CHAPTER IV

TRAPPED AND TRUNCATED: NEUROTIC WOMEN

The vogue of psychoanalysis has metamorphosed the tenor of Western drama in general and contemporary American Drama in particular. In the psychoanalytic paralance, the normal individual is one who, whatever his individual debility, is not seriously crippled in dealing with his situation or environment. According to Sigmund Freud, human impulses and cultural values are always at loggerheads and neurosis is the restlessness that an individual experiences on account of the instinctual frustration he faces in society. Indeed, as Freud argued, neurosis is the price an individual pays for the advantages he gains by the growth of civilization. As this neurosis develops, it loosens his contact with reality and drives him to seek total fiction or "substitute satisfactions." According to Carl Jung, neurosis is essentially a matter of schism between individual's conscious and unconscious desires - "a dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes." For Alfred Adler, the basis for the neurotic conflict is social set up. While Freud sees in a neurotic very little of social inclination, Adler considered him as one with irresponsible social cravings. He is bent on establishing his supremacy in society - an anxiety that springs from a sense of inferiority. Adler contends that "every neurosis can be understood as an attempt to free oneself
from a feeling of inferiority in order to gain a feeling of superiority." Neo-Freudians like Eric Fromm and Karen Horney have emphasized "anxiety," "adult experience," "cultural influence on the individual" as the dominant factors of neurosis. The neurotic person either withdraws into "phantasy life" or seeks "mechanisms of escape" like sado-masochism, destructiveness and conformity. R.D. Laing prefers to call it schizoid personality and, according to him, "the term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two ways. In the first place, there is rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself." All the psychiatrists, Freudian or neo-Freudian, however, observe that neurosis is "a sickness" in a personality; it seriously debilitates one's mind and leads to erosion of one's individuality.

The post-World War II American plays are full of anguish, frustration and defeat. The contemporary playwrights feel cut off from the old securities as they no longer visualize a harmonious social relationship in a society. Sex, violence, perversion, moral and spiritual damnation chiefly fascinate O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Albee. Contrary to traditional heroism, the protagonist is seen hitting back with violence at the machine age that stifled his sensibility and robbed him of his individuality. The neurotic protagonist is dramatized as a lonely individual, craving love and affection, a prey to the mental and physical diseases. Both male and female
protagonists suffer alienation, anxiety, depression and despair. A protagonist is presented at a moment when frustration has led to a crisis. He has only two possible ways of acting: to face reality or to retreat into illusion. His passionate tendency to cling to neurotic illusions dehumanize his personality and debilitate his sensibility.

Now neurotic perversion must not be confused with passionate frenzy. For example, Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, too, are very passionate, but their passions inspire them to act and fight till the end of life. As their tragic illusions lead them to a heroic fall, in their death they achieve a certain measure of glory and grandeur. In spite of tragic flaws, they have "character," a unique individuality, and a certain moral or spiritual commitment; thus blessed, they defy the evil forces to restore peace and order. On the other hand, neurotic protagonists, lacking the strength of character, passionately seek sex and dope, turn escapists, and degenerate into morbidity. Projection of such "sick" men and women as protagonists by the contemporary playwrights like Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams is a measure of their anti-heroism born of their revolt against the socialistic and realistic traditions. No wonder, instead of fighting heroically against the forces of his environment, man is seen as a victim of alienation.

O'Neill was at the end of his emotional tether in 1939. The onset of the War in Europe threw him into a depression from which he never recovered. No wonder, The Iceman Cometh,
Long Day’s Journey Into Night, A Moon For The Misbegotten
and A Touch of The Poet were the creation of a pessimistic
and nihilistic O’Neill, not affirming life and the quest of
spiritual order as we find in Days Without End but highlighting
his unqualified despair over the fact that the world was
heading towards total annihilation. No wonder, O’Neill told
a reporter that mankind ought to be dumped down the nearest
drain and the world given over to the ants. Being a spiritual
physician, O’Neill endeavoured to "dig at the roots of the
sickness of today" dramatizing cynical, pessimistic, nihilistic
and neurotic protagonists haunted by the absurdities of existence.
His male protagonists like Hickey, Larry, Con Melody, Edmund
Tyrone and Jamie helplessly invite their doom as they discover
that there is no way out but death. Andre Malraux once asked
if man in the twentieth century could survive after God had
died in the nineteenth; perhaps, to answer him, O’Neill was
writing his later plays just to say, "NO!" - with both letters
capital.

Not only male protagonists, even female characters of
later O’Neill are anti-heroic. The Iceman Cometh was
non-personal, Long Day’s Journey Into Night is openly
autobiographical. The play exists in a split world peopled by
characters haunted by their past "guilt and crimes." Just as
the trio in Sartre’s No Exit make the hell, the family in
Long Day’s Journey Into Night represents the human existence
on the Earth. ”The Tyrone family which it depicts is O’Neill’s
own, and the story which he lays bare, a story of 'the damned,'
is true to facts as we know them.\(^6\)

Anticipating Tennessee Williams's Blanche, Mary Tyrone heads the tribe of neurotic protagonists. Her affliction and concomitant guilt are the major forces that integrate all the characters in the play. The cynicism of Edmund and Jamie is the product of her harrowing past as the sons are deprived of motherly affection when it was crucially needed. Jamie observes that he has been made a "cynical bastard" by his mother's "repeated leave-takings." In a way his gambling and drink are simply extensions of her narcotic sensibility. Edmund too holds his mother's addiction responsible for his despair. Her addiction, he says, "made everything seem rotten." The need for motherly love is poignantly expressed by Jamie in his quotation from Swinburne's "A Leave-taking" near the end:

"Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear/ She would not hear."\(^7\)

Thus, the denial of motherly love is a major force in the play. Since Mary is the central protagonist, her neurotic self causes the feelings of bitterness and despair in Edmund and Jammie. Theirs is a disintegrated family in which all the inmates lack the "guts" to make an ideal "home". Being the pivotal figure, Mary, instead of facing life, consistently indulges in her neurotic illusions. Thus her anti-heroic response to the situation inevitably brings doom for her sons.

