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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: THE CHARACTERS ARE THE PLAYWRIGHT

By

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## Tennessee Williams: The Characters are the Playwright Abstract

Chairperson: Dr. Bernadette Sweeney

Tennessee Williams was first and foremost a personage of the South, having been born, raised, and nurtured in the Mississippi Delta country. His early influences formed the concept of his “American Theatre.” He was a keen observer of people and places and wrote about the individuals he studied. He espoused the idea that as a homosexual he had the innate capability to write and appreciate various genders and sexualities, expressing himself as the character being developed in the moment of creation. Williams’s works, though containing moments of great humor, often trend toward darkness, becoming ever more pessimistic of human survival as he aged.

Chapter 1: Biography contains a survey of the life of Williams, from the triumphs and catastrophes of his youth, through success, and into the psychological re-examination of his life through the help of Freudian psychologist Lawrence Kubie. Chapter 2: Character Development through Androgyny/Genderfluidity explores character development in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Something Unspoken*, and *Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens* through the lens of Queer and 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage Gender Theory. Chapter 3: Expressionism in Williams’s American Theatre walks through the evolution of Williams’s use of expressionistic techniques from early works through his middle period, analyzing *Mooney’s Kid Don’t Cry*, *The Dark Room*, *Not About Nightingales*, *Camino Real*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and wrapping with *The Two Character Play*. Chapter 4: Spirit and the Flesh dives into the homosexual economy in the plantation environment of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Chapter 5: A Last Late Look into Williams’s Experimental Apocalyptic Expressionism shows the end progression of Williams’s slide into apocalypticism through *The Three Plays for a Lyric Theatre: The Youthfully Departed*, *Now the Cats with the Jeweled Claws*, and *A Cavalier for Milady*. Chapter 6: Music as a Methodology Toward Truth in the Literary Canon of Tennessee Williams plays with the many ways in which Williams embraced the music of his day, especially works by blues and jazz musicians, incorporating styles and themes into his works and cites specific examples in *Fugitive Kind*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Finally, the Appendix contains a dramaturgical work-up of the play *Summer and Smoke*, created by Peter Philips.

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Tennessee Williams: The Characters are the Playwright

By Peter A. Philips

## Acknowledgements

I received my master's degree in Theatre, May of 2015, after returning to The University of Montana in 2011 as an undergraduate student. I completed my thesis and performance work, developing and directing a Tennessee Williams's one act play *Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen*, performed in the Masquer Theater before a live audience. The play was performed in accordance with Williams's theory of Plastic Theatre, that is the use of other forms such as music, dance, lighting, costumes, in order for theatre to "...resume vitality as a part of American culture." (Williams 1975: 7)

Shortly after receiving my degree, Professor Bernadette Sweeney, who had been my advisor and guide, offered me the opportunity to apply for the University's Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. Such a position would allow me to continue my research work on Tennessee Williams by introducing other disciplines which had affected his life and canon. In January 2017 I was accepted by the Graduate School and have worked diligently with Dr. Sweeney and my five committee members these past four years.

With great humility and a deep sense of appreciation and love, I thank my Committee Chairperson Dr. Bernadette Sweeney, and committee members Dr. Pamyla Stiehl, Dr. Lynne Koester, Dr. Michael Mayer, and Dr. James Randall for continuing their support and guidance.

As the final year of my study developed, and I looked forward to graduating at the end of Fall Semester 2021, a physical change in my wellbeing became increasingly apparent. I was diagnosed with a neurologic condition called Chronic Idiopathic Axonal Polyneuropathy, a long term slow deteriorating process clinically manifesting in elderly populations. There is no known treatment or reversal of this condition. Dr. Bernadette Sweeney, the Chairperson of my Ph.D. Committee, arranged through the University Office for Disability and Equity for a recent MA

and MFA graduate in Theatre and Media Arts, Adjunct Professor David Mills-Low to assist me in meeting the strict requirements necessary for the manuscript to be accepted by the Graduate School. The support from the Office of Disability and Equity, The University of Montana Graduate School, and my Ph.D. Committee has been truly encouraging.

Adjunct Professor David Mills-Low has made the completion of this project possible. His patience and kindness, his devotion to helping a fellow theatre devotee appreciate a long sought for dream at a late period of life gives credence to a humanity toward a fellow traveler that is rare, beautiful, and heartwarming. That stated, I would like to include, as part of this manuscript, the dedication of my efforts including these last ten years as a student within the enlightening School of Theatre and Dance and Doctoral Interdisciplinary Studies Programs at the University of Montana, to my dear friend David Mills-Low.

I would be remiss if I neglected one wonderful lady who helped this pilgrim start on his remarkable odyssey, at the age of 74, by recommending drama courses and the folks to help begin this journey. Over these years Erin McDaniel has always been a beacon of light and comfort for me and so many theatre students needing moments of guidance and encouragement, as they move through their educational endeavors. ~P. Philips.



## Preface: Soul and Stone

The life of the [true]artist cannot be otherwise than full of conflicts, for two forces are at war within him. The justified longing of the ordinary man for happiness, satisfaction, and security, and a ruthless passion for creation which may go so far as to override every personal desire. A person must pay dearly for the divine gift of creative fire. In the artist, the strongest force in his makeup is his creativeness, which will seize and all but monopolize his energy draining him of his humanity to such a degree that the personal ego can exist only on a primitive or inferior level and is driven to develop all sorts of defects---ruthlessness, selfishness, auto eroticism, vanity, and other infantile traits. (Jung 1953: 77)

The poet distilled his own liquor and had become so accomplished in this art that he could produce a fermented drink from almost any kind of organic matter. He carried it in a flask strapped about his waist, and whenever fatigue overtook him, he would stop at some lonely point and raise the flask to his lips. Then the world would change color as a soap bubble penetrated by a ray of light and a great vitality would surge and break as a limitless ocean through him. The usual superfluity of impressions would fall away so that his senses would combine in a single vast ray of perception which blinded him to lesser phenomena and experience as candles might be eclipsed. His existence was one of benevolent anarchy, for no one of his time was more immune to the influence of states and organizations. (Williams 1985: 246)

In the prologue of *Summer and Smoke*, ten-year-old Alma Winemiller describes to her slightly older companion, John Buchannan, the meaning of the stone angel of the fountain, named Eternity.

Alma: Eternity! -- Didn't it give you the cold shivers?

John: Nahh.

Alma: Well, it did me!

John: Because you're a preacher's daughter. Eternity. What is eternity?

Alma: [in a hushed wondering voice] It's something that goes on and on when life and death and time and everything else is all through with.

John: There's no such thing.

Alma: There is. It's what people's souls live in when they have left their bodies. My name is Alma and Alma is Spanish for soul. Did you know that? (Williams 1948: 3)

Throughout the play there are repeating references to the fountain that appear to be deliberate signatures of what has or is about to transpire within these moments. Similar use of “soul” and “stone” is used as symbols to denote the particular moments in the lives of Alma and John.

Williams has Alma and John undergo vigorous and dynamic changes in their personae as the arc of the play develops. Both characters undergo violent emotional upheavals that stagger them. John is initially a reluctant physician introduced, at the start of the play, as a Promethean figure, embracing the chaotic nature of life’s experiences, searching for “...indescribable pleasure...” (Williams 1947: 47) while Alma, is presented as a symbol of the traditional humanistic values of a contemporary, stilted environment. By play’s end, both characters have become polar opposites of their original presentation.

Tennessee Williams’s frequent use of the term “neurosis” suggests that he was well versed in Jungian psychology. Jung writes:

Neurosis is an inner cleavage---everything that accentuates this cleavage...that drives people to war with themselves is the institution of the knowledge that they consist of two persons in opposition to one another. This conflict may be between the ego and the shadow. It is what Faust meant when he wrote: “Two souls alas, dwell in my breast apart.” (Jung 2017: 36)

Through the course of this document, I will also be using the term “neurosis” in a strict Jungian fashion. A neurotic personality refers to Jung’s theory of the Id and the Animus, the warring parts of a whole being, those doppelgangers that push at our inner mind.

The importance of *Summer and Smoke*, being written at the same time as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, demonstrates the neurotic personality of their creator as do the characters in the two plays. *Summer and Smoke* demonstrates, what I consider, the softer, more resilient, and

empathetic side of Williams, whereas *Streetcar* shows the more brutal, and violent emotionality that Williams presents of himself in so much of his work. The two plays and their characters mirror the very humanistic core of Tennessee Williams. *Summer and Smoke* is to an Apollonian perspective as *Streetcar* is to a Promethean attitude.

I offer this personal point of view from the educational and multi-decade experience of a medical professional whose chosen field was cardiac/thoracic surgery. It was in this specific discipline where the meaning of the “soul and stone” were ingrained in my personal psyche and what made Williams’s canon so meaningful and comprehensive. One finds numerous poetic quotes by Williams in his vast literature relating to the heart and the soul.

What demonstrated Williams’s poetic and spiritual use of the symbol “soul and stone” so vividly to me was fashioned at the surgical operating table. A vital part of my training was as a Fellow with internationally renowned cardiac surgeon Denton Cooley, who when about to perform his magic on the quiet and resting organ before him, would pause and place his finger on the portion of the aorta as it curled its ascending arch toward the lower body and proclaim, “Here is where the soul rests, be gentle.” Not only did I learn where this direct link to humanity rested, but I could figuratively touch the “soul” of the individual lying before me.

The “stone” and all its meaning represented both in *Summer and Smoke* and in cardiac care is even more dramatic. The remarkable supportive technical achievements developed after the Second World War, allowed the ability to operate on the human heart while the patient’s regular body functions were maintained by sophisticated heart/lung machines. These machines provided blood and oxygen to other organ systems while the heart was being repaired. The most common early work was performed on the mitral and aortic heart valves when they had been damaged by rheumatic fever. The leaflets of the valves would either be destroyed and would not

close effectively, or become stenotic, impeding the flow of blood through them, forcing the heart muscle to overwork. Aortic stenosis, a weakening of the heart muscle, was a leading cause of death in individuals whose aortic valve was immobile. Replacing the damaged valve with a device that permitted unimpeded flow was vital, and with the advent of various mechanical and then actual tissue valves, such relief was available.

Unfortunately, despite various methods used to safeguard the heart muscle, such as hypothermia while the damaged valve was being replaced, the heart would fail to function when the heart/lung machine support was discontinued, resulting in an operative fatality. The condition was referred to as Stone Heart, wherein the left ventricular muscle contracted onto itself becoming as hard as a stone. It was determined that when the heart was stopped to permit corrective surgery, the muscle contracted and remained in a tense, spasmodic state burning up its reserve oxygen and retaining muscle waste products which resulted in muscle fiber deterioration. Adding a cold potassium solution to the heart/lung support system induced muscle relaxation preventing the strong contraction, allowing oxygenated blood flow through the relaxed, non-beating heart while maintaining the metabolites that are vital for normal cardiac function.

Today aortic valve surgery is one of the safest heart procedures with low complication and mortality rates. Thus, at least from a medical perspective the “stone cold heart” of song and literature is left to the poets and the composers.

*Summer and Smoke* will be discussed further in this document but suffice to mention at this juncture; in this most poignant moment in Williams’s play, John Buchanan kneels at the feet of Alma Winemiller, places her hands on his face, and lowers his head to her lap. In his moment of renewed spirituality John says, “Eternity and Ms. Alma have such cool hands.” (Williams 1947: 57) Williams would seem to agree. He notes that “...the attitude suggests a stone Pieta.”

(Williams 1947: 57) Miss Alma, this living “statue” of the Virgin Mary, starts out with a stone heart herself. It is only through the trauma experienced through her recognition of the loss of her true spiritual love that the stone heart melts, that Alma recognizes her true soul. This dissertation will attempt to show that, as demonstrated in *Summer in Smoke*, Williams can adapt to the change in the persona of the individual character he becomes, while inserting himself into the immediate environment of the composition. The playwright enters the story, the characters are the playwright.

## Introduction to Thesis

“Is it right or is it not right or wrong for a playwright to put his persona into his work? My answer is: 'What else can he do? '—I mean the very root-necessity of all creative work is to express those things most involved in his experience.” (Williams 2000: 711)

“Miss Alma Winemiller may very well be the best female portrait I have drawn in a play. She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being, and it was no effort to put her on paper.” (Williams 1975: 109)

Tennessee Williams acknowledged that he never developed a character that did not contain “...some quality of his own personality elaborated and developed for theatrical purposes.” (Tischler 1997: 156)

Williams, perhaps more than any other playwright of his generation, wrote passionately of his heroines. Williams’s androgynous psyche allowed him to draw deep emotionality for the women he explored. Amanda, Blanche, Alma, Sissy, Maggie, Hannah, Candy and so many others, considered by Williams scholars to represent moments of deep emotional crisis in Williams’s life. At one moment women are objects of great love and empathy, only to be scorned and derided in another. Initially it was thought by this writer that through the lens of Gender Fluidity, it could be shown that Tennessee Williams, raised from infancy within a dysfunctional family environment, formed emotional and psychologic, protective, neurotic defenses that led to artistry which enabled him to create genuine, emotionally complicated female and male characters.

This work will attempt to explain this argument through the form of the expressionistic writing Williams used to counter the environmental taboos of his world. His drama is based on his own anguished life. Male/female, attraction/conflict, masculine/feminine identities, and

love/hate family conflicts are all motivating factors for this American playwright's vast body of work.

## **Chapter Synopsis**

### **Chapter One: Biography**

This first chapter covers the life of Thomas Lanier Williams III, from infancy, through his education, early successes and failures, and on into his exploration of psychological motivations through his work with noted Freudian psychologist Lawrence Kubie. Discussion includes a view of Williams's tumultuous early childhood, influenced, on the one hand, by a philosophically Puritan mother, and on the other hand by a hard-living, Cavalier father, and how these dual philosophic opposites may have affected Williams's gender identification.

### **Chapter Two: Character Development through Androgyne/Genderfluidity**

An explanation of Genderfluidity and Androgyne and how Williams creates character through his ability to create meaningful male and female characters. *Summer and Smoke*, *Something Unspoken*, and *And Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens* are discussed as well as the specific character couples of Blanche and Stanley from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and John and Alma from *Summer and Smoke*.

### **Chapter Three: Expressionism in Williams's American Theatre**

Chapter three discusses Williams's expressionistic writing as a means of bringing truth to American theatre. Over time his form became increasingly apocalyptic as demonstrated both in early and later writings. Also discussed is Williams's genderfluidity in specific plays and how he relates this androgyny to his deepening relationship with his beloved sister Rose.

### **Chapter Four: Spirit and the Flesh**



A look at Williams's deepening philosophy of life as he aged, as well as an exploration of the economy of homosexuality in the Southern, Plantation Society. A discussion of mendacity and alcoholism amidst intimations of homosexuality make up the milieu of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

### **Chapter Five: A Last Late Look at William's Experimental Apocalyptic Expressionism**

Williams apocalyptic tryptic, *Three Plays for a Lyric Theatre* demonstrate his belief in the progressive declivity of humanity. *The Youthfully Departed*, *Now the Cats with the Jeweled Claws*, and *A Cavalier for Milady* relate the rapidly declining concept of societal propriety as greed, avarice, and violence increase.

### **Chapter Six: Music as a Methodology Toward Truth in the Literary Canon of Tennessee Williams**

This last chapter relates to Williams's embrace of music in both his life and his works. Music was high on the list of the precepts of "Plastic Theatre," Tennessee's mantra of theatrical engagement. It utilizes all tools of expressionistic theatre, including but not limited to, lighting, sound, music, movement, sets, and props, all elements that help to elevate and revitalize a theatre that had stagnated through the over reliance on realism.

## Chapter 1 Biography

### 1.1 A Catastrophe of Success

My greatest affliction...is perhaps the major theme of my writings, the affliction of loneliness that follows me like a shadow, a very ponderous shadow too heavy to drag after me all of my days and nights. (Williams 1975: 99)

Edwina Estelle Dakin was the daughter of an Episcopal minister, who although a carefree young woman who delighted in a social life of card and garden parties, dances and cotillions, music and theatre events, was at heart "...the actress playing the role of coquette." (Leverich 1995: 23) Underneath, she was a resolute puritan ensuring that her behavior would always be beyond reproach. "Any "overzealous" young man with excited ideas would be quickly reminded that Miss Dakin was very much the minister's and her mother's daughter. She was the kind whom a young man would like to conquer but not marry. And she was the kind who might have become a reluctant virgin had not fate intervened and had she not persisted in her determination to get married." (Leverich 1995: 25)



Figure 1 Edwina Dakin.

Cornelius Coffin Williams was a young gentleman whose family was among the so called Four Hundred of Knoxville, a city calling itself “Queen City of the Mountains,” one that was moving rapidly into the twentieth century, and no longer a part of the agrarian society of the

“Old South.” Although legally dry, there was no lack of liquor in the clubs and homes of those with money and an educated thirst. Cornelius was well educated in this respect by the time he met Edwina, although this facet of his education would remain unknown to her for some time (Leverich 1995: 38)



Figure 2 Cornelius Williams.

The first eighteen months of Edwina Estelle Dakin and Cornelius Coffin Williams’s marriage were idealistic and very happy. This loving atmosphere began to change with Edwina’s announcement of her first pregnancy. On November 19, 1909, Edwina gave birth to Rose

Isabelle Williams, a lovely, cheerful baby girl. Cornelius was delighted, regarding his daughter as a personal accomplishment and something to be proud of and to brag about with co-workers. “After the birth of Rose, Edwina became less interested in sex, and would increasingly resist her husband’s advances, which, perhaps, in regard to his ego, he would describe as coyness, considering her behavior a challenge to his masculinity.” (Leverich 1995: 42)

On March 26, 1911, Thomas Lanier Williams was born. Cornelius’s reaction to a male heir was both proud and suspicious. Perhaps because of Edwina’s increasingly negative responses to Cornelius’s amorous advances, he became concerned about parentage, being suspicious of an old boyfriend of Edwina’s.



Figure 3 Rose, Edwina, and Tom Williams.

It would become obvious relatively soon that Cornelius's jealousy was caused mainly by Edwina's dotting affection for baby Tom. Cornelius was both proud and suspicious of his first son. Jealous over Edwina's dotting affection for baby Tom, she became more mother to the baby than wife to him. Cornelius, early on, set the pattern of his relationship with Tom, suggesting to his small daughter "...we really do not think much of the new baby, do we?" (Leverich 1995: 42) He added the opinion that the "...infant was not good for much." (Leverich 1995: 42) Even sister Rose demonstrated jealousy, caused by the attention her mother was giving to her baby brother. The new addition had become an intruder who had taken the love and devotion she felt belonged to her

However, as Tom and Rose Williams grew older, with only fourteen months difference between the two, the brother/sister relationship turned from jealousy to one of inseparability. Tom adored and was enchanted with Rose's beauty and vivacity. She took pride in imparting her superior knowledge to her little brother, who looked up to her in every way. They grew to look so much alike as to be mistaken for twins. Although Rose's childhood imagination mostly involved her dolls and other games of her own invention, Tom, from the very start was fascinated and curious about all she showed him. Years later Williams continued to detail the closeness of the two. He extolled their happiness together as children, sailing paper boats in the bathtub, cutting paper dolls, playing with pets, and most interestingly, collecting "...bits of colored glass that were diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds." (Leverich 1995: 43) It became apparent that there was great love taking root that would entwine brother and sister for the rest of their lives, a love that would, through the machinations of health and welfare, be cemented for a lifetime by fear, self-loathing, and emotional instability.

Williams regarded the first eight years of childhood living in Mississippi as the most joyously innocent period of his life. With their father away on business a great deal of the time, the young family was living with Tom's beloved grandparents, referred to as "Grand" and "Grandfads" Dakin. They were two elderly, loving, and supportive people, whose largesse, particularly that of Grandmother Rosina, was a blessing to the young family. Until the time of her death, she provided her grandson a few dollars sewed into clothing sent as gifts; money, at times her grandson sorely needed.

Walter Dakin, an Episcopal minister, established within young Tom an inner sense of Puritanism, which was strengthened significantly by the Reverend's daughter, and Williams's mother, Edwina. It was, however, the extensive rectory library with its many books that occupied young Tom, and influenced so much of the future playwright's adolescent life.

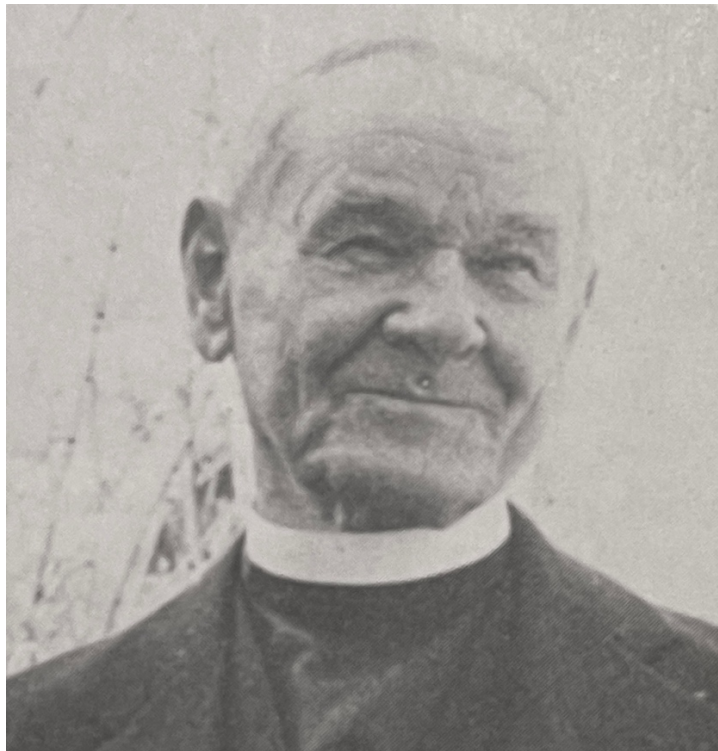


Figure 4 "Grandfads" Dakin.

“Grandfads” Dakin, a childhood sobriquet that Rose would continue to use as an endearment long after childhood, had a free ranging intellect and love of books, particularly Edgar Allen Poe, Shakespeare, melodrama and the macabre. The last two items would especially leave their imprint on Tom. “It was at this early impressionistic age immersed in his grandfather’s well-stocked library, that young Tom formed much of his poetic styling. Among his earliest readings were the “Lady of Shalott,” the novels of Sir Walter Scott, the expressionistic poetry of Coleridge and Edgar Allen Poe, as well as the “flowery style” of women poets such as Sara Teasdale and Edna Vincent Millay.” (Tischler 1997: 149) Within the “Frivolous Version” of a 1944 essay “Preface to my Poems” Williams explained that he had “...begun to write verse at about the time of puberty, and that one of my earliest successes was the poem ‘An apostrophe to death’ The sextet as written:

Rudely you seized and broke proud Sappho’s lyre  
 Barret and Wylie went your songless way.  
 You do not care what hecatomb of fire  
 is split when shattering the urn of clay.  
 Yet, death, I’ll pardon all you took away  
 While still you spare me---glorious Millay (Bak 2009: 11)

This verse not only displays the lighter side of young Tom’s writing disposition, while at the same time displaying his ability to imitate, but also highlights his wit and ability to marry high verse with a comedic air.

Growing up, having his grandfather’s rectory so much to himself during these formative years, while regularly attending church and Sunday School, Tom became enthralled with the meaning and love of God, and a sense of dread at the possibility of a Judgement Day. “Edwina, having been brought up in the same religious atmosphere, added her authority as Tom’s mother with the admonishment “God will punish you” whenever Tom behaved badly.” (Leverich 1995: 37)



This so called “puritan” strain would, for much of his adult life, become the gentler Dakin side of his nature, in direct conflict with a side born of the “wild” cavalier disposition of the Williams family, especially that of his father. As a child Tom witnessed this brute side in his father and it terrified him. At times Cornelius voice could be boisterous and jovial, although most other times it was harsh, sometimes “sounding like thunder.” To a youngster, it sounded huge, booming, far from benign. “You wanted to shrink away from it, hide yourself.” (Leverich 1995: 38) Later Tennessee Williams would state that this trait of his father was the origin of the strength he needed to survive. It may have been during such periods, when Williams, as a result of such early tumultuous emotional experiences, created characters which demonstrated a side of his personality that at times of great stress could be considered sadomasochistic. “The very same patriarchal attitudes that so terrified him as a boy would revisit the elder Williams as his personality, affected by age, alcohol and increasing drug ingestion became increasingly paranoid, and vituperative, lashing out occasionally at one person after another, alienating the few remaining friends and businesspeople, isolating him from even those who loved him.” (Tischler 2000: 155)

In 1916, at age five, Tom contracted diphtheria, which almost took his life. Day and night Edwina nursed her sick youngster. A significant complication related to diphtheria left him unable to walk, requiring a long period of Tom being bedridden. Later in life, Williams reflected that the illness had changed his nature as significantly as it had changed his health. “Prior to illness, I had been a little boy with a robust, aggressive bullying nature.” (Leverich 1995: 11) After the health crisis he became “...a decided hybrid,” (Leverich 1995: 12) different from the Williams cavalier family line of frontiersmen/heroes of east Tennessee. In its aftermath, Tom was left with difficulty walking, eventually being brought back to better health by round the

clock care provided him by his grandparents and Edwina. Williams wrote some years later: “Edwina’s overly solicitous attention planted in me the makings of a sissy, much to my father’s discontent.” (Williams 1972: 12)

Edwina saved Tom’s life, and she never let him forget it. The ultimate effect of the ailment left both Williams and Edwina emotionally entwined, turning Tom’s boyhood energies in upon himself, toward an interior life that became his very private world. But this mother/son relationship had a more immediate and perhaps sinister foretelling. Edwina’s added attention to Tom’s smallest discomforts, could well have created a psychological imprint on the growing boy’s psyche wherein he would become more preoccupied with his own body and subsequent illnesses that followed, further seeding what was to become lifelong hypochondria.



Figure 5 Cornelius, Tom, and Edwina Williams.

Shortly after Tom's birth, another wonderful influence entered the lives of Rose and Tom in the person of a nurse they called Ozzie, described by Williams as "...our Negro nurse, as warm and black as a moonless Mississippi night, [who] would lean over our bed, telling in a low, rich voice, her amazing tales about foxes and bears and rabbits and wolves that behave like human beings." (Leverich 1995: 43) Unfortunately, Ozzie was to become another deep trauma in young Tom's life, leaving him with a lasting burden of guilt and shame. Shortly before Ozzie left on her annual trip home, during the summer of 1916, Tom, angered and in a fit of childish temper, had called her "a big black nigger." (Leverich 1995: 43) Ozzie never returned to the Williams household, and despite Edwina's attempt to ease Tom's mind, the incident was "...burned into his conscious..." (Leverich 1995: 43) for the rest of his life, influencing his deepening respect for Black race and culture. She too, would be remembered in Williams's writings long after she disappeared from the Williams home.



Figure 6 Tom and Rose with Ozzie, Edwina, and Rosina.

Edwina literally devoted her daily waking existence to her young son. Cornelius, feeling himself increasingly marginalized by his wife's progressive lack of attention to him, spent more and more time away from home, seeking relations with fellow business associates, other woman, gambling, and alcohol as reprieves from the stultification of his marriage. When home he terrorized the family with his temper, mostly aimed at his wife, while berating his son's lack of interest in sports and other manly endeavors. He would continuously refer to Tom as "Miss Nancy." (Leverich 1995: 53)

When Tom turned twelve, Edwina gave him a secondhand typewriter. From that old machine issued a steady stream of stories, poems, letters, and various school contest entries. One such school assignment was to select a picture on the classroom wall and write about it. He chose the Lady of Shalott, a Tennyson heroine, depicting her floating down a river. His instructor directed him to read his essay to the class, resulting in a very good reception. From that moment, he said, "...I knew I was going to be a writer." (Leverich 1995: 64)

Thirteen-year-old Tom Williams's first published writing appeared in *The Junior Life*, the bi-weekly newspaper of his Junior High School in St Louis. The school, Blewitt Junior High, was "...among the most innovative schools in the country." (Leverich 1995: 64) Choosing "Classical" as his planned curriculum included the study of art, choral music, Latin, English composition and publishing, areas of study which would prepare him well for life as a writer.

