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SHAME AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE,  
SUMMER AND SMOKE, THE ROSE TATTOO AND NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

By

Kelsey Duane Tyler

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## ABSTRACT

SHAME AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE,  
SUMMER AND SMOKE, THE ROSE TATTOO AND NIGHT OF THE IGUANA

By

Kelsey Duane Tyler

This study discusses the puritanical/sexual conflict present in several works by Tennessee Williams in terms of the emotion shame. Using a theory of shame developed by a nationally recognized psychologist, this study first looks at the role of shame in Williams' life and how his shame for his sexuality transferred into characters in his dramas. The study then applies the theory and emotion of shame to the character's motivations and actions in A Streetcar Named Desire, Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo and Night of the Iguana.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Williams and the Puritanical/Sexual Conflict**

Tennessee Williams is known as one of America's greatest twentieth century playwrights and his plays are performed all over the world. In addition to the vast wealth of literature and academic activity accorded to Williams the continued success of his professional productions is itself testimony to the timeless nature of Williams' work. Indeed numerous biographies, theses, dissertations, journal articles, books, and an annual academics conference in New Orleans are dedicated to the works and life of Tennessee Williams.

This study contributes to the wealth of academic and professional interest in Tennessee Williams by expanding the literature addressing the conflict between sensual desires and spiritual aspirations. This conflict found in human nature is an important explanation why Williams' writings enjoy such success. The conflict between a puritanical self and the natural sexual desires and human pleasures of the body is the subject of many of Williams' dramas. In his biography of Williams, Lyle Leverich describes Williams as someone ". . . deeply preoccupied



with the dualism of the body and the spirit. . . the inner conflict between the sensual and spiritual. . . ." (310).

Analyzing Williams' work in terms of the puritanical/sexual conflict is illuminating but fails to fully explain the motivations in the characters. To truly understand the characters' actions we need to understand the emotions that motivate actions. For example, when a person is threatened with a dangerous attacker, the flight or fight responses are motivated by fear, not by a conflict within the person.

In The Rose Tattoo, Serafina's choice to lock her daughter's clothes up so that she can not leave the house can be explained only on the surface by saying it is due to the conflict between Serafina's puritanical nature and her sexual desires. This study will look at Serafina's emotions that relate to the conflict, and prove that one emotion motivating Serafina to action is shame.

Likewise, Blanche says in A Streetcar Named Desire she does not want to be seen in broad daylight. This can be explained by saying that she does not want people to see her sexual past; it is as important to understand what Blanche is feeling. Blanche's emotion of shame, and the secondary emotions that follow motivate her action.

My hope is that this study will give both practitioners and theorists a deeper understanding of the puritanical/sexual conflict found in Williams' work by examining it in the context of the emotion shame. It will

be most helpful as a dramaturgical tool for productions of the four plays I have chosen for this study: A Streetcar Named Desire, Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo and Night of the Iguana.

These four plays illustrate the conflict between puritanical values and sexual desires. The protagonists Blanche, Alma, Serafina and the Reverend Shannon are all characters who exhibit the characteristics of shame as it is born of the puritanical/sexual conflict inherent in themselves. I will use examples from other plays by Tennessee Williams when it serves to illuminate further the struggle of shame in the four protagonists and in Williams himself.

The puritanical/sexual conflict has been the subject of many discussions about Williams' work. The conflict has been labeled different things by different people including: corporeal/puritanical, flesh/spirit and body/soul. The choice to use the words puritanical and sexual is predicated on the need to make clear the concept of shame and how it develops and manifests itself in the characters.

Chapter one is divided into four main parts. Part one gives a definition of Shame based on the shame theory of Gershen Kaufman Ph.D. Part two explains the development of shame in individuals, and the development of shame's relation to community, environment, family, peers, and the self. Part three highlights the defenses taken by persons

to prevent against shaming. And finally, part four reveals the physical and emotional manifestations of shame upon exposure.

Chapter two contains biographical information on Williams that can be seen to validate Kaufman's theory of shame development, shame defenses, and exposure of shame. It also notes how events and people in Williams' life influenced the puritanical/sexual conflict in the four selected plays.

Chapter three applies Kaufman's theory of shame development to the conflict between puritanical values and sexual desire in the four protagonists. This chapter also shows how Williams' stage directions, stage settings and symbols strengthen the emotion of shame in the four protagonists.

Chapter four draws attention to how Williams' characters defend against exposure of their sexual desires. It also explains how these defenses agree with Kaufman's defenses against shame.

Chapter five identifies specific moments in the scripts where Williams gives characters physical and emotional manifestations of shame upon exposure to the self and to others.

## CHAPTER I

### **Kaufman's theory of shame**

*Think of all the ways shame can occur: being laughed at, mocked, or ridiculed; suffering the belittling scorn of a parent or the biting mockery of peers; enduring humiliation from a father or mother, an older sister or brother, a bully or even a teacher at school; appearing foolish, clumsy, or stupid; feeling embarrassed, shy, or tormented by self-consciousness; criticizing or blaming yourself for a mistake; retreating from a challenge because going ahead would leave you feeling foolish or expose you to ridicule (Kaufman 1996: 15).*

Dr. Kaufman, a psychologist, psychotherapist, writer and professor of psychology at Michigan State University, is considered a national expert and authority on shame. He has been called ". . . one of the early pioneers in the study of shame," (Kaufman 1996: 13) and has published four books on the phenomenon of shame since 1974. Kaufman believes that shame is one of our most highly misunderstood emotions, and yet one of the most debilitating and powerful (Kaufman 1996: 4).

Although shame is a very natural human emotion that is experienced by everyone in some shape or form during at least one point in their lifetime, coming to terms with a definition has been difficult. Kaufman believes that in defining shame problems arise.

In conferring a *name* to a particular inner event, the linguistic symbol confers a measure of understanding from which conscious control in turn evolves. In all our language, societally we have for the most part never evolved accurate symbolizations for the phenomenological experience of shame (Kaufman 1985: 108).

Without an accurate definition, the experience of shame has been reduced to trying to understand it in terms of other feelings such as embarrassment, shyness, discouragement, inferiority, self-consciousness, and guilt.

*Embarrassment* is shame in front of an audience of some kind, while *shyness* is shame in the presence of strangers or at the thought of approaching a stranger. *Discouragement* is shame about temporary defeat and is not necessarily focused on the self as a whole but can be limited to specific actions, while *inferiority* is shame that is permanent and localized directly within the self. *Self-consciousness* is shame about performance, such as public speaking, athletics, or dancing, while *guilt* is shame about moral transgression. An ethical judgment of immorality must be added to shame in order to produce the distinctive feeling of guilt. . . ." (Kaufman 1996: 41).

Kaufman believes the reason for this hesitancy to define shame is the inherent feelings of inferiority associated with shame. In other words, in our culture, to be ashamed of something is to own up to having a fault, admitting inferiority, therefore producing shame for feeling ashamed. The emotions of embarrassment, shyness, discouragement, inferiority, self-consciousness, and guilt all have the same underlying experience of the exposure of inferiority. This exposure of inferiority is an important element in Kaufman's definition of shame.

## **The Development of Shame**

Kaufman states the development of shame begins with a feeling of difference:

It is virtually impossible to be different, particularly in this culture, and not feel deficient for the difference, because any awareness of difference inevitably translates into a devaluing comparison, first we are devalued by others, and then we devalue ourselves (Kaufman 1996: 6).

In measuring our own self worth, we know no other way to judge than to compare ourselves with what others do. If our differences in comparison fail to measure up to that of our community's, family's, or peer's expectations, the differences turn into deficiencies or inferiorities. Our culture values strength and power, therefore deficiencies in these become traits that can not be shown and become hidden within ourselves because we deem them as shameful. When these traits become hidden they will forever be in danger of being exposed and producing the emotion of shame.

The course of development, according to Kaufman, begins with the building of what he calls "scenes and scripts." Logically to most theatre practitioners, scripts are built of scenes. An enjoyment scene for example, involves attaching the emotion of enjoyment with an object such as the beach. Experiencing enjoyment while playing at the beach is likely to motivate action in the form of future visits. The attachment of an emotion to an object such as enjoyment with the beach is an example of a scene.

An emotional script is made up of similar types of scenes that produce the same emotion with the same object. For example, if you go to the beach often, and every time you equate enjoyment with going to the beach, you will eventually develop a script of enjoyment associated with the beach. Scripts, therefore, become more solidified as part of a person's individual character. As a result these scripts tend to motivate action. For example if you have an enjoyment script associated with the beach, your actions to go to the beach are motivated by this emotion.

Kaufman gives this example of how a shame script can develop within a person:

Imagine a situation in which a child awakens from a nightmare and cries out in fright. Mother rushes in, asking what is wrong. The child screams, "I'm scared, I'm scared! There's a monster!" Mother abruptly silences the child's screams with, "Now stop that. Don't be silly. Big boys don't get scared of silly things like dreams." The effect upon the lad is that he has been shamed for being afraid. Perhaps this same boy, running away from a bully at school, is told by his Dad, "Don't be a coward! Real Boys aren't afraid to fight." If this boy has sufficient experiences in which his scared or frightened feelings are met with shaming, he will learn that there is something wrong with him whenever he feels afraid. Feeling afraid has become shameful, bad. Situations which trigger fear will now also trigger shame (Kaufman 1985: 40-41).

In this example, Kaufman shows how the boy developed a scene where he was made to feel ashamed about expressing fear. Several more scenes throughout his life when he is told that it is not O.K. for boys to be afraid create his shame script.

## **Defenses Against Shame**

The power and intensity of shame as a negative emotion is substantial according to Kaufman. "Shame is deeply rooted in self esteem, identity, and intimacy, which are vitally important to each of us, and shame is the most disturbing of human emotions. Because shame is so acutely disturbing, we quickly try to escape the feeling, mask it from view, or even deny its existence" (Kaufman 1996: 7). Therefore Kaufman explains how people develop defenses against exposure. These defenses include rage, contempt, striving for perfection, striving for power, the transfer of blame, internal withdrawal, humor, and denial (Kaufman 1985: 71-88).

Rage is directed at anybody who threatens to expose, or exposes the shameful trait in a person. Rage becomes successful in that it pushes the threatening force from the self. "When the intensity of shame reaches the highest levels, rage is triggered. Rage serves a vital self-protective function; it shields the exposed self. At certain times, rage actively keeps everyone away, covering the self" (Kaufman 1996: 40).

