

Chapter-IV

INNOCENCE AT THE CROSSROADS: *Camino Real, Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth*

The plays of Williams' later phase are very different from the earlier ones as they are dealt very differently. In this phase his characters moved towards spiritual acceptance of what can not be changed. The plays of this phase *Camino Real* (1953), *Orpheus Descending* (1957) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), deal with the story of corruption with an innocent wanderer who destroyed by his own evil. His characters are not only homosexuals but sterile and guilty. Arthur Ganz observes:

Again and again in Williams' those whom he most desperately wishes to perceive as innocent-- whom he sometimes does so perceive-- are ultimately adjudged guilty. A group of Williams' plays-- *Camino Real, Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth*-- develop this vision of pervasive corruption through the story of a wanderer, usually only dubiously innocent, who enters a world of blatant evil and is destroyed by it.¹

These wanderers are homosexual under the apparent scenario of heterosexual relationship and there pervades an aura of guilt in the plays. These wanderers-- Kilroy (*Camino Real*), Val (*Orpheus Descending*) and Chance (*Sweet Bird of Youth*) look like innocents, but are bearing various degrees of

guilt for which they deserve punishment; "each of the three wanderers, Kilroy, Val and Chance, had been born to make love, but each has been wounded by a hostile world."²

In *Camino Real*, Williams has presented his own vision of hell. "The parallel to the poet, Dante, in Williams' inferno is Kilroy the twenty-seven year vagrant and all-American GI."³ He is a traveller and a fighter who has left his wife; comes to the Camino Real. "Kilroy, the sentimental romantic, the epitome of confidence of eternal youthful energy, has gallantly left his one true woman because the nature of his accomplishments has made him unable to give her satisfactory physical love."⁴ Coming to Camino Real, he pretends to be innocent and becomes a source of attraction for ladies like-- Rosita, a prostitute, Marguerite, a traveller and Esmeralda, daughter of the Gypsy.

In the hell-like world, where virginity of a girl is restored every month with the rising of the full-moon, Kilroy's innocence makes him hero. When Esmeralda tells her mother about Kilroy's sincerity; she replies, "Baby, they're always sincere when they life your veil."⁵ The reality comes out and Kilroy becomes the prey of street cleaners. He is punished for his deeds.

In *Orpheus Descending*, Val Xavier is the representative of the sensitive and artistic type, whose arrival in a small Southern town becomes a straw to cling for the three sex-starved women. He is a wild-spirited boy who creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop. He carries a guitar, a symbol of innocence and becomes attraction for the three ladies, Lady

Torrance, Carol Cutrere and Vee Talbott. They try to possess him in their own way. Val enters storehouse of dry goods of Jabe Torrance, who is husband of Lady, and she finds him and her physical relationship with Val revives and strengthens her and she becomes pregnant. His innocence turns as living sin in Lady Torrance. Jabe fires his gun to kill him but Lady saves him losing her life. Jabe's shouting gathers the crowd and Val gets punishment for his cynical deeds. Nelson Benjamin writes on Val's relation with Lady and his destruction:

What Lady and Val see and cling to in each other is the tenderness and warmth each give the other.⁶

But when his sin is disclosed, he loses his life. He is purified by the band of the people and Val becomes "a phoenix like self-destructive purification by fire."⁷

Chance, the next innocent young man, in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, is clinging to Alexandra Del Lago in the hope of getting an entry into the film world; who is an ageing film actress. He becomes a male prostitute for her. Before coming to Alexandra, Chance has also infected to Heavenly by a venereal disease and has destroyed for sake of love. At last, according to Miller,

Chance Wayne has surrendered, but sacrifices himself for his sins and awaits his fate not whimpering, but with the strong positive

nature that seems to make more of a man of himself in the end than could have been anticipated in his previous lifetime.⁸

For his crime, he is "beaten up by the brother of his old sweet heart."⁹ He as a prostitute is suitably punished as he is castrated." Chance's castration in *Sweet Bird*-- a kind of ritual that lifts the plot from the realistic to the metaphorical."¹⁰

Camino Real (1953)¹¹ is quite different from the traditional kind of plays. Williams becomes slightly comic and indeed he liked to think that it was "an open challenge to the realistic conventions of the American theatre that would liberate that theatre from its conservatism. As a play it owes something to the comic strip."¹² It seems that the main character Kilroy's name comes up by the Second World War Soldiers. 'Kilroy Was Here,' was a famous joke commonly used among the soldiers during the war.

The action of the play takes place in a tropical sea-port, in an unspecified Latin American country containing Siete Mares Hotel, Skid Row with the Gypsy's gaudy stall and a dry fountain near the hotel. Beyond the place is 'Terra-Incognita,' a wasteland between the town and the distant snow-topped mountains. The play is divided into sixteen blocks and it starts with the shouting of Don Quixote de la Mancha "*dressed like an old "desert rat"*" (p.432), and that of the appearance of Gutman the proprietor of the hotel, a lordly fat man on the balcony of the hotel. The whole play is presented through the dream of Don Quixote and Gutman remains present in the most part of the play. The major incident of the play is the restoration of the

virginity of Esmeralda, daughter of the Gypsy. Kilroy, "*a young America vagrant, about twenty-seven*" (p.454) appears on the scene with the beginning of the main action. He has been a boxer whom Williams describes:

He has a pair of golden boxing gloves slung about his neck and he carries a small duffle bag. His belt is ruby-and-emerald- studded with word CHAMP in bold letters. (p.454)

At the time of his arrival to the hotel, Kilroy is suffering from tropical fever. He is ignorant of the place, even he doesn't know, where he is! He also notices that he has been robbed of by pickpockets and seems needy of employment.

Marguerite, "*a beautiful woman of indefinite age*" (p.489) appears on the scene who is also robbed of by the pickpockets and has lost her papers and passport. She describes her past before Jacques Casanova, a person from "Venice, city of pearls" (p.439) He asks Abdullah, the son of the Gypsy about her journey with him where she was robbed.

