home in the world." (12)

A strong belief in anthropocentrism and geocentrism ruled out the possibility of alienation. As long as man believes sincerely in the divine dispensation, a system in the creation, and in his own greatness as a human being—he feels at home with the Universe, his society, and with himself. In such a system of belief, divine personalities stand for the good and the just. If evil exists, it is usually overpowered by the pervading goodness of God. "Since God is the highest good," observes St. Augustine,

"He would not allow any evil to exist in His works unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil." (13)

The geocentricity enjoyed by the earth in the Ptolemaic cosmology was shattered in the first half of the 17th century when Galileo invented the telescope to prove the Copernican theory that the earth moved round the sun. The anthropocentricity enjoyed by man was exploded when Charles Darwin published his two epoch-making books—The Origin of Species in 1859 and The Descent of Man in 1871. Darwin proved that Man was not a fallen angel, a descendant of Adam and Eve whom God had created in His own image, but a developed beast, a descendant of anthropoids.

Many other factors are responsible for the decline of the religious fervour in the twentieth century. Free and bold thinking, scientific and technological inventions have denuded religion and God of most of their mystical garments. Karl Marx's Dialectical Materialism and Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis dealt fatal blows to the authority enjoyed by religion and God. Marx brands religion as "a perverse world consciousness" for both capitalist and worker because it obscures the inescapable fact of the conflicting economic interests in society and "the changes required to alter the course of society," and hence serves

as an "opiate" that de-politicizes the individual consciousness. (14) Transvaluation, the substitution of spiritual values for material values, "consoles and compensates the under-privileged by substituting a hierarchy based on one's state of grace for hierarchies based on birth, possession, and power." (15)

Sigmund Freud is outright in his rejection of religion. Religion, according to him, is an illusion, a pernicious illusion because it impoverishes intelligence by blocking critical thinking, because it retards free development of human faculties by fettering the grown-up individual to infantile fixation. "The origin of the religious attitude," observes Freud, "can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness." (16)

Even before Freud, God was sufficiently enfeebled and religion was sufficiently humbled. Puritanic religion and orthodox theology were desperately on the defensive. Robert G. Ingersoll, writing in the last part of 19th century in America, declares trenchantly--"She (The Church) is filled with the spite and spleen, born of intellectual weakness. Once she was egotistic; now she is envious.


(15) Ibid., p. 356.

Once she wore upon her hollow breast false gems, supposing them to be real. They have been shown to be false, but she wears them still. She has the malice of the caught, the hatred of the exposed." (17) R.G. Ingersoll was unsparing in his attack on God and the Church. "A deity outside of nature," he declared, "exists in nothing, and is nothing." (18) The spirit of the orthodox religion and the deity was declining in adverse proportion to the progress made by the modern civilization in fields of science and technology. A sweeping rationality had swallowed up faith. Mysteries, miracles and arcane situations lost their terror and appeal, and were subjected to the glaring lights of scientific probings and secular thoughts. God and Christianity were fighting desperately for survival. Towards the last part of the 19th century, Nietzsche in his Thus Spake Zarathustra wrote the obituary of God— "God is Dead."

Bertrand Russell, a great thinker of the 20th century, raised his powerful voice to condemn the institutionalized religion practised in Europe and America. He, like his contemporary, Freud, believed that the popular belief in God arose out of the fear of insecurity, and God, was more or less, a sort of big brother who looked after mankind,


that people believed in religion because they were taught to believe from their early infancy. "It is not only intellectually but also morally that religion is pernicious. I mean by this that it teaches ethical codes which are not conducive to human happiness." (19) Then he adds that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of the moral progress in the world, and the scriptures contain words uttered long ago by "ignorant men." (20) It is very interesting to note that Russell after uttering such apparently heretical words was appointed as Professor of Philosophy in the City College of New York in 1941. A bishop of a protestant Episcopal Church strongly disapproved of that appointment, and both the Lower Court and the Supreme Court revoked his appointment. It was a challenge to the secularism that had already struck roots in the American Society: a tussle between orthodox dogma and free thought, between puritanism and agnosticism. A signature campaign was launched in support of Russell's appointment. Most of the eminent professors, scientists and philosophers were among the signatories which included Whitehead, Dewey, Shapley, Kasner, Einstein and Cohen. "Great spirits," Einstein remarked, "have always found


(20) Ibid., pp. 22-23.
violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence." Professor Cohen called law an ass. "As Americans," said John Dewey, "we can only blush with shame for this scar on our reputation for fairplay." (21) The Supreme Court did not revoke its judgement. But Russell was invited to join Harvard. He went to England, and when in 1950 he returned to America to address Columbia University students, he was given a reception that could be compared with the reception given to Voltaire in Paris in 1778. He was also awarded the Nobel Prize in 1950. The importance of such an incident can never be exaggerated. The zeal and enthusiasm with which the issue of Russell's appointment was taken up shows the force of secularism that had already become firmly placed in the public life of American society.

Tennessee Williams began his dramatic career in the forties and was fully aware of the psychological conflict the American laity was undergoing, poised between the puritanic beliefs inculcated through familial

(21) Ibid., p. 23.
and social brainwashing and upbringing, and the increasing agnosticism and skepticism attacking the psyche in a progressive age. Williams was also aware of the similar schism and tension in him. And his plays are an endless endeavour to get at a point of compromise between God and Satan, spirit and flesh, belief and disbelief, goodness and vileness, religion and sex. He is not a systematic thinker and like most volatile and sentimental artists, he seems to find his salvation, not in a ship-shape compromise of these two contrary forces, but in a continuation of such conflicts, and revels in unresolved ambiguities. He is not exactly a "non-absurdist nay-sayer" (22) as Gassner calls him, nor a "Calvinist" as Nancy Tischler describes him. (23) He is genuinely confused, and his confusion over issues, moral and otherwise is so pervasive and typical that most of his protagonists who sport such ambivalent notions on the stage, sometimes deserve credibility.

"In the plays of Tennessee Williams," observes a critic, "the enfeeblement of sex is exceeded only by the enfeeblement of God." (24) In most of his plays, his obsession with religion and God can only be matched with

(23) T. Williams, Rebellious Puritan, Nancy Tischler, p. 264.
his sex and corruption. Sometimes he projects his two major obsessions, religion and sex, in his central characters with such tense proximity that one seems to be ingrained in the other. Reverend T. Shannon recapitulates before Hannah, how he could seduce his first victim, a very young girl, in front of the altar of his church. "I said, let's kneel down together and pray, and we did; we knelt down, but all of a sudden the kneeling position turned to a reclining position on the rug of my study and...when we got up? I struck her. Yes, I did, I struck her in the face and called her a damned little tramp." (25)

Looking at the plays of Williams and his treatment of religion and sex, it becomes increasingly clear that Shannon is Williams—combining in himself a priggish puritanism and concupiscence, the sin of gross sensuality and the inevitable atonement and retribution, a desire to conform and an urgency to rebel. Shannon succumbs to his sensual passion for the young girl and drifts with amazing swiftness from an elevated mood of prayer to a carnal mood of fornication, and is possessed by a morbid mood of guilt. Instead of condemning his own vulnerability, he condemns the victimized girl who aroused his passion, and strikes her in the face. Such strange behaviour shocks the girl who tries to kill herself but is saved. It creates a

scandal. The laceration of the spirit that comes over him after coitus is an outcome of his demented and priggish psychosis. The mind of Shannon is infested with lurid images of sex and a stern image of orthodox God as in a medieval monastery as depicted by Boccaccio in *Decameron*—with its lecherous monks and their voluptuous concubines. Williams' protagonists, more or less like Reverend Shannon are always "torn between the god-seeking impulse and pull of desire," observes Harold Clurman. And he adds, "In the shambles of our civilization desire has been debased into raw carnality. Sex without the blessedness of Love is death-dealing corruption...his (Williams') men and women are destroyed by the poisons which emanate from it. The lacerations they suffer are the result of their bodies and souls being at odds. The sharpness of this division is a characteristic of Williams' puritan consciousness." (26)

