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POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND SELF-DESTRUCTION:
A RECURRING NARRATIVE IN SELECTED PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

BY

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1998

ABSTRACT

POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND SELF-DESTRUCTION: A RECURRING NARRATIVE IN SELECTED PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

By

Pranab Kumar

In this dissertation I explore the trait that stands out most for observers of the American culture: possessive individualism. It differs from the Asian and European conceptions of the self. American individualism, what Whitman called "the destiny of me," has developed into the aim of being able to extend oneself, to appropriate, and to own as much as possible. In his plays, Tennessee Williams explores the inner tension that grows out of the possessive individual's drive to be great against his or her desire to be good. The drive for greatness or self-promotion pushes many of Williams's individuals into a possessive frenzy leading to self-destructive consequences. But Williams also offers the antidote to this possessive bent in the American individual by creating characters who fulfil the ideal of democratic or expressive individualism. Williams's democratic or expressive characters stand apart from their possessive counterparts.

Democratic or expressive individualism originates in the philosophy of Emersonian self-reliance and stresses the connection of the individual to the world, but in ways that should not obstruct the individualism of others. Democratic or expressive individualism is a higher form of self-reliance. It is a mental self-reliance or mental individuality, which aspires to an impersonality that manifests itself in indirect service rather than through charity or paternalism. Democratic or expressive individualism is opposed to active self-reliance or active individualism, which is associated with worldliness

and tied up with egotism and selfishness in its pursuit of the prizes of power, position, or fame.

Williams offers a unique view of American individualism by dramatizing the dilemma of possessive individuals, while subtly suggesting an American alternative to the kingdom of the self through the practice of democratic or expressive individualism.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Prof. Arthur Athanason, my dissertation director, for his encouragement, patience, and support during the course of my writing this dissertation. I am deeply indebted to John Lahr of The New Yorker magazine, who offered me advice and encouragement and helped me with my understanding of the American culture and Williams's importance in the American theater. I am also indebted to Dr. Patricia Julius for her encouragement, suggestions, and kindness. I am grateful to Dr. Ann Larabee who not only participated in the process as an outside reader but also offered constructive suggestions for improvement. I am also grateful to Ms. Lorraine Hart who has been helpful in many ways throughout the completion of this degree. I am indebted to my friend, Dr. Ruth Haring, who was always there when I needed advice and encouragement. I am also grateful to Maher Ben Moussa and Janet Catterall, fellow graduate students, for their friendship, criticisms, and encouragement. Above all, my deepest thanks and gratitude are due to Prof. Arthur Falk without whose invaluable criticism and generous personal support this project would never have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Possessive Individualism in the Drama of Tennessee Williams and its Evolution in American Culture	6
Chapter Two: Possessive Individualism and Self-Destruction in <u>Kingdom of Earth</u> and <u>27 Wagons Full of Cotton</u>	70
Chapter Three: Possession, Individuation, and Liberation in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>	119
Chapter Four: Possession, Reputation, and Redemption in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>	165
Chapter Five: Possession, Status, and Truth in <u>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</u> and <u>Suddenly Last Summer</u>	215
Conclusion: <u>The Night of the Iguana</u> and Beyond Possession	266
Bibliography:	278

Introduction

The plays of the contemporary dramatists are not easily pigeon-holed by the rules of traditional dramatic practices. After the world wars, modern and contemporary dramatists' focus has shifted from a protagonist hero's quest for the moral order of the universe to characters who are bent upon exercising their right to exist in a society that has become increasingly hostile to their individual needs and desires. These characters are trapped in a materialistic world which interferes with their essential humanness. The characters become subservient to the rules of the community with which they are out of tune. The more they are pressured into conforming, the greater their suffering. Subsequently, these characters are pushed into becoming outsiders, survivors, and non-conformists. In other words, they become victims of an inimical and overpowering social order.

In 1939, a young Tennessee Williams declared in a letter to his agent, Audrey Wood, the theme of his work: "As you have observed by now, I have only one major theme for all my work which is the destructive impact of society on the sensitive, non-conformist individual."¹ The traditional reader, who is trained to look for clearly defined lines between good and evil in a work of representational art, could easily be misled if he or she applies this statement blindly to Williams's works. The truth is, Williams's work is far more complex and far less didactic than Williams's own early impressionable assessment of his work. The dramatic unfolding of the lives of Williams's characters sharply contrasts to the traditional ideal of the tragic hero whose tragic fall

is a consequence of his tragic flaw, the recognition of which allows him to depend on himself, so that he may walk away ennobled. The complexities in lives of contemporary characters do not arise from the characters' inherent flaws. Instead, they are essentially victims of a rigid social order. Thus the theater of the modern individual is a loss of blame-worthiness and its replacement by compassion.

As Williams developed as an artist and continued producing masterful works, his conception of his work in relation to life matured considerably. His later pronouncements about his dramatic vision were less romantic and more in tune with what he really understood about life in America which he strove to capture in his work. In his essay, "Tennessee Williams Presents his P[oint] O[f] V[iew]," Williams employed a more appropriate idiom to explain his stance and goal as an artist:

People are humble and frightened and guilty at heart, all of us, no matter how desperately we may try to appear otherwise. We have very little conviction of our essential decency, and consequently we are more interested in characters on the stage who share our hidden shames and fears, and we want the plays about us to say "I understand you." You and I are brothers; the deal is rugged but let's face and fight it together.²

With this statement, Williams clarifies the link between life, art, and the audience in modern America. Williams is writing about the individual who is not a tragic hero, but the contemporary man or woman who is struggling with his or her problems and obsessions and journeying through the confusion of his or her life and times. And in dealing with the ordinary individual Williams replays and dramatizes his own life history through his works. In a culture that encourages individuals to be responsible for making as much of a success of their lives, Williams

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sought to examine his own life through his dramatic works and make his works the playground for self-examination. Thus, "Williams never stopped taking his moral temperature and weighing the increasing psychic cost of his drive to be great against his desire to be good." And in the process, Williams's "drama offers a unique view of American individualism, bearing witness to both the brilliance and the barbarity of the one big idea of the American experiment--what Whitman called 'the destiny of me.'"³

In chapter one I establish the groundwork for my analysis of Williams's plays in this dissertation. I examine in detail the evolution of American individualism, since I argue that Williams's plays are concerned with celebrating the unique quality of the American individual. In chapter two I discuss the crude materialism or possessive individualism that leads to self-destruction in *Chicken and Lot* in Kingdom of Earth, and Jake and Silva in 27 Wagons Full of Cotton. In chapter three I discuss the clash between two opposite forms of individuals--the possessive individual, Amanda, and the democratic/expressive individual, Tom--in The Glass Menagerie. In chapter four I discuss the tragedy that issues from Blanche's drive towards a re-possession of reputation in A Streetcar named Desire. I also demonstrate how Blanche's drive to repossess her reputation interferes with Stanley's possessiveness of territory and space. This leads to a violent conflict in which Stanley overpowers and destroys Blanche. In chapter five I discuss the peculiar form of possessiveness that is the male quest for status in society. In this chapter I examine the alienation and frustration that Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and

Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer suffer as a consequence of being homosexual males in a patriarchal society. I conclude my analysis with a discussion of The Night of the Iguana, particularly drawing on the democratic/expressive individualism as embodied in the character of Hannah Jelkes. I show how Hannah is able to present us with an American antidote to the possessive individualism in the American character.

In my dissertation, I have not discussed some of Williams's other plays like Summer and Smoke, Sweet Bird of Youth, and Orpheus Descending because in these plays Williams is too heavily preoccupied with exploring the tussle between the carnal and the spiritual elements in a person's character. They do not contribute to my overall argument. On the other hand, plays like Rose Tattoo, with its "insistence that sexual response is the answer to life's problems,"⁴ and Period of Adjustment, an exploration of "a strangely ambiguous"⁵ marital situation, are written in the comic genre and they are not helpful in my discussion of the pattern of possessive individualism in Williams's plays.

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NOTES

1. Pancho Savery, "The Faded and Frightened and Different and Odd and Lonely": Psychological Realism, Polarity, Morality, and Identification in the Theatre of Tennessee Williams," diss., Cornell U, 1980, 11.
2. Tennessee Williams, Where I live: Selected Essays, eds. Christine R Day and Bob Woods (New York: New Directions, 1978) 117-18.
3. John Lahr, "Fugitive Mind," The New Yorker, 18 July, 1994: 68.
4. Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 188.
5. Spoto 254.

CHAPTER ONE

POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM IN THE DRAMA OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND ITS EVOLUTION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

I Tennessee Williams and the inner battle ground of Individualism

Williams was situated in America's cultural history at a time when the pre World War II rhetoric "that had reinvented small-town America" with its old values of idealism and patriotism, and that had been celebrated in works like Thornton Wilder's Our Town, the paintings of Norman Rockwell, or the sanitized covers of Saturday Evening Post, were being questioned by William Inge, Carson McCullers, and Robert Anderson. While these artists dealt with the happy values of the pre World War era, they also exposed their hollowness by pointing out how "bleak" such values "could be until redeemed by an unambiguous love." These writers appeared on the intellectual scene in America at a time when the traditional reliance on "family and community, civility and responsibility, style and grace" were being actively replaced by a choice between accepting bland materialism or an unquestioning conformity to a uniform lifestyle that generated a spiritually and intellectually stifling influence in people's minds.¹ It was also a time when the modern world of inhuman mechanical transformations and technologies ceased to be potent antagonists of man, because the battleground had shifted to the "inner oceans" of the individuals' own consciousness.

Williams's stage directions to his episodic memory play The Glass Menagerie succinctly hints at this picture of the new individual's despair in modern society: "[A]ll of these huge buildings are always

burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation."² The source of an individual's unhappiness lay within the individual. The unhappiness was not so much a result of any external condition but internal turmoil. It resulted from his or her unfulfilled desires and needs. But the more the individual reflected on himself or herself and questioned authority and traditional values, the greater became the fragmentation of the self, since the individual no longer felt any sense of belonging anywhere.

Williams's plays, which deal primarily with the individual's plight in contemporary American society, culminate in violent incidents of castration, cannibalism, madness, spiritual disintegration and the like. This symbolic representation of the individual's turmoil in Williams's plays can partly be attributed to what C. W. E. Bigsby calls a romantic's "fascination with extreme situations." But on a deeper level, these horrifying spectacles were presented by Williams to jolt the audience and the readers out of their complacency and draw them into the inner despair of the contemporary individual in a democratic society at a time of great upheaval in America's cultural landscape. Indeed, Williams's aim in his plays is to draw our attention to the frustrations and disappointments that the individual faces when he or she is trying to find a place in society or forge an identity, and this letdown of the individual serves as an ironic commentary on the nature of democracy itself, where the growth of the individual is one of its cornerstones.

Williams's plays do more than document the frustrations of individual development. The plays serve as an ironic commentary on the lack of development of the true individual self in a democracy. While it

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is understandable why the individual's plight or suffering is often considered tragic in contemporary American drama, I personally feel that the individual's suffering in Williams's plays tends to be *terrifying* rather than being simply tragic. I am choosing the word *terrifying* to characterize Williams's plays, as I feel that a tragedy, as we have come to understand it from its evolution since the ancient Greek times, is primarily a *fait accompli*, whereas terror is linked with the sense of anticipation, the dark ponderous obsession with man's recognition of his own negative potential,³ the "deliberate cruelty" that one is capable of inflicting on one's fellow humans purely on the grounds of self-preservation to guard one's own interest or to protect one's "territory" from direct or perceived aggression, thereby securing one's own sense of space, freedom, identity, and self. I think it is this trait that Williams's plays are dramatizing minutely. In dealing with a clash of individuals, Williams is at once able to exhibit his craftsmanship by exploiting the dramatic tensions that are inherent in the unique nature of American life, and also by documenting these explosive situations that develop during moments of individual assertion and individual confrontation in the American culture, Williams is able to focus our attention more vividly on the fact that sometimes individuals themselves are the sources of their own destruction. The stoic but compassionate Hannah Jelkes in The Night of the Iguana says: "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent."⁴ Perhaps this is the attitude Williams wants us to cultivate after we have watched his theater of American life. Williams's plays are the testing grounds where we are invited not to pass moral judgment but to exercise compassion and empathize with

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those who have lost on the battle ground of individual assertion. But above all, we are invited to exercise tolerance for those who are weak, wayward, and unprotected because in a democracy the other name for freedom is tolerance.

Williams's plays are so infused with the modern American concept of the individual that his plays are not effective in cultures where the concept of the individual is wholly different. For instance, in Asian cultures such as India the individual is an amalgamation of a familial *self* (self as defined by one's position in one's family) with a *transcendant self* (self as defined by one's awareness of one's closeness *with* the Gods, an individuality that is independent of material *attachment*), with very little scope of development of a more independent *self*. This Eastern individual is quite different from the contemporary *American* individual in whom the independent self is the dominant note, *with* very little emphasis on the familial and transcendant self.⁵ Since *Williams's* plays celebrate the unique quality of the American *individual*, a closer examination of the evolution of American *individualism* is pertinent in connection with my study of Williams's *plays*. Not only the uniqueness of American individualism, but its *varieties*, is pertinent for an understanding of the variety of *Williams's* characters.

Individualism was alien to America's founders. The Puritan ethos *was* based on John Winthrop's ideal of a religious community where "moderation" was the operative word around which people arranged their *lives*. People in the community did not have the "natural liberty" to do *whatever* they wanted. Winthrop inculcated in the Puritan community a

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code where a person's individualism was subordinated to the group's or community's well being. "We must delight in each other, make others['] conditions our own, rejoyce together, mourne together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body."⁶ Thus, there was a certain element of authority in the pronouncement that limited an individual's right to total freedom, but this strict sense of control did not last long.

Drama was also alien to America's founders. American drama, even after America's birth as a newly independent, democratic country after the revolution, stayed surprisingly undistinguished until the twentieth century. Alexis de Tocqueville, an astute observer and critic of American democracy, considered drama as the "literature of the stage" and was of the opinion that the dramatic form, even among aristocratic nations, was "the most democratic part of their literature." De Tocqueville likens drama to an immediate, down to earth, easily accessible, unique form of literature since: "No kind of literary gratification is so much within the reach of the multitude as that which is derived from theatrical representations. Neither preparation nor study is required to enjoy them: they lay hold on you in the midst of your prejudices and your ignorance." He also indicated that the new identity, the fully independent spirit that a new nation acquires after a "revolution[,] which subverts the social and political state of an aristocratic people," is most noticeable in the nation's dramatic literature.⁷ De Tocqueville saw in the dramatic medium the exact energy and enthusiasm conducive to capturing the excitement and fervor of any social or political change in a nation's history. His comment about the

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truly democratic, independent, revolutionary zeal of drama is perceptive. Yet, one cannot help but wonder as to what took drama in a democratic nation, such as America, so long to develop into a distinctive genre, and capture the American spirit of freedom and independence when the other two forms of literature, poetry and prose, had already produced their distinctive American voices.

On the other hand, when we recapitulate the progress of American drama from the perspective of contemporary readers and audiences, we cannot help but feel that the delayed appearance of distinctive American drama was serendipitous in that the delay prevented a premature development of an artificial tradition on borrowed themes before the original theme for American Drama could have evolved, since the distinctive American character had not yet formed. The American character took a two hundred year period of gestation before it was ready for dramatic treatment.

Partly, the slow development of American drama was caused by the fact that the political and social situations in America were different from any other nations'. America was not throwing off the yoke of any traditional form of entrenched aristocratic oppression or inequality, neither was it overhauling a systematic centuries-old tradition of old world authority and government control. America was a new country where the settlers came to escape the tyranny of old world customs and government. While the "new man" in America was afforded a new habitat, where he was reinventing himself with his new found independence from the old world authority of government and aristocracy that had held him captive, his energies were naturally more devoted towards self

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development through an exploration of unlimited space. Finding a place for himself in that space was more important than giving in to intellectual pursuits. Furthermore, as de Tocqueville remarked, American literature would not develop on the literary rules of the old world, since "in a democracy each generation is a new people," and "so it is difficult to establish strict literary rules among them," and since they are "accustomed to the monotonous struggle of practical life, what they want is vivid, lively emotions, sudden revelations, brilliant truths, or errors able to rouse them up and plunge them, almost by violence, into **the** middle of the subject."⁸

America was not a copy of the old world system; it was a place **where** man was free and enjoyed a completely new way of life. The **uniquely** individualistic, freedom loving, unfettered, adventurous life **that** the settlers embarked upon in the new world was the special feature **of the** American man, and in order to capture this special quality in **man**, a new sensibility was required of the poets, novelists, and **drama**tists, whereby they could invent a distinctive style which would **allow** them an all-inclusive portrayal of the assertion of the new **indiv**idual's uniqueness and infinitude.

However, the case for American drama is a little different from **that** of poetry and prose. American drama took the most time to develop **and** mature into its distinctive American form partly because of the **first** settlers', the Puritans' anathema and indifference to this **particular** art form. Also, during the time of settlement and after, the **people** themselves were "changing every moment with changing of place of **residence**, feelings, and fortune." American dramatists neither had any

American "traditions, nor [any] common habits, to forge links between their [the peoples'] minds."⁹ Fashioning plays on borrowed superstructures of heroic traditions of nobility and aristocracy, with a mythic background about great nationalistic wars and acts of personal heroism on the part of the heroes, whose exploits and heroic attributes dramatists could use to construct model plays, would hardly capture the predominantly ordinary, classless people's imaginations in America. Dealing with European heroes and myths in American drama could hardly satisfy this new nation's objective.

Furthermore, drama by itself is a very different form of literature than poetry or prose (novels, essays, etc.). Unlike the other two genres' dependence on printed words, that is its overtly textual nature, drama not only uses words to capture the characters' dialogue, but it is primarily live "action in imitation of human behavior." Drama's primary "emphasis on action" makes it more than merely a form of passive, subjective literature. Drama has a certain amount of life to it in that a dramatic text has to be "acted," its words must accompany human action on stage "to give the author's concept its full value," and it must also have an receptive audience.¹⁰ This kind of participation in the excitement of theatrical activity was sinful during the Puritan period of America's history.

Moreover, because dramatic "action" is at the heart of drama, "words (the literary component of the dramatic fragment) become "secondary." Thus, employment of actors to bring out the significance of the "relationship, the interaction of... characters," and the task of successfully being able to suit the words to convey "the imponderable

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mood, the hidden tensions and sympathies of human relationships and interaction" with utmost economy are ingredients that do not constrain a poet or novelist. Furthermore, as drama is "concrete representation of action," it cannot deal with any abstract philosophizing in its artistic process, as this risks alienating the thought from human reality, thereby failing to reach the audience. Whatever is said or done during the process of dramatic action on stage, needs the support of "real human behavior... in the most concrete form in which we can think about human situations."¹¹ Therefore, when a dramatist chooses to dramatize "action," he or she has to consider the most common and immediately recognizable forms of behavior that the dramatist's society encourages or holds valuable. The American dramatists' quest was in finding a distinctive feature of American life that was representative of its people in a new land. They needed to capitalize on a uniquely American characteristic that would lend itself to dramatic, action-filled representation on stage. American dramatists were able to realize this quest after a long period of apprenticeship in imitating European models, honing their skills by experimenting with native themes,¹² and carefully observing the new man's impulses, until they were finally able to break out of the traditional mold by dramatizing *the unique nature of American individualism*, with its inherent tension between an individual's necessity to conform while becoming aware of the potential in the principle of being true to one's self.

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II The Founding Theme for American Drama

a) Individualism and Land: A Conflicted Individualism

If the occurrence of the Puritan society in America enabled the settlers to cultivate a certain space in which they could pursue their religious beliefs freely, then that same circumstance and space fostered the growth of a particular spirit of individualism or identity that characterizes the American character. When the Puritans came to the new world, justifying their arrival and experience in America as a reenactment of the Old Testament episode "in which they [the Puritans] were the Jews, God's chosen people, fleeing from oppression to a new Canaan," they were more specifically driven by a transcendent idealism that "America was the New Eden" and that "all of man's efforts must be directed toward the ideal of a transcendent unity."¹³ Therefore, the temptations of the world (the Puritan view of the rich and unexplored land of the new continent) existed only "to divert and seduce man from his true goal." So, "the New World" with its vast stretches of wilderness became the "very antithesis of their ultimate hopes, the very abode of the Devil himself, and sure to be the source of all their temptations." The challenge to the Puritans was to set up a "Theocracy, A Holy Commonweal of the elect" in this alien territory, "to be defended and protected by means of the realistic appraisal of an alien environment and an eternal vigilance in fighting fire with fire." But, on the flip side, this alien ground that was considered as the fighting ground for gaining entry into the Puritans' ideal transcendent land, proved too alluring to hold back the settlers' wishes for worldly

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success and self-sufficiency. The alien territory "came to be for many men something which might be accepted and sought in its own right."¹⁴

Struggling to assert themselves against the authority and oppression of the old world, the Puritans, inspired by a religious individualism and classical political philosophy, which maintained peoples' right to govern themselves, prepared to settle in the new country, based on the "voluntary participation of individuals." But what the Puritans did not foresee was that this individual autonomy, which was based "in a context of moral and religious obligations that in some context justified obedience as well as freedom,"¹⁵ would have to contend with the fact that America's lack of social density, its high geographical mobility, and its apparent geographical and physical boundlessness could easily spur in the minds of the more independent the assertion of "one's own sense of space," thereby pushing them out of the commune to lead independent lives. Therefore, once the Puritans learned to domesticate the land, fight the Indians, and learned to trade, "the old cohesiveness went limp." The abundance of land in the colony, and the wealth of natural resources became too tempting a force that worked "against cohesiveness and for the individual."¹⁶ After all, many of the settlers came from the old world to escape the oppressive climate of the European aristocracies and overcrowded lands. No matter how religious the settlers might have been, the love of equality and liberty that they inherited from their fathers in England, added fire to their prospects of a personal independence and freedom in a new land, "a limitless continent," which "gave them the means of long remaining equal and free."¹⁷ The riches of the land were too seductive a commodity to

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In fact, land-based individualism or the hunger for land, in addition to a desire for adventure, for freedom of religious worship and freedom from other sundry frustrations at home, became the prime mover for later generations of emigrants for their leaving their homes in Europe and coming to America, since owning land would enable them to fulfil the "dream... of becoming a landed proprietor."¹⁹ The dispossessed, territoriless man of the old world now had a sure footing upon the territory which gave him the pride and dignity of ownership that he never had in his life. But the emigrants' possession of land in the new world meant much more than a sure footing; it meant the new man's equality with others in a land where one is a free agent. Although this land would become a scarce commodity in the next few centuries, the excitement of exploring and owning land in the vast American frontier became a passion among the people who came over from Europe. A restless urge to own unclaimed territory as one's right, coupled with a fearlessness of the Indians or the wild animals, induced in the American

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character a love for freedom, adventure, and conquest (possessiveness) as constituent marks of his distinctive character to this day.²⁰

Moreover, the conflict between communal living and personal independence in the Puritan colonies energized an adventurous individualism in yet another group of people, who survived in the early settlements by living at the margins of society. William Byrd, a rich landowner, took note of this phenomenon while on his travels to North Carolina, and although he detested this "waste of man and land," the "squatters" living in the fringes of society, these "frontiersmen," someone who "doffs his coonskin cap to no man and who asks society for no handouts," were the precursors of the new independent free American man that so many of the writers and poets came to extol and document as the "new man" in their works.²¹ If this was the kind of person who grew out of the ill-effects of European aristocracy and class consciousness, then he was also an alter image of the Puritan "religious self-reliance" since, by living solitarily on the fringes of the settlements, he too "exercised self-reliance in all phases of his activity, and developed a sense of impatience at restriction," as well as "a sense of independence and power." While the Puritans considered the allure of the world as an evil, a distracting force, disrupting one's attention to God, one's alterego, the frontiersman "found human possibilities in the world, and saw worldly effects as important and good."²² This emergence of the new man of the frontier was possible because of the abundance of unsettled land, a land so rich that it not only assisted in the independent existence of the non-conformist but it also allowed him to extend himself into the land, thereby diffusing any form of dissension within a

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community.²³ In other words, the independent man was free to pursue his own interests, while the community was left undisturbed.

This character and style of life of the new man in the frontiers gave the writers of the new world an opportunity to investigate the new nature of man in the new continent. It caught the attention of John Filson, one of the first writers to consider in his fiction Daniel Boone's "freedom from society" as "freedom from the vicious artificialities that impede man's realization of a life based on his noblest instincts." Wild nature was now considered the "best of all possible schoolmistresses" as living among nature's wildness meant developing "a love of liberty and sensitivity to the rhythms of primal life."²⁴ In D. H. Lawrence's words, the frontier environment in the new world provided the frontiersman an opportunity "to get away from everything that they are and have been," to be "masterless," to remove themselves "from any control of any sort" to a "new more absolute unrestrainedness." The "spirit of place is a great reality," and the new world's "spirit" was to allow that freedom to take expression in the heart of the new man.²⁵

The new man's position in the wilderness and his association with "the noble savage," the Indians, and with bears and other beasts was assessed in a new and positive light, in that he was as pure as the Indians in his "separation from the artifices of civilization," conducting a life in "response to the rhythms of nature." This new man became a staple for writers from William Bartram in the 1770's to Cooper in the 1840's, who saw in nature its redeeming influences, and who in their praise of the wilderness gave it a sort of tame quality, thereby

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validating and justifying man's presence in its surroundings. Writers such as Filson and Cooper talked about wild nature's literary function in aesthetic terms--the sublime, and the picturesque. Audubon's wilderness portraits of birds and Thomas Cole's and George Bingham's romantic art were inspired by the wilderness. Yet at the same time they hinted at the impending end of the wilderness with its replacement by natural and civil law.²⁶ Subtly but surely, the fact that the new man was dominating his surroundings, thereby establishing a new identity for himself is evident from the works of these writers.

b) Taming the Wilderness Within: Individualism and Aesthetic Ideal

There were other writers in this period who took a different view of nature's influence on the new man. Charles Brockden Brown in Edgar Huntly (1799) showed the release of man's violent self as an effect of his contact with wild nature, suggesting the wilderness's influence in awakening the violent streak in man that he had so long kept under wraps in society. But this violence was justified as it served to protect the white man from the Indians' savagery. But in Robert Bird's Nick of the Woods, white savagery eclipsed Indian behavior in the name of "advancement of civilization." In these writers' works, the wilderness allegorized "the drama of the psyche." It awakened the repressed wildness of the American character. But more specifically, by overemphasizing the "wildness" of the wilderness the wild white men's act of clearing the way for settlement was justified. These wild men served propitiously the later generations as they "remove[d] the difficulties which might discourage the attempts of better and more

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quiet men."²⁷ The previously unclaimed frontier was slowly giving way under the "new man's" urge to tame it in his ultimate quest for permanence, comfort, and his sense of identity as a landowner was being established. The "wildness" of his nature that was once able to secure for him a place in the wilderness was now enabling him and the others following him into it to turn the wild land into farm land for their personal benefit and possession.

The American writers found in the adventurous frontiersmen a sharp contrast with the people of the Atlantic coast, who were individuals but essentially commercial and less colorful than their European counterparts. Besides, the frontiersmen were one of a kind, a uniquely American phenomenon. The settlers on the coast still aped the cultures of their European ancestors, and built neo-classical monuments. Their poets wrote according to the style prescribed by English Augustan tenets, and their painters emulated the style of Reynolds. Those who needed a closer contact with culture moved to London. The frontiersmen, on the other hand, were close to the land, the abundance of which made America a rural colony, enabling the adventurous to embark on a life of prosperity and freedom that none of the European countries made accessible. Moreover, the wildness of the frontiersman reminded the writers of the essentially untamed quality of the freedom-loving spirit that enthused the new nation, where inherited institutions and high culture were absent but the opportunity existed for self-assertion and the growth of individual personality that was an alien concept in the European motherland. The frontiersmen led a fuller, closer life in nature if not a culturally richer life in the crowded European cities.

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The frontiersmen's free lives highlighted the sense of enjoyment of space and physical expansiveness, and the forging of a new destiny for oneself that were so coveted by the rest of the old world. Thus the freedom and the individualism of the frontiersmen's lives served to inspire literary works from Cooper's Deerslayer, to Twain's Huck Finn, and Owen Wister's Virginian, to Faulkner's stories of bear hunters and the cowboys of Hollywood. "Hand in hand with this figure's right to self-determination, marches his right to settle matters with the gun."²⁸

To a large extent, the period starting at the colonial American experience of settlements on the new land, leading to the adventurous man's foraging into the frontiers and his taming it into farmland, demonstrated the individual's resourcefulness and capacity to improvise solutions to the problems that obstructed his chances of survival. His subsistence farming methods placed him in a number of situations where he could rely on no one but himself. The pressures of survival during this time stamped on the new man's asocial character a strong sense of self-reliance. And while this frontier experience encouraged writers and artists to explore a sense of the new man's character, others saw in this experience "the development of an American political and economic character." But the common impetus behind an attraction towards documenting and analyzing this experience was "an explicit rejection of things foreign... as well as a clear affirmation of cultural independence."²⁹

c) Liberty versus Equality

Thomas Jefferson was the person who saw in the life of the independent farmer, who tilled his own land and gained sustenance by his own produce, the possibilities of fulfillment of the ideal American character. His belief in the tenets of liberty and equality was suited to growth only in the kind of society where the white Americans' ability to own land gave them an equality of status and made the ideals of self government, rather than old world aristocratic authoritative rule, a possibility. "The model American was a plain, straightforward agrarian democrat, an individualist in his desire for freedom for himself, and an idealist in his desire for equality for all men."³⁰ But Jefferson's purpose in envisioning a republican form of government sprang from his strongly held conviction of the universal principle of political equality, as he saw in the structure of closely knit small republics, contributing to Common government, a check in preventing people from becoming solely interested in making money, for he feared that people's forgetting themselves in the pursuit of wealth could create a bleak and tyrannous republic.³¹ Jefferson's conception of the new man, independent both in his values and mode of life, was the basis for the true American.

Apart from the experience of the agrarian democrats, the frontier experience had also shaped the American consciousness. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his influential 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier In American History," explained the important influence of the frontier on the formation of the American character in these words: "...to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That

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coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom--these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier."³²

Turner's argument about the frontier experience's indelible influence on the American character arose from his understanding of the conditions of the environment that the frontiersmen had to confront, which necessitated the development of certain obvious traits for his survival. Turner argued that the large availability of land at inexpensive costs made the possibility of everyone's becoming a land owner, thus enabling equalitarianism in society. The scarcity of bonded labor, also made it imperative for every man to work for himself, and the struggle against the elemental forces of nature and the wilderness also strengthened the frontiersmen's sense of self-reliance. The unstratified society of the frontiers enabled the frontiersmen to develop an independence from institutional pressure of stratified society. All these things, Turner argued, gave the new man a certain equality of status. While Turner never forgets to mention the unsavory aspects of the frontier life: the frontiersman's lack of the social grace and polish of civilized society, and the aspect of a certain coarse and brutal nature as part of his make up, he readily forgave these drawbacks as minor compensations for the essentially egalitarian

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life in the frontiers. In fact, both Jefferson's agrarian man and Turner's frontiersman are shown to share the same qualities of democratic, freedom-loving, self-reliant, and individualistic backgrounds, and both Jefferson and Turner believed that "the love of liberty and equality go together."³³

What we have to realize at this point is that the principles of equality and liberty that both Jefferson and Turner idealized in the agrarian's and the frontiersmen's lives did not exist harmoniously. Jefferson's agrarian society was composed of people who tilled their own land and sustained themselves through the produce of their own lands. Their independence and equality rested on the fact that each family could afford its own land and attain a certain amount of self sufficiency through hard work as opposed to being subjects under a European aristocrat. In the new world, the virtue of being able to own land gave men an equality of status. They were equal citizens as they achieved this equality through their landholding privileges. The frontiersmen too enjoyed a certain amount of freedom and independence because they were not subject to institutional supervision. But the individualism and liberty of these people were different only in degrees from the freedom and equality afforded to people in the aristocratic cultures, as even in this new society, a deep tension existed among the people, who tended to value equality more than liberty.

Land based individualism, founded on the principle of equality, was an important and cherished ideal, and in many ways Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer is still considered as the definitive statement of the American dream. But possession of land did not

necessarily mean that an individual could be politically or naturally free to choose and exercise his own opinions about politics and life. The European immigrants' transformation into self-sufficient Americans is succinctly summed up in Crèvecoeur's words: "From nothing to start into being; from a servant to the rank of a master; from being the slave to some despotic prince, to become a free man, invested with lands, to which every municipal blessing is annexed! What a change indeed! It is in consequence of that change that he becomes an American."³⁴ But this expansive and relaxed depiction of the life of a second generation American farmer in all of his letters, does not prepare one for his last letter, where he begins: "I wish for a change of place; the hour has come at last that I must fly from my house and abandon my farm." These words throw the reader into confusion.³⁵ In fact, Crèvecoeur's loyalty to the British put him at odds with the majority's or community's revolutionary feelings, and so his sudden, nightmarish conclusion to his mostly cheerful letters highlights that, while one could make the most of one's opportunities in America and create oneself as a person of substance and authority, thereby achieving a social equality with others, the liberty to exercise one's personal feelings in the form of political dissension or disagreement with the majority could be catastrophic for the thinking individual's or dissenter's survival.³⁶ One is reminded of de Tocqueville's comment about the dangers or hostilities that a dissenter might incur if he chose to oppose the majority's views.

You are free not to think as I do; you can keep your life and property and all; but from this day you are a stranger among us. You can keep your privileges in the township, but they will be useless to you, for if you solicit your fellow citizens' votes,

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they will not give them to you, and if you only ask for their esteem, they will make excuses for refusing that. You will remain among men, but you will lose your rights to count as one. When you approach your fellows, they will shun you as an impure being, and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you too, lest they in turn be shunned. Go in peace. I have given you your life, but it is a life worse than death.³⁷

While the Jeffersonian edict in The Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal" and are "entitled to [and could look forward to] life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," implying that the principle of equality afforded man an opportunity to exercise and demand his rights, neither the Jeffersonian society nor the frontier society was ready for radical changes, where people could afford an unlimited personal liberty. The people in these societies were far more concerned with equality than with liberty or true individual freedom. Jefferson's ideal, that by virtue of being equal man could demand a certain personal liberty through an assertion of his personal rights, was too advanced a concept for the people of these societies. In Jefferson's time, the option of demanding one's rights was farthest from people's minds. The American society was still too "traditional" for such radical upheaval. In fact, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that while a democratic spirit infused the lives of the people, society was not operating on the principles of Jeffersonian democracy. Liberty or "Freedom," de Tocqueville said, "is not the chief and continual object of their desires; it is equality for which they feel an eternal love; they rush on freedom [liberty] with quick and sudden impulses, but if they miss their mark, they resign themselves to their disappointment; but nothing will satisfy them without equality, and they would rather die than lose it."³⁸

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While de Tocqueville did not totally rule out the possibility that the principles of equality and liberty might "meet and blend," he did observe that "conformity" rather than individualism would result from the adherence to equality. He reasoned that:

The citizen of a democracy comparing himself with the others feels proud of his equality with each. But when he compares himself with all his fellows and measures himself against this vast entity, he is overwhelmed by his sense of insignificance and weakness. The same equality which makes him independent of each separate citizen leaves him isolated and defenseless in the face of the majority. So in democracies public opinion has a strange power of which aristocratic nations can form no conception. It uses no persuasion to forward its beliefs, but by some mighty pressure of the mind of all upon the intelligence of each it imposes its ideas and makes them penetrate men's very souls.³⁹

De Tocqueville claimed that the element of conformity in the American character, as a result of the rule of the majority, threatened the existence of not only individualism but even the concept of freedom. In fact, so pervasive is the power of the majority, he declared, that "the majority in the United States takes over the business of supplying the individual with a quantity of ready-made opinions and so relieves him of the necessity of forming his own," and so the person in the minority not only "mistrusts his own strength, but even comes to doubt his own judgement, and he is brought very near to recognizing that he must be wrong when the majority hold the opposite view. There is no need for the majority to compel him; it convinces him." De Tocqueville continues, that the predilection for "equality" induces "him [the minority individual] freely to give up thinking at all," and "there is no freedom of spirit in America." The principle of equality on which America operates, de Tocqueville says, undermines liberty, as peoples' only concern for equality breeds in them "a tendency to despise

individual rights and take little account of them." Thus, de Tocqueville fears that an emphasis on equality not only curbs individualism and breeds a certain conformism in people, but it contributes to fears of "despotism... in democracy."⁴⁰

d) Selfishness and Introversion versus Expressive Individualism

De Tocqueville also thought the equalitarian aspect of American democracy promoted a materialist attitude in the American character: "A passion for well being is... the most lively of all the emotions aroused or inflamed by equality, and it is a passion shared by all. So this taste for well-being is the most striking and unalterable characteristic of democratic ages."⁴¹ And de Tocqueville was not alone in this opinion about the American's materialism. In 1805, Richard Parkinson observed in his A Tour in America in 1779-1800 that "all men there make money their pursuit," and another traveller, William Faux concurred, saying in his Memorable Days in America, that "two selfish gods, pleasure and gain, enslave the Americans." While the American individual's material craving and the materialist culture that was developing in America was succinctly summed up by Washington Irving: "the almighty dollar, that great object of devotion throughout the land."⁴²

However, it is important to mention at this point, that the word "individualism," which came into use in Europe during de Tocqueville's time, was applied critically against the tenets of the Enlightenment that was sweeping through Europe.⁴³ The term in the Old World "was almost synonymous with selfishness, social anarchy, and individual self-assertion," but in the American context, the term's "value content changed completely," and came to be associated with "self-determination,

moral freedom, the rule of liberty, and the dignity of man." De Tocqueville's doubts and fears about the primacy of the individual and society's growth based on the principles of equality and liberty were the farthest notions from the American consciousness. In the years that followed, the term's popularity grew in America as it stood for "a rationalization of its [America's] characteristic attitudes, behavior patterns, and aspirations." Thus, in 1888 James Bryce remarked that everything associated with the American experience "went to intensify individualism, the love of enterprise, [and] the pride in personal freedom."⁴⁴

Since equality was an important part of life in democratic America, de Tocqueville was perceptive in his observation of the development of the kind of individual, who, he said, having no easy recourse to personal rights, operated according to the principles of social equality, but tended to "withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself." Furthermore, de Tocqueville argues that as a result of the spread of social equality, not political equality, "more and more people... neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained and kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands." Finally, de Tocqueville suggests that as the principle of equality without personal freedom allowed a person to be

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"forever thrown back on himself alone, there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart."⁴⁵

Thus it is easy to understand why materialism was to become another trait of the American character. The new man may not have had personal freedom but he was free as far as he was engaged in matters of self-improvement. Having little scope for freedom of the spirit, the individual was thrown back on the only option of materialistic conformism. Thus, while farmers were busy branching out into farms and the countryside, acquiring land, fixing an identity and rooting themselves firmly in the ground, the individual's scope to get ahead materially by his own ingenuity and initiative was widening. Benjamin Franklin's example of "a poor boy who made good," achieving worldly success by hard work and frugality, was emblazoned on the public consciousness. Franklin's example gave credence to the eighteenth century notion of what many thought to be the most important fact about the new continent, namely, the individual's merit of worldly success by virtue of his own initiative. Franklin himself advised the Europeans: "If they are poor, they begin first as Servants, or Journeymen; and if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters, establish themselves in Business, marry, raise Families, and become respectable Citizens." Although Franklin did not withdraw into his own world of selfish unconcern, since he was a supporter and defender of popular government, and he did not allow personal aspirations to obstruct his political commitments to the community,⁴⁶ nevertheless, Franklin did live in a society where people lived lives without having much right to, or an awareness of, personal individualism as we

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understand it in this latter half of the twentieth century. In fact, many of the people who followed the cult of success well past the middle of the nineteenth century did not interfere with the already established notions "of traditional religious and social patterns," since young Americans were encouraged to "follow in the secure and respectable paths of the established social and religious tradition."⁴⁷ In Franklin's time, "lives were lived as if by permission," where each private person had practically no identity outside the community. The individual's rights were "thought to need justification," for no matter how free the individual was in matters of pursuit of money-making, "individuals had rights as individuals... on condition that they be used well or virtuously or productively or for the sake of a common purpose." This tendency in society is what gave rise to the notion of utilitarianism.⁴⁸

Thus, Franklin's example of following a utilitarian individualism, which was strengthened by a democratic equalitarianism, became a dominant fact of life by the middle of the nineteenth century, and utilitarianism was a contributing factor to the aggressive capitalism that came into fashion with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. The utilitarians, who viewed life in purely economic terms, were busy influencing the people about the way they could protect and increase their personal wealth and influence by making social contracts purely based on their self interests, with no concern for any person's individual rights. And with this primary emphasis on the individual's interest in material pursuit, little room was left for "love, human feeling, and a deeper expression of the self."⁴⁹ Thus, a new aspect of individualism called "expressive individualism" came into existence to

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counter the cramped and soulless character of bourgeois utilitarian individualism. The "American Renaissance" in literature that F. O. Matthiessen talks about grew out of a reaction to utilitarian individualism and "against the formulas of eighteenth-century rationalism."⁵⁰ Expressive individualism focussed upon the dictum that "the unique core of intuition and feeling" that lies at the heart of each person required "creative expression" and "protection against the encroachments of both other individuals and of social institutions." The important message of expressive individualism was that people "who fritter away their personal creative potential allegedly sacrifice their real personal identity to unthinking social conformity, that perennial 'hobgoblin of little minds.'"⁵¹

It was Emerson who was perhaps one of the first to realize that the American ideal (or American character) would take shape from its contact with the largely "unhistoricized natural environment." Thus, after his initial experimentations in imparting an "American coherence" to extraneous sources such as Greek and Oriental philosophy and post-Kantian thought, Emerson turned to nature and encouraged his fellow men to think "beyond appearance and see that the afflatus that moved in each man was identical with that which flowed in nature." Emerson declared that "the selfsame divinity thrust forth its features in both. What appeared to be an objective nature was in reality merely mediate, an assemblage of commodities and symbols for the sustenance of human life and human thought." He further indicated that the accumulation of history in the older cultures had indeed fettered their growth since the "social traditions and artifact" in the older cultures had been

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"transmitted for so long so unthinkingly that they had attained that fatal status of objective realities."⁵² America's lack of history was a blessing as it freed the people here from adhering to idols and instead enabled them to learn directly from nature, to become self-reliant decision makers, since "Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us."⁵³ Emerson not only encouraged his fellow Americans to look to nature for their education and inspiration, but he also invited them to disavow unhesitatingly their European backgrounds, origins, and influences. With essays like "The American Scholar" and "Self Reliance," Emerson began to raise his countrymen's consciousness to what constituted the beginnings of the American notions of intellectual and cultural individualism. With lines like: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe..." or, "Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition... Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past?" ("Nature"), Emerson was exhorting his fellow Americans to exploit the fertile experience of life in nature in the American culture. In essays like "Nature," "The American Scholar," "Self Reliance," and others, Emerson's extended his call for cultural independence by showing the directions in which cultural individualism could be perfected by enabling the American to turn the tables "against the history of [old world] economic privilege" through making the Emersonian poet or scholar the cultural pioneer in the new world, "the representative man, who sums up the desire of history's dispossessed to come into possession--for possession is power and power is freedom."⁵⁴

But Emerson's concept of individual ownership and the power factor involved in it cannot be construed in the feudal or capitalistic sense

of ownership, since the germ of Emerson's transcendental economy is "not owning but belonging, not possessing, but being possessed." ["Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eyes can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty deeds give no title." (Nature)] The particular aspect of nature that Emerson describes here is what he will variously refer to in the essay as the "universal soul," "Reason" and the "Oversoul," all of which, however, Emerson pithily describes as "an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed"--"we are its property." The words "it" and "immensity" are not quantifiable terms in the essay, and neither can they be considered a "commodity." Therefore, by suggesting that the poet is the real owner of the landscape, Emerson really means to draw our attention to the poet's sense of "belonging" to the landscape since this sense of "belonging" is actually "a condition of release from [the] possessive selfhood" of commercial commodification. It hints at a sense of "possession by freedom" rather than a sense of capitalistic ownership, by which rules people merely grab at property to externalize and validate their sense of individuality and assert their material selves through a pride in worldly possessions.⁵⁵

Emerson was an inspirer and encourager. He wanted to banish the "Puritan sense of darkness, guilt, and intrinsic limitation" by countering it with his personal conviction in "the infinitude of the private man,"⁵⁶ and "his eager apprehension of the possibilities of American democracy."⁵⁷ His idea of individualism, originating in his

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philosophy of self-reliance, stressed the connection of the individual to the world, but in ways that should not obstruct the individualism of others. His society of individuals consisted of "individuals serving or contributing to other individuals," because Emerson's individual is a person who is "at one with himself or herself, self-sufficient, self-contained; that its acting will be indistinguishable from its being; that its being will naturally attain its perfection; and that its being is an unintentional blessing on whatever is around it or happens to come its way." Emerson encouraged a person to develop a higher form of self-reliance, a "mental self-reliance," or mental individuality, "which aspires to impersonality," where one person can help the other through "indirect service" rather than through "charity or paternalism," as opposed to an "active self-reliance" or active individualism which is associated with "worldliness" which is "too entwined with selfishness or egotism" in its pursuit of a worldly prize in the form of "power, position or fame." Moreover, "worldliness" to Emerson is nothing more than conformity, and conformity is "the main antithesis to self-reliance" because by conforming one merely observes one's life and work as something obvious without looking at its true significance or worth. Emerson exhorted people to look at their lives and works as one's double, as a deliberate externalization of the self. But this does not mean Emerson is against active individualism. Rather, Emerson wanted individuals to consider their lives "from the perspective of power and energy" and to "find better channels than those already established in the world, established by and for the world, established by society and understood as an unself-examining organization of power." He wanted a