A scene of the presence of Lord Byron is also added in the play. Lord Byron, "the strongest exponent of freedom, bears some relation to Williams himself."¹³ He is about to leave for Athens and tells about the cremation of Shelley. Marguerite wants to see the way he goes: Kilroy also follows him. Marguerite becomes unable to fly by 'Fugitivo' having no proper papers and ticket. Meanwhile, she becomes quite intimate to Jacques.

The next block is prominent one in which with the rising of the moon, virginity of Esmeralda is restored; Kilroy becomes the hero whom she addresses as her sweet heart; "you're still Champ, the undefeated Champ of the golden gloves!" (p.536) Williams describes the scene:

Kilroy surrounded by cheering Street People goes into triumphant eccentric dance which reviews his history as fighter, traveller and lover. (p.536)

Esmeralda "*snatches a bunch of red roses from the stunned Nursery and tosses them to Kilroy.*" (p.536) Gypsy takes whole identity of Kilroy and sweet conversation between him and Esmeralda continues. Later on, Marguerite also tells Kilroy about her loneliness and need of a man. Kilroy describes her how he left his wife.

A band of street-cleaners is waiting for him outside. When he comes out, he addresses them as 'SONS OF BITCHES' (P.577). They knock him down. "*He falls to his knees still swinging and finally collapses flat on his face.*" (p.577) An old lady, La Madrecita, covers his body with her shawl.

Medical Instructor, medical students and nurses come to examine the body. The instructor expresses his desire to open the chest cavity and examine the heart. All of a sudden he becomes conscious but his heart, "as big as a head of a baby," (p.581) a "solid gold" (p.581) is already taken out. He snatches it from the instructor but Gutman shouts, "That gold heart is the property of the State!" (p.582) Gypsy tells her daughter about the sincerity of

the people like Kilroy. At last his reality has come out and finally he assumes an exaggerated attitude of despair.

The sinister world of fantasy of the *Camino Real* is neither more nor less than the corruption of the time in which Williams lives. It was a time in which greed and brutality were the ruling forces and the pathetic souls tried to show some affection for their fellow creatures but they were remorselessly crushed and then thrown into a barrel and cast away by the street cleaners. Such kind of presentation is made by the author in the play.

Williams has selected the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno* which read, "*In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight was lost,*" (p.417) as an epigraph of the play. It represents the symbolical world of hell where is Death. In this play, Gutman, the proprietor of the Siete Mares Hotel, is cruel and sinister enough to present a hell-like world, but he always remains a little away from the main action.

While describing his anti-heroic condition, Williams observes that the anti-hero engages himself as a sufferer of the agony of conscience for recognizing hidden truth, and is victimised by the heavy burden of such kind of metaphysical crime:

KILROY:

Amen!

[*He falls to his knees in the empty plaza.*] (p.585)

Williams also presents the religious and theological vision of Strindberg and William Blake and foresees the end of humanity in the play. It is observed by him and presented as a kind of spiritual death of his protagonist. The vision of the dying world is the internal form of the play. Jordan Y. Miller observes:

Conversely, it conveys Williams's ultimately optimistic resolution of the human condition, no matter how sordidly self-destructive it may seem. For underneath, though not always in the true classic sense, in all of his important plays Tennessee Williams is a writer of tragedy, and the ultimate tragic catastrophe must, by its very nature, end on the positive note of human dignity.¹⁴

From the very beginning, the play has been proved to be a troublesome drama for the author himself. When Williams was writing the play, Elia Kazan; an intimate friend of him, who also had directed most of his plays for theatre and for films offered to work on his play, he mainly concentrated on freedom and mobility of form. Williams also confesses in the "Foreword" of the play, "My desire was to give these audiences my own sense of something wild and unrestricted.... I have given more conscious attention to form and construction than I have in any work before." (p.420) He also clears in the "Foreword" of the play that "I can't say with any personal conviction that I have written a good play, I only know that I have felt a release in this work which I wanted you to feel with me." (p.422) And he further writes in the

"Afterword" of the play, "Those who do not like *Camino Real* on the stage will not be likely form a higher opinion of it in print, for all the works I have written, this one was meant most for the vulgarity of performance." (p.423)

The dramatic action of the play is concentrated on the dream of Don Quixote who idealises and holds head high amidst the defeats and slightly inflicted by the surrounding realty in the play. He falls asleep in the PROLOGUE of the play and awakes in the end of it.

Kilroy, the hero, of the play, represents the innocent modern Americans amidst the corruption of older civilization. When he comes to the Camino Real he asks about the place, the officer brutally elbows him aside. Even, he looks very innocent with the prostitute Rosita on the matter of love:

ROSITA:

Love? Love?

Kilroy:

ROSITA:

Love?

KILROY:

Sorry--- I don't feature that... I have ideals. (pp. 457-58)

In the same way a paradox is found in the speeches of the Baron. First he says to Kilroy:

...My own choice of resorts is the Bucket of Blood downstairs from the "Ritz Men Only." (pp. 469-70)

But, later on, Kilroy's innocence changes his heart and he says:

The eyes are the windows of the soul, and yours are too gentle for some one who as much as I have to atone for. (470).

The further paradox of the play is the presentation of the characters long dead. In this way, the play is a place of life-in-death, a purgatory, if the character wills. Tennessee Williams frequently sees hell in the people, and finds the punishment of life. Dominated by the threatening and sinister Gutman, the Siete Mares soon reveals that it is a place of lust, overripe sensuality of destruction and degeneration. "This hotel has become a mecca for black marketers and their expensively kept women!" (p.492) In the play, the ultimate sensualist, Jacques Casanova is hopelessly pursuing the decayed beauty, charm and attraction of Marguerite Gautier, who must now permanently wear the white camellia of lateness of her life. Most probably, Casanova, Jacques is modelled after Casanova, Giacomo (1725-98) an Italian autobiographer. His reputation lies on the posthumously published Memoirs (12 volumes, 1926-38) written in French. These volumes are primarily an account of an extraordinary succession of sexual encounters. Marguerite herself, far away from the age of youthful attractiveness, must in turn, seek to buy her internal and sexual satisfaction from virile young men.