Shannon's first act of fornication leads to an inner schism, renders him unacceptable to the tenets of theology. He is alienated from the sacrosanct principles of religion, and consequently is alienated from himself. It is not God, whose absolute speechlessness is stressed by Heckler in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, who is showing His displeasure or a wry face to Shannon, but it is his own sense

of purity that is desecrated as he hankers after an atonement through suffering. It is interesting to note that his blasphemous tirade comes after his act of fornication, not the other way round which might have been more spontaneous. After that act of guilt, after the spread of the scandal—he conjures up a new image of God who can harbour in Himself both good and evil. His inner imperative to have God at any cost is clear. He also knows that he can never be acceptable to the God of Western theologies, hence his urgency to reject Him before being rejected. He confesses that he had an impulse to shake them. He told them extempore, of course—

...I am tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent...All your western theologies, the whole mythology of them, are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent...this angry, petulant old man...a bad-tempered childish old, old, sick, peevish man—I mean like the sort of old man in a nursing home that's putting together a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table...blaming the world and brutally punishing all He created for His own faults in construction. (27)

His guilt turned him into a rebel. He rebels against the Church that makes heavy demands upon his very human faculties—asking him to bridle his passions for sex and freedom. When his desire triumphs over his puritanic value—judgement embedded in his psyche through a long

episcopal training, he holds at first the poor, pretty choir singer guilty for carrying him to forbidden corridors of sex, then he lashes at the western theologies that he has imbibed in himself, because they have infused in him a peevish image of God who would mind his having sex with a young girl. Shannon's flambouyant Jeremiad against God can be equalled only with the quiet violence with which Zarathustra declares that "there is nothing of all that whereof thou speakest; there is no devil and no hell. Thy soul will be dead even sooner than thy body; fear, therefore, nothing anymore" (28) and tells to his heart, "Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that God is dead." (29)

But causes and contexts of these two characters' denunciations are different. Zarathustra expresses the ineluctable and inevitable fate of God, not with a tone of exultation, but with a tone of brooding concern. Here in Williams' play, the declaration is more in the nature of exulting rodomontade than in the nature of concern for God's sickness and senility. The reasons are obvious. Shannon exults when he discards God as an impulsive dotard because, he feels, he can have greater freedom in a world that does not take God seriously. There is no anguish, but bravado;

no self-scrutiny, but self-justification; no conviction, but a face-saving affrontery. The contradiction in his attitude is too glaring. A few minutes later the sick, senile God pays a visit to His created world in the form of storm, lightning and thunder. The storm, accompanied by lightning and thunder, is the awesome majesty of God. Williams describes the storm using grand and terrible words. "He (Shannon) is pointing out at a blaze, a majestic apocalypse of gold light, shafting the sky as the sun drops into the Pacific." (30) Again in the same Act, the storm, with its white convulsions of light is like a giant white bird attacking the hilltop of the Costa Verde...The German party look on the storm as a Wagnerian climax:

Hannah: ...Here is your God, Mr. Shannon.
Shannon: (quietly) Yes, I see Him, I hear Him, I know Him. And if He doesn't know that I know Him, let Him strike me dead with a bolt of His lightning--(31)

It is the tone of Job, sitting on the ash-heap; it is the poignant tone of Jesus Christ on the Cross. God of The Book of Job directs "his lightning unto the ends of the earth," "thundereth marvellously with his mouth." (32) Job, like Shannon, has added rebellion unto his sin and Job's God, like Shannon's "respecteth not any that are wise of heart." (33) But Shannon is not Job. Shannon

(31) Ibid., p. 286.
(33) Ibid., 37: 28.
flaunts his wisdom about God, and his antagonism comes after his transgression. Job cries out against the divine dispensation out of intense suffering, that is undeserved suffering, and his anguish is sincere. In Job’s tone, there is both reverence for the deity and the assertion of his own ways before Him, both faith and doubt. God of the Old Testament, observes Carl Jung, "has a terrible double aspect: a sea of grace is met by a seething lake of fire, and the light of love glows with a fierce dark heat of which it is said—ardet non lucet—it burns but gives no light." (34) But in Shannon’s conception of God, there is no benign aspect. God is a sick, peevish cantankerous old "man", and He still is in possession of thunder and lightning. Shannon can only see God as an angry, impulsive, childish, old "man" holding a loaded machine-gun, His finger on the trigger, who can only arouse fear, not love, not spontaneous surrender. Whereas Job’s accusations have the saving grace of faith, and his anguish is due to his disillusionment about the divine justice, Shannon’s disbelief is occasioned by his hubris and guilt. Job, like the tragic heroes of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Shakespeare, feels alienated from God, the society and fellow-men, but their alienation is temporary. That’s because their faith in certain values and in God is not to be destroyed by

their suffering, by the catastrophe befalling them, though temporarily shaken. But Shannon is confused about his own perspectives, and tries to go back to the Church to preach God as lightning and thunder. He fails to substantiate his defamation of God with reasons. What exactly the Western theologies and God have done to merit such wholesale denigration? Passing references are there about his being caught and thrashed by his Mama while practising "the little boy's vice" and though he desisted from such practices, he harboured a perpetual and "secret resentment against Mama and God"—gets back at God "by preaching atheistical sermons" and gets back "at Mama by starting to lay young girls." (35) If such hints would be taken seriously, the problems and aspersions of Shannon can be explained in terms of psychology and very superficial aspects of religion. His mother's threat that God would be offended and would punish him was a damp squib.

Once Shannon's fornication and heresy are attributed to this incident in his early puberty, the play loses its intensity, complexity and metaphysical dimensions, and becomes embarrassingly simple, and certainly the playwright does not mean it. Williams does not want us to appreciate Shannon's being confined to a private asylum. He cuts himself off from the benign aspect of God, and his identification with humanity is suspect. "I love nobody,"

declares Shannon, "I'm like that; it isn't my fault." He is alienated both from God and from his fellowmen.

Williams seems to stress in *The Night of the Iguana* that religion that cashes in on human frailty, or restricts the freedom of man conjuring up before him an image of an irascible God who would not like man having his own way or that approves of Inquisition has no relevance for the individual who respects himself. Religion, the true religion saves man, and protects him from despair that arises out of the transitoriness and misery of existence. The Ark of Religion in the 20th century America has decayed beyond repair and would not save its crew from the flood.

"Multitudes of people today," observed H.E. Fosdick in 1932, "are trying to preserve the organizations and thought-forms of religion. They are habitual steadiers of the Ark. Often with feverish militancy, always with deadly earnestness, they have made up their minds that religion must be saved. Such an attitude is a sure sign of religion's senility." (37) A religion that grows into senility is bound to die. What Williams and Fosdick mean is not exactly that. They perhaps mean that a religion that refuses to grow, to keep up with the spirit of changed times, that depends solely on old dogma for its justification and

sustenance, slowly and imperceptibly stagnates; instead of liberating, it enslaves; instead of correcting some of its follies, it tries to stick to them with fanatical zeal. Such a religion fails to help its adherents when they are lonely and alienated.

Posdick points out that it is not irreligion that would replace religion, it is not disbelief that would replace faith, it is not anarchy that would replace freedom—but a higher, more dynamic, more authentic, more relevant religion, faith, and freedom that would replace their stagnated, senile forms. "We are insisting, rather," he observes, "that the sort of dogma now enjoying ecclesiastical ascendancy has no vital relation with the best spiritual life of our time, and that the sort of churches now existent are often stifling the life out of real religion." (38)

Erich Fromm divides religion into two types: authoritarian religion and humanistic religion. In authoritarian religion God is the omnipotent being that demands total obedience and reverence, and "the life of the individual becomes insignificant and man's worth consists in the very denial of his worth and strength. Frequently authoritarian religion postulates an ideal which is so abstract and so distant that it has hardly any connection

(38) Ibid., p. 22.
with the real life of real people." (39) On the other hand, humanistic religion concerns man and admits his strength, allows him to realise his own potency and individuality, helps him to understand himself, to establish a meaningful relationship with his fellow beings, in other words, to get rid of his alienation. Observes Fromm, "Man's aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength, not the greatest powerlessness: virtue is self-realization not obedience. Faith is certainty of conviction based upon one's experience, thought and feeling...The prevailing mood is that of joy, while the prevailing mood in authoritarian religion is that of sorrow and guilt." (40)

