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PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS - OPÇÃO INGLÊS E
LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'
MAIN PROTAGONISTS IN THE FOLLOWING PLAYS:

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

ORPHEUS DESCENDING

THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

TESE SUBMETIDA

À UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL

DE SANTA CATARINA PARA

A OBTENÇÃO DE GRAU DE

MESTRE EM LETRAS.

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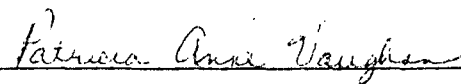
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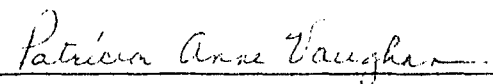
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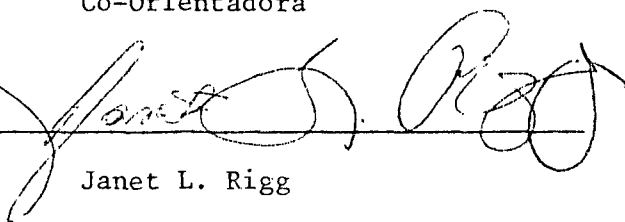
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ABSTRACT

The theme of human anguish is basic to the existential philosophy which states that man is a creature in conflict, that he is unable to live at peace with the demands which body and soul make upon him. Christian existentialism sees this conflict in a religious context and applies to it a morality which is essentially related to original sin. Atheist existentialism, on the other hand, views this conflict in a purely rational way, by replacing the word "soul" for "mind".

In almost all of Tennessee Williams' plays the theme of existential anguish is found in the conflict-ridden personalities of his characters. In the four plays here analyzed (The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Orpheus Descending, The Night of The Iguana), this theme is explored as the central subject of the thesis.

Tennessee Williams uses the conception of existential anguish in his plays, even though he does not appear to be inclined toward either Christian or atheist existentialism. But one can notice that all of the main characters in the plays analyzed in this thesis suffer from an existential anguish. This anguish is caused by inner struggles which have their origin in an incapacity to live harmoniously with the demands of both body and soul.

Such characters are for the most part, totally unable to achieve the human synthesis idealized by the philosopher Kierkegaard in which man can learn to live at peace with his inner self when he becomes able to fuse the

temporal and the eternal elements in his life. In order to reach this synthesis Kierkegaard states that man must successfully pass through three crucial stages. The first stage is the aesthetic, in which man surrenders to sensuality, the instinct of living, by the constant inhibited search for beauty, pleasure and happiness. The second stage, the ethical is lived in accordance with reason and man thus becomes able to control his instincts and passions. The last and most complete stage is found on the religious level in which man lives according to the norms of faith.

Tennessee Williams' characters unable to reach Kierkegaard's last two stages, experience a deep anguish of conflict and this conflict leads them to try to escape from their own reality, into the illusory worlds of sex, drink, art, travel, religion or else into a make-believe and fantasized reality. These forms of retreat are most often very dangerous to the characters' personalities, for they lead to a complete alienation from reality.

The chapter of the thesis consist in a detailed analysis of the four plays mentioned above in the light of existential anguish. The plays are analyzed in chronological order with the objective of demonstrating how the author appears to change his point of view as he matures in his own way of seeing modern man's attempt to find solutions for his personal anguished existence. Tennessee Williams seems to discover that in order to be relatively free from anguish man must be able to accept himself as he is, with both his sensual instincts and spiritual aspirations.

RESUMO

O tema da angústia humana é fundamental para a filosofia Existencialista que afirma que o homem é uma criatura em conflito, incapaz de viver em paz com os seus próprios apelos de corpo e alma. O existencialismo cristão ver este conflito num contexto religioso e o aplica à uma moralidade que é essencialmente relacionada com o pecado original. O existencialismo ateu, por outro lado, ver esse conflito num modo puramente racional com a substituição da palavra "alma" por "mente".

Em quase todas as peças de Tennessee Williams, o tema da angústia existencial é encontrado nas personalidades angustiantes e em conflitos dos seus principais personagens. Nas quatro peças aqui analisadas (The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Orpheus Descending e The Night of The Iguana), este tema é explorado como assunto central da tese.

Tennessee Williams usa a concepção da angústia existencial em suas peças, mesmo sem ter inclinações pelos existencialismos cristão ou ateu. Mas é notório que os personagens principais de Tennessee Williams, nas peças analisadas nesta tese, sofrem angústia existencial por causa dos seus conflitos anteriores que são causados pelas suas impossibilidades de viver em harmonia com os apelos de corpo e alma.

A maioria dos personagens são totalmente incapazes de alcançar a síntese idealizada pelo filósofo Kierkegaard na qual o homem vive em paz com o seu íntimo e chega à

um ponto no qual ele possa unir o temporal e o eterno em sua vida. Para alcançar essa síntese, Kierkegaard afirma que o homem deve passar com sucesso através de três estágios. O primeiro estágio é o estágio estético, no qual ele cede à sensualidade, ao instinto de viver pela constante procura desinibida da beleza, prazer e felicidade. O segundo estágio: o estágio ético - é vivido de acordo com a razão e o homem torna-se capaz de controlar seus instintos e paixões. O último, e o mais completo estágio, é o estágio religioso no qual o homem vive de acordo com as normas da fé.

Os personagens de Tennessee Williams incapazes de alcançar os últimos dois estágios de Kierkegaard experimentam um conflito resultante ainda mais angustiante, e este conflito os leva a tentar escapar de suas próprias realidades nos mundos ilusórios de sexo, bebida, arte, viagens, religião e ainda para dentro de pseudo-realidades fantásticas. Estas formas de fuga são frequentemente perigosas para as personalidades dos personagens porque elas levam à uma completa alienação da realidade.

Os capítulos da tese consistem numa análise detalhada das quatro peças mencionadas acima na luz da angústia existencial. As peças são analisadas em ordem cronológica com o objetivo de demonstrar como o autor parece mudar seu ponto de vista, amadurecendo de um certo modo, seu próprio modo de ver a tentativa do homem moderno de encontrar soluções para sua própria existência angustiante. Tennessee Williams parece descobrir que para viver sem muita angústia, o homem deve ser capaz de aceitá-lo como é, com seus instintos sexuais e aspirações espirituais.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Even though a materialistic philosophy would have us believe only in the existence of empirical reality, the existentialists claim that most human beings suffer to a greater or lesser degree, depending on whether or not they are able to be satisfied with what a purely empirical world has to offer. This type of anguish is considered as a very real problem in the life of modern man by those philosophers who adhere to existentialism, for they believe it to be one of the factors which most affects those forced to live in a materialistic society.

However, in addition to the anguish produced in man by the pressures of the material world, the existentialists also see man as profoundly anguished by his own inherent inability to live in harmony with himself. A synthesis of body and soul, man is constantly at war with himself.⁽¹⁾ If he submits to the pleasures of the flesh which satisfy his body, he often finds himself frustrated spiritually. And if this frustration is deep and continual, in order to bear his own existence, he will often adopt

(1) In Kierkegaard's thought this word obviously has a spiritual connotation, for the philosopher was an essentially religious man. This thesis will then consider "soul" in Kierkegaardian terms, that is, as the spiritual element in the human makeup which leads man to desire transcendence and to crave for fulfillment as a human being.

forms of behavior which are, in essence, only efforts to escape from his own personal reality. This very escapism, however leads to a new type of anguish - a Spiritual Suffering which entraps him just as much, if not more, than the reality from which he seeks to flee.

These concepts are based principally on the existential thought of the philosopher Kierkegaard who states that while man is essentially a synthesis of body and soul. There is also a third element at work within him which is the Spirit. This is the element, then, which Kierkegaard sees as the real cause of human anguish, for man cannot live in peace and harmony with himself, that is, with either body or soul, while the Spirit in him requires that he be more than that which he is in reality. The anguish conceived by Kierkegaard springs from this relationship of the human Spirit with man's body and soul as well as the Spirit's relation to itself and its own particular condition. (2)

The spirit, in the thought of Kierkegaard, is that element in man which should mediate, or bring about harmony, between the body and the soul. Anguish in the human person results when this harmony is not achieved.

The elemental synthesis in man treated above - body, soul, spirit - gives rise to a secondary synthesis, according to Kierkegaard: that of the temporal and the eternal. Man suffers a profound anguish because while he

(2) Kierkegaard, Soren - Conceito da Angústia, Editorial Proença, Lisboa, 1977, p. 60.

is drawn toward the transcendence of the infinite, he must live in the present, finite moment. Instead of abstracting the present temporal moment from the eternal, he tries desperately to convert the temporal into an eternal moment. Thus, while man's sensual life can be lived only in the present, concrete moment, his spiritual demands cannot be satisfied with such short periods of happiness as occur in time. These must somehow be linked to the eternal for *"The moment is an atom, not of time, but of eternity in time."*⁽³⁾ But the problem arises, says Kierkegaard because

"in the moment, there is an attempt to unite man's body and soul, but then the demands of the spirit appear and man becomes anguished because he cannot transform this present moment into an eternal one."⁽⁴⁾

For man, freedom is an overpowering condition for his own being and yet he feels lost in this world, invaded by a terrible sense of nothingness:

"a kind of vertigo seizes man - Nothing is stable, nothing offers man a place to stand or a sign by which to orient himself. He is left alone with his limitless freedom - limitless because no claim is made to limit it, in dread man understands his utter

(3) own translation from Kierkegaard's Concept of Anguish:
"O instante é, no fundo, um átomo não do tempo, mas da eternidade. É o primeiro reflexo da eternidade no tempo" - p. 123

(4) abstracted translation (From Portuguese to English) from Conceito de Angústia (Kierkegaard) - p.p 119 - 126

homelessness. He is uneasy about the meaning of his own being - in - the world."(5)

Because man often has neither the will nor the strength to endure his own anguish/dread, he retreats from himself into another kind of world a world that does not create anguish for him but rather a pseudo happiness:

"the strength to face dread is thus the strength to face an abyss which in the end may swallow all meaning. Where this strength is lacking, all that remains is a flight from dread, since man is essentially a being in dread, this flight must be a flight from himself. In dread of dread, man flees back into the world of everyday. Man takes refuge from the burden of having to be himself by escaping in the anonymous safety of the mess."(6)

Tennessee Williams can be considered a follower of the existential philosophy, and in particular that of Kierkegaard, since in the depiction of his characters, so much emphasis is placed upon the problem of human anguish. This will be seen to be true in the analysis of the four plays selected for special study in this thesis.

Tennessee Williams has at times been considered a merely pagan hedonist by his critics, but such a denomination tends to limit the scope of both his works and

(5) *Harrie - Kersten - The Search for Meaning. Chapter IV in existential Philosopher - Kierkegaard to merlou Ponty, ed. G. A. Shroder, N. Y. Mc graw Hill, 1967, p. 183*

(6) *Ibid. - p. 184.*

the thought of the man who wrote them. It is obviously true that he wanted to shock the false moralities of his time. But he did this in order to expose far deeper human truths upon the stage. By so doing, he also exposed deep feelings of human anguish. Through his protagonists he showed that man is indeed a divided self - a being who oscillates between what earth can offer him, and what his heart claims as being beyond the earth. Because man is unable to harmonize these tendencies towards earth and towards the transcendental into a united self, he experiences the feelings of anguish that are so apparent in characters such as Tom of the Glass Menagerie and Blanche of a Streetcar Named Desire, to cite only two of many possible examples.

Thus, it seems eminently justifiable to relate the thought of Kierkegaard to elements that have become thoroughly characteristic of the plays of Tennessee Williams, even though along with the similarities, differences are to be found. The similarity lies in the acknowledgement of human anguish and the need to find some kind of solution to this universal human problem, which results from man's inability to achieve a satisfactory synthesis of body and soul. The difference is to be found in the solutions which the two writers propose. Kierkegaard calls upon religion and the faith experience to solve the problem of human anguish. Tennessee Williams sees the solution in the experience of life itself which can eventually lead man to an acceptance of himself and his human condition.

Because a definite parallel does exist between the thoughts of the two men, the central theme of the work

here presented is based upon the fact that many of Tennessee Williams' characters are indeed victims of what we may call existential anguish. They cannot live out their lives in peace because they experience the agony of the division within themselves. While on the other hand, these fictional personalities are inclined to the pleasures of the flesh, they cannot accept this totally human response to the world because they are also drawn to that purity of soul which they erroneously see as incompatible with carnal satisfaction. As a consequence of this inability to face up to, and ultimately resolve, this inner conflict, Williams' protagonists prefer to retreat into a illusory make-believe world which they themselves create.

The four chapters of the dissertation then, will consist in an analysis of four different plays, based upon the theme of existential anguish. These four plays were especially chosen from Williams' opus because, while they all treat the problem of human anguish, they do so in different ways. The Glass Menagerie, the first important play in Williams' literary career, is analyzed in the first chapter. Written at the beginning of Williams' career as a playwright, this work treats the problem of human anguish in a fairly ingenuous manner. Anguish is present in terms of social acceptance or/and non-acceptance of the "ugly" reality which surrounds the characters. The forms of escape which the characters choose in order to retreat from the anguish of their lives are not as violent and shocking as those to be found in the later and more mature plays, such as A Streetcar Named Desire and Orpheus Descending.

These later plays were written during a very negative phase of the author's life - at a time when he himself was inclined to view life and the world about him with a pessimistic eye. The fourth play analyzed in this thesis was chosen not only because it is the last really important play written by Williams, but especially because it seems to indict a change in Williams' way of looking at the problem of human anguish and human existence. The Night of The Iguana is the only play among those included in this analysis in which the author views, with any degree of optimism, ways in which the problem of human living can be dealt with. In this play, as opposed to the others analyzed in previous chapters, the protagonists find solutions that permit them to live more peaceful and, hence, less anguished lives. The solution lies, Williams seems to be saying, in man's acceptance of himself and of his human condition. There can never be a total solution for existential conflicts but the kind of solution found by the two main characters in this later play - Shannon and Maxine - at least presents a way of living a kind of peace, in strong contrast to the earlier plays which are as Williams himself affirms: "*about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people.*"⁽⁷⁾

(7) *Preface to Orpheus Descending, Williams,*
London, Secker and Warburg, 1958, p. 10.

Review of Criticism

There are many books, articles and reviews written about Tennessee Williams's work. The opinion of the critics is however, contradictory. Some appreciate him and consider him an outstanding playwright, while others criticize him. I have chosen to concentrate on critics that discuss questions which are linked to the topic of this dissertation, that is, they either deal directly or indirectly with the theme of existential anguish analyzed in this study.

Two critics are very important for my work: Esther Jackson and Donald Costello's opinions are analyzed in this work because they mention the problem of body versus soul conflicts in Tennessee Williams' characters as well as the analysis of existential philosophy in the author's thought. Esther Jackson considers Williams an existentialist in his depiction of his characters as anti-heroes with the weakness of the flesh and with evil characteristics in their inner selves. She states that:

"through exposure and scrutiny of man's inner nature, he reveals man's anti-heroic qualities, his potencial for moral and spiritual disintegration, his frequent lack of compassion, his own responsibility for his suffering, his sense of guilt, his quest for identity, and his possible redemption through compassion and Love... Evil is not only found in Society. Evil also exists within the self and his characters like Blanche and Shannon are dramatic demonstrations of it. All have

weaknesses of the flesh and are selfish even brutal... Corruption, whether in others one's self is a cancer that gradually consumes and kills. And it causes its victim to hate, to destroy and kill, too."⁽⁸⁾

While Esther Jackson considered Tennessee Williams' characters anti-heroes with evil characteristics, the critic Donald Costello considers them fugitive beings who are trapped in a corrupting world, fighting desperately in order to achieve freedom and peace:

"Good is Spirit as opposed to flesh; dreams as opposite to mundane reality; ideals as opposite to brutality; above all it is love as opposed to selfish interests. The sensitive conveyors of spirit, dreams, ideals and love are the misfits in a savage world who fight alone and are destroyed. In vain do the pursuers of good struggle to be free of this contaminating world. Gradually they are too polluted with the stain of evil. The Symbolism of sky, stars, birds and animals throughout the play helps Williams to dramatize the difference between the instinctual, fleshly and rapacious nature of the corrupting earth and the clean, white serene sky which remain pure, inviolable. The purity and beauty of sensual life can exist from man's jungle, the kingdom of earth."⁽⁹⁾

(8) Jackson - Esther Merle - The Anti-Hero in the plays of Tennessee Williams from The Broken world of Tennessee Williams, Madison University, University of Wisconsin 1965, p. p. 87-99.

(9) Costello - Donald - Tennessee Williams' Fugitive Kind, Modern Drama, 15 (May 1972) p. p. 26-43

These two critics are very important because their ways of viewing Williams are connected to the theme of my work which is mainly to show how Tennessee Williams deals with the philosophical problem of existential anguish in man. Because of this we do not focus on him as a "realist" but rather consider him to be an expressionist and romantic because he mirrors reality with a wealth of inventive and successful theatrical effects. Critics differ as to whether Williams is basically a realist or a poetic interpreter of sharply realistic actions and characters through a screen of illusion and memory. The critic Gerald Weales' opinion is that:

"Williams has done his best to mask the realistic through caricature, myths and rituals, lurid plots, symbols, distorted sets and visual and auditory effects."⁽¹⁰⁾

In one of the author's interviews during the rehearsals of his play The Night of The Iguana, Tennessee Williams expresses his own opinion about his use of theatrical effects. He states that human relationships are "terrifyingly ambiguous" and for this reason he can not portray a true reality because everything in life is uncertain:

"I depended too much on language - on words... The whole attitude of this new wave of playwrights is not to preach... not to be

(10) Weales, Gerald - Tennessee Williams (1965) University of Minnesota Pamphlets - p. 66.

dogmatic, to be provocative allusive... human relations are terrifyingly ambiguous... I think my kind of literary or pseudo-literary style of writing for the theatre is on its way out... Poetry doesn't have to be words, you see. In the theatre it can be situations, it can be sentences... My great bête noir as a writer has been a tendency to poeticize... The Night of the Iguana is a play whose theme... is how to live beyond despair and still live... I despair sometimes of love being lasting, and of people getting along together... as nations and individuals."⁽¹¹⁾

The critic Delma Presley has a position that is very relevant to the theme of the body versus soul conflict explored in this work. She states that:

"Williams' early works (Glass Menagerie, a Streetcar Named Desire) suggest that, beyond human weaknesses, a cause of isolation is the inability of the flesh to coexist harmoniously with the spirit."⁽¹²⁾

She also realizes that:

"Williams common themes-frustration and anxiety are far more commendable, more real than the religious bounding clichés of the hero in later plays... Indeed he succeeds most of all when he describes loneliness,

(11) Theatre Arts, (Interview with Tennessee Williams) January, 1962. p. p. 17, 18, 73.

(12) Presley, Delma E - The Search for hope in the plays of Tennessee Williams, Mississippi Quaterly, 25 (Winter 71-72), p. p. 31-43.

frustration, and the unavoidable anxiety of human experience."⁽¹³⁾

Esther Jackson in another article about Williams says that Williams writes his plays in an individualized manner because he wants the reader to perceive things in the world of the play as if he were in the characters' mind:

"Each of his plays takes the shape of a vision proceeding from the consciousness of the protagonist. In the Glass Menagerie, the play represents the memory of the hero, while in A Streetcar Named Desire, the spectator observes the "Elysian Fields" as it appears in the troubled mind of Blanche... Williams seeks to provide a way through which the spectator may be alienated from the "false" world of appearances and induced to share the discovery - creation... of a world of eternal truth... He is specifically concerned with the interpretation of those crises - inner and outer - which attend the human condition in the world of today."⁽¹⁴⁾

Tennessee Williams is very concerned about the problem of human existence and he states in the preface of The Rose Tattoo that human relations are ambiguous and occur in an indefinite time. What is important is man's constant fight between his being and nonbeing. He thus takes an

(13) Presley, Delma E - The Search for hope in the plays of Tennessee Williams, Mississippi Quaterly, 25 (Winter 71-72), p. p. 31-43.

(14) Jackson - Esther - Williams and the Lyric Moment. University of Washington Press, 1966 - p. p. 32-33.

existentialist position:

"In a play, time is arrested in the sense of being confined. By a sort of legerdemain, events are made to remain events, rather than being reduced so quickly to mere ocurrences, the audience can sit back in a comforting chair to watch a world which is flooded with light and in which emotion and action have a dimension and dignity that they would likewise have in real existence, if only the shattering intrusion of time could be locked out.

About their lives, people ought to remember that when they are finished, everything in them will be contained in a marvelous state of repose which is the same as that which they unconsciously admired in drama. The rush is temporary. The great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power deliberately to choose certain moral values by which to live as steadfastly as if he, too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time. Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence. As far as we know, as far as there exists any kind of empiric evidence, there is no way to beat the game of being against nonbeing, in which nonbeing is the predestined victor on realistic level."⁽¹⁵⁾

The above quotation shows Tennessee Williams' concept of the human being and his reality. He takes a

(15) Preface to the Rose Tatoo - The Timeless World of the play - Tennessee Williams - p. p. VIII - IX.

pessimistic attitude when he says that on realistic level, the nonbeing is always the victor. He also considers man tormented by "an anguish of fruitless living" and he expresses this through his characters. The critic A. D. Choudhuri's opinion is strongly linked to this issue:

"His plays speak intimately to the secret personal dilemmas and perplexities of the harassed and open up a new vista of fresh feelings and possibilities... a sense of guilt, born largely of repressed sex urges, informs the drives and activities of the characters. Sex, violence and sense of guilt characterize the vision of his plays... In them Williams seems to be brooding on the vague absurdist sense of nothingness as the basic fibre of existence. As the characters are tormented by an anguish of fruitless living, at odds with the world of conformists and efficiency, they opt for a life of self-inflicted exile which is a kind of non-recognition of society. Many of them attempt to find meaning and significance in the exploration of sex."⁽¹⁶⁾

Tennessee Williams has showed in his plays the important relationship between life and Art. For him, any form of art is a purifying element that prevents the characters from being totally corrupted in a corrupting world. He also considers artistic powers to be equated with

(16) Choudhuri, A. D. - The face of Illusion in American Drama Chapter 7, The Glass Menagerie - Private Face of Illusion, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1979, p. 113.

sexual powers. As Albert Karlson comments that:

"Williams has demonstrated a continuing preoccupation with the relationship and interdependence of life and art."⁽¹⁷⁾

Concluding one can say that those critics have a vision of Tennessee Williams that is somehow connected with that which will be explored in this work. Williams as a dramatist is more concerned of problems than of solutions. That is what makes his plays such challenging masterpieces, but it is also clear that the author through the progression of his plays is in search not only of a solution for the anguish of his fictional characters but also for a solution for his own conflicted existence.