It is also a place where the Gypsy tells her fortunes and the moon restores the virginity of her daughter Esmeralda. Here, once virile Kilroy becomes the hero but is destroyed at the end. He utters on the separation of his heart:

Gee, I'm lost! I don't know where I'm! all turned around, I'm confused, I don't understand-- what's-- happened. (p.582)

Finally, Kilroy who carries the boxing gloves and belt, the symbol of the glories of his past, a sentimental romantic, and the epitome of confidence of eternal youthful energy loses every thing. At the end, he emerges more pitiful than tragic who is knocked down by the street cleaners:

Kilroy emerges more pitiful than tragic, and although in his death he becomes one of the figures who can overcome the destructive forces around him, he is knocked about by the "gods" He is far too sentimentally romantic, without personal depth, and he does finally escape, but with all his former glories of belt, gloves, and heart left behind.¹⁵

Williams mourns on the destruction of Kilroy, the protagonist through Esmeralda:

ESMERALDA:

God bless all con men and hustlers and pitchmen who hawk their hearts on the street, all two-time losers who're likely to lose once more, the courtesan who made the mistake of love, the greatest of

lovers crowned with the longest horns, the poet who wandered far from his heart's green country and possibly will and won't be able to find his way back..... (pp.585-86)

The place and the people are quite suitable to create the tragic atmosphere in the play. 'Terra-Incognita,' as its meaning suggests is an unknown land while in the town, people like Gutman and street cleaners are the agents of death. The virtue of Kilroy is trapped in the play. It is a world where everything is possible by power of money, even sincerity, love or kindness. It is a place where a poor person shot by the guards who asks for drinks. It is also a spot where once virile Kilroy "becomes the Chosen Hero, seduced and destroyed in the end, ultimately able to free himself, but only at the cost of life itself."¹⁶

Sometimes it becomes difficult to prove that Kilroy is innocent or some accidents have taken place with him. When, Kilroy is robbed and he has no employment, he becomes unable to present any witness to the fact, simply he says, "Robbed! My God, I've been robbed!" (p.459) But his cruelty for his wife and duality of his personality is seen in these statements:

---To give up sex! I used to believe a man couldn't live without sex-- but he can-- if he wants to! My real true woman, my wife; she would of stuck with me, but it was all spoiled with her being scared and me, too, that a real hard kiss would kill me!-- So one night while she was sleeping I wrote her good-bye..... (p.456)

and

I looked at my wife one night when she was sleeping..... My wife was sleeping with a smile like a child's.... I kissed her. She didn't wake up. I took a pencil and paper. I wrote her. Good--bye!
(p.576)

Through the destruction of Kilroy, his purification is seen in the play and destruction becomes the synonyms with purification:

Purification is most effectively initiated through ritual death. Of course Kilroy, the great American pragmatist, is incapable of even imagining the suprarational or supraphysical and dies like survivor, senselessly, without meaning and with the rattle of a dry gourd.¹⁷

The innocent looking wanderer, Kilroy gets the punishment of desertion of his really innocent wife whom he left when she was sleeping and comes to Camino Real and becomes the attraction for Rosita, Marguerite and Esmeralda. Two climaxes come together, inside he is declared here by Esmeralda and "outside the door, the street cleaners are waiting for Kilroy. He struggles to survive but goes down swinging."¹⁸ His real countenance appears before the people and reality is revealed.

Orpheus Descending (1957)¹⁹ is new version of Williams's *Battle of Angels* (1940), an unsuccessful play and this "paradigmatic wanderer play is a grim threnody for lost youth, love and art."²⁰ It contains the important

themes of the isolation and frustration of the persons trapped by circumstances. It is a play of conflicting forces between the sensitive and romantic versus the insensitive and unromantic. Val Xavier represents the sensitive and artistic character who enters a small Southern town, the inferno in order to rescue three sex hungry women but gets destroyed by the hostile society. The play is known as one of the most autobiographical play of the period 1940-57.

Val Xavier, a handsome young man, "*about 30, who has a kind of wild beauty*" (p.26) is the hero of the play. He is a renowned poet and folk singer, who wears "*a snakeskin jacket*" (p.26), a symbol of youth and freedom and "*carries a guitar*" (p.26), a symbol of innocence and purity. On his thirtieth birthday, he comes to a small town of rural Mississippi, where he manages to get a job as a shoe salesman in a general store, "*TORRANCE MERCANTILE STORE*" (p.11) of Jabe Torrance, "*a gaunt, wolfish man, gray and yellow*", (p.33) The play moves around his relationship with three lusty ladies Lady Torrance, Carol Cutrere and Vee Talbott.

Lady Torrance is the wife of the storekeeper where Val serves. She is the daughter of an Italian immigrant "a Wop bootlegger burned to death in his orchard" (p.49) because of selling liquor to niggers'. At that time she was pregnant and was bearing the child of her lover David Cutrere who later on, left her. Afterwards, she married Jabe Torrance, an ill-matched person, several years older than her. Jabe Torrance is the live caricature of Evil and

Death. He is suffering from an endless disease of cancer and could never satisfy his wife who is living in a difficult state of situations.

Carol Cutrere of twenty-nine, a disillusioned reformer of aristocratic family, a decayed aristocrat like Blanche DuBois, is sister of David Cutrere. She has walked barefoot wearing sackcloth in protest against the racial injustice and has become famous as 'lewd vagrant' in the locality and is banished from her hometown. Being disillusioned and dissolute, she seeks a company of a male partner and loves to be eloped with Val.

Another lady Vee Talbott, "a heavy, vague woman in her forties," (p.26) a religious and visionary, is wife of local Sheriff but not satisfied with him. She is a painter, and "*does primitive oil paintings*. (p.26) It presents her canvas of inner visions. She compares Val with Christ, while he seeks his love from viewpoint of fundamental purity.