The central point of this chapter is that true religion elevates man's consciousness to a level where he is capable of knowing himself and identifying with what Hegel calls, the social substance. In that high level of consciousness most of the problems that confront a sensitive individual, deeply disturb him, confuse him, lose their magnitude and emphasis. Man's narcissism, solipsism, maladjustment, pettifoggings, over-indulgence with his senses, continually force him to be crazy for the trivial and the small. Man feels alienated from the self,

(40) Ibid., p. 37.
from the society because he fails to imbibe in himself the true spirit of religion, what Erich Fromm calls humanistic religion. Whereas humanistic religion protects man from a feeling of alienation, authoritarian religion precipitates such a feeling. Fromm points out..."in authoritarian religion God becomes the sole possessor of what was originally man's: of his reason and his love...when man has thus projected his own most valuable powers onto God, what of his relationship to his own powers? They have become separated from him and in this process he has become alienated from himself." (41) Religion, in this sense, instead of assisting man to improve upon his own powers to think and love, delegates these powers to God who bestows them upon him at the cost of total surrender and devotion. Man is evil and God is good. Man without the benign help of God cannot rise above the evil so ingrained in him and attain goodness and perfection which is divine. Authoritarian religion reminds man that he should not respect himself, but God. "The real fall of man," continues Fromm, "is his alienation from himself, his submission to power, his turning against himself even though under the guise of his worship of God." (42)

Fromm stands on dubious grounds when he tries to separate these two aspects of religion in two hermetically

(41) Ibid., p. 50.
(42) Ibid., p. 53.
sealed units. No religion can be ever so bad as authoritarian religion and no religion can ever be so good as humanistic religion. There is always the possibility of authoritarian religion containing some aspects of humanistic religion and vice versa. All great religions of the world emerged out of man's yearning beyond the sheer physical, out of his awe in the face of natural phenomena and his conception that the creator, God, is not only the dispenser of his own destiny but also the master of Nature; that not a sparrow falls without God's intention and knowledge. Hence the urgency to propitiate God. Christianity was born out of human concerns and was an improvement upon the existing Jewish and Roman classical religions. But in course of time it played into the hands of prigs and tricksters who bothered more for rituals and superfluities than for the spirit and essence of religion until it became in the words of R.G. Ingersoll, an "admixture of love towards God and hatred towards man." (43) What Fromm calls humanistic religion, Fosdick calls "youthful" religion. Fosdick stresses the existence of God who deserves our adoration. According to him man's "authentic religious experience" comes not by what he enslaves and uses but by what he adores, not by what he commands but by what commands him. "The one thing that backward, sectarian,

and obscurantist churches need most to fear is such religion...an aged and decrepit religion to its crutches has always needed to fear a youthful movement of the spirit, a vigorous and spontaneous emergence of religious experience in its essential meaning." (44) This youthful and vigorous religion is not so much of a brand new birth as a sort of renaissance of the essential and humanistic values the old religion holds sacrosanct, though distorted and rusted beyond recognition.

In Williams' play, Shannon's protest against the orthodox God and Theology loses direction. He disavows God as a senile man, and then discovers his God in the storm, lightning and thunder. His acute alienation springs from his inability to believe in the old God and his failure to conjure up a new image of God as Reason and Love. In a world devoid of a benevolent God, a reasonable God, man is bound to feel forsaken. Man is not in a position to count on God, nor is he capable of counting on other men around him. Shannon is locked out of the Church, he is also sacked by the Blake Tours. He sharply reacts when he is accused by Miss Bellows of atheism. He really does not deny the existence of God, but he simply portrays Him differently, as Williams asks us to believe. But to see God as Lightning and Thunder is not to see Him

(44) H.E. Fosdick, As I See Religion, p. 31.
differently, Zeus and Jehovah were Gods with lightning and thunder. The entire Old Testament pictures Jehovah as a whimsical God of wrath who demands total surrender, fear and trembling. In *The Book of Job*, God is "senile" and puerile enough to be intrigued by His shrewd son Satan, and then towards the end he replies with the voice of thunder, he alludes to hawks, eagles, behemoth and leviathan to convince Job about his omnipotence. Words like power, terror, thunder and lightning are used frequently in connection with Jehovah in the Old Testament.

In Williams' plays God is equated with the savage birds of Encantadas Islands tearing open the flesh of young sea-turtles. *(Suddenly Last Summer)*. The Deity that arouses awe cannot be the thing after our heart. Man crouches, as Job did towards the end, before this highly inflammable Deity. The New Testament God is an improvement upon the Old Testament God, Jehovah. Though there is a note of condenscension, it is enriched by an unmistakable touch of understanding of man's necessity of Love and proclivity towards forbidden pleasures of senses. To conjure up an image of God, as Shannon does in *The Night of the Iguana*, as Sebastian does in *Suddenly Last Summer*, as a senile man, a wrathful manifestation through lightning and thunder, and as a rapacious bird of prey, is to divest Him of that aspect of love, forgiveness and understanding.
that goes with the Christian faith. Paul Tillich in his book *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, Vol. I, 1951, Vol. II, 1957) figures out the inevitability of alienation in persons who are incapable of faith. Man, by the very fact of being existent, is estranged from his true essence, from his true being, and his estrangement is marked by three symptoms—"hubris," when the man elevates himself to the sphere of divinity and does not admit his finitude, "unbelief" and "concupiscence." (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 44-47). Both Shannon and Sebastian search for God more like inquisitive voyeurs than like persons with indomitable earnestness, more like wanderers than like pilgrims, and have failed to love Him and are guilty of unbelief, concupiscence and hubris. The author decks them with supernatural auras, Christ-Adonis symbolism, and grandeur and dignity at the heavy cost of being stodgy. Sebastian, a precarious combine of Adam, Christ, Adonis and St. Sebastian, turns out to be a solipsistic snob, and a shrewd, go-getting pederast who "uses" his doting mother and cousin Catharine as baits to catch victims. Shannon, a priest, indulging in worn-out rhetorics about his own unique, intellectual superiority, his dignity as a messiah of a New God of Thunder (who turns out to be the Old One), against the orthodoxy of the sex-inhibited spinsters, is nothing but a crazy, obstinate moron, a seducer of young girls; who flouts God,
then crouches before His pantheistic manifestations of fury and ends up as a gigolo of a middle-aged, rough-hewn nympho, Maxine Paulk. This is a manifestation of a neurotic personality like many other protagonists of Williams, or for that matter, the protagonists in a good deal of modern literature.

According to Paul Tillich the existential estrangement whose marks are concupiscence, unbelief and hubris, can be overcome through man's identification with Jesus, his power, greatness and love. "The characteristics of the New Being," he asserts, "are the opposite of those of estrangement, namely, faith instead of unbelief, surrender instead of hubris, love instead of concupiscence." (Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 177). The way Tennessee Williams treats Christ in his plays, one-act plays and short stories reveals not only his ambivalent attitude towards the Messiah but his inner dichotomy also. Commenting on The Mutilated, a Slapstic tragedy as the author dubs it, in which Celeste, a mean parasite, a dirt-cheap whore receives the invisible presence of Mary, in which a miracle takes away the pain in the breast of a mutilated Trinket, Harold Clurman calls it "Williams' squint-eyed flirtation with mysticism." Williams in this play "attempts," adds Clurman, "to ward off self-pity through
Camino Real conjures up an ambivalent image of God—a confused Old Man, a cruel experimenter, a pitiable, even foolish creator. The survivor declares, "when Peeto (a pony) was one year old he was wiser than God." (Penguin Plays: T. Williams, Block-II, p. 137). The Gipsy smirks at Kilroy's assertion that he is not a guinea pig: "Don't kid yourself! We're all of us guinea pigs in the laboratory of God. Humanity is just a work in progress." (Ibid., p. 203) Block-12). In this vast laboratory, God relentlessly carries on His experiments, dissecting so many human guinea pigs with sharp knives. Like the human scientists, He does not feel any pity or remorse for butchering so many innocent creatures. Kilroy pities the world and pities the God who made it. (Ibid., p. 214) Esmeralda, Gipsy's weird daughter asks an already besotted Kilroy, if they have got the Old Man in the bag yet, and she means God. Then she adds knowingly: "We think there has been so much of the mumbo-jambo it's put Him to sleep! (Ibid., Block-12, p. 209). A cold-blooded, feelingless, truth-searching dissector may be an object of terror, but certainly not an object of pity. Then how can these helpless

