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# The Role of Betrayal in Selected Drama of Tennessee Williams

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THE ROLE OF BETRAYAL IN SELECTED DRAMA

OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

(TITLE)

BY

CRAIG E. SANDERSON

Bachelor of Science in Business, 1968

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1977

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
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THE ROLE OF BETRAYAL  
IN SELECTED DRAMA  
OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

BY

CRAIG E. SANDERSON

B.S. in Bus., Eastern Illinois University, 1968

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in English at the Graduate School  
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS  
1977

Much of the critical analysis of Tennessee Williams' drama concerns itself with the inherent conflict between ideals and reality in the universe as perceived by Williams. Such analysis, however, has not considered this conflict as a source of betrayal, or betrayal as a dominant theme in Williams' drama. In at least four of his plays it becomes evident how each of the individual characters in Williams' drama endures the conflict of reality and ideals, and the extent to which their respective approaches to the resolution of this struggle result in betrayal. Four plays--all regarded as among his most successful and most important, and spanning much of his career--were selected for consideration. The plays are The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and The Night of the Iguana.

In all four plays betrayal has been a primary ingredient of the action. There is also a similarity in the manner in which the betrayals are structured in each play. In each instance at least one betrayal has occurred prior to the action of the drama. The betrayals that occur during the action of the play stem from this initial conflict. In two instances, A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams uses the birth of a child at the end of the play to suggest a setting for future betrayals.

Three types of betrayals occur in these plays: self-

betrayal, betrayal of ideals, and betrayal of others. Williams indicates through the characters' reactions to the betrayals what they value and what his own views on betrayal are. His view is that betrayal is an inevitable occurrence in life as a result of the conflict between reality and ideals. He therefore is not inclined to pass judgement on the morality of betrayals, but he is offended by the cruelty with which the betrayal of others is often levied. He views self-betrayal resulting from an attempt to retain belief in ideals as tragic in the earlier plays (The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire). In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof there is some progression toward the tentative ability of the protagonist to resolve the conflict and thus avoid ultimate destruction by self-betrayal. In The Night of the Iguana Williams makes a definite positive statement as to the individual's ability to resolve the conflict of ideals and reality and thereby avoid destruction by self-betrayal. If The Night of the Iguana represents Williams' most recent position, then he no longer finds it necessary for his characters to betray others in order to insure their own survival, or to dedicate themselves to ideals which ignore reality and result in self-betrayal. It has become possible for the individual to seek and hope for a reconciliation of ideals and reality.

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## INTRODUCTION

Much of the critical analysis of Tennessee Williams' drama concerns itself with the inherent conflict between ideals and reality in the universe as perceived by Williams. Some of the major critical writings that discuss this theme in Williams' drama include Benjamin Nelson's Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work, Nancy Tischler's Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, Esther Merle Jackson's The Broken World of Tennessee Williams, and Elia Kazan's "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire." Benjamin Nelson states in the conclusion of his study that man's inability to reconcile his ideals with reality is a problem that surfaces throughout Williams work. In Rebellious Puritan Nancy Tischler states that in Williams' drama the world is in conflict because it lacks a stabilizing force; it has two forces in constant conflict, such as flesh and spirit or brutality and ideals. Esther Merle Jackson concludes that Williams' drama is a presentation of the conflicts inherent in the structure of the universe. Elia Kazan's interpretation of Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire seems to support the more general conclusions of the other critics. Kazan believes that the tragedy of the play is the needless destruction of a human being simply because her tradition is in conflict with the new society. This, of course, is another way of stating that the

source of conflict is the character's inability to reconcile her ideals with the reality of her situation.

Although each of these works makes reference to Williams' presentation of reality and ideals as a source of conflict, none of these writers have considered this conflict as a source of betrayal. Furthermore, none have considered betrayal as a dominant theme in Williams' drama. This thesis, then, is a study of how each of the individual characters in Williams' drama endures the conflict of reality and ideals, and the extent to which their respective approaches to the resolution of this struggle result in betrayal. Four plays--all regarded as among his most successful and most important, and spanning much of his career--have been selected for consideration. The plays are The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), and The Night of the Iguana (1961).

This study of betrayal must seek answers to some basic questions.

1. How important is betrayal in relation to the story-line of the play?
2. What different types of betrayal occur during the play, for example, self-betrayal, betrayal of ideals, or betrayal of others?
3. Are the betrayals catastrophic in nature or are they minor incidents in the lives of the characters?
4. How does Williams view the various betrayals? Does he find one type of betrayal more offensive than another?
5. How do the characters react to the betrayals? What do these reactions indicate in regard to their values?
6. Are the plays structured so that the characters are locked into committing betrayal?

These, then are the major considerations to be applied to the analysis of each play in order to determine the role of betrayal in the drama of Tennessee Williams.

### The Glass Menagerie

Betrayal of others as a necessity for the individual's survival is a basic ingredient of The Glass Menagerie. An analysis of this play will illustrate that early in Williams' career he considered betrayal an almost inevitable result of human relationships. By studying the relationships of these characters, one can almost begin to see Menagerie as a study of betrayal. It can also be shown that Williams uses his staging effects to accentuate the feeling of betrayal throughout the play.

One difficulty which must be mentioned before discussing Menagerie in terms of betrayal, however, is the problem of objectivity which is inherent in the structure of the "memory play." That is to say, since the situation is presented as it is reconstructed in Tom Wingfield's mind, the character relationships may not be presented as they actually existed. The relationships would probably differ if presented objectively or as remembered by Laura or Amanda. Consequently, any conclusions reached concerning these relationships must be viewed as resulting from a biased perspective. This is a basic and bothersome limitation of the memory play but probably is not a valid problem in relation to this discussion, as Williams urges us to ignore such problems when he has Tom say, "Being a memory play it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic."<sup>1</sup>

Although this statement refers to the techniques employed by the playwright, it should also serve as a guide to how one should view the play in its totality. Granted a bias in the narrator's perspective, one might expect to find Tom's betrayal of Laura and Amanda camouflaged or hidden. On the contrary, one finds the opposite to be true. The story of the remembered events revolves around Tom's inner struggle to be free from the suffocating responsibilities of his family. Tom's presentation of the events immediately preceding his abandonment and betrayal is not camouflaged because of his guilt feelings. Instead he accents his guilt to demonstrate that his freedom was not gained without loss.

Although Tom's narrative is primarily concerned with relating his past dilemma to the audience, it also presents other betrayals and illustrates Williams' insistence that betrayal is an inevitable ingredient of human relationships. One such betrayal (the father's) has already occurred before the point where Tom's reminiscences begin. Tom says of his father: "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town . . . "2 The father appears in the drama itself only as a photograph that serves as a reminder of the betrayal that resulted from his having been a dreamer in St. Louis during the 1930's. More importantly, the father, or his family's memory of him, also serves as a parallel to Tom's situation and subsequent betrayals. Tom's statements seem to categorize his father as a dreamer; that is an idealist

or adventure-seeker (like Tom) who discarded his responsibilities and the mundane existence that accompanied them. He was an idealist, in other words, who attempted to turn his ideals into reality. There is no indication that he was not in touch with the reality of his situation. He simply left an unsatisfactory situation in search of another which he might find more congenial. Like Tom, he recognized that he could not save his family from the doom of a meaningless existence in the decaying environment of an economically depressed city and a spiritually depressed family unit, but that he could save himself. That is, he had the ability to betray others in order to save himself, an ability shared by Williams' stronger characters. This betrayal not only undoubtedly influenced Tom, but it also left Amanda in a precarious situation that perhaps contributed directly to her paranoia.

Two other betrayals have occurred in the past. Amanda seems to feel that she betrayed herself when she married Tom and Laura's father. When describing her popularity as an eligible young lady, she laments her failure to see the true worth of the men courting her:

That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune-- came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold! And I could have been Mrs. Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But--I picked your father!<sup>3</sup>

A great deal of Amanda's popularity probably existed only in her imagination, but this is irrelevant. She believes she was guilty of self-betrayal in marrying the wrong person. But

Amanda also warns against betrayal of others with her light but scathing references to her long-absent husband. These remarks suggest her inability to fully appreciate Tom's dilemma and give Tom further motivation for leaving. This history is important because it gives us some insight into her attempts to channel the lives of her children into avenues she considers to be practical and responsible rather than idealistic and doomed.

