CHAPTER IV

THE TRAUL WOHL OF T. N. WOLLWILLIAMS

The central character in majority of the plays of Tennessee Williams is a woman. There is hardly any other modern playwright who has used women so persistently as has Williams to communicate with the audience. In an interview, Williams once said, "All my relationships with women are very important to me. I understand women and I can write about them.... Playwrights have always used somebody to speak for them. I think that more and more often I have a woman rather than a man to articulate my feelings."¹ It is generally agreed that his characterization of women is the most memorable aspect of his theatre. He truly excels in drawing female characters who bear the stamp of his psychological insight and understanding. Ponte places Williams' heroines alongside some of the most memorable female creations in both fiction and drama:

"Consider in the history of fiction and the stage how rarely vital, rounded female figures appear. Some of Shakespeare's heroines... Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Molly Bloom, perhaps Hedda Gabler -- there are not many who tower above their sisters to achieve the rarefied air of absolute greatness.... There have not been many, like Amanda and Laura, Alma and Blanche DuBois.²"
According to Jung, the renowned psychologist, a work of art is a product of complicated psychic activities. Williams' work reveals the mental make-up of a young man whose world became increasingly feminine. From his early childhood his world was completely dominated by the female members of his family, namely, his mother, his grandmother and his sister, Rose. A severe attack of diphtheria left him with partial paralysis of legs and forced him to retire to his private and isolated world where, apart from books, his constant companions were these ladies on whom he came to rely more and more for comfort, solace, and emotional security. Expressing his gratitude to them in the Foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth, he described his excessive attachment to these compassionate women who had coaxed him back into life. Staying indoors with them fostered the feminine influence on the young Williams. In Memoirs, he acknowledges the profound impact of his grandmother and sister on him, "Whatever I have of gentleness in my nature comes from the heart of Grand as does the ineluctable grace and purity of heart that belong to the other Rose in my life, my sister." Besides, he has often confessed that he has an effeminate nature which has enabled him to understand the female psyche better. And during the later years of life, he came into close contact with women of different shapes and temperament.
who not only enriched his understanding of the feminine sensibility but also helped him to create such memorable characters as Amanda, Laura, Blanche, and Alma who are known to the theatre-goers the world over. On the other hand, he admits that he finds the male psyche mysterious and inscrutable and that is why his men, with the exception of a few, lack the subtlety and complexity of their female counterparts.

Some critics have attempted to reduce Williams' heroines to variations on the same theme and have labelled differently. For instance, Nancy M. Tischler calls them "witches", C.N. Stavrou finds them "neurotic", and Henry Hopkin describes them as "Gargoyles", and so on. But the fact is that though these women look alike at first glance, a close scrutiny shows they are vastly different from one another. Williams, during his prolific career as a playwright, has created a large number of women, but his better known heroines Amanda Wingfield, Laura, Blanche, Alma, Cassandra Whiteside (Carol Cutrere), Myra (Lady Torrance), Serafina, Rosalie, Alexandra del Lago, Aaron Stone, Flora Coforth, Hannah, Leona, etc., deserve a closer consideration for the appreciation of the distinctive characteristics of his female types.

The most compelling female creations who made Williams a playwright of international repute are Southern
women of aristocratic origin. The reason why Tennessee
Williams chose to write about Southern women is not difficult
to find out. Williams is a Southern American writer. His
childhood was spent in the South where he came to know the
Southern womanhood closely and intimately. He was fascinated
by Southern women's pattern of speech ("hysterical eloquence"
he calls it) and found that it best suited his style of
writing. In an interview in 1962 he revealed:

My great detective noir as a writer has been what
people call...to poeticize, you know, and
that's why I suppose I've written so many
Southern heroines. They have a tendency to
gild the lily, and they speak in a rather
floral style which seems to suit me because I
write out of emotion and I get carried away by
the emotion.5