guinea pigs put God in the bag, and how can a Deity who carries on experiments on the lives and bodies of human beings be put out by the mumbo jumbo? Williams mean to say that there is something incorrigibly wrong in the universe and God, the Creator of such a universe, is both cruel and pitiable. Man, perhaps, surpasses God in knowledge, hence is in a position to pity Him. Of course it is no great achievement to surpass God in wisdom, because He has already been surpassed by a one-year old pony. Such statements prove or disprove nothing; vague, bloodless rhetorics that emerge not out of an inner, sincere perplexity, of an agony of being at a loss, but out of intellectual swash-buckling. Problems are bypassed, themes waver and characters lose credibility and conviction, because the author directs his efforts more to shock, startle and stun than to convince his audience. Great writers invariably rise above their characters, allow their characters to grow, but Williams is very much a sort of prompter behind the wing whose voice is more audible than the voice of his characters, and his characters who are set and stunted, revel in self-justification. That's the reason why Kilroy has no unique reason in pitying God nor has Esmaralda any dramatic necessity in calling Him a dozing dotard nor has the Gipsy any character-urgency to dub Him as a reckless, feelingless dissector.
In the play *Kingdom of Earth*, Chicken, a direct descendant of Stanley Kowalski, a cruder specimen of sadism, animal vitality and vulgarity, when informed that a certain old Man Mr. Sikes might dynamite his south bank levee to save his north bank levee, compares Mr. Sikes with God because he has "got more to think about than people below him." (46) Referring to the sound of a river swelling "to a muted lion-like roar," Chicken says, "If God had a voice that is the way it would sound." God is a selfish person in possession of dynamite/thunder who would not mind to drown others when it comes to protecting his own estate. He "roars" wrathfully like a lion. He, indeed, is the God of Sebastian who is epitomized in the grizzly sight of predatory birds tearing young sea-turtles on the Gelapelago islands, and He is the God of Shannon who manifests Himself through the elemental furies of Nature—Storm, Lightning and Thunder.

It is significant to note that nowhere in his prodigious output, Williams questions God's existence in order to deny the importance of religion in the life of an individual. On the other hand, there is always an attempt to explain the inexplicable, to see the invisible, to define the indefinable, to humanize the divine, and to perceive the transcendent. Heckler in *The Sweet Bird of

Youth believes in the "silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him." (Act II, Sc.2, p. 94). Williams' God is not exactly silent, though speechless. He is the God of gestures, grunts, roars, rather than the God of rhetorics and dialogues. Moony in one of Williams' earliest short plays—Moony's Kid Don't Cry—finds God a "crazy man, deaf, dumb, and blind (who) could have put together a better kind of a world than this is." (God is deaf, dumb and blind, and has created a world that constantly goes haywire, slips out of his hand and He grows furious over the mess like the superannuated Old Man of Reverend Shannon trying to put "together the jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table." (The Night of the Iguana, p. 269).

"Tennessee Williams," observes a critic, "is on the board of trustees of the 'God is dead' school of literary writers." (48) But though Williams humanizes God, stressing His sickness and senility and does not rule out the possibility of His natural death in the near future, he has not seen Him dead like the prophet Zarathustra. It is not the ghost of God, but His living presence that pervades his plays.

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(48) Francis L. Kunkel, Passion and the Passion, p. 103.
Reverend Shannon protests when he is called an atheist. He scolds God, declares old theologies irrelevant and refuses to conduct services in praise of God, but nowhere he asserts that God is dead. He is sick, old, stupid, but He is very much alive. He is offended and abashed by the mumbo jumbo, the rank corruption in His created world, fails pitifully to set things in order, occasionally venting out His pent-up vexation through rumbles of thunder, terrifying flashes of lightning and stormy waters of the Pacific. These elemental furies are indignant and enraged gestures of a mute, yet powerful God, and a moral God who is living. His existence is evidenced not only through intuition but also through pantheistic manifestations.

God, according to Williams, is both a part of the cosmic mystery and its primus mobile. Mystery is the sine qua non of God's existence, hence His attraction for the author. Like Myrtle in Kingdom of Earth (New Directions, 1968) who is touched by Lot's mysterious ways and wants to devote herself to him, Williams' characters show their obsession for the Deity they hardly understand. "I am going to devote myself to you," says Myrtle, "like a religion, mystery as you are, back of that ivory holder and Mona Lisa smile." (p. 43). The mystery of God and the universe engrosses Williams and his characters because
it gives them sometimes an alibi to escape from the drab chores of routine life and painful deprivations, sometimes a chance to approximate God in their own way in desperate attempts of self-justification. Catharine Holly quotes a well-known metaphor of E.A. Robinson: "We're all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks." (Suddenly Last Summer, Penguin Plays, p. 130). Perhaps, they can never arrange these alphabet blocks correctly to write God's name, because these blocks are "wrong," but, though their failure is ineluctible, such infinite number of permutations and combinations keep them engaged. And Williams, perhaps, asks us to believe that they are significantly engaged, for their very intention to spell God's name endows their otherwise paltry frisking with blocks with a higher significance, a transcendental meaning. The different ways in which some of Williams' characters try to arrange the alphabet blocks, convince us that they are all children obsessed with their blocks, not with seriousness, but with flambuoyancy and fun, not with professional, efficient zeal but with amateurish interest, and sometimes those chance arrangements reveal weird images, grotesque names.

Alma Winemiller, a priest's daughter who symbolizes soul and eternity, discovers God Almighty in a box of
morphine tablets. Like morphine tablets God makes possible her escapades; for they both paralyse senses and also intoxicate. Religion is branded (by Karl Marx) as the opium of the people, hence the need of its being discarded. Alma, the spirit/soul/eternity personification, loses faith in the spiritual and turns to promiscuity as a solution of her problems. Alma's disenchantment with the Church, the symbol of institutionalized, puritanic, orthodox, episcopal religion demanding total conformity, arises, perhaps, out of her psychological maladjustment with her family and society. Promiscuity is one of the forms of protest. Her fantastic, even unnatural leap from innocence to experience, from pristine purity to rank sensuality, from spirit to flesh, from love to lust, and finally from God Almighty to the box of morphine tablets is symptomatic of an acute form of alienation occasioned by an inner schism. To reject the Old God and Dogma for the sake of it, and to reject the Old God and orthodox dogma as a gesture of offence to join the camp of gross sensuality—-are not the same things. In Alma's case the thawing (down) of religious fervour precipitates her feeling of loneliness, and her sensuality that at first, appealed to her as a sedative, can only aggravate her alienation. Again, if Williams intends her to be a symbol of the "soul" and eternity, her revolt against the superficial, corrupt
form of religion should not have pushed her to a paranoic obsession with sex. If Williams tries to prove that religious taboos and repressions have to yield ultimately to promiscuity and nymphomania, his frequent allusions to soul, spirit, eternity, love and God are glib patters. On the other hand, John's transformation from earthiness to spirituality, from a gay Stanley to a seedy Hannah Jelkes, from genitals to soul, is more of a conjurer's tricks than the consummate artistry expected from a seasoned playwright. Williams does not give us clues to take John's final confession about his metamorphosis as a trick to get rid of a passe Alma. The tone of the play seems to suggest that such role-swapping, saint turning sinner, sinner turning saint, has relevance in the realm of ideas, and Williams who is essentially an emotional, non-intellectual, involved playwright, fumbles pathetically when he trespasses into the realm of ideas. A great deal of artistic objectivity is required when a writer ventures into ideas, as we find in Bernard Shaw, Pirandello, Ionesco and Beckett, and Sartre. A greater deal of objectivity is seen in writers who fuse ideas into emotionally charged dramatic situations, as we find in Bertolt Brecht. But Williams throughout his writing career, from The Glass Menagerie (1945) to Something Cloudy, Something Clear (1981) has not attained any objectivity, never risen above his
characters and their immediate surroundings. And that is the reason why he limps clumsily, rather than walk elegantly in the world of ideas, and *Summer and Smoke* turns out to be a realistic/modern parody of a Morality play. Alma Winemiller and Dr. John Buchanon swap their roles for no dramatic exigency. Alma is hopelessly alienated in both situations—when in shackles of over-bearing parents and when availing the freedom of a common prostitute.