(17) Karlson, Albert - Tennessee Williams enters Dragon Country Modern Drama, 16 (June 1973) p. 61.

Statement of Purpose

The following questions will serve as the basis for analysis of four of Tennessee Williams' principal plays in this thesis: What is the cause of so much anguish in Tennessee Williams' principal characters? How does Williams view the human conflict that arises because of the body-soul dichotomy in man? Tennessee Williams portrays his characters not as ordinary people, living ordinary lives but rather as persons who have become alienated from society and as a result live in an unreal or imaginary world of their own making. Why does he do this? How do these characters try to deal with the anguish that results from this alienation? Are they generally successful in their attempts to find peace? Is Williams himself consistent in the way in which he presents the characters' search for a solution to the problems of life? How does this attitude toward the problem of existential anguish change and/or develop in the four plays here presented? In order to facilitate the analysis of the plays and especially in order to be able to answer this last question, the plays selected for study in this thesis will be presented in chronological order.

The Glass Menagerie

Chapter two of the dissertation deals with one of Tennessee Williams' earliest plays. In this play the author portrays the four protagonists as extremely anguished beings,

all of whom are unable to live in the present and retreat into either the past reality, as in the case of Amanda or of future dreams as do both Tom and Jim, or even into an imaginary reality, such as the one Laura creates for herself.

The main focus in the play is on these characters' response to the anguish of their human existence and the effect that these reactions produce upon one another.

A Streetcar Named Desire

The third chapter of this study is an analysis of one of Tennessee Williams' most famous plays. Here the analysis focuses upon the guilt and anguish which the main protagonist, Blanche Dubois, feels in relation to the circumstances of her life. Strong emphasis is also placed on the body - versus - soul conflict which is so much a part of Blanche's experience of her inner self and which is finally revealed in her relationship with her brother - in - law, Stanley Kowalski. These conflicts, which Blanche tries desperately to avoid, eventually lead to self - destruction and total alienation from reality.

Orpheus Descending

Chapter four presents a view of four anguished characters who seek to escape from the corrupting reality of their lives through the mediums of sex, drink, art, religions but who are finally destroyed by the very earthly

and corrupting forces which they sought to avoid. On a symbolic level, the author manages to suggest that these characters (Val, Carol, Vee, Lady) are not really destroyed but rather released to a better world and thus an optimistic note is allowed to creep in. It is in this play that Williams puts his greatest emphasis upon Art as one of the purifying elements in life, an element which frees man in a certain sense from "the corrupting earth" to which he is bound, and which can relieve him, if only momentarily, from the anguish of human existence.

The Night of The Iguana

This play, Tennessee Williams' last really important work is extremely important, for it shows a change of attitude on the author's part in relation to the finding of a solution for the problem of existential anguish. This play presents Shannon's (the main character's) anguish, his inner struggle between his "flesh and soul" poles, his relationship with two women representative of these poles and his final decision to stay with one of them. The author in this play, seems to be optimistic as to the finding of answers to man's personal anguish.

Conclusion

The basic conclusions to be drawn from this analysis are:

- The existential anguish which these characters suffer is due to inner conflicts caused by their inability to live harmoniously with the demands of both body and soul.

- They are unable to achieve the synthesis idealized by the philosopher Kierkegaard (mentioned in the statement of problem), in which man lives at peace with his inner self and arrives at a point in which he can fuse the temporal and the eternal in his life.

- This anguished conflict leads them to try to escape from their own reality into the illusory worlds of sex, drink, art, travel or religion, or else into make-believe and fantasized forms of reality.

- These forms of retreat are most often dangerous to the characters' personalities, for they lead to a complete alienation from reality.

- Throughout the thesis I have attempted to show that Williams' attitude in relation to possible solutions for the anguish of human existence matures, and develops from a basically pessimistic view of "the corrupting earth" toward a cautious acceptance of life as it is, and of the conflicts which are naturally part of that life.

Chapter Two - The Glass Menagerie

Because it is one of the first plays written by Tennessee Williams. The Glass Menagerie focuses on the problem of existential anguish in a rather different way than is to be found in the later plays. The conflict between body and soul exists, but one does not find in the characters of this play the same sense of desperation and neurotic sexuality that occurs in the other three plays explored in this thesis.

The author, in the beginning of his career, viewed life more optimistically than in his later writings. However, the problem of anguish is already present and through skillful character portrayal he clearly exposes his own thoughts concerning man's existential anguish, what causes such anguish and what forms of escape are most effective in order to avoid total alienation.

The characters of this play experience the anguish of four human beings who do not wish to accept the reality that surrounds them. They choose rather to live in a world of dreams. The sense of anguish that results from such a flight into unreality is analyzed in the following study. As the critic A. D. Choudhuri says about the play:

"Tennessee Williams shows in The Glass Menagerie great ability to dramatize the tension that exists between the idealized world of the protagonists and the pragmatic reality they are forced to accept."⁽¹⁾

The critic also considers the world of the play:

"a dreamland in which shadowy delicate figures move about, fighting the invisible enemy of ugly reality".⁽¹⁾

The action of the play involves the difficult days of the thirties, days difficult both for Americans and for the world, during the depression. This social background is important insofar as it influences the life of the characters on stage. The action clearly defines the slow disintegration of the family structure, because its members are not prepared to live in the real world and suffer its tragic consequence:

"Tom plainly stated that the background is a crisis in society for the depression decade is teetering on the brink of the second world war."⁽²⁾

Even though the Wingfield family is slowly disintegrating because each member is alone and alienated, still the sense of family loyalty so characteristic in the past generation, persists in their thoughts and actions. Amanda, the mother, tries her best to keep the family united, intact and cohesive: *"In those trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is each other"* (Scene IV), but she does not really know how to do this, for she herself is mainly responsible for its disintegration. The son, Tom,

(1) Choudhuri, A. D. - The Glass Menagerie - Private Face of Illusion N. J., Humanities Press, 1979, p. 114, p. 123.

(2) Gassner, John - Tennessee Williams - Dramatist of Frustration, College English, vol. 10, number 1, October 1948, p. 5.

finally escapes from the web of his family but later cannot avoid feelings of remorse for having abandoned it. Consequently through his memories he remains loyal to his family. Laura, the daughter who is crippled and almost totally alienated from reality, is unable to live outside the bosom of her family. A sense of nothingness is intensified in this play. A. D. Choudhuri thinks that:

"the characters seem to be haunted by an element of uncertainty and instability, and they are caught in a helpless web of estrangement from reality which produces the anguish of fruitless living."⁽³⁾

The atmosphere and mood of the play have the elusiveness of a dream as the characters live, not in the reality of the present but rather in the past, the future or an alienated world lost in time. For example Amanda, exhausted by poverty and worry, retreats to the glorious past of her youth, when as a young woman living in the opulent south of Blue Mountain, She received seventeen gentleman callers is one afternoon. Tom, Amanda's son is a clerk in a warehouse. He composes poems on the lids of shoeboxes, and lives in the future by dreaming of running away to the south sea islands, or of going on a safari to exotic far - off places. Jim, his friend, a shipping clerk in the same warehouse, lives in the past by remembering his glorious high school days when he was a "hero". But Jim also lives in the future, for he

(3) Choudhuri - p. 126.

takes a course in public speaking and aspires to an executive position. Laura, Amanda's crippled daughter, lives neither in the past nor in the future, but in a private world of her own, a world of fragile glass ornaments.

The Glass Menagerie thus projects not a series of violent confrontations as in the author's other plays as A Streetcar Named Desire,

"but a compact vision of lonely human beings who fail to make contact, who are isolated from each other and reality and who seem ultimately abandoned in the universe".⁽⁴⁾

The author makes a social analysis of the background and circumstances of the play through the figure of Tom who, as the narrator, represents Tennessee Williams himself. We become aware of this social analysis through Tom's initial words:

Tom - *"In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica, Here there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis... This is the social background of the play..."⁽⁵⁾*

This notion of social disaster appears throughout the play and it denotes Tennessee Williams' desire to express

(4) Stein - Roger - "The Glass Menagerie Revisited - Catastrophe Without Violence" Western Humanities Review 18 (September 1964) p. 141.

(5) In The Glass Menagerie - Williams, Tennessee, Penguin Books, Great Britain, 1933 - p. p. 234-235, Ac I, Scene 1.

more than a plot of illusion and frustration in the lives of its characters.

In the opening scene Tom appears against the background of the apartment. He is dressed as a merchant sailor and thus addresses the audience. He speaks of the social significance of the memory play and of its characters. He also speaks of illusion and how often people live a life of illusions:

Tom - "yes I have tricks in my pocket. I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you the illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.

To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a School for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery braille alphabet of a dissolving economy".⁽⁶⁾

Tom is Tennessee Williams' mouthpiece. He has two functions in the play: that of Narrator and that of character. In the role of narrator he holds the play together through his remembrances of things past and also through the organization of the development of the drama.

(6) Ibid - p. 234 - Act I, Scene 1.

Tom, as a character in the play, is a poet who is desperately unhappy in his warehouse job. Tennessee Williams is also reflected through Tom as a character, and he speaks feelingly through Tom's words about the afflictions of the modern age, Tom cannot accept the mediocre life he leads:

Tom - *"Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, and none of those instincts are given much play at a warehouse".⁽⁷⁾*

His life heretofore has been fruitless, but he dreams of a better future. He desires desperately to escape from his aimless life and this escape, as the critic Nancy Tischler explains

"heartless as it may seem (for it implies the abandoning of his family) is for him a necessary and wholesome measure of self-preservation".⁽⁸⁾

Thus Tom's conflict can be analyzed in terms of themes focused upon in this dissertation: man's anguish which results from the body versus soul conflict in his existence. Even though in the play this basic conflict is not as explicit as in others, one can still find in the characters of The Glass Menagerie, words and actions that bear testimony of its existence Tom in the above quotation praises the instinct which implies a carnal existence... but is anguished and unsatisfied in the life he is leading. He is neither

(7) Ibid - p. 260.

(8) Tischler - Nancy - Tennessee Williams -Rebellious Puritain.

satisfied in body or soul. Tom an avid reader of the instinct affirming writings of D. H. Lawrence, is rebuked by a religious sounding Amanda, who would have him concentrate on life's nobler qualities:

"I took that horrible novel back to the library - Yes! That hideous book by the insane Mr. Lawrence".⁽⁹⁾

Tom's monotonous job and life suffocate him and create in him the anguish of a person eager to be released from the web of family responsibilities, forced upon him. Because his father had early run away from this kind of responsibility, Tom admires him, for he represents escape for his son who craves the same kind of independence:

Tom - *"He was a telephone man who feel in love with long distances. He gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped out of town".⁽¹⁰⁾*

Tom hints admiration of his father's romantic disappearance:

Tom - *"The last we heard from him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan on the pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words - "Hello - good - bye" and no address".⁽¹¹⁾*

(9) The Glass Menagerie - p. 250.

(10) The Glass Menagerie - p. 235

(11) Ibid - p. 235.

The father of the family, even though absent, constitutes a symbolic character in the play. The picture of the father which constitutes an important visual element, symbolizes a kind of romance for his son - the romance of escape and adventure:

Tom - *"Mother, if self is what I thought of, I'd be where he is - gone! (Pointing to father's picture)"*⁽¹²⁾

Tom expresses the need to escape "the nailed up coffin" of his restricted existence, and it is not difficult to see that this feeling is very clearly linked to the traditional "body versus soul" conflict. The "nailed up coffin" implies Tom's lack of physical adaptation to his mediocre existence. His conflict is generalized to include the familial and social aspects of his life. Tom craves desperately for independence from his family, but he is aware of the loss that comes from his choosing his freedom.

"Tom rejects the possessive love of his mother because he can accept it only by shouldering the responsibility and imprisonment that go with it".⁽¹³⁾

Not only Tom, but everyone in the world of the play needs to escape from the cruel reality imposed upon them by various circumstances. Tom expresses the forms of

(12) Ibid - p. 252.

(13) Tischler - Nancy - Tennessee Williams - The Rebellious Puritan - p. 95.

escape people use in order to forget their disturbing and unquiet world. He compares himself to these lonely beings:

Tom - "... Then the orchestra played a waltz or a tango, something that had a slow, a sensuous rhythm. Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash-pits and telegraph poles. This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure".⁽¹⁴⁾

Since Tom cannot flee from the present moment as his father did, he looks for ways of more immediate escape, such as drinking or going to the movies. He loves the movies because he can imagine, feel and live the adventures and the fantasy of their imaginary characters:

Tom - "I go to the movies because I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much at work, so I go to the movies".⁽¹⁵⁾

However, Tom realizes that this type of escapism does not ultimately satisfy his own longings of those of others like him. He affirms that everyone prefers going to the movies to actually "moving", and he condemns them for this. He, himself has tired of only going to the movies. He wants to "move", to seek real adventures:

(14) Play - The Glass Menagerie - p. 265.

(15) Ibid - p. p. 259-260.

Tom - "People go to the movies instead of moving. Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them!... I'm about to move! (16)

Feeling strongly the anguish of living a boring and frustrating life at his job and with his family, Tom knows he must leave. His final decision in scene six does not only indicate withdrawal, rather is a choice which he makes in order to save his soul. Thus the anguish caused by the conflict "body versus soul" appears again here. He feels his body "nailed up to a coffin" and he knows that if he does not break out from this coffin he will never be able to save his soul and yet the conflict here is felt on both the levels of body and soul. He reveals his decision to Jim:

Tom - "I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside-well, I'm boiling! Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing! Whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes, except as something to wear on a traveller's feet". (17)

But later, when Tom is far away, having left his family, and thinking that he is at last free from Amanda and Laura, he realizes that their shadows, especially that of his sister, follow him everywhere. He is then confronted

(16) Ibid - p. 282.

(17) Ibid - p. 283.

with another kind of anguish, which stems from remorse for having abandoned his family, and he senses the grief that is part of memory itself. He admits in retrospect that he tried to leave them behind but was *"more faithful than he intended to be"*.⁽¹⁸⁾ And in order to fight against the anguish of this remorse, he must repeat his story to every person he meets along the way in a desperate attempt to *"exorcise the guilt he feels"*:

Tom - *"I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves... I would have stopped but I was pursued by something - It always come upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass... oh Laura, I tried to leave you behind but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies, I speak to the nearest stranger - anything that can blow your candles out"*.⁽¹⁹⁾

For Tom, to leave home and family is to insure self-preservation, but at the same time, it is to kill something vital within his self. Tom's punishment for having chosen freedom lies in the grief of his memories. Examining his decision one can conclude that, in order to save his soul, Tom has tried in vain to *"break the chains of his body."* But

(18) Ibid - p. 313.

(19) Ibid - idem

he finds he cannot free himself from the anguish that torments him as the painful memories of his past live in his present experience of them.

If we apply Tom's final decision in life to Kierkegaard's thought which states that *"man must assume his own destiny through choice, decision and compromise,"*⁽²⁰⁾ Tom can be considered a Kierkegaardian figure. According to Kierkegaard *"no one is himself without freedom but freedom is not free from anguish since anguish is the result of every choice, especially the great choices in life"* and Tom's choices is final - a decisive one that changes his whole life.

Laura is an individual completely different from ordinary people. She isolates herself from the world and is unable to make contact with people:

Laura - *"... you see, I wasn't acquainted with many people... I - I - never had much luck at making friends."*⁽²¹⁾

Laura considers herself an abnormal being because of her physical defect. This suggests another aspect of the conflict between body and soul. Because she has a defective body she has over-developed her imagination and lives in a spiritual world of illusion and fantasy. Unable to coexist with her bodily defect, she retreats into an imaginary

(20) Kierkegaard, Soren - Conceito de Angústia, Editorial Proença, Lisboa 1977 - p. 85.

(21) The Glass Menagerie - p. 295.

spiritualized world. Her physical defect is the result of a childhood illness which has left her crippled: one leg is slightly shorter than the other and is held in a brace. For Laura, this is the worst thing in her life. An example of this can be seen in the recounting of her high-school days when she felt that her physical defect called attention to herself in an unfavorable way. The brace on her leg has always been a cross for her:

Laura - *"I had that brace on my leg it clumped so loud!... and everyone was seated before I came in. I had to walk in front of all those people. My seat was in the back row. I had to go clumping all the way up the aisle with everyone watching."*⁽²²⁾

So Laura prefers to retreat in her own imaginary world - Her Glass Menagerie that becomes her only "common" world, it is an illusion that haunts her. The critic Henry Popkins explains that *"the attention she gives to the fragile collection testifies to both her eccentricity and her identification with these creatures, for she, like them, is frail and delicate."*⁽²³⁾

As Laura herself explains the fragility of the glass animals:

Laura - *"Little articles of it, they're ornaments mostly! Most of them are little animals made out of glass! the tiniest little animals in the world"*.⁽²⁴⁾

(22) Ibid - p. 294.

(23) The Glass Menagerie - p. 300.

(24) Ibid - idem.

Williams compares Laura to the ~~Glass~~-Menagerie in the descriptions of her appearance, for the delicate collection aptly represents the fragility of Laura's world, her search for beauty and her own sensitivity:

("a fragile unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura; She is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting I")⁽²⁵⁾

Laura cannot be like Tom, who escapes into the world of movies, alcohol and literature. Nancy Tischler comments that "her retreat is rather into the world of glass and music. Together with her glass menagerie, her father's old phonograph records provide her with an escape from the frightening aspects of her own reality and of the modern age in which she lives."⁽²⁶⁾ At the same time her collection and the records provide her with a link to the past, (the phonograph records belonged to her father) which is important to all of the characters of this play. Her collection of glass absorbs her time. She spends hours polishing the tiny animals that are as delicate as she. Laura hides herself in the magic world of fantasy and illusion in order to protect herself from the real world that, according to her way of thinking, will never accept her the way she is.

However, Laura finally exposes herself to this real world when she lets her feelings of love for Jim (the

(25) Ibid - p. 274.

(26) Tischler, Nancy - T. Williams - The Tebellious Puritan
p. 99.

gentleman caller) flow. For once she is able to emerge from her imaginary world in order to be exposed to the reality of love - But unfortunately circumstance helps her to close off the possibility of a new meaningful relationship, because Jim already has "strings" attached to him. Nevertheless, he gives Laura new courage and helps her to momentarily forget her inferiority complex:

Jim - "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 amount of faith in yourself as a person. I'm basing that fact on a number of your remarks and also on certain observations I've made. For instance that clumping you thought was so awful in high school you say that you even dreaded to walk into class. You see what you did? You dropped out of school, you gave up an education because of a clump which as far as I know was practically non-existent! a little physical defect is what you have. Hardly noticeable even! Magnified thousands of times by imagination! you know what my strong advice to you is?... Think of yourself as Superior in some way."⁽²⁷⁾

But Jim cannot bind himself to Laura, because he is already attached to a girl and he prefers to tell Laura the truth in order to avoid making her feel even worse than she is:

(27) The Play - p.p. 298-299.

Jim - "Laura, you know, If I had a sister like you, I'd bring out fellows and - introduce her to them. The right type of boys of a type to appreciate her. Only - well - he made a mistake about me.

Maybe I've got no call to be saying this. That may not have been the idea in having me over. But what if it was? There's nothing wrong about that. The only trouble is that in my case - I'm not in a situation to - do the right thing - I can't take down your number and say I'll phone. I can't call up next week and - ask for a date. I thought I had better explain the situation in case you - misunderstand it, and - hurt your feelings...

I've got strings on me.

Laura I've been going steady! I go out all the time with a girl named Betty".⁽²⁸⁾

In Laura's Glass Menagerie, one of her favorite animals is the Unicorn - beautiful, unusual and extinct - a symbol of Laura herself. Both are so delicate that they can be broken at any time:

Laura - "oh be careful, if you breathe, it breaks!"

Jim - "Unicorns, aren't they extinct in the modern world?"

Laura - "I know".

Jim - "Poor little fellow he must feel sort of lonesome."⁽²⁹⁾

(28) Ibid - p. 306.

(29) Ibid - p. p. 300-301.

But when Jim, like a whirlwind from the outside world, inadvertently breaks off the little animal's horn, Laura sees this as symbolic of her own situation. She sees both the Unicorn and herself as becoming less freakish, more normal, more like the ordinary people. Laura hopes that, through loving Jim, she can become a normal person, and she makes a heroic attempt to open her eyes to this reality and to leave behind her the world of illusion:

Jim - *"Did something fall off it? I think*

Laura - *"yes"*

Jim - *"Aw, Aw, is it broken?"*

Laura - *"Now it is just like all the other horses.. the horn was removed to make him less freakish! Now he feels more at home with the other horses, the ones that don't have horns..."⁽³⁰⁾*

This last statement of Laura's gives a hint that she wants to overcome her shyness and her inferiority complex and become like any normal girl. She sees Jim as the one who can rescue her from the unreal world and bring her to real life. Her momentary capacity for living in the "real" world seems somewhat comparable to Tom's decision to flee to the larger world. The only difference is that Tom does not need an agent from the outer world to impell his flight from his family. Laura, however, needs this "emissary" from the

(30) Ibid - p. p. 302-303.

real world, and Jim appears to be the only one who can give her the necessary impulse to fly from her world of illusions.

Thus, one can see the emotional impact that Jim's confession of his engagement has upon her, for she has loved him secretly since their highschool days together:

*("Pause,
Slowly, slowly, Laura's look changes, her eyes returning slowly from his to the ornament in her palm, Laura sways slightly forward and grips the arm of the sofa. Leaning stiffly forward, clutching the arm of the sofa, Laura struggles visibly with her storm. But Jim is oblivious, she is a long way off.") (31)*

In an effort to pretend that she is not shocked, Laura gives the broken Unicorn to Jim, as a souvenir of their encounter. But in her heart she knows that now she can never be like the others. Laura gives the broken Unicorn to Jim because he was the only one who had the ability to help her become like other "normal" people, and because she sees that this help must finally be denied her. The broken Unicorn is, in fact, Laura's broken self and a symbol of her final retreat within herself. Jim's confession leads Laura back (perhaps forever) to her own illusory world:

"She bites her lip which was trembling and then bravely smiles. She opens her hand again on the broken glass ornament. Then she

(31) *Ibid* - p. p. 306-307.

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," I

Jim - "What are you doing that for? you want me to
have him? Laura? (She nods) what for?"

