

THE ABANDONED WOMAN
IN THE DRAMAS OF
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A Monograph 540

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Chapter One: The Women of Tennessee Williams' Dramatic World

The dramatic world of Tennessee Williams is densely populated with people who are frustrated and neurotic. These characters, desperately unhappy with the reality of the present, seek some means of fulfillment for their lives. In their searches, they often resort to sensuality, alcohol, reminiscence, or religious fanaticism in their efforts to evade reality and create a world of fantasy.

Within the dramatic world there are two major themes with which Williams has carefully interwoven a number of minor themes. Destruction is the subject of the major themes: the disintegration of a family and its tradition and the "destruction of the sensitive and romantic by the insensitive and unromantic."¹ Among the minor inter-related themes are the conflict between flesh and spirit (body and soul), the lack of communication, isolation, the search to fully understand the value of personal relationships, and the "search for beauty in an ugly world."²

At the center of each of his plays and illustrating the themes is a woman, usually a most memorable female. The

¹Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 226.

²Ibid., p. 228.

woman is typical of the character type which dominates Williams' drama. She is one who exists by "denying today and living an imaginary yesterday."³ The Williams' woman becomes so intimately involved in her world of fantasy that she is seldom able to escape from it. By creating a dream world, she causes her own personality to split. She becomes incapable of facing reality although she knows that reality does exist. Here is "the problem of modern man 'wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born,'"⁴ Neither world is satisfying. A sense of pride, a certain dignity achieved by social position, and an inability to adjust a memory of the past with the reality of the present are the primary reasons the woman feels she is compelled to live in a world of her own creation.

What causes Williams' women to reject reality? Abandonment is the major factor in their rejection of the present. Although the form of abandonment varies, the women are frequently a causal factor in their isolation. A study of the abandonment of some women in the plays of Tennessee Williams will comprise the remainder of this paper. Those women to be studied are the abandoned women found in The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1950), and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955).

³Robert Emmet Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II, (1959), p. 212.

⁴Edward F. Callahan, "Tennessee Williams' Two Worlds," North Dakota Quarterly, XXV (Summer, 1957), p. 61.

Chapter Two: The Women

What kinds of women are these who are abandoned?

There are both older and younger women of varying backgrounds and nationalities. Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche du Bois in A Streetcar Named Desire, Serafina Delle Rose in The Rose Tattoo, and Margaret Pollitt in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof are the older abandoned women. In the younger category are Alma Winemiller in Summer and Smoke and Laura Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie.

The older women in these dramas can be divided into two smaller groups: those who are representatives of decaying gentility and those who are striving to attain a position of social prominence through their husbands. The women in the first group are more numerous not only in the five plays to be discussed but also in the other dramas by Tennessee Williams. "... these heroines never find anything in the contemporary world to replace their former society."⁵ Representing the decaying gentility are Amanda Wingfield and Blanche du Bois.

Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie is the oldest of the genteel and is most strongly bound to the moonlight and magnolia tradition of her childhood. She "lives in two

⁵Jones, "Early Heroines," p. 216.

worlds: the pleasant dreams of the past . . . and the drab and demanding world of the present."⁶ Totally incapable of confronting her present situation without desperately clinging to the splendor of by-gone days, she must incessantly chatter about her youth, emphasizing the social graces:

AMANDA: One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain--your mother received--seventeen!--gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house.

TOM (Remaining at portieres): How did you entertain those gentlemen callers?

AMANDA: Girls in those days knew how to talk, I can tell you.

TOM: Yes?

. . .

AMANDA: They knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers. It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure--although I wasn't slighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions.

TOM: What did you talk about?

AMANDA: Things of importance going on in the world! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar. . . . My callers were gentlemen--all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta--planters and sons of planters!⁷

Among the other subjects on which Amanda doted were the Governor's cotillion ball in Jackson and the whirlwind of summer parties, picnics, and rides through the Southern countryside.

Talk of the past is Amanda's means of escaping the present. Her present living conditions in the second-story

⁶Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1961), p. 97.

⁷Six Modern American Plays, introduction by Allan G. Halline (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), pp. 279-80.

alley apartment in an overpopulated slum area of St. Louis is in sharp contrast to the luxurious Mississippi Delta plantation and its servants. This "little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place"⁸ does not understand nor does she try to understand the industrialized economy in which she now lives.

Amanda wants desperately to help her children, Tom and Laura; she does everything she can in an effort to inspire Tom to make something of himself. Being genuinely concerned about the welfare of Tom and his sister, she wants Tom to be the family provider and Laura, the refined, popular lady. She summarizes her fondest wish while talking to Tom one night on the fire escape:

. . . I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish that whenever there's a moon and when there isn't a moon, I wish for it, too.⁹

In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche du Bois, being younger than Amanda and more recently associated with her family and its dwindling fortunes, is also a member of the decadent aristocracy. As the curtain rises, Blanche arrives in the slums of New Orleans where her younger sister lives.

. . . daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district,¹⁰

she offers a sharp contrast to the impoverished corner in the

⁸Ibid., p. 272.

⁹E. Martin Browne, ed., A Streetcar Named Desire and The Glass Menagerie (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1959), p. 13.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

Elysian Fields. Amid "the atmosphere of decay,"¹¹ Blanche hopes to find warmth and affection.

Blanche is not unselfishly interested in the welfare of Stella as Amanda is in the welfare of her offspring. Finding Stella well adjusted to the urban environment where she and her crude husband live, Blanche feels obligated to call Stella's attention to the problems she sees.

BLANCHE: . . . you've spilt something on that pretty white lace collar! About your hair--you ought to have it cut in a feather bob with your dainty features. Stella, you have a maid, don't you?

STELLA: No. With only two rooms it's--

BLANCHE: What? Two rooms, did you say?¹²

Seeing that Blanche is quite shocked by the apartment, Stella attempts to prepare Blanche for meeting her husband: "You'll get along fine together, if you'll just try not to--well--compare him with men that we went out with at home."¹³ Blanche cannot understand Stella's marrying beneath her social position.

Through her affected manners, Blanche manages to alienate her sister's friends, and her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski. The new wardrobe and the imitation jewels and furs, as well as Blanche's manner, lead Stanley to suspect that something is amiss in the loss of Belle Reve, the Mississippi plantation belonging to the du Bois family.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 18.