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person to do his work with "a certain unegotistical spirit" while at the same time "moving, searching, finding..., as life in a democratic society, where change is allowed as a matter of principle, only conformists crave fixity."⁵⁸

This is the "democratic individualism" that rallied Whitman to answer Emerson's call in his Song of Myself, where he looks around himself into the nature of American life and individualizes himself as part of the fabric of the democracy of "the divine average," the "self" among all other "selves." Whitman sought to awaken the private citizen's sense of belonging to a democratic whole through his intellectual expression of the American self. He was able "to sing--the democratic individual, especially as such an individual lives in receptivity or responsiveness, in a connectedness different from any other," and therefore, in telling us about himself, he is also telling us about ourselves. While considering the wholeness of the scene, Whitman is also telling us about "the reservoir of potentialities" that is found in a democratic culture, which can be defined as the uniqueness of each person in a democratic culture. By giving the poem, in D. H. Lawrence's words, an "accumulative identity," Whitman is suggesting an inclusive nature, rather than an exclusive nature of the whole fabric of a democratic culture. Whitman's aim is to prove that if we are ready to accept ourselves, then we will "grow more in mutual recognition, in democratic acceptance. Feelings of superiority and other discriminations will exist,... but their validity will be challenged by a poetically enhanced awareness of the vastness of every individual equally." And just as one individual has the ability to see the diversity in a

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democracy, in the same way that person "needs to be seen by many individuals and also by one individual's many eyes." Yet, Whitman's final aim as a reflective individual is the suggestion to transcend the "adventures of human connectedness" and cultivate an attitude of "democratic solitude" by acknowledging and realizing the "sheer fact of existence" which inspires in one "a philosophical self-respect," therefore, opening up the possibility for each person to "take himself or herself seriously, as directly connected to whatever is irreducible, to that around which the mind can never close."⁵⁹

In many ways, Thoreau too answered Emerson's call for an expression of the American self by "practical reform and spiritual renewal," by his putting the idea into practice, theory into action, when he spent two years at Walden Pond and recorded his experiences in the text by the same name. Walden became an American classic. By going to live in the woods, Thoreau exemplified a self-reliance that recognized man's nature as that of "a shaper, a constructor, a maintainer," and that "each man" should consider himself not "only as a part of the creative flow of experience but as a universal reference point in this flow." This self-reliance view would enable a person to recognize that he was not synonymous with the "evolution of a novel strand of experience," but "a jewel," an agent "that might reflect an inclusive and external meaning" of the whole of experience. Man was asked to consider himself as "a universal spark" and realize his own "intrinsic nature" since this would allow him to "maintain his integrity in the course of his creative action" in whatever path he chose to express himself. But this exhortation to "find the inner knowledge of

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the self" was too philosophical or individualistic a theory to challenge the economic and capitalistic potential that the majority saw in the new land. Extracting meaning out of experience through concrete action and self-assertion linked to an identification with the land and its economic potential, combined with a self-sufficiency that grew out of worldly success, was too easy a prospect to forego. This "unreflective self-assertion" led man to believe "that the creative life was a life of power" as exercised through physical control and that man's integrity was intrinsically linked with "the success of his [worldly] endeavors."⁶⁰

On the other hand, after giving his call to reconfigure culture in America, Emerson was mostly interested in witnessing the advent of that "great *reflective* poet," and by asserting that "'Ours is the Revolutionary age, when man is coming back to Consciousness,'" Emerson's call was chiefly to the thinking man, the man of aesthetic sensibilities.⁶¹ Neither he nor for that matter Whitman ever ventured to talk about democracy as not being nice all the time, because there are things in human nature and natural reality that may be called monstrous or evil. In their effort to "encompass everything, they [Emerson and Whitman] reduce[d] and eliminate[d] aspects of reality in order to make it encompassable or to make it lovable." Perhaps, it was these artists' objective to help "discipline [our] sensitivity to suffering by the sense of beauty, to extend our sense of beauty, to make us see, as democratic individuals, more beauty in the human and natural actuality than eyes not trained by democratic life are able to see." Perhaps they dwelt on the heroism and optimism of democratic possibilities, "more

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thoroughly... because of their democratic commitment." But in a democracy, where an individual is encouraged to foster a sense of justice and honesty and an awareness of the wholeness of life, is it not immoral of the artist to suppress or aestheticize the "animal eating animal" reality of nature that might evoke a sense of disgust from an individual?⁶²

e) Politics and Power

Taking Emerson to task for his cold absorption and excessive optimism about the self, John Updike points out that Emerson, because of his enthusiastic wishing "to give men the courage to be, to follow their own instincts," never quite realized that "these instincts... can be rapacious."⁶³ De Tocqueville, in his discussion about individualism in democracy, raised another valid issue, that individuals' self-absorption places them at risk of becoming hostages to despotism. Melville makes a compelling case for a "democratic sanction of despotism" in Moby Dick, with Ahab's "absolute domination of the crew." Melville's critique of the importance given to self-assertion and personality in a democratic society at once highlights the fact that, while "individual personality counts" or is indeed "determinant in the distribution of power" of such societies, nevertheless "it is the very assertion of rights of self which risks destroying those conditions allowing for it in the first place." With unrelenting logic, Melville shows how democracy can bring about "the unintended and politically tragic consequence of its own extinction."⁶⁴

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Despite Bersani's convincing argument about the horrors of Ahab's despotic individualism, I believe that, by situating Ahab's society in the wilderness of the sea far removed from ordinary society, unconnected to civilization as it were, Melville does give us some hope that the severe individualist despotism occurs only in an unusual circumstance, in a far-away place. Moreover, modern experience has shown us that the political machinery of some democracies may have been tampered with by individuals for personal profit, but that condition has not remained unresolved for long. The recent collapse of the USSR, China's political and economic reforms towards a market economy, and the successful democratic elections in Haiti, and other countries' quest for democratic forms of government prove that the democratic form of government is the most successful alternative among all forms of government.⁶⁵ Perhaps the rights based system of American democracy is too advanced for other democratic nations to adopt at this time, since most democratic nations became democracies after overthrowing despotic aristocracies or autocracies, and are as yet unable to overhaul the old systems of social stratifications of rank and class, yet that rectification will happen as education spreads amongst their masses. But whether other democracies will be able to afford their citizens the kind of protection and individual rights that America offers is another challenge. We shall see that the real threat to individualism is not democracy but the new economic, technological, and social conditions of power. In these conditions, democracy is the one preservative element.

It would be a mistake to think that either Whitman, Thoreau, or Emerson are talking about "unqualified individualism" or the doctrine of

individualism "without a democratic connection." They are concerned with the principle of democratic individualism where democracy and individuality are not foreign to each other, not where "one can flourish at the expense of the other." The growth of their individuality is only possible within a democratic system, and the individual and the system must work together in order "to bring out the most brilliant potentialities and avoid the most sinister ones."⁶⁶ To them, democracy and individuality are not mutually exclusive terms. Whitman explained the connection or interdependency of democracy and individuality as:

For to democracy, the leveler, the unyielding principle of the average, is surely joined another principle, equally unyielding, closely tracking the first, indispensable to it, opposite, (as the sexes are opposite,) and whose existence, confronting and ever modifying the other, often clashing, paradoxical, yet neither of highest avail without the other, plainly supplies to these grand cosmic politics of ours, and to the launch'd-forth mortal dangers of republicanism, to-day or any day, the counterpart and offset whereby Nature restrains the deadly original restlessness of all her first-class laws. This second principle is individuality...⁶⁷

In fact, all of them, Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, were deeply interested in enabling the individual to operate within the democratic system and effect change by effective use of the political machinery. "I know nothing grander... than a well contested American national election," Whitman declared. And voicing his trust in the system, Whitman pointed out, "Political democracy, as it exists and practically works in America, with all its threatening evils, supplies a training-school for making first class men. It is life's gymnasium, not of good only, but of all. We try often, though we fall back often... Whatever we do not attain, we at any rate attain the experiences of the fight, the hardening of the strong campaign, and throb with currents of attempt at least."⁶⁸ "With subtlety and feeling," Emerson, in his essay,

"Historical Discourse," addresses the importance, relevance, and effectiveness of organizing town meetings. And although Whitman is the one who is most vocal in his writings about the electoral process in democracy, "all [of the writers] pay tribute to the American political system, despite their continued guardedness." Running through their writings about politics is the common theme that, since the electoral process enables the political offices to be occupied for a fixed time, thereby allowing a voter to judge the officeholders' capacity to hold office, the democratic process is a "strong dissolver of the mystique of authority." Moreover, since laws, not the principles upon which they are based, are made by temporary officeholders, the democratic process allows a group of like-minded individuals to elect new officers who would reinterpret or change the laws made by unsympathetic and unpopular political officers voted out of office. In a democratic system, they argue, the average individuals help to select the government.⁶⁹ In other words, all three writers saw the importance of a democratic political participation through a reactivated citizenship as the means to fulfilling the individual's growth in a democracy.

But more directly in answer to Updike's criticism, through their doctrine of expressive individualism, more appropriately called "*democratic individualism*," Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau encouraged individuals to free themselves of the constraints of convention, since, according to them, democratic individualism in its capacity to "liberate human energies" encourages people to "live more intensely." Emerson and his followers advocated a disregard for the economic life in favor of building a faith in "*democratic individuality*," for they understood and

wanted others to understand and see clearly that "all social conventions are, in fact, conventions--that is artificial; that they are changeable," and that although the Emersonians knew that conventions are a part of life, they were afraid that people were susceptible "to take a given network" of conventions "as natural, as nature itself--as imperative and therefore sacred," since they knew well that "people--even in a democracy--are too timid, too unadventurous, too conformist."⁷⁰

Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau wanted to draw people's awareness to the powers of the "unsettling" process of democracy, which not only enables the "slow growth of individuality" but ruffles everything for everyone in a way that liberates the "*democratic* individuality" of all citizens. Their call is a call "to *honesty*," as the awareness of "democratic individuality" would enable people to see through existing conventions and opt for the "dangers and opportunities of being self-conscious creatures," to "see through and around ourselves," and so have the power "to reject identification with any role or set conventions." They were asking people to "not be afraid of self-consciousness" for "democracy will thrive on it." They wanted people to understand that the true meaning of democracy was "to sustain social life without bad faith, and without superstition, mystique, and misdirected religiousness."⁷¹

Yet all three writers were in fact aware that not all individuals live or are even capable of living a life as a fully democratic individual. "Democratic individuality is not an ideal that one can ever be certain to have reached... It is not a permanent state of being, but an infinite project." While some people try harder than others to attain

this ideal, "some try *deliberately*," with the strange result being "that the egalitarian ideal is lived unequally; the cultural ideal is lived fitfully; the *telos* [the ultimate aim or object] is often avoided," and this is the reason why these writers felt that "the ideal must be advocated" despite the only appropriate channel for its proliferation being "philosophical or poetical."⁷²

The charges against democratic individualism brought by post-modernists such as Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and others are that the individual or the "self (the subject)" is merely a construct of language⁷³, or that an individual is nothing more than a "constituted" personality by virtue of the "calling" or "hailing" of a person by a (suspect) authority,⁷⁴ or that certain dominating powers or groups in society, which Foucault labels as "pseudosovereign,"⁷⁵ deliberately create and disseminate individuals, who are made to believe that they are individuals, thereby enabling the dominating groups to dilute the power of a group of like-minded individuals against them. But these theorists merely assume that an individual is a construct of language; they do not give valid reasons for their assumptions. On the other hand, if individuals are, as these post-modernists see them to be, merely "products of the environment,"⁷⁶ then they should admit that the early environment that led to American individualism was one of a power vacuum. Only over the last century has this power existed to manipulate and subjugate democratic individualism.

In his works, Foucault labors to highlight that individualism, as it appears today, is merely the outgrowth or product of techniques of "discipline" or "power." In works such as Discipline and Punish and The

History of Sexuality, Foucault's main line of argument is that a person's "individuality" is "an artificial production," a by-product of social control instituted by powerful interest groups in society and in the hierarchies of power so that the masses may be easily controlled and exploited. But in most cases, power rarely operates solely for its controlling capabilities. No despot or hierarchies of power could be satisfied by exercising power over people merely for the sake of power. Rewards in the form of monetary and material payback are the chief reasons why people like to hold power over others. People exercise power over others to gain economic control, not merely for reasons of knowledge or ego. Foucault does not deal with this issue in his theory of power. However, Foucault's critique does alert us to the extent to which a person's individuality can be shaped by one's cultural forces. Some of the cultural influences may even be due to the influence of technology and the media, and indeed they can be a problem. But we have to realize that not all people in a culture can be unaware of their own unique self no matter how powerful the social and cultural forms of control. The existence of democratic individuals such as Lincoln or Gandhi or Mandela or Rosa Parks or Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King Jr., or the Burmese dissident, Aung San Suu Kyi, challenge the pessimism of post-modernists and support Whitman's and Emerson's optimism. A post-modern argument can be made that these individuals sacrificed their lives for their beliefs in ideologies. But all these individuals pursued highly moral principles, for are not the destructive principles of slavery, colonial rule, apartheid, totalitarianism and the like, that

degrade peoples' lives, and deny people their basic human dignities, worth opposing by personal sacrifice? I say, yes.

On the other hand, it is relatively easier for me to accept de Tocqueville's argument that equality makes conformists out of people than to accept without doubt the theory that technologies of power or controlling mechanisms invest people with a false individuality. Foucault's theory so far has been falsified by the American democratic system, where a person's civil rights and privacy are constitutionally protected. America's rights-based system of individualism affords the individual his or her rights to self-determination. Granted that there are major instances where individuals are too weak or outnumbered to fight for their rights, yet that does not make the Bill of Rights invalid or any less applicable to any individual case of resistance to oppression. The various liberationist movements of the 1960s, like feminism and civil rights for advancement for colored people, which later inspired movements like gay rights, could only have been possible in this country of rights-based individualism, taking succor from the Bill of Rights and other constitutional protection of peoples' rights. This shows that the ascent of individualism is not a closed issue in America. Yet the battle continues, and democracy may not prove equal to the task. Individualism is threatened with a hostile take-over.

f) Equalitarianism and Basic Human Dignity versus Competitiveness and an Aggressive Pursuit of Wealth.

The equalitarian principle in American democracy, by helping to obliterate the basis for the development of a hierarchy of ranks, allowed men to share a common humanity and dignity. Thus, no man was

born to rule while others were born to serve, and although some could regard themselves as more fortunate than others, they were not better. People were permitted to rise in the world but not allowed to forget or ridicule their origins. The concept of rank or authority became anathema, and people viewed it with resentment. Rejection of the role of authority was thus fostered as a way of life, and so the man with most responsibilities did not rule but led the other members, not subordinates, and together they formed a team, and orders were given in the form of requests. The father in the family is expected to persuade, not command, and the children are not told to obey but cooperate, and the husband is no more the lord and master but a partner. But while this brand of American equalitarianism stressed the universal dignity of men and women by rejecting social rank as a slur on dignity, and promoting the ideal of the perfectibility of man and its potential fulfillment, the goal's complete fulfillment was impeded by exploitation of unorganized labor, chattel slavery, insufficient education, inequities of unemployment, and the handicaps of age, race, and sex. Nevertheless, the basic equalitarian principle of the universal dignity of all men enabled reform and protest movements to address the flaws and move on towards achieving the full potential of the ideal.⁷⁷

When the American wilderness was being transformed by the new man into habitats, the equalitarian principle afforded Americans unlimited access to develop undeveloped resources, and while the enterprising individual was free to gain wealth, society too benefitted from rapid economic development. The principle of equalitarianism, which enabled all individuals an equal start, reinforced the concept of self-reliance

in the common man, and this self-reliance had everything to do with physical stamina, rather than "independent-mindedness," or the "intellectual-resourcefulness" that de Tocqueville said the nineteenth century man did not exercise or lacked. Therefore, when a person gained more wealth by being clever or stronger or through sheer entrepreneurial acumen, he was allowed to enjoy what he had earned. Thus, a tolerance for great discrepancies of wealth, as a result of this equalitarian permissiveness, has permeated the American character, since the wealth was created by an individual, who had an equal start, and was not acquired by inheritance.⁷⁸

But the drawback of this equality of opportunity is that it overlooked the fact that, although men may be equal in terms of rights, they were not equal in terms of abilities. Therefore, "to say that men deserve equal opportunity is tacitly to admit that with this opportunity they will become unequal."⁷⁹ Thus, by encouraging competition, this equalitarian principle only made the individual materialistic and heightened his distinctive qualities of aggressiveness and competitiveness. In fact, this dream of success served to dampen the individual's freedom of expression of the self. Valuing the individual meant primarily valuing his worldly success, since "mobility through individual economic achievement remains that primary career path for which young Americans are educated."⁸⁰

Again, this equalizing principle, that has fostered in Americans the belief that all men are equal and has encouraged Americans to better their lives and advance their human potential through generating wealth, has also made them conformists, because, while the mutual respect people

show to each other has made them think that one's fellow citizens are worth helping, this same view has taught them not to question the opinions of their fellow men. If all men are equal, then each can think for himself, and as no man is above the rest, therefore one should not assume superiority and question the opinion of his neighbors. And while the majority is in no way directly responsible for making someone else adopt their views, it is also understood that no one will object or challenge the majority's views. Therefore, "the absence of a formal compulsion to conform seemingly increases the obligation to conform voluntarily."⁸¹

Thus, equalitarianism makes the American character work in ways that are antithetical to the development of *personal character and individuality* that the expressive individualists like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman were encouraging. Equalitarianism promotes a restrained, utilitarian individualism that works to advance the goals of a citizen as long as no radical schemes are hatched, no common laws are broken and no discontent is aroused within the majority. In fact, American individualism has always stayed within clearly defined boundaries, and although the qualities of authority-rejection and self-reliance that developed in the individual for reasons of survival in the frontier have prompted people to act "individually," the individual in America has never been radically free to act in a totally unfettered manner and give expression to a self-indulgent self-expression, often labeled as "eccentricism," that is permissible in an aristocratic society. This is the reason why a person from another culture, accustomed to the impulsive habits of individuals who assert themselves at the expense of

others, finds the American brand of restricted individualism quite hard to grasp.

g) Laissez-faire and Non-Conformist Individualism

American individualism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has shifting centers of emphasis. While self-reliance was at the core of nineteenth century individualism, dissent or non-conformism has become the focus of twentieth century individualism. Yet both brands of individualism converge when it comes to counting individual growth as a means to serving society rather than individual growth apart from society. This could easily lead us to believe that self-reliance and non-conformism are interchangeable terms, because it can be argued that an individual who is self-sufficient or independent of others in matters of physical welfare will not be influenced by others' ideas. So, if this individual is used to taking care of himself, then he will naturally think for himself too. And if he can think for himself, then he will obviously not need others and therefore be free of social constraints. Thus, we can argue that if individualism leads to independence and independence means freedom, then freedom gives scope for dissent. Therefore, individualism equals dissent. But this kind of reasoning has often led to the misleading conclusion that individualism finally means both "self-reliance" and "non-conformism." The reality of the situation defies such easy conclusions. First, self-reliant or self-help individuals are basically conservative in their beliefs; as we have discussed earlier, such a person is orthodox and mainly enterprising in his ideas of success by taking advantage of laissez-faire economics; but

nonconforming individuals who value new ideas of self-expression regard the laissez-faire individualist as a hindrance to self-expression and new ideas in general. Yet while both these groups of individualists situate the individual over the group, ironically they both are group conscious, since both groups reject each other by criticizing the other's betrayal of the group. The nonconformist charges that the laissez-faire individualists trample on the weak, since the laissez-fairists value private advantage more than the success of the whole group. The laissez-faire individualists, on the other hand, charge that the nonconformists are irresponsible dissenters, who allow the easy decline in the overall community's values and morals by sanctioning hostile or irresponsible forces to injure group cohesion through irresponsible behavior.⁸²

But the place where the laissez-faire individualists seem to overlap with the nonconformists is in their permissiveness of the unusual individual. The laissez-faire individualists qualify their argument in support of the bold, unusual individual's success at the group's expense by suggesting that the unusual individual's efforts, although radical, are nevertheless needed by the group because the dissenter's daring serves the community in the long run. This justification is similar to the nonconformists' mode of operation where they allow dissent since the dissenters' novel ideas, which eventually benefit the group, could hardly be expected of any conventional member of the group. Often, the laissez-faire individualists cited Adam Smith's dictum that the unseen hand of God in the providentially designed economy looked upon the "selfish" actions and impulses of individuals

and transformed them for the good of the whole community. But overall, the laissez-faire individualists did not fully accept the notion that the individual could supersede the interest of the group for his personal goals.⁸³

The independent, self-reliant attitude of the laissez-faire individualists suffered a blow during the depression era when the New Deal abandoned the principle.⁸⁴ Yet the self-reliant attitude was too ingrained in the American character to be forgotten for good. Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites cite in their study of American films, that the major plot in American movies differs from the French and British films as "winning is terrifically important and always possible though it may be a tough fight." "The conflict" in American movies "is not an internal one" as "it is not our own impulses which endanger us nor our own scruples that stand in the way." Rather, "the hazards are all external,... not rooted in the nature of life itself. They are the hazards of a particular situation," with which we have to contend. The hero comes into a strange town full of "dangerous men and women of ambiguous character and where the forces of law and order are not to be relied on." Therefore, "if he sizes up the situation correctly, if he does not go off half-cocked but is still able to beat the other fellow to the punch once he is sure who the enemy is, if he relies on no one but himself, if he demands sufficient evidence of virtue from the girl, he will emerge triumphant. He will defeat the dangerous men, get the right girl, and show the authorities what's what."⁸⁵ Margaret Mead too argues that the concept of rugged self-reliance of the frontier is perpetuated or reenacted through the cultural medium's portrayal of the

self-reliant individual's getting the desirable girl as a reward for his self-reliance.⁸⁶ But this self-reliant individual, this straight-shooting cowboy with a penchant for "a special sense of justice" is too unique to ever "fully belong to society." His special significance lies in his virtue of self-reliance and special skill that society needs for its benefit. His purpose is to "defend society without ever really joining it." What is extracted and held exemplary is not the individual but the individual's self-reliance and conviction to settle matters straight with the barrel of a gun.⁸⁷

Eventually the concept of self-reliance fell into disrepute as the notion of private goals and values became an overriding factor, transcending the goals of the community, the most denigrating aspect of its manifestation being in the private goals of American whites' practices of slave holding, where the private values of individuals had far overtaken the public values of the country as a whole.⁸⁸ This kind of privatism had become so self-serving a factor that an old Yankee poem summarized it with remarkable clarity:

God save me and my wife,
My son John and his wife,
Us four and no more.⁸⁹

The privatism that the Americans now practiced became a universal factor in their lives, and the social equality that the equalitarian tenet had promised to the Americans was bearing fruit by travelling the economic route. The success oriented culture, where "winning is terrifically important" was producing individuals who were now winning for themselves sufficiently, so much so that one is reminded about what de Tocqueville

had said about an individual's development in a system based on equalitarian principles:

As social equality spreads there are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands.⁹⁰

When Gabriel Almond talked about the unfolding of privatism in the American character, his observations echoed de Tocqueville's thoughts. In fact, so important had privatism become that Almond distinguished it as a totally self-absorbing value since "in other cultures there is a greater stress on corporate loyalties and values and a greater personal involvement with political issues or with other-worldly religious values." Almond's American "is primarily concerned with 'private values,' as distinguished from social-group, political, or religious-moral values. His concern with private, worldly success is his most absorbing aim."⁹¹

Most importantly, despite the popularity of privatism, it did not make the individual free. Equalitarianism had raised the individual's living standards, privatism was the norm, and equalitarianism made him a conformist. The freedom to pursue wealth was only an appeasement for his deeper unexpressed choices, since creating wealth can never substitute for an expression for the private self.⁹² And thus the individual conformed, by paying the bitter price of being "shut up in the solitude of his own heart."⁹³

h) Individual and Society in the Twentieth Century

Despite the contemporary emphasis and awareness of peoples' understanding of the value of democratic individuality, life in America has grown comparatively more materialistic and people have become more conforming by nature than their nineteenth century counterparts. David Riesman, who distinguished two categories of Americans, the "inner-directed man" or the nineteenth century individualist, who holds deeply and adamantly steadfast to his inner values, "implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" and who does not defer readily to the opinions of his compatriots or group members, and the "other-directed man" or the twentieth century conformist, who prefers the group's or community's opinions or values over his own values and thoughts, since he is "tradition-directed" and "hardly thinks of himself as an individual." Riesman felt that the "inner-directed man," or the 19th century man who was de Tocqueville's "conformist" has been supplanted by the "outer-directed man," the 20th century man who he (Riesman) considers a conformist. Although Riesman gives no historical reasons for this observation for the change, it is logical to assume that cultural transitions and technological innovations occurring during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries partly caused the transition in the character of the American individual. Comparatively, Riesman's self-reliant American of the nineteenth century (the farmers, resourceful frontiersmen, and success oriented, practical-minded individualists like Franklin,) were freer people than most twentieth century factory and office workers and specialists. These latter types exemplify the

"organization man," whose career-moves and success depend not so much upon the individual's ability in solving external problems but on the individual's ability to manipulate the bureaucratic rules and roles.⁹⁴ The twentieth century individuals' operation within a framework of more strict control in the form of co-operation, mutual support, and goodwill, did not constrict the nineteenth century individuals. William H. Whyte calls the 20th century transformation the "bureaucratized individual," as the modern man has had to learn the tools of trade in order to cooperate and succeed with others in a stratified organization of hierarchies.⁹⁵

Yet this does not mean that the nineteenth century man, whom de Tocqueville called "conformist" was not really a conformist. The nineteenth century individual's conformism is comparatively less rigid than his twentieth century counterpart's. The degree of conformism has increased in the character of the twentieth century individual because of the contrast in living and the change in working conditions.⁹⁶ It is important to make the distinction here that in the nineteenth century, a man's spontaneous activities, despite being individualistic, conformed to the recognized patterns of behavior in society. There were no radical or unconforming behavior patterns that interfered with the group's overall well being or the community's needs. "But as men grow more civilized[,], there comes to be an increasing difference between one man's activities and another's, and a community needs, if it is to prosper, a certain number of individuals who do not wholly conform to the general type."⁹⁷ These individuals' activities make others in the community take notice of what they could not have realized by

themselves, and like-minded individuals rally for individual causes. Thus the notion of human rights was heard loudly in the twentieth century. Civil rights issues, women's franchise and rights issues, minorities and ethnic identity issues, all crowded the social scene, and the right to dissent or a refusal to conform attracted people's attention. In this new era, these individual movements attracted the label of "collectivism." But this is not individualism in the strictest sense, no matter how emancipated or purged of the old ideas of privatism and conformism the new movements might be.

At this juncture one is forced to ask whether the old ways of conforming and privatizing one's life have taken just new forms, or what's the alternative? Surely the conformism in a democracy does not occur as blatantly as it occurs in communist societies, but the concept of a lone, self-sufficient, autonomous individual is still unrealistic even in a democracy, for even among non-conformists or dissenters, without their banding together for a particular cause, the cause would not have a voice. On the other hand, even the radical, militant non-conformists are not alone in their dissent, as "the bohemians and rebels are... zealously tuned in to the signals of a defiant group that finds the meaning of life in a compulsive non-conformity to the majority group."⁹⁸

Man's knowledge about the self or idea about the self provides him with meaning and goals for his existence, and this is where the modern individual is different from his predecessors. This awareness of identity leads to the development of human personality, and a person develops or realizes this sense of identity only in relation to his

situation in a group or community, where he interacts with others, not in a vacuum. Therefore, a person's identity develops both by others' perception of it as well as his own assessment of his self in comparison with others. In the frontier atmosphere, where people were busily advancing their economic status, their roles were fixed as husbandsmen and community members. A person's identity was the same as his or her role, a person did not get a chance to develop into a fully differentiated individual. An assertion of his or her difference from the rest of the community could not be effectively achieved. With rapid urbanization, resulting from technological progress, competitive systems of production grew to address the demands of the market. People could no longer fall back on communal interdependence, as they were forced to become increasingly self-aware of their survival in highly regulated work environments. People dealt with one another as strangers, and interpersonal relationships became momentary and monetary, with no warmth or emotional rapport. The loss of community support was compensated by a person's freedom to pursue his or her own careers, thereby giving resourceful people a chance to foster their individuality by freeing themselves from the network of ties and social roles. The room for their psychological growth was increased and in a sense they were freer persons. Thus with the disappearance of the frontier, men turned towards their own space and their thoughts became more self-reflective.

Erich Fromm argues in his book Escape from Freedom that individualism, with its clamor for freedom brings upon the individual a sense of isolation; that the blessing of freedom burdens a person with

the curse of isolation. When Fromm wrote his book, he was aware of the developments in Nazi Germany, "where the dread of the burden of freedom, he believed, had produced the pathological reaction known as National Socialism." The freedom that was so highly prized by individuals, according to Fromm, "was obviously overridden by the impulses that led millions to submit themselves unquestioningly to the authority of Der Fuehrer."⁹⁹ And although this scenario has not tarnished the American notions of democratic individualism, the increasing gap between "the overclass" or "economic elite," consisting of a self-perpetuating elite class of industrialists, managers, professionals, and techno-geeks, and "the underclass" in recent years¹⁰⁰, and the moving away from the principles of an equalitarian (welfare) democracy does make us wonder about the future of America's democracy:

Clearly, we have moved from being a country that believes in equality of human nature and the effectiveness of government to being one that not only doubts the ability of government to improve people's lives but also denies the possibility of personal transformation. This shift of perspective is reflected in the retreat from the social activism of our recent past. One can look at the cuts in job-training programs, the attacks on affirmative action, and the erosion of tax support for public education as strong evidence that Americans no longer embrace the ideal that it is possible to change people substantially by improving their circumstance.¹⁰¹

While in a democratic rights-based system, such as the one in America, the scope for the development of both good and bad individuals like Lincoln and Genghis Khan is a possibility, both types of individuals share the common characteristics of "a quality of energy and personal initiative, of independence of mind and of imaginative vision," and for these qualities individual growth should be encouraged. On the other hand, despite the individual's contribution to social progress,

unhampered growth of individualism can lead to the death of that same society which fosters individual growth because "the same kind of individual initiative which may produce a valuable innovator may also produce a criminal. The problem... is one of balance; too little liberty brings stagnation, and too much brings chaos." What a true individual must strive for is a sense of *responsibility* that he or she must cultivate while pursuing the goals of individual growth either through an awareness of the self, manifesting itself through self-assertion, or by making a change or contribution in the community through the exercise of an "independence of mind and an independent vision."¹⁰²

Individualism is not something that one inherits, rather it is a self-affirming posture or a way of living one's life responsibly. "Freedom or individuality," remarked John Dewey, "is not an original possession or gift. It is something to be achieved, to be wrought out."¹⁰³ Although the individual in America, by virtue of the Bill of Rights, enjoys individual privileges and protections that are sacred, yet the system in America, in rejecting elite individualism and showing a marked preference for a certain kind of individualism in a democratic society, does not place the individual above the aggregate social values of the community, because the American system of democracy allows a person to control his own life, but not to control the lives of others. Individuals are seen here as the building blocks of society, and they are linked together by a variety of invisible bonds. Here, the development of the self is encouraged, while the individual is still subordinate to his or her society, since the individual cannot have an identity without being a member of society, as society itself is an

aggregate of many individuals. One fear is that "society may overwhelm the individual and destroy any chance of autonomy unless he stands against it." But the realization that "it is only in relation to society that the individual can fulfill himself," and that a radical break with society renders life meaningless, puts a twist to this tension between the individual and the group which can never be easily unraveled.¹⁰⁴

Erich Fromm remarked that "It is a part of the tragedy of the human situation that the development of the self is never completed."¹⁰⁵ But this view needs reinterpretation since the ongoing process of the achievement of selfhood is what gives life a part of its special zest, and the real achievement for every individual lies in recognizing those unique individual initiatives and acting upon those "creative emotions from which a good life springs."¹⁰⁶

NOTES

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4. Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York: Signet Classics, New American Library, 1976) 117.
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CHAPTER TWO

POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND SELF-DESTRUCTION IN KINGDOM OF EARTH AND 27 WAGONS FULL OF COTTON

In this chapter I will discuss Kingdom of Earth and the one act play 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and the similar ways in which the possessive instinct of Chicken, Lot, Jake, and Silva eventually leads to destructive consequences. These two plays exhibit a remarkable similarity in the way the possessive individuals operate and victimize. The major characters in both plays pursue identical routes towards possessing the things they value most, because they are convinced that their possessiveness is not only just, but also that they can enhance their self-worth through acts of possession. On the other hand, the possessive drive that leads these characters to move forward, giving them the illusion of winning, is the cause of their destruction. Furthermore, not only are these two plays similar from the point of action and the characters' motivation to possess their desired objects, but also both plays have three main characters, two males and a woman in each, and the male characters in both plays are concerned with attempts to enhance their individual worth through a possession of property, but they also act on their desires to control and own the people who are weaker than they are, in this case the women who unwittingly stumble into these possessive individuals' lives.

Before discussing the two plays, I wish to clarify my position about the two later versions of 27 Wagons Full of Cotton. Williams, at the urging of his friend and stage director Elia Kazan, fashioned a screen play called Baby Doll based on his two one act plays 27 Wagons

which Kazan directed for the screen in 1955-56.¹ Later in his career, in 1978, Williams again wrote a stage version of the screenplay, Baby Doll, and named it Tiger Tail.² Although these two later versions, the screenplay and the stage play, are expanded versions of the original one-act plays, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and The Long Stay Cut Short or The Unsatisfactory Supper, Williams made many changes and additions in these two versions which are "quite different from the two short plays."³ Moreover, Williams also gave these revised and expanded versions happy or comic endings that, I feel, are contrived and therefore detract from the rich ambiguity/uncertainty of the open endings that he gave to his original one act play, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton and his full length play Kingdom of Earth. Williams may perhaps have felt the need to give his later versions of 27 Wagons happy resolutions to provide his audiences with the satisfaction of seeing the victim compensated with happiness. Hence, these changes are understandable. But these happy resolutions or non-threatening endings are unhelpful for proving the link between the possessive instinct and the destructive consequences. Therefore, I have chosen not to deal with these later crowd-pleasing versions of 27 Wagons.

I The Central Image of Possessiveness in the two Plays

From the two plays' symbolic representation of material property as objects of possession and contention among the pair of rival males, the emphasis is on the possessive instinct. In Kingdom of Earth, we are presented with the image of a Mississippi delta farmhouse's imminent danger of being engulfed by the elements: the "rattling winds," with

their power of invading space and the "insistent murmur of vast waters" of "a flooding river."⁴ This image of a natural engulfment is of special significance, as Chicken, who is also contending for this house, is presented as "a suitable antagonist to a flooding river" (Kingdom 125). Again, the confrontation of the two antagonists for the possession of the farm house is not so much a confrontation between Chicken and the elements, but a foreshadowing of the bitter bickering and rivalry that ensues between Chicken and his half-brother, Lot, both of whom are eager to get hold of the Mississippi farmhouse and its adjoining land, for purposes of self-satisfaction, enhancement of social status, and self-worth, all of which qualities they feel will enhance their individuality.⁵

27 Wagons Full of Cotton begins with a scene of conflagration. The Syndicate Plantation, a modern automated cotton gin, is at the center of dispute because it has put Jake Meighan and his antiquated cotton gin out of work, thereby appropriating Jake's livelihood, his position in society, and his self worth. Jake views this competition from the Syndicate Plantation Mill as an act of usurpation. He clandestinely sets the Plantation Gin on fire, thereby securing vigilante justice and personal satisfaction. The antagonism that ensues as a consequence of this rivalry between Jake and Silva, the Syndicate Plantation gin's superintendent, who is now the victim of Jake's arson, builds into a spectacle of intrigue and revenge as Silva embarks on avenging the loss of the Syndicate Plantation gin at Jake's hands, and as Jake prepares himself to deal with Silva's doubts, plans for retribution, and for regaining his self-worth.

More importantly, while the male characters in both the plays are involved in asserting their individuality through their efforts in trying to perpetuate control over material possessions, the two women characters, Myrtle in Kingdom of Earth and Flora in 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, are also treated as objects of control. They are exploited and used by the possessive individuals because the women are seen as accessory properties that the males want to possess both sexually and also keep under their control.⁶

II Lot's Possessive behavior

When Lot, the lawful owner of the house, enters with Myrtle, we are given hints that the two are related, but we learn from Myrtle about the unusual nature of their marriage. Their marriage is not based on love, but on a pact of protecting each other, taking care of each other's need: "I'm not just your wife, I'm also your mother," (Kingdom 130) says Myrtle to Lot. We are told that Myrtle "dominates him [Lot] in an amiable way" (Kingdom 127). More importantly, there is a hint of role reversal and it is the wife who is in charge. Myrtle sings to Lot: "Cuddle up a little closer, baby mine./ Cuddle up and say you'll be my clinging vine" (Kingdom 135). What becomes increasingly clear as the scene progresses is that Lot's marriage to Myrtle is not only one of convenience, but also his personal gain, since he confesses to her about his selfish, self-centered nature: "Yes, selfish as hell," and "when people are desperate, Myrtle, they only think of themselves" (Kingdom 156). Lot's plans are to hold onto the property by enticing Myrtle with dreams of owning material wealth by convincing her to "handle" and

overpower Chicken after getting him drunk and then stealing the piece of paper on which Lot has deeded his property to Chicken. This action will serve Lot's plan of preventing the property from slipping into Chicken's control in the event of his own death. But there is an element of irony that underlies Lot's desire to possess the house through Myrtle by inciting her to outmaneuver Chicken and return to him the paper that he has signed. Lot's sending Myrtle to Chicken is in a way his risking Myrtle to Chicken's attack, and although Lot feels safe in not directly facing this attack, he is, in fact, not immune from it because the same reasoning that makes him feel that he can own the property by proxy through Myrtle makes Lot as vulnerable to Chicken's counterattack as Myrtle.

Lot's hostility, hatred, and jealousy of his half-brother, Chicken, and Chicken's aim of avenging himself for the treatment that he received at the hands of Lot's parents is the moving force of this play. When Lot confesses to Myrtle about his hatred of Chicken, he merely wants Myrtle to be satisfied with the fact that he just happens to hate Chicken and therefore he is justified in his purpose of getting a tighter hold on the property by preventing it from passing into Chicken's hands: "I hate and despise him with such a passion that if this place or anything on this place became his property---... Neither mother or me could rest in peace in Old Gray Cemetery" (Kingdom 178). Even so, Lot's confession to Myrtle does not truly reveal his motive for hating Chicken because his reasons for hatred lie buried deep in his own physical, psychological, and social inadequacies and problems. Lot's hatred of Chicken stems from his being an insubstantial person, both

physically and socially. He is unmanly and envious of Chicken's virility. So possessiveness compensates for Lot's lack of the more elemental sources of self-worth. Therefore, as the play progresses, Lot's increasingly hostile behavior and possessive actions throw light on this hatred that arises out of his rage at being an insubstantial and an increasingly powerless individual.

When Chicken is introduced in the play, he is described as "a strange looking young man but also remarkably good looking with his very light eyes in darker than olive skin, and the power and male grace of his body" (Kingdom 126). Chicken is thus given a physical substantiality which Lot lacks because he, in contrast, is described as "a frail, delicately--you might say exotically--pretty youth of about twenty--ten years younger than Myrtle, and his frailty makes him look even younger" (Kingdom 127). It is thus clear from this context of the play that Chicken has a virility and a personality that attracts Myrtle in a way that Lot cannot. This fact is eventually proven by the way Myrtle tries to befriend Chicken through the kind of questions she asks of him: "How come a handsome man like you is still single?" Or when Chicken warns her about the flood, Myrtle does not hesitate to reveal her vulnerability to Chicken: "I'm counting on your protection" (Kingdom 182-83) she declares. In ironic contrast, Myrtle, despite being Lot's wife, almost mothers Lot and sympathizes with his weak constitution: "Why, baby! Precious love!--That's an awful cough!--I wonder if you could be coming down with th' flu?... Last night you touched the deepest chord in my nature, which is the maternal chord in me. Do you realize what a beautiful thing you are?... Skin, eyes, hair, any girl would be jealous

of. A mouth like a flower" (Kingdom 134-135). In fact, Lot is aware of Chicken's virility and readily accuses Myrtle of being attracted to his half-brother when he feels his plans are not moving along as planned: "I think what attracts you back down there is nothing made of rubber and nothing made of paper, whether you face it or not" (Kingdom 179).

Chicken, who is not only physically substantial, but also desperately desires social acceptance and individual worth, which he believes have eluded him because he is low born and a man of no economic means.

Furthermore, by owning the house and the adjoining land, Chicken will ultimately be able to avenge himself on Lot's family and their inhuman treatment of him.

Lot's seething hatred of Chicken is also his way of compensating for his lack of masculine grace and magnetism, his poor health, and his own self-hatred. He is a victim of consumption and therefore physically weak, incapacitated, and his "physical disease... parallels his emotional feebleness."⁷ Chicken refers to him as an "invalid," "TV husband," implying that Lot is a fake husband, a husk, and he makes fun of Lot's illness, calling him a "headless chicken," who "bleeds like a chicken with its head chopped off" (Kingdom 140, 151-152). In the same scene, Chicken mocks the conversation between Lot and Myrtle to prove to them that he considers them both insubstantial, their marriage false, that Lot is no man, and by being Lot's wife Myrtle too is a mere echo, a shadow of no substance:

Myrtle: I don't understand! What is it?

Chicken [mimicking her]: "I don't understand! What is it?"

Myrtle [backing up steps]: You scare me!

Chicken: "You scare me!"

Myrtle [running up a few more steps]: I'm going up with Lot!

Chicken: "I'm going up with Lot!"

Myrtle: Do you know he mocked every word I said. (Kingdom 152-53). Lot's poor estimation of himself is seen in the lines where he uses self-deprecating language. He refers to himself as "a impotent one-lung sissy who's got one foot in the grave and's about to step in with the other" (Kingdom 156). Lot is an insubstantial man, weak and frail, and in order to compensate for this physical insubstantiality he desires to hang onto his property, believing that the value of the property will give him more worth as its owner and cover up his weakness and dependency on people.

Lot is presented not only as someone with no physical substantiality, but also as someone with no personality and no social status, a fact that Lot is overtly conscious of. Thus, in his desperate urge to give himself a personality and status, he impersonates his dead mother. He informs Myrtle that his mother "Miss Lottie, was socially accepted by sev'ral families with standing in Two River County" (Kingdom 158). He keeps up with his mother's ritual of drinking sherry, smokes from the ivory cigarette holder which he inherited from his mother, tells Myrtle that he used to read the Vogue magazines that his mother subscribed to, and he even confesses to her that he bleaches his hair with the formula that his mother passed down to him (Kingdom 133-34, 154, 157, 159-60). In other words, Lot's own estimation of himself as a person of no personality and social standing is partly the reason why he so desperately goes about impersonating his mother. Through his impersonation of his mother, Lot substantiates the need and desire to feel accepted, acquires a personality that he lacks, and feels superior to Chicken since his mother was of a class that is above Chicken's.

Lot's impersonation of his mother and his desire to own the house are linked to each other. Lot is aware of his lack of manliness, his ill-health, and the disadvantage that these inadequacies spell for him. So, he is given to self-mockery. He inadvertently refers to himself as "a fairy" when he warns Myrtle, "don't imagine you've married a fairy" (Kingdom 160). Therefore, he feels that the only way he can overcome this disadvantage is to endow himself with a personality that is borrowed, and which at the same time threatens Chicken. This is because Chicken knew and worked under Miss Lottie, Lot's mother, and was aware that she had legal right over the property, and this fact kept Chicken away from the property. On the other hand, Lot's desire to own the house has a deeper significance that is linked with his ritual of impersonating his mother. For Lot, owning the house completely would not only enhance his personality as a man of property and invest him with an individuality, but owning the house would mean ensuring his connection with his mother and making him one with her. Thus, just as Lot's impersonation of his mother reinforces his claim of ownership, his ownership role completes the impersonation.

Despite being the legal owner of the house, Lot has had to depend on Chicken for its upkeep, and he is unable to accept the idea that the house will pass into Chicken's hands as soon as he's dead. His consumptive condition and his inability to take care of the house and be a man around the house, like Chicken, pain him acutely. Although he can do nothing about his physical insubstantiality, without the property completely under his control he is liable to become an economically powerless person too. Since he neither possesses physical individuality

nor a guaranteed economic individuality, the only alternative that is available to him for becoming substantial is by making property a memorial to himself and making sure that it does not go to Chicken even after his own death. Because of this desire, Lot is prepared to establish his permanent control on the house even by the crudest tactic, that is by proxy and by taking the risk to incite the woman who he considers to be his wife, to "make him [Chicken] pass out to get the paper, knock him with a hammer" and get a hold of "that paper," (Kingdom 180) for that would be far more desirable than having the property slip into the grasp of his half-brother.