Laura - "A Souvenir..."⁽³²⁾

If one compares Laura's and Tom's conceptions of
the real world, it is possible to see that Tom sees the real
world as ugly and hostile, but Laura has briefly stepped
into an outer world of possible love and, even though she
has been disappointed, her brief experience has taught her
that the world can be beautiful. As Nancy Tischler says,
"Laura has stood at the brink of this world without becoming
a part of it, but she has caught its beauty."⁽³³⁾

Paralleling the characters of Laura and Blanche
Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire, one can see a certain
similarity in their incapacity to face the real world, both
try to escape from reality into an imaginary make-believe
world. Of course, Blanche's world is much more violent, for
her retreat is into sex and drink (and also an imaginary
world where there is no violence and where she is magically
"the good girl" she could never be in reality.) In contrast,
Laura's fantasy world is fragile and beautiful; She is the
representative of an ideal beauty and delicacy, a fragility

(32) Ibid - p. p. 306-307

(33) Tischler, Nancy - T. W. - The Rebellious Puritan - p.99.

extinct in the real world. Her Glass Menagerie represents the idealized world where she herself is like one of those glass ornaments "too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."⁽³⁴⁾

Amanda, Tom's and Laura's mother also lives a life of non - reality. She glories in the past when she was part of a southern aristocracy that gave no thought to poverty and privations as she experiences them in the present moment. She is nostalgic about her past life and wants to recapture it through her two children.

She wants to believe that time has not changed, and that Laura can easily have as many "gentleman callers" as she once had in Blue Mountain:

Amanda - "I remember... one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain your mother received - seventeen gentleman callers."⁽³⁵⁾

Amanda is a prisoner of her present fantasies and of past reality: all of her efforts are directed towards bringing back the glorious bygone days, thus foisting her illusions upon her unwilling children as she says to Tom:

Amanda - (with great enthusiasm) - "Try and you succeed". (The notion makes her breathless) Why, you, you're just full of natural endowments! Both of my children - they're unusual children!

(34) The Glass Menagerie - p. 228.

(35) Ibid - p. 276.

Don't you think I know it? I'm so proud!"(36)

Analysing the personality of Amanda, the critic A. D. Choudhuri thinks that

"Amanda dangles between the two worlds of fantasy and reality and she makes spirited but losing attempts to come to terms with the condition she instinctively hates and fears."(37)

Quite possible, Amanda is the most fully developed character in the play as Choudhuri comments that *"she is the only one deeply and emotionally involved in the life of other characters, accepting a kind of moral responsibility for their actions" (38)*, she does her best to keep her family together, although her almost heroic efforts seem pathetic. But her efforts do not mean that Amanda is really in contact with the outside world. In fact she is not any more in touch with reality than the other characters are. For example, she wants terribly to believe that Laura will marry like any other normal girl, and, so she asks Tom to look after his sister until her marriage:

Amanda - *"... I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent-why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please... But until that time you've got to look out for your sister."(39)*

(36) *Ibid* - p. 258.

(37) *Choudhuri*, A. D. - p. 124.

(38) *Ibid* - p. 127.

(39) *The Glass Menagerie* - p. 261.

She frantically attempts to discover meaning and order in a world of chaos - Her out-dated clothing and her mannerisms indicate her desperate longing for vanished grace, and her pathetic attempts to introduce it into the present:

Amanda - *"See something I've resurrected from the old trunk! Styles haven't changed so terribly much after all... (She wears a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils - the legend of her youth is nearly revived)"*

- *(Feverishly) - This is the dress in which I led the Catillon, won the cakewalk twice at Sunset Hill, wore one spring to the Governon's ball in Jackson! See how I sashayed around the ballroom, Laura?"*

("She raises her skirt and does a mincing step around the room")

___ *"I wore it on Sundays for my gentleman callers! I had it on the day I met your father."⁽⁴⁰⁾*

Amanda lives a fantasy of lost grace evidently in conflict with the cruel present reality. Choudhuri explains that *"the fantasy of lost grace violently in conflict with the meanness of the present contributes to the pathos of her position."*⁽⁴¹⁾ She warns Tom about the problem of the cycle in time in one's life:

(40) Ibid - p. 276.

(41) Choudhuri (1) - p. 126.

Amanda - "You are the only young man I know who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present, the past and the past turns into everlasting regret, if you don't plan for it."⁽⁴²⁾

But the above statement shows a realistic side as Nancy Tischler comments her realistic characteristic appears "when she tries to hold the family together and hopes that her children will follow practical careers rather than the romantic paths she herself has followed."⁽⁴³⁾ For instance, she lectures Tom on the merits of tending to business by soliciting magazine subscriptions over the phone:

Amanda - "Well, I just happened to notice that your subscription to the companion's about to expire! yes, it expires with the next issue honey! - just when that wonderful new serial by Bessie Mae Hopper is getting off to such an exciting start, oh honey, it's something that you can't miss."⁽⁴⁴⁾

She finances a secretarial course in business school for Laura, but later disappointedly discovers that she has not been attending the school:

Amanda - "... I stopped off at Rubican's business college to speak to your teachers about your having a cold and ask them what

(42) The Play - p. 269.

(43) Tischler - p. p. 93-94.

(44) Play - p. 249.

progress they thought you were making down there - I went to the typing instructor and introduced myself as your mother. She didn't know who you were. She said, Wingfield, we don't have any such student enrolled at the school."⁽⁴⁵⁾

After Amanda realizes that Laura will never be able to learn secretarial work, she decides that her daughter must marry, because she fears Laura's and her own future of being alone and with no one to protect them, even though she knows but refuses to accept that Laura will most certainly never have a normal life:

Amanda - *"So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the Glass Menagerie, darling? What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position... But of course - some girls do marry."*⁽⁴⁶⁾

The reason Amanda urges her children into the practical life is because she herself is a disillusioned romantic. She deeply regrets having married a man who disappointed her and killed her hopes for an idealized life:

Amanda - *"All of my gentleman callers were sons of planters and so of course I assumed that I would be married to one and raise*

(45) *Play* - p. 243.

(46) *Ibid* - p. 245.

my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants. But man proposes - and woman accepts the proposal! To vary that old, old saying a bit - I Married no planter! I married a man who fell in love with long distances."(47)

But even if Amanda regrets choosing her husband among many gentlemen callers, and is deeply hurt by his having left the family, she does not seem to guard any rancor toward him. In fact, she continues to admire him:

Amanda - *"One thing you father had plenty of - was charm!"*(48)

Nancy Tischler, analyzing the character of Amanda, comments that

"Tennessee Williams endows Amanda with some practicality by giving her an exceedingly complex personality; She has her past to recall (Blue Mountain and gentleman callers) and her present to endure. The only way she can live with ugly reality is to retreat into memories. There is no sexual solution for her, as for others of Tennessee Williams' Characters. Her clothing, her speech and her ideals for her children, all declare her belief in the past and her rejection of the present."(49)

(47) Ibid - p. 247.

(48) Ibid - p. 247.

(49) Tischler - p. 97.

as Tennessee Williams says in his descriptions of the characters: *"She is not paranoid, but her life is a paranoia."*⁽⁵⁰⁾

Amanda's anxieties concerning economic situations, status and aristocracy are the one shared by her fellow Americans in the traditional myth of success: *"Try and you will succeed"*. This motto represents the American dream of success, the theme of self - reliance.

The reason for Amanda's constant fights with Tom is her own insecurity when she sees in him the same irresponsibilities she earlier learned to fear in her husband:

Amanda - *"Tom - Tom - life's not easy, it calls for spartan endurance! There's so many things in my heart that - I cannot describe to you! I've never told you but I loved your father - 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!..."*⁽⁵¹⁾

Amanda always discourages Tom's attempts at his poetical or nautical career and instead she insists on his taking an interest in practical things. But she fails and when Tom finally leaves she says:

Amanda - *"Go, then, go to the moon - you selfish dreamer."*⁽⁵²⁾

(50) The Play - p. 228.

(51) Ibid - p. 259.

(52) Ibid - p. 312.

Nancy Tischler thinks that Amanda is "really able to speak these words (selfish dreamer) with understanding because she shares his ability to dream of a better world."⁽⁵³⁾ Amanda's dreams have been destroyed by reality but have not been forgotten. Amanda continues to be a romantic.

Jim has a symbolic role; he is as Tom says "an emissary from the outer world."⁽⁵⁴⁾ Tennessee Williams portrays Jim as "the most realistic character of the play"⁽⁵⁵⁾; even though he can be considered also a deluded character, for he too dreams of reaching a higher position in life. He represents for all the characters, especially to the always romantic Amanda, an archetype of "the long - delayed but always expected something that we live for"⁽⁵⁶⁾. This sentence is considered by the critic Delma Presley as a hint from the author to portray Jim as a "Messiah, a Savior from the outer world to rescue Amanda and Laura from their illusory world."⁽⁵⁷⁾

Jim during his happy high school days had been a hero:

Jim - "I was beleaguered by females in those days".

Laura - "you were terrible popular"

Jim - "I was spoiled in high school."⁽⁵⁸⁾

(53) Tischler - p. 98.

(54) The Play - p. 235.

(55) Ibid - idem.

(56) Ibid - p. 235.

(57) Presley, Delma - The Search for Hope in the plays of Tennessee Williams - p. 33.

(58) Play - p. 292.

Laura has loved Jim Since High School. In an ironic coincidence and, to Laura's despair, he turns out to be her "only Gentleman Caller". Laura reminds him that once he had called her "Blue Roses":

Laura - "I was out of school a little while with pleurosis. When I came back you asked me what was the matter. I said I had pleurosis. You thought I had said Blue roses. That's what you always called me after that."⁽⁵⁹⁾

After dinner in Laura's home many years later, after they had been going to high school together some years ago, Jim discovers that they had known each other, Laura confesses her admiration for him:

Laura - "Everybody liked you"

Jim - "Including you?"

Laura - "I - yes, I did too."⁽⁶⁰⁾

Nancy Tischler comments that "Jim's good nature melts Laura's shyness and she finds herself comfortable talking to him."⁽⁶¹⁾

Jim - "Don't you like to sit on the floor? Take a pillow."⁽⁶²⁾

(59) Ibid - p. 294.

(60) Ibid - p. 296.

(61) Tischler, Nancy - p. 94.

(62) The Glass Menagerie - p. p. 291-292.

Tischler continues saying that Jim and Laura

"talk of Jim's ambitions in electrodynamics and of his night school courses. Then they turn to a discussion of Laura's tiny Glass animals, especially the Unicorn. Laura believes in these little creatures with the same simplicity and eagerness with which Jim believes in electrodynamics."⁽⁶³⁾

Jim expresses to Laura his future ambitions:

Jim - *"My interest happens to lie in electrodynamics. I'm taking a course in radio engineering at night school, Laura on top of a fairly responsible job at the warehouse. I'm taking that course and studying public-speaking because I believe in the future of television."*⁽⁶⁴⁾

These above words justify Tennessee Williams' description of Jim *"as the most realistic character of the play."* While Laura believes only in the beauty of her ideal world, Jim believes in progress in the future of the real world.

Jim's interest in public speaking underlines his intention to become powerful and successful in life. He represents the man of modern society who craves for education, wealth and power:

Jim - *"Knowledge - zzz p! Money zz p! - Power!
That's the cycle democracy is built on!"*⁽⁶⁵⁾

(63) Tischler, Nancy - p. 94.

(64) The Play - p. 299.

(65) Ibid - p. 300.

Laura exposes to Jim, her only interest in life; the Glass Menagerie with its fragility; its beauty and its eccentricity which are in direct contrast to Jim's dynamic, strong and practical ambitions. As they begin to dance, Jim strikes the table and Laura's favorite animal, the Unicorn, falls to the floor, breaking the tiny horn on its head. Laura picks up the broken object; holds it in her palm and muses that he (it) is better off without the horn. This shows her desire to be normal. She sees in Jim the possibility of experiencing love and of facing the real world. For this reason she says that the Unicorn is better without the horn.

Jim perceives the change in Laura as, little by little, she forgets her inferiority complex in his presence. But as he is somewhat oblivious he does not realize that the merit of this change is not only due to Laura's heroic attempt or his encouragement, but also because of her love for him and her hope to live a normal life with him beside her. When later Jim confesses that he is engaged, Laura is shocked but outwardly demonstrates self - confidence and strength even though inwardly she is, as broken as the Unicorn. She gives this broken figurine to Jim as a remembrance of the girl who for a moment sees that she could have become "normal" through his love. However, Jim, unaware of this fact, leaves Laura's presence, confident that she will now be a different person and that he has been responsible for her change.

Analyzing Jim's personality, one can notice that

he is not the completely realistic character that Tennessee Williams perhaps wants to portray. He is also a deluded person who is involved in a world of fantasy, although he himself seems to be totally unaware of this. Choudhuri's conception of Jim is as *"the typical, faceless American high school hero, who could give continuity to the success begun in his younger days."*⁽⁶⁶⁾ As he says to Laura:

Jim - *"But just look around you and you will see lots of people as disappointed as you are. For instance, I hoped when I was going to high school that I would be further along at this time, six years later, than I am now..."*⁽⁶⁷⁾

He knows that he does not have the same value as before but he dreams of being better in the future:

Jim - *"My signature isn't worth very much right now. But some day - maybe - it will increase in value."*⁽⁶⁸⁾

Jim believes he is fighting in a real world, but his optimism can be considered a form of illusion too. He has embraced with all his heart the myth of American success. He feels that he is strongly rooted in the living stream of society but in fact he really exists in the invisible structure of illusions that an industrial society manufactures. Jim accepts the values of society without

(66) Choudhuri - (4) - p. 124.

(67) The Play - p. 295.

(68) Ibid - p. 296.

questioning and Choudhuri thinks

"he belongs to the commonplace type, operating in this world of make-believe as much as the other characters live in their own fantasy world. Of all the four characters, Jim lives most intensely in the territory of fantasies as he does not know that the ideals he cherishes are the myths of the open society."⁽⁶⁹⁾

In conclusion we can say that all the characters in this play live in two different worlds, they sway between the world of reality and the world of illusion. This aspect makes them similar but they can be considered different in the way that they deal with their illusions. The experiences, actions and reactions of the characters throughout the development of the play either make them beings full of anguish or simply deluded (without anguish to the circumstances of their lives).

Tom lives in anguish because he can clearly see the real world but considers it too violent and overpowering for him to bear. Instead of facing the world and modern society and of accepting the values imposed by it, he prefers to retreat into his own world of movies, drinking and the writing of poetry (clearly an effort to escape from the realism of his mediocre job). He also dreams of the future when he will be free to be an eternal traveller and adventurer in his idealized world.

(69) Choudhuri - (4) p. 125.

During Tom's present he constantly experiences the feeling of anguish because he can not coexist with the reality which suffocates him. But later, at the close of the play, one can see that although Tom has attained his ideal of adventure and travel, he cannot avoid the same feeling of anguish that lies in the pain of his past memories. He can not cut the strings that link him to the past. He feels remorse for having abandoned his family and for having rejected the responsibility of supporting them by accepting the values of a pragmatic society. The shadow of his family follows him everywhere in spite of all his adventures.

The body versus soul conflict appears in Tom as the basic factor of his anguish. In him "*Body*" represents the material and pragmatic aspects of reality which he rejects, while "*soul*" is represented by his dreams and illusions of a better future. Tom rejects the material side of life, for he does not have great ambitions to earn great quantities of money, nor does he reach for power as Jim does. Instead he writes poetry and dreams of an illusory and ideal world. But because he can not allow the material and spiritual poles of his self to coexist in harmony he will forever be an anguished person.

Laura is different from Tom in that which refers to reality versus illusion. She has totally lost contact with the real world and lives in a world of her own. She herself has become a part of her Glass Menagerie. This fantasy world fills all her time and imagination. She steps into the real world only once, when she experiences lively

feelings of affection during her short relationship with Jim. However, having perceived the impossibility of a romance with him in reality, she retreats again into the imaginary world where she does not suffer and where she can live in peace.

For Laura, there is no present as she lives constantly in the past or in a timeless world. She rejects present reality in favor of the past world of the Unicorn. Because of her own physical defect, Laura is unable to accept the reality of the world in which she finds herself. In order to suffocate any feeling of anguish for being a crippled person, Laura prefers to cultivate her spiritual side. Due to her physical defect she has overly developed her "soul". Thus, living apart from reality, she is able, at least in part, to forget her own suffering and to live the illusion of a happy unanguished existence.

Amanda is a complex character, she can be considered a disillusioned romantic as well as a realist. Aware of the reality around her, Amanda panics in the face of its ugliness. She is the only character who demonstrates fear in relation to reality. Laura is fearful, too, it is true, but her fears are more egoistical, for she is afraid of her own reality. Amanda, on the other hand, fears the real situations of life and the problems she and her children will experience if they are not prepared to face the world about them. Because of her panic and her knowledge that her children are not sufficiently strong either to help her or themselves, Amanda retreats in the illusory and glorious world of the past. In her past, She was a happy

girl with no fear of the present or of the future. In her lovely memories of the past she does not feel the anguish of present reality but rather the great happiness of bygone days.

In relation to the body and soul theme, which is being pursued here, Amanda presents her own duality. She cultivates the material things of life: She wants to be rich, she wishes her daughter would marry a rich man, she wants Tom to earn much money in order to support the family. She is thus placed on the materialistic side of society as she steers her children toward practical and material careers. But she also cultivates her own "*spiritual*" world and she finds her peace and happiness in a past world brought back by the force of her imagination.

Jim is considered by Tennessee Williams as the most realistic character of the play. He is the ordinary man whom society praises, so involved in the process of the realistic system that he does not feel anguish nor does he aspire to be more than that which society requires him to be. Jim, however, relies on the past as he remembers his glorious high-school days when he was a football hero - and he is deeply aware that in the present, he is no longer a hero to anyone, not even to himself. In order to regain his lost glory, he tries hard, always having before him the objective of achieving future success. But he is not so materialistic and realistic as Tennessee Williams apparently wants him to be. In his dreams of the past and in his belief and ambitions to be someone of value in the future, lies an idealized will

to reach success and value in the time to come.

Choudhuri synthesizes the characteristics of the play:

"the transient nature of existence, a disposition to view life and events in their transitory character seem to be woven into its very perception and architecture: the characters live in their world of illusion, and it is a study of the illusory aspects of life that the playwright establishes its significance and reference."⁽⁷⁰⁾

As it was seen in this chapter, all the four characters of The Glass Menagerie are lost in a strange and ugly reality that confound them and make their anguish increase. They try to find their ways of escape from this reality but are doomed in pseudo make-believe realities. They end up being more lost and more anguished than they were in the beginning of the play. The problem of anguish is focused by the author in a light and ingenuous manner as opposed to the next chapter on the play A Streetcar Named Desire that treats this problem in a more shocking way.

(70) Ibid - p. 115.

Chapter Three - A Streetcar Named Desire

This play shows a definite development in the author's conception of the problem of human anguish. While The Glass Menagerie presents this dialectic; it does so in a softer mood; and it strikes a lighter note. The beauty of the imaginative elements eliminate a final note of despair. In A Streetcar Named Desire Williams leaves no doubt as to the fact that the real world, far from imaginary beauty is a corrupted and corrupting place. The main character of the play, Blanche Dubois, who tries against this corruption is finally doomed to the chaos of madness (real or assumed) and a total alienation from reality.

In all of Tennessee Williams' plays we can see clearly man's great conflict between flesh and Spirit and this play is notable for its profound analysis of this theme. The characters of the play constantly struggle between these two very human elements. Critic Esther Jackson thinks that

"

"Tennessee Williams' protagonists are always transgressors (a split being - Flesh / Soul) who are guilty of the human condition and are in constant anguished flight from their own transgression..."⁽¹⁾

One finds in this play together with other important themes, a very complex study of guilt. Man as a

(1) Esther Jackson, The Anti-hero in the plays of Tennessee Williams, from the Broken world of Tennessee Williams, Madison, Wisconsin University, Wisconsin Press, 1965, p. 93.

being is fragmented: on the one side is a natural and instinctive structure which leads him to follow his physical sensual drives, and on the other side are inclinations of a more spiritual nature which also crave for fulfillment while many thinkers do not accept this polarization, the existentialists, and especially Kierkegaard, understand that "man is a synthesis of body and soul."⁽²⁾ The philosophy of Kierkegaard is based on the notion that man must resolve this body-soul conflict in order to reach an idealized synthesis. This conflict in man leads to existential anguish, and if unresolved, to final desperation. The basic cause of all human suffering and anguish lies in man's incapacity to exist in harmony with these two essential elements of his nature. He must learn to live with the world of the flesh and yet not neglect the world of the Spirit.

A Streetcar Named Desire shows two antithetical figures who are representative of these different worlds. One Stanley, is mainly carnal and does not seem to be anguished by being such a natural and instinctive man. The other, Blanche, is an anguished being because she craves for purity of Spirit and wants to act in accordance with what is considered right by a moralist system of society. At the same time she can not avoid sharing the same carnal desires that characterize Stanley. The critic Joseph Riddel affirms that

(2) Soren, Kierkegaard. *Conceito de Angústia*, Lisboa, Editorial Proença, 1977, p. 60.

"Blanche's life is a living division of two warring principles, desire and decorum, and she is the victim of civilization's attempt to reconcile the two in a morality. Her indulgent past is a mixture of sin and romance, reality and illusion, the excesses of the self and the restraints of society."⁽³⁾

The critic John Gassner comments on the two opposing polarities that characterize Stanley and Blanche:

"In A Streetcar Named Desire, health and disease are at odds with each other, but here the dialectal situation flares up into relentless conflict... Nothing is circuituous in a Streetcar and the dramatic action drives directly to its fateful conclusion as plebeian and patrician confront each other. Blanche is not only a recognizable human being but an abstraction - the abstraction of decadent aristocracy... It is Stanley's terrible health, which is of earth and will defend itself at any cost that destroys Blanche."⁽⁴⁾

The play opens with "a humourous vulgarity," as the critic Joseph Riddel explains, that is carefully designed to signify the play's two worlds. Stanley's appearance in his masculine vigor, carrying a package of meat, underlines the

(3) Joseph Riddel, A Streetcar Named Desire, Nietzsche Descending, Modern Drama, Volume VI (1963), p. 424.

(4) John Gassner, Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration, College English, October, 1948, vol. 10, number 1, p.p.6-7.

author's objective in portraying Stanley as the representative of the flesh."⁽⁵⁾ The implied virility in throwing the package to Stella, his wife, and her suggestive response defines succinctly the kind of world they represent:

"Stanley carries his bowling Jacket and a red stained package from a butcher's"

Stanley - "Catch"

Stella - "What?"