Contempt is a tool used to make the self appear superior to others that may judge the trait a person feels shameful about. If a person places themselves above the shameful trait they are in effect immune to it. The shameful trait becomes associated only with the people who



are inferior, or that the person feels contempt for. This can also be thought of as a blend of conceit, arrogance, and excessive pride.

By using the defense Kaufman labels "striving for perfection" a person can in effect erase any part of themselves that does not measure up as good enough. Striving for perfection therefore becomes preventative so as to make a person impervious to flaws and shameful characteristics.

By striving for power a person gains control of situations or people that may threaten exposure. By striving for power a person can control what people are thinking about. This deflects the possibility of exposure away from themselves.

The transfer of blame is in essence pointing the finger at someone else for a deed or aspect that a person finds inferior in themselves. Therefore the fault, or the inferiority, is not the person's own. The inferiority in turn belongs to someone else and the person does not need to own the inferiority.

The defense of internal withdrawal takes the form of a person hiding or isolating themselves, by removing themselves from the forces that threaten exposure, or produce shame. "The principal effects of shame on the self are *hiding*, *paralysis*, and a feeling of being *transparent*. The urge to hide and disappear from view immediately follows shame because we desperately want to reduce that

agonizing scrutiny" (Kaufman 1996: 38). Any act that distances a person from others can be included in the defense of internal withdrawal. For example substance abuse is a defense of internal withdrawal in that the person is distancing themselves from the same mind frame as others around them.

Humor may best be explained in terms of humility in that it makes light of the situation. To use humor as a defense is to find a communal bond with the source of shame. In other words showing how human weakness is within us all.

Denial is basically ignoring that the shameful or inferior trait exists or that an act that may be judged never happened. Failure to recognize the inferior trait helps to escape ownership of it even when people have exposed it as truth.

### **Shame and Exposure**

The most dangerous aspect of shame is the threat of exposure, the realization to ourselves or to others that we have something within ourselves that is inferior. After the feeling of shame is experienced both physical and emotional manifestations of shame occur.

Kaufman states that there are two main types of exposure: exposure to the self and exposure to others (Kaufman 1996: 17). Exposure to others is possibly the most terrifying; however, exposure to the self can happen

at any time causing a person always to be defending against exposure to others. The nature of exposure to others is in itself an exposure to the self. Likewise, in order to exhibit defenses against exposure to others or to the self, the inferior trait must be acknowledged. In other words, if the trait is not exposed to the self, then there is nothing to defend against. This is what Kaufman calls the internalization of shame:

Internalization of shame means that the affect of shame is no longer merely one affect or feeling among many which become activated at various times and then pass on. Rather, internalized shame is experienced as a deep abiding sense of being defective, never quite good enough as a person. . .For example, feelings of inadequacy, rejection or self-doubt, feeling guilt-ridden or unlovable as a person, and pervasive loneliness are all conscious or semiconscious expressions of internalized shame. (Kaufman 1985: 66).

The physical manifestations of shame are tightly linked to the concept of exposure and the fear of and the intensity of the experience of shame. They include keeping the head lowered or "hanging your head in shame," keeping the face and eyes covered or hidden and blushing.

These physical traits are linked to the very nature of exposure inherent in shame. To experience the emotion of shame is to have the inferior aspect of you seen, therefore sight becomes linked with exposure. Kaufman states, "Because we feel painfully revealed in the moment of shame, it feels as if others can see inside of us and know our innermost being, our secret flaws. Shame therefore leaves us perpetually feeling like impostors, waiting to be found

out and unmasked" (Kaufman 1996: 38-9). Exposure heightens the effect of being seen and so we seek to make people not able to see us. This fear of "being seen" or "being unmasked" supports the physical manifestation of hiding the eyes and defending against eye contact.

The hiding of the face and the lowering of the head are also physical defenses adopted so as not to be seen. "Shame instantly calls attention to our face, heightening both self-awareness and visibility to others. That is why we immediately become so aware of our face in the moment of shame. We are unexpectedly visible when we wish most to disappear from sight" (Kaufman 1996: 18).

Kaufman states that the three most common emotional responses to shame are fear, rage and distress (Kaufman 1996: 39).

Fear is a secondary response to shame because exposure is so debilitating there is fear of further exposure. Often fear takes the form of anxiety or anticipation of further shame or additional encounters with shame.

What Kaufman means by distress as a secondary reaction to shame, is suffering from the painful effects of exposure of the inferiority. This secondary reaction reflects the painful intensity of exposure, and is often recognizable through cries of distress, or crying itself.

The third secondary response of rage can be easily confused with the defense of rage. The difference is that the defense of rage is to prevent exposure. The secondary

response of rage is after exposure has happened, but serves almost the same purpose, which is to push the source of shame away from the self. In the defense of shame it is to push potential shaming forces away from the self.

The next chapter will show how Kaufman's theory of shame applies to the life of Williams. It will describe the societal and familial influences on Tennessee's development of shame for his sexuality, point to defenses against exposure and manifestations of exposure throughout his lifetime, and give examples of how these aspects of his life influenced his dramatic writing.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Shame and Tennessee Williams**

In our culture the comparison of homosexuality with heterosexuality leads to a devaluing of homosexuality as "different," and thus inferior. Shame becomes inextricably linked to homosexuality. "The failure to openly recognize and value different patterns of intimate relations unavoidably communicates that these different forms of love are deficient and unworthy, hopelessly flawed, inherently shameful" (Kaufman 1996: 95). Homosexuality, when compared with the normative heterosexual culture, becomes an inferior characteristic and something to be ashamed about. During the first half of this century the focus on conforming to normality, Christian values, and the heterosexual nuclear family unit served to increase the inferiority of homosexuality and the world of theatre that Williams was rapidly becoming a part of, reflected the society at large. This inferiority created an unavoidable shame of homosexuality for Tennessee Williams.

Prior to the civil liberty movements of the 1960s was a time of conformity, and the plays of this period conformed to the popular morality found in the institutions of family and marriage. Commercial theatre reflected the

Christian ethic and the representation of homosexuality was forbidden by law. Senator McCarthy, ironically as a closeted gay man, can be seen as a link between what was happening in the world to what was happening on stage. Senator McCarthy considered homosexuals, due in part to their invisibility, as potential spies and traitors. Homosexuals were equated with Communists at a time when Communism was considered the biggest threat to American values (Savran 84-85).

In plays of this time homosexuality could only be represented by a series of coded behaviors such as a "very well dressed", "slender", "sensitive" man since any direct reference to homosexuality would have been immediately banned on legal and moral grounds. To signify a gay male on-stage the actors, directors, designers, and other collaborators on a production would attribute significant traits of effeminacy, or traits opposite of masculinity. Since homosexuality at this time was equated with evil, the characters defined by these feminine codes generally always met with psychological trauma plunging themselves into alcoholism, committing suicide, or suffering from a mental breakdown. Most of the characters were plagued by guilt, fear and shame.

Williams' family contributed to his development of shame towards his homosexuality as well. Born Thomas Lanier Williams III in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, Williams' life in the south was an extremely conservative

one that followed strict social rules. Tennessee's mother, Edwina, with her beauty, strong will, Southern charm and social ambition, was arguably the strongest influence on the early life of Tennessee (Spoto 12-13). Tennessee's father Cornelius, as a traveling salesman, was largely absent from the Williams' household. The times that Cornelius was present were times of trial for all involved. Edwina and Cornelius fought incessantly and ended up in separate beds. "Sex for Edwina had become a horror, and inevitably she conveyed this attitude to her children. She implied it was dirty and dangerous . . ." (Leverich 61).

Edwina's influence on her son's views about sex must have had a profound impact as Tennessee would not experience his first sexual encounter until the age of twenty-seven. Tennessee commented about this time of his life saying, "I was a terrible puritan . . . and I remained a puritan until my late 20s," (Spoto 58).

Another strong influence on Williams' life was his maternal grandfather, the Rev. Walter Edwin Dakin. Tennessee's grandfather was an Episcopalian priest and Tennessee spent many years of his life living with his grandfather and his grandmother Rose.

For most of his life, Tennessee felt that his natural sexual desires needed to be hidden. "Given the sexual mores of 1937 and his devoutly Christian background, Tom simply was unable to reconcile an inclination with what he knew to be wrong, a sin, and utterly unacceptable"



(Leverich 237). Not only was it sex, it was unspeakable sex.

Edwina's puritanism, profound virtue, and aristocratic manners became the basis for such characters as Mrs. Venable in Suddenly Last Summer, Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire and Amanda in The Glass Menagerie. Mrs. Venable protects at all costs the chaste reputation of her son Sebastian, Blanche becomes both the destroyer and the destroyed of unacceptable sexuality, and Amanda becomes a suffocating mother. The influence of Tennessee's grandfather can be seen through Williams inclusion of priest characters in several plays including Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo and Night of the Iguana.

Out of necessity, Tennessee began questioning his own views of his sexuality as inferior:

And is sex ugly? Not essentially—not from a cosmic viewpoint. But when it is divorced from reason—it looks like slime—it seems horrible if you can't reason it away. Poor mad creature—if only it didn't make you so hideous you wouldn't dread it so much (Leverich 335).

He could not, however, fully embrace his sexuality and this led to a conflict between his puritanism and his sexual nature that would never be reconciled. The simultaneous existence of these two sides of Williams, "The side that was obsessively homosexual, compulsively interested in sexuality. And the side that in those days was gentle and understanding and contemplative," (Spoto 81) led him to define himself as the "rebellious Puritan."

Williams puritanical side at times led him to equate sexual desire with animal instinct. At one point Williams asked himself "Am I all animal, all willful, blind, stupid beast? Is there another part that is not an accomplice in this mad pilgrimage of the flesh?" (Leverich 288). His comparison of sexual desire with animal instinct emerges symbolically in several plays including a goat in The Rose Tattoo and an iguana in Night of the Iguana. Animal traits would also become associated with characters that represented sexuality such as Val with his snakeskin jacket in Orpheus Descending, Rosario of The Rose Tattoo equated with a bull, and Stanley being described as an ape in A Streetcar Named Desire.

Tennessee's shame, or the view of his sexuality as inferior, would stay with Williams his entire life. From an early age Williams displayed the physical characteristics of shame.