III Jake's Possessive Behavior

In 27 Wagons Full of Cotton we see the same kind of social, economic, and sexual inadequacy at the core of individual rivalry. Jake Meighan, the sixty year old owner of a cotton gin seeks vengeance by setting the Syndicate Plantation gin on fire because the mill's modernization has left Jake without a job and is also threatening his survival. But Jake is not merely upset at the loss of his livelihood and income. The Syndicate Plantation has now left him with no social standing because he no longer has a respectable income, and this loss of social face or social individuality is partly the reason why Jake sets fire to the Syndicate Plantation gin. In fact, when rewriting the play as Baby Doll and later as Tiger Tail, Williams spells out the complete motivation that led Jake to arson the Syndicate Plantation gin. Archie Meighan, Jake's counterpart in Baby Doll, says on the phone to The Ideal Pay As You Go Furniture Company, an organization from which he has

rented furniture: "Well you see I had a terrible setback in business lately. The Syndicate Plantation built their own cotton gin and're ginnin' their own cotton, now, so I lost their trade and it's gonna take me a while to recover from that..."⁸ And when the furniture company does not buy his excuses, Archie angrily orders his caller to take back the furniture: "Then TAKE IT OUT! TAKE IT OUT! Come and get th' damn stuff. And you'll never get my business again! Never!" (Baby Doll 9).

Therefore, the phone call to Archie Lee is not only an indication of Archie's [Jake's] defaulting on his mortgage payment on the furniture, for which he has been called and insulted, but it also points to the agony he suffers as a result of his loss of face because of his loss of income. Furthermore, the instability, which this lessened economic power causes in him, further complicates his social status and this condition makes him burst out in anger. In the 1977 version of the 27 Wagons called Tiger Tail, Williams makes Jake's counterpart Archie Lee's social position even more precarious as we see at the play's opening, Archie's wife, Baby Doll, plans to leave Archie since the Ideal Pay As You Go Plan Furniture Company has removed the furniture from Archie's home for lack of payment: "I don't want to sit in the same house with a man that would make me live in a house without no furniture."⁹ Archie's wife's decision to leave has much to do with Archie's threatened economic status, and it is also an indication of his loss of social status, which maddens Archie to take revenge. Thus, these explanations of Archie's [Jake's] rage that Williams does not elaborate on in his one-act version can be applied to Jake Meighan, who in 27 Wagons is not only piqued because his livelihood is threatened, but is even more angry because his

social position as a man with an earning power has been damaged by the Syndicate Plantation's competition. This fact is a terrible blow to Jake's economic status as an individual of possessions or a man of means.

The fact that ownership and individual economic power have a lot to do with the rivalry and hatred between the two plays' male characters is also evidenced by Williams's emphasis on key words and acts of possession. In Kingdom of Earth, Lot's fear of his property's slipping out of his grasp makes him desperately, frantically, possessive. He needs to convince himself that he still is the owner of his house by repeatedly reminding himself and the people around him that the property belongs to him. Thus, in his conversations with Myrtle he says: "This place is mine. You're my wife... the place went to me. It's mine..."(Kingdom 137). "We're two against one in this house and the house is ours" (Kingdom 141). "I'm home, in *my* home, on *my* land, with *my* wife..." (Kingdom 147). Through this repeated usage of the words "mine," "ours," and "*my*," Lot impresses on Myrtle the need and importance of possessions and how possessions can impart an individuality to one. Therefore, he tries frantically to make her understand the value of ownership: "Here's your chance to own something... I married and brought you down here to own a place of your own an' be a lady" (Kingdom 169). The final implication is that possessions not only make a person an individual but also bestow and establish social identity, and in Myrtle's case, possessions have the power even to transform some ordinary, unknown woman into "a lady."

Williams's italicizing the key word of possessiveness as Lot's talk progresses in the play increasingly indicates this social status that ownership imparts to an individual. To Lot, home has become the object to contest about, to take from another, and an object for others to envy. Therefore, at the time Lot has finished convincing Myrtle that the property is his, he is also showing Myrtle how to think like him, in terms of having, owning, possessing. Myrtle exclaims: "My house, my home! I never suspected, how much havin' property of my own could mean to me till all of a sudden I have some. Home, home, land, a little dream of a parlor, elegant as you, refined as you" (*Kingdom* 137). This romantic reference is a traditional reference to the home as a hearth, a place of warmth and love. But Myrtle's traditional and romantic attitude will not make Lot succeed in his aim to outwit Chicken and own the property. Therefore, he takes it upon himself to instruct Myrtle to rethink her notions about home as not something idyllic and cozy, but to look at home as a hard material object, as a unit of economic worth and merit. Lot wants to change Myrtle's understanding of home from a conception of merely being a home to something of far more personal significance. He wants her to make the home a part of the self and exploit its economic potential to advance individual power and position, because only through Myrtle's acquiring a possessive attitude and acting on it can Lot win and gain back his substantiality since he does not have much time to live. The following conversation between Lot and Myrtle makes this point.

Lot: Have you ever owned much of anything in your life?
 Myrtle: Yais! My self-respeck an' decency as a woman!

Lot: In addition to that, marvelous as it is, would you like to own and possess entirely as your own a place that's worth much more than it gives appearance of being?

Myrtle:-- Worth what?

Lot: Over fifty-thousand dollars and could increase well managed.
[long pause] -- Well? Attractive to you or not?

Myrtle: I've never owned a stone I could call my own.

Lot:-- A pitiful confession, but now's your chance if you want it.
(Kingdom 178)

The possessiveness that the male characters in the two plays exhibit is not just directed at owning things of material value. Their possessiveness extends to possessing the people around them that matter, in this case the women around them. However, Lot's possessiveness of Myrtle is not of the usual kind, where men exercise their sexual and economic control over their women. Since Lot is physically incapable of taking care of the property and physically controlling his woman, his possessiveness of Myrtle is channelled by his enticing Myrtle with lures of material gain in the event of his death: "As my wife, when I die, this place will be yours, go to you,-- Valuable property." And a little later: "Don't you want this place all your own when I go?... Here's your chance to own something... I married and brought you down here to own a place of your own an' be a lady" (Kingdom 168-69).

At this point in my discussion, it might appear to the reader that I am arguing towards Chicken's winning over Lot and Silva's winning over Jake as being the inevitable results of Williams's endowing these primary males with elemental sources of self-worth and virility. And although, to some extent, I do feel that these qualities of native manliness and virility propel both Chicken and Silva to get ahead, it would be a travesty to assume that serious readers would accept Williams's judgment as fair and wise if I were to argue that Williams

was indeed letting the overtly obnoxious male characters deserve the rewards. But I do not think Williams agrees with the rightness of Chicken's and Silva's success. I will address this issue in detail towards the end of the essay, where I discuss Chicken's and Silva's motivations for possessiveness and Williams's ambiguous ending of the two plays.

IV The Deeper Significance of Lot's and Jake's Possessive Control

Lot's enticement of Myrtle has a more sinister side. Lot wants to possess Myrtle not by taking hold of her physically but by letting the property gain a control over her mind, so that she is willing to become the new owner and by virtue of which not only will Chicken's machinations on the land be defeated, but the property will also stay in Lot's name through his marriage to Myrtle. Therefore, Lot argues with Myrtle to collaborate with him in his crude plans to overpower and seduce Chicken in order to get at the paper that Lot signed, giving control of the property to Chicken. And while he confesses to the risk and danger involved in this kind of crude possessiveness, he assures Myrtle that the crudeness and dangers are worth it:

Anything worth having and doing in this world is risky. So go down and use your charms on him and drink, but out of your drink take little sips like a bird while he sloshes down his till he falls on his cot, passed out, and you take out his wallet and out of his wallet take that legal paper and destroy it. It would haunt me in my grave and my mother in hers if this place went to Chicken. That paper gone, you'll own a good piece of property, and you can run him off it, marry again, and be happy (Kingdom 168-69).

It may seem that Lot's non-sexual possession of Myrtle is ironic since Lot loses status in our eyes as he is unable to possess Myrtle

sexually. But Williams balances this ironic position that Lot is in by allowing Lot's control over Myrtle to be psychological and ulterior. Lot's physical incapacity to possess Myrtle sexually is redressed by the fact that he is able to take control over her mind. In other words, his mental manipulation of Myrtle manages to be more heinous and devastating than his physical control may have been.

In 27 Wagons, Jake Meighan's control over his young wife Flora is necessitated by areas of interest other than Lot's interest in Myrtle. Jake is "a fat man of sixty," married to a young woman whom he constantly calls "baby" and "a baby-doll" and who is also described by Jake's rival, Silva, a much younger man, as "delicate... soft, Fine-fibered and smooth" (27 Wagons 3,18). Naturally, Jake's age makes him insecure about his erotic hold over his woman and so he is even more controlling of her. He is constantly vigilant of Flora's attentions and from the way he treats her, we are left with no doubt that his control over Flora is akin to a child's possessiveness of its toys. Jake's control of Flora is also permitted socially because of the cultural sanction of a woman as a man's possession and therefore women are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of men for their own well being. When Jake tells us of his marriage to Flora, he is merely concerned about our knowing his feelings and reasons for marrying her: "When I fell in love with this baby-doll I've got here, she was just the same size that you see her today... A woman not large but tremendous!... when I slipped the ring on her finger... I said to her, Honey, if you take off one single pound of that body--I'm going to quit yuh!" (27 Wagons 11). In other words, the relish with which Jake harps on Flora's

weight and bulk makes her merely a physical object in the grossest way imaginable.

More importantly, Jake's ownership and control of Flora is so complete that Flora lives in an environment where she is not allowed to be an individual with an independent mind. When Flora confronts Jake about his disappearance on the night the Plantation gin was set on fire, Jake compels her to recant her knowledge of her suspicions about him:

Flora: You certainly *did* go off! Try an' tell me that you never went off when I just now seen an' heard you drivin' back in the car? What uh you take me faw? No sense a-tall?"

Jake: If you got sense you keep your big mouth shut! (27 Wagons 5)

And just after this verbal confrontation, Jake resorts to physical torture. He "stands in front of her and grips her neck with both hands," "twists her wrists," and only "releases her" (27 Wagons 6) when he is successful in getting her to support his alibi that she did not see or hear anything about Jake's whereabouts and agree to lie on Jake's behalf, answering to his catechism:

Jake: "Where have I been since supper?"

Flora: "Here, here! On th' porch! Fo' God's sake, quit that twistin'!"

.....
Jake: "What was I doin', then?"

Flora: "Swinging! For Christ's sake--swingin'!"
(27 Wagons 6-7)

Thus, not only does Jake not entertain any rebellion from Flora, he even controls her mind and body and lets her know that she can never have her say in any matter that might jeopardize her husband's well being and security. And once Jake feels secure about his power over his human possession, he exhibits yet another facet of his controlling nature, namely his sexual control of Flora. He rewards Flora with kisses, he

"grips her loose curls in his hand and bends her head back. He plants a long kiss on her mouth," calls her endearing names, "That's my sweet' baby girl...Whose baby? Big? Sweet?" (27 Wagons 7) and even goes to the extent of referring to her as his food as "he lifts her wrists to his lips and makes gobbling sounds" and asks: "What would I do if you was a big piece of cake?... What would I do if you was angel food cake? Big white piece with lots of nice thick icin'?... Gobble, gobble, gobble!" (27 Wagons 8). Finally, when he is sure of his complete control over Flora, he reiterates his question: "Where've I been since supper?" and when Flora answers: "Settin' on th' swing since we had supper. Swingin' back an' fo'th--back an' fo'th..." (27 Wagons 8) throwing in tentatively, jokingly, in the same breath: "You didn't go off in th' Chevy. (slowly) An' you was awf'ly surprised w'en th' syndicate fire broke out!" (27 Wagons 9) Jake slaps her, and does not hesitate to let her know directly that she is only a piece of property and must relinquish all notions of individuality: "A woman like you's not made to have any ideas. Made to be hugged an' squeezed!... But not for ideas. So don't you have ideas" (27 Wagons 9). Jake's behavior may be controlling, but the irony of his act is it reduces him to an animal without ideas making sub-rational sounds and gestures.

If Flora is under Jake's physical and economic control, Myrtle too is controlled by Lot through indirection or what Leo Bersani calls, a "potential suppression of all otherness." This means Lot recasts his sexless, powerless psyche into a frantic possessive urge that outwardly mimics the conventions of manlike possessive control, forcing him to manipulate Myrtle's mind for his own advantage and advancement. Bersani

would also argue that Lot's making a show of possessiveness is in actuality a desire to fantasize the action of possessing merely for the sake of possessing, because Lot is not strong and manlike enough, or is too "other" to Chicken, to contend with the possessive drive that comes naturally to his step brother. This "theatricalization of [the] desire" to possess also occurs partly in the form of Lot's impersonating, dressing, and behaving like his dead mother, whose previous ownership of the house and social position, Lot believes, serve as a deterrent to Chicken's advances. The other part of Lot's "theatricalization" issues from his "fantasy" desire to possess the property through the help of a living woman, Myrtle, whom he has brought into the scene as his wife in order to thwart Chicken's alternative plans of possession. Finally, Lot's channelling of his possessive desires, partly through his dead mother's rightful ownership of the property and partly through Myrtle's legal right to own the property as Lot's wife, amounts to a "suppression of... otherness," or suppression of his unmanly qualities, because only through this "theatricalization of desire" is Lot able to sublimate his apparently impotent, passive self that he is so conscious of as we see when he refers to Chicken as: "My opposite type" (Kingdom 177). Again, since Lot is restricted/handicapped from possessing in concrete terms because of his insubstantial physical and sexual condition, "the paradoxical nature" of his "uncompromised desire is that it is simultaneously the experience of a lack and the experience of omnipotence" which make him "yearn for what" he "does not have." Through fantasizing and sublimating his innermost desires, he is able to wish

for himself the "ideal possessions" that he so desperately desires to accumulate and aggrandize.¹⁰

In fact, Lot's fantastical desire to possess and appropriate becomes so all consuming, his desire to force the impossible into a mold of truth becomes so intense that he loses patience with Myrtle when she is tentative and finally unable to act according to Lot's plans. When Myrtle returns to Lot after failing with Chicken according to Lot's plans. (And understandably so, because Chicken has threatened her with the scenario of the flood, with sexual aggressiveness through his crude display of the sexual carvings on the kitchen table, and by suggesting to her that she is in his power through his antics of dropping the cat through the trap door into the basement.) Lot is reluctant to sympathize with Myrtle's predicament. Instead, Lot makes things even worse for himself. He pushes Myrtle even more to Chicken's side when he accuses her of being physically attracted to Chicken: "I think what attracts you back down there is nothing made of rubber and nothing made of paper, whether you face it or not" (Kingdom 179). This unsympathetic and cruel statement from Lot is instrumental in forcing Myrtle to seek the protection of the more physical and real of the two males, Chicken, and she now abstains completely from acting according to Lot's plans and ideas about possessing valuable property for self-advancement. She rejects Lot by saying: "I don't possess this house or anything in it except what I brought here with me" (Kingdom 180), and what she has brought with her, besides her electrical equipment, herself, she now offers reluctantly, for safety, to Chicken.

In fact, it must not be understood from this action of Myrtle's that Lot merely loses. What Williams suggests here is that Lot's loss is the creation of his own lack of judgment and that he is destroyed because he makes his individuality depend on possession through impersonation. On the other hand, Lot's freedom as a human being is not informed by a judgment that is born of wisdom. Furthermore, Lot lacks crucial self-analysis which prevents him from seeing others' predicaments. Lot's possessive self, his dreams of self promotion and perpetuation, his goals of self-aggrandizement, prevent him from seeing Myrtle's predicament in an environment where she has learned to look out for her own safety. The bickering between the two brothers has made it clear to her that neither Lot nor Chicken will protect her, and since she is trapped between the two and cannot escape because of the dangers of the approaching flood, she is forced to side with Chicken and abandon helping Lot. As a result of Lot's action, Myrtle ironically sees things in a better light and is able to judge for herself her own situation and the vulnerable condition that she is in. Her rejection of Lot can be translated as her consideration of her own safety and survival which she had kept under wraps in order to be with Lot and give him the protection that he needs, and which she now realizes that he did not deserve. The following exchange between Lot and Myrtle makes the point clear.

Myrtle: If this house is flooded, both floors, could *you* get me up on the roof?

Lot: Aw. Chicken has offered to get you up on the roof.

Myrtle: You brought me here and put me at his mercy, don't forget that.

Lot: I thought you could handle Chicken.

Myrtle: You gave me no warning. (Kingdom 194)

V The Unraveling of Lot's Possessive Control

The point at which we realize Myrtle has given herself over to Chicken is practically the point where Lot's destruction starts to acquire speed. And Lot's own possessive actions hasten his destruction. When Lot realizes that his methods to get Myrtle to acquire the property for himself have failed, he panics since he knows that his fantasy is ruined, his plans are shattered, and therefore in his anger and disappointment he resorts to violence. However, Lot's violence is not physical; rather it is verbal and directed solely at Myrtle, who Lot feels is the cause of his ruin. Lot breaks out in violent abuse and calls Myrtle "a whore," "a prostitute," whom he feels he has "married... an' brought her back here to Chicken for him to lay while I die up here in this rocker, you *common* trash!" (Kingdom 196). In Williams's terminology, Lot's action is his "deliberate cruelty" towards Myrtle, and an action for which Williams the dramatist never absolves the culprit. This unjustified cruelty that one character directs at another is what Williams categorizes as the lack of fellow feeling of one human being towards another and for which he always held his characters to the severest censure.

After all, Williams was very aware of the dichotomies inherent in a democratic culture between the laudable "direction of the democratic impulse, which is entirely and irresistibly away from the police state and from any and all forms of controlled thought and feeling--which is entirely and irresistibly in the direction of that which is individual and humane and equitable and free,"¹¹ and the "inequities" that pervade the system when one sees in the "sight of an ancient woman, gasping and

wheezing as she drags a heavy pail of water down a hotel corridor to mop up the mess of some drunken overprivileged guest," an action that Williams says "sickens and weighs upon the heart and withers it with shame for this world in which it is not only tolerated but regarded as proof positive that the wheels of Democracy are functioning as they should without interference from above or below."¹² And for this understanding Williams always spoke out for the one who suffered under a free system, by highlighting their sufferings in his plays and reminding us that there should be a place for everyone in a democracy and that "nobody should have to clean up anybody else's mess in this world," because "it is terribly bad for both parties, but probably worse for the one receiving the service" (Where I live 20). When Lot forces Myrtle to act according to his plans to the point when Myrtle agrees to act according to Lot's wishes, they are both guilty of the sin of exploiting one another for personal gain. Only Lot's sin is more grave in Williams's eyes because he stands to be the "advantaged receiver" in this instance; Lot's actions in Williams's world are not condoned.

Lot's violent outburst not only alienates Myrtle, but also causes his own destruction as he no longer has the means to exert his control over the course of events that lead to Chicken's apparent victory. With the loss of Myrtle's support, Lot has not just lost his chief instrument of destruction of Chicken's plans but he has no other recourse than to redirect the anger and jealousy which tear at his heart. Thus his actions become more and more obscure, unpredictable, and aimless. With his plans unfulfilled, his anger smoldering, Lot's outlet is the self. He thus becomes a victim of his own aggressiveness and

directs his anger towards himself. This collapse of his self is evident as we see him for one last time, towards the play's end in a spectral and ghostly appearance, physically and mentally depleted, descending the stairs, dressed in a "gauzy white dress," in precarious health, "gasping for breath," inarticulate, but "with a fixed smile on his face" and finally, on reaching the parlor, where he "crumples to the floor" (Kingdom 212). Lot's own actions lead to his self-destruction. His possessive urges, his nefarious plans for self-aggrandizement, and his manipulation and misleading of Myrtle to advance his own goals ironically steer him in the path of automatic self-destruction. Lot's symbolic death portrayed through his crumpling to the floor in a dress, is ironic in the sense that for a man, no matter how weak or frail, to dress in a woman's clothes before the audience (and on stage) undermines the quest for status. On this level, Lot's cross-dressing can no longer be simply seen as a dramatic tool for heightening the theatrical effect of the play. In terms of contemporary reexaminations of issues related to gender, norms, and class, Lot's cross-dressing at once becomes Lot's personal act of defiance, and unwittingly for Williams it becomes a rebellion against the notion of status and norm.¹³ My interpretation of Lot's self-destruction and his defiance may seem contradictory, but in dealing with most homosexual or "sissy" types in his representative plays, Williams's own ambiguous attitude towards these characters is highlighted by his ambiguous rendering of these people on stage. This is not surprising because Williams was deeply torn in rendering homosexual characters boldly and positively. "Like Williams's instinctive radicalism, his homosexuality is both ubiquitous and elusive, everywhere

in his work and yet nearly impossible to pin down."¹⁴ We cannot take Williams to task for this wary approach because he lived and wrote at a time when homosexuality was considered as an abomination in democratic America, and this social oppression and ostracism obviously threatened him and prevented him from portraying major, positive gay characters on stage.

VI The Unraveling of Jake's Possessive Control

In 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, the reversal phase of the play commences within a short span of time, from the time when Silva comes over to Jake's house to ask for his help in ginning the twenty-seven wagons of cotton, meets Flora in her "watermelon pink, silk dress," to the time when Jake leaves to do the work, instructing his wife to "keep Mr. Vicarro comfo'table while I'm ginnin' out that twenty-seven wagons full of cotton" (27 Wagons 10-12). It is from this juncture that Jake starts losing control of his property and is drawn into destruction. Jake's possessiveness and control over Flora appears to be complete and uncompromising, and this feeling gives Jake the urge to deliberately flaunt Flora as his property and give her orders to take care of Silva, the rival gin owner, who comes over to Jake's home to ask for his help in ginning the cotton. And while flaunting his control over Flora in Silva's presence, Jake snidely reminds Silva how well he knows how to take care of his own property, considering the fact that Silva has just lost his cotton gin to fire. In actuality, Jake's control of Flora, which he feels is secure and because of which he is able to let his wife be alone with Silva, is in reality quite tenuous and becomes

increasingly looser as the scene progresses. What falls into Silva's hands, as a consequence of Jake's possessive control over Flora, from which Flora wants to break out, is what Silva had least expected. But the dynamics of what transpires between Flora and Silva when they are alone is not unexpected to the audience. Silva's arrival at Jake's door for help with ginning the cotton is not an accident. In fact, the way Jake is overtly but falsely affectionate to his wife in front of Silva is proof of the fact that Jake does suspect that Silva harbors suspicions, but Jake also most specifically believes that Silva is powerless to do anything against him, in terms of harming Jake's possession, without concrete proof of Jake's hand in the arson. But the point Williams may be making here is that Silva may not have proof but he does have imagination and the resolve to penetrate Jake's fake neighborliness and possessive boast to seek his revenge since he does suspect Jake's hand in the arson that destroyed his gin. The fact that Jake's crime against Silva is so blatantly obvious is supported by the fact that it is arson and besides Jake there is no other possible suspect.

Jake's hypocritical neighborliness and possessive exhibitionism serve as his undoing. He sows seeds of his own destruction as he takes leave of Silva, proudly leaving his possession for Silva's benefit by saying: "Baby, you keep Mr. Vicarro comfo'table while I'm ginnin' out that twenty-seven wagons full of cotton. *Th' good-neighbor policy Mr. Vicarro. You do me a good turn an' I'll do you a good one!*" [my italics] (27 Wagons 12). In fact, it is this good neighborly advice from Jake that Silva scrutinizes and puts to the test in successfully arriving at

the truth behind Jake's connection with the arson, and from which point he literally acts according to the dictum of the "good-neighbor policy." Silva takes full advantage of Flora's helpless and sexually docile nature. He loses no time in baiting her with his masculine and youthful charm until Flora is so caught up in him that she accidentally divulges Jake's whereabouts during the time the gin was set on fire. Silva makes good on Flora's accidental confession, grills her about Jake's whereabouts, and when he has fully extracted the truth from Flora, he unleashes his psycho-sexual attack on Flora, by telling her: "It's no use crying over a burnt-down gin. This world is built on the principle of tit-for-tat," and he sarcastically reminds her that Jake's remark about "The good-neighbor policy... was a lovely remark your husband made... I see what he means by that now" (27 Wagons 17). Thus, Flora, who is Jake's property, becomes Silva's sexual victim upon whom he vents his full anger and revenge for Jake's damage to Silva's gin. Williams shows us very skillfully Flora's progression from being Jake's woman into becoming Silva's sexual slave. Silva sweet talks her: "There's a lot of you, but every bit of you is delicate... You're soft. Fine-fibered. And smooth," and flatters her: "You have an attractive smile. Dimples." He invites her to feel his coolness in contrast to the warmth of the outdoors: "I'm just as cool as a cucumber. If you don't believe it touch me... Anywhere." He switches her with his riding crop, deliberately quibbling on the word "switch" when Flora protests: "Quit switching me, will yuh?" with: "I'm just shooting the flies off... I think you like to be switched." He gets closer to her physically, sits on the swing with her, wipes off the sweat from her arms with his

handkerchief, and lets her know directly his interest in her: "You're big. A big type of woman. I like you." And he finally follows her into the house despite Flora's objections and her fearfulness of him: "I'm afraid!... Of you... You've got a mean look in your eyes and I don't like the whip... Don't follow. Please don't follow!" The way in which Williams sets up this scene, arranging the conversation and body language between Flora and Silva, leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that Silva is following Flora into the house, not because he is in love with her but because she is in his power and that he will use her. And so the scene closes with Flora "helplessly" entering the house with Silva following her, while a little later we hear "wild and despairing" cries from the house (27 Wagons 18-23). Silva's abuse of Flora is confirmed by Williams by his description of Flora after Silva has left and just as Jake comes home from ginning Silva's cotton: *"Her appearance is ravaged... Dark streaks are visible on her bare shoulders and arms and there is a large discoloration along one cheek. A dark trickle, now congealed, descends from the corner of her mouth"* (27 Wagons 23-24).

Unlike Lot's partial automatic physical self-destruction that commences as soon as Myrtle goes over to Chicken's camp, Jake's destruction is insidious and unrelenting, but not physical. When Silva leaves after his satisfaction with Flora and Jake arrives home, the conversation between Jake and Flora is laced with heavy dramatic irony:

Flora: I think it was a mistake.

Jake: What was a mistake?

Flora: Fo' you t' fool with th' Syndicate--Plantation...

Jake: The Syndicate buyin' up all th' lan' aroun' here an' turnin' the ole croppers off it without their wages-- mighty near busted ev'ry mercantile store in Two Rivers County! An' then they build their own gin to gin their own cotton. It

looked for a while like I was stuck up high an' dry. But when the gin burnt down an' Mr. Vicarro decided he'd better throw a little bus'ness my way--I'd say the situation was much improved!

Flora: (*She laughs weakly.*) Then maybe you don't understand the good-neighbor--policy.

Jake: Don't understand it? Why, I'm the boy that invented it.

Flora: Huh-huh! What an--*invention!*" (27 Wagons 25-26)

Through this conversation, we learn of Jake's destruction as Flora has now become Silva's property and she will undergo a slow decline in his hands. Her decline is tantamount to Jake's humiliation and this will continue to happen, apparently without any suspicion on Jake's part, since Flora tells him that "Tomorrow he [Silva] plans t' come back--with lots more cotton... he'll have me entertain him with--nice lemonade!... I guess it's--gonna go on fo'-- th' rest of th'--summer..." because Flora, like Jake, has also had to manage "A man-size job" (27 Wagons 26-27, 24). This discussion between Flora and Jake might strike some (readers/audiences) as comic, but I think Flora's treatment by Silva is tragic and cruel because Silva's treatment of her is no better than the physical torture that she endures at Jake's hands. Flora now ends up being used by both the males for she is seen by Jake, ironically, as still being his property and by Silva as his object of use in the form of payment for Jake's destruction of his mill.

VII The Primary Males' Possessiveness

Having discussed the secondary males' possessiveness and its effect on them, I would now like to discuss the primary males, Chicken and Silva Vicarro, who, despite being virile and potent do not fare any better than their rivals, Lot and Jake. It may seem to some readers that

Chicken and Silva are winners because they finally move on to a position where they can congratulate themselves for acquiring or fulfilling their desired objectives, but I feel Williams's wisdom prompted him to construct these plays with open endings so that the (readers/audiences) can interpret for themselves the quality of the primary males' final victory. Therefore, we need to consider carefully what Williams may want us to know by portraying these virile males operating in arenas where they are contesting for ascendancy over their rivals.

Although both plays deal with the primary males' sexual virility and the way they go about using their sexual potency to gain advantage over the sexual ineffectuality and inadequacy of the secondary males, by luring and victimizing their women, nevertheless, sex is of secondary importance to the contentious males in both plays. In the case of Chicken and Lot, the creation of their individuality is more important to them in order for them to be in opposition and antagonism to each other: Chicken is a virile, young "wood's colt" hungry for status and position, while Lot is a dying and effeminate legitimate son who is trying hard to hold on to his property and name. Their insistence on their possessive control and their radically different temperaments enable them to maintain their individuality. In the case of Silva and Jake, their individuality lies in their coming from two opposite sides of society: Jake is the older, established conservative cotton gin owner whose status quo is challenged by competition from an outsider, Silva, a foreigner who is in possession of a more efficient and productive gin, and who has been poorly treated and provoked into seeking retribution or revenge.

These two factors, property and status, in both plays are important ingredients in the rival males' creation of their individuality, and the hostility and discrimination that the primary males face from their opponents and the communities where they find themselves are preexisting conditions in the two plays. In addition to this, since both the primary males, Chicken and Silva, are "outsiders," who have been either ostracized or looked down upon by the secondary males, Lot and Jake, and their communities, this apartness had created in the primary males in a more painful way, a sense of inadequacy that is social and status related rather than being merely a rivalry based on sexual inadequacy and potency. And the imbalance that this social inadequacy and difference in status creates in the two sets of characters gives rise to the two primary males' motivation for using their sexual potency as weapons against their rivals. In other words, the primary males use sex as a weapon against their opponents by sexually controlling the women, in this case the property, of the secondary males to gain advantage in the competition for control over possessions.

On the other hand, we cannot really blame or vilify either Chicken or Silva for their desire to get even or for their harboring the urge to pull down those who are privileged. We learn from Chicken himself of his mistreatment at Lot's mother's and Lot's hands, and to put things into perspective with Myrtle, Chicken explains his social status and treatment with a self-deprecating sarcasm:

Daddy got Lot in marriage but not me. You're lookin' at what is called a wood's colt... He married this little blonde-haired woman... Miss Lottie, so when Lot was bawn, he got the name of Lot. Legal, bawn in marriage. Not a wood's colt. Me--wood's colt.

You know what a wood's colt is?... My son of a bitch daddy got me offen a dark-complected woman he lived with in Alabama... Lot's mother, Miss Lottie, she thought she was surely going to bury my daddy. Hell, he was sixty when he married Miss Lottie... Well, she did bury daddy and the place was hers, but she didn't have long to hold it... [but] she lived long enough to throw me off the place. Called me in her parlor one day and fired me like a field hand... What she give me amounted to just about the pay that a field hand gets for a week's work... [and when Miss Lottie started dying, Lot] sent for me to come back and operate this place for him... (Kingdom 185-87).

Finally, Chicken goes on to explain to Myrtle the "setup" or the reason why he will not leave the house until he owns it completely since Lot agreed to the "setup" according to Chicken's terms: "If you want me to run this place for you, well, here's the deal. When you are through with TB!--It goes to me..." an agreement that Lot is trying to invalidate by establishing Myrtle as his heir and thereby provoking Chicken's aggressive behavior (Kingdom 188).

In Chicken's revelation to Myrtle about his status as a "wood's colt" and his desire to own the house and land, one is reminded of the Earl of Gloucester's bastard son, Edmund's, self justification for exacting revenge on the ones who are higher up in the social scale. In his soliloquy in King Lear, Edmund reasons that his low birth and status are responsible for his malicious behavior against the people whom he cannot stand. He reasons that his legitimate brother's and aristocratic father's social position make them anathema to him, just as his being a bastard makes him a socially unequal person and the butt of people's jokes. I quote Edmund's soliloquy here for a recapitulation of his argument for justifying his conduct and evil nature:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess, to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,

For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
 Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?
 When my dimensions are as well compact,
 My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
 As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
 With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
 More composition, and fierce quality,
 Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
 Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,
 Got 'tween sleep and wake? Well then,
 Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
 Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
 As to the legitimate. Fine word, "legitimate"!
 Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
 And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
 Shall [top] th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper:
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards!¹⁵

The striking parallel that Edmund has with Chicken other than the fact that both characters are bastards lies in Edmund's symbolic significance in the play. Arnold Kettle sees Edmund as the "new man of the incipient bourgeois revolution, the private enterprise man, the man who thinks he has got to be a phoenix, the individualist go-getter, the Machiavel, Marlowe's aspiring hero taken to his extreme conclusion: man with the lid off."¹⁶ This symbolic characteristic of Edmund is perhaps more close to Chicken, the possessive individual in Williams's play, than even their connection as bastard sons, because both of them are driven by strong but individual urges to remedy the socially inferior condition that traps them from achieving self-advancement.

But Chicken is not Edmund. Unlike Edmund, Chicken is not a villain. He does not go about planning Lot's destruction out of sheer hatred. Chicken harbors a resentment towards Lot because of his own low status and birth, and he wants the satisfaction of being equal with Lot by possessing the property that is Lot's and which Lot does not want Chicken to have. Chicken's status-related resentment for Lot parallels

Edmund's grounds for his resentment of his "legitimate" brother Edgar and towards his father, the Earl of Gloucester, for having borne him as an illegitimate child, which has doomed him to his second hand life, a life in the shadow of his "legitimate" brother, Edgar. But Chicken does not plan on deliberately getting rid of Lot. Edmund essentially wants everybody around him dead, and he makes his bastardy a condition for being vindictive. He argues that since he has no redress for his condition in his society, he therefore harbors no remorse for what he will do to the people closest to him. In fact, he vows to be wilfully malicious, evil, and destructive to those who are above him in rank and position, although we see that Edmund's father treats him well and also his brother, Edgar, harbors no resentment towards Edmund. Edmund justifies being evil with a relish and "he is incapable of an honest passion of any kind."¹⁷

Chicken, on the other hand, desires to rise above his condition to a status he believes he can reach by owning the property that he feels should be his, since he feels he has the right to the property by virtue of the paper on which Lot has relinquished his claim on the property. Chicken's speeches also contain a frankness, a certain lack of guile that Edmund's does not. Edmund tactfully argues that his perverse plans are the workings of unseen deities on his nature. He wants to influence the audience into believing that his nature is being run by a blue print designed by a pagan god, a god who is the patron of bastards, and so, he reasons, it leaves him with nothing else to do but to behave cruelly. Through this argument he absolves any personal responsibility for the harm that he plans on bringing upon the people closest to him. But

Edmund's argument is merely an argument for argument's sake, because the argument is a lame and unoriginal excuse that all consummate villains have made to free themselves from the burden of responsibility that a person ordinarily feels in making a choice and taking the risk that it will be a bad one. Edmund's evil nature is deep seated in his personality, and that is why he can go about unflinchingly at his mission of dispossessing his brother, who harbors no hatred for him, and wreaking vengeance on the lives of the people closest to him. Edmund shows no real interest in rising above himself, but Chicken does. Chicken is a victim of circumstance and seeks to rise above his status from being a bastard to being a person who can be an equal individual through owning a piece of land. Edmund's villainy arises out of raw malignity and he uses his status as a bastard to justify the malice and violence that are integral to his personality. Edmund is relentless in his pursuit of evil. Chicken's antagonism rises out of his being treated cruelly by everyone close to him. And now that circumstances have changed for him, he desires self-advancement through asserting his rights to gain control and possession of the property.

Similarly, Silva's motive for revenge partly issues from his being an outsider and a man whose means of livelihood have been destroyed by a community, which is opposed to granting him acceptance because of his outsider status. Silva has also been victimized by an unfair, unimaginative, paranoid, ageing competitor, who sets fire to his gin, provoking Silva's anger and thirst for adequate revenge. Silva's status as an outsider and a threat to some of the people of the community is mentioned by Williams in the screenplay, Baby Doll, where we see a

hostile crowd attacking the speaker at the opening celebration of Silva's gin by throwing something "liquid and sticky" at him, and an increasingly agitated and troubled Silva trying to put on a brave front to the hostile opposition by declaring: "If anybody's got anything more to throw, well, here's your target, here's your standing target! The wop! the foreign wop!"¹⁸

VIII The Primary Males' use of Sexual Manipulation to further their Possessive Control

Since so much emphasis is placed on the sexual politics in operation in both plays, we need to look at exactly how Chicken and Silva use their potent virility to get control of what they ultimately desire. From the way Chicken and Silva operate in their respective environments, we can safely say that they both use their virility to get control of their situation and get the secondary males out of their way so they can lure and victimize the women who belong to the secondary males, so that these socially ostracized but potent males feel vindicated as the more dominant and hence the more powerful males. Chicken's and Silva's chief aim is to validate their own powers to themselves and get revenge on the agents of the secondary males because these agents, the women, have been strategically positioned by the secondary males to thwart or distract the primary males' progress towards self-advancement. Therefore, the path that the primary males embark upon by manipulating sex is tantamount to rape and humiliation, as they purposely refrain from using their sexual potency in a romantic way to ensnare and win over their rivals' other halves to their side. Another reason why these primary males do not use sex as a romantic lure

for the women is for reasons of their own safety, because Chicken and Silva would then risk falling under the power of the women if they let the women have an equal hand in the sexual act. Their purpose is to use sex to overpower the women, be in control of the situation, and use the women towards getting even and furthering their possessive control over the property.

Both Chicken and Silva use the women as commodities that they exploit on the path towards gaining control of their status as the more dominant males. But in their use of sex over the women, both Chicken and Silva go one step further. Both use sex as a tool for self-satisfaction and humiliation of the agents, who were put in their way to either thwart their aims, or as mere objects of pleasure. That is why as soon as Chicken gets Myrtle to relinquish her control over the property as Lot's wife, by dictating to her and making her sign a retraction of her claim over the property as Lot's widow, he calls her "weak," and in response to Myrtle's concession: "I've always been weak compared to men, to a man. I think that's natural, don't you think?" (Kingdom 201) Chicken challenges her to kiss him, disclosing to her that he wants her to kiss him specifically because he has "some black blood in him" (Kingdom 201), kisses her, and then proceeds to consummate the sexual act with Myrtle to her consternation and humiliation by making her perform fellatio on him. This controlling sexual act is evident in the way Act 2, Scene 2 concludes:

Myrtle: I'm a warm natured woman. You might say passionate, even.
A Memphis doctor prescribed me a bottle of pills to keep
down the heat of my nature, but those pills are worthless.
Have no effect, I'm through with them.-- Don't you know
that I would never back down on that letter you dictated to
me? Not if I could, never would!

Chicken: No, I reckon you wouldn't. [*He hoists himself onto the kitchen table, directly in front of her, legs spread wide.*]

Myrtle: Wouldn't you be more comfortable in a chair?

Chicken: I wouldn't be as close to you--I'm right in front of you now.

Myrtle: I have to strain my neck to look at your face.

Chicken: [*with a slow, savage grin*]:--You don't have to look in my face, my face ain't all they is to me, not by a long shot, honey... [*She begins suddenly to cry like a child.*] Why're you cryin'? You don't have to cry fo' it, it's what you want and it's yours! [*He snatches up the lamp and blows it out.*][*The kitchen is blacked out: an opaque scrim falls over its open wall. Light is brought up in the bedroom where Lot sits in the wicker rocker, moonlight on him brightening, fading and brightening again.*]

Lot: Lamp's gone out in the kitchen and I don't hear a sound.-- What I've done is deliver a woman to Chicken, brought home a whore for Chicken that he don't have to pay. -- A present from the dying (Kingdom 201-202).

The dramatic irony in Lot's comment with which the scene concludes is suggestive of the predicament that Lot has forced upon Myrtle from which she is unable to extricate herself. Indeed, it is Lot's miscalculation that backfires on Myrtle and helps Chicken to gain control of the situation.

Silva, on the other hand, manipulates Flora's sexual attraction for him as soon as he is able to confirm his suspicions about Jake's whereabouts during the time the Syndicate gin was set on fire. He proceeds to follow her into her house, all the while "switching" her with his riding crop and inflicting himself on her. Williams deliberately refers to the scene in the house by using ambiguous stage directions to let the audience know that Silva is not exactly enamored of Flora, and once she is fully under his power, Silva's "switching" Flora with his whip against her objections smacks of his sado-masochistic drive. Flora's condition as a victim is unambiguous. Williams's description of Flora and the activity inside the house,

through the sounds emanating from within, conjures in the reader's mind the image of a rabbit in a boa-constrictor's grasp:

Flora: Please don't!

Vicarro: Don't what?

Flora: Put it down. The whip, please put it down. Leave it out here on the porch.

Vicarro: What are you scared of?

Flora: You.

Vicarro: Go on. *(She turns helplessly and moves to the screen. He pulls it open.)*

Flora: Don't follow. Please don't follow! *(She sways uncertainly. He presses his hands against her. She moves inside. He follows. The door is shut quietly. The gin pumps slowly and steadily across the road. From inside the house there is a wild and despairing cry. A door is slammed. The cry is repeated more faintly.)* (27 Wagons 23)

Thus, both Jake and Lot lose control of their women. Myrtle's going over to Chicken's side is a definite loss for Lot, whereas Flora becomes Silva's object of lust, since Silva makes a point of extracting a price on Jake's property by letting Jake gin the cotton in exchange for his enjoyment of Jake's wife, ironically without Jake's knowledge of the occurrence. This slow and humiliating treatment of Flora serves as Jake's defeat or Jake's destruction.

Yet, on another level, this apparent victory of the two primary males is hardly victory. In Chicken's case, despite his looking about himself "appraisingly, a man who has come into possessions fiercely desired," despite his triumphant cry at the play's end, as he declares: "Sing it out, frogs an' crickets, Chicken is king" (Kingdom 213-24), his victory is a pyrrhic one. Chicken's strutting about on the roof in triumph, almost testosterone-addled, is merely an act of bravado, for immediately after Chicken's call, Chicken's next battle is about to begin, and this time it is not with an unequal foe but with nature,

since we hear nature's challenge in the "great booming sound," which is the noise of the oncoming flood that is about to engulf the house, and which will neutralize both Chicken's victory and his new-found self as a man of possessions. This premonition of natural disaster is symbolic of Chicken's destruction. Although Williams closes the play at this point, with a threat of natural disaster, the significance of the threat from the flood is enough to suggest the possessive individual's insignificance and powerlessness in the face of this danger. In 27 Wagons, Silva's victory is no less a short-lived victory since he too has not been assured a complete control of the situation. Silva, we are told by Flora, has left with the hope of coming back, but his plans of using Flora are just plans, because we do not for one moment doubt that Silva has indeed overreached himself and given in to an illusion of order, an order that has been imposed by him, because the certainty of Jake's finding out the real story at one point or another is very real, and at a minimum a bloodbath will ensue as a consequence of the discovery.

Thus, Chicken's and Silva's victories remain uncertain and incomplete through Williams's ambiguous endings of the two plays. And the fact that these males hardly fare any better than their antagonists is not because of some dramatic scheme on Williams's part, or even because of his feeling of outrage for the victors. Chicken's and Silva's defeats are inevitable since these two characters are devoid of any redeeming values or positive qualities that set them apart from their antagonists. These primary males are in no way superior people, and despite their virility and drive at winning, they hardly deserve to hold

on to their victories or possessions. The uneasy resolutions of both plays are perhaps a testimony to the uncertain victories and hollow triumphs that result from the possessive characters' actions resulting from their adamant approach to self-glorification and self-realization through possessive control.

IX The Survivors

The essential problem with Chicken and Silva and the reason why their apparent victory fails to affect us is that these two characters never grow in the course of the play. Their aim is purely to redress the wrongs that they had suffered, and their achieving their goals is tied in with their self-justification of their behavior. They simply operate on a fixed route to glory. Neither of these two characters exhibits any attempt at self-discovery or entertains any notion of acquiring wisdom by enabling a growth of personality in order to understand what it means to be human and live among people just like them.

If self-growth or self-discovery is the measure of a character's success in a work of art, then only Myrtle and Flora qualify by this criterion. Both Myrtle and Flora start off as either objects of people's desires or instruments of their male owners's self-advancement. But their ability to survive in a hostile and constricted atmosphere issues out of their understanding of their predicament, which in turn prevents them from being either possessive or destructive. Yet, the element of tragedy in their situations cannot be overlooked. The tragedy of their situations arises not out of pathos but out of their vulnerability and helplessness in being objects of the possessive males' domination and

control. It is ironic that with all the freedom and power available to the male characters, neither their personalities nor their outlook show any development in the course of the plays. On the other hand, both Flora and Myrtle, despite having to live in constriction, show remarkable courage and perseverance and the imprisonment under which they were supposed to be destroyed, somehow serves as a condition for their becoming more aware of who they are and how they should best conduct themselves to overcome the predicament that they find themselves in. On a deeper level, however, both Myrtle and Flora are possessed of an innate quality that is absent in both sets of males. These controlled characters have the desire to change and this change occurs in them as a result of their capacity to realize and accept the truth of their situation and opt for the best choices available to them in order to survive.

