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THE RE-INVENTION OF THE SELF: PERFORMATIVITY AND LIBERATION IN SELECTED PLAYS BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

By

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ABSTRACT

THE RE-INVENTION OF THE SELF: PERFORMATIVITY AND LIBERATION IN SELECTED PLAYS BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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In this study entitled: The Re-invention of the Self: Performativity and Liberation in Selected Plays by Tennessee Williams, I argue that the self is not a fixed, stable, and coherent entity, but rather a performative self that plays different roles, wears different masks, and presents itself in different scripts. Most of the critics who have tackled Williams's plays have argued that his characters are torn between such dichotomies as flesh and spirit, and body and soul. In my study, I re-examine such claims, reassess Williams's characters' identity, and revisit the tensions and clashes that haunt these characters. I argue that the notion of identity Williams dramatizes is more complex and multi-dimensional than the clear-cut binary dichotomies through which these characters are often perceived. The alternative notion I present, in lieu of these readings, is that the self Williams constructs is performative with a multiplicity of faces and facets. I re-examine the self by applying different theories to come to a fuller understanding of Williams's notion of identity.

In the opening chapter, I challenge reading the self from a single theoretical viewpoint, and instead, present the performative as accountable for its complex multi-dimensionality. The first chapter on A Streetcar Named Desire examines Blanche DuBois recreating a new image of herself to cope with her loss of social status, prestige, and respect. The second chapter on Cat on a Hot Tin

Roof explores the masks and façades by which Brick Pollitt's identity is constructed and argues that it is ultimately a result of negotiation between his private desires on the one hand, and the public resistance to the legitimacy of such desires on the other hand. The last two chapters successively entitled "Orpheus Descending: the Myth of a Liberated Self" and "'Out, Out, Human Outcry': Theatricality as an Impasse," examine the impossibility of the self to be liberated from this performativity. In conclusion, I argue that the self can be captured in its totality and open-endedness only through its own performativity which prevents the self from becoming an essentialized entity that feeds on clearly defined stereotypes and prejudices.

To Sabrine and Mariam,

Yessine and Tessnim,

For their unconditional love...

Their songs...

Their smiles...

And their love for beauty...

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Introduction

The self that I will explore in this study is not a fixed, stable, and coherent entity, it is rather a performative self that plays different roles, wears different masks, and derives itself from different scripts. As I will demonstrate in four selected plays by Tennessee Williams: A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Orpheus Descending, and The Two-Character Play, the characters Williams dramatizes on the stage are amalgamations of a multiplicity of faces and a plethora of facets. They act and perform not only for the audience but also for each other. Most of Williams's plays can be perceived as plays within plays where the characters subscribe to many roles and seem to have more than one true identity. When we meet Blanche DuBois early in Streetcar, we see her in her white suit performing the role of the Southern belle, it is only later in the play we discover that she is performing this role to cover and hide her troubled past in Laurel after what happened to her with the loss of Belle Reve and the suicide of her homosexual husband. The closing lines of Cat, marking Brick's willingness to make Maggie's lie about her pregnancy true, illustrate how the world of reality is but a transformation of lies and pretenses. Orpheus Descending presents a variation of the same theme. Val Xavier faces his own doom not only because of the destructive conservative forces of Jabe Torrance and Two-River County community, but also because he has locked himself into the role which such conservative forces have cast him. In The Two-Character Play, the theater becomes a central metaphor through which Williams demonstrates how the self is performative and theatrical in its very nature and essence.

Even though some theorists have recently begun to approach the self from this perspective, many literary figures have already explored the performative nature of the self in their own works. W.H. Auden comments: "Human beings are, necessarily, actors who cannot become something before they have first pretended to be it."[1] The relationship of the role to the self is not that of the copy to the original, it is rather "as copy is to copy," to borrow Judith Butler's image, and every self becomes "an imitation without origin."[2] Butler's observation that "genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived"[3] is pertinent not only to gender, but also to the self in more general terms. Appearance and being become interchangeable, if not totally identical, and the demarcation line between false self and true self is subsequently removed. As Roy Schafer affirms, "we must also allow falseness a quantitative aspect--a position on a continuum rather than a fixed, absolute, and even discontinuous position."[4] The mendacity that Big Daddy speaks about in Cat is part of the truth, performativity part of who we are, and falsehood is enclosed within the matrix of our identity. Therefore, we can have access only to the image i.e. the performance. Stephen Frosh remarks: "It is the image which is the most vibrant metaphor for modern reality: the image as on a television screen, with no substance behind it, creating, playing, disappearing, all in an instant gone. This image is subversive because it is fluid and provocative, but it is anarchistic because it offers no roots and no sources of value."[5]

The gap between illusion and reality, masks and faces, and role and self is diminished in this perspective. The mask becomes so close to the face that it can hardly be dropped. If it does drop, we may discover that there is nothing behind the mask. The game of the performance is all there is to Williams's characters.

The mask is the very skin of the face, and only in the mask do we see the face. In a similar manner, the self and the role are not antithetical as much as they are inter-changeable. The image of Peer Gynt in Henrik Ibsen's play sitting in the forest and peeling an onion while talking to himself is a dramatization of the idea that the self is a multitude of faces and roles. As the layers of an onion, Peer Gynt sees himself as a collage of roles and faces. He is "the drowning man hanging on the wreck," "the archaeologist," "the prophet," and "the man who lived for gaiety." The many faces collide, and Peer asks Gynt the ultimate question: "There's quite a multitude of layers. When am I going to get to the heart?" He poses the question only to discover in disappointment and regret that there is no heart to an onion. He screams: "God, it hasn't got one! Right to the middle, it's layers and layers, each getting smaller."[6] At the end of this scene, Peer is left talking to Gynt as if they were two different characters or two reflections of the same entity. There is nothing to the self but one layer after another, and nothing to the face but one mask after another, and nothing to identity but one persona after another. The layers are endless, and so are the faces; one face reflects another, and one voice echoes another; and what lies behind the appearance is not reality, but another appearance.

Butler's conclusion that "gender is an act"[7] is also applicable to our understanding of a performative self. The self "requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and a re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization."[8] Williams's characters are caught within this circle of en[act]ment. Tom Wingfield, for example, has fallen in love with long distances as his father did, and Blanche DuBois has fallen victim to the same deliberate

cruelty she claims she herself has never been guilty of. Brick Pollitt's closing line in Cat "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?" not only draws a parallel between son and father, but also demonstrates how the son is following in the father's footsteps. Felice and Clare are afraid of re-enacting their father's suicide, and in holding each other at play's end, it seems that they have found the ultimate alternative as well as the escape from the cycle of death and destruction, even though such escape remains temporary. In Orpheus Descending Val and Lady refuse at a certain point to reenact the values and "meanings already socially established," and decide to act against the "mundane" forms of these values by refusing to act as the agents of "legitimization" of such values. When Lady's and Val's desire is exposed and perceived as subversive, as it is, then they have to face their destruction and mutilation. Williams's characters are always caught within the image that the others have designed and tailored for them.

As a consequence, the self I am discussing in this study is not a site of synthesis, for such a terminology reveals a state of harmony, serenity, and cohesion not pertinent to the state in which Tennessee Williams's characters find themselves. Blanche DuBois whom we meet in Streetcar is torn between her past and her present; and her attempt to reinvent herself through her theatricality does not prove to be conducive to the longings that she deemed for herself. Similarly, Val Xavier and Lady Torrance, the protagonists of Orpheus, are torn between their longings and the expectations that others impose upon them. They fail to live up to their desires and thus fall victims to the images and the molds that their Two-River County community has imposed on them. Brick Pollitt's fate in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is less tragic than Val's, but that does not take away from the play the dramatic tension and the different voices between which Brick

is torn. The Two-Character Play does not offer a relief to a performative self from its performativity and theatricality. On the contrary, Williams demonstrates that this tension between the past and the present, between who we are and the image others project upon us, are ultimately the very conditions with which we have to live. In shaping their identities, Williams's characters cut and paste, write and edit, and select what to remember and what not to as if they were the master creators of their own script. But their task is not that easy. They are always crushed by the forces others manipulate and the images and the expectations that others are asking them to live up to. Blanche does not escape the brutality of Stanley Kowalski; neither do Lady and Val escape the aggression and the violence of the Two-River County community. Brick has accepted his wife Maggie's manipulation into his own design, and her lie has become the very lie with which he has chosen to live for the rest of his life. The ending of The Two-Character Play is ambiguous. Whether Felice and Clare will follow in the footsteps of their parents remains a question. Obviously, Williams's characters' identity is not a site of synthesis and harmony, but rather that of collage, fragmentation, and tension between private longings and public expectations.

Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke speaks perhaps most eloquently for this doubleness, multiplicity, and complexity: "I've thought many times of something you told me last summer, that I have a *doppelganger*. I looked that up and I found that it means another person inside of me, another self, and I don't know whether to thank you or not for making me conscious of it!"[9] Alma, Blanche, Brick, Val, Lady and others of Williams's characters do not present the audience with a coherent and unified self; they are broken pieces and incomplete entities. They are a collage of images from their past, images of who they deem

themselves to be, and images of who the others expect them to be. Within their voices, they embody the voices of the others, and in their own reflection they disclose reflections of the others. The tension in Williams's plays is about who is to occupy the center around which this self is constructed. On the one hand, the desires and the longings of the individual are pushing their way towards this center against the social forces which, on the other hand, present themselves as the most legitimate occupants of this center.

The performative self is disunited; it has a multiplicity of faces and facets and an infinity of voices and images, and masks and roles to play that reflect the polymorphousness and the complexity of human identity. The American novelist Paul Auster has explored this multiplicity in his autobiographical work, The Invention of Solitude:

> I felt as though I were looking down to the bottom of myself, and what I found there was more than just myself--I found the world. That's why that book is filled with so many references and quotations, in order to pay homage to all the others inside me. On the one hand, it's a work about being alone; on the other hand, it's about community. That book has dozens of authors, and I wanted them all to speak through me.[10]

This multiplicity does not necessarily entail contradictions, schizophrenia, and discontinuity; there can be continuity within the roles that the self plays. As Irving Howe observes: "Once perceived or imagined, the self implies doubleness, multiplicity."[11] Schizophrenia is no longer the clinical term for a psychologically deficient state of being, it is rather the very nature and the very condition within which the self can exist. Otherwise, the complexity of the self can be aborted, and our understanding of the human machine remains partial. If the self Williams

dramatizes is incomplete, disfigured, and mutilated, this incompletion, disfigurement, and mutilation are part of who/what this self is. Our view of the self has to separate itself from any understanding of the self in clinical terms, for these terms have proven to be twisted and manipulated by the normative and oppressive powers against the individual. I shall steer away from terms like continuity and coherence in my discussion of the self, because I accept "'coherence' and 'continuity' of the 'person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility," as Judith Butler informs us.[12] The view that the self is a "coherence" and "continuity" is not without an exclusionist political agenda. It sets a norm for what types of behavior and ways of thinking we deem acceptable or not. Under such normalizing views, desire, sex, sexuality, and gender become matters of prescriptions, and those who do not behave according to such prescriptive and normative manner can not fit. Kim Worthington poses the rhetorical question "But why should I seek to know myself as a fixed, permanent presence?" And she continues to explore the ideological implications of these views that attempt to fix the self: "This is surely to look for the wrong thing entirely. The discovery of a transcendental self is hardly desirable, even if it were possible, for this must limit me to the given contours of the unchanging, permanent form I discover."[13]

Perceiving the self as performative allows us to accept it as a multiplicity of versions and editions. Through the notion of performativity the contradictions embodied in one's identity are not resolved by means of nullification, but rather by accepting them as integral and crucial components to our understanding of the self. As Schafer claims: "identity... is always at risk... [and] implies acceptance

of there being no final resting place and a great need to tolerate ambiguity, tension, and deferral of closure."[14] Through this performativity, the self never allows itself to be defined as object by others; it rather defies categories, limitations, and definitions in the face of its beholders, and becomes an entity or a concept that can elude definitions and the boundaries that such definitions might impose upon its fluidity and switching circumference. Through its performativity, the self usurps the power to formulate categories "to control the moral currency, to define the nature of 'nature'"[15] from the hands of the normative forces and places that power within the realms of the self. Moreover, the different roles that the self plays make it not a singular entity, but an entity that has to be always in the plural, an entity of assemblage of selves and accumulative roles. Through these roles, the self reinvents itself into different faces and facets and multiple performances.

From this perspective, the self is an open-ended question. It refuses conclusions, resists closures, and acts against all readings that might intentionally or unintentionally reduce it to formulaic interpretations. The self expands beyond categories. It is private, yet undeniably social. The self is "socially formed even as it can be quickly turned against the very social formations that have brought it into birth."[16] The self is in a state of homelessness; its roots and origins are far remote because the self refuses to live with its ties to different institutions such as society and family. It is everywhere yet nowhere; it is here and there; it partially resides within the individual, and partially within the social and political institutions that the individual is part of. The apprehension of the self remains a longing that is yet to be achieved. Paul Ricoeur concludes that "there is no direct apprehension of the self by the self, no

internal apperception or appropriation of the self's desire to exist through the short-cut of consciousness, but only by taking the long road of the interpretation of signs."[17] Therefore, the self is not a matter of fact and truth. The meaning of the self is not in definitions but, rather, in the state of chaos and conflict within which the self exists. As Colin Eisler succinctly observes, "If we think we are in 'control of the subject' we are demeaning it and ourselves, assuming a superiority unworthy of the privilege of scholarship."[18]

Ricoeur's assertion not only refers to the impossibility of defining the self but also to the fragmented and discursive characteristic of the self that has made such definition impossible. The self is never in possession of itself. "The self that we are," as Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us, "does not possess itself: one could say that it 'happens.'"[19] The self is a process of becoming that is never complete and finalized to fit in the boundaries and limitations of definitions. It can be observed only in motion and progress, and any attempt to define the self is an attempt to stop this process of becoming and abort the self while it is in its creation. Stephen Frosh has commented on the fragmented self in his book Identity Crisis:

> People are not really structured in stable, integrated ways but are by nature, full of fluidity, contradiction, impulse and frustration, psychological processes brought together only to make coherence within the domains of rationality seem attainable.[20]

Defining the self is only an attempt to impose "an ideological fiction... upon the irrationalities of psychological reality" and new ways of "constraining desire" to the limitations of definitions, and thus misses the complexity and fluidity of the

self.[21] This study, therefore, will attempt to capture the self in flux, in its process of becoming, revision, and re-signification.

If the self is discursive, performative, and multiple, one starts to wonder about the value of studying, examining, and writing about the self. Howe answers this question when he concludes at the end of his essay that "the idea of the self has been a liberating and revolutionary step, perhaps the most liberating and revolutionary, toward the goal of a communal self-humanization."[22] The notion of the self as constructed and performative, as it is, is a mark of freedom. It allows individuals to sort out answers to the eternal question "Who am I?" and to perform an exercise of self-interrogation that might be thorny in its nature, but (dis)comforting in its outcome. Only in this introspective and retrospective leap can the self meet itself on a more or less familiar and recognizable ground.

The self has a value of resistance and moral advancement as well. The self-examination that leads towards self-realization allows individuals to distance themselves from the conventionally accepted moral values, and to draw them more and more towards values springing from themselves rather than from established conventions. In the exercise of self-realization, the self turns its own gaze upon itself to make out of this gaze a journey of self-understanding and self-affirmation. In this exercise, the self can contemplate the truths and the lies with which it is surrounded, and the conventionally accepted social values imposed upon it in an oppressive and controlling manner. With the absence or the annihilation of the self, resistance and change would have no place in our lives any more. Though discursive, ambiguous, and even enigmatic, the self has always played the role of catalyst in the process of change, and has always been the motor for this change. The self is the product of specific actuality and

historical circumstances, but it is an entity that goes beyond its historicity, and sometimes defies this defining actuality to motivate change and movement. From this perspective, the self becomes an affirmation of the possibility for creative life. As Frosh states: "The self, then, is an affirmation of what is humanly worthy and creative."[23] Moreover, no matter how deeply entrapped we are in the social normative forces, be they moral, religious, or even linguistic, the self provides us with a possibility of a better option within them. Identity triggers the dynamics of change and resistance. By erasing and annihilating the self, the individual is left at a loss and falls prey to the deterministic aspects of these normative powers. With the erasure of the self, the individual is turned into a docile entity created by the normalizing forces of the disciplinary regimes, and a victim of the homogenizing mechanism of culture.

Our belief in the self places the individuals' agency in the hands of the individuals themselves without necessarily nullifying the dialectical relationship or tension between the dictations of the social organizations and the will of the individuals to be who they deem themselves to be. As Frosh claims, the self becomes like a creative work of art. Bits and pieces, memories, and incidents are selected to be included in the narrative of the self so that we can read ourselves and make ourselves accessible to others. This narrative is the image of ourselves that we want to present to the world, to our friends, and to our relatives, and in which we exercise our freedom to reinvent ourselves. George Levine affirms: "The 'self' of contemporary social debate, even transmuted into 'subject,' remains an agitator for individual action and agency."[24] However, one should also bear in mind that much of the self is also internalization of the forces of culture, history, and ideology that have produced this self. Therefore, the separation between

who the individuals are and the image the others project upon them becomes totally irrelevant if not impossible.

Examples from Williams's plays make the point in the case clear. The homophobic discourse, for example, that Brick resorts to to describe himself, as well as Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, is largely socially constructed. His fear is not of homosexuality itself, but more of the pejorative tags with which this society labels homosexuality. Brick himself, as I will clarify in the chapter on Cat, who may be a latent homosexual, has himself become the very agent to perpetuate the homophobic discourse which ultimately seeks to destroy the homosexual figure. Val Xavier is another example that supports this point. Even though Val has some feelings and desires for Lady, he has chosen not to reveal them. He has also sacrificed his vision and ideal of freedom for the desire to fit in with the Two-River County community. I suggest that long before he is destroyed by Jabe and the rest of the community, Val is destroyed by himself. He has shut off the voice of his own desire and the dream of his own free will to gain rite of passage in a community which has never ceased to see him as an intruder. Val in Orpheus Descending, like Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, has internalized many of the social and moral conventions. Both characters carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction and demise. The two examples state clearly that the question of agency is not always clear-cut and often more complex and murky than we might think. The individuals' agency is a matter of dispute and conflict between the individuals themselves and the ideologies that codify and dictate much of their behavior. Williams's characters exemplify this conflict and depict its tragic outcome on the individual. Williams does not eliminate the self, but instead portrays it as de-centered, broken, and scattered;

simultaneously he also retains it as a participant in the construction of its own image. Thus, Williams preserves the intrinsic relationship and dynamics between the desires of the individuals and the powers to which their society wants to subdue them. He is not willing to deny the emancipative possibilities available to individuals even though such possibilities can prove to be unattainable and meager at times

An Eclectic Approach for a Performative Self.

The approach I am undertaking in this study is eclectic and constructivist whereby the self is a creation and a construction of the imagination. This approach does not necessarily annihilate the self; on the contrary, it tries to explore its complexity and rediscover the pieces of a puzzle, which ultimately remains incomplete. The self is a fiction not in the sense that it is a fallacious and artificial entity, but in the sense that it is the creation of an accumulation of memories and experiences which are constantly remaking themselves. As Patricia Waugh affirms, the "self is an endless gathering and interpretation of fragments of experience."[25] The self inhabits what Brian McHale calls pluralistic "ontological landscapes."[26] Williams does not seem to be embracing the "death of the subject." He seems to be embracing the "reinvention of the subject" with all the affirmation and assertions that this reinvention may entail. Williams still has faith in the individual and the important place the individual deserves to occupy in a democratic society. The odds against which the individual is operating can be massive, oppressive, and defeating, but Williams never lost faith in the individual's resilience and capacity to cope with these odds. Thus, even though one can opt for a constructivist approach to the self that Williams stages for us, it

is not necessary that the individual's agency should be dislocated and [re] placed within the hands of the normative powers. The subjective agency never becomes an impossibility in Williams's understanding of the subject. We observe his characters in their private longings, and in their private seclusion, but we never lose sight of the forces which are trying to invade the privacy or the intimacy of these moments. In my constructivist approach, I do not intend to trace an origin of the self, I am rather arguing for a multiplicity of origins, desires, and longings that come together to shape and re-shape the self-- such factors are public in the same way as they are private. I do not intend to ground the self in one center rather than the other, it is an entity with no center; and even if that center does exist, it is far and beyond our capacity to trace it back to an origin. All the attempts to claim that the self has a definite origin are attempts to control the uncontrollable and to fix the unfixed. As Derrida warns us, the idea of a center offers us "a reassuring certitude... and on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered."[27] Establishing an origin of the self offers us some certitude, but this certitude is erroneous and fallacious. The self is more of a floating sign where the signifier and the signified do not necessarily correlate, and therefore the sign itself escapes any kind of deterministic relationship. The self is a site of ambiguity where types and stereotypes are inapplicable.

Studying the self cuts across different fields of discipline, including sociology, language, and politics. In recent years, discussions about the meaning of selfhood have even made their way into pop culture; a magazine entitled Self sells now in the news stands, and some Hollywood movies have started to explore the dividedness and the multiplicity of the self along with its representational and performative nature. Movies like The Truman Show, Ed TV,

The Talented Mr. Ripley, and the Australian film, me, myself, and i all explore the self from this perspective, and demonstrate how the reality of the self can be turned into a fiction of our own and the other's creation. In these movies, the protagonists live their lives on the screen; and in the roles they act, and the way they turn their world into a stage, they reinvent themselves and create characters not out of their imaginations but out of themselves, and who they are. Bruce Willis's movie Disney the Kid, portrays a protagonist whose life turns upside down when he meets himself as an eight-year-old child. In this movie, the past and the present collide with each other on the screen to show the audience that the demarcation line between both is not as defined as we may have thought.

If the self is multiple and discursive, so should the discourse we adopt to examine and understand this highly complex entity. George Levine avers: "No discussion of the self can any longer confine itself to psychology, or to the 'internal' conditions of 'mind'... Language and history and social context in fact become psychology, as psychology and anthropology and sociology become language and history."[28] Arnold Modell agrees with Levine's claim: "...for in our contemporary world human life is irreducibly multi-leveled. We are both paradoxically merged with the other and separate from the other. This represents an intrinsic dialectic, which I believe should also be reflected in our theories that conceptualize the relation between private meanings and our interaction with others."[29] In an eclectic approach to the self, one can avoid the risk of essentializing the self and reducing it to a homogenized entity. Through an interdisciplinary dialogue, the self can be examined and understood without necessarily fixing or pinning it down to a single dominator. The self is a site of different impulses, forces, and urges which, contradictory as they seem,

collectively constitute the texture of the self. These internal contradictory impulses of the self are the foundations of the self. Perhaps the self is so broad in its scope that "it spills through and over disciplines and out of the academy into the life of our times."[30] We can not afford to think about the self any more without taking into consideration the lack of uniformity and consistency inherent in the very nature of this entity.

The Authorial Subject: The Ultimate Performance

When the topic is about the performative self in the plays of Tennessee Williams, the playwright himself can not be excluded from this discussion, for Williams himself, throughout his career, has become a character of his own creation. The name Tennessee Williams, for example, is both the name of the actor who is playing the role of Tom Lanier Williams and the name of the writer who wrote the script for that role. As is the case in The Two-Character Play, the actor is the writer of his own role. Lyle Leverich comments on the fictionality/performativity inherent in the name of Tennessee Williams: "Now there was Thomas Lanier Williams of St. Louis, born 1911, and Tennessee Williams of New Orleans, born 1914. And, henceforth the man and the personae would ever be at odds."[31] Leverich describes Williams the performer:

> The Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, very much on stage, as he was... has been described anonymously as 'his own greatest work of fiction' and 'a tragicomic genius on and off stage, a lyric poet whose wry, sad protagonists lived life through each sweaty nuance, in much the same way as he chose to live.' He was often impossibly demanding, purposefully irrational, egocentric, vulnerably generous, and hilariously funny, --all within 60 seconds.[32]

Tennessee Williams is an actor of different roles among which he moves with subtlety and versatility. By adopting the name of Tennessee, Williams is trying to reinvent himself in a new role, and leave behind him the "Tom" of his childhood. But again and again, the role of Tom still imposes itself on Tennessee, and ultimately, it becomes another facet and dimension that Tennessee has to portray. As Lyle Leverich observes, in the 1960's Williams "became acutely aware that he was in competition with himself--the self he had created as Tennessee Williams."[33] Tennessee Williams is no less of a theatrical performer than the other characters of his creation such as Blanche, Brick, or Felice and Clare. Williams does not seem to be unaware of the performative nature of his identity when he avers to Rex Reed in a 1971 interview that his "public self" is an "artifice of mirrors,"[34] implying that it is a collage of different images, facets, roles, and personae. The point I would like to highlight here is that the playwright himself can not be separated from his own work. Gore Vidal notes in his introduction to Williams's collected stories that Williams's biography may be found not so much in his Memoirs as in his fictional writing.[35]

In his interviews and comments Williams portrays himself as a dramatic persona who shares with his characters not only their stage, but also their feelings, their conflicts, and their pain. "A writer's view," he told Don Ross in 1957, "is always affected by his own state of being. I am an anxious, troubled person. I can't write about anything I don't feel..."[36] In his foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams writes: "I can't expose a human weakness on the stage unless I know it through having it myself. I have exposed a good many human weaknesses and brutalities and consequently I have them."[37] In his characters, Williams writes himself, in his heroes and heroines he explores his sensitivity,

and his "drama derives its force from the depth of feeling that prevailed in the heart of the playwright..."[38] Williams's characters are shattered fragments of him, and constant reworking of his divided entity. In his Memoirs, he claims: "What is my profession but living and putting it all down in stories and plays and now in this book?"[39] In Laura and Tom Wingfield, Blanche DuBois, Brick Pollitt, Val Xavier, and many others, Williams has found the opportunity and the material to refashion and redesign himself. The act of writing, for Williams, is an act of reinvention and becoming. "Writing is a question of becoming," Deleuze argues, "always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed... Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes..."[40] In writing, the author himself, according to Deleuze, undertakes some metamorphosis and transformation, and hopes for the attainment of self-completion.

Williams's claims about his identification with his characters are numerous. Repeatedly, he claimed that Alma is his favorite character: "I think the character I like most is Miss Alma... She is my favorite because I came out so late and so did Alma... Miss Alma grew up in the shadow of the rectory, and so did I."[41] Moreover, in 1973, he called his play, The Two-Character Play "a history of what I went through in the Sixties transmuted into the predicament of a brother and a sister."[42] Even though these claims of identification are valuable in enriching our understanding of Williams's plays, they can not be taken at face value. The correlation between Williams and his characters is never total or complete. This correspondence is based on selected memories, imaginary ties, and omissions. This correspondence involves "defacement," it involves putting on faces and removing others; it entails exaggerations, justifications, and rationalizations in order to turn this self into a subject of monumental status as

Paul de Man argues.[43] Stories after stories are woven in front of our eyes by Tennessee Williams in his Memoirs, plays, poetry, and interviews. They are all stories which come from a man who has rehearsed how to live on the screen and on the stage even when he seems to be mostly absorbed in his real life.

If Williams's plays are the narratives of his own self reinvention, then we should be alert that this narrative of reinvention is troubled, confused, mixed, and reflexive. It is a narrative of collision where the narrator and the central figure in the narrative are the same; however, the two never become identical. Between the narrative and the self depicted remains a gap and an omission. There is a gap between the self that recalls and the one that is recalled, between the reflecting subject and the reflected object. Williams comments on the evasiveness of writing in his Memoirs: "I think writing is continually a pursuit of a very evasive quarry, and you never quite catch it."[44] The pursuit is endless and what writing communicates is never complete, accurate, or precise. The dilemma of a self trying to reinvent itself is a dilemma of déchirure between its past and its present, between the future into which this new self is trying to cast itself and the examining retrospective perspective from which this self seems incapable of liberating itself. Williams, along with his characters, does not escape this déchirure. Crites Stephen comments on this state of being and describes this déchirure in terms of hiatus between the recollecting and the recollected selves:

> What I own as myself is always present as the character in the story from whose perspective its episodes are recalled, claimed as its own self by this 'I' who recalls. By telling the story from the perspective of this self, as in a first person narrative, usually told in the past tense, I distance this self from the intersubjective matrix of experience in order to claim it as my own, as that personal past with which I claim identity. Still there is always some hiatus between the

> 'I' who recollects and the self who appears as a character in a succession of episodes, a hiatus that I artfully bridge by owning this self, claiming it as my own.[45]

When Williams claims "I am Blanche DuBois," the correlation between himself and this heroine is rather metaphorical, imagined, and thus fictional. Williams's reinvention of himself in his characters can not be read and understood only within the realms of fiction where the reality itself becomes imagined and the lines between reality and fiction are rendered blurred if not totally tangent. In Williams's texts "every word is autobiographical and no word is autobiographical."[46] Norman K. Denzin observes: "if an author can make up facts about his or her own life, who is to know what is true and what is false?"[47] Similar to his characters, the only Tennessee Williams we can have access to is the representational Williams. He is an artifice of one mask after the other, and a mirror of endless reflections. Donald Windham comments: "Curtain after curtain of ambivalence has descended in his life. Self-portrait after self-portrait has intervened in his plays. And the same qualities that make Tennessee a good dramatist make him an impossible documenter."[48] Williams is a role player as Windham observes. He "assumed surrogate personalities, surrogate biographies, trying them on like suits of other peoples' clothes and substituting them for his own when they fitted the part he was playing, sometimes briefly, sometimes more or less permanently."[49]

Like Alma Winemiller who comments upon her split and divided identity, Williams also talks frequently about his fragmented self and the multiplicity of voices he embodies: "If only I could realize I am not 2 persons. I am only one. There is no sense in this division. An enemy inside myself!"[50] Williams's claim

echoes Alma's in Summer and Smoke. If one could peek inside Williams's personality, one would realize that he is a character with a multiplicity of selves. Analyzing the relationship between Williams and his characters in his book A Look at Tennessee Williams, Mike Steen comments:

> All of [his] characters are a bit of him. It' s astounding that when you really get to know him you recognize all these different characters inside him, summed up into the one severely complex character of his actual being. It's amazing, I think, to see the aspects of Stanley Kowalski in him as well as those of Blanche DuBois and Alma Winemiller, Valentine Xavier, or Alexandra Del Lago, or Flora Goforth... You'd think, 'How can a person have that many selves?'[51]

Williams's fear is of "his own shadow." His fears are internalized, and the "crazy blue devil" would never let him go. In his journal Williams wrote: "A little crazy blue devil has been with me all day. I wish I could shake him off and walk alone and free in the sunlight once more. There is one part of me that could always be very happy and brave and even *good* if the other part was not so damned 'pixilated.'"[52] Williams's identity is a site of division, fragmentation, and broken texture. The "enemy inside [him]self," as Leverich argues, is "an essential division in [Williams's] personality that would plague him and manifest itself in patterns of contradictory behavior throughout the years to come. It would divide him not only against himself but often against those closest to him, leading him to characterize himself as 'half mad.'"[53] In his description of The Glass Menagerie, Williams describes his perception of the truth, the reality, and himself in terms of contradictions and paradoxes. Williams wrote: "My next play will be simple, direct, and terrible--a picture of my own heart. There will be no artifice in it. I will speak the truth as I see it--distort as I see distortion--be wild as I am wild--

tender as I am tender--mad as I am mad--passionate as I am passionate."[54] Williams himself is a personality woven of passion, madness, distortion, truthfulness, evasion, and wildness. He is an artifice of contradictions and an edifice of masks and distortions. The theme of the reinvented self with all its masks and role-plays is not an unfamiliar theme to Tennessee Williams, the man and the artist. It is a theme that hits very close to Williams, and too close at times.

Attributing some space to the author in my interpretive framework sets me, seemingly, against the postmodern skepticism of the authorial intention, or at least the way we understand this skepticism. With Roland Barthes's influential essay of 1968 "The Death of the Author," our understanding of the link between authors and their works has undergone some drastic revisions. The author is no longer seen as the ultimate origin of his work; instead, these works are perceived in the light of different cultural texts whereby the author is only one of them. In Rethinking Literary Biography, Nicholas Pagan highlights this new understanding: "Instead of examining the author or the author's psyche, then, as source/origin/father of the author's texts, these thinkers claim that the author's life is itself a text." Pagan continues to explain that "Postmodern thinkers like Barthes, however, replace the flesh and blood author with 'a paper author.'"[55] Consequently, the authorial self can not exist only on paper and in writing; it is always told in the form of narratives, stories, and tales. These postmodern thinkers have blurred the line between author and character. Barthes explains: "If [the author] is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters... no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work, there is a reversion of the work on to the

life... The *I* which writes the text... is never more than a paper-*I*."[56] It is from this perspective that I intend to see the link between Williams and his work.

Critics who have neglected this view have ended up by making claims which are not only intellectually arrogant but also presumptuous, for most of them have read Williams's plays as faithful photocopies of his own life. Spoto, Tischler, Bigsby, and Leverich have fallen victims to the tendencies of earlier criticism to let biographical information stand as explanation for Williams's drama. Tischler, for example, writes that "the mother Williams had chosen to write about in The Glass Menagerie was, naturally, his own."[57] Almost forty years later, Leverich echoes Tischler's claim: "I have, for example, come to a conclusion forced by events documented in Tom's home life and in his writings that it was his 'hated' father who *most* influenced him personally."[58] Spoto's understanding of the authorial identity is no different from Tischler's or Leverich's. Even though he recognizes that Williams is the creator of his own image, he has accepted unquestionably Williams's claims and interviews as facts to support his interpretation of Williams's fiction, and has raised little doubt about these claims and interviews. Marlon B. Ross asks: "How can self-commentary be any more or less reliable than the commentary of others? How can the inside, that abode of self-woven images, be any more or less truthful than the outside, itself an image?" The answer Ross offers is no less unsettling: "Williams pondered a lot about how the external image is only an image of an internal image that is invented to make the external image real. No wonder he flirted with insanity."[59] The difference between Tischler's and Leverich's claims in the sense that one has attributed Williams's source of his inspiration to his mother and the other to his father points out that the autobiographical reading is

more complex and slippery than we tend to think. Therefore, if we are looking for clear-cut correspondences between Williams's life and his work, most likely our effort will go astray.

As an alternative, I suggest in this study that we should reconsider the confidence and the assertiveness with which we make any biographical claims. We, as scholars, should accept that the life -or lives- of Williams, do indeed have an influence on his writing, but his works themselves also have a life of their own, and do reflexively influence his life. The relationship is more than dialectical; it is intertextual. Williams's works, including his plays, short stories, poems, and interviews, all influence each other. His poems are often predecessors to his drama, and his plays are often reworkings of his short stories and other plays. Williams's life is a part of this network of stories and fiction. When Williams states "I am Blanche DuBois," Williams, the artist is comparing himself to a fiction of his own creation. The metaphor has no reference outside itself. It is only within the frames of fiction the artist himself establishes that he can exist and operate. Instead of looking into the life of Williams to find the origin of his works, we should accept the fact that the origin of these works is untraceable in its multiplicity, or the traces of the origin of these works do not move from reality to fiction into which the reality is translated, but from fiction to fiction whereby the world of the real is not much different from the world of fiction. This approach does not imply that the author is disposable because he is "a paper author." On the contrary, as Derrida claims: "the subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; (the author). I situate it." Derrida continues: "one cannot get along without the notion of subject."[60] The authorial identity is made into a narrative and a fiction in our current thinking, but it is

never made a non-existing elusive mirage. The subject is well and alive. It might be scattered, dispersed, broken, and de-centered, but never annihilated and disposed

Chapter I

Blanche DuBois: Public Faces and Private Longings

Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire deals with the divided and scattered identity of Blanche DuBois, who is forced to resort to role play to be able to co-exist with her new coercive reality in the Kowalskis' apartment. The play depicts Blanche's subsequent downfall as a result of her failure not only to be herself, but also to be the miniature image that others expect her to be. In this chapter, I will analyze Blanche's identity and argue how she has turned into a public artifact who is engaged in performing the image that others project on her. I will also shed more light on Blanche's divided personality, focus on her "irreconcilable split" between reality and appearance,[1] and analyze the clash between her public and private personas. I will conclude that the faces and the masks that Blanche wears are all parts of her identity that can be known and revealed only in these façades and facets. In the second section of this chapter, I will focus on the metaphorical connection between the creator, Williams, and his creation, Blanche. I will argue how this creation has turned out to be the private space where Williams can create his own identity and reveal what he is usually uncomfortable revealing outside the theatrical space. Such a reading bridges the gap between Williams's artistic vision and his personal reality--a space that the playwright himself wants to narrow down when he states: "What is my profession but living and putting it all down in stories and plays..."[2] It is not my intention, however, to reduce the play to a gay subtext. Reading the play as a private space where Williams asserts what he has kept as a private identity does not reduce the play to an exclusively homosexual subtext. Indeed, to read Streetcar exclusively as a heterosexual play is reductive, abortive, incomplete,

and conducive to a polarized view of the play, and to read it as a homosexual text is even more so.

Blanche DuBois: Identity as Role Play

Upon her entrance, Williams invites his audience to witness the last episode of Blanche's disintegration. The tone of Blanche's dilemma is set in the first scene. Her internal conflict between the past and the present, illusion and reality, her genteel upbringing and sensual desire, her virtuousness and physicality are manifested right at the beginning of the play. Her physical appearance reflects her disintegration and suggests that she belongs to a world much different from the world where she finds herself in New Orleans. Blanche enters carrying a valise and a look of "shock and disbelief." She is "daintly dressed" in a "white suit with a fluffy bodice...white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district"[15][3]. She is "incongruous" in this New Orleans setting, confused, and unable to match the number of the building in front of which she is standing with the information on the slip of the paper she is holding. By this time in the play, we already know that Eunice's question to Blanche- "What's the matter, honey? Are you lost?"-can bear only a positive answer for we have noticed that Blanche comes to her sister's house for refuge and protection.

Blanche's disintegration and dislocation are further developed as the drama progresses. She seems unable to familiarize herself with her new locale. The way Blanche is sitting in Stella's apartment with "her shoulders slightly hunched and her legs pressed close together and her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold," reveals Blanche's discomfort and nervousness [18]. She expresses her distress with her new locale when she states that "only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe! could do it justice!" [20]. Blanche is terrified by

the shabbiness and dirt of her new environment. She supposes that "out there...is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir" and Stella answers: "No, Honey, those are the L&N tracks" [20]. Blanche finds the Kowalskis' reality cramped, foul, ugly, and dim compared to her childhood home, Belle Reve, that Eunice describes as "a great big place with white columns" [17].

Blanche is dislocated not only in space but also in time. She lives in the past, and when she arrives at the Kowalskis' apartment she identifies Stella by her maiden name. She tells Eunice: "I'm looking for my sister, Stella DuBois, I mean--Mrs. Stanley Kowalski" [15]. Blanche dislocates her sister in order to relocate her back to her old home. In Scene Four, in her plea that her sister not hang "back with the brutes!" [72], Blanche tries to convince Stella of the brutality and primitivity of her present world and the actual environment where she lives. She argues that Stella could not "have forgotten much of [their] bringing up" in Belle Reve with its refined lifestyle. The world that Blanche wants to cling to is a world of "such things as art--as poetry and music," a world without the "grunting," "swilling," and "gnawing and hulking" of Stanley Kowalski and his "party of apes." She is longing for an ideal world of purity where no "apes" gather when "night falls" and no "sub-human" creatures remind her that we are still far away from "being made in God's image." In her attempt to draw her sister to her idealized past world, Blanche reveals her feeling of insecurity. Blanche needs Stella to share with her the idealized world she wants to live in, and confirm her belief that the present world is so ugly and unbearable that the only refuge left to her is the past and the lost Belle Reve that she is trying to restore. Blanche wants to duplicate the past and relive it with all its contradictions and dichotomies, but she needs a companion to share with her this world for she is afraid that it might not be as beautiful as she constructed it in her dreams and illusions. Even in her illusion, Blanche is lonely. By dragging

her sister into her private illusion, then, she will not only lessen her feeling of loneliness, but also get Stella's confirmation that her illusion can be turned to reality and her dream can come true. Blanche reveals her fear of being alone to Stella when she says:

> ...I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone!...I'm--not very well... [23].

However, Stella resists Blanche's attempt to drag her into the past of Belle Reve, and asks Blanche: "Don't you think your superior attitude is a bit out of place?" [71]. Thus, reminding Blanche that the world she wants to live in is merely fictitious and unreal.

Blanche wants to go back to her past life at Belle Reve in spite of its deaths, ugliness, losses, and fornication, because it is only in this past that she experienced love with Allan Grey. She was sixteen when "she made the discovery--love." Stella informs us that "Blanche didn't just love Allan but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human!" [102]. However, this love was not reciprocated for Blanche finds out that her "beautiful and talented man was a degenerate" [103]. Both this instance and the loss of Belle Reve mark the turning points in Blanche's life, because it was in this instance when her identity as a woman was shaken and she began to feel the need to restore and confirm her femininity. At that time Blanche felt defeated for not being able to give Allan what he required from her. Blanche felt "deluded" not only because she did not figure out that Allan was homosexual, but also because "he came to [her] for help" but she could not really help. Blanche's bitter realization is that she "failed him in some mysterious way and was not able to give the help he needed but could not speak of!" Blanche is also overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt because she could not show

understanding and compassion for Allan. She claims: "I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me--but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that" [95]. Instead of cherishing the man she loved "unendurably" and be on his side, she decides to confront him with the unspeakable truth that he wants to hide from Blanche herself. Blanche shows no sympathy for Allan. She removes all the fragile boundaries of the private space he carefully constructed around himself, and decides to face him with the very intimate and private detail of his life that he is not ready to share with her as yet. The love that she has for him has suddenly turned to disgust. Even though Blanche just blurts it out and shouts in Allan's face: "I saw! I know! You disgust me..." which might seem unintentional, the lapse of time between the moment when she discovers the truth of Allan's sexuality and when she faces him with that truth indicates that Blanche has already staged in her mind different scenarios to confront Allan with the truth. Such a dramatic moment may have been intentional, premeditated and rationalized. Blanche is guilty of "deliberate cruelty" although she denies it. With Allan's suicide, the "Varsouviana" music starts. "The music is in her mind" and Blanche "is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her and she seems to whisper the words of the song" [113]. The "Varsouviana" music is that very feeling of guilt that Blanche cannot escape because she denounced Allan at the time when he needed her the most. It is only after his death that Allan succeeds in arousing Blanche's sympathy and compassion.

In the intervening years, Blanche has tried to atone for that act of guilt and death, but in doing so herself has fallen a victim to the harsh and relentless judgment of society and has herself become subject to its brutality, misunderstanding and falsities. After Allan's death, Blanche felt devoid of her

identity as a woman and started her long process of affirmation and self-assertion. Blanche confesses to Mitch: "After the death of Allan--intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with," and she continues "I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection--here and there in the most unlikely places." Her promiscuity is an expression of desperation, sadness, loneliness, and panic. We notice in all the relationships she has that there is a similar pattern. The soldiers in the army camp near Belle Reve, the seventeen-year-old student in one of her high school English classes in Laurel, and the newsboy Blanche kisses are all about the same age as her husband Allan. Blanche does not go for those young boys because she is promiscuous, but rather because she wants to duplicate her past love story with Allan and rewrite a happier version of it and atone for her feeling of guilt that she has experienced after the death of Allan. She is trying to bring Allan back to life through living a seemingly identical story with those young boys. She is eager to succeed with the soldiers, the student, and the newsboy where she has failed with Allan. Thomas P. Adler agrees with such a view and interprets her promiscuity with the soldiers as a "kind of desperate flailing about for gratification as a compensation for powerlessness."[4] Blanche's promiscuity is a long search for all those beautiful things lost in her relationship with Allan. It is also a search for proof that she is still young and desirable. Through all those relationships, Blanche is seeking that part of her identity that she suddenly lost when she walked "into a room that she thought was empty--which wasn't empty" [95]. Blanche perceives all her relationships as romantic ventures which can give her an outlet for her romantic passions that her marriage with Allan left unfulfilled. Blanche always weaves romantic fantasies about her conquests. The soldiers are gathered up "like daisies" from the lawn at Belle Reve, and the shy newsboy is perceived as " a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights" [84].

