"MENDACITY" IN FOUR PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

"MENDACITY" IN FOUR PLAYS

OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:

A Streetcar Named Desire
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Suddenly Last Summer
Small Craft Warnings

By

MARGARET LYNNE QUINN, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

November 1973

MASTER OF ARTS (1973)
(ENGLISH)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: "Mendacity" in Four Plays of Tennessee Williams

AUTHOR: Margaret Lynne Quinn, B.A. (Queen's University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. M. Juneja

NUMBER OF PAGES: 126

ABSTRACT

The thesis explores one aspect of Tennessee Williams' moral vision -- his concern with the "mendacity" which he sees pervading our society and his conviction that, whereas one cannot endure a life bereft of illusion, man can approach full humanity, effectively deny his incompletion, by a never-ending effort to confront truth within himself and in communication with others. A chapter is given to the study of each play. The four plays discussed are chronologically ordered: A Streetcar Named Desire, 1947; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, 1955; Suddenly Last Summer, 1958; Small Craft Warnings, 1972. Passing references are made to the earlier poetry, short plays, and short stories in an effort to make clear that Williams' work has a peculiarly consistent moral centre. Similarly, an attempt is made to interconnect the single-play chapters by making comparisons and drawing parallels between the plays as the study progresses. In the Conclusion some tentative statements are made regarding Williams' persistent world-view and his contribution to a theatre concerned with its ethical function.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. M. K. Juneja I extend my thanks for his help and encouragement in writing this thesis as well as for his academic-as-playgoer love for the theatre which is a continuing inspiration to his student. To Dr. J. Dale I owe my appreciation, also, for taking the time to read the thesis in its original barely-legible state and for neatly pencilling helpful marginal notes which curbed my wildest verbal excesses, mis-spellings, and typographical "howlers".

T A B L E  O F  C O N T E N T S

"Mendacity" in Four Plays of Tennessee Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Suddenly Last Summer; Small Craft Warnings

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that Tennessee Williams is indeed a moralist, concerned, as Esther Jackson comments, with "the ethical function of theatre".[1] This "erotomaniac",[2] of the "sick imagination"[3] is himself revolted by our transgressions, by a world in which "the true beast . . . the beast of mendacity in us, the beast that tells mean lies"[4] is the adversary for whom we, like free-loving Olga in "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch" ought to reserve our fury.

It will be the purpose of this thesis to explore the many faces of "mendacity" -- of untruths told, of truths withheld or denied, of deceptions practised on oneself and others -- in the four plays, with a particular emphasis on that part of Williams' moral scheme which insists that the truth ought to be told and dealt with, but that the problem of defining it is not easy, the individual is never fully capable of handling it, and what is human must be valued first: "I thought she was human and a human life is worth saving or what the shit is worth saving."[5] That belief in our salvation by the compassion of others and the value of that salvation is the central truth in Williams' moral scheme: "The only satisfactory thing we are left with in this life is the relations -- if they're sincere -- between people."[6]

Williams makes a distinction between the "mean lies" which sustain

a conventional bourgeois existence which he clearly despises and the necessary "lies" or illusions which human beings manufacture to adorn the bare ugliness of their lives and thus avoid the despairing evaluation of Steve in Small Craft Warnings (a play that is strangely bleak for a Williams work; no one in it, except Leona, has sustained a belief in the possibility of beauty in his life): "Life! . . . Throw it to a dog. I'm not a dog, I don't want it."[7] This distinction is made clear in his short play, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" (the title itself a euphemism, a veiling of the ugly truth of Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore's declining days as a prostitute in the sleazy "Vieux Carré"):

> And suppose that I -- stumbling from bar to bar, from drink to drink, till I sprawl at last on the lice-infested mattress of this brothel -- suppose that I, to make this nightmare bearable . . . suppose that I ornament, illuminate -- glorify it! With dreams and fictions and fancies . . . Suppose that I live in this world of pitiful fiction. What satisfaction can it give you, good woman, to tear it to pieces, to crush it -- call it a lie? I can tell you this -- now listen! There are no lies but the lies that are stuffed in the mouth by the hard-knuckled hand of need, the cold iron fist of necessity, Mrs. Wire. So I am a liar, yes. But your world is built on a lie, your world is a hideous fabrication of lies. Lies. Lies . . . .[8]

It is the "good woman" -- always a heavily ironic epithet in Williams' work, since he knows what "good Christians" are apt only to mouth -- that we are transgressors all -- whose life is truly vicious; she preys on the sufferings of those who owe her money. As long as the rent is paid she will play "deaf";[9] but her conventional moral indignation is aroused by overdue rent money. She then applies labels to her tenants: "Quarter rats, half-breeds, drunkards, degenerates, who try to get by on promises, lies, delusions!"[10] She sets about destroying their life-support systems, their

illusions, forcing Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore to face the "fact" that no one on any "Brazilian rubber plantation"[11] (an earlier version of Blanche's "Belle Rêve" in A Streetcar Named Desire) will be sending her money. Mrs. Wire, the "good woman", is guilty of deliberate cruelty, the one sin that to Williams' heroines is "not forgivable"[12] and the only thing human that is disgusting.[13] If to salvage what is human one must revert to illusion or collaborate in the illusions of others (as the kindly porter does for Miss Collins in "Portrait of a Madonna", an early one-act that prefigures the portrait of Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire) then these are the lies "stuffed in the mouth by the hard-knuckled hand of need" and must be allowed. It is the not so obvious lies that Williams despises -- the lies that subvert human values, the conventional lies that Shaw exposes in Mrs. Warren's Profession (a turn-of-the-century "shocker" that challenged the "public opinion" of an individual, Mrs. Warren, prosperous prostitute) and society's evasions of "inadmissible"[14] things that Shaw attacks in the same play. (To Vivie Warren "There is nothing I despise more than the wicked convention that protects these things by forbidding a woman to mention them.")[15]

On an individual level this "Something Unspoken" (the title of the play presented as part of a double bill, "The Garden District" with Suddenly Last Summer) separates us from one another; it is the mendacity of silence that keeps us locked in the prison of our individual self -- "sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins"[16] as Val Xavier in Orpheus Descending puts it. This non-communication which attempts to deny the existence of whatever is not spoken provides a central theme for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer. To face the truth within oneself

is painful; whatever is articulated, even inwardly, must be dealt with; the web of protective illusion is broken into. This painful process is dramatized in each of the plays here examined. To communicate to another individual the truth once recognized is a process no less difficult. The playwright acknowledges this difficulty and thus another function of his writing in the Preface to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: "I still find it somehow easier to 'level with' crowds of strangers in the hushed twilight of orchestra and balcony sections of theatres than with individuals across a table from me. Their being strangers somehow makes them more familiar and more approachable, easier to talk to."[17]

His art, then, dislocates the artist from the personal confrontation. Tennessee Williams frequently dramatizes this need for detachment in order for the truth to be told without laceration. Blanche relies on the "kindness of strangers";[18] the psychiatrist will hear her truth without hostility. Catharine, injected with truth serum, in Suddenly Last Summer, will be allowed under the impersonal surveillance of the doctor, her most receptive audience within the play, to tell a "true story"[19] impossible for her to tell "across a table" to her family. Maggie and Big Daddy meet Brick's resentment when, both outspoken, they insist on telling the truth; only when Brick is fired by anger because Big Daddy forces him to face the truth of his own guilt can he in turn tell the truth to Big Daddy, thus using it as retaliation. In Small Craft Warnings, the playwright abstracts his characters from the dramatic situation to allow them the freedom to tell their own truth.

Ironically, the mendacity of silence in three of the plays is woven into the fabric of a family (and, in Small Craft Warnings, into a group

Monk says "take the place of a family"),[20] that social unit bonded by blood in which one might expect open loving communication; instead, Williams finds therein selfishness, evasion, incomprehension, indifference, cruelty, and certainly no alleviation of our "solitary confinement". Big Daddy has not only "lived with mendacity"[21] all his life in the world, but has lived lies all his life in the world of the family, which, in William's vision, is no less tainted with corruption than the world "outside". In Suddenly Last Summer Aunt Vi's miniature indoor jungle objectifies the reality her words deny: her attempted cannibalism by psycho-surgery of a member of her own family is the really shocking element of the play. And, of course, Brother-in-law Stanley, outraged at Blanche's lies, rapes her to make clear his contempt and then must live forever with the lie of his innocence "something unspoken" between himself and his wife. In the pseudo-family of Small Craft Warnings, pseudo-husband Bill cynically deserts the unstable "home on wheels"[22] to put his sexuality on the market again, available to the right "buyer" of either sex.

Williams would seem to have little regard for "facts" as revealers of the truth; they tell us so little. To Lucio, in the short story, "The Malediction", they offer no answers to significant questions; they relay only "the total amount of tonnage now lost at sea. . . . The facts were confusing".[23] Facts related to people are even less illuminating. They are the interpretation of data by observers, outsiders -- mere opinion. In considering the labels applied to the widow in "Three Players of a Summer Game" (the short story later reworked in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof) the author comments that "it is only the outside of one person's world that is visible to others, and all opinions are false ones, especially public opinions of individual cases."[24] It is apparently Williams'

rejection of "public opinions" of individuals that infuriates those who are shocked by the "immorality" of his characters. (Significantly Blanche's real guilt, her cruel rejection of her young homosexual husband, is never mentioned as "shocking". It is similarly paradoxical that people shocked by A Streetcar Named Desire, as Harold Hobson points out,[25] went about humming "I Can't Say No" from Oklahoma.) It is the drama's triumph that in defiance of the "facts" about Blanche, town prostitute, chronic liar, alcoholic and incipient psychotic, in the theatre we reject such superficial "truths" and do not condemn her, but share the playwright's compassion for her and see our own flawed lives mirrored in hers.

Tennessee Williams would seem to believe with T. S. Eliot that "humankind cannot bear very much reality";[26] he has infinite compassion for those "weak, beautiful people"[27] who spin webs of illusion about themselves as protection against what the world calls "reality" -- the fragile "moth",[28] Blanche, in A Streetcar Named Desire, the athlete-turned-alcoholic, Brick, in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, the derelict "water plant",[29] Violet, in Small Craft Warnings. Williams, himself, of course, spins his own web by writing: "I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge . . .".[30]

The artist does not merely "escape" through his art, but it provides, as do lesser orders of illusion, a means to what Williams calls his "completion". In "Desire and the Black Masseur" Tennessee Williams tells us "the sins of the world are . . . its incompletions";[31] man devises "makeshift arrangements" to "cover his incompletion". The use of the imagination in spinning illusion and artistic creation are both means to

his completion. To impose order on experience through art is to remove one's feeling of incompletion -- of helpless mutilation. Arthur Miller expresses the importance of this function of art to him: "A thing becomes beautiful to me because it promises to remove some of my helplessness before the chaos of experience. . . . I wrote not only to find a way into the world but to hold it away from me so that sheer, senseless events would not devour me."[32] Similarly the writer of "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" claims that his "lies" "illuminate" this "nightmare" existence -- clarify it, make it manageable. He refers to his illusory world as "this world of pitiful fiction"; thus he "writes" his life. When Blanche is disallowed her "fictions" her mental life slips into the chaos of madness; a similar fate befalls Mrs. Venable in Suddenly Last Summer. Catharine reports, in Suddenly Last Summer, that when her life became unmanageable, she began to write it in a journal, transposing herself into the third person.[33] Stanley, in A Streetcar Named Desire, becomes increasingly violent as his illusory system is threatened, and Quentin, in Small Craft Warnings, compensates for his inability to love by writing erotic scenes for "blue" movies.

I shall discuss the plays in chronological order: A Streetcar Named Desire (1947); Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955); Suddenly Last Summer (1958); Small Craft Warnings (1972). It will thus be clear that mendacity, and its opposite, the telling of truth, are continuing Williamsian concerns.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER ONE)

[1]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 129.

[2]Time, "The Theater: The Angel of the Odd", LXXIX, No. 10 (March 9, 1962), p. 49.

[3]Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 148.

[4]Tennessee Williams, "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch", in his Hard Candy (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 159.

[5]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 21.

[6]C. W. E. Bigsby, "Tennessee Williams: Streetcar to Glory", in Jordan Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire" (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 108.

[7]Williams, Small Craft Warnings, p. 29.

[8]Tennessee Williams, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion", in his 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 70-71.

[9]Williams, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, p. 68.

[10]Williams, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, p. 69.

[11]Williams, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, p. 69.

[12]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: The New American Library, 1947), p. 126.

[13]Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: The New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. 117.

[14]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. 85.

[15]George Bernard Shaw, "Mrs. Warren's Profession", in Complete Plays With Prefaces, Vol. III (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962), p. 94.

[16]Tennessee Williams, Orpheus Descending (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 47.

[17]Williams, "Person-to-Person", in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. ix.

[18]Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 142.

[19]Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 47.

[20]Williams, Small Craft Warnings, p. 51.

[21]Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 81.

[22]Williams, Small Craft Warnings, p. 71.

[23]Tennessee Williams, "The Malediction", in his One Arm (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 39.

[24]Tennessee Williams, "Three Players of a Summer Game", in his Hard Candy, p. 17.

[25]Harold Hobson, "Miss Vivien Leigh", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire", p. 47.

[26]Tennessee Williams, "Camino Real", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 47.

[27]Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 123.

[28]Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 15.

[29]Williams, Small Craft Warnings, p. 11.

[30]John T. von Szeliski, "Tennessee Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire", p. 67.

[31]Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in his One Arm, p. 85.

[32]Arthur Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods", Harper's Magazine, CCXVII (August, 1958), p. 37.

[33]Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, p. 63.

## CHAPTER TWO

## A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Tennessee Williams has called A Streetcar Named Desire "a tragedy of incomprehension".[1] This "incomprehension", it seems to me, is manifested in the deadly conflict between two illusory "systems", that of Blanche DuBois, and of Stanley Kowalski. Blanche travels, somewhat like the earlier "Lady of Larkspur Lotion" from the genteel white-columned world of "Belle Rêve"[2] to a "raffish" (p. 13) section of the Quarter, Stanley's terrain, via a "Streetcar named Desire" (p. 15). The "Grim Reaper" had set up his "headquarters" (p. 27) in the family homestead, and Blanche's excursion to Stella and Stanley's run-down love-nest is one last desperate run from Death, whose "opposite" is Desire (p. 20). For Blanche, Stanley provides a return ticket (p. 111) to Death. It seems to me merely naïve to assume that the conflict that ensues upon the arrival of the "intruder"[3] is between an unsubstantial "moth" (p. 15), Blanche, and a hard-nosed realist, Stanley, with Stella as the "morally indifferent"[4] caught painfully somewhere in the middle.

Nelson would have us believe that "Stanley is victorious and deservedly so. Although he is brutal and coarse, he is a realist . . . What he wants he gets".[5] One is somewhat shocked first by the assumption underlying this assertion -- that is, that in this achievement-obsessed society of ours, being able to "get" what one "wants", no matter how and now matter what, is the criterion of worth, or, put another way, that in this Darwinian universe, the "brutal" and "coarse" not only survive but "deservedly" so.

Granted, Tennessee Williams shows us repeatedly that it is so, that coarseness and brutality are "survival" qualities in a de-humanized jungle society, but "deservedly" so? (Signi Falk makes a similar value judgement: that Stanley's "primitive vitality excuses his crudeness and brutality".)[6] Tennessee Williams' sympathies are clearly on the side of the "weak, beautiful people",[7] the losers, the "freaks of the cosmic circus",[8] the moths, like Blanche. His compassion for them, his admiration for their strange beauty, and his affirmation of their value, disregarded in Nelson's statement above, is clear in his poem, "Lament for the Moths":

> Give them, O mother of moths and mother of men,
> Strength to enter the heavy world again,
> For delicate were the moths and badly wanted here in
> A world by mammoth figures haunted.
> (In the Winter of Cities, p. 31)

But even if one ignores the underlying moral assumption in Nelson's statement, it is overly simplistic and thus ultimately false. Stanley, the "realist", is as much dependent on his illusions as is Blanche. (Blanche insists on a paper-lantern to soften the glare of daylight and cast a romantic glow; Stanley smashes every light bulb in the place to get "them coloured lights going" [p. 112].) It is precisely because Blanche, the "liar", threatens to destroy his heretofore successful illusory system that Stanley fights her to her symbolic death, the climactic rape, which severs forever her hold on reality. (It is no good arguing that the arrival of the psychiatrist at the play's end is hopeful -- that he is a "surrogate artist-priest who must reconstruct the fragments of personality by absolving conflict and guilt".[9] Because of his beloved sister Rose's lobotomy and subsequent lifelong commitment to a mental institution, Tennessee Williams has little faith in the ability of psychiatry to "reconstruct the fragments of personality". Blanche is destroyed at the play's end.) Stella and Mitch,

part of Stanley's environment, testify to the power of Blanche's personality by aligning themselves, if temporarily, with her. In the end, confronted by her truth, they submit to the illusory system of Stanley, no better equipped than the major figures to live a life without illusion.

Let us begin, then, by examining this kind of mendacity in A Streetcar Named Desire -- the spinning of illusions to deceive oneself and others and the overt telling of lies, which, of course, if one can distinguish them from reality, serve only to deceive others. Blanche's expression is one of "shocked disbelief" (p. 15) when she arrives at "Elysian Fields" (an ironic lie about the kind of heaven the Streetcars named "Desire" and "Cemeteries" lead one to -- a run-down two-room flat squeezed between the railway tracks and the river). Obviously, Stella has been as hazy about her present life-style in her communication with Blanche as Blanche has been with her. It is worth noting that immediately upon her entrance into the play, we see Blanche forced to acknowledge an ugly reality she is unprepared to cope with. She feels immediately in need of her self-prescribed therapy -- a drink and a bath; the incident and her reaction to it are a metaphor for the central action of the play.

Blanche, equipped with her own set of fragile illusions, symbolically represented by her trunk full of fake jewels and furs, a box of worthless papers and a collection of treasured love-letters, arrives at the Kowalski home looking for refuge, but incapable of co-existing in Stanley's world, she is destroyed by the "King" of the Kowalski castle, the protector of its illusions. (It is interesting and significant, I think, that the central figures in each of these plays is a person dislocated, set adrift and seeking temporary refuge in someone else's home -- the Pollitts' plantation

house, Mrs. Venable's fashionable "Garden District" parlour, or Monk's Home-Bar.) As Porter points out, in Myth and Modern American Drama, Blanche "has to lie to hold onto the truth she lives by -- the truth of the myth".[10] The myth Blanche believes in is the myth of what Alan Downer calls "the Aristocratic utopia of the ante-bellum South"[11] in which a lady is a beautiful and flirtatious Belle, oozing The Glass Menagerie's Amanda's "charm",[12] unable to button up the back of her dress for herself (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 38), in awe of the male's "imposing physique" (p. 89), shocked at coarse language (p. 107), impropriety of dress (p. 113), lack of manners (p. 115), and wary of the dangerous desires of men (whose counterpart she must not admit in herself) (p. 87), and not quite sure what "Southern Comfort" (the drink) is (p. 115). The Southern Gentleman, again according to the tenets of the myth, while virile and passionate, is gentle-mannered, polite, and respectful of a "lady" (Mitch embodies these virtues), not undisposed to violence in defense of his honour (Mitch's violence flares near the play's end, but is too undirected to be convincing). Yet he has two attitudes toward women; there are women one respects and apologizes for wanting to kiss (p. 86), however chastely, and those whom one attacks with unrepressed lust, those "not clean enough" (p. 121) to take home to mother. Blanche acknowledges this distinction bitterly when she tells Stella that "epic fornications" (p. 43) and "the four-letter word" (p. 43) robbed them of Belle Rêve. The "four-letter word", of course, will rob Blanche of her "beautiful dream" of finally finding a place to "rest" (p. 81). We shall see that it is the gentleman's "double code" in regard to women, embodied by Mitch, that has as much to do with Blanche's destruction as the opposing simpler "ape" code of Stanley who "sizes women up . . . with sexual classifications" (p. 29). Neither code

allows her to be fully human.

For Blanche to attempt to sustain her romantic myth as anachronistic and incongruous in the Kowalski world as the "white gloves" and "summer tea" outfit (p. 15) she first appears in, it is necessary for her to tell lies, to cover her jarringly unromantic past, to play various "roles" as Elia Kazan points out in his "notebook".[13] At the same time, Blanche has acute insight into the "truth" of both present reality and her past, when forced to acknowledge it: she knows her trunk is full of beautiful but worthless things; she is also adept at picking up non-verbal "cues" which reveal more accurately than words people's genuine reactions to her. She has had to cope with reality, to stare death (as well as desire) in the face whereas Stella has neatly avoided the former, travelling directly via Desire to the "Elysian Fields". She realistically plans to ensnare Mitch, no matter how deceptive the means, in a shrewd and immediate evaluation that he is her last hope for the permanent protection that every Belle schemes to secure for herself. To Stella she confides: "I want to deceive him enough to make him -- want me . . ." (p. 81).

Thus I shall attempt to demonstrate that Blanche tries to use illusion to gain realistically-appraised goals, even in the play's final scene slipping only sporadically into an actual belief in her illusions, whereas Stanley, lacking her complexity, whole-heartedly believes his own "lies", is a victim of his own mendacity. One might recall, I think, this same distinction made clear in "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" and articulated by its "artist": the "lady" and the "artist" ornament their lives with a wry awareness, when pressed into admission, that they do adorn the truth, tell "what ought to be truth" as Blanche put it (p. 117), rather than what is.

The author, in the autobiographical short story, "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin", describes his beginning to write in similar terms: "I began to find life unsatisfactory as an explanation of itself and was forced to adopt the method of the artist of not explaining but putting the blocks together in some other way that seems more significant to him".[14] Blanche's confessed design, like that of the playwright, is to "give magic" to people (p. 117). On the other hand, the "respectable" landlady of "Larkspur Lotion" is conveniently not aware that her "world is . . . a lie."[15] Like Stanley she has the indignation of the put-upon. When Stanley's liquor is depleted, his brutality abhorred, his sex-life threatened, and his bathroom constantly occupied, he reacts like the landlady whose roomer complains about the roaches but doesn't pay the rent -- he confronts Blanche with the most hurtful "labels" dealing primarily with her sexuality, the very quality for which, in a paradox he, of course, cannot perceive, he has been rewarded and exalted -- as a "cock of the walk".