In a sense, Amanda betrays her children by viewing them merely as extensions of herself rather than as individuals. It is not only the attempt itself that constitutes a betrayal, but the manner in which Amanda attempts to force her feelings upon Tom and Laura. Often when Amanda feels that her attempts at channeling Laura and Tom into the desirable direction are failing, she seems to escape into the past. This is one facet of her betrayal of her family. Nancy Tischler explains, "The only way Amanda can live with ugly reality is to retreat into her memories . . . Her clothes, her speech, and her ideals for her children declare her belief in the past and her rejection of the present."<sup>4</sup> Escape, then is a kind of betrayal. Despite the difference in the method of escape, it is doubtful that her betrayal is any less complete than her husband's or her son's betrayals. Her illusion of living in the past is a betrayal because she attempts to force her children to share this illusion. She forgets it is a past they cannot possibly share since they have never experienced anything remotely similar to it. Thus Amanda's rebuke to Tom that "Nobody in their right minds goes

to the movies as often as you pretend to"<sup>5</sup> is forcefully ironic considering that Amanda escapes reality by slipping into her temple of illusion, the past, just as Tom escapes by retreating into his temple of illusion, the movie theater.

Amanda's attempts to use Tom to stabilize the family unit also result in her self-betrayal. Amanda's contribution to Tom's motive for abandoning his family can be seen in the conflict between her actions and her aims. She recognizes Tom as the one hope of stabilizing their family unit and saving Laura, while at the same time she antagonizes him by denying his right to dream. Her attitude towards Tom's proper role is realistic, but her actions to insure his cooperation are not. Realizing that Tom must serve as the financial provider of the family, she reminds him of his responsibility and attempts to convince him that he can be happy fulfilling it. Thus she makes his life in St. Louis totally unberable and perhaps hastens his decision to leave.

Tom: Every time you come in yelling that God damn "Rise and Shine!" "Rise and Shine!" I say to myself, "How lucky dead people are!"<sup>6</sup>

Amanda contributes to his dissatisfaction by continually making remarks such as, "What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all?"<sup>7</sup> Her badgering him thus, out of near desperation, negates her attempts to get Tom to sacrifice his life for the sake of the family. Her failure constitutes a betrayal on two different levels. She not only betrays her family by hastening Tom's departure, she betrays herself in that she deprives herself of something she



has dearly wanted. Williams does not indicate how Amanda reacts to her failure. Perhaps she was able to cope with it financially, but on an emotional level it may have pushed her further from reality.

Amanda also betrays Laura with her unrealistic behavior. Amanda's relationship with Laura is similar to her relationship with Tom. While she recognizes Laura's inability to function in a harsh reality, she at the same time is unable to act upon the situation in a meaningful manner. Consequently she is doomed to failure. Her obsession with making Tom a protector for Laura is evidence that Amanda recognizes Laura's problem. Yet, in her relationship with her daughter, she seems to deny the existence of a problem. When Amanda scolds Laura for using the word "cripple" she is ignoring the reality of Laura's situation. For Laura's physical affliction can be seen as symbolic of her inability to function in society. By denying Laura's physical disability Amanda must also deny Laura's emotional handicap. Amanda's refusal to act in a rational manner is also apparent in her constant but impractical attempts at finding a career for Laura, such as enrolling Laura in a business school and trying to find Laura a husband. By failing to recognize Laura's fragility and sensitivity she ignores the problem while trying to solve it! Such action is anything but realistic. Laura must remain loyal to her sensitive nature because a denial of this sensitivity would result in self-betrayal.

Williams indicates Laura's fragile and sensitive nature

to the audience through the symbolism of the glass menagerie. The glass menagerie, through lighting directions, is shown to be a beautiful and fragile thing to admire, but it has no practical value. It is then a representation of Laura, for she too is a beautiful and fragile individual that must be placed on a shelf to be protected from life. Williams also uses the device of the appearance of blue roses on the screen to illustrate Laura's rareness. Blue is a beautiful color, but it is the wrong color for roses; blue roses do not exist in the real world. Similarly, Laura is a worthwhile individual, but her sensitivity sets her apart from others.

Laura's fragility and sensitivity, then, are tantamount to inability to function in society. Throughout the play Williams indicates in various ways that Laura will never be able to function in reality. Consider the importance Laura places on the mythological unicorn in her glass collection. According to the Greek myth the unicorn could be captured only by a virgin. This is why the unicorn's horn breaks when Jim touches it, making it an ordinary horse. Laura's glass menagerie world would be destroyed by Jim. In his opening narration Tom says of Jim:

He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for.<sup>8</sup>

What Jim symbolizes does not become apparent to the reader until the breaking of the unicorn in the last scene. Jim was to Laura what adventure was to Tom. When Jim finally arrives

on the scene he symbolically forces Laura to choose between him and her glass menagerie world. The breaking of the unicorn signifies that Laura cannot have both Jim and the life she has known. In a sense Laura betrays herself when she attempts to allow Jim's entry into her special world. The innocence of her world cannot survive contact with a harsh reality. In order to be true to her soul and her world she must deny the kind of life that Amanda desires for her. The fate of the unicorn, her favorite piece in the collection, signifies this. Just as the unicorn broke when placed in Jim's hands, so would Laura break if she left her world of illusion to enter society. Once again Williams places a character in the position of choosing between saving oneself and succumbing to the desires of another. For Laura to succeed in the eyes of Amanda she must betray her sensitivity and her glass menagerie world.

One cannot help wondering to what extent Amanda's influence is responsible for Laura's inability to cope with reality or to function properly in society. For instance, once Laura is left alone with Jim, away from the influence of Amanda, a transformation occurs which allows Laura to develop some rapport with Jim. This transformation is negated not when Jim reveals that he is engaged to another girl, but only when he leaves and Laura is once more left with Amanda and the glass menagerie. However, the premise that Laura would not be as sensitive or fragile if not for Amanda might be somewhat optimistic. All other indications reveal that Laura must remain loyal to her sensitivity in order to survive.

Similarly, Tom can have a life of his own only by deserting Amanda and Laura. Williams indicates in a number of ways how Tom gradually comes to realize that he must leave his family. For example, the inevitability of Tom's betrayal of his family is recognizable in his characterization as a realist. That is to say, Tom is an idealist who perceives the reality of his situation. He realizes that in order to accept their love he must also accept the imprisoning responsibilities that accompany it.<sup>9</sup>

Another indication that Tom is progressing towards betraying his family is evident in his conversations with Amanda. Even while Tom was apologizing to Amanda so that he might lessen the tension in the apartment he was thinking of leaving. The apology was sincere, but it was not an indication of a change in his attitude. A ship flying the Jolly Roger appears on the screen during Tom and Amanda's discussion. This device is used to inform the audience that while Tom is placating his mother by apologizing and promising to bring a friend home he is still dreaming of adventure and seeking his life as a poet. He was not surrendering his position, but only camouflaging it in order to make life in the apartment tolerable.

The sight of the Jolly Roger is not the only indication of Tom's determination to leave St. Louis. Tom's replies to his mother's inquiries about the gentleman caller should have been a signal to Amanda that Tom was not succumbing to her possessiveness. It is only to appease and quiet her, not because he feels the plan might aid Laura. He also at this time attempts to force his mother to accept the reality of Laura's, and therefore

his own, position. Throughout the action of the play, then, Tom presents himself as continually moving in the direction of escape from his family. From the point of the initial argument at the dinner table to Tom's failure to pay the light bill, Tom is progressing towards his ultimate betrayal--the desertion of his family. The pattern of the play is one of continual confrontation between Tom and Amanda. The action of the first scene shows Amanda instructing Tom in the rules of etiquette and the action of the play ends in a darkened atmosphere as a result of Tom's final rebellion. Tom, the narrator, has used his memories to describe the source of his growing feeling of restlessness and why such a situation inevitably results in betrayal.