Indeed, her encounter with the young newsboy has a dream-like quality about it: Blanche talks about New Orleans' "long rainy afternoons...when an hour isn't just an hour - but a little piece of eternity dropped into you hands" [83]. Blanche wants to expand this moment to a life--long encounter where she can venture into a romantic quest. She shuts her eyes for fear a beautiful dream might escape her once she opens them: she stands "a little dreamily" after the newsboy has disappeared. Thus, from Blanche's perspective, her promiscuity does not spring "from her own nature," "from the uncontrollable duplicity" or "from her selfishness and her vanity which are insatiable,"[5] as Mason Brown argues, but from her romanticism that the conventions of Blanche's society and the traditions of Belle Reve in which she was raised could not recognize and admit. Blanche could not find the socially accepted channel through which her passion and desire could be expressed. She is the romantic heroine who lives in a non-romantic reality and according to a tradition where passion can only go unfulfilled.

Blanche is forced to live the contradictory duality and the tearing dichotomy between what she really wants and what others expect her to pretend to want. Blanche's dilemma is that she has to compromise between her private and public identities and to resolve the state of polarization and conflict that living with the two identities entail. Blanche is torn between the two extremes of her identities: her burning desires and the puritanical tradition in which she was raised and which taught her that gentility and respectability are the virtues which ultimately lead one to happiness. Blanche's Belle Reve allows no room for the sensual and the physical. When Blanche succumbs to her desire and gives in to her sexual ventures, the price is more guilt and self-loathing. She tends to reject and deny this physical side in her, and when she perceives it in Stella's and Stanley's relationship, she names it "brutal desire" in an attempt to degrade her

physicality to an animalistic level that she can easily deny and reject. Speaking about Blanche's unwillingness to give in to her sensual desire, Kazan argues that she "thinks she sins when she gives into it...yet she does give into it, out of loneliness...but by calling it 'brutal desire' she is able to separate it from her...'cultured' and refined self."[6] In doing so, Blanche contributes to her own isolation from the people that love her and becomes also alienated from herself for she rejects who she is and clings to what the others and her decadent, phony, and outdated tradition want her to be. Blanche finds no compromise, falls a victim of this duality, and finds that masking and masquerading are the only legitimate means of survival and the only weapons available for her to avoid the cruelty of her society, to adhere to her grand tradition with all its passé mannerisms, airs, and pretenses; and at the same time to express her desires and assert her femininity. Blanche has to theatricalize herself and be self-affirmative through falsehood and pretenses. Truthfulness and genuineness do not really pay in such a hypocritical society, and Blanche is forced to put on the airs of an aristocratic lady and fulfill her desires even though she knows that the discrepancy between the two behaviors is what society labels as promiscuity and would give her the tag of a 'whore.' Blanche is forced to live with the two personas. Only through role-play can she display her conscious intentions to herself and to the others. When the play's action begins, Blanche is reduced to a public, well-constructed, and artificial persona. It is only in few fleeting, unguarded, and flash-like moments that Blanche removes her mask to reveal another face which is not less theatrical than the other faces.

Blanche explains to Stella her need to lie and masquerade:

> I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft--soft people have got to shimmer and glow--they've got to put on soft colors of butterfly wings, and put a paper lantern over light...I'm fading

> now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick [79].

Blanche's masquerading is a defense against the falsities and contradictions in the society where she lives in the same way as it is a means of compromising her private needs to the public image that the others want to see in her. It is a desperate defense that reflects Blanche's eagerness and willful desire to survive. It is this weapon of deceiving and masquerading that has changed Blanche the "moth" into a "tiger" in Stanley Kowalski's eyes. Her means of deceit are varied and her strategies of masquerading complex. They range from clothes that she wears for everyday circumstances to the man that she wants to marry for security and protection.

When Blanche arrives at Stella's apartment, she makes sure she has brought with her all the glamour and the make-up that she needs to put on aristocratic airs and masks of pretense. Her wardrobe trunk is loaded with "feathers and furs that she come here to preen herself in!" "a solid-gold dress," "genuine fox-fur-pieces" and "a fist-full of costume jewelry" [36]. Even though these are Stanley's words about which we might be skeptical knowing his real feelings about Blanche, Blanche removes this skepticism and confirms Stanley's opinion about her when she informs Stella that she "bought some nice clothes to meet all [Stanley's] lovely friends in" [23], and tells Stanley that she is nearly out of her twenty-five-dollar-an ounce perfume in case he wants to remember her on her birthday. She is also aware of wearing the right clothes on the appropriate occasion. When she first enters Stella's apartment, Blanche is wearing "a white suit" and "white gloves and hat." The emphasis in the description is upon the color white. Blanche is dressed in such a color so as to convey an impression of purity in her new surroundings, and impress them with her conventionality through the formal suit, the gloves, and the hat she is wearing. At play's end,

Blanche appears in a jacket of "della Robbia blue" that she herself describes as "the blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures," another emblem of purity and virginity. However, when Blanche wants to be seductive, she wears the clothes that match the right occasion and help her attract the others' attention. For instance, in Scene Three, when she comes back with her sister to the apartment while Stanley is still playing poker with his friends, Blanche "takes off the blouse and stands in her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portieres" [50] and when Stella warns her , she pretends that she does not know that she is "standing in the light". Such an instance presents the audience with two different Blanches and different roles they each have to play. We are allowed to see the "virgin" Blanche in her white suit and later in her Della Robbia blue jacket, and we are allowed to see Blanche in her silk brassiere trying to seduce whoever of the poker players might fall into her snare. The first is the theatrical Blanche who is bound to conventionality and to a well-determined social role to play. She is the reduced Blanche who has defaced herself and changed her nature so as to fit in her society and to pass in the Kowalskis' apartment. She is the Blanche who has given in to her society's prescription and accepted the role that she has been assigned ever since she was born. She is the stereotype who has effaced all the traces of her individuality and has chosen to fit in an oversimplified model that her conventional society presents to her. This is the Blanche who cannot stand in the light, and can survive only in the darkness and in the dim shadows of New Orleans. Even though the second Blanche is not less theatrical, she is the more self-assertive Blanche who tries to eliminate any restrictions imposed on her behavior. She is the other Blanche, who can stand under the light to seek visibility and recognition.

In her sister's apartment, Blanche has to find ways and means to hide her past, her failures, and her loss of Belle Reve. She has to cope with her emotions

on her own and to hide her real face in order to cope with Stanley's eyes, which are scrutinizing her every gesture and word. After their first confrontation about the loss of Belle Reve, and the Napoleonic code which according to Stanley entitles him to whatever belongs to Stella, Blanche has to mask her fears and her anxieties. Stella apologizes: "I'm sorry he did that to you," and Blanche responds: "We thrashed it out. I feel a bit shaky, but I think I handled it nicely. I laughed and I treated it as a joke" [44]. It is with pretenses, masks, and masquerades that Blanche deals with Stanley and hides from him her past failures and disappointments. She deflates the serious matters that Stanley brings up to discuss with her and reduces them to a joke that needs none of her attention and care.

While she deflates what Stanley considers important and worth discussing, she inflates what other characters and audience may seem as trivial and irrelevant in order to add other layers of pretenses and masquerading. Blanche uses facts to heighten what she wants the others to see in her, and to create out of reality an illusion that can convince them that her innocence, purity, and virginity are not just a matter of appearance and pretenses, but are virtues deeply rooted in her character and upbringing.

Blanche uses other means of masquerading. She uses her name Blanche DuBois to explain that her virtuousness is not a matter of appearance, but is deeply rooted in her origins and her family. She explains to Mitch that it is a French name, and 'Blanche' means 'white' while 'DuBois' means 'woods.' Thus her name translates into English as the "white woods" or the "white orchard." Therefore, her name becomes an icon for her purity and virginity--a fact that Blanche stresses when she informs Stanley that she was born "on the fifteenth of September...under Virgo" [77].

Blanche not only constructs herself as a theatrical entity, but also constructs others out of her imagination to share with her the world of illusions that she dwells in. She is so powerful in weaving stories and constructing façades that not till play's end do we know whether Shep Huntleigh is a true character or a mere construction of Blanche's fantasy. Till the last scene, Blanche expects the Texas millionaire to come to her rescue, but he never does. Shep Huntleigh is the man of Blanche's fantasies she uses to convince herself and the others around her, including Stella, Stanley, and Mitch, that she is still young, desirable and, above all, 'normal' in the sense that somebody appreciates her refined taste, her manners and airs--a person who knows that "a cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life--immeasurably!" [126]. Unlike Stanley and Mitch, who perceive her as not being "clean" and "straight," Shep Huntleigh is the Gentleman Caller that Belle Reve tradition promises every beautiful Southern belle like Blanche DuBois as a reward for her purity, virginity, and chastity. Shep Huntleigh is the "magic" who is going to bring a miracle into her life and restore her image from a "destitute woman" to a woman with "treasures locked in [her] heart" [126]. The Dallas millionaire is the 'ought-to-be truth' that Blanche stresses when she says:

> I don't want realism. I want magic!...Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what ought to be the truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! [143].

Shep Huntleigh is the Gentleman Caller who corresponds to her preconceived specifications. He is not, for Blanche, a fantasy as much as a 'promised reality' or an actual wealthy suitor that Belle Reve tradition prescribes to any woman of Blanche's noble upbringing.

Mitch could have been the concrete alternative to Shep Huntleigh. Mitch could have offered the security and protection that Blanche is seeking. Were it not for Blanche's divided personality, her dichotomy between her private and public images and her insistence upon role-play, their relationship might have been written with a different ending. Blanche is not sincere in her relationship with Mitch since she perceives him as a means of masquerading more than as a loving and genuine husband. When Stella asks Blanche if she really wants Mitch, Blanche confesses:

> I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes--I want Mitch...very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem...[81].

Blanche's feeling for Mitch is not one of love and care but, rather, she sees him as a means to avoid Stanley's brutality, escape the hostile environment of New Orleans, and especially erase all her past of 'promiscuity,' guilt, and rejection. After all her intimacies with strangers, after the suicide of her husband, Allan Grey, after her affair with the seventeen-year-old student and the "town ordinance passed against her," Blanche needs Mitch as a refuge from the world. Blanche is looking for the seal of conformity that would allow her back into the mainstream. She wants a place where she can bury all her past and hide herself from all the accusing eyes. She admits to Mitch:

> ...I thanked God for you, because you seemed to be gentle--a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in! But I guess I was asking, hoping--too much! [118].

Blanche looks to Mitch as a refuge that can offer her the social respectability of marriage, restore her self-esteem and her battered faith in her attractiveness to men.

Blanche's relationship with Mitch is, however, doomed to failure because of her duality. She wants "to deceive him enough to make him--want [her]." She has to pretend to be "prim and proper" with Mitch. As Leonard Berkman argues, "fearful that her satisfying him would lead to his loss of regard for her, Blanche repulses Mitch's sexual advances and creates a constant impediment to their being fully easy with one another."[7] The result is that Blanche is never herself with Mitch. She tries to put up a façade to face Mitch and wears her public persona to convince him of her purity and sincerity, without knowing that while she is playing such an artificial role, she is driving him away from her and preventing the opportunity for any moment of genuineness and truthfulness. Even though Blanche might feel some sort of attraction to Mitch, she refuses to express such attraction because, as she tells him:

> ...You know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost! [87].

Blanche is aware of the social decorum that she has to observe and the emotional restraints imposed upon her. Even though Blanche is "flattered" that Mitch "desired" her and even though she "liked the kiss very much," she is aware that "it was the other little -familiarity- that [she]-felt obliged to discourage..." [87].

Blanche can be herself with Mitch only in a space that they do not occupy together simultaneously. For instance, when Mitch wants to keep his hands on her waist, Blanche asks him to unhand her and explains that there is no need for such excessive gentility because he is already "a natural gentleman" [91]. She

also informs him that he should not think of her as "severe old maid schoolteacherish" but rather as someone with "old-fashioned ideals." At this very moment when she speaks about her "ideals," Williams informs us that "she rolls her eyes, knowing [Mitch] cannot see her face" to mock the façade of propriety she has been holding [91]. Blanche is aware that, since Mitch cannot see her face, she has a secure space and a very short time when she can be by herself to express her weariness with this role-play and her disgust with her own hypocrisy, and reveal the morbid travesty her life has become.

More revealing is the instance when Blanche asks Mitch "*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas ? Ah quelle dommage!*--I mean it's a damned good thing..." [88]. In this scene, Blanche is trying to generate a private space where she can move freely and express her feelings towards Mitch without necessarily running the risk of damaging her public image of the Southern lady who can control her feelings and maintain a strong grip on her desires. Blanche can be herself with Mitch only by turning him into a non-entity or an entity that cannot share with her her moments of intimacies and truthfulness because the channels of communication are totally blocked between both of them. Ironically enough, Mitch swallows the bait, for he thinks that the Blanche he sees is the real and sincere Blanche that he wants to marry. Mitch shows sympathy and compassion to Blanche when she tells him her story of Allan and her love for him. That is perhaps the only sincere moment of the play, and Mitch responds positively and proposes to Blanche: "You need somebody, I need somebody, too. Could it be--you and me Blanche?" To Mitch's sincere feelings towards her and his proposal to her, Blanche responds: "Sometimes--there is God--so quickly!" Blanche is giving thanks to god because, as her reply indicates, she believes that she might have found her salvation in her marriage with Mitch. The discrepancy between the two attitudes is conspicuous: While Mitch proposes out of

fascination and admiration, Blanche accepts Mitch's proposal out of need. She wants to rest, to be safe, and to be taken care of. Mitch does not know that the Blanche he sees is just a mask or a public persona hiding Blanche's private entity. Mitch tells Blanche:

> I like you to be exactly the way that you are, because in all my--experience--I have never known anyone like you [87].

and Blanche responds with a grave look at him, "then she bursts into laughter and she claps a hand to her mouth," a gesture that emphasizes further the dramatic irony of this exchange. Mitch has "bought" the performance but failed to appreciate the actress behind the mask. He thinks that the Blanche he sees is the real Blanche, and Blanche gasps and laughs because that is the very performative Blanche with which she meets the faces of the rest of her world. As Laurilyn J. Harris argues, "It is both pathetic and ironic that Blanche, who is desperate for love and acceptance, thinks that she cannot attain them without trivializing herself by assuming a fictive and superficial identity."[8] It is Stanley who reveals the truth in an act of cold brutality, and uncovers to Mitch Blanche's past that she has desperately tried to hide. Thus, the mask is removed and Blanche is psychologically naked before Mitch and the audience. What she has eagerly tried to cover is now revealed, and her private past has become a subject of public scrutiny, and a basis for rejecting and marginalizing her.

If Blanche's first confession to Mitch about the failure of her marriage and her husband's homosexuality is followed by a genuine response to Blanche's candor, the second confession about her promiscuous affairs is followed by rejection and hatred. Mitch does not embrace her tenderly as he did before, but he calls her dirty and asks her to give him what he has been "missing all

summer." This is the point of Blanche's downfall. At this moment of the play, Leonard Berkman argues, Blanche finds "herself...back into the whore-image from which through truth, she struggles to escape."[9] Such instance is charged with dramatic irony. Mitch's response to Blanche's initial confession has encouraged her to make further truthful admissions that will not elicit the same response from Mitch but will condemn her further. When Blanche asks him to marry her, Mitch cries: "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" [121]. This scene parallels the one when Blanche faces her husband Allan with the truth that she discovered about his sexuality. Blanche the victimizer who has triggered her husband's suicide with her disgust and "deliberate cruelty" is now the victim and Mitch is the victimizer who is inflicting his "deliberate cruelty" on Blanche and trying to hurt her in the same way she hurt Allan. Mitch is playing in this scene the same role that Blanche played in the suicide scene. Blanche is facing her doom now that the boundaries of her own closet are removed and her private persona has come under the light while the mask of her public persona has been shattered to bits and pieces. Blanche is doomed to suffer the way Allan did. Unable to live out of his closet, Allan decided to bring about his own death, and leave such a cruel world, and Blanche will be forced to leave this world that she has tried hard to cling to so desperately. Blanche's fate is "mapped out for her" [105], and the Mexican Woman who is heard out in the street just after Blanche's confession suggests Blanche's fate and foreshadows Blanche's spiritual death in the asylum. "Flores. Flores. Flores para los muertos. Flores. Flores" is Blanche's epitaph; and her "frightened" cry: "No, no! Not now! Not now!" is the only alternative left to her through which she can defy her fate which was "mapped out for her" a long time ago by people that she might have never met or seen. Indeed, the grammatical mode of Stanley's sentence "her future is mapped out for her" and the absence of

any active subject suggest the enigmatic nature of 'the others' and the arbitrariness of the social conventions that have classified Blanche in the category where they think she should fit.

Mitch's rejection of Blanche does not stem from his own personal conviction that she is not the right person for him, but is the result of the social convention--specifically represented by his possessive mother--which prescribes to Mitch what is right and what is wrong and dictates to him that Blanche is not "straight" and "clean enough." Mitch's rejection of Blanche has been generated by his friend Stanley and his mother. It is, in fact, interesting that Mitch has evoked his mother when he says, "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" [121]. Mitch is bound to his sick mother, and it is by his mother's standard that he judges Blanche. Blanche has fallen victim to the people's judgment--people she has never met: Mitch's mother and Stanley's friend, Kiefaber. Williams is stressing the arbitrariness of the social conventions that judge people by their appearance. Blanche is the victim of deviation from what we label normal. She is doomed to a tragic end because she is not able to leave the margin and live again according to the norms of society. Blanche is tagged as being marginal, and there is no way for her to get rid of such a tag, no matter how hard she may try. The last scene, when Mitch tries to strike Stanley and "collapses at the table, sobbing," [141] reveals the extent of his deep remorse and his inability to help Blanche. Mitch is totally paralyzed. He cannot act himself and do what should be appropriate to help himself and Blanche. His sobbing and collapse are physical manifestations of his helplessness and his feeling of guilt and defeat. Mitch is defeated by his mother's conventionality and Stanley's manipulation. Indeed, I suggest that the "Versouviana" music is going to stop in Blanche's mind, for she has found the kindness in the 'strange' doctor, but a

similar music is going to start in Mitch's who will try to purge himself of a deep feeling of guilt for renouncing Blanche at a time when she most needed him.

At this point in the play Williams achieves his desired effect upon the audience. In an answer to Kazan's question about what the audience should feel for Blanche, Williams answers: "It is a tragedy with the classic aim of producing a catharsis of pity and terror and in order to do that Blanche must finally have the understanding and compassion of the audience."[10] Williams succeeds in evoking his audience's empathy for his heroine, Blanche DuBois. Even though at the beginning of the play, the audience might identify with Stanley more than with Blanche, at play's end we cannot help but feel Blanche's tragedy and may even leave the theater "troubled, not tranquil" because we have been "sitting at the death of something extraordinary...colorful, varied, passionate, lost, witty, imaginative, of her own integrity..."[11] In the last two scenes especially, Williams invites the audience to participate in Blanche's downfall by allowing us to hear all the subjective noises, music, and echoes that haunt Blanche's mind and dreams. Before the rape scene, we can see the "lurid reflections on the wall around Blanche" and "the shadows...of a grotesque and menacing form," we notice how these "lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces," and we also hear the "inhuman voices like cries in the jungle." At play's end, we hear, along with Blanche, the "Varsouviana" music and how it "filtered into a weird distortion accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle" [139]. When we see Blanche walking off on the doctor's arm at play's end and hear the "blue piano" music swelling, then the audience may realize that Blanche's quest for identity and her long search for a place to fit in her society is closing down on a note of despair and agony. The backstage wall that becomes transparent during the rape scene to expose the sordid violence of the streets paralleling the violent action on stage allows Williams to show the relation between the decadent New

Orleans street life and the shameful event inside the Kowalskis' apartment, and helps him emphasize to the audience that the rape scene we are witnessing is just an idiosyncratic illustration of the brutality and violence of the whole society to which Blanche has been exposed.

In the figure of Stanley, Williams has created a typical American character. As Irwin Shaw comments on Marlon Brando's Broadway performance:

> He is so appealing in a direct, almost childlike way in the beginning and we have been so conditioned by the modern doctrine that what is natural is good, that we admire him and sympathize with him. Then, bit by bit, with a full account of what his good points really are, we come dimly to see that he is...brutish, destructive in his healthy egotism, dangerous, immoral, surviving[12].

As Mary Ann Corrigan argues, "Stanley bears remarkable resemblance to the kind of hero that Americans love."[13] His Polish ancestors are immigrants, like most Americans. He is also the symbol of the patriotic, and proud-to-be American full of pragmatism and self-confidence. As a result, the audience can readily see themselves in Stanley. They can see their origins and their pride in being part of what Stanley represents. However, the rape scene reverses this possible identification between Stanley and the audience, and as Irwin Shaw explains, in the rape scene the audience is challenged to face the "harsh reality" for they realize by play's end that what they instinctively admire is really "a base egotistical force, destroying what it can not comprehend."[14] With the rape scene, Williams has reversed the whole equation. It is no longer Blanche who is full of "lies, lies, inside and out, all lies," as Mitch puts it, but it is Eunice, Mitch, Stanley, Stella, and those who are ready to accept Eunice's easy way out who are full of lies, falsities, pretenses, and distortions. Blanche DuBois has left Stanley's world

of harsh reality, but she has left behind her a powerful outcry of a broken heart in a broken world. The image Stanley holds of himself now is that of a cruel, brutal, and destructive human being who can no longer be perceived as a victim to Blanche's intrusion. He is a rapist who has hurt Blanche at the very moment when she is sensitive and vulnerable. Eunice's attempt to suppress the truth because "life has to go on" at any expense, and Stella's willingness to deny Stanley's rape of Blanche in order to go on living with him make them all collaborators with him in Blanche's rape and destruction. Blanche's departure to the asylum "holding tight to [the doctor's] arm" not only demonstrates that Blanche can find kindness in the most unlikely places, but she can do so with a great amount of dignity, valor, and courage. Blanche is the most appealing character at play's end. Williams has given her the exit of a character who has admirable resilience, magnitude, and integrity even when she is facing the adversities of defeat and loss to the forces of brutality.

Blanche DuBois: Williams' s Private Space

This is Blanche DuBois, the woman who cannot pass for who she is in the society where she lives. She fails to pass in the Kowalskis' apartment in the same way as she fails in New Orleans and in Laurel before. Blanche is rejected for who she is, and her attempts to atone do not bring her any redemption, but rather reinforce the very image she is trying to escape. When Williams states "I am Blanche DuBois," he switches the focus of Streetcar. Williams himself becomes the subject, and Blanche the vehicle that conveys such a subject. Such a paratextual remark modifies our reading of Williams' text and raises a whole cluster of textual signs that gives Williams's text a broader and more complex meaning in their combinations. Thus "further meaningful potentialities arise from [the] connotations" of these signs which were buried under the thick walls

of the closet that Williams has constructed around himself. With such a claim, Williams shifts the gears from the communicative formula "I, Blanche, you" to the more complex one "I,I you" whereby Williams is both the addresser and the addressee, and Blanche becomes just a metaphor for the "I" of Tennessee Williams.

Cesare Segre's understanding of the function of a literary text is particularly germane to our discussion of the metaphoric relationship between Williams and his creation. It is an understanding which recognizes the complex manner in which the author's identity is woven and intertwined with that of the characters of his own creation. Segre perceives a literary text as "a form of communication" where the addresser sends a message to the addressee coded in a text that "offers itself to the reader as a set of graphic signs. These signs have a denotative meaning whose character is linguistic. At the same time they constitute, in the variety of their combinations, complex signs, which have also a meaning of their own. Further meaningful potentialities arise from connotations."[15]

Segre explores the different levels of communication a literary text may embody. The communication circuit, he explains, includes "I," the addresser, "you," the addressee, with "he" or "she" the subject of communication.[16] In Streetcar, Williams is the addresser, "you" is the audience, and Blanche DuBois is the subject of communication. However, Segre explains, this simple communicative formula can become more complex once the "'I' of the addresser attempts to identify himself, exactly as he would with a character in a play."[17] And that's what happens when Williams comments "I am Blanche DuBois." The interpretative dimensions of the text change and some linguistic signs in Williams's text start to take different coloring and broader connotations. The

formula is no longer "I," the addresser, "you," the addressee, and Blanche, the subject; it becomes "I," the addresser, "you," the addressee, and "I," the subject.

The relationship that I want to suggest between Blanche and Williams is metaphorical, a relationship that posits identification between things which are not necessarily identical. It is through a metaphorical structure that Williams's claim "I am Blanche DuBois" transfers the subject, "I," to the object, "Blanche DuBois." Blanche DuBois by herself is a subject and a representation, but through her relationship to Williams she becomes the vehicle for the tenor, Williams. This does not imply that Blanche DuBois is a drag character, and my reading does not necessarily imply that Blanche should "be read as a man who wanted to be a woman; or as a gay man, or as a transvestite."[18] My reading does not force us to be involved in a "substitution game." Blanche is a female character and Streetcar is a tragedy about a female romantic outcast who can not find the acceptable avenue to be herself, to express her desire, and to atone for her past of death, guilt, and promiscuity. However, her tragedy is analogous to that of Williams, since both the female heroine and the male playwright face the same doom of rejection and marginalization. My reading highlights the associations between Blanche and Williams rather than substituting one for the other. Blanche is not a drag queen but a channel through which much of Williams's tension, paranoia, and frustration is expressed. Even though critics have constantly warned us to be skeptical of authorial intentions and authors' interpretations of their own writing, I still believe that Williams's claim "I've read things that say Blanche was a drag queen. Blanche DuBois, ya know...these charges are ridiculous!" has some validity.[19]

Many critics and directors who perceived the play from such an autobiographical perspective were able to penetrate to the complex aspect of Williams' text. As Williams states in his Memoirs, the Italian director Visconti

"called him Blanche as [they] prepared the Roman production of Streetcar."[20] During Kazan's direction of Williams's play, he also felt that there was more to the play than "a moral fable of the brutalization of a sensitive soul by a sadistic bully."[21] It is "far more ambivalent and far more personal."[22] In Kazan's words, it is a "masterful work, written out of Tennessee's most personal experience."[23] Foster Hirsch claims:

> The play has been accepted by audiences throughout the world as a potent heterosexual conflict, but to ignore the possibility that the play itself is as masked as its beleaguered heroine is to miss reverberations that echo throughout the Williams canon.[24]

Such a claim points to the complexity of Blanche DuBois' characterization, and depicts the fusion of what I label the subject Blanche i.e. the oppressed Southern woman imprisoned in the traditions of the South, and the metaphorical Blanche who becomes a legitimate expression for the suppressed playwright's identity, a playwright who is caught on the edge of his private yearnings and the prescriptions imposed on him as a public celebrity. What is shared between the playwright and his heroine is a common paranoia of two people victimized by the prejudice, torn by the same dichotomy, and haunted by the same fear--the fear that what is private might one day become public. Both Williams and Blanche are trying to find an outlet for their identity-- a private space where they can bear their fears, feel more free to be who they are, and take the mask off their faces to reveal what their faces are like, and put away the public personae and the social role they are cast to play. Other critics have recognized the necessity of adopting Williams's oblique view in reading his texts. Both Colin Chambers and Mike Prior have captured the obliqueness of Williams's vision in Streetcar where he "often channeled [his] vision through heterosexual situations."[25]

Williams declares in many circumstances that he is not a direct playwright, but rather a creator who resorts to allusions and believes in the richness, complexity, and versatility of symbols. Williams states, "I am not a direct writer; I am always an oblique writer, if I can be; I want to be allusive. I do not want to be one of these people who hit on the head all the time." [26] Williams is inviting us to an open-ended reading of his plays; he is inviting us to follow him to a limitless exploration of his texts. To impose a straight-forward and simplistic view on Williams's Streetcar is to go against the grain of the text and its creator. In another circumstance, Williams insists again upon this oblique angle that we have to take while reading his texts. He claims,

> People have said and said and said that my work is too personal: and I have just as persistently countered this charge with my assertion that all true work of an artist must be personal, whether directly or *obliquely*, (Italics are mine) it must and it does reflect the emotional climates of its creator.[27]

Such a claim recapitulates the perspective through which we can read Streetcar. Williams points to his oblique mode of representing what he believes to be the reality. In such a quotation, Williams points to the personal tone and the oblique vision in his texts that some critics like Mark Winchell and others are trying to suppress.[28] Streetcar is a mirror that reflects its creator. How much of this mirror is revelatory in its oblique and distorted nature is another question that I will raise and try to answer. However, I insist that it is only through an oblique point of view that we can explore Williams' vision in Streetcar, grasp its totality, unlock its ambiguity, and explore all the levels of its meaning.

In the following section of this chapter, I will focus more on the metaphorical Blanche and draw the correlation between her and her creator in the sense that both are constructing a theatrical identity, and argue that Blanche

has ultimately turned to a private space secured by Tennessee Williams in order to reveal to his audience more of the image of Tom Lanier Williams--another personae that they are very likely not to have met. The metaphorical Blanche is no longer the central character of the play, but rather the tenor of Williams's tension, restlessness, and clash between his private and public identities.

The parallels between Blanche and Williams are more than striking, and they function at many levels. Williams shares with Blanche her dividedness, her ambivalence, her paranoia, her guilt, and her hysterical outbursts, and she in turn shares with him his creativity and his infatuation with the theater. From the play's outset, Blanche is depicted as a character who has been assigned a role to play. She arrives at her sister's with a trunk full of costumes that can help her perform all the roles she wants to play and maintain all the theatrical nuances and illusions she wants to communicate to her audience. Her language is theatrical and scripted, it is definitely above the language Stella speaks and the everyday dialect Stanley understands. She quotes Edgar Allan Poe, refers to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, alludes to the chauvinistic tradition of the 'Rosenkavalier,' shows familiarity with The Arabian Nights, compares herself to "La Dame aux Camellias," and also speaks French, which was then thought to be the language of literature, romance, and gentility. Her plea to Stella not to hang back with the brutes can come only from Blanche DuBois and from a highly creative and literary mind. It embodies more than one allusion and more than one poetic image. It recapitulates the entire history of human civilization, and through its poetic language, it depicts the spiritual essence of human civilization. Blanche is even able to write her own fiction about her life and creates her hero, Shep Huntleigh, and constructs all the episodes of her own rescue. It is through art that Blanche can escape her cruel reality, bear her loneliness, and tolerate the

intolerable. It is through "magic" that Blanche can live with the decadence and transgression that she sees around herself.

The story of Blanche is Williams's story as well. Williams, like Blanche, does not "want realism," he wants "magic." He "misrepresent[s] things" to his audience by being evasive about the reality, and if he wants to be truthful to them, he can be so only through oblique ways and deviant means. Williams is deeply committed to change all appearances, curb all conventions, and question the unquestionable. He states: "I'm not sure I would want to be well-adjusted to things as they are. I would prefer to be racked by desire for things better than they are, even for things which are unattainable, than to be satisfied as they are..."[29] Is Blanche DuBois well-adjusted to her society? Is she well-adjusted to herself? Isn't she racked by desire at play's end? How [un]attainable a dream is Blanche's quest to bring the past back to the present, weld idealism to realism, and reach romanticism in an unromantic environment? In this last quote, Williams seems to be making a claim not only about himself, but also about his heroine, Blanche DuBois. When Williams explains why he writes, he claims that in his writing, he was "creating an imaginary world into which [he] can retreat from the real world because...[he has] never made any kind of adjustment to the real world."[30] For both Blanche and Williams, art is a romantic quest to subvert the reality for a better version. They both believe that art is "a criticism of things as they exist."[31] Blanche's fate at play's end is analogous to what Williams thinks is the fate of the artist. In 1950, a few years after the opening of Streetcar, Williams stated that in the present American society the artist found himself with no choice but to withdraw "into the caverns of his own isolated being."[32] The artist is forced to be silent perhaps in the same way as Blanche is forced to be shut away in an asylum. Years later, Williams drew the parallel between the artist and the insane, stating: "it appears to me, sometimes, that there are only

two kinds of people who live outside what E. E. Cummings has defined as this 'so-called world of ours'--the artist and the insane."[33] Such a claim brings Williams and Blanche together. Blanche starts as a romantic artist who tries to express her voice to the others and attempts to secure her own space within her own world, but ends the play on the margin, insane, and with a voice that does not fit with the conventionality of others. Williams starts his life as the promising American playwright, and ends his career imprisoned by the fear of insanity and the shadows of loneliness in the Friggins' violent ward where he spent three months. Both Blanche and Williams opted for the "withdrawal into the caverns of isolation" at the end of their lives.[34] In Blanche DuBois, Williams theatricalized himself, and in his portrayal of the theatricalized Blanche, Williams has found the safe and secure space to reveal much of himself and much of the tension of his divided nature.

Elia Kazan wonders whether Streetcar reveals Williams' "inner conflict" of the "gentleness of his true heart against the violent calls of his erotic nature."[35] While directing the play, Kazan became more and more convinced that Blanche's divided nature was reflective of the very contradictory and ambivalent nature of her creator. Williams claims: "I have such a divided nature! Irreconcilably divided,"[36] and elsewhere he reinforces his first claim. About his crisis in the 1960's, he claims that it was the result of the "contradiction between two sides of [his] nature: between gentleness and violence between tenderness and harshness."[37] Williams shares with Blanche her paranoia and her neurosis. He is attracted to what he is repelled by. Elia Kazan argues: "I saw Blanche as Williams, an ambivalent figure who is attracted to the harshness and vulgarity around him at the same time that he fears it, because, it threatens his life."[38] Indeed, both biographers Donald Spoto and Ronald Hayman have suggested that much of the tension between Blanche and Stanley is just a reflection of

tension between Williams and Pancho, one of his former homosexual lovers. Both biographers agree with Fritz Bultman that in his relationship with Pancho, Williams tried "to create real life situations that were then translated into sequences in A Streetcar Named Desire."[39] However, the similarities between Blanche and Williams go even further than that.

Williams is a man who is not in tune with his own desires. His homosexual desires are fraught with guilt and self-loathing. When he gives in to his desires, he feels like Blanche; he feels the same dichotomy between her desires and her awareness of the unconventionality of those desires. In an interview with Robert Jennings, Williams reveals: "I've been profligate, but, being a puritan, I naturally tend to exaggerate guilt. But I'm not a typical homosexual. I can identify with Blanche--we are both hysterics."[40] Williams has to tone down his homosexual desires and often cloak them in heterosexual disguise to make them more acceptable to his audience. He has to exercise self-effacement and to kill his homosexual characters as well. Neither Allan in A Streetcar Named Desire, nor Skipper in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, nor Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer can appear on the stage. As Ronald Hayman states: "In spite of himself, he ferociously punishes the characters he would most like to protect, while punishing himself for his irresolution."[41] Williams has to be complicit in their suicide so that he can reveal his desires and the pain they generate. Williams has to find the language that the others can not comprehend to reveal his private persona. If Blanche has found her target in the French language to generate her own private space, Williams has adopted the metaphorical discourse--a discourse that can, by definition, offer Williams the multi-layered mode of expression that he needs to convey the complexity of his multi-faceted personality. This is the split vision with which Williams has to contend. To affirm his desire, he must deny his self. Williams is an outsider to the others and a

stranger to himself. He lives constantly with a feeling of rejection and insecurity. Self-assurance is sought, but never achieved. "The presence of his name and often his photograph on the front page of a newspaper in each new encampment did not quiet his unhappy conviction that he was not liked, not wanted there, and scorned for his sexual preference. Fame and money did not solve his problem. He still expected to be betrayed socially and personally, even by his closest friends and, as he grew older, by his lovers. But above all and most painfully, by his public."[42] Just as Blanche's attempts to secure self-validation by looking at herself constantly in the mirror, by taking care of her looks, and by expecting "a word about her appearance" are all in vain, Williams, too, is not able to achieve self-assurance, because whatever assurance he might get from his friends, newspapers, reviewers, and audience is, in fact, an assurance about his public, rather than about his private, persona that he has constructed to hide his private one. Such a split causes Williams not only to realize that he is not a "typical homosexual," but also to question the validity of his vocation as an artist.[43] "I was...certain that I was a dying artist and not even the least sure that I was an artist."[44] With such neurosis, such paranoia, and such fear that the private should become public, one may wonder if Williams has ever felt the need, as Blanche did, for someone, like Mitch, to give him the security, assurance, and comfort he is longing for, someone who would be for him "a cleft in the rock of the world that [he] could hide in!"

Williams echoes his heroine in Streetcar in his 1992 codicil to his will:

> I, Thomas Lanier (Tennessee) Williams being in sound mind upon this subject and having declared this wish repeatedly to my close friends--do hereby state my desire to be buried at sea. More specifically, I wish to be buried at sea as close as a possible point as

> the American poet Hart Crane died by choice in the sea. I wish to be...dropped overboard...as close as possible to where Hart Crane was given by himself to the great mother of life which is the sea...[45]

Williams reflects Blanche's yearning death wish "to die on the sea," and be "buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard--at noon--in the blaze of summer and into an ocean as blue as...[her] first lover's eyes" [136]. Blanche is determined to remain true to her romanticism and her sensuality. She adheres to her desire, and claims that she "will die--with [her] hand in the hand of some nice looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond mustache and a big silver watch" [136]. Years later, in his interview with Robert Jennings in 1973, Williams resorts to the same image that Blanche uses when she imagines her death. Williams adheres to his sensuality, desire, and romanticism in the same way as Blanche does. He tells his interviewer: "I do know that I shall never cease to be sensual--even on my deathbed. If the doctor is young and handsome I shall draw him into my arms."[46]

Blanche lives inside Williams and he still feels her inside him many years after she was sent to her asylum and accepted the lie about her madness as a truth with which she can now live in peace.[47] Years later in his Memoirs, Williams draws another parallel between his life and Blanche's. "I have always depended upon the kindness of strangers" is a key factor not only in Blanche's life, but also in her creator's as well. Just like Blanche, he has felt the fear of loneliness, the pain of estrangement, and, on more than one occasion, he has relied on "the kindness of strangers." In his Memoirs, Williams can see himself as the ultimate verification for the truthfulness of such a line. He states:

> I would guess that chance acquaintances, or strangers, have usually been kinder to me than friends... To know me is not to love me. At best, it is to tolerate me.[48]

What is more precious for a homosexual playwright who has always felt on the fringes of human acceptance? What is more precious for Blanche, who has followed the call of her heart and felt wrecked by her desire, than unconditional acceptance? Blanche and Williams share the same 'promiscuous' past, the same overwhelming guilt, the same dichotomy between their traditional, puritanical upbringing and their burning desires, and they also share their need to atone for their guilt and to overcome their fears of rejection. The only door that may be open for their acceptance and admission to the mainstream of society is tolerance. Blanche and Williams want to be themselves, yet they want to live in the society that rejects them for who they are.

Through these instances, it is obvious that Streetcar is autobiographical and that it is in his heroine that Williams has embodied "his sense of isolation," "his disgust with his own flesh," "his concern for cruelty," and "his confused drives." They are both "the romantic in an unromantic land."[49] As Kazan argues, Williams "used his personal contradictions and the memory of his pain to make it. When I considered him, I saw that the true artist must have the courage to reveal what the rest of mankind conceals."[50] It is not surprising at all that most of the reviewers have felt the truthfulness the play reveals about its playwright. Streetcar is a play without a theme. It is just a fleeting moment of the reality that Williams has succinctly grasped, depicted, and posed in front of his audience. Williams pointed to his play's authenticity when he told Molly Kazan that Streetcar "had no theme; it had a deeper meaning because it describes a universal struggle in the soul of its author."[51] Such a play will keep running and future generations will still feel its fascination because Williams has depicted, as no

other playwright has before, our eternal tragic struggle between our private and public selves captured and staged in the soul of the playwright himself. In fact, the more we go into the tormented soul of Williams, the more we realize that Blanche is just an echo of a much louder cry, and just a piece of a much larger puzzle. Blanche, with all her grandeur as a modern tragic character, is just a distorted mirror of what Williams's tragedy can be. Biographies which have tried to depict Williams's anguish have failed to rewrite the life of such a misfit and have failed to be honest to the complexity of his life. Williams is the subject that refuses to be put under control, and the fugitive of his own kind. Donald Windham has commented upon the duality, the inconsistency, and the complexity of Williams:

> Each of his traits was balanced, like the evenly weighed pans of a scale, by its opposite. He was ordinary...bashful and bold, chaste and lascivious, talkative and taciturn, tough and delicate, clever and stupid, surly and affable, truthful and lying.[52]

In Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, Windham dwells upon Williams's paradoxical and closeted nature:

> Curtain after curtain of ambivalence has descended in his life. Self-portrait after self-portrait has intervened in his plays. And the same qualities that make Tennessee a good dramatist make him an impossible documenter.[53]

Such quotations emphasize the enigmatic and conflicting nature of Tennessee Williams --a nature that the playwright himself could not convey. Williams, commenting on the kind of relationship he has with his characters, states: "I tend

to see and hear my plays and stories before I write them; I hear the mad music of my characters. But I don't think any piece of work is ever what one wishes it to be, or that one's completed works ever fulfill one's potential."[54] The relationship between Williams and Blanche is based on partial similarities and associations rather than on total identification. Blanche is only a small fragment of the whole Williams and there is no character that can ever speak out for Williams. The Williams that we know in his plays, and experience in his confessional Memoirs, is the theatrical Williams. He is the Williams who has manipulated himself in his own writing. Williams has left his traces, and when we try to follow them back to the real Williams, we find ourselves not before the real Williams, but before another Williams that can never take us back to the original Williams. The real Williams is enwrapped and closeted in the theatrical 'Williamses,' and the main problem that such a self-portrait reveals is how to envisage a real Williams in the midst of all the masks he creates and the theatrical make-up he wears. To re-draw the demarcation line between the real and the theatrical Williams becomes an impossible act. How can we have access to the real Williams if everything he presents to us is conveyed through twisted ways and delivered in oblique manners? What Stella says to Stanley about her sister, "You didn't know Blanche as a girl," is true for Williams himself, too. We know only Williams as a playwright, and Williams the person can reveal himself only to himself. For the audience, Blanche is enigmatic and the only Blanche that we can have access to is the Blanche who has experienced the suicide of her husband Allan. There are many spots in her life that remain unilluminated to us. We are in touch only with Blanche who is the product of the script, and so is the case with Williams himself. The Williams who is available to us is only an effect of his script and writings. The real Williams remains far from our reach and comprehension. Even Williams' Memoirs and letters cannot lead us to the real Tom. Terry Eagleton

points out this theoretical dilemma in all literary texts: "The biography of the author is, after all, merely another text, which need not be ascribed any special privilege: this text too can be deconstructed. It is language which speaks in literature, in all its swarming 'polysemic' plurality, not the author himself."[55] Williams remains the secret that he can reveal only to himself and in his private moments of silence; and such a possibility still remains questionable. This is the nature of Williams' closet. It is a thick wall of secrets, allusions, lies, pretenses, fictions, and also truths. The truth can never come out, and when it does, we do not know anymore whether it is the truth or another facet of masquerading. It comes out twisted, oblique, and distorted. Donald Windham argues that Williams "helped to create legends and created them himself--as he had from the days when he made up the name Tennessee." Windham never believed Williams's story about his name being the invention of his classmates, and argued that the story and the name were of Williams's creation.[56]

With a playwright who assumes such "surrogate personalities, surrogate biographies, trying them on like suits of other people's clothes and substituting them for his own when they fitted the part he was playing, sometimes briefly, sometimes more or less permanently,"[57] the biographers need to understand "the complexity of the task they had undertaken or of the enigma they had set out to put down in words."[58] Blanche is Williams only to the extent that she reveals parts and fragments of Williams's tension between his private and public persona.

Blanche is a space of reconciliation. It is in Blanche that Williams manages to accommodate his homosexuality without being rejected, to portray his androgyny without being ludicrous, and to reveal his sensitivity without being excessive. Williams functions in a culture where "love of beauty is seen as a weakness in a man" and "excessive sensitivity as a fault."[59] Therefore, Williams

needs such a mask to reveal the intolerable and speak out the unspeakable. Williams is in touch with his female characters because of the profound understanding he shares with them and the femininity they have in common. In Blanche, "Williams can confess his love of fragility without sounding sentimental."[60] Moreover, by conveying his plight as a homosexual through depicting Blanche's plight as a woman, Williams has subverted all the borders between the homosexual and the heterosexual. The demarcation line between both is blurred, and Williams manages to demonstrate that Blanche's plight as a Southern suppressed woman is analogous to Allan's and his own plight. Blanche is the space that Williams secures for the marginalia. It is in Blanche that the homosexual, the uprooted, the oppressed, the rejected, the fragile, the neurotic, and the psychotic can hear their own voice, find their own consolation, and claim their own identity.