Besides, Williams was impressed by the virtues of honour, decency,
courage, and valour which characterize Southern women. Their
reliance on charm was yet another attribute which inspired
Williams to write about them. According to Locke, a critic
of Williams, a glimpse of that charm and eloquence can be had
"in his mother Edwina Dakin Williams when she writes in
remember me to Tom a sentence such as the following:

"Southern men seem a little embarrassed to let their wives
work, and therefore, the women have more time to spend taking
care of the house and themselves. No matter how difficult the
"trudery all day, I always took a bath in the evening and
changed to a dainty dress for dinner, as did Rose".6 Lastly,
Williams could best express his criticism of the values of crass commercialism of society through the melancholy and suffering of Southern women.

The principal among Williams' Southern women are Amanda of The Glass Menagerie and Blanche of A streetcar named Desire whose early versions appeared in short plays — Mrs. Kendricks-Moore in "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion", Miss Collins in "Portrait of a Madonna", Gertha in "Hello from Bertha", and Irene Henry in "Auto-da-Fe". They are representatives of a culture and refinement associated with the era that disappeared during the decade of World War I. Gerald Moore observes, "In real appeal of the early plays lay in character ; particularly in Amanda and Blanche. In these two the playwright created a type that is Williams' landmark, the Southern woman with a presence of gentility and culture, caught in the context in which the pretense is meaningless and so is forced to use her mannerisms of vivacity and charm as a defense." 7 They are relics of the vanishing aristocracy of the South and persist in maintaining grace. Both Amanda and Blanche are obsessed with the thought that they are ladies. They cannot forget that they were born on rich plantations. The more they think about their once-prosperous state, the more tenaciously do they cling to the ideal of respectability. Their present circumstances, however, highlight their pitiable state. Amanda has been forced to live in a tenement apartment.
overlooking the slum valley in Saint Louis. Krutch finds her "an absurd and pathetic widow who likes to think herself as a member of the decayed aristocracy and hence the exponent of gracious living."8

Similarly, Blanche is forced by her circumstances to seek refuge in her sister Stella's apartment in Elysian Fields, a shabby river-side district of New Orleans. She is distressed to see Stella living in a place which is unworthy of the aristocratic gentry to which she belongs:

**BLANCHÉ:** What are you doing in a place like this?
**STELLA:** Now, Blanche—
**BLANCHÉ:** Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical. I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dream could I picture—only Poe! Only Mr Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.9

In this two-room tenement, which she has to share with her sister and brother-in-law, she worries about her privacy and maintains her pretensions to gentility and grace. Rather fastidious about her person, she indulges in the luxury of hot baths and perfumes to cheer up her spirits. To quote Nelson:

Her speech, manners, and habits are foolishly passe' and still she cannot abandon this sense of herself as someone special, as a 'lady' in the grand tradition. She knows she is an anachronism in an alien world and yet she will not compromise. She cannot and will not surrender the dream she has of herself.10

Porter, commenting on Blanche's pretense of being a lady observes,

Blanche combines in her personality the qualities of a Southern lady and no matter what disillusioning or degrading experience she has undergone, she never relaxes in her role as a Southern belle.11
Amanda and Blanche are ladies in another sense also, viz., in their inability to manage their financial affairs. Amanda is completely at sea in the matter of managing her household and Blanche, having failed to hold to the family plantation, has let it slip through her fingers, so that it has been reduced only to a pile of papers.

These Southern ladies also have a tendency to look back fondly on the past because there is very little in the present which can replace their former security. Instead of coming to grips with the reality of the present, they make forays into the past. Their past, or rather their idealized past cannot be recaptured and yet they try to recapture it by whatever means possible. Recognizing the tendency of Williams' heroines to live in the past, K. Tynan observes, "Williams trades in nostalgia and hope, the past and the future, the obsessions which we associate most strongly with great female characters - Marguerite Gautier, Cleopatra, Hedda Gabler and Chakhov's women - none of whom cares for today as much as she cares for yesterday..." Amanda lives vitally in the past, in the pleasant dream world of Moon Lake Casino and Blue Mountain. She cherishes the memory of her eventful days as a charming and vivacious belle when she received her gentlemen callers and when conversation centred round things of importance, nothing coarse or vulgar. To quote Sam Bluefarb:
the memory of that life is nourished and kept alive by the fertile earth of her nostalgia...
Amanda can never extricate herself from the past in order to come to terms with the flow of life in the present or what that present bodes for the future.13