The certain eventuality of Tom's betrayal is evident not only through his rejection of Amanda's wishes, but also through his nocturnal adventures. Through these nightly escapades, Tom temporarily escapes from the pressures of his responsibilities. Much of Tom's free time is spent attending the movies. This use of fantasy as a narcotizing agent is also seen in his day-dreaming on the job at the warehouse, and in his musing on the fire escape. His flight to the movies and his drinking indicate to Laura, and to the audience, that Tom is going to follow his father's example. In Scene Four Amanda tells Tom that Laura has been crying because she feels Tom hates the apartment and is therefore going out nights strictly to get away from home. Even Amanda sees a resemblance between Tom's actions and those of her husband when she says: "And you--when I see you taking after his ways! Staying out late--and--well, you had been

drinking the night you were in that--terrifying condition!"<sup>10</sup>

The nocturnal wanderings are merely a prelude to Tom's ultimate betrayal of his family.

Despite Tom's fantasizing and his evasion of his responsibilities to his family he is ultimately a realist who meets his responsibility to himself. He realizes he cannot save Laura from her fate and therefore sees no reason to share it. Yet he is not as cruel a realist as Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire, for Tom retains guilt feelings as a result of his betrayal. These guilt feelings are evident throughout the action of the play. For example, Tom's drinking can be interpreted to be not only a means of escaping the drudgery of his life, but also a way to sublimate his guilt. Williams indicates Tom's hesitancy to betray Laura and Amanda by having him wait until he is fired from his job before leaving. Ultimately Tom expresses his inability to repress his guilt in his final speech.

Perhaps I am walking along a street at night,  
in some strange city, before I have found  
companions. I pass the lighted window of a  
shop where perfume is sold. The window is  
filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny  
transparent bottles in delicate colors, like  
bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once  
my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around  
and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura,  
I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more  
faithful than I intended to be! I cross the  
street, I run into the movies or a bar, I  
buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger--  
anything that can blow your candles out!<sup>11</sup>

These guilt feelings result from a deeper betrayal than the mere abandonment as evidenced by this speech. Earlier in the scene the stage directions inform the reader that Jim's presence "lights her (Laura) inwardly with altar candles."<sup>12</sup> Tom is

also guilty then of offering a false hope to Laura prior to his abandonment of her. This false hope was his inadvertently bringing home Jim, who Laura has loved since childhood but who is already engaged to another girl. In his final speech he is telling Laura to blow out her candles of hope--for no hope exists. But in order to gain his freedom he had to betray his family. This is the "moral lesson" of Tom's narration: freedom in any form demands the payment of a price and this tarnishes the ideal.

The Glass Menagerie can be seen to be a study of betrayal. The realist, confronted by forces he cannot control, faces a choice of betraying a member of the family who lives in a world of illusion, or allowing his own life to be destroyed. The structure of betrayal is not quite this simple in the play, however. The action of the play is totally dependent upon Tom's eventual betrayal of his sister and his mother. Tom is an idealistic dreamer who acts in a realistic manner to make some of his dreams come true. A betrayal is perpetrated by both Tom and Amanda even if some of these are self-betrayals. Williams places each of these characters into a situation that forces each individual to choose between betraying others and betraying himself. The only betrayal which Williams indicates as being offensive is Tom's betrayal of Laura by giving her false hope because Tom could have avoided this betrayal by showing some kindness and understanding. Thus, Tom's guilt feelings indicate the offensive nature of this betrayal.

A Streetcar Named Desire

A Streetcar Named Desire, more than any of the other plays discussed, is dominated by betrayal. The source of betrayal is once again the conflict between reality and ideals. Blanche DuBois is the central figure in the betrayals and the one most affected by them. She is both a betrayer and one betrayed. While a majority of these betrayals happen during the action of the play, at least one betrayal has occurred before the opening scene, namely, Blanche's betrayal of her young husband years before. As a result of it, Blanche has been forced into a world of illusion and becomes an immediate threat to her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski, and his existence. Blanche provokes Stanley, and the resulting confrontation between them is the primary conflict during the action of the play. Stanley's betrayal of Blanche also places Stella Kowalski in the predicament of having to choose between sister and husband. These two betrayals are orbited in the structure of the play by minor betrayals that occur at varying levels of the characters' consciousness, specifically Blanche's self-betrayal and her betrayal of Mitch. Also, Williams closes the play with the setting for a potential future betrayal.

Blanche's past betrayal of her husband, Allan, has already had catastrophic results when the play opens. As a result of it, Allan committed suicide; and Blanche's furies have pursued her ever since, driving her to the brink of madness and drastically affecting her personality. At a dramatic moment in the play she relates the trauma she experienced in learning that Allan was a homosexual. The manner in which she made the discovery heightened



the impact it had upon her: she walked into a room she thought to be empty and discovered her husband and his lover. That night, the three of them, pretending that nothing extraordinary had occurred, attended a party. Suddenly her husband ran from the party and committed suicide. As Blanche says,

It was because--on the dance floor--unable to stop myself--I'd suddenly said--"I saw! I know! You disgust me . . . " And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this--kitchen--candle . . . <sup>13</sup>

Symbolically Blanche is saying that since that fateful evening she has surrounded herself with a veil which has shaded her from the harshness of reality. Blanche believed that her cruelty had been responsible for the death of a person she had loved. She felt not only that she had been betrayed by the discovery of her husband's homosexuality, but more importantly that she had betrayed her husband. By cruelly berating him, instead of attempting to understand him and show her love for him, she had destroyed him. It is a rather cruel poetic justice that just as Blanche destroyed her husband through the thoughtlessness of a cruel remark and a lack of understanding so these very traits in Stanley later destroy her.

This betrayal, significant in itself, led to yet another major betrayal, a self-betrayal. Vulnerable because of loneliness and guilt feelings Blanche faced a number of new problems. She struggled through a long succession of deaths in her family and the loss of her plantation home (Belle Reve). She began to ride the "Streetcar Named Desire" long before her arrival in New Orleans. Turning to sexual gratification in an attempt

to replace the happiness of a life that no longer existed, she began giving herself to soldiers in an effort, perhaps, to overcome her loneliness. This solace seemed to narcotize her as she moved from one meaningless relationship to another, perhaps afraid to give more than her physical self for fear of another failure and subsequent betrayal.

Yet, Blanche also attempted to deny this need for physical gratification as a substitute for a more rewarding relationship. Having ruined her reputation and seriously violated the Southern tradition she idealized, she lied and rationalized to avoid acknowledging her degradation. This refusal to accept the truth is the basis for her self-betrayal. Having violated this Southern tradition, Blanche placed herself in the position of having to betray her ideals in order to survive. Not realizing this she betrayed herself in a feeble attempt to cling to her ideals and tradition. Elia Kazan, in his "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," says that Blanche's problem has to do with her tradition. Blanche, like Amanda in The Glass Menagerie, tends to live in the past perhaps comforted by the security offered by its traditions. Because this past is in conflict with the present Blanche continually takes refuge in a world of fantasy. "Everything that she does in reality too is colored by this necessity, this compulsion to be special. So, in fact, reality becomes fantasy too."<sup>14</sup> Kazan also states that we cannot understand Blanche's present behavior without an understanding of the effect her past has had on her behavior.<sup>15</sup> Blanche refused to recognize her real self, which she labeled brutal desire.<sup>16</sup> This is a contradiction in her nature (her

actions being in conflict with her desires) that is similar to Amanda's problem in Menagerie. This is a fatal flaw in Blanche's character. Also, it is this inability to recognize her real self that provokes Stanley and leads to her ultimate destruction.