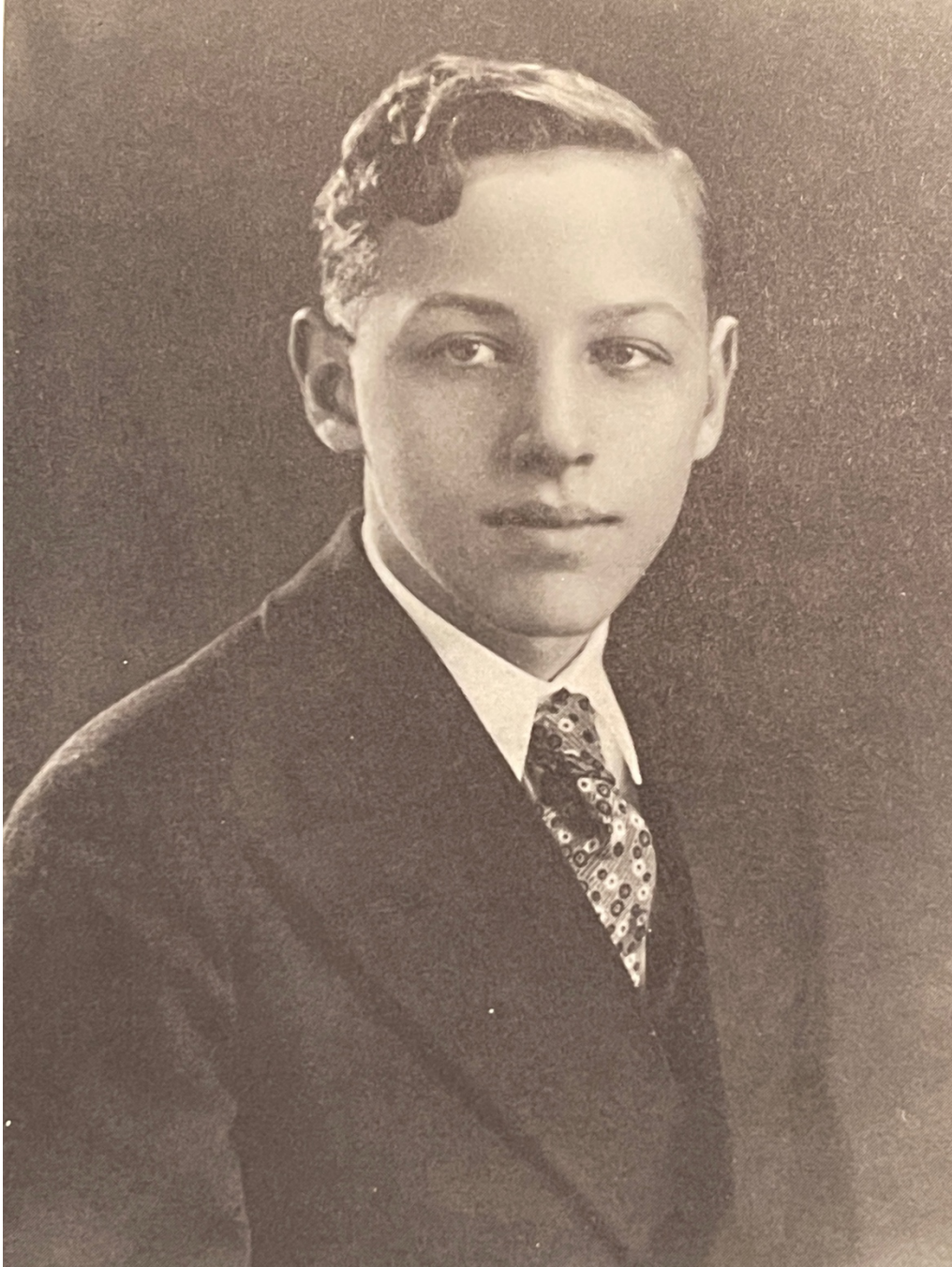


Figure 7 Tom Williams,. Blewitt Junior High School photo.

His course in publishing led to the story named “Isolated,” which appeared in the November 1924 issue of *The Junior Life*. It relates, in the first person, how the author fell asleep

while fishing on an island named White Fan Island. He awakens to the noise of the river in flood “...changed into a roaring torrent of brown eddies.” (Kolin in Bray 1988: 35) The author is eventually rescued by searchers who are reclaiming dead bodies. They illuminate the flood with torches as the water inundates his sanctuary. “As we rowed back to the mainland, the waves washed over the last hillock of my erstwhile refuge.” (Kolin in Bray 1988: 36)

From 1929 to 1932 Williams attended the University of Missouri, where he enrolled in journalism classes. Although he found schoolwork assignments boring it was not long before he was entering his poetry, essays, stories, and plays in writing contests, hoping to earn extra money. His first play to be submitted for a contest was *Beauty is the Word* (1930), followed in 1932 by *Hot Milk at Three in the Morning*.

Cornelius grew dissatisfied with his son’s progress in his studies at Missouri and, embarrassed that Tom had failed ROTC, he pulled Tom out of school, refusing to pay any further tuition for what he deemed a waste of time and money. He arranged for Tom to work at the International Shoe Company factory in St. Louis where Cornelius was district manager. Tom’s intense dislike of his-nine-to-five routine drove him to write even more than before, at moments escaping to the roof or writing poems on the backs of shoe boxes. He set himself a goal of producing a story a week, writing on weekends, often late into the night. Edwina recalled his intensity:

Tom would go to his room with black coffee and cigarettes, and I would hear the typewriter clicking away at night in the silent house. Some mornings when I walked in to wake him for work, I would find him sprawled fully dressed across the bed, too tired to remove his clothes. (Leverich 1995: 135)

Overworked, unhappy, and lacking any success with his writings, Tom suffered a nervous breakdown by his twenty fourth birthday. The illness proved to be beneficial for Tom. He was now free of the daily misery of working at his father's shoe factory.

On July 12, 1935, the event that may have presaged Williams's future took place. His first collaborative play, *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!* was performed in a friend's back yard in Memphis, by a local theatre group, the Rose Arbor players. The response thrilled the young theatre student. William wrote. "The laughter...enchanted me. Then and there the theatre and I found each other for the better and for worse. I know it's the only thing that saved my life."

(Williams 1975: 42)

In 1936 Tom Williams enrolled at Washington University in St Louis where he wrote the play *Me, Vashya* (1937).



Figure 8 Tom front row far left. University of Washington

By 1938 he had moved on to the University of Iowa, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. He hoped to remain at the University as a graduate student, but his application was turned down. He then sought, unsuccessfully, to obtain a Works Progress Administration (WPA) theatre project, when he found that his theatre company, Mummers Theatre Associates, had disbanded and his school friends were moving on to graduate school. To make matters almost unbearable, Cornelius referred to him as a parasite whose best chance to make something of himself would be to be drafted into the armed forces. Meanwhile his beloved sister Rose had been institutionalized for her radical behavior. Williams decided he could no longer live at home. Rose's psychological instability terrified him into wondering how her illness might portend his own future psychological incapacity. Within these parameters of paranoia, Williams believed only his exhaustive passion for daily writing could salvage his future. Then on September 1, 1938, he read the news story that would offer him his emotional ticket out. In August of 1938, at the state prison in Holmesburg, Pennsylvania, several prisoners were cooked to death in their cells, as a retaliation for a hunger strike. The brutality of this story inspired what became the play *Not About Nightingales*. Williams looked toward theatre as the frontier that held the promise of setting him free, and how interesting that it was a play about prison that offered him this freedom. His concentrated work ethic built an ever-growing arsenal of one act and full-length plays.

On March 20, 1939, Tom Williams was notified that he had been awarded a special \$100 prize by the Group Theatre judges in New York, for three of his plays in a collection entitled *American Blues*. One of the judges, Molly Day Thatcher, wife of the director Elia Kazan, was impressed enough with Tom's work that she enlisted her friend and theatrical agent Audrey Wood to communicate with Williams. Thus began a dynamic agent/client relationship, bordering



on a mother/son bond, that lasted thirty-one years until, "...in a drug-alcohol induced rage, he fired Ms. Wood at the 1971 stage opening of his play *Out Cry*." (Lahr 2014: 512)

On Easter Sunday, 1939, buoyed by his Group Theatre award, and in what he called "...manic elation..." (Leverich 1995: 301) he penned a new positive sense of himself.

My next play will be simple, direct, and terrible---a picture of my own heart. There will be no artifice in it. I will speak the truth as I see it--- distort as I see distortion---be wild as I am wild---tender as I am tender---mad as I am mad---passionate as I am passionate. It will be myself without concealment or evasion and with a fearless unashamed frontal assault upon life that will leave no room for trepidation---a passionate denial of shame and a cry for beauty. (Leverich 1995: 301)

At this moment of triumph, his first real recognition as a writer of substance, Williams wrote a manifesto for all the plays, stories, and poetry to follow. This new positive sense of himself allowed him a feeling of accomplishment and hope for the future. He adopted the name Tennessee. He was no longer Tom, hoping, as he dropped his given name, that he would also leave behind the intense and terrifying emotional inner torments, what he called his "blue devils," that had haunted and tormented him the first twenty-eight years of life.

Though Rose acted as young Tom's salvation in his early childhood, when she grew into her teenage years, her character changed. Her behavior became disturbing and erratic, with increasingly sexual overtones that were both shocking to Edwina and Cornelius and embarrassing and terrifying to Tom. Rose was eventually institutionalized and given insulin shock therapy with little positive affect. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, she was subjected in 1943 to a pre-frontal lobotomy. The procedure succeeded in producing in Rose a calmer demeanor, but as Williams sadly noted, inwardly, the dynamic, fun personality with whom he spent so many joyous hours, was obliterated. Williams was devastated and carried great shame and guilt for the remainder of his life. He had been shocked and horrified, and viewed her illness

as a portent to what he might experience in his own future. He devoted the remainder of his life to her care, and she became a vital component in many his plays, poems, and stories.

In 1943, while in the employ of MGM in Hollywood, a position arranged for him by Audrey Wood, Tennessee Williams began work on a play entitled *The Gentlemen Caller*, which later became *The Glass Menagerie*. It opened on Broadway on March 31, 1945 with Laurette Taylor in the role of Amanda Wingfield. Within two weeks of the opening, *The Glass Menagerie* was awarded the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as the year's best play.

*The Glass Menagerie* is intensely autobiographical. The family on stage mirrors Williams's own life, during an important moment in the playwright's early adult years, a time when Tennessee lived in St. Louis. Williams detested the city for its pollution, its poverty, and its sense of darkness from which people "...lost belief in everything but loss." (Lahr 2014: 35) While writing *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams described himself to a close friend as "...both a wild animal and a bundle of emotional dynamite." (Lahr 2014: 35) Williams's romance with the theatre allowed him to get his insides out and to act out the warring fragments of family madness to which he had been an understudy all his life. The anxieties and troubles affecting the Wingfield family are played out against the social and political upheaval of the Great Depression and the encroaching World War. (Lahr 2014: 35)

From the mid 1940's to the early sixties, a period when Williams realized his greatest success, the playwright also grew increasingly unstable emotionally. Theatrical work is drenched in stress, whether in pre-production dealing with casts and directors, or after the show has been mounted, in the form of less than enthusiastic reviews, particularly from out-of-town critics. The work required to get a show onto its feet, preview it on the road, before making the move into New York, with the end goal of a Broadway run, left Williams devastated emotionally,

psychically bruised. Rewrites weren't Williams's only trial. His personal problems involving his domestic partners, much of the time caused by Williams's unwillingness to remain faithful, bled into his professional life as well.

Most grievous to Williams were critical references made to his integrity as an artist. In 1955 after two poorly received Broadway productions, Williams needed a hit. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* would be that success, winning both The Drama Critic's Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize, but at a price that eventually endangered the working relationship between Williams and his favorite director, Elia Kazan. This break resulted in debates in the press and on the street. Williams was accused of selling out his artistic soul for commercial success, by allowing Kazan to talk him into reworking the third act of *Cat*. In Williams's original act two Big Daddy leaves the stage never to reappear. Instead, he is heard crying out in pain off-stage in the final act. In the revised third act, the Broadway version, Kazan forced Williams to bring Big Daddy back on stage in order to confirm Maggie's supposed pregnancy, a revision that changed Williams's original disposition concerning the relationship between Big Daddy's daughter-in-law Maggie and her estranged husband, Big Daddy's son, Brick.

Although the two men did work again, the commercial success vs. artistic truth argument initiated a slow but inevitable change in the Williams-Kazan collaboration that would end in 1959 with *Sweet Bird of Youth*.



Figure 9 Frank Merlo and Tennessee Williams.

For fourteen years, from 1948 when they began living together, to September of 1962 when the two men separated, Frank Merlo was one of Williams's closest and dearest friends, as well as his sexual partner. The two men were opposites attracting. Williams, being nomadic, was driven by his work. Merlo provided constancy, stability, and security for Williams. Frank was friend, lover, amanuensis, and protector. When he wrote *The Rose Tattoo* and *Camino Real* (1953) the relationship was at its happiest. However, throughout this long relationship there were periods of tension that would see the two men part for lengths of time. Merlo wanted a stable, monogamous life, Williams, in his impetuosity, was disinclined to give up his promiscuity.

Shortly after the death of his father in 1957, Williams began psychotherapy with Dr. Lawrence Kubie, a noted New York psychiatrist. Among a number of restrictions pushed on Williams by the physician, one was to discontinue his homosexuality and thus his relationship with Merlo. At the same time, Williams became increasingly dependent on alcohol and prescription drugs prescribed by Dr. Max Jacobson, a well-known “society physician” known by the nickname Dr. Feelgood. These medications only increased Williams’s paranoia and promiscuous behavior. This in turn led to angry, violent reactions against Williams by Merlo, who in 1961 broke their relationship. About that time, Merlo had begun to show signs of declining health, and shortly thereafter was diagnosed with lung cancer. In September of 1963 he died at Memorial Hospital in New York City. Williams, ridden with guilt over his former companion’s death, fell into a deep cycle of depression and emotional self-destruction. He would later allude to the following decade as his “stoned age.” Although much lauded late work by Williams lay ahead, from Merlo’s loss to his own death in 1983, Williams, without the stability afforded by Merlo, appeared at ever increasing moments incapable of coherence in both his writing and his life.

## 1.2 The Making of a Playwright:



**HIRSCHFELD**  
© Al Hirschfeld Foundation

Figure 10 Hershfeld caricature

The color, the grace and levitation, the structural pattern in motion, the quick interplay of live beings, suspended like fitful lightning in a cloud, these things are the play, not words on paper, nor thoughts and ideas of an author, those shabby things snatched off the off-basement counters at Gimbel's. (Williams 1958: x)

From the beginning of his career, Tennessee Williams engaged in the formulation of a dramaturgy for his theatre. His dramatic texts were written as a series of notations, what he

referred to as a score, similar to that set down by a composer. Williams rejected the theatre of his day, calling it incomplete in its execution, basing this rejection on his belief in the surrealist nature of poetic expression. Not unlike Wagner, Williams believed that dramatic content is suprarational, and thus extra-verbal in form. His concept of Plastic Theatre deals not just with the rational planes of experience but with the suggestion of an ambiguous sense of meaning both above and below what he referred to as "...accepted levels of reason." (Jackson 1966: 89)

Williams's writings, not just his plays, but his poetry, short stories, and novel, attempt to "...project onto a "stage" his vision of the entire complex of human experience, as defined years earlier by Wagner as reality that is unutterable." (Jackson 1966: 89)

Tennessee Williams treated art as the supreme reality and life as the ultimate illusion. He put so much of his daily existence into his art that very little was left for his life. Jung describes such an individual as

"[a] creative person (the tragic poet) is a duality or a synthesis of contradictory qualities. As an artist he is "man" in a higher sense---he is "collective man," a vehicle and mold of the unconscious psychic life of mankind... prevailed upon by the Unconscious, the mysterious god within him so that ideas flow to him---he knows not whence." (Jung 1953: 57)

Williams crafted a life so illusionary, so artful that those who knew him well, might recognize the playwright in the characters presented in his writings. Friends and enemies, relatives and strangers are all found, at one time or another, taking part in the drama that Williams creates of his life. Thus, as suggested by Marlon B. Ross, since Williams dramatizes his life and since all the people and events that constitute his daily existence are found to take part in the drama, it is impossible to discern where drama leaves off and life begins.

Tennessee Williams was born to be a visionary. As he wandered through life, he gathered ideas, themes, images, phrases all the while developing colorful, romantic shapes and designs onto the realism of his early literary creations. Williams considered himself first and foremost a poet. He lived his life as a peripatetic fugitive who wandered from place to place, exploring, discovering his place in the world, honing a vocation in art, transforming and acquiring substance and experience, shaping artistic visions. His many travels took him through the heartland of America as well as distant European cities, where he gathered ideas, facades, motives, impressions all to be woven into colorful romantic patterns of "...grand designs and vivid contrasts." (Tischler 1997: 147)

Williams was quintessentially American, with a lineage of early settlers, state and government politicians and judges, continental army officers, and two illustrious American poets Tristram Coffin and Sidney Lanier. However, Williams never saw himself "...a typical pragmatic American, but rather as the archetypal outsider, A poet in a practical world. A homosexual in a heterosexual society." (Tischler 1997: 147)

Williams, as an American, endeavored distinctively "...to build a theatrical language specifically emphasizing an American method, characterized by its own distinctive style of directing, acting, staging, design and lighting." (Jackson 1966: 88) This American methodology developed through the pattern of American arts and letters of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "...the architectural forms of American painters, sculptors, and architects, writings of such essayists as Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Henry Thoreau, the fiction of Hawthorne, Melville and Poe, with none more influential than the poetic imagery of Walt Whitman." (Jackson 1966: 193)



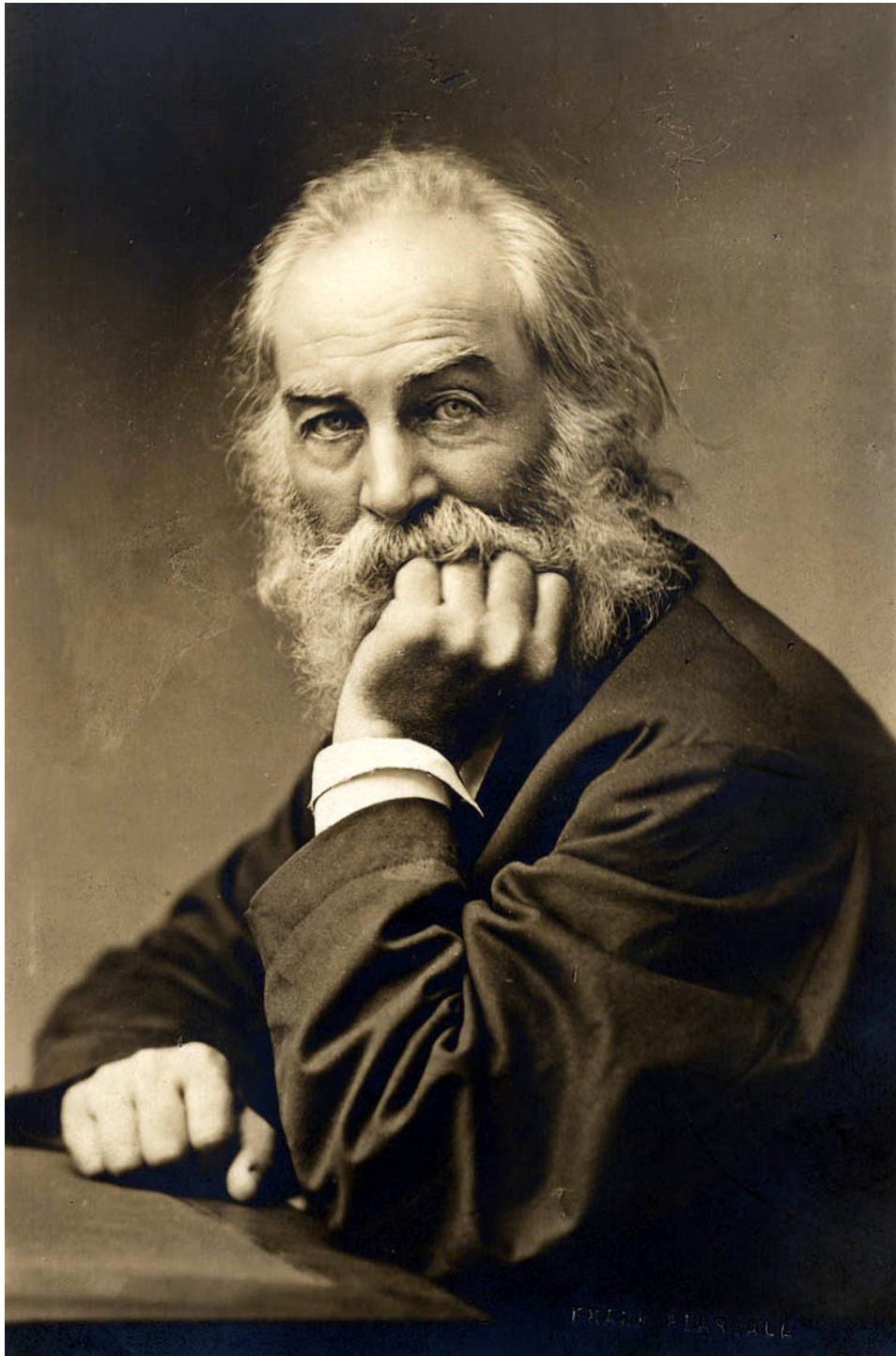


Figure 11 Walt Whitman.

Whitman wrote in the 1885 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem, a creation closely imitative of nature...a dynamic form in which the search for individual identity is the defining motif in what is a massive work of art.” (Whitman 1982: 5) As such Whitman “anticipated” American life as the primary mode of art, and the role of the poet as the benefactor to the greater American good. “The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest poetical nature.” (Whitman 1982) As for the poet in this environment Whitman states, “the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. Obedience does not master him, he masters it.” (Whitman 1982: 8)

In his short story entitled *The Poet*, Williams interprets Whitman’s definition of a poet:

The poet distilled his own liquor and...whenever fatigue overtook him he would stop at some lonely point and raise the flask to his lips...the world would change...and a great vitality would surge and break as a limitless ocean through him...his senses would combine in a single vast ray of perception which blinded him to lesser phenomena. ...[He] felt that his stories...had been little more than preliminary exercises to some really great outpouring which might be more of a plastic than verbal creation. (Williams 1985: 246)

Williams wrote eloquently, in this 1948 short story, of his own philosophic persona.

From this writer’s perspective the story is as close to the psychological expressionism of Tennessee Williams as any biography written. Within the structure of the story, one finds Jung’s theory of image-making, that is, his concept of primordial and archaic forms written in the collective unconscious, the archetypes. Vital to Williams may be the poetic ambiguity embodied in Jung’s theory of images. Jung wrote of the poetic types:

The great problems of life...are always related to the primordial images of the collective unconsciousness... (balancing or compensating factors which correspond with the problems life presents in actuality)...deposits representing the accumulated experience of thousands of years of struggle for adaptation and existence...Every great experience in life, every profound conflict, evokes these images and brings them to inner perception;...they become accessible to consciousness only in the presence of that degree

of self-awareness and power of understanding which enables a man to think what he experiences instead of just living it blindly. (Jung 1971: 271)

These images, "...archetypes within the collective unconscious, provided Williams with a poetic symbolic structure for human experience within the entire pattern of Western historical, cultural, social, political, and intellectual life." (Jackson 1966: 65) Williams found in the aesthetic view of experience in Jungian psychology hope of individual and societal reconciliation and salvation. He spelled these emotions out critically in "The Poet". In the story Williams proclaimed to be his own creed as an artist. Like the character of the story, Williams was a born romantic, stating "...his existence was one of benevolent anarchy." (Williams 1985: 246)

In a document referenced by Nancy Tischler in her essay entitled "Romantic Textures in Williams's Plays and Short Stories," she describes a statement Williams made to the press at the time *The Night of the Iguana* was premiering on Broadway. In it, the playwright referred to "...his "obsession" as being part of "the Visionary Company." (Tischler 1997: 148) He was referring to the fact that in *Iguana* and the play that followed, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* "...both contain characters who are poets." (Tischler 1997: 148) According to Williams, "...this was not planned, it just happened." (Tischler 1997: 148) Similarly, poets are found in *Suddenly Last Summer*, where the male protagonist, as the topic of "...discussion and violence..." (Tischler 1997: 148) is also a poet. "Continuing this line of reasoning Williams explained that 'obviously the archetype of the poet has become the obsessive figure, a leit-motif in my recent work,' and was likely so always, in that Tom Wingfield was a poet in *The Glass Menagerie*, as is Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending* through his guitar and singing." (Tischler 1997: 148)

### 1.3 The Role of Dr. Lawrence Kubie, 1957-1960 and the Psychological Aftermath

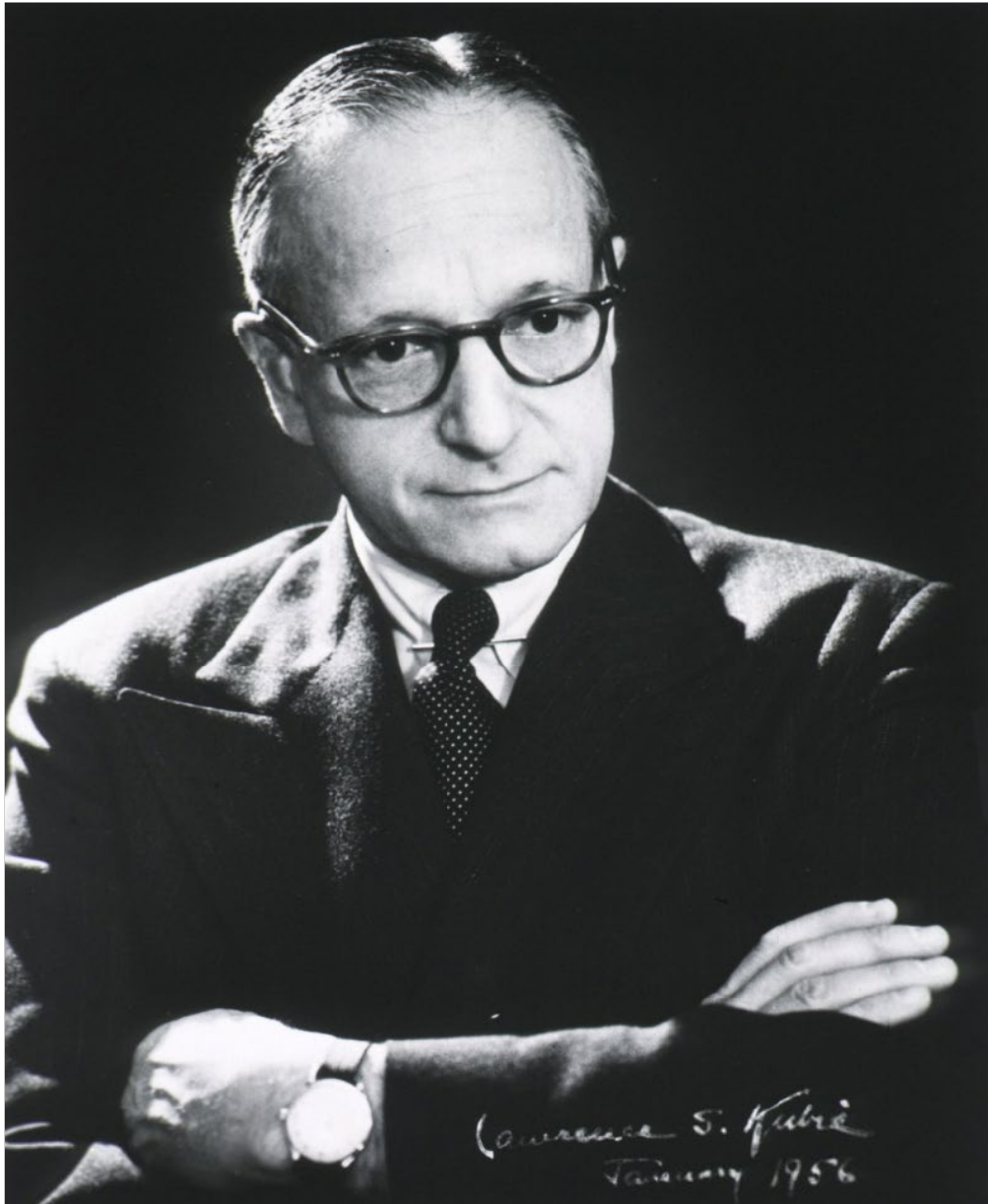


Figure 12 Lawrence Kubie.

For Kubie, Williams presented a true challenge. He considered Williams a borderline personality with tenacious addictive and depressive tendencies. This was compounded by the fact that his patient was already famous, wealthy, and considered a genius. Kubie put Williams through a long, strict program beginning with testing at Columbia University's Harkness

Pavilion, to be followed by a period of seclusion at Austin Riggs Center, a therapeutic community for “severely troubled” patients. During the year prescribed at the Austin Riggs Center, Williams was to give up his drinking, his homosexual life (particularly with his partner Frank Merlo), and most grievous for Williams, his writing. “I don’t think I can stand much of it...can do without the liquor and that’s undoubtedly a wise move, but—” (Williams 2006: 705) As for the scheduled Austin Riggs stay, Williams did initially plan to enter the facility, but he was spooked by the residents he witnessed there. “I took one look at the other patients and told Frank [Merlo] to carry my bags right back out to the car...Dr. Kubie is right in thinking I need some therapy of that kind to relieve the tensions that I have been living under, but I think it unnecessary for me to live in a house full of characters that appear to be more disturbed than myself.” (Thornton 2006: 706)

Williams did commit to other aspects of Kubie’s regimen, which included five 50-minute sessions a week with the analyst. Finding it hard to share his small apartment with Frank Merlo while under analysis, he took a second New York apartment on the upper West Side with a “...calming vista of the Hudson and the George Washington Bridge.” (Lahr 2014: 351) He wrote to Lady St. Just, “Analysis is very upsetting at first. You are forced to look at and examine things in yourself that you would choose not to, so it is necessary to have a retreat, a peaceful place to retire.” (Lahr 2014: 351) Despite his annoyance and initial misgivings, he was serious about his effort. In a note to Elia Kazan, he stated that he had “...painted a black picture of [him]self, concentrating on his negative points: “my suspicions, fears, jealousies, a sort of “mea culpa.”” (Lahr 2014: 352) He admitted that for the most part very little positive turned up, admitting that only “...envy, hate, anger, and so forth...” (Lahr 2014: 352) was openly revealed.