There are many instances in Williams' s text that open Streetcar to such autobiographical reading. Hand in hand with the parallels that I've drawn between Blanche DuBois and Tennessee Williams, we find more in the text that can imply more similarities between Blanche and her creator. As Nicholas Pagan demonstrated, the name Blanche DuBois and Belle Reve point already to the gender confusion that we find in Williams' text.[61] When meeting Mitch, Blanche explains that her name means "white woods" in French. Such translation is not accurate in terms of gender. The exact French translation of 'white woods' is 'blanc bois' so that the noun and its modifier agree in their gender. "Bois" is masculine and so should "Blanc" be. But that's not the case in Blanche's translation. It is a translation that points out to the confusion of gender, and hints at the androgyny of Blanche, a characteristic that she shares with her homosexual creator. 'Belle Reve' is another important detail in this case. The feminine adjective "Belle" does not correlate with the masculine noun "Reve," and if we

have to stick to the gender agreement between the adjective and its noun, the correct translation would be "Beau Reve." Blanche's dream is androgynous, a dream that fits with her creator's when he claims "I'm only attracted to androgynous males."[62] Just like Williams, Blanche has androgynous traits in her character. The parallel becomes more conspicuous when Williams claims that only artists and especially poets are possessed by such "androgynous quality,"[63] and Blanche is definitely an artist in her theatricality, in her language, in her romantic desire, and in her sensitivity.

Stanley Kowalski offers us the opportunity to read Blanche as an androgynous male when he states: "What queen do you think you are?" The audience of Streetcar has been aware of the homosexual connotations of the word "queen" as early as the first performances of the play. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "queen" used for "the effeminate partner in a homosexual relationship" appears as part of the slang diction as early as 1924. In fact, in a letter to Maria St. Just dated October 9th 1949, Williams himself used the term "queen" in the homosexual sense. He writes: "Well, the town is blooming with British queens, mostly connected in some way with the ballet."[64] Therefore, it is obvious that twenty years later after the use of the word "queen" in the homosexual sense, the audience cannot miss the homosexual connotation of the term "queen." Mitch's statement about Blanche, "I was fool enough to believe you was straight," and Blanche's answer "Who told you I was not 'straight'?" [117] is also over charged with the same homosexual tone we find in the word "queen." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of "straight" as "a heterosexual; not practicing sexual 'perversions'" came into the American slang in 1941, six years before the first performances of Streetcar. Therefore, the American public may have been aware of the sexual connotations when the play was being performed on Broadway. Moreover, the quotation

marks around "straight" in the script draw our attention to the word itself, and I suggest that Williams wants the actress who is performing Blanche's role to give a special tone and implication to the word "straight." In Kazan's movie version of Streetcar, the word "straight" receives more emphasis, for Blanche answers Mitch's question:

> What's straight? A line can be straight or a street. But the heart of a human being, oh, no, it's curved like a road through mountains.[65]

Years later in his Memoirs, Williams remembered Blanche's unforgettable line. It is the instance when he recalled such a line that is relevant here. It is during his narration of one of his homosexual cruises and encounters that Williams evokes Blanche's line. When the boy claims that he is 'straight' Williams remembers what Blanche said years ago. This is an evidence that Williams is definitely aware of the hetero/homosexual connotations of the word 'straight' when he puts such a claim in his heroine's mouth and makes her speak out his beliefs, fears and also frustrations.

Williams implies that the human heart cannot accept any restrictions and limitations on emotions. Williams tells his audience that there is more to life than the heterosexual love they believe in. Blanche DuBois is Williams's voice in which he can speak out what he has to mute, and she can state explicitly what he can refer to only implicitly. Through Blanche, Williams is trying to claim a space within the conventional society where he lives, to assert his identity as a homosexual, and to secure the validation and acceptance that he has been denied for being homosexual.

The closure of Streetcar reinforces the idea that the play is offering a place for the marginalized, and Williams is prompting his audience's empathy towards the victimized and the outcast, including Blanche, Allan, and also himself. The play's closure does not suggest that Streetcar is a celebration of heterosexual desire as much as a plea for understanding the deviant and those who live "out-of-bounds," as Stanley puts it [100]. At play's end, Williams is inviting his audience's involvement and engagement with what is taking place on the stage. He claims: "The world is incomplete, it's like an unfinished poem. Maybe the poem will suddenly turn to a limerick or maybe it will turn into an epic poem. But it is for all of us to try to complete this poem, and the way to complete it is through understanding and patience and tolerance among ourselves."[66] Williams's aim is to broaden the scope of his audience's perception and compassionate understanding so that it can become more inclusive. Williams is comparing the world to a poem that has no meaning and it is up to us either to leave it as meaningless or to attribute to it an epic-like significance. The audience is the actor who is going to change to the drama taking place before them by being collaboratively active and by having a broader perspective than the characters who are performing on the stage.

The major turning point in the audience's empathy and the event that forces us to turn away from Stanley and become more empathic to Blanche is the rape scene. This scene is an act of condemnation not only of Stanley, but also of Stella, Mitch, the poker players, and Eunice, who try to maintain the status quo. It is a condemnation of the entire society which has made Blanche DuBois a victim of its falsities and brutality. Through the rape scene, Williams has also managed to switch our empathy from Stanley to more compassionate understanding of Blanche. Even though Blanche may have been erroneous in her attitudes towards Stanley, there is nothing that can explain or legitimize his

crime of rape against her. The rape scene engages the involvement of the "other implied reader...who sees the final scene as an occasion to reassess rather than endorse" Stanley as hero. Indeed, "at this point [the rape scene] of the play, this reader will [hopefully] have recognized his or her complicity in what can only be described as coercive closure"[67].

Eunice, Stanley, and Stella are trying to force us into this coercive closure; they want us to see that Blanche alone is responsible for her fate, and she carries within her the hubris of her doom. They want to wash their hands of the evil conspiracy and convince us that what we are watching on stage is Blanche's inescapable end. However, in the last scene, Eunice's pacifism when she says to Stella: "Hush! Hush! Honey" trying to suppress the truth [134], and Stella's acceptance into this pacifism unquestionably, along with Stanley's gratuitous violence and aggression towards Blanche make it clear that the three of them are involved in the conspiracy of Blanche's victimization, and silence, and perhaps indifferent to the vile act of rape that Stanley has committed upon her. When Blanche desperately asks: "What happened here? I want an explanation of what's happened here" she is trying to unlock the secrets of this conspiracy, and utter a plea to draw from the audience their empathy, their understanding, and perhaps their reaction to the violence and cruelty to which she was subjected. By posing such a question, Eunice's pacifism, Stella's erasure, and Stanley's coercion can not be denied any more. The façade of happiness and propriety the Kowalskis put up does not hold anymore, and the deliberate cruelty with which they abandoned Blanche is indeed unforgivable.

Blanche manages at play's end to arouse all our empathy and compassionate understanding. Her words are accusatory and they prompt us to further introspective investigation and self-examination. Stanley's macho-attraction, his representation of the 'typical' American male, the disruption that

Blanche is about to bring to his home, his innocent behavior at the beginning of the play, and the threats that Blanche represents invite us to a game of conspiracy with him against Blanche. Blanche questions this complicity and invites us to reconsider the role of such a game. Her line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," debunks our sympathetic reading of Stanley, deconstructs the positive image we have held of him, and sets up a communicative channel of understanding between her and the audience. In fact, as June Schlueter argues, "Blanche's reliance on the kindness of strangers, even as family and acquaintances assemble to witness, not to prevent, her expulsion, encourages the awareness of how little kindness the reader has shown,"[68] and also reminds us of Blanche's fear that "maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image" [72].

Kazan follows this line in his staging of Streetcar. He explains his understanding of the relationship between Blanche and the audience as follows:

> I wanted Blanche to be a 'difficult' heroine, not one easy to pity, and for the audience to be with Brando at first, as they were closer in their values to Stanley than to Blanche. Then, slowly, Jessie and I and the play would turn the audience's sympathies around so that they'd find that their final concerns were for her and that perhaps, as in life, they'd been prejudiced and insensitive.[69]

Kazan wants to tap into the audience's initial prejudice and insensitivity towards the marginalized and to invite them to take the hard way to the "arduous journey through Purgatorio" because he is aware that the easy way always fades away quickly and does not leave its imprints on the audience.[70] The audience, for Kazan, has to experience the pain to reach purgation and he wants his audience

to give Blanche a well-earned and fought-for sympathy. Kazan wants his audience to earn their purgation through experiencing the tension between the normal and the 'abnormal,' and the marginal and the conventional. He wants them to cross from the safe shores where they are standing to the unsafe shores where they discover that the 'abnormal' is as normal as the normal, and the marginal is as conventional as the conventional. In this way, Kazan adheres to Williams's quest for tolerance, understanding and compassion toward a confused self with multiple faces to carry and many roles to play. This is what Kazan aims at when he declares:

> ...As the play progresses, and especially in the scenes where Blanche fearlessly declares herself and tells her history, the onlookers should admire her courage. It was my hope that they should then slowly reappraise her and perhaps even be dismayed at their original prejudices. Only in the end and with difficulty should the audience find special worth in this difficult person.[71]

Kazan is helping the audience to see the worthy side in Blanche's character, and to see her as the sensitive character who is trying to atone for her deadly feeling of guilt when she faced her husband with the unspeakable truth and screamed in his face: "I saw! I know! you disgust me..." [96].

Williams' closure of Streetcar is effective in drawing the audience's attention to the marginalia of the play. Had the play ended with the separation of Stanley and Stella, the audience would have probably had the opportunity to release and get rid of their tension that has been electrified inside them throughout the play, especially after the rape scene. Therefore, the audience would have distanced themselves from the play for the playwright, the director,

and the actors would have brought poetic justice on the stage and the catharsis that the audience wants to experience. The ending of Streetcar is not cathartic. Stella comes back to Stanley, and he with "his fingers tries to find the opening of her blouse." Stella has decided to live in her denial. She knows that she can live with Stanley only through pretending that he never raped her sister Blanche. At this point of the play, if the audience still choose to grant their empathy to Stanley and Stella, they can not do so without denying that they are granting their empathy to Stanley, the rapist, and his wife Stella who has collaborated in this rape through her silence and denial. The end of the play poses a moral dilemma to the audience that is more likely to be sorted out in Blanche's favor, especially with the failure of Stanley, Stella, Mitch, and Eunice to bring the play to a more just closure.

Through the ending of Streetcar, Williams is hoping to invite the audience to see themselves as characters and their life as a stage in a large theater. The three-hour performance is not a period of sheer entertainment, but a moment when we, as members of the audience, feel involved with Blanche and responsible for the victimization of the outcast. The performance is not a fictitious moment of mystification and evasion, but it is a moment that hopefully will generate a genuine response from the audience and encourage each of its members to open up to more humane possibilities and more compassionate understanding. During the performance, the restricted space of the stage expands to become more inclusive. The stage can become the space where the members of the audience project themselves and try to observe their own reaction to the situation that the play invites them to consider. In the moment of watching the play, the fusion between the external space, the stage, and the internal space, ourselves, may be achieved; the barriers that separate our public self from our private self are possibly removed, and the gap between our inner

selves and outer selves is reduced. During the three-hour performance, the audience are held witnesses to this public artifact that Blanche has become, and the desperation with which she has held to this public artifact in order to survive in her hostile environment. For some members of the audience, it would be possible to write off Blanche's struggle and steer their compassion away from her, but for others this would mostly be impossible. Some of the audience would leave the theater with the fear that they themselves have given up their identity for the public artifacts the others want them to become or have (un)consciously collaborated in the construction of these artifacts that we and the others are. The audience, if they allow themselves to succumb to the experience the play is asking them to partake with its characters, would pay reverence to this moment of truth and be ready to recognize this truth of victimization and atonement inside themselves as well.

Williams has deliberately removed any possible smoke screen that the audience may use to impose distance between Blanche and themselves. Stella, Stanley, Mitch and Eunice collectively form a proxy of the audience. In Stanley, we can see the possibility of our brutality and violence; in Eunice, the possibility of our denial, indifference, and pacifism; in Stella, our inclination to accept this pacifism; and in Mitch, we experience, as Williams may have hoped for, our regret and guilt for having abandoned Blanche at the very moment when she needs him most. Williams has projected his audience's possible attitudes on the stage and has allowed us to see the pattern of renunciation and guilt already performed on the stage before us so that we can avoid such an irreversible fate and perceive its tragic outcome. Blanche does not depart for the asylum in distress and humiliation but rather with admirable dignity and grandeur. Blanche may be defeated by Stanley's coercion and insensitivity but there is some valor and resilience about her that may trigger the audience's compassion

and empathy. Blanche's words to her sister "...don't--don't hang back with the brutes!" resonate at play's end, and the audience realizes that Stella has failed to live up to her sister's creed--a failure that hopefully they will not invite upon themselves.

Williams has succeeded in building a bridge of understanding between himself as a homosexual outcast and his audience. By arousing his audience's empathy for Blanche, Williams is transforming the theater into a temple of tolerance and inviting his audience to share with him his closeted space so that he himself can be understood, accepted, and validated. Williams is no longer by himself in his closet. He is extending its boundaries to be more inclusive, less lonely, and thus more tolerant. Through Blanche, Williams revealed his truth, the truth of a suppressed homosexual playwright. Williams is aware that if he is to awaken his audience's empathy towards himself, he can achieve it only through partial revelation, partial sincerity, and partial honesty. Williams is far beyond achieving total understanding and complete compassion with his audience. He can be honest with them only by claiming half truths and by conveying a toned down and understated confession. The audience are allowed to hear only a faint echo of Williams' cry. His relief is only temporary, and he is by no means able to find lasting comfort with his audience. Once the last member of his audience leaves the theater, the temple of compassion falls apart and becomes a vacuum. The audience's departure marks the desolation of the space that Williams has been striving to secure, and the 'inward' space of the theater is engulfed into a larger 'outward' space, i.e., the whole society. Williams is once again alone with his fear of loneliness and isolation. The performance is over, and Williams has to seek refuge once again in New York's streets, or in the dim alleys of the French Quarter of New Orleans, or in the cruising areas of Key West where he can find company, compassion, and kindness in the hearts of 'strangers.' Only in those

streets can the celebrity Tennessee Williams meet Tom Lanier Williams. In those streets Williams has to look into every face he meets to recognize those moments of truth, sympathy, and understanding. However, the quest is impossible and the common bond that Williams may have fostered during the performance proves again to be unattainable, unreal, and only theatrical. The audience remains anonymous to Williams, and so does Tom to his audience. The audience is always the stranger that Williams can be familiar with only in temporary and fleeting moments. The performance is over and Williams has to seek refuge in his typewriter and look for consolation in his script. Williams has to go back to his papers to re-enact such moments of understanding and compassion--moments that can be captured only on paper in sporadic, temporary, and fleeting instances.

In portraying himself in such a highly coded and closeted way, Williams has accepted his own demise. He is inflicting on himself the same erasure that he inflicted on Allan in A Streetcar Named Desire, on Skipper in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and on Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer. Williams is refusing to come out to his audience in the same way as he refuses to let his homosexual characters come out on the stage. In such a self-portrayal, Williams runs the risk not only of becoming an erasure but also of being a fragment of who he is. Williams is much larger than Blanche despite her grandeur, her gentility, and her refined literary taste. The space that Williams has secured for himself in the character of Blanche DuBois is so small that it may turn him into a claustrophobic seeking his own death. Williams, the creator, has imprisoned himself in his creation, Blanche DuBois. Williams, in his closet, has been reduced to a figure of speech. He is reduced to a metaphor, or a synecdoche, or to an entity with a lost origin--an entity that can define itself only in reference to a similar entity, not to itself. Williams can reveal himself only in partiality, and, no matter how much

we may admire Blanche DuBois, she still remains just a fragment and fading trace of the Williams whom we seek in his text.

Chapter II

The Gay Self: Lies that Come True

Tennessee Williams's Pulitzer Prize winning play, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, has caused a lot of confusion and critical dilemma to theater reviewers and critics alike. Williams argues that his play is about the truth and the critics argue that it is about evasion from the truth. Catherine Hughes, for example, contends the evasion as a weakness in the play and one of its negative aspects. Although she considers Cat as one of Williams's "most highly theatrical plays," she believes that it does not bring the audience to a clear resolution because "many things [are] still kept in the air at one time" at play's end.[1] Walter Kerr, writing in the New York Herald Tribune, has argued that Cat "is a beautifully written play... a play of evasion: evasion on the part of its principal character, evasion perhaps on the part of its playwright."[2]

Such critical attitudes stem from the critics' dilemma regarding the play's central character, Brick Pollitt. Some critics see him as a latent homosexual who can never come to terms with his homosexuality and his own erotic feelings towards his friend, Skipper, who commits suicide after he admits his erotic and physical attraction to Brick. Others have argued that Brick is not homosexual and his confusion and disorientation throughout all the play come from his feeling of guilt because he is not ready to listen to Skipper's confession, and chose to hang up the phone when Skipper disclosed his own homosexuality and his homoerotic feelings towards Brick. The play ends with no closures and the audience / readers are left in the dark with neither a clear resolution about Brick's sexuality nor a hint about what the future may hold in store for him.

These paradoxical critical attitudes reveal some flaws in the interpretive framework that these critics are trying to impose upon the play. The homosexual

identity that Williams constructs in his play is not easy to unfold; and it does not yield itself easily to the readers, the audience, or the critics. The critics want to stabilize the homosexual self in Cat. They want to see it in black or white, and they want to find a definite answer to their simplistic yes/no question about Brick's sexuality. Brick's identity is not fixed, not stable, and perhaps not recognizable all together. Our interpretation of the homosexual self in Cat should take into consideration the multiplicity of its narrative. Brick's story is told from more than one point of view. We hear Mae's and Gooper's version, Maggie's and Big Daddy's, Brick's, Skipper's remains 'undramatized' and thus withheld from us. The homosexual, apparently, is a self without a voice, multi-folded, of multiple narratives, and with its own secrets that it has to keep for its own sake. It is an entity that can not narrate its own narrative. The gay story can not be an open story with a definite ending. It is a story with many voices and with no closure. It is a secretive self that has to fight against its own authenticity, and if we try to penetrate to its authenticity, we shall find it folded in one secret after another, and in one layer after another. The homosexual self becomes an artificial edifice of many selves with different faces, one face can recognize the other, and perhaps it can not. Such faces may remain unrecognizable and perhaps incoherent as well.

Eve Sedgwick argues that "In this century... homosexual definition... is organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence."[3] Therefore, the gay self is not represented in a linear and straightforward narrative. It has to be de-stabilized, and it comes to us in a series of ruptures, incoherence, fragmentation, and mutilation, if not annihilation and erasures all together. David Savran agrees with Sedgwick about the nature of the construction of the homosexual self. He states:

> Throughout [Williams's] work for the theater of the 1940's and 1950's, homosexuality appears--ever obliquely--as a distinctive and elusive style, in every word and no word, as a play of signs and images, of text and subtext, of metaphorical elaboration and substitutions, of disclosure and concealment--in short, as textuality itself.[4]

From this perspective, the homosexual self is dislocated and misplaced. It is here and there, everywhere and nowhere. Its displacement points to its enigmatic nature. It is the entity that refuses definition, acts against categorization, and removes all sorts of boundaries and binary distinctions. The meaning of the self is not contained in what the characters say about it, it rather comes in signs and gestures, hints and ellipses, and images and concealments. The homosexual self is not what it is said to be, but rather what it is not. It is a disappearance and a concealment, a mask and a screen, and a shadow that points to an entity that lurks behind it. It expresses itself through the language of the metaphor--a language of association and disassociation, similarities and dissimilarities, a language of existence and non-existence. It is an ambiguous self. It negates itself to affirm this self. From this perspective, we can read Cat to look for association and disassociation. We should be well-equipped to understand the signs and the hints that Williams is sending us; we should be able to look through the screens he is putting in front of us not to confuse us, but rather to be able to tell us the story. We should be able to speak out the ellipses which are rampant in every page of the script, recognize the erasures that we encounter, and read "the thing" that Cat deals with for what that "thing" is and meant to be. Cat becomes not a play of language and words, statements and claims, truths and certainties, but "a play of signs and images" as David Savran chooses to perceive it.

Williams's de-stabilization of the homosexual self in Cat has its roots in Williams's perception about life in general. Williams does not believe in a stable and coherent homo / heterosexual self. The self, for Williams, is plural and in constant flux. It is a subject of rearrangement and re-consideration. He wrote to Donald Windham:

> Naturally we have very little integrity, if any at all. Naturally the innermost "I" or "You" is lost in a sea of other disintegrated elements, things that can't fit together and that make an eternal war in our natures... We all bob only momently above the bubbling, boiling surface of the torrent of lies and distortions we are borne along.[5]

Williams is asking us to redefine our understanding of the self. Unlike his critics and reviewers, he is arguing that we can never have access to a totality of selfhood. Our knowledge is only fragmentary and our understanding is doomed to remain partial and incomplete. The war between the fragments of the self is eternal. It is a state that defines our pre-existence and postulates our post-existence. The elements of the self never "fit together." Thus, no coherence, no stability, no unity, and no continuity of the self is ever attained. The "normative constructions of sexuality" are deconstructed as David Savran argues.[6] Therefore coherence is sought, yet never to be achieved. For Williams "some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself" (117). Full knowledge and recognition of oneself is almost impossible. The self refuses to yield itself to other selves, and also to itself. It just has this quality of resistance and defensiveness about it; it never lets itself out to people. It is a self which is always on guard. Such mysteries and secretiveness are not just a question of aesthetics as much as qualities of life for Williams: "I

live with [my characters] for a year and a half or two years and I know them far better than I know myself... But still they must have that quality of life which is shadowy..."[7] Life, for Williams, is "shadowy," it has twilight characteristics about it. The opposites are not opposites, they are just two ends of the same spectrum. Homosexuality and heterosexuality are not two well-defined binary compartments in Williams's understanding of sexual identity. They are rather two concepts which are intertwined and interwoven together. "I think that everybody has some elements of homosexuality in him, even the most heterosexual of us," Williams told David Frost in his interview.[8] And in another interview with Mel Gussow, Williams added that "no living person doesn't contain both sexes..."[9] We are in halves, and the image of the androgynous perhaps best describes Williams's understanding of the fluidity and continuity of sexuality. Williams is a playwright of ambiguity and obliqueness: "You may prefer to be told precisely what to believe about every character in a play... Then I'm not your playwright."[10] Williams does not tell us what to believe and what not. He does not place tags on his characters, he would rather give them a quality of life which is their mystery that they hold only to themselves. Meaning is not stated in Cat, it is inferred, deduced, felt and implied. To have different expectations from Williams is to tackle his plays with an interpretive framework that does not fit with the nature of his works, and perhaps reveals more of our resistance and abstinence in reading Williams's plays.

Williams is adopting a Pirandellian understanding of the self. Brick and most of Williams's characters are a collage of different images, and a montage of different, if not paradoxical, roles. The identity of Williams's characters is similar to the identity of Pirandello's. They are "an agglomeration of roles," "a loosely unified grouping of identities," and "a configuration of masks."[11] The self , for Williams, is analyzed and understood in terms of "images" and "roles". The self is

performative and perhaps theatrical. There is no self outside its own performance, and his characters are the roles that they are performing. Only in very scarce moments do we have the chance to meet Blanche, Brick and Sebastian (we never do as a matter of fact) outside their performance. They are playing roles for the other characters and a double role for their audience. Who they really are remains a question yet to be answered. We can have access only to their masks and we can see only the faces they are holding for us. "You didn't know Blanche"[12] is relevant not only for Blanche, but much more so for Brick, Sebastian, Skipper, and most of Williams's characters. We can peek at what is behind the cover only through what is left uncovered, but we can never be sure whether these uncovered spots are part of the mask or not. We are not to meet Williams's characters on our ground, but on their own terms, listen to what they say, and be patient not to categorize them in some already defined compartments. As Williams states: "I've always sensed the fact that life was too ambiguous to be... to be presented in a cut and dried fashion."[13] Williams's understanding of the self is that it can not be contained even by itself. As Stephen Stanton claims, Williams's "romantic nature is most pronounced in his unusual sensitivity to the multiple levels of the self."[14]

The critics' obsession with a stable and authentic self proves to be a mythical misconception in their understanding of Williams's plays. Williams does not fulfill our voyeurism, does not satisfy our gaze, and does not respond to our rush to conclusions and definitions. He challenges the dominating view that the self can be fully known and exposed. As Roy Schafer mentions, identity "is not so much stable identity... as identity that is always at risk... Identity at risk implies acceptance of there being no final resting place and a great need to tolerate ambiguity, tension, and deferral of closure."[15] Williams seems to hold the same belief when writing Cat. The play ends with no sense of closure. In fact, its

ending is dislocated between the play's two textual versions: the one that happens to be known as the Kazan or Broadway version, and the other as Williams original version. In both versions meaning is deferred, and the homosexual self remains unstable and ambiguous. The tension of the narrative about the homosexual self is left unresolved, perhaps postponed, but never slackened. As Stephen Frosh mentions:

> People are not really structured in stable, integrated ways but are, by nature, full of fluidity, contradiction, impulse and frustration, psychological processes brought together only to make coherence within the domains of rationality seem attainable. For that matter, rationality is itself an ideological fiction, imposed upon the irrationalities of psychological reality; intellect subordinating emotion, repression constraining desire.[16]

To impose rationality upon the self is to take away from it the complexity of its "psychological reality."

It is from this theoretical perspective that I will approach Brick's dilemma in Cat, and explore the construction of the homosexual self in Williams's play. I propose that the gay self that Williams presents to his audience in Cat is a product of negotiation between the personal factors and its social environments. It is a product of tension between its private longings and the social demands which are being made upon it. The self is an invention and reinvention as a result of the dialogue between these two forces. It is "a dialectical relationship with social organization. It is full of conflict, particularly between what is desired and what is encountered."[17] The self seeks its own liberation from these social forces, from its past, and its history that determines its destiny, but the quest for liberation proves to be in vain as Williams demonstrates in Cat. Nicholas de Jongh points to this identity tension in Cat and argues that Williams's play "becomes the finest truly modern play about homosexual desire... It relates the

demands of the public world to private lives. It questions the idea of fixed or unchanging sexual identity and the complex tension of the conscious and unconscious mind."[18] Therefore, Cat can be read only through its signs and hints, through its ellipses and erasures, through its masks and screens. It is a play of the unspoken, a play that deals with "the thing" that does not dare speak its own name. Cat, as Roland Barthes would describe it, is a text "that discomforts... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions," questions "the consistency of his tastes, values, memories," and "brings to crisis his relation to language."[19] Cat achieves this effect upon the audience. It shakes them out of their comfortable composure and challenges them to reconsider their assumptions. It questions the relationship between the signifier and the signified, and proves that meaning may not be contained in the sign, but it may be lurking behind the sign. Meaning is not in the text and in what the characters tell us, but in the subtext; it is not in the linguistic sign, but in the theatrical signal.

The Gay Self: Masks and Façades

Williams has included enough hints and signals in his script to make the audience believe that Brick may be homosexual. His nervousness, restlessness, detachment, disgust with heterosexual physical attraction, and his alcoholism may be seen as earmarks of his homosexual desire. De Jongh argues that Brick's reaction to Big Daddy when the latter suggests that Brick's relationship with Skipper might not be normal "keys with the description of the latent homosexual who was also often characterized as alcoholic caught off-guard." De Jongh observes that Williams's following stage description of Brick:

> Brick's detachment is at last broken through. His heart is accelerated; his forehead sweat-beaded; his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse (Cat, 116).

fits with the description of the latent homosexual:

> Pressures from repressed homosexual inclinations often produce acute or chronic anxiety neurosis. Analysts report that anxiety states palpitations, sweats, phobias and the like frequently turn out to be caused by unconscious homosexual tendencies which when they threaten to break forth into full consciousness produce feelings of acute fear and tension.[20]

De Jongh reads Brick's detachment, palpitation, sweat, and fears as the fear of the latent homosexual whose sexuality is about to be exposed. Brick is under the pressure of a crisis. The constant showers he takes are attempts to cleanse himself and to put out the inner fire that he is feeling. Brick's restlessness and detachment are not a result of his feelings of guilt over Skipper's suicide, but more of a result of a hidden secret. Brick's hanging up the phone and his refusal to hear Skipper's confession about his homo-erotic desire is not a secret in the play anymore. Both Maggie and Big Daddy know about it, and that's what torments Brick and causes all his seclusion and detachment. As Jung has pointed out:

> Nothing makes people more lonely (and perhaps more detached) and more cut off from the fellowship of others, than the possession of an anxiety hidden secret. Very often it is "sinful" thoughts and deeds that keep them apart and estrange them from one another...[21]

As Jung claims , Brick's detachment is a result of a secret that he has to keep to himself, and he can not face the others with it because of its 'sinful' nature. It is clear that in Cat, Brick perceives any sort of homosexual love and homosexual couples in derogatory terms. He sees gay couples in terms of "queers," "sissies," and "fairies." His understanding of homosexuality is in tune with the society's understanding that homosexuality is a religious and social aberration. Brick has

accepted his society's harsh judgment of homosexuality unquestionably. He describes Peter Ochello and Jack Straw as "fairies", and at this very moment Williams adds in his stage direction:

> In [Brick's] utterance of this word, we gauge the wide and profound reach of the conventional mores he got from the world that crowned him with early laurel (Cat, 122).

Brick realizes that this society can never accept homosexuality for what it is. This lack of tolerance and openness causes his loneliness, detachment, and estrangement. As Foster Hirsch argues: "Brick, at any rate, is not comfortable with his sexuality, and Williams presents his maladjustment as a result of indoctrination by smug and intolerant straight society."[22] Homophobia is so rooted in Brick's environment and ingrained in the majority of the people's mind that he has begun perhaps to think that they are 'right' and he is 'wrong'.

Brick tells the audience that his attachment to Skipper is not physical and has always been sexless. He informs Big Daddy that there was no physical contact between them except "once in a while he put his hand on my shoulder or I'd put mine on his, oh, maybe even, when we were touring the country in pro-football an' shared hotel-rooms we'd reach across the space between the two beds and shake hands to say goodnight..." (123). Brick's perception of his relationship with Skipper would be plausible, if it were not for his excessive nervousness, his alcoholism, and his constant protestations that his relationship with Skipper was "normal." Moreover, Skipper's confession to Brick about his own homosexuality points out that this relationship, though it might have seemed "normal" was, in fact, physically and sexually charged. This is perhaps the side that Brick wants to deny in his relationship with Skipper.

More important to this argument is Brick's relationship with Maggie and his attitude towards heterosexual physical attraction. In his article, "Homosexual Signs," Harold Beaver argues that

> Homosexuality... transgresses against breeding... it appears the very incarnation of social self-destruction... It threatens to turn abundance to sterility... it transgresses not merely against breeding but against the institution of marriage and of the family.[23]

Brick's relationship with Maggie fits with this observation. Brick refuses to go to bed with Maggie and have physical contact with her, and therefore he refuses to give Big Daddy, and Big Mama the grandson for which they yearn. His sexual abstinence and alcoholism are acts of revenge against a society which does not recognize and validate homosexual desire. They are acts of destruction against a society that denies homosexual desire and marginalizes it. "The homosexual has never submitted to a contract," Beaver contends, and Brick would have nullified this contract if it were not for the social shelter against his society's homophobia that this contract provides him.[24] Brick does not undo his contract with Maggie, but he has managed to empty it of the significance, the importance, and the ramifications that his society has bestowed upon it. Unlike Mae and Gooper whose marriage is conducive to a family and wishful financial reward, Brick has refused to place his desire within the framework of such social transactions, and has refused to be part of the heterosexual politics. Maggie kisses Brick on the mouth, which "he immediately wipes with the back of his hand." Big Daddy who notices such a gesture asks: "Why did you do that?" And Brick answers: "I don't know. I wasn't conscious of it" (81). Such slips define the homosexual self in Cat, and such hidden signals point to the homosexual subtext in Williams's play.

The closer Maggie tries to get to Brick, the more sophisticated and complex his masks for concealing the truth become. When Maggie puts more stress on Brick to force him to face the truth, Brick exclaims questioningly:

> I married you. Why would I marry you, if I was-----?
> [49].

However, when Brick uses this argument to deny his homosexuality, the audience is already aware that Brick's marriage is just a mask of mystification and concealment. Maggie has, by this time, revealed that she has been "just a sort of tagging along as it was necessary to chaperone" Brick and help him "to make good public impression" (59). In her relationship with Brick, Maggie has been used as a laissez-passer to enter the public world and acquire the seal of conformity and acceptance. When Maggie tells Brick that at her friend Alice's party the best looking man in the crowd followed her to the powder room and tried "to force his way in," Brick replies coldly, "I see no reason to lock him out of a powder room in that case." To which Margaret responds:

> ... I'm not going to give you any excuse to divorce me for being unfaithful or anything else.

> Brick: I wouldn't divorce you for being unfaithful or anything else. Don't you know that? Hell. I would be relieved to know that you'd found yourself a lover (51).

This exchange between Brick and Maggie speaks to another instance earlier in the play when Brick urges her to "take a lover!" (40). This would give him a reason for rejecting his wife and women in general. Even though Brick would know that Maggie is unfaithful to him, he would not divorce her, because marriage is the public and social institution that allows him to live with his

homosexual feelings and yet be part of the heterosexual majority of his society. To acquire the seal of public approval and identity, Brick is willing to sacrifice any sort of genuine feeling of love and integrity and live with fake, plastic, and deadly cold emotions of pretense and mystification.

Maggie has always played a mandatory role between Brick and Skipper in accommodating their desire. As Eve Sedgwick would have argued, Maggie's relationship with Brick serves only as a way of "triangulating" the homosexual desire in the female body. Brick has never been intimate with Maggie. Their marriage is loveless, and we are never let to experience in Brick's relationship with Maggie the same passion and intimacy we sense in his relationship with Skipper even though such a relationship was never consummated or dramatized on the stage. Maggie is the third part in the Maggie, Brick, and Skipper triangle. Brick tells Big Daddy:

> I think that Maggie had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed, which is not much closer than two cats on a--fence humping... (125).

Maggie, on the other hand, is recalling her sexual encounter with Skipper, tells Brick: "we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us!" Mark Winchell follows this line of reasoning and argues that "paradoxically, Maggie's body is the one place where Brick and Skipper can experience a blameless physical communion. It has an appeal akin to what Fiedler characterizes as the appeal of the whorehouse--'a kind of homosexuality once removed."[25] Homosexuality has to be relegated to the female body, it is an entity that has to remain only a fantasy or a dream. It is only in Maggie's body that Skipper and Brick can have a vicarious physical encounter. The homosexual self has to be contained, therefore, within the female body; and it is only within the heterosexual boundaries of the female body that it can exist.

The Homosexual Performative Self in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

R. M. Mansur points to the dichotomy between illusion and reality in Brick's character. He argues that Brick's "dilemma is that of a man who knows the painful truth about himself, but who would like to cling desperately to his self-created illusion, and go on disintegrating rather than change for the better," and Mansur concludes that Brick "is an irreparable illusionist."[26] Brick is aware of his homo-erotic desire, according to Mansur, but he is also aware of the impossibility to live with it. In fact, when we, the audience, see Brick on stage, we see him at a very crucial extremity of his life. He is facing Skipper's death, experiencing the pain of the loss of his friend, and trying to reconstruct for himself an illusion by which he can find consolation and comfort again. Brick at this moment is on the crossroads of the past and the future, the past where he has managed to convince himself that his relationship with Skipper is a pure friendship that does not involve any homosexual feeling between them, and the future where he has to save his face from the humilations that the others may cause him because of this relationship. The turning point in Brick's life is the moment when he receives Skipper's phone call admitting his homosexual feelings for Brick. This moment in Brick's life denotes the shattering of Brick's past illusion that his relationship with Skipper is not homosexual and marks the beginning of another role he has to play to conceal the nature of this relationship.

Skipper's voice on the phone is the voice that Brick does not want to hear. Brick's refusal to speak with Skipper is an attempt to deny and suppress his own feelings. He wants to disown these feelings because he is afraid that once the unspeakable is spoken, it can never be denied. Brick prefers to live with the illusion of denial rather than with the reality of what he is. It is more comfortable for him to deny and neglect his identity and private self as a homosexual than to

deal with Skipper, because he will have ultimately to deal with his emotions and come to terms with himself. Brick's fear does not stem from this over-taxing self-fulfillment, but rather from the others' reactions to homosexuality. Brick shouts at Big Daddy breathlessly: "Don't you know how people *feel* about things like that? How *disgusted* they are by things like that?"(121). For Brick, homosexuality is a terrifying inadmissible truth because it is inevitably public. "Brick simply can't acknowledge the homosexual tendency within himself," Nancy Tischler argues, "because he accepts the world's judgment upon it."[27] Even though his relationship with Maggie is unsatisfactory and unhappy, Brick wants to live within those enclosing boundaries of this relationship, because they give him the comfort and safety of normalcy and conformity. He is afraid that his passion might compel him to break his matrimonial and family ties and force him into exile and loneliness. Brick finds ease by being with the others even though the others are strangers to him. He does not want to hear Skipper for fear the eyes and the tongues of others might tear them to pieces and force them into a more deadly seclusion. Consequestly, he wears different masks and puts on other faked faces so that he might be able to survive. The mask is social, a result of the fear and anxiety from society. In putting on all these faces, Brick is trying to find a compromise between his private and public selves. He is trying to be in the mainstream. Gerald Weales argues that Brick refuses to consider the possibility of his homosexuality because "society condemns the homosexual and demands that he conform or face rejection. Brick chooses to reject rather than be rejected, to drink in disgust at society, but he carries with him the pretenses of that society, the need to lie about his sexuality."[28] Brick's lies and masks are attempts to achieve conformity. With every lie, and every mask, Williams points to the bottomless nature of Brick's tragedy.

Maggie draws the audience's attention to Brick's role-playing. It is Maggie who tells us that Brick is avoiding to deal with Skipper, and who tells us how Skipper and Brick were trying to convince themselves that their relationship was 'pure,' 'innocent,' and 'normal.' To cloak their intimate relationship with normalcy and commonness, Brick and Skipper form a football team that allows them to be as close to each other as they want to be, yet at the same time avoid any homosexual intimacy in their relationship. As Mark Winchell argues, this football team allows Brick and Skipper "to foster the illusion that they are still boys... they are safe in their homo erotic Eden."[29] Margaret confronts Brick with the truth that he and Skipper "organized The Dixie Stars that fall, so [they] could keep on bein' teammates forever! but somethin' was not right with it!... between [them]" (60). It is this confrontation with the truth that compels Brick to retreat into seclusion and total detachment. Brick is afraid that more intimate, sincere and honest communication with Maggie would strip off the illusions and the masks he is wearing. He is afraid that his fate would be identical to that of Skipper when Maggie confronted him and "destroyed him, by telling him the truth that he and his world which he was born and raised in... had told him could not be told" (60). Brick once again, evades this truth. Towards the end of his private conversation with Maggie about the nature of his relationship with Skipper, Brick feels that the truth is about to be revealed and his identity is about to be discovered, thus he resorts to more masking and disguise. Seizing the opportunity his niece provides him when she comes up-stairs, he says:

> Tell the folks to come up!--Bring everybody upstairs!... Little girl! Go on, go on, will you? Do what I told you, call them! (57-8).

Brick wants the others to invade the private space that Maggie has secured for herself to talk with him and to trace back the secret of his relationship with Skipper. The family members are used as a means of confining and restricting this space so that any sort of genuine revelatory communication between him and Maggie is restrained.

Brick's sense of detachment and superficial involvement is a strategy in his battle for survival. It is a defensive measure to which he resorts for fear of being attacked and discovered. It is only through silence that he can assert himself and feel that he is being accepted as one of the others. Williams is careful to render Brick's psychological confinement to his audience. In fact, when we first hear Brick, we hear him speaking from the enclosed and confined space of the shower. The sound of the running water materializes the psychological barriers that Brick has erected between himself and Maggie. It is only through shouting and screaming that Maggie can reach Brick. Throughout the play, we see more physical facts about this psychological detachment. Brick appears "in a white towel-cloth robe" (32) in the first act, and in a "white silk pajamas" in the third act (103). Although white is the color that might symbolize the state of innocence, idealism, and purity that Brick wants to convey to the others, it can also suggest the lack of involvement and attachment in Brick's character. White is the color that has no color, in the same way as Brick is the character that has lost any personal traits, and has become colorless for fear any other color that he should have might be rejected on the basis of being different, abnormal, and strange.

In the course of the play, Brick's mask of detachment becomes more and more conspicuous. Williams's stage directions describing the protagonist tell us that "a tone of politely feigned interest, masking indifference, or worse, is the characteristic of his speech with Margaret" (19). Williams further adds that Brick

"has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment [of] people who have given up the struggle" (19). The struggle that Brick has given up is that of his private self versus his public self, the struggle of being different, self-assertive, and truthful, yet recognized rather than rejected for being so. Brick finds compromise between these conflicting tensions in his solitary confinement. He talks to Maggie in abrupt sentences. He is "faintly vague," and answers Maggie's questions in very unsatisfactory short answers. Brick wants to keep Maggie at a distance, to the extent that he can retreat to himself, give the illusion of normalcy, and enjoy the "solid quiet... perfect unbroken quiet" (91). Through this detachment, Brick "exiles himself into his own narrow shrinking universe, distracting himself from the outside world by tuning in T.V. or singing a song. At almost every juncture, Brick refuses conversation, avoiding it as he would a contagious disease."[30]

In his conversation with Big Daddy, Brick becomes even more tragic and also more resourceful in his diversionary and misleading tactics. By subscribing to this hostile homophobic discourse, Brick reaches the endless bottom of his tragedy. Brick labels Jack Straw and Peter Ochello with the very pejorative terms that the others would use to label him. He calls both Jack and Peter "old sisters," "queers," "fairies" and "sissies," and speaks about homosexuality in terms of "sodomy," "dirty things," and "unnatural things." Brick's discourse shows us how self-loathing he has become. He has totally erased his identity as a homosexual to avoid the hostility of the homophobic others. He has become just an erasure and a role to play so that he can avoid the animosity and antagonism of the others.

Not only has Brick become more tragic in his conversation with Big Daddy, but also more evasive and misleading. At the very moment when the truth is imminent and Big Daddy named the lie with which Brick tries to live, Brick proves to be even more evasive. Big Daddy confronts:

> Anyhow now!--we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick... This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself. You!--dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!--before you'd face truth with him! (127).

But Brick denies: "[Skipper's] truth, not mine!" To top it all Brick decides to use Big Daddy's truth about his cancer which has been kept from him as a means of diversion and escape. Ironically, Big Daddy's truth is manipulated by Brick to conceal another truth. Big Daddy, who is helping Brick to face the truth, can not himself face his own. He screams and shouts "with a fierce revulsion," leaving the stage "lying! Dying! Liars!" (131); and Brick remains standing alone on the stage as he has always wanted to be.

The consequence of these masks and screens that Brick uses as means of evasion from the truth of his homosexuality is that he and the audience would never have the chance to know the 'real' Brick, if such a real Brick were ever to exist. Brick's reality becomes a fiction of his own construction. The self is a fiction that we create and an image that we market. Brick wants to cater to his society a very specific image of his own, and this image is created and designed after the prescriptions that his society expects from him. Brick's self is a prescriptive self. It follows pre-supposed expectations and certain social needs. The homosexual self, in Cat, can not write its own script, and create its own discourse. And if it does, it has to follow the prescriptions of the social forces which contrive to deny its existence, and refuse to give it the legitimacy that it is longing for. It has to be told from the others' point of view. Skipper is dead and therefore cannot talk about it, and Brick is left too numb to describe it to his audience. The homosexual self is edified by characters who exist 'outside' the homosexual circle-- characters

like Big Daddy, Maggie, and Mae and Gooper. Thus, the authentic self remains an ontological impossibility.