Myrtle's entry into the play as Lot's agent suffers an upset when Chicken reveals to her the nature of the "set-up." For Myrtle, it is a fleeting and mystifying moment, but nevertheless a real and decisive one. It is at this point that Myrtle realizes that she is being used by Lot to further his own plans. And rather than participate in the scheme or be used by someone else, she asserts her individuality for the first time in the play by not swearing revenge against Lot, but by relinquishing her control over the property and returning to her life in show business. Williams makes the internal change in Myrtle unmistakable and poignant: *"Myrtle has risen stiffly from the chair with a look of slow and dreadful comprehension. Her breathing is audible and rapid... She remains standing, her eyes wide and bright but not focused"* (Kingdom

149). And soon after this Myrtle delivers her longest speech in the play:

Oh, it's all clear now. I understand the setup and I want you to know, here is my right hand to God, that everything you told me is okay as far as I am concerned. I got no designs on nothing. You know how quickly the human mind changes! Ain't it queer how quick it changes? I had my heart set on a quiet, happy married life. Now what I want most in the world is to return to show business! ... Now I think I can fill that hot-water bottle and take it up to that poor child I married... -- *God pity us both!* (Kingdom 149)

Myrtle is too agitated, internally, as she has realized her predicament of being trapped in a situation and yet being attracted by Chicken's virility, and so she fails to act on her own and move on. She also knows that her hopes are dashed, and she knows what awaits her if she returns to her work in show-business, but she wisely chooses not to expend herself seeking retribution. Her last four words in this speech are one of understanding and forgiveness. Perhaps Myrtle has finally realized that she has done battle against a powerful foe in hostile territory and has done well. And just as in Chicken's reference to his bastard condition one hears an echo of Edmund's soliloquy; so too in Myrtle's speech one hears an echo of the plain but sensitive Sonya's comforting speech to Uncle Vanya:

You and I, Uncle Vanya, we have to go on living. The days will be slow, and the nights will be long, but we'll take whatever fate sends us. We'll spend the rest of our lives doing other people's work for them, we won't know a minute's rest, and then, when our time comes, we'll die. And when we're dead, we'll say that our lives were full of pain, that we wept and suffered, and God will have pity on us, and then, Uncle, dear Uncle Vanya, we'll see a brand new life, all shining and beautiful, we'll be happy, and we'll look back on the pain we feel right now and we'll smile ... and then we'll rest. I believe that, Uncle. I believe that with all my heart and soul. (*Kneels down by Vanya and puts her head in his hands; wearily*) Then we'll rest.¹⁹

In loss and defeat is born both Myrtle's and Sonya's triumph. It is a triumph not of the will, but of their deep understanding of what it is to be human. But Sonya has an advantage that is not available to Myrtle. Sonya's journey in reaching an understanding and acceptance of her loss is both paralleled and strengthened by her being able to have her Uncle with her, who too suffers through his own loss, and with whom Sonya is able to commiserate. Myrtle, on the other hand, is left to fend for herself. She is alone at the moment of her understanding and she is therefore confused as to how she should react to Chicken's revelations. She wishes to return to her work but she is unable to do so as the floods have trapped her in the house. Therefore, Myrtle gives in to Chicken's control, and although she is forced to give herself up to Chicken, she does not show a vindictive urge to seek retribution against Lot. Ironically, Myrtle's character is strengthened as Williams takes her through serious humiliation at Lot's and Chicken's hands. And while this maturity endows her with the capacity to realize the powerlessness of her situation, it also gives her courage to give in to Chicken. But her giving herself up to Chicken is not her defeat since she realizes that she is now in a situation where the consequences have to be worked through so that she is able to survive.

Flora's condition too is not much different from Myrtle's, but the wisdom that she gains from her situation is left ambiguous for the (reader/audience). The most striking change in Flora's personality is reflected through her speech in Scene III. She is not the overtly girlish person in this scene that she was in the first two scenes. The overgrown babyish quality that Jake referred to as "baby doll" has now

been replaced by a "ravaged" or haggard condition. But most of all, her conversation with Jake throughout this scene is heavy with dramatic irony.

Jake: Vicarro was pretty well pleased w'en he dropped over.

Flora: Yeah. He was--pretty well--pleased.

Jake: How did you all get along?

Flora: We got along jus' fine. Jus' fine an'--dandy.

Jake: He didn't seem like such a bad guy. He takes a sensible attitude.

Flora: (laughing helplessly) He--sure--does (27 Wagons 26).

This same ironic tone in Flora's speech is unbroken throughout the scene, and occasionally her speech is colored with a wry humor, barbed with the indignation of her injury, which Jake lacks the awareness of mind to penetrate because, unlike Flora, he is blind to the ironic sense of his own position. In fact, every line of exchange between Jake and Flora is unmistakably ironic. Even her nervous giggles and laughter in this scene are more prominent and emphasized than in the previous scenes.

Flora: Yeah. Tomorrow he plans t' come back--with lots more cotton. maybe another twenty-seven wagons.

Jake: Yeah?

Flora: An' while you're ginnin' it out--he'll have me entertain him with--nice lemonade! (*She has another fit of giggles.*) (27 Wagons 27)

Thus, Flora's maturity is conveyed through her speech. But the tragic problem lies in the fact that Flora will never be able to express her sorrow or pain to her fullest satisfaction, for she is trapped between two males who are unrelenting in their control over her.

Yet both Myrtle and Flora are able to survive. Despite their powerlessness, despite their sacrifice of individual desires and urges, despite their victimization, despite their suffering at the hands of

insensitive possessors, they are not destroyed. In a way, their survival can also be looked upon as their "desperate but determined, defeated but undaunted" sense of mission in life, to live.²⁰ It is indeed remarkable that in their inescapable condition they are able to hope and "maintain a certain dignity and stature" that make them strong, and yet more human than the rest.²¹

Notes

1. Tennessee Williams, Baby Doll & Tiger Tail: A Screenplay And A Play (New York: A New Directions Book, 1991). See Publisher's Note to the 1956 Edition of Baby Doll for a brief history of the screenplay and stage play (Tiger Tail).

2. Catherine M. Arnott, Tennessee Williams on File (New York: Methuen Inc., 1985) 27, 64. Provides information on production dates, completion dates, and adaptations of Williams's plays, poems and prose works.

3. Tennessee Williams, Baby Doll & Tiger Tail Publisher's Note.

4. Tennessee Williams, Kingdom of Earth (the Seven Descents of Myrtle), The Theater of Tennessee Williams, Vol. 5 (New York: New Directions Books, 1976) 125. Subsequent references to this edition of the play are cited parenthetically in my text.

5. Foster Hirsch, "Sexual Imagery in Tennessee Williams' Kingdom of Earth," Notes on Contemporary Literature 1. 2 (1971): 11. In this article, while discussing the play as partly symbolizing the marginal "decline" of the South, Hirsch connects the "decaying house," over which the two brothers are contesting their ownership, to be symbolic representation of "the corresponding dilapidation of the characters." My argument goes further in showing that this "ownership" issue that is tied in with the brothers' possessive urge serves to bring about their destruction.

6. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review P, 1975) 157-210. In this anthropological study, Rubin discusses the domestication of women through sexual oppression and the ownership of women as shared property by men. This discussion has some bearing as to providing a background why Lot and Chicken, Jake and Silva consider the women as their subordinates and use them as their property.

7. Katherine Zabelle Derounian, "'The Kingdom of Earth' and Kingdom of Earth: (The Seven Descents of Myrtle) Tennessee Williams' Parody," The University of Mississippi Studies in English, New Series, 4 (1983): 152.

8. Williams, Baby Doll & Tiger Tail 9.

9. Williams, Baby Doll & Tiger Tail 119-20.

10. Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976) 286-315. Bersani argues in this chapter through his analysis of Pompes funebres, Histoire d'O, and L'Image that these texts' authors' ability to fantasize enabled them far more liberty for "sympathetic identification," "appropriation," and "total possession" of their objects of desire than would have been possible if these authors were treating their subject matter in a realistic tradition. I am using Bersani's theory of theatricalization or

manipulating of desire as an alternative way to support Lot's behavior in the play.

11. Tennessee Williams, "Something Wild...", Where I live: Selected Essays by Tennessee Williams, eds. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978) 13.

12. Tennessee Williams, "On a Streetcar Named Success," Where I live: Selected Essays by Tennessee Williams, eds. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978) 19-20.

13. Mildred L. Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley, True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism--For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996) 17. These authors refer to certain acts of cross-dressing as "gender bending," and the individual cross-dresser as the "gender bender," who are "males or females who challenge and cross traditional gender boundaries, often in outrageous ways. They dress and behave to surprise or shock... Some gender benders consider cross dressing and cross-gender behavior an act of rebellion or a political statement--their way of telling society that they refuse to be governed by stereotypical clothing, presentation, or gender roles." Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1992) covers a wide period in western culture and provides a historical and interpretative analysis of the challenge that cross-dressing has posed to the politics, hierarchy, status, and gender codification behind the tradition of dress-codes.

14. David Savran, Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1992) 82. Savran quotes both from critics and Williams's own prose to support the opinion that Williams had a contradictory, unresolved attitude towards homosexuality and this attitude influenced his depiction of fractured homosexual behavior on stage.

15. William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. G. Blackmore Evans, The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 1259,

16. Arnold Kettle, "The Humanity of 'King Lear,'" New Casebooks: King Lear, ed. Kirenian Ryan (London: Macmillan, 1993) 19. I find the trait in Edmund's character as a "individualist go-getter" a particularly striking parallel to Chicken's possessive and individualistic urges in Williams's Play.

17. Harold Bloom, introduction, Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's King Lear, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 8.

18. Tennessee Williams, Baby Doll and Tiger Tail 24-25.

19. Anton Chekhov, The plays of Anton Chekhov, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) 253. The page reference is to Chekhov's play, Uncle Vanya.

20. Derounian 154.

21. Derounian 154.

CHAPTER THREE
POSSESSION, INDIVIDUATION AND LIBERATION
IN THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Arguing about the importance of Tom's role in The Glass Menagerie, Thomas King notes that readers, directors, and audiences often get too emotionally caught up in the pathos of "the scenes involving Laura and Amanda" and push aside Tom's role as merely "nostalgic yearnings for a former time."¹ King argues that Tom's importance in the play must not be overlooked despite Williams's endowing Amanda with an arresting role, because in the overall picture, Amanda, Laura, the artist-magician, Tom, and the gentleman-caller, Jim, are all "aspects of Tom's consciousness."² King uses a key word here, "consciousness," by which, I feel, he means a particular form of consciousness, namely recall or remembrance, where the thing recalled has a kind of double existence, as past and as present. Williams himself defines the play as a "'memory play,'"³ and it is Tom's memory that is being replayed on stage. Scientifically, "this ability to revive the experience, or to mentally relive it, is referred to as remembering; remembering is the feeling of reexperiencing and of recollecting many details that authenticate the memory."⁴ Therefore, Tom's role and purpose in the play cannot be overlooked, since he is the character who is fashioning the play through remembering crucial moments from his past and weighing them in light of the present.

In the Production Notes to the play, Williams informs us that the play is "episodic" rather than linear, and hence the effect of the play may seem fragmentary rather than architectural" (GM 24). Williams's

American stage necessitated the invention of Tom who is both narrator and character. Therefore, Tom's role of narrator/character is also in keeping with the new medium of the play, since he is both inside and outside of the play, helping Williams at his attempt in ordering reality and presenting us with "a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are" (GM 23). For this reason, King appropriately calls Tom "the Prospero of The Glass Menagerie,"⁵ since Tom is the one who introduces the play and shows us how and why things happen in the play. Thus King continues, any reference or performance of the play with "undue prominence"⁶ to Amanda, Laura, or even the glass menagerie distorts Williams's overall purpose in the play where he tried to create a balanced whole by bringing in things from the past and examining them in the light of the present.

More specifically, in his essay, King argues about giving Tom's character and soliloquies the attention they deserve because King shows how Tom's soliloquies and speeches invest the play with "irony and humor which work in the opposite direction"⁷ or away from Amanda's interests and problems. King shows how, by using irony, Tom "protects himself from the pain of [reliving] his experience" so that he can use his art of creation "objectively."⁸ And Tom's use of "humor" in his narration, says King, also prevents the play from becoming too nostalgic or sentimental.⁹ Therefore, Tom's role and soliloquies ultimately enrich the play's experience for the audience, and "reveal Tom as an artist figure whose utterances show how the artist creates, using the raw materials of his own life."¹⁰

Although I agree with King's argument, I personally feel that Tom's soliloquies and his role as narrator/character chiefly invest him with an individuality, a selfhood, that is usually overwhelmed by Amanda's dominance in the play as a character, who towers over Tom as his mother and moral superior. Through his role and soliloquies, Tom the narrator/character is able to take on the role of the individual and accept responsibility for his actions in the Wingfield family's life. In this way, Tom is able to say how he feels about his life after assessing the part he had once played in the Wingfield household in contrast to what he has achieved by leaving home. Moreover, because Tom has been able to leave, because he is now free and able to follow his own course in life, he has gained the courage and state of mind to recapitulate and explore his past and show us the facts without any rancor, recrimination, or even by presenting himself as a victim.

Commenting on his first commercially and critically successful play, The Glass Menagerie, Williams said: "I put all the nice things I had to say about people into The Glass Menagerie... What I write hereafter will be harsher."¹¹ The subtly disguised dramatization of Williams's close relationship with his mother, Edwina, and his sister, Rose, in the play may have prevented him from taking too harsh a tone in this play. Yet, one needs to realize that although The Glass Menagerie is autobiographical, it is not, what Williams would later call his Memoirs, an "undisguised self-revelation."¹² Williams's point in the play was not so much to render an accurate cataloging of his life but to approximate artistically the conditions under which he lived at home, the conditions which led to the frustrations that he faced in not being

free and in not being able to take charge of his own life. While it is true that the tension between Tom and his mother served as a vehicle for exciting drama, the more experiential aspect of the friction between Tom and his mother fueled Tom's desire for pursuing certain truths about the self that are, I believe, more important in the context of a person's life in a culture where every person is considered his or her own person, an individual, who must care for his or her self. One cannot do justice to the play if one fails to see this side of the issue.

Williams, through Tom, says that he has given us "truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (GM 29). For Williams, the truth behind the experience of his past lay in the emotions that he felt while living at home under the constant supervision and control of his mother, and the frustrations of his developing into the person that he felt he was supposed to develop into, namely, a poet or an expressive individual. Because Tom was burdened with the responsibility of having to work in a warehouse in order to support the family his father abandoned, and because he had no respite from Amanda's constant directions on how he should live his life, Tom's own purpose in life was being destroyed. Therefore, what I am primarily interested in exploring here is not how Williams dramatized his past through reworking his own life experience, but the discord between two opposed viewpoints issuing from the clashing of two opposed selves of two strong individuals--the clashing between Amanda's embodiment of the "commodified self," that arises from her ideology of possessiveness, discipline, and control, and Tom's conception of the "democratic self," that he believes should not be a product of secondary supervision, control, and possessive materialism,

but a self that must issue as an outgrowth of a one's personal best, a self that can develop only from one's understanding of personal integrity and the responsibility that one has towards others.

In his Memoirs, Williams talks of discovering the ideal of a democratic self early in his career. In an effort to exorcise his "phobia about 'thought process,'" Williams composed a poem after returning from his aimless wanderings on the streets of Amsterdam during his visit to Europe with his grandfather:

Strangers pass me on the street
in endless throngs: their marching feet,
sound with a sameness in my ears
that dulls my senses, soothes my fears,
I hear their laughter and their sighs,
I look into their myriad eyes:
then all at once my hot woe
cools like a cinder dropped on snow.

Williams elaborates on this verse, saying: "[T]hat little bit of verse with its recognition of being one among many of my kind... that recognition of being a member of multiple humanity with its multiple needs, problems and emotions, not a unique creature but one, only one among the multitude of its fellows, yes, I suspect it's the most important recognition for us all to reach now, under all circumstances but especially those of the present."¹³ In essence, we can say that Tom's search in the play is a search after this same self, a democratic self, that is not a twisted growth of conforming to conventions and giving in to dependencies, but a self that manifests a deep understanding of where one stands in one's relation to the others in a democratic society. This democratic self or empowered self that Tom is in search of is born of one's abiding sense of self discovery through

Living life honestly among others like oneself, because only then one achieves a certain dignity and power to liberate others with whom the empowered and democratic self comes into contact.

Furthermore, this democratic self that Tom is in search of is a product of a free, unregulated environment. Therefore, Tom seeks to develop fully as an individual in an atmosphere where he can be, as Wallace Stevens said, "unsponsored, free." Tom wants to exist in a space where, in the words of culture critic C. L. R. James, "the freedom, the energy, the heroic quality of the individual pursuing his daily vocation" is respected.¹⁴ Tom is a poet, an "expressive individual," and the fullest expression of his poetic self is what Tom feels is his life's mission. Although Tom is trying hard to become a poet by trying to use his spare time at home to practice his art, which is sullied by the considerable opposition and unappreciative comments from his mother, and by his stealing time from his work at the warehouse to indulge in his artistic passion, the fact remains, Tom is tremendously frustrated at not being free to develop his talents in the way he desires to. Tom's Confession to Jim in Scene Six bears evidence: "I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside--well I'm boiling! Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!" (GM 97) In fact, so intense is Tom's frustration at being forced to take care of his father's responsibilities at the expense of having to sacrifice his own life and self, that he is desperately dejected and annoyed, and he even desires death during one moment of heated exchange with Amanda, who is unceasing in her harangues about how Tom should live his life and bear his responsibilities:

You think I'm crazy about the *warehouse*?... You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that--*celotex interior*! with--*fluorescent--tubes*! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains--than go back mornings! I *go*! Every time you come in yelling that Goddamn "*Rise and Shine!*" "*Rise and Shine!*" I say to myself, "How *lucky dead* people are!" But I get up. I *go*! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being *ever*! And you say self--*self's* all I ever think of (GM 52).

Tom's outburst reminds one of how intensely and uncompromisingly Williams, the artist, felt about the association between being free and being a writer:

What is it like being a writer? I would say it is like being free... To be free is to have achieved your life. It means any number of freedoms. It means freedom to stop where you please, to go where and when you please, it means to be the voyager here and there, one who flees many hotels, sad or happy, without obstruction and without much regret. It means the freedom of being. *And someone has wisely observed, if you can't be yourself, what's the point of being anything at all?*¹⁵ (my italics)

Tom's desperation at not being free and able to be the person he desires eats him from the inside, while he has to contend with Amanda's inability and reluctance to understand his desperation. Nevertheless, in this dramatization of "a very personal account of his relationship with his family," Williams was "all too aware that he had claimed his own freedom at the expense of his mother and sister, Rose, the lobotomy which destroyed her life being performed while he was away at university beginning his career as writer."¹⁶ And he is likewise careful in his role as a dramatist to persuade us not to misjudge Tom's action of leaving home to be a cruel and hasty decision, since Williams comments: Tom's "nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he has to act without pity" (GM 22). In fact, Tom's own regret for not having a simple, painless, magical solution that would make his leaving home less

painful is evident from his confession to Laura: "You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in the hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?" (GM 57)

For Williams, writing this play was not only an exercise in honing and perfecting his craft as a dramatist, which was proven by its success on stage, but through the play Williams was able to do what he wanted to do most through his writing: "to capture the evanescent quality of existence," which "when I was writing Menagerie, I did not know that I was capturing...."¹⁷ I feel that through this play, Tom as Williams was able to transform the raw materials of his life in a way that eventually enabled him to liberate himself from the people who had for so long followed him in his mind, making him feel guilty of his action of leaving. Tom's expiation of his guilt through this play becomes his attempt at exploring his self-liberating consciousness and detaching it from the consciousness that had been following him around in the form of a sullied and guilt ridden memory of the past. This he needed to grow out of and not let it restrict him in his search for his true self and mission in life. Moreover, this confessional play which liberated him from the memory that possessed him and drove him with the intensity of the Furies also helped him to present objectively Amanda's situation, whose inability to let go of the past and seek new alternatives to solve her problems, and whose possessive drive led to her own alienation and self-destruction. Yet, perhaps most significantly, through this confessional, Tom is able to individualize and liberate both himself and his sister by freeing himself and her from the stagnation that they had

been stranded in because of their family environment. Thus, Laura's physical handicap no longer remains a handicap by the time we reach the end of the play, because it is valorized by Jim as a "minor problem" and thus becomes a symbol for her own uniqueness among the sameness of so many others around her. Tom's responsibility for his position in the Wingfield family and his self-discovery as a writer enable him to give credit to the lives of the people closest to him.

I The Construction of Amanda's Dramatic Personality

After considering the two final versions of Amanda that Williams created (the "reading version... copyrighted in 1945" and in the "acting version... copyrighted in 1948" of the play,) James Rowland declares that Williams made Amanda less "dictatorial in the 'acting version'" or in the latest version of the play than in the "reading version."¹⁸ Laboring over the changes that Williams made in Amanda's character in the "acting version," Rowland is of the opinion that "in the 'acting version' we see an understanding and loving mother, we see Amanda as a person who truly suffers, and her suffering is such that others have pity for her."¹⁹ I feel Rowland's conception of what constitutes good dramatic characterization is misconceived. In commenting about the play in his Memoirs, Williams's criticism is not directed towards his characters, instead, he feels that "the narrations are not up to the play," because, he thinks "the play itself holds without much narration."²⁰ Several critics agree with Williams's comments about the redundancy of the narrations, but no critic has found any character in

the play in particular to be weaker than the others or in any way more commanding or out of proportion than the rest.

Williams had a penchant for rewriting or revising his material even after his finished works turned out as artistic and financial successes. There is no significant evidence that the revisions he made after any particular play's stage success turned out to be radically improved and artistically enhanced. The Glass Menagerie in its "acting version" does not show any significant improvement either, despite Mr. Rowland's interpretations of the two versions of Amanda.²¹ I cannot opt for Mr. Rowland's choice of the "acting version," where Amanda is portrayed as a pitiful and suffering character. For me, the play would lose the energy and drama that a strong and dictatorial Amanda brings to it. I feel Amanda's strength lies in her obstinate and determined quest to relive her past in the way she could not live it, and this means that if she has to make it come true by redirecting her children's lives then so be it. I cannot imagine how a pitiful and suffering Amanda could convince the audience about her determination to turn back the past. In fact, Williams's own conception of Amanda would have been flawed by the portrayal of a weak Amanda, for Williams never thought of his mother, on whom he modelled Amanda, as a weak person. Williams says: "I feel that Mother always did what she thought was right and that she has always given herself due credit for it even though what she sometimes did was all but fatally wrong."²² Furthermore, a pitiful and suffering Amanda in the play would only make us resent Tom's leaving home, and the tension in the play that issues from Tom's desires to leave and take control of his own life as opposed to Amanda's desire to compel him to stay and

live his life according to her directions could not be successfully portrayed. The Glass Menagerie would fail as a dramatic work and would be forgotten by now if Amanda were to be seen as one frail victim of a cruel and selfish individual.

Amanda's strong individualistic drive is in keeping with Williams's own philosophy of life, which he calls "living with intensity." In comparison with the great heroic characters of traditional drama, Amanda no doubt is a member of the group of "little people," but Amanda is certainly not weak. Portraying her as weak to elicit the audience's sympathy would certainly be a contradiction of Williams's personal and deeply felt view of how he saw his "little people" conducting themselves: "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."²³ Thus, Amanda's domineering nature serves both as a plus and as a minus, because the elements in her nature that create a strong role also create a person whose method of operation in pursuing her goals turns out to be a flawed and highly self-serving.

II The Construction of Amanda's Possessive Individualism

Amanda's drive to get where she wants as an individual is misdirected because she desires to reconstruct and alter her past at the expense of her children's lives. This desire in Amanda arises from what Tom describes as "having failed to establish contact with reality, [Amanda] continues to live vitally in her illusions" (GM 21). Therefore, the occasion of her husband's estrangement becomes for her the exact

opportunity to breathe life into her fantasy. Thus commences Amanda's pursuit of individualism not through reassessing her life, but through a selfish effort at mock-doing her life by exercising her control and discipline over her children's lives: "We have to do all that we can to *build ourselves up*. In these trying times we live in, all that we have to *cling to* is--each other" [my italics] (GM 61). The inherent contradiction in Amanda's statement reflects her own paradoxical way of trying to operate in life. One cannot build oneself up by clinging to others; instead one builds oneself by freeing the self from any secondary influence, thereby allowing the self to develop independently, free to cultivate its deeply felt inner beliefs and convictions without hindrance. But Amanda's own situation in life at this point--disenchanted, husbandless, and bereft of any permanent means of earning a living--prevents her from releasing the individuals around her to develop as free and self-sustaining people. Tom's reference in his narration at the play's beginning to this aspect of Amanda's situation bears witness: "She is not paranoic, but her life is paranoia" (GM 21).

If life is paranoia for Amanda and she is overwhelmed by her fears of losing the people around her, she tries to counter this fear by embarking on a blind route to safety, because she too, like the "vast middle class of America," had matriculated "in a school for the blind" (GM 29). Therefore, for her the alternative is to resituate herself in her past and repossess vicariously, through her children's lives, the opportunities that she missed and the material things that she could not have. Her blindness comes from her belief that regressing into her past self and play-doing the things that she couldn't do will solve her

problems of the present. She is fearful of change because she believes that the only time worth living was before she got married, before her children were born. Tom characterizes this attitude by introducing her as a "little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another place and time" (GM 21).

Amanda's possessing and controlling drives are not creative but remedial, and in her urgency to fix things she refuses to understand how fixing things by regressing into the past is futile. It never occurs to her that what is required is giving others around her the opportunity to fix things in a new way. Amanda is incapable of relegating trust and responsibility to others. Instead, she adamantly moves forward by displaying a dominating, controlling, and possessive drive that makes her feel important, accomplished, and, most importantly, in control, the control or the sense of power that she probably never had when her husband was around.

III Amanda's Possession through Domination and Control by her use of Language and Intonation

According to David Birch, the use of language in a dramatic text becomes "distinct communicative acts aimed at influencing the thoughts and actions of other people" instead of simply being "representations or expressions of something else, some other semiotic system or text."²⁴ Birch argues that this "influencing" factor of language in drama often, through characters' intonation, results in the characters' "domination" or "struggle for power" over others around them.²⁵ From common knowledge, we realize that domination and control are the distinguishing

traits of possessive people. Amanda's actions towards Tom, Laura, and even the gentleman caller, Jim, display an overwhelming record of the variety of ways she uses language and her position as the mother in the family to control and dominate the people around her in order to perpetuate and validate the self.

Williams supplies us with ample evidence of Amanda's possessive drive by the way she conducts herself around people and through her use of language and intonation in the play. Amanda's "hawklike attention" (GM 31) and ceaseless nagging are initially irritating to Tom: "Chew your food" (GM 31), "You smoke too much" (GM 32), "Eat a bowl of Purina" (GM 61), "Do me a favor.. comb your hair" (GM 69-70), but with time, despite Tom's frequent outbursts resulting from his feelings of being preyed upon and being issued directions and commands, Amanda's hectoring gets even more moralistic, judgmental, and controlling: "Tom you go to the movies entirely too much!" (GM 63), "Promise, son, you'll-never be a drunkard!" (GM 61), "You smoke too much. A pack a day at fifteen cents a pack. How much would that amount to in a month? Thirty times fifteen is how much, Tom? Figure it out and you will be astounded at what you could save. Enough to give you a night-school at Washington U!" (GM 70).

In the play, Amanda often resorts to language that is infused with slave imagery and terminology. Being born and raised in the slaveholding south, Amanda had become accustomed to the comforts of life reaped at the expense of indentured negro servants, if not slaves, serving her family. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear in Amanda's language, references to the benefits that servant or slave labor availed white

southern families. When Laura volunteers to bring in the "blanc mange" after supper, Amanda is quick to dissuade Laura from her efforts by saying: "No, sister, no, sister--you be the lady this time and I'll be the darky" (GM 32). And when she has brought in the dessert bowl and is recalling her favorite detail about receiving seventeen gentleman callers at home on a Sunday afternoon, Amanda remarks: "Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house" (GM 33). Amanda's references to slave labor here may be innocuous, but the eagerness with which she says them betrays her fondness for cherishing the benefits that came from owning or possessing people.

In some of Amanda's remarks to Tom, her references to the benefits of slave labor are stark. Her treatment and control of Tom reminds one of the way servants were held responsible for the work in the household, while being denied the freedoms the masters enjoyed. Tom himself complains of his slave status after he finds out that Amanda has returned his books to the library: "House, house! who pays the rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to--" (GM 25). Here the idea behind controlling Tom as a slave is evident because Tom himself likens Amanda's authority over him as a master's authority over his slave. In fact, one can easily make a case that Tom's inability to leave home is directly related to his status as Amanda's possession or slave because the only way Amanda will give him his freedom is when she finds a replacement, as she tells him: "But not till there's somebody to take your place... I mean as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her,... then you'll be free to go wherever you please, on land, on sea,

whichever way the wind blows you!" (GM 65). Not only does this statement reinforce Amanda's belief that Tom is her property, but she treats him as an object in the way that he can leave only if he can replace himself with a different object of equal worth, in this case, a gentleman caller for Laura, who in reality will be under Amanda's control.

In her dealings with Laura, Amanda's sense of control and domination are blunt. She knows exactly how to exploit Laura's quiet nature and never waits for Laura to speak up. She orders Laura to study her typewriter charts and stay fresh for gentleman callers, uncaring of Laura's own wishes and desires. Amanda even decides for Laura what path her life should follow: "Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up getting married to some nice man... Sister, that's what you'll do!" (GM 44) And for the rest of the play, Amanda throws herself into a frenzy, planning and feathering "her nest" in which she can trap the ideal suitor for Laura (GM 47-48).

Amanda's controlling nature even spills over in her dealings with an outsider, Jim, the gentleman caller, whom she feels ready to manipulate into following her directions and whims. The moment Jim enters the Wingfield space, Amanda captures him and pursues her objectives without any qualms. Arraying herself attractively in her girlhood clothes, Amanda moves steadily from charming Jim with her sweet-talk to controlling his movements and his speech in the course of the evening. She charms him with her "girlish Southern vivacity," her "unexpected outlay of social charm," and her "gay laughter and chatter" to a degree that manages to "throw [Jim] off the beam" (GM 98). From this superior position, Amanda exercises her control and power over Jim

by confidently issuing him her commands: "Sister is all by her lonesome. You go keep her company in the parlor!" (GM 106) Immediately afterwards she follows it up with: "And how about you coaxing Sister to drink a little wine? I think it would be good for her! Can you carry both at once?" (GM 106) Amanda is aware of the importance of this moment, as she basks in her power and ability of having accomplished in her goal of having set "a trap" and in catching the prey that she feels will not only save Laura, but an arrangement through which she can live vicariously a complete second life, a life that she will never let slip out of her control (GM 86).

IV Amanda's Possession through manipulation of the emotions of guilt and shame

Amanda furthers her use of language by her intonations and angry accusations to control Tom and Laura by manipulating their sense of guilt and shame. Despite Amanda's vigilance to dominate and control, there are occasions when her overbearing attitude towards her children seem to be ineffective. She feels powerless and insecure when Tom fights back to regain his own ground and sanity. From this position of insecurity and powerlessness, she pounces on Tom's rightful indignation and treats them as proofs of insubordination. Therefore, to save herself she tries to subdue him by instilling feelings of guilt into his conscience. Amanda is aware that by arousing Tom's guilt she will be able to disturb him sufficiently into distracting him from focussing on his own self and needs. She thinks that through this scheme her possession of him will be more secure. She rebukes him for thinking too much about himself: "Overcome selfishness! Self, self, self is all that

you think of..." (GM 66). She rebukes him for being sneaky and irresponsible: "Oh, I can see the handwriting on the wall as plain as the nose in front of my face... More and more you remind me of your father!... I saw the letter you got from the Merchant Marine. I know what you are dreaming of" (GM 65). Ironically however, after the fiasco with the gentleman caller when Amanda has her last fight with Tom, she hurls her final accusation at Tom, without realizing how her own method of control has served to break up her family: "Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go--go to the movies!" (GM 136) And not willing to give up her last chance to rebuke and shame him, even after Tom openly declares that he is indeed leaving, Amanda hurls her final sarcastic rebuke at him, convinced that she is the one who is in control of the situation, and who is rightfully banishing him to a place that is as cold and barren as his heart: "Go, then! Go to the moon--you selfish dreamer!" (GM 136) The irony here is that her controlling, blaming nature blinds her to the truth behind Tom's departure, which is in fact an act of desperation on his part to save himself from his mother's interference and control.

In between Amanda's possessive control of Tom by issuing aggressive commands and by playing upon his guilt, there are instances when she uses her chief weapon of psychological control, namely, exploiting Tom's sense of shame. She shames Tom to the point of breaking his spirit and making him vulnerable to feelings of inferiority. Tom himself categorizes Amanda's behavior as a kind of "foolishness [which]

makes her unwittingly cruel at times" (GM 21), but I personally think Amanda's shaming tactics are acts of deliberate cruelty. When Tom is exasperated at Amanda's excessive control and complains about Amanda's confiscating his books, Amanda breaks out in her puritanical zeal and lashes out by saying that she has indeed returned "that horrible novel," "that hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence" to the library, and she asserts her will by decreeing: "I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE!" (GM 50) When Tom attempts to leave the apartment, bothered and provoked by this prudery, Amanda calls his behavior insolent and mercilessly hits at the core of his shame, his "otherness:"

I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two A.M. Come stumbling in. Muttering to your self like a maniac! You get three hours' sleep and then go to work. Oh, I can picture the way you're doing down there. Moping doping, because you're in no condition... What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all? (GM 51-52)

Amanda's chastisement is not only loaded with allegations of shameful sexual and drug related activities on Tom's part, but she also accuses Tom of lying, being inconsiderate and irresponsible. While Tom's angry and violent outburst at this point stuns Amanda, she picks out the personal insult that Tom hurls at her: "You ugly--babbling old-witch..." (GM 53) and makes it a point of teaching him the lesson by refusing to speak to him until he apologizes. William Miller's characterization of the different forms of apology and humiliation in different cultures seems to be in line with what Amanda expects from Tom, namely Tom's assuming the "posture as the inferior and invest[ing], for however brief a moment, the wronged person with a higher status. The assumption of the

lower position, the position of the beseecher, is the substance of the compensation paid to the other party."²⁶ Amanda's Southern upbringing could have influenced her to expect this form of elaborate and "ritualized" apologizing. Furthermore, this show of an apology would be in keeping with her expectations because her own conduct throughout the play can be seen as her own ritualized way of recapturing the past.

During a similar instance of driving home the point about Tom's duty at the warehouse, Amanda chastises him for being uninterested in his work and wasting his time: "Most young men find adventure in their careers" (GM 63), and she cuts him down with her puritanical vehemence as she sneers at his suggestion of what it means to be human. She counters Tom's opinion: "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter," by instantly drilling into him that his conception of human behavior is atavistic and depraved. Amanda remarks: "Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!... Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys--and pigs--" (GM 64) Amanda makes every effort to make Tom feel shameful about his ideas and conceptions of normal human behavior.²⁷

While Tom's vitality and rebelliousness raise problems for Amanda's status as an individual who likes to be in command, in control, and regulate things, Laura's being crippled becomes burdensome for Amanda. Amanda sees Laura's crippled state as an obstacle to her own path towards revising and reliving her own past by vicariously indulging in the matchmaking process for Laura. Therefore, every time Laura strays

from Amanda's schemes, she shames Laura into silent submission. Upon discovering Laura's fiasco at Rubicam's Business College, Amanda repudiates Laura for her behavior instead of sympathizing or even trying to understand Laura's problems. She presents herself as someone who has been wronged and disobeyed: "Deception? Deception?... I wanted to find a hole in the ground and hide myself in it forever!... I thought that you were an adult; but I was mistaken... What are we going to do, what is going to become of us, what is the future?" (GM 38-39) She blames Laura for wastefulness and injudiciousness: "Fifty dollars' tuition, all of our plans--my hopes and ambitions for you--just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that" (GM 40). And from this premise of blame, Amanda resorts to painful sarcasm and manipulation of Laura's sense of shame: "So what are we going to do with the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him? We won't have a business career--we've given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion?... What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South--barely tolerated spinsters... eating the crust of humility all their life! Is that the future that we've mapped out for ourselves?" (GM 42-43) But it becomes obvious to the audience from Amanda's subsequent actions that Laura's upsetting of Amanda's first plan is hardly a catastrophe for her because from this point in the play, Amanda's "calculations" for "getting a gentleman caller for Laura" become her "obsession" (GM 47).²⁸

Even if one wants to believe that Amanda's urge to control Tom is partly a result of her own insecurities and partly because of Tom's self-absorption and impatience with Amanda's solicitations, one still cannot overlook Amanda's cruelties towards Laura. Her cruelty to Laura on the occasion of Jim's visit stands out. After preparing Laura as "a pretty trap" by stuffing Laura's bosom with "gay deceivers" and then making Laura observe herself in the mirror, Amanda remarks: "Now look at yourself, young lady. This is the prettiest you will ever be" (GM 85-86). I see Amanda's behavior in this instance as cruel because her statement to Laura implies that only through Amanda's initiative will Laura ever amount to anything at all. Furthermore, by dressing up Laura as a "trap," Amanda not only commodifies Laura into a package that Jim might like, but Amanda also erases Laura's own identity and her natural self against Laura's wishes. Paradoxically however, Amanda tries to implant in Laura's mind the same brand of deception that she herself found hurtful when she discovered Laura had not been attending Rubicam's Business College.

V Amanda's Individuation through Commodification

If Amanda's individuality is partly shaped by her drive to control, discipline, and direct others around her, then her deeper sense of self or identity is inextricably linked with her desire to commodify the self and endow it with economic worth. When she is not controlling others, Amanda regresses into her past, continually recalling events and occurrences that are specifically materialistic in tone and color because her recollections only deal with lost opportunities at economic

and material advancement. Amanda does not recall these memories to find emotional satisfaction from them, rather she recalls them to reexamine where and how things went wrong and how, from her present position of disadvantage, she can find new ways to redress these missed opportunities. Her recollections do not fill her with tranquility, they serve to fire her with the urge to relive them in a way that, ironically, is not possible. The occasion of Tom's father's desertion increases Amanda's urge to revisit these youthful memories and air her regrets, and through repeated recollections she fixates her urge to breathe life into them by molding her children's lives in order to fulfill her dreams. Thus, in order to influence her children to take heed from her youthful mistakes, she reenacts the scenes laden with economic specificity, where the self is presented as a commodified product, poised on the verge of economic fulfillment. Her aim is to induce in her children the virtues of self-aggrandizement and strain for the benefits that await a bloated, commodified self.

Thus in all her remonstrances with Tom, one finds her advice to be ruthlessly utilitarian and commercial. She urges him to forgo any effort at creative existence; instead, she wants him to make a career out of his work in the warehouse, a work that he despises:

Amanda: Most young men find adventure in their careers.

Tom: Then most young men are not employed in a warehouse.

Amanda: The world is full of young men employed in warehouses and offices and factories.

Tom: Do all of them find adventure in their careers?

Amanda: They do or they do without it! Not everybody has a craze for adventure (GM 63-64).

Later when she finds her way into coaxing Tom to find "some nice young man, "one that's clean-living--doesn't drink" and "ask him out for

sister!" (GM 66) Tom's disbelief at Amanda's request is enough to signal to us that Amanda's self-enhancement schemes will not stop at anything, and that includes using her son to procure men for her daughter, whom she intends to commodify and set up as a trap.

Amanda frequently regrets missing the conveniences of life when the self was securely ensconced in the comfort of servants and admirers who could be ordered around and manipulated for self-satisfaction: "One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain--your mother received--*seventeen!*--gentleman callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in the folding chairs from the parish house" (GM 33). Emphasizing to her children the status that she could have enjoyed and the easy comfort she could have slipped into had she been wise enough to the virtues of commodity she continues:

Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta--planters and sons of planters!... There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank. Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds. There were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux!... His widow was well provided-for, came into eight or ten thousand acres, that's all... (GM 34).

Later on Amanda fills in Jim with her conceptions of a good life. A life full of conveniences and commodities:

Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me. All of my gentleman callers were sons of planters and so of course I assumed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants (GM 99).

But having failed to snare the right gentleman caller and now that her husband is out of the picture, Amanda has resolved to commodify herself,

and she never fails in constantly reminding Laura about the virtues of a commodified self. She wants Laura to emulate her, to commodify herself and make it her path to success and happiness. In fact, Amanda's sending Laura to Rubicam's Business College was ostensibly to let Laura come in contact with men, and that is why Amanda's disappointment is so great, so cataclysmic, when Laura informs her that she does not expect gentleman callers to call on her:

Amanda:... Stay fresh and pretty! It's almost time for our gentleman callers to start arriving... How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?

Laura: ...I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.

Amanda: ...What? No one--not one? You must be joking!... Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must be a tornado! (GM 35)

If Laura's fiasco at Rubicam's Business College disappoints Amanda at first, she recovers quickly and takes it upon herself to commodify Laura with even greater intensity: "Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually end up married to some nice man... Sister, that's what you'll do!" (GM 44) She begins instructing Laura in the subtle arts of commodification: "When people have some slight disadvantage... they cultivate other things to make up for it--develop charm--and vivacity--and--charm! That's all you have to do!" (GM 45) When she gets her way with Tom by convincing him to bring home Jim for Laura, not only does she prepare Laura as a trap by stuffing Laura's bosom with "gay deceivers," but she also tells Laura that commodification of the self is the norm for women because: "All pretty girls are a trap," and "men expect them to be" (GM 86). In her final effort at trying to convince Laura of the power of the commodified self,

she decks herself in the yellow voile and blue silk dress of her youth, sashays around the room, and recounts the glory of her youth for the last time in a speech, referring to herself in the first person, "I," sixteen times. Symbolically, this is Amanda's crucial moment of self-commodification, since, by exhibiting herself in this way she not only shows Laura the power of a commodified self, but she also shows Laura later on how it exerts its power over both Tom, who gasps at Amanda's transmogrification, and Jim, who is at first taken aback but recovers only to be swept away by Amanda's vivacity and charm.

Amanda champions the values of a society where, for more than a hundred years, the American ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom were roundly contradicted by the facts of life. She came from a place where the social order of life and its institutions were based on unquestioned vertical chains of power and patronage, where the genteel surface of hierarchy was stretched over the brutality of forced labor and the suspension of individual conscience. Therefore, it is hard for Amanda to function without being able to control and dominate others because she cannot think of any suitable alternative form of existence. Her discontent with her present status arises from her powerlessness to forgo using the language of the southern economic system that she had absorbed so many years ago, and by whose rules her class of people gained satisfaction through the consumption of commodities and services and accumulation of wealth.²⁹ Therefore, Amanda's sense of power and purpose are not the products of an individual's conception of self-worth, arising from the conviction that each life is meaningful in its own right, but her sense of power and purpose derive from the belief

that life is meaningful only if one can enslave others in order to perpetuate one's own happiness and comfort and corrupt values. The qualities that Amanda endows the self with come from the outside, and this self is enhanced through the process of acquisition and perfected through the negative forces of deception and subterfuge. Amanda's conception of the self is a grotesque growth of an accumulated self that obliterates an individual's creative, expressive, and self-fulfilling existence. One is reminded of Williams's own statement in his Memoirs, where his exasperation at his mother's stultifying and destructive pattern of possessive behavior with Rose and Tom led him to exclaim: "Why do women bring children into this world and then destroy them."³⁰

VI Tom's Individuation and Gift of Liberation

If Amanda's aim to perpetuate the self leads her to possess and control others around her, then Tom's aim is to free the self through self-reliance and by exercising his right to be a creative, expressive individual. However, Tom's problem in the Wingfield household is that he is unable to find a way to individualize himself because Amanda is blind and unsympathetic to his need for individuation. While this conflicting philosophy of life between Amanda and Tom contributes to the stifling atmosphere that Tom describes as: "this two-by-four situation," (GM 57) and as a result of which Tom is forced to leave, nevertheless, Tom harbors intense regrets for his leaving. His awareness of the pain that his leaving would bring to the Wingfield household is vocalized through his remarks to Laura: "You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got

himself out of one without removing one nail" (GM 57). And as Tom had feared, his individuation occurred at a much higher price than he had originally imagined. It occurred at the price of his having to leave behind the thing closest to his heart, his other self, Laura. It is this profound sense of distress at having forsaken his sister, Laura, that gnaws at his heart and makes him retrace his steps and construct this confessional. Tom's last soliloquy explains this point well:

I didn't go to the moon, I went much further--for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on a lid of a shoe-box. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for the last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space. I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger--anything that can blow your candles out!... For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura--and so goodbye.... (GM 137)

Williams does not dramatize an account from his life that spotlights only his personal individuation and liberation, because such a naked approach would fail to uphold the truth of the connection between self-realization achieved through freedom. What makes this play significant, poignant, and timeless is that Tom is also able to free and liberate Laura through a crucial event in the play where Laura's innermost desires and wishes are realized. It is because of this liberating event that when we reach the end of the play we no longer see

Laura as a person who is fragile, nervous, and lacking in self-confidence, but we see her as someone who has achieved a certain balance in life and who is contented because of her own self-liberating, freeing gesture.