Mary's quest for her true self is a parody of the quest of the mythical heroes. She is desperately looking for a self that does not exist. Repeatedly she complains that she cannot
find her glasses; this is a way of saying that she is too
neurotic to see what she is. Her home is essentially a
symbolic image of her alienation: the room is shabby, poorly
furnished, a temporary inn at best. The loss of an ideal home
where "one is never lonely" (Journey, p.72) overwhelms Mary.
Gripped by the consciousness of her failure, the anti-heroine
is seen constantly apologizing for the disorder of her hair.
Her neurosis is rooted in the fact that she realizes
unconsciously that Edmund had inherited from her his fear of
life. Instead of doing anything to set things right, Mary
picks up morphine to escape from her guilt. Instead of facing
life in a heroic manner, she shoves the blame on to life - an
attitude quite anti-theetical to what an Electra or an Antigone
would have done in such a situation. Most characteristically,
she says:

None of us can help the things life has done
to us. They're done before you realize it, and
once they're done they make you do other things
until at last everything comes between you and
what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true
self forever.

(Journey, p.61)

Long Day's Journey Into Night is primarily about human
isolation and the defeat of the spirit. Too weak to cope with
the absurdities of existence, the anti-hero moves away from
commitment, away from will to make decision, hope and
disappointment. In Mary's personality we don't have the heroic
struggle, or a quest for meaning and identity, instead, she has
a frenzied will to pass "into the realm of a white nothingness."
As Mary tells her son, "... I really love fog ... it hides you from the world and the world from you. ... It's the foghorn that I hate. It won't let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back" (Journey, p.98). Guilt feelings compel a neurotic to seek withdrawal from life. Mary's love of fog is symbolic of her helplessness to shoulder the responsibilities of a mother. Her neurotic attitude infects the vision of Edmund who does not want "to see life as it is."

Like Blanche later, Mary longs for her ideal past: "I had two dreams. To be a nun, that was the more beautiful one. To become a concert pianist, that was the other" (Journey, p.104). But the dreams of lost faith and spent talent are, in fact, dreams of retreat from life. Lost in her dreams, Mary is separated from the men in both space and time. After Tyrone takes the wedding gown, she "moves like a sleepwalker" around the chairs of the seated Jamie and Edmund. For the guilt-ridden anti-hero, dream is a necessity of life. In Long Day's Journey Into Night, dope-dreaming replaces the pipedreaming of Iceman Cometh. When the morphine talks in her, she treats her husband with a mixture of love and contempt, dwelling on his failures and yet affirming her true love for him. "As Deborah Harford escaped in her dreams, Mary needs to turn from them all, to find a path that will take her deep into the fog, hating the loneliness, yet wanting to be rid of the obligations the men's love place upon her." Lacking the inner strength of character and
invincibility of spirit, Mary desperately needs dope to wipe out "the pain—all the pain—I mean, in my hands." (Journey, p.103). Indeed, Mary, as a protagonist, makes the downward course of an incapable mother utterly intelligible. She does not have the deep, resonant notes that will sustain her woman through the blinding, tragic memories of the centre of the play; she cannot quite fight fury with fury.  

This bewildered, submissive mother symbolizes the inert and paralyzed state of modern man living in America during World War II. Her neurotic dope-addiction involves her in confrontation with her husband and her sons. What we have in the play is not the forceful personality of character, but the interplay of the orgy of resentment, recriminations, accusations and a network of confessions, excuses and self-accusations. The characters flay one another, cause a scar and then immediately afterwards feel ashamed of themselves. The attacks and counter-attacks, impulsive outbursts of hatred of Edmund and Jamie are linked with Mary's dope-addiction. In each confrontation, Edmund tries to get Mary to face a fact, but Mary ignores him by saying, "I don't know what you're talking about." Edmund is so much frustrated with the repeated denials of her mother that he cries, "It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope-fiend for a mother!" (Journey, p.120).

Herein we get the real self of the anti-hero. Mary's deceiving and evading lies make her histrionic progression, or retrogression, from nervous mother to hardened addict.
In the end, Mary appears as a true "drug-fiend," an extremely dehumanized woman whose fear and loneliness have become intensified by the drug. Mary is totally dissolved into nothingness, and Jamie compares her to mad Ophelia in a "sardonic" tone. The defeat of the spirit is total. Indeed, the heroic self is beyond the reach of the protagonists like Mary. Antigone never loses sight of her true self; Mary seeks "dream, drunkenness and death," to overcome her guilt and shame. Crushed by guilt, fear and alienation, she proves a hopeless mother who is not at peace with herself to be able to give the peace and comfort her sons long for in her.

The world of Tennessee Williams is also populated with the anti-heroic neurotic protagonists, especially women. He is traditionally regarded the dramatist of frustration because he had "captured with such skill the truncated lives of his characters caught in a world of their own illusions unable to break out."

Tennessee Williams does not conceive characters in the traditional pattern; his protagonists, in fact, do not have a "character" at all, for they have weak personalities. They lack the tragic strength, the force of character, the spirit of invincibility, and the sense of commitment. Since they project humanity as neither good, knowledgeable nor courageous, they obviously negate the Aristotelian concept of the "ideal tragic hero." Now, traditional tragic heroes, placed in relation to the community and the cosmos and endowed with splendid powers of self-expression, possess a heroic spirit
that urges them to make epic sacrifices for a noble cause. Rejecting traditional heroism, Tennessee Williams created such protagonists as withdraw into their own fantasies and seek ecstasy in illusions to conceal their guilt. Crushed under the heavy burden of metaphysical guilt, they suffer alienation, anxiety, depression and despair. Sensitive and vulnerable, weak and fragile, they easily become prey to internal and external forces. Their psychological pressures make them morbid. Conscious of their harrowing guilt and unable to confront the situation heroically, they lose their balance and indulge into perversion, nymphomania, even cannibalism.