Regardless of the unpleasantness of his time with Kubie, it did alter one very important aspect of Williams's narrative which took the form of a change in his disposition towards his parents and how they manifested themselves in his plays, beginning with *Suddenly Last Summer*, and extending through his last writings. That change involved a reversal "...of his deep emotional hate toward his hateful father." (Lahr 2014: 352)

In a 1973 Playboy interview with C. Robert Jennings, Williams detailed his experience with Kubie, and how it related to both his immediate emotional crisis, and the change it wrought concerning his relationship with his father. "Kubie would imitate my father and scream at me --- to break doors down, you know. What he gave me was not forgettable. I actually learned to respect my father and now that he is dead, I love the old son of a bitch." (Devlin 2000: 245) The sessions with Kubie allowed Williams to appreciate that perhaps, behind the tyranny of Cornelius's anger was a punishing sense of resignation, a man exiled from those he ought to love and who ought to love him. Williams's poem entitled "Iron Man" imagines his father's "...strangled love." (Lahr 2014: 353)

We cringed at his anger,  
As sudden as steel,  
rapier-like,  
But did not feel

His wounds that could not  
Utter their need  
But bled in silence  
As martyrs bleed!

His rage over trifles,  
His bitter smile  
Were the things that we noticed,  
and yet all the while  
A frustrated heart  
Was beating there  
that wanted to love us  
But did not dare! (Lahr 2014: 353)

In a touchingly elegant and lovely essay “The Man in the Overstuffed Chair” written shortly after his analysis, Williams states:

A psychiatrist once said to me, you will begin to forgive the world when you’ve forgiven your father. I’m afraid it is true my father taught me to hate, but I know that he didn’t plan to, and terrible as it is to know how to hate, and to hate, I have forgiven him for it and for a great deal else. (Williams in Bak 2009: 104)

But the examination of his forbearers didn’t end there. “Sometimes I wonder if I have forgiven my mother for teaching me to expect more love from the world, more softness in it, than it could ever offer.” (Williams in Bak 2009: 104) The change in Williams’s perception of his father, resulted in a deep and somewhat dark reflection on his life with his mother Edwina and her “...legend as the put-upon family saint.” (Lahr 2014: 355). In an interview with Mike Wallace, Williams sought to demonstrate his serious attempt to reconsider his upbringing and the effect it likely had on his character. He explained to the interviewer his new understanding of what Kubie called “...infantile omnipotence,” (Lahr 2014: 355) an early condition present in babies where initially the newborn is able to achieve comfort and contentment by screaming in the cradle until tended to by mother. This leads to the child feeling omnipotent until such time when it discovers that its wailing no longer achieves the same response. It learns its world “...is less caring and forgiving, it misses the maternal comfort, and becomes outraged. From such angst neuroses develop, the root of most anger.” (Devlin 2000: 54)

Before his time with Kubie, Williams explored the Williams family dynamic in *The Glass Menagerie*. The play presented Edwina’s version of family life. After analysis, and with his new vision of parents, and of himself, a new and darker version of the Williams story emerged. This new view appeared in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Written in 1957, the year Cornelius

died, *Suddenly Last Summer* is the result of Kubie's encouragement of Williams to forgive his father and to acknowledge his repressed rage at his mother. Williams may also have been encouraged to "...displace onto Edwina some of the guilt he had been carrying within himself." (Williams 2011: 22)

Kubie's psychoanalysis allowed Williams to begin to come to terms with his mother, appreciating that her punishing passive-aggression contained as much unacknowledged hate as love, as much selfishness as selflessness. In a letter to Elia Kazan, Williams was able to express his comprehension of the degree of lethal, castrating power his mother demonstrated.

Only four feet eleven, she conquered my father who was six feet and drove him out of the house as soon as she received half of "Menagerie", allowed the State Hospital to perform one of the earliest lobotomies on Rose, and unconsciously managed to turn both her sons gay. (Lahr 2014: 356)

For Williams, writing also acted as a form of psychotherapy. His intensive therapeutic sessions with Kubie left Williams with the impression that his art might well have developed through his "madness."

As Nancy Tischler makes clear in her chapter on the *Two Character Play*, only through this playwright's works can his psychology be given consideration. The author is no longer available for a more exacting evaluation. Williams used his writing to explore the ideas of Freud and Jung. Likewise, in moments of creativity, Williams fit the definition of the Jungian artist:

The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him...as an artist he is "man" in a higher sense--he is "collective man," a vehicle and molder of the unconscious psychic life of mankind. (Jung 1971: 57)



As an author Williams purposely and explicitly used symbols and dreams in his writings, penning in his forward to *Camino Real*:

We all have in our conscious and unconscious minds a great vocabulary of images... as are our dreams; and a symbol in a play has only one legitimate purpose ... to say a thing more directly and simply and beautifully than it could be said in words. (Williams 1970: viii)

The concept of the artist as mad was part of the Romantic Tradition, dating all the way back to the time of Plato. As implied by Jung, many artists, philosophers, and psychologists have connected art with madness, and like Jung, truly believed that the actively creating artist was most likely in the throes of "...a kind of divine madness." (Tischler 2000: 156) Williams essentially agreed with this psychologic dictum. In a 1957 essay entitled "The World I live In," he presented, as a two-way discussion with himself, the harshness, coldness, violence and anger in his most recent works. He admitted that the increasing tension in his work exhibited a morbid condition "...verging on the psychotic...I guess my work has always been a kind of therapy for me." (Williams 2009: 83) For Williams, having witnessed the cure for his dear sister Rose, in the form of an invasive, brain-altering procedure, his "...resultant torment became an essential part of his creativity." (Tischler 2000: 156) In so many words he suggests his plays mirror his world. "I think, without planning to do so, I have followed the developing tension and anger and violence of the world and time I live in." (Williams 2009: 82)

As Williams experienced his sister slip into madness, he became concerned for his own sanity. He sought to comprehend what she must have been going through, wondering at her world as she saw it. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom, despite great effort, "...could not escape Laura," (Tischler 2000: 156) "Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me but I am more faithful than I intended to be..." (Williams 1970: 115) any more than he could abandon "...Rose,

whose tragedy became the source of his success.” (Tischler 2000: 156) A strong sense of guilt remained deep within his psyche late into his career, “...haunting him, forcing him to take her [Rose] into himself to experience her tragedy for himself.” (Tischler 2000: 156) The last play he wrote, *The One Exception* was a poem to Rose as she languished in a mental health facility. Rose Williams outlived her brother Tom by 13 years, dying at Phelps Memorial Hospital in Tarrytown, New York from cardiac arrest. Upon his death in 1983, Williams left the bulk of his fortune in a trust for Rose's care allowing her to live comfortably at the Bethel Methodist Home in Ossining, New York. Rose was 86.

## Chapter 2: Character Development through Androgyne/Genderfluidity

Miss Alma Winemiller may very well be the best female portrait I have drawn in a play. She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being, and it was no effort to put her on paper. (Williams 1975: 109)

Is it right or is it not right or wrong for a playwright to put his persona into his work? My answer is: What else can he do? I mean the very root-necessity of all creative work is to express those things most involved in his experience. (Williams 1972: 711)

Tennessee Williams acknowledged that he never developed a character that did not contain some quality of his own personality. Transforming human experience, while exploring human variability, was Williams's ultimate challenge, his very purpose for life. Male figures such as Chance Wayne, Kilroy and Don Quixote, Big Daddy and Brick, and off-stage homosexual figures like Allan Gray and Sebastian Venable are all "...mythic romantic anti-heroic protagonists exploring and mirroring dimensions of the artist himself." (Tischler 1998: 156)

Williams, perhaps more than any other playwright of his generation, wrote passionately about and for his heroines. Williams's androgynous psyche allowed him to draw deep connections with the women he explored. Amanda, Blanche, Alma, Sissy Goforth, Maggie, Hannah, Candy, and so many others are considered by William's scholars to represent moments of deep emotional crisis in Williams's life. At one moment women are objects of great love and empathy, only to be scorned and derided in another. Williams spoke of the value of having "...the female within him, allowing him to understand the feminine point of view. He believed his sensitivity was due in part to his own sexuality." (Tischler 2000: 157)

### 2.1 Coleridge/ Woolf: Queer/ Third Stage Feminine Theory

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that the "...creative mind is itself androgynous... thus allowing the artist to comprehend and explore a wider range of human experience." (Tischler

2000: 157) According to Virginia Woolf "...an androgynous mind finds objectivity in its relationship with "reality"; hence it is not concerned with itself but with its subject, independently. It is an approach of thinking that allows women and by implication men or vice versa, to write as themselves, still in a sexed body, but without the presence of prejudice that is linked to the body, to write without consciousness of sex is to see the piece of work for itself not as its author. In each of "us" two powers reside, one male, one female. It is when the two live in harmony with one another, when this fusion takes place, that the mind uses all its facilities." (Farwell 1973: 23)

Woolf and Coleridge share a common idea that an androgynous mind is present when one is working at the absence of self-consciousness, without impediment, and free from gender-specificity. Thus, "...a purely masculine mind cannot create any more than a mind that is purely feminine!" (Mann 1929: 55) Woolf's declaration acts as a balance between "...the poles of intuition and reason, subjectivity and objectivity, anima and animus, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and manic and depressive." (Farwell 1975: 434) This polarity is the most familiar of Woolf's distinctions between male and female principles.

When researching androgyny in the writings of Woolf and through Queer and Third stage feminist theory it occurred to me that through the lens of Transgender Fluidity one might consider that Tennessee Williams, raised from infancy within a dysfunctional family environment, may well have formed protective neurotic defenses, "doppelgangers" (the two competing aspects of the individual psyche, the animus and the shadow) as described through Jungian psychology, that led to artistry enabling him to create genuine emotionally complicated female and male characters, such as Candy Delany, a thirty-four-year-old transvestite in *And Tell Sad Stories of The Death of Queens*. In creating the diverse figures of Alma Winemiller in

*Summer and Smoke*, Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and the homosexual poet Sebastian Venable, in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Williams believed himself to be a double person, and his double vision as “something cloudy, something clear.” Certainly, Williams’s one act play *Something Unspoken*, described as a “feminist play,” might well support the concept of artistic genderfluidity.

Historically, feminists have argued that sex is biological, and gender socially constructed. With the deconstruction of essentialist group categories, feminist post-modernists and post-structuralists took issue with the assumption of collectivity, having certain traits that bind group categories together, arguing instead that “groups” have no single voice or vision of reality, but instead are “...made up of individuals with heterogenous experiences.” (Mann 2012: 214) Today’s thinking among many feminists is that both sex and gender are socially constructed. From a strictly physiologic perspective this is factual as demonstrated via biologic technologies demonstrating the variation of chromosomal patterns of human beings. In work reported by feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling based on her study of X and Y chromosomes, the chromosomal pattern of human bodies indicates that “...there are five rather than two sexes.” (Mann 2012: 5) *In Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* Fausto-Sterling writes:

Ultimately ...concepts of masculinity and femininity might overlap so completely as to render the very notion of gender difference irrelevant.” (Mann 2012: 101)

Genderfluidity is an actual physical, mental and emotional shift in how one interacts with the world. It is not just about being male or female, in fact, how one identifies can change every day or even every few hours. Genderfluid individuals have different gender identities at different times. Williams acknowledged freely his belief in the dual nature of the romantic artist, thus

being genderfluid may have enabled Williams to move between male and female character development at various moments of artistic creativity enabling strong, passionate feminine and male figures of mixed gender.

## 2.2 Case Studies of Gender Fluidity in Four Williams Plays

*A Streetcar Named Desire* vs *Summer and Smoke*: The Feminine, Blanche Dubois/Alma Winemiller. The Masculine, Stanley Kowalski/John Buchanan.

*Summer and Smoke* introduces Alma Winemiller as the spinster daughter of a small-town southern minister. Alma's state of mind at the time of her inception is a reflection of the forces, both emotional and physical, that were driving Williams at the time. Alma and Blanche are both women with similar Southern Agrarian backgrounds. Williams, like so many of his contemporaries, was a creature of his environment. His writings acted as a psychological release from the immense pressures he experienced daily. Williams's characters reflect those pressures, and their eventual determination echoes the lives of people surrounding the playwright.

Stress at critical moments overpowered Williams, adding to his insecurity and self-doubt. In the grueling months of 1946, as he wrestled with *Chart of Anatomy*, the precursor to *Summer and Smoke*. Severe emotional problems with his lover, Pancho Rodriguez, caused the playwright great consternation for his own wellbeing--physically, psychologically, and threatening his theatrical future. At the same time, Williams translated Pancho into the character Pepe Gonzales, the hot-tempered, pistol carrying father of Rosa. Thus, Pancho was fixed in theatrical posterity as the catalyst for change in the lives of Alma and John, the violent figure that shatters both of their worlds.

Williams's health suffered as well. Despite physician assurance to the contrary, persistent abdominal discomfort convinced him he had pancreatic cancer. His anxiety became such that he was advised to see a psychiatrist, finally admitting to his publicist Audrey Wood his symptoms were "...undoubtedly psychosomatic." (Lahr 2015: 114) "I get depressed about my work or something and feel as if I were about to give up the ghost." (Lahr 2015: 114) Most interesting was his feeling about Alma. "Miss Alma has been an ordeal. I have gotten so tired of her." (Lahr 2015: 114)

### ***2.2.1 A Streetcar Named Desire***

Elia Kazan, whose collaboration with the playwright stood as one of theatre's great theatrical partnerships, wrote, "...Tennessee Williams equals Blanche. He is Blanche. And Blanche is torn between a desire to preserve her tradition, which is her entity, her being, and her attraction to what is going to destroy traditions." (Kazan 1988: 351) Blanche, like Williams, longs for the safety of embrace and for release from terrible loneliness, "...a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in." (Kazan 1988: 341) The turmoil within her character, the drinking, promiscuity, her false, fear driven display of feminine charm is Williams's veiled admission of his own delirium. When she tells Mitch that she believes her words caused the suicide of her young husband:

There was "something different--- He was a boy, just a boy... there was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's although he was not the least bit effeminate looking---still---that thing was there... (Williams, 2012: 67)

Is Williams admitting that his strong, negative reaction to his sister's promiscuous sexuality the impetus that drove Rose into madness? Blanche exposed Allan's sexuality. Williams exposed Rose's fragility. He seems to be delving into his persistent fearful anxiety

concerning his own potential for slipping into madness, madness he believed entwined within the Williams's genetic code.

In Williams's original Streetcar stage directions Stanley's carnal charisma is evident:

He is a man of thirty-two or three who moves slowly not out of apathy but from extreme male assurance. He is medium height about five foot eight or nine and strongly, compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence or dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life...that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He seizes women up at a glance, with sexual classification, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them. (Lahr 2014: 123)



Figure 13 Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando, and Kim Hunter in the original Broadway cast of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.



Stanley represents the alter-Williams, the dark side of the playwright, the individual who roamed the streets of New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles, various Mexican towns, “cruising”, finding momentary lovers, being beaten by sailors and others with whom he would momentarily cohabit. Kazan, so aware of Williams’s personae wrote: “In *Streetcar*, Stanley exhibited a personification of William’s erotic ideal, a priapic vividness. From the earliest sketches of the play to the final draft, Williams had Stanley make his entrance carrying dead meat. Stanley is all about flesh and feast, both of which require killing. Stanley never forgets, he’s common! Bearing red meat home from the kill in the jungle.” (Lahr 2014: 123)



Figure 14 Elia Kazan, 1947.

John Lahr describes Williams's use of the tumultuous surroundings of the railroad flat in which Stanley and Stella live, where Blanche finds herself trapped in a new, foreign, and frightening society. It becomes a battleground that externalizes Williams's own internal war. Pancho's capricious intrusiveness, the absence of a calm environment, Williams's persistent fear of his own psychological collapse, his need for sexual dalliances despite a compulsion to continue the relationship with his temperamental and abusive partner, all the while being haunted by the ingrained memories of his early family life. The psychological effect of those early family memories, described in a scene between Stanley and Stella in which Stanley describes the intensity of their sexual relationship. "When we first met ...you thought I was common as dirt. How right you were, baby. I was common as dirt... I pulled you down off those columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going...weren't we happy together? Wasn't it all okay?" (Williams 1953: 80) At this critical moment in *Streetcar*, Kazan writes "[I] could hear Williams telling of his experiences as a young man properly brought up by Ms. Edwina, his Southern Princess mother, then abruptly awakened to the life of desire and his own erotic possibilities." (Kazan 1988: 351) "All these warring personal issues became the pigments that brought Williams's [*Streetcar*] characters to life." (Lahr 2014: 119)

### ***2.2.2 Summer and Smoke***

*Summer and Smoke*: I think Alma was certainly the more triumphant of the two, though Blanche was perhaps the more feeling. You see, Alma went through the same thing that I went through---from puritanical shackles to, well complete profligacy...freedom...liberation from taboos. (Devlin 1972: 218)

The struggles between darkness and light, spirituality and the senses, love and lust, were familiar territory for Williams. Containing elements of Williams's life, *Summer and Smoke* echoes his mother Edwina Dakin's youth in Port Gibson and Natchez, Mississippi. Edwina's strong streak of Puritanism developed within the home of her Episcopal Reverend father had lifelong consequences for the future playwright. Edwina's fear of original sin was deeply imprinted on her young son who, while suffering from severe illness, received constant attention from a mother fearful of losing her son to a judgmental and unforgiving God. Williams struggled his entire life balancing the spirit and the flesh in his own life through the lives of his characters.

Williams begins *Summer and Smoke* with a prologue, introducing Alma, age ten, and John, perhaps one or two years older. Both demonstrate personalities formed early that follow them into adult life, influenced by their Southern societal community and family philosophical and interpersonal relationships.

Williams described the 10 year old Alma as:

"...already [having] the dignity of an adult; there is a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her, which must set her apart from other children. She has a habit of holding her hand, one cupped under the other in a way similar to that of receiving the wafer at Holy Communion. This is a habit that will remain with her as an adult." (Williams 1948: 1)

Williams does not contribute a similar physical or spiritual description of young John, nevertheless one becomes aware of the youngster's strident personality by the physical and verbal way he makes his presence felt in his discourse with Alma during their short childhood meeting.

As adults the similarity of Alma and John's early personalities are apparent. Williams's stage directions:

"John Buchanan... is now a Promethean figure, brilliant and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel...at present he is unmarked

by the dissipations in which he relives his demonic unrest; he has the fresh and shining look of an epic hero.” (Williams 1948: 7)



Figure 15 John (Ryson Sparacino) as the Promethean figure that Alma (Aimee Paxton) looks up to. University of Montana School of Drama Dance production of *Summer and Smoke*. (Fall 2018)

John embraces the chaotic nature of life’s experience which magnifies man as one and the same with all ordered human experience, the continuing search for “indescribable pleasure.” “You know who’s crowned with most of the glory on this earth? The one who uses his senses to get all he can in the way of---satisfaction.” (Williams 1948: 47)

The sudden death of John’s physician father during a violent confrontation is the major turning point in the lives of the two characters. Both are deeply affected, physically and psychologically. John, himself a physician, is called upon to minister to severely ill patients in

his father's clinic. He is no longer the Promethean figure. The repressed aspect of his alter-ego's deep subconscious "shadow" is identified, and Williams leaves him as an anti-hero, a man searching for salvation, and redemption. John is safely harbored in the society which until recently he had rebelled against.

"Alma had an adult quality as a child and now, in her middle twenties, there is something prematurely spinsterish about her nervous laughter... her true nature is still hidden even from herself..." (Williams 1948: 8)



Figure 16 John (Ryson Sparacino) and Alma (Aimee Paxton). University of Montana School of Drama Dance production of *Summer and Smoke*. (Fall 2018)

The tragic event that affects change in John also transforms Alma. She and the elder Dr Buchanan were very close. Growing to adulthood, the devoted child of a rigid, minister, Alma attempts to hold to the precepts she was raised in. She aspires to a higher calling, "...to [us]all reaching up to something...like a Gothic cathedral for something beyond attainment...the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach."

(Williams 1948: 48) Suddenly faced with the fear of losing the one great romantic love of her life, she becomes aware of her own “doppelganger,” the corpulent desires John had suggested dwelled within her, compulsions that will have her moving past tradition, past propriety, primness and respect. She is left with desires and revelations that her world will most likely attempt to disgrace.

### **2.2.2.1 Relating Feminine Gender Priority**

It would appear that during the creation of these two female protagonists, Blanche and Alma, both competing for their creator’s favor, the women’s paths through the thorn riddled thickets of their disparate lives were mirroring the journey Williams navigated physically and psychologically through his own “Dragon Country.” Having grown up within similar southern societies, with vivid memories of deep emotional and physical influences, and spawned by an artist with his own psychological events, the final divergent paths taken by Blanche and Alma suggest non-definitive alternatives.

I suggest that in the final analysis, Williams chose a pathway for Blanche far kinder than that he allotted Alma. Certainly, all that Blanche dealt with before and after her stay in the Vieux Carre had allowed her to develop a survivor mentality which, though strained to the point where most others would, at the very least, become emotionally incapacitated, at worst, insane, Blanche maintains a modicum of rationality that allows her to escape the terror that is robbing her of what is left of her composure. Her words to the doctor who offers his arm, doffs his hat to “...her ladyship,” (Williams 1947: 102) allows that tiny fragment of reality still existing within a damaged ego to guide her out of an immediate crippling environment with the words, “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.” (Williams 1947: 102) We are left with the

impression she is being taken to a sanatorium. From there? Again, as with John and Stanley, Williams challenges the individual psyche of each audience member as they leave their seats and get on with the getting on of their respective lives.

Williams is not as giving to Alma as he is to Blanche. Although he later writes of her “seem[ing] to be somewhere in my being,” (Williams 1975: 109) he is not clear in what way, but rather acknowledges, like so many of his “little people,” that she represents a figure from somewhere deep within his unconscious mind; his sister Rose, who, through no fault of her own, is rendered incapacitated, his puritanical mother Edwina whose rage against her dominating husband, linking his sexual overtures with impurity, created deep psychological scars of sexual repression within the Williams children, or his grandmother, the elder dying Dakin who devoted her time, money, love, and gentle support to Williams sustaining him when he was all but destitute. I suggest that once Williams provided only a spiritual bond between Alma and John, that he placed her within his own immediate frame of mind wherein his agonizing sense of self-doubt, self-loathing, and loneliness, enhanced by all the described anatomic ills and emotional fears, were eased by increasing amounts of medication and alcohol.

Early in *Summer and Smoke*, John Buchanan provides a sleepless agitated Alma, feeling “...walled in...” (Williams 1948: 38) with “...some pills placed in a glass of water,” (Williams 1948: 39) instructing her to “...toss that down, Ms. Alma.” (Williams 1948: 38) Alma soon becomes relaxed and drowsy feeling like “...a water lily on a Chinese lagoon.” (Williams 1948: 41) John provides her with a small box of the pills, with instructions “...to never take more than one or two at a time.” (Williams 1948: 42) Over the course of the play Alma becomes addicted to the little white tablets. Williams implies Alma’s dependency when she admits to John, she “...used them all up and would like some more.” (Williams 1948: 75)

Drugs played a significant role in the life and works of Williams. He was well versed in the drug culture of the 1930s to the 1980s. In *Summer and Smoke* the little white tablets provided Alma by John Buchanan were probably amobarbital, a barbiturate with both a calming and hypnotic effect that induces sleep. It is these tablets which allows Alma her release of the repressed *animas* doppelganger the previously spontaneous and ungovernable in her own nature.

Alma's spiritual turnabout is not unlike Williams's self-engineered escape from his own cage of Puritanism. The serenity Alma finds, once she has cast off the rectory, her domineering father and spiteful mother, is not the peace of heaven but the bliss of pickups and pills. "The prescription number is 96814. I think it is the phone number of God!" (Williams 1948: 78) In William's renovated consciousness, revelation is gratification. "The body is spiritualized, offering the promise of a communion that brings resurrection in the flesh, not the afterlife." (Lahr 2015: 99) "And still our blood is sacred; to the mouth/the tongue of the beloved is holy bread." (Williams 2011: 60)





*Figure 17 Sculpture of The Eternal Idol by Auguste Rodin.*

Alma, with the help of mind-altering substances, is off to find that which may not be there for her. Williams, in his final stage directions, has Alma “face the stone angel and raise her hand in a sort of valedictory salute.” (Williams 1948: 79) What does this gesture imply? I suggest that Alma, now with her pills creating a sense of euphoria, and having invited a male companion to join her for the evening, is attempting to bid farewell to this symbol of spiritualism. Blanche may find peace and solace in the kindness of strangers. I fear the strangers in Alma’s life may not provide the kindness she seeks. It is my contention that Alma, believing herself rid of her inherent spirituality, and under the influence of mood elevators, will be taken advantage of by men who will never be able to replace the man known since childhood whose presence is ingrained in her very ego.



Figure 18 Alma bids farewell to Eternity. Margaret Phillips in the 1948 Broadway production of *Summer and Smoke*.

“I write so often of people with no magnitude, or at least on the surface. I write of “little people”. But are there “little people”? I sometimes think there are only little conceptions of people. Whatever is living and feeling with intensity is not little and, examined in depth, it would seem to me that most “little people” are living with that intensity that I can use as a writer. Was Blanche a “little person”? Certainly not. She was a demonic creature; the size of her feeling was too great for her to contain without the escape of madness. And what about Miss Alma? Was she a “little person”? Certainly not. Her passion gave stature to the drama.” (Williams 1972: 235)

### 2.2.3 Something Unspoken: The Lesbian Closet

*Something Unspoken* and *Suddenly Last Summer* are two one act plays, billed together and produced in 1958 under the title *Garden District*. Both plays involve southern matriarchs dealing with gender identification. Violet Venable, mother figure in *Suddenly Last Summer*, is using all her acerbic skills to deny her son Sebastian’s sexual orientation. Cornelia Scott age sixty, a wealthy, Southern spinster in *Something Unspoken*, struggling with her own homosexual desire, is more than anxious to confront what has been suppressed for many years, the love between herself and her long-term companion, forty-five-year-old Grace Lancaster. Rather than the more common examples of male homosexuality in Williams’s writings, *Something Unspoken* is themed as a lesbian play.

In 1953, at a time when the subject of lesbian desire constituted an unspoken taboo, Williams defines the humanistic aspect of female desire by not denying the taboo that characterizes same-sex love, and rather assures that the subject being portrayed is never made marginal between the two women. In this way, Williams bravely places on a theatrical stage a subject, during a homophobic societal period, where such relationships between couples is not just unlawful, but deleterious to a playwright’s future. As the play is presented, there is “...no

overtly demonstrable sexual presence between the two women, but rather a mode of possibility, imbued with a sense of potentiality, a temporality that is not in the present but more nearly on the horizon, thus considered as futurity.” (Munoz 2019: 99)

The lesbian theme in *Something Unspoken* is precisely marked by silence and the interruption of silence. There is never complete physical silence between Cornelia and Grace. The interruptions instead are filled by music, phone calls, moments of business discourse between the two women; mechanisms to silence the issue before them. Williams, through the tension developed via his written artistry “silence-through-sound,” (Quinlan 1959) establishes lesbian desire as the clear presence in the women’s lives.

Fifteen years to the day, Grace Lancaster, a thirty-year old widow, arrived at the elegant home of then forty-five-year-old Cornelia Scott. At this anniversary moment Williams writes an elegant poetic reminiscence spoken through Cornelia about her initial view of Grace:

“A shy, little, quiet little widow...the season was Autumn...I heard footsteps on the gravel light, quick, delicate footsteps like Spring coming in the middle of Autumn...a little person so thin that light shone through her as if it were made of silk of a white parasol!” (Williams, 2000: 866)

Upon hearing Cornelia speak these words Grace, now forty-five, responded, somewhat surreptitiously, that people who know Cornelia would be astounded to hear that “grave and dignified lady, express herself in such a lyrical manner. You must admit, dear Cornelia, that such sentiment isn’t like you”! (Williams 2000: 867) Stung by Grace’s statement Cornelia rages “Is nothing like me but silence (The clock ticks loudly) Am I sentenced to silence for a lifetime?” (Williams 2000: 867)

This early moment between the two women determines much of their story together. Grace has lived with Cornelia for fifteen years as an employee and thinks of Cornelia as befits

her somewhat arrogant and stodgy persona. “As the two women struggle to overcome the silence between them, it is Grace who, by her demeanor, manages to repeatedly frustrate Cornelia’s attempts to communicate her strong and barely controllable emotion. In so doing she offers *Something Unspoken’s* definition of the lesbian closet.” (Quinlan 1959)

Grace is fully cognizant of what Cornelia is relating to, that there exists something in their fifteen-year relationship that both women have repressed. Grace, however, is reluctant to face what she appreciates has been contained in their silence over the many years. “You say there is something unspoken. Maybe there is. I don’t know. But I do know that some things are better left unspoken” (Williams 2000: 868). She interprets the long silence as an impenetrable wall between her and Cornelia, a wall she is incapable of breaking, one requiring an effort she has not the strength or wish to attempt. Grace conjures up her own sense of reality comparing the two women as to their backgrounds in societal position, interests, wealth, education, and their “greying” ages:

“And that being the difference between our two kinds of grey, yours and mine—you mustn’t expect me to give bold answers to questions that make the house shake with silence! To speak out things that are fifteen years unspoken!” (Williams, 2000: 869)

In using Grace to define the differences between the two women’s personalities and strengths, Williams is developing the critical component that reinforces the concept of their society’s “...wall of silence.” (Williams 2000) Cornelia is a woman of strength; she has the sovereignty in her domain that allows her the ability of accepting a truth that is socially unacceptable. Grace, however, is nothing more than Cornelia’s property, her “...shy little secretary.” (Williams 2000) In stating her weak position, Grace is admitting a sense of relief. She comprehends full well the unacceptable truth about their relationship being not just unspeakable, but almost unthinkable (Quinlan 1959)

The contrast in the different backgrounds of the two women is exploited by the playwright to maintain the status quo. Cornelia tirelessly attempts to draw Grace into a conversation to explore and acknowledge what she considers the true nature of their relationship, and as a method of avoidance, Grace repeatedly employs her public role to deny Cornelia such an exchange thereby avoiding any suggestion of romance.