Brick's self has turned out to be performative. We don't know the 'real Brick' in the same way as we don't know the 'real Blanche' that Stella tries to tell us about. Both Brick and Blanche are performing a role of themselves. Blanche is performing to her sister, to Stanley, and to his friends; while Brick is performing to Big Daddy, Maggie, and the rest of his family. The role that they are to play and the self become synonymous. They are what they are performing. Both Blanche and Brick are obsessed with their showers, and their cleansing, both are dealing with their "disgust" with the idea that homosexuality is closer to them more than they want to think. Blanche is purging herself of the feeling of guilt at her homosexual husband's death, and Brick is coping with his homosexual friend's suicide. Brick's case might be more complex than Blanche's in the sense that he is what he is repelling and what he is pretending not to be. Blanche uses her clothes to play all these roles, She is aware of the subtle effect that colors might have on her audience. She made her appearance on the stage in a white dress; and Brick spends most of the play in his white pajamas. Purity is what they are longing for and what they want to communicate to the others. The mask drops only in fleeting moments. In a moment of frankness and honesty, Blanche decides to get rid of the mask for a while. In a theatrical gesture she turns to the audience and rolls up her eyes in an act of self-mockery, and disdain at the moral codes and hypocrisy to which she is abiding. Blanche generates a small space where she can be herself for a while. Similarly, when Brick is about to face the truth with Maggie, he asks his niece to bring people up at the very moment when Maggie is about to reveal the truth about his relationship with Skipper. Both know how to manipulate their private or public space to protect themselves. Both Blanche and Brick are toning down themselves in order to pass and to be

accepted. Both are aware that they need to cater and to hide, to shimmer and to mystify, to pretend and to deny in order to be accepted in their immediate environment. The result is that their identity is blurred and blended into the performative self; and the former becomes the latter and vice versa. As Arnold Modell argues:

> As a consequence, the individual loses touch with the vital affective core of the self, and life loses its zest and meaning. Some individuals become estranged and decentered from their own private self and are as false and inauthentic within themselves as they are with others. In the struggle to preserve private space they therefore achieve a tragic pyrrhic victory. Ironically, the fight to protect the private self continues even after the individual has lost contact with it... *In closing oneself off from others, one inadvertently closes oneself off from oneself.*[31]

Brick is doomed to be only the mask of who he is. Appearance takes precedence over the essence. Indeed, this essence dissolves to become only appearance. Even if it remains, there is no way for the audience to know this essence and to understand it comprehensively. "The means employed to protect private space against intrusion by others is also re-created within the self," as Arnold Modell demonstrates.[32]

Big Daddy seems to believe that behind these layers of masquerade, Brick is hiding an authentic self and a real identity that he can extract in a moment of truthful communication. He wants to cut through what he calls "scruples, convention, crap" (95) of existence, and gets to the truth of Brick's alcoholism, detachment, and wasted life. He expects Brick to dig into his past relationship with Skipper, examine his marriage with Maggie, and look back at his life to reach a sort of self-revelation that may allow him to gain his life back. Big Daddy believes that the self can understand itself through self-examination and

introspective and retrospective examination. Big Daddy believes that Brick can realize the mendacity of his existence, remove the screens and masks he lives with and be able to live a life of honesty and authenticity. However, these attempts towards the truth and authentic self prove to be in vein.

There is no moment of self-revelation or self-understanding in Cat. All the characters remain locked in the self-illusion they construct. In no moment do they reach to each other, and the self is presented with no exit and no escape. Big Daddy himself who is trying to reach an authenticity and genuineness with Brick, suggests 'mendacity' as a way of living. He screams and shouts to Brick:

> I lived with mendacity!-- why can't you live with it, there's nothing... there's nothing else to live with except mendacity, is there? (111).

Even though Big Daddy reveals self-awareness about the quality of his existence, he does not seem to be able to find an alternative. He is suggesting to Brick exactly what he is trying to escape from. His moment of self-awareness:

> Think of all the lies I got to put up with!--Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have any idea of... Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!- I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now!--even when I laid her!-- regular as a piston... (110).

remains unrealized and never to be materialized later in the play. He suggests to Brick what he is repelled from. The breakthrough from a world of pretenses and mendacity does not seem to be within Big Daddy's or Brick's reach. The self is locked into its performativity. It has to perform its roles no matter how pretentious and inauthentic such roles might be. No essence is beyond the role, and no reality beyond the illusion. Big Daddy can not face his own truth either.

He prefers the illusion to the reality. Brick confronts him with the reality of his cancer, and Big Daddy responds with devastation and screams:

> All - lying sons of lying bitches! ... Yes, all liars, all liars, all lying dying liars!... Lying! Lying! Liars!... (131).

To remove all these thick screens and big walls separating him from Brick, and to understand and reach out to his son, Big Daddy has walked into Brick's private space. The bedroom is the place where Big Daddy tries to invite Brick to open up to him. Even though it may seem to be just a bedroom, one can see in it the very characteristics of the homosexual closet where the homosexual identity is usually constructed. In his "Notes for the Designer," Williams writes that the bedroom that Maggie and Brick share

> Hasn't changed much since it was occupied by the original owners of the place Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts, it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon (15).

This room represents the new homosexual politics that exists within the politics and economics of a heterosexual culture, yet it questions and redefines this culture. The room is a place where the homosexual desire is conceived and the homosexual politics and economics are originated. Peter Ochello and Jack Straw created their own family in this room, and the plantation that Big Daddy inherited is the embodiment and the fruit of this consumed homosexual desire. The room stands for another subversive alternative to the predominant traditional understanding of the notion of family, and illustrates how other alternatives can be possible. Yet, this room is also the object of the heterosexual gaze, the object of Mae's and Gooper's voyeurism, Big Mama's intrusions, and

the Reverend Tooker's curiosity. It is a place of social, political, and religious surveillance. Every character in the play including Gooper's and Mae's children, the no-neck monsters, want to know what happens behind the closed doors of this closet. They are all spies lurking behind its walls eavesdropping and trying to understand the mystery and the exoticism of the closet. The bedroom fits with Sedgwick's description of the closet. Allowing the audience to catch a glimpse into the closet, a site that Eve Sedgwick has postulated as an epistemological, "curious space that is both internal and marginal to the culture: centrally representative of its motivating passions and contradictions, even while marginalized by its orthodoxies."[33] The closet is a place of fascination, yet of fear, that all the characters are curious about while afraid to enter and be part of it. Reverend Tooker, Mae, and Gooper are curious to know what happens in side this room, but one cannot imagine their wanting to be associated or a part of this closet, or subjects to such curiosity and voyeurism themselves.

Brick's room is analogous, as Savran explains, to Barthes's description of what he calls the "Racinian Antechamber: a space between, a room in which one waits, 'a site of language,' of debate that stands in opposition to the turbulence outside."[34] This place maybe a place of inward turmoil, a place of fear and anxiety that the hidden secret might become suddenly an open secret, and what is private might turn to be public. Yet, it is a place of serenity and peace. It is a refugee from "the turbulence outside," it is a place of privacy and eroticism, and honesty and frankness. This room is the place where "the homosexual subject is constituted" as David Savran argues. The closet sets the demarcation lines and the only legitimate space where the gay self can exist in a homophobic and intolerant culture. Once the boundaries of the closet are removed, the homosexual self has to face either the threat of violence and aggression or the embodiment by the heterosexual culture. Brick, in retreating more and more into

his closet, and thus adding one mask and one screen after another to his make up, is, in fact, protecting his homosexual identity from the ferocity of Mae and Gooper, and even Maggie, and all the demands that the heterosexual culture is making upon him. True but sad, the homosexual identity can not survive outside its closet, and Williams is aware that the 1950's is not the ideal decade of unconditional tolerance.

Brick's bedroom is an inward space as well. The closet is not a geographical space, it is rather a virtual space and so is the bedroom where Big Daddy is trying to handle his conversation with his son, Brick. The setting is not realistic. Williams states:

> The set should be far less realistic than I have so far implied in this description of it... The walls below the ceiling should dissolve mysteriously into air; the set should be roofed by the sky; stars and moon suggested by traces of milky pallor, as if they were observed through a telescope lens out of focus (16).

Williams, from The Glass Menagerie, through A Streetcar Named Desire, to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, has always been interested in a sort of plastic theater and transparent scenery which allow the audience to see what they usually can not see. The walls of Williams's screens are transparent in Streetcar, and the projection of shots from the past on large screens in Menagerie invites the audience to see the emotional coloring that the characters are experiencing during the moment of performance, and brings the past and the present together in the now of the performance. In his book, Designing for the Theatre, Jo Mielziner believed that Williams was concerned with a drama that can externalize "the inner man and made his spiritual longings a concrete viability on stage." Mielziner's description of Menagerie's setting rings true as well for Cat:

> My use of translucent and transparent scenic interior walls was not just another trick. It was a true reflection of the contemporary playwright's interest in... and at times obsession with... the exploration of inner man. Williams was writing not only a memory play, but a play of influences that were not confined within the walls of a room.[35]

This description is appropriate to Cat as well. The room takes an interior dimension. It is an inward space that correlates with Brick's mind and yet it is an externalized space that transcends the walls and the geographical limitations of a room. It is a room where the past survives and shapes the present. It is a room whose walls open up to an unlimited horizon, a horizon of the stars and the moon, it is a horizon of other possibilities that may be available. It is a room where Peter Ochello and Jack Straw worked hard and died to make such possibilities come true. Brick misses such possibilities not because he is not willing to live up to his options, but because the voice of his society torments him and its view on homosexuality dooms him to marginalization and gives him the label of an outcast. The voice of the public Brick has toned down the voice of the private Brick. The homosexual identity is destined to remain a torn identity-- an identity in constant risk of loss-- loss of respect, integrity, and longings. The homosexual self is a story of doubt. It is afraid that if it asks for more, it might lose what it already has- no matter how little that might be. The homosexual self can survive only in the darkness of the closet in Cat for fear that any bright light might blur it, freeze it, or even annihilate it as what happened to Skipper in Cat, Allan Grey in Streetcar, and Sebastian in Suddenly Last Summer. The homosexual self prefers this darkness to light because it is delicate and fragile; it is an identity in its embryonic stage, and any outside element that is strange to the closet might contribute to its extermination. The closet does not shed much light on the homosexual self, but it tells more about the society where the gay self tries to exist. It does not speak to the luck of courage in the gay self to confront

and blurt its homosexuality in every face, but it tells something about the cowardice of the society which is intolerant to difference. It is a society that is afraid, insecure, lacks maturity, and not confident yet to deal with differences. It is scared and appalled, because it has failed to make everyone conform to its norms and regulations. The American society has not succeeded yet in accommodating the homosexual self. It can not remove the boundaries of the closet; and if it does, it is only to threaten and to deny. It aims at deluding the gay self into a culture that has never secured a safe zone for the gay identity.

The Gay Self and the Critics

The homosexual self that Williams constructed for his audience in the 1950's, and 1960's has become the subject of criticism from different critics. It is argued that Williams has resorted to a language of accommodation to dramatize the homosexual identity on the Broadway stage. For some critics, Williams's homosexual self is not affirmative. It points to its own erasure more than to its own assertiveness. It claims its absence more than it states its presence. It is an understatement of what it should be, and it is devoid of its own voice and complexity. Supporters of the Gay Liberation accuse Williams of evasion and indirectness. Graham Jackson, for instance, points out that Williams did not bring up the issue of homosexuality as a subject itself:

> In Williams' plays, homosexuality is implied but never actually stated–that is, until 1968... In his earlier plays, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More, homosexuality is the thing never named, or talked about only in whispers, behind closed shutters. It is the thing Blanche saw when she opened; that door she should never have opened, it is the thing Maggie alludes to when she talks about the strange relationship between Brick and Skipper; or it is the

> thing that leads to a grisly death on the streets of Cabeza de Lobo, the thing Catherine Holly will not stop talking about, the thing Mrs. Venable wants to cut out of Catherine's head--always the Unnamable Thing.[36]

According to Graham Jackson, homosexuality is always an issue of 'hush... hush' for fear the unspoken is articulated, and the entity which does not speak its name becomes an open matter. Homosexuality, Jackson contends, remains "a thing" in Williams's plays "always the unnamable thing" that has to remain under covers and smoke screens.

Albert Devlin tends to agree with Jackson's claim. Devlin recognizes that Williams is complicit in the construction of "the speechless self" of Brick, even though Devlin recognizes that Williams does not have another choice in the ways to represent the gay self.[37] Therefore, according to such critics, the homosexual self is relegated to a secondary position in Williams's plays, and it is communicated only through metaphors of mutilation and annihilation. The split and incomplete self is the metaphor of the gay self. The split self in Menagerie[38] and The Two-Character Play depicted as male and female, in Summer and Smoke as body and soul, in The Rose Tattoo as desire and fidelity, becomes a metaphor for the gay identity. It speaks for the incompletion, the dividedness, and the erasure of this identity. It speaks for the way the gay self is split between the 'conventionality' of its society, and the 'unconventionality' of its own desire, and its 'illegitimate' private longings, and its need to conform and be publicly accepted according to the codes and norms of behavior. Homosexuality is never allowed to be a name of its own in Williams's plays.

Williams's gay self is not affirmative according to some critics. John Clum argues that Cat is a frustrating play because the "potential of an abiding love between two men" is being mutilated. "Homosexuality," for Clum, "is linked to

an inability to grow up into any kind of relationship" in Williams's play. It remains unrecognized and yet to be materialized. Williams has failed as Clum argues "to forge a positive language for the homosexual love the play tries to affirm."[39] Clum argues that the only positive and affirmative presentation of the homosexual self is to be found in the stage directions to which the audience has no access. He recognizes that Jack Straw and Peter Ochello are not the stereotypical homosexual characters and "do not carry the freight of negative stereotypes other Williams homosexuals carry: they are not frail like Blanche DuBois's suicidal husband; nor voracious pederasts like Sebastian Venable... nor are they self-hating like Skipper."[40] However, "beyond the stage directions, there is no positive language for Straw and Ochello." If there is any positive tone to the gay identity in Cat, it remains beyond the ears of the audience, for this tone is locked into the undramatized stage directions of Williams's play. The only voice we are meant to hear in Cat is that of Brick's homophobic attacks on Ochello and Straw. The positive and affirmative homosexual self remains not only invisible but also silent.

Williams's claims about Brick's sexuality have added more frustration to the critics. Williams is evasive when he talks about Brick. In an interview with Arthur Waters, he suggests that "Brick is definitely not a homosexual... although I do suggest that, at least at some time in his life, there have been unrealized abnormal tendencies [in his character]."[41] In his response to Walter Kerr's charge that Williams is being evasive about Brick's sexuality in Cat, Williams poses the question: "Was Brick homosexual?" and answers: "he probably,--no, I would even say quite certainly--went no further, in physical expression than clasping Skipper's hand across the space between their twin beds in hotel rooms--and yet his sexual nature was not innately' normal."[42] More evasive than Brick is Williams himself regarding Brick's sexuality. He

points to the duality of Brick's sexuality, but never denies at least his protagonist's homosexuality even though he denies the possibility of physical love between Brick and Skipper. Williams labels Brick's tendencies as "not quite normal," and adds that his sexual nature was not "innately normal." Such claims and such non-affirmative representation of the gay self is perceived by critics as Williams' way to accommodate the gay cause to the comfort zone of the majority of his heterosexual audience. Williams claims:

> You still want to know why I don't write a gay play? I don't find it necessary. I could express what I wanted to express through other means. I would be narrowing my audience a great deal... I wish to have a broad audience because the major thrust of my work is not sexual orientation, it's social. I'm not about to limit myself to writing about gay people...[43]

Such a statement was seen by some critics as Williams abandonment of the gay cause for the sake of the audience's approval and validation. John Clum claims that:

> If one's goal is the approbation, and financial reward, of a broad audience, then one must not 'force upon' that audience any more than they find acceptable. Like many closeted homosexuals... Williams has a fine sense of how much people 'want to know.'[44]

John Clum reveals a sort of paradox between what Williams claims to achieve and what he really sets up to fulfill. John Clum observes that on one hand Williams claims "the highly personal nature of his work and of his close relationship with his characters," but on the other hand, he does not really launch himself to achieve what he sets up for himself to achieve. Cat, according to Clum, does not "conform" with Williams's assertion: "I draw all my characters from my self. I can't draw a character unless I know it within myself."[45] Thus, the ultimate

conclusion, for Clum, is that Cat is not a gay play, but rather a heterosexual play. "Williams... has written here a virulently heterosexist play," Clum observes. Once again, the creator is being separated from his creation, and Williams is being distanced from his own work and from his own plays which are and remain to be the only space that he could secure to reveal his tension and to resolve much of the maladjustment that his society brought upon him. Even the space that Williams has secured for himself is being taken away from him. Williams is denied the security of this space he created for himself, and he is being denied the comfort that it brings upon him. Williams is presented again with a large gap and a huge distance that separate him from his work. He has spent all his life longing for a life-long companionship. His plays present the only affirmation life gave him that such an option is possible for him. unfortunately, critics took away from him the only confirmation and affirmation for such a possibility. Clum's claim is not different from that of Mark Winchell's about Streetcar where he argues that Williams, the homosexual playwright, ended up by writing a heterosexist play.[46] The absence of an assertive homosexual identity does not imply that Williams ended up by writing a heterosexist play. It rather implies that Williams was operating under a political environment and an ideological framework that come between the creator and his own creation to dictate to him the type of play he could write, and to force him into a particular discourse about homosexuality. Such discourse may be limiting and confining, yet Williams was able, in fact, to find the place where such a discourse could be turned against itself, and where what might seem to be accommodationist is subversive, and what is non-affirmative is, indeed, challenging and assertive. The homosexual self that Williams is presenting to his audience is the product of a negotiation. It is a self which is negotiating its own space, and trying to explore the in-between liminal spaces where it can claim its own complexity. The homosexual identity in

Cat is a result of negotiation with its political, social, and historical environment. To deny such factors in the construction of the gay self in Cat is to mutilate this self one step further, and to take from Williams the credit that should be attributed to him for being able to speak the unspeakable, and to tell a story that was rarely told on Broadway stage.

The Negotiative and Affirmative Gay Self

As J. F. Buckles demonstrates, the self is always "negotiating with and within its relationships with socializing forces and cannot escape being pulled to and from by norms and language and social institutions."[47] The self is not a total autonomous entity. It exists in a context that shapes it, even though such a context is similarly shaped by this self. The relationship is interactive, and so is the self. To believe in a totally independent and autonomous self is to deprive it of its social context, and to end up by creating an ideal self that does not exist at first place. It seems to me that when critics are arguing that Williams does not create an assertive and affirmative gay self, they are, in fact, arguing for an ideal self that did not exist in Williams's time i.e. the 1940's and 1950's, and does not exist even in the second half of the twentieth century. They are demanding that Williams create a self that is isolated from its cultural and political context-- a homosexual self that is cut off from the homophobia of the time, and the internalized fears and worries that homosexuals had to live with because of such homophobia. They expect from Williams magic and not reality, and Williams was definitely unwilling to feed his homosexual and heterosexual audience alike the illusion of perfection and social justice that proves to be only an ideal. Williams takes illusions away, removes the façades, and deals with the screens we construct to create such illusions. Whether his audience, reviewers, or critics are ready to deal with the ugliness of this reality is a decision that is left up to

them to make. Williams did not give us the perfect gay self in Cat, but instead, a self in constant negotiation--a self in a state of fluctuation and constantly under a sort of adjustment that speaks for its maladjustment in a society of conformity and rigidity. As Ellis Hanson says: "any sexual identity is not an immutable essence, but a performance, a negotiation, 'peace talks'" of a sort.[48] The homosexual self in Cat is in 'peace talks' with Maggie, Big Daddy, and the rest of the Pollitt family. It is in constant conversation with Brick himself, Skipper, the past, the present, and its future. It is in negotiation with the political and social forces of the time period. It is in a dialogue with the homophobia of the 1950's and the moral strict codes of Broadway and Hollywood. It is in and out for dialogues and adjustments. These are the demands and the requirements of a struggle for survival. To ask Williams not to adopt the techniques of masquerading, evasion, and erasure is to ask him to be suicidal, and to abort the homosexual self that he wants to dramatize on Broadway stage in its cradle. Williams's homosexual self is a sign that refers us back to the time period, the political, social, and cultural milieu which have produced it. Such a sign reads well. It points to the limitations within which the homosexual self can operate, but also subverts these limitations, asserts itself, and claims itself for what it is. Williams presents a homosexual self with and without a make up. The screens and the façades are its make up, but this make up is part of it-- part of the gay identity. It is a forced choice that gays do not have the right to reject. A better alternative might be there, but the willingness of the 'American culture' and the gay self as well to admit such an alternative as an option is not necessarily granted.

As the historian Martin Duberman remembered: "It took an enormous amount of courage to openly declare yourself to be a lesbian or a gay male."[49] There was no safe zone for gays and lesbians in the 1940's and the 1950's. Charles Kaiser witnesses to such a hard fact:

> When you were born in the late twenties or early thirties, which is my generations--I was born in thirty-six--it was a disgrace to be gay. There's something wrong with you. You're an embarrassment to your family--you're a 'sissy,' you're a 'fairy,' you're a 'pansy.' Whatever the appropriate words were of that era.[50]

To be gay is a social and political embarrassment. Gay men were perceived as a social danger and a threat to the national security:

> By the end of the 1950's, the anti-homosexual campaign had spread far beyond the government and military. Fanatical vice squads arrested countless men and women in gay and lesbian bars, cruising areas and even their homes, while local newspapers printed the names and addresses of these "perverts"... In 1958, a Florida legislator even succeeded in dismissing sixteen faculty and staff members from the State University in Gainsesville on charges of homosexuality.[51]

Homosexuality is a perversion, a charge, and a crime requiring punishment and rehabilitation. There were no possibilities outside the norm. The social expectations are not to be curbed. Charles Kaiser demonstrates the ideal respected and accepted picture of a family is of a male and female couple with "three children, a barbecue, and a two-car garage." The 1950's and 1960's were a time period where "conformity of every kind was king."[52]

Hollywood and Broadway were not free from such homophobia and conformity. Art was supposed to reinforce rather than subvert the already existing social and political beliefs. Art was not expected to question the ideals that people were made to hold about their lives. "For the New York theater, like

Hollywood," David Savran claims "was subject to strict legislative censorship that worked in complicity with the severe ideological constraints of the period." He adds: "Dating back to the passage of the so called Wales Padlock Law in 1927, plays which 'depict[ed] or deal[t] with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion were prohibited from the New York stage."[53] Homosexuality falls under such prohibitions. "In 1934 the Hollywood production code banned all representations of homosexuality in films," Savran wrote, and "the National office for Decent Literature of the Catholic Church impelled 'publishers and newspaper editors' to practice 'a form of self-censorship that kept homosexuality virtually out of print.'"[54]

Williams was operating under such codes of limitations and inhibitions. His art had to fit with prescriptions and regulations. As David Savran points out, "Williams insisted, with some justification, that he could not stage his homosexuality directly or candidly during the 1940's and 50's, believing that 'there would be no producer for it' given the homophobic program of the Broadway theater."[55] Williams faced such a problem not only when writing his scripts, but also when translating them into movies. The homosexual theme had to be further blurred and erased in the motion picture, and the possible homosexual relationship between Skipper and Brick had to be removed. Instead of such a relationship, Brick is represented as the illusionist athlete who wants to live in the past. He is a young man who does not want to grow up and to assume the responsibilities of the reality, and the requirement that his family and his wife are making upon him. The homosexual theme is toned down, and more emphasis is placed upon sports and Brick's past as an all-American athlete. Brick is not represented as a man who refuses to fulfill his sexual and physical 'duties' towards his wife, but rather as a man who might have lost his impotence but not his desire, to perform with his wife. As Maurice Yacowar states, "Richard Brooks

adds a shot of Brick in the bathroom, burying his face in Maggie's slip and caressing it in agony."[56] The effect of such a scene is to suggest "that Brick still desires his wife" therefore, his heterosexual desire is not under question. What is being questioned instead is his physical capacities to perform the role that is bestowed upon him. The screens and covers that Williams uses to depict homosexuality and to construct the homosexual self are not a matter of choice as much as a question of survival. Gore Vidal believes that the very few artists whose homosexuality was not a hidden secret to the critics all paid a significant price for their frankness and honesty.[57] The critics were not welcoming to Williams's plays, and he was not willing to meet these critics on a safe ground, and give them the certainties that they were looking for. They were ruthless and unsympathetic to him and to his characters, and he was willing to protect his characters even through evasion and lies.

The homosexual identity that Williams constructed is itself a result of the homophobia of the reviewers and the critics. Had Williams presented them with a more openly gay character, the critics and the reviewers' attacks would probably not have been any less tolerant and accepting. Perhaps, in such a case, the critics would have found a more firm moral ground to attack him and raise doubts about his literary abilities. The critics can pretend to be confused by Williams's characters, about Brick and his sexuality, but it is also obvious that they themselves are evasive and mendacious. The reviewers were reluctant to point out the possibility of Brick's homosexuality. In his review, Brooks Atkinson includes not a single reference to Brick's dilemma or to his relationship with Skipper. In the reviews where Brick's and Skipper's relationship was mentioned, it was not recognized for what it is, but it was exposed to be condemned and rejected on the very moral and social basis that Williams is criticizing in his play. Such critics become themselves the very epitome of the "conventional lie" and the

mendacity that Williams is arguing against. "There is the implication, at least, that the most motivation in the play derives from an unnatural relationship" between Brick and Skipper, John McClain wrote.[58] McClain is deploring homosexuality, and not accepting it, he is condemning rather than understanding. Later, and in her first book on Williams published in 1961, Nancy Tischler repeatedly refers to homosexuality as a "perversion" that requires "the inevitable punishment."[59] Brick's homosexuality, for Tischler, is a sickness. She asks: "Is brick a homosexual, if he is, can he be cured?" Brick needs a "cure" according to Tischler, and this remedy can be sought only in his "conversion" to heterosexuality.[60] Such a tone is to be echoed in later academic works on Williams. Francis Donahue refers to Brick's and Skipper's relationship as "the unnatural affiliation."[61] Such attitudes reveal how much resistance these critics are exercising not to read Williams's plays. They are reading Williams's work extrinsically rather than intrinsically for Williams has never meant to portray homosexuality as a perversion and the sense of mutilation and incompletion, usually associated with the homosexual self in Williams's plays, does not shed lights on homosexuality as a perversion as such as much as it tells us about the norms and conventions which could not accept and recognize this homosexuality. Williams's gay self is the product of this academic and institutional homophobia. To be illusive is a necessity, and to be evasive is not a question of choice. The gay self can not bear the bright lights of Broadway's theaters. It is to remain a shadow that lurks behind the curtain. As David Savran argues, Williams's presentation of homosexuality has to be "ubiquitous and elusive. It structures and informs all his texts, yet rarely, especially in his plays, produces the (un) equivocally homosexual character that most critics look for in attempting to identify a homosexual text. Instead, Williams's homosexuality is endlessly refracted in his work, translated, reflected, and transposed." It is this

homophobia that forces the gay self in Williams's plays to be so, i.e. "translated, reflected, and transposed."[62] The homosexual self in Cat is a result of the social, political, and academic attitudes of the time.

One can read Williams's plays in parallel with his Memoirs, his letters, and other private writings such as his journals. The most obvious outcome that such private writings point to is that if the social attitudes towards homosexuality had been more tolerant and accepting, Williams might have presented us with a gay self with a different make up. As Foster Hirsch notices, Williams's Memoirs "doesn't change the plays, but it compels us to admit their masks and transpositions" which are social and political at first place.[63] The discrepancy between the way the homosexual self is depicted in these private writings and in his public writing, i.e. his plays, does not reveal a loss of honesty on the part of the playwright himself, but a social resistance to open up a topic that is still considered to be a taboo. In the Memoirs, Williams is openly admitting his homosexuality and he is celebrating his homosexual desire. We don't encounter the same masks, screens, and façades that we encounter in his plays, but we meet Williams who is in the state of *'jouissance'*. Niaz Zaman makes the case that "Williams was not at odds with his own sexuality, but rather with a potentially hostile society."[64] Williams's Memoirs, letters, and journals are confessional not necessarily in the religious meaning, but in the way he communicates to himself and others that there are other options and alternatives in life that can be enjoyed. There is no guilt in Williams's Memoirs, but there is fear in his plays. His fear comes from the artificial edifice we call society. His celebration in his letters and Memoirs stems from his comfort with himself, and his long journey of self-validation. Niaz Zaman makes the case that "even as [Williams] was evading homosexual issues in his plays, and veiling them in metaphor and innuendo... he was writing openly to Donald Windham about his

own homosexuality... It was the social and theatrical atmosphere, rather than a personal inability to speak that created the forced silences that also resulted in the strange horror that streaks Williams' s writing."[65] In his letters to Donald Windham, Williams does not avoid any opportunity to tell Windham about his homosexual encounters and his cruising ventures. Sometimes the letters are so graphic and detailed to the point that one may wonder about the attitude of the public towards such a celebrity, if such letters were made available to the public at that time. Williams does not hide and cover his homosexuality when he is certain that he is communicating his desire to those who understand and also appreciate such a desire. Williams, for example, writes to Windham about his love affair and homosexual encounters with Kip:

> We make up two or three times in the night and start all over again like a pair of goats... The sky amazingly brilliant with stars. The wind blows the door wide open, the gulls are crying. Oh, Christ. I call him baby... When I lie on top of him I feel like I was polishing the statue of liberty or something. He is enormous. A great bronze statue of antique Greece come to life... I lean over him in the night and memorize the geography of his body with my hands... His skin is steaming... He lies very still for a while, then his breath comes fast and his body begins to lunge. Great rhythmic plunging motion with panting breath and his hands working over my body. Then sudden release and he moans like a little baby...[66]

Williams adds towards the end of this letter:

> Please keep this letter and be very careful with it. It's only for people like us who have gone beyond shame!

Williams as his letter reveals is not ashamed of his desire. He is embracing his love for Kip, and other men. His desire is unchained, unabashed, and exuberant. His masks and masquerades reveal the public Williams who is shaped by a "sense of self-preservation" as Windham informs us. With the gay lib movement,

and with the possibilities of a more open-minded society, Williams's unchained, unabashed, and exuberant private celebration of his desire makes its way to the public. In Williams's play Small Craft Warnings, Bobby, the young homosexual character, expresses his desire with an ecstatic tone:

> A lovely wild young girl invited me under a blanket with just a smile, and then a boy, me between, and both of them kept saying "love," one of 'em in one ear and one in the other, till I didn't know which was which "love" in which ear or which... touch... The plain was high and the night air... exhilarating and the touches not heavy...[67]

Bobby's exuberance in 1972 echoes Williams's in 1940 when he wrote his letter to Donald Windham. This ecstasy and exuberance were postponed for more than 30 years; and Brick Pollitt, Allan Grey, Skipper, and Sebastian Venable did not have the chance to express the same ecstasy, excitement, and resilience that Bobby does. Such a possibility was taken away from them not by their creator, Tennessee Williams, but by those for whom Williams was writing. Brick, Allan, Skipper, and Sebastian are left mutilated, incomplete, distorted, and transfigured. Their desire is deferred. They are negotiating their identity with their immediate environment, and that's all they got from the negotiation: death, suicide, and lies.

The gay self that Williams constructs for his Broadway audience is an affirmative self in spite of its erasure, and in spite of the critics failure to perceive it in such positive terms. Williams is not "affirming [his audience's] homophobic reaction" as John Clum claims. On the contrary, he is questioning this convention and raising doubts about their assumptions through different ways. If there is an erasure in Cat, it is not one of defeat, and if there is silence and detachment in the representation of the gay self, such silence and detachment are not signs of withdrawal and retreat. From such a perspective, Brick's withdrawal does not

align him with those "weak people, you weak, beautiful people! who give up with such grace..." The play's ending does not necessarily read in Maggie's way where the lie comes true and Brick is converted to heterosexuality. It can be read as Brick's ending where he affirms and confirms his sexuality in the way that might be effective, but not confrontational. Williams's evasiveness is Derridian. Homosexuality in Cat and other Williams plays is "under erasure." It is crossed out, but it remains legible. Both the word and its deletion are present, for the signs that Williams has given us about Brick's sexuality are erasures and also signs of resistance to the predominate heterosexual values that Big Daddy, Big Mama, and Maggie want to impose on Brick. This strategy of erasure "is the strategy of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premises."[68] Derrida describes such strategies as a "discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself."[69] Williams has emptied these dominant conventions whether they are social, political, or sexual from within. He is not confrontational, yet he is subversive. He is not accommodationist, yet he manages to place the homosexual subject in the center of Broadway stage in spite of its conservatism and intolerance. No other playwright of Williams's time period has been capable of presenting homosexuality with the same intensity. Unlike other playwrights, Williams has presented his audience with gay characters in many of his plays. When he does not, the playwright's own gay sensitivity makes its way on the stage.

Williams ambiguity about Brick's sexuality does not erase as much as it affirms. If Brick is ambivalent about his sexuality, if he uses masks to hide and to mystify, such tactics, not only help Brick co-exist with his immediate environment, but also make the play more subversive. Brick remains an enigma till play's end, and thus he takes away from the audience the right to judge him,

to place him in a compartment, and to tag him with a title or a name that does not reveal the complexity of his character as much as it oversimplifies his sexuality and places it into a stereotypical frame with which they are comfortable. Brick, through his evasion, takes the power to name and categorize away from his audience. As Harold Beaver demonstrates: "Power is the right to formulate categories, to control the moral currency, to define the nature of 'nature.' Defeat is humiliation extorted as a confession."[70] Till play' end, Brick remains the owner and the claimer of his own discourse. Neither Big Daddy nor Maggie is able to take such an advantage away from him. Brick has remained the one and the only one who can write his own script, and he diligently refuses to give such an authority to any of the other characters.

The play's ending affirms and asserts the gay self as well. Cat does not end "with a compromised version of marriage and procreation, as Brick is forced to turn Maggie's lie about her pregnancy into the truth."[71] Such a reading of the ending of Cat is rather superficial and oversimplifies the complexity of the play. Through sleeping with Maggie to make the lie true, Brick does not necessarily confirm his heterosexuality. As a matter of fact, through such a lie, Brick has found the mask that he can wear to hide his sexuality, and to portray to the others the image that they want to see in him. Maggie's lie, for Brick, is the mask behind which he can conceal his real identity forever. The coming child will be the proof for Brick's family that Brick fits in their norms and suits their common moral codes of behavior. The child will offer Brick's family and society the illusion that his marriage with Maggie is fruitful, genuine and fulfilling. Brick subscribes to this lie quickly and with "gratitude [that] seems almost infinite" to Maggie, because she offers him the perfect mask that he has been looking for throughout the play. Even though Maggie thinks that Brick's silence to this lie is a "gallant" gesture of him to "save [her] face!" it is, in fact, an intelligent move on

Brick's part to save his own face. This lie is becoming the reality with which Brick is going to live forever. Brick's closing line of the play "wouldn't it be funny if that was true?" shows that Brick is "going to make the lie true" not because he loves Maggie, but rather because he wants to defend himself against the harsh and mendacious world he lives in. This lie is the only weapon that Brick has to defeat Gooper's and Mae's plans to disinherit him. It is through this lie that Brick can invalidate his brother's attacks and counterpart Mae's accusations. This lie is the closet and the refuge where Brick can survive, bear his fears and hide his identity without fully adjusting to the conformity of the norms. Through such representation of appearance and reality or illusion and truth, Williams proves that there is no truth outside the illusion of the truth; and what we usually label as truth is but a lie that comes true. Williams agrees with Big Daddy's belief that "mendacity is a system we live in" (129). The gay self can live only through falsehood, and can survive in this world only through contriving, feigning, and counterfeiting. The gay self needs its masks and make up. It is this very façade that constitutes the 'essence' of the gay self. Williams seems to hold the belief that this is true for every character in his play, including Big Daddy, who is trying to separate himself from the mendacious world he lives in. Big Daddy has accepted Maggie's lie at the end unquestionably. He does not express any doubt or fear that Maggie might be telling a lie. He immediately decides to ask his lawyer to come the following day to write his will. Big Daddy has experienced the pain of the truth and has learnt that mendacity is the system we live in. At the end, Big Daddy has saved himself the pain of discovering that Maggie is lying. He finds comfort and consolation in this lie. And Brick has decided to live his life without necessarily being confrontational with the people around him. Mae and Gooper will stop talking, Maggie will get the plantation (that's the only thing she cares for any way) Big Daddy and Big Mama will have their long expected son from

Brick, and Brick will have the mask that would save his life forever in the middle of a hostile and homophobic society.

Reading the play in the way Clum deos, i.e. as a conversion to heterosexuality, is to discard its implications and to resort to an easy way out in resolving its complexity. Brick does not turn to Maggie because of a sudden renewed physical attraction to her, such physical attraction and fascination is not expressed anywhere in the play. I am suggesting that Maggie is always playing the role that she was playing in the past in the Brick, Skipper, and Maggie love triangle. One can suggest that Maggie's body is still the embodiment of Brick's and Skipper's desire, and the point of their physical encounters if such encounters are to take place. Brick is vicariously re-establishing a bond with his dead friend in Maggie's body. Maggie has always played the 'tagging' role in Brick and Skipper's relationship, and she apparently will continue to do so. Moreover, the room where such heterosexual desire is consummated is the very room where the homosexual desire has claimed itself. Once Brick's and Maggie's relationship is resumed, Brick will enhance his chance to inherit the legacy of the homosexual couple that Big Daddy inherited from Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. It is up to Brick, then to handle this legacy, cherish it and pass it on to future generations. Homosexuality is not marginal in Cat. It is central to the play's setting, it triggers the actions and the confrontations between the characters, and the destiny of the plantation inherited from the gay couple is the dramatic question that has to be resolved towards play's end.

The image of the homosexual self that Williams presents does not conform to the stereotypical image of the homosexual either. It confirms a new gay self that was not presented in any of Williams's plays before Cat. Homosexuality makes its presence in Cat where the audience does not expect it to be. For instance, Brick is not the stereotypical gay man that we meet in Streetcar. Allan

Grey has "a nervousness, softness, and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking - Still - that thing was there..." (Streetcar, 95). Brick does not fit with this profile and almost stereotypical description of the gay self. On the contrary, "Brick is," as De Jongh argues, "the modern American theatre idea of the perfect male hero. He is the embodiment of all that masculinity is supposed to entail. He is not damned with the tell-tale signs of artistry, sensitivity or nervousness."[72] Therefore, De Jongh contends, "the play dare[s] to suggest that homosexual desire may lurk unacknowledged in the body of a hot, heavily male sex-object."[73] Moreover, this homosexual self is also the object of our fascination. Brick is attractive and desirable. Maggie comments on his beauty: "I wish you would lose your looks. If you did it would make the martyrdom of Saint Maggie a little more bearable. But no such goddam luck. I actually believe you've gotten better looking since you went on the bottle" (29). Maggie can not get Brick out of her mind. She seems to strongly believe that Brick and Skipper are attracted to each other, yet she is not capable of letting Brick go. The homosexual self in Cat does not assert itself through its erasure and detachment, but through its beauty and other physical qualities. The beauty of the male body is a matter of celebration in Cat, and other of Williams's plays. It is not a taboo that has to be veiled, it is an entity that has to be admired and embraced.

Big Daddy represents another affirmation of the gay self in Cat. He is the icon of a patriarchy that places man in the center of the family and the social structures. For Arthur Miller, Big Daddy is "the very image of power, of materiality, of authority."[74] In spite of his old age, he still has a leach for Maggie. He is still "contemplating... pleasure with women" on his sixty-five birthday (95). He wants to pick up a woman and "strip her naked and smother her in minks and choke her with diamonds... and hump her from hell to breakfast" (99).

Williams does not leave Big Daddy in such confinements. Instead he made this exemplum of the normative heterosexuality one of the most tolerant characters to homosexual desire in the play. He faces Brick: "Always, anyhow, lived with too much space around me to be infected by ideas of other people. One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton!-- is tolerance! I grown it" (122). Unlike Brick, Big Daddy has managed to distance himself from the conventional beliefs and ideas of his time. He has used the distance that separates him from other people to think for himself and to realize that what the others reject and condemn is not necessarily wrong and condemnable. Homosexuality is not to be feared; according to Big Daddy, it is to be understood, if not appreciated. It is thanks to Jack Straw and Peter Ochello that Big Daddy is who he is today. Big Daddy does not allow Brick to talk about this couple in such pejorative terms. He feels a certain kind of affiliation and fidelity to Jack and Peter that we do not see him expressing even to Big Mama to whom he has been married for almost forty years. This is the affirmative and assertive gay voice that we hear in Cat. Affirmation does not necessarily come from Skipper and Brick, but rather from Big Daddy, for he is the character that the audience might relate to the most because of the vividness and the warmth with which Williams has drawn the character. Big Daddy is the voice and "the carrier of homosexuality--the heir to the estate" that captures a new order based on the homosexual politics and economics.[75]

Homosexuality is not alien to Big Daddy. The life he has shared with Jack Straw and Peter Ochello has shown him that love between two men is possible, and the other prejudices and misconceptions that people have about homosexual behavior are a consequence of the scruples and the predominant social conventions. Big Daddy has "knocked around in [his] time" (117), and he adds as

if to confirm to his son not only his tolerance, but also his identification and understanding of homosexual feelings:

> I said 'Hold on!'--I bummed, I bummed this country
> till I was- ... slept in hobo jungles and railroad Y's and
> flophouses in all cities before I-- (117)

Big Daddy does not have the chance to tell Brick all that he wants to tell him, and as Williams informs us in his stage direction Big Daddy "leaves a lot unspoken" (115) about his past and his years of youth. Big Daddy is on the verge of a confession that Brick is not willing to hear. Brick's fear and impatience deprive him of the chance to experience a more intimate and closer relationship with Big Daddy. Had Brick given his father the chance to open up to him, he might have realized that he has more in common with his father than he may think he does. Brick's internalized fear of who he is and who he might be proves to be alienating. It alienates him both from himself and from his father. This fear, in fact, has prevented Brick from seeing the similarities between himself and his father, a realization that might have significantly changed Brick's life, his perception of his father, and more importantly, himself.

Williams has used different parallels to suggest certain similarities between Big Daddy and his son, Brick. Apart from being familiar with homosexual feeling, and probably with the gay experience as well, Big Daddy, in his relationship with Big Mama, resembles his son Brick in his relationship with Maggie. Big Daddy has lived with Big Mama for almost forty years, but has never gotten to love her at all. Big Daddy has never felt close to Big Mama: "I slept with Big Mama till... five years ago, till I was sixty and she was fifty-eight, and never even liked her, never did!" (95). Big Daddy knows what it means to live with a person he does not love. After forty years he realizes that life spent in such a way is a waste, and for forty years he has been wasting his life with

pretenses and illusions of happiness in the same way his son, Brick, is destroying his life with alcohol. Big Daddy has spent all of his life pretending that he is what he is not. He claims to Brick:

> Think of all the lies I got to put up with!- Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have any idea of? Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!--I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now! --even when I laid her!-- regular as a piston... (110)

For forty years, Big Daddy has never felt close to Big Mama. There is a great distance and a huge gap separating both of them. Brick feels the same way towards his wife Maggie: "I think that Maggie had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed, which is not much closer than two cats on a fence humping" (125). What brings Big Daddy to Big Mama, and Brick to Maggie is just instinctual animal desire. Their respective marriage beds have brought them together without their being necessarily together. They go through the motion of the sexual intercourse, but they never experience the intimacy and ecstasy of the act. For them, it is a ritualistic act with no essence. It is an act that refers to nothing beyond the act itself, and merely a performance they put for each other. Both Brick and Big Daddy have been deluding themselves with the illusion of happiness, and both have been trying to convince themselves that if they maintain the illusion of happiness, then they can really be happy. However, neither can put up with this lie further. Consequently, Big Daddy tries to reach to Brick so as to communicate to his son what he has failed to communicate for almost forty years, and to establish an honest bond even for the short period of time that has remained in his life. The play's closing line recalls the parallel between Brick and Big Daddy. When Maggie states: "I do love you, Brick, I do!" and Brick responds: "Wouldn't

it be funny if that was true?" (173), the audience can hear the echo of Big Mama when she tells Big Daddy: "I even loved your hate and your hardness, Big Daddy!" and he responds with the same line as Brick: "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true..."

Life is a cycle in Cat, and Brick has ended where Big Daddy has spent all his life with pretenses, lies, and mendacity. No matter how hard the individuals may try to set themselves free, the mendacious world imposes itself upon their will, undermines their volition, and distorts their dreams, their longings, their hopes, their wishes, and the way they want to be. Brick subscribes to the "conventional lie," "the scruples" and the "crap" that such conventions press upon the individual (95). He is destined to live with the lie of a wife, a son, and a family; a lie that is discomforting and comforting for it gives him the comfort of falsehood and illusions, but it takes away from him who he is. With this lie, Brick is merely a social artifact. He is an image, a tag, and a role that his society and its conventions expect him to be. The individual Brick is dead, he died when he hung up the phone on Skipper, but the social Brick is still alive. He can still pretend that he never liked Skipper, he can still pretend that their relationship was just a "real... real... friendship." He can still pretend that he likes his wife Maggie, even though we know that he never did, but we are aware that all his life is pretenses. The more he pretends, the more his society validates these pretenses because that's what they want to hear and see in Brick. They do not want to see Brick for who he is, they want to see him with his masks, his lies, his make up, and his masquerade, because it is this Brick who fits with the role they assigned for him and the costume they cut and designed for the role. The image of Brick is more important than Brick himself. A lie has substituted the truth. The truth is nothing but an accepted and agreed upon lie. It is a lie that has lived with us for a long time to the point that we have forgotten that it originated as a lie. It

dropped the title of a lie, and took a more respected title--that of a convention. This is the make-belief strategy that Williams is questioning. He is questioning the social conventions, raising doubts about the common consensus, and pointing out that once we are honest and frank with ourselves and with each other, then we can discover that we have more in common than when we start to cater and adjust to each other. The audience can leave the theater and pretend that Brick's and Maggie's life can go on, they can pretend that their life is going to be rosy and beautiful, but then they should be aware that they are fooling only themselves and constructing a large edifice of lies and a web of mendacity.