In my high school days I had no disguise, no facade. And it was at University City High School that I developed the habit of blushing whenever anyone looked me in the eyes, as if I harbored behind them some quiet dreadful or abominable secret. You will have no trouble in guessing what that secret was. . . (Memoirs 17).

In Memoirs, Williams refers to his sexuality as an indiscretion. "This book is a sort of catharsis of puritanical guilt-feelings, I suppose. 'All good art is an indiscretion.' Well I can't assure you that this book will be art, but it is bound to be an indiscretion, since it deals with my adult life . . ." (Memoirs 144).

Williams would never give up trying to reconcile his shame. "'-How many of us feel that way , I wonder? Bear this intolerable burden of guilt? To feel some humiliation and a great deal of sorrow at times is inevitable. But feeling guilty is foolish. I am a deeper and warmer and kinder man for my deviation'" (Leverich 421).

As ashamed of his sexuality as Tennessee was, he accepted it enough that it became common knowledge among his friends and later to the public at large:

However bizarre his sexual behavior would become, Tennessee Williams never covertly lived the lie. And in those days, that took courage, because exposure could and often did ruin the lives and careers of even the most powerful. . . . he was living free of the closet, sometimes dangerously, long before the word took on its present meaning (Leverich 360).

One of the defenses used by Williams to distance himself from people who were knowledgeable about his sexuality was to hide.

Williams was known for his impulsive flights to far away places and "Certainly this curious impulse to move about-toward friends and then quickly away from them, to foreign places and then back to familiar ground-was a protective measure" (Leverich 370). Often the destinations were exotic places where Williams' puritanical nature felt less restricted. Many of these locations became the settings for his plays and representations of the sexual side of the puritanical/sexual conflict. One of these places was the city of New Orleans. Here Williams found:

. . . a hedonism that both shocked and intrigued him, the classical Appollonian disciplines gone to Dionysian orgiastic rites. At once, an inner and lasting conflict was set up. . . . and looking back upon the impact of New Orleans, he would say that there 'I found the kind of freedom I had always needed. And the shock of it against the Puritanism of my nature has given me a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting' (Leverich 285).

Another defense against shame that Williams used was contempt. At times he would profess a great pride in his sexuality. Williams placed himself above the more puritanical social norms by stating, "There is no doubt in my mind that there is more sensibility—which is equivalent to more talent—among 'gays' of both sexes than among the 'norms'" (Memoirs 51). His contempt was not limited to non-gays. Williams defended against feelings of inferiority with his contempt for effeminate gay men:

I also remember, when I returned to New Orleans after my first exposure to the more discreetly organized gay world of New York, proselytizing my 'gay' friends in the Quarter to conduct themselves in a fashion that was not just a travesty of the other sex. I told them, those who would listen, that that type of behavior simply made them distasteful, sexually, to anyone interested in sex . . . and that it was 'dated,' as well (Memoirs 50).

By placing himself above other gay men, and having pride in his masculinity, Williams was able to lessen his feelings of shame towards what he saw as his own inferiority.

Tennessee Williams deemed his sexuality as inferior, this is shame. Chapter three will show how profoundly Williams' shame effected his dramatic writing as the

puritanical/sexual conflict in four selected plays and the development of shame in their protagonists is examined.

### CHAPTER III

The conflict between the sexual and the puritanical is central to the actions and emotions in Williams' protagonists. As a result the conflict is present literally or symbolically in almost all of the production elements including the set design, costume design, stage directions and dialogue. Williams juxtaposes symbols, communities and characters that represent both sides of the conflict between the puritanical and the sexual, and these aspects of the production in turn support the protagonist's struggle with shame. Therefore it is important to examine characters, communities, symbols and settings that support the inner conflict of the protagonists.

How does the presence of shame relate to the puritanical/sexual conflict in the plays of Tennessee Williams? As a binary the conflict is inherently a comparison, and comparisons point to deficiencies that are the source of shame. In comparing the puritanical side of the characters with the sexual side of the characters. Williams makes a judgment as to which side is deficient. In his own life it was the sexual side that was deemed inferior. Williams extends this judgement to the characters in the plays.

The communities and families that the characters inhabit become the context for the normative values and mores that make this judgement possible. As a part of these communities and families the characters have developed shame scripts associated with their sexuality.

Kaufman explains, "Of all the physiologically based drives, the one most significant in its association with shame is sexuality" (Kaufman 1996: 42). The characters all have the sexual side of themselves hidden within because they see that side of themselves as inferior or morally corrupt. Kaufman explains the importance of the relationship between sex and shame in our culture when he states, "In many cultures the sexual drive is a primary target of shaming, causing sex to become bound by shame" (59). Shame has a profound effect because the sexual drive is a natural physiological function of the human body. Shame then can be triggered by any sexual feeling, thought, image, or fantasy. "To the degree that sexuality becomes associated with and hence bound and controlled by shame, the individual concerned is faced with an intolerable dilemma: how to come to terms with a vital part of the self that is seen as inherently bad" (Kaufman 1985: 43).

The communities and/or symbols associated with Alma, Blanche, and Serafina support traditional values and conventional mores that find contempt and disdain for individuals who sway from a spiritually based morality.

## **The Sexual vs. The Puritanical in Summer and Smoke**

Perhaps nowhere is the conflict between the puritanical and the sexual represented as clearly as in Summer and Smoke. Alma, the daughter of a minister in a town named Glorious Hill, is a woman with extreme faith in religion, morality, and normal social values. In the prologue of the play the stage directions describe a young Alma: *"She already has the dignity of an adult; there is a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her, which must set her distinctly apart from other children"* (125). Williams establishes Alma as someone who is different from the norm, and it will be these differences that add to the elements which create shame in Alma.

The puritanical quality of spirituality is very strong in Alma as a girl and these traits carry over to the adult Alma. Williams' stage directions describing the adult Alma upon her first entrance read:

*. . . there is something prematurely spinsterish about her. An excessive propriety and self-consciousness is apparent in her nervous laughter; her voice and gestures belong to years of church entertainments, to the position of hostess in a rectory. . . .Her true nature is still hidden even from herself* (Summer 135).

In order to establish Alma's puritanical values, Williams connects her with religious symbols.

The fact that Alma has an excessive self-consciousness is critical since Kaufman states that self-consciousness is one of the several forms of shame. By attributing to Alma



an excessive propriety Williams emphasizes the importance of correctness of morals, and suitable societal behavior. The nervous laugh which is a result of her self-consciousness emerges throughout the play and is triggered when Alma feels shame. Her laugh is born of a fear to expose anything that may be different or wrong.

The importance of propriety is reflected in the expectations the community and Alma's family have of her. Her minister father becomes linked to Alma's shaming script when he observes that Alma's singing at the fourth of July celebration could ". . . provoke a lot of criticism" (132). Living with her family in the rectory, Alma has had to assume the responsibilities of the lady in a minister's household, as her mother has faded into a mild form of madness that also becomes a source of shame for Alma and her father.

Outside of Alma's family is a community that can be seen to effect her puritan nature as well. The views on sexuality held by the community can be seen when Alma tells John about the character of Mrs. Ewell. Mrs. Ewell "entertains" traveling salesmen who come to Glorious Hill on the train. Alma states, "Of course she is ostracized by all but a few of her own type of women in town" (148). Mrs. Ewell's behavior does not meet with acceptable social standards. Alma defends the moral standards of the community when she states to John that, "Being a minister's daughter I have to be more selective than most girls about

the society I keep." (153). The sexual desire that Alma is discovered to possess, can not be accepted by this puritanical community nor by Alma herself.

The sexual desires in Alma are impossible for her not to judge. Throughout her entire life she has been taught to find pride in an excessive reverence, faith, and a puritanical nature because of their social acceptability. This trait can be seen in the Alma of Tennessee Williams' Eccentricities of a Nightingale, a later revision of Summer and Smoke in which she lets John know of her desire for him with "I'm so ashamed of myself!" (*Eccentricities* 80). The source for her shame is explained when she says, "I exposed myself. Father is frightened of me and he's right. On the surface I'm still the Episcopal minister's daughter but there's something else that's—. . . Something—else that's—frantic!" (*Eccentricities* 81). The "something else" that is frantic is the sexual desire she feels for John. Alma feels shame in exposing this desire.

The importance of spiritual relationships, which to Alma mean relationships devoid of desire, becomes apparent when she says to John;

But suppose that some day . . . suppose that some day you - married. . . . The woman that you selected to be your wife, and not only your wife but - the mother of your children! . . . Wouldn't you want that woman to be a lady? Wouldn't you want her to be somebody that you, as her husband, and they as her precious children - could look up to with very deep respect? (80).

Despite Alma's need to judge and suppress her desire for John in this way, he becomes a constant attraction to her. She peeks out her window at night to spy on him coming home and nervously flutters at his invitation to go for a ride with him in his car.

The theme of the play demands that Alma's sexual nature be exposed. To ensure exposure, Williams includes antagonists and symbols that become representations of sexuality and desire. The most obvious representation of this struggle between the puritanical and the sexual is in the play's scenic design. On one side of the stage, as a representation of the puritanical, exists the parlor of an Episcopal rectory which houses a minister and his family. On the opposite side of the stage exists the examination room in the residence of Dr. Buchanan Sr. and Dr. John Buchanan Jr. As a doctor's office, with a large chart of the human anatomy on its back wall, it becomes representative of the sensual needs of the body. The simultaneous representation on stage of these two rooms is ultimately important to the play's theme and physically represents the primary conflict between the sexual body and the puritanical soul.

Situated between these two interior aspects of the set is an exterior that represents a park or public square in the town. The centerpiece of this park is a stone fountain of an angel named Eternity. The angel's natural association with heaven and spiritual transcendence is

superimposed on her more earthly function providing water. Her position between the two residences, her name, and her ability to serve both a spiritual and sensual purpose make her an important marker for which the audience can gauge the resolution of the puritanical/sexual conflict throughout the play.

In addition to the on-stage locales, Williams creates two offstage locales, the town of Glorious Hill and the Moon Lake Casino, which provide an important element in the symbolism of the play as well. The name of Glorious Hill suggests the value of puritanical lifestyles, up from the earth toward glory, as the locale of Moon Lake Casino becomes a place associated in many of Williams' plays with sexual relations. The characters who represent social acceptance, or who have more puritanical interests become associated with Glorious Hill, as the characters who seek sexual fulfillment and don't follow puritanical social rules become associated with the Moon Lake Casino.