Toward the end of their immediate conversation Cornelia, having given Grace fifteen roses, one for every year they have lived together, must nevertheless, push Grace to notice a rose she has placed on the table before her. “Dearest, isn’t there something you’ve failed to notice?” (Williams 2000: 865) Grace’s response of “Oh, you mean my flower?” (Williams 2000: 866) is couched in the role of the persona she strenuously maintains throughout the play, that of an employee. “Whom do I have to thank for this lovely rose? My gracious employer?” (Williams 2000: 866) In so stating Grace reduces Cornelia’s love offering to a friendly gift. Cornelia presses her gift’s romantic meaning. “You will find fourteen others on your desk in the library... a total of fifteen the number of years you made this house a house of roses.” (Williams 2000:866)

Grace is well aware of Cornelia’s meaning, but once again, as she does throughout the play, counters Cornelia’s amorous wording. “What a nice way to put it...I’ve been your secretary for fifteen years.” (Williams 2000: 866) Cornelia will not be put off. Grace has been more than secretary; she has been her life partner as well. The persistent romantic tone of Cornelia’s intent only adds to Grace’s discomfort, and she replies as only she is able. “What a charming sort of a way to observe the occasion.” (Williams 2000: 866)

Williams continues the back-and-forth emotional duel between the women to a point where he brings the two to as close a potential acceptance of their feminine desire as he dares.

Cornelia draws Grace specifically into a discussion concerning the events that led to their fifteen-year relationship. Grace acknowledges her initial fear of becoming part of Cornelia's household. "I wanted to be quite sure I was really wanted...I was so afraid that I would outstay my welcome." (Williams 2000: 871) Cornelia, taking advantage of the moment, emphatically discloses her deep emotional feelings of love for Grace. "How blind of you not to see how desperately I wanted to keep you here forever." (Williams 2000: 871) Grace, taken aback about what she now realizes is Cornelia's confessional plea of true romantic love, acknowledges, perhaps, from within the deep recesses of her own subconsciously repressed sexuality, her own desire. She begins to accept Cornelia's passionate tone. "Oh, I did see that you--- (the phone rings)." (Williams 2000) Grace's assent is abruptly cut off. She quickly takes up the phone. "Miss Scott's residence! ...Yes she is here..." (Williams 2000: 871) The culmination of the story regarding the intimacy of the play is reached. The call breaks off Grace's sudden spontaneous moment of emotional self-realization. It is back to business as usual. Grace resumes her expected employee duty. "Notebook and pencil?" (Williams 2000: 872) Cornelia can only respond accordingly. "Yes. Notebook and pencil...I have to dictate a letter." (Williams 2000: 872)

Williams, however, has more to relate concerning human sexuality as a driving force of desire. As in so many of Williams's writings concerning women living within repressed Southern, societal environments, the inner conflicts of the main protagonists mirror the struggle, between soul and body, spirit and flesh So, like Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, Grace has developed defense mechanisms such as her repeated attempts to change Cornelia's train of thought by insisting on playing music from their shared classical collection or her repeated steering the conversation back to the socially accepted role of employer and employee. As he did in *Summer and Smoke*, Williams has written a psychological discussion, a revealing portrait of



the repression of sex in conversion, symptoms of the Agrarian South which, to the playwright, symbolized a last stronghold of unrealistic societal attitudes.

Thus, Williams in *Something Unspoken* is not finished probing at what he insists is the other within the psyche of Grace. In the words and symbols used in the story Williams probes Grace's id, seeking the neurotic shadow her unconscious role in defying Cornelia's attempts to draw out what Cornelia expects to be Grace's true yet repressed femininity. Williams begins his self-characterization as Grace with music, a feature of his psychic animus enabling him to personify so elegantly his female characters.

Grace chooses a record in which the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska is playing. She appears to be enthralled, "...clasping her hands and closing her eyes." (Williams 2000: 865) She emotes, "Music hath charms to sooth the savage beast..." (Williams 2000: 865) Williams is suggesting that Grace's use of this statement implies that she does indeed have a "savage" side which she is attempting to sooth. Cornelia's immediate response, "Yes. Oh, yes, if the savage beast permits it," (Williams 2000: 865) suggests Cornelia appreciates full well that Grace, despite all her machinations to avoid Cornelia's "...something that has been unspoken," (Quinlan 1959) is not free from such homoerotic desire. Williams supports Cornelia's awareness by having Grace specify the Landowska recording for her effort to avoid Cornelia's conversation. Grace has found "...an affectation of enchantment..." (Quinlan 1959) in the music of a lesbian artist. Grace is not only enthralled by Landowska's playing, but also her looks: "...(ecstatically) And such a noble face, a profile as fine and strong as Edith Sitwell's." (Quinlan 1959). Grace appears to not just enjoy the music but appears to be attracted to Landowska as a woman as well. Williams then has Grace quote ecstatically Stillwell's "Aubade," her lyric poem about the early dawn parting of lovers whose affairs are usually secretive. "Jane, Jane, tall as a

crane, the morning light creaks down again...” (Williams 2000: 865) pulling from a poem by a female writer about a female character. (Quinlan 1959)

Williams does not end his play with the “silence” broken between the two women. *Something Unspoken* is considered as a challenge to the societal mores of the time wherein the “closet” was not to be opened on a theatrical stage. However, there is no question that the theme of the play is lesbian love. Although Cornelia and Grace do not achieve a fully consensual lesbian relationship, one cannot but realize that a stronger and more genuine emotional bond has been forged. By dramatizing the “silent” interruptions, at critical moments Williams underscores closeted female-female desire. (Quinlan 1959) Although coming out in the 1950’s remained taboo, *Something Unspoken* was a challenge to that culture of silence. As the curtain falls, it is reasonable to contemplate that a significant number of audience members are left with a sense of possibility, or as suggested by Munoz, “...a utopian potentiality.” (Munoz 2019) Certainly, one might speculate that Grace’s last words, although spoken off stage from the “safety” of her office, out of sight of audience and Cornelia, may so imply. “What lovely roses! One for every year!” (Williams 2000: 872)

#### ***2.2.4 And Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens***

*And Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens* was first performed by the Shakespeare Theatre in 2004 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The play concerns the private life of “Candy” Delany, a successful interior decorator and landlord who is a transvestite living in New Orleans, a city Williams knew well. In a 1971 television interview, Williams proudly described the drag queen character he had created in Candy Delany. “If I wanna write a drag queen, I’ll write a drag queen, and I have...” (Moschovakis 2005: xxxi)

Williams describes Candy as a “New Orleans Queen uncomfortably close to his thirty-fifth birthday with the sort of face that can never look adult...with a grace and slimness that will always suggest a girlish young boy.” (Williams 2005: 189)

Candy Delany was a teenager living in Georgia when, after “coming out,” she began a seventeen-year relationship with an older man. The couple then moved to New Orleans. Recently Candy has been abandoned for a younger rival. She is devastated, but still exhibits a photograph of her former husband in her exquisitely decorated apartment. He left her a very wealthy individual set up in her own decorating business, and with other valuable building investments. However, experiencing loneliness, and despite her husband’s lingering emotional presence, the woman in Candy’s closet is about to expose herself in drag with genuine heartfelt passion, to an unlikely lover.

The individual picked up in a bar is a merchant sailor who insists early on “I don’t go with queers,” (Williams 2005: 193) until Candy’s money changes his mind.

Candy brings the merchant sailor to her exotic apartment and after offering him drinks suggests that when she hears her tenants leaving for their evening, that she and her consort “...adjourn to the patio...” (Williams 2005: 193) when in the privacy of their retreat the evening atmosphere will be “...magical.” (Williams 2005: 193)

Candy teases her companion stating she likes him very much and feels safe with him. We immediately realize the danger looming when the retort to her statement is “That’s a mistake. Nobody’s safe around me when I am liquored up.” (Williams 2005: 195)

However, Candy is desperate for a strong male companion and denying caution relates the desperate story of her lonely life as an individual who was only able to find happiness with an older man who accepted her as a woman while physically enjoying their physical relationship

as a man.

At a critical moment Candy enters her bedroom, telling her companion that she wishes to change cloths, and sex. Upon returning to his company Candy states, “I am a transvestite.” (Williams 2005: 197) The sailor’s surprised response, “You’re as much like a woman as any real one I have seen.” (Williams 2005: 197)

Within this play is a poem written by Williams that appears as well in another of Williams’s plays concerning gender, *The Mutilated*, which, as so many others in his canon, deal with the subject of “other” or “difference.” It speaks to the very core of the playwright’s lifelong sense of being different, suffering the loneliness felt daily:

I think the strange, the crazed, the queer  
Will have their holiday this year,  
I think, for just a little while  
There will be pity for the wild.

I think in places known as gay,  
In special little clubs and bars,  
Pierrot will serenade pierrot  
With frantic drums and sad guitars.

I think for some uncertain reason  
Mercy will be shown his season  
To the lovely and misfit.  
To the brilliant and deformed.

I think they will be housed and warmed  
And fed and comforted a while,  
Before with such a tender smile,  
The earth destroys her crooked child. (Williams 2005: 199)

Candy is beaten almost to death by the individual with whom she is desperate to have as a companion, saved only by the timely appearance of two of her gay male tenants. As she regains consciousness and sits up from the floor helped by her rescuers, she states, “oh, my God...I’m

old!... I've gotten old, I'm old." To which one friend responds, "Now let us sit upon a rumpled bed, and tell sad stories of the death of queens." (Williams 2005: 220)

### Chapter 3: Expressionism in Williams's American Theatre

There are no good or bad people. Some are a little better or a little worse, but all are activated more by misunderstanding than malice. (Kazan 1989: 329)

The formal beginning of contemporary theatre is believed to have had its roots in European Expressionism. Expressionism seeks to depict the subjective emotions and responses that objects, events, or emotions arouse within the individual. Williams's characters have been so meticulously wrought, the playwright might indeed be creating true expressionistic passion through androgyny and gender fluidity.

Expressionism is thought to have developed from the writings of playwrights such as Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, Chekhov, who while professing their theatrical allegiance to realism, in actuality, reflected significant divergences from realistic form. Actual anti-realist tendencies are now appreciated in such plays as *Ghosts*, *Cherry Orchard*, *Miss Julie*, and *St. Joan*. Critics have exemplified them as "...serious divergences from the true realist tradition." (Jackson 1966: 18) In the light of contemporary American theatre, the work of these dramatists in the epoch of orthodox realism did not actually conform to many of its prerequisites. These writers, in a number of their works, "...evolved a certain poetic method which they bequeathed to and was developed further by 20th Century contemporary dramatists such as Eugene O'Neil, William Saroyan, Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams." (Jackson 1966: 20)

"The term "expressionism" was initially a descriptive title for paintings concerned with the outward representation of the inner experience, thus sharing with romanticism an interest in individual consciousness. It was considered partially romantic in kind, although it represents a romanticism in which a true image of reality is degraded. Unlike romanticism, expressionism does not suggest that within reality there is the principle of order. Rather, expressionism attempts

to create theatrical forms which possess greater unity than what is capable of being understood by reality alone.” (Jackson 1966: 21)

The American theatre of the early years of the twentieth century employed a more tragic form of expressionism, underscoring the meaning in the fabric of American life. Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), and Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine* (1923), Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal* (1928), *Our Town* (1938) by Thornton Wilder were a new kind of theatre, applying expressionistic techniques to the fabric of American themes. It was a frightening and disorientating moment in American society and these writings reflected the common concern of the new century. By 1945, a new kind of expressionistic theatre emerged that produced a drama that was a vital, popular form, specifically related to the interpretation of the reality of the period. It involved not just the conflicts within Western societies but included problems common to the whole of the human race. The nature of this drama may be well imagined in the works of playwrights such as Arthur Miller, William Inge, and Tennessee Williams. (Jackson 1966: 24)

Since the 1930s, when he wrote his first full-length plays, Williams was influenced by European and American traditions of Expressionism that used apocalyptic discourse for social critique. Apocalypse presents visions, as in The Book of Revelations, of the ends of corrupt worlds (Babylon) and the beginnings of ideal new order, the New Jerusalem. (Dorff 1999: 115) Industrialization had bestowed on Western societies increasingly complex social, political, economic and spiritual problems. Fears of machine domination, societal anxiety of spiritual, physical, intellectual and psychological annihilation, and revolutionary drives toward social, political, and economic reforms were expressed in catastrophic works such as Georg Kaiser’s *Gas* (1918-20), and Ernst Toller’s *Man and the Masses* (1920-1921). (Jackson 1966: 21) These

plays by Kaiser and Toller were expressionistic plays that "...abandoned the hope of a rebirth of pure humanity and focused instead upon total Armageddon." (Dorff 1999: 115)

### 3.1 *Mooney's Kid Don't Cry*

Linda Dorff discusses the expressionistic apocalypticism found in the death-to-rebirth cycles that structure the early plays of Tennessee Williams, referring to them as the "hell-on-earth" version of apocalypse, as spoken in the oracular speech of his visionary characters. In Williams's early plays, from *Mooney's Kid Don't Cry* to *Orpheus Descending*, expressionist New Man ideology influences their plots in which "...the path to spiritual purification is found through literal or figurative death or dismemberment." (Dorff 1999: 115)

*Mooney's Kid Don't Cry* (1934) exists within an "...infernalist..." (Dorff 1999: 115) setting suggesting a "...hellish environment." (Dorff 1999: 115):

Kitchen of a cheap three-room flat in the industrial section of a large American city. Stove and sink are eloquent of slovenly housekeeping. A wash line-line stretched across one corner of the room hung with diapers and blue work shirts. (Williams 2011: 131)

"...occupied by disgruntled individuals" (Dorff 1999):

Mooney grumbles incoherently, Jane pads into the kitchen... like a tiny mandarin, enveloped in the ruins of a once gorgeously-flowered Japanese silk kimono...still young but her pretty, small-featured face has a yellowish, unhealthy look. (Williams 2011: 131)

"...relating their existences in "oracular" speech." (Dorff 1999: 115):

An them stars...millions of 'em, huh? ...millions of people...down here in the mud. Ugh, too many of 'em, God...crawling all over each other, snatching and tearing livin' an' dying till the earth's just a big soup of dead bodies...oh well, what's the use? A man's gotta live his own life. Cut his own ways through the woods somehow. (Williams 2011: 131)



### 3.2 *The Dark Room*

*The Dark Room* presents a similar structure to *Mooney's Kid Don't Cry*. The setting is described in Williams's stage directions. He instructs that the same set used in *Mooney's Kid Don't Cry* be used with "...a general rearrangement to heighten effect of poverty." (Williams, 2011: 131) The two female characters, Miss Morgan and Mrs. Pociotti, are offered "...pretty much as stock characters..." (Williams 2011: 131) i.e. Miss Morgan: "...the neat, fussy spinster engaged in social work." (Williams 2011: 131) Mrs. Pociotti, the housewife "...is an avalanche of female flesh, swarthy Italian, her bulk emphasized by her clothing...everything about her is heavy and deliberate except her eyes, which smolder and dart suspiciously." (Williams 2011: 131)

The language spoken is not as oracular as in *Mooney's Kid Don't Cry*, but rather guarded and increasingly defensive, as Mrs. Pociotti moves about the enclosed space pushing a broom. We learn that her husband has had no job for "...eight or nine years, his head is no good, he couldn't remember no more." (Williams 2011: 131) He resides in the City Sanitarium. There are two older sons Frank and Tony, living elsewhere. "Was never no good those boys, I don't know those boys no more." (Williams 2011: 131) Two younger children Lucio and Silva, "...still in school..." (Williams 2011: 131) and an older daughter about fifteen who has confined herself to a dark room for the last "...six mons beginning on New Year's, he didn't come over ...so she called up the place and his Mama said he was out and not to call him no more...he was going to marry a German girl." (Williams 2011: 131)

After the call, the daughter, complaining of stomach pain, takes to her bed, lying in the dark, refusing to come out except to use the bathroom. At times she is "...heard to make noise, calling bad names and knocking her hands on the wall." (Williams 2011: 137) She only eats food

delivered by her boyfriend Max, the only person she allows in the room. “When he don’t come around a few days she takes on something awful hollering screaming, never you heard such bad names.” (Williams 2011: 138)

When told the girl must be taken from the home, because her mother is incompetent to care for her daughter, Mrs. Pociotti states she hopes Tina will go because her lying naked is “...bad for the boys who look in and laugh and say bad things ...it better be soon from the way she is looking.” (Williams 2011: 139) Mrs. Pociotti’s curved palm moves slowly before her abdomen in a broadly elliptical gesture denoting pregnancy.

### ***3.3 Not About Nightingales***

Williams carries this theme of descending apocalyptic hell further in his 1938 drama *Not About Nightingales*, a three-act play focusing on a group of inmates who go on a hunger strike to better their situation. Williams wrote *Not About Nightingales* shortly after graduating from Iowa. At the time his father Cornelius referred to him as a parasite whose best hope was to be drafted, his beloved sister Rose languished in an asylum, and Williams grew depressed, ready to hit the road. Then on September 1, 1938, he read the news story that would offer him a way out.

On a day late in August of 1938, in a high security prison in Holmesberg, Pennsylvania, 650 inmates of the county prison held a strike against the deplorable prison conditions which included a repeatedly monotonous diet of hamburger and spaghetti. They refused their supper. Twenty-five, so-called rebellious prisoners, alleged ringleaders of the hunger strike, had been placed in twelve airtight cells equipped with a bank of steam radiators each capable of producing heat of up to two hundred degrees. Windows had been closed; water in the cell basins cut off. By

“...morning the shrieks of the tortured had been stilled.” (Williams 2000: 110) Four of the prisoners in one of these cells had been scalded to death.

The vision of the hell-on-earth in *Not About Nightingales*, Dorff believes, underscores Williams’s expressionistic apocalypticism. It is exemplified when Butch, the leading prisoner, rallies his forces, destined to be punished for their food strike, with the following rallying cry, “Tonight, we go to Klondike! —Dere’s three compartments! One of ‘em ‘s little hell, one of ‘em’s middle-sized hell an’ one of ‘em’s BIG Hell!” (Williams 2000: 123) Dorff relates Butch’s rallying cry to Williams’s stage directions describing the deepening levels to Dante’s *Inferno*, with the words “...weird flickering of flame shadows on the walls.” (Williams 2000: 159)

Further apocalyptic discourse is voiced by the character Canary Jim concerning his life in the hellish atmosphere of the prison “... me pent up here, in these walls, locked in ‘em so tight it’s like I was buried under the earth in a coffin with a glass lid that I could see the window through! While I felt the worms crawling inside me...” (Williams 2000: 126) Dorff suggests that “...gradually these early Williams apprentice (proletarian) plays evoke a persistent one-way descent not unlike the deepening declivity of Dante’s writing.” (Dorff 1999: 117)

In a 1957 essay entitled “The Past, The Present, and the Perhaps,” Williams describes his thoughts: “It was called *Not About Nightingales* and it concerned prison life, and I have never written anything since then that could compete with it in violence and horror...the literal roasting alive of a group of intransigent convicts sent for correction to a hot room called ‘The Klondike’” (Williams 2009: 81)

### 3.4 *Camino Real*



Figure 19 Hirschfeld caricature of Broadway production of *Camino Real*.

In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straightway was lost. (From canto I of Dante's *Inferno*.) (Williams 1958: Epigraph)

Williams's route to the apocalyptic lies through hell. *Camino Real* (1953), for example, reconfigures Dante's hell as a vast prison in which the confined undergo repeated tortures. The play, considered by some to be one of, if not the most autobiographical of his theatrical canon, was first written in 1948 as the short play *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*. Williams defined the drama as [my] "...conception of the time and world in which I lived..." (Jackson 1966: 101) and described its characters as "...archetypes of basic attitudes and qualities..." (Jackson 1966: 101)

of people in that world. *Camino Real* differs from *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* in its more mature symbolic development. Williams declared that his intent is the discloser of value systems, attacking what he considers to be comprehensive forms of immorality in the world of the twentieth century. Williams's vision in this drama is theological, even apocalyptic. He foresees the end of humanity, a humanity condemned to spiritual death. This vision of a dying world is the internal form of the *Camino Real*.



Figure 20 Painting of Dante Alighieri.

I know this place...Here it is on the chart. Look, it says here: "Continue until you come to the square of a walled city which is the end of the *Camino Real* and the beginning of the *Camino Real*. Halt there," it says, "and turn back, Traveler, for the spring of humanity has gone dry in this place. And--- (Jackson 1966: 113)

The Bochum critics [from Ruhr University] describe *Camino Real* as a theological vision, as a contemporary rendition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* [*Inferno*]. (Jackson 1966: 121)

Wayward persons come to this unusual place where things happen intolerably and where every man tortures the other, where an eternal complaining and groaning, pressing and pounding, rules. This puzzling locality is described precisely in Dante: it is the middle realm between life and death where at the end of their life's journey all men gather. They are already dead but still have not lost their memory of earthly life; this memory burns and pains them yet, they always want to go back again, while the way back is barred. (Jackson 1966: 121)

Williams fashions a contemporary *Inferno* based on legends out of Western literary traditions. What the playwright is attempting to say is evident in the play's title. In English the title means "the way of reality", in Spanish it means "royal road," the road taken by the Spanish knights who conquered the land and brought Christianity to the West Coast of America. The sixteen blocks represent the sixteen missionary stations that lay along this path a day's journey from one another. This same byway in the mid-twentieth Century has become a route of industry, money, tourism... a pathway of business. (Jackson 1966: 121)

But there were other stark realities of the post-war American Society from which Williams could draw his apocalyptic references, other models for his *Inferno*. There were traveled roads not unlike the *Camino Real* in which thousands of fleeing refugees vainly attempted to flee persecution usually ending in "places of intolerable transition between life and death." (Jackson 1966: 121) It is a road essentially "...from life to death, its Blocks represent the stations of the cross in man's progression toward annihilation." (Jackson 1966: 122)

As in much of Williams's world, his representative characters on the *Camino Real* suffer greatly. In Block III a loudspeaker blares across the town's plaza:

Are you perplexed by something? Are you tired out and confused? Do you have a fever? Do you feel yourself spiritually unprepared for the age of exploding atoms? Do you distrust the newspapers? Are you suspicious of governments...does further progress appear impossible to you... [afraid of] the eyes of strangers? Do you wish that things could be straight and simple again as they were in your childhood? Would you like to go back to Kindy Garten? (Williams 1958: 28)

Jackson declares *Camino Real* a contemporary *Inferno*, an image of human suffering and damnation. “As in Dante’s *Inferno*, there is no real and present God. Man alone is responsible for his own cause, his own reason, he alone is responsible for his destruction.” (Jackson 1966: 123)



Figure 21 Jessica Tandy and Al Pacino in *Camino Real*, 1970 Lincoln Center revival.

### 3.4.1 A Mirror on the Soul

*Camino Real* was a complete cleansing of Williams’s theatrical palate. He claimed that *Camino Real* served him as a “...spiritual purgation of that abyss of confusion and lost sense of

reality...” (Lahr 2015: 254) that he had “...wandered into.” (Lahr 2015: 254) The epigram, taken from Canto one of Dante’s *Inferno*, set the stage for the spectacle of Williams’s existential bewilderment. In the exuberance of its dreamlike design and in the bold absence of psychology and the realism of earlier Williams plays. *Camino Real* became an unfettered journey into his interior. To the play’s director, Elia Kazan, Williams remarked, “This play is possible because it deals precisely with my own situation.” (Williams 2014: 443) Williams feared that his America was “...galloping into totalitarianism...” (Lahr 2015: 254) while at the same moment, having achieved artistic, commercial, and critical success, his emotional insecurity was being heightened by his difficult relationship with Frank Merlo. *Camino Real* developed as a phantasmagoric, expressionistic mirror of Williams’s inner life and a censure statement “...about the all-but-complete suppression of any dissident voices.” (Lahr 2015: 254) The corrupt society and deceptive characters within *Camino Real* mirror the harsh American politics of the 1950s, the crusade against liberals and homosexuals, the corruption of individual freedoms, and the so called communist “witch hunts” by the HUAC instilling paranoia between neighbors.

### **3.5 *The Glass Menagerie***

From the perspective of a downward proclivity, through the stations of Dante’s Cantos, Williams moves his plays and their characters deeper into territory away from any hope of a redemptive ending. In the stage directions of his first Broadway expressionistic success, *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams describes the apartment in which Tom, Laura and Amanda live:

The audience is faced with the dark grim rear wall of the Wingfield tenement...the apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. (Williams 1970: 21)



From its beginning, one senses an undercurrent of societal uncertainty and fear as the lead protagonist, Tom, speaking as narrator, informs his audience that he will present his world as "...truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." (Williams 1970: 21) He underscores the anxiety of the Depression era of the 1930's when the "...middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind... by having their fingers pressed forcible down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy... in Spain there was Guernica, while there were violent labor disturbances in Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis." (Williams 1970: 23)

Williams carries this sense of impending apocalypse further when Tom, again as narrator, describes the festivities of a dance hall scene in the alley across from the Wingfield apartment. To the music of "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise" Williams writes:

Adventure and change were imminent ...suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella ...[while] here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies and sex that hung in the gloom [flooding] the world with brief deceptive shadows...the world was waiting for bombardments!  
(Williams 1970)

Tom eventually tries to escape his stifling and depressing home environment leaving his mother Amanda, and sister Laura behind. He descends another stairwell to a lower "...rung of hell." (Dorff 1999: 116) "I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time...attempting to find in motion what was lost in space...for nowadays the world is lit by lightning!" (Williams 1970: 116)

In Williams's late plays, such as *The Chalky White Substance*, *A House Not Meant to Stand*, and *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, his writing increasingly adopts the tone of the apocalyptic jeremiad, which identifies corruption as a historical crisis and prophesies that the end is near.

### 3.5.1 Genderfluidity Creating *The Glass Menagerie*

In an April 24, 1943 letter to Donald Windham in which he suggests that such visions perceived by Rose is "...proof [of] what a dark and bewildering thing it is, this family group." (Lahr 2015: 57) Williams remarks to Windham concerning the visions perceived by Rose as indicating a troubling darkness within the Williams family psyche, was implied in an earlier period of the playwright's life, as he was starting work on *The Glass Menagerie*. Over the course of his writing, he based a character on Rose in more than eight poems, fifteen plays (eleven of which deal with mental illness and lobotomies), and over ten plays and fragments in which he uses her name. Although *The Glass Menagerie* is not one of them, there is reference made in the material Williams used to develop the play that exposes the psychological intensity of remorse, helplessness, and guilt experienced by the playwright when developing *The Glass Menagerie*.

Williams was, at the time, on a six-month screenwriting contract at MGM. His assignment, which he considered to be an absurd request, was to write a script full of B-movie clichés for Lana Turner. Instead, Williams devoted his time to his own works, manuscripts he had written previously about his sister's tragic situation. Rose had been diagnosed with dementia praecox. Williams wrote: "We have had no deaths in our family, but by degrees something was happening much uglier and more terrible than death. Rose, my dear little sister---I think of you, dear, and wish, oh, so much that I could help!" (Williams 2006: xiii) Three months after Rose had undergone a prefrontal lobotomy in January 1943, Williams began the play *The Gentleman Caller*, drawing material from his short story "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," and borrowing from other pieces such as the "Spinning Song" and "Blue Roses and the Polar Star."