Blanche, from the point of her arrival in New Orleans, insures her ultimate destruction by placing herself in competition with Stanley for Stella's sympathies. She further provokes Stanley by maintaining a position of superiority. It is important to understand Blanche's attitude toward Stanley in order to comprehend why he was forced to destroy Blanche. Usually, she considers herself to be superior to Stanley's animalistic qualities.

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits. Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something--sub-human--something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something--ape-like about him like one of those pictures I've seen in anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is-- Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you--you here--waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you.<sup>17</sup>

Yet despite this plea for a return to the puritanical values of her youth, at another point in the play Blanche says:

Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix<sup>18</sup> with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve.

This is not an acceptance of Stanley Kowalski and what he represents, but rather a recognition of his inevitable triumph. This recognition of Stanley's animalistic behavior is evident when Blanche tells Stella:

What you are talking about is brutal desire--  
 just--Desire!--the name of that rattle-trap  
 street car that bangs through the Quarter,  
 up one old narrow street and down another . . . 19

Blanche, like her sister, is attracted to some extent by this animal sexuality, but she also damns it. While Stella is content to merely accept such animalistic behavior, Blanche recognizes that it can be used either to create or to destroy, depending upon how Stanley chooses to employ it. It is ironic that Blanche, who recognizes the inherent danger in such traits, is the one who is ultimately destroyed by Stanley.

Blanche's arrival in New Orleans forces Stanley to fight, like a trapped animal, for his survival. Either Blanche or his life with Stella must be destroyed. He allows this disruptive situation to exist for a time, then acts swiftly and violently to insure the survival of the fittest. The ultimate betrayal begins with Stanley researching and exposing Blanche's tragic history and culminates in his rape of Blanche. These actions, climaxed by the rape (We've had this date with each other from the beginning!")<sup>20</sup>, force Stella to make a choice--him or Blanche. This statement tells the reader that Stanley realizes such actions will force Stella to be either his wife or Blanche's sister. He may not be quite conscious of the fact that his actions will completely destroy Blanche, but this does not concern him. During Blanche's removal, Stanley blocks her reentry into the bedroom (her last hope for survival) and waits calmly so that he may resume his poker game! Evidently unaware of any change in his relationship with Stella, he is attempting at the play's end to comfort Stella while continuing his poker game. His animalistic nature allows no room for regret or

remorse. He simply saw what had to be done and proceeded to act in an expedient manner to achieve the desired results. This lack of regret is what distinguishes Stanley from Stella or Tom Wingfield.

Stanley's denial of his rape of Blanche forces Stella to believe him and thus betray Blanche. But this betrayal has been growing--from the first time Stella met Stanley. In contrast to Blanche's desire to abide by the social dictates of a dead tradition, Stella, upon choosing Stanley as a mate, forsook those traditions. This of course placed the two sisters in opposition. The process which Stella underwent after meeting Stanley is summarized in Williams' stage direction at the opening of the play. This stage direction tells us that when Stanley pitches a package of raw meat to Stella she, " . . . cries out in protest but manages to catch it; then she laughs breathlessly."<sup>21</sup> This scene is symbolic of Stella's acceptance of Stanley's animalistic sexuality which was the basis of their relationship. When Blanche arrives, Stella is forced to consider the way of life she had once embraced. The primary difference between Stella and Blanche is that Stella abandoned the value system that accompanied this traditional life-style before it was destroyed, while Blanche clung to the old values and was destroyed with them.

Wanting to avoid further betraying Blanche, Stella attempts to reconcile the respective positions of Blanche and Stanley. This attempted reconciliation is evident in Stella's statement to Blanche following Stanley's absurd accusation that she let "his" property slip away: "I'm sorry he did that to you."<sup>22</sup>

Stella apologizes for the very qualities that she finds attractive in Stanley. In effect, she tells Blanche that she is sorry for what she (Stella) has done to Blanche. Stella's confusion as to how to reconcile her own and Blanche's traditional values with her present life is perhaps best illustrated in the poker scene. When Stanley throws the radio out the window, Stella defends Blanche and then rushes from the apartment. But when Stanley calls for her, she returns to him and accepts him as a lover.<sup>23</sup> This scene can be seen as a prelude to Stella's eventual betrayal of Blanche. She sympathizes with Blanche but ultimately aligns herself with Stanley. The betrayal is climaxed later when Stella must refuse to believe Blanche's story of a rape and regard it as a result of Blanche's unstable mental condition. To believe Blanche would be to lose Stanley and his security. This would leave Stella with the prospect of following Blanche into her world of loneliness. She must betray either the life she has chosen or Blanche. Faced with this reality Stella has no choice but to believe Stanley's denial of the rape. This situation naturally leads to the savage betrayal of Blanche in the final scene.

It is impossible to predict the effect of this betrayal on Stella's conscience. But her life with Stanley can never regain the same luster it once had, just as Tom Wingfield's freedom is tainted by his thoughts of Laura. Stella will undoubtedly face a similar struggle the rest of her life attempting to convince herself that she was "right" to take the action she chose. Also, her unintentional cruelty has destroyed the

innocence of her relationship with Stanley. With Blanche representing a dead past and the despair that is now associated with it and Stanley representing a corrupted present, Stella's hope for the future must lie with her child. Perhaps as Blanche hoped, this child would have Stanley's strengths tempered by Blanche and Stella's sensitivities. It is also possible, however, that the child would develop Blanche's and Stella's weaknesses and Stanley's lack of sensitivity. However the child develops one thing remains certain. As a character in the world of Tennessee Williams the child will eventually be involved in a betrayal.

As in Menagerie Williams again uses the stage directions and stage effects to reinforce the contrast of illusion and reality and its bearing on betrayals. One of Blanche's first acts upon arriving at Stella's apartment is to place a paper lantern over a bare light bulb. Symbolically this shields Blanche from the harshness of reality. This becomes even more evident when, in Scene Nine, Mitch tears the paper lantern from the bulb to reveal Blanche's true appearance. Another example of Williams' use of staging effects is evident in his directions preceding Scene Three. He describes the kitchen, where the men are playing poker in such a manner that he reflects the raw sensuality and almost juvenile primitiveness of its inhabitants. The dimly lighted bedroom signifies the subdued sensitivity of the women. Without a word being spoken Williams has set the scene for inevitable conflict.

There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors

of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric light bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players-- Stanley, Steve, Mitch, and Pablo--wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red and white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table, whiskey bottles and glasses.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, "The bedroom is relatively dim with only the light that spills between the portieres and through the wide window on the street."<sup>25</sup> With this description, Williams has drawn the battle lines.

Williams continually reminds his audience of the source of Blanche's self-betrayal through the use of stage effects. Whenever Blanche's peace of mind is threatened by the intrusion of reality she hears a polka tune in her mind.

Blanche: Something's the matter tonight, but never mind. I won't cross-examine the witness. I'll just--(She touches her forehead vaguely. The polka tune starts up again.)--pretend I don't notice anything different about you! That--music again . . .

Mitch: What music?

Blanche: The "Varsouviana"! The polka tune they were playing when Allan--Wait! (A distant revolver shot is heard. Elanche seems relieved.) There now, the shot! It always stops after that. (The polka music dies out again.)<sup>26</sup>

Williams uses this device to remind the audience that the source of Blanche's torment, which leads to her self-betrayal, is her guilt-feelings that are the result of the cruel manner in which she betrayed Allan and her memory of his subsequent suicide. Once the shot is heard Elanche no longer feels threatened by reality for she has withdrawn further into her world of illusion. Williams also uses Blanche's lurid visions of shadowy images on the wall



and the changing color of the sky to make the stage become a representation of Blanche's torment.