Like Amanda, Blanche, too, has her affluent memories of a romantic past to which she must return persistently. Just as the memory of seventeen gentleman callers is an obsession with Amanda, the beautiful dream of Belle Reve, her family plantation and her legend about her former suitors are an obsession with Blanche. When she finds herself trapped at Stanley's, her memory repeatedly brings back to her mind Shep Hunteigh, an old beau of hers. Till the end, she remains deeply involved with the past, with the lost tradition of greatness and happiness.

It is true that the past of these Southern ladies was not always rosy; Amanda's desertion by her husband and Blanche's encounter with deaths in the family are terrifying aspects of their past - but they deliberately choose the romantic aspect of it in an effort to tinge their present with some colour. In this context, Robert E. Jones observes, "Seeing the romanticized past die before their eyes, these heroines cling all the more to the romantic aspect of it....They consciously ignore the horrible aspects of it and seek to embrace its careless pleasant aspect in order to retain the glory and the dream."14

Amanda and Blanche are immoderately romantic weaklings who seek support in past grace and gentility. Williams does
not hold them to ridicule but sympathetically presents them as emblematic of the stresses and strains of the modern living. Like Ibsen, he believes that the individual needs a romantic vision to survive in the face of harsh realities.

No less striking are Williams' portraits of sensitive and delicate girls like Laura and Alma, whom he has drawn with a great deal of compassion. They are like pieces of translucent glass which when touched by light, produce a beautiful glow. These are unmistakably patterned on his sister Rose. The suffering of Rose, who had withdrawn completely from the outside world, haunted him to such an extent that he felt impelled to write about her early in a poem "The Resemblance Between a Violin - Case and a Coffin." Even the last pages of Memoirs, which he wrote in 1975, are devoted to Rose. Williams' concern for her found expression in his works of great dramatic quality in the figures of Laura in The Glass Menagerie and Alma in Summer and Smoke.

Of all women created by Williams, it is Laura who evokes our genuine sympathy. "In her portrait the colours are subdued, the strokes delicate. There is fragile haunting beauty and pathos about her. She is also gossamer and lace but there is no phony sentimentality in her creation. She is treated gently, but she is treated honestly." Laura is exquisitely fragile like the glass ornaments and phonograph records with which she spends most of her time. Likening her to Shakespeare's Ophelia, C.N. Stavrou observes, "Of all Williams' creations, Laura remains the most tenuous. She has the evanescent loveliness... She tugs at our heart strings as compellingly..."
as she did those of her brother Tom who, try as he might, could not forget her. Like Shakespeare's Ophelia she is pathetic.\textsuperscript{16} Morbidly shy, Laura cannot face even the typing school and breaks down at her first speed test so that she has to be led to the washroom. Added to her diffidence and shyness is her physical defect which aggravates her suffering, increases her inferiority complex, and makes her extremely introverted. She has only one moment of self-realization when Jim, the man she had a crush on as a school-girl, brings her close to life and makes her see that to be different from people is to suffer and that to be happy one must be normal. In spite of her own dilemma, she remains sensitive to the suffering of her paranoid mother and cynical brother. She appreciates Amanda's need to romanticise her past in order to face the present and sympathises with Tom for the unfulfillment of his dreams. To preserve peace and harmony in the family, she acts as a buffer between her mother and her brother in the wranglings which break out rather abruptly and frequently between them.