Williams described *The Glass Menagerie* as a “memory play” alluding to the Wingfield family as a mirror image of Williams’s own family and background. It has been suggested that Williams, with knowledge of Freud’s writings concerning declarative memory--resurrecting and maintaining in the present what was lost in the past--utilized this template in writing *The Glass Menagerie* as his mechanism to escape the dreadful consequences of his home life in 1943. Certainly, a good part of Williams’s torment dealt with his intense anxiety over Rose. “Memory takes a great deal of poetic license, it omits some details, others are exaggerated to the emotional value of the article touched, for memory is seated predominately in the heart.” (Williams 1970: 21)

In a letter to a close friend Williams compared himself, not to Gulliver, Jonathan Swift’s dynamic outgoing character, but rather, to Lewis Carroll’s feminine hero Alice. Stephanie Hammer surmises in her essay “That Quiet Little Play Bourgeois Tragedy, Female Impersonation, and a Portrait of the Artist in the Glass Menagerie,” that at this moment, Williams understood himself as both a man and a girl, aligning himself more with the little girl in his play, Laura, sitting quietly and alone constrained by her physical and emotional proprieties. Further, Hammer suggests that Williams’s recollection of collecting the baubles as a child with sister Rose foretells Laura’s glass collection, and Williams’s youthful enthusiasm in their treasure hunts implies that Laura represents a lost part of Williams himself rather than of his sister Rose. Hammer goes on to suggest that Laura’s limp manifests gay identity, a subject Williams could not present openly on the American stages of the 1940’s and 50’s, instead having to transmute his autobiography into fictional representation. But as a girl who isn’t a girl, the playwright was able to begin a conversation of homosexual desire, to depict himself, his passions, desires, and his method of poetic discourse within a feminine portrayal.

### 3.5.2 Intense Brother/Sister Relationship

Tony Kushner, in his introduction to *The Glass Menagerie*, written for The Tennessee Williams Centennial, describes the sister/brother relationship between Tom and Rose, that led fifteen years later to *Suddenly Last Summer*. In so doing Kushner explains the phenomenal, post-lobotomy relationship between Tennessee and Rose. In Williams's 1943 short story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" written shortly before commencing work on *The Glass Menagerie*, the characters and the major dramatic action of *Menagerie* are sketched.

Amanda encourages Tom to invite an eligible male friend from work home for dinner. She is hopeful that Tom's shy and wayward sister Laura might find salvation from what Amanda fears is a hopeless future for a daughter with no marriage possibility. The story does contain the template of the dinner, the flirtatious activities of the two young people, the record player, Jim's dancing instruction, and Laura's warming to Jim's attention. But then as Amanda brings in the lemonade, we learn that Jim is engaged to be married and must be off to meet his fiancé at the train station. After Jim leaves "...we all sat down, looking dazed." (Williams 1999: 118) Instead of Amanda starting the conversation as she does in *The Glass Menagerie*, it is Laura who is the first to speak. "Wasn't he nice? ...and all those freckles!" (Williams 1999: 119) The conversation then is between Amanda and Tom:

"You didn't mention he was engaged to be married!"  
 "Well, how did I know that he was engaged to be married?"  
 "I thought you called him your best friend down at the warehouse?"  
 "Yes, but I didn't know he was going to be married!"  
 "How peculiar...how very peculiar!" (Williams 1999: 119)

Williams gives this exchange to Laura in the story, which he chose not to allow in the play. And in her words, he exposes a deep emotional undercurrent that at the time of writing the

story Williams dared not divulge in any public discourse other than in story form. Laura's words, "No... There's nothing peculiar about it." (Williams 1999: 119) Laura picks up one of the records and blows on its surface as if it were dusty, then sets it back down. "People in love... take everything for granted." (Williams 1999: 119) Tom asks, "What did she mean by that? I never knew. She slipped quietly back into her room and closed the door." (Williams 1999: 119)

Kushner repeats the question. Just what does Laura mean by that remark? He surmises that Laura's statement is "...fairly obvious... she means that Tom is in love. Tom is in love with Jim..." (Williams 2011: 27) and it's because Tom is desirous of that love that he takes it for granted that Jim isn't the kind to get engaged. Tom's claim of not understanding his sister's comment suggests a willed obtuseness, coming as it did from a sister Tom considered, earlier in the story, of "...having the habit of being dissociated..." (Williams 2011: 27) but who then suddenly outs him in front of his mother.

Or perhaps it is not Jim that Laura believes Tom loves, but rather Laura herself! Might she be implying that her brother takes for granted her apparent stated indifference regarding Jim's availability because Tom assumes, she reciprocates her brother's feeling for him! (Williams 2011: 27) What is revealed in the story is how Jim's heartbreaking departure allows a more vital part of Laura, her wisdom and ability to "...pop out with something that took you by surprise." (Williams 1999: 112)

### ***3.6 Suddenly Last Summer: Deeper into Williams's Apocalyptic Hell-on Earth***

Beginning with *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), Williams's plays belong entirely to the demonic side of apocalypticism, abandoning entirely redemptive endings to focus on total destruction. (Dorff 1999: 115)

In a 1975 interview with Charles Ruas for the journal *Conversations with American Writers*, Williams remarked that he was “...quite through with the kind of play...” (Williams 2000) that had established his reputation. When asked which play marks the transition in his writing Williams responded:

The work has become darker. It began to get darker in the sixties so dark that people find it painful. *Camino Real* was a real departure from convention, but *Suddenly Last Summer* was the first work that reflected the emotional trauma, that of my life, very deeply. (Williams 2000: 287)

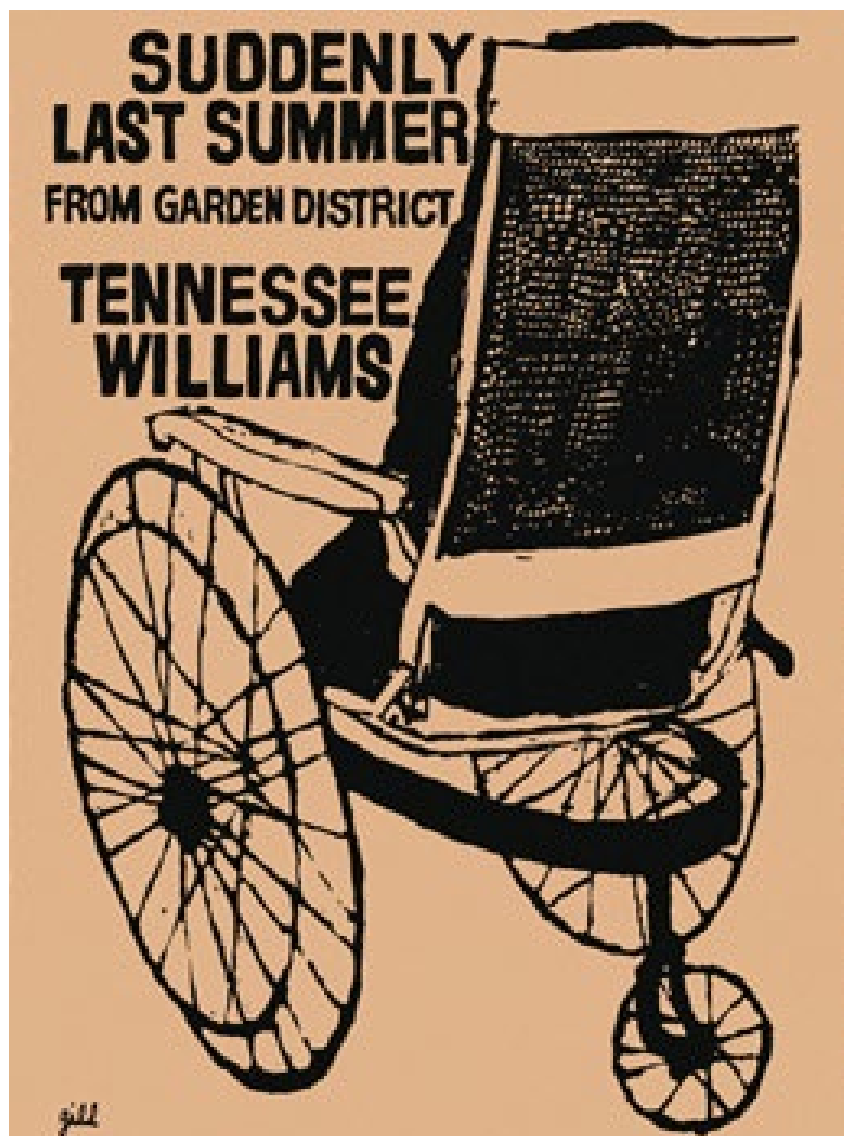


Figure 22 Play cover from *Suddenly Last Summer*, 1959.

“There is a passion for declivity in this world!” (Williams 1958: 78) cries Lord Byron as, in block eight of Williams’s *Camino Real*, he “...limps across the plaza with his head bowed.” (Williams 1958) Williams underscores the pathos of the moment by detailing a somber “...quiet intense” (Williams 1958) musical interlude as the poet moves across the town square. In nearly every one of Williams’s plays and short stories from the end of the Great Depression through the war years, the societal upheaval of the mid twentieth century and well into his later life, there is a slow but persistent deepening subjective character declension.

*Suddenly Last Summer* was a critical success in its New York Broadway premier on January 7, 1958. It was written at a momentous time in the playwright’s often tumultuous life, one of a number of plays which might be considered as turning points in his philosophic and expressionistic approach to comprehensions of his own psyche, as revealed through personal disruptive events.

*Suddenly Last Summer* contains autobiographic components, being written at a critical moment in the playwright’s life, the immediate period following an intense and disarming time of psychiatric analysis with the Freudian psychiatrist Lawrence S. Kubie.



Figure 23 Anne Meacham as Catharine, Hortense Alden as Mrs. Venable, and Robert Lansing as Dr. Cukrovicz in the original Broadway cast of *Suddenly Last Summer*.



### 3.6.1 Dramatic Theatrical Catharsis

*Suddenly Last Summer* made a sudden literary turn into the realm of the grotesque, as suggested by Dorff, offering "...a deep and bleaker version of a redemptive, cannibalistic world," (Dorff 1999: 117) another step downward and deeper into Dante's Cantorian hell. The play permitted Williams to face what had been gleaned from his time with Kubie, which was to face overtly the madness of his mother. In the play, the mother figure, Mrs. Violet Venable, refuses to acknowledge the shocking and contradictory story concerning her beloved poet-son Sebastian, on account of his behavior experienced by his young female cousin companion, who claims he used her as bait to attract young male lovers. Catharine Holly claims she was procuring for Sebastian, emphasizing that "...she [his mother] used to do it, too." (Williams 1990: 412)

Mrs. Venable considers Catherine a vandal, deliberately trying to destroy the image she has of her son and herself. She has had Catherine institutionalized and is attempting, via her wealth and moral authority, to bribe Catherine's family into agreeing to have the incriminating evidence of Sebastian's sex life "...cut out..." (Williams 1990: 412) of her brain via an operative procedure practiced on individuals suffering from what was then referred to as dementia praecox. (Schizophrenia). "After the operation, who would believe her, doctor?" (Williams 1971: 423) The play ends with Catherine detailing the hideous cannibalistic death of Sebastian by the mob of young boys he had sexually victimized. Mrs. Venable is led off stage by the doctor after physically threatening Catherine, yelling "Lion's View! State asylum cut this hideous story out of her brain!" (Williams 1971: 423)



Figure 24 Elizabeth Taylor in the filmed version of *Suddenly Last Summer*, 1959.

As harsh a character as Violet Venable is, she is a mirror of Williams's post-Kubie comprehension of his mother Edwina's parenting practice. *Suddenly Last Summer* acts as an "...autobiographical exorcism..." (Lahr 2015: 357) for Williams, who for the rest of his life carried great grief and guilt over the tragedy of his sister Rose's bilateral frontal lobotomy. The operative procedure was performed in January 1943 without Edwina informing Williams in advance, for which he never forgave her. In the play, Catherine states the obvious regarding Williams's anger with Edwina. "Do you want to bore a hole in my skull and turn a knife in my brain? Everything else was done to me! You'd have to have my mother's permission for that." (Williams 1971: 389)

Edwina's consent to the operative procedure was due to the lack of progress that Rose made in her behavior patterns despite hospitalization, and numerous insulin shock therapies. What was particularly odious to Edwina, and to an extent Cornelius, was Rose's persistent graphic sexual outbursts, which Williams experienced himself when visiting his sister. He too was embarrassed and terrified by what he witnessed of his sister's behavior, noting in his diary, "Horrible, horrible, her talk was so obscene. It was a horrible ordeal." (Williams 2006: 177)

In a late life conversation with Dotson Rader for the *Paris Review*, Williams explains what drove Edwina into the frenzy which led to her signing permission for the lobotomy. Williams explains that Rose "...loved to shock mother, she had a great inner resentment towards her, because mother had imposed this monolithic puritanism on her during adolescence." (Williams 2000: 177)

Rose told her mother that at All Saints College where she schooled "...we girls used to abuse ourselves with alter candles we stole from the chapel." (Williams 2000: 177) For Edwina, that was the last straw. "She rushed to the head doctor...do anything *anything* to shut her up! Just

like Mrs. Venable...except that mother wasn't as cruel as Mrs. Venable, poor bitch." (Williams 2000: 177) However, Williams denied being embittered against his mother, but rather deeply saddened because "My sister and I cared for each other. I cared for her more than I did my mother...I just thought [Edwina] was an almost criminally foolish woman." (Williams 2000: 177)

Catherine Holly is Rose Williams in terms of her predicament and defining characteristics. She is defiant, truthful, smokes, loves fashion, and enjoys a sense of mischief. In *Suddenly Last Summer* Williams uses a frightening dream told to him by Rose following the lobotomy, wherein she was terrified by a vision of "...devouring hordes." (Williams 2000: 177) Catherine relates to Dr. Sugar, her psychiatrist, of having witnessed Sebastian being eaten alive by "...a band of frightfully thin and naked children that looked like a flock of puckered birds." (Williams 1971: 142) It is this moment in the play when the doctor appears to appreciate the moment of Catherine's emotional breakdown.

Perhaps we saw some of Williams's emotional release against Edwina in *Suddenly Last Summer* with his character Mrs. Venable, and her attempt to cripple her niece. Certainly, the method to be used to silence Catherine, the prefrontal lobotomy, relates to Edwina's frantic appeal to eliminate from her daughter's mind the increasing verbal and sexual manifestations being exhibited by Rose. One wonders if Edwina was persistent in her plea more to help Rose, or to ease her own embarrassment at having her daughter so rebellious to her mother's strict Puritanism. "And mother screamed like a peacock. She rushed to the head doctor and she said...do anything, do anything to shut her up." (Devlin 2000: 327)

In the final scene of *Suddenly Last Summer* as Catherine and Dr. Sugar are approaching the climax of the play, Williams provides a statement through Catherine that very well might

relate to Williams and his own mother: “Catherine: Yes...something had broken, that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like ---a ---sort of a ---sort of---umbilical cord, long after...” (Williams 1971: 409)

Long after what?

“Catherine: All I know is that suddenly, last summer, he wasn’t young any more.”

(Williams 1971: 409)

### 3.7 The Image of Sunflowers in the *Two Character Play*

He was uttering an outcry from his heart when he revealed the madness that he and his sister shared in the fear they overcame daily. Their courage was their most heroic quality. For Williams, the playwright must be a kind of Sisyphus, the existential hero, who can’t die, can’t escape, can succeed for long, but also can’t stop trying. Reality itself becomes a terrifying circle of effort to understand in the midst of madness. (Tischler 2000: 150)



Figure 25 Jo Mielziner's set design for *Two Character Play*.

In the final decades of his life, Williams spent a good bit of his time contemplating his death, his writings increasingly mirroring such thoughts. The most important of these plays is, *The Two Character Play*, a masterpiece on which he crafted several versions between 1967 and 1975, hoping it would "...win him the final honors for fresh creativity that he so desired." (Tischler 2000: 143)

*The Two Character Play* is immensely complicated, difficult to follow, interpret, understand, and explain. The ultimate challenge for Williams was showing the complexity of human life on stage, transforming human experience into art. The Williams mythic protagonist is a romanticized persona seeking and explaining facets of the playwright himself. Williams based his dramas on his own anguished life often portraying the male/female attraction/conflict, the masculine/feminine identity, the love/hate conflicts of family life.

In *The Two Character Play* Williams develops an extremely complex vision of the human psyche. Brother and sister appear to be two sides of a single person, the animas/anima, acknowledging Williams's belief in the dual nature of the romantic artist. In *Summer and Smoke*, John explains to Alma that she contains a doppelganger, a reference to Williams's own inner neurotic other person that haunts his psyche. Of all of Williams's later works, none summarizes the final decades of creative work as richly as does *The Two Character Play*. Tischler describes the play as "...one of the most remarkable creations..." (Tischler 2000: 143) to have come about through Williams's lonely and courageous voyage through his private "Dragon Country," the final great composition of his long and varied career.

Williams designed *The Two Character Play* as a play about writing and producing a play. Felice, the brother and main protagonist, is both author and actor who is describing his own life in the work he is developing. His sister Claire, who often refuses to follow Felice's script, forgets

her lines, or argues with the facts being presented, and having no clarity in her memories of the events being presented, appears to be on drugs in pill form, used to overcome her terror of acting, but which only contributes to her confusion.

Reality and fantasy are interwoven with terrifying power as two actors on tour--brother and sister--find themselves deserted by their troupe in a decrepit "...state theater in an unknown state." (Williams 1997) Faced (perhaps) by an audience expecting a performance, they enact "The Two Character Play"--an illusion within an illusion, an outcry from isolation, panic, and fear.

Felice and Claire carry the entire play. "They both have long hair and androgenous characteristics." (Tischler 2000: 145) Felice appears periodically to be more forceful, more creative, more masculine. Claire, perhaps under the influence of her drug ingestion, "...is more passive, more frightened, and more feminine." (Tischler 2000: 145) She does have moments of rebellion, but mostly follows her brother's initiative. "The brother-sister relationship is certainly underscored as they appear to have lived a single life and seemed preordained to a single fate." (Tischler 2000: 145)

The siblings are living as hermits, sequestered in the house where their father murdered their mother before taking his own life. They have imprisoned themselves in the horrific memory of the event by their own frozen wills, too terrified to leave the house even for necessary staples. Although the violence in the play is remembered by Felice and Claire as murder/suicide, the actual Williams family disruption was sexual. Edwina "...was so Puritanical and frigid..." (Tischler 2000: 145) that she screamed and fought her husband Cornelius during sex, harsh noise and rhetoric overheard by Rose and Tom standing in the hallway outside their parent's

bedroom. Turning for comfort and companionship to each other, the children huddled together unnaturally close in their strong love, which became their emotional core of being for both youngsters. (Tischler 2000: 146) In the play, Claire and Felice are now penniless paranoiacs, trying to come to grips with their dark past by finding a way to live through another day. Their isolation from the outside world has become their destiny.

As witnessed in *The Glass Menagerie*, where Williams and Rose are portrayed as Tom and Laura, Felice and Claire, as loving siblings, share memories of having been raised within a markedly dysfunctional family environment. Though Felice and Claire find they have the imagination to escape, fear blocks their will. The deep love that solidifies the very essence of each protagonist, one to the other, reflects what Tischler refers to as "...a clear reflection of the near incestuous love Williams and his sister [Rose] shared." (Tischler 2000: 145) Although as teenagers Rose and Tom wrote extremely flirtatious letters to one another, and while there appears to have been no other romantic interests at that time of their lives, Williams has on more than one occasion, explicitly denied any actual incestuous relationship with Rose, though she was in many ways the one constant in his life. However, as Williams composed the moments of Felice and Claire's tormented closeness, he used symbols to suggest what may have been his own intense psychologic sexuality recalled from his agonizing over his emotional ambivalence of love/guilt concerning sister Rose.

Gigantic sunflowers symbolize the sexuality that is in plain view, but not in reach, growing right outside Felice and Claire's front door. Blocked from expression of their incestuous urges, the characters turn inward. The androgenous quality of Claire and Felice and their mirrored identities lead to a path of narcissism: they find themselves in one another.



Williams loved Rose more fiercely and tenderly than he ever loved another human being, and as such his writing *The Two Character Play* lays bare the tormented theme of sibling love. He quotes from the Biblical Song of Solomon: “You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride, you are spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.” (Song of Solomon 4:12) He was seeing Rose as “...a garden enclosed...” (Tischler 2000: 148) not just because of her forbidden sexuality but, as he wrote years earlier in “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” “I think the petals of her mind had simply closed [during the early years of adolescence] through fear, and it’s no telling how much they had closed upon in a way of secret wisdom.” (Tischler 2000: 148) Williams might as well have added a second line from the Biblical reference. “I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: ‘Open to me my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one.’” (Song of Solomon 5:2)

Williams came to regard the intense sibling relationship as both love and a form of bondage. Actual sexual expression is strictly beyond a physical reality, yet the intense relationship of the two figures was analogous to the “...one flesh paradigm of marriage.” (Tischler 2000: 149) The huge and ever enlarging sunflowers right outside their windows are constantly a part of that awareness.

In a short two-page note written, it seems, to a future performance director and cast of *The Two Character Play* Williams writes:

There may be no apparent sexuality in *The Two Character Play* and yet it is the *Liebestod* of the two characters from whom the title derives. This fact should be recognized by the director and players, but then it should appear to be forgotten. (Bak 2009: 211)

One wonders why Williams even mentions *Liebestod* which infers “love death” defining lover’s consummation of their love in death, often by double suicide. Is Williams relating Claire

and Felice to the childhood relationship he and Rose enjoyed as children, their closeness, their game playing, sneaking off on treasure hunts, being read nighttime stories before sleeping in the same bed?

*The Two Character* Play describes two desperately "...gallant but hopelessly deviant beings finding themselves with no escape but self-destruction, which fails them too... Both Felice and Clare, each with an opportunity to use a revolver on one another, can only forego the opportunity, finally reaching toward each other as the curtain falls" (Bak 2009: 212) So, there is no death by any means, therefore no opportunity for *Liebestod*. At a moment toward the end of the play Claire states what may be at the emotional core of their lives together, written by their creator as a plea for universal understanding:

The worst thing that has disappeared in our lives is being aware of what's going on in our lives. We don't dare talk about it, it's like a secret that we're conspiring to keep from each other, even though each of us knows that the other one knows it. (Williams 1997: 53)



Figure 26 Cara Duff-McCormack and Michael York in *Two Character Play* (titled *Outcry* at the time).

### 3.7.1 Genderfluidity in *The Two Character Play*

Tischler suggests that Williams's effort to feel Rose's pain may well have increased his sensitivity to women. Williams spoke of his sense of:

Having the female within him, allowing him to understand the feminine point of view, to create living female characters. He attributed his sensitivity in part to his sexuality. As Coleridge had noted, the creative mind is itself androgynous, allowing the artist to explore a wider range of human experience than most people can. (Tischler 2000: 157)

As stated earlier, Claire and Felice appear to be two sides of a single person, but the reality of the play's anima/animus is two sides of Williams's psyche. In *The Two Character Play*, Williams is projecting the images of Tom and Rose as youngsters, terrified of their parents' violent temper and behavior with one another, their timidity of the outside world, preferring to be sealed within the confines of their love and support for one another. Their bonding was so close that the siblings could all but read one another's minds, imagine the other's thoughts.



Figure 27 Julie Haydon and Laurette Taylor as Laura and Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*.

## Chapter 4: Spirit and the Flesh

During an extended interview with Cecil Brown of *The Partisan Review*, given in 1974, at the time of his late apocalyptic play *Red Devil Battery Sign*, Williams was asked what was it that made him so successful as a writer. Williams spun a story in which he explained that once when meeting Joe DiMaggio, the baseball great had complimented him on his use of sex in his writings "...the best thing in the world," (Devlin 2000: 276) Williams was told. When Brown then asked, "Because sex is closer to the truth?" (Devlin 2000: 276) the playwright responded that [he] could see a lot of things by putting sex into it. "I like it, you know. It seems very beautiful to me to write sex into plays." (Devlin 2000: 276) The remark resonates throughout the Williams canon. It is rare, if not impossible, to find a written example of his work wherein there is not some form of sexuality as a driving force.

### 4.1 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

A prime example of Williams's genius in defining a lifestyle during a time of strong societal homophobic discourse is how he used both character and psychological methodology to define stage individuality. Although Williams's first openly homosexual character, Quentin, in *Small Craft Warnings*, did not appear on a Broadway stage until 1972, in 1953 *Camino Real*, introduced via "...a phrase of light music..." (Williams 1958: 38) The Baron de Charlus. He is described as, "...an elderly foppish sybarite in a light silk suit, [with] a carnation in his lapel..." (Williams 1958: 38) who states, "My suit is yellow, my nationality is French, and my normality has been often subject to question." (Williams 1958:38) However, Williams does not allow the homosexual to stay for long and makes short shrift of the Baron's stay on the *Camino Real*, as the character is dispatched rather quickly by the "streetcleaners" whose job within this

totalitarian fantasy world is to maintain certain "...strict conservative principles." (Williams 1958: 38)



Figure 28 The poster from the Broadway production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1957.

Refusing to succumb to the political atmosphere of the moment, Williams continued to challenge critics, scholars, and audiences with characters, though never making an appearance on stage, whose image strongly evoked, and whose presence was critical to the very essence of the

play. Five of these are homosexuals. Allan Grey (Blanche Dubois' late young husband, *Streetcar Named Desire*), Skipper (Brick Pollitt's football buddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), Sebastian Venable (the poet son of Violet Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*), and Jack Straw and Peter Ochello (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*). These off-stage characters allowed Williams to present them on-stage through dialogue, descriptive music, moments of sudden interruption, as important pivotal missing individuals, whose influences govern the lives and times of the staged personalities.

#### 4.1.1 Homosexuality in Big Daddy's Plantation

Jack Straw and Peter Ochello are introduced in "early notes for the designer," from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by describing the style of the main room in which the play will take place:

It hasn't changed much since it was occupied by its original owners, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts: it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon. (Williams 1971: 880)

These stage directions establish "...homosexuality not only as the physical origin of the plantation but also as its *metaphysical* origin in the loving relationship that "haunts" this bedroom so "gently and poetically.'" (Bibler 2003: 384) Thus, this very setting establishes the historical method of inheritance by describing the early beginnings of the plantation by the "ghostly" lingering presence of a "pair of old bachelors," Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. Furthermore, the words "must evoke some ghosts" is Williams indicating that his stage design must convey the "tenderness" of the two men's relationship throughout the play.

What is most striking about the pathway to inheritance of the estate ownership is the homosexuality that stands at its attributed origin, "...influencing the shape and significance of



other relationships on the plantation.” (Bibler 2003: 384) As we learn, the close loving, caring homosexual relationship of the two original owners, Straw and Ochello, represents the only meaningful sensual relationship in the play, as opposed to either loveless heterosexual partners or tragically suppressed homosexual longings of other occupants.

#### 4.1.2 Like Father, Like Son



Figure 29 Illustration by Stage Designer Jo Mielziner for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Big Daddy, as the direct patriarchal inheritor of the estate, may well have unwittingly planted the seed of homosexual desire in his younger son by having Brick and Maggie occupy the bedroom shared by Straw and Ochello. Brick is a man driven to heavy drinking by fear of his own inherent homosexuality caused by the death of his longtime friend Skipper and underscored by his marriage to Maggie, a woman he now “can’t stand” (Savran 1992: 101) and refuses to sleep with. Brick appears to suffer from a sense of self-hatred, a condition brought on by a nagging belief of having incited another to homosexual desire.

As heir and benefactor to Straw and Ochello, Big Daddy, who admits to having “knocked around in his time” (Williams 1990) before arriving at the Straw/Ochello estate, may well be considered as a carrier of homosexuality. However, as Savran points out, Williams uses Brick’s father’s “taint” (Savran 1992: 101) of homosexuality to present Big Daddy an “exemplar of normative masculinity,” (Savran 1992: 101) With Big Daddy’s “lech” for Maggie, and his diatribe concerning his longing for a “young choice” mistress, as well as his blistering contempt of the “fat old body” of Big Mama his character epitomizes the very orthodox heterosexual masculinity that degraded woman during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Thus, Williams may well be suggesting Big Daddy’s role in Brick’s homophobia.

Near the end of Act two, Big Daddy intensifies his pressure on Brick to explain his drinking; “Yep, you’re passing the buck to things like time and disgust with mendacity and ---crap---if you got to use that kind of language about a thing, its ninety-proof bull, and I’m not buying any...you started drinkin’ when your friend Skipper died.” (Williams 1990: 944) Brick is stunned at Big Daddy’s statement. “What are you suggesting?” (Williams 1990: 944) When told he is not suggesting anything “but Gooper an’ Mae suggested that there was something not right exactly in your---not, well, exactly normal in your friendship with...” (Williams 1990: 944) Brick intercedes with his reason for denying Maggie. “They suggested that too? I thought that was Maggie’s suggestion.” (Williams 1990: 944)

At this tense moment between father and son Williams intercedes, almost as a narrator, with a stage direction describing a dynamic change in Brick’s physiognomy.