All the ladies become happy with the arrival of Val and each of them tries to possess him physically, mentally or spiritually. First he hesitates to be involved with Lady Torrance any way but she gets attached and his physical relationship revives her life by making her pregnant. Her happiness ends soon with her shouting of joy when Jabe descends from staircases with a gun. He fails in his attempt to kill Val, Lady is killed in defending him from the bullets. Jabe, later on shouts that Val has killed his wife and the crowd gathers to punish him.

Lady Torrance is a warm, passionate and fleshy lady who believes intensely in making physical relations. Williams describes her:

She could be any age between thirty-five and forty-five, in appearance, but her figure is youthful. Her face taut. She is a woman who met with emotional disaster in her girlhood; verges a hysteria under strain. Her voice is often shrill and her body tense. But when in repose, a girlish softness emerges again and she looks ten years younger. (p.33)

She is not a shy lady like Laura Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie* or Alma of *Summer and Smoke*. She had love affairs with David Cutrere before her marriage, which ended for his lust of money and status. He didn't know that she was pregnant with his child. Lady had to seek abortion--- "I had it cut out of my body, and they cut my heart out with it!" (p.78) She married Jabe Torrance. Both followed the same path, later on when they meet, Lady says to David:

--I-- carried your child in my body the summer you quit me... *You sold yourself. I sold my self. You was bought. I was bought. You made whores of us both!* (p.78-79)

David confesses that life has punished him for his guilt.

It is understood that both have not forgotten each other and the pain still exists in Lady's heart and she becomes violent to David:

I hold hard feelings! -- Don't ever come here again.... Because I hope never feel this knife again in me. (p.79)

Though marriage of Lady and Jabe is not a satisfactory one yet they tolerate the presence of each other. Jabe is suffering from cancer and Lady continues her love. At the time of their marriage, he was aware of David's connection with Lady and that of the unborn child but his great lust for Lady compelled him to marry her. After the desertion of David and abortion of the child, Lady could not resist and married a materialistic, selfish and malicious man several years older than her. She describes Val:

Ask me how it felt to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when he touched me. But I endured it. I guess my heart knew that somebody must be coming to take me out of this hell! You did. You came. Now look at me! I'm alive once more! (p.135)

Val is afraid of surrendering himself before her yet is drawn toward her. Both are physically and overwhelmingly attracted to each other but their spirit to live together is beyond their relationship. "In their relationship there is the desperate mutual need for love arising not from any consuming physical passion, but from the desire not to be lonely."²¹

Val's protections make him more attractive and she chases him with a renewed spirit of intense passion. "This semi-gigolo semi-youth finds that reforming is not so easy as he had anticipated,"²² and he surrenders himself

before Lady's passionate cries. Their love affair is "more a childlike groping for protection than a release of overpowering sexual drives."²³ While presenting the growing relationship between Lady and Val, Williams uses the image of lonely children. Val awakens her sleeping desire by his virility. "She is like earth in winter, joined with Val, she is springtime and fertility."²⁴

First time, when Val comes to this small town he has no shelter. The three ladies are fascinated towards him and he accepts Lady. He describes his nature before her"

I can sleep on a concrete floor or go without sleeping, without even feeling sleepy, for forty-eight hours. And I can hold my breath three minutes without blacking out; I can go a whole day without passing water. (p.54)

She is satisfied with his charm and innocence:

I ain't dissatisfied with you. I'm pleased with you, sincerely! (p.61) She gives him a job and also describes her heart-felt pain to him:

---Because I sleep with a son of a bitch who bought me at fire sale, and not in fifteen year have I had a single good dream, not one-- oh! (p.57)

Naturally, the relationship between Val and Lady is depending on their physical necessity. He stays with her, but while she is off stage he takes some money and leaves the place taking his guitar. Late night, when he returns, he

puts the money once again in the cash box. Discovering him by flashlight, Lady catches him red-handed; he explains:

LADY:

--Why'd you open the cashbox when you come in?

VAL:

I opened it twice this evening, once before I went out and again when I come back. I borrowed some money and put it back in the box and got all this left over! (p.99)

Val tries to prove his innocence but Lady quits him from the job:

LADY:

---I'm sorry for you.

VAL:

You're sorry for me?

LADY:

I'm sorry for you because nobody can help you. (p.99)

But very soon she calls him back; perhaps his physical charm binds her to recall him:

NO, NO, DONT GO..... I NEED YOU!!! . . .

TO LIVE . . . TO GO ON LIVING!!! (p.102)

Val also expresses his gratification for the lady: "I feel a true love for you, Lady!" (p.132) Lady's lust for Val is transparent in her statement, for me the show is not over, the monkey is not dead yet!" (p.125)

Lady was childless for several years but Val had returned her life by making her pregnant. She thanked the Nurse who conveyed the message, "Thank you for telling me what I hoped for is true." (p.139) She also describes Val, "I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body has burst in flower! You have given me a life!" (p.140) Williams has given this same final announcement to his heroines in *The Rose Tattoo* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In these plays sexuality is equated with fertilizing human life.

Lady has decided to leave the town with Val and wants to have a revenge on Jabe. She describes Val:

---I want that man to see the wine garden came open again when he's dying! . . . *You get me? Just to be not defeated!* Ah, oh, I won't be defeated, not again in my life!