¹³Ibid., p. 20.

Blanche is repulsed by Stanley and his friends: yet she knows she must remain on friendly terms with them. In her efforts to be pleasant, she creates animosity. She is unable to adjust to her new surroundings, and, because she cannot accept the present reality, she constantly reminds those around her of the luxury of her childhood. She, like Amanda, must rely on the past in order to live in the present, and her reliance on the past suppresses the reality of the present.

In the early scenes, Blanche reveals a great deal about herself. When Stella returns home, Blanche, an alcoholic, begins to "look around for some liquor."¹⁴ Upon finding the bottle in the closet, she becomes quite nervous, and, before she can mix herself a drink, "the bottle nearly slips from her grasp."¹⁵ She is overly concerned about her appearance.

BLANCHE: You haven't said a word about my appearance.

STELLA: You look just fine.

BLANCHE: God love you for a liar! Daylight never exposed so total a ruin!¹⁶

And later, she pathetically discloses her need for companionship.

. . . I guess you're hoping I'll say I'll put up at a hotel, but I'm not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone! Because--as you must have noticed--I'm not very well.¹⁷ . . . Her voice drops and her look is frightened.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 20.

She is afraid of being left alone again.

Serafina Delle Rose in The Rose Tattoo and Margaret Pollitt in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof are searching for a kind of social status which they hope to find through marriage to their husbands. Both women are of poor backgrounds.

Born a peasant, Serafina Delle Rose is called "Baroness" by her neighbors. Among the Sicilians a baron is any landowner, and his wife, of course, is a baroness. The title, a mark of social prominence, thrills Serafina who spends her time working as a seamstress in her home.

For Serafina the rose is singularly important. Not only is Rose her last name, but it is also the emblem which her husband, Rosario, had tattooed on his chest. It is the symbol of their complete love, the sign of her conception, the pattern on the wallpaper and the paper fan, the color of the carpet, the flower she wears in her hair, and the fragrance of her husband's hair oil.

In Act One, Scene One, Serafina portrays a very happy, well-adjusted Sicilian wife. She lives in the world of the present enjoying its physical pleasures. Her life is full and satisfying. Her stability is upset when she receives the news of her husband's murder. At first, she refuses to believe the priest who told her of Rosario's death. When, at last, she accepts the news, she ceases to live in the present. Her reason for living is gone; so Serafina reverts to living in her past when she was happier.

Serafina's attitude toward her daughter differs greatly from Amanda's. Serafina is not interested in obtaining the best for Rosa: she is selfish. Her desire to preserve Rosa's virginity is not primarily a sincere interest in the moral character of the child but rather the means by which her own refusal to enjoy the physical pleasures in life and her attempt to impose the past on the present are manifest.

Like Amanda and Blanche, Serafina is compelled to tell others of her success in former times. She pours out the story of her love to a total stranger, Alvaro Mangiacavallo, who is a banana truck driver as was Rosario.

"My husband hauled bananas, but underneath the bananas was something else. He was--wild like a Gypsy.--"Wild--like a--Gypsy"? Who said that?--I hate to start to remember, and then not remember. . . .

. . .

. . . Come here. I show you this picture--my wedding. .
 . . Here's me a bride of fourteen, and this--this--this!
 . . . My husband!
 . . .

A rose of a man. On his chest he had the tattoo of a
 rose. . . .¹⁸

Margaret "Maggie" Pollitt was born "poor as Job's turkey,"¹⁹ and, consequently, she has had to play up to those who were in a better financial position than she. Marriage to Brick Pollitt, son of the largest plantation owner on the Mississippi Delta, seemed to be the answer to Maggie's desire for security.

¹⁸Stanley A. Clayes and David G. Spencer, ed., Contemporary Drama: Thirteen Plays (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962) pp. 460-61.

¹⁹Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: The New American Library, 1955), p. 41.

Maggie enjoyed the social life open to the wife of a college football player. After Brick's graduation, he decided to play pro-football. The excitement of traveling with her husband added to the excitement of their marriage.

Maggie, like Amanda and Serafina, has motherly instincts. Childless, Maggie wants to have a child. Unlike Amanda, she is not interested in the child as a child. More like Serafina, Maggie's motives are selfish. The child for Maggie would mean triumph for her. Her first victory would be the defeat of her husband's will. If successful, she will bring an end to Brick's self-imposed isolation from her. A child would mean security for Maggie as well as defeat for her brother-in-law and his wife, Gooper and Mae. By producing a child, Maggie would assure the ownership of the cotton plantation would fall to Brick. Financial security is most necessary for her to escape returning to the past. In a heated discussion with Brick, Maggie confesses her need:

"Brick, y'know, I've been so God damn disgustingly poor all my life!"²⁰

Maggie, unlike Blanche and Serafina, is openly aggressive. She admits very candidly to Brick, "I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see you! . . ." ²¹ "I don't mind makin' a fool of myself over you!" ²² The things she wants she takes action, whatever is necessary, to obtain.

²⁰Ibid., p. 41.

²¹Ibid., p. 31.

²²Ibid., p. 32.

The backgrounds of the younger women are as contrasting as are those of the older ones. In Summer and Smoke, Alma Winemiller has a more aristocratic home life than Laura Wingfield, in The Glass Menagerie, does. Although they are from different environments, both of the young ladies are unable to adjust themselves to the world outside of their homes.

Alma Winemiller has been reared by a religious family: her father is a puritanical minister, and her mother, a childish demented woman. Because her mother is incapable of fulfilling the obligations of the minister's wife, Alma has had to accept many responsibilities around the parsonage.

Alma's attitude toward love is akin to Serafina's during the period before she accepts the truth about Rosario. Although she is not physically handicapped as Laura, she is emotionally handicapped. The spiritual qualities of love are of primary importance to her. She, like Serafina for a time after Rosario's death, excludes the physical aspect of love. Just as Blanche notices Stanley's brute desires, so Alma, loving the neighbor boy, John Buchanan, since she was ten, sees in John's view the same ideas of love, and she tries to explain her view about anatomy to him.

ALMA: So that is your high conception of human desires. What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I--I reject your opinion of where love is, and the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking!--There is something not shown on the chart.

JOHN: You mean the part that Alma is Spanish for, do you?