Akin to Laura is Alma Winemiller, the heroine of \textit{Summer and Smoke}. In the stage directions early in the play, Williams writes, "In Alma's voice and manner there is a delicacy and elegance, a kind of airiness which is natural to her as it is, in a less marked degree, to many Southern girls. Her gestures and mannerisms are a bit exaggerated but in a graceful way. She seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth century in France."\textsuperscript{17} She is a picture of maidenly charm and decorum. A minister's daughter, she is delicate, sensitive,
refined and interested in the finer things of life like literature, culture, music, etc. She is hysterical like Laura and when she is in panic, she develops physical symptoms such as fast heart-beat and frozen fingers. At odd hours in the night she rushes to Dr. Buchanan's clinic to get pills in order to quiet her nerves.

Like her counterpart in The Glass Menagerie, Alma is also extremely introverted and since her childhood she has been given to the contemplation of the life of the soul as opposed to that of the flesh. She keeps reminding us throughout the play that her first name 'Alma' is Spanish for soul. However, unlike Laura, neither she is awkwardly shy nor does she suffer from any physical deformity. She faces life more courageously and helps her father in bearing the cross of her demented mother who has regressed to a state of perverse childhood. She is invested with the virtues of filial duty, family honour, and respect for tradition.

Sexually passionate and exuberant women form another group of females created by Williams obviously under the influence of D.H. Lawrence. Besides, his visit to Italy after the success of The Glass Menagerie played a great part in portraying such women. Williams found the Italian women like the Southern women without their conservatism and puritanism. Their physical beauty and their zeal for life appealed to him in no small measure. Nancy M. Tischler perceptively notes, "Coming to know the Italians and their philosophy of living seemed to
to him the most important experience of his adult life....

Here also is a passionate aliveness that needs no Lawrencean celebration for its promotion. The women mature early, love lustily and react violently to the human drama. "It was, thus, this philosophy, coupled with the influence of Lawrence, that Williams created women who live life to the full and know no inhibitions.

These women, such as Serafina of The Rose Tattoo, Margaret of Catón a Hot Tin Roof, Stella of a Streetcar Named Desire — to name only a few — strongly believe that the very reason for existence is love-making. They are not deterred by any sense of propriety of the Victorian culture or by the constraints of Southern puritanism. They have shed all notions of gentility. They think that their salvation lies in the free expression of their physical desire. To them the opposite of sexual passion means death.

The most eloquent exponent of the credo that the affirmation of sex is the root of a complete existence is Serafina, who is vitally and overwhelmingly alive. In love-making she achieves rapture and ecstasy which border on religious mysticism. She has had a blissfully satisfying sexual relationship with her husband and elaborately describes her emotional fulfilment to the women of the neighbourhood:

When I think of men I think of my husband. My husband was a Sicilian. We had love together every night of the week, we never skipped one, from the night we were married till the right he was killed... I count up the nights I hold him my arms.... Sometimes I didn't sleep, just held
him all right in my arms.... I know what love-making was. And I'm satisfied to remember. I'm satisfied to remember the love of a man that was mine—only mine. 19

A perfect Lawrentian heroine, she is strongly critical of the women who are incapable of giving themselves wholly to physical love. To the priest Father De Leo she says:

"They make the life without glory. Instead of the heart they got the deep-freeze in the house. The men, they don't feel no glory, not in the house with them women; they go to the bars, fight in them, get drunk, get fat, put horns on the women because the women don't give them the love which is glory. - I did, I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion." 20

Serafina's passion, though it remains dormant for a time after her husband's death, is too strong to be subdued for long. Made of more resilient stuff than the fastidious Southern women, she destroys the symbols she has preserved of her husband's memory the moment she learns that he had relations with other women. She tacitly accepts Alvaro's proposal for a sexual relationship and satisfies her lust for life.