While Tom's breaking away to find himself gives him time to practice and perfect his craft, it is significant that this play Tom creates out of this experience transcends the bitterness and acrid atmosphere from which it issued. The play as a final product champions Tom's faith in his own capacity as an expressive, creative individual to bring about change, and although Tom's assessment of his own success at becoming a free and expressive individual is modest, the poetry of the play, the play's dramatic development with its balanced characterization, motivation, and action point to Tom's own success at his craft. More importantly, because of this vantage point of having achieved personal success as an artist, because of his accomplishment at self-actualization, Tom's newly empowered self is able to take on the challenge of recounting his life in the Wingfield household. The play becomes a serious and honest exploration of what it means to be human and free.

VII Laura: Tom's other self

In his Memoirs, Williams often talks about his concern and emotional closeness with his sister, Rose. He offers several glimpses into her personality, interests, and problems and even talks of his having modelled Laura's character on Rose. Although Williams does not attempt an analysis of his creative reconstruction of Rose as Laura, his

disclosure of certain common traits between Rose and Laura is helpful in our understanding of what made Rose special to Williams, and why Tom considers Laura as an individual in the play, whom he is protective of and whom he eventually liberates from her ordinary condition of being a strange and elusive character into a mature person. In one instance, while talking of his closeness with Rose and his attempt at capturing Rose's condition in his play, Williams says: "[W]e strolled about the business streets of University city. It was a sort of a ritual with a pathos that I assure you was never caught in the *Menagerie*, nor in my short story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," on which *Menagerie* was based."³¹ In another reference a few pages later, attempting an approximation of Rose's personality and problems that he tried to capture in his play, Williams gives us a rare insight of having modelled Laura on Rose:

But you don't know Miss Rose and you never will unless you come to know her through this 'thing,' [Rose's mysterious stomach trouble] for Laura of *Menagerie* was like Miss Rose only in her inescapable 'difference,' [her individuality] which that old female bobcat Amanda would not believe existed. And as I mentioned, you may know only a little bit more of her through "Portrait of a Girl in Glass."³²

In modelling Laura on Rose, Williams modified Rose's problems and personality in a way that made Laura not a carbon copy of Rose but an idealized and loving representation of his sister. Rose's problems and heartaches are artistically transformed into Laura's quiet, shy, nervous, and self-effacing personality.

Williams's love for his sister not only made him sensitive of how and in what light he should depict her through Laura, but his love for Rose also made him make his namesake, Tom, protective of Rose's

counterpart, Laura, in the play. Tom's attitude towards Laura in the play prefigures Williams's own concern and care for Rose in real life. From all of Williams's references to Rose, the most important or serious recollections have to do with Williams's own regret of having failed his sister by concentrating too much on his own dreams, failing to recognize her problems, for being cruel and selfishly occupied with his own happiness and new friendships, and mostly, for being unable to protect her from being forced to undergo the prefrontal lobotomy, an operation that Williams says left Rose "tragically becalmed,"³³ or in more direct terms destroyed his sister's selfhood and life:

...Rose was sent away to the State Asylum in 1937. It's not very pleasant to look back on that year and to know that Rose knew she was going mad and to know, also, that I was not too kind to my sister. You see, for the first time in my life, I had become accepted by a group of young friends and my delighted relations with them preoccupied me to such an extent that I failed to properly observe the shadow falling on Rose.³⁴

In fact, it became Williams's lifelong quest to take care of his sister and somehow redeem himself for this neglect and betrayal he felt he had shown towards Rose. Later in his career, when Williams had been able to secure for Rose a comfortable place in "Stoney lodge in Ossining,... a lovely retreat where she has a pleasant room to herself, with flowered wallpaper," he was able to declare: "This is probably the best thing I've done with my life, besides a few bits of work."³⁵

If Williams presented Laura as an artistic representation of Rose, he also infused Laura's character with traits of his own self. Laura's nervousness, her shy and retiring character, her quiet self-consciousness are all Williams's personal characteristics that he talks of in his Memoirs.³⁶ By investing Laura with aspects of his own self,

Williams the playwright becomes aware of her problems and is protective of her in the play in a way that he could not protect her in life.

Laura's quiet self and her uniqueness are always present in Tom's mind, and although Tom is free to pursue his own goals, what binds him to Laura is his perception of her as his other self that he felt he had forgotten and abandoned in real life. Yet, the agony and frustration of not being able to do enough for Laura still haunts Tom, Williams's prototype in the play. Tom's lines in the play, where he narrates the magician's tricks, refer to his deepest wish to be able to free Laura from her problems and rescue her from her environment, a feat that he knows will not be possible to carry out, but wishes it was true anyway:

There was a big stage show! The headliner in the stage show was Malvolio the Magician. He performed wonderful tricks, many of them, such as pouring water back and forth between pitchers. First it turned to wine and then it turned to beer and then it turned to whiskey. I know it was whiskey it finally turned into because he needed somebody to come up out of the audience to help him, and I came up--both shows! It was Kentucky Straight Bourbon. A very generous fellow, he gave souvenirs. [*He pulls from his back pocket a shimmering rainbow-colored scarf.*] He gave me this. This is his magic scarf. You can have it, Laura. You wave it over a canary cage and you get a bowl of goldfish. You wave it over a goldfish bowl and they fly away canaries.... But the wonderfulest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail (GM 56).

Nevertheless, despite the coffin imagery of death and decay, Tom is able to individualize and free Laura in his own magical way because Williams was able to turn this play into a souvenir for his sister. Williams gives us a hint of this resolve in his memoirs when he says that just about the time his sister, Rose, was "submitted to a lobotomy," "I was just beginning to write well in an individual style. I remember writing... the short story 'The Malediction' and a number of nice little

poems."³⁷ Thus it will not be farfetched to say that young Williams would use his gift for writing, his newly discovered talent, his individual voice to pay tribute to his sister through the medium in which he felt his own boss.

VII Laura's Individuation and Liberation

Apart from investing Laura with a part of his own personality, Williams was also able to codify in Laura's physical handicap a part of his own gay self. Recent critics like Mark Lilly have argued convincingly about Laura's physical disability or her lameness and Laura's favorite, the glass unicorn in her glass menagerie, as representing Williams's coded references to his own gay self. Lilly's justification behind his claim being that Williams as a writer and a gay man was "faced with not only an external censorship, but a self-censorship arising directly out of the cultural atmosphere produced by the former," and therefore he had to resort to "to an opacity of imagery and meaning" in creating "a satisfying creative ambiguity" to camouflage his gay interest and self.³⁸ Elsewhere, Lilly makes a good point about the "unicorn as an emblem of Laura, who in turn symbolizes the individual gay person, isolated certainly, but possessing valuable individuality."³⁹ I find this explanation helpful to my discussion of Tom's individuation of Laura.

In addition to codifying a part of his sexual self through Laura's handicap and the symbol of the unicorn, Williams also gives us hints, throughout the play, about Tom's gay self that was left for Tom to discover on his own in addition to his search for his vocation. Tom's

references to his gay self are made through his hints about staying out at night, ostensibly with the purpose of visiting gay bars, his "desire for the seaman's life," a life of "the desire for an all-male community linked by a common endeavor and the especially intense camaraderie that is the product of hardship,"⁴⁰ and even his revelation in the epilogue hints of his gay activities: "Perhaps I am walking alone at night, in some strange city, before I have *found companions*" [My italics] (GM 137).⁴¹ What is significant here is that although these hints about Tom's gay self speak of Williams's desire to somehow talk about a fact of life which ordinarily could not be addressed, his codified gay self, camouflaged through Laura's lameness and her association with the unicorn become at the same time symbols of Laura's uniqueness and the source of her individuality and strength because Williams does not let Laura's individuality remain a static entity. In the course of the play, Williams is able to show the growth of Laura's individuality through her meeting with Jim, an episode that both liberates Laura and enables her to act freely and confidently.

When critics comment on Williams's use of unconventional techniques in the play, they usually agree or disagree with Williams's stage directions for the specific use of expressionistic modes of "the screen device," "the music," and "the lighting," in the play. Very few critics have explored the experimental technique that Williams adroitly embedded in the play's last scene, where the meeting between Jim and Laura is handled.⁴² I consider this episode between Jim and Laura as experimental because Tom, Williams's surrogate as the play's narrator, could not have been present during this moment of private meeting

between Jim and Laura, nor could he have known the details of what transpired between Jim and Laura because Tom leaves home for good presumably after his second fall out with Amanda, immediately after Jim leaves, without having the chance even to speak with Laura. Thus, we can say the meeting between Jim and Laura and what transpires between them is a product of Tom's imagination, and so it is in keeping with the experimental nature of the play's structure, an experiment that Williams pulls off with remarkable success. This experimental but imaginative episode is at the core of the play's success because it fulfills at least two objectives. It enables Williams the artist to pay tribute to his sister by making her dream come true, while within the context of play, the episode works as device which brings about Laura's individuation and liberation.

Although the scene between Jim and Laura starts off awkwardly with Laura's usual shy and withdrawn self-serving as a barrier to their closeness, Jim's initiative at breaking the ice, however ironic it may seem at this point because of his trying to impress Laura with his focus on the materialist vision of the self: "think of the fortune made by the guy that invented the first piece of chewing gum,... The Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago..." (GM 109), and his grand plans for his future: "I've already made the right connections and all that remains is for the industry itself to get under way! Full steam-- *Knowledge--Zzzzzp!--Money--Zzzzzp!--Power!*" (GM 120), paves the way for Laura's growth of self-confidence and selfhood. To Jim's question: "Now how about you? Isn't there something you take more interest in than anything else?" Laura's response: "Well, I do--as I said--I have my--

glass collection--"(GM 120) is so fresh and free of pretense that Jim is forced to drop his guard and see her for who she is. It is an instance where Laura's simple self overpowers Jim's material self. It is a moment when, according to Bigsby: "Art [truth and beauty] alone, it seems, has the power to halt, however momentarily, the rush towards extinction."⁴³

The following conversation between Jim and Laura, built around the reference to the glass unicorn becomes symbolic of Laura's own uniqueness and Jim's unconscious but sympathetic reference to Laura's individuality:

Jim: What kind of a thing is this one supposed to be?
 Laura: Haven't you noticed the single horn on its forehead?
 Jim: A unicorn, huh?
 Laura: Mmmmm-hmmmm!
 Jim: Unicorns--aren't they extinct in the modern world?
 Laura: I know!
 Jim: Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome.
 Laura [*smiling*]: Well, if he does, he doesn't complain about it. He stays on the shelf with some horses that don't have horns and all of them seem to get along nicely together?
 Jim: How do you know?
 Laura [*lightly*]: I haven't heard any arguments among them!
 (GM 121-22)

Laura's assurance that the unicorn is comfortable among a majority of hornless horses is evidence of her own rising self confidence and self-trust in defending others like herself. Throughout the scene, this rising self-confidence in Laura is strengthened by Jim's assurances to her about her own condition: "A little physical defect is what you have. Hardly noticeable even!... Think of yourself as *superior* in some way!" (GM 119); his effort in making her feel comfortable and close to him by teaching her how to dance; and his impressing upon her the fact that she is indeed a distinctive and unique person:

The different people are not like other people, but being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Because other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand, You're one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here. They're common as--weeds, but--you--well, you're--*Blue Roses!*" (GM 126)

More importantly, Jim's praise of Laura does not end merely with words, it culminates with the kiss, "A souvenir," (GM 127) as it is described in the play. It is through Jim's kiss that Laura's individuality is finally validated most convincingly to herself. It helps her become free of the doubts she had about her herself. It fulfills her completely."

But if this kiss serves to validate Laura's unique personhood and individuality, the kiss also serves to free her in the sense that it liberates her because now her most secret desire has come true. Williams himself hints through his scene directions at this process of freedom that he had envisioned for Laura: "*While the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life*" (GM 107). Laura who is fulfilled through this kiss is freed or liberated as a person, and hence she is able to act democratically with Jim as she hands him the unicorn, her most precious treasure, now with its horn broken, as a gesture of her gratitude for Jim's liberating effect on her. Laura's gesture of handing over unicorn is also an example of her ability of having grown into more empowered state, because with her giving action, Laura in turn frees Jim of any sense of guilt that he might harbor for kissing her since he is already engaged to someone else. Laura's action is thus not only freeing but also noble and sincere. It is an act that issues only out of an empowered self.

Many critics have interpreted Jim's kissing Laura and his subsequent revelation to her about his being engaged as an act of betrayal. They claim that Jim's action destroys Laura's dreams and as a result Laura now "retreats within herself forever."⁴⁵ Some have maintained that Jim is insensitive to Laura's feelings and Jim "gives with one hand only to take away with the other," and ultimately "Laura loses out."⁴⁶ But these critics forget that Jim was brought into Laura's life at Amanda's insistence, who wanted Laura to trap Jim into marriage and save herself. Laura herself may have dreamed of Jim, but she had no dreams of possessing him to the extent where we can say that Jim's revelation of his engaged status destroys Laura. Ironically it is Amanda's dreams and hopes of possessing Jim through proxy that are destroyed, not Laura's. While Tom's bringing Jim home at Amanda's behest ends with Amanda's loss, Jim's meeting with Laura creates for her a positive environment, where his liking for her infuses her with a sense of self-worth. Laura's quiet self in contrast to Amanda's self-promotion wins over Jim in a way that he never realized was possible. The fact that Jim's revelation disappoints Laura cannot be denied, but to say that it destroys Laura is an error. I do not think Williams would have wanted us to see Laura destroyed because Williams would not want us to feel sorry for her because she is unable to possess. Furthermore, Laura's dependency on Jim would in the end only be an echo of the real life helpless dependency on others that was forced upon Rose by cruelly subjecting her to a prefrontal lobotomy.

VIII Tom's Democratic and Empowered Self

Tom's last soliloquy in the play, with its image of a wandering self, wistfully remembering fond human attachment is both an act of tribute as well as a severance of ties. It should not be interpreted as merely an exercise in nostalgia. In fact, Tom's speech embodies the perfect image of the self suspended in the "paradox of being lost and found simultaneously."⁴⁷ In this case, Tom is "lost" because he has lost a home, yet "found" since he has discovered his true vocation as a poet and a dramatist. Yet, Tom's courage to narrate this play could not have materialized if he was not, in fact, driven away from home, because Tom's urge to do justice to the facts of what happened in his past also drove him to write. Tom's leaving home also ties in with his conception of personal freedom and yearning for democratic participation because "home, in our contemporary democracy, is comprehended as a private place, a place of withdrawal from the demands of common life, a place of fixed meaning where one is protected from disorientation, but also from the possibility of democratic involvement. Hence one might say that the [aspiration for] democratic life requires one to overcome the fear of homelessness, to develop the courage to leave home (embracing another fear) without knowing when or whether one will return."⁴⁸

But Tom does return home through this play, not as a struggling poet but as an empowered person since he has now realized his own will, by becoming a poet/dramatist, against the resistance of others, like Amanda.⁴⁹ And as a result of his empowered self he is able to free others, Laura through Jim's kiss and by memorializing her memory through this play. Williams frees Amanda or her real life incarnation, Miss

Edwina, too, as he willed half of all the royalties from the performances of this play to Edwina for the rest of her life. It is ironic that "the play she [Edwina] had unwittingly inspired would give her considerable financial reward and finally enable her to have the one thing she had so long desired--her independence from Cornelius."⁵⁰

Although Williams exploits the real life tensions that existed between himself and his mother because of their inability to compromise, Williams does not underestimate the desperation of Amanda, who is more present-sacrificing, in order to achieve a secure future for herself as well for her children, and whose present is in such contrast with her past, that she more than others feels the insecurity intensely, and has very limited means of doing anything about it. Her possessiveness partly grows out of this insecurity and helplessness. This is perhaps what Williams would want us to understand most about Amanda, and that is why Williams introduces Amanda to us by saying: "There is much to admire in Amanda, and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. Certainly she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person" (GM 21). Williams also did not let Amanda lose in the play as her material loss is substituted by a greater gain, wisdom. Williams conveys this to us through his scene description, not through words but through Amanda's gestures, for what words can summarize the nature of wisdom: "*Now that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her stillness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty... Amanda's gestures are slow and graceful, almost dancelike, as she comforts her daughter*" (GM 136). Williams's final image of Amanda conjures in our minds the image of the

wise Maurya in J. M. Synge's Riders to the Sea, who too gains wisdom through a great deal of suffering.

NOTES

1. Thomas L. King, "Irony and Distance in The Glass Menagerie," Modern Critical Views: Tennessee Williams, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 85.

2. King 86.

3. Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York: A Signet Book, 1987) 23. Subsequent references to this edition of the play, abbreviated as GM, will appear parenthetically in this chapter.

4. Suparna Rajaram and Henry L. Roediger, "Remembering and Knowing as States of Consciousness During Retrieval," Scientific Approaches to Consciousness, ed. Jonathan D. Cohen and Jonathan W. Schooler (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997) 214.

5. King 86.

6. King 86.

7. King 86.

8. King 87.

9. King 87.

10. King 87.

11. Benedict Nightingale, Fifth Row Center: A Critic's Year On And Off Broadway (New York: Times Books, 1986) 112.

12. Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975) xviii.

13. Memoirs 21-22.

14. C. L. R. James, American Civilization (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) 46.

15. Memoirs 230.

16. C. W. E. Bigsby, Modern American Drama: 1945-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 40-41.

17. Memoirs 84.

18. James L. Rowland, "Tennessee's Two Amandas," Twentieth Century Interpretations: The Glass Menagerie: A Collection Of Critical Essays, ed. R. B. Parker (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983) 64.

19. Rowland 73.

20. Memoirs 84.

21. Lester A. Beaurline, "The Glass Menagerie: From Story to Play," Twentieth Century Interpretations: The Glass Menagerie, A Collection Of Critical Essays, ed. R. B. Parker (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983) 44-52. In this essay, Beaurline traces the four stages of development and revision of The Glass Menagerie and analyzes the improvements that Williams makes with each successive version. Donald Spoto, The Kindness Of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 179. Spoto tells us how Williams used his the short fiction form as a springboard for his longer plays. Lyle Leverich, Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams (New York: Crown Publishers. Inc., 1995) 206-7. Leverich quotes Clark Mills, one of Williams's writing partners from the Poetry Society of St. Louis, who commented on Williams's writing and revision process as: "He was never sure if he knew where he was going, but when he got there--when he finished that passage and it might not be right--he'd toss it aside and start all over again... You know, usually one sits down and writes page one, two, three, four, and so on--but he would write and rewrite and even in the middle of a passage, he'd start all over again and slant it another way."

22. Memoirs 85.23. Memoirs 234-35.

24. David Birch, The Language Of Drama: Critical Theory and Practice (New York: St. Martin's P, 1991) 76. In this chapter, Birch explains the different ways in which continental dramatists have used language in their plays. Birch explains how language is used as an active tool by characters to either influence or control the others around them. He comments on dramatists like Antonin Artaud's search for a new type of physical language of the stage and Brecht's innovations of dramatic speech through his technique of "defamiliarization" or use of narrative intervention in the characters' speeches.

25. Birch 76-77.

26. William Ian Miller, Humiliation And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993) 163.

27. Bernard Williams, Shame and Necessity (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 75-102. In these pages Bernard Williams makes an important distinction between the Greek dramatists' use of the emotion of shame, where the characters often pursued shame or inflicted shame on others as a necessary means to get at the truth of things, and the modern day use of shame where "shame is on the bad side of all the lines" because of "its notorious association with the notion of losing or saving face" (77). Amanda's shaming of Tom is in keeping with this modern aspect of shaming because she wants Tom to know that she is aware of his activities and habits and therefore he should be ashamed of himself in her presence. In other words, she wants Tom to suffer a loss of face. Amanda's accusations are made not only to embarrass Tom but to threaten him into submission as

well. See Thomas J. Scheff, "Conflict in Family Systems: The Role of Shame," Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride, ed. June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fisher (New York: The Guilford P, 1995) 393-412. Thomas Scheff analyses and discusses how family members use shame in their speech to avoid responsibility. See also, Carl D. Schneider, Shame, Exposure, and Privacy (Boston: Beacon P, 1977) 56-65. Here Schneider talks about how a person's self or individuality can be violated by when the private "facts" about the individual are openly discussed or referred to in the course of a conversation.

28. Brian A. Hickey, "Bowen's Family Projection Process and Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie," Perspectives in Psychological Care, 22. 1 (1984): 26-32. In this interesting article, Hickey uses Bowden's theory of "family dysfunction: the inability of family members to distinguish their own thoughts and feelings from other family members' referred to as differentiation of self," to explain Amanda's problems with being possessive, controlling and destructive of her own family's cohesion.

29. Robin Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800 (London: Verso, 1997) For a detailed account of the history of the institution of slavery and forced labor and how the system anticipated some of the features of capitalist industrialism, see pages 315-363. For an account of slavery and the economic benefits of accumulation in America see pages 459-483.

30. Memoirs 219.

31. Memoirs 120.

32. Memoirs 125.

33. Memoirs 126.

34. Memoirs 121.

35. Memoirs 126-27.

36. The following pages in Williams's Memoirs refer to his the own self that I feel he transposed in Laura in The Glass Menagerie. p. 16, 17, nervous problems; p. 46, 163, Williams's shy self; p. 23, Williams's shy self in school transferred to Laura's shy self in Rubicam's Business College; p. 38, Williams's habit of walking the streets when he felt agitated in seen in Laura's habit of walking in the city instead of going to Rubicam's; p. 46, Williams's shyness among people.

37. Memoirs 48.

38. Mark Lilly, "Tennessee Williams," American Drama, ed. Clive Bloom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 70.

39. Mark Lilly, "Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire," Lesbian and Gay Writing: An Anthology of Critical Essays, ed. Mark Lilly (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990) 155. Lilly provides a good interpretation of Laura's lameness as Williams's metaphor for his view of homosexuality.

40. Mark Lilly, "Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire*" 157.

41. Memoirs 27-29. In these pages, Williams mentions his first awareness of the existence of gay bars in St. Louis brought to his notice by the young man who he was paired off with when he accepted a summer job as a "house to house peddler of a big 'woman's magazine.'" Later he reiterates that his young friend "from Oklahoma kept hanging around St. Louis, which is all but intolerably hot in summer" and kept "suggesting that we go to 'the bars'--but I continued to decline." See also George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York: Basic Books, 1994) 1-12. In documenting the "highly visible, remarkably complex, and continually changing gay male world" in New York city "between 1890 and the beginning of the Second World War" Chauncey also mentions in his meticulously researched and insightful book, that "scattered evidence" of gay life in "other American Cities" "indicates that Chicago, Los Angeles, and at least a handful of other cities hosted gay subcultures of considerable size and complexity before the war, and that many small towns also sustained gay social networks of some scope." [My italics.]

42. Thomas P. Adler, "The (Un)reliability of the Narrator in The Glass Menagerie and Vieux Carre," The Tennessee Williams Review 3. 1 (1981): 6-9. Adler is supportive of Tom's "remembrance of things he was not present to observe" by explaining that "seeing events acted out on the stage surrounds them with an aura--the illusion, if you will--of objectivity, making them not as subjective as they might if they were simply told" because the "dramatic form itself precludes the solipsistic effect often felt in the first person point of view."

43. Bigsby 43.

44. My understanding of the significance of Jim's kiss as "a souvenir" in the larger context of Williams's love for Rose has been greatly enhanced by a seminar on Williams's plays conducted by Prof. Arthur Athanason.

45. Patricia R. Schroeder, The Presence of the Past in Modern American Drama (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1989) 109.

46. Alex Potter, "The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams," Crux 14. 2 (1980): 21.

47. Thomas L. Dumm, united states (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994) 155.

48. Dumm 155.

49. Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford UP, 1946) 180. Weber was one of the first people to describe positive effect of power, what we now call "empowerment" thus: "[P]ower is the ability to realize one's own will even against the resistance of others."

50. Spoto 123.

CHAPTER FOUR
POSSESSION, REPUTATION, AND REDEMPTION
IN A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

Critics and commentators have often suggested that Williams's interest and empathy lay with the outsiders and the dispossessed people of society. Foster Hirsch writes: "Williams is obsessed with the social outsider, the character who is unbalanced in extravagant and colorful ways,..." and his "sympathy is reserved for the hounded, rejected, dishevelled."¹ Benjamin Nelson is of the opinion that Williams gained a "sense of kinship with the lonely, the rootless and the outcast" when he was in New Orleans early in his career with the "attempt to join the Writers' Project or the Theatre Project."² During one of the rare introspective moments about his art, Williams mentions in his Memoirs: "I write so often of people with no magnitude, 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..." [my italics]³ By the phrase "*living and feeling with intensity*" Williams means the emotional drive that people exhibit or are influenced by while going through life. Williams was not so much interested in analyzing or unraveling character as in exploring how people dealt with or were driven by their innate feelings and emotions. For Williams, emotion was more important than reason, and in most of his successful plays we encounter the drama that develops out of a character's wrestling or trying to cope with his or her feelings and emotions in an environment where the cultivation of these qualities is severely repressed or thwarted.⁴ In post-modern

terminology, this internal conflict in the individual or "radical politics of the soul"⁵ that drives the individual in a repressive environment is defined as "the conflict between the otherness of the individual and the uniformity that characterizes the community,"⁶ and as a result of which "the individual [becomes] a victim of a system resistant to human need."⁷ Williams's Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire is a good example of an individual, who is not only an "other," but is also someone who is driven and eventually destroyed as a result of pursuing her desires or needs. This is perhaps why Williams himself considered Blanche more than a "little person." He elaborated on his point by both asking and answering the question in a reader's mind: "Was Blanche a 'little person?' Certainly not. *She was a demonic creature*, the size of her feelings was too great for her to contain without the escape of madness" [my italics].⁸

Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire is a character who cannot be easily forgotten. When we meet her, she is in a state of panic because she is fleeing from a ruinous past, she is destitute because she has no personal belongings or money, and she is alone without anybody's love or support to count on. This condition is aggravated by her discovery of her sister's place, a place which is incompatible with her idea of a refuge or quiet shelter because it is exactly the opposite of the "great big place with white columns,"⁹ an ironic "Elysian Fields," a place which, according to Blanche: "Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!--could do...justice!" (Streetcar 20) It is a place bristling with the sexual energy of Stanley's and Stella's compatibility as highlighted by the stage direction's highly suggestive sexual symbolism portrayed by

Stanley's and Stella's interaction at the beginning of the play, as Stanley appears in "his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's" and "heaves the package at Stella," who "cries in protest but manages to catch it," and "laughs breathlessly" at her success

(Streetcar 13-14).¹⁰ In contrast, Williams presents Blanche as someone who is suffering from acute physical exhaustion, highlighting Blanche's precarious physical condition and mental instability in the stage directions, through an apt image: "There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth" (Streetcar 15). As the play progresses, this metaphor of the "moth" conveys more about Blanche's physical and mental condition than anything else. More appropriately, it becomes a haunting symbol of the duality of Blanche's psyche. The moth's desire for the flame, the flame that both attracts it and eventually serves to immolate it, mirrors Blanche's own desire for physical passion that both attracts her and destroys her in the end.

Yet, we must not read too heavily into this symbol of the "moth" and reduce Blanche's operation in the play as occurring merely as a result of a naturalistic progression,¹¹ where Blanche's destruction is a result of being inexorably pushed into an arena of no escape, an environment which she calls "a trap" (Streetcar 128). Blanche has her own distinctive method of operation, her own consciousness of action, and if she describes her environment as being a "trap," it is only because she herself is partly responsible for finding herself in the "trap." Blanche is, after all, an individual who is trying to reclaim her past, the past that is especially linked with her good name and her

lost reputation. In her drive to repossess this very personal and pristine part of her identity that she has lost, she drags herself into an environment that becomes a "trap." But the tragedy of Blanche's attempt at regaining her reputation is that she is ironically drawn into deceptive behavior, subterfuge, and eventually into a desperate and destructive possessiveness by which she imagines she can somehow recover/reestablish her lost reputation. Her frantic attempts at repossessing her past come into violent conflict with her nemesis, Stanley's suspicions and interests, because the gains that Blanche believes she can accomplish through her possessive urges, namely, endowing herself with self worth and a sense of power, threaten Stanley's hold on his own territory and the stability of his family life. Thus, Blanche's attempt at escaping her sullied reputation is thwarted by Stanley, whose violent and cruel actions intensify Blanche's destruction.

Blanche's situation is further complicated in the play because of her own mistaken yet adamant desire to situate herself in an environment, Stanley's family, where she is both unwelcome and feared by Stanley, the primary male, because of Blanche's efforts to reeducate Stella, her sister, about Stanley. But Blanche's predicament in her sister's home gets even more acute as her vulnerability to desire, exhibited through her simultaneous attraction and repulsion to Stanley, undermines her own efforts at repossessing her reputation because it arouses Stanley's suspicions about her past and provokes him to thwart Blanche's efforts at repossessing her good name and reputation. In this chapter, I will explore how Blanche's ironic desire to repossess what

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she can no longer have intensifies her possessive drive and ultimately leads to her self-destruction. I will also show how Blanche's desires and interests come into conflict with Stanley's desire to protect and remain in control of his own territory eventually provokes him into participating in Blanche's destruction.

I Blanche's status as an Individual

There is something ironic about Blanche's individuality right from the moment we meet her. Williams presents her with attributes that are non-individualistic in the traditional sense of the word because she is presented not as an imposing, confident, or even a demanding personality. She is instead depicted as someone who is "delicate" and "uncertain," "incongruous to the setting" or irreconcilable to the environment in which she desires to find shelter and protection, and extremely vulnerable (Streetcar 15). She is materially bankrupt and physically exhausted, and her sense of desperation is right at the forefront. She embarks on her quest to find some solid ground to hold onto in order to survive and eventually turn herself around by revamping the past. Although these qualities are individualistic in themselves because Blanche's soft and vulnerable nature makes her unusual enough to attract our attention, Blanche is essentially individualistic because she is a desperately lost, unhappy, and lonely individual operating in a society where the standards of happiness and success are measured in terms of a person's economic worth. Blanche is an individual in terms of her maladjustment to the hypercivilized complexities of status, money, and fame. Blanche's individuality grows on us as the play progresses and

as she becomes more and more embroiled in her desperate and misguided search for happiness through her efforts to repossess her lost self, a self that consisted of worth, status, and reputation.

Blanche is an individual without worldly possessions or stability: "[E]verything that I own is in that trunk" (Streetcar 41), she tells Stanley, because the ancestral home, the plantation, Belle Reve is now "lost" (Streetcar 26). She is lonely, with no human contact, except her sister, Stella: "[Y]ou're all I got" (Streetcar 20), "I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone!..." (Streetcar 23) Blanche is unmarried, over thirty, and is fast losing her looks and ground, and this condition of fading away causes her great concern and anxiety: "I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft--soft people have got to shimmer and glow... And I--I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick" (Streetcar 79). Therefore, her desperation to holding on to something wholesome and tangible that she believes will give her life some worth drives her. Blanche's condition reminds one of Williams's own comment about his personal life of hardship and survival before he gained recognition and wealth as a successful playwright. And it is perhaps more than coincidence that Williams made this disclosure in an essay that appeared in The New York Times Drama Section, on November 30, 1947--four days before the New York debut of A Streetcar Named Desire. Williams declared:

The sort of life which I had previous to this success was one that required endurance, a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before, but it was a good life because it was the sort of life for which the human organism is created.¹²

While Williams's condition in life previous to his success reminds one of Blanche's circumstances in the play, there is an important difference in the two situations. Blanche's privileged background has restricted her from believing in the democratic principle of self-sufficiency and self-advancement through individual effort. When her aristocratic heritage slipped away, Blanche found herself unable to function in a place where her privileged past is no guarantee of automatic success. Blanche essentially has had no knowledge of what it means not to have. Her status as a "fallen aristocrat" is a paradoxical status in a democratic environment, and her effort to climb back on to the pedestal from which she had fallen becomes self-defeating and wasteful.

But Blanche's anxiety about her material and social status is primarily compounded by the fact that she has lost her reputation or good name. Reputation is something we possess, which we can add to, which can be gained and lost, just like property.¹³ This reputation of character is what Blanche desires to repossess, more than anything else, in order to have a sense of self-worth and some material hope for a future. The loss of Belle Reve, her original shelter, and the loss of her position at her place of work in the high-school in Laurel, which occurred as a result of her rendezvous with "a seventeen-year-old-boy" have rendered her rootless and socially ostracized (Streetcar 118). Therefore, only by repossessing her good name, Blanche realizes, can she have another chance at enhancing her self-worth and character, and eventually become reestablished through attracting a life partner and possessing a shelter.

Blanche's drive to repossess her reputation and her aristocratic heritage can be better understood if we compare her with Chekhov's aristocrat Lubov Ranevskaya and her nostalgia for her childhood memories in his The Cherry Orchard, since Williams's indebtedness to Chekhov's art and his own comment on Chekhov's play about the theme of loss seems particularly relevant to this discussion. Commenting on a revision of a fellow playwright's play, and comparing it to Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, Williams wrote:

It seems to me that the loss of dear things is always a terrible loss and I can't see, personally, how it makes things better. Oh, theoretically, yes, like it's better to give up drink or part from a beautiful lover who drives you mad, but--people after reform always seem sort of dull and commonplace to me, even if they are socially more adjusted.¹⁴

Chekhov's influence on Williams is evident in Streetcar. Like Lubov, not only is Blanche overtly affected by "the loss of dear things" but Williams makes Blanche herself refer to Chekhov's play as she explains to Mitch the epistemology of her name: "DuBois... It's a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in spring!" (Streetcar 54-55) Although Lubov and Blanche are both concerned with their past, there is an important difference in the way these two characters handle or desire their past. In The Cherry Orchard, Lubov returns to her estate for the last time, as it is about to be auctioned off because of the default on mortgage payment, to revive her precious childhood memories for one last time and revisit her past in the estate where she had grown up as a girl. Lubov's connection with her past has to do with her memories of the past. Therefore, her return is an act of reconciliation with her past, not possession. This self-generated reconciliation enables her to let go of

her orchard with dignity, with its memories preserved in her mind. Blanche, on the other hand, who has already lost her property, Belle Reve, as well as her reputation, wants to repossess her past in order to reinvent herself. Blanche is not able to let go and reconcile herself to her loss of Belle Reve because only by associating the loss of her reputation as the after-effect of losing Belle Reve does she have any chance or hope of eliciting sympathy and acceptance from others. Thus, Blanche cannot afford to let go of the past and her memories of Belle Reve even if she so desires. There is an obsessive and unhealthy connection in Blanche's desire for her past that is not evident or even suggested in Lubov's philosophical connection with her past.

Yet, Blanche cannot be held blameworthy for her desire to repossess her reputation because she is after all rooted in her unique culture, where the enhancement of self-worth through possessing wealth is encouraged. Since Blanche has lost her reputation, she has in fact lost more than wealth. Only by repossessing reputation can she hope of regaining her wealth. Although Blanche is operating in a democratic culture, she is barricaded in a patriarchal system, whose rules of operation and standards of reputation for males and females are unequal. In all male dominated societies, a woman's loss of reputation occurs for the same reason that ironically valorizes a man's manliness and status. Blanche has a hard road to travel, and because Blanche is a vulnerable individual, her "life is a living division of two warring principles, desire and decorum, and she is the victim of civilization's attempt to reconcile the two in a morality."¹⁵ Thus, Blanche's desire to repossess her reputation becomes an even greater task because her chief opponent,

Stanley, who is also the primary male, is adamantly unsympathetic to Blanche's predicament or even her loss. Her position in Stanley's territory is complicated by the fact that Blanche simultaneously fears and desires Stanley. Therefore, while Stanley's uninhibited manliness and sexual charisma attract her: "My sister has married a man!"

(Streetcar 40) they also serve to repel her: "A man like that is someone to go out with--once--twice--three times when the devil is in you. But live with? Have a child by?" (Streetcar 71). Perhaps the biggest challenge in Blanche's path at repossessing her reputation comes from her own confession about the irony of the situation that she has to labor under when she lets Mitch become aware of her feelings for Stanley: "The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me" (Streetcar 93). Ironically, Blanche's vulnerability to desire, a part of the cause behind her loss of reputation rears its head right in the domain from where she is planning a rescue of her reputation.

But Blanche is also an individual with a substantial amount of guile. Unable to find any other angle of escape from Stanley's dissection of her past, Blanche gives into a display of highmindedness and puritanical behavior. Blanche's highminded behavior in her new environment, the center of Stella's tumultuous relationship with Stanley, is also fueled by her own need to forget her own loveless, defeated state and to reinvigorate her self-image with the respectability she and Stella had in their Belle Reve days: "Why didn't you tell me, why didn't you write me, honey, why didn't you let me know... that you had to live in these conditions!" (Streetcar 20) And

the more deeply Blanche sinks into observing Stella's closeness with Stanley, the greater becomes her need to compulsively recall the glory of their Belle Reve upbringing and ridicule Stella's closeness with Stanley in order to feel somehow superior, unsullied, and at a safe distance from desire: "I take it for granted that you still have sufficient memory of Belle Reve to find this place and these poker players impossible to live with" (Streetcar 70). All of this invocation of respectability, associated with their common aristocratic lineage is part of Blanche's attempt at trying to recover her own lost reputation, to become new and respected again through selective repetition, recall, and reexamination of things that were once endowed with worth.

II Blanche's Vulnerability

Blanche's efforts at reclaiming her reputation are not merely an exercise in repossessing her character through revisioning herself as a new person, for reputation can include more than character. Reputation includes elements that have to do with the process of life, like age and attractiveness. These possessions or personal attributes are perhaps not subject to what others do to us, or even what we do to them. Nevertheless, they are all part of our vulnerability. The loss of these elements in Blanche has also contributed towards creating in her an even more vulnerable desire for her attachment to self-worth and reputation. Thus, Blanche's age and her fading looks have made her extremely particular about what she wears, how she looks, and in the way she carries herself: "Don't you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested!" (Streetcar 19) Her overanxiety

about her looks and her age often confuses Stella, who sometimes reassures her and at other times even questions Blanche's anxiety: "Why are you sensitive about your age?" Blanche's response clues us into her vulnerability: "[M]en lose interest quickly. Especially when a girl is over-- thirty." And continuing in this vein Blanche declares that she is sensitive about her age: "Because of the hard knocks my vanity has been given" (Streetcar 81).

Blanche's vulnerability about her looks and age is also exacerbated and complicated by her fears of facing loneliness, lovelessness, parting, and death. The simultaneous experience of having had to face the trauma of the death of her parents and relatives while watching Belle Reve slip out of possession, she explains, compounded the nervous anxiety that she suffered after her husband Allan's suicide, leading her to indulge in intimacies with men, intimacies which she confesses that she needed to prove to herself that she was not dead:

Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. And after the death of Allan--intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection--here and there, in the most--unlikely places--even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old-boy but--somebody wrote the superintendent about it--'This woman is morally unfit for her position!'
(Streetcar 118)

She tells Stella: "I wasn't so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to slip through my fingers" (Streetcar 79). Later in the play when Stanley exposes her and Mitch confronts her about the truth, Blanche reveals her vulnerability fearlessly: "*Death... The opposite is desire*. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder! [my italics]" (Streetcar 120) But the irony of Blanche's action, no matter

how vulnerable, to convince herself that she was alive also killed her most precious possession, her reputation.

If Blanche's loneliness and fear of death in the past had made her vulnerable to intimacies with strangers, and as a result of which she is now alone and shunned, then these same vulnerabilities have now forced her to become even more desperate and anxious to gain a foothold by establishing herself in her new environment at Stella's. She is intensely concerned with being liked and not ignored and not being left alone. Therefore, she asks Stella: "Will Stanley like me, or will I be just a visiting in-law, Stella? I couldn't stand that" (Streetcar 23). A little later when Stella has revealed a little hint about Stanley's difference from the men that they had known as youngsters and about his military background, Blanche gets more concerned and anxious to know if she will be accepted, if she will be able to fit in and asks: "How did he take it when you said I was coming?" (Streetcar 24) Her most acute vulnerability in the form of her need for acceptance is evident from her declaration to Mitch, which comes just after Mitch's display of friendship and solicitations for her concerns and right after Blanche has witnessed for the first time the tumultuous display of the sexually charged compatibility between Stanley and Stella: "There's so much--so much confusion in the world... Thank you for being so kind! I need the kindness now" (Streetcar 61). Indeed, her loss of reputation has made her so desperate to gain it back that she even resorts to lying about her past and misrepresenting herself just to fit in, to be not ignored, to be liked and accepted. Consequently, when she is forced to accept responsibility for misrepresenting herself to people she responds to

Mitch's accusation in a bitterly truthful and desperate confession: "I misrepresent things... I don't tell truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" (Streetcar 117)

Blanche's need to do something about being accepted and liked by her sister's husband, her chief obstacle, and his circle causes her to flirt with Stanley and even his friend, Mitch. Unfortunately, Blanche's attempts at flirting with Stanley in order to get close to him as a person and as Stella's sister backfires because Stanley makes no concessions for subtlety, humor, and cordial behavior for he unhesitatingly declares to Blanche when he meets her for the first time: "I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type" (Streetcar 31). But Stanley's roughness is compensated by Mitch's unexpected cordiality and kindness, and this encourages Blanche's hopes of being saved and accepted. In Mitch's manner and sensibilities, Blanche finds the oasis of calm that she had been looking for. Thus, the symbolic act of Mitch's complying with Blanche's request for draping the "adorable little colored paper lantern... over the light bulb" can be partly read as Blanche's moment of wish fulfillment, however transitory, of gaining back her reputation and being saved, for the harsh glare of the naked light bulb representing Blanche's past is willingly but temporarily covered up by the paper lantern. Also, Mitch's responses to her interest in him not only gives her hope but their mutual understanding also prevents Blanche from falling into the trap of loneliness and seeking comfort in the arms of the newspaper boy who drops by just before Mitch's arrival for their first date. Mitch's affability and kindness

strengthens Blanche's self-control and permits her to be invulnerable for once as she is able to say to the newspaper boy, who makes her "mouth water": "Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good--and keep my hands off children" (Streetcar 84). If Mitch's cordiality sustains Blanche in her quest for happiness in the desert of Stanley's territory, it also inflames Blanche's desire to possess something more in addition to reputation, for this possession would be her freedom. She thus confesses to Stella: "He hasn't gotten a thing but a goodnight kiss, that's all I've given him Stella. What I mean is--he thinks I'm sort of--prim and proper, you know! [*She laughs out sharply*] I want to *deceive* him enough to make him--want me... Yes I want Mitch... very badly! Just think if it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem..." (Streetcar 81)

III Blanche's Possessiveness

The possessiveness that Blanche exhibits in Stella's home is a curious combination of her innate controlling nature and her desperate desire to regain her reputation through reliving her old connections with her sister, Stella. When Blanche complains that she feels Stella is not happy to see her, Stella reminds Blanche of her dominating nature: "You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you" (Streetcar 17). Stella's remark proves to be revelatory about Blanche's character since Blanche does show evidence of domination as she dictates and orders Stella around without the thought that Stella is a married woman, Stanley's property no less, and is under no obligation to humor Blanche or give in to the

dominating ways that Blanche was once accustomed to. Therefore, Blanche's inability to control her exactly in the way she wants, and Stella's acceptance and adjustment to her new life with Stanley become irksome to Blanche, not to mention Stella's married status is a constant reminder to Blanche of her own companionless status, a status that Blanche regrets not possessing. This thought is certainly on her mind when she accuses Stella of selfishness, of looking out for herself: "You left! I stayed and struggled! You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself. *I* stayed at *Belle Reve* and tried to hold it together!... you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!... Where were *you*! In bed with your--Polak!" (Streetcar 25-27) Williams's italicizing the I's and you's in Blanche's accusatory tirade highlights the truth of Blanche's regrets about her present worth-devoid self which is in contention with Stella's worth-endowed self as a woman who is possessed of a husband and a home.

Blanche's possessiveness in Stella's home also manifests itself through her adoption of the subtle guile of flirting with the men. Although Blanche is aware of Stanley's nature as a self-possessed and coarsely exacting man, as she herself tells him when he does not give into her "fishing for... compliment[s]," "You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think.... That's why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself--'My sister has married a man!'" (Streetcar 39-40) Blanche uses this knowledge of Stanley to exercise her power by flirting with Stanley and sprinkling her actions with sexual innuendoes in order to soften the ground and get a foothold in her new territory. Thus, Stanley's rejection of giving in

to

to her feminine control bothers her and causes her to flinch and throw insults at him, insults that on one level appear harmless but on another level are sufficient to alienate and antagonize Stanley for good.

Stanley's reluctance and lack of interest in doing the buttons on the back of Blanche's dress: "I can't do nothing with them," causes Blanche to retaliate: "You men with your big clumsy fingers" (Streetcar 38).

Later when Stanley tells Blanche that he does not believe in humoring a woman's craving for flattery by saying: "Some men are took in by this Hollywood glamour stuff and some men are not," Blanche quickly retorts: "I cannot imagine any witch of a woman casting a spell over you"

(Streetcar 39). Although Blanche's comments betray her frustration at her inability to control Stanley in the way that she had planned, it is not until a little more daring on her part that she becomes completely convinced of Stanley's shrewdness at having seen through her reputation. The following lines exemplify the point:

Stanley: If I didn't know that you were my wife's sister I'd
get ideas about you!