In A Streetcar Named Desire Tennessee Williams once again states his belief that betrayal is an integral factor in the struggle for survival. Unlike Tom Wingfield, however, Stanley shows no remorse for his actions. Only Stella and Blanche have struggled with their consciences because of their actions. Williams, then, in this instance has taken betrayal a step further than he did in Menagerie. He has used betrayal to illustrate a regression, or reverse evolution, which results in the strong destroying those that are sensitive to the established ideals and traditions. As Elia Kazan states, "We are shown the final dissolution of a person of worth, who once had great potential, and who, even as she goes down, has worth exceeding that of the 'healthy' coarse-grained figures who kill her . . . ."27

The dramatization of the destruction of Blanche also seems to indicate that Williams finds Blanche's fate to be the real tragedy of the drama. Williams constructs the play in such a manner that there should be a complete reversal of the audience's attitude towards Blanche. At the beginning of the play Blanche's aloofness and feeling of superiority place her in an unsympathetic role in comparison to Stanley. However, as the action of the drama progresses and Stanley's cruelty and Blanche's sensitivity become evident the audience's sympathies should shift to Blanche as a basically good individual who is cruelly wasted. The next step in the regression is, of course, Stella who

sympathizes with Blanche, but contributes to her destruction so that the life she has chosen with Stanley can continue. Finally, there is Stanley, who is unable to feel remorseful for his actions. He simply realizes Blanche is a threat to his existence and therefore must be destroyed. In his mind, this is nothing for which he should feel remorseful; it is simply a law of nature. It is this cruelty and lack of remorse that Williams seems to find most offensive. Ultimately there is the presence of Stanley's child. If created in his father's likeness the child will be an extension of Stanley's animalistic nature. It is also possible that the child will inherit the sensitivity of Blanche and will inevitably face a similar betrayal and destruction.

#### Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Betrayal is evident throughout the story line of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The characters' inability to accept the truth and the conflicts and betrayals resulting from this inability are the theme of the play. As Esther Merle Jackson states in her book, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams:

In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof Williams seems to say . . . that there is no truth at all in existence; that the very nature of existence conspires against human understanding. He develops this theme in three movements. The first of these progressions mirrors the anguish of the protagonist Brick, seeking to unravel the truth of his complicity in the death of his friend Skipper. The second variation is in thematic proximity; for it concerns the life relationship between Brick and his wife Maggie. The third is, like the first, an extremely ambiguous progression. It involves the attempt to diagnose Big Daddy's cancer. The ambiguity of this

illness symbolizes the whole problem of the play; for it poses the crucial question, not only about Big Daddy Pollitt, but also about the whole of mankind. What is the nature of its illness? Is it a sickness unto death?<sup>28</sup>

The sickness is the result of the conflict between reality and illusion which is now focused on the characters' acceptance or denial of truth. This is the illness symbolized by Big Daddy's cancer and by Brick's drinking and his broken leg. Williams, then, uses the characters of Cat to illustrate that a denial of truth inevitably leads to betrayal. The betrayals are not as catastrophic in nature, however, as they were in Streetcar. The characters' approaches to the resolution of conflict are perhaps more positive, but Williams is not overly optimistic about their success.

There are numerous betrayals involved in the three thematic movements mentioned by Jackson. In the first movement the betrayals to be considered are Maggie's betrayal of Skipper and Brick's relationship, and Brick's subsequent betrayal of Skipper. Also, Brick's betrayal of Skipper results in Brick's self-betrayal. The second movement is concerned with the attempts of Maggie and Brick to cope with the destructive nature of their relationship, a relationship that has deteriorated because of Brick's self-betrayal. In the third movement the betrayals to be considered are Big Daddy's symbolic self-betrayal, and finally Maggie's betrayal of Big Daddy.

Once again significant betrayals that have occurred in the past are the source of the conflict occurring during the action of the play. From Brick and Maggie's discussion

in the opening scene it is learned that Brick blames Maggie for the destruction of his relationship with his best, and perhaps only, friend, Skipper. Brick and Skipper, teammates at Ole Miss, had formed a professional football team after college in order to preserve their youthful image of themselves and to continue their comradeship. As a result, Maggie felt that her relationship with Brick continued to take second place to Brick's relationship with Skipper. Understandably, when presented with the opportunity, she attempted to strengthen her position. Such an opportunity occurred when, with Brick absent from the team because of an injury, Skipper began drinking and consuming drugs to such an extent that he could not play with the team. Maggie, after drinking all night with Skipper, confronted him about his relationship with Brick. "SKIPPER! STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE'S GOT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM!-- one way or another."<sup>29</sup> Afterwards, Skipper attempted to prove Maggie wrong by making love to her, only to fail in his attempt. Consequently Skipper's disintegration quickened. He increased his consumption of liquor and drugs until they resulted in his death.

One ideal, then, has been betrayed and subsequently destroyed by reality, or by a person's inability to face reality, before the play has begun, namely, Brick and Skipper's ideal friendship, which could not survive exposure of Skipper's homosexual feelings for Brick. This recalled incident serves to establish Maggie as the realist willing to destroy the illusion created by ideals if such destruction

might be to her advantage. She did not, presumably, intend to betray Skipper and Brick's relationship but merely wanted to make Brick face the truth about it and thereby strengthen her relationship with Brick. This position is evident from her statement that ". . . life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is--all--over. . . ."30 Maggie was trying to force Brick to forsake his illusions in favor of an acceptance of truth that would allow his life to continue. The destruction of their relationship was something that she could not avoid if she was to survive. However, during Brick's discussion with Big Daddy, the fact surfaces that Brick's disgust is perhaps not so much with Maggie's responsibility as with his own. Brick reveals that after Maggie and Skipper's confrontation, he received a confessional call from Skipper. Unable to face the truth which Skipper was revealing, he refused to listen and never talked to his friend again. It was this denial of Skipper that resulted in his death and in Brick's disgust.

Big Daddy: Anyhow now!--we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You have been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself. You!--dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!--before you'd face the truth with him!31

For a long time Brick refused to face the truth of his own responsibility and betrayed his relationship with Maggie by putting the blame on her.

Ironically, Brick speaks at length against "mendacity"--the very thing of which he is guilty. The source of Brick's

paralysis is his inability to accept the truth that he, not Maggie, is responsible for Skipper's betrayal and subsequent death. Brick betrayed Skipper because he was unable to accept a commitment of love--especially the unorthodox love Skipper offered--and the subsequent responsibilities that accompany it. Now, as a result of his failure to make a commitment to Skipper, Brick is unable to make or to continue his commitment to Maggie. Brick betrays Maggie by refusing to continue their sexual relationship and by denying his love for her.

Brick's emotional handicap (this inability to make the necessary commitments for a lasting relationship) is symbolized by his drinking and his being physically crippled. However, Brick has also been betrayed by worshipping the illusion of youth.<sup>36</sup> This belief in illusion is revealed in his accident at the athletic field and his desire to continue playing football after his graduation from college. In an attempt to relive the glory (and innocence) of his youth, he has suffered a broken leg while attempting to negotiate a hurdle on his old high school athletic field. This hurdle is symbolic of the one he now faces in his life, which is his awareness that ideals are inevitably betrayed by human frailties. Unable to accept this fact, Brick has turned to liquor to narcotize himself from the pain of this truth. Brick acknowledges such a retreat during his scene with Big Daddy in Act Two.

Big Daddy: . . . I've lived with mendacity!--  
 Why can't you live with it? Hell you got  
 to live with it, there's nothing else to  
 live with except mendacity, is there?

Brick: This!--Liquor . . .

Big Daddy: That's not living, that's  
 dodging away from life.

Brick: I want to dodge away from it.<sup>32</sup>

Big Daddy's taking Brick's bottle and crutch during this scene is symbolic action representing what Williams sees as Brick's only hope for recovery--the throwing away of his emotional crutches so that he will accept the truth.

Brick's retreat from life and from the possibility of future betrayals results not only in betrayal of himself and his relationship with Maggie, but also in the betrayal of Big Daddy. Big Daddy feels betrayed by Brick's retreat from life because it will force him to eventually will his estate to Gooper and Mae.