[His] ...detachment is at last broken through. His heart is accelerated; his forehead sweat-beaded; his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse. The thing they are discussing... is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between [he and Brick], The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to keep face in the world they

lived in, may be at the heart of the mendacity that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with. It may be the root of his collapse. (Williams 1990: 945)

Brick demands of Big Daddy “Who else’s suggestion is it, is it yours? How many others thought that Skipper and I were?” (Williams 1990: 945) Big Daddy’s attempts to ease Brick’s intense fear that has caused his son’s temperamental terror, but only manages to add fuel to the fire. He gently tries to ease Brick’s pain:

Now hold on, hold on a minute, son---I knocked around in my time...I bummed---I bummed this country till I was--- slept in hobo jungles and railroad Y’s and flop houses in all cities before. (Williams 1990: 945)

Brick takes this to mean that Big Daddy is admitting to the very lifestyle of which he is being accused, conceding his own “depravity” which led to his being hired by Straw and Ochello, and continuing as such with Ochello after Straw died. Brick turns on his father questioning Big Daddy’s thoughts concerning his and Skipper’s relationship: “Oh, you think so too, you call me your son and a queer...” accusing Big Daddy of deliberately putting Maggie and him in the room that was Straw and Ochello’s “...in which that pair of old sisters slept in a double bed where both of them died. You think we did dirty things between us, Skipper and me...you think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men...Straw? Ochello? A couple of...ducking sissies... Queers? (Williams 1990: 947) Brick’s use of these verbal symbols underscores the “...wide and profound reach of the conventional mores...” (Williams 1990: 948) of his and Skipper’s world composed of people who feel “disgusted” by things “like that”. “Why can’t exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship between two men be respected as something clean and decent without being thought as...fairies?” (Williams 1990: 948)

In response to Big Daddy's attempt at assurance that such is possible, Brick lashes out at Maggie, detailing her part in the sordid atmosphere of his relationship with Skipper, stating that Maggie "...got the idea you're talking about...it is too rare to be normal" (Williams 1990: 948) Brick relates how Maggie worked on "...poor dumb Skipper...poured in his mind the dirty, false idea that what we were, him and me, was a frustrated case of the ole pair of sisters that lived in this room, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello." (Williams 1990: 948) Skipper took Maggie to bed to prove the accusation was nonsense, and "...when it didn't work out, he thought it was true!" (Williams 1990: 950) Skipper then drank himself to death, "...breaking in two like a rotten stick." (Williams 1990: 951)

Big Daddy will have nothing to do with Brick's story, calling it half-assed, something left out, pushing his son to finally disclose the truth for his drinking and rampant homophobia. Brick admits to receiving a phone call from Skipper in which he "...made a drunken confession to me and on which I hung up!" (Williams 1990: 951) The truth, Brick is responsible for his friend's death. "You ----dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it...before you'd face the truth with him.?" (Williams 1990: 951)

#### **4.1.3 The Influence of Homosexuality in Plantation Succession and Inheritance.**

As the play proceeds it becomes apparent that Brick is the only person to harbor fear of his identification with himself and the previous occupants of his and Maggie's bedroom. Big Daddy has made it clear that his relationship with the estate founders provides him no uneasiness. "[I have] lived with too much space around me to be infected by ideas of other

people.” (Savran 1992: 948) “One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton is tolerance.” (Bibler 2003: 386)

Every other character either ignores or treats with love and respect Straw and Ochello’s relationship. They appear to follow the lead of their creator. In Williams’s setting of the play, the rural part of Northern Mississippi, a country and its people the playwright knew well, “...Straw and Ochello clearly enjoyed an openly homosexual life without any sign of social isolation, disapproval or retaliation.” (Bibler 2003: 385) Big Daddy’s admission that during an earlier moment in his life he had “knocked around” with men may have very much to do with the current ease with which his plantation family accepts the homosexual relationship of Straw and Ochello, thus posing no threat to Big Daddy’s white masculinity and authority. Under these circumstances, it makes sense that now that Big Daddy has learned of Brick’s role in the death of Skipper, that he may be amenable to accepting the possibility that his son may harbor homosexual tendencies. For Big Daddy and Maggie, both very aware of Brick’s plight, it matters little if Brick is homosexual because with the societal acceptance of Straw and Ochello’s relationship, the plantation’s hierarchy is likely to work to guarantee the primacy of Brick’s masculinity and his position as likely plantation patriarch regardless of his sexual identity. Behind Maggie’s intense role in her relationship with Skipper and Brick, she is working toward her own survival within the male dominated environment. Although she may be concerned with her husband’s sexual identity, her main thought is how she will personally deal with it. Thus, she works to force the matter of Brick’s sexuality into the open rather than denying or immediately attempting to correct it. First and foremost, is Big Daddy leaving the estate to his favorite son. Maggie will endeavor in any way she deems necessary to make that happen. At this moment it means her very survival.



Figure 30 Hirshfeld illustration of Big Daddy, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

In a letter Williams wrote to Donald Windham while suffering through an episode of his so called “blue devils” (periodic neuroses) he stated:

Naturally we have very little integrity, if any at all. Naturally the innermost “I” or “You” is lost in a sea of other disintegrated elements, things that can’t fit together and that make an eternal war in our natures...we all bob only momentarily above the bubbling, boiling surface of the torrent of lies and distortions we are borne along. (Savran 1992: 108)

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, "...genders and sexuality are not set in opposition but rather dispersed and ... constantly in circulation..." (Savran 1992: 108) This sense of gender/sexual ambiguity was apparent when Williams revised the relationship between Brick and Maggie to accommodate the changes that director Elia Kazan demanded for the Broadway production of the play. At various moments in the original version of the play Brick and Big Daddy respond to their wives' declaration of love by stating "...wouldn't it be funny if that was true." (Williams 1990: 78 & 166) This happens between Big Daddy and Big Mama at the end of Act 2, and between Brick and Maggie at the End of Act 3, implying a common inability of such true heterosexual love. Like father, like son. In Williams's revised third act, Brick's line is omitted, suggesting that perhaps Brick is beginning to accept Maggie's claim of love as a possibility, and in so doing moving past his homosocial relationship with Skipper.

But it is Maggie's "...final and peripetous confession..." (Savran 1992: 109) directly to Big Daddy before the entire family that destabilizes normal constructions of sexuality. Savran states unequivocally that Maggie's declaration of her "...invented pregnancy... ironically, becomes a testament not to the "naturalness" of heterosexuality but to the impossibility of erasing male homosexual desire and to Skipper's... position in the erotic triangle." (Savran 1992: 109) The fact is that should Brick sleep with and impregnate Maggie, in the bed of Straw and Ochello, the heterosexual act would actually further guarantee Brick's place in the plantation's homosexual economy by producing an heir in a setting not unlike that initiated by Straw and Ochello. These two individuals got around the need to provide an heir by heterosexual pairing by adopting Big Daddy as their son and heir. However, Brick, is still at a moment without a clear understanding of his sexuality. The question that his situation presents is one that forestalls the

resolution of the play's scheme by superimposing the plantation's heterosexual and homosexual components onto each other.



Figure 31 Burl Ives and Barbara Bel Geddes in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1947 Broadway production.



In Michael Bibler's article, "A Tenderness Which Was Uncommon: Homosexuality, Narrative, and the Southern Plantation in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*," he makes the case that under these circumstances, if Brick sleeps with Maggie, "he may only compound the problem of his sexual identity, because both options, sleeping with, or not sleeping with, produced possibilities for his identity at the same time." (Bibler 2003: 399) If Brick sleeps with Maggie, he may settle for himself his heterosexuality even as he enters into a homosexual economy with Skipper and Straw and Ochello. If he refuses to sleep with Maggie, he avoids implying any sexual similarities to Straw and Ochello but may be admitting that he has no interest in a meaningful heterosexual relationship with his wife, and his true "...sexual desires might be... reserved for other men like Skipper." (Bibler 2003: 400)

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the widely admired and acclaimed 1955 Pulitzer Prize winning Broadway Play attests to the brilliance of Williams's ability to present what David Savran calls "...male, homosexual subject[s]" (Savran 1992: 109) on New York theatrical stages during the 1940's and 1950s, a turbulent and homophobic time. By implying, but not stating explicitly, Williams was able to address topics and issues that were not allowed on the stages of the American Theatre, especially not those of Broadway. Some of Williams's most admired and prized productions were presented with significant positive critical and audience response in the troubled homophobic atmosphere of the period through off stage characters like Jack Straw, Peter Ochello, Skipper, Alan Grey, Sebastian Venable, Rosario del la Rose, and daringly and briefly, a staged homosexual Baron De Charlus in the 1953 production of *Camino Real*.

## Chapter 5: A Last Late Look at Williams's Experimental Apocalyptic Expressionism

I'm just writing little plays now, plays that involve dancing, mime and dancing.  
(Williams 1974: 273)

### 5.1 Preface to Lyric Theatre

The “little” plays Williams evokes in his 1974 interview with Cecil Brown were written after his last series of “big plays”, those written between *The Night of the Iguana* in 1961, and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* in 1969. The plays written in this period were “...lambasted mercilessly...” (Halle 2005) by the critics who failed to appreciate the continuing experimentation in Williams's writing. Of the collection during this decade none of his compositions were more boldly in this vein than *Three Plays for the Lyric Theatre*, made up of *The Youthfully Departed*, *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws*, and *A Cavalier for Milady*.

These three late Williams plays might be considered a condensed reminiscence of so much of Williams's life from childhood through the tumultuous late 1940's-1950's when he burst upon the theatre scene with *The Glass Menagerie* followed by one great Broadway success after another ending with *The Night of the Iguana* in 1961. The loss of Frank Merlo in 1963 led to ten years of emotional and physical depression enhanced by drugs and alcohol leading almost to his death in 1969. These years were followed by another decade of what has become appreciated as his experimental period. The study of Williams's complicated personae is reflected in his writings, the stories within them, and most importantly the characters portrayed. The three short pieces are linked together by both subject and Williams's use of dance.

### 5.1.1 *The Youthfully Departed*

*The Youthfully Departed* is a short poetic fantasy in which two dead lovers attempt to relive their passion through dance. The play's title originates from the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, a poet Williams first became aware of as a student at Washington University. "Rilke's "Nur die jungen Toten," which translates to "only those who die young," was converted to "youthfully departed" by Williams." (Halle 2005) Rilke became a strong poetic influence for Williams, who earlier in his career invokes Rilke in the title *Battle of Angels*, and in the prologue to *Summer and Smoke*.

Rilke's description of the Laments and their Land of Lamentations is the substrate upon which Williams builds his exposition and action for the play. *The Youthfully Departed* is a fantasy meditation on death performed as a dance in a literal afterworld.

Two young lovers who, while in the act of making love in their car, drown when their automobile rolls into a lake, beginning their journey into oblivion. They are now represented as ghosts and are positioned on separated benches. Another ghost-like figure, a Lament, is standing behind each of the youths who, when the lovers try to move to the same bench or even turn their heads, are restrained by their monitor.

As the youths become chilled and find themselves trapped, unable to return to their sexual passion, the Laments perform a funeral dance, a *pavanne*, while chanting their verse "...in an antiphonal manner." (Halle 2005)

As the Laments prepare the two young people to accept their sacrificial death, the two lovers jump up and perform what Williams describes as:

“...a passionately erotic dance between them; it must contain whirls and leaps to evade their captors . . . At its climax, THEY may tear their clothes off, flinging them in the faces of the pursuing ATTENDANTS with savage outcries: then their bodies join—appear to—and a great, startled “Ahhh” rises from their throats and the place itself...” (Halle 2005)

This highly erotic dance is to end at the base of a sacrificial figure described via a Second Lament chant from which Williams takes references from Rilke:

“Even the guarding sepulchral stone, emerges out of dusk, that replica carving of the lofty Sphinx, its taciturn chamber’s gaze from which they drew back at first view, that regal head that silently poised forever the human and mortal face on the scale of the stars.” (Halle 2005)

The wild dance rebellion staged by the two young people has disrupted the usual world of the Laments by causing a destructive fire destroying the house of the Laments. Eventually the two young lovers are restrained, but the Laments mourn the destructive changes that have occurred in their domain such that “nothing will ever be the same again in this place.” (Halle 2005)

*The Youthfully Departed* was initially set in type in 1980 to be published in *New Directions Volume 6 of The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, when the playwright asked it to be withdrawn. Apparently, no reason was put forth, but it is speculated that Williams’s play *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* had not been well received, and Williams may have been wary of provoking further audience and critical outcry with material such as the dance scene with its implication of sexual intercourse. By 1981, neither nudity and sex were considered as experimental on the American stage, still *The Youthfully Departed* has never been produced nor has appeared in print.

### 5.1.2 *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws*

Allean Halle, in her 2005 *Tennessee Williams Annual Review* discussion of *Three Plays for the Lyric Theatre*, suggests *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws* appears, at first, not unlike what Linda Dorff titled Williams's absurdist plays written during the period of the playwright's life, when "...the author had drugged himself into a zombie state following the death of his longtime companion." (Halle 1950) Williams, in earlier versions, worked with concepts of elegy and religious sacrifice building on themes by Rilke, much as he did with *The Youthfully Departed*. In this second play Williams develops a character referred to as "The Manager" who ends the play explaining to his listeners "...the lines given [me] by the playwright who came to my dressing room, drunk of course and handed me a rewrite."

The Manager explains the words he has been asked to read come from: those lines of the tenth and last of those elegies that the poet Rilke wrote in a storm on a sea-cliff at Schloss-Duino in 1911 . . . Something about the youthfully dead, A Lament, and a Sphinx at the edge of a desert that "silently poises forever the human face on the scale of the stars. (Halle 2005)

Williams describes the manager as "...an aging queen with dyed hair, a white carnation in the lapel of his swallowtail coat..." (Williams 1981: 302) an early description of the character's sexual orientation explaining his interplay with his male and female cliental.

The version of the play, as it appears in *The Plays of Tennessee Williams Volume 7*, begins with two women, Madge and Bea, the same two characters (Flora and Bea) that appear in an earlier Williams one act, *A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot*. Revised and retitled *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws*, Halle describes the version written in 1969 as being much darker in

tone and significantly better written than earlier drafts, although the basic plot and characters are the same.

Madge and Bea meet for lunch in a diner, across the street from the department store, Guffels, during a mad Christmas shopping rush. Bea is carrying a “huge bunny rabbit, bought for a mutual friend’s little afflicted child’s birthday.” (Williams 1990: 300) The wrapping has been torn to pieces by the frenzied crowd in the department store.

The two women, supposedly good friends, pick away like cats at one another discussing their appearances, their unfaithful husbands, and the threat posed by an increasingly anxious and fearful society:

Bea: just look at the street of infuriated shoppers!

Madge: It’s a sight to be seen that’s obscene. But serenity will descend...

Bea: When the bomb is dropped. (Williams 1990: 302)

Madge tells Bea that she is taking an evening course at N.Y.U. on “Problems Confronting Urban Society in Our Time.” As though to underscore the danger of urban life, Williams includes a young, pregnant waitress who, when she takes the two women’s orders, explains her black eye is due to her having been assaulted during her subway ride to work.

At this juncture of the play, two young male bikers are introduced, referred to in the play as Young Man One and Young Man Two. They have entered the restaurant while waiting for their motorcycle to be repaired. They are wearing pink leather biker jackets which are inscribed with The Mystic Rose insignia. In a rhyming duet Young Man Two sings “Height of a hill where He died, the First Mystic Rose was crucified.” (Williams 1990: 321) His partner is less poetic, he sings, “We’re on a flat surface, Babe.” (Williams 1990: 321)

As the story proceeds, we learn that the two are lovers, but that one of them has been less than loyal of late, hustling on his own, being "...on call for well-paying trade." (Halle 1990) Underscoring Young Man One's concern and remonstrations that their relationship should be exclusive, Young Man Two has drawn the attention of the gay restaurant manager and moves with the man into the rest room, demonstrating his use of trade as a method of obtaining a free meal.

Upon returning to his companion the two men argue the meaning of their relationship. They speak candidly of their lifestyle, Young Man One appealing in an accusatory manner Young Man Two's sexual activity with other partners, demanding to know just what his limits are, and his fear that his behavior will result in destroying their relationship.

Young Man Two: You know. Today's trade is tomorrow's joke. I'm scared I love you and I'm scared. You're my life. I'm scared.

Young Man One: Of What?

Young Man Two: Tomorrow and---Look! Look out the window! (Williams 1990: 320)

A hunched over figure moves by the restaurant window bearing a placard on which is printed "Mr. Black," a dark figure representing death seen previously in Williams's one act play *The Mutilated*.

The Young Man One makes fun of his partner's fear of the figure but is then suddenly staggered as the apparition passes the restaurant window. Only the two young men can see him. When his terrified partner again mentions the religious symbolism of the "Height of a hill where He died, the Mystic Rose was Crucified," the disbelieving partner attempts calm by repeating his earlier mantra: "We're on a flat surface, Babe."

The bike is repaired, and the two young men leave the restaurant after discussing who will ride in the buddy seat. However, a few moments later there is a resounding crash, causing Madge and Bea jump from their seats and rush to the windows. Young Man Two lies dead in the street, already having his brains swept up by the local street sweeper. Young Man One comes running back into the restaurant, and heads directly for the bathroom leaving a trail of vomit behind him. Madge and Bea decide they have had enough of the scene and decide to leave for home. The waitress informs the manager she will not be returning the next day as a result of her having been attacked in the subway on her way to work, and taking a cab is too expensive. The manager receives the news impassively, his thoughts on the youth struggling in the lavatory.

Williams now has the manager sing a lyric as he approaches the bathroom door:

“And now the cats with jeweled claws  
 Glide down the wall of night  
 Softly to crouch with bated breath  
 And glare at all below,  
 Their malice on each upturned face  
 Descending cool as snow.” (Williams 1990: 329)

The manager knocks on the lavatory door. The young man emerges and stares aghast at the manager:

“Young Man One: Who the hell are you?

Manager: Your future. I’ll introduce you to it. Shall we go?” (Williams 1990: 330)

The young man closes his eyes. The manager takes his arm and leads him toward the revolving door.

### 5.1.2.1 Interpretation of Cats

Williams’s first stage directions describing the forth coming scene includes: “Through the window we can see the marquee of a cinema. The attraction offered is *Defiance of Decency* which certainly defines the underlying theme of the society and individuals portrayed.”



(Williams 1990: 299) Donald Spoto, in his 1985 biography of Williams, describes the play as set in the anteroom of Hell, "...gruesome ...a tale of madness, depravity and death." (Spoto 1997: 353)

Of interest is how marked the play is in its descriptive homosexuality. *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws* has been described as one of Williams's most openly homosexual plays, on a par with *And Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Queens*, and contains what may be his most open and frank assessment of homosexual life since Quentin's long description of the isolation and frustration experienced by the older segment of the gay men's community in *Small Craft Warnings*.

However, *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws* is describing a different homosexual lifestyle, a sense of love and community spirit, as opposed to Quentin's plea for respect for and within the gay community. *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws* portrays the brevity of homosexual attachments, the betrayals between partners, the huckster looking to score through sordid self-abasing tricks, and finally describing potential death in a gruesome manner.

What keeps *Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws* from being a strong homophobic discourse on gay life is Williams's linking the two bikers to the crucifixion and the resurrection. In 1982 Williams wrote to his longtime friend Marie St. Just, "I had begun to turn completely against all gays and was killing them off in my plays." (Spoto 1997: 386)

Halle suggests Williams, as playwright, is "...translating the elegy into theatre." (Halle 2005) By destroying the "Mystic Rose" emblem he is suggesting a dead church. The excessive sexuality and the implication of its connection with money is interpreted as the message within Rilke's elegy which links *Now the Cat with Jeweled Claws* to *The Youthfully Departed*. The

same emphasis by Williams on human sexuality in *A Cavalier for Milady* binds all three of these late plays to Williams's use of human sexuality to define a critical component of human erotic carnality.

### 5.1.3 *A Cavalier for Milady*

The play opens in New York City. Williams's stage directions reveal an elegant, older home in a smart section of Manhattan with interior furnishings described as Victorian chic. The first character to be introduced is Nance, a young woman dressed as a child, her hair fixed in little girl curls. She is sitting on a small sofa in a three windowed bay. Williams decrees that the actress should be between twenty-five and thirty. As the curtain rises, Nance is holding an open book and is staring off into a small adjoining room at what is described as a piece of life-sized statuary, a Greek Apollo with fig leaf.

There are two older women in the play, Nance's wealthy mother and her friend Mrs. Aides, a somewhat bitchy and sarcastic individual. The couple are preparing to go out for the evening when the babysitter arrives to care for the "child." These two women are not unlike the two bickering old friends Bea and Madge, but with new names and a modern setting. They are "...man-hunting females." (Halle 2005) As in so many of his works, Williams includes people from his past, or those who were family friends or acquaintances. Mrs. Aides is based on the mother of Rose Williams's best friend Mary Louse Aides in St. Louis.

The sitter is described by Williams as "a stocky, fiftyish-looking woman [who] enters glumly." (Williams 2008: 49) She is Miss Josie. When addressed as Miss Josie, however, she turns to Mother stating, "The name is Missus. Flattery..." (Williams 2008: 49) to which, in introducing Miss Josie to her ward, Mother retorts, "Heavens, don't glower like that! ...This is my child Nance, dear, this is Miss Josie." (Williams 2008: 49)

But Miss Josie already suspects she is encountering a less than normal mother-daughter relationship. What she sees is no little girl, but what might be considered a disturbed young woman. Nance is sitting in the side room with a book of photos of the Russian dancer Nijinsky, and staring at a marble statue of a fig-leaved, Grecian male. Miss Josie is aghast as she observes this individual masturbating as she stares at the statue.

Josie: ...I wasn't told that I was engaged to sit with a grown woman disguised as a little girl...she wasn't reading no book, but was starin' at that naked man's statue ...and her hand is---look at her fingers, she's--- Josie puts it straight to Mother: "I don't sit with perverts and mental patients. (Williams 2008: 52)

She is, however, not above taking extra compensation for her trouble, which allows Mother and Mrs. Aides the opportunity to leave for their appointment at the Plaza Hotel with unknown male companions.

It does not take long for one versed in the works and life of Williams to appreciate that the young woman Nance, is the playwright's sister, Rose.

Nance ignores her babysitter. She has delved deep into her imagination and has conjured up her own companion, the apparition of the dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. She begins conversing with the apparition, after telling the increasingly frustrated babysitter to return to her chair and to mind her own business. Miss Josie does so after railing at Nance, "If I was your mum, I'd lock you up and throw the key away." (Williams 2008: 57)



Figure 32 Nijinsky as Vayou in *The Talisman*.

Nance asks Nijinsky would he like some music to dance for her. Nance and her apparition begin a lengthy conversation not unlike a two-part verbal dance of their own. Nijinsky details his own disturbing life story, his seduction at the hands of the famous Russian choreographer Sergei Diaghilev, his status and fame as a great dancer, and, as he explains to Nance, his own descent into madness.

Nance: I do not understand apparitions.

Vaslav: They're contradictory, paradoxical things: maybe only possible on stage, in a play written by a madman.

Nance: I want to touch and be touched.

Vaslav: [touching her hand] This is my touch. Do you feel it?

Nance: If you say so.

Vaslav: You'll believe so?

[Nance smiles]

Vaslav: The licenses of madness are almost unlimited. I know since I've explored them too.

Nance---you're beautiful. (Williams 2008: 59)

Nance's desire for both physical and emotional contact is made clear as she attempts repeatedly to touch and caress him, anxious for a sexual relationship. He rebuffs her.

Vaslav: ...please remove your hand. ---I suspect that you will have no love in your life outside of your fantasies, because when people go mad, they're usually, almost always, kept under close custody, and intimacies are forbidden.

Nance: ---There are diamonds of perspiration on your forehead and throat.

Vaslav: You do ---imagine well...

Nance: I feel this blue vein pulsing in your throat, and I feel---

[he catches her hand]

Vaslav: No, no. No more, I'm sorry. I can't go back that way, not even in your fantasy. It was too much: it burned me up, it interfered with my art and finally blasted my mind...

(Williams 2008: 62)

Nance and her apparition embody the essence of the play, as Williams describes both Nance's deep desire for physical contact and Nijinsky's message that spirituality may be sullied by sex.

Vaslav: I informed the world that I am spiritual food. People go to the church to pray and there they are made to drink wine and are told it is the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ does not intoxicate...it makes people sober. Catholics do not drink wine but make use of it in a symbolic way. They swallow white wafers, thinking that they swallow the blood and flesh of Our Lord. I am the spirit in the flesh and flesh in the spirit

Nance: Yes, remember the flesh, it cries to be remembered. (Williams 2008: 63)

The scene between Nance and Nijinsky is interrupted by the return of Mother and Mrs. Aides. They arrive chatting about their adventure, complimenting themselves on the erotic evening spent with their young consorts, mostly in the bushes across from the Plaza Hotel or in a horse drawn open carriage. Their language is bawdy and boastful, comparing each other's conquests as competition. The scene is an example of Williams's use of humor, and it carries them into their interactions with an angry, hostile Miss Josie, who demands "...double pay plus compensation for her insult to decency while you ladies were out." (Williams 2008: 66) The three women, aside from commenting on their individual interpretations of Nance's behavior with her imaginary lover, rail at one another. When Mother throws the extra money on the floor and challenges Josie to pick it up, Mrs. Aides, sprawling on the floor, admonishes the babysitter "...here, take it and shove it, and get the fuck out of here!" (Williams 2008: 67) Mrs. Aides using the most vitriolic language finally drives the frustrated babysitter from the apartment.

Meanwhile, Nance is besides herself as Nijinsky's apparition has bid her au dieu, and has taken his leave. "God loves and protects the artist, even your fantasies of one. Bonsoir, je pars!" (Williams 2008: 73) Nance is devastated and in desperation tries to follow him screaming, "When will you come back? When? When?" (Williams 2008: 73) She collides with the Greek statue attempting to embrace it.

Mother and Mrs. Aides, hearing the noise, return and note the blood on the statue's fig leaf.

Mother: Nance! What are you---Child, what is it now? She's cut her forehead, its bleeding.

Mrs. Aides: Yes, I see. She tried to embrace the statue in the hall...and look! There is blood on the fig leaf...obscene, salacious, face it you're harboring a monster in your house, a travesty of a child in a ruffled white skirt and pink sash and Dotty Dimple curls!

Mother: Yes, it is a little bit de trop, the blood of the fig leaf bit. I had no idea she had such---embarrassing aberrations. Tomorrow I'll simply have to find a place away for her. I suppose Riggs Institute or---

Mrs. Aides: They won't accept her. She'd make disgusting advances to the attractive male patients and even young doctors. Where she belongs, if anywhere on earth, is in a segregated ward of a real asylum, that sort of institution is the only solution: face it!

(Williams 2008: 74)

Perhaps Williams is recalling the concern and fear that pervaded his childhood home, as Rose increasingly acted out her poorly understood sexual feelings.

## **5.2 Discussion concerning the Meaning of *Three Plays for a Lyric Theatre***

Sexuality is an emanation, as much in the human being as the animal. Animals have seasons for it. But for me it was a round-the-calendar thing. (Halle 2005)

Homosexuality is the superior way of life, and most geniuses are homosexual. (Halle 2005)

Of the three lyric plays presented, *A Cavalier for Milady* defines the arc of the playwright's creative life. His relationship with his sister Rose was an overwhelming influence in his personal life, one that grew precipitously as both individuals aged. Rose, as the character Nance, is the dominant force in *A Cavalier for Milady*. Not unlike Tom (Felice) and Rose (Claire) in *The Two Character Play*, where brother and sister appear to be two sides of a single person, I believe the argument may be made that Nance, the name Williams's father gave him, implying his son more feminine than masculine. At this moment, Williams is exposing his own alter ego, his Jungian anima, the female within. Williams has asserted that his homosexuality

allowed him "...to understand the feminine point of view to create living female characters."

(Tischler 2000: 157)



Figure 33 Nijinsky and Daughter.



What is interesting, is Williams's use of Nijinsky as the specter that is Nance's hallucination. In his concern with his own mental future, Williams became obsessed with the biographies of artists who had gone mad, with a particular fascination for Nijinsky who, after undergoing insulin shock therapy, had been restored to relative emotional stability. Williams began a play about Nijinsky but did not complete it. His late play *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, written in 1981, does relate the story of an older artist's seduction of a young heterosexual youth, not dissimilar to the Russian Choreographer Diaghilev's seduction of Nijinsky.

Williams's first great love in his life was Kip Kiernan, a young heterosexual Canadian dancer who Williams met when summering in Provincetown, in 1941. In the 1972 version of his *Memoirs*, Williams goes into great detail concerning his relationship with Kiernan, detailing both their physical and emotional coupling. Williams describes his first face-to-face impression of Kiernan: "And when he turned from the stove, I might have thought, had I been a little bit crazier, that I was looking at the young Nijinsky." (Williams 1975: 54) This included a "...phenomenal facial resemblance...slightly slanted lettuce-green eyes, high cheekbones, and a lovely mouth." (Williams 1975: 54)

The affair with Kiernan was of such intensity that Williams was inspired to write his only verse play, *The Purification*, writing that "...in that play I found a release, in words, of the ecstasy of the affair and also a premonition of its doom." (Williams 1975: 55)

The affair ended when a young woman warned Kiernan that Williams was "...in the process of turning [Kiernan] into a homosexual." (Williams 1975: 60) After their separation, Kiernan married, and shortly after underwent surgery for what was diagnosed as a benign brain tumor. When Williams visited him at the hospital, he could only describe the dying man in terms of Kiernan's physical beauty, again mentioning Nijinsky's eyes: "...he had never looked more

beautiful. Although sugar syrup dripped from his mouth ...Kip's mind seemed as clear as his Slavic blue eyes." (Williams 1975: 60) Williams's last written word concerning Kiernan are, "Well Kip, you live in my leftover heart...how gently you told me our love-affair was finished, now, since it was turning you homo." (Williams 1975: 61) Kiernan died at the age of twenty-six of a brain tumor.