ALMA: Yes, that's not shown on the anatomy chart! But it's there, just the same, yes, there! Somewhere, not seen, but there. And it's that that I loved you with

--that! Not what you mention!--Yes, did love you with, John, did nearly die of when you hurt me!²³

Alma's ideas about being a lady and her concern about the proper social graces make her another member of a decaying aristocracy. In spite of the ties to tradition she feels, Alma knows that there are other pleasures in life. Being a member of the younger generation, she finds herself torn between the beliefs of the church and the more lenient ideas of her peers. This dilemma creates an emotional instability in Alma. She becomes a hypochondriac, and her hypersensitivity manifests itself in nervous laughter.

Laura Wingfield, on the other hand, has been deserted by her father and has been raised by a domineering ex-Southern belle who tries to impose memories of her own childhood upon her children. The atmosphere of the apartment and the domineering stare from her father's portrait add to Laura's already unstable emotional condition.

Being crippled since early childhood, Laura uses her handicap as a shield behind which she hides from reality. Laura's ideas about her lameness kept her from normally participating in her high school activities. She becomes more shy and withdrawn as she becomes older. Her shyness leads to her dropping out of school. With her mother's insistence, she enrolls in business school where nervousness and nausea overpower her. Too embarrassed to return to classes and afraid to try to explain the situation to Amanda,

²³Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke (New York: The New American Library, 1948), pp. 98-99.

Laura "walked around in the park," ". . . went in the art museum and the bird-houses at the Zoo," "sometimes . . . did without lunch and went to the movies," ". . . spent most of the afternoons in the Jewel-box, that big glass house where they raise the tropical flowers."²⁴

Only once does Laura openly express any romantic interest and that is in answer to her mother's question.

AMANDA: . . . Haven't you ever liked some boy?

LAURA: Yes. I liked one once. . . . I came across his picture a while ago.

. . .

. . . His name was Jim.

. . .

When I had that attack of pleurosis--he asked me what was the matter when I came back. I said pleurosis--he thought that I said Blue Roges! So that's what he always called me after that.²⁵

She also concludes that Jim O'Connor is now married because his engagement had been announced six years previously.

Laura lives in a world of tiny glass animals and old victrola records belonging to her father. It is here that she feels most secure. The glass menagerie takes up her time; she tenderly cleans and polishes each of the perfect creatures in the collection. All of her other acquaintances disappoint her. She comes to rely on the presence of the figures; for her they are real.

Each of these women is unable to make a satisfactory adjustment to reality. Regardless of her social position,

²⁴Six Modern Plays, p. 285.

²⁵Ibid., p. 286.

there are factors in her past from which she cannot escape. She must create a world of fantasy in order to exist in the present world. In the next chapter, the particular reasons for the creation of each dream world will be investigated.

Chapter Three: Abandonment

Dreams are an escape mechanism; in them persons frequently express subconscious desires. It seems as though Williams believes that dreams are necessary for a person's maintaining sanity. If the woman in Williams' drama creates a dream world, she must be attempting to escape something. Each woman, with the exception of Maggie, is trying to escape reality. In the reality of the present, she sees something which terrifies her and makes her incapable of making a proper adjustment.

All of the women in this study have been abandoned and are now alone. Although the form of the abandonment varies, its basis is a masculine rejection brought about by the woman who is left alone. The abandonment of these women takes two forms: abandonment by a husband and abandonment by a suitor. All of the older women, Amanda Wingfield, Blanche du Bois, Serafina Delle Rose, and Margaret Pollitt, have been abandoned by their husbands. Those who have been abandoned by their suitors are Alma Winemiller and Laura Wingfield, the younger women.

Amanda Wingfield left her social position on the Mississippi Delta when she married a telephone man. Prior to his

falling "in love with long distances"²⁶ and abandoning his family, Amanda bore him two children. The shock of his irresponsibility causes Amanda to revert to the world of her youth. It is very doubtful that she was ever entirely free from it. While trying to do the very best she could for her children, she alienates them by her forceful deliveries of reminiscences.

I had malaria fever all that spring. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the Delta--weakened resistance--I had a little temperature all the time--not enough to be serious--just enough to make me restless and giddy!--Invitations poured in--parties all over the Delta!--"Stay in bed," said Mother, "you have fever!"--but I just wouldn't.--I took quinine but kept on going, going!--Evenings, dances!--Afternoons, long, long rides! Picnics--lovely!--So lovely, that country in May.--All lacy with dogwood, literally flooded with jonquils! . . .
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Amanda cannot be absolved from all blame for her abandonment. It is entirely reasonable to assume that Amanda's constant nagging of her children is only a transference of her conduct around her husband before he deserted her.

AMANDA [To her son]: Honey, don't push with your fingers. If you have to push with something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew--chew! Animals have sections in their stomachs which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down. Eat food leisurely, son, and really enjoy it. A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavors that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation. So chew your food and give your salivary glands a chance to function!²⁸

²⁶Six Modern Plays, p. 278.

²⁷Ibid., p. 310.

²⁸Ibid., p. 278.

Amanda does not comprehend the changes in dating customs which have occurred since her youth. Gentlemen callers in the city are passé; yet Amanda insists that Laura remain relatively inactive so she will be "fresh and pretty--for gentleman callers."²⁹ Amanda has not learned that now a girl must show some initiative when it comes to romance.

Although she wants Laura to be happy, Amanda cannot accept the fact that she is crippled.

TOM: Laura seems all those things, lovely and sweet and pretty to you and me because she's ours and we love her. We don't even notice she's crippled any more.

AMANDA: Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!

TOM: But face facts, Mother. She is and that's not all--

AMANDA: What do you mean "not all"?

TOM: Laura is very different from other girls.

AMANDA: I think the difference is all to her advantage.

TOM: Not quite all--in the eyes of others--strangers--she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.

AMANDA: Don't say peculiar.

TOM: Face the facts. She is.³⁰

Amanda's new environment offers a sharp contrast to that of her childhood. Now that the splendor of her childhood has disintegrated, she finds herself unable to understand the world outside of the apartment. Its "dog-eat-dog"

²⁹Ibid., p. 279.

³⁰Ibid., p. 306.

philosophy is alien to her nature. Although she tries to keep the atmosphere in the dingy apartment pleasant and cheerful, she is concerned about the industrialized world of the thirties which has a pronounced effect on her life.