*Summer and Smoke* (1948) is one of Williams' earliest plays in which he juxtaposes his two favourite themes: Religion and Sex, and attempts to show them as two indispensable polarities between which man's existence is a continuous tension. Many of his protagonists, like Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending* and *The Battle of Angels*, Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*, Sebastian in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Christopher Flanders in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* and Chance in *Sweet Bird of Youth* combine in themselves Jesus Christ and Adonis, a religious yearning and proclivity towards sex, the immaculate saint and the dirty gigolo, and are constantly torn between these two polarities. Shannon, the priest, the searcher for God commits fornication; Alma, the puritanic daughter of a priest, accepts the life of a whore; Val, stooping to secret sex with a married elderly woman, is depicted by Vee Talbott and Lady Torrance as the Messiah; Sebastian
Venable, a relentless searcher for God, a poet, an Adam figure, happens to be a committed homosexual; Christopher Flanders, the Angel of Death, a Christ figure, a self-appointed priest, turns out to be a male-at-stud, attending dying bitches; and Chance Wayne, portrayed as a Christ figure, who has to be castrated in St. Cloud on the Easter Sunday, is a male prostitute, selling himself to an ageing actress after infecting his beloved Heavenly with venereal disease.

I would like to stress here that these characters are alienated from themselves, from their traditional and social/familial moorings through their inner cleavage wrought out by their wobbling allegiance to these two apparently irreconciliable ways of life. Their puritanism, their value-awareness, their irreducible human dignity do not desert them in the face of their guilt, rank sensuality, Bohemianism and moral turpitude. And they end up as deracinated, demented, even pathetic creatures unable to stick to one and reject the other. Poised between these two forces, they ceaselessly dither, and their lives are a prolonged shriek against the morass they are in. It makes little difference whether they are castrated like Chance, eaten up in a primitively cannibalistic ritual like Sebastian, burnt by blow torches like Val Xavier or allowed to carry on like Shannon and Chris.
"Unbelief for Williams," observes John Fritscher, "is an impossibility." (49) It is not the existence of God, but His nature. His ways to man, His utter speechlessness that disturb him. His attitude to God is that of an adolescent, rebellious son to his authoritarian, selfish, old father—a father who like Mr. Sikes in Kingdom of Earth, has more to think about his own interest than the interest of those below him, a father who has no compunction to desert his wife and children for his own freedom.

Tennessee Williams did not like his father, Cornelius, from the very beginning. His father also disliked him and called him "Miss Nancy," Edwina Dakin Williams, his mother, describes the father-son relationship in her book, Remember Me to Tom: "He took no joy in the children... The most trivial act might spin him into a tantrum." (50) Young Williams describes the malignant presence of his father: "On those occasional week-ends when my father visited the house... the spell of perfect peace was broken. A loud voice was heard, and heavy foot-steps. Doors were slammed. Furniture was kicked and banged... Often the voice of my father... was harsh. And sometimes it sounded like thunder. He was a big man... And it was not a benign

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(50) Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom, New York, Putnam's Sons, 1963, p. 35.
bigness. You wanted to shrink away from it, to hide
yourself...." (51) This image of a father in the forma-
tive, impressionable mind of the child may explain his
adult obsession with the image of God as a senile delin-
quent, a peevish, crazy, harsh man with a voice like
thunder, a predatory bird that rends innocent young turtles
asunder. Only an intense hatred for his bossy, ruthless
father, transferred in his dark unconscious, can force him
to parody God in the villainous figure of Boss Finley who
declares himself as the chosen of God: "Last Friday, Good
Friday...A hideous straw-stuffed effigy of myself, Tom
Finley, was hung and set fire to in the main quadrangle
of the college...However, that was Good Friday. Today is
Easter. I say that was Good Friday. Today is Easter Sun-
day and I am in St. Cloud." (The Sweet Bird of Youth, p.97).
God who would choose Boss Finley as the Messiah must be as
bad as the Messiah himself.

In most of his plays, the father of the house is
absent. Sometimes the names of fathers are not at all
mentioned. Sometimes when they are referred to, they are
treated with disrespect and disdain. The father in The
Glass Menagerie is a solipsistic coward who shirked respon-
sibility and "fell in love with long distances" (Penguin
Plays, p. 235) and deserted/betrayed the family. Mr.

Winemiller, Alma’s father, is a religious caterpillar, a fanatical repressionist. Big Daddy, the dying patriarch of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a loveless bully. The dead father of *Kingdom of Earth* and Jabe Torrance of *Orpheus Descending* are not likeable characters either. The cruel God of *Suddenly Last Summer* goads His priest-son Sebastian to the top of Cabeza de Lobo to be devoured by hungry beggars, and the deadly, vile Jabe Torrance like the wrathful Old Testament God, shoots his daughter-consort-Eve-Mary-Lady Torrance and gets Adam-Christ-Val Xavier burnt down by the blow-torches. "The Oedipal alienation," observes Fritscher, "from the violent father is wider: it becomes an ambivalent reaction—a confusion of love-hate— to the mother-sponsored inferiority which counsels passivity and surrender. This passivity is intolerable to a person whose stage of individuation has become fixated on his isolation. To become passive is to engender a feeling of existential guilt to the individual who betrays himself by making a sacrifice of individuality in becoming passive to another." (52)

Psychologically it is more demanding for an individual to inhabit a world created and ruled by an unpredictable, wrathful, cruel and evil God than to inhabit a world without God. A person who does not bother about the

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(52) John Fritscher, "Some Attitudes and a Posture...." *Modern Drama*, p. 206.
existence of God, who does not depend upon God helplessly as an extension of infantile dependence of a son upon his father—draws upon his will and inner resources to confront the world and to solve his problems, and grows into a responsible adulthood. It is just like living in a family without a father. But to live with a hostile, cruel pee-vish, harsh, hateful, tyrannical Father-God who is indistinguishable from the Devil engenders in the individual a timidity, passivity, infantile nervousness and also a painful repression. Under such circumstances, the individual is bound to feel alienated from himself because his personality, his ego, his essential nature are smothered up by a feeling of fear and guilt. His growth is retarded; his manhood is negated. Williams confesses in one of his essays his uncertainty about the nature of God whom he cannot exorcise from his psyche nor can he come to terms with Him. "Do they work together, God and the devil? I sometimes suspect that there's a sort of understanding between them, which we won't understand until Doomsday."(53)

It is interesting to note that, though he is not very sure about God's alliance with the devil, his suspicion tends towards God as devil or devil as God. In the above cited quotation, Williams suspects an understanding between God and the devil, which undoubtedly implies that God has a

distinct identity which is good, that God is not evil and His pact with the devil may make Him evil, which is not a certainty but a probability. If so, then it is not at all clear why he steadfastly refuses to portray God as good, or at least a mixture of good and evil, in all of his creative writings. Again why should a writer who has such bizarre and invidious attitudes towards God, the Messiah and religion, change his religion from Protestantism to Catholicism in an advanced age? Such ambivalence on the part of the author and his characters does not diminish the worth of his plays, but it reveals a highly confused intellect, or may be in broader connotation, reveals the moral shambles the average American is in. In a rare moment of self-scrutiny and self-pity, Williams quips (of course, through Boss Finley. For that matter, Williams often picks characters at random to shoulder his mordant repartees.): Boss: "Take it to the Supreme Court, 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, Sc.2, p. 57).