Blanche: Such as what!

Stanley: Don't play so dumb. You know what! (Streetcar 41)

It is this danger of exposure by Stanley that forces Blanche to lay her "cards on the table" and seek an alternative route in bringing Stanley under control. Because she is unable to withstand Stanley's pressure she inadvertently admits to him: "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion..." (Streetcar 41).

Blanche's disillusionment in the inefficacy of her scheme to overpower Stanley, and Stanley's threat of assaulting her reputation forces Blanche to throw herself into attacking what she calls Stella's madness over Stanley. At first Blanche assumes a highminded and

condescending approach about Stella's present condition, sarcastically remarking: "[M]aybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve" (Streetcar 44) and even putting down Stella's praise of Stanley by saying: "I'm sorry, but I haven't noticed the stamp of genius even on Stanley's forehead" (Streetcar 50). But while Blanche's need to manipulate Stella gains momentum as she experiences the violently abusive yet passionately fulfilling relationship between Stella and Stanley, Blanche seriously miscalculates Stella's feelings for Stanley. Blanche's overzealous effort to manipulate Stella out of her sexually narcotized and perfectly complementary relationship with Stanley backfires because Stella defends Stanley and refuses to be swayed by Blanche's admonitions:

Blanche: All right, Stella. I will repeat the question quietly now. How could you have come back to this place last night? Why, you must have slept with him!
[Stella gets up in a calm and leisurely way.]

Stella: Blanche, I'd forgotten how excitable you are. You're making much too much fuss about this.

Blanche: Am I?

Stella: Yes, you are. Blanche. I know how it must have seemed to you and I'm awful sorry it had to happen, but it wasn't anything as serious as you seem to take it. In the first place, when men are drinking and playing poker anything can happen. It's always a powder-keg. He didn't know what he was doing.... He was as good as a lamb when I came back and he's really very, very ashamed of himself (Streetcar 63).

Blanche's need to manipulate Stella also arises from her need to control and have power over Stanley through Stella. Blanche's effort to talk Stella into leaving Stanley is motivated by her desire to repay Stanley for his disrespect and abuse of her position as Stella's sister. Blanche knows that "the relationship between Stella and her Promethean husband, Stanley, must be destroyed not simply because he threatens to

eject her from her last refuge (this he only does when she reveals herself as a threat) but because then the clock will be turned back,"¹⁶ since Stella's gravitating to Blanche's side would not only help Blanche in her efforts to gain an ally, an ally from her unsullied past, but Stella's companionship of Blanche would also keep her occupied and invest her with worth in her presently destitute and shunned condition. Unfortunately, Blanche's plans turn out to be too farfetched and unrealistic, as the following conversation between them demonstrates:

Blanche: Pull yourself together and face the facts.

Stella: What are they in your opinion?

Blanche: In my opinion? You're married to a madman!

Stella: No!

Blanche: Yes, you are, your fix is worse than mine is! Only you're not being sensible about it. I'm going to *do* something. Get a hold of myself and make myself a new life!

Stella: Yes?

Blanche: But you've given in. And that isn't right, you're not old! You can get out.

Stella [*slowly and emphatically*]: I'm not in anything I want to get out of.

Blanche [*incredulously*]: What--Stella?

Stella: I said I am not in anything that I have a desire to get out of. (Streetcar 65).

Thus, Blanche's frustration and disappointment at Stella's staunch devotion for Stanley forces her to ridicule Stella's attraction to Stanley: "Now don't say it was one of those mysterious electric things between people! If you do I'll laugh in your face" (Streetcar 70). And Stella's sexual attraction for Stanley gives vent to Blanche's highminded puritanism: "What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to--go to bed with him! And that's your job--not mine!" (Streetcar 69) In effect, Stella's complete acceptance of Stanley

signifies her rejection of Blanche, and therefore Stella's happiness with Stanley becomes her rejection of the ideals that have sustained Blanche at this point of her life. Stella's confident and proud reply to Blanche clarifies this point: "[T]here are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem--unimportant" (Streetcar 70). But Blanche's inability and refusal to accept Stella's acceptance of Stanley finally forces her to ridicule and trivialize the nature of desire that exists between Stella and Stanley.

Blanche's attack on the passionate nature of desire that exists between Stella and Stanley has deeper relevance to Blanche's possessiveness. The following conversation between Stella and Blanche will verify my point:

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

Stella: Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?

Blanche: It brought me here.--Where I'm not wanted and where
I'm ashamed to be...

Stella: Then don't you think your superior attitude is a bit
out of place?

Blanche: I'm not being or feeling at all superior, Stella.
Believe me I'm not! It's just this. This is how I look
at it. A man like that is someone to go out with--once-
-twice--three times when the devil is in you. But live
with? Have a child by?

Stella: I have told you, I love him.

Blanche: Then I *tremble* for you! I just--*tremble* for you...

Stella: I can't help your trembling if you insist on
trembling! (Streetcar 70-71)

Blanche deliberately undermines Stanley's and Stella's mutual desirability for good reason. From Stella's reply we learn that Blanche herself is not a novice to the true nature of desire, despite her puritanical and highminded airs, which Stella is aware of. Yet, at this

point, what is bothersome to Blanche is that not only are Stella and Stanley deeply involved in an explosively passionate desire for each other, but the desire is a legitimate factor in their lives. This legitimacy of their desire for each other make them unafraid and bold. It invests Stella with a sense of pride and for which she is able to qualify her attraction for Stanley as "love." Furthermore, the legitimacy of their desire is ratified by a third person, Mitch, as he confidently extols the bond of "love" that holds Stanley and Stella together: "There's nothing to be scared of. They're crazy about each other" (Streetcar 61). The biggest challenge that Blanche has to deal with in the Stanley household is realizing while her own vulnerability for desire ruined her reputation, Stanley's and Stella's desire for each other is not only legitimate but also a life-giving entity for them and the relationship endows Stella with status. It is this status and legitimate desire that Blanche wants simultaneously to undermine and yet possess for herself through her efforts at repossessing her reputation.

In opposition to the legitimate nature of desire between Stella and Stanley, Blanche realizes that her own intimacies with men were merely furtive acts, since she sees herself being driven to give into these intimacies for self-fulfilling reasons, as proof that she was alive and desirable. Blanche realizes that while Stella can boldly declare to Blanche that her desire for Stanley is an outcome of her "love" for him, Blanche can never admit that her intimacies were acts of love but of need, and because they were acts of need, they remain merely biological or programmed acts, no more noble, ideal, or pleasurable than a creature's adaptive sexual behavior in its environment. Furthermore,

the only person whom Blanche claims to have "loved" was incapable of reciprocating her love, and whose suicide, partly resulting from Blanche's cruelty towards him, ironically drove Blanche to seek comfort in the arms of others. Thus, Blanche's realization of her miserable failure at "loving," conflicts violently in her mind with Stella's state of happiness and provokes her more than anything else to sabotage Stella's happiness through one last effort, by reducing Stanley's character and psyche to that of an ape.

Blanche's insecurity, jealousy, and loneliness are so overwhelming at this point of defeat that she gives in to aggressively attacking Stanley's reputation and humanness. Her speech is not only an example of her desperate effort to evoke Stella's sympathy but the speech, with its carefully chosen comparisons between an animal's behavior and Stanley's habits and conduct, is Blanche's own ruthless effort at undermining the relationship between Stella and Stanley. It is her way to justify to herself and to convince Stella that what they have is no more than a biological necessity either, despite Stella's qualification of it as "love."¹⁷ Ironically, Blanche's attack does not provide her with the intended relief or satisfaction that she had imagined because not only is Stella's subsequent action of "embracing him [Stanley], with both arms, fiercely and in full view of Blanche," while Stanley "laughs and clasps her head to him," and "grins... at Blanche" (Streetcar 73) symbolic of complete rejection of Blanche and her views, but Stella's action is also a tacit validation of the power of Stanley's animal magnetism that Blanche had so vehemently denounced as "common" and "bestial" (Streetcar 71). Stella's open show of affection for Stanley

diminishes Blanche's position and security in Stanley's territory. It is the moment of reversal in the play since Blanche's speech also sets in motion her ironic collaboration in her own physical destruction at Stanley's hands as Stanley himself interprets her speech as a declaration of war because he has overheard Blanche's reduction of him as "common," "ordinary," "bestial," "animal," "ape-like," attributes that will ironically be manifest in Stanley's personality during his physical possession of Blanche.

Furthermore, Blanche's vituperative put down of Stanley and her scoffing at Stella's attraction for Stanley is proof not only of Blanche's naked aggression into the privacy of Stanley's and Stella's lives, but her aggression is also fueled by her concealed jealousy of Stella's and Stanley's sexual compatibility. This situation is compounded by the fact that while Blanche herself is desperately attempting to regain her reputation, Stella not only possesses Stanley but is now bringing an addition to their family by virtue of being pregnant with Stanley's child. In other words, while Blanche is constantly reminded of her loss and her regression into the past, she realizes that Stella's life keeps moving forward.

IV Stanley's Individuality

Stanley's individuality as the primary male who is in charge and is the keeper of his dominion, "the icon of male heterosexual power,"¹⁸ is established in opposition to Blanche's dominionless, powerless status in the play. Stanley is everything that Blanche is not. He has "no past. He comes into existence ready-made and fully known. Directness is his

keynote and his virtue."¹⁹ He is possessed of all the accoutrements of a male dominator. He is bold, brash, strong, self-confident, virile, coarse, territorial, and in love with life and the freedom that he enjoys with his conquests, women. When Stella tells Blanche that Stanley is of "A different species" (Streetcar 24), she is in fact establishing Stanley's "Sameness" in opposition to the "Otherness" that Blanche brings into the world beyond Belle Reve. In Elysian Fields, virile male domination and sexual control are "the organizing principle[s] around which life is centered and revolves,"²⁰ and Stanley is its chief and legitimate symbol and mover. He is the Huey Long of Elysian Fields, "the King around here" (Streetcar 107), whose jurisdiction over his territory and "will to knowledge" is exercised through interrogation, threat, and physical punishment.

Stanley's individuality is also stressed by his non-idealistic, earthy, grounded, fixed, rooted, self-centered mode of existence that is representative of the "New Man." He has brought down Stella, the star, from the heights of the columns of Belle Reve, "thrilled" her with his unsophisticated, spontaneous antic of smashing "the light bulbs with the heel of my [Stella's] slipper" on their wedding night (Streetcar 64), and has got Stella addicted to the pleasures of a sexual and sensual existence, as she herself declares to Blanche: "I can hardly stand it when he is away for a night... When he's away for a week I nearly go wild! (Streetcar 25). Stanley's constant attacks and taunts about Blanche's noble and aristocratic airs are in opposition "to his own espousal of the Populist doctrine of Huey Long ("Every man is a King"), which he understands as well as any of that demagogue's followers

probably did." And in this sense he is on par with the leveling "process of modern 'Democracy,' which by its very nature is "unromantic and non-idealistic."²¹

Stanley is the representative Darwinian fundamentalist, for *"the center of his life has been the pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens"* (Streetcar 29). His is *"the gaudy seed bearer"* who is fixed on his urge and mission to propagate his species and protect his territory for his own self-interest. All other interests are subordinated to this primal urge that drives him relentlessly forward. Stanley's allegiance to the "winner takes all" dictum, an upgraded version of the survival of the fittest mentality, is the philosophy that guides him in life, as it is reflected in his own confession towards the play's end: "Luck is believing you're lucky... To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you're lucky" (Streetcar 131). Thus, the slightest threat or obstruction to this controlling principle of operation in life makes him react with a ruthlessness that is reminiscent of a despot's tyranny over those who challenge or oppose his authority.

Yet Williams did more than present Stanley as the heterosexual bastion of power and "sameness." He is Williams's stage representation of the "uncouth" male, and Williams enjoyed exposing on stage the core of Stanley's maleness or his strong sexual vibes that make him secretly desirable. Through Stanley, Williams took the original concept of the rugged individual foraging at the frontier and followed his progression into the domestic sphere, where, the highly touted virtues of

domestication or family values not only failed to reach him but turned him "uncouth," for he has remained untamed and unshorn of his primitive qualities of aggression and violence. But Williams went further. He dared to portray this "uncouth" male individual in its essential glory by unabashedly letting loose its sexual and sensual side. Gore Vidal's analysis of the significance behind one of Williams's most famous artistic creations is worth quoting:

When Tennessee wrote A Streetcar Named Desire, he inadvertently smashed one of our society's most powerful taboos. He showed the male not only as sexually attractive in the flesh but as an object of something never before entirely acknowledged, the lust of women... Marlon Brando's appearance on stage, as Stanley, in a torn sweaty T-shirt, was an earthquake; and the male as sex object is still at our culture's center stage and will so remain until the likes of Boy George redress, as it were, the balance.²²

V Stanley's Possessiveness

If Williams created Stanley in the image of the rugged individual whose domestication has hardly managed to tenderize his uniquely male qualities of aggression and territoriality, then the instincts of possessiveness and self-preservation that Stanley exhibits right from the moment we meet him do not cause us any surprise. In fact, Stanley's "uncouth" bearing and possessiveness fit well with most patriarchal cultures' benign sanction of the male's prerogative for aggressive and violent behavior as a legitimate mechanism for self-preservation. Yet, we cannot dismiss the fact that this innate possessive urge in Stanley is also activated by Blanche's threatening presence in his territory, which Stanley interprets as an intrusion, because it challenges him and makes him fearful of losing control over his territory. Blanche's own

fear of upsetting Stanley by intruding on his territory is betrayed right at the beginning of the play in her conversation with Stella:

Blanche: ...How did he [Stanley] take it when you said I was coming?"

Stella: Oh, Stanley doesn't know yet.

Blanche [*frightened*]: You--haven't told him? (Streetcar 24)

In fact, the issues of possessiveness and territoriality are of such central importance in this play that Williams introduces the issues straightaway during Stanley's and Blanche's momentous first meeting:

Stanley: Where you from, Blanche?

Blanche: Why, I--live in Laurel.

Stanley: In Laurel, huh? Oh, yeah. Yeah, in Laurel, that's right. Not in my territory (Streetcar 29-30).

Although Stanley's use of the word "territory" does not imply his home ground at this point, it does give us an indication of his sense of pride and responsibility in possessing a particular territory, or his hunting ground, of work. But Stanley does not wait long to get to the real issue of home territory and his possessive feelings for it when he bluntly questions Blanche: "You going to shack up here?" the weight and centrality of which Blanche is able to diffuse only momentarily by replying: "I thought I would if it's not inconvenient for you all" (Streetcar 31). With Stanley, the issue of his rightful control over his territory lurks in his unconscious right from the beginning and is indicated by his remark towards the play's end, after his having successfully discovered the truth about Blanche's reputation in her own territory in Laurel. Stanley interprets for Stella that Blanche's move to their place is nothing short of her preying on his territory after having lost her own and on having been advised to "move on to some fresh territory" (Streetcar 101).

Stanley's discovery from Stella about the loss of Belle Reve and his hostile reaction to its loss is the first overt sign in the play about his passion for possession and territoriality. His justification that not only does he have a right to the property of Belle Reve by virtue of being Stella's husband, because whatever belongs to his wife belongs to him, (in Stanley's case, by virtue of the "Napoleonic code"), but the ruthlessness of Stanley's will to possess is unswerving because he is unwilling to accept any extenuating circumstances for the "loss" of Belle Reve, which Stella accepts and understands and is willing to forget as a "sacrifice." Stanley demands "more details on that subject" and the "bill of sale" because he asserts that Belle Reve was "disposed of," "sold," and he caricatures the loss of Belle Reve as being "give[n] away? To charity" (Streetcar 33-34).

Stanley's behavior and anger at this point tell us more about his possessive vein than any other action of his in the play. A closer look at Stanley's declaration to Stella, where he asserts his view of his rights over Belle Reve as Stella's husband, reveals the groundwork for the course of action that Stanley will take in his dealing with Blanche, who he has by now clearly identified in his mind as the intruder and enemy: "In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa... It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you're swindled under the Napoleonic code I'm swindled too. And I don't like to be *swindled*!" (Streetcar 34-35)

More importantly, through this declaration of property rights, Stanley not only legitimizes his ownership of Stella's property and

possessions, but also Blanche, who is dominionless and unprotected, and who by coming to "shack up" with Stella in Stanley's territory has reduced herself in Stanley's eyes as being merely an extension of Stella, related through blood, just as much as Belle Reve was in the past related to Stella through her childhood and growing up in that place. Blanche loses her status by having to accept Stanley's shelter and become his ward.

It is this view of Blanche as property that Stanley has chosen and it is this interpretation of ownership or possession that primarily prompts him to rape Blanche, as he views his possession of Blanche's physical self as nothing more than his possession of fresh territory, which is not only under his kingly jurisdiction and but also under his care. Stanley's reduction of Blanche to the level of a defeated and humiliated subject, grovelling at her master's feet, is further seen from his humiliating and derisive remarks to Blanche about her reputation, the reputation that he took pride in exposing and destroying:

What queen do you think you are?... I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place is turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say--Ha!--Ha! Do you hear me? Ha--ha--ha! (Streetcar 127-28)

Cleopatra's final humiliation at being exhibited in Rome as the trophy of a victor, and her reputation of being the mistress/property of both Caesar and Anthony, but who is now reduced to being merely the spoils of war, reverberates both in Stanley's mockery of Blanche as "Queen of the Nile!" and his subsequent rape or possession of Blanche. Thus, history's

long chain of the socially sanctioned pattern of male possession over their victory spoils remains unbroken here.

If Stanley is the possessor, who seeks complete and secure control over his territory through vigilantly exterminating any outside interferences, his possessiveness is also ironically fueled by Blanche's own insensitive comments, her hypocritical puritanism, and subversive attempts to gain a foothold in Stanley's *terra firma*. Blanche's insensitivity and affronts against Stanley are revealed repeatedly in her comments and replies to Stanley throughout the play. She categorized him as: "You men with your big clumsy fingers" (Streetcar 38), she derides his masculinity and refers to him as someone: "I cannot imagine any witch of a woman casting a spell over" (Streetcar 39), she calls him: "simple, straightforward, honest,... primitive" (Streetcar 40), she purports to be understanding or seeing through him to his basic level of animality, telling him: "I have an idea she [Stella] doesn't understand you as well as I do" (Streetcar 40), she tries to humor Stanley's uncouthness, playing it off against her pretense of being proper while telling the parrot joke at the dinner table: "This old maid, she had a parrot that cursed a blue streak and knew more vulgar expressions than Mr. Kowalski!" (Streetcar 107). In fact, Stanley's exasperation and anger at Blanche's affronts which have had its share of influence on Stella, the influence that Stanley fears threatens his control over his family and territory is expressed through his violent behavior, accompanied by his threat to Stella when he violently clears the table on the occasion of Blanche's birthday by hurling his plate and smashing his cup on the floor, roaring:

Don't ever talk that way to me! 'Pig--Polak--disgusting--vulgar--greasy!' them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said--'Every man is King!' And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!" (Streetcar 107)

Perhaps the most damaging instance that reinforces Stanley's possessive bent and secures for Blanche Stanley's enmity is his overhearing Blanche's dissection of his character, which she indulges in with the intention of planting doubts in Stella's mind against Stanley. Blanche's condescending remarks about Stanley when she calls him: "common!" and sarcastically reminds Stella of her past status, which according to Blanche, Stella has forsaken through her association with Stanley: "You can't have forgotten that much of our bringing up, Stella, that you just suppose that any part of a gentleman's in his nature! *Not one particle, no!*" (Streetcar 71) alienate Stanley completely. His subsequent anger and resolve to destroy Blanche before she can break up his family is clear from his gesture of grinning at Blanche after Stella, despite hearing Blanche's harangue, embraces him in full view of Blanche. Stella's action not only strengthens Stanley's confidence about his own power, but her action also validates the strength of their relationship to Stanley. From this point in the play, Stanley becomes fully charged with a possessive momentum that will indeed convince Stella to "*hang back with the brutes!*" (Streetcar 72) Thus Stanley's subsequent action of impugning Blanche's credibility in Stella's eyes by disclosing to her the information he has gathered about Blanche's reputation is tied in with his urge to preserve the closeness he has

with Stella and also prevent Stella from empathizing with Blanche and moving over to her side.

If Blanche's attitude and behavior in Stanley's territory threaten Stanley with his prospective loss of control over his territory and possessions, Blanche's mere presence distracts his sense of possessive satisfaction. For Stanley, possessiveness signifies more than hoarding and controlling of possessions. Possessiveness for Stanley means a direct, vigorous, physical participation with his objects of possession. Blanche's presence not only restricts his privacy by limiting his powers of movement and personal freedom in his own territory, but it also hinders his enjoyment of his possession (Stella) through unabashed sexual intimacy. Although Stella's pregnancy is a damper for Stanley, he is more concerned with Blanche's presence as an obstruction to his freedoms with his possession than with anything else. Thus, after his exposure of Blanche's past, convinced that this exposure will serve to estrange Blanche from Stella, he remarks:

Stell, it's going to be all right after she goes and after you've had the baby. It's going to be all right between you and me the way that it was. You remember that way that it was? Them nights we had together? God, honey, it's gonna be sweet when we can make noise in the night the way that we used to and get the colored lights going with nobody's sister behind the curtains to hear us!" (Streetcar 108-9)

If there is any redeeming feature in Stanley, it is in his devotion to Stella and his sense of loyalty to Mitch. Despite his self-serving and possessive instincts, Stanley is completely dedicated to Stella, and at times even tender and submissive in his behavior towards her. Following his first explosion in Scene 3, when it dawns upon him that his behavior towards Stella has caused her to leave him, albeit

momentarily, his remorse for his action and his childlike desire to have Stella back are unmistakably and tenderly human: "My baby doll's left me!" Stanley declares in genuine despair and *"breaks into sobs. Then he goes to the phone and dials, still shuddering with sobs,"* and pleads with Eunice to send Stella back: "Eunice? I want my baby... Eunice I'll keep on ringing until I talk with my baby!" (Streetcar 59) And this is not all. When Stella comes down the stairs from Eunice's, Stanley *"falls to his knees on the steps and presses his face to her belly, curving a little with maternity. Her eyes go blind with tenderness as she catches his head and raises him level with her. He snatches the screen door open and lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat"* (Streetcar 60). Stanley lets Stella have her victory here as he knows that Stella does possess him. He submits himself to her and only carries her off into the flat when he has her permission to do so. This action of Stanley is in stark contrast with the way he carries off a defeated Blanche after he *"springs towards her, overturning the table... catches her wrist"* and when Blanche *"sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed"* (Streetcar 130). As for his friendship with Mitch, Stanley's loyalty prevents him from letting Mitch get married to Blanche and then having to find out about her past later. In this way Williams is able to give a much more nuanced picture of Stanley instead of making him a one-sided, atavistic, apelike caricature of a primitive man.²³

Blanche's threat to Stanley's territory extends beyond his immediate home. Blanche's budding closeness to Mitch also interferes with Stanley's sense of possessiveness as Mitch is after all a valuable

part of Stanley's group of card-playing cronies. Blanche's closeness with Mitch not only threatens Stanley with the loss of a friend but Blanche's influence on Mitch and her closeness to him in a way that Stanley does not and cannot have over his friend, also threatens Stanley's control over his circle of friends. After all, Blanche's power over Mitch would be greater because it would be sexual. It would not only destabilize Stanley in his circle but it would bring Blanche dangerously close to his own territory, as she would be in close contact with Stella if Mitch were to marry Blanche. The sexual threat that Blanche poses to Stanley in the event of capturing Mitch is too overwhelming for Stanley to ignore. Therefore, his coming to Mitch's defense by exposing Blanche's past is in reality Stanley's effort at regaining his own hold over Mitch. Stanley's fear of Blanche's power is unmistakable when he tells Stella of his action of telling Mitch about his discovery of Blanche's past: "Well, he's not going to marry her. Maybe he was, but he's not going to jump in a tank with a school of sharks--now!" (Streetcar 104) Stanley's justification of his act of disclosure of Blanche's past to Mitch in this instance also becomes his weapon, his poison, with which he poisons Blanche's victim, Mitch, rather than let Blanche possess him and pose another challenge to Stanley's territoriality.

VI Stanley's Violence

An analysis of Stanley's rage and his eruption into violence in Streetcar will be better understood if we consider Williams's own views of Stanley and Blanche and compare it with some very contemporary

scientific studies on the issue of violence in human nature. In a comment Williams made to Elia Kazan during the rehearsals of the first production of Streetcar in New York, we come across a revelatory instance of his perception of Blanche and Stanley as both actors and characters. Kazan recapitulates:

At breakfast, I brought up my worry about Jessica and Marlon. 'She'll get better,' Tennessee said, and then we had our only discussion about the direction of his play. 'Blanche is not an angel without a flaw,' he said, 'and Stanley's not evil. I know you're used to clearly stated themes, but this play should not be loaded one way or the other. Don't try to simplify things.' ...I remembered the letter he'd written me before we'd started the rehearsals, remembered how, in that letter, he'd cautioned me against tipping the moral scales against Stanley, that in the interests of fidelity I must not present Stanley as a 'black-dyed villain.' 'What should I do?' I asked. 'Sometimes the audience laughs when Brando makes fun of her.' 'Nothing,' he said. 'Don't take sides or try to present a moral. When you begin to arrange the action to make a thematic point, the fidelity will suffer. Go on working as you are. Marlon is a genius, but she's a worker and she'll get better. And better.'²⁴

Williams's comment about Stanley and Blanche makes us aware that Stanley and Blanche are not only dealing with some very basic issues, in this case possessiveness and violence, that are a part of ordinary people's daily struggle to survive but Williams's comment shows how deeply, as a dramatist, he had progressed in his understanding of the essential blurring of the lines between good and evil in life. Stanley's violence is not condoned by Williams but it is not condemned either, and neither does he throw his weight as a playwright by advising Kazan to direct the play in a way that would make Blanche's position clear and her actions less culpable. Williams's comment suggests that he wanted his audience to make their own inferences about the nature of possessiveness and violence as presented through the play's microcosmic representation of life. More importantly, Williams wanted his audience, especially those

who would condemn Stanley for his violence, at least to realize that Stanley's violent outburst does have a trigger, because Blanche is not as Williams says, "an angel." Nor did Williams make straightforward suggestions about the problems Blanche faces as a woman in trying to find a place for herself and build another life.

Modern studies in the biology of human behavior have attested to the fact that aggression or violence is an inherent part of human nature, carried down through our genes for specific purposes. Here is what a renowned sociobiologist, Edward O. Wilson, has to say about violence or aggression:

Human aggression cannot be explained as either a dark-angelic flaw or a bestial instinct. Nor is it the pathological symptom of upbringing in a cruel environment. Human beings are strongly predisposed to respond with unreasoning hatred to external threats and to escalate their hostility sufficiently to overwhelm the source of the threat by a respectably wide margin of safety. Our brains do appear to be programmed to the following extent: we are inclined to partition other people into friends and aliens, in the same sense that birds are inclined to learn territorial songs and to navigate by the polar constellations. We tend to fear deeply the actions of strangers and to solve conflict by aggression. These learning rules are more likely to have evolved during the past hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution and, thus, to have conferred a biological advantage on those who conformed to them with the greatest fidelity.²⁵

The problem with this purely biological or evolutionary view of violence in human nature is that it has caused considerable problems for experts on human behavior like Frederick Goodwin, who had been dragged too far to the left by a modern Darwinian view of the human mind, leading him to believe that only "genetic factors" lead human beings toward violence. His view or idea in the Federal Violence Initiative, a study undertaken under the auspices of the Bush Administration, "was to treat violence as a public-health problem--to identify violently inclined youth and

provide therapy early, before they had killed."²⁶ This view led him into considerable trouble as he went too far in making "comparisons between the behavior of inner-city youths and violent, oversexed monkeys who live in the wild."²⁷ The opposition to Goodwin's argument came from psychiatrists like Peter Breggin, the founder of the Center for the study of Psychiatry, in Bethesda, Maryland, and his mentor Thomas Szasz, the author of The Myth of Mental Illness, who viewed much of psychiatry as "merely an oppressive tool by which the powers that be label inconvenient behavior 'deviant.'"²⁸ Breggin, the author of The War Against Children, saw Goodwin's proposal of "giving Ritalin to 'hyperactive' children as a way of regimenting spirited kids rather than according them the attention they need--just as giving 'anti-aggression' drugs to inner-city kids would be an excuse for continued neglect."²⁹ In fact, Breggin saw parallels between Goodwin's Violence Initiative and Nazi Germany, and declared: "[T]he medicalization of social issues, the declaration that the victim of oppression, in this case the Jew, is in fact a genetically and biologically defective person, the mobilization of the state for eugenic purposes and biological purposes, the heavy use of psychiatry in the development of social control programs."³⁰

This opposition between the two camps has been bridged by modern evolutionary psychologists like Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, who, in their seminal book on violence in human nature entitled, Homicide, while accepting the basis of violence in humans to be genetic, criticize the dubious concept of arguing about violence merely as a from of "primitiveness" or a primitive hangover carried through our genes. They assert that there is no "empirical support for the assertion that

violence is more characteristic of the 'primitive'--whether cultures, species or whatever--than of more 'advanced' forms."³¹ Instead, Daly and Wilson view the factor of violence in human nature as primarily "genetic," while also leaving the ground open to the idea that violence is partly a natural reaction to a particular social environment.

Although this view of the evolutionary psychologists comes close to Williams's objective view of violence as seen in the play, as Stanley's predisposition to violence is partly set off by the pressure of Blanche's actions and having her around in his territory, this modern view of evolutionary psychologists still does not help explain completely Williams's or even our own understanding of violence as it occurs in everyday life. The main problem with this view is that it does not make it easier for us to deal with Stanley's final treatment of Blanche, because Stanley goes beyond violence through his gratuitous action of raping Blanche to establish complete control and power over her. Stanley's physical possession of Blanche is an excessive act, wholly unnecessary because he has already achieved his purpose in regaining his ground by destroying Blanche through exposing her past reputation, the reputation that she so carefully tried to obliterate to enhance her status. Stanley's rape of Blanche thus becomes his act of transgression. It can be that a man's raping a woman is moral equivalent of his murdering a male competitor.

Thus we can say with his final action against Blanche, Stanley does portray the "evil" side of his nature. In his book, The Death of Satan, Andrew Delbanco discusses how the old concept of evil in the form of Satan or the devil, which "was an incandescent presence in most

people's lives," and stood as "a symbol and explanation for both the cruelties one received and those one perpetrated upon others" has now lost its original meaning because of the "visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it."³² Acts of horror and mayhem exhibited and domesticated through the gratuitous depiction of scenes of violence and cruelty on television and pop culture have inured people to the monstrosity of evil. On the other hand, Satan or the Devil has moved closer to the home ground as it has even assumed representative human forms through the likes and actions of men like Hitler or Stalin.³³ Evil now operates in our lives with a human face and we now more easily "discover in ourselves the capacity to inflict it [evil] on others."³⁴ In other words, while the devil has disappeared, it has endowed us with its appetite for evil. Frequently, this legacy or appetite in us, or in the majority, is directed or unleashed against the minority or the transgressor. Stanley's rape of Blanche becomes symbolic of this aspect of society's ferocity against the transgressor. But we cannot help but view this kind of action against the transgressor as evil, for no matter how contrary an individual's actions might seem to an authority, no authority can be unaware of another individual's humanity. When authority becomes willfully unaware and blinds itself to an individual's humanity in order to exact punishment, the punishment becomes an evil act. In the instance of Stanley's rape of Blanche, Stanley the authority figure becomes wilfully unaware of Blanche's humanity and is thus able to inflict on her an evil deed in the form of a severe and humiliating punishment. While the stage directions forbode the evil nature of Stanley's action through suggestions of "*inhuman*

jungle voices rise up," Stanley's declaration to Blanche: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Streetcar 129-30) reveals the blindness that he had cultivated long before against Blanche so that he could pounce on her at the right moment and destroy her personhood completely.

Speaking about the nature and form of society's punishment against the transgressor in his book, Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault talks of how the medieval concept of physical torture of "body as the major target of penal repression disappeared"³⁵ over the years as "the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of punishment that must discourage crime"³⁶ gained favor among the elite of society. Foucault is of the opinion that this change in the penal system occurred as the punishers were interested in "reaching something other than the body itself."³⁷ In place of spectacle of public executions and torture which affected the body directly and in the most severe form, "imprisonment, confinement, forced labor, penal servitude, prohibition from entering certain areas, deportation," have been substituted, although these forms also directly affect the body.³⁸ But the real reason behind this substitution in the form of punishment, Foucault says, is that the people in power viewed the body differently, as "an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as right and property."³⁹ Thus, punishment became a tool with which the powerful inflicted the penalty of powerlessness on the individual by depriving the individual of rights and wealth. But Foucault goes further with his analysis of the more sinister aim of

social punishment and declares: "If the penalty in its most severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body, on what does it lay hold? The answer... seems to be contained in the question itself: since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in the depths on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations."⁴⁰

Stanley's rape of Blanche embodies the complete scenario of penalty exacted both on the body and the soul that Foucault has analyzed. Thus, Blanche's rape is not only Stanley's way of exacting punishment on Blanche's personal possession, her body, by establishing complete control over her and destroying her freedom, but through his rape he also targets her "soul," as this ruthless exercise of power serves to hit directly at Blanche's core, her humanity, and destroy Blanche's mental equilibrium, and hence her sense of selfhood and individuality.

VII Blanche's Redemption

It is ironic indeed that the past that Blanche so desperately seeks to hide in order to repossess her reputation is finally resurrected by Stanley who uses it to destroy her. And it is also ironic that Stanley's final humiliation of Blanche is also Blanche's moment of redemption. In the play, Blanche is obsessed with taking hot baths, symbolic of a ritual purification of the self, a washing away of the guilt and shame as it were. Her unusual sense of relief after hot baths is expressed right from the beginning of the play: "Hello, Stanley! Here I am all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human

being!" (Streetcar 37) The irony in her statement hits home when Stanley's hot anger, not the hot baths, becomes Blanche's purifier. On the other hand, if Blanche's destruction is primarily caused by the route she takes to adamantly repossess her reputation and control the events of her life, then she is not totally unaware of the destruction that lies in front of her if her plans should fail. This risk factor in her plans is complicated by her own sense of guilt for her actions that lead to the loss of reputation after the loss of Belle Reve and more especially her husband's death. It is because of this pressure of guilt that Blanche perhaps harbors a secret desire to hurt herself. This aspect of Blanche's despair is presented in the play through Blanche's own sense of doom at Stanley's hands, as the thought is present in her mind long before Stanley's act, when Blanche reveals to Stanley: "I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable anymore. But my young husband was and I..." (Streetcar 42). Thus, Blanche's "entirely natural but cruel exposure of him [Allan]," is partly "the origin of her sense of guilt" that is "expiated by her own sexual immolation" at Stanley's hands.⁴¹ Stanley's rape of Blanche thus exonerates her of her guilt, but from Williams's point of view, the rape humanizes her tragedy of violation and helps us feel compassionate towards her. Williams himself meant this when he talked to Kazan about Blanche: "I remember you asked me what should an audience feel for Blanche. Certainly pity. It is a tragedy with the classic aims of producing a catharsis... and in order to do that Blanche must finally have the understanding and compassion of the audience."⁴²

In Streetcar, the complications that result in Blanche's fall or destruction result partly from Stanley's refusal to understand Blanche's predicament or his adamant refusal for sympathy, which Mitch criticizes at the end of the play: "You... you... you... Brag... brag... bull... bull" (Streetcar 131), and from Blanche's own inability to tell the truth as this would destroy all her hopes at a second chance. In a letter that Williams wrote to Kazan, pleading with him to direct the play, and where Williams elaborates on his philosophy in the play, he underscores this same point:

I think its [Streetcar's] best quality is its authenticity or its fidelity to life. 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. A blindness to what is going on in each other's hearts. Stanley sees Blanche not as a desperate, driven creature backed into a last corner to make a last desperate stand--but as a calculating bitch with 'round heels.'... Nobody sees anybody truly but all through the flaws of their own egos. That is the way we all see each other in life. Vanity, fear, desire, competition--all such distortions within our own egos--condition our vision of those in relation to us. Add to those distortions in our *own* egos, the corresponding distortions in the egos of *others*, and you will see how cloudy the glass must become through which we look at each other. That's how it is in all living relationships except when there is that rare case of two people who love intensely enough to burn through all those layers of opacity and see each other's naked hearts. Such cases seem purely theoretical to me.⁴³

Thus, despite Stanley's remorseless behavior and Blanche's spiralling downfall, Williams did manage to confer Blanche with a certain courage and dignity that manifest themselves by the time we come to the end of the play. Kazan feels that Blanche gains in stature, for she finally finds the courage "as the play progresses, ... especially in the scenes where Blanche fearlessly declares herself and tells her history"" to Mitch hoping for his understanding, which is never

offered. Thus, Blanche's action is not an outcome "of the reckless revelation from pride...to deny nothing"⁴⁵ but of her courage to acknowledge the presence of the devil within her, just as the presence of the devil in each of us cannot be denied. And for this revelation, our understanding of Blanche's character matures.

Moreover, Williams does not let Stanley triumph completely, because Stanley loses status in our eyes by his vindictive act. Williams also does not let Blanche lose completely since her essential humanity is reaffirmed by the doctor who comes to her aid as the kind stranger. Also, with this kind stranger's appearance in coming to Blanche's aid, Williams reaffirms one of the basic tenets of the American Dream, the realization that no one anywhere will be denied his or her inherent human dignity. Williams confers dignity on Blanche by letting her articulate the truth behind the pain and sorrow of her condition through the most famous line in his oeuvre: "Whoever you are--I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Streetcar 142). It is Williams's gift to Blanche. And so, as Streetcar closes, one is reminded of a parallel situation in Yeats's play, Cathleen Ni Hoolihan. When Patrick, who came into the house after the poor old woman had left, and is asked: "Did you see the old woman going down the path?" Patrick replies: "I did not, but I saw a young girl and she had the walk of a queen."

In a sense, Blanche's individuality is extra-textual because Williams's understanding of the human condition enabled him to construct a play where Blanche's individuality grows on us as we near the play's last scenes and her personality haunts us long after the play is over,

and hovers in our consciousness, "serenely brilliant." This is the effect that Kazan too thought that Blanche would have on the audience:

I wanted Blanche to be a 'difficult' heroine, not an easy one to pity, and for the audience to be with Brando [Stanley] at first, as they were closer in their values to Stanley than to Blanche. Then, slowly, Jessie [Blanche] and I and the play would turn the audience's sympathies around so that they'd find that their final concerns were for her and that perhaps, as in life, they'd been prejudiced and insensitive.⁴⁶

Theater critic Kenneth Tynan summed Streetcar's effect on us best when he declared: "Where ancient drama teaches us to reach nobility by contemplation of what is noble, modern American drama conjures us to contemplate what might have been noble, but is now humiliated, ignoble in the sight of all but the compassionate."⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Foster Hirsch, A Portrait Of The Artist: The Plays Of Tennessee Williams (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat P, 1979) 15, 13. Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1966) 68-69. Jackson is of the opinion that Williams, with his creation of "anti-heroic protagonists" or characters rejects the Aristotelian conception of the hero and has thus created protagonists who are "personifications of a humanity neither good, knowledgeable, nor courageous." Borrowing from T. S. Eliot, she calls them "'non-beings'"-- "'Caught in the form of limitation/ Between un-being and being.'" Hedwig Bock: "Tennessee Williams, Southern Playwright," Essays on Contemporary American Drama, ed. Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1981) 5. Bock says: Williams's "plays mainly deal with the 'fugitive kind,' misfits of the modern society, who often cling to their own views of a society, the anti-bellum South, which no longer exists and perhaps never existed."
2. Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: His life and Work (London: Peter Owen, 1961) 45.
3. Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975) 234.
4. David Frost, "Will God Talk Back to a Playwright? Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J Devlin (Jackson, Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 146. In an interview given late in his career, Williams expressed his view of the society's oppression of the outsider as "society rapes the individual."
5. Arthur Miller, Timebends (New York: Grove Press, 1987) 181.
6. Istvan Palffy, "'Otherness' as a Salient Feature in Tennessee Williams' Plays," The Origins and Originality of American Culture, ed. Tibor Frank (Budapest, Hungary: Akademiai Kiado, 1984) 427.
7. C. W. E. Bigsby, Modern American Drama: 1945-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 37.
8. Memoirs 235.
9. Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York: A Signet Book, 1974) 17. Subsequent page references to this edition of the play, abbreviated as Streetcar, are cited parenthetically in my text.
10. The generic reference to the male or female sexual organ suggested through the connotation of the phrase "red-stained package from the butcher's" and "meat" is unmistakable. See: Slang and its Analogues, Past and Present: A Dictionary Historical and Comparative of the Heterodox Speech of Society for more than Three Hundred Years, compiled and edited, John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, Vol., IV (Printed for Subscribers Only: 1896) 296. The bawdy chuckling of the Colored Woman in the play as she

remarks: "What was that package he th'ew at 'er?" and Eunice's response: "You hush, Now!" to the Negro woman's reiteration: "Catch *what!*" also make the sexual connection between "the red-stained package from the butcher's" and the sexual atmosphere prevalent in the household clearly evident.

11. Alvin B. Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode in A Streetcar Named Desire," Tennessee Williams: Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 9. Although I agree with Kernan's opinion that "Williams poises the human need for belief in human value and dignity against a brutal, naturalistic reality," in his plays, I do not entirely agree that Blanche is primarily pushed into confronting a world where she does not belong. Blanche's tragedy is partly of her own making, despite Stanley's cruelty and remorselessness. A naturalistic progression of Blanche would deprive her of all individuality.

12. Tennessee Williams, Where I Live: Selected Essays (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978) 16.

13. Robert Wright, The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) Although Wright mentions later in his book: "females in our species do compete for mates--for mates with the most parental investment to offer. But there's no evidence that, during evolution, social status was a primary tool in that competition" (246), he contradicts this assertion by having stated earlier in the book the following view: "Anticuckoldry technology could come in handy not just when a man has a mate, but earlier, in choosing her. If available females differ in their promiscuity, and if the more promiscuous ones tend to make less faithful wives, natural selection might incline men to discriminate accordingly. Promiscuous women would be welcome as short-term sex partners--indeed, preferable, in some ways, since they can be had with less effort. But they would make poor wife material, a dubious conduit for male parental investment.

What emotional mechanisms--what complex of attractions and aversions--would natural selection use to get males to uncomprehendingly follow this logic? As Donald Symonds has noted, one candidate is the famed Madonna-whore dichotomy, the tendency of men to think in terms of 'two kinds of women'--the kind they respect and the kind they just sleep with." (72)

Thus, status and reputation was as much a factor among women just as much as it was a factor in the lives of the men.

14. Donald Windham, ed., Tennessee Williams's Letters to Donald Windham (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977) 287. In this letter, Williams's acknowledges Windham's revisions of a play, but Williams's emotions lay with the older version of Windham's play because it reminded him of The Cherry Orchard with its theme of "the loss of dear things" and the anguish and pain that it caused its protagonist. And although Williams himself seems to have used The Cherry Orchard's "theme of loss" in Streetcar, through emphasizing Blanche's regret, guilt, and remorse at having lost Belle Reve, Williams complicated Blanche's regret by making

her vulnerable to the loss in a way that she cannot accept its loss and move on. Furthermore, Blanche is neither reformed nor socially more adjusted as her attraction and repulsion of Stanley causes her to antagonize him to such an extent that he resurrects the very reputation that she wants to revise thereby completing her destruction. Commenting on his indebtedness to Chekhov, Williams declared in his Memoirs: "It has often been said that Lawrence was my major literary influence, Well, Lawrence was, indeed a highly simpatico figure in my upbringing, but Chekhov takes precedence as an influence--that is, if there has been any particular influence besides my own solitary bent...(41). Indeed, Chekhov's influence on Williams was so singular that Williams's last play, The Notebook of Trigorin, which he completed in 1982 was an adaptation of Chekhov's The Seagull. It was produced for the first time in the US in 1996 by the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. See Chris Jones's rev. of The Notebook of Trigorin, by Tennessee Williams, Variety, Sept. 16-22, 1996: 79.

15. Joseph N. Riddle, "A Streetcar Named Desire--Nietzsche Descending," Tennessee Williams: Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985) 17.

16. Bigsby 45.

17. Edward O. Wilson, On Human Nature (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) 121-148. In these pages, biologist Wilson explains the nature of sex and its functions in terms of pleasure and profit. Wilson is of the opinion that "sex is not designed primarily for reproduction... nor is the primary function of sex the giving and receiving of pleasure... Pleasure is at best an enabling device for animals that copulate, a means for inducing creatures with versatile nervous systems to make the heavy investment of time and energy required for courtship, sexual intercourse, and parenting" (121-22). Wilson's view that the pleasure aspect of sex is an enabling device for parenting fits in with Stanley's and Stella's situation in the play. Blanche is incapable of reconciling the pleasure and profit aspect of sex, and as she has never experienced the full implications of being a parent, she is incapable of fully understanding Stella's and Stanley's attraction for each other at this point of their relationship. Her categorization of Stanley as being merely lustful is clearly an error as she is too focussed on the "desire" part of Stella's and Stanley's relationship. She cannot understand that for a married couple expecting a child, the nature of pleasure has a very different function.