Amanda's anxieties are in large part economic and there is money behind many of her illusions: her mythical suitors were all wealthy men; she hopes to make money by selling subscriptions to the fantasy world of The Homemakers Companion; she computes the money Tom would save by giving up smoking.³¹

She depends upon Tom for support, and she fears that he will follow in his father's footsteps.

Blanche du Bois suffers from the most complex abandonment. Married at sixteen, she was aware of the fact that her husband was different from other boys, but she was unable to pinpoint the difference. She confides in Harold Mitchell ("Mitch"), her new suitor,

. . . There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate-looking--still--that thing was there. . . . Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty--which wasn't empty, but had two people in it. . . . Afterwards we pretended that nothing had been discovered. . . .³²

Hoping that Blanche would forget, Allan Grey (her husband) takes her dancing. Blanche recalls,

Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few minutes later--a shot!³³

³¹Roger B. Stein, "The Glass Menagerie Revisited," Western Humanities Review, XVII, (1955), p. 148.

³²Browne, Streetcar, pp. 78-79.

³³Ibid., p. 79.

Grey's suicide followed Blanche's reminder about his affliction.

After the suicide, Blanche returned to Belle Reve plantation where the family fortunes were soon squandered by male relatives. The money that was not foolishly consumed was used to pay the funeral expenses of the elderly relatives who died there and whom Blanche cared for and suffered with. Finally, the bank confiscated the mortgaged estate, and Blanche was forced to become a school teacher.

Residing at the Flamingo Hotel in Laurel and having a very limited income from her job, Blanche began to entertain a long procession of men, many of them traveling salesmen. Deserted by her family and fortunes, Blanche so intensely needs affection that she becomes a nymphomaniac; so desperate is her need that she attempts to seduce one of her seventeen-year-old students. This action leads to her ostracism from Laurel society and her "resignation" from her job. Completely alone, Blanche travels to New Orleans for a visit with her sister Stella, her only living relative.

Blanche, shocked by the tiny apartment where Stella and her husband live, tries to maintain a sense of personal dignity. She, like Amanda, is concerned about her financial situation. While trying to convince Stella that she is worthy of a better life, Blanche shows her desire to have money: "We've got to get hold of some money, that's the

way out!"³⁴ Later, when Stella offers her half of the household money which Stanley gave her, Blanche refuses, keeping her pride unmarred. She secretly hopes that an old admirer, now wealthy, Shep Huntleigh, will desert his wife and rescue her from her impoverished condition.

Serafina Delle Rose becomes an abandoned woman when her husband, Rosario, is murdered as he is making his last delivery of the smuggled narcotics. Upon receiving the news of her beloved husband's death, Serafina becomes hysterical. Desiring to find a way to immortalize the perfect love she felt they shared, Serafina defies the priest by having her husband's body cremated. She places the urn containing Rosario's ashes in the small shrine of the Virgin Mary.

In the three-year timelapse between scenes three and four, Serafina's life changes drastically; the purpose for living has gone. Her once-immaculate appearance is now slovenly. She is unconcerned about the condition of her house; she has no pride in her work. Rarely ever does she have her sewing finished when she promises.

Once thoroughly enjoying her passions, Serafina now rejects all carnal desires. "She chooses to cut herself off from the world and look upon the world which Rosario left as something cheap and impure."³⁵

Her rejection of all passion in the present is reflected in her treatment of Rosa, her only child. Serafina, like

³⁴Ibid., p. 55.

³⁵Callahan, "Two Worlds," p. 66.

Amanda, tries to force her daughter to live in the world of fantasy where she now chooses to live. Rosa, a beautiful, passionate teenager, is forbidden to attend school as a result of the events at a school-sponsored dance. Serafina berates the teacher, who comes to persuade Serafina to allow her daughter to get "mixed up with a sailor."³⁶ Realizing that she has been unreasonable, Serafina relents and agrees to let Rosa attend her graduation.

After the teacher's visit, Serafina begins to acknowledge that Rosa is all she has in the world. She plans to give Rosa a watch for graduation, and she herself intends to be present at the ceremony. Much to her dismay she is unable to wear any of her clothes since she has gained so much weight. Her plans to present the watch to Rosa after the ceremony fail; Rosa dashes off to a picnic, leaving Serafina on the threshold calling pathetically to her. Left alone, Serafina now reverts to the comfort of her religion.

Margaret Pollitt's abandonment by her husband is quite different from the others. Maggie enjoys the security (personal and financial) of her marriage. Like Blanche's, Maggie's abandonment centers around the problem of homosexuality. After she and Brick were married, Maggie sensed that her husband's relationship to Skipper, his close friend, exceeded the bounds of friendship. Rather than confronting Brick with her suspicions, Maggie chooses to reveal her feelings to

³⁶Clayes and Spencer, Contemporary Drama, p. 443.

Skipper. In an effort to dispel the idea from Maggie's mind, Skipper began to drink; later he took drugs. The combination of the two soon killed him.

Brick, blaming Maggie for his friend's early death, isolated himself from her in an effort to punish her for her crime. Maggie, like Amanda, is a woman of action; unlike Amanda, she is more fully aware of the materialistic society in which she lives. Determined "to create a meaningful life with her husband"³⁷ and to see that the conniving of Gooper and Mae is exposed, she is more realistic in her acceptance of reality than any of the other abandoned women.

Because Maggie does not live in a world of illusion, she is not without her anxieties. With her physical desires frustrated, she says, "I'm like a cat on a hot tin roof!"³⁸ In the bold confessions of her love and need for Brick, she is making desperate efforts to overcome her frustrations.

Living in "a world of mendacity, avarice, and hypocrisy,"³⁹ Maggie's character is not flawless. She is greedy-- for Brick's love. She is also guilty of lying to get what she wants, but she is not a hypocrite. She detests her brother-in-law and his family, and she enjoys helping Big Daddy see their faults. She explains Big Daddy's position:

³⁷Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 214.

³⁸Ibid., p. 212.

³⁹Williams, Cat, p. 42.

Big Daddy dotes on you, honey. And he can't stand Brother Man and Brother Man's wife, that monster of fertility, Mae; she's downright odious to him! Know how I know? By little expressions that flicker over his face when that woman is holding fo'th on one of her choice topics such as--how she refused twilight sleep!--when the twins were delivered! Because she feels motherhood's an experience that a woman ought to experience fully!--in order to fully appreciate the wonder and beauty of it! HAH! . . . --Big Daddy shares my attitude toward those two!⁴⁰

In addition to expressing her animosity, she is also voicing her jealousy of Mae's ability to bear children.