What Boss Finley says mockingly, Williams believes sincerely. What is more outrageous, Williams tries to convince us throughout the play that Chance Wayne deserves our admiration and pity more than Heavenly Finley whom
he infected with venereal disease. By getting him castrated on a Good Friday, Williams attempts to make him a moral equivalent of Christ, the Saviour which is baffling and even offensive. His early short story "Desire and the Black Masseur," also depicts the ghastly ritual, cannibalism, on a Good Friday in the proximity of a Church. A masochistic young white man, Burns, is whipped, mangled and eaten up raw by the sadistic black Masseur, which surpasses in grimness and violence the Marquis de Sade at his most abominable. The Old Man in a weird one-act play—"The Strangest Kind of Romance," declares unabashedly: "My name is Man, I live on a Cross. Cupidity and stupidity, that is the two armed cross on which you have nailed me." *(27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other one-act Plays, p. 150).*

The intolerable and odious old Man, though he has little reason to feel so wronged and elevated, throws quite inadvertently serious aspersions on mankind. If cupidity and stupidity are the arms of the Cross upon which men have crucified Christ, then why his Christ-figures are so much obsessed with promiscuity and stupidity? His four major Christ-figures, Val Xavier, Chance Wayne, Rev. T. Shannon and Chris Flanders are connected sexually with four spent-out female voluptuaries, Lady Torrance, Alexandra Del Lago, Maxine Faulk and Mrs. Goforth respectively.

This vision of Christ, observes a critic, "is unacceptable
to most play-goers, not simply because there is too much narcissism, too much pagan Apollo in these impersonators; but this vision would make the gigolo, the world's most despicable professional lover, interchangeable with Christ, the world's most pure amateur lover." (54)

Williams not only introduces miserable human specimens as impersonators of Christ, but also conjures up the vision of an anthropomorphic God, equally miserable and faulty. Unable to challenge and vent out his diatribes against the abstract majesty of God, which is generally seen in great tragedians like Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare and Marlowe, and which demands great tragic vision and dimension, Williams chooses to challenge a disparagingly humanized God. Esmeralda in Camino Real calls God a drowsy, exhausted Old Man who, unable to set His world in order, drops into a helpless stupor. (Block 12, p. 209); Moony, the crazy, axe-wielder, in "Moony's Kid Don't Cry" imagines God to be a "deaf," 'dumb,' 'blind,' 'crazy' man and a very bad craftsman too; Rev. Shannon calls God a 'childish,' 'bad-tempered,' 'peevish,' 'petulant,' 'senile', delinquent the like of whom one finds in a nursing home getting furious over a jigsaw puzzle he cannot solve (p. 269); Chicken in Kingdom of Earth without any provocation whatsoever compares Mr. Sike, (a very selfish

(54) Francis L. Kunkel, Passion and the Passion, p. 105.
and myopic and cruel Old Man, planning to dynamite his south bank levee to save his north bank levee without bothering about the damage it would do to others) with God.

The Doctor in the short play *Confessional*, whose licence has been cancelled because of over-drinking, who "couldn't tell the appendix from the gizzard," (p. 165) who carries on his medical practice clandestinely and kills his patients invariably, goes to deliver a new messiah on whom shines the Star of Nativity and kills him (*Dragon Country*, New York, New Directions, 1970, p. 170). This tipsy and murderous doctor finds a sort of metaphysical justification for his irresponsible acts and has the vision of God as black and morbid as himself. "It's hard to see," he reflects with boozy profundity, "back of this cloud of irreverent paraphernalia. But behind them both are the holy mysteries of birth and death... They're dark as the face of God whose face is dark because it's the face of a black man; yes, that's right, a Negro, yes. I've always figured that God is a black man with no light on his face; He moves in the dark like a black man, a Negro miner in the pit of a lightless coal mine, obscured completely by the irrelevancies of public worship—standing to sing, kneeling to pray, sitting to hear the banalities of a preacher." (pp. 169-70).
The speaker, Doc., in a single sweep of his tongue declares God a Negro miner with no light on his face, the Messiah a stillborn child and organized religion irrelevant and banal. In the fitness of things, serious allegations ought to be made in a serious mood; when in the drama, such allegations should emerge out of dramatic urgency. The noble and grave themes of religion, Christ and God are parrotted most churlishly by a hopeless alcoholic without any dramatic urgency. God is inscrutable, mysterious, a black cat in a dark room, a Negro miner in a coal mine, but the existence of the Negro is categorically stressed, so also the existence of God. Perhaps, the painful fact about God, painful at least to Mr. Williams and "Doctor," is that though the presence of the Negro miner-God is ascertainable in the dark coal-mine-world, his movements and acts are not visible. This mysterious invisibility leaves hopes and possibilities for individuals to imagine the facial expressions of the Being in their own way. And Williams and his God—obsessed characters imagine God with a wrathful face, a cruel face with a sardonic grimace, sometimes frowning over trifles, sometimes smirking at the human misery and sometimes threatening men with thunder and lightning.

The Messiah, degenerating considerably in his impersonators, has been pronounced dead by the Doctor—
ultimately and inevitably. If it is not Doctor's delusion under the power of wine to see a moving star stopping over the unborn child, it can be attributed to his severest form of guilt consciousness which arises out of his brutal irresponsibility in killing innocent patients. A demented Sissy Goforth of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore whistles and rings a bell to summon the Messiah/God/Chris as if he is a "cow on the streets of Bombay." (p. 219).

Williams has always maintained his dissatisfaction with the institutionalized religion and public worship connected with the Church and priests. Reverend Looker in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof has nothing holy and dignified in him. He is a mean, clumsy grabber, a laughing-stock, a more pathetic version of Christopher Flanders of The Milk Train. Eloi, the son, in the one-act play, "Auto-da-fe" (27 Waggons Pull of Cotton and Other one-act Plays, T. Williams, New York, New Directions, 1953), has a neurotic hatred for corruption, "this fetid old swamp we live in," and wants "the corrupt town to be razed," "condemned and demolished" because he has "good precedence of it": "All through the scriptures are cases of cities destroyed by the justice of fire when they got to be nests of foulness!" (p. 110). Eloi probably feels that the New Testament God and His Son, Christ have failed to tackle the pervasive evil through kindness and love and forgiveness. The world
needs the wrath of Jehovah, not the love of Christ, and the town, if its denizens grow dirty and bad, deserves to be swept away by a new Flood or to be burnt down and buried under the hot lava. When his mother advises her obsessed son to go to confession, he flouts the priest and the Church for their inability to punish the degenerate city with inundation and conflagration, to turn the city into a mud-heap and into cinders. "The priest," he says, "is a cripple in skirts...Because I have seen his skirts and crutches and heard his meaningless mumble through the wall! ...It's worn-out magic, it does not burn anymore! ...there needs to be burning...For the sake of burning, for God, for the purification." (Ibid., p. 114).

Reverend Tooker in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is made the butt of bawdy and crude humour. Like one of the vulture-like visitors of Volpone (*Volpone* by Ben Jonson), he visits a dying millionaire to get a mention in his will. He lacks tact, self-respect, good taste and personality. Big Mama drags him to her lap and hollers: "Ever seen a preacher in a fat lady's lap....?") (Penguin Plays, p. 48). Like a shapeless menial he wanders in the Pollitt household searching for the gentlemen's lavatory, peeping awkwardly through half-closed doors, talking about rich widows who have donated memorial windows and air-conditioners to the church, swallowing all indignities with a grin. Desperate
to please and impress others about the miracles in his church, he forms: "Yes, last Sunday the gold in my chasuble, faded into the purple." And Gooper sniggers: "Reveren', you must of been (sic.) preachin' hell's fire last Sunday!" (p. 88). He also runs errands. (p. 87). He has come to ask for the air-conditioning units in his pulpit to a dying Big Daddy. Williams calls him "an incongruous apparition" and "the living embodiment of the pious, conventional lie." (p. 76). Obviously the preacher, not as a person, but as a representative of a larger fraud that is conventional religion is the target of ridicule.