Serafina's voluptuous daughter Rosa, too, is endowed with her mother's passion for physical fulfilment. Despite her mother's advice to preserve her innocence, she urges her sailor boy-friend, Jack Hunter, to gratify her sensual desires: "You don't need to be very old to understand how it works out. One time, one time, only once, it could be! God! to remember." 21

It is the desire to celebrate life which prompts Stella, Blanche's sister, to escape the decaying Southern culture and marry the rough-hewn but virile Pole, Stanley Kowalski. In his drunken orgies and fits of explosive temper, Stanley becomes
violently cruel to Stella, but she accepts his brutish behaviour unflinchingly. She feels fully recompensed by his salacious and satisfying love-making. She tells Blanche, "... there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark — that sort of make everything else seem — unimportant."22

Cassandra Whitiside of Battle of Angles also belongs to the group of sensual cavaliers who regard sexual gratification as the only meaningful purpose of life. To her, the "sexual passion is the only one of the little alphabet blocks they give us to play with that seems to stand for anything of importance."23 She is obsessed with Val's body and crosses all limits of decency to entice him to make love to her. At one point in the play she loosens her red velvet cape and drops it to the floor at her feet and stands close to Val her white evening gown clinging nakedly to her body:

VAL: Don't stand there in front of me like that.

SANDRA: Why not? I'm just looking at you. You know what I feel when I look at you, Val? Always the weight of your body bearing me down.

VAL: Christ!

SANDRA: You think I ought to be ashamed to say that? Well, I'm not. I think that passion is something to be proud of.24

Lady Torrance of Orpheus Descending is also a passionate and full-blooded woman whose marriage to invalid and impotent Jabe has left her emotionally and sexually starved. She is awakened to life when Val appears on the scene. Though initially Val is reluctant for a sexual relationship with her, he finally
succumbs to her desire and need for love and they consummate their love in a side-room in the mercantile store. The Lady, like Serafina, rejoices not only at her emotional fulfilment with Val but also at the discovery that she has conceived. When Val, desperate to flee corruption he has involved himself in, seeks release from such a relationship, the Lady pleads with him not to abandon her, "NO, No, DON'T GO.... I NEED YOU! ! ! .... TO LIVE... TO GO ON LIVING!"25 Having known fulfilment through physical love with Val, she can't understand how she can live without him.

And then there is Margaret, a down-to-earth American woman, who des exately uses her feminine charm and wit to lure Brick, who has recoiled from sex as he has from all bonds of human attachment. She loves him devotedly and sensually and makes no secret of the fact that she is "eaten up with longing." Almost like Serafina, she nostalgically remembers the one-time sweet love-making of her man: "With absolute confidence and perfect calm, more like opening a door to a lady or seating her at a table than giving expression to any longing for her."26

To the group of these female sensualists also belongs Maxine Faulk, the middle-aged hotel proprietress of The Night of the Iguana. This woman, coarse and vulgar, is endowed with an insatiable desire for physical love. In a stage direction at the beginning of the play, she is described as "rapaciously lusty".27 The extent of her sexual appetite can be realized from the fact that she has hired two strong Mexican boys to slake her lust. Still not satisfied, she feels the need for another
captive lover. Throughout the play, her conversation is bawdy and her manner, suggestive. Without mincing words, she tells Shannon that her interest in him is primarily sexual because she knows the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone, and that they have both reached a point where they have got to settle for something that works for them in their lives—even if it isn't on the highest kind of level.

If Williams has portrayed women for whom sex is a life force, the very basis of existence, he has also drawn women for whom sex has an entirely different function. Sex, to such women, is merely a distraction, a means to forget that they are approaching the end of their youth or their career. Three women, all fading actresses, who bear remarkable resemblance to one another, belong to this group. They are the Princess Kosmonopolis (Alexandra del Lago) of Sweet Bird of Youth, Flora Goforth of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and Karen Stone of the short novel The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. These portraits were undoubtedly inspired by the aging stage beauties who impressed Williams with their talent—Laurette Taylor, Helen Hyno, Tallulah Bankhead and Diana Barrymore. The Princess is a blatantly perverted woman, who picks up young men like Chance Wayne for her sexual gratification and casts them off when she has grown sick of them. She wants sex on her own terms in order to forget that the legend of her youth is already over. She tells Chance, "When I say now, the answer mustn't be later. I have only one way to forget these things I don't want to remember and that is through the act of love-making. That's the only dependable distraction. So when I say now"
because I need that distraction, it has to be now, not later."