Highlighting the neurotic morbidity of William's protagonists Esther Merle Jackson observes:

> Apparently shocked and frightened by the growing threat of human annihilation, he suggests that the theatre cannot afford to exalt man, to praise and to commend his nature. He insists that the proper function of the modern drama is to expose man's hidden nature, to search out his motives, to discover his limits, and, ultimately, to help him to find a mode of salvation.  

Tennessee Williams does use the devices of decadent memory, insanity, intoxication, dream and death to highlight the "broken" and shattered spirits of his protagonists - the trapped victims.
whose heroism lies in merely waiting to be "physically or psychologically emasculated." Emotionally displaced people, unable to come to terms with their environment, seek fantasy, alcohol or sexual promiscuity - all antidotes to the traditional tragic passions. No wonder, they emerge as neurotics instead of heroes.

This gallery of neurotics is invariably dominated by women in whose portrayal Williams has evinced much insight. Some of them are relics of the moribund tradition of Southern gentility; some others have gone neurotic because, unable to accept the new socio-economic forces of the post-War era, they prefer living in the legendary world of something that never really was. The disorder of their nervous system results from some "maladjustment" of the super-ego-id-balance: promiscuity or repression born of enforced respectability characterizes all of them.

Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie (1945) is Williams's first anti-heroic protagonist of this type. A silly, garrulous, spinsterish widow, she imagines that she still belongs to the dead world of aristocrats. She is the head of a disintegrating family in which all the members lack the capacity to play meaningful roles in life. Her anti-heroic response to life generates devastating consequences for her children, crippling them psychologically and seriously inhibiting their growth for maturity and self-realization. Wrapped up in delusions of her girlhood conquests, Amanda is often unaware of the realities of the world around her. As she explains to Tom and Laura:
One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain - your mother received seventeen gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house.15

How Amanda lacks heroic sensibility becomes clear when she is compared to Cora Flood, the heroine of William Inge's The Dark At the Top of the Stairs. Cora too is threatened by the economic insecurity like Amanda; but she faces her situation heroically and makes successful efforts to find out a match for her daughter, Reenie, who, like Laura, had a physical imperfection. Just as Laura seeks to escape by means of her glass figurines, Reenie attempts to escape by playing the piano. The predicament of Amanda is her false delusion, a sense of nostalgia for the past that is dead, a longing for an age of chivalry and elegance - a time characterized by the "art of conversation" by young ladies possessed of a pretty face, a graceful figure, and "a nimble wit and tongue to meet all occasions." Too sadly, however, it is a time now irrevocably lost. Her admission that she "wasn't prepared for what the future brought me" is a clue to her false delusions. She deeply believes that she belongs to the early age of aristocratic life, not to the grinding daily routine of her St. Louis tenement. In the words of Signi Falk, "In her pathetic refusal to be realistic, she clings to such delusions as a certainty that she could have married any of her now wealthy gentlemen callers if she had not fallen in love with the man in the soldier suit or her conviction that her children are exceptional."16
Amanda has her own obsolete vision of life. Her passivity in coping with the bleak reality of her present is as pronounced as the way she uses the past as her point of reference for everything connected with goodness, truth and reality. She desperately tries to hold two worlds together even when she realizes that both are crumbling beneath her feet. This weakness of personality is not a "tragic hamartia" but a wilful tenacity to cling to neurotic passions. Her sexual repression, nostalgic sensibility, and feelings of alienation lead to a neurotic instability which blurs her value judgement.

Certain aspects of her neurotic personality can be explained in Freudian terms. Her repressed energy seems to have directed her to become a dominating personality. A clash between the adult Tom and his sexually repressed mother is, therefore, inevitable. David Sievers is correct in his analysis when he says, "Williams uses the Freudian language as a system for designating reality, its tripartite divisions as signs of modes of experience, and its clinical nomenclature as a description of universal human distress." 17

Sexual anxiety is an irrevocable force which disintegrates the personality of Williams's protagonists. It is sexual morbidity and repression that lead them to alienation, frustration and despair. Like Freud, Williams establishes human personality in its animal origin. For both, sexuality is the symbol of being. Amanda had married a telephone man who deserted her after siring two children. Like Alma, Cassandra and Blanche,
Amanda thus becomes a victim of sexual repression which ultimately makes her a psychic case. Now Inge's heroine Cora Flood also feels sexual repression as her husband, Rubin, frequently remains absent from home; but she does not allow her sexual passions to degenerate into neurosis because she finds Reenie and Sonny as substitutes for Rubin to overcome her alienation. Amanda's situation is pathetic for she miserably fails to master her sexual repression by directing her energies for the welfare of her family.

What worries her most is her inability to find a suitable match for Laura, but she must decide the future of her daughter according to her own narrow and delusive tastes. Thus her only obsession is that Laura must stay fresh and pretty for gentlemen callers. When Laura protests that she is crippled, Amanda says that she has only "a little defect - hardly noticeable" and advises her to cultivate charm and vivacity. She sends Laura to "Church socials" and when the latter fails to attract any youngman there, she sends her to a business College to learn typing to earn a living. When she discovers that her daughter is not attending the institute, she "looks grim and hopeless and a little absurd." Her struggle is leading her nowhere because she shows her fierce concern for a daughter whom she cannot understand. When Laura talks about a "High-School Boy" that she had liked once, Amanda is lost in her own romantic world and recollects the charm of her husband whom she loves still despite his having treated her so badly;
Such a neurotic craving for sexual satisfaction even from a person one hates was in the mind of Dr. Karen Horney when she said, "The neurotic need for affection may be focussed on a single person - husband, wife, physician, friend. If this is the case, the devotion, interest, friendliness and presence of that person will acquire inordinate importance." It is not surprising therefore that in Scene IV, Amanda is all excitement when preparing for Laura to receive a gentleman caller. At the very mention of such a visit, she used to slip into the memory of her past, and now that such a caller is definitely coming, Amanda strikes a neurotic longing for love and affection. After preparing Laura, she goes off-stage "to fix" herself. When she appears again, she is once again the young Amanda of the Blue Mountains with her "bunch of jonquils ... girlish Frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash...." She is sure to trap a young caller for Laura, but all her hopes are belied because she forces on the daughter the role of "Southern belle." The result is a complete disintegration of Laura's personality. Jim's revelation about his engagement to another girl brings the collapse of all the delusions of Amanda, but characteristically enough, she brutally castigates Tom for what in fact has been her own folly. "Her carping accusations of his being selfish and thoughtless, her hysterical disappointment over another plan gone wrong, and her mawkish
self-pity are ruthlessly exposed. She lacks the charm she talks so much about."¹⁹