18. William Kleb, "Marginalia: Streetcar, Williams, and Foucault," Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism, ed. Philip C. Colin, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P., 1993) 37.

19. Bigsby 50.

20. Kleb 37.

21. W. Kenneth Holditch, "The Broken World: Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism in A Streetcar Named Desire," Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, ed. Philip C. Colin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1993) 158-59.

22. Gore Vidal, introduction, Tennessee Williams: Collected Short Stories (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) xxvi.

23. Mark Royden Winchell, "The Myth Is the Message, or Why Streetcar Keeps Running," Confronting Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire: Essays in Critical Pluralism, ed. Philip C. Colin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1993) In this essay, Stanley is considered merely as an atavistic ape. My position is to go beyond this reductionist put down of Stanley because I do not see him as a one-sided creature.

24. Elia Kazan, Elia Kazan: A Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) 345.

25. Wilson 119.

26. Robert Wright, "The Biology of Violence," The New Yorker March 13, 1995: 67.

27. Wright, "The Biology of Violence" 67.

28. Wright, "The Biology of Violence" 69.

29. Wright, "The Biology of Violence" 69.

30. Wright, "The Biology of Violence" 69.

31. Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, Homicide (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1988) 1.

32. Andrew Delbanco, The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) 1.

33. Delbanco 4.

34. Delbanco 9.

35. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 8.

36. Foucault 9.

37. Foucault 11.

38. Foucault 11.

39. Foucault 11.

- 40. Foucault 16.
- 41. Bigsby 45.
- 42. Kazan 330.
- 43. Kazan 329.
- 44. Kazan 353.
- 45. Kazan 349.
- 46. Kazan, 343.
- 47. Kenneth Tynan, Curtains (New York: Atheneum, 1961) 263.

CHAPTER FIVE

POSSESSION, STATUS, AND TRUTH IN CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF AND SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

One of the glaring paradoxes of our civilized natures is that **while** we have made consistent progress in the scientific and **technological** arenas, fields that lie outside our immediate selves, with **the** objective of making life less stressful, more convenient and **comfortable**, we have been unable to look at ourselves as healthy and **sane** sexual beings. At the heart of our problem lies our reticence to **explore** our inner selves more completely, while we continue distracting **ourselves** with technological developments merely for the purpose of **enhancing** our superficial or material selves. Our sexuality is a unique **part** of our inner selves, and because our sexuality is inextricably **linked** with our existence as a species our psychological well-being is **dependent** on how well we adjust and understand ourselves as sexual **creatures**.

But the story only begins here; by distancing ourselves from an **inquiry** into human sexuality we have only erected barriers, constructed **myths**, and regimented ourselves into believing only the majority, who **behave** in acceptable and productive forms of sexual behavior have the **power** and authority to prolong and ignore the suffering, agony, and **tragic** desperation in the lives of countless socially, culturally, **intellectually**, and even religiously productive and contributive **men and women** in cultures across the world. On occasion, there have been voices **from** among the majority who have spoken with integrity, and I am **reminded** of the English poet and mystic, William Blake. His belief that

the thwarting of the life force, whether by repression of sexuality or **by** the "mind fettering" of censorship or by the new factory work--men **wasting** "the days of wisdom/ In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty **pittance** of bread"--is as close as one can get to a definition of the **evil** that is perpetuated in our society.

Unfortunately, the topic of sexuality causes discomfort even to **the** most enlightened and well-meaning minds. Dean Hamer and Peter **Copeland** advocate the need to remember that an objective and healthy **inquiry** into matters regarding the varieties of human sexuality is **important** because sex is "the continued source of life," and "the **mechanism** by which higher organisms pass on their genes and evolve." An **understanding** of human sexuality is important for reasons of "health **because** so many diseases, of which only the most devastating example is **AIDS**, are sexually transmitted." Furthermore, human sexuality is **inextricably** linked with our psychological health as "so much of our **joy**, frustration, pleasure, anguish, pursuit and thought," are dependent **on our** sexual well-being.¹

With the publication of The Origin of Species in 1859, Darwin **opened** up a new and scientific way of looking at our origins, and his **evolutionary** thesis influenced us in our thinking about the biological **aspect** of sex and sexual dimorphism. These facts contradicted antiquated **"popular** culture and medical theor[ies] that there was but one sex: a **kind** of signified male/masculine body and mind, inscribed on the **incomplete** and subordinate female body."² Modern research has **increasingly** thrown light on the diverse nature and forms of sexuality **among** which homosexuality, transsexuality, bisexuality, and other forms

of sexuality are now seen as variations or diversity within the human sexual psyche.³

From a Darwinian point of view, homosexuality has been a particularly disdained and maligned trait during most of our immediate history. Perhaps this view was linked with the low reproductive urge or success among homosexuals, which relegated homosexuals to positions of low status in the system of social hierarchies prevalent in most human societies.⁴ Yet, records existing from the earliest of human societies indicate that people's knowledge and practice of homosexuality were neither limited nor stereotypical. The theorist David Greenberg, in his scholarly book, The Construction of Homosexuality, has chronicled and studied diverse patterns of homosexual practices prevalent in different cultures of the world, from the ancient to the present times.⁵ But Greenberg's constructionist view of homosexuality cannot be taken as a comprehensive picture of homosexuality since he arrived at his theory purely from culling historical records or data that recorded diverse forms of homosexual practices. He did not incorporate the views or feelings of the homosexuals themselves. Greenberg's constructionist view of homosexuality assumes the premise that homosexuality is an invention, not something that is more deeply embedded in human nature. He takes a purely constructionist approach to homosexuality, according to which "sexual behavior is determined by (or "constructed" from) the culture in which a person lives."⁶ However, Greenberg does concede the important point that "despite the importance of heterosexuality in the cultures of the early civilizations,... homosexuality was far from unknown."⁷ Furthermore, he also states that homosexuality became a moral issue with

secular moralists like Plato and with the major religious institutions of the West, like Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam, because of the discovery of heterosexuality's "importance of propagation to human life,"⁸ and hence immediate importance was attached to heterosexuality.

Therefore, the primary reason contributing to homosexuality's shunned and categorized fate as an unnatural act in cultures all over the world is its ostensibly sparse connection with the utilitarian aspect of procreative sex. This view against homosexuality was exploited by the "Christian tradition" in the West, which made rules that forbade the practice of homosexuality "within [the] Christian tradition by utilizing a comprehensive system of sexual ethics" that "pertain to the regulation of sexuality within the confines of matrimony, for the single purpose of reproduction."⁹ The institutionalized repression of homosexuality by the church was also influenced by "the fear of sex and passion [that] is pervasive in our churches" in general, and which in turn is derived from the church's ancient, unresolved fear stemming from "the two interlocking dualisms, a body-spirit dualism and a male-female dualism."¹⁰ The first or spiritualistic dualism, which elevates the higher spirit and puts it in control of the baser body, automatically sees any form of sexuality as threatening or improper, and much of the "sex-negativity" of the western culture "displays this spiritualistic distortion, which simultaneously generates both fear of and fixation with sex and the body."¹¹ In this light, homosexuality is considered by the church as even baser than procreative sex and consequently has been made into something perverse.

Williams's own homosexuality, which clashed with his upbringing in the Christian tradition, caused him no little anguish and confusion. Leverich recounts: "[G]iven the sexual mores of 1937 and his devoutly Christian background, Tom simply was unable to reconcile an inclination [or homosexual feelings] with what he knew to be wrong, a sin, and utterly unacceptable." This "religious restraint, which prevented [his] self-confrontation," imbued in him a sense of "terror of encroaching madness" and a division of personality. Williams addressed this issue in his journal: "'If only I could realize I am not 2 persons. I am only one. There is no sense in this division. An enemy inside myself.'"12 Williams transposed this internal battle or grappling with the self as two people into the spirit-body dualism in some of his most successful plays. Summer and Smoke, A Streetcar Named Desire, Orpheus Descending, The Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Night of the Iguana can all be read as dramatic explorations of the spirit-body dualism that deeply affected Williams in his personal life.

On the other hand, Williams's two plays, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer, produced within a few years of each other,¹³ bear a remarkable affinity in their treatment of and focus on the taboo, misunderstood, explosive, and often painfully subjective topic of male homosexuality. Williams's deep pain and unresolved sadness about the life that homosexuals are forced to lead in a world that refuses to acknowledge them as people with emotional and physical needs are captured in his conversation with the poet Harold Norse:

Norse recalled that at night they occupied a bunk bed, Tom in the upper bunk and he in the lower. "One night before we went to sleep, we were discussing the difficulties of being homosexual. 'It's probably the worst kind of existence in the world,' I said.

'Having to hide such a great need for love and sex has got to be the most painful kind of life.' 'All homosexuals,' said Tennessee, in a choked voice, 'have to live with a deep wound that never heals.'"¹⁴

I Williams and his Gay Critics

While Williams's discovery of his own homosexuality and his coming out to himself had undoubtedly influenced him to explore this issue in his plays,¹⁵ his apparent inability to deal with the homosexual issue honestly and frankly during his most creative years has not been looked upon fairly or sympathetically by critics. Williams drew fire from gay critics who accused him of not being "out" enough in his works, of evading the issue, of being unsupportive to the "gay cause," and of even failing "to contribute any work of understanding to gay theater."¹⁶ Although this criticism stung Williams to the extent that he did come out later in his career, with public disclosures of his homosexuality in his Memoirs and in several TV and magazine interviews, I feel that these critics were being fanatical in their criticism of Williams's lack of support for the gay cause and went overboard in their criticism. They failed to consider that Williams was a product of his times. It is important to understand that no matter how much Williams may have tried, he could never have done enough to temper the bigoted and mean attitude that most people in society harbored for homosexuals and homosexuality. Williams matured at a time when things such as "gay causes" or "gay issues" did not exist in people's consciousness. Therefore, it was injudicious of these critics to condemn Williams for writing within the confines of his own time.

Although Williams's early efforts to write about homosexuality openly or even favorably were seriously thwarted by the repressive, hostile, maligning, and inhospitable climate of the 40's and 50's, we must not forget that Williams did write and manage to get Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer produced at a time when Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch hunts against suspected Communists and homosexuals were in full swing, and gay people were forced to remain invisible. Despite this threat, Williams did manage to write these plays that deal with gay concerns and issues at a time when gay men had few illusions about the dangers that could befall them if they were to make any gay waves.¹⁷ Williams was also writing at a time when a good percentage of the American population, the African Americans, were not even treated as equals, and talking openly about gay causes or issues at such a time was unimaginable or inconceivable. It was the era of "witch hunts" and forced integration, when President Eisenhower had to summon the armed forces to protect the African American children who were obstructed from attending classes with white children in Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. At a time when people in American society were intolerant of people with a different skin color, expecting them to be wise about homosexual issues was like expecting wishes were horses.

These circumstances were compounded by Williams's own misgivings and guilt about his homosexuality. In fact, Williams developed a dual attitude towards homosexuality. He neither accepted it fully nor rejected it to lead a false life. As Leverich remarks: Williams was "not reconciled toward being a homosexual and never would be."¹⁸ Commenting on the absence of focus on gay issues in his early works, and knowing

that his forte was not the gay play, Williams remarked in an interview: "I never found it necessary to deal with it [homosexuality] in my work. It was never a preoccupation of mine, except in my intimate, private life."¹⁹ Later in his career, Williams confessed more fully about not wanting to jeopardize his status as a playwright with the majority by bringing in an overtly homosexual content in his plays. In an interview that he gave in 1976 to a gay publication entitled *Gay Sunshine*, Williams remarked that he was more concerned about his portrayal of the larger picture:

People so wish to latch onto something didactic; I do not deal with the didactic, ever.... You still want to know why I don't write a gay play? I don't find it necessary. I could express what I wanted to express through other means.... I would be narrowing my audience a great deal [if I wrote for a gay audience alone]. I wish to have a broad audience because the major thrust of my work is not sexual orientation, it's social. I'm not about to limit myself to writing about gay people.²⁰

Williams's comments show his complete understanding of his strengths and interests, for if we assess the plays that he wrote later in his career in light of his comments, plays in which he tried to deal with the topic of homosexuality openly in response to the pressure that he was receiving from gay critics, we cannot help but notice that "as the sexual self became clearer, and the plays became more autobiographical, the writing became murkier."²¹ Therefore, holding Williams accountable for not dealing openly with issues of homosexuality, or accusing Williams of not politicizing the homosexual issue in his plays is an unfair and naive charge. Viewed objectively, Williams was neither a hypocrite nor inconsiderate. Given the cruelly repressive and unenlightened times he grew up in, Williams did his best

to develop an artistic vision that helped him transcend the meanness of his times and immortalize the consummate American experience in his best works.

However, it is not entirely true that Williams avoided writing about the homosexual issue in his works. His poems, "Life Story," or "Young Men Waking at Daybreak," and others, are strewn with "homoerotic visions," meetings with "gentlemen callers," and vivid and poignant moments of "the tension, excitement, and loneliness" so authentic to the "anonymous sexual encounters" of repressed sexuality.²² John M. Clum summed up Williams's treatment of homosexuality best, remarking:

I do not see a steady evolution in Williams's "*homosexual sensibility*": rather, there seems to be a constant attitude towards *homosexual acts*, [my emphasis] though Williams's presentation of homosexual persons changed when public tolerance allowed a candidness in drama which Williams had previously restricted to his stories and poems. That change in presentation, alas, was... a function of his decreased ability to convert memory or self-judgment into a controlled work of art.²³

No matter what judgments future critics might pass on Williams's non-committed attitude towards the homosexual issue, I feel it is unfair to demand of an artist, who had invested so much of his career, time, and energy into fashioning his own particular vision of life through art, to somehow adopt a new and trendy philosophy only because it would serve a fixed political agenda.

II Homosexuality as Contrary to Patriarchal Power

On the other hand, arguing about Williams's non-contribution to the gay cause seems to be self-defeating for it will take many more years of research and education before the general male antipathy

towards homosexuality can be mitigated, if not eradicated. Hundreds of years of inculcated bigotry and injustice cannot be undone by a few years of activism or even by the sporadic efforts of the most brilliant minds. I say this because sex, as viewed by most males in the western society is primarily an issue of power. The universal male antipathy towards homosexuality, born out of the irrational fear of being classified as "other" or "queer," is an attitude that has been fortified in the West by the Christian indoctrination of the spirit-body dualism, which stresses the "complementary inferiority of the woman versus the superiority of the man in all marital relations."²⁴ This patriarchal dualism "generates a gender hierarchy of value, status and power[, and]... promulgates the belief that 'good order [in society] means that men must be in command' of women."²⁵ This moral view of the church, which heavily influenced the secular world view, was singularly influential in its control over the ordinary male mind through its suggestion that sexuality was the tool by which men were to exercise their power and control over women. This idea of sex as being a form of power, which gave men their position of control, also made men fearful of any notion of homosexuality, where sex could be seen as either egalitarian or pleasurable. The French sociologist Reynaud sums it up well:

Trapped between his [man's] fear of letting himself go and his use of the penis as a means of appropriation, man does not see that sexuality could be something other than a struggle for power or as a means for comparison. His general attitude has little to do with love or pleasure, but much more with hatred, disgust and jealousy. And its nature is well illustrated in one of the most democratically shared sentiments among men: the fear of homosexuality.²⁶

This interpretation of sex as an arsenal of power that was made available to men has over time influenced men to conceptualize homosexuality as a perverse form of loss of power, leading them to valorize heterosexuality to the exclusion of any other notions of sexuality. As this focus on heterosexual sex was elevated and enshrined in the "the home," "the conjugal family took custody of it [sex] and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law."²⁷ Thus, says Foucault, the heterosexual or the "utilitarian and fertile" couple became the norm and the "sterile behavior" of all other forms of sexuality "carried the taint of abnormality," and was "repressed," and relegated to the "brothel and the mental hospital[,]. . . places of tolerance," where these "illegitimate sexualities... could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit."²⁸ The politics behind this repressive act of relegating the "illegitimate sexualities" to "places of tolerance" was to contain, circumscribe, and restrict them to a specific locale so that in the heterosexual domain, "modern puritanism could impose its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence and silence" over all other forms of sexualities even more effectively.²⁹ Foucault sees in these repressions enacted against the "illegitimate sexualities" a signal for them "to disappear," but these repressions, he points out, were also a form of "an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know."³⁰ And as a result of this "repression," Foucault elaborates, the "fundamental link between power,

knowledge, and sexuality" was established by the legitimate and procreative sexual majority, who exercised their control through prohibition, censorship, and denial.³¹

On a more obvious level, the complacent attitude universally shared by the privileged male, heterosexual social majority prevented them from questioning their position in society, as they "took for granted the naturalness and validity of their own gender and sexual status" just as "any individual unconsciously assumes as natural those aspects of one's life that confer privilege and power." In this instance, the heterosexual majority's complacency and unquestioning stance about their superior position in society in terms of "heterosexual social order" can be compared to the bourgeois's acceptance, assertion, and justification of "the naturalness of class inequality and their [oppressive] rule." Thus, this normative "male-dominated... heterosexual social order" naturally opposed or was unwilling to examine the "formation of modern regimes of bodies and sexualities."³²

III Homosexuality and Status

From these arguments, it is easy to recognize why homosexuality has been such a repressed yet provocative, maligned yet lingering social/cultural issue, and what exactly it means for a man to be identified as a homosexual in overtly heterosexual cultures. Critics have taken issue with Williams for not addressing the issue of homosexuality directly and forcefully, thereby creating a precedent for a more substantial focus on this topic by future dramatists. But I feel,

Williams, in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and in Suddenly Last Summer, hit at the core of the homosexual issue that has created so much of a problem for the repressed homosexual individual. In fashioning these plays, where the characters are either repressed or reluctant to face or accept their homosexuality, Williams created a dramatic space wherein he could explore a male's trauma in either facing and accepting his homosexuality or the fear that consumes him in the event of the public disclosure of the male's homosexual status. Assuming the status of a homosexual in the western culture is tantamount to the death of the individual. It becomes a metaphorical oblivion of the individual because of the inevitable loss of face, social position, and power that males fight so hard to acquire and maintain in and over their surroundings. Status is the resource that men compete for most in society. Thus, what generally wins a man low status is gayness. Status may be an abstract thing but it is very real. This abstract something, that is status/face, is a possession and people become possessive of it, even if it is not concrete and made of shingles, for reasons of self-enhancement and for elevating one's position in society. Therefore, for the male, status becomes equivalent to money, a resource, and it can be cashed in for favors, power, and social standing. To study Brick and Sebastian (in Sebastian's case it is his mother, Mrs. Venable, who is the keeper of status since Sebastian is dead and his past is unknown to others) as people who are seeking status despite the rankings that others would give them because of their gayness is as much a story of possessive individualism as wrangling over property deeds. The importance of status, power, and position in society to the male psychology is explained best in these lines:

... [O]nce hierarchies exist [like pecking order in chicks], status is a resource. If status expands your access to food or sex, then it makes sense to seek status in the abstract, just as it makes sense to seek money even though you can't eat it. So, an exchange of status-enhancing assistance between two animals is not different in kind from an exchange of food: so long as the exchange is non-zero-sum, natural selection will encourage it, given the opportunity. Indeed, after looking closely at chimp and human society, one might suspect that, from natural selection's point of view, status assistance is the main purpose of friendship.³³

I have discussed earlier, Williams's own concern for his status as a dramatist in the eyes of the public. This notion, I feel, imbued Williams with an ambivalence or unresolved attitude towards his own homosexuality, especially the private and public aspects of it, which he took care to separate and reveal selectively. For Williams, at least during the time he was writing in the 1940's and 1950's, homosexuality was a private issue, "incongruent with his 'social' interest," as opposed to the writers who began dealing with the issue of homosexuality during the era that came into being after the Stonewall rebellion in 1969, and for whom homosexuality had become a social and political issue. When Williams confessed in his Memoirs: "[O]f course I also existed outside of the conventional society while contriving somewhat precariously to remain in contact with it. For me this was not only a precarious but a matter of dark unconscious disturbance[,]"³⁴ he was in fact referring to the issue of his own private self as a homosexual artist, and the "gulf between private art (poetry and fiction) and public art (drama), and the corollary gap [that existed in his life] between [the] private homosexual and [the] public celebrity," a fact that he was extremely careful about keeping separate. Thus, while Williams was "privately open about his sexual orientation," he was also

"publicly cautious" of it, only dealing with "homosexuality directly in his nondramatic writings, which would reach a limited audience (he never until his later years strove for the money and publicity of a best-selling novel), but cautious in his dramas."³⁵

This personal vision of homosexuality that Williams cultivated, or was forced to cultivate, this dealing with it as a "private" issue and keeping it away from becoming "public" knowledge is primarily linked with the notion of status in society that a homosexual man has to balance carefully. It is this balancing act, this maintaining of status in society, that influenced Williams's treatment of his male homosexual characters who are also seen grappling with their own private and public notions of homosexuality. After all, Williams confessed: "I draw all my characters from myself. I can't draw a character unless I know it within myself... I draw every character out of my very multiple split personality."³⁶ Thus, Williams's own conception of maintaining status in society hits directly at the heart of a homosexual man's possessiveness of the self and the tact and guile he has to employ in maintaining his status as a social being. Williams, having practiced it in his own life, perhaps felt the need to explore it through a male character in a play, and so in *Brick* we see this tension that is reminiscent of the inner battle that one constantly has to fight in order to display an overtly masculine public self, a self that is in keeping with the culturally sanctioned image of a man, at the expense of suppressing the knowledge of the homosexual self that is denied legitimacy and expression because of the cultural connotations of shame and unmanliness wedded to it.

The conflicted self in the homosexual that arises out of the need to maintain status is reinforced by the social construction of the meaning of "otherness," where a man is viewed as being less than a man, a negative man, a powerless deviant, a sterile but contaminating influence on the healthy and pure, and lacking the responsibility of contributing to social growth by being unable to reproduce.³⁷

Furthermore, in light of this public construction of a homosexual man's manhood, any disclosure of a man's homosexuality or even self acceptance of one's identity as a gay man is tantamount to the destruction of one's selfhood and ego in the social and public sphere of life. Thus, the Conflicted self of the homosexual, which is further constrained by the issues of deep personal shame and guilt, helps complicate the picture of the tortured homosexual, who is forced to live a life of emotional and spiritual paralysis, fueled with a hatred of the self that often finds a vent in self-destruction or violence.³⁸

The trauma of not being able to accept oneself, which issues from the "deep historical and cultural shame about homosexuality" and the oppressive silence that was maintained about a subject that was "perceived to be too shameful to speak about[,]"³⁹ affected most of Williams's early depictions of gay characters in his plays. It is primarily for this reason that Williams shows why Alan in A Streetcar Named Desire had to kill himself when Blanche inadvertently walked in on his private act and was compelled to shame him and ridicule his manhood. This issue of silence and protectiveness of status is also the reason why we do not see Sebastian as a live character in Suddenly Last Summer, and the climactic disclosure of whose gruesome death was accepted by the

audience as deserved punishment for the "horrors of [leading] such a lifestyle."⁴⁰ The issue of shame and status is also the reason why Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is forced to hurt Big Daddy when he forces Brick to confront his homosexual feelings, thus bringing into the open Brick's private and secret desire. This public aspect of homosexuality, or the possibility of a conscious action arising out of the homosexual desire is most threatening and shameful to the male status, and therefore the desire has to be abolished or denied or killed off before it becomes established as a truth. For this reason, Peter Ochello's and Jack Straw's love for one another had to be kept outside the "normal" world of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. But these patterns of portrayal of the homosexual circumstance must not be construed as a reflection of Williams's discomfort with homosexuality. Rather, in showing what the public felt comfortable in seeing when homosexual issues were presented on stage, Williams was making an effort, although a feeble one by today's standards, that was deliberately nonconfrontational or as Williams would say not "didactic," hoping to awaken public awareness or even empathy for these wasted, tortured, and unacknowledged lives.

IV Social Repression and Low Status

Exploring the cultural politics and practices that led to the social classification or stigmatization of the gay man as "Un-American" in American society during the period that extended from World War II into the cold war years, Alan Sinfield shows the connection between social ostracism and prejudice that led to relegating a gay man to a low-status position in society. Sinfield's documentation of the

treatment that gay men received at the hands of army recruiters makes this point clear:

During World War II, U.S. recruiting officers were on the lookout for *two unmanly types: malingerers and homosexuals* [my emphasis]. The malingerers were drafted, but gays were rejected; whatever they did, they couldn't be *manly* [my emphasis]. But what of the gay man who tried really hard to get into the services? Was that not *prima facie* evidence of *manly courage*? [my emphasis] No, he was rejected, and there was a special term for him: *reverse malingerer*. It was unthinkable that he might actually be brave and 'American'; however hard he tried to enlist, he must be some kind of a malingerer. He was a 'reverse malingerer,' lacking the potential even of true malingerers.⁴¹

This deliberate stigmatization and prejudicial classification of the gay man as someone "unmanly" and therefore of a low status was also supported and perpetuated by the views of the psychologists of that era. Homosexuals were defined by the psychologists as having "every kind of 'feminine' weakness," of being "dangerous,... impertinent, possessive, Cocksure," and possessing an "attitude and ego-feeling [that] are only a reaction formation against a deep-seated feeling of weakness and insecurity." This vilification of the homosexual character gained rapid favor in the public mind, and the misconception was transformed into active belief as a result of the general unease and insecurity in the public's mind with the onset of the Cold War. The public's prejudice was rationalized by the necessity:

to control sexual dissidence for, even more than battle conditions, it depended on the ideological--spiritual, moral--determination of U.S. people. They had to establish and maintain the superiority of 'the American way of life' over communism. Un-Americans were dismissed from jobs in governments, municipalities, business, education, and medicine, often on suspicion and without appeal. By the mid-1950's, one in five of the workforce had been required to sign an oath of moral purity in order to get or retain employment. Communists seemed to threaten military and

political security; queers undermined family values and the frontier vision of the *manly man*. [my emphasis]⁴²

This repressive control or social encoding of the homosexual's "otherness" or inferior status that is stamped on the public mind is evident in the radical technique that Williams invented in portraying the social and familial status of the homosexual man in his two plays: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer. Williams's technique in dealing with the gay issue that is at the heart of the two plays is both affirming and mystifying. Williams dramatizes Brick's understandable reluctance and opposition in facing the issue of homosexual desire directly, while underscoring Brick's inability to eradicate the nature of this desire from his deeper consciousness. In contrast, through Sebastian's rebellion in flouting the social codes of conduct, Williams is at once able to show how the statusless, powerless individual is eventually pushed into a disillusioning spiral of despair and self-destructive behavior that is born out of society's disregard, vilification, and inability to recognize the homosexual citizen.

Status by itself is a very male thing, because status gives the male the right and means to control others around him and also gain others' respect. A male's status in a patriarchal society is also measured by the male's ability to hold things together, command others' obedience, and be in charge of material possessions. Thus, status imparts to one a certain uniquely overt maleness in a patriarchal society, and in both Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer this essential maleness of Brick and Sebastian are in question because of their status as homosexual males. Williams introduces the issues of

homosexual status and desire in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof right at the beginning of the play in the "Notes for the Designer" section. Here

Williams instructs:

*The set is the bed-sitting-room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta... the home of the Delta's biggest cotton-planter... It hasn't changed much since it was occupied by the original owners of the place, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, 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... the set is the background for the play that deals with human extremities of emotion, and it needs that softness behind it. [my emphasis]*⁴³

By situating the play's action in the bed-sitting-room of the two gay men who previously owned the plantation, Williams underscores the importance of the homosexual issue that lurks like a ghost behind the play's action. But, by keeping Jack Straw and Peter Ochello outside the immediate action of the play, Williams is also able to show the statuslessness of these two men, who, for reasons of having no power or position in society, are relegated to a life outside of society. In contrast, by setting Brick's life with Maggie in this bedroom, with the bed that had been shared by the two men sharply in focus, Williams symbolically emphasizes the issue of gay desire that lies in Brick's heart, namely, Brick's unfulfilled, mysterious closeness with Skipper, which Brick is reluctant to examine or accept. It is also an issue that Brick is trying to obliterate through drinking and by behaving in a deliberately indifferent manner toward everyone and everything close to him. On a larger scale, this set represents the social atmosphere where Brick's "otherness" is magnified as the taboo that Brick so desperately

wants to possess or contain, since his "manliness" is dependent on how wilfully he can keep his unmanliness locked away inside him.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams's inability to bring Sebastian into the play, except through others' reference to him and his actions, points to the repression and anxiety that Williams himself felt as a playwright in challenging the audience's tolerance by presenting an openly gay character on stage. Sebastian's mysterious yet ageless demeanor: "Here is my son Sebastian, in a Renaissance pageboy's costume at a masked ball in Cannes. Here is my son, Sebastian, in the same costume at a ball in Venice;" his character: "You would have liked my son, he would have been charmed by you. My son, Sebastian, was not a family snob or a money snob but he was a snob, all right. He was a snob about personal charm in people, he insisted upon good looks, in people around him, and, oh, he had a perfect little court of young and beautiful people around him always, wherever he was" (Suddenly 22); and a little later: "My son, Sebastian was chaste. Not c-h-a-s-e-d! Oh, he was chased in that way of spelling it, too, we had to be very fleet-footed... with his looks and charm, to keep ahead of pursuers (Suddenly 24); his interest in maintaining "*a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning into limbs and scales to skin*" (Suddenly 9); and his occupation: "Sebastian was poet! That's what I meant when I said his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and--vice versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can't separate them..." (Suddenly 12); all these details are impressed upon the audience's mind through the words

of Mrs. Venable, who is now the reconstructor and possessor of the image and social status of her son, Sebastian. Williams reveals the details of Sebastian's life through Mrs. Venable, whose idealization of her son's character and occupation is ostensibly meant to establish and confirm an aura of superiority about Sebastian's status in the audience's mind. Nevertheless, Williams undercuts Mrs. Venable's invention by alluding to a sense of mystery and loneliness that colored Sebastian's life, especially by not showing him on stage. With this technique of oral dramatization of an invisible character, Williams simultaneously creates a sense of comfort and unease in the audience's mind as they are not forced to see a character whom they cannot fathom, yet whose existence among them they cannot dismiss.

Sebastian's possessiveness of status is brilliantly made felt through his mother's, Mrs. Venable's, violent efforts to bury the secret of his life and death by a ruthlessness that gains prominence as the drama of Sebastian's life unfolds through the clashing of Catherine's, Sebastian's cousin's, account of Sebastian's last moments with that of Mrs. Venable's constructed history of Sebastian's life. The audience's complacency is slowly dissolved as Catherine's version becomes more and more believable, and as Mrs. Venable's overwhelming and powerful participation in the play's action culminates with her final offstage command to the psychiatrist: "*Lion's View! State Asylum, cut this hideous story out of her [Catherine's] brain!*" (Suddenly 93) The simultaneity of the revelation of the circumstances that led to Sebastian's death and Mrs. Venable's desperate but ongoing attempt to destroy the veracity of Catherine's account, captures and stuns the

audience's expectations. By substituting Mrs. Venable for Sebastian, and by endowing her with the motivation to bury the secret of her son's life, no matter what the cost, Williams directly hits at the issue of the homosexual man's status or position in society. Mrs. Venable's ruthless desperation at containing the truth about the circumstances surrounding Sebastian's life and death is motivated by her own wish to continue having or possessing something, and in this case it is the idealized, sanitized, and reconstructed status of Sebastian that Mrs. Venable is reluctant to let even her dead son lose.

V Inside the Person of Low Status: Anxiety and Powerlessness

The cultural codification of the gay man as an unmanly and untrustworthy person automatically relegated him to a position of powerlessness and low status in society. This view forced the gay man into becoming extra vigilant at maintaining the status that society was in fact denying him. Because the risk of any public disclosure of his status would inevitably lead to a traumatic and humiliating experience for him, the gay man's effort at vigilance and his efforts in devising ways to deflect the social stigma created in him an acute sense of anxiety and desperation. Williams deals with this aspect of a gay man's anxiety and despair by using codes, symbols, and subtexts in the two plays. Thus, Brick's anxiety about his present status makes him understandably morose and despairing, for his football career on the field has come to a close. With his former glory behind him and his friend Skipper dead, Brick is presented as a man who is not quite sure

of his position or status either inside his family or in the cultural/social space.

Brick's active participation in a sport like football not only validated his future but also invested him with the socially sanctioned "manly" status of the American male. In contrast with his immediate past as a football hero, Brick is now a sports announcer, a spectator relegated to the sidelines. This makes him doubly powerless since he is no longer adored as a football star, the icon of American masculinity, and his sexuality is now in question.⁴⁵ Although his marriage to Maggie had helped in raising his status, his hostile behavior towards Maggie, the gibes and teasing that come from his brother and his wife about his refusal to sleep with Maggie: "Do you know why she's [Maggie's] childless? She's childless because that big beautiful athlete husband of hers won't go to bed with her!" (Cat 113); his parents' concern for Brick's reluctance or inability to produce an heir, which would open up his way to becoming a legitimate owner of the plantation, and hence the next patriarch, all point to Brick's unsure status and powerlessness that cause him anxiety and his parents much concern.

This powerless, statusless condition is suggested metaphorically in the play by showing Brick's hobbling around on a crutch. Brick's powerless condition is also reemphasized by his own confession, which again hints at his deeply disturbed condition: "I'm a restless cripple. I got to stay on my crutch" (Cat 102). While the crutch is symbolic of Brick's inner brokenness, his uneasy resolve, anxiety, and the precariousness of his situation, it can also be seen as a symbolic representation of the hindrances and obstacles that Brick has had to

dodge in the past to manipulate his self-image constantly. Therefore, he is now left with a personhood that is a shadow-self, a construct of social repression, and he is unable to function without a facade that will enable him to present a manly status. Moreover, the crutch's utility in aiding Brick to maneuver around the house also becomes symbolic of the detachment, unconcern, and indifference that Brick has cultivated to deflect his real feelings about Skipper from the scrutiny of others.

More importantly, by using this metaphor of the crutch as a correlative of Brick's inner condition, Williams raises a profound social criticism. Although Brick's injury results from his own actions, his jumping hurdles on the high school athletic field at "three o'clock in the morning," Brick's statement: "Jumping the hurdles, Big Daddy, runnin' and jumpin' the hurdles, but those hurdles have gotten too high for me, now," becomes his coded confession about the pressure that he feels in maintaining his status as a "hero," and the inner desperation that has pushed him into his present maimed condition (Cat 56). Pondered closely, Brick's maimed condition, his hobbling around on a crutch amongst a house full of people who have no visible physical problems (except for Big Daddy, who is suffering from cancer), becomes a larger metaphor of the maimed or stunted condition of all those people in society who, like Brick, are maimed and limited as a result of the social ostracism, repression, and bigotry against the "other."

But Williams did not merely bring in the crutch to evoke our sympathy for Brick. Brick himself bears some responsibility for his maimed condition. Although Brick is brooding with guilt at Skipper's

death for which he feels essentially responsible, Brick's desire to be left alone with his feelings rather than confront them honestly, despite the risk of giving in to others' suspicions about his relationship with Skipper, is an indication of Brick's inability to accept himself for who he is when others are around him. "Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant...." (Cat 25) says Maggie to Brick, but the prospect of facing the truth becomes so traumatic for Brick that he is even willing to face the eventuality of being cut off from his inheritance rather than admit to himself his hidden desire for Skipper or make any realistic effort to help dispel others' doubts about his feelings for Skipper. Moreover, Brick's indifferent and uncaring attitude becomes a convenient tool by which he can protect himself in the event of being disinherited, since his excuse would enable him to rationalize his disinheritance and his lack of interest in his father's property and support. Brick's admitting to the fact of having forgotten Big Daddy's birthday party, his refusal to sign the card for Big Daddy, his permission to Maggie to "jump off the roof," and "take a lover" (Cat 31), all point to the same thing: Brick's inability to deal with problems honestly, openly, or even rationally. Thus, Brick's statement: "I don't want to lean on your shoulder, I want my crutch," (Cat 26) becomes symbolic of Brick's pathetically weak attempt to free himself from the obligations that he had forced upon himself, undoubtedly under the pressures of conforming to the rules of social decorum, and from which he is now trying to declare his independence but is unable to do so wholeheartedly or even with any semblance of dignity. All of Brick's efforts to free himself of being

the person who he has become because of social pressure, and his desire to maintain his status as a real man are weak, dishonest, and ultimately hypocritical as he is unwilling to let go of his good name and association with his family, yet at the same time desiring to lead a life that no one can know about.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams alludes to the Christian myth of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian⁴⁶ by associating the name of the saint and the nature of the martyrdom with that of Sebastian Venable's fate. Williams brings in the symbolism of the Christian myth to highlight the unchanging nature of exploitation of the minority over time. Williams also shows by comparing Sebastian Venable's death with the ancient Christian myth of the martyrdom of the saint, that the purely exploitative use of one human being by another has not changed over time. Calling his play, a "moral fable of our times,"⁴⁷ Williams explains his use of the metaphor of cannibalism in Suddenly Last Summer as his condemnation of what he saw in modern society: "Man devours man in a metaphorical sense. He feeds upon his fellow creatures, without the excuse of animals... I use that metaphor to express my repulsion with this characteristic of man, the way people use each other without conscience."⁴⁸

If we look closely at Williams's use of the symbolism of St. Sebastian's martyrdom and its connection with Sebastian's death, we will notice that Williams is both affirming and denying Sebastian Venable the status of a martyr. While St. Sebastian ostensibly died for an honest cause in defending his Christian faith, he also chose martyrdom because he would not give in to the carnality of the ones who desired him

sexually. In contrast, Sebastian Venable's martyrdom is ambiguous, especially when we consider Catherine's account of Sebastian's last anxious moments of existence. Catherine suggests that Sebastian did not appear to pay heed to her suggestions to flee the scene by cab or take shelter in the cafe. Instead, he insisted on handling the situation himself, and as a result he was pursued and cannibalized.

Sebastian's final action of running up the hill to avoid the urchins issued from the conflict in his mind that was born of a sudden change in his perception of life. Sebastian's original way of looking at life as described by Catherine was: "He!--accepted!--all!--as--how!--things!--are!--And thought nobody had any right to complain and interfere in any way whatsoever, and even though he knew that what was awful was awful, and what was wrong was wrong, and my cousin Sebastian was certainly never sure that anything was wrong!--" (Suddenly 88) Thus, we gather, Sebastian's sexual exploitation of the boys was a self-serving habit that he had cultivated, and for which he eventually paid a great price. But the ambiguity inherent in Sebastian's death issues from Sebastian's momentary abandonment of his usual outlook on life. Catherine recalls that Sebastian commanded the waiters at the cafe to stop the disturbance that the urchins were causing by exclaiming: "'They've got to stop that! Waiter, Make them stop that. I'm not a well man, I have a heart condition, it's making me sick!'" Catherine interprets this interfering action on Sebastian's part as the cause that hastened his self-destruction: "This was the first time that Cousin Sebastian had ever attempted to correct a human situation!--I think that was his fatal error...." (Suddenly 89) In other words, Sebastian's final

action was ironic because he tried to stop what he could not stop. His anxiety as a man with nowhere to go forced him into such a degree of panic and despair that he had no other choice but to allow his final destruction to take place at the hands of the urchins whom he had once exploited. Catherine's description makes this point:

And cousin Sebastian shouted, 'Please shut up, let me handle this situation, will you? I want to handle this thing.' And he started up the steep street with a hand stuck in his jacket where I knew he was having a pain in his chest from his palpitations.... But he walked faster and faster in panic,... The band of naked children pursued us up the steep white street in the sun that was like a great white bone of a giant beast that had caught on fire in the sky!--Sebastian started to run and they all screamed at once and seemed to fly in the air, they outran him so quickly. I screamed. I heard Sebastian scream, he screamed just once before this flock of black plucked little birds that pursued him and overtook him halfway up the white hill (Suddenly 91).

The only clear connection between the two instances of death, one ancient and the other modern, is that both St. Sebastian and Sebastian Venable were minorities who chose to die rather than face further oppression.

VI Ostracism, Despair, Self-Hatred and the Fear of Loss of Status

If Brick and Sebastian, through his mother's, Mrs. Venable's efforts, show a sense of self-absorption and exhibit a sense of wariness at guarding a explosive personal secret, then this sense of acute self-possession issues from a deep despair born of self-hatred, which is coupled with a fear of losing status as males. Brick's discomfort with any reference to his latent gayness and Sebastian's apparent self-revulsion and cultivation of an amoral attitude towards life are caused by their internalization of the social repression and intolerance of the homosexual character that was prevalent in the 1940's and 1950's era. A

socially sponsored ideology of repression of what these two men essentially are, ends up making both Brick and Sebastian unhappy and anti-social in ways that could have been prevented if people allowed goodwill and reason to prevail over their baser instincts for bigotry and intolerance.

Brick's self-hatred and discomfort at facing the truth about himself is so traumatic, that he is reluctant even to let anyone come close to him or even to help him with the process of self-discovery. This emanates from a deep fear that his private knowledge about himself could become public and result in the shameful loss of face and status. Williams describes Brick as someone who is possessed of or *"has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle"* (Cat 17). But Brick's aloofness is cultivated at the expense of his possessing the truth about himself so that he can maintain his status with impunity. Brick exudes an aura of aloofness or "the charm of the defeated," which Maggie complains about but finds hard to break down because Brick will not let her come close to him: "[Y]ou always had that detached quality as if you were playing a game without much concern over whether you won or lost,... you have that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people" (Cat 24). Paradoxically, Brick's need to maintain his status as a sexually functioning normal male had driven him in the past to fake a passion for Maggie which Maggie senses but cannot criticize because of Brick's exceptional performance: "You were... such a wonderful person to go to bed with, and I think mostly because you were really indifferent to it... Never had any anxiety about it, did it

naturally, easily, slowly, with absolute confidence and perfect calm, more like opening a door for a lady or seating her at a table than giving expression to any longing for her. Your indifference made you wonderful at lovemaking--strange?--but true..." (Cat 24-25) Maggie's testament of Brick's past performance with her, Brick's sudden cutting off of his sexual relationship with Maggie, his giving permission to Maggie to find a lover, for which he assures her he will not find her accountable, his indifference to Big Daddy's health, his disinterest in inheriting the property that Big Daddy wants to leave him, all point to Brick's passivity of action, a withdrawal from life, so that he can protect himself from others' discovery of his sexual inadequacy and status as a gay male.

Although Brick's self-loathing is not as intense as Sebastian's, who is subconsciously filled with a death-wish, Brick drinks heavily in order to forget his desires and deny their existence. Thus he tells Big Daddy, who has made an attempt to reach him: "Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out and death's the other..." (Cat 94) However, Brick's sense of his deep hatred of himself is betrayed through his violent outburst when his protective reserve of silence and denial is penetrated. When Maggie brings up the issue of Brick's friendship with Skipper and chastises him for failing to be candid, for being secretive, Brick becomes agitated, defensive, and accusatory:

Margaret: ...It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, and that's what made it so sad, that's what made it so awful, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything or even talked about plainly...

.....

Brick: One man has one great good true thing in his life. One great good thing which is true!--I had friendship with Skipper.-- You are naming it dirty! (Cat 43-44)

Ironically, it is Brick who construes what Maggie is alluding to as "dirty," not Maggie, for Brick is simultaneously paranoid because of the fear of exposure and filled with a seething self-hatred. Therefore, as Maggie boldly presses on with the taboo subject, Brick panics. He is no longer able to distance himself by assuming a "slow vague smile"; instead he becomes angry and then violent. After ordering Maggie to stop by saying: "Maggie, shut up about Skipper. I mean it. Maggie; you got to shut up about Skipper" (Cat 42), an order that Maggie ignores, Brick warns her: "You don't think I'm serious, Maggie? You're fooled by the fact that I am saying this quiet? Look, Maggie. What you're doing is a dangerous thing to do. You're--you-re--you're--foolin' with something that--nobody ought to fool with" (Cat 42), but Maggie lays it bare. Brick loses his cool and control and acts out violently against Maggie by swinging his crutch at her. Instead, the crutch "*shatters the gemlike lamp on the table*" (Cat 45). He strikes at her again, but "*misses*" her. He makes another attempt, as he "*hops awkwardly and strikes at her,*" but is unable to hit his target. His frustration and anger in being unable to stop Maggie from talking about Skipper or hit her are epitomized by his final action as he "*hurls the crutch at her, across the bed she took refuge behind, and pitches forward on the floor*" as Maggie finishes her speech. But Maggie gets her shot at him by ridiculing his manliness. As the child, who has entered the room, tries to help Brick get up on his feet by giving him his crutch, Maggie remarks: "Yes, give your uncle his crutch, he's a cripple, honey..." (Cat 46).