The representation of the struggle between spiritual and sensual symbols in the scenic design is supportive of the more important internal struggle in the protagonist of the play, Alma Winemiller. As a resident of the puritanical rectory, and as a minister's daughter, Alma finds herself struggling with her undeniable attraction to Dr. John Buchanan Jr. John is a symbol of sensual pleasures and he becomes the catalyst for exposing the sexual desire which Alma finds shameful. The struggle of

reconciling their seemingly opposing natures illustrates the major theme of the play.

Their relationship and the conflict become apparent from the opening moments of the play when, as children, John teases Alma, kisses her, and then runs away. This interaction establishes a pattern between Alma and John.

The struggle between Alma's soul and John's body appears literally when John describes the importance of using all of your senses to gain self-satisfaction. Alma retorts by describing a Gothic cathedral. She states;

How everything reaches up, how everything seems to be straining for something out of the reach of stone—or human—fingers? . . . The immense stained windows, the great arched doors that are five or six times the height of the tallest man—the vaulted ceiling and all the delicate spires—all reaching up to something beyond attainment! To me—well, that is the secret, the principle back of existence—the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach. . . . (77).

The scene is ended with Alma rejecting the sexual advances of John and John in turn rejecting Alma herself.

### **The Sexual vs. The Puritanical in A Streetcar Named Desire**

The puritanical elements in A Streetcar Named Desire are not as prominent as in Summer and Smoke: however it is important to understand the puritanical nature of the community that surrounds the character of Blanche in order to understand her dilemma and conflict.

The first clues of the puritanical nature of Blanche are derived from Williams' description of her in the stage directions. *"She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. . ."* (245). Coupled with this image of white is Blanche's name. Blanche DuBois means 'white woods' suggesting a pastoral image of purity. The character of Blanche at the beginning of the play is a symbol of purity, puritanical values, virginal qualities, and conventional mores.

The use of white as a symbol for purity, aside from its cultural significance, is supported by its use in other plays. For example, Boss Finley's House in Sweet Bird of Youth is: *"a frame house of Victorian Gothic design. . . . There is only essential porch furniture, Victorian wicker but painted bone white. The men should also be wearing white or off-white suits: . . ."* (Bird 56). Thus Boss Finley appears a man who is deeply connected to God and to purity. First, his daughter's name is heavenly. Secondly, Boss Finley is on a campaign to keep the white blood of the South untainted and pure.

The fact that Blanche looks as if she has come from a party in the garden district says much about her puritanical value system. Williams' puritanical associations with the garden district, a wealthy upper-class community, are revealed through the character of Mrs.

Venable from Suddenly Last Summer. For Mrs. Venable the implication that her son might be sexual, let alone homosexual, is "a hideous attack on my son's moral character which, being dead, he can't defend himself from. I have to be the defender" (361). To Mrs. Venable, Sebastian was a chaste man. It was this purity that was to be respected. When Catherine implies that Sebastian was anything but chaste, Mrs. Venable describes her as perverse. The puritanical Blanche and Mrs. Venable share the same feelings on homosexuality. Adjectives used to describe homosexuality in these plays, as well as other plays of Williams, include disgusting, perverse, and degenerate.

Both Boss Finley and Mrs. Venable, to whom Blanche is linked through the use of images and locations, reside in mansions described by Williams as Victorian Gothic. This architectural design supports the puritanical natures of the characters that inhabit the structures as the words 'Victorian' and 'Gothic' conjure images of strict morality and sexlessness.

Blanche shows her conservative puritanical value system through a conversation between her and Stella. Stella states "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant." To which Blanche responds:

"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. . . . It brought me here.—Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be. . ." (321).

Blanche is literally ashamed to be in a community where desire is an accepted value.

Kaufman emphasized the importance of community and cultural values as an influence on the formation of self identity. In A Streetcar Named Desire, as in many of Williams' plays, there are two distinct communities with different values represented. It is this conflict between the two that is at the base of the conflict between the spiritual and sexual. New Orleans embraces and symbolizes the sexual nature that comes into conflict with Blanche Dubois, the protagonist and symbol of puritanism.

To enhance the conflict between puritanical values and sexuality in Streetcar Williams sets the play in a district of New Orleans named Elysian Fields, which means the abode of the blessed after death or a place or state of ideal happiness. New Orleans allows for a cosmopolitan anonymity wherein races can mix, people can be themselves instead of conforming to any set community moral standards, and "desire" can be expressed and even embraced.

The setting is described in the stage directions as a poor community with a "raffish charm," or in other words a charming flashy vulgarity. Later the stage directions state, *"In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated*



fluency of brown fingers. This 'blue piano' expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here" (243). The piano music appears throughout the script to emphasize the representative values of New Orleans and Elysian Fields. In fact this music appears when ever the sexual side in the conflict during the play seems to be winning or taking over the puritanical side.

Surrounded by this environment, Blanche's exposure, or shame, becomes inevitable. This conflict between the values of the characters and communities is expressed symbolically with the discovery of Blanche and Stanley's astrological signs. Stanley is Capricorn, or the goat, a pagan representation of pan, a sexual creature, and Blanche is Virgo, or the virgin.

At the center of the sexually free New Orleans community is the character of Stanley. As "The King" of Elysian Fields Stanley compliments the setting and helps to further define it. On his first appearance the stage directions read;

*Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them (264-265).*

Stanley, as the embodiment of a sexual creature, is established early to become Blanche's antagonist for the exposure of her sexual desires and past.

### **The Sexual vs. The Puritanical in The Rose Tattoo**

The internal struggle of the spiritual vs. sensual in Serafina Delle Rose is much different than in Alma Winemiller. Serafina is a woman who has accepted both the sexual and spiritual sides in herself through her marriage to Rosario. Serafina's Catholic religion gives her permission to enjoy a sexual relationship with her husband within the institution of marriage. However, when her husband dies she becomes a grieving widow, suffers a miscarriage, and suppresses her sexual nature and desires. With the loss of her husband and her unborn child, two bodies symbolic of sensuality, Serafina begins associating herself strongly with the symbol of the Madonna figure. No more physical expression of love can be openly expressed around Serafina who would judge them as impure when compared to the love she shared with her deceased husband.

Serafina's daughter Rosa, who at the age of fifteen has physically become a woman, has fallen in love with a sailor named Jack Hunter, and desires to explore an intimate and sexual relationship with him. The struggle between Serafina's puritanical faith and her daughter's sexual desires can be seen in several scenes of the play.

Serafina locks Rosa up in the house so that she can't leave in order to prevent any sexual relationship between her daughter and Jack. When finally she is faced with the two young lovers together she makes Jack kneel in front of her Madonna shrine and swear he will not consummate any sort of sexual relationship with Rosa.

As in Summer and Smoke the representation of spiritual symbols in The Rose Tattoo is present in the scenic elements themselves. The stage directions describing the inside of Serafina's home read, "*There are many religious articles . . . There is a small shrine against the wall between the rooms, consisting of a prie-dieu and a little statue of the Madonna . . . Before this burns always a vigil light in its ruby glass cup*" (139).

Placed in Serafina's house are mannequins used for her sewing business. One of these mannequins is dressed as a young bride and the other is dressed as a widow. The two mannequins "*face each other in violent attitudes, as though having a shrill argument . . .*" (140), and these mannequins become evidently symbolical of the struggle between the sensual and the spiritual as they mirror the relationship between Serafina as a puritanical, un-sexual widow and her daughter Rosa as a vivacious, sensually hungry young lover.

This religious and puritanical interior location is juxtaposed against the exterior location of an Italian community on the Gulf Coast. For Williams, the Italian culture was significant in its free expression of

sensuality and sexuality. When Williams was in Rome ". . . he fell deeply in love with the city and the Italian people. Their art, their dignity, their physical beauty, their speech, their zest for life appealed to every anti-Puritanical inch of his being" (Tischler 166). The religious signification and the purity of the Madonna figure in the house is enveloped in a community which appealed to Williams for its "anti-Puritanical" qualities.

The animal images that Williams associates with the sexual nature in Streetcar are present in The Rose Tattoo as well. The character who ultimately exposes Serafina's sexual desire, Alvaro, is described as a bull. Also present in this play is a black goat that becomes a symbol of the sensual and sexual. Every time the goat infringes upon Serafina's spiritual home, it is seen as a bad omen and chased away. At one point the goat charges Serafina who runs away from it screaming. The character of Assunta offers to make a powder from the dry blood of a goat to act as an aphrodisiac.

### **The Sexual vs. The Puritanical in Night of the Iguana**

Of the four plays included in this study, Night of the Iguana was the last for Williams to write. The conflict between the puritanical and the sexual in Night of the Iguana reveals a more complex conflict. Unlike the three previous plays which include a puritanical protagonist

faced with an antagonist representative of the sexual, Night of the Iguana includes a character representative of the puritanical and a character representative of the sexual who both influence the protagonist's struggle.

The Reverend Shannon is by his title immediately connected to the puritanical side of the sexual/puritanical conflict. Priests, ministers, and reverends are common characters in several of Williams' plays used to help support the puritanical side of the sexual/puritanical conflict. Williams uses these characters in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and The Rose Tattoo as well. The priests are always the representation of puritanical morality and a source for shaming the main characters.

Although Shannon embodies the puritanical symbolism of a minister, he also is considered a "defrocked" minister who has both rejected his faith and been thrown out of his parish. Shannon's status as a defrocked minister helps to reveal the conflict between the sexual and the puritanical present within him. Shannon's temporary rejections of religion through sexual encounters are incomplete as he clings to the idealistic higher existence of priesthood by wearing his cross and professing his return to the church.

Shannon arrives with a busload of women who are school teachers at a Baptist female college in Blowing Rock, Texas. The women's connection to a puritanical morality adds to the puritanical Shannon since he is their leader. At the same time he is connected with the puritanical side

of the conflict he is connected to the sexual side as it is discovered that he has slept with a sixteen year old girl who is a member of the tour group.

Also adding to the puritanical Shannon is the pure image of the color white as he is described arriving, similar to Blanche in Streetcar, ". . . in a crumpled white linen suit." (256). Instead of making Shannon's suit completely a symbol of purity, Williams describes his suit as crumpled. The crumpled white suit foreshadows Shannon's future deviation from the puritanical.