In Scene One we see Blanche playing her role of delicate Southern Belle. She has been carefully trained in the social lie; to get rid of inquisitive Eunice she asks politely to be excused: "I'm just about to drop" (p. 18) so that she can find the whiskey and pull herself together without being observed. The Southern Belle was not supposed to be a lush. She extends the deception with Stella, pretending not to know where the liquor is (p. 19) and protesting gaily, "Don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty!" (p. 19). To explain her absence from her school-teaching job she attributes to her "superintendent" a kindness that, pathetically, she is all-too-hungry-for: "he suggested I take a leave of absence" because

of "nerves" (p. 21). Again, the lie is in support of her belief in her outdated myth; ladies are permitted fluttery "nerves" (if not schizophrenic breakdowns) and gentlemen are expected to respond with consideration and gallantry. Ladies are not permitted to be run out of town for their promiscuity.

To preserve intact her mythical system and her individual role in that system Blanche must avoid telling the "truth"; it does not coincide with her "truth", the "Belle Rêve" truth that she so desperately clings to. After all, she has "bled for it, almost died for it!" (p. 26). Since excessive modesty is part of the Belle's social equipment, Blanche professes doubts about having Stanley sleeping in the next room: "will it be decent?" (p. 22). Repeatedly in this opening scene we see her preoccupation with her physical appearance, since the Belle's primary goal was to adorn some man's life -- to be his ornamental appendage. She appears immaculately over-dressed (p. 15) despite the heat; she protests to her own sister that she "won't be looked at in this merciless glare" (p. 19), is disappointed that Stella says not "a word about my appearance" (p. 21), and boasts that "I weigh what I weighed the summer you left Belle Rêve." (p. 22). (It is symbolically significant, surely, that Blanche strives to preserve her physical appearance from "Belle Rêve" days; she clings as tenaciously to a belief in its out-dated social attitudes and its repressive gentility. On the other hand, Stella left Belle Rêve, indulged her animal nature, and is now "as plump as a little partridge" [p. 21].)

The ordering principle of Blanche's life -- this attempt to "write" her life in the style of an old-fashioned southern romance, obviously is not working, although Blanche "might have worked"[16] as Elia Kazan

insists, I think rightly, in another time, another place. There are signs even before Stanley's opening confrontation with Blanche that there are cracks in the facade. It seems to me clear that Blanche is trying to "construct a fourth wall",[17] to complete herself via illusion. John Gassner expresses the same idea somewhat differently: he terms the play "the drama of a woman's tragic effort to clothe her nakedness".[18] But the "fourth wall" keeps slipping out of place: Blanche repeatedly slips out of character. She sits down rigidly, "her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold" (p. 18), although she will later complain of the heat (p. 19). When a cat screeches she reacts with a nervous "startled gesture" (p. 18), quickly downs a "half tumbler of whiskey" (p. 18), and mutters, "I've got to keep hold of myself!"

This last statement is an explicit acknowledgement that Blanche knows she has to play a role; she is consciously enacting a part she has written for herself. The tension of constantly sustaining the role is underscored by the playwright throughout the scene. "She rushes to the closet . . . she is shaking all over and panting for breath as she tries to laugh. The bottle nearly slips from her grasp." (p. 19). Her glass "shakes in her hand" (p. 20). She emphasizes with a certain desperation that "I <u>can't</u> be <u>alone</u>" (p. 23). Even to the rather sluggish perception of Stella she seems "a little bit nervous or overwrought or something." (p. 23). She is genuinely "frightened" (p. 24) that Stanley is not expecting her, and "begins to shake again" (p. 25) when recalling her struggle for Belle Rêve. The scene mounts in excitement with a powerful crescendo as Blanche with barely-controlled hysteria recalls the deaths of her family and the loss of Belle Rêve while Stella enjoyed Death's

"opposite", Desire, "In bed with your -- Polack!" (p. 27). Appropriately, when Stella is thoroughly roused from her habitual lethargy the "seed-bearer" (p. 29) appears on the scene.

By the time Stanley confronts Blanche for the first time we have been carefully prepared for the incompatibility of their respective illusory systems. We have seen both characters counterpoised to Stella; Stanley, on the run, bellowing his characteristic mating call, (which rings out at various times in the play as a grotesquely parodic echo of Romeo's summons of Juliet from beneath her balcony) has thrown her the bloodied meat at the play's opening curtain and Stella has agreed to watch Stanley knock down pins at the bowling alley; Blanche has arrived, precipitating Stella's leaving Stanley without his admiring spectator at the bowling alley. Already Blanche has disturbed the rhythm of Stanley's life patterns. Their first meeting objectifies the resulting abrasion. Blanche retreats from Stanley's "stare" (p. 29); the Southern Belle almost needs a protecting parasol to ward off the heat of Stanley's unguarded scrutiny. When Blanche tells him she is from "Laurel", Stanley retorts, measuring the whiskey left in his bottle, "Yeah . . . Not in my territory." (p. 30).

Blanche and Stanley cannot inhabit the same "territory"; the implication is that Stanley does not ever go to Laurel, just as Blanche has no business in <u>his</u> territory. The unsteadiness earlier observed in Blanche is heightened as Stanley pierces immediately two illusory restraints of her assumed role: he sees quickly that she drinks a good deal; he then removes his shirt, thus flaunting his ungentlemanly "motto" of "Be comfortable" (p. 30) as well as his unrestrained sexuality. To his elegant lady visitor he queries: "You going to shack up here?" (p. 31).

The term "shack up" is one that must strike a nerve in Blanche, cut through to the reality of her infamous days in Laurel. When he bluntly inquires about her sexual status -- "You were married once, weren't you?" (p. 31) -- illusion slips out of Blanche's control: the polka music inside her head begins to play inexorably, her head falls on her arm, and she feels "sick" (p. 31). Stanley will not allow her to play her role in his territory; that is clear. Later in the play, by piercing her illusions he will literally sicken her once again, this time sending her running to the bathroom (p. 111).

Interestingly, it is clear this early in the play that Blanche, having perceived from Stella's few guarded comments that Stanley is "a different species" (p. 24) tries to "humour" at least at this point, Stanley's illusions, to allow him his role, whereas he will not make any concessions to hers. As Elia Kazan notes, he is "marvellously selfish", indifferent to everything except his own pleasure and comfort.[19] She laughs (if faintly) at his unfunny joke about liquor (p. 30) and agrees with him that being "comfortable" is of prime importance, although we have seen that her personal fastidious dress code is founded on anything but comfort. She has, after all, invaded his "territory", his space; could she but adapt successfully to "circumstances", as she later in a lapse of self-knowledge asserts she does well (p. 55), "make a reasonable adjustment"[20] and assume the colouring of her environment, Stanley's colour, she might survive. But Blanche is a "dinosaur"[21] clinging to what "worked" in the past, a creature unadaptable, and thus fated to become "extinct in the modern world".[22] Fittingly, it is her individual past, "recent history" (p. 102) as Stanley emphasizes, which, when revealed and thrust into the present, precipitates her destruction by the

embodiment of the present, Stanley Kowalski.

As the play progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult for Blanche to play convincingly the role she has assumed for herself; similarly, it becomes increasingly clear that Stanley, threatened, will be, as she accurately perceives, her "executioner . . . unless --" (p. 93); the foundation for her hope remains unarticulated, but we see that only the refuge provided by a Southern Gentleman can save her. Ironically, her myth having betrayed her, only his surrogate will appear in the final scene -- in the person of Blanche's "keeper".

Blanche shows us repeatedly with an appealing ability to laugh at herself, that she is, for the most part, acutely aware of the distinction between illusion and reality: she designedly plays her "Paper Doll" (p. 59) role, showing flashes of sensuality and shrewd insight beneath it; she tells lies, ruefully laughing at her own audacity. Like Tom, in The Glass Menagerie, and like the playwright of course, she admits that she deals in illusion: "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion, but when a thing is important I tell the truth . . ." (p. 41). She tries her "charm" on Stanley, playfully spraying him with her cologne (p. 41), but perceives immediately that Stanley won't be distracted: "All right. Cards on the table. That suits me." (p. 41). In this scene her frankness about the worthless fripperies in her trunk symbolizes her openness about the trappings of her role; it is only the love-letters, concretions of her past love and its consequences, that she jealously guards from the rough hands of Stanley. It is precisely this vulnerable area that Stanley will not keep his "big capable hands" (p. 43) off; he has already discovered her Achilles' heel. Interestingly,

in this scene, Blanche sends Stella off to the drugstore, thus protecting her sister from the ugly reality of the scene with Stanley: "I have an idea she doesn't understand you as well as I do." (p. 40).

The sensual Blanche is a side of her she knows she must hide in order to snare a Southern Gentleman. As Riddell puts it succinctly: "her life is a living division of two warring principles -- desire and decorum."[23] The night of the Poker Game (Scene III), scantily dressed, she stands silhouetted in the bedroom door; warned by Stella that she is visible to the men, she moves away, but later deliberately returns into the light, letting her sensuality have some play when she can safely do so. Later, when she kisses the paper boy she will wryly remind herself to "be good" and "keep my hands off children" (p. 84). Gaily inquiring if Mitch wants to "coucher avec moi" (p. 88) she laughs to herself that it is a good thing he understands no French; she protests demurely that she has "old-fashioned ideals" (p. 91), but her eyes, which she "rolls" at the audience, reveal her ironic awareness of the assumed role of "Miss Primanproper".[24]

She laughs at herself "for being such a liar" (p. 74) when writing to Shep, but puts illusion to good work in setting her snare for Mitch. Coyly she lies about her age (p. 55), plays helpless, asking him to put the lantern over the bulb (as though she needed help in creating her own illusions!), fabricates the story that she has come to help Stella, when precisely the reverse is true. She waltzes about evoking a "Gone with the Wind" ballroom, enchanting the awkward Mitch. But all this behaviour is coolly premeditated. Immediately perceiving that Mitch is "superior" (p. 49) to the rest, a possible, if paler, less affluent realization of Shep Huntleigh, she has established certain pertinent data by pointed

questioning of Stella: his marital status, his sexual etiquette ("Is he a wolf?" [p. 49]), his job security. She has pulled herself together for the struggle and significantly, in this scene, she meets without flinching the hard stare of Stanley. There is this element of the "tigress"[25] in Blanche; in her moments of tough determination she is a forerunner of Maggie the Cat, sizing up her opposition and weighing her chances realistically.

In the aftermath of the Poker Night Blanche shows both the accuracy of her insight and her inability to adapt, to "do something" (p. 65) about her "circumstances". She sees that her sister is totally caught up in the magic of Stanley: "Pull yourself together and face the facts." (p. 64). But it is pathetically clear that there is no "way out" for the Southern Belle except via a man and "a Streetcar Named Desire". That is the "way out" that Stella has already found, with Stanley. She has made the workable accommodation: she has "settled for sex"[26] and a ten dollar bill. Blanche's ineffectual attempt to "get out" (p. 65) via her Southern Gentleman, the legendary "Shep Huntleigh", and his money, is symbolized by her inability to use a modern, "dial" telephone. Blanche cannot cope with the present age; her attempt to "connect" herself with a longed-for past, Shep, the onetime "beau", via modern methods of communication, the telephone and the telegram, is a predictable failure. The modern methods at her disposal only make more acute her sense of isolation. It seems clear to me that Blanche only pretends to want this connection; no doubt Shep is barely aware of her existence and she saves herself the pain of facing this truth by "not getting through". The past is as dangerous for Blanche as the present. Ironically, Stanley will make the successful "connection" with her past and the communication of that "truth" will bring about her

destruction. But Blanche's observations about Stella and her way of life with Stanley are deadly accurate -- "What such a man has to offer is animal force" (p. 69). Her perception that he represents "something -- sub-human", climaxed by her appeal to Stella not to "hang back with the brutes" (p. 72), overheard by Stanley, sets him on a path of merciless revenge.

It is the incompletion of the Stanley-Stella code that it allows for nothing but the "sexual classifications" (p. 29) of women; it is the incompletion of the Blanche-Mitch code that it disallows frank sexuality for a woman. Neither will allow Blanche, perhaps "an artistic intensification of all women",[27] the freedom to be fully human. ". . . the sins of the world are really only its partialities, its incompletions, and these are what sufferings must atone for."[28]

Stanley is as "incomplete" as Blanche. According to Williams, "The use of imagination, resorting to dreams or the loftier purpose of art, is a mask he [man] devises to cover his incompletion. Or violence such as a war, between two men or among a number of nations, is also a blind and senseless compensation for that which is not yet formed in human nature."[29] It seems to me that Stanley has built for himself an even more elaborate illusory system to "cover his incompletion" than has Blanche. While he has rejected "the loftier purpose of art", certainly, (Clurman calls Blanche a "poet")[30] he is an embodiment of the male mystique and resorts frequently to violence as an effective "compensation". With telling insight, Blanche remarks that "You must have had lots of banging around in the army and now that you're out, you make up for it by treating inanimate objects with such a fury!" (p. 76). Stanley accordingly revels in male rituals like the bowling league, the Poker Night, the coarse joke (p. 47), the proprietary

"whack" on the thigh that proclaims his sexual domination of his wife (p. 48). Ironically, the stud reaffirms his "masculinity", his aura of "King" (p. 107) more and more hysterically as the play progresses, thus betraying his fear and insecurity as he sees Stella showing signs of allegiance to Blanche, who sees him clearly and despises him. At first he only "bellows" for attention (p. 13); he progresses through issuing gruff commands to Stella -- "I said to hush up!" (p. 51) to hurling the radio through the window (p. 57) and the phone to the floor (p. 59), and beating her up (p. 57). He crashes about in the flat, slamming drawers and throwing clothing (p. 76), "clears the table" by hurling his plates to the floor (p. 107), finally climaxing his performance of "King of the Castle" by the ultimate violent act of rape of the "visiting royalty" (p. 100).

Unlike Blanche, Stanley shows no self-insight, and no sense of humour. He lacks the detachment necessary for laughing at himself and his illusions and pretences as Blanche does. His impenetrable self-absorption is objectified in the Poker Night scene. When Steve tells a joke Stanley shouts impatiently, "Deal!" (p. 47). When he feels the threat of loss (he is losing at this point in the poker game) he will not be distracted from his desperate drive for victory. Stanley's carefully-protected ego cannot withstand any kind of loss -- at bowling, at cards, at the game of "King of the Castle". It is necessary for him that Stella serve as a mirror-image of his power. As long as she is "narcotized" (p. 62), "under the influence" of Stanley (significantly, Stella has no need of alcohol-induced illusion; she is "drugged" by Stanley), Stanley feels secure in his "territory". He cannot allow her to be awakened, and when he sees signs of her being aroused by Blanche to a degree of autonomy he cannot tolerate (she dares

even to assert "This is my house and I'll talk as much as I want to!" [p. 51]) he explodes into violence against her, and works toward the destruction of the "intruder".

Stanley's weapon will be his version of the truth about Blanche. It is the conventional "labelling" truth that he will reveal to both Stella and Mitch -- the two people besides himself whose lives he sees touched by her. Juxtaposed to Stanley's "dope" (p. 98) on Blanche "from the most reliable sources" (p. 98) is the truth revealed by Blanche herself, for in her desperate fight to win Mitch and thus save herself she tells her own truth. Blanche's first marriage was destroyed because of "something unspoken"; she seeks an "intimacy"[31] that will preclude any "mendacity of silence". Depending on which version of the truth they ally themselves with, the audience will "take sides". It is clear to me that we are to align ourselves with Blanche and feel that something beautiful and valuable has gone out of the world at the play's end. Tennessee Williams wants us to reverse the conventional labels and indict the husband-breadwinner-protector-of-his-home, "one hundred percent American" (p. 110) as the "degenerate" (p. 102). (This is Stella's conventional label for Blanche's dead homosexual husband. Ironically, it is Stella who is married to a "degenerate".)

Stanley's version of the truth is that Blanche is "no lily" (p. 99), but a notorious former resident of the Flamingo hotel (p. 99), ejected for her "goings-on" and fired from her job for seducing a seventeen-year-old boy. One notices Stanley's euphemistic language in this "revelation scene" with Stella; true to his type, Stanley has a locker-room language reserved for his male cronies. No doubt he has relayed the "facts" somewhat

differently to his army "buddy" (p. 103), Mitch. But, Stanley's "dope" has the opposite effect on Stella from the calculated one. Lacking imagination and any real knowledge of his wife, he has assumed that tagging Blanche with condemning and "verifiable" labels would precipitate Stella's rejection of her. Instead, Stella's pity and concern are intensified and she is horrified that Stanley has "wised up" (p. 104) Mitch. About his motives, Stanley is notably mendacious. He actually seems to believe that he had to save his "best friend" (p. 103). This "best friend" he had ridiculed publicly for his attachment to his mother. Stanley cannot admit and probably doesn't even know his real motive, which is clearly to re-establish order in his own territory and to punish the intruder.

When Mitch fails to arrive at her birthday dinner, Blanche quickly perceives that it is her "death-day".[32] Her telling of the pathetic little joke at the opening of Scene Eight is a master touch by the playwright. Like the caged bird, Blanche is aware that her "day" (p. 107) has been wilfully removed from her; she has been deliberately thrust into darkness by Stanley and it is in accordance with her fighting spirit that she tries to "make light" of it.

Having perceived that she must now deal in truth, not "magic", Blanche begins to "lay her cards on the table" while at the same time, the illusion of the polka music becomes more invasive of reality, thus signalling her approaching retreat into madness. The playwright is making the point that, deprived of our necessary illusions, (Mitch will no longer let her play refined lady) the "make-believe" we are aware of, the illusions we cannot control begin to control us. (Perhaps this is why we need the theatre -- a set of illusions to which we submit ourselves, always aware

that they are illusions and that we can dissociate ourselves from them at will.) Blanche's only hope lies in her belief in the transforming power of love; this core belief is juxtaposed to Stanley's version of the truth in Scene Seven, as she sings, "It wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!" (p. 99). The one reality in a world of illusion, the one thing to hang onto for Blanche (and for Williams) is love, "sincerity" of emotion (p. 54), and if she is deprived of that, she knows she will be destroyed by her "executioner". Only Mitch can stop the polka tune in her head (p. 113) and anchor her to reality.

Thus in this war between two illusory systems, ironically, Mitch, the "natural gentleman" (p. 91) and his response to the "truth" becomes the key. It is Mitch's failure and the incompletion of Blanche's own "Southern Gentleman" code that leave her broken, detached from reality, an easy victim for Stanley to "finish off". Significantly, Blanche, seeking an honest intimacy, has already revealed to Mitch (in Scene Six) what surely Williams sees as her major transgression: that having discovered the "truth" about him she had withdrawn love from someone who needed her and her rejection had killed him. It is precisely this fate for herself which she fears as retribution. Mitch, Southern-Gentleman-style, was more than willing to excuse her "disgust" (p. 96) for a homosexual. In our society, when the truth about him can no longer be evaded, it is forgiveable, even expected, to abhor the "degenerate", but when her transgression is against Mitch's own code of sexual purity for women one "takes home to mother" his scorn knows no bounds. This part of the truth he cannot accept. He sees the transgression as against himself; it is easy enough to forgive transgressions against others. She may have killed her husband, but

"You lied to me, Blanche." (p. 119). When he reverts to the behaviour the Southern Gentleman reserves for whores, Blanche, the past and the polka tune more and more insistently breaking into her consciousness, screams "Fire!" (p. 121). The "moth", attracted to the flame of life, is about to be destroyed utterly by it.

It is puzzling to me that so many critics apply the lying conventional labels that Tennessee Williams would clearly have us "re-think" in their discussions of Blanche. She is repeatedly given the facile tag of "nymphomaniac";[33] her past is referred to as "a cauldron of filth",[34] "raw and sordid", a "life devoted to coarseness".[35] The playwright's compassion for her, irresistibly contagious in the theatre, does not seem to carry beyond the final curtain. The Southern Gentleman-Ape code on the subject of the "fallen" woman (on this subject the two are identical), based on the lie that women one marries must be "lilies", appears universally adhered to. Conveniently the psychological mechanisms underlying her behaviour are ignored. Fedder, I think, interprets her sexual escapades correctly: "She masochistically embraces, out of deep self-hatred, the very behaviour she abhors".[36] Blanche herself explains them as "hunting for some protection . . . in . . . -- unlikely places" (p. 118), thus masochistically dooming herself each time to the pain of disappointment and rejection. This mechanism is dramatized in miniature in the paper boy scene. Waiting for Mitch, but afraid he has rejected her as she rejected her first love, she throws herself suggestively at the young man, who is clearly unreceptive. This is precisely the pattern of her past; having lost her husband because of her own failing, she threw herself at a series of strangers, anticipating and perversely needing rejection as a perpetual self-punishment to atone

for her terrible sense of guilt. From Death she turned repeatedly to its opposite, Desire, only to reaffirm each time its equal destructiveness.

In Scene Ten, slightly drunk and bedecked in her costume-ball outfit, ironically with the rhinestone tiara perched on her head, Blanche greets Stanley with the most outrageous lies yet -- that she has had a "telegram" from the past, from Shep Huntleigh, who wants her "companionship" (p. 126) and that Mitch "implored" her "forgiveness" (p. 126) which she disdained to give. Blanche is now connected irrevocably with illusion based on the past; she will never be in command of the present again. As Stanley closes in for the "kill" the symbolic "flames" and grotesque images play on the wall and "inhuman jungle voices" (p. 129) are heard. Blanche, her back to the wall, fights like a "tiger" (p. 130), finally playing Stanley's game in his territory by his rules. But at his familiar games he cannot be beaten. He easily overpowers her. His illusory system has triumphed; the modern world <u>is</u> a jungle; man <u>is</u> an animal and Stanley is "king of the pigs".[37] Stanley objectifies with terrible clarity the truth of Blanche's past experiences: the act of love can be the most devastating act of hatred and rejection. Stanley thus twists into a lie the one act his whole life is based on, its "complete and satisfying center" (p. 29). He sinks to a mendacity that Stella cannot allow herself to believe him capable of and still remain his wife.