Brick is locked into the web of the past and entangled into what his father used to be. Brick has followed those steps faithfully only to realize that there is no breakthrough. The gay self is locked into its past, it is imprisoned in its history, and the breakthrough is no easy possibility. The self needs more courage and endurance to stand for what it is in the midst of cries and uproars, demands and requests to be what it is expected to be and not what it is willing to be. It has to curb the path of the past, the paved ways of history, and escape a determinism that might prove to be just inescapable.

Williams's affirmation has made his drama not only humanitarian in its dimensions, but also political. He is the playwright of the torn, mutilated, and marginalized individuals, but his treatment of the plight of the individuals is political as well. As Savran observes about Williams: "here was a writer who called himself a revolutionary and meant it, a playwright who produced a new and radical theatre that challenged and undermined the Cold War order."[76] Williams is trying to secure a space for the individual in the midst of pressing social realities, arbitrary conventions, and stiff traditions. C. W. Bigsby's observation about Williams's drama is perceptive:

> If, after the 1930's, Williams rarely chose to formulate his sense of oppression in overtly political ways, his portraits of individuals pressed to the margins of social concern, trapped in a diminishing social and psychological space, are not without ideological significance, for, as Michel Foucault has reminded us there is a link between space and power.[77]

Williams has decentralized the notion of conventions and traditions, and has 're-placed' the individual in the center of his philosophical beliefs. Williams has de-objectified the moral system under which the individual operates. He has made the value and the moral system subjective and grounded in perception. Values are no longer systematic and objective. They are more grounded in the individual's identity and performative self. In Williams philosophy, the self is central holding its own system of beliefs, values, and morals.

Chapter III

Orpheus Descending: The Myth of a Liberated Self

In his play Orpheus Descending which premiered on Broadway in March 1957, Tennessee Williams continued a project that he had already started with The Glass Menagerie: The exploration of the possibility of a liberated self—a self that can define itself, break away from conformistic conventions, and express itself in a way that it deems itself to be. Perhaps the manifesto for Williams's Orpheus Descending was already established in 1953 with Camino Real when Williams explains:

> My desire was to give these audiences my own sense of something wild and unrestricted that ran like water in the mountains, or clouds changing shape in a gale, or the continually dissolving and transforming images of a dream. This sort of freedom is not chaos or anarchy. On the contrary, it is the result of painstaking design...[1]

I find Williams's description of what he is attempting in Camino Real applicable to Orpheus Descending as well. In his four major characters in Orpheus, Val Xavier, Lady Torrance, Carol Cutrere, and Vee Talbott, Williams is exploring the possibility of a liberated self. The four characters' experiences differ from one to another, yet they are all haunted by the same dream—a dream of freedom from what Herbert Marcus calls the "one-dimensional society."[2] Val, Lady, Carol, and Vee are all trying to transcend imposed limitations and explore different possibilities through love, sex, religion, and art. Their journey is not without pain and loss, but the self-realization that they may achieve even in very fleeting moments is worth the effort, as Williams seems to argue through his character

Carol Cutrere, who tells Val: "What on earth can you do on this earth but catch at whatever comes near you, with both your hands, until your fingers are broken?"[3] The breakthrough may seem to be momentary for these characters, but the light they catch and the self-understanding they achieve prove to be worth what they undertake.

In his preface to Orpheus Descending, "The Past, the Present, and the Perhaps," Williams explains that his play is about four protagonists who continue to ask "unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people," and the rest of the community who have accepted the "prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary" (vi). The differences that Williams is drawing between those who are willing to ask questions and those who are not are the differences between those who are willing to struggle for liberation from the codes that their society imposes upon them and those who want to follow the herd as they always did and remain locked within the roles they are assigned to play.

Val's Vision of a Liberated Self.

Orpheus Descending tells a story of an awakening to the self and the long dormant desire that remains unexpressed in an oppressive society similar to that of Two-River County. The tale is that "of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop" (Orpheus, vi). Val walks into the Two-River County community, and as a result, the lives of Lady, Carol, and Vee and the entire community are never the same. Val has brought this small village community something of his wildness, and has left his snakeskin jacket not only as a memento and celebration

of his spirit, but as an indication that the life of this community can never be restored to what it used to be. Val is able to make all this change and commotion within this community because Williams has created in him a character of multi-dimensions and special grandeur. Val is an Orpheus and an artist, he is a myth and a reality, he is an ideal and a dream that points to the possibility of better options and better chances, yet an ideal that reality has twisted, distorted, and reduced to its own commonality. The question that I would like to pose is the following: Does Val manage to reach the possibility of a liberated self that he potentially embodies? Or does he remain a myth, i.e. a misconception, and an ideal that verges on the brink of a utopia?

Val's first enters accompanied by the Choctaw cry from the Conjure Man. This cry, as Williams tells us, is associated with Val as if it is a cue for him to enter. This Choctaw cry associates Val with protest, pain, and dissatisfaction in the same way as it highlights his essential, wild quality. Williams writes in his stage direction:

> Val enters the store. He is a young man, about 30, who has a kind of wild beauty about him that the cry would suggest.... His remarkable garment is a snakeskin jacket, mottled white, black and gray. He carries a guitar which is covered with inscriptions. (26)

Val's beauty is wild, and his jacket suggests something untamed, natural, and raw. The snakeskin jacket also represents Val's regenerative powers and highlights his masculine and sensual qualities. It is an emblem of the "naked unashamed quality of passion," as Williams explains.[4] The guitar Val is carrying has been perceived by many critics as a phallic symbol that attracts and fascinates the other female characters. Val's wildness and particularity are in

juxtaposition with the rest of the community of Two-River County that the first scene establishes. "Curiosity is a human instinct," Beulah Binnings affirms, but this instinct has no immediate implication for their everyday life (14).

Val is established as an intruder in Orpheus Descending. John Ditsky argues that Val is "a messenger from another order of creation," who is perceived as a danger and a threat to the community because he leads them to "rouse up to [themselves]."[5] Val is a catalyst that will activate and intensify Lady's and Vee's liberation. The community perceives him as a threat because he invites new changes and questions the values that they are used to. Val comes to Two-River County as a liberated character who is free from the burden of the past as well as the inadequacy of such social institutions as marriage and family. He is not programmed to conform like the rest of the community. Like Blanche, who satisfies her desire outside the recognized institution of the patriarchy, Val's sexual desire is not institutionalized as yet. He is a free agent who, in spite of his thirty years of age, has managed to preserve his freedom and independence. Val's desire operates outside the boundaries of patriarchal authorities and institutions. He has managed to preserve his own Dionysiac nature that is in tune with his wildness and beauty. Val is not a social archetype, but rather the emblem of the natural and liberated man. When Val enters the life of Lady, he threatens the validity of the institution of marriage and family and removes the boundaries of their norms. Lady throws herself into a relationship with Val without considering the social implications and ramifications of this relationship. As Samar Attar comments about the sexual intruder, Val also "poses questions as to the validity of other societal values and conventions such as work and social

responsibility."[6] Val is debunking social ties and institutions. Instead, he is glorifying a self with no inhibitions, restrictions, or restraints.

Not only is Val unwilling to subjugate his desire to family and marriage, but he is also a character with a blurred past and untraced origin. He has no family, as he informs Lady. "When I was a kid on Witches' Bayou," Val tells Lady, "after my folks all scattered away like loose chicken's feathers blown around by the wind-- I stayed there alone on the bayou, hunted and trapped out of season and hid from the law!" (63). Neither the audience nor the Two-River County community know much about Val's past. He is a stranger to them, one who does not belong to them or to any other community. If the individual is defined through the community, which s/he belongs to, Val then is an indefinable individual. Val is a character to be defined on his own terms as an agent of his own identity. He is constantly on the move. Carol tells him: "We followed you through five places before we made contact with you" (31). He has no place of birth or family origin. Like Tom Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie and Lord Byron of Camino Real, Val must break away from the past and destroy any family ties before reaching self-understanding and self-fulfillment. Tom, Byron, and Val have to keep moving in time and space to discover the truth of Who they are. Their movement is towards the Terra of Incognito. Their quest is a romantic quest, and what attracts them to the Terra Incognito is the unpredictability of the unknown, and the hope that maybe in exploring the unknown they will realize their proper and own longings, and thus find more comfort and inward peace. The distance that Val and Williams's characters travel in their constant movement allows them to put themselves at a distance from the society where they live and form a more independent view about who they are

and who they deem themselves to be. Non-conformity is the curse and the blessing of Williams's characters. They lose the security of the group and the comfort of the crowd, but they gain themselves, even though these selves may be shattered, hurt, injured, and fragmented towards the end of their journey of self-discovery. The loss is inevitable, but the gain is more valuable. Those who are afraid to take this risk and choose to conform to the prescriptions of their society shall always remain dependent on the dictations of the society where they live. In such a case they collude with their own defeat by collaborating with their own entrapment. They remain, as Val informs Lady, "sentenced to solitary confinement inside their own skins, for life!" (63).

Val is liberated from the norms in almost a supernatural way. He tells Lady, "My temperature's always a couple degrees above normal the same as a dog's, it's normal for me the same as it is for a dog, that's the truth..." (48). And he claims that he "can sleep on a concrete floor or go without sleeping, without even feeling sleepy, for forty-eight hours. And I can hold my breath for three minutes without blacking out... and I can go the whole day without passing water." He adds, "They say that a woman can burn a man down. But I can burn down a woman... I'm saying I could. I'm not saying I would" (54). The character-reference letter Val shows Lady focuses on his particularity: "This boy worked for me three months in my auto repair shop and is a real hard worker and is good and honest but is a peculiar talker and that is the reason I got to let him go but would like to—would like to--keep him. Yours truly" (52). Val, in his particularity and supernatural quality, has become almost a demi-god. Vee's perception of Val as a Christ-like figure adds more to the supernatural dimension of his character. In his search for a liberated self, Val has transcended beyond the

human physical limitations and turned into a mythical figure similar to the Romans' and Greeks' demi-gods.

The vision that Val holds is a vision of a liberated self—a self with absolute and unrestrained freedom, as he tells Lady:

> You know they's a kind of bird that don't have legs so it can't light on nothing but has to stay all its life on its wings in the sky? That's true. I seen one once, it had died and fallen to earth and it was light-blue colored and its body was tiny as your little finger... They was transparent, the color of the sky and you could see through them. That's what they call protection coloring. Camouflage, they call it. You can't tell those birds from the sky and that's why the hawks don't catch them, don't see them up there in the high blue sky near the sun!... They fly so high in gray weather the Goddamn hawks would get dizzy. But those little birds, they don't have no legs at all and they live their whole lives on the wing, and they sleep on the wind... and never light on this earth but one time when they die! (56).

Throughout the play, Val is associated with the image of the bird. In Act 2 Scene 4, Lady tells Val: "I said to myself, 'this boy is a bird with no feet so he has to sleep on the wind...' and I wanted to help" (100). When Val speaks about his youthful experience with the young girl on the bayou when he was fourteen, both the young girl and Val are associated with the image of the bird. "Her naked skin was like that," Val informs the audience. "Oh, God, I remember a bird flown out of the moss and its wings made a shadow on her," he adds. "Yes, I followed, I followed like a bird's tail follows a bird, I followed" (65). Moreover, the bedroom alcove where Val and Lady have enjoyed their sexual encounters is "masked by an Oriental drapery which is worn dim but bears the formal design of a gold tree with scarlet fruit and fantastic birds" (11). The image of the bird is associated with a lost Eden of desire, 'plaisir,' carefree love, and physical and

romantic encounters. It is a Dionysiac image through which Val reveals the liberated spirit that fascinates and attracts him.

The vision that Val has is that of the uncorrupted and unmasked individual. He wants to live beyond the eyes of the hawks and be able to soar in the sky like the legless birds. Val wants to escape the basic categories in which most people endure. He wants to be one of "the kind that's never been branded" (55). Val is afraid of brands, tags, and commodities. He is seeking a self with no title and no tag. He wants to defy the defined and the limited. He holds a vision of a boundless space and a flowing identity through which he can be who he is and what he does. The mercantile and transactional world scares Val. He tells Lady: "I'm disgusted... There's people bought and sold in this world like carcasses of hogs in butcher's shops!" (55). The image of the world that Val is afraid of is animalistic, sanguine, and violent. He is aware of how human interaction has been reduced to a transaction in the world where he lives. He does not want to be bought; neither does he want to be a buyer. He wants to escape this simplistic, yet frightening, binary division of the world. He wants to escape the mercantile commercialized world to live as an individual without a brand.

Val's vision of liberation and freedom is almost inexpressible and inexplicable. He has to resort to the language of the symbol to express an ideal that seems to be beyond the reach of his own reality. In the image of the bird, Val is seeking elevation, pure love, and sublime feelings. He wants to be a transparent creature through which people can see. He wants to understand and be understood, and escape the clumsiness of the heavy weight of earth and return back to earth only in his death. Far away from earth, Val sees in the legless

birds the option to explore the distant horizons and the far possibilities. As Gulshan Rai Kataria notices, "the bird reveals Val Xavier's yearnings to transcend his corporeal and earthbound condition."[7] The birds, along with the snakeskin jacket, reveal Val's Dionysiac nature and speak for his dream of freedom and liberation.

Val translates his vision into art and music. As Nancy Tischler argues, Val is discovering the redeeming power of art. "Although disgusted with the flesh and the world, Val has found in art a means of cleansing and sanctification. His guitar is his sacred symbol, evidence of an immortality and a transcendence of flesh achievable in art."[8] Val's guitar enables him to transcend and overcome the corruption of the world and reach new purity that he can find only in the realms of art. He tells Lady:

> I'm thirty today, and I'm through with the life that I've been leading... I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted. Here is why. [Picks up his guitar]. My life's companion! It washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched me... (50).

Val's guitar connects him to his vision and helps him achieve the incorruptible world that he envisions.

The guitar also sets Val on the edge of mainstream society and enhances his particularity. On his guitar are inscribed the names of great black musicians such as Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, and others. Emphasizing the liberating nature of music, Val claims Leadbelly to be the "greatest man ever lived on the twelve-string guitar! Played it so good he broke the stone heart of a Texas governor with it and won himself a pardon from jail"

(51). The names of the musicians autographed on Val's guitar connect him to the blues and jazz tradition—a music about people who are looking for their lost origin and usurped identity and expressing a longing for a mother land that they have never seen. Through his music, Val expresses his own dislocation, uprootedness, and discomfort with the environment where he lives. These emotions of loss and liberation are expressed in the song "Heavenly Grass" Val sings throughout the play.[9] The song illustrates a romantic longing for a lost origin and speaks for his existential dilemma.

> My feet took a walk in heavenly grass.
> All day while the sky shone clear as glass.
> My feet took a walk in heavenly grass,
> All night while the lonesome stars rolled past.
> Then my feet come down to walk on earth,
> And my mother cried when she gave me birth.
> Now my feet walk far and my feet walk fast,
> But still got an itch for heavenly grass.
> But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.[10]

Val's song describes the mythic conflicting nature of human existence. On the one hand, we long for the ideal and the perfect, but on the other hand, we are debased by the ignoble and the corrupted. It also depicts the world that Val wants to reach out to. The repetition of "heavenly grass" and the diction of the poem-"shone clear as glass" and "the lonesome stars"-introduce us to a world beyond earth and a sphere different from the world of Two-River County. In fact, this world is in juxtaposition to the earthly world where "my mother cried... my feet walk far and my feet walk fast." For Val, the moment of birth is a moment of loss. He is in search of a world that is far removed from his actual reality, yet is still familiar to him. Val is a romantic Wordsworthian in both his dream and in his quest. Life is a recollection of lost memories, and a drifting

away from a lost origin. The earth is the prison and the cage from which Val wants to liberate himself and soar back to his heavenly grass. He is in quest of a prelapsarian world—a world that is not physical and concrete in its nature. It is only in this world that Val can re-connect with himself and come to a realization of his selfhood. Williams believes in this transformational and transcendental power of art and music when he says that the "impulse of song... breaks out of confinement and goes on despite orders to halt."[11] Only through music can Val stand up to the contradictions and fragmentation imposed upon him. Between the strings of his guitar and the lines of his song "Heavenly Grass," Val can find cohesion and meaning for what he would like the world to be. Williams's use of music discloses the beginning of his disillusionment with language. Williams is losing trust in the power of the word to liberate and free individuals from the compartments and the conceptions by which they live. The liberation of the self can be sought in music instead for only the note, and not the word, can re-connect individuals to their private inner space. Williams is committed to an emotional reality that can transcend the concreteness of the mercantile mentality of our time. Behind his use of music, Val is seeking the immediacy that the spoken word has lost. Music is always here and now. The dislocation and rupture that "Heavenly Grass" illustrates is underscored in the music of Val's notes. In music, Val can find refuge from the dislocation and misplacement that the written word has created.

From Self-liberation to Self-mutilation

Val is not able to achieve the liberation he seeks in Two-River County. The ultimate end he has to face is ugly and deadly. Val is lynched and burnt. The Jabes, the Talbotts, the Dollys, and the Beulahs of Two-River County have defeated him at the end. He becomes the sacrificial icon of the county. The audience is left to ponder the value and the particularity of Val's vision. Does Val's death signify the impossibility of a liberated self, or does it suggest some flaws in Val's vision that have to be redefined and re-worked?

Carol Cutrere points to what may have gone wrong with Val's vision. As a warning, Carol tells Val:

> You're in danger here, Snakeskin. You've taken off the jacket that said: "I'm wild, I'm alone!" and put on the nice blue uniform of a convict! I drove all night to bring you this warning of danger... (76).

Val is denying what has made him particular. He is toning down his wildness and settling for the common options and the safe choices. Val has put away the snakeskin jacket, and as Jack E. Wallace notes that "now his snakeskin jacket has a new meaning. Instead of being a sign of innocent wildness and pagan freedom, it represents the sexual bondage that Val feels he must escape..."[12] Again and again, he reminds Vee, Lady, and Carol that he is done with the past. Val wants to put behind him his past with its entire wild spirit and settle now in Two-River County for a job. He is disillusioned and disgusted with the bohemian life he has been living. He thinks that the past years of his life have been squandered and wasted. Val tells Carol:

> That's about what I figured. But I don't go that route. Heavy drinking and smoking the weed and shacking with strangers is okay for kids in their twenties but this is my thirtieth birthday and I'm all through with that route... I'm not young any more (32).

Val in this speech is aware of his age, and he associates his past wildness and wandering spirit with his youth. But now, since he is getting older, he wants to settle for the common options and opts for the conservative and traditional ways of life as opposed to the experimental Val he used to be. Hugh Dickinson suggests that, "This is a curious speech for a man who will boast of his proponent virility."[13] This is the new Val who wants to escape his past and embrace a new image of what he never used to be.

Val is heedless not only of Carol's warnings but also of other warnings. He sees the danger that surrounds him in Two-River County, but he is not willing to protect himself against it. Even though "he can't get used to this place," he tells Lady, because he does not "feel safe," he "want[s] to stay" (88). When he hears the dogs barking off stage and "the chain gang dogs... chasing some runaway convict...," Val responds alertly: "Run boy! Run fast, brother! If they catch you, you never will run again! That's--for sure..." (88). Tragically, he never heeds this warning himself. Val is almost self-destructive and self-defeating in his heedlessness. In spite of his discomfort in Two-River County, Val has surrendered to the life of this small community. He has come to Two-River County as an itinerant folksinger seeking self-liberation and self-fulfillment, but ends up a prisoner to the world into which he has descended with a hope and a dream. The vision has turned to ashes, and Val's enthusiasm and free spirit have become a part of the past that he himself has collaborated in denying and

burying. Val is perhaps defeated by external forces and a hostile environment, but what he has inflicted upon himself is no less cruel than what Jabe Torrance and Sheriff Talbot have brought upon him. Val is collaborating with his own defeat and destruction. He is lynched and mutilated by the townsmen, but the self-mutilation Val inflicts upon himself has prompted their vile retaliatory acts against him. At play's end, Val is not able to confront the townsmen, because he has lost "concord " with his past and himself. As Dharanidhar Sahu argues, "The individual is capable of protest and confrontation when he lives authentically in concord with his inner voice. But when the rapport is broken, the man is no more sensitive and human enough to refuse. He accepts and enjoys the spirit of compromise."[14] And Val's inner voice is not his own any longer. It has succumbed to and been subdued by the voices of the others.

Val is no longer the romantic that he used to be. He denies his own sexuality. In denying his sexuality, Val is denying his own subjectivity and mutilating an important constituent of his inner and private self. Val is a threat to his own subject and his own identity; he is the victimizer in his own victimization, and the agent of his own imprisonment. Val is a romantic who has lost faith in his romanticism and the liberating power of love. He does not talk about love in terms of vision and sublime feelings; he talks about it as a debased, sinful, and dirty feeling. When Lady tells him:

> You see, we don't know each other, we're, we're--just gettin' -- acquainted.

Val responds:

> That's right, like a couple of animals sniffin' around each other... (62)

Val sees human love in animalistic terms, which is the very feeling that he wants to purify himself of. As Hugh Dickinson argues, love for Val is a "lure and distraction from the true course of freedom."[15] Love in Val's understanding is equated with illusion. It is "the make-believe answer," he tells Lady. "It's fooled many, a fool besides you an' me, that's the God's truth, Lady, and you had better believe it" (64).

Because love is an illusion and a make believe answer for Val, he resists Lady's love for him at the beginning of the play, rejects Carol's interest in him, and ignores the Valentine card from the pink-haired lady. Instead of freeing himself, Val abstains from women and imposes limitations and restraints upon his own desire. In this respect Michel Foucault's views on sex, sexuality, and desire are informative. In one of his interviews, Foucault claims that "what we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure (plaisirs)."[16] From this perspective, Val is not making himself susceptible to desire; on the contrary, he is finding ways and means to exercise self-control upon his desire. Even his relationship with Lady fits into this context. He does not subvert the patriarchal institution. Although he has this affair with Lady, he remains monogamous, and exclusive in the way he acts his desire. He is uncomfortable with Carol because she is the one who subverts the provincial sexual politics of the Two-River County community. He is more at ease with Vee since she manages to sublimate her passion into the acceptable conventional and moral frame of religion and ethics. Val is a paradoxical and contradictory character. He is aware of the tragedy and the loneliness of human destiny when he tells Lady that "we're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life!" Yet, he shuns

human contact and devalues the significance of human love and understanding. Therefore, he remains locked within the confinements of his own skin because of this conflicting, paradoxical, and even fragmented nature. In 1971, When Williams was asked by Jean Fayad: "Val is a very complex character; he gives to each one what they demand..." Williams responded: "But these fragmented personalities are not reconciled. There is still a duality. A duality is not reconciled.[17] Val is trapped within his own skin, but also within what the condition of humanity is meant to be. Williams concedes that such fragmentation and dualities are permanent conditions of humanity. Williams shares Hart Crane's belief that the human self is fragmented like a "broken tower," as the opening epigraph of Streetcar suggests. The human being is shattered, tormented, and torn between opposites at each end, and it is to this fragmented nature to which the self remains tied.

Even though Val has expressed his willingness to remain incorruptible and outside the transactional world of exchange between those who buy and those who are sold, Val is not really able to transcend this world where the human being is commodified. Val cannot remain outside "the materialist system of ownership."[18] Commenting on this inescapable system of corruption, Williams states that Val is "trapped in his corruption and engaged in his struggle to maintain his integrity and purity."[19] He resents Lady for his being caught and trapped within this system. In his relationship with Lady, he can not escape the past that he describes in mercantile terms: "all my life I have been selling something to someone" (51). Now, this past when Val was commodified is not far away from him in his relationship with Lady. He feels that he is being

objectified by Lady. She is the buyer and he is the seller. Val can not see that his relationship with Lady could escape this polarization. He claims to Lady:

> A not so young and not so satisfied woman, that hired a man off the highway to do double duty without paying overtime for it... I mean a store clerk days and a stud nights. (101)

Williams comments on this incident between Val and Lady:

> Val is very hurt when he discovers that Lady used him as a stud to satisfy her sexual needs. He is at first disappointed but finally reconciles himself to this idea because it is part of his nature.[20]

Val's and Lady's love for each other is underscored in this mercantile system. This system aborts any sense of self-fulfillment that Val and Lady want to achieve. Furthermore, it was this system which did not allow Lady to lead a happy life with David Cutrere. When he exchanged her for a more established and wealthier woman in Two-River County society, Lady had to abort the child she was carrying, and had it "cut out of [her] body, and they cut [her] heart with it!" (78). Val's relationship with Lady meets a similar and perhaps more tragic end. When Val takes the money from the cash box to use for gambling, he is admitting his financial dependency on Lady and casting himself in the role of a seller within the very mercantile system that he is rejecting for its corruption.

By walking into Lady's store, Val places himself at great risk for he makes himself vulnerable to a dehumanizing system, as "the store represents the barren world of commerce, of people bought and sold, that Val tries to rise above."[21] Signi Falk reaches the same conclusion, stating that "Val courts disaster when he seeks to exchange his itinerant freedom for a job in the mercantile store."[22] The integrity, cohesion, and purity that Val aims to fulfill remain a chimera and an

illusion that can never be transformed into a reality. Val is doomed to remain broken and incomplete. Williams's poem Orpheus Descending describes succinctly Val's doom and destiny in the play Orpheus:

> And it will not be completed,
> No, it will not be completed,
> For you must learn, even you, what we have learned,
> That some things are marked by their nature to be not completed
> But only longed for and sought for a while and abandoned.[23]

Val can not become a complete and liberated self. The nature of human existence is "to be not completed." Val has sought a dream and a vision of liberation, but this vision hits the hard rocks of reality and the dehumanization of the system within which these relationships have to exist and operate. The vision of liberation is "sought" and "longed for" but it has to be "abandoned" towards the end, not only because of the pressure of the tough circumstances and the provincialism of Two-River County, but also because of Val's ambivalence and fear of the price that the fulfillment of this vision might cost him. Val has a vision, but he has never believed in the practicality, the value, or the possibility of this vision. Val, like the Orpheus of the poem,

> ... Must learn, even you, what we have learned,
> The passion there is for declivity in this world,
> The impulse to fall that follows a rising fountain.
>
> Now Orpheus, crawl, O shamefaced fugitive, crawl
> Back under the crumbling broken wall of yourself,
> For you are not stars, sky-set in the shape of a lyre,
> But the dust of those who have been dismembered by furies![24]

The failure of Val to transform his vision into a reality has led some critics to see him as weak and lacking the maturity and courage to change his life to what he wants it to be. Athena Coronis claims:

> Val is not so powerful, and strong as [Lady] thinks. He is rather weak, reluctant, and passive, unable to defy the authoritarian images that confront him. He is at his best when he consoles and offers solace to unhappy and unfulfilled beings like Lady[25]

Val's weakness, negativity, and reluctance are more blatant in his desire to remain invisible and to hold his love for Lady within the restricted limitations of the alcove. Lady's and Val's love for each other survives inside a space that is similar to the space of the closet. Williams describes this space as follows: "Another, much smaller, playing area is a tiny bedroom alcove which is usually masked by an Oriental drapery which is worn dim but bears the formal design of a gold tree with scarlet fruit and fantastic birds" (11). Similar to the closet, the alcove is a space within the larger space; it is a private space that exists within the larger public space. It is maneuvered and constructed as a result of what the larger society deems illegitimate and thus forbidden. The design of the curtain suggests that Lady and Val are in a mythical Edenic space of Venus, Cupid, and Eros. It is the lyrical space of their erotic encounters and passionate energy. When the nurse faces Lady with her pregnancy towards play's end, Lady exclaims: "Why are you staring at me?" And the nurse, recognizing the alcove space as the private space of the consummation of their forbidden passion, replies while "start [ing] toward alcove: 'I'm not staring at you, I'm staring at the curtain. There is something burning in there, smoke's coming out'" (138). The nurse is curious about the secrecy of Val's and Lady's closet. She wants to peek into this closet to demystify its secrecy and also to destroy the boundaries that

separate this private space from the rest of the public space within which it exists; thus rendering the relationship between Val and Lady a public affair for exposure and moral judgment.

Within such a space, Val wants to keep his love relationship with Lady. Scared of Jabe coming downstairs, Val tells Lady: "Don't he know I sleep here?" and Lady offers him the reassurance he is looking for: "Nobody knows you sleep here but you and me" (103). Towards the end of the play when Val learns about Lady's pregnancy, and asks her: "Is it true or not true, what that woman told you?" And Lady answers, highlighting the psychological trauma of Val: "You sound like a scared little boy" (139). Val is afraid that, with Lady's pregnancy, what had been private will become public. The secret will be out, and their relationship will have to be recognized and admitted by both of them and also the community. Val can not hide his feelings any more, can not curb his identity more than he has, and can not cater to the rest of the provincial community more than he has. The truth is out, and with it comes the possibility of full self-realization. Val's and Lady's desire has to be recognized now, if not accepted. They can not hide in the closeted alcove anymore. With Lady's pregnancy, both Lady and Val become visible. Val is scared of this visibility. He prefers to remain hidden and under the cover of the curtain. Even when he expresses his vision of the legless bird, Val is fascinated by the bird's invisibility. The birds are "transparent, the color of the sky and you could see through them... *Camouflage*, they call it. You can't tell those birds from the sky and that's why the hawks don't catch them, don't see them up in the high sky near the sun!" (Italic emphasis is mine) (56). Williams is demonstrating that no matter how lyrical the closeted space maybe, Val's and Lady's love can not survive within its limits.

They suffocate and ultimately die. Val is defeated by his environment and by the hostile mentality of the crowd as he is defeated by himself. He is a prisoner to his own fears. Indeed, he fits with Wylie Sypher's description of the "existential hero manque." Sypher argues that the "[hero manque's] adventures never make him a hero, yet he thirsts for heroism in an age that is mediocre... The Dandy resists the ordinary, which is the inauthentic, but he fails to gain the authentic. He is an existential hero manque."[26] Val is running away from the corrupted system, but in his escape he starts running from himself as well. In his quest for his vision of liberation, he has destroyed this vision and thus mutilated himself.

Val's mutilation is also ontological. He is an Orpheus and a Christ-like figure as well. He embodies the qualities of Orpheus. He is a wanderer and a musician "whose music had almost magical properties, able to tame wild beasts and reconcile contending parties."[27] Williams is attracted to the Dionysiac quality of this myth. Benjamin Nelson, commenting on the parallels between the myth of Orpheus and the story of Val in Orpheus Descending, states that Val, like the mythic Orpheus, "has brought some beauty, his personal beauty of the wild and innocent, to the under kingdom, and he has attempted to rescue one of the captives."[28] Both Val and Orpheus are musicians, singers, lovers, and also marginalized outcasts. Orpheus's wife, Eurydice, was killed by a snake, and Orpheus decides to take a journey to Hades, the world of the dead, to save his wife. The King of the Dead let him in and allows her to return with him to earth because he has been mesmerized by the music of Orpheus. The King of Hades, however, makes it a condition that Orpheus should not turn back and look at Eurydice before he reaches the upper world. Orpheus almost fulfills his quest, but when his anxiety causes him to turn around to make sure Eurydice is

following him, he violates the condition he has agreed upon. As a punishment, Orpheus is deprived again of his wife, and he himself is dismembered. Not only does Orpheus fail to liberate his wife from the underworld and defeat death, but he himself also becomes imprisoned to the world of the dead from which he has been trying to free her. Orpheus is a captive to the underworld and also to his own anxiety. The Orpheus myth recapitulates Val's quest to liberate Lady from her dead self and to awaken her again to her desire and Dionysiac free spirit. His failure to achieve such a quest parallels Orpheus's failure to defeat the forces of death and highlights the dramatic irony that he himself has fallen captive to the same forces from which he was trying to liberate Lady. Both the myth and the play point to the impossibility of a dream in the midst of an ugly reality. The harmony and the beauty of Orpheus's music does not change and transform the hearts of the dead; neither does Val's music change the spirit of Two-River County.

Val is also often perceived as a Christ-like figure. There are some Christian allusions in Orpheus Descending that enhance such a reading. Among his superhuman qualities, Val tells Lady that he was once tied up to a post for a whole day without passing water, a story similar to that of Christ who was tied up to a post before his crucifixion. Val refers constantly to his thirty years of age and his departure from the life he has been living, which can be read as an allusion to Christ's death around the same age. Most of the play's action takes place on the Saturday before Easter, i.e. between the time of the crucifixion and the resurrection. Finally, Vee relates Val to Christ in her vision that she has been waiting for. Vee recaptures her vision only to Val, and she chooses to trust him with her story about what she has seen and experienced. In fact, Val comes

bearing the same mission as Christ. Christ came to save, and so does Val, as his name Xavier suggests. Both of them come to break and destroy the existing laws and the rigid moral codes. In the same way as Christ offered his flesh and blood for redemption and salvation, so does Val. He offers his life to save that of Lady. Whether Val is an Orpheus or a Christ-like figure, the outcome is the same. The three figures -Val, Orpheus, and Christ- descend to the world of hell to save and redeem, and all meet the same destiny of dismemberment, death, captivity, crucifixion, and the destruction of the forces of light and the spirit of change. In Orpheus Descending, Williams dramatizes the death of the gods, the demise of the kindred spirits, and the impossibility of escape from the dominion of power and darkness. The light that marks the liberation of the self is yet to come.

Most critics have been perplexed and confused by Williams's multiple allusions in Orpheus. Walter Kerr, however, who has noted that "the brilliance of Williams' best work lies precisely in its admission of complexity... as the root condition of our lives."[29] John Gassner called this play "one of the most chaotic contemporary works of genius."[30] Nelson claims that "in the story of Val Xavier... Williams presents a conglomeration of pagan and Christian symbolism and myth which obliterates almost all else in its intensity and confusion."[31] As Kimball King claims, "critics who have complained that Orpheus Descending bewildered its audience with excessive signaling failed to recognize that the playwright was engaged in a Promethean adventure, which, despite its potential for failure, he felt compelled to undertake."[32] Critics are often perplexed by the complexity of Williams's work. They seek characters cut according to their own views who fit into clearly defined compartments. They are often perplexed by the rich texture of his characters and the absorption and transformation of

mythical, Christian, and pagan references present in Williams's text. What is an intertextual mosaic in Orpheus is perceived by many critics as confusion of symbols and allusions.

The metaphor of the mosaic fits with Williams's characterization of Val Xavier, who like a mosaic, is divided, dispersed, fragmented, and contradictory. It is, however, this very fragmentation that gives him his tragic grandeur. His fragmentation is his weakness and his tragic flaw; it is also his richness and complexity. Val is an Orpheus, a Christ-like figure, a musician, and an artist; however, this multiplicity does not make him a confusing character, but rather a character larger than life, and a self that is beyond containment and confinement in its multiplicity and fluidity. The self, for Williams, is complex and of multiple facets; and any attempts made by critics or the audience to resist the complexity of these characters make them collaborators in the mutilation inflicted on Williams's characters by the society in which they live.

Williams's use of the Orpheus myth as well as Christian and pagan allusions fits with his understanding of the self as a complex structure. In his interview for Playboy magazine, Williams states that "all [his] great characters are larger than life."[33] They are icons who have managed to resist the fragmentation of the world they live in without necessarily nullifying this fragmentation. They are able to extract beauty out of ugliness, meaning out of chaos, and order out of disorder. As Judith Thompson argues, Williams makes his characters larger than life because he wants "to universalize the particular and the peculiar, to find those analogues or archetypes in myth, legend, or fairy tale that will tap the collective unconscious and give archetypal meaning to personal plight."[34] Williams's characterization of Val transcends the boundaries

between past and present; as well as the rigidity and artificiality that separates now from then.

Through the use of the Orpheus myth and Christian allusions, Williams tries to liberate the self from the limitations and the restraints of time. Williams envisions a self in a timeless world. In his essay "The Timeless World of a Play," he conceptualizes this vision, and explains that his responsibility as a playwright is to snatch "the eternal out of the desperately fleeting," which is the greatest "magic trick of human existence."[35] Williams wants to portray his characters outside the "shattering intrusion of time." For Williams, time is the enemy that has to be defeated because it is the enemy that shatters, divides, and fragments. Williams seeks this "repose" in the world of his plays because it "allows contemplation and produces the climate in which tragic importance is a possible thing, provided that certain modern conditions are met."[36] The timeless world of the play is an occasion for meditation and self-reflection. It is a moment of self-understanding and self-realization. Williams praises the timeless quality of Greek tragedy, because it offers the audience a sense of "magnitude" since "the created world of the play is removed from that element [time] which makes people *little* and their emotions fairly inconsequential."[37] The timeless world of the play brings the audience to terms with their own emotions, and consequently with themselves. In this self-reflection, redemption will hopefully be achieved because it is only in this timeless world that they can "pity and love each other more deeply than they permit themselves to know" in "this continual rush of time."[38]

Yet, what Williams envisions is paradoxical and ontologically defeating. Time always embodies and engulfs even in the very moment when we seek

liberation from it. By blurring the specificity of Two-River County through Christian allusions and mythic references, Williams creates a world that can exemplify "the past, the present, and the perhaps," as the preface of Orpheus suggests. Val, Lady, Carol, Vee, and the tide of forces against which they are struggling are part of the present in the same way as they are part of the world of Hades, and the world where death is ultimate. In Orpheus, Williams has re-created a myth for our time. Through the Orpheus myth and Christian allusions, Williams "seeks to expose the ruthless savagery still extant in modern man." Consequently, Williams's play provides "important psychological insight into the anatomy of violence,"[39] and uncovers the ugliness of group consciousness and the limiting confinements exercised upon the self as a result of this consciousness which prevail in human attitudes and behaviors

Orpheus Descending depicts the timeless and universal plight of human enslavement and the hope for freedom and liberation. It is a story told and re-told by different people in different times and about different characters. The past is not far away, and we are doomed to re-live the same experience of our ancestors. The past presses itself against our own will even though we long to separate ourselves from it and would like to believe that we live in a better world than that of our predecessors. The self remains locked in these confinements of time, and most of Williams's characters fail to liberate themselves from its octopus-like grasp. Tom Wingfield, for example, follows the same footsteps of his father, who fell in love with long distances. Blanche DuBois falls victim to the same cruelty that she herself inflicted upon her husband Allan Grey. Brick Pollitt's life parallels that of Big Daddy to the point that Brick's relationship with Maggie seems to duplicate that of Big Daddy's relationship with Big Mama.

Lady Torrance meets the same destiny as her Italian Immigrant father, and both are defeated and murdered by the same man and the same brutal forces. Val, with the dignity of the defeated, follows in the footsteps of the mythical Orpheus and the legendary Jesus Christ. The self can not be liberated from time and from the past. It is a re-enactment of past cruelties, past pains, and past sufferings. The self is pre-destined and pre-determined to be what it is; it is a product of its own past, its own history, and its own environment, yet an entity that is destined to be at odds with this environment. The self is chained to these forces which run opposite to its desire and what it is longing for, but this struggle is what defines it, and provides it with its essence. The essential core of the self is that of struggle and resistance, evasions and masquerades, masks and role-playing, self-erasure and self-affirmation; in-between lies the bright possibilities of victory as well as the dark forces of defeat. The self is under attack from inside and from outside, from internalized fears, anxieties, confusion; it is under threat from friends and relatives and other institutions which have placed themselves as its own guards and safe watchers.

Val is defeated by all these forces at the end of Orpheus. He is killed by the mentality of the mob that can not accept change and prefers to remain blind to other options and better possibilities. Val can not reconcile his paradoxes or live up to the opposing drives within himself. He is torn by polarizations and extremes. He can not find the texture where these opposites can be synthesized and celebrated. He cut himself off in order to live up to an image of who he is not. The burden of the wanderer spirit is unbearable for Val, and he can not carry its weight by play's end. His snakeskin jacket has to be passed on to another character to cherish and spread the spirit of wildness and defiance that it

represents. Lady fails to perpetuate Val's inheritance; Carol Cutrere who is entrusted with the snakeskin jacket to carry on the spirit, may hopefully succeed where Val did not. Many questions are posed by the fall of Orpheus's final curtain: Why isn't Lady capable of carrying on this spirit? What is there about her character that she should redeem so as to be able to fulfill this mission? What factors contribute to Lady's tragic downfall and ultimate death? Does she achieve self-liberation at play's end? The same questions can also be posed about Carol Cutrere. Through examining these questions, I am hoping to further investigate Williams's understanding of a liberated self and the character who may embody this understanding in Orpheus Descending.

Lady Torrance between the Past and the Future: The Ambivalent Self

Similarly to Val, Lady has mutilated herself and made many concessions and compromises at high personal expense just to survive, and be able to live with Jabe and the Two-River County community. Yet, in her mutilation and entrapment, Lady is always seeking her own escape and liberation from the cruelties that she endured for most of her life. The ultimate end that she has to face is her death by the same forces of evil from which she is trying to liberate herself. In an attempt to protect Val from Jabe's bullets, Lady sacrifices herself and dies without achieving the self-fulfillment that she has so sought. Why does she fail in the same way as Val does? Why does she face the same end as his? Why does she fail to be the one who can carry Val's wild spirit and inherit his vision and his snakeskin jacket? And what circumstances and conditions hinder her from achieving her vision of liberation and freedom?

Lady's dilemma starts with the loss of her father, who was burnt to death, and the destruction of the orchard he planted on a piece of property called Moon Lake. The loss of the orchard signals, for Lady, the loss of an Edenic and prelapsarian state of being. The orchard is an earthly paradise with its "grapevines and fruit trees" and "little arbors." Lady's father has turned a cheap wasteland into a place where young people can meet to "court up a storm" and express more freely their passion and desire. The orchard is a libidinal place where young people could "go out to... drink that Dago red wine an' cut up an' carry on an' raise such cane in those arbors!" (16). This was a place of the free Dionysian spirit of Lady. It was in this orchard where she knew and met David Cutrere, and where both of them together discover their own passion, and consummate their mutual love. Like two carefree people, they enjoy each other's company, and make the best out of this sexually free Edenic garden. Sometimes her father "would look around for his daughter," Beulah tells us, "and all of a sudden Lady wouldn't be there!" Dolly suggests that "it's hard to shout back, 'here I am, Papa,' when where you are is in the arms of your lover!" (17). Both Lady and David were such "a beautiful thing," "and those two met like you struck two stones together and made a fire! Yes-- fire..." (14). All of this comes to a halt when Lady's father made the irreversible mistake in the eyes of the Two-River County community of selling liquor to some colored men. The Mystic Crew burnt the orchard down to the ground, and Lady's father died trying to smother the flames. The Edenic paradise is destroyed, and Lady becomes a shattered entity that retains its identity only through the memories that she carries of a once joyful past. Alone, broken, bereft, and jilted by David Cutrere for another local girl with more money and social prestige to save his family

home, Lady accepts the financial security that Jabe offers her and marries him in spite of her own will.

Such events mark the turning point in Lady's life. Her desire is no longer her own, it is rather placed in the hands of Jabe for his own disposal. Instead of being part of her own subject, Lady's desire has become part of a transaction between her and Jabe based on exchange values and determined by what he is willing to offer and what she is ready to return. Her identity is placed inside a mercantile system instead of being contained by herself and performed according to what she deems herself to be. Beulah tells Dolly: "He bought her, when she was a girl of eighteen! He bought her and bought her cheap because she'd been thrown over and her heart was broken by that" (14). And Lady thinks of herself in the same transactional terms when she tells David: "You sold yourself. I sold myself. You was bought, I was bought. You made whores of us both!" (79). Within the socially sanctified and socially accepted institution of marriage, Lady finds herself forced to sell her body to Jabe in order to seek the financial security he is offering her after her father's death. Marriage, however, gives her neither protection nor self-fulfillment. It is rather a big lie that she lives by every day and gives her the appearance of propriety and respectability. Lady is mutilated and incomplete after David jilts her: "I carried your child in my body the summer you quit me but I had it cut out of my body, and they cut my heart with it" (78). Lady's past is taken away from her, and so is her heart. She is destined to be mutilated and incomplete for the rest of her life. In this state of existence, Lady has sought her own death, as she tells David: "I wanted death after that, but death don't come when you want it, it comes when you don't want it! I wanted death..." (78). In spite of her loss of her father and her lover, Lady

has enough valor to survive and keep on living. She is on pills, and is "going to pieces," as she tells Val, but she tries to understate her tragedy and minimize her pain when she talks to David (46):

> I haven't gone down so terribly far in the world. I got a going concern in this mercantile store, in there's the confectionery which'll reopen this spring, it's being done over to make it the place that all the young people will come to, it's going to be like--the wine garden of my father, those wine-drinking nights when you had something better than anything you've had since!" (80).