The twin issues of Brick's self-hatred, indirectly expressed through his revoltingly homophobic vituperation of the relationship between Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, and his intense fear of his loss of status are best exhibited in the play when Big Daddy confronts him with the issue of his friendship with Skipper. Big Daddy's "tentative comparison between Peter Ochello's love for Jack Straw and Brick's for Skipper," not only infuriates Brick, but his "transformation is volcanic,"⁴⁹ as he screams at Big Daddy: "YOU THINK SO, TOO!... You think me an' Skipper did, did, did!--sodomy!--together?... You think we did dirty things between us, Skipper an'... Me, is that what you think of Skipper, is that--... You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men?... ducking sissies? Queers?" (Cat 87-88) Although Brick does not hit Big Daddy with his crutch, as he had tried to hit Maggie when Maggie brought up the taboo subject, nevertheless, his violent and angry denunciation of homosexuality leaves one wondering about Brick's real motive behind such a verbally abusive and violent outburst. His cruel behavior against Big Daddy, and his unnecessary denunciation of Peter and Jack, who at least were comfortable and honest in their love for each other, despite their low status, despite what others thought of them, lowers our estimation of Brick considerably because Brick's hypocrisy becomes apparent.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Sebastian's sense of despair and self-loathing are best described through Williams's own words. Williams considered people like Sebastian as "autonomous," which he explained as people who "are incapable of relating to other people. They do on the surface, but there's no inner commitment to another person, or other

people, or to society."⁵⁰ In light of this statement, I believe, Sebastian cultivated his "autonomous" nature, his private self, as revealed through his predatory habits, and kept it separate from his public self, which is represented by his stance as a poet and an aesthete. And even this stance of Sebastian was somewhat hidden as, it was "unknown outside of a small coterie of friends" (Suddenly 11). Sebastian's private self or his homosexuality, which he only carefully acted upon during his trips abroad, in the companionship of his mother and later his cousin, Catherine, was an issue which he could not address publicly for the loss of his status. And the ambiguity, the duality of Sebastian's position or nature is heightened all the more because he is a ghost character. All we see of him is through his mother, who is reluctant to let the whole truth of Sebastian's life come to light.

Yet, despite this separation of the public and private self in Sebastian, which obviously makes clear to one the question of guarding or being possessive of one's status, the question we need to ponder is, why does Sebastian's attitude towards himself seem so compromising, so weak? Why does Mrs. Venable try so hard to suppress the truth in regard to the circumstances leading to Sebastian's death? I believe Williams wanted us to ponder the source of Sebastian's behavior more seriously. Williams could not have been unaware of the consequences of creating a character such as Sebastian and presenting him to an audience at a time when the "witch-hunts" were in full swing in America. By creating such a character as Sebastian, Williams perhaps also wanted to make his audience conscious of the social oppression that could spin the lives of people like Sebastian's askew. And since Williams himself categorized

this play as a "moral fable," I feel I need to look at the source of Sebastian's problem more than at his actions.

Sebastian's development as an "autonomous" character is a result of his mother's over-protectiveness. It is a characteristic that destroys one's ability to make independent judgments. As Catherine tells the doctor: "I think it started the day he was born in this house" (Suddenly 72). Sebastian is also an artist/aesthete, and therefore, an outsider, whose status is precarious, for he does not fit the cultural category of the manly type. Sebastian's autonomous behavior/nature thus became a tool which shielded him from making an emotional commitment and enabled him to have the sexual pleasure without binding him. Moreover his dissatisfaction with his artistic career, on which he could not fully concentrate, his inability to have a fulfilling love life, further distracted him from forming goals. All this influence served to "completely enslave his baser nature,"⁵¹ and heighten his urge into becoming possessive of evanescent pleasures. His decadent self, that may have originally been cultivated for his urge to defy conventions, coupled with his inability to concentrate on his work and function in society, pushed him into a hopelessly despairing situation in which he finally drowned.

Sebastian Venable chose death to living the life of a conventional lie. He chose to die at the hands of the ones he'd once used, partly out of his own sense of disgust at himself and partly because he was unhappy living a life which did not offer him the scope to dampen his predatory habits. His sacrificing of himself to the ones he had exploited, to a certain extent, dismantles the scourge of his predatory past. Yet, if we

ponder about the nature of his death, we are bound to realize that his death occurred because he literally ran out of options of protecting himself, or even trying to protect himself, thereby letting himself become a victim of the urchins he had once sexually exploited in disregard and defiance of social conventions.

After Oscar Wilde was released from Reading Prison in 1897, he used the name Sebastian Melmoth as an alias in his exile on the European continent. The origin of the name was the "mysterious, satanic hero" of the novel Melmoth the Wanderer written by a grand uncle of Wilde's, the Reverend Charles Maturin.⁵² Since Sebastian Venable is a practitioner of the Wildean aestheticism mixing religion and homoeroticism, it is plausible that Williams intended an allusion to the late tragic Wilde when he wrote Suddenly Last Summer.

Although Williams calls Sebastian "a little more decadent than the others [Val, Shannon, Blanche, Alma...],"⁵³ I feel that Sebastian becomes a predator and is eventually destroyed as a prey for reasons that are primarily social. His predatory habits can be seen as an outgrowth of his internalization of the repression born of societal disregard and stigma of the homosexual's nature and its object of desire. If Sebastian's predatory actions are an unhealthy offshoot of a cumulative act of possessiveness and self-exploitation, it is primarily because he has been denied any chance to live a healthy existence. This absence of any avenue for the cultivation of a love relationship or bonding, helped transform his desire into a form of predatory utilitarianism that finally became so despairing and grasping an urge

that it swallowed him up by turning him into a victim of his own desires and habits.

Although Brick and Sebastian are partly able to sustain their self-protective stance and status as men, nevertheless, one cannot help but feel, by the time one reaches the plays' conclusions, that the price they had to pay for being what society wanted them to be was excessive. The anxiety and psychic dilemma at being unable to be sexually free as men whose sexuality is contrary to social norms, imbued in them a despair that became terminal and brutal. Brick's and Sebastian's situations are comparable to the despair that Chekhov's hero, Ivanov, exhibits in the play Ivanov. Ivanov, Chekhov's hero, who is in his thirties, has lost his interest in life. His tragedy becomes all the more poignant because despite all his efforts to articulate his pain, he cannot give us adequate reasons for his state of despair. He honestly cannot find any. We hear from him his confession about his condition of despair and depression throughout the play: "[M]y mind is a mess; there's a lethargy in my soul. I don't understand other people, I don't understand myself"⁵⁴(Ivanov 58). "... I'm exhausted in my body and soul. My conscience bothers me day and night, but I can't figure out exactly what I have done wrong... I cannot stand my own contempt for myself. I'm intelligent, I'm in the prime of my life, and I could die of shame when I realize that I'm turning into some kind of a Hamlet, a completely superfluous man. It fills me with shame!" (Ivanov 77) " And by the time we come to Ivanov's great monologue in Act III, that begins: "I'm a monster. And I am good for nothing... God, how I hate myself with a passion. I hate the sound of my voice, my footsteps, my hands, these

clothes, the things I keep thinking..." (Ivanov 89), we can almost feel his despair and understand why Ivanov is unable to show compassion for his dying wife. It is this same quality of despair, although born of different reasons and circumstances, which made Brick unable to show compassion for Big Daddy: "I'm sorry Big Daddy. My head don't work any more and it's hard for me to understand how anybody could care if he lived or died or was dying or cared about anything but whether or not there was liquor left in the bottle and so I said what I said without thinking. In some ways I'm no better than the others, in some ways worse because I'm less alive" (Cat 94.) And it is this quality of despair, but of a more self-despising variety, that made Sebastian unable to feel for himself or show compassion and love for others, and his method of operation turned utilitarian and passionless. We learn this from Catherine, as she explains to the psychiatrist the nature of love and hate that she saw in operation while she was with Sebastian: "Yes, we all use each other and that's what we think of as love, and not being able to use each other is what's--hate...." (Suddenly 63)

Thus, all these three men are driven mad by their own despair, in their own unique ways, but the common ground among them is that there is nothing left for them in life to which they can respond, by which they can be moved, or in which they can find happiness. Yet, the important difference between Ivanov's despair and between that of Brick and Sebastian is that while Ivanov's despair is the result of a clinical depression, which is heightened by his own sense of despair at having failed in his life's work, Brick's and Sebastian's despair are primarily social in their origins. Their despair originates from their having no

option of living a free and open life as gay men. Brick's and Sebastian's situation is best summed up in Williams's own words about the effect of social repression on the individual: "Society rapes the individual."⁵⁵

VIII Personal Responsibility and Truth

Brick Pollitt is perhaps the most problematic character to fit into the category of the possessive individualist. I feel I need to address this issue because of the stage directions that Williams slips in midway in Act II. Just before Brick's act of cruelty against Big Daddy, Williams instructs:

Brick's 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're discussing, timidly and painfully on the side of Big Daddy, violently on Brick's side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them. 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. Or maybe it is only a single manifestation of it, not even the most important (Cat 85).

From this clarification of Brick, it can be argued that Williams perhaps intended to create a character that must not be conclusively understood, but rather the impetus for unending questions in the audience's minds. Yet, if we look closely at the stage directions, we do recognize the major concession that Williams makes about Brick. If Brick and Skipper were about to realize that their lives were to be consummated in a total union with each other, then they would lose "face in the world they lived in." Therefore, Brick's motivation for his possessiveness of status is a valid issue in this play. And ironically enough, the way

Brick faces up to the sexual dimension of his love for Skipper is by doing everything in his power to lose face anyway, to take all the loss that would have come if he and Skipper had become lovers. Thus, Brick becomes possessive about the truth and is willing to take all the social consequences of truth, just as long as he can avoid the truth itself.

For Brick, the consequences of confronting the truth are enormous. He would then have to accept the truth about the fact that his own mendacity in not acknowledging the truth about his real feelings about Skipper caused him to hang up the phone on Skipper which in turn caused his death. And this is the reason why he gets so upset at Big Daddy's accusation, which is in fact the truth: "You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself. You!--dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!--before you'd face the truth with him!" (Cat 92) It is also for concealing the truth about himself that when Brick "let slip" to Big Daddy that he had cancer, Brick did it in a mendacious way, since he did it in a way that concealed his desire to hurt Big Daddy and that allowed him to "pass the buck" from intent to mistake. In doing this he created some dramatic irony, pointing to his own mendacious bent, just as Big Daddy suggests. On another level, we can reconstruct from Big Daddy's statement that Brick's anger at Maggie at the end of the first act may have been triggered because she too, like Big Daddy, upset the delicate balance by digging for the hidden truth. If Brick's attraction for Skipper was the truth, and Brick owned up to his attraction to Skipper, then that also would interfere with his performance with Margaret. Furthermore, Brick's anger at Big Daddy and Margaret could also be an outcome of his realization, but now all too

late, that he could have been truly happy with Skipper on Skipper's own terms. And now that he has no chance of realizing that happiness, it makes him all the more regretful for his lack of courage to face the truth. But whatever the source of Brick's anger and mendacious behavior, it all points to his problem with accepting the consequences of the status of a homosexual, and these consequences Brick does not want to face.

In Sebastian's case, if his inability to accept his status led him to rebel against social norms in an extreme way, then his action was born of a conscious decision and for which he does bear some responsibility. But to cover this up, Sebastian devised his own way of justifying or rationalizing his selfish actions as a predator. When Mrs. Venable explains to the psychiatrist that Sebastian, who on his "solitary safari" (Suddenly 18) happened to come across the spectacle of the flesh-eating birds preying upon the newly hatched turtles and intuited that he had seen the ugly face of God, she is in fact arguing, although unconsciously, that Sebastian's subsequent actions in life were a result of this discovery or insight into this ugly face of God. Thus, Mrs. Venable's intent here is to discredit the veracity of Catherine's stories by presenting Sebastian as the spiritual sage, the seer, whose intuitive insight into the facts of life is a justifying factor of his actions. Venable desires to establish the truth that Sebastian's chance discovery of the cruel face of God underwrote his actions, for which he cannot be held responsible. But this argument is roundly defeated by the objective view of the psychiatrist, who is in fact brought into the play as the objective voice to preside over the two versions of the truth

about Sebastian's life, one from Venable and the other from Catherine. His interpretation of Venable's argument is that Sebastian chose to see what he wanted to see so that his predatory actions would appear less inhuman to him. And although the psychiatrist accepts Mrs. Venable's account of the story, he also explains to her the incredulity of her interpretation:

I can see how he *might* be, I think he *would* be disturbed if he thought he'd seen God's image, an equation of God, in that spectacle you watched in the Encantadas: creatures of the air hovering over and swooping down to devour creatures of the sea that had had the bad luck to be hatched on the land and weren't able to scramble back into the sea fast enough to escape the massacre you witnessed, yes, I can see how such a spectacle could be equated with a good deal of-- *experience, existence!*--but not with *God! can you!*" (Suddenly 19)

And to this objective evaluation of the circumstances, Mrs. Venable cannot give an equivocating reply.

Thus, Williams does hold both Brick and Sebastian accountable for their lack of moral courage to face the truth about themselves, as they find ways to obfuscate the truth by either hitting back at others or turning violently opposed or by justifying their possessiveness of status by forcing their own interpretations about the process of life so as to avoid making a commitment to live honestly. Both characters are ultimately guilty of a form of violence: the destruction of truth through lies. In these two plays, Williams draws our attention to the fact that people find it very difficult to act on what they know. This is because an individual's action arising out of self-knowledge demands a commitment that makes the individual's position fraught with dangers. And in both Brick's and Sebastian's cases, the danger is their loss of

status, sense of security, and integrity that they have managed to hold onto by possessing the truth about themselves. In the end, because of these characters' fear of losing their status in case of the disclosure of the truth about their gayness, their possessiveness of the truth about themselves ultimately ends with Sebastian's self-destruction, and in Brick's case the issue remains even more deeply linked with his having to wrestle with a false, hypocritical, and unhappy existence. Kenneth Tynan astutely remarked that: "the behavior of a human being at the end of his tether is the common denominator of all drama. When a man (or woman) arrives at self-knowledge through desperation, he (or she) has become the raw material for a great play."⁵⁶ In these two plays, although both Sebastian and Brick arrive at the end of their tether, they fail to move us because they are too concerned with maintaining the status that society will not allow them to have. They fail to act in proportion to what they know about themselves and their struggles end with no resolution of their pain.

NOTES

1. Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland, The Science of Desire: The Search for the Gay Gene and the Biology of Behavior (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 13. In this highly readable book, Dean Hamer explains and tackles the controversial but promising scientific research into the human genetic behavior, sexuality in particular. Equipped with a background in human genetics, Hamer taps into the methods and results of the U.S. government's fifteen-year, \$3 billion research of the Human Genome Project, whose goal is to "precisely map all three billion base pairs, or bits of information, that make up the human genome, which is the complete complement of the genetic information in a single person," (36) and applies his own theories and data to present his theory, in light of the growing interest and search for the "gay gene," that our genes are in part involved in the formation of human sexual orientation. Also see, Simon Le Vay, Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). In this book, Le Vay presents a balanced view about the social, political, and scientific implications that we must consider in light of the scientific quest for finding a cause for homosexuality.

2. Gilbert Herdt, introduction, Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994) 26.

3. Francis Mark Mondimore: A Natural History of Homosexuality (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1996). In this book Mondimore talks and analyzes the important studies that contributed or raised people's consciousness about the issues of sexuality, in particular homosexuality. Some names of important studies are as follows: Karl Ulrichs (1825-1895), was the first person who treated the subject of homosexuality in a positive light and talked of it as a normal form of sexuality in a series of monographs that he published "at his own expense and under the pseudonym 'Numa Numantius'" (29). Krafft Ebing vehemently countered Ulrichs and his views in his "enormously influential book on 'sexual deviations,' Psychopathia Sexualis (1886), and "for all its shortcomings, [it] would unfortunately become that basis of 'scientific' thinking about homosexuality for years to come" (39). Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld continued the work of Ulrichs and "edited the first scientific periodical on homosexuality, the Yearbook for Sexual Intermediates, which published the research on homosexuality that Hirschfeld, whose personal motto was *Per scientiam ad justatiam*--'Justice through knowledge,' believed would inevitably lead to changes in the law" (232). Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds contributed to the work, Sexual Inversion (1897), which is a "scholarly, measured, restrained survey of history and literature, some current sociological observations, case studies, and theoretical discussions" on the topic of homosexuality (47). Sigmund Freud's ideas and observations cover every aspect of human behavior on human behavior. "Although Freud regarded much of his thinking and many of his ideas preliminary and speculative, some of those who took up his methods did not" (75). Freud himself did not consider homosexuality as a "mental

problem," and his "descriptions of disturbed homosexuals who came to him for treatment were used by later theorists to bolster their case" against homosexuality (75). In his letter to an American woman who sought his help for her son, Freud's response is evidence of his conception of homosexuality:

I gather from your letter that your son is a homosexual. I am most impressed by the fact that you do not mention this term yourself in your information about him. May I question you why, why do you avoid it? Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest in development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them. (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.) It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime and cruelty too. If you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis (75-76).

On this side of the Atlantic, Alfred Kinsey's study and data of male sexual behavior in The Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948) exploded some of the stereotypes that people had in their minds regarding homosexual behavior, and although Kinsey felt that homosexuality was a result of the cultural and socializing factors on the male, his claim of "10 per cent" of males as being homosexual in the population raised people's consciousness even more about the topic (78-86). With the appearance of Dr. Evelyn Hooker's influential and scientific study of homosexuality, "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual," in the Journal of Projective Techniques (1958), the subject of homosexuality and homosexuals gained a new and respectable ally. Her lifelong study of homosexuality earned her enormous respect among her colleagues in the files of psychology, and Hooker's work would be singular in its influence on the "efforts of those who would eventually have homosexuality removed from the list of mental disorders of the American Psychiatric Association" (89-90).

Also see, Simon Le Vay, The Sexual Brain (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993). In this book, Le Vay recounts his study of the essential differences in the constructions of the brains in heterosexual and homosexual males (the differences in the size of the hypothalamus) and links a part of the homosexual behavior to the sexual signals emanating from the "smaller hypothalamus" in the "gay brain" 120-121.

4. Robert Wright, The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 236-262. In these pages, Wright arrives at the conclusion, from analyzing anthropological data of human societies and the modern genetic inclinations, that humans in all societies are inexorably driven to establish a system of hierarchy among their communities, and that males who contribute most to the communities' growth in terms of securing wealth, food, protection, and reproducing heirs, enjoy a higher status or respect than the males of that community who are somewhat reluctant or incapable of administering to the material and reproductive needs of that society.

5. David F. Greenberg: The Construction of Homosexuality (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 25-26. Greenberg classified four major types of homosexual relations that were socially sanctioned in the various cultures across the world. The first, he called "transgenerational homosexuality," where the relationship existed between an older and a more assertive man and a younger male partner (prevalent among the Coerunas Indians of Brazil and in New Guinea and parts of island Melanesia); the second, described as "transgenderal homosexuality," involved the assuming of a gender-role that was normally not associated with the man's biological sex, in this case the female role was assumed by one man in the relationship, (prevalent among the American Indians of North America, and the partner assuming the female role was described by the French word "berdache,"); the third, described as an "egalitarian relationship," where both partners in the relationship had an equal status or treated each other as social equals, (prevalent among the East Bay community of the Melanesian islands); and the last category is "a class-distinguished homosexuality," where the dominant sexuality of the culture was heterosexual but where heterosexual men often engaged in intercourse with sexual partners who came from a lower class or caste of people, (prevalent in China and India) 25-93.

6. See Mondimore. He clarifies the two approaches sociologists have taken in studying homosexuality: the "constructionist" view and the "essentialist" view. In the "constructionist" view, "no particular type of sexual behavior is any more natural or unnatural than any other. Thus, many different forms of male-male, female-female, and male-female sexuality have been observed over time and across cultures because each culture *constructs* its form of sexuality. According to this view, sexual roles and behaviors arise out of a culture's religious, moral and ethical beliefs, its legal traditions, politics, aesthetics, whatever scientific or traditional views of biology and psychology it may have, even factors like geography and climate. The constructionist view holds that sexual roles vary from one civilization to another because there are no innately predetermined scripts for human sexuality" 19. The "essentialists" contrast with the "constructionist" view in that the essentialists "propose that there is an innate quality in individuals, stable and unchanging over their lifetime, which drives their erotic life irresistibly toward the opposite or toward their own sex (and only rarely toward both)-- whatever the cultural milieu. The essentialists argue that cultural factors may shape the expression of this personal essence but they do not *construct* it. 'Essentialists' take the simultaneous existence of same-sex and opposite-sex eroticism across time and cultures as evidence for an essential human quality we have come to call sexual orientation" 20.

7. Greenberg 93.

8. Greenberg 92.

9. Bruce L. Mills, "The Construction of Homosexuality in the Christian Tradition and its Influence on the Meaning of AIDS: A Psychological Study," diss., The University of Ottawa, Canada, 1990, 96.

10. Marvin M. Ellison, "Homosexuality and Protestantism," Homosexuality and World Religions, ed. Arlene Swindler (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1993) 153.

11. Ellison 153.

12. Lyle Leverich, Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995) 237, 151, 169.

13. Catherine M. Arnott, Tennessee Williams on File (London: Methuen, 1985) Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was adapted from the short story, "Three Players of a Summer Game," and produced in New York on March 24, 1955 (40). Suddenly Last Summer was produced in New York on January 7, 1958 with companion piece Something Unspoken as Garden District (44).

14. Leverich 543.

15. Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1975) Williams recounts his sexual attraction for his college roommate "Smitty," whose eager feelings Williams was unable to reciprocate as he felt too afraid and self-conscious (29-33). A few pages later, Williams recounts his early experiences with homosexual desire for a theater student at the University of Iowa, during the time he was enrolled in E. C. Mabie's playwriting class. He recounts his realization of being homosexual in the following lines: "That single summer at Iowa, I was still lonely, and I took to wandering aimlessly about the streets at night to escape the stifling heat of my room... I was lonely and frightened, I didn't know the next step. I was finally fully persuaded that I was 'queer,' but had no idea of what to do about it" (42-49).

16. John M. Clum, "Something Cloudy, Something Clear: Homophobic discourse in Tennessee Williams," Studies in Homosexuality: Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies, Vol. VIII. (1992): 43-61. In this article, Clum summarizes some of the charges that critics have leveled both against and in support of Williams's dealings with homosexuality and homosexual issues in his writings.

17. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 293. See also Neil Miller, Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 258-75, for a detailed account of the McCarthy years and its effect on gay and lesbian life.

18. Leverich 410. Here are some instances of Williams's discomfort and anxiety about his homosexuality from Leverich's biography of Williams. Williams's recollection of his discovery of physical desire for other boys when he was a boy himself is captured in this confused and sad statement: "How on earth did I explain to myself, at that time the fascination of his [Richard Miles] physical being without at the same time, confessing to myself that I was a little monster of sensuality? Or was that before I began to associate the sensual with the impure, an error that tortured me during and after pubescence, or did I, and this seems most likely now, say

to myself, Yes. Tom you're a monster!" 63. Years later, when Williams talked of his "blue devils," he frequently referred to his problems arising out of his fear of being a homosexual and the pain and sadness of having to somehow function in a straight world: "If only I could realize I am not 2 persons. I am only one. There is no sense in this division. An enemy inside myself" 169. In his journal, Williams often referred to his problems with homosexuality as a "sexual neurosis [that] continues to occupy the center of my emotional stage... I must meet it and be the master, it challenges the manhood in me" 455.

19. Dotson Rader, "The Art of Theater V: Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 344.

20. Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 355.

21. Clum 47.

22. Clum 44.

23. Clum 44.

24. Mills 96.

25. Ellison 153.

26. Emmanuel. Reynaud: Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity, trans. R. Schwartz (London, UK: Pluto P, 1981) 53.

27. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990) 3.

28. Foucault 3-4.

29. Foucault 4-5.

30. Foucault 4.

31. Foucault 5.

32. Steven Seidman, "Introduction," Queer/Theory Sociology, ed. Steven Seidman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996) 4.

33. Wright 249.

34. Memoirs 162.

35. Clum 46.

36. Spoto 153, 289.

37. Gore Vidal, introduction, Tennessee Williams: Collected Stories (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) xxiv. In describing Williams's interest in the outsiders, Gore makes a revealing point about the social categorization of the two classes of people, gay and straight, and feels that Williams was influenced by this categorization. Making the assertion that "there is no such thing as a homosexual or heterosexual person," but that there "are homo- or heterosexual acts," Gore explains:

Unhappily it has suited the designers of the moral life of the American republic to pretend that there are indeed two teams, one evil and sick and dangerous, and one good and normal and --that word!-- straight. This is further complicated by our society's enduring hatred of women, a legacy from the Old Testament, enriched in due course, by St. Paul. As a result, it is an article of faith among simple folk that any man who performs a sexual act with another man is behaving just like a woman--the fallen Eve--and so he is doubly evil. Tennessee was of a time and place and class (lower middle class WASP, southern airs-and-graces division) that believed implicitly in this wacky division.

38. For a detailed discussion of the power of shame and guilt that have contributed to repressing, silencing, and manipulating gay lives and culture, see Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael, Coming Out of Shame: Transforming Gay and Lesbian Lives (New York: Doubleday, 1996) 77-121.

39. Kaufman and Raphael 10.

40. Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). Russo relates that the reason there was no objection to homosexual issue on screen in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's screen version of Tennessee Williams's Suddenly Last Summer (1959) was because "homosexuality" in this instance became the "evil incarnate, the symbol of a sterile decadence that is punishable by death" 108. Russo also relates that the "Breen Office, in a meeting with producer Sam Spiegel and screenwriter Gore [Vidal], cut all direct references to homosexual relations... and The Legion of Decency, after seeing that the necessary cuts were made, gave the film a special classification: 'Since the film illustrates the horrors of such a lifestyle, it can be considered moral in theme even though it deals with sexual perversion'" 116. Finally, Russo quotes the critic Henry Hart, who wrote after seeing the film, Suddenly Last Summer, "exposes clearly the foremost causes of homosexuality and... points to one of the horrible fates that can overtake this particular kind of pervert" 117-118.

41. Alan Sinfield, Cultural Politics--Queer Reading (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 40.

42. Sinfield 40-41.

43. Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: Signet Classic, 1985) xiii. Subsequent references to this edition of the play, abbreviated as Cat, are cited parenthetically in my text.

44. Tennessee Williams, Suddenly, Last Summer, Tennessee Williams: Four Plays (New York: Signet Classic, 1976) 22. Subsequent references to this edition of the play, abbreviated as Suddenly, are cited parenthetically in my text.

45. Alan M. Klein, "Managing Deviance: Hustling, Homophobia, and the Bodybuilding Subculture," Studies in Homosexuality: Sociology of Homosexuality, Vol. XIII. (1992): 159-175. In this article Klein discusses the facade of masculinity the abounds in the male bodybuilding culture in Southern California. This facade or the hypermasculinity of the bodybuilding scene is adopted by homosexuals in order to present a facade of masculinity in American cultural/social space. Klein also refers to the athletic scene and the belief in the masculine status of athletes in American culture that makes athletes' "masculinity beyond doubt," just as pro-football players are viewed as the "gatekeepers of masculinity." When Brick was a football star, his distance from Maggie and his closeness with Skipper were overlooked because he was endowed with a special "male" status as an athlete/football player. But now that his career is over, his aloofness and inability to forget about Skipper's death makes him nervous and anxious of others' suspicious about his masculinity.

46. St Sebastian (A. D. 288 ?) was a Roman martyr who served under emperors Diocletian and Maximian. Diocletian made him commander of the First Cohort or the captain of the pretorian guards, but on learning that Sebastian practiced the Christian faith, Diocletian ordered him to be shot to death with arrows. While nothing specific is know about the episode of Sebastian's being shot with arrows, the fact that the same soldiers under Sebastian's command carried out this gruesome act has somehow led to conjectures that behind the obvious tale of Sebastian's martyrdom lies the story behind the soldiers' actions, which is allegedly attributed to have surfaced because of their unrequited lust for Sebastian's body. For details of the life and account of martyrdom of St. Sebastian see: Jacob de Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, Vol. 1. trans. Williams Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 97-101. Butler's Lives of the Saints, Vol. 1. edited, revised, & supplemented, Herbert Thurston S.J. and Donald Attwater (New York: P. K. Kennedy & Sons, 1956) 128-130.

On another level, the highly unusual form of Sebastian's punishment (being shot with arrows) was an extremely popular theme in the 15th century artistic circles, "supposedly because it gave Renaissance artists opportunities to portray a young and sometimes effeminate male nude in an ecclesiastical context." David Hugh Farmer, Oxford Dictionary of Saints (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 429.

20th century French composer, Claude Debussy, composed the incidental music to Gabriele d'Annunzio's mystery play, Le Martyre de Saint-Sebastien, as "the figure of the holy man-athlete, part Christian saint, part Adonis, reconciling Christian legend with pagan nature worship, had a deep appeal to Debussy." Charles Burr, liner notes, Debussy: The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian, LP, Columbia Masterworks, n.d.

47. Don Ross, "Williams on a Hot Tin Roof," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 52.

48. Cecil Brown, "Interview with Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 274.

49. Brenda Murphy, Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A collaboration in the theatre (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge UP, 1992) 105. In this chapter, Murphy compares the different versions of the play and shows that Williams rewriting of the play according to Kazan's directions not only made the play's issues less volatile, but that the characterization also suffered, especially Maggie and Brick seemed less dramatic and captivating as a result of the revisions in the Broadway version of the play.

50. Charles Ruas, "Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, (1986) 284.

51. Jeanne Fayard, "Meeting with Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 210.

52. Richard Ellman, Oscar Wilde (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) 528, 538, 6.

53. Fayard 210

54. Anton Chekhov, Ivanov: The Plays of Anton Chekhov, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1997). Parenthetical page citations are to this edition of the play.

55. David Frost, "Will God Talk back to a Playwright? Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 146.

56. Kenneth Tynan, Curtains: Selections from Drama, Criticism, and Related Writings (New York: Atheneum, 1961) 258.

CONCLUSION

THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA AND BEYOND POSSESSION

With the composition of The Night of the Iguana, Williams triumphantly capped the first phase of his grand vision of American life. Williams, who in his plays often unmask the violence among people, born of the depravity of the self-aggrandizement and a fever to win unabashedly, takes an altogether different route in this play. Williams summarized his view of American life from which he would temporarily avert his attention by saying: "Somehow we Americans have never stopped fighting... The very pressure we live under, the terrific competitive urge of our society brings out the violence in the individual." But he continued: "We need to be taught how to love. Already we know only too well how to hate."¹ Williams dramatized this positive idea in The Night of the Iguana. In this play, the mature Williams overwhelms us "with the sense of healing and love" and draws us into the "poetry and emotional depth" of "how one gets through the night."²

The Night of the Iguana deals with Williams's major preoccupation both as an artist and as a human being, *the need for human contact*. Williams explains it like this: "[T]he only truly satisfying moments in life are those in which you are in contact, and I don't mean just physical contact, I mean in deep, a deeper contact than physical, with some other human being... it's the only comfort we have, of a lasting kind."³ The Night of the Iguana portrays this aim admirably. I feel, with this play and the creation of "a new figure in the American

Williams was able to show the superiority or "brilliance" of the democratic gestures of reaching out to the other person over the "barbarity" or meanness of possessive and self-aggrandizing actions. In all of the plays that I have considered in this study, most of Williams's characters are driven to possess in order to hold on to life so that they can feel secure both in themselves and around others. All of the characters concentrate on their "personal situation[s]"⁵ and work towards the enhancement of their own situations to the virtual exclusion of others' needs and feelings. Williams had effectively summed up this acquisitive, self-enhancing, self-perpetuating trait of possession in Big Daddy's speech: "[T]he human animal is a beast that dies and if he got money he buys and buys and buys and I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting!"⁶ In The Night of the Iguana, Williams argues against this attitude of owning, buying, and possessing. Instead, he shows the superiority of the human being who is only willing to understand and connect with others. Williams's own views about his aims in The Night of the Iguana are recorded in the following interview:

Interviewer: Some time ago you said that you were hoping to someday write one play that would encompass everything that you've been trying to say. Is *Iguana* that play?

Williams: I was trying to work on it in *Iguana*, yes, at least a kind of summation of what I've derived finally from these mixed feelings and attitudes.

Interviewer: You might say, then, that from your point of view *Iguana* is the most important of your plays.

Williams: For my own personal selfish satisfaction at least. I hope it will reach other people too, but, God knows, not everybody has the same life, or problems that I have and maybe it won't communicate to them. I can only hope that it does.⁷

Williams was known for the use of symbols in his plays. He was often asked about his use of symbols, but he avoided giving any definitive answers.⁸ He could not disguise his love for symbols even when recreating himself through Tom in The Glass Menagerie, who confesses: "I have a poet's weakness for symbols, [and] I am using this character also as a symbol..."⁹ I will make use of Williams's use of symbols in The Night of the Iguana to draw a distinction between possessive and democratic individualism. In this play, the iguana, which represents "a monster," "is literally at the end of its tether under the veranda of Maxine's Costa Verde Hotel, trying 'to go on past the end of its goddam rope,'" says Shannon.¹⁰ But the iguana's condition is also Shannon's, as he too, like the iguana,--"Like you! Like me!"--has turned into a "monster" trying to keep up with the rat-race and find a secure place in the world. From this analogy it would not be unwise to think that the play's setting as the hotel is more than what it seems. Considered closely, the hotel is the representation of the world we live in, populated by the desperate masses who want to win and hold on to material anchors. In The Night of the Iguana's representational world, people like Shannon, Hannah, Maxine, Nonno and others have gathered to spend their time. These people are of two kinds, the ones like Shannon and Hannah, who are like the iguana, at the end of their tethers, and the people like Maxine and the bus load of women, who are caught up in their own situations, oblivious of others' needs and feelings. But only Hannah stands out as unique because she is not the possessive or despairing individual the others have managed to become. Hannah

functions in this world as their liberator because she possesses the strength to reach out, to connect, and to heal.

In an interview with Studs Terkel during the play's premiere in Chicago, Williams himself endorsed Hannah and was critical of the critics who missed Hannah's centrality and importance in the play.

TW: What astonished me about some of the reviews... is that they didn't see what I was trying to find through the creation of Hannah. I don't see how a woman as unique and as lovely as Hannah Jelkes could be ignored...

ST: It's interesting that it's Hannah you see--offhand, we think of the defrocked clergyman, Shannon, as the focal figure, yet, as you say, he's had a prototype in a way in Blanche DuBois at the end of her tether. But the new figure in your world, then, is Hannah, is it not?

TW: She's the new one, yes. And I say, she's still in the process of creation. The first production of a play isn't for me the final one... I would go on working on this play until I had created Hannah completely.¹¹

In Hannah, Williams not only created an individual who exemplifies the ideal individual the American democratic background can produce, but he also captured through Hannah's journey and conduct a unique quality of the American individual, who despite being a product of "a very particular American loneliness--that of the self adrift in its pursuit of the destiny of 'me,' and [who is now] thrown back onto the solitude of its own restless heart,"¹² has not let her personal experience or restlessness impair her ability to commune and connect with others. This is her greatness and newness. This is what Shannon sees in her and lets her know: "I'm going to tell you something about yourself. You are a lady, a real one, and a great one."¹³ Whereas Stanley denies Blanche her humanity in order to destroy her and re-establish his hold on his territory and his progress, Hannah's humanity enables her to reach out to others and make them more human and giving: "I know people torture

each other many times like devils, but sometimes they do see and know each other, you know, and then, if they're decent, they do want to help each other all that they can" (*Iguana* 81).

In the play's symbolic representation of the world, Hannah's presence accentuates all that is trivial and transitory in the American culture--people going about their ways justifying and individuating themselves by extending, appropriating, and colonizing as much as possible. To Maxine's possessiveness of Shannon as revealed in her remark to Hannah: "I want you to lay off him, honey. You're not for Shannon and Shannon isn't for you," Hannah's answer embodies a truthful and realistic assessment of own her situation and condition in life, a condition that she does not desire to revamp with evanescent possessions. And if Hannah's reassurance to Maxine's paranoia does not reassure Maxine completely: "Mrs. Faulk, I'm a New England spinster who is pushing forty" (*Iguana* 78), that is because Hannah does not mean to reassure her, but to tell the truth of where she herself stands in the competitive environment. It is a fact that Maxine will of course never give credit to Hannah for objectifying. Yet Hannah does reveal her non-possessive philosophy to the person who matters to her at this stage, Shannon, who is the person that she is trying to help survive his crisis of despair:

Hannah:... Do you know what I mean by a home? I don't mean a regular home. I mean I don't mean what other people mean when they speak of a home, because I don't regard a home as a... well, as a place, a building... a house... of wood, bricks, stone. I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can... well, nest--rest--live in, emotionally speaking. Does that make sense to you, Mr Shannon?

.....

Shannon: ... When a bird builds a nest, it builds it with an eye for the... relative permanence of the location, and also for purposes of mating and propagating its species.

Hannah: I still say I'm not a bird, Mr Shannon, I'm a human being and when a member of that fantastic species builds a nest in the heart of another, the question of permanence isn't the first or even the last thing that's considered... necessarily?... always? Nonno and I have been continually reminded of the impermanence of things lately... (Iguana 110-11)

Hannah's individuality is not in receiving but in giving, not in repressing but freeing, not in being false but in being truthful. This she does by conducting herself not from a sense of possessiveness but from her faith in the "primacy of individual conviction." She is an ethical individual, who knows "that we each have a responsibility for making as much of a success of our lives as we can, and that responsibility is personal, in the sense that we must each make up our own mind, as a matter of felt personal conviction, about what a successful life for us would be."¹⁴ To her, individual success means being able to liberate people from their deepest dilemmas. When she confides in Shannon: "I respect a person that has had to fight and howl for his decency and his... bit of goodness, much more than I respect the lucky ones that just had theirs handed out to them at birth..." (Iguana 102), she in fact is telling us the essential factor that motivates her in life.

Because Hannah is an ethical individual, she is able to prevent the willing execution of truth. She does not profess what she believes to be false, and she speaks out for what she believes to be true. She is a moral beacon in a fallen world because her truthfulness, humanity, decency, kindness, and intelligence could not be dissolved by the acids of possessiveness. The particular way in which she conducts herself in

particular circumstances argues against the zealously possessive, vindictive, and selfish natures that manifest themselves in the course of the interaction of the other characters in the gamut of Williams's world, who are in conflict with themselves and the people and the circumstances around them. Hannah's principles help to extricate Shannon from his dilemma of being torn between the spiritual and the carnal, a pull that he has been unable to resolve by himself, as he has not found the patience or self-confidence to seek anything to believe in. Hannah's relating to Shannon the truth of her own problems and how she overcame them by exercising endurance, partly shows him the way to salvation. But Hannah's unconditional acceptance of the human condition, her non-judgmental attitude and a willingness to connect, whether it be with an Australian salesman or with Shannon, the defrocked priest, is what finally helps free Shannon of his dilemma. Her emphasis on the communion of the soul, the antidote to possessiveness, is what makes Shannon whole. And by making Shannon realize the truth of his situation, that his role in the church is his way of avoiding his attraction for the life that he really wants, Hannah is able to free Shannon of his spook. This is exemplified by Shannon's freeing of the iguana, the monster, which represented the position that Shannon found himself in at the play's beginning, and from this position he is now partially liberated through Hannah's grace.

In Hannah's communion with Shannon, Williams was able to give us a completed version of the unfinished communions that he had attempted in his earlier works. In Hannah's communion with Shannon one is reminded of Laura's communion with Jim in The Glass Menagerie, where Jim's kiss

liberates Laura, and Laura reciprocates his kindness by presenting him with her precious unicorn as a keepsake. Again, one is reminded of Blanche's momentary relief at having found a soul-mate in Mitch when she expresses, "Sometimes there is a God so quickly!" But we all know how cruelly this communion is aborted by Stanley's exposure of Blanche. One is reminded of the communion that never takes place between Big Daddy and Brick because of Brick's resistance in facing the truth. And one is also taken back to the psychiatrist's acceptance of Catherine's story at the end of Suddenly Last Summer, where he acts out of his understanding of the situation and Catherine's condition and "accepts the girl's [Catherine's] story."¹⁵ Although the communion in these earlier plays is not portrayed as a crucial event, its importance is heightened in retrospect. We now realize that these scenes were in fact a preparation for Williams's portrayal of the crucial communion between Hannah and Shannon in The Night of the Iguana.

Williams pays tribute to Hannah through her grandfather's poem in the play. In the poem Nonno completes, he is talking about the process of life, the hope that is born with every new day, the excitement and energy of youth, the gradual fading, and the eventuality of death and decay and a reiteration of new life. Yet Nonno, in the last section of the poem, ends with a prayer which applies both to himself as well as to Hannah, who will have to continue her journey alone, as Nonno dies in her arms. Nonno's prayer is for courage, for endurance: "O Courage, could you not as well/ Select a second place to dwell,/ Not only in that golden tree/ But in the frightened heart of me?" (Iguana 124) The play too ends with Hannah's prayer for courage and endurance. At this

juncture of Hannah's journey, one is inevitably reminded of Whitman's democratic individualism that I have talked about in chapter one. It enabled Whitman to "grow more in mutual recognition, in democratic acceptance," transcend the "adventures of human connectedness" and cultivate an attitude of "democratic solitude" by acknowledging and realizing the "sheer fact of existence" which inspires in one "a philosophical self-respect."¹⁶ Both Emerson and Whitman, in their effort to "encompass everything..., reduce[d] and eliminate[d] aspects of reality in order to make it loveable." Perhaps, it was these artists' objective to help "discipline [our] sensitivity to suffering by the sense of beauty, to extend our sense of beauty, to make us see, as democratic individuals, more beauty in the human and natural actuality than eyes not trained by democratic life are able to see." Perhaps they dwelt on the heroism and optimism of the democratic possibilities "more thoroughly... because of their democratic commitment."¹⁷ But I feel Williams was more truthful about life in a democracy. Despite the feelings of connectedness and "philosophical self-respect" that imbue a democratic individual, the human predicament of being solitary and forlorn cannot be overcome easily. In a way Hannah is beyond the possessiveness which drives people to become pests to each other. Williams's understanding of life helped him articulate through Hannah's journey the inevitability of suffering.

In Hannah's last lines in the play, "Oh, God, can't we stop now? Finally? Please let us. It's so quiet here, now" (Iguana 127), we find echoes of Shaw's St. Joan. Or during Hannah's communion scene with Shannon we are taken back to the moving reconciliation scene between

Lear and Cordelia. Or in Hannah's endurance we are reminded of the endurance of Wordsworth's "The Leech Gatherers." Shakespeare gives both Lear and Cordelia relief, but Williams does not, even though he said in an interview that Hannah "is alone, but she says that she is prepared to face it."¹⁸ I personally feel that although Hannah is the soaring secular spirit who has come to free Shannon, she is nevertheless firmly planted on the ground and has to pay a huge price for being the individual that she is. Hannah's journey ends with a quest that is never really completed because she arrives at the frontier between what is and is to be, a journey that has grown out of the suffering and endurance so typical of the experience of all true individuals.

Perhaps it is best if we conclude this study by letting Williams have the last word about his philosophy of life and an artist's work:

Then what is good? The obsessive interest in human affairs, plus a certain amount of compassion and moral conviction, that first made the experience of living something that might be translated into pigment or music or bodily movement or poetry or prose or anything that's dynamic and expressive--that's what's good for you if you're at all serious in your aims. William Saroyan wrote a great play on this theme, that purity of heart is the one success worth having. "In the time of your life--live!" That time is short and it doesn't return again.¹⁹

NOTES

1. John Lahr, "Fugitive Mind," The New Yorker, July 18, 1994: 68.
2. Peter Marks, "A Director Who Sees Himself in Many Characters," New York Times 17 Mar. 1996: H8. In this article, Marks write glowingly of director Robert Falls's restaging of Tennessee Williams's The Night of the Iguana at the Roundabout Theater Company. Writing about Falls's directing Marks says: "Mr Falls... seems not just to interpret Williams's work but to imbibe it. He says he has taken on The Night of the Iguana because he thinks it is good theater and because reading it three years ago helped him through the break up of an eight-year relationship." Marks quotes Falls as saying: "The play became almost a bible on the healing process for me. It's about how one gets through the night."
3. Studs Terkel, "Studs Terkel Talks with Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 87.
4. Terkel 82.
5. Terkel 81.
6. Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, (New York: A Signet Book, 1985) 67.
7. Lewis Funke and John E. Booth, "Williams on Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 100.
8. Lewis Funke and John E. Booth 100. When Williams was asked about the significance of the iguana in his play, he replied: "The Iguana? If I start talking about the significance of it, people will say I'm talking in symbols again and people don't like the symbolic quality of my work. I don't think. They think I over depend on symbols."
9. Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York: A Signet Book, 1987) 30.
10. Lahr 69.
11. Terkel 83-4.
12. John Lahr, "Sinatra's Song," The New Yorker 3 Nov. 1997: 89. John Lahr gives us an insightful portrait of Sinatra's career and Americanness. I felt his statement in describing the American individual in this article is precise and applicable to my view of Hannah Jelkes.
13. Tennessee Williams, The Night of The Iguana (New York: A Signet Classic, 1976) 80. Subsequent page references to this edition, abbreviated as Iguana, are cited parenthetically in my text.

14. Ronald Dworkin, Freedom's Law: The Moral Reading Of The American Constitution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996) 250.

15. Charles Ruas, "Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 287.

16. George Kateb, The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992) 240-51, 265-66.

17. Kateb 169.

18. Jeanne Fayard, "Meeting with Tennessee Williams," Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 210.

19. Tennessee Williams, Where I Live: Selected Essays, eds, Christine R. Day and Bob Woods, (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978) 22.

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