### 5.2.1 Edwina and Rose

What Williams might have been doing with these plays, particularly *A Cavalier for Milady*, is deliberately striking back at the misery he and Rose suffered at the hands of their mother and father. If one accepts the premise that these plays reflect that an aging Williams has finally severed the umbilical cord attaching him to his mother, his act of revisionism in which he converts Edwina's hysterical aversion to sex into its opposite, portraying her as a sex-crazed adventuress who, with her foul mouth friend Mrs. Aides, spends her evenings seeking sexual rendezvous, is reasonable. Williams also portrays her as a heartless and cruel individual, planning to dispose of her daughter in the Riggs Institution, a private institution for the mentally insane. It is entirely feasible that Williams, at this late time of his life, by portraying mother and daughter as he does in *A Cavalier for Miladay*, is attempting to exorcise both.

I was brought up puritanically...I try to outrage the puritanism. I have an instinct to shock. Hit them with something. (Williams 1962: 28)

Williams ends *A Cavalier for Milady* by granting Rose, through Nance, a possible moment of freedom, a consummation she was never to experience in her lifetime. Williams inverts the ending of *The Glass Menagerie* wherein Laura blows out her candles, leaving her future undeclared, but most likely one of celibacy. Taking up a business card with the inscription

“Cavaliers for Milady,” brought home that evening by her mother, Nance calls for an escort. But in light of our previous conversation, is it Nance? Is it Rose? I suggest that it is in fact Tom, Tennessee Williams himself, calling out for Kip, his lost love.

Nance: Cavalier---Companions?” I, I--- want one---tonight, no it’s not too late, I’ll pay extra!...send me an escort cavalier that looks like him---Nijinsky.

[She turns about excitedly, snatches a candle from the candelabra on the table, and rushes out to the entrance which becomes visible as the interior is dimmed. Nance, carrying an evening bag, is lighted with her lit candle.]

Nance: Oh, God, make him hurry, I don’t have ---a few years left me! (Williams 2008: 76)

## Chapter 6: Music as a Methodology Toward Truth in the Literary Canon of Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams's theory of Plastic Theatre involves the use of all stage resources, lighting, sound, music, movement, set, and props, to generate a theatrical experience greater than realism. Tennessee Williams's keen appreciation of the ability of music to create atmosphere and define character is evidenced by his inclusion of music as a vital element throughout his entire literary canon. Williams has utilized the skills of composers such as Alex North and Paul Bowles to score his plays, poetry, and short stories. Their contributions have underscored Williams's comprehension of the power of music, by emphasizing the playwright's often tragic and ambivalent characterizations of his protagonist anti-heroes. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner, who considered music the purest form of art, Williams understood the impact of music on audiences as expressionist components of his stories.

Williams, as a young writer, appreciated certain values of blues, jazz, and spirituals, or at least had notions about these values and aspired to impart something of them to his work. Early manuscripts show that his taste for music was formed in opposition to contemporary, white attitudes toward certain African American musical stylings and their cultural origins, attitudes that might be considered primitivist and essentially racist, attitudes that Williams may have initially shared. However, Williams's more mature works move toward a criticism of these racist attitudes, provoking scrutiny of the music's problematized association with blackness. Especially in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Orpheus Descending*, Williams's use of blues and jazz tend to "...disrupt culturally constructed racial binaries..." (Moschovakis 2005: 13) intimating a resistance to emergent, postwar redefinitions of whiteness.

### 6.1 Tennessee Williams Dramaturgic Use of Music

In August of 1942, while residing in New York's Greenwich Village, Williams wrote what was to become a dramaturgic blueprint for his theatrical stage presentation.

The experimental dramatist must find a method of presenting his passion and the world's in an articulate manner. Apocalypse without delirium. In considering this problem while at work on new scripts, I have evolved a new method which in my own particular case may turn out to be a solution. I call it the "sculptural drama." Because my form is poetic. The usual mistake that is made in the presentation of intensified reality on the stage is that of realistic action .... a new form, nonrealistic, must be chosen.... the forming of statuesque attitudes or tableaux...resembling a restrained type of dance, with motions honed down to only the essential or significant. (Leverich 1995: 446)

The idea of sculptural drama would become Williams's Plastic Theatre, a concept Williams introduces in the production notes of *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams believed that to develop a closer approach to dramatic truth, beyond the dominant realism of the American Theatre, expressionism, employing unconventional techniques, would have to be employed. Only by using "other" transformative shapes could poetic imagination define truth, life, or reality. Fundamentally, Plastic Theatre may be considered performative theatre as opposed to literary theatre.

Williams, from his earliest writings, recognized the expressionistic purity of music as a source of poetic truth. In the verse drama, *The Purification* he writes:

For truth is something alluded to in music.  
But words are too loosely woven to catch it in...  
A bird can be snared as it rises  
Or torn to earth by the falcon.  
His song which is truth,  
is not to be captured ever. (Williams 1966: 40)

In Williams's theatrical works, racial issues do not often explicitly arise, particularly when compared with other major southern writers of the same period. However, as rarely as

African American characters appear in Williams's plays, he often alludes to music taken from African American traditions and performed by African American musicians. Williams's early 1930's writings involve various black singers. In one such story, published posthumously, "Big Black: A Mississippi Idyll", not only are singers represented, their singing and instruments appear as well. Similarly, southern blues music is specifically called for in *Hello from Bertha*, *Battle of Angels*, and *Orpheus Descending*.

In the 1940s, Williams turned his attention to what he called folk-verse, which included either the term Blues in the titles, or were very similar in dialect and stanza forms to blues songs. For one of Williams's first free-verse efforts, the poem "Tenor Sax Taking the Breaks," jazz and swing were used as inspiration for this composition. Williams used hot swing as theme music in *The Glass Menagerie*. Similarly, he was to follow this musical pathway in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

## **6.2 Formative Years: *Fugitive Kind***

To the young Tom Williams, during the 1930's, what general mood or atmosphere was generated in his mind by the phrase Blues music? He had written four short plays titled "American Blues" which he entered in a contest, winning "...a one-hundred-dollar award for three of them." (Leverich 1995: 297) In one of these, his 1937 full length play, *Fugitive Kind*, the character named Texas is a musician who sings along to the radio playing the "Sugar Blues." At other moments he picks up his guitar and plays a "...doleful blues melody." (Moschovakis 2005) His clothes are that of a cowboy from the western plains, suggesting that Williams may be modeling his character after the Hollywood style movie cowboys of the period. For Williams, however, neither the name Texas nor his clothing would make the character any less a bluesman.



Figure 34 Jimmy Rogers, 1935.

Texas likely owes his musical sensibilities to a group of artists in the later 1920s and early 1930s, the singing cowboys. This group, founded by Jimmy Rogers, had made numerous recordings with either “blues” or “blue” in their titles. Rogers was well known for his yodeling abilities. His first big hit had been titled “Blue Yodel”. Williams knew and admired Rogers’s professional persona, that of a down and out character, a “rounder” who traveled about playing and singing his white blues music.

Although the character Texas was not to be Williams's last, or most compelling blues singer, by 1937 he had come to depict the "guitar-slinging" cowpoke, wanderer as a facsimile of his own artistic vocation. Texas appears as "...the romantic, bohemian archetype which appealed to Williams, a character persona with which he identified." (Moschovakis 2005) In Williams's 1957 play, *Orpheus Descending*, the character Val Xavier is imagined as a travelling performer very much in the form of *Fugitive Kind*'s Texas. In her preface to *Fugitive Kind*, Allean Halle writes, "Texas is the wandering minstrel with a guitar who is obviously a sublimation of the playwright. He has been everywhere that Tom [Williams] longed to go," (Williams 2001: xvii) to flee the workplace through travel and his art. "Although Williams did not play the guitar, he took to carrying around an instrument of his own." (Leverich 1995: 138) It has been speculated that as a fan of Jimmie Rogers, Williams was influenced by his singing of "Blue Yodel" with beginning lyrics "T for Texas, T for Tennessee. There is speculation that Blue Yodel might have influenced Williams's new creative *persona* as "Tennessee Williams." (Moschovakis 2005)

African American blues tradition encompasses numerous emotional settings, so it is not surprising that Williams should have used the term "blues" for happy as well as mournful music. Wherever he lived, or wherever his travels took him, he would find jazz clubs or dance venues. One particular favorite in Key West, where he kept a home, was "Sloppy Joe's," which in 1941, "...had ...a really good black dance band." (Williams 1975: 65)





Figure 35 Tennessee William's favorite haunt in Key West, Florida.

### 6.3 “The St. Louis Blues”: Black Music on the Threshold of Nature and Culture

Written in 1946, *Hello From Bertha*, is set in “...a notorious red-light district along the river flats of East St. Louis.” (Williams 1990: 231) Bertha, an overweight prostitute, is lying in her unkempt bed, upset and forlorn. Her suffering is in stark contrast with offstage sounds of laughter, singing, and dancing. The background music heard repeatedly in the play is W.C. Handy’s “The St. Louis Blues.” As part of Williams’s tragic design, the gaiety of the offstage music acts contrapuntally to the configuration of the bed ridden woman. Similarly, Williams uses the sensuality of hot swing music in *The Glass Menagerie* to inform his depiction of disappointed lives and loves. “Lives that pass like mine, without change or adventure...there is

only hot swing music and liquor, ...that hung in the gloom [flooding] the world with brief, deceptive rainbows.” (Williams 1945: 425)

Tom Williams had lived as a child in Clarksdale, Mississippi for seven years prior to the family moving to St. Louis. Allean Halle postulates, it is possible that at this impressionable period of his life he heard the authentic blues music of its supposed originator, W. C. Handy. Handy had come to Clarksdale in 1902. The city was already noted for music by black musicians and Handy is given credit for introducing what came to be called Boogie-Woogie and the Blues. Like the other black musicians, Handy lived across the tracks, near the red-light district, and often played in houses of prostitution, like those described in *Hello From Bertha*. As his band and reputation became famous in the region, Handy was in increasing demand for local events, dancehalls, political rallies, and white people’s parties. Halle continues, “It is not inconceivable, despite mother Edwina Williams and Grandmother Rosina Dakin’s negative thoughts of such music, that Tom and his minister grandfather heard Handy’s blues at the local gambling club the future Tennessee Williams would call the Moon Lake Casino and at the city’s vaudeville house.” (Leverich 1995: 608) Thus, when Williams wrote *Hello from Bertha*, he had experienced the Clarksdale “red-light” district as a marginal world, and likely studied first-hand the atmosphere where social restrictions were relaxed.

#### **6.4 The Glass Menagerie**

In *The Glass Menagerie*, as in *Hello from Bertha*, the music’s affirmative qualities function contrapuntally as part of Williams’s tragic design, much as the sensuality of “...hot swing music...” (Williams 1970: 425) informs his depiction of disappointed lives and loves.

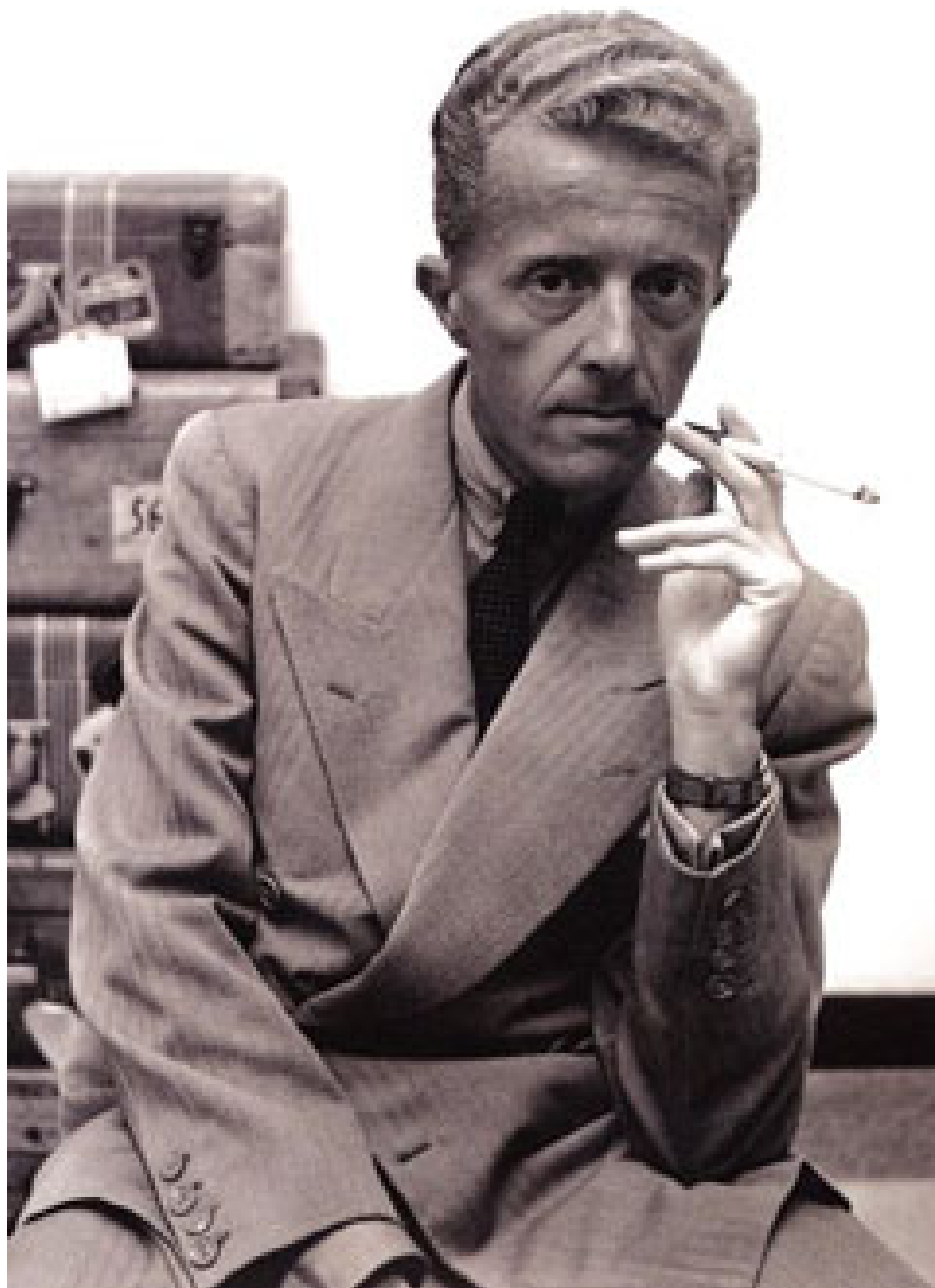


Figure 36 Paul Bowles.

For *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams used music composed by Paul Bowles, a close friend and favorite composer. The playwright calls for music to give “...emotional emphasis,” (Williams 1966: 33) music which is to be “...the lightest, most delicate music in the world,”

(Williams 1966: 33) emphasizing “...emotion, nostalgia, which is the first condition of the play.” (Williams 1966: 33) He asked Bowles to develop a “...circus tune...” (Williams 1966) to begin the play with, as background to Tom’s initial explanatory monologue that relates the story as a “...memory play... not when you are on the grounds or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and very likely thinking of something else.” (Williams 1966: 396) The music, delicate and sad, is tied to the old Victrola upon which Laura plays recordings left her by her father, linking her emotionally to him. “It expresses the surface of vivacity of life with the underlying strain of immutable and inexpressible sorrow.” (Williams 1966: 396) It is Laura’s music. Often Williams uses musical interludes to emphasize states of mind. “He had the ear of a musician, playing with gesture, nuance, tone, and juxtaposition.” (Tischler 2000: 38)

#### **6.4.1 Specific Music as Moments of Color**

The theme “Laura’s Music,” played on a violin, begins as the curtain rises. Tom Wingfield, dressed as a merchant sailor, strolls across the front of the stage, stops to light a cigarette, and addresses the audience. His introductory monologue describes the effects on middle class America at a moment of societal upheaval during the early 1930s. He then explains that the audience will be experiencing a “...memory play, sentimental, not realistic and that in memory, everything seems to happen to music, that explains the fiddle in the wings.” (Williams 1966: 400)

As Scene Three begins, Williams directs Tom, to “...motion the fiddle in the wings.” (Williams 1966: 410) Tom relates to his audience how Amanda, realizing that extra money “...would be needed to properly feather the nest and plume the bird...” (Williams 1966: 410) campaigns to sell subscriptions to a magazine for matrons entitled *The Home-Maker’s Companion*. The background melody played by violin and harp gently, yet pointedly, follows

“sublimations of ladies... who think in terms of delicate cup-like breasts, slim tapering waists, rich, creamy thighs, eyes like wood smoke in autumn, fingers that sooth and caress like strains of music.” (Williams 1970: 411)

During Scene Four, Amanda touches on Laura, echoing her daughter’s concern that Tom is not happy living with his mother and sister. Amanda expresses her worry that Tom may leave them, as his father did, and asks why Tom is so restless. Tom replies he likes adventure, which he finds by going to the movies. Amanda claims that most young men find adventure in their careers, such as in the warehouse where Tom works. Under Amanda’s continued inquisition Williams calls for Bowles’s refrain, “The Glass Menagerie,” which is played quietly and delicately by violin, chimes, xylophone, and harp, recalling the memory theme of the play.

This very theme, and similar instrumentation, are again heard in Scene Seven after Jim, the gentleman caller, has left the Wingfield apartment. Angry and frustrated, Amanda angrily berates Tom for not knowing Jim was engaged, which caused his sister confusion and emotional pain. Although Laura is devastated, it is Amanda’s rage at the sudden realization of all her fears that is explosively expressed. She screams out at Tom “...don’t think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who’s crippled and has no job.” (Williams 1966: 114) In using the word crippled, Amanda acknowledges her daughter’s emotional, as well as physical disability, using the very word for which she admonished Laura for using to describe herself.

Williams’s final musical direction calls for the dance-hall music, heard from the nightclub across the alley, as Tom delivers his closing monologue. However, the Bowles music played returns to the themes outlined in various earlier scenes developing a quiet, sentimental, melancholic sound as Tom describes his moving away from the confines of the tiny apartment, and “... followed from there in my father’s footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost

in space.” (Williams 1970: 115) As Tom speaks the audience watches an interior pantomime as Amanda comforts Laura with “...dignity and tragic beauty, gracefully and almost dance-like.” (Williams 1966: 115) The Bowles score fades as Laura blows out her candles, ending the play with a quiet and elegant diminuendo.



Figure 37 Amanda comforting Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, 1945.

### 6.5 Musical Character Emphasis in *A Streetcar Named Desire*



Figure 38 Set Design illustration for *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Jo Mielziner.

New Orleans was full of the music I loved... after dark the city was full of pulsing sound. I'd walk down a street lined with "joints" out of which jazz flooded into the soft night air....in New Orleans I learned the importance of music in film. (Kazan 1988: 381)

Williams numbered several composers among his close friends; the most important of these in the early years were Paul Bowles and Alex North. North composed the music for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for the Broadway run in 1947 and the 1951 film adaptation. Bowles's

music was heard in a number of important Williams premieres: *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Summer and Smoke* (1948), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1962). Later relationships with composers included Williams's friendship with Lee Hoiby, who scored the music for the 1972 revival of *Summer and Smoke* and composed an operatic version of the play in 1976. (Crandell 1995: E)



Figure 39 Alex North.



### 6.5.1 Music as a Descriptive Component to Place and Character

Williams's initial stage directions, printed in the 1947 New Directions reading version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, describes the Elysian Fields environment in which Blanche makes her entrance, an area described as poor, but one "...with a raffish charm, where a visitor can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with the faint redolence of bananas and coffee. And heard in the corresponding air, music of Negro entertainers... a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers, the spirit of life expressed by the "Blue Piano"." (Williams 1984: 469)

In her academic paper, "Williams's Journey to Streetcar: An Analysis of Production Manuscripts of *A Streetcar Named Desire*", "[Sarah] Boyd Johns dates the first mention of blues piano to the professionally typed draft of February 1947 where the blues are featured in the opening stage directions for scene 1. Williams placed these blues piano cues, at times expanded to a band of "negro entertainers," or hot trumpet and drums, across several scene changes. Such cues are essentially structural, covering the time needed to change the set and lighting set-ups... but they also offer further opportunities to establish the play's locale and even provide commentary in places. Blues piano cues were also indicated at key moments within scenes, with placement relatively consistent in that such cues are heard at moments of loss, loneliness, and melancholy, with a modified, more up-tempo version of this music suggested for anxious situations." (Davison 2009: 81) Williams had a keen conception of the play's use of jazz, although as play rehearsal and production developed, Kazan modified some of Williams's initial usage of this musical genre as a means of balancing the character performances of Stanley and Blanche.

After *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams confronts and rejects the conviction that the primitive is a quality naturally less white than black or brown. Williams appears to be suggesting, "...we are all primitives by nature, taking pleasure in our instincts." (Davison 2009: 82) Some might argue that to deny such instinct, such as Blanche appears to do in *Streetcar*, is at least partially responsible for her downfall. Thus, as suggested by Davison, "...it is possible to read the blue piano's unbounded permeation of the warm [languid] air" in Williams's stage notes for *Streetcar's* first scene as appearing to relate well to the French Quarter's special character, the intermingling of the races." (Davison 2009: 83)

Kazan agreed with Williams's choice of the blues, particularly as it related well to Blanche's "...lonely, abandoned soul." (Davison 2009: 82) In the production, the piano and trumpet were enlarged to a four-piece jazz band, composed of a clarinet, drums, piano, and trumpet, playing various arrangements of well-established and recognizable jazz standards. The blues/jazz music was used at various moments ostensibly coming from the neighboring Four Duces bar. The ghostly dance music, the "Varsouviana," alluded to by Williams as the polka, was the music played at the Blue Moon Casino the night Blanche's husband shot himself. It was used for purely subjective effect, heard only by Blanche at moments of her experiencing emotional crisis. In the theatre production, it was played on an early electronic polyphonic synthesizer, the Novachord, which was capable of different mood sequence sounds via manipulation of numerous pedals and dials, allowing for various musical cues depending on the critical moments when Blanche heard the music. Kazan made frequent use of the "Varsouviana" to signify Blanche's disintegrating mental state. "Kazan integrated it more with North's jazz score, embedding the play's juxtaposition of subjectivity and objectivity in the production's musical code." (Murphy 1992: 31)

Through collaboration with Kazan, the association with the “Varsouviana” and Blanche was intensified. Kazan took the cues, initially detailed by Williams, who had concentrated the music in the later portion of the play, and added it, in different arrangements, in scenes where Blanche’s emotions were motivated primarily by mention of her late husband. In so doing Kazan was making the point that Blanche’s mental state, already fragile prior to her arrival in New Orleans, was becoming more fractured during the course of her stay in the Kowalski household. From the point of view of character propriety, Kazan was concerned with the Brando mystique, generated by his performance, influencing audience favorability toward Stanley, thus detracting sympathy from whom the playwright intended. By showing Blanche’s increasing mental disintegration during the moments when she heard the “Varsouviana,” Kazan would shift audience empathy toward Blanche as the play proceeded, thus guaranteeing a more positive audience response as Blanche suffers her mental breakdown at play’s end.



Figure 40 “Stellaaaaaaaaaaaaa!” Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski in the film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The jazz elements used throughout the production emphasized a strong connection with Stanley. Davison describes three particular moments: First, as in Scene Three, he screams out his wife's name Stella at the bottom of a circular staircase, pleading with her to return from an upstairs apartment where she has taken temporary sanctuary from his drunken rage. Second, in Scene Eight, when, after providing Blanche a birthday gift of a ticket back to Laurel, the town from which she had fled, Stanley reminds Stella of their previous physical relationship and the happiness they had shared before Blanche had entered their lives. And the rape, Scene Ten, where the music articulates carnality, a reference, perhaps, to the sense of human primitivism, a recurring motif in Williams's writing. The first two scenes, three and eight, suggest the importance of sex in Stanley and Stella's relationship. Scene ten underscores "...the potential for sexual violence when desire is unrestrained by morality." (Davison 2009: 84)



Figure 41 *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the rape scene.

The substantially enlarged role for music by North's score develops and intensifies Williams's and Kazan's vision, developed for the play most notably by their use of jazz-inspired elements, the "Varsouviana," and the technique of layering and/or juxtaposition of these elements. The score's dynamic asserts a three-act structure shaping both film and stage play, and directs the score towards both a musical climax, which then impacts the dramatic climax. North's music emphasizes "...Williams's tragic and ambivalent characterization of Blanche and Stanley in musical terms and does so without moralizing or resorting to sentimentality." (Davison 2009: 84)

## CONCLUSION

In an interview with the *New Orleans Times Picayune*, while speaking with writer Don Lee Keith, Williams stated, “I’ve never hidden my homosexuality, I don’t think. But then, I haven’t tried to flaunt it...in many ways it has been such an integral part of my creativity, however...” (Keith 1970: 159) When [Italian director] Luchino Visconti was directing a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* he had stated: “Tennessee you are Blanche.” (Keith 1970: 159) Williams replied, “I’ll admit to being other heroines. I was Alexandra del Largo in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. I’ve probably made every speech she made...anyone who knows my plays will know that.” (Keith 1970: 159)

This manuscript begins with what Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist and psychoanalyst, defines as what constitutes the life of the true artist. Such a person must pay dearly for what Jung alludes to as the “...divine gift of creative fire.” (Jung 2017: 77) Such divinity does not come without great peril to the individual, monopolizing energy and endangering one’s very humanity, causing the artist to develop various humanistic defects. It may also engender various character identities such as ruthlessness, selfishness, and both physical and emotional maladies, leading to deep depressions which may lead to suicide.

Tennessee Williams was such an artist. Over the course of his life, he composed a vast treasury of poems, short stories, essays, a novel, and various lengths of play. He stood as the very model of Jung’s definition of a true artist.

Furthermore, if there is one underlying theme in this manuscript, it relates to the Williams family and the effect that relationship had on the physical and emotional aspects of Tom Williams and his sister Rose. That effect is echoed through the characters that Williams creates.

How those characters are assumed, depended on Williams's personal anxieties in the moment of their development. Williams implies that it is necessary for himself as a playwright to put his own persona into his work, explaining that the root necessity of creative work is to express those things most involved in one's own experience. Williams repeatedly insisted that he never developed a character that did not contain some quality of his own personality. In the playwright's own words, his homosexuality allowed him the ability to develop deep emotionality as the female characters he explored. But in applying the lenses of gender fluidity and androgyny, we see Williams digging deeper into his attempts to explore his own life and times. Especially in his later works, as he slips in and out of gender, pushing past the necessity for gender, Williams searches for himself, for an understanding of himself. Williams is not only the playwright, but he is also, as he's said, Alma. He is Blanche. He is John Buchanan and Stanley Kowalski. He is his sister Rose, masquerading as the character Nance. Through the male/female, attraction/conflict, masculine/feminine identities, and love/hate family conflicts, we find that this canon of characters is one and the same. They are all Tom Williams. The characters are the playwright.

**Epilogue: The Meeting**

In 1964, I met a man who, unappreciated at the time, likely planted an image in my collective unconscious that many years later, following a sudden change in an intense cardio/thoracic surgical career, caused that hidden image to emerge in my conscious state.

In February of 1964, I had finished six months of a vigorous surgical internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. Exhausted, depressed, angry, discouraged, I boarded a plane and flew off to Jamaica. I had doubts at that moment of wanting to return to medicine, rather wondering if I had made a mistake by not following what I considered my desired life's journey, and accept an appointment to a leading theatrical department in an Eastern University.

On the final day of my vacation, as I was leaving the sleepy fishing village of Ocho Rios, I passed an outdoor restaurant which looked inviting for a good meal. I was seated out of doors under a private leafy canopy, ordered a meal and sat waiting, while enjoying a Jamaican brew. At a table some feet away were a man and a woman who appeared a bit drunk, having a bit of an argument. Their conversation grew louder until the lady stood up, collected her handbag, bid the gentleman good evening and stormed past my chair and out into the evening.

I thought nothing more of it until a short time later, the waiter approached my table, handed me a small snifter of brandy and asked if I would like to finish dinner with Tennessee Williams! The gentleman in question waved and motioned me over.

What followed was a five-hour evening that included my driving Williams to his Jamaica residence, a conversation that involved telling him all about myself, including the angst I felt about my current working arrangement in New York. From the moment he learned of my profession, he referred to me only as "young doctor," never again using my name. He related



some of his health problems and his fears concerning his heart and intestinal maladies, suffered at times during periods of great stress concerning his script writing or following poor critical reports concerning his plays.

However, one very emotional moment that occurred that evening, and has stayed with me and been revisited these last few years as my research delved deeply into the playwright's canon, particularly his character development and the role played by his sister when creating his feminine figures. At a late point, as Williams headed off to his bedroom, he began talking about Rose, his sister, explaining to me the "awful soul killing" frontal lobotomy she underwent as treatment for her schizophrenia. To this day, I remember his words distinctly: "My mother never told me that she signed the papers for that operation. If I had had just two more years, that operation would never have happened."

Rose's brain operation occurred in 1943. *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams's brilliant first great success opened on Broadway on March 3, 1945.

I did return to New York City, and to the Second Surgical Cornell Division at Bellevue Hospital, proceeding over the following years to cardiac/vascular and thoracic medicine. It took a while, but I did make it back to Rose and Tom Williams's beginning in January 2011.