This speech reveals how far Lady is separated from reality. She is pretending that she is not hurt, because she does not want David's pity. But deep down the trauma of the past still has its impact upon her. The two alternatives that she opted for--that of her marriage to Jabe and her harboring interest in the confectionery--will definitely push her further down into loss and mutilation.

In her marriage with Jabe, Lady has acquiesced to couple herself with death. There is nothing human and passionate about Jabe Torrance. Lady calls him "Mr. death," Val tells Lady that "he looks like death" (109), and Williams refers to him as "death's self, and malignancy" (141). In a macabre image that reveals the dread and the pain Lady has to deal with in her marriage with Jabe, she tells Val:

> I know! Death's knocking for me! Don't you think I hear him, knock, knock, knock? It sounds like what it is! Bones knocking bones... ask me how it felt to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when he touched me... (135).

Lady has settled with such a man because she wants to deny her passionate side, and she wants to bury her desire that was destroyed with the death of her father

and the loss of her lover. She wants to be with a man who can remind her the least of her love and her past, and who can draw her the farthest away from her human side. In Jabe Lady has found a convenient prison for her desire and herself. They live in the same house, and yet not together. "They got two separate bedrooms which are not even connectin,'" Dolly informs us, and "everything is so dingy an' dark up there... It seemed like... a county jail!" (14). She has settled for this isolation and imprisonment in order to escape from her own self. With Jabe Lady is allowed neither to dream nor to be inspired. She is nailed down to an ugly reality through the concessions she has made at her own expense. Her life has turned into a nightmare, as she tells Val, "because I sleep with a son of a bitch who bought me at a fire sale, and not in fifteen years have I had a single good dream, not one..." (57). Without her dreams and her inspirations, Lady has found herself living in hateful deprivation. "She could live with him in hate, "Beulah observes, "people can live together in hate for a long time" (18).

Lady's passion for life, romance, love, and free sexuality, does not fade away, but is translated into a passion for money. Vee has found an outlet for her passion in painting and in religion, while the alternatives Lady explores are no less futile. She has cultivated a business-woman persona, and occupies herself with running Jabe's mercantile store. Beulah hints at the way Lady has displaced her passion when she states about Lady and Jabe: "Notice their passion for money. I've always noticed when couples don't love each other they develop a passion for money" (18). Lady has developed a façade of professionalism behind which she can hide her emotions. She interviews Val, checks references, gets him to wear a dark business suit in the store instead of his snakeskin jacket, and

negotiates with him his salary and commission. This is Lady's business persona. She wants this persona to be affirmative in the business world to compensate for the emotional anorexic life she currently endures.

Despite her oppressive circumstances, Lady has never lost her passion. The confectionery that she is creating can not be read solely as a sign of her growing mercantile interests for it is also her shelter and refuge. It is a "shadowy and poetic" space, as Williams describes it in his opening stage direction. Therefore, the confectionery has a personal significance for Lady, it is in this poetic space where she tries to re-assert her own self as a subject and liberate her "frozen self" from the long austere and cold years that she has lived with Jabe. Through constructing this confectionery, she is restoring a part of her life that was destroyed and taken away from her. Kimball King furthermore has suggested that "The confectionery which Lady plans to open on Easter Sunday... looks like the wine garden of her father's... Thus it becomes a construction of a part of her life which she views nostalgically and which also emphasizes the magnitude of her personal loss..."[40] Through the confectionery, Lady wants to look back and reclaim the past with its innocent, pure, and idyllic spirit. She is restoring the wildness of this past and hoping that what was then not tolerated may be tolerated and perhaps even celebrated now. "The confectionery," Lady tells David, "which'll reopen this spring, it's being done over to make it the place that all the young people will come to, it's going to be like—the wine garden of my father, those wine-drinking nights when you had something better than anything you've had since!" (80). Athena Coronis comments on the rejuvenating nature of Lady's project: "Lady's attempt to recreate her father's wine garden in the mercantile store may be seen as an indication of her inner wish to renew

herself, to pull herself... out of deadly corruption and evil, to start her life anew". Coronis continues: "Her effort to make the confectionery a meeting place for young people re-affirms her desire for life, purity, and love. The opening of the store in the spring symbolizes the project of hope and warmth, the dawn of a better tomorrow, the recovery of a frozen self."[41]

The coming of Val Xavier to Lady's store accelerates this process of recovery from the "frozen self" that Coronis has succinctly described. Val has made Lady more determined to follow her own desire and follow the will of her heart rather than succumbing to the harsh circumstances where she has found herself entangled. Her attraction to Val has reassured her that she is still a human being capable of loving and feeling. Though skeptical at first, she believes in his vision. In response to his description of the flying transparent birds, she replies:

> Show me one of them birds and I'll say, Yes, God's made one perfect creature! - I sure would give this mercantile store and every bit of stock in it to be that tiny bird the color of the sky... for one night to sleep on the wind -- and float! --around under th'- stars... (56).

Lady's optimism manifests itself in her readiness to give up all that she has in order to know what it feels like to be as free as the transparent legless birds. Moreover, when Val tells her about his view that "we're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life!" Lady replies that she "cannot agree with something as sad as that statement!" (63). Though desperate, Lady wants to believe that there are still possibilities. But unfortunately, Lady doesn't live to see the day when she is free and liberated from the chains that pull her down to corruption. The forces of Jabe destroy her in the way they collaborated in destroying her father. Lady's self is locked to the same destiny as her father's.

The way Lady and her father envision their lives as innocent, idyllic, and wild is not tolerated by Jabe and his kind. Lady fails to fulfill her dream and transform it into a reality. She fails in her quest for a liberated self and therefore she meets the same destiny as Val. She has fallen another prey to the forces of evil. With her death, Lady exemplifies the sad fact that the past can not be restored and the self can not seek its own refuge in this past no matter how glorified this past is and how tempting such an alternative might be.

Lady's attempt at reconstructing the past proves to be artificial and elusive. Everything about the confectionery is artificial including the branches of the fruit trees and the flowers on the walls and ceilings. Lady is trying to duplicate the past instead of searching for other alternatives and more original possibilities. She has managed to demolish her illusion about the present that her life with Jabe is of any significant quality; but in her search for another alternative she has accepted the illusion of the past as an ideal alternative. The past is another force that Lady fails to escape. Her self-realization that takes place at play's end happens like a revelation about the past rather than an awareness about the present or the future. Again, Lady evokes memories about the past and the "little fig tree between the house and the orchard" (140). Lady's revelation has a dream-like quality about it that is reinforced not only through the poetic images of the bearing fig tree, the Christmas ornaments and the "glass bells, glass birds, tinsel, icicles, stars" and snow, but also through the past tense that prevails throughout the entire passage. Lady's revelation is still a dream that is far remote from her. It is a dislocated dream—a half-dead memory and a renewed hope in its embryonic stage. Lady's self-realization is still incomplete at play's end. She is still searching for the appropriate language that would express

this dream, reveal her inspiration, and describe the released energy that she is experiencing. This language is yet to be formulated. While unable to construct this language to write herself, Lady resorts to the language of the past and that of metaphors and similes. Lady compares herself to a fig tree that was cursed, but can now bear once again. The metaphoric language does not express the entity as such, but what it is like by means of comparisons to other entities and other subjects. Lady's identity remains hidden behind the screens and the façades of this metaphoric language. The subjective "I" of Lady is dislocated and relocated to the vehicle of the metaphor, i.e. the fig tree. Lady is rejuvenated at play's end, and her energy is revived, but she remains locked not only into the memories of the past, but also into the labyrinth of language. She is a subject in search of its own language to write itself. While this voice is yet to be found, she remains dependent on a language that is not her own. She remains fragile, defenseless, and vulnerable to Jabe's forces, and dies at play's end signaling out the demise of another sensitive and fragile character who has been struck down by the ugly brutality of a deadly reality. Williams's sensitive characters whom he describes as the "moths" in one of his poems, find the world too aggressive and too brutal for their sensitivity that remains yet to be appreciated and cherished.

Lady's failure is similar to that of Blanche in the way they both allow the past to interfere with their present and press against their own will for liberation and freedom. Blanche can not escape the memories of Belle Reve and the death of her homosexual husband; and Lady can not get over the death of her father and the loss of her lover. Neither can she convince herself that the quality of her life will not change with the re-creation of the wine garden. "Just as Blanche's final attempt to find a new meaning with Mitch is shattered by the events of her

past and the brutality of the present," argues Benjamin Nelson, "so too is Lady's attempt to regain life with Val destroyed by the past and the viciousness of her present milieu."[42] The doom of Williams's characters is that in their quest for identity and liberation, they resort to an image of themselves that they are already familiar with. Therefore, instead of engaging themselves in redefining and re-examining their own image, they start performing a role that they used to perform, and they wear the mask of the same persona they used to act. They deny or block out the fact that what they are re-enacting can not match in any way the originality and the genuineness of this past. The effect is detrimental since the reality is perverted, twisted, distorted, and remodeled just to fit with the views they want to hold of the world. The doom of Lady and Blanche is that they refuse to involve themselves in a negotiation about their identity. It is worth noticing that the characters who are able to survive the cruelty and the threats of erasures they face everyday are the characters who are aware that the self can not exist in isolation and is a product of negotiation and dialogue. Lady fails to place her project of liberation within a larger social context. She is too self-centered in her quest and she lacks resilience and commitment to a larger cause than herself. Examples that fit with the latter category of Williams's characters, to mention a few, are Maggie and Brick in Cat on Hot Tin Roof, and Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending. These characters have learnt in their quest for liberation that reality has to be faced on its own terms.

Lady has also proven to be vengeful in her quest, not that she does not have reasons and justifications for being so, but her vengefulness is gratuitous and not constructive. Jack Wallace argues that "there is admittedly nothing very noble about Lady's plan to renew the wine garden, no thought of settling the

world right, no real concern for the good of the community."[43] Even though one can not understand how Lady can be involved in and caring about a community that has robbed her everything she has and contributed to her destruction through their silence to the evil that has befallen her, one can not help noticing the impracticality of Lady's act. "Hell, I don't even want it," she screams to Val. "It is just something's got to be done to square things away, to, to, to--be not defeated!... Just to be not defeated!" (130).

In seeking independence from Jabe, Lady has become dependent on Val. Out of loneliness, she enjoys being with Val. He offers her companionship in the midst of the dark and cold store. He also comes into her life at a time when she needs some affirmation and reassurance that she can be humanly capable once again of loving and being loved. Often in the play, she holds Val's guitar to prevent him from leaving her: "I'm going to keep hold of your 'life companion' while I pack! I am! I am goin' to pack an' go, if you go, where you go!" (134). Lady can not imagine what her life would be like without Val, she is scared of the emptiness she has to face once he leaves. Eager to protect him and alarmed by the danger that he is exposed to, Lady releases him at play's end. "You've given me life, you can go!" (140). But, it is already too late for him to escape the cruelty of Jabe and his evil intention. With such a claim, Lady has transformed Val into a functional entity who is free to go once he has fulfilled his duty: "You've done what you came here to do... " (140). And obviously they have nothing more to give to each other.

Benjamin Nelson has succinctly observed about Lady's ambivalence towards love that she "has not been afraid of love; she has been betrayed by it. She is a full-blooded woman, warm and passionate, who had known love, been

terribly injured, and has detached herself from life, through wanting desperately to live."[44] Lady is betrayed and injured, and I am suggesting that she is not capable of forgetting what love has caused her even when she is with Val. She has never totally invested herself with him, she has always been on guard with him, and she has never managed to put the experience of the past behind her. She is a damaged woman and she has never forgotten that she is so. She wants Val, yet she feels she has to hold back. She wants the romance, yet she is afraid that the ghosts of the past will come back to haunt her again. She is willing to put her heart on the line for Val and assume the risk of living with him, yet she is afraid that her heart will be once more smashed and crushed. In her attitude towards Val, Lady is always ambivalent and sometimes even devious.

Lady does not reveal her real feelings towards Val honestly and frankly.[45] She feels she has to maintain the mask of propriety and decorum: "I'm not interested in your perfect functions, in fact you don't interest me no more than the air that you stand in. If that's understood we'll have a good working relation..." (57). But when he is out of her sight she allows the audience to see what she has hidden from him. "She throws back her head and laughs as lightly and gaily as a young girl," Williams's stage direction informs the audience. "Then she turns and wonderingly picks up and runs her hands tenderly over his guitar as the curtain falls" (58). Lady can express her feeling towards Val, and be herself only vicariously. In touching Val's guitar, she is caressing Val's body that she knows no one would allow her to have. Similar to Blanche, Lady needs a private moment to drop off the public mask and share only with the audience a moment of honesty and integrity.

Lady resorts to the same devious indirection and masquerade when she invites Val to live in the alcove of the store ostensibly to save money on rent, but in reality to court him for companionship and hopefully to seduce him. She tells Val:

> There wouldn't be no obligation, you'd do me a favor. I'd feel safer at night with somebody on the place. I would; it would cost you nothing! And you could save up that money you spend on the cabin. How much? Ten a week? Why, two or three months from now you'd--save enough money to... (90).

The stage directions further describe Lady's nervous perplexity. She "makes a wide gesture with a short laugh as if startled" (90). Feeling her emotional nakedness and her fear that her real intentions and feelings towards Val might be revealed, Lady says, "Where does heat go in this building?" while "shivering" and "hugging herself" (90). This scene is filled with tension that is revealed in understatements and gestures—a tension that stems from Lady's desire for Val, but this desire can never be expressed or released. In the passage quoted above, Lady talks about so many things in a short period of time. She talks about feeling unsafe on her own, about Val's saving some money, about the cabin where he lives now, about the favor that he can offer her, and the no obligation that he has towards her, but she never mentions anything about her feelings and physical attraction to him. She piles up one reason after another to convince him to live with her, but the truth is lost in the midst of this verbal conglomeration. She "gasps aloud," "utter[s] a startled exclamation," and "a startled laugh," and "sits stiffly without looking at him," and her voice sounds "harsh and sudden," but she never reveals what she wants from Val. Lady is afraid that if she were more truthful towards Val, she might lose in him the possibility of a future companion.

She is caught in an awkward situation where she cannot reveal the truth, she has to pretend and to deny; and if she reveals the truth about her feeling, she is not sure either that the outcome will be anymore satisfying. Blanche is caught in the same dilemma in her relationship with Mitch. She hides and conceals the truth about her past. Both Blanche and Lady are caught between the truth they want to reveal and the mendacity they are forced to practice in order to survive. Both of them fear the abandonment and loss that the revelation of the truth may entail, and therefore choose to remain estranged and distant from the very people they want to be the closest to and the most honest with. Only towards the end of the scene does Lady "look at [Val] directly for the first time since mentioning the alcove" (95). Her laughter is still "senseless." Her mask is dropped again when Val takes some money from the cash box and runs away. Coming down from the stairs, Lady realizes that Val has left; and she "wanders desolately back to the door, opens it and stands staring out into the starless night as the scene dims out" (96). At that moment she realizes the depth of her loss. After their confrontation in the last scene of Act four, Lady decides to be more honest. In an outcry, she tells Val: "NO, NO, DON'T GO... I NEED YOU!!! TO LIVE... TO GO ON LIVING!!! (102).

Lady's deviousness and masquerading backfire. Val is confused by her intentions and ambivalence: "I ain't dissatisfied with you. I'm pleased with you, sincerely!" She tells him; and Val, questioning Lady's sincerity and highlighting her deviousness, answers: "You sure don't show it" (61). He suspects her of trying to buy and to use him. He resists her offer, and when she asks him to stay in the alcove, Williams tells us that "his manner is gently sad as if he had met

with a familiar, expected disappointment" (91). And finally he confronts her with the painful truth that she does not want to hear:

> --A not so young and not so satisfied woman, that hired a man off the highway to do double duty without paying overtime for it... I mean a store clerk days and a stud nights... (101).

Because of her deviousness, Lady is misunderstood and hurt. Her relationship with David follows the same pattern. She talks in half confessions and half truths. She evokes with him the beautiful memories of the past, but she asks him to reciprocate neither in pity nor in love. She regrets being open and frank about her emotions towards David and what he means to her. "I made a fool of myself!... I--threw away-pride...-I said things to him I should of been too proud to say..." (88). Lady puts decorum, pride, social etiquette, and propriety before herself and her own desire. She places society first, and relegates herself to a secondary position. She imprisons herself to what her society expects her to be, and places herself as the watchful guardian of her own prison. She has sought her own liberation, but she has become a collaborator in her own damnation. Lady can not free herself from the values that her society has been imposing on her, and she has internalized them convincingly and at points unquestionably. Lady has disguised her own feelings from herself and has toned down her own voice, and molded herself in order to fit with the small image of her that the town's people project on her. In doing so, she has denied or blocked out from her mind the possibility that such a tragedy could ever happen to her. Williams seems to be making the case that individuals have to live the intensity of their emotions and experience the sensibility of their humanity for what these experiences are worth. He makes his case clearer in the way he portrays Carol

Cutrere who is capable of living with emotional intensity and is ready to embrace the full range and complexity of her humanity and her desire.

Carol Cutrere: Writing Her Own Self

At the end of Orpheus Descending, Carol has to carry out the spirit of wildness, protest, and valor that Val Xavier has undertaken. Even though there are similarities between Carol and Val, she carries this spirit with a modified and revised vision. Carol shares with Val his wildness and his restlessness with conventional society and traditional values. She dissociates herself from her society and all its moral values and laws. Learning that Carol is looking for cartridges for her revolver, Dolly says: "She don't have a license to carry a pistol," and Beulah responds: "She don't have a license to drive a car" (24). Obviously, Carol pays no attention to what society allows her to do and not to do. She places herself out of its restraining control and codifying rules and regulations. There are certain affinities between Val and Carol. In one of his stage directions, Williams tells us: "It's important that VAL should not seem brutal in his attitude toward CAROL; there should be an air between them of two lonely children" (74). Val and Carol are lonely in their search and in their quest for freedom. They are both fugitives. Val is rootless, he moves from one county to another, and Carol "has an odd, fugitive beauty which is stressed, almost to the point of fantasy, by a style of makeup with which a dancer named Valli has lately made such an impression in the bohemian centers of France and Italy" (21).

Both Val and Carol are bohemians, wild, and fugitives. Val wears the snakeskin jacket as a badge for his wildness and free spirit; and Carol expresses

her fascination with and simultaneously her disappointment at the loss of the wild spirit from the country. She tells Val:

> Something is still wild in the country! This country used to be wild, the men and women were wild and there was a wild sort of sweetness in their hearts, for each other, but now it's sick with neon, it's broken out sick, with neon, like most other places... (127).

Carol is reacting against the artificiality and the superficiality of the country that is "sick with neon." She is not fascinated by the commercialism that has prevailed in the country and she is determined not to be part of it. Similar to Val, she is in search of some primal innocence and romantic ventures. Moreover, her association with the Conjure Man "further indicates her embattled alliance with wildness, freedom, and racial brotherhood."[46] Williams describes the Choctaw cry as "a series of barking sounds that rise to a high sustained note of wild intensity" (26). Carol wants emotional intensity and she wants to live her life up to her potentialities. Val has somehow accommodated the commercial aspect and the corruption he has tried to avoid, but Carol has not. It saddens her to see Val settling for the common options and the commercial world of Lady's store. She feels lonely in her spirit and in her venture when she realizes that Val has abandoned her and has exchanged the snakeskin jacket for "the nice blue uniform of a convict." Carol warns Val that the loss of his snakeskin jacket and his wildness will ultimately lead to his demise, but what he offers her in return is a "rolex chronometer that tells the time of the day and the day of the week and the months and all the crazy moon's phases" (75). Carol is asking Val to remain the wild and free spirit that he is; but he is asking her to become the monitored and programmed individual that she can never be. Carol resists Val's offer, and

Williams describes this confrontational scene that dramatizes the different directions the "two lonely children" have taken as they drift away from each other:

> He takes her hand and tries to force the watch into her fist. There is a little struggle, he can't open her fist. She is crying, but staring fiercely into his eyes. He draws a hissing breath and hurls the watch violently across the floor (76).

The struggle between Carol and Val is a struggle between those who are tempted to give up, accommodate, and collaborate in their own downfall, and those who are determined to resist and live the life they deem best for themselves. Val wants to take Carol's spontaneity away from her; he is looking for the reassurance that a similarly spirited individual is also willing to accommodate and monitor herself the same way as he does. Carol is left alone in her dream of freedom and in her battle to remain the woman she is. But in spite of this loneliness and Val's abandonment she never gives up. It is her valor and her spirit of the warrior which have allowed her to carry on the mission that Val has failed to achieve and convinced Williams that she is subversive enough to be capable of being the rebellious spirit of Two-River County.

Carol stands for her own subjectivity. She is affirmative and assertive. Unlike Val, who has mutilated himself through rejecting women and romantic ventures, Carol claims her identity and tries to liberate her desire even though this liberation costs her her reputation and ultimately marginalization. Carol finds relief in sex even though this relief is momentarily and the sexual act is painful for her. She finds solace in the act of lovemaking. She admits to Val:

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

> even for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger. It's dangerous for me because I'm not built for childbearing (75).

For Williams, as Kimball King argues, "liberation from the stern rules and hypocrisies of the faces of darkness often takes the form... of the pursuit of sexual liberation."[47] Irene Shaland elaborates in more details that "sexual love is the opposite of death; it represents a drive to live, and sex is a repeated metaphor for an ecstatic life lived fully in the present moment... Sexuality is transformed into salvation when it seems to be life's only fulfillment. Then it becomes an attempt to find God in one's fellow-man in a world which God Himself seems to have forsaken."[48] Carol wants the Two-River County community to face what they can not usually face, and to deal with her as a woman who asserts her own desire and does not cut herself off just to fit into her society's compartments and the image that they expect her to be. Carol is in search of her liberated and unchained self. She is aware that once she lives through the conventions and the codes of Two-River County then her life and her individuality are not her own anymore. She has learnt from the dead the unforgettable lesson that life is meant to be lived to the extremes, and her embracing of the wild and the fantastic is her way of living up to these extremes. Speaking about the dead, she tells Val: "They chatter together like birds on Cypress Hill." And she continues: "But all they say is one word and that one word is 'live,' they say 'live, live, live, live, live!' It's all they have learned, it's the only advice they can give.- Just live... Simple- a very simple instruction..." (40).

Critics have tried to place Carol in the same compartment that she is trying to break out of, impose upon her the same moral standards that she is

questioning, and bind her to the same chains from which she is trying to free herself. Through such an attitude, these critics have expressed their discomfort in facing the liberated self that Carol deems herself to be. In imposing these limitations upon Carol, these critics are expressing their resistance in accepting and dealing with Carol as a subject who claims, affirms, and asserts her own identity. For instance, John Clum makes some claims which do not probe the complexity of Carol's character but rather take away from her her subversive nature and the questioning spirit she embodies. "Carol's wildness," Clum claims "is no threat to the Southern patriarchal order. She is a remittance relative, paid to get out of town, but not in danger when she breaks her contract and appears. She is an embarrassment to her family and an outrage to the women, but nothing more."[49] Clum underestimates Carol's subversive power. If the case were similar to what Clum describes, Carol would not have been banished by the entire community in spite of her aristocratic background and her brother's apparently powerful and influential position within the community. Carol is not banished just because she is an annoyance to the community. Hugh Dickinson blames Carol for not being constructive in her criticism of the society where she lives, and in the way she asserts herself. He states: "the only alternative she offered [Val] was to join her in the old, self-destructive life of flouting society and jooking."[50] He overlooks Carol's commitment to racial equality and her protest against racial injustice and discrimination. The most common ways of discarding Carol's self-assertion and the liberated spirit she is determined to live by come from critics who place their own moral judgment upon her rather than examine her motives and objectives. These critics have denounced Carol as immoral and have based their denouncement on the evidence of her bizarre life style. For

instance, Jeanne McGlinn, even though she is mostly sympathetic to Carol's cause, states that her "economic resources bankrupt and her personal sense of well-being threatened by the rejection of her family and community, Carol employs bizarre survival tactics."[51] More groundless is Benjamin Nelson's observation about Carol. For him she is the "corrupted aristocrat, the last tainted remnant of a civilization and way of life that once was royal and honorable."[52] Definitely, Carol does not find anything royal or honorable about her socio-economic background, and neither can she affirm that the society where she lives as civilized. The critics' attitude towards Carol does not reflect the way Williams portrays his character. It is rather an intellectualized version of the way Dolly, Beulah, and the Two-River County community see Carol. In the same way as Carol has fallen prey to the moral judgment of the other women who think of her as an "absolutely degraded" and "corrupt" woman, the critics can not perceive Carol in a more positive way and in a less judgmental manner (40). If these critics see Carol as the freakish, immoral, and corrupt woman, Williams responds to them succinctly in his essay "Something Wild..." "Mutilations," he states, "is another word for freaks. For God's sake let's have a little more freakish behavior--not less."[53] If we are to understand Williams's characters with their dilemmas, their sense of doom, and their longing for freedom and liberation, we have to embrace their ambivalence, their weakness, their bizarre behavior, and sometimes their grotesque response, because that's when we just start touching upon the surface of their humanity, and maybe that of our own as well. Williams is initiating a whole cultural revolution and new understanding of the role of sex and sexuality in defining the subjectivity and the independence of the individual. However, the reactionary attitudes of such critics make it obvious that Williams's

revolutionary ideas and politics about the self and identity were ahead of his time. It took a couple of decades after Orpheus Descending for philosophers and thinkers to re-examinine the politics of self and identity in a way that Williams would have liked to see. For instance, Michel Foucault claims that

> sexuality is a part of our behavior. It's part of our world of freedom. Sexuality is something that we ourselves create--it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life[54]

Such a claim could not be more true for Williams's characters especially for Carol Cutrere.

Early in the play the audience learns something about the way Carol uses her own sexuality. Dolly asks Beulah:

> Can you understand how any body would deliberately make themselves look fantastic as that?

And Beulah responds:

> Some people have to show off, it's a passion with them, anything on earth to get attention (21).

Through flaunting her sexuality in front of the towns people, Carol is seeking visibility and recognition. Unlike Val, who has chosen to hide behind the alcove curtain, confine his relationship with Lady in such a small space, and live a closeted life for fear others should discover his secret desire, Carol wants the entire community to know who she is and what she is doing. She is not willing to curb her desire to the power fabrics of her community, and she is determined not to live a life of hypocrisy and double standards. "I'm an exhibitionist!" she

exclaims, "I want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt! I want them to know I'm alive! Don't you want them to know you're alive!" Val's attitude juxtaposes hers. His response: "I want to live and I don't care if they know I'm alive or not" (39)- illustrates how he wants to pass in silence, while Carol has chosen to live out loud. Carol's exhibitionism is subversive not only because it makes her visible, but because she is also capable of inventing and creating herself while underscoring the importance of the social taboos and the social conventions in the image she is creating of herself. Carol's act of self-creation or self-theatricalization is an act of resistance and defiance. Her exhibitionism is not for the sake of exhibitionism and self-exposure. She tells Val: "I suppose it was partly exhibitionism on my part, but it wasn't completely exhibitionism; there was something else in it, too" (39). Carol is not the "lewd vagrant" that the town people want to see in her, she is the political and social protestor who is committed to her vision of equality and justice for the deprived and the oppressed. Carol's exhibitionism is not just sexual and personal, it is more. It is political and ideological as well. Arthur Miller recognizes Williams's political and ideological subversion when he claims in Timebends that Williams was not "the sealed off aesthete he was thought to be. There is a radical politics of the soul as well as of the ballot box and the picket line."[55]

Carol is what they used to call "a Christ-bitten reformer" who is trying to secure justice for the downtrodden and the deprived. She tells Val she writes "letters of protest" and she "squandered the money [her] mother left [her]" to "put up free clinics." Moreover, on the cause of black civil rights she becomes a staunch advocate. She has protested the wrongs done to blacks: "I thought it was wrong for pellagra and slow starvation to cut them down when the cotton crop

failed from army worm or boll weevil or too much rain in summer" (39). In the case of Willie McGee, who "was sent to the chair for having improper relations with a white whore," Carol "put on a potato sack and set out for the capital on foot... to deliver a personal protest to the Governor of the state" (39). Carol is raising the consciousness of the community and leading a one-woman revolt against the hypocrisy of Two-River County. As Samar Attar observes, "Carol Cutrere... reveals the atmosphere of the town, its racist violence and the moral corruption and hypocrisy which lie behind the façade of social respectability."[56] Carol has managed to demonstrate how individuals can apply themselves not only to their own best, but also to the best of the community. Her sense of involvement, engagement, and attachment is opposed to Val's sense of detachment, invisibility, and lack of engagement. She is willing to put herself and her life on the line, while he has "a kind of refusal to concern himself with a problem that isn't his own" (73). Carol has realized that if somebody's identity and autonomy are taken away, then the day when she herself will be robbed of her own identity and freedom is not that far off. She takes it upon herself not to let this happen—a responsibility which Val is reluctant and ambivalent to assume.

Because of her sense of self-liberation, and her striving for justice and visibility without necessarily offering herself as a sacrifice, Carol is the character who is most prepared to inherit the snakeskin jacket, to carry on the spirit of wildness and protest, and to have the closing lines of the play. In the midst of the cries of "anguish," "the fierce blue jet of fire" and "the faces of demons," Carol stands more determined and firmer in her beliefs. She claims:

> Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bones behind them, and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive can always follow their kind... (144).

The audience is left with the hope that Carol's destiny will not be similar to that of Val. Carol remains a token among Williams's characters—a token of liberation and freedom that even the Sheriff's voice "Stay here! Stop! Stop!"-can not stop. "She crosses directly past him as if she no longer saw him, and out the door" (144). Val's death and the cruelty of the towns people do not change much of Carol's subversion and her strong belief in better possibilities. Carol is the transparent bird of Val's vision, as he describes her in Act Two Scene One. "Fly away, little bird, fly away before you get broke," he tells her (75). But Carol is a bird that is meant to be visible in order to unsettle and disturb those who are unwilling to see her and who remain blind to her existence.

Carol fits with Williams's understanding of the theater and the way he envisioned it to be. If art is "a kind of anarchy... in juxtaposition with organized society" and "runs counter to the sort of orderliness on which organized society apparently must be based,"[57] then Carol Cutrere is all of that. Williams's description of the ideal theater can also describe the sort of individual he envisions and the role that these individuals should play in their society. For Williams, the function of the theater is to break open and tear down traditional meanings and replace the old-fashioned authorities with values of one's devising. This seems to be Carol's goal in her quest for her own identity and selfhood. Carol belongs to a theater with "something wild, something exciting, something that [we] are not used to. Offbeat is the word."[58] She embodies

Williams's view of a liberated self that is dependent only upon its own autonomy.

Chapter IV

"Out, Out, Human Outcry:" Theatricality as an Impasse

In his play The Two-Character Play, Williams reaches an apocalyptic view of the destiny of the theatrical and performative self. In this play Williams expresses a grim vision about the self and the impossibility of the self to liberate itself from its theatricalism and its performativity. The characters in Williams's play are playing the roles of themselves and the demarcation line between reality and performance is blurred. Fiction and reality merge together. Unlike others of Williams's scripts where art and fiction represent an escape from reality, in The Two-Character Play performance does not provide Felice and Clare such an escape. Tom in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, and Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof resort to a fiction of their own creation to deal with their harsh reality. They write their own script and they try to create their own identity as they would like it to be, but in The Two-Character Play Felice and Clare can not afford the luxury of this escape. Their imagination becomes the prison where they have to live, and the theater becomes not so much the space of freedom and liberation as a place of confinement and seclusion. Felice and Clare are not confined to an institution of one sort or another, but they are confined within themselves, within limitations they impose upon themselves and accept as obstacles towards their own freedom. The effect of Felice's and Clare's confinement is not tragic in the sense that it does not lead them to a mental hospital at play's end as it does with Blanche, or to their destruction and death as with Lady and Val in Orpheus. Felice and Clare live in and with their own

confinement which defines their state of being. They can not have a life outside this confinement, and they do not know what their life would be like without it.

In The Two-Character Play Williams re-examines the possibility of a liberated self, i.e. a self that stands outside its own theatricality and outside the accepted norms and the standard conventions. In this play, we hear the echo of Val's words that "we're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life."[1] It is made clear for us in The Two-Character Play that the odds against which individuals have to fight to become who they are are not necessarily just social and political, but are internalized within the individuals themselves. The social and the group pressure against which Val, Lady, Blanche, Brick, and Tom contend are almost absent or secondary in The Two-Character Play; and even if they are present, they are not dramatized on the stage of The Two-Character Play. In this play, the self is locked within itself, and the relief that other characters have found in staging themselves according to their own script is not available to Felice and Clare. The Two-Character Play is not just about the incommunicability of ideas and emotions to others, but it is also about the incommunicability of these emotions to oneself as well. Felice and Clare are not just two individuals who are estranged to their society as is Blanche, Lady, or Tom, but they are also estranged to themselves.

In The Two-Character Play Williams's characters are professional artists as well. Blanche and Brick are artists in the way they stage themselves, and so is Val. But Felice and Clare are professional artists. They write and act their own plays. However, in spite of their artistry, the world they live in is no less austere and less tragic than that of the world where Blanche, Brick, Val, Lady, and Tom live. Williams's play reflects the disillusionment of an artist with his own art. The

promise that Williams saw in art at the beginning of his career as a way to freedom and liberation from the harsh reality he dramatized in Menagerie does not seem to be possible in The Two-Character Play. Williams started his career with a promise of liberation and freedom that he saw in the theater, but he ends with disillusionment towards the end of his career. In this chapter, I will explore the confinement of the self within its own theatricality and performativity, and also examine Williams's apocalyptic vision of his own art that fails to free and liberate the self and Williams, the artist himself, from its own shackles and from the chains of the society where it exists.

The Two-Character Play takes place in "a deep Southern town called New Bethesda" and is about two siblings named Clare and Felice who live alone in an abandoned house and who were orphaned after their father killed their mother and then committed suicide. Now, they are terrified of leaving the house to face the outside world with the family scandal they were forced to witness. They are afraid to walk to Grossman's Market and to deal with the insurance company. Felice and Clare are also abandoned by their acting company, who proclaim in a telegram that the two siblings are insane. The theater is their house. It is the same place where the family tragedy was staged. Deserted as they are, they have no choice but to live with this seclusion and find mutually shared resourcefulness that can sustain their dreadful existence haunted by memories of death and abandonment from the past. The play within the play they are performing is a re-enactment of their family tragedy. Felice wrote The Two-Character Play with two characters who are also named Felice and Clare, and obviously Felice is playing in Williams's play the role of Felice that he wrote for himself in the play within the play. Clare is also playing the role of the character Clare.

The Play Within the Play and the Theatrical Self

In Williams's play, the differentiation between actors who play characters and characters who are actors is simultaneously blurred and highlighted not to reinforce the difference between the actors and the characters they play, but to comment upon the theatrical and performative nature of the self.

In their state of destitution and confusion, Clare and Felice have nothing left but to "speak their lines with diminishing confidence, perform their lives even if that performance has been drained of meaning"[2] Felice and Clare, C. W. E. Bigsby argues, "have no alternative but to continue their performance; though denied an audience, they are denied equally the significance which that audience might have been prepared to grant to that performance..." Bigsby continues: "The theater is the condition of their existence; acting the only verification of their being."[3] But in spite of this devaluation, they continue their performance. No ending is in sight for Felice and Clare. Both the interior and the exterior plays are without closure. Felice comments on his play: "It's possible for a play to have no ending... in order to make a point about nothing really ending."[4]

The structure of The Two-Character Play is Pirandellian. The play within the play is not just a technical aspect in Williams's play, it has a thematic relevance to the play and it is in accord with Williams's views on the theatrical self. This structure allows Williams to explore the relationship between the roles one plays and the real person one is. It allows him to dramatize the veils behind which the self recreates itself and the costumes in which it performs its different roles. Thus, the structure of the play within the play highlights the tension between the theatricality and the authenticity of the self; and, thus, explores the nature of the relationship between the real and the fictional and blurs the

differences between both. The play within the play is a thematic and intrinsic component in Williams's vision.

Bigsby describes Williams's vision as "deconstructive vision." Williams in The Two-Character Play blurs the demarcation line between actor, character, and author. He inextricably mixes reality with fiction and intertwines the past and the present. The self is a collision of all the roles it plays. The gap between illusion and reality is so narrowed to the point that it becomes non-existent; thus being and acting become synonymous in a performance where reality and play are woven of the same thread. The set of the play is the theatrical space of this collision where the reality yields to the power of fiction and imagination. The reality is a product of the imaginative prowess of both Felice and Clare. The set of the play is a space of dislocation, decentralization, and "differance,"[5] to borrow Derrida's terminology. Bigsby explains further Williams's deconstructive vision when he adds: "the sense of dislocation of logic and continuity is a major force in Williams's work."[6] The set contains "the incomplete interior of a living room in Southern summer" and some other "scattered unassembled pieces of scenery for other plays than the play-within-a-play which will be 'performed.'" Williams hopes that this "incomplete," "unassembled," and "scattered" setting will suggest "disordered images" and a "nightmarish world... with all its dismaying shapes and shadows" (308). The ultimate effect of this setting is that of dislocation, disconnection, and disorder. It is a broken world of bits and pieces that will never come together. Williams is suggesting that this setting is a reflection not only of Clare's and Felice's psyche and their "mind approaching collapse" but also a reflection on the state of human existence. The Two-Character Play is a drama that is staged in the human psyche of Clare and Felice

that also points to the inwardness of these characters and dramatizes the dividedness and the dislocation of the self. It is a play which depicts a self of differance.

The setting of The Two-Character Play deconstructs logic and linearity. It is a stage where "the boundaries of realistic space and time no longer hold," as Annette Saddik demonstrates.[7] The past collides with the present in this setting. Memories are acted and re-enacted in front of the audience. In the course of the play, we witness Felice's and Clare's fears and anxieties because of that haunting moment when their father killed their mother and then committed suicide. We watch Felice and Clare sorting out the past, coming to terms with the present, and finding ways and means of handling their future. The coherence of a physical space is also denied in this play. The setting is a theatrical stage, but also a "house [that] has turned to a prison." Felice remarks: "I realize, now, that the house has turned to a prison," and Clare responds, "I know it's a prison, too, but it's one that isn't strange to us" [354]. Felice and Clare claim their familiarity with this house or this prison-like theater. The audience is left in limbo by Clare's claim and is never sure whether Clare and Felice live in the theater or the family house has been transformed into a theater. The only certainty that the audience and the critic can claim is that the house and the theater are used interchangeably. The interior and the exterior sets are inter-mixed. As Nicholas Pagan notices: "... We may find ourselves wondering where the interior set ends and where the exterior set begins, and vice-versa. This problem of separating inner and outer set will later be carried over to the problem of separating inner and outer play."[8] The audience is plunged into the interiors of the world of the psyche in a dream-like atmosphere that surpasses the real. The world of the self

is dramatized in this play where we are invited to observe the self in its disconnection, dislocation, and differance. We are witnessing "a mind approaching collapse" [308]. The movement of the play is inward and limnetic. Both Clare and Felice probe as deep as they can into their own psyche to understand who they are and to contain their own experience. It is a movement of disclosure and enclosure. Williams aims at exploring the personal and the inner "subjective"(308). Whether Felice and Clare will be capable of fully understanding themselves and containing their own identity is yet to be answered. Williams's deconstructive vision does not aim at annihilating and eliminating the self, but it focuses on re-creating and reshaping this self through the process of dismantlement.

Williams also dismantles the differences between actor and character. Clare and Felice the actors carry the same names as the characters. Felice and Clare are acting a double role in both the interior and the exterior play. The play within the play is a continuum to the exterior play. To try to draw the demarcation line between the interior and the exterior play becomes irrelevant since Williams seems to be making the case for a continuum rather than a rupture between the world of reality and that a fiction. Clare points to this continuum between the interior and the exterior play. Felice tells Clare: "... go get your things."

> Clare: Get what things?
> Felice: Your purse, your handbag, for instance.
> Clare: I don't have one to get.
> Felice: You've lost it again?
> Clare: This still seems like a performance of The Two-Character Play (360).

In another incident, Clare expresses her fear at being locked inside the theater, and Felice informs her that probably they are, because the "backstage phone is lifeless as the phone in The Two-Character Play was." (362). The continuum between the interior and the exterior play, on the one hand, and the fictional and the real, on the other, is further intensified in other moments of the play. Felice and Clare are discussing some possible reworking of the scenario of The Two-Character Play when Felice makes the observation:

> The revolver and the box of cartridges that you found last night have never been anywhere else in any performance of the play. Now I remove the blank cartridges and insert the real ones... (356).

At this point, the audience becomes more and more aware that the reality of Clare and Felice is an extension of the supposedly fictitious play they are performing on the stage before us. The reality is an extension of the play. The story of the interior and the exterior play is the real story of Felice and Clare. Moreover, when Williams decided to give his revised version of the play the title of the play within the play, The Two-Character Play, instead of Outcry, he narrowed further the gap between the interior and the exterior play and brought them to an ultimate collage of fiction and reality. The boundaries between the fiction and the reality of the two siblings collapse, and neither the factuality of the reality nor the imagination of fiction describes accurately Felice's and Clare's state of being. Therefore, as Bigsby contends "the theater is the condition of their existence; acting the only verification of their being."[9] Felice and Clare are caught inside their performativity. They can not step outside the roles they perform, for if they do, they will face nothing but the abyss. Performativity is the only essence that they have to their identity. It defines who they are and gives life to their

selves. Without it, they are left prey to death and reduced to a state of non-being. When Clare asks Felice to stop the performance, Felice answers: "With no place to return to, we have to go on, you know" (316), implying that there is nothing left for them except their performance.

The only Felice and Clare that we can have access to are the performative Felice and Clare. They perform on the stage, and they perform in the play within the play. And when they face some other "real" situations outside the world of the theater, they tend to perform as well. In his stage direction, Williams describes Felice and Clare in theatrical terms: "He is a playwright, as well as player... His hair almost shoulder length, he wears a great coat that hangs nearly to his ankles... a bizarre shirt... trousers of soft-woven fabric," and Williams adds at the end of his stage directions that "the total effect is theatrical and a bit narcissan" (309). Felice is theatrical, and Clare carries the same traits in her personality. She is an amalgamation of roles and different casts: "She has, like her brother, a quality of youth without being young, and also... an elegance, perhaps even arrogance, of bearing that seems related to a past theater of actor-managers and imperious stars" (310). Her personality has different shades and masks. "Her grand theater manner," Williams writes, "will alternate with something startlingly coarse, the change occurring as abruptly as if another personality seized hold of her at these moments" (310).

Both Felice and Clare perform when they are outside the interior and the exterior play. They confront the world through their performance and the show they put together. In art, they find resolutions to real life situations. Felice and Clare want to go to Grossman's Market to meet the insurance agent and inform him about the status of their settlement after the death of their parent. To cope

with this situation, Felice and Clare have scripted and also rehearsed this meeting together. Felice suggests they should "enter with some air of assurance... like a pair of-" and Clare edits the script "prosperous paying customers?" Felice then rehearses what they intend to tell Mr. Grossman: "We are going to tell him convincingly that in spite of all spite and, and-contrary-accusations-Father's insurance policy will be paid to us by the Acme Insurance Company" (343). Later they start rehearsing the dialogue that they are planing to deliver at Mr. Grossman's office:

> Clare: (at a fast pace): We've been informed by the-
> Felice: Acme Insurance Company
> Clare: (at a fast pace): that the insurance money is-
> Felice: (at a fast pace) Forfeited (343).

Such an exchange between Felice and Clare is charged with theatricality and artificiality. Felice suggests the same strategy in order to get a hotel room for which they made no previous reservation. "I think I remember seeing a hotel across the plaza from the theater when we came from the station," Felice states. "We'll go there, we'll enter in such grand style that we'll need no reservation," he adds (361). Through putting on airs, pretenses, and performances, Felice and Clare try to handle their reality. Whether they are in the play or in the play within the play, or outside the theater scenarios, Felice and Clare are always performers playing whatever role the situation calls for. Even in the very moment when they think they are not performing, this moment of "improvisation," is part of their performance. The performance is their essence and the boundary they can not surpass and overcome.