In the final scene both Stella and Mitch have submitted to the illusory system of Stanley, but one feels that they are never again to be completely under his spell; they have gained some detachment. Both now acknowledge an awareness of his mendacity: Mitch, ill at ease at the poker table, says outright: "You . . . you . . . you. . . Brag . . . brag . . .

bull . . . bull." (p. 131). To Eunice Stella confides, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley." (p. 133). It is not that the "story" seems untrue; Stella herein admits her inability to cope with the truth Blanche has told her about her husband. She has chosen to live with Stanley's lie. Both Stella and Mitch are wracked by guilt as they perceive Blanche's panic. Stella cries, "Oh God, what have I done to my sister?" (p. 141). Mitch "lunges" (p. 141) at Stanley, going to Blanche's aid, but Stanley's violence overpowers him, just as Stanley's caresses overpower Stella (p. 142). Neither is strong enough to live with the truth Blanche has told them. Neither is any more "adaptable" than Blanche, the "dinosaur"; they survive only because their unchangeable behaviour "works" in Stanley's world. In order to accept the truth Blanche tells him about her past Mitch would have to reject his "Gentleman" code in regard to women, to re-adjust his own illusory system. To accept the truth of Stanley's rape of Blanche Stella would have to reject the "narcotizing" effect of Stanley's sexuality, to leave the "Elysian Fields". She has no real alternative, since Blanche's fate is an object lesson in what happens to "Belles" who leave their "Belle Rêve" and cannot "adjust" to the Elysian Fields. They are led away by strangers to "rest in the country" (p. 132); if one rejects Desire, its opposite is death. Eunice's view is the practical one: "Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going." (p. 133). One needs one's illusions to live: "Stay with me and don't look" (p. 140) she tells Stella. Similarly, as Blanche passes, Mitch is "looking down at the table" (p. 138). Neither is able to face her and the truth she represents. Williams objectifies the victory of Stanley's illusory system by having him tear Blanche's paper lantern off the light bulb (p. 140). He is now free to "get them

coloured lights going again", to re-assert his own illusions.

Ironically, despite her obvious disorientation, the "Varsouviana" playing unremittingly in her head, Tennessee Williams allows the "mad" woman, Blanche, the final perception of truth in the play. She sees clearly that "That man isn't Shep Huntleigh." (p. 138). She senses immediately the threatening inhumanity of the matron: "I don't know you. I want to be -- left alone -- please" (p. 140), and tries to break away from her, crying out for help when she is overpowered. Even her illusions dramatize a truth. She hears "cries and noises of the jungle" (p. 139). She <u>is</u> in a jungle. Stanley's voice echoes "in threatening whispers" (p. 139). Stanley <u>is</u> unchangeably malevolent -- the destroyer. She goes off quietly with the doctor not because she is deluded into thinking that he is Shep or because she believes Stella's lie that she is "going on a vacation" (p. 135), but because she perceives accurately that she must go somewhere -- "this place is a trap!" (p. 135) -- and because he offers kindness.

There is such sad truth and self-insight in her comment: "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." (p. 142). She has found little enough kindness in strangers but she now knows better than to depend on the kindness of those who supposedly love her -- Stella and Mitch. The "stranger" of this scene is <u>paid</u> to accept her. The playwright thus makes a horrifying comment on our society: the impersonal acceptance offered (for a price) by psychiatry is necessary because the love of family and friends is a lie: they offer only a personalized rejection. At the play's end the "ineffectual dreamer" walks out to the mental institution more aware of the truth than the "realists" inside the flat, who tighten protectively their illusory webs about themselves, glad that the disruptive element has been driven out. Stanley begins to fondle

Stella; Mitch remains at the card table playing "seven card stud", the masculine ritual re-affirming him as one of "King" Stanley's buddies.

All three, Stanley, Stella, and Mitch, no matter how they lie to themselves, are now guilty of precisely the same transgression as Blanche had confessed, unsparing of herself, the one sin that is "not forgivable" (p. 126): they have rejected cruelly someone who, like her husband, "was in the quicksands and clutching at me" (p. 95). The consequence for Blanche was that "the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again" (p. 96). One feels that with Blanche's lantern torn off the lightbulb the hot jungle glare of the Kowalski kingdom will seem more and more like darkness to Stella and to Mitch, if not to Stanley himself.

Thus I see this play as no black-white melodrama wherein the "realist" hero triumphs "deservedly" over the stained idealist. Neither is able to live without illusion. But Stanley's illusions are the ones society alarmingly stamps with approval: that "real men" train wives to catch the "meat" they throw, and flaunt their inarticulateness ("I never was a very good English student" [p. 30]); that women ought to play no part in their work or play -- poker ("Poker shouldn't be played in a house with women" [p. 58]), bowling, drinking with "the boys"; that the "healthy housewife"[38] (Stella) sips soft-drinks, reads comics, and waits for night to fall ("I can hardly stand it when he is away for a night . . ." [p. 58]); that promiscuity in a man is good for a laugh (Eunice shouts, "Call the police" and "They laugh lightly." [p. 75]) or the fault of the woman (Tischler suggests that Blanche is attracted to Stanley and even <u>desires</u> the rape;)[39] but that promiscuity in a woman requires a total withdrawal of love, immediate rejection; and that in this great democracy a man

is "King" in his own house. Stanley's illusions are "normal" because they are shared by "the people".[40] Blanche's illusions, bound up with her Old South myth, are "abnormal"; most people find them ridiculous. It is recorded that the audience laughed at her in the first New York production and sided with Stanley through much of the play. (Mary McCarthy thought he was justifiably angry for having his bathroom so constantly given up to Blanche's "hydrotherapy".)[41] The rape, the characteristic Williams retreat-to-the bedroom scene, is absolutely necessary to mitigate this response. Even if the most Kowalski-like audience has been "with" Stanley to this point, they cringe at the rape of the lifeless, defeated girl in his arms. Husband and father-to-be as rapist of his own sister-in-law is <u>not</u> part of the "one hundred per cent American" illusory system. Blanche's evaluation begins to be credible: there <u>is</u> something "sub-human" about Stanley. Stanley himself is aware that he must lie to preserve his relationship with "the little woman" (p. 29). Ironically his marriage begins to mirror Blanche's; it can survive only as long as something remains "unspoken".

We are all guilty of various degrees of mendacity, the playwright reminds us in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>. Thus none of us has the right to crash through, perhaps mortally, the illusory system of another. "The big mendacities must be slain. The smaller mendacities -- I should like to have them remain. . . .Let them remain like springs in an automobile to relieve the shock of the trip . . .".[42] Blanche has tried to remove the "smaller mendacities" from Stella's life, to arouse her from her narcotized satisfaction, which she has no right to do. In retaliation, Stanley blazes through Blanche's illusory system, climaxing his victory

with the rape, thus, I think, becoming guilty of a major mendacity in defense of his own illusory system, and thus destroying utterly the "moth".

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER TWO)

[1]Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (London: Monton and Co., 1966), p. 85.

[2]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: The New American Library, 1947), p. 25. [All subsequent references to A Streetcar Named Desire refer to this edition.]

[3]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work (London: Peter Owen, 1961), p. 126.

[4]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 137.

[5]Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 126.

[6]Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1961), p. 17.

[7]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. 123.

[8]Tennessee Williams, "Carrousel Tune", in his In the Winter of Cities (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 95.

[9]Joseph N. Riddell, "Nietzsche Descending", in J. Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire" (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 88.

[10]Thomas E. Porter, Myth and Modern American Drama (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 160.

[11]Alan S. Downer, Recent American Drama (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 10.

[12]Tennessee Williams, "The Glass Menagerie", in Six Great Modern Plays (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 449.

[13]Jackson, The Broken World, p. 106.

[14]Tennessee Williams, "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin", in his Hard Candy (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 88.

[15]Tennessee Williams, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion", in his 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 71.

[16]Jackson, The Broken World, p. 106.

[17]Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in his One Arm (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 85. "He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall . . .".

[18]John Gassner, "A Streetcar Named Desire: A Study in Ambiguity", in Travis Bogard and W. I. Oliver, eds., Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 383.

[19]Elia Kazan, "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire", in Miller, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire", p. 27.

[20]Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 165.

[21]Kazan, "Notebook", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 24.

[22]Williams, "The Glass Menagerie", in Six Great Modern Plays, p. 498.

[23]Riddell, "Nietzsche Descending", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 84.

[24]Tennessee Williams, "The Case of the Crushed Petunias", in M. Jerry Weiss, ed., Ten Short Plays (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 31.

[25]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1965), p. 26.

[26]E. Hughes, "Reviews of Tryout Performance in Boston", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 36.

[27]Kazan, "Notebook", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 24.

[28]Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in One Arm, p. 85.

[29]Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in One Arm, p. 85.

[30]Weales, Tennessee Williams, p. 18.

[31]Leonard Berkman, "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche DuBois", in Modern Drama, X, No. 3 (December, 1967), p. 253.

[32]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 40.

[33]J. W. Krutch, "Modernism" in Modern Drama (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 127.

E. Hughes, "Reviews", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 39.

Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 176.

N. M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), p. 136.

Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, IV, No. 3 (March, 1960), p. 47.

J. C. Trewin, "In the Fashion", The Illustrated London News, XXI (November 5, 1949), p. 712.

[34]Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 125.

[35]E. Hughes, "Reviews", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 39.

[36]Fedder, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence, p. 86.

[37]Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 134.

[38]W. David Sievers, "Most Famous of Streetcars", in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 90.

[39]Tischler, Rebellious Puritan, p. 144.

[40]Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 126.

[41]Mary McCarthy, Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles 1937-1962 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1963), p. 133.

[42]Henry Hewes, "Critics on a Tin Roof", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVIII, No. 18 (April 30, 1955), p. 26.

# CHAPTER THREE

## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

"Who can face truth? Can you?"[1]

Based on a series of climactic disclosures and their effect on the individual members of a family, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof strips away illusions and reveals truths about people and about the relationships between them as they cross "Dragon Country, the country of pain".[2] One of the two central disclosures concerns the present and one the past. Tennessee Williams uses in all these plays an Ibsen-like technique of retrospective exposition: "the past is never dead; it isn't even past".[3] The characters move within the context of their past just as the action of the play takes place on a set already "there" when the action of the play begins. Thus the past serves not as a passive background to the present, but, like the set, intrudes on the present, demanding to be recognized, illuminating it and thus often providing the key to understanding present action.

In this play Williams reworks some of the materials of the earlier A Streetcar Named Desire. Both plays reveal some hidden truth about the central character's past relationship with a now dead homosexual, thus, peripherally, making a comment about our society's evasiveness on the subject. (In fact, the homosexual who dies antecedent to the action of the play, but whose death is painfully forced into present consciousness, is a motif in all four of the plays here studied, as we shall see.) Brick parallels Blanche in his conscious

attempt to evade "recent history" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 102) by drinking someone else's liquor in someone else's house. Yet both try to reaffirm their identity from further back in the past as part of a great American myth, because their growth has been arrested; they have been unable to grow beyond this immature identity to come to terms with themselves as they now are. Blanche tries to remain a fluttering Southern Belle, Chatelaine of "Belle Rêve"; Brick tries to remain an All American football hero and track star of "Glorious Hill" high school, to remain part of "the American mythology of brilliant halfbacks, beauty queens, and sports announcers".[4] Time has outrun them both. Only when "pushed to the wall" will Brick admit that time has "intercepted" (p. 90) "those long, long! -- high, high! -- passes", that he now can't manage even the lowest hurdle on the high school track and that the infamous reality of a resting-place at "Rainbow Hill" may well replace the glamorous illusion of triumph at "Glorious Hill". It is time for Brick to grow up, find a new role to play, but instead, he disengages from the struggle of life.

Brick, like Blanche, is guilty of the transgression of denying love and compassion to someone who "was in the quicksands" and "came . . . for help" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 95). Like Blanche, having accepted society's conventional labels and attitudes, he reacted to the revelation of truth with shock and "disgust" (Blanche's word precisely, and a key word in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof). Like Blanche he keeps his body fastidiously clean, is tormented by the summer heat, leaving the bedroom repeatedly for the cooler air of the balcony. Both bathe and shower ritualistically, as though both, like Lady Macbeth, were trying

to wash away their guilt. Like Blanche, Brick, dressed in pure white, seems an "ass-aching Puritan" (p. 19), disdaining vulgarity of language, and refusing the passionate advances of the one who loves him. Both are confronted by someone who fights desperately to strip them of their illusions.

But there are essential differences in character and theme: Blanche admits the truth about her transgression unsparingly and seeks a new intimate relationship with Mitch based on truth; Brick uses the word "mendacity" itself like the "cheap politicians" who "throw [it] back and forth at each other" (p. 79) -- that is, as a screen for the truth and to evade moral responsibility. He never admits (except in the unconvincing Broadway Act III) that he is guilty of any transgression or evasion of the truth; he deflects all accusations in the direction of others. He rejects the very kind of intimacy that Blanche so desperately reaches for. Unlike Stanley, Maggie and Big Daddy, the "antagonists" in the play, fight to free Brick of illusion, to make him face truth, not to destroy him, but to save him from "Rainbow Hill" in the name of their love for him. Symbolically, both Maggie and Big Daddy deny him his crutch and his liquor, but with the plea, "Grab my hand!" (p. 88). Stanley pulls away Blanche's "crutch" of illusions to let her struggle helplessly on the floor (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 141), leaning finally on the arm of a stranger in her exit to Streetcar's equivalent of "Rainbow Hill", where beautiful illusions, unlike "real" rainbows, are likely never to fade. Maggie and Big Daddy are strong enough to love without condition, unlike Mitch, and want an intimacy with Brick based on shared truth, not a relationship like that of Stella and

Stanley at the end of A Streetcar Named Desire -- with "something unspoken" between them. They fight for his life, which is more than he will do for it. Brick's ultimate guilt is his rejection of life, his wish to be cool and virginal like the moon -- detached from humanity. Blanche desperately grabs for life in Death's opposite, Desire, and is subsequently destroyed; Brick is willing to throw his life away "like somethin' disgusting you picked up on the street" (p. 77), revolted by Death's "opposite", which in this play is not Desire, but mendacity, the "system that we live in" (p. 94). To refuse to live with mendacity is to refuse to live.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof's setting in time and space makes an ironic comment on its "mendacity" theme: the entire action of the play takes place on Big Daddy's birthday, a celebration of life based on the lie that Big Daddy is suffering not from terminal cancer, but from a "little spastic condition" of the colon (p. 105). In reality, it is Daddy's "Death Day", the day on which he must confront a knowledge that, as he points out, man alone must bear -- the knowledge that he is about to die (p. 68). The single set is Maggie and Brick's shared bedroom in the Pollitt plantation house; the "big double bed" (p. xiii) is one of the focal points of the set, the place of love-making, yet, ironically, the lack of love-making and the reasons behind it are the salient feature of the Brick-Maggie marriage, and the "big double bed" is used by a single person, Maggie. The other focal point of the set is the "monumental monstrosity peculiar to our times, a huge console combination of radio-phonograph . . . television set and liquor cabinet . . . a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions

behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with. . . ." (p. xiv). This ugly piece of "real" furniture (Margaret turns on music to "start off th' party" [p. 49], and Brick turns on the television to "turn off" Big Mama's chatter [p. 50]) bespeaks the lies and illusions that help us endure the pain of "Dragon Country", which we all inhabit. Brick refers to the liquor cabinet as "Echo Spring" (p. 66). It is just to still the "echo" from the drying-up "spring" of his youth and his last communication with "Skipper" that Brick drinks until he hears the mechanical "click" (p. 73) in his head that turns off his anxiety and gives him peace. The bedroom is not even a place of rest. Tennessee Williams directs that the actors must be "above all" given "room to move about freely (to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out)" (p. xiv). The bedroom is indeed no bedroom at all, but as Maggie says -- and she is the play's only main character who "knows", to whom no shocking disclosure need be made -- it is a "cage" (p. 28).

Act I belongs to Maggie the Cat. She is surely one of Williams' most undeceived, most clear-sighted and thus one of his strongest characters, a predecessor of Leona in Small Craft Warnings. The only illusion she clings to, it seems to me, and it is one she must cling to or "pick out the longest and sharpest knife . . . and stick it straight into my heart" (p. 25), is that human behaviour patterns change, that Brick's "moral paralysis"[5] is only a temporary functional disturbance, like spastic colon, and Brick will recover and engage himself in life again. It is to this end that she probes his "sore" (p. 24) in Act I. The act is really a lengthy monologue by Maggie, punctuated by occasional

interruptions from other characters, and by terse comments by Brick. She finally breaks through his composure when she probes too insistently the truth about the "one great good true thing" (p. 44) in Brick's life -- his friendship with Skipper.

Maggie's clear-sightedness, her determination to face truth, and Brick's self-enclosure, his attempt to evade truth, to not let it touch him, to remain inviolate, are clear from the play's opening. Maggie enters the bedroom to change her dress because the "no-neck monsters" (p. 15) have soiled it with a hot buttered biscuit. The tag she gives Mae and Gooper's charmless children is typically "Maggie-ish"; it is an unequivocal statement of her antipathy, yet an attractive lacing of humour blunts its bitterness and wins us to Maggie. She uses humour this way consistently in the play; it is her way of facing unpleasant minor irritations, of seeing them steadily, yet seeing their humorous aspect and thus engaging with some relish in the ensuing conflict. After a sarcastically astute observation about Big Daddy's unspoken hostility toward Mae -- "little expressions that flicker over his face when that woman is holding fo'th on one of her choice topics . . ." (p. 19), the playwright explains parenthetically: "A speech of this kind would be antipathetic from almost anybody but Margaret; she makes it oddly funny, because her eyes constantly twinkle and her voice shakes with laughter which is basically indulgent." (p. 19). That her "indulgent" laughter is a sign of her compassion is clear: Maggie is capable of tempering the truth, like pretending that Brick and not she remembered Big Daddy's birthday, in order to save other people pain. Ironically, Brick doesn't want to "fool" Big Daddy (p. 28). "When a thing is important" (A

Streetcar Named Desire, p. 41) Maggie relentlessly pursues the truth and "The Important Thing"[6] for Maggie is her relationship with Brick. Conversely, when a thing is unimportant, like who bought the cashmere robe for Big Daddy's birthday, and only other people are to be hurt, Brick insists on not pretending; when a thing is important Brick does nothing but pretend, evading the truth via Echo Spring, or the balcony (p. 70), or by singing (p. 104), or by turning on the television set (p. 50), or even by threatening to silence Maggie by violence (p. 44).

Brick cannot hear Maggie shouting (p. 15) above the roar of water in his shower. This opening reveals metaphorically much about their relationship. Brick later complains that "Lately your voice always sounds like you'd been running upstairs to warn somebody that the house was on fire!" (p. 31). Maggie's "house" -- her marriage with Brick -- is threatened with destruction and she is trying desperately to save them both, but Brick can't hear her; he is preoccupied with himself, tortured by guilt, moving from the shower to "Echo Spring", from a ritualistic self cleansing (instead of a "house" cleansing, involving Maggie and him both) to a renewal of his alcoholic haze, "the screen of his liquor" (p. 56), oblivious of other people's pain and even of their concern for him. The otherwise nameless character, "Two", in "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow", explains precisely Brick's predicament: "If the inhabitants, the explorers of Dragon Country, looked about them, they'd see other explorers, but in this country of endured but unendurable pain each one is so absorbed, deafened, blinded by his own journey across it, he sees, he looks for, no one else crawling across it with him. It's uphill up mountain, the climb's very steep: . . .".[7]

The remarkable distinction of "explorer" Maggie is just her awareness, despite her own painfully "steep" climb, of Brick's pain, her openness as opposed to his enclosure.

Act I is mainly concerned with Maggie's efficient piercing of various illusions. She sees clearly the truth behind the lie of the Gooper Clan's gift-giving conviviality at Big Daddy's birthday dinner: they are eagerly awaiting his "death day" and the gifts they hope to receive -- his money and his land. "Of course it's comical but it's also disgusting since it's so obvious what they're up to!" (p. 16). Brick, typically, is unconcerned. Maggie then confronts head-on the two pivotal truths of the play -- Big Daddy's imminent death -- "We know that Big Daddy's dyin' of -- cancer . . ." (p. 17) and Brick's imminent retreat from "Glorious Hill" to "Rainbow Hill": ". . . you're a perfect candidate for Rainbow Hill, Baby, and that's where they aim to ship you --" (p. 18).

Maggie's clear-sightedness is all the more remarkable because it is not the vision of a Williams "outsider"; Maggie is neither the poetic nor the insane character who is able to see the world because he is detached and has an "exterior" view.[8] Maggie's view is that of the involved; her "hat is still in the ring" (p. 25). She is a realist, if reality for Williams is (and I think it is, in this play at least) the "naturalistic setting of the . . . jungle" wherein "moralistic and poetic approaches are unworkable" and "realism is only a way of living with the reality".[9] Maggie's vision is neither moralistic nor poetic: she refuses to take a lover, not for the conventional "moral" reasons, but because "I can't see a man but you! Even with my

eyes closed, I just see you!" (p. 31). She might "cheat on" Brick (p. 39), sometime, but only if the time and place ensured secrecy; she will not risk grounds for divorce. She does not expect people to be other than frail. The dying have to be lied to: "You have to fool them. They have to fool themselves." (p. 40). She recognizes Big Daddy's "little . . . 'lech'" (p. 19) for her with some amused enjoyment. She is notably unpoetic about love. She does not expect that Brick will forget Skipper and love only her, but only that he recognize the reality: "Skipper is dead! I'm alive!" (p. 45). Interestingly, she is wary of an affair because she fears a divorce, yet she openly admits her aborted affair with Skipper; it is characteristic of Maggie that she does not lie about what is already done and her vision of Brick is clear enough that she knows he would never use that particular truth against her.