Another Laura, the heroine of Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy*, is also threatened by the forces of sexual frustration, but she acts heroically at the end by accepting Tom Lee's love for her. There is, indeed, no such heroism in the personality of Amanda, whose romantic delusions thus lead her son and daughter to live in permanent alienation. Indeed, her illusive response to life cripples her children psychologically. Being fragile and misfits, they seek "autonomy" through promises, lies and "pipedreams" which enable them to survive the onslaughts of reality. The contrast between the imagined ideals of Amanda and the grim reality outside lends poignancy to the situation.

It is difficult to agree with Benjamin Nelson who treats *The Glass Menagerie* as a tragedy. For the learned critic, "it presents a tragic situation and characters whom, despite their moodiness and foolishness and self-deception, possess a sense of the tragic."²⁰ The sufferings of Amanda don't yield tragic experience for the audience any more than tragic enlightenment or redemption for the protagonist herself. There is no grandeur in her struggle for there is no struggle at all. There is no moral or spiritual commitment either. Here is a personality lacking in tragic character, incapable of asserting her individuality to cope with the problems of existence, and content to accept the metaphysical loneliness and frustration. In fact, the entire play is directed towards depicting the poetry of
frustration - a translucent world peopled by neurotic and shadowy figures.

However, according to Abe Laufe, Miss Laureate Taylor "portrayed Amanda in her own fashion and, in spite of the annoying, nagging characterization, made a woman for whom audiences felt sorry even if they did not sympathize with her." Perhaps the proper way to understand Amanda will be to study her role in relation with Tom and Laura. She is insensitive to Tom's position and cannot understand Laura. Each lives in his or her own world. Amanda longs for the past, Laura is imprisoned in the prison of present, and Tom expresses his longing for the future. All of them are sick neurotics totally unfit to cope with life.

The universe of The Glass Menagerie does not allow tragedy. None of these people are given the opportunity to triumph against a fate which is as malignant as it is implacable. Trapped, fragile and crippled as they are, their only heroism lies in their withdrawal to illusions. Their struggle is always a continuous retreat - "among pathetic, melodramatic or boisterous, but it is always a withdrawal." The Wingfields are trapped in a deterministic universe. They can simply accept the doom; at best their struggle will help them to survive. Theirs is neither tragic elevation nor tragic fall and thus their sufferings evoke sympathy and pathos but not pity and fear.

A Streetcar Named Desire (1959), too, documents the neurotic life of an anti-hero protagonist, Blanche DuBois, who "is perhaps
Williams's most forlorn character. She has been a gentlewoman knowing wealth and ease; now she is destitute, an alcoholic, an ageing nymphomaniac.23 Frustrated by life, the personality of this belle too has acquired schizoid dimension because of her frantic efforts to hold on to her youth. She resembles Amanda in so many ways in her reactions to the harsh world. Her attempt to hold the crumbling world of the family plantation together is similar to Amanda's frantic attempt to keep her family together. Also like Amanda, she painfully refuses to accept the reality of her life and attempts to live in her neurotic fantasies and illusions. She too has a false sense of gentility which is paradoxically contradicted by an equally false flight to promiscuity. The conflict between these two paradoxical modes of behaviour means self-defeat instead of survival. This duality of Blanche's behaviour is a testimony of her neurotic state of mind which inevitably leads to her final descent into madness. John Gassner has characterized this duality of Blanche's behaviour as an "abstraction":

Like other Southern heroines of Williams who invariably suggest Picasso's dehydrated "Demoiselle d'Avignon," Blanche DuBois is not only a recognizable human being but an abstraction - the abstraction of decadent aristocracy as the painter's inner eye sees it.24

Tennessee Williams introduces the protagonist on the verge of disintegration, for when Blanche comes on the stage, she has already lost the plantation and her youth. Blanche's moment of crisis occurred when she discovered that her husband, Allan, was
a homosexual. "In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty - which wasn't empty, but had two people in it..." Her disgust drove him to suicide. The memory of this guilt recurs in vivid flashes and that is why she wants to avoid the "blinding light" of naked bulbs. She does not want to face her rejection of her husband and the part she played in his suicide. Turning to sex as an escape from the nightmarish reality, she later becomes an English teacher with rather unusual extra-curricular activities.

After the death of Allan - intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with. . . I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection - here and there, in the most - unlikely places - even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy but - somebody wrote the superintendent about it - This woman is morally unfit for the position! (Streetcar, p.205)

The disintegration in Blanche's personality is imminent when she enters the world of Stella and Stanley. That is what makes Streetcar, in the words of U. Gibbs, "a brilliant implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or if you like, of a society." In frightened flight from the horrid nightmare of her existence, Blanche seeks a haven with her sister on whose "squalid, dilapidated" home in the French Quarter of New Orleans she descends assuming the role of a gracious, refined lady of the Old South - the same "ego-ideal" which Amanda held for herself. The glamorized neurotic behaves
like injured "grand-duchess." She tries to conceal her age, lies about taking liquor, although she has emptied Stanley's bottle, assumes a strict idea of purity though she has been 'run of town, turns sexy and exhibitionist before Stanley's poker-playing friends, and goes on an emotional drunk with saccharine love songs.