She understands Brick's problem, and she insists that he face it squarely. After being stopped a number of times in her efforts to tell Brick the full story of his friendship with Skipper, Maggie becomes determined to tell him the story from beginning to end. She also knows that Brick is using alcohol as an escape. She searches for the solution to both problems.

Alma Winemiller, one of the younger women, first fell in love with John Buchanan when she was ten years old. The love, one-sided as it is, grew stronger through her fleeting encounters with John during the next decade and a half.

In Alma's pursuit of John, there is an element of sadism. Since childhood, John has delighted in trying to upset Alma by teasing her. When she was ten years old in the park with John, he kissed her and ran away "with a mocking laugh."⁴¹ When he is in his mid-twenties, John deliberately tosses a lighted firecracker under the bench where Alma is sitting. She knows John delights in teasing her and she

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 19.

⁴¹Williams, Summer and Smoke, p. 20.

too derives pleasure from his pranks. She tells him,

You threw that firecracker and started a conversation just in order to tease me as you did as a child. You came to this bench in order to embarrass me and to hurt my feelings . . . You've succeeded in your purpose. I was hurt, I did make a fool of myself as you intended.⁴²

Even as a ten-year-old child, Alma possessed "the dig-
nity of an adult."⁴³ By her mid-twenties, she had become "prematurely spinsterish."⁴⁴ Her puritanical upbringing causes frustrations when she begins to experience feelings of passion. She chooses to believe that man's carnal desires are non-existent; she lives in a world of frigid spirituality.

Alma's frustrations lead to hypochondria. Whenever she becomes alarmed by one of her "attacks--of nervous heart trouble,"⁴⁵ she runs to the doctor, John's father, who lives next door. She knows that she is not ill, and she admits to John that his father "always reassures"⁴⁶ her.

John diagnoses her ailment first as "just a little voice inside saying--'Miss Alma is lonesome!'"⁴⁷ Later in an effort to satisfy her hypochondriac needs, he tells her she had a doppelganger, and she naively believes him.

Alma's world of spirituality and the fact that the chivalrous ideals are fast-disappearing from the world of

⁴²Ibid., p. 40.

⁴³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 65.

reality only create more emotional problems. In trying to maintain the genteel behavior she prefers, she adopts affected mannerisms and an unusually breathy speech pattern.

She seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France. Out of nervousness and self-consciousness she has a habit of prefacing and concluding her remarks with a little breathless laugh.⁴⁸

Alma, like Maggie and Amanda, is a woman of action. She is an organizer; she successfully talks John into attending the meeting of "a little group . . . of young people with--intellectual and artistic interests . . ." ⁴⁹ At every opportunity she tells John that love is more than physical desire.

Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some people, there are some women, John--who can bring their hearts to it, also--who can bring their souls to it!⁵⁰

John does not understand the soul aspect of the body.

. . . Some time I'd like to show you a chart of the human anatomy that I have in the office. It shows what our insides are like, and maybe you can show me where the beautiful soul is located on the chart. . . .⁵¹

The conflict between body and soul is not part of Laura Wingfield's abandonment. However, her romance dates back to her high school days. A terribly shy, backward girl, overly self-conscious of a leg brace, Laura responded to the kindness of Jim O'Connor extended to her after an attack of pleurosis. The popular high school hero dazzled Laura, and she fell in love with him only to be disappointed by a newspaper

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 81.

⁵¹Ibid.

announcement of his engagement to another girl.

Laura's abandonment began when her father disappeared leaving his record collection behind. For Laura the records became a substitute for her father. She played them continuously, losing herself in reverie.

Laura's childhood illness which left her crippled and her father's desertion cause her to reject the reality of the world. She becomes like one of the animals "of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."⁵²

Laura makes futile attempts to join the world of reality. Most of her efforts are a result of her mother's insistence. Each time the world proves too harsh for her. Nervousness during a speed-test in a typing class leads to deep humiliation for Laura. Tom's dinner guest, Jim O'Connor, brings a shock to Laura, and once again she becomes ill. As a result of the unpleasant experiences in the world of real people, Laura "creates her own sparkling, cold world which gives the illusion of warmth but is as eternal in its unreality as the glass from which it is composed."⁵³ The glass menagerie never causes problems for Laura; it is all she has or can find that is dependable. In her dream world she can express her love by tenderly caressing and meticulously caring for each animal. She does not have to fear rejection and abandonment.

Although each woman suffers a slightly different kind of abandonment, she creates a world of illusion. Only

⁵²Six Modern Plays, p. 272.

⁵³Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 110.

through the dreams of her new world is she able to face reality in any degree. She makes rather desperate attempts to adjust to reality. Varying degrees of success are achieved.

Chapter Four: The Results of the Abandonment

The degree to which the women are able to adjust to being abandoned is dependent upon the strength of the basic needs and fears motivating them. Love is the basic need of each woman; her fear is failure--failure to be loved in return and failure to achieve set goals.

Serafina Delle Rose and Maggie Pollitt make the most satisfactory adjustment in their new lives. Serafina's is the most clearly presented by Williams. Laura and Amanda Wingfield merely survive their abandonment. A serious adjustment is made by Alma Winemiller. Blanche du Bois is completely unable to readjust herself to reality.

Serafina is the only one of the women who had nothing to do with her abandonment; however, she is totally to blame for the isolation which she has imposed upon herself. Closing her mind to the reports that Rosario had been unfaithful, Serafina creates a dream world wherein she relives the past--a past filled with pleasant memories of the pure love she shared with Rosario.

To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion. Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories only! It is still beautiful to me and I don't believe that the man in my heart gave me horns!⁵⁴

Even the memories she cherishes are not completely satisfact-

⁵⁴Clayes and Spencer, Contemporary Drama, p. 455.

ory for her; she exaggerates:

. . . We had love together every night of the week, we never skipped one from the night we was married till the night he was killed in his fruit truck on that road there. . . .⁵⁵

Not only has she romanticized her love-making but also her conception. Serafina's pregnancy at the time of Rosario's death has an aura of sacredness about it. She recalls the night she knew she had conceived.