[Embraces him]

Thank you for staying here with me! (p.130)

She foresees to open her husband's confectionary store a replica of her father's wine garden. In this way, she develops confidence in herself and hopes "to overcome David's rejection and regain self-esteem by reviving the richness of the time when she loved her."²⁵

But her announcement, "I've won, I've won, Mr. Death, I'm going to bear" (p.141) leads her to pay for her transgression and before she runs away with Val they have to face desertion. Her cries of joy make Jabe annoyed and as a result, he kills Lady, his wife, and blames Val for the murder. He opens the door and rushes out shouting with a charge on Val:

The clerk is robbing the store, he shot my wife, the clerk is robbing the store, he killed my wife! (p.141)

His cry of blame helps Sheriff who was already looking forward a chance to punish Val; and makes his men to attack him." Val makes the mistake of Orpheus; he symbolically looks back by delaying too long in his attempts to convince Lady of flee, and Jabe and the Sheriff's men destroy them both."²⁶ Thus three lives are destroyed out of their personal as well as communal hatred, "two *born* lives and *one-not*" (p.129). Jabe, the representative of death, at the edge of death wears a cloak of a totalitarian society by destroying the non-conformists. Since 'convention-bound morality is a form of death."²⁷ But both relationships are ill-matched and the legal marriage of Jabe and Lady leads her to whoredom, while her love towards Val is adulterous. His relationship with Lady is "more than the sexual awakening of a woman, it becomes the search of two people to find in their union some kind of meaning."²⁸

Carol Cutrere, an over-bred aristocrat, is attracted towards Val because of similarity of his character. She is a lonely fugitive lady in search of peace. She is an isolated person who struggles against cruelty and injustice in her

society. People hoot and spit on her and has made her under bizarre activities. She says, "*I'm an exhibitionist!* I want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt! I want them to know I'm alive!" (p.39) Here physical attraction is also connected with "desperate and unsuccessful attempts at human contact,"²⁹ and she foresees a person to feel alive like Lady Torrance. She can only toll isolation by living in the company of a man and she loves to be indulged with Val. She wants to be wild like Val, though her love making is almost a non-searchable pain but she is ready to bear it:

The act of love-making is almost unbearably painful, and yet of course, I do bear it, because to be not alone, even for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger. (p.75)

She is also ready to run away with Val as she expresses her desire before him; "I RUN WITH NOBODY!-- I hoped I could run with you.... (p.76)

Vee Talbott is a primitive painter, who presents "a sort of imaginative treatment" (p.82) in her paintings. She herself describes her world:

They call it a primitive style, the work of visionary. One of my pictures is hung on the exhibition in Audubon Park . . . I can't paint without visions . . . I couldn't *live* without visions! (p.83)

Her world is an escape world like the word of glass collection of Laura Wngfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. Val's fascination attracts her vision and she tells him, "A good-looking boy like you is always wanted." (p.118)

Williams also describes:

They are like two children who have found life's meaning, simply and quietly along a country road." (p.115)

She accepts Val as Christ, her saviour:

I thought I would see my Saviour on the day of His passion, which was yesterday, Good Friday, that's when I expected to see Him. (p.114)

These women try to draw Val towards them. Before he gets punishment for his deeds "he gives to each one what they demand: Carol (his body), Vee (his spirit), Lady (body and spirit),"³⁰ He brings his handsomeness and innocence and "does briefly cause a false spring-- an orchard bloom in the confectionary and life stirs in Lady's womb-- but Pluto comes to reclaim his wife and to destroy human happiness."³¹

In the play the Orpheus, Val's life is as tragic as Orpheus in Greek mythology. Orpheus is:

... a legendary Greek her, son of Apollo,... was renowned as a musician, a religious leader and seer. He was reputed to have made trees and rocks follow his singing, ... visited Egypt, and founded mystery cult in several parts of Greece. He was eventually torn to pieces by Maenands (frenzied votresses of Dionysus); and his head and Iyre, thrown in river Hebrus.....³²

Orpheus Descending is a play of lust and destruction. The play has great resemblance with the life of Orpheus the poet-singer of Greek myth who failed to bring his beloved Eurydice from the kingdom of dead:

It is amusing with the Williams plays to try to fit myth to plot-to see Orpheus (Val) with his Iyre (guitar), descending into Hades (a small southern town) to rescue Eurydice (Lady) from Death (Jabe). Williams, however, does not work really. His Val is identified not only with Orpheus (by the title and his guitar), but with Christ (through Vee Talboot's painting and his last name) and St. Valentine (through his first name).³³

The handsome hero of the play, Valentine Xavier, is also compared with Saint Valentine. Saint Valentine is accepted responsible for the protection of lovers. On 14th February he is worshipped as saviour of lovers in various countries of the world, specially in England. On this date people exchange love cards and messages. In this play, as his name suggests, he is both Saviour and Valentine, a male sex object to whom the women of the play turn for salvation. Vee Talbott confuses him with Christ while Carol Cutrere wants to elope with him. The destruction of Val Xavier-- saint saviour turns elegiac:

He is an elegiac figure, tarnished by corruption but uncorrupted, as his guitar and snakeskin jacket, badges of purity in art and nature, clearly indicate. He looks back to the days before and he became a male prostitute.³⁴

Portrayal of Val Xavier presents the tragic isolation of an artist in the hell of modern society and his destruction on the cross of sexuality. He also becomes the prey of jealous sexuality and finally unsuccessful townsmen approach him with knives. He is destroyed by the forces of hatred and envy. Finally the play combines Williams's theme of over-sexuality and its worst result.

Val Xavier, who is a wanderer, suggests another fact of his personality. His personality is the motivating force behind his tragedy. He meets his death because of his commitments, Bigsby observes, "Williams's version of the myth of Sisyphus, his *Waiting for Godot*. Those of his characters who have not chosen to embrace absurdity by enacting its ironies as a social policy, killing life wherever it threatens to burst through the arid soil, are its victims through the persistent and self-mocking hope which they embrace."³⁵

The disease of cancer which swallows Jabe's life is symbolic of the corruption of community which is centered on sexuality. Lady has been corrupted by David Cutrere's abandonment and again she is more corrupted by marrying Jabe Torance. Carol Cutrere who has been an idealist, is forced by the community to live in a promiscuous scenario. The same sexuality has hopelessly confused Vee Talbott. While Jabe is the symbol of sterility and impotence.