Maggie's compassionate insight into people is similar to that of the playwright. Tennessee Williams says that he has shared the vices and weaknesses of his characters.[10] Maggie (like Blanche) does not try to spare herself: "I'm not tryin' to white wash my behaviour, Christ, no! Brick, I'm not good. I don't know why people have to pretend to be good, nobody's good." (p. 45). Maggie knows about greed because she, too, is greedy for a piece of Big Daddy's estate. She remembers bitterly that "mean ole thing" (p. 36) "Aunt Cornelia", who left her nothing but "unexpired subscriptions to five magazines and the Book-of-the-Month Club and a LIBRARY full of ev'ry dull book ever written!" (p. 36). She knows about the pretense of love to gain one's own ends: "Always had to suck up to people I couldn't stand because they had money

and I was poor as Job's turkey." (p. 41). She knows about the pain of guilt because she feels guilty for Skipper's death too: "I destroyed him, by telling him truth . . . From then on Skipper was nothing at all but a receptacle for liquor and drugs. . . ." (p. 45). She feels she has emasculated one man by her attempt at love-making with him, has made a passive "receptacle" out of a man famous for his "aerial attack" (p. 90). She sees that Brick too is becoming a "receptacle" for liquor, if not for drugs, and longs to re-invigorate him by "successful" love-making, that results in impregnation. A clear affirmation of her fertility would cancel out her past as destroyer; no wonder Maggie the Cat is so determined to lure Brick into her bed. It is not only his life she is out to save, but her own. This absence of the self-abnegating "mission" is part of Maggie's human credibility.

The only quality Maggie claims credit for is honesty. (Ironically she is the only character in the play whom Williams allows to tell a deliberate lie.) "I'm honest. Give me credit for just that, will you please?" (p. 45). And throughout the play's first act, it is clear that she actively seeks to expose the truth about Brick's relationship with Skipper. It is only when this subject is approached that Brick's composure is broken through. When he tersely orders her to "shut up about Skipper" (p. 42), to maintain the mendacity of silence that is destroying their marriage, Maggie protests against his "godlike" (p. 43) expectations of "too goddam much of people that loved you" (p. 43) and against his clinging to this fatal silent mendacity: "Truth, truth! What's so awful about it? I like it" (p. 43). Again the danger to their marriage is imaged by fire: "But not facing a fire doesn't put it

out." (p. 25). (Lightening flashes harmlessly in the Broadway more "hopeful" Act III.) It is clear in this climactic "truth disclosure" scene in Act I that Brick has been determined to disallow the intrusion of truth between them. He even calls upon a nameless no-neck monster to "tell the folks to come up!" (p. 43) to remove Maggie's touch from the "sore". But Maggie is not to be dissuaded; she proclaims that the love between the two men was "beautiful, ideal" (p. 43), yet hidden, never "talked about plainly" (p. 43), finally making her plea for "the only 'truth' that Williams will maintain: You've got to keep going."[11] Maggie's words are: "life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is -- all -- over. . . ." (p. 44), recalling Eunice's words late in A Streetcar Named Desire, that "Life has got to go on . . . you've got to keep on going." But Stella "keeps on going" by maintaining another illusion: that of her husband's innocence and of Blanche's mendacity in the matter of rape. Maggie offers no new illusion to cling to and Brick is not ready to "walk" unassisted. Brick at this point loses his crutch, and is frantic to recover it; symbolically, of course, he is being deprived of the "crutch" of his silent mendacity ("laws of silence don't work!" [p. 25]) and he cannot move about his world without it. Without his crutch, he will have to face the truth about his injury and bear the pain when he tries to manoeuver without it; similarly, stripped of his mental "crutch", the illusions with which he covers up his inner wound, he will be forced to bear a pain that is "endured, but unendurable".

Brick's self-enclosure is so impenetrable that Maggie's words are lost in the sound of "running water"; preoccupied with trying to cleanse himself, he cannot allow her words to be heard: "you are

naming it dirty!" (p. 44). It is clear that Maggie is doing no such thing: she is "naming it clean . . . so damn clean that it killed poor Skipper!" (p. 44). It is Brick who has assimilated so many of society's conventional lying labels that he could not allow the love that existed between Skipper and him to exist on a "real" and human level; he has etherialized it, purified it, taken it out of the body and cooled it into something inert like the moon: "and death was the only icebox where you could keep it . . ." (p. 44). (One notes throughout the play Brick's puritanical rejection of physical contact: "Brick never liked bein' kissed or made a fuss over . . ." (p. 50). He shrinks from Big Mama's embrace, wipes away Maggie's kiss, and refuses to take the hand of his father.) Here it is Maggie, "society" (p. 60) lady, who can discard conventional moral attitudes and face what is real. "The rich or the well-to-do can afford to respect moral patterns, conventional moral patterns, but I could never afford to, yeah . . ." (p. 45). She does not blame Brick for loving Skipper, but only for not accepting the end of the "dream" (p. 44) and thus not allowing the continuation of "real" life through procreation with Maggie the Cat. At the end of Act I we see again that Brick spins illusion only to protect himself; he does not hesitate to tell Maggie outright that he "can't stand" (p. 47) her.

"Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an' death's the other. . . ." (p. 94). The two characters on their "way out" of that "system" -- Brick through liquor, and Big Daddy through death, confront each other with the "truth" in Act II of the play. Again the tension is between the character who has "always said 'Life!' to life"[12] while he is ironically about to die, and the character

who is "throwing it away", while his body remains "slim and firm as a boy" (p. 17). The "Life" character in Act II is not Maggie, but Big Daddy; there is an affinity between them -- both fighters for life, both "lovers" of Brick, both piercers of illusion.

"When he's disgusted" (p. 116) the word Big Daddy uses to express his disgust is "crap" and that is his first word in his first exchange with Brick when he enters the play. Brick momentarily uses the social "lie" -- "Congratulations!" (p. 48) -- although he is well aware that "congratulations" on this particular day are hardly in order. Big Daddy, cutting through the pretense, retorts "Crap" (p. 48) and this initial interchange, like that between Maggie and Brick, provides the keynote to the dramatic revelations made in Act II. Brick, still enclosed by illusion, tries to evade talk about anything "real". "You know what I like to hear most? . . . Solid quiet. Perfect unbroken quiet." (p. 67). Big Daddy, like Maggie, insists upon breaking in on Brick's detachment, in an attempt to re-engage him in life, to which Big Daddy, like Maggie, attaches supreme value. Again, the motive is love, but more than that, it is to assert again the truth of the Williams battle-cry. Big Daddy's version of it is: "Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto. . . ." (p. 63). Ironically, it will be Brick, who, "throwing away" his own life, reveals to Big Daddy that the life he "holds onto" so desperately and believes to be safely in his hands for some time to come, will soon be wrenched from his grasp; Big Daddy will be able to do nothing but "rage" against the inexorable "dying of the light".[13]

Big Daddy, with characteristic bluntness, (like Maggie he believes "laws of silence don't work") disdains the fake "joy" of the birthday party to attend to something real, the deterioration of Brick. When Big Mama tells him to "open your present" (p. 53) he tells her to "Open it you'self. I want to ask Brick somethin'. Come here, Brick." (p. 53). He wants to know how Brick "got crippled" (p. 53). Brick "got crippled" trying to hang on to the past, trying to jump hurdles at "Glorious Hill", but, in the dark, drunk, and alone with no cheering section, the past refused to be "replayed". Brick "got crippled" spiritually by, conversely, trying to escape "recent history" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 102), the death of Skipper, and his involvement in that death. Daddy tries to find an adult motive for Brick's regression to adolescence: "Was it jumping or humping that you were doing out there? . . . layin' a woman on that cinder track?" (p. 55). With a sure instinct he touches the "sore": nothing is less likely than Brick's "chasin' poon-tang on that track" (p. 56). Brick has probably never "chased" any woman in his life. (As a football star, he made a profession of "chasing" men.) Maggie "chases" Brick on the "track" of their bedroom; he confronts her with the boudoir chair, raised "like a lion-tamer facing a big circus cat" (p. 32), on the defensive, preventing her approach, refusing to be caught. His aversion to his wife is the outward manifestation of his psychic wound.

Ironically, it is his renewed, but false "lease on life" that has determined Big Daddy to live honestly. His resolve to face and speak the truth is based on the illusion that his body is basically sound. He says he had to "put up with a whole lot of crap" (p. 57)

because he thought he was dying -- soon. (Williams makes us see so clearly that the truth is bearable at a distance; we all know we are to die and accept the fact of our mortality. But to die soon makes the pain "endured but unendurable".) Truth has new value for him as he rebounds to life with gusto, determining to reject "all the goddam hypocrisy that I have had to put up with" (p. 58). He can show the "fat old body" (p. 58), his wife, exactly what he thinks of her and tell Mae to her face what he thinks of "eavesdroppers" (p. 62). When she protests his unkindness "to those that really love you" (p. 62) Big Daddy tells her to "shut up" and not to spy on Brick and Maggie.

Big Daddy's perceptions are, for the most part, accurate: Mae and Maggie are both interested in getting his land; Mae and Gooper do spy on Brick and Maggie; Brick is repulsed by his wife's physical advances; the American-tourist's Europe is a "great big auction" (p. 64); the Gooper children are carefully trained pickpockets, their act being designed to rob Daddy of his land; something is fundamentally amiss in Brick's personality and it does have something to do with Skipper. But to make Big Daddy too akin to Maggie and thus too much unlike Brick would make them untrue dramatically as father and son. Big Daddy, like Brick, does not scruple to hurt other people and Williams makes us see that Big Daddy's marriage is a mirror-image of Brick's. So convinced is he of the world's "crap" ("mendacity" to Brick who has gone to college) as its defining characteristic, that he cannot accept the reality of Big Mama's love for him. Maggie's perceptions of other people, as I have tried to demonstrate, are based on her own experience and self-knowledge. Similarly Big Daddy, never having loved, but having

lived a lie and "laid her! -- regular as a piston" (p. 80) for years, cannot believe that Big Mama loves him. When she tells him of her love he only muses: "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true . . ." (p. 59). Paradoxically, it seems that he, like Brick, has been "wonderful at lovemaking" (p. 25) because of that very "indifference" (p. 25). Significantly, in Act I Big Mama asked Maggie if she made Brick happy in bed (p. 37). She clearly has felt it her responsibility to make Big Daddy "happy", accepting and loving in return his "indifference" and even his "hate" and "hardness" (p. 54). Sadly, in a world of "crap", he cannot perceive what is "too rare to be normal" (p. 89) (as Brick characterizes his relationship with Skipper), Big Mama's sincere love for him. He is so convinced of its opposite that sincerity he cannot recognize and it is Mama's outstanding characteristic -- "she is very sincere" (p. 33) the playwright states. Williams reinforces the point of her openness, her dislike of lies and secrets symbolically, by her much-repeated insistence that the doors in her house remain open. "I hate locked doors in a house. . . ." (p. 33).

The original Williams Act III ending which repeats this skepticism about love in Brick seems to me beautifully true: the Brick-Maggie marriage, despite the "revelatory" (p. 125) conversation of Act II, will remain fundamentally a Big Daddy-Big Mama relationship (and with the birth of the child and the death of Big Daddy, Brick will progress from "Little Father" to Big Daddy and Maggie will have no choice but to be Big Mama), with the husband accepting the love and adulation of his adoring wife, but deigning to give little in return except evidence of his unconcern. Maggie says that Brick is one of

the "weak" people and that she must "take hold of" him (p. 123), but it is clear to me that this suggestion of the "managing female" stereotype is but another illusion, as Williams shows all stereotypes to be: Brick, like Big Daddy, (and indeed, like Stanley) will be "lord and master" of the house, perpetuating a clear case of the sado-masochistic marriage, which, strangely enough, is clung to desperately by its masochistic "victims" -- Big Mama and Maggie the Cat (for all her show of being "in command").

The Brick-Big Daddy "truth" confrontation is archetypal: the son mainly listens, while the father reminisces about his life and travels, and hands out unsolicited gems of worldly wisdom ("the human animal is a beast that dies . . ." [p. 66]; "I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting!" [p. 67].) The son mainly tries to let "th' breeze" (p. 67) pass over his head, in Brick's case drinking steadily throughout. Brick speaks for all sons to their fathers when he says (with difficulty): "Communication is -- awful hard between people an' -- somehow between you and me, it just don't --" (p. 67). Then the conversation progresses from the father-son pattern to the man-to-man pattern. They share a drink, Big Daddy becomes more expansive and the talk switches to sex and women. Daddy states he's ready "to cut loose and have . . . a -- ball" (p. 70) and confesses that he "never even liked" (p. 70) Mama. When Brick tries to escape even this man-to-man type conversation, by retreating to the cool of the balcony, and responds only by moving away when Daddy, trying for some contact, touches him, Big Daddy demands to know the reason

for Brick's restless alcoholism. At this point Big Daddy reverts to his father role: "you set there and listen" (p. 74). The son is roused to adolescent rebellion: "It's always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don't have a ruttin' thing to say to me!" (p. 76) and accuses his father of not knowing "where it's at" (in 1955 language): "you're all balled up!" (p. 76).

Big Daddy, as unsubtle in action as he is in speech, suddenly pulls Brick's crutch out from under him, and the confrontation breaks out of set patterns to become "real". Symbolically he is denying him his illusory "support system", insisting that he confront the reality of his crippling and of his pain. Big Daddy's tactic for forcing Brick to confront reality is a prefiguring of Maggie's: both offer the bribe of a drink in exchange for the truth, realizing that the "naked truth" needs quick "recovering", because it is so painful. In Act III Maggie will offer him all he can drink after he has confronted the reality of Maggie in the double bed. Again, one contrasts their stripping away of Brick's illusions with the process Stanley uses in A Streetcar Named Desire. Stanley's feeling for Blanche is hatred and thus his motive destruction. The ripping away of the paper lantern is a concretion of his method; it is destroyed utterly. Neither Maggie nor Big Daddy breaks Brick's crutch and throws it away, and neither of them expects him never to drink again. They demand only self-awareness, an understanding of one's own need for illusions and of the pain underlying them. (The artist in "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" similarly understands and confronts his need for illusions, for "fictions"; he does not try to live utterly without them.) Their feeling for Brick is love, not hatred,

and thus their motive is reconstruction, not destruction. If one accepts Esther Jackson's view (and it seems to me a valid one) that Williams suggests throughout his work that humanity can be saved through commitment to the ethic of sympathy for others and confrontation of oneself, they are offering him salvation.[14]

Brick's pain is overlaid with layers of illusion. When he declares that he drinks to kill his "disgust" (p. 78) with "mendacity", he is being mendacious, and Daddy quickly perceives that there are veils yet to be peeled away. Ironically, when Daddy demands, "Has someone been lying to you?" (p. 79) a chorus of "monster" voices is heard chanting, "We want Big Dad-dee!" (p. 79), another calculated lie. Drinking to "drop out" of a system of mendacity is simply not acceptable to Big Daddy's realistic view: after all, he has lived with "lies" and "pretenses" (p. 80) and "Ain't that mendacity?" (p. 80). His family life is riddled with it, a microcosm of society. He pretends to love his wife whom he finds a repulsive "tub of -- hog fat" (p. 77) and a son whom he considers a "son of a bitch" (p. 80), whose children are "screechers" (p. 80). Institutionalized mendacity -- "church" and "clubs" (p. 80) -- are still more "crap". There simply is no choice: "you <u>got</u> to live with it" (p. 81). To reject life is unthinkable because that's all there is "to hold onto". Big Daddy cannot believe that his son would rather "hold onto" a glass -- would rather drink than live, or indeed rather drink than die: "Then why don't you kill yourself, man?" Brick: "I like to drink . . ." (p. 81). To Big Daddy life and death are what Williams later calls "the holy mysteries";[15] Brick in rejecting both is electing for a kind of no man's land, a limbo, or in the imagery of the

play -- a frozen, lunar existence. (In the original Act III, Brick sings, "By the light . . ./ Of the sil-ve-ry mo-ooo-n . . ." [p. 104]; in the Broadway version of Act III, in one of his retreats to the cool balcony he says: "Hello, moon, I envy you, you cool son of a bitch" [p. 130]. Big Daddy has just returned "from the other side of the moon, death's country . . ." [p. 89].)

Big Daddy is aware of the mendacity of silence, the "something . . . left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us was honest enough . . ." (p. 82). He knows he has not really probed down to the truth and insists on breaking through that silence. One notes another similarity with Maggie and indeed, with Blanche. They are characters to whom Williams gives his compassion because they do not try to "whitewash" (p. 45) themselves, to appear "good" (p. 45). Big Daddy admits his failing, but Brick, characteristically evasive, proclaims he "never lied" (p. 82) to Big Daddy. Big Daddy gets him to admit he never "lied" to Brick either. But a lie is an articulated mendacity; Brick evades Big Daddy's real point which is that to keep "something unspoken" may be equally mendacious. Even Brick recognizes that they never lied because they "never talked to each other" (p. 83), not because they were honest. But Brick denies Daddy's love as clearly as he denies Maggie's (and as Daddy denies Big Mama's) when he says there isn't "anything much to say" (p. 83). He is dismissing him, as he has dismissed Maggie by telling her to take a lover (p. 39). He is telling Big Daddy similarly, though far less obviously, that he ought to love someone else and allow Brick his detachment, since to love is to allow the truth to be spoken between the "lovers".

Big Daddy sees that Brick is not "facing truth" (p. 92) with him. "Disgust" with "mendacity" is "crap! . . . ninety-proof bull, and I'm not buying any." (p. 84). When Daddy unsubtly slashes through the non-communication with "You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died" (p. 84), Tennessee Williams has Brick make "a startled movement, reaching for his crutch" (p. 84). The truth, or the pain, has been touched and Brick reaches for his illusions, his cover-ups, his compensation for being "crippled". (One notices again the "completing" function of illusion; Brick's crutch makes him "complete", replaces the non-functioning part of him. Liquor completes him by providing inner peace, a false harmony whose commencement is signalled by a "click", a falling into place.) When Big Daddy applies tentatively the conventional labels to the relationship -- "not right exactly" (p. 84) and not "exactly normal" (p. 84), "Brick's detachment is at last broken through." (p. 85). They are finally discussing "the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them" (p. 85). Significantly, Skipper died trying to maintain a lie, to evade the truth; similarly, Brick has turned to drinking trying to maintain a lie, to "disavow" the "inadmissible thing". Dying and drinking are the "ways out" of the "mendacity", the "system that we live in" (p. 94). But both Skipper and Brick then, have sought to maintain a lie, to maintain the "system" of life by seeking ways out of it. The illogic of their endeavour is unmistakable. Thus to give in to the "system", to apply its non-morality to personal relationships is, paradoxically, a denial of life. When Big Daddy accuses Brick of killing his friend by not facing the truth with him (p. 92) and when it is clear that Skipper's death has in turn made Brick

into an alcoholic, the insidiousness of the mendacity between them is clear. It is destructive of both individuals. Thus, despite the "system" of "mendacity" we live in, it is the moral responsibility of individuals to define and assert the truth in their relationships with others: "being friends is telling each other the truth . . ." (p. 94).

The "truth" about Brick's relationship with Skipper is that they loved each other; Brick's "disgust" with mendacity -- the lies people tell, is, as Big Daddy sees, really disgust with himself. He believes the conventional lies -- that to love another man is to be "a queer" (p. 87), one of a "pair of old sisters" (p. 86), that it necessarily means "sodomy! together" (p. 87) and that all such things are "dirty things" (p. 87) performed by "dirty old men" (p. 88), or "ducking sissies" (p. 88). Significantly, when he falls to the floor he refuses to take his father's hand, as though even that physical contact between men were unmanly, "disgusting". When Brick says "people" are "disgusted . . . by things like that" (p. 88) (meaning homosexuality or even the suggestion of it) he means he is disgusted; he finds himself disgusting because he accepts the conventional lies. The people who love him, Maggie and Big Daddy, are not disgusted by him. They accept him without reservation, thus offering him just what he refused to give Skipper.

Big Daddy, "Mississippi red-neck" (p. 41) though he may be, has been able to grow more than cotton on his plantation: "One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton! -- is tolerance! . . . I grown it." (p. 89). And here, of course, Williams is revealing the true "bigness" of Big Daddy, superficially a stereotype of the "man's man", arrogant, vulgar, domineering, contemptuous of women, yet in that

"big place" (Big Daddy) tolerance grows. He, after all, began his career on the plantation with Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a "pair of old bachelors", Williams tells us in "Notes for the Designer" (p. xiii), who shared a relationship "that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon" (p. xiii). They "took in" (p. 86) Big Daddy and he saw at close-hand the relationship between them. If one learns to grow love as one learns to grow cotton, then Big Daddy learned both from them. Significantly, after the death of Straw, he became Ochello's "partner" and "the place got bigger and bigger and bigger . . ." (p. 58), and he loves only one character in the play -- not his wife, but Brick, his male child. Again, Williams turns the stereotype inside-out. The "Mississippi red neck" who "quit school at ten" (p. 58) is more "liberal" than his college-educated son. He is able to love another man without guilt and thus cling to life, instead of seeking either "way out" -- via death or drinking. His life will have to be wrenched from him.

The "half-ass" (p. 91) story that Brick tells about Skipper's death, blaming Maggie, because when the love-making she pushed Skipper into "didn't work out" (p. 91) he was convinced of his homosexuality and thus drank and drugged himself "out" of the "system" of mendacity we call life, leaves out his own involvement. Big Daddy sees the omission and finally Brick admits the phone-call -- Skipper's cry for help, and his own response -- "I hung up!" (p. 92). His transgression is that of Blanche. His breaking of the connection revealed his disgust as clearly as Blanche's "you disgust me" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 96). Big Daddy is right. "You! -- dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it! --" (p. 92).

Brick's guilt is clear. In self-defense he confronts Big Daddy with an "inadmissible thing" as Skipper confronted him: he tells him he is dying of cancer. Ironically, Brick is being a friend, if being a friend is "telling the truth" (p. 94) to each other. But Brick's motives are clearly malevolent (like Stanley's). His own illusions torn away, he wants Big Daddy to feel pain severe enough to need a "crutch" too (he will, and morphine will be his crutch). There is no "living with" the thing that Big Daddy has in his body; he will need his "crutch" until he dies. Facing the truth about the reason for Daddy's pain doesn't help; one can only "rage" against Death, and Daddy roars: "Christ -- Damn -- all -- lying sons of -- Lying Bitches!" (p. 95). We live in a "system" of mendacity, but people ought to tell truth to one another; thus Big Daddy's roar is still an affirmation of Life, a belief in the possibility of a "pure an' true thing" (p. 90) between people.