Felice's and Clare's performativity is not similar to that of Blanche's in Streetcar. For Blanche, fiction is a substitute for reality, and it is only through art

that she can process and transform the reality where she lives. Shep Huntleigh is an illusion she has created for herself to feel loved and to make herself believe that there is always someone who loves her and cares about her enough to rescue her. In The Two-Character Play, fiction is not a substitute for reality. The reality is designed and patterned like a fiction, and it is within the boundaries of fiction that the reality exists. In The Two-Character Play fiction and reality are two closely connected entities, and each can disrupt the other without traits and traces of this disruption. For Blanche, performance is a mask; but for Felice and Clare, it is a reality. When Blanche's mask is dropped, we discover behind it the scars, the pain, and the distortion of the past. For Clare and Felice, the mask is so close to the face that it can hardly be dropped. And if it does drop, we may discover that there is nothing behind the mask. The game of the performance is all there is to the life of Felice and Clare. The mask is the very skin of the face, and only in the mask we see the face. The origins of this theme in Williams's plays, can be found in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Brick has to live with his masks and pretenses. The fragile veneer behind which he hides his relationship with Skipper, maneuvers his own space, and deals with his own alcoholism is part of his identity. The gay self is an amalgamation of masks and performances in Cat, as is Clare's and Felice's identity in The Two-Character Play. Williams, in both plays, is making the case that the theater is the metaphor that describes best the performative nature of the self and the amalgamation of masks and roles in which this self/identity is constructed. Brick, Felice, and Clare do not play roles that are strange to them, but they play and act themselves. The role and the self are not antithetical as much as they are inter-changeable. In a similar manner, the face and the mask are also inseparable. As Bigsby argues, the dramatic tension in

The Two-Character Play no longer comes "from the space which opens up between illusion and the real," as it did in Streetcar and Menagerie.[10] Instead, it is generated by the collage between the two, and the sense of confusion and disruption that this collage creates. Through deconstructing the boundaries between fiction and reality, role and self, and face and masks, Williams leaves his characters with an identity that is unstable, decentralized, and disoriented. It is a self with no location and no origin. Williams is not depicting a self in a state of disintegration, regression, or decline, he is rather dramatizing the condition in which this self exists. Felice, Clare, and Brick have to live with this condition. In The Two-Character Play, Williams is not a moralist who believes in the lapse of the self from an ideal state. He is more inclined to argue that this dislocation, disorientation, and disconnection are the very essence of the self that his characters have to bear

Through his deconstructive vision, Williams draws our attention to the unsettling, switching, and disrupted condition within which the self can exist, thus rendering any attempt at defining the self through stable and clear cut categories almost impossible. The only condition that can modify, and not define, our understanding of the self is its performativity. In accepting the performativity of the self, we can understand that the self is always in a constant state of flux and in a process of making and re-making that is never complete and final. "Identity," as noted "is not an object" that can be contained and pinned down into a single clear-cut definition; it is, rather, "a process which self-consciously strives towards, but never reaches, total intelligibility."[11] The self is "subject to internal contradictions which are never resolved and thus fails to become concretized or fixed."[12] The self reacts against definitions, limitations,

and narrow scopes. It is only through the notion of performativity that these "internal" contradictions are resolved, understood, and contained to be embraced and celebrated. Under performativity, these contradictions are not resolved by means of nullification, but rather by accepting them as integral and crucial components to our understanding of the self.

In the theater Williams has found a metaphor to convey the theatricality, the performativity, and the artificiality of a multi-layered self for it is on the stage of the theater that playwrights can demonstrate how mendacity is part of the truth, performativity is part of who we are, falsehood is enclosed within the matrix of our identity, and the separation between falsehood and truth is almost impossible. The theater is not just performances and entertainment; it is this, but also a comment on the fictitiousness, the theatricality, and the unreality of the real. Irma's statement at the end of Genet's The Balcony "You must now go home, where everything—you can be quite sure—will be even falser than here" (96) not only rings true, but reveals the extent to which the real is fictional and theatricality is another face of reality.

The theater and the play-within-the-play technique offer Williams the space to pose ontological questions about the nature of the self, its theatricality, and the connection between human beings and the roles they play. Williams is problematizing the relationship between the self and the roles it plays, and of course demonstrating that the distinction between the essential self and the roles it plays may not be that clear-cut. The play-within-the-play highlights a double vision, not so much a dichotomy of appearance and reality and illusion and truth, but rather a confluence of the two. This dramatic technique does not present the audience with a drama in the illusion of a reality, but in the illusion

of an illusion which points to the illusive nature of the real as well. Tom Wingfield succinctly expresses this idea in Menagerie when he says: "I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."[13] Unlike the characters in a realistic play who have to pretend that there is no gap between who they are and the roles they play, the characters in Williams's The Two-Character Play are "aware of their own theatricality."[14] Therefore, in a drama that refers to its own theatricality, the play-within-the-play makes it impossible for the audience to pretend that illusion and fiction are not pertinent to the real.[15]

In The Two-Character Play, the audience can not ignore that Clare and Felice are actors performing the roles of the actors Clare and Felice. Clare comments on Felice's hair: "why, it's almost as long as mine," and Felice responds: "you know I wear a wig for the role of Felice" (320). This moment in the play captures the ontological questions that Williams poses about the self and its relations to the roles it plays. The audience may lose any certainty about who the real Felice is and whether there is another Felice outside the roles he performs on the stage. Felice's comment points to the dual nature of the person on the stage: an actor playing a character who is an actor, or the "real" Felice taking the "role" of Felice. The only Felice the audience can have access to, however, is the performer Felice. Williams seems to argue that if we are to assume that there is an essential and central self to Felice, this self remains inaccessible; and we, as audience, remain at a simulation level as to Felice's real identity and essential self. We, as audience, have to take Felice's identity at (inter)face value, and accept the simulation of Felice as the real one, for both Felices are theatrical in essence. Felice becomes an image duplicated not into a mirror or a screen on the theatrical space, but into his own face. And the

duplication of faces becomes an infinite multiplication of faces and roles. As Bruce Wilshire argues "the self that appears behind the various social roles it performs is itself another performance. There is no substantial or atomic self behind the appearances."[16] Homan succinctly describes this state of confusion, deferral, and opaqueness when she maintains that it is through this theatricality that "we see how integral... the supposedly illusory world of theater is to the reality."[17] Martin Esslin supports Homan when he states: "all human interaction in the real world [is] based on 'role-playing,' conventionalised behavior, hence 'acting?'"[18]

More towards the end of his career, it becomes clearer that Williams believes in a disunited and divided view of the self. With this view, he is abolishing the idea of well-constructed plots, coherent characters, and linear structure in his plays. He is experimenting more with his concept of a decentralized subject and a multi-faceted selfhood. Williams's discourse about the self is no longer coherent and linear not only because he perceives the self as divided and polarized, but because he sees it as a multiplicity and fragmentation, of scattered particles, and shattered pieces that have never been incorporated into a coherent unified entity.

The ambiguity of the self is what fascinates Williams. Through believing that this ambiguity is an integral part of the self, Williams is accepting contradictions, opposites, and tensions as constituents of this self. His characters are torn between who they are and who they are not, between the image the others impose upon them and the image they want to design themselves. They are always in a state of disjunction and dislocation. In Pinter's The Caretaker, Williams admires this characteristic of allusiveness and ambiguity. He states:

"The play was about the thing that I've always pushed in my writing...If you write a character that isn't ambiguous you are writing a false character, not a true one."[19] Williams expresses his admiration of Harold Pinter and who he calls "the new wave of Playwrights" on the basis that their drama captures this ambiguity in human identity, and they have found the appropriate means to convey this multi-layered identity. "The whole attitude of this new wave of playwrights," he claims "is not to preach, you know. Not to be dogmatic, to be provocatively allusive. And I think that's much truer."[20] The only truth that human identity has is its ambiguity, allusiveness, and disharmony. The self in The Two-Character Play is a configuration of masks and a collage of different theatrical roles. It is a self that has given up its search for a reconciling symbol, and its need for coherence, unity, and harmony. It is a self that is in flux, with its loosely unified facets and its state of rupture.

This chaos and multiplicity prove to be frightening and discomforting at times for both Clare and Felice. They realize the rampant disorder around them and inside themselves, yet they try to impose order upon this disorder and find a sense of cohesion so that the fragmented memories of the past and their relevance to their present start to make sense. Clare's and Felice's quest for order is a quest for meaning in a world that seems to them fragmented, divided, and nonsensical. It is an attempt to establish order upon "the disordered images of a mind approaching collapse" (308). Clare expresses this longing desire for order and coherence when she exclaims to Felice: "No show!" Felice asks: "What then? - In your contrary opinion?" and Clare answers: "Restoration of--order!... Rational, rational" (313). Clare and Felice want to understand their traumatic past, come to terms with their father's suicide and their mother's death, and

break the cycle of isolation and estrangement that this past has imposed upon them, and find a way to cope with their fear of what the future may have in store for them. The play within the play becomes their coping mechanism. Out of the play within the play, they create a mirror to reflect an image of themselves so that they can see who they are, face their fears and anxieties, come to terms with their own psychological nakedness, and break the cycle of death and suicide in which they find themselves confined.

> Felice: Fear is a monster, vast as night-
> Clare: And shadow casting as the sun.
> Felice: It is quicksilver, quick a light-
> Clare: It slides beneath the down-pressed thumb
> Felice: Last night we locked it from the house.
> Clare: But caught a glimpse the house of it today.
> Felice: In a corner, like a mouse.
> Clare: Gnawing all four walls away (311).

In this exchange Clare and Felice talk about their fear and their dilemma, and recognize that even though, "last night [they] locked it from the house," they have to face it now because they "caught a glimpse of it today" (311). In their own performance, they are stripping away their own illusion to deal with their reality on its own terms. Art is not an escape for them; it is rather a self-reflective mirror that sends back to them their own reflection and their own self. In their performance, Clare and Felice do not create other characters, but they come to terms with their own characters. About the same passage quoted above, Francis Gillen argues that "the obvious use of rhyme and the rhythm of the music both suggest the attempt to assert control through art. Fear itself, spoken about and presented on stage, is fear already begun to be brought under control."[21]

In the play within the play, Clare and Felice are confrontational. The drama they act is a re-enactment of their past trauma. In spite of their broken

language, they are vocal about their mother's death and their father's suicide, and they are grappling with the possible reasons that might have pushed their father to such a vile act. Their own confinement is also a subject of debate. At a certain point in the play, Clare does not seem to be willing to deal with her own confinement. "You shouldn't have spoken that word!" Clare regrets, "'Confined!' That word is not in the-..." Determined to sort out this feeling of isolation and destitution, Felice reminds Clare that the only way for them to be out is to speak out, because silence has a monstrous snowball effect. "Oh. A prohibited word. When a word can't be used, when it's prohibited its silence increases its size. It gets larger and larger till it's so enormous that no house can hold it" (338). Clare, realizing the danger of her denial, and accepting the painful truth and the need to confront her reality, "smiles and forms the word 'confined' with her lips; then she says it in a whisper... *confined, confined*!" (339). Clare and Felice leave no room for pretenses and illusion. It is upon such a climatic moment of disillusionment that the first act closes.

Clare and Felice are crossing the safety zone and holding themselves accountable for who they are and where they are. They are trying to understand the "forces which shaped their identity and examine their own existence." The play within the play is not an escapist strategy. On the contrary, in their performance Clare and Felice are trying to rewrite their identity and thus own it not through fiction or illusion, but through having a grip on their own reality. Felice and Clare are grappling with the attempt to find a way to live in the present without necessarily forgetting the past or letting it infringe and impose its ugliness and grimness upon the present. Both siblings are involved in a

negotiation between a self defined by the past and a self that tries to possess itself.

From this perspective, Felice and Clare, in finding their own voice and constructing their own identity, are involved in a process of creation similar to that of the construction of a narrative. As Kim Worthington suggests: "In the act of conceptualizing one's selfhood, one writes a narrative of personal continuity through time. That is, in thinking myself, I remember myself: I draw together my multiple members--past and other subject positions--into a coherent narrative of selfhood which is more or less readable by myself and others."[22] To perceive the self as narrative implies that one should try to accept a multiplicity of interpretive frameworks and perceptions from which this self can be examined and understood. The meaning Felice and Clare are bestowing upon themselves can not nullify the multiplicity and the plurality of the self. Meaning by definition is always subject to a multiplicity of interpretations, revisions, and also misinterpretation: "The history one tells of one's self... is a narrative in which moments of the past achieve some kind of interconnection, even coherence."[23] Kim Worthington observes that "this meaning constituting narrative does not guarantee permanent fixity or access to the meaning or truth of the self, but it provides a more or less stable conceptual framework from which to begin to understand the present and anticipate the future."[24] The meaning that is constructed is not immune to gaps, omissions, and ellipses. Its basic validation is that it is an attempt by the self to contain and embody its own subject(ivity). Constructed in the same manner as a narrative, the self is always in flux. Defining the self as an act of creation and construction does not necessarily classify it under the category of fiction, if we deem fiction as untrue and

fallacious. The self is a fiction only in the sense that is "an active interpretive process."[25]

Though disturbed and threatened by the multiplicity of their selfhood, Clare and Felice never find it possible to forsake their multiplicity and reduce it to a one single role to play. The only belief in the "everlasting" that they can still hold is that no play has ever ended, and everything is constantly set in motion. Felice and Clare are longing for "a release from the burden of multiple roles," but "at the same time however, there is a fear of stability, of being 'confined'... to one role."[26] When Clare comments: "the part of Felice is not the only part that you play," Felice replies, "from now on, it might be" (320). Felice's comment remains ambivalent, and also irrelevant to the outcome of the play. Exhausted with her role-play, Clare demands an end to her performance, but the only place where she believes she can rest is a hotel room. The hotel room in Williams's plays is not a space of permanence and stability, but rather of temporality and transitions where the distinction between the private and the public is blurred, and where the individual experiences a certain kind of freedom and latitude without total detachment from the public. It is a space in-between that takes different colors and different shades. If the self is multiple, of different facets, and a variety of façades and an amalgamation of private longings and public roles, then it follows naturally that the hotel room, as a space of intersection, is the only space where this performative self can find a home. The hotel is the transitory setting that can contain a self in a state of flux and mark the displacement of a stable self in such an in-between space. Like the theater where the narrative of re-configuration and revision about the self is constructed, the hotel is always a space of re-configuration, transformation, and revision. Clare's and Felice's escape to a hotel

would offer them a change from one space to another, but would never set them free from the performativity of their own identity. Every space that Felice and Clare occupy, whether it is a theater or a hotel, is a place of performance. There is nothing outside the performance and no life outside the theater. The self can exist only through its performativity. "Our home is a theater," Felice observes (315). Theatricality is the only space where they can exist and their acting becomes analogous to their being.

The play's ending marks this impasse. Clare and Felice attempt to commit suicide by pulling the trigger of a gun in the same way as their father did, but they ultimately realize that outside the performance, there is only hollowness, nothingness, and death. To escape from the state of performativity is to fall into a state of meaninglessness. Their performance is the only context within which meaning can be constructed, created, or imagined. No ending is provided to the play or the play within the play. At the moment the play stops, it does not end for that same pause is a part of the performance, of scripted silence, and non-action. Suicide does not provide an outlet to Clare and Felice. Instead, they choose to continue the process of self-fashioning and self-designing. Theatricality is an impasse with no exit to another state of being.

The theatrical impasse in which Clare and Felice find themselves locked is not an annihilating and self-denying option. It is, rather, affirmative and assertive. By choosing to continue the performance and thus rejecting suicide, both Clare and Felice are starting to assume a more active role in designing their own identity and to distance themselves from any other factors that may prevent them from fashioning their own identity. By play's end, Clare and Felice become indistinguishable from their own drama. They are the actors and the writers of

their own script and the tale and the tellers of their own narrative. No source of verification of Clare's and Felice's story is available to the audience except their own. They are their own validators of a story that they only can tell. What is outside the subjective self is toned down and rendered obsolete in Williams's play. Instead, the subject is made the subject of its own. The theatrical space offers Clare and Felice the possibility to re-imagine and reconfigure their own identity without letting the past be the only factor to determine this identity. By not committing suicide, Felice and Clare are refusing to re-shape their destiny after that of their mother's and father's. They are breaking away from the re-enactment of the past and managing to find their own voice. The ending of The Two-Character Play marks the release of the two siblings from the ties and the forces of the past, which have added more to their fears, anxieties, and fright. As Ren Draya suggests:

> At least for now, they have faced and defeated their fear of death. They have courageously acknowledged their frightened heart but have not retreated in panic. At the play's end there's no sense of self-pity. Their outcry is the sound of their humanity, of their fears, of their final acceptance of life and self.[27]

The quality of this acceptance is questionable and remains always a matter of critical debate. However, it is important to mention that though "in both their faces is a tender admission of defeat" (370), their choice to live in spite of all the odds against their existence and their isolation is rather brave and commendable. Clare and Felice are not defeated by these odds, they do not accept them at face value, they are rather determined to face and challenge these odds. Felice and Clare have stripped away the illusion of an ideal and perfect life, and they have accepted these odds as part of what they have to deal with in their life. By play's

end, Clare and Felice have found consolation in each other, and they reach out to each other in an act of genuine care as they have never done before in the play. "They reach out their hands to one another," the final stage direction describes, "and the light lingers a moment on their hands lifting toward each other. As they slowly embrace... THE CURTAIN FALLS" (370). The outside world may be sordid and unwelcoming, but the journey Felice and Clare have taken together in The Two-Character Play has brought them together and they have seen in each other the reflection of their fears, their past, and their pain. By embracing each other, Clare and Felice demonstrate their ability to face their own psychological nakedness and accept themselves for who they are. Performativity is an impasse, but it is not a deadly one. With their valor and endurance, Clare and Felice have turned this impasse into a possible livable option. In spite of this affirmation, the ending of The Two-Character Play is not a happy one in the conventional sense. "[T]he gun of the abnormality of family insanity is apparently pointed at them, rendering them powerless to leave the house, the stage, or the theater."[28] Moreover, they are still locked within the thick walls of the theater, and deprived of any contact with the outside world. The fate of Felice and Clare remains fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity. What is to become out of them, and whether they will stick to this final resolution and reject the possibility of a suicide remain questions that only the future can unfold. Felice and Clare do not break away from their isolation and chaotic world, but through their art they manage to face the inevitable, tolerate the intolerable, and rewrite themselves. Art is not an escape in The Two-Character Play, but a means through which they can probe the darkest secrets of their past, and venture together on a journey of mutual understanding and self-realization. Without the audience to validate

their performance, Felice and Clare continue their performance playing the role of actors, audience, and playwrights who can validate their own performance.

The Theatrical Self and the Need for New Realism

In a play that explores the self as an unstable, changing, and theatrical entity, the notion of conventional realism has to be curbed and defamiliarized in order to fit with the non-linearity of this performative self that Williams is dramatizing in The Two-Character Play. As Saddik suggests:

> The Two-Character Play does not cater to the central illusions of realism, but rather stretches and transforms the boundaries of realistic conventions, playing with the notions of realistic space, consistent and logical character, (dis)closure, and the reestablishment of a dominant order. Williams 'teases' the audience with the expectation of the unfolding of a stable narrative core, yet each 'disclosure' reveals only more uncertainty.[29]

Early in his career, Williams questioned the value of realism in dramatic representation:

> The straight realistic play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes, its characters who speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.[30]

If the self is multiple as well as multi-faceted, then the two-dimensional and linear photographic realism can not reveal the essence of this self in all its three-dimensional complexity. Any photographic realism, according to Williams,

represents only two dimensions of this multiple self, i.e. appearance. The unconventional techniques which disturb and subvert the realistic representation are not without a function to fulfill. "All other unconventional techniques in drama," Williams claims, "have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to the truth."[31] Unrealistic representation of the truth is more realistic than conventional realism in representing the truth. This unconventional representation that Williams labeled as "expressionism" is not an escape from reality as Williams sees it. Williams's suspicion of traditional realism does not nullify the fact that he is a playwright who is dealing with reality in its manifold complexity. John Gassner proposes that Williams's realism is "poetic realism," and explains that "it edges over into *theatricalist realism* because he tends toward the symbolist school of writing, and whenever symbolism has to be given physical equivalents it becomes theatricalism."[32] Gassner's understanding of Williams's realism as a sort of "theatricalist realism" sheds more light on the way Williams perceives reality as theatrical and the self as performative.

Williams's "theatricalist realism" does not pretend to convince the audience that the representation they see dramatized on the stage is reality itself. It does not attempt to bridge the gap between the theatricality of the stage and the outside reality. Williams's "theatricalist realism" does not require the audience to collaborate in constructing the illusion that what they see on the stage is the reality they live every day. Instead, Williams's theatrical realism collides theatricalism and realism, and makes them the same entity of the same nature, i.e. a theatrical reality. This new equation that Williams poses highlights the artificiality of what we see on the stage to draw the audience to the conclusion that their reality is no less artificial than the theatrical representation

they see on the stage. In Williams's equation, the characters are of many faces, and multiple facets. Blanche is the Southern belle who married Allan Gray, but also the "infamous" woman of the Flamingo Hotel who flirts with the newspaper boy and sleeps with the young soldiers from her neighborhood. Blanche is what Stella knows her to be and what Stanley is insisting that she be. She is a collage of images constructed by Stella, Stanley, Mitch, and herself. We see Blanche only through the different roles she plays and the many costumes she wears for these roles. The same is true for Tom Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie. He is the head of the family who wants to keep it together, but he is also the man who can not deny his desire to escape. He tries to break away from his family, but through his memories he is attached to his sister Laura more than he thought he was. He is an actor, but also a narrator. He is the writer of his own play, and the director of his own script. The Glass Menagerie is a creation of Tennessee Williams, but Tom Wingfield shares with his creator his creation. Like Blanche, Clare, and Felice, Tom is a collage of roles and images, faces and facets, masks and façades. Behind such a representation of his characters is Williams's belief that

> sometimes the truth is more accessible when you ignore realism, because when you see things in a somewhat exaggerated form, you capture more of the true essence of life. The exaggeration gets closer to the essence. This essence of life is really very grotesque and gothic. To get to it you've got to do what may strike some people as distortion.[33]

Williams in both The Glass Menagerie and The Two-Character Play invites us to the cosideration that his characters' identities are a matter of subjective construction and a result of different roles--some of which they have picked up for themselves and some of which have been imposed upon them. The

theatricality of his characters is highlighted not to illustrate that theatricality and reality are unbridgeable, but to demonstrate that they are of the same nature for the reality is itself preformative. The entire world is a stage for Williams's characters. Brick, for instance, is giving his performance on the stage of the Morosco Theater, but every other incident is a performance on a different stage and with a different set. His conversation with Maggie is a performance, his conversations with Big Daddy are even more so, and every word he says and every step he makes is for a well-calculated theatrical effect. The entire world is a stage within the stage in the same way as most of Williams's plays are a play within the play. Streetcar, Menagerie, Cat, Suddenly Last Summer, and other plays carry the seeds of Williams's views about the reality and the self which ultimately are fully realized in The Two-Character Play.

The Author as Character: The Ultimate Layer of the Theatrical Self

Williams's deconstructive vision does not only blur the demarcation lines between reality and illusion, past and present, the self and role-play, and theatricality and reality, it also blurs the identifying lines between author and character. Saddik recognizes this self-reflexive dimension of the play and contends that "Williams' exposure of the instability of identity in terms of both 'character' and 'author' is yet another element in this work which blurs constructed boundaries and shatters illusions of wholeness."[34] Nicholas Pagan agrees that Williams's deconstructive vision also "renders problematic the straightforward existence of the author." Pagan further contends that: "The 'presence' of the author here or any where else in Williams's plays is a supposition or (superstition?) in need of rigorous examination."[35] In Williams's

The Two-Character Play, the author is a character. Felice is an actor but also a playwright, and it is the life of this playwright which is fictionalized on the stage. Clare states: "-sometimes you work on a play by inventing situations in life, that--correspond to those in the play, and you're so skillful at it that even I'm taken in..." [365]. The details of Felice's life are woven into the texture of his fiction and his own memories are selectively incorporated into his own drama. As in Sebastian's life in Suddenly Last Summer, the borderline between the life of the creator, Felice, and his own creation, The Two Character Play, becomes non-existent. Mrs. Venable observes:

> Sebastian was a poet! That's what I meant when I said his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and-vice versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can't separate them...[36]

Mrs. Venable's claim is also true for Clare and Felice, for Williams's other artist figures, and for Williams himself. Williams echoes Mrs. Venable's claim in many other circumstances, one of which is when he asserts in an interview in 1975 that "in [his] writing [he] always reveal[s] [himself]" and he adds: "my plays actually deal with me."[37] Thus Williams mingled his own voice with that of Mrs. Venable and that of Mark in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel who states that "an artist has to lay his life on the line."[38] Williams and all his artist characters are acting fictional versions of themselves. The autobiographical detail and the fictional text are in a state of collage not in an attempt to verify the validity of one at the expense of the other, but to question and subvert the significance of representation and reality, and to illustrate that the separation between the two is an impossible act of foolishness and intellectual arrogance. The reality and its representation thereof are of the same nature if not reciprocally identical.

Through blurring the demarcation line between author and character, Williams is re-examining the identity of the author and its construction in the same way as he does with his characters in his drama. The identity of the author or the artist is performative as well. Indeed, if there is an artist who is capable of deconstructing this borderline between the fictionalization of a character and the historical reality of the author, this artist has to be Tennessee Williams who bears the stamp of a name that hinges more on the borders of fiction than on that of the reality.

In writing, Williams has found a space where he can create his own identity and reconstruct his own image to tailor it to what he wants it to be rather than to cater to what the others expect from him. To Williams, writing is what the theatrical space is to his own characters. In the same way as Felice and Clare find in the interior play a way to look inside themselves, sort out who they are, come to terms with their tragic past, Williams found in writing a way of redesigning his own image. In all his plays from Menagerie to Streetcar, Cat, Orpheus, The Two-Character Play, and others, Williams is fully occupied writing Tom, the artist, and turning real life situations into pieces of fiction and drama to be staged and theatricalized. In writing Williams discovered the powers of a transformative imagination that is capable of rendering a more real image of the self than reality itself. Michel Foucault comments in one of his interviews on this transformational power of the imagination that is deeply engrained in the creative process. "You see" Foucault claims,

> That's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That's the reason also why, when people say, 'well, you thought this a few years

> ago and now you say something else,' my answer is... (Laughing) 'Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?[39]

Williams could not have agreed more with Foucault's claim, for he saw his work as so personal that it is almost impossible to separate the creator from his own creation. The value of art is self-transformational—and in this transformation, one is led to (re)discover all the multi-sidedness of his/her identity and acquire a more comprehensive understanding of these seemingly nonsensical tensions and violent contradictions. It is between these tensions and contradictions that the complexity and perhaps the uniqueness of the human psyche/identity lies. Williams would have accepted Foucault's claim unconditionally that "this transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is... something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?"[40] Williams echoes Foucault's statement when he insists that he writes for his own needs: "I have always written for deeper necessities than the term 'professional' implies, and I think that this has sometimes been to the detriment of my career. But more of the time to its advantage."[41] Such personal needs have been to the "detriment" of his career because the critics have mistaken Williams's self-transformation and self-discovery for self-indulgence and lack of professionalism.

Williams started his career in the theater because of the many promises he saw on the stage. Often he states that he didn't become the poet that he wanted to be because it is only in the theater that he could find an outlet for his own voice and a safe haven in which he could recreate himself. Williams states that he "discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which [he] felt

acutely uncomfortable...[Writing was his] place of retreat, [his] cave, [his] refuge."[42] Writing opened up a space and a new horizon for Williams where he could resolve the conflicting tensions of his personality and bring together his own multiple voices and images with greater coherence. The private Tom is torn between the nature of his own desire and the conventional exigencies of his family and others of his public life. Tennessee Williams, the image of the conflicting Tom, aims at consolidating these tensions, but in doing so, he ended up by highlighting these tensions and placing them under the scrutiny of the public eye. Again, the image is that of a mirror reflecting another image in another mirror, and the reflections are not more or less genuine than the original artifact that is being reflected upon them. In his essay "On a Streetcar Named Success," Williams describes himself and his public personae as "a fiction created with mirrors and that the only somebody worth being is the solitary and unseen you that existed from your first breath..."[43] The theater gave Williams the space to refashion his identity and re-shape his private self into more theatrical public and performative personae. However, the new artifact of Tennessee Williams that Tom created out of himself does not reveal less tension and less anxiety than the introverted, secluded, and isolated Tom.

In the theater, Williams saw the promise of a community that provided an essence and stronger bond than the actual community into which he had been born i.e. his family and his society. In the theater, Williams sought a community that could be based upon more honesty, understanding, and compassion. Williams sees himself "as having a highly personal, even intimate relationship with people who go to see plays." "I still find it somehow easier," he claims "to level with crowds of strangers in the hushed twilight of orchestra and balcony

sections of theaters than with individuals across a table from me. Their being strangers somehow makes them more familiar and more approachable, easier to talk to."[44] The audience of the theater is Williams's surrogate family with which he can share himself honestly and unconditionally. Jack Wallace succinctly describes the importance of the theater to Williams in this respect. Wallace writes that for Williams "theater is essentially popular and cathartic; its aim is to entertain--literally to hold the audience together by stimulating and purging hostility, and by healing, for a few hours at least, the wound of isolation."[45] The theater brings the audience together in a moment of honesty and truth. In the closed space of the theater, they share understanding and are invited to offer sympathy and compassion to those who are on the brink of collapse—a sympathy and compassion that they may find difficult to experience and express in the rush of everyday life. The theater creates for them a vicarious situation close to the one they experience in everyday life, but from which they can find ways to disown and distance themselves. The theater brings the audience back to itself not only through confronting themselves, but also through finding companionship in the most unlikely places to be found, i.e. in the presence of strangers. The playwright is seeking to reach out to the darkest side of human nature and shed more light on this darkness so that the audience may recognize this same darkness inside themselves and acknowledge it as part of who they are. On the stage of the theater we can recognize our own theatricality, and in the performance we can see our own performativity. "Our hearts are wrung by recognition and pity; so that the dusky shell of the auditorium where we are gathered anonymously together is flooded with an almost liquid warmth of unchecked human sympathies, relieved of self-consciousness, allowed to

function..."[46] The playwright seeks to remove the thin veneer of propriety that people uphold, and he is inviting them to launch themselves on a journey of self-discovery. "The theater has made in our time its greatest artistic advance through the unlocking and lighting up and ventilation of the closets, attics, and basements of human behavior and experience," Williams claims.[47] The movement of Williams's art is towards the inside and the very inwardness of the individual. It aims at probing and exposing, at reading and understanding in order for people to be able to accept their own image and reshape this image not according to what it is doomed to be, but rather according to what it is longing to be.

The self that Williams wants to construct is a self liberated from the limitations of society and the restraints of time, i.e. a self outside its own history. In the transformative power of the imagination Williams has explored his longing for a timeless world that the theater and acting can secure for him. Time, for Williams, is infinite. It is the now and the indefinite then, the past and the present and what is yet to come. In 1950, he wrote, "a character in a play [is] immuned against the corrupting rush of time."[48] Through art, Williams is hoping that the artist, the character, and the audience can exist outside time if only during the very limited and fleeting hours of the performance. The time of the performance becomes another temporal space where the audience and the artist alike can re-define their identity and reshape themselves in a manner that transcends "the corrupting rush of time."[49]

In escaping the rush of time, Williams is making the case for a self that can defy its own death and demise. Williams's dilemma as artist is an existential ontological one: If death is defeating and devaluates human existence, then what

is the point of human existence in the first place? In art Williams has found an affirmative answer: "An artist will never die or go mad while he is engaged in a piece of work that is very important to him."[50] Through art, the artist can challenge and even defeat death. Nicholas Pagan comments on Williams's prolific writing: "Williams's constant rewriting is a relentless attempt to delay this moment of dispossession."[51] Jacques Derrida describes the pain and the alienation that "this moment of dispossession" causes an author. It is a moment of anxiety and anguish; and paradoxically enough, a moment both of completion and of demise and dispossession. For Derrida, when an author signs his work, he is breaking the bond/ties that have contributed to this creation. He is undoing the intimacy between himself as a creator and his own creation. The act of signing is a moment of dispossession and dislocation. "When I sign," Derrida claims, "I am already dead [I am D.J. dead][52]. I hardly have the time to sign then I am already dead... I have to abridge the writing, hence the siglum, because the structure of the 'signature' event carries my death in that event."[53] Williams's prolific writing and his revisions of his plays even after they are published, and the transformation of poems and short stories into plays and sometimes even into more than one version of the same play, is an (un)conscious attempt to delay that moment of dispossession. It is a way to combat and defeat death. In spite of his limited critical and popular success after The Night of the Iguana, Williams kept on writing partly to sustain his reputation as a major playwright, but partly to escape the restraints of time and death, and thus to immortalize the moment of creation. It is through its performance on the theatrical stage and through the different roles it has to play that the self can exist. Only when the performance is

over and the tappings of the typewriter stop does the self cease to exist. The theater is a raison d'être for Williams.

In writing Williams found a safe space for freedom and self-expression. Sex(uality) offered him the same consolation. To him, writing and sex were both life-affirming as well as confirmations of his own identity and sexual desire. In a letter to Donald Windham dated September 20th, 1943, Williams wrote:

> There are only two times in this world when I am happy and selfless and pure. One is when I jack off on paper and the other when I empty all the fretfulness of desire on a young male body. There must be a third occasion for happiness in the world.[54]

Writing to Williams is no less a liberating romantic venture than the sexual act. In fact, he describes writing in explicit sexual terms, for he sees the creative act as an assertion and affirmation of desire and identity. Writing is "like a love affair. It goes on and on and doesn't end in marriage. It's all courtship."[55] Both writing and sex are an affirmation of the subjectivity and the individuality of the subject. Through them, the individual is who s/he is, and the entirety of the social, conventional, and normative baggage is rendered obsolete. Hence, the purity, the happiness, and the selflessness that Williams experiences. His affirmation of his sexuality and desire is an abandonment of social control and conventional rationality. Once this rationality and control are abandoned, then the individual is left with more space for a freer and more subjective expression.

Williams's dream of constructing a self that can exist outside the normative social conventions and outside its own history did not come true. The surrogate community of the theater within which such a self can exist proved to be just another imagined community no less illusory than the society and family

communities from which Williams tried to escape. Williams's disillusionment about the theater as a community is clear in The Two-Character Play. The audience is described in terms that depict not only its insensitivity, but also its lack of compassion for and understanding of the artist. Clare, in fact, describes the audience in very unfavorable terms. "Do they seem to be human?" she asks Felice. Then she calls them "idiots," (358), "enemy forces" (317), and "curious trespassers!" (335). Clare blames the audience for not being able to yield to the artist. They "don't get lost in a play!" They are "fur-bearing mammals" who are "furious, unfed apes" (320). When Felice tries to call the director of their performing company, Clare suggests that "perhaps the audience caught him and fed him to their dog teams--" (359). The animal imagery with which the audience is associated calls attention to its cruelty, savagery, and grotesqueness. Clare and Felice are seeking understanding from the audience, but this understanding is yet to be found. Clare has become a subject of the audience's mockery, which has rendered the relationship between the audience and the artist antagonistic and confrontational. According to the stage directions, "[Clare] freezes. There are several guttural exclamations from the house: above them, a hoarse male laugh and the shrill laugh of a woman." And Clare responds to this mockery: "She suddenly flings her cloak to the floor as if challenging the audience to combat." On this note of hatred, antagonism, and confrontation, Felice announces that "the performance commences!" (325).

At the end of the inner play, the audience deserted Clare and Felice, and therefore, they have prevented the performance from having any meaning and significance. The audience did not connect with Clare and Felice, and while the two performers were lost in the play, the audience "weren't, so they left" (357).

The theater is no longer the temple of common understanding, sympathy, and compassion that Williams deemed it to be. Instead, it has become a place of isolation and alienation no better than the society where the artist lives. Loneliness is the state of being for the artist: "but to be an artist is to be essentially lonely. To be passionate and lonely isn't the easiest of things in the world," Williams claims.[56] With this moment of abandonment, the artist has to face confusion, doubts, and uncertainty. Francis Gillen observes that the "playwright, too, is trapped within himself, never knowing if the reality that he perceives is ever understood by anyone, and hence doubting its reality and perhaps his own."[57] The theater has turned into a prison where the characters and the playwright alike are locked within their own performance and left with no connection to the outside world. In the theater, the artist can never be a complete individual as Williams had hoped to become. He is dependent on the audience to define him and to sustain this definition. In The Two-Character Play, Williams seems to have reached the conclusion that the artist is always contained within the image that the audience and the critics have carved out for him. J.L Styan wrote about the reliance of the playwright on the audience for meaning and order. The "miracle of theater," he states, "is that a community, an audience, has agreed to let drama happen."[58] Without the audience, drama turns into an absurd act drained of meaning and importance. The playwright makes an unspoken commitment with the audience which requires the collaboration of both to make sense out of what the playwright is presenting to them. If this commitment is broken, the communication between the playwright and the audience will collapse, and the order and coherence the playwright has tried to present to his audience will turn into chaos. Such a collapse marks the end of the

performance as well as the demise of the artist. The Two-Character Play dramatizes the dependence of the artist upon an audience, and suggests that the audience is a necessary part of the creative experience and the identity of the artist himself is always under the scrutiny of this audience waiting for their validation and legitimation. The freedom of the artist can never be complete. It is codified and dependent on what the audience is willing to accept and to reject. Thomas Adler comments on Williams's growing resentment of this ultimate dependence from which he could not escape. Williams himself, Adler writes "is well aware of this need of communicating with an audience for the act of artistic creation [and the artist himself] to be complete."[59] He continues "Williams can never prove to be an entity of his own for the artist's self-identity depend[s] upon being heard by others."[60]

Towards the end of his career, Williams started to realize that he was caught in the image of Tennessee Williams that he created out of Tom Williams. The two roles were in constant conflict, and the duality in these roles was perhaps the source of Williams's suspicions and paranoia. In fact, as early as 1958, he admitted to Mike Wallace his discomfort with this duality. When Wallace asked Williams:

> You've also told me...that for a long time, you were a lonely man and rather afraid of friendship,

Williams responded:

> Not afraid of it, but suspicious of it. I'm never certain whether they're liking Tom Williams or Tennessee Williams, you know... and I deeply resent the fact that becoming a prominent playwright has made me like that.[61]

As his response clarifies, Tom Williams is lost and contained in the public role of Tennessee Williams. The line is blurred between both entities and the multiplicity of the roles. The fictitiousness of the public artifact Tennessee Williams has totally engulfed and devoured the reality of Tom Williams. Similarly to Felice and Clare who do not know where their life begins and where their role playing ends, Williams has also fallen victim of his own fiction and his own artistic genius. The author has become a character of his own creation. Williams even starts to resent and defy the image the public has created of him with his own collaboration.

Williams was growing more and more resentful of his play The Glass Menagerie--a play which contributed much to the creation of the artifact Tennessee Williams. In 1965, Williams expressed publicly his feeling of resentment towards The Glass Menagerie because it placed him within a frame of an image that was making him uncomfortable. "You should remember that you're always competing with your earlier work," he tells John Gruen. Williams adds: "In my particular case, they all say, 'Oh, that Glass Menagerie!' Until you almost begin to hate it! Because you know you have been working fiercely all the time since. And it's not quite possible to believe that you haven't created something since then."[62] Williams's frustration stems from the fact that the public and the critics were not capable of understanding the multiplicity of styles and the variations of characters with which he tried to endow the American stage. Not only is Tennessee Williams in constant clash with Tom Williams, but even this public artifact of Tennessee Williams is further fragmented and divided into the Tennessee Williams of The Glass Menagerie and the post-Iguana Tennessee Williams.

Williams remained a fragmented artist as art and theater failed to provide him with the sense of completion and totality he was hoping. Throughout his entire career, Williams dramatized the sense of completion of the artist. Williams's artist characters are all involved in this quest for wholeness and completion. However, they never achieve this aim. Blanche through her own theatricality can not write her own script, and she ends up subjected to the ending that Stanley, with the collaboration of Stella, write for her. Brick's theatricality leads to more ambivalent outcomes. He never gives up his masquarding and if he seems to accept the role that Maggie has assigned him at play's end, it is because he sees in this role a stretch over the one he is already playing. Val's destiny is no less tragic than that of Blanche. His guitar and his music do not take him farther than Two-River County where he meets his own demise. While Sebastian dies without completing his poem in Suddenly Last Summer, Nonno in The Night of the Iguana die immediately after finishing his poem. In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Mark can not paint anymore because his paintings have become too personal, and as a result, he can not separate himself from his own art. In other words, Mark becomes an entity of his own creation; and when his art can not sustain the life of this entity, it all ceases to exist. Paradoxically enough, the climactic moment when the artist achieves harmony with his own art marks the very moment when the artist starts to live depending on this life-sustaining artifact we call art. Once the artistic expression becomes impossible, the artist discovers that he has been dependent on this artifact, and it is almost impossible to be an entity of his own again. Williams suggests that writing is no longer life-sustaining, but it is, rather, a painful and draining life-taking process. He reveals his ambivalence towards art and writing: "Writing for

me is a continual see-saw between rapture and despair which leaves me so exhausted, nervously and physically, that I actually believe each play reduces my life expectancy by several years."[63] Writing, which for Williams was a romantic venture of self-discovery and a safe haven for a more assertive and affirmative identity, ended up, for him, as more of an enclosed space of exhaustion and despair.

Williams's disillusionment with the function of art in his life and with his own image as an artist is not a product of his later career. Disillusionment is deeply rooted in his early plays. However, his Broadway success kept his disillusionment under the surface of glamor, fame, and the financial security that this success brought him. When we compare Williams's fiction to his drama, we realize that Williams did not find in the theater the level of truthfulness, honesty, and understanding that he was seeking. For instance, the short story that was later transformed into The Glass Menagerie is more honest in its portrayal of its narrator than The Glass Menagerie. The narrator of "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" is more frank and more open than his counterpart Tom of the dramatic version. The homosexual dimension in the narrator's portrayal, even though it is just hinted at in the short story, is totally eliminated from the dramatic script or placed under layers and layers of evasion and avoidance. The Glass Menagerie brought Williams success and recognition, but it also highlighted the limitations and the restraints of the illusory, if not evasive, nature of theatrical representation. The theater is representational and therefore by definition, it is illusory, removed, dislocated, and inaccurate in its representation. What Williams is presenting to his audience is always a copy removed from its original, a copy with faded colors, shrinking dimensions, and toned-down

volume. Williams uses the image of the "ghost" to describe the illusive representational nature of the theater. In 1960, in his note to Clothes for Summer Hotel: A Ghost Play, Williams states that "all plays are ghost plays, since players are not actually whom they play."[64] The actor on the stage is a representational sign representing an image of what s/he is and what s/he is not. Actors are signifiers with no accurate correlation and direct relation with the signified, i.e. the character he is playing. He is a part of a representational system that is loose, incoherent, and totally incongruent. Not only does Williams see the theater and the actors as "ghost" representations, but he also sees himself in the same terms. In 1977, in a New York Times article, Williams complained that he was "widely regarded as the ghost of a writer--remembered most for works which were staged between 1944 and 1961."[65] The author, Williams, is himself an actor who is not actually whom he plays. The author himself is caught in the same illusive system of representational theatricality. Williams is a shadow of a shadow, and a copy of an image that he can never be.