Once again, *Orpheus Descending* presents the hell of South. The playwright has concerns with human desperation, with the contradictory consolation of human relationships, and the brutal language of racism which

are the noted echoes of the play. The dominating images of the play are death and disease. It is a world where all signs of vitality are feared and destroyed. The play becomes the horrible sequence of Lady Torrance who loses first her young lover, then her father, and aborted child and finally her freedom from the whoredom as she was married to Jabe. The role of Sheriff in the play is underlined as his jealousy for his wife for loving Val becomes the main centre of Val's destruction. He gathers an angry mob and orders them to lynch Val.

It is noteworthy to highlight and compare the play with *Battle of Angels*. The play is a remake of *Battle of Angels* (1940), has remarkable difference from the earlier play. In *Battle of Angels* Val, the hero of the play is not a musician but an aspiring writer. He is involved with two women. He faces destruction when he saves a homeless black man named Loon from the charge of vagrancy. Myra of *Battle of Angels* is different from Lady Torrance of *Orpheus Descending* because she has neither Italian father nor any future plan to open confectionary store. Carol Cutrere of *Orpheus Descending* is quite different from Cassandra Whiteside of *Battle of Angels* because Myra and Cassandra both clutch Val passionately while the portrayal of Carol in *Orpheus Descending* is less developed than Cassandra. After Val is killed Cassandra commits suicide by driving herself into the river, Carol only thinks to do so.

Val Xavier's coming to this small town and his relationship with Lady Torrance is based basically on necessity of his heterosexuality. George Niesen considers,

Val himself becomes the true "angel of death" who brings life and hope to Lady and Carol just before he brings them destruction.³⁶

He brings not only his death but the death to Lady and to her unborn child. He becomes neither Valentine offering love to others nor Saviour like Jesus Christ for offering long-life and peace. He gets punished for his cynic acts; he is burnt by A BLOWTORCH, (p.143) and the action of the play goes far ahead from the bloody Elizabethan tragedians. But the reality of life dominates beyond the emotional sentiments of love and these characters are legally charged and they can't exist against the rules of society. Williams is a judge of situations and he punished his characters in ratio of their crime.

Sweet Bird of Youth (1959)³⁷ is the story of two fragmentary and bitter characters, who live the miserable lives of hopelessness. Their lives are a struggle between the article real and ideal and the play faces a crisis of identity. The Princess Kosmonopolis (pseudonym of Alexandra Del lago), a dissolute movie star and Chance Wyane a self-centered gigolo are close to each other at St. Cloud, a small Southern town on the Gulf of Mexico. Both have lost their charms and rhythms of life-- one is an ageing lady and has lost her beauty and charm and the second is a desperate and spoilt person. Benjamin Nelson writes that she forgets that "she had once been a legend and

he to attempt in vain to become one."³⁸ Both are incompetent to face the time. Williams's preoccupation with approach of time and death becomes important here; and to him the 'Time' becomes the chief antagonist in the play. The play exposes the theme, matter and manner of playwright's one-actor *The Enemy: Time*. The playwright also expresses his feelings through the imagery of bird. The play deals with desperate items like Castration, Corruption, Politics, Purity, Sex, Time and Youth; where the role of 'Time' is vital and dominating.

The major part of the play is set at St. Cloud. We see Chance and Princess sitting in a hotel, Royal Palms' bedroom in the opening scene of the play. In a fine morning, Chance comes to meet Princess with hope of getting a chance to enter the beautiful world of the film industry. He is a "*good-looking*," (p.15) "*finest, nicest, sweetest*," (p.49) young man of "*twenty-nine years*" (p.23). His aim is to find his childhood's sweetheart Heavenly Finley, the daughter of Boss Finley, a local politician, and an established person in the film world.

Boss Finley and his son Tom Finley Junior are figures of hate. Both are ready to avenge Chance, who has infected Heavenly with a venereal disease. Chance neither knows about the infectious disease of Heavenly caused by him nor of his mother's death who is staying in the town. He couldn't get the message of death of his mother because of the changed address. The church authorities cremated her, and she was buried in their family graveyard.

Alexandra Del Lago, who is quite aged now, has been a successful film actress in the past. In her last premier of the film, she experienced herself the pale and wrinkled shadow of the old Alexandra. Now she is worried of the reality that her chief asset of youth has left her. On hearing the gossip of the people, she left the theatre and has been travelling since the time of the premier. Coming at St. Cloud, she met Chance at this hotel, where he has been working as a beach boy. Now both are the fellow travellers and Chance is attending all her physical and mental needs. Most of his time passes in bringing her oxygen to relieve shortness of her breath, and helping her every way as a male nurse.

Though Chance stays with Princess, he is pondering for his career in film world of Hollywood and his love for Heavenly humiliates him. He tapes Princess's conversation to pin down her because he thinks that he has been given false contract of the movies. She is ignorant of his dubious motives and recounts her experiences. Chance is very happy and tries to blackmail the Princess by asking a real contract of movies at the cost of taped cassette. She denies to do so but comes to know that Chance is hopelessly miscast in his aim of blackmailing. Now he doesn't want to debate about her but has no other way to accept.

After sometimes, both share the same bed and Princess asks him the story of his past life and family. Chance explains his handsomeness of infancy which made him different from his family and generation. He has not enjoyed the company of the right thing social circle. He has only craved to

look more handsome in uniform therefore, joined the Navy. But he was always afraid of death, and by presenting a false certificate, he made himself free from the restrictions of the soldiers and returned home. Except Heavenly Finley, nobody welcomed him after his return from Navy, and she became the only most lovable figure for his life.

Chance and Heavenly have been in love since their youthful days... Her father was ever against their relationship. Chance wanted to marry Heavenly for selecting the political field of her father. She was faithful to Chance until she caught infection of his venereal disease.

Princess is very much influenced by Chance's sincerity and offers to help him. Chance proposes to organize a false beauty contest in which they (Heavenly and Chance) want to be winners and plans to grab a new film at the prize of contest. This proposal of Chance is turned down by Princess. Meanwhile, Boss Finley organizes a political rally in the same evening and the rival group arranges the people to shout Heavenly's corruption for perplexing Boss Finley. He turns angry and wants to keep Chance far away from the city and he decides to present Heavenly on the stage for cleaning the rumours. After her objection, she is threatened to face the similar consequences for her love Chance and he has to meet the same fate like Negro who was castrated after messing the white woman.