And this is how she invites Chance to bed, "Now get a little music on the radio and come here to me and make me almost believe that we are a pair of young lovers without shame." At last, when she has had the distraction she needed, she abandons Chance to his terrible fate.

Flora Goforth is no less perverted than the Princess. She is a dying actress who describes herself appropriately as an "ex-swamp bitch from Georgia" who has had a number of lovers and husbands and vividly recalls the love-making she has had, "...we made love without mirrors.... He used my eyes for his mirrors. The only husband of the six I've had that could make love with a bright light burning over the bed.... To see, while we loved." Even now when she is nearing the end of life, she desperately feels the need for a lover to shake off her depression at the loss of her youth and glory.

Karen Stone is a study of a woman who finds promiscuity as the only means to fill the vacuum of her life. As a young woman, she deliberately married a timid and impotent man in order to avoid both copulation and motherhood. She was chiefly interested in furthering her prospects as a career woman and considered children an obstacle to the attainment of her dreams. But, now, when her husband is dead, her career has come to an end, and the beauty that made her the stage queen is fast fading, she must find a substitute for them. That substitute is none other than animalistic sexuality and she indulges in it unreservedly. She buys love from successive gigolos in Rome.
Their unreasonable and crass demands for money hurt her pride and fill her with a sense of disgust and humiliation. She realizes only too well what such liaisons with male prostitutes would lead to, but her incontinent longing cannot be denied. Sexuality seems to have been left to her as the only means to stop the drift and she sinks irretrievably into its morass.

Those who believed that Williams could draw only psychotic, sick and perverted females were proved wrong by his creation of women like Fland Jelkos in The Night of the Iguana and Leon in Small Craft Warnings. These women are, in fact, portraits of Williams himself and they embody his own credo of compassion and endurance in the face of all trials and tribulations. They have attained higher moral values and are endowed with gifts of compassion and human understanding. They are saints in disguise whose mission is to help the abject people dispel the gloom of misery and suffering from their lives.

Hannah, whom Williams calls "the female Buddha", is "remarkably looking, ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic Cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated... she is totally feminine... almost timeless." 31 Sensitive to the suffering of the other people, she has denied herself emotional freedom, but spiritually she is at peace. She helps Shannon a great deal by bringing to him an understanding of the Christian ethics and self-awareness. She diagnoses his problem as "the oldest one in the world - the need to believe in something or in someone." 32 As for herself, she has discovered something to believe in, "Broken gates between people so they can reach
each other even if it's just for one night only." But unlike other Williams' women, this reaching out is not physical. She elaborates that it is "a little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this."

Hannah's circumstances are no better than those of Shannon's—both are at the end of their rope—but Shannon is sadly lacking in qualities of patience, endurance, and perseverance which Hannah possesses in abundance. Like Shannon, she, too, is haunted by her "blue devils" but she has learnt to conquer them with her power of endurance because she thinks that it is something which spooks and blue devils respect. Whereas most Williams' women submit to dope, sex, and other distractions in the face of suffering, Hannah encounters it with courage and fortitude.

The other female saint Leona is surrounded by all sorts of perverted people—drunkards, cheats, homosexuals, and prostitutes, i.e., the kind of people Williams rubbed shoulders with as a bohemian—but she remains free of corruption. Like Hannah, she gives love and solace to those who are in distress. She can pull along with all sorts of people whether they be studs like Bill or young faggots because they remind her of her own brother. In an interview, Williams described Leona as one of his best female characters: "I think that Leona in Small Craft Warnings is a fully integrated woman.... she is my first wholly triumphant character. She is truly devoted to life, however lonely...."