Through these images Williams gives Shannon aspects of both sides of the conflict that set up the existence of shame in Shannon. Shannon throughout the play struggles to connect himself to an existence above sexual desire by professing his connection to the church. At one point Shannon even puts on his clerical collar and a heavy gold cross.

The setting for Night of the Iguana is a jungle in Mexico. The jungle is described as being "among the worlds wildest and loveliest populated places" (251). Williams does not describe this jungle in much detail but we can look at it as a symbol of the sexual side of the puritanical/sexual conflict and compare it to another jungle of Williams', the jungle garden of Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer. Sebastian's jungle is described like this:

*The interior is blended with 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 to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature. . . (Suddenly 349)*

The setting of Mexico in Night of the Iguana can be compared to other settings such as Italy in The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, or the Italian community of The Rose Tattoo, and the New Orleans of Streetcar Named Desire. The exotic locales break from the traditional rules and values of puritanical beliefs in our culture. Williams used these settings the same way he used them in his own life, as an escape.

The owner of the verandah in the Mexican jungle is a representation of the sexual side of the puritanical sexual conflict. Upon Maxine Falk's first entrance she is described as a " . . . stout, swarthy woman in her forties—affable and rapaciously lusty. She is wearing a pair of Levis and a blouse that is half unbuttoned." (*Iguana* 255). Maxine's first line reveals her nature even more. In reference to the bus full of women Shannon arrived with, Maxine asks, "How many you laid so far?" (255). Maxine's connection to the sexual side of the argument is augmented when we realize that the two young men who work for her are also at times her lovers. Maxine illuminates further the

source of Shannon's shame for his sexual desires when she recalls a story he told her deceased husband Fred.

You told him that Mama, your Mama, used to send you to bed before you was ready to sleep—so you practiced the little boy's vice, you amused yourself with yourself. And once she caught you at it and whaled your backside with the back side of a hairbrush because she said she had to punish you for it because it made God mad as much as it did Mama, and she had to punish you for it so God wouldn't punish you for it harder than she would. . . You said you loved God and Mama and so you quit it to please them, but it was your secret pleasure and you harbored a secret resentment against Mama and God for making you give it up. And so you got back at God by preaching atheistical sermons and you got back at Mama by starting to lay young girls (329).

Maxine tells Shannon that they have both reached a point where they have to settle for something that works for them even if it isn't on a higher level.

Contrasted with the sexual Maxine is the character of Hannah who to Shannon represents a higher plane of existence through her association with puritanism and art. Upon Hannah's first entrance she is described as ". . . *remarkable-looking-ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated*" (Iguana 266). With her beauty and puritanical qualities Hannah has an immediate calming affect upon Shannon.

In Night of the Iguana Williams reveals his feelings of art as a higher purpose and existence in the characters of Hannah and Nonno. Both are artists and have found a certain peace with their existence. Williams comments on this as well in Streetcar when Blanche says to Stella:



Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world . . . In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching (323).

In Suddenly Last Summer Williams places art on higher spiritual level with Mrs. Venable equating her son Sebastian's puritanical existence with his poetry. Shannon seeks for this same existence in religion and as a result is dissatisfied and dissatisfied.

Shannon feels a deep connection to the character of Hannah because of her association with the puritanical and a higher existence in art, but he also recognizes in her an acceptance of natural human instinct including sexuality. Shannon calls Hannah an "*emancipated Puritan*" (344). This title, as well as the shared stories between Hannah and Shannon about their demons, mirrors Williams' own self title of "*rebellious puritan*" and his own demons that he called "*blue devils*." Hannah serves as the catalyst for Shannon's acceptance of his own sexuality that he has been ashamed of.

The development and presence of shame in the four protagonists inevitably leads to the use of defenses against exposure. Two ways that Williams defended against the exposure of his self-judged inferiority were by hiding or separating himself from others and by having contempt for others. Chapter four will show how Williams' characters use Kaufman's defenses against exposure.

## CHAPTER IV

Chapter one listed the eight defenses against shame a person adopts when threatened with exposure of the self judged inferior trait: contempt, rage, striving for power, internal withdrawal, denial, transfer of blame, striving for perfection, and humor. Chapter two explored examples of these defenses in the life of Tennessee Williams. This chapter will show where these defenses are used by the four protagonists to defend against their source of shame—sexual desire.

Not all the defenses are used by all of the characters. The use of different defenses, as well as the secondary emotional reactions of fear, distress, and rage are what make the characters' motivations for action different. This difference gives the characters their individuality. For example, Blanche uses the defenses of contempt and denial profusely and displays the secondary emotional reaction of fear, while rage, either as a defense or secondary reaction, is hardly a trait that Blanche exhibits at all. Serafina Delle Rose, on the other hand, displays the emotion of rage as both a defense against further shaming and as a secondary emotional reaction

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several times throughout the play. She seldom displays fear as a secondary reaction, or humor as a defense.

### **Defenses Against Exposure in Alma Winemiller**

Contempt is defined by Kaufman as the judgment of other people as lesser than oneself. Placing yourself above others, and having disdain, or dislike for their actions serves to make yourself impervious to judgment. All four protagonists exhibit an almost fanatical pride in their puritanical side. Their dedication to purity places them above others so that they can judge behaviors in others and stand above judgment themselves.

Like Williams, Alma mirrors the views of her community and family. Both Alma and her community condemn the behavior of people who act upon their sexual desires. In a scene where Nellie tells Alma that John was out last night with her mother and Rosa Gonzales, two women who are known in the town for their uninhibited sexual liaisons, Alma states, "these people who shout his name in front of his house are of such a character that the old doctor cannot permit them to come inside the door" (167). Her contempt for people that recognize their sexual desire is a defense against the exposure of her own.

Alma even expresses contempt for the object of her sexual desire, John. John's reckless and sexually fulfilling behavior is criticized when Alma calls it a "desecration". Alma's defense becomes a combined defense

of contempt with striving for perfection. Her need to be seen and respected as a lady, impervious to flaws, works in combination with her contempt for others.

Defenses against exposure that Williams uses often are alcohol or other drugs. This trait is apparent in Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Alma in Summer and Smoke, Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer and Blanche in Streetcar Named Desire. For example, Brick in Cat, does not have to face anyone if he can just tell them that he can't see any of them until he has had enough to drink. When Brick reaches a state of sufficient inebriation, then he can face the world. Williams writes in the stage directions for Cat that the liquor cabinet is ". . . a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with. . . ." (Cat 16).

Alma's reliance on the sleeping pills that John prescribed to her is a way for her to forget that she has sexual desire. John refers to Alma's sexual desire and her need to hide it when he says, "Under the surface you have a lot of excitement, a great deal more than any other woman I have met. So much that you have to carry these sleeping pills with you. The question is why?" (200).

Alma also exhibits the defense of internal withdrawal when she "retreats from the world" by hiding behind a fake illness. Her father says to her:

Why don't you get dressed? It hurts me to see you sitting around like this, day in, day out, like an invalid when there is nothing particularly wrong with you. . . You may have had some kind of disappointment, but you must not make it an excuse for acting as if the world had come to an end (225).

It is revealed that Alma does leave the house but only in the middle of the night to walk around. By leaving the house only in the middle of the night, Alma defends against anyone being able to see her or shame her.

At the end of this scene, John returns to Glorious Hill and when Alma sees him she must defend against the same sexual desires she has always had for him. Alma uses possibly the ultimate form of internal withdrawal when she expresses the desire to die. "What . . . happened? Something . . . struck me! . . . No, no, don't. Don't call anybody to help me. I want to die!" (227).

### **Defenses Against Exposure in Blanche DuBois**

Of the eight defenses against exposure and shame defined by Kaufman, Blanche uses most frequently the defenses of contempt, striving for power, internal withdrawal, and denial.

Blanche feels contempt towards both the setting she has found herself in and for every other character in the play. Blanche starts expressing contempt for Elysian Fields from the very beginning of the play. During her first conversation with Eunice she seems to be unconvinced that her sister could possibly live in this community. In

fact, Williams writes that *"Her expression is one of shocked disbelief."* Blanche questions, "This—can this be—her home?" (245). Blanche discovers that indeed it is and she continues to show disdain in the first conversation with Stella.

Expecting someone of herself and her sister's social station never to stoop so low, Blanche asks Stella "What are you doing in a place like this?" (252). When Stella doesn't understand the question Blanche continues:

Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical, I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture—Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoulish, haunted woodland of Weir! (252).

By expressing contempt for the place that Stella lives, Blanche has elevated herself above such living and this defense works to make her feel that she is above anything so base. If she can make Stella and Stanley feel lower than herself, it will make it harder for them to judge her or shame her.

Blanche's contempt for Stanley is the strongest contempt of all. This makes sense since he is the antagonist that is fated to expose her sexual desire, the source for her shame. Stanley's strong connection to sexual desire is the catalyst for the final exposure of Blanche's shameful trait, and the driving force of the action. Blanche's description of Stanley reads:

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! Oh, if he was just-ordinary! Just plain-but good and wholesome, but -no. There's something downright-bestial-about him! . . . He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something-sub-human-something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something-ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in -anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is-Stanley Kowalski-survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you-you here-waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night!-you call it-this party of apes! Somebody growls-some creature snatches at something-the fight is on! (322-323).*

Williams uses many exclamation points for punctuation, indicating the strength of her contempt. It must be this strong in order for her to triumph over him.

Blanche's contempt is mirrored in her excessive pride of where she comes from, and the "higher" things in life as she finishes her long speech with;

*Such things as art-as poetry and music-such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . Don't-don't hang back with the brutes! (323).*

There is more to be found in this speech on her pride, and on her elevation of herself than contempt for Stanley however.

Blanche states that they must "*cling*" to tenderer feelings and higher ideas such as art and music, indeed



hold them as her flag. Blanche is almost exposing the side of herself that she so desperately must keep hidden. Her speech on the sexual nature of Stanley has made Blanche conscious of her own sexual desires and as a result she must convince herself, as well as Stella, that she is above desire and beyond hanging back with "the brutes."

Blanche also expresses contempt for Stanley directly to his face when he is forcing her to hand over the papers on Belle Reeve. Stanley finds her love letters from Allan and Blanche states, "The touch of your hands insults them!" She then states "I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was. . ." (282-283). Her statement is important in showing how Stanley is the threat of exposure of Blanche's sexual desire and past. The way that Blanche hurt Allan was to expose his homosexuality as she said to him "I saw! I know, You disgust me. . ." (355). The exposure of Allan's homosexuality and the resulting shame was so terrifying and distressful to Allan that he proceeded to take his own life. Blanche believes that Stanley will hurt her in the same way.