Once again, the next scene takes place at the hotel in a big rally. Chance goes there with some of his old friends but their cold responses deeply hurt him. He too sings a song but no body joins him. Miss Lucy, Boss

Finley's mistress takes pity on him and informs that her master intends to castrate him. But Chance doesn't want to leave the place without Heavenly. Even he wants to see her for a while who is taken away by her father. Her father warns Chance to castrate him if he stays in the town, but Chance doesn't care of his warning.

At last Chance telephones a Hollywood reporter and forces Princess to tell about her discoveries to realize his reverie. But Princess doesn't respond properly and talks only about herself. Now, she is very much happy and realizes that her comeback in movie is successful. She offers Chance the job of her companion that he refuses in fear of castration. Now he decides to repent for his sexual transgressions and the play ends with a self-illuminative statement of Chance:

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. (p.93)

In the play Chance and Princess sell their youth for money. The loss of their sweet bird of youth is like a blow of death for them. Both cannot rise above the crushing disappointment. They are defeated by their high ambitions. The Princess has sold her everything -- heart, soul and body for getting the top position. She is a shameless opportunist, who picks up young men; uses them for her sexual gratification, and then casts them away. Chance has whored himself and recalls his past as an act of goodwill:

I gave people more than I took. Middle aged people I gave back a feeling of youth. Lonely girls? Understanding, appreciation! An absolutely convincing show of affection. Sad people, lost people? Something light and uplifting! (p.38)

Their defeat in life brings them closer and it is in their "mutual defeat and in their recognition of it that the only meaningful relationship of the play develops."³⁹ Their lost charm is regained in their truthful actions. "In both Chance and the Princess, we should return to the huddling-together of the lost, but not with sentiment, which is false, but with whatever is truthful in the moments when people share doom, face firing squads together."⁴⁰

Chance and Princess live in the world of illusions. Princess wanders in her days of sweet youth and takes refuges from the bitter reality of life and enjoys the nourishing diet of sex, hashish and pure oxygen etc., while Chance wants to cash his sound body before it fades.

Princess has "red hair, a voluptuous body as also an insatiable weakness for virile young sex athletes."⁴¹ She is a pitiless monster that she herself proclaims:

When monster meets monster, one monster has to give way,
AND IT WILL NEVER BE ME. (p.35)

She insists Chance to act up to her wishes. She shows claws when he tries to outsmart her and reminds him of dictating terms in their relationship but after some times says:

I want to help you. Believe me, not everybody wants to hurt every body. I don't want to hurt you, can you believe me? (pp.41-42)

In her life, Princess has been too busy to climb up the ladder of success for getting a faithful soul mate. After a great success also, she couldn't win a single permanent mate. "For Alexandra, sex is an end in itself, rather than as for D.H. Lawrence, a means for exploring the otherness of the other partner."⁴² Now at the crossroads when she is unable to proceed ahead, forgets her hardness and cruelty that Chance understands and says:

Time does it. Hardens people. Time and the world that you've lived in."(p.42)

Chance becomes aware of the fact about her and refuses to be her sexual slave any more. She offers him the role of a lap dog on a golden chain that Chance refuses as he is fearful of castration. However, she too is aware of reality. Williams writes:

She makes this instinctive admission to herself when she sits down by Chance on the bed facing the audience. Both are faced with castration, and in her heart she knows it. They sit side by side on the bed like two passengers on a train sharing a bench.
(p.91)

Ultimately, Princess realizes that nothing is static in this mundane world. Chance is wrapped in self-pity at the end while Princess has also the

same fate in her. Nelson Benjamin observes, "just as Jim O'Connor and Laura Wingfield pass each other, as Alma and John and Mitch and Blanche pass, so too do Alexandra and Chance Wayne touch and vanish, each other to his own hell."⁴³ But, when Chance is castrated, Williams describes his destruction as ritualistic death, he says, "Chance is used in a symbolic manner. It is a ritualistic death, a metaphor."⁴⁴

The play shows that Chance, the protagonist, could not go to his home again. His youth, the beautiful sweet-bird-of-youth, is lost and he is sexually dying. Chance, a perverted creature, attempts in vain to reach his goal and Princess devoid of human concerns, attains her goal in the most condemnable and animalistic ways. Princess lacks love and human warmth.

An intimate relationship is seen between Chance Wayne and Alexandra Del Lago in the very beginning of the play and as well as in the end of it. They use each other in the play in their downward journey. On the other side, Heavenly is always loyal to Chance. She opposes her father:

Don't give me your Voice of God speech. Papa, there was a time when you could have saved me, by letting me marry a boy that was still young and clean, instead you drove him away . . . (p.53

Once again we see the dramatist involved with an oedipal situation in which a father is prepared to destroy the life of his daughter. Here, a father is destroying the life of his daughter in the same way as a mother destroys the

life of her son in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. The conversation between father and daughter presents a glimpse of it:

BOSS:

You're still a beautiful girl.

HEAVENLY:

Am I, Papa?

BOSS:

Of course you are. Looking at you nobody could guess that---
(p.52)

The portrayal of Chance is very close to Birkin-- the phallic prophet in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. But, "Birkin, like Chance, never ceases to proselytize "the dark knowledge you can't have in your hand."⁴⁵

The play is widely accepted as a Southern Gothic horror story. In the play, the protagonist, a sexually errant man, is punished and destroyed. He is also a destroyer of many lives and leads to a sexually diseased world. He is guilty because he has robbed Heavenly of her innocence and her womanhood.

Sweet Bird of Youth is an expansion of *The Enemy: Time* (1952), a one-act play of Williams himself. Williams has expanded the one-actor by connecting the part of actress and adding elements of social protest in the

one-actor, the hero is beaten by the brother of his old sweetheart while here he is castrated by her father. Here, father of the heroine is a corrupt politician who castrates the hero.