The schizophrenia latent in her neurotic personality begins to rise to the surface and Blanche holds onto her "beautiful dream." She scrupulously conceals her wrinkles by shading the naked bulbs with paper lanterns, her drinking by insisting that she rarely touches it, and her isolation by recalling some millionaire, Shep Huntleigh of Dallas, to whom she can appeal whenever disaster brushes too close. In the world of Stanley, Blanche is an impostor; she is not the lady she pretends to be. Right from the moment she comes in Elysian Fields, she is an outsider, a foreign element from another time and space. Williams introduces this fading "Her Majesty" thus: "She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and ear-rings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district" (Streetcar, p.117).

That Blanche has a schizoid personality is implicit in Benjamin Nelson's observation: "It is obvious that she is unwell; she is hyper-sensitive, giggling too much and talking too much. . . ."27 After all, as R.D. Laing has pointed out, "In the schizophrenic state the world is in ruins, and the self
is (apparently) dead. No amount of frantic activity seems to have the power to bring back life again." Blanche too is struggling in vain, for her "pack of lies," her over-refined manners, speech and physical appearance lead her nowhere. Her inner self is dead when she descends into the world of Stella, and her confrontation with Stanley explicitly reveals the dialectic of her frantic activity which results in her total disintegration and collapse. Anyway, nowhere does she strike as a heroine--neither in the beginning nor at the end.

Blanche's confrontation with Stanley is between culture and brutality, between illusion and reality. Her presence is a challenge to Stanley who is quite baffled because Blanche's "airs" are defiance to his manhood: "Don't ever talk that way to me! Pig-Polack-disgusting-vulgar-greasy! - them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here!" (Streetcar, p.194). His victory is rather easy because Blanche becomes the victim of her own neurosis, her weakness of sex and her false pretensions. Stanley is the epitome of the pleasure that an animal enjoys with his body--an aggressive, indulgent, powerful, and proud expression of male virility. Blanche makes a ridiculous attempt to instruct both Stella and Stanley on the values of the genteel tradition. Disgusted with Stanley's crudeness, brutality and sub-humanity, she assumes a stance of superiority which is veritable threat to Stanley's dominance in the house. In the ensuing struggle between Stanley and Blanche for Stella, Blanche is the doomed loser because she
can find anchor neither in their kind of life nor in the genteel life of which she dreams. She appeals to Stella with arguments about civilization, thus touching her heart and mind; Stanley touches the body. For Stella, "the things that happened between a man and woman in the dark" make everything else unimportant. Blanche would not succumb to such barbarism.

Truly has it been observed, "The play's leading characters, Stanley and Blanche, symbolize the eternal struggle of earthly reality versus the romantic imagination, bestiality versus beauty."  

In fact, the struggle is not confined to Stanley and Blanche; it is there in the very personality of Blanche. That is what makes her a neurotic being - an anti-heroic protagonist in whom animal triumphs over the human. As Dr. Horney observes, "Sexual activities may serve as the safety-valve through which anxiety can be released." In Blanche's personality, the anxiety is excited when she finds her sister Stella leading an "adjustable" life with Stanley, but there being no outlet, her sexual anxiety becomes an obsession. No wonder, she takes resort to hot baths and shots of whisky. Blanche needs her bath to "calm her nerves," but in fact, her hot baths symbolize her sexual neurosis. As she baths and baths, the steaming hot water washes her body but never penetrates to cleanse her soul. The hot water and soap cannot wash out her guilt, and her perfumes cannot sweeten the tainted morality. In fact, "Blanche's obsessive bathing is a nominal gesture of guilt and her neurotic quest for redemption."
The ritual of the bath is useless because it provides only temporary release from neurotic anxiety. Aptly enough, Stanley reveals to Stella the particulars of her sister's sordid life when Blanche is bathing and singing in the bathroom:

She is as famous in Laurel as if she was the President of the United States, only she is not respected by any party! . . . The trouble with Dame Blanche was that she couldn't put on her act anymore in Laurel! They got wised up after two or three dates with her and then they quit, and she goes on to another, the same old lines, same old act, same old hooey! But the town was too small for this to go on for ever! And as time went by she became a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco-nuts.

(Streetcar, p.187)

That the "bath" is a functional symbol highlighting Blanche's world of neurotic illusions is implied in Elia Kazan's observation, "Thus the 'baths' 'music' 'Blues' and 'Jazz' catch the soul of Blanche, the miserable usual side of the girl which is beneath her duplicity, her treachery, lies etc."³² The bath-syndrome prepares us to see Blanche as a sexual adventurer playing her sex-game with Stanley to satisfy her sexual anxiety, her sophisticated self notwithstanding:

BLANCHE : How do I look?
STANLEY : You look all right.
BLANCHE : Many thanks! Now the buttons!
STANLEY : I can't do anything with them.
BLANCHE: You men with your big clumsy fingers. May I have a drag on your cig?

(Streetcar, p.136).

So she sprays with perfume atomizer Stanley who "is all
muscle, lumpish sexuality," and crude energy; she is equally seductive toward the newsboy and perhaps that is how she must have behaved in her affair with the seventeen years old pupil that cost her teaching job. In short, sex-anxiety is fundamental in Blanche's personality, and this plays a vital role to bring her downfall. Electra, Medea, and Antigone were inspired by tragic passions which ultimately led them to heroic grandeur. Blanche is, indeed, one of those women who, according to Horney "feel miserable and anxious if they have no man around them; they will start an affair, break it off after a short time, again feel miserable and anxious, start another affair, and so on." Blanche admits her alienation and the vital need for a man when Stella asks her if she wanted Mitch:

I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again!
Yes — I want Mitch. . . . very badly! Just think!
If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone’s problem. . . .