Stanley - "Meat"

"He heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it; then she laughs breathlessly."⁽⁶⁾

In contrast to Stanley's vulgarity, the scene turns to Blanche in her fragile appearance, *"over - refined, overwhelmed by life, out of place in Elysium."⁽⁷⁾*

Tennessee Williams' first description of Blanche proves Riddel's above mentioned affirmations:

"Blanche comes around the corner, carrying a valise - she looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip of paper, then at the building. Her expression is incongruous to the setting. She is daintly

(5) Riddel - p. 424.

(6) Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, Great Britain Penguin Books, 1933, p. 116.

(7) Riddel - p. 424.

dressed in a white suit in a fluffy bodice, necklace and ear-rings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or a cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than Stella. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner as well as her clothes that suggest a moth."⁽⁸⁾

We learn that she has taken two streetcars - one Named Desire and the other "cemeteries"; these two symbolic names represent the antithesis of her life:

Blanche - with faintly hysterical honour - "they told me to take "A Streetcar Named Desire" and then transfer to one called "Cemeteries" and ride six blocks and get off at Elysian Fields."⁽⁹⁾

The two streetcars suggest the opposing forces that claim Blanche but which she never comes to fully understand. "Desire" is presented as synonymous with life and its opposite Death is "cemeteries". In the past Blanche has used desire to escape from death but in Elysian Fields her past desires turn to present death. Blanche describes to Mitch her constant proximity to death:

(8) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 117.

(9) Ibid - *Idem*.

Blanche - "Death - I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are... we didn't dare even admit we had ever heard of it. The opposite is desire."⁽¹⁰⁾

Obviously, Williams means for us to understand that Desire and Death are not only opposite but equivalent at the same time. Sex for Blanche means death as she can never accept her own sexuality as a normal thing. When Mitch discovers that Blanche is not the "pure" lady she pretends to be to him, this discovery makes him desire her. This is death to Blanche: She dies symbolically and the proof is in the presence of the old Mexican woman selling flowers for the dead:

Mexican woman - "Flores, flores, flores para los muertos."⁽¹¹⁾

Blanche's life is a living division of two warring principles - desire and the ideals of the Spirit. Her "schizoid" personality is a drama of man's inner division between animal reality and the ideals of the Spirit:

Blanche - "Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart - and I have all those things - aren't taken away but grow!"⁽¹²⁾

(10) Ibid - p. 206.

(11) Ibid - p. 206.

(12) Ibid - p. 211.

The critic Delma Presley comments that in A Streetcar Named Desire as in most of Williams' plays "the cause of human isolation is the impossibility of the flesh to exist harmoniously with the Spirit."⁽¹³⁾ In one of the dialogues between Stanley and Blanche, we can see a great contrast between them. While Blanche tells him to "possess your soul in patience", Stanley replies that "It's not my soul, I'm worried about."⁽¹⁴⁾ These words indicate the great difference between Stanley and Blanche. Stanley's mind is open, not the attraction of the Spirit, but only to the desire of the flesh. Blanche even though She is a Slave of the flesh, yet desires purity of Spirit. The difference between Stanley and Blanche in what concerns the desires of the flesh is that Stanley surrenders to them with pleasures, Blanche through necessity. A proof of this statement is that Stanley's desire is inserted in his vital nature, while Blanche's sexual desire is a form of reminding her that she is alive, to give her "a sense of existence" (play, p. 169).

Blanche is the real representative of the conflict man suffers in his human existence, He is what he really is, weak and frail, yet he anguishes and aspires to be the ideal type. Blanche represents idealism and tradition, seeing herself as she would like to be, denying what she is, trying

(13) Delma Preley - The Search for Hope in the Plays of T. Williams, Mississippi Quaterly, p. 32.

(14) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 189.

to appear special and different. Joseph Riddel thinks that "Blanche comes to symbolize a civilized world that cannot face its essential and necessary primitive self, and thus exists in a constant state of intericine anxiety."⁽¹⁵⁾ But because Blanche's image of herself does not exist in reality, she makes a great effort to cause it exist in fantasy.

Riddel suggests that Blanche "as her name implies, is the pallid lifeless product of her illusion, of a way of life that has worn out its vigor."⁽¹⁶⁾ Her main anguish lies in her dual personality. In her personal battle she longs for purity of soul but she knows (and refuses to accept) that she is just as much of an animal as Stanley is.

Blanche is like those women who depend on men in order to live, aware of her melancholy physical appeal, terrified of her threatened extinction - "She drinks to dim her world, seeks sex to forget her loneliness, and when the real world catches up with her, she retreats into the allout fantasy of madness."⁽¹⁷⁾ As an example, when in scene ten, Blanche feels the threat of Stanley's coming to her, she begins to create the story about her old friend, a rich suitor:

Blanche - "an old beau of mine Mr. Sheep Huntleigh,
I wore his ATO pin my last year at
college. I hadn't seem him again until

(15) Riddel - p. 428.

(16) Ibid - p. 424.

(17) Nancy Tischler, Tennessee Williams - The Rebellions Puritan, New York, the citadel Press, p. 137.

last Christmos. I ran into him on Biscayne Boulevard. Then - just now - this wire inviting me on a cruise of the Caribbean! The problem is clothes: I tore into my trunk to see what I have that's suitable for the tropics."⁽¹⁸⁾

In Blanche we clearly see her duality as the anguished character in search of happiness in life. She wants to be pure and respectable but her physical needs prevent her from being what she would like to be. Her very name suggests her duality - Blanche - white (purity), Dubois - woods (corrupted earth). In the play, she translates it to Mitch:

Blanche - *"It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white whoods - Like an orchard in spring."*⁽¹⁹⁾

Blanche refuses to admit her own physical reality. Longing for purity in fantasy, she considers herself "a dirty" and abnormal woman. Unable to show her real self, she shows herself to Mitch as a prim lady:

Blanche - *"... He hasn't gotten a thing but a good-night kiss, that's all I have given him, Stella. I want his respect. And men don't want anything they get too easy. But on the other hand men*

(18) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 209.

(19) Ibid - p. 150

lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over - thirty -. What I mean is - he thinks I'm sort of - prim and proper, you know! She laughs sharply I want to deceive him enough to make him - want me..."⁽²⁰⁾

The critic Esther Jackson thinks that "Blanche's inner nature is revealed through her playing out of conflicting roles: Schoolteacher, Southern belle, poet, sister, savior and prostitute."⁽²¹⁾ Consequently her inner nature is desintegrated as she seems to be fragmented into thousands of personalities the pieces do not satisfy her but rather increase her anguish. Blanche's whole experience of life is presented in terms of polarities which, as Thomas Adler says "reflect her habitual dichotomizing of experience into irreconcilable opposites."⁽²²⁾

Blanche is full of anguish, and this anguish becomes intensified due to the circumstances of her husband's suicide. Blanche feels responsible for his death because she could not accept his sexual abnormality. She allowed herself to demonstrate prejudice towards the man she most loved and now she rejects herself because of that.

Another kind of anguish arises because Blanche feels herself drawn to the forbidden things she has been taught to reject all her life. Due to adverse circumstances

(20) Ibid - p. 171.

(21) Esther Jackson, - p. 96.

(22) Thomas Adler,

she has experienced when she was forced to be responsible for and to take care of Belle Reve all by herself, to watch her relatives die etc., She has put aside all sense of responsibility as well as the puritanism she had learned in her traditional Education and thus is transformed into a marginal being.

But Blanche is unable to accept consciously the kind of life she has led since her husband's death; She can not accept herself as being a totally alienated person, capable of behaving in strange and inconceivable ways. For this reason the only solution so as to avoid the anguished feeling for not being the person she would like to be is to forget her "*dreadful*" actions and her real existence and create a world of fantasy wherein she can rationalize her behavior as being the result of an unprotected, sensitive and delicate nature. In doing so she avoids facing the anguished feeling for not being the person she would like to be is to forget her "*dreadful actions*" and her real existence and create a world of fantasy wherein she can rationalize her behavior as being the result of an unprotected, sensitive and delicate nature. In doing so she avoids facing the anguished reality of her physical and sensual desire; Her fantasy is also a desperate attempt to be faithful to her traditional southern values which no longer exist within herself and in the society in which she finds herself.

Blanche tells Stanley what a good woman she is in a desperate attempt to justify herself and to be convinced that she is really the refined type of woman and not the one

she has been since the death of her young husband:

Blanche - "a cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding can enrich a man's life immensurably!... I have all those things to offer... I think of myself as being a very rich woman..."⁽²³⁾

But those words also show that Blanche is telling the truth. She has intelligence, and spirit and even refinement. We agree with the critic Ruby Cohn who thinks that

"her dialogue and vocabulary underline her manner. Born superior, she introduces cultural references into the French Quarter dwelling, which evokes an Edgar Allan Poe horror story for her, she recognizes that the lines on Mitch's cigarette case belong to a sonnet by Mrs. Browning; She has evidently taught American literature, since she mentions Poe, Hawthorne and Whitman... She uses correct grammar and varied syntax. Her vocabulary contorns such Latinisms as "heterogeneous", "absconding", "judicial", "transitory" and "recriminations".⁽²⁴⁾

However Blanche's problem is that she cannot reconcile these qualifying aspects of herself with the sordiness of past experience.

(23) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. p. 211/212

(24) Ruby Cohn, The Garrulous Grotesque of T. Williams, Dialogue in American Drama, Indiana University Press, 1971, p. 48.

Blanche is anguished because she is unable to reconcile her highly developed sexual instinct with her past moral education. She knows she depends on "love-making" in order to live" (p. 169). But since the disastrous revelation of her true love's sexual abnormality and her own resulting disgust she does not believe in love-making for its own sake and turns it into a strategy to try to attain security:

Blanche - *"I've run for protection, Stella from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof - because it was storm - all storm, and I was - caught in the centre - People don't see you - men don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you've got to have your existence admitted by someone, if you're going to have someone's protection."*⁽²⁵⁾

So instead of accepting love-making as a normal thing and allowing her real life to be revealed, she leads a double life and prefers to ignore the fact that she is not the prudish and puritanical woman she tries to impress others as being. When Stanley asks her if she has stayed in a cheap, third rate hotel called Flamingo, Blanche feels offended and denies to Stella the fact of having stayed there:

(25) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 169.

Blanche - "I'm afraid he does have me mixed up with "this other party". The Hotel Flamingo is not the sort of establishment I would dare to be seen in". (26)

Thus Blanche becomes anguished almost to the point of madness. She denies both her own reality and her present acts. Another cause of her anguish is the present moment in which she is living as the play develops. Blanche lives her sensual life at the present moment, but she knows this cannot satisfy her for she desires to invest the moment that exists here and now with an eternal element. As one can observe in Kierkegaard's concept of Anguish, one of the causative factors of Anguish is man's limited ability to join the temporal and eternal dimensions into one.

According to Kierkegaard, one of the causative factors of anguish is man's limited ability to join the temporal and eternal dimensions into one, living mainly for the Instant - the moment abstracted from the eternal. Sensual life is lived only through the Instant - as the instant has the meaning of present as something without past nor future and it is there that lies life's imperfection. The eternal has also the meaning of present without past nor future but it is there that lies life's imperfection". (27) Kierkegaard

(26) Ibid - p. 1881

(27) Versions of the book in Portuguese - Kierkegaard - Conceito de Angústia, Lisboa, Editorial Proença, 1977, pp. 119-127.

also thinks that "the temporal concept is like the infinite without content - the present will appear again in the determination of the past and future because time is imagined, instead of being thought and for the imagination the infinite succession of time is an infinite and empty present. The eternal is the present for the imagination-the eternal is a present time of infinite plenitude and there is no separation of past and future because the present is defined as succession of time."⁽²⁷⁾ Man feels anguished because he knows that time is transitory, that he cannot make the present moment eternal. Blanche tries to fool herself by attempting to be "Pseudo"satisfied with the moments in her sensual life:

Blanche - "Have got to be seductive - put on soft colours, the colours of butterfly wings and glow - make a little temporary magic just in order to pay for one night's shelter."⁽²⁸⁾

But Blanche knows she cannot live for the moment she knows that time is running out and that she herself is fading:

Blanche - "But I'm scared now - Awfly scared, I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick. It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I'm fading now'."⁽²⁹⁾

(28) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 169.

(29) Ibid - p. 169.

Our concern about Blanche's illusory chosen life particularly coincides with the critic Joseph Riddel who says that "*Blanche lives in a magical world of shadows, of Chinese paper lanterns, of romantic melodies that make up the dream worlds of illusory romances and alcoholic escape and of time past to which she wants it to return.*"⁽³⁰⁾

She dreams of a social morality that refines away or morally perverts all natural impulses. Consequently Blanche feels guilty because of her own indulgences, but she is guilty because society requires her not to tell the truth and to pretend to be what she is not in reality:

Blanche - "*yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought to be truth. and if that is sinful, then let me damned for it.*"⁽³¹⁾

Blanche's neurotic daydreams are consequences of her conflicting personality, her sensitivity to loss, sexual betrayal, human crudeness and the ravages of time. When Stanley has beaten Stella, Blanche tries to help her by sending a message appealing for help from her old suitor, Shep Huntleigh. She tries desperately to reach him by telephone or telegram, but she ultimately fails because even if this suitor does exist as a person, he no longer exists

(30) Riddel - p. 425.

(31) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 204.

for her except in her imagination He might have existed in the past during her high school days but in the present moment, he is not someone to whom she is important. He is a product of her disintegrated mind:

Blanche - *"Do you remember Shep Huntleigh? I ran into him on Biscayne Boulevard on Christmas Eve..."*⁽³²⁾

Alcohol plays for Blanche an important role as one form of escape from her own reality; *"it is a stimulant for her, Blanche drinks to induce illusions,"*⁽³³⁾ and to forget the real facts of life:

Blanche - (She drinks quickly) - *"Oh, this buzzes right through me and feels so good!"*⁽³⁴⁾

Blanche is always obsessed with taking baths. Her ritualistic bathing is a recurrent symbol through the play. It is *"a symbolic gesture of guilt and wished - for redemption"*⁽³⁵⁾, she feels herself dirty and needing of purification:

Blanche: *"Oh, I feel so good after my long hot bath... a hot bath... always gives me a brand - new outlook on life!"*⁽³⁶⁾

The critic Nancy Tischler considers Blanche's *"turning to sex as a refuge from rightmarish reality"*.⁽³⁷⁾ This nightmarish reality is due to her awful past experiences

(32) Ibid - p. 159.

(33) Riddel - p. 426.

(34) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 122.

(35) Riddel - p. 426.

(36) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 192

(37) Tischler - p. 136.

and the resulting anguish that arose from all this. Blanche has become the "town character" in Laurel and the result is her expulsion from the town. In frightened flight from the increasing horrors of her existence, she seeks a haven with her sister Stella:

Blanche - "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."⁽³⁸⁾

The above quotation is a proof that Blanche does not live completely in a world of illusions. She recognizes her truth and as she tells Stella, the main truth is that she feels totally lonely and insecure.

Blanche also sees in Mitch a final chance for her own salvation, someone who will save her from the loneliness of life. She plays the role of a prim, refined lady to a mama's boy Mitch:

Blanche - "In fact, I was somewhat flattered that you desired me! But honey, you know as well as I that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost."⁽³⁹⁾

Mitch finds in Blanche the purity and loneliness he has associated with his mother:

(38) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 124.

(39) Ibid - p. 176.

Mitch - "I like you to be exactly the way that you are, because in all my experience - I have never know anyone like you."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Tischler comments that "they reach out to each other in mutual understanding of loneliness and longing."⁽⁴¹⁾ Mitch shares Blanche's awareness of death. Mitch too, has suffered the loss of the young girl he loved in his youth, just as Blanche has suffered the loss of her desperate young husband. Ruby Cohn thinks that "as Blanche has watched the members of her family die, Mitch is now watching his mother die. Mitch's feeling for his dying mother elicits Blanche's confession of her husband's suicide."⁽⁴²⁾ The presence of death in their lives makes them realize their need for each other:

Mitch - "Mother is sick. She won't live long. Maybe just a few months."

Blanche - "I loved someone too, and the person I loved I lost."

Mitch - "You need somebody, And I need somebody, too. Could it be you and me, Blanche?"

Blanche - "Sometimes - there's God - so quickly."⁽⁴³⁾

But when Mitch learns of Blanche's past he forgets that he is a mamma's boy and acts as most "macho" men would, and he

(40) Ibid - p. 177.

(41) Tischler - p. 136.

(42) Cohn - p. 150.

(43) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. p. 182-183.

also tries to use Blanche as a sexual object. Mitch thinks Blanche is not clean enough to marry him but he feels he has the right to use her sexually:

"after a moment, Mitch rests and follows her purposely. The polka music fades away. He places his hand on her waist and tries to turn her about."

Blanche - *"what do you want?"*

Mitch - (fumbling to embrace her) *"what I been missing all summer."*

Blanche - *"Then marry me Mitch."*

Mitch - *"I don't think I want to Marry you anymore... You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother."⁽⁴⁴⁾*

Blanche is always afraid of showing her real self. That is the reason she cannot stand being seen in daylight. She is constantly trying to cover a naked bulb with a paper lantern. This symbolic gesture illustrates her basic interior attitude. The *"covering"* up of reality with illusions. The first time the paper lantern appears, Blanche asks Mitch to cover up the light with it as he is the person to whom she desperately tries to reach out as a last chance to be happy:

(44) Ibid - p. p. 206-207.

Blanche - "I bought this adorable little coloured paper lantern at a chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! will you please?"

Mitch - "Be glad to."

Blanche - "I can't stand a naked light bulb, anymore than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action."⁽⁴⁵⁾

In the final scene, in the moment Blanche is taken away to the asylum, Stanley contemptuously offers her the paper lantern. Then he destroys the paper lantern in the same way that he has destroyed her. Blanche cries out as if the piece of paper were a part of her:

Stanley - "you left nothing here, but spilt talcum and old empty perfume bottles - unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you - you want the lantern?"

"He crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends its towards her. She cries out as if the lantern was herself".⁽⁴⁶⁾

One can see that all of the forms of escape Blanche

(45) Ibid - p. 150.

(46) Ibid - p. 223.

uses are fruitless. Tischler observes that *"Tennessee Williams confesses that Blanche's world and his are doomed. One can escape only into death, madness or chaos."*⁽⁴⁷⁾ In the case of Blanche, Williams clearly rejects the real world and finds no escape from it.

According to the existentialist Kierkegaard,

"the dimensions of time-present Past - Future form simultaneously one eternal time. It is a cycle. Instead of putting the past aside, after it has occurred, it will be present in total continuity with the future. That is what happens in life. The future is a consequence of the past and present".⁽⁴⁸⁾

Blanche's past guilt-that of feeling responsible for her husband's death is not only a past guilt but a psychic impediment that prevents her from making any progress in either the present or the future. Blanche talks about the circumstances of her husband's death and about how she has assumed guilt for his suicide:

Blanche - *"He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything after our marriage... all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of!..."*

(47) Tischler, Nancy - *"The Distorted Mirror - T. Williams' Self Portraits"*. *Mississippi Quaterly*, 1972, p. 169.

(48) Kierkegaard. *Conceito de Angústia*. p.p. 119-126.

He'd struck the revolver into his mouth and fired... so that the back of his head has been - blown away!

"She sways and covers her face"

It was because - on the dance floor - unable to stop myself - I'd suddenly said - I know! you disgust me!..."⁽⁴⁹⁾

Blanche suffers a kind of shock when she remembers the circumstance of her husband's death, and this situation comes to her mind every time that she perceives a sign of disaster or a reminder of the past:

Blanche - *"The Varsouviana? The polka tune they were playing when Allan - wait!..."*

"a distant shot is heard, Blanche seems relieved..."

There now, the shot! It always stops after that."

"The polka music dies out again".⁽⁵⁰⁾

Blanche comes to the realization of her own responsibility for suffering; she becomes aware that she suffers more because she thinks she has contributed to increase the suffering of her husband. She even suggests that she is the effective cause of her husband's death. "In a moment of partial "enlightment", she describes to Mitch the critical point in time when she withdrew from and

(49) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. p. 183-184.

(50) Ibid - p. p. 201-202.

refused to help a morally helpless being "(51) as she comments to Mitch:

Blanche - "All I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me - but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him." (52)

The critic Arthur Granz thinks that in terms of Williams' morality

"Blanche tries to endure her punishment in reparation for her act of rejection, her sin. When Blanche tells Mitch about having discovered that her husband was a homosexual and of the consequences of her disgust and revulsion, she both describes the crime and condemns herself." (53)

Blanche attempts unsuccessfully to alleviate her guilt by a series of promiscuities which she regards as opportunisties not to fail others as she has failed her husband. Blanche's basic need is of someone to love and reassure her, to help her rediscover a belief in her own humanity. She believes that she has found that person in Mitch: "sometimes there's God so quickly" (play, p. 183). But just as she has failed her husband in passing judgement

(51) Esther Jackson. p. 94.

(52) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 183.

(53) Arthur Granz. "Tennessee Williams" - A Desperate Morality. The American Scholar 31 (Spring, 1962) p. 127.

upon him, so too, Mitch rejects Blanche when he learns of her past, and thus he destroys any hope that she might have of regaining mental and moral stability. Blanche has been slowly destroying herself since her husband's death but as Ruby Cohn observes *"she is ultimately destroyed by a strong antagonist - Stanley Kowalski, whom she correctly views as her executioner."*(54)

Stanley's rape of Blanche brings the play to its climax. Forcing Blanche to recognize her sexual attraction to him, and consequently her own reality, Stanley says to her:

Stanley - *"Tiger - Tiger! Drop the bottle - top! Drop it! we've had this date with each other from the beginning."*(55)

Earlier in the play Blanche has called Stanley an animal, but now the animal accusation is turned against her which means, of course, that Blanche has also the animal instinct within her. But because Blanche is innerly pure, she can not bear the stress that such an experience brings and her final retreat is the Sanatorium to which Stella sends her. As Blanche is handed over to a doctor, he shows her the sort of kindness she has been needing for so long. Her exit line is addressed to him:

(54) Ruby Cohn - p. 49.

(55) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 215.

Blanche - *"Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."*⁽⁵⁶⁾

This affirmation intensifies her pathos and shows that she prefers to be blind to her own situation, that she is ultimately an alienated being, and it also shows how lonely she has always been, especially during the period which she has spent with Stella and Stanley.

Perhaps, however, this is a certain kind of solution for Blanche. She can not live in real life with all the anguish of her dual and guilty existence. Quite possibly, Williams believes that madness or alienation can finally give her some kind of peace. If Blanche is not really mad, she chooses to pretend being mad or totally alienated from the reality that only made her suffer.