. . . That night I woke up with a burning pain on me, here, on my left breast! A pain like a needle, quick, quick, hot little stitches. I turned on the light, I uncovered my breast!--On it I saw the rose tattoo of my husband!

. . .
I screamed. But when he Rosario woke up, it was gone. It only lasted a moment. But I did see it, and I did know, when I seen it, that I had conceived, that in my body another rose was growing.⁵⁶

During the period of intense grief following Rosario's death, Serafina lost the baby.

Her fear of infidelity to her husband's memory comes to an abrupt end. After a fight with a novelty salesman, the defeated banana truck driver invites himself into Serafina's house until he is able to regain his composure. "The grandson of the village idiot,"⁵⁷ Alvaro Mangiacavallo, she soon discovers, has her "husband's body, with the head of a clown."⁵⁸ The two achieve an immediate rapport; there is a "profound unconscious response to this sudden contact with

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 446.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 436.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 462.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 459.

distress as acute"⁵⁹ as theirs. Serafina sympathizes with Alvaro who knows that he will lose his job as a result of the fight. She also feels that Alvaro is the sign from the Lady for which she has been waiting.

Serafina's passions have been reawakened, and she becomes terribly gullible. Not fully realizing that Alvaro is an opportunist, she is a bit skeptical when he tells her,

I am hoping to meet some sensible older lady. Maybe a lady a little bit older than me.--I don't care if she's a little too plump and not such a stylish dresser! . . . The important thing in a lady is understanding. Good sense. And I want her to have a well-furnished house and a profitable little business of some kind. . . .⁶⁰

She softens when he explains that his life lacks love, a vital element. He explains that she has and wants love just as he does. They could fulfill one another's lives.

Not only does Alvaro arouse Serafina's passions but he also successfully convinces her of Rosario's infidelity. He accomplishes this through a telephone conversation with Estella Hohengarten, the local blackjack dealer and Rosario's former mistress. In a fit of anger, Serafina smashes the urn scattering Rosario's ashes on the floor. Then she expresses a sudden change in her religious faith.

I don't believe in you, Lady! [speaking to the Madonna]
You're just a poor little doll with paint peeling off and now I blow out the light and forget you the way you forget Serafina!⁶¹

The reawakening of her physical desires and the feeling that her faith has deserted her cause Serafina to take a new

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 458.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 462.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 471.

position on her daughter's chastity. In direct opposition to the vow she made, Jack Hunter, Rosa's suitor, take, she sends Rosa to spend the night with Jack before he goes back to sea.

Maggie Pollitt's victory is not as explicit as Serafina's. Maggie, unlike the other abandoned women, does not use her dream world as an escape; instead, she uses her dreams to help in her attempts to alter the situation in which she finds herself.

A woman of action, Maggie uses her rapport with Big Daddy, her father-in-law, in an attempt to make Brick jealous. Hoping to tantalize Brick and to make him desire her, Maggie tells him,

"I give him a laugh now and then and he tolerates me. In fact!--I sometimes suspect that Big Daddy harbors a little unconscious "lech" fo' me. . . ."⁶²

Brick finds the suggestion far-fetched and pays no attention to her.

Frustrated by her husband's refusal to have a natural marital relationship with her, she admits her loneliness to him. "Living with someone you love can be lonelier--than living entirely alone!--if the one that y'love doesn't love you. . . ." ⁶³

Although Maggie's love for Brick is genuine, she becomes obsessed with idea that he will not inherit the estate. When she learns that Big Daddy's cancer is in very advanced stages, she boldly announces to her husband and his family,

⁶²Williams, Cat, p. 19.

⁶³Ibid., p. 23.

"Brick and I are going to--have- child!"⁶⁴ Both Maggie and Brick know the announcement is a lie. Brick does not expose his wife's mendacity.

When they are alone, Maggie is determined to make the announcement come true that very evening. Knowing that Brick needs his liquor, she decides she can satisfy her own needs only by getting Brick in a compromising situation. While Brick is out of the room, Maggie removes the liquor from the room. After Brick's discovery of her deed, Maggie calmly tells Brick of her plan.

MAGGIE: And so tonight we're going to make the lie true, and when that's done, I'll bring the liquor back here and we'll get drunk together, here, tonight, in this place that death has come into . . . --What do you say?

BRICK: I don't say anything I guess there's nothing to say.

MARGARET: --Oh, you weak people, you weak, beautiful people!--Who give--What you want is someone to-- . . . --take hold of you.--Gently, gently, with love! And--I do love you, Brick, I do!⁶⁵

The play ends with feeling that Maggie not only has succeeded in getting Brick to go to bed with her but also that she will be successful in her plan to conceive an heir for the Pollitt plantation.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 118.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 123.

⁶⁶Williams wrote two third acts to the play, one in the original script and one to be used by Eliz Kazan on Broadway. Finding the original Act Three to be the most consistent in its characterizations, I have used it for the quotations.

Although Laura Wingfield "begins as a true heir of Amanda's vision of the world. She is convinced of the horror of her deformity and seeks the traditional Wingfield solution, escape."⁶⁷

Encouraged and pushed by her mother, Laura hopes to find a solution to her need for love in the gentleman caller whom Tom, her brother, is bringing home for dinner. When the boys arrive, Laura's nervousness turns to nausea, and she is hesitant about answering the door. Her nervousness was intensified by Amanda's announcement that the caller is Jim O'Connor. After seeing Jim, her old high-school flame, she promptly excuses herself and retreats to her father's record collection.

After dinner, Jim joins Laura, who was too ill to come to the table, in the living room. "Her paralyzing shyness"⁶⁸ is soon overcome, and Laura begins to respond to Jim's kindness and flattery.

Laura recalls her leg brace and the thumping noise it made; Jim tells her he "never even noticed."⁶⁹ He then consoles her about her shyness,

People are not so dreadful when you know them. That's what you have to remember! And everybody has problems, not just you, but practically everybody has got some problems.

You think of yourself as having the only problems, as being the only one who is disappointed. But just look around you and you will see lots of people as disappointed as you are. . . .⁷⁰

⁶⁷Callahan, "Two Worlds," p. 64.

⁶⁸Six Modern Plays, p. 322.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 324.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 325.