Big Daddy: . . . Should I or should I not,  
 if the jig was up, give you this place when  
 I go--since I hate Gooper an' Mae an' know  
 that they hate me, and since all five same  
 monkeys are little Maes and Goopers.--And I  
 thought, No!--Then I thought, Yes!--I couldn't  
 make up my mind. I hate Gooper and his five  
 same monkeys and that bitch Mae! Why should I  
 turn over twenty-eight thousand acres of the  
 richest land this side of the valley Nile to  
 not my kind?--But why in hell, on the other  
 hand, Brick--should I subsidize a goddamn  
 fool on the bottle?--Liked or not liked, well,  
 maybe even--loved!--Why should I do that?--  
 Subsidize worthless behavior? Rot? Corruption?<sup>33</sup>

Brick's actions, then, were forcing Big Daddy to leave his life's work to someone he hated, rather than to Brick--perhaps the only person Big Daddy had ever loved.

Brick also betrays Big Daddy's love in another respect during their discussion. This last betrayal of Big Daddy

also serves to further illustrate Brick's hypocrisy. Brick corrupts the use of truth when he hints to Big Daddy that he has been lied to about the medical report. He makes the revelation partially because he loves Big Daddy and shares his disgust with mendacity. However, the manner in which Brick reveals the truth is a betrayal. He does not have the courage to actually tell Big Daddy the truth, but merely hints at it. Also, during the heated argument he speaks not entirely in the spirit of an honest and pure relationship, but rather in an attempt to use truth as a weapon with which to gain revenge. In this regard he is acting not in a loving manner, but rather hatefully and destructively. It is the use of truth in this manner that betrays Big Daddy and at the same time betrays Brick's own standards and beliefs. He has used truth in a manner similar to Maggie's use of it during her confrontation with Skipper.

Just as Brick's inability to accept the truth leads to betrayal, so Big Daddy's willingness to accept mendacity leads to his corruption and self-betrayal. When rebuking Brick, Big Daddy exclaims:

Think of all the lies I got to put up with!--  
 Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to  
 pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have  
 any idea of? Having for instance to act like  
 I care for Big Mamma!--I haven't been able to  
 stand the sight, sound or smell of that woman  
 for forty years now!--even when I laid her!--  
 regular as a piston.<sup>34</sup>

Like Brick, he seems unable to accept a commitment of love and its responsibilities, but like Maggie, he accepts the corruption in the world and as a realist is able to function



in such corruption. Big Daddy is the result of the hypocrisy that Brick claims to be fighting. Big Daddy has just admitted that his marriage to Big Mamma has been a life of mendacity; yet, he aligns himself with Brick and Maggie in their disgust with the mendacious Gooper and Mae and their "five entertainers" (children) as people who use others simply to satisfy their own desires. However, Big Daddy apparently lived a lie simply by using Big Mamma as a convenience, for procreation and for satisfaction of desires. This inability, or unwillingness, to return Big Mamma's love and devotion is certainly a betrayal of that devotion. This acceptance of mendacity also results in Big Daddy's self-betrayal in the sense that his inability to love results in his family's inability to love him in return. Of all his family only Big Mamma shows grief at the news of Big Daddy's impending death by cancer. Brick and Gooper cannot return the love which they never received. Brick, of course, does love Big Daddy, but cannot express this love because of the shallowness of their past relationship.

Big Daddy's illness can also be seen as being symbolic of his self-betrayal. Big Daddy corrupted his life by worshiping false idols. Esther Merle Jackson states that "Williams suggests that the sickness in the House of Pollitt, like that of humanity, may be traced to its belief in illusions."<sup>35</sup> In Act Two when Big Daddy is discussing the power of money, he exclaims to Brick:

But a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished . . . 36

Big Daddy realizes he has betrayed himself by wasting his life seeking power through the acquisition of land and money.

Maggie is, of course, a younger version of Big Daddy. She, like Big Daddy, worships illusion (success through physical acquisitions), but because of her relative youth the corrupting influence is not yet evident.

In an attempt to save her marriage and her chances of controlling Big Daddy's estate she announces to the family that she is pregnant. The play ends with Maggie attempting to coerce Brick into making this lie come true. It is ironic that Maggie resorts to attempting to change a lie into truth in order to salvage her relationship with Brick, since it is mendacity which Brick finds so disgusting. Maggie uses her unborn (and as yet unconceived) child to manipulate existing circumstances. Maggie's lie possibly betrays Big Daddy by offering him a false hope, but more importantly it corrupts her relationship with this unborn child. It also further illustrates Maggie's willingness to succumb to the same betrayals as Big Daddy and Brick--the use of illusions to achieve her desires.

Betrayal and destruction of the ideal are inherent factors in the relationships of the characters in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof just as they have been in the plays previously discussed. The first ideal to be betrayed is the relationship

of Skipper and Brick. It is Maggie who first tarnished the relationship, but Brick's denial of Skipper was the ultimate betrayal leading to Skipper's self-destruction. Guilt-ridden over his betrayal of Skipper, Brick turned to alcohol in an attempt to hide from himself his complicity in Skipper's death. This use of alcohol and Brick's refusal to quit searching for his lost youth lead to Brick's self-betrayal and the destruction of his relationship with Maggie. Big Daddy has also betrayed himself by worshipping an illusion--the power of money. His betrayal and corruption are symbolized by his fatal illness--cancer. Likewise, Maggie is in the process of corrupting her life by seeking illusions. Williams once again places the characters in a universe that dictates betrayal in their attempts to satisfy their desires. The tragic betrayal in *Cat* that Williams finds most offensive is an individual's refusal to accept the responsibility of making a commitment of love. This is evidenced by Big Daddy's cancer and the possible destruction of a youthful and worthwhile person such as Brick.

#### The Night of the Iguana

In The Night of the Iguana the act of betrayal is still a major ingredient. The focus has shifted, however, to the characters' hopes and ability to recover from conflict and betrayal. Once again, the primary source of betrayal is the protagonist's inability to accept life's corruption of his ideals.

The protagonist this time is Larry Shannon, a defrocked minister who has betrayed the religion of his childhood and ministerial career. This religion proposed an ideal of human nature which Shannon has found he cannot live up to. The theme of the play is his attempt to reconcile his behavior with those religious ideals or to find a new "religion" which will more adequately allow for the limitations of "normal" human behavior. To do either would bring release from the guilt of his self-betrayal.

The original conflict in The Night of the Iguana develops during Shannon's youth. This is revealed to the reader or audience by Maxine during a conversation with Shannon.

Maxine: . . . I know your psychological history, I remember one of your conversations with Fred. You was explaining to him how your problems first started. You told him that Mama, your Mama, used to send you to bed before you was ready to sleep-- so you practiced the little boy's vice, you amused yourself. And once she caught you at it and whaled your backside with the backside of a hairbrush because she said she had to punish you for it because it made God as mad as much as it did Mama, and she had to punish you for it so God wouldn't punish you for it harder than she would.

The conflict of the play, then, presents itself as the common problem of religion versus sexuality. This scene serves to illustrate how Shannon came to learn at an early age that human desires and human ideals are in conflict. Circumstances beyond Shannon's control forced him into committing a betrayal. By succumbing to strong physical desires he was betraying God; yet, to follow "God's dictate" meant betraying his physical desires and needs.

This childhood lesson stayed with Shannon and surfaced when he was a minister in Virginia, in the form of guilt, resulting in rebellion. The rebellion was sparked by a scandal resulting from Shannon's sexual relationship with a young female member of the congregation. When people began to talk about Shannon's sin he retaliated in a sermon based on the senility of God as Western culture perceives him.

Yeah, this angry, petulant old man. I mean he's represented like a bad-tempered childish old, old, sick, peevish man--I mean like the sort of old man in a nursing home that's putting together a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table. Yes, I tell you they do that, all our theologies do it--accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all he created for his own faults in construction . . . 38

In this speech Shannon verbalized the realization that what he desired and what his religion expected him to teach (and to follow) were in conflict, and therefore he must betray either himself or his religion. He also placed the blame for this dilemma upon man's view of the universe as professed by the major religions.