The character of Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire is without doubt one of Tennessee Williams' most controversial personalities. At times Williams seems to praise, at other times he obviously criticizes him. As "an animal idol" venerated by society he represents the "macho". He is thus described by Tennessee Williams:

"Stanley throws the screen door of the kitchen and comes in. He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes.

(56) Ibid - p. 255.

Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male birds among hens. Branching from this complete and satisfying centre are all the auxiliary channels of his life such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humour, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed - bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them."⁽⁵⁷⁾

But through Blanche, Tennessee Williams also criticizes the Stanleys of the world. She rejects Stanley and condemns him not only because she thinks he is a "subhuman being" but also because she realizes that she can not live without this kind of man. Her rejection of him represents her own rejection of him represents her own rejection of the carnal part of herself:

Blanche - *"What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to go to bed with him."*⁽⁵⁸⁾

(57) Ibid - p. 128.

(58) Ibid - p. 161.

This ambiguity shows the duality of Blanche's life. She wishes to be innerly pure, in fact, Joseph Riddel observes that "*Blanche has a psychologically ingrown virginity.*"⁽⁵⁹⁾ She wants to achieve an idealized "*Spiritual/psychic*" purity but her actual life is on carnal level. She describes Stanley as a "*sub-human ape like man*":

Blanche - "*He acts likes 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 antropological studies! Thousands and Thousands of years have passed right by, and there 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'... Don't hang back with the brutes!*"⁽⁶⁰⁾

This description of Stanley by Blanche can be only partly trusted because she sees him only as an animal and this vision both disturbs and shakes her. Therefore, She prefers to condemn his animal instincts because at the same time she is condemning her own.

(59) Riddel - *ibid* 131, p. 428.

(60) Ibid - p. p. 163-164.

To Blanche, Stanley is both threat and fatal attraction. He represents the animalistic world and the pleasures of the flesh and he apparently has no regret for having more or less ignored the Spiritual elements of his nature. If Williams had a mind to criticize Stanley, he also obviously admires him for the exuberant vitality and forceful manhood which he exhibits.

"The incipient animal within the human and his unsubtle and ape-like approach to life pointed out, principally to provide a glaring foil to Blanche. Stanley is a foreign and vital invader in the world of faded aristocracy, and he is vicious but effective in his impact upon the DUBOIS Sisters."⁽⁶¹⁾

Stanley is selfish and self centered. He realizes that he is animal but he also knows that every other human being has animalistic tendencies. Stella his wife, lived on a higher social level than he, but he pulled her down and made her enjoy and share his life of pleasure:

Stanley - "When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns, and how you loved it, having them coloured lights going. And wasn't we happy together...?"⁽⁶²⁾

(61) Nancy Tischler - T. W. A Rebellious Puritan - p. 144.

(62) Play - p. p. 198-199

But Stanley is not all negative. His Spontaneity in saying what he thinks, his being a "truth teller" are positive aspects and give a certain value in his character. He is authentic in that he makes no pretense to be what he is not, In this, he is in clear contrast to Blanche who hides behind the fantasy which she has woven about herself in order to make life bearable.

When Blanche appears, Stanley finds in her someone difficult to handle, someone whose mannes irritates and infuriates him. Then he must destroy her. He is no fool; he knows that Blanche is different, that she stands on a higher social level than he, but he also knows that her pose of being superior and fragile will be easy to "break". He knows how to shatter her illusions about herself.

Thus he wraps himself in sensuality and brutality in order not only to put her down but also to expose her to the sordidness of life and to the truth, to cut through her self - deception.

Stanley informs Stella:

Stanley - "Our sypply-man down at the plant has been going through Laurel for years and he knows all about her and everybody else in the town of Laurel knows all about her. She is as famous in Laurel as if she was the President of the United States, only she is not respected by any party!... All this Squeamishness she puts on! you should just know the

line she's been feeding to Mitch. He thought she had never been more than kissed by a fellow. But sister Blanche is no lily."(63)

Stanley declares open war upon Blanche, because he resents his intrusion into his world and he feels threatened by the strength behind her weakness. Therefore he attacks her with his natural weapons. First he inquires into her sale of Belle Reve but it yields nothing. He then investigates her behaviour in her home town and exposes the scandals that forced her into flight. Stanley destroys her relationship to Mitch by disclosing Blanche's scandals to him:

Stanley - *"Mitch is a buddy of mine, we were in the same outfit together..."*

Stella - *"Stanley, did you repeat what...?"*

Stanley - *"You're goddam right I told him! I'd have that on my conscience the rest of my life if I knew all that stuff and let my best friend got caught."*(64)

Thus, discovering Blanche's real past is a part of Stanley's plan to level her. He exposes her past and proves that she is not as "superior" as she pretends to be. Finally Stanley shows her that she is not only not better than he is but even worse. For Stanley this is a kind of

(63) Ibid - p. 186.

(64) Ibid - p. 190.

victory and the rape of Blanche makes concrete this triumph. It is the act which culminates in her final annihilation, reducing her to complete withdrawal from reality. Stanley finally succeeds in destroying Blanche by relying on his weakness. Sex, which is Blanche's weakest point, has always been Stanley's strongest weapon.

In contrast to Stanley's destructive domination over Blanche, his relationship with Stella provides human fulfillment for both of them. *"Stanley's world can be amoral, primitive, chaotic and partial but it becomes whole through the total satisfaction of Stella."*⁽⁶⁵⁾

Therefore his world can not be completely condemned, for it is part of the essential and inescapable reality of things.

Stella, Blanche's younger sister and an impoverished Southern gentlewoman is the wife of Stanley. She easily forgets her past life as Belle Reve, the decayed family plantation and its traditional morality, and she now revels in her sexual passion for Stanley, content to live with him in a New Orleans slum. Stella tries to tell Blanche that her kind of life does not cause her any anguish:

Stella - *"I said I am not in anything that I have a desire to get out of."*⁽⁶⁶⁾

(65) Nancy Tischler - p.

(66) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 158.

Her sexual relationship with Stanley fulfills her physically and humanly. For all Stanley's animalism, *"he is the one who keeps Stella from decaying like Blanche. Without him she would undoubtedly have been like Blanche - a caricature of outdated aristocracy."*⁽⁶⁷⁾ Stella tells Blanche of her relationship to Stanley:

Stella - *"... But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem unimportant."*⁽⁶⁸⁾

Stella does not seem to be a person who once belonged to aristocracy. She is simple and accepts Stanley's sexuality with single mindedness. She remembers Belle Reve without nostalgia and lives contentedly in Elysian Fields, acquiescing to Stanley's dominance as quietly as she evidently did to Blanche in their childhood. Thrilled by Stanley, she accepts all the facets of his violence:

Stella - *"Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our wedding - night - soon as we came in here - he smashed off one of the bulbs with my slipper and rushed about the place smashing the light bulbs with it."*⁽⁶⁹⁾

Stella belongs to the kind of women who have subordinated themselves to a domineering and often inferior

(67) Riddell - p. 430.

(68) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 162.

(69) Ibid - p. 157.

person, in an effort to attain reality and meaning through communication with another person. She is superior in background and education to her mate, but she subordinates herself to his way of life, because together they have a satisfying sexual relationship:

Stanley - "you remember that way it was? Them nights we had together? God, honey it's gonna to be sweet when we can make noises in the night the way we used and get the coloured lights going..."⁽⁷⁰⁾

Riddel observes that "the love of Stanley for Stella includes the rhythm of violence and reconciliation and it exists beyond Blanche's ken."⁽⁷¹⁾ Their kind of love is formed of extremes as can be observed in the passage when Stanley beats Stella, her withdrawal, the moments of waiting while Stanley bellows out his need for her and finally their reconciliation, all of which constitute a ritualistic pattern which culminates in a transcendental ecstasy of love. This transcendental ecstasy is a kind of spiritual fulfillment that makes of Stanley and Stella a synthesis of body and soul through the medium of sexual Union.

(70) Ibid - p. 169.

(71) Riddel - p. 425.

Stanley - "Stella! ("there is a pause") "My baby doll's left me!"

"He breaks into sobs. Then he goes to the phone and dials still shouldering with sobs"

"Stella - ah - ah!"⁽⁷²⁾

The result is that Stella returns once more to her husband's primitive embrace:

"The door upstairs opens again. Stella slips down the rickety stairs in her robe. Her eyes are glistening with tears and her hair loose about her throat and shoulders. They stare at each other. Then they came together with low, animal moans. He falls on his knees on the steps and presses his face to her belly, curving a little with maternity. Her eyes go blind with tenderness as she catches her head and raises him level with her. He snatches the screen door open and lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat."⁽⁷³⁾

Stella also surrenders to Stanley's sensuality after she has sent Blanche to the asylum:

"Stella sobs with inhuman abandon. There is something luxurious in her complete surrender to crying now that her sister is gone."

(72) A Streetcar Named Desire - p. 153.

(73) Ibid - p. 154.

Stanley - (voluptuously soothing) - "Now honey. Now love. Now, now, love.. He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse Now, now love, now love..."

"The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the "blue piano" and the muted trumpet."(74)

Stella has reconciled herself to the "animalistic" forces of nature without any regrets, thus she prefers to avoid the feeling of anguish that characterizes Blanche and most human beings. Tennessee Williams seems to show that Stella and Stanley move freely between elemental sex and transcendental ecstasy. Thus Stella, after having a satisfying sexual relation with Stanley, is associated with Eastern idols famous for their sensuality:

"Her eyes and lips have that almost narcotized tranquility that is in the faces of Eastern idols."(75)

Stella's world is not so ambiguous as that of Blanche. She prefers to be illuded and accept things unquestioningly and she does not complicate them with moral suspicious. But one must admit that Blanche's reentrance into Stella's single minded Universe in a way shakes this

(74) Ibid - p. 226.

(75) Ibid - p. 156.

pseudo-balance and she begins to question if things are really as right as she had thought before.

For a moment Stella shares Blanche's attitude towards Stanley. It occurs during the poker game when he tosses the radio out of the window and strikes her in front of everybody:

Stella - "*Drunk - Drunk - animal thing, you.*"⁽⁷⁶⁾

However after the fight Stella goes back to Stanley's arms and sexuality succeeds in winning her to his side once more.

Stella accepts all the facets of Stanley's violence except the truth of his rape of Blanche. When Blanche tells her about it, her response is to pretend that Blanche is mad. It is easier to send her sister to a madhouse than to lose Stanley:

Stella - "*I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.*"⁽⁷⁷⁾

She has chosen to accept her own reality and not the lost world of Blanche, even though in her heart she knows Blanche has spoken the truth. Consciously she must make a choice between her sister and her husband. She cries in bitter grief when Blanche is being taken to the sanatorium:

(76) Ibid - p. 152.

(77) Ibid - p. 217.

Stella - "Oh, God, oh, please God, don't hurt her!
 What are they doing to her? What are they
 doing? What have I done to my sister? Oh
 God, what have I done to my sister?"⁽⁷⁸⁾

... but nevertheless she chooses Stanley whose "maleness"
 evidently compensates for everything.

Section on Symbols

A Streetcar Named Desire is a play rich in
 symbolism. The symbols have important functions in the
 development of the play. Besides being directly linked to
 the actions, they offer rich and varied ways of interpreting
 the play.

The tittle in itself is symbolic. Desire has
 always been the basic form of Blanche's existence, but is
 also responsible for her final destruction. She is unable to
 coexist with her natural desires, due to the guilt of her
 past (her husband's suicide), her longing for purity and the
 moral education she has received in her aristocratic back-
 ground.

Blanche has to take two streetcars before arriving
 at the home of the Kowalskis. One is called Desire and the
 other Cemeteries. These two names symbolize the two basic
 drives which bring Blanche to that place: Desire for love and
 protection and the fear of death that constantly haunts her.

(78) Ibid - p. 224.

For simple people like Stella and Stanley, desire and death are two unrelated things. Desire is nothing more than pure sex and sex for them means life. But for sensitive people like Blanche sex and death imply each other and are even two sides of the same coin. One can notice this aspect in Blanche's description of her husband's death and also in her desperate attempt to separate the two opposites within herself. Thus, she describes the complete satisfaction of the soldiers scattered like daisies (dead - like) after having sex/desire with her:

Blanche - *"Death... The opposite is desire. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder! Not far from Belle Reve, was a camp where they trained young soldiers. On Saturday nights they would go in town to get drunk - and on the way back they would stagger on to my lawn and call - "Blanche! Blanche! The deaf old lady remaining suspected nothing. But sometimes I slipped outside to answer their calls... Later the paddy - wagon would gather them up like daisies... the long way home..."*(79)

Blanche cannot understand why Stella seems to be so satisfied with sexual "desire" and she condemns her for that, even though, at the same time she condemns herself for the same reason.

(79) Ibid - p. 206.

Symbolically Stella asks Blanche if she has never experienced desire:

Blanche - *"What you are talking about is brutal Desire - just Desire! The name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another..."*

Stella - *"Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?"*

Blanche - *"It brought me here where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be."⁽⁸⁰⁾*

When Blanche, playing the prim virgin, goes out with Mitch, she asks about the Streetcar Named "Desire", because she unconsciously (or consciously) desires him sexually, even though she does not admit this at the time:

Blanche - (laughing grimly) - *"Is that Streetcar Named "Desire" still grinding along the tracks at this hour?"⁽⁸¹⁾*

The place to which Blanche comes is called Elysian Fields. Elysian Fields has a double meaning. It is used symbolically to suggest the paradisaical and blissful qualities that the environment has for Stanley and Stella, as a reference to greek mythology in which Elysian means paradise. It is a place where life is pursued on a primitive

(80) Ibid - p. 162.

(81) Ibid - p. 175.

level beyond the principles of good and evil. But it is also used as an ironic comment on the situation in which Blanche finds herself. Elysian Fields is no paradise for her - on the contrary, it is her hell. It is the place, where she is totally exposed and where her mental condition gradually worsens until she completely breaks with reality. It is true that Blanche retreats from the real world but if this retreat is really into insanity, one cannot be sure. It seems to retreat into a kind of nervous psychosis where she prefers to be alienated from reality. Blanche's final lines to the doctor shows her own recognition, of how lonely she has been:

Blanche - (holding tight to his arm) - *"Whoever you are - I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."*⁽⁸²⁾

A significant symbolism is present in Blanche's effort to preserve illusion as she tries desperately to keep her surroundings dark so that no one can see her as she really is. One of her first acts is to turn off the "overlight". Later she buys a paper lantern to cover the naked bulb. Her covering the lights with decorative bits of paper illustrates in miniature her attempts to camouflage reality with illusion. This symbolic gesture sums up her entire plight and appears throughout the play. Blanche asks Mitch to cover up the light bulb with her paper lantern

(82) Ibid - p. 225.

because she finds in Mitch her last hope for happiness. When Mitch learns of her past, he tears off the lantern and examines her under the glaring light in an attempt to see her as she really is:

Mitch - *"Let's turn the light on here"*

Blanche - (fearfully) - *"Light? Which light? What for?"*

Mitch - *"This one with the paper thing on it."*

*"He tears the paper lantern off the light
She utters a frightening gasp."*

Blanche - *"What did you do that for?"*

Mitch - *"So I can take a look at you good and plain."⁽⁸³⁾*

In the final scene, as Blanche is led away to the sanatorium, Stanley contemptuously offers her one possession, the paper lantern whose magic has failed. Stanley destroys the paper lantern, just as he has destroyed Blanche herself. She cries out as if the piece of lantern were a part of herself. Symbolically it is, indeed:

(83) Ibid - p. 203.

Stanley - "you left nothing here, but spilt talcum and old empty perfume bottles unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you.
You want the lantern?"

"He crosses to dressing - table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends it towards her. She cries out as if lantern was herself."⁽⁸⁴⁾

When Mitch, having discovered what Blanche really is, desires her sexually, an old Mexican flower vendor appears in front of the house crying - "*Flores para los muertos...*" a symbolic refrain in the play. It signifies that at the moment when Mitch exposes her, Blanche dies symbolically. That is, the ideal Blanche whom she has presented to Mitch dies at this moment. The flowers that the Mexican woman is selling are really being offered for her "funeral":

"a vendor comes around the corner. She is a blind Mexican woman in a dark shawl, carrying a bunch of those gaudy tin flowers that lower class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions. She is calling barely audibly. Her figure is only faintly visible outside the building".⁽⁸⁵⁾

(84) Ibid - p. 223.

(85) Ibid - p. 205.

Throughout the play, other minor symbols are used to reinforce theme and character and to give additional richness to the fabric of the drama. In the few moments Stanley is alone with Blanche, prior to the violence of his raping her, we can see through a transparent wall, a struggle between "a drunkard and a prostitute," obviously symbolizing Stanley and Blanche at that moment. Blanche is not the prim lady she has desperately fought to be, but rather is little better than the prostitute outside in the street:

"Through the back walls of rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along a walk, overtakes her, and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up. The figure disappears."⁽⁸⁶⁾

Due to Blanche's interior guilt, she is constantly taking baths, bathing is a kind of purification rite for her. She constantly tries to cleanse herself of the impurities of her real self. In constantly washing herself, she makes an effort to become the stereotyped pure type of woman her traditional southern society has required her to be:

Blanche - (airily) - *"Hello Stanley! Here I am all freshly bathed and scented and feeling like a brand - new human being."*⁽⁸⁷⁾

(86) Ibid - p. 215.

(87) Ibid - p. 145.

After the fight between Stanley and Stella, Blanche decides to take a bath:

Blanche - *"I think I will bathe"*⁽⁸⁸⁾

She always feels good after taking a bath:

Blanche - *"Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and rested!... a hot bath and a long, cold drink always gives me a brand - new outlook on life."*⁽⁸⁹⁾

In scene ten (the rape scene) just before Stanley arrives in the house where she is alone, Blanche feels so nervous that she cannot hold on to a small hand mirror. She drops it, perhaps on purpose, and it cracks. This is undoubtedly a foreshadowing of what is going to happen between her and Stanley and it also predicts Blanche's own "*crack - up*":

"Trembling she lifts the hand mirror for a closer inspection. She catches her breath and slams the mirror face down with such violence that the glass cracks."⁽⁹⁰⁾

Music plays an important, symbolic role in the play, besides being a great theatrical device. To symbolize New Orleans and the spirit of life that goes on there, one finds the sound of the "*Blue piano*" which plays throughout

(88) Ibid - *idem*.

(89) Ibid - p. 192.

(90) Ibid - p. 208.

the play:

"This "Blue piano" expresses the spirit of life which goes on here".⁽⁹¹⁾

Blanche also has a special song that expresses her effort to create illusions about herself:

Blanche - *"Say, it's only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea - But it wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me!"⁽⁹²⁾*

She sings this song as she bathes, while at the same time Stanley is destroying the illusions she has created by telling Stella the scandalous story of her life in Laurel.

The polka music is symbolic and has a tragic connotation throughout the play; it is connected with Blanche's tragic fate and it illustrates the sense of death that haunts her. The polka is also mainly connected to Blanche's relation to her dead husband. When Blanche remembers and tells Mitch about her husband's suicide, she explains its significance for her:

Blanche - *"We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the Cassino. A few moments later... a shot! "the polka stops abruptly.*

(91) Ibid - p. 115.

(92) Ibid - p. 186.

Blanche raises stifly. Then the polka resumes in a major key". (93)

As Blanche tells Mitch exactly how her husband had killed himself, the rhythm of the music increases:

Blanche - *"He'd struck the revolver into his mouth, and fired so that the back of his head had been blown away!... It was because on the dance floor, unable to stop myself, I'd suddenly said - I know! I know! You disgust me!"*
"The polka music increases". (94)

At the end of the play, as Blanche flees from the doctor who is to lead her off to the asylum, her punishment is complete and the Varsouviana sounds again:

"The Varsouviana is filtered into a weird distortion accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle". (95)

Besides symbolizing Blanche's chaotic state, the Varsouviana is also related to Blanche and Stanley, as Stanley is Polish like the Varsouviana and he is also the one who symbolically destroys her. The first time Blanche sees Stanley, one hears the sound of the Varsouviana:

(93) Ibid - p. 183.

(94) Ibid - p. 184.

(95) Ibid - p. 222.

"The music of the polka raises up, faint in the distance."(96)

This foreshadows the fact that Stanley is to be the instrument of Blanche's final destruction. But one may also conclude that the Varsouviana is intimately connected to Blanche's inner divisions Desire and Death. It is also the music which provides the background for Blanche's tragic situation of death as well as for her moments of "brutal" desire.

In this play, as opposed to The Glass Menagerie, one can notice a change in the author's approach as to the body versus Soul conflict. In this latter play, the characters are anguished because they are incapable of coexisting with the harsh reality which surround them (body) and prefer to retreat into imaginary worlds of fantasy, dreams and adventures (Spirit). In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche is unable to accept the reality of her existence not only because it is ugly but also because she is unable to accept herself the way she is. She rejects her strong sexual inclinations (body) and aspires to an existence in which she can consider herself as a flower of culture and purity. Unable to rise to this height of goodness, she prefers to retreat into a pseudo world (Spirit) where she is the idealized person she cannot be in reality.

(96) Ibid - p. 130.

Chapter Four - Orpheus Descending

This chapter follows the chapter on A Streetcar Named Desire and it shows the author's consistent opinion concerning the problem of existential anguish. Orpheus Descending is indeed a much more violent play, one in which Tennessee Williams faces the problem of human corruption, praising those who fight desperately to escape such corruption. But once again Williams does not seem to find answers to man's anguished existence, since Orpheus Descending is a play about *"unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people"* (Preface to Orpheus Descending - p.10)

This play concerns four anguished lonely "fugitives" who try to escape earthly corruption. Tennessee Williams sees the earth as a place of corruption and this corruption takes the form of exploitation, violence and social injustice. Because of all this these corrupted beings treat other human beings as objects.

These four specific fugitives try to escape corruption in various ways. Some of them *"retain a free wild nature, two of them try to escape into artistic vision or sex and above all, they try to fight death."*⁽¹⁾

Tennessee Williams wrote this play with a very pessimistic outlook as he himself expresses in the preface of this play his feelings about it:

(1) Costello, Donald - Tennessee Williams' Fugitive Kind
Modern Drama 15, p. 107, 1972.