In Act III of the play, there are no new disclosures to be made, only a new "audience" -- Big Mama -- for the truth about Big Daddy's condition. Big Mama, like every major character but Maggie, needs illusion to help her deny the truth: "It's all a mistake, I know it's just a bad dream" (p. 107). But Big Mama, like the other "lovers" in the play -- Maggie and Big Daddy, is finally able to accept the truth about the man she loves and, consequently, his need for illusion. Maggie will promise Brick more liquor, and Big Mama will give Big Daddy his morphine. Both are acts of love; even if the truth ought to be told between individuals, no-one can live utterly without illusion. "The everyday attempt of ordinary people to -- try to live a

little in both the jungle and the glass menagerie . . . is an eternal compromise . . . There is no way out."[16] To accept that fact is to say "Life!" to life.

The social system we live in is "mendacity"; this point is reinforced in Act III. The institutionalized mendacities of marriage, the church, medicine, the law, are all reiterated in this act. Mae and Gooper clearly (but discreetly) hate each other; they are constantly poking each other viciously (pp. 99; 104; 108; 119), ordering each other about. They are "joined together" in only two projects: producing an endless line of no-neck monsters (who lie in chorus) and securing as much of Daddy's money and land as possible for themselves. The "reverend" is clearly a vulture, hanging about in the hope of securing some prestigious "memorial windows" (p. 107) or an air-conditioning system for his church so that he can lie in comfort. Like Brick, interestingly, he longs to be "cool" -- detached, making his vocation a lie. When confronted directly he evades truth by laughing "falsely" (p. 54). In Act III, when the family begins to face reality together, he slips "discreetly" (p. 107) away, quietly intoning "God bless you all . . ." (p. 107). This cliché, of course, hides his real meaning -- settle it and send a cheque. The doctor, too, deals in illusion; he can't do anything with the truth -- cancer, except cover it over with morphine. (Interestingly, the truth-revealing injection in Suddenly Last Summer is a step forward for the profession in the Williams canon.) Gooper is a lawyer; he covers his envy and greed with a suitcase full of legal papers and jargon about a "preliminary outline" (p. 115) protecting "the biggest estate . . . from irresponsibility" (p. 116). Big Mama is not to be deceived again: "CRAP" (p. 116) is her Big Daddy-like response.

The play culminates in Maggie's lie that she is pregnant. In this deliberate mendacity we see Maggie's desperate survival tactics in operation. She tells the lie for social reasons: to comfort Big Daddy and Big Mama, to secure a large chunk of Daddy's estate for her and Brick, to strike back at the ballooning, vicious Mae, to assert her own prominence in the family network. But her lie is designed to make Brick face the reality of her and of her love for him. She is going to make him face her truth: "Skipper is dead! I'm alive!" (p. 45). It can be defended on the grounds that Maggie is playing in the "system" by its rules; yet in her relationship with Brick they will be "facing truth" together. She is asserting the primacy of individual personal relationship over social relationship. She is making the compromise and in so doing facing the truth about her marriage: Brick has to be given a motive for making love to her. Holding back his liquor is another "realistic" step; he is thereby given another "motive". Maggie plans for them to convert the illusion into reality -- "we're going to make the lie true" (p. 123); thus Williams emphasizes again the transforming power of love. As Blanche sang for us: "It wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 99).

The fact that Maggie's assertion is based on a biological naïveté is hardly relevant. It has also been argued that a man would not be convinced of his homosexuality because of one unsuccessful attempt to make love with his best friend's wife. Similarly some critics seem overly concerned about Brick's sexual orientation. Eric Bentley reports, "The play was heralded . . . as the play in which homosexuality was at last to be presented without evasion. But the miracle still hasn't happened."[17] Was he? or wasn't he? (homosexual). It surely does not

matter. The playwright is concerned not with "the literal presentation of reality" but with the truth of human relationship. He is also aware, on a "literal" level that we are all androgynous to some degree. We know that his love for Skipper was the most important thing in his life, that Skipper is dead, and that Brick is suffering from guilt and alienation. It seems clear to me that, here, as in all his plays, Williams uses sexual matters metaphorically: Brick's suggested homosexuality provides a metaphor for any "inadmissible thing" that separates people and perpetuates the system of mendacity we live in. Williams shows us dramatically in Act III that a family may be brought to face the truth about death together, but Brick's "truth" is never even suggested in Act III's social gathering; homosexuality remains "inadmissible", in this sense ridiculously "worse" than death. It seems to me that Williams is saying that there is something "sick" about a society that can view any kind of loving human relationship as even more frightening and unmentionable than death.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER THREE)

[1]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. 92. [All subsequent references to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof refer to this edition.]

[2]Tennessee Williams, "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow", in his Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 138.

[3]Thomas E. Porter, Myth and Modern American Drama (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 158.

[4]Henry Popkin, "Williams, Osborne, or Beckett?" in Morris Freedman, ed., Essays in the Modern Drama (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 289.

[5]Tennessee Williams, "Note of Explanation", in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 125.

[6]Tennessee Williams, "The Important Thing", in his One Arm (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 115.

[7]Tennessee Williams, Dragon Country, p. 138.

[8]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1965), p. 17.

[9]Alvin B. Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theatre: Chekhov, Pirandello, and Williams", Modern Drama, I, No. 2 (September, 1958), p. 113.

[10]Tennessee Williams, "Foreword" to "Sweet Bird of Youth", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 336.

[11]Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode", p. 113.

[12]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 55.

[13]Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night", used as the epigraph for Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

[14]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 145.

[15]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings, p. 36.

[16]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965), p. 258.

[17]Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A. 1668-1957 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 472.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

"It is simpler to think of Williams' work as a single unit."[1] As we progress to a study of mendacity in Suddenly Last Summer we notice the play's similarities in themes and character with A Streetcar Named Desire and with Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. As in A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, the plot "spine" in Suddenly Last Summer is the gradual revelation of a "truth" in the past -- the telling of a shocking "true story"[2] involving homosexual desire and guilt, and violent atonement of that guilt. The unseen homosexual figures whose truth is told in A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof both died violent deaths, atoning by self-destruction for their "incompletion".[3] Similarly, in Suddenly Last Summer Sebastian runs toward self-destruction instead of toward life. As in both the earlier plays a central character has been involved with the homosexual now dead; instead of rejecting him as did Blanche and Brick, however, thus being guilty of denying love, one central character in this play, Catharine, offered him love (despite knowing the "truth" about him) which he refused, and one character, Mrs. Venable, who should have rejected or "let go of" her forty-year-old son, did not reject him; he rejected her, thus revealing the truth of their relationship. In this play, the homosexual-rejector figures are merged into one.

The play centres, as Popkin says each Williams play does, on an attack, a shock which effects a violent interruption of a "hermetically sealed life of self-deception".[4] As in A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat

on a Hot Tin Roof, a central character, Mrs. Venable, clings to her own manufactured illusions to escape the "truth"; Mrs. Venable wants to evade at all costs the truth about her son and her part in that truth, while masochistically insisting on its being told before witnesses. Again the antagonist fights to strip the other central character of her illusions; Catharine, injected with truth serum, relentlessly reveals what happened in Cabeza de Lobo last summer despite the barely-repressed hysteria of Mrs. Venable. Her motive, however, is not destruction, as is Stanley's, nor reconstruction, as is Big Daddy's and Maggie's, but rather, self-preservation.

The implication, of course, is that the truth about life is too terrible to be told to "civilized people" (p. 46) unless one's own "civilization" is stripped away. Civilization becomes equated with what Dr. Sugar calls "resistance" (p. 67) to the truth. "Civilization" is thus but the acquisition of "sugar-coating" illusions which protect us from the truth, make us "fit in" to the "system of mendacity" that the Holly family (a distortion of the "Holy Family" which did know something about truth) inhabits so comfortably. (George can't understand why Catharine can't "forget that story" -- that is, the truth, "for . . . fifty grand". [p. 45]). Catharine, who was brought up and "came out" (p. 78) in the system, cannot tell the "absolutely true story" (p. 67) naturally; she has been too effectively conditioned to the system of mendacity. Paradoxically, the playwright in this play shows one of civilized society's institutions -- the medical profession -- serving not to perpetuate the system of mendacity, as it does in A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, but to undermine it: Dr. Sugar is working against the "system" by offering

to Catharine liberation from the sugar-coating of lies that allows us to hide from the truth.

Again the revelations of truth are precipitated by the introduction of an intruder, or visitor, into someone else's house. Blanche, Brick, Catharine are all visiting in the house of someone in their family. As Gordon Rogoff points out, everyone in a Williams drama is a "traveller";[5]

> even the context of the family can offer only the illusion of permanent refuge for Williams' "fugitive kind" who, as Cassandra says in Battle of Angels, "live on motion".[6]

Williams repeatedly uses the family as the social matrix for his plays, exposing this most intimate and seemingly stable of social structures as riddled with hatred, jealousy, greed, mendacity, and as always changing, threatening to disintegrate utterly -- a microcosm of the corrupt "Camino Real" we all live on.

The spectre of the institution as a de-humanized horror chamber ("St. Mary's" or "Lion's View", the latter more "advanced" because it allows chunks of brain tissue to be cut out) hangs over Catharine in this play as the mental hospital provides Blanche with refuge at the end of A Streetcar Named Desire and "Rainbow Hill" remains a possibility for Brick at the curtain of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The "home for the insane" -- that is, those given over totally to their illusions -- is "outside" in all three plays, but, in a peculiar sense, inside this play, as Williams again turns labels inside out. Mrs. Venable's home, after all, is a home for the insane -- for her; Catharine, the "psychotic"[7] mental patient, is sane, if, indeed, such legalistic labels have meaning at all in the Garden District jungle-world of the play.

The set in Suddenly Last Summer, as in all Williams' plays, provides

not a passive background for the action, but states metaphorically some truths about the characters and their world. Williams states that it is to be "unrealistic" (p. 13); once more he gives us "truth in the . . . disguise of illusion".[8] The "fantastic . . . jungle-garden" (p. 13) encroaches on the interior of the Venable mansion: its massive plants suggest the mutilation-consumption motif of the play: "massive tree-flowers . . . suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood" (p. 13); jungle noises are heard before Mrs. Venable enters. The savagery of the setting reveals the truth about Mrs. Venable; beneath her elegant "pink" and "lavender" (p. 14) surface is a voracious predatory animal, willing to cannibalize by psycho-surgery her own niece to preserve intact her projected illusions about her son and their life together. Unlike the Princess in Sweet Bird of Youth who realizes that using Chance has made her into "a monster"[9] who lives in "the country of the flesh-hungry",[10] Mrs. Venable, like Mme. Duvenet in "Auto-da-fé" who asserts smugly, "As for corruption, I've never allowed it to touch me",[11] is self-deluded and thus self-satisfied. Significantly the playwright directs that she wear "a starfish of diamonds" (p. 14). This ornament symbolizes the process of her "art" -- which is to "freeze" life into a glittering, expensive, artificial but beautiful image. She is trying to do the same with Sebastian's lost life -- to "capture" it in a beautiful image for other people to admire; its congruence with reality does not matter so long as it is beautiful. The starfish does not look "real". This process of etherialization is precisely Brick's tactic regarding his relationship with Skipper, and both Mrs. Venable and Brick fight against the intrusion of reality into their image.

James Hurt, writing in Modern Drama, reminds us that "above all the poet's responsibility is to tell the truth".[12] Williams himself tells us of the artist's relationship with his audience: "We come to each other gradually, but with love."[13] Violet and Sebastian's artistic process is thus a perversion of art. Sebastian did not want his yearly poems touched until his death lest he be "disturbed" by his audience (p. 17); Violet has no regard for the truth. Williams clearly sees their artistic process as, in fact, anti-art and anti-life. The true artist, says the Lawrence character in Williams' "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix", is "a man who loves life too intensely, a man who loves life till he hates her and has to strike out with his fist . . . I wanted to stretch out the long, sweet arms of my art and embrace the whole world!"[14] Sebastian rejected life, entombed his poetry, and shut his eyes to the world. (He counselled Catharine not to look at the beggars; it "spoils" the country [p. 80].)

Scene One of the play, another interrupted monologue, this time by Mrs. Venable (a fitting amalgam of "venerable" and "venal"), provides us with some insight into Mrs. Venable's past relationship with her son and her present relationship with the "icy" Dr. "Sugar" (p. 15). (Paradoxically, he does not "sugar-coat" the truth, but allows it to be told.) She draws his attention first to the "Venus flytrap" (p. 14). The plant is, of course, an objectification of Mrs. Venable. Named for the Love goddess, it eats insects; Mrs. Venable, in the name of love, consumes people; she "fed on" Sebastian, losing her vitality and becoming "an elderly lady" (p. 28) when he died, and plans to have the doctor cut out a chunk of her niece's brain to feed her own illusions. Ironically she is about to dispose of the plant because of the "effort" involved in obtaining insects; similarly,

her "victims" will not be so readily attainable as she imagines.

Mrs. Venable reveals her "truth" about her son -- the sort of man he was, but in her revelation of his character she reveals much of the truth about herself and their relationship. We shall have later, of course, Catharine's image of Sebastian superimposed on that of Mrs. Venable. Williams shows us here again that what is "true" depends on who is perceiving it; there are as many "truths" as there are people: "objective truth is itself an illusion."[15]

Mother and son were clearly inseparable until "suddenly,last summer" (p. 71). Mrs. Venable tells the doctor about Sebastian's occupation -- "his life" (p. 15). (Significantly, Sebastian's "art" is not "life", but "his life"; he does not try to connect with the world, but remains, like Brick, self-enclosed.) It is clear that his life was also her occupation, her art. Together they "left behind us a trail of days like a gallery of sculpture!" (p. 27). He could not write his annual poem without her (p. 18). Together, in a perversion of the life-creating process, they would "deliver" (p. 18) a dead poem, to be brought to life only upon the death of its creator. She claims that "everything was planned and designed in Sebastian's life" (p. 15); but later Catharine will say: "He thought it unfitting to ever take any action about anything whatsoever!" (p. 84). It is, in fact, Mrs. Venable who is the designer; she has a carefully constructed plan for enticing the doctor to perform a lobotomy on her niece; she keeps reports and even their translated transcripts neatly in labelled portfolios (p. 50); she insists on scheduling even her illusions: the daiquiri is served at precisely five o'clock each day -- the hour of Sebastian's death. "Poets are always clairvoyant!" (p. 17) she proclaims (There is a deadening

certainty about all her pronouncements), but it is she who in Scene Four claims this "poetic" attribute: "I told him . . . that I'd never see him again and I never did" (p. 58). Williams emphasizes their inseparability when Mrs. Venable lifts his volume of verse "as if elevating the Host before the altar" (p. 17). Her face has "the look of . . . an exalted religieuse" (p. 17). The "religieuse" is wedded to Christ; Mrs. Venable was "wedded" to her son. The "Host" is representative of the Body and Blood of Christ which the "religieuse" consumes in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The terrible truth is that Mrs. Venable "consumed" cannibalistically, as we shall see, the body and blood, the life, of her son.

Both Mrs. Venable and her son tried desperately to maintain the illusion that they could arrest time; to try to "stop" time is, again, anti-life and thus anti-art. Sebastian wrote his annual poem "on an eighteenth-century hand-press" (p. 17); he insisted on "young and beautiful people around him always" (p. 23); she insists that "Both of us were young, and stayed young, Doctor." (p. 23). To stay young is to die young. Proudly she shows the Doctor two pictures of Sebastian in "a Renaissance pageboy's costume" (p. 23) taken twenty years apart. The photograph has aged naturally. Unnaturally, Sebastian remains young, and the costume is carefully chosen never to show its age in a life-time. According to Mrs. Venable the illusion of youth is preserved by "discipline, abstention" (p. 24). But one cannot "abstain" from life and its time-dimension. To know, as Chance Wayne discovers in Sweet Bird of Youth, that the "monosyllable of the clock is Loss"[16] and that Time is "the enemy"[17] within us, is to face one of life's terrible truths. It is a truth Big Mama recognizes when she says, "Death commences too early -- almost before you're half-

acquainted with life -- you meet with the other" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 117). To deny the reality of death is to deny the reality of life and that is precisely Mrs. Venable's transgression. As she says: "We really didn't count birthdays. . . ."(p. 25). Sebastian's "birthday" didn't count; in fact his "umbilical cord" (p. 74) was not broken until "suddenly last summer" (p. 75).

The vision of God Sebastian had and shared with his mother reveals not so much the truth about the nature of God, but about the nature of Sebastian and his mother. According to Mrs. Venable "All poets look for God . . ." (p. 21). But genuine artists are not so likely as Sebastian to accept one illustration of nature's savagery -- the birds swooping to attack and eat the flesh of newly-hatched sea-turtles dashing for the sea -- as the definitive "clear image of Him" (p. 21). Again, D. H. Lawrence, in Williams' play, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix", whom Williams reveres as an artist ("his work is probably the greatest modern monument to the dark roots of creation", Williams tells us)[18] tells Frieda that "in looking for God so unsuccessfully myself, it seems that I have accidentally managed to create one for an anonymous spinster".[19] Only a man whose "eyes looked in" (p. 73), inseparable from a mother so devouring of his life, could accept so limited an image of "Him". Sebastian sees everything through the prism of his own incomplete, fragmented self. Clearly, in this case, man has created a God in his own image, according to his own experience of life and human relationship.

The unnatural tie between Mrs. Venable and her son is made clear when she reports refusing to leave him in order to attend her critically ill husband. Sebastian was about to submit his possessions to a mendicant

order of Buddhist monks; rather than permit this detachment from her, she "made the hardest decision" (p. 22) and stayed with her son. Strangely, despite his forty years, she is proud of his chastity, his denial of what Williams calls "the dark roots of creation". He was pursued, but always kept "ahead of pursuers" (p. 25). Ironically, Catharine will report his running toward the pursuers who offer not "Desire" and thus life, but its opposite -- death.

We are prepared for Catharine's entrance and her conflicting version of the "truth" about Sebastian and her relationship with him, by Mrs. Venable's attitude toward Catharine and the umbilical cord of money by which she hopes to create in Dr. Sugar a surrogate-son in her image -- as devouring as she and Sebastian have been. Mrs. Venable first claims that "She'll collapse!"; having made the slip, she quickly corrects herself: "I mean her lies will collapse -- not my truth -- not the truth. . . ." (p. 16). She slips again, first confining the truth to her individual possession and then "pluralizing" it. Her next accusation is even more revealing: Catharine is a "vandal" with a "hatchet" who is "smashing our legend" (p. 27). It is the illusion of "Violet and Sebastian", the work of art, that Catharine is threatening with her truth. She sees other people only in relationship to her, just as she saw her son; she is unable to recognize the "otherness" of other people. Thus to Catharine she attaches her own motives. It is not Catharine who demands her "blood" (p. 28); it is she who is willing to make "a sacrificial victim" (p. 28) of Catharine -- to sacrifice human life for the preservation of a "legend", an illusion. Mrs. Venable represents, indeed, a perversion of the artist who "loves life too intensely" and "embraces the whole world".

When "Dr. Sugar" discusses honestly the risks and limitations of lobotomy he admits that the person may be "limited" (p. 30) always, if "peaceful". Mrs. Venable's retort reveals that she recognizes Catharine's story is the truth, not lies. "After all that horror, after those nightmares: just to be able to lift up their eyes and see -- a sky not as black with savage, devouring birds . . ." (p. 31). But she has accepted Sebastian's "black" sky as "a clear image" (p. 21) of God, not as nightmare, but as reality. A clear sky would thus be a false, limited image, a lie. Thus she is not trying to cut out lies from Catharine's brain, but the truth. By bribing Dr. Sugar with money from the "Sebastian Venable Memorial Foundation" (p. 31) to perform psycho-surgery on Catharine she is trying to play God by creating another Sebastian in her image -- to make him into a man who, to satisfy his own ends ("I need trained assistants, I'd like to marry a girl I can't afford to marry!" [p. 29]) would devour another human being's life, just as Sebastian devoured people as "items on a menu" (p. 40).

In Scene Two of the play the "psychotic" girl, Catharine, is introduced. Ironically, Signi Falk has referred to this mental patient as one of the few "normal" people in Williams' plays.[20] It is clear that she is perfectly "sane" by conventional standards -- that is, in touch with her surroundings -- "We're not at Saint Mary's, this is an afternoon out" (p. 36), able to discourse rationally -- "I did not start a fire. I just burned a hole in my skirt because I was half unconscious under medication" (p. 36), responsive to her environment -- "There goes the Waring Mixer, Aunt Violet's about to have her five o'clock daiquiri" (p. 38), and undeluded about the significance of

"LION'S VIEW" (p. 39). She is obviously too "sane" to be let loose in the crazed world of either the conventional bourgeois Hollys or the sugar-coated "jungle" of the Venable mansion. Williams is turning the labels inside out again. Her reactions are too direct -- she deliberately thrusts her lighted cigarette into the Sister's hand -- and her "babbling" (p. 31) too close to truth, to be tolerated by her "civilized" family and the society they mirror; instead, a professional, uniformed "Sister" is assigned to take care of her. This sister, Williams shows us, despite her affiliation with "St. Mary's" and thus with the "Holy Family", is as ill-equipped to bear the truth as the Holly Family, and, indeed as Williams' other clerical figures, like the "Rev." in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. When Catharine confronts her with even a fragment of truth she responds with: "Catharine, dear -- be still." (p. 39). The Church is just another part of the system of mendacity; even the appellation, "Sister", is a lie, compounded by her given name, "Felicity".

