An Interpretive Study of the Religious Element in the Work of Tennessee Williams.

Henry R. Beasley

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS 
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The Louisiana State University and 
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AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY

OF THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN THE WORK OF

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

the Department of English

by

Henry R. Beasley
B.A., McNeese State University, 1961
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1965
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An acknowledgement of this sort serves a useful purpose in that it reminds the author of all the people who have contributed in various ways to the completion of the work. Among those people are my major professor, Dr. James T. Nardin, and my principal readers, Dr. Lewis P. Simpson and Dr. Don D. Moore. Additionally I am grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Thomas L. Watson and Dr. Nicholas Canaday. Obviously it is gratifying to work with the assistance of such distinguished teachers, scholars, men.
There are only three kinds of persons; those who serve God, having found Him; others who are occupied in seeking Him, not having found Him; while the remainder live without seeking Him, and without having found Him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those between are unhappy and reasonable.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 257
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ABSTRACT

Tennessee Williams' first professionally produced play, *A Battle of Angels*, is characteristic of the playwright's continuing concern with sex and with religion. The sexual content of Williams' plays has been the subject of a great deal of criticism, most of which involves the application of Freudian principles to the playwright or his characters. The religious content of the plays has been largely ignored. Accordingly, the criticism relative to Williams is misleading and disproportionately concerned with the playwright's treatment of sexual themes.

Psychologists Viktor Frankl and Colin Wilson offer perspectives within which Williams' work may be understood more clearly. Frankl proposes that the traditional psychologies of Freud, Jung, and Adler are invalid. He further asserts that the dominant motive in human psychology is the Will to Meaning and that most emotional disturbance is the result of the frustration of the Will to Meaning. Colin Wilson treats extensively of a character type called the Outsider, who is characterized by a kind of minority consciousness marked by world rejection and the intensification of the Will to Meaning.

A close study of his work indicates that Williams' plays are characterized by the struggle of an Outsider protagonist who attempts to fulfill his Will to Meaning. Within
the context of these ideas, Williams' work emerges as conspicuously and consistently religious. Accordingly, Williams adopts the language of Christian symbolism as a means of stating his ideas, and the figure of Christ and the passion of the crucifixion emerge as central symbols.

* A Battle of Angels * treats the Christ figure explicitly and dramatizes events that are unmistakably symbolic of the crucifixion. There are indications in this play and in others that Williams' Christ figure is based partially on Wilhelm Reich's idea that Christ is the supreme example of life affirmation in a world that suffers from the Emotional Plague, a condition marked by progressive indifference to life itself. Reich concludes and Williams concurs that the crucifixion of Christ is perpetual.

Following the failure of * A Battle of Angels *, Williams' concern with religious themes becomes less explicit and shows itself in a recurrent pattern. The Outsider protagonist looks to some other character as a savior. The imagery of the plays identifies that savior with the Christ. The implied Christ consistently fails to meet the needs of the protagonist. The pattern of the failure of salvation is repeated in most of Williams' plays that fall between * Battle of Angels * (1940) and * Orpheus Descending * (1957).

The later plays return to explicitly religious themes. * Suddenly Last Summer * and * Sweet Bird of Youth * feature characters who are equated with Christ but who function as antagonists. Apparently Williams had become disillusioned with
theological Christianity, but he remained convinced of the efficacy of Christian ethics.

Night of the Iguana, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel are increasingly involved with Oriental mysticism. These plays dramatize Williams' idea that one must confront the contrarieties of existence by achieving a kind of mystical consciousness marked by acceptance. Sweet Bird of Youth had proposed that God is silent. Subsequent plays dramatize the orthodox mystical conclusion that identifies God with the silence. However, Williams continues to insist upon the necessity of practicing the Christian ethic. Thus, his final position involves the synthesis of Christian and Oriental religious thought.

In the light of these ideas, Williams' work may be viewed as more conspicuously religious than previous commentators have acknowledged. Furthermore, the work dramatizes the rather consistent progress toward a set of philosophic conclusions that are religious in nature and stated in terms of traditional Christian symbolism.
Tennessee Williams, born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911, was infamous before he was famous. His day of infamy was December 30, 1940, the day of his first professional production of a major play—Battle of Angels, at the Wilbur Theater in Boston. Despite the talent associated with the production (Margaret Webster, Miriam Hopkins, John Gassner, Irwin Shaw)\footnote{Benjamin Nelson, *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1961), pp. 50-51.} it was an unmitigated catastrophe whose final curtain saw a half-empty house, a smoke-beclouded leading lady, and a stricken playwright. Tennessee Williams reacted with characteristic melodrama—a rewritten third act that he submitted with the plea: "I will crawl on my belly through brimstone if you will substitute this." He added, to Miss Webster, the director, "You don't seem to see that I put my heart into this play."\footnote{Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels* (New York: New Directions, 1958), pp. v-vi.} Only later, after the success of *The Glass Menagerie*, was Williams to see that first failure more clearly, if more defensively. With a touch of self-deprecating humor that is as characteristic as his melodrama, he said of *Battle of Angels*: "That play was, of course, a much better play than this one [The Glass Menagerie]. The
thing is, you can't mix up sex and religion, as I did in *Battle of Angels*, but you can always write safely about mothers." Later his own mother commented on that Boston opening: "Personally I think what most disturbed Boston, a highly Roman Catholic city, was the idea of Vee Talbot painting the young wanderer in the resemblance of Jesus. This must have struck the Catholics as sacrilegious. After a week of deliberation, irate city officials demanded this scene be deleted and other 'offending' lines be cut."4

Even though the play failed, Williams held it in higher regard than he did *The Glass Menagerie*, one of the very few plays to be universally recognized as an American "classic." Years later, after the success of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams revised *Battle of Angels*. It became *Orpheus Descending* and opened in New York on March 21, 1957. In a pre-opening essay published in *The New York Times*, Williams declared that his feeling for the play had not changed greatly during the interim:

Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years, in fact? Well, nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his

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5In a recent interview, Williams indicates that he has come to like *The Glass Menagerie* better than his other plays. See Don Lee Keith, "Phoenix Rising from a Stoned Age?" *After Dark*, August 1971, pp. 28-35.
youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call Orpheus Descending... a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them... and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary... And so you see it is a very old play that Orpheus Descending has come out of, but a play is never an old one until you quit working on it, and I have never quit working on this one, not even now. It never went into the trunk, it always stayed on the work bench... Anyone familiar with Williams' constant need to rework, revise, and improve, might well wonder if that play is not still on the work bench—whether we might not still expect that old play to be resurrected with still a newer title. Students of Williams would anticipate such an event with a degree of pleasure, for that play is more important to a study of Williams than one might suspect considering its obvious weaknesses. The play is so important because it is indicative of concerns that have continued to engross the playwright. Williams doubtless hoped that one result of the 1957 production might be that a new audience would find in that play a concern to which his Boston audience had not been sympathetic.

By 1957 Williams' audience was a large one. Few people were unaware that Tennessee Williams was the American playwright who spoke most candidly and poetically about the great American bugaboo—sex. However, few people remembered that Williams' coeval concern was with religion. In 1957

6Williams, Orpheus Descending, pp. vi-x.
no one had yet realized that Tennessee Williams was a religious man.

One cannot deny that much of the attention lavished on Williams by the popular press has been due to his startling treatments of sexual subjects, especially the subject of abnormal sexual activity. But Williams' power to shock us has vanished in the face of what has come to be called the "New Freedom." Already people are beginning to forget that in an earlier time Williams, more than any other American playwright, worked to extend the limits of the allowable in the subject matter of professional drama. Paul Hurley has said that "unless Williams can give us a good healthy play about necrophilia, the chances of his ever again horrifying us seem slight."\(^7\) After Futz and The Beard, one wonders whether even necrophilia could provoke the requisite horror.

The decline of Tennessee Williams' stature as spokesman for sexual minorities, as crusader for dramatic liberalism, is decidedly an asset to the playwright and to his more serious audience, for it allows a more detached view of the man and his work. It allows that themes other than the sexual may at last be studied with the seriousness that they deserve. In an essay-review of four books about Tennessee Williams (those by Nancy M. Tischler, Signi Falk, Edwina Dakin Williams, and Benjamin Nelson), Paul Hurley finds that even

given the books cited, "aside from a few scattered essays in academic journals, no evidence of a judicious attempt at critical evaluation is available. Publicity Williams has seldom failed to receive; critical evaluation he lacks." Hurley finds that the implication of all of the works mentioned is that Williams is more interesting than his work and that to explain the man is to explain the work.

At this point it is perhaps wise to acknowledge what is probably the biggest specter that haunts the critical responses to Williams' work—the problem of biography. Tennessee Williams is a "character." His work and his personal comments bespeak a personality that is attractive to some, repellent to others, but fascinating to all. Williams' work is often personal; some of the stories are frankly autobiographical. All of his work is marked by complex psychological concerns that apparently derive from Williams' own personal makeup. Understandably both the playwright and his creations have been lavishly psychoanalyzed, and it is not uncommon for psychological critics to use the work merely as a vehicle to approach the man. All of the book-length studies are compromised by this flaw. Nancy M. Tischler's Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan offers a characteristic instance in the discussion of The Glass Menagerie and Williams' attitude to his father. We are told that the absence of the father "suggests that Tennessee Williams could not

\[8\text{Ibid., p. 62.}\]
view him with sufficient objectivity to portray him," and that Williams hated his father "so much that the sweetness would have gone out of the play if he had been included." Consequently, "in discarding the real father's part, Tennessee Williams found it necessary to endow the mother with some masculine practicality, thus giving Amanda Wingfield an exceedingly complex personality."\(^9\) The playwright's father, C. C. Williams, is a red herring so far as The Glass Menagerie is concerned. If a father had been present, the situation out of which the play grows simply would not have existed. The need for assuring Laura's security, and the consequence of Tom's flight would have been so crucially diminished that the play as we know it would become unrecognizable. The play to which Tischler's comments pertain is hypothetical. It simply does not exist. Though extreme, this example is characteristic of a great deal of the criticism of Williams' work.

As with all serious writers, Williams' work is created out of his experience, and admittedly the line between the two is sometimes subtle indeed, but Williams has certainly not profited from the failure of critics to make the needful distinctions that are prerequisite to valid criticism. One must and should draw inferences from a writer's life. To hold otherwise would invalidate much of the study that follows. However, to approach a writer's work through

\(^9\)Tischler, pp. 96-97.
his life requires a degree of caution not to be found in cases such as that cited above. It is not difficult to concur with Mr. Hurley in his assessment of the "sad fate of Tennessee Williams."

The recent New York opening (March, 1973) of Out Cry marks the latest offering from the playwright whose career in the American theater spans over 30 years. While one could hope for a great many more plays from Tennessee Williams, despite the general critical opinion that his work for some time has been in decline, we cannot reasonably expect more than a few new Williams openings. In an item in Time, January 11, 1971, Williams is quoted as saying that he has done ninety percent of the work that he is going to do, and in a subsequent interview, Williams said that The Two-Character Play, a 1971 version of Out Cry, was to be his last full-length drama. Williams' latest published anthology, Dragon Country, does read very much like a clearing of the work bench. The time is right for exactly the sort of "careful evaluation and analysis" of the work that Paul Hurley called for in 1964.

This study is not intended to constitute, but rather to contribute to that "evaluation and analysis." It is based upon the premise that a careful study will reveal that Tennessee Williams is a religious writer of some importance,

11Don Lee Keith, "Phoenix Rising From a Stoned Age?" After Dark, August 1971, p. 32.
and that his admixture of sex and religion will be found to include a larger proportion of the latter than has previously been acknowledged.

In order to accomplish what this study sets out to do, it will be necessary to ignore what is still a relevant concern, that is, the degree to which Williams has been successful in what he attempts to do. Obviously the work is uneven. Benjamin Nelson has said that, paradoxically, it is because "his art is often so good that we find ourselves asking him for greater mastery, and deploring his loss of control." But this study aims primarily at interpretation. What emerges should be a set of ideas which might be called Williams' religious philosophy, together with some treatment of the technical means whereby Williams states this philosophy in dramatic terms.

The mere fact that Williams is a dramatist contributes to the difficulty of such a study. While a poet or a novelist may speak directly to his audience, the playwright may provide a direct spokesman only at the cost of a stultifying transparency. We must see drama as action rather than dramatized conclusions, or it ceases to be drama and degenerates into pageantry and tableaux. Hence, the degree to which Williams has succeeded in the creation of living, acting, vital characters, moving toward rather than embodying conclusions, makes such a study more difficult. To judge in such

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12 Nelson, p. 294.
cases we must be able to identify the motivations of the characters and to decide when those motivations are inherently operative and when they are figurative of other motivations which cannot be represented so readily in dramatic terms. Such considerations will be found to be particularly relevant to Williams' treatment of sex.

There are those within his audience who still consider Williams to be first and foremost the poet of the sexually maladjusted and depraved. As late as 1956, Herbert J. Muller summed up what might then have been a majority opinion. In The Spirit of Tragedy Muller says of Williams that "he can render sex convincingly in character and action, instead of merely talking about it. But he seems unable to think very clearly about it, or deeply about anything else." Muller further judges that Williams' "tragic theme is the disorder due to sex; the implication is Lawrence's idea that the restoration of sexual order is the key to salvation or peace. This may be reading too much into his plays, but in any case they have no wider or deeper tragic import."

Such a view is naive, but it has proved to be persistent. It must be put to rest, thus overcoming what has proved to be the most difficult obstacle to an adequate understanding of the work of Tennessee Williams.

In a discussion of Piers Plowman, Derek Traversi comments that "no community can be called balanced or complete

which lacks a considered attitude to the two central themes of European literature—death, and what Langland called 'the flesh'; without such an attitude, poetry, though capable of isolated achievements, degenerates inevitably into triviality or romantic pose."14 Removed from the realm of "the flesh," death is, of course, preeminently a spiritual problem—the problem of eschatology. Exactly that balanced attitude that Traversi attributes to Langland might be attributed to Tennessee Williams. Whether or not one grants him success, it must be apparent that Williams' goal has been to achieve such a balanced view. His Summer and Smoke, even in its title, proclaims his concern with both the flesh and the eschatological problem of the spirit. Donald Newlove, in a 1969 Esquire article, accuses drama critics of seeing only "aesthetics and psychology," and of not realizing that for all dramatists, and for Williams in particular, "all playwriting is eschatology. . . ."15

Although Williams' attitude toward the flesh has been exhaustively considered, the problem of eschatology in Williams has only begun to be recognized. In February, 1968, Francis Kunkel, writing in Commonweal, put the problem plainly: "'All poets look for God,' declares Mrs. Venable, a


character in Suddenly Last Summer. Perhaps, but few look as strenuously as Tennessee Williams, and like most fiction writers he conducts his search through his characters. Donald Newlove was to assert the following year that "In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, far from being self-parody and a fiasco, is his great crucifixion play and an inspired, religious work."17

Such judgments are a far cry from Muller's remark that Williams' "tragic theme is the disorder due to sex."18 Accepting the more recent statements characterizing Williams' work, one must be struck by the degree of misunderstanding from which Williams' work has suffered and must search for the reason for such misunderstanding. Williams has been misunderstood largely because of the critical tools that have been applied to his work. Consequently, we must find new tools more suitable to the task at hand. The work of two modern thinkers can do much to supply those tools; one of those men, Viktor Frankl, is a psychologist and psychiatrist; the other, Colin Wilson, is an English philosopher, critic, novelist, and psychologist. Both men represent extensions of modern existentialist thought. Frankl considers his work to be in the field of existence psychology; Wilson calls his philosophy "the New Existentialism." Both men claim that their ideas originate in and are validated by the

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17 Newlove, p. 176. 18 Muller, p. 318.
phenomenological analysis of traditional theories and human experience.

Frankl furnishes a theory of psychology that is contradictory of much twentieth-century psychological thought—chiefly that derivative of Freud—but that provides a description of human nature and behavior that is more consistent with Tennessee Williams' psychology.

Wilson describes what may best be called a philosophic viewpoint that is derivative of a certain psychological condition that is similar, if not identical, to that of both Williams and his major characters.

Both men mark rather radical departures from traditional psychological theory. To a degree, the two thinkers are complementary and mutually supportive. Each offers certain ideas which, if not indispensable to a clear understanding of Williams, will certainly facilitate such an understanding. Those ideas may be treated more profitably against the wider background of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century thought and psychology.

Frankl's ideas are similar to those of such modern thinkers as Camus, Malraux, and Sartre whose ideas were formulated in response to experience garnered with the resistance movement headed by the French underground during World War II. The wartime experience moved Camus and Sartre to a profound re-examination of that complex of conditions and circumstances—external, emotional and intellectual—which go to make up what we intend when we use the phrases
"human condition" or "modern condition." Characteristic of that condition is isolation, alienation, anonymity, and a conspicuous separation from what theologians designate as the ground of being. The awful condition of modern man when he rises to consciousness of that condition is the touchstone of existentialist philosophy—a philosophy which posits as a prerequisite to fruitful thought and action the acceptance of a human condition which, descriptively treated, seems conducive only to despair.

The sense of isolation and the immediacy of death worked deeply on the sensibility of such men as Sartre, Camus, and Malraux. These two factors soon came to be considered the basic conditions underlying the lives of all modern men. They became the starting point for Sartre's existentialism and for Camus' Absurdism.

Tennessee Williams is of the same generation and is as much a product of the period of the 30's and 40's as are the French existentialists. Williams doubtless recognizes that the period is a crucial one both in terms of his personal life and of history. Many of his plays are set during that time. It is understandable that the autobiographical Glass Menagerie is set in that time, but the placing of Williams' 1941 play, Night of the Iguana, in the late 30's is a more conscious device, and it indicates the playwright's recognition of the importance of that period to history as a whole.

Frankl's psychology is a product of the same period.
Frankl's experience, described in *Man's Search for Meaning*, was more extreme than that of Williams or the French existentialists. Dr. Frankl was an inmate of Dachau and Auschwitz, and while his ideas bear the marks of that experience, he departs from such philosophers as Camus and Sartre in the direction of optimism. There were, however, more pervasive and, perhaps, more resistant obstacles to optimism than even Frankl's concentration camp experiences.

The generation before Frankl's had been forced to cope with an emotional attitude that was dramatically stated by John Burroughs in the 1890's: "Feeling, emotion, falls helpless before the revelations of science. . . . The universe is going its own way with no thought of us. . . . This discovery sends the cosmic chill with which so many of us are familiar in these days." The condition persisted, and in 1921, when Frankl was sixteen and Williams eleven, Bertrand Russell published "A Free Man's Worship," which includes a famous statement that might well serve as an explanation de texte for Burroughs' statement:

That man is the product of causes that had no pre­vision of the end that they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collo­cations of atoms, that no fire, no heroism, no in-

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19Quoted in H. H. Waggoner, "E. A. Robinson and the Cosmic Chill," *New England Quarterly*, 13 (1940), 65. It is not surprising that a critical context established to deal with Robinson should be applicable to Tennessee Williams. The ideas of the two men are similar, a fact to which Williams points in his repeated use of Robinson's metaphor in which Man becomes a child in a kindergarten trying to spell *God* with the wrong alphabet blocks.

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tensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individ­u­al life beyond the grave, that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a uni­verse in ruins—all these things, if not quite be­yond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. How, in such an alien and inhuman world, can so powerless a creature as Man preserve his aspiration untar­nished?20

The conclusions stated by Russell are, of course, the con­clusions toward which scientific thought had been tending since its beginnings in the seventeenth century—a time when all science was physical science.

The principles which imply "the cosmic chill" were given impetus by the new science of psychology, particularly in the works of Sigmund Freud. At the heart of Freudianism is the belief that man is a creature driven by instincts and impulses that are hidden from him and that are as implacable and unreasoning as those forces that govern the unconscious universe. To some degree, Freudianism worked to reintegrate man into the physical world from which he had come to be more and more estranged, but it did so only at the cost of certain cherished conceptions of humanity and human nature. At the same time that Freud offered hope of better under­standing through a codification of the laws of human behav­

ior, he cast man back into the Naturalist's dilemma that has haunted our thinkers and writers from the seventeenth century until now.

Western civilization has always been preoccupied with the Self and with self-knowledge. The Naturalist's dilemma is that condition which occurs when one realizes that the major teachings of science have been such as to make self-knowledge largely useless, or even destructive to man's religious sentiments and higher aspirations. Erich Fromm, in his *Psychoanalysis and Religion,* sums up the changes that have taken place in the general tendencies of Western thought:

> Out of their belief in man's reason the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who were at the same time students of man's soul, affirmed man's independence. . . . They taught him to abolish those conditions of existence which required the maintenance of illusion. . . . But in the last few generations the rationalism of the Enlightenment has undergone drastic changes. Drunk with a new material prosperity and success in mastering nature, man no longer has considered himself the primary concern of life and theoretical inquiry.  

Science in general and traditional psychology in particular teach that man is not his own creature, that he is rather a functionary through which larger forces, not even particularly human forces, act and react. In the words of Sigmund Freud, Man "'is lived by' his instincts."  

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Viktor Frankl denies or radically qualifies the major premises of the psychologies based upon the ideas of Freud, Jung, and Adler. Thereby, he evolves a set of ideas that has done much to revolutionize psychoanalytic theory and practice. If Frankl is adopted as seriously by the literary community as he has been by the psychiatric community, we may look for some radically new interpretations of our literature. Frankl notes that in the psychologies of both Freud and Jung "reality, the world of beings and meanings, is debased to a pool of more or less workable instruments to be used to get rid of various stimuli such as irritating superegos or archetypes. What has been sacrificed, however, and hence totally eliminated in this view of man, is the fundamental fact which lends itself to a phenomenological analysis--namely, that man is a being encountering other beings and reaching out for meanings to fulfill" (p. 8). He adds, "My own reaction to this theorizing is that I would not be willing to live for the sake of my 'defense mechanisms' much less to die for the sake of my 'reaction formations'" (pp. 10-11).

Frankl's reaction to Freudian thought is of particular importance in the areas of both psychology and literature, for Freudianism itself came to be much more than a pioneer theory of psychodynamics. It offered both philosophical and esthetic implications--implications that are realized to some degree in such diverse artistic works as the tracts and novels of D. H. Lawrence and the plays of Eugene
O'Neill. The ideas of Freud even came to be the basis for a school of literary criticism. The tools that Freud furnished to literary critics have been useful to a degree, but they have led to excesses such as the over-emphasis on the hidden motives of both fictional characters and creative artists. Just as the New Criticism is satirized in a study which proves conclusively that Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a poem about Santa Claus,23 a similar essay purports to find dire sexual and mythical implications in the nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill.24

The most extreme implication to be found in Freudian critical theory is one that is more widely held than we would choose to admit, namely, that the very act of artistic creation is symptomatic of deep unconscious emotional disturbances. To see a writer and his characters in terms of Freudian psychology and to see that same writer and his characters in terms of Frankl's ideas is indeed to see two entirely different writers and two distinct and separate groups of characters.

Both Williams and his characters are susceptible to a psychoanalytic approach, and Freudian criticism of the playwright has been unproductive to the degree that it has been


misleading. So varied and complex is the makeup of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* that Williams has been accused of writing a case study instead of a character.\(^\text{25}\) Williams himself complains that Blanche has been taken by some to be a drag queen,\(^\text{26}\) a transvestite parody of a woman. The first judgment is irrelevant, and the latter is irrational; however, both illustrate the degree to which Freudian criticism has contributed to excess. More will be said later of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but it might be useful at this point to note that no single reading of the play deals adequately with two aspects of the drama. The first time that Blanche speaks in the play it is to deliver what is obviously intended as a description of human life in general: "They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then to transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!"\(^\text{27}\) The nature of Blanche's desire, we have been told, is a complex of sexual desire and the need for security. Still, at the end of scene six, when Blanche's needs seem about to be satisfied, when she is in a position to secure her situation with Mitch, a strange interchange takes place:

MITCH [Drawing her slowly into his arms]: You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be--


\(^\text{26}\)Keith, p. 35.

"...you and me, Blanche?"

[She stares at him vacantly for a moment. Then with a soft cry huddles in his embrace. She makes a sobbing effort to speak but the words won't come. He kisses her forehead and her eyes and finally her lips. The Polka tune fades out. Her breath is drawn and released in long, grateful sobs.]

BLANCHE: Sometimes—there's God—so quickly.\(^{28}\)

Now one of the needs that Blanche embodies, as the quoted passage clearly implies, is the need for meaning—the need for God. Freudian psychology can offer little to elucidate this need that is obviously major since the statement of it occupies a climactic position in a crucial scene in the play. The ideas of Dr. Viktor Frankl provide exactly the frame of reference that this and other plays of Tennessee Williams require.

Probably the most succinct discussion of Frankl's ideas is to be found in an address that was delivered before the Conference on Phenomenology, meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, on April 4, 1963, and published as "The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy" in Frankl's *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*. Therein, Frankl explains his therapeutic technique which he calls logotherapy or meaning therapy. He tells us that there is, with logotherapy, as with other types of therapy, "a theory underlying its practice—a theoria, i.e., a vision, a Weltanschauung. In contrast to many other therapies, however, logotherapy is based upon an explicit philosophy of life. More specifically, it is based

\(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 110.
upon three fundamental assumptions which form a chain of inter­connected links: 1. Freedom of Will; 2. Will to Meaning; 3. Meaning of life" (p. 2). The remainder of the essay is given over to an explanation of these "fundamental assumptions."

Man's "Freedom of Will" belongs to the immediate data of his experience, though that freedom is "freedom within limits." Only two classes of people deny such freedom: schizophrenics and determinist philosophers. Man's freedom of will consists in his ability to "take a stand toward" conditions that are "biological or psychological or socio­logical in nature," and by taking that stand, to "rise above the plane of somatic and psychic determinants of his existence." This transcendence of material determinants gives man access to what Frankl calls the dimension of the "noetic" or the "Noölogical," a dimension which is "specifically human" and is "not accessible to a beast" (pp. 2-3).

Frankl's second basic assumption is the "Will to Meaning." It is here that Frankl departs most radically from the theories of traditional psychologists. Underlying Freudian theory is the idea that man is principally motivated by the will to pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. Adler, on the other hand, proposed that the dominant motive of human behavior is the will to power. Frankl holds that "in the last analysis, it turns out that both the will to pleasure and the will to power are derivatives of the original will to meaning" (pp. 5-6).
Frankl does not deny the pleasure principle. Indeed, he asserts that "the more a man aims at pleasure by way of a direct intention, the more he misses his aim. And this, I venture to say, is a mechanism etiologically underlying most cases of sexual neurosis" (p. 5). Thus, Frankl denies the motive power that Freud attributed to the pleasure principle. For Frankl, pleasure is not a goal but a "by-product, or side effect of the fulfillment of our strivings. . . ." Whereas traditional psychologies "assume that man aims for the goals of his behavior unwillingly and unwittingly and that his conscious motivations are not his actual motivations," Frankl finds that "it is not conceivable that man be really driven to strivings; I would say either he is striving or that he is driven" (pp. 5-6). Frankl's theory seems to be demonstrated in many of Williams' characters, Blanche DuBois, Brick Pollitt, and Alma Winemiller, to mention only a few. Both Williams and Frankl look beyond sexual excess and abnormality as mere neurotic symptomology to a realm wherein sexual activity and orientation become metaphoric of philosophic states or conditions.

Colin Wilson offers confirmation of this general principle in his "existential theory of perversion." It is interesting that Wilson does not treat the problem of homosexuality, for he holds that there is sufficient evidence to suppose that the condition is genetic and not psychic.29

conclusion that some scientific research has confirmed since Wilson's book was published.\textsuperscript{30} The subject of homosexuality is introduced at this point only because it is a matter of tangential interest since Williams is homosexual. More to the point is the idea that sexual maladjustment, in the terms of Frankl's argument, is likely to be the effect of a thwarted striving toward what he calls meaning fulfillment. The idea itself is not so surprising when one remembers that in \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus} Albert Camus discusses the condition known as Don Juanism as an example of the human motivations that imply the Absurd condition.\textsuperscript{31}

Significantly, Camus and Frankl agree on another crucial point. Freud contends that "he reality principle is "a mere extension of the pleasure principle" (p. 7); that is to say that only those things that affect our pleasure become real to us. Frankl holds that "the meaning which a being has to fulfill is something beyond himself, it is never just himself. . . . Only a meaning which is not just an expression of the being itself represents a true challenge." It follows then that "meaning must not coincide with being; meaning must be ahead of being. . . . Existence falters unless it is lived in terms of transcendence toward something beyond itself" (p. 12). The tension between meaning and be-


ing is exactly that condition that Albert Camus calls the Absurd. 32

If, as Frankl attests, man's dominant motive is the Will to Meaning, it follows that men must attempt to find and to embrace an object of meaning. Like Frankl, Camus believes that "for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his action." 33 The discovery and the attempt make up what Frankl calls "meaning confrontation." Such confrontation transforms man's freedom into "responsibleness; man is responsible for the fulfillment of the specific meaning of his personal life. But he is also responsible before something or to something, be it society, or humanity, or mankind, or his own conscience. However, there is a significant number of people who interpret their existence not just in terms of being responsible to something, but rather to someone, namely, to God" (pp. 12-13). Frankl agrees with Christopher Flanders, in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, who tells Mrs. Goforth that she will have need for "something to mean God." 34

Thus, commitment is necessary, but Frankl does not mean commitment in the same sense that the word is used by Sartre. Sartre has said that "to choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose,

32Ibid., p. 16.
33Ibid., p. 5.
because we can never choose evil." The implication is that only our choice of something confers value upon it. Frankl, however, believes that we can indeed choose evil, for values are external and may be judged by external criteria.

Frankl's third basic assumption, the Meaning of Life, asserts that "a person's will to meaning can only be elicited if meaning is essentially more than his mere self-expression. We do not just attach and attribute meanings to things, but rather find them; we do not invent them, we detect them." The meaning of life may be detected in at least three ways. "First, through what we give to life (in terms of our creative works); second, by what we take from the world (in terms of our experiencing values); and third, through the stand we take toward a fate we no longer can change (an incurable disease, an inoperable cancer, or the like)" (p. 15). Frankl continues: "However, even apart from this, man is not spared facing his human condition which includes what I call the tragic triad of human existence: namely, pain, death, and guilt. By pain, I mean suffering; by the two other constituents of the tragic triad, I mean the twofold fact of man's mortality and fallibility" (p. 15). Frankl's "tragic triad" will be seen to constitute the principal attributes of Tennessee Williams' tragic vision.

Two of the constituents of that vision are readily

apparent. Guilt, for both Frankl and Williams, means merely that the nature of man is such that he will inevitably fail to realize the potential of his situation. To acknowledge guilt, man must admit simply "that he has failed," that he is less than he might have been (p. 24).

Though life does hold meaning, man must detect that meaning; he may not merely assume it, and yet when man looks for meaning in the world, he is confronted by what Frankl calls variously "the existential vacuum," "meaning frustration," or "existential frustration"—all terms intended to represent an apparent lack of meaning, the response to which constitutes what Frankl calls "the collective neurosis of our time" (p. 17).

In another essay, "Existential Dynamics and Neurotic Escapism," Frankl accounts for the existence of the existential vacuum by saying that it "seems to issue from man's twofold loss: the loss of that instinctual security which surrounds an animal's life, and the further, more recent loss of those traditions which governed man's life in former times" (p. 19). Again, Frankl seems to echo Williams' ideas. Many of Williams' characters are beset by the loss of innocence, a term that may be defined as that state of instinctual security preceding the period in life during which one confronts the "tragic triad." The loss of tradition and the resultant hiatus are everywhere present in Williams, but probably the theme is most obvious in Streetcar. Joseph Wood Krutch acknowledges as much when he says of Blanche
DuBois: "She is on the side of civilization and refinement. But the age has placed her in a tragic dilemma. She looks about for a tradition according to which she may live and a civilization to which she can be loyal. She finds none. Ours is a society which has lost its shape." Blanche also manifests another significant condition which Frankl says is "pervasive in the present culture," and that is "the fear of aging and dying" (p. 15).

A major tenet of Frankl's therapeutic technique is that "life's transitoriness does not in the least detract from its meaningfulness." The implications to be drawn from this assertion constitute a theory of time that is identical to that held by Williams. Frankl explains by way of a quotation from Edith Weissdopf-Joelson who says: "The past of an individual is seen, as it were, as a storehouse of everything he has brought into existence, of safely and immutably materialized possibilities. Thus, the past of an individual is the part of his life in which he has overcome transiency and achieved eternity" (p. 84). Tennessee Williams says: "About their lives people ought to remember that when they are finished, everything in them will be contained in a marvelous state of repose which is the same as that which they unconsciously admired in drama. The rush is temporary. The great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power deliberately to choose certain moral values by which to live

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as steadfastly as if he, too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time. Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence. 37

On all major points of psychology Williams and Frankl agree. Man is guilty of being less than he might have been. Man is inherently and essentially oriented toward meaning but subject to what Frankl calls "meaning frustration." A chief obstacle to man's self-fulfillment is his consciousness of the transitoriness of his life, or to use Sartre's term, his contingency. Nonetheless, man's nature and the capabilities of that nature indicate a spiritual, or noetic, dimension of existence, which is to say that "one characteristic of human existence is its transcendence" (p. 136).

The view of man fostered by the traditional psychologies of Freud, Adler, and Jung—a view that is basic to a great deal of art and criticism—is based upon "unconscious invalid philosophical hypotheses," and constitutes a "caricature of man and not a true image" (p. 130).

In the course of this study I will attempt to show that Williams' psychology is not that of Freud but of Frankl. That is not to say that Williams makes no use of Freudian psychology. It must be remembered that when Williams began writing Freudianism was the only well-known and coherent theory of character formation to which writers had access.

Accordingly, Williams makes use of Freudian concepts in a functional but not a thematic way. Apparently his own experience, his own perceptions led to his commitment to a philosophy that Frankl was later to codify as Existential Psychology or Logotherapy.

As the ideas of Viktor Frankl serve to explain Williams' psychology, so do the ideas of Colin Wilson contribute to a better understanding of the point of view of both Williams and many of his major characters. Wilson's first book, The Outsider, is probably what a cover blurb on the paperback edition attests it to be, namely "The Seminal Book on the Alienation of Modern Man." It is as well, as Sidney Campion says, "one of the most difficult books to summarise ever written." To further complicate the problem of summary, The Outsider is only the first of a series that contains seven non-fiction books and a number of novels. The whole series attempts to define the concept of the Outsider, to explain his problems, and to point toward solutions to those problems.

Wilson's thinking makes it necessary that he deplore the fact that "spiritual standards have almost ceased to exist, and [that] Freud and Marx have done a thorough job of convincing us that all men are much the same, subject to the same kind of psychological and economic pressures." The

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Outsider is not "much the same" as other men. In fact, Wilson theorizes that the Outsiders in any culture comprise about half of the dominant minority of five percent. Frankl's ideas pertain to all men. It will be seen, however, that Outsiders represent in extremity certain qualities that all men share to some degree.

Most simply defined Outsiders are those men who "feel alienated from the life around them because they possess some insight or genius beyond that of their fellows." Thus, the basic problem of the Outsider is his "instinctive rejection of the everyday world. All major poets and philosophers have had this feeling as their starting point." Thus, Campion notes that the Outsider is not like the normal man who is "a completely social animal who would have no meaning and no existence if he was removed from all relation with other living creatures." The Outsider is:

\[\text{a being whose reality requires only one other reality to complete it— that of God or the Life Force (or simply "otherness" if you dislike these religious terms). . . . In The Outsider, the phrase "other people are the trouble" is repeated many times. It means roughly what Sartre meant in Huis Clos by "Hell is other people." Even an atheist may be glad to get away from some exhausting and uncongenial human relationship to turn to some more abstract pursuit—mathematics or music or political idealism? In its narrow and least controversial sense, the word God could be defined as the Abstract.}\]

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41 Campion, p. 157.
42 Wilson, *Outsider*, p. 293.
43 Campion, pp. 156-57.

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Campion notes that "in its simplest definition, then, 'Outsider' means a man who finds human relationships particularly wearing, and hungers for 'the Abstract' far more than the average. His resistance to other people and his need for 'the Abstract' is on a lower level than that of most people; just as a man's resistance to noise (and his need for silence) might be lower than other people's."\(^44\)

Wilson's thinking leads him to the conclusion that the central problem is one of individual consciousness and the evolution of civilizations.\(^45\) In short: "The more I considered the Outsider, the more I felt him to be a symptom of our time and age. Essentially, he seemed to be a rebel; and what he was in rebellion against was the lack of spiritual tension in a materially prosperous civilization. . . . An individual tends to be what his environment makes him. If a civilization is spiritually sick, the individual suffers from the same sickness. If he is healthy enough to put up a fight, he becomes an Outsider."\(^46\)

More and more it has become necessary for such a person to put up a fight, for modern society, unlike earlier societies, has no outlet for the Outsider. The church, for example, was once the institution to which the Outsider might retreat from the social world in order to follow the dictates of his own highly individual nature. However, mod-

\(^{44}\text{Ibid., p. 157.}^{45}\text{Wilson, Outsider, p. 296.}^{46}\text{Wilson, Religion and the Rebel, pp. 1-2.}

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ern society has moved increasingly toward a way of life dominated by a kind of "automatism" that Wilson designates as "the problem of life itself." The automatism results from the achievement of a state of technology and philosophy in which the human being is not called upon to exercise will; in fact, in such a culture, "every act of will is unnatural." Thus, the "life-force" stagnates and "gives off smells like standing water, and the whole being is poisoned."

The Outsider is aware of his own different nature, though he may not achieve an intellectual understanding of his condition. He may say with the hero of Henri Barbusse's L'Enfer, "I see too deep and too much." His perceptions tell him that "life-as-it-is-commonly-lived" is pointless and demeaning, and that mankind is a "vast sea of mediocrity" to which he does not wish to belong. Once he begins to find himself, he realizes that his hatred of common life and common men "is perfectly justified: a healthy reaction to a world of sick half-men." At this point, the Outsider is likely to hit upon the answer that "his salvation lies in extremes," and those extremes lie in those directions that are most susceptible to atrophy due to the processes of modern life. The original insight and the nature of the extremity to which the Outsider is driven furnish a workable classification system.

47 Ibid., p. 27. 48 Ibid., 49 Ibid., pp. 40-41. 50 Wilson, Outsider, p. 66.
The three types of Outsider seek salvation through extremes of intellect, emotion, and bodily activity. T. E. Lawrence "could write: 'I am insight through mind, not through feeling.' Van Gogh could write: 'I am insight through feeling, not through mind.' It is Nijinsky who can say: 'I am insight through flesh, not through either mind or feeling.'"\(^{51}\)

But such narrow insight is not sufficient to the Outsider's needs, for the Outsider's "chief desire is to be unified,"\(^{52}\) to be reintegrated into the world from which he feels himself to be estranged. The intensity of that estrangement forces the Outsider to live life as if it were perpetually critical, and "the crises of living demand the active cooperation of intellect, emotions, and body, on equal terms."\(^{53}\) Lacking integration of his own faculties, the Outsider is prone to extreme visions of his world. He may, like H. G. Wells, in *Mind at the End of its Tether*, predict that "the end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded."\(^{54}\) Wells, the intellectual Outsider, argues that if we look objectively at life we must realize that there is "no pattern of any kind," and if we are courageous enough to follow our thought to its ultimate end we must conclude that thought negates life. Reason provides no consolation, no answer.\(^{55}\)

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 101.  \(^{52}\)Ibid., pp. 58-59.  \\
\(^{53}\)Ibid., p. 239.  \(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 16.  \(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 19.
The Emotional Outsider, whose relationship to the world is not based upon intellect but upon feeling, is likely to be drawn in two directions based upon the two modes of consciousness that characterize the Romantic poet—namely, the experience of the world as futile and meaningless, and the experience of a personal, non-reasonable response to life that is completely affirmative. Thus, the Emotional Outsider alternates between a negative experience that has been called variously Vastation by William James, Nausea by Sartre, or the existential void by Viktor Frankl, and a positive experience that psychologist Abraham Maslow terms a peak experience.

That Williams is prone to such a dualistic vision of reality has been acknowledged by a number of critics. John Buell comments that "the most commonly noted imagery in Tennessee Williams' plays is an irrational, brutal, orgiastic violence . . . of nightmarish or neurotic proportions, but it exists in the same play side by side with an incredible tenderness and sensitivity."56 The negative experience of the world leads Williams to designate the world as "Dragon Country," or the "Beanstalk land of the giant."

The Outsider is basically a religious man, and his problem is a religious one. What the Outsider is looking for is a justification for life itself. The quest often transforms the Outsider into the philosopher. A philosopher

such as Nietzsche exemplifies, even epitomizes, most of what has been said of the Outsider up to this point. Wilson summarizes Nietzsche's development in this way:

He was getting tired of the everlasting pendulum that swung between Yes and No, of happiness that made him think misery unimportant, and misery that made happiness a delusion. He wanted to know for certain. He looked into himself and faced the fact that he could not say Yes or No. He asked himself: Is this true of the nature of life itself, or could a man exist who could say finally: I accept everything? His imagination set to work on the problem, to conceive a man great enough to affirm.57

The result was the creation of the concept of the Superman.

What becomes increasingly clear is that Nietzsche's problem, indeed, the problem of all Outsiders, is the same problem that was posed by Viktor Frankl, the frustration of the Will to Meaning. But in the Outsider, both the Will to Meaning and the frustration of that will achieve degrees of intensity that would surely be called pathological if they were not firmly grounded in an impulse that is essentially sane. The Outsider is the "basically religious man . . . who refuses to develop those qualities of practical-mindedness and eye-to-eye business that seem to be the requisites for survival in our complex civilization."58 Refusing to do so, he makes himself vulnerable; he opens himself to pain of the most intense sort.

Wilson concludes that the only answer to the Outsider's problem is to find a philosophy that is consistent with his own experience of life. Such an answer is only to

57 Wilson, Outsider, p. 133. 58 Ibid., p. 261.
be found in a life that encompasses the visionary and the mystical. Probably the most heroic and the most successful of Wilson's Outsider heroes is William Blake, whose success was the result of his maintaining the view that life is infinite in its potential. However, in practice, life is appallingly evil because it is appallingly innocuous. Blake accepted both the sorry state of the world and his superiority over other men. Certainly, Tennessee Williams has not succeeded in attaining such a philosophical position. Modern life makes it increasingly difficult for the Outsider to maintain his realization that the sickness that he feels is in fact perverse health. More and more, modern psychology has taught that the manifestations of Outsiderism are manifestations of mental disorder, and that one ought to adapt to the world rather than alter one's nature or the nature of one's world.

The problem emerged in clear relief at a convention of psychiatrists held in 1966. The problem that the convention put to itself was whether the analyst should work to make the patient sane or help the patient to adjust to his world. The conclusion was that the demands of modern life are not sane in themselves and that our society would reject the sane man as a misfit. The Outsider manifests that sort of sanity that is easily mistaken for madness, and he must bear the consequences of his own strengths.

Tennessee Williams is an Outsider. He feels, to an extreme degree, the position that is summed up in the printed
character-reading that Flora is given in "A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot": "You have a very sensitive nature, and are frequently misunderstood by your close companions." 59 Williams is specifically that type of Outsider that is epitomized in Van Gogh—the Emotional Outsider who is characterized not by the quality of his intellect, but by the quality of his feeling. Wilson's treatment of Van Gogh contains much that is applicable to Tennessee Williams. For example, Van Gogh's "earliest experiences teach him that life is an eternal Pro and Contra. His sensitivity makes him unusually aware of the Contra, of his own misery and the world's. All his faculties are exerted in a search for the Pro, for instinctive, absolute Yea-saying." Accordingly, his "wretchedness lies in his inability to find a new faith; he tends to regard his condition of unbelief as the result of a Fall," 60 that is to say a reason for his own and the world's misery. Williams too seems intent upon accounting for the state of the world. In such plays as Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, he explores the idea that it is the responsibility to the family and the human community that renders people unhappy. In plays like A Streetcar Named Desire, Glass Menagerie, and Kingdom of Earth he considers the loss of a coherent and ordered society as reason for unhappiness. In such plays as Sweet Bird of


60 Wilson, Outsider, p. 89.
Youth, Suddenly Last Summer, and Night of the Iguana, the conditions implying a fall seem to derive from a malevolent deity. The Outsider must account for his own condition and the condition of the world. His answer to that condition need not be positive, though he would wish it to be. What he requires is a way to be "completely in accord with" the order in the universe—the order that "he can sometimes perceive."

With Van Gogh the thought was that such a sense could be regained by discipline, and art became the form of his discipline. Williams too has taken art as such a discipline. His constant reworking of his plays, the faithfulness with which he plies his trade, and the acknowledged importance of his creative work to his own sense not only of well-being, a feeling that is uncommon to Williams, but of meaningful being are indicative of the degree to which art has become, for Williams, a life-discipline. In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, the play that Donald Newlove calls his "crucifixion play," dramatizes an artist in the grips of a passion that Williams must know intimately. Mark is torn between the demands of his craft and the demands of human relationships. The conflict is made more complex by the fact that his artistic powers are undergoing great changes in the face of a breakthrough, a new sense of style and a new appreciation of light and color that figure in the play as symbols of mysti-

61 Ibid.
cal and religious insight. Mark must suffer both from the demands of his art and the failure of his wife and associate to understand either his devotion to his art or the changes that are taking place with regard to his own consciousness of art and reality. He finds himself in a position similar to that of Van Gogh.

Wilson tells us that Van Gogh's attempts to render his vision in art "completely transcend most of their critics' knowledge of reality." He even advises that when we approach "the work of such a man as Van Gogh, an attitude of completely uncritical acceptance (such as most of us feel towards the dogmas of higher mathematics) may be more rewarding than the intellectual-critical approach." Such an approach to Williams' work might not be ill advised. Much of Williams' work, especially the later plays, often does seem to aspire to the condition of the graphic arts, that is to the concrete objectivity, focus, and intensity of painting. Much of the value of Esther Merle Jackson's *The Broken World of Tennessee Williams* is to be found in her continued comparison of Williams' conceptions of staging to the work of painters.63

Anyone familiar with the work of Hieronymus Bosch is likely to grasp the amazing similarities between his work

62Ibid., p. 90.

and Williams'. In spite of the disparate media one can see that both men operate under a religious bias, both make use of a style characterized by distortion and juxtaposition, and both are obsessively concerned with the dark side of human life. It is that which Williams has in common with Bosch that led to the now famous epithet "poet of the damned."