"Orpheus Descending is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them, a difference represented by the four major protagonists of the play, and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary"⁽²⁾

Donald Costello also thinks that for Williams' characters *"there is no possible happy escape from the earth and so most of the fugitives remain, questioning and lonely; or they find madness or despair or death, Orpheus Descending is a quest."*⁽³⁾

Orpheus is Val Xavier, who on the symbolic level, plays the role of the mythological poet, itinerant minstrel,

"who descends into a kind of Hades - the hell of a small southern town, in order to give life to the "dead" Eurydice, or Lady Torrance, and to rescue her from Pluto, or Jabe Torrance, her flint - hearted husband who is "symbolically" sick with cancer and who has snatched Lady away from the romantic life she had dreamed of."⁽⁴⁾

But Val fails to completely rescue her, and they both have a tragic end.

On the other hand, Val Xavier is the "life-

(2) Williams - Tennessee - Orpheus Descending (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), p. 10.

(3) Costello - p. 122.

(4) Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 131.

bringer", who comes to give life back to Lady Torrance. Being "the symbol of wild and pure freedom, Val is later "trapped" by love."⁽⁵⁾ Lady Torrance tells him that he is responsible for making her feel alive once more:

Lady - "... I guess my heart knew that somebody must be coming to take me out of this hell. You did. You came. Now look at me! I'm alive once more."⁽⁶⁾

And Val has not only given life back to Lady but he has planted the seed of life inside of her and her "dead tree" has blossomed again, making sex a purifying element, not a corrupting one:

Lady - "I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body has burst in flower! you've given me life, you can go."⁽⁷⁾

Val, as a real character, is a person who is tired of the way he has been leading his life. He is only thirty years old, but he knows that he has experienced things that lead to corruption. Now, he wants to quit that life; he wants to rest:

Val - "Heavy drinking and smoking the weed and shacking with strangers is okay for kids in their twenties but this is my thirtieth birthday and I'm all through with that

(5) Falk - p. 134.

(6) Orpheus Descending (play) - p. 90.

(7) Ibid. - p. 93.

rout."

Looks up with dark eyes" "I'm not young any more." (8)

Val, like the philosopher Kierkegaard when he was young, has felt the seductions of earthly pleasures which Kierkegaard has classified as components of the aesthetic stage, the first of the three stages he has created to explain man's condition in life the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage and the religious stage. The aesthetic stage is that stage in which man is characterized by his complete surrender to sensitivity, the instinct of living, by the constant uninhibited search for beauty, pleasure and happiness. The aesthetic man lives only for the present moment - Kierkegaard had once been through this stage but later chose to remain in the ethical stage in which man lives in accordance with reason, controls his instincts and passions. And he finally chose the most authentic stage, the religious one, by living the religious existence of faith. (9)

It is certain that Val will not reach the other two stages as Kierkegaard did. But one thing is certain, that Val is weary of the pleasures of the aesthetic stage. He has other aspirations that could be possible routes to the second stage.

Val has had his share of adventures and he is weary of it all. Now he does not want to make more conquests

(8) Orpheus Descending (play) p. 28.

(9) Nogare - Pedro Dalle - Humanismos e Anti-Humanismos, Editora Vozes Ltda, Petrópolis, 1977, p. 138.

because he wants to rest. Throughout the play he is a passive person but his latent masculinity and attractiveness make him a source of attention; however he does not want to compromise himself and does not take the initiative in any kind of sexual relationship because he does not want to accept responsibility for it later on.

Besides having a latent masculinity, Val possesses another element that makes him superior to any other "corrupted male" - his music. This art form is what keeps him from becoming corrupted. Through Val Tennessee Williams seems to say that art is a purifying element and that music cleanses Val of all his corrupting experiences of the past. Val knows that he has long been walking the road of corruption, but he has not yet become corrupted because of his life companion, his guitar which is a symbol of his art and of his purity. Signi Falk comments that "*Val believes his music affords a purification after he has been contaminated by the world.*"⁽¹⁰⁾

Val - "Lady, I'm thirty today and I'm through with the life that I've been leading. I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted. Here is why (Picks up his guitar) my life's companion! It washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched me..."⁽¹¹⁾

This shows Tennessee Williams' great concern with Art as a purifying element in life. In most of his plays

(10) Falk - p. 131.

(11) Orpheus Descending - p. 38.

Tennessee Williams uses Art as an uncorrupted element that makes artistic people "clean" in a corrupted world. The artist is someone different from others in that he is able to remain intact and uncorrupted in the midst of corruption because of his art. In the Night of the Iguana, Hannah is someone who has learned to remain free of corruption through her painting of people's faces. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche is somehow "pure" when she wanders in her "artistic" imaginary world of fantasy, beauty and magic which also constitutes a form of art.

In Orpheus Descending, Val is a fugitive from the world of men, in which, according to his philosophy, there are two kinds of people - the buyers and the ones who are bought:

Val - *"Lady, you might think there's many kinds of people in this world but, Lady, there's just two kinds of people, the ones that are bought and the buyers."*⁽¹²⁾

However Val, considers himself a different kind of person, one who has not yet been "branded":

Val - *"... No, there's one kind... The kind that's never been branded."*⁽¹³⁾

In Val, Williams expresses his opinion that "men's major sin is to surrender to the evil, corrupted earth, no matter what happens we should always be able to continue the

(12) Ibid. - p. 41.

(13) Ibid. - p. 41 (Idem)

fugitive flight, the quest,"⁽¹⁴⁾ as Val explains to Lady:

Val - "what does anyone wait for?
 For something to happen, for anything to
 happen, to make things make more sense....
 but I was, waiting for something like if
 you ask a question you wait for someone to
 answer, but you ask the wrong person and
 the answer don't come. Does everyting stop
 because you don't get the answer? No it
 goes right on a if the answer was given,
 day comes after day and night comes after
 night and you're still waiting for someone
 to answer the question and going right on
 as if the question was answered."⁽¹⁵⁾

The critic Signi Falk observes that "Val courts disaster when he seeks to exchange his freedom for a job in the mercantile store and becomes involved with Lady Torrance."⁽¹⁶⁾

But sex is not really a danger here; the danger lies in his becoming one of the "bought" by accepting the job and by possibly "accepting" Lady's love. But Val knows that the right answer (the one he has been looking for) does not lie in a love-sex relationship:

Val - "Love, that's the make believe answer.
 It's fooled many a fool besides you an' me,
 that's the god truth, Lady."⁽¹⁷⁾

But Val cannot keep himself from being emotionally

(14) Costello - p. 110.

(15) Play - p. 46.

(16) Falk - p. 132.

(17) Play - p. 47.

involved with Lady:

Val - *"I wanted to tell you something I never told no one before. I feel a true love for you, Lady... I'll wait for you out of this country, just name the time and the..."*⁽¹⁸⁾

Val knows that his involvement with both Lady and the religious charitable woman-Vee, is dangerous because their husbands are corrupted people who can finally destroy him. It is both ironic and tragic that his involvement finally spells his doom. Attempting to detach himself from involvement in a human relationship, Val is finally "destroyed" by the "corrupted" people of the town. Nancy Tischler thinks that Val is like Williams who *"elevates the rights of the individual above the demands of society and to fall in love or to accept the role imposed by society is to die."*⁽¹⁹⁾

Val is burned by fire. When Jabe, Lady's husband finds about Val's romance with his wife, he goes after him with a revolver in order to kill him but Lady covers Val and the shot gets her. Jabe screams, calling his corrupted fellow men by saying that Val has killed his wife and robbed the store. Soon the corrupted owners of the town appear and decide to take matters into their own hands:

(18) Ibid - p. 38.

(19) Tischler, Nancy - The Distorted Mirros - Tennessee Williams' self-portraits, Mississippi Quaterly, 25, 1972, p.

- Voices of men - shouting - "Keep on to the wall!"
 He's armed!
- "Usptairs, Dog!"
 - wild cry back of store
 - got him. GOT HIM!
 - "They got him!"
 - "Rope, git hope!"
 - "Git hope from th'hardware section!"
 - "I got something better than rope!"
 - "What've you got?"
 - "Wat's that, what's he got?"
 - "a Blowtorch!"
 - "Christ. "
 - "a momentary hush"
 - "come on, what in hell are we waiting for?"
 - "Hold on a minute, I want' a see if it works!"
 - "wait, wait,"
 - "Look here"
 - "a jet of blue flowers stabs the
 dask, it flickers on Carol's
 figure in the confectionery. The
 men cry out together in hoarse
 passion crouching to ward the
 fierce blue jet of fire, their
 faces lit by it like faces of
 demons"
 - "Christ!"
 - "It works!"⁽²⁰⁾

According to the critic Donald Costello "Tennessee Williams uses fire as the most purifying and sacramental of

(20) Play - p. 95.

symbols."⁽²¹⁾ In Orpheus Descending one finds that the author is a little ironic because the "purifying fire" is actually administered by the impure elements in the play as a way of proving that purity is found in the midst of and through corruption. The corrupted people did not realize that the burning of Val only serves to purify him and to release him to a better place.

Val is finally free from earthly corruption but as he was a different uncorrupted person he leaves something of himself for "the fugitive kind" to follow his kind. He leaves his snakeskin jacket behind him and it becomes a fugitive symbol for others to follow. Carol is the representative of the fugitive Kind who will remain on earth:

Carol - "Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bores behind them, and these are tokens passed from one to another. So that the fugitive kind can always follow their kinds."⁽²²⁾

Lady Torrance functions on the Symbolic level in the play, like Eurydice, whom Val - Orpheus fails to lead out of hades. On the literal level "Lady is a complex person, torn apart by life and the explosive elements in her own character."⁽²³⁾ She has been forced to live a fruitless and empty life and feels anguish because of that.

(21) Costello, *ibid*, p. 116.

(22) Play - p. 96.

(23) Monarch Notes - Nelson, Benjamin - 1965, New York - p.61.

Lady is a strong and decent woman who has been - hard - working and devoted wife to her husband, Jabe, whom she married for economic security. But she is an unsatisfied and anguished woman, yearning for real love, Through her sexual relationship with Val, Lady attains the reality and meaning in life.

In the past, Lady had once had a full and satisfying love affair with David Cutrere, but David abandoned her at the most trying moment of her life - after her father's violent death (he was burned by the corrupted people of the town-similar to Val's death) and when she was carrying his unborn child. While David actually sells himself to a woman with money and position, Lady aborts her pregnancy and sells herself to Jabe Torrance. Lady tells David years later as they meet in her husband's store:

Lady - "... But I had your child in my body the summer you quit me, that summer they burned my father but I had it out out of my body, and they cut my heart out with it! I wanted death, then, but look the next best thing. You sold yourself. I sold my self. You was bought. I was bought. You made whores of us both."⁽²⁴⁾

Thus, having known love but being terribly thwarted in this love, Lady is forced to detach herself from life, though still wanting desperately to live. She buries herself alive and admits that life has no meaning or purpose for her,

(24) Play - p. 56.

and is too spiritually vacuous for her to make any attempts to amend the situation. She lives in eternal anguish, completely frustrated by her existence with Jabe. Tischler thinks that:

"there is a great depth in the portrayal of Lady - the horrible sequence of her losses - first of her young lover, then of her father, then of her aborted child, then of her freedom in the whoredom of marriage to Jabe, have left her empty in a seemingly barren universe."⁽²⁵⁾

bearing the anguished existence of her routine:

Lady - *"... I ain't sleep' for the three nights, I'm going to pieces I got to have some tonight send me over some tablets."*⁽²⁶⁾

Nevertheless, Lady is strong, even though she is anguished about living a meaningless existence, she feels deeply in her heart that her life is not yet over. She still cannot wholly accept what she herself has been saying - that there is no meaning to her existence - She cannot accept detachment. She is too vital and alive to close herself off forever. Lady tells David:

Lady - *"go now. I just wanted to tell you my life ain't over."*⁽²⁷⁾

Even though Lady has passed through many bad things in life, she still seeks something positive. Her

(25) Tischler, Nancy - Tennessee Williams - The Rebellious Puritan The Citadel Press, New York, 1965, p. 236.

(26) Play - p. 36.

(27) Ibid - p. 57.

grasping attempts to fulfill herself as a woman with Val are yet another proof that she is not ready to give up living. Val can give life back to her and she knows this. In order to have Val, she desperately begs him to stay with her:

Lady - "No, no, don't go... I need you! to live!...
To go on living!!!"⁽²⁸⁾

Lady certainly desires Val sexually, particularly after her union with the cold, deathlike Jabe. But a sexual relationship is only part of what she seeks with Val. The critic Choudhuri thinks that:

"Val's relationship with Lady is not simply sexual - it is a commitment to another sympathetic human being. He is tormented by a search of some significance in living and a sense of rebellion against the futility around him. Their cry of loneliness makes them frantic to discover or invent some worthwhile meaning of existence and establish human attachment in a world of desperation."⁽²⁹⁾

In Val, Lady is looking for someone who will show her the warmth, tenderness and respect she lost when her father died and David left her.

Fulfilled in her relationship with Val, it seems that Lady has found the world's solution to her anguished existence and she feels alive once more. Even when Val warns

(28) Ibid - p.

(29) Choudhuri, A. D. - The Face of Illusion in American Drama, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N. J., 1979, p. 113

her that love is only the make - believe answer, Lady feels resurrected, as though she had emerged from hell, and she knows that Val is responsible for her salvation:

Lady - "... I guess my heart knew that somebody must be coming to take me out of this hell! you came. Now look at me! I'm alive once more."⁽³⁰⁾

She feels even happier and more exultant when she finds that she carries Val's child within her body:

Lady - "I have life in my body tree, my body has burst in flower! you've given me life."⁽³¹⁾

And she knows she has triumphed over death:

Lady - "I've won, I've won Mr. Death, I'm going to bear."⁽³²⁾

Lady's elation when she finds that she is again pregnant is further evidence that she has a deep and profound anxiety about living. She not only desires to live life but she wants to create a new life within herself. But, ironically, it is just when she is given the opportunity to find new meaning in life with Val that once again her husband Jabe destroys her.

Carol Cutrere, like Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire, attempts to fill the emptiness of her life with sexual promiscuities - It is the way she chooses to

(30) Play - p. 90.

(31) Ibid - p. 93.

(32) Ibid - p. 93.

fight her basic frustration with the eccentricities of her life. Nancy Tischler comments that "*Carol's eccentricities makes her a case study of a social deviate.*"⁽³³⁾

She freely admits she is an exhibitionist because she wants people to realize she is a human being and that she is alive:

Carol - "I'm an exhibitionist! I want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt! I want them to know I'm alive."⁽³⁴⁾

Once beautiful and vital, she has fought for and been committed to causes and ideals that seemed worthwhile for her:

Carol - "I used to be what they call a Christ-bitten reformer. You know what that is? A kind of benign exhibitionist... I delivered stump speeches, wrote letters of protest about the gradual massacre of the coloured majority in the country. I thought I was wrong for pellagra and slow starvation to cut them down when the cotton crop failed from army worm or boll weevil or too much rain in summer. I wanted to, tried to, put up free clinics, I squandered the money my mother left on it. And when that Willie McGee thing come along - he was sent to the chair for having improper relations with a white whore - ... I made a fuss about it. I put on a potato sack and set out for the capital on foot. This was in winter. I

(33) Tischler - p. 236.

(34) Play - p. 32.

walked barefoot in this burlop sack to deliver a personal protest to the governor of the state. Oh, I suppose it was partly exhibitionism on my part, but it wasn't completely exhibitionism: there was something else in it, too. You know how far I got? Six miles out of town - hooted jeered at, even Spit on! - every step of the way - and then arrested! Guess what for? Lewd vagrancy!... (35)

Now, scorned and mocked for her efforts, she has become a decadent being, committed only to her desperate attempts to seek new sensations in life order to maintain a sense of existence. She consciously defies all the corrupted members of a failed society by becoming a "lewd vagrant." She also feels herself half dead as a human being but she has learned the advice dead people keep whispering to her when she goes to Cypress Hill which is to LIVE:

Carol - Now, I'm not a reformer any more. I'm just a "Lewd vagrant." and I'm showing the "S.O.B'S" how a "lewd vagrant" can be if she puts her whole heart in it like I do mine!... Now I want you to do something for me. Take me out to Cypress Hill in my car. And we'll hear the dead people talk. They do talk there. They chatter together like birds on Cypress Hill, but all they say is one word and that word is "live", they say "live, live, live, live, live!" It's all they've learned, it's the only

(35) Ibid - p. 32.

advice they can give - just live. (36)

Carol purpose fully mocks the hypocritical puritanism of the townspeople who detest her. She prefers to defy them by acting honestly and in a way that threatens their corrupting "pseudo" stability. But, unfortunately, Carol is not very secure in her behavior. She is a lonely, anguished and fragile being.

Comparing Carol with Blanche, one can notice that while the latter preferred to hide her "dirty" side, the former chooses to lead an open and free existence. But Carol uses this way of life as a form of escape from her anguished living. She, like Blanche is a simple human being who is insecure and terribly anguished in search of love, affection and Kindness even if from "strangers" Val can see Carol's fragile and inner self:

Val - "Little girl. You're transparent, I can see the veins in you. A man's weight on you would break you like a bundle of sticks." (37)

Carol, like Blanche is a decadent of an old aristocratic southern family and her degeneration is, also like Blanche's degradation, a symbol of the degeneration of southern aristocracy. Carol throws herself into a life of sexual orgy because she can not cope with life by herself. Wanting desperately to live, she continually runs from life

(36) Ibid - p. 32.

(37) Ibid - p. 54.

in a frenzied race toward self destruction. But there is a basic difference between the characters of Carol and Blanche. Blanche is eternally anguished because she knows that her sexual promiscuity is not accepted in her traditional society. Because of this she leads a double life. Carol also chooses to lead an authentic and open sexuality for two main reasons: first, because it is the only way to give her a "sense of existence" (Which makes her like Blanche) and second, and perhaps more importantly, because it is a way to shock the decadent and falsely correct (but basically corrupt) society in which she lives. Unlike Blanche Carol refuses to feel guilty, an act that saves her from feeling decadent in the way that Blanche feels. Carol explains her orgies to Val:

Carol - "Oh, don't you know wat jooking is? That's where you get in a car and drink a little and drive a little and stop and dance a little to a juke box and then you drink a little more and drive a little more and stop and dance a little more to a juke box and then you stop dancing and you just drink and drive and then you stop driving and just drink, and then, finally you stop drinking..."⁽³⁸⁾

But she admits that love - making even though it gives her a sense of existence, is painful for her:

Carol - "The act of love - making is almost unbearably painful, and yet, of course, I do bear it, because to be not alone, even

(38) Ibid - p. 28.

for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger."(39)

Carol compares herself to Val in their mutual desires for freedom, and she expresses the thought that wild things are the purest and most sensitive:

Carol - *"This country used to be wild, the men and women were wild and there was a will sort of sweetness in their hearts, for each other, but now it's sick with neon, it's broken out sick, with neon, like most other places..."*(40)

Nancy Tischler comments that throughout the play one can see Val's and Carol's similiarity in

"their mutual understanding, she sees the danger for him just as he sees it for her.. Val is the savage, Carol the faded aristocrat, and these two anachronisms are the alien elements that disturb the town and they represent the creative ferment in a conformist world."(41)

In reality, Carol is trapped by her heritage and her own instability to exist in a world ruled by blind hate and prejudice. She is thoroughly misunderstood and the whole town, as well as her own family, repudiates her, thus transforming her into an outcast.

Carol, like Val and Lady Torrance also plays a

(39) Ibid - p. 54.

(40) Ibid - p. 86.

(41) Tischler - The Rebellious Puritan - p. 237.

symbolic role in the play. She is to follow Val's fugitive Kind in this world. Uncompromised, free and wild, she is similar to Val and when he is released and purified from the corrupting world to a better place, Carol is the last "remnant" of his Kind on earth. As the play ends and Val is purified by Fire, he leaves his snakeskin Jacket behind and Carol is the one responsible for keeping it as a symbol to follow Val's fugitive species:

Carol - *"Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins... and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive Kind can always follow their Kind..."*⁽⁴²⁾

Being similar to Val is a positive characteristic in the personality of Carol, and as the play ends, she is more successful, more satisfied and less anguished than Lady Torrance has been during life and at the time of her death.

Vee Talbott is the third anguished woman character who becomes involved with Val, but on a different level than Carol and Lady Torrance. Vee is both sexually and spiritually frustrated. Her marriage to the cruel sheriff is a disaster because she can not be sexually fulfilled with such a violent man and she can have no peace of mind while she is forced to accept the violence of her husband's deeds. Here the conflict of body versus soul appears in Vee who, unable to explore her sexual drives, has sublimated them into

(42) Play - p. 96.

spiritual activity which brings her a certain peace. She has become a painter of religious figures or saints. She paints from "visions" and creates works of the imagination in order to compensate for the emptiness and dissatisfaction she feels in her marriage to the brutal and ignorant sheriff (one of the rulers and the buyers of the town) and in her meaningless existence.

Vee is a charitable person; She is not a hypocrite, as are most of the people in town, and she is always trying to help others. She is the only one who helps Val by bringing him to town in order to find him a job:

Vee - *"Mr. Xavier is a stranger in our midst. His car broke down in that storm last night and I let him sleep in the lock up, He's looking' for work and I thought I'd introduce him to Lady an' Jabe because if Jabe can't work, they're going to need somebody to help out in th' store."*⁽⁴³⁾

But people in town, especially her husband, do not understand her:

Sheriff - *"I'm sick of you making a goddam fool of yourself - over every stray bastard that wanders into this country."*⁽⁴⁴⁾

In Vee's visions she always tries to build up characters and not destroy them as most people in town do. As she says to the two hypocritical and corrupted women,

(43) Ibid - p. 26.

(44) Ibid - p. 34.

Dolly and Beulah, who think they are the only correct ones in town, when in reality they are far more? Perverted than the perversion she sees in Carol:

Vee - *"If some of you older women in two River country would set a better example there'd be more decent young people!... I mean that people who give drinkin' parties an' get so drunk they don't know which is their husband and which is somebody else's and people who serve on the altar guild and still play cards on Sunday - I try to build up characters! you and your drinkin' parties are only concerned with tearin' characters down! I'm goin' upstairs, I'm going back upstairs."*⁽⁴⁵⁾

Through the character of Vee, again Tennessee Williams uses Art as a purifying element in life and as a means of escape from the corrupting world. Painting for Vee is what gives her a sense of existence and makes her feel less anguished in life; She seen horrible things in the town and she has been a witness of beatings, lynchings and other terrible acts her husband and the corrupting members of the town have perpetrated, but through her art she tries to make some beauty out of that dark place:

Vee - *"Since I got into this painting, my whole outlook is different. I can't explain how it is, the difference to me."*

(45) Ibid - p. 33.