In this scene we see Catharine, I think, as a "life" character, like Maggie and Big Daddy, offering Sebastian her "hand" to "hold" (p. 40) as opposed to Mrs. Venable, who strangled him with her "umbilical cord" of "pearls" (p. 74). But Sebastian, having been taught to consume people -- "He was famished for blonds, he was fed up with the dark ones" (p. 40) -- by his mother-devourer, Mrs. Venable, runs away from life, to its opposite: "I tried to hold onto his hand but he struck me away and ran, ran, ran in the wrong direction, Sister!" (p. 39). The truth about the relationship between Sebastian and his mother is becoming progressively clearer: she did not give him life when he was

"born in this house" (p. 70) but death, because she did not let him go. Unlike the sea-turtles which the mother releases to make their "race to the sea" (p. 20), for life, and then never sees them again, Mrs. Venable never let go of Sebastian: "We had an agreement between us, a sort of contract or convenant . . . which he broke last summer when he broke away from me . . ." (p. 73). When he broke away, at such an unnaturally advanced age, he did not run down the street towards the sea and life, but up the hill towards the devouring mouths and death. Mrs. Venable, deluded into believing she "held him back" from destruction (p. 74), in fact held him back from life. When he was finally released, to complete the "image! -- he had of himself as a sort of! -- sacrifice to a! terrible sort of a --" (p. 62) he ran towards the reality he recognized. He had been sacrificed to his mother's ego; she had taught him by example that other people were "items" on a fly-trap "menu"; he in turn had "used" her (p. 61) and Catharine to help feed his own inverted desire. The recognizable reality was the devouring mouths.

Scene Three is a diversion from the gradual disclosure of the "true story", the central truth of the play, and it is a pale prefiguring of the climactic revelations of Scene Four, as Catharine here demonstrates her "mad" propensity to dispel illusions and to tell the truth. Williams exposes in this scene the conventional lies by which we live in our miniature society, the family. Mrs. Holly, thoroughly submerged and de-humanized by a web of mendacity too well-established to be penetrable, is the cliché voice of polite suburbia: she embraces Catharine without warmth and comments on how "fine" she looks (p. 41). Catharine, direct, pierces that illusion: "They send you to the beauty

parlour whenever you're going to have a family visit. Other times you look awful . . ." (p. 41). Later Mrs. Holly refers to St. Mary's as a "sweet, sweet place" (p. 53). Catharine again shatters the illusion: "No place for lunatics is a sweet, sweet place." (p. 53). Maintaining a mendacity of silence Mrs. Holly is pleased that "not a soul" (p. 44) knows anything of Catharine's truth. Believing in the illusions of status and reputation she is so immured to truth that she automatically labels it as illusion: "that . . . fantastic story" (p. 44) that must not be repeated, a "nightmare" (p. 45). Anything painful or not "decent" (p. 45) must not be talked about; not articulating it is a magic formula (how the lady is addicted to illusions!) for cancelling its validity.

Interestingly, this seemingly innocuous character, the "average mother", Mrs. Holly, is a woman as dangerous in her way, as child-devouring as Mrs. Venable. Again Williams insists that we look for truth beneath the facile labels which tell conventional lies. She is one of those people described by Williams in discussing Orpheus Descending, who accept "the prescribed answers that are not answers at all", as opposed to the "fugitive kind" who continue to ask "the unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people".[21] Mrs. Holly's approval is needed for Mrs. Venable's "answer" to Catharine's "babbling" (p. 31), the lobotomy, an approval expected since she is financially dependent on Mrs. Venable. Thus she would feed her own child to the voracious "Venus fly-trap". She wants to stop Catharine's "babbling" (p. 31) for her own ends as much as does Mrs. Venable, a point made clear in Scene Three; she has no concern whatever with what the truth is,

only with "WHAT SEBASTIAN HAS LEFT US IN HIS WILL, DEAREST!" (p. 48). The only truth she recognizes is money. To disregard a person's truth is to disregard the person; if "being friends is telling each other the truth" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 94) then "mother" Holly is less than a friend to her daughter. According to Martin Esslin, violence consists in depriving a person of his autonomy as a human being and of his freedom of choice.[22] Since this deprivation is precisely her aim, she intends violence towards her own daughter.

Similarly the mendacity of "brotherly love" between siblings is exposed in Scene Three. George has assimilated his mother's value system based on money as the primary value. But he is less mendacious in that he refuses to bother with even the pretense of concern for Catharine. He calls her a "BITCH" (p. 47) and is bluntly selfish: "I got ambitions! . . . I want things, I need them . . . So will you please think about ME?" (p. 47). Dressed in Sebastian's clothes, he is as guilty as Sebastian of self-enclosure and of people-consumption, although of a less spectacular, collegiate version. Both sons are mirrors of their mother; the mothers are two versions of predators -- one exotic, rare and colourful -- Mrs. Venable, Queen of her Garden District jungle, and one common, bland, garden-variety -- Mrs. Holly, a paler and poorer in-law, but, nevertheless, of the same family. Both belong to what the prophetic Old Man in Williams' "The Strangest Kind of Romance" calls a "race of gluttons".[23]

Catharine is the misfit, the outsider within the family. She is distinguished by her insistence on the truth. Telling the truth to one's family exposes one to the danger of lobotomy. Once lobotomized,

one becomes acceptable to one's family -- "limited" but "peaceful", Dr. Sugar explains (p. 30). Williams is making the horrifying observation that the "acceptable" members of a "nice" family are the equivalent of lobotomized zombies, the possibility of ever being fully human very remote (p. 30). To remain whole is to remain agitated and truthful, therefore unacceptable to a society that demands tranquillity, lack of disturbance, the smooth running of its mendacity. In Camino Real, Jacques Casanova explains to Kilroy his unfitness and that of all Williams' outsiders for the world of the Camino: "You have a spark of anarchy in your spirit and that's not to be tolerated. Nothing wild or honest is tolerated here!"[24] Suddenly Last Summer's jungle-world is just another version of the Camino Real.

In Scene Four the play moves in its terrifying "accelerando"[25] towards its climax. Mrs. Venable, at the opening, suggests its essential cross-currents. As she demands her "frozen daiquiri" (p. 49) at the hour of Sebastian's death, she asks if the others would like coffee (p. 49). In this scene Mrs. Venable will cling to her illusions about her son's death, a process symbolized by her habitual daiquiri (Blanche and Brick were similarly addicted to bottled illusion) while in fact she is offering the others a stimulant -- an awakening to the truth -- by insisting on having Catharine tell her story.

If the artist is an "outsider" in our society, one who tells the truth, "loves life too intensely", and reaches out with the love to the "whole world", then Catharine is established in Scene Four as Williams' artist figure in this play, as opposed to the non-artist, Sebastian, and his mother. Crashing through the social masks at "a Mardi Gras ball"

(p. 63) she reports to Dr. Sugar, she accompanied a married man to "the Duelling Oaks". There she gave him love "as if somebody was calling . . . for help" (p. 63). The hypocrisy of marriage is Williams' target again, as the faithless husband, Gooper-like, rebounded to cling to his conventional "lie": "We'd better forget it . . . my wife's expecting a child . . ." (p. 64). Catharine on that occasion, without the aid of truth serum, was able to tell the truth in the face of society's conventional liars: "I rushed right into the ballroom, yes, I didn't stop . . . and ran up to him and beat him as hard as I could in the face" (p. 64). This truth-telling incident resulted, not only in the man's rejection, but in society's rejection: "everybody dropped her" (p. 57). For Catharine, rejection was like a "dying" (p. 64); she became an outsider and gained the kind of "exterior view" which Weales says characterizes Williams' artists and madmen.[26] "Suddenly last winter I began to write my journal in the third person." (p. 63). It is interesting to note the contrast here between Catharine's art and Sebastian's non-art. Rejected, Catharine began to write; having rejected others (his mother and Catharine) Sebastian wrote nothing: "Blank pages, blank pages, nothing but nothing!" (p. 72). Ironically, the blank pages of "nothing" were the truest expression of "his life" which was his "art" (p. 16).

As the truth serum takes effect, Catharine begins the story of her relationship with Sebastian, a reconstruction that illuminates in a final horrifying glare, the truth of the relationship between Violet and Sebastian. Having broken the "cord" binding him to mother, Sebastian "suddenly, last summer . . . wasn't young" (p. 74). We recall

Mrs. Venable's similar transformation to "an elderly lady"; the mutual destructiveness of her unnaturally prolonged hold on Sebastian is clear. Trying to "use" the "motherly" (p. 62) Catharine as he had "used" Violet -- the Venable definition of love (p. 61) -- Sebastian devoted his life to death: in the water, symbolic of life, he "baptized" Catharine so that she would attract the "hungry children" (p. 78), his eventual devourers. Similarly Mrs. Venable is "devoting all that's left of my life . . . to the defense of a dead poet's reputation" (p. 16). He learned to embrace death from his mother.

Sebastian's martyrdom is a terrible realization of his world-view, the distorted version of truth which he had learned from Violet, a mirror-reflection of which he saw in the image of the newly-hatched sea-turtles. Thus in his death he was living his truth. Severing his bond with his mother, a bond in itself unnatural because it was mutually parasitic -- they "fed off" each other -- he was free, like the turtles, to run for the "sea", life. (Williams uses the sea repeatedly as symbolic of life. Nonno in Night of the Iguana asks, "Which way is the sea . . . It's the cradle of life. Life began in the sea."[27] Christopher in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore explains: "Here's where the whole show started, it's the oldest sea in the Western world."[28]) Life was attainable in the form of Catharine: "He liked me and so I loved him." (p. 62). "If he'd kept hold of my hand I could have saved him!" (p. 40). But Sebastian had not learned to love or accept love but to use or be used: Mrs. Venable states proudly that "I was . . . the only one in his life that satisfied the demands he made of people" (p. 26). Conversely she "fed off" his life, remaining youthful until he left her. Except as menu "items" he

shut himself off from people, preferring to swim in water uncontaminated by others (p. 75). Already dying at "birth" -- that is, "popping little white pills in his mouth" (p. 79) the first summer separated from his mother, when pursued by the ravenous children, a "flock of black plucked little birds" (p. 86) like those that swooped on the baby sea-turtles, he ran not toward Catharine, the sea, and life, but toward the mouths, the hill, and death. He was living the truth that he had learned from Violet; murder and cannibalism were accepted natural processes he lived with in a house containing a well-fed Violet and a Venus fly-trap. By sacrificing himself to the God he recognized he was atoning for his part in that God's brutal scheme and was accepting the implications of a dark perversion of the "Golden Rule".

> The nature of man is full of such makeshift arrangements, devised by himself to cover his incompletion. He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall or a room left unfurnished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it. The use of imagination, resorting to dreams or the loftier purpose of art, is a mask he devises to cover his incompletion. Or violence . . . Then there is still another compensation. This one is found in the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt.[29]

It is clear that Violet and Sebastian, to "cover" their "incompletion" resorted to "imagination" -- imagining that they could stop time, defy the laws of nature, and control the naturalistic jungle world by cultivating it in the Garden District hothouse. The Venable version of "art", the joint production of a yearly poem, was another attempt to build a fourth wall. Both resorted to violence -- the use of other people whom they "consumed" cannibalistically to feed their own egos, to complete themselves. But Sebastian dismissed the "Violet and Sebastian" dream of staying young

and indestructible forever when he faced the "fact" that his elderly mother had suffered a disfiguring stroke. He stopped writing, thus dismissing art as a "completing" mechanism. Violence and atonement remained. He tried to use Catharine as bait for his own satisfaction, an act of violence, and finally submitted himself, in an act of purification, to that same violence. Williams is saying, I think, that we will strive for completion; if illusion and art are "blocked" then violence or atonement or both will ensue. (When the doctor at A Streetcar Named Desire's end acted like a gentleman caller, thus serving Blanche's "Southern Belle" illusions, a strait-jacket was no longer needed.)

At the play's end, robbed of illusion, Mrs. Venable lunges with her cane and screams for violence: "cut this hideous story out of her brain!" (p. 88). Strangely, she has insisted on Catharine's telling it. Is not this insistence a form of atonement? She is willfully submitting herself to the pain of having her illusions publicly demolished, and thus possibly condemning herself to the death treatment at "Lion's View"; significantly the doctor from that institution leads her offstage and he is ready to "consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true" (p. 88). If Catharine is declared "sane" the now-hysterical Mrs. Venable must be assumed insane; Dr. Sugar knows the method to make her "peaceful" (p. 30).

While Williams has infinite compassion for those who cling to "glass menagerie" illusions to make the jungle-world "Dragon Country" existence bearable, his ethic demands that we do not cannibalize one another in order to preserve those illusions. Jungle behaviour to preserve the "menagerie" is not admissible. As we have seen, Mrs. Venable and her

son are by no means the sole predators; the Holly Family, trying to preserve the illusion of a "nice" family whose son "received bids from every good fraternity" (p. 51) and whose daughter was away on a glamorous trip abroad with her wealthy cousin, is equally blood-thirsty. Truth must be told at last and we must listen and endure it, no matter how "unendurable" the pain, because it is one's only hope for becoming "a -- totally sound person" (p. 30); denying it, or in the terms of the play, "cutting it out" by lobotomy, sentences us to a life as "limited" beings. At the end of the play, the truth has been told and listened to; Mrs. Venable's cry to "cut this hideous story out" reveals, in itself, a desperate illusion: to "cut out" the truth now that it has been transmitted would necessitate lobotomy for the entire family and even for Dr. Sugar, who, not being a Venable, is no self-devourer. Meaningful human relationships are based on shared truth; according to Ibsen,who was as preoccupied with social hypocrisy as Williams,enlightenment provides "the basis for a whole new way of life. . . . a union based on confidence and truth --".[30] Perhaps the Holly Family will now become genuinely loving. There are signs that a "new existence" is possible: George even offers to go to work.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER FOUR)

[1]Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since World War II (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 21.

[2]Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 70.
[All subsequent references to Suddenly Last Summer refer to this edition.]

[3]Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in his One Arm (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 85.

[4]Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, IV, No. 3 (March, 1960), p. 55.

[5]Gordon Rogoff, "The Restless Intelligence of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, X, No. 4 (Summer, 1966), p. 88.

[6]Tennessee Williams, "Battle of Angels", in his Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 213.

[7]Tom F. Driver, "Accelerando", The Christian Century, LXXV, No. 5 (January 29, 1958), p. 136.

[8]Tennessee Williams, "The Glass Menagerie", in Six Great Modern Plays (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 438.

[9]Tennessee Williams, "Sweet Bird of Youth", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 425.

[10]Williams, "Sweet Bird of Youth" in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams, p. 426.

[11]Tennessee Williams, "Auto-da-fé", in his 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 109.

[12]James R. Hurt, "Suddenly Last Summer: Williams and Melville", Modern Drama, III, No. 4 (February, 1961), p. 399.

[13]Tennessee Williams, "Person-to-Person", in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. ix.

[14]Tennessee Williams, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix", in his Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 74.

[15]Alvin B. Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theatre: Chekhov, Pirandello, and Williams", Modern Drama, I, No. 2 (September, 1958), p. 100.

[16]Tennessee Williams, "Introduction: On a Streetcar Named Success", in his A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: The New American Library, 1947), p. 10.

[17]Tennessee Williams, "Sweet Bird of Youth", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams, p. 452.

[18]Tennessee Williams, "Author's Note" to "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix", in Dragon Country, p. 56.

[19]Williams, "I Rise in Flame", in Dragon Country, p. 62.

[20]Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 148.

[21]Donald P. Costello, "Tennessee Williams' Fugitive Kind", Modern Drama, XV, No. 1 (May, 1972), p. 24.

[22]Martin Esslin, "Violence in the Modern Drama", in his Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), p. 177.

[23]Tennessee Williams, "The Strangest Kind of Romance", in 27 Wagons, p. 151.

[24]Tennessee Williams, "Camino Real", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams, p. 225.

[25]Tom F. Driver, "Accelerando", The Christian Century, LXXV, No. 5 (January 29, 1958).

[26]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1965), p. 17.

[27]Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: The New American Library, 1961), pp. 32-33.

[28]Tennessee Williams, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 94.

[29]Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur", in One Arm, p. 85.

[30]Henrik Ibsen, "The Wild Duck", in The Wild Duck and Other Plays by Henrik Ibsen, trans. Eva Le Gallienne (New York: The Modern Library, 1961), p. 177.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS

Small Craft Warnings is an expansion of an earlier one-act play, "Confessional". In a confessional one is obliged to tell the truth, insofar as one is able, to the confessor-priest, with the explicit understanding that the "father" is pledged to confidence. In Small Craft Warnings as in the earlier play, Tennessee Williams isolates each character with a spotlight (in "Confessional" the characters move downstage into the "box" of the confessional) as each delivers his "aria"[1] telling his own immediate "truth" as he knows and understands it. Significantly the bar in which the play is set is called "Monk's Place" and Monk, the owner, who also lives there, is the surrogate father-confessor to whom his regular customers reveal "the stories, the jokes, the confidences and confessions".[2] But Williams has Monk himself tell his "confession" to the audience and all the long arias are delivered with the rest of the stage in darkness, indicating that they are spoken directly to the audience, as a Shakespearean soliloquy, not to be heard by the other characters. Thus the technique is of a "confessional" -- Monk's Place -- within a larger "confessional" -- the theatre. The theatre-as-confessional metaphor bespeaks Williams' two-fold conviction: the theatre is a place where the truth must be told -- "writing is a confessional"[3] and the playwright "levels with"[4] his audience -- and that good theatre is a form of religion.[5]

Ironically, Williams makes the point that even in the

"confessional" of Monk's Place mendacity is in operation: lies are told, people deceive themselves and others, and deliberately withold the truth. Indeed, the characters go to Monk's Place to drink -- to purchase bottled illusion. Thus the "confessional" deals in illusion, false solace. The "confessional" of the theatre is purer, untainted, because when the characters abstract themselves from the world of the play and address themselves to the audience, there is no motive beyond the telling of truth. Only Leona, whom Williams calls "a fully integrated woman . . . the first really whole woman I have ever created and my first wholly triumphant character",[6] descendent of Maggie the Cat and Catharine, and of the earlier landlady in "The Mattress by the Tomato Patch", insists on telling the truth within the play's matrix of relationships. Significantly, she is the only "small craft" that has sailed and is thoroughly committed to action, constantly moving on in her "home on wheels" (p. 55). Again Williams seems to be equating the strength to face and to tell the truth with the strength to face life and to "sail" in it; no victim of Brick's "moral paralysis", Leona has always said "'Life!' to life." (p. 55). Like Maggie, her hat is "still in the ring" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 25). Perhaps with this metaphor in mind Williams has her characteristic gesture one of slapping at things with her hat for emphasis: "On her head of dyed corkscrew curls is a sailor's hat which she occasionally whips off her head to slap something with -- the bar, a tabletop, somebody's back -- to emphasize a point." (p. 16).

Again, one sees similarities with the earlier plays. The revelation of truth is the "spine" of this play as it was of A Streetcar

Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and Suddenly Last Summer. But in all those plays, it seems to me, something vital "happened"; a present tension was superimposed on the revealed past. A sort of "double-level" suspense was in operation: what is the "truth" about Blanche? And what will happen to her now? What is Brick's "truth"? And can Maggie win him back to life? What really happened at Cabeza de Lobo last summer? And what will happen to Catharine now? Although none of these tensions is definitively resolved, some tentative resolution is offered: Blanche is led off to the asylum on the arm of her doctor; Brick goes to bed with Maggie; the doctor seems to believe Catharine. A man and a woman make some tentative contact; in each case, interestingly, the man achieves, if momentarily, what Williams calls "self-transcendence".[7] Dramatically women are the controlling figures, bending men to their vision of truth: the doctor plays Shep to Blanche the Southern Belle; Brick becomes an accomplice to Maggie's desperate life-lie: the doctor puts aside self-interest to consider the truth of Catharine's story. Similarly, Monk gives in to Violet's need for refuge, but no suspense has built up to the familiar Williams "exit-to-the-big-double-bed"[8] because neither character has experienced an enlightenment or a disenchantment. Their personal version of truth has remained constant.

Thus the play is strangely static. With the exception of Leona, the characters are all what Henry Hewes calls "tiny abandoned vessels",[9] seeking refuge from the storm on life's sea in Monk's Place. They seek no intrusion of truth into their squalid but familiar lives. Their shared attitude seems to be one of resignation, yet they lack

the "charm of the defeated" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 24). As Leona points out, they have "never, ever sailed" (p. 25) -- never engaged in life and therefore cannot be considered even "defeated". The only conflict in the play is provided by Leona's insistence that people face the truth about themselves; repeatedly her active probing comes up against their passivity; no one really listens to Leona; she's "on a . . . mean drunk" (p. 39). Contrary to the dramatic development in each of the other plays discussed, the characters' personal truth, as revealed in the "arias" in this play, provides no background for present or possible future enlightened action; as in a confessional the truth is told only to absolve one of its consequences; it is delivered in "chunks" to be erased upon utterance -- washed away by an alcoholic absolution. There is no suggestion that anyone's life is changed because of its recognition or, indeed, that the truth itself is dynamic and changing.

There is no mystery in the play, no dramatic unveiling of truth as there is in each of the other plays; one is not aware from the beginning of "something unspoken" which the drama will relentlessly bring to light and articulate. Again the metaphor of the confessional is illuminating. What is told, in each aria, is that character's personal version of truth about himself and his life. Necessarily, because the truth is revealed in isolation from other characters, it does not cross the barrier from one life into another, so that the lives become "confluent".[10] (Leona's attempt to crash through barriers is constantly frustrated.) It is presented formally, as a "set piece", not in dialogue, and thus, for Williams, is strangely unorganic, (he

uses the word "organic" in explaining his own criteria for good playwriting[11]) lifeless, untheatrical, because it has no power to bring about change, no power to surprise. Quentin's attitude toward life seems to be that of all of the characters, excepting Leona, toward the truth they know: "Oh, well." (p. 45).

Quentin, the homosexual character in this play, reminds one again of the homosexual figure in each of the three earlier plays. The playwright is no longer being indirect, allusive about homosexuality; he brings the truth about it centre-stage. Ironically, each of the others is dead antecedent to the action of the play; but their "truth" is a vital element in each play. Alan, Skipper, and Sebastian each died a violent death, leaving others tortured by the terrible lack of love his death illuminated. Quentin is alive, but strangely dead. He tells us, "There's a coarseness, a deadening coarseness, in the experience of most homosexuals. . . . once, quite a long while ago, I was often startled by the sense of being alive, of being myself, living! . . ." (p. 47). But Quentin no longer feels alive. He is as immured to feeling and curiosity as a "stupid stone paralyzed sphinx that knows no answers" (p. 47). More importantly, Quentin, unlike Williams' tortured searchers, no longer asks the questions. Williams manifests his deadness by having him mirror conventional society's attitudes toward the homosexual. Ironically he rejects the boy because he is "gay" (p. 43); homosexual Quentin prefers, like conventional middle-class America, "straight trade" (p. 43).