It is not only Elysian Fields in New Orleans and Stanley that Blanche feels contempt for. She also has contempt for locations in her home town of Laurel that are associated with sex. The feelings she expresses for the Hotel Flamingo, where Stanley says that his friend met her, puts her above such establishments. She states "The Hotel

Flamingo is not the sort of establishment I would dare to be seen in!" (329). When Stanley describes the sort of establishment the hotel is to Stella he states:

A secondclass hotel which has the advantage of not interfering in the private social life of the personalities there! The Flamingo is used to all kinds of goings-on. But even the management of the Flamingo was impressed by Dame Blanche! In fact they was so impressed by Dame Blanche that they requested her to turn in her room key—for permanently! (360).

Thus the place that Blanche took residence, after the loss of Belle Reeve, is the same place she staunchly stated she would never set foot in.

Blanche uses the defense of striving for power to gain control over Stanley so that he can't expose her sexual past and desires. She uses the only way she knows, her charm and her beauty. The same man that she considers no better than an ape, is a man that she is not above flirting with if it will gain her control over the situation.

In the scene where Stanley is trying to discover what happened to Belle Reve, Blanche firsts asks him to help her button up her dress. Then she starts "fishing for a compliment" by asking Stanley, "Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be—attractive?"(278). When these tactics seem to be failing, Blanche becomes more foreword stating, "You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think. To interest you a woman would have to—[*She pauses with an indefinite gesture.*]" Stanley finishes her sentence with, "Lay . . . her cards on the table," (279) but the

implication is surely sexual. Blanche's ability to defend against exposure is strong enough that she proves to be a powerful force against Stanley and solicits respect from the audience.

### **Defenses Against Exposure in Serafina Delle Rose**

By using the defense of contempt, Serafina judges the relationships of the other couples in the community.

Serafina, equating her and Rosario's bed with God, judges and criticizes the impurity of others:

The men, they don't feel no glory, not in the house with them women; they go to the bars, fight in them, get drunk, get fat, put horns on the women because the women don't give them the love which is glory. - I did, I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion (196-7).

Pride in the purity of her marriage to Rosario, and pride in the symbolic social status of their titles as Baron and Baroness serves to raise Serafina above the other characters who threaten to expose her shame about the possibility of Rosario's infidelity. Serafina states, "My folks was peasants, contadini, but he—he come from landowners! Signorile, my husband—At night I sit here and I'm satisfied to remember, because I had the best.—Not the third best and not the second best, but the first best, the only best! . . ." (311). The purity of the sexual relationship with her husband is very important to Serafina as it allows her to have contempt for the other married couples in her town.

Serafina expresses contempt for other characters in the play as well. Bessie and Flora are two women who stop by Serafina's home to pick up a shirt that Serafina has made for one of them. When the two women begin talking about sex, Serafina becomes aware of the sexual desire within herself that she deems impure and also questions the purity of her relationship with her deceased husband. Serafina condemns their behavior, and puts herself above them by stating, "[ominously]: You two ladies watch how you talk in there. This here is a Catholic house. You are sitting in the same room with Our Lady and with the blessed ashes of my husband!" (308). This shows the importance and strength of the puritanical nature of Serafina as she again makes a connection between her marriage with Rosario to religion.

Serafina also strives for power to defend against exposure. By obtaining power over situations or people there is less of a chance that exposure can occur. Serafina displays this defense most in terms of the relationship between her daughter Rosa and herself. Rosa is unafraid to express her sexuality and has found an outlet for this expression in a sailor named Jack that she met at a school dance.

For Serafina, any form of impure sexuality is a source of shame because it forces her to acknowledge her own desires that would, in her mind, soil the image of her relationship with her husband. Pre-marital sex is one of

these forms of sexuality that Serafina deems impure, and her daughter Rosa, is expressing desire to have a sexual relationship with Jack.

Serafina, being in a position of power over her daughter, locks her daughter's clothes up so that Rosa can't leave the house. Her power over the situation combines with contempt for the school where Rosa met Jack when Serafina says to a teacher from the school:

You give this dance where she gets mixed up with a sailor. What do you think you want to do at this high school? . . . How high is this high school? Listen, how high is this high school? Look, look, look, I will show you! It's high as that horse's dirt out there in the street! (300-301).

Serafina expresses power over her daughter's relationship and contempt for Jack when she makes Jack kneel in front of her Madonna shrine and swear to her that he won't do anything sexual with Rosa. Serafina feels that it is necessary to make him swear because she has contempt for the intentions of all men. Serafina says, "I know what men want—not to eat popcorn with girls or to slide on ice! And boys are the same, only younger" (332).

When Father Del Leo comes to visit Serafina, she displays the defense of internal withdrawal. Serafina is described in the stage directions as evading the stare of a little girl and evading the attention of the priest. *"Father De Leo approaches the house. Serafina crouches low in the chair to escape his attention. He knocks at the door. Receiving no answer, he looks out into the yard,*

sees her, and approaches her chair." (337). The priest must be avoided at all costs, for through the confessions of Rosario, he knows the truth about the affair with Estelle. Serafina withdraws from seeing him in order to avoid this knowledge and the exposure that would lead to shame.

Serafina uses the defense of internal withdrawal to distance herself from everyone in her town. They all know about the affair that Rosario had with Estelle and they represent a threat of exposure. Father Del Leo asks Serafina why she doesn't have any friends and why she will not accept the women who try to be friendly with her. Serafina replies, "They think they know something that Serafina don't know; they think I got these on my head! [*She holds her fingers like horns at either side of her forehead.*] Well, I aint got them!" (339). She goes on to say later, ". . . I don't mix with them women. [*Glaring at the women on the embankment*] The dummies I got in my house, I mix with them better because they don't make up no lies!" (341). The defense of internal withdrawal is combined here with denial that there was anything impure about her and Rosario's marriage.

Serafina uses the defense of rage in combination with internal withdrawal to protect herself from exposure by pushing these same women who are trying to be friendly away. The defense of rage, as explained by Kaufman, is used in order to push the factors that threaten exposure

away. These women know the truth about Rosario's affair and Serafina knows it. If she has contact with them she will have to accept the fact that her sexuality with Rosario was not the puritanical sexual relationship that she thought it was, so she decides to push these threats away by using the defense of rage. When two women appear near her house and start to come towards it Serafina reacts with rage:

*lurches heavily up to meet them, like a wary bull turning to face another attack.*" She then says to them "You ladies, what you want? I don't do sewing! Look, I quit doing sewing. [*She pulls down the 'SEWING' sign and hurls it away.*] Now you got places to go, you ladies, go places! Don't hang around front of my house! (338).

The description of Serafina as a bull facing another attack implies that there is danger of some kind when people approach her. This is the danger of the exposure of her impure relationship with Rosario which she will defend any way possible because of its potential of creating shame.

After Rosario's death Serafina keeps Rosario's ashes in an urn by her Madonna figure as a reminder of the sanctity and purity of their love and marriage. Serafina convinces herself throughout most of the play that there is no cause for her to feel shame about her marriage to Rosario or their sexual relationship. This is one of the instances that Serafina uses the defense of denial.

Throughout the entire play, Serafina denies the truth about Rosario's affair with Estelle Hoehengarten. Her denial is expressed again with Flora and Bessie. When

Flora exposes the possibility that her marriage was not pure, and that Rosario had an affair, Serafina cannot face the truth. She denies this information vehemently calling the women dirty liars.

### **Defenses Against Exposure in Reverend Shannon**

The Reverend Lawrence Shannon in Night of the Iguana uses the defense of contempt and his position as a minister to defend against any possible exposure of his sexual desire which he feels is sinful. Shannon professes his worthiness as the best tour guide the women from the Baptist college could ever expect. This pride in his abilities serves to convince himself of his worthiness and places him above characters who might cause exposure. Shannon's pride that elevates him and turns into a contempt for those he has placed beneath him extends to his position as a minister and as a gentleman as well. Miss Fellowes places a call to Shannon's employer in order to get him fired. She then storms out of the office to accuse him of cheating them and sleeping with Charlotte Goodall. Shannon's only defense against the accusations is to convince her and himself that he is the best at what he does. He states "My degree from Sewanee is *Doctor of Divinity*, but for the past ten years geography's been my *specialty*, Miss Fellowes, honey! Name any tourist agency I haven't worked for! You Couldn't!" (274). Upon her



accusations of him stealing from them and cheating them  
Shannon replies:

Miss Fellowes, I am a gentleman, and as a gentleman I can't be insulted like this. I mean I can't accept insults of that kind even from a member of a tour that I am conducting. And, Miss Fellowes, I think you might also remember, you might try to remember, that you're speaking to an ordained minister of the church (275).

This pride acts to place him above the accusing women and allows him to have contempt for them. He states that the ladies have, "for the first time in their lives the advantage of contact, social contact, with a gentleman born and bred, . . ." (334).

After Shannon has been accused by Miss Fellowes for being impure sexually, he has to condemn the women for something that he feels is even worse. Shannon expresses contempt when he accuses the women of being lesbians. ". . . did you know they had Lesbians in Texas—without the dikes the plains of Texas would be engulfed by the Gulf." (334). He punctuates the accusation with a violent nod directed toward Miss Fellowes, who in turn rises and slaps him for his accusation. Shannon dissatisfied that he has convinced anyone of his purity expresses contempt for their sexuality by calling them whores. "I've certainly never desired to, have relations with whores" (335).

The other defense that Shannon uses often is denial. His contemplation of returning to the church is a denial of his sexual desires. He has never been able to keep from having sexual relations and yet he still believes that he

can. This time the denial and the choice to go back to the church is ultimately influenced by his shame of having sex with the character of Charlotte Goodall, a sixteen year old ward of the Baptist Women on the tour.

No matter how strong the use of defenses appears in the four protagonists, the dramatic conflict results in exposure of their sexual desires. Chapter five will show how Williams creates dramatic tension in the plays with small moments of exposure. These moments ultimately build to the climax of the plays, the ultimate exposure of the characters' sexual desires, and the resulting resolutions.