In the audience, Williams has sought companionship, but in the public dimension of drama, he found a thick wall of barriers and isolation. The theater that Williams hoped would shed light on the attics, the basements, and the closets of the human existence turned into an "attic" itself. Williams states:

> I feel strangely remote from everything--insulated--cut off from the mainstream. Home--the attic--the literary life--the creative trance-it makes you feel like you have practically stopped living for a while. I want life and love again--and a swift flow of significant experiences.[66]

The theater is the ultimate closet for Williams; and the masks and the façades are part of the face of the author who has become a character in his own plays. The

playwright, to borrow an image from Derrida, can write only "derriere le rideau," i.e. behind the curtain.[67] The theater does not dispell the darkness of Williams's closet; on the contrary, it adds an extra dimension to it. It is a closet with an audience who can express love and admiration for the playwright, but little do they know that the author they are admiring and applauding is a copy of an original they do not know, and can not have access to. The story of Williams's career of success and failure is a story of erasure and effacement, a story of self-annihilation rather than one of self-assertion and affirmation. Williams's later failure on Broadway can not necessarily be attributed to his lack of talent and literary capability so much, but to his decision to tear down the walls of the closet that were suffocating him. The audience and the literary critics were not willing to deal with Williams's disclosure about who he really was. It was easier for them to grant their love and admiration to a fragmented Williams rather than to an honest Tom. The truth proved equally painful to Williams's family and to the strangers whose love and acceptance he sought. The theater, in the same way as the outside world, is a world of mendacity, of pretenses and role-playing. It is in this world that Williams found the metaphor that best reflects and embodies the mendacity and the pretenses of the real world. Brick's statement "mendacity is a system we live in" rings true on more than one level.[68] Williams knew that when the critics refered to him as the greatest American playwright, they were indeed referring to a small fragment of who Tom Williams was.

In 1973, Williams claimed that the "reviewers were intolerant of [his] attempt to write in a freer way."[69] He then went on to explain his frustration with the way the public and the critics perceived him: "They want to try to judge you on traditional form when you're trying to move to something freer, like

presentational theater... "[70] Williams is not free in the theater. On the contrary, he is stifled and his voice is rejected by the critics and the audience alike. Williams's early plays such as The Glass Menagerie, Streetcar, Cat, and others in which he sought his own free space, turned into his own prison. Clare and Felice are caught in the middle of their interior play, and locked within the thick walls of the theater that has become their own prison. Like Clare and Felice, Williams is also a prisoner to his own plays, to the success they brought him, and to the public personae they bestowed upon him. Through The Two-Character Play, Williams was able to engage in a dialogue about his own plays, his past, and his own identity not just as an author, but also as a character staging his own drama. In this figure of the artist character, Williams is dramatizing his own life and his own personae of a playwright who is locked in his own art and in the classics that he put on the American stage.

The image of the prison and confined spaces is a recurring motif in Williams's plays. From Not About Nightingale which takes place in a prison on an island from which there is no escape to The Two-Character Play where the theater itself has become a prison, Williams is commenting upon the fate of the individual who is destined to remain lonely and incomplete. The loneliness and incompletion are dramatized in The Two-Character Play as this exchange between Clare and Felice reveals:

> Clare: [like a child]: When are we going home?
> Felice: -- Clare, our home is a theater anywhere that there is one.
> Clare: If this theater is home, I'd burn it down over my head to be warm a few minutes... (315).

Clare can not find the comfort and familiarity of a home in the theater. It is a space from which she wants to break away and escape. The unfamiliarity of the theater is further intensified by the fact that the theater is located in "an unspecified locality" called "New Bethesda," and isolated from the rest of the world since the phone has been disconnected. The stairs in the theater lead to nowhere, all the doors are locked and every possibility of escape is rendered null. The theater is lit with the "benign light of a late summer afternoon," and "a dusky violet light deepening almost to blackness at its upstage limits" (308). In the middle of this theater is a "statue of a giant, pedestaled, which has a sinister look" (308). Obviously, this is not the theater Williams envisioned earlier in his career as a sanctuary offering light and comfort, warmth and understanding, and compassion and love.

The theater in which Clare and Felice find themselves locked is a theater of darkness and gloom. Felice informs the audience that "the house [the theater] is so old, so faded... seems to be whispering to me: 'You can't go away. Give up. Come in and stay.' Such a gentle command! What do I do? Naturally I obey" (353). There is no life to Clare and Felice outside the theater and outside the performance. Clare's and Felice's exchange about the confining nature of the theater reveals Williams's disillusionment with and ambivalence toward art and his growing despair about the relief the theater can offer:

> Clare: ...So it's a prison, this last theater of ours?
> Felice: it would seem to be one
> Clare: I've always suspected that theaters are prisons for players...
> Felice: Finally, yes. And for writers of plays... (364).

Such an exchange reinforces Felice's early realization that "the house has turned to a prison" [354]. Kalm's conclusion that "the theater has been [for Williams] the agency for freedom, both personal and artistic, but, as he discovered, and as the entrapped Felice and Clare symbolize, it can also be a prison" is an astute understanding of Williams's disillusionment with the theater.[71]

A Self Caught between the Word and the World.

The alienating effect of the theatrical representation is further deepened in the very medium that the artist and the playwright use to communicate with the audience, i.e. language. With The Night of the Iguana, Williams admitted his skepticism about the ability of language to communicate and to reveal. In 1962 Williams stated his new vision about language and the role it should play in his own drama. In an 1962 interview with John E. Booth about The Night of the Iguana, Williams stated:

> I suddenly saw the light--that there were enough long speeches, which is my specialty, unfortunately... I realized there was too much talk. I mean there were speeches of five lines where half a line could have done it. Right now I am engaged in trying to say--trying to express a play more in terms of actions. Not in terms of physical action; I mean, in a sort of gun-fire dialogue instead of the long speeches that I've always relied on before. Let me say that I depended too much on language--on words.[72]

Williams is seeking his own liberation from language now. He is realizing that human nature is more complex and ambiguous than can be revealed in a clear-cut fashion. Only allusiveness can reveal this ambiguity and can portray the self in its complexity and multiplicity.

The Two-Character Play reflects Williams's skepticism about language and underscores his new vision about language and communication. It is a play that explores the tragedy of limitations imposed by language, and as Lyle Leverich suggests, "the tragic failure to communicate one's true feelings not only to others but also to oneself in an interior dialogue."[73] Language does not bring the self in tune with itself. The self instead remains "the other" to itself. The Two-Character Play is the play of disfigured aesthetics, broken sentences, and incomplete dialogue. Such disfiguration, brokenness, and incompletion speak for the characters' disfiguration and impossibility of knowing themselves for who they are. It is a confused language of a confused self, and an aborted meaning of an erased identity. It is a language that "serves to indicate the impossibility of containing or rationalizing the interior life of the self," and the distortion and fragmentation of this self.[74] The ellipses, the pauses, and the exclamations present in Cat are also prevalent in The Two-Character Play. Brick can not tell his story and remove the veils, and neither can Felice nor Clare. They have to cut their sentences short when they feel the rush and the imminence of the moment of revelation. They hold themselves back when their own truth starts to bring pressure on them to be told and revealed. The following exchange between Clare and Felice highlights their incapability to face their destiny through their language. Their dialogue is that of limitations, pauses, and erasures.

> Clare: You shouldn't have spoken the word! "Confined"!
> Felice: Oh. Prohibited word...
> Clare: Then say the word, over and over, you-- *perverse, monster,* you! Scared to? Afraid of a-
> Felice: I wouldn't do lunatic things. I have to try to pretend there's some sanity here.

> Clare: Oh, is that what you're trying? I thought you were trying to go as far off as possible without going past all limits...
> *Confined, confined!*
> *He thrusts the pillow over her mouth... she struggles as if suffocating...* [339].

In Clare's and Felice's exchange words and sentences are erased. Clare accuses Felice of being "scared" and "afraid," but she never states explicitly what he may be afraid of. Meaning is never stated, always implied. It is only during the course of the play that we learn that the past is the source of their fear and discomfort. Moreover, because of this erasure, words mean more than what they usually mean. The word "confined," for example, is highlighted in quotation marks, and is left up to the audience to construct the meaning of "confined," since they are left in a state of quandary regarding the reasons for this confinement. Felice and Clare can not unlock their secrets to each other and to the audience. They can not pass the limitations of language and the restraints of their dialogue. Clare remarks: "I thought you were trying to go as far off as possible without going past all limits..." However, this dialogue exchange between them shows that they can not go that far and the limitations of language are stronger than what they think. Afraid that Clare may say more, and unready to hear and reveal more about their truth, Felice "thrusts the pillow over [Clare's] mouth... she struggles as if suffocating..." (339). Felice is trying to obstruct and obfuscate the truth and the revelation that is about to come from Clare. Hence Clare's fear "my voice is going!" does not mean exclusively that Clare is literally losing her voice, but also implies her incapability to confide in and console Felice and the audience alike.

Clare's and Felice's failure to extend their dialogue to the limits of truth and honesty does not necessarily stem from their unwillingness or unreadiness to do so for this failure is inherent in language itself. Language does not reveal; it rather interprets. And in interpreting, it changes and distorts like a distorted glass that stands between the interlocutors. When the play opens, we see Felice "slowly, reflectively, writing" (309). Felice is consciously trying to pin down language to the meaning he wants to communicate to the audience. He is struggling with the unstable, unfixed, and representational nature of language. He wants to stop time for an hour and a half to tell the audience about his own and his sister's fear, but time will not stop for him, and language will not offer him the opportunity to create a tableau for his audience out of his fear and anxiety. The instability of language is defeating. It fails the artist because the picture he beholds in his imagination is never close to the picture audience may hold in their eyes. The voice the artist conveys to the audience resonates in a processed and distorted version of what it was. Language does not belong solely to the artist, "the signifier belongs to everybody," as Barthes reminds us.[75] Therefore, meaning is never exact; it is always a matter of speculation, inference, and differance. The message is never exact and truthful to what it describes. It is communicated with shades and shadows, illusions and implications, and disputes and debates between the artist and the audience. The word and the world never correlate and coincide. There is no immediacy to the message, it is always delayed and postponed. By the time it reaches the audience, the voice of the artist might have already been transformed into an echo, shattered and divided, which marks the destruction of a self that is yet to be made. The self is

never fulfilled, it is always conveyed in a multiplicity of conveyances. Language through which the self is asserted is also the very means of its destruction.

The self to which we can have access through language is, therefore, a linguistic representation. It is a series of images. As J. Fichte avers: "I nowhere know of any being, not even my own. There is no being. I myself know nothing and am nothing. There are only images: they are the only thing which exist, and they know of themselves in the manner of images... I myself am one of those images; indeed, I am not even this but only a confused image of images."[76] The self is reduced to a reflection on a screen or in a mirror. It is a virtual representation of lines, shapes, and surfaces with no depth and nothing beyond the reflection. We are back to the image of a mirror reflecting other images reflected in other mirrors, and the ultimate observation is that of confusion, decentralization, and loss of authenticity. The conclusion one can draw is that the nature of the self follows that of the medium in which it is conveyed. Language is elusive, ever shifting, referential, and endlessly flowing; and so is the self. In this linguistic system, the self can be identified only in close approximation.

In the course of the play, Felice observes metaphorically: "that's the interpreter," and Clare responds with disappointment, surprise, and exclamation: "Oh, my God, he's telling them what we're saying!?" (334). Clare's astonishment expresses the linguistic ontological dilemma that I traced previously. She is afraid that her message will never reach the audience the way she meant it; and if it does, she fears that this message will be distorted, defaced, and dislocated. Clare is aware that language is an open-ended interpretative system which renders impossible the task of pinning down the meaning of her play, or the true interpretation she is offering the audience. Through this

interpreter, Clare's and Felice's message is losing some of its meaning and immediacy. The audience will never know who Clare and Felice are. They will know only the approximate representational image of them that the interpreter is constructing for both of them. The "I" of Clare and Felice becomes a linguistic construct. As Derrida admits: "What is called the speaking subject is no longer the person himself, or the person alone, who speaks. The speaking subject discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin that is always already eluded... on the basis of an organized field of speech."[77] It is this secondarity and differance which scare Clare. The interpreter has no physical presence on the stage. It is the very language of the artist that is interpreting and thus distorting. Clare and Felice are defeated not by their unwillingness to reveal themselves, but by the games of language and meaning. Their dilemma is not personal as much as it is ontological and universal. There is no honesty and truthfulness to the truth anymore. If the truth is mendacious for Big Daddy and Brick in Cat, it is "sick, sick--aberrations!" for Felice, as he describes it in The Two-Character Play (315).

Felice and Clare are caught in the repetitive cycle of language in the same way they are trapped within the play and the performative nature of their identity and selfhood. Felice screams to Clare: "stop repeating, repeating!" (327) and "his outcry could be seen as a plea for release from the language... that traps him."[78] Felice's outcry is a comment on the enslaving nature of language, a language that locks our minds and bodies in a pre-set system of signifiers and signifieds set for us prior to our existence. Ironically, in this pre-set and socially-constructed system the individuals have to seek their own freedom and find their own idiosyncratic voice.

Some modern twentieth century thinkers and philosophers have explained and shed more light on this dilemma that individuals have to face. Their conclusions illustrate that language can not be the medium through which the individual can speak out his individuality because it is the language of the other. Roland Barthes writes: "the language I speak *within my self* is not of my time; it is prey, by nature, to ideological suspicion."[79] Derrida could not have agreed more. Explaining his frustration at the ideological embodiment inherent in language and in artistic expression, Derrida claims: "as soon as I speak, the words I have found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to me..."[80] Language and words are imposed upon the individual. They are tarnished with a long history of ideological abuse and tyranny. Hence, the self-expression of the individual and the artist can not help being contaminated by this history and tarnished by shades and meanings from which they can not purify this language. The language we speak does not carry our own voice, but that of society and others. In this view, there is no possibility of a private language and even the most intimate voice that we hear from ourselves is not necessarily recognizable as our own. Individuals are mutilated and victimized even by the very language they speak. Individuals are subdued by the tyranny of language "dismembered, dis-remembered, disintegrated," in Gilbert's and Gubar's terms.[81] If we are seeking a pure "I" this search is in vain. We are embedded in "the other," and "the other" is embedded in us. "I'm this, that and the other," Williams claims.[82]

The ontological trauma of the individual is that this language is the source and the limit of the individual's self-awareness. As Emile Benveniste states: "It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in its reality which is

that of the being."[83] The self is deeply implicated in language to the point that this self does probably turn to a purely linguistic construct and becomes a linguistic narrative. Lacan also depicts the self/subject as an artifact that is invented in and by the linguistic and social structures which are located outside the individual himself. Thus, for Lacan, the subject/self is without a center; and if it does have a center, this center does not exist within the self, but within the very social and ideological forces outside the self. In Écrit, Lacan expresses this view succinctly when he avers: "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object."[84] Hélène Cixous agrees with Lacan's conclusion "everything turns on the Word: everything is the Word and only the Word," she claims. "We must take culture at its Word, as it takes us into its word, into its tongue... No political reflection can dispense with reflection on language... For as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its law..."[85] Both Lacan and Cixous are expressing a paradoxical, confusing, and schizophrenic state of being. The moment the individual speaks out who s/he is, s/he turns into an object manipulated, designed, and invented by language. The ultimate outcome is not that of self-assertion, but more of self-alienation into this pre-existing, depersonalized and intricate system we call language. Ellie Rogland-Sullivan explains: Lacan "depicts Man as a representational, symbolic being who believes that he autonomously originates ideas which, in fact, he only acts out. We are born into a vast symbolic network of words, codes, and meanings which inhabit, direct, and control us..."[86] The individual is the subject and the predicate of language.

These views of the self as a linguistic and ideological invention are not without implications. To state that the individual is determined by language and

ideology eliminates the notion of agency, authenticity, and autonomy from the individual who is rendered merely a public artifact created by extra-personal ideological terms. These views eliminate the tension between the private longings of the individual and the necessity of this individual to exist as a social being. One can embrace the idea that the self is the product of an inter-subjective and extra-personal discursive process, but at the same time can not deny the resistance and the resilience with which this individual responds to these deterministic ideological forces. The views of the subject that Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and others present to us do not account for this tension. And if they do, it is only to demonstrate that it is conducive to the destruction of the individual and the annihilation of individuality.

Williams's characters do not accept such a fate of annihilation and extermination. They do carry with them the reminiscence of this marginalization, and defeat, but they handle their defeat with valor and resilience that is unique to them. Foucault's, Derrida's, Lacan's and others' accounts of the subject do not include such characteristics as the ones that Williams's characters embody, neither do they explain the resistance and confrontation with which Williams's characters face these sources of defeat and annihilation. Williams's characters are defeated, but they manage to secure the audience's admiration for their capability to deal with the odds of their existence, and cope with them sometimes partly, but enough to keep them alive, assertive, and affirmative.

Even though defeated and mutilated by language, Clare and Felice manage to overcome the trap of language and create an intimate rapport with each other within the boundaries and the limitations that language imposes upon both siblings. The incomplete sentences, the pauses and the ellipses in The Two-

Character Play are not exclusively signs of people defeated by language and locked into its commonality and pre-set rules, they are sometimes the private language that both characters have found to share their common experience—a private language through which they can speak out their fears and anxieties. Speaking of their fears, Felice states:

> Felice: Fear is a monster vast as night--
> Clare: And shadow casting as the sun.
> Felice: It is quicksilver, quick as light--
> Clare: It slides beneath the down-pressed thumb
> Felice: Last night we locked it from the house.
> Clare: But caught a glimpse of it today.
> Felice: In a corner, like a mouse
> Clare: Gnawing all four walls away (311).

This exchange reveals the mutual understanding between the two siblings. As Jacqueline O'Connor demonstrates, when Felice and Clare "help each other finish sentences, they indicate their interwoven lives and personalities, and their limited ability to aid each other in communication."[87] Even though they are isolated from the outside world, they can still find solace in each other. Felice and Clare find it almost impossible to communicate with the outside world, but their past and their common experience has made it possible for them to reach out to each other. This sort of language traces the journey of two siblings who are trying to break away from the limitations of the self and the barriers of language. As Thomas Adler suggests, the incomplete dialogue represents Clare's and Felice's attempts to break "out of the self and make contact with the other" for the "completion of dialogue and/or self identity depends on the presence of and interaction with the other."[88] The other that Clare and Felice find to offer them comfort and validation is not their family and society, but each other. Only Clare

can offer Felice understanding, and only Felice can feel Clare's fears because both have crossed the same path, lived the same tragedy, and learned that the only redemption possible for both of them is to offer the marginalized, the uprooted, and the lonely who they are what the others and their family have refused to grant them. In each other, Felice and Clare have found a god who understands and shares their pain.

Even though language is a social code that can be stiffening, and confining for the individual, Clare and Felice have managed to curb this code and make it the medium through which they can express their fears, convey their selfhood, and enter "into a saving communion of shared humanity."[89] Language is no longer a diminishing social system through which Clare and Felice have to reduce their own self to repetitions and clichés, it is rather a space that can allow them to become their own subjects, and render their past and their fears more tolerable. Williams realizes how difficult it is "to put what [we] think and feel into speech,"[90] as one of his characters expresses, but he never takes away from his characters the possibility of affirmation and self-assertion. The human condition is painful, defeating, and confusing, but there is always room for the individual to survive in the midst of this confusion, labyrinth, and Babylon-like world. Williams imbues his characters with valor and resilience not to transcend their limitations and become demi-gods, but to find dignity in defeat, and live up to their humanity with all its contradictions, and with all the ontological confusion that surrounds human existence. By not resorting to silence, Clare and Felice start to speak for themselves and become autonomous agents of their own making instead of collaborating in their own demise through their silence. Only by accepting to transact through this social artifact we call language, both

siblings start to challenge the past which defines who they are and distance themselves from the image that this past has forced upon them. The Two-Character Play demonstrates that individuals can maintain their originality and individuality even though they have to express themselves through a linguistic system that is not their own—a system that reflects more the oppressive social and ideological aspects of our culture than the individuals' longings and aspirations.

Conclusion

In spite of the ontological and ideological odds against which Williams is working, and which I outlined in my introductory chapter and developed subsequently, he has managed to present to his audience a performative and fluid self that shakes established values, opens the small closets of narrow minded thinking, and tears down conventional ideas to replace them with those of one's own devising. In his project, Williams is hoping to re-establish the dignity of the individual and restore the humanity of the human being. "What I am writing about is human nature," Williams claims. His characters have "a natural elegance, a love of the beautiful, a romantic attitude toward life," and his "main theme is a defense of that attitude, a violent protest against those things that defeat it."[1] The human spirit is under threat as Williams sees it, and the individuality of the individual is under siege; but Williams is determined to write to save the individual from extinction. In Williams's drama, his vision is apocalyptic, but the option of being a sensitive, giving, and compassionate human being is still a possibility, and the ability to overcome the brutality of the world we live in is still feasible. In his drama, we rediscover ourselves, we recognize our human face, and find the long forgotten pleasure of being human again.

Williams's career has been consumed in opening up spaces and securing safe zones for the deformed, the mutilated, and the uprooted that we all might be. As Celeste, the visionary from The Mutilated explains to Trinket:

> I'd say to her everyday, forget your mutilation, it's not the end of the world for you... Hell, I'd say, we all have our mutilations, some from birth, some from

long before birth, and some from later in life, and
some stay with us forever.[2]

If the odds of our existence are so prevalent and part of our everyday life, then the ultimate message is that perhaps we all have to settle for these odds, not as an act of fatal subservience, but as a celebration of our own humanity that remains far from being perfect in Williams's understanding. The message Williams is sending to his readers, audience, and critics is one of acceptance. It is a message to embrace life with all its odds, extremities, contradictions, and complexity because between the tensions of its paradoxes lies its vitality. Williams's message makes a request of us i.e. to steer away from the deadly absolutism of what we call the truth. "The truth?" the Son in The Purification asks:

Why ask for that?
Ask it of him, the player_
for truth is sometimes alluded to in music.
But words are too loosely woven to catch it in...
A bird can be snared as it rises
or torn to earth by the falcon.
His song, which is truth,
is not to be captured ever.
It is an image, a dream,
it is the link to the mother,
the belly's rope that dropped our bodies from God
a longer time ago than we remember![3]

Williams is trying to cut the individual loose from the tyranny of the truth for it is confining and rendering the identity of the individual a one-fixed version of what this identity is constructed to be. With skepticism, doubts, and scrutiny

Williams approaches the truth. "Why ask me for that?" does not reveal only Williams's unwillingness to answer the question, but also points to the hidden agenda that may lie behind asking for the truth. If the truth is sought only to define, determine, and fix according to clearly-established values and compartments, then Williams is not willing to define the truth in such terms. The truth is more fluid and allusive than most of us want it to be. For Williams, it is an "[allusion] in music," thus remains just "an image" or "a dream." If this truth has ever had an origin, its origin is untraceable, and our birth marks our loss of this origin, or maybe this loss goes far back into remotely past recollections that our memories fail to bring back. Williams is accepting the shady meaning of life, and ready to walk us through its twilight zone. He claims:

> The whole meaning of all my work is that there is no such thing as complete right and complete wrong, complete black, complete white. That we're all in the same boat... All creation is the boat, not just one nation, not just one ideology, not just one system.[4]

Williams's vision expands beyond the narrow focus of systems and ideologies and refers us back to what we all share together as an irreducible common denominator i.e. our humanity.

Williams's drama does not destroy the individuals nor does it deny them an identity of their own. The self that Williams presents to us is simultaneously ideological and counter-ideological. It is a product of the cultural rules, regulations, and beliefs in which we are born and shaped, it is expressed in a language that has existed prior to our own existence, but in its longings and inspirations for other possibilities, it reveals what this culture has taken away from the individual. This identity is counter-ideological not only in the sense that

it questions these rules and laws, but also reformulates and reworks them towards its own private inspirations. Therefore, the self in its negotiation with the ideology in which it is produced challenges this ideology from within and presents better options of freedom and democracy than what this ideology already presents to us.

Williams establishes this identity in a more pluralistic landscape than his critics, and his audience alike were used to in the 1950's and 1960's. In doing so, he is launching an attack on all the traditional and essentialist thinking that has confined the self to limited frames and renders it more of a unitary, fixed, and straight linear entity. Williams's understanding of the self, as I demonstrate in this study, is more fluid and more accommodating to paradoxical human nature than the traditional ways by which the self has often been perceived. Williams's depiction of the self as pluralistic and performative indicates the impossibility to rationalize the interior caves and curves of the self, and the distortions which arise from attempts to do so. As pluralistic and multi-faceted as it is, the self that Williams depicts is not a call to embrace the chaotic and live in a Babylon state of being, but rather an incentive to dismiss the static and monolithic in us, and to extend and embrace our democratic values in ourselves and in our everyday interaction with others. It is a call to the realization that there are as many selves as there are individuals who are multiplicities of faces and roles that can not be contained in just one face and one identity. This is the revolutionary, iconoclastic playwright Williams deemed himself to be and that other critics and playwrights have seen in his drama. Arthur Miller wrote in his biography Timebends that Williams was not "the sealed off aesthete he was thought to be. There is a radical politics of the soul as well as of the ballot box and picket line."[5] Williams is the

"poet of the human heart"[6] but he is also the iconoclastic playwright who puts our perception in doubt, makes us re-examine our values, and challenges our well-defined categories by which we perceive each other. Savran, in his re-evaluation of Williams, realizes that he "was a writer who called himself a revolutionary and meant it, a playwright who produced a new and radical theater that challenged and undermined the Cold War order."[7] In the midst of McCarthy's hearings, the threatening homophobia of the 1950's and 1960's, and the resultant prevalent conservatism, Williams managed to open on the Broadway stage a space of acceptance and compassion. However, it is also this iconoclasm in Williams's works which has made both critics and audience wary of him, and contributed to pushing him to the edge of insanity, and to his being confined to a mental hospital ward for long periods so as to silence him for the disturbing images of corruption and brutalities he depicted in his drama.

Williams's depiction of the self as a performative, multiple, and paradoxical entity challenges the theories and perceptions of his time which tried to examine and understand the self in more linear manner. The critics' failure to see the value of Williams's work after The Night of the Iguana can be greatly attributed to the lack of language to understand, to describe, and to analyze what Williams was presenting to his audience. Williams's work is ahead of its time; it is the threshold and the foundation on which recent playwrights such as Harold Pinter, Sam Shepard, and David Mamet are still developing in their respective plays. What Williams has offered the American theater defies the already existing formulas to which critics and audiences were accustomed. In his later works, he achieved what he was set to fulfill early in his career. Williams was drawn to the theater by "the desire of an artist to work in new forms, however

awkwardly at first, to break down barriers of what he has done before and what others have done better before and after and to crash, perhaps fatally, into some area that the bell-harness and rope would like to forbid him."[8] Not only was Williams challenging and subverting our understanding of the self, but also subverting the expression in which this new understanding is to be conveyed and communicated.

In one of his interviews Williams has revealed his rejection of any systematic thinking and expressed how his revolutionary approach and understanding to theater does not correlate with the ideologies and the "isms" of his time. "People think I'm a communist," he claims, "but I hate all bureaucracy, all isms. I'm a revolutionary only in the sense that I want to see us escape from this sort of trap."[9] Williams escapes all theoretical frames and paradigms. In fact, if we approach his work only to place him in a clear-cut theoretical category, our effort would more likely be in vain. Approaching Williams's work from a single theoretical perspective is reductive for it fails to comprehend the pluralistic self Williams dramatizes on the stage. In the course of this study, I have come to the realization that Williams's works should be approached from a psychoanalytical perspective without denying the cultural, historical, rhetorical, and biographical readings which can also illuminate and enrich our understanding of them. Williams's works open themselves to such critical possibilities not only because of their complexity and humanistic dimensionality, but also because of the multi-layered identity which Williams presents to his audience. Future scholarly studies of Williams's works will, I predict, find it increasingly useful to steer away from limiting singular critical paradigms to approach Williams's works

which are much more complex, inclusive, and subversive in content and philosophy, than we have allowed them to be.

When I began researching and reading for this study the question of whether Williams is a modernist or a postmodernist posed itself with an obsessive urgency. However, as I arrived at the conclusion of this study, I have realized that the answer is not perhaps relevant at all to our understanding of Williams. If the modernist "objective is to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning,"[10] as Lyotard defines, then Williams is not modernist according to this definition. However, if modernist literature "questioned the certainties that provided a support for traditional modes of social organization, religion, morality, and the conception of the human self,"[11] then Williams can be perceived as an integral part of this literary movement. By the same token, if postmodernism defines itself as the theory that perceives the human being as a product of the normalizing effects of power and institutions, and the linguistic medium in which humans are perceived by themselves or imagined by others, and presents its objective as "to reveal the 'meaninglessness' of existence and the underlying 'abyss,' or 'void,' or 'nothingness' on which our supposed security is precariously suspended,"[12] then Williams is not willing to accept this theory at face value for he gives his characters more resilience and agency than such theory is willing to grant the individual. Simultaneously, if postmodernism defines itself as resisting closure, order, and stability, and tends to open more space for paradoxes and contradictions, then one can find justification for aligning Williams with such theory. However, I really wonder about the validity of such practice if the boundaries between theories themselves are constantly shifting and a product of

their own history and culture. Moreover, such attempts would not contribute to our understanding of Williams as much as point to the limitations of the theoretical paradigms in/through which we are trying to place him and understand his philosophy.

Before bringing this study to a closure, I would like to clarify the autobiographical reading I chose to pursue in some parts of my dissertation. In my reading, rather than seeking exact correlation between Williams's life and his writing, I was, instead, more interested in the metaphorical relationship between him and his creation as I have demonstrated in my chapter on A Streetcar Named Desire. Moreover, this autobiographical reading brought me to the conclusion that Williams's identity as a homosexual playwright can not be isolated and separated from the way he perceived the nature of identity in general. Early in his life, Williams's homosexuality made him aware of the masks he had to wear to deal with a brutal father who could not tolerate the fact that his son was a "sissy," and a mother who had managed to spare herself the trouble to see her son, Tom, for who he is and not for who she wanted him to be. Under these circumstances, Tom had realized the wide gap between who he is and who others want him to be, and perhaps concluded that the outer public role was mistakenly taken for the truth of the inner reality. Ironically, he found that with his own family, he had to be who he was not. Early in his life Williams realized that the people who were the closest to him were greater strangers to him than the unfamiliar faces he cruised in New York city's Time Square or in the dark streets and alleys of New Orleans' French Quarter.

The authenticity of the self is to be constantly sought, yet never achieved. Early in Williams's life, he learned what kind of face and image he had to present

of himself to survive and cope with the ugliness of brutal rejections. Early on he learned how to transform himself into a public lie of pretenses and façades, and to create a masquerade. Consequently, the young Tom was pushed to the dark corners of the closet where his sole outlet of self-expression was his writing, his stories, and his plays that he could share with us sometimes in half confessions and other times in whispers and hints, but always with a frankness and truthfulness to the times and the culture in which he was forced to co-exist. His homosexuality also drove him away from his family at an early age, and prompted him to seek a home for himself in highly unlikely places. From one foreign country to another, from one state to another, and from one hotel room to another, Williams was constantly searching for a safe haven where he could be the Williams that he had wanted to be. It is no surprise, therefore, that he peopled his plays with characters who are struggling against the same odds and driven by the wish for a home and acceptance. To these people he offered a dream and a vision:

> I think the strange, the crazed, the queer
> Will have their holiday this year
> And for a while, A little while,
> There will be pity for the wild.
> A miracle, A miracle!
> A sanctuary for the wild
>
> I think the mutilated will
> Be touched by hands that nearly heal,
> At night the agonized will feel
> A comfort that is nearly real.
> A miracle, a miracle!
> A comfort that is nearly real.[13]

When we examine the faces of Williams's characters' identity, analyze the public and private identity of Blanche DuBois, notice the masks and guises of Brick Pollitt, and realize the sense of mutilation which beset Williams's characters, then it becomes apparent to what extent Williams has turned himself and his own quest for identity into the very theme of his own works. In writing autobiographically, Williams not only dared to be himself, but also managed to dramatize how the artist captured this sense of homelessness, loneliness, and mutilation to which the human race is ultimately condemned.

Williams and his characters are drifters, bohemians, and malcontents who are trying to find their own way in the society in which they live. Williams shares with his characters the spirit and restlessness of the wanderer: "I think I've been expelled from America, and I'm no longer in the mood to take it. I want to get together a repertory company with one or two American actresses to go down to Australia with me..."[14] The image that such a remark brings to mind is similar to the image of Val Xavier, the wandering artist with his guitar and his wild snakeskin jacket. Williams shares with his creations his sense of uprootedness and non-belonging which manifest itself in the lack of family or other institutional ties: "Most of you belong to something that offers a stabilizing influence: a family unit, a defined social position, employment in an organization, a more secure habit of existence. I live like a gypsy. I am a fugitive." And in a statement that echoes Val's monumental line, "we're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life!" Williams adds: "No place seems tenable to me for long anymore, not even my own skin."[15]

Williams's artist characters from Tom Wingfield in Menagerie, to Blanche DuBois in Streetcar, Val Xavier in Orpheus, Sebastian Venable in Suddenly Last Summer, Clare and Felice in Two-Character Play, Mark in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, and Flora Goforth in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore epitomize the artist's quest for selfhood and completion. In Camino Real, Lord Byron explains Williams's artist characters' quest for selfhood. I will "make a departure!" he exclaims "from my present self to myself as I used to be." He urges the audience "Make voyages!" and adds, "attempt them! - There's nothing else..." He explains why an artist makes such attempts:

> But a poet's vocation, which used to be my vocation, is to influence the heart in gentler fashion... He ought to purify it and lift it above its ordinary level. For what is the heart but a sort-- [he makes a high, groping gesture in the air]--a sort of--instrument! -- that translates noise into music, chaos into--order--a mysterious order![16]

Williams has envisioned the self in a state of total freedom and has challenged throughout his entire career the boundaries of his comfort zone to achieve the limitless. "I won't ever make a good captive," he wrote at the beginning of his career. "I guess what I will do is drive beyond safety--till I smash--Cleanly and completely the only hope."[17] It is this sense of completion that Tom Wingfield hoped to achieve when he abandoned Laura and Amanda; and Val Xavier envisioned when he walked into Two-River County. Williams's artists are in search of a Terra Incognito where they can free themselves from the burden of the past and the restraints of their immediate environment. However,

when their search proves to be in vain, their Terra Incognito becomes their imagination where they can rearrange and remodel the ideal world they seek in accordance with their own desires

The imagination is the private space of Williams's characters where they construct themselves and recreate the world they dream to inhabit. It is within this sphere of the imagination that they can move and operate freely and fearlessly. The imagination is the space where their dreams, their hopes, ideas, and ideals of themselves are created and sustained. They seek refuge in their imagination because the rest of the world is getting smaller and increasingly minimized for them. The public space is dwindling and closing down on them and leading to their suffocation, death, or madness under the best of circumstances. The inner space of the imagination is the only refuge allowed to them. This is a means still available to Williams's characters to survive and co-exist within the brutal reality, but by the same token it is also a possibility that points to the state of impoverishment and sterility that these characters have to face. Their imagination is the cell where they are locked, alienated, and victimized. Their imagination is their doom; and what has proved to be their escape and refuge has become the cell where they have to face their loneliness and ultimate demise. The imagination is both their sustainer and their principal destroyer. They are alienated and marginalized not in the outside world but also in the imaginative world they have created for themselves in their quest for what is ideal and perfect. Their dreams have turned to ashes. They have wakened to either the brutality of the reality or to the realization that even in their imaginative refuge, they have not liberated themselves. They have instead created a self that others reject and destroy because it is not real for them, and

therefore does not fit in the mold in which these characters are placed. The self remains unliberated and, ironically enough, imprisoned in the imagination to which it has turned, in desperation, for both shelter and safety.

NOTES

Introduction:

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[15] Harold Beaver, "Homosexual Signs," Critical Inquiry 8 (1981): 107.
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Chapter I: Blanche DuBois: Public Faces and Private Longings.

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[7] Berkman, "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche DuBois," 37.

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[30] Williams, Conversations, 106.

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[38] Quoted in Michel Ciment, Kazan on Kazan (London: 1973) 71.
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[46] Williams, Conversations, 232.
[47] Many years after the production of Streetcar, Williams also quotes Blanche when he talks about his relationship with Elia Kazan. "It may seem as if I am blaming Kazan for the beginning of my disasters as a drugged writer. I have never blamed anyone for anything but deliberate cruelty, for there has always been in me the conviction of Blanche, that 'deliberate cruelty is the one unforgivable thing'" [Memoirs, 170].
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[6] David Savran, "Mapping the Closet with Tennessee Williams," Studies in Literary Imagination 24 (1991): 71.
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[16] Stephen Frosh, Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and the Self (New York: Routledge, 1991) 3.
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[18] Nicholas de Jongh, Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage (New York: Routledge, 1991), 74.
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[22] Foster Hirsch, Portrait of the Artist (New York: Kennikat Press, 1979) 49.
[23] Harold Beaver, "Homosexual Signs," Critical Inquiry 8 (1981): 99.
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[28] Gerald Weales, American Drama since World War II, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962) 29.
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[42] Williams, Where I Live, 72.
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Chapter III: Orpheus Descending: The Myth of a Liberated Self

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Chapter IV: "Out, Out, Human Outcry:" Theatricality as an Impasse.

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[2] C. W. E. Bigsby Modern American Drama, 1945-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 67.
[3] Ibid., 111.
[4] Tennessee Williams, The Two Character Play, The Theater of Tennessee Williams, Vol. 5 (New York: New Directions Books, 1976) 360. Subsequent references to this edition of the play are cited parenthetically in my text.
[5] The term "difference" is coined by Jacques Derrida with the "-ance" spelling instead of "-ence" in order to indicate the sense of difference and deferal inherent in the representational nature of meaning. See A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams 5th Edition, page 204 for further clarifications.
[6] C. W. E. Bigsby, A Critical Introduction to twentieth Century Drama 2: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 80.
[7] Annette J. Saddik, The Politics of Reputations: The Critical Reception of Tennessee Williams' Later Plays (London: Associated University Presses, 1999) 93.
[8] Nicholas Pagan, "Tennesee Williams' Out Cry in The Two- Character Play," Notes on Mississippi Writers 24 (1992) 69. [67-79].
[9] Bigsby, Modern American Drama, 67.
[10] Ibid., 67.
[11] Ruth Christine, Judith Drinkwater, and John Macklin, The Scripted Self: Textual Identities in Contemporary Spanish Narrative (England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1995) 8.
[12] Ibid., 8.
[13] Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York: New Directions Books, 1970) 22.
[14] Lionel Abel, Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic form (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966) 60.
[15] Lionel Abel comments on the use of the play-within-a play and on the theatrical nature of the reality even in plays that do not make use of such a theatrical device. Abel states: "Yet the plays I am pointing at do have a common character: all of them are theater pieces about life seen as already theatricalized. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them... only that life which has acknowledged its inherent theatricality can be made interesting on the stage..." [6].
[16] Bruce Wilshire, Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991) 278.
[17] Homan, "When the Theater Turns to Itself," 410.
[18] Martin Esslin, "Actors Acting Actors," Modern Drama 30 (1987): 76.

[19] Tennessee Williams, Conversations With Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986) 98.

[20] Ibid., 98.

[21] Francis Gillen, "Horror Shows, Inside and Outside My Skull: Theater and Life in Tennessee Williams's Two-Character Play," Forms of the Fantastic, eds. Jan Hokenson and Howard Pearce (New York: Greenwood Press, 1982) 228.

[22] Kim L. Worthington, Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 13.

[23] Ibid., 15.

[24] Ibid., 15

[25] Ibid., 13.

[26] Annette Saddik, The Politics of Reputation, 101.

[27] Ren Draya, "The frightened Heart: A Study of Character and Theme in the Fiction, Poetry, Short Plays, and Recent Drama of Tennessee Williams," diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1977, 144.

[28] George Niesen, "The Artist against the Reality," Tennessee Williams: A Tribute, ed., Jac Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977) 492.

[29] Saddik, The Politics of Reputation, 92.

[30] Tennessee Williams, Production Notes, The Glass Menagerie (New York: New Directions Books, 1970) 7.

[31] Ibid., 7.

[32] John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954) 351.

[33] Tennessee Williams, Conversations, 264.

[34] Saddik, The Politics of Reputation, 101.

[35] Nicholas Pagan, Rethinking Literary Biography: A Postmodern Approach to Tennessee Williams (London: Associated University Presses, 1993) 32.

[36] Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, Tennessee Williams: Four Plays (New York: Signet Classic, 1976) 12.

[37] Williams, Conversations, 297.

[38] Tennessee Williams, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Dragon County (New York: New Directions Books) 22.

[39] Michel Foucault, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, 131.

[40] Ibid., 131.

[41] Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City: Boubledy, 1975) xix.

[42] Foster Hirsch, Portrait of the Artist (New York: Kennikat Press, 1979) 6.

[43] Tennessee Williams, Where I Live, 21

[44] Ibid., 78.

[45] Jack E. Wallace, "The Image of Theater in Tennessee Williams's Orpheus Descending," Modern Drama 27 (1984): 328.

[46] Quoted in Tribute, 842.

[47] Williams, Where I Live, 116.

[48] Ibid., 52.

[49] Ibid., 52.

[50] Ibid., 141.

[51] Pagan, "Tennessee Williams' Outcry in the Two-Character Play," Notes on Mississippi Writers 24.2 (1992),76.

[52] There is a pun-on words in [I am D. J. dead]. D. J stands for Derrida's signature, Jaques Derrida and also is prounced like the French word 'déja' which translates to 'already' in English. So, the sentence "I'm D. J. dead" means "I am already dead."

[53] Jacques Derrida, Glas, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 19. I credit Nicholas Pagan, who draw my attention to these quotes on Derrida's views.

[54] Tennessee Williams, Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965 ed. Donald Windham (New York: Penguin books, 1977) 105.

[55] Tennessee Williams, Conversations, 11.

[56] Tennessee Williams, "Concerning Eugene O'Neill," Center Theatre Group/ Ahmson's Theatre's Inaugural Season Program, 12 September: 1967: 1.

[57] Gillen, "Horror Shows, Inside and Outside My Skull," 229.

[58] J. L. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 3.

[59] Thomas P. Adler, "The Dialogue of Incompletion: Language in Tennessee Williams's Later Plays," Quarterly Journal of Speech 61 (1975) 55.

[60] Ibid., 62.

[61] Williams, Conversations, 56.

[62] Ibid., 122.

[63] Lyle Leverich, Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1995) 331.

[64] Tennessee Williams, Clothes for a Summer Hotel: A Ghost Play, The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol 8 (New York: New Directions, 1992) 202.

[65] Tennessee Williams, New York Times (8 May, 1977, section 2, p3.)

[66] Leverich, Tom, 333

[67] Jacques Derrida, The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida, ed. Christine McDonald, trans.Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schoken Books, 1985) 76.

[68] Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New Directions, 1975) 129.

[69] Williams, Conversations, 236.

[70] Ibid, 240.

[71] Sy M. Kahn, "Listening to OutCry: Bird of Paradox in a Gilded Cage," New Essays on American Drama, ed. Gilbert Debusscher and Henry I. Schvey (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989) 51 (41-62).

[72] Williams, Conversations, 97-98.

[73] Leverich, Tom, xxiii.

[74] Judith Drinkwater, The Scripted Self, 109

[75] Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 37 (32-47).

[76] Quoted in Worthington's Self as Narrative, 162.

[77] Derrida, Writing and Difference, 178.

[78] Saddik, The Politics of Reputation, 102.

[79] Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 40.

[80] Derrida, Writing and Difference, 177.

[81] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literay Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 98

[82] Williams, Conversations, 263.

[83] Emile Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics, trans. Mary E. Meek (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971) 224.

[84] Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 86.

[85] Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" trans. Annette Kuhn, Signs, 7 (1981-1982):44 (36-55).

[86] Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Lacan, Language, and Literay Criticism," Literary Review 24 (1980-81): 577 (563-577).
[87] Jacueline O' Connor, Dramatizing Dementia: Madness in the Plays of Tennessee Williams (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997) 72.
[88] Adler, The Dialogue of Incompletion, 49-50.
[89] Ibid., 49.
[90] Tennessee Williams, "I can't Imagine Tomorrow," Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970) 140.

Conclusion:

[1] Tennessee Williams, Conversations with Tennessee Williams, ed. Albert J. Devlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986) 45.
[2] Tennessee Williams, Dragon Country, (New Directions Book, 1970) 87.
[3] Tennessee Williams, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton (New York: New Directions) 40.
[4] Williams, Conversations, 90.
[5] Arthur Miller, Timebends: A Life (New York: Grove Press, 1987) 180-81.
[6] Lyle Leverich, Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1995), 5.
[7] David Savran, Communists, Cowboys, and Queers (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) ix.
[8] Tennessee Williams, Where I Live (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978) 56.
[9] Williams, Conversations, 292.
[10] Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979) 74.
[11] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1988) 109.
[12] Ibid., 110.
[13] Williams, Dragon Country, 81
[14] Tennessee Williams, New York Times, 22 June 1983.
[15] Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (New York: Anchor Press, 1983) 247.
[16] Tennessee Williams, Camino Real (New York: New Directions, 1970) 77.
[17] Quoted in John Lahr's, "Fugitive Mind," The New Yorker 8 March, 1999:93.

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