(Streetcar, p.171)

Mitch is the "gentleman" Blanche has been seeing for so long. A derelict like Blanche, he too needs her desperately but he is not a neurotic. Blanche fails in her efforts because of her neurotic self; she can neither balance her emotions nor overcome her fears and anxiety. Fighting a lost battle, she makes a desperate effort but gets caught in her own net. As she has lied too much to conceal her past, when Stanley exposes her, Mitch is not able to withstand the truth. Stanley reveals the barrage of facts of Blanche's dirty past and wrecks all hopes of her marrying Mitch.
Rosamary in Inge's Picnic also finds herself in a situation like Blanche's, but she is successful in getting Howard because she gives up her false pretensions. Blanche is trapped in a terrifying contradiction. Her need to adhere to the codes of a tradition that is no longer valid creates an intense isolation, while her neurotic anxiety to be loved threatens to break through this isolation. Betrayed by her illusions, she is an easy victim for Stanley who has come to know her position only too well:

I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light-bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say - Ha - Ha! . . .

(Streetcar, p.213)

When she tries to threaten Stanley with broken bottle, he tells her: "Tiger - Tiger! Drop the bottle - Drop! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Streetcar, p.215). Her "rape" visualizes the triumph of reality over illusions and the ultimate disintegration and collapse of a neurotic soul. This total defeat of the protagonist on both physical and spiritual planes is a measure of her anti-heroism.

Of course, some critics do treat Blanche as a tragic heroine. For instance, David L. Sievers observes: "Blanche is no less a tragic figure than Antigone or Medea - whether she is literally destroyed or whether it is only her mind seems but a technicality. It is a tragic experience in the theatre to participate in the disintegration of a personality." It is difficult to agree
with Sievers because Blanche has the tragic stature of neither Antigone nor Medea. Being a neurotic through and through, her suffering fails to gain the tragic dimension. One cannot make along with her the dramatic leap from the pathetic to the tragic, because she lacks tragic greatness, tragic maturity and tragic awareness; instead, she disintegrates and descends into madness.

Williams too spoke of the gallantry of Blanche's struggle but it is the gallantry of a lost cause. A tragedy depends on individual responsibility, the realization of this responsibility, and the inner growth evolving from this realization. That is why tragic destruction possesses exaltation. In Blanche's case, the acknowledgement of individual unity with a universal unity is unthinkable. "She is fascinating, vibrant, pitiable and her suffering is real, but there is no growth through this ordeal. Things happen to her and she declines until she is totally destroyed."35 Certainly, no tragic exaltation inheres the process. Hamlet's fall evokes not pathos but pity and fear; the fall of Blanche evokes pathos but neither pity nor fear. Had her sufferings been the result of the decline of her family fortunes even as she stuck to old ideals, she might have risen to a tragic height; but most of her sufferings spring from her neurotic illusions, her false pretensions and self-imposed delusions. Moreover, there is no spirit of sacrifice in her personality to redeem her; instead, she is only too selfish adventuress lacking in character. Wanting in moral or spiritual commitment of the great tragic heroes, she meets an end that
fails to effect catharsis. She does possess intelligence and refinement but she never uses these noble talents for a higher cause. On the other hand, given to sex and luxury, she never tries to rise above her personal self. Resembling a moth-beauty destroyed by brute ugliness, she has about her a softness rather than tragic strength.

Indeed, Blanche is not a tragic heroine and that because she is a neurotic case. Trouble lies within her personality. In vain does Lumley hold society responsible for her fall when he observes, "We are all responsible for Blanche and detest a society which has not given her a chance to save herself, and spiritual values are lacking for any other kind of redemption. It is a tragedy of society, not of an individual." Well, society did give Blanche a chance to get Mitch, but her own illusions and neurotic handling of the situation led to her ultimate failure. It will be more appropriate to endorse Nelson when he observes, "Let us not say it could not happen, but death, destruction, sexual aberration and what appears to be a case of rampant nymphomania all combine to create a kind of psychological jig saw in the person of Blanche DuBois."^37

The world of Maggie, the Cat, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) is the world of animals; the society presented in the play is Hobbesian for there is "every man against every man," all struggling desperately for their existence. It is a primitive world full of greed, selfishness, fraud and mendacity and all the protagonists behave like animals. The playwright uses animal
images to delineate their qualities and behaviour. Big Daddy is a huge animal with "a loud barking laugh;" Big Mama wears a dress with large irregular patterns "like the markings of some massive animal." In the first Act, she enters "huffing and puffing like an old bull-dog," and in the Second Act "like a charging rhino." Maggie is a Delta Cat or "a big Circus Cat." Being like animals, these protagonists of the play are ogreish and cruel, vicious, and devouring — indeed, anything but heroic in the classical, neo-classical or modern sense. They may be labelled as anti-heroes or neo-heroes of the contemporary America. No wonder, too, an atmosphere of death and decay hovers around them: Big Daddy is dying of cancer, Maggie is rotting with sterility, and Brick is killing himself with liquor.

In this animal menagerie, the interest of the audience centres on Maggie because Williams has dramatized once again the loneliness and frustration of a female protagonist. Indeed, Maggie affords yet another portrait of sex-neurosis. Now neurosis, according to Dr. Karen Horney, is "a psychic disturbance brought by fears and defenses against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies." Maggie's life is a long tale of "fears and defenses"; she fears the loss of her husband's love, the loss of her physical charm, the loss of Big Daddy's rich plantation estate, and the loss of her "nerves." To overpower these fears, she assumes the role of a "Delta Cat" and indulges in the dirty game of a sex-exhibitionist. Like Blanche, Maggie is "sensuous, sily, febrile, gallant, and scorchingly southern." Like Blanche again, she
is entirely motivated by sexual frustration that primarily accounts for her psychic distortion and harmony. Rejection of life is a sin in Williams's plays and a character who accepts rejection suffers. Maggie is also a victim of the rejection of Brick, and all her efforts are directed to get a release from sexual repression.