Another important aspect of Tennessee Williams' portrayal of female characters is the creation of a woman who is a mother
or who has a strong instinct for motherhood. Trinket in *The Mutilated* is a woman with a strong maternal instinct which has, however, remained unfulfilled. To her, motherhood is a mystic experience which has been denied to her. Some women in the later full-length plays share Trinket’s maternal instinct and believe that motherhood rejuvenates a woman. To them, conception is a great event worthy of celebration. Lady Torrence feels as if her heart were cut out of years before she had a child cut out of her body. After her marriage to sickly Jabe, she loses every vestige of hope for creating new life, but Val, as her saviour, not only releases her emotionally from death-in-life existence but also helps her in the fulfilment of her long-cherished dream of attaining motherhood. Exultant at the expectation of new life in her, she tells Val, "true as God's word! I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body, has burst in flower! You've given me life ....... Unpack the box! Unpack the box with Christmas ornaments in it, put them on me, glass bells and glass birds and stars and tinsel and snow!" 36 She is so rapturous that she cannot resist telling even Jabe about the fruit of her adultery. "I've won, Mr. Death, I'm going to bear!" 37

"The Rose Tattoo" is, as its author has claimed, a paean of praise to the Dionysian elements of life — a celebration of the forces of rejuvenation, fertility, fecundity." 38 Its heroine, Serafina, twice in the play experiences the wonder of having two lives in her body — first after conceiving with her husband Rosario and the second time with Alvaro. Like Lady, Serafina also goes into raptures at the prospect of bearing
new life: "Oh, it's so wonderful, having two lives in the body, not one but two: (Her hands slide down to her body, luxuriously). I am heavy with life, I am big, big, big with life!" The desire to become a mother is also an obsession with Maggie, the Cat. Throughout the play we find her coaxing Brick to aim their child. This desire is, no doubt, partly motivated by her determination to inherit her share of Big Daddy's rich plantation; all the same, her longing for motherhood cannot be minimised much less denied.

As for Williams' mother figures, the most impressive and memorable in Amanda Wingfield. Patterned on the figure of his own mother, Mrs. Edwina Williams, Amanda is excessively obsessed with notions of propriety and continually comes into clash with her son who shows little respect for her ideas. She constantly finds fault with whatever Tom does. She is critical of his eating habits, his smoking, his going to the movies, his literary pursuits, and his flights from reality. Puritanical by disposition, she does not like his reading books by "insane D.H. Lawrence", and when Tom says that "men is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter," she flies into a rage and reprimands him for talking about "instinct", which according to her, "belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!" She expects Tom to cultivate higher values of the mind and the spirit. Amanda, on occasions, is so appallingly and exasperatingly fussy and nagging that Tom is forced to flee home as did his father years ago.
Beneath her rough exterior, however, one cannot fail to see Amanda's simplicity, tenderness, and solicitude. After her desertion, she puts up a brave fight to fend for herself and her children, particularly Laura. Her efforts to keep the family together by selling magazine subscriptions are touching. In spite of her pretensions to an aristocratic past, she has not lost touch with the real resent. Though she insists that Laura should not refer to herself as "crippled" and instead speak of only a little physical defect, "hardly noticeable even", she is aware of the reality of her situation. Her chief concern is that unworldly Laura must get a husband because she knows from experience what happens to a Southern woman who fails to settle down in life:

I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South - barely tolerated spinsters living upon the rudging patronage of sister's husband: or brother's wife! - stuck away in some little mouse-trap of a room.... Little bird-like women without any nest - eating the crust of humility all their life! 42

In order to save Laura from such a fate, she insists on her to develop charm and "to stay fresh and pretty for gentleman callers because "sometimes they come when they are least expected." 43

At last, when a prospective caller does actually appear in the person of Jim O'Connor, she vicariously tries to woo him, realizing no doubt, that Laura is too shy and inept for such a situation. In the end, when all her plans for Laura's future have fallen through, we see her completely broken and defeated.
Notwithstanding her own mood of despondency, she does not overlook the fact that Laura's need for consolation is much greater than her own. She, therefore, turns to Laura to comfort her. As Williams says, "... her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty." She may be foolish, she may be nagging, she may be querulous, but her great qualities of endurance and tenderness amply make up for all her short-comings and finally she emerges as a truly noble and valiant woman.