Val - "you don't have to explain. I know what you mean. Before you started to paint, it didn't make sense."

Vee - "what didn't make sense?"

Val - "Existence."

Vee - slowly and softly - "No, - no it didn't.. existence didn't make sense..."

She places canvas on guitar on counter and sits in a chair

Val - rising and crossing to her - "you lived in Two River country, the wife of the country sheriff. You saw awful things take place."

Vee - "How do you _____?"

Val - "Know? I been a witness! I know!"

Vee - "I been a witness, I know!"

Val - "We seen these things from seats down front at the show. (He crouches before her and touches her hands in her lap. Her breath shudders.) And so you begun to paint your visions, without no plan, no training you started to paint as if god touched your fingers (He lifts her hands slowly, gently from her soft lap.) You made some beauty out of this dark country with these two, soft, woman hands..."⁽⁴⁶⁾

(46) Ibid - p. 60

The ultimate proof of Vee's confusion is her discovery that Val's eyes are the same as those she painted in her visionary partrait of the ressurected Christ. Because she has transferred her sexual drives into religious visions through her painting, she cannot admit that She desires Val. Thus the only way to express her desire is through the vision of his eyes in her painting of Jesus Christ:

Vee - *"And there in the split - open sky, I saw, I tell you, I saw the two Huge blazing eyes of Jesus Christ Risen! The blazing eyes of Jesus Christ Risen! The blazing eyes of Christ Risen! you... The EYES!"(50)*

But when Vee in ecstasy tells Val about her discovery, the brutal Sheriff appears and sees Val's persecution by the corrupted members of the town.

Concluding one can say that in Orpheus Descending one can clearly see the difference between the corrupted people and the uncorrupted beings. The corrupted are the ones who are on the materialistic side and do not seem to experience the body versus soul conflict common to every human being, nor the feeling of anguish that man feels due to this conflict. The uncorrupted beings are more on the spiritualistic side of the conflict, but they experience the feeling of anguish because sometimes they are unable to live a life in harmony with their materialistic (instinctive) demands and the craving of spirituality and purity of spirit.

(50) Ibid - p. 78.

But in this play, Tennessee Williams wants to show that even though sex is only the make - believe answer, the characters seem satisfied with it and through it achieve a relatively peaceful spirituality. What he condemns is the selling (the buyers and the ones who are bought) of sex, power and money, the misjudging of people and violence (abusing of power). Val's quest is to protest against all this and as the words of the producer Robert Whitehead who shared the author's formulation of the theme of this play: *"The poet's life blood is protest, even though when he does protest he is destroyed, yet he has planted a seed."*⁽⁵¹⁾

Another important point focused by the author is the relevant use of art as a purifying element to the creatures in search of reaching plentiness of being and stillness of mind/spirit, as in the case of Val's guitar that washes him clean.

As to what refers to Williams' change of thought to the problem of human anguish, one can notice that there has been a progression in the author's mind towards pessimism and negativism. He began with ingenuous / innocent kinds of conflict in The Glass Menagerie, became more shocking through the development of the Play A Streetcar Named Desire and this shock and violence increases in his approach of the play Orpheus Descending. With these three plays Williams did not seem to find an answer to his anguished search. He

(51) In The muth of the modern age - Dickensen, Hugh -
Tennessee Williams Orpheus as savior, University of
 Illin Press, 1969 - p. 281.

gave only vague hints of unrealistic solutions that could diminish the intensity of the characters' anguish. In The Glass Menagerie, anguish is intensified as the play ends in the pain of Tom's memories and in order to make this pain less he repeats his family story to every unknown person he meets throughout his travels. In A Streetcar Named Desire, the pressure of Blanche's conflict between body and soul is so great that She flees into the safety of insanity in order to bear her anguished existence. In Orpheus Descending, the main characters fight against this human anguish and try to free themselves from their corrupted existence. They are destroyed, however, by the very corruption from which they attempt to flee. Williams seems to say, however, that instead of being destroyed they are released into a better and less anguished life. But all of these solutions are fantasies and far from reality. The only play that treats the problem of human anguish in a more optimistic and realistic way is The Night of The Iguana which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five - The Night of The Iguana

This chapter deals with the last play analyzed in this work. It is one of Tennessee Williams' last plays and his last real success. One can notice that the author has changed in relation to the finding of solutions for "unanswered questions" to man's anguished existence in the world and also in relation to the finding of his own personal God. This play is the only one among those analyzed in this study in which Tennessee Williams seems to have finally found an answer to man's anguished existence. This answer lies in man's communion with both his corrupting and uncorrupting impulses.

Two important critics also seem to consider this play as one of the author's most important ones - Thomas Adler thinks that this play is "Williams most profound play and his fullest exploration of person - to - person Goodness."⁽¹⁾ And Esther Jackson considers The Night of The Iguana "a Kind of Modern Everyman, a moment when the protagonist watches his own vices and virtues parade across the great stage of his consciousness."⁽²⁾

(1) Adler, Thomas - The Search for god in the plays of Tennessee Williams, Renaissance 26, (autumn 1973), p. 246.

(2) Jackson, Esther - The Anti-hero in the Plays of Tennessee Williams from the Broken world of Tennessee Williams, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, p. 97.

The Night of the Iguana deals with the relationship which involves an unfrocked minister - Shannon, a Spinster painter, - Hannah, and her grandfather, Nonno, who is a ninety - year - old poet; as well as Maxine, the lusty proprietress of the resort hotel in which they are all guests. All of these characters represent fighters in search of something meaningful to fulfill their existence. Shannon fights desperately against his natural impulses and hopes to find his real God in order to live in peace with his conflict-ridden personality. Hannah has a fighting Spirit to keep on living in spite of everything good or bad she has experienced throughout her life. Nonno, at the end of his life, fights with all his heart to be able to write his last poem before he dies. And Maxine fights desperately on a more carnal level, to gain the love of Shannon, hoping that he will stay with her for the rest of their lives.

Shannon is the most important character of the play. He is an anti-hero who is guilty, of his human condition which he cannot accept which in fact reflects Kierkegaard's thought that he himself and the whole human race are transgressors in search of salvation. Esther Jackson thinks that "*Shannon travels the difficult road from despair to hope, from the shadows of tragedy to the light of cosmic vision.*"⁽³⁾ Shannon is a protagonist who is potentially tragic. An anti-hero he represents the modern image of man - the personification of a humanity which is neither good, nor knowledgeable, nor courageous. A man "*sick*" of his

(3) Ibid - p. 91.

human condition, he is in search of healing. But he himself prevents his own personal salvation, He feels himself guilty of a profound flaw - he is unable to accept his divided reality of flesh versus spirit and he condemns himself for being more inclined to the pleasures of flesh. Esther Jackson admits that:

"Shannon is conscious of his transgression, because he pays the penalty of fragmentation, disorientation and despair. He is a man in exile, in flight from his own transgression."⁽⁴⁾

Shannon denies himself the possibility of salvation and redemption because of his own distorted vision of God. His crisis of Faith comes from his conception of God as a vengeful and senile delinquent who denies man his pleasures. Because Shannon sees his inclination towards the pleasures of the flesh as sinful he does not accept this part of his nature as a normal thing. He "*Sins*" in a social sense because he tries to deny his nature. Thomas Adler says that Shannon is "*so obsessed with the evil in himself and in those around him that he transfers this evil to God, creating a God devoid of any Goodness or love.*"⁽⁵⁾

As a minister, Shannon was accused of seducing a

(4) *Ibid* - p. 95.

(5) *Adler* - p. 141.

young girl and of heresy. His last sermon reveals his inability to accept society's pre - conceived notion of God:

Shannon - "Look here, I shouted, I'm tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent... all your Western theologies are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent..."⁽⁶⁾

Seen in this light, it is no wonder that he detests Western Institutional Congregation and the Institutional Christianity that is masked in hypocrisy. He cannot preach false beliefs to a hypocritical congregation which is unable to hear the truth of God:

Shannon - "I shouted after them, go on, go home and close your house windows, all your windows and doors against the truth about God!"⁽⁷⁾

The above words were spoken after a thunderstorm broke out at the moment when Shannon was preaching his last sermon. With the storm, Shannon wants to show to the hypocritical congregation that it fears the reality of God.

Later in the play when Shannon and Hannah are discussing the idea of God, a storm appears again:

(6) The Night of The Iguana - Tennessee Williams - p. 59.

(7) Ibid - p. 60.

"The storm with its convulsions of light, is like a giant white bird attacking the hilltop of the Costa Verde."⁽⁸⁾

This is indeed the author's own description of the storm, it does not indicate words spoken by Shannon. It shows how the playwright wants us to understand the storm in the light of Shannon's distorted concept of God. Hannah tells Shannon that the storm is a proof of the presence of his god:

Hannah - *"Here is your god, Mr. Shannon."*⁽⁹⁾

The symbol of God in the storm is majestic, frightening, and powerful. *"It also represents an attainable god - that purity which is above the earth's corruption and which the fugitives seek but can never reach."*⁽¹⁰⁾ Shannon is convinced that God is as cruel as the storm. As he says in reply to Hannah's words:

Shannon - *"yes, I see him, I hear him, I know him. And if he doesn't know that I know him, let him strike me dead with a bolt of his lightning."*⁽¹¹⁾

But Shannon seems to be willing to reach the

(8) Ibid - p. 82.

(9) The Night of The Iguana - p. 82.

(10) Donald Costello, Tennessee Williams' Fugitive Kind, Modern Drama, 15 (May 1972) - p. 116.

(11) The Night of The Iguana - p. 82.

unreachable God, and for a moment he recognizes his God in the power and beauty of the storm:

"Shannon lowers his hands from his burning forehead and stretches them out through the rain's silver sheet as if he were reaching for something outside and beyond himself. Then nothing is visible but these reaching out hands."⁽¹²⁾

Hannah tries to help Shannon to understand that God can be found everywhere, especially in the suffering of people. She tries to show him that by giving comfort to them one finds and offers God at the same time:

Hannah - *"Shannon, there is a place that's called the House for the Dying - the old and penniless dying whose younger, penniless living children and grandchildren take them there for them to get through with their dying... I saw that their children and grandchildren and the custodians of the place had put little comforts beside their death - pallets, little flowers and opium candies and religious emblems. That made me able to stay to draw their dying faces. Sometimes only their eyes were still alive, but, Mr. Shannon, those eyes of the penniless dying with those last comforts beside them, I tell you, Mr. Shannon, those eyes looked up with*

(12) Ibid - p.

their last dim life left in them as clear as the stars in the Southern cross... Nothing I've ever seen has seemed as beautiful to me, not even the view from this verandah between the sky and the still - water beach, "(13)

And God can be also found in people reaching out to each other, even for a short period of time, according to Hannah. Thomas Adler says that

"Hannah is the only one who is able to mean God to each other, because she does not feel disgust toward anything that is human, If one has such limitless compassion, he will never become so obsessed with the evil in himself or others that he denies the possibility of the good, nor will he be deliberately cruel to the other or sit in judgement upon him."(14)

Hannah says to Shannon:

Hannah - "... The oldest problem in the world - the need to believe in something or in someone - almost anyone - almost anything... Something...I'm not hopeless about it. In fact, I've discovered something to believe in... Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only..."(15)

(13) *Ibid* - p. 110.

(14) Thomas Adler, - The Search for god in the Plays of Tennessee Williams, Renascence 26 (autumn, 1973)-p.293.

(15) The Night of The Iguana - p. 106.

Hannah's words are not referring to sexual contact but
"Spiritual" human communication:

Shannon - *"you don't mean physically, do you?"*

Hannah - *"No"*

Shannon - *"I didn't think so, then what?"*

Hannah - *"A little understanding exchanged
 between them, a wanting to help each
 other through nights like this."⁽¹⁶⁾*

Through Hannah we get a glimpse of Williams' concept of a God who must be found in human beings. Thomas Adler thinks that *"sin for Williams is not an offense against some distant God but a form of alienation between people which keeps them from meaning God with each other."⁽¹⁷⁾*

Shannon is desperately in search of a real god - He seeks to know the Universe, to define its purpose and to discover the ultimate meaning of his own life. But he is a desperate man who feels doomed and who sees death as the only solution for himself - Thus he considers committing suicide by throwing himself into the ocean:

(16) Ibid - p. 107.

(17) Thomas Adler - p. 138.

Shannon - "I'm going swimming. I'm going to swim out to China!"⁽¹⁸⁾

This is due to his guilt at not being able to lead an exemplary ministerial life. He attempts desperately to take the gold cross from his neck:

"He bends far over the verandah rail, then straightens violently and with an animal outcry begins to pull at the chain suspending the gold cross about his neck. Pancho watches indifferently as the chain cuts the back of Shannon's neck."⁽¹⁹⁾

Shannon's reaction to his own guilt is to strike at everyone like a child, including himself. He is immersed in self-pity. When he is tied in a hammock, presumably to be saved from suicide, Hannah tells him that he enjoys suffering:

Hannah - "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."⁽²⁰⁾

(18) The Night of The Iguana - p. 96.

(19) Ibid - p. 96.

(20) Ibid - p. 99.

Throughout his life Shannon has shown to be a weak man and *"his weaknesses draws him to inaction, sex, alcohol, mental crack-ups and self-pity."*⁽²¹⁾ He is overly preoccupied with his own guilt and thus becomes a self victim with a sense of his failure in life. Thomas Adler says that *"he does not realize that to be human is to be sinful but not so flawed as to despair."*⁽²²⁾ Hannah reveals this egotistical tendency to him:

Hannah - *"you have just been so much involved with a struggle in yourself that you haven't noticed when people have wanted to help you the little they can..."*⁽²³⁾

Likewise, She tells Shannon that instead of forcing his God of *"Lightning and Thunder"* on others he should look into the longing faces of his people and *"lead them beside still waters because you know how badly they need still waters."*⁽²⁴⁾ She suggests to him that if one cannot have God, then he must *"play God"*. Shannon goes down under the porch and cuts the iguana loose, *"because God won't do it."*⁽²⁵⁾

The iguana is identified with Shannon throughout

(21) Ferdinand, de Leon - Time, Fantasy, and Reality in Night of The Iguana, Modern Drama, may 1968, p. 90.

(22) Thomas Adler - p. 147.

(23) The Night of The Iguana - p. 81.

(24) Ibid - p. 62.

(25) Ibid - p. 123.

the play. They both long to be free: Shannon says of himself:

Shannon - *"I can't stand being tied up."*⁽²⁶⁾

and later of the iguana:

Shannon - *"Iguanas have been known to bite their tails off when they're tied up by their tails."*⁽²⁷⁾

In the same way, the releasing of the iguana parallels Shannon's desire to be released from himself. Both he and the iguana are *"unattractive, corrupting creatures but they are God's creatures."*⁽²⁸⁾ When Shannon cuts the iguana free, he feels at peace with himself, he feels full of grace:

Shannon - *"I cut loose one of God's creatures at the end of the rope... so that one of God's creatures could scramble home safe and free... A little act of grace..."*⁽²⁹⁾

Thomas Adler analyzing Shannon's effort to escape from his despairing existence and of comparing himself with the tied iguana takes a position that is parallel to the existentialist philosophy:

(26) Ibid - p. 98.

(27) Ibid - p. 122.

"Shannon's identification with the bound iguana lizard objectifies and amplifies his view of the human state. Like the iguana, tied to a post, helplessly waiting to be slaughtered by the native boys, man, helplessly tied to earth by his life, cannot evade his life, cannot evade the inevitable suffering of existence. Only death can free one from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. If like Shannon, one does not have the courage to commit suicide, one's position is much like that of the tied iguana. Man's greatest hope, Shannon explains is to get beyond the end of his rope (to death) quickly so that his inevitable suffering will be minimized... Insofar as Shannon is typical of despairing modern man, we may see the nature of our spiritual turmoil in his iguana symbol."⁽³⁰⁾

Before the act of releasing the iguana Shannon has descended into a kind of hell of suffering where he goes through "*the dark night of the soul*". Finally the cycle of understanding is completed when he seems to have found God through the friendship of Hannah, a woman who offers him sympathy and grateful affection. But probably Shannon will never find definite peace as he is always "*cracking up*", according to Tennessee Williams

(30) Philip, armato - Tennessee Williams' Meditations on Life and Death - p. 564.

"His nervous state is terribly apparent; he is a young man who has cracked up before and is going to crack up again - perhaps repeatedly."⁽³¹⁾

Shannon has always been unable to escape corruption. He views the world as a corrupting place, as one sees in his description of one of the sights he takes his tourist ladies to see:

Shannon - *"... I noticed too, a pair of old natives of this nameless country, practically naked except for a few filthy rags creeping and crawling about this mound of... and... occasionally stopping to pick something out of it, and pop it into their mouths. What? Bits of undigested... food particless, Miss Jelkes..."*⁽³²⁾

And he also speaks about his corrupt way of life:

Shannon - *"Fast decay is a thing of hot climates, steamy, hot, wet climates and I run back to them like a... always seducing a lady or two, or three or four or five ladies in the party, but really ravaging her first by pointing out to her the - what? - horrors? yes, horrors!"*⁽³³⁾

(31) The Night of The Iguana - p. 10.

(32) Ibid - p. 121.

(33) Ibid - p. 22.

Shannon's inability to escape corruption is one of the main causes of his anguish in life. He cannot avoid enjoying the pleasures of the flesh and he feels he cannot continue to be a minister of God because of this - His great conflict between flesh/spirit can be seen throughout the play. It is clear in the case of his brief affair with Charlotte Goodall, one of the young girls on the Blake tour. Having made love to her, he regrets his behavior and forces her to pray for forgiveness together with him:

Charlotte - *"I remember that after making love to me, you hit me, Larry, you struck me in the face, and you twisted my arm to make me kneel on the floor and pray with you for forgiveness."*⁽³⁴⁾

Once again, in the character of Shannon, Williams uses sex as an attempt to escape reality. Shannon is like Elanche in

"A Streetcar Named Desire, or Carol in Orpheus Descending, a fugitive from the real world and from his own reality. Shannon in this play justifies his hopeless and trivial sexual adventures by stating that people need human contact."⁽³⁵⁾

(34) Ibid - p. 52.

(35) Armato - p. 566-

But he cannot exist with this type of "human contact" in his life as a minister. As a minister he cannot control himself from having a sexual adventure with a young parishioner, but after the act, he strikes her as if to punish himself also:

Shannon - *"The natural or unnatural attraction of one... lunatic for... another... that's all it was I was the God - damnest prig in those days that even you could imagine - I said, let's kneel down together and pray and we did, we knelt down, turned to a reclining position on the rug of my study and... when we got up? I struck her. Yes I did, I struck her in the face and called her a damned little tramp..."*⁽³⁶⁾

Shannon's reality is his inability to discover a personal God whom he can serve in peace and love. Thus, he flees from this spiritual reality into the world of carnal pleasure, but this situation only brings him anguish because he wishes desperately to be pure of spirit. Unable to escape from reality he takes revenge on humanity, specially the people close to him, as in the case with the young parishioner mentioned in the above quotation.

Despite Shannon's efforts to free himself from corruption and to identify himself with Hannah, he is not able to escape being a "captive" to Maxine:

(36) Ibid - p. 59.

Shannon - "So I stay here, I reckon and live off
la patrona for the rest of my life.." (37)

He is momentarily panicked at this possibility and turns to Hannah in a tone of despair:

Shannon - "you mean that I'm struck here for Good?
Winding up with the.... incansolable
widow?" (38)

However Hannah admits that perhaps it won't be so bad after all:

Hannah - "We all wind up with something or with
someone, and if it's someone instead of
just something, we're lucky, perhaps
unusually lucky." (39)

Shannon knows Maxine has a great power over him. Each time that he has "cracked up" he has gone to her for comfort, rest, sex and liquor. In the beginning of the play, when Shannon arrives at Maxine's resort hotel, ("a framework to enclose the guests' anguish.") (40) desperately needing to escape from his responsibility with Blake Tours, Maxine notices that Shannon has "cracked up again.":

Maxine (She chuckles) - "So you've got the spook
with you again?" (41)

(37) Ibid - p. 122.

(38) Ibid - p. 118.

(39) Ibid - idem

(40) Ferdinand de Leon - p. 91.

(41) The Night of The Iguana - p. 17.

And Maxine takes advantage of Shannon's situation by openly offering herself to him. But Shannon knows that as her lover he will be literally and figuratively a kept man. So he rejects her advances. He even admits Maxine is a "bitch" compared to Hannah:

Shannon - *"Maxine, honey, stop persecuting this lady. You can't intimidate her. A bitch is no match for a lady, except in a brass bed honey, and sometimes not even there."*⁽⁴²⁾

But as the play ends, Shannon chooses to stay with Maxine, giving evidence that although Maxine is corrupted, transcendence and peace can be found in the midst of the corrupting world. One can conclude that perhaps Shannon's salvation comes through the restorative powers of Maxine. Most likely, He will be finally released and relieved from his despair through the love of Maxine. In the final exchange between Maxine and Shannon - there is something touching when she promises her assistance to him:

Maxine - *"I'll get you back up the hill (they have started off now, toward the path down through the rain forest) I've got five more years. Maybe ten to make this place attractive to the male clientele. And you can take care of the women that are with them. That's what you can do, you know that, Shannon."*
"He chuckles happily. They are now on

(42) Ibid - p. 104.

the path, Maxine half - leading, half - supporting him... "(43)

Perhaps by Shannon's chuckle, Williams wishes to convey that he has finally found a measure of peace within himself and that although he will remain with Maxine, Hannah has been the one responsible for making him see that the transcendence he has sought can finally only be found in the midst of the corrupting world. Williams seems to want to say that in order to live a less anguished existence one should accept himself the way he is, with both his carnal inclinations and spiritual aspirations.

Hannah is probably one of the most important characters of the play. Even though her role is mainly symbolic (for she is "*the instrument*" of Shannon's attempt to find himself and his true god), she is primarily important as the kind of ideal person who is able to endure any situation in life. She is so totally idealized by Williams that she is described variously as someone fantastic, non-existent, an androgynous being, a nymph, an angel. Shannon is completely disturbed when he first sees her:

"Hannah is remarkable looking - ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be

(43) Ibid - p. 126.

forty: She is totally feminine and yet androgynous - looking - almost timeless."(44)

Hannah is a spinster who has devoted all of her life to caring for her grandfather Nonno - "*the oldest living and practicing poet*", who is racing death. She wanders over the world with him, provides for the two of them by her sketches of people, and together they lead a kind of bohemian life:

Hannah - "*My grandfather is the oldest living and practicing poet. And he gives recitations. I... paint... water colors and I'm a "quick sketch artist." We travel together. We pay our way as we go by my grandfather's recitations and the sale of my water colors and quick character sketches in charcoal or pastel.*"(45)

As the play proceeds Shannon and Hannah are drawn to each other, and in long confrontations express their fears, hopes and philosophies of life. They are linked by a kind of spiritual attraction to each other. Hannah counteracts the despair of Shannon with her guarded optimism. Life has not been very kind to her, but she is able to take it for what it is worth and to cope with it. Shannon knows that he could never be like Hannah and he admits that they

(44) Ibid - p. 21.