What makes Maggie an anti-hero is the fact that she fights not for love but for sexual gratification. Rosalind, Viola, Portia fight for love and they use all their talents to win that battle, but Maggie knows no love: her longing to sleep with Brick for a night is born of a desire to become pregnant so that, as the mother of a child, she can inherit the Plantation Estate of Big Daddy. Her struggle can never be called heroic for her motives are selfish, mean and greedy. More than the love of Brick, she has a lust for sex and money. Indeed, as Henry Hewes observes, "Her motives are a need to produce a child in order to get a rich inheritance from her dying father-in-law (Big Daddy) and a physical desire for Brick, based largely on what she calls "the charm of the defeated." A neurotic "Cat," Maggie is seen spitting at the enemy, purring for the master, clawing for survival. She finds herself locked in a trap and she must claw her way out. Maggie had married her dream lover, Brick, only to discover, like Blanche, that the husband did not love her as much as he did another person, a man. Maggie's sex-neurosis came to the fore when Skipper emerged as a threat to her relationship with Brick. She accused him of homosexuality even though she knew it would be devastating to him: "SKIPPER!
STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE'S GUT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM! - One way or another! The guilt combined with grief at Skipper's death widens the gulf and their alienation is even greater.

To get a release from her sexual repression, she makes every possible effort, for loneliness weighs heavily on her: "Living with someone you love can be lonelier than living entirely alone! - if the one that y'love doesn't love you..." (Cat, p.12) Maggie's alienation is not the product of spiritual and unselfish love; it is the product of her unfulfilled longings: "You know, our sex life didn't just peter out in the usual way, it was cut off short, long before the natural time for it to, and it's going to revive again, just as sudden as that" (Cat, pp.32-33). Obsessed with sex-neurosis, Maggie has no moral scruples. She makes erotic poses to excite sexual passions of Brick: she moves her hands slowly over her breasts and hips; later she endeavours to marshal a series of imaginary sexual poses. She even excites sexual passions of Big Daddy:

MARGARET: ... In fact! - I sometimes suspect that Big Daddy harbors a little unconscious "lech" fo' me...

BRICK: What makes you think that Big Daddy has a lech for you, Maggie?

MARGARET: Way he always drops his eyes down my body when I'm talkin' to him, drops his eyes to my boobs an' licks his old chops! Ha ha!

(Cat, p.7).

Maggie lacks the refinement and elegance of Blanche. A cat on hot tin roof, she would do anything for sexual gratification -
beg, borrow or steal. In a most beseeching tone she moans, "Oh, Brick! How long does it have t' go on? This punishment? Haven't I done time enough, haven't I served my term, can't I apply for a - pardon?" (Cat, p.23). Earlier she had made love to Skipper, too - a borrowing bordering on stealth: "Skipper and I made love, if love you could call it, because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you" (Cat, p.39).

Another source of Maggie's anxiety and feline sexual restlessness is her sterility because it would imply a threat to her economic security which has an obsession with her. After all, she has had a background of comparative poverty. Growing up, she felt inferior because her family had to struggle to maintain a respectable standard of living; now she must have money to feel good in old age. Since the inheritance seems to rest on progeny, the rivalry between the fertile Mae and the childless Maggie is bitter and spiteful. The obsession of sterility consumes her good sense; no wonder she becomes arrogant and haughty, malignant and jealous: "You're jealous! - you're just jealous because you can't have babies" (Cat, p.45). Her frantic struggle to mother a child is the offspring of her neurotic fears - the fear of eternal alienation, of economic insecurity, and of eternal sterility. To overcome these fears, she must lock up Brick's liquor and force him to submit to her. She does win the battle but she loses the war. Brick is not concerned with the physical and remains as detached as ever: all the jumping and thumping of the "cat" goes in vain.

Maggie-Brick confrontation does not lead anywhere as it is
an outcome of flight and hysteria. The confrontation does not affirm universal values: there is no certainty, no positive affirmation, no conflict, no human dignity and no future either for Maggie or for Brick. The world of Maggie is a world of sexual abnormality, harlotry, neuroticism, violence, perversion, and moral decadence. No wonder, Robert Hatch observed, "Williams had written a charade that spells psychoanalysis - sex and death and money preoccupy Williams's characters, in the face of death the sex is regulated to get the money..." Thanks to Maggie's sensuality, Marya Mannes found that "the total effect of the drama was shock treatment with a stage full of screaming, mendacious and violent people, thrashing in the net of their errors and deceptions." 

Maggie, thus, emerges as an anti-heroic protagonist, a victim of her sexual neurosis, a trapped personality - selfish, greedy, aggressive, forlorn and frustrated. Her neurotic urge to mother a child recalls the illusion of Albee's Martha. Her sufferings do not evoke admiration or involvement, for her struggle is without a noble cause. Instead, her sexy, catty activity creates melodrama and fails to carry conviction. "In the theatre, audiences may be sympathetic to Maggie, but as they reflect over the drama, they may question Maggie's motives and suspect her possible avarice." In short, Maggie lacks heroic qualities and thus belongs to Williams's tradition of anti-heroism.