It is possible to press the comparison between Williams' drama and painting too far, but many of Williams' small plays do stand in the same relation to his major works that an enlarged "detail" illustration in an art book stands to the larger work in question. The attention to details of light and color that we often find in Williams indicates that he and the graphic artist have perceptions that are alike in kind if not in degree. A close study of the later plays, especially The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, indicates that Williams has made what must be a conscious attempt to introduce the esthetics of Oriental Zen art into the structure of his plays.

Wilson says that Van Gogh looked for the answer in the "concept of discipline. But with him it is no longer the discipline of the intellect; his powers of will were directed towards a development of the emotions." Williams has proclaimed more than once that his theater is a theater of sentiment, of feeling. He says in his "Afterword" to Camino Real: "There are plays meant for reading. I have

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64 Wilson, Outsider, p. 92.
road them. I have read the works of 'thinking playwrights' as distinguished from us who are permitted only to feel. . . ."\(^{65}\) Elsewhere, Williams defines the experience of seeing a play in distinctly emotional terms. Of plays "in the tragic tradition," he says: "Because we do not participate, except as spectators, we can view them clearly, within the limits of our emotional equipment. . . . All at once, for this reason, we are able to see them! Our hearts are wrung by recognition and pity, so that the dusky shell of the auditorium is flooded with an almost liquid warmth of unchecked human sympathies, relieved of self-consciousness, allowed to function..."\(^{66}\) In this description of an emotional peak experience, Williams suggests that part of the function of serious drama is to force from us those human feelings with which we have lost contact and that the failure of much serious drama is more the fault of the audience than the playwright. "So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensibility of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue."\(^{67}\) One detects here the characteristic Outsider impatience with those people, the majority of people, who fail to experience with the intensity that the

\(^{65}\)Williams, Three Plays, p. 163.

\(^{66}\)Ibid., p. 6. Throughout this paper, single-spaced ellipses should be understood to be a part of the original quotation. The usual double-spaced ellipsis will be used to indicate omissions from a quoted text.

\(^{67}\)Ibid., p. 7.
Outsider himself feels.

Van Gogh arrived at the point at which "he felt too much just as [T. E.] Lawrence thought too much. One felt without thinking; the other thought without feeling." He arrived at such a point through the elevation of the emotions. There is in Williams that same elevation of the emotions to the level of crucial significance. A passage from a recent profile of Williams written by Rex Reed is more helpful to an understanding of Williams than most specifically critical comments. Reed sums up the life and work of Tennessee Williams in this way:

Years of indescribable torment and physical dissipation that taught him a way of life. . . . And out of the loneliness and self-destruction and pain have come some of the world's greatest plays. Why do they survive along with him? Why does Tennessee Williams, already written off by the cynics in the obituaries they keep taking out and rattling whenever a new play opens, make more comebacks than Judy Garland? Because in an age so filled with non-appreciation and polite sensibility, a time of fatalism, nihilism, a certain destruction of the ideal of beauty, a replacement by wastelands and other sterile sanctuaries, he suffers the urgent need to bring meaning to life, to resurrect gentility and kindness. It is not necessary to understand him to appreciate his genius. One needs only to feel, and he feels magnificently.

Unlike Van Gogh, Williams did not kill himself at the age of 37. Williams remains a dramatist who is concerned with the presentation of emotional truths, but he has more and more begun to look for answers to his emotional dilemma and

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68 Wilson, Outsider, p. 93.

the dilemmas of his characters in nonreasonable ways. His rather steady progress toward the visionary and the mystical is reflected in his plays in such a way that he has lost many of his audience. He can no longer claim the sympathetic consideration from drama critics that was his while his plays were characterized by the lyric realism of Glass Menagerie, or the more formalistic realism of such plays as Summer and Smoke. Williams has moved through the style of the drama of the absurd, that he handles so masterfully in Slapstick Tragedy, to a ritualistic drama that is very much akin to Japanese Noh drama. Williams himself says that the critics "got hung up on my naturalistic plays. And when I began to phase-out naturalism in the 60's, they couldn't go with me." Williams' stylistic development is rather like that of Ibsen, and his late work has been as coolly received as Ibsen's and for the same reasons. Both playwrights evolved a style with which they might render their truths with some clarity, only to find that the styles that they had evolved made those truths inaccessible to a large part of the audience that they had created for themselves.

One other aspect of Wilson's philosophy requires discussion here, and that is made up of the ideas stated in The Origin of the Sexual Impulse. Like Frankl, Wilson doubts the mechanistic view of personality that is fostered by

Freud. He contends that "the sexual impulse is not the basic human drive. It is no more 'basic' than the urge to social reform or to doing mathematics." Far from having "taught us to face unpleasant truths about ourselves," Freud "has taught us to face an unpleasant lie." Wilson grants that Freud's psychology might have been more valid when it was developed in an "age of security and optimism, an age dominated by 'convention' and taboo." However, "the world of the mid-twentieth century is an entirely different affair." Indeed, conditions in the twentieth century are very nearly the reverse of those that prevailed during Freud's lifetime. "So it is no longer permissible to assume, like Freud, that all neurosis has a sexual basis, and disappears when man is adjusted to society. Society is no longer stable, so adjustment to it is no longer the wholly satisfactory solution." Wilson finds instead that the characteristic neurosis of the present day is exactly that condition that Viktor Frankl calls Noetic or Noölogical neurosis: "... the basis of the prevalent twentieth-century neurosis ... is not man's fear of his own irrationality, but a deeper fear that all life is futile, is a horrible joke." The fear of futility is the result of man's reduced consciousness. All men desire an increase in con-

72 Ibid., p. 224. 73 Ibid., pp. 208-209.
74 Ibid., p. 209.
sciousness, for during those periods of heightened consciousness, what Abraham Maslow calls peak experiences, man's sense of futility is overcome by affirmation. For most human beings the most accessible and reliable means of creating such an experience is through the sex act. For most men those sexual acts that are generally considered to be usual are sufficient to generate the necessary heightened consciousness. For some men sexual excesses become necessary. At one point Wilson says that "'deviation,' like Leopold Bloom's fetishism, is the attempt of the healthy organism to tear off the blinkers that frustrate its self-knowledge, the widening of its self-consciousness."^75

Wilson's theory is a restatement in sexual terms of Frankl's idea of the Will to Meaning. Hence to see sexual activity as merely an attempt to satisfy Freud's will to pleasure is to miss the point, that being that sexual activity is an attempt to realize meaning, an attempt that takes the form of the affirmation of life through expanded consciousness. This concept of sexuality would appear to be the one that is operative in several of Williams' plays, notably **Sweet Bird of Youth** in which Chance Wayne, opposed by the Messianic Boss Finley, attempts to reestablish his love affair with Heavenly in order to recover his own lost innocence, a state that has been defined previously as the state of instinctual security, the loss of which Frankl cites as a

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^75 Ibid., p. 114.
cause of the existential vacuum.

Both Frankl and Wilson approach the prophetic in their stated opinion that the fulfillment of the Will to Meaning, or the achievement of heightened consciousness, is a way to overcome the human condition. Wilson quotes Hesse, who declares that "man . . . is a bourgeois compromise."\(^76\) Frankl cites Goethe's: "If we take man as he is, we make him worse; if we take him as he ought to be, we help him become it."\(^77\) There is, in both the work of Frankl and Wilson, the tacit acknowledgment of the heroism involved in seeking to go beyond compromise, in seeking to achieve human potential, in seeking to find the significant truth that will dispel our suspicions that all existence is futile and that our lives are death in disguise.

The importance of the ideas of Frankl and Wilson to the study of Tennessee Williams should be immediately apparent. Williams' characters are characters in extremity. But if we entertain the ideas of Frankl and Wilson, the extremity is not the extremity of neurosis or psychosis. Williams' characters are not driven by the Freudian psycho-mechanism that is powered by the sex drive. Rather, their motive power is Frankl's Will to Meaning. Since Williams is a dramatist, and since drama has been the realm of extremity since Sophocles, Williams' characters tend toward those extremes of sanity that Wilson holds to be characteristic of

\(^76\)Wilson, Outsider, p. 60. \(^77\)Frankl, p. 12.
the Outsider. In fact, Williams has created one of the most impressive galleries of Outsider portraits to be produced in the twentieth century. Williams' protagonist is most often the classic Outsider; his quest is for a ground of being and meaning. His quest becomes religious rather than psychic because Williams insists upon designating that ground of being by the term that theologians have always favored—God. Time and again he is defeated, but from time to time he does glimpse some shred of insight. As those insights collect, we are gifted with the drama of the Outsider struggling toward self-realization. Implicit in that public drama is the private drama of the playwright in search for a vision whose basic terms are religious and whose insights are cast in traditional symbolic terms. Those traditional symbols, however, often function in a most untraditional manner. Such is decidedly true of the Christ figure in Battle of Angels and Orpheus Descending.
CHAPTER II

THE HEROIC CHRISTS OF BATTLE OF ANGELS

AND ORPHEUS DESCENDING

Like much of the work to follow, Williams' first professionally produced play is a classic Outsider drama which features four protagonists, each seeking to remedy his situation in a separate way. Williams says that Orpheus Descending, the 1957 revision of Battle of Angels, is "a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them . . . and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary."\(^1\) The questions in the play are exactly those questions to which Viktor Frankl addresses himself.

The play is of crucial importance to a study of Williams. The ideas that are dramatized in the play mark the beginning of a set of inquiries that has dominated all of Williams' work. There are here, too, the character types who will continue to inhabit the world of Tennessee Williams.

The printed version of the play Battle of Angels differs from the script that was produced in Boston in 1940. The printed version contains a character, David Anderson, 

\(^1\)Tennessee Williams, Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. vi.
who apparently was not in the Boston production. Neither the part nor an actor is listed in the original cast. Also, the printed version of the play contains nothing to account for the clouds of smoke that dismayed the Boston audience. Those aspects of the play that led the city fathers to censor the play on the grounds that it was blasphemous are an inextricable part of the design of the play. Val Xavier remains unmistakably a Christ symbol even in the 1957 version, *Orpheus Descending*.

Battle of Angels is framed within two scenes that take place in the Torrance Mercantile Store in Two Rivers, Mississippi. The audience is prepared for the religious implications of the narrative to follow when, in the first scene, Eva and Blanch Temple, two women of the town, show a tourist couple through the building that has been maintained as a shrine to commemorate the events that took place there on Good Friday of the year before. When the four people go upstairs, the play proper begins so that when Eva and Blanch descend the stairs, the action of the play has moved into the past, to the day on which Myra Torrance brings her husband Jabe home from the hospital. He knows, though he has not been told, that he is dying of inoperable cancer. He is carried upstairs by a back staircase. Throughout the play, he thumps his cane on the floor, but he is not seen by the audience until the final few minutes of the play.

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The second scene introduces one of the four major characters of the play. Eight years before, as a young girl, Myra Torrance had been involved with David Anderson, who later married a delta debutante for her money. After that marriage, Myra married Jabe and has lived since that time in a sort of suspended animation. Her friend, the wife of the local sheriff, is Vee (for Veronica) Talbott. For twelve years Vee has been working on a series of visionary portraits of the apostles. She is waiting for a vision before she paints a portrait of Christ. Another member of the community, the third of the four protagonists, is Cassandra Whiteside, the promiscuous daughter of a wealthy planter family.

The character around whom the play is fashioned is the young writer-drifter who has changed his name from Jonathan West to Valentine Xavier after a casual encounter with a middle-aged woman in Waco, Texas, leads to a charge of rape. Names are always significant in a Williams play. The name of the central figure in this play indicates that Williams wishes to suggest that in our culture the concern with the geographic frontier has been superseded by a necessary new concern with emotional frontiers, the frontiers of sentiment in the best sense of that word. Val arrives in Two Rivers wearing a snakeskin jacket and carrying a tin box in which he keeps the pages of his book.

Val is first a clerk in Myra's store, then her lover, then the father of her unborn child. Cassandra makes sever-
al attempts to seduce him, but all that she finally wins is his admission that, to some degree, the two of them are alike, fellow members of the "fugitive kind." The catastrophe of the play comes about soon after Vee Talbott sees a vision of Christ near the lynching tree on the levee. The townswomen recognize that the Christ in the resultant portrait is none other than Valentine Xavier. One of the women who see the resemblance is the woman from Waco who arrives during the last few minutes of the play. Val's actions have offended most of the people in the town so that they are anxious to do violence to him. It should be said that Val's actions are largely a matter of according sympathy to the poor, the black, the desperate—those like himself whom he calls the "dispossessed."

In the final act, with the river at flood stage, the bridges out, and the telephone wires down, Jabe descends the stairs and confronts Myra and Val. Myra, in a fit of anger at Jabe and at the thought of losing Val, who has succeeded in bringing her back to life, confesses that she is carrying Val's child. Jabe kills her, then rushes out to tell the townspeople that Val is the murderer. Myra dies, and Val is stripped and carried off to the lynching tree, where he is killed with a blow torch. The stage is empty. After a brief curtain, Eva and Blanch Temple descend the stairs and, in a conversation with the tourists, explain that on the night of Val's death, Cassandra drove her car into the river and drowned. Vee Talbott was so struck by the tragic events

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that she lost her sanity. The guides and tourists leave the stage, and a Negro conjure man hangs Val's jacket in a shaft of light. "He seems to make a slight obeisance before it." As the curtain falls, the only sound to be heard is the singing from a Negro church, and it "swells in exaltation."³

The tragedy of the play is intended to suggest parallels between the events in Two Rivers, Mississippi, and the events that culminate in the crucifixion of Jesus. The chief device used to convey this parallelism is the placement of the actions of the play so that the catastrophe falls on Good Friday. (The same device is used again in Sweet Bird of Youth). Val is immolated on a hill, on a tree that has been the site of previous killings. In this light, the central action of the play, the rejuvenation of Myra Torrance, suggests the resurrection of Lazarus. In the later version of the play, Williams suggests in a number of ways both the Lazarus and the Orpheus story.

The traditional view of the play is that it is an allegory based upon the ideas of D. H. Lawrence. Considered from this point of view, the major conflict of the play is between the forces of healthy, fruitful sexuality, and sterile conformity to social mores. Such a view must result in the judgment that the play is muddled, for the doctrine of the play simply is not compatible with Lawrence's ideas.

³Williams, Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels, p. 238. Future references to this edition will be included in parentheses within the text.
As complex as Lawrence's ideas are, they are not unduly misrepresented if we say that Lawrence believed that the sexual relationship was metaphorical of the nature of the universe itself, and that surrender to the "dark gods of the blood" allowed one to grasp the universe in a very real, but non-reasonable, way. The male-female relationship is, according to Lawrence, fraught with conflicts that cannot be resolved. Man's highest vision is the result of acting in accordance with those conflicts. In so doing, man adapts himself to the texture of the physical world. Williams does not hold the same views. To impress upon Williams' play the pattern of Lawrence's vision is to misunderstand the play.

The major theme of the play is not sexuality, but a certain kind of freedom. The play dramatizes Williams' concept that the free man is likely to be free in terms of his sexuality, but, unlike Lawrence, Williams does not consider sexuality to be the source of that freedom.

Valentine Xavier is an Outsider. Characteristically, he desires to become an insider: "I wanted to feel like I belonged somewhere and lived like regular people" (p. 165). But he wishes to become an insider without giving up those qualities of responsiveness that characterize the Outsider. Accordingly, he must finally refuse the life that is implied in the sexual relationship between himself and Myra. He does so because he can envision a better life. That view of life is more compatible with Wordsworthian Romanticism than Lawrentian sexuality. Val tells Myra that he will retreat
to the desert in New Mexico, and that her presence in that desert would "make it crowded": "It is big, Myra. It stretches clean out 'til tomorrow. Over here is the Labos Mountains, and over there, that's Sangre de Cristo [Blood of Christ], and way up there, that's the sky! And there ain't nothing else in between, not you, not anybody, or nothing. . . . Why, my God, it seems like sometimes when you're out there alone by yourself (not with nobody else!) that your brain is stretched out so far, it's pushing right up against the edges of the stars" (p. 224). Val has a very strong helping of the Outsider's appetite for the abstract. He intends leaving the human community completely to look for his answers elsewhere.

Val's involvement with Myra is a repetition of an earlier sexual encounter, Val's first, and it confirms what Val had discovered previously; namely that sexuality may be a constituent of the freedom that he desires, but that it is not the totality. As a boy, Val had lived in a state of nature in the wilderness of Witches' Bayou. He had lain naked to the sky, waiting "for something important that was going to come in to me." He asks "the sky, dark--or with stars--or blazing yellow with the sunlight . . . 'Why? why? why?'" (pp. 167f). Val's chief aim is the aim that Viktor Frankl cites as a dominant human motive--the Will to Meaning. Val looks for the "something secret that I would find out and then it would all make sense" (p. 168). Val is the Outsider looking for the key that will render the world consistent.
His encounter with the girl promises a Lawrentian revelation, but it does not happen. Rather, Val realizes that sexual satisfaction is short-lived: "But when I'd left her, the satisfaction would leave me an' I'd be... like this. [He clenches his fist.] Right on the edge of something tremendous. It wasn't her. She was just a woman, not even a woman quite, and what I wanted was..." "Was what?" Myra asks. Val replies, "Christ, I don't know. I gotta find out!" (pp. 170f). Val's encounter with the girl is a perfect dramatization of Colin Wilson's theory of the sexual impulse, namely that it promises more than it can deliver in the way of revelation. Val's answer to Myra, and other interchanges in the play, imply that Val's particular brand of freedom is to be found in the character of Christ.

Basic to the play is Val's realization that he and Myra are not compatible. Val promises to send for Myra after he has finished his book, but his delay indicates where he places most value. The two protagonists are not compatible because Val is not a D. H. Lawrence hero, but Myra is a Lawrentian heroine. She requires that Val dominate her. She has locked the room in which she and Val consummate their passion, knowing that he will break the lock when the time comes. The height of her vision of life is fruitfulness. When she tells Val that she is pregnant with his child, she tells him of the fig tree that grew in the back yard of her childhood home. After a long period of barrenness, the tree had born one small fig, and Myra had celebrated the event by
decorating it with Christmas ornaments. But Myra attempts to sum up the nature of the vital life when she is still reeling under the effects of a sense of renewed being that has come upon her after an eight-year period of a sort of living death. When she lost David Anderson, what she "really wanted was death. But Jabe was the next best thing" (p. 118). Myra has mistaken the part for the whole, for sexual passion is not the total answer. She has failed to grasp the import of Val's experience on Witches' Bayou.

In fact, in spite of the commanding figure that Myra has in the play, there is another character who understands better the nature of life. That character is Cassandra Whiteside. Despite her frantic, seemingly insane attempts at realizing the ideal of a full life, Cassandra knows more of the truth than Myra does. Cassandra knows that the world, like Cypress Hill cemetery, is a dead place. She knows that the implicit command of a dead world is to live. She tells Val that she is like the first Cassandra: "Her ears were snake-bitten, like mine. . . ." Given the knowledge to see the truth of things, Cassandra learns that "everything that she'd been told before . . . was all stuff and nonsense, a pack of lies" (p. 135). In characteristic Outsider fashion, she attempts to escape her feelings of futility and unreality through extremes, through drink, speed, and sex. Near the end of the play, she tells Val, "I think that passion is something to be proud of. It's the only one of the little alphabet blocks they give us to play with that seems to
stand for anything of importance" (p. 215). The image is E. A. Robinson's; Williams has used it elsewhere. The object of playing with the blocks is, of course, to spell out the name of God. Cassandra acknowledges that there are other blocks, though she herself does not understand them. Like Val, she has grasped that she is constitutionally different from the dead who make up the majority of the human community. She has reached the point at which her alternatives are defined. She finds that she and Val have in common that "we both want freedom." Lacking that freedom, she craves death. She tells Val, "You should have killed me, before I kill myself. I will someday" (p. 161). Cassandra has reached the state at which she has turned her hatred of the world toward herself. She could say with the classic Outsider, "I see too much and I see too deep." She says instead, "I wear dark glasses over my eyes because I've got secrets in them. Too much of something that makes me rather disgusting" (p. 161). Like Tom in Glass Menagerie, she is "trying to find in motion what was lost in space."4 She tells Val that they are both damned "because we know too much." Her strongest appeal to Val is that together they might "live on motion. . . . Nothing but motion, motion, mile after mile, keeping up with the wind, or even faster! Doesn't that make you hungry for what you live on? . . . Maybe we'll find something new, something never before discovered" (p. 213). Cassandra has suc-

cumbed to the dark side of her Outsider nature. She has faced the existential void. Her Will to Meaning has been frustrated, and she reacts in the manner of a cornered animal. In *Orpheus Descending*, Williams makes even more clear this aspect of her character. Renamed Carol Cutrere in the later play, she is given the past of an idealistic civil rights worker. The failure of her idealism leads to the perversion of her positive nature, so that her inclination to death is shown to be an inversion of her original will to do good. Still, despite her frenzied actions, Cassandra has more of the answer than does Myra. But she has less of the answer than Val, and less, perhaps, than one other character in the play.

Vee Talbott, the wife of the sheriff, has arrived at a state of consciousness that does make her life meaningful and significant. She is not tortured, as the other characters are, by the fear of futility and unreality, for she sees the world in religious terms. Critics insist upon interpreting her character in Freudian terms so that her quasi-mysticism becomes the result of sublimation and repression of the libido. It is more likely that Williams intends that we take Vee more seriously than such an interpretation would allow. Vee has been a visionary since she was seven years old, an unlikely age for sexual sublimation to express itself as religious vision. For twelve years before the play begins, Vee has been painting portraits of the apostles. Her painting is primitive, but we are expected to see that it is suc-
cessful to the degree that it renders her intense response to the world around her. The work is good enough to have interested New Orleans artists, and some of her work does hang in a New Orleans museum. Additionally, she shows real signs of the stigmata, and her vision of Val and the lynching tree does prove to be prophetic.

Vee stands in dramatic contrast to most of the other characters in the play because her vision is completely positive. Her world is not unreal, is not futile, because she has succeeded in impressing on that world the pattern of her own Christian faith. Her paintings serve the same function as Val's book. They are both about life, and both are attributed to madness. She tells Val, "I always paint a thing the way that it strikes me instead of the way that it actually is" (p. 177). Let the world be what it is, Vee has grasped the Outsider truth that her response to the world constitutes a greater reality than does mere actuality.

It is not surprising that her fate is finally the asylum of a mental institution. Vee's experience, her tragedy, is not the same as that of the other characters. They might have some vague sense of the parallels suggested by the violent events of Good Friday in Two Rivers County, Mississippi. Vee has gone further. She has witnessed the crucifixion. The design of the play itself validates her vision of the world.

The changes that have taken place in the play when it re-emerges in 1957 as *Orpheus Descending* are subtle but mean-
The reference to Orpheus serves to generalize rather than eradicate the implications of the slain Christ. The characters remain essentially the same, though the plotting is still rather heavy. The framing device is gone. The theme of the battle of angels, the battle between the forces of life and of death, is still the motive power behind the new play. However, the introduction of the Orpheus myth allows Williams to emphasize his theme more clearly by subtly altering the importance of his characters. Val Xavier was the hero of the first play. In Orpheus Descending, Lady Torrance is the dominant protagonist. It is still Val who carries the message of the play, and the message has changed very little. Val is still the young man who lay naked in a boat on Witches' Bayou "waiting for something to happen, for anything to happen to make things make more sense. I was waiting for something like if you ask a question you wait for someone to answer, but you ask the wrong question or you ask the wrong person and the answer doesn't come" (pp. 47f). Val has even more of the Outsider's impatience with the world that blithely continues as if the answer were apparent: "Does everything stop because you don't get the answer? No, it goes right on as if the answer were given... And then--well--then.... You get the make-believe answer."

Lady supplies the word. The make-believe answer is "Love" (p. 48). Val's experience with the girl on the bayou had taught him as much. That experience had begun with an omen, a bird shadow on the skin of the girl, but it ended with Val
unsure "whether that was it, but from that time the question wasn't much plainer than the answer" (p. 48). It was then that Val donned his snakeskin jacket and left the Edenic bayou for New Orleans. Val adopts the jacket as a sort of heraldic device, but the jacket does not, as one critic claims, function in such a way as to indicate that Val is of the devil's party. The device is adopted at exactly that point in his life at which he has gained some knowledge. The snake image suggests knowledge, not evil. It should be remembered that Cassandra, who becomes Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending, had spoken of herself in terms of the snake image. That her ears were snake-bitten made her able to perceive the truth. The snake is a fitting image for the double-edged truth of good and evil that leaves the knower vulnerable.

By the time Val enters the play he has had the opportunity to acquire more knowledge. As an itinerant musician in New Orleans, he has encountered corruption, and when he first finds himself stealing, he faces himself and changes his life. He tells Carol: "... this is my thirtieth birthday and I'm all through with that route" (p. 22). Like Christ in the wilderness, Val has overcome the temptation. He has left the underworld of nighttime New Orleans and has re-entered the real world of Two Rivers, Mississippi. By doing so, he sets into motion a series of events that paral-

lel those that took place in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. Thus he learns that even Two Rivers, Mississippi, is within the limits of the kingdom of death. He journeys through that kingdom with his snakeskin jacket and his "life's companion," his guitar that is covered with the names of Outsider musicians like himself. Whereas the first Val had been a writer, the second is a musician. The change is in keeping with the change in title, but the implication of both vocations is the same. Val has saved himself so far by the curative powers of an artistic discipline. His guitar, he says, "washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched me" (p. 37).

Like the magical Orpheus or the mystical Christ, Val impels other people to greater vision, to greater realization of themselves and the world around them. Both Carol and Lady experience Val's influence and respond with a candor that surprises even themselves. When she reminds Val of their meeting in New Orleans, Carol remembers that she had said, "What on earth do you do on this earth but catch at whatever comes near you, with both hands, until your fingers are broken? I'd never said that before, or even consciously thought it, but afterwards it seemed like the truest thing that my lips had ever spoken . . ." (p. 21).

With Vee Talbott, however, Val functions in a different way. He does not cause her to grasp new conceptions. Rather, each confirms the vision of the other. There is a telling interchange between them after Vee has seen her vi-
sion of the Christ—a vision that is remarkably like that of
the painter Mark in *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*:

VEE [with the naivete of a child, as VAL comes back
to her]: I thought I would see my Savior on the day
of His passion, which was yesterday, Good Friday, . . .
But I was mistaken. . . . Yesterday passed and noth­
ing, nothing much happened, but--today--this after­
noon, somehow I pulled myself together and walked
outdoors and started to go to pray in the empty
church and meditate on the Rising of Christ tomorrow.
Along the road as I walked, thinking about the mys­
teries of Easter, veils! [She makes a long shudder­
ing word out of "veils."] seemed to drop off my eyes.
Light, oh, light! I never have seen such brilliance!
It PRICKED my eyeballs like NEEDLES!

VAL:--Light?

VEE: Yes, yes, light. YOU know, you know we live
in light and shadow, that's, that's what we live in,
a world of--light and--shadow....

VAL: Yes. In light and shadow. [He nods with com­
plete understanding and agreement. They are like
two children who have found life's meaning, simply
and quietly; along a country road] (pp. 91f).

To some degree, the two have found life's meaning, as the
playwright suggests. Both are Outsiders, which means that
both Vee and Val (even the names are similar) are inordin­
ately sensitive people, and their sensitivity leads them
both to condemn the world of Two Rivers, Mississippi, the
world that functions, much as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Coun­
ty does, as a microcosm not only of the South, but of the
world. Earlier in the play Vee and Val have compared their
perceptions of the world:

VEE: --Oh, I--tell you!--since I got into this
painting, my whole outlook is different. I can't
explain how it is, the difference to me.

VAL: You don't have to explain. I know what you
mean. Before you started to paint, it didn't make
sense.
VEE: --What--what didn't?

VAL: Existence!

VEE [slowly and softly]: No--no, it didn't... existence didn't make sense....

VAL . . .: You lived in Two Rivers County, the wife of the county Sheriff. "You saw awful things take place.

VEE: Awful! Things!

VAL: Beatings!

VEE: Yes!

VAL: Lynchings!

VEE: Yes!

VAL: Runaway convicts torn to pieces by hounds!

[This is the first time she could express this horror.]

VEE: Chain-gang dogs!

VAL: Yeah?

VEE: Tear fugitives!

VAL: Yeah?

VEE: --to pieces....

VAL: . . .: But violence ain't quick always. Sometimes it's slow. Some tornadoes are slow. Corruption--rots men's hearts and--rot is slow....

VEE: --How do you--?

VAL: Know? I been a witness, I know!

VEE: I been a witness! I know!

VAL: We seen these things from seats down front at the show. . . . And so you begun to paint your visions. Without no plan, no training, you started to paint as if God touched your fingers. . . . You made some beauty out of this dark country with these two o'f, woman's hands...."(pp. 66f).

Since the catastrophe of the play dramatizes exactly
the dark, shadowed aspect of the world upon which Val and Vee agree, it seems reasonable to assume that their view is Williams' view as well. If one looks truly at the world as it exists, one must acknowledge that the world is sick and rots slowly. It is a world that is perfectly figured in the character of Jabe Torrance.

In such a world, Val tells Lady, there are two kinds of people: "You might think there's many and many kinds of people in this world but, Lady, there's just two kinds of people, the ones that are bought and the buyers! No!-- there's one other kind..." The last type Val identifies as "the kind that's never been branded." He further explains to Lady by telling her about "a special 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. . . . They live their whole lives on the wing, and they sleep on the wind. . . . They sleep on the wind and . . . never light on this earth but one time when they die!" Lady envies the marvelous bird, and Val tells her: "So'd I like to be one of those birds; they's lots of people would like to be one of those birds and never be--corrupted!" (pp. 41f).

Vee Talbott and Val Xavier condemn the world with cause. Yet, they are far from being pessimistic misanthropes. They are both open, sensitive, and concerned with the plight of other people in their world. They both have found the regenerative power of the artist's craft. They both have those moments in which the world is bathed in light. In
short, they encompass the negation of the existential view of life, and the polar extremity of the peak experience of the world, the major constituent of which is life-affirming. They have come to realize, imperfectly, the Outsider truth that the world is a dead place, a place so dead that it resists the introduction of life affirmation that is symbolized in the Christ that Val implies. Pitted against this Christ is Jabe Torrance and the world of Two Rivers County that wills itself to insensitivity, to sterility, and to death.

The play has often been criticized by those commentators who are dismayed by its implied pessimism. However, Williams has cast his play in such a way that a part of the action of the play is the crucifixion of Christ. Williams could not have arranged the outcome of the play otherwise without asserting falsely that the Christ did not have to suffer crucifixion. Time and again, Williams' later plays show that the first and all subsequent crucifixions are necessary—they are necessitated by the very nature of the world. The Christ symbolism of the play is not gratuitous. It is an essential facet of Williams' thought.

We might well question, at this point, Williams' reasons for casting Valentine Xavier as the Christ. Williams had before him the model of Lawrence's "The Man Who Died." In that story, the Christ appears not as the traditional celibate martyr, but as the sensually alive lover of a priestess of Aphrodite. The portrait is an attractive one,
and Williams surely knew the story. He would have been led to it by his admiration for Lawrence.

Secondly, Williams had already begun to evolve the set of ideas that create the pattern of much of his drama. John Buell has noted that "violence is admittedly the most noticeable characteristic of Williams' better plays, but that does not mean that it is the primary or most dominant characteristic. . . . What dominates the plays is . . . the image of a singular gentleness. . . ." These divergent constituents of Williams' drama emerge as types of characters, the brutal and the gentle. "From this brutal-gentle postulate a recurring pattern of action emerges from the plays whatever the varying concrete details of a particular story-line. The pattern is something like the brutal overwhelming the gentle, fully or partly." Buell concludes that "Williams writes plays about victims. . . . The Victim, the victimizer, and the circumstances and details of the Victimization are the generic image-ideas of Tennessee Williams' plays. It is private fantasy made public through art, it is myth without mythology." Buell's final statement is introduced at this point solely for the sake of refuting it. The mythology is present in Williams' plays. That mythology was available to Williams and through more than the vague workings of cultural influences. Williams was the grandson

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7 Ibid., p. 187.
of a protestant minister and lived much of his younger life in his grandfather's home. The single narrative that epitomizes the actions and circumstances that Buell detects in the work of Williams is the story of the crucifixion. Despite his failure to recognize the mythology that informs Williams' drama, Buell has very succinctly stated the dominant action that recurs in Williams' drama: "The image of the Victim carries with it the inescapable judgment, felt or thought out, that the victims are better than the victimizers . . . that the more innocent the victim the more likely he is to be victimized, and finally that the ideal terror and, by implication, fact of life and reality is found in the innocent sacrificial victim who is immolated without ritual or reason." The ritual is there of course; the term "ritual violence" is a mainstay of Williams criticism. The phrase is used even by those critics who do not see or feel the need to comment on the Christian implications of ritual violence. But Buell believes the victimization to be both a "fact of life and reality" and to be without reason. Each play does account for the victimization in its own way. But operative behind the whole of Williams' drama is a set of ideas that no critic, to my knowledge, has detected. Williams did have at his disposal a psychological-philosophical schema that does account for the pattern of the major part of his drama.

After Audrey Wood was instrumental in securing a

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Ibid.
Rockefeller grant for Williams' work in the American Blues collection, she also arranged a scholarship for Williams to work at the New School for Social Research. It was there that Williams worked with John Gassner and Theresa Helburn on the revisions to Battle of Angels before it opened in Boston in December, 1940. From 1939 until 1941, there was on the faculty of the New School for Social Research, as Associate Professor of Medical Psychology, a psychologist of some note and considerable notoriety, the former student of Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich. Reich's ideas furnish a rationale for the pattern of violence found in Williams' plays. It seems unlikely that Williams could have been working at the same institution as Reich without some knowledge of his ideas, particularly since there were elements of Reich's psychology that could be used, as they later were by Allen Ginsburg and William Burroughs, as a defense of homosexuality and the use of drugs—both areas in which Williams was personally involved.

Two of the most readable and succinct treatments of Reich's ideas are to be found in a study by Paul A. Robinson called The Freudian Left, and Orson Bean's recent memoir which gives an account of his Reichian therapy and is called Me And the Orgone. Both studies are sympathetic, a point

9Tischler, p. 70.
11Ibid., p. 72.
not to be ignored or minimized since Reich's late work has led many to say that he was insane. Reich called his philosophy the science of Orgonomy. Robinson notes that "the science of orgonomy was as fantastic and elaborate as any theological system, and its content was identical with that of the great religions of salvation; it promised both a total interpretation of reality and a total therapy for man's individual and social ills."  

Reich's system had much to commend it to the young Tennessee Williams. To begin with, the issue upon which Freud and Reich clashed, and the issue which led to their estrangement, was of such a nature that Williams would have sided with Reich against Freud. Freud's Society and its Discontents advances the theory that civilization is the result of the sublimation of the energies of the libido. In short, Freud evolves a "universal equation of culture and repression."  

Reich holds instead that "culture as such was not incompatible with sexuality" and that "sexual satisfaction, far from undermining creativity, was its foremost prerequisite."  

Much of Reich's philosophy is not germane to a study of Williams, but the major outlines of his ideas are pertinent. Orson Bean offers a simplified version of Reich's concept of something like "original sin":

\. . . Reich figured that thousands of years ago in the caves, as early man began to perceive that he

\[^{12}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 70.} \quad ^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 33.} \quad ^{14}\text{Ibid.} \]
could perceive, he saw that nature was terrifying. He felt alone and helpless in the face of wind and storm and eruptions and predators. He also became aware of nature within himself in the form of gentle, pleasant, rhythmic stirrings. . . . They were pleasurable and they made him feel at one with nature, but nature, when he thought about it (because he could), was a horrifying thing. So, he fought nature on the outside (to this day he tries to subjugate it to his will) and he rejected it on the inside, tightening his muscles against its gentle streamings the way a frightened man tenses up by holding his breath, and before long, the condition became habitual. In this way, the first man to armor himself may have done so. . . . The armored person, having lost the ability to perceive his streamings can only hypothesize intellectually about the unity of nature and his connection with it.

The process of armoring is reinforced by a patriarchal social structure so that finally human beings come to be shut off from their own deepest natures where are to be found "natural sociality and sexuality, spontaneous enjoyment of work, [and] capacity for love." 16

Ultimately, nearly the whole of the human race is completely armored against the positive feelings that constitute the ground of human nature. Individuals and societies that succumb to armoring are said to suffer from the Emotional Plague. Reich's term is not intended to be metaphorical. The Emotional Plague is a very real disease that is operative in societies and individuals.

Even as early as 1940, Reich was moving toward a formulation of his ideas that Robinson characterizes in this way: "... Reich propounded a unified-field theory more

15 Orson Bean, Me and the Orgone (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1971), pp. 55ff.
ambitious than even the most undisciplined physicist could have imagined. Every aspect of reality . . . was encompassed within his system. Only nuclear energy retained its autonomy. In fact, Reich came to conceive of the history of the cosmos as a titanic struggle between Orgone energy and atomic energy." Reich "had arrived at a dualistic antagonism not unlike Manichaeanism. . . . The struggle of love against hate was only the psychological manifestation of a more basic cosmic antipathy."\(^{17}\) Reich was not unaware of the religious implications of his philosophy, for he came to "reinterpret the principal Christian doctrines in terms of their 'Orgonot-ic' meanings."\(^{18}\) Ilse Reich notes that "during this period [1939-1950] Reich was very much preoccupied with the Christ story and he had talked in the family group on many occasions about Jesus."\(^{19}\) Reich arrived at two conclusions that are relevant to the study of Williams. These conclusions furnished the thesis of the book *The Murder of Christ* that was published in 1953. Reich had formalized his unique view of Christ prior to his immigration to America in 1939.\(^{20}\) In short, Reich concluded that "Christ represents Life per se. Armored man cannot tolerate any manifestation of life or aliveness and therefore has to kill it wherever he finds it. Thus, the murder of Christ is re-enacted over and over again

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 67-68. \(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 69.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 40.
in all spheres of human life—in family life, in politics, in education, in science, in the name of organized religion, and in the name of charity and love." Valentine Xavier functions exactly as Reich's Christ does. He is "Life per se," and as such he has the power to bring life to the dead, as he does to Myra-Lady Torrance. As Christ, the bringer of life, Val must inspire antagonism in the opposing camp led by Jabe Torrance, the single character who best sums up the essential nature of a dead world. Jabe, whose name suggests both Jehovah and Jove, is less a character than a presence. He is commanding even before he makes his entrance near the end of the play. His disease is the concrete embodiment of the sickness of the community in which he is the chief citizen. His actions, the murder of Val, and the earlier burning of the vineyard and casino of Lady's father, indicate that he cannot abide the intrusion of life into his dead world.

Furthermore, the revision of the play as Orpheus Descending leaves no doubt that Williams conceives of the world of Two Rivers County as the underworld kingdom of death. It is equally clear that Two Rivers County functions as a microcosm of the real world. Hence, the play concludes that the real world is a wasteland world that will not admit its own salvation. It must react to attempts at salvation with cruelty and immolation, with crucifixion.

\[21\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 117.} \quad 22\text{Tischler, p. 77.}\]
Such a reading of the play may lack complexity, but it does seem to be a just statement of what Williams attempts in the play. The play certainly is not a treatment of the conflict between the "fleshly camp" and the "spiritual camp" as Nancy Tischler contends, for it is patently ridiculous to see Jabe Torrance as "the epic antagonist, the defender of the spiritual." However, the judgment that "Christ and God are separate and antagonistic" is certainly correct, and will be found to be a key principle in other Williams plays. Still, the play itself does not bear out Tischler's interpretation that "Myra and Val represent Satan and his fallen angels. . . ." Neither Val nor Myra is Satanic in any sense of the word. That Val is Christlike and antagonistic to God is best explained in another way.

Jabe is the God of the creation, the God who has authored the world of Two Rivers County. He is remarkably like the God that Williams is later to picture in the visions of the birds and turtles in Suddenly Last Summer. He is exactly the sort of God who would emerge if one decided to approach God through his created world, and then viewed that world through the Outsider's divided vision which holds that the world is a "world of light and shadow" and that the shadow predominates. Val, as Christ, appears to reconstitute the creation of such a God so that it will be more amenable to human habitation. He fails and so becomes a

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23 Ibid. 24 Ibid., p. 78. 25 Ibid., p. 77.
sacrificial victim.

In short, Jabe epitomizes those aspects of the world at large, and they are many, which Williams sees when he looks at the world from his standpoint as Emotional Outsider. Val epitomizes the opposite. He is free and individualistic where Jabe embodies the collective, armored mind. Val is sensually alive both to sexuality and to nature where Jabe is impotent and indifferent. Val is self-determined where Jabe is nothing more than the most extreme spokesman and defender of the public morality. Val is mobile, Jabe is static. Val acts on the basis of his own will, Jabe seems incapable of doing so. Jabe is the personification of Reich's armored man who "cannot tolerate any manifestation of life or aliveness and therefore has to kill it wherever he finds it." Contrary to Benjamin Nelson's judgment that "sexuality in Battle of Angels is conspicuously tinged with destruction and decay," \(^{26}\) sexuality is only one constituent of the vital life that cannot assert itself in a world so embroiled in its own death that it must view the coming of life as the intrusion of an alien principle. In Battle of Angels and Orpheus Descending, as well as in The Wasteland, "April is the cruelest month."

In ways that it would be difficult to explain, Williams' plays about Valentine Xavier are more akin to Dostoevski's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" than to any work by

D. H. Lawrence. Like the Grand Inquisitor, Jabe stands at the head of a well-organized society—a society that functions well enough because it excludes from consideration certain truths and individuals. Val's contest with Jabe is based upon little more than Christ's with the Grand Inquisitor. He can offer only love that shows itself in his understanding of Vee, his sympathy with the dispossessed, and his sexual love for Myra-Lady. Hence, his heroism is essentially passive, and his crucifixion is unwarranted. Still, his humanity is in some way inclusive. We can best understand this aspect of the nature of Williams' Christ figure if we consult the source of much of John Buell's argument, Northrop Frye's

Anatomy of Criticism:

Thus the incongruous and the inevitable, which are combined in tragedy, separate into opposite poles of irony. At one pole is the inevitable irony of human life. What happens to, say, the hero of Kafka's Trial is not the result of what he has done, but the end of what he is, which is an 'all too human' being. The archetype of the inevitably ironic is Adam, human nature under sentence of death. At the other pole is the incongruous irony of human life, in which all attempts to transfer guilt to a victim give that victim something of the dignity of innocence. The archetype of the incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society. Halfway between is the central figure of tragedy, who is human and yet of a heroic size which often has in it the suggestion of divinity. His archetype is Prometheus, the immortal titan rejected by the gods for befriending man. Valentine Xavier exemplifies all three of Frye's archetypes. He is Adam fated to death. He is Prometheus rejected by the gods for his gift to man. And he is the Christ excluded

from human society without just cause. As Adam he moves from a state of nature into human society. As Prometheus he brings with him the gift of life. As Christ he is unjustly murdered by the very people who stand to profit from his gift. Such a protagonist implies both a certain conception of character and of fate that works to make Williams' play at once both like and unlike Greek tragedy. As with Greek tragedy, the outcome is known, but unlike Greek tragedy, the outcome is not the result of a set of causal and sequential actions. Val's fate is not caused by his actions but is implicit in his very nature. What we are given is not so much a conception of tragic fate as the conception of a tragic character. When he casts Val in terms of the Christ, Williams predicts the outcome and so gives up the possibility of realistic conflict. Where is the realistic conflict, for example, if the audience knows that Oedipus will end up blind and wise at Colonus and will conclude that "All is well." However, in return for the conflict that Williams gives up, he achieves the possibility of formalism or ritualism. That Williams' choice is conscious is substantiated by certain remarks in his "The Timeless World of a Play." He notes that the value of the drama is based largely upon the truth "that the created world of a play is removed from that element which makes people little and their emotions inconsequential." 28 He continues with a very telling comparison:

Great sculpture often follows the lines of the human body: yet the repose of great sculpture suddenly transmutes those human lines to something that has an absoluteness, a purity, a beauty, which would not be possible in a living mobile form.

A play may be violent, full of motion: yet it has that special kind of repose which allows contemplation and produces the climate in which tragic importance is a possible thing. . . . In a play, time is arrested. . . . By a sort of legerdemain, events are made to remain events, rather than being reduced so quickly to mere occurrences.

It is the quality of repose, to use Williams' term, or formalism, to use my own, that lends a certain static quality to much of Williams' drama—Summer and Smoke, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and Small Craft Warnings, or even Glass Menagerie. It is the static quality of Williams' plays that has led to more and more criticisms like the one leveled by Henry Hewes that "character revelation lays all the groundwork for dramatic confrontation. Yet the form of Small Craft Warnings is to substitute revelation for action. . . . Whatever conflict there is seems accidental."30

The question may well be asked whether such drama is good drama, or even drama at all, since the possibility has been raised that there might be a drama without conflict. In his introduction to The New Theatre of Europe, Robert W. Corrigan addresses himself to just this problem. Furthermore he claims that the problem is a basic one for all modern playwrights. Corrigan traces the effects of such forces

29 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
as industrialization, collectivism, specialization, and bureaucracy on individual members of modern society, and concludes that modern man is dehumanized to such a degree that "individuality" which "etymologically . . . means that quality in man which cannot be divided, that which is indivisible" has come to be divided. The dramatist is faced with the problem of creating "a meaningful action or significant characters in a 'What-can-I-do?' kind of world." One might adopt the attitude of the Swiss playwright Duerrenmatt and conclude that "today art can only embrace victims if it can reach men at all; it can no longer come close to the mighty." That would seem to be the attitude that Williams has adopted. But, how can such a hero perform his function which is "both in art and life . . . to supply those images, values, and ethical standards which people aspire to and which they would like, if possible, to incorporate into their own lives"?31

For Williams the answer is to treat his characters in such a way as to suggest historic, legendary, or mythic characters. In so doing he uses Christian mythology in much the same way that Joyce uses Greek myth in Ulysses. The mythic dimensions serve to amplify the significance of the character, and to suggest that human history is to some degree cyclical so that events that are central to Christian history and myth emerge as paradigmatic of human life in general.