In the play, according to Benjamin Nelson, "in *Alexandra Del Lago*, Williams creates the finished product of the successful story-- Karen Stone reincarnate the individual who has sold her heart, soul and body to get to the top."⁴⁶ She is never satisfied in her life and is still desiring, not for love, but for the act of love. Through this pseudo love she hopes to forget the rapidly approaching end of her physical beauty. Fedder also writes:

The Princess, who is described as resembling "'a big magnified-- - insect", is a dramatic version of Williams's Mrs. Stone a fading actress who attempts-- through drink, drugs and sex-- to escape the possibility that her serene comeback has been a failure.⁴⁷

Both *Chance* and *Princess* are the representatives of the decayed beauty in the play. They escape from the reality of the world and embrace the world of corruption. *Chance* has already sold his soul for the success in order to become a Hollywood star. *Princess Kosmonopolis* is having nothing for survival, for a little time, she finds consolation in her relationship with *Chance*. *Boss Finley* and his son *Tom Finley Junior* are also corrupt and lead to play to the universe of the hell. They don't understand the value of love and life.

Chance is himself responsible for his down fall. The whole town treats him as a criminal. When he states Aunt Nonnie that everyone treats him as a criminal, she replies him to realize himself his works:

CHANCE:

Why does everyone treat me like a low criminal in the town I was born in?

AUNT NONNIE:

Ask yourself that question, ask your conscience that question. . .
You can't be trusted. (p.61)

Chance has not a single face but different for different people and he has different roles throughout the play.

Chance is an actor, obviously assuming various roles throughout the play--- son, blackmailer, lover, young romantic with Aunt Nonnie, sophisticate in St. Cloud and at the bar, and finally Fatalist, appealing to the audience for understanding.... He exhibits self-destructive tendencies and accepts his castration.⁴⁸

He is a combination of cheap values and has no real worth. In his personality, we find a volcano of hatred. His relationship with Princess is shameful which creates hatred in audience; they don't sympathise on his castration. Though he is himself an evil, still has great love for Heavenly. While discussing with Tom, he expresses his love for her:

I know I've done many wrong things in my life, many more than I can name or number, but swear I never hurt Heavenly in my life.
(p.77)

Even, he describes his love for Heavenly to Miss Lucy:

. . . Don't ask me her name. I respect her too much to speak her name at this table. (p.70)

But, Chance's love for his youthful relationship is not Williamsian it is definitely Lawrencian who carries the naked photograph of Heavenly when she was fifteen years of age:

The is a flashlight photo I took of her, nude, one night on Diamond Key, which is a little sandbar about half a mile off shore which is under water at high tide. This was taken with the tide coming in . . . This was her at fifteen. (p.40)

Chance's sinful past becomes the tool of his castration. He is same kind of sinful creature like Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending*. He represents the lost innocence, which can never be regained. But he differs to Val in the sense, if Heavenly's father agreed they would have been married a long time ago. He and Boss Finley are the opposite sides of the same coin. Chance becomes victim of the sex envy because of his unconscious incestuous feelings. Boss Finley harbours for his beautiful daughter who reminds him of a dead wife. Williams describes him:

It's important not to think of his attitude toward her in the terms of crudely conscious incestuous feeling, but just in the natural terms of almost any again father's feeling for a beautiful young daughter who reminds him of dead wife that he desired intensely when she was the age of his daughter. (p.52)

Here, Signi Falk presents the same point of view, "This ageing politician watches his beautiful daughter with the same lust he had felt for her mother, at the same age when he had desired her so intensely."⁴⁹

Boss Finley is a symbol of hatred and fascism in the play. His image is not less than a monster who wants to use his own daughter for his political purposes. He cares less for her life by curing her from sexual disease caused by Chance but is more interested to castrate Chance for causing her infection:

Boss Finley desires his own daughter, an incestuous motif which reflects Freud's association of incest with anarchy. Himself impotent, or so it seems, he urges his daughter into relationship which will serve his political purposes. She, meanwhile, has contracted venereal disease for her lover and is incapable of bearing children while that over is himself emasculated, at Boss Finley's command, on Easter Sunday.⁵⁰

The play mirrors a universe of inferno. In the end, as Gerald Weals observes that Alexandra and Chance for whom "the loss has made desperate,"⁵¹ become a fellow traveller in their journey to hell. Both share moments of life

and feel that time is running fast. Like Val and Sebastian, Chance is an artist who attaches himself to an older lady. He also infects Heavenly whose cure requires removal of uterus, a kind of castration. She is unable to be a mother and to pass a happy married life with a family of husband and children. Therefore, his punishment like Sebastian Venable, fits his crime.

Thus, we see *Sweet Bird of Youth* becomes a play of crime and punishment in itself. Sexual crime and the castration as an act of punishment are in the soul theme of the play. There are four real castrations, which comprise Negro, Chance, Princess and Heavenly and their stories shake the readers.

The study of the play highlights a long tale of destruction in forms of impotence, sterility, frigidity and castration of major characters. George Niesen truly observes:

Indeed the entire play is one of the destruction, castration, and impotence. Boss Finley disenfranchises voters. He is responsible for the Negro's castration and is more at fault than Chance for Heavenly's sterility.... Still, the Princess and Chance are alive at the end of the play though alone, powerless, and futureless.⁵²

Chance and Princess have surrendered and atoned for their sins. The greatest punishment in life is that they will never be capable to enjoy a family life. Chance suffers more than Heavenly and Princess. But Williams is a dedicated existentialist philosopher who perceives his characters in light of his insights

and values and test them at the touchstone of reality of life. His characters are suffers as they deviate from the realistic bond of life and human values. The playwright is justified in his judgment of crime that his characters have committed. His judgment is unchallengeable in the court of reality and he has shown the justified reasons for his treatment of crime and punishment. He thus stands as a pioneer in the American world of drama.

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