Yet another instance of a neurotic protagonist in this tradition of Tennessee Williams brand of anti-heroism is the heroine of *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962). She is not a childless
young wife like Maggie, but a fading movie queen, Lago. A dissipated ex-film star, she is struggling desperately to revive her lost youth and vivacity. She clings to vestiges of youth with her last gigolo, Chance Wayne. Both the derelicts, who are drifting together after the wreckage of their lives, are lustful, sensual and primitive in tastes and attitudes. Given to alcohol and narcotics, she strikes more or less a neurotic monster unfit for heroism. Her weakness for oxygen mask, Vodka and a pill is a characteristic stance of her morbid personality. Indeed, her life is nightmarish as she struggles in vain to escape from her guilt and fear, taking recourse to sexual promiscuity. Both Chance and the Princess live in delusions. Chance hopes that the Princess will be able to foster his career in films and thus help him win his beloved, Heavenly, to whom he had bequeathed the venereal disease which necessitated hysterectomy. The Princess needs Chance for her sexual gratification. To ward off her anxiety and despair, she assumes that she is young and beautiful and bids Chance (in the very first scene) to draw the curtains - and prove himself. She is sick and decadent, lonely and frustrated, hysterical and neurotic. She is always obsessed with her impending failure as a screen actress: "For years they all told me that it was ridiculous of me to feel that I couldn't go back to the screen or the stage as a middle-aged woman. They told me I was an artist not just a star whose career depended on youth." She is desperately making efforts to recapture her lost glory by selling her body, soul and everything. In Nelson's words, here
is a woman "who has worshipped the eagle of ambition and has succeeded, but whose triumph depends too greatly on time standing still. . . ." 46

The Princess is a corrupt personality, a wretched, defeated actress on the verge of doom. She can only feel desire, an animalistic passion for sexual pleasure, not love. Mind, consciousness and values are fictitious things for her. Unlike the great heroines, she distrusts truth, justice and love and negates all social, religious and moral values. No wonder, she takes hashish to escape from the world of reality. Just as Blanche had tried to atone for Allan's death by becoming the object of desire for every soldier in Laurel, the Princess here takes dope to forget her harrowing past. Like Blanche again, the Princess is fighting a lost battle: her film career is over, yet she seeks in vain to reinvoke the pleasure of "screen life" through intoxicants and sexual perversion. Aply observed Kenneth Tynan that she is "doped alcoholic, hypochondriac and exorbitantly sexed." 47

Emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually, the Princess is a bankrupt personality, torn and shattered in body and spirit. The anti-heroic indulgence in sexual pleasures and dope highlights her total disintegration. Love-making is for her the only way to forget her problems: "I have only one way to forget these things I don't want to remember and that's through the act of love-making. That's the only dependable distraction. . . ." (Bird, p.41) A criminal degenerate, her ideals
are selfish, mercenary and sensual. She towers over all the other characters in her lust and depravity. Drugs and sex have made her cruel, monstrous, suspicious, ego-centric and nervous. Love and tenderness are alien to her and even at the end she fails to save Chance from castration. "Unwilling to let chance blackmail or manipulate her to shore up the ruins of his aborted life, she is nonetheless protective when the lynch mob threatens; she offers him role of pet dog on a golden chain." In fact, she is so much intoxicated with her success that she exposes the brutal truth about his personality: "Chance, you've gone past something you couldn't afford to go past; your time, your youth; you've passed it. It's all you had, and you've had it" (Bird, p.107). Conveniently forgetting that this applies to herself, too, the Princess now busies herself with thought of how she can get back into shape, arrange for publicity, and cover up her tracks of the last few weeks. Turning to Chance, she says, "We are two monsters but with this difference between us. Out of the passion and torment of my existence, I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil, which is true! But you?" (Bird, p.107). This is a typical case of an "Ogre's toughness." After using Chance for her sexual gratification, she wants him to be her permanent pet dog, "to return with her to Hollywood as her paid companion."49

Of course, Nancy M. Tischler has different perception of her character. According to her, "Although egocentric and domineering, Alexandra del Lago is not all monster, she has compassion,
understanding and dignity." In this she is missing the very central point of the play which is implicit in the fact that when the Princess offers to take Chance with her to the near town, he refuses to be a part of her luggage: "I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding - not even that - no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all" (Bird, p.111). She remains a monster of vices till the end of the play. The hallmark of her "ogrish personality" is her sex-neurosis which urges her to commit fraud and dissipation. She lacks heroism because there is no conflict in her personality, no real commitment: she never tries to grapple with the situation. Her sufferings result from her own sensual nature and there is no quest in her life.

To conclude, the post-World War II American drama is dominated by the neurotic women - too fragile to cope with the absurdity of human existence and victims of their own passions, sensual desires and guilts. The dominance of the American female, her inordinate hunger for sex and dope, love of material comfort and the soft illusory world to avoid harsh realities, the sense of insecurity in the midst of material abundance, incapacity for genuine love, the craze for conformity and respectability - all this has been satirically treated with a view to dramatizing the contemporary neurotic sensibility. No wonder, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams give us neurotic escapists tormented by an anguish of fruitless living. Their cry of loneliness makes them frantic to discover or invent some worthwhile meaning of
existence, and establish human attachment in a world of
desperation. Antigone and Electra end their alienation,
confronting the supernatural powers, but the struggle of the
neurotic women of today is internalized and the quest is for
a life of self-inflicted exile which is a kind of non-recognition
of society. These anti-heroic protagonists attempt in vain to
find meaning and significance in the exploration of sex. Indeed,
Mary, Amanda, Laura, Maggie, Alma, Blanche, Serafina and
Alexandra del lago are neurotic derelicts. They live in
eternal vacuum without any moral or spiritual commitment. Indeed,
the theatre of post-World War II dramatize "man as prey, a
victim of the wayward id. Williams's typical hero merely waits
to be physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his
doom with a self-immolating passivity that masochistically
converts pain into pleasure."51
Notes


7 Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p.173. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text, the title having been abbreviated as Journey.


15 Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York: New Directions Books, 1945), p.8. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text, the title having been abbreviated as G.M.
16 "The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams," Modern Drama, 1, No.3 (December 1958), 177.


25 Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p.205. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text, with the title abbreviated as Streetcar.

26 The New Yorker, 23 (12 December 1947), 54.


30 The Neurotic Personality of Our Time, p.52.


33 The Neurotic Personality of Our Time, p.118.

38 *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, pp. 28-29.
41 *Tennessee Williams, Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* (New York: New Directions Books, Inc., 1955), p. 43. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text, the title having been abbreviated as *Cat*.
45 *Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 32. All subsequent page numbers refer to this edition and are incorporated in the text with the title abbreviated as *Bird*.
46 *The Man And His Work*, p. 262.
50 *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 265.