(45) Ibid - p.p. 39-40.

view life on two different levels:

Shannon - looking out gloomily from the verandah:

"Yeah, well you know we live on two levels, Miss Jelkes, the realistic level and the fantastic level, and which is the real one, really..."

Hannah - *"I would say both, Mr. Shannon"*

Shannon - *"But when you live on the fantastic level as I have lately but have got to operate on the realistic level, that's when you're spooked, that's the spook..."⁽⁴⁶⁾*

Unlike Shannon's terror before a bleak future, Hannah accepts her fate. She seems to be the play's truest and most impressive character. Endowed with a history of unhappy experiences, she has been a spectator of a life-in-the-round, seeing it as from a raised center, without getting involved. Hannah is an itinerant like Shannon, but unlike him, she has absorbed and benefited from her experiences of frustration and humiliation, especially solitude.

Hannah offers wise counsel as to the nature of reality to the despairing Shannon, but in the end she is too spiritual for him. Shannon needs a woman like Maxine because she can help him regain his mental stability by sharing his sexual inclinations and feeding his spirit with happiness.

(46) Ibid - p. 74.

Hannah is an example of the woman who has made the best of the relationship between herself and her grandfather - a relationship that has denied her the normal communion between man and woman. Because of the circumstances of her life with Nonno, she has come to regard "home" as a spiritual good, a mutual understanding between persons and not as a concrete reality. She has learned how to make a home in her grandfather's heart:

Hannah - *"we make a home for each other, my grandfather and I. Do you know what I mean by a home? I don't mean a regular home. I mean, I don't mean what other people mean when they speak of a home, because I don't regard home as a... well, as a place, a building...a home.. of wood, bricks, stone. I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can... Well, nest, rest, live in, emotionally speaking."*⁽⁴⁷⁾

But Shannon is confused as to Hannah's conception of home. He believes that permanence is the best part of a home:

Shannon - *"when a bird builds a nest, it builds it with an eye for the... relative permanence of the location and also for the purpose of mating and propagating its species."*⁽⁴⁸⁾

(47) Ibid - p. p. 110-111.

(48) Ibid - p. 111.

Hannah responds:

Hannah - "... I'm not a bird, Mr. Shannon, I'm a human being and when a member of that fantastic species builds a nest in the heart of another, the question of permanence isn't the first or even the last thing that's considered.... necessarily..."⁽⁴⁹⁾

She then tells him that she has learned to believe in brief periods of understanding between two people. Never having had a serious man versus woman relationship, Hannah has sacrificed her life for her grandfather and besides her devotion to him, she has managed to survive with meaningless relationships.

Hannah tells Shannon that man needs to cultivate endurance in order to be able to "keep on going". She, as a normal human being, had once had her own "spook" and she identifies with Shannon in his present mental condition. But as she tells him, she has managed to survive:

Hannah - "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. I called him the blue devil... oh... we had quite a battle, quite a contest between us... I showed him that I could endure him and I made him respect my endurance..."⁽⁵⁰⁾

(49) Ibid - p. 111.

(50) Ibid - p. 107.

However, Hannah is human and she has need of something to help her through the periods of trial. As she explains to Shannon about her forms of escape:

Hannah - *"Some people take a drink, some take a pill, I just take a few deep breaths."*(51)

Her painting is another form of escape, as it is for her a type of occupational therapy:

Hannah - *"I never cracked up, I couldn't afford to - of course I nearly did once. But I was lucky my work, this occupational therapy that I gave my self - painting and doing quick character sketches - made me look out of my self, not in, and gradually at the far end of the tunnel that I was struggling out of. I began to see this faint, very faint gray light - the light of the world outside me - and I kept climbing toward it."*(52)

Hannah as a human being, has the human necessity to escape from reality by taking "a mild sedative drink." This can be seen as one human weakness in Hannah's strength and it is not so different from Shannon's inclination to alcohol:

(51) Ibid - p. 70.

(52) Ibid - p. 105.

Hannah - "It's a mild sedative drink that helps you get through nights that are hard for you to get through."⁽⁵³⁾

In an attempt to compare Hannah with Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire one can notice that Hannah's reaction towards sex is quite different from that of Blanche. Hannah has learned to accept everything in life without being shocked. Her philosophy of life is one of equanimity as she says to Shannon:

Hannah - "accept whatever situation you cannot improve."⁽⁵⁴⁾

While her husband's abnormal sexuality, disgusts Blanche, when confronted with abnormal sexual inclinations, Hannah reacts calmly. Adler says that "she succeeds in maintaining her equanimity when the underwear fetichist requests a piece of her clothing"⁽⁵⁵⁾ in order to masturbate:

Hannah - "... and he said to me: Miss Jelkes? Will you do me a favor? Will you do something for me? If I turn my back, if I look the other way, will you take off some piece of your clothes and let me hold it, just hold it?"⁽⁵⁶⁾

(53) Ibid - p. 101.

(54) Ibid - p. 116.

(55) Adler - p. 139.

(56) Ibid - Ibid - p. 115.

Sympathetic to all human needs, Hannah understands the man's request not as something "dirty" (as Shannon would think) but rather as a "love experience",⁽⁵⁷⁾ since it calls for a response on her part to "a degree or depth of loneliness"⁽⁵⁸⁾ she had never before encountered in one God's creatures.

The difference between Blanche's and Hannah's attitudes in facing abnormal sexual experiences reflects a difference in outlook between The Night of The Iguana and A Streetcar Named Desire. It seems that the author has become more mature, as he seems to have lost that sense of puritan guilt in his view of sex. According to Hannah's opinions throughout the play, sex in any form comes from a human being and it should be accepted without disgust by every other human being. Alcohol and "mild sedative drinks" are not signs of corruption as they were in Tennessee Williams' other plays especially in A Streetcar Named Desire. They are forms of offering some momentary peace to despairing existence.

Thus Hannah seems to stand as an example of courage and understanding in the face of any kind of human tribulation. Philip Armato comments that Hannah "like Shannon has also experienced harrowing moments, but unlike

(57) Ibid - p. 116.

(58) Adler - p. 139.

him, she has never allowed herself the luxury of despair."⁽⁵⁹⁾

Her experience with a man whom society would condemn as abnormal demonstrates an almost saintly response to life's trials. Certainly Hannah's conduct during this episode serves as an example of what is finest in human nature. She does not become disgusted with life as a result of this episode, nor does she see in this seemingly perverse act, a cruel God enjoying her humiliation. Rather she values the experience as a human contact, a touch with life as it is. In one of the play's most touching passages, Hannah explains to Shannon that she has tried to understand human beings deeply because they are, for her, the reflection of God, and thus the only thing that should disgust one is human violence:

Hannah - "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent."⁽⁶⁰⁾

Hannah's acceptance of affection and endurance clearly shows the saintly virtue of charity, understanding and courage. Williams argues through Hannah that love and courage, not hate and cowardice are the virtues needed if one wishes to remain afloat in "life's troubled waters."

Even though Hannah represents the ideal kind of woman, Williams has Shannon stay with Maxine. Hannah is only

(59) Philip M. Armato - Tennessee Williams' Meditations on Life and Death - p. 564.

(60) The Play - p. 117.

the instrument of Shannon's attempt to realize that his despairing existence is in fact a normal one. His staying with Maxine represents his following of Hannah's way of life.

Hannah obviously plays a symbolic role in the play. She is "*the guardian angel*" who tries to help Shannon to find himself and his God through courage, endurance, understanding and affection. She realizes that Shannon's search for God is sincere but that he is too disturbed to be able to pursue this search at the moment of her encounter with him. For this reason she calls him "*a man of God on vacation.*" And she tries to help him regain some kind of belief in his own goodness and Kindness, and in the God he seeks, by prompting him to perform "*the little act of grace*" which sets the imprisoned iguana free. Shannon's cutting the iguana free is a very important moment in the play.

At the moment that the iguana is freed, Nonno completes the poem. The title of the play, underlines this importance:

Hannah - "... *It's an unattractive creature. Nevertheless I think it should be cut loose.*"

Shannon - "*you mean it's one of God's creatures?*"

Hannah - "*If you want to put it that way, yes, it is, Mr. Shannon, Will you please cut it loose, set it free? Because if you don't, I Will.*"

Shannon - "can you look at me and tell me truthfully that this reptilian creature, tried up down there, doesn't mostly disturb you because of its parallel situation to your grampa's dying - out effort to finish one last poem, Miss Jelkes?"⁽⁶¹⁾

However Hannah tells Shannon that his main problem is the need to believe in something, that he must have someone to believe in and this implies communication with people. She emphasizes the need of "Broken gates between people so they can reach each other..."⁽⁶²⁾ The important thing in life is for human beings to try to understand and to help each other get through the difficult periods:

Hannah - "A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this."⁽⁶³⁾

Hannah suggests to Shannon an alternative, an idea of God that she has learned in the House for the Dying in Shanghai. There she saw dying people who were almost brought to life again, their eyes bright and happy because they knew that they had not been abandoned, that their relatives and friends had brought "the little comforts

(61) Ibid - p.p. 122-123.

(62) Ibid - p. 106.

(63) Ibid - p. 107

beside their death - pallets." Hannah goes on to explain that while she has no great personal convictions about God, she is beginning to feel that he may be seen in the faces of suffering humanity.

Hannah's point is that Shannon's problem of belief will be more easily solved if he tries to live in communion with someone. Delma Presley affirms that "*Hannah insists that Shannon deal with the question of disbelief with the answer for human isolation - human community,*"⁽⁶⁴⁾ and Hannah tries to help him realize that even when he seemed most surrounded by people, in his heart, he was always alone:

Hannah - "... *Oh No, Mr. Shannon, don't kid yourself that you ever travel with someone. You have always traveled alone, except for your spook as you call it. He's your traveling companion. Nothing, nobody else has traveled with you.*"⁽⁶⁵⁾

Perhaps it is the idea of "*community*" (acceptance of the corrupting earth) that makes The Night of The Iguana so different from Williams' other plays. The emphasis on community implies acceptance. And it is this need for community and sex that leads Shannon to accept life with Maxine.

(64) Delma Presley - The Search for Hope in the plays of Tennessee Williams Mississippi Quaterly, 25 - 1971 -1972 p. 39.

(65) The Play - p. 112.

Not only Hannah, but also her grandfather Nonno, gives Shannon a great lesson of living a life of courage and endurance. After the release of the Iguana, Nonno is able to finish his last and loveliest poem, which affirms

"that man cannot live in a perfect, uncorrupted world, but must have the courage to endure in the face of evil and suffering, without ignoring the good or despairing over the human condition."⁽⁶⁶⁾

Donald Costello gives a wonderful interpretation about Nonno's poem. Nonno's poem at the climax of the play, speaks of an orange branch which observes that winter is coming and that it thus soon must fall to the corrupting earth:

"How calmly does the orange branch observe the sky begin to blanch without a cry, without a prayer with no betrayal or despair.

*A Chronicle no longer gold,
A bargaining with mist and mould
And finally the broken stem,
The plummeting to earth; and then*

*An intercourse not well designed
For beings of a golden kind
Whose native green must arch above
The earth's obscene, corrupting love."*⁽⁶⁷⁾

(66) Thomas Adler - p. 147-148.

(67) The Play - p. p. 123-124.

With the coming or fall, year after year new branches will face this some fate. But Nonno, with existential courage, sees this as a symbol of man's fate which is also a falling to earth, and like Hannah, he comes to accept it:

*"Sometimes while night obscures the tree
The zenith of its life will be gone past forever,
and from thence a second history will commence.*

*And still the ripe fruit and the branch
observe the sky begin to blanch without a cry,
without a prayer with no betrayal of despair."*⁽⁶⁸⁾

Hannah and Nonno show Shannon two alternatives to despair. Hannah's philosophy of life and Nonno's philosophy of death function as powerful rejoinders to those, who like Shannon, despise life and are half in love with death.

Nonno's solution probably echoes Williams' own thoughts concerning the fundamental problem of death as it appears in the play. Nonno's completion of his final poem just before his death reveals something about the way death must be looked at. The concluding lines of his poem reveal that Nonno's solution to death is "courage":

*"O courage could you not as well select a
second place to dwell not only in that Golden
tree But in the frightened heart of me?"*⁽⁶⁹⁾

(68) Ibid - p. 124.

(69) Ibid - p. 124.

Nonno and Shannon are both struggling with something. Shannon is trying to understand his existence in view of his concept of God. Nonno is trying to complete his poem who makes him accept death. The critic Delma Presley thinks that *"Nonno's climactic poem lends an air of calm, reserve to this scene in which Shannon attempts to find something worthy of his belief: Shannon struggles with life while Nonno struggles with death."*(70)

The poem takes the form of a prayer for courage in the face of possible extinction. The poem's lesson is clear. Life is to be valued, for it is as precious and beautiful as the orange branch, and to desire death as Shannon does is perverse and wrong. In short, man, like the orange branch, must glory in earthly existence but courageously accept death's dominion.

Another important objective of the author in relation to Nonno's poem is the value of art as one of the great life forms and as the answer to the truth of things. In fact Esther Jackson comments that in *"The Night of The Iguana - Williams emphasizes the lyric theme - his search for truth and meaning within the moment of poetic vision."*(71)

Maxine is an earthy, lusty woman who does not seem to feel any kind of anguish as a consequence of the

(70) Delma Presley - p. 39.

(71) Esther Jackson - Williams and the Lyric Moment, from the Broken world of Tennessee Williams, Washington Press, p. 28.

flesh/spirit conflict so often found in Williams' characters. She seems to know what she needs and her basic necessity is mainly sexual.

As the play opens she has recently lost her husband. She does not seem to be inconsolable about this fact because her husband was old and no longer able to give her the sexual pleasure that they had shared in their youth. Shannon comments on the fact that she is not sorry about Fred's death:

Shannon - *"you don't seem... inconsolable about it."*(72)

And Maxine justifies herself for not really missing her husband as deeply as she perhaps should:

Maxine - *"Fred was an old man, baby. Ten years older'n me. We hadn't sex together in..."*(73)

Because of her highly developed sexual need, she is one of those women who waste no time in trying to re-establish a satisfying relationship. Thus she has tried to fulfill her sexuality by having affairs with the Mexican boys who work for her:

Maxine - *"The Mexican kids are wonderful night swimmers."*(74)

(72) The Play - p. 11.

(73) Ibid - Idem

(74) Ibid - p. 24.

However, at this point, Maxine wants a stable sexual relationship and she knows that only Shannon can offer her this. When Shannon arrives at the hotel, Maxine is pleased because she feels most strongly the need of a permanent mate. She has known Shannon for some years and she knows him to be a weak man who, together with his other vices, also has a leaning toward alcoholism. In Maxine's lonely state she is more than willing to provide him with strength in order to have him stay with her. Shannon at the moment is involved in a problem with a young girl who is taking his tour and Maxine gently advises him:

Maxine - *"you know I'll help you baby, but why don't you lay off the young ones and cultivate an interest in normal grown up women?"⁽⁷⁵⁾*

The character of Maxine is a great contrast to that of Hannah. While the latter is created on a fantastic and / or angelic level, the former is definitely on the earthy realistic level. But what Williams wants is to realize that Maxine and Hannah are not so different from each other as they seem to be. They both represent the hope of the human community. This point makes this particular play different from the author's other plays, as for example A Streetcar Named Desire in which Tennessee Williams seems to view Stanley, the representative of the flesh, as a corrupting being.

(75) Ibid - p. 28.

Throughout the play, Maxine perceives Hannah as a threat to her in her pursuit of Shannon because Hannah represents the pure and spiritual side of life which Maxine does not understand. For this reason, Maxine wants Hannah and her grandfather out of the hotel:

Maxine - *"I got vibrations between you. I'm pretty good at catching vibrations to Hannah between people and there sure was a vibration between you and Shannon, the moment you Got here. That, just that has made this misunderstanding between us."*(76)

Maxine realizes that she must rid herself of Hannah as soon as possible, for in that new England spinster she recognizes an identification with Shannon's own sensitivity. Shannon's weakness is Maxine's strength and Hannah must not succeed in dominating him by sharing with him her own inner strength.

Although Shannon has rejected Maxine's advances throughout the play, he stays with her at the end, having discovered, no doubt with Hannah's help, that his only hope for salvation lies in a conscious acceptance of that which is most human and *"down-to-earth."*

Thus understood, Shannon's staying with Maxine is

(76) Ibid - p. 78.

not a negative act but rather a step toward the final discovery of his own identification and human destiny. And as the play ends, Shannon seems satisfied with his choice, evidenced in the author's last description of him: "*He chuckles happily.*"

This play shows a different aspect of the problem of anguish in that which refers to the conflict between flesh and soul. The main character's inner struggle seems to be finished when he decides to remain with Maxine (the representative of the flesh). He realizes it is useless to fight against his own sexual impulses and that it is better to accept naturally both of these tendencies. God and a form of spiritual peace can also be found through sexual fulfillment.

CONCLUSION

In most of the modern playwrights a common theme is that of anxiety. Their plays reflect the anguish suffered by modern man who lives in a world immersed in anxiety. Man feels within himself a kind of universal guilt, and because he realizes that this guilt has no form of effective expiation, he cannot escape the burden of anguish which is its consequence.

Kierkegaard has said that man feels anguish towards the sense of nothingness in his life. He feels lost in a chaotic world in which it is difficult to find meaning, in a world which views a return to nothingness as the ultimate reality.

While it is almost impossible for a playwright to create a dramatic "*action*" capable of depicting the terror of being on the edge of an abyss, Tennessee Williams seems to have come to an understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of anguish, for in his plays he creates characters who are deeply anguished beings and who virtually exist on the edge of the abyss.

Kierkegaard has declared that the threat of nothingness is the central anxiety of modern man. Existentialist playwrights have sought to overcome the despair of this situation by maintaining that the only meaning in life is to be found in the inevitability of death. Tennessee Williams, in portraying his characters as anguished

creatures, has also suggested that death (in any of its forms) is a solution for their conflicted lives.

Death as the solution for the characters' agony in life is found principally in two of the four plays analyzed in this thesis. In A Streetcar Named Desire Blanche, the main character, "*dies*" to her real but anguished self and finds release from a corrupted and conflicted life by descending into a state of madness. In Orpheus Descending, the main character, Val, is actually killed by the "*corrupted*" members of the town - an action which has given him release from "*corrupted*" life and has freed him for entry into an "*uncorrupted and pure*" eternity.

In the four plays analyzed in this thesis, one discovers that the existential anguish suffered by Williams' protagonists is due to their inner conflicts, which are in turn caused by their inability to live in harmony with the demands of both body and soul. Basically, these characters cannot accept their own reality. For example, Tom, in the Glass Menagerie hates his present situation and while his body feels "*nailed up to a coffin*", his soul aspires to adventure. He desires release from the burden of supporting his family, a mediocre job, and an empty life, and he dreams of a better life in the future. Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire is trapped in life which is dominated by her highly developed sexual instincts but in her heart she desires to be pure and uncorrupted. In Orpheus Descending, Val is also of the "*fugitive kind*" who seek freedom from corruption and purity of spirit but who can not avoid becoming

involved in the corrupting experiences of life. Shannon, the main character of The Night of The Iguana is a priest but he feels that he must leave the ministry since he feels that he is unworthy to worship and serve the Lord while his body continues to desire sexual experience.

Kierkegaard views man ideally as a synthesis of body and soul, of the temporal and the eternal. But he argues that man is usually unable to harmonize these elements within himself, for he lives in the continual conflict of his "*bodily*" desires with his soul's aspirations. Thus, he experiences sensual/sexual sensations in a temporal framework, never in an eternal one. Tennessee Williams' anguished characters experience modern man's conflict and are totally incapable of achieving Kierkegaard's idealized synthesis. They are divided beings who oscillate between the pleasures of the flesh and the ideals of the spirit, and it is impossible for them to link the eternal to the temporal element in the sensuous experiences of their lives.

Because Tennessee Williams' characters are always in conflict with their own reality- they seek to escape this through excesses of alcohol and sex, as well as in travelling and the arts. All of these means help to create within them a make-believe and fantasized world. Such escapes are most often dangerous to the characters' personalities, however, since they do not offer the sought for peace and reconciliation but rather a complete alienation from the real world.

From the analysis of the first play, The Glass

Menagerie to the last, The Night of The Iguana, one can observe the changing and maturing of Tennessee Williams' point of view in relation to his characters' struggle against their own anguished and conflicted existences and in the solutions which they accept in order to minimize the anxiety of their lives. In the first three plays: The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Orpheus Descending, the author seems to follow the existentialists' solution to man's mediocre existence which is simply death. In the Glass Menagerie, Tom does not actually die, but his final escape brings him only remorse and a nostalgia that he was not able to find himself nor to achieve the freedom dreamed in his former reality. As a result, he seems to be an even more disillusioned and disintegrated person than he was before he left home and family behind him. Tom's partial disintegration is a kind of symbolic death. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche dies symbolically as she totally disintegrates herself in her alienation from real life and in her final retreat into madness. In Orpheus Descending, Val's disintegration in present reality is not a psychic one but a real physical death that releases him from his conflicted existence. But in The Night of The Iguana, Tennessee Williams seems to find a happier solution for Shannon- the anguished protagonist who has *"sought death"* throughout the play. He begins to find himself and to be less desperate through the help of a spiritual creature - Hannah who holds his hand and takes him out of the edge of the abyss. By the end of the play, he comes to an acceptance

of himself, and he seems to find the peace he had searched for so long in the love and dedication of an apparently corrupted being-Maxine. In this play, Tennessee Williams seems to say that man must accept himself as he is, with both carnal instincts and spiritual aspirations. He must be able to find himself and his own peace of conscience in spite of the existent corruption in himself and in the total reality of the world in which he lives.

Above all, Tennessee Williams claims that man must be able to fight against his anguished existence and to live beyond the despair he finds in life: "The Night of The Iguana is a play whose theme... is how to live beyond despair and still live..."⁽¹⁾

(1) Theatre Arts, January 1962 (p.p. 17-18, 73).

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