## **Chapter V**

This chapter will show how the characters exhibit the physical and emotional manifestations of shame. After the exposure of shame, Kaufman says that the face becomes a thing to hide. If people can see your face and especially your eyes they will see into you. Williams himself experienced this physical manifestation of shame in high school. This chapter will show how Williams allows the characters to express the physical manifestations and the secondary emotional reactions of fear, distress, and rage that follow exposure.

### **Exposure and Alma Winemiller**

The inherent sexual desires of her nature are a source for shame in Alma and the shame manifests itself in both physical and emotional ways. For example Mrs. Winemiller exposes Alma's desire for John to Nellie. She tells Nellie that Alma watches for John through the window late at night and Alma lashes out at her mother with anger saying:

If ever I hear you say such a thing again, if ever you dare to repeat such a thing in my presence or anybody else's—then it will be the last straw! You understand me? Yes, you understand me! You act like a child, but you have the devil in you. And God will punish you—yes! I'll punish you too. I'll take your cigarettes from you and give you no more. I'll

give you no ice cream either. Because I'm tired of your malice. Yes, I'm tired of your malice and your self-indulgence. People wonder why I'm tied down here! They pity me—think of me as an old maid already! In spite of I'm young. Still young! It's you—it's you, you've taken my youth away from me! I wouldn't say that—I'd try not even to think it—if you were just kind, just simple! But I could spread my life out like a rug for you to step on and you'd step on it, and not even say "Thank you, Alma!" Which is what you've done always—and now you dare to tell a disgusting lie about me—in front of that girl! (168-169).

Alma's sexual desire is also exposed during the gathering of her friends at the intellectual meeting. She again displays great embarrassment and shame for her feelings leaving the meeting in great distress:

Stop it! [*She stamps her foot furiously and crushes the palm leaf fan between her clenched hands.*] I won't have malicious talk here! You drove him away from the meeting after I'd bragged so much about how bright and interesting you all were! You put your worst foot forward and simpered and chattered and carried on like idiots, idiots! What am I saying? I—I—please excuse me! [*She rushes out the inner door*] (177).

Alma's shame manifests itself physically when she goes to see John at two in the morning because she is having "fits". The fits can be seen as a physical manifestation of her internal struggle between her puritanical and sensual desires. John describes this struggle and the fits as a doppelganger. "You swallow air and it presses on your heart and gives you palpitations. That isn't serious in itself but it's a symptom of something that is. Shall I tell you frankly? . . . what I think you have is a doppelganger" (144). It is assumed that her fits are not a medical problem but a problem of the soul as

"doppelganger" is described later as the presence of another person or self inside of Alma. The other person inside of Alma is the self that she judges as inferior. Like Williams' this inferiority produces the feeling of shame.

Alma exhibits the physical manifestations of Shame when before her first conversation with John she ". . . moves her parasol so that it shields her face from him. She leans back closing her eyes" (138). Alma is avoiding John because he is the object of her desire. To talk to John would be to risk exposure of shame. Whenever John looks closely at Alma it makes her uncomfortable. "He remains looking down at her with one foot on the end of her bench. His steady, smiling look into her face is disconcerting her" (139).

Alma reacts with great distress towards John when he makes the suggestion at Moon Lake Casino that they could go into a room to be intimate with each other. Alma reacts with "Oh! I want to go home. But I won't go with you. I will go in a taxi! [She wheels about hysterically.] Boy! Boy! Call a taxi!" (203) In this scene she is both trying to defend against exposure by hiding and withdrawing from the source of shame, and exhibiting the secondary emotional reaction of distress upon the exposure to John.

When Alma finally recognizes her sexual desire and exposes herself to John she temporarily reconciles her "doppelganger," or her two selves. She says to John ". . .

let's talk truthfully. Well, let's do! Unsparingly, truthfully, even shamelessly, then!" (245). With shame out of the way, Alma is able to describe the spiritual love she has felt for him and offers herself sexually to John. She describes the struggle to John when she describes the puritanical side of herself. She states, ". . . she doesn't exist any more, she died last summer - suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her. . . . I said, 'But what about pride?' - She said, 'Forget about pride whenever it stands between you and what you must have!'" (243). Alma decides that it is time to forget about the pride she has for her puritanical side in order to no longer feel shame for her sexual desire.

The tragedy of this play is that following his father's death, John has discovered the spiritual side of himself and is still unable to love Alma. Upon John's rejection of her, Alma loses the resolution and balance she had found of her two selves. Having acknowledged and released her sexual self, Alma finds it impossible to return to what she used to be and in the last scene we find Alma fulfilling her sexual desires by inviting a traveling salesman to accompany her to Moon Lake Casino.

### **Exposure and Blanche Dubois**

As Blanche Dubois is faced with possible exposure to the other character's in Streetcar, she must become aware of the part of herself she is protecting from exposure.

The consciousness of her sexual nature produces the secondary emotional manifestations of shame that Kaufman lists as fear, rage, and distress.

Blanche's fear is pervasive throughout the play. In Blanche's first appearance outside of Stella and Stanley's house she is described sitting ". . . *very stiffly with her shoulders slightly hunched and her legs pressed close together and her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold. . . A cat screeches. She catches her breath with a startled gesture.*" She proceeds to find a whiskey bottle and pour herself a drink saying to herself "I've got to keep hold of myself!" Finally when Stella greets her, Blanche "*begins to speak with feverish vivacity as if she feared for either of them to stop and think*" (250). Blanche is fearful of the exposure of why she had to leave her hometown of Laurel. She knows that it is inevitable that Stella will ask her why she isn't in Laurel teaching, and the truth, is shameful for Blanche and must be protected at all costs.

The threat of exposure becomes increasingly dangerous and inevitable as the play progresses. In the scene where Stanley asks Blanche if she knows anyone named Shaw, Blanche becomes fearful of exposure. Stanley at this point in the play has heard from an acquaintance the true story of why Blanche left Laurel. A man named Shaw happened to be one of Blanche's old sexual liaisons. The stage directions describing Blanche's actions at this point read:

*She speaks lightly but her voice has a note of fear. . . Blanche closes her eyes as if faint. Her hand trembles as she lifts the handkerchief again to her forehead. . . Blanche rises from her chair. She seems faint; looks about her with an expression of almost panic (330-31).*

Again Williams states that Blanche reacts with fear and panic. The thought that the sexual side of herself might actually be exposed is terrifying.

Blanche's fear in this scene builds and builds during Stella and Blanche's dialogue until finally Blanche asks what Stella has heard about her. Blanche's reaction is again one of fear as Williams describes her as spilling her coke and giving a "*piercing cry*" (334).

Stanley double checks his sources about Blanche's past and ends up with the same results as he did with his acquaintance Shaw. He comes home with this information right before Stella is about ready to throw a birthday party for Blanche. Blanche can sense something in Stanley as he passes by her on her way out of the bathroom. Williams writes that a "*frightened look appears in her face, almost a look of panic*" (367).

The physical manifestations of shame: eyes down, head down, eyes averted to the side, and blushing, are significant as defenses against further shame. The face, and especially the eyes become a thing to hide. Blanche exhibits both the physical and emotional reactions to shame when she is exposed to Mitch. The fear is intensified when Mitch confronts Blanche with the information he has received from Stanley. The dialogue reads:



BLANCHE:  
What's in your mind? I see something in your eyes!

MITCH *[getting up]*:  
It's dark in here.

BLANCHE:  
I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me.

MITCH:  
I don't think I ever seen you in the light.  
*[Blanche laughs breathlessly]* That's a fact!  
(383).

The exposure is becoming immanent to Blanche as she is fighting to keep Mitch from seeing her in the light. This will allow him to see her for what she really is.

As the threat of exposure increases, Blanche gives a laugh that is described as breathless, indicating her fear. The scene continues a few lines later:

MITCH:  
What it means is I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche. Let's turn the light on here.

BLANCHE *[fearfully]*:  
Light? Which light? What for?

MITCH:  
This one with the paper thing on it. *[He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp.]*

BLANCHE:  
What did you do that for?

MITCH:  
So I can take a look at you good and plain!

BLANCHE:  
Of course you don't really mean to be insulting!

MITCH:  
No, just realistic.

BLANCHE:

I don't want realism. I want magic! [*Mitch laughs*] Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!—*Don't turn the light on!*

*[Mitch crosses to the switch. He turns the light on and stares at her. She cries out and covers her face. He turns the light off again.]*

MITCH [*slowly and bitterly*]:

I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it—Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But I was a fool enough to believe you was straight (384-385).

This moment of exposure of Blanche's true sexual nature to Mitch agrees with Kaufman's theory of shame. Williams writes in the reactions of fear, and of Blanche trying to cover her face so as not to have to be exposed. When Mitch stares at Blanche, it is the moment of staring that makes Blanche cry out and cover her face. Once he has seen her, once the moment of exposure has occurred, Mitch knows that what he heard was true, that Blanche isn't "straight".

In possibly the most powerful scene in the play, Blanche finally realizes that Stanley knows the truth about her as well when he proclaims that all her stories are imagination, lies, conceit and tricks. Again Blanche's first response is one of fear. Blanche, out of panic, tries placing a call to Shep Huntley through western union as Stanley changes into his pajamas. When Stanley emerges

Blanche acts as if she is afraid of Stanley and tries to keep distance between him and herself telling him to stand far away from her, and to stay back. When Stanley makes his move towards Blanche, she breaks a bottle in half and threatens to twist the broken end in his face stating, "I warn you, don't, I'm in danger!" (401). Blanche realizes that Stanley can and has hurt her the way that she hurt Allan. Stanley exposes Blanche for what she really is, a woman who has been consumed by her own desire.

### **Exposure and Serafina Delle Rose**

Serafina expresses fear at the thought of exposure when she gives the shirt she made for Estelle Hohengarten to Alvaro for him to wear. The shirt was to be a gift from Estelle to Serafina's deceased husband and she asks him if there is a name pinned to the shirt. She states, "Don't tell me the name! Throw it away, out the window! . . . Throw it, throw it away!" (368). Serafina becomes afraid of the name pinned to the shirt because Estelle represents the false fidelity of her and Rosario's sexual relationship.

In a conversation with Serafina, Father Del Leo refuses to tell her that her husband did have an affair with Estelle because of the sanctity and confidentiality of confession. Serafina reacts with fear when Father Del Leo tells her to return to her house. Serafina cannot enter because she is afraid that she won't be able to breathe due

to the tin roof. The memory of her marriage with Rosario, and the possible infidelity and impurity of their sexual union is too much for Serafina to face when Father Del Leo hints at the truthfulness of the accusations.