The dead homosexual figure, of course, is present in this play as well. The playwright's use of the figure, however, is significantly

changed from the earlier plays. Leona looks back on her homosexual brother as the "one beautiful thing" (p. 34) in her life. She accepted the truth about him, loved him, and believed him "too beautiful to live" (p. 34). Her idealization of the boy is in direct opposition to Blanche's and Brick's rejection of Alan and Skipper respectively. There is no suggestion that, like Sebastian, he cut himself off from the world; like the true artist of "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix" he "stretched out the arms" of his art to embrace the world: he played and sang "like an angel" (p. 33) and he "had that gift of making people's emotions uplifted" (p. 33). With him she was able to have Ibsen's "union based on confidence and truth --".[12] It is no wonder that Tennessee Williams considers her a "fully integrated" human being. To be able to accept with love and understanding a truth which in the eyes of the conventional bourgeoisie is an "inadmissible thing" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 85), in this play represented again by homosexuality, is the test of one's humanity.

Similarly Violet and Bill are variations on familiar Williams characters. Violet is the Blanche-like drifter-with-suitcase in the play, reportedly Williams' favourite character in Small Craft Warnings.[13] A "water plant" (p. 70), she drifts about from one "temporary arrangement" (p. 69) to the next. She cannot be made to "come out of the fog" (p. 70); the truth cannot break through her web of self-deception. Chased by Leona, who wields the truth with a heavy hand, she seeks refuge by hiding in the "ladies' room" (p. 23), by drinking "whatever is put in the reach of your paws" (p. 29), by groping at men beneath tables (p. 18; p. 52; p. 70) and by eating "Whoppers" (outsize hot-dogs) (p. 35) brought to her by her current male companion. (Is Williams

here making a too-obvious Freudian connection?) Bill is a Stanley-Brick-Chance Wayne (in Sweet Bird of Youth) "stud", fading, but still in business. Like the others of his breed he exposes another lie: none of Williams' "great lovers" is able really to love, -- that is, to transcend self and feel deeply for another human being. Bill's deserted trailer-mate, Leona, is, ironically, the play's only lover.

In her first entrance into the play, poised between "realist" Bill and "dreamer" Violet, Leona is a stronger, modified Blanche. She adorns her life with "pitiful fiction";[14] her occupation -- "beautician" (p. 34) -- is a metaphor for the way she deals with life. She does not hesitate to look in the face of its "homeliness" (p. 34) and articulate the truth as she sees it, but, at the same time, she works to ornament it, thus touching people's lives with some transitory beauty and solace. She is the play's artist-figure. To the earthbound Bill, her "memorial dinner" is "Stew and veg." (p. 16). To Leona it is "[lyrically, as a pop-poem]: Lamb stew with garden fresh vegetables from the Farmer's Market, seasoned with bay leaves, and rosemary and thyme." (p. 16). Like Blanche she insists on life's little refinements that gloss over its ugliness and evoke a lost world of beauty and meaning: she had set the table with "my grandmother's silver and Irish lace tablecloth, my crystal candlesticks with the vine leaves filigreed on 'em in silver which I'd polished" (p. 16). Like Stanley, concerned about liquor levels, Bill disallows her her fictions; he confronts her with the unadorned "facts": "I went out for a bottle. You'd kilt a fifth of Imp." (p. 17). Selectively fastidious, as is the constantly-bathing Blanche, she objects to Violet's dirty fingernails (p. 17);

significantly, Violet, lost in an illusory world, cannot see beyond the flaw in the illusion to the ugly reality beneath: "the enamel's chipping" (p. 17), she says. When Violet tells Leona she's "not depressed" (p. 17) Leona's laughing retort provides the key to Violet's dream-like existence: "Then you must not be conscious." (p. 17). Violet is not conscious, not fully human; as even Doc notices, she is "more like a possibility than a completed creature" (p. 12).

Despite her own little fictions, her lapses from the jungle into the "menagerie" world of illusion, Leona proceeds to whip through the play like a whirlwind, ripping away veils of illusion to expose truths to which all the other characters seem impervious. Her "scene" with Bill and Violet provides the first conflict of the play, as Leona's perception of truth pierces through deception. She sees the real situation through the innocent-seeming sharing of a table: Violet is groping for Bill under the table and Bill is encouraging her. Strangely, Violet is capable of deception while incapable of recognizing truth. Although "not conscious", she is enough in touch with reality to be vaguely aware of Leona's tolerance levels. Williams is making the point that we have been so effectively conditioned to lie -- to cover over the truth -- that even when one has no firm grasp of truth, he is able to subvert it -- that is, to function, if imperfectly, within the "system" of "mendacity".

Enraged, Leona attacks the euphemism to cover all varieties of females -- "Ladies". The label on the washroom door is one of life's lies, she screams. Violet, who "lives like an animal in a room with no bath" (p. 20) over the amusement arcade, herself occasionally

providing the amusement for its habitués, is, according to Leona, no "lady". A lady has "respect for herself and for relations of others" (p. 20), and Violet has neither. Like Blanche, who is "Out-of-Bounds" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 100) for soldiers, Violet seeks diversion with "a shipload of drunk sailor boys" (p. 21). She is hiding behind a door marked "Ladies" but doesn't belong there; she's a "parasite" (p. 21), a "dog" (p. 21). Leona threatens to break down the labelled door and drag "the filthy bitch" (p. 22) out to face the reality beyond the label. It is worth noting that Leona's vision is conventionalized by jealous rage. Like the "good woman" of "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" she pulls out conventional labels to rationalize her own anger. But, unlike the "good woman", Leona's self-centredness can be transcended by an alternate view of truth, as we shall see.

Interspersed with her verbal attacks on Violet are her thrusts at Bill and the newly-arrived Steve. She reminds Bill of the inevitable waning of his only asset -- "How long does he figure Junior is going to continue to provide for him, huh? . . . Forever or less than forever?" (p. 21) -- and of his stealing her money. Steve must have "fog" in his head (p. 25) to be so unaware of reality; his passivity, she suggests, results from an incomplete anatomy.

But, interestingly, Leona's rage changes direction when Steve rejects Violet. ("I'm not married to Violet, I never was or will be." [p. 25].) He is withdrawing his compassion from a fellow sufferer in "Dragon Country" -- the transgression of Blanche, Stanley, and Brick, and we hear Williams' ultimate ethic, which is to sympathize, expressed by Leona:

> No responsibility? No affection: No pity? You stand there hearing her wailing in the ladies' and deny there's any connection between you? Well, now I feel sorry for her. . . . Let her out . . . I'll never hit her again. I feel too much pity for her . . . (p. 25).

The truth of Violet's pathetic loneliness supersedes all other truths for Leona: she puts aside her own grievances, achieving a Williamsian moment of self-transcendence. This change of response in Leona is surely to be seen as a model to emulate; preoccupied by her own hurt, Leona withdrew her compassionate support from Violet and vented on her a conventional moral indignation: Violet was not a "lady". But when she sees the truth of Violet's loneliness she withdraws her rage and pities her. To Stanley Stella can only protest after the fact: "You needn't have been so cruel to someone alone as she is." (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 111). Leona does precisely what Stanley is unable to do: She disregards the "facts" in the face of the larger truth of human need, and extends her compassion.

The first two confessing "arias" of the play are given to Bill and Steve, as though Williams wanted us to test the truth of Leona's evaluation of them against their own self-revelation. Both "confessions" reveal a practised and thoroughly calculated mendacity; both pretend to a feeling they do not have. Bill wonders how best to use "Junior" in the present situation, now that a "piss elegant" (p. 28) homosexual is available for exploitation. A "pro" at the game of deception, he'll pretend to be receptive and then "scare him a little" (p. 28) to extort money from him. Steve's relationship with Violet is revealed as similarly exploitative. Violet he considers one of the world's

"Goddam scraps" (p. 28), a "pitiful scrap" (p. 28) (although he feels no pity), who is as a "bone" to a "dog" (him) -- that is, to be used, gnawed on, then discarded.

Interestingly, Leona has referred to Violet as a "parasite". Steve provides Violet with "Whoppers"; thus their relationship is mutually parasitic. The images of "feeding off" one another suggest the cannibalism of the Venable jungle-world. The world-as-jungle is a continuing Williams metaphor, expressing the truth about our life. Blanche is the "dinosaur" who hears "inhuman jungle voices" (p. 129) as Stanley the "ape" (p. 72) moves in for the kill. The Pollitt's bedroom in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof "sounds like a great aviary of chattering birds" (p. 49), and Big Mama enters "like a charging rhino" (p. 49), while Gooper produces a line of "monkeys" (p. 81). Williams is quoted as saying "There is a horror in things, a horror at the heart of the meaninglessness of existence . . . if heaven is a fantasy, we are in this jungle with whatever we can work out for ourselves."[15] In this play Monk suggests to Quentin that the "Jungle Bar" (p. 27) is the proper place for him; Doc is heading for "Treasure Island" -- wild treacherous country, inimical to human intruders; and Leona, "an angry big cat" (p. 36), has "a jungle-look in her eyes" (p. 57).

Doc provides an easy target for Leona's illusion-destroying process. When Monk comments that he has a good practice "for a man in retirement" (p. 31) Leona pounces on the lie and shatters it: "Retirement, your ass, he was kicked out of the medical profession for performing operations when he was so loaded he couldn't tell the appendix from the gizzard." (p. 31). Then she "kicks out" Bill and

shatters his illusion of being every lady's wish-fulfilment: "You never satisfied nothing but my mother complex." (p. 32).

It seems to me that here Leona's self-insight is as accurate as her perceptions about other people. A protective compassion is the key to all her relationships with men. Since her brother's death all the "studs", of whom Bill is but the recent edition, have been surrogate-brothers to her. Had he lived, "The companionship and the violin of my brother would be all I had any need for in my life-time till my death-time!" (p. 34). To all the subsequent "small craft" she has offered her "home on wheels" (p. 41) as temporary refuge; she will make the usual offer to Bobby, who is no "stud": It is thus not Bill's "Junior" that satisfies her, but his child-like need for her protection, a need Bobby can offer her just as well.

The point Williams seem to be making here is that Leona's relationships with people (not only men, since she takes care of Violet), modelled on her love for her homosexual brother, are the type for loving human relationships. If all people were as "brothers" accepting the truth about one another without judgement, Leona would not have to keep "moving on", finding new people to "give protection to" (p. 48). She has lost Bill precisely because he cannot accept the truth about Leona, which is that she loved her brother. Loving a homosexual is almost as "bad" as being one. Bill, impervious to Leona's truth as all the characters are (they consider her only a nuisance, an obstruction to the smooth functioning of their illusory systems) repeats even after Leona's long eulogizing speeches his label of "fruit" (p. 32).

Doc's long "holy miracles" (p. 35) speech illustrates well, I

think, the "dead-weight" of truth in this play. Doc has the insight to see behind the "irreverent . . . paraphernalia" (p. 36) that "cloud" the face of life and death to the reality of the "holy mysteries" (p. 36). He sees beyond the "irrelevancies and irreverencies of public worship" (p. 36), its organized mendacity, to his own particularized non-vision of God: "a black man with no light on his face" (p. 36). But recognizing the truth does not disrupt his behaviour patterns; the confession is told, erased, and then life goes on, much as it has done: Doc fortifies himself with a double-dose of illusion -- benzedrine washed down with brandy -- to "steady my hands" (p. 36) -- that is, to calm his nerves which are his "antennae", sensitive to truth. He is incapable of performing professional duties; he doesn't know the "appendix from the gizzard", as Leona has said, and recognizing that fact he is properly nervous. The drugs will deaden the truth so that he can murder with steady hands.

Characteristically Leona confronts Doc and the others with the truth. His romantic declaration that he's "going to deliver a new Messiah" (p. 36) she pierces with deadly accurate perception: "The hell you are, you criminal, murdering quack, leggo of that bag!" (p. 36). Being the only character in the play who acts in accordance with her perception of the truth, Leona sits on his medical bag and refuses to budge. When the others conspire to dislodge her she faces them with their own complicity in murder. Meeting indifference she runs to the telephone to take action; the "family's" response is predictable: Bill is indifferent, Steve bewildered, Monk considers her a "disturbance" (p. 38), and Violet, totally self-enclosed, bleats that "tonight she

turns on me" (p. 38). To counteract her "disturbance" (the truth-teller as dangerous agitator reminds us of Catharine's role in Suddenly Last Summer) Monk telephones lies to the trailer camp; Leona's behaviour is rationalized as a "crazy mean drunk" (p. 39) and later Bill will recommend "an ambulance with a strait jacket for her" (p. 63). (Similarly Catharine the truth-teller in Suddenly Last Summer, was considered "crazy".) Her attempt to tell the truth about a pill-popping drunk is translated into making "trouble for a capable doctor" (p. 39). Thus Monk, the father-confessor figure in the play, is no more capable of handling truth -- of recognizing it and making it operative in his life -- than any of the others; like all of them he dismisses Leona's truth and even actively undermines it with his own mendacity.

Leona's approach to the homosexual Quentin and his companion is characteristically direct: "Well boys, what went wrong?" (p. 39). In this relationship, ironically, it is Quentin, the embellisher of erotic movie love scenes, who is unable to love. His confession reveals his own insight into the truth -- that his experiences are "hard and brutal" (p. 46), that "love life" (p. 46), "act of love" (p. 46), and "sensibility" (p. 46) are meaningless words. And yet he cannot act upon that knowledge; he simply wants to "escape" from Bobby, as Leona sees immediately; he used him, as Leona points out -- "Baby, his hand had . . . ambitions" (p. 49) and now rejects him, paradoxically, for being "gay". Is Williams saying that we cannot accept the "truth" of another even if we share it in ourselves? Do we use conventional condemnatory labels even if they might equally apply to us? Both Brick and Quentin reject men who are homosexuals, yet whose love they have sought. Perhaps the mechanism at work in Quentin is that which

we observed in Sebastian. Robbed of illusion, he turns to violence to "cover his incompletion" -- preferring the brutality of "vicious pickups" (p. 44) to the gentleness of a young boy who "liked him" (p. 43). As Leona explains to Bobby, Quentin wants to pay him: "It's like doing penance . . . penitence." (p. 44).

Monk himself "confesses" in the act's last aria. In it Williams reveals a sad truth about this secular "Monk's Place". To Monk, his "regular customers" (p. 51) are a surrogate "family" for whom he feels "affection" (p. 51). But his affection, like that of other "fathers", is selective. His "children" are expected to be like him. Being homosexual is "inadmissible" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 85) in Monk's Place. He turns homosexuals out to the "Jungle Bar". In the confessional of the theatre the truth about homosexuality can be told; thus Quentin delivers his long aria. But despite Monk's avowal that he wants to know the "personal problems" (p. 51) of his customers, the truth cannot be allowed in Monk's "confessional". Handling the truth is expensive and inconvenient; homosexuals cause disturbance and "The place is raided" (p. 51). Monk has "no moral objections" (p. 50), but moral matters count for little in a cash-register world; the truth that one acts upon has a dollar-sign attached. Monk, then, is clearly related to the predatory Holly Family; people are to be sacrificed to one's self-interest. "Monks's Place" would be more truthfully labelled the "Jungle Bar".

In Act II of the play, Leona continues on her course of truth-telling, and various exits are made from the "confessional" of Monk's Place: Leona moves on, saying "Yes" to life (p. 57); Doc moves

on, having taken life; Steve and Bill move on, avoiding commitment to life, and Violet and Monk retreat to beyond the "confessional" to make bearable their pain with yet another "temporary arrangement" (p. 69).

In Leona's early long speeches of the act she continues her analytical dissection of Bill (who, jungle-style, has "lived off one woman after another woman" [p. 54]) and of herself. Leona faces the truth of her own loneliness, and can act on that truth: "it takes me two or three weeks, that's all it takes me, to find somebody to live with in my home on wheels" (p. 55). Her own personal Williamsian commitment to life she reveals in her "confession": "Life! Life! I never just said, 'Oh well,' I've always said 'Life!' to life, like a song to God . . ." (p. 55). She is able to face even the truth of loss and act upon that truth instead of deluding herself like Violet, the ever-drifting "water plant" with drink, sex, and "Whoppers" (p. 35): "I live with a person I love and care for . . . I expect his respect, and when I see I've lost it, I GO, GO! . . ." (p. 55).

The long "offstage quarrel between Leona and a night watchman" (p. 59) is Williams' inversion in Small Craft Warnings of conventional society's labelling lies. Leona is about to be apprehended for chasing the screaming Violet. According to Leona, being honest about one's emotions is disallowed in a society that allows "murdering, robbing, thieving" (p. 59). All she is guilty of is "showing a little human emotion" (p. 60). She is as suspicious of the motives of "straight" society as those of Monk's regulars: "you're looking for free drinks" (p. 60). Since Monk, in fact, gives the policeman a bottle of liquor to convince him that "It's been very peaceful tonight" (p. 68), Leona's

perception again seems to be accurate. Again Williams is pointing out society's conventional lies: real "protection" -- the kind Leona offers -- is freely given; the kind offered by "a cop or gangster" (the two are interchangeable, in Monk's opinion) has to be paid for. As Monk pointed out earlier, the price of "protection", if one offers refuge to homosexuals, is too high; admitting the truth is too costly.

The watchman's indignant protestations of middle-class goodness are laughably hollow-sounding: "I've never had a drink in my life, lady!" (p. 60); "I'm just trying to do my duty"; "a poor man like me trying to earn a few dollars . . ." (p. 60). Like the characters inside the bar, his vision is narrow, and self-concerned and he rebuffs Leona's attempts to enlighten him with a wider vision of truth: "I don't have anything to do with what's going on somewhere else in the city, just on this beach!" (p. 60). Leona pierces his self-deluding complacency with a shattering accusation: "watchman" is but a euphemism; "Peeping Tom, that's what you are!" (p. 61). His "duty" she redefines as "peeping in windows" (p. 61). She turns the situation about as she turns labels inside out exposing his self-protective illusions: she wants his identification; his interest in her sexual activities she interprets as an excitement for him; her "problem" she turns into his. "Does your wife know about the girls you go out with?" (p. 62). Exposing the truth, Leona manages to throw his conventional approach into disarray. Ironically, she has an unsettling effect on the outsider that she fails to have on her own "peer" group. From his early, learned-in-training-school hypocritical politeness -- "Listen, please, come on, now, let's take this thing easy . . ." (p. 59) -- he

reverts to a jungle-like viciousness, which is certainly more honest: "Anyone want to spend the night with you, he must be a pig then . . ." (p. 62). If Leona has gone "ape" (p. 63) as Bill terms it, then the watchman, one of the "holy boys" (p. 62) is equally stripped of his conventional middle-class "good Christian man" (p. 61) mendacity.

The sad self-knowledge of Doc plays as an onstage counterpoint to the complacent self-delusion of the watchman-"Peeping Tom". As Williams instructs, the sound of the altercation should "'bleed under' like the lights 'bleed under' Doc's big monologue." ("Notes After the Second Invited Audience", Small Craft Warnings, p. 76.) When Violet (in an uncharacteristic flash of insight) accuses Steve of giving her "no protection and no support" (p. 64) Doc's laugh reveals "an ultimate recognition of human absurdity and his own self-loathing" (p. 65). His self-knowledge wins our compassion as he "confesses" to Monk the story of "Treasure Island" (p. 65). Instead of Stevenson's promised "storm and adventure"[16] this tale is a death-story. Life has been aborted; the baby was "born dead" (p. 65). Having sent the child off to sea in a shoe box, a small craft with no chance ever to sail, he let the mother die, because "I thought of the probable consequences to me" (p. 66) if help were called. He sacrificed the woman's life to his own fear and paid fifty dollars for the purchasable kind of "protection" -- that is, for the truth to be witheld. Warned by Monk of Leona's phone-call, he swallows another Benzedrine tablet and plans to "hit the road" (p. 66). Leona will leave to meet life anew; Doc leaves to escape the consequences of his own truth: that he has been responsible for taking a life, that someone "in the quicksands" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 95) needed him and he turned away.

For Monk, "That old son of a bitch's paid his dues." (p. 67).

Leona re-enters for one "last conversation" (p. 69) with Violet. Again, but this time enlightened by compassion, Leona confronts Violet with the truth about herself: "Her problems are mental problems and I want her to face them, now" (p. 69). She asks Violet to "come out of the fog" (p. 70) and explain her present "temporary arrangement" (p. 69). But Violet is incapable of facing the truth about her life; she simply weeps. "Her mind floats on a cloud and her body floats on water." (p. 70). Violet is the least committed to life of any of the characters; Leona recognizes her truth and finally resigns herself to the unchangeable pattern of Violet's fogbound delusions. She is no "craft" at all, but a "plant"; thus there is no possibility of her ever sailing. She is a "water plant" (p. 70) "drifting" as the water (life) takes her. She does not say "yes" to life in a decision to act, as Leona does, but "Oh, well" (p. 47) in a submission to its vagaries. Facing the implacable vegetative passivity of Violet is, in effect, Leona's climactic insight in the play. It seems as if it is the only dramatic character "development" in Small Craft Warnings; from a rage at Violet's under-the-table seduction of Bill, Leona comes to an acceptance of someone else's truth that cannot be modified by her rage or reason: "Well, I guess she can't help it. It's sad, though. It's a pitiful thing to have to reach under a table to find some reason to live." (p. 70). Sex is Violet's only religion: "she's worshipping her idea of God Almighty in her personal church." (p. 70).