Williams perhaps has this purification in his mind when he writes his one-act play "The Purification" (27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One-act Plays)—which so far as its theme and setting and poetic language are concerned, reminds one of Lorca's The Blood Wedding. In this bizarre play, Rosario, the Son, a handsome youngman of twenty is sexually and romantically obsessed with his sister Elena, who is married to the Rancher from Casa Rojo. The Rancher kills Elena, his wife, with an axe when he finds her engaged in sexual act with her brother. The son is portrayed with an excess of sympathy. His speeches are highly sentimentalized, poeticized and evasive attempts at self-justification and refutation of the
conventional morality. When Luisa (an Indian servant woman of Spanish blood, who is painted as a savage creature because she could not tolerate such a relationship between the brother and sister) gives an eye-witness account, how she saw Rosario indulging in a sort of naked dance with Elena, the Judge asks Rosario to speak the truth, "for the truth between men is the only purification." (p. 32). The son, of course, does not deny the charge, but chooses to clothe his confession with tawdry romanticism and garbled poetry:

The truth?
Why ask me for that?
Ask it of him, the player—
for truth is sometimes alluded to in music.
But words are too loosely woven to catch it in...
How shall I describe
the effect that a song had on us?
Our genitals were too eager! (pp. 40-41)

This is only one of many instances when Williams quite inadvertently reveals his inability to sustain a mood, to live a vision. The bathos here, instead of giving the poetry and the confession a plasticity and satiric objectivity, exudes a rank odour of guilt and narcissism. The speech swings unfortunately from Truth, poetry and vision to greedy genitals. The mother-son incest in Suddenly Last Summer is obliquely and even artistically implied, but the Brother-Sister incest in this play is cavalier and glib—-and both suggest flagrantly
autobiographical overtones. This Freudian derring-do sits stodgily over Williams, because the tone is devoid of a detached objectivity peculiar to a psychoanalyst. The son also, like the Survivor of Camino Real (Block-II, p. 137), has a pony named Peeto who was wiser than God when he was one-year old (The Purification, Sc. 3, p. 60). By consecrating the vile act of incest, by throwing an off-beat gauntlet at the old guardians of the conventional morality, by making the brother kill himself as a weird measure of purification only to be united with his sister-beloved Elena of the Springs, by spiritualizing the flesh—by romanticising contraband passions—Williams flouts moral absolutes. A city without a sense of morality, with confused notions of good and evil, is bound to become (in Eloi's words) a "fetid old swamp" of "every imaginable kind of degeneracy." (Auto-da-fe, p. 109). If God is wrathful and unreliable, if Christianity is old magic that does not work, if Christ is a gigolo, a gambler and even a thief, if the priests are cripples and objects of public ridicule, if morality and traditional codes of conduct are mere aberrations, then what can help the society from disintegration? What can prevent man from being his baser self, from running berserk? What can help man at the moment of his acute desolation, disillusionment, despair and alienation?
Here I would like to stress that a society without religion is psychologically unthinkable and historically impossible. Man has always believed in some sort of deity residing in or out of Nature—manifesting itself in elements, tree-trunks, animals and cobbled stones. Call it infantile dependence, helpless surrender or opium, or mass delusion, but it has its appeal to the human mind, be it the mind of an African tribal, or that of Albert Einstein. It matters little whether one believes in Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Islam or Communism, in wooden and stone mascots in Indian villages annointed with vermillion paste. Man has to count on some force that surpasses human dimension for inner stability. "Religion," observes H.E. Posdick poignantly, "can whip irreligion on any field at any time." (55) Williams does not attempt to replace religion with irreligion, but attempts to replace the old religion based on dogma, commandments, inquisition and meaningless formalities with a new religion based on human understanding, mutual clinging together, individual dignity, and youthful and imperious acceptance of human frailty. Most of our norms, transvaluations and judgements, he seems to stress, are contingent, not self-determined and self-sufficient. The reason why he abuses God is obviously due to God's incapability or reluctance to come up to human

(55) H.E. Posdick, As I See Religion, p. 31.
expectation, and that certainly is betrayal of Man-God covenant. It irks him, and it also irks his protagonists. Out of exasperation or sulkiness, he points out that men, when betrayed by God, Christ and the Church, have to discover God in one another, have to cling to each other for a little warmth and security, to believe in each other—and their happiness, comfort and salvation lies in their ability to get into each other storming the barricades of formality.

Williams believes that the general way to get at each other is through sexual act. The lone exception to this rule, of course, is the Shannon-Hannah Jelkes encounter in The Night of the Iguana. In most of his plays, a sensitive protagonist, feeling acutely the betrayal of God and Religion, straining under the concussion of a hostile universe, tries desperately to strike up an intimate relationship with someone, either a heterosexual or a homosexual liaison, in an indifferent, self-seeking society.

In Camino Real, an ageing voluptuary, Marguerite after losing her chance to escape through the Pugitivo and hearing the pipings of the street-cleaners, stretches her hand towards her old lover Casanova:..."although we've wounded each other time and again—we stretch our hands to each other in the dark that we can't escape from—we huddle together for some dim communal comfort—and that's what
passes for love on this terminal stretch of the road that used to be royal...Something, yes, something—delicate, unreal, bloodless! The sort of violets that could grow... in the crevices of those far away mountains... But tenderness, the violets in the mountains--can't break the rocks!" But Jacques Casanova believes that these violets in the mountains can break the rocks if you believe in them and allow them to grow. (Camino Real, Penguin Plays, Block-10, p. 192). She sleeps with a charming young man only to forget for sometime her missing the Fugitivo. She is betrayed by her young lover and is robbed; she has lost all hope of escaping Camino Real; she is old and lonely—and all these misfortunes force her to lean over the shoulders of old Jacques as a last resort. "Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for," observes Marguerite cynically. (Ibid., Block-7, p. 174). The final words of Quixote—The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" (Ibid., Block-16, p. 233) suggest that those two old voluptuaries, Marguerite and Jacques Casanova, have come to a liaison of love after a long career of loveless sex. Though Williams' intention is to make sexual love a force to counteract the decay of faith in a benevolent Deity, to fill up the vacuum, his execution is hopelessly inadequate. People seem to cling to each other when all doors are closed, all exits are blocked, hence the temporary
eczasy of love-making is only a palliative, not a permanent cure of their painful alienation and despair.

Chicken and Myrtle in Kingdom of Earth attempt to cling to each other when the flood waters are threatening to wash away their house. They carry on a parlance on religious salvation and sensual salvation. Myrtle admits that she always prays God only when she is "perplexed" and "worried over something," and the Saviour has never let her down. Now she clings to Chicken so that he can save her from flood waters by carrying her up to the roof. She prays both God/Saviour and human beings for protection, and the only way open to her to appeal to the kindness of males is to make herself available sexually. Both the Saviour and Chicken mean something to her. On the other hand, Chicken admits that there are two ways for human beings to be saved—either by hauling spiritual energies for a religious salvation, by opening up the spiritual gates, or by yielding whole-heartedly to the lustful body. Most of Williams' characters are not cut out for spiritual or religious salvation as it entails a lot of "straining and struggling," (p. 105) a "terrible struggle against our lustful bodies" (p. 105). If human bodies are naturally lustful as the preachers stress, then it is vain and self-defeating to wage a relentless war against our natural proclivities, and better to get the best out of them, even
to find salvation in the sexual consummation. "There is nothing in the world, in this whole kingdom of earth, that can compare with one thing, and that one thing is what's able to happen between a man and a woman, just that thing, nothing more, is perfect." (Kingdom of Earth, New Directions, p. 107). What Chicken refers to is not exactly love in its spiritual or exalted or supra-mundane sense of the term, but in its gross, physical sense—which gives warmth, comfort, a fleeting sense of security, may be of belongingness—which prompts man to go to religion. Chris, the self-appointed Angel of Death, enlightens Mrs. Goforth: "...You're a fool, you need somebody or something to mean God to you...." (The Milk Train, Sc.5, pp. 218-19). Human beings are born in this world, like kittens in a giant household, which threatens them with its strangeness and vastness. Their myopic vision cannot comprehend it, and they curl up in twos, rubbing against each others' bodies, huddled up together both to derive some pleasure and to ward off the terror of an indifferent universe. "This is particularly so to the Williams people who have no surety that the mumbo jumbo will keep the angry Old Man asleep and off their backs." For this reason they often cling physically together like Chris's two little animals in sleep simply to salve "the feelings of being dispossessed by a carelessly whimsical deity." (56) Hannah and Shannon

find God in each other without an act of love-making. Shannon seems not to have traced the roots of his discontent, his intrepid and restless nature, and Hannah knows it. Shannon's problem, insists Hannah, is "the oldest one in the world—the need to believe in something or in someone—almost anyone—almost anything...something...I have discovered something to believe in...Broken, gates between people so that they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only." (p. 308). How pathetic and pitiable is this condition! This love is "strangling, deadening, suffocating, killing, not life giving." (Erich Fromm, To Have or To Be, London, 1981, p. 52).