When the drama opens the Larry Shannon that Williams introduces to the audience is a defrocked minister who conducts third rate tours through Mexico. This does not mean, however, that Shannon has totally forsaken religion. The fact that religion remains important to him after he quits the ministry is evidenced by his reacquiring his collar from a pawn shop just to convince the ladies of his tour that he had not been defrocked. This is, perhaps,

an attempt by Shannon to prove to himself, and to the others, that he has control over the events of his life instead of being controlled by the events. Also, the belief that he could return to the church upon his merely choosing to do so offered him the comfort that viable alternatives remained open to him. Shannon hoped his "spook" was perhaps only temporary in nature if he could return to the church and the less "fantastic" past if he so desired. In this regard Shannon was clinging to an illusion, however.

Intellectually, at least, Shannon had already accepted a new God that would not allow him to return to his church. Shannon conducted "side-tours for the ladies to show them the part of life not usually seen on guided tours. These "expeditions" went through the more corrupt part of the cities, to show the ladies the houses of prostitution and the poverty of the natives. Shannon's aim was to show the ladies his new God. This is Shannon's God of Lightning and Thunder that does not punish man for the unavoidable corruption that is inherent in his world.

Shannon: It's going to storm tonight--a terrific electric storm. Then you will see the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon's concept of God Almighty paying a visit. I want to go back to the Church and preach the gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder . . . and also stray dogs vivisected and . . . and . . . and . . . (He points out suddenly toward the sea.) That's him! There he is now! (He is pointing out a blaze, a majestic apocalypse of gold light shafting the sky as the sun drops into the Pacific.) . . .<sup>39</sup>

It would be impossible for Shannon's church to accept him as a minister, as long as he intellectually accepts this new God. Shannon, then, must find a basis for an emotional

reconciliation with this God if he is going to defeat his spook.

The action of the play focuses on Shannon's struggle to reconcile his emotional acceptance of God with his acceptance of corruption. Esther Merle Jackson states in The Broken World of Tennessee Williams that "The Night of the Iguana is a kind of modern Everyman, a moment when the protagonist watches his own vices and virtues parade across the great stage of his consciousness."<sup>40</sup> Although it may be stretching a point to refer to Maxine Faulk and Hannah Jelkes as representations of Shannon's virtues and vices, as Jackson does, it is possible to examine these characters as reflections of Shannon's self.

Maxine can be seen to reflect the part of Shannon that rebukes impossible ideals in order to embrace human desires. This is evident when she tells Shannon, ". . . We've both reached a point where we've got to settle for something that works for us in our lives--even if it isn't on the highest kind of level."<sup>41</sup> Maxine refuses to strive for an ideal, but rather accepts the reality of her present situation and seeks only what happiness it might offer. She does not hope for romantic love from Shannon, but believes they might console each other with the gratification a physical relationship might offer.<sup>42</sup> Rather than attempting to aid Shannon positively, it appears Maxine would rather convert him into a one dimensional character such as herself. Maxine would allow Shannon to betray his faith in God without retaining guilt feelings. However to do this would be to avoid the

pain of conflict by accepting defeat. Maxine's lack of any spiritual dimension is foreign to Shannon, and makes her somewhat unsympathetic in the eyes of the reader.

In contrast to Maxine, Hannah professes to understand Shannon's plight and attempts to help him in her version of a positive manner. She reflects that part of Shannon's nature that wishes to combat the spook.

Yes. I can help you because I've been through what you are going through now. I had something like your spook--I just had a different name for him.<sup>43</sup>

Hannah has fought the same battles as Shannon and survived as a relatively free spirit. Hannah has overcome betrayals and guilt feelings and has placed her life and its events in the proper perspective. She has learned to accept loneliness and defeat without being totally defeated. For example, she does not view death as life's final betrayal, but rather as God's way of releasing a person from the battle to overcome life's betrayals: "Oh, God, can't we stop now? Finally? Please let us. It's so quiet here now."<sup>44</sup> This plea occurs when it becomes apparent that Nonno's death is imminent and seems to be a request that both she and Nonno be allowed to advance beyond the end of their ropes.

Since Hannah has won the battle with her spook she is able to illustrate to Shannon that his wanderings without direction result in a continuation of his betrayal. Just as in the quick sketches she can truly reflect a person's nature, she gives an accurate character sketch of Shannon when she says:



Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Mr. Shannon? There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock--no nails, no blood, no death. Isn't that a comparatively comfortable, almost voluptuous kind of crucifixion to suffer for the guilt of the world, Mr. Shannon?<sup>45</sup>

She seems to be telling Shannon that if he is going to mimic Christ's acceptance of responsibility for human frailties he should at least do so with some form of dignity, instead of satirizing it as a sexually frustrated fool. Shannon even views Hannah as his Peter when he answers her Character sketch by asking: "Why have you turned against me all of a sudden, when I need you the most?"<sup>46</sup>

Hannah has not betrayed Shannon, as he suggests, but rather is trying to force him to accept that just as the captured iguana panics at the end of its rope, Shannon panics when confronted with the conflict between human ideals and desires. He is betrayed by his inability to accept life's inevitable corruption of our ideals. Unable to please God, whether as a masturbating child or as a fornicating minister, Shannon has chosen to succumb to corruption and becomes a comic imitation of Christ. Spiritually he could not accept corruption and the subsequent suffering as Christ did, and this is the spook that is destroying him. Whether Williams means for Shannon to progress or to remain child-like and destructive is debatable.

Shannon is offered the possibility of recovery from his betrayals as there is some indication that Shannon has resolved

his inner conflict in a positive manner. This can be seen in his acceptance of the rain. Water, a necessary ingredient to sustain life, also causes corruption (the use of water to suggest the inevitable process of rotting and corruption is a device Williams uses throughout the play) and therefore Shannon's catching the rain in cupped hands can be seen as a symbolic acceptance of life's corruption. Also, his agreeing to go for a moon-light swim (he had earlier refused to do so) can be seen as a symbolic baptism signifying his acceptance of this new God that tolerates the corruption in man's world that He has created. If this is true, Shannon has defeated his spook and therefore avoids further self-betrayal by accepting the inevitability of life's corruption of man's ideals.

Shannon's ability to resolve his inner conflict and overcome his betrayal is paralleled in the character Nonno, the minor league poet. Nonno's lifetime quest was his poetry, which he completed immediately prior to his death. By continuing to battle the obstacles that prevented him from easily completing his lifetime work, he finally overcame these obstacles and was released from the battle as symbolized by his death upon the completion of his poem. The text of the poem also supports this conception of Nonno's role in the play. The poem Nonno has written is a request to be granted the courage to continue the battle and for the perseverance necessary to get beyond the "end of one's rope."

This morality lesson concerning life's conflicts and

betrayals is present to some degree in each of the characters in the play. Each character is placed in conflict with another just as human desires and ideals are in conflict. Shannon is placed in conflict with Jake Latta. Latta seems to represent acceptance of reality and betrayal of the ideal when he reprimands Shannon for attempting to take the tours away from their preordained schedule to offer the tourists added attractions. Hannah and Maxine are placed in conflict by their competition for Shannon's companionship. This parallels their respective attitudes in regard to how Shannon should approach life's conflicts and betrayals.<sup>47</sup> Williams uses each character to illustrate how the spiritual worlds of man are in conflict and therefore result in betrayal. That each individual's life will become embroiled in such conflicts and betrayals appears to be a predestined fact in Williams' world. Only each individual's manner of coping with such conflict remains questionable.

Williams ends the play with a more optimistic projection for the future than in the previous plays. The focus of attention has shifted from the source of conflict to the possible resolution of conflict. Nonno, for example, was released from his quest for his life's poem just as he finished it. He had completed his battle with the spook and could be released from the threat of future betrayals. Meanwhile, Hannah is asking God to release her from life's conflicts. The end of the play finds Hannah facing a life of loneliness and perhaps a renewal of her battle with the

spook. However, the audience realizes, from the previous action, that Hannah is strong and should ultimately defeat the spook.