While Williams protests that Small Craft Warnings is not "a play about groping" ("Notes After the Second Invited Audience", Small

Craft Warnings, p. 74) Leona's acceptance of Violet's truth is centred on the acceptance of this specific outrage; "groping", not homosexuality, is for Leona the "inadmissible thing" -- the truth about a human being that she cannot countenance. When she learns to accept and understand it, as she does, by the end of the play, one must recognize, I think, that, paradoxically, the only character in the play who has developed morally as a Tennessee Williams human being is the one who was most "fully integrated" to begin with -- Leona. The other "small craft" remain unchangeable, unresponsive to truth, "unsailable". Leona leaves in search of a "faggot" (a man who accepts the truth about himself) to share her "home on wheels" with (p. 71) while Violet (a woman who is "not conscious" of the truth about herself) begs Monk for yet another "temporary arrangement" (p. 72) which he, with resignation, allows. Interestingly, he waits in vain for Violet to turn on the shower; Violet submits her floating "roots" to life's water, but any positive action, like turning the water on for herself, she cannot do.

Thus this final play, like the three earlier ones, is concerned with truth-telling and with mendacity. But, unlike the other plays, Small Craft Warnings reveals no previously unspoken "true story" that in some way affects every character in the play. The characters carry around within their isolated selves a personal and limited version of the truth about themselves and their lives; they are "boxed in" by their own self-concern. The function of the "box" of the "confessional" is simply to unburden oneself, not to communicate in a dialogue that puts one's version of truth to the test and modifies it as it clashes with insights from different vantage points. Leona, like Hannah in

Night of the Iguana, believing in "broken gates between people so they can reach each other",[17] tries to barge through the barriers that separate individuals, to pierce their illusions and enlighten them with her perceptions of truths about themselves and their relationships with others. But ironically her technique works only on herself. She is a successful "beautician" because people submit readily to an ornamentation of the "truth"; the opposite process is resisted by everyone, and at the play's end only Leona is "enlightened". Sadly, if "being friends is telling each other the truth . . ." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 94) friends are not wanted in the jungle-world. Leona, having grown in the recognition of truth and its assimilation into her life, "moves on" alone; the others (Bill, Steve, Doc, Quentin), "hit the road" (p. 66) or exit to bed (Violet, Monk) to avoid confronting the truth about themselves and their bleak "unsailed" lives.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER FIVE)

[1]Robert Brustein, "Portrait of a Warning", New Republic, CLXVIII, No. 11 (March 17, 1973), p. 23.

[2]Tennessee Williams, Small Craft Warnings (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 51.
[All subsequent references to Small Craft Warnings refer to this edition.]

[3]C. Robert Jennings, "Playboy Interview: Tennessee Williams", Playboy, XX, No. 4 (April, 1973), p. 84.

[4]Tennessee Williams, "Person - to - Person", in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. ix.

[5]Time, "The Theater: The Angel of the Odd", LXXIX, No. 10 (March 9, 1962), p. 49.

[6]James Gaines, "A Talk About Life and Style with Tennessee Williams", Saturday Review, LV, No. 18 (April 29, 1972), p. 27.

[7]Time, "The Angel of the Odd", p. 54.

[8]Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 61.

[9]Henry Hewes, "The Deathday Party", Saturday Review, LV, No. 17 (April 22, 1972), p. 22.

[10]Tennessee Williams, "The Human Psyche -- Alone", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII, No. 51 (December 23, 1950), p. 19.

[11]Williams, "Too Personal", in Small Craft Warnings, p. 5.

[12]Henrik Ibsen, "The Wild Duck", in The Wild Duck and Other Plays, trans. Eva Le Gallienne (New York: The Modern Library, 1961), p. 177.

[13]Tennessee Williams, "Genesis and Evolution", in Small Craft Warnings, p. 89.

[14]Tennessee Williams, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion", in 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 70.

[15]Time, "The Angel of the Odd", p. 49.

[16]Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs and Company), p. 7.

[17]Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. 106.

# CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

Thus it seems to me that Tennessee Williams, in each of the four plays I have discussed, is concerned with probing truth-telling and mendacity. But the playwright's definitions are, as they must be, particularized by his own vision. The telling of what Williams calls "mean lies" may coincide with what conventional middle-class society calls "getting the facts" about someone: Stanley's "dope" on Blanche demeans the teller, and Blanche's version of "truth", devastatingly self-baring, exalts her. From the mouth of Brick, the "fact" of Daddy's imminent death is a mean lie, motivated by a desire to retaliate, hurt for hurt; Brick, self-enclosed and healthy as a boy, is nearer spiritual death than Daddy.

It is the artist's task to tell the truth, to "level with" his audience, thus playing the Maggie-Big Daddy-Catharine-Leona role of truth-teller. His concern is not to reinforce their comfortable illusions, but to subvert the easily-digested untruths and half-truths in which their "system" of "mendacity" enmeshes them. The destruction of Mrs. Venable's beautiful but illusory "legend" concerning herself and her son involves the ripping away of illusions protecting a venerated relationship -- that between mother and son -- which Williams reveals as mutually parasitic and thus as ultimately mutually destructive. (Mrs. Holly's apron-string command of George is but a dim carbon copy of the more exotic Violet and Sebastian relationship.) The Holly Family,

America's smiling suburbanites, Williams reveals as brutal and predatory and he makes an admirable heroine out of a hard-drinking free-loving "beautician", Leona, whose vocabulary would shock Stanley and whose real love was her now dead homosexual brother. The "one hundred percent American" husband-breadwinner, Stanley, is "ape-like" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 72), fit for the "encroaching jungle"[1] of our modern world, but his very fitness for it forces a re-evaluation of that world; the All-American football hero, Brick, is a latent (at least) homosexual, so hopelessly "hung up" about it that he can only turn our society's fearful vituperation upon himself, in a weird litany of self-abuse; the "Mississippi red-neck" is a man who served and respected two homosexuals; and that protector of law and order, the watchman of Small Craft Warnings, may be what Leona accuses him of being -- a "Peeping Tom": she is wrong about no one else.

Appropriately, Tennessee Williams, this writer so concerned with truth-telling and illusion, writes most successfully when writing for a "make-believe" world, in which all participants wear disguises -- the world of the theatre. As Gordon Rogoff, writing in The Tulane Drama Review reminds us: "nothing in the end is ever really real on the stage. The illusion is real enough, but the medium used -- a person, is no more real aesthetically . . . than an oboe, a pigment. . . . If a dramatist had no ambition beyond the literal presentation of reality, he would not then be writing plays. He would be making personal appearances."[2] The audience, by their willing participation, their acceptance of the conventions of the stage, affirm our need for "escaping" into illusion, and, paradoxically, our hunger for exploring "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion",[3] since one does not expect mere "entertainment" from a

Williams play. By our collusion in the drama we are agreeing implicitly with the playwright that the "lies" of the theatrical effects (the walls are transparent in A Streetcar Named Desire; they "dissolve mysteriously into air" in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof [p. xiv]; a white spot isolates individual characters for monologues in Small Craft Warnings; inhuman sounds immerse us in the jungle of Suddenly Last Summer) and the fundamental "lie" that the actor is the character, that James Farentino is Stanley Kowalski, and that we are not in the theatre at all, but invisibly transported to the Pollitts' bedroom or to Monk's bar, relate to the truth not as its denial but as the instrument of its revelation. They may reveal it "more directly and simply and beautifully"[4] than "the literal presentation of reality".

Williams' insight into character seems to me to be an adjunct of this premise that the truth is to be discovered by make-believe: the lies we tell reveal the truth about us; the illusions we spin reveal our deepest needs, our most "unendurable" pain. Blanche's lies reveal her pathetic need for love and self-esteem; Stanley's illusory system reveals his need to be "King" of an enclosed manageable jungle-kingdom, and Brick never wanders far from "Echo Spring", lest his alcoholic haze dissipate and he be left to face the truth without his crutch. To face truth about ourselves is "Dragon Country's" most unendurable pain; to avoid it we drink (Blanche, Brick, Mrs. Venable, everyone in Small Craft Warnings), drug ourselves (Big Daddy, Sebastian, Doc), "narcotize" ourselves with sex (Stella, Stanley, Quentin, Bill, Violet), or tell lies, as though denying truth would make it cease to be true (notably Blanche, who believes in "magic" [A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 117], but everyone lies, except Maggie, Big Daddy, Catharine with the help of truth

serum, and the splendid Leona). But finally it must "out", if we are to be fully human, instead of lobotomized zombies, or "not -quite-with-it" (Small Craft Warnings, p. 12) creatures like Violet, or "brutes" (A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 72) like Stanley, or alcoholics like Brick and Doc, or shabby studs like Bill, or criminally insane, like Mrs. Venable. This is the Williams horrifying gallery of half-people; at our peril we deny truth our steady gaze.

The plays, of course, are Williams' revelation of his truth; they are "a snare for the truth of human experience".[5] It is interesting to me that Williams' vision and presentation of that truth are so often condemned as distortingly violent, a wallowing in "moral squalor",[6] a vision of the "damned".[7] (If we are all transgressors and in need of salvation, who are "the damned"?) It is clear that one needs to redefine "violence" as Williams would have us examine carefully all facile labels; Martin Esslin's essay on "Violence in Modern Drama" seems to me directly applicable to the plays of Tennessee Williams:

> On the one hand you have those artists who, however aggressive and violent and bitter their lesson may sound, try to shock people into a genuine awareness of reality. . . . If, on the other hand, we are using empty forms of art in order to administer sedatives or sleeping pills, then we are in fact depriving people of their autonomy and committing an act of bad and reprehensible aggression. The most aggressive theatre is the one that has this kind of effect and covers up and prettifies the human situation -- that pours a chocolate sauce of contentment and complacency over people's lives. . . . This to my mind is the ultimate immoral use of violence.[8]

Of this kind of violent mendacity Tennessee Williams is never guilty.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER SIX)

[1]Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: The New American Library, 1961), p. 5.

[2]Gordon Rogoff, "The Restless Intelligence of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, X, No. 4 (Summer, 1966), p. 85.

[3]Tennessee Williams, "The Glass Menagerie", in Six Great Modern Plays (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 438.

[4]Tennessee Williams, "Foreword" to "Camino Real", in Three Plays of Tennessee Williams (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 161.

[5]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. 85.

[6]Eric Bentley, "Theatre", New Republic, CXXII, No. 15 (April 11, 1955), p. 28.

[7]Francis Donohue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964), p. 107.

[8]Martin Esslin, "Violence in Modern Drama", in his Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (Garden City: Doubleday), p. 177.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## PRIMARY SOURCES


Williams, Tennessee. Baby Doll. New York: New Directions, 1956.

--------. "The Case of the Crushed Petunias", in M. Jerry Weiss, ed. 10 Short Plays. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971.

--------. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. New York: The New American Library, 1955.

--------. Dragon Country. New York: New Directions, 1970.

--------. The Eccentricities of a Nightingale and Summer and Smoke. New York: New Directions, 1948.

--------. "The Glass Menagerie", in Six Great Modern Plays. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971.

--------. Hard Candy. New York: New Directions, 1967.

--------. In the Winter of Cities. New York: New Directions, 1964.

--------. Kingdom of Earth. New York: New Directions, 1968.

--------. The Knightly Quest. New York: New Directions, 1966.

--------. The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. New York: New Directions, 1964.

--------. The Night of the Iguana. New York: The New American Library, 1961.

--------. One Arm. New York: New Directions, 1967.

--------. Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels. New York: New Directions, 1958.

--------. Period of Adjustment. New York: New Directions, 1960.

--------. The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. New York: New Directions, 1969.

--------. Small Craft Warnings. New York: New Directions, 1972.

--------. A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: The New American Library, 1947.

Williams, Tennessee. Suddenly Last Summer. New York: New Directions, 1958.

--------. Three Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Rose Tatoo; Camino Real; Sweet Bird of Youth. New York: New Directions, 1959.

--------. 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and Other One-Act Plays. New York: New Directions, 1966.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Ashton, Roger. "Back on a Hot Tin Roof", New Republic, CXXXII, No. 17, 23.

Atkinson, Brooks. "'Streetcar' Tragedy", The New York Times, Sunday Dec. 14, 1947, 88.

Becker, William. "Reflections on Three New Plays", The Hudson Review, VIII, 258-272.

Bentley, Eric. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", Theatre Arts, XXXIX, No. 6 (June, 1955), 18-19.

--------. "Theatre", New Republic, CXXII, No. 15 (April 11, 1955), 28-29.

Berkman, Leonard. "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche DuBois", Modern Drama, X, No. 3 (December, 1967), 249-257.

Bigsby, C. W. E. Confrontation and Commitment. Kansas City: University of Missouri Press, 1968.

Brown, John Mason. "Southern Discomfort", Saturday Review of Literature, XXX, No. 52 (December 27, 1947), 22-24.

Brustein, Robert. "Portrait of a Warning", New Republic, CLXVIII, No. 11 (March 17, 1973), 23.

--------. "Sweet Bird of Success", Encounter, XII, No. 6 (June, 1959), 59-60.

Buckley, Thomas. "Tennessee Williams Survives", The Atlantic, CCXXVI, No. 5 (November, 1970), 98-108.

Chiari, J. Landmarks of Contemporary Drama. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965.

Clurman, Harold. Lies Like Truth. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

--------. The Naked Image. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1966.

--------. "Theatre: Man with a Problem", New Republic, CXIX, No. 7 (October 25, 1948), 25-26.

Clurman, Harold. "The Theater", The Nation, April 24, 1972, 540-541.

Cohn, Ruby. Currents in Contemporary Drama. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969.

--------. Dialogue in American Drama. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1971, 97-130.

Costello, Donald P. "Tennessee Williams' Fugitive Kind", Modern Drama, XV, No. 1 (May, 1972), 26-44.

Donohue, Francis. The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964.

Dony, Nadine. "Tennessee Williams: A Selected Bibliography", Modern Drama, I, No. 3 (December, 1958), 181-191.

Downer, Alan S., ed. American Drama and its Critics. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965.

--------. Recent American Drama. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966.

Driver, Thomas F. "Accelerando", The Christian Century, LXXV, No. 5 (January 29, 1958), 135-137.

Dukore, Bernard F. "The Cat Has Nine Lives", The Tulane Drama Review, VIII, No. 1 (Fall, 1963), 95-101.

Engle, Paul. "A Locomotive Named Reality", New Republic, CXXXII, No. 4 (January 24, 1955), 26-27.

Esslin, Martin. Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1961.

Falk, Signi Lenea. "The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams", Modern Drama, I, No. 2 (September, 1958), 172-180.

--------. Tennessee Williams. New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1961.

Fedder, Norman J. The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams. London, The Hague, Paris: Monton and Co., 1966.

Fitch, Robert E. "La Mystique de la Merde", New Republic, CXXXV (September 3, 1956), 17-18.

Fritscher, John J. "Some Attitudes and a Posture: Religious Metaphor and Ritual in Tennessee Williams' Query of the American God", Modern Drama, XIII, No. 2 (September, 1970), 201-216.

Gaines, James. "A Talk About Life and Style with Tennessee Williams", Saturday Review, LV, No. 18 (April 29, 1972), 25-29.

Gassner, John. Form and Idea in Modern Theatre. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956.

--------. "A Streetcar Named Desire: A Study in Ambiguity", in Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver, eds. Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

--------. "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration", College English, X, No. 1 (October, 1948), 1-8.

--------. Theatre at the Crossroads. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.

--------. The Theatre in Our Times. New York: Crown Publishers, 1966.

Gilder, Rosamond. "The Playwright Takes Over", Theatre Arts, XXXII, No. 1 (January, 1948), 10-11.

Gould, Jean. Modern American Playwrights. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1966, Ch. XI.

Hardwich, Elizabeth. "Disgust and Disenchantment: New British and American Plays", Partisan Review, XXV, No. 2 (Spring, 1958), 282-288.

Hartley, Anthony. "Poetry or Pistol?" Spectator, CXCVII (December 14, 1956), 879-880.

Hatch, Robert. "Theater", The Nation, CLXXX, No. 15 (April 9, 1955), 314-315.

Hewes, Henry. "Critics on a Tin Roof", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVIII, No. 18 (April 30, 1955), 26.

--------. "The Deathday Party", Saturday Review, LV, No. 17 (April 22, 1972), 22-24.

--------. "Tennessee Williams: Last of Our Solid Gold Bohemians", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVI, No. 13 (March 28, 1953), 25-27.

--------. "Off Their Trolleys", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIX, No. 9 (March 3, 1956), 22.

--------. "'Sanity' Observed", Saturday Review of Literature, XLI, No. 4 (January 25, 1958), 26-27.

--------. "A Streetcar Named Mendacity", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVIII, No. 15 (April 9, 1955), 32-33.

Hewitt, Barnard. Theatre U. S. A. 1668-1957. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.

Highet, Gilbert. "A Memorandum from Lucius Annaeus Seneca to Tennessee Williams Subject: Horror", Horizon, I, No. 5 (May, 1959), 54-55.

Hughes, Catharine, "Retreading the Past", America, CXXVI (April 29, 1972), 462.

Hurley, Paul J. "Suddenly Last Summer as a Morality Play", Modern Drama, VIII, No. 4 (February, 1966), 392-402.

Hurt, James R. "Suddenly Last Summer: Williams and Melville", Modern Drama, III, No. 4 (February, 1961), 396-400.

Jackson, Esther Merle. The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

Jennings, C. Robert. "Playboy Interview: Tennessee Williams", Playboy, XX, No. 4 (April, 1973), 69-84.

Jones, Robert Emmet. "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines", Modern Drama, II, No. 3 (December, 1959), 211-219.

Kaufmann, Stanley. "Stanley Kaufmann on Theatre", New Republic, CLXVI, No. 18 (April 29, 1972), 24.

Kernan, Alvin B. "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theatre: Chekhov, Pirandello, and Williams", Modern Drama, I, No. 2 (September, 1958), 101-114.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. The American Drama Since 1918. New York: George Braziller, 1957, 324-332.

--------. The American Drama Since World War II. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962, Ch. II.

--------. "Modernism" in Modern Drama. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962, Ch. VI.

Lewis, Allan. American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre. New York: Crown Publishers, 1965, Ch. V.

--------. The Contemporary Theatre: The Significant Playwrights of Our Time. New York: Crown Publishers, 1962.

Lumley, Frederick. Trends in Twentieth Century Drama. London: Barrie and Rickliff, 1960, Ch. I; Ch. XIII.

Magid, Mario. "The Innocence of Tennessee Williams", in Morris Freedman, ed. Essays in the Modern Drama. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1964.

Maxwell, Gilbert. Tennessee Williams and Friends. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Co., 1965.

McCarthy, Mary. Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles 1937-1962. New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1963.

Miller, Arthur. "The Shadows of the Gods", Harper's Magazine, CCXVII (August, 1958), 35-44.

Miller, Jordan Y., ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire". Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Moor, Paul. "A Mississippian Named Tennessee", Harper's Magazine, CXCVII (July, 1948), 63-72.

Nelson, Benjamin. Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work. London: Peter Owen, 1961.

New Republic. "Portrait of a Warning", CLXVIII, No. 11 (March 17, 1973), 23.

Newsweek. "A Talk With the Playwright", LIII, No. 12 (March 25, 1959), 75-76.

Oliver, Edith. "Off Broadway: How They Feel", The New Yorker, XLVIII, No. 8 (April 15, 1972), 110.

Oppenheimer, George, ed. The Passionate Playgoer. New York: The Viking Press, 1958.

Phelan, Kappo. "The Stage and Screen", The Commonweal, XLVII, No. 10 (December 19, 1947), 254-255.

Popkin, Henry. "The Plays of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, IV, No. 3 (March, 1960), 45-65.

--------. "Williams, Osborne, or Beckett?" in Morris Freedman, ed. Essays in the Modern Drama. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1964.

Porter, Thomas E. Myth and Modern American Drama. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969.

Rogoff, Gordon. "The Restless Intelligence of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, X, No. 4 (Summer, 1966), 78-93.

Sacksteder, William. "The Three Cats: A Study in Dramatic Structure", Drama Survey, V, No. 3 (Winter, 1966), 252-266.

Sharp, William. "An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams", The Tulane Drama Review, VI, No. 3 (March, 1962), 160-172.

Shaw, Irwin. "Sobering Thoughts", Theatre Arts, XL, No. 6 (June, 1956), 11.

--------. "Theatre: Masterpiece", New Republic, CXVII, No. 25 (December 22, 1947), 34-35.

Theatre Arts. "Garden District", XLII, No. 3 (March, 1958), 13.

Time. "The Theater: The Angel of the Odd", LXXIX, No. 10 (March 9, 1962), 49-54.

Time. "The Theater: New Play in Manhattan", L, No. 24 (December 15, 1947), 34.

--------. "The Theater: New Play in Manhattan", LXV, No. 14 (April 4, 1955), 69.

--------. "The Theater: Old Play in Manhattan", LXVII, No. 9 (February 27, 1956), 49.

--------. "The Theater: Tramway's Progress", LIV, No. 18 (October 31, 1949), 48.

Tischler, Nancy M. Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan. New York: The Citadel Press, 1965.

Trewin, J. C. "In the Fashion", The Illustrated London News, XXI (November 5, 1949), 712-713.

Tynan, Kenneth. "American Blues", Encounter, II, No. 5 (May, 1954), 13-19.

Vidal, Gore. "Love, Love, Love", Partisan Review, XXVI, No. 4 (Fall, 1959), 613-624.

Vowles, Richard B. "Tennessee Williams and Strindberg", Modern Drama, I, No. 2 (September, 1958), 166-171.

--------. "Tennessee Williams: The World of his Imagery", The Tulane Drama Review, III, No. 2 (December, 1958), 51-57.

Waters, Arthur B. "Tennessee Williams: Ten Years Later", Theatre Arts, XXXIX, No. 7 (July, 1955), 72-74.

Weales, Gerald. "The Stage: At Monk's Place", Commonweal, XCVI, No. 9 (May 5, 1972), 214-216.

--------. Tennessee Williams. St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1965.

Williams, Edwina Dakin. Remember Me to Tom. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963.

Williams, Tennessee. "The Human Psyche -- Alone", Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII, No. 51 (December 23, 1950), 19-20.

--------. "An Open Response to Tom Buckley", The Atlantic, CCXXVII, No. 1 (January, 1971), 34-35.