Hannah Jelkes stresses that one need not go to God but try to strike up a rapport with another person in order to solve his problems. (p. 308). Chris points out that a person has to find God in someone or something and the Writer in a superb one-act play—"The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" (27 Wagons and Other one-act plays, New Directions, 1953), observes that, even if there is no God, no Christ, men still need compassion, love and understanding of one another. (pp. 69-70). By emphasizing the need of a person to cling to and understand another person to belong to another person, by substituting the Man-God relationship with the Man-Man/Man-Woman relationship, by declaring God a persona non grata, by ridiculing God, Christ, Church,
Angels and priests, associating them with all sorts of rank perversions, guilts and vices, Williams simplifies what is complex, vulgarizes what is profound and holy, evades what he cannot resolve. God is denuded of all metaphysical and mystical relevance, and the innate longing of man for religion is slighted. If God and religion can be so easily dispensed with; if Man-God communion can be equated with a chance encounter of two individuals on the verandah outside their separate cubicles (i.e. Shannon and Hannah), if religion is reduced to functional, therapeutic and psychological norms, then man is bound to depend solely on human intercourse, which, particularly in the dramatic world of Williams, is highly unreliable and shaky and even transitory.

Nor does Williams believe in goodness of man. "We are all civilized people," writes Williams in his foreword to the Sweet Bird of Youth (New Directions, 1959), "which means that we are all savages at heart but observing a few amenities of civilized behaviour." (57) Williams has stated frequently that the world abounds with blood-hounds who chase frightened foxes. (Battle of Angels, New Directions, 1958, p. 165). His hounds are as bloody as his foxes are foxy. Williams tries to arouse pity and empathy in us for the fox that is guilty, cunning and even priggish

(57) T. Williams, Where I Live (Selected Essays), p. 105.
because it is chased by blood-hounds, because its condition is desperate. These blood-hounds are geared to action sometimes by the universe, sometimes by the society, sometimes by the built-in guilt in foxes on the run.

Chris is pursued and mangled by the hounds of Mrs. Goforth, and he, in his turn, drowns an old man who needed his help and robs his purse, and robs dying ladies too. Val Xavier compares his condition with that of run-away convicts pursued by police dogs who would get him and tear him to pieces, and he himself is burnt down by blow-torches, and he is a convict all the same, guilty of stealing, gambling and vagrancy. Shannon, though he steals our pity, is a seducer of young girls. Blanche DuBois, an advocate of delicate, civilized, aristocratic and refined norms of behaviour, a veritable vixen cornered by blood-hounds, is a seducer of young boys, a liar, a flirt and a notorious prostitute, in short, a pathological character representative of what Erich Fromm calls the pathogenic nature of our present social character. Silva Vacarro in Baby Doll, a whip-handed, vengeful, phallic Italian who succeeds in seducing Baby Doll talks eloquently on the evil spirits "of violence—and cunning—malevolence,—cruelty—treachery—destruction" and an apparently innocent Baby Doll adds: "Oh, them's just human characteristics." (Baby Doll, New Directions, 1956, p. 78).
Chicken in *Kingdom of Earth*, a coarse-grained, brutal symbol of male virility asks Myrtles: "You know what life is made out of?" and she promptly replies: "Evil, I think it's evil." (p. 92). In a world populated with sly foxes, ruthless blood-hounds, full of all sorts of evil, all imaginable forms of perversion; in a world where people use solipsistically one another, betray one another, do not try to understand one another's problems, where the Church suffers from a "spiritual schism" ("Portrait of a Madonna:" *27 Wagons and Other one-act Plays*, p. 97)--how can man find solace in another in a closed room "with the windows blind to the world?" ("The Strangest Kind of Romance," p. 150). Perhaps, the disillusionment of a person, his inability to get to another person, would force him to depend on a cat. The Little Man, whose name is not mentioned because it is unnecessary, sums up the condition of most of Williams' pathetic protagonists who have failed to strike up a significant relationship with human beings and have got their spiritual gates blocked (as in the case of Chicken): "You're wrong if you think I'm a person! I'm not--no person! ...A kind of ghost of a man! The body is only--a shell. It may be alive--when what's inside--is too afraid to come out! It stays locked up and alone! Single! Private! That's how it is with me." (Ibid., p. 146).
The Little Man is alienated because the society threatens him and he is unable to confront it. He cowers and shrinks, as a turtle into its shell. Like Ulrich in Robert Musil's novel—*The Man Without Qualities*, he feels like a "human something floating about in a universal culture-medium. His existence is negative because he has been completely available to others, to causes, to events and forces, as if he were a liquid capital. He is extremely disposable." (58)

Williams' protagonists have high ideals, but they sell them cheap; they make themselves easily available—Paolo to Mrs. Stone (*The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*), Chance Wayne to Alexandra Del Lago (*The Sweet Bird of Youth*), Val to Lady/Myra Torrance (*Orpheus Descending, The Battle of Angels*), Kilroy to Esmeralda (*Camino Real*), Blanche DuBois to her customers (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), Rev. Shannon to young girls and Maxine Faulk (*The Night of the Iguana*), Brick to Maggy (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), Chris Flanders to Mrs. Sissy/Flora Goforth (*The Milk Train*) and Sebastian to young boys (*Suddenly Last Summer*). By making themselves available to others, they go against their grain, in a desperate attempt to find God in other human beings, suffering the tribulation of crucifixion on a cross with two arms—cupidity and stupidity. But their tribulation

is too private to attain a broader, universal significance, lacking, as it were, the saving grace of religion.

The Little Man believes in a female cat and thinks she would not betray him. But the Land Lady who wants her tenants sexually would not understand a man's infatuation with a cat. The Old Man who swings precariously between glib profundity and incipient lunacy grows eloquent and sentimental when he learns that there is still a heart in the world which trusts another heart, be it the heart of a cat. "A rare and beautiful trust," he says. "It makes me cry a little. That's all that life has to give in the way of perfection... The warm and complete understanding of two or three in a close-walled room with windows blind to the world... The roof is thin. Above it, the huge and glittering wheel of heaven which spells a mystery to us. Fine--invisible--cords of wonder--attach us to it. And so we are saved and purified and exalted." (The Strangest Kind of Romance, p. 150). As long as the Little Man holds the cat, Nitchevo, close to his heart, the evil powers of the earth, the hostile chance and "the mad, insatiable wolves in the hearts of men" can do no harm to him. But such desperate optimism is bound to collapse because here the female cat has no existence outside of man's loneliness, because she is like a straw to a drowning man, and cannot save him from drowning how much faith the man may put on
her. Two or three persons cannot be saved or purified or exalted if they cling together like terrified kittens, not out of love, but out of exigency, of common fear of a hostile force.

Faith in man or faith in a pet animal can never be a substitute for faith in God. Carnal or emotional liaison cannot be a substitute for the spiritual or religious yearning in the human breast. If Williams' protagonists feel acutely alienated, that is because they live inauthentically. They neither believe in a God who knows and understands them nor do they believe in the innate goodness of man. Their actions and sufferings are one-dimensional. They are like a flock of cocks with plenty of feathers---and flutter a great deal, pose a great deal--but rise very little, sometimes get at the roof-top, crane their necks and shriek. Their alienation is not the alienation of the strong--of the tragic, suffering hero, but like that of the coward and the defeated, of the runaway convict.

"Williams has had a character," observes Signi Falk, "repeatedly ask the Big Question... Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Are all the cosmic fireworks just for this? Williams never gets beyond these large and safe philosophic and rather meaningless generalities which he gives to his characters as if he had discovered something really profound." (59) Though his

characters frequently advocate human dignity, honour, heart's affection and love, they never live up to their own principles. Like Williams, his characters suffer from a spiritual dichotomy because their errant lifestyles, wild passions, obsession with the trivial constantly run counter to their heart's longings for authenticity, for a humanistic, healthy religion, for a mutual love which includes, but transcends sex. And the result is a painful feeling of insecurity and alienation from their inner resources, from people around them, from the universe that contains them. Williams seems to be contented with mere palliatives. Only a heart that believes in the essential goodness of man and God or the Son of God can conquer debilitating influences of hubris and concupiscence, can be a solid prop to fall back upon, can be a cure for the feeling of alienation.

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