Shannon also has found a basis for ending his battle with the spook by coming to the realization that corruption in life is inevitable, and man must temper his ideals to coincide with this realization. Shannon's release of the iguana "So that one of God's creatures could scramble home safe and free . . ." seems to indicate that Shannon has realized that his spook haunts everyone and that an occasional act of kindness is the most effective form of combat against corruption.<sup>48</sup> Shannon, then, seems to be approaching the recognition of a God that does not punish man for his frailties. He cannot be assured of release from his inner conflict except through death, but as a result of the night's activities he has a better understanding of his spook (inner conflict) and can therefore fight from firmer ground. This seems to be as optimistic as Williams is capable of being.

## CONCLUSION

In the plays discussed certain patterns are evident. In all four plays, betrayal has been a primary ingredient of the action. There is also a similarity in the manner in which the betrayals are structured in each play. In each instance, at least one betrayal has occurred prior to the action of the drama. The betrayals that occur during the action of the play stem from this initial conflict. In two instances, A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams uses the birth of a child at the end of the play as a setting for potential betrayals.

Three types of betrayals occur throughout each of the plays. These types are: self-betrayal, betrayal of ideals, and betrayal of others. In The Glass Menagerie, for example, Tom Wingfield betrays Amanda and Laura in order to avoid betraying his ideals. Amanda betrays her children by attempting to force her vision of an ideal world upon them. Her inability to recognize Tom and Laura as individuals also results in her failure to achieve what she most desires. Amanda attempted to channel her children's lives in the directions she desired so that they would not repeat the mistakes she believed she had committed. Williams indicates, by making Amanda a sympathetic character, that her self-betrayal is tragic, but he is not

inclined to pass judgment on its morality. Similarly, Tom's betrayal of Laura leaves him with guilt-feelings, yet Williams does not attempt to pass judgment on the morality of this betrayal either. Rather, Williams seems to indicate that both individuals were forced into situations that would inevitably result in betrayal. Tom had to betray Laura (by abandoning her) or betray his dream of becoming a poet. The most offensive betrayal in the drama (and the betrayal that resulted in Tom's guilt-feelings) was Tom's willingness to falsely build Laura's hopes simply to appease Amanda. This betrayal--the most tragic in the play--is presented as offensive because it could have been avoided if Tom had shown more kindness and attentiveness to his sister.

Blanche DuBois is tragically betrayed in A Streetcar Named Desire. Like Amanda's, Blanche's self-betrayal is also presented somewhat sympathetically. Blanche was forced into her world of illusion as a result of her sensitive nature and her loyalty to her ideals. Blanche's choice to remain loyal to her tradition made Stella's betrayal of Blanche inevitable. Stella's allowing Blanche to be institutionalized was merely an extension of her earlier betrayal of Blanche when she chose to marry Stanley. This betrayal lessens the audience's sympathy for Stella. It is Stanley's cruelty, however, that is presented as actually villainous. Unlike Tom Wingfield's, Stanley's nature does not allow him to be penitent. Cruelty and lack of sensitivity seem to be what Williams finds most offensive. It should be noted that Streetcar is structured so that the

audience reaction to the characters of Stanley and Blanche should be reversed at the end of the action from what it was at the beginning. When Blanche arrives in New Orleans, her aloofness and feeling of superiority place Stanley in a sympathetic role and Blanche in an unsympathetic role. As the action progresses, however, Blanche's sensitivity and Stanley's cruelty reverse their positions in this respect. Thus, it is not Stanley's betrayal of Blanche but his unfeeling cruelty that Williams finds offensive.

Hypocrisy and mendacity are the source of the betrayals which Williams finds offensive in Cat. Brick's self-betrayal is the result of his inability to accept the truth--specifically his inability to make commitments. He professes that he is disgusted with mendacity but actually he is disgusted with himself for failing to meet his ideals. His ideals are perhaps unattainable, and he is therefore doomed to betray them. Maggie is presented as a realist who has successfully reconciled herself with reality. However, if Maggie's acceptance of reality can seem to parallel Big Daddy's, her reconciliation might not be so successful. Big Daddy's cancer is the symbolic representation of the corrupting nature of mendacity as a way of coping with reality. Williams again indicates in Cat that devotion to one's ideals with complete disregard for reality inevitably results in self-betrayal. Williams does not seem to be particularly offended by either situation, as none of the characters are presented unsympathetically. If any of the betrayals in Cat offend Williams' sensitivity, it must

surely be Brick's denial of Skipper and Maggie and Big Daddy's denial of Big Mamma, for these betrayals are the result of Brick's and Big Daddy's inability to accept a commitment of love and its accompanying responsibilities.

The Night of the Iguana differs from the earlier plays in that in Night Williams offers some definite proposals for resolving the conflict of reality and ideals and the resulting betrayals. The action of the drama is centered upon Larry Shannon's inner conflicts and the resulting self-betrayal. Once again the conflict is the result of an individual's quest to reconcile ideals with reality. Each character in the play represents different approaches to the resolution of this conflict. Maxine is similar to Stanley and Maggie in her total acceptance of the physical and denial of the spiritual. This attitude results in strength in regard to an ability to avoid betrayal, but also results in spiritual emptiness. Hannah Jelkes seems to offer a more beneficial approach as she subscribes to acceptance of what one cannot change, but not total abandonment of ideals. Rather, the individual should develop attainable ideals. Nonno, for example, achieves his life's quest and is then released from the conflict through death. At the end of the play, Shannon tentatively adopts Hannah's position as a resolution to his inner conflict, but remains with Maxine. Night, then, differs from the earlier plays in that it is the only drama to offer hope of recovery from life's conflicts and betrayals. Shannon accepts the idea that life must go on, even after the "dream of life" has failed.



In the later plays, then, the results of betrayal change from what they were in the earlier plays. In Menagerie and Streetcar the betrayals are final in that Laura and Blanche are offered no hope for recovery. Tom, in fact, closes Menagerie by telling Laura to blow out her candles of hope--for there is no hope. The betrayals in Cat fall into two categories in regard to results. Big Daddy is offered no hope of recovery; his corruption and self-betrayal is total and his destruction is inevitable. Brick, however, is offered some hope of recovery through a possible reconciliation with Maggie. This reconciliation though, is based on a lie which surely dampens whatever optimism the audience might have developed. Night of the Iguana is a play about recovery from betrayal. Shannon has made progress in his battle with the spook. Still, however, there is no definite indication at the end of the play as to whether the protagonist will succeed in reconciling his inner conflicts. Williams has moved, then, from betrayals that must result in total destruction to betrayals that allow for hope of possible recovery from their destructiveness. Williams, then, no longer finds it necessary for his characters to betray others in order to insure their own survival or to dedicate themselves to ideals which ignore reality and result in self-betrayal. It has become possible for the individual to seek and hope for a reconciliation of ideals and reality.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York: New Classics, 1945), p. 23.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 27.
- <sup>4</sup>Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), p. 27.
- <sup>5</sup>Williams, Menagerie, p. 41.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 23.
- <sup>9</sup>Tischler, p. 95.
- <sup>10</sup>Williams, Menagerie, pp. 50-51.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 115.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 97.
- <sup>13</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: New American Library, 1947), p. 96.
- <sup>14</sup>Elia Kazan, "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, edited by Jordan Y. Miller (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 22.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 21.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 23.
- <sup>17</sup>Williams, Streetcar, p. 60.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 74.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 78.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 130.

- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 44.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 60.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 45.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 114.
- <sup>27</sup> Kazan, p. 21.
- <sup>28</sup> Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 41-42.
- <sup>29</sup> Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: New American Library, 1955), p. 45.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 44.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 92.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 81.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 81-82.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 80.
- <sup>35</sup> Jackson, p. 142.
- <sup>36</sup> Williams, Cat, p. 65.
- <sup>37</sup> Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 86
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 59.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 61.
- <sup>40</sup> Jackson, p. 86.
- <sup>41</sup> Williams, Night, p. 86.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 87.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 107.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 127.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 99.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Jackson, pp. 85-86.
- <sup>48</sup> Williams, Night, p. 126.

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