Big Mama of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is another mother figure worthy of note though she lacks the depth and complexity of Amanda. Garrulous and big-hearted, she is a dedicated wife, but Big Daddy has always hated her for her lack of sexual appeal. Throughout the play, he shows his open disgust for her, but her devotion to him remains unobscured. Even after forty years of marriage, she has not been able to convince him of her love for him. Frustrated in her love for her husband, she turns to her favourite son, Brick in whom she finds much of the charm of Big Daddy, but he, too, shrinks from her. The undercurrent of pain of unfulfilled love is discernible in her seemingly boisterous spirits and jokes. Williams nearly succeeds in investing her with the same tragic beauty as he does in Amanda when all her hopes have collapsed. At the end, when she learns that Big Daddy is suffering from malignant cancer, she takes
control of the situation as if she had been the head of the family since long. She is determined not to let Mae and Gopper cheat Brick of his legitimate share of the inheritance.

Lastly, Mrs. Venable of *Suddenly Last Summer* is a domineering mother who, despite her old age, accompanies her son on his travels in order to prevent his escape to freedom. She idolizes her son as a creator, a poet, though he turns out just one poem in a year. When Catherine, her niece, who knew Sebastian to be a sexual pervert, insists on telling the true account of his gruesome end at the hands of some cannibalistic urchins, Mrs. Venable maintains that her story is false and fabricated. She even arranges for a doctor and offers him a huge sum as illegal gratification to perform prefrontal lobotomy on Catherine in order to cut that "hideous story" out of her brain. Thus, apart from being strangely sadistic, Mrs. Venable believes in maintaining a clean facade: instead of feeling grief over the loss of her only son, she concerns herself with preserving outward appearances even if that should involve the annihilation of a fellow human-being.

Williams has, thus, given us an incredibly large and varied portrait gallery of female characters. The charge of critics like Walter Kerr that Williams is ambiguous and evasive about certain questions of character cannot be levelled against him so far as his heroines are concerned. On the
contrary, as Fonte observes, "Not the least ambiguous of Williams' characters, it goes without saying, are his women." They are complex, no doubt, but in the end, we know all about them as does their creator. Fonte further goes on to say, "We may not like them all or find them uniformly admirable.... Even the minor (female) characters possess a vivid theatricality that lifts them immediately upon their appearance on the stage out of the area of familiarly real into the realm of most intense art." Paying tribute to the varied and true-to-life image of Williams' women, Geraldine Page, who played the female lead in many of his plays, said in an interview, "That is why his characters are life-like and why they are so valid on the stage, because they are not just one colour. Because none of us in life are." Williams, with his artistry and acumen, has created heroines who rank among the most impressive creations of the theatre in this century.
Notes

5. Lewis Furke and John E. Booth, "Williams on Williams", Theatre Arts, 46 (Jan.1962), 16-19.
15. Ponte, p.15.


20 Ibid., p. 64.

21 Ibid., p. 104.

22 *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 162.


24 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

25 *Orpheus Descending*, p. 314.


28 *Sweet Bird of Youth*, p. 41.

29 Ibid., p. 42.


32. Ibid., p. 104.

33. Ibid., p. 104.

34. Ibid., p. 104.


36 *Orpheus Descending*, pp. 343-44.

37 Ibid., p. 344.

38 Ponte, p. 18.

41. Ibid., p. 260.
42. Ibid., p. 245.
43. Ibid., p. 237.
44. Ibid., p. 312.
45. Fonte, p. 11.