Serafina reacts with rage when Flora and Bessie expose the possibility of the impurity of her marriage with Rosario. The women, fed up with Serafina's pretentious comments about the purity of her marriage, mention Estelle Hohengarten. Serafina reacts with a forceful rage chasing the women out of her house with a broom. First Serafina states:

SERAFINA [in a terrible voice]:  
Liar!—Lie—arrrrrr!

[She slams the wooden door shut with a violence that shakes the walls.] (314).

Then Serafina picks up the broom and the stage directions read:

*Serafina suddenly rushes at them with the broom. She flails Flora about the hips and shoulders. Bessie gets out. But Flora is trapped in a corner. A table is turned over. Bessie, outside, screams for the police and cries: 'Murder! Murder!'. . . Flora breaks wildly past the flailing broom and escapes out of the house. She also takes up the cry for help. Serafina follows them out. She is flailing the brilliant noon air with the broom. The two women run off, screaming] (314-315).*

The rage of Serafina continues as Serafina slams the door and states "[in a crazed manner]: Have me—have me—arrested—dirty slut—bitch—liar!" (315). This also shows Serafina using the defense of contempt. By calling the women sluts, bitches, and liars, Serafina can convince

herself that she is above their accusations, giving their accusations no merit, and allowing her to continue her denial.

Serafina at one point has no more energy to react with rage or fear and finally is able to cry. After Serafina attacks the priest with rage for his implications at the infidelity of Rosario, Serafina exhibits the secondary reaction of distress:

*She returns slowly to the porch steps and sinks down on them, sitting like a tired man, her knees spread apart and her head cupped in her hands. . . . She starts up with a cry . . . . She sinks back down on the steps, then leans back, staring up at the sky, her body rocking (347).*

The final exposure of the truth to Serafina happens with the phone call to Estelle that Alvaro prompts her to make. Serafina begins her emotional response with the secondary reaction of fear. "Serafina holds the phone away from her as though it had burst into flame. Then, with a terrible cry, she hurls it to the floor. She staggers dizzily toward the Madonna." (392). The fear quickly turns to rage, and the rage motivates her action of placing a knife in her purse so that she can go and kill Estelle.

The physical manifestations of shame are very clear in the stage directions of The Rose Tattoo. When Serafina's sexual evening with Alvaro is exposed to her daughter, Serafina has to admit to having a sexual relationship that she has always deemed as shameful.

*Don't look at me like that with the eyes of your father! [She shields her face as from a terrible*

*glare.] . . . [. . . Serafina cannot meet her daughter's eyes. . .] . . . [Serafina turns slowly, shamefully, to face her. She is like a peasant in the presence of a young princess. . . ] (250).*

The tables have turned, as Serafina is afraid her daughter will judge her the way that she has judged her daughter. Serafina can no longer stand behind her puritanical tirades.

Serafina's reconciliation of the puritanical and the sexual is the result of her attraction to Alvaro. Alvaro challenges Serafina to contest her view of herself by finally convincing her of her deceased husband's infidelity. Serafina's conviction towards the purity of sexual relationships has been a product of her pride and belief in the purity of her own marriage. Her faith in this purity is as strong as her faith in her religion, and when this faith is shattered with the knowledge of Rosario's affair with Estelle Hohengarten, she is no longer subject to her faith and pride.

Serafina temporarily abandons her faith by smashing the urn containing the ashes of her deceased husband and blowing out the candles in front of the Madonna. With her connections to the spiritual world safely cut she invites Alvaro to spend the night with her. Serafina's shame returns temporarily when her daughter discovers her affair but Serafina's spiritual and sensual experience is too profound for the shame to last for long. She soon confesses the truth to Rosa and in reconciling her own

needs gives her daughter both permission and blessing to go to her man, Jack. Serafina having found peace between her body and spirit returns to the Madonna and re-lights the candle.

### **Exposure and Reverend Shannon**

Shannon's sexual desires, similar to Serafina, are exposed to others almost at the very beginning of the play. Shannon's defenses of denial and contempt are so strong however, that he refuses to face the truth. Unlike Streetcar and Summer and Smoke, where the tension is driven by the threat of exposure, the tension in Night of the Iguana, is not for Shannon to be exposed, but for him to accept his sexual desires as something human and natural.

When Charlotte first appears in Act II Shannon tries to remove himself from the situation, and from shame by ducking quickly into his cubicle and slamming the door. When he finally comes out "*. . . he emerges from his cubicle like a man entering a place of execution. He leans against the wall, mopping the sweat off his face with a handkerchief*]" (Iguana 296). First Shannon defends against the exposure by hiding, but as exposure is inevitable, Shannon displays fear of further exposure by acting as if he is "*entering a place of execution.*"

Shannon displays a mixture of fear, distress, and rage when Miss Fellowes calls him a defrocked minister, exposing the truth of Shannon's sexuality:

Miss Fellowes, don't, don't, don't . . . do what . . . you're doing! *[He is on the verge of hysteria, he makes some incoherent sounds, gesticulates with clenched fists, then stumbles wildly across the verandah and leans panting for breath against a post.]* Don't! Break! Human! Pride! (Iguana 276).

By being called a defrocked minister Shannon feels that his pride will be broken because it labels him as something he feels is inferior or shameful. Later, Miss Fellowes again calls him a defrocked minister and again Shannon reacts with a mixture of fear, rage and distress. The stage directions read, "*[His voice stops oddly with a choked sobbing sound. He runs at the wall and pounds it with his fists]*" (Iguana 337).

Shannon's most disturbing reaction towards exposure is rage. Shannon and Charlotte reveal that immediately following the sex act, Shannon strikes his partners and then forces them to pray with him. Charlotte describes the moment after their encounter; "Yes, I remember that after making love to me you hit me, Larry, you struck me in the face, and you twisted my arm to make me kneel on the floor and pray with you for forgiveness" (Iguana 298). The initial rage is followed by a defense to prevent against further shaming. The act of praying symbolizes Shannon's need to purify himself as he strives for perfection.

The constant attacks by Miss Fellowes that expose Shannon's sexual behavior soon become too much for Shannon and he responds with rage by running down the hill and urinating on the luggage of the Baptist women. The



exposure becomes one Shannon can no longer defend against. His rage becomes combined with distress and fear soon after as Shannon tries to rip the cross off of his neck, cutting himself, and then heads for the ocean in order to swim to China to kill himself. At this point there must be a resolution in Shannon or the shame will lead him to destroy himself.

Shannon gets tied up in a hammock so that he can't hurt himself further. Mirroring Shannon's captivity is an iguana that is tied up underneath the verandah. The iguana serves the same function as the animal images in other plays by Williams. The iguana, a resident of the jungle, is symbolic of primitive sexual desire. While Shannon and Hannah spend the evening together, trying to resolve Shannon's conflict, they discuss resolving the conflict of the iguana by setting it free. By the time that the iguana is set free, Shannon himself is no longer tied up in the hammock and his "primitive" nature, or sexual desires, are set free as well. Shannon states, "We'll play God tonight like kids play house with old broken crates and boxes. All right? Now Shannon is going to go down there with his machete and cut the damn lizard loose so it can run back to its bushes because God won't do it and we are going to play God here" (370).

Shannon at this point realizes that God can't set him free either. The idealized higher existence that he strove for in religion can never be reached. He resolves, with

the help of Hannah, to accept the sexual nature within himself at the same time that Nonno finishes and recites his poem about acceptance.

After Hannah describes the two sexual encounters she has had in her life Shannon asks her if she was disgusted by them. Hannah responds by saying "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent" (363-364). With Hannah's admission Shannon realizes that the higher plane of existence he has been striving for can be reached through acceptance. Hannah's acceptance of Shannon, and her respect for him despite his unadmirable characteristics, allows Shannon to make a connection with Hannah. This connection with another human being, coupled with acceptance, allows Shannon to reconcile his shame for sexuality. Shannon can now accept himself and decides to stay at the hotel with Maxine.

## Conclusion

A much deeper understanding of the puritanical/sexual conflict present in the life and plays of Tennessee Williams can be gained by applying Kaufman's theory of shame. Kaufman defines shame as the feeling a person experiences when something inherent about them is felt to be inferior, deficient, or morally wrong. Tennessee Williams was a gay man at a time in our culture when to be gay was to be immoral. The puritanical influences upon Williams' life, both in the culture and in his family, led him to judge his sexuality as an inferiority. As an inferiority, Williams' sexuality produced in him the complex emotion of shame.

Examining the conflict in terms of shame allows for an understanding in terms of emotion. Emotions are something that all people have in common. Emotions are what bring us together or tear us apart. Emotions are what motivate us to action. Shame is an emotion that everyone can understand. Perhaps this is the answer to why Williams' dramas have always experienced such profound success.

Everyone that sees a play by Williams may not be able to fully empathize with a conflict between a puritanical value system and sexual desires, however, everyone can

empathize with the universal feeling of shame, or the feeling that something within you is inferior. We all know what it is like to fear exposure of our inferiorities, to defend against them, hide them, or react with fear, distress, or rage when the inferiority is exposed.

Not everybody would react to shame like Blanche does by breaking a bottle to twist in Stanley's face, but we do understand the importance of proving to ourselves and to others that we are not inferior. In a culture that values strength, we all need to feel worthy and defend against people seeing our faults. So we understand the intense emotions of the characters as they almost frantically defend their pride and self worth. We understand the fear of exposure of something that is not only not valued, but at times, as Tennessee Williams must have felt, is immoral or illegal.

The scope of this thesis did not permit investigation into the impact of shame on other writings by Williams. The puritanical/sexual conflict, and the shame associated with sexuality, could be examined in other plays by Williams, as well as Williams' poetry, novels, and short stories. Besides the shame associated with the puritanical/sexual conflict, it would also be interesting to look at the role of shame in ageing. For example in Sweet Bird of Youth, both Chance and Princess have lost their youth. The shame of ageing motivates many of the character's actions.

As this thesis shows, much can be gained by examining Williams' work from a psychological perspective. Further studies could be done applying psychological theories or clinical studies to drama. Applying disciplines other than psychology to Williams' work can produce valuable insights into Williams' plays.

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