ILLUSION AND REALITY THEME
IN SELECTED PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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INTRODUCTION

When Tennessee Williams was asked to comment on the themes in some of his plays, he stated

> I have never been able to say what was the theme of my play and I don't think I have ever been conscious of writing with a theme in mind. . . . Usually when asked about a theme, I look vague and say, "It's a play about life."[1]

Williams' evasive answer is more succinct than one first suspects, for his plays are about life. Like Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and other prominent American playwrights, Williams is concerned with man's conflict between illusion and reality. According to Esther Merle Jackson, one of the themes running through much of Williams' work is "a fundamental internal antagonism, an inner conflict between experience and meaning, poetry and logic, appearance and reality."[2] Critics agree that Williams' greatest talent lies in the creation of Southern characters, a part of a decaying society, who are alienated from modern society and forced to escape into their illusions in order to avoid reality. Because of the importance of Williams' characters, this thesis will deal mainly with the theme of illusion versus reality as

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[1]Tennessee Williams, "Questions Without Answers," New York Times, October 3, 1948, Sec. 2, p. 3.

[2]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 157.

evidenced by analysis of the characters.

In analyzing Williams' characters, such critics as Frederick Lumley have compared Williams' concept of illusion versus reality to that of Luigi Pirandello. Pirandello's works indicate his belief that "truth cannot be described objectively or explored scientifically" and that illusion "is a positive and indeed indispensable element amid circumstances that render existence wretched and all but unbearable."[3] He shows sympathy with those who suffer and to whom life is impossible without "creating a mask, imposing a fictitious reality, reshaping the image of the self."[4] Pirandello has labeled this process "'costruirsi', to build one's self up."[5] His collection of plays is entitled Naked Masks to emphasize the conflict between the make-believe and the real. Pirandello's work shows understanding and compassion with the characters who suffer from the conflict between illusion and reality. With the aforementioned facts in mind, selected plays of Williams will be analyzed in an effort to determine which of Pirandello's concepts are evident in them.

The theme of illusion versus reality was used by many writers other than Pirandello, and because the American theatre

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[3]Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, eds., Masters of Modern Drama (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 508.

[4]Ibid. [5]Ibid.

is extremely eclectic, the influence of other writers on Williams should also be considered. Illusion versus reality has been important to many different playwrights, including Shakespeare and the more recent existentialist playwrights. According to Lumley, while Williams may have looked to Pirandello as his master, he, like other American playwrights, has integrated these teachings with those of other playwrights. Thus, these American playwrights "have already the appearance of having started an American school in its own right."[6]

Williams' understanding of the problems involved in determining what is illusion and what is reality in the minds of his characters stems from his personal experiences. His first play is based upon the personalities and problems of members of his family, and these characters and their problems are repeated in many of his other plays. Signi Falk states that "he is more closely akin to the romantic spirit of Thomas Wolfe, who wrote mostly of himself and his own experience" in the South.[7] Therefore, any analysis of Williams' view of life includes some biographical information.

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[6]Frederick Lumley, Trends in Twentieth Century Drama (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1960), p. 193.

[7]Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1961), p. 26.

In addition to analyzing his characters, investigating the influence of other playwrights who emphasize illusion and reality, and examining pertinent biographical information, this thesis will also investigate Williams' use of poetic and theatrical images to further his theme of illusion versus reality. Critics agree that Williams makes frequent use of poetic symbols and images. Concerning his theatrical and poetic devices, Nancy M. Tischler comments,"in a technique reminiscent of Chekhov's, Williams heightens the emotional truths of the scenes and the reality of the internal action through unusual external effects."[8]

While the conflict between illusion and reality is prominent in many of Williams' plays, for the purpose of this thesis three prize-winning plays plus one which received belated critical acclaim will be discussed. On March 31, 1945, Williams' play The Glass Menagerie appeared on Broadway and was immediately successful. The thirty-one-year-old playwright won the New York Drama Critics' Circle prize for the best American play of the 1944-45 season.[9]

Two years later, A Streetcar Named Desire had its Broadway premire on December 3, 1947. Streetcar was the first

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[8]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), p. 103.

[9]John Gassner, "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration," College English, X (October, 1948), 1.

American play to win all three theatrical awards: the Pulitzer prize, the New York Drama Critics' Circle prize, and the Donaldson award. Streetcar was also produced in Rome, Brussels, Stockholm, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Melbourne, and Paris.[10] Because it has also appeared twenty-six years later, in May, 1973, at the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, the continued popularity of this play is obvious.[11]

Following Streetcar, Summer and Smoke opened on Broadway on October 6, 1948, Although it did not receive as much critical acclaim as the two previous plays, it was praised by Joseph Wood Krutch and Brooks Atkinson. Many critics however, panned it. Yet when Summer and Smoke returned to New York four years later, it became the most highly acclaimed off-Broadway production of 1952. Jose Quintero's theatre-in-the-round production, like the original Margo Jones production, and convinced critics like John Gassner of the value of the work.[12]

The final play to be examined, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,

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[10]Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), pp. 191, 192.

[11]Jack Kroll, "Battle of New Orleans, "Newsweek, (May 7, 1973), p. 109.

[12]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, pp. 160, 162.

opened on Broadway on March 24, 1955.[13] Most of the critics felt that Cat was the work of a more mature artist. Brooks Atkinson believed that Williams, after his period of experimentation, was now a competent craftsman. He also stated that "seldom has there been a play in which the expression of thought and feeling has been so complete." Cat, which won for Williams his second Pulitzer prize and his third Critics' award, was also produced in Europe.[14]

All of the plays under examination deal with the protagonists' conflicts with illusion and reality. Laura and Amanda in Glass Menagerie, Blanche in Streetcar, Alma in Summer and Smoke, and Brick in Cat, members of a decaying society, are unable to cope with reality. In view of the fact that all the protagonists in these plays appear to use the costruirsi in order to cope with reality, investigation of the other well-drawn characters in the plays may lead to some conclusions about Williams' view of man. Furthermore, critics like Benjamin Nelson and John Gassner agree that Williams' creation of his characters is extremely objective.[15] Inasmuch as Williams'

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[13]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams Vol. III (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1971) III, 11.

[14]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 211.

[15]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work, (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), p. 148; John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 363.

characters maintain opposing views of reality, investigation of this fact may suggest some conclusions about Williams' view of reality.

CHAPTER I

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

In The Glass Menagerie Tennessee Williams gives an autobiographical account of the Wingfield family who take refuge in their illusions in order to avoid facing reality. The problems causing each member to escape reality, as well as those of the gentleman caller whom they would like to make a member of the family, are well developed. Laura, the daughter, escapes reality by living in her world of the glass menagerie and listening to her father's old records; Jim, Laura's gentleman caller, escapes reality by following the quest of the American Dream; Amanda, the mother, escapes reality most often by living in her memories of the past; Tom, the son, escapes reality by going to the movies and writing poetry until he eventually follows in the footsteps of his father who long ago escaped their world of illusion.

Tom, the narrator, who is the author, Williams, describes this flight from reality. He begins by stating that not only do the individual characters live in illusion, but "America also was matriculating in a school for the blind."[1]

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[1] Tennessee Williams, "The Glass Menagerie", in Masters of Modern Drama, ed. by Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd (New York: Random House, 1962), i.993.

Americans are escaping reality at the "Paradise Dance Hall"[2] and are only mildly concerned with the serious labor problems, while at the same time the Spaniards are being slaughtered at Guernica. In the 1930's Americans deluded themselves at the dance halls with hot swing, liquor and sex; and while these unsuspecting kids danced to "All the World is Waiting for the Sunrise," "all the world was waiting for bombardments."[3] At the dance hall a huge glass sphere slowly rotates, filling the darkened room with delicate rainbow colors which mesmerize the dancers and draw them away from reality just as Laura's glass menagerie deceives her.[4]

The character of Laura is based on the life of Williams' only sister, Rose. Rose was Williams' constant playmate and companion while they were growing up in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and was symbolic to him of everything beautiful and fragile.[5] When the family was transplanted from their Southern town to the Midwest, Rose, as is characteristic of the delicate flower for which she was named, did not survive the transplant. However, she did escape periodically back to the South. On one

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[2] Ibid., v.1002. [3] Ibid.

[4] Ralph Capasso, "Through a Glass Starkly," English Journal, LVII (February, 1968), 211.

[5] Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), p. 24.

of these visits she attended a masquerade party dressed as a Christmas tree in a "gown of green tarleton flounces covered with little tinkling glass ornaments, mostly animals."[6] Rose also possessed a collection of glass animals which represented to Williams and his sister

> . . . all the softest emotions that belong to recollections of things past. They stood for all the small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive.[7]

Rose, as indicated in the character of Laura, left public school and later attended secretarial school where she was also unsuccessful. Both Rose and Laura were jilted by a young man; both were subject to stomach pains and vomiting which proved to stem from psychological causes. Rose eventually was unable to cope with life, and when she retreated permanently into her illusions, she was institutionalized.[8]

Laura, like the person from whom her character is drawn, is unable to cope with life. Crippled early in life, she suffers a physical problem parallel to Rose's mental affliction. Because Laura's brace sounds like thunder to her, it prevents her from taking an active part in school activities and from

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[6] Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), pp. 54-55.

[7] Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXIV (February 16, 1948), 113.

[8] Edwina Dakin Williams, pp. 56-57.

being able to communicate with the popular student Jim. When she is told six years later that Jim, the football hero with whom she is enamoured, is coming to her home for dinner, she again hears thunder. The thunder, then, is symbolic of Laura's feelings of inadequacy because she is unable to communicate with Jim.[9]

Jim, described by Tom, is "an emissary of a world of reality,"[10] while Laura, on the other hand, is a fragile girl who lives primarily in the imaginary world of her glass menagerie. Like the Lady of Shallot, who views life through a mirror, Laura views life through her glass world. Williams had read the "Lady of Shallot" at twelve years of age when he was attempting to avoid the unpleasantness of the real world;[11] thus the poem may have influenced Williams. Laura, like the Lady, is content with her glass reflection of life. Laura's glass menagerie, like the Lady's mirror, is a satisfactory substitute for reality until she sees Jim, her Sir Lancelot, again. Jim, like Sir Lancelot, is from the world of reality. When Jim appears that evening, Tom describes

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[9]Capasso, p. 210.

[10]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, i.993

[11]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 29.

him as having the "polished look of white chinaware,"[12] just as Tennyson compares Lancelot to "some bearded meteor, trailing light."[13] When Jim asks the crippled Laura to dance with him, she accepts his invitation, just as the Lady accepts the challenge to become a part of reality by taking the stream of life to Camelot. And, just as the Lady's "mirror cracked from side to side,"[14] forecasting her death, Laura's glass unicorn also breaks, forecasting her broken heart.

Laura identifies herself with the unicorn because it is different from the other glass animals just as she is different from other people. When Jim accidentally breaks the unicorn's horn, the element which made it unique, Laura is not disturbed, for she remarks that now it is like an ordinary horse. Her calm acceptance demonstrates her desire to be an ordinary person. This desire proves to be impossible, however, for Laura "is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."[15]

Laura, according to Williams, was named for a fragile,

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[12] Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, vi.1004.

[13] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," in Poetry of the Victorian Period, ed. by Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods (Glenview Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1965), p. 18.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 99.

beautiful lady whom Williams used to visit in his childhood. In one of her rooms multi-colored pendants of glass hung. When he went to visit her, she would lift him up to shake the glass and hear its delicate music.[16] Laura and Rose were both gentle, frail, beautiful women who were withdrawn from society and whom Williams associated with music and glass. From his experiences with these gentle women, Williams knew that to such hypersensitive people, the momentary rejection, like that of Jim's, would deal a crushing blow. For Williams, then, ideal beauty is far too fragile to survive the harshness of the world of reality.

When Laura lives for a few minutes under the illusion that she will know the love of this big dazzling Irishman, the stage properties used in this scene are significant. The theatrical device Williams uses demonstrates further Laura's illusion of marriage. The candelabra placed on the floor before them are from "the altar at the church of the Heavenly Rest."[17] Before the altar candle they drink dandelion wine and eat macaroons; their actions may be symbolic of taking communion. At this time Laura makes her love known to Jim

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[16]Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 3-4.

[17]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, vii.1010.

and eventually gives him the unicorn, symbolic of herself. Jim, in turn, kisses her and offers her a ring of peppermint.

Ironically, this illusory union is as close as Laura will ever come to the altar of love or of marriage, for at the end of the play Tom tells her to blow out her candles and she does. It is ironic that sensitive, perceptive Laura, who is always cushioning the blows between Amanda and Tom, has no one to soften the harsh blow of reality from Jim when he tells her he is already engaged to marry someone. Another theatrical device, which Williams uses to indicate Laura's abrupt return to reality, is the mother's song. Amanda comes in singing "Lemonade, lemonade. . . . Good enough for any old maid!"[18] Although Jim states that "the power of love . . . changes the world," this fact will not be true for Laura. Although this philosophy is a favorite concept of Williams, Signi Falk observes that in this situation the author undoubtedly intends to be ironic. The only lover Laura will know will be in her world of illusion.[19]

Jim, unimaginative, but with fewer psychological problems than the other characters, is not sensitive enough to realize what he has done to Laura. While he represents reality, he is

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[18] Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, vii.1015.