The central such event is, of course, the crucifixion, but subsidiary events are the temptation, the revelation, the annunciation, the martyrdom of a saint. When the mythic dimension of a character is based upon Christ, the central event of the drama is likely to be, as it is in *Battle of Angels* and *Orpheus Descending*, of sufficient significance to furnish the chief structural pattern of the play. In a far more complicated way the crucifixion furnishes a structural principle for both *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Thus Williams' exploitation of the Christian mythos is both a means to the statement of his major themes and a way of dealing with a problem that is common to all modern playwrights. However, Williams' use of Christ occasions another critical problem, the nature and the degree of affirmation. We readily see that Christ is heroic, and we readily see that Valentine Xavier is intended to represent Christ. But wherein is he heroic? More will be said on this count later, but at this point we may say that most often affirmation as well as fate are a matter of character in Williams. Val is good, is heroic, because the world is evil and he is not of the world. A curious morality emerges, the ethic of which is based upon omission, not commission. Valentine Xavier is good not because his actions are exemplary, but because he does not partake of the evil in the world. The implication is that the world is corrupt, and its corruption is contagious. It is sufficient that a character resist the tempta-
tion to become like the base world—that alone is enough for heroism. Indeed, Williams' drama seems to assert that such is perhaps the only type of heroism that a modern man is allowed, that and the sort of secondary heroism that is allowed the audience who sympathizes with such a character to the degree that Williams intends. Williams asks too that we sympathize with two other types of characters—those who await the coming of a redeemer, and those to whom a Christ comes who is unexpected and terrible.
CHAPTER III

THE FAILURE OF SALVATION

Williams was understandably hurt by the reception of Battle of Angels. There is every indication that Williams believed that his first play had failed because of what he has recently called its "super religiosity."\(^1\) Williams did not again attempt such explicit treatment of religion until the 1957 opening of Orpheus Descending. However, his concern with religious themes and images was still strong. It could hardly have been otherwise. Williams had been born on Palm Sunday,\(^2\) had come from the religiously conservative South, and had been reared in the household of a clergyman; predictably the figure of Christ and the drama of the crucifixion continued to exercise a strong influence over the young playwright.

One very subtle but significant change was made in the plot of Battle of Angels before that play became Orpheus Descending. In the first play, Val is crucified on Good Friday. In the 1957 version, the crucifixion comes on Easter Sunday—the day of resurrection. During the seventeen-year period between the two plays, Williams had not only be-


\(^2\)Edwina Dakin Williams and Lucy Freeman, Remember Me to Tom (New York: Putnam, 1963), p. 16.
come more pessimistic, his focus had shifted from the pas-
sion of the crucifixion to the somewhat similar passions of
those who await the coming of the Christ. Accordingly, Val-
entine Xavier comes to be more than the martyred savior; he
becomes the Messiah who fails. That figure is the subject
of this chapter, and the subject is a delicate one.

A significant passage from Hawthorne might well be
recalled at this point as a precautionary note applicable to
the present study. Hawthorne felt that his chief problem as
a writer of romance was to provide "a neutral ground where
the Actual and the Imaginary might meet," a problem that
faces the dramatist as well as the writer of romance. It is
not an easy problem to solve. Hawthorne declares, "The fact
is, in writing a romance, a man is always--or ought to be--
careening on the utmost verge of a precipitous absurdity,
and the skill lies in coming as close as possible without
actually tumbling over."^  

Williams' exploitation of the Christ figure has often
led him to the brink of Hawthorne's precipice. The critic who
attempts to treat of that aspect of Williams' work must fol-
low the playwright into dangerous territory. There is first
the danger of imposing an allegorical framework where none
exists. At the opposite extremity, there is the danger of
overlooking the religious imagery because it is used in an

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3Norman Holmes Pearson, ed., The Complete Novels and
Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Modern
Library, 1937) p. xv.
unconventional way or is secondary to the general symbolic structure of the play. However, the purposes of this study will be served if it is established that a certain pattern persists in Williams' plays of the period between 1940 and 1957. That pattern consists of a dramatic situation in which a character, or characters, anticipate an event which is of crucial importance, an event upon which life itself, in a metaphorical sense, is dependent. The agent of this anticipated salvation is more often than not associated in some subtle but specific way with Christ. The pattern usually completes itself when the Christ comes and is found to be insufficient. Hence, the protagonist is not saved in either a realistic or metaphorical sense.

Furthermore, it must be granted that proving that a certain character is presented so as to imply the Christ need not add appreciably to an understanding of the play in question. We might say that during these years Williams writes plays that are not religious in terms of subject matter, but which do display a strong religious subjectivity which shows itself, most often, through staging, gesture, and imagery. The plots of the plays establish a pattern of anticipation. The texture of the play identifies the object of anticipation with the religious, most often with the Christ.

The pattern of the failure of salvation will be found to be more important to a view of Williams' total work than it is to any particular play treated in this chapter. Simply, it is the recurrence of the theme rather than its pres-
ence in a single play that makes it significant. One will understand Tennessee Williams better if he recognizes the Christ figure in *The Glass Menagerie*, although he may understand that play well enough even if he fails to do so.

*The Glass Menagerie*, like all of Williams' plays, is a drama about Outsiders. Laura and Amanda are outsiders in the more conventional sense of that word. Tom is an Outsider in the more restricted sense in which Colin Wilson uses the term; that is, to designate a man whose superior perceptions and intense responses to the world make him a misfit. Tom is motivated, principally, by two aspects of his personality. He has a sense of his own artistic calling, and he has the Outsider's detestation of the common practice of living life at second hand and at minimal levels of intensity. Late in the play, he explains himself to Jim O'Conner in a speech that might well have come from T. E. Lawrence, one of Wilson's archetypal Outsiders:

Yes, Movies! Look at them—(A wave toward the marvels of Grand Avenue) All of those glamorous people—having adventures—hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses. . . . I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the movies and I am about to move. . . . I'm starting to boil inside. . . . Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!

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Even Williams' description of the set for the play testifies to the Outsider's feeling that most people lack some basic quality that might lead them to live life more fully. The building in which the Wingfields live is described as "one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism" (p. 3). The impulse to stasis is characteristic of the condition that Wilhelm Reich calls the Emotional Plague. Reich says that "there are certain truths which are a priori given by one's senses and movements. That Life, Living, is constant MOTION, is such a self-evident truth itself."  

Tom's discontent leads him to leave St. Louis and follow in his "father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space---" (p. 123). What Tom needs, what he attempts unsuccessfully to find, is something that will resolve the conflict in the world as he sees it—a way to resolve the divided world that is lit both by lightning and by Laura's candles.

Amanda's needs are simpler, but they too remain unsatisfied. Amanda, like other of Williams' female characters,  

has been reared to an estate that she fails to come into. She is a valuable, genteel, gracious, even enlightened woman whose time has passed. A noble anachronism, transplanted from the South of her birth, she comes into a world that is foreign to her, and there her virtues are transmuted into vices. Her concern for Laura has led to her obsession with gentleman callers. It is principally that same concern that has turned Amanda's normal maternal affection into a grasping and possessive passion that Tom finds repulsive.

Laura, the focal character in the play, is too beautiful and too delicate to exist in the modern, realistic world. Laura is a creature of glass who is lighted by a light "having a peculiar clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas" (p. xii). Laura stands in delicate opposition to the outside world of approaching war, of ugliness—the world that is represented in Picasso's Guernica. Twice in the play, Tom, as narrator, mentions the Spanish town Guernica, but the effect is to call to mind the Spanish painter's famous rendering of the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War.

As the narrator, Tom introduces us to one other character, "a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes. He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for" (p. 5).
Realistically Jim O'Conner is a shipping clerk for Continental Shoemakers. He chews gum, attends night classes in public speaking, and dreams of being a future television tycoon. Symbolically, he is the expected deliverer. He is expected to deliver Tom and Amanda from their responsibility for Laura, thus freeing Tom to seek fulfillment in travel and in poetry. He is expected to deliver Laura from her fantasy world into a world where she can exist in sympathy with a person from the world at large. Jim O'Conner is the messiah.

The suggestion is not so ludicrous as it appears. Williams, at least, has not tumbled into a "precipitous absurdity." Jim O'Conner is Christ, but in a most qualified sense, and that aspect of his character is more suggested than imposed. After telling us that the character is intended to function as a symbol, Williams introduces a man whose name is Jim O'Conner. His initials should not escape us, but if they do, Williams' point is made in other ways.

There is a technical device that was part of the original conception of the play, though it usually is not used when the play is staged. A series of projected images and legends were to be shown on a portion of the wall in the Wingfield apartment. In his production notes, Williams explains that "the purpose of this will probably be apparent. It is to give accent to certain values in each scene. . . . The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the
entire responsibility were on the spoken word" (p. x). Di­
rections for the use of the screen device are still included
in printed scripts and can provide some insight into the
author's intent in any particular scene.

Scene Five of Glass Menagerie begins with the legend:
"ANNUNCIATION" (p. 45). In Christian terminology, the Annun­
ciation is the encounter between the Blessed Virgin and the
messenger who is sent to announce the coming birth of Jesus,
who "shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of
his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:33) The Biblical
allusion is ironic, as we shall see. The major event in
Scene Five is Tom's announcement that he has invited a friend
from the warehouse to come to dinner. The stage direction
instructs: "THE ANNUNCIATION IS CELEBRATED WITH MUSIC" (p.
49). By suggesting the Christ symbolism, Williams emphasizes
the importance of the scene that is to follow between Laura
and the gentleman caller. This is the crucial scene in the
play. The whole of the play is constructed so as to focus
attention on it. The stage directions, as well, indicate
its importance: "In playing this scene it should be stressed
that while the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to
LAURA the climax of her secret life" (p. 88).

For a while it appears that Laura's dreams will be
realized. Jim is able to coax her out of the dream world
which she inhabits. His effect on her is described in re­
ligious terms. He smiles "with a warmth and charm which
lights her inwardly with altar candles" (p. 101). For a few
brief moments, Jim O'Conner succeeds in bringing to Laura the sense of a life that is larger than the one she has led. Tom and Amanda are allowed a momentary glimpse of their own freedom. Then, Jim confesses that he is committed to another girl and that he will not call again. Then, "the holy candles in the altar of LAURA'S face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation" (p. 115).

Jim leaves the little world of the Wingfield apartment to return to the real world of which he is the emissary. Ironically, the real world, ugly, violent, and materialistic, is the kingdom of which "there shall be no end." Such an ironic treatment of the Christ figure is characteristic of Williams. It foreshadows the more significant and extensive treatments in later plays. Perhaps the irony involved accounts for the failure of most critics to recognize Williams' almost obsessive concern with the Christ figure.

If Glass Menagerie were an allegory, it would be sufficient to prove that the gentleman caller is a Christ figure and show that he acts as Christ did. But, James O'Conner is not, in himself, Christlike. Rather, he is Christ because he promises a kind of salvation for the other characters in the play. To see him as the possible agent of a rescue with religious overtones does serve to make the encounter between Jim and Laura a crucial one. On the realistic level, what we see is a chance encounter between a shallow "bright-young-man" and a pathetic wallflower. The scene has in it all the stuff of comedy, and that the final outcome is not comic at-
tests to the realization of Williams' intent. We do see the characters as highly significant. We do care and care intensely about the outcome of the pathetic romance. Our response is, in part, conditioned by Williams' skillful presentation of Jim O'Conner as more than he is, precisely because, for the Wingfields, he is more than he is. At best he offers emotional rather than religious salvation, but the religious implications of the Christ symbolism condition us so that we accept the final state of Amanda and Laura as something approaching the rather absolute condition of theological despair, and we must see Laura's fate as absolute or the play is no longer the powerful statement that its playwright intended. It is a testament to Williams' craft that we cannot envision the second coming of the gentleman caller.

A further word about the effect of the play is appropriate here. In Battle of Angels and in Orpheus Descending, Williams' use of the Christ story allows us to know the fate of the characters before that fate is dramatized for us. In Glass Menagerie, the framing device of the narrator looking back through time serves the same function. Tom appears in the uniform of a merchant sailor and speaks in a tone that tells us before the events take place what the outcome of the events will be. Again we find that Williams has given us more the appearance of conflict than conflict itself. Thus, he achieves something like the stasis of the graphic arts, and thereby gives to the play exactly that sense of renewed recollection that we associate with ritual. This
effect is achieved through details of staging as well as through structure. The chief tool of staging is the use of light. Williams suggests that "a certain correspondence to light in religious paintings, such as El Greco's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky, could be effectively used throughout the play" (p. xii).

In The Glass Menagerie, Williams marshalls theatrical and structural resources to suggest the religious, although the import of the play is not specifically religious. The religious impulse in Tennessee Williams was still active at this point, though he seems to have chosen to give it voice through implication. Although the explicit Christ figure in a major play was still far in the future, Williams continued to create characters and situations embodying needs so great that their solution required a Messiah. Not surprisingly, that Messiah continued to fail those who anticipated him.

While Glass Menagerie was still running in New York, another Williams play opened there. It was a dramatization of D. H. Lawrence's short story, "You Touched Me," and was a collaborative work with Williams' friend Donald Windham. The play was not re-written and not reprinted, so it has been unavailable for years. The play opened in New York on September 26, 1945, but it had had performances in Cleveland in 1943, where it was staged by Margo Jones. In 1944

the play had been performed in Pasadena. The play is a lyrical comedy and features a happy ending, something that is unusual for Williams, but his ending conforms to Lawrence's story. Comments about the play indicate that it is pertinent to the present study, although the outcome of the play features the success rather than the failure of the redeemer.

The following summary is based upon Nancy Tischler's treatment of the play. The play is set in the household of Cornelius Rockley, a "drunken, profane, chantey-roaring ex-sea captain living out the end of his life trying to forget an unsatisfying marriage and a smashed career." Living with him are his deceased wife's sister, Emmie, and his daughter Mathilda, a shy girl much like Laura in Glass Menagerie. The action of the play centers on the return of Hadrian, a young man who had been a charity boy in the household some years before. He returns after a five-year absence during which he fought in the war as a bombardier in the Canadian Air Force. The captain favors a marriage between Hadrian and Mathilda, and after a while Mathilda comes to favor the same thing. Her aunt, Emmie, resents the presence of the masculine young man. Her own tastes run to the sort of man who is represented by the weak minister who is her fiancé. She plots against Hadrian, but her schemes fail, and Hadrian and Mathilda marry. Mathilda is thus saved both from her own shyness and the fate of a rather militant chastity that is

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8 Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams, Univ. of Minn. Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 53 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 13.
represented by her aunt.  

The play differs markedly from Glass Menagerie in that the heroine's salvation is achieved. The instrument of that salvation is again cast in terms that suggest the Messiah. The action centers on the events of Palm Sunday.  

Hadrian's first entrance is arranged so that he enters with the rising of the sun. He also is said to have the power to bring life to the dead. In a confrontation between Emmie and Captain Rockley, the following interchange takes place:

CAPTAIN (yelling at her from the foot of the stairs): You want to do with my daughter what you did with my wife?  
EMMIE: Protect her from you? That's right!  
CAPTAIN: Turn her into a lifeless piece of clay!  
EMMIE: That's an astounding statement.  
CAPTAIN: True! You weaned her from me. Holy, holy, holy! Nothing but helping others in your dear brain. Some people have got the power--of turning life into clay. You're one of that kind, Emmie.  
EMMIE: Insane babblings!  
CAPTAIN: But others have got a different kind of power. Their touch turns clay into life. Hadrian's one of that kind.  

Hadrian succeeds where Jim O'Conner fails. One wonders whether You Touched Me would have ended the same way if Williams had not been bound to Lawrence's plot.

Another, still earlier Williams play is relevant to the present discussion, although it too ends happily. The play is a fantasy and is entitled Stairs to the Roof. The

9Tischler, pp. 120-30.  
10Ibid., p. 127.  
play was begun in the summer of 1940 and laid aside when Williams began to rewrite *Battle of Angels* for its December premier.\(^{13}\) Thus it is an earlier play than either *Glass Menagerie* or *You Touched Me*; however, it was not performed until 1947 and then for only two weeks at the Pasadena Playhouse, where it was staged by Margo Jones.\(^{14}\) The play has never been published, and Benjamin Nelson's comments on the play are based upon his reading of a manuscript version that belongs to Audrey Wood.\(^{15}\)

The play is very complicated. The hero is an Outsider who, like Tom Wingfield, works for a manufacturer, the Continental Shirtmakers. Benjamin Murphy is very nearly stifled by his insignificant job until he discovers a stairway to the roof of the building in which he works. After a series of misadventures, that need not be summarized here, Benjamin and "The Girl" arrive at the final scene of the play. It is set on the roof. While the enemies, Benjamin's boss and the stockholders in the company, clamber up the stairs, a new character makes his appearance. He is Mr. E., "whose laughter and sighs have been heard at the conclusion of many of the scenes."\(^{16}\) Mr. E., "an old man with a flowing white beard . . . materializes out of the air" to conclude the play. His last speech discloses his identity:

\(^{13}\)Nelson, p. 65.


\(^{15}\)Nelson, p. 67.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 70.
What a fool I am. What a sentimental old fool I am. At last I come to the inescapable conclusion that it is all a dreadful mistake I made when I created the race of man on earth. I decided to correct it by blotting the whole thing out. Good!—but what happens? My heavenly spyglass happens to fall on a little clerk named Murphy. No hero out of books, no genius, mind you, but just an ordinary little white-collar worker in a wholesale shirt corporation, a man whose earning capacity has never exceeded eighty-five per week. At first I am only a little amused by his antics. Then I chuckle. Then I laugh out loud. Then all at once I find myself—weeping a little. This funny little clown of a man named Murphy has suddenly turned into a tragic protagonist of a play called "Human Courage." Yes, the wonderful, pitiful, inextinguishable courage of the race of man—has played me for a sucker once again. In the middle of my laughter—I suddenly cry. What do I do? Rectify the mistake as planned, by fire and the sword and everlasting damnation? No. Quite the contrary. Instead of exterminating the human race I send it off to colonize a brand-new star in heaven. Ah, well, there's no fool like an old fool, as they say—and I, by God, am the oldest fool of them all.  

Instead of the Son we are given the Father to serve as the deliverer, and the play does end with a deliverance, but, as Nelson remarks, the play contains "a qualification easily ignored or overlooked. Murphy's victory is not achieved on earth. He must leave his world which cannot and will not allow the self-expression of 'the fugitive kind.'"  

Nelson further notes that "in Stairs to the Roof, God makes His initial and concluding appearance in Williams' universe. From now on He will be known only in his remoteness and incomprehensibility, and if He shows a face at all, it will no longer be the kindly face of Mr E; it will be a savage face, the cruel countenance of a God unknown."  

\[ \text{17Ibid., pp. 74-75.} \quad \text{18Ibid., p. 74.} \quad \text{19Ibid.} \]
kindly, but the implications of his admissions are certainly not optimistic. He admits that his creation is faulted, that it deserves destruction. He admits his own inability to correct its faults. His only recourse is to seed a new world with a new Adam and Eve. Stairs to the Roof allows us the rare view of the Creator commenting on his creation.

In the plays that follow, however, Williams follows the deistic concept that we may know God by examining his creation. Such an examination yields the implication that the world is faulted and deserves destruction. The world is in need of a savior. While the savior does not come to the world at large, Williams continues to treat of the coming of a sort of Messiah to certain individuals. Damnation is general; only the particular man deserves salvation. The world of fantasy admits such salvation; the real world does not. The world of A Streetcar Named Desire is unmistakably real, indeed, so real that the play has been taken to be the dramatic rendering of an epic historical conflict. That view is deserving of some attention since it probably accounts for the enormous popularity of the play.

Streetcar, like Gone With the Wind and The Cherry Orchard, approaches the epic in its treatment of the passing away of the old order. Wolcott Gibbs says that Streetcar is "a brilliant implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or if you like, of a society." Wolcott Gibbs, "Lower Depths, Southern Style," The New Yorker, 13 Dec. 1947, p. 54.
icates the theme with which most of the criticism of the play concerns itself; that is, the conflict of the past, represented in Blanche Du Bois, with the present, represented in Stanley Kowalski.

There is no reason to deny that the historical conflict is important, but if we take Blanche to be merely the representative of a diminishing Southern Aristocracy, we must arrive at a rather distorted view of the play. The historical view helps to indicate the strengths of *Streetcar*, but it seems somehow not to close with the crucial issues at stake in the play. Such criticism is better employed in discussing a play like *Death of a Salesman*, which follows *Streetcar* by two years. Willy Loman's destiny is much more involved with historical considerations than is that of Blanche DuBois. Willy's fate is bound up in that of the nation and is brought about by a series of mistakes for which the country must bear part of the responsibility. Blanche's fate is more particularly her own, and the mistakes that she makes are presented in such a way that we must see them as sins.

Although we have learned from William Faulkner that sin may be a collective act and that the expiation of sin may involve whole nations and cultures, it is difficult to associate that lesson with Blanche, whose sin and whose suffering are solitary. Thus, it is a mistake to see Williams' play primarily in historical terms so that Blanche becomes the Old South in human form.
At its simplest and most direct level *Streetcar Named Desire* is the story of a woman who sins and is estranged from God. She repents of her sin and goes through a period of expiation. When she has reached the point at which her suffering equals her offense, she incurs the animosity of a man who is unable to understand her nature or her past and who feels that her presence is a threat to him. Even when that threat is removed, he willfully destroys her. When Blanche leaves the stage at the end of the play, she takes with her some of our own sense of Christian justice tempered with mercy. In short, *Streetcar Named Desire* is an inverted Saint's life.

Williams' original title for the play was *The Poker Night*. Had that title been retained, we would have been directed more clearly to the symbol of the poker game and of gambling which are far more important to the play than the symbol of the streetcar. For most of the people in Williams' play, life is a poker game; that is, it is a process whose object is personal gain, and whose prerequisites are singularity of purpose, selfishness, lack of scruples, and poker-faced indifference, all of which stand in contradiction of the chief Christian virtue which is mercy. The passing away of mercy, the failure of redemption, is formalized in the final line of the play: "This game is seven-card stud."  

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21 Williams, *Glass Menagerie*, p. xvi.

22 Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 166. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
Streetcar Named Desire is another message from T. S. Eliot's wasteland. Eliot chose a nursery rhyme to conclude "The Hollow Men" as a way of dramatizing the aimlessness of modern life. Williams chose the adult game of poker to indicate the malevolence of modern life.

The pattern that determines the course of Blanche's life is the traditional Christian pattern of sin, repentance, penance, and expiation. The pattern is short-stopped on the near side of redemption. The first element in the pattern is enacted many years before Blanche arrives at her sister's apartment in the New Orleans French Quarter. As a young girl, Blanche had been something of a paragon. Stella tells Stanley, "You didn't know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change" (p. 128). It is likely that Stella has in mind Blanche's former husband Allan. When she tells Stanley about the marriage, her terms suggest that she feels that Blanche was the abused party: "But when she was young, very young, she married a boy who wrote poetry.... He was extremely good-looking. I think Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out . . . . This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate" (p. 117).

But Stella does not know all there is to know of Blanche's short marriage. Blanche confides more of the story to Mitch:
He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking—still—that thing was there....He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage when we'd run away and come back and all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me—but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except that I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming into a room that I thought was empty—which wasn't empty, but had two people in it...the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years...." (pp. 108f)

The three pretend that nothing has happened. Later that night, some hours after the inadvertent discovery of her husband's homosexuality, Blanche dances with Allan to the Varsouviana. Then Blanche commits an act that is to determine the course of her future life:

Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later--a shot! . . . Then I heard voices say--Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He'd stuck a revolver into his mouth, and fired--so that the back of his head had been--blown away! . . . It was because--on the dance floor--unable to stop myself--I'd suddenly said--"I saw! I know! You disgust me..." And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this--kitchen candle... (pp. 109f)

The scene ends with Mitch holding Blanche in his arms while the polka tune, the audible memory of her sin and the resultant guilt, fades out. Blanche's last line is given
great importance because it is the curtain line before the second intermission. Blanche says, "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly" (p. 110). With this line Blanche sums up the importance of her marriage. Her love of Allan brought with it a sense of religious assurance that Williams symbolizes in the light. Her cruelty to Allan, a cruelty that seems almost premeditated since it follows the discovery by some hours, leads to his ugly and violent death. The consequences of her action are the death of the boy that she loved "unendurably," her own submersion in loneliness and isolation, and the loss of the God who had come like a light being turned on and had gone away as quickly.

The effect of Blanche's sin is compounded by the experience that follows it. During the years that follow Allan's death, Blanche is forced to endure four other deaths. Early in the play, Blanche tells Stella of what she had missed by leaving Belle Reve:

All those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father! Mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned like rubbish! You just came home for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths— not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you, "Don't let me go!" As if you were able to stop them! But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers. And, oh what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! Unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, "Hold me!" you'd never suspect that there was struggle for breath and bleeding. (pp. 25f)

Blanche's dying relatives had looked to her for help in much the same way that Allan had when he was "in the quicksands,
clutching." The cumulative effect of Blanche's confrontations with death and her remorse over her part in Allan's death lead her to look for solace in "intimacies with strangers." Such intimacy, Blanche says, "was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.... I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection...." (pp. 136f).

Blanche's promiscuity is apparently a rather recent development. Stella had left Belle Reve after the death of her father, the first death to follow Allan's. Blanche is still at Belle Reve when the last relative dies. Both Blanche and Stanley's Mr. Shaw cite two years ago as the time when her actions came to the attention of the community. Blanche's last conversation with Mitch is the occasion of her remembering her guilt, her experience with death, and one of the means by which she dealt with the ugly reality of death. Mitch and Blanche are interrupted by a blind Mexican flower vendor who cries "Flores para los muertos," flowers for the dead:

[The polka tune fades in.]

BLANCHE [As if to herself]: Crumble and fade and--regrets--recreminations... "If you'd done this, it wouldn't have cost me that!"

MEXICAN WOMAN: Corones para los muertos. Corones...

BLANCHE: Legacies! Huh...And other things such as bloodstained pillow-slips--"Her linen needs changing"--"Yes Mother. But couldn't we get a colored girl to do it?" No, we couldn't of course. Everything gone but the--

MEXICAN WOMAN: Flores.
BLANCHE: Death—I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are... We didn't dare even admit we had heard of it!

MEXICAN WOMAN: Flores para los muertos, flores—flores...

BLANCHE: The opposite is desire. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder? Not far from Belle Reve, before we had lost Belle Reve, was a camp where they trained young soldiers. On Saturday night they would go in town to get drunk--

MEXICAN WOMAN: [Softly] Corones...

BLANCHE: --and on the way back they would stagger onto my lawn and call--"Blanche! Blanche!"--The deaf old lady remaining suspected nothing. But sometimes I slipped outside to answer their calls.... Later the paddy-wagon would gather them up like daisies... the long way home... (pp. 138f)

It must have been soon after, about two years before the play begins, that Blanche moved into the Flamingo hotel. It was during the spring before the play opens that Blanche began the affair with the seventeen-year-old schoolboy that was the cause of the suspension from her teaching job.

Thus, Blanche's past is a painful one. Furthermore, Blanche, like Tom Wingfield, is an Emotional Outsider whose responses to the world are of greater than normal intensity. A character such as Stella would not have suffered so greatly in similar circumstances, nor would those experiences have meant the same thing to her.

It is imperative that we see the particular way in which death works upon Blanche's overly sensitive consciousness. Twice she tells us that death is something more than the cessation of life. Death transforms Allan, the Grey boy, into "the terrible thing at the edge of the lake." Death
turns Margaret into something that "had to be burned like rubbish." The death of Allan signals more than an estrangement from God; it begins the undermining of all of the beliefs that Blanche's life has been based on. The experience of seeing not one but five transformations of people into ugly and repulsive things leads Blanche to retreat from Death and to look for some compensatory aspect of life. She looks to desire, which she designates as the opposite of death.

T. S. Eliot has rather aptly described the condition in which Blanche finds herself: "There are moments, perhaps not known to everyone, when a man may be nearly crushed by the terrible awareness of his isolation from every other human being; and I pity him if he finds himself only alone with himself and his meanness and futility, alone without God. It is after these moments, alone with God and aware of our worthiness, but for Grace, of nothing but damnation, that we turn with most thankfulness and appreciation to the awareness of our membership. . . ."²³ Blanche, however, moves from an awareness of Grace, when she first marries Allan, to the period of isolation from God. The withdrawal of God is the result of her own action, a fact that would intensify rather than diminish the sense of isolation.

Considered from this point of view, it becomes impossible to see Blanche as a nymphomaniac. A standard textbook of abnormal psychology defines nymphomania as "insatiable

impulse to sexual gratification in women." That hardly seems to describe Blanche's condition because it cannot take into account the experiences that prompted her forays into promiscuity. Blanche is desperate, but she is not psychotic. The action of the play covers some four months during which time Blanche has no sexual contacts. Such a period of celibacy would be impossible for a nymphomaniac. Even the one scene in the play that seems to condemn Blanche is explainable. When Blanche makes advances toward the boy who is collecting for the newspaper, it is only after her own isolation has been emphasized by the actions of people around her: "Eunice shrieks with laughter and runs down the steps. Steve bounds after her with goat-like screeches and chases her around the corner. Stanley and Stella twine arms as they follow, laughing" (p. 92). The four are bound for the Four Deuces, a bar and whorehouse which is the source of the blues music that underlines much of the action of the play. The Four Deuces is not only an extension of the gambling images that are important in the play, it is also a constant reminder that Blanche is alone in a world that seems to exist in pairs, in couples. Blanche is finally a part of a couple in a physical, sexual sense when she is raped by Stanley near the end of the play.

Rape hardly constitutes a horrible punishment for a nymphomaniac. But Blanche is not a nymphomaniac. In fact, 24

Williams has created a character to whom Freudian psychology is not applicable. Blanche's problem is not psychic but Noetic. Blanche is very nearly a classic case of what Viktor Frankl calls the frustration of the Will to Meaning. Her promiscuity, not nymphomania, is both a retreat from isolation and an attempt to reinvest the body with human value after a sense of that value has been eroded by a continual confrontation with death, a power that divests the body of human value and turns people into things. When Blanche asks Mitch, "So do you wonder? How can you wonder!" she is voicing Williams' plea that his character be understood rightly and judged accordingly. In her own way, Blanche makes an heroic but misguided effort to discover meaning in a world from which God has been removed.

Quite simply, Blanche seeks to find again in life and in the world the values that we associate with civilization and with the Christian ethic. She tells Stella, early in the play, that her husband is "common," that he is an ape:

Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle. . . . Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night!--you call it--this party of apes! Somebody growls--some creature snatches at something--the fight is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching.... Don't--don't hang back with the brutes! (pp. 80f)
Stanley has overheard these remarks. Four months later, he is to echo Blanche's charges. The implication is that his willful destruction of Blanche is more a matter of avenging his vanity than of protecting his home from a disruptive agent.

Blanche's Will to Meaning shows itself in an ideal of life that is far beyond Stanley's. This point is made quite strongly in Scene Ten. Stanley volunteers a bit of information about his "cousin who could open a beer-bottle with his teech. That was his only accomplishment, all he could do--he was just a human bottle-opener" (p. 144).

Moments later, Blanche sums up her own accomplishments:

> A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life--immeasurably! I have those things to offer, and this doesn't take them away. Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart--and I have all of those things--aren't taken away, but grow. Increase with the years! How strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart... I think of myself as a very, very rich woman! (pp. 145f)

She is right to think so highly of herself. The values that Blanche advocates are the values that the play itself advocates. And Blanche DuBois embodies those values. One wonders how a whole body of criticism could have arisen that deals with the question of the focus of the playwright's sympathy. Tennessee Williams is fascinated by Stanley Kowalski as a character of great dramatic value, but Williams is a moralist, and Stanley is completely lacking in moral value. Blanche is indeed "on the side of civilization" and Williams...
is on the side of Blanche DuBois.

Another passage, indicating that Blanche's prime motive is not based upon psychological but upon spiritual motivations, is one that has often been cited as proof of Blanche's commitment to a world of illusion. When, in his last conversation with Blanche, Mitch insists that he wishes not to be insulting but to be realistic, Blanche replies: "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 truth. I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, let me be damned for it!" (p. 135). Blanche's comment is remarkably like a quotation from Goethe that Viktor Frankl uses as a summary of his philosophy: "If we take man as he is, we make him worse; if we take him as he ought to be, we help him become it." Blanche does indeed have a firm grasp of the ideal, but she might still be faulted if her grasp of reality is found to be imperfect.

Like her creator and many of his other creatures, Blanche DuBois is an Outsider of the type that Colin Wilson designates as Emotional. Characteristic of that type of Outsider is the curious double vision that is based on the Emotional Outsider's abnormal sensitivity to the extremes of beauty and ugliness in the world. (Vee Talbott had used the terms "light and shadow; Alma Winemiller speaks of "order and anarchy.")) Blanche DuBois is more aware of her charac-

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teristic Outsider consciousness than were Williams' earlier characters. She tells Stella, "... Honey, believe I feel things more than I tell you!" (p. 90). It is probably the element of self-awareness that led Williams to describe Blanche as "the most rational of all the characters I've created. . . ." 26

Though one might question Williams' success, it would be rather difficult to deny that the Blanche Williams intends is able to see the world realistically when the need arises. When Stanley accuses her of cheating her sister in the sale of Belle Reve, Blanche becomes as realistic and as business-like as even Stanley Kowalski could ask. She tells Stanley, "When a thing is important, I tell the truth, and this is the truth: I haven't cheated my sister or you or anyone else . . ." (p. 43).

Blanche can indeed see the truth. Her problem is that for her the truth is doubled. Blanche's consciousness incorporates both the optimism of a Romantic poet and the pessimism of an existential philosopher. This enormous range of perception accounts for Blanche's popularity as a character. It accounts, too, for the fact that Blanche is capable of what Maslow calls a peak experience during which a "search-light" is turned on and the shadows banished, but she is capable too of those experiences that William James called "vastation," and Viktor Frankl calls the experience of the

26 Tischler, p. 144.
existential void—those periods during which the shadows of the world achieve a primacy that is not visible to someone not gifted, or cursed, with Outsider perceptions.

Williams seems to have been aware that his audience might reject Blanche because of her "illusions," so he has taken care to have Blanche say that she can see the truth even when she fails to verbalize that perception. More significant, however, are Williams' reminders that other people are perhaps more dependent upon illusion than Blanche is. Both Stanley and Stella, whom some critics take to be complete realists, embrace illusions, though neither has the justification for doing so that Blanche has. During his last poker game, Stanley tells his cronies: "You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take at Salerno. I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through but I would...and I did. I put that down as a rule. To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky" (p. 152). We may be sympathetic to Stanley's illusion not only because of its obvious survival value, but because it is essentially harmless. However, moments later Stella voices her own, shall we say, necessary belief. Stella's illusion is not harmless, for Blanche must suffer its consequences. Stella says, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" (p. 154). Despite the mitigating circumstances, we must find Stella guilty of something akin to selfish expediency.

Williams has carefully given us three instances of
illusion. Blanche, at least, has the justification of her
nature and the fact that her fantasy consists of a rather
formalized idealism. Stella and Stanley adopt expedient il-
usions. Stella denies what she knows to be true. She de-
nies the shadows in the world and consents to delusion.
Blanche heroically insists upon maintaining both views. She
can do no less since both views constitute truths though the
truths seem necessarily exclusive. Her stance toward ex-
perience and the world is valid in terms of the phenome-
ological principle which holds that we can only see the ex-
ternal world through the filter of our natures and our cir-
cumstances.

Blanche's nature is divided, and her circumstances
are desperate. Her survival is at stake. At the end of her
own resources, both economic and emotional, she must look
elsewhere than herself for deliverance. She seeks deliverance
in three places. She seeks a sort of therapeutic sanctuary
with Stanley and Stella. She tells Stella that she won't
stay long, but that for the moment she needs rest. No Out-
ider would question either the quality or the degree of
fatigue that makes such sanctuary necessary. Stanley and
Stella might have helped Blanche to salvage her life if they
had accepted the one necessary condition—belief. But
Blanche had offended Stanley deeply when she called him "com-
mon" and "an ape." Unfortunately, she is unaware of what she
has done. She is unaware too of the evidence that Stanley
has been collecting against her. In Scene Seven, Stanley
tells Stella about Blanche's past, and that he has informed Mitch of that past:

STANLEY: You're goddam right I told him! I'd have that on my conscience the rest of my life if I knew all that stuff and let my best friend get caught!

STELLA: Is Mitch through with her?

STANLEY: Wouldn't be if--?

STELLA: I said, Is Mitch through with her?

[Blanche's voice is lifted again, serenely as a bell. She sings "But it wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me." (pp. 118f)]

Stanley's unconscious repetition of the words of Blanche's song is the playwright's way of indicating that if Blanche had been given the belief she asked for, her fate would have been different. Stanley, however, refuses to give Blanche what she needs. He goes further when he cuts off Blanche's second avenue of escape—Mitch, to whom Blanche says: "I thanked God for you, because you seemed to be gentle—a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in!" (p. 137).

The last place to which Blanche might look for deliverance is the rich, former schoolmate Shep Huntleigh. It is in this character that Williams again implies the redeemer who fails. Shep is the diminutive form of the word shepherd. Blanche almost never mentions Shep's name without recalling that she met him on Christmas Eve. Blanche had worn his fraternity pin for a while in college, and Williams probably intends something by his choice of fraternity—ATO, Alpha Tau Omega. Shep is the Christ to Blanche. Again, it is
perhaps wise to add that Shep Huntleigh's role as the messiah does not require that the whole of the play function as an allegory. The messianic implications of Shep Huntleigh serve to underscore Blanche's desperation. Her condition near the end of the play is such that divine intervention seems the only possible escape. That there is no escape represents Williams' judgment, for the moment, that hope for salvation is not realistic.

Williams manages one other very subtle and skillful religious implication in the play. A number of references suggest a connection between Shep Huntleigh and Stanley Kowalski. Blanche met Shep on Christmas Eve, an appropriate detail, and his name implies sheep. Stella notes that "Stanley was born five minutes after Christmas," to which Blanche responds, "Capricorn--the goat!" (p. 86). Thus, both men are associated with Christmas, and both are associated with animals that are familiar New Testament symbols. The effect of these details is to recall a passage from the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew:

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:
32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

The sheep are to be rewarded, but to the goats the King shall say:

41 ... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
42 For I was hungered, and ye gave me not meat;  
I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:  
43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in:  
naked, and ye clothed me not:  sick, and in prison,  
and ye visited me not.  
44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord,  
when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a  
stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did  
not minister unto thee?  
45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I  
say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of  
the least of these, ye did it not to me.

The last five verses describe rather aptly, though in an exagge­
erated fashion, Stanley's treatment of Blanche; they in-
dicate too exactly that sense in which Blanche may be identi-
fied with the Christ who is the man of constant sorrow who  
epitomizes suffering humanity. In the last scene of the  
play, Blanche is said to have "a look of sorrowful perplexity  
as though all human experience shows on her face" (p. 156).  

That Stanley is associated with Christmas and with  
the goat suggests that he too is a sort of Christ who is de­
void of mercy, a kind of anti-Christ who serves as the aveng­
ing agent of a pre-Christian divinity given to an eye-for-an-
eye morality. Harold Clurman, in his Lies Like Truth, calls  
Stanley, "the unwitting anti-Christ of our time."27 Blanche  
tells Mitch, "The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to  
myself, that man is my executioner" (p. 106). Earlier, she  
had told Stanley, "I hurt him [Allan] the way that you would  
like to hurt me . . ." (p. 44).

If Stanley and Shep Huntleigh do represent the divi­sion of powers that is implied in the Biblical division of  

27 Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth (New York: Mac­
the sheep and goats, it is significant that Stanley triumphs. Thus, the outcome of the play indicates that Williams doubts that the new dispensation promised in the New Testament (that is the augmentation of Jehovah's justice with Christ's mercy, and the addition of Christ's positive commandment to love to the negative dicta of the ten commandments) is really operative in the world. Blanche's belief that "kinds of new light have come into the world" would indeed be pathetic if it were not so tentative, so qualified.

Elia Kazan, whose Director's Notebook helped to establish the view that Streetcar is a drama about the clash of historical cultures, concludes: "The more I work on Blanche, incidentally, the less insane she seems. She is caught in a fatal inner contradiction, but in another society, she would work. In Stanley's society, no!" No, Blanche is not insane. She is desperate and confused. But she is morally superior to any other character in the play.

Williams expects us to believe her when she says, "Never inside. I didn't lie in my heart..." (p. 137). In her heart Blanche knows the enormity of her sin, she suffers the desolation of estrangement from God, she feels the horror of death that makes ugly things of people, she sees both the ugliness and beauty of human experience, and she clings nonetheless to an ideal of human conduct that advocates

exactly the sort of mercy that she is denied. What Blanche lacks is the ability to surrender her heart and her moral sense as Stanley has done, as Stella does at the end of the play. But Blanche rises to heroism even if that heroism is futile. Perhaps Blanche is most heroic when, in the last scene of the play, she voices Frankl's Will to Meaning, a sentiment that must be that of Williams himself: "What's going on here? I want an explanation of what's going on here" (p. 156).

In an early one-act play, "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion," a character rather like Blanche is befriended by a young writer who speaks the message of that play, and it is the message of Streetcar. The message is phrased as a question, and the question is one that has haunted Tennessee Williams throughout his life and work: "Is there no mercy left in the world? What has become of compassion and understanding? Where have they all gone to? Where's God? Where's Christ?"  

George Core, the editor of Southern Fiction Today: Renascence and Beyond, comments on Southern writers in general in a way that is applicable to Tennessee Williams in particular: "Southern writers by and large have retained a religious sense of man. . . . They have been able to fashion from the Southern experience a literature which translates

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man's dreams and goals and his failures to achieve them into something resembling tragic grandeur. . . .”30 Williams has done as much in Streetcar. Williams and his heroine, Blanche DuBois, have maintained a religious sense and sensibility into a time and a culture that seem to give the lie to that sense. A Blanche DuBois in a world of Stanley Kowalskis is as much an anachronism as Cervantes' knight errant who persists after the time of knight errantry. We should accept Blanche in much the same way that we accept another modern proponent of the chivalric code, the Hemingway man. Blanche is as certain to be defeated as are all of Hemingway's heroes, but both Hemingway and Williams commend the values of their defeated.

Blanche is, as Kazan says, "an outdated creature, approaching extinction,"31 but the loss of Blanche will be the world's loss. That Blanche has "always depended upon the kindness of strangers" (p. 165) is more the fault of the world than of Blanche. Williams' play is apocalyptic. It signals not the second coming of the Christ for the first has failed already. The brutes have returned, and the game they play "is seven-card stud" (p. 166).

The play that follows Streetcar Named Desire is also about a human anachronism whose virtues seem out of place in the historical period in which she lives. The play is Summer

31 Kazan, p. 370.
and Smoke, and the heroine is Alma Winemiller.

*Summer and Smoke* is the story of Alma's love for John Buchanan. Alma, the minister's daughter, has loved John, the doctor's son, since they were both children. The play begins with an encounter between John and Alma as children. The meeting takes place in the town square in front of the angel in the fountain whose base bears the inscription, "Eternity." The angel oversees the action of the whole play.

As adults, Alma "*seems to belong to a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France*," and John is "*a Promethean figure, brilliantly and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one, it will burn him up*" (p. 124). Alma's elegance is misconstrued by the townspeople who view her as an affected and eccentric prude, the fitting subject of comical imitation at parties. Alma misunderstands herself. She suffers from a number of physical ailments which are merely the physical concomitants of her intense emotional nature. John is a person who is victimized by his own strengths. His energies are squandered in drinking, gambling, and whoring. The community publicly condemns him yet privately regards him with admiring awe. Alma and John appear to be polar opposites. They are not, for both are Outsiders who reject the workaday world as

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32Tennessee Williams, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale, with Summer and Smoke* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 131. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
meaningless. Both are beset by double vision, and both seek salvation in extremes.

While both protagonists are Outsiders, John is only temporarily so. During the course of the play he undergoes such changes as bring him into the human community. Alma undergoes a corresponding change, but it is one that takes her even more outside the community to which she should belong by virtue of her birth. Very nearly the whole action of the play is summed up by a line from near the end of the play. Alma, having resisted John's advances in the past, comes to offer herself to him, only to find that he has adopted her former position and so must refuse her. Alma tells him:

You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you, John, in spite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse. Yes, that's it! You tried to avoid it, but you've told me plainly. The tables have turned, yes, the tables have turned with a vengeance! You've come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each finding the other gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell! [She laughs.] I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn't seem so important to me any more, but you're telling me I've got to remain a lady. [She laughs rather violently.] The tables have turned with a vengeance. (p. 239)

The end result of the change in positions is that John plans to marry an innocent child of a girl, and Alma begins to pick up traveling salesmen in the town square.

The play is relevant to the present study because it does involve the theme of the anticipated redeemer who fails. However, the theme is an implication of the action that Williams has not exploited fully. Alma's Will to Meaning and
her anticipation of the Christ that she identifies with John Buchanan are indicated in a number of subtle ways. When Alma is introduced in the prologue, she is said to have "a habit of holding her hands, one cupped under the other in a way similar to that of receiving the wafer at Holy Communion" (p. 117). When, as children, John and Alma kiss, she adopts the same position (p. 123). On another occasion, Alma tells the young doctor: "To be a doctor . . . I think it is more religious than being a priest" (p. 134). Still later in the play, after John's reformation and his heroic effort to stamp out the fever epidemic in a neighboring town, he is given a hero's welcome by the people of Glorious Hill. Alma is standing at the window watching his homecoming when "the sun brightens and falls in a shaft through the frame." What follows identifies John with the light. Alma cries out: "There he is! [She staggers away from the window. There is a roll of drums and then silence. Alma now speaks faintly.] What...happened? Something...struck me!" (p. 219). Only after this quasi-religious experience does Miss Alma offer herself to John, and she is rejected. For Alma, the only possible match is John, but that match is denied her.

When she tells John about the changes that have taken place in her, she recalls that when the old Alma died, "She said to me when she slipped this ring on my finger--'Remember I died empty-handed, and so make sure that your hands have something in them'" (p. 235). Alma's fate is ultimately to die empty-handed. The need for love that she hoped to
satisfy with John is now parodied in her encounters with traveling salesmen. Williams sums up the course of Miss Alma's life in this way: "You see, Alma went through the same thing that I went through—from puritanical shackles to complete profligacy." Her Will to Meaning is stifled by the sleeping pills that give her solace. Their prescription number is 96814; she thinks of it "as the telephone number of God!" (p. 246). *Summer and Smoke* illustrates the pattern that has been traced in other Williams plays. The protagonist looks to another person for deliverance. References in the play identify that deliverer with Christ. However, the outcome is not what the protagonist expects. There is no deliverance.

The play that Williams calls *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is markedly different from *Summer and Smoke* though the same major characters appear in both plays. When the two were published together in a 1964 edition, Williams appended an author's note:

> Aside from the characters having the same names and the locale remaining the same, I think *Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is a substantially different play from *Summer and Smoke*, and I prefer it. It is less conventional and melodramatic. I wrote it in Rome one summer and brought it with me to London the fall that *Summer and Smoke* was about to be produced there. But I arrived with it too late. The original version of the play was already in rehearsal. (p. 76)

Williams added that he hoped the publication of the play would lead to its production. The play was produced in June

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of the same year in a summer theater in Nyack, New York, but the play deserves a better showcase, for Eccentricities is one of Williams' finest plays. More than any other Williams play it recreates the lyrical, dreamlike quality that accounted for the success of Glass Menagerie. The Alma of Eccentricities is a better character than her predecessor. The pattern of the play is not so decidedly that of "ships that pass in the night." As that pattern submerges, another emerges more strongly, and that pattern is of the failure of the redeemer.

The later John Buchanan is more human, more sensitive, and less the Outsider. He is given a possessive mother whose aim it is to marry him off to the sort of woman that she feels is suited to a brilliant, young doctor. Mrs. Buchanan shares the sentiments of The Reverend Winemiller and the rest of Glorious Hill, Mississippi, that Alma is an affected eccentric. The charge is a serious one in the restricted and parochial environment of a small Mississippi delta town. The town itself is modeled after Port Gibson, Mississippi. A rather unusual church in that town figures prominently in the last act of the play.

Alma is found guilty of being different because she is a member of a small society of culturally inclined outcasts like herself, because she feeds birds in the town square, and because she is carried away by the emotion implicit in the songs that she sings. Alma defends herself on

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34 Weales, p. 12.
the last charge in a significant speech: "It's true that I feel the emotion of a song . . . even commonplace little songs like 'I Love You Truly,' they have a sincere emotion and a singer must feel it, and when you feel it, you **show** it! A singer's face and hands are part of a singer's **equipment**! Why, even a singer's heart is part of her equipment!" (pp. 27f).

Alma's speech is a kind of credo of the Emotional Outsider who has adopted the discipline of art. One might easily imagine Van Gogh saying something similar.

To make things more difficult for Alma, her mother is eccentric to the point of harmless madness, and her Aunt Albertine has been the cause of a family scandal. Albertine, too, was a minister's daughter, and she ran away with a traveling man, Otto Schwartzkopf, when she found "living in sin preferable to life in the Rectory" (p. 82). Together the two lovers toured the South with a traveling show, the Musée Mécanique, a collection of mechanical oddities created by Mr. Schwartzkopf. The ultimate fate of the lovers is bound up in the Musée Mécanique and in the oddities which make it up:

Among them was a mechanical bird-girl. She was his masterpiece. Every five minutes a tin bird flew out of her mouth and whistled three times, clear as a bell, and flew back in again. She smiled and nodded, lifted her arms as if to embrace a lover. Mr. Schwartzkopf was enchanted by his bird-girl. Everything else was neglected....He'd suddenly get out of bed in the night and go downstairs to wind her up and sit in front of her, drinking, until she seemed alive to him....Then one winter they made a dreadful mistake. They mortgaged the whole museum to buy a boa constrictor because somebody told them 'Big snakes pay good'--well, this one didn't, it swallowed a blanket and died....You may have heard Mother speak of it. But not of the fire. She refuses to believe in the fire. (p. 83)
Rather than lose the show, Otto set fire to it. Albertine ran into the fire to pull him out. She failed, and "when they dragged her cut, she was dying, but still holding onto a button she'd torn from his sleeve. 'Some people,' she said, 'don't even die empty-handed!'" (p. 83).

Miss Alma is in something of the same position as Otto and Albertine. Like Albertine, Alma faces the possibility of dying empty-handed. She is conscious of that possibility:

JOHN: You've been very quiet, Miss Alma.

ALMA: I always say too much or say too little. The few young men I've gone out with have found me... I've only gone out with three at all seriously--and with each one there was a desert between us.

JOHN: What do you mean by a desert?

ALMA: Oh, wide, wide stretches of uninhabitable ground. I'd try to talk, he'd try to talk. Oh, we'd talk a lot--but then it would be--exhausted--the talk, the effort. I'd twist the ring on my finger, so hard sometimes it would cut my finger. He'd look at his watch as if he had never seen a watch before.... And we would both know that the useless undertaking had come to a close. . . . At the door he would say, "I'll call you." "I'll call you" meant goodbye. . . .

JOHN: [gently] Would you care much?

ALMA: Not--not about them. . . . They only mattered as shadows of some failure that would come later. (pp. 87f)

That failure is, of course, the failure of the love between John and Alma, or more realistically, Alma's love for John. Like Mr. Schwarzkopf's love for the bird-girl, Alma's love is for a creature that is not of her kind. She tells John: "I've lived next door to you all the days of my life, a weak and divided person, lived in your shadow, no, I mean in your brightness which made a shadow I lived in, but lived in
adoring awe of your radiance, your strength...your singleness" (p. 89). The terms suggest more a religious object than a man.

Alma, like the masterpiece in the Musée Mécanique, is an Outsider, a superior misfit, unlike other people. She has no hope of being John's wife, because his bride will be perfectly suited to the world: "The bride will have beauty, beauty! Admirable family background, no lunacy in it, no skeletons in the closet—no Aunt Albertine and Mr. Otto Schwarzkopf, no Musée Mécanique with a shady past!—No, no, nothing morbid, nothing peculiar, nothing eccentric! No—deviations!—But everything perfect and regular as the—tick of that—clock!" (p. 76).

John acknowledges Alma's worth: "You know, you know, it's surprising how few people there are that dare in this world to speak what is in their hearts" (p. 76). What is in Alma's heart leads her to ask for an hour, the hour of the new year, in "a small hotel of the sort that is called, sometimes, a 'house of convenience': a place where rooms are let out for periods as brief as an hour" (p. 96). When the fire that is laid in the room fails to burn, Alma gives John a plume from her hat because "something has to be sacrificed to a fire." When the fire still fails to burn, John says, "It never was much of a fire, it never really got started, and now it's out....Sometimes things say things for people." Their departure is interrupted by church bells announcing the New Year. Alma wonders whether the new year might see
"the coming true of our most improbable dreams!—I'm not ashamed of tonight! I think that you and I have been honest together, even though we failed!" When the lights are turned on, the fire miraculously revives, and the two stay to make love (pp. 96-102).

It is probably this Miss Alma, rather than the earlier one, that Williams remembers when he describes Alma as "triumphant." Alma is triumphant in the sense that she is courageous enough to chance everything on what, in the parlance of prostitutes, is called a "short-time." She shares the belief of Williams that "love can occur on a single occasion . . . when it happens to be some transcendentally beautiful experience."  

The last scene of *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, the Epilogue, shows Alma in the town square on a Fourth of July night an indefinite time later. One of Alma's students is singing in another part of the square, and Alma has just made the acquaintance of a "salesman who travels." Before they part to meet later in a less respectable section of Glorious Hill, Alma points out the unusual steeple on the Episcopal church where her father had been rector before his death: "Instead of a cross on top of the steeple, it has an enormous gilded hand with its index finger pointing straight up, accusingly, at--heaven...." (p. 105).

Of what must heaven be accused? The answer, for Alma in particular, has been furnished earlier in the play. After

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35Gaines, pp. 27, 29.
John attends a meeting of Alma's "little band of eccentrics" and has been called away by his mother for a fictitious medical emergency, Alma explains the effect his presence and departure have had: "Oh, you put us in our place tonight, my little collection of--eccentrics, my club of--fellow misfits! You sat among us like a lord of the earth, the only handsome one there, the one superior one! And oh, how we all devoured you with our eyes, you were like holy bread being broken among us.--But snatched away!" (pp. 74f).

The image obviously alludes to the communion, the breaking and sharing of the bread of Christ's body. Incidentally, the name John means "Yahweh is gracious," and Williams perhaps suggests that we seek out that meaning when he has John remark that Alma is Spanish for soul. John's name is ironic. Alma's past relationships are shadows of a failure yet to come. On one level that failure is her romance with John. On another level, the failure is the failure of the redeemer, the Christ. Admittedly, the religious theme of the messiah who fails is an implication of the action rather than a major theme. Still, though it is not the focal point of the play, it is undeniably an aspect of the associated meanings of the play. The characterization of Alma Winemiller calls our attention to it. Alma is concerned with the religious in more than a conventional way. Furthermore, Alma's view of God's creation is complicated by the double vision of the Outsider, a trait that she shares with Vai Xavier, Vee Talbott, Tom Wingfield, and Blanche DuBois.
When she looks at the world, what does she see? "Part anarchy and part order--the footprints of God! . . . Isn't it strange? He never really, really-exposes Himself! Here and there a footprint, but even the footprints are not very easy to follow! No, you can't follow. In fact you don't even know which way they're pointing...." (p. 17).

In a world of polar opposites, anarchy and order, light and shadow, Alma Winemiller is forced to live and to cope with her own needs and desires. She thinks that her principal need is "the ordinary human need for love." John sees more clearly into her needs. When she asks for an hour of his time in a hotel room so that she "can make a lifetime of it," he replies, "For you, Miss Alma, the name of the stone angel is barely enough and nothing less than that could be!" (p. 95). The name of the angel is Eternity.

Alma's need is more than the Outsider's characteristic desire to belong--more even than the need to be loved. Her talk of the "footprints of God" and her telling comparison of John to the bread of the Eucharist indicate that her prime motives are those that we should now be familiar with. She is dominated by Frankl's Will to Meaning--her need is for God. It would seem, too, that Williams has in mind, with regard to Alma, a conception that is an important aspect of the doctrine of Platonic love, that is, that a lover is a friend in whom one feels the divine.

The Alma of Eccentricities is less pathetic than the Alma of Summer and Smoke. She is endowed with candor and
self-knowledge. She is heroic, though her heroism is perhaps obscure. Her victory would seem to be that for one brief hour she succeeds in loving God in a body. As she knew he would, the god goes away, and the final scene shows that she has continued to love the bodies that she meets even when they no longer represent the divine to her. But the fate of the second Alma is better than that of the first. One dies with nothing; the other can remember a success, and so, like her aunt, she "doesn't even die empty-handed."

_Camino Real_, which premiered in March, 1953, is one of Williams' most uncharacteristic works; it is both a comedy and a fantasy. It is, as well, probably his most provocative play. The play puzzled its opening night audience and critics and sent some of the audience stamping out of the auditorium. Williams professed surprise that "the play would seem obscure and confusing to anyone who was willing to meet it even less than halfway."  

Most commentators do find the play obscure, though Harold Clurman voices a minority opinion when he says that _Camino Real_ "is too nakedly clear to be a sound work of art."

Criticism of the technique of the play is similarly divided. Signi Falk says that Williams, "having divorced

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36. Tennessee Williams, Three Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Rose Tattoo, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 160. Future references to Camino Real will be from this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

37. Harold Clurman, "Theater," The Nation, 175 (1953), 293.
himself from the life and people he can write about so effec-
tively . . . allowed himself to be dominated by theatrical
devices.  

38 Esther Merle Jackson, on the other hand, con-
cludes that the play "represents a significant achievement
in the development of a mature contemporary form," an
achievement whose beneficiaries are Beckett, Ionesco, Genet,
Pinter, and Albee.  

When asked his opinion of the work of Tennessee Wil-
liams, William Faulkner replied, "A play called Camino Real
I think is the best. The others were not quite that good . . . .
Camino Real was--it touched a very fine high moment of poet-
ry, I think."  

40 Perhaps Faulkner was impressed by the pres-
ence of a theme that he shares with Williams, namely, the
decline of virtue in the modern world.

Williams' play is intensely theatrical, so much so
that the setting of the play carries as much of the meaning
as do the characters and script. The play takes place in a
walled city in the Tierra Caliente, the hot or angry land.
The city sits on the edge of the Terra Incognita, a stretch
of desert land that sometimes functions as a symbol of the
"undiscovered country" of Hamlet's famous soliloquy. Beyond
the desert there are mountains. Much like Oran in Camus'
The Plague, the city is a symbol of modern life. Williams

38 Falk, p. 129.  39 Jackson, p. 128.

40 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds.,
Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the Uni-
versity of Virginia 1957-1958 (Charlottesville, Va.: Univer-

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says that the play "is nothing more nor less than my conception of the time and world that I live in, and its people are mostly archetypes of certain basic attitudes and qualities with those mutations that would occur if they had continued along the road to this hypothetical terminal point in it" (p. 159). Two such archetypes are Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

On Sancho's chart, the city is designated as "the end of the Camino Real and the beginning of the Camino Real," a place where the "spring of humanity has gone dry," and the only birds are "wild birds that are tamed and kept in ... cages!" (p. 173). The meaning of the city is further indicated by the play on words involved in the title. When the name is given its Spanish pronunciation it means Royal Road. The Anglicized pronunciation means the Way of Reality. The past was royal; the present is real. Thus, the city marks a point in time rather than a point in space. This aspect of the play is further indicated by its division into scenes called blocks.

The title also has historical implications. The Camino Real is "the road of the Spanish knights who conquered the land, but also the road upon which Christianity came to the West Coast of America. This, moreover, is the division of the play into sixteen stations ... missionary stations. ... Today, however, the old missionary way has become a street of industry, of money, of tourist trade--a
Esther Merle Jackson has said that "Camino Real represents . . . a road from life to death; its blocks are 'stations of the cross' in man's progression toward annihilation." In this, she suggests a general rather than a specific allegorical correspondence to the stations of the cross.

That Williams sees the modern world as hell is indicated by an epigraph of the first lines of Dante's Inferno: "In the middle of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost." The epigraph has led D. E. Presley to equate the blocks of the play with the circles of Dante's hell. Whether or not Williams intends so neat a comparison is immaterial. The epigraph is sufficient cause to find that Williams intends that we see the modern world as hell. Thus, he puts himself into the company of those other major writers whom J. Isaacs has in mind when he says that "the topography of Hell and its interior decoration is a very great concern of the modern dramatist and the modern novelist."

The world of the Camino Real is presided over by Gutman, a "lordly fat man" who is both the proprietor of the Siete Mares (seven seas) hotel, and the master of ceremonies

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42 Jackson, pp. 121-22. 43 Presley, p. 63.
of the procession that makes up the play. The chief person-age in the city, Gutman represents the mysterious Generalis-simo who rules the land. The city is a place of extremes. The two sides of the street represent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Near the back of the stage is a gigantic arch that opens into the Terra Incognita. Streetcleaners prowl through the streets blowing on whistles and carting off the dead and dying. These agents of death represent a higher power than Gutman. "Could it happen to ME?" he asks. "The answer is 'YES.' And that's what curdles my blood like milk. . . ." (p. 226).

The one law that seems to prevail on the Camino Reali is the sanction against the word hermano, the Spanish word for brother.

Quixote and Sancho arrive during the Prologue, and Quixote proclaims that "an old knight should always have about him a bit of blue ribbon" to remind him "of distance that he has gone and distance he has yet to go" and "of that green country he lived in which was the youth of his heart, before such singing words as Truth! . . . Valor! . . . De-
voir! . . . turned into the meaningless mumble of some old monk hunched over cold mutton at supper!" (pp. 170-72). Sancho, who was devoted to Quixote rather than to Quixote's ideals, reaches the limit of his endurance and deserts the old knight to return to La Mancha. Quixote, alone and lone-ly, concludes that "when so many are lonely as seem to be lonely, it would be inexcusably selfish to be lonely alone"
Quixote lies down to sleep and to dream "a pageant, a masque in which old meanings will be remembered and possibly new ones discovered, and when I wake . . . I'll choose one among its shadows to take along with me in the place of Sancho..." (p. 175).

The play that follows is the dream of Don Quixote, one of Williams' personal heroes, whom he calls "the supreme example of the obstinate knight, gallant and unashamed at being the victim of his own romantic follies." The present dream is as disturbing as those dreams that first led Cervantes' Spanish gentleman to journey into the world to right all wrongs. It is important that we remember that the play is cast as the dream-vision of Cervantes' mad knight. The mind of the old knight is the frame within which the play takes place. The controversial curtain line is reasonable enough once we remember that the speaker is Don Quixote.

The chief concern of the people of the Tierra Caliente is escape. The mad world of Quixote's dream offers very few routes of escape. To one who knows only the way of reality, the choice seems to be to stay where he is, perhaps to move from the Siete Mares to the Ritz Men Only, and then into the streetcleaner's carts. Once dead he may be buried if he has five dollars. If not, he is reduced to his component chemicals to become "an undistinguished member of a collectivist state" (p. 211). That is the fate of most of the people on

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the Camino Real.

There are others, those who are not so resigned to their present condition, those who can remember when the road was royal and thus recall a kind of freedom presently denied them. In Casanova's words, such people "have a desperate bird in our hearts, a memory of--some distant mother with--wings..." (p. 263). For such people there are two alternatives. They might attempt to leave on the unscheduled passenger plane called the Fugitivo, which represents the possibility of flight from the conditions on the Camino Real. Those who do succeed in getting seats die in a plane crash. Mere flight is not possible.

The only other alternative is to brave the Terra Incognita in an attempt to reach the mountains on the other side. The last alternative is the one that Williams himself designates as the right choice, or at least, the choice that he would make. Thus, one may stay in the city and die by degrees, one may attempt mere flight and die, or one may brave death in an heroic attempt to cross the wasteland of the Terra Incognita.

Until the choice is made, the inhabitants of the city wait. Their waiting period is treated in surrealistic terms, but their anticipation is not unlike that of other characters surveyed in this chapter. They wait to be rescued from futility. In the meantime, some indulge in business as usual, for example Gutman, the Pawnbroker, and the Gypsy.

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46 Hewes, p. 25.
Others, notably Camille, may distract themselves with drugs or sexual companions. Still others may, like Casanova, hold to a less utilitarian and more idealistic view of love, a love less self-directed. Jacques tells Marguerite, "I want to stay here with you and love you and guard you until the time comes that we both can leave with honor" (pp. 239f).

Those who elect to choose, as Williams would, to cross the Terra Incognita, must confront a future that may well be worse than the present. Lord Byron heroically chooses the Terra Incognita because he realizes that "there is a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go!" He admonishes those who remain behind to "make voyages!—Attempt them!—there's nothing else..." (p. 246). Byron's departure marks one of the "resurrections" which Williams says are so much a part of the play's meaning (p. 169).

Byron and the others have one enigmatic testament as to what the Terra Incognita holds. Early in the play The Survivor enters through the arch. His return provokes Gutman into calling the Generalissimo: "Hello Sweetheart. . . . You know that party of young explorers that attempted to cross the desert on foot? Well, one of them's back" (pp. 187f). Gutman is right to anticipate trouble. The Survivor's return is the occasion for the speaking of the forbidden word, Hermano (brother). When the word is spoken, "the cry is repeated like springing fire and a loud murmuring sweeps the crowd. They push forward with cupped hands extended and the grasping cries of starving people at the sight of bread"
(p. 189). If there is any doubt as to The Survivor's identity, it is dispelled a moment later when he is shot, and a character called La Madrecita de los Perdidos, the little mother of the lost ones, cradles "the dying man in her arms in the attitude of a Pietà" (p. 190). Before he dies, the Survivor speaks a kind of parable: "When Peeto, my pony, was born--he stood on his four legs at once and accepted the world! --He was wiser than I . . . . When Peeto was one year old he was wiser than God!" (p. 185). Thus Christ counsels acceptance.

The Survivor represents another instance of the Christ who fails. He does so because the essence of his message is brotherhood, and to the people on the Camino Real, the word brother has lost its meaning. Casanova speaks of the word in terms that suggest the Biblical Logos: "The people need the word. They're thirsty for it!" The equation of Brotherhood and water figures prominently in the Epilogue of the play. Gutman, more cynical than Jacques, asks, "What is a brother to them but someone to get ahead of, to cheat, to lie to, to undersell in the market. Brother, you say to a man whose wife you sleep with!" (pp. 189f). The fate of the Survivor is death and the streetcleaners' carts. The possibility of the solace of communion in a world characterized by loneliness, a possibility first voiced by Quixote, is reiterated, but it is not realized.

Significantly, the death of The Survivor precedes the arrival of the play's hero, Kilroy, "a young American vagrant"
with "a pair of golden gloves slung about his neck" and a belt that is "ruby-and-emerald-studded with the word CHAMP in bold letters. He stops before a chalked inscription ... which says: 'Kilroy Is Coming!' He scratches out 'Coming' and over it prints 'Here!'" (p. 192). It is the fulfillment of his prophesied coming that first equates Kilroy with Christ. The ubiquitous Kilroy is the everyman Christ in the modern world.

Later Kilroy dies, and before his resurrection La Madrecita holds him in the attitude of a Pietà. Kilroy is further equated with Christ by a peculiar physical condition which has caused him to leave his home, his profession as champ, and his "one true woman." Kilroy has a heart as big as a baby's head, and we find in the last few scenes that the heart is made of pure gold. His heart indicates the capacity for intense feeling that is both his weakness and his strength. He shares this quality with Camille and Casanova.

Like Val Xavier, Kilroy has the power to transform people, to make them both more self-aware and more admirable. He works such changes on Camille and the Gypsy's Daughter. With Jacques, Kilroy realizes the kind of brotherhood that is at the heart of both Williams' play and orthodox Christianity.

Kilroy, the American boxer and folk hero, is the focal character of the play. He enters in Block Two shortly after the death of the survivor. Kilroy comes to the Tierra Caliente in an effort to evade death. His heart condition
makes it dangerous for him to drink, smoke, fight or make love. The first major Character that Kilroy meets is the Baron De Charlus, the homosexual masochist of Proust's *Cities of the Plain*. There is a slight suggestion that Williams intends that we take Charlus as a Christ symbol, but he is the ironic Christ. His masochism is his own attempt to atone for the cruelty of the world as well as for his own shortcomings. Like Anthony Burns in "Desire and the Black Masseur," and like Sebastian Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*, the Baron de Charlus has discovered there is partial compensation for the state of the world in "the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt."  

Williams does not commend the way of the baron. Charlus explains to Kilroy: "I used to wonder. Now I simply wander. I stroll about the fountain and hope to be followed. Some people call it corruption. I call— it simplification..." (p. 207). The baron's way of dealing with the world is wrong because it is a simplification. He has adopted the role of the masochistic victim after he has ceased to wonder, to ask the questions that other characters in the play still do ask, the questions that Gutman says "are passed amongst them like something illicit and shameful, like counterfeit money or drugs or indecent postcards—'What is this place? Where are we? What is the meaning of—Shhh'—Ha Ha..." (pp.

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The Baron has made what Williams calls, in his preface to *Battle of Angels*, an "expedient adaptation"; a "surrender to a state of quandary."

The Baron is killed offstage by a young man whose interest he has invited. Moments later Kilroy and Jacques Casanova meet. Their conversation shows a more honorable if less successful way of dealing with the questions that haunt the travelers on the Camino Real. After Casanova explains the fate of those who, like the baron, are carried away by the streetcleaners, Kilroy responds:

**KILROY [following]:** --I guess that's--sensible...

**JACQUES:** Yes, but not romantic. And romance is important. Don't you think?

**KILROY:** Nobody thinks romance is more important than me!

**JACQUES:** Except possibly me!

**KILROY:** Maybe that's why fate has brung us together! We're buddies under the skin!

**JACQUES:** Travelers born?

**KILROY:** Always looking for something!

**JACQUES:** Satisfied by nothing!

**KILROY:** Hopeful?

**JACQUES:** Always! (pp. 211f)

The baron has made the mistake of settling for a role in lieu of an answer. Mere suffering is not sufficient to the needs of the world. One must, like Kilroy and Jacques, like all Emotional Outsiders beset by the Will to Meaning, continue to look for answers.
Shortly thereafter Gutman orders Kilroy to don a clown costume and become the Patsy, a kind of twentieth-century scapegoat. Kilroy refuses and a chase ensues during which Kilroy cries out, apparently to Esmeralda, the Gypsy's daughter, "Mary, help a Christian! Help a Christian, Mary!" (p. 220). Kilroy is captured and forced to become the Patsy.

When the play resumes after the intermission, Gutman announces Block Seven on the Camino Real, that time of day "when we look into ourselves and ask with a wonder which never is lost altogether: 'Can this be all? Is there nothing more? Is this what the glittering wheels of the heavens turn for?'" (p. 223). Such questions continue to haunt Kilroy and Jacques who have begun to address each other as brothers. Jacques tells Kilroy that making him play the Patsy is a means of taming him, of stifling the freedom and the honesty of spirit that he represents. He assures Kilroy that "before the final block we'll find some way out of here! Meanwhile, patience and courage, little brother!" (p. 225).

Gutman announces the entrance of Camille, "another legend, one that everyone knows, the legend of the sentimental whore, the courtesan who made the mistake of love" (pp. 226f). That mistake, of course, qualifies her to be a heroine in Williams' play. Camille has come to the point of almost total despair. When Jacques tells her that he is waiting for a time when they can both leave with honor, she responds with a line that sums up the conditions that prevail on the Camino Real and, by extension, in the modern world: "'Leave
with honor?' Your vocabulary is almost as out-of-date as your cape and your cane. How could anyone quit this field with honor, this place where there's nothing but the gradual wasting away of everything decent in us...the sort of desperation that comes after even desperation has been worn out through long wear!' (p. 240). Thus Camille echoes Byron's remark that "there is a passion for declivity in this world!" (p. 246).

Block Eight dramatizes exactly the sort of departure with honor that Camille no longer believes possible. Lord Byron, aware that the city "is a port of entry and departure" with "no permanent guests" (p. 241), knows that to remain is to die by degrees. Before he leaves he recounts the cremation of Shelley. The story bolsters his resolution to return to the vocation of poet which is "to influence the heart in a gentler fashion...to purify it and lift it above its ordinary level. For what is the heart but a sort of...--A sort of--instrument!--that translates noise into music, chaos into--order...--a mysterious order!" (p. 245). Like Vee Talbott and Blanche DuBois, Byron realizes the role that one's consciousness plays in his view of the world. Byron leaves and Kilroy starts to follow, but his nerve fails him.

Immediately, Block Nine is announced, and the sound of the approaching Fugitivo provokes a scramble during which almost all of the characters attempt to purchase available seats. Camille is especially desperate in her attempt. She
shows that her love is not so true as Casanova's since she would readily desert him if it meant that she could leave the city. Jacques is not surprised by her betrayal, nor does he condemn her.

Block Ten, a crucial scene, is given over to the reconciliation of the two lovers. Jacques tells Marguerite that despite his past, he has "never loved until now with the part of love that's tender..." Camille responds that they do not love, that they are merely "used to each other." She counsels distrust as "our only defense against betrayal." Jacques answers, "I think our defense is love." Camille replies with a long speech that partially defines the human condition on the Camino Real:

What are we sure of? Not even of our existence, dear comforting friend! And who can ask the questions that torment us? "What is this place?" "Where are we?"... What else are we offered? The never-broken procession of little events that assure us that we and strangers about us are still going on! Where? Why? and the perch that we hold is unstable... And where else have we to go when we leave here? Bide-a-While? "Ritz Men Only?" Or under that ominous arch into Terra Incognita? We're lonely. We're frightened. We hear the streetcleaners' piping not far away. So now and then, although we've wounded each other time and again--we stretch out hands to each other in the dark that we can't escape from--we huddle together for some dim-communal comfort--and that's what passes for love on this terminal stretch of the road that used to be royal. What is it, this feeling between us? Something, yes, something--delicate, unreal, bloodless! The sort of violets that could grow on the moon, or in the crevices of those far away mountains, fertilized by the droppings of carrion birds... But tenderness, the violets in the mountains--can't break the rocks! (pp. 263-65)

Signe Falk attributes these sentiments to Williams and
attacks them as nihilistic.\(^48\) She ignores Casanova's response which does not deny what Camille has said, but rather significantly extends it. Williams' view is more nearly stated by Jacques. Not so desperate as Camille, not so disillusioned with the motion that passes for progress, Jacques refuses to believe that the only love is one born of uncertainty and nourished by the fear of death. He maintains that there is hope, and reasonable hope, to be found in the vestigial human feelings that remain in "whatever is left of our hearts." He tacitly denies that love as it is commonly practiced encompasses the love that is possible, for he asserts that though our human feelings be "delicate, unreal, bloodless," as delicate as violets, "the violets in the mountains can break the rocks if you believe in them and allow them to grow!" Camille cannot, however, muster the positive tenderness that Jacques both advocates and dramatizes. She tells him that she will betray him that very night, "Because I've out-lived the tenderness of my heart." She sends a messenger to arrange an assignation with a gigolo, and Gutman announces "Block Eleven on the Camino Real" (pp. 265-67).

A fiesta has begun, and the first event is the coronation of the King of Cuckolds—Casanova. Jacques is given a crown of horns, and over the noise of the crowd, he shouts: "The greatest lover wears the longest horns on the Camino!"

\(^{48}\)Falk, pp. 120-28.
(p. 269). "Crown of horns" is too close to "Crown of thorns" for us to miss Williams' intent. Momentarily Jacques emerges as the Christ who loves best and is most betrayed. Immediately, the second event in the fiesta is announced—the restoration of the virginity of the Gypsy's Daughter. In the excitement that accompanies the announcement of the restoration, Kilroy "crosses to Jacques . . . snatches off the antlers and returns him his fedora. Jacques reciprocates by removing Kilroy's fright wig and electric nose. They embrace as brothers" (p. 269). In pantomime Kilroy explains that he will leave the city and cross the Terra Incognita. He invites Jacques to go with him, but Casanova refuses to leave Camille behind. Kilroy pawns his belongings and ascends to the arch. The Gypsy's Daughter, with her virginity restored, appears and convinces Kilroy to become the chosen hero and make love to her. The crowd roars its assent (pp. 268-75).

After an intermission, Block Twelve begins. In an obvious satire on inhuman bureaucracy, The Gypsy puts Kilroy through a regimen consisting of questions, an oath, a signature, and a shot. Kilroy tells her that he is "no guinea pig," to which she replies, "Don't kid yourself. We're all of us guinea pigs in the laboratory of God. Humanity is just a work in progress" (p. 281). The line is one of the most significant ones in the play. The ideas recalls Colin Wilson's treatment of Steppenwolf. Certain of Harry Haller's realizations are as pertinent to Williams as they are to Hesse or Wilson:
Like all men Harry believes that he knows very well what man is and yet does not know at all. . . . Man is not by any means of fixed and enduring form. . . . He is much more an experiment and a transition. He is nothing else than the narrow and perilous bridge between nature and spirit. His innermost destiny drives him on to the spirit and to God. His innermost longing draws him back to nature, the mother. Between the two forces his life hangs tremulous and irresolute. What is commonly meant, meanwhile, by the word "man" is never anything more than a transient agreement, a bourgeois compromise. . . .

That man is not yet a finished creation but rather a challenge of the spirit; a distant possibility dreaded as much as it is desired; that the way towards it has only been covered for a very short distance and with terrible agonies and ecstasies even by those few for whom it is the scaffold to-day and the monument to-morrow—all this the Steppenwolf, too, suspected. . . . But as for striving with assurance, in response to that supreme demand, towards the genuine manhood of the spirit, and going the one narrow way to immortality, he is deeply afraid of it. He knows too well that it leads to still greater sufferings, to proscription, to the last renunciation, perhaps to the scaffold, and even though the enticement of immortality lies at the journey's end, he is still unwilling to suffer all these sufferings and to die all these deaths. . . .

The passage from Hesse offers not only an analysis applicable to Kilroy's conflict but also the best explanation that we are likely to find of the meaning of the Terra Incognita. An additional passage from Steppenwolf helps to explain Williams' treatment of the Christ figure. Among those who have achieved the status of immortality, Mozart is Harry Haller's personal hero. Still, Haller has a tendency to explain Mozart's perfected being, just as a schoolmaster would, as a supreme and special gift rather than as the outcome of his immense powers of surrender and suffering, of his indifference to the ideals of the bourgeois, and of his patience under

the last extremity of loneliness which rarefies the atmosphere of the bourgeois world to an ice-cold ether, around those who suffer to become men, that loneliness of the garden of Gethsemane.\textsuperscript{50}

Hesse's "Treatise on the Steppenwolf," which Wilson says "could be called 'A Treatise on the Outsider,'"\textsuperscript{51} explicates the Gypsy's line, a line which certainly represents Williams' sentiments. Kilroy, in Block Twelve, is faced with exactly that conflict that faces the Steppenwolf. He stands on the threshold of the Terra Incognita, the uncharted way forward, the wilderness from which Christ The Survivor has returned to speak his enigmatic message. Kilroy is caught between the conflicting demands of his destiny and his longing for human companionship. Kilroy is diverted by Esmeralda's promise. Longing triumphs over destiny.

For the moment, Kilroy succumbs to the temptation to which Casanova has surrendered. Earlier, Jacques has confessed to Marguerite: "I'm terrified of the unknown country inside or outside this wall or any place on earth without you with me! The only country, known or unknown that I can breathe in, or care to, is the country in which we breathe together. . . ." Camille wisely replies, "Caged birds accept each other but flight is what they long for" (p. 239). Momentarily, Kilroy accepts the "make-believe answer which is make-believe love. But such love is not sufficient to

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{51}Colin Wilson, \textit{The Outsider} (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 58.
Kilroy's needs. He is susceptible to the temptation to happiness, what Camus terms the "call to happiness" which attacks Sisyphus as he descends to take up again his fate that is symbolized in the rock. Camus says that in such moments "the boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane." 52

Kilroy suffers such a night. Left alone with Esmeralda, he raises the veil from her face only to find that all the promise that she had represented has not been kept. He sinks into despair. He says, "I pity myself and everybody that goes to the Gypsy's daughter. I pity the world and I pity the God who made it" (p. 301).

Possibly Kilroy's line is intended to suggest the point in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound when the Titan recalls the curse that he has levied against Jupiter only to retract it when he finds himself moved by pity. Williams apparently does intend some significant connection between Kilroy and Shelley. Byron's story of Trelawney's snatching the heart from Shelley's burning corpse provides a parallel to the removal of Kilroy's heart in Block Fifteen. There is a similar obscure connection between Camille and Esmeralda. Both Esmeralda's recurrent virginity and Camille's flowers are governed by the phases of the moon.

The Gypsy intrudes upon her daughter and the despairing Kilroy and forces Kilroy to leave. He does not yet

realize the effect he has had on Esmeralda. He has aroused in her feelings with which she is not familiar. "Esmeralda raises a wondering fingertip to one eye. Then she cries out: ESMERALDA: Look Mama! Look, Mama! A tear!" (p. 304).

Jacques has been evicted from the Siete Mares. He and Kilroy agree to share a single bed at the Ritz Men Only, but Kilroy reconsiders when he remembers that the Gypsy had told him that his number was up. He decides again to chance the Terra Incognita and to sleep under the stars. From his vantage point at the top of the stairs leading to the arch, he sees Camille return with her gigolo. He sees him abuse her, steal her purse, and leave, counting his loot. The plaza is quiet when Kilroy descends to talk with Camille. In the face of his own possible death, he consoles Marguerite. When they hear the streetcleaners piping, he tells her that they are coming for him.

His consolation of Camille leads Kilroy to remember his wife: "Y'know what it is you miss most? When you're separated from someone. You lived. With. And loved? It's waking up in the night! With that--warmness beside you . . . And a stranger. Won't do. It has to be some one you're used to. And that you. KNOW LOVES you!" (pp. 313f). Thus, Kilroy neatly resolves the conflicting views of love that were voiced before by Camille and Jacques.

When Kilroy tells Camille of the night that he left his wife, she says, "That was the night she would have loved you the best." Kilroy's reply betrays a less selfish motive.
for leaving than we have heretofore been given: "Yeah, that night, but what about after that night? Oh, Lady... Why should a beautiful girl tie up with a broken-down champ?--The earth still turning and her obliged to turn with it, not out--of dark into light but out of light into dark? Naw, naw, naw, naw!--Washed up!--Finished!" The streetcleaners' piping is nearer; death is imminent. Kilroy rises from his despair. He declares that "finished ain't a word that a man can't look at...There ain't no words in the language a man can't look at...and know just what they mean. And be. And act. And go!" (p. 314). Kilroy, having faced the worst possibility about himself, regains the will that he had lost in his encounter with the Gypsy's Daughter. Once more he can be, can act. He can go. But his going is interrupted. The streetcleaners enter and circle around him. Though he strikes at them, they remain out of reach. Kilroy dies fighting, a victim of his own heroic resistance. La Madrecita covers his body with her shawl to protect it from the streetcleaners.

After a blackout, La Madrecita cradles Kilroy, as she had The Survivor, in the attitude of a pietà. On another part of the stage, a group of medical students observe the dissection of Kilroy's corpse. La Madrecita eulogizes the young American folk hero: "This was thy son, America--and now mine." She calls up images of the Christian martyrs when she mentions the "robe in which he strode the aisles of the Colosseums." Her terms indicate that Kilroy is to be a sort of patron saint of the lost: "Yes, blow wind where night
thins! You are his passing bell and his lamentation. . . .
Keen for him, all maimed creatures, deformed, and mutilated--
his homeless ghost is your own" (pp. 316-18).

The passage involves an allusion to the prose poem
that prefaces Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel. The poem
is a statement of many of the themes of Williams' play:

...a stone, a leaf, an unfound door; of a stone, a
leaf, a door. And of all the forgotten faces.
Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark
womb we did not know our mother's face; from the
prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeak-
able and incommunicable prison of this earth.
Which of us has known his brother? Which of us
has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has
not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is
not forever a stranger and alone?
O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among
bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder,
lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great
forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a
stone, a leaf, an unfound door. Where? When?
O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back
again.

Recourse to the novel shows that Wolfe too was fascinated by
"maimed creatures, deformed and mutilated." Near the end of
the novel, Eugene Gant comes to see for the first time "the
romantic charm of mutilation. The perfect and unblemished
heroes of his childhood now seemed cheap to him. . . . He
longed for the subtle distinction, that air of having lived
and suffered that could only be attained by a wooden leg, a
rebuilt nose, or the seared scar of a bullet across his
\footnote{Ibid., p. 531.}

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in human life was touched with a divine pearl-sickness. Health was to be found in the steady stare of cats and dogs, on the smooth vacant chops of the peasant. But he looked on the faces of the lords of the earth—and he saw them wasted and devoured by the beautiful disease of thought and passion. . . . These were all faces upon which life had fed."

The "divine pearl-sickness" has touched all of the protagonists of the play. They have all lived and suffered. Kilroy, with a face "upon which life has fed," comes to represent all those whose lives bear the marks of having been lived. La Madrecita ends her eulogy with a line partially quoted from T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton": "Rise, ghost! Go! Go bird! 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality.'" She touches Kilroy with her flowers; he opens his eyes and rises. His spirit witnesses the mutilation of his body. The doctor removes the heart and discovers, "This heart's solid gold!" (pp. 318f).

Block Sixteen is particularly troublesome. Without it a consistent reading of the play would be much simpler. No commentator, to my knowledge, has recognized that the Kilroy of the last block and the Epilogue is not the physical but the spiritual Kilroy. The only two people who acknowledge Kilroy's presence are Gutman and Quixote, both of whom have an existence outside the dream that is the play. When Kilroy rescues his heart at the beginning of the last scene, there

55 Ibid., pp. 587-88.
follows "a dream-like re-enactment of the chase that occurred at the end of Block Six," but this time "there are no visible pursuers." In fact, "the autopsy proceeds as if nothing had happened . . ." (p. 320).

Furthermore, Quixote is beginning to wake, and the effect is that Kilroy begins to recognize that he is part of a dream: "I don't understand--what's--happened, it's like a--dream, it's--just like a--dream...Mary! Oh, Mary! Mary! [. . . A clear shaft of light falls on him. He looks up into it, crying:] Mary, help a Christian!! Help a Christian, Mary!--It's like a dream..." (pp. 320f). The first time that Kilroy had called out to Mary, the name had been ambiguous. Addressed to a prostitute, it might have signified either the Magdalene or the Blessed Virgin. Now, however, the name obviously indicates the Virgin, for Esmeralda has been transformed.

She appears on the roof of her mother's house. Her mother gives her a sedative. She tells the Gypsy, "I want to dream of the Chosen Hero, Mummy." "Which one," her mother asks, "the one that's coming or the one that is gone?" Esmeralda answers, "The only one, Kilroy!" (p. 321). Among other things, Kilroy's fate is intended to teach the necessity for compassion. Esmeralda has learned this lesson well. She is no longer the sly slut that she was earlier. As she drifts into sleep, she prays. Her prayer is one of the most frequently quoted passages from Williams' works. The prayer is a sort of reprise. It recapitulates the major characters
of the play. It is, finally, the play's major statement of
the heroism involved in emotion, in love, and of the fact
that such heroism has become faded, has ceased to be the ob-
ject of a positive faith:

ESMERALDA:
God bless all con men and hustlers and pitch-men who
hawk their hearts on the street, all two-time losers
who're likely to lose once more, the courtesan who
made the mistake of love, the greatest of lovers
crowned with the longest horns, the poet who wandered
far from his heart's green country and possibly will
and possibly won't be able to find his way back, look
down with a smile tonight on the last cavaliers, the
ones with the rusty armor and soiled white plumes,
and visit with understanding and something that's
almost tender those fading legends that come and go
in this plaza like songs not clearly remembered, oh,
sometime and somewhere, let there be something to
mean the word honor again! (pp. 323f)

Both Kilroy and the awakening Quixote say, "Amen!" But the
Gypsy's daughter is falling under the effects of the seda-
tive and Kilroy is unable to convince her that he is anything
more than a stray cat. When he pounds on the Gypsy's door,
he is drenched with the contents of a chamber pot.

Quixote is fully awake. The dream that represented
the reality of modern life is over. Paradoxically, Quixote
has reawakened into the dream world that is his reality. In
the world of Quixote's fabulous quest, fountains flow. Kil-
roy is greeted as, "Mi Amigo." The two men talk and agree
that a just description of life is that "the deal is rugged."
The old knight advises Kilroy that, nonetheless, even under-
standable self pity is dangerous. Just as the fear of death,
says Gutman, can "curdle" the blood "like milk," self pity
can turn a person into "a bag of curdled cream--leche mala,
we call it!" (p. 327). The image suggests that to surrender to self-pity is to consent to a living death.

Quixote asks about Kilroy's plans, and the young man replies, "Well, I was thinking of—going on from—here!"

Quixote invites Kilroy to go with him, though he admits, like Byron, that he does not know where that will be. Earlier, the people had been thirsty for the word Hermano, brother. With Quixote assured another Sancho in Kilroy, the fountain flows plentifully, and the people move toward it "with murmurs of wonder" (p. 327).

When Camille enters, Quixote prevents Kilroy's speaking to her. Gutman summons Casanova from the Ritz Men Only, and Jacques crosses to Marguerite. He embraces Camille and soothes her chronic desperation. She stares over his shoulder "with the serene, clouded gaze of someone mentally ill as the mercy of a narcotic laps over his brain" (p. 329).

Meanwhile, Kilroy has returned to the inscription on the wall near the arch. He alters it so that it takes on the familiar form: "Kilroy Was Here!" Kilroy has joined the ranks of the legendary and so deserves to accompany Quixote. The ancient knight errant raises his lance in a formal salute and cries out: "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" Gutman announces that "the Curtain Line has been spoken!" He directs, "Bring it down!" (p. 329). He bows, the curtain falls, the play is ended.

Camino Real seems to require more by way of explanation than most of the plays treated in this chapter. The
explanation must be offered tentatively, for twice the play
has been given major productions, and twice the play has
failed to create an audience. Nonetheless, we must consider
Williams' disclaimer that of all his plays, *Camino Real* "was
meant most for the vulgarity of performance" (p. 163); the
remark carries the implication that the meaning of the play
is not accessible to merely literary analysis. Lee Stras-
berg, too, questions the ability of critics "accustomed to
the study and analysis of texts," for "to read plays as a
succession of words intended for literary analysis is to
miss the nature of drama and of theatre."56 Anyone who has
dealt seriously with twentieth-century drama knows quite
well that more is necessary than an adequate script and an
adeptness at visualization. This observation is especially
relevant to *Camino Real* because as late as 1962 Lee Stras-
berg maintained that the play failed due to weakness in the
productions: "Many of us in the theatre have a special fond-
ness for this play. Yet neither of its two productions have
been able to create for the audience what we see in it. . . .
If someone ever captures in a production a circus quality, a
sense of the showbooth and the color of a county fair, a
vision of primitive orgiastic rites which carnival time sug-
gests, it would help us to appreciate this effort of Mr.
Williams as he originally imagined it—a sort of 'American

blues,' a sort of jazz symphony."\textsuperscript{57}

Under the circumstances, it might be wise to accept Esther Merle Jackson's judgment that \textit{Camino Real} is a play before its time. If we do so, we can more readily see what the play intends and what the play succeeds in doing.

To begin with, in its most general sense, the play is not obscure. The world of the play is the modern world. No commentator on the play has missed that point of Williams' design. The modern world is hellish, a nightmare world characterized by isolation, the loss of community, the fear of death, the heartless demands of grasping commercialism, and the equally heartless demands of inhuman bureaucracy. In such a world our freedom is curtailed, our ideals are obscured, and our sympathy for others is stifled. The end result is that we find ourselves unable to muster sufficient human feeling to alter the situation that exists.

The characters' preoccupation with "the way out" is really the playwright's means of asking "Is human life still possible?" The answer is that truly human life is not possible because the modern world is such that those who do still harbor vestigial human feelings are made to suffer inordinately from loneliness and despair precisely because they do retain their humanity. In short, the play says that we must, if we desire something better, go beyond this place, this time. Hence we must heroically confront the future

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., pp. 19-20.
with the idea of creating a place fit for human life. Such a venture requires courage, and the play dramatizes three specific types of courage. Byron illustrates the courage of the poet, Quixote epitomizes the courage of the idealist, and Kilroy represents the courage of the rebel. Their ends are similar; their means differ. Significantly, the poet leads the way. Williams' play dramatizes exactly that function of the poet that is the subject of T. S. Eliot's "Literature and the Modern World." Eliot imagines a world in which "persons" will have ceased to exist, leaving behind "the purely material individuation of the old-fashioned or Democritean atom." Such a world, says Eliot, is not likely, but it is possible. If it were to come into being, "it would be brought about, not by the diabolic cleverness of scheming philosophers or politicians, but by the natural aversion of human beings to the responsibility of being human. For we must remember that it is a great strain for the erect animal to persist in being erect, a physical and still more a moral strain. . . . Most people spend a good deal of their time avoiding the human responsibility; and we only remain human because of the continual vicarious sacrifice of a few dedicated lives," particularly the dedicated lives of our poets. 

Significantly, Eliot identifies feeling as the basis of all great art and designates as the weakness of art based upon philosophy that philosophy is open to manipulation, whereas

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58 Eliot, p. 21.
feeling is necessarily genuine and personal.

Williams' play does embody the message that he attributes to it: namely, that "life is an unanswered question, but let's continue to believe in the dignity and the importance of the question." There is in modern life that which militates against such belief. In some people there is a tendency to move from the recognition of human life as suffering to the perverted enjoyment of that suffering. That is the answer of the Baron de Charlus, an answer that Williams will re-examine in later plays. There is the tendency, represented in Camille, to accept the apparent as the possible and to sink beneath the weight of desperation. Williams' latter-day Camille no longer believes in love; she has evolved a philosophy that takes cognizance of the reality of life to the exclusion of the possible. Accordingly, she confuses familiarity with affection and tenderness with desperation.

Casanova, on the other hand, dramatizes the idea that love is still possible. His failure to confront the Terra Incognita is based upon more than his fear of the unknown. It is based too upon his very admirable compassion and affection for Camille. He also dramatizes the concept of Christian brotherhood, another value that the play celebrates, though the playwright sees little evidence of it in the world.

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Early in the play, Jacques says that the people are thirsty for the word brother. The fountain begins to flow once more when Kilroy and Quixote become brothers in the quest.

But Williams embodies these values in legendary figures from the past. The judgment cannot be denied. The abiding values of love and brotherhood abide only in legend and in the legendary characters of the past. Kilroy becomes such a character in the course of the play. Kilroy was chosen as the hero of the play because he has been everywhere, but the motto that he leaves testifies that he did not stay. The play symbolically asks that we take Kilroy's motto in its associated sense. Christ was here. Where is he now; where are the values he taught? The play implies that they may be realized in the future. Still, at the moment the play ends, the human value represented by Kilroy and Quixote goes out of the world. Only Jacques Casanova remains. All the value of the real world resides in him.

Jackson is correct in her judgment that "Williams' vision in this drama is theological, even apocalyptic." Williams' play asserts that the apocalypse has come. The nature of the apocalypse that Williams dramatizes is not unlike Eliot's picture at the end of "The Hollow Men";

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Yet the play treats of a way out. The flowing fountain is not a part of the real world, the world of Quixote's dream,

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60 Jackson, p. 113.
but it does flow. The brotherhood for which men thirst is possible even if it is not a present reality. There is hope, though the hope is tentative.

Quixote is right to proclaim that "the violets in the mountains have broken the rocks." The mountains are the future; the rocks may be broken. Quixote is right to think so. His commitment to an ideal possibility allows him to "go on from here." Without that necessary item of faith, illusion, if you will, Quixote would die. However insubstantial the ideals epitomized in Williams' legends, they are presented as the only alternatives to a living death.

The single best reading of Camino Real is not specifically addressed to the play, but rather serves as a generalized summation of the nature of modern literature, and is proposed by Nathan Scott in The Broken Center:

We were reminded in 1959 by R. W. B. Lewis that we live today under the immediate pressure not of the generation of Joyce and Kafka but of Moravia and Camus and Silone, and that these are writers who have for­gone the metaphysical radicalism of the classic modern generation for a quieter kind of humanism, a humanism which commits them not to the practice of the presence (or absence) of God but to the practice of the presence of man. . . . The effort by the generation of Camus and Silone to redeem time by sacramentalizing the relation between man and man is con­ceived to be the one remaining way of shoring up the human enterprise in this late, bad time of our abandonment. "In the sacred history of man on earth," says Silone, "it is still, alas, Good Friday." And in The Rebel, the greatest testament of his career, Camus declared that "only two possible worlds can exist for the human mind: the sacred (or, to speak in Christian terms, the world of grace) and the world of rebellion. The disappearance of one is equivalent to the appearance of the other. . . . [And today] we live in an unsacrosanct moment in history. . . . [So] rebellion is one of the essential dimensions of
man. It is our historic reality." And similar testimonies could be drawn from the work of such writers of the present as Samuel Beckett and Friedrich Duerrenmatt and Jean Genet and Albert Moravia and Tennessee Williams. 61

Benjamin Nelson says that the curtain line indicates that the aim of rebellion has been achieved in the very act of rebellion and that the play affirms "man's ability to rebound from ultimate degradation." Still, he asks, "If the be-all and end-all of this rebellion lies only in the physical and spiritual fact of the revolt itself, what kind of affirmation is truly made?" 62 Rebellion is not the end in itself that Nelson takes it to be. It is a curious rebellion that affirms the values of the existing public ideal. Only deplorable conditions could make rebellion necessary to reinstitute those values. "Our ideas and ideals," says Williams, "remain exactly what they were and where they were three centuries ago." Then he adds, "No, I beg your pardon. It is no longer safe for a man to declare them." 63

The crime of both Christ and Kilroy is to be human in an inhuman world. That world exacts a penalty. Williams' play dramatizes Wilhelm Reich's conclusion that the crucifixion of Christ is perpetual. The import of the crucifixion never changes, nor is it ever heeded. Eliot's "continual perpetual sacrifice" goes on.

_Camino Real_, like all of Williams' plays to varying

63 Williams, _Menagerie_, p. xviii.
degrees, proposes an anachronistic revolutionary philosophy. Williams proposes seriously that the state of the world may be altered by the power of feeling, the power of love. It becomes more and more clear that Williams is a romantic sentimentalist of a high order. His work represents an attempt to raise sentiment, mere feeling, to the level of seriousness that we assign to philosophy. Williams' total work implicitly carries the message that Williams attributes to Camino Real, namely a "plea for a romantic attitude toward life, which can be interpreted as a religious attitude—religious in an august mysterious sense."64 That attitude consists largely of compassion and idealism. It is not surprising that Williams designates as Christ both those characters who display such qualities and those characters to whom other characters look for those qualities. One or the other use of the Christ figure is involved in every play that is treated in this chapter. Such usage is thematic.

One other function of the Christ figure is almost totally technical. Like many other playwrights of the modern theatre Williams has discovered the truth of a statement by Duerrenmatt: "Any small-time crook, petty government official, or policeman better represents our world than a senator or president. Today art can only embrace victims if it can reach men at all; it can no longer come close to the

Williams occasionally resorts to imagery to suggest a significance that the character or situation does not seem to warrant. His near obsession with Christ surfaces at those times, and we are given words or gestures that suggest parallels between Christ and the Holy Family and the characters on the stage. A notable instance occurs in the last act of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the controversial revision that was written at Elia Kazan's insistence. A gesture serves to imply something like the Annunciation. Maggie kneels before Big Daddy to announce that she is expecting a child. Should the child in fact be born, it would serve as a means whereby the Outsider, Brick, might be reconciled with the world of Insiders. Thus the child would function to some degree, as do the Christ figures in *Glass Menagerie*, *You Touched Me*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, and *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. In almost every instance, that Christ was the redeemer who failed. In almost every instance, the expected redeemer is or comes to be identified with the world at large. Such a Christ has been called the ironic Christ, for he embodies, finally, not Christian values, but the values of the world at large. It is likely that Williams was led to his concept of the negative Christ only after he became aware of the implications of his own early work. The concept of the negative, villainous

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Christ is at the heart of several of the plays of the next period. That Christ is to be examined in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE SATANIC CHRISTS OF SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER AND SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

Probably Williams would not have had the courage to attempt a new production of his first play, Battle of Angels, had it not been for the resounding success of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in 1955 and the moderate success of the film Baby Doll in 1956. Both productions were the occasion for considerable furor over the nature of the subject matter. However, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Award. Perhaps Williams felt that his own increased stature as a playwright, the careful revisions that he had made over a period of years, and the increased audience that he had collected from Baby Doll and Cat might now make the story of Val Xavier more acceptable to American audiences. As the discussion in Chapter Two explained, the late version of the play is much changed in terms of form, but little changed in terms of content, the most significant change being that in the first version Val is crucified on Good Friday while in the later version the crucifixion comes on Easter Sunday. Orpheus Descending ends with Carol Whiteside clinging to Val's snake-skin jacket as if it were a talisman, a symbol both of freedom and knowledge: "—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 kind can always follow their kind...." Holding the talisman, Carol leaves the stage, indifferent to Sheriff Talbott's command to stop.¹ Thus the final scene of Orpheus Descending seems to dramatize the message that John Gassner attributes to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; namely, "the saving power of 'the Truth,' hard and unpleasant though it be for individuals to ascertain it."²

Nevertheless, the implied optimism, though dramatically justified, is severely qualified. The central action of the play remains the crucifixion of Valentine Xavier. The play ends with a death on a day that is supposed to bring a resurrection. The reversal of the usual associations with Easter Sunday gives a clue to the depth of Williams' pessimism. But even in that ironic reversal there is nothing to prepare Williams' audience for the two plays that were to follow, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth. The two plays are complementary; both are clearly focused treatments of themes that had been implied earlier. The early plays had consistently pictured the passions of those who await some deliverer who could mercifully resolve the conflict between the Outsider protagonist and the world at

large. They waited to no avail. In the dark world of Tennessee Williams, the virtuous may look for neither mercy nor justice. Neither the Old Testament God nor the New Testament Christ seems able to alter the conditions that prevail in the world. Williams' conclusion, based upon the observations that underlie his plays, is that the human condition necessitates suffering the pains of hell.

Williams might well have summarized his feelings in this way:

I look into the world of men, and see a sight that fills me with unspeakable distress. . . . I look into this busy, living world, and see no reflection of its creator. To consider . . . the defeat of good, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the dreary, hopeless irreligion . . . all this is a vision to dizzy and appall, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution. . . . And so I argue . . . "If there be a God . . . the human race is implicated in some terrible, aboriginal calamity."

The sentiments are orthodox; Colin Wilson quotes the passage from John Henry Newman's Apologia. A key phrase is "if there be a God." Newman obviously believes that there is a God and that his observations of the world support the idea of original sin. Williams, however, would have considered an alternative that Newman would have been reluctant to admit.

It is wise to recall at this point that one of the Outsider's principal motives, perhaps the principal motive, is to find something—an idea, a way of life, a philosophy—that will render the world consistent and allow the Outsider

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himself to act in accordance with the principles that direct the universe. The Outsider would wish that he might find the universe to be basically positive; in religious terms, that would mean that the universe was ruled by a benevolent God. However, the Outsider's characteristic dual vision leads him to view reality as both more positive and more negative than the normal man takes it to be. Accordingly, it is reasonable that the universe might be based upon a negative, malevolent principle and still be consistent. The religious counterpart would then be a belief in a God Who is evil and Who imprints His character upon His creation. Even Pascal hints at such a possibility when he says, "The knowledge of God is very far from the love of Him." That statement might well serve as an epigraph to Suddenly Last Summer. In that play, as well as in Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams explores the idea that the dominating principle of reality is evil. In both plays Williams focuses on actions that are symbolic of the crucifixion. What emerges in Suddenly Last Summer is one of the most daring re-interpretations of Christian myth in all of literature. The major character in the play is the absent Sebastian Venable. In a sense, Sebastian Venable is the most heroic character in the work of Tennessee Williams, a fact that has led many critics to view the character as a personal and defensive self-portrait. But, if Sebastian is heroic, it is in much the sense that Milton's

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Satan is heroic in his attempt to affirm evil, or that the Marquis de Sade is heroic in his attempt to face the reality of evil and to reason out all the possible conclusions of that evil. Williams' play dramatizes a sort of negative deistic view of the universe, of God, and of Christ; for Sebastian Venable, the sensualist poet, is Christ. He is the most appalling Christ in the Williams cannon, perhaps in all of literature.

Suddenly Last Summer is unique in that its major character is never shown; still, he dominates the lives of the characters and motivates the action of the play. The play, which takes place in 1935, is set in Sebastian's home in the New Orleans Garden District, in a garden that Sebastian has designed. The first half of the play is constructed so as to focus on Sebastian's experience in the Galapagos islands. The second half of the play is given over to the relation of the circumstance surrounding Sebastian's death. Ostensibly, the play treats of the fate of Catherine Holly, Sebastian's cousin, but at the end of the play we are not told specifically what her fate is to be. The play, however, sets up a series of patterns that lead to certain expectations. Thus, we can know Catherine's fate even though that fate is not designated in the play.

The first half of the play is given over to a conver-

5Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer (New York: Signet Books, 1958), p. 13. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
sation between Sebastian's mother, Violet Venable, and Dr. Cukrowicz, a young brain surgeon from Lion's View, a state mental institution. The young doctor has been conducting experiments in lobotomy. Mrs. Venable explains to the doctor that her life has been devoted to her son, to helping him with his two dominant pursuits. Each year, after a preparation of nine months, "the length of a pregnancy," Sebastian had composed a "poem of summer." Sebastian's other pursuit was the quest for God. The quest had ended some years ago when Sebastian witnessed His presence on a beach in the South Seas. We learn that there is a mystery surrounding the death of Sebastian, last summer, in Cabeza de Lobo. We learn that Catherine Holly, a witness to Sebastian's death, is being brought from an asylum to confront Mrs. Venable with her story. Mrs. Venable already knows part of the story, and we learn that she is attempting to bribe Dr. Cuckrowicz to perform a lobotomy on Catherine. She hopes that the operation will remove the story from Catherine's memory; lacking that, she hopes that the operation will render Catherine untrustworthy as a witness to the facts surrounding Sebastian's death. Catherine's mother and brother arrive. They too hope to keep Catherine from telling her story. They are beneficiaries of Sebastian's will, but Mrs. Venable has had the will placed in probate. When Catherine arrives, she is given a truth drug, and the story of Sebastian's death unfolds. We are told that Sebastian was a homosexual, that he had used Catherine, as he had used his mother before a stroke.
rendered her ineffective, to lure people to him. His mother had been his entrée to the beautiful and the elite. Catherine, not so socially accomplished, was useful only to attract the poor young boys in Cabeza de Lobo. On the last day of his life, a group of those boys and others had collected outside the cafe where Sebastian and Catherine were sitting. After a complaint from Sebastian, the children were driven away by waiters carrying sticks, but when Sebastian left the cafe the boys returned. Sebastian, nervous and afraid, began to run up the hill. He was pursued by the boys who were like "black plucked little birds." Halfway up the hill they overtook him, and there they attacked him. Later, when Catherine reached the scene with help, she discovered Sebastian's body. He was naked, and parts of his body had been cut away. The children had eaten parts of him. Earlier Catherine had said that her account is "a hideous story but it's a true story of our time and the world we live in . . ." (p. 46). Dr. Cuckrowicz ends the play when he says "I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true...." (p. 93).

This was not Williams' first treatment of cannibalism. In 1948, in a collection called One Arm and Other Stories, Williams had published "Desire and the Black Masseur." The story was mentioned earlier in connection with the Baron de Charlus in Camino Real. The protagonist of the story is Anthony Burns, a latent masochist who delights in things that "swallow him up." For example, he frequents movie houses.
where he finds that "the darkness absorbed him gently so
that he was like a particle of food dissolving in a big hot
mouth." Anthony Burns is an incomplete character who must
have a means of compensation. His compensation "is found in
the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent
treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's
self of his guilt" (p. 35). At the age of about thirty (tradi-
tionally the age of Jesus at the time of his death), suf-
fering from a vague ache, he goes to a Turkish bath where he
meets a race of gods in the Negro masseurs. One masseur
recognizes something in his patron and is willing to help
him to atone. The affair progresses to an expectable if un-
natural end. Toward the end of the Lenten season, Anthony
Burns and the black masseur take a room across the street
from a church where

> each afternoon the fiery poem of death on the cross
> was repeated. The preacher was not fully conscious
> of what he wanted nor were the listeners, groaning
> and writhing before him. All of them were involved
> in a massive atonement. . . . Suffer, suffer, suffer!
> the preacher shouted. Our Lord was nailed on a cross
> for the sins of the world! They led him above the
town to the place of the skull, they moistened his
> lips with vinegar on a sponge, they drove five nails
> through his body, and He was The Rose of the World
> as He bled on the cross.
>
> The congregation could not remain in the building
> but tumbled out on the street in a crazed procession
> with clothes torn open.
>
> The sins of the world are all forgiven! they
> shouted. (p. 92)

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Tennessee Williams, "Desire and the Black Masseur," in One Arm and Other Stories (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 83. Future references to this work will be included within parentheses in the text.
While this is going on, and while a house nearby is being consumed in "the purity of the flame," Burns and the Negro come to a wordless understanding: "The giant began to devour the body of Burns. It took him twenty-four hours to eat the splintered bones clean" (pp. 92-93). It is apparent that the passion celebrated in the church and the passion in Burns' upper room are complementary. The deaths of both Sebastian Venable and Anthony Burns emerge as complex parodies of both the crucifixion and the last supper. However, our response to the two characters differs greatly. Sebastian elicits much more than pity.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams does not use his favored device of setting the play during the passion week: nonetheless, Sebastian Venable is a consciously intended Christ figure. Mrs. Venable boasts of her son's chastity and at least in terms of heterosexual sex, there is no reason to doubt her. Additionally, Sebastian always dresses in white, and he meets his death on a hill in the city of Cabeza de Lobo, which translated means skull of the wolf, a near approximation of Golgotha, place of the skull. The play was originally titled Cabeza de Lobo, a device that would have focused attention more directly on the name of the city and its symbolic meaning.7

As usual, names are very significant in Williams' play, and it is the choice of the saints' names that helps

7Don Keith, "Phoenix Rising From a Stoned Age?" After Dark, August 1971, p. 33.
us to understand the roles of Sebastian Venable and Catherine Holly. St. Sebastian was a Roman centurion of the first century who was killed by torture for his beliefs. It is of interest that St. Sebastian is said to have been beloved by the emperor Diocletian, who ordered Sebastian shot with arrows by his fellow soldiers when the saint refused to recant his beliefs and to acknowledge the emperor as divine. There is much to indicate that Williams takes his conception of Sebastian, at least in part, from Claude Debussy's _Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien_, a sort of an oratorio called a "mystery in five acts," based upon the treatment of the saint's legend by Gabriele d'Annunzio. 8 Oddly, the music is scored so that the part of Sebastian is sung by a woman. Much is made of the love between Sebastian and the emperor. The musical piece emphasizes, as does Williams' play, the erotic overtones of the death of Sebastian. The symbol of the rose appears in both works, but the rose is so much a part of Williams' symbolism that there is no reason to suppose that he takes the image directly from Debussy.

Both Williams' Sebastian and the historical saint die in the service of God, the God whose face Sebastian had seen in the Encantadas. To that God must be attributed the martyrdom of the historical Saint Catherine and the implied martyrdom of Catherine Holly. Mrs. Venable's account of the

Encantadas experience dominates the first half of the play. Her account is very consciously balanced against Catherine's account of Sebastian's death to which the last half of the play is given over. The dominant color associated with the Encantadas experience is black. The later vision is seen in terms of white.

Sebastian had been prompted to go to the Encantadas by Melville's account of the islands. Charles Darwin is not mentioned in the play; still, Sebastian's experience invites that we recall the concept of "nature, red in tooth and claw" that was the heritage left by the great biologist, largely on the basis of his observation of phenomena in the Galapagos Islands. Once there, Sebastian sees something Melville had not seen:

Once a year the female of the sea-turtle crawls up out of the equatorial sea onto the blazing sand-beach of a volcanic island to dig a pit in the sand and deposit her eggs there. It's a long and dreadful thing, the depositing of the eggs in the sand-pits, and when it's finished the exhausted female turtle crawls back to the sea half-dead. She never sees her offspring, but we did. Sebastian knew exactly when the sea-turtle eggs would be hatched out and we returned in time for it. . . . Terrible Encantadas, those heaps of extinct volcanos, in time to witness the hatching of the sea-turtles and their desperate flight to the sea! . . . --The narrow beach, the color of caviar, was all in motion! But the sky was in motion, too. . . . --Full of flesh-eating birds and the noise of the birds, the horrible savage cries of the--. . . . Over the narrow black beach of the Encantadas as the just hatched sea-turtles scrambled out of the sand-pits and started their race to the sea. . . . To escape the flesh-eating birds that made the sky almost as black as the beach! . . . And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attach and hovered and--swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea-turtles, turning
them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh. (pp. 15-17)

At the insistence of Dr. Cuckrowicz, Mrs. Venable explains her son's interpretation of the experience:

Yes, well, now, I can tell you without any hesitation that my son was looking for God, I mean for a clear image of him. He spent the whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's-nest of the schooner watching this thing on the beach till it was too dark to see it, and when he came down the rigging he said "Well, now I've seen Him!" and he meant God. (p. 19)

Having seen God, Sebastian begins to serve him, and there is, in that service, a kind of religious heroism. In his own unique way Sebastian follows the directive that is implicit in St. Augustine's observation that "the perfection of religion is to imitate whom you adore." The sequence of past action is not explicit, but it may be assumed that Sebastian constructed the garden that is the setting of the play after the experience in the islands. It is a discussion of the garden that first reminds Mrs. Venable of the sea birds and turtles. The garden that Sebastian has fashioned is an icon, a sort of pictorial representation of the God who had revealed Himself in the islands. Like the set of Camino Real, the garden is intended as emblematic not only of the world of the play, but of the world at large:

The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans. . . . The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle,

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or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sound in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature....(p. 9)

The garden is a mirror image of the God who showed himself on the black beach of the Galapagos islands. The nature of the garden suggests too that man's evolution, far from being complete, has reached only a very primitive level.

Dr. Cuckrowicz suggests that perhaps we should interpret the experience in the islands to mean that "we must rise above God." Mrs. Venable, however, finds a different meaning in the experience, one neither so unorthodox nor so terrible as Sebastian's: "He meant that God shows a savage face to people and shouts some fierce things at them, it's all we see or hear of Him, now?—Nobody seems to know why...." (p. 20).

Mrs. Venable's interpreting her son's experience suggests that she too has a symbolic dimension. She may be intended as symbolic of the Mother Church. She is named Violet and she dresses in lavender; violet is a liturgical color. Additionally, Mrs. Venable declares that the remainder of her life will be dedicated to the memory of her son. On at least one occasion, she insists that her son is immortal:

"Well, here is my son's work, Doctor, here's his life going on!" (She lifts a thin, gilt-edged volume from the patio table as if elevating the Host before the altar. Its gold leaf and lettering catch..."
the afternoon sun. It says Poem of S u i r a n i . Her face suddenly has a different look, the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse. At the same instant a bird sings clearly and purely in the garden and the old lady seems to be almost young for a moment. (p. 13)

Mrs. Venable's devotion to her son requires that she deny and attempt to disprove the facts of Sebastian's death. The only character who knows the facts is Catherine Holly.

Catherine knows more about her cousin than his mother does. She knows that in the service of the terrible God he acknowledges he had come to prey upon the young boys on the beach in Cabeza de Lobo. She had come to recognize that Sebastian was intent upon "completing—a sort of!—image!—he had of himself as a sort of!—sacrifice to a!—terrible sort of a—" The doctor completes the sentence, "God?" "Yes," she answers, "a cruel one, Doctor!" (p. 64).

Catherine has perceived both Sebastian's chief motive and the effect it has had on his behavior: "He—accepted!—all!—as—how!—things!—are!—And thought nobody had any right to complain or interfere in any way whatsoever, and even though he knew what was awful was awful, that what was wrong, was wrong, and my Cousin Sebastian was certainly never sure that anything was wrong!—He thought it unfitting to ever take any action about anything whatsoever!—except to go on doing as something in him directed...." (pp. 88-89). Sebastian's vision of God has given the lie to the message of the Gospels; accordingly, he adopts a philosophy in direct opposition to the ethics of love and concern that was taught
Catherine Holly, on the other hand, practices what is, relatively speaking, a more moral ethic. She responds to every act of kindness with affection. It is this tendency on her part that leads to her seduction by a married man on the night of a Mardi Gras ball. Catherine describes the scene at Dueling Oaks where the seduction takes place: "...we walked through the wet grass to the great misty oaks as if somebody was calling us for help there!" (p. 65). Catherine followed the man back to the ball and created a scene. The aftermath brings two results. From this point, Catherine's life takes on a dream-like quality. She begins to write her diary in the third person. Shortly thereafter Sebastian invites her to go abroad with him. True to her nature Catherine responds to the kindness. She tells the doctor that Sebastian had "liked me and so I loved him" (p. 63).

Catherine's affectionate nature is not the only quality that directs our sympathy to her. With the exception of the doctor, about whom we know little, Catherine is the only character with whom it is possible to sympathize. She tells us at one point, "The truth's the one thing I have never resisted!" (p. 68). On another occasion the doctor asks if she hates Mrs. Venable. Her reply is calculated to win our approval: "Didn't you ask me that, once? And didn't I say that I didn't understand hate. A ship struck an iceberg at sea--everyone sinking--... But that's no reason for everyone drowning for hating everyone drowning! Is it, Doctor?"
Catherine's idea of hatred is simple: "How can you hate anybody and still be sane?" (p. 62).

Catherine's affectionate response to others does not change. Sebastian's indifference, however, crumbled shortly before his death. As he and Catherine sat at the seaside restaurant he had become increasingly distraught:

There were naked children along the beach, a band of frightfully thin and dark naked children that looked like a flock of plucked birds, and they would come darting up to the barbed wire fence as if blown there by the wind, the hot white wind from the sea, all crying out, "Pan, pan, pan! . . ." The word for bread. . . . (p. 84)

Sebastian sends the waiters to chase away the children who have been joined now by several of the older boys whom Sebastian recognizes. When Catherine and Sebastian leave the restaurant, the boys flock around them. Sebastian refuses to go down hill to the waterfront where Catherine assures him they will find a taxi. He refuses to re-enter the restaurant because of what the boys have called out to the waiters. Instead, Sebastian chooses to run up the hill and the children pursue him. Catherine hears Sebastian scream and runs to find help:

When we got back to where my Cousin Sebastian had disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows, he--he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won't believe, nobody could believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don't blame them!--They had devoured parts of him. . . . Torn or cut parts of him away with their hands or knives or maybe those jagged tin cans they made music with, they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs. There wasn't a sound any more, there was nothing to see but Sebastian, what was left of him,
that looked like a big white-paper-wrapped bunch of rod roses had been torn, thrown, crushed!—against that blazing white wall.... (p. 92)

The play ends immediately and enigmatically when the doctor says, "I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true...." (p. 93).

There is no question in the mind of the audience that the story is true. Williams has carefully balanced the Encantadas scene and the Cabeza de Lobo scene; even the bird images of the last scene recall the former. We grasp immediately that Sebastian's death, too, furnishes us with an "image of God." The play itself seems to function, much as Sebastian's garden does, as an image of God, an icon. The Encantadas experience postulates a theoretical vision of God. The death of Sebastian Venable confirms that vision. There can be little doubt that, for the moment, Tennessee Williams shares Sebastian's view of God. Thus, there can be little doubt as to the general meaning of the play.

The play stands as a judgment that God himself is cruel. He devours his servants. While Sebastian's experience in the islands leads him to follow a philosophy of indifference that is ethically immoral, his way is intellectually valid. Sebastian, Outsider that he is, has sought out a principle that does render the universe consistent, though the universe is shown to be consistently evil and inhuman. Sebastian is heroic in his effort to live in harmony with the principle that motivates creation and which Sebastian attributes to God. The construction of the jungle gar-
den emerges as a rather elaborate act of worship. In fact, Sebastian takes on all of the attributes of the God that he has seen in the carnage on the beach.

A wicked God implies a wicked son. For this reason Williams casts Sebastian as the Christ. Sebastian is the cruel God made flesh. Williams does not intend that we sympathize with Sebastian, as many critics have suggested. Indeed, Williams has so presented Catherine Holly that we must see that she represents the opposite of Sebastian, and it is to her that our sympathy is repeatedly directed. Our feeling toward Sebastian is carefully conditioned and intensely complex. As Christ, he demands our sympathy, but the Christ that he represents is not the Christ to which we are accustomed, for the God that he incarnates is not the God which we find in theology. The God of Suddenly Last Summer is the negatively deistic concept of God that we are shown repeatedly in the work of the Marquis de Sade. De Sade, in fine eighteenth-century fashion, looks to Nature for an image of the Divinity. He finds no god, but in Nature herself, he finds evidence of certain motives. He raises Nature to the level of God and characterizes Her, here in the words of one of his sensual sages, Monsieur Dolmance, in this way:

Ah! Believe me, Eugénie, believe me, Nature mother to us all, never speaks to us save of ourselves; nothing has more of the egotistic than her voice, and what we recognize most clearly to be therein is the immutable and sacred counsel she gives us: prefer thyself, love thyself, no matter at whose expense. But the others, they say to you, may avenge themselves... Let them! the mightier will vanquish; he will be right. Very well, there it is, the prim-
itive state of perpetual strife and destruction for which Nature's hand created us, and within which alone it is of advantage to her that we remain. . . . I add thereunto that cruelty, very far from being a vice, is the primary sentiment Nature injects in us all. . . . Cruelty is natural.

De Sade's heroes more often than not, and Williams' Sebastian Venable, take Nature's way as their own. That way leads Sebastian to be killed and eaten by the very boys upon whom he had preyed. The symbolic dimension of the play directs that we see Sebastian's death as a symbolic rendering of the orthodox Christian mass. We are requested to see the mass most unsympathetically as a communion of cannibals. Still, Sebastian as a Christ figure recalls the real Christ. The name Sebastian recalls the name of the saint. Significantly, the historical Christ and the historical saint suffer fates like Sebastian Venable's. Vice and virtue are met equally with horrible destruction. The play concludes that if God is to be inferred from nature and the actions of men, the implication is that God is evil. It is no wonder that the play was greeted with such an outcry as it provoked.

Most of the criticism of the play is characterized by both horror and respect. Brooks Atkinson's comments are representative. After granting that "Mr. Williams is solely concerned with putting into moving words the hopeless things he believes," Atkinson praises the play as a "triumphant

piece of dramatic literature." He adds, "Believing in the validity of what he is saying, Mr. Williams has made art out of malignance and maleficence, like Remy de Gourmont or Baudelaire."¹¹

When the play was filmed in 1958, many people were surprised that the Catholic Legion of Decency did not condemn the movie. In the debate that ensued in the press, a spokesman from the Legion explained "that it is not, and never has been, the purpose of the Legion to forbid genuine and sincere artists from raising questions that relate to man's relationship to the world and to God. Perhaps more than any other writer in the theater today . . . Tennessee Williams is dealing with these fundamental issues."¹²

Clear in terms of itself, Suddenly Last Summer has much to contribute to the discussion with which the present study is concerned. The play makes a rather radical departure from Williams' previous treatments of Christ. One might even call the play sacrilegious. The play attests to the truth of a remark by the French anthropologist Georges Bataille: "The human spirit is prey to the most astounding impulses. Man goes constantly in fear of himself. His erotic urges terrify him. The saint turns from the voluptuary in alarm; she does not know that his unacknowledgeable

¹²Donahue, p. 109.
passions and her own are really one.\textsuperscript{13}

The daring equation of Christ with the villainous sensualist Sebastian Venable indicates that, for the moment at least, Williams had dispensed with the theological content of Christianity. The Christian view of God, unrealistic as Williams took it to be, could no longer be accepted. Still, however, in the character of Catherine Holly, Williams advocated the emotional content of Christianity as well as the ethical system that had been taught by Christ. Furthermore, the play itself indicates that while Williams had lost faith in the theological Christ, the image of Christ was still a useful and engaging one embodying the fate of intense suffering that Williams holds to be definitive of the human condition. The Christ in Suddenly Last Summer is both the victim and the victimizer. He is both the servant of the God, and the sacrifice to the God. The two images of Christ that are combined in the character of Sebastian Venable are separated into two characters in the play that followed. In Sweet Bird of Youth, the demonic and villainous Christ is dramatized in Boss Finley. The victimized Christ is shown in the young Chance Wayne. Sweet Bird of Youth lacks the concentrated horror of Suddenly Last Summer, but to some degree, the world views presented in the two plays are the same.

town of St. Cloud some years before with the rather hackneyed dream of making it in show business. A failure as an actor, Chance Wayne discovered another vocation as a male prostitute. In that capacity he has attached himself to a has-been movie actress, the Princess Kosmonopolis, the former Alexandra Del Lago, who is fleeing from what she supposes to be the failure of her attempted comeback. The two arrive in St. Cloud on the evening before Easter Sunday. Little by little we discover that Chance is attempting to blackmail his companion to sign both himself and his girlfriend Heavenly Finley to a movie contract. In this way Chance hopes to salvage both his own life and Heavenly's. Only later does Chance find out that on a previous visit he has given venereal disease to Heavenly. The disease prompted a secret operation in which, she says, her "youth" was cut out. Boss Finley, running for re-election, has lately been bothered by a mysterious heckler who baits him with comments about Heavenly's operation. Finley has threatened Chance with castration, as Chance later discovers. In the last act, Alexandra finds that her comeback, far from being a failure, promises a whole new career. Despite Chance's previous attempts at blackmail, she offers to take him with her when she leaves. Chance elects to remain, and in the last scene, when Boss Finley's promised vengeance is about to be enacted, Chance steps to the forestage and addresses the audience: "I don't ask for your pity, but just your understanding—not even that--no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time,
in us all." The ending is as consciously enigmatic as that of *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Opening-night reviews were nearly unanimous in their praise. John McLain acclaimed the play as Williams' best. No other critic was so lavish in his praise. Most of the reviews were rather vague in their discussion of the play's themes. The general tendency was to treat the play as if it were another version of Thomas Wolfe's great dictum: "You can't go home again." Walter Kerr observes that the play shows "a yearning for an 'innocence' that probably never was; a failure to identify, in the last analysis, the source of the initial corruption that continually begets itself." Williams' growing pessimism was readily apparent in the play, so much so that John Chapman was led to say: "Tennessee Williams is a greatly gifted, extraordinarily original and dirty-minded dramatist who has been losing hope for the human race..."

John Gassner did not take the play to be one of Wil-

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liams' best. He cited as a weakness "the split dramatic construction that divided attention between the personal drama and an attack on racist demagoguery in the South. . . ."18

However, there is much to indicate that the division that Gassner criticized is one aspect of the radically experimental nature of the play.

The major characters in the play are Chance, Princess, Boss, Heavenly, and the Heckler. In Act Two, shortly before Boss is to deliver a nationally televised speech, these characters confront each other:

In the hot light all alone on stage is CHANCE; behind him, is the PRINCESS. And the HECKLER is at the bar. The entertainer plays a feverish tango. Now, off left, BOSS FINLEY can be heard. . . . At this instant she [Heavenly] runs in--to face CHANCE.... The HECKLER rises. For a long instant, CHANCE and HEAVENLY stand there; he on the steps leading to the Palm Garden and gallery; she in the cocktail lounge. They simply look at each other... the HECKLER between them. Then the BOSS comes in and seizes her by the arm.... And then he is facing the HECKLER and CHANCE both.... For a split second he faces them, half lifts his cane to strike at them, but doesn't strike... then pulls HEAVENLY back off left stage... where the photographing and interviews proceed during what follows. CHANCE has seen that HEAVENLY is going to go on the platform with her father.... He stands there stunned.... (p. 427)

Chance and Heavenly are the love interests in the play.

Chance and Boss are protagonist and antagonist respectively. And yet these people confront each other only once, in this scene, and they do so without speaking. A working script of the play does include a phone conversation between Chance and

Heavenly, but the printed version eradicates even this meager contact. Williams obviously intends a radical separation of the forces that do battle in the play, a tactic which gives the play's conflict a curiously abstracted quality. Something more is necessary than an understanding of the roles of Boss and Chance. A complete understanding of the play requires that one see the relationship of Boss and Chance to another force, a common enemy that the play identifies as time.

One must first understand the role of Boss Finley, for he is something more than the American archetypal, grassroots politician. No critic seems to have recognized that the play suggests an equation between Boss Finley and Hitler. Like Hitler, Boss Finley claims divine ordination for his mission, the maintenance of racial purity. He gains much of his support from an organization called Youth for Finley, a thinly disguised version of the Hitler Youth Corps.

Finley is more than a political demagogue; he is potentially a Fascist dictator of the worst sort. He represents those forces that were symbolized by Jabe Torrance in Battle of Angels and Orpheus Descending, but Boss Finley is more active. He is a public figure of great importance. Hence the evil that he represents is of a more virulent strain than that represented by Jabe. Boss Finley is intent on extending his sphere of influence; his aspirations are to

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19 Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, Esquire, April 1959, p. 130.
national office. He is the evangel of a positive evil, and he is all the more evil because he has cast himself in the role of the militant Christ.

The voice of God speech that is mentioned numerous times furnishes the apocalyptic climax to the second act of the play: he delivers his speech from the television screen that occupies the whole back wall of the stage:

Thank you, my friends, neighbors, kinfolk, fellow Americans.... I have told you before, but I will tell you again. I got a mission that I hold sacred to perform in the Southland.... When I was fifteen I came down barefooted out of the red clay hills.... Why? Because the Voice of God called me to execute this mission.... And what is this mission? I have told you before but I will tell you again. To shield from pollution a blood that I think is not only sacred to me, but sacred to Him....

The Heckler interrupts to question the purity of Boss's daughter:

Will you repeat that question. Have that man step forward. I will answer his question. Where is he? Have that man step forward, I will answer his question.... Last Friday... Last Friday, Good Friday. I said last Friday, Good Friday... Quiet, may I have your attention please.... Last Friday Good Friday, I seen a horrible thing on the campus of our great State University, which I built for the State. A hideous straw-stuffed effigy of myself, Tom Finley, was hung and set fire to in the main quadrangle of the college. This outrage was inspired... inspired by the Northern radical press. However, that was Good Friday. Today is Easter. I saw that was Good Friday. Today is Easter Sunday and I am in St. Cloud. (pp. 434-36)

The act ends with the Heckler being beaten senseless on the forestage and "at the height of the beating, there are bursts of great applause" from the political rally. The action is another instance of the perpetual crucifixion of Christ by
those who suffer from Wilhelm Reich's Emotional Plague. Boss Finley epitomizes Fascism, the political philosophy which is the outgrowth of the Emotional Plague. He characteristically strikes out against Truth in the person of the Heckler and love and sexuality in the person of Chance Wayne. Boss Finley epitomizes repression and authoritarian paternalism. He personifies the corruption that the play identifies with age.

The "youth" in the title of the play is not literal youth. It is rather a psychological and philosophical ideal. Chance Wayne, who best represents that ideal, does not do so by living it but by subscribing to it. He is a man who is losing his youth in the literal sense and who comes to see that he has, without knowing it, surrendered most of the ideal that is designated by the word *youth*. Lacking youth in both senses, Chance's situation is extreme; his alternatives are limited. At the end of Act One as Chance is leaving the hotel suite, Princess asks where he will be. Chance replies, "With my girl, or nowhere" (p. 382). Chance's whole life has brought him to the point at which his choice is quite literally between life and death.

Chance and Alexandra are complementary in many ways. Both are Outsiders, and it is their similarity that makes them accessible to one another. Princess says that they are both monsters, but she can recognize the virtue that remains in Chance, though there is little of the virtue of youth left to him by the time the play begins. In the conversations between them, Chance's life story unfolds.
Chance had been born twenty-nine years before in St. Cloud. Born with what he calls "some kind of quantity 'X' in my blood, a wish or a need to be different," he finds the life of his peers unsatisfactory. While they were still in school, Chance "sang in the chorus of the biggest show in New York, in 'Oklahoma.'" Concurrently, he practices his other vocation, which he says was "maybe the only one I was truly meant for, lovemaking..." While Chance's sexual experiences were satisfactory for his partners, he was never satisfied himself: "But always just at the point when I might get something back that would solve my own need, which was great, to rise to their level, the memory of my girl would pull me back: home to her . . ." (pp. 375-76).

When Chance entered the Korean War, he was forced to confront his own death. He was haunted by the idea that he would die "blacked out like some arithmetic problem washed off a blackboard by a wet sponge, just by some little accident like a bullet, not even aimed at you but just shot off in space, so I cracked up, my nerves did . . . that was when Heavenly became more important to me than anything else...." (p. 377). Chance invested Heavenly with something like religious value. She became the supreme value in his life. His life, since that time, had consisted of his ventures into the world outside St. Cloud, his disappointments, and his returns. "Yes, after each disappointment, each failure at something, I'd come back to her like going to a hospital...." (p. 379). Chance's inability to marry Heavenly was one of
his first great disappointments; there were many others. He has returned to St. Cloud tired and disillusioned, accustomed to threats and to treachery. He tells Princess, "I've been conned and tricked too often to put much faith in anything that could still be phony" (p. 367). The admission comes at a time when Chance is taping a conversation that incriminates the princess in drug smuggling. He hopes to use the recording to force her to honor a contract that she has signed him to.

Despite the circumstances, Princess recognizes the vestiges of the Chance Wayne who was. She speaks one of the many lines in the play that serve to identify the concept of youth that is central to the play. She says, "Chance, come back to your youth. Put off this false, ugly hardness . . ." (p. 368). Alexandra recognizes that Chance has been hardened, aged, as she has been by confrontations with the world. She acknowledges that she has become something unnatural, that she and Chance are monsters.

The two strike a bargain. Alexandra will help Chance in return for his services as a paid lover who will offer her the "only dependable distraction" from the uncomfortable process of remembering. To the credit of them both, they are ashamed of the contract, but they are drawn together by their mutual enmity toward time. They both agree that "Time does it. Hardens people. Time and the world that you've lived in" (p. 381).

Gassner is probably right to criticize what he calls
"the attempted focusing of sympathy on two self-confessed 'monsters,' the actress and the gigolo."  

Williams' protagonists are unsavory, and the playwright probably expects too much when he asks that we look at Princess and Chance and be able to see the virtue in their past and grasp that the erosion of that virtue is the outcome of their battles with a world less good than themselves. There are several lines that indicate that such is Williams' intent, but somehow these lines seem to lack sufficient power. For example, in Act Two, Boss and his sister Aunt Nonnie talk about Chance Wayne. Nonnie speaks of him in much the same way that Stella had spoken of Blanche: "I remember when Chance was the finest, nicest, sweetest boy in St. Cloud, and he stayed that way till you, till you—" (p. 391). Later, when Nonnie goes to warn Chance of Boss's plan, Chance reiterates his alternatives: "I go back to Heavenly, or I don't. I live or die. There's nothing in between for me." Nonnie tells him, "What you want to go back to is your clean, unashamed youth. And you can't" (p. 411).

The remainder of the play is given over to Chance's discovery of exactly how far he has departed from his youth; that discovery is largely a matter of his realizing how little youth has to do with numerical age. Chance discovers the moral value that the play attributes to the terms youth and age. Chance determines what youth is by coming to understand

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what age represents, and the degree to which he himself has aged.

Age is marked by envy. In Act One, Chance had told Alexandra:

Princess, the great difference between people in this world is not between the rich and the poor or the good and the evil, the biggest of all differences in this world is between the ones that had or have pleasure in love and those that haven't and hadn't any pleasure in love, but just watched it with envy, sick envy. The spectators and the performers. (p. 378)

When Chance is asked for an opinion about the emasculation of a young Negro by the supporters of Boss Finley, he designates the motive for the action as sex-envy: "Sex-envy is what it is, and the revenge for sex-envy which is a widespread disease that I have run into personally too often for me to doubt its existence or any manifestation" (p. 418). In lines that were cut from the working script, Chance carries this discussion further: "On a large scale, old men makin' war because they're retired from love-makin'! On a lesser scale, they'll catch a young Negro. . . . Old men, young men, middle-aged men, any men can have this sex-hatred in them—believe me, I've met with it often—if for some reason hate-makin' is easier for them than love-makin'. . . . Now this may sound like an oversimplification. . . . But truth is simple like this!"21

Moments later Chance is joined by Princess. The en-

21Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, Esquire, p. 140.
counter earlier in the morning has worked a change in the aging actress. She has regained some of the responsiveness and sympathy that the play associates with youth:

Chance, when I saw you driving under the window with your head held high, with that terrible stiffnecked pride of the defeated which I know so well; I knew that your comeback had been a failure like mine. And I felt something in my heart for you. That's a miracle, Chance. That's the wonderful thing that happened to me. I felt something for someone besides myself. That means my heart's still alive, at least some part of it is, not all of my heart is dead yet. Part's alive still.... Chance, please listen to me. I'm ashamed of this morning. I'll never degrade you again, I'll never degrade myself, you and me, again, by--I wasn't always this monster. Once I wasn't this monster. And what I felt in my heart when I saw you returning, defeated, to this palm garden, Chance, gave me hope that I could stop being the monster that I was this morning, and you can do it, can help me. I won't be ungrateful for it. I almost died this morning, suffocated in a panic. But even through my panic, I saw your kindness. I saw a true kindness in you that you have almost destroyed, but there's still there, a little.... (p. 425) Chance is the agency through which she is partially re-born. Princess finds herself young again to the degree that she finds that she can feel. She recognizes in Chance the vestiges of true sympathetic kindness and she responds. More significantly, she too realizes that the qualities associated with youth have been lost in the encounter with the world at large. She tells Chance that he is "no kind of monster," that he is merely "lost in the beanstalk country, the ogre's country at the top of the beanstalk, the country of the flesh-hungry, blood-thirsty ogre--" (p. 426). Moments later there comes the wordless confrontation of Chance, the princess, and the Heckler with Boss and Heavenly.
Chance is confused by Heavenly's apparent siding with her father. His confusion is ended when he discovers from her brother that Heavenly has been, in Tom Junior's words, "spayed like a dawg" as a result of a venereal disease that she had contracted from Chance himself on his last visit. Chance begins to understand that the forces opposing him are not completely seated in Boss Finley. He had believed that truth was on his side. He comes to know differently.

The Heckler is the spokesman for Truth in the play, and he recognizes that the truth is double-edged: "I don't want to hurt his [Finley's] daughter. But he's going to hold her up as the fair white virgin exposed to black lust in the South, and that's his build-up, his lead into his Voice of God Speech" (p. 433). Just as Heavenly's virginity is a lie, and Boss Finley's divine mission is a lie, Chance's youth is a lie. Heavenly and Chance come to realize the lies in which they are implicated. Boss does not. His identification with Christ is sincere. Boss maintains his delusion; he sincerely believes that he is God's spokesman on earth. The Heckler knows better, and in one of the most dramatic lines in the play, the Heckler declares, "I don't believe it. I believe that the silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the whole world is lost because of. I think it's yet to be broken to any man, living or any yet lived on earth,—no exceptions, and least of all Boss Finley" (p. 433).

Chance's increasing self-knowledge leads him to alter
his goals. He comes to realize that Heavenly's need for him is greater than his need for her. He declares that he will "take her out of St. Cloud" and "give her life back to her" (p. 435).

In the last act of the play, that possibility becomes increasingly unlikely. The princess offers to take Chance with her as a paid companion: "The only hope for you now is to let me lead you by that invisible loving steel chain through Carltons and Ritzes and Grand Hotels and--" (p. 442). But Chance refuses her offer of help, for he has arrived at something like self-knowledge. He knows himself for what he is, and if he sees that to be very little, at least he is admirable in his resolution to fall no further from his ideal. He tells Princess that rather than suffer additional degradation, he would die.

In a final act of desperation, he calls the Hollywood columnist Sally Powers. When Alexandra takes the phone, she discovers that her come-back has been successful. She is offered a new career. It becomes clear that Princess, too, has been faced with the alternatives of life and death, the life of a successful actress or the death of dependency on drugs and sex. She regains her power and turns on Chance:

We are two monsters, but with this difference between us. Out of the passion and torment of my existence I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil, which is true. But you? You've come back to the town you were born in, to a girl that won't see you because you put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and hung up on a butcher's hook, like a chicken dressed for Sunday.... [He wheels about to strike at her but]
his raised fist changes its course and strikes down at his own belly and he bends double with a sick cry. Palm Garden wind: whisper of The Lament.] (p. 448)

The princess's fury spent, she becomes sympathetic again. The final moments of the play show the two protagonists again attempting to comfort each other. The words that pass between them indicate the depth of Chance's new understanding.

Chance realizes that his fate has been fashioned by the way that he has lived his life. He faces castration rather calmly, having realized that "whatever happens to me's already happened." His consenting to what amounts to death is his final chance to give some meaning to his life. When Alexandra asks what he is trying to prove, he replies, "Something's got to mean something, don't it, Princess. I mean like your life means nothing, except that you never could make it, always almost, never quite? Well, something's still got to mean something." At this point Chance's attitude is designated as "self-recognition but not self-pity--a sort of deathbed dignity and honesty is apparent in it." His new dignity, no matter how insecure, does not allow him to become part of Alexandra's luggage. When Princess says, "Chance, we've got to go on," he replies, "Go on to where? I couldn't go past my youth, but I've gone past it." Told that he is still young, Chance answers with perhaps the most significant line in the play: "Princess, the age of some people can only be calculated by the level of--level of--rot in them. And by that measure I'm ancient" (pp. 449-50).

Alexandra responds with one of the strangest lines in
the play, one of many in which she associates herself with
the middle east, the birthplace of Western civilization:

What am I?--I know, I'm dead, as old Egypt... Isn't
it funny? We're sitting here together, side by side
in this room, like we were occupying the same bench
on a train--going on together... Look. That little
donkey's marching around and around to draw water
out of a well.... [She points off at something as if
outside a train window.] Look, a shepherd boy's
leading a flock.--What an old country, timeless.--
Look--

[The sound of a clock ticking is heard, louder and
louder.]

CHANCE: No, listen. I didn't know there was a
clock in this room.

PRINCESS: I guess there's a clock in every room
people live in.... (p. 451)

These lines extend the significance of the play into the
past.

Like the city in Camino Real, St. Cloud is the end
point on the road of human history. The play says that the
events that take place on this symbolic road are cyclic.
The pattern is always the same; people move from youth to
age to death. But the pattern has moral implications. Youth
brings with it, without effort, certain virtues: affection,
sympathy, kindness, the capacity to feel, the ability to love
and to respond to others. As people age, they either fight
to maintain those qualities, only to see them eroded by con­
frontations with an evil world, or they pervert the positive
aspects of youth into their opposites; hatred, envy, ambition,
indifference, cruelty, and religiosity.

Chance's acceptance of death dramatizes the pessimistic
attitude of an Old Testament prophet: "O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Colin Wilson says that in this attitude we find "summarised what is, for the Outsider, the whole tragedy of living." Chance Wayne might ask with the speaker in Eliot's The Rock: "Where is the Life we have lost in the living?"

_Sweet Bird of Youth_ poses a question that is decidedly a religious one. How is one to transcend the corrupting influence of a life that is lived in time, a life that is foreordained to end in age, decay, death. How, indeed, is man to live in a world where God is silent and the trappings of religion are appropriated by such as Boss Finley, where self-knowledge is hard won and more often than not amounts to knowledge of one's own corruption and despair of future success.

One way to deal with such a life is to affirm the value of death. Through a curious inversion, Chance Wayne's consenting to his own death becomes an act of real heroism, an act intended to affirm the moral values associated with youth. Chance marshals all of his courage in order to die because he comes to see that his living longer can only result in his living in an increasingly dehumanized way. The play dramatizes the ultimately disturbing conclusion that

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our only victory may lie in our refusal to live on the terms that the world allows.

The appreciative opening-night critics were probably too kind to the play; perhaps they were misled by the commanding performances of a gifted cast. Still, despite its faults, *Sweet Bird of Youth* is one of the best examples of the "Heroic attack" that Arthur Miller finds in Williams. The play is also another attempt on Williams' part to make his drama the mirror of his own religious quest.

Though *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* are conspicuous in their pessimism, they are consistent with the plays that precede them. Both plays feature Outsider heroes and dramatize the special problems that face the Outsider when he acts in response to his Will to Meaning. Both plays picture a world in which the satisfaction of the Will to Meaning seems impossible. Still, these plays depart radically from their predecessors in that they feature dominant Christ figures who are Satanic. Sebastian Venable is the sort of Messiah that de Sade might have created. Boss Finley is the kind of false, perverted Christ who is described in the work of Wilhelm Reich. The two inverted Christ figures imply a view of existence that seems irrevocably to lead to despair.

But Williams does stop short of the declaration of

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ultimate meaninglessness. Catherine Holly still believes in the saving power of Truth. Alexandra Del Lago still says, "We've got to go on" (p. 452). Chance Wayne does find a nominal victory in death. Though Chance's death is made to parallel that of Christ, there is no indication that his death is redemptive in any orthodox sense. At best, his choosing death allows him to maintain intact the vestiges of virtue, of youth to use the terms established by the play.

The Satanic Christs of Suddenly Last Summer and Sweet Bird of Youth attest to the failure of Christianity at the same time that they plead for the Christian ethic as a means of mitigating the pain that is characteristic of human existence.

Sweet Bird of Youth was obviously a difficult play to write. Its very imperfections may be evidence of the strain under which it was written. The working script that was published in Esquire shortly after the play opened differs greatly from the final printed version of the play. One of the most striking lines in the working script was cut from the printed text. Moments before the end of the play, Chance and Princess become conscious of the clock in their room:

**CHANCE:** It goes tick-tick, it's quieter than your heartbeat, but it's slow dynamite, a gradual explosion, blasting the world we live in to burnt-out pieces....

**PRINCESS:** Then will the mystery, God, step down out of the clock like an actor takes off his costume and make-up after a failure?

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The line holds two implications that suggest the direction that Williams' next plays were to take. First, the implication that God costumes himself in temporal, phenomenal reality suggests a divinity whose existence is outside of time. To posit an order of reality outside of time amounts to an admission that the defects of the human condition might be remedied if men could gain access to that dimension. These ideas go to the heart of mysticism.

Chance quite properly responds to the Princess' question: "Time— who could beat it, who could defeat it ever? Maybe some saints and heroes, but not Chance Wayne" (p. 451). Williams had acknowledged the possibility of a mystical sainthood that might allow transcendence of time. A new direction was indicated; Williams began his movement toward the stoical mysticism of the East.
Williams' next major, serious play was Night of the Iguana. It won the New York Drama Critics Award, was made successfully into a movie, and became one of the four plays for which Williams is most respected, the others being Glass Menagerie, Streetcar Named Desire, and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Night of the Iguana is perhaps the most satisfying of Williams' plays. Iguana seems intended to be not so much a dramatization of the playwright's anguished attempts at achieving some sort of acceptable grasp of the nature of the world and of God, as it is an attempt to state all of the conclusions of the quest that had gone before. In order to do so, Williams had to create a character capable of the sort of sympathy and compassion that would lead to a degree of self-knowledge and a depth of understanding that Williams had come to accept as a viable ethical model, a model that seemed the best that we might hope for—one that did not require nor take its strength from either religious dogma or a theistic view of universe. Taking advantage of his demonstrated capacity for effective female characterization, he created Hannah Jelkes, one of the most beautifully compassionate characters ever to be presented in a serious American play. In Hannah Jelkes, Williams created, for the first
time, a character who was both worthy and capable of acting as a spiritual teacher for the Emotional Outsider who is the focal protagonist in the play. The Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, eight years before, had been a minister in a church in Virginia. While counseling one of his more emotional parishioners, Shannon had succumbed to a sort of mutual seduction. Later the lady's attempted suicide provoked a scandal. When next Shannon faced his congregation they knew about the episode and met him with "smug, disapproving, accusing faces."¹ Shocked by what he saw, Shannon threw away the confessional, apologetic sermon that he had planned and instead drove the people from the church, reviling them and their God, whom he characterized as a "senile delinquent" (p. 55). Shannon was locked out of his church and for a time was committed to a sanitarium by his congregation. Thereafter, he became a tour director—"tours of God's world by a minister of God" (p. 56). In that capacity, his life came to be characterized by a morbid interest in the evil and the pain in the world, a continuation of mutual seductions with the lonely women who took his tours, and a series of periodic breakdowns during which he would retire to a hotel on the Costa Verde to be ministered to by his friend, the owner of the hotel, Fred Faulk.

The occasion of the play is Shannon's current trip to

the hotel. Badgered by the members of his tour group, the faculty of a Baptist female college, and pursued sexually by a young girl on the tour, Shannon hijacks the bus and takes the women, against their will, to his haven by the sea. Shannon discovers that Fred is some months dead and that the new widow, Maxine, has decided that Shannon is exactly what she and her establishment require.

Concurrent with Shannon's arrival is the arrival of the painter, Hannah Jelkes, and her grandfather, Nonno, who is the "oldest living and practicing poet" (p. 36). Hannah too comes to the Costa Verde for safety. She and her grandfather, having fallen on bad times, are penniless. As well, her grandfather has sensed his coming death, and has come back to the sea, the "cradle of life," to wage his last battle, a heroic effort to finish the first poem he has begun in twenty years. Shannon befriends Hannah and Nonno, arranges for them to stay at the hotel, and even ministers tenderly to the old man. Shannon is driven to the limits of sanity by what he calls an overdraw on his emotional bank account, a situation that Hannah recognizes from her own past experience. Hannah answers the need that she finds in Shannon, and she does so more successfully than Fred had done in the past. She leads Shannon to understand himself better, she shares with him something of her own view of the world and of God, and, finally, she succeeds in convincing Shannon of the advisability of his making a kind of workable compromise whereby men of his nature may find a way to live
in a world in which the scales seem always to tip in favor of pain, cruelty, injustice, and despair.

Shannon's present alternatives are suicide, which he calls "the long swim to China," insanity, or momentary respite before his next breakdown at which time the alternatives of death or insanity would again assert themselves. The play ends with Hannah having arranged for Shannon a kind of livable life. Weighted down by her own spiritual and emotional struggle and the death of her grandfather, she would like to stop, to rest, but the situation that she has arranged leaves no place for her. She must go on.

Opening-night critics differed only in the degrees of excellence, even greatness, which they attributed to the play. Subsequent criticism has not significantly altered the first judgments of the play. The play is probably as successful as it is because, as he indicated before its opening, Williams believed it to be the last play that he would write for the New York stage. One might assume that Nonno's struggle to complete his last poem mirrors Williams' own struggle to bring Night of the Iguana into production. There is everything to indicate that Williams intended the play to be a dramatization of the conclusions that he had reached in the way of achieving a sort of world-view and of evolving a viable ethical response to that world. He put his conclusions into the mouth of Hannah Jelkes; expectedly, the heart of the play is a series of dialogues between Hannah and Shannon. If we take Shannon, Hannah and Nonno to be aspects of
their creator, we may understand both the play and the playwright better. Williams implies such a connection when he gives all three characters names which repeat the nn of his own pen name, Tennessee.

Before dealing with the philosophic aspects of the play, it is expedient to deal with one characteristic of the play that makes it similar to *Sweet Bird of Youth*. *Night of the Iguana*, like the earlier play, deals with the problem of Fascism and makes use of the ideas of Wilhelm Reich.

In *Sweet Bird of Youth* Williams had treated, in Boss Finley, the makeup of a potential fascist Dictator. In the hotel that is the setting for *Night of the Iguana*, there are certain German tourists. Their first entrance is described in this way:

The German family . . . suddenly make a startling, dreamlike entrance upon the scene. They troop around the verandah, then turn down into the jungle path. They are all dressed in the minimal concession to decency and are pink and gold like baroque cupids in various sizes—Rubenesque, splendidly physical. The bride, HILDA, walks astride a big inflated rubber horse which has an ecstatic smile and great winking eyes . . . followed by her Wagnerian-tenor bridegroom, WOLFGANG, and her father, HERR FAHRENKOPF, a tank manufacturer from Frankfort. He is carrying a portable shortwave radio, which is tuned in to the crackle and guttural voices of a German broadcast reporting the Battle of Britain. FRAU FAHRENKOPF, bursting with rich, healthy fat and carrying a basket of food for a picnic at the beach, brings up the rear. They begin to sing a Nazi marching song. (p. 13)

At one point, Shannon calls them "fiends out of hell with the... voices of... angels." Hannah remarks, "Yes, they call it 'the logic of contradictions,' Mr. Shannon" (p. 103). Through-
out the play, the Germans listen to news reports of the fire-bombing of London, or to speeches by Hitler, and at one point when Shannon is tied into the hammock on the porch of the hotel, they crowd around him and taunt him, in much the same way that the iguana is taunted by its captors.

The play invites that we identify the world conflict with the personal conflict that is the subject of the play. No causal relationship seems intended. From references within the play that point to Williams' increasing interest in Oriental philosophy, particularly Buddhism, one might justifiably assume that the presence of the Germans, even the device of setting the play some twenty years before the date of its composition, is an instance of Williams' making use of a basically Oriental concept that C. G. Jung calls "synchronicity." In his well-known introduction to the *I Ching*, Jung sums up the concept in this way. Synchronicity is, he says, "a concept that formulates a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality. . . . Synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers."² A version of the concept of synchronicity is, of course, accepted as a traditional dramatic device. Each time that we associ-

ate the setting of a play with the actions of a play we grant that a significant, non-causal relationship exists between the two. Williams' play, however, seems to go beyond that tradition. Though the play takes place on a seaside cliff in Mexico, our attention is directed to Europe and the growing conflagration that was to become the Second World War. To some degree, the cause of the personal problems in the play is vaguely indicated as deriving from the same sources as the political problems implied by the presence of the German tourists and our own knowledge of subsequent history. Let it suffice to say that both the war in Europe and the personal conflict with which the play is concerned are dramatic emanations of the nature of the world as Williams sees it, and that view is similar to Reich's.

Now, at their simplest level, Wilhelm Reich's ideas hold that the misery in the world is the outcome of the Emotional Plague, a condition that is chronic in Western society, and which, at its extremity, results in exactly that sort of government and culture that were created by Hitler and later by the Russian Communists. The Emotional Plague is an acquired disease; the young develop it only as a result of the teachings of their elders. The Emotional Plague develops as an individual conditions himself against his human and sexual feelings until such time as he is physically incapable of those feelings. Having been infected by the Emotional Plague, the individual cuts himself off from a healthy life characterized by the three principles of Reich's ideal,
"natural sociality and sexuality, spontaneous enjoyment of work, [and] capacity for love." The German grotesques in the play furnish the dramatic presence of the Emotional Plague, but they are incidental to the central action which has to do with Shannon's fate.

Reich's ideas seem to be operative with regard to one additional element in the play. Earlier, Shannon had told Fred something of his childhood that seemed to him to account for his history of seductions and breakdowns. Maxine had overheard and she repeats Shannon's earlier account:

I know your psychological history. I remember one of your conversations on this veranda with Fred. You was explaining to him how your problems first started. You told him that Mama, your Mama, used to send you to bed before you were ready to sleep—so you practiced the little boy's vice, you amused yourself with yourself. And once she caught you at it and whaled your backside with the back side of a hairbrush because she said she had to punish you for it because it made God mad as much as it did Mama, and she had to punish you for it so God wouldn't punish you for it harder than she would. . . . You said you loved God and Mama and so you quit it to please them, but it was your secret pleasure and you harbored a secret resentment against Mama and God for making you give it up. And so you got back at God by preaching atheistical sermons and you got back at Mama by starting to lay young girls. (p. 81)

Reich held that the first intrusion of the sort of influences that would result in the Emotional Plague was adult interference with infant sexuality. Williams, in the speech just quoted, makes use of Reich's idea, but later in the play, Hannah leads Shannon to a depth of self-knowledge that re-

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sults in his accounting for his condition in another way.
Thus, the play does offer two possibilities to explain Shan­
non's condition: one is psychological, the other spiritual.
Our greater attention is directed to the account of the
spiritual motivation.

In the last few minutes of the play Shannon explains
himself as he has come to be revealed to himself by Hannah.
The speech is one of the central passages in the play; it
contains an image that was sufficiently arresting for sev­
eral critics to take special note of it. Hannah has just
been told that the iguana under the porch is to be eaten.
She "cannot understand how anyone could eat a big lizard."
Shannon tells her:

Don't be so critical. If you got hungry enough you'd
eat it too. You'd be surprised what people eat if
hungry. There's a lot of hungry people still in the
world. Many have died of starvation, but a lot are
still living and hungry, believe you me, if you will
take my word for it. Why, when I was conducting a
party of--ladies?--yes, ladies... through a country
that shall be nameless but in this world, we were
passing by rubberneck bus along a tropical coast when
we saw a great mound of... well, the smell was un­
pleasant. One of my ladies said, "Oh, Larry, what
is that?" My name being Lawrence, the most familiar
ladies sometimes call me Larry. I didn't use the
four letter word for what the great mound was. I
didn't think it was necessary to say it. Then she
noticed, and I noticed too, a pair of very old na­
tives of this nameless country, practically naked
except for a few filthy rags, creeping and crawling
about this mound of... and... occasionally stopping
to pick something out of it, and pop it into their
mouths. What? Bits of undigested... food particles,
Miss Jelkes. [There is silence for a moment. She
makes a gagging sound in her throat and rushes the
length of the verandah to the wooden steps and dis­
appears for a while. SHANNON continues, to himself
and the moon.] Now why did I tell her that? Be­
cause it's true? Yeah. Because it's true was a
good reason not to tell her. Except... I think I first faced it in that nameless country. The gradual, rapid, natural, unnatural--predestined, accidental--cracking up and going to pieces of young Mr. T. Lawrence Shannon, yes, still young Mr. T. Lawrence Shannon, by which rapid-slow process... his final tour of ladies through tropical countries.... Why did I say "tropical"? Hell! Yes! It's always been tropical countries I took ladies through. Does that, does that--huh?--signify something, I wonder? Maybe. Fast decay is a thing of hot climates, steamy, hot, wet climates, and I run back to them like a.... Incomplete sentence.... Always seducing a lady or two, or three or four or five ladies in the party, but really ravaging her first by pointing out to her the--what?--horrors? Yes, horrors!--of the tropical country being conducted a tour through. . . . Cruelty... pity. What is it?... Don't know. . . . (pp. 120-21)

Shannon, like most of the Williams protagonists examined in this paper, is an Emotional Outsider. He has the Outsider's dominant motive, the Will to Meaning; he has the Outsider's need to stand for truth; and he has the Outsider's uncommonly intense response to the world, particularly the dark side of the world. Hannah must grasp these aspects of Shannon's personality before she can help him.

The first significant encounter between Hannah and Shannon takes place in Act Two. Shannon, in his clerical collar, and Hannah, in her artist's smock, confront each other "like two actors in a play which is about to fold on the road, preparing gravely for a performance which may be the last one" (p. 52). (Those familiar with Williams' recent work will recognize that the situation is similar to that in Out Cry.) Hannah inquires about Shannon's ministry and he tells her of his last sermon, during which he has condemned his congregation for their conception of God:
Look here, I said, I shouted. I'm tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent--Yeah, that's what I said, I shouted! All your Western theologies, the whole mythology of them, are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent and, by God, I will not and cannot continue to conduct services in praise and worship of this... angry, petulant old man. I mean he's represented like a bad-tempered childish old, old, sick, peevish man--I mean like the sort of old man in a nursing home that's putting together a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table. Yes, I tell you they do that, all our theologies do it--accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all he created for his own faults in construction. ... (p. 56)

Shannon's sermon is a sort of "God is dead" pronouncement. The God is dead movement was not popular at the time of the play's first production; Edward B. Fiske cites 1965 as the year in which the "God is dead" movement came to the attention of the popular press. Shannon's sermon is rather like a real sermon delivered by Unitarian minister Walter Donald Kring some years later: "The God who answers special prayers, the God who blesses cannon, the God who is 'the man upstairs,' the God who is my 'co-pilot,' is very much dead, for this God never existed except in some extreme imaginations." Some thirty years before organized religion as a whole began to revise the popular conception of God, Shannon had judged the then current conception to be invalid. Having lost a belief in the traditional concept of God, Shannon sought to evolve another. As a tour guide, he has been "col-

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5 Ibid., p. 8.
lecting evidence" of his "personal idea of God, not as a senile delinquent, but as a..." (p. 56). The sentence is left uncompleted. Unable to visualize or to conceptualize his idea of God, Shannon is able to identify his presence in the approaching storm.

Shannon still feels his vocation; he still feels the need to preach: "I want to go back to the Church and preach the gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder... and also stray dogs vivisected and... and... and... [He points out suddenly toward the sea.] That's him! There he is now... His oblivious majesty—and here I am on this... dilapidated veranda of a cheap hotel, out of season, in a country caught and destroyed in its flesh and corrupted in its spirit by its gold-hungry Conquistadors that bore the flag of the Inquisition along with the Cross of Christ" (p. 57).

Hannah tells Shannon that she believes that he will return to the ministry, but she tells him that when he preaches again he will look "over the smug, complacent faces for a few old, very old faces, looking up at you... with eyes like a piercing cry for something to still look up to, something to still believe in." Hannah tells him that he will again throw away his prepared sermon; instead he will "lead them beside still waters because you know how badly they need the still waters, Mr. Shannon" (p. 57). Even early in the play, Hannah realizes that Shannon too needs the still waters; however, she would be unable to help him if she were not capable of understanding his nature, a nature very like
her own. The quoted lines indicate the degree to which her nature, and Shannon's, are determined by the frustration of what Frankl calls the Will to Meaning.

Hannah recognizes the strain under which Shannon must live because of his double vision of the world, a vision that is characteristic of the Outsider. Shannon tells her, "You know we--live on two levels, Miss Jelkes, the realistic level and the fantastic level, and which is the real one, really...." Hannah's wise reply is, "I would say both, Mr. Shannon" (p. 69). Hannah's comment is sufficient to lead Shannon to a better identification of his problem, that being his own divided consciousness: "But when you live on the fantastic level, as I have lately but have got to operate on the realistic level, that's when you're spooked, that's the spook.... [This is said as if it were a private reflection]" (p. 69).

Hannah continues to lead Shannon toward greater self-understanding. At one point, Shannon tells Hannah that she is a lady, "a real one and a great one." He adds, "It isn't a compliment, it's just a report on what I've noticed about you at a time when it's hard for me to notice anything outside myself" (p. 75). When Hannah verbalizes her desire to help Shannon, he replies: "Now I know why I came here. . . . To meet someone who wants to help me, Miss Jelkes.... [He makes a quick, embarrassed turn in the chair, as if to avoid her seeing that he has tears in his eyes . . . ]" (p. 76).

Hannah, compassionate though she is, recognizes that one of
Shannon's problems is self-pity, the condition against which Don Quixote had warned Kilroy. She asks Shannon, "Has it been so long since anyone has wanted to help you or have you just ... been so much involved with a struggle in yourself that you haven't noticed when people have wanted to help you, the little they can. I know people torture each other many times like devils, but sometimes they do see and know each other, you know, and then, if they're decent, they do want to help each other all that they can" (p. 76). Hannah's view of people is a more valid one than Shannon's, and she succeeds in diluting his pessimism to some degree. She is, herself, as Fred had been, living proof of the desire to help that she equates with decency.

Moments later Act Two ends as the storm descends on the hilltop hotel. The scene is distilled into one of Williams' most poignant images of the will to believe, the Will to Meaning. Hannah tells Shannon that his God has arrived:

SHANNON [quietly]: Yes, I see him, I know him. And if he doesn't know that I know him, let him strike me dead with a bolt of his lightning.

[He moves away from the wall to the edge of the veranda as a fine silver sheet of rain descends off the sloping roof. ... SHANNON extends his hands under the rainfall, turning them as if to cool them. Then he cups them to catch the water in his palms and bathes his forehead with it. The rainfall increases. ... SHANNON lowers his hands from his burning forehead and stretches them out through the rain's silver sheet as if he were reaching out for something outside and beyond himself. Then nothing is visible but these reaching-out hands. A pure white flash of lightning reveals HANNAH and NONNO against the wall, behind SHANNON, and the electric globe suspended from the roof goes out, the power extinguished by the storm. A clear shaft of light stays on SHANNON'S]}
reaching-out hands till the stage curtain has fallen, slowly. (p. 78)

Significantly, Williams directs, in a note, that "the plastic elements should be restrained so that they don't take precedence over the more human values. It should not seem like an 'effect curtain'" (p. 78).

Act Three contains the most significant scene in the play, a scene that we are invited to see as a version of the crucifixion. It is useful, in this context, to recall that the working title for the play was The Southern Cross. Before Shannon is led to that last extremity, his circumstances become more desperate. Maxine has become more demanding. When she puts her case to Shannon, she explains, "We've both reached a point where we've got to settle for something that works for us in our lives—even if it isn't on the highest kind of level." Shannon, not yet driven to the kind of desperation that necessitates compromise, replies, "I don't want to rot" (p. 81). Later, a representative of the tour service arrives to relieve Shannon from his position as tour director. Accused of altering the itinerary of the tour, Shannon defends himself in another speech that indicates a characteristic Outsider attitude, the desire to stand for the truth:

"The whole world . . . God's world, has been the range of my travels. I haven't stuck to the schedules of the brochures and I've always allowed the ones that were willing to see, 

6 Don Lee Keith, "Phoenix Rising From a Stoned Age?" After Dark, August 1971, p. 33.
to see!—the underworlds of all places, and if they had hearts to be touched, feelings to feel with, I gave them a priceless chance to feel and be touched. And none will ever forget it, none of them, ever, never!" (p. 90).

Shannon, desperate now, must be restrained from taking what he calls the "long swim to China." He is bound in a hammock on the verandah. Maxine, her advances having been rebuffed and her patience at an end, threatens to have Shannon committed to the asylum to which he had been committed earlier and where he had attempted suicide. What follows has been rather aptly called, by Esther Merle Jackson, a "dark night of the soul" that yields up a portrait of Shannon as a "negative saint."^7

Act Three divides rather clearly into two parts. The first part is given over to an examination of Shannon that is so framed as to state the problem of the play as it is dramatized in the character of Shannon. The last half of the third act is given over to an examination of Hannah that illustrates the answer to the problem. Significantly, Hannah costumes herself for her encounter with Shannon; she dresses in a robe given her by an actor from the classical Japanese Kabuki theater, and she carries a Japanese fan. Later she specifically identifies her philosophy as Oriental.

In the first half of Act Three, Hannah succeeds in

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Giving Shannon what she tells him is "a character sketch of yourself, in words instead of pastel crayons" (p. 96). That sketch is hardly flattering; it reveals to Shannon the degree to which his problem is grounded in his own selfishness, morbidity, and indulgent, self-destructive role-playing. Hannah accuses Shannon of emphasizing the negative aspect of his world-view to the exclusion of all things good. She does not deny Shannon's view, but she conditions it by exposing the other side of the question. She shows Shannon that his isolation is more severe than he has acknowledged. In doing so, she points out that his role-playing has kept him from facing himself truthfully. Shannon prides himself on his ability to make "intimate connection with someone in my parties." Hannah, however, doubts that these encounters have yielded any meaningful intimacy: "The gentleman-of-Virginia act that you put on for her, your noblesse oblige treatment of her... Oh, no, Mr. Shannon, don't kid yourself that you ever travel with someone. You have always traveled alone except for your spook, as you call it. He's your traveling companion. Nothing, nobody else has traveled with you" (pp. 110f).

Hannah tells him too that his problem consists of more than isolation. He is selfish, and his vaunted mission of holding the ugliness of the world up to the eyes of the women on his tours is not completely what he claims that it is. Shannon's methods may well expose the truth, but his motives are suspect. Hannah says, "You did conduct the tour as if it was just for you, for your own pleasure" (p. 97).
Shannon's pleasure has a decidedly morbid turn. That morbidity is best illustrated when Shannon suggests that he and Hannah kill Nonno as an act of mercy. The image that Shannon uses indicates the degree to which Shannon has identified God with destruction, with death itself: "Put some hemlock in his poppyseed tea tonight so he won't wake up tomorrow for the removal to the Casa de Huéspedes. Do that act of mercy. Put in the hemlock and I will consecrate it, turn it to God's blood." Hannah tells Shannon that he is talking "like a small, cruel boy" (p. 98).

Like a small boy, Shannon is self-indulgent, an aspect of his character that is suggested by his adolescent masturbation as well as his tendency to morbid introspection. That quality has kept him from seeing the presence of decency in the world, notably the decency of such characters as Fred and Hannah.

Hannah is able to recognize this tendency in Shannon because she has also suffered from it to the extent that she too has come close to cracking up. Her way out was through her work, work which she says, "made me look out of myself, not in, and gradually, at the far end of the tunnel that I was struggling out of I began to see this faint, very faint gray light--the light of the world outside me--and I kept climbing toward it. I had to" (p. 107). The light then turned from gray to white. "Never gold?" Shannon inquires. Hannah answers, "No, it stayed only white, but white is a very good light to see at the end of a long black tunnel you
thought would be neverending, that only God or Death could put a stop to . . ." (p. 107).

Hannah forces Shannon to acknowledge "the light of the world outside," but in order to do so she must expose that aspect of Shannon's character that is most destructive. When Shannon, bound in his hammock, declares, "A man can die of panic," Hannah responds, "Not if he enjoys it as much as you, Mr. Shannon." Hannah detects the conspicuous religious nature of Shannon's indulgence, his "Passion Play performance"; she exposes Shannon's suffering as masochistic role-playing:

Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Mr. Shannon? There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock—no nails, no blood, no death. Isn't that a comparatively comfortable, almost voluptuous kind of crucifixion for the guilt of the world, Mr. Shannon? (p. 96)

Shannon's identification with Christ, like that of Sebastian and Boss Finley, is disproportionate and thus ultimately destructive.

Hannah realizes Shannon's faults; she recognizes many of them in her own history. Finally, she designates Shannon's problem clearly. It is the problem which Frankl had come to believe was the central motive in human psychology, the problem that is "the oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone--almost anyone--almost anything... something" (p. 104). When asked whether that something is God, Hannah says that it is not. Rather, she
tells Shannon that she believes in "broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only." The sort of contact that Hannah means is not physical. Gates might be broken by "a little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this" (p. 104). This marks the second time that Hannah has talked of the desire to help; she is not so naive as to think that all human efforts to help others will be successful. However, the desire to help another is sufficient in some cases, even extreme ones wherein the person needing help is facing death. Hannah recounts a sort of parable, one of several in the play, intended to represent the efficacy of the desire to help:

In Shanghai, Shannon, there is a place that's called the House for the Dying—the old and penniless dying, whose younger, penniless living children and grandchildren take them there for them to get through their dying on pallets, on straw mats. The first time I went there it shocked me, I ran away from it. But I came back later and I saw that their children and grandchildren and the custodians of the place had put little comforts beside their death-pallets, little flowers and opium candles and religious emblems. That made me able to stay to draw their dying faces. Sometimes only their eyes were still alive, but, Mr. Shannon, those eyes of the penniless dying with those last little comforts beside them, I tell you, Mr. Shannon, those eyes looked up with their last dim life left in them as clear as the stars in the Southern Cross. . . . Nothing I've ever seen has seemed as beautiful to me, not even the view from this verandah between the sky and the still-water beach, and lately... lately my grandfather's eyes have looked at me like that.... (pp. 107f)

The setting of Hannah's story is almost as significant as the content, for as her philosophy emerges, it proves to be a curious blend of Orientalism and Christianity. For this
reason it is highly fitting that Hannah should be described as suggestive of "a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint" (p. 18) and yet be addressed repeatedly by Shannon as "Miss Thin-Standing-Up-Female-Buddha" (pp. 98, 99). Hannah combines the functions of Oriental sage and Christian saint. Still holding to the concept of Christian ethics and the desire to help that is implicit in the idea of Christian charity, she grasps that Christianity fails to provide an adequate view of the cosmos. Orientalism, however, does provide such a view.

At the heart of Oriental thought there is the idea that the universe and man are integral to a unified principle of reality, or ground of being, which is the highest divinity. This union is manifest in diversity, in contrariety. The concept of union in diversity has been touched on belatedly by such diverse Westerners as Heraclitus and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Westerners, however, have not carried the concept to its logical conclusion.

The idea may be best explained in terms of a traditional graphic symbol. The most common symbol of the dualistic nature of the universe is the Chinese figure representing Yin-Yang. The symbol is a circle, bisected by a sigmoid curve. The two halves of the circle are represented by contrasting colors, red and black or white and black. Each half of the figure contains a smaller circle of the opposite color. The symbol is the graphic representation of the concept of union in diversity. R. B. Blakney explains the concept in
the introduction to his translation of the *Tao Té Ching*:

"Generally speaking, Yin stands for a constellation of such qualities as shade ('on the north side of a hill') darkness, cold, negativeness, weakness, femaleness, etc.; while Yang ('on the south side of a hill') denotes light, heat, strength, positiveness, maleness, etc. The Yin-Yang experts regarded the interaction of these cognates as the explanation of all change in the universe. . . . Thus Yin and Yang are the major principles of the world. . . ."  

In short, the universe is The One that manifests itself in diversity, in contrariety. To grasp that insight fully one must achieve mystical insight, supra-rational insight. Lacking that insight, one may, by intellection, come to know the contraries of the world and to know that reality is double. Hannah, though she falls short of mysticism, has nonetheless come to understand the double nature of the universe. She tells Shannon, "Everything in the whole solar system has a shadowy side to it except the sun itself—the sun is the single exception" (p. 106).

Shannon's view of the dark side of reality is not false, but it is limited. Since Shannon's perceptions encompass the half of reality, one of the abiding principles of the universe, it follows that the way to deal with reality is to acknowledge its nature completely and to find the way to come to terms with it. Hannah, more interested in the

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ethical than the philosophical implications of the nature of reality, characterizes the proper response to the world in this way: "... the moral is oriental. Accept whatever you cannot improve" (p. 115).

Hannah's moral indicates how far from mystical consciousness she is. The true mystic would accept the universe as unchangeable and delight in the experience of unified being that comes of identifying not with the contraries of the world but with the unity that underlies the apparent reality of the phenomenal universe. The mystic refrains from judgment; Hannah does not, but the nature of her judgment indicates the depth of her compassion. Asked whether she was disgusted by her encounter with an Aussie underwear salesman, a panty fetishist, she replies with a line that has been attributed to St. Catherine: "Nothing human disgusts me," adding, "unless it's unkind, violent" (pp. 115f). Hannah's experiences have taught her what may be taken as Williams' own philosophy. She has come to adopt a kind of Oriental stoicism that is mitigated by a very personalized version of Christian agape.

At the end of the play, Hannah moves Shannon to free the iguana, the creature that he says is "at the end of its rope. ... Like you! Like me! Like Grampa with his last poem!" (pp. 120f). Each of the protagonists achieves a sort of freedom. With Shannon, that freedom is found in compromise. His pairing off with Maxine represents a workable compromise for Shannon, much as Brick Pollit's reconciliation with Maggie.
represents the workable compromise whereby the wounded idealist is mated to the practical realist. Maggie had said to Brick: "Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you—gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of—and I can! I'm determined to do it—and nothing's more determined than a cat on a hot tin roof—is there? Is there, Baby?" Shannon's resolution, his compromise, is dramatized in this way:

MAXINE: Let's go down to the beach.

SHANNON: I can make it down the hill, but not back up.

MAXINE: I'll get you back up the hill. (p. 126)

The rope that had bound Shannon was the limit of his emotional resources. Shannon, disabled by his own nature like other Outsiders before him, must finally say, "My... brain's going out now, like a failing—power...." (p. 121). Shannon's fate is to be one of those who failed on the quest, one of those who could conceive of a goal that he could not reach.

Nonno, too, achieves a kind of freedom. Nonno does not so much escape into death as he passes into his fate. Having completed his last poem, having returned to the sea and thus completed the cycle of human life, he can die with grace and dignity. His last words are an affirmation:

HANNAH: Good night. Sleep now, Grandfather. You've finished your loveliest poem.

NONNO: [faintly, drifting off]: Yes, thanks and praise... (p. 125)

Nonno's poem, composed line by line during the course of the play, serves something of the function of the Greek chorus that comments on the actions of the play. The poem sums up the theme of aspiration and human limitation. The poem concerns a tree, which, in its prime, lives "without a cry, without a prayer,/ With no betrayal of despair." Even past "the zenith of its life," even in the midst of its "second history" that is "a bargaining with mist and mould," the tree remains heroic:

And still the ripe fruit and the branch
Observe the sky begin to blanch
Without a cry, without a prayer,
With no betrayal of despair.

O Courage, could you not as well
Select a second place to dwell,
Not only in that golden tree
But in the frightened heart of me? (pp. 123f)

Williams' tree symbol is remarkably similar to P'o, the tree that is a major symbol in the Tao Te Ching. R. B. Blakney defines P'o: "A kind of tree and hence a 'virgin block' of wood, untooled, and not artificial; raw material and thence, the natural state of things; substance plain, simple, sincere. . . . P'o is also a symbol of the Way and its virtue. It is sometimes a synonym for wu wei and a model of tzu-jan." Tzu-jan means "what happens of itself, without prompting and therefore spontaneously." The former concept, wu wei, is more complex. "It cannot be translated literally and still render its meaning. Wei is a verb cor-
responding to the English do or act but sometimes meaning other things depending on the expression. Wu is a negative. Thus, clumsily, wei wu wei is to do without doing, to act without action. Put positively, it means to get along as nature does: the world gets created, living things grow and pass away without any sign of effort.  

With one significant exception, Williams' tree and P'oe serve the same purpose. Williams' tree is heroic; its heroism resides in its continued aspiration toward something that is beyond its own nature. In the midst of its own on­coming death, it continues to "observe the sky."

The tree is more directly related to Hannah and Nonno than to Shannon. Earlier in the play, Hannah had compared her relationship to Nonno to a home which people might "nest--rest--live in, emotionally speaking." Shannon, with Nonno in mind, replies, "When a bird builds a nest to rest in and live in, it doesn't build it in a...a falling-down tree" (p. 109). Nonno's similarity to the tree is evident. He continues to live and to strive to create right up to the moment of his death. Hannah, however, is symbolized in the tree as well. The play ends with Hannah alone. Bereft of the emotional security that she had in the relationship with Nonno, she must decide whether to continue. She is fatigued by her participation in the struggles of Shannon and her grand­father. She is now isolated, her quest being toward some-

10Blakney, pp. 39-40.
thing beyond the sort of life for which Shannon had to settle. At the end of the play her philosophical position may be summarized in this way. The universe is divided; both goodness and something like evil have an equal part in its makeup. At best, a human being may accept what may not be changed, and what may be changed is to be changed by compassion, understanding, and the desire to help people in need. The solution, as it is dramatized by Hannah, is that one should accept the nature of the universe, and direct one's attentions to the needs of other human beings. If we take her quest to be religious, and it would be difficult not to do so, we must see that her religious quest for the moment has led her to turn away from God. This, more than any other aspect of her character, indicates the degree to which she has failed to achieve mystical consciousness. However, her past history indicates that her future progress, if progress there is to be, must be toward mysticism. Hannah has transformed her Will to Meaning into the need to help. She acknowledges the Oriental conception of the nature of reality, but forsaking the Oriental ideal of enlightened indifference, she affirms the ideal of Christian charity. Two of Williams' later protagonists, Christopher Flanders in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore and Mark in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, achieve something more nearly like mystical consciousness. In many ways, Christopher Flanders seems to be an extension of Hannah Jelkes. One thing that they have in common is their personal need to help other people; Chris tells Flora...
Goforth, "Mrs. Goforth, some people, some people, most of them, get panicky when they're not cared for by somebody, but I get panicky when I have no one to care for."\textsuperscript{11}

Significant too is that both are artists, as is the painter, Mark. All three characters are indicative of a development which marks a significant change in theme in Williams, that being the increased attention given to the aesthetic quest treated in such terms that we come to see it as a version of the religious quest. The identification of the two motives is considerably stronger in Christopher Flanders than it is in Hannah Jelkes. It is significant, too, that both Chris and Hannah are pictured in circumstances requiring that they become spiritual teachers for another person who is in need of the knowledge that they have to impart. To a large extent, that knowledge is the same. In The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Williams moves even further toward the East.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore was a complete commercial failure. The play first opened in the United States in New York on January 10, 1963. The play closed quickly, perhaps because of the lack of publicity about its opening that was due to the New York newspaper strike. A revised version, starring Tallulah Bankhead, for whom the role of Flora Goforth was intended, opened on

\textsuperscript{11}Tennessee Williams, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 73. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
January 1, 1964.  

Neither production found favor with its audience. As might be expected, the critical evaluation of the play is varied; there is no agreement even as to which version of the play is better. Some critics consider the play to be one of Williams' dotages.

In his *Best American Plays; Fifth Series*, John Gassner laments the decline in the work of "Williams, Miller, Inge, Robert Anderson, and others. To an unfriendly critic, it was certain that their work was deteriorating, and even a friendly one had reason for concern when . . . Williams produced *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore.* . . ." In his *Best Plays* collection, Henry Hewes comments:

This play, which in the wealthy Sissy Goforth offers us the most unforgettable character since Big Daddy, was deliberately ambiguous and subliminal as the playwright tried to create the atmosphere of contemporary life as it is illuminated by the proximity of death. To have achieved his ambitious intention fully, Mr. Williams would have had to write a masterpiece, and Hermione Baddeley, who played Mrs. Goforth, would have had to add to her unsparingly accurate characterization an emotional warmth comparable to the late Laurette Taylor's. Neither did.

The play did have its defenders; among them was Dan Isaac, who designates *Milk Train* as "a mystical work of religious significance." He adds that the play is Williams'.

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12 Jackson, p. 163.


most complex and obscure. The complexity and obscurity derive from three aspects of the play. To begin with, the doctrines of the play, a strange mixture of the Oriental and Western, were unfamiliar to American audiences; that unfamiliarity produced an obstacle to understanding. Secondly, the play derives its form from the classical Japanese Noh drama and the Kabuki theater. Williams adopted the unconventional form of the drama because, as he explains in his "Author's Notes," he feels that "the play will come off better the further it is removed from conventional theater" (p. 1).

Finally, the play makes use of a style that is complex, repetitive, and allusive—a style reminiscent of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. A complete understanding of Milk Train would require the sort of reader's guide, footnote knowledge to which most readers must resort to plumb the meaning of Eliot's Wasteland, or one of Pound's Cantos, or an episode in Ulysses. Future criticism of Williams' play will probably furnish such a service. Such an undertaking is beyond the limitations of the present study. Still, the ideas within the play are relevant and must be dealt with as briefly as possible.

The play dramatizes the last two days in the life of Mrs. Flora Goforth. The play is made up of six scenes. The fifth comes after the intermission and marks the beginning of the second day. Significantly, the first part of the

\[\text{\footnotesize 15} \]

\[\text{Dan Isaac, "A Streetcar Named Desire--or Death?" New York Times, 18 Feb. 1968, section 2, p. 1.}\]
play ends with Mrs. Goforth's reliving the death of her first husband. The second part begins with her dictating her thoughts on the "meaning of life." Mrs. Goforth--her friends call her Sissy--has outlived four husbands, three wealthy financiers and a young poet, Alex, whom she married for love. Rightfully fearing her own death, Sissy has retired to her mountain-top villa to complete her memoirs, Facts and a Figure, which her publishers assure her will "rank with and possibly even out-rank the great Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past as a social documentation of two continents in three decades...." (p. 89). Mrs. Goforth's mountain rises out of "the oldest sea in the Western world... this sea called the Mediterranean Sea, which means the middle of the earth, was the cradle of life, not the grave, but the cradle of pagan and Christian--civilizations..." (p. 94). Mrs. Goforth's villa is filled with possessions that make it comparable to the great burial pyramids in Egypt. Other references in the play indicate that we are expected to identify Sissy Goforth with Western Civilization.

Mrs. Goforth's solitude is interrupted by the poet and sculptor Christopher Flanders. Chris arrives in Scene One, although he and Mrs. Goforth do not confront each other until Scene Five, when he appears, after the intermission, dressed in the Kabuki costume of a Samurai. A Samurai is roughly the Japanese equivalent of a medieval knight. Chris has reached the mountaintop by scaling a goat-path that Mrs.
Goforth had thought impassable, by fighting off Mrs. Goforth's dogs that are called lupus, wolves, and after undergoing a five-day fast for what he calls "non-secular reasons" (p. 96). Thus, Chris survives a number of tests before he arrives at the elevation to which Mrs. Goforth has retired.

He arrives dressed as Mrs. Goforth's last husband had been dressed when she first saw him. Chris's climb has been made more difficult because of the weight of his pack, which contains his metalsmith tools and a mobile that figures prominently in the last scene of the play. The mobile is entitled "The Earth is a Wheel in a Great Big Gambling Casino" (p. 29).

While Chris is sleeping, his hostess summons Marchesa Ridgeway-Condotti, the Witch of Endor, and discovers from her that last summer Chris had been christened "the Angel of Death" because he has been present at the death of several women of Mrs. Goforth's generation. Later the Witch attempts to lure Chris away from Mrs. Goforth, but without success. Chris tells the Witch that she is "the heart of the world that has no heart, the heartless world that you live in . . ." (p. 76).

Mrs. Goforth needs companionship and a lover, but she fears that people will take advantage of her. At one point, she says that she does not trust people, only dogs (p. 97). Much of her conversation with Chris amounts to a verbal sparring match whereby she attempts to exact her own terms from her "Trojan Horse Guest," a phrase with which she repeatedly
addresses Chris (pp. 64, 82). Chris designates his intention as an attempt to give to Mrs. Goforth what he has given to other "old dying ladies," that is, "something closer to what they need than what they think they still want" (p. 28). At the end of the play Sissy Goforth comes to accept what Chris has to offer. After her death, the griffin banner that had been her heraldic device is lowered. In the meantime, Chris has hung his mobile. The whole action of the play, in one sense, is summed up in the ascendance of the mobile, a mandala device, over the banner, a symbol of duality. Still, a final line of the play asserts: "It's Reveille always, Taps never, for the gold griffin" (p. 117).

If Mrs. Goforth is intended as a portrait as Western Civilization, and that much seems certain, it is surprising that Williams deals with her so kindly. She epitomizes the vices of a materialistically oriented and technologically powered society. Sissy Goforth is a business-woman par excellence. Born in One Street, Georgia, and possessed of only one asset, her remarkable figure, she begins as the Dixie Doxy in a carnival strip show, reaches star billing in the Follies, and then marries Harlon Goforth, "a man that Presidents put next to their wives at banquets in the White House . . ." (pp. 7f). Two subsequent marriages have increased her wealth. She may, in truth, proclaim herself to be "a legend in [her] own lifetime" (p. 65).

Mrs. Goforth has wholeheartedly adopted the business ethic. Though she describes herself, in a line from Ibsen,
as having "a robust conscience, and the Viking spirit in life," she interprets those qualities in this way: "I give away nothing, I sell and I buy in my life, and I've always wound up with a profit, one way or another" (p. 87). Much of the play concerns her attempt to capitalize on Chris's hunger. She denies him food, hoping to humiliate him and bring him to submit to her desires. At one point, Blackie, Mrs. Go­ forth's secretary, brings a tray of food for Chris. Mrs. Go­ forth has it sent away; then she asks Chris why he did not "grab the plate and run off with it . . . like a dog with a bone." Chris answers, "I can fight if I have to, but the fighting style of dogs is not my style" (pp. 82f). It is, however, Sissy Goforth's style. She is a self-admitted bitch. Her fortune and her social position are totally the result of her skillful marketing of the only product that she can sell, and that is herself.

Now old and fearing death, she must take stock of herself. During the course of the play, in part due to her conversations with Chris, she comes to realize the personal losses that she has sustained while her material success accumulated. Projecting her own values into other people, she has come to feel that everyone intends taking advantage of her. For this reason she has moved to her mountaintop where she most often refuses to see people because, as she says, "they all seemed like the same person over and over and I got tired of the person" (p. 32). She has also come to see all life as a struggle with the sun--"just a big fire-ball
that toughens the skin, including the skin of the heart" (p. 85). Imperfectly, Sissy has discovered the truth that is dramatized in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, namely, that the life struggle is debilitating and that success demands that one armor oneself against those constituents of life that might confer value on existence. The end result, dramatized in Mrs. Goforth, is that present life seems almost to be nonexistent. Our lives come to exist largely as completed memories. In a passage that leads one to believe that she has been reading Henri Bergson, Mrs. Goforth tells the Witch: "Has it ever struck you, Connie, that life is all memory, except for the one present moment that goes by you so quick you hardly catch it going? It's really all memory, Connie, except for each passing moment. . . . Practically everything is a memory to me, now, so I'm writing my memoirs.... [She points up.] Shooting star: it's shot—a memory now. Four husbands, all memory now. All lovers, all memory now" (p. 44).

Only one of Mrs. Goforth's past lovers, the poet who was her last husband, is now important to her. He alone succeeded in breaking through her defenses: "The love of true understanding isn't something a man brings up the road to you every day or once in a blue moon, even. But it was brought to me once, almost too late but not quite.... The hard shell of my heart, the calcium deposits grown around it, could still be cracked, broken through, and my last husband broke through it, and I was brought back to life and almost
back to—what?—Youth...." (p. 12). Again, Williams has
given us a definition of youth that has nothing to do with
age, but rather consists in a certain response toward life.
Most important in the passage just quoted is the mention of
calcium, and the phrase, "Man brings [this] up the road."

Several times during the play, milk and calcium be-
come the subject of conversation. The "milk train" is in-
volved with the theme of the destruction of the quality of
life through the perpetuation of the life struggle; that is,
we are nourished by milk from birth, but the danger is that
the very milk that nourishes us is the source of the calcium
deposits which enclose the heart and so make it oblivious of
things and people external to ourselves. To hold too strong-
ly to life, as Mrs. Goforth has done, is to become inured to
the only values that make life admirable. The play identi-
fies those values as love and religion. Thus, Chris's gift
to the elderly of "something closer to what they need than
what they think they still want" (p. 28) is more than a mere
willingness to die.

The phrase "Man bring this up the road" is important
for a number of reasons. The short story from which Milk
Train develops is called "Man Bring This Up Road." Mrs.
Goforth identifies this with "a love of true understanding."
Later, when the servant gives Mrs. Goforth the book that

125-43.
Chris uses as a calling card, he does so by saying, "Man bring this up the road" (p. 16). The phrase later recurs in significant positions in the last two scenes.

The proximity of death illuminates the heroine of Williams' drama. Mrs. Goforth, though she has led a full life, comes to see her own emptiness. She fears age and fights it. She fears death and refuses publicly to acknowledge it. Lonely, she desires companionship but does not invite guests for fear that they will not come. Chris understands her plight and tells her, "You're suffering more than you need to. . . . You're suffering from the worst of all human maladies, of all afflictions, and I don't mean one of the body, I mean the thing people feel when they go from room to room for no reason, and then they go back from room to room for no reason, and then they go out for no reason and come back in for no reason—" (p. 88).

In the past Mrs. Goforth has looked for reasons:

MRS. GOFORTH: I've been on the Nile. No message. Couple winters ago I stayed at the Mena House, that hotel under the pyramids. I could see the pyramids, those big-big calcified fools-caps from my breakfast balcony. No message. Rode up to 'em on a camel so I could say I'd done the whole bit.

CHRIS: No message?

MRS. GOFORTH: No message, except you can get seasick on a camel. Yep, you can get mighty seasick on the hump of a camel. Went inside those old king-size tombstones.

CHRIS: No message inside them, either?

MRS. GOFORTH: No message, except the Pharaohs and their families had the idiotic idea they were going to wake up hungry and thirsty and so provided them—
selves with breakfasts which had gone very stale and
dry, and the Pharaohs and families were still sound
asleep. . . . (p. 94)

The theme of the message is at the very center of the
play's meaning. In the last scene, in a fit of temper, Mrs.
Goforth snatches up the book that Chris has brought her, the
translation of the sayings of the Hindu Swami who was Chris's
guru. "Man bring this up the road, huh?" she says. The re­
mark leads Chris to speak one of the most important and most
misunderstood lines in the play:

CHRIS: Oh, no, you're nobody's fool, but you're a
fool, Mrs. Goforth, if you don't know that finally,
sooner or later, you need somebody or something to
mean God to you, even if it's a cow on the streets
of Bombay, or carved rock on the Easter Islands or--

MRS. GOFORTH: You came here to bring me God, did you?

CHRIS: I didn't say God, I said someone or something
to--

MRS. GOFORTH: I heard what you said, you said God.
My eyes are out of focus but not my ears! Well,
bring Him, I'm ready to lay out a red carpet for Him,
but how do you bring Him? Whistle? Ring a bell for

Chris's insistence that Mrs. Goforth needs, and that
he has brought, "something to mean God" embodies an important
Hindu belief. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna instructs
Arjuna in the principles of Vedanta. One of the most signif­
icant of these principles is that though worship is neces­
sary, the object of worship is immaterial; indeed, anything
can mean God. This idea is repeatedly stated in the Gita.
The few instances quoted below should serve to clarify this
paradoxical belief. In each case, the speaker is the God,
Lord Krishna:

Some see me one with themselves, or separate:
Some bow to the countless gods that are only
My million faces. . . .

Even those who worship other deities, and sacrifice
to them with faith in their hearts, are really wor­
shipping me, though with a mistaken approach. For
I am the only enjoyer and the only God of all sacri­
fices. . . .

O Arjuna, I will indeed make known to you my divine
manifestations, but I shall name the chief of these,
only. For, of the lesser variations in all their
detail, there is no end. I am the Atman that dwells
in the heart of every mortal creature; I am the be­
ginning, the life-span, and the end of all. . . . I
am the silence of things secret: I am the knowledge
of the knower.

Whatever path men travel
Is my path:
No matter where they walk
It leads to me.

Though the idea that the object of worship is immateri­
al is foreign to Westerners and probably repugnant to Chris­
tians, it is not unreasonable. Though varied means are per­
missible, the end of all religious activity is the same. To
the degree that Hinduism involves a salvation philosophy,
that salvation is located on this side of death and consists
of the achievement of a certain experience. Admittedly that
experience is ineffable, incommunicable, but the means to
the achievement of that experience and certain symbols of
the content of the experience are not so inaccessible. Cer­
tain of those symbols are what Chris Flanders "brings up the

17Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood,
trans., The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita (New York: New
road" to Mrs. Goforth. Any one of them might "mean God."

Chris brings three things up the road to Mrs. Goforth. He brings the metal sculpture that is called "The Earth is a Wheel in a Great Big Gambling Casino." He brings the translation of his teacher's sayings that is titled *Meanings Known and Unknown* (p. 35). Chris tries to bring her the peace that he had received from his teacher, the Hindu Swami that he met in Baja, California, a man who has "meant God" to him. Chris attempts to do so by telling her a story, a sort of parable that is similar to Hannah's story of the Shanghai death-house. The story consists of two parts. In the first, Chris finds his vocation. In Baja, Chris had left his hostess's home to go for a swim:

Swam out in the cool water till my head felt cool as the water, then turned and swam back in, but the beach wasn't deserted completely any more. There was a very old gentleman on it. He called "Help!" to me, as if he was in the water drowning, and I was on the shore. I swam in and asked him how I could help him and he said this, he said: "Help me out there! I can't make it alone, I've gone past pain I can bear." I could see it was true. He was elegantly dressed but emaciated, cadaverous. I gave him the help he wanted, I led him out in the water, it wasn't easy. Once he started to panic; I had to hold onto him tight as a lover till he got back his courage and said, "All right." The tide took him as light as a leaf. But just before I did that, and this is the oddest thing, he took out his wallet and thrust all the money in it into my hand. (p. 112)

Later, Chris goes to the encampment of a Hindu teacher. When Chris tells the story, the old man tells Chris that he has found his vocation. Chris had given the money to the Swami, and Mrs. Goforth asks if the old Man said "thank you for it." Chris replies:
I don't know if he did. You see, they—No, I guess you don't see. They had a belief that too much is said, when feeling, quiet feelings--enough--says more.... And he had a gift for gesture. You couldn't believe how a hand that shriveled and splotched could make such a beautiful gesture of holding out the hand to be helped up from the ground. It made me, so quickly, peaceful. That was important to me, that sudden feeling of quiet, because I'd come all the way down there, with the--the spectre of lunacy at my heels all the way--He said: "Stay."--We sat about a fire on the beach that night: Nobody said anything.

MRS. GOFORTH: No message, he didn't have any message?

CHRIS: Yes, that night it was silence, it was the meaning of silence. (p. 113)

When Mrs. Goforth had interrogated the universe, she had received "no message." Chris received the message of silence, the message that Sissy Goforth might have received if she had known how to listen in the right way. Unsatisfied with Chris's enigmatic report, she questions him further:

MRS. GOFORTH: Silence? Meaning?

CHRIS: Acceptance.

MRS. GOFORTH: What of?

CHRIS: Oh, many things, everything, nearly. Such as how to live and die in a way that's more dignified than most of us know how to do it. And of how not to be frightened of not knowing what isn't meant to be known, acceptance of not knowing anything but the moment of still existing, until we stop existing--and acceptance of that moment, too. (pp. 113f)

Chris's line holds the essential message of Williams' play, but the message is easily misunderstood. The doctrine of acceptance is not the pessimistic directive that it seems to be. The message is conditioned by the body of knowledge,
say wisdom, from which it comes. That body of wisdom is unmistakably Oriental. The principal elements are to be found in any number of Eastern holy books from the Vedas to the writings of Sri Aurobindo; however, the knowledge that Chris brings imperfectly to Sissy Goforth is contained in its most popular form in the Bhagavad-Gita. Though he lacks the usual trappings that Westerners associate with the Eastern holy man, Christopher Flanders is a sort of Hindu novice, a follower of his own guru, his spiritual teacher.

He is, as well, unmistakably associated with the Christ, but he is a more benevolent Christ than any other in Williams. The merging of the functions of Christ and Hindu holy man is surprising only to the Westerner who is unfamiliar with Eastern religions. That unfamiliarity is doubtless the cause of much of the confusion that is evident in the reviews of the play, and there is little criticism to augment the opening-night reviews that followed the two openings of the play.

Hinduism contains the idea that the divine incarnation is a recurring event. In the edition of the Bhagavad-Gita that is translated by Christopher Isherwood and Swami Prabhavananda the following explanation is given: "Hinduism accepts the belief in many divine incarnations, including Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus, and foresees that there will be many more: In every age I come back/ To deliver the holy,/ To destroy the sin of the sinner,/ To establish righteous-
ness."

Other aspects of his role of Eastern holy man are compatible with the qualities associated with the Christian priesthood. Chris has come to Mrs. Goforth's mountain after a "five-day fast for—nonsecular reasons" (p. 96). Fasting is, of course, a thoroughly familiar spiritual discipline. But, like an Eastern monk, Chris is obliged to receive food as a gift. Much as Buddhist monks are required to beg their food, Chris must wait until food is offered him.

More closely associated with Christian discipline, Chris is apparently bound by the rules of poverty and chastity. He arrives at Mrs. Goforth's villa with only a book, his mobile, his metalworking tools, and a single shirt. In the last scene of the play when, Mrs. Goforth invites him to share her bed, he politely refuses.

At one point, too, Chris suggests that Mrs. Goforth's physical problems might be partially solved by the process of inhaling sea water to cleanse her nasal passages (p. 80). The technique is one that is prescribed by the discipline of Hatha Yoga.

Earlier, when it appears that Mrs. Goforth is not yet ready for what Chris has to offer, he asks permission to live in the bamboo hut on her private beach. Mrs. Goforth designates it as an oubliette, a sort of prison where people are put so that they can be forgotten. Chris, however, sees it

\[18\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 133.}\]
as a place where he might live the life of an ascetic. He says that he can spear the fish that he needs for food and that he can even turn seawater into fresh water. When Blackie asks why he would want to stay there, Chris's reply is very significant:

CHRIS [as a wave crashes under the mountain]: Boom! I'd like to make a mobile. I'd call it "Boom." The sea and the sky are turning the same color, dissolving into each other. Wine-dark sea and wine-dark sky. In a little while the little fishing boats with their lamps for night fishing will make the sea look like the night sky turned upside down, and you and I will have a sort of valedictory dinner on the terrace.

BLACKIE: Yes, it sounds very peaceful.... (p. 104)

Chris's mobile is to represent the resolution of contraries in which is to be found the peace that comes from detachment, from acceptance, the acceptance that Chris tells Mrs. Goforth was the import of the silence that was the message Chris had received from the Swami on the beach in California.

Chris is obviously drawn in two directions. He desires the religious solitude that he might find in the beach cottage, the solitude that would result in his completing a work of art that would fall into the class of *Tantra*, a term which will be explained shortly. But Chris is drawn too in the direction of his mission in life, the enactment of his vocation that had been shown to him by his spiritual leader. The two directions are those that are designated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as the way of meditation and the way of selfless action.\(^\text{19}\) Chris's vocation as it is revealed to him

\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 44.\)
might even be better designated by a Sanskrit term—dharma. Dharma is one of the many enigmatic concepts central to Oriental thought, but it is often translated as a word involving the meanings of fate, duty, and vocation. Chris's dharma is to assist the dying through their death. At the end of the play, even though Chris has been tortured in various ways by Mrs. Goforth, she calls to him. Blackie tells Chris, "That's her, she's calling for you. Can you stand to go in there?" Chris does not hesitate: "Sure I can--it's a professional duty" (pp. 104-105).

But Chris Flanders is an artist, a sculptor. Thus, whatever message he has to impart, he may render it not only in words, as he does in the story of the dying man and the message of silence, and as he had done in the book, Meanings Known and Unknown. He may also render that message in concrete form, in his sculptures. One might even say that the two sculptures mentioned in the play, the completed "The Earth is a Wheel in a Great Big Gambling Casino" and the projected "Boom," are intended as the embodiment of a truth that cannot be stated. As such, the spirit of the play is consistent both with Hindu philosophy and with the conclusion reached by W. B. Yeats whose "Sailing to Byzantium" furnishes the epigraph to the play.

Chris's sculptures are enormously important. First, they have been constructed in the proper religious spirit. Early in the play, Blackie asks Chris whether he sells his mobiles. He replies, "Some things aren't made to be sold.
Oh, you sell them, but they're not made for that, not for selling, they're made for--" Blackie supplies, "Making them" (p. 25). Chris does not dispute her answer. Chris has learned, perhaps from his Hindu teacher, one of the lessons that Lord Krishna teaches to Arjuna in the Gita:

He who does the task
Dictated by duty,
Caring nothing
For fruit of the action,
He is a yogi,  
A true sannyasin. [monk]²⁰

Chris displays just such an attitude. He gives the mobile to Mrs. Goforth though it represents six months' labor (p. 29). As we learn of his past history, we find that though Chris has rendered invaluable service to the women that he has attended, his only reward has been the publication of his translation of his teacher's sayings.

Of Chris's first sculpture, little need be said except that, as a wheel, it is a version of the mandala, a symbol known to Westerners primarily through the work of C. G. Jung, who theorized that the device is "derived from dreams and visions corresponding to the most basic of religious symbols known to mankind. . . ."²¹ The mandala is both the embodiment of a truth and an aid to religious discipline. The "mandala is, above all, an image and a synthesis of the dualistic aspects of differentiation and unification, of variety

²⁰Ibid., p. 62.
and unity... It is, then, the visual, plastic expression of the struggle to achieve order—even within diversity—and of the longing to be united with the pristine, non-spatial and non-temporal 'Centre,' as it is conceived in all symbolic traditions."

It is wise at this point to recall that one of the needs dramatized in *Sweet Bird of Youth* was the need to find a means of transcending time.

J. E. Cirlot notes that mandala devices "are to be found all over the Orient, and always as a means toward contemplation and concentration—as an aid in inducing certain mental states and in encouraging the spirit to move forward along its path of evolution from... the realm of corporeal forms to the spiritual."

It might well be argued that there is insufficient evidence to invest Chris Flanders' artifact with so much meaning, and much of that meaning so esoteric. That argument may be granted easily, for the nature of the mobile that Chris plans to construct embodies the same meanings that have been attributed to the first sculpture. With regard to the second work, there is no possibility of its meaning being mistaken—at least no possibility of misunderstanding not based upon ignorance of the tradition from which it is derived. Its name, "Boom," identifies it as a religious artifact, even an icon, of the highest order; "boom" is a

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23Ibid., p. 190.
version of the supreme Hindu mantra, Om.

The extreme importance of the word boom and the artifact that is to be so named is indicated in a number of ways. The sound represented by the word, the sound of a single wave crashing on the rocks below the terrace of Mrs. Goforth's villa, punctuates the action of the play repeatedly. Each time Chris hears the sound, he repeats the word boom. The movie version of Milk Train, a version that was radically redesigned to serve as a vehicle for Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, is even entitled Boom!

Of the numerous repetitions of either the sound of the wave or of the word boom, five are especially important. In Scene One, when Chris first hears the noise, a stage direction instructs: "The YOUNG MAN, CHRIS, limps out upon the forerstage, sinks onto a white iron bench. A wave crashes below the mountain. He looks blankly out at the audience for a moment, then shakes his head and utters a desperate-sounding laugh" (p. 13). In this way Williams focuses the attention of the audience on the sound. A few moments before the intermission, the sound is again repeated. Mrs. Goforth has awakened to find herself reliving the death of her first husband. She stumbles out onto her own terrace, just as she had fled from her dying husband to the terrace "over the high, high city of Goforth." On the remembered terrace, she finds "wind, cold wind, clean, clean! Release! Relief! Escape from--[She reaches the edges of the orchestra pit. A wave crashes loudly below.]" (p. 56) The scene
marks the first association of boom, the wave sound, with "release." A similar association is made in Scene Five. Mrs. Goforth, angry with her secretary, tells her to write a check for her wages and to leave. Chris says "--Boom..." Blackie says, "Release!" (p. 98).

In Scene Five, there is one of the most important occurrences of the word and sound. Chris speaks to Mrs. Goforth of a recent alteration in his consciousness: "I've lost it lately, this sense of reality in my particular world." His sense of a separate reality has had repercussions:

CHRIS: When one person's sense of reality seems to be too--disturbingly different from another person's, uh--

MRS. GOFORTH: Sense of reality. Continue.

CHRIS: Well, he's--avoided! Not welcome! It's--that simple. ...And--yesterday in Naples, I suddenly realized that I was in that situation. [He turns to the booming sea and says, "Boom."] I found out that I was now a--leper!

MRS. GOFORTH: Leopard?

CHRIS: Leper!--Boom! (pp. 68-69)

Thus, in the last scene of the play, when Chris tells Blackie of his plan to construct a mobile called "Boom," the sound of the wave and the word boom have come to be associated with the idea of a separate reality and the concept of release.

The present argument will be best served if, at this point, we take note of a scene that is the central episode in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India, a book that may be the source of some of the ideas in Williams' play, and almost
certainly is the inspiration for Williams’ symbolic sound effects. In Forster's novel, Mrs. Moore, an Englishwoman visiting India, is taken to visit the unique Marabar caves. She visits only one of the caves, for she encounters there a sound that first sickens her and then begins to work more deeply on her ideas, even her very nature:

The more she thought over it, the more disagreeable and frightening it became. She minded it much more now than at the time. The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—"ou-boum." If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff—it would amount to the same... No one could romanticize the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind.

She tried to go on with her letter, reminding herself that she was only an elderly woman who had got up too early in the morning and journeyed too far, that the despair creeping over her was merely her despair, her personal weakness, and that even if she got sunstroke and went mad the rest of the world would go on. But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from "Let there be light" to "It is finished" only amounted to "boum." 24

Forster’s Mrs. Moore has had the unfortunate experience of stumbling, by chance, upon the outer limits of a realm that is most often the goal of a lifetime of religious

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training and rigorous physical discipline. She has accidentally come to the verge of the universal experience that is called variously cosmic consciousness, mystical consciousness, or simply the mystical experience. She has, in terms of Hindu doctrine, made contact with the ultimate reality, the ground of being from which emanates every aspect of apparent reality, a subordinate reality called, in Sanskrit, Maya. She has done so through the agency of the supreme Hindu mantra, Om, or "ou-boum," or "boum." It is Mrs. Moore's misfortune that she has come to her experience with no preparation, either by way of cultural familiarity or specific training. Thus, she fails to gain immediately from the experience what is implicit in it, namely the sort of detachment, acceptance, which numerous mystics, Oriental and Christian, have told us is capable of over-shadowing all of the deficits of life. She might have come away from the Marabar whispering Shantih, Shantih. Instead, for the moment, her hold on life is undermined. Not so with Chris Flanders.

Now to return to the planned sculpture, "Boom." We have said that Chris's artwork is to be of a kind called Tantric art. Most briefly stated, Tantric art aims, through various techniques and patterns, at a concrete rendering of a visualization of totality. One student of Tantra, Ajit Mookerjee, explains that "Tantra is derived from the Sanskrit root, tan, meaning to expand. Tantra thus indicates all comprehensive knowledge or expansion of knowledge." Thus, the object of the shilpi-yogin, or Tantra-artist, is "to pene-
trate the enigmatic silence, the mystery of the universe."\(^{25}\)

"To see the truth," says Sri Aurobindo, "depends on being in contact with the Truth and the mind silent and quiet to receive it."\(^{26}\) **Tantra** art, then, aims at a concrete visualization of pure essence.

The means by which the artist enters into the spirit necessary for the contact with essence, either as an end in itself or as a prelude to the creation of an artifact of **Tantra**, is the **mantra**. The **mantra** is a sound symbol, not a word in the usual sense. The repetition of certain **mantras** is said to have the power of inducing a certain consciousness, a state of being that is the goal of religious mystics and the starting point for the creation of **Tantric** art. Such a belief is involved with an elaborate phonetic symbolism common to most Eastern religions and to the version of Christianity called Gnosticism.\(^{27}\)

The particular **mantra** used by Chris Flanders is the **Om**, the most potent of all Hindu **mantras**. Ajit Mookerjee says that "**Om** aims at the total elimination of subject-object by the expression of sound rhythms. . . ."\(^{28}\) Further, this "first and most important monosyllabic **mantra** is the sound-symbol **Om**, generally considered to be the sound-symbol of the Supreme One."\(^{29}\) Another commentator, J. E. Cirlot, ex-


\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 12.  

\(^{27}\)Cirlot, p. 242.

\(^{28}\)Mookerjee, p. 15.  

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 18.
explains the mantra in this way: "The tradition is that the entire essence of the universe is contained in the syllable 'Om' (or Aum) of the Hindu or Tibetan languages: A=the beginning, U=transition, M=the end, or deep sleep."^{30}

One might well ask after the proper response to the experience of mystical consciousness shared in common by Chris Flanders, Forster's Mrs. Moore, the protagonist of Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, the speaker in Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, and the great mystics of all religions (the experience itself is universal no matter what the interpretation put upon it). The best answer is furnished by Dr. D. T. Suzuki, the major proponent of Zen in the Western world. Dr. Suzuki attributes a number of characteristics to the experience of satori, the Japanese term for the "timeless moment" of mystic enlightenment; among them are "authoritativenss" and "affirmation." Dr. Suzuki explains that by "authoritativenss" he means "that the knowledge realized by satori is final, that no amount of logical argument can refute it. . . . All that logic can do here is to explain it, to interpret it in connection with other kinds of knowledge with which our minds are filled. . . . Hence the sense of authoritativenss, which means finality."^{31} The experience also brings a sort of affirmation that might easily be mistaken for pessi-

^{30}Cirlot, p. 242.

mistic fatalism, a sort of metaphysical determinism. Dr. Suzuki explains that:

what is authoritative and final can never be negative. For negation has no value for our life, it leads us nowhere; it is not a power that urges, nor does it give one a place to rest. Though the satori experience is sometimes expressed in negative terms, it is essentially an affirmative attitude towards all things that exist; it accepts them as they come along regardless of their moral values. Buddhists call this kshanti, "patience," or more properly "acceptance," that is, acceptance of things in their suprarelative or transcendental aspect where no dualism of whatever sort avails.

Once one grasps the degree to which Williams' play is based upon Oriental mystic traditions, it is no surprise that when Chris Flanders' first sculpture is hung, "music seems to come from the turning mobile that casts very delicate gleams of light on the stage" (p. 117), the light recalling the lights that figure so prominently in Chris's description of the projected artifact: "Boom! I'd like to make a mobile. I'd call it 'Boom.' The sea and the sky are turning the same color, dissolving into each other. Wine-dark sea and wine-dark sky. In a little while the little fishing boats with their lamps for night fishing will make the sea look like the night sky turned upside down . . ." (p. 104).

Once the nature and kind of acceptance that Chris counsels is glossed with recourse to Oriental traditions, the final lines of the play emerge in a new light. They are appropriate; they are even profound. Perhaps lacking in dramatic quality, they nonetheless carry associations that

\[32\text{Ibid.}\]
are ultimately conclusive:

[BLACKIE comes up beside him on the forestage and offers him the wine goblet. A wave is heard breaking under the mountain.]

BLACKIE: The sea is saying the name of your next mobile.

CHRIS: Boom!

BLACKIE: What does it mean?

CHRIS: It says "Boom" and that's what it means. No translation, no explanation, just "Boom." (p. 118)

To conclude the present discussion, it must be granted that certain aspects of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any-more have not been touched on here. Other elements of the play have, perhaps, been overly explained. The object of this method of treatment is to suggest, if not precisely to delineate, the existence of a body of traditional wisdom and religious lore within which Williams' play is completely comprehensible. What no critic has brought to a discussion of the play is the recognition that Williams' play is a work of profound synthesis. The play attempts to meld two divergent, perhaps ultimately incompatible, religious traditions.

Although it is not necessary to indicate precisely the source from which Williams took his knowledge of mysticism, it is interesting to speculate. Williams himself may have been, at various times in his life, a practicing mystic. That fact would not be so surprising as it appears to be. Though it is not common knowledge, Tennyson was a practicing
mystic during most of his life, and a great many other poets, both English and American, have exhibited mystical inclinations. Williams probably was exposed to mystical doctrines through his friendships, particularly his friendship with Christopher Isherwood, whose joint translation of the Bhagavad-Gita has been cited in the study, and his friendship with the Japanese novelist and playwright, Yukio Mishima, a writer who has been called the Japanese Hemingway.

To better understand the reaction that the play received, one might put himself in the place of a member of the audience, or better still the position of an opening-night critic. A comparable position might be that of a critic forced to judge Eliot's Wasteland or Ash Wednesday from memory, on the basis of a single public reading.

It is interesting to theorize about whether a new production of Milk Train would succeed. Recently movements in American society have focused attention on certain ideas that remain esoteric, but which were completely foreign to American audiences when the play received its second production in 1964. In 1964 India, the homeland of Hindu ideology, occupied roughly the same position with regard to American


audiences that Africa, the dark continent, occupied with regard to nineteenth century Europeans. In 1964 we had not yet experienced the psychedelic revolution that erupted after the "Summer of Love" in San Francisco in 1967. Few people had heard of Dr. Timothy Leary, or his co-worker Richard Alpert, who has since re-named himself Baba Ram Dass. The Beatles had not yet brought to our attention the work of such musicians as Ravi Shankar or the philosophy of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Few people knew of the existence of Alan Watts or D. T. Suzuki. R. D. Laing had not yet begun to incorporate the techniques of Oriental dialectics and meditation into psychiatry.

_Boom!_ can offer no answer to the question. The roles of Chris and Mrs. Goforth were greatly altered to make the script suitable for Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Noel Coward was cast as the Witch of Endor, a part originally played by Mildred Dunnock. Static drama seldom translates well into film, and _Milk Train_ is a static play. Even in 1968, the date of the film's release, the ideas that are central to the play were familiar to very few people.

It is not surprising that Williams' play failed. Nor is it surprising, though it is indeed admirable, that Williams arranged for a second production of the play a year after its first opening. Williams obviously had a sense of the value of the play that was not shared by critics or viewers. The second opening of _Milk Train_ is comparable to the opening of _Orpheus Descending_ seventeen years after the failure of
Battle of Angels. Williams' gesture was an heroic one. It is not difficult to imagine the emotional cost to the playwright of the failure of not one, but two versions of a play to which he attached great importance. Williams' play may well be what its critics say it is, namely a work of many and great faults. However, it seems evident that Williams' greatest fault was not aesthetic and not philosophic; it was strategic. Williams overestimated his audience. It is oddly fitting, too, that Williams should earlier have designated one of his opponents as "the enemy, time." History has conspired to make Milk Train more intelligible to the 1970's than it was to the 1960's. The greatest fault that may be attributed to The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore is that it was premature.

It was, however, consistent with the works that had gone before. The dominant motive of the play and its characters is Frankl's Will to Meaning. Again, a central character is featured whose problems are those that we have labeled Outsider problems, problems which we may designate as the result of a person's possessing a minority consciousness. Finally, the play goes beyond Night of the Iguana in its treatment of the proper way to confront the reality of the universe and the proper relationship to establish with other inhabitants in this "house full of--voices, noises, objects, strange shadows, light that's even stranger . . ." (p. 74). Williams' play advises a quality of acceptance to which it seems naive to apply the term Stoic. In terms of human re-
relationships, Chris Flanders represents a devotion to other people that is more extreme even than that of Hannah Jelkes. Thus the play represents the merger of Oriental Stoicism and Christian Ethics. However, it goes beyond other, earlier works that might be summarized in similar terms by virtue of its treatment of what can only be called mysticism.

After *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, both Williams' work and his biography enter a new stage. Williams had relied rather strongly on alcohol from the beginning of his career. In 1963, as a result of his chronic insomnia, a condition going back to his youth in St. Louis, Williams began to take drugs. Thereafter, a number of circumstances acting in conjunction led to increased dependence on drugs, successive crackups, and repeated commitments.

That Williams should go through such a period was almost predictable, a result of the internal strain generated by the divided consciousness and the extreme sensitivity that are characteristic of the Outsider personality. It may well be recalled that Wilson's study contained a sort of prediction based upon the study of historical Outsiders. Wilson predicted that the Outsider's final position had, of necessity, to lead toward mysticism or madness. The Outsider seemed fated to find either the happiness of William Blake or Alfred North Whitehead, or the madness of Nietzsche, Nijinsky, or Van Gogh.

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In addition to, or perhaps because of, the problems of the Outsider, other problems were rendered more extreme. To begin with, during this period Williams was undergoing that problem that other American writers have experienced—the block. Dan Isaac eloquently treats this problem in a 1968 essay in the *New York Times* where he interprets Williams' one-act play, "I Can't Imagine Tomorrow":

The only characters in this very short work are simply called "One" and "Two." One is a woman, talkative and sarcastic, who is in great pain and wants to die. Two is a helpless little man who wants nothing more than to help One, his only friend, but does not want her to die. His ineffectuality is underscored by his inability to finish a sentence. After he stutters through a speech, every word costing him immense pain, One sarcastically tells him, "You completed a sentence. It wasn't easy for you, but you got through it."

For "completed a sentence" read "completed a play," and we suddenly realize that this statement may perfectly represent the private pain suffered by this playwright in bringing his material forth having to fight the tendency toward silence all the way.

If one appreciates the degree to which Williams' work served as a stabilizing factor, he must realize the devastating effect of a writer's block.

Williams also had to face the frightening possibility that his labors to overcome the block and to produce new plays for the American theater would be thankless. One of the most important problems facing Williams in the 1960's was the loss of an audience. In an interview occasioned by the Chicago opening of his Two-Character Play, a play since retitled *Out Cry* for its New York opening in March, 1973,

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37 Isaac, p. 7.
Williams indicated the degree to which he felt himself to be forsaken by his audience. Speaking of Edward Albee's All Over, Williams said: "If I had written All Over, you know, I would have been very upset about the notices. But they had a serious audience the night I was there. Everyone listened, spell-bound! But if I had written All Over, believe me, it would be closed by now. Because, you see, I don't have an audience. I had one but I lost it. I lost it back in the mid-Sixties. Yes, I know that."  

Increasingly dependent on drugs, faced with a writer's block, and bereft of an audience, Williams came more and more to consider himself unjustly maligned by critics and interviewers. Tennessee Williams is a sensitive man; the extraordinary sensitivity that has contributed to his success as a playwright has also made him vulnerable to his critics. There can be little doubt that Williams was damaged by even the just comments of reasonable critics. One can only theorize as to his reaction to the many published comments not marked by reason or critical objectivity. In truth, Williams has had to face the worst press of any American writer of the last decade. Robert Brustein, in his criticism of Sweet Bird of Youth, exhibits the tendency of other of Williams' critics to divert their attention from the work to the man and then to indulge in the sort of lay-psychiatry current at cocktail parties in the 1960's. In an essay in Hudson Review,  

Brustein dismisses *Suddenly Last Summer* as "an extended, sick joke actualizing a homosexual metaphor." Of *Sweet Bird*, he says that it "looks less like art than like some kind of confession and apology." The "review" by the same critic in *Encounter* was even more extreme. What passes for drama criticism is in fact an essay in Freudian psychology. In effect, Brustein diagnoses Williams' personal problems as Oedipal, indicates that "the real theme" of all of Williams' plays is incest, and concludes that Williams' work is primarily an exercise in indecent exposure that theater audiences are willing to accept "just so long as that exposure reveals nothing searching or true." Still, not even Brustein's comments could be matched by the extremity of one critic who said of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, "I don't think anyone should be allowed to see it." There can be little doubt that Williams' quarrel with the critics and interviewers was justified.

Williams did have his champions. For example, after the opening of *The Seven Descents of Myrtle*, Whitney Bolton wrote several columns that can only be interpreted as a rather gallant attempt to keep the play open by way of his

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own judicious approbation of the play and the actors.\textsuperscript{42} Still, the negative criticism of Williams and his work must have caused great discomfort to a writer whose chief attribute is probably his sensitivity. So bad had Williams' critical press become that in 1962 William Sharp published, in the \textit{Tulane Drama Review}, an essay entitled "An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams." The "unfashionable view" that is the thesis of the essay is simply that Tennessee Williams is a writer of value. That essay did contain a comment about the absent hero of Suddenly Last Summer that might serve as a telling contrast to Robert Brustein's summation that was quoted above. Sharp says of Sebastian Venable that he "lives what he thinks until it kills him, as does Lear; and though Sebastian is no Lear, he is closer to him than any other dramatic creation in contemporary American drama."\textsuperscript{43}

There is too the possibility that Williams' problems of the 1960's were occasioned by the discoveries dramatized in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. That is the conclusion of Dan Isaac: "The many and convoluted metaphors written into this metaphysical drama suggest that what Williams finally arrived at when his quest was completed was so hopeless--and ultimately frightening--that he built into the play a set of contradictions in order to refute his own con-


clusions. The final truth that Williams arrived at in 'Milk Train' was at least so frightening that it rendered the most productive American playwright of the past 20 years catatonic for a time. 44

The mid and late sixties were indeed a difficult time for Tennessee Williams. The plays of that period are indeed difficult plays. None was commercially successful. With the exception of the modest success of Small Craft Warnings in 1972, Williams' last successful play was Night of the Iguana in 1962. Small Craft Warnings was heralded as a comeback; the public appearances to publicize the play's opening showed Williams to be far more secure than he had been in a decade.

In the sixties, the prime theme of Williams' plays is, to an unprecedented degree, the fight for survival, a struggle that is repeatedly dramatized in the plays in Williams' anthology Dragon Country. Reprinted in that collection are the two short plays that appeared as a program entitled Slapstick Tragedy in 1966. One play, "The Mutilated," concerns the struggle of Trinket Dugan to reenter the world after a period of retirement due to an operation that has left her mutilated. Another, "The Gnädiges Fräulein," concerns the survival struggle of a former circus entertainer forced to compete with scavenger birds for spoiled fish thrown off fishing boats. She must produce three fish a day in order to be permitted to stay in "the great big dormi-

44 Isaac, p. 1.
Williams' 1968 play, first titled Kingdom of Earth, and published under that title, using as a subtitle the name given to the New York production, The Seven Descents of Myrtle, centers on the struggle to survive a flood that functions variously as the original deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the prophesied apocalypse. A suitable subtitle might be "survivor's benefits." The play contains some of the best writing that Williams has ever done, but the play itself is disappointing. While survival is apparently the theme of the play, it is difficult to say whether the play is about who will survive, who should survive, or whether we ought to admire those qualities that allow a person to survive. The play displays not a failure of talent, not a failure of power, but a failure of control. In Kingdom of Earth Williams commits every fault ever attributed to him, but he demonstrates, too, the strengths for which he had been admired in his earlier plays. Williams will probably revise the play, as he has so many others, but in its present form Kingdom of Earth can contribute little to the present discussion except the recognition that the play embodies a judgment to be found in earlier plays that Christianity is an exhausted religious tradition. There is, however,
over, nothing to relate the play to the mystical concerns of Milk Train.

The last play to be written in the sixties was In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel. The opening night reviews of that play mark the nadir of Williams' career.

Edwin Newman, in a television review, noted that "there is no dramatic power in the situations, and even the gift of language seems to have deserted Williams." Clive Barnes judges the "Philosophic content" of the play to be "a cotton puffball of commonplace." Richard Watts, although he acknowledges Williams as "the most distinguished American playwright since O'Neill," says that in Williams' new play "virtually all of his characteristic excellence is absent. . . ." The critic for Women's Wear Daily calls the play "dreadful, of course, but worse . . . pitiable." It is in this review that the remark appears: "I don't think anyone should be allowed to see it." Still, it is this play that Donald Newlove calls "his great Crucifixion play and an inspired religious work." Such a difference of opinion is

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50 Gottfried, p. 262.


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not likely to be solved by anything short of posterity.

In part, the critical reaction was probably a response to the unique style that Williams makes use of in the play. The sort of dialogue that audiences had come to expect from Williams is almost completely lacking. Instead, Williams seems to be aiming at the kind of austere, even ritualistic dialogue that is characteristic of Hemingway's short stories, particularly such stories as "A Clean Well-lighted Place" and "Hills Like White Elephants." However, the most characteristic stylistic device of In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel is unique to Williams. The lines often end at unexpected places. Clauses will be followed by coordinating conjunctions or relative pronouns that one would expect to introduce other clauses. Instead, the pronoun or conjunction will be followed by a period. Quite often a preposition will be followed by a period where we would expect an object of the preposition. Examples of these oddities of style will appear in sections of the play that are quoted in the pages that follow.

However, a more important theme that echoes through all of the adversely critical comments about the play is that it is too nakedly a treatment of personal problems. That personal problems are at the heart of Williams' play is undeniable. That the play is too personal, or even exclusively personal, is open to question. Williams himself has said that the play was suggested by the death of Jackson
Pollock.\textsuperscript{52}

Williams' problems of the sixties were anything but private, and there is every possibility that the opening-night critics found in the play exactly what they expected to find. One might well propose, as a corrective to such a rejection of the personal, the remark of T. S. Eliot, who finds such personalism to be at the heart of the greatest poetry. Eliot says of Dante that he is involved with all his own sufferings—definite grievances and definite humiliation at the hand of particular people . . . self-interested grudges and deprivations, earthly if you like, but primarily real, and that is the first thing . . . in ordinary human poets the human personal loss, the private grievance and bitterness and loneliness, must be present. Even when the poet is aware of nothing, interested in nothing, beyond his personal feelings, these may have, by their intensity, a representative value, so that we envisage him, like Villon, not as wrapped up in his private griefs, but reliving them, holding nothing back, in a passionate cry to God and there is, in the end, no one else to cry to.\textsuperscript{53}

Depending upon one's point of view, Eliot's comments are as applicable to Williams' play as are the critical comments directly related to it.

Without denying the personal suffering that is involved in the play, it is possible to maintain that the problems treated in the play are not of such a nature as to render the play invalid. In short, the play is a treatment of the Outsider problems with which much of this study has

\begin{footnotes}
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been concerned. Thus, the problems rendered are those that Colin Wilson attributes to T. E. Lawrence, to Vaslav Nijinsky and to others. More telling, however, is the applicability of the play to the problems that faced Vincent Van Gogh. Although there are no conclusive parallels between Williams' painter, Mark Conley, and Van Gogh, anyone who is familiar with the life of the Dutch painter can see the similarity between Van Gogh, Williams' character, and Williams himself. The last fifty pages or so of Dear Theo, the autobiography that Irving Stone pieced together from Van Gogh's letters, tell of Van Gogh's repeated breakdowns and commitments to various asylums. They tell of Van Gogh's sense of the progressive revelations to be found in color and light and his need to develop a technique that would allow him to work fast enough to capture his visions of reality. The letters render very eloquently the conflict between Van Gogh's reliance on Theo and his need to free himself from the conditions that made economic reliance on his brother necessary. Van Gogh writes often of his fear that he could not withstand the physical demands of the work itself, and he is tortured by doubts as to the value of his own work and his place in the history of painting. Finally, Van Gogh tells us time and again of the conflict into which he is thrown when the responsibility to his work runs counter to his own needs for human companionship, for love, and for the sort of approval that might give him, on a continual basis, the sort of personal confi-
dence that he sometimes derived from his work.  

Very similar conflicts face Mark Conley. Mark, married fourteen years ago to Miriam, has enjoyed critical success in the past. On a trip to Japan, his work enters a new phase that amounts to a "discovery" of the power of light and color. Ravaged by his own past excesses with regard to his work, and troubled by the state of his marriage to a woman who leaves his bed at night to meet her lovers, Mark has reached the limits of his endurance. His pain and isolation are intensified by the fact that his passion must be solitary—no one, not even his agent Leonard Frisbie, is capable of understanding the state of Mark's consciousness, of his new and altered comprehension of reality.

Miriam mistakes Mark's condition for madness. Her uncle, stricken with a brain tumor, had exhibited similar symptoms. She wishes to send Mark home and to continue alone. Mark is willing to go or to stay so long as Miriam does not desert him. The long and unsatisfactory marriage has taken its toll of Miriam as well. She had married Mark because she thought that he would lift her "above the trivialities of life." But, she has discovered what Mark readily admits: "I've always felt that. After the work, so little is left of me. To give to another person" (p. 28). Her means


55 Tennessee Williams, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, in Dragon Country (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 22. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
of coping with the bad marriage is to indulge in casual seductions. Much of the play is given over to her attempt to seduce the impassive Japanese Barman. Mark's fear that he will not be equal to the demands of his art is paired off against Miriam's fear of the loss of the physical attractiveness and youth that allow her to continue to live. She wears bracelets that she calls "insignia of attraction still persisting" (p. 37). She carries a little regency snuff box containing a single, deadly pill to be used when the attraction fails or if she is stricken with "incurable illness" (p. 13). In the meantime, Miriam cuckolds her husband and cuts flowers, for she says that they lie, that they deny "the sentence of death" that is imposed on them (p. 26). Her cutting flowers emerges as an emblem of her own attempt to maintain her power, the feminine power of physical attraction. She knows the failure of that power to be the prelude to her own death, her recourse to the pill that she carries: "When then. I will carry it into a grove of afternoon trees. Swallow the. And in a single, immeasurable moment--" (p. 13).

In desperation, she summons Mark's agent from the United States. Leonard is sympathetic to both Mark and Miriam, but he can do nothing. At his first meeting with Miriam, he underscores Miriam's desperation when he asks her intentions. Those intentions are stated entirely in negatives: "Not continuing with him and not returning with him" (p. 36). In the last few minutes of the play, Mark dies,
apparently carried by his vision beyond the limits of his physical capabilities. Miriam is at first strangely untouched. Her comment is, "Released." Leonard says, "Yes, he's released from." Miriam replies, "I meant that I am released" (p. 50). The nature of that release is explained in the last moments of the play. Miriam, far from escaping the triviality of life, has come to depend upon it; she calls it her "circle of light," and she describes it as

Animation. Liveliness. People at a smart restaurant talking gaily together. Interested in jewelry, clothes, shopping, shows. Leonard, you know it's imperative for us to stay inside of. As for the others. You know and I know incurably ill people, especially those with dreaded diseases such as. And people gone made that need an acre of pacifying meadows, trees around them . . . It's like they'd violated a law that's.

LEONARD: Inviolable.

MIRIAM: Yes. Double yes. The circle of light won't be and can't be extended to include them. The final black needle is their visitor, Leonard. (p. 52)

Her husband's state of mind threatens her own sense of security. Then, she turns her attention to Mark, to:

the man who has made a crossing that neither of us but each of us. I will bow my head to the table as an appearance of being stricken with. Then when we go to the street, put your arm about me as if I were overcome with the expected emotion. . . . It would be strange but possible if later I discovered that I cared for him deeply in spite of. He thought that he could create his own circle of light.

LEONARD: Miriam, what are your actual plans?

MIRIAM: I have no plans. I have nowhere to go.

[With abrupt violence, she wrenches the bracelets from her arms and flings them to her feet. The stage darkens.] (pp. 52-53)

One need only recall the endings of other of Williams' plays
with their talk of "going on from here," to recognize how radical a departure Tokyo Hotel really is. No other major Williams play closes on so negative a note. It is possible to see in the play, in the death of Mark and the implication of Miriam's suicide, a dramatization of the death of both the flesh and the spirit. That is not, however, the opinion of Donald Newlove, who sees in Williams' late work "a process of transformation only great artists pass through to achieve their summits" and finds that process mirrored in the character of Mark Conley. That Mark dies is not intended to indicate the death of vision, but rather the fear that the artist's resources, physical and emotional, will not be equal to the task imposed by artistic vision and dedication to craft.

Newlove comments further on Williams' late plays, Kingdom of Earth, Slapstick Tragedy, and most specifically on In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel:

... nothing like it since Strindberg's last letter. It's from the Upper Waters... his work has become illuminated... Tennessee is suffering but he is writing the plays that he was finally meant to write. These are the plays. Not some other ideal claptrap the critics are waiting for. This is the work that they want and they don't know it when they see it... All you really have to do after the play ends is close your eyes, and wait for the symbols to start to glow in memory, and that is what the play is all about. Not showstop, not intellectual, not aesthetic—just a memory of glimmering symbols, because those touchstones are what led the playwright through the play. They are drops of his spiritual light, pulling him toward the divine end of his marriage with the King within him. Play by play, the playwright finishes a little part of his work. And his work is to change himself into something

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56 Newlove, p. 176.
more than a man—or else he's less than an ant. In brief, he wants to become a spirit, a pure spirit, the spirit of his works, a spiritual spirit."

Williams has no more impassioned nor subjective a champion than Donald Newlove. Still, Newlove has identified the major theme of the play—the attempt to rise above the human. That is the motive that is the core of Mark Conley's character, just as Miriam Conley represents the demands of a human life tied to the desires of the body, the desire for approval, for affection, for companionship, even for sexual union. And the play pits the demands of the body against the demands of the artist's spirit, a conflict made evident in the following interchange that occupies the climactic position immediately before the intermission curtain:

MIRIAM: — Are we two people, Mark, or are we—

MARK: [with the force of dread]: Stop there! [She lifts her hands to her face, but the words continue through it.]

MIRIAM: Two sides of!

MARK: Stop!

MIRIAM: One! An artist inhabiting the body of a compulsive—

MARK: [itch: (p. 30)

Mark and Miriam are a single divided person; indeed that divided person furnishes an analogue for the two bars that form the cross. This idea of character is substantiated by an enigmatic remark by Williams' psychiatrist during an interview conducted by Newlove shortly after the opening of

\[57\text{Ibid.}, p. 178.\]
In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel: "I believe that you are nailed to your skeleton, and that I am nailed to mine, and that many men have acted out this mystery for us. And Tennessee Williams is acting it out for us again." 58

Newlove theorizes that Williams' title means "On the Cross at the Gates of Heaven." 59 That judgment is probably correct, though "in the bar" implies that the setting of the play is a place of judgment. The suggestions that the play represents a kind of crucifixion are strong ones; Mark's artistic passion is equated with the passions of Christ. Mark, the "X" with which an illiterate signs his name, is easily translated into a cross. The mark functions too as an emblem of other, un-named artist-seekers. Mark paints naked on "a huge nailed-down canvas" (p. 17). Mark's first line is: "No chair for me at the table" (p. 14). Read "No room for me at the inn." In his last speech, Mark says: "Fini" (p. 50). Read "It is finished." Thus, Mark's first and last words equate him with Christ.

Also, Miriam designates Mark as "the man who has made a crossing" (p. 53). The line is the most direct indication that the implications of the cross include the idea of a crossroads, and a frontier—the point at which new directions are accessible, at which new creations are possible. Mark stands "in the bar," in the crossroads; his new vision contains something that Mark fears, though it contains, too,

58 Ibid., p. 66. 59 Ibid., p. 76.
the artistic imperative to create further: "I feel as if I were crossing the frontier of a country I have no permission to enter, but I enter, this, this! I tell you it terrifies me! Now! In the Beginning" (p. 19). Mark has used the phrase "In the beginning" a few moments before. The repetition of the line serves to reinforce the allusion to the opening verse of the Bible, the verse that precedes the divine fiat "Let there be light."

For the moment, human concerns have been eclipsed for Mark. His attention is directed toward ultimates, towards the first and the last. Light is the major constituent of his new vision. He speaks of Michelangelo's painting of the creation; then he indicates his own theme as "The creation of the creation of the creation" (p. 48). The light of the beginning will persist even after the end. Mark tells Miriam: "I've heard that finally on earth there'll be nothing but gigantic insects but now I know the last things, the imperishable things, are light and color" (p. 24). Quite obviously Mark has touched and is attempting to render in his painting the reality that underlies the phenomenal reality with which we are all familiar, the conventional reality that comprises Miriam's "circle of light." Miriam, the body bound up with its inertia, fears the fading of the light of common reality. At one point she tells the Barman, "For light in your eyes be grateful" (p. 5). Accordingly, she must see Mark as "A man raging in dark!" (p. 39). She cannot understand the demands imposed by Mark's vision. To
Miriam, Mark's light is darkness. She acknowledges that Mark's creativity is "a mystery" (p. 27) that she cannot understand. Thus she cannot consent to the visionary quest represented by Mark. She is necessarily unsympathetic to Mark's attempts to explain to her.

Van Gogh had closed his last letter with: "Well, my own work, I am risking my life for it and my reason has half-founndered." Mark tells Miriam, "An artist has to lay his life on the line" (p. 22). Miriam responds by changing the subject, by recalling the first time that they made love together. When Mark says that he was "always willing to . . . die," the audience is aware that he means that he is willing to die for his work. Leonard, attempting to bring about a reconciliation between his client and the client's wife, tells Miriam that Mark is "willing to die" for her (p. 45).

Now, if Williams' play were merely about the vocation of a painter, the play would not be relevant to the present study. But, the many suggestions that the play is a version of the story of the Christ make the play religious. The nature of the new comprehension of reality identifies more specifically the brand of religion with which the play is concerned. Mark's discovery of color and light, his crossing of a frontier, is cast in terms that are associated with the long tradition of mystical experience.

The emphasis on light is one clue as to the nature of

60 Irving Stone, pp. 479-80.
Mark's experience. Light has long served as a symbol of the Divinity, so much so that the Bible is filled with images of light that represent the knowledge of God. In mystical literature, the single image that the mystic most often resorts to in order to render his experience, an experience that is by definition non-sensory and non-intellectual, is light. Mark's lines identify the light that he sees with the light of creation and the light that will persist after the passing away of all things human. Light and color, "the imperishable things," (p. 24) are thus eternal. That Mark's visionary reality is eternal and timeless equates his vision with the mystical experience.

The most conclusive aspect of Mark's vision, however, is the quality of unity, of oneness, that Mark finds:

MARK: For the first time, nothing that sep, sep!

MIRIAM: Are you trying to say separates?

MARK: Yes, separates, holds at some dis!

MIRIAM: To translate your incoherence, holds at some distance, is that it?

MARK: You understand what I'm trying to say. . . . I've understood the intimacy that should, that has to exist between the, the--painter and the--I! It! Now it turned to me, or I turned to it, no division between us at all any more! The one-ness, the!

MIRIAM: Are you hysterical? . . .

MARK: There was always a sense of division till! Gone! Now absolute one-ness with! (p. 17)

Mark's earlier failure to achieve the intimacy that he is presently experiencing is similar in kind if not in degree to one of Van Gogh's problems. When Van Gogh ques-
tions the nature of the creative process, he concludes that "it is working oneself through an invisible iron wall that seems to stand between what one feels and what one can do." Mark's explanation deals with a more intense level of consciousness. Miriam mistakes for hysteria what amounts to a very exact, albeit commonplace and orthodox, description of mystical consciousness, a state of consciousness that Mark holds in common with Christopher Flanders. That Mark lacks the instruction that Chris had from his Hindu guru accounts for the terror that he feels for the direction that he feels himself impelled toward. Except for the sense of excitement and expectancy that are a part of Mark's experience, his contact with mystical reality is rather like that of Forster's Mrs. Moore. She too had found that what she had undergone "began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life," her hold on the commonplace reality that Miriam calls her "circle of light." Mrs. Moore, too, suffers an alteration of consciousness, an alteration of a sense of reality, that resulted in her being removed from the concerns of ordinary human life. She comes to be isolated from all of the other characters in Forster's novel. In fact, she experiences the kind of isolation imposed upon Christopher Flanders and Mark Conley. And like Mark Conley, Mrs. Moore glimpses a new reality and then dies.

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62 Forster, p. 149.
We must now consider the conclusions that may be drawn from Williams' play. The two halves of a single person are presented so that they are rather like the two halves of a magnet. Miriam represents the extreme attachment to the body and to phenomenal reality. Mark represents the extreme disaffection with the body in favor of the inclination toward a sense of reality identifiable as mystical consciousness.

The kind of conflict that we are attempting to explain may be clarified by a recent statement made by Williams. He says that a characteristic problem of writers is that they "are paranoid, because they're living two lives—their creative life, which they are most protective of, and their life as a human being. They have to protect both lives."\(^6^3\)

However, Mark's death is qualified by his symbolic identification with Christ, whose death is not an end but a beginning. Both Christ and Mark Conley say "It is finished." Still, both men may be designated as "the man who has made a crossing." However, the death of Mark anticipates the death of Miriam. She has vowed that when her attractiveness is ended, she will kill herself. The last event in the play is her tearing off the bracelets that are "insignia of attraction persisting."

One death is enacted; another is implied. It is possible to interpret these events to signify that the two aspects of the Outsider personality are mutually dependent and

\(^6^3\)[C. Robert Jennings], p. 82.
that one cannot, even through mystical consciousness, leave the world of human beings and phenomenal reality. Still, Mark's identification with Christ will not allow such a conclusion. Thus, the situation at the end of the play is this. The fates of the two characters are decided; both Mark and Miriam die. There is no question that the sensual life that Miriam has led is ended. Mark, however, not content with the reality within which Miriam had her being, "thought that he could create his own circle of light." And perhaps he did. The play says no more than perhaps. The play is dramatically conclusive, but there is no philosophical conclusion. To the degree that the play represents the religious problems of the Outsider's quest for meaning, all that we may finally conclude is that the play dramatizes a step in a progress. The quest itself goes on.

Donald Newlove, ever the sympathetic commentator, sums up his own reaction to Williams and the failure of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*: "I feel pity for Tennessee, spaced out in The Plaza drapery with his play dying. All that money from the backers sinking—because he wanted to write a poem to God."^64

Williams' next full-length play, *Small Craft Warnings*, is, according to Williams, a minor work. Some of the themes that this study has dealt with are treated there, but that play does not contain anything to take us beyond the conclu-
sions dramatized in *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. **Small Craft Warnings**, an expanded treatment of a play in *Dragon Country* entitled *Confessional*, takes place in a bar on the coast of Southern California. The characters are a collection of derelicts, the "small craft" of the title. In simple terms, the conflict of the play is between a brand of cynicism that is the death of life and a kind of interest in humanity that can be the life even of death. Two characters typify the two responses to life. Quentin, a homosexual, has reached the point at which life holds no more surprises. His total response to life is, "Oh, well." Leona, an aging and unattractive itinerant hairdresser summarizes much of the play's philosophical content when she says: "I never just said, 'Oh, well,' I've always said 'Life!' to life, like a song to God, too, because I've lived in my lifetime and not been afraid of... changes..." (p. 55). The other characters in the play gravitate toward one of the two extremes. However, the idea that life itself can lead to a stultifying indifference that constitutes a kind of death was at the heart of other of Williams' plays, notably *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

The play also includes a surprising recurrence of the theme of the failure of the Messiah that was so large a part of the work of Williams' early and middle period. Before

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65Tennessee Williams, *Small Craft Warnings* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 47. Future references to this edition will be included within parentheses in the text.
the character Doc leaves Monk's bar to deliver a baby, he tells the other patrons: "Tonight, as I drove down Canyon Road, I noticed a clear bright star in the sky, and it was over that trailer court, Treasure Island, where I'm going to deliver a baby. So now I know: I'm going to deliver a new Messiah tonight" (p. 36). The child is so premature that it is scarcely recognizable as human. Doc puts the fetus into a shoe box and leaves it for the tide to dispose of.

Expectedly, the major motive that is dramatized in the play is the Will to Meaning. And characteristically, that theme is treated partially in sexual terms. The most pathetic rendering of the theme in question is involved in the character of the feeble-minded Violet who fondles the male bar patrons under the cover of the tables. Leona, in a line to Monk, the proprietor, advises the proper attitude toward Violet: "Well, I guess she can't help it. It's sad, though. It's a pitiful thing to have to reach under a table to find some reason to live" (p. 70).

The play was greeted as a comeback of "America's greatest living playwright." Notes appended to the published version of the play indicate the degree to which the play does indeed represent a comeback, both an emotional and professional comeback. Those notes also recount the production history of the play. After a preview in Bar Harbor, Maine, in the summer of 1971 (p. 79), the play moved to New

York. After it received generally good reviews, the play
changed theaters (p. 86) only to be closed later to make
room for a previously scheduled opening of the review Oh
Coward.67

In March, 1973, Williams' latest full-length play
opened in New York. Out Cry is a vastly revised version of
The Two-Character Play that had been produced in London and
in Chicago. The critical response has been cool: two good,
six bad, several mixed reviews.68 The play concerns a
brother and sister team who, when deserted by the rest of
their company of actors, must perform the only "two-
character" play in their repertory. Like other of the late
plays with which this study has dealt, the play is difficult.
Clive Barnes notes that the play is "deliberately static, but
moving." He gives the play a "chance of survival." If the
play should fail, Barnes feels that the failure will be, at
least in part, due to a peculiarity of the American theater
audience. Although the greatest American playwrights have
written poetic drama, the American audience prefers its
poetry "to have been translated from the Elizabethan, or
Greek, or Norwegian." Such a preference, Barnes warns, may
lead to that audience's "missing the glory in the artifice."69

67 [C. Robert Jennings], p. 72.

section 2, p. 6, cols. 3-6.

69 Clive Barnes, "Theater: Deliberately Static but
Clive Barnes' concluding remarks may serve as a suitable conclusion to this section of the present study: "Undoubtedly 'Out Cry' is a very brave and difficult play. It is not ordinary Broadway fare, and seen in the context of Broadway show business its situation and its poetry, its demands on ears and mind, may seem to many merely pretentious. Yet this is an adventure into drama which many, perhaps the majority, will scoff at, but some will find stimulating. Minorities, needless to say, are not always wrong."  

\[\text{70 Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

On January 11, 1969, Tennessee Williams, an Episcopalian since his childhood, became a Roman Catholic. The event was widely reported, and became the occasion for numerous comments, few of them kind. In its own way, Williams' change of faith was the coming true of a prophecy made over a century ago. Alexis de Tocqueville, though he could not have envisioned such a man as Tennessee Williams, would have recognized in America's foremost playwright a condition that he had found to be incipient in the American experience. Few historians or prophets have seen so clearly the tendency toward which American democracy has moved; accordingly, Tocqueville's comments have become more and more pertinent with the passage of time. Robert W. Corrigan finds great significance for the theater in Tocqueville:

"All the searchers for communion have either forgotten or have refused to accept the truth that de Tocqueville told us long ago, that 'not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine

him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."

Tocqueville's assessment of the American future has proved to be true, so true to our present experience that his century-old words are an eloquent rendering of the theme of loneliness that Tennessee Williams designates as his primary theme. ³

Tocqueville also predicted that the loneliness of the American experience would eventually impel Americans, as a sort of last resort, into the community of the Roman Catholic church. ⁴ Perhaps another of Williams' themes of the later plays can help to explain why the prophecy has not come true. A theme of increasing importance from the time of Sweet Bird of Youth was the idea that life itself is of such a nature that we construct defenses that are transformed into something like cages. In order to live we most often inure ourselves to those very experiences that constitute a life worth living. Thus, in one sense, Williams believes that the fall of man is perpetual. In the words of another great moralist, the problem may be put in this way: "Where is the Life we lost in living?" ⁵

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Williams himself has fought valiantly against the encroachment of such indifference. It is a mark of Williams' objectivity that in his recent *Small Craft Warnings* he could present his own problem so directly and candidly as he did in the character of Quentin, the homosexual who had lost the capacity to respond to life in a vital way. Leona, who says "'Life!' to life," represents the other side of the conflict, a conflict that is probably not yet resolved for the Outsider playwright. But neither is that conflict resolved on a national scale. As time passes, it may be that Quentin and Leona will emerge more clearly as two of the archetypal representations of American experience in the 1960's and 1970's.

Williams' sensitivity continues to make him vulnerable to the stress of American life and to the solitude that Tocqueville predicted. There can be little doubt that Williams' conversion to Roman Catholicism, though partially the result of the emotional imbalance that he was suffering in the late 60's, was also a response to the loneliness that has been the keynote of his life and work from the very beginning. While many commentators have questioned the sincerity of Williams' conversion, those few people who were truly familiar with Williams' work were not surprised.

Williams is still a Roman Catholic, but his Catholicism is certainly not orthodox. It could not be. Williams' work performs the function of a religion for him, much as it did for Ernest Hemingway. Williams' later plays evolve a mystique of the artist-priest that has been matched by few
other writers. In a recent interview, Williams comments upon his conversion, in terms that confirm much of the present study:

I would love confessionals if I could get up at that time, but writing is a confessional, and I feel that I confess everything in these interviews. What is there left to say. My brother Dakin had me converted to Catholicism when he thought I was dying; it did me no harm. I've always been very religious; I was religious as an Episcopalian and I'm still religious as a Catholic, although I do not subscribe to a great many of the things you are supposed to subscribe to, like the belief in individual immortality. Nor in the infallibility of Popes. I think Popes are among the most fallible people on earth, so this is heresy, isn't it? And yet I love the poetry of the Church. I love to go into either a high Anglican service or a Roman Catholic service. And I love to receive communion, but I'm usually working Sunday morning—so I take communion at funerals.

Add to the foregoing comment the following note from a piece of correspondence dealing with Small Craft Warnings, and what emerges is a rather comprehensive, if impressionistic, profile of Tennessee Williams: "I think we need a later opening than is now scheduled. I have always opposed an Easter Sunday opening for very personal but understandable reasons."  

Of course Williams loves the poetry of the Church, for the poetry of the church is the poetry of his drama. The figure of Christ and the passion of the crucifixion are as much at the center of Williams' art as they are at the

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6 [C. Robert Jennings], p. 84.

center of the Mass. At the risk of melodrama, one might even characterize Williams' late plays as elaborate and ritualistic Masses for the soul of suffering humanity. Williams has bought them by his own suffering and has cast them in terms commensurate with his own unique vision of reality. Few men of the twentieth century could quote with more authority the line from Walt Whitman: "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there."\(^8\)

To comprehend the role of suffering in the life and work of Tennessee Williams (and pain is the keynote of Williams' drama), we must look to William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, to a passage that is quoted in Wilson's *The Outsider*:

Recent psychology...speaks of the threshold of a man's consciousness in general to indicate the amount of noise, pressure, or other outer stimulus which it takes to arouse his attention at all. One with a high threshold will doze through an amount of racket by which one with a low threshold would be immediately waked.... And so we might speak of a 'pain threshold,' a 'fear threshold,' a 'misery threshold,' and find it quickly overpassed by the consciousness of some individuals, but lying too high in others to be often reached by their consciousness. The sanguine and healthy minded habitually live on the sunny side of their misery line; the depressed and melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension.

These conclusions lead James to question further:

Does it not appear as if one who lived habitually on one side of the pain threshold might need a different sort of religion from one who habitually lived on the other?


\(^9\)William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. 

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James' question is rhetorical. The answer is obvious. The present study has attempted to describe the process whereby Tennessee Williams, an Emotional Outsider characterized by the kind of intense sensitivity that James describes in the metaphor of the threshold, has set about the finding of such a religion.

The first Chapter of the study attempted to substantiate a number of observations. First, a survey of the philosophical climate of the twentieth century revealed the not very surprising conclusion that religion and religious institutions had ceased to occupy a central place in the mainstream of twentieth-century thought. Philosophy attempted to fill the resultant void by way of Existentialism, a philosophy that points generally to despair both as a condition and as a philosophical conclusion. Without ignoring the spectrum of thought represented in the Existentialists, it is reasonable to say that Existentialism ends by pointing to the self as the sole source of value; what emerges is a sort of formal theory of despair, a sort of rendering of the story of Job from which the divinity has been extracted.

At the same time that philosophy was assaulting the void, psychology, revitalized by the theories of Sigmund Freud, attempted something like the same thing. Freudianism, however, proved to be a cul-de-sac, for the codified view of human behavior that Freud evolved was another version of the

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specter of mechanism and determinism. Neither Existential philosophy nor Freudian psychology succeeds in filling the hiatus that is the result of the decline of religion. However, both Freudianism and Existentialism furnished terms within which we could grasp our world and our place in it—even though the position toward which they directed us was unsatisfactory.

However, in the mid-twentieth century, certain thinkers began to apply the doctrines of phenomenology to the data of human experience; the resultant conclusions were dramatic. The work of Viktor Frankl and other allied psychologists began to challenge the principles of Freudianism at their most basic level. The result was Frankl's conclusion that the basic motive of the human personality was not the Will to Pleasure, not the Will to Power, but rather the Will to Meaning. The source of emotional and psychological problems came again to be seated within a realm that was undeniably religious. Frankl locates man's problems not in the frustration of the sexual impulse, not in the frustration of the impulse to dominate, but rather in the frustration of the most basic of human motives, the Will to Meaning, the will to believe.

An examination of Williams' work has shown that the playwright and the psychologist concur. The Will to Meaning that Frankl formulates is dramatized repeatedly in Tennessee Williams' drama. It receives its most forceful statement in characters like Hannah Jelkes, who identifies Shannon's prob-
lem as "the oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone," or in Christopher Flanders, who attempts to bring to Mrs. Goforth, "something to mean God," or in the visual image that precedes the intermission in Iguana, the image of Shannon's "reaching-out hands."

As Frankl was making his reevaluation of human psychology, Colin Wilson applied the techniques of phenomenology to the study of a certain personality type called the Outsider. Wilson's description was found to be applicable to most of Williams' protagonists, and to the degree that Williams' work is descriptive of himself, to Williams himself. The Outsider, a sort of superior misfit, was found to be characterized by a kind of consciousness that Wilson attributed to health, though he granted that Outsiderism might exhibit the same symptoms as emotional disorder. More particularly, the Outsider, especially the Emotional Outsider, exhibited a set of perspectives characterized by extremes. He was inordinately impatient with "life-as-it-is-commonly-lived," an attitude that was verified in the Outsider's experience by the sense that his vision was deeper, more truthful, and more valid than the vision of the majority of people who make up human society. It is this aspect of the Outsider that, coupled with intellectuality, leads to Existentialism,

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12 Williams, Iguana, p. 78.
both of the brand propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre and by H. G. Wells in *Mind at the End of Its Tether*.

However, when the Outsider demonstrates his extremity in Emotional terms, his view of reality becomes doubled and exhibits the emotional grasp of existential despair and the affirmative contact with those moments of exhilaration that are at the heart of most of the poems of the Romantic period, moments which Abraham Maslow later called peak experiences. The result of such a personality's expressing itself in art is to be found in the pattern of vacillation between moments of despair, of the condemnation of life, and those moments of "yea-saying" and affirmation when life seems a *priori* to be a thing of value permeated by meaning. Such vacillation is to be found in the works of Outsider artists from the late eighteenth century to the present, in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and later in Hemingway, Camus, Faulkner, Eliot, and Tennessee Williams. In the graphic arts, the major example of the dual vision of the Romantic Outsider is to be found in the work of Vincent Van Gogh. Wilson characterizes the conflict exhibited by such artists in terms of a question: "Ultimate Yes or Ultimate No?"13 He grants further that for most Outsiders the tendency toward negation ultimately triumphs over the tendency toward affirmation. The usual end of the Outsider, if he persists in his Outsiderism, if he refuses to adapt himself to life as it is lived by

other people, is madness and death. The situation is treated in stark terms in Wilson's commentary on Van Gogh:

For Vincent the battle was never conclusively won; the day he painted a chair 'as no one else ever painted it', he bickered with Gauguin and wrote an irritable letter to Theo; at other times it was simply that there was no hope of his painting ever contributing to his support, and the painting suddenly seemed hopeless and bad. His last words to Theo are the words of a man who feels that defeat is inevitable, that life is a baited trap; who kills himself to escape the necessity of taking the bait again. The last canvas is more than a landscape tinged by a mood of depression and fatigue; it is a summary of life as he knew it; his judgment is: No. 14

No one who has ever experienced the painter's Wheatfield with Crows can doubt the truth of the final judgment that Wilson attributes to Van Gogh.

For the Outsider, religion becomes a matter of survival; that has been the tacit implication of much that has been said about Tennessee Williams in the course of this examination of his works. Beginning with the assumption that Frankl's psychology was identical to Williams' and that Wilson's Outsider was descriptive of Tennessee Williams and his major protagonists, this study has moved through a series of steps.

Chapter II provides an interpretation of Williams' first professionally produced play, Battle of Angels, and the revised version, Orpheus Descending, that was produced seventeen years after the original. The examination of the two plays led to certain conclusions, the principal ones being

14 Ibid., p. 90.
that the tragic figure in Williams' first play represented the life-affirming aspect of the Outsider personality. Thus, Val Xavier is life, opposed to Jabe Torrance, who is death. Val comes to be killed not so much as a result of his actions--the play is not a play of consequences, of action and response--but rather as a result of his very life-affirming nature.

Williams had found in the psychology of Wilhelm Reich both the description of a set of circumstances and a metaphor adequate to render his view of reality. Reich said that all attempts at life affirmation are resisted by the condition of the world, a condition that he equates with a disease, the Emotional Plague. Reich finds that the archetypal figure of life-affirmation is Christ. Thus, the crucifixion of Christ is perpetual. Such a view was compatible with Williams' own Southern and religious upbringing as well as his own experience of life, experience characterized by isolation and by suffering.

Williams' hero was cast in such terms that he was unmistakably a Christ figure. The symbolic implications of that role fulfilled a number of functions. First, the association of Christ with Val considerably elevated the importance of Williams' character. Secondly, the implication that Val's death was indeed a crucifixion pointed up Reich's conclusion that the crucifixion was perpetual. Thirdly, the religious dimension of the leading character pointed to a certain kind of tragic figure--the term tragic is to be understood in the
generalized sense in which it is currently used. Val came to experience a violent death that was the result not of his actions, but of his nature. He was the forerunner of many similar tragic protagonists. Williams' view of tragedy and his conception of tragic characters has led him to write plays that are more and more static, less dramatic, more emblematic, less problematical, more ritual. To varying degrees, Williams' plays have maintained the focus on Christ and on the crucifixion. As a result, there are few of Williams' plays that do not picture the Messiah in some fashion or other.

The production of Williams' first play was a dismal failure. There are indications that Williams attributed that failure to the reluctance of his audience to accept what he has since designated as the "religiosity" of the play. Whether or not the process was conscious and intentional, Williams' strategy changed after Battle of Angels. The religious concerns persisted, but they were more implicit than explicit.

In the plays that stretch from Glass Menagerie to Camino Real, Williams shifts his attention from the deliverer to those who have need of deliverance. The pattern that repeats itself in the plays of this period is that of a protagonist, characterized by suffering and isolation, who looks to some other person as a redeemer. The imagery of the plays equates that person with the Christ. The Christ that is implied is ironic. He is not the Christ of theology and ortho-
dox Christianity, for he repeatedly fails to serve as deliverer for the protagonist: Jim fails Laura, Shep fails Blanche, John fails Alma. Though the pattern emerges repeatedly, the theme of the failure of religious salvation is treated in such terms that it is not always central to the plays involved: indeed, the Christ symbolism is very subtly implied, most often through isolated images, and very often the character who emerges as Christ is conspicuously inappropriate in that role.

Once the images are acknowledged, we see that Williams has indicated a dimension of character that is sometimes not essential to the plays involved. We may infer from such a technique that Williams' religious preoccupations had been driven underground by the failure of his first play.

After Williams had secured his position in the American theater, he returned to explicitly religious themes and characters. In Chapter IV, two plays were examined in which the explicit Christ figure re-emerges as a major character. However, a curious change had taken place, for in Suddenly Last Summer and Sweet Bird of Youth the major Christ figures are Satanic, not protagonists but antagonists. Boss Finley and Sebastian Venable emerge as serious parodies of the Christ of Orthodox Christianity.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams casts Sebastian Venable as Christ. Sebastian, believing that he has seen God in the spectacle of the birds and turtles on the tropical beach, sets out in a premeditated way to act out the implicit
commandments of the god he has seen. His decision ultimately leads to his being killed and partially eaten by a band of street children in Spain. His death, cast as it is in such terms as suggest the crucifixion and the communion service, indicates that momentarily at least Williams was considering the idea that God was evil, that Christ was evil, and that the only hope for humanity was somehow vested in the virtues of Catherine Holly. Despite her position, Catherine continues to subscribe to the belief that truth itself has redeeming value, and that the proper personal response to the world is to mitigate the awful nature of reality by practicing the Christian ethics of Charity—of love, concern, and the desire to help those who are in need.

Boss Finley, the demonic, Satanic Christ of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, appropriates the Christ role for himself as a means of solidifying his political position and justifying his Fascist, dictatorial tendencies. Chance Wayne, too, is given a Christlike dimension, but that dimension is diluted to a great degree for it is not as Christ that he is crucified; rather, it is because we are asked to see his fate as a crucifixion that we can grasp that he is a kind of Christ.

During this period, Williams continues to make use of the ideas of Wilhelm Reich but in a rather diluted fashion. The major theme of *Sweet Bird of Youth* is that life itself is debilitating. Born open and responsive to life and to other people, our very maturation leads us to erect defenses that serve to divert the pain that seems the human lot.
Paradoxically, however, our defenses against pain act to prevent our realization of those aspects of life that might give life some value. Thus, in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, age and youth take on moral value, and the progress of the play becomes Chance Wayne's gradual discovery of his own loss of the moral virtues of youth. His sole recourse, his sole means of arresting the process of moral decay, is his conscious choice of death, a death that is rendered minimally heroic by comparison to its alternative and by the association of Chance with Christ. The moral victory belongs to Chance, but the dramatic conflict is resolved in favor of the demonic Christ, Boss Finley. Chance Wayne succeeds only in identifying a corruptive element in the process of maturation. He identifies the enemy as Time; but he finds himself unable to transcend time or to reverse the process of corruption that he finds even in himself.

Despite the pessimistic view that is dramatized in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Williams seems to have been looking for a way out of the conclusions that his observations had led him to. Accordingly, he has one character, the very significant but undeveloped character called the Heckler, deliver a line that would seem to remove from God whatever blame might accrue from the state of the world. The Heckler says, "I believe that the silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the whole world is lost because of."[15] The mere identification of a problem

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does not constitute an answer. However, *Sweet Bird of Youth* concludes that God is not at fault, and that transcendence of time is at least a possibility, though it might only be possible to "saints and heroes."

Chapter V treats Williams' pursuit of answers in the direction indicated by the terms in which he had identified the problem. Williams began a steady movement toward the East. In two of the plays of the late period, the period that begins with *Night of the Iguana*, Williams goes beyond the beliefs dramatized in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Again the problems of the Outsider are dramatized, this time in the character of the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, a man who is vulnerable to all of the pain in the world. So much has he come to identify with suffering humanity that he plays the role of the Christ in agony. Hannah Jelkes, the spokesman of reason in the play, partially disperses Shannon's masochistic self-dramatization. She passes on to him certain values that she has derived from experience; significantly, much of that experience has been garnered in the Far East. She counsels acceptance of all things human excepting the unkind and the violent. She advises that one may endure those periods when the suffering and the isolation are greatest. She leads Shannon to see that his self-involvement has kept him from the realization that his vision of life as a dung heap is only half the truth. Unsure herself of the existence of God, she tells Shannon that one may nonetheless find something to believe in through contacts with other
people. She dramatizes Williams' message that existence may be made bearable by human beings meeting each other within an atmosphere of concern and respect. She voices Williams' opinion that there is meaning to be found in the human context of the world if human beings can succeed in breaking through their own isolation in order to meet another person outside their largely self-erected obstacles to communication.

In *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, Williams arrives at the destination that retrospectively seems his goal from the beginning. In Christopher Flanders, Williams creates a man who has largely come to terms with life and the cosmos. As Hannah had brought certain truths to Shannon, Chris Flanders brings a set of truths to Flora Goforth. Chris's message is cast in terms of orthodox Hindu mysticism. He counsels that one develop a degree of mystical consciousness that allows one to experience the universe as a whole, as a thing in itself, a thing that is not accessible to moral judgments. The divinity is to be found in such consciousness, and that divinity resolves all conflicts. *Milk Train* goes beyond the conclusion of *Sweet Bird of Youth* that God is silent. *Milk Train* reaches the orthodox mystical conclusion that identifies God with the silence.

Williams' later plays do not take us beyond the conclusions of *Milk Train*, and those are that one may achieve a sort of religious consciousness leading to an acceptance of the state of the universe. That acceptance may be rendered more positive by a commitment to a life designed to help
other people. The play dramatizes a merger of Oriental mysticism and Christian ethics.

In the light of the observations proposed by this study, it should be clearly established that it is certainly possible, and probably advisable to view Williams' total work as the embodiment of a continuous, sometimes strenuous, religious quest. The limitations of this study have precluded careful examination of Williams' minor work— the short plays, the poetry, and the fiction. The minor work has, from the beginning, been the area in which Williams could work more freely both in terms of ideas and style; this aspect of Williams' work probably accounts for the fact that many of his major works have evolved from short stories and one-act plays. The minor work, not intended for professional presentation, and therefore not bound by the economic considerations implicit in the production of a major play for New York audiences, has approached religion far more directly than do the major plays.

There is to be found in the minor work, in such collections as One Arm, Hard Candy, The Knightly Quest, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, In the Winter of Cities, and Dragon Country, a more explicit treatment of the religious themes than that which has been traced throughout the major work. Though Williams himself has said that his best writing is to be found in the minor work,16 no adequate study has been made of the

work in question. When critics come to study that work seriously, much of the present examination of Williams' work will undoubtedly be additionally substantiated.

A study of this sort often ends in the discovery of questions equal in importance to those which prompted the original exploration. The most pressing question for the moment is this: Granted that Milk Train stands as the summary of all that Williams has garnered from the religious quest that is embodied in his work, does that play mark the end of the quest, or is that quest to continue?

There is much that is contained in the conclusions of Milk Train that would not appear to be completely satisfactory to the sort of man that Tennessee Williams is. Williams is a sentimentalist par excellence (In this context the word sentimentalist must be understood to contain no pejorative connotations). The plays for which Williams is presently most admired achieve the stature that they have primarily because they succeed in evoking a sympathetic response toward people for whom we would normally feel little sympathy. Williams' heroes are often not very nice people. Tom Wingfield is, after all, a young man who deserts his mother and sister after the desertion of his father has already left the family in rather desperate circumstances. Blanche DuBois is a woman whose past offers all of the evidence that we need to condemn her. Big Daddy is a rather coarse, crude man, redeemed only by his love for his son and his overwhelming appetite for life. The Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon is a man whose re-
igious quest has often been interrupted by his seductions of the women on his tours. The nature of the characters who people the world of Tennessee Williams is a clue to his concept of theater, and even that concept has much of the religious about it. Williams has explained to us that he views the theater as the context for an experience that borders on the sacramental:

Yet plays in the tragic tradition offer us a view of certain moral values in violent juxtaposition. Because we do not participate, except as spectators, we can view them clearly, within the limits of our emotional equipment. These people on the stage do not return our looks. We do not have to answer their questions nor make any sign of being in company with them, nor do we have to compete with their virtues nor resist their offenses. All at once, for this reason, we are able to see them! 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...

Herein Williams explains to us the intent of his work. Further, he explains the difficulty of working to bring forth the response that he aims at: "So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensibility of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue."18

It seems credible that Williams might reject the conclusions that he reached in Milk Train. Though he has evolved a religious philosophy that is, in many ways, com-

17Williams, Three Plays, p. 6.
18Ibid., p. 7.
parable to the middle-path of Buddhism, the path between the extreme of materialistic submersion in the world of matter and the senses and the opposite extreme of other-worldly asceticism, there is no assurance that Williams will stop at this point. The Oriental view of the nature of reality may be accepted as a truth, but there are irrelevant truths. There is little in Oriental mysticism that would seem to be amenable to the sort of elevated emotionalism with which Williams and his characters are endowed. Love and sympathy hardly seem the proper responses to the transcendent reality that is the content of the mystical experience. There can be no emotional identification with a level of reality that may be described equally well as consisting of no-thing and every-thing.

In the past, Williams' forte has been intense emotional identification with the world and the people that he portrays. As Williams' drama now stands, the later work does present a strange incongruity—in fact, the same incongruity that we grasp when we consider that the central image of Western Christianity is the tortured form of the crucified Christ, while the essence of Oriental religions seems to be best summed up in the meditative and passive attitude of the Lord Buddha in the seated lotus position. The images of the Christ and the Buddha offer analogues to the styles within which Williams has cast his drama. Streetcar is analogous to the first image; In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel is analogous to the second. If the evolution of style that we
find in Williams' plays of the sixties were really what it appears to be, we might find support there for concluding that Williams' tendency toward mysticism will continue. In point of fact, however, the Spartan style of Tokyo Hotel and other plays in Dragon Country is not new. Several of the plays in the 1946 collection 27 Wagons Full of Cotton exhibit the same characteristics of style that make Tokyo Hotel seem to be eccentric to Williams' major work. There is the same compact, allusive, ritualistic dialogue delivered by people who are not so much abstractions as depersonalized and, if the word may be permitted, essentialized characters. The spare, stark, Hemingwayesque lines of Tokyo Hotel do not differ in kind from those of such early plays as "The Purification" and "Auto-Da-Fé." Thus, we may draw no convincing conclusion from style, for Williams has always made use of such a style, though he has not done so in major plays intended for professional production. Thus, the question that has been raised must be left unanswered. The religious quest may continue; Williams may have additional religious directions to indicate to us. Williams is not an aged man, and his family is noted for longevity. It is possible that the major work is yet to come. Considering the sort of experience that is embodied in Williams' plays, one might judge that Tennessee Williams is presently in the position that might allow him to write plays of a degree of maturity unprecedented in the American theater. George Bernard Shaw lived to be ninety-four and Ibsen seventy-eight. While they were not the same kind of
Outsider that Williams is, they were, according to Colin Wilson, Outsiders. Their quest persisted to the end.

In the course of this study certain similarities between Williams and other twentieth-century writers have been indicated. In conclusion, let us return briefly to four of the modern writers with whom Williams has most in common: Camus, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Eliot.

Like Camus, Williams finds the modern world to be absurd. With Williams, the term is more descriptive than ideological. However, Camus' Absurd void that falls between our aspirations and our realized actualities is the same void that Williams' characters sense and attempt to bridge in various ways. Williams and Camus share the tendency to see the world as made up of two classes, the murderers and the victims, a theme that is treated extensively in Camus' The Rebel. The two men also share an attitude toward time. A major step in the recognition of the Absurd is the identification of time in relation to the perceiver. Camus says that once one truly acknowledges time, "he belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it." 19 The line is an interesting gloss to the character of Chance Wayne in Sweet Bird of Youth.

Another correspondence between Camus and Williams has

to do with their conception of the role of the artist in society. One must recognize Williams' sentiments in Camus' credo: "... the legions of the persecuted throughout the world—they need all those who can speak to communicate their silence and to keep in touch with them. ... But from my first articles to my latest book I have written so much, and perhaps too much, only because I cannot keep from being drawn toward everyday life, toward those, whoever they may be, who are humiliated and debased. They need to hope, and if all keep silent or if they are given a choice between two kinds of humiliation, they will be forever deprived of hope and we with them. ... We must simultaneously serve suffering and beauty. ... His [the artist's] very vocation, in the face of oppression, is to open the prisons and to give a voice to the sorrows and joys of all."²⁰

Faulkner and Williams are not so much similar as they are complementary. In one sense, Williams continues the work of Faulkner. Faulkner's greatest theme is probably the progressive estrangement of man from the earth upon which he lives. His major work chronicles the period during which America was breaking the ties with the land that Faulkner deemed essential to human virtue. Thus, his work treats of the progressive and perpetual fall of man. Williams locates the same fall of man within the individual. However, Williams' drama is a continuation of Faulkner to the degree that

²⁰Ibid., pp. 150-51.
it is a drama that takes its material from an America that has become so increasingly mobile that Vance Packard has lately called America "a nation of gypsies." One need only recall the number of Williams plays that are set in public places (rented apartments, hotels, barrooms, town squares, theaters) to realize the degree to which his drama derives from a world which is post-Faulknerian, but which is not divorced from the past of Faulkner—it is an extension of that past.

Hemingway and Williams are so much alike in so many respects that the failure of commentators to explore the connections is very surprising indeed. In recent months, Williams has acknowledged his debt to Hemingway. Asked about writers who have "exerted a special influence" on his work, Williams replied: "Hemingway was, without any question, the greatest. . . ." There can be little question that the style that is used in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel owes more to Hemingway than to any other writer. In addition to the stylistic influence, there is also considerable thematic similarity that may be derivative of Hemingway. The wasteland world of Hemingway's early novels has much in common with the settings of Williams' early plays. Both men are highly critical of a world that they see as militating against values that had been realized in the past. Both men evolve

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22 [C. Robert Jennings], p. 82.
an idea, a code, that pleads the case for an archaic but admirable code that is, in the largest sense, chivalric. Both men share that characteristic with Faulkner. A purely personal opinion, one that is not likely to be proved, is that Williams' portrait of Fred Faulk in *Night of the Iguana* is based on Hemingway.

Surprisingly, the single American writer who is most similar to Tennessee Williams is T. S. Eliot. Both indicate a strong religious sensibility. Both begin with a pessimistic view of the world as a wasteland devoid of human or religious values. Both move through a series of steps that take them ultimately to the idea that mystical religious consciousness is a means of dealing with the problems of life. In Williams, the distance between the beginning and the end is the distance between *Battle of Angels* or *Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. In Eliot, the quest stretches from *The Wasteland* to *Ash Wednesday*. It is not unlikely that Williams' movement toward Eastern mysticism was partially inspired by the directions that were supplied by T. S. Eliot.

Another element that is shared by Williams and Eliot has to do with the difficulty of their work and the audience that the work might find. Both writers make demands upon the reader or viewer; those demands are often so great that the audience who is willing to meet them is small. While a poet may write for individual readers, a playwright must address audiences. Tennessee Williams chose to write for a medium
within which esthetic concerns are most often secondary to commercial ones. For a time Williams' progress was such that his plays could serve both his ends and the theater's. After *Night of the Iguana*, however, Williams began to move in directions that resulted in the rather steady attrition of his audience. Thus, at the very point at which Williams began to say more, he began to say it in ways that were more difficult, less accessible, and less acceptable to American theater audiences. Williams is no longer a popular playwright in either sense of the word *popular*. However, the theater remains a medium of popular entertainment. Williams' present position in the theater is comparable to that of Ingmar Bergman in cinema. Neither man commands an audience of great size. However, Bergman, working in film, can afford to do as he wishes with the assurance that his audience will find him. A playmaker has no such assurance.

Tennessee Williams has shown considerable versatility and even more considerable staying power. There is no question that Williams is America's greatest living playwright. Williams is assured a high position in the history of modern drama—so much of American drama consists of Tennessee Williams that it could not be otherwise. The direction that his subsequent plays will take is as yet not clear. The direction of the criticism of those plays is, however, not so disputable. We will continue to find the value that is in Williams' work, and many critics will hopefully find value where they had not seen it before. Critics can help audiences...
to find that value too. Then, perhaps we can repay Mr. Williams for the insights and entertainment that he has given us. Then, perhaps we can relieve Tennessee Williams of his most pressing present need, a need that he has lately stated with such regularity that we cannot fail to grasp its importance: "I have a need to convince the world that I still exist. . . ." Modesty, too, is one of the attributes of Tennessee Williams.

\[23\] Ibid., p. 80.
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VITA

Henry R. Beasley was born on May 22, 1939, in DeQuincy, Louisiana. He was awarded the Bachelor of Arts from McNeese State University in 1961, and served as an officer in the United States Army from 1962 until 1964. In 1965, he was awarded the Master of Arts degree from Louisiana State University. Presently, he is a Special Lecturer and a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Henry R. Beasley

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: An Interpretive Study of the Religious Element in the Work of Tennessee Williams

Approved:

[Signatures]

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

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