Laura is more encouraged by the news that Jim and Emily Mesisenbach are no longer engaged. Jim diagnoses Laura's problem as an

Inferiority complex! Know what that is? That's what they call it when someone low-rates himself! . . . Yep --that's what I judge to be your principal trouble. A lack of confidence in yourself as a person. . . . A little physical defect is what you have. Hardly noticeable even! Magnified thousands of times by imagination!⁷¹

When Jim sees the tiny glass unicorn, the prize of Laura's collection, he remarks that unicorns are extinct now and he thinks it might be lonesome. Laura, feeling empathy for the little creature, notes that "He stays on a shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together."⁷² Jim notes that these animals are real to Laura.

Music from the Paradise Dance Hall prompts Jim to ask Laura to dance. Clumsily waltzing about the room, "they suddenly bump into the table"⁷³ knocking off the unicorn and breaking its horn off. Laura sees that "it is just like all the other horses."⁷⁴ She senses that being like the others is "a blessing."⁷⁵

Jim again begins to flatter Laura, telling her she has a rare beauty about her. Dazed by his kiss, Laura, for the moment, feels like other girls. Her period of normalcy is

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 328-29.

⁷²Ibid., p. 330.

⁷³Ibid., p. 331.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 332.

⁷⁵Ibid.

short-lived, however, for Jim quickly explains that he is engaged to another girl. Laura's encounter with reality has again been a cruel one.

She bites her lip which was trembling and then bravely smiles. She opens her hand again on the broken glass ornament. Then she gently takes his hand and raises it level with her own. She carefully places the unicorn in the palm of his hand, then pushes his fingers closed upon it.⁷⁶

"A souvenir. . .,"⁷⁷ she explains. Her world of dreams again offers her consolation and warmth; she retreats to the records and the glass menagerie, her refuge.

Amanda Wingfield has no passionate desire for any man; she recalls the painful end of her marriage and prefers to remember the days of her maidenhood. She meticulously arranges the details for Tom's bringing a gentleman home from work to meet Laura. She even has Tom "forget" his door key so Laura can let them in when they arrive.

Having a young suitor in the house causes Amanda to regress to the immature flirtatious behavior of her youth. She cannot resist the urge to tell Jim of her youthful popularity. In spite of attempts to satisfy her own impulses, Amanda does not lose sight of her ultimate goal--finding a suitable husband for her introverted daughter. Amanda uses the same technique in selling her daughter that she used to sell magazine subscriptions.

She tells Tom that Laura is not different from other girls, but, when it comes to pointing out Laura's good qualities, she lies.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 335.

⁷⁷Ibid.

You know that Sister is in full charge of supper!⁷⁸

Standing over the hot stove made her ill! I told her that it was just too warm this evening, but--⁷⁹

In her sales pitch, she tries to bring out Laura's qualities (as she sees them) which make her a lady who is quite different from other girls of her age and, at the same time, has their good features.

It's rare for a girl as sweet and pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic.⁸⁰

Amanda's sensitivity to Laura's problems is much greater than she cares to admit. After Jim leaves, Amanda berates Tom for bringing "some other girl's fiance"⁸¹ home to meet his sister. After accusing Tom of "manufacturing illusions,"⁸² she becomes most bitter toward him.

Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!

Just go, go, go-- to the movies!

Go, then! Then go to the moon--you selfish dreamer!⁸³

Only in her rage does she admit the truth about Laura, the truth she struggled so heroically to hide.

In the process of realizing Laura's plight, Amanda has driven her son away. Unsure of future financial support,

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 317.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 318.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 317.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 339.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

Amanda tries to comfort the heart-broken Laura. Williams chooses not to reveal the precise conversation between Amanda and her daughter in the final scene. He prefers to show the depth of Amanda's understanding and compassion in pantomime while Tom narrates the events of his life.

. . . her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty. . . . Amanda's gestures are slow and graceful, almost dancelike, as she comforts the daughter.⁸⁴

Alma, unlike Serafina, rejects religion as the answer to her abandonment. Loving John Buchanan, she sees there is a discrepancy between the spiritual and carnal views of love. Unable to turn to her family for advice, Alma is left alone with her problem.

John, like Alvaro, has aroused Alma's passions. He tells her when they are at Moon Lake Casino.

Under the surface you have a lot of excitement, a great deal more than any other woman I have met.⁸⁵

When he kisses her, she willingly responds and lowers the barrier between them for a moment. Again her puritan ideas take control.

. . . suppose that someday you--married . . . The woman you selected to be your wife, and not only your wife but--the mother of your children! . . . Wouldn't you want that woman to be a lady? Wouldn't you want her to be somebody that you, as her husband, and they as her precious children--could look up to with very deep respect?⁸⁶

John points out that respect is not the only basis for a marriage; Alma agrees but becomes confused and excited.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 340.

⁸⁵Williams, Summer and Smoke, p. 79.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 80.

She takes a taxi home alone.

Later, when Alma visits the Buchanan home after old Dr. Buchanan had been shot, John presents the anatomy lecture he promised her,

. . . This upper story's the brain which is hungry for something called truth and doesn't get much but keeps on feeling hungry! This middle's the belly which is hungry for food. This part down here is the sex which is hungry for love because it is sometimes lonesome. I've fed all three, as much of all three as I could or as much as I wanted--You've fed none--nothing. Well--maybe your belly a little--watery substance--But love or truth, nothing but hand-me-down notions!--attitudes!--poses! Now you can go. The anatomy lecture is over.⁸⁷

Much to Alma's dismay, John tells her that he would not have made love to her at the Casino.

. . . Even if you had consented to go upstairs. . . I couldn't have made love to you. . . . Yes, yes! Isn't that funny? I'm more afraid of your soul than you're afraid of my body. You'd have been as safe as the angel of the fountain--because I wouldn't feel decent enough to touch you. . . .

Realizing that she and John really do "move in different circles," Alma secludes herself with a psychosomatic illness. On her first venture outdoors, she learns that John has changed and owes the change to her. Nellie explains, after revealing her engagement to John,

He told me about the wonderful talks he'd had with you last summer when he was so mixed up and how you inspired him and you more than anyone else was responsible for his pulling himself together, after his father was killed, and he told me about . . .⁸⁹

Alma, unable to listen to the rest, leaves.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 99.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 39.

Alma goes to the office to see John. She reveals her knowledge of the meaning of doppelganger. She continues,

. . . and I don't know whether to thank you or not for making me conscious of it!-- I haven't been well. . . . For a while I thought I was dying, that that was the change that was coming.