Figure 42 Tennessee Williams.

Appendix A:

***Summer and Smoke* as Viewed Through a Dramaturg's Lens**

*Summer and Smoke*

*Some mystery should be left in the revelation of a character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself*

.....Tennessee Williams *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Act II)

An e-mail, sent in late Spring of 2018 to students in the Department of Theatre & Dance at the University of Montana announcing the theatre play selections for Fall Semester, caught this writer by complete surprise. The first play of the season was to be Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*.

At the moment, I was dramaturg for the Department's production of Carolyn Duffy's *Everyman*. It had been this student's hope that before leaving the University, a Tennessee Williams play would be produced, and there would be an opportunity to be a member of the production team. The hope was recognized when play director, Dr. Bernadette Sweeney asked me to act as her dramaturg on *Summer and Smoke*.

Over a then seven-year intensive study of Tennessee Williams's life, theatre philosophy, and literary canon, I had become familiar with his artistic philosophic methodology of writing and character development in his plays, short stories, and poetry. From a dramaturgic point of view, effort was made to develop an understanding of the various characters, particularly their physical and psychologic characterizations.

From the standpoint of the two main protagonists, John Buchanan Jr. and Alma Winemiller, the playwright develops their individual arcs as the couple appeared to him at particular moments of emotionally trying periods in his life.

Williams begins *Summer and Smoke* with a prologue, introducing Alma, age ten, and John, perhaps one or two years older. This short piece, though not usually performed, is invaluable to an audience as alerts to Alma and John's personae at an elementary age. Both demonstrate personalities formed early that follow them into adult life, strongly influenced by their Southern societal community and family philosophical and interpersonal relationships similar attributes as affected the Williams children's early years.

As a ten-year-old Alma is described by Williams as *already [having] the dignity of an adult; there is a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her, which must set her apart from other children. She has a habit of holding her hand, one cupped under the other in a way similar to that of receiving the wafer at Holy Communion. This is a habit that will remain with her as an adult.*

Although Williams does not contribute a similar physical or spiritual description of young John, nevertheless one becomes aware of the youngster's strident personality by the physical way he makes his presence felt, and his discourse and aggressive physical treatment of Alma during their short childhood meeting. This youthful aggressive attitude, carried into his adult years, may be explained by what he relates to Alma:

John: Have you ever seen a dead person?

Alma: No.

John: I have. They made me go in the room when my mother was dying, and she caught hold of my hand and wouldn't let me go---and so I screamed and hit her.

Alma: Oh, you didn't do that.

John: [*somberly*]: Uh-huh. She didn't look like my mother. Her face was all ugly and yellow and---terrible---bad-smelling! And so, I hit her to make her let go of my hand. They told me that I was a devil!

Alma: You didn't know what you were doing.

John: My dad is a doctor.

Alma: I know.

John: He wants to send me to college to study to be a doctor, but I wouldn't be a doctor for the world. And have to go in a room and watch people dying! ---Jesus!

Alma: You'll change your mind about that.

John: Oh, no, I won't. I'd rather be a devil, like they called me and go to South America on a boat!---

The horror felt at the deathbed of his mother such that he struck her in order to free himself from her grasp is likely to have created an emotional shock to the twelve-year-old John that carried deep within the neurotic element of the boy's psyche as guilt, thereby creating a defense mechanism such that John's future behavior is one of an existential denial of realistic rationality, manifested through self-gratification. John displays his attitude toward life as he explains to Alma at their evening at the Blue Lake Casino: "*You know who's crowned with most of the glory on this earth? The one who uses his senses to get all he can in the way of---satisfaction.*"

*(Summer and Smoke Part 1, scene 7 Dramatists Play Service 1950 :47)*



*Figure 4* John (Ryson Sparancino) and Alma (Aimee Paxton) at the Blue Lake Casino in *Summer and Smoke*, during rehearsals, University of Montana 2018.

As the adult figures make their early appearance an audience, having seen the prologue, should recognize immediately the similarity of Alma and John's early personalities. Williams's stage directions relate perfectly to what the playwright first encountered of the two youngsters. *John Buchanan comes along. He is now a Promethean figure, brilliant and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel...at present he is unmarked*

*by the dissipations in which he relives his demonic unrest; he has the fresh and shining look of an epic hero.*



*And Alma? Perhaps as Williams predicted: Alma had an adult quality as a child and now, in her middle twenties, there is something prematurely spinsterish about her nervous laughter... people her own age regard her as quaintly and humorously affected. Her true nature is still hidden even from herself...in Miss Alma's voice and manner there is delicacy and elegance, a kind of "airiness" which is really natural to her...she seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in France.*



Character image for Tennessee Williams is closely related to his uneasiness of human action. His great concern is that man is the great sinner, a transgressor against moral law. In Williams's work his effort is to show man as a creature in need of a path toward salvation, in search of a power which can transcend that invested in natural life. This is made apparent through his use of the language of Christian theology, particularly through character progression of suffering, sin, punishment, guilt and finality of expiration. Onto these human sufferings he attempts a transcendent progression of sympathy, sacrifice, contrition, understanding. (Jackson 1965:58)

Transcendent Changes



These character changes in Alma and John were brought about through emotionally traumatic moments as the arc of the play proceeded. For John, the sudden trauma of his father's death created the conscious shock, the force by which the hidden "shadow" from within his suppressed unconscious was brought to the fore, that anima which turned him from an Aeschylean/Promethean figure to a redemptive seeking Euripidean anti-hero. Jung wrote in a discussion of poetic types:

The great problems of life...are always related to the primordial images of the collective unconscious...balancing or compensating factors which correspond with the problems life presents in actuality...these images are deposits representing the accumulated experience of thousands of years of struggle for adaptation and existence. Every great experience in life, every profound conflict, evokes the treasured wealth of these images and brings them to inner perception; as such, they become accessible to the consciousness only in the presence of that degree of self-awareness and power of understanding which enables a man to think what he experiences instead of just living it blindly. (*C.J Jung, Psychological Types London 1923 : 271-72*).

Williams sets in motion John's "conversion" when after an altercation with a hostile figure, John enters Alma's domain pleading for a sense of purpose, placing his head in her lap, and muttering "*Eternity and Miss Alma have such cool hands*, described by Williams as a "Pieta attitude" suggesting a religious moment, John's move toward spirituality. Eternity, Williams's stone statue symbol of the spiritual soul, the meaning of Alma's name.



Alma was somewhat more difficult to comprehend as I followed her passage through the vicissitudes of Williams's character development. In the 1972 edition of his autobiography "Memoirs", Williams discusses working on *Summer and Smoke*, relating that although "it was a tough nut to crack Miss Alma Winemiller may very well be the best female portrait I have drawn in a play. She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being, and it was no effort to put her on paper". (*T. W. Memoirs Doubleday and Company, Garden City, New York , 1972: 109*)

However, as in so many moments of the emotional exploration of his feminine figures, at one moment Williams displays the individual as an object of great love and empathy only to be scorned and derided in another.

New York Times critic, Brooks Atkinson, longtime friend, and supporter of Williams wrote of Alma; [*Summer and Smoke*] cuts mercilessly into the sensibilities of a frustrated woman--- sympathetic in its concern for her but pitilessly objective in its analysis and conclusion. It is the chronicle of a desperately lonely woman and it seems to have been written out of the loneliness of the author...he has portrayed her in a character analysis of incomparable tenderness and ruthlessness. Although he respects her, he is merciless with her. The further he searches into her character the surer he is that she is doomed to misery and loneliness” (Atkinson, Brooks. *Work of Art* The New York Times, New York, 1948).

Alma too undergoes a great change, but not through a similar traumatic injury as had John, whose father was violently murdered. Alma’s psychic “shock” occurs when John returns from his pilgrimage to his father’s clinic in Lyon, where he spent time tending to the needs of those ill from a severe disease. Alma, who has been in a state of depression since the death of the elder Dr. Buchanan, is informed by her father that John has returned to town. Alma views John through a window, suddenly cries out *There he is!* and staggers to her knees. “*Something...struck me...I want to die!*” (*S&S Part 2 scene 3:63*) What is it that has struck Alma? Certainly nothing physical that is obvious. Rather a strong subconscious emotion has forced its way from its hidden place deep within her psyche in a moment of intense realization, such that Alma grabs her chest as though in pain and falls breathlessly to her knees. Has she, at this moment, projected her “soul-image” onto John, her archetypal animus? (*Robertson, Robin: C.G. Jung and the Archetypes of the collective unconscious: American University Studies Peter Lang. New York 1987: 121*)

Jung describes this erotic influence. “*The fact remains that love, its conflicts, its problems, is of fundamental importance in human life, and is of a far greater significance than the individual*

*suspects*” (Jung; C.G Adler, G, Hull, R. F. C. Collected Works. Vol. V11 *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology: Relations Between Ego and the Unconscious* (89-178 ProQuest E-Book Central). Alma has been living in such circumstances, her melancholy a daily conscious “pretense”. Her real passion has remained hidden, her “shadow” her unconscious “attitude”, that of an intense sexuality which she has repressed fervently. That “attitude,” defined as a “readiness” of the psyche to act or react in a certain direction, is stimulated by the sight of John through the window. It is a terrifying specter for Alma. For the moment she wants only “*to die*” (*S&S Part 2 scene 3 :63*).

Over the next few months Alma sinks deeper into her melancholy. She denies the passion evoked by the event that drove her to her knees. She avoids all societal contact, leaves her literary group, does not answer the phone, stays far from John’s clinic, spends time at the park where the Eternity stone angel comforts her anxiety, supporting her denial of that which so affected her on that fateful summer day. It is at a moment in the Eternity park when Alma is staggered again, this time by a young woman, one whose demeanor is that of a rebellious, dynamic individual, a driving feminine force keenly aware of her own sexuality.

Nellie, once a singing student of Alma’s, whose mother is looked down upon as being from the “other side of the tracks” scorned by the strict ethically uncompromising southern society of Glorious Hill. Nellie has returned from the Sophie Newcomb Finishing School where “we are prepared to be young ladies in society” having learned her lessons well. Alma realizes quickly that her former student has become the paramour of Dr. John Buchanan. Nellie aggressively, slyly and deliberately references Alma as the “angel of mercy” who inspired and supported John after the death of his father helping him “pull himself together”. Alma, shocked for a second

time, responds “*the fountain is the only angel in Glorious Hill. Her body is stone and her blood is mineral water*”. (Williams:68).

What is Alma implying with this statement, what subconscious “shadow” has suddenly been activated by Nellie’s deliberate jab at the woman she considers her rival for John’s love. Alma is realizing that emotionally she has turned to “stone” that the liquid that flows in her veins has turned icy. She is now aware how she has used the symbol of the stone statue to afford her self-imposed “emotional” solitary confinement, realizing suddenly she has likely forfeited her chance for a meaningful reconciliation with the man she emotionally and physically loves.

(Williams:68)

Earlier in *Summer and Smoke*, Williams set the action for Alma’s response to the emotional upheaval she had just experienced from her meeting with Nellie. In the very first scene of the play, when Alma admits to John that at times she [has] “attacks of nervous heart trouble”, (a condition that Williams experienced, not too infrequently, during times of stress), John tries to assure her that *her swallowing air is what is causing her heart distress ...”a little trick that hysterical women get into...it presses on the heart and gives you palpitations*”. He reassures her that by itself it is not dangerous, but *it’s a symptom of something that is*, she has a doppelganger, and *it is badly irritated*”. John does not explain to Alma that this doppelganger is her second suppressed identity, that it is this “hidden” side of Alma that is provoking her emotionally caused “heart” discomfort. (Williams:12).

*We have an ego and a shadow side, a sensual life and a spiritual life, and when “we cannot see the other side of our nature,” we can fall prey to a neurosis: “... the cause of neurosis is the discrepancy between the conscious attitude and the trend of the unconscious”* (Jung C.G. [1921] (1971. *Psychological Types, Collected Works*, Volume 6, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University

Press). Alma's neurosis arises from her acceptance of the role of a minister's daughter which is countered via her "shadow or ghost" which she represses intensely. According to Jung the repressed shadow must be made conscious in order to produce a tension of opposites "without which no forward movement is possible". The stronger conscious mind "[is]seek[ing] its unconscious opposite" thereby sparking the symptomatology troubling Alma (Jung, Vol. V11 63-64).

Alma has left the Stone Angel and Nellie and changed her appearance to assume a style not unlike that which had appealed to John when she last saw him. John is taken aback when she enters his office. There is a brief awkward moment when the two just look at one another inciting Alma to ask "*No greeting? No greeting at all*" (Williams: 69).

What follows is a heart-breaking scene where Alma admits she has not been well, that she now realizes that what John told her about the other "person" the "doppelganger" inside her made her conscious of such a force, one that had her thinking she was dying. But now the Gulf Wind has blown that feeling away, she is not dying, she has come to realize that she is no longer the person she was when she said "no" to John's physical approaches, that that "girl who said no, doesn't exist anymore, she died last summer, suffocated in smoke from something inside her, she doesn't live now" (Williams: 68).

Is this "conversation" between Alma's suddenly understood new self and the previous girl who said no, realistic, or at this moment is Alma's plea a fiction, a delusion from reality? Although it might seem that Alma finally recognizes the existence of "another self", her double, she appears to not grasp the duality by stating in essence that her "persona" the girl who said no "died" last summer, implying "she" no longer exists.

From the Jungian perspective of neurosis, Alma's action is a neurotic impulse, a totally fictitious fantasy. In denying the existence of her persona, the girl who said "no", Alma is deceiving herself and John by "replacing what is still half of her personality with the "new" personality containing the "fire inside her". Alma's neurosis, at this moment in the play, is the "smoke" that is actually "suffocating" her, the "unreality" of the death of her "persona" and the "sudden" appearance of her "shadow" both of which have always been present. (Spero:63) ( Zweig, Connie, Abrams, Jeremiah, editors: *Meeting the Shadow The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature* Los Angeles, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. 1991.)

In a critique of this paper the question was asked concerning my interpretation of Alma's self-deception concerning the girl who said no wherein she attempts to replace what has always been present, her conscious persona her spirituality, with one of the flesh, the so called "new" personality containing the "fire inside her".

It was difficult to reconcile with Jungian neurotic theory, a suggestion concerning Alma's statement regarding "the fire inside her" as creating the smoke that suffocated the ego side of her psyche. Jung's theory of neurosis is based on the premise of a self-regulating psyche composed of tensions between opposing attitudes of the ego and the unconscious. Alma's interior "fire" was sparked by her emotionally traumatic Christmas gift meeting with Nellie bringing to the fore the "repressed doppelganger" but there was no smoke that "killed" that persona, thereby creating a new personality. The Jungian "gift of the divine fire" goes to the creative artist, in this case the playwright, who according to Jung "is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends but allows art to realize its purpose through him".

-----**From the pen of anguish**

My dramaturgic interpretation of the character personalities of the two protagonists, Alma Winemiller and John Buchanan is influenced by an appreciation of the emotional and physical forces affecting the psyche of their creator. Williams, like so many of his contemporaries, reacted to the personal environment in which he lived, and his artistic writing acted as a psychologic release from the immense pressures he experienced daily. Williams's characters reflect those pressures, and their eventual determination might very well have acted as a catharsis for the playwright as he dealt with how their presence affected his own private pathos.

*The Glass Menagerie* (1944) had catapulted Williams onto the theatrical world stage. Although his essay 'The Catastrophe of Success' written immediately after *Menagerie* penned his concern of being able to sustain such high accolades in his future work, he almost immediately began work on two plays, *The Chart of Anatomy (Summer and Smoke)* and *The Poker Night (A Streetcar Named Desire)*. At this important moment in his early career, he was living with Amado Pancho Rodriguez y Gonzalez, a "tall, good looking, dark skinned, dark of hair, dark of eyes" (*Memoires*) individual he met when living in New Orleans. Pancho became his lover, companion, home, and financial manager and at increasing moments an extremely volatile, jealous and angry individual who caused Williams great consternation for his own wellbeing. In the grueling months of 1946, as Williams wrestled *Chart of Anatomy* into shape, Pancho's most potent rival was Williams's work. Pancho seemed to exist for Williams "on the other side of a center" which was Williams's writing. Everything outside of that existed in a penumbra as shadowy forms on the further side of a flame" (Lahr 2014:114). Poncho was portrayed in *Summer and Smoke*, as Pepe Gonzalez the hot tempered, pistol carrying father of Rosa, who for a brief moment is engaged to John Buchanan. Here, as in other of his writings, Williams uses the



atmospherics about him, such as Poncho's persona, as models for his characters and his reactions to them as it affects moments in his scripts (Lahr 2014: 99-110).

At this time as well, Williams was involved with the tedious time-consuming details required to complete work on the two plays as well as dealing with the mind-boggling political details necessary to acquire appropriate dual production teams. Kazan had hesitated to accept direction of *Streetcar*, Audrey Wood, Williams's publicist, was in negotiation with Irene Selznick to produce *Summer and Smoke*, and Margo Jones was pushing Williams to allow her to direct *Summer and Smoke* for her Dallas Texas Theatre-in-the Round. Also, of concern to Williams was Wood's apparent lack of interest in *Summer and Smoke*. Williams feared the worst. "She is probably disgusted with it. So was I! Maybe it will seem better after a while Oh, how dull am I, this huge, dreadful game of fox and hounds with neurosis" (Lahr 2014: 116).

The stress at times overpowered Williams. He was advised to see a psychiatrist, finally admitting to Wood, "Undoubtedly a lot of my symptoms are what is called psychosomatic" (Letters #2).

He acknowledged being depressed about his work, feeling at times "as if I were about to give up the ghost" In a [[the same]] note to Wood he stated, Miss Alma has been an ordeal. "I have gotten so tired of her" (Lahr p.114). A blistering comment from a friend in which Williams had great confidence and to whom he had read *Summer and Smoke* asked the already suffering playwright "how could the author of *The Glass Menagerie* write such a bad play as this" (Notebooks: 450, 664)

Adding to the playwright's misery-of-the moment, was the unexpected death of Lorette Taylor on Dec. 7 1946. It was Taylor whose glorious portrayal of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* had been the driving force that made this first Williams Broadway offering a huge success. Taylor

was an actress Williams consider on a par with Dues and Bernhardt and with whom he had “the only close friendship I have ever had with a player”. Williams wrote a note of appreciation to the New York Times concerning Taylor ending it by quoting John Buchanan’s admission to Alma that “an immaterial thing –as thin as smoke-- may give “value” to “this unfathomable experience of ours” (Williams’ “An Appreciation” NYTimes 15 December 1946).



*Figure 5 Lorette Taylor in The Glass Menagerie.*

In the meantime, Williams devoted the majority of his time to finishing ‘The Poker Night,’ (*Streetcar*) influenced by his emotional and psychologic affinity with Stanley and Blanche and encouraged strongly by Audrey Wood and Elia Kazan to place this play ahead of all else. During this intense moment in his life Williams was dealing with incredible emotional anxieties some of which are detailed in this writing. His fears are well documented in the physical discomforts he was experiencing, those which he admitted were likely psychosomatic, but nevertheless very real to him. He was living with a volatile individual in a relationship which, in the time period, was

deemed unsavory and potentially a societal crime, thus, a very real threat to Williams's theatrical future.

The four characters in the two plays, Blanche, Stanley, John and Alma were mirrors into the immediate androgynous moments being experienced by Williams as he composed. Stanley represents the darker Williams personality, the individual who roamed the streets of cities such as New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles, Mexican towns, "cruising", being beaten, robbed, brutally taken advantage of by those with whom he would momentarily cohabit. Again, Kazan, so aware of his friend Williams's personae wrote: "*From the earliest sketches of the play to the final draft, Stanley is all about flesh and feast, both of which require killing* (Williams's stage directions: Stanley enters carrying a "red-stained package which he tosses to Stella). (The Plays 2000 : 470) *When Stanley overhears Blanche tell Stella that she thinks him bestial she effectively seals her fate. Stanley never forgets, he's common! He's common!* (From Kazan's; Production script of *Streetcar*) (The Plays : 510). In *Streetcar*, Stanley, a personification of Williams's erotic ideal, had a priapic vividness, that John Buchanan never did. (Lahr 2014: 122)

Nor, actually, did the many other male figures in Williams's plays reach the level of violence as Stanley though violent male figures are revealed in a number of his short stories. John Buchanan is introduced as a Promethean figure at the beginning of *Summer and Smoke*, but events change John wherein he becomes a Williams anti-hero, a man searching for salvation and redemption. When explaining to Alma his work at his father's clinic in Lyon, Alma asks if he was "covering [him] self with sudden glory". John responds, "redeeming myself with good works" and when she pushes him to "ask for the coming true of his most improbable dreams, he responds "it's best not to ask for too much" (*S&S part 2 scene 4:70*). Williams has drawn from John's collective unconscious the animas archetype of spirituality, leaving behind the boy figure who stated he

would never be a doctor, to becoming a mature adult, busy, caring physician, with a sense central to Williams's basic humanistic philosophy, "the need for compassion for the world's fragile and sensitive human beings".

### **Blanche and Alma**

It would appear that during creation of the two lady protagonists competing for favor in *Summer and Smoke* and *Streetcar Named Desire*, their paths through the thorn riddle thickets of their disparate lives were mirroring the journey Williams navigated physically and psychologically through his own "Dragon Country". Having originated within a "societal norm" of similar southern societies, with vivid memories of deep emotional and physical influences, and spawned by a creator with his own not too dissimilar psyche events, the final divergent paths taken by Blanche and Alma suggest non-definitive alternatives.

In the final analysis, Williams may have chosen a pathway for Blanche that may be far kinder than that which he allotted to Alma. It stands to reason that all that Blanche dealt with before and after her stay in the Vieux Carre had allowed her to develop a survivor mentality which though strained to the point where most others would, at the very least, have become emotionally incapacitated, at worst, insane, Blanche maintains a modicum of rationality, enabling a psychic retreat under which she hides allowing her an escape from the fear, the terror, that is robbing her of what is left of her composure. At this critical moment, Williams, true to form, underscores his plea for compassion of sensitive human beings with his stage directions for the doctor who has come to take Blanche to a sanatorium.

*He takes off his hat ...he becomes personalized...his voice is gentle and reassuring ...he crouches in front of her. As he speaks her name, her terror subsides a little...the inhuman cries and noise die out...[Blanch] turns to face him and stares at him with desperate*

*pleading...she extends her hands...he draws her up gently.* (Streetcar Gussow, Holditch The Plays :563)

Certainly, Williams comprehended full well the severity of rape, having, at moments been so tortured. If, as I have come to believe, Williams's transgender fluidity allowed him to be the character, male or female at the moment of writing, thus as Blanche he/her seeks some sense of compassion from the trauma inflicted.

Blanches's words to the doctor who now offers his arm, doffs his hat to "her ladyship" allows that tiny fragment of hope and reality still existing within to guide Blanche out of an immediate crippling environment with the words "Whoever you are---I have always counted on the kindness of strangers" (563).

I fear Williams is not as "giving" to Alma as he is to Blanche. Although much later he writes poetically of her "seem[ing] to be somewhere in my being" he does not suggest in what way, but rather acknowledges, like so many of his "little" people that she represents a figure from somewhere deep within his collective unconsciousness. His sister Rose, who, with no fault of her own, is rendered incapacitated, his puritanical mother Edwina whose rage against her dominating husband, linking his sexual overtures with impurity, created deep psychological scars of sexual repression within the Williams children, or his grandmother, the elder dying Dakin who devoted her time, money, love, and gentle support to Williams sustaining him when he was all but destitute. I suggest that once Williams provided only a "spiritual bond" between Alma and John, that he placed her within his own immediate frame of mind wherein his agonizing sense of self-doubt, self-loathing, and loneliness, enhanced by all the described anatomic ills and emotional fears, were eased by increasing amounts of medication and alcohol.

Early in *Summer and Smoke*, John Buchanan provides Alma, who has been unable to sleep after a trying experience making her feel “walled in,” with “some pills placed in a glass of water” instructing her to “toss that down, Ms. Alma” (S&S 1972 :38). (claustrophobia, Williams’s own terror). Alma soon becomes relaxed and drowsy feeling like “a water lily on a Chinese lagoon”. John provides her with a small box of the pills with instructions “to never take more than one or two at a time” (S&S 1977:42).

Over the course of the arc of the play, it becomes apparent that Alma may have been using the pills during the critical moments described and has become addicted to the ‘little white tablets’. Williams tells us of Alma’s dependency when during the final critical moments in John’s office moments before Nellie enters, she asks John “*do you remember those little white tablets you gave me? I’ve used them all up and I’d like to have some more*” (S&S 1977:75). He writes her a prescription which she will fill and carry with her. It is these tablets which may very well allow Alma to give herself over to the previous spontaneous and ungovernable in her nature.

Alma’s spiritual turnabout is very much a mirror on Williams’s own break away from the atmosphere of Mother Edwin’s Puritanism. Although at moments of great stress, as he maneuvered between *Streetcar* and *Summer and Smoke*, becoming frustrated and growing “so tired of her”, in retrospect, in Williams’s *Memoirs*, Miss Alma is portrayed as being “very well the best female portrait I have drawn in a play. She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being, and it was no effort to put her on paper” (*Memoirs*; 1972 Double Day and Co Garden City N.Y. :109). In that statement Williams is admitting to similarity between himself and Miss Alma. Once she has cast off her parents and the rectory, the serenity she finds is not the peace of heaven but the bliss of pickups and pills. “The prescription number is 96814. I think it is the phone number of God”. In William’s renovated consciousness, revelation is gratification. The

body spiritualized, offering the promise of a communion that brings resurrection in the flesh, not the afterlife.

For the moment Alma, with the help of mood sensitizers, is off to find that which may not be there for her. Williams, in his final stage directions, has Alma “face the stone angel and raise her hand in a sort of valedictory salute” (S&S 1977:79). What does this gesture imply? I suggest that Alma, now with ingested pill creating a sense of “a water lily on a Chinese lagoon”, and having “picked up” a male companion, is attempting to bid farewell to this stone symbol of restricting spiritualism.



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## Images:

Figure 1: Memoirs by Tennessee Williams.

Figure 2: <https://bit.ly/3s5aPWh>.

Figure 3: [https://deardigitaldramaturg.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/9361\\_1393743367.jpg](https://deardigitaldramaturg.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/9361_1393743367.jpg).

Figure 4: Memoirs by Tennessee Williams.

Figure 5: <https://source.wustl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Williams-feature-1400x700.jpg>.

Figure 6: <https://pin.it/PRAYj8n>.

Figure 7: Memoirs by Tennessee Williams.

Figure 8: [https://source.wustl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hatchet\\_Williams\\_Hotchner.jpg](https://source.wustl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hatchet_Williams_Hotchner.jpg).

Figure 9: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Ck7ifOGUYAArkWN?format=jpg&name=small>.

Figure 10: <https://bit.ly/3dTlCua>.

Figure 11: <https://www.vpl.ca/sites/vpl/public/Whitman2.jpg>.

Figure 12: <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101420869-img#>.

Figure 13: <https://bit.ly/3q5l6iu>.

Figure 14: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elia\\_Kazan#/media/File:Elia\\_Kazan.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elia_Kazan#/media/File:Elia_Kazan.JPG).

Figure 15: Photo by Peter Philips.

Figure 16: Photo by Peter Philips.

Figure 17: <https://bit.ly/3q18M2M>.

Figure 18: <https://broadway.cas.sc.edu/content/margaret-phillips-alma-winemiller>.

Figure 19: <https://www.alhirschfeldfoundation.org/type/camino-real>.

Figure 20: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/agnolo-bronzino/allegorical-portrait-of-dante-1530>.

Figure 21: <https://bit.ly/3EZ6jfn>.

Figure 22: <https://bit.ly/3sbCqF7>.

Figure 23: Memoirs by Tennessee Williams.

Figure 24: [https://pics.filmaffinity.com/Suddenly\\_Last\\_Summer-783152615-large.jpg](https://pics.filmaffinity.com/Suddenly_Last_Summer-783152615-large.jpg).

Figure 25: Mielziner: Master of Modern Stage Design by Mary Henderson.

Figure 26: Memoirs by Tennessee Williams.

Figure 27: Photofest.

Figure 28: <https://bit.ly/32bzEoE>.

Figure 29: Mielziner: Master of Modern Stage Design by Mary Henderson.

Figure 30: <https://bit.ly/3q0yPXV>.

Figure 31: Zinn Arthur photo, Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan by Brenda Murphy.

Figure 32: <https://bit.ly/33oNZyr>.

Figure 33: <https://bit.ly/3oXWJnx>.

Figure 34: <https://bit.ly/3E9bNDq>.

Figure 35: <https://ringfineart.com/products/sloppy-joes-bar>.

Figure 36: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Bowles#/media/File:Paul\\_Bowles.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Bowles#/media/File:Paul_Bowles.jpg).

Figure 37: <https://bit.ly/31SVygF>.

Figure 38: Mielziner: Master of Modern Stage Design by Mary Henderson.

Figure 39: <https://soundtrackfest.com/en/micro/alex-north-in-memoriam-2019-09-en/>.

Figure 40: <https://bit.ly/3ISajRg>.

Figure 41: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/broadway-stars-and-celebrities-viewed-hirschfeld/>.

Figure 42: <https://bit.ly/3soCX75>.