[19] Signi Falk, "The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams," Modern Drama, VIII (December, 1958), 176.

also the illusion of the "long delayed but always expected something that we live for."[20] Since Jim did not marry Laura, he is symbolic of a dream that does not materialize. Jim, the most realistic character in the play, ironically represents the greatest illusion.

In high school, Jim, furthermore, was voted the one most likely to succeed; yet six years later he works with Tom, the dreamer and poet, in a shoe factory. Jim believes in the American Dream, that everyone has the opportunity for success, however; and he attends night school classes in public speaking in an attempt to fit himself for an executive position. Jim hopes he is able to take advantage of the American Dream, but he also has nagging doubts that he may be six years too late.

Williams' use of artificial light symbols is a device to indicate Jim's self-deception. Through Laura's and Jim's reminiscences with The Torch, the high school yearbook, we see that Jim was often in the "limelight," and that he had moved "in a continual spotlight."[21] While his hopes for tomorrow lie in television, another form of artificial light,

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[20] Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, i.993.

[21] Capasso, p. 212.

he works presently in a factory, which Tom describes as a "celotex interior! with--flourescent--tubes!"[22]

Jim not only deceives himself, but he unconsciously deceives the Wingfields also. Jim's appearance to the Wingfields as "polished white china" is further deception, for he is not their shining knight. In spite of his illusions, he is too realistic, too much a part of the modern mechanical world to be a part of the Wingfield world of dreams and fears. The exuberant and optimistic Jim can understand the quiet, unhappy Laura only in terms of something sadly artificial and unreal like "blue roses."[23] Jim, furthermore, speaks often of the American Dream, the world of the future, a world which Laura fails to acknowledge. Laura cannot face tomorrow and the reality of what will become of a young woman who will not make an attempt either to support herself or to marry someone who will support her.

Amanda, on the other hand, is realisticially well aware of the enemy: time. She warns Tom "that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it."[24] Amanda believes

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[22]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, iii.998.

[23]Ibid., vii.1011.

[24]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 28.

that time can be outmaneuvered with illusion as shown in her effort to deceive the gentleman caller. The futility of her efforts, however, indicates that she does not succeed in this manner. Because Amanda fears the future, she escapes into the illusory past and frequently recalls the days when she was a young Southern belle.

The character of Amanda is based upon Williams' mother, who recalls her youth in the South.

> Life is as unpredictable as a dream. Once I was young and gay and danced night after night with beau after beau, the belle of the ball. Then a handsome young man from a fine family came along, fell in love the first time he saw me and asked my hand in marriage. How was I to know this charming youth would turn into a man of wrath. . . . How prepared was I to meet an anguish I never dreamed existed, not in my wildest nightmare?[25]

Edwina Williams, depicted in Amanda, married a man in uniform who also became employed by the telephone company and brought her a great deal of unhappiness. Furthermore, both Edwina and Amanda are Regents of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The most important similarity between Williams' mother and the characters in the play, however, is that both women had difficult times adjusting to the lack of social prestige they had in St. Louis, a town of the <u>nouveau riche</u>, after having been popular young belles in old established Southern cultures.[26]

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[25] Edwina Dakin Williams, p. 88.

[26] <u>Ibid</u>., pp.30, 75, 183, 185.

Many of Williams' female characters are forced to cope with the problem of being forced to adjust to a new set of social values. In order to combat this enigma, many of his characters, like Amanda, use illusion to escape reality. Amanda clings to the illusion that she could have married any one of her many suitors if the charming man in uniform had not swept her off her feet. She is so convinced of the reality of her illusion that when Jim comes to dinner, Amanda puts on an aged yellow dress that she wore at a Southern Governors' ball and coquettishly treats Jim as if he were her gentleman caller.

One Southern myth which Amanda dramatizes is the idea that the Southern woman believed that a proper lady was exceedingly puritanical.[27] When Tom tries to explain to her that man is by instinct a hunter, a fighter, and a lover, she becomes extremely upset. Amanda believes that the word "instinct" should be used to describe an animal, not a Christian gentleman. This conflict between body and spirit, common to many of Williams' works, shows the influence of D.H. Lawrence upon Williams. Further proof that she finds his novels animalistic is shown when Amanda, like his own mother, chastizes Tom for

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[27]Robert Emmett Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), 213.

reading a D.H. Lawrence novel.[28]

While Williams has stated that "an author can always write with impunity about mothers," this play is obviously "in part an attack on the institution of motherhood."[29] Amanda's lack of encouragement for her son's aspirations to write poetry is evidence of this fact. She keeps Tom trapped at the shoe factory by her constant reminders that she depends upon him to support Laura and herself. Amanda constantly nags Tom by instructing him on how to eat his food, by criticizing his selfish spending on cigarettes and movies, and by ordering him to "rise and shine"[30] each morning. This last order is the author's pun on Tom as the son.

While the author paints Amanda as a dogmatic, garrulous old Southern belle, he also gives her vitality and endurance which makes her the most moving character in the play. The illusions of the paradoxical character cause her to be "both Laura's disease and her brace."[31] Amanda's determination that Laura can marry or support herself keeps Laura near the

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[28]Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D.H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (London: Mouton and Co., 1966), p. 79.

[29]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1969), p. 26.

[30]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, iv. 999.

[31]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p.100.

brink of reality, but Amanda is also the major barrier which forces her to remain in her illusions. Amanda will not permit Laura to face the reality that she is crippled and is thus unlike other young women. She refuses to allow the word crippled to be spoken about Laura or to acknowledge that other people find Laura peculiar. By her failure to discuss these problems, she enlarges them in Laura's mind.

Amanda's efforts to find Laura a husband, while unrealistic, are heroic. Her efforts stem from her own unhappy experience as a deserted woman who now has no husband and is not equipped to support herself. Amanda believes that a husband, like a fish, can be caught for Laura if they create the proper bait. Thus she shares no expense or time in preparing the apartment, a new dress for Laura, and a lovely meal, and in creating for Jim the illusion that Laura made all the preparations for the evening. Laura is so over-excited by her mother's extreme efforts and the shock of seeing Jim again that, ironically, she is too sick to enjoy the meal.[32]

Amanda lives in further illusions, one of which concerns her husband. Though deeply hurt by his desertion, Amanda still believes that he is the essence of romance and associates him with that marvelous time in her youth when the house was full

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[32]Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 73.

of jonquils and gentleman callers. Amanda keeps her husband's smiling, youthful picture displayed and because she has not seen him grow old and change, she attempts to make time stand still with her romantic image of the past.[33] Amanda is aware, however, that appearance and reality are not synonymous, for she admits to Tom that "that innocent look of your father's had everyone fooled!"[34] On the other hand, Amanda is unaware that by frequently berating Tom for not having his father's neat appearance and manners, she forces him to act like his father and leave the family.

Although the character of the father is only sketched by the statements of the other characters, the presence of his photograph and his influences on the illusions of others are important to the play. Irony is evident in the situation where the father's smiling face, frequently illuminated by a spotlight, watches constantly over the Wingfield household; yet he, by his absence, is the source of many of their problems. Mr. Wingfield, like Williams' father, was the source of many of his family's problems, C.C. Williams was a charming, extroverted salesman who drank a great deal to escape reality.[35] Nancy M. Tischler believes that only the father's photograph appears in the play because it "represents the standard view the

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[33]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 96.

[34]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, vi.1004.

[35]Edwina Dakin Williams, p. 202.

outside world caught of the gay, soldierly C.C. Williams, whom his son hated so much that the sweetness would have gone out of the play if he had been included."[36]

Tom Wingfield does not have a disparaging view of his father, however, for he states in the narrator's preface to the story, "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances. . . . and skipped the light fantastic out of town."[37] He also mentions that the last they heard from him was from romantic Mexico. Tom's concern with his father's wanderlust at the beginning of the play prepares us for his own departure at the end. Tom's departure is foreshadowed by his uniform of a merchant seaman when he first appears as the narrator.[38]

While Tom Wingfield's attitude toward his father differs from the attitude of Tom Williams (Tennessee Williams' real name), there is smple evidence that this character is based upon the author. Tom Wingfield worked at The International Shoe Company in the play and earned $65 a week just as Tom Williams did during the Depression. Williams' unhappiness with his life at home and at the shoe factory, furthermore, forced him to escape reality often through the movies and through his poetry. Williams' problems became so acute that his final escape from

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[36]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 96.

[37]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, i.993.

[38]Kappo Phelan, "The Stage and Screen," Commonweal, LII (April 20, 1945), 17.

this situation came through his first nervous breakdown.[39]

In creating the fictional alter-ego, Williams speaks from first-hand experience about the dilemma of a poet living in the machine age. Tom's escape from the shoe factory, according to John Gassner, is "a necessary and wholesome measure of self preservation."[40] Tom, however, does not arrive at this conclusion until the end of the play. Tom, like Hamlet, is an observing, reflective man who is seeking truth and the answers to his own identity. Shakespeare reveals Hamlet's character by showing the possibilities of action and his inability to act.[41] Williams also shows the poet Tom, who must decide whether or not to remain trapped at the shoe factory by his obligations to his mother and sister, whom he is unable to save from their predicament, or to leave and attempt to save himself. Tom admires his father and Jim because they are realistic men of action, just as the poet Hamlet admires Fortinbras because he is a realistic man of action.

Tom attempts to escape reality by going to a stage show only to discover that even there he is unable to avoid his

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[39]Edwina Dakin Williams, p. 62.

[40]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 98.

[41]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 85.

problem. By describing the magician at the stage show, Williams states that Tom's choice is between escape and death because Tom discovers that

> . . . the wonderfullest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail. There is a trick that would come in handy for me--get me out of this two by four situation! . . . You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?[42]

In answer to Tom's question, "the father's grinning photograph lights up."[43] A further example of Tom's feeling that he is being buried alive is found in the statement to his mother that "every time you come in yelling that God damn 'Rise and Shine! Rise and Shine!' I say to myself, 'How lucky dead people are!'"[44] Tom sees his home and work as a coffin in which he endures a living death.

In this coffin-like environment, Amanda keeps bringing the beautiful but dead past into the present. Tom is embarrassed by his mother's behavior when she dons the old garb of her Southern belle days and noticeably flirts with Jim. He understands the truth of his mother's and sister's problems, however, better than any other character in the play. He is

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[42] Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, iv.999.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Lester Beaurline, "The Glass Menagerie," Modern Drama, VIII, (September, 1965), 145.

aware that his sister is vulnerable because of her extreme sensitivity. The stormy relationship between Amanda and Tom is difficult and hurts Laura because she is caught in the middle trying to keep peace in the family. Tom realizes that he cannot prevent hurting her in spite of his love for her. An example of this problem is seen during an argument between Amanda and Tom, when the son flings his coat across the room and accidentally hits Laura's glass collection. Tom's action results in "a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura cries out as if wounded."[45] This scene shows that Laura's world, symbolized by her glass menagerie, will always be subject to accidental blows from her brother as long as he is desperately unhappy.

In spite of Tom's understanding of his mother and sister, he remains powerless to act until, ironically, his mother, steeped in her illusions, makes the most harsh and realistic statement in the play. She berates her son, who believes he is a realist:

> Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go--to the movies!

She concludes, "Go, then! Then go to the moon--you selfish

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[45]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, iv.998.

dreamer!"[46]

When his mother forces him to face reality, he is finally able to reject the possessive love of his family which has kept him imprisoned. He then avoids the illusive adventure of the movies and he leaves for authentic adventure in the merchant marines. Leaving by the fire escape, "a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth." Tom escapes the apartment containing "the slow and implacable fires of human desperation"[47] that he refers to at the opening of the play. While the fire escape is the medium through which the gentlemen caller appears and the place where Amanda and Laura wish on the moon for happiness, it does not offer escape for Amanda or Laura.

Although there is no evidence in the play that Tom is able to reconcile himself to leaving Laura, by joining the merchant marines he admits that his escapes to the movies were only illusive efforts for adventure, and, therefore, he stands closer to the truth than at the beginning of the play. Tom's statement, "nowadays the world is lit by lightning,"[48] indicates the existentialist belief that change in man will come by gaining truth and taking action. Tom gains

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[46] Ibid., vii.1016.

[47] Ibid., i.992.

[48] Ibid., vii.1017.

some degree of self-knowledge and takes action. Inasmuch as light symbolizes knowledge, Tom is stating that the world gains knowledge through lightning, a natural, active force. Laura, on the other hand, will always prefer her glass menagerie, a reflection of light and action and an illusion of truth. The candles, another form of artificial light, when blown out at the end of the play, will leave her in darkness with no hope for enlightenment.

The fact that none of the characters is able to deal with the harshness of reality without some illusions shows the Pirandellian concept of man's necessity for illusion. The subjective view of reality experienced by Williams' different characters reflects further the influence of Pirandello. For example, Amanda, steeped in the Southern tradition of the importance of the family, believes that family love can only prove a positive force for Tom and that his leaving would be escaping his responsibilities to her and Laura. Tom, on the other hand, discovers that the love and responsibility of the family are inhibiting his ability to be a creative and happy person and, because of these circumstances, he is not able to contribute anything more to the family than an insufficient income. According to Frederick Lumley, Williams, like Pirandello, shows illusion

carefully nursed and insensitively destroyed as in the case of Laura.[49] Laura carefully preserves her unique glass unicorn and nurtures her love for her high school idol, while Jim, the emissary of reality, inadvertently destroys both.

Tennessee Williams' play, based on his own experiences, is an attempt to deal with truth. This purpose is obvious when Tom states,

> Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.[50]

This idea is further indicated in the production notes to the play, which state that

> truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.[51]

Williams then justifies expressionism on the basis that subjectivity provides an "approach to truth." He believes, furthermore, that no playwright should use such devices in an effort to avoid the "responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience."[52]

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[49]Frederick Lumley, Trends in Twentieth Century Drama (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), p. 195.

[50]Tennessee Williams, Glass Menagerie, i. 993.

[51]Ibid., p. 991

[52]Ibid.

Although Williams uses expressionistic devices through poetic symbolism, symbolic stage lighting (as used in the father's picture), and symbolic stage properties (as described in the love scene between Laura and Jim) in order to support his theme of illusion and reality, his treatment of his characters is realistic. Williams' dialogue and stage directions require a realistic method of acting. Since the action of the play evolves from the characterizations rather than plot, which is comparatively insignificant, their importance to the play is paramount. His understanding of the characters and their illusions, gained from first-hand experiences and other literary sources, is his most powerful aid in representing his concept of reality. While to some authors close association with the characters causes too much subjectivity and their personal experiences fail to hold enough objectivity to have universal meaning to others, this fact is not true of Tennessee Williams. As stated by John Gassner,

> Williams exhibits here much strength of mind and objectivity. Sympathize though he does with his failures, he recognizes that one can not accept their quiescence and bumbling. . . . The author was attached to his characters to such a degree that he could make them move us deeply, but he was also detached enough to locate them in time, place, and necessity.[53]

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[53]John Gassner and Bernard F. Dukore, ed., A Treasury of the Theatre, Vol. II (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1970), p. 1077.

Williams, like Eugene O'Neill and Thomas Wolfe, proves that he can create art out of his most personal experiences and that through his examination of a family's illusions and reality, the author states some basic truth about mankind.

CHAPTER II

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

In A Streetcar Named Desire Williams presents two opposing views of experience: the realistic view of Stanley Kowalski and the illusory view of Blanche Du Bois. Realism, however, is equated not with truth but with nature, which is brutal and undefinable.[1] The conflict between the views of Stanley and Blanche is established at the opening of the play and indicates that reality is subjective. Jack Kroll, in a recent issue of Newsweek, states that Williams found in Blanche and Stanley "the perfect objective correlatives for these opposites and he created one of the few authentic protagonist-antagonist relationships in contemporary theatre."[2]

Like Amanda, of Glass Menagerie, Blanche represents the decadent Southern aristocrat, and Stanley, like Jim, represents modern society. Also, as in Glass Menagerie, Williams uses elements from his own life in the play. He chooses to set his play in the French Quarter of New Orleans where he lived and watched the streetcars named Desire and

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[1]Alvin B. Kernan, "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theatre: Chekhov, Pirandello, and Williams," Modern Drama, I (September, 1958), 111, 113.

[2]Jack Kroll, "Battle of New Orleans," Newsweek, (May 7, 1973), 110.

and Cemetery travel back and forth on the same track. "Their indiscourageable progress up and down Royal St.," the playwright explained, "struck me as having some symbolic bearing of a broad nature on the life in the Vieux Carré--and everywhere else, for that matter. . . ."[3]

The names involved in the setting of Streetcar indicate a combination of stark realism and mythical fantasy in that the Quarter is an actual part of contemporary society, but the street on which the play is set, Elysian Fields, is the name of a Greek mythical paradise. In Elysian Fields, a pre-Christian primitive paradise antedating the development of good and evil, life and passion were one and good. In this setting, the play may be considered a protest against conventional morality.[4] It is a protest of the romantic Blanche--a Southern aristocrat who cherishes her decayed plantation home, Belle Reve (beautiful dream) and understands the meaning of Elysian Fields -- against Stanley, who understands only the reality of the New Orleans slum street and labels Blanche a whore.

As in Menagerie, Williams uses Luigi Pirandello's concept of illusion and reality in that illusions are first

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[3]Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), p. 30.

[4]Joseph N. Riddel, "A Streetcar Named Desire--Nietzsche Descending," Modern Drama, VI (February, 1963), 423.

carefully nurtured and then brutally destroyed. Blanche in this manner is ruined by Stanley.[5] Also like Pirandello's characters, each character must nurture some illusions in order to cope with reality. Blanche, like Pirandello's Henry IV, is aware that she dons her illusions to protect herself against reality. Blanche tells Stanley at the beginning, "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion."[6] Later she says,

> I don't want realism. I want magic! . . . Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what ought to be the truth. And if this is sinful, then let me be damned for it![7]

The rape of Blanche by Stanley, who believes that by this act he will force her to face reality, is compared to the shock treatment that Henry receives from the doctor in order to force him to face reality. After the confrontation with harsh reality, Blanche and Henry escape into madness.

Like Henry, Blanche chooses a role to play and plays it to perfection. As a Southern belle she is dated because her speech and mannerisms are ridiculous and passé. Her

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[5]Frederick Lumley, Trends in Twentieth Century Drama (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1960), p. 195.

[6]Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire , in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol. I: (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1971), ii. 281.

[7]Ibid., ix.385.

peculatities, however, represent her illusion of the mythical Southern lady. While they alienate her from modern society because she is an anachronism, they allow her to identify herself as someone special. She must convince herself that she is superior to others, and by this act she alienates herself from others. Elia Kazan compares her to the heroines of medieval romances as revived by the English Pre-Raphaelites. "Because," Kazan says, "this image of herself cannot be accomplished in reality, certainly not in the South of our day and time, it is her effort and practice to accomplish it in fantasy."[8]

Williams concurs with Kazan when he says that

> It appears to me, sometimes, that there are only two kinds of people who live outside what E.E. Cummings has defined as "'this so-called worlds of ours'--the artists and the insane."[9]

Blanche represents the artist when she compares Stanley to primal man and says to Stanley's wife,

> 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

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[8]Elia Kazan, "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," in The Passionate Playgoer, ed. by George Oppenheimer (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 344.

[9]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 17.

> some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In the dark march toward whatever it is we are approaching. . . . Don't--hang back with the brutes![10]

Not only can one identify with the role Blanche plays as representing the artist within each of us, but she is also universal in that she is a middle-aged woman who fears the loss of her beauty. She constantly contrives for compliments about her appearance because she needs frequent assurance that she looks as she did ten years ago. This behavior then furthers the appearance and reality theme.

Blanche's masquerade behind a facade of fastidiousness is another method of defending herself against the horrible reality of her soiled past. Her obsessive bathing is symbolic of her desire to wash away the guilt of the sexual affairs, including one with a young school boy, and her cruel verbal attack upon her homosexual husband which caused him to take his life.[11] Because she can not reconcile her actions with the image she has of herself, she refuses to acknowledge them and lives in the illusion that she is still a virgin. Joseph Riddel refers to this fact as her "psychological ingrown virginity."[12] When Stanley admits that he was born under Capricorn, the sign of the goat and sexual prowess, Blanche, whose name means white and symbolizes

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[10]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, iv.323.

[11]Riddel, p. 426.

purity, claims she is born under Virgo, the Virgin.

Blanche also goes to great lengths to convince Mitch, Stanley's friend, that she is a pure, genteel lady. She will not admit to him that her excessive drinking is a means to escape reality. Accordingly, she tells Mitch that she never has more than two drinks. Even when Mitch tells her that Stanley has complained that she has "been lapping it up all summer like a wild cat,"[13] she continues to drink the Southern Comfort.

Blanche can not come to terms with reality but tampers with the truth to suit her illusion of herself, just as she covers the light bulb with a Japanese lantern to suit her illusive world. Williams, as in Glass Menagerie, uses light to symbolize illusion and reality. The bare electric light bulb symbolizes stark reality which Blanche is unable to confront without illusion. After Mitch has been enlightened by Stanley about Blanche's past, Mitch cruelly removes the protective covering which Blanche has carefully placed there and reveals every line in her face. Blanche, in order to conceal her age, has refused to see Mitch except in the dim light of night. Williams states in the stage instructions before Blanche's first entrance

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[13]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, ix,383.

that "her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth."[14]

While her masquerade is a defense against the world as well as against herself, it is a losing battle. Aware of this fact, she says,

> When people are soft--soft people have got to shimmer and glow--they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a--paper lantern over the light. . . . It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I--I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick.[15]

It is evident from the beginning of the play, when Blanche travels to Elysian Fields on the streetcars named Desire and Cemetery, that death is not a stranger to Blanche. In the first scene she tells her sister of family sickness and dying, "the long parade to the graveyard,"[16] which preceeded the loss of their family plantation to Stanley as "twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which all but Stella and I have retreated."[17] The culture of the Old South is dead and the life in the French Quarter is a constant reminder to Blanche that the world of Stanley and Stella is too barbaric for this genteel Southerner. Blanche, therefore, "chooses the dead past and becomes the victim of that

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[14]Ibid., i.245. [15]Ibid., V.332.

[16]Ibid., i.261. [17]Ibid., ii.284.

impossible choice."[18] Because she refuses to adjust to modern life as her sister does, her fate is inevitable.

As the play progresses it is revealed that Blanche's own disintegration had begun much earlier. Stella's home is the last stop along the line for Blanche; it is her last desperate attempt to alleviate her loneliness. Much earlier in her life, after her young husband had committed suicide, sexual desire began to fill her loneliness and was an attempt to ward off her fear of death. Death, in Blanche's mind, has wasted away her beautiful dream, Belle Reve.

> 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 have ever heard of it! . . . The opposite is desire."[19]

Desire, then, is to Blanche the antithesis of death. However, her puritanical Southern background will not permit her to face the sensual side of herself. Instead, she associates desire with animalism, like Stanley's love-making, and calls it "brutal desire."[20] Because Blanche cannot reconcile her Southern lady-like illusion of herself with her sensual desires, she remains a fragmented, schizoid personality.[21] This conflict results in her complete

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[18]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Modernism" in Modern Drama (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 128, 129.

[19]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, ix.388, 389.

[20]Ibid., iv.321. [21]Riddel, p. 424.

disintegration after Stanley rapes her.

The reality of Blanche's desire is underscored throughout the play with Williams' use of the musical jazz theme. Jazz, born in the brothels of New Orleans, is the creation of the Negro who, like Blanche, is alienated by society.[22] Blanche's illusion of her death is also symbolized throughout the play beginning with the streetcar, Cemetery, to the cry of the old street vendor, "Flores para los muertos" (flowers for the dead) in Scene Nine.[23] In this scene the cry is repeated in the background as Mitch, Blanche's last hope for salvation, rejects her. In the final act Blanche's soliloquy concerning her desire to die at sea is accompanied by cathedral chimes. This soliloquy indicates further her desire to wash away her guilt. It heightens the illusion of the nearness of death with the cathedral chimes symbolizing her fear of the afterlife.

Nancy M. Tischler offers more insight into Williams' emphasis on death. She notes that the author was concerned with the loss of his own life. Just before Williams wrote The Poker Night, which was later renamed Streetcar, he had undergone an operation. At this time he overheard a nun

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[22]Kazan, p. 349.

[23]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, ix.387.

say that she thought he had cancer; therefore, he left the hospital under the illusion that he was "under a death sentence." Because of this attitude, he wished to have Streetcar express everything he had to say about life and death.[24]

Williams continues to express his philosophy of life and death in the final scene in which Blanche is taken to a mental institution. Benjamin Nelson calls this scene "a microcosm of the entire play."[25] The nurse, who brutally knocks Blanche down and wishes to put her into a straight-jacket, represents the cruel, real world's reaction to the artist Blanche. The doctor, on the other hand, fulfills Blanche's illusion of the gentleman who will come to rescue her from Stanley's home, the world of reality. The doctor treats her with kindness and takes her away where she can live safely with her illusions. While Blanche is unable to adjust to the modern world, she is heroic in her refusal to compromise. She refuses to give up her illusions about herself as someone special. Blanche escapes into her world of illusion, but she does so as a Southern aristocrat.

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[24]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), p. 134.

[25]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), p. 152.

While Williams' sympathies appear at the end of the play to lie with Blanche, he is also sympathetic with her counterpart, Stanley. Williams describes Stanley in the stage directions as:

> Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. . . . Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer.[26]

Streetcar is an objective play. Indeed, Benjamin Nelson believes that the play is great because of its objectivity.[27]

Williams makes clear that the realistic world is cruel and difficult for the extremely sensitive artist; he believes however, that the realistic view of experience must be considered valuable. Through Stanley, who is symbolic of realism, it is apparent that realism is victorious. Stanley has the drive that Jim O'Connor was seeking. As Stella reveals to her sister, "Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere. . . ." Stella also believes that "It's a drive that he has."[28] Unlike Blanche, Stanley knows who he is. When Blanche calls him a Polack he exclaims,

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[26]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, i.264, 265.

[27]Nelson, p. 148.

[28]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, iii.292, 293.

> I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is one-hundred-per-cent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack.[29]

While Blanche is the decadent South of yesterday, Stanley is virile America today. Harold Clurman has observed that for more than two-thirds of the play, the American audience identifies with Stanley.[30] Blanche is an ineffectual dreamer, but Stanley knows what he wants and he gets it, just as he married Stella.

With the appearance of Stanley and Blanche in the opening scene, Williams indicates immediately that they are from completely different worlds. Blanche, dressed entirely in white, symbolic of purity, is described in the stage instructions as looking "as if she were arriving at a summer tea."[31] Her dress and mannerisms are in keeping with her illusive world. Stanley, on the other hand, is introduced in denim work clothes carrying a "red-stained package from a butcher's."[32] The color red implies passion, and his gesture in tossing the package to Stella furthers the image of virility. There are no affected airs about Stanley.

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[29] Ibid., viii.374.

[30] Harold Clurman, Lies Like Truth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958). p. 78.

[31] Ibid., i.244.

Stanley's realistic world is the present and he is happy with the status quo. Because Stanley's world revolves around himself and his desires, Stella is forced to cater to all his demands. Their relationship is a continual round of love-making. Williams indicates Stanley's dynamic, sex-centered life by the symbols of the goat and, the phallic symbol, the locomotive.

Stanley's vibrant, physical world is completely upset when Blanche enters it bringing her world of illusions. In the center of the stage, her truck full of faded dresses and old letters is placed as a constant reminder that Blanche and her illusions are intruders in Stanley's home.[33] During their first encounter, when Blanche flirtingly is "fishing for a compliment,"[34] realistic Stanley recognizes her affected ways and deflates her intentions immediately by saying that he "doesn't go in for that stuff."[35]

A strong example of the intrusion Stanley feels is indicated in the raw, physical poker scene. Here Williams uses the bright primary colors in Van Gogh's picture of a billiard-parlor. The flat becomes a man's world as indica-

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[33]Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 178.

[34]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, ii.278.

[35]Ibid.

ted by Mitch's repeated statement that "Poker shouldn't be played in a house with women."[36] If Blanche had not been there, Stella would have gone upstairs as Stanley demanded. Blanche, therefore, is the intruder. Furthermore, she has revealed Stanley's brutish manners to Stella, causing her sister to exclaim "Drunk-drunk-animal thing, you!" [37] when Stanley throws "his" radio out the window in order to protest their presence.

The two opposing worlds of illusion and reality, although in constant conflict with one another, continue to exist side by side. Williams makes this fact clear by a number of devices. The cultured Southern tones of Blanche's poetic, artificial speech describe her illusive world and are used constantly juxtaposed with Stanley's harsh, realistic language. In Scene Seven Williams' ability as a chiarocscurist is especially obvious.[38] This scene is the preparation for the birthday supper to which Mitch, Blanche's last means of escape, has been invited. Blanche, in her own imaginary world, soaks in a hot tub in 100° weather gaily singing "Say, it's only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea--But it wouldn't be make-believe, if you believed in me!"[39] Simultaneously Stanley tells Stella the

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[36] Ibid., iii.303. [37] Ibid., iii.302.

[38] J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 225.

[39] Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, vii.360.

realistic facts about Blanche's past. As Stanley's voice grows more intense and the facts more grim, Blanche's song grows more animated and from the bathroom "little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub."[40] The scene reaches a climax when Stanley reveals to Stella that he has exposed Blanche's past to Mitch. Blanche then comes out of the bathroom to see the horror in Stella's face while she stands beside the birthday cake and flowers prepared for the happy occasion.

Realistic Stanley, however, is not totally without illusion. When he believes that Blanche has cheated him and Stella out of Stella's inheritance from the sale of their old plantation, he mistakes imitation furs for genuine ones, rhinestones for diamonds, and a mortgage-ridden old house for a cotton kingdom. This illusion, however, is the mistake of a realist who evaluates objects by their literal appearances.[41] Hence the theme of appearance versus reality applies to all the characters.

Blanche appears to find Stanley ape-like and repellent; however, in reality she is attracted to him by the same desire that has caused her downfall in the past. Blanche

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[40] Ibid., vii.362.

[41] Kernan, p. 111.

has flirted with Stanley from their first encounter over the Belle Reve plantation, when she states "Last night, I said to myself--'My sister has married a man'",[42] and "I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands!"[43] She also exposes herself at the edge of the curtain while undressing during the poker scene. In the following scene, hidden by the sound of the locomotive, a symbol of his virility, Stanley enters the flat uunoticed and overhears Blanche tell Stella that

> He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There is even something--sub-human--something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in--anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there is--Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle![44]

Besides the fact that Stanley is psychologically incapable of understanding Blanche, it is no wonder that he resents her. Stanley also feels a loyalty to Mitch who served with him in the Marines; therefore, he feels a moral obligation to forewarn Mitch about Blanche's past. After attempting to expose her to reality and to destroy her last

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[42]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, ii.280.

[43]Ibid., ii.284. [44]Ibid., iv.323.

hope for the future, Stanley expects to find Blanche giving up her airs of superiority and facing reality. When he returns from taking his wife to the hospital to deliver their child, however, he finds Blanche more deeply engrossed in her illusions than ever before. Escaping into the past with the help of alcohol, she is dressed in an old white ball gown with a rhinestone tiara on her head. When Stanley asks her where she is going dressed in that manner, she tells him she is leaving for "a cruise of the Caribbean on a yacht!" Stanley knows that she believes in this illusion. She continues, "anyhow I shall be entertained in style."[45] This derogatory remark implies that, in Stanley's two-room flat, she has not been entertained in the style to which she was accustomed. The scene builds to the point where Stanley can no longer tolerate her superior attitude and her failure to examine the facts. Clad in his silk wedding pajamas, with the background music of a jazz piano, reinforced at this point with hot trumpets and drums, he shouts, "Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! . . . Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! . . ." and finally, "We've had this date with each other from the begin-

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[45]Ibid., x.393, 394.

ning!"[46] Just before Stanley rapes her, Blanche sees a prostitute roll a drunkard through the window. Blanche is being forced to face reality and to accept the whore-image of herself that she has fought so hard to escape. Because she cannot, her mind snaps. This outcome is indicated by the shadows of a grotesque and menacing form which appear on the wall around her in this scene and in Scene Eleven, until the gentleman doctor rescues her.

Some critics have stated that the rape scene employs melodrama. Williams defends it, however, with the statement that

> the rape of Blanche by Stanley is a pivotal, integral truth in the play, without which the play loses its meaning, which is the ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate, by the savage and brutal forces of modern society."[47]

Stanley's victory cannot be ignored. As the poker players resume their game of seven-card stud, his world is still intact. This fact is further evidenced by Stella who is standing by holding their child in her arms.

Through Stella we find another key to the concept that reality is subjective. While Blanche sees Stanley as ape-like and disgusting, Stella, although aware that he is ex-

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[46]Ibid., x.398, 402. [47]Weales, p. 26.

tremely different from the type of Southern gentlemen they have known, sees him as someone extraordinary. Stella represents the average or normal person in opposition to the extremely realistic Stanley or the extremely romantic Blanche. Like all Williams' characters, however, Stella lives with some illusion in order to cope with reality.

Nancy M. Tischler stated that while "Blanche is the catalyst around whose visit the play revolves, Stella is the key figure."[48] Stella's importance lies in the fact that much of the action of the play revolves around her decision either to accept Stanley's realistic, physical world to which she has escaped from the decaying Belle Reve, or to return to the more spiritual values of Blanche's Southern, mythical world.

Stella is content with Stanley's harsh, realistic world when Blanche arrives, but, after a short time of being exposed to Blanche's evaluation of Stanley, she reflects Blanche's ideas. When Stella calls her husband an "animal thing" during the poker night quarrel, she is reflecting Blanche's concept of Stanley. Stella's love for Stanley, however, will not permit her to quarrel with him long. Even though he has struck her, pregnant with his child, when he

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[48]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 137.

discovers that she has left him to find protection in her neighbor's apartment, he cries out in anguish and she quickly returns to comfort him.

Although Williams shows Stella's indecision, he also indicates the narcotic effect of the illusion Stella has maintained in her relationship with Stanley in order to reconcile her genteel background with his harsh realistic one. The morning after their quarrel and reconciliation, Williams states in his description of Stella that "her eyes and lips have that almost narcotized tranquility that is in the faces of Eastern idols."[49] Further evidence that her concept of their relationship is an illusion is indicated in the statement that Stella makes to Blanche concerning their honeymoon. She tells her sister that on their wedding night Stanley "snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing light bulbs with it."[50] The stark light bulbs which Blanche hides under the Japanese lantern represent harsh reality. Stanley's desire to smash the harsh light bulbs and "get the colored lights going"[51] indicates his desire to convince Stella, through

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[49]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, iv. 310.

[50]Ibid., iv.312.

[51]Ibid., viii.373.

glorifying their sexual relationship, that this relationship alone will be sufficient on which to build a marriage. The colored lights indicate illusion here just as the rainbow colored lights in the Paradise Dance Hall of Glass Menagerie indicate the illusions the dancers used to avoid the reality of the oncoming war.

Stella's character, in sharp contrast to Blanche, makes it possible for her to accept this illusion. Blanche, according to Williams,is "the quick, light one, Stella is relatively slow and almost indolent."[52] Blanche can not understand Stella's indifference to everything about Stanley except his sexual attraction and her failure to ignore their total relationship. Stella's passiveness is indicated in Blanche's question, "Is this a Chinese philosophy you've--cultivated?"[53] Stella's passive philosophy enables her to accept life with Stanley. Because life with her husband is on his terms, Stella must submerge all her dreams of personal dignity. She dulls the pain of reality by ignoring any sense of herself as special. Stella is not unhappy being a common, ordinary person, however; in contrast to Blanche, whose unhappiness stems from the fact that she sees herself as a rare individual.

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[52]Kazan, p. 352.

[53]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, iv.314.

Blanche's intrusion into Stella's home life culminates when Blanche tells her sister that Stanley has raped her. Stella is forced to make a decision between the two, both of whom are products of their own extreme views of truth. While Stella, like most ordinary people, must share some romantic views and some realistic ones, she must decide whose view of the truth she will accept. As previously discussed, Blanche's illusive view of reality centers around the decaying South where Stella was Blanche's little sister. Further evidence is shown when Blanche continually calls her "Stella baby" or "little sister." Stanley, on the other hand, represents the more realistic, virile life Stella escaped to from the dead past, and Stanley also sees Stella realistically as a woman. Stella then must choose Stanley. She must make the adjustment to reality for this adjustment is necessary in order for her to survive.

The importance of Stella, which Blanche points out means"star,"is Williams' bright hope that the ordinary person can make the adjustment from a decadent society to a new vigorous one. According to Joseph W. Krutch, "Virility, even orgiastic virility, is the proper answer to decadence. Stella, the representative of a decayed aristocracy, is rejuvenated by a union with a representative of 'the

people'."[54]

In order to accept Stanley's realistic view of life, however, Stella, ironically, must reject Blanche's confession of Stanley's sexual attack upon her as part of the illusion of a mad woman. Therefore, she must live with this illusion in order to face reality. In reality her love for Stanley is the main reason Stella is able to adjust to life, rather than live with the illusion of the past like Blanche. Because of her baby, Stella must live for tomorrow and, thus, she takes her friend Eunice's advice: "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going."[55]

Like Stella, Mitch is another character caught between the illusions of Blanche and the realistic view of Stanley. He is the last hope for Blanche, who sees in him the sensitivity of her Southern gentleman Conversely, she is the last hope for him. Mitch, tied to his mother's apron strings, longs for Blanche's love because he recognizes her as another person alienated from others. Although permitted to play poker with the men, Mitch is teased and considered less of a man because of his devotion to his

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[54]Krutch, p. 128.

[55]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, xi.406.

mother. Not only does Mitch see Blanche as different, but he also sees in her the soft Southern gentlewoman who fits the illusion he has built of the type of woman he could bring home to his mother. Mitch, a workingman like Stanley, will probably never have another opportunity to meet a woman like Blanche. Marriage to her is probably the last chance he will have to silence the jibes of his friends and cut the umbilical cord.

Unfortunately, as much as Blanche and Mitch need each other, their marriage is an impossible dream. Stanley cannot permit Mitch to live in the illusion that Blanche is the stereotype of the Southern lady. Mitch, ironically, is unable to accept reality anymore than Blanche can. In turning against Blanche because of her past, he rejects the exact thing that Blanche honors him for rejecting. "Blanche herself would have rejected Blanche."[56]

Although Blanche, the antagonist, is not victorious as is Stanley, the author sympathizes with the artistic, sensitive Blanche just as he does with Laura. These people are not held up to ridicule, but their frailties are exposed because "they are symptoms of the stresses and strains of

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[56]Leonard Berkman, "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche Du Bois," Modern Drama, X (December, 1967), 256.

modern living."[57] Laura and Blanche both represent the sensitive artist who is destroyed by modern society.

On the other hand, Williams also sympathizes with Stanley, the protagonist. While some critics have considered Williams' ambiguity toward Stanley a defect, others believe that this is part of William's artistry. Norman J. Fedder believes that Williams' intention to make his male protagonist both a brute and a sympathetic figure is a result of the influences of D.H. Lawrence. Fedder compares the character of Stanley with "the Lawrencean fox, limited in intellect and delicacy but, nevertheless, alive in the flesh."[58] Signi Falk argues that it is characteristic of Williams "not to take a stand," but "romanticize both the natural man and the decadent aristocrat."[59]

The result of Williams' ambiguity concerning his characters furthers the concept that reality is subjective. Because Williams paints such an objective picture of both his protagonist and his antagonist, he is showing that no one has truth.[60] The fact that his play does not contain an absolute theory of reality is also shown by Stella's

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[57]Peter Hall, "Tennessee Williams: Notes on the Moralist," Encore, IV (September-October, 1957), 18.

[58]Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D.H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (London: Mouton and Co., 1966), p. 85.

[59]Falk, Tennessee Williams, p. 80.

[60]Kernan, p. 114.

and Blanche's entirely different, subjective views of Stanley.

One reason for the subjectivity of reality is indicated in Williams' affirmation of T.S. Eliot's statement that "Human kind can not bear very much reality."[61] Therefore, each of Williams' characters harbors some illusion which makes him incapable of viewing the whole truth. Although illusion supplies the armor against reality, these very illusions are "always pierced, and in the most mortal spots."[62] Blanche's illusion that desire is the antithesis of death proves false when she desires Stanley. The rape by Stanley, furthermore, is an attempt to force Blanche to face the reality that Blanche is a harlot rather than her illusive lady. Stella's adulation of the power of Stanley and Stella's sexual relationship proves false. For the power of this relationship is not strong enough to prevent Stanley from wanting this kind of relationship with Blanche. Finally, Mitch's illusion that Blanche is a real Southern lady is his Achilles heel when he discovers she is a harlot, and, although he still desires her, he cannot marry her.

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[61] Berkman, p. 225.

[62] Irwin Shaw, "Theatre," New Republic, CXVII (December 22, 1947), 34.

Therefore, not only is the armor of illusion necessary and insufficient, but also each character has a different view of truth. Neither Blanche, buried in her world of illusion, nor Stanley, engrossed in his world of harsh reality, has the absolute formula for truth.

CHAPTER III

SUMMER AND SMOKE

When Summer and Smoke appeared on Broadway a number of critics complained that, because of its similarity to Streetcar, Tennessee Williams was repeating himself. Joseph Wood Krutch felt, however, that

> the whole method and effect of the two plays is so different that if they did actually have a common origin, then the fact merely demonstrates the impressiveness of Mr. Williams' gifts. Only a powerful imagination could have used so profitably the same thing twice.[1]

The fact that this play is also about two people from different worlds, with extremely different views of reality, is demonstrated by the stage setting. The two main acting areas are John Buchanan's home and office, with the large anatomy chart, represents the desires of the body; Alma's home, the rectory, represents the longing of the soul.

The main difference in the two plays is that both parties in Summer and Smoke try desperately to communicate with each other and fail. Alma and John search for

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[1]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, CLXVII (October 23, 1948), 473.

truth, and during their quest both change their original points of view. In Streetcar, however, neither Stanley nor Blanche ever understands the other's point of view nor do they make any effort to understand. Although Williams has described Streetcar as a "tragedy of incomprehension,"[2] Summer and Smoke is more tragic because of the futile efforts of John and Alma to communicate with one another.

The battle between Blanche's illusory world and Stanley's realistic world is the more intense of the two plays; therefore, some critics have compared them on this basis and found Summer and Smoke lacking dramatically. On the other hand, Brooks Atkinson and other critics have praised the more lyric, expressionistic quality of Summer and Smoke and labeled it a tone poem because of its greater use of symbolism.[3] John Rosenfield of The New York Times described the production as a "unified 'orchestration' of dialogue, stage movement, and background."[4] Although Nancy M. Tischler states that "the play is as contrived and symbolic as a medieval mystery"[5] and "the characters are excellent as

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[2]Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 193.

[3]Brooks Atkinson, Review, New York Times October 7, 1948, p. 33.

[4]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), p. 152.

[5]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1969), p. 30.

allegorical figures,"[6] John Gassner believes that John and Alma "are almost painfully real."[7]

When Williams was asked with which of his characters in all his plays he most identified, one of the two he named was Alma, because, like Alma, he feels many of his psychological problems were created because he "grew up in the shadow of the rectory."[8] Alma, like Laura, is lonely because she is different from others. She, too, is desperately in love with a young man whom she has known from her youth and who eventually breaks her heart. Both possess the beauty of the ideal, which is an anachronism in the modern world, and both suffer intensely because they are unable to communicate with anyone.[9]

Alma is also like Blanche in that in order to face reality she has created a mask, an illusion of herself, to hide behind. The image that Alma has of herself is a distorted one of a refined, Southern lady who speaks with a broad "a", indulges in verbal affections, and uses affected gestures and mannerisms which have been acquired after years

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[6]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 155.

[7]John Gassner, "The Theatre Arts," The Forum, CX (December, 1948), 353.

[8]"Playboy Interview: Tennessee Williams," Playboy, xx (April, 1973), 72.

[9]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), p. 120.

of being the hostess for church entertainments. Williams says "she seems to belong to a more stately age, such as the eighteenth century in France."[10] She has a nervous laugh, and because she has spent most of her time with older people, there is a spinster-like quality about her. Williams states that "her true nature is still hidden even from herself."[11]

Alma hides her feelings of passion because, like Blanche, she cannot reconcile these feelings with the puritanical myth she has created of the Southern woman. Thus, as John tells her in Scene One, she has a Doppelgänger and it "is badly irritated."[12] A Doppelgänger, Alma discovers, is the other person inside herself. Alma has a fragmented personality; her "secret self (her physical passion) is in conflict with her public self."[13] This idea is the Pirandellian concept of man as a "loosely unified group of identities." Alma is in search of "a

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[10] Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), p. 40.

[11] Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1971). II, I.135.

[12] Ibid., i.144.

[13] Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 153.

reconciling symbol, [and] in need of a self above selves."[14] Alma must understand that passion is normal, rather than her distorted puritanical view, if she is to be a normal, happy person. John tells her that,

> Under the surface you have a lot of excitement, a great deal more than an other woman I have met. So much that you have to carry these sleeping pills with you.[15]

Alma does stifle her desire with sleeping pills. She claims "the prescription number is 96814. I think of it as the telephone number of God!"[16] Thus she escapes reality by feeling "like a water lily on a Chinese lagoon,"[17] just as Stella escapes with her Chinese philosophy. John gives her sleeping pills to cure her heart trouble, which he recognizes as a troubled heart.

Alma, however, will not acknowledge her physical desire; she acknowledges only the desires of the spirit. Expressing the desires of her soul, symbolized by her name, she describes the Gothic cathedral as symbolic of man's "struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in

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[14]Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 84.

[15]Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, vi.200.

[16]Ibid., xii.254. [17]Ibid., xii.255.

our reach."[18] This expressive, spiritual symbol is ironically also a phallic symbol which Williams may have used to indicate that physical and spiritual desire can not be completely separated as Alma believes they can. The Gothic cathedral also symbolizes traditional humanist values which are an essential quality of Alma's character.

Although Alma hides behind her costruirsi, like Tom, who is also created out of the author's personal experiences, she seeks truth. During a mental illness in which she wrestles with doubts about herself, the fire of passion burns so strongly she can no longer ignore its existence. The passion purges her of her puritanism; thus she goes to John a changed, calmer woman and states, "You said, let's talk truthfully, well let's do! Unsparingly, truthfully, even shamelessly, then."[19] As in the character of Tom, there is evidence of existentialism: both characters struggle for truth, and when they achieve some glimpse of it they make a choice and take action. The core of existentialist philosphy, agreed upon by those existentialists who disagree on other points, is the importance of making a choice and taking action.[20]

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[18] Ibid., vi.197. [19] Ibid., xi. 245.

[20] Jack Brooking, "Directing Summer and Smoke: An Existentialist Approach," Modern Drama, III (February, 1960), 383.

This action then causes a change in Alma's character. It involves dropping the affected airs and mannerisms. She is attempting to throw off the mask and all pretense. At this moment, however, completely unarmed, Alma is wounded by John who spurns her offer of herself. This action confirms the necessity of protective illusion, and when she leaves his office she immediately resorts to her sleeping pills. Her need to communicate her recently discovered truth, the necessity of passion, has not been fulfilled. Thus, when she sees a lonely salesman, who is as nervous as she once was, she believes she has found someone with whom she can communicate.

This scene with the salesman takes place in stage center in a park setting which includes the civic statue of the angel, Eternity, who broods over the entire play. Eternity is symbolic of Alma's illusion of her "virginal idealism or 'soulfulness'"[21] and by Williams' effective use of stage lighting the audience is made aware of Eternity's presence at strategic points throughout the play. An example of this idea occurs at the end of Scene Six when John expresses his desire to make love to Alma and

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[21]Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 352.

she refuses. At this moment the lights dim leaving a soft light on the angel. This symbol effects dramatic irony at the end of the play when Alma renounces her purity at the foot of the statue.[22]

The fountain of water spouting from the hands of Eternity symbolizes life and reality. In the prologue, when John wants Alma to face reality, instead of dwelling on the soul of man, he washes his young, dirty face at the fountain and asks for a kiss. Similarly, after Alma has been ill and has expressed her desire to die, she has a change of heart and returns to the fountain. At the fountain she learns the news about the possibility of John and Nellie's engagement; when she decides to face John realistically in search of the truth, she first drinks from the fountain. At the end of the play when she approaches the young salesman, they both drink from the fountain when they meet, and again they partake of the cool water before they go to Moon Lake Casino together. There is no question that either of them has any illusions about his relationship.

The gulf between Alma's and John's views of reality is stated in the prologue when Alma, as a little child, tells

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[22] Ibid.

John that her name is Spanish for soul and he replies "Hee-haw! Ho-hum!"[23] John is already interested only in kissing her, rather than discussing desires of the spirit. Later, when he takes her to Moon Lake Casino and she tries to discuss her spiritual needs, he states again "Hee-haw! Ho-hum!"[24] and then proceeds to invite Alma to share a bedroom at the Casino with him.

From the beginning John is concerned primarily with the problems of the flesh. Williams' description of John as a grown man resembles Milton's description of Satan when he first falls from paradise and is brilliant, beautiful, and powerful.

> Brilliantly and restlessly alive. . . , at present he is unmarked by the dissipations in which he relieves his demoniac unrest; he has the fresh and shining look of a epic hero.[25]

In order to further the image of John's love of physical pleasures, Williams again uses rainbow colored lights. Just as Stanley's desire to "get the colored lights going" with Stella indicates purely physical pleasure, so too does John's admiration for the rainbow colored Roman candle indicate that John's <u>costruirsi</u> is solely physical.

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[23]Tennessee Williams, <u>Summer and Smoke</u>, p. 127.

[24]<u>Ibid</u>., vi.196. [25]<u>Ibid</u>., i.132, 133.

The first scene also indicates that John's selfish concern for only the physical pleasures of life has made it impossible for him to communicate with his father. The illusion that John clings to in order to avoid reality is evident. His nonchalant actions, when his father tells him he does not want him to come home, stem from John's illusion that it does not matter to him whether or not he is accepted by his father. When his father forgives him, in his effort to communicate, John immediately reaches out to touch Dr. Buchanan, but his hand is roughly brushed aside indicating their inability to communicate with each other. From the beginning John needs to communicate with someone; yet he is unable to do so.

Through John's relationship with his father, it is evident why John lives in illusion. John's illusion, his desire not to become a doctor, occurs because of his fear that he will then be compared to his father, a strong and compassionate man, and he will fail to measure up to his father's image. To compensate, he goes to the opposite extreme, becoming as irresponsible as he can and convincing himself that his actions satisfy his needs.[26]

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[26] Brooking, p. 381.

John begins to face reality when he is about to marry Rosa Gonzales in order to "live on fat remittances" from her father. He asks then,

> Did anyone ever slide downhill as fast as I have. . . . all summer I have sat around here like this, remembering last night, anticipating the next one! The trouble with me is, I should have been castrated![27]

In his search for truth he leaves Rosa and wanders next door to Alma's house where he tries desperately to communicate with her. When he goes to Alma, he says,

> I took the open door for an invitation. The Gulf Wind is blowing tonight, . . . cools things off a little. But my head's on fire. . . . The silence? . . . Yes, the enormous silence.[28]

She says nothing. The fire in John's head indicates the battle he is fighting for truth, but Alma's inability to help him indicates the hopelessness of ever being able to communicate with each other.

John's involvement with Rosa leads to a conflict resulting in the father's death and a revelation of truth for John. While Alma is administering to John's dying father, her confrontation with John over the desires of the soul versus those of the flesh motivates John's change in character. He tries to convince Alma of his view of reality when, pointing to the anatomy chart, he shouts,

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[27]Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, vii.212.

[28]Ibid., vii.215.

> Now listen here to the anatomy lecture! This upper story's the brain which is hungry for something called truth and doesn't get much but keeps on feeling hungry! This middle's the belly which is hungry for food. This part down here is the sex which is hungry for love because it is sometimes lonesome. I've fed all three, as much of all three as I could or as much as I wanted--[29]

Alma rejects his view of love and truth, and tells him for the first time that she loves him. John, in turn, admits to Alma, as well as to himself, that he is as afraid of her soul as much as she is of his body.

After Alma forces John to face reality, his rebellion against his father also ends. After Alma leaves, he breaks down and cries as his father lies dying in the next room. Previously he had refused to see his father, but now he goes to him and says tenderly, "Father,"[30] a word he had not been able to use for years. After his father's death, John accepts his responsibilities as a doctor and finishes his father's work at the fever clinic in Lyons.

Another reason John developed his illusion that he did not want to be a doctor was that he feared death. In the prologue, when Alma romanticizes about the beauty of death, John tells her about his childhood experience when his mother died. The theme of appearance versus reality

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[29] Ibid., viii.221.

[30] Brooking, p. 383.

is stressed when he says,"She didn't look like my mother. Her face was all ugly and yellow and--terrible--bad-smelling! And so I hit her to make her let go of my hand."[31] Later, at the casino John tells Alma that he is going to give up studying medicine because "A doctor's life is walled in by sickness and misery and death."[32] He does come to terms with death, however, when his father dies and he plunges into the work of the clinic with fervor. According to Camus, facing death realistically is the first step toward freedom.[33] John, like Alma, practices the existential philosophy when he chooses to face death and life more realistically and takes action by assuming his father's duties.

When John returns from Lyons with a new view of reality, he falls in love with the earnest, straight-forward, and infinitely simpler Nellie. Thus, when Alma comes to tell him of her revelation about truth and passion, she is too late. John is unable to cope with the complexities of someone like the sensitive, artistic Alma. He tells her that the few times that they were close enough to each other

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[31]Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, p. 130.

[32]Ibid., vi,195.

[33]Brooking, p. 382.

to speak truthfully of their feelings they were unable to communicate. He declares also that she had something he wanted but he did not recognize what it was. At this point Williams uses light symbolically. When Alma asks, "What did I have?"[34] John lights a match to indicate enlightenment. He states, furthermore, "You couldn't name it and I couldn't recognize it. I thought it was just a Puritanical ice that glittered like flame, But now I believe it was flame, mistaken for ice."[35] Like two strangers they have passed in the night because of their inability to communicate their feelings to each other. While Alma now believes that the desires of the flesh sometimes take precedent over spiritual desire, John states, "but I've come around to your way of thinking."[36] He believes now that man contains something more than just functional organs. "Something else is in there, an immaterial something--as thin as smoke."[37] John has discovered the soul.

Both John and Alma acknowledge that their previously limited views of reality were incorrect. Thus, Summer and Smoke, which symbolizes the desire of passion and the long-

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[34]Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, xi.246.

[35]Ibid. [36]Ibid., xi.244. [37]Ibid.

ing of the soul, demonstrates better than any of Williams' previous plays that reality is subjective. Williams' objective handling of these characters indicates that there is some truth and some fallacy in both points of view. John Gassner commented that "reality concerned [Williams] as strongly as ever before, but he could place no positive interpretation on it."[38] Gassner later stated, concerning the Broadway production of the play, that "realism of treatment is precisely what Williams' novelistic drama cannot stand, because its reality is subjective."[39]

Not only does Williams view reality as subjective but, like the existentialists, Williams views society as closer to anarchy than to order. John is concerned with the anarchy and order in life in the opening scene. Furthermore, John's irresponsible attitude of life is more acceptable to society than Alma's spiritual eccentricities. John, who is accepted by society, views religion as "mumbo jumbo" and "worn out magic."[40] Alma, in response to the news that John has taken out a license to marry Rosa, states that

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[38]Gassner, "The Theatre Arts", p. 352.

[39]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 162.

[40]Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, viii.219.

"the pieces don't fit!"[41] Alma views life as absurd. Ironically, Alma expresses the ideals which society still claims to uphold: fidelity, discipline, love of truth, respect for tradition, and humanism.[42] But Alma is considered peculiar by the others and is rejected by John at the end because, like society, he cannot understand her. The absurdity of the world and man's inability to communicate support Williams' concept that truth is not absolute.

Other characters in the play serve to reinforce either Alma's or John's view of reality. Unlike Williams' previous plays, most of the characters, other than Alma and John, are flat characterizations.[43] Rosa Gonzales and her father represent John's earthy, passionate desire. Gonzales has won his fortune by physical methods including theft and cock fights. Anything Rosa wants he gets for her "with this. . . or this!"[44] Gonzales pulls out first a roll of bills and then a revolver. Rosa wants John and for purely sensual reasons. She desires John because he is tall, he smells good, and he doesn't grunt like a pig to show his passion.

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[41] Ibid., vii.210.

[42] Jackson, p. 138.

[43] Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 178.

[44] Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke, vii.214.

On the other hand, Alma's parents are flat characterizations which represent spiritual desires and indicate the void that a solely spiritual view of reality would create. Her mother has completely escaped reality by assuming the role of a child, contented with ice cream cones, rather than accepting the responsibilities of a minister's wife. While Mrs. Winemiller is insane, like Pirandello's characters, she has better insight into reality than many of the other characters. Her mother recognizes the air and affectations that Alma uses, and she is the first to realize that Alma is in love with John. The mother's continual declaration that "the pieces don't fit,"[45] is her analysis of life. The puzzle that Alma keeps encouraging her to work is symbolic of life, and the mother cannot solve the puzzle anymore than she can cope with life.

Reverend Winemiller's purely spiritual view of reality is the antithesis of the concept of Christianity exposing brotherly love. He constantly fights with his wife, although he knows she is not responsible for her actions, and expresses the view that his wife is the cross he and Alma must bear. He shows his inflexibility and narrow-mindedness when he refuses to forgive John for his past sins when John returns home from the fever clinic a hero. He states

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[45]Ibid., ii.159.

> These people are grasshoppers, just as likely to jump one way as another. He's finished the work his father started, stamped out the fever and gotten all of the glory. Well, that's how it is in this world. Years of devotion and sacrifice are overlooked an' forgotten while someone young an' lucky walks off with the honors! [46]

The characterizations of both parents indicate the impracticality of a strictly spiritual view of reality.

The only character, other than John and Alma, who is well developed is Nellie. When Nellie is introduced in the first scene, Alma discloses that she is the youngest and prettiest of her students "with the least gift for music."[47] Nellie, unlike the artistic Alma, is realistic. Like Stanley Kowalski, she knows who she is, and what she wants, and how to get it. In the opening scene she seeks John's help in explaining the facts of life. She contends that she must know them for she has fallen in love. If John had been less wrapped up in his own illusions, he might have realized she had fallen in love with him. Nellie's realistic view of life is evident in Scene Two when she discloses to Alma her love for John and says,

> Oh, you know, and I know, I never had any voice. I had a crush on you though. Those were the days when I had crushes on girls. Those days are all over, and now I have crushes on boys.[48]

Nellie's naturalness and lack of illusion are evident in

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[46] Ibid., ix.226,227. [47] Ibid., i.147.

[48] Ibid., ii.165.

Scene Nine when she greets John, the homecoming hero. Telling John her beauty is not due to cosmetics but natural excitement, she talks him into kissing her. When he tells her to "run along," she indicates her optimistic determination by stating, "Oh, I'll go. But I'll be back for Christmas!"[49]

Nellie's only illusion is that she does not realize how much Alma loves John and how difficult it is for Alma to accept their engagement. When Nellie proudly shows Alma her engagement ring, Alma is startled by the reality of the idea that she suspected when she read the Christmas card containing both their names. When Alma looks at the diamond she exclaims, "It's blinding, Nellie! Why, it hurts my eyes!"[50] Again, Williams uses light image to describe reality. John's statement, "Excuse her, Miss Alma. Nellie's still such a child,"[51] indicates that Nellie did not know about Alma's feelings for John and that John considers Nellie as simple and uncomplicated as a child. In many ways Nellie is the antithesis of Alma: uncomplicated, unartistic, straightforward, and realistic.

In spite of the character changes at the end of the play, Alma and John still maintain different views of reality.

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[49] *Ibid.*, ix.230. [50] *Ibid.*, xi.249. [51] *Ibid.*

John will settle down to a bourgeois point of view as a doctor, happily married and serving society. On the other hand, Alma will seek happiness and truth with a salesman who will probably never form a permanent relationship nor one of which society would approve. In spite of the character changes and reversal of views, John is still accepted by society and Alma is still alienated from society.

Although many of the ideas are similar to Streetcar, as Krutch stated, they are two entirely different plays. Summer and Smoke has a stronger existentialist view of illusion versus reality with more emphasis on the absurdity of life. Streetcar is closer to naturalistic theatre;[52] Summer and Smoke is more expressionistic. Different ideas on illusion versus reality, therefore, are presented in each play and presented in a different manner.

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[52]"Naturalistic theatre" used here indicates the realistic style of theatre rather than the philosophy of naturalism.

CHAPTER IV

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof won for Tennessee Williams the Pulitzer prize ten years after the opening of his first success, Glass Menagerie. Of all Williams' plays, Cat is considered outstanding for its maturity as well as its unique theme of illusion and reality. Although Cat also deals with Southern life, the theme of illusion and reality is complicated because Williams is also dealing with mendacity and truth. Both realistic Big Daddy and his idealistic son, Brick, believe that life is full of mendacity. Esther Merle Jackson states that in his latter play "Williams has determined that affective reality--the reality of everyday life--is in the nature of things misleading, illusory, and, ultimately, false."[1] Cat, then, deals with the lies that people tell to others in order to hide truth from them, as well as those which they tell themselves and accept as truth.

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[1] Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 141.

Not only is Williams concerned with the mendacity of life in Cat, but he is also convinced that "we're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins."[2] This idea of Pirandello appears in Williams' preface, in which he explains that because man hides behind his masks and his lies, he not only fails to understand his truth, but he, in turn, is unable to make others understand his truth.[3] Thus, the cause of man's inability to communicate is mendacity.

While the theme of illusion and reality in Cat is unique among Williams' plays, so too are some of the characters. Maggie is the first dynamic, realistic heroine that Williams created. Maggie, like Stanley Kowalski, knows who she is and what she wants, and she will fight like a cat to get it. Maggie characterizes herself well when she states,

> But one thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win. Cause I'm at cat! . . .
>
> Why! Am I so catty?--Cause I'm consumed with envy an' eatin' up with longing?
>
> I'm not good. . . nobody's good. . . I'm honest. . . I'm alive! Maggie the cat is--alive! I am alive, alive! I am. . . alive![4]

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[2]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol. III: (New York: New Directions Publishing Co., 1955), p.3.

[3]Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), p. 216.

[4]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky Inc., 1961), p. 203.

Also, like Stanley Kowalski, she is sensual. She basks in the admiring looks of other men, including Big Daddy, but she is not promiscuous. When she is spurned by her husband, she is as frustrated as a "cat on a hot tin roof." Brick tells her, "Jump off the roof, . . . cats can jump off roofs and land on their four feet uninjured! . . . Take a lover!"[5] She becomes only more determined to win him back.

In opposition to Blanche Du Bois, who attempts to win men through illusion, realistic Maggie uses the truth. "Yes, yes, yes! Truth, truth! What's so awful about it? I like it,"[6] she exclaims. She continues to explain to Brick her concept of the truth of his illusory relationship with his friend Skipper. Maggie compares their relationship to the close attachments of men in Greek legends. To Maggie, the relationship is too pure and ideal to remain in that idealistic condition. Realistically, she is aware that Brick's dream does not take into consideration human frailty and foibles. Because she believes that Skipper has homosexual tendencies, and because she wants Brick to look at his and Skipper's relationship realistically, she confronts Skipper

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[5]Tennessee Williams, Cat, I.39,40.

[6]Ibid., I.56.

with her view of the truth. Maggie's truth, then, causes Skipper to fear his latent homosexuality and to resort to liquor and drugs. This act ultimately results in his death. She assures her husband repeatedly, however, that he need not fear homosexual tendencies, and that he can regain assurance of his masculinity by returning to their bed instead of spending his nights on the sofa.

The bed becomes an important device with which Williams dramatizes the conflict between Brick and Maggie.[7] It also serves to remind the audience constantly of the reality of the failure of Maggie's and Brick's marriage as opposed to Maggie's illusion about their marriage. In center stage the large double bed, which is referred to frequently, is raked in order that the players may be easily seen when using it. The use of the bed, prevalent throughout the play, keeps the audience aware of the state of their marriage.

In as much as there are few pieces of furniture on the set, the bed and a huge console, a combination-radio-phonograph-television-liquor cabinet, take on special significance. Williams' comments in the "Notes For The Designer" that the console is a "compact little shrine to virtually

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[7]Gerald Weales, Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 41.

all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with. . . ."[8]

Maggie, like all the characters, is unable to live without illusion. Not only does Maggie believe that she can change her relationship with Brick, but also she believes that money will solve their problems. Her concern with money is apparent here:

> You can be young without money, but you can't be old without it. You've got to be old with money because to be old without it is just too awful, you've got to be one or the other, either young or with money, you can't be old and without it. That's the truth, Brick.[9]

The desire for money in part motivates Maggie to lie about producing an heir for Big Daddy's millions; but the main motivation for Maggie to create this illusion involves the Life Force. George Bernard Shaw demonstrates the vitality of the Life Force in many of his female characters, and Maggie, like Shaw's characters, is determined to have Brick's child. While creating an illusion for others, she fully intends to make this dream a reality. Like Ann Whitefield in Shaw's Man and Superman, Maggie's devious methods are admirable because they serve to further life.

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[8]Tennessee Williams, Cat, p. 16.

[9]Ibid., I.54.

Furthermore, a child from the god-like Brick and Maggie would, in her estimation, be a superman.

Maggie's need to make the illusion of her pregnancy a reality is apparent from the beginning of the play. In the first scene Maggie displays her hate for her sister-in-law, Mae, because Mae has children and Maggie is childless. Mae's "no-neck monsters"[10] are a constant reminder to Maggie of the reality that her marriage is unsuccessful. Mae's and Gooper's children are also a major reason why Big Daddy considers leaving his plantation to his other son, inasmuch as he fears that Maggie and Brick will remain childless and be unable to provide an heir for the plantation. Maggie's desire to please Big Daddy is not solely in order to inherit his money, however. Maggie and Big Daddy are so alike in character that she loves and understands him and deeply desires to present him with a grandchild. Her "life-lie" in the face of Big Daddy's impending death is, therefore, what makes Maggie such an admirable character.[11]

Although idealistic Brick has never been able to communicate with realistic Maggie, nor fully understand her, by the end of the play he is forced to admit that he admires her. After refusing throughout the play to show her any

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[10]Ibid., I.17. [11]Nelson, p. 205.

amount of affection or understanding, his attitude changes. When Mae claims that Maggie's statement about her pregnancy is a lie, Brick comes to her defense: "No, truth is something desperate, an' she's got it. Believe me, it's somethin' desperate, an' she's got it."[12] Even when Maggie throws out his liquor supply in order to force him to share her bed, the alcoholic Brick shows for the first time his affection for Maggie. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he admits, "I admire you, Maggie."[13]

With Maggie's following speech Williams not only creates his first dynamic, realistic female heroine, but also sympathizes with her. Evidence is that he does not reserve his love only for the illusory misfits when Maggie proclaims,

> 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 tin roof--is there? Is there, baby?[14]

In all probability Maggie's dream can not fail to become a reality. Her determination can turn her lie into truth.

While determination is the essence of Maggie's character, like the leading characters in Williams' past plays,

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[12] Tennessee Williams, Cat, III.212.

[13] Ibid., III.214.

[14] Ibid., III.215.

Brick's character is the antithesis of Maggie's. His alcoholism causes him to be detached and uninterested in life. While Maggie is "alive," Brick is barely living. Maggie, the realist, is anxious to share her truth with everyone. Conversely, Brick, an idealist, believes that the world is filled with "lying and liars,"[15] and will not attempt communication.

The character of Brick is difficult to analyze. In the original script Brick's character remains static, but in Williams' Broadway version of the third act Brick's character changes. Elia Kazan, director of the play, requested several changes in the original script and Williams complied. Williams, however, is not in agreement with Kazan on the change in Brick's character:

> I felt that the moral paralysis of Brick was a root thing in his tragedy, and to show a dramatic progression would obscure the meaning of that tragedy in him and . . . . I don't believe that a conversation. however revelatory, ever effects so immediate a change in the heart or even conduct of a person in Brick's state of spiritual disrepair.[16]

The fact remains, however, that Williams did make the changes that Kazan requested. Also, the change in Brick's character does make the character of Maggie more favorable, and

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[15] Ibid., II.106.

[16] Nelson, p. 221.

Williams states that he agreed with Kazan on his suggestion to make the character of Maggie more likeable. Thus, the last version--the Broadway version---is the script under consideration in this thesis.

In both versions of Cat, Brick is an idealist, the illusory male counterpart of Blanche, Alma, and Laura, with whom Williams shows a great deal of sympathy. Nancy M. Tischler, as do other critics, believes that these characters express many of Williams own problems. As previously stated, Williams admitted his identity with Alma because of her puritanism, and the problem of puritanism is also shared by Brick.[17]

Brick, Maggie points out, has built up an illusion about his relationship with Skipper which he believes was the "one great good true thing in his life."[18] When Skipper calls Brick to discuss the problem of homosexuality, with which Maggie has confronted him, Brick hangs up the phone. He is shocked at Skipper for revealing the problem; he refuses to discuss homosexuality. Furthermore, he idealizes their relationships to such an extent that when Skipper confesses his doubts about himself, Brick realizes that his

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[17]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 213.

[18]Tennessee Williams, Cat, I. 58.

ideal has fallen short of his expectations. Because Skipper cannot communicate with his friend when he needs help, Skipper commits suicide. After his death, in order for Brick to maintain his illusion, he becomes an alcoholic. He drinks until he feels the "click"[19] in his head which permits him to escape reality and maintain his cool, detached outlook on life. In a drunken condition he blames Maggie for Skipper's death, and tells her he will never share her bed again. He believes that Maggie was jealous of Brick's love for Skipper, and thus had attempted to terminate their relationship. While this fact is undoubtedly true, Brick's analysis of the problem completely ignores his responsibility for failing to attempt to communicate with Skipper. Thus, lies and illusion form the barrier which make communication between Skipper and Brick impossible.

Brick's illusion about his relationship with Skipper is further maintained by convincing himself that this ideal relationship was too pure to exist in a rotten world. Brick characterizes the world as mendacious and uses this reason as an excuse for his drinking problem. He believes then that his drinking makes it possible for him to tolerate the

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[19]Ibid., I.33.

mendacity of others.

Another aspect of Brick's illusion involves his fear of accepting maturity. Brick claims that "Maggie declares that Skipper and I went into pro-football after we left 'Ole Miss' because we were scared to grow up. . ."[20] After Skipper dies and Brick is no longer young enough to play football, he takes a job as a sports announcer. Announcing the games, however, becomes a constant reminder that he is no longer able to play. This problem further motivates his drinking which he begins while announcing the games. The problem of Brick's immaturity and his effort "to remain beyond his time in the world of illusion" are emphasized by the film version of Cat.[21] Because of the moral code of motion pictures and the lack of a statement in the play that Brick is a homosexual, this aspect of Brick's illusion is ignored. Brick's concern with his latent homosexuality is not ignored by the critics, however.

Williams supports Brick's illusion by the use of the symbol of the cool moon, just as the hot cat symbolizes Maggie's realistic, fighting nature. During the first act

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[20] Ibid., II.122.

[21] Francis Donahue, The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 77.

Brick tries repeatedly to avoid communication with Maggie by going out on the terrace to gaze at the moon. In the second act Big Daddy continues the same struggle. Williams again uses the reflected light symbol to indicate the cool detached illusions that Brick prefers, rather than reality.[22]

In opposition to Brick and similar to that of Maggie is realistic Big Daddy. Benjamin Nelson believes that Big Daddy is "the strongest male character that Williams has created."[23] He is rugged, self-made millionaire who, while he is a part of the mendacity that he and his son deplore, is aware of these qualities in himself. His realistic appraisal of himself allows him to transcend his mendacity; therefore, his vitality and honesty in this respect make him a truly admirable character. The virility of this man of large stature and great emotions is dramatically shown by his use of profanity as ordinary vocabulary. His vocabulary also serves to remind the audience of his realistic appraisal of life.

In the same way Stanley Kowalski views life, Big Daddy has no illusions about mankind; he sees them as purely animal. He describes humanity: ". . . the human animal is a beast that dies but the fact that he's dying don't give

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[22]Nelson, p. 217.

[23]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 216.

him pity for others, no, sir. . ."[24] Big Daddy's view of life as a zoo is reinforced by Williams' use of naturalistic imagery. Maggie calls the children "no-necked monsters." About their names, she further comments, "Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, Polly!--Sounds like four dogs and a parrot. . .animal act in a circus!"[25] Brick believes the children are like "monkeys," and Big Daddy sees them as "pigs."[26] Big Mama is described in the stage instructions as a "huffing and puffing. . .old bulldog."[27] Williams' instructions depict the Pollitt home as "a great aviary of chattering birds."[28]

Big Daddy's realistic view of life does not prevent him from creating an illusion. In the past he has believed in the illusory power of money, but now he states that "a man can't buy his life."[29] Death, then, is the reality that Big Daddy will not face. Rather than accept the consequences of cancer, in spite of constant pain, he gladly accepts the illusion that his physical problem is only "a little spastic condition."[30]

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[24]Tennessee Williams, Cat, II.88.

[25]Ibid., I.17,37. [26]Ibid., II.126, I.19.

[27]Ibid., I.42. [28]Ibid., II.65.

[29]Ibid., II.86. [30]Ibid., III.185.

Big Daddy's fear of death is dramatically shown by the device of setting the play on his birthday. During the celebration Big Daddy dwells on filling the years ahead with happiness and exclaims, "I'm going to cut loose and have, what is it they call it, have me a--ball!"[31] He continues to remind himself of this illusion rather than face the reality of his approaching death. Thus, by the use of the celebration, the author makes the audience further aware of illusion juxtaposed against reality. This device was used previously in Streetcar when Blanche wallows in illusion and sings in the bath tub while preparing herself for her birthday party. At the same time, Stanley is imparting realistic, unpleasant truth to Stella. In Cat Williams has,like a composer, the realistic theme of Big Daddy's impending death scored as a bass counterpoint against the theme of illusion expressed in the shrill, continual merriment of the birthday festivities and the constant reference to the lie about a spastic colon.

Big Daddy's fear of death prompts him to try desperately to save his son from a living death. His efforts, which encompass the entire second act, cause Benjamin Nelson

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[31] Ibid., II.93.

to write that "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof contains a love story."[32] In this powerful act Big Daddy labors to strip layer after layer of illusion from Brick in a desperate effort to make him face reality.

Critics, like Nancy M. Tischler, believe that the success of this scene is due to Williams' description of emotions stemming from his personal experience. As previously mentioned, evidence is sufficient to believe that Brick represents Williams' personal problems. Likewise, Big Daddy is much like C.C. Williams, the author's father. The overbearing, masculine tyrant, C.C. Williams, was evidently attempting to strip illusions away from his son when he frequently called him "Miss Nancy."[33]

The problem of lack of communication was as much a part of the relationship of Tom and C.C. Williams as it is between Brick and his father. When Big Daddy keeps questioning Brick concerning why he wants to throw his life away by drinking constantly, Brick finds the questions painful and difficult to answer. Brick dwells on his disgust with the mendacity of life, but Big Daddy cannot understand why Brick cannot cope with mendacity as his father

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[32]Nelson, p. 214.

[33]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 214.

has. He has lied about loving his wife and loving his other son, who disparingly is called Gooper. But Big Daddy recognizes these lies as necessary in order to cope with life; thus, he fights mendacity with mendacity.

Big Daddy continues to probe until he strikes at the core of the problem. He forces his son to acknowledge that disgust with the mendacity of life is disgust with himself. Afraid to face the truth that his relationship with Skipper is not perfect, he refuses to help his friend. Brick turns down a cry for help which means a chance to save Skipper's life. Big Daddy points out that Brick's prudish idealism will not permit him to face truth. Brick shouts, "His truth, not mine!"[34] To which Big Daddy replies, "His truth, okay! But you wouldn't face it with him."[35]

Big Daddy's attempt to bring back to life a man whose alcoholic stupor makes his detachment from life a living death is successful. Brick immediately fights back by ripping the illusion from his father. While looking out the window at the birthday celebration on the lawn, which forms the accompaniment for his fight for the rebirth of his son, Brick devastates Big Daddy with one statement. He callously remarks, "How about these birthday congratulations, these many, many

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[34]Tennessee Williams, Cat, II.125.

[35]Ibid.

happy returns of the day, when ev'rybody but you knows there won't be any!"[36] Big Daddy is forced then to face Brick's truth that "Mendacity is a system that we live in."[37] The lie that they tell Big Daddy, and that he wants to believe, is exposed. But Brick is also forced to face Big Daddy's truth that, while life is made up of mendacity, escape is not the answer. Only in living life fully is there hope. In the last act Brick admits that he may not be as alive as Maggie, but he is alive. Big Daddy's fight for Brick's life and the truth in the face of death and mendacity make Big Daddy the hero of the play.

The fact that Big Daddy's world is full of lies and liars is revealed at the opening of the play through Mae and Gooper, the perpetrators of the lie about Big Daddy's health. Both of these minor characters are living under the illusion that they can convince Big Daddy, or Big Mama, without his knowledge, to sign the plantation over to them. Mae spends the bulk of her time criticizing Brick and Maggie, whom Big Daddy and Big Mama favor, or forcing Gooper's children on Big Daddy, who believes they are "pigs." Gooper hates his brother who has always been in first place; however, the prize is large enough to force Gooper to

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[36] Ibid. [37] Ibid., II.127.

harbor the illusion that he might win first place. He and his wife are compelled, however, to face the reality that they cannot win when Maggie's more determined lie wins the approval of Big Daddy and Big Mama.

The caricature of the minister, Reverend Tooker, furthers the theme that reality, like illusion, involves mendacity. This hypocritical little man, who also lies about Big Daddy's health, lives in the illusion that Big Daddy will include in his will an air conditioner for the church. Big Daddy believes, however, that the preacher is a fool and claims that church "bores the bejesus out of me."[38] The inadequate little parson also cannot face reality. When he is most needed to help break the news of Big Daddy's cancer to Big Mama, he makes his exit, saying, "I think I'd better slip away at this point. Good night, good night everybody, and God bless you all--on this place."[39]

Big Mama not only faces reality with courage, but she also helps remove the illusion that Mae and Gooper harbor of owning the plantation. Greedy Gooper attempts to get Big Mama, under the illusion that she is signing a dummy

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[38] Ibid., II.108.

[39] Ibid., III.188.

trusteeship, to sign over the plantation to him. In the family storm which follows, as well as the accompanying rain storm which heightens the tension, Big Mama refuses to leave the helm. Instead, she encourages Maggie to make Brick face reality and assume his responsibility in order to carry out Big Daddy's wishes. Big Mama's love and devotion to her husband, who admits that he does not love her and that he does not believe she loves him, is especially moving. When she calls on Brick and tries to express her love for and need of him, she is rejected. In her strength to face reality alone, she demonstrates a touching example of unfulfilled love. Although she is only a minor character, she plays a strong and demanding role in the outcome of the family's illusory problems.

Nancy M. Tischler believes that the conflicts of the family are well understood by Williams because they represent those in his own family relationships. She sees a similarity between Big Mama and Amanda.[40] Furthermore, she believes in Cat

> Williams was able to look at his own family--the confused attraction-repulsion relationship with his tortured father, the love-envy relationship with his younger brother, [and] the affection-rejection relationship with his mother. It is a mature, perceptive, realistic, richly rewarding play.[41]

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[40] Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 205.

[41] Tischler, Tennessee Williams, p. 34.

Williams again, based on his own family relationships, gives a sound analysis of the conflicts man faces in distinguishing illusion from reality. The problem is further complicated by the lies each character tells to others as well as the illusion each character harbors about himself. Because of the lies and illusions of all the characters, Williams suggests that mankind suffers from the problem of mendacity. Through the example of Brick and Skipper, it is apparent that lies and illusion prevent men from communicating with each other. Observing Brick and Big Daddy tear away each other's masks of illusion is evidence that, if man dispenses with lies, he may communicate "his version of truth." Truth is obscure in Cat because effective reality is mendacious. Truth is ambiguous, furthermore, because of Williams' insistence that it is subjective. Each character tells his version of the truth. Maggie, Brick, and Big Daddy, all, maintain different views of reality.

While this is one of Williams' most ambiguous dramas on the theme of illusion and reality, it indicates the influence of Pirandello. Pirandello's influence is seen in the masks each character wears. Williams describes Reverend Tooker in the stage instructions as "the living embodiment

of the pious, conventional lie."[42] Nancy M. Tischler states, furthermore, that like Pirandello, Williams believes that "'truth' has a protean nature, that its face changes in the eyes of each beholder."[43]

Although Williams shows that life is full of mendacity, this is one of his most optimistic dramas. For the first time, Williams' sympathies lie with the strong: Maggie and Big Daddy. Their ability to live and fight for their version of truth in the face of a mendacious world is heroic. J.L. Styan says that Williams believes that "life is never what it seems, but that it must be faced."[44]

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[42]Tennessee Williams, Cat, II.116.

[43]Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan, p. 215.

[44]J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 222.

CONCLUSION

In the plays examined in this thesis evidence is shown that Tennessee Williams' understanding of man's use of illusion in order to avoid reality is based on his personal experiences. As a Southerner, Williams is well acquainted with the problems of a changing society. These problems force Alma, Blanche, Amanda, and Laura to live in their illusions rather than face a modern world. Big Daddy's concern for an heir for his vast Southern plantation, furthermore, contributes to his fear of death. Thus, his concern for the future of his plantation--"Twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile"[1]--is an important factor in his failure to face reality.

Evidence is also shown that many of the problems of Williams' characters concerning illusion and reality are based on personal experiences of members of his family. Critics believe that the experiences of Edwina Williams, the author's mother, are portrayed in Amanda and to a much lesser degree in Big Mama. C.C. Williams, the author's

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[1]Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol. III: (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1971), II. 26.

father, is considered a model for Big Daddy by critics; even Edwina Williams states, "I had a feeling Big Daddy was patterned somewhat after Cornelius."[2] Edwina Williams also indicates a similarity between Stanley and her husband. When Streetcar first opened many theatre-goers were shocked by the brutality of Stanley Kowalski. The author's mother noted, "Cornelius was not shocked at Streetcar. After all, it would take a lot to shock him, for he was a veteran of many A Poker Night, as the play was originally called."[3] The problems suffered by Williams' sister Rose, which caused her permanent withdrawal into her illusion, are dramatized in Laura. Some of Laura's problems are also shown in Alma, in whom the author has stated are also depicted some of his own problems. Many of Williams' own personal experiences are shown also in Tom and Brick. Thus Williams biographical information is an important source of his concept of illusion and reality.

Williams' use of poetic and theatrical devices to further the theme of illusion and reality is found in all of the plays discussed. Richard B. Vowles believes that Williams is "supreme among playwrights in his use of color

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[2] Edwina Dakin Williams, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 207.

[3] Ibid., p. 189.

in the theatre."[4] An example of Williams employing color symbolically is seen in the use of the bright primary colors of Van Gogh in Streetcar to indicate the realistic Poker Scene, in contrast to the white dress of the illusory, moth-like Blanche.

The use of light images, both poetically and theatrically, are apparent in all of the plays. The figurative use of the natural light in Tom's statement that "the world is lit by lightning"[5] shows reality as opposed to the artificial reflected light of the glass menagerie which demonstrates illusion. Williams, in addition, uses colored lights in Glass Menagerie, Streetcar, and Summer and Smoke in order to indicate illusions involving sexual desire. Rainbow colored lights in the dance hall indicate the illusions of society concerning the importance of sex as opposed to the importance of the state of the world. Stanley's desire to "get the colored lights going"[6] with Stella, together with John's admiration of the rainbow colors of the Roman Candle, imply sexual illusions. The bare light bulb in Streetcar represents a reality which Blanche cannot tolerate with out covering it with a Japanese lantern to suit his illusive world.

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[4]Richard B. Vowles, "Tennessee Williams: The World of His Imagery," Tulane Drama Review, III (December, 1958), 55.

[5]Tennessee Williams, Menagerie, vii.1017.

[6]Tennessee Williams, Streetcar, viii.373.

Williams also uses water to symbolize illusion and reality. Blanche's illusion that she can wash away her guilt is indicated in her excessive bathing and her desire to die at sea. Rainstorms represent Laura's fear of reality as well as the Pollitt family's turbulent effort to come to terms with truth. The fountain of Eternity symbolizes life and reality to Alma in Summer and Smoke. Vowles states that "the concern with images of liquid and water is pervasive in most of Williams' writing."[7]

Many other theatrical devices support the theme of illusion and reality in Williams' dramas. Signi Falk states that Williams is "the greatest poet-dramatist to have appeared on the American scene since Eugene O'Neill."[8] She believes that because of the importance he attaches to symbolism, he makes excellent use of theatrical devices. The stage properties in the scene in Glass Menagerie with Laura and Jim support Laura's illusion of marrying Jim. The set in Summer and Smoke, which includes the angel and the anatomy chart shows the illusions of Alma and John. Also on the bare set of Cat, the use of the large bed symbolizes the real state of Maggie's and Brick's marriage, while

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[7]Vowles, p. 52.

[8]Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 189.

the equally prominent console represents the illusions of the characters. As a poet-dramatist, then, Williams makes excellent use of color, light, and water, as well as symbolic sets and stage properties, to create poetic and theatrical illusions which further his theme of illusion and reality.

An analysis of Williams' characters in these plays indicates that all of Williams' well-drawn characters live with illusion. Blanche, Alma, Amanda, and Laura, all anachronisms in their world, are forced to take refuge in their illusions. Tom and Brick represent the poetic, idealistic male who, also an anachronism, chooses illusion. John and Stanley, though accepted by their contemporary society, also harbor illusions. Stella, in order to be accepted by modern society is forced to harbor illusion. In her decision between a harsh, realistic world and a spiritual, illusory one, Stella chooses to accept as illusion Blanche's version of truth about Stanley's actions. Maggie and Big Daddy, both realistic characters, choose illusion rather than face reality.

The major characters not only live in illusion, but in each play they have opposing views of reality. In Glass Menagerie the more realistic Tom and the illusory Amanda have opposing views of Tom's family obligations.

In Streetcar the opposing views of experience are sharply drawn between Stanley's realistic world and Blanche's illusory one. Summer and Smoke also shows two extremely opposing views of the truth--the spiritual and the physical. Further, when these two antithetical, one-sided views are enlarged to include some aspects of the opposite view, ironically, each one changes his point of view to emphasize the outstanding quality of the other. This evidence indicates the difficulty of two people's viewing truth alike. Also, in Cat Brick takes an idealistic view of life; Big Daddy and Maggie share a realistic one. The problem of illusion and reality is complicated because all three characters view reality as mendacious, yet none of the three characters have an entirely identical view of reality. Big Daddy and Maggie view many aspects of life similarly; however, they have an antithetical view of Big Mama. Big Daddy does not indicate love or understanding of Big Mama. Maggie, on the other hand loves and understands her because like Maggie, she is spurned by the man she loves.

While these plays all contain opposing views of reality, Williams does not show more sympathy for one character than for the other. Signi Falk states, "It is characteristic of Williams, however, that he does not take a stand,

for he romanticizes both the natural man and the decadent."[9] Benjamin Nelson concludes that "Williams is the romantic and the realist, and his best work is marked by this important justaposition of beliefs."[10] John Gassner, likewise, believes that Williams shows great objectivity in the creation of his characters. Because the dramatist does not demonstrate complete empathy with one type or the other, critics agree that Williams' characters are created objectively. Although in Glass Menagerie the character's experiences resemble his own experiences and those of his family more closely than any other play, some critics concur with Nelson, that "the author's sympathies for his ineffectual dreamers are tempered by his objective attitude toward them."[11]

Although Williams creates extremely different types of characters, he shows fewer of the normal, average member of society. Thus critics say that Williams favors the abnormal, troubled person-the misfit in society. Neither Stanley nor Big Daddy can be considered an average American male. Jim, Stella, and Nellie do represent the normal American, but with the exception of Stella, they are not

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[9]Ibid., p. 80.

[10]Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1961), p. 289.

[11]Ibid.

major characters. The statement, therefore, that Williams favors the misfit in society is based on the fact that most of his major characters are abnormal. It would be difficult to say that he sympathizes with one atypicality more than another, for he does create all his characters objectively.

An analysis of Williams' characters indicates the influence of a number of different authors who deal with illusion and reality. In Tom's conflict we see evidence of Shakespeare's Hamlet and his inability to face reality and take action. In Laura there is a similarity to Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott." The vitality of Maggie driven by the Life-Force is found in Shaw's realistic, determined women. The existential philosophy, stated by Jean-Paul Sartre, is evident in Tom, John, and Alma: these characters seek truth and, on the basis of their findings, make a choice, then take action based on that choice. Maggie is also drawn with the existential philosophy in mind. Because to Maggie life is mendacious, Maggie does not act upon her discovery of the truth; her actions, however, are based on the determination that she can turn a lie into truth. Upon this premise she makes her decision and takes action.

Although there is evidence in these four plays of the

influence of a number of different authors, in all the plays analyzed here a strong influence of Pirandello is apparent. In all the major characters, and in some of the minor ones, there is ample evidence that they find illusion a necessity. Big Daddy, the strongest, most realistic of Williams' character uses costruirsi because he can not face death. On the other hand, moth-like, illusory Blanche uses costruirsi because she can not face life. Thus Williams demonstrates that illusion is necessary in order to make existence bearable.

Blanche is heroic, furthermore, because she will not give up her image of herself; just as Maggie the Car is heroic because her mask enables her to believe she can make truth out of a lie. As depicted in Blanche and Maggie then, illusion is a positive element.

Because Alma, Blanche, Brick and Laura are considered figuratively dead, through these illusory characters we see that Williams views existence as unbearable for the artistic, sensitive person. In Cat, however, Williams, through both idealistic Brick and realistic Big Daddy, views life as mendacious and absurd. Although all of the characters use illusion as an armor against reality, the latter play emphasizes that a realist also views life as unbearable. Thus Williams

believes with Pirandello that "illusion is a positive and indeed indispensable element amid circumstances that render existence wretched and all but unbearable."[12]

Also, as does Pirandello, Williams believes that truth is subjective. Through Williams' objective treatment of his antithetical characters, it is apparent that Williams does not accept either view of reality as absolute. The different worlds of each of the opposing views of experience are carefully drawn. Williams states, "My world is different from yours, as different as every man's world is from the world of others. . . ." Through the objective treatment of the characters and their different worlds of experience it is clear why John Gassner believes that Williams' "reality is subjective." Like Pirandello, Williams believes that "truth can not be described objectively or explored scientifically."[13]

While there is evidence that Williams was strongly influenced by Pirandello in the plays examined, it is apparent that he draws from other sources as well. This eclectic

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[12]Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, Masters of Modern Drama (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 508.

[13]Ibid.

writer not only shows a thorough comprehension of the ideas of literature, but he also demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the techniques of the stage. Esther Merle Jackson believes, that Williams' productions indicate "a poetic penetration of the life of modern man." Thus, Williams' statement earlier, made in reply to the question of the theme of his plays seems appropriate: "It's a play about life."

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