. . . .

. . . I know now I'm not dying, that it isn't going to turn out to be that simple. . . .⁹⁰

John does not know how to react to the change in Alma, who explains it to him.

. . . One time I said "no" to something. You may remember the time, and all that demented howling from the cock-fight? But now I have changed my mind, or the girl who said "no," she doesn't exist any more, she died last summer--suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her. No, she doesn't live now. . . .⁹¹

John confesses to her,

. . . You've won the argument that we had between us.
. . .

. . . I've come around to your way of thinking, that something else is in there, an immaterial something-- as thin as smoke--which all of those ugly machines combine to produce and that's their whole reason for being. It can't be seen so it can't be shown on the chart. But it's there, just the same, and knowing it's there --why, then the whole thing--this--this unfathomable experience of ours--takes on a new value, like some--some wildly romantic work in a laboratory! . . .⁹²

Alma soon recognized that John, too, has changed his position.

. . . the tables have turned with a vengeance! You've come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each one finding the other one gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 115.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 116.

⁹²Ibid., p. 117.

bell! . . . I came here to tell you that being a gentleman, doesn't seem so important to me any more, but you're telling me I've got to remain a lady.⁹³

Like Laura, nausea overtakes her when the situation becomes strained. When Nellie enters, Alma tries to be polite before making a hurried exit.

Alma now believes that physical desires are more important than the spiritual needs of love. Frustrated, she goes to the park. While seated near the angel of the fountain, Alma's reverie is disturbed by a young man wearing "a checkered suit and a derby."⁹⁴ Alma starts a conversation with him. Her former nervousness when confronted by a young man has disappeared, she is very calm.

In the course of their conversation, each reveals his loneliness. Alma discloses her victory in the argument with John as well as the fact that she has taken a sleeping pill to quiet her nerves. When the Red Goose shoe salesman reveals his nervousness, she offers him one of her tablets, saying,

"You'll be surprised how infinitely merciful they are. The prescription number is 96814. I think of it as the telephone number of God!"⁹⁵

After a discussion of possible evening activities, they decide to go to the Moon Lake Casino, now under new management.

Blanche is Alma twenty years older. In spite of her affectatious mannerisms of a lady, Blanche is an exhibition-

⁹³Ibid., pp. 119-20.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 125.

ist. She uses a front about purity and wholesomeness as a cover for her past. "But there's no door between the two rooms, and Stanley--will it be decent?"⁹⁶ she exclaims. During the poker game, Blanche meets Harold Mitchell who finds her attractive. Later when Mitch returns to the game, Blanche "takes off the blouse and stands in her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portières."⁹⁷

Now at the end of the road, Blanche finds herself unable to accept life as her sister Stella has. Blanche cannot adapt herself to living in this poor socio-economic area nor can she openly admit that she has the animalistic desires of which Stanley is the primary representative.

Mitch is presented by Williams as Blanche's last real hope for romance. When Blanche learns that Stanley has discovered the truth about her life in Laurel and has revealed the news to Mitch, she knows the romance is over, and she sinks deeper into the world of fantasy.

Knowing that she cannot stay in New Orleans any longer, Blanche looks for a way out. She turns to dreams, believing that Shep Huntleigh, a former suitor, now a successful oilman, will leave his own wife so he may rescue her from the squalor of the Kowalski apartment. Blanche knows her dream cannot materialize, and, for this reason, she never actually makes contact with Shep.

While Stella is in the hospital following the birth of her first child, Stanley breaks the thin thread which is

⁹⁶Browne, Streetcar, p. 20.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 43.

Blanche's only contact with reality. When he returns from the hospital, he announces to Blanche, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!"⁹⁹ Blanche, being quite intoxicated, succumbs without any resistance. Her "single impulsive relationship with . . . Stanley . . . results in her complete breakdown and abandonment . . ." ¹⁰⁰

Upon returning with the baby, Stella is confronted with two versions of the rape, Stanley's and Blanche's. Knowing if she accepts Blanche's story she would be unable to live with her husband, Stella accepts Stanley's version. Her decision leaves Blanche alone, left only with her fantasy.

Stella and Stanley understand the gravity of Blanche's condition, and they decide to have her committed to an asylum. Stella tries not to upset Blanche and so she goes along with Blanche's plans. Under the fantasy of taking a sea cruise, Blanche explains:

I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. You know what I shall die of? . . . I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean, I will die--with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond moustache and a big silver watch. . . . And I'll be buried at sea--sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard--at noon--in the blaze of summer--and into an ocean as blue as . . . my first lover's eyes!¹⁰¹

Blanche believes water to be a purifying element; hence, she bathes as a form of therapy. Her obsession about being alone haunts her thoughts of death, and the thought of death brings

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰⁰Philip Weissman, M.D., "Psychopathological Characters in Current Drama: A Study of a Trio of Heroines," American Image, XVII (1960), p. 277.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 116.

back memories of her husband.

When the asylum attendants arrive, Blanche balks against the rude matron, but responds readily to the kind refined manner of the doctor. She gallantly accepts his arm and exits, saying, "Whoever you are--I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."¹⁰²

Williams' heroines are "unhappy, desperate [*sic*], frustrated, fearful, lonely, and insecure because this is the condition of humanity as Williams see it. His heroines find illusory solace for their wounded sensibilities in their dreams because dreams are necessary, Williams seems to say, in a world that drives the sensitive, the humane, the refined, and the noble to introspective desire."¹⁰³

The women each fear being left alone; only in her dreams is there any comfort. " . . . these heroines [with the exception of Serafina] never find anything in the contemporary world to replace their former society."¹⁰⁴

Neurotic symptoms (nymphomania, hypochondria, frigidity, alcoholism) are common among the abandoned woman. The causes of these symptoms might well be related to the function which Williams sees for women in his dramas. " . . . the functional role of Williams' heroines is the dual one of protesting against the cruelty of man's inhumanity to man and of pleading their creator's case for the need of love and understanding between man and his fellow men."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁰³C. N. Stavrou, "The Neurotic Heroine in Tennessee Williams," Literature and Psychology, III, (1955), p. 33.

¹⁰⁴Jones, "Early Heroines," p. 16.

¹⁰⁵Stavrou. "Neurotic